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BOLLYWOOD ECLIPSED: THE POSTMODERN AESTHETICS, SCHOLARLY APPEAL, AND REMAKING OF CONTEMPORARY POPULAR INDIAN CINEMA

Neelam Sidhar Wright



PhD thesis submitted to the University of Sussex
September 2009

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature.....

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the following people for all their support, guidance, feedback and encouragement throughout the course of my DPhil: Professor Richard Murphy, Dr. Thomas Austin, Andy Medhurst, Professor Sue Thornham, Dr Shobini Chaudhuri, Margaret Reynolds, Steve Jones, Sharif Mowlabocus, the DPhil student organisers of the MeCCSA postgraduate conference 2008, staff at the BFI library, British Library, University of Sussex library and the Prince of Wales Museum in Mumbai, film director Leena Yadav, Pollyana Ruiz, Iain M. Smith, Michael Lawrence and his Indian cinema undergraduate students, my DPhil friends in the School of Humanities at the University of Sussex, Rachael Castell and Eliot Grove from Raindance East, Ajjad Nazir, Bobby Friction, Jeremy Wooding, Herbert Krill, Paulo Mantovani, Ian Huffer, Niall Richardson, Rosalind Galt, Corey Creekmur, Abhiji Rao, Kay Dickinson, Richard Dyer, Ian Garwood, Stephen Barber, Andre Rinke, Sara Gill, Catherine Reynolds and Helen Wright.

I would also like to thank my parents Kiran and Sharda Sidhar, my brother Vikram, and my husband Christopher for accompanying me in sitting through all those Bollywood films, and for always showing enthusiasm and interest for this project. I dedicate this thesis to you.

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

NEELAM SIDHAR WRIGHT (DPHIL)

BOLLYWOOD ECLIPSED:
THE POSTMODERN AESTHETICS, SCHOLARLY APPEAL AND
REMAKING OF CONTEMPORARY POPULAR INDIAN CINEMASUMMARY

This thesis uses postmodern theory to explore aesthetic shifts in post-millennial Bollywood cinema, with a particular focus on films produced by the Bombay film industry over the past nine years (2000-2009) and the recent boom of Hindi cross-cultural and self-remakes. My research investigates reasons behind the lack of appeal of Bollywood films in the West (particularly in their contemporary form), revealing how our understanding and appreciation of them is restricted or misinformed by a long history of censure from critics, scholars, educators and ambassadors of the Indian cinema. Through my analysis of the function and effects of cultural appropriation and postmodern traits in several recent popular Indian films, I expose Bollywood's unique film language in order to raise our appreciation of this cinema and suggest ways in which it can be better incorporated into future film studies courses. My analysis is based on a study of over a hundred contemporary Bollywood remakes and includes close textual analysis and case studies of a wide variety of popular Bollywood films, including: *Dil Chahta Hai* (2001), *Abhay* (2001), *Kaante* (2002), *Devdas* (2002), *Koi...Mil Gaya* (2003), *Sarkar* (2005), *Krrish* (2006) and *Om Shanti Om* (2007). In my conclusion, I offer a redefinition of contemporary Bollywood and I consider postmodernism's usefulness as a tool for teaching Indian cinema and its value as an *international* cultural phenomenon.

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List of Abbreviations for Film Titles

DCH	<i>Dil Chahta Hai</i> (2001)
DDLJ	<i>Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge</i> (1995)
E.T.	<i>E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial</i> (1982)
KANK	<i>Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna</i> (2006)
K3G	<i>Kabhi Kushi Kabhie Gham</i> (2001)
KHNH	<i>Kal Ho Naa Ho</i> (2003)
KMG	<i>Koi...Mil Gaya</i> (2003)
K2H2	<i>Kuch Kuch Hota Hai</i> (1998)
OSO	<i>Om Shanti Om</i> (2007)

Chapter 1

Introduction: The Bollywood Eclipse

In May of 1998 the Indian government announced that it would grant the Bombay film industry (commonly referred to as Bollywood) the right to finance its films through foreign funding, bank loans and commercial investment. With this new industry status, Indian filmmakers would no longer need to seek money from the government or resort to black money laundering via the criminal underworld, but could instead have their productions backed by global sponsors and multinational corporations such as Coca-Cola and Nokia. Within this climate of economic restructuring, Bollywood also opened itself up to several aesthetic makeovers. In 1998 it adopted the frenetic editing techniques of popular Music Television (MTV) to re-image its song sequences (*Dil Se*, 1998). A year later in 1999, the release of Sanjay Leela Bhansali's film *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* marked the beginnings of new visually 'excessive' style of filmmaking. This novel aestheticism was achieved not only through Bhansali's designer mise-en-scene and extravagant cinematography, but also through the careful casting of Miss World contest winner Aishwarya Rai – a rising star who would exhibit a kind of hyper-femininity and visual perfection previously unknown to the cinema¹. Rai was soon branded as 'the new face of film' by Time magazine² and her unique star quality was soon matched by that of male star Hrithik Roshan in 2000. Roshan's hyper-masculine physique and almost super-humanly fluid dancing abilities in his first feature *Kaho Naa... Pyaar Hai* made him an astonishing overnight success, with the Indian press even describing the Indian public's feverishly fanatical response to his cinematic debut as 'Hrithik mania'. In this same year, India also witnessed the revival of its biggest film star Amitabh Bachchan, who (previously representative as a working class hero and socialist political figure both in and outside of his films) now returned with a new internationalised affluent image – an iconic white goatee beard and designer suit – as a pop star and television show host³. Bachchan also used this time to re-launch his film career by starring as a cynical headmaster in Bollywood's *Dead Poets Society*-inspired *Mohabbatein* and was subsequently voted the biggest star of the millennium in a BBC poll. Since this moment, Bachchan has continued to appear in almost sixty films in either middle class patriarchal or darker anti-heroic (sometimes even villainous) lead roles.

A year later, 2001 saw Bollywood's industry status finally take effect and its global circulation realised. Santosh Sivan's *Asoka* was marketed across the UK and screened at London's Empire

¹ Even Hollywood's then most popular actress, Julia Roberts, described Rai as the most beautiful woman in the world

² *Time [Asia Edition]* (2003)

³ From 2000 to 2005 Bachchan was the host for *Kaun Banega Crorepati*, India's version of the British quiz show *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*

Leicester Square. Karan Johar's big-budget family melodrama *Kabhi Kushi Kabhie Gham* followed soon after, proving to be the industry's highest international grosser with many non-Indian European audiences flocking to see the film. This film, coupled with Farhan Akhtar's smart and stylish tale of urban youth *Dil Chahta Hai*, marked the beginning of a new generation of young directors in Bollywood who promised to challenge old-fashioned attitudes and promote a newer, more modernised India. Meanwhile in Hollywood, Baz Luhrmann also helped draw attention to Bollywood with his homage to the cinema in his Oscar nominated *Moulin Rouge*. Further global awareness was received in 2002 with Hollywood's first fully-fledged Bollywood themed film *The Guru* and a similar tribute in the West End in the form of Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *Bombay Dreams*. While the West showed its critical appreciation of Indian culture largely through East-West hybridised productions such as BAFTA and Golden Globe nominated *Bend it like Beckham* and Golden Lion winner *Monsoon Wedding*, Bollywood orchestrated its own international publicity by exhibiting Bhansali's even more visually operatic follow-up film *Devdas* at the Cannes film festival. This hype was further exceeded in the same year by the Oscar nomination of colonial period sports film *Lagaan: Once upon a time in India* and the promotion of Bollywood fashion by *Vanity Fair* and major department stores in London and New York. Meanwhile, in India, Sanjay Gupta inaugurated a new era of cross-cultural remakes in Bollywood with his successful adaptation of Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs*. A year later, Bollywood produced another indirect Hollywood remake in the form of *Koi...Mil Gaya* – an unacknowledged reinterpretation of Steven Spielberg's *E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial*. 2003 also added another global twist as powerhouse 20th Century Fox became the first Hollywood sponsor of a Bollywood film (*Ek Hasina Thi*).



Figure 1: Aishwarya Rai and Hrithik Roshan: The new faces (and bodies) of Bollywood

Whilst the West continued to play with mixing Hollywood and Bollywood conventions in *Bride and Prejudice*, 2004 brought about further hybridity and creativity in Hindi filmmaking. Farah Khan's *Main Hoon Na* wowed audiences with its *Matrix*-inspired special effects action choreography, whilst *Hum Tum*, one of the biggest hits of the year, experimented with inserting animation sequences into its live-action diegesis.

In 2005, Bollywood released its first full-length feature animation *Hanuman*, again something novel that was received well by Indian audiences. One more landmark film came in the form of yet another Bhansali production, *Black* – a film which lacked the so-called ‘essential’ song and dance elements required for a film to be commercially successful in India. *Black* presented a remarkably unglamorous role for its lead actress Rani Mukherjee (one of the industry's top stars), who took on a deaf, blind and mute character, earning her five awards and the film critical acclaim. Most importantly, the film's commercial success in India signalled the changing and diversifying tastes of the Indian viewing public. At this same time, India demonstrated the power and influence Bollywood stars had over their audiences when the Times of India group launched *India Poised* – a government supported initiative which combined politics with entertainment media in order to reinvigorate the country's future leadership. Following the model of Western panel shows such as *Pop idol*, the campaign ran a television show called *Lead India* inviting members of the Indian public to apply and compete for a place in India's assembly elections⁴. Audiences were able to vote for their favourite contestants via an SMS text or online ballot. Most significantly, despite the serious politics behind this campaign, the judges' panel on the programme comprised of Bollywood industry professionals such as lyricist Javed Akhtar and movie star Akshay Kumar. The *India Poised* publicity campaign also included adverts starring Bollywood megastars such as Amitabh Bachchan and Shah Rukh Khan, which were displayed on TV channels⁵ and before film screenings in Cineplex theatres across the country.

In 2006 Bollywood production companies realised the potential for mass profit through film franchises and launched their first movie sequels, *Krrish* and *Dhoom 2*. This year also marked a first in the industry for self-adaptation, producing two big-budget remakes of landmark Hindi films from previous eras: *Don* and *Umrao Jaan*. Interestingly, these new sequels and remakes challenged assumptions regarding Bollywood's supposed moral high-ground, instead casting their lead stars in negative roles: Hrithik Roshan as a master-thief in *Dhoom 2*, Shah Rukh Khan as a ruthless Mafia-boss in *Don: The Chase Begins*, and Amitabh Bachchan as a torturing psychopath in *Aag* (a 2008 remake of legendary 70s “curry Western” *Sholay*). Bollywood's innovation and trend for recycling

⁴ The prize also included a scholarship to study leadership and politics at Harvard University and Rs. 50 lakh for a public-welfare project

⁵ Star TV channel in India, America and the UK

has continued to proliferate in following years. In 2007 – the same year that the word Bollywood entered the Oxford English Dictionary and Indian film actress Shilpa Shetty won the public's vote on *Big Brother* in the UK – the industry's previous record for highest grossing film was broken by *Om Shanti Om*, a remake of 1980's Indian film *Karz*. Other films in the top ten of highest grossers that year included unacknowledged versions of Hollywood's *Three Men and a Baby* and *Hitch*. 2008 followed in similar vein with two more hit sequels (*Golmaal Returns* and *Sarkar Raj*) and *Ghajini*, which despite being a Bollywood remake of a South Indian film adaptation of Christopher Nolan's *Memento*, has since become the most successful Indian film of all time.

All of the above shifts in Bollywood's film production take place after its economic liberalisation and point towards a new consumer centred, self-reflexive, visually spectacular and nostalgic style of filmmaking in India, which I believe signals the country and film industry's overall increasing shifts into postmodern territory.

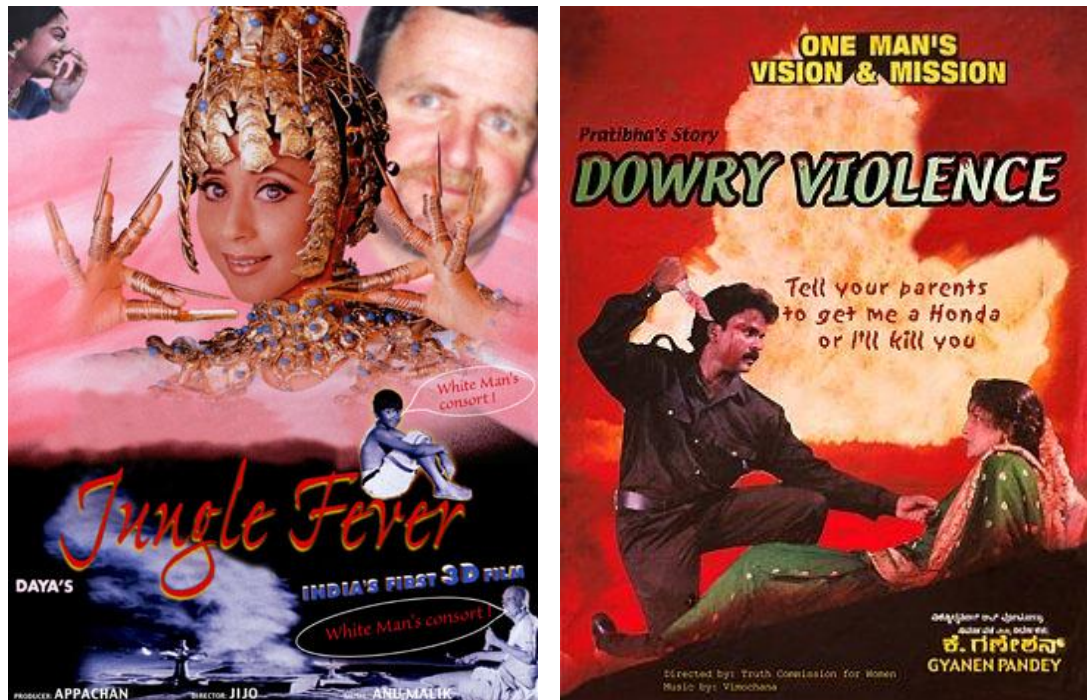


Figure 2: Satirising Bollywood: Postmodern art posters by Annu Palakunnathu Matthew

The postmodern

Aside from the novels of Indian English literary authors such as Salman Rushdie (see Bijay Kumar Das, 2007), the art work of Annu Palakunnathu Matthew⁶, or the post-1990s *Adhunikantika*

⁶ I refer here to Matthew's art work in a 2001 exhibition entitled 'Bollywood Satirized'. The artist mocks commercial films for reinforcing Indian traditional socio-cultural prejudices by manipulating and subverting images from existing film posters. For a more detailed account of Matthew's work see Nandini Bhattacharya (2005).

movement in Bengali literature⁷, it is uncommon to find examples of (let alone discourses on) postmodern cultural art in India. However, Bollywood's aforementioned current impulse to repeat and recycle, to excessively express and visualise, to commercialise and self-commodify, to appropriate other cultural works and de-differentiate binaries or blur distinctions through such processes suggests that the cinema has acquired strikingly postmodern qualities.

Despite being a highly debated and perplexing descriptive term, postmodernism has already brought much to cinema and its academic study in the West. As a mode of film practice, it allows texts to inscribe and subvert prevailing conventions and question ideology, subjectivity and historical knowledge, allowing us to 'reconsider the operations by which we both create and give meaning to our culture through representation' (Linda Hutcheon, 1989: 117). In doing so, it draws our attention to certain films' consciously mimetic and anti-original qualities and to how contemporary films now seek to "rework" rather than invent stories. Postmodern films facilitate an act of looking from both sides of the screen (Christine Degli-Eposti, 1998: 5) and will (mis)represent identity in a way that exposes it as something to be understood as decentred and complex rather than whole and fixed. Postmodernism also increases the tension between, and closeness of, the political and the aesthetic, paradoxically creating texts that are at once culturally resistant and yet seem politically barren (Steven Connor, 1989: 180). Postmodernism has helped us to understand and create shifts in knowledge and thinking, economic and social ordering, and aesthetic debates in the Western contemporary climate. It has offered us a means to investigate how capitalism and globalisation have impacted upon our society, pushing our artistic cultural practice towards profit driven eclecticism and a saturation of media images and signs. The concept has also proved useful in helping to reveal how even the most commercial and trivial art forms can have the potential to interrogate: to be oppositional, contestory, aesthetically diverse and ideologically ambivalent (John Hill, 1998: 101-102). We are able to appreciate how popular cinema can use irony as a means of questioning truth, reality and artificiality, how it can manipulate images for commercial ends whilst problematising image-creation itself (David Harvey, 1990: 323). Postmodernism has thus provided us with new reading strategies and different systems of interpreting films (Degli-Eposti, 16). With this in mind, this thesis attempts to apply the concept to Bollywood cinema in order to enrich our understanding of its contemporary filmmaking processes. In my discussion, I shed light on a range of issues and questions concerning popular Indian film. I explore reasons behind the lack of scholarly attention to post-millennial Bollywood films, particularly in existing Indian film criticism and Western film studies courses. Within this, I consider the issue of non-Indian audiences' lack of interest in – even rejection of – popular Hindi film texts, suggesting that Hindi cinema may have a more unusually unique film language and logic

⁷ From *Adhunikā*, meaning *new* or *modern* and *Antikā*, meaning *beyond*. The poetry and short stories of this movement share many characteristics with the postmodern including plurality, de-territorialization, eclecticism, multi-linearity, pastiche, irony and de-centeredness. See Malay Roy Choudhury (2001).

of pleasure compared to other, more accessible Asian cinemas. This thesis also argues that contemporary Indian popular cinema should not be dismissed as crass, mindless entertainment or considered unworthy of intellectual engagement. Rather, it suggests that there is a credible, academically engaging cinema to be found beyond high art, political and diasporic Indian cinema, and that popular Indian cinema can be found to be equally fascinating and revealing in a *postmodern* sense. In addition, far from declaring it as a continuation of previous eras of filmmaking, I demonstrate how post-millennial Bollywood has broken away from certain modes of representation, so much that it can be described as a kind of renaissance period for the cinema. Amongst its many formal aesthetic changes, this decade has seen an emergence of a new genre of contemporary Hindi cinema in the form of the postmodern remake. Through tracing this recent phenomenon, I reveal how Bollywood uses postmodern methods of appropriation in order to reinvigorate itself and at least attempt to break free of its formulaic trappings. This postmodern reading will help us to rethink and expand our current definitions of Bollywood, as well as understand how postmodern techniques can enable a seemingly monolithic and nationalistic cinema to become more fragmented and experimental.

Thesis structure

My investigation begins in chapter two with a broad review of Indian film criticism. I try to ascertain how previous published critical work on Indian cinema has shaped our current understanding of (and critical attitudes towards) popular Indian films. Inspired by the postmodern notion of history as *narrative* (which chooses to perceive historical discourse as subjective storytelling rather than something conveying [actual] universal truth or fact), I demonstrate how India's cinematic history has been articulated through particular intellectual discourses cultivated within the discipline of Indian film studies. As I reveal, these discourses tend to focus upon a particular set of themes in order to fulfil specific social and political agendas, thus often neglecting to analyse certain aspects of the text's formal aesthetics. My literature review looks at a variety of sources, including: historical biographies, textbooks and introductory guidebooks from renowned Indian cinema scholars, press interviews with industry professionals, film festival brochures, pedagogical accounts from those who have taught the subject to a Western audience; as well as more empirically based data taken from University syllabuses on Bollywood, formal conversations with film scholars at academic conferences, and my own personal observations of non-Indian undergraduate students' experiences of intellectually engaging with Indian film texts. Using this information, I argue that much of the scholarly and journalistic critical writing on Bollywood currently works *against* Bollywood's interests in securing international appeal. Far from accurately defining and dissecting the cinema's unique film language, this literature has failed to adequately address significant aesthetic shifts within the industry over the last decade, instead producing

outmoded or woolly definitions of contemporary Bollywood which have hindered its global inauguration both in terms of commercial success and academic interest.

In an attempt to better address aesthetic shifts in contemporary Bollywood and develop a new way of studying the cinema, chapter three proposes that the Indian film industry has taken a postmodern turn after the millennium – a response to its increased global exchanges and commercialisation. After reviewing existing academic attempts to place the concept in a global or international context, I observe how the postmodern, as an aesthetic style and fluid cultural practice, manifests in contemporary Bollywood film texts. To aid my investigation, I draw upon the various concepts and traits identified by postmodern theorists such as Frederic Jameson, Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard and Hayden White, as well as postmodern film theorists such as Linda Hutcheon, Peter and Will Brooker, and M. Keith Brooker. As the field of postmodern Bollywood cinema studies is relatively uncharted, I feel it is important to employ a variety of tools and strategies throughout my research in order to demonstrate the cinema's versatility (hopefully assisting its flexible application in future film studies courses) and to aim for experimentation and exploration rather than an absolute concretisation of the concept. Thus, my methodology here shifts between formalist film theory, semiotics, (post)structuralism, broad cultural politics and some Marxist poetics.

My analysis of postmodern Bollywood involves a close reading of three key films which I consider to be prime examples of this new form of filmmaking. The first of these, *Om Shanti Om*, directed by Farah Khan (perhaps Bollywood's female equivalent of pastiche-auteur Quentin Tarantino), provides a complex self-critique by employing a variety of postmodern devices including pastiche and nostalgic recycling, which inhabit everything from its narrative and plot to its visual aesthetics and formal structure. I reveal how through these strategies, the film is able to simultaneously celebrate, exploit and dismantle its own cinematic conventions and modes of representation. A second example of postmodern Bollywood is offered through *Koi... Mil Gaya* – the film that initiated and signalled the Bombay film industry's yielding to the previously unfamiliar territory of science fiction. This film usefully demonstrates how Bollywood uses postmodern methods to play and experiment with a long-established theme of post-independence Hindi cinema: the tension between modernity (progress, the future) and tradition (regression, the past). Whereas previously Bombay film narratives would conclude with the rejection of the former and a return to the latter, as I reveal, *Koi...Mil Gaya* in fact facilitates the *blurring* of these two binaries in order to ultimately render them both as suspect. The film also reveals how a comparative study of a Bollywood remake of a Hollywood original (in this case, *E.T: The Extra Terrestrial*) can help us better understand both the interconnectedness and distinctive differences in film language between these two dominant cinemas. My final case study uses *Abhay* as an example of avant-garde techniques emerging within mainstream Indian cinema. Through its constant interchange between conventional cinematic

realism and absurd comic book representation, the film demonstrates how popular Indian films deconstruct (Western) notions of realism by innovatively dissolving the divide between non-fiction and fantasy. In doing so, the film shows us how Bollywood poses a challenge to the negative elitist criticism it has received (as discussed in chapter two) by revealing itself as a cinema that cannot be underestimated and easily categorised, instead sitting comfortably between the posts of mainstream popular entertainment and radical art cinema.

Chapter four continues to provide further examples of postmodern aesthetics in contemporary Bollywood cinema, this time looking more specifically at a particular kind of filmmaking that has emerged prolifically over recent years: the Bollywood remake. Based on research that considered 144 Indian film remakes (almost one hundred of which were produced after 2000), I discuss how remaking has become a platform for innovation and creative translation in Bollywood, offering a unique form of cinephilic pleasure for its audiences. Drawing upon various theoretical work on textual adaptation – including issues of textual fidelity that continue to plague the Bollywood remake’s critical reception – I look at how the diverse methods of remaking that Bollywood employs (intertextuality, cross-cultural borrowing, aesthetic as well as narrative appropriation, pastiche and parody) allow it to experiment with and innovate its filmmaking. For example, I explore how certain film stars are used as inter-texts through ‘celebrity’ or ‘genetic’ intertextuality, how Bollywood uses figural excess to distinguish itself aesthetically from and *rework* previous canonical Indian film texts, and how the cinema hybridises with Hollywood modes of filmmaking in order to de-authenticate and dismantle both American and its own cinematic codes and conventions.

Initially looking at how repetition has always been a fundamental characteristic of Indian artistic culture, I go on to explain how remaking has become a central or signature feature of Bollywood cinema in the first decade of the 21st century, now embodying postmodern concerns such as the prevalence of stylistic excess over discourse, self-referential critique, identity fragmentation, and a questioning or crisis of representation. The film texts I explore include remakes or “re-imaginings” of films as diverse as Hollywood’s critically acclaimed *The Godfather* and testosterone-driven *Fight Club*, Indian socio-realist drama *Devdas*, independent American cult movie *Reservoir Dogs*, special effects sci-fi *The Matrix*, new Hollywood’s taboo-breaking classic *Bonny and Clyde*, and South Korea’s international award-winning *Oldboy*. My analysis of postmodern remaking in Bollywood explains how the cinema has changed and evolved since the 1990s and I argue how such films can help enrich our understanding of Bollywood’s current film language and aesthetics, revealing an Indian cinema that is both at its most innovative and self-destructive.

Finally, in chapter five, I offer a summary and discuss the outcomes of my research. In this conclusion I provide a redefinition of contemporary Bollywood cinema, propose the value of

postmodernism as a new alternative method for studying, teaching and articulating Bollywood cinema in the West (particularly offering us a means by which to better engage with the visual aesthetics of popular Indian films), and lastly, push towards a more *global* view of the postmodern, which can help us to expand and update our understanding of the concept as well as emphasise its potential for international application and cultural impact.

Bollywood film productions over the past ten years signal a significant intervention in popular Indian cinema. There has been a break or interruption in its filmmaking methods, an obscuring or *eclipsing* of previous cinematic processes. I believe these newer Bollywood texts contain culturally, aesthetically and politically subversive qualities which endeavour to overpower previous aesthetic modes and conventions, revealing a postmodern shift that has enabled a darkening of these films' internal agendas.

Chapter 2

Contexts and Frameworks

Part 1: The critical history and traditional modes of studying Indian cinema

Structure and focus

This three-part chapter outlines the central frameworks, key arguments, and dominant critical approaches that have shaped the field of Indian cinema research today. Within this broad review, I draw attention to the key works that have impacted upon my own research. This includes, on the one hand, certain attitudes and approaches that I find problematic and hinder the analysis of popular Indian cinematic texts, and on the other, new emerging ideas and arguments that I aim to develop and build upon in the proceeding chapters of this thesis. As such, I will be highlighting significant areas of neglect or ‘research gaps’ that I am hoping to fill through my own study of contemporary Bollywood cinema.

Rather than providing a straight-forward literature review, I have sculpted this chapter around a particular argument that I wish to present regarding the notable lack of scholarly critical attention to *contemporary* Bollywood cinema in the West – particularly with regards to how certain patterns of academic discourse have steered Westerners (specifically non-Indian Euro-American audiences, film journalists, academics and film institutions) towards inadequate and restrictive definitions of this particular cinema. This pedagogical investigation (which accounts for the way in which Bollywood cinema has been taught and studied academically) will therefore also demonstrate how my own research can be seen as progressive and provocative in its rupturing of previous rigid models and frameworks. To add further merit to this discussion, some empirical research data, such as interviews with film academics and students of Indian cinema, will also feature within my critical review. In the final section of this chapter, I situate my own research within more recent shifting structures of thought. I shall demonstrate how the current wave of emerging literature on contemporary global Bollywood cinema promises to take the industry (and its academic study) in new directions – helping to signal an entirely new era of Bollywood films.

As my thesis focuses on post-millennial Bollywood films, my broad review will eventually narrow down to trace specifically the form and extent to which my chosen era of cinema (2000 to 2009) features within established critical writing on Indian film. Consequently, some key works on Indian cinema will have been omitted in order to allow me to explore others of greater relevance in more

depth. For example, I do not look at much critical work on genre, or more specifically, the melodrama or the musical. Nor do I consider Indian independent, New Wave, or Parallel/Middle cinema. These alternative Indian cinemas have their own vast supporting bodies of work, and the aforementioned genres are very broad topics that would be difficult to conceptualise comprehensively in addition to exploring the stated agendas for this thesis. However, in the following two chapters, I do comment on some melodramatic modes and devices, analyse the effects and style of certain musical sequences, and explore the notion of the Bollywood remake as a kind of postmodern film genre. It is also important to note that my research will not explore any of the numerous other regional cinemas within India. Whilst choosing to focus on a particular Indian film industry, I have considered that there may be other varieties of Indian cinema containing similar tropes to those discussed in this thesis. Therefore it should be noted that I do not at this stage wish to sign off my approach as being exclusively applicable or restricted to the remit of Bombay cinema, nor to assert that this is automatically reflective of *every* kind of contemporary popular Indian film. But I do envisage that my approach may be useful and adaptable when analysing other kinds of commercial Indian cinema, such as Tamil Nadu-based films⁸. Finally, it should be noted that although I uncover postmodern sentiments within Indian film criticism in the final section, this chapter will not include a literature review of postmodern theory and criticism, which is instead explored in a more focused and direct manner in the following chapter on postmodernism and Indian cinema.

Popular trends: The (hi)story of the evolution of Indian cinema

Compared to longer-established studies of other popular cinemas, such as Hollywood, Bollywood cinema still seems to be in the process of emerging as an area of academic research in the West, and its historical excavation can equally be considered a relatively young practice. At this early stage, the need for Indian film scholars to go back to the beginning of its historical emergence seems logical and essential, so that we may chronologically go about constructing Indian cinema's history and explain how it has evolved into its contemporary form. Mihir Bose's book *Bollywood: A History* (2007) for example offers a detailed study of the development of cinema in India over one-hundred-and-ten years, from its first introduction in Bombay in 1896 (courtesy of France's Lumiere brothers), all the way to rising film star-producer Amir Khan's critically acclaimed commercial blockbuster *Rang De Basanti* (2006). Interestingly, despite such an extensive and complex history of filmmaking (and comparatively short period of academic research), it seems that we have already reached a stage whereby many writers, commentators and educators feel they can offer a condensed version of this history, emphasising the Hindi film industry's most significant aesthetic and thematic shifts, which can be represented as follows:

⁸ See my section on *Abhay* in chapter three, which does acknowledge that this postmodern approach may be transferable to other Indian cinematic forms.

1910s-20s Mythologicals

(Films like *Raja Harichandra* based on Hindu texts: Ramayana, Mahabharata)

**1930s-40s Stunt movies**

(Star persona: Fearless Nadia)

**1950s Socials: The ‘Golden Era’**

(Directors: Raj Kapoor, Guru Dutt, Bimal Roy)



[1960s: “Overlap with 1950s”]

**1970s ‘Angry Man’ Era and Parallel Cinema movement peak**

(Social retribution action films, Directors Shyam Benegal and Ritwik Ghatak)



[1980s: “Overlap with 1970s”, Dip in cinema-going due to rise of television]

(Doordarshan channel launches successful *Ramayana* TV series)

**1990s NRI and Family movies**

(Diaspora-orientated productions, patriotic, traditionalist, family-oriented ‘multi-starrers’)



[2000s: Continuation of 1990s?]

Such a *history* of the development of the Bombay film industry, though useful for its categorisation and emphasis on the dominant trends throughout the decades, clearly contains certain gaps. By drawing our attention to the so-called “milestones” in the history of Indian cinema in such a way, we also come to see how entire decades (presumably considered less innovative and critically significant) appear to be pushed aside⁹. But while they may leave holes in Indian cinema’s history, these gaps do tell us a very interesting story about the trends and biases of Indian cinema scholarship. The decades that tend to be skimmed over in Indian cinema timelines are the ones that have produced less politically-orientated and more populist films. For example, with only a few minor passing references to the rise of star comedian Mehmood, legendary screen hero Dev Anand or romance movies such as *Guide*, *Jewel Thief*, *An Evening in Paris* and *Waqt*, the 1960s decade of Bombay cinema is generally seen as non-distinctive in itself, instead overlapping with the 1950s

⁹ This is common amongst many academic accounts of Indian film history. For example, Tejaswini Ganti’s guidebook on Bollywood emphasises the ‘three eras of filmmaking’ in Indian cinema history – the 1950s, 1970s and 1990s (Ganti, 2004: 24).

golden era of social satires. Similarly, the 1980s decade is seen as either marked by the fizzling out of the 1970s Angry-man era, or is simply skipped over entirely, an omission justified through the supposed dip in film production due to the rising popularity of Hindu religious television serials in India at the time. Eighties Bombay cinema also has the misfortune of being littered with low-brow ‘masala’ entertainment films¹⁰ which again are given little critical attention. As a child growing up in the 1980s, I remember it as a time where Indian film watching distinctively moved away from the cinema theatre and into the home, thanks to the rise of home VCRs and VHS piracy, and a time when Amitabh Bachchan (flagship star of the 1970s Angry-man films) still had many people crowding in the film rental section of both India’s and the UK’s Indian-owned grocery stores. I remember the excitement surrounding Bachchan’s new look (a notable departure from the 1970s Angry-man) as gloomy anti-hero *Shahenshah* (1988) or his double role and horse-riding super heroics in *Toofan* (1989)¹¹. The same decade saw the emergence of new actors such as college-boy romancer Amir Khan and the on-screen sex symbol and seductress Rekha – both of whom are regarded as icons of the cinema today.



Figure 3: Amitabh Bachchan as 1980s superhero in *Shahenshah* (left) and *Toofan* (right)

I would argue that the 1980s and 1960s are decades from which we can best study Indian cinema’s most popular form of filmmaking – the masala movie, as the genre has prevailed at these points over any other ten year period. Both the 1960s and 1980s should be considered important phases in Indian cinema’s development. They are equally valuable to a study of evolving aesthetics and styles in popular Indian film, even if their films may not always indicate the national sentiments or socio-political psyche of their audiences at that time. More recently, we can see a similar gap emerging in

¹⁰ A sometimes derogatory term referring to all-round entertainers which explicitly seek to provide audience value-for-money by including a mixture or blend of different generic ingredients within a single film (action, romance, comedy, music, tragedy and drama). Masala films are often stigmatised as mindless, formulaic, predictable and unoriginal in their execution, although it should be noted that the term is also sometimes used more broadly to represent all films under the popular Indian cinema banner.

¹¹ Although films such as *Shahenshah* and *Toofan* may not have been cinema box office hits, the rise of VHS piracy and home video rentals needs to be acknowledged as they significantly call Bollywood cinema’s assumed unpopularity during this decade into question.

relation to our understanding of popular Indian cinema in the 2000s. There is a tendency to view noughties films as either a continuity of 1990s NRI¹² films, or to simply focus on a select few texts which posit a political stance or offer up social commentary (as discussed later on in this chapter). Indian films from the 1960s, 1980s and 2000s thus share a lack of direct socio-political engagement and mark an increase in so-called “run of the mill” populist entertainment. From looking at such a historical narrative of the Bollywood cinema industry, we can begin see how socio-politics and cultural tradition ultimately determine the significance of and scholarly focus on certain periods over others.

The above gaps in Indian cinema’s narrative history are apparent in some well-known “guidebook” essays by leading scholars in the field of Indian film criticism. For example, in *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (1998) Ashish Rajadhyaksha offers a condensed history, both of Indian cinema – ending with the late 1980s and largely following the structure I described above – and Indian film scholarship (1960s to mid 1990s). He suggests here that Indian films are largely discussed in relation to the following themes and contexts: film policy, government controlled film production, censorship, New Wave Indian cinema, 1970s ‘national emergency’ (Angry-man films), Indian modernism, post-colonial theory (nationalism and identity), politics, economics, the India-Pakistan partition (terrorism), and subaltern studies (citizenship, nationalist historiographies). Choosing not to include or address the analysis of textual film form in his account, Rajadhyaksha presents the above research trends as the ‘nationalist critical tradition’ of Indian film criticism. He explains how orthodox periodisations of Indian cinema serve as ‘cinematic equivalents of the ‘biography of the nation state’ (536) and that India’s film history is ‘largely written from the stand point of state policy on Indian cinema after 1947’, with a critical-theoretical focus on ‘realist cinema’, ‘respectability’ and ‘political usefulness’ (535). Later, in another essay, he affirms that ‘film theory has repeatedly demonstrated the crucial role that nationalist-political constructions play in determining narrative and spectatorial practices’ (2003, 33).

Many scholars will try to declare that Bollywood films are simply too culturally-specific (requiring a lot of prior cultural knowledge) and suggest that the films are perhaps more suitable for sociology, anthropology, political-economy or post-colonialism based courses. Therefore it is hardly surprising that the majority of prominent Indian cinema scholars tend to have come from a social science rather than film studies background. These commentators on Indian cinema present themselves (often assertively) as culturologists, historians, or cultural philosophers, rather than film theorists or film analysts. Heidi Pauwels, who has more recently tried to break from the above patterns and traditions of Indian film research and criticism, notes how in such accounts, the film text itself is rarely looked on as a work of art. Pauwels comments that:

¹² A common term used to refer to the Non Resident Indian diaspora who form part of the 1990s Bollywood films’ subject matter and targeted international audience.

Ironically, although many of these studies argue for and see themselves as part of a rehabilitation of popular movies as a serious object of study, little sustained attention has been paid to detailed analysis of the films themselves. Sometimes scholars seem mainly interested in the way films may be invoked to address larger debates over theory within specific academic disciplines... (Pauwels, 2007: 2).

Social scientists will often boldly state their objective to ‘rescue’ Indian cinema scholarship from being limited by over-exhaustive formal analysis and textual parameters. As Rajadhyaksha and Kim Soyoung comment in their essay ‘Imagining the cinema anew’: ‘restricting the investigation to inside the movie theatre and the textual practices we find there is hardly sufficient’ and they instead favour looking at the history, spectatorship and distribution of films (Rajadhyaksha and Soyoung, 2003: 7). Furthermore, in her guidebook on Bollywood, Tejaswini Ganti is quick to assert that her work is ‘written from the point of view of an anthropologist rather than a film critic’ and therefore ‘does not undertake qualitative judgements’ or much textual analysis of the texts themselves (Ganti, 2004: 4). However, when one actually looks for this supposed excess of formalist study, it is nowhere to be found. On the contrary, there appears to be a fundamental dearth of critical attention to Bollywood film form, particularly covering the cinema of the last ten years. One of the few published monographs wholly focusing on popular Hindi film form and style is Rachel Dwyer and Diva Patel’s *Cinema India: The visual culture of Hindi film* (2002). But this book’s chapters on mise-en-scene and visual style are sketchy at best, offering generalised introductory accounts and lacking any in-depth textual analysis. Dwyer and Patel fail to offer any detail or elaborations on Bollywood visual film language (for example, aspects such as tone, pace, cinematography, ornamental framing, image composition, camera work) and they do not account for any of the more recent contemporary aesthetic shifts and experimentations in Bollywood film style.

Of course, this social science and history-based scholarship on Indian cinema has helped draw our attention to and raise our appreciation of a highly populist form of mainstream Indian cinema. But in exploring the cinema within the prism of political, historical and sociological frameworks, the film text itself (in terms of its formal aesthetic and stylistic values) can become peripheral or of secondary importance – simply an accessory to help serve socio-political thoughts and functions. Indian cinema’s history is therefore rather exclusively seen as not so much driven or shaped by its aesthetics or technological changes, but primarily by cultural, political and social factors. This vernacular, although by no means unimportant, can become a great obstacle when we try to also consider and engage with the cinema as an art form in its own right.

Traditional approaches to Indian film: Nationalism, Diaspora, Postcolonialism and Cultural Identity

As revealed earlier in Rajadhyaksha's account of Indian film criticism, nationalism prevails as the most common and popular approach to Indian film studies, though this is also problematic and controversial. The idea of popular Bombay cinema as India's 'national cinema' is often justified through its history of governmental control and financing, its entanglement in state policies, its trans-regional appeal and thematic versatility, its ethnic neutrality¹³, and its unique application of mixed Indo languages¹⁴. But despite Bollywood's mass popularity, the majority of total film output in India still comes from the South, and claiming Bollywood as the nation's official film producer leads to many other productive regional cinemas being ignored. There are also problems with the fact that industry and state do not necessarily work to support each other's interests (for an interesting discussion on the lack of cooperation between the industry and state, see Ganti, 2008).

In recent years, the rise of globalisation and the film industry's economic liberalisation has also put this label under some strain. Notions of 'national cinema' are now constantly being broken down and replaced by newer labels such as 'transnational', 'Asian' and 'global' cinema. In fact, determining the national cinema of India has never quite been so straightforward. Previously, Bengali director Satyajit Ray's socio-realist films frequently stood as fitting flagship examples of national Indian cinema, yet his specific regional focus and lack of appeal with mass Indian audiences suggested otherwise. Popular Indian films rarely directly address the nation and the fact that American cinema is continually adopted as Bollywood's 'blueprint' also makes the study of both pre- and post-colonial Indian cinema problematic (Valentina Vitali, 2006).

The nationalist focus of Indian film scholarship has naturally led to certain film texts being studied on film courses and written about more than others. For example, *Mother India* (1957), as national allegory, is perhaps the most written about Indian film and regularly tops the lists of core texts of most Indian film studies courses. Another popular topic which has been increasingly drawn upon in recent years and that is tied up in issues of nation is terrorism and border-crossing – relating to India's ongoing conflict concerning the Indo-Pak partition. But solely focusing on the national-ness or political function of Hindi films is problematic not only for the mass of commercially successful films produced by Bollywood that do not engage with these issues, but also reductive for the way it assumes the homogenisation and fixing down of Indian identity. On the contrary, I hope to reveal

¹³ Bollywood has a long track record of employing successful Muslim artists, although some will still insist on the industry's Hindu-fascist base, particularly through its publicised backing from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Shiv Sena (the far right-wing Hindu nationalist political party) – see Ganti (2002; 2004).

¹⁴ Unlike other Indian cinemas, Bollywood's films are widely viewed across different Indian states and use a self-invented and self-serving language combining Hindi and Urdu vocabulary.

how the Bollywood cinema of recent years aims not for a straightforward binding of Indian identity and nation, but rather, a fragmentation, confusion or disassembling of identity.

Another popular area of study, branching off from national cinema, is diasporic representation and film viewing in Bollywood cinema. Since the mid 1990s, contemporary Indian cinema has been described chiefly in relation to how it engages with Indian diasporic communities around the world and particularly the UK and US. Nineties Bollywood has seen the emergence of a new so-called “brat-pack” generation of young filmmakers, including Aditya Chopra, Karan Johar and Farhan Akhtar. Karan Johar is perhaps the most infamous of the group, having been responsible for producing, if not directing, some of the most famous films in the NRI film canon: *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* [aka *DDLJ*] (assistant director) *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* [aka *K2H2*] (director) and *Kabhi Kushi Kabhie Gham* [aka *K3G*] (director)¹⁵. The films of this genre are usually considered to portray NRIs as either corrupted by their Western cultural lifestyle¹⁶ or, in a moment of self-realisation and self-reformation, yearning to return to their true cultural origins¹⁷. Such depictions are largely based on stereotypes and caricatures, forcing the identity of the Non Resident Indian into homogenised representations. As Sanjay Srivastava (1998) points out, ‘Bollywood films delude themselves by creating a Westernised Indian-ness, a ‘real’ identity which is fabricated and contradictory to actual identity’ (Srivastava: 196). Nevertheless, film sociologists have demonstrated how these texts correspond with and serve the NRI audience’s supposed own desire to reattach itself to an imaginary India – the ‘Desi’ homeland:

...there has been a re-mapping of the ‘Indian’ subject... located not just within the confines of India but also outside the nation-state where countries of actual residence appear to matter little next to the diasporic character’s ‘essential’ identity premised upon origins. (Kaur, 2005: 310).

Pleasure in film viewing for NRI audiences is equated to the text’s open patriotism and securing of Indian cultural identity – although some empirical work on audiences suggests that this is not the case and that the pleasure received from such films is based more on aesthetic grounds: the originality of the script, the performance and star-power of the actors, and the look of the film in terms of its musical picturisations¹⁸ and fashionable costumes (Kaur, 2005). Furthermore, as Kaur

¹⁵ Most of the films associated with Johar are known in India by their standard abbreviations, which I have referred to and used hereon.

¹⁶ For example, in the film *Pardes* (1997), the heroine’s US-residing Indian groom is depicted as an amoral, alcoholic, misogynistic rapist.

¹⁷ In *DDLJ* we see characters repeatedly express a desire for the preservation of their culture and Indian identity. This is most directly seen in the film’s opening sequence, where the heroine’s father expresses a wish to leave a cold and grey London and go back to the luscious fields of an unspoilt colourful Punjab.

¹⁸ This is a term used widely by Indian press, filmmakers and film scholars to refer to the song sequences of Indian films (see Priya Jha, 2003).

tries to prove through her interviews with diasporic viewers, these misrepresentations can at times backfire and actually be rejected by the NRI audience as inaccurate and somewhat cringe worthy.

Although NRI characters are not unfamiliar to Indian cinema (regularly serving as a negative stereotype even before the 90s) the release of *DDLJ* is often seen as the milestone that signalled a shift of agenda in the Indian film industry. *DDLJ* is regarded as a flagship example for the Bollywood NRI film. The film has famously broken records for being the longest consecutively running Hindi movie (last recorded in 2006, it sustained 570 weeks in a Mumbai theatre), and it is a key text used on Indian cinema courses to explore notions of national identity in Hindi cinema. The film broke international records for Bollywood and was one of the first films to set the majority of its story on-location abroad in Switzerland¹⁹. *DDLJ* is seen to signal a switch in Bollywood's targeted audience, from local Indians to global NRIs. It perhaps marked the beginning of Bollywood's international profile, although the first Bollywood film to reach the top ten UK box office charts was *Dil Se* (1998). The NRI-centred plots of films like *DDLJ* transformed the style and form of Hindi films, providing more opportunities for foreign location shoots (outdoor song sequences), an increased use of English, a greater engagement with modernity, displays of extreme wealth, and raising issues surrounding family separation and detachment.

Recent studies of diasporic cinema consider splitting it into two different stages: firstly, the 1990s patriotic Bollywood nostalgia film, and secondly, the rise of films from NRI diasporic filmmakers such as Mira Nair, Gurinder Chadha, Deepa Mehta and Srinivas Krishna (Jigna Desai, 2004). However, the fact that the Bollywood NRI genre has evolved in recent years means that we now need to consider adding a third kind of cinema to this category. The films of directors such as Karan Johar are held to be prime examples of the first stage of the Bollywood NRI genre, yet is interesting how Johar's later films such as *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (aka *KANK*, 2006) and *Kal Ho Naa Ho* (aka *KHNNH*, 2003) do not quite fit this model and as a result tend not to be discussed as much. Johar's later films in fact complicate this supposed NRI pursuit for soulful Indian-ness. For example, we can read *K3G* as a highly ironic critique of Indian values²⁰ whilst Johar's subsequent two films can be seen to embrace a fragmented Indian identity that does not wish to return to its roots. Characters in *KHNNH* now celebrate the split or diffusion of Indian and Western identity and are happy to remain in New York and in the case of *KANK*, there is no mention of India at all. On a more general level, there seems to be a more Western-friendly outlook and positive view of Western cultural consumption in these films.

¹⁹ Although in reality this was achieved much earlier, such as in the 1960s with films like *An Evening in Paris*.

²⁰ See Patrick Colm Hogan (2008: 160-193).

The somewhat exhaustive discussions surrounding NRI representation in Hindi films tend to lead us to the assumption that these films work on the level of patriotism and cultural preservation, but I think there is also room here for self-critique, as I will reveal later when I discuss the fragmentation of Indian identity (of both NRI and resident Indians) in recent Bollywood films. Some scholars are also cynical and warn of how far this diaspora argument can be taken. For example, Kaur states that many commercial Hindi NRI films often fail on the level of misrepresentation and therefore:

it is too glib and cursory to say that Bollywood enables a religion-like nostalgia for people of the Indian diaspora... It is also specious to presume that Indian popular films provide a 'shared culture' that links everyone who is ethnically Indian as a general rule' (Kaur, 2005, 313-314).

The diaspora approach, for all its revelations about Bollywood's emerging internationalisation, has moved on. I believe it has been complicated, if not superseded, by new agendas and modes of representation. Contemporary Bollywood mediates and celebrates more significantly the experience of the (post)modern Indian and his or her fragmentation. Instead of simply aspiring towards caricaturing or capitalising on the diasporic experience, these newer Bollywood films are now invested in the questioning and blurring of identity, rendering the previous separation of 'foreigner' and 'desi' problematic. Due to the exhaustive output of diasporic-related work on Hindi cinema over the past ten years, I have chosen to shift my research's focus away from the NRI. Instead I wish to draw attention to aspects of the text that operate outside issues of migration, for not everything in Bollywood these days is determined and shaped by the diaspora. I will be bringing our attention back to Bollywood's textuality, and in doing so, will also consider its effect on other emerging targeted audiences within modern developing India and the non-Indian global market.

Postcolonial theory has also provided a fairly solid backbone to much Indian film scholarship. Postcolonial approaches to Indian cinema have helped to trace and explain the industry's shifts during India's pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence eras. As my research engages with postmodern approaches, it does overlap with and share similar interests to postcolonialism (such as the desire to re-write or re-construct past histories and textual hybridity), but it also seeks to offer something beyond the postcolonial perspective. The application of postcolonial criticism can present problems for the study of contemporary Bollywood cinema, particularly when it calls for a righteous return to cultural autonomy and tradition, instead of addressing the more complex emerging modes of resistance to cultural authenticity accounted for in my own research. Postcolonial issues are addressed further in the following chapter in relation to postmodernism.

Cultural studies approaches have also been prevalent in Indian film studies and have tended to help tie Bollywood films to issues of national identity. However, in contrast to the nationalism-focused discussions mentioned above, cultural studies of Bollywood films differ by placing a greater emphasis on and investing more in religious thematics as opposed to state politics by drawing attention to mythology, ritual customs, and particular culturally-driven signifying and belief systems (Dissanayake, 1988: 1). The cultural studies approach is important in helping explain how Indians construct, maintain and respond to certain meaning systems that operate through the medium of film. However, by introducing postmodernism into the equation, I take this a step further and examine how Indians also *deconstruct* their own cinematic culture and meaning systems, as well as those of others (such as the West and Hollywood). My investigation reveals an increased playfulness, inversion, subversion and questioning of such systems. For example, the tension between tradition and modernity is often considered a central theme in contemporary Asian cinema within cultural studies. But rather than seeing these two themes as polarised within Indian films (where modernity often represents the threat), my postmodern reading reveals how the lines between them have become erased or blurred. This is best seen in Bollywood's recent blending of traditional mythological and science-fiction codes to convey an ambiguous, if not pessimistic, outlook on traditional Indian values (explored in the next chapter through my reading of *Koi...Mil Gaya*).

Some cultural sociologists have made the mistake of equating Bollywood's recent internationalisation with Hollywood hegemony, viewing the cinema's global move as a threat to its cultural authenticity²¹. Bollywood's more recent globalised texts often fail to feature in cultural studies readings, perhaps because they do not present themselves as straightforward cultural political tools or 'indigenous instruments of communication' (Dissanayake, 1988: 3). They are too explicitly and self-consciously steeped in their desire to make money as commercial hybridised products, and as Wimal Dissanayake has confirmed, Indian films are deemed valuable only as windows to Asian culture and not for their artistic merit, unlike the 'good artistic films' of Satyajit Ray or Yasujiro Ozu (ibid: 7). I would argue that as Bollywood has increasingly become conscious of its capacity for cultural hybridity, it has used this to its advantage. Through my analysis, I determine how the recent cross-cultural 'inauthentic' influences in Bollywood films do not simply set out to sabotage Indian cinematic culture, but instead also enrich and affirm it. I reveal how these postmodern film texts, particularly in the form of remakes, allow Bollywood to shift between Hollywood universality and cultural specificity, maintaining a unique film language as "original plagiarisms".

²¹ See Wimal Dissanayake (1988).

Popular definitions: Guides to Bollywood cinema

A handful of introductory Bollywood guidebooks, published over the past decade, have paved the way for many further and higher education courses on popular Indian cinema in the West. These first-hand resources prove ideal for new audiences and novices seeking to grasp the (once daunting) general mechanics and peculiarities of the Bombay film industry. Unfortunately, some of these comprehensive guides have misled readers towards restrictive (if not outmoded and derogatory) definitions of the cinema they seek to understand. K. Moti Gokulsing and Wimal Dissanayake's *Indian Popular Cinema: A Narrative of cultural change* (1998) is one such text which, in its opening chapter, promotes its use as an introductory reading to the Indian cinema for future Western media and film studies courses. Unfortunately the book pays poor attention to styles and techniques in popular films beyond their musical dimensions and a handful of outmoded genres, here labelled as the mythological, the devotional, the social drama, and the erotic or romantic drama. The authors fail to unpick the 'emotional excess', 'flashy' (32) and 'obtrusive' editing (92), and 'melodrama' of popular films, or explain the possible intentions behind and desired affect of their 'lack of realism', 'extravagant use of colour' and 'self-conscious use of sound' (32). Instead, the authors' focus on style and form is reserved for artistic films outside the remit of popular Indian filmmaking, which are explored in more detail and celebrated for their sequential editing, balanced framing, centred shots and image continuity. In separating the two, Gokulsing and Dissanayake suggest that art cinema's purpose is to innovate and provoke, while the popular cinema's is to conform. As pure escapism, Bollywood is not associated with any kind of aesthetic politics. Themes such as selfhood, tradition versus modernity, alienation and the impact of Westernisation are deemed to only find expression in the artistic cinema of Ray et al (32) – an assumption which I will disprove later through my own research. Whilst the work of art film auteurs such as Ray (who is described by the authors as India's greatest filmmaker) are discussed, the directors of Bollywood are presented as more homogenous and therefore not distinctive enough in their technique to deserve individual attention – with the exception of Mani Ratnam, whose broad directorial work is only explored through a narrow selection of his most controversial and politically edgy films. Thus, despite their book's title and opening promise to present and promote popular Indian cinema, Gokulsing and Dissanayake's reading is driven by a partiality for 'serious' cinema. In their conclusion, the authors assert that popular cinema is best understood in relation to artistic cinema (136), which does nothing to assist the West's already fuzzy definitions of Bollywood. I aim to disprove some of the above claims in the proceeding chapters by exposing popular Indian cinema's diversity, complex aesthetic playfulness, and the variety and individual creativity of several of its key film directors – each with their own unique postmodern signature traits: Sanjay Leela Bhansali (figural excess), Kamal Haasan (avant-garde experimentation), Vikram Bhatt (cross-cultural remaking), Farah Khan (intertextuality and self-referentiality).

Gokulsing and Dissanayake's discussion of new popular Indian cinema, whilst hinting at its frenetic 'MTV' and hybridised 'Hollywood' visual style, has a rather negative outlook. Contemporary Bollywood is pessimistically described as the 'cardboard age' – an error which is later corrected in their revision of the book in 2004. The second edition includes an additional chapter noting the 'broad concerns and technical attributes...[and] the narrative grammar of Hindi mainstream cinema [which] has metamorphosed significantly' over the last decade (142). Here the authors note and begin to appreciate contemporary Bollywood cinema's inherent contradictions and polysemic nature, its complex blending of Hollywood-style gloss and indigenous narrative ethos, its sexual openness, its potential for creative innovation via a fresh breed of directors²², and its conflict between serving Western or modern material needs and negotiating cultural identity (143-44).

Tejaswini Ganti's *Bollywood: a guidebook to popular Hindi cinema* provides a little more emphasis on recent changes in Bollywood, although her account still paints a fairly grey picture of contemporary popular Indian cinema. Discussing new Bollywood through its corporatisation since the year 2000 (2004, 88), Ganti presents the cinema as an antithesis of the industry's nostalgically mourned for 1950s golden era, which is conversely seen as embodying creativity, originality, talent, quality and sincerity (28). She typifies recent Bollywood films through their 'matter-of-factness', their 'essentially conservative outlook... regardless of their cosmopolitan and MTV inspired style' (41), and their continuation of nationalist trends (emphasising their thematic focus on terrorism and Pro-Hindu politics). But Ganti does highlight important changes in the cinema's stylistic presentation: fluid camera movements and rapid editing are mixed with old-style frontal encounter or frontal aesthetics²³ to create a unique hybrid style (144). However, ultimately the author's aesthetic account falls short due to the socio-anthropological perspective she chooses to apply to her analysis. For example, her explanation for Bollywood cinema's distinctively rich saturation of colours is not seen as a matter of aesthetic choice, but rather a practical requirement to overcome the poor projection conditions at screenings in Indian villages (143). But as other film researchers have discovered, colour plays an important part in the coding of Hindi films²⁴ – guiding viewer pleasure and shaping the aesthetic agenda of the films. It can even serve as a filmmaker's stylistic trademark, as in the case of Sanjay Leela Bhansali (see my analysis of Bhansali's *Devdas* in chapter four).

²² In addition to Mani Ratnam, Ram Gopal Varma is now put forward as a Bollywood auteur with a unique signature style.

²³ Frontal aesthetics are explained here as the films' use of flat planes; their elimination of middle distances; and lack of points of entry into the frame - as if performing to a live audience.

²⁴ See, for example, Patrick Colm Hogan's cognitive study of colour in Hindi films (2008: 194-249).

‘Bollywood’: The double-edged word

Bollywood, n. Brit. /blwd/ US /bliwd/ [Humorous blend of the name of *Bombay* (see BOMBAY n.) and HOLLYWOOD n.] The Indian film industry, based in Bombay; Bombay regarded as the base of this industry.

The Oxford English Dictionary Online (dictionary.oed.com)

Indian cinema guidebooks will often begin with a proclamation that the Western world has finally ‘discovered’ popular Indian cinema through its global marketing under the guise of *Bollywood* (Ganti, 2004: 2). But these commentaries reveal an ambiguous relationship with the term, which has been both exploited and sneered at by industry professionals and film scholars alike. The word ‘Bollywood’ is a taboo term which many writers on Indian cinema (such as Gokulsing and Dissanayake) will, with good intention, try to wholeheartedly reject or shake off in haste. Although much of the published work on Bollywood cinema will capitalise on the word by using it in book titles and cover faces, authors of these texts will often, within the opening pages, feel the need to offer justifications for its use through lengthy footnotes (see Pauwels, 2007: 43) or frequently replace it with substitutes such as ‘Bombay’, ‘Hindi’ or ‘popular Indian’ cinema (see Ganti, 2004). But these alternative terms can be equally problematic: ‘Popular Indian cinema’ is too vague and nation-centric, failing to emphasise the industry’s global, transnational and diasporic ventures; ‘Hi-fi’ or ‘popular Hindi film’ misleadingly associates all films with Hindi-centred dialogue, ignoring that fact that many of the films (especially song sequences) include Urdu and Islamic metaphors and English dialogue; and ‘Bombay film’ is problematic again due to the industry’s numerous transnational and trans-regional productions. Of course, ‘Bollywood’ also brings its own complications by conversely trying to be all-encompassing. As Madhava Prasad notes, the phrase becomes an ‘empty signifier’, collapsing together and thus suppressing the individuality and variety of films produced in India:

those who have invested in earlier models of the Indian popular cinema – the ‘so many cinemas’ model, the folk culture model, the ‘yeh-to-public-hai-yeh-sab-janti-hai’²⁵ model, the regressive ‘pulse of the people’ model, the ideological model, art versus popular, and so on, should feel slightly resentful of this development which threatens to absorb their own special areas into its commodious (because ill-defined) purview (Prasad, 2003: 1).

Whilst quietly avoiding use of the term in his *Encyclopaedia of Indian cinema* (co-authored with Paul Willeman, 1999), Ashish Rajadhyaksha later outwardly rejects it in his article on ‘The ‘Bollywoodization’ of the Indian Cinema’ (2003), suggesting that the word has little to do with the

²⁵ Roughly translates as: ‘this-is-the-public-they-know-everything’.

actual film industry and instead signals a rather separate cultural phenomenon created by surrounding ancillary paraphernalia (theatre shows, art exhibitions, fashion culture). Rajadhyaksha argues that 'Bollywood' in fact signals the demise of the Bombay film industry, where marketing and product placement reduce cinema to 'only to a memory, a part of the nostalgia industry' (38). It therefore seems that the phrase 'Bollywood', despite all its commercial appeal and lure, has become a subject of shame and denial within film academia, and I believe that this ambivalence has in turn served to suppress our understanding of the cinema it alludes to. Whilst the word may indeed stand for a cultural trend, fad or fashion, I believe it also serves as an artistic term: a marker of a particular kind of visual aesthetic phenomenon that is representative of a contemporised Indian film style. Rajadhyaksha's call to 'drive a wedge' (31) between Bollywood and the Indian cinema is, I think, in itself damaging and unhelpful as the word offers us great insight into the contemporary status of the cinema.

The term's origins are disputable. Some believe it was phonetically transposed from 'Tollywood' in the late thirties (Prasad, 2003). Others argue it was self-created by the Bombay industry (Bhaumik, 2007) or India's English-language press (Ganti, 2004). Actors within the industry itself dismiss and resent it as a Western term created for kitsch-value (Derek Malcolm, 2002) or for referring to Indian films as simply rip-offs of Hollywood texts (see director Subhash Ghai in Hardy [2002] and actor Ajay Devgan in Prasad [2003]). However, it is important to note that many of the actors and directors who once rejected the term, including megastars Shah Rukh Khan and Amitabh Bachchan, have since accepted the term, adopting the phrase during the marketing and promotion of their own international films.

The Oxford English Dictionary currently cites the first appearance of the term 'Bollywood' in a British crime writer's mystery novel *Filmi, Filmi, Inspector Ghote* (H R F Keating, 1976), although a handful of Indian film journalists have also tried to make claims to coining the term. Whatever the case, these mysterious and disputable origins of the term confirm it as something that crept up behind the backs of industry professionals and academics without invitation, and emphasise the cinema's refusal to be pinned down and categorised. The word's loose application and somewhat inappropriate nature (the 'B' in the word becomes evermore problematic with the city's name change from Bombay to Mumbai) can also be seen to reflect the informality and displacement associated with the cinema. The fact that Bollywood, unlike its Western American counterpart, does not refer to an actual geographical location set in wooded hills, indicates the homelessness of the cinema. This particular popular Indian cinema's transferral to the global international market means that it does not necessarily exist in any physical space as a studio-based industry. The word therefore indicates both the cinema's fragmented production and the trans-locational experiences of the characters within its more recent films. Some authors, such as Raminder Kaur and Ajay J. Sinha (2005), have therefore chosen to specifically use Bollywood to refer to a transnational cinema

‘at once located in the nation, but also out of the nation in its provenance, orientation and outreach’ (Kaur and Sinha: 16).

As a portmanteau, ‘Bollywood’ indicates an important dialogue between two of the world’s biggest cinemas and, in fact, hints at their inseparability. It expresses the recent concrete indigenisation of Hollywood aesthetic modes in Indian films and the cinema’s tendency for cultural fusion or blending. As such, the term also alerts us to the cinema’s problematic relationship with cultural authenticity, indicating the loss of identity and nationally or culturally distinctive boundaries within its films. ‘Bollywood’ is often blamed for wrongly drawing associations between Indian cinema and Hollywood and for implying that popular Indian films simply produce inferior copies of popular American cinema. Interestingly, Kaushik Bhaumik (2007) has revealed how the appropriation of Western cinematic modes in Indian cinema in fact precedes the creation of the word ‘Bollywood’, tracing Hollywood influences as far back as the early 1900s (although I later argue that this kind of appropriation differs from that of newer Bollywood texts, particularly with regards to narrative remaking and the adoption of certain stylistic codes). Nevertheless, Bollywood is continually perceived as a pejorative term placing Indian cinema forever in the American film industry’s shadow. Its hijacking of an essentially Western term also hints at the Indian cinema’s ‘indulgent lampooning’ of English dialogue in order to assist its integration into a Eurocentric world and desire to appeal to its growing middle-class audience (Prasad, 2008: 43). But what may at first appear to simply be Indian cinema aping the West can in fact conversely be a strategy for the ‘reproduction of difference...which the industry itself, in its current reflexive moment, is responding to’ (Prasad, 2003). ‘Bollywood’ simultaneously presents Indian cinema as imitative and derivative of *and* alternative to the dominant Hollywood idiom – something which I explore in more detail later in my analysis of Hollywood-Bollywood remakes. As Bhaumik notes, ‘Bombay films are [also] a subversion of Western cultural and political expectations, carving out their own autonomous history outside Hollywood’ (Bhaumik, 2007: 202).

To use the word ‘Bollywood’ is to continually be conscious of the shadow of Western cinema which forever looms over it as a constant source of comparison and value-marking by film critics and academics across the world. It connotes the Indian film industry’s current obsession with capitalism, mass production and celebrity populism. Furthermore, the hybrid nature of the term conveys Indian cinema’s own inherent hybridity, particularly in recent years where its films outwardly mesh together multiple cultures and identities and negotiate between traditional Indian-ness and Western modernity. The linguistic similarity between the two film industries also indicates a hidden imperialist agenda: Indian cinema’s (perhaps naïve) desire for super-power and aspirations to replace Hollywood as the global dominant cinema.

Perhaps at its most basic level as a humorous blend of terms, 'Bollywood' refers to the jest and ridicule which the cinema both embodies and is subjected to by its harshest critics. It refers to a cinema that is not taken seriously and is often mocked – it 'denotes the user's distance from the object, a non-participatory passion for description' (Prasad, 2003). Most importantly, as word-pastiche, it is an indicator of intertextual playfulness, unabashed plagiarism, cultural appropriation and parody. As Madhava Prasad has wisely pointed out in 'This thing called Bollywood' – a more optimistic account of the word's appearance and usage – the change of name might indicate a change in reality too:

...we do find, do we not, that this cinema has given us, in the last decade or so, a large number of films which may be said to constitute a new genre of sorts, which has been, moreover, the staple of the new global Bollywood presence (2003: 2).

As Prasad later argues in extending his previous discussion in 'Surviving Bollywood' (2008), 'Bollywood' is an important indicator of *change* within the Indian film industry, specifically in terms of contemporary Indian cinema's increased bilingualism, its internationally-educated directors, its shifting notions of Indian identity via globalisation, its textual struggles and contradictions on the level of representation, its increased commoditisation as a 'fetish object' (50) and most importantly of all, its now inherent self-referential exploitation as a global brand:

'Bollywood' also signals the advent of a certain reflexivity, becoming a cinema for itself as it were, recognizing its own unique position in the world, the contrastive pleasures and values that it represents vis-à-vis Hollywood. This reflexivity is as much a form of self-awareness as it is a know-how that enables the Hindi film to reproduce itself for a market that demands its perpetuation as a source of cultural identity (50).

National, Third, World, Asian, Global or Transnational cinema?

Our perceptions, understanding and critical approaches towards popular Indian cinema will also be shaped by how it is categorised. Particularly with its recent move into global territory, the concept of Bollywood cinema as either 'national', 'third' or 'world' cinema is complicated if not compromised, inviting newer and more elusive labels such as 'Asian', 'Global' and 'transnational'. These latter labels, although arriving with their own set of problems, have helped broaden our understanding of the changes that have taken place within the industry in recent years.

When perceived as 'third cinema', Indian films are predominantly analysed as instruments of social change and 'nation-bound' national allegories (Jyotika Viridi, 2003: 4), with a focus on political

themes drawn from a narrow selection of exemplary canonised classical texts. Anne Tereska Ciecko (2006) has criticised this category for homogenising all non-Western cinema, arguing that it does not suit Bollywood's levels of production. This includes its textual diversity, its obsession with luxurious wealth, happy endings and big budgets, and its investment in modernity, capitalism and multinationalism (Ciecko: 21-22). Furthermore, as James Chapman (2003) also suggests, it becomes very difficult to present Indian cinema as an 'alternative' to Hollywood, due to the cinema's own governance, dominance and mass popularity within India. Thus, some even argue that Bollywood is much better suited to the category of 'first cinema' due to its commercial studio base and Hollywood-style production model (Chaudhuri, 2005) and that it is no longer humble enough to fit the 'world of the disadvantaged' model of World cinema (Bhaumik, 2006: 196), unlike the past works of Guru Dutt, Raj Kapoor or Ray.

The category of 'World cinema' has also faced much scrutiny recently as an outdated film concept, particularly with the increase in transnational film production. As Chapman notes, World cinema has traditionally given privilege and preference to texts that visibly differentiate themselves from Hollywood, whilst those cinemas (like contemporary Bollywood), which share common traits or model themselves on Hollywood fall into a trap of being marginalised (Chapman, 35). Similarly, Bhaumik has commented that 'any popular cinema without art-house, realist or genre credentials on the West's terms stands condemned to a marginal position in the mainstream' (2006, 195). Following Rajadhyaksha's concept of 'Bollywoodization', he argues that Bollywood's world profile is suspect as its impact and presence in the West has been non-cinematic, or rather *extra*-cinematic. Bollywood's marginal success as a recognisable World cinema is therefore regarded as purely a by-product of marketing and political multiculturalism (ibid, 194) as the cinema fails to satisfy World cinema's taste for high modernism, realism, genre, serious subjects and political edginess. Bhaumik suggests that Bollywood can only be accommodated if the West expands its rather restrictive criteria of "good" World cinema.

Unlike World cinema, the 'Asian cinema' model has more explicitly accommodated both popular and niche (artistic or cult) texts and brought into play a larger variety of identities and subject positions (Ciecko, 2006). But some commentators have also warned how the use of prefix 'Asian' can be accused of ghettoisation and 'Otherising' Eastern cinema. It is often posited away from or against Hollywood, thus reinforcing the centrality or 'false universalism' of American cinema in film studies (Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, 2006). But such arguments do little but delay research and fail to account for the fact that the mainstream cinema under the umbrella of 'Asian' (including Hong Kong and Bollywood blockbusters) also often engages in a complex dialogue-exchange with Hollywood on the level of textual style and form, which cannot be ignored.

There has recently been a boom in published criticism on Global contemporary Indian cinema, most notably seen in recurring titles such as *Brand Bollywood: A New Global Entertainment Order* (Derek Bose, 2006), *Once upon a time in Bollywood: The Global Swing of Hindi Cinema* (Gurbir Jolly, Zenia Wahwani and Deborah Barretto, 2007), *Global Bollywood* (Anandam P. Kavoori and Aswin Punathambekar, 2008), *Global Bollywood: Travels of Hindi song and Dance* (Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti, 2008), *Untimely Bollywood: Globalization and India's New Media assemblage* (Amit S. Rai, 2009) and *Global Bollywood: Culture, diaspora and Border Crossings in Popular Hindi Cinema* (Rajinder Dudrah, forthcoming). For the most part, these texts tend to focus on diasporic filmmaking and cross-over films produced outside of the Bollywood film industry, but a number of these global studies have also helped elevate the analysis of Bollywood's dialogue-exchanges with and influences from other cinemas. For example, Gurbir Jolly sees globalisation as India's 'invitation to the Anglosphere' and its opportunity to both generate wealth and 'civilize India' (Jolly, 2007, xiv). Other scholars see this global move as an opportunity to learn how the cinema negotiates, fixes and unfixes national narratives in a global context (Kaur and Sinha, 2005). But the national is no longer Bollywood's only concern, with many of its seemingly nation-centred films now additionally seeking 'international authentication'²⁶. The Global cinema approach appears to be the latest development in Bollywood studies, although scepticism towards this newer form of cinema is also abundant. For example, Ashok Raj perceives Indian cinema's global move as a 'curse' and calls for a nostalgic return to previous cinematic era:

The macho heroes and sensuous heroines are...worshipped for their [...] ad-model looks. And as these third-generation actors are part of the new materialism and representatives of the prevailing yuppie culture—they are simply not equipped to evoke the awe, the dignity and the grandeur of the era of our cinema's earlier legendary artists.... the future Indian film will continue to be a reflection of the profound crisis of values being faced by society, which will only grow more complex in the future (Ashok Raj, 2004, 802; 804).

Similarly, Monika Mehta (2007) pessimistically sees the global as the national in sheep's clothing. She argues that the film industry's recent economic liberalisation is simply a way of the state reinscribing its authority and values. But Mehta's argument is largely directed towards the diaspora and family films of the late 1990s and does not account for the noticeable apathy towards social and political discourse that follows in later films (Mehta, 22-23)²⁷.

²⁶ See for example Susan Dewey on the Oscar expectations surrounding *Lagaan* (Dewey, 2007: 11).

²⁷ Although this new era certainly assists the dehistoricising and depoliticising agendas of transnational capital (Yoshimoto, 2006), through my research I will demonstrate that Bollywood is in fact incredibly conscious and critical of its methods of representation and political in its anti-political stance.

The most recent (and arguably, most appropriate) category used to explore Bollywood's current manifestation is that of 'transnational' cinema. Popular Indian cinema has diffused with different cultures through a variety of ways. Not only has it appropriated other cultures in its formal aesthetics and subject matter – setting its entire film story abroad in foreign locations such as South Africa (*Race*), Australia (*Salaam Namaste*) and Miami (*Dostana*), but it has also invested much time in loaning its talents to produce films for other countries (for example, choreographer Farah Khan's work in Chinese musical *Perhaps Love*) and vice versa (by employing Hong Kong martial arts experts for *Krrish*). Bollywood is also becoming increasingly transnational through having its films co-financed by Hollywood conglomerates such as Twentieth Century Fox (*Ek Hasina Thi*), Sony Pictures, (*Saawariya*) Walt Disney (*Roadside Romeo*) and Warner Brothers (*Chandni Chowk to China*). Despite initial fears of possible ethnocentrism, film scholars have slowly begun to investigate cross-cultural and inter-cultural play within these transnational films²⁸.

Transnational cinema has been considered an important object of investigation particularly for the way in which it self-orientalises through an 'authoethnographic gaze' (Rey Chow cited in Chaudhuri, 97) – consciously exploiting, exoticising, parodying and critiquing both its home and foreign cultural conventions (as demonstrated in my analysis of *Om Shanti Om* and *Kaante* in the following two chapters). It has enabled Bollywood cinema to not only negotiate Indian identity amongst multiple identities, but to also dismantle and *remystify* Indian-ness. Most important to my own investigation, transnational cinemas have been identified as operating through, occupying and serving postmodern principles. Shohini Chaudhuri has noted the widespread influence of postmodern aesthetics in various contemporary World cinemas (particularly MTV-style filmmaking practices) which in countries such as China have signalled 'the full-blown arrival of postmodern culture...hand-in-hand with its cities' consumer lifestyles boom' (100) and, paradoxically, in conjunction with the rise of modernity (10). In her discussion of recent commercial Chinese transnational cinema which has tried to resist the realist conventions of sixth generation Chinese films, Chaudhuri notes several markedly postmodern cultural traits, such as the rejection of excessive politics and the blurring of (American) popular and (European) artistic styles (99). She also refers to the postmodern pastiche present in contemporary Thai cinema, best exemplified through its recent Westerns. I believe that we can find similar postmodern traits within contemporary Bollywood films and, whereas national cinema approaches to popular Indian cinema looked at the filmic constructing of nation, my postmodern reading helps consider the way in which transnational Bollywood films *dissolve* nation and Indian identity. Further discussions of non-Western forms of postmodern filmmaking are explored in more detail in the next chapter.

²⁸ See Nitin Govil et al (2005), Jigna Desai (2004), Anand Mitra (1999), Kaushik Bhaumik (2007).

While ‘Asian cinema’ may be oversimplified and ‘third’ and ‘world’ cinema have become outmoded, it seems that ‘global’ and ‘transnational’ are the categories that are being adopted in haste due to the indisputable impact of globalisation upon Bollywood filmmaking processes. But while the ‘global’ is still a fuzzy term, the ‘transnational’ draws a convenient line from the national to the global in specifically addressing co-production. The transnational also refers to cross-cultural exchange on the level of textuality. While a film like *Chandni Chowk to China* is a transnational film on all levels – transcending geographical boundaries in its production (produced by a Hollywood studio and filmed in Chinese studios and locations) as well as incorporating conventions from Hong Kong martial arts films and Bollywood musicals – a film like *Koi...Mil Gaya* may initially only be seen as a nationalist film, having being made in India and backed by the Hindu Bharatiya Janata political party. However, as I later reveal in my analysis of the film, *Koi...Mil Gaya*’s adoption of Hollywood narrative and generic codes still suggests some sort of transnational exchange in operation. Of course, there is still much work to be done with regards to what we mean by transnational, particularly in determining whether it really exists as a definitive term, or is just another fuzzy replacement for the previously inadequate categories mentioned above. Further discussions on new perspectives on Indian cinema in its Global form can be found in part three of this chapter. But first it is important to explore the scholarly status of Bollywood cinema in light of the above critical review.

Part 2: The Scholarly Appeal of (Contemporary) Popular Indian Cinema

Displeasure and unpopularity in the West

Popular Indian cinema had been subject to marginalisation well before its kitsch Bollywood status. In a 1949 UNESCO Courier article reviewing India’s various artistic practices, Kwaja Ahmad Abbas contemplates how the cinema’s comprehension and success with Euro-American international audiences was ‘doubtful’, and that a specialised audience could only be secured with the ‘right kind’ of ‘good Indian films’. Whilst claiming to offer a list of such films, which represented a ‘complete cross-section of...Indian cinema’, Abbas places a firm emphasis on historicals, non-commercial realistic feature-documentaries, ‘dignified’ mythologicals (that had ‘none of the tinsely gaudiness’ associated with some of the more typical films of that genre) and artistic ‘masterpieces’ depicting social themes in feudal society – offering ‘simplicity’, ‘fidelity’ and a ‘humanistic approach’. Many of the films in Abbas’s recommendation are valued for their ‘utter realism’ and their holding up a ‘mirror to Indian life’. They are ‘daring and progressive’ with a ‘dignified restraint’. The few popular texts that are considered worthy of merit are specifically ‘Hollywood-style melodramas’, whose ‘colourful pageantry would appeal to the Western audiences... notions of the exotic [East]’. No recognition is given here of Indian cinema having its

own popular dominant alternative to the Hollywood melodrama. Abbas warns his Western readers that they should not approach Indian films with the same expectation as that of Hollywood products, and should instead expect a certain level of frustration at the over-lengthiness, exasperating musical basis and slow tempo of the films. Interestingly, Abbas suggests how these films 'will acquire the nervous tension and mounting tempo of a Hollywood thriller when the impact of industrialism has created the same psychological atmosphere in India as in England and America' (Abbas, 1949, 8). Abbas was certainly onto something here. Global capitalism has indeed led to a shift in tempo within Bollywood films, although not necessarily matching that of Hollywood films. Abbas's review indicates early on how Western pursuits for realism, logic and seriousness have served to marginalise popular forms of India's cinema. Of course, not all Western responses towards commercial Indian films have been negative. But I would argue that even then this positive discourse can be vague, non-specific and kitschy. It is celebratory, yet fails to critically explore the films beyond their bizarre novelty value. For example, as writer Justine Hardy describes almost fetishistically in *Vanity Fair's* 2002 special edition 'salute' to popular Indian cinema²⁹, Bollywood offers 'dreams where everything is over-lit, over-fed and neo-nausea bright. This sweaty technicolour hallucination, this spinning core of Hindi film, is forever in your face here at flesh-on-Arabia sea' (Hardy, 2002, 12).

Western film reviewers seem to be the usual suspects contributing to the wave of negative censure Bollywood had received over the years, and this is something that has already been explored by Rosie Thomas in her landmark 1985 *Screen* article 'Indian cinema: Pleasures and Popularity', and later in a more contemporary context by Kaushik Bhaumik (2006). Thomas's article is possibly the most widely cited piece of academic critical writing on popular Hindi film today. Despite being written over two decades ago, it still finds its way into almost every introductory university course and guidebook on Indian cinema, so much that it could be described as Indian film studies' (somewhat less contested) answer to 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative cinema' (Laura Mulvey, 1973). Thomas's essay is essentially an introduction to Indian cinema's place in the Western context. It candidly conveys the fact that mainstream Bombay cinema has, up until the mid 1980s, remained generally ignored, ridiculed or misunderstood by Western critics, and that such a condescending reception is ultimately facilitated by upper middle-class intellectuals, critics, and governing bodies from within India who 'shamefacedly disavow' and make 'defensive apologies' on behalf of the cinema (118). As a consequence, Indian cinema's recognition in the first world leaves something to be desired. Popular Hindi films are Otherised (more so than some other Asian cinemas) and are defined by extreme difference as a markedly 'alternative' marginal mode of cinema. Indian films are generally 'unseen' and 'unspoken' of. They are met with 'arrogant silence' and 'complacent ignorance'. Those who do take the opportunity to watch the films dismiss them with 'patronising

²⁹ This supplement was produced in association with UK departmental store Selfridges' high-profile promotional event paying homage to Bollywood in 2002.

amusement’ or ‘facetious quips’ accompanied by an assortment of excuses and complaints (as noted below), attacking various aspects of the films’ stylistic and formal construction (117). Throughout her article, Thomas offers us a wide vocabulary of terms that have been used (by different people, at different times, in different contexts) to describe popular Indian films. Together, these descriptions can offer us a deeper understanding of what it is exactly about Indian cinema that repels the Westerner (both critics and spectators). Thus, in an attempt to explore this displeasure, I have collected together these critical comments and phrases collated by Thomas and grouped them under the key aspects of a film to which they refer, as in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Critical comments on Indian cinema, sourced from Rosie Thomas’ article

<p>Narrative content: <i>style/image over narrative; depthless</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on spectacular events and songs at expense of narrative • Lack of story <p>Story comprehension: <i>meaninglessness</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mystification • Nonsensical plots • Senseless • Convoluted plot <p>Structure and Pacing: <i>fragmentation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elephantine capers (slow movement of narrative) • Lengthy duration <p>Originality and quality: <i>recycling; repetition; unauthentic</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor imitations of Hollywood film conventions and texts • Mediocrity • Sub-standard • Formulaic <p>Tone and performance: <i>sublime; exhibitionism; disclosure</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over-enthusiasm • Lacking gentility • Manufactured emotions • Enthusiastic • Brutalism (in talk and acting) • Exaggerated stylised acting • Overblown dialogue <p>Western spectator’s experience of watching: <i>shame</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disarming • Charming • Embarrassing (cringe-worthy) • Resistance to admitting finding pleasure in viewing 	<p>Levels of realism: <i>un-realism; reality and fantasy blurred</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absurd elements mistaken as reality • Lack of truthfulness • Unregulated, uncontained spectacle • Overt phantasy • Preposterous narrative • Disregarding character psychology • Lack of historical, geographical and spatial accuracy • Unreal • Ridiculous <p>Intellectual value: <i>anti-intellectualist</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mindless melange • un-sensible and non-serious themes • Immaturity, naïve • Stupendous • Inane • Lack of ‘sensible themes’ • Gauche <p>Political content: <i>confusion or lack of social politics</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capitalist • Sexist (Insensitive) • Exploitative • Politically reactionary • Purely escapist intentions <p>Aesthetic mode: <i>figural excess</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visually garish (overt spectacle) • Exotica • Artificiality • Vulgar • Aesthetically reactionary • Spectacle • Stylised
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As the above collected comments (which Thomas largely extracts from various Western film review magazines) reveal, Indian cinema unashamedly stands in opposition to the very things Western critics tend to value in cinematic works of art: a concrete and carefully paced narrative; textual depth of meaning, preferably with socio-political undertones; a commitment to authenticity and originality; a gracefulness and gentility in execution; characters with robust psychological profiles and clear agendas or functions; a genuine, metered display of emotion; a sense of realism conveyed through plausible scenarios and lucid distinctions between the real and the fantastical (something *perceivably* real); and a certain obligation towards historical, geographical and spatial accuracy. More importantly, these traits point towards those often attributed to criticisms of postmodern art – depthlessness, meaninglessness, fragmentation, unoriginality and recycling, stylistic excess, presenting the sublime, anti-politics, unconventional representations of reality, and anti-intellectualism (explored in more detail in the following chapter).

Furthermore, if Indian cinema does indulge in extreme, extrovert emotional displays and vulgar excess, one can instantly see why the intellectuals that Rosie Thomas speaks of have a problem engaging with and admitting to enjoying the ‘guilty-pleasures’ offered by the Indian cinema. Perhaps the ‘intellectual and emotionally cold’ (ibid: 121) Western critic cannot handle the Hindi popular film because, in requiring identification while viewing, it assaults his or her Ego and ideas of respectability and sensibility. The cinema asks the grown-up adult to engage (through identification) in infantile displays of emotion, to return to a naïve sense of the world and to forgo the real, logical or rational in favour of fantasy, play and imagination. It asks the spectator to externalise all repressed emotions until he or she is emptied out, and as such, it takes away one’s privacy, depth, individuality and all that is secret. What happens to our Western standards of taste, quality, and self-respect in such a context? Indian cinema is fundamentally and essentially undignified. It assaults the composed, noble image that the Western critic has worked so hard to maintain, by threatening to take it away. If Western audiences do indeed identify with on-screen images as mirrors of their more perfect selves, then perhaps it is their discontent with the shamed, naked emotions of the Indian film protagonist that repulses them – coupled with their inability to transfer or surrender to the imaginary realm to the extent of which the Indian spectator does with remarkable ease³⁰.

³⁰ Psychoanalytic approaches, although extremely rare in studies of Hindi film, are worth investigating in order to identify such discrepancies. Although this is not the focus of my own investigation, I refer to the work of Jacques Lacan (1977) here to demonstrate this interesting hypothesis, which supports the value of looking further into issues of displeasure. According to Lacanian film theory, the film text satisfies the desire to connect with one’s on-screen ideal-ego (our identifiable better self or Other) who will be suitably composed on-screen. If the ideal-ego (the film protagonist) is shamed or embarrasses itself, this could in turn cause the spectator to experience a sense of disgust and lead to dis-identification.

Almost twenty-five years after Thomas's article was published, it seems that these same negative attitudes are still festering and others have tried to bring the same discussion to a more contemporary context. For example, in discussing its place in the global age, Kaushik Bhaumik explains how the concept of World cinema is problematic for Bollywood, which he describes as an 'unfine' cinema, particularly when considered from a Western critical perspective (Bhaumik, 2006). Bhaumik concludes that Bollywood's failure in the West is a result of its generic impurity. It lacks the defined genre conventions which assist filmic comprehension and typically help Western audiences to digest foreign films. Another reason for its unpopularity is its musical elements, and Bhaumik suggests that a revival in Hollywood musicals may be its only saving grace. However, even with the rise of genre-based films in Bollywood (particularly horror and science-fiction films) and the recent success of Hollywood musicals such as *Mamma Mia!* (2008), we see very little increase in the West's taste for Bollywood song and dance – implying that the problem lies in something else inherent in the design of Bollywood films. Bhaumik warns against the over-emphasis of song and dance elements of Bollywood films, which lead to the assumption that the cinema is restricted to its musical dimensions. Many Western audiences fail to realise that this element is a naturalised feature of Bollywood films that one becomes more accustomed to when watching such films, and Bhaumik asserts that the West needs to learn to look beyond the music, just as it has done with films such as *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) as road movie and *Sweeney Todd* (2007), with its elements of horror.

From some perspectives, the situation and damage could be worse now as popular Indian cinema has achieved a more permanent public awareness and has a rapidly growing international profile. In February 2009, I listened to a Radio Four news feature about the critical success of *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), which asked if the Mumbai film industry "could ever produce a film like it". After mentioning how Bollywood has previously failed to attract Western audiences, the report suggested that the Indian film industry may need to consider ditching its fantasy-based style for a more realist aesthetic, firstly by showing the grittier side of India – as seen in Danny Boyle's film. This argument concerning Bollywood's problematic 'unrealism' is long-standing. But is it really a solution to insist that Bollywood drops its fundamental characteristics for what some have crudely described as 'poverty porn' (Alice Miles, 2009)? And what about the other fantasy and spectacle-based movies that drew in Western audiences and award nominations in the same year (*The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, *The Dark Knight*)?

Film institutions and representatives

The supposed Western appetite for sophisticated and realistic Indian films seems to trickle down into the film festivals which ironically claim to raise the profile and celebrate popular Indian cinema. For example, the official press release for the British Film Institute's 2007 *Indian cinema now*

film showcase has an opening paragraph which openly rejects the “frivolity and glitz of Bollywood”. Even in the programme’s synopses for the few Bollywood films that are selected for the festival, there is a need to include justifications for the film’s un-integrated song sequences and historical inaccuracies³¹. Furthermore, unusual choices behind the appointment of Western ambassadors for the Indian cinema also add to the problem. For example, Hollywood independent producer Ismail Merchant recently wrote a forward for a book called *The Bollywood saga* (Dinesh Raheja and Jitendra Kothari, 2004), which aims to celebrate and promote the cinema. But Merchant’s firm Western base and history of producing elegant Western period dramas makes him an unusual spokesperson for Bollywood cinema, and in his foreword, he in fact criticises “the glut of such formalised entertainment without variation in style or substance [which] may soon alienate all but the most jaded of cinema-goers”. Merchant goes on to warn against Bollywood’s dangerous over-production and its over-hyped films and he suggests that instead of copying from the West, it is “imperative” that Bollywood filmmakers instead learn from World cinema.

Correspondingly, as previously mentioned, auteur Satyajit Ray has been a longstanding representative of the Indian cinema in the West, despite his distinctively European film style and lack of popularity with the mass Indian audience. Ray’s high international-profile has proved an obstacle for Indian popular cinema, particularly considering his condemnation of popular Hindi films. In his 1976 essay ‘What is wrong with Hindi films?’ Ray suggested that popular Indian films had in some ways become a source of shame. He blamed the negative influence of American cinema, which depicted a way of life “so utterly at variance” with that of Indians, and instead presented Italian neo-realism as a positive role model, arguing that it would be impossible for India to ever achieve Hollywood’s high-tech polish. Ray insisted that what Indian cinema needed was not more gloss, but integrity and a more intelligent appreciation of the limitations of the medium, and that it needed to adopt more unique and recognisably Indian iconography. Thirty years on, it seems that Bollywood has partly invalidated Ray’s statement, at least in terms of its technical proficiency. And, once again, such calls for culturally authentic Indian films are becoming increasingly problematic in recent years with the rise of remaking and textual appropriation in Bollywood, something I will return to later on in this chapter and more explicitly in chapter four.

(Western) Academia

Despite the proliferation of Indian film research from the mid 1980s onwards, Indian cinema’s appearance in film studies courses remains somewhat cursory. Some of the Western film academics I have spoken to over the course of my PhD research have offered very straightforward and

³¹ Cinema institutions and theatres have used several excuses to explain why they do not regularly screen Bollywood films, such as being charged exorbitant prices from film distributors. There are also ethical issues concerning the rumours surrounding the cinema’s alleged funding of underworld and Islamic terrorist activities and its anti-Pakistani sentiments – see Aftab (2002: 95-97).

practical reasons for this, such as the films previously being hard to get hold of, badly subtitled, and too long in duration to fit lecture booking slots, or the cinema seeming too large in scale to be done justice in the time allocated. A few UK film scholars I have spoken to were honest enough to admit that they also had an aversion to Bollywood and instead felt more drawn to other Eastern World cinemas (Iranian and Japanese in particular), which they found to be much more approachable. Many argued that Bollywood films were less accessible or ‘hermeneutically sealed’ (Bhaumik, 2006: 188) and required an entirely different set of analytical tools. As a film academic from University of Bristol recently explained to me: “the frustration comes when one watches and enjoys a film like Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s *Devdas*, and yet does not know what to *do* with it”.

One further reason for this avoidance, this time given by a Media and Cultural Studies academic at the University of Sussex, concerned the issue of Western film academics and their white liberal guilt. Bollywood films were perhaps too culturally alien or intimidating due to their ethnicity-centred form and style, which made non-Indian academics feel it was inappropriate for them to comment on the texts or fearful that this would shamefully expose their lack of understanding of Indian culture. Although controversial, this reason may go some way to explaining why the few Western academic film courses that do incorporate Indian cinema will emphasise the cinema’s cultural or social attributes rather than expose it to the straightforward aesthetic criticism akin to studies of American popular cinema.

Another related contextual problem concerns the difficulty of getting Western students to take Indian film material seriously in the first place, as they often quickly turn to ridicule or become confused at the lack of familiar visual cues, not knowing whether to read the films as serious works or highly-ironic comedies (“am I *supposed* to laugh at this?”). From my own observations of teaching this cinema to students, the Indian accented use of English (or *Hinglish* as its now termed) is also somewhat a source of irritation (students described hearing phrases such as ‘bloody hell’ and ‘bloody shit’ in Hindi films as “annoying”). Certain English or American expressions may be read as poor cultural mimicry rather than being understood as phrases genuinely used by modern day Indians (interestingly, one student described scenes with English dialogue as specifically “non-Bollywood moments”). The paradigetic nature of Bollywood song sequences also proved a confusing and surreal viewing experience, as sometimes it was unclear if the sequence is the course of a character’s dream-fantasy or some sort of revived memory of an actual past event.

In the classroom: Student responses to studying popular Indian films

Whilst auditing an Indian cinema class for a group of non-Indian film studies undergraduates³², I observed student responses to *Kabhi Kabhie* (1976) which was, for many, their first encounter with popular Indian cinema. Almost instinctively, students mocked the film for its amateur special effects and historical inaccuracies, as well as certain cliché-ridden gestures and peculiar dress-codes (the throwing of a scarf in the wind or a man wearing a thin white polyester pant suit in the pouring rain). Changes of characters' outfits during song sequences were seen as continuity mistakes due to the lack of production experience of filmmakers, rather than being understood as conscious stylistic decisions made to enhance visual pleasure. The fashioning of flared trousers and skirts instead of traditional Indian attire was not seen as "normal" but a naive attempt on India's part to keep up with Western culture. Tilted angle camera shots were not artistic, but "bizarre". Students felt jolted by the compactness of narrative events, complaining that the story-time moved too quickly: "it was like watching the middle section of a story. There was not a beginning or an end and no establishing of character relationships... [it was as if they had] already fallen into the story". Whilst the students followed the films' longer developing stories, they often failed to remember or follow incidences compressed and represented by montage sequences, insisting that they "needed more time" or information to process the action. Acting styles were regarded as oddly inconsistent – switching from realist and serious to performative and parodic. Likewise, certain stars' acting styles were regarded as "cringe worthy", presenting insincere emotions which seemed un-naturalistically magnified. Furthermore, the surface nature and artificiality of fight sequences lent them to be compared to the "stupid overacting" of TV shows such as *Power Rangers*³³. The film's narrative conclusions were considered unsatisfying as they were either unrealistic (illogical) or did not meet their expectations and taste for controversy. For example, one student said she expected the film to end with an adulterous relationship as opposed to a faithful return to marriage: "I wanted the predictability of controversy and found the traditional balanced happy ending quite jarring". Furthermore, the students felt unsatisfied by the way a family conflict was resolved by a simple apology or family hug. They lacked the willing suspension of disbelief required to fill in certain gaps to explain certain "implausible" scenarios, such as a horse suddenly appearing from nowhere to rescue the hero. Such coincidences were regarded as unbelievable and therefore distracting for being "not like real life". Character motives were also discussed at length for their lack of logical justification, and some on-screen relationships were described as "uncomfortable" and "weird", particularly interactions and affections between mothers and sons, which were "too intense" and confusingly appeared to suggest romantic undertones. Politically conscious students found the films' reinforcement of clichés and racist stereotypes shocking and problematic, whilst at the level of presentation, students were generally surprised by the amount of explicit metaphors, particularly the text's dependence on visual representations where dialogue did not work independently and was

³² This empirical investigation took place from January to June 2009 at the University of Sussex.

³³ A 1990s American children's TV series franchise which included costumed superheroes and comic-book style action stunts.

often backed up by non-diegetic imagery (“they [the films] are so in your face... we *hear* the dialogue about the waves, so we don’t need to actually *see* the waves”).

The majority of the above students’ reasons for initially choosing to take the Indian cinema course were related to tourism, exoticism or cultural capital. Some students appreciated Bollywood’s novelty and kitsch cult value – citing Western popular cultural references (the opening sequence to Terry Zwigoff’s *Ghost World* [2001] and various novelty Bollywood music compilation CDs) as a source of inspiration – or for its culture-shock value. However, many students also admitted that although they had not been exposed to Indian popular cinema before, they were familiar with the negative stigma attached to more commercial Bollywood films, which they thus expected to enjoy less. Some outwardly rejected the term ‘Bollywood’, instead emphasising their interest in more “authentic” and “traditional” modes of Indian cinema which were “gritty” and dealt with serious issues such as poverty. Co-British funded film *Monsoon Wedding* was cited as one such film which, unlike Bombay produced films, seemed to fulfil their ideas of “what *real* India is *really* like”. Interestingly, at the end of the course, the few students that had previously discovered Indian cinema through Satyajit Ray (via previous World cinema courses they had taken) expressed that this may have misled them to automatically associate “real Indian-ness” with social deprivation, poverty and realism. They agreed that Bollywood films had instead allowed them to rethink, redefine and broaden their understanding of genuine Indian experiences from a more contemporary and modern context. However, this exposure to newer Bollywood texts still did not necessarily lead to positive viewing pleasures. One student, who originally expressed a wish to overcome negative attitudes towards Bollywood cinema (“I want to understand it, to be able to take it seriously... not to laugh *at* it but to be laughing *with* it”) noted her constant frustration at the popular films’ persistent lack of realism, eventually finding herself unable to adjust to this and in the end largely preferring the socially realist and “polished” earlier films on the course (specifically, those directed by Guru Dutt). Interestingly, despite all the above issues, at the end of the course all the students cited 1990s Bollywood archetype *DDLJ* as one of their favourite films on the course, although they struggled to articulate how and why this was the case. Particularly when writing their essays about these Indian films, the students said that they struggled to find the means to describe or articulate the films in terms of their form and style – perhaps largely due to the general absence of formal analysis in their critical readings.

Indian film education

From looking at a sample mix of Indian cinema course outlines collected from several UK, US and Indian universities, it is noticeable how historical or biographical accounts of the Indian cinema tend to skim over less politically-focused periods – often dissolving them into decades which have a more socio-political premise, as discussed earlier on in this chapter. More often than not, these

biographies stop at the 1990s, and as a consequence, this decade's family-based diaspora-themed films are often mistakenly represented as the current phase of Bollywood filmmaking. When Indian film courses do include films produced after the year 2000, Bollywood texts tend to be ignored. Instead, contemporary Indian cinema is explored through cross-over films of diaspora-directors like Mira Nair or Canadian filmmaker Deepa Mehta. Of course, those compiling Indian film courses have to make do with whatever accompanying critical literature is published and readily available to them. There is still very little substantial published work on how Bollywood has formally changed since 2000, other than minor points made within broader discussions around the industry's global-economic shifts³⁴.

A few tutors of Indian cinema have attempted to pedagogically discuss their experiences and shed light on the difficulties faced when trying to teach the subject to a non-Indian audience. For example, Lucia Kramer (2008) has described how some of the cinema's most fundamental features can create difficulties for her German students (particularly males), who will often reject the films due to their inferior technical quality and seemingly brainless kitsch melodramatics (Kramer, 2008: 113). There is also a particular cynicism towards the way in which NRI films inaccurately construct and depict the Western world as Indian territory (119). Kramer asserts the need to emphasise Bollywood's heterogeneity which she sees as 'the basic prerequisite for an adequate engagement' with the cinema (120). She also claims that newer Bollywood films can help overcome some of the above issues, suggesting that the introduction of more contemporary versions of historicals (*Jodha Akbar*), literary adaptations (*Devdas* [2002]) and action films (*Main Hoon Na*) will better engage students and generate discussion: 'Through their negotiation of the Indian and the foreign, and of tradition and modernity on the levels of technology, storytelling, aesthetics and values, recent Bollywood films moreover encapsulate important developments and conflicts in present day India' (120). Similarly, she argues that social criticism needn't be purely associated with or reserved for parallel or 1950s cinema, but can be analysed just as effectively in select contemporary mainstream commercial films such as *Swades* (poverty and illiteracy), *Rang de Basanti* (government corruption) and *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* (Gandhism).

Sheila Nayar (2005) has made further recommendations on improving academic approaches to teaching Indian cinema through actively dissolving the Asian cinema-Hollywood binary, which associates the former with psychological interiority (slow pacing and a subdued tone), whilst the latter is equated with a faster pace 'driv[ing] relentlessly towards a climactic explosion of action' (Nayar, 59-60). One need only look at contemporary Bollywood blockbusters such as the *Dhoom*

³⁴ As mentioned, whilst these newer commentaries may note the films' MTV aesthetics, bigger budgets and glossy look in the vein of Hollywood blockbusters, they rarely explore these textual changes in any detail.

franchise³⁵ to see how this is a grossly mistaken assumption. Through surveying standard film courses herself, Nayar notes how the specific kind of ‘elemental focus on montage and mise-en-scene, on lyricism and neo-realism and a gamut of auteurs, will have well prepared students for Ray—but not for Bollywood’ (63).

Most significantly for my own study, Nayar’s broader critical work has introduced the notion of how structural similarities between American cinema and Bollywood can be identified by analysing cross-cultural remakes³⁶. According to her, this comparative approach can help ‘expose students to the internal inconsistencies —or...the internal variety—that exist within Indian cinema’ (63) and can be a useful way of ‘dis-Orientalizing’ Bollywood by revealing a ‘space for ambivalence—about American-ness, about Indian-ness, about the purity of identity’ (71). Nayar identifies how this approach allows us to better understand an important paradox within contemporary Bollywood cinema concerning how its film texts appear distinctive and yet simultaneously ‘bear the stamp of the experientially familiar’ (70). However, whilst Nayar chooses to only place emphasis on the comparative socio-cultural aspects of popular American and Indian films (sexuality, marriage, domesticity) my own research on Bollywood remakes will aim to explore this paradox by elaborating on the shared *artistic* nuances and formal aesthetic interplay of Bollywood and Hollywood cinematic codes³⁷.

Other criticisms regarding the current status of Indian film academia have begun to lament the declining status, appreciation of and academic attention to canonised Indian film artists such as Ray and Ghatak. Whilst some, like Mark Cousins, have suggested that the Oscar success of *Slumdog Millionaire* may instigate a revival of interest in the subtleties of parallel cinema (Cousins, 2009: 81), others like Frances Gateward and David Desser (2006) blame Bollywood for art cinema’s continual erosion: “‘Bollywood’ has frozen out not only India’s regional cinemas, its art-film auteurs, and avant-garde efforts, but also Hindi cinema’s own past’ (Gateward and Desser: 6). Whilst I agree that contemporary Bollywood is indeed participating in a kind of swallowing up of previous cinematic forms and thereby stripping them of their superior significance, I aim to demonstrate how the artistic and avant-garde is becoming evermore present within Bollywood films texts themselves³⁸ via their high-aestheticism, their absorption of avant-garde techniques (particularly concerning anti-

³⁵ The franchise includes two highly successful motor vehicle stunt-based movies *Dhoom* (2004) and *Dhoom 2* (2006), which are expected to eventually form part of an action film trilogy – a first for Bollywood.

³⁶ In drawing cross-cultural parallels, Nayar specifically makes reference to *Speed*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Rambo*, *Titanic* and Walt Disney films (2005: 65).

³⁷ For a more detailed discussion on remakes, see Nayar (1997).

³⁸ See my analysis of *Abhay* in the following chapter.

realism) and their incorporating cinemas of different states through cross-regional remakes such as *Ghajini*³⁹.

Ashis Nandy (2003) has also commented on academia's failure to do much good for popular Indian cinema, which has either been reduced to 'sociological data' (Nandy: 83) or viewed largely in relation to its middle class audiences, thus largely ignoring the aesthetic pleasures which appeal to its working-class consumers in India. Nandy insists that a better understanding of the cinema's psychological effects and radically different meanings and interpretations can only be achieved through 'grounded ethnography', including a direct interaction with viewers in the gaudiest and cheapest of theatre halls (ibid: 80). This study of audience preferences (i.e. which aspects of the films appeal to and bore the working class Indian citizen) would enable an engagement with the 'vernacular and the folk' (82) and better incorporate audience perspectives into Indian film studies. Of course one could argue that it is difficult to determine and be certain about what aspects of these specifically *aesthetic* pleasures appeal to consumers of a particular social class, and Nandy provides very little indication of what these unique pleasures may be in his own critique.

The Indian film studies bias towards middle class audiences, as noted by Nandy, refers not only to the upwardly mobile audiences within India's multiplex theatre chains, but I think also applies to diasporic audiences and the constant academic attention to NRI-centred film production. Kaleem Aftab, for example, has cynically concluded that as Bollywood's popularity in the UK is limited to NRI audiences, the cinema chiefly serves to expose and assist the divide between Indian and Western viewing habits and the regressiveness of the British Indian diaspora (Aftab, 2002). Although this may have been the case in the mid 1990s, more recently Bollywood has produced films which no longer simply aim to reflect the feelings of the home-sick diaspora. These texts instead engage in a more complex and diverse kind of pleasure which also addresses the needs, pleasures and experiences of Indian citizens (particularly in the light of India's global shifts and modernisation).

Nandy suggests that the recent academic interest in Bollywood is simply a by-product of the transitory vogue of pop culture, and he accuses film theorists and historians of distancing themselves from the conventional, gullible and the predictable and for presenting popular cinema as 'inaesthetic, demonic or stupid', fearing it will otherwise impede their desired rigid political-ideological classifications, definitions and conclusions. As Nandy comments: 'recent research deals at greater length with popular cinema in an even more serious and sophisticated manner. Nevertheless the aim is still to produce lengthy serious and sophisticated reasons for not liking

³⁹ The South Indian film of the same name was remade three years later in Bollywood but retained some of its original key cast and crew, including its director A. R. Murugadoss and leading actress Asin Thottumkal.

them' (2003, 81). The film historian cannot watch 'without losing... respectability and without feeling guilty about enjoying something 'vulgar' and 'cheap' (ibid: 83).

It therefore seems that despite the shift in focus towards more global and transnational forms of filmmaking, Indian cinema's place in Western academia continues to be problematic. As Sumita Chakravarty (2007) remarks through her own observations and experiences of teaching the subject in various American Universities:

a course on Indian cinema ... must bear the "burden" of being a course in social history, politics and economics, language and religion. As a stand-alone course on ... film tradition, it cannot benefit from the "symphonic effect" that courses more central to the curriculum, such as ones on American or European cinemas, can generate (Chakravarty, 105).

My above investigation of past trends and approaches to studying and critiquing Indian cinema gives us much insight into how Bollywood has come to be perceived and understood both academically and more broadly in the West (and why this is the case). I would like to make three final conclusive points summarising these insights, which will also help corroborate my own research that follows.

Firstly, my above investigation reveals that we must try harder to avoid leaving students of Indian cinema and Western film audiences thinking that today's contemporary Bollywood is the same as it was in the 1990s. It is time to start acknowledging and exploring the formal and aesthetic changes that have taken place in the films after the industry's economic liberalisation. Secondly, we need to be slightly careful with our demands for authenticity and more sensitive towards moments of cultural appropriation. Simply rejecting newer forms of popular Indian cinema or 'Bollywood' because they are too Westernised and parodic seems unfair, as this too is a reality of (modern) India. As Nandy points out in his aptly titled essay 'An intelligent critic's guide to Indian cinema': 'The West today is only partly an external category; it is also an inner vector of the Indian self, an acceptable and legitimate aspect of Indian-ness activated by the society's long exposure to Occidental despotism...' (Nandy, 1995: 228). Also, as British Asian Radio presenter Bobby Friction has more recently warned, the modern generation of youth in India may take offence at being rigidly defined *against* Western culture, which they now see as an important part of their identity, and they may protest at having their popular culture confined to [often outmoded] ideas of authentic traditional Indian-ness⁴⁰. There is thus a significant need to investigate cross-cultural

⁴⁰ This argument forms part of a larger discussion I instigated with DJ Bobby Friction, Indian film journalist Asjad Nazir and Bollywood "fusion" film directors Jeremy Wooding and Herbert Krill to form the 'Bollywood Reborn' panel event at the Raindance East Film Festival in London, Tuesday 26th April 2005.

appropriation in Indian cinema. Through my own research, I will reveal that what may at first seem like inauthentic cultural copy-catting can actually be a conscious process of playful mistranslation, leading to much creative innovation. This method of appropriation could in fact be the key to driving the cinema forward into new territory.

A final important point that the above enquiry raises is that, as well as continuing to investigate pleasure and popularity in Indian cinema, we should also pay closer attention to the *displeasure* experienced by viewers of Bollywood films who may ultimately reject the texts. For example, what is it about these films that puts off so many Westerners? Is it really because they have no appetite for song and dance and that they cannot tolerate anti-realism or excessive displays of open emotion as ‘emotionally retarded, if not totally cold-blooded’ Westerners (Thomas, 121)? Or is it something deeper rooted than this: a special kind of film language that Indians are better programmed or conditioned to understand and tolerate? If so, how can one learn and teach this language? Are Westerners able to adopt a more extreme sense of disavowal in order to enjoy such films? Or are we to assume that this is something too culturally specific – a cinematic mode of spectatorship unique to less-discerning Indians. If that is the case, then Bollywood’s attempts to become a global or international success seem tragically futile. Whatever the case, I believe that through my postmodern reading of Bollywood cinema, we can better access, appreciate and articulate the aesthetic frameworks of such films – particularly in their recent contemporary form.

Part 3: Contemporary Bollywood: New directions in Indian film research

Defining the ‘contemporary’

As explained above, it appears that many Indian cinema researchers would have us believe that Bollywood is anything but contemporary. The ignorance of post-1990s popular Indian films is widespread, from popular film journalism (the October 2007 issue of *Total Film* magazine offers an introductory timeline of Bollywood cinema, stopping unsurprisingly in 1996), reference compendiums and introductory film guides (such as *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* and *BFI 100 Bollywood Films*, both of which reveal a bias towards earlier periods of the cinema’s history), to established film societies and organisations (the British Film Institute’s web archive includes only one post-millennium release in its canonical list of the ‘greatest Indian films of all time’)⁴¹. Many of the Indian film courses I came across failed to move beyond issues surrounding national identity or diaspora politics, and therefore films released after *DDLJ* or *K2H2*. It is no wonder that definitions (and perceptions) of Indian cinema have not moved past farcical song and dance routines and

⁴¹www.bfi.org.uk: accessed at the time of writing (2007).

issues of fixed national identity-related ideologies – much of which have become peripheral or discretionary features in many films produced over the past decade.

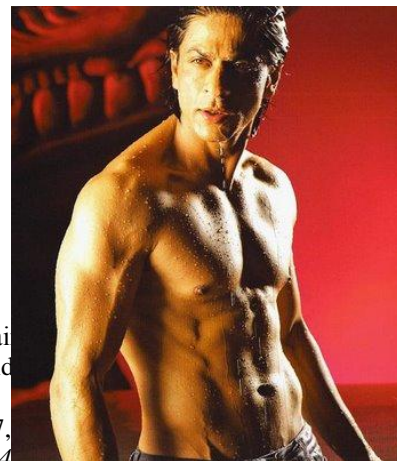
With regards to the popular topic of NRI representation in Hindi cinema, it is worthwhile asking why so many of the major post-millennium Bollywood films that explicitly deal with the issue are ignored in recent studies of the topic. For example, Raminder Kaur in her 2005 article⁴² discussing diasporic representation in popular Hindi film, and later when writing about occidentalism and NRI values in Bollywood cinema (Kaur, 2007) focuses solely on Bollywood films released in the 1990s. This is also the case with Jigna Desai's (2004) monograph on South Asian diasporic cinema. Academic writing on diasporic representation in popular Indian cinema generally ceases to explore more contemporary films such as *KHNNH* and *KANK*, which directly address NRI issues and are directed by the very NRI cinema 'auteurs' that the above writers offer case studies on. These newer films are incongruous to those of the 1990s, arguably dealing with the subject matter in an entirely contradictory and novel manner. Raminder Kaur concludes her discussion on NRI cinema by proclaiming that 'the recent restoration of pride in the motherland is reflected in the renewed patronage of Indian culture [in]... Bollywood movies' and that 'the emphasis is on Indian tradition and family values, where the young Westernised characters keep returning to roots located in a traditional-yet-modern India' (Kaur, 2007, 101). But in a film such as *KHNNH*, characters do not return to their homeland. Foreign (American) cultural identity is more respected, retained and even cherished. Families remain broken or incomplete and culture (particularly religious practice) is compromised and adapted to suit an ultimately comfortable Western lifestyle.

There certainly seems to be a shared sense amongst many Indian film scholars, that these newer films display a certain 'lack' of critical appeal and are in some way of lesser value than their canonised predecessors. I would challenge this assumption and instead suggest that the problem lies in the fact that these newer films do not fit existing models and established theories, and are thus left unacknowledged in the hope that we may never assume their significance. As established in the previous sections of this chapter, Indian cinema has ultimately been a platform for exploring cultural *tradition* in India. The 'contemporary', it seems then, poses a threat to our precious few established definitions of popular 'traditional' Indian cinema.

One must eventually begin to question the sense in purely offering definitions of a cinema that no longer exists, as well as be wary of the dangers posed by this elision of contemporary modes of filmmaking. Let us consider, for example, the inadequacy of conceptualising contemporary Hollywood cinema without acknowledging any of the developments that have taken place after 1996. Could one justifiably describe contemporary popular American cinema without considering

⁴² See Raminder Kaur in Kaur and Sinha (2005: 309-329).

the impact of CGI after *The Matrix* (1999), the internet and its influence on film marketing strategies, recent shifts in global economy, the emergence of DVD and digital filmmaking, or the aftermath of 9/11? Likewise, in television, could we claim to understand the medium today if we overlooked its shift from analogue to digital broadcasting formats? As in the case of its Western counterpart, popular Indian cinema has changed dramatically in the last ten years. The pleasures on offer in *DDLJ* can no longer suffice and wholly embrace the needs of today's Bollywood audience. A film's lead character's charm alone is no longer enough to push a movie to the box office top spot. The leading actor must now be marketable as a superstar and be able to do his own stunts. He must be measured and approved, exhibiting an actual talent in acting and dancing. He must sponsor a decent haircut, display superhero-like muscles, and be the face of an internationally renowned consumer brand. He must offer everything a Hollywood A-list actor does – and more. The much talked about re-branding of Bollywood megastar Shah Rukh Khan demonstrates this shift perfectly. Khan is famously known for initially gaining popularity in the 1990s despite his scruffy hair, dark skin and ordinary stature. He originally won the audience because of his mischievous smile and 'cheeky yet charming' character (see Anupama Chopra, 2007). However, the actor himself has recently discussed his need to reinvent his image (including hair extensions, chest waxing, intensive body building and skin-lightening⁴³) in order to meet the demands of current younger Bollywood audiences – including his own son. In a television interview with director Farah Khan on the Indian celebrity talk show *Koffee with Karan*, hosted by Bollywood director and producer Karan Johar, the three discuss Shah Rukh Khan's radical make-over for the then upcoming film *Om Shanti Om*, for which he physically trained for months to achieve a leaner, muscular body. Farah Khan declares the film as having launched an entirely new look for Khan, which she describes as an "item boy" image⁴⁴. In the Bollywood film, an "item number" usually refers to the objectification of a seductive female performer (the "item girl") in a singular highly-sexualised song sequence which is inserted in a film independently of its narrative context, but this has been extended across gender in the past five years with actors Abhishek Bachchan, Hrithik Roshan and Shah Rukh Khan occupying similar roles in films⁴⁵. Such shifts on the level of star image and sexuality are prime examples of how films have changed in terms of their aesthetics in the post-millennial contemporary Bollywood era.



⁴³ In 2007 K...
lightening p...
Indians.

⁴⁴ *Koffee with Karan*, August 2007.

⁴⁵ See Bachchan in *Rakhi* (2007) and Roshan in *Krrazy 4* (2008).

...sing 'Fai...
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...kin-
skin toned

Figure 4: Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan in *DDLJ* (left) and post-millennium (right)

By ‘contemporary Bollywood’, I refer to a cinema beyond the aforementioned period of first generation NRI movies – particularly focusing on films released post-millennium. Whilst I am somewhat hesitant to confine my research to a fixed historical period, I have found that the most significant factors solidifying change within the industry take place from 2001 on. 2001 in particular beckoned a change with regards to the ‘polish’ of Bollywood cinema in terms of its actor-stars as well as its general production. The release of Farhan Akhtar’s *Dil Chahta Hai* that year is almost unanimously seen as a landmark moment in this sense, and thus a key text I explore in more depth in chapter four. Though it is difficult to determine what exact socio-historical factors have caused this somewhat sudden shift in Bollywood film production, there are a few likely suspects. The change may be symptomatic of the rise of globalisation, which is now finally able to access, reconcile with and occupy Indian public perceptions and experiences. Subsequently, the shift is also a result of modernisation permanently (and almost comfortably) assimilating *alongside* the monoliths of religion and cultural tradition in India, as I will explore later. I hope to demonstrate how this co-existence of the indigenous past and the contemporary modern is also indicated through and supported by the integration of postmodern strategies in Indian cinema⁴⁶.

Influential work and newer approaches to analysing Bollywood

Before I begin my analysis of contemporary postmodern Bollywood cinema, it is also worth briefly mentioning a few academic publications that have particularly inspired my own investigation and helped drive my argument forward. These texts have offered several refreshing ideas and perspectives, firstly with regards to Bollywood’s recent formal-stylistic transformations.

A few Indian film writers have seen Bollywood’s future as more positively reenergised, particularly through its recent technological developments, cross-border productions, and ‘taboo-trashing experimentation’ (Raheja and Kothari: 133). The latter has manifested firstly through the cinema’s less restrained and occasionally ambiguous representations of sexuality, as seen in *Jism* (2003), *Girlfriend* (2004) and *Dostana* (2008) respectively⁴⁷. This experimentation has also included the industry’s successful investment in generically diverse scripts, leading to a new ‘horror vogue’ in Bollywood (Alex Ninian, 2003: 239) and the production of songless films like *Eklavya: The Royal*

⁴⁶ For a more general but useful summarising account of Bollywood’s contemporary changes, see Creekmur and Viridi (2006).

⁴⁷ For more on Bollywood’s new sexual openness, see the Cannes film festival special of *Variety* (Anupama Chopra, 2004: 4). Also see chapter five of this thesis.

Guard (2007) and *Chak De India* (2007), the latter of which, despite having only one theme song, proved to be a box office blockbuster in India (for more information on songless Bollywood films, see Ian Garwood, 2006). Also, by announcing the demise of family epics and acknowledging the diversifying tastes of the Indian viewing public – who are now arguably more responsive to novel kinds of filmmaking – Raheja and Kothari have been eager to assert that Bollywood has superseded its 1990s era. The authors note how the cinema may be on the cusp of a global breakthrough and query the possibility of a new wave emerging from *within* commercial cinema (Raheja and Kothari: 141). Though they rightfully signal that contemporary Bollywood is ‘evolving, morphing and mutating’ (146), I would add that these changes occur within the context of continuity and therefore without necessarily abandoning the familiar traits of the cinema altogether. Bollywood paradoxically moves forward yet remains stuck in its ways and this is something that the cinema has explicitly begun to address self-reflexively in its films⁴⁸.

A few international scholars have also usefully begun to explore Western audiences’ consumption and reception of Bollywood films. For example, whilst challenging the overemphasis on Indian cinema as a conveyor of cultural authenticity (and therefore something only applicable to Indian audiences), Adrian M. Athique (2008) has surveyed the success of newer contemporary Bollywood films amongst non-Indian Australians, both at film festivals and through self-organised focus group screenings⁴⁹. Athique’s outcome reveals a particular responsiveness towards more contemporary, technically advanced films (70% of young Australians exhibiting an interest in consuming more of these films) and therefore suggests that: ‘It might be useful... in the imagining of a Western audience, to update the realist imperative of the 1950s and to accommodate the more recent convergence between Indian cinema’s song ‘picturisations’ and the post-MTV generation in the West’ (307).

There are several key studies that have also provided a particularly valuable insight into India’s intersections with Western cinematic culture. For example, Ananda Mitra’s book *Indian Cinema Through a Western Lens* (1999) investigates the representation of Indians within Western (chiefly Hollywood) film texts. His study concludes that in the future, Indian diasporic immigrant filmmakers may be inclined to produce ‘nomadic identities’ which set out to challenge these Western cinematic representations of South Asia, carefully maintaining or negotiating a sense of Indian-ness whilst attempting to situate themselves within the Western market. I would add that this is no longer something exclusive to diasporic filmmaking, but has increasingly also become a practice of contemporary Bollywood cinema. Through my own research, I uncover how

⁴⁸ Further elaboration on this kind of self-reflexivity is offered through my analysis of *Om Shanti Om* in the following chapter.

⁴⁹ Athique uses the example of a film festival tour across Australia in 2004/2005, which ‘recorded an attendance of 40,000-odd people of which 80 percent were non-Indians’; and a ‘screening survey’ with a group of 90 young Australians. All of the films he mentions were produced after 2000.

Bollywood's latest representations of Indian identity also attempt to challenge and convert certain Western exoticised images by first appropriating and then subsequently *deconstructing* them from within. I will therefore be conversely looking at how Bollywood represents Western cinema through an *Indian* lens, particularly in terms of how it adopts and subverts Hollywood aesthetic codes through its own genre-based films.

Whilst historically tracing early Indian cinema's borrowing of Hollywood codes and conventions, Kaushik Bhaumik (2006) has usefully described this process of Western appropriation as Indian cinema's long-standing and continual method for accessing the modern. However, I believe that this bricolaging and eclecticism has become much more distinguishable and complex in the contemporary climate, and shall therefore aim to demonstrate how Bollywood's recent dialogues with Hollywood are no longer necessarily neutral, nor ones of admiration. On the contrary, certain Western cinematic codes are now increasingly being manipulated to serve Indian popular cinema's own postmodern agendas. For example, as Heather Tyrell has noted in her account of Hollywood's relationship with Bollywood (1999) the latter now presents a firm challenge to Western dominant modes of representation through the way in which it constantly problematises realism – a key postmodern trait. Through my own analysis of contemporary Bollywood texts, I will demonstrate how this anti-realist stance is achieved through manipulating Hollywood codes and deconstructing Western notions of realism (reducing the effectiveness of verisimilitude).

Finally, in relation to Bollywood's cross-cinematic ventures, a handful of scholars have also helpfully drawn attention to the unique processes of imitation and adaptation in Bollywood filmmaking. Mira Reym Binford (1988) has crucially revealed how imitations can facilitate innovation in the Indian cinema. She argues that novelty is almost inevitable, even in texts based on Hollywood models, particularly considering Bollywood's disorganised, anarchic and fragmented filmmaking processes. As discussed previously with reference to Sheila Nayar's ground work on Bollywood remakes, comparative studies can greatly inform our understanding of the differences between, and the bi-directional transferability of Indian and American filmmaking practices. Work of this kind has slowly begun to emerge and produce some interesting readings. For example, Tejaswini Ganti (2002) has built on Nayar's work on remakes by investigating how Bollywood filmmakers search out, select and '(H)Indianize' Hollywood films for an Indian audience, although her analysis looks more at transformation during pre-production stages and her textual analysis, like Nayar's, falls short in focusing almost exclusively on narrative content.

In her account of Hindi film remaking, Ganti suggests that in order for a Hollywood film to be deemed suitable for remaking, it must contain plot, character, melodramatic and thematic elements (including sexual themes and moral values) that will be tolerated and 'approved' (287) by an Indian audience. The 'moral boundaries' (288) considered important for a successful adaptation include

kinship relationships (which interestingly were something that the Western film students interviewed above found peculiar and difficult to engage with). Furthermore, difficulties with remaking are seen to occur if the Hollywood text and its protagonist fail to uphold moral values. Ganti notes that Hindi remakes will rectify this problem by including culturally-specific social taboos and different ‘symbols of deviance’ (289). These are seen as missing in Hollywood cinema which contrarily is seen to have a ‘lack of a moral universe’ (289). Also, in the process of translation, sexuality in the Hindi film is purely reserved for song sequences and the film will often exclusively centre around a romance where lovers must woo one another. Ultimately, Ganti argues that the successful Hindi adaptation of a Hollywood text involves the addition of three key elements: song sequences, melodramatic emotion (specifically in terms of the narrative) and narrative extension (whereby further sub-stories and diversions are added to the main narrative thread).

However accurate Ganti’s analysis of pre-2000 Hindi remakes may have been at the time of writing, many of her assumptions and conclusions now seem outmoded when considered in the contemporary context of Bollywood filmmaking. Sexual imagery can now be found to venture outside and beyond song sequences. Popular films may now address certain social taboos and stories no longer necessarily need to be family, kinship or romance-centred in order to be considered marketable. These changes are largely a result of the liberalising viewpoints and changing tastes of the Indian viewing public – something that Ganti does not seem to consider much in her investigation. Ganti suggests that choices to remake are determined largely by “worldly” filmmakers (as ‘mediators’) whose decisions are ultimately tied to the rigid and backward traditionalist tastes of the Indian public (289). Here, the Indian audience is seen as stifling film creativity. It is considered ‘monolithic’ and ‘prudish’ (297) by filmmakers – a perception which has since begun to change considering some of the more experimental, generically diverse and sexually risqué films produced after Bollywood’s economic liberalisation.

Ganti also suggests that ‘(H)Indianization’ is necessary as filmmakers believe that Hollywood films are ‘not capable of evoking in Indian audiences the psychological or emotional responses necessary for viewing pleasure’ (286). But this situation may now have changed in some sections of society considering the rise of the multiplex audience and the wider accessibility and distribution of Western popular culture via cable and satellite television. Furthermore, Ganti’s argument seems to imply that all remakes that are made (or chosen to be made) are risk-free, accepted and successful, but this is not always the case. For example, Ram Gopal Varma’s *Aag* follows virtually the same narrative and character experiences as its 1970s Indian original *Sholay*. The remake contains the three elements Ganti suggests are required for a successful remake, and yet the film was rejected by Indian audiences and performed badly. Ganti also asserts that Indian audiences ‘derive pleasure only from familiar stars and narratives’ (285), whereas I would argue that there are other formal

aesthetic aspects of contemporary Bollywood remake texts that attract the audience (something I will explain in more detail in chapter four with reference to the spectacular and figural presentation of recent Bollywood films).

Finally, I would add that the moral conscience of the film hero has also been weakened in newer Bollywood films. The protagonist as anti-hero may now engage in adultery (*Murder*) or kick women in the face (*Don: The Chase Begins*) without losing the Indian spectator's investment in the film. Also, lovers may have already met and been married before the narrative begins and the film may instead now focus on the problem of marital relationships (*Shabd*). Thus, as Ganti herself states at one point in her essay: 'filmmakers' ideas about what constitutes acceptable representations [in a Hindi remake] are not fixed but fluid, and they are highly dependent upon commercial success or failure' and these levels of acceptability are 'revised or reinforced' depending on box office performance of films (289) – something which ultimately comes down to matters of public taste.

The rising trend of self-remaking in Bollywood over the past ten years has also led to some interesting comparative studies which consider how new film texts *reimagine* older classics. Valentina Vitali's comparative work on *Don* (1978) and *Don: The Chase Begins* (2006) has helped inform us about the way in which the action film genre has evolved from that of the Angry man era. Similarly, Corey Creekmur's (2007) close aesthetic analysis of multiple cinematic versions of *Devdas* across different eras of Indian cinema history has drawn attention to Indian cinema's inherent patterns of repetition, as well as its relationship to film remaking in general (something I build on through my own investigation of Bollywood film remakes). Creekmur's article offers a more positive perspective on Bollywood's recent remake phenomenon, arguing that contemporary (literature to film) adaptations can also offer us valuable insight into Indian artistic traditions.

On rare occasions, Indian cinema researchers have attempted to adopt more unusual or unorthodox techniques in order to analyse Bollywood's unique film language (perhaps aiming to serve as those 'alternative analytical tools' so desperately requested by alienated film academics) and in order to help push the field of Bollywood studies into new directions. For example, Patrick Colm Hogan (2008) uses cognitive neuro-scientific theory to help identify universal principles within Bollywood films and to dissect the subtle strategies behind their unique filmic coding. In doing so, Hogan explains how certain films, which may on the surface seem trivial, can in fact be highly ironic and playful – particularly texts produced after the 1990s, which he regards as a renaissance period for popular Indian cinema. Hogan's investigation is most useful in pointing out that Bollywood films may not be palatable to Western audiences because of their different employment of cognitive functions (colour, emotion, music) which require different cognitive responses. Although I do not apply a cognitive scientific approach to my own research, I am also interested in using new methods to unpick the subtleties and strategies behind Bollywood's visual aesthetic

structures and modes of signification⁵⁰. My postmodern reading of Bollywood should also be acknowledged as a similarly unorthodox approach which may raise eyebrows and invite some resistance, but nevertheless helps refresh both our understanding of Bollywood films and the discipline of Indian film studies.

Although the more innovative dimensions of this research project come largely from the application of postmodern theory to Indian cinema, I would like to also acknowledge some sources of inspiration with regards to this aspect of my investigation. Whilst few scholars have dared to describe Bollywood as explicitly postmodern, much of the progressive research done on contemporary forms of Indian cinema exhibits underlying postmodern sentiments. Indian film scholars have already noted a growing self-consciousness towards song sequences (Garwood), a rebranding of the cinema as Western 'postmodern pop art' (Athique), a notable death or substitution of the real by a kind of Baudrillardian hyperrealism (Srivastava), a nostalgic evoking of a past that is not remembered through memory, but rather, artificially overstated through past styles (Creekmur, 2007), and an increase in the exteriorisation of psychological problems, dissolving of the modern and pre-modern, and Bollywood's strange apolitical disposition (Nandy, 1998). Even actors and filmmakers within the industry have discussed the cinema's sublime excess, overt sensation, eclecticism and schizophrenic nature (see various interviews with industry professionals in Ganti, 2004). One scholar who has perhaps made the most explicit attempt to classify this latest phase of Bollywood as postmodern is Vijay Mishra. Mishra first indicates how Indian cinema is naturally parodistic of its own 'artificial totality' and inherently self-reflexive in his article 'Towards a Theoretical Critique of Bombay Cinema' (1985) – one of the earliest well-known published theoretical articles on popular Indian cinema. However, in a later publication, Mishra confirms the postmodern aims of contemporary Bollywood as an industry growing 'out of the logic forces of late capital' (Mishra, 2006: 24) and, more recently, begins to explore the concept's impact on Indian film production in his critically descriptive entry on 'Bollywood' in the *Encyclopaedia of Communication*:

The postmodern Bollywood, where the old depth of language and dialogue (hallmarks of classic Bombay cinema as seen, for example, in the 1953 *Parineeta*) is replaced by a "technorealism" (seen in the remake of *Parineeta* [2006]) at the level of production and the "mise-en-scene", became the marker of Indian modernity (Rajadhyaksha 2003). With a difference though – this (post)modernity negotiated a new definition of the spectator and a new definition of the subject of cinema (Mishra, 2008: 351).

⁵⁰ It is also important to cite here the work of Lalita Gopalan (2002) who has already drawn our attention the formal and structural differences of pre-millennial popular Hindi films via their use of interruptive elements such as intermissions and song sequences.

Referring to several key Bollywood films produced after 2000, Mishra explores the cinema's transformation on the level of representation, focusing on the proliferation of different languages and discourses within a single film text and the implementation of computer effects technology that 'seems to overtake the camera' – a feature which he dubs *technorealism*. Mishra also notes how recent film remakes such as *Devdas* avoid cinematic fidelity to their originals and instead refer to their own postmodern simulacral textuality (352) – an issue that I will explore in more detail in my next two chapters on postmodern Bollywood films and remakes. Unfortunately, neither of these ideas are explored any further in Mishra's concise summary of New Bollywood, but his account at least instigates a possible space for discussion which I hope to now elaborate on through my own research.

Chapter 3

Postmodernism and Contemporary Indian Cinema

This chapter considers the much contested concept of *postmodernism* within a global context. By surveying selected critical writing which has previously attempted to relate the concept to both Western and Eastern cinemas, I argue that contemporary Bollywood cinema also embraces several of the fundamental aesthetic traits of the postmodern. By providing clear definitions of what I mean by ‘postmodern’ (for the concept in particular is known to manifest itself in many different and often contradictory ways), I go on to locate and investigate Bollywood postmodern aesthetics through a close analysis of three key mainstream Indian film texts: *Om Shanti Om* (2007), *Koi...Mil Gaya* (2003) and *Abhay* (2001), which I consider to be prime examples of this phenomenon. My discussions and analysis will reveal that contemporary Bollywood cinema aims to reinvent and invigorate itself in the manner of the postmodern work – through self-reflection, reviving and reworking the past (established histories and traditions), and by upsetting notions of reality and artifice. I also explain how this inward and backward-looking approach can simultaneously prove destructive to Indian cinema, by paradoxically restricting the cinema’s ability to achieve its aspirations for difference, change, modernity and international commercial appeal. This postmodern approach to Bollywood film will help us consider what an originally Western theoretical framework can actively do to raise our appreciation and alter our understanding of popular Indian cinema, and what the Indian cinema in turn can do for our understanding of postmodernism as a global (as opposed to West-centric) concept.

India: A postmodern presence

An investigation into postmodern shifts in contemporary Bollywood is best begun by observing the film industry’s geographical site of production. A brief descriptive walk through two of India’s most prominent celluloid cities perfectly conjures up a sense of what I mean by a *postmodern presence* in contemporary Indian culture (or more precisely, contemporary Indian cinema). In today’s Delhi, one can alight an air-conditioned electric sky train, walk through an expansive, immaculate, cavernous silvery brushed-steel station – equipped with all the latest computer-generated digital communication technology, only to find oneself suddenly thrown back into the third-world at the station exit. Standing at the entrance to Delhi’s state-of-the-art Chawri Bazaar train station is enough to confuse one’s sense of place and time. Within a few metres above-ground, hundreds of ragged street-merchants, bullock carts and rickshaw-wallahs stampede under a sky of thick smog, soiled shop signs and tangled electricity cables. All of these almost tenaciously encircle the shiny new metro station – ironically one of the Government of India’s latest development ventures to modernise the city through its transport system.

Delhi's cityscape reveals a similar paradox. The vast concrete flyover stretching across the city seems somewhat dwarfed under the towering 175 foot statue of Hanuman, the Hindu Monkey God, whose figure looms over the city from every direction⁵¹.



Figure 5: A Hindi temple inside a statue of Hanuman over-looking Delhi's Metro-link

Similarly, in Mumbai, the city's ever-evolving dystopian skyline offers a cacophony of shanty towns and derelict buildings squashed in alongside endless gleaming glass skyscrapers and designer shopping malls – a constant architectural battleground for tradition versus modernisation, the past versus the future. In this city, where Italian sports cars give way to the stray cows that nestle in the central reservations of dual carriageways, the past, present and future seem to co-exist with an air of indifference. The poverty-stricken sleep peacefully in television boxes, whilst across the road, the wealthy middle classes purchase their latest collection of one lakh⁵² designer saris.

Andrew Wyatt (2005) has suggested a possible link between this contemporary climate in India and what has been described broadly as the 'postmodern condition' through his study of the country's recent economic shifts. Wyatt argues how late 1990s India has moved away from its 1950s modernist national visions of economic development and instead towards an 'imagined' economy (where the country now sees itself as already an international orientated and important economy) and a 'more fragmented and disjointed approach to economic policy in India' (466). What Wyatt terms as 'postmodern India' describes the simultaneous national and international branding of the

⁵¹ The brick and cement statue is built as part of a Hindu temple, which sits at its base, on the intersection of Pusa Road and Link Road, Karolbagh, Delhi.

⁵² A 'lakh' is the Hindi term for a monetary unit equivalent of one hundred thousand Indian rupees.

country (467) (indeed, interesting connections can be made here to Rajadhyaksha's aforementioned discussion around the use of Bollywood as an international brand for India) but his account is not a full acknowledgement of postmodernity on the level of Indian society. Rather, he asserts how certain late capitalist financial structures are creeping into India's metropolitan economy. For example, there is evidence of postmodern patterns of production and consumption in India, particularly with regards to the increased desire for 'intangible and ephemeral goods' (466). There is now more attention given to the building of shopping malls and the retail-leisure industry than to rural agriculture. Wyatt also notes an increase in the variety of cultural products on offer and the 'differentiation in the market for popular culture' in India, briefly mentioning the recent shifts in popular Hindi cinema as a prime example of this (474). He also draws attention to the growing impact of advertising which (through curiously engaging in a kind of patriotic dialogue) has made 'a consumption oriented imaginary part of the common sense' (477) and also led to a rise in celebrity endorsement of international consumer products.

So what of cinema-going in such an environment? How has this uneven development and economic shift affected Bollywood cinema viewing beyond its days of class-divided picture halls? Rapidly sprouting multiplexes now belittle their since declining predecessors and house a variety of consumerist treats. From designer clothes stores to DVD vending machines, the Mumbai cinema multiplex is the epitome of modern luxury in India, be it only for the middle classes. But before one becomes too comfortably settled in the auditorium's premium-class soft leather cinema hall seats, box of masala-flavoured popcorn in hand, a peculiar thing happens: the bellowing sound of the Indian national anthem surrounds us in the darkness, a giant Indian flag envelops the screen, and one is forced to join the rest of the auditorium audience, who are now all standing with hand on heart in a ritualistic salute. This is contemporary India, and it is from this place that a new kind of postmodern Indian cinema also rises.⁵³ But what do I mean by 'postmodern Indian cinema'? And is it even viable to apply the term outside a Western context?

Postmodernism in the non-West

Many major theorists of the postmodern have confined themselves to relatively West-centric definitions of the term, most explicitly Fredric Jameson (1991) and Linda Hutcheon (1988), though it should be noted that the latter has since revised this viewpoint in her second edition of *The Politics of the Postmodern*, which contains an additional chapter exploring the concept in an international context.⁵⁴ Despite the counteractive intentions and conflicting interests of various postmodern

⁵³ Since January 2003 it has become state law to screen the National Anthem in multiplex theatres throughout Maharashtra. The video playback of the National Flag fluttering to the National Anthem has been enforced by the Maharashtra Government which regulates the authority of screening films in movie theatres across the jurisdiction of Mumbai. See Sandhya Iyer (2002) and Harneet Singh (2003).

⁵⁴ See 'Epilogue: The Postmodern . . . in Retrospect' in Hutcheon (2002).

commentators, there seems to be a commonality shared between them with regards to *where* this (post)modernity is deemed to be globally situated. Indeed, most have acknowledged universal issues such as globalisation and commercialisation (see Jameson) as part and parcel of postmodernity. Most famously, Jean-François Lyotard (1992) has commented upon this 'postmodern eclecticism' where one can 'listen to reggae... watch a Western... eat McDonald's at midday and local cuisine at night... wear Paris perfume in Tokyo and dress Retro in Hong Kong' (8). However, for the most part, celebrated discussions on the development of postmodern art politics have concentrated exclusively on Americanisation, Hollywood and other forms of Western and European cinema and art.

The foundations of postmodernism are very much rooted in the West. Accordingly, there are many thinkers who would hold reservations toward any attempt to theorise the concept's *global* reach, instead asserting its inability to exist in parts of the world untouched by post-industrialism and modernism. How can a society that has never been modern, be post-modern? How can a concept that revolves around technology, consumerism and mechanical reproduction be appropriated in the context of third world poverty? There is a danger of taking the term for granted but I would insist that, in keeping with postmodernism's own principles, stretching the boundaries and maintaining ambiguity in the concept's definitions is essential, rather than simply confining it to a West-centric perspective. Definitions of the postmodern are forever in constant transition and negotiation. The popular assumption that the term implies a continuation of or connection to the era of modernism (post-modernism) is merely one of many explanations on offer. While it may have begun as something serving particular and precise objectives, the concept has since grown tortuous and diverse in its application.

Postmodernism has an abundance of defining traits. Some of these are seen to spring from a particular historical context: post-industrialism, Western capitalism, modernism etc, whilst others – as autonomous stylistic devices – promote the concept's principles, shape its aesthetics and (rather than serving as catalysts) address the *consequences* of a postmodern world. For the purpose of my own investigation into Bollywood cinema, I approach postmodernism as a much more versatile form of cultural practice. I am interested not so much in postmodernity as a historical period of post-industrial Western society, but rather in postmodernism as an aesthetic philosophy or a critical tool and a non-geographically specific artistic tendency which can be assumed by any culture.

Dominant Western theories have contributed, and continue to contribute, a great deal towards the concept of the postmodern. But although there is still much to be explored in these Western fields, it is vital that we are at the same time able to continually reassess and extend our boundaries to gain an objectively broad understanding of what postmodernity was, is, and will become. Postmodernity has for too long been considered a fundamentally Western motif. To suggest that this cultural

movement exclusively operates within the Western hemisphere is to ignore the fact that its very objective transcends geographical, historical and spatial boundaries. Why should a concept that comprises of texts produced for global mass circulation and consumption be so irrelevant beyond the West – particularly as countries such as China (Hong Kong), Japan and India are increasingly powered by international conglomerate corporations and capitalist industries? It is not my intention to suggest that these other unexplored non-Western territories can offer a necessarily better or polarised perspective on postmodernity. Rather, I aim to prove that these new areas may in fact help us to reflect upon and adjust current ideas on the concept, allowing the (now somewhat stagnant) postmodern debate to be reawakened and further developed.

Postmodernism in the Global and Eastern context

A select few have already attempted to apply the term ‘postmodern’ to non-Western contexts and have contributed to the notion of a *global* or *international* postmodernism. Hans Bertens (1986) particularly notes the early contributions of Ihab Hassan, William V. Spanos and Richard Wasson, who are regarded as the first theoreticians to explore postmodernism as an international movement (38, 44). This global relevance has also been further interrogated, most notably, by Scott Nygren (1989), Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto (1991), Kwame Anthony Appiah (1991), Hans Bertens and Douwe Fokkema (1997), Ziauddin Sardar (1998), R. Radhakrishnan (2000), and Arif Dirlik and Xudong Zhang (2000). My work does not form part of or spring from any particular school of thought (perhaps something unfeasible considering the subject matter and objectives of this thesis) but the above noted critical investigations into global postmodernism have very much inspired and motivated my research. It is therefore important and worthwhile to explore some of their key ideas and perspectives, with particular focus on how they define and authenticate the ‘postmodern East’.

Within the Eastern terrain, Japan is perhaps viewed as the place where the frameworks of modernity and postmodernity can be situated with the most legitimacy. Japan has been viewed as postmodern in its very essence, particularly through its hyper consumer culture, so much so that it has even been imagined as a catalyst for Western postmodernism (Stephen Melville, 1994: 280).⁵⁵ Contemporary Japanese society has been viewed as fundamentally postmodern in various ways, but Masao Miyoshi (1994) offers a précis of the country’s key postmodern attributes as the following: [1] a hostility towards logic and rationalism, [2] an engagement with the visual and a world-renowned reputation for packaging and image-making, [3] its ‘devotion to simulacra’, [4] its fascination with the sublime (most notably through the popular theme of suicide), and [5] its trademark as an industry of global mass production and reproduction (Miyoshi, 148). For scholars such as Miyoshi, postmodernism is seen as a way of gaining insight into contemporary shifts in

⁵⁵ For example, the technology-saturated Japanese city of Tokyo has heavily inspired postmodern cyberpunk fiction.

Japanese society. It also serves as a means of resistance and a way of equalling (if not superseding) the authority of the West.

In his chapter 'Reconsidering modernism: Japanese film and the postmodern context', Scott Nygren (1989) traces the parallels between postmodernist and modernist movements in Japan and what he refers to simply as 'Western' society. For Nygren, both modern and postmodern cultural movements are unquestionably present in Japanese art, and he contemplates the possibility of an 'alternative access to the postmodern situation' within Japanese society (7). Despite its title, Nygren's essay focuses mainly on modernism, though often his argument appears to interchangeably relate to both Japanese modernism as well as its 'post' form (somewhat problematic, considering the popular polarisation and differentiation of the two concepts). Nygren asserts how Japanese modernism functions inversely to its Western equivalent. He claims that just as Japanese modernist art has been heavily influenced by Western traditionalist metaphysics and humanism. Likewise, Western modernism appropriates Japonisme (traditional Japanese aesthetics) as a means of deconstructing its own humanist ideologies. As he demonstrates in the case of cinema, whilst Japanese traditionalist filmmaker Yasujiro Ozu's film style was read as modernist in the West, in Japan classical Western film conventions were interchangeably adapted to help oppose Japanese cinema's own dominant traditional ideologies. This process of what Nygren terms 'cross-cultural inversion/modernism' raises interesting questions surrounding the dialectics between Western and Eastern modernisms. Particularly in the case of Nygren's noted global interplay of modernist and traditionalist techniques, one becomes aware of the causal effects and destructive consequences of this form of cultural exchange:

Japanese artists influenced by Western modernism were placed in the odd position of imitating a Western authenticity that in turn imitated Japanese tradition to oppose Western humanism... Insofar as Japanese artists sought in Western modernism's borrowing of Japanese tradition a modernism to position against Japanese tradition, they became caught in mirrors within mirrors, an *aporia*, or collapse of meaning' (13).

Whilst viewing Japanese modernism as something created 'on its own terms' (7), Nygren perceives Japanese postmodernism as having an 'analogous but not identical' connection with 'the non-progressivist interplay of traditional and modernist values in Western postmodernism' (14). Unfortunately, Nygren does not extend his discussion here to delineate these connections and differences, nor does he offer explanations of what comparative features Japanese postmodernist texts might possess. But despite this, Nygren's account is useful in several ways – namely: in disputing the West-centric origins of Western modernism and relocating them in Japanese

traditional art⁵⁶; promoting the possibility of *alternative modernisms* in the East, operating diversely to their Western counterparts; demonstrating an analogous relationship between Eastern and Western modernisms and thus the value of their comparative study; serving as a reminder that Western definitions of modernism and postmodernism are not quite universal, and that the concepts' characteristics can at times be culturally-specific and thus open to interpretation, reconfiguration, and inversion; acknowledging how the tension-ridden adversaries of old and new, past and present, and traditional versus alternative in postmodern art further gain complexity and intertwine when considered in a cross-cultural context; and finally, proposing the idea that non-Western postmodernism complies not with Western postmodernist, but rather, Western *traditionalist* conventions.

Although Nygren tries to account for Japanese modernism, others see modernity as something unfeasible in the East. For example, for Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto (1993), modernity remains ultimately unattainable in Japan, as the concept relies on the division of West and non-West:

The non-West can achieve the goal of modernising itself by the advancement of technology, yet modernity remains always unattainable to the non-West because what constitutes modernity is precisely the exclusion of the non-West from the modern, “universal” West. The paradox of modernity for the non-West is if the non-West somehow succeeds in obtaining modernity, that would also be the end of modernity, or, in Hegelian words, the “end of history” (Yoshimoto: 118).

Again with reference to Ozu, Yoshimoto sees modernism as an inappropriate mechanism for categorising and refocusing the director's films beyond Japanese traditionalist filmmaking⁵⁷. He instead encourages us to view the filmmaker through the postmodern, which does not encourage such a rash break from tradition and avoids ‘retrapping him in the discursive field of international modernism’ (115). Rather, “Postmodern Japan” is constructed in the process of de-historicisation and a parodic mimicry of the critique of modernity in the name of tradition with “progressive potentialities” (121).

⁵⁶ Nygren discusses how key modernist works of artists such as Van Gogh and Monet were heavily inspired by Japanese woodcuts and brocade prints, though the extent of this influence has been contested and is open to debate (Nygren: 8).

⁵⁷ It is worth noting here that modernism also tends to be a rather difficult and problematic concept in film studies in general.

International postmodernism

Hans Bertens and Douwe Fokkema's book on *International postmodernism* (1997) usefully accounts for the wide variety of approaches to postmodernism in the global and non Euro-American context, though their study is somewhat literature-specific: interesting in itself as literature remains an even more problematic medium in the third world context than popular cinema, which for the most part is still created for and consumed by the masses. However, as a significant portion of the book's chapters explores the concept within a specific national context, it is clear that here the focus is not so much on quantitative investigations of postmodern textual consumption (measuring the proportions of society that access and consume postmodern texts), but rather on the *methods* and *motives* behind each of these emerging non-Western postmodern literary works. Whilst these postmodern texts may not outwardly instigate postmodern thinking for the whole of a particular society, their postmodern fashioning may nevertheless prove to be *symptomatic* of present shifts in non-Western contemporary culture. Hence, the postmodern strategies and devices I hope to identify through my study of contemporary popular Bollywood cinema should be understood not as socially revolutionary, but nonetheless representative and reflective of a postmodern conceptual thinking (if not a postmodern practice) already present in India.

Bertens and Fokkema defend their international application of the postmodern firstly by drawing attention to the convergence of postmodern literature and postcolonialism. Comparative studies of these two research areas have proved popular and fruitful⁵⁸, suggesting a complex, problematic yet interdependent relationship between the two. Postmodernism has often been utilised in postcolonial criticism due to its anti-essentialist nature, its obfuscation of identity, and its tendency to deconstruct socio-cultural monoliths (or 'grand narratives'). However, whilst the prefix in postcolonialism suggests the superseding or desired overriding of colonialist literature and authority (49), the 'post' in postmodernism does not necessarily imply the same. It is modernism that seeks to withdraw from the autonomy of traditional practices, whilst postmodernism conversely preoccupies itself with revisiting (be it in order to critique and rework) history, tradition and the past. But along with their differences, the postcolonial and the postmodern do share a likeness in their methods and strategies (something I return to later on in this chapter). Perhaps the most significant connection, as drawn by Bertens and Fokkema, is the way both paradigms achieve development and expansion through surpassing their place of origin. In their study, Bertens and Fokkema examine the global travel of postmodern writing, favouring the 'diffusions and transformations of the concept' over the study of its 'original invention' (298). As in the case of postcolonial literature, sanctioning postmodernism as a globally applicable process helps undermine national and local monoliths and nurtures inclusivity over 'Otherisation'. This approach, even if somewhat

⁵⁸ See Helen Tiffin (1988), Simon During (1998), Kwame Anthony Appiah (1991), and bell hooks (1991).

problematic and romantically idealist itself, at least opens the field by providing alternatives to the concept's previously exclusive and thus limited definitions. Within a global context, postmodernism essentially becomes a problem if the term is used to explicitly refer to a particular kind of logic within the social system (Sanehide and Ken, 511) and a 'lifestyle based on consumption' (Bertens, 1997, 5). Instead of struggling to locate it within third world frameworks in that sense, Bertens and Fokkema alternatively present the concept as a universally functioning 'workable poetics' (303), an 'interpretive code' or 'style marker' (298) used as a 'framework to debate the nature of language and the subject... [the] provisionality of meaning and truth... [the] inevitability of power relations... [and] the politics of representation' (Bertens, 1997: 7).

International Postmodernism is also useful for its critical responses to the concept's appropriation within particular national contexts. Although the book's individual chapters cover much of the non-Western terrain, it is interesting to note how India is singled out as a particularly problematic setting for postmodernity from the outset. Unlike countries such as Japan (where the application of modernist principles is better tolerated), India is regarded as a place which socially restricts the postmodern due to its intransigent and reactionary nature. As Bertens and Fokkema declare in the introduction to their chapter on the international reception and processing of the postmodern: 'local conditions have destroyed the identity of the concept of postmodernism completely in India' (300). Although they do not dwell on this argument long enough to convey what these unique 'conditions' may be, it is clear that they are concerned with the absence of cultural modernism and a problem of assimilation within Indian society. Other local conditions put forward as possible factors affecting postmodernism's execution in certain countries include the lack of tradition or presence of a historical avant-garde, the presence of a neo-Marxist tradition or a communist regime, and a general reluctance or resistance towards any form of American and Western influence.

Notwithstanding these reservations, the materialisation of the postmodern in India is still tackled within this edited collection. In his chapter 'Facets of postmodernism: A Search for Roots. The Indian Literacy Scene', Indra Nath Choudhuri aims to resolve this problem of incompatibility through proposing a call for new (socio-culturally customised) definitions of the postmodern. Choudhuri opposes the comparative study and application of Western postmodernism in the East through familiar accusations of subordination and West-centrism. However, his attempt to instead propose a 'parallel' postmodernism in India (which he names 'uttara andhikata') seems somewhat fuzzy in its delineation and intentions. Choudhuri fails to provide tangible examples demonstrating the productivity and value of this new concept, beyond evading Eurocentrism. His suggested effacement of Western postmodernism through the introduction of parallel versions of the concept is seen as a way of critiquing and 'challenging the very idea of Eurocentrist modernism'. But the critical evasion in this approach is itself similarly problematic, primarily through the fact that any such form of challenge or critical attack on Western postmodernism would inevitably end up

conceding to it to some extent. The subject of critique would unavoidably need to be addressed, referred to and thus given a certain level of significance in order to explain the very ‘parallels’ and differences behind these newer foreign manifestations of the concept. To avoid this kind of exclusivism in my research I maintain allusions to Western postmodernism and instead view postmodern manifestations in India through the very way in which Choudhuri justifies current modernisation practices in India – as an *active response to* (and critical engagement with) *the West*, rather than simply a passive process of Westernisation (492).

Choudhuri seeks Indian modernity through an introspective turn to roots, tradition and history as opposed to cross-cultural borrowing, but he overlooks India’s inherent tendency for cultural appropriation, particularly vis-à-vis its colonial connections with the West. What’s more, he acknowledges India’s past indigenisation of Western artistic modes as a positive and productive method of achieving cultural innovation and producing alternative experiences and perspectives, listing in particular movements such as imagism, the anti-novel, the anti-play, expressionism, beat poetry, and experimentalism (492). It would be equally unethical (and somewhat condescending) to deny Indians this ‘alternative perceptivity’, particularly the newer generations who can find this a liberating escape from oppressive traditionalist cultural regimes. Thus, cultural appropriation could instead be better viewed as a powerful system of rebelling, critiquing and Otherising the West through mimicry (see Homi Bhabha: 1984).

In overview, Choudhuri’s essay proposes that Indian postmodernism should be observed through the Indian subject’s ‘own realities’, independently of the West. But how can one do so when these realities are so inherently tied up with the West, and when the postmodern, by definition, summons the demotion and abstraction of social realities? Despite certain differences in perspective, Choudhuri’s account is useful for my own investigation into postmodernism in Indian cinema. Firstly, with regards to his idea of Indian modernity as a reaction or response to the West: Indian modernity is not to be confused with Westernisation or modernisation because it still absorbs and expresses traditional values and shows reluctance towards the technological. For Choudhuri, Indian modernity is not achieved through what is borrowed, but rather through the country’s own roots, traditions and realities (494). This idea of accessing and constructing the modern through discourses of the past (tradition, culture, mythology, religion) is particularly compelling, and something I will adapt and explore in my own investigation of Indian cinema. However, Choudhuri is perhaps a little too hasty to draw all our attention to tradition and discount the role cross-cultural exchange plays in helping India conjure up its own experience of modernity. Despite his reservations, Choudhuri usefully acknowledges India’s history of imitating Western artistic modes as a way of escaping from the experience of an essentially insular society. I believe it is worthwhile exploring how indigenised foreign elements may exist and work together with the traditional (though by no means harmoniously) to achieve a mutual goal. Choudhuri hints at this co-existing

tension when discussing India's conflicting yet simultaneous desire for 'romantic individualism' and a 'reassertion of cultural traditions' (493). Indian modernism is regarded as a way of helping the former manifest itself, and I would add that Indian postmodernism balances and supervises the co-existence of the two. Whereas modernism is usually concerned with Western processes, postmodernism has an affiliation with and dutifulness towards the indigenous. Finally, Choudhuri's account is useful in its claim that the 'Indian mind has always conceived of change within a framework of continuity' (495), thereby suggesting a habitual cognitive tendency for repetition and a regression into the past, and the constant pursuit for innovation through the ancient – a crucial postmodern paradox and fundamental crisis within contemporary Indian society which, as I shall reveal in the following chapter, is inherent in much contemporary Bollywood cinema.

Another fruitful investigation into postmodernity in the Asian context comes from Arif Dirlik and Xudong Zhang's edited book exploring *Postmodernism and China*. Dirlik and Zhang provide a well-balanced approach to the topic, identifying not only the values but also several key problems and possible objections towards this methodology. For example, the authors observe a common disdain towards the application of postmodern theory in the East due to its apparent yielding to Western modes of thinking, or what Xudong Zhang describes brusquely as a "whoring after Western academic fashions" (Zhang, 404). Consequently, this method of research is often written off as an unethical 'social fantasy to "catch up" with West' (Dirlik and Zhang, 9). Global postmodernism is reduced to empiricism and nominalism, particularly through its misplacement of first world politics within third world contexts. Ultimately, the approach is either viewed as simply advocating global capitalism or dismissed as unsubstantial and vague, drawing connections on the weak premise of 'postmodernism for postmodernism's sake' (ibid: 9). An even more valid justification for such scepticism is found in the key problems Dirlik and Zhang raise regarding postmodernism's *geographical* and *cultural* displacement in this Asian context. Countries such as China (and similarly, India) could be regarded as too rural, educationally and economically under-developed, and thus inadequate spaces to foster postmodernity. A certain level of literacy is required for the significance of these cultural concepts to be socially realised and wealth is required in order to experience the consequences of commodification and consumerist practices, as is a civilised urban lifestyle. In addition, Wang Ning's chapter on 'The mapping of Chinese Postmodernity' also addresses the popular belief that these countries are somewhat socially unreceptive and incapable of absorbing foreign contemporary cultural movements, operating purely on the basis of practicality and relativity. As Ning notes, the West offers 'a multiplicity of choices [whereas]... in an economically developing third world society such as China... creation is strongly colored with a sort of utilitarian and cognitive function' (35). But as several of the book's authors unanimously protest, these somewhat arrogant assumptions verge on generalisation and oppression, offering a narrow, naïve, colonialist view of the East as a conservative socio-developmentally restricted Other. Indeed, Eastern societies do cling to and appear somewhat held back by traditional modes when compared

to the West, but this in no way confirms their incompatibility with the postmodern – which itself fundamentally employs past traditions as part of its innovatory strategies.

In response to the aforementioned cultural inadequacies of China, Dirlik and Zhang counterpose and unpick these criticisms, reconceptualising Eastern postmodernism and proposing their own vision of what it might entail. In response to the nativisation and geographical location of postmodernism, they argue that, by definition, the concept cannot be determined by nation, space or temporality. Postmodernism, as a non-nationalist concept, provides us with a way in which to ‘grasp and make sense of a complex reality that does not lend itself to comprehension through categories marked by the spatial and temporal teleologies of modernity’ (Dirlik and Zhang: 9). The paradoxical co-inhabitancy of industrialised and rural lifestyles in countries such as China and India unusually offers a space in which social progression occurs in a lateral rather than linear fashion. As another contributor to the book, Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, comments with reference to China, the modern, postmodern and ‘pre-modern’ transpire through ‘spatial coextension rather than temporal succession’ (Hsiao-peng Lu, 146), an idea shared with Ning, who declares China a site where the premodern, modern, postmodern and primitive are *blended* (Ning: 34). The very term ‘uneven development’ indicates social progression as well as social dormancy, and thus the possibility of non-Western societies manifesting post-industrial symptoms to some extent. The authors of *Postmodernism and China* draw attention to how the third (and second) world is becoming increasingly pluralistic (once again aided by globalisation) and if viewed as such, opens itself to new cultural movements such as postmodernism, which could eventually be assimilated as a cultural dominant in Asian societies. Although we may be a while away from realising a postmodern Asian society in this final stage, this last point at least removes the fallacy of the East as homogenous and the tiresome argument that Asian countries are virtually immune to cultural assimilation.

In his counter-criticism, Ning argues against the polarisations of East and West that accompany elitist calls for postmodern-exclusivity. As a way of avoiding accusations of mimicry and forced connections with Western cultural concepts arbitrarily, Ning suggests that Chinese postmodernism need not be regarded as something brought about by a specific socio-historical condition, but a consciously ‘borrowed’ concept with different means. To paraphrase Ning, non-Western postmodernism is a mutated version of its original, which eventually assumes and produces its own indigenous traits (24). Postmodernity can best be useful as a critical tool, a ‘descriptive paradigm’, an ‘interpretive code’ or ‘reading strategy’ (23). In this case, the concept’s relevance in the East can be broken down in terms of its *theoretical* and *practical* tangibility and these can be dealt with as two separate issues.

Ultimately, Dirlik and Zhang's book is useful for anticipating possible problems with, finding solutions for, and offering suggestions on how to utilise postmodernity in the East⁵⁹. And in fact, despite their varied contexts and locales, all of the above attempts to globally apply the postmodern share several key viewpoints and beliefs. All consider freeing postmodernism from exclusivity and homogenising definitions, and the possibility of removing wholly accomplished post-industrialism from the equation. In order to truly observe the postmodern, they suggest that one must be prepared to take a postmodern approach and be willing to both surpass and rework questions of concept-origin. In aiming to broaden postmodern definitions, all consider the possibility of not one, but multiple alternative postmodernisms – each with their own limitations. While the majority of these alternative postmodernisms are situated uniquely in the realm of Eastern cultural production, a magnetic attraction to Western postmodernity is often maintained – at times through conceiving Eastern postmodernism as a possible process of inversion of the concept's original effects and principles. It is through this contrast and inversion that we are able to extend our definition of this cultural phenomenon.

The presence of Western cultural modes in Eastern postmodernism, by way of cross-cultural appropriation, is considered analogous to the fundamental postmodern tension between modernism (the new, innovation) and tradition (past, history). In this context, imitation becomes paradoxically a site for innovation and escape, and postmodern cultural appropriation can become a way of responding to, critiquing and perhaps even internally attacking the Western Other. Arguments made in the interest of protecting the East from converting to Westernised postmodernity are invalidated as such an effort would equally lead once again to trapping Eastern culture within its own national and local monoliths and its subsequent "Otherisation".

'Universalising' the East

Despite their interesting revelations, the above cited writers on global postmodernism notably struggle with a need to justify and defend their approach. Criticism towards the application of Western-originating cultural theories to non-Western contexts is to be expected, particularly as this can end up reaffirming the notion of Western values as *universal*. Seeking Western aesthetic values in non-Western texts could be seen as unethical, and attempting to do so under the umbrella of postmodernism would go against the concept's own calls for anti-universalism. Universalism is to be avoided as it supports the West's self-reaffirmation through putting itself at the centre (as a universal point of reference). It consequently Otherises or particularises the non-West whilst regarding itself as invisible.

⁵⁹ However, it is interesting (and unfortunate) that despite the attempt to separate postmodernism from its historical context and origins, the authors still feel the need to later locate modernism in China historically (offering various factual examples of its capitalist and post-industrial practices).

As the above discussions have revealed, postmodernism can be made universally applicable yet can also have culturally unique manifestations. Whilst it may indeed be influenced by Western concepts and techniques, global postmodernism is a place where the West simultaneously self-deconstructs as it informs. The West, once appropriated, is no longer able to be ubiquitous. It is instead opened up to critique and deconstruction. The cross-cultural manifestation and consequent mutation of the original concept of postmodernism allows previous definitions to be challenged, re-mystified and superseded. In my following chapter on remakes, I reveal how the indigenisation of Western filmmaking modes as a 'universal language' in turn helps to expose this language and prevents it from functioning irrefutably. A global approach to postmodernism may in fact be the answer to seizing the concept from Western elitism and authority once and for all, through a gradual process of reaffirming and reworking existing models.

The question of legitimacy

A final unfavourable critique that could be directed at my attempt to associate Bollywood cinema with postmodern art concerns the issue of legitimacy. Some scholars may argue that there is danger here of simply identifying coincidental or incidental stylistic correlations between these two art forms and then jumping to the assumption that these minor correlations mean they both automatically qualify as 'postmodern'. Postmodern techniques refer to ordinary stylistic and textual devices (which can be present in earlier forms of cultural art, such as modernist and tribal art) that have become postmodern only through their being intentionally used in a new way (often politically) and produced within a particular socio-economic context. A text cannot be declared 'postmodern' just because it happens to contain a few of the same isolated stylistic devices found in other texts that have been labelled 'postmodern'. This kind of argument is common and can be responded to in several ways. Firstly, the above statement of the conditions under which a text can become or be labelled as postmodern is problematic in that it implies that stylistic devices need to be verified as being *intentionally* motivated by a postmodern political incentive in order to pass as postmodern. This issue of intent is particularly tricky and therefore something I will engage with briefly here as well as in the following chapter in more detail.

In general, my response would be to argue that postmodernism is not always achieved through intention. So many years on, we still contest whether certain films are 'wholly' postmodern. Quite often, the postmodern intentions or effects of a text remain open to debate. The notion of postmodern intentionality leaves no room for interpretation (unless one believes that postmodernism is where interpretation ends). By interpretation, I mean the ability to re-read or re-write the text and take it out of its normal implied context if one wishes. If anything, the postmodern text is ultimately an 'open access' text. What's more, one could ask: what governing

role can inferred meaning play in texts that are, for example, fundamentally devoid of depth and averse to meaning-making? Postmodern signification does not stop at production (particularly when we consider its associations with ideas surrounding the death of authorial intent)⁶⁰ but also involves the consumer of the text. The consumer's role is particularly distinctive here as postmodern texts tend to be highly self-reflexive, contradictory or chaotic in content, and steeped in intertextuality. Thus, in this thesis, I offer my own 'postmodern reading' of contemporary Bollywood cinema.

The contemporary Bollywood cinematic texts I engage with in my research do in many cases also share objectives with those of established Western postmodern texts. This includes for example: the rejection and conquering of discourse and meaning by replacing it with pure figuralism and sensation, the desire to simultaneously reinvent, reaffirm and efface the past, the evocation of nostalgia, and the questioning of realism and reality through its magnification. Thus with regards to legitimacy, although I initially identify a range of Western postmodernism's common stylistic characteristics in contemporary Bollywood cinema, I later narrow my focus on the key traits that have had a more obvious impact and exhibit clearer postmodern principles, perspectives and agendas. This will avoid taking the term for granted and my making any connections that could be seen as merely 'coincidental'.

Postmodernism as a form of *aesthetic practice*

Postmodernism can be looked at, often simultaneously, from a variety of positions. It can be examined temporally as a precise period or phase of Western cultural history (post-war, early 1960s to present day), economically as a major shift in the structure and patterning of consumer trade (multi-national capitalism, global exchange, transgression from use-value to exchange-value), or socially as a cultural epidemic, symptomatic of the degradation or mystification of previously upheld ideological value systems (the waning of post-war bourgeois high-modernism).

As mentioned briefly in chapter one, postmodernism has offered us supplementary ways of enunciating and presenting the world. As such, it can be viewed as an abstract cultural theory, offering intellectuals a way of contemplating and contextualising culture in its present state. However, it is also concurrently conceived of as a life philosophy, an adopted lifestyle, a cultural fashioning which can be assumed by anyone. Once adopted, its stylistic modes and principles can help manipulate structures and formations of identity and assist ontological playfulness. For the individual, it offers a means of self-evaluation, self-affirmation or self-abstraction. Productively, it regurgitates, distorts, transforms, innovates, reifies and reinvents. Politically, it can reassert, question, challenge, critique, and deconstruct existing values and ideals. Theoretically, it promises

⁶⁰ Postmodern theory has built on Roland Barthes' concept of the 'death of the author' (Barthes, 1977).

an all-encompassing metaphysics, ruthlessly and ambitiously swallowing up every representation, and every articulated phase of cultural history it comes across. Much like Michael Ende's 'das Nichts' in *Die Unendliche Geschichte* (1979), it aspires to consume *everything* only to leave us with *nothing*. After it has hit, some argue that we are left with a feeling of emptiness. The mind becomes a barren landscape where all creativity and thought has been either stolen or emptied of meaning. However, it is this same void and *nothingness* that paradoxically draws our attention to the barren landscape before us, encouraging us to replenish and re-question our original pursuit for meaning, innovation, and re-presentation.

For the purpose of my investigation into contemporary shifts in Indian cinema, I am interested in these latter approaches to postmodernism as a form of cultural *practice* and a mode of cultural resistance, a stylistic principle assumed in cultural production to help a work withstand existing universalising cultural dominants. In Bollywood's case, postmodern aesthetics are adopted to help it resist the first-world economic power that Hollywood/Western cinema holds. However, this resistance is not to be taken as a simple act of evasion by way of 'side-stepping' Western hegemony. Rather, resistance is achieved through appropriating the dominant culture and its internal conversion. Western modernisation is transcended not through distance, but in proximity through confrontation and *association*. I am also interested in shifting perspectives on the epistemology of postmodernism and hope to demonstrate how postmodern Bollywood films can inform us about the nature of the postmodern, allowing us to question its foundations. I believe these films strengthen the concept's legitimacy as a cultural-political enigma as well as its progressive potential and overall global significance.

My theoretical framework: Postmodernism and film theory

In the following case studies, I observe a variety of postmodern strategies and conventions operating within contemporary Bollywood cinema. Throughout the remainder of my thesis, I draw my research hypothesis from a selection of seminal postmodern works, including Jean Baudrillard's (1983) formulation of postmodern hyperrealism (the extinction of actual reality and its substitution by the endless saturation of 'simulated' images) and Fredric Jameson's scrutiny of postmodern art as nostalgic, depthless, soulless pastiche, leading to the annihilation of temporality in which past and history collapse into the present. Jean François Lyotard's celebration of the sublime, the presentation of the unrepresentable in postmodern art, and the destruction of grand monolithic narratives, will also be drawn upon. Furthermore, in relation to the issue of historical temporality, I have also been informed by Hayden White's (1978; 1996) enlightening work on the blurring of the boundaries of historical truth as fact and fictional narrative.

My work also draws influences from theorists who have attempted to develop these ideas specifically in relation to the medium of cinema. This primarily includes Scott Lash's (1988) expansion of Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum through observing its prioritisation of the figural over discourse and consequent subordination of meaning and signification, specifically with respect to Hollywood's spectacle-based cinema, and Linda Hutcheon's (1988; 1989) retorts against Jameson's ideas of postmodern depthlessness and historicism in nostalgia films, arguing instead for a politics of representation and a return to the past in postmodern cinema.

In addition to Hutcheon, there are several other scholars who have tried to salvage meaning and value in the cinematic postmodern text. Catherine Constable's (2005) account of postmodernism and film has explored how its inherent intertextuality and visual stylisation can enrich characterisation and assist narrative comprehension. Her brief analysis of *Face/Off* also argues how character interiority can also be achieved through postmodern techniques. Peter and Will Brooker's (1997) reader on *Postmodern After-Images* also argues against the blankness and nihilism of postmodern films, this time drawing attention to the deconstructive effects of intertextual devices which challenge distinctions between true original and false copy (Brooker and Brooker, 94). Using the postmodern cinematic bricolage of Quentin Tarantino as a prime example, Brooker and Brooker explain how postmodern films enable 'a more active... intertextual exploration than a term such as 'pastiche'...implies' instead suggesting that these moments of textual appropriation be read as a kind of re-writing or re-viewing (7) and a reinvention, extension and *affirmation* of cinematic conventions (something I will later argue is also true in the case of pastiche and intertextuality in some postmodern Bollywood film texts). Brooker and Brooker also assert the broadness of the concept of postmodernism, explaining that there are many varieties of postmodern films which work in different ways: 'If some examples... are at once scandalous and vacant, or 'merely' playful, others are innovative and deeply problematising. If some are symptomatic, others are exploratory. Like postmodern society, cultural postmodernism is various and contradictory: fatalistic, introverted, open, inventive, and enlivening' (94). This wide applicability of postmodernism to cinema is further demonstrated in M. Keith Brooker's (2007) study of postmodernism in contemporary Hollywood cinema which considers a broad variety of Hollywood texts, many produced in the 2000 decade⁶¹. For the sake of my own investigation, Brooker's book is particularly useful for its consideration of postmodern traits in non-Hollywood cinema. Whilst focusing largely on Hollywood films, the author also explores the possibility of postmodernism's presence in third world cinema. Through his analysis of Mexico's *Amores Perros*, Brooker questions the validity of Fredric Jameson's claim that third world culture (which in this sense would include literature and cinema from India) is the only final refuge for unity and authenticity. Rather than seeing third world

⁶¹ The author's long list of postmodern populist films includes *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery*, *Charlie's Angels*, *A Knight's Tale*, *Oceans Eleven*, *O Brother Where Art Thou*, *Wayne's World* and *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*.

cinema as the antithesis of the 'polished' commercial postmodern film, Brooker concludes that, despite its 'lingering humanism and utopianism', third world film can also be found to 'articulate the global spread of postmodernism' (M. Keith Brooker, 18). It is also worth noting here that Jameson's contrasting of third world and postmodern world is problematic particularly with regards to contemporary Bollywood cinema which, as explained in chapter two, is now both polished and difficult to categorise as third world cinema. The notion of 'authenticity' is also difficult here because contemporary Bollywood cinema is fundamentally non-authentic, as I explain in the following chapter in relation to its abundant remaking practices and tendency towards textual appropriation.

Postmodern aesthetics: Key conventions

For the sake of pragmatism, I have provided a list (see table 2) of all the key postmodern aesthetic features that I engage with throughout my analysis of contemporary Bollywood films. These listed postmodern traits, for each of which a brief description is provided, feature the most prominently and frequently in the film texts I have selected for study. Although I am discussing individual features of postmodernism here, I am aware of the danger and problem of separating off individual characteristics from the overall category of postmodernism as a cultural phenomenon. One can risk losing the dimension of postmodernism by simply citing its individual characteristics. It is therefore important to stress here that these individual characteristics are necessarily part of an overall historical response to the (post-industry status and globalisation) period of Bollywood cinema I am explicitly investigating. Although some of these same fundamental characteristics may be found in earlier examples of Indian cinema, they take on a different value and a different function depending on the historical context in which they emerge. In this case, they specifically respond to the post-industry status of Bollywood in the era of globalisation.

Table 2: Key features of the postmodern in contemporary Bollywood

1. Depthlessness (<i>elevation of the textual surface, anti-intellectualist</i>)
2. Blank parody (<i>intentional or non-intentional pastiche</i>)
3. The Figural (<i>saturation of images, failure of language, politics and deep meaning</i>)
4. Emphasis on Sensation (<i>melodramatic, emotional excess over narrative storytelling</i>)
5. Nostalgia (<i>yearning for lost authentic past, return to the past, presence of the past</i>)
6. Schizophrenia and Fragmentation (<i>of identity</i>)
7. Self-reflexivity (<i>self-referentiality</i>)
8. Intertextuality (<i>inter-referentiality</i>)
9. Hyperrealism (<i>Simulacra, annihilation of the real, questioning/failing realism</i>)
10. Hybridity and bricolage (<i>mixing of styles and conventions</i>)
11. Mise-en-abyme (<i>worlds within worlds, stories within stories</i>)
12. Boundary Blurring (<i>high/low culture, fact/fiction, reality/fantasy</i>)
13. Deconstruction of grand narratives (<i>master narratives, metanarrative</i>)
14. The Sublime (<i>presenting the unrepresentable in presentation</i>)
15. Meta-history (<i>history as narrative/fiction/myth</i>)
16. Transcending time and space (<i>non-chronology</i>)

Depthlessness

This fundamental postmodern trait often deliberately draws our attention to the surface of a text. Surface style is emphasised heavily at the expense of signification and hermeneutics (meaning-making). The depthless work moves away from any traditional realistic mode of presentation and is instead inclined toward the *artificial* and the *superficial*. Postmodern pessimists (such as Fredric Jameson) especially criticise this trait for stripping a text of all its meaning and politics. As the text is not ‘meaningful’ it is considered worthless. It fails or refuses to contribute anything novel or authentic. It has a tendency towards re-production or ‘re-packaging’ rather than actual innovation and imaginative originality. Conversely, other more sympathetic commentators have commended the same trait for its radical political strategy in helping enquire into preconceived notions of text and textuality, and enabling the disassembling and disclosure of ‘Art’ as a concept or institution (e.g. Linda Hutcheon). By demoting or eliminating meaning in the depthless art work, we are left to question our own investment in the text, confront its pre-fixed function and institutional labelling, and query our own desires for meaning and subtext. The depthless work is also positively seen to offer its audience a purer sensory-based experience (see Susan Sontag in Lash, 1988) thanks to its anti-intellectualist approach. This postmodern characteristic is often attributed to mass reproduction and the emphasis on the surface-value rather than ‘intrinsic’ value of a text, and thus configures with Walter Benjamin’s notions of *lost aura* (Benjamin, 1999). In film, this trait is

recognisable through a notable heightening of cosmetic stylisation (e.g. editing, visual aesthetics, music) over ‘substance’ (concrete narrative and character psychologies). Despite its shared sensibilities with the avant-garde and some art cinema, the trait is more commonly associated with mainstream popular culture – particularly the genres of melodrama and the action blockbuster in the case of film. Interestingly, many condemnations of the postmodern depthless work echo those of popular Bollywood texts. Both are considered trivial, formulaic, repetitive, predictable, and purely commercial, factory-line mass-produced consumer products. They are said to be profit-driven rather than artistically-driven (opulence over significance), non-experimentalist, flawed, devoid of artistic merit, sensationalist and generally considered unworthy of intellectual engagement.

Blank parody

This term is often used derogatively to refer to postmodern art as an empty copy of an original work: a pointless plagiarism exploiting a dead language (Jameson, 74) which ‘mimes the formal resolution of art and life... while remorselessly emptying it of its political content’ (Terry Eagleton, 1986: 132). This particular mode of imitation is devoid of the political or historical content and humour or ridicule that conventionally accompanies more credible or productive works of parody. The term therefore has associations with certain notions of *pastiche*. It has been argued that, whilst lacking an outwardly political or satirical motive, postmodernism’s so-called blank parody or empty pastiche can still prove fascinating in its function as tribute or homage. By referring to its original in such a way, it has the potential to ironise, internally critique, and problematise the representation and autonomy of the original work, often *beyond* artistic intention. I explore and draw from varied theoretical definitions of postmodern parody and pastiche (most significantly those of Jameson, Hutcheon [1985] and Richard Dyer [2006]) and consider this concept in more detail in the following chapter, which locates parallel methods of postmodern pastiche within contemporary Bollywood remakes.

The Figural

This postmodern concept stages the failure of language and instead promotes the authority of the figural (the visual image). In mainstream popular American cinema, the image is normally assumed to serve the needs of the narrative, which drives and directs the text. Discourse is usually centralised (dialogue, narrative, script, storyline), with images functioning secondarily as accessories to the discourse. In the case of postmodern film however, the triumph of the figural involves the subordination of discourse in favour of the dominance of on-screen images as *pure spectacle*. Consequently, visual moments will often transcend and occur independently of narrative causality, and this can impact upon the text’s overall level of signification. Images now operate as empty signs. Ultimately, they do not explicitly tell us anything (signify, denote, story tell) but instead

primarily invite us to see or sense with our bodies without the interference of rationalisation, narrative justification or meaning-seeking.

Despite sharing or accommodating certain aspects of Surrealism, the postmodern figural text differs in its agenda to this previous artistic movement. Whereas Surrealism is often abstract, symbolic, invests in deeper hidden meanings and encourages interpretation, the postmodern figural text has no such intellectual agenda. Images are primarily used to elicit sensory pleasure. And whereas Surrealism clearly operates as a transcendental alternative to the real (constructing a symbolic world), the postmodern figural initially claims to operate within our perceived reality – although this reality is ultimately simulated or amplified, deconstructed, corrupted and eventually invalidated. As a consequence, the recent increased saturation of images in media and films world-wide has been viewed somewhat apocalyptically, particularly by Jean Baudrillard, who sees this postmodern shift towards the figural as indicative of the end of signification and our ability to perceive and represent reality.

The notion of figural postmodern cinema has been chiefly developed by Scott Lash whose examples extend from popular avant-garde cinema (the films of David Cronenberg and David Lynch) and Spaghetti Westerns, to contemporary Hollywood blockbusters (the *Ghostbusters* and *Indiana Jones* films and the action films of Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger). I believe that Lash's concept of the figural is the crux of contemporary Bollywood's formal aesthetics, and is what primarily distinguishes this particular breed of cinema. By employing Lash's concept when reading key contemporary Bollywood film texts (in the following chapter), we gain a greater understanding of the effects and objectives of this new phase of cinema. Most importantly, analysing Bollywood's figural techniques will help us explore the industry's baptism by fire (or rather, its *agni pariksha*) in the course of its global initiation, and ultimately offer some explanations for the cinema's somewhat problematic transition into the international arena.

Self-reflexivity

This postmodern term refers to texts which address their own textuality. In cinema, self-reflexivity can consist of a film directly or indirectly referring to its own production, or more broadly, to the world of filmmaking in general. This parodic function facilitates both spectator pleasure (through invested cinephilia) and a more complex mode of self-critique. In the case of the latter, this method of internal commentary aids the postmodern work's ongoing quest to question its own modes of representation. Through self-reflexivity, the text is no longer elusive, but instead becomes the subject of its own political attack. The act of self-referencing is particularly significant in the case of popular cinema, in that it fundamentally disrupts verisimilitude, *revealing* as opposed to *masking* filmic modes of production and textual artifice.

Intertextuality

This broad term refers to the moment upon which a text references or alludes to another pre-existing text. This act of quotation manifests in cinema in a variety of ways, including found-footage filmmaking, where actual original stock footage is re-edited within a new context or appears within the diegesis of a new fictional text, the parodic mimicking or restaging of elements and scenarios from other original texts, or the overlapping and infusion of old footage (from the referred text) with new fictional material. This postmodern function thus incorporates parody, hybridity and bricolage – involving the mixing and simultaneous presentation of different genres and styles. Theoretical definitions of intertextuality are as varied and diverse as its applications (see Gerard Genette [1982] for an extensive list of the concept's many classifications and guises). It can be found to perform several political functions, but most explicitly, it has the ability to critique and 're-code' its very object of citation.

Intertextuality and its related trait, self-reflexivity, are particularly central to the period of Indian cinema I am investigating. They both encourage new reading strategies – allowing Bollywood audiences to engage differently with the text – and are thus particularly enlightening with regards to how cinephilia can serve as an additional form of spectatorial pleasure for the modern Indian film audience. Such perspectives on how Indian audiences receive pleasure from new Bollywood films will hopefully offer a refreshing alternative to the previously cynical notions of the simple and naïve Hindi film spectator. Intertextuality is becoming a recurrent aesthetic device in newer forms of popular Indian cinema which, when employed strategically, helps to break down the boundaries between different genre classifications and aesthetic modes and conventions. This is particularly powerful when Bollywood forces intertextual exchanges with adversary forms of popular cinema, such as Hollywood.

Boundary blurring

This is less a stylistic trait, and more an adopted theme or effect achieved by postmodern aesthetics. The 'boundaries' in question here may refer to those preset political, ideological, formal (stylistic), philosophical or contextual aspects of a text, whose fixed positions are gradually weakened by being subjected to various kinds of inversion, manipulation, and contradictory juxtapositions. Here, binary opposites (such as masculine/feminine, past/present and good/evil) are most unusually brought together until they are indistinguishable. One of the classic examples of postmodern boundary blurring is the fusion of 'high' and 'low' art forms, such as opera and pop music. Such a blurring or dissolving of established differences, categories or markers can lead to what Scott Lash has termed as 'de-differentiation' – an inversion of the modernist structural logic of difference which instead favours an aversion to or collapse of difference:

Postmodernism results from a much more recent process of *de*-differentiation or *Entdifferenzierung*...[It is] present in the postmodernist refusal to separate the author from his or her oeuvre or the audience from the performance; in the postmodernist transgression of the boundary (with no doubt greater or lesser success) between literature and theory, between high and popular culture, between what is properly cultural and what is properly social (Lash: 312).

Although these boundaries are indeed dissolved, this is not intended as an act of universalisation or a way of oppressing difference. Rather, boundary blurring incorporates ambiguity, facilitates diversity, and prevents universality. The inability to distinguish, define and order thereby avoids partiality, inclusion, exclusion and prioritisation, which facilitate grand narratives and dominant modes of discourse. The postmodern aim to work against universal or absolute truths is thus achieved, although somewhat problematically. Particularly with regards to social distinctions (for the most part concerning gender, class and race), boundary blurring can be seen to have dangerous unethical implications, stifling the Other's ability to voice or represent their difference. However, as representations of the oppressed dissolve and confuse with those of the oppressor, the oppressed can just as easily be seen to be empowered (internally manipulating, dismantling and critiquing the language of the oppressor). This postmodern strategy thus proves to be both replenishing and destructive, and partly contributes to the woolly definitions, contradictory behaviours and the paradoxical nature of the postmodern⁶².

Fragmentation and Schizophrenia

Much like the schizophrenic patient, the postmodern work incorporates a multiplicity of voices and viewpoints. There is no final dominant or fixed identity on offer in the text, but rather, a plethora of multiple clashing styles and subjectivities are presented. The postmodern subject comprises various (often arbitrary) parts: bits and pieces of alternate personas combining to form a fragmented whole. In postmodern film, this schizophrenic tendency penetrates the style (the bricolage of different genre conventions), form (multiple diegesis, mise-en-abyme narratives, non-chronology, time and space travel) and content of the text (such as characters with double or split personas and agendas).

The application of this postmodern characteristic in the Indian cultural context is particularly interesting and problematic. When applied to popular Indian film, postmodern schizophrenia threatens contemporary Bollywood's position as a 'national' cinema, as the 'national' often implies

⁶² This empowered/disempowered argument is further explored and elaborated on in the following chapter, particularly in relation to Bollywood's remaking incentives and the act of 'reverse colonialism' in the film *Kaante*.

and requires the presence of a fixed Indian identity or cultural consciousness. The process of fragmentation within the Bollywood film text involves the breaking down of cultural and national identity, and therefore obstructs rather than advocates any feasible on-screen representations of Indian-ness. The appearance of this postmodern trait in Indian cultural texts is at times destructive, dissolving distinct difference (and thus, alternative identities) and denying the post-colonial Indian Other an authentic voice or a fixed whole subjectivity. At its best however, it helps popular Indian cinema transcend its universal labelling and break away from predictability and closed definitions (its somewhat restrictive classifications, categorisations and generalised conventions) and encourages its re-interpretation through offering up a multiplicity of readings. Considering that Indian cinema has a history of being confined by its cultural and national boundaries, fragmentation liberates Bollywood film texts by making room for experimentation, innovation, inversion and reconfiguration.

It is worth bearing in mind that there have been versions of schizophrenia located in art before the emergence of postmodernism. For example, it is particularly known in the modernist work. However, the postmodern schizophrenic subject remains different to modernism's, which ultimately relies on an individual whole subjectivity. Modernism is in pursuit of interior truth, whereas postmodernism rejects the desire for coherence and uses schizophrenia to assist a permanent sense of fragmentation. It assists a meltdown of subjectivity where the self cannot be distinguished from the multiplicity of selves it crosses with.

Hyperrealism

This aesthetic mode is fundamental to the postmodern work's primary agenda, which seeks to question and problematise notions of the real. It employs an alternative method of (anti)representation as opposed to established modes of realist representation. Hyperrealist texts employ a visibly artificial poetic realism that claims to be more legitimate and 'more real' than the real itself. The quest for authentic realism is regarded as overrated and reality is suitably replaced by a substitute simulation – the postmodern *simulacrum*. This substitute is constructed through the mutilation and exaggeration of common conceptions and representations of the real. Elements of reality/fact and fantasy/fiction are mixed and fused to the point at which the two are no longer distinguishable, and the ability to represent or conceive any autonomous reality is shattered in the process. Real moments are magnified so much that they appear surreal. By revealing the inadequacy of realist representation, hyperrealism also ultimately undermines modernism's pursuit for a definitive realism and truth.

Hyperrealism corresponds with popular Indian cinematic notions of realism. Both function as an *extension* to the real and present a flawed or artificially grounded and magnified reality combined with elements of fantasy, which the spectators are invited to perceive as conceivable substitutes to

the real world – commonly referred to as a willing ‘suspension of disbelief’⁶³. Hyperrealism appears in different texts with different levels of intensity. More extreme manifestations result in texts which completely lack real-world referents, instead creating worlds which are entirely divorced from the real and, in referring only to their own artifice, revel in the marked *absence* of the real world altogether.

Metahistory

Postmodernism’s relationship to history is complex. On the one hand it seeks to undermine the foundations upon which history is based. On the other, it draws attention to the historical past and seeks to affirm its significance. The concept of ‘metahistory’ (see Hayden White, 1978) advocates the removal of objectivity from all historical writing (journalism, news reports, historical accounts of past events) and instead exploits and reduces history to a form of narrative storytelling. In postmodern film, this is achieved by scrambling historical facts with fictitious elements (factual narrative is merged with mythology and fantasy) or presenting fiction as if it were historical fact (as with mockumentaries and false documents).

Postmodernism has at times been described as *ahistorical* for erasing the distinctions between past and present and diffusing different historical periods. It disorders historical chronology in order to challenge the autonomy of history. Thus, non-chronology and time-space transcendence also form part of the postmodern aesthetic. However this perceived ahistoricism is ultimately unconvincing as it deviates from and conflicts with notions of postmodern *nostalgia*, which suggests a desire ‘to turn back’ or ‘return to’ the past rather than a wish to escape it totally (as with modernism). Metahistory instead makes room for postmodernism’s duplicitous relationship with history, both as a mode of internal attack and inquiry. In my own investigation of postmodern Bollywood cinema, I will reveal how certain contemporary Bollywood texts contain elements of the metahistorical, particularly moments of temporal playfulness, non-chronology and the blurring of truth/fact/history with fiction/myth. The latter is particularly explored through my analysis of the Bollywood science fiction film remake *Koi...Mil Gaya* discussed later on in this chapter.

Deconstructing grand or meta-narratives

This Lyotardian concept points to another political tendency of the postmodern. Grand (also known as ‘master-’ or ‘meta-’) narratives are defined as the dominant discourses, belief systems, culturally-prescribed stories and socio-ideological frameworks that cultural texts tend to operate within. Postmodernism aims to deconstruct and weaken the power of these master narratives which

⁶³ The term originally coined by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817), refers to the audience’s investment in (and acceptance of) the fantastic, even impossible, elements of an artistic work for the sake of entertainment: the act of literally suspending one’s judgement of a text’s plausibility in order to immerse oneself in its fictional world.

are seen as too universalising and restrictive (particularly for the marginalised Other). However, the latter is seen to be somewhat contradictorily achieved due to the double agency and paradoxical nature of the postmodern, which always ends up reinscribing the very things it contests.

Postmodern texts initially operate within grand narratives, effacing and perverting them from within. In the context of postmodern contemporary Bollywood cinema, these imprisoning grand narratives include the indigenous – religious ideologies, Hindutva politics (Hindu fundamentalism), nationalism, patriarchy – and the external, such as Hollywood (as the ‘definitive’ cinema) and Western rationalism. I will look particularly at how contemporary Bollywood texts disassemble fixed and autonomous representations of Indian-ness, masculinity and modern science, as well as certain universalised (Hollywood) cinematic aesthetic codes.

The sublime

Definitions of the sublime vary in relation to the contexts and theoretical frameworks within which they are used. My use of the term specially refers to Lyotard’s discussions of the postmodern text’s aim to present the unrepresentable – to present things that cannot be conceived through human reason and cannot be described, conceptualised or represented (given form). Examples of the sublime experience include: the infinity of space, the enormity of an earthquake, turbulent nature, the size of an atom, ugliness, death, love, emotional ecstasy and God. The sublime can only be felt or sensed and is again one of several nihilistic postmodern concepts that protest the failure of representation. It marks the inadequacy of the imagination and thus artistic representation. The attempt to portray the sublime on-screen presents a constant struggle and failure to give form to the formless, and to conceive the inconceivable.

I believe that contemporary Bollywood is a cinema unique for its persistence in trying to present the unrepresentable and summon the sublime on-screen – particularly intense emotions such as love. As I will later demonstrate, certain films of the current period have engaged in a kind of aesthetic excess, bombarding the spectator with intricate details and dazzling images in order to simulate and evoke the sublime. It is important to note that although little work has been done on Bollywood’s approach to the sublime, the concept has already been regarded as being especially relevant to Eastern art forms. For example, G.W.F Hegel observed the sublime as a key feature of Chinese, Indian, Persian and Islamic art – all of which adopt stylistic strategies of intricacy, figural abstraction and formlessness in order to overwhelm and awe-inspire the observer (see Hegel, translated by T. M. Knox, 1975).

In summary: although they are individually complex, the principal postmodern conventions briefly described above do share common goals. They all mark an absence and declare the insignificance of intellectual meaning. They facilitate the fragmentation and abstraction of previously established fixed frameworks and governing belief systems. But despite this, they do not aspire to contribute to

any compelling outwardly political agenda, beyond the self-referential. Instead, all are comprised of an inward textual politics. Any possible interpretations or conclusions drawn will usually concern the text as *text*. Through dismantling their own methods of presentation, they render the act of representation either impossible or infinitely problematic. Furthermore, they hail an absence of the 'reality' upon which we normally base our artistic representations. Thus, in the case of postmodern cinema, normative modes of cinematic realism and presentation deliberately malfunction. Finally, they are all inherently hypocritical, paradoxical and contradictory, and as such, they are always subject to contestation.

I shall now try to locate and interrogate the above postmodern concepts in contemporary Bollywood cinema in order to indicate a postmodern shift within the film industry in the period indicated above and demonstrate how a postmodern perspective can contribute towards issues (and rework our existing perceptions) of representation, realism and artistic value within popular Indian cinema.

Postmodern traits in Contemporary Bollywood 1: *Om Shanti Om*

Contemporary Bollywood cinema's postmodern inclinations can first be confirmed through an analysis of one of its recent high-grossing productions – Farah Khan's *Om Shanti Om* (2007). Khan's film can be considered a landmark in a growing postmodern Bollywood canon, offering a synthesis of many of the postmodern traits listed above. The film's story revolves around protagonist Om, a junior Hindi film actor (professional extra) in the late 1970s, who secretly witnesses the murder of his beloved movie star idol Shantipriya by her producer-husband Mukesh Mehra on the set of their latest film, *Om Shanti Om*. During his failed attempt to save Shanti's life (by rescuing her from the burning film set), Om is killed in a car accident and later reincarnated as Om Kapoor, the son of a famous film star. Thirty years later, now himself a Bollywood megastar, the reincarnated Om suddenly recalls the tragedy he witnessed in his past life and subsequently devises a plan to trick Mehra to return to Bollywood and finance a remake of his *Om Shanti Om* film, so that Om may expose him as Shanti's murderer in the process.



Figure 6: *Om Shanti Om*'s Protagonists Om and Shantipriya in the 1970s

Khan's film is the first of its kind to construct, document and offer homage to an Indian cinematic canon with such precedence. The film's entire diegesis is immersed in a matrix of references from the past three decades of popular Indian film history. Many of the film's costumes recall film personalities famous to the era, such as Om's outfits which are modelled on the wardrobe of 1970s acting legend Rajesh Khanna. In the sequence for the song 'Deewangi' (involving thirty 1970s, 1980s and 1990s Hindi film actor cameos) the dance choreography mimics the trademark moves and gestures from each of the actors' previous movies. Similarly, the use of film star look-alikes, bricolaged musical scores (encompassing classical Kathak, rock-n-roll, gothic opera, and Danny Elfman-esque horror compositions)⁶⁴, frequent quotation via 'filmy' dialogue⁶⁵ and abundant movie-prop memorabilia all work together to evoke a sense of cinematic nostalgia.

In his discussions, Fredric Jameson argues how postmodernism's lack of new ideas and stifling of creative innovation has resulted in a nostalgic mourning or *yearning* for past aesthetic modes. Any postmodern attempt to re-summon past styles and conventions is dismissed as empty pastiche, doing nothing more than damaging the autonomy of historical works. Jameson laments the way in which this form of pastiche causes the past to be swallowed up by the present, destroying our ability to access the past in any objective or pure sense. *Om Shanti Om* (hereon *OSO*) equally demonstrates the theft of classic Indian cinematic forms and their assimilation into present modes of filmmaking, causing different periods of old/past and new/modern Hindi cinema to dissolve

⁶⁴ The 'Dastaan-e-Om Shanti Om' song sequence is a visual amalgamation of Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, Andrew Lloyd Webber's/Gaston Leroux's *Phantom of the Opera*, the music videos of rock star Meatloaf, and Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge* (2001).

⁶⁵ 'You're not getting bored are you?' and 'In friendship there are no sorrys or thankyous' from *Maine Pyaar Kiya* (1989), and 'Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn' from *Gone with the Wind* (1939).

and collapse into one another, although the result of this pastiche is not as fruitless as Jameson presumes.

Initially set in 1977's Film City⁶⁶ *OSO* begins with footage of a song sequence lifted directly from the Indian revenge film *Karṅ* (1980). This found footage is intercut with shots of Om (played by Shah Rukh Khan), who is seen dancing and mimicking the song sequence's music. The camera frame then widens to reveal Khan/Om amongst an audience of film extras, supposedly watching a live recording of the sequence from *Karṅ*. The set pieces and costumes from the original footage of *Karṅ* are of course replicated for this shot, but so seamlessly is this done, that the move from the original *Karṅ* footage to the replica set with Om is almost indistinguishable, thus allowing the original cinematic sequence to blur with the new one in postmodern synthesis. Furthermore, the casting of Shah Rukh Khan as the 1970s wannabe film star also works to a similar effect. Shah Rukh Khan, whose actual star persona is emblematic of contemporary Bollywood cinema, submerges himself in an older model of the Indian film hero – his character being modelled on 1970s film star Rajesh Khanna. The two actors' different personalities are fused into one character (indeed, it is difficult to tell whether the character of Om is a modern interpretation of Khanna, or a seventies interpretation of Khan) and the film instead invites us to draw connections and continuity between the two personas.

Later on in the film, this collapse of past and present also takes effect in the simultaneous presentation of actors from several decades of Indian cinema. In the 'Deewangi' song sequence, celebrated film stars such as Dharmendra (1960s-70s), Jeetendra (1970s), Rekha (1980s), Kajol (1990s), and Priyanka Chopra (2000) all come together on-screen. Likewise, the 'Dhoom tana' song sequence brings together deceased actor Sunil Dutt with actress Deepika Padkone (who plays Shanti in the film) through the aid of digital computer effects trickery. The song itself, composed of four verses, fuses four different genres or eras of Indian film music: verse 1 a homage to the Indian classical song and dance number in *Amrapali* (1966), verse 2 from the rock-and-roll cabaret number in *Sachaa Jhuta* (1970), verse 3 alluding to the romantic-comedic duet in *Humjoli* (1970), and verse 4 the archetypical Gypsy item number evoking a courtesan dance sequence from *Jai Vejay* (1977).

Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyperrealism can also be found to manifest in Farah Khan's film. Characters such as Om and his mother, Bela, are seen to communicate in their everyday lives through noticeably exaggerated gestures and deliberately hammy overacting. During much of their scenes together, voices are projected to the point of shouting, every emotion from happiness to pain is comically amplified, and facial and bodily movements are eccentric, heavily relying on stereotype – a mocking nod to the performance style of the traditional Indian film melodrama. At

⁶⁶ Film City is the real name of the Indian film industry's officially based studio complex in Mumbai.

one point, Om even refers to Bela as his “filmy” mother, a familiar Hindi colloquialism meaning *like in the films*, which draws connections between the melodramatic excess of Bela and the on-screen mother figure of 1970s to 1990s Indian cinema. This absurd depiction of the ‘reality’ of Om’s home-life strangely works to promote the idea of perceived reality as a fictive construct, particularly when contrasted with the more fictional elements of the diegesis. The ‘real life’ of the film characters appears more of an artifice than the actual movies being shot in Film City, where the acting and performance gestures appear to be much more sincere and plausible. Compared with the diegetic world of Om and Film City, it is ironically the cinematic footage shown from Shantipriya’s film *Dreamy Girl*, and later, the *Om Shanti Om* remake which engages with genuine emotions and complex character-relationships (and hence why the latter is used to convey the story of Shanti and Om). Thus, in a classic case of postmodern irony, it takes a fiction-film to reveal the ‘truth’ about Shanti’s death. Cinema, it seems, reveals life better than life itself, which, in the diegesis of *OSO*, is a world of artificial backdrops and fake personalities (Film City). Even when Om’s memories of his past life are finally stirred, these memories are presented like old stock film footage: faded images with dust marks and scratches, projected behind him on a film screen. As Hayden White has noted, such efforts to ‘blur the distinction between fact and fiction’ challenge historical objectivity and restrict our ability to ‘discriminate between truth on the one side and myth, ideology, illusion, and lie on the other’ (1996: 19).

The idea of the fictional *Om Shanti Om* remake serving up the ‘real truth’ also correlates with Baudrillard’s (1983) theory of the fourth stage of (postmodern) representation or signification, where the signifier (in this case, the film *OSO*) also becomes the signified. It no longer bears any connection to the real world but instead refers to its own pure simulacrum (see Baudrillard, 1993: 347). *OSO* becomes a film which continuously re-presents other films that quote further films ad infinitum and where Bollywood cinema represents, signifies, simulates and *real*-ises only its own (false) interior reality. While *OSO* uses several methods to displace reality, it should be noted that in other textual examples, this construction of the artistic simulacrum as a parallel reality pushes Bollywood cinema even further towards experimentalism, offering a heightened and more visceral cinematic sense of the real, as I will explore later on in this chapter.

Keeping with this notion of cinema-art reflecting cinema-art, Farah Khan’s film also includes several instances where it acknowledges itself as a fictitious text. This self-referencing is evident in the film’s opening sequence, where Farah Khan herself appears as a groupie in the audience and begins mocking Om’s over-enthusiasm and “over-acting”. In a quick retort, Om replies: “What is it to you? Are you the director of the film?”. Later on, a similar drawing attention to the story as ‘just a movie’ is achieved through Om’s catchphrase: “there is still some film left in the reel, my friend[s]” (which is finally used to address us, the spectators, before the film’s end credits) and in

instances where the audience is literally ‘taken to the movies’ – i.e. the cinema auditorium during the *Dreamy Girl* premier or the mock Indian Film Fare Awards (IFFA) ceremony⁶⁷.

OSO’s self-referentiality is also accustomed to self-parody and self-reflexive critique. In the era of the late 1970s, the Indian film industry is teased for its incomplete scripts, its stock characters and dialogue (as seen with the melodramatic mother-figure, emblematised by Om’s mother), its exploitation of female actresses (as in the case of Shanti’s problematic relationship with Mehra) and for the over-the-top action stunts of the period (as seen in the parodic filming of Om’s Madras action film, *Mind it*). In the flash forward to 2007, contemporary Bollywood conventions are likewise mocked through jokes about the industry’s current trend for sequels (the *Dhoom 5* nomination at the Film Fare awards) and superhero movies (the comical filming of *Mohabbat Man*). Also, whilst on set for his latest movie, the reincarnated Om ridiculously suggests conveying a mute, deaf and blind cripple’s anguish (this itself critiquing the improbability of many masala film scenarios and characterisations) by having him burst into a sexy disco-dance number. As Om remarks, the relevance of the disco song to the film’s narrative and its plausibility with regards to character realism is immaterial. What is important is that it will guarantee its makers a “hit movie”. Ironically, it is this same disco song that partly guaranteed OSO’s success – no doubt a comment on Bollywood films’ box office revenue often largely depending on the popularity of their song sequences and soundtrack-album sales. Furthermore, the ‘Pain in Disco’ song sequence that follows is saturated with overtly sexual connotations. Shah Rukh Khan’s newly toned abdomen and oily, water-drenched body are put on constant display, offering a blatant commentary on the over-emphasised muscled physiques of many male film stars of the post-millennium era.

Additional reflexive commentary on the construction of film star personae is offered in the film through references to actors’ film careers. During the Indian Film Fare Awards, Om is offered a best actor nomination for a film called *Phir Bhi Dil Hai NRI (But my heart is still NRI)* – a deliberate pun on actor Shah Rukh Khan having been the male lead in most major films in the Bollywood NRI genre canon, including *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani (But my heart is still Hindustani)* (2000). Also, the fact that Om is reincarnated as the son of film star Rajesh Kapoor parodies the genealogy of many current Bollywood actors, who have entered the industry by being born into film star families – as with the case of the Kapoor dynasty whom Om and Rajesh’s family name alludes to⁶⁸. Finally, during the film premiere of *Dreamy Girl*, Shantipriya’s visual make-up and performance during her ‘ek chutki sandoor’ scene mimics Aishwarya Rai’s performance as Paro in Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s *Devdas* (2002) – the role which secured Rai’s career as a leading Bollywood actress. This connection

⁶⁷ India’s equivalent to Hollywood’s annual Academy Awards.

⁶⁸ The Kapoor family comprises five generations of actors, producers and directors. The lineage includes legendary superstar Raj Kapoor and the legacy has been recently continued by newcomer Ranbir Kapoor in 2007.

signals *OSO*'s unabashed promotional casting of Deepika Padkone as Shanti, also a model-turned-actress (like Rai) in her acting debut.

In its self-reflexivity, *OSO* also invites an interesting postmodern Marxist reading. The Indian cinema industry is depicted as an exploitative commercial business throughout the film, but this critique is particularly marked through the way in which Farah Khan chooses to demonstrate the industry's transition from the 1970s to the 2000s. At the beginning of the film, Om is seen to seek solace by a walkway under a gallery of late 1970s billboard posters. Surrounding a central film poster for *Dreamy Girl* (comprising mainly a giant image of Shantipriya), we see a collection of hand-painted adverts for consumer goods which clearly demonstrate the use-value products and market capital culture of the period: Ovaltine, Tea, Biscuits, Schweppes and Dulux paint. However, when we later see the same billboard thirty years on, these adverts have been replaced by materialist vanity objects – designer watches, mobile mp3 players, jewellery and makeup – signalling the country and industry's shift towards exchange-value consumerism and its growing individualism. Whereas in the 1970s the posters and their featured products target the Indian at home and uphold the idea of 'wholesome family goodness' (classically iconised by the Indian mother in the Ovaltine advert), the post-millennium adverts literally address the 'global Indian' and their impulse to do nothing but go 'shopping'. This particular example of self-critique reveals how filmmakers can make use of postmodern strategies for dual gain – offering a critique of this materialist culture of product placement, whilst also preserving, practicing, promoting and economically benefiting from its glamour and appeal. Again, this political attack from within demonstrates the method through which postmodern works paradoxically reinstate the very things they challenge.

The above postmodern strategy is especially effective in the Indian context, particularly if we take the 1977 poster display to be representative of the traditional values of the period, and the 2007 display as symbolic of the impact of global commerce after the millennium. It is interesting that *OSO* chooses to first view the past (tradition and values) so nostalgically, only to then efface or replace them with an inverted substitute. What happens to the Indian at home and the Ovaltine Mother in this new consumer culture set up? Is this a passing gesture towards India's blind submission to materialism at the risk of tradition and culture? If this is the case, perhaps it is no accident that in the 2007 version, in addition to the painted posters, Farah Khan also removes the view of a Hindu temple in the foreground. Although the film preaches much about traditional values, truth and *sanskara*⁶⁹, its protagonists eventually sink back into this very same world of materialist glitz and glamour. Whilst we may follow a narrative about the cheapening and loss of values due to greed and profit, all the while it is made apparent that we are marketing targets for

⁶⁹ The Hindi term for sacrifice, ritual, ceremonial rites and religious service.

Maybelline make up and TAG Heuer Swiss watches (most obviously through actors Shah Rukh Khan and Deepika Padukone being the real life ambassadors for these global consumer brands). Could such moments be considered a means by which Bollywood consciously laughs back at its audience? Whatever the case, *OSO* reveals an Indian society trapped in double-standards, torn between the idea of feudal community and the practice of humanist individuality. Bollywood cinema thus doubly serves its purpose as an *advocate* and *adversary* of Indian culture.



Figure 7: Bollywood in 1977 and 2007: Film City Billboards in *Om Shanti Om*

Trapped in *Samsara*: The theme of Reincarnation

“vasamsi jirnani yatha vibhaya navani grhnati naro'parani

*tatha sarirani vibhaya jirnany anyani samyati navani dehi”*⁷⁰

Bhagvad Gita, chapter 2 verse 22

OSO is deeply invested in the Hindu model of *Samsara* – the Sanskrit term for reincarnation or regeneration (the continuous cycle of birth and death). The cyclical nature of *samsara* is evoked from the film’s palindrome-like title *Om-Shanti-Om*, alluding to the principal Hindu-Sanskrit circular chanting prayer, to its song sequences, which include the ‘reanimation’ of dead film styles and actors achieved through careful digital superimposition and morphing. Similarly, the protagonists Om and Shanti are literally ‘reborn’ in the narrative, the reincarnated Om ‘recycles’ Mukesh Mehra’s *Om Shanti Om* script and ‘rebuilds’ or ‘clones’ its original film set, and in the final sequence, he ‘re-stages’ an uncanny theatrical production of the entire first act, simulating it perfectly from Shanti’s costumes to the 1970s set designs. Furthermore, this pattern of reoccurrence is fundamental to the film’s narrative structure. Each stage of the story mirrors the next, with the first and third acts more or less paralleling one another:

Act 1 – 1977

Content: Film production of Mukesh Mehra’s *Om Shanti Om*
The story of junior artist Om and film star Shanti (love story, murder act, death scene on Mehra’s *Om Shanti Om* film set).

Act 2 – 2007

Content: Om’s reincarnation/reintroduction as film star Om Kapoor
Shanti’s reincarnation/reintroduction as junior artist Sandi

Act 3 – 2007

Content: Film production of Mehra’s *Om Shanti Om* remake
Musical staging and theatrical re-enactment of the Story of Om and Shanti (love story, murder act and death scene on *Om Shanti Om* remake film set)

OSO’s diegetic framework can be divided into four separate sub-streams: [1] the primary diegesis (the ‘real life’ story of Shanti and Om), and three further *extra*-diegetic narratives, each of which overlap with one another and mirror the primary diegesis: [2] Mehra’s original *Om Shanti Om* film

⁷⁰ “As one gives up old and worn out garments and accepts new apparel, similarly the embodied soul, giving up old and worn out bodies, verily accepts new bodies” (translated via www.bhagavad-gita.org).

production, [3] Om Kapoor's remake of Mehra's original *Om Shanti Om* movie, and [4] a theatrical re-staging of the remake of the original *Om Shanti Om* movie. This type of story frame is familiar within postmodern art and can be seen to follow in the vein of 'Chinese-box' or 'Russian-Doll' narratives (involving worlds within worlds) and the formal technique of mise-en-abyme (recursive imaging). Through such a framework, the film text becomes a gyre of stories within stories, all bound within a main film-story (the movie *OSO* by Farah Khan). Furthermore, the movie as a whole is itself ultimately about *all* films and stories within the history or world of Bollywood cinema.

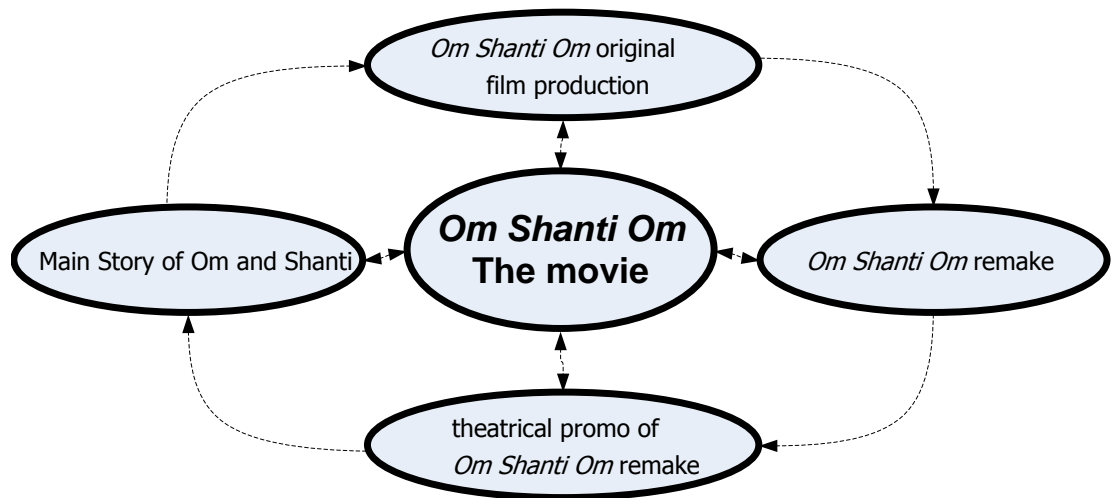


Figure 8: The recursive structural framework of *Om Shanti Om*

OSO consciously exploits its circular narrative structure, bringing it visibly to the surface of the text. As a result, it exposes a cinema trapped within its own samsara-cycle. The film literalises Bollywood cinema's notorious appetite for recycling formulas, plots and conventions, both through its narrative subject-matter and its creative execution. It assumes the postmodern impulse for reproduction and imitation, and helps us envisage postmodern art's potential for critical self-reflection through creative reinvention.

Like other Bollywood texts, *OSO* performs through an excess of emotion, sensations and spectacle. But it also fulfils spectatorial desire and pleasure through simulating and pastiching images and styles from the past: the classic Bollywood love-story, the religious mythology, or the supernatural gothic. As such, the film is also guilty of *Kama* – an unappeasable indulgence in material pleasures or 'carnal' desires (emotion, spectacle) believed to ultimately tie the soul to an endless samsara. In the context of Hindu philosophy, the lack of escape from *Kama* prevents the human soul from achieving freedom from Samsara and thus liberation (*Moksha* – access into heaven). In Bollywood's case, this can be translated as popular Indian cinema's failure to free itself from formulaic conventions and achieve originality, innovation, and/or autonomy in their purest sense. Thus,

Farah Khan's filmic depiction of cinematic reincarnation demonstrates and playfully critiques the endless repetition and recycling of popular Indian filmic modes, in each instance assuming a new body, a different guise, but always retaining the same *cinematic soul*.

Regardless of whether or not we wish to perceive this pattern of repetition as Bollywood's eternal curse, despite its stylistic continuities *OSO* remains politically and aesthetically progressive through its employment of postmodern methods, including intertextuality, nostalgia, mise-en-abyme, pastiche, self-reflexivity, hyperrealism and simulation. With reference to this last technique, all modes of reality in the film are constructed through artifice. There is no reality (actual or masked) other than those simulated realities presented through the plastic arts (cinema, music, dance, theatre). All are multiple simulacrum within a false universe – the diegesis (Om's world of filmmaking), the *Om Shanti Om* film shoot, the theatrical stage production, the behind-the-scenes end credit sequence with director Farah Khan and her film crew, the Film Fare awards mockumentary of actor-stars, and so on.

OSO is also progressive in being one of the few Bollywood films to creatively address issues of cinephilia and the Indian audience's investment in popular cinema, allowing the spectator's dreams and desires to be realised in the diegesis (the ordinary movie-goer Om eventually becomes a film star). Particularly during the earlier 'Dhoom Tana' and opening title song sequences, we are invited to see through the eyes of Om who, himself a mere film spectator, is seen to repeatedly imagine and project himself onto the screen in place of the film hero. The film acknowledges and creatively employs this process of cinematic transference. Thus, the spectators may imagine themselves to be Shah Rukh Khan as Om Prakash Makhija imagining himself to be Rishi Kapoor as Monty Verma (in *Karz*).

Whilst immersing us in extreme melodrama, sensation, and the surface-value of the medium, *OSO* concurrently demystifies the glamour-value of Bollywood. In true postmodern style, it *subverts* the cinema as it *reaffirms* it. Bollywood is both celebrated and critiqued for its repetition, its hyperbole, its artificiality, its lack of substance, and its failure to present reality. By observing how postmodern functions work within *OSO*, we come to realise that such films may not necessarily be guilty of the postmodern sins outlined by Jameson and Baudrillard (blank pastiche, empty signification, meaninglessness, devoid of political agenda) and that these texts instead deserve further examination.

Once we couple *OSO* with her debut film *Main Hoon Na*, which contains similar signature postmodern conventions (see following chapter), Farah Khan appears to be, perhaps indisputably, India's first official postmodern auteur. But the postmodern techniques identified in her films also appear in a number of other contemporary Bollywood films, and it is vital that we map these

influences in order to determine the extent of the impact of the postmodern on Bollywood styles and modes of production.

Postmodern traits in Contemporary Bollywood 2: *Koi... Mil Gaya*

As we have established, postmodern works blur the temporal boundaries of past and present and dissolve reality into fiction. We can detect a similar blurring of such boundaries in *Koi...Mil Gaya* (*I found someone*), a Bollywood film re-interpretation of Steven Spielberg's *E.T. The Extra Terrestrial* which attempts to transpose ancient traditions and values onto modern cultural representations. It is worth mentioning here that Spielberg's *E.T.* is itself rumoured to have plagiarised Bengali filmmaker Satyajit Ray's unmade film *The Alien*, whose production was abandoned in the late 1960s by Columbia pictures– the same studio that went on to produce *E.T.* (see Ray cited in Andrew Robinson [2004: 295]). However, considering that there is very little information on Ray's original script, and for the sake of this investigation, in the following discussion I will refer to Spielberg's film as the 'original'.

The Bollywood film version recalls the original's classical Hollywood narrative, adopting its key themes of friendship, alienation and childhood innocence. Its story centres around Rohit, a developmentally-disabled young man with the mind of a child, who befriends a space alien called Jadoo who has been left behind on earth and needs to get back home. The film embraces many of the familiar conventions of soft science fiction (science, technology, aliens, space ships, the paranormal, government and military operations, special effects, unexplained supernatural phenomenon) – a genre previously 'alien' to Bollywood. Bombay-based cinema has rarely shown an interest in producing science fiction films, with Shekar Kapoor's film *Mr India* (1987) being the sole science-fiction masala to achieve box-office success prior to *Koi...Mil Gaya*. As a result, the *E.T.* remake has become famous for using sophisticated modern special effects technology never before seen in the history of popular Indian cinema.

Despite its noted narrative, stylistic and thematic continuities, *Koi...Mil Gaya* (unlike its precursor) does not opt to achieve narrative plausibility through scientific rational or a Hollywood realist aesthetic. Rather, in this science-fiction-cum-masala-musical, diegetic realism is unusually sought through a science-fiction narrative rooted in religious superstition and Hindu mythology. Here, religious mythology becomes the vessel through which one can observe, contemplate and *conceptualise* science. This affinity for a 'vedic science' rather than atheistic science (Alessio and Langer, 2007: 227) is evident in the film in several ways. Firstly, we can consider the importance of 'magic' in both *Koi...Mil Gaya* (hereon *KMG*) and the classical Hindu mythological folktale. In the case of the latter (the religious text), the magical is associated with Godly powers. Each of the many Hindu deities is known for their individual special powers and ability to perform magic. Both the

Ramayana and *Mahabharata* include moments of magic such as levitation, disappearing, shape-shifting, and the ability to fly. *KMG*'s similar emphasis on the spectacular and miraculous is generated through the character of the alien, who is appropriately named after the Hindi word for *magic*. In the context of Rohit's mental handicap, Jadoo's powers to heal him are not presented as an extra terrestrial advanced super ability, but rather as a 'divine miracle', implying that the sublime wonder in this film is not so much the sci-fi spaceships or the alien, but rather the *mysterious and magical work of God*.

The impingement of the religious upon conventional scientific contexts can also be seen to impact upon certain cause-effect elements of the film's narrative. In *E.T.* the aliens come to planet Earth in order to research and collect plants, but in *KMG*, it is the religious *Om* message in Rohit's father's computer (accidentally re-activated by Rohit) which originally calls the aliens to Earth. The Hindu *Om* chant is described by Rohit's father at the start of the film as a universal code which transcends language (and apparently spatial) boundaries and contains "the vibrations of the universe". Jadoo's rescue spaceship is also subsequently summoned by the *Om* computer, whilst *E.T.*'s spaceship is signalled through his self-assembled satellite transmission device. This conversion of a man-made (or rather alien-made) technical device into a religious symbol serving a religious function (the *Om* computer literally recites a prayer) can be considered in relation to the earlier raised issues regarding the negotiation between modernism and technical advancement, and tradition and primitivism in Indian culture.

It is interesting that the actual moments of extra terrestrial phenomena in *KMG*, such as the UFO sighting, are so quickly neutralised. The spaceship witnessed by the entire town does not appear to stir much fear or curiosity into its residents, as one would expect. Likewise, Jadoo is almost immediately accepted into Rohit's group of friends. The alien is quickly initiated as one of the gang and the 'Jadoo' song sequence with the children early on in the film confirms this. The sequence is initially set against unusual barren rock formations, colourised with a sepia tint to evoke an alien landscape. However, as Rohit and friends sing of their growing friendship with Jadoo, this environment changes to a natural backdrop of blue skies, mountain valleys, hay-stacked grass meadows, wheat fields and forests. This natural framing suggests that, unlike *E.T.*, Jadoo is not quite intended to be perceived and presented as an 'Other' to the key characters and audience. In *E.T.* the alien, usually lit in shadows and low-key lighting, is always to some extent depicted as *strange*. *E.T.* is curious, unpredictable, an oddball, funny looking, or as Spielberg has described him, deliberately fat and ugly⁷¹. As Andrew Gordon (2008) has recently explored, *E.T.*'s story is that of the ugly frog prince – an animal who is later revealed to have the heart of a human. Jadoo on the other hand, is obedient, rational and even pretty-faced. Before he appears, the mysterious alien

⁷¹ For a further discussion see Andrew Gordon (2008: 78).

fugitive is described by Nisha as a ‘jaanwar’ (animal), yet he is quickly ‘normalised’ through his physical appearance.

The attempt to familiarise and somewhat normalise the alien in *KMG* is also evident through the mirroring of Rohit and Jadoo. In *E.T.*, boy and alien are connected telepathically and physically (when E.T. gets drunk or feels ill, Eliot’s body reacts the same way), but in *KMG* these similarities are more explicit. Unlike Eliot, who is the “ordinary kid”, Rohit is by no means considered normal. He is called “abnormal” by his bullies and is the alien or freak within his social circle. When Rohit eventually acquires Jadoo-like super powers, he becomes superhuman and thus retains this unique anomalous persona. A biological link between Rohit and the alien is also made explicit when the two characters greet one another for the first time. During the film’s intermission, the camera-frame freezes on Rohit and Jadoo’s shaking hands. In this still image we clearly see that the unusual shape of the alien’s hand matches Rohit’s, conspicuously replicating the supernumerary thumb of actor Hrithik Roshan⁷². This again reveals a deliberate intention to associate Rohit with Jadoo and neutralise the boundaries of alien and human in the process.

Furthermore, considering this process of association, mirroring and normalisation, this Indian science fiction film’s object of antagonism appears not to be that which is ‘beyond-belief’, but rather, *non-belief*. In *E.T.* low floor-level camera shots are used to film the antagonists (the faceless adults and government authority figures’ identities are instead indicated by their suits, walkie-talkies, guns and handcuffs), but in *KMG*, aside from Rohit’s school bully, there is no such antagonist in the film. Unlike the menacing American government astronauts who break into Eliot’s home, the black uniformed gas-masked figures that come for Jadoo are left unidentified. Police officials Inspector Khan and Officer Sukhwani are generally sympathetic rather than menacing figures. However, at the start of the film, a group of atheist scientists ridicule Rohit’s father for unorthodoxly mixing his religious beliefs with hard science. The audience is encouraged to identify with Rohit’s father’s frustration and battles against these ‘non-believers’ and this key moment in the narrative clearly stands as a subtle attack on the monolith of Western atheistic science.

In their postcolonial reading of *KMG*, Domonic Alessio and Jessica Langer (2007) also note the film’s abundance of religious motifs, such as its use of the divine phrase ‘Om’ to communicate with the aliens and its symbolic depiction in the design of the alien spacecraft, its prevalent themes and upheld moral ideals of faith, prayer, worship, and self-sacrifice, and the narrative’s suggestive moments of divine intervention. The authors offer several reasons for the film’s rigid religious backbone. Firstly, the religious motifs are seen to follow the conventional tropes of Western science fiction, which often embodies the metaphysical and incorporates the ‘religious imagination’

⁷² The actor is famous for his deformed hand, which has since become something of a signature trademark in his films.

into its narratives (John Clute and Peter Nicholls cited in Alessio and Langer: 222). I would add that although religious connotations are not uncommon to the sci-fi genre, with *E.T.* having drawn its own list of references to Christianity (see Andrew Gordon), in *KMG*, religion functions beyond subtext and instead outwardly instigates several of the cause-effect moments in the narrative. For example, it is explicitly 'God' who helps the Pandava team win their basketball game by parting the clouds and helping Jadoo regain his powers. Religion has a particular significance and centrality in *KMG* it serves a purpose above and beyond genre conformity. It is strategically used to break down the master narrative of science (submerging scientific rational in mythical superstition) and most significantly, to help challenge *modernity*⁷³.

Alessio and Langer's other explanations for the religious-rootedness of *KMG* concern Western modernity. The religious motifs are firstly seen to be a conscious *postcolonial* attempt to challenge the homogeneity of Hollywood/Western/Colonial cinema, where Western domination is seen to be prevented and replaced by an equally oppressive religious extremism and Hindu nationalist 'forced cultural assimilation' (222), and secondly, a less-conscious 'withdrawal symptom' following India's inevitable retreat from tradition and religion towards modernity – a side-effect of the 'future shock' (Alvin Toffler cited in Alessio and Langer [222]) experienced through the country's sudden technological change and modernisation.

The collapse of religion, past and tradition into modernity or the future in *KMG* can be best explored through the text's identification with Hindu deities. Despite the film's innovative style and subject matter, we can tell simply from the way in which Jadoo's character is constructed and presented that Bollywood cinema, despite surrendering to modernity, cannot let go of its past. Jadoo appears not as the infantile, wrinkled, pale, doe-eyed and squeaky voiced creature of Spielberg's original. Instead, he has blue skin, leaf-like Indian eyes, a deep resonating voice, and is adorned with something resembling a *tilak*, or *urdhva pundra* – the Brahman marking of a half-moon and three horizontal lines which is worn on the forehead in the Hindu religion. Jadoo is in fact the incarnation of the Hindu God Lord Krishna, and comparisons between the two occur throughout the film⁷⁴. In Hindu mythological representations, Krishna is often depicted as a young child, innocent and mischievous, much like Jadoo. In the *Mahabharata*, Krishna is portrayed as faithful friend to the Pandava brothers (incidentally a name shared with Rohit's basketball team) who is sent to earth as God's messenger or helper. Amongst his many achievements, he is best known for giving prince Arjuna personal strength and the power to fight in battle. These character functions

⁷³ Indeed, scientific rationale is fought somewhat hypocritically with another grand narrative – Hindu religion, but I wish to suggest that such a polarisation ultimately leads to a mutual cancelling-out effect, thus weakening the solidity of both ideologies.

⁷⁴ For detailed examples see Alessio and Langer (222-223).

plainly and purposely parallel with Jadoo's, who is seen to befriend Rohit and give him special powers and intelligence to fight his own demons.



Figure 9: Jadoo: The sci-fi incarnation of Hindu God Lord Krishna

The significance of this religious transformation of the alien could be considered in relation to the cultural accessibility of film texts like *KMG*: is this analogy created to make the extra-terrestrial character more palatable to Indian audiences? Are we to assume that, had Jadoo not had this connection with Krishna, he would be harder to relate to and characterise? In such a case, do these religious connotations therefore prove wasted on Western audiences or elicit confusion within non-Indian viewers? If so, could this assumed nationalist or postcolonial tendency be the very thing that continues to problematise the Bollywood text's international accessibility? Such questions highlight the need for exploring Indian and non-Indian audiences' reception of such films (and their originals), which would perhaps further help unveil the differences between Hollywood and Bollywood filmic coding and viewing processes.

On the one hand, Alessio and Langer argue for *KMG* as an example of postcolonial cinema which asserts its religious tradition and culture in order to counteract Western modernity and technology⁷⁵, but on the other, they dedicate much of their article to justifying the film's conformity and adoption of the traits of Western science fiction and explaining the economic motivations behind the film's production as an international commodity. Besides the need to adopt the science fiction genre to attract global as well as domestic audiences and celebrate India's increased investment in technology and scientific research, the authors direct the question of *why* the film chooses to adopt the sci-fi aesthetic purely towards issues of nationalism. The film is primarily seen to use science fiction conventions for the purpose of nationalism and assisting its 'Hinduized visual regime' (218). As the authors note, *KMG* adopts and 'reshapes' the sci-fi genre to assist its

⁷⁵ The authors give the example of Rohit reminding his IT teacher that "man made the computer, the computer did not make man", which reveals the film's binary opposition of humanity and morality over technology and machine (223).

postcolonial agenda – something which I will later explain further through a postmodern perspective. Otherwise, they dismiss the film's science fiction elements as borrowed 'almost entirely from earlier Hollywood [science fiction] films, making *Koi [Mil Gaya]* a conglomerate of influences rather than a uniquely conceived film in terms of form' (221).

Alessio and Langer are correct in suggesting that the science fiction genre allows the Bollywood film to evoke the metaphysical and religious imagination, and to juxtapose Indian society and culture against the 'machine' (technology, science). However, their rejection of any originality in the film's form is mistaken. Also, while pursuing their postcolonial reading of the film, they raise (yet fail to explore) the issue of *KMG* as a text which 'challenge[s] the hegemony of Western cinematic production' (227). But why does the film steal references from so many Hollywood films? Surely if the film wishes to challenge Hollywood, this would require a dismantling of Western codes and not a straightforward conformity and preservation of them? Alessio and Langer consider this supposed attack on Hollywood filmic conventions as simply an example of the film's anti-colonial agenda, but although this may be the case, this unique process of internal critique marks a shift in Bollywood cinema aesthetics which needs be addressed. As will be revealed, films such as *KMG* use foreign generic conventions not only to serve their own alleged socio-political agendas, but also to manipulate and politically reflect on their own genre, aesthetics and textuality.

There are a few issues with regards to mise-en-scene and production modes that could be seen to problematise Alessio and Langer's anti-modern and anti-colonial reading of *KMG*. Firstly, regarding its supposed wish to demote modernity and therefore technology, it is inconsistent that the film resorts to innovative special effects and has been publicly revered for having modernised Indian cinema through its technological advances (wire-stunts, CGI, animatronics). Secondly, with regards to the film's alleged semi-extremist nationalist politics, Alessio and Langer discuss the rejection of Western commercialism and consumerism as a firm principle of Indian Hindu nationalist group, the *Shiv Sena* party (224, 226). However, this would fail to explain the fact that *KMG* is unabashedly littered with product placement, including several rather blatant adverts for *Coca-Cola*.

Instead of simply seeing technology and modernity as perceived 'evils' within the film, I would rather suggest that these are *regulated* through the adoption of cultural or religious motifs. This ambiguous treatment of and attitude towards modernity indicates the film's playful position, instead approaching these issues with a simultaneous *desire* and *dread*. Furthermore, rather than seeing *KMG* as a downright rejection of the West as coloniser, I would argue that there is a simultaneous attraction to, even adoration of the 'colonial' in the film which also needs to be acknowledged. It is interesting that many of the songs in *KMG* incorporate Western musical dances (Tango, Ballroom, Tap) and that there is an absence of a traditionally Indian song and dance number in the film. Similarly, the costumes of the lead characters are very much Western or 'modern' (the lead actress is

predominantly seen in summer dresses, not a salwar kameez or sari). The sports challenge between Rohit and his school bullies is not a cricket match, but a basketball game (a markedly non-Indian sport), and the entire narrative is set in a hill-station town in Kasauli, northern Punjab, which lacks the iconic Indian architecture (or Hindu temples) which would normally help give the film a distinctively Indian nationalist backdrop. Finally, it is also noteworthy that Rohit, once in possession of supernatural powers and transformed into 'hero', appears to be modelled on a disco-dancing John Travolta or tap-dancing Gene Kelly rather than any known Indian equivalent. All of this Western iconography can be seen to counteract a purely nationalist pro-Hindu and anti-Western reading of the text.

Comparisons with *Krrish*

Alessio and Langer choose to avoid recognising *KMG* as a remake of *E.T.*, almost treating the film as an independent work aside from a few incidental, plagiarising intertextual references. Whilst briefly acknowledging the film's sequel, *Krrish*, the follow-up film to *KMG* is also ignored in their discussion. However, I believe *Krrish* is worth looking at, particularly for its marked omission of science-fiction tropes (spaceships and aliens, the character of Jadoo), its shortage of religious motifs⁷⁶, and its move away from science-fiction to its more diluted sub-genre, the super-hero action film⁷⁷.

Krrish is predominantly set in Singapore, a place where religion is peripheral and makes way for modernity as the dominant lifestyle. Its cityscape of high rise corporate buildings and modern architecture signals wealth and progress, but the city is not depicted as suffocating or monstrous. It is beautified. Singapore as the modern city is not the subject of attack, but an object of desire (most likely a result of shooting being permitted there in exchange for Roshan having the film promote the place as an attractive travel destination)⁷⁸. Nevertheless, modernity is still put in its place elsewhere in the film. For example, the dangers of science and technological progress are expressed through superhero *Krrish*'s nemesis (and this time the text's real antagonist) Dr Arya, whose sins are greed, fame, success, power, control and knowledge. Arya's supercomputer which sees the future allows him to be, in his own words, "God-like". His desire to replace God can thus be read as a stand-in warning for technology and modernity's impact on a non-secular society such as India. Whereas *KMG* forebodes a coming modernity from the point of an unspoilt rural India, *Krrish*

⁷⁶ The religious analogy of Lord Krishna goes only as far as the film's title and the name of the lead character, Rohit's son Krishna.

⁷⁷ It is worthwhile noting that *Krrish* is still directed and produced by the same supposedly pro-Hindu BJP backing director, Rakesh Roshan.

⁷⁸ *Krrish* was the first film to take advantage of the Singapore tourist board's 'Film In Singapore' scheme. The scheme, launched in 2004, offered to subsidise 50% of on-location filming costs for foreign productions as well as assistance with restrictions concerning film permits, road closures, and access to key resources (see Silvia Wong, 2005).

narrates from within the modern – a modernity already in existence. Thus, the objective is no longer to ‘protect’ the Indian from the modern (as shown through Krishna’s grandmother, who learns to let him experience the world and travel abroad), nor to convince Indians of whether or not to embrace it when it arrives. Instead, *Krrish* presents an India which is already internationally situated, globally integrated and culturally hybridised. Krrish is Bollywood’s first official Indian cinematic superhero, yet he bears little mark of the traditional Indian. In the film, Krrish is the alter-ego of Krishna, who is very much depicted as a nature-child of rural India at the start of the film. However, these two egos remain separate (if not oppositional) throughout the film and the masking of Krishna when he becomes Krrish ultimately signals the active erasure of his original identity. Krrish’s anonymous black masked and cloaked appearance suggests a character that exists outside reality and thus any fixed social or national context. Krrish’s lack of a real identity, the erasure of his Indian-ness, and his consequent unbound freedom echo the experiences and desires of the modern day Indian. Contrary to the claims that popular Indian cinema supposedly feeds the audience’s desire to retain and return to their Indian roots, *Krrish* instead engages in the removal or effacement of one’s fixed identity in order to attain other identities, or even be freed from identity altogether.

The Postmodern and the Postcolonial approach

Alessio and Langer’s reading of *KMG*, if somewhat rigid, is valuable for its recognition of contemporary Bollywood cinema’s distinct obsession with and ambivalence towards modernity. Religion may indeed be the ‘antidote to modernity’ (226), but Hollywood codes of science fiction are simultaneously adopted to contest India’s primitivism and backwardness (227). *KMG* thus represents the dual desires of a culture wanting to be at once modern and global, *and* traditional and autonomous. The film can be considered an ideal metaphor for postmodern Bollywood, a visual culture which now accesses its past through a vernacular of the modern, present or future.

Considering the influence of Alessio and Langer’s article in my analysis of *KMG*, it is worthwhile explaining my reasons for choosing to view the film as a postmodern rather than a postcolonial text. I have already attempted to differentiate the postcolonial from the postmodern earlier on in this chapter. However, my argument for the limitations and incompleteness of applying a postcolonial approach to contemporary Bollywood film is best explained in relation to this key film. As previously noted, there is a reluctance to allow postcolonial texts to enter postmodern discourse under the assumption that this may trivialise the political meaning extracted from a prior postcolonial reading. Both approaches are concerned with the crisis of authority and challenging monoculturalism, but postmodernism is often accused of reinforcing the very thing it claims to oppose by speaking and operating from within a dominant white Western or European hegemonic discourse. It is thus seen to seize postcolonial texts and stifle their ability to serve any radical

political objectives, particularly those concerning issues of race. My postmodern readings could likewise be accused of re-inscribing the Indian film texts' marginality whilst 'robbing them of their raw materials' (Williams and Chrisman, 1993: 13), and forcing them back into colonial territory:

Assimilation of these [postcolonial] texts into 'postmodernism'... invokes a neo-universalism which reinforces the very European hegemony which these works have been undermining or circumventing. Thus the so-called 'crisis of (European) authority' continues to reinforce European cultural and political domination... [making] the rest of the world a peripheral term in Europe's self-questioning (Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, 2002: 171).

However, this anxiety and disreputability alone is not enough to disprove the fact that certain Indian cultural works produced post-independence *can* and *do* aspire to appropriate and merge with the West. We may not like it, or want it, but this does not mean to say it is not happening. In the case of *KMG*, it is the colonial subject (or Indian cinema) that willingly chooses to engage with and adopt dominant Western conventions, and therefore an active accomplice to this alleged reinforcing of Western hegemony. Rather than refusing to acknowledge this cultural overlap, it is instead important to explore the reasons behind and effects of this active re-instatement of Hollywood aesthetics in popular Bollywood cinema. Thus, my postmodern approach differs in concerning itself with aesthetics and critiquing essentialism, whereas postcolonialism is specifically interested in critiquing, deconstructing and obstructing forms of cultural imperialism – although, as Alessio and Langer reveal in the case of *KMG*, this ambition is not necessarily realised.

Alessio and Langer's fixed focus on the nationalist and postcolonial politics behind *KMG* causes them to almost neglect the aesthetic dimensions of film. It is important to remember the distinction between a 'representation of politics' and a 'politics of representation'. Alessio and Langer read *KMG* as the former, and as such, they choose not to dwell on Bollywood's reasons for adopting a Hollywood science-fiction aesthetic (other than tracing back the Indian film industry's sketchy history of occasionally dabbling in the genre). But there is value in exploring this cinematic appropriation to observe the way in which various modes of representation are manipulated or inverted, and to what ends. In the case of both approaches, textual analysis reveals how the master narratives behind a text are internally challenged and broken down. However, in Alessio and Langer's article, these challenged master narratives are predominantly engaged with through the film's narrative story and production history. A postmodern film theory approach additionally and more significantly engages with the visual dynamics of film, allowing us to explore this subversion vis-à-vis a more comprehensive study of textual *aesthetics* (stylisation, visual methods of presentation, film form). Alessio and Langer's reading contextualises *KMG* forcefully against a political backbone. As a result, we lose the sense of the text's playfulness and purpose as mass

entertainment medium and deny the various cultural contradictions inherent in its style and form. Whilst a postcolonial approach leads these authors to locate the cultural specificity of *KMG*, a postmodern approach instead helps us identify moments of textual playfulness, often leading to cultural *ambiguity*. This therefore indicates a final difference in the primary function of the two methods.

Differences in film language

E.T. and *KMG* make for an interesting comparison, particularly as the former is very much considered an archetype or landmark of popular American cinema. By seizing the opportunity to rework a classic popular Hollywood text, *KMG* enables us to see how the language and schema of film operates comparatively within popular Indian cinema. By observing the breaks and deviations amongst all its continuities, this film remake allows us to consider contemporary Bollywood's inherently varied and culturally different psychologies, perspectives, priorities and agendas that prove so fundamental to this global form of Indian cinema. The formal differences between *E.T.* and *KMG* extend beyond basic mise-en-scene and plotline, and can be further identified in relation to genre conformity, levels of dramatic effect, character functioning, and narrative structure and pacing.

One of the most obvious differences between the two films can be seen in the increased number of spectacular moments in *KMG*. Spectacular moments can be broadly defined as whole scenes that function as instances of comic relief or visual spectacle, often operating independently of narrative causality. However, as Geoff King's (2002) extensive work on Hollywood spectacle reveals, these free moments do not always act as a diversion from, or elimination of, narrative. King's study of cinematic spectacle helpfully divides it into four broad subgroups: [1] *action/motion* (stunts and chase sequences) [2] *performance* (song and dance, comedy sketches, celebrity and star appeal) [3] *spectacular vistas* (backdrops, locations, set pieces, production art, special effects, animation) and [4] moments of *emotional intensity* (King: 181). The extent to which each of these elements feature in *KMG* mark its difference to its comparatively less 'spectacular' original. As table 3 below shows, *KMG* contains significantly more spectacular moments (identified according to King's terms listed above) than its predecessor, even with the exclusion of its six song sequences and moments of emotional intensity.

Table 3: Moments of spectacle in *E.T.* and *KMG*
(action, comedy, special effects, stunts, song and dance)

KOI... MIL GAYA	E.T.
1. Outer Space visuals during opening credit sequence	1. Spaceship landing and aliens
2. Car Crash and UFO encounter	2. E.T. makes solar system out of levitating objects
3. Rohit smashes Sukhwani's Window (comedy)	3. E.T. raids fridge and gets drunk (comedy)
4. Song: <i>In Panchhiyon Ko Dekhkar</i>	4. Drunken Eliot releases frogs in science class
5. Rohit's Bullies: motorbike and pushbike chase	5. Eliot and E.T. fly over moon on bicycle
6. Song: <i>Idhar Chala Main Udhar Chala</i>	6. E.T. is dressed up as a woman (comedy)
7. Sukhwani smashes his own windows (comedy)	7. Halloween costumes
8. Song: <i>Koi...Mil Gaya</i>	8. Bicycle and car chase 1
9. Storm and UFO encounter in Kasauli	9. Government 'astronauts' enter house
10. Jadoo's magic prank with cricket ball (comedy)	10. Scientists arrive and set up gadgets and equipment
11. Song: <i>Jadoo</i>	11. Bicycle and car chase 2
12. Rohit fights bullies with his super-strength	12. Bikes flying over sun
13. Song: <i>It's Magic</i>	13. Spaceship arrives to take E.T. home
14. Basketball match (inc. comedy)	
15. Song: <i>Haila Haila Hua Hua</i>	
16. Motorbike chase	
17. Violent fight: Rohit versus Raj's thugs	
18. Rohit beaten up by police officers	
19. Rohit rescues Jadoo from military base	
20. Jeep and car chase	
21. Spaceship arrives to take Jadoo home	

KMG often pauses its story to engage in emotions, relationships, and entertain its audience via (musical) spectacle. Together, these spectacles and sentimental moments drive the text, whilst *E.T.* bases more of its content on narrative cause-effect relations. Also, considering how heavily the themes of sexuality, intelligence or knowledge, physical strength and courage feature in the remake, one could argue that the character development of Rohit and his coming-of-age are more central to *KMG*'s story than its actual supernatural elements, which are merely circumstantial or instrumental.

In the Hollywood original, in-depth relationships really only extend as far as Eliot and E.T., but in *KMG*, the narrative splits into mini-stories allowing us to view the dynamics between mother and son, Rohit and Jadoo, Rohit, Nisha and Raj (love triangle), Rohit with his child-friends, as well as more peripheral relations between Nisha's and Raj's parents and the comical interaction between police inspectors Khan and Sukhwani. It is interesting to see how the Bollywood adaptation chooses to side-track from the main story of the alien (who is not introduced as a character until eighty minutes into the film) in order to explore character dynamics – particularly considering the common criticisms about popular Indian cinema's constant neglect of character psychologies (see Rosie Thomas).

Furthermore, usually it is the science-fiction narrative that regulates and directs spectacular events in a film text, but in *KMG* almost the reverse is true. Here, it is spectacle that appears to control and direct the tone and pace of the narrative. Unlike in *E.T.*, where almost every moment is neatly stitched into the storyline, *KMG*'s spectacular moments allow the narrative to ricochet off into different directions and tangents. Lalita Gopalan (2002) has talked of the Hindi song sequence functioning as a disruptive break from the narrative, but in the case of *KMG* the effect is not of abandonment but rather a *branching-out* of narrative. *KMG*'s song sequences can in fact be seen to introduce or trigger subplots. For example, it is not until the second song ('Idhar Chala Main Udhar Chala') that we are made aware of the sexual attraction between the film's two protagonists⁷⁹, which then opens up the subplot of the love triangle between Rohit, Nisha and Raj. Thus I would be more inclined to agree here with King's view that in spectacle-based cinema, the relationship between spectacle and narrative is one of interdependence (King: 207).

With regards to spectacular vistas, we see that the moments of special effects used to display the powers of the two film aliens also differ greatly. *E.T.*'s power and intelligence are practically applied: he heals wounds, he makes objects float to demonstrate the solar system, he builds a satellite transmitter, he learns to read and speak English, he makes bicycles fly to help Eliot and his friends escape, and restores the dying plant which is later used to signal that *E.T.* is still alive. Aside from similarly helping Rohit escape through making his bicycle fly, Jadoo employs his powers for less practical reasons. They are instead used more for entertainment value and dramatic effect (such as making funny faces out of clouds in the sky during the Jadoo song sequence) or to carry out social functions: he fixes the water pot to make friends with Rohit, he makes the cricket ball float to amuse the children, he lifts people in the air for mischief and gifts Rohit with powers out of an act of sympathy, love and friendship. What's more, in the original, *E.T.* approaches everything with a scientific curiosity, for information and research. There is significant time given in the film to our viewing *E.T.* getting acquainted with TVs, fridges and comic books etc. Jadoo does not possess this inquisitiveness and there is no such period of initiation. Instead he invests his time in playing and socialising with his new found friends. One could even argue that, more than religion, it is the excessive *humanity* in *KMG* which often compromises the science-fiction elements of the film.

Bollywood's appropriation of science fiction is also compromised or problematised due to its inherent exhibitionism and magnification. *E.T.*'s film language is all about secrecy and concealment. The film's lighting is largely low-key, with most scenes set as dawn, dusk or at night. In *KMG* most scenes and subjects are filmed in bright light and full colours (a large proportion of the scenes are set in full daylight), as opposed to the purely cool blue-black colour palette in *E.T.* In contrast to *E.T.*'s low-key lighting, heavy shadows and low angles, there is also a notable level of performativity

⁷⁹ The adolescent sexuality between Raj and Nisha is classically and symbolically represented in the sequence through their playful dancing and getting soaking wet in the rain.

evident in *KMG* as actors' bodies often fully face the camera. *KMG* intends to offer its audience complete disclosure and an almost omniscient perspective. The remake displays its alien in all his supernatural glory, without shrouding him in shadows or leaving gaps for the spectator's imagination. In *E.T.* viewers are often literally and metaphorically left in the dark. It is the difference between this ambiguity which serves the suspense and mysterious elements of *E.T.*, and the complete extroverted exposure or 'naked screen' aesthetic of *KMG* that I believe distinguishes the two cinemas. If we take popular definitions of science fiction, which speak of the genre's compulsion to always hide and conceal things and employ a formal aesthetics (similar to horror) where figures are often shrouded in shadows, then such attempts by Bollywood to dabble in science fiction are always to some extent going to be different and difficult.

KMG's loyalty to its adopted genre seems to swing to two extremes, on the one hand deviating from the tendencies of science fiction, whilst at other times almost caricaturing it. Whereas *E.T.* approaches sci-fi aesthetics with subtlety, *KMG* ventures into a kind of science fiction genre *drag*. This can be seen from its opening title sequence, which floods the screen with excessive futuristic clichés: a digital font text in *Star Wars* style rolling credits, superimpositions of shooting stars, galaxies and random flashing lights (consisting of fabrications rather than scientifically referenced images of space), and an accompanying orchestra of electronic synthesisers. This presentation of outer space is too seriously conveyed to be read as parody, yet too excessive and eccentric to be taken as a continuation of the Hollywood science fiction style. This science fiction imagery thus hangs off the text like an ill-fitted dazzling costume.

By recycling *E.T.*, the Bollywood text reworks and transforms the sci-fi genre whilst accommodating its own idiosyncrasies. It obscures and fragments what was originally perceived as a clear cut sci-fi classic, mixing it with elements of romance, melodrama, comedy and musical. Sci-fi imagery and special effects are used for their dramatic effect and to evoke genre, rather than for narrative practicalities. Sensation is important to both postmodern and Bollywood cinema, and the sci-fi genre allows Bollywood cinema to engage in an orgy of spectacle. Also, like the postmodern text, it prioritises emotion over narrative, and embodies multiple enigmas and story threads. It celebrates excessive and eccentric performance over discretion (realism, verisimilitude) and total disclosure over obscurity, secrecy and mystery – at times flaunting and bombarding the text with sci-fi conventions on such a grand scale that it brings the genre's stylistic tendencies and conventions to our critical attention.

KMG's unsteady management of science fiction traits reveals that Bollywood refuses to access certain newer genres in a straightforward manner. These genres often need to be translated and adjusted in order to be more palatable to an Indian audience. Although the sci-fi genre continues to

attract more Indian filmmakers⁸⁰, it will continue to cause problems for Bollywood cinema as the supernatural will always to some extent be compromised by the ubiquity of religious faith and ritual. While Bollywood endeavours to modernise and liberate itself through adopting Western aesthetics, the Bollywood remake also shows that contemporary Bollywood cinema cannot or will not escape its origins so easily. Whereas many Western sci-fi texts portray the mutation or perversion of nature, *KMG* attempts to naturalise science and douse it in religious myth. The connections made between the alien and God in particular signal [1] an Indian culture only able to access the future through its past, [2] an Indian culture torn between its tradition and its aspirations for modernisation, and [3] the reinsertion of the religious faith ideal via scientific discourse – or rather, the prevalence of religious beliefs over science and technology. Science and technology is usually seen to be the anti-thesis to religion, but here the two are merged.

Finally, *Koi...Mil Gaya* shows how religious myth functions in place of historical or scientific fact in Bollywood cinema and is used to insert plausibility into the Bollywood film narrative. Religion rationalises the otherwise implausible aspects of the sci-fi genre. Religious mythology is used to locate science fiction fantasy in “reality”. In postmodern vein, the film exploits the tensions between tradition (past) and modernity, presenting a world where fiction, myth and factuality overlap and merge with one another.

Postmodern traits in contemporary Bollywood 3: Questions of realism in *Abhay*

Although *OSO* and *KMG* both experiment with popular cinematic traits, some would still argue that they do not quite venture into the kind of experimentalism and political aesthetics akin to an oppositional Indian art cinema. As discussed in the previous chapter, scholars and critics of popular Indian cinema have lamented the loss of Indian cinema’s artistic and experimental edge, particularly when compared with the national, social, neo-realist and new wave films of the pre-global era. However, by studying such criticisms, it has become clear that this alleged neglect essentially refers to an absence of (or even ignorance towards) realism in contemporary Bollywood cinema.

Verisimilitude⁸¹ is rarely a concern for popular Indian film. Actors can directly address an audience in order to explain the key themes of the film before it begins, and it has been common practice for crowds of fans to be positioned within the frame and filmed watching an on-location song or fight sequence as it happens. Having been built on a foundation of musicals and melodrama, the laws

⁸⁰ As seen through the production of forthcoming films *Krrish 3*, *Action Replay* and S. Shankar’s Tamil film *Robot* (see chapter five).

⁸¹ The verisimilitude I refer to here is the social or cultural variety (public perception of reality or truth) as opposed to the generic kind (conformity to the rules of a particular genre). See Steve Neale’s discussion of Tzvetan Todorov’s two definitions of the term (Neale, 1990: 47-48).

and rules of reality are always to some extent compromised in popular Indian film. The fundamental theme of love in almost every film is portrayed as something sublime, it has a power so great that it can transcend the laws of space and time, best demonstrated through the multiple-location song sequence. And as seen above, mainstream Hindi cinema is inherently performative and often self-reflexive of its own artificiality, exhibiting dialogue over conversation and costumes as opposed to clothes (Jyotika Viridi, 2003: 2). Such unrealistic forms of presentation have aimed to fulfil the audience's desire for films that are larger than life, with 'stories engulfing generations, large periods of time, big influences on a large spectrum' (Javed Akhtar cited in Viridi: 174) and involving great coincidences, dramatic scenes and religious miracles. Such methods of disrupting realism and issues of spectator desire have thus informed our understanding of the Indian film audience's engagement with the popular film text. Manjunath Pendakur (2003) claims to have observed audiences becoming so emotionally drawn into a film that they literally tear up their seats in excitement:

...the audience actively transforms watching movies into a performative act... the cinematic experience and meaning making by the audience is not idle, analytic activity but real engagement with the film. It is often taken to its extreme when the active audience in its excitement of a fight on the screen tears up the seats or gets into a brawl (Pendakur, 2003: 97).

Pendakur acknowledges the way the Indian audience consciously and actively participates in the cinematic experience, but he is quick to condemn this as an almost hypodermic act, where the emotionally vulnerable spectators are duped into believing in the fictional world of the text. Similarly Chidananda Das Gupta (1991) has claimed that the Indian spectator is restricted by specific cognitive conditioning, which prevents him or her from differentiating between cinema and real life. Gupta's account of the naivety of Indian spectators has since been rejected by Indian film scholars for over simplifying Indian spectatorship in this way. I would argue that it is not necessarily that the Bollywood audience does not know that the text is not real, but rather that they are for once able to understand that *reality does not matter* and perhaps that these 'performative' spectators acknowledge the possibility of investing in art as an alternative to the real. Thus, as realist filmmakers such as Shyam Benegal continue to attack mainstream cinema's inability to connect with and reflect upon real life (Benegal cited in Binford: 83), others equally criticise the realist cinema as being just as guilty of 'anti-emotion' and 'sterile representations of realism' (Pendakur, 1990: 249). Perhaps what is most significant in such disputes is not questions of value, but rather the question of the *importance* of cinematic realism.

Avant-garde in Bollywood

As demonstrated in the case of *Om Shanti Om*, contemporary Bollywood cinema is wary of its unsteady relationship with the real and takes this as an opportunity to experiment with modes of realist representation. In doing so, it arguably introduces a kind of avant-garde filmmaking practice which could be taken as a new alternative Indian cinema emerging from within mainstream Bollywood.

Peter Burger (1984), in his attempt to rethink and challenge previous theorisations of the avant-garde, has helped draw attention to the concept's significant links with mass culture. According to Burger, whereas the historical or modernist avant-garde of the early twentieth century attempted to separate itself from the mainstream, new avant-garde works (such as the 1960s pop art of Andy Warhol) have instead come to embrace popular culture. In response to Burger's attempt to define the avant-garde, Richard Murphy (1999) has therefore insisted that we consider the possibility of an avant-garde that exists within popular cultural forms. Murphy notes how this 'expressionist avant-garde' shares several characteristics of the postmodern, such as self reflexivity, parody, rewriting, the rejection of claims to truth and origin, and the Lyotardian affirmation of the 'fictionality of all existing cosmologies, metalanguages and master narratives' (Murphy: 263). Furthermore, the expressionist avant-garde realises it cannot resist institutionalisation. Hence, it is able to step across the boundaries of art cinema and that of the commercial industry, and implement the conventions and concerns of both forms of art. With this considered, one could argue that although independent art cinema may be diminishing since the glory days of Benegal and Ray, the concerns of such a cinema may in fact continue to develop within an Indian avant-garde that combines the concerns of high-art cinema and mainstream film. Through investigating such an artistic movement within popular Indian film, we can identify a cinema that does justice both to issues of realism and the emotional intensity of (more obviously) commercial films.

Kamal Haasan's *Abhay*

Radical forms of aesthetic experimentation may be scarce in contemporary Bollywood cinema, but there is evidence of an avant-garde style emerging through some examples of post-millennial Bollywood filmmaking. South Indian writer, actor and producer Kamal Haasan could in many ways be seen to support such a cultural movement. Haasan's films⁸² have always maintained cross-regional commercial popularity, but they also demonstrate an attempt to stretch the boundaries of Indian cinema, particularly in terms of formal style. Technically, many of Haasan's films have been

⁸² Haasan is credited as an actor for *Abhay* and *Hindustani*, and the writer and director for *Hey Ram*. However, he is still widely considered and described as the auteur of his films due to his collaborative involvement in all creative stages of filmmaking. For example, *Abhay* is based on the 1984 novel *Dayam* written by Haasan.

known to serve as rare examples of Indian cinema's successful experimentations with visual effects. In his nationalism-themed film *Hindustani* (1996)⁸³, many of the featured dance sequences involve absurd hallucinatory effects via image manipulation (walking on walls, morphing, and image duplication) never before seen in the cinema. The above films' aesthetic innovations coupled with often challenging storylines – *Hindustani* serving as an attack on Indian patriotism, and *Hey Ram!* (2000) challenging the integrity and exposing the darker side of Mahatma Gandhi – have not prevented them from achieving reasonable commercial success, suggesting that not all forms of experimental artistic expression in popular Indian cinema are subject to failure.

Both issues of realism and the avant-garde in Bollywood cinema can be explored through Haasan's most recent work *Abhay* (aka *Aalavandhan*, 2001), which potentially serves as one of the best examples of an alternative and aesthetically political text operating within the boundaries of popular Indian cinema. Despite its commercial packaging, *Abhay* cannot be regarded as a run-of-the-mill popular Indian film⁸⁴ but rather a fusion of several contradictory styles – most significantly reminiscent of Western postmodern surrealist works which aim to distort and diffuse the features of realism and representation.

Abhay's narrative tells the story of twin brothers Abhay and Vijay, whose childhood is destroyed by their mother's sudden suicide and father's consequent remarriage to their adulterous, alcoholic and abusive stepmother, Diane. Abhay, who is particularly affected by these traumatic events, murders his stepmother and as a result suffers a mental break down, later causing him to turn into a misogynistic psychopath obsessed with a desire to kill women who he sees to be incarnations of his dead stepmother. Abhay is detained in a prison for the criminally insane whilst his brother Vijay, who is able to forget his past, enrolls in military school and looks towards a happy and successful life as an Army soldier and fiancé of Tejaswini. However, still troubled by his conscience (a hallucination in the form of his mother's ghost asking him to avenge her death), Abhay takes Vijay's fiancé as a re-embodiment of Diane. Thus, convinced that his brother is in danger of being subjected to the same female manipulation as his father, Abhay breaks out of the mental institution and attempts to hunt down and murder his stepmother's incarnation, Tejaswini.

Abhay's plot contains several dramatic clichés familiar to popular Indian cinema such as the struggle between an “evil” villain (Abhay) and an “honest” hero (Vijay), a beautiful heroine in need of rescuing (Tejaswini), an attention to romance, and the theme of inner-family conflict. However, the

⁸³ This film is also known under the title *Indian*.

⁸⁴ I shall avoid explicitly referring to *Abhay* as a Bollywood film, as it and many other Kamal Haasan films have been produced by the Tamil film industry in Chennai (known as Kollywood) and not in Bombay. However, I would argue that the film's Bollywood co-stars, its Hindi dubbing and repackaging for the north Indian market, and its promotion in Bombay film press circles allows the film to fall into a grey area regarding whether or not it can be considered part of the medium of Bollywood cinema.

way in which the film chooses to present these characters and storylines proves anything but conventional.

Abhay as comic book villain

We have already briefly begun to explore ways in which hyperrealism features in the contemporary Indian cinema through analysing *OSO*. However, the impact and affect of this particularly complex postmodern function on the Indian film aesthetic can be further explored through *Abhay* – firstly through the way the text constructs and presents its key anti-hero protagonist. Abhay’s physical appearance alone suggests something beyond the ordinary: his bald head and provocative red eyes, his large tattooed muscular body which is continuously highlighted and emphasised through shadowed lighting. In the film’s introductory sequence, he is juxtaposed alongside monkeys as he mimics their actions and expresses his animalistic tendencies through repeatedly stating that he is “half human, half animal”. This, coupled with his constant growling and snarling, his husky deep voice, his distinctively monstrous cackle and his tremendous strength, creates an image of a character verging on the superhuman. Everything about Abhay is exaggerated. His facial features, his dramatic gestures, his animalistic posture and his always dramatic dialogue all help to create a character which to the audience seems larger-than-life.



Figure 10: Abhay, the real life manifestation of a larger-than-life comic book villain

Vinay Lal has commented on the ‘ludicrously comic’ nature of the archetypal Bollywood villain, which in effect produces unrealistic caricatures of real evil: ‘some are demons, but for that reason

all the more assimilable to rakshashas [demons], the creatures of mythology rather than of history' (Lal: 237). Indian film villains have continually been portrayed through caricature. They are often scarred with facial disfigurements and distinguished by their speech impediments or trademark evil laughter. Amresh Puri, perhaps the most famous actor in Indian cinema to have played a villain (best known in the West for his role as the villain in Steven Spielberg's *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* [1984]), has become famous for having more hairstyles, costume changes and image transformations than most Bollywood actresses. However, *Abhay* is one of the first films to take this form of villainy to such an extreme. Throughout the film our antagonist is presented as if out of a comic-strip, often associated with images of Indian comic book heroes like 'Betaal' (the 1960s Indian version based on Lee Falk's American comic book hero known as *The Phantom* – see Murli Sharma, 1997), towards whom references are made throughout the film⁸⁵.



Figure 11: Comic hero Betaal (left) as inspiration for the character of Abhay (right)

Abhay's character is not simply presented like this for the sake of entertainment. Rather, it seems that with this film, villainy is being *consciously* and intentionally exaggerated. Haasan's film is engaged in a deliberate attempt to bring the fictionality and unreality of its lead character to the fore, and for this reason it is a film that raises important questions surrounding the notion of reality and representation.

Abhay's world

Although Abhay may be the villain of the movie, the film's focus is nevertheless shared between the point of view of its villain and its hero, Vijay. On several occasions, the audience is given a taste of the world through Abhay's eyes. For example, when Abhay first escapes from prison, we are presented with his point of view of the world around him via a sequence that verges on the surreal. This scene, which follows Abhay through the city's streets at night, is shrouded in an unnatural

⁸⁵ Abhay's personality is marked by a giant picture of his hero Betaal which is clearly seen painted on the wall in his bedroom as a child.

smoky green light, and presented through a fish eye lens which follows Abhay through various abandoned streets and alleyways.

Unlike the scenes surrounding Vijay's story, which are shot in natural and familiar surroundings, Abhay's street scene conversely resembles a fantasy or dream sequence. As Abhay's hallucinations increase, the audience are brought into a world of the surreal, featuring giant junk food clowns (Abhay stops to ask a giant Ronald McDonald for directions), rowing boats and divers which suddenly appear to swim through the town centre. When it seems the sequence cannot get any stranger, cartoon characters appear from television sets and begin morphing into humans (Abhay is prevented from entering a cinema by an usher who morphs from a cartoon character into a human) and we watch as a three-dimensional animated hand of Batman's comic sidekick Robin reaches out of a wall poster and knocks a bemused Abhay on the head in a comedy moment.

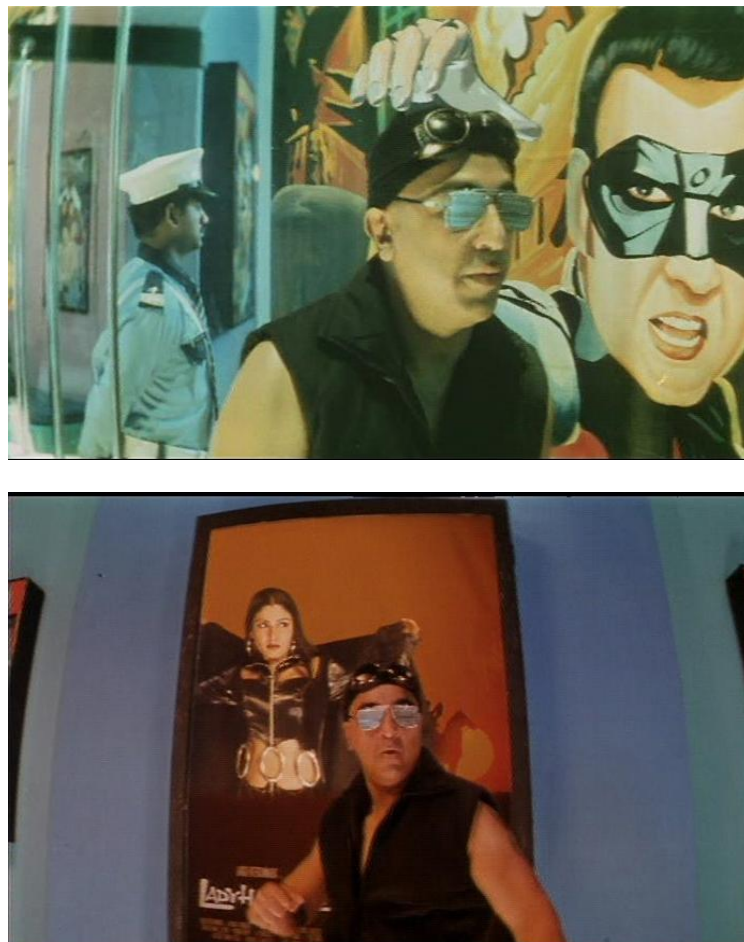


Figure 12: In Abhay's world reality is fictionalised and pictures come to life

This cartoon world is taken to extremes when Abhay visualises Tejaswini crawling out of a poster dressed in a black leather suit and holding a whip – resembling the look of an archetypal comic book vixen. Thus, the audience is yet again drawn into a parallel world where ordinary people

become fictionalised superheroes. However, although Abhay's world may indeed be full of dream sequences, childish fantasies and cartoon characters, it is even more interesting to note the ways in which this fictional and surreal world is repeatedly blurred with reality throughout the film – a crucial feature overlapping with many postmodern texts.

The exchangeability of reality and fiction

Throughout *Abhay*, we see our protagonist and other real life characters merge into fiction and fantasy. This dissolving of real and unreal elements is also transferred into and prompted by the film's action sequences, which further complicate the possibility of a "pure" representation of realism in the film. For example, this can be seen through a comparison between two key fight sequences in the film: the first relating to when Abhay slaughters movie actress Sharmilee in her hotel bedroom (after yet again mistaking her for his stepmother), and the second, a climactic breakout between the text's twin protagonists at the end of the film.

The violent scene between Abhay and Sharmilee is presented through an animated sequence where a cartoon version of Abhay continues to attack and torture his female victim. However, surprisingly, despite the clear fictionality of the cartoon sequence, the killing scene appears strangely visceral and disturbing. The camera shakes and spins with the action and the sound effects of blood spilling and bodies thumping against a wall sound shockingly realistic. At one point, Abhay's cartoon double is seen to cover the camera lens with his bloody fingerprints, further creating the illusion of reality. Through this sequence we are confronted with an animated world that becomes more real than the "real". Thus, through adapting and blending with the cinematic styles of realism (shaking mobile cameras and life-like sounds effects) *Abhay* invests in hyperrealism.



Figure 13: Abhay murders Sharmilee in a hyperrealistic animated sequence

This hyperrealism is even more significant when we consider the way in which *Abhay* handles its scenes of live action. Almost acting as an inversion of the above stylistic sequence, the final fight between Abhay and Vijay inherits all the conventions of a slapstick cartoon. Whilst the above animated sequence uses accurate, detailed and vivid movement and sound, this live-action fight scene is presented through comic parody. The punctuating sound effects used here are cartoon-like. Framing is kept tight, action is often interrupted with several close-up shots of the characters' eyes – a style very much resembling the images captured in conventional comic-strip art – whilst Abhay is seen to jump into the air in slow motion and swing his brother on his back like a true animated action hero. What's more, when Abhay pursues Vijay and Tejaswini in a dramatic car chase, the fictionality of the scene is further stressed through Abhay, who now actually wears a mask in true superhero style.

It should be noted here that although integral to the formal style of *Abhay*, cartoon or comic book aesthetics have been increasingly employed in other contemporary Bollywood films, such as certain fight sequences in *Krrish* and throughout Anubhav Sinha's *Cash* (2007), which includes thirty-eight separate instances where the live action switches to animated sequences. In *Krrish*, tight framing, askew camera angles, extreme close-ups and speed trails are used in live action to emphasise the sensorial vivacity of the hero's punches and kicks, whilst in *Cash*, a similar effect of visual intensity

is achieved, this time by replacing each protagonist with a cartoon avatar during heightened moments of action and drama.



Figure 14: Cartoon comic aesthetics in *Cash* (above) and *Krrish* (below)

So absent is *Abhay's* desire for realism, that moments of slapstick comedy in the film are deliberately inserted into these otherwise serious and viscerally violent scenes. Characters walking into poles and lamp posts and hitting one another on the head spoil the verisimilitude of the violence, preventing spectators from being able to take the action as real or plausible.

The interchangeability of the stylistic techniques which have previously accompanied the portrayal of reality and unreality in cinema is most effectively emphasised through the parallels between Vijay and Abhay. At first, Vijay is portrayed as the direct opposite of Abhay, both in terms of his humane

characteristics and visual presentation. He is sane, honest, successful and lives according to the rationale and ideologies of the “real world”. However, as the story unfolds, Haasan’s text reveals that even these opposites of madness and sanity (or fantasy and truth) are inevitably linked. As the film develops, *Abhay* is increasingly filled with moments in which the characteristics outlining Abhay and his world of fictional hallucinations can be seen to diffuse into Vijay’s. In one scene, Abhay recalls the memory of his meeting Vijay and his fiancé in prison at the start of the film. However, this memory is somewhat altered and they too are suddenly presented to us not as “real” people, but as comic book characters. Vijay becomes an exaggerated version of himself as a military commando, whilst Tejaswini is portrayed in the previously mentioned form of a comic book vixen. This scene may indeed be a concoction of Abhay’s disturbed mind, but the similarities between Abhay’s distorted vision and the original “naturalistic” version are nevertheless still significant.



Figure 15: Vijay and Tejaswini: Reality is presented in comic book form

What’s more, in later scenes, even Vijay’s perception of events appears to be influenced and blurred by his brother’s. When Vijay arrives at his abandoned childhood family home towards the end of the film, his emotions are no longer portrayed through realistic modes of presentation. Instead, Vijay’s reactions are marked by a cut to a close-up of the face of comic hero Betaal. This juxtaposition of real and fictional characters marks yet another attempt by the film to unite the characteristics of the real and unreal. Towards the end of the film, Vijay eventually also begins to hallucinate like Abhay, when he envisions the image of his dead father. Thus, finally (through engaging in the comic book fight sequence mentioned above) Vijay’s reality is shattered and he too begins to interact with the unreal world of his brother.

In *Abhay*, the audience is confronted with a world that is unable to contain the kind of realism that the work of realist cinema previously wished to expose. Separating the “real” from artistic representation becomes difficult. Once reality as an ideological concept is broken down, its instability is exposed and we are instead presented with hyperrealism – a confused mix of the

unreal, the surreal and the *too real*. As with the case of Abhay and Vijay, reality proves to be a mirrored version or alter-ego of the unreal.

Indian popular cinema's relationship with reality is more complex than we thought. Like postmodern Western cinema, it constantly brings to attention its unreality and its constructedness. The difference is that in India, this self-exposition is regarded as having an important if not *vital* part to play in engaging the audience successfully. Commercial Indian films like *Abhay* show that the audience not only *desires* the unreal, but is able to acknowledge and indulge in its playful relationship to and manipulation of the real. There is no need to completely disguise fiction as reality. It can be openly presented as unreal and remain a fabrication, and yet still reveal how realism and its aesthetic alternative – the simulacra, the signifier as referent, and the sublime substitute – are inherently related. One should not be so quick to declare an end to realism in Bollywood cinema. Instead we should consider that it is not so much that realism which has been lost, but rather that it has been *displaced*. Whilst realism may not inhabit the form and style of many Bollywood films, its very absence is jarring and thus, in effect, drawn to our attention constantly throughout such presentations.

The Indian Avant-garde: Art cinema enters the mainstream

Films like *Abhay* may hold the key to resolving the conflict between art cinema and the mainstream popular cinema in India. Postmodernist or expressionist avant-garde texts such as *Abhay* are able to question, displace and decentre ideologies surrounding the authority of the real as origin (Murphy: 268) and challenge established ideals of artistic freedom and innovation. Such texts are able to occupy both mainstream and aesthetically experimental territories, providing entertainment via spectacle as well as providing a light-hearted critique of cinematic modes of representing realism (verisimilitude) and occupying the interests of *both* art house and multiplex audiences. The postmodern avant-garde aims to 'deconstruct established patterns of perception without hastily replacing them' (ibid: 271) or providing a necessarily better utopian alternative – a mistake made by supporters of modernism and historical avant-garde movements.

Films that continue along the lines of *Abhay* show that commercial cinema can support avant-gardist concerns and that these postmodern aesthetically, stylistically and commercially driven films still have the potential to be critical, particularly of cinema as an ideological construct. Furthermore, this critique need not even be conscious. Such forms of cinema do not need to produce manifestos or revel in destruction in order to get their point across. In fact, the less conscious a text may be of

its critical potential, the less exclusive and corrupted the result is likely to be⁸⁶. Perhaps the reason why we puzzle over the lack of artistic cinematic movements in contemporary India is precisely due to our having simply looked in all the wrong places. Rather than searching peripheries, margins and niches for innovative and artistic texts, we should consider the sheer volume of films being produced in the mainstream Bollywood. There is a great deal of experimentation going on in contemporary Indian cinema today. Boundaries are being pushed, conventions are being subverted and modes reinvented. The personal agendas and aspirations of Bollywood cinema have broadened. The process of creating and offering visual pleasure to audiences now incorporates postmodern irony, invokes cinematic canons, addresses the artifice of filmmaking and fiction, rouses and articulates cinephilia, celebrates the hostile interplay of different cinematic modes, inverts and attacks traditional conventions, and nurtures aesthetic experimentation.

The above film texts show that it is possible for mainstream Indian cinema to entertain and critique, to conform and subvert, to affirm and problematise, to produce art yet make money. However, this presents no utopia, silver linings or happy endings for the medium, for the interdependency and constantly apparent tensions visible between each of these binary objectives remind us of its inexorable predicament: popular Indian cinema is caught in a trap, a cycle that ties it to convention, consistency, custom, repetition and reproductions. Its aspirations for change (*vis-à-vis* modernity, evolution, progress, sophistication, global appeal) result in a paradoxical turning back to the past. Whether or not we consider Bollywood to be postmodern, the concept – at the very least as a stylistic mode – has helped us to articulate this predicament and understand its benefits and hindrances. A postmodern perspective unveils Bollywood's current attempts at innovation and evolution. By adopting postmodern traits, the industry can attempt to serve its divided objectives of outward global expansion on the one hand, and internal self-preservation on the other. What was previously a West-centric theoretical framework now actively helps raise our appreciation and understanding of contemporary Bollywood films and uncovers an entirely new phase of Indian cinema. Likewise in turn, by placing it in the context of Indian cinema, we will also be able to see how postmodernism's global application broadens its impact and brings to our attention its many new potential materialisations and aesthetic applications – the latter of which I continue to explore in my next chapter on remaking in Bollywood.

Now that we are able to see how the postmodern can apply to mainstream Bollywood cinema, we can study these postmodern texts in more detail (via a more detailed and intensive textual analysis) as a body of texts, or perhaps even a movement or genre, in order to consider further instances of aesthetic innovation and political issues at stake in this cinema. It is interesting to note that several

⁸⁶ This is perhaps a return to Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni's category (e) where ideologies and systems are corroded and dismantled through their being restated and integrated in a film (Comolli and Narboni, 1969: 817).

of the films mentioned in this chapter are, in some form, cultural appropriations of other texts. Although I do not wish to suggest that postmodern occurrences in Bollywood films stop at remakes, there are certainly a strikingly significant number of post-millennial Bollywood texts that lend themselves to the postmodern, yet also happen to engage in remaking. Remaking appears to be perhaps one of the most characteristic features of contemporary Bollywood cinema, and I believe its connections with the postmodern issues discussed above are more than merely coincidental.

Chapter 4

Remaking in Bollywood

In the previous chapter's three case studies, we have identified that Bollywood cinema's postmodern tendencies stem from its investment in remaking and recycling past film texts, styles and conventions as a means of internal commentary, creative innovation and subverting conventional modes of representation (such as cinematic realism). This chapter provides further examples of similar instances of postmodern appropriation and repetition in contemporary Indian cinema in order to demonstrate how widespread such processes are amongst the diversity of films produced in Bollywood in the 2000 decade. To inform my research, I have viewed over one hundred modern Bollywood remakes⁸⁷ (see appendix), including several of the film texts that appear in Nayar's aforementioned discussions of 1990s popular Indian film remakes (1997; 2005). However, the majority of films I have chosen to discuss in this chapter emerge specifically from within the post-millennium decade. I intend to draw attention to the sheer output of remakes in this period in order to signal a new phenomenon of remaking within Bollywood filmmaking that is symptomatic of the recent impact of postmodernism, globalisation, modernisation, Westernisation and internationalisation in India and its film industry. In the following discussions I shall refer to the term 'remake *genre*' as I believe the contemporary Bollywood remake has inherited a particular set of (postmodern) agendas and stylistic conventions. It can be recognised as an artistic work with unique form and content which offers its audiences a particular kind of gratification in viewing and engaging with it.

By exploring a wide range of film remaking modes which function and perform on various levels from scene-specific citations and allusions to the more blatant "rip offs" and movie tributes, this chapter aims to expand our current understanding of the various categories and functionalities of cinematic remaking. I will also provide further illustration of how remaking can powerfully assist a dismantling of familiar filmic conventions. In the latter part of my investigation, I look at a series of remake films specifically focused around masculine themes and a male ensemble cast, demonstrating how these male orientated films have spawned a new breed of Bollywood remakes which subvert cinematic representations of the 'coolness' and 'masculinity' of the Bollywood anti-hero.

As most of the following Bollywood remakes tend not to disclose or acknowledge their original sources, my study of Indian film remakes will be less historical – that is, less about the conditions in

⁸⁷My appendix broadly includes both disputable or unsubstantiated remakes which have emerged from public hearsay, as well as the conspicuous plagiarisms, certified homages, sequels and explicit literary adaptations which are discussed in this chapter.

which the film was made, thus following a different line of investigation to Ganti's anthropological work on remakes which looks at pre-production decision making and scripting processes (as discussed in chapter two). Instead my study will be more analytically focused on the remake text's formal techniques and devices. I will study the semantics and iconography as well as narrative structuring of the film texts. Key areas of analysis will consider technical or stylistic exchanges between original and copy, shifts in character and audience perspectives, thematic focus and prioritised content, the balance of style versus story (substance), audience reading and decoding processes, and the inversion of thematic, stylistic and cultural codes.

The film remake

Film remakes and adaptations occupy a relatively narrow space within Western film studies. The remake text often has the misfortune of having a stigma attached to it. It is inherently a source of comparison against its esteemed original, through which we enjoy critiquing, condemning and demoting the copy. In short, the remake text seems to incessantly fall victim to the laws of fidelity and the defenders of elite film or literary canons it often alludes to. The question of whether Hollywood's remakes – in the form of sequels, homages, literary adaptations, updates, parodies, makeovers, and series – engage in this textual 'cannibalisation' (Stam, 2000: 61) for the sake of quick profit, nostalgia, or simply because they have run out of new ideas, is a fashionable point of debate in remake and adaptation studies.⁸⁸ Meanwhile, literary adaptation theory largely preoccupies itself with four key concerns: autonomy, fidelity, the supremacy of the literary original, and the problems of translating *word-story* into *image-story*.

The issue of textual fidelity (a remake's loyalty to its original) has fuelled criticism and dominated remake discourse. In his survey of pre-1980s Hollywood movie remakes, Michael B Druxman (1975) comments on the danger fidelity holds for the remake:

'...people cling to their precious memories of a grander cinema in days gone by and ... almost no remake – despite its quality – can shatter the fondness a spectator might hold for the original version he saw in his youth. It's called nostalgia' (24).

However, such discussions distract us from other more positive traits of remake cinema. As Brian McFarlane (1996) notes, the fidelity argument prevents the drawing of attention to adaptation as 'inevitable artistic (and culturally rich) progress; the more interesting process of transference...[and] the powerfully influential production determinants in the film remake which may be irrelevant to

⁸⁸As James Naremore (2000: 7) highlights, since the 1960's adaptation theory has particularly gained sophistication via the structuralist and poststructuralist poetics of Barthes, Genette and Bordwell and Thompson.

the original' (McFarlane: 10). Thus, theorists have attempted to shift the focus away from comparative quality analysis, and towards interpretation. For example, Robert Stam (2000) has proposed that we look at adaptations as 'translations' (62), encouraging a study of the way in which original texts are manipulated and altered to produce new meanings, perspectives and experiences.

Scholarly work on film remaking is limited, yet dense and diverse in ideas and perspective. For example, some theorists argue that remaking is a fundamental part of all cinemas, and that all texts are applicable to the term since every film is guilty of re-presentation or prior conception (Andrew, 2000: 29). As Stam comments: 'All texts are tissues of anonymous formulae... conscious and unconscious quotations, and, confections and inversions of other texts' (64). Others however have tried to classify and order the term (see Druxman, Harry Roy Greenberg [cited in Verevis, 2006: 8-9], Thomas Leitch [2002: 45-49] and Robert Eberwein [in Horton and McDougal: 15-33]). Gerard Genette (1982) first used the term 'transtextuality' to refer to special and unique instances of repetition, and attempted to divide, organise and group these instances of cinematic intertextuality into various sub-genres: paratextuality, metatextuality, hypertextuality, architextuality, celebrity intertextuality, intratextuality, genetic textuality and auto-citation⁸⁹. Likewise, more recently, Robert Stam has confirmed the complexity of the remake-adaptation as a subject of study by noting its many tropes, including: reading (shedding new light on the original text through critique or a creative misreading), dialogization (engaging the original text in a dialogue or conversation with other texts), cannibalisation (the remake text's openness to a polyphonic and infinite number of textual influences) and transmutation (specifically here, changes to an original text's plot events and characters) (62) as well as its transformation processes: selection, amplification, concretization, actualisation, critique, extrapolation, analogization, popularization and reculturalisation (68)⁹⁰. Theoretical studies of the visual adaptation have also pointed to its broader importance in media and film studies – for example in relation to general issues surrounding postmodern reproduction and with regards to the act of *storytelling* itself. As James Naremore (2000) envisions: 'The study of adaptation needs to be joined with the study of recycling, remaking, and every other form of retelling in the age of mechanical reproduction and electronic communication. By this means, adaptation will become part of a general theory of repetition...' (15).

Another underexplored aspect of the textual adaptation is the cross-cultural remake. A few scholars have produced interesting accounts on cross-fertilisation and boundary crossing between various foreign national cinemas and Hollywood, most notably remakes from Hong Kong (Bordwell, 2000 and Aufderheide, 1995), Eastern Europe (Horton, 1995) and France (Willis, 1995 and Mazdon,

⁸⁹For detailed definitions of each, see Genette (1982)

⁹⁰Unfortunately, despite this long list of processes, Stam does not provide concrete definitions and explanations for all of them. Nevertheless, I have noted them here to indicate the diverse ways in which adaptation has been found to operate within or affect a text.

2000). In her book *Encore Hollywood: Remaking French cinema*, Lucy Mazdon (2000) focuses on the ways in which remaking, or more precisely, the ‘aesthetic cross-fertilisation’ of French and American cinema facilitates *and* interrupts the formation of French or American cultural and national identity (26). Mazdon highlights the importance of determining ‘how ... the signifying structures of the original text [are] replaced by target culture signifying structures in the remake’, arguing that remakes do not simply copy, but that they *produce new identities*. Mazdon first explains how cultures use the process of cross-fertilisation to differentiate themselves (through their own nationalist cinematic traditions) and mobilise their sense of national identity. However, she later reveals how remaking can also end up interrogating and calling those very same identities into question (125) – particularly when the values and beliefs of the original text’s culture are reinscribed into the target culture of the remake (26). The act of remaking can therefore draw our attention to ‘the instabilities and hybridity which constitute the filmic text’ (125). To paraphrase an important question posed by Genette, there is an urgent need to investigate cross-cultural adaptations and ask what dynamics and dimensions are involved in such films, where language, cultural traditions, psychology, and even narrative sense may differ greatly between original and remake (Genette cited in Horton and McDougal: 4). Such discussions have almost denounced discourse on textual fidelity in favour of studying the way in which remakes ‘resist’ and perform in opposition to their originals (Dika, 2003: 20).

The majority of theoretical work on film remaking has focused on Western and specifically American cinema. Particularly in the case of mainstream Hollywood, the remake text is associated with the following distinctive characteristics: the pre-sold text, the reiterated formula, a bigger budget, updated technical effects, extensive marketing and publicity campaigns, blatant commercial filmmaking methods, as well as often explicit incentives: “guaranteed” financial gain, cultural imperialism and ‘defensive production’ (where a popular foreign text may threaten to compete with or steal its inland box office spots [Verevis, 3]). Remakes have offered Hollywood studios economic efficiency via their recyclable plots and recycled studio-owned material (Druxman: 14) and quick profit through non-remakes (films simply bearing the same title and author name of previous films as defined by Druxman: 15), plus the chance to re-package old texts successfully with the help of nothing more than updated dialogue, star casts and technical advancements in sound, colour and ratio-format (ibid: 15). But although the aforementioned appraisals are certainly relevant to scholars investigating, say, the commercial filmic adaptations of Shakespeare, Jane Austen, or the original Batman franchise, they do not suffice to explain the phenomenon of all other forms of remake cinema – such as the Bollywood remake.

American cinema has several decades of solid movie remaking behind it, but the same cannot be said of Bollywood, for which a concentrated output of film remakes is more of an abrupt millennium phenomenon. As previously discussed, mainstream Indian cinema has seen many

formal changes in recent years, including a booming series of over a hundred self-remakes, sequels and foreign film adaptations. The latter category's most well known examples include *Kaante* (2002) [*Reservoir Dogs* (1992)], *Koi...Mil Gaya* (2003) [*E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial* (1982)], *Krishna Cottage* (2004) [*Ringu* (1998)], *Sarkar* (2005) [*The Godfather* (1972)], *Fight Club: Members Only* (2006) [*Fight Club* (1999)], *Partner* (2007) [*Hitch* (2005)] and *Ghajini* (2008) [*Memento* (2000)]. Of course we can still find some earlier evidence of such appropriation in films such as *Mr India*, which works almost as a cultural inversion of Steven Spielberg's 1980s film *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, and further back in the 1950s with screen legend Raj Kapoor's involvement in reworkings of Charlie Chaplin films, Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night* (1934), and Vittorio De Sica's *Shoeshine* (1946). In addition, as mentioned in chapter two, Hollywood narrative adaptation in 1990s Bollywood cinema has already been explored by Nayar (1997; 2005) and Ganti (2002). But despite these earlier examples, what I wish to emphasise here is the shift in remaking from previously being something occasional and cursory, to a now much larger-scale investment and cultural trend that is being recognised by the Indian film media and embraced by the industry and its audiences like never before. But what has sparked Indian cinema's sudden wholehearted and extensive investment in this 'special form of repetition' now, having previously comfortably conformed to more familiar (now outmoded) stereotypes, stock conventions, and traditional methods of movie making? Before addressing the ways in which Bollywood remakes can operate as a form of resistance and innovation, it is best to begin with a brief account explaining Indian cinema's inherent hunger for textual appropriation in more detail.

Indian cinema: A history of repetition

The remake, in its various forms, is not unfamiliar territory to Indian cinema. On the contrary, the act of repetition has been considered *fundamental* to Indian cinematic tradition. Film historians have revealed how today's Bollywood industry evolved from the dramatics of Sanskrit Drama, Parsi theatre, folk myths and ancient religious texts⁹¹. One particular religious myth, the *Ramayana*, has been repeatedly looked upon as a framework for almost every commercial masala movie ever produced vis-à-vis its Proppian stock characters of the gallant hero who must rescue an endangered damsel from an evil or demonic villain⁹². As we have already established through Rosie Thomas's account of Indian cinema, Western criticisms of Hindi films have thrived on this compulsive custom to repeat the same clichéd and repetitive stories, characters and outcomes: '... the story-line will be almost totally predictable to the Indian audience, being a repetition, or rather, an unmistakable transformation of many other Hindi films, and... it will be recognized by them as a "ridiculous" pretext for spectacle and emotion' (Thomas, 122). Even despite Robert Stam and

⁹¹ For more information on the repetitive structuring principles of Hindu mythology and oral traditions in India, see Corey Creekmur's Freudian analysis of repetition in *Devdas* films (2007).

⁹² V.I Propp, *Morphology of the Folk Tale* (1968)

Dudley Andrew's (2000) declaration that *all* cinema is inherently re-presentational, or Steve Neale's (1990) discussion of repetition (alongside novelty) as intrinsic to all film genres, repetition still seems to have a deeper rooted significance in popular Indian cinema. According to Vinay Lal (1998), the Indian film medium, like its nation's culture, is trapped in past traditions, each time inevitably reproducing the same past ideas and results. Thus, as Lal comments:

Whereas the Western concept of continuity construes it as 'only a special case of change', in Indic traditions the language of continuity, which assumes that all changes can be seen, discussed or analysed as aspects of deeper continuities, occupies a predominant place. Change, in other words, is only a special case of continuity – and this is best exemplified in the Hindi film' (232).

Although the Hindi film industry has long been in the business of recycling formulas, it has rarely resorted to such blatant repetitions as Druxman's 'direct' or Thomas Leitch's 'true' remakes (see Verevis: 7-12) which carry the same title and character names – with the exception of movie versions of religious classics (the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*) and filmic adaptations of Saratchandra Chattopadhyaya's literary classics, *Parineeta* and *Devdas*. In the case of *Devdas*, the story of the lovesick, doomed alcoholic has been remade nine times: in 1928 by Naresh Mitra as a silent movie, 1935 by P.C. Barua in Bengali (and redone in Hindi a year after), 1953 in Tamil and Telugu by Vedantam Raghavaiah, 1955 by Bimal Roy, 1974 in Telugu by Vijaya Nirmala and 1979 in Bengali by Dilip Roy. More recently, 2002 saw the release of two more versions – by Bengal's Shakti Samanta and the high-profile Bollywood blockbuster by Sanjay Leela Bhansali – whilst Anurag Kashyap attempted to update the story with his modern-day rendition *Dev.D* (2009). However, it is important to remember that these remakes are *literary* adaptations and not copies or sequels of original film screenplays, which have only emerged in paucity over the past 20 years: *Nigahen* (1989 follow up to *Nagina* [1986]) and *Return of the Jewel Thief* (1996 sequel to *Jewel Thief* [1967]) are both regarded as critical and financial flops.⁹³

Perhaps the most popular and long-standing reasons given for Indian cinematic remaking is the industry-spread belief that this act of borrowing or copying foreign cinema is symptomatic of the sheer lack of good writers in Bollywood, as has been stressed by film directors such as Nagesh Kukunoor and remake connoisseur Vikram Bhatt:

⁹³It should be noted that South Indian director Satyajit Ray produced two follow-ups to *Pather Panchali* (1955) prior to this. However, Ray's films do not form part of the mass-consumed popular cinema that Indian audiences identify with, therefore I have excluded his work from my account of popular Hindi film remake series.

If you hide the source you're a genius... There is no such thing as originality in the creative sphere... When you begin creating a work, you look around for inspiration – a real life character, a sound, a tune or something that stirs you, something that you wish to replicate... If the Indian market begins to invest in writers, more people will see it as a career option and you'll have fresh ideas rolling in... Till that happens, I would rather trust the process of reverse engineering [remaking a film] rather than doing something indigenous (Bhatt cited in Banarjee, 2003).

Fortunately, despite the above claims of starved creativity, others have suggested alternative reasons which point towards remaking as a form of creative transformation. As Ganti has revealed, foreign film scripts often first require a certain amount of “cultural filtering” by filmmakers, but contrary to her attention to film storyline, moral values and emotional narrative themes, these adjustments also take place on the level of visual representation and aesthetics, as I will later demonstrate (Ganti, 2002). Indeed, the remake offers Indian audiences a way of better understanding and accessing foreign film texts, whilst conforming to a Bollywood-specific *film language*. However, I would add that contemporary Bollywood’s remaking incentives have also been stirred as it has shifted away from the confines of the native Indian viewing public and towards a world-wide *global* audience. This pursuit for global recognition and Bollywood’s acknowledged popularity with the NRI diaspora are both primary catalysts for the cinema’s increased modernisation and experimentation. The recent boom in self-remakes through revisions of several 70’s and 80’s Bollywood classics could also be seen as the (somewhat belated) active formation of an Indian film canon and the signalling of a nostalgic Indian cinema endeavouring to eternalise itself. Perhaps this inclination to remake marks a phase of Indian popular cinema that is finally nurturing a conscious desire to improve and update itself, now mindful of the aforementioned criticisms of its primitivism and “backwardness” in comparison to its Western (and Eastern) cinematic rivals. The remake therefore serves the frustrations of a cinema wanting to escape from itself, led by a new generation of filmmakers who seek to replace movie moguls (such as Yash Chopra and Mahesh Bhatt) who had preserved the industry for two decades, and it is the perfect platform for a newer “cooler” global Bollywood where previously non-Indian filmic forms, styles and characters can flourish. Once it has borrowed from and indigenised external foreign cinematic modes, the remake potentially promises Bollywood a status akin to Hollywood. At times, it offers empowerment through a seeming act of *reverse-colonialism* (a concept which I will return to later in the chapter) – a terroristic device that sabotages its employed hegemonic Hollywood codes. At others, it stands as a symptom of the collapse of Indian identity in the wake of globalisation, making cross-cultural mixing a possibility, if not a *necessity*.

Technical progression is another factor that may play a part in Indian cinema’s move towards remake films. Before the release of post-millennium films like *Koi...Mil Gaya*, Bollywood had

invested little time or money in technologically advancing its movies. Filmmakers account for this by arguing that there has never really been a *need* for a technical investment in their films, particularly considering the Indian audience's alleged lack of a discerning viewpoint, their tendency to overlook technical flaws, and their ability to extend their suspension of disbelief *just that extra bit further*⁹⁴. Once again I would assert that this is not to say that the Bollywood audience does not know that the text is not real, but rather that they are able to contemplate and adhere to the idea that reality (and therefore technical precision) does not always matter, as I have already discussed in chapter two with reference to Rosie Thomas and the Indian spectator's disavowal and in chapter three in response to Chidananda Das Gupta's account of the Indian audience's cognitive conditioning.

Considering the Indian audience's cultural orientations, it seems that religious devices and narratives centred on the theme of human compassion have effortlessly fed their appetite for fantasy and escapism – leaving little need for or interest in indigenising Western fiction-fantasy genres which would more often require the assistance of special effects technology. However, despite its previous reservations, it now appears that the Indian film industry and its audiences are finally ready to embrace a cinema of *technical* attractions⁹⁵. With the recent discovery of new special effects aesthetics in the form of CGI, time-slicing or “bullet-timing” and green-screening⁹⁶, Bollywood has been inspired to produce a range of action movies, often alluding to action sequences from Hollywood blockbusters – thus signalling the beginnings of the Bollywood-Hollywood remake. Recent films such as *Mujse Shaadi Karogi*, *Awaara Pagal Deewana*, *Jaani Dushman* and *Krish* all contain sequences openly mimicking the virtual cinematography of the Wachowski brothers' 1999 film, *The Matrix*. Farah Khan's 2004 action blockbuster *Main Hoon Na* also contains similar allusions. In this film, we see Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan play Major Ram Prasad Sharma, an Indian commando who has gone undercover as a college student in order to foil a terrorist plot to sabotage a peace pact between India and Pakistan. During his mission, Ram finds himself chasing a gang of terrorist henchman with only the aid of a rickshaw. We watch him exit a road tunnel in slow motion, narrowly escaping the explosions from a CGI petrol tank that bursts out from behind him. The chase sequence is accompanied by a musical score of frantic beating drums and classical raag (Indian vocal percussion). However, as we watch the Rickshaw hurtle down a hill, rebound off a rock, and launch into the sky, we hear this music suddenly merge into a parodic rendition of the theme tune to *Mission: Impossible* (1996). The camera encircles this hyperreal

⁹⁴ This is not to suggest in any way that the Indian spectator's gaze is less-civilized or less-informed. A significant percentage of the Indian film viewing public avidly consume Western or alternative modes of filmmaking, yet equally take pleasure through this subject position when viewing Indian films.

⁹⁵ I make a connection here to Tom Gunning's essay on early cinema which describes it as a spectacle or visual-trickery driven 'cinema of attractions' (Gunning, 1990). References to Gunning's concept have been made before in popular Indian film criticism, but I would argue that the term is more aptly applied in relation to the cinema's latest turn to special effects.

⁹⁶ Most notably established in the Hollywood sci-fi film *The Matrix* (1999).

moment of action, prolonging and intensifying it as the henchmen (and cinema audience) gasp in amazement at Ram's stretched out body, now frozen in mid air, shooting a gun in *Matrix*-esque (1999) bullet-time, handgun in one hand, rickshaw in the other. This postmodern technorealism has updated and furthered the wow factor of action sequences, but it has also impacted upon the generic framework of Indian action films as a whole – something I will explore later on in this chapter in relation to action film remakes.

Despite the different reasons outlined above, I would emphasise that Bollywood's most recent boom in remaking is ultimately a product and vehicle of modernisation, globalisation and global postmodernism. It responds to India's obsession with modern advancement (as seen through *Koi...Mil Gaya*) and is a 'historically specific response to the postmodern circulation and recirculation of images and texts' (Verevis: 23), as self-reflexively illustrated by film remakes like *Om Shanti Om*. As such, the consequences of this current phase of Bollywood cinema could not only prove to problematise Hollywood codes and conventions once they have become wholly indigenised, but perhaps even prove apocalyptic for Bollywood as a film genre itself.

Researching the Bollywood remake genre

There are several key questions that need to be asked of Bollywood remakes which I believe may help enrich our understanding of contemporary Indian cinema, inspiring new definitions for the Indian popular film genre as well as increasing the scope of remake theory and research. Firstly, with regards to textuality and referencing, we need to establish which elements of the original text these Indian remakes tend to borrow from, how frequently and systematically they do so, and how an original citation is used and manipulated to serve the remake-film's own ideology (McFarlane: 10). Is there a particular aspect of a foreign film text that draws Bollywood towards adapting it? Does Bollywood (like Hollywood) actively search for foreign stories to steal, or is the attraction more organic and incidental? Do these Indian remakes invest purely in the narrative content of the Western original, or does this borrowing stretch to other aspects of the text's form and coding? And do these Bollywood remakes fit within the categories defined by theorists such as Genette, Leitch and Druxman, or do they occupy a category all to themselves, with entirely different characteristics and incentives?

Questions concerning viewing and reception processes are also important. One needs to consider how these remakes can operate as both readerly and writerly texts – that is, how they enable the audience to participate both as consumers of the text's pre-determined meanings *and* engage in their own meaning making via the films' self-reflexive layers of textual referencing⁹⁷. Are some Bollywood audiences even aware of the intertextuality within the Indian film text which alludes to

⁹⁷Roland Barthes *S/Z* (1975)

Western films? If not, how do they comprehend and receive these alien aspects of the remake text? And why are Western consumers not drawn in by Bollywood remakes of Western films they have previously enjoyed? Why are we attracted to the Korean film original (*Oldboy*), but not its Indian remake *Zinda*, which employs a seemingly identical on-screen action and technical style, when we will more readily pay to go and see a Hollywood remake of a Japanese or Chinese film?⁹⁸ Of course there is always to some extent a discourse of the distinction of the original present, even with commercially successful Hollywood remakes. And one can account for the poor reception of Bollywood remakes through issues of access and exposure, such as their limited distribution in the West. However, Bollywood filmmakers (and distributors) are fully aware that Western audiences are less ready to accept Indian remakes than ones from Hollywood – something they confirm through the countless number of negative Western reviews of their remakes. Indeed, through my own research reading press reviews of the contemporary Indian remakes discussed in this chapter, I have rarely found any that could be considered positive. I would therefore argue that this hostility is also a result of something deeper rooted in the style and semiotics of Indian film texts – that is, the *way* in which they remake and appropriate their texts.

Regarding the impact and consequences of Bollywood producing foreign remake films, I would also ask whether the original film source is able to maintain its autonomy, authenticity or affect once translated by Bollywood, or if its exploited signifiers are altered permanently. Could the Bollywood remake, as a ‘hypertext’⁹⁹, be destructive to its Hollywood original, whereby exposed Hollywood devices are made vulnerable and are no longer able to hide behind the illusion of verisimilitude which fundamentally regulates the Hollywood mode in certain genres?¹⁰⁰ Lastly, in relation to artistic merit and labelling: How does the fact that Bollywood is not sanctioned or confined by laws of plagiarism and copyright¹⁰¹ affect the way in which it copies and borrows from other texts? Can we learn anything from remakes which have not been institutionally defined or labelled as such? Is a Bollywood remake of a Western film really a remake if there is no discourse surrounding the text to support this link? Given its distinctively unique film lingo, stylistic preferences and thematic barriers, can Indian cinema ever remake a Hollywood film in the direct sense? These are all questions I hope to answer through my investigation and analysis of Indian film remaking.

⁹⁸For example, Hollywood remakes *The Ring* and the *The Departed* reached the top of the box office chart on their opening weekends in the US (Boxofficemojo.com).

⁹⁹Gerard Genette’s umbrella term for any text that transforms or relates to another (Genette cited in Verevis: 20).

¹⁰⁰I acknowledge that the level of verisimilitude varies in Hollywood depending on genre; for example, it is less concentrated in comedy films. However, the majority of the remakes I look at in this thesis occupy more “serious” genres which do normally rely on a certain level of generic and cultural verisimilitude (gangster, action, thriller, heist).

¹⁰¹This is not to suggest that copyright laws do not exist or apply to the industry, but rather that legal proceedings against Bollywood films copying foreign texts are rare, inconclusive or ineffective. See Nandini Raghavendra (2002) and Nitin Govil et al (2005).

Parody or Pastiche?: A note on intentionality

Intentionality plays an important part in discussions surrounding cinematic remaking. Parody is in particular a remake category viewed as an explicit and deliberate act of political humour, as opposed to an instance of incidental quotation. According to Linda Hutcheon (1985), parody is distinguishable as an act of constructive critique, which actively seeks to distance and differentiate itself from its subject. Here, the process of copying an original text offers a means of *commenting* upon it – thus audience pleasure is received not so much via the act of repetition as from the counter-readings on offer: the change of meaning or the semantic shifts that have been imposed upon the original source through a process of abstracted reflection, involving exaggeration, misdirection, deformation, defamiliarisation and inversion¹⁰². Hutcheon's definition of the parodic moment involves a sophisticated subject who recognises and reads an author-implied evaluation or critique of a primary text within the meta-text, and she argues that this intentionality is 'essential' to the functioning of parody. In light of this, it is important to stress that the majority of Indian remake films have rarely employed a parody of this kind (with the exception of films like *Om Shanti Om*), since this particular definition implies a verified conscious attempt to portray a remake as a copy in order to offer some form of sophisticated political critique. However, alternatively, other writers such as Dan Harries (2000) have argued that the power to read parody lies with the reader and that the parodic function of a film text is completed and thus determined by its spectator (Harries: 107). Harries somewhat devalues authorial intent by stressing a film text's potential plurality of meaning and by pushing the idea of an active spectatorial pleasure derived from inventing meaning:

As ironic discourse, parody would possibly need to be decoded as having some authorial intention... but this does not necessarily rule out the potential for reading no intention into a text... With such refashioning, the parodic text is viewed as being intended as a 'reformulated', multivoiced text... a spectator can generate meaning out of the text's significance without any consideration of how the parody was intended by its producer (Harries: 106 – 107).

Indeed, when there is neither audience awareness of nor acknowledgement made to a film's intertextuality, Indian film remake texts may be in danger of coming across as "mindless" copies devoid of play and critique. But Harries' argument reminds us of the value of cinematic interpretation and that authorial intent is not essential to it. One may even be so bold as to say that intentionality is in itself somewhat overrated, particularly in the case of the remake. For as Robert Eberwein (1998) rightly argues:

¹⁰²For a more comprehensive list and explanation of these methods, see Harries (2000).

Are we limited in our interpretation to those relationships that the director consciously wove into the fabric of the film? It seems a rather simple-minded stance, and one that most artists would reject... the diversity of cinematic modes of alluding and the sheer number of allusions themselves in films ought not to be ignored merely because intentionality cannot be proved (Eberwein:142).

By demoting intentionality, Harries' redefinition begins to offer us a way to consider parody's potential in Indian remake cinema, though certain remaining elements of the category still seem somewhat unsuitable. For example, humour-focused parody ultimately aims to deconstruct, mock and hold a certain disdain for its target text. Bollywood texts often lack such an explicit political reflexivity or critical evaluation of their target texts. Unlike Hollywood, Bollywood films do not exclusively borrow from films that have been widely promoted, discussed in national media circles, or canonised by art institutions and film critics in India. There is often no guarantee that the majority of the pan-Indian audience is even aware of the original, as in the case of producer/director Vikram Bhatt, whose impressive profile of Bollywood-Hollywood remake films¹⁰³ have almost always passed as disguised originals. The Bollywood remake film functions more on the level of *secret* or *concealed imitation*, or what Bhatt himself terms as 'reverse engineering', and thus *pastiche* may be a more useful term for it.

Richard Dyer (2006), in his book on *Pastiche*, defines it as an alternative to parody in that it does not deconstruct but rather *reconstructs* its target text. It imitates for the sake of imitation, favours similarity over difference, and has a more neutral attitude towards its original. It should be noted that Dyer similarly states that in order for pastiche to exist, irony and intention is required, and that non-intentional pastiche indicates a failed attempt (Dyer, 2006: 3). He even draws connections between *pasticcio* (pastiche as combination, bricolage and hybridity) and the Indian masala genre, though he quickly abandons this association by condemning the opportunistic and nonsensical manner by which different ingredients are 'crammed' into the popular Indian film text:

[Popular Hindi cinema's] opportunism in cramming in feelings is still subject to rough notions of not having too much of any one thing or not putting all the searing or all the hilarious bits together, and with no sense that it is inappropriate to combine so many different things. In other words, masala is not *pasticcio* (ibid: 11).

¹⁰³Bhatt has directed remakes of several Hollywood films: *What Lies Beneath*; *Jagged Edge*; *On the Waterfront*; *There's Something About Mary*; *The Whole Nine Yards*; *Fear*; *Unlawful Entry*; *State of Grace*.

Though Harries' and Dyer's definitions of parody and pastiche may not wholly suffice to explain the kind of intertextuality that functions in the contemporary Bollywood remake, they can at least help identify and indicate certain problems and irregularities that this method of copying creates for the Bollywood text – particularly in terms of its unsteady reception by (particularly non-Indian and Western) audiences. As Harries mentions, *excess* is one of parody's key strategies of spectatorship. Moments of excess in cinema are often signalled and read as parody by audiences, most explicitly in the case of the Camp genre. In the Western text, excess as a parodic strategy automatically invites counter-readings and can thus be seen as problematic with regards to the international appeal of the Bollywood remake. As discussed previously in reference to my observation of Western film students, when a Western audience attempts to "read" a Bollywood film, heightened actions and emotions may be mistaken for excess and therefore as parody, inciting laughter and a mockery of the text. Thus for example, when referencing *Reservoir Dogs*, Indian remake *Kaante's* excessive style and action could automatically invite a double parodic reading of both the primary and secondary text. Neither Hollywood nor Bollywood conventions can be naturalised. As irony is absent from the allusions and exaggeration appears without humour, this, coupled with Harries' notion of active meaning-making, can lead to interesting and unusual viewer positions and responses.

Parodic referencing is often employed in Hollywood films to turn serious matters into comedy. However, Bollywood remakes will also frequently do the opposite when parodying Western texts. For example, internationally released cross-cultural remake *Ek Aajnabee* introduces one of its leading characters (played by Arjun Rampal) through a Kung Fu fight sequence which uses the stigma ridden comical 1974 music track 'Kung Fu fighting' by Carl Douglas as a non-diegetic accompaniment. Ironically, in *mock-heroic* style – what Dyer terms as pastiche that aims to reproduce a low or trivial subject in an artistic, sophisticated or high style – the parody here is used not to ridicule but to add sophistication, class or "coolness" to character or scene (Dyer, 2006: 39). This strategy is persistent throughout many contemporary Bollywood-Hollywood remakes and therefore something I explore in more detail later in relation to masculine orientated film remakes. Through its parody, *Ek Aajnabee* unfixes or deliberately misplaces the comical connotations associated with the song, inverting its stigma to suit the film's own aesthetic agenda. This form of borrowing again may have unusual implications for the Western viewer's experience of such texts, who may instead recognise and associate the song with tongue-in-cheek chopsocky films and therefore identify with Rampal's character as comical or ridiculous rather than serious and "cool".

In considering the many Indian remakes which deny or withhold their textual sources, one can also see the problem of what Harries terms as the 'sophisticated naïve viewer' (Harries: 110). When allusions are not acknowledged, audiences may take references or borrowed styles literally. In the case of the Indian remake, some Indian audiences may come to take Western/Hollywood iconography and visual techniques as authentic to the style of Bollywood, which in turn impacts

upon and complicates notions of convention, tradition and genre. Imitation can thus be a valuable and progressive strategy rather than empty, and should not be so readily associated with simple repetition. The imitative remake is an especially interesting (and problematic) object of analysis as it is neither pure copy nor original. Rather, it is a *supplement* that acts as a pre-text to its original (Worton and Still: 7). As Worton and Still point out, remakes are revealing in that they can be ‘usefully seen as textual modalities of recognition and transgression of the law’ (9). Though Indian cinema has been born and bred under the style and influence of pre-existing texts (such as those of Hollywood), this should not stand in its way of it being also viewed as an innovative and educative cinema. Contemporary Bollywood cinema is a special case of imitation in that it simultaneously imitates itself, its Other, the familiar and the arbitrary, as the following case studies reveal.

Celebrity and Genetic Intertextuality in *Sarkar*

As mentioned earlier, the film texts I have chosen for my study reveal Indian film remaking in its most diverse modes: from the mirroring homage-remake to more subtle and temporary forms of remaking such as quotation, citation and intertextual referencing. Bollywood remakes encompass various forms of intertextuality, but one of the most unique kinds that I wish to first draw attention to is ‘celebrity textuality’: the function of the star (and singer-stars) as an intertextual device. With regards to the film star personality:

The very concept of a film star is an intertextual one, relying as it does on correspondences of similarity and differences from one film to the next, and sometimes too on supposed resemblances between on-and-off-screen personae (Worton and Still: 176).

Several key theorists (most significantly Richard Dyer [1997; 2004]) have written on the function of the star persona within Hollywood filmmaking. Likewise, celebrity textuality, having a similar if not more central significance in Bollywood, has also attracted some limited theoretical criticism (see Vijay Mishra, 2002). The Indian film star persona is, even in the experimental climate of the modern day Bollywood industry, frequently subject to stock characterisation, stereotype and genre attachment. Certain lead actors will often better succeed in specific character roles which allude to their previously similar and acclaimed performances. For example, actor Sanjay Dutt's gangster role in comedy *Munna Bhai M.B.S* will comically allude to his more serious profile of gangster films such as *Khal Nayak* (1993) and *Vaastav* (1999), as well as his real life involvement in drug crime, black money laundering and the Bombay underworld¹⁰⁴. What's more, Bollywood movies are

¹⁰⁴ Dutt is known as “Bollywood’s Bad Boy” for his connections with infamous Mumbai mobster Dawood Ibrahim and for being suspected for planting bombs preceding the 1993 Bombay riots. He was arrested under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities court and imprisoned for illegal possession of arms. The actor also has a known history of drug addiction.

famously driven by the audience's identification with the vocal talent of backing singer superstars such as Asha Bosle and Lata Mangeshkar, whose voices are often similarly used to connect certain actors or movies to previous characters and films. Perhaps one of the best examples of this is in the 1994 film *Hum Aapke Hai Kaun* [*Who am I to you?*] where the audience is invited to make connections with this film and 1989 "super hit" *Maine Pyaar Kiya* [*I fell in Love*] (made by the same film production company) through the use of the same star singer Lata Mangeshkar's voice for the female lead, and the reappearance of several songs from the soundtrack of its' eighties predecessor.

In her account of the different categories of the remake, Constantine Verevis (2005) examines the significance of this particular form of filmic referencing within Hollywood cinema, which she terms *celebrity* or *genetic textuality* (20). However, I believe this particular mode of remake referencing is even more prominent in Bollywood and most telling through the case of the famous Bachchan family. The connection between Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan and his rising star son, Abhishek Bachchan, has been played with in several contemporary Bollywood film scripts – most significantly in the case of *Bonny and Clyde* pseudo-remake, *Bunty aur Babli*:

DCP Singh [Amitabh Bachchan]: Why did you get into all this?

Bunty [Abhishek Bachchan]: I wanted to be someone important

DCP Singh: And you became...?

Bunty: Forget it. You wouldn't understand

DCP Singh: Why? Why wouldn't I understand?

Bunty: Because he never did.

DCP Singh: Who?

Bunty: My father (turns to look at DCP Singh). He's just like you. [PAUSE]

DCP Singh: Are you trying to con me again?

In his chapter tracing the construction of Amitabh Bachchan's star profile, Vijay Mishra (2002) describes his celebrity as a special case of stardom in that it moves beyond Dyer's morphology based on 'political economy, marketing and distribution' (Mishra:147). For Mishra, Bachchan senior 'transcend[s] the status of stardom to become a text in his own right' (156). His 'ubiquitous' star persona¹⁰⁵ is constructed through alternative methods, most significantly a 'carefully modulated and subtly self-conscious... manipul[ation of the film's] song and dialogic situations' (ibid: 155), and thus he becomes a 'parallel text' in himself. If Amitabh Bachchan is indeed a text as Mishra suggests, this implies that he is also open to quotation, manipulation, and rewriting. Thus, for example, in *Bunty aur Babli*, this is achieved through the deconstruction of Bachchan's star

¹⁰⁵Bachchan has been referred to by the Indian media as the "one man industry" or "king of Bollywood" for his influence over the public as a national treasure and for the mass popularity of his films due to his star presence.

‘costume’, consisting of his ‘stereotyped voice, constructed physiognomy and gestural repertoire’ (ibid: 127), which is parodied by playfully transferring the characteristics onto his actor-son, Abhishek¹⁰⁶.

An even more revealing example of this genetic or celebrity referencing can be seen in the Bachchan’s more recent collaborative production, Ram Gopal Varma’s *Sarkar*. Varma’s acknowledged tribute to Francis Ford Coppola’s legendary *Godfather* trilogy is perhaps one of the rarer examples of Bollywood-Hollywood remake, in that it is presented as a direct homage to Coppola’s original. *Sarkar* opens with a signed note from director Varma, who declares: *‘Like countless directors all over the world, I have been deeply influenced by “THE GODFATHER”. “SARKAR” is my tribute to it’*. This blatant acknowledgement of the film as homage-remake does not only openly invite a comparison to the original, but also emphasises the film’s interpretive and intertextual relationship to an established world-wide film canon on top of which Coppola’s classic sits comfortably. Varma’s reworking follows Subhash Nagre, a wealthy resident and unofficial Mafia Don in Mumbai. Through facilitating an almost parallel government, Nagre takes justice into his own hands and in effect earns the respect of the people – thus earning the title of ‘Sarkar’ (translating as *Sir, Boss, or Government*). Following a murder of a local politician, Nagre is framed and imprisoned by his enemies through the assistance of his weak and bitter eldest son. Nagre’s younger son Shankar thus sacrifices his life plans to take on the responsibility of maintaining the Sarkar supremacy, seeking vengeance, and freeing his father. Though the film’s narrative bears a strong resemblance to *The Godfather*, the story is relevantly historically situated within the existing political climate in Mumbai and current anxieties over the prominence of the Mumbai Underworld. Whilst *Sarkar* is an interesting source for comparison with its celebrated original, beyond its many references to its Hollywood counterpart lies an even more interesting and unique form of intertextual referencing – relating exclusively to the film’s two lead protagonists: Amitabh Bachchan/Subhash Nagre (as Marlon Brando’s Don Vito Corleone equivalent) and his on-screen/off-screen son Abhishek Bachchan/Shankar Nagre (as Al Pacino’s Michael Corleone).

Miriam Hansen (1991) has already explored the way in which the presence of film stars (in her case, those specifically of the Hollywood silent era such as Rudolph Valentino) ‘undercut the narrative and scopic regimes’ of a film, stimulate a discourse external to the film’s diegesis, and enhance ‘a centrifugal tendency in the viewer’s relation to the filmic text ... thus [running] ... counter to the general objective of concentrating meaning in the film as product and commodity’ (Hansen, 246). This centrifugal tendency is increasingly present in contemporary Bollywood films like *Sarkar*. Varma’s choice to cast father and son is interesting particularly in relation to how the Indian audience is left to interpret and experience the film. Amitabh Bachchan’s Godfather role in *Sarkar*

¹⁰⁶ At certain points in the film, Abhishek Bachchan evokes his father’s early-career person via his costumes, dialogue delivery, and acting style.

uncannily mirrors his famous persona as the Godfather of Hindi cinema. On writing on the phenomenal persona of Bachchan, Mishra explains how the film star has become much akin to a Godly or religious figure in India, whom devoted fans have worshipped for over three decades – particularly evident during the actor’s involvement in a near-fatal accident on the set of his 1983 film *Coolie*, which virtually threw the nation into a state of mourning¹⁰⁷. This image of Amitabh Bachchan as a national power figure is even more significant when we consider the actor’s real life involvement in state politics. The actor was once a Member of Parliament and close friend of the Gandhi family, before getting caught up in a financial scandal and later being rumoured to have connections with the Mumbai gangster underworld (Mishra:140). This background profile immediately dissolves the barriers separating real life fact and the fictitious filmic world of *Sarkar*. The use of Bachchan’s biographic profile becomes yet another textual source for the film, and in effect, is used to manipulate the audience’s identification towards and judgement of the lead character. Subhash Nagre (aka the “Sarkar”) is all at once a law breaking gangster (within the film diegesis) and heroic idol (as a much loved and respected film star). Thus the connection between the film and Bachchan’s off-screen persona uncannily allows the audience to experience a deeper reading of or insight into *Sarkar*’s characters and thematics.

In addition to this celebrity textuality in *Sarkar* is the genetic textual dynamic which arises from the audience’s awareness that Amitabh Bachchan is the father of Abhishek Bachchan, who analogously plays his son in the movie. To illustrate the value of this particular intertextual device, I want to draw attention to one of the film’s climactic scenes, where Shankar/Abhishek Bachchan visits his father Sarkar/Amitabh Bachchan in prison, and the inevitable transference of his father’s roles and responsibilities onto him take place. As father and son share an emotional moment of bonding on-screen, the audience members find themselves passing through several worlds, realities and narratives simultaneously as the film text allows them to decode and interpret the scene in a multiplicity of ways: (1) an allusion to the actors’ real life father and son relationship, subject to much discussion in popular widely read Indian media gossip columns, (2) a symbolic depiction of Amitabh Bachchan passing his fame and status as Indian cinema’s leading actor onto his son, who has with each film increasingly grown to adopt his father’s acting style, image and on-screen persona, (3) an underlying commentary hinting at Bachchan senior’s real life political agenda and underworld connections, (4) an analogy of the real life tensions created by the gangster underworld and its power over the Bollywood film industry and its stars¹⁰⁸ and (5) the comparative Bollywood equivalence of Bachchan senior and Bachchan junior, as great actors of their generation, to the original performances of Hollywood legends Brando and Pacino.

¹⁰⁷See Mishra (2002: 144)

¹⁰⁸Bollywood stars and directors are commonly known to be repeatedly exposed to blackmail and death threats from the Mumbai underworld, which often tries to launder black money through financing films.

Coupled with the nostalgic star cameos and self-parodic performances of actors in *Om Shanti Om*, this kind of tensioned, overlapping multiplicity of reading in *Sarkar* and playfulness in *Bunty aur Babli* demonstrates the value, insight and innovation that remaking and intertextual referencing can bring to the Bollywood film viewing experience – contrary to the arguments of those who wish to simply dismiss the technique as a crass and empty method of duplication. Later films such as *Drona* (where genetic textuality is this time achieved through the relationship of on and off-screen mother and son Jaya Bachchan and Abhishek Bachchan), *Billu Barber* and *Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi* (both discussed in the next chapter) and Zoya Akhtar's *Lucky by Chance* could be similarly explored to reinforce the fact that, far from being a rare novelty, these intertextual methods are becoming more and more a staple device of Indian filmmaking.

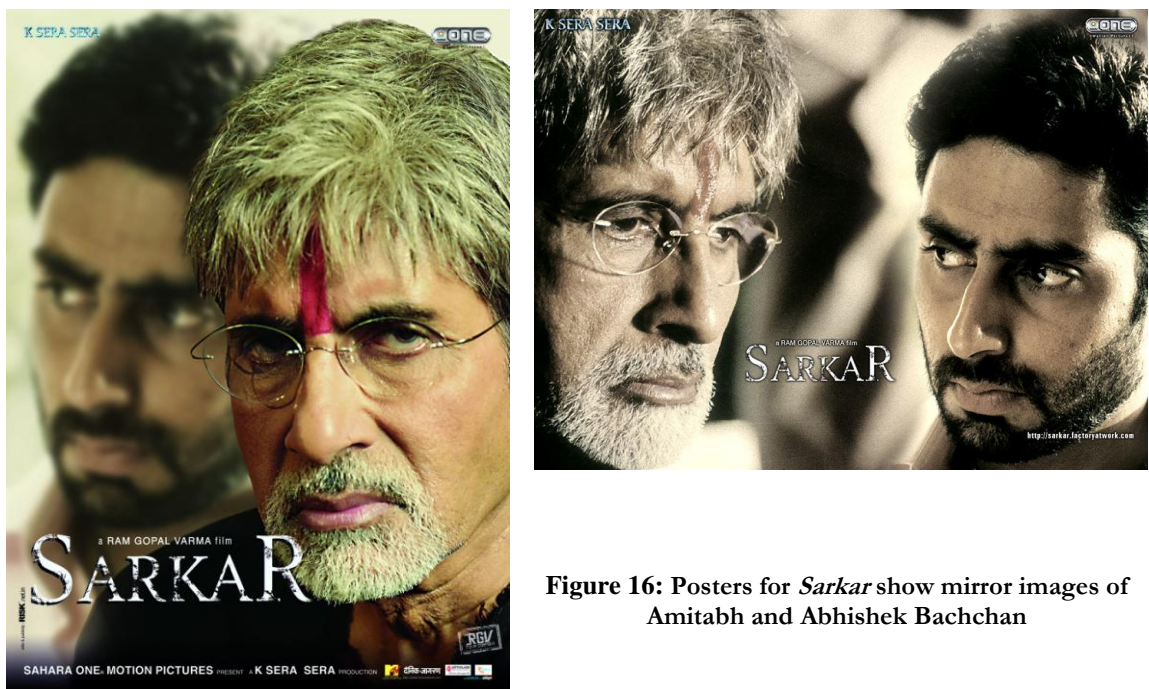


Figure 16: Posters for *Sarkar* show mirror images of Amitabh and Abhishek Bachchan

Shifting towards the figural: Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Devdas*

Further insight into postmodern aesthetic shifts in the contemporary Bollywood remake can be offered through an in-depth analysis of one of the genre's earliest, most prominent examples: the *Devdas* lineage. As mentioned earlier, filmic re-presentations of Chattopadhyaya's novel are profuse. However, for my analysis, I want to draw attention to two of the most popular and widely regarded versions: Bimal Roy's 1955 classic, and Sanjay Leela Bhansali's 2002 version – a divergent alternative to Roy's pseudo-original¹⁰⁹. The somewhat ritualistic and exhaustive inclination to juxtapose the superiority of an original text against its 'inferior' remake applies greatly in the case of

¹⁰⁹ Although several filmic versions preceded Roy's film, the success and critical acclaim of this particular remake heralded it a 'classic', and the film is often regarded by many as the Indian film industry's original adaptation of Saratchandra Chattopadhyaya's 1917 novel.

these two films. Roy's film marked the start of a classic era of socio-realist¹¹⁰ films in India, held in high regard for their refreshingly underplayed performances, their compassion for humanity (as social commentary and morality tales), and their attention to "real" characters. Contrarily, Bhansali's remake is a flagship for the Bollywood blockbuster, famous for its operatic style and record breaking budget (costing Rs 500 million): the most expensive Indian film in history at the time of its release. However, as mentioned earlier, simply debating "which one is better and why" will neither satisfy nor advance our understanding and appreciation of the Bollywood remake genre. What's more, as my investigation will reveal, it seems inappropriate to judge Bhansali's remake against Roy's original when the two films have been produced not only in separate decades, but also through a completely different *genus* of cinema.

There is an almost unanimous sense of disregard present in much of the discourse surrounding Bhansali's *Devdas*¹¹¹ and his work as a director, which parallels Western criticisms of postmodern and low popular art forms. The circulation of Bhansali's *Devdas* within high and low art circles reveals a familiar paradox: the film was loved by mass audiences (a national and international box office hit), yet panned in its world-wide critical film reviews. It was a characteristically populist mainstream Bollywood production in India, yet promoted in high art film festivals (Cannes) and exhibited in art-house cinemas in the West. Bhansali's film therefore exists simultaneously as art cinema (through its exhibition) and "depthless melodrama" (through its critical reception) – a label that the director has become much accustomed to in his career. In her book which cites *100 Bollywood films*, Rachel Dwyer (2005) comments on Bhansali's trademark cinema of 'excess'. For example, in reference to his international debut *Hum Dil De Chukeh Sanam*, she comments that: 'although the film boasts beautiful clothes, sets and locations, Bhansali is showing the beginnings of the excess that was to mar *Devdas*... the main Haveli [mansion] seems to open out into different landscapes and climates in strange continuity breaks' (Dwyer: 116)¹¹². Dwyer and critics alike have struggled with the implausibility, unreality and overt stylisation of Bhansali's works – all of which apply chiefly to the recent *Devdas* remake and underline its extreme digressions from Roy's socio-realist original:

The 2002 adaptation, although it had some wonderful musical and visual scenes, is a series of moments, where the storyline is spoilt...by the all too often kitsch quality of its visuals. The emphasis on the mise-en-scene overwhelmed the love story to the point at which it seemed to become almost irrelevant. The zamindars [land owners of colonial India] are

¹¹⁰The term refers to social realism in Indian cinema, encompassing films which depicted the harsh realities of urban life, such as poverty and famine, and the feudal roots of India's patriarchal society.

¹¹¹See reviews of the film in *Sight and Sound* (Ramachandran, 2002), *Screen International* (Johnston, 2002), *Variety* (Elley, 2002) and India's *Trade Guide* (Unauthored, 2002)

¹¹²Dwyer goes on to complain of the way in which Hungary is used as a location replacement for Italy in the film, without any attempt to conceal or disguise its characteristic scenery or landmarks.

presented as glamorous and supremely wealthy in the manner of bazaar art, whereas at this time (this version is set in the 1930's) they were in decline (Dwyer: 68).

This frustration with the historical inaccuracy of *Devdas* is a familiar reaction to the “heretical” film remake. As Stam comments, the adaptation which threatens the authenticity of the original will often be viewed as a deformity, religious sacrilege and invite charges of ‘outraged negativity’ (Stam: 54). But I would add that the very fact that Bhansali’s films transgress the laws of history and plausibility (perhaps occasionally even in a conscious act of rebellion) also indicates the postmodern sensibility of this contemporary text. Bhansali’s confusion of historical facts corresponds to the ahistoricism or temporal and spatial discontinuity that enhances fragmentation in many postmodern works.

Bollywood and the postmodern regime of signification

Audience and critical reviews of *Devdas* describe it as ‘spectacular’, ‘extravagant’, ‘operatic’, ‘lavish’, ‘picturesque’, ‘beautiful’, and ‘opulent’ – terms that continue to dominate from its international reviews to its DVD packaging¹¹³. Bhansali’s film therefore also supports Scott Lash’s (1988) concept of postmodern cinema’s move towards a discourse of the *figural*¹¹⁴. Lash’s theoretical contributions to postmodern film theory are useful here on several levels. In his essay ‘Discourse or Figure? Postmodernism as a ‘Regime of Signification’ Lash deals with a polarisation of the literal and the visual in cinema. He draws his ideas from Lyotard’s earlier writings which establish and differentiate the terms ‘discourse’ and ‘figure’, Susan Sontag’s esteem for an ‘erotics of art’ and a ‘sensual’, ‘energetic’ cinema, and the Artaudian theatre of cruelty. Particularly in the case of the latter two, the sensory and the visual are privileged over didacticism and discursive meaning. This surrender to a principally figural mode of theatrical presentation is what Lash identifies as a key characteristic of all postmodern cinemas¹¹⁵.

Whilst some of the perspectives in his essay may be too specific to be widely applicable to mainstream texts (his use of Sontag’s argument for instance focuses too much on anti-meaning and the avoidance of interpretation), Lash’s attempts to apply his ‘regime of signification’ to popular modes of postmodern filmmaking can also inform our understanding of contemporary Bollywood cinema aesthetics. For example, connections can be made through the notion of bringing *sensation* to the surface of the text and the deprivileging of dialogue and intellectualised hermeneutics –

¹¹³ These terms feature significantly in the film’s ‘curtain edition’ DVD and vox pops taken from audiences after viewing the film at Cannes film festival (DVD special feature: ‘World premier at Cannes’).

¹¹⁴ Indeed, the notion of a figural cinema is not a new one, but Lash explains how the function and authority of images is amplified in peculiar ways in postmodern films.

¹¹⁵ Lash identifies this shift to a postmodern cinema of spectacle as beginning with the commercial cinema of the late 1960s, although his article largely focuses on Hollywood films from the 1980s.

which interestingly, Bollywood cinema is often critically condemned for. Whereas formalist, modernist and realist aesthetics would assume a “worthy” work of art as that which *discursively* attempts to represent or critique the world, Lash’s postmodern aesthetics celebrate those texts that bring sensation and overt figuralism (beyond intellectualised meaning) to the fore:

... even in mainstream cinema, narrative content is increasingly losing centrality and giving way to a more image-centred ‘spectacular’ cinema ... [and] in non-mainstream critical cinema, a new image-centred mode of signification, based on an alternative ‘regime of pleasure’ may come increasingly to displace the most pervasive type of critical cinema which is modernist, discursive and intellectualist (Lash: 314).

Lash embraces popular Hollywood texts (such as the early action blockbusters of Spielberg, Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger) under this new concept, though he quickly separates this ‘postmodern mainstream cinema’ from texts such as the films of David Lynch – what he contrarily terms as ‘Transgressive postmodernist cinema’. Unlike the *Postmodern mainstream*, *Transgressive postmodern* texts allow the spectator a critically-accessible and unfixed viewing position. They more consciously and deliberately problematise reality through a film’s subtext or context. These films have more associations with avant-garde techniques such as surrealism (indeed, from the outcomes of my analysis in the previous chapter, we may be able to describe *Abhay* as a film that falls into this transgressive category). Ultimately, as Lash notes, his postmodern aesthetics are more concerned with those ‘unpleasant’ texts which ‘have a notable absence of a vision of a better world’ (Lash: 331). Populist Bollywood films clearly do not fit this mould, as they are largely anchored in pleasure and utopian fantasies. But despite this (particularly as his theorisations remain relatively incomplete and under-explored by others) there is a potential here to try and expand on some of Lash’s ideas regarding popular postmodern cinema, and utilise them to demonstrate the productivity of contemporary Bollywood’s cinematic modes.

There are several postmodern sensibilities listed in Lash’s work which tie in well with the characteristics and criticisms of contemporary Bollywood cinema and (more specifically) Bhansali’s *Devdas* – particularly the film’s aforementioned foregrounding of desire, its presumed ‘draining of aura’ from its original and its lack of critical distanciation. The film also exhibits what Lash describes as *de-differentiation* – a key process of postmodern filmmaking that denies the difference or separation of aesthetics, theory and cultural art from the real world, reality and the social. Similar to *Om Shanti Om* or *Abhay*, Bhansali’s *Devdas* facilitates this blurring of art and life, although this time the film text does not see itself as an artificial work severed from reality. Rather, it asserts itself as a *sublime version of reality*. In many contemporary Bollywood films, the intensity of human emotions is transfigured onto the cinema screen in deliberately extreme (often absurd and excessive) ways in order to project feelings as *close-to-life* as possible. Thus, for example, moments of characters

bursting into song and dance and other forms of exaggeration in the films are very much treated (and read) by their regular audiences as “natural”. Defenders of Bollywood cinema argue that it is this increased visceralism of Indian films which separates them from other modes of filmmaking (particularly Western realism), and provides audiences with a unique empathetic pleasure and experience of the world. Also, with regards to the figural, both Lash’s postmodernist cinema and Bollywood texts like Bhansali’s *Devdas* advocate a distinctly visual sensibility, a devaluation of formalism, and ‘operate[s] through the spectator’s immersion, the relatively immediate investment of his/her desire in the cultural object’ (ibid: 314).

In his essay, Lash references the Nietzschean notion of art as not representative, but rather as an ‘extension’ or ‘supplement’ to life – a philosophy that aptly explains the aspirations and logic behind Bollywood cinema. As explained in chapter two in relation to the cinema’s history of censure, popular Indian films (even if not through conscious critique) have always been known to deform and exaggerate reality. Regarded as unnecessary and incidental, realism is often omitted by design. Plot becomes ‘an excuse for a succession of spectacular events’, or in Bollywood’s case, an excuse for immersion in song and dance (326). In Bollywood cinema, the image is not always constrained or subordinated by meaning. It will often free itself from the ‘dictates of narrative’ (317) for the sake of immersing itself in the sensory, as seen in its sometimes disruptive song sequences. However, as with Lash’s postmodern ‘pornographic’ cinema of spectacle, contemporary popular Indian films frequently depart from realistic representation (and realist aesthetics) to a greater extent than their predecessors, for example by allowing fragmented images of the body and sexuality to dominate over dialogue and narrative – as epitomised by the cinema’s trademark MTV song sequences. Lash’s concept can thus help us begin to answer the scepticism-ridden question of: *What is the value of contemporary popular Hindi cinema?* For it is now neither narrative nor socio-political enlightenment, but rather the pleasure in the image, the spectacle, and the sensory expression of emotion, that drives the cinema. The influence of the figural within contemporary Bollywood cinema infiltrates the film text, affecting a wide spectrum of cinematic devices, and this is notably evident in Bhansali’s *Devdas*.

A synaesthetic cinema

Perhaps the thing that is most striking about Bhansali’s adaptation is the film’s opening sequence which has been described by some as a scene so hysterically melodramatic it is almost unendurable. Critics describe the scene as a moment of ‘dramatic claustrophobia’ (Elley, 2002: 25), a ‘grotesquery of emotion’ (Singh, 2002: 90), ‘suffocated’ by its elaborate mise-en-scene (Johnston, 2002: 20). However, this excessive melodramatics should not be dismissed as an accident or product of the director’s carelessness. Rather, it is intentionally and strategically created through the collaboration of the film’s director, costume artists, musical composer, cinematographer, production designer and

actors¹¹⁶. The scene is perhaps particularly problematic for cross-over audiences as it is too lavish and hyper-emotional – a cinematic language perhaps alien or inaccessible especially to modern Western audiences.

The first scene of Bhansali's *Devdas* opens with jaunty-angled crane shots of a mansion resembling a giant Roman temple. Cameras track behind Devdas's mother running frantically through the halls of her palace-like home, arms open wide as the near-screaming voices of Devdas's family members overlap to rejoice about Devdas's return home after ten years. No character establishment is offered at this point through the narrative or dialogue. Instead, the wealth, status and background of this family is indicated through the grand architecture of their 250 foot long home¹¹⁷ which, barely fitting into the camera frame, is overwhelmingly and blatantly put on display¹¹⁸. Sound and noise also function pivotally in the sequence and significantly add to this experience of excess. During its opening segment, the noise in *Devdas* is as striking and obtrusive as the visuals. The amplitude appears maximised (perhaps to the point of distortion) and there is a distinct lack of pauses and silences. The orchestration of music, dialogue, sound effect and silence lacks 'focus' (the careful selection and exclusion of sounds – see Gianluca Sergi, 2004) and such a density and layering of sounds compromises the clarity of a sequence, inevitably resulting in 'cacophony' (Sergi, 150-151). Furthermore, during conversational exchanges between two or more characters, the dialogue appears compressed as if silences have been removed to quicken the pace of the scene. Devdas and Paro's mothers' Kaushalya and Sumitra, even when standing only a foot away from each other, project their voices and shout their dialogue as if acting on a theatrical stage. There is also an unusual over-sensitivity to surrounding sounds: Foley effects of even the softest of sounds – the rain drops from a leaking roof, the crystals of a hanging chandelier, a distant outdoor water fountain, the bangles on Paro's arms or the bells on her dress – are all amplified in volume to assist this multi-sensory, exaggerated introduction¹¹⁹. This deployment of noise as an *effect* could alone be enough to instil a feeling of suffocation in a viewer previously unaccustomed or unconditioned to such highly charged opening film sequences. Dudley Andrew has spoken of cinema's extra-literality in comparison to the novel, particularly in cinema's ability to be 'synaesthetic' (engaging multiple senses simultaneously). In many ways, a film like *Devdas* epitomises this notion of synaesthetic cinema by intensifying its mise-en-scene (Andrew: 61).

¹¹⁶Indeed, one could take this aesthetic excess as a clear opening statement of intent that the film will not be faithful to its original.

¹¹⁷As noted in 'the making of *Devdas*' notes on the film's official website (devdas.indiatimes.com).

¹¹⁸This display of wealth is key to the film's overall visual rhetoric. As Mandakranta Bose notes, the film is so focused on wealth that 'money does not just make the film, it is the film' (Bose, 2007: 192).

¹¹⁹The film's abundant use of echoes and surround sound could also be seen to assist this excess, giving a sense of the grand scope and scale of the film's wide narrative space (Sergi, 147).

Drawing parallels: Devdas and the Indian miniature painting

In order to further explore Bhansali's visual style in some depth, I would like to turn to another Indian art form (somewhat smaller in scale) also marred by similar criticisms: the Indian miniature painting. The foundation principles of the now sparse Indian miniature (developed and circulated in India most notably between the 16th and 18th century) lay in illustrating a reality beyond a certain vantage point, a world expressed through the language of symbolism. The paintings adopted an aesthetic mode incorporating 'gesticulating' figures, visible brushwork, multiple viewpoints, a playfulness with perspective, as well as an active attempt to merge and 'unfold' multiple dimensions in a single image. For example:

The [Mogul Indian miniature] painters found a solution to the problem of spatial projection through European examples and repeatedly painted the distant views of towns set on craggy hills, winding roads... [but] such passages seemed hard to rationalize with the rest of the composition, which was conceived in birds-eye view ... [also] they never conjured up a planned chiaroscuro (Anjan Chakraverty, 1996: 33).

The credibility of Indian miniature art was hindered by its contradictions in perspective and stylistic incoherencies or 'imperfections', such as night scenes lit as if in full sunlight and distant objects occupying disproportionately larger space than those in the foreground. Trees and foliage painted with shaded layers creating the illusion of depth were disruptively positioned onto floors with a two-dimensional effect 'enhanced by a flat application of the pigment' (Chakraverty: 53). The images were attacked for their hurried brushwork, often a result of the 'freak idiosyncrasies' (ibid: 71) of their character figures: women with elongated fingers and eyes 'almost touching the ears' (Jodhpur style, ibid: 71) drawn in unusually exaggerated poses, often presented simultaneously in frontal (flattened) or three-quarterly (three dimensional) views. Also, with regards to overt visual detail, the paintings were seen to be hindered by their excessive and 'forceful' application of bold colours, which particularly in cases such as the Pahari-style, never lowered in strength of tone regardless of the size, type, distance or positioning of an object-feature in the picture frame (Chanderohri, 2001). Such criticisms thus inevitably led to Western intervention, significant stylistic alterations and, arguably, the subsequent demise of the Indian miniature painting. As Anjan Chakraverty explains, the blame for the dying art form lay partly with the East India Company's derisive critical assessments of miniature craft work, ironically set up to help promote the trade. The following citation, which Chakraverty takes from a late 19th century British civil servant's account of a local miniature artist at work, demonstrates the simultaneous admiration and disdain incited by the excessive style of the Indian miniature:

‘His colour is often exaggerated but it is always warm and rich and fearless. The native artist is also patient... painfully elaborating the most minute details; no time is considered too long, no labour too intense to secure perfection in imitation or delicacy in execution. The greatest failing in native artists is their ignorance of perspective and drawing... and it is fortunate that this want is most easy to supply...’ (Powell Boden, *Handbook of the Manufacturers and Arts of the Punjab* cited in Chakraverty: 355).

This demand for the de-abstraction and the installation of realist aesthetics in the miniature painting parallels the aforementioned comments made by Dwyer regarding Bhansali’s naïve craftsmanship and the general condemnation of Bollywood cinema’s inferior, almost primitive modes of filmmaking¹²⁰. However, in the case of the Indian miniature, those in defence of the paintings have argued that these visual abstractions were deliberate and intentional and that they should not be condemned, but celebrated for their unique qualities – their abstract, sensuous, sublime images conveying a world beyond the eye of realism. The paintings were meant, like true art, to *represent* and *stimulate*. The intensity of their colour, detail and hyperrealist aesthetics all contributed towards an attempt to depict and grasp a truer sense of emotions such as passion, elation, romance, love and seduction. With this in mind, I likewise invite a similar argument to be made in the case of Bhansali’s *Devdas*.

One of the most striking similarities between the Indian miniature and Bhansali’s film is in the construction and presentation of the female subject. As discussed with regards to the miniature, the representation of the female figure in *Devdas* (2002) pushes towards hyper-femininity. Not only are the female leads adorned head-to-toe in elaborate jewellery, draped in daring bold colours and heavily embroidered designer fabrics (actress Madhuri Dixit’s costumes for the film reportedly weighed as much as 30 kilos each, one of which famously fetched Rs. 2.5 lakhs in a film auction), but each and every detail of their visual make-up accentuates their femininity. Fingertips and feet are decorated with intricate henna patterns, even for shots lasting only a few seconds. Carefully applied eye make up abnormally extends, enlarges and throws open the eyelids. Lead protagonist Paro’s excessively lengthy Rupunzel-like hair extensions give her a larger-than-life quality¹²¹, whilst several of her choreographed dance sequences give at least the *illusion* of her fingers, arms and torso stretching with abnormal flexibility – much like the gesticulating figures of the aforementioned

¹²⁰ Almost mirroring the above patronising comments on Indian miniature art work, critic Sheila Johnston (2002) similarly comments that: ‘*Devdas* is a bloated banquet with minimal nutrition for the grey cells, but [has] a few spicy morsels to tease the taste buds along the way’ (Johnston: 17). Johnston goes on to positively critique the film only via its comparisons to Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rebecca* and a feminist reading of the narrative – reducing its visual abstractions to something gluttonous (ibid: 17), tiring, inflated and unnecessary.

¹²¹ As mentioned in chapter one, the casting of Aishwarya Rai as Paro further accentuates this excessive femininity.

Indian miniature figures. In fact, Paro analogously personifies the miniature, right down to her kiss-curls which almost pay homage to the trademark fine brush stroke hair strands commonly found framing the faces of the paintings' female subjects¹²².



Figure 17: Ornately decorated Chandramukhi (top left) and Paro (bottom right) match the detail of a fine Indian miniature painting

Another stylistic aspect of the miniature which forms part of Bhansali's film is the extension of optical views. Set design, art direction, lighting and cinematography are combined to present a perspective beyond realism's single-angle, mono-dimensional viewpoint. This can be exemplified through the opening shot of Devdas' family home. As mentioned earlier, the purpose-built Roman temple-like mansion is overblown in size and distorted through the use of a wide-angle lens and

¹²²This stylistic trait was particularly present in Kangra and Guler style miniature painting (Chanderohri, 2001: 62)

tilted cameras. The visual presentation of this family home continues to resist subtle realism by displaying interiors through multiple viewpoints: omniscient birds-eye and mid-air shots suddenly switch to eye-level tracking shots following characters running through corridors. Throughout the film, static shots are often disrupted by subsequent point-of-view shots of spinning dancers, a scene through a pair of binoculars, or the blurred vision of a tearful-eyed Devdas (a technique I will return to later). Also, just as the miniature obscures depth of field through blending three-dimensional architecture with flat-profiled figures, Bhansali utilises a generous lighting set-up and frame composition to achieve a similar effect. Depth is not created through the usual contrast of light and shadows, but rather, it is abstracted through the manipulation of light and layering of visual stimuli within the frame. For example, in scenes set in Devdas and Paro's family homes, distant windows and door frames are subjected to a vivid lighting set-up, bold colour scheme and sharp focus of equal strength to the foreground. Every section of the film set (and camera frame) is decorated and rarely is there a back wall or corner of the frame left empty and unlit. Images in the foreground appear to merge in with the background – such as the dancers in Chandramukhi's Kotha palace, whose costumes resemble the colour and fabric of the hanging drapes behind them. The details of the Rangoli-pattern painted floors appear raised and mix in with the outlines of the figures that dance upon them.

The clarity of detail of distant objects encourages multiple points of distraction within the frame. The spectator's eye scans the image frantically, unable to focus on a single object in the frame, lacking the aid of a conventional set up of blurred backgrounds, shadows and perspective. This abstraction of the film's visuals is further emphasised through frame composition layering techniques. For example, in her first song sequence in the Kotha, Chandramukhi is seen walking down the Kotha palace steps. The composition is a complicated one, made of many layers which simultaneously exhibit and focus upon far-off views as well as set pieces directly in front of the camera. Hence, in this particular image set-up, the composition is thus (from foreground to background):

Fountain spray (close-up, right corner of frame) curtained pillar → ornate Chandramukhi on staircase → decorative wall, window opening and pillar → exterior fountains lit in brilliant-white light → a moodily lit marble building → another background building with decorative turrets, lit yellow → spinning nauch-girl in turret window → deep blue night sky

What is interesting about this busy visual set up is how its contained objects and scenery, whether placed in front and nearer the lens or behind and far away, all appear at focal point. In effect, the scenery fights for the viewer's attention, creating multiple distractions and encouraging a fetishist gaze. It is this constant meticulous process of ornamenting the frame and this unabashed exploitation of façade that moves Bhansali's film beyond realism and towards a multi-dimensional

figural overindulgence. From this example alone we can see that what we may at first regard as photographic inaccuracy, error, or amateurism, can in fact offer us something that the mirror-to-life image of realism's static camera cannot.

Bhansali's *Devdas*' visual complexity stretches even further beyond its gargantuan mansions, stained glass hallways, chandelier scattered palace halls and jewel encrusted costumes as the story's characters also disclose and communicate to one another via the figural. This can first be observed with regards to the film's opening eighteen minute delay before revealing the face of lead protagonist, Devdas. The film's lead character is at first unusually hidden from us, playing upon the audience's desire to not only see superstar Shah Rukh Khan in the classic role, but more importantly, to push them to a point at which they care not so much about *who* he is or what his intentions are, but rather, *what he looks like*. When Devdas finally appears, his image is styled upon the vintage fashion of 1930s England, complete with an Englishman's hat, cravat, coat and smoking cigarette which becomes a dominant visual character trait throughout the film. Similarly, when Paro (Devdas's lower caste childhood sweetheart and neighbour) first hears that her long lost love has returned home, there is very little dialogue used to convey her thoughts. Instead her emotions are made evident visually or sensorially: from the use of highly saturated colours and images of fluttering doves, to rapidly tracking cameras following her running down a seemingly endless corridor, the fabric of her silken sari trailing behind her. (This visual depiction of Paro differs greatly to Roy's version which subtly hints at her emotions through static shots, strategic silences and relying predominantly on dialogue). Of course, a more visualised style is not uncommon to Indian cinema, but it is the sheer *excess* and prioritisation of this style in Bhansali's *Devdas* that I wish to stress and draw attention to.



Figure 18: Promotional image for *Devdas* depicting the suave and sophisticated protagonist, having returned from his studies in England

Figural excess versus low-key realism: Bhansali and Roy's adaptations

It is not sufficient to say that Bhansali's visually excessive reworking of Roy's film is a naturally progressive result of modern updates in film technology, as would be commonplace when comparing a modern remake to its classic original. Bhansali has found it necessary to create an entirely new cinematic language for *Devdas* in order to allow us to perceive its characters in a new light, to get closer to a more literal (or rather, hyper-literal) experience of the film story's sublime themes: passion, devotion, sacrifice, eternal love. As mentioned, the 2002 adaptation of *Devdas* makes an interesting shift towards multiple viewpoints compared to its statically shot predecessor, as can be seen in the key moment when Devdas first lays eyes on his beloved Paro. In Roy's original, we see Devdas walk into a bare room, catching Paro lighting a diva. Paro, stunned by the sight of Devdas, burns her hand on the match she is holding. The two are locked in a gaze while the hidden, still eye of the camera and sudden silence supporting the privacy of the moment. However, in the contemporary version, the scene is presented more dynamically as the audience is invited to experience the moment through a multiplicity of gazes. As Devdas moves towards a sleeping Paro, the camera moves right up-close to almost touch her softly-lit face as she lies shrouded in moonlight, stain glass shadows and flickering candles. The scene subsequently shifts between such extreme close-ups to long-shots, tracking shots, and point-of-view perspectives of Devdas observing Paro. Furthermore, in following scenes, we find ourselves voyeurs peeping through binoculars, omnisciently floating through corridors and down the stairs of grand mansions via crane shots and unedited long-takes. Thrown into the chaos of the moment, we spin and get dizzy with the dancers (as in the film's sequence for the song *Dhola Re*). We fall with the characters as they drop to the ground, with even our vision blurring as Devdas takes his last breath in the final scene of the film.

Unlike the contemporary adaptation, cinematography in Bimal Roy's *Devdas* is utilitarian and does not draw attention to itself. In the blockbuster remake however, cameras move all over and around the characters – fragmenting and shifting the position of the audience by switching between shot-reverse-shot gazes, third-person spectator views, voyeuristic gazes, and character point-of-view shots. The issue of positioning the audience is also interesting when we consider *where* incidents are placed within a key scene. For example, we notice the difference in suturing strategies in the scene where Paro receives a letter from Devdas, denying the love between them. Whereas the older version distances us from the moment at which Paro screws up the letter in despair (verisimilitude and an impersonal static observatory shot of her prevents any chance of an overtly intimate and subjective viewpoint), the 2002 remake instead throws us and our viewpoint into the fire with the letter. The cinema screen burns with the letter in an extreme close-up before us and our personal

engagement with this moment is thus encouraged. Through an enhanced visualisation of this incident we feel more involved and entangled as our viewpoint (literally thrown into the fire) mirrors the emotional state of Paro.

One can also look at environments and settings in order to determine the polarisation of visual set-ups in the two film versions. Bimal Roy's production is set in a naturalistic environment. Most of what we see contributes to the rural realism of the story: forests, village roads, crop fields, muddy farm roads and river banks. In fact, the only obvious symbolic use of the story's setting is a lotus flower bud, which blooms to bridge the passing of time between the childhood and adulthood of the lead characters. In Bhansali's film however, this symbolism is so frequent we can scarcely keep up with it. We barely have a chance to interpret a symbol's meaning before we are confronted with another. Every environment or setting the character or audience is brought into is used for aesthetic gain: the pond in the courtesan's palace which Chandramukhi dips her hair into seductively to entice Devdas; the mirror in Chandramukhi's bedroom which shatters dramatically when she turns to see Devdas, indicating the chemistry between them; the river Devdas sinks into as he drowns in alcoholism; the tree whose red petals shower over Devdas as he lies on his death bed. For some audiences and critics this excessive need to over-saturate the screen with images can become too much, as demonstrated through my earlier examples of the film's negative Western critical reviews and my analysis of student responses to Bollywood films in chapter two. So why does this cinematic technique appeal and work in Bollywood cinema? Why are audiences of such films drawn to this aesthetic style? And what do films like this reveal about the Bollywood audience's tolerance, understanding and perception of the relationship between image and word on screen? Is it perhaps possible that the Bollywood audience has come to be more tuned into and dependant on the poetry of the cinematic image? From analysing films like Bhansali's *Devdas*, it certainly appears that Indian cinema, with its unique cinematic language, can at times come to depend on the image as much as the Western film depends on its narrative discourse.

Demoting the discursive

Bhansali's remake perfectly invades cinematic discursive frameworks, particularly with regards to narrative storytelling and dialogue. In Roy's film the emotions, relationships and sentiments of characters are 'told' rather than shown. Relationships are developed through narrative. The first hour of the film focuses on the lovers' childhood friendship, whilst the contemporary version disposes of this background story, aside from a few seconds of flashback footage. Rather than documenting or staging events and conversations to explain the bond between Paro and Devdas, *Devdas* (2002) expresses this more explicitly through its sensuality and imagery – at times almost akin to a picture book or comic-strip storytelling sensibility. Also, it is through the dialogue and narrative that we learn of Chandramukhi's riches and Devdas's prosperity in Roy's version, whereas

Bhansali communicates this through his imagery and set pieces. In Roy's film, locations (such as Chandramukhi's dancing room) are often lit rather low-key and camera shots are almost always tightly-framed around the character's bodies. Our knowledge of Chandramukhi's wealth or Devdas's extreme love for Paro is therefore often dependent on narrative and discursive clues. This form of narrative presentation is not merely a consequence of technical inefficiency and low production costs at the time Roy's film was made, but an intentional hesitation and restraint that forms part of Roy's classic socio-realist style. Thus Bhansali, in breaking with this realist aesthetic, tries to instead represent the film's issues, themes and emotions through his saturated visuals.

The demoting of discourse in Bhansali's remake is also evident with regards to its dialogue, as seen in the reuniting of Paro and Devdas at the start of the film:

Paro: The desire to meet the sea turns the stream into a river

Devdas: Then why take time to show me your face?

Paro: Like sighting the moon after ages, I fear I shall leave you breathless

Devdas: (Laughing) Not even the moon is as vain

Paro: Why should it be? The moon is scarred.

Devdas: Fair enough Paro, then we shall wait 'til moonrise to see which leaves me breathless, the moon's radiance? Or your vanity?

To some extent the dominance of imagery in this passage of film dialogue is partly symptomatic of the language used at the time the story is set in (early twentieth century Bengal), which is fundamentally poetic and descriptive. Nevertheless, the way in which the image invades conversation throughout Bhansali's film is distinctive when compared to its realist predecessor. Dialogue, discourse and narration function at different levels in the two films. Most noticeably in contrast to the above visually driven dialogue, Roy's *Devdas* uses two vagabond minstrels as a narrative device to verbally explain the situation and feelings of young Paro, after having been abandoned by Devdas:

"Come and meet me dear Krishna... come and meet

Come dear Krishna, your Radha's roaming all alone looking lost

We all miss you so terribly in Vrindavan dear Lord

The day your topic comes up, our haunted eyes overflow

Even now we worry in mind, what will happen in future

For your Radha's roaming, lost lost

You still haven't sent us news about yourself

We still have no news from you

Every girl in Vrindavan has gone mad crying over you,

Come and console them, show your face o lord”

Throughout the above song sequence the movement of the camera is discrete. It is restricted to two camera set ups (a long shot and a medium close-up) and a few cuts catching the facial expressions of the three on-screen characters. In this scene (and the film as a whole) the image functions as a frame for words, dialogue and narrative. The minstrels’ song is situated very much in reality (a diegetic musical moment as opposed to a dream sequence), and thus cannot be confused with the way in which songs are employed in Bhansali’s version. Here, the minstrels remain fairly static and their religious songs are coincidental, detached representations of Paro’s situation. In the 2002 remake however, songs are less devices of omniscient narration and become actual projections or re-enactments of the characters’ fantasies, thoughts, desires, and emotions. They shift between real events (Chandramukhi’s dance hall numbers) and symbolic events (the Krishna and Radha song) and thus often move beyond storytelling into figural emotion and sensation. Just as with cinema’s attempt to remake or retell the novel, Bhansali’s remake can transfer Roy’s film’s narrative, but not its original *system of enunciation*. In speaking for Western remakes, Brian McFarlane notes that whereas the novel’s enunciation operates wholly through verbal signs, film varies between the visual, the aural and the verbal (McFarlane: 26). Bhansali’s *Devdas*’s ratio of these three forms of enunciation is somewhat different in this sense as the film operates predominantly through the first two *sensual* sign systems. Roy’s original also features songs which connote the feelings of characters – particularly in the case of dancing courtesan Chandramukhi. However, Roy’s Chandramukhi’s feelings are still often under-represented and subtly hinted in her dance sequences when compared with Bhansali’s Chandramukhi – whose framing, choreography and ‘operatic’ emotive vocals all contribute to revealing her inner emotional state. Thus again Roy’s adaptation, as a classic of Indian social realism, maintains a distance in its song pieces, whilst Bhansali’s film liberates and exploits the virtues of song-and-dance for heightened sensation and affect.

As well as highlighting the prioritisation of visuals in the postmodern film text, Lash has stressed how these dominant images can come to act independently of narrative, signification and meaning to a point at which symbolism and connotation become irrelevant or obsolete. Bhansali’s *Devdas* may not do this to the extreme of, say, a David Lynch movie, but the film certainly shows moments of this pure, exclusively figural presentation. As mentioned earlier, critics have attacked the film’s failure to narrate, represent or signify. Bhansali reduces the story of Devdas to ‘a series of moments’, the storyline is ‘spoilt’ and cannot function normatively due to the ‘overwhelming’ emphasis on ‘kitsch’ visuals. Mise-en-scene becomes so dominant that the love story of Devdas and Paro ‘becomes almost irrelevant’. In this particular remake the hierarchy of word and image are reversed. Narrative and discourse now inversely function to frame the image. Bhansali’s *Devdas* becomes so absorbed in its visual dimension, it consequently dispenses with narrative, historical accuracy, plausibility, realism, and signification (at least in its conventional and palatable sense).

However, one could argue that in doing so, Bhansali's film challenges these grand frameworks, inviting us instead to view a more liberated, less repressed, and purer sense of the film as a "cinematic" art form.

Dilip Kumar (lead actor of the 1955 classic) once commented on Roy's intention to make films that were 'close to the soil' and his inclinations towards a minimalist style that involved 'trying *not to do* rather than doing'¹²³. This tendency led to underplayed roles (particularly with regards to Kumar's acclaimed performance), producing a completely different Devdas to Shah Rukh Khan's later interpretation – who cries with bloodshot eyes, shouts and yells drunkenly, staggers around stubble-faced, unwrapped dhoti¹²⁴ in hand, and has hence been attacked repeatedly by critics for "over-emoting". Khan's Devdas thus almost works against everything that Kumar's characterisation stood for. With Roy's and Bhansali's adaptations therefore, we have two films representing two entirely different cinematic interpretations of human passion. However, it is the later version that exudes passion, obsession, tragedy, romance and devotion in its most visceral form. One can understand and appreciate Bhansali's method of remaking as akin to (to borrow from Andre Bazin's description of film adaption) an 'electric transformer transforming the "voltage" of the original', where 'aesthetic energy is dissipated... differently according to the demands of the camera lens' (Bazin, 1948: 25). Through increasing the visual and dramatic energy of the film (perhaps to the point of absurdity, abstraction and risking authenticity) Bhansali aims, in postmodern fashion, for the *sublime* – to present those intangible emotions (passion, devotion, sacrifice, eternal love) that cannot be described, conceptualised through narrative or represented through conventional modes of representation: those *unpresentable* emotions which Roy chose to suppress. In such a pursuit for the sublime, Bhansali willingly risks allowing his film to fail to represent in a manner that is deemed acceptable, plausible and conceivable to Western audiences. Thus regrettably, for all its visual barrage, noise, and high-voltage unabashed indulgence, it may not be so easy to overcome our impulsive discomfort towards this form of cinema. However, through considering the above, Western critics, theorists and audiences may begin to appreciate the complexity, craftsmanship and unique affect of such a cinema, rather than dogmatically and futilely condemning it for being figurally excessive. In light of the above, we can argue that Bhansali's film is cinematic in the purest sense of the word vis-à-vis its foregrounded and dynamic visual aesthetics. For as Robert Stam reminds us, cinema is: 'a composite language by virtue of its diverse matters of expression – sequential photography, music, phonetic sound, and noise... [it] "inherits" all the art forms associated with these matters of expression. Cinema has available to it the visuals of photography and painting, the movement of dance, the décor of architecture, and the performance of theatre' (Stam: 61).

¹²³From 'An interview with Dilip Kumar' in DVD of Bimal Roy's *Devdas* (1955)

¹²⁴A traditional sarong-like men's garment consisting of a piece of fabric that is wrapped around the waist and legs.

Self-reflexivity and self-referentiality in Bollywood and *Dil Chahta Hai*

We have already begun to look at how self-reflexivity has become a central device in the contemporary Bollywood text, particularly in the case of *Om Shanti Om*. I will now provide further examples of its functions in popular Indian films in order to illustrate how it is part of a wider phenomenon in contemporary Bollywood. Self-reflexivity has rarely been a focal point of Indian cinema criticism, yet it frequently figures in the contemporary Bollywood film text, particularly if we permit it to function independently of authorial intent. As discussed previously, whilst it may be treated as a novel feature in the modern Hollywood text – operating outside or against the principles of verisimilitude (for example, as in the comedy spoofs of director Mel Brooks) – Bollywood, which is often contrarily devoid of verisimilitude, may allow its self-reflexive moments to manifest repeatedly in film after film, with little critical or innovatory recognition ever being drawn to them. In Hollywood, self-reflexivity may receive critical attention and acclaim for its ingenuity or daringness to step outside and look back at itself (*Being John Malkovich*, *Pleasantville*, *The Truman Show*). In Bollywood however, it has come to form part of the often taken-for-granted nature of popular Indian cinema – repeatedly used and perceived as an integrated, *non-disruptive* device inciting routine humour, momentary cinephilia, and audience pleasure. Common self-reflexive moments in contemporary Bollywood films include the drawing of attention to film as text though the popular use of the phrase “this is not a movie, this is real life” in film dialogue. Most explicitly, Sanjay Gupta’s *Musafir* (2004 remake of Oliver Stone’s *U-Turn*) uses similar dialogue to reflect on the narrative and stock character conventions of the film and play with the audience’s anticipation of the unfolding narrative action. The film’s lead villain (archetypically played by Sanjay Dutt) spends much on-screen time referring directly to the film’s current plot and action, literally addressing himself as “the villain” and the lead character as “film hero”. He also openly cites or alludes to other popular Indian films – particularly those that have starred actor Anil Kapoor, who incidentally plays opposite Dutt as *Musafir*’s lead protagonist¹²⁵.

Another key self-reflexive function in Bollywood cinema is the film within a film scenario. Lead characters are often portrayed as struggling actors attempting to break into the Bollywood industry (*36 China Town*, *Mast*, *Lucky By Chance*). The films of contemporary director, producer and auteur Ram Gopal Varma are perhaps most well-known for their narratives set in the filmmaking world. Several of Varma’s most successful film projects deal with film-within-film scenarios: *Mast* (focusing on a young boy’s obsession over a film actress), *Rangeela* (a love triangle set in the backdrop of the Hindi film industry), *Company* (involving underworld money laundering through film production), *Satya* (the female lead plays an aspiring actress), *Naach* (portraying a wannabe

¹²⁵For example, references are made to one of the most famous films of Kapoor’s early career, *Ram Lakhan* (1989).

Bollywood dance choreographer), *Sarkar* (one of the key villains is a corrupt film producer) and *Darna Zaroori Hai* (two of its short stories centre around a member of the film audience, an aspiring actress and a film director)¹²⁶.

Self-commentary is also made effective in contemporary Bollywood through different modes of narration. Song sequences too will now increasingly act as extra-diegetic commentary, reflecting on the film's story or foretelling events to come. For example, during a climactic cliff-hanger moment in *Don: The Chase Begins*, the song *Aaj ki raat* [Tonight] is shot with the film's key characters facing the camera/audience and asking them "*Aaj ki raat hona hai kya?* [What is going to happen tonight?]"'. What's more, one verse in the song, sung by the anti-hero Don, blatantly hints at the plot-twist at the end of the film¹²⁷. Several recent films have featured narrator-figures, who will interrupt the narrative in order to interact with the audience and comment on the characters and action. Two contemporary examples of this include India's Oscar entry for 2006 *Paheli* (in which two Rajasthani puppets comment on the story-action throughout the film) and the *When Harry Met Sally* inspired *Hum Tum* (where the film story and themes are reflected upon by two cartoon characters from a comic book).



Figure 19: Cartoon characters *Hum Tum* and *Paheli*'s Rajasthani puppets narrate and reflect on the film's narrative and themes

¹²⁶ Some of Varma's reflexive work that I have listed here precedes the contemporary period I am investigating, and it is clear that certain kinds of self-reflexivity manifest earlier on in Bollywood's film history. However, again, what I wish to stress here is that there is a significantly heightened and concentrated use of self-reflexive devices in the film industry's post-millennium era.

¹²⁷ Don sings about his getaway plan to 'quietly sneak away' with his girlfriend under everyone's noses.

Furthermore, in Bollywood it is not uncommon for actors to step outside their roles and look at, talk to, and interact with the audience. In Karan Johar's New York based *KHNNH*, film extras stop and face the camera to indicate what day it is in the count down to the lead characters Rohit and Naina falling in love¹²⁸. Movie star personas are also similarly played on within the film. At the start of the film, Shah Rukh Khan's character is given a somewhat exaggerated tongue-in-cheek introduction – a dramatic fanfare, a *Titanic* style 'king of the world' pose as his ferry approaches New York city, and the juxtaposed shots of other characters' desperate prayers for a saviour-like hero to come along. This moment signals to the audience, whose attention is drawn to the casting of Bollywood's most famous lead actor in an archetypal heroic role. They are reminded of their own investment and submissive pleasures rooted in the Bollywood star system¹²⁹. As a final example, the film's closing song sequence explicitly situates the film as part of the Yash Johar Production Company lineage (Dharma productions) as the sequence's female lead is occasionally replaced by momentary cameos of actresses Kajol and Rani Mukherjee, who both appear in the company's previous hit films: Rani Mukherjee in *K3G* and *K2H2*, and Kajol in *K2H2* and *DDLJ*.

Amongst all the various self-reflexive techniques employed in Bollywood film, self-parody is perhaps the most dominant. Most interestingly, as Harries comments, parody itself operates with the postmodern potential to *reinforce* and *counteract* the film canons and genres it works within: 'As parodies arrive to scavenge worn-out conventions and their accompanying over predictability, some critics argue that this signals the end of the tradition and its approaching moment of extinction' (Harries: 123). Thus when looking at Bollywood self-parody (and indeed when considering the contemporary Indian remake in general) it is important to bear this self-destructive potential in mind. Admittedly, the above examples of continuous self-reflexivity may be disputed as offering nothing beyond visual gags, directorial in-jokes, or brief moments indulging and evoking audience cinephilia. However, I would argue that a closer look at such cinematic moments can reveal more complex ways in which self-reflexivity functions in these films. In order to explore this complexity and investigate the importance of self-parody as a valuable feature of Bollywood text, I will conduct an in-depth analysis of a key song sequence from one of contemporary Bollywood cinema's most acclaimed films.

Fahran Akhtar's new generation film *Dil Chahta Hai* (hereon *DCH*) has been regarded as a milestone in popular Indian cinema and in many ways marks the beginning of what I have proposed to be a significant shift in contemporary Bollywood film production. As Rachel Dwyer notes in *100 Bollywood films*, *DCH* touches new ground in a multiplicity of ways – its slick look, its

¹²⁸For example, in one scene, a man calling for a taxi faces the camera and shouts "Day 1". This technique of creating a calendar through visual cues continues throughout the scene. A business man, a student, a waiter, and a passer by all stop to reflect on and punctuate the storyline.

¹²⁹These subtle hints at Khan's iconic celebrity status are clearly abundant as demonstrated in *Om Shanti Om* and discussed further in the following chapter.

updated representations of modern day youth with stylish haircuts and designer clothes, its global international settings (Australia, Goa), and its deeper exploration of character relationships (Dwyer: 71-72). But despite deserving much credit for its fresh take on love in the modern age (the film as a whole is not a remake), *DCH* cannot be associated with a return to sophisticated realism and originality in mainstream Indian cinema either. Although its script and story is largely original, *DCH* still exhibits key elements of postmodern imitation in cinema, this time through one of its most popular song sequences entitled *Woh ladbki hai kahan?* [*Where is that girl?*].

In the song sequence, protagonists Sameer (Saif Ali Khan) and Pooja (Sonali Kulkarni) walk into a Hindi cinema theatre and pass a poster, reading the title of a pseudo-movie called *Woh Ladkhi hai kahan*. We are allowed a quick glance at the poster's lead hero and heroine, who look uncannily familiar (1). Following a cut to the auditorium interior, we are presented with a point of view shot of a blank cinema screen from the upper balcony (2). As the 'movie on the screen' begins, the camera cuts between what is on the 'screen' and reflects back to catch the expressions of Sameer, Pooja, and the auditorium 'audience' as they watch (3). The song sequence on the 'screen' first appears as a black-and-white homage to 50's Hindi cinema (4), perhaps most directly quoting Guru Dutt and Mala Sinha's roles in *Pyaasa* [1957]). What's more, the lead performers in this parodic scene are played by none other than Khan and Kulkarni (5). The camera cuts to Sameer and Pooja in the auditorium, who look at each other in shock, recognising none but themselves in the film (6). After a moment of bewilderment, the two decide to submit to this fantasy and begin to laugh at the screen (7). The second verse of the song switches to a parody of 60s to early 70s Bollywood cinema, accompanied by appropriately amateurish special effects of the period: a studio-set car supported by a moving-scenery backdrop, with several film extras on bicycles implausibly riding along beside it. The scene's lead singers (the 'on-screen' Sameer and Pooja) comically stand up and dance inside the car, rarely looking ahead in a driving pose, and even sit on the bonnet whilst the car is supposedly moving (8). The final section of the song ends with a parody of 90's Bollywood conventions. The 'screen' Pooja appears as an exaggerated version of popular actress Madhuri Dixit, supporting a badly wrapped chiffon sari and a false-looking wig. Her performance is deliberately unconvincing, melodramatic to the point of absurdity, and her dance movements are staged as extremely tongue-in-cheek clownish convulsions (9). In the last few lines of the song, the camera cuts back to the auditorium 'audience', where the real Sameer and Pooja are now standing up singing to each other (10). Suddenly the 'audience' in the auditorium around them also bursts into dance, mimicking the hand-gestures of the goofy 'on-screen' choreography (11). The scene ends with a return to the point of view shot of the auditorium cinema 'screen', which now reads: '*The Beginning*' (12).



Figure 20: *Wo Ladhki Hai Kahan*, a parodic journey through popular Hindi cinema in the 1950's, 1960's and 1980's

On one level, this sequence can be conceived of as a moment of light-hearted relief and amusement, a comic interval serving as a break from the more serious and dramatically charged scenes which directly precede it in the film narrative. On another level however, the kind of pleasure being offered to the audience in this scene is far more complex than we may think. What can we make of this scene, considering that this film largely chooses to veer away from stereotypical old-fashioned Bollywood conventions? Is this Akhtar paying homage, or trying to indicate the staleness and artificiality of the kind of Bollywood films that the audience would usually find pleasure in (in which case, this sequence is potentially quite damaging to traditional Bollywood cinema)? The scene stands apart from the film's other song sequences, which depart from familiar conventions, though *not* always through the eye of realism (for example, one of the film's equally fantastical song sequences is situated inside a painting – including smudged images, over-enhanced colours, high exposures, and CGI graphics of jumping dolphins). Thus, although it may be more 'real' than the traditional Bollywood masala film in one sense, *DCH* often explodes into multiple modes of existence – the real, the cinematic, the symbolic, the hyperreal.

The *Woh Ladki Hai kahan* sequence consists of a multiplicity of self-reflexive moments. The film text sets its own characters up and instigates audience pleasure through the following self-reflexive techniques: dramatic irony [a film poster hints at what is to come (1)] whereby the viewer's

voyeuristic gaze and position as spectator is reaffirmed if not *doubled* as the act of cinema-going becomes part of the story-subject. The real world and film world overlap or align [point of view shot inside auditorium (2)]. Much like Pooja and Sameer, we the spectators see ourselves mirrored in this scene and we read our own pleasures in the faces of the diegetic 'audience' [Shot of 'audience' in auditorium (3)]. The film text acknowledges and evokes its own historical roots [1950's black and white film parody (4)]. Casting, role play and performativity are exposed and lines are drawn between the lovers on the 'screen' and the characters in the diegesis. Desires are paralleled and transferred from spectator to the on-screen characters, and from the on-screen characters to the fantasy personas on the diegetic 'screen' [film watchers Sameer/Khan and Pooja/Kulkarni take on fantasy personas (5)]. Pooja and Sameer register and respond to their own artificiality whilst we, the spectators, indulge in seeing their functionality as the source of light comedy and 'innocent love' openly addressed in the film and mockingly projected back at them in exaggerated form [Pooja and Sameer see themselves 'on-screen' (6) and (7)]. Bollywood cinema mocks (perhaps even invalidates) its own form and conventions [Amateur 60s/70s film set (8)] and the performativity and staged femininity of the Bollywood heroine is mocked [Pooja's exaggerated poses as a 90's heroine (9)]. The levels of reality between Sameer and Pooja's world and the 'on-screen' world are now entirely fused. This final harmonisation of 'on-screen' fantasy and diegetic reality produces both audience pleasure and a kind of narrative or textual disorientation [Sameer and Pooja sing the final lines of the song to each other in the auditorium (10)]. We the audience are forced to register our own emotional investment, pleasure, and submersion in the film action as it is played out before us by our on-screen mirror doubles [the on-screen 'audience' start to dance to the music (11)]. The film inverts its own traditional conventions through paratextuality¹³⁰ and thus addresses its function as storyteller [at the end of the song sequence, the diegetic 'screen' reads *The Beginning* instead of *The End* to highlight the start of Sameer and Pooja's love story (12)]. Not only is the characters' fictionality being played with and exposed, but also the film world's fictionality (verisimilitude is explicitly denied), the performativity of the actors, Bollywood's film style, and the audience themselves who are receiving pleasure from watching at that moment.

DCH switches between the fantastical and the conventional, the diegetic and the extra-diegetic. It simultaneously identifies with and undermines its filmic conventions, its heritage, and its textuality, offering an altogether unique and innovative form of audience viewing pleasure. The film thus confirms Harries' earlier argument concerning film parody's potential to question and/or deconstruct established norms. Though it may be too harsh to declare Bollywood an elimination target for Akhtar in this sequence, the film crucially succeeds in pushing the cinema off a tangent and 'maiming it with a smile' (Harries: 123). As lead characters Akash, Sameer and Sid (somewhat ironically) exclaim in the film's opening song sequence: *hum hai nabe, andaaz kyun ho purana?* [*We are*

¹³⁰ The term refers to intertextual referencing via a film's graphic or title credits. (See Genette cited in Harries: 29).

new, so why should our style be old?]. One answer to this question lies in the fact that Bollywood, in true postmodern style, has come to recognise its potential to break new ground, to be creative, and to innovate itself through recycling the past.

Action movies, identity and the ‘cool’ aesthetic in *Kaante*

The action movie is a genre that has remained consistent in popularity in Bombay cinema since the 1970s, but it has also transformed significantly in the past decade (see Vitali, 2008). Increased film budgets have led to evermore daring stunts, giant rigged explosions and Bond-like gadgets courtesy of the industry’s financial structural shifts. Motivated by the increase in Indian computer effects studios and the industry’s growing international exchanges, the cinema has begun to invest heavily in martial arts choreography training by Hong Kong experts (where stars are put under tougher fitness regimes) as well as digital pyrotechnics, wire-work and green screen technology, all of which have contributed to the cinema’s aforementioned technorealism. However, as Valentina Vitali has noted regarding her study of changes in the contemporary Hindi action film, the predominance of modern technology in such films is rather redundant. Technology has a less functional purpose and instead is there to serve the aesthetics and mise-en-scene. Vitali also makes a similar point about the male body in these newer films, which is less ‘acrobatic’ and ‘agile’ than in earlier eras. Instead, the actor’s body is ‘representative’ – its ‘unreal plasticity’ is now a ‘symbol of luxury and leisure’. Vitali argues that technorealism has suppressed the acrobatics and energy of fight scenes. The action choreography is ‘cut to the bone because each action sequence relies primarily on a combination of digital manipulation and jump-cuts’ (240). As a result, physical movements of the actors are ‘discontinuous’ and ‘reduced to a few crucial temporal fragments... for the sake of brevity’ (241) whilst this technical style ‘enhances the visual impressions of speed’ and an ‘emphatic, even aggressive mode of address’ (ibid). The experience for spectators in such moments is thus a kind of ‘sensory overload’ resulting in anaesthesia (a numbing of the senses) towards the visual stimuli.¹³¹ Vitali’s somewhat deterministic formulation of the contemporary Bollywood action film genre ultimately sees it as built around the luxury goods it advertises. So deeply is it driven by economic pressures that film sponsorship now dictates this cinema’s modes of operation.

Having dispersed comfortably across a variety of masculine sub-genres (revenge, heist, gangster, thriller, adventure, sci-fi, war, buddy), the Bollywood action movie presents itself as perhaps the most faithful disciple of the Bollywood-Hollywood remake. Within the past decade, a significant portion of A-list action movies have been moulded around Hollywood films and conventions. Films such as the *Dhoom* franchise, *Main Hoon Na*, *Fight Club: Members Only*, *Kaante*, *Ek Ajnabee*, *Chocolate*, *Dus*, *Zinda* and *Don: The Chase Begins* do not only have their popularity in common as

¹³¹ The image sequences of these films are linked with the sensory effects and subliminal techniques of advertising.

major box-office releases, but also the fact that each of them has been created with a high concentration of Hollywood/foreign film aesthetics – in some cases abandoning traditional Bollywood conventions altogether. For example, in *Zinda* song sequences are absent and almost every frame set-up and camera shot endeavours to carefully duplicate the Korean original. As a result, the entire film text is edited and stitched together with an experimental style unfamiliar to popular Indian cinema. *Zinda*, as shot-for-shot remake,¹³² is an extreme example of Bollywood cinema's gradual surrender to foreign cinematic styles and techniques at the expense of its own generic identity – an identity which is increasingly problematised and repeatedly put to question. When judged by the generic definitions of Bollywood currently available to us (as discussed in chapter two), were it not for its Indian lead characters and Hindi dialogue, *Zinda* could cease to possess any of the traits allowing it to register as a conventional product of popular Indian cinema. Considering that films such as *Zinda* do not openly acknowledge themselves as remakes, and since a large portion of the viewing public in India may have little or no knowledge of *Oldboy*'s existence, such films can easily pass off as products of the new style of contemporary Bollywood. As Andrew Willis has noted: 'the first thing we may watch will be the remake so the chronological wires are crossed. The remake is us taking a look at the original before we've seen it. Before we've seen it we are analysing it' (Willis: 147). Thus here, the styles and techniques of foreign cinema can become part of Indian cinema's own identity. For Bollywood and its audience, the cross-cultural remake can paradoxically be taken and used to indicate or advocate change, innovation, and progression within the Indian film industry. Furthermore, as the remake 'neutralises the otherness of the foreign film' (Willis: 149), it also estranges itself from its own conventions, creating an altogether unusual kind of hybrid text. But regardless of how much Bollywood remakes may 'steal' from outside sources or stray from their own conventions, they cannot be experienced or labelled as foreign, Western or non-Indian productions. Their method of appropriation and resulting hybridity is still a product of (and tied to) Bollywood's unique film language. Current definitions of Bollywood cinema have yet to accommodate this particular variety of hybrid films, but a space and name for such films is imperative – particularly when we consider their normalisation, proliferation and increasing popularity with in-land audiences.

¹³² It is important to stress here that *Zinda* does not mirror the camera work of its original as perfectly as, for example, Gus Van Sant's 1998 remake of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*. What's more, even in its moments of closest replication there is an irrefutable difference in emotional tone and pacing – something which I will address at the end of the chapter.



Figure 21: *Oldboy* (above) and its alleged ‘shot-for-shot’ remake *Zinda* (below)

Bollywood-Hollywood remakes are schizophrenic by nature. They lack a fixed identity, and this may explain why many Westerners (or anyone possessing a certain level of global cultural capital) might find watching them an unsettling, even uncanny experience. In many cases, the effect of borrowing from Western cinematic conventions becomes an almost violent act. Once its familiar traits have been used, exposed and exaggerated, the original no longer remains pure. As with Benjamin’s account of mechanical reproduction, the original loses its soul and even its affectivity in relation to its aesthetic allure. For example, in his remake of *Reservoir Dogs*, director Sanjay Gupta chooses to take an archetypal American low-budget independent film and present it as a Bollywood film through using stylistic techniques better accustomed to a Hollywood blockbuster. However, these Hollywood conventions are unable to function and achieve effect customarily when applied to a story originally presented as a low-key independent cult film and subjected to a semi-Bollywood regime of story-telling. Though the film still adheres to the song-sequence formula, its musical sequences are distorted via the film’s Western cinematic style. For example, the song *Mahi Ve* [*My Beloved*] is sung in traditional Punjabi-Urdu style, yet presented in the manner of an MTV pop video (shot in an L.A. night club), thus contradicting and undermining the folk song music

track it accompanies. In *Kaante's* song sequences, conventional Bollywood shots of hip-swinging Indian women in traditional outfits are exchanged for close-up shots of the bottoms of multi-racial dancers in tight hot pants, whilst images of women dancing sexually with other women or muscular black men almost subliminally flash onto the screen. The effect of merging traditional folk songs and Bollywood choreography with a glamorised, carefree and controversial American lifestyle (striptease and drinking culture) is extremely disorientating – producing a hybrid cinematic style that deviates from both Western and traditional Indian modes of filmmaking.

Kaante's opening title sequence also works to exploit certain cinematic conventions. The sequence resembles the famous *Reservoir Dogs* shot of a pack of black suited men walking in slow motion – only this time, the scene is further dramatised by large bold green title credits that flash onto the screen in Hollywood blockbuster style. A dramatic, fast paced action movie-style soundtrack is laid over the image of the protagonists who are dressed in designer sunglasses, suits and leather jackets, wearing twinkling gold jewellery, swinging chains, smoking cigarettes and chewing gum in slow motion. This two minute sequence uses the same shots repeatedly, to an extent that the scene eventually becomes almost monotonous. This moment of cinematic quotation can be read on two levels – firstly as an act of pastiche simply for the sake of heightening dramatic action via an aesthetic of “American coolness”, or secondly, as a moment of semi-parodic play (humour aside) with Hollywood’s own forms of dramatic stylisation.



Figure 22: Exploiting Hollywood conventions: *Kaante's* opening sequence

The Indian cool aesthetic as problematic

As I have already discussed in chapter two with reference to the critical reception of 1990s Bollywood films, NRI and non-Indian audiences, as well as Western critics, have often found Bollywood's attempts to mimic Hollywood's American coolness difficult to accept, often rejecting them as cringe-worthy and unconvincing. Admittedly, with its recent increase in film budgets and technical advancements, contemporary Bollywood's ability to appropriate this aspect of American cinema has somewhat improved. Nevertheless, even in these later films there appears to be a major flaw in what I would call the 'Indian cool' aesthetic, which I think is largely a result of a fundamental clash or friction between the masculine representational codes used in Bollywood and Hollywood film texts. The appropriation of American 'coolness' in the contemporary Bollywood action film is perhaps the genre's most unflattering and off-putting attribute, particularly for the non-Indian Western spectator. There often seems to be an imbalance or inconsistency in the way the contemporary Bollywood text constructs its Hindi male leads as Hollywood-like heroes. On the one hand they are cigarette smoking, independent, free-spirited and indestructible individuals with a care-free attitude. They are kitted-up on powerful motorbikes with their long hair and leather jacket blowing in the wind – yet they will also preach about religious superstitions, be tied to their family honour and culture, and sing, dance and go soft around women¹³³. The problem thus lies with the 'masculine sensationalism' of contemporary Bollywood cinema. Heroic men often express their emotions so extremely that they verge on melodrama and thus femininity, whether crying at the loss of a loved one, shouting with a vow for vengeance at an enemy, or getting carried away in a love song dance number. Of course, this has always to some extent been a difficulty with popular Hindi song and dance films (such as those of the 1970s Angry man era), but I believe the problem has become more complex in post-millennium Indian films which now heavily model themselves specifically on the testosterone-driven machismo of contemporary Hollywood cinema.

¹³³For example, action film *Kaante* is heavily criticized for its 'syrupy sentiment'. See its *Sight and Sound* review (Unauthorred, 2003).

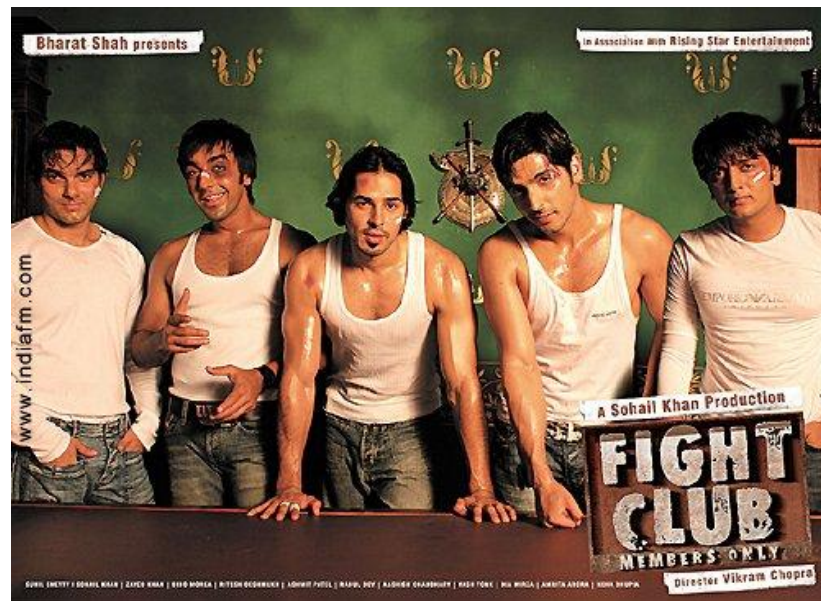


Figure 23: *Fight Club: Member's Only*, Indian 'cool' aesthetics and masculinity in contemporary Bollywood

In the contemporary Bollywood-Hollywood remake it is often the technical style of a film (editing, mise-en-scene, music, song lyrics) that dictates the 'coolness' of a character to the audience rather than the narrative. For example, in both *Fight Club: Members Only* and *Dhoom*, the male lead's coolness is not so much constructed through witty dialogue, acts of bravery or narrative scenarios as through flashy title credits, dramatic music, MTV-style editing and a costume and make-up modelled on the persona of Tom Cruise in the *Mission: Impossible* trilogy. In some instances, such as in *Fight Club: Members Only*, there is very little narrative or contextual evidence of a character's masculine-heroic traits (bravery, strength, courage etc.). We are instead left to acknowledge this purely through the character's visual style (leather jackets, designer clothes, sun glasses, oiled muscles) and the technical façade surrounding him (obtrusive electric guitar music and beating drums, excessive slow motion effects, frantic MTV cutting and repeated extreme close-ups). What's more, with regards to the use of dialogue, American lingo is often incorporated into the script to assist the film character's 'cool' image. However, when spoken by the male lead, American terms are often mispronounced with a noticeably Hindi accent or misplaced within the wrong context, almost to the effect of bad caricature. This issue of the 'Indian cool' aesthetic could therefore be seen as another key reason for Bollywood cinema's failure to attract international audiences as it mimics and *mutates* certain familiar Hollywood gender codes. Contemporary Bollywood produces an altogether confused and inconsistent form of masculinity because the Western modes of gender representation it chooses to pastiche fundamentally clash with or counteract its own cinematic language.

***Kaante*: Exposing Bollywood conventions**

Returning to my discussion of the Bollywood-Hollywood remake as a parodic-exposé of Hollywood conventions, one can find further examples of how this is effectively achieved through *Kaante*. For example, the very techniques that mainstream American films would use to disguise the text-as-construct (such as the effacement of the camera), *Kaante* uses to bring artistic construct to the fore. For example, the bank robbery shoot-out scene between the Indian criminal gang and the L.A. cops is shot in a style familiar to the Hollywood action blockbuster (slow motion gun-play, loud rapid gun-fire, fast-paced action music, high-rigged explosions). However, each element of this style, from the sound of gunfire to explosions and plausibility of stunts, is exaggerated.¹³⁴ The bank shoot-out sequence is padded with repetitively recycled shots and sound effects lasting so long that the impact of the action sequence is lost and reduced almost to a parody of the style itself. What's more, the climactic scene of the bank robbery consists of cameras positioned everywhere but at eye level. Several different images overlap and occupy the frame at one time. Diagonal tilts, rapid zooms and distorted camera angles are used to follow the action, as well as several shots taken at floor level, inviting characters to jump directly over the camera. Once again the effect is not of realism, but of a drawing attention to the stylistic techniques of the action movie. Furthermore, during a gang meeting on a building rooftop, the use of a handheld camera (a cinematic tool usually used to create a sense of realism) is instead seemingly deliberately used out of context and purely for aesthetic purposes.¹³⁵ The same can be said of the use of jump cuts when one of the lead characters, Andy, is taken into police custody at the start of the film. There are no narrative breaks created by such a technique to leave spectators in suspense. Instead, the scene (which in real-time lasts under a minute) uses four jump cuts which interrupt the moment of Andy being held by the police to being pushed into a police car. Thus again this cinematic technique is used purely for visual effect. The use of slow motion shots, hand-held cameras, and jump-cutting is often misplaced and so excessive that these techniques effectively assert the unreality of the text and create a Brechtian distancing-like effect between spectator and text.

When viewed at surface level, *Kaante* can appear as merely a cheapened blank pastiche of its acclaimed pseudo-original (which is itself a remake of Ringo Lam's 1987 film *City on Fire*). But at a deeper level, one can also find opportunity for its critical appreciation. By playing with Quentin Tarantino's trademark 'coolness' in such a way, *Kaante* becomes a mocking caricature. As the film text magnifies and exploits its modes of presentation, it exposes itself as a cinematic construct for the sake of spectacle and sensationalism. In *Kaante* we witness independent American cinema

¹³⁴At one point in the film, the audience is presented with an assortment of over 35 consecutive shots of guns being seamlessly loaded and fired at random.

¹³⁵The scene lacks the tension or heightened action that would normally require such a shot; instead it is used to follow the six protagonists as they engage in friendly banter.

collapse into Bollywood, which effectively collapses into Hollywood, until it soon becomes difficult to distinguish between the opposing styles. Once again, as argued in the case of *Abhay*, this film remake's subversive and hybrid tendencies make it difficult to simply shoe-horn it into film categories bound by nation or status as run-of-the-mill conventional Indian cinema.

Hijacking Hollywood: dissolving American identity and reverse colonialism

Kaante is also interesting with regards to how it constructs Western identity. Despite being entirely set in Los Angeles, the film appears to refuse any accurate portrayal of America. The L.A. portrayed in this Bollywood remake is an America without Americans. It is never quite allowed to represent itself as a 'real' place with 'real' American people. Cityscape shots of L.A. consist of empty skyscrapers and deserted office blocks. American extras often have their backs to the camera, are blurred out entirely, or appear as caricatures – such as a bald, fat, tattooed, thuggish American drug dealer with a comic moustache who appears at the start of the film. Ironically, despite this absence of authentic White American characters, *Kaante* remains extremely Americanised through its Indian actors and lead protagonists who are set up to represent American-ness more genuinely in the film: they speak and dress American, they effortlessly occupy an American lifestyle, and in effect, they simultaneously *overwrite* authentic American-ness in the process.

Rather than Otherising the West and placing it in *opposition* to Indian-ness, in *Kaante* American identity and Hollywood are hijacked and swallowed up by Bollywood in a process of 'reverse-colonialism'. Through such films, India fulfils a secret fantasy of switching places with its 'white-man' coloniser. In many contemporary Bollywood films, it is now often the Indians who teach the Westerners how to live, the Indians who represent and evoke the 'American cool', the Indians who run American businesses, and the Indians who are called to rescue the West from external threats. The sheer excess of appropriating Hollywood aesthetics in such a way can end up weakening their very impact and power. Cross-cultural copycatting allows Western power to be 'translated' or transferred into the Indian context (Dudrah, 2006: 144). Thus, as Thomas Leitch comments: "The true remake admires its original so much it wants to annihilate it" (Leitch cited in Mazdon: 4). The intent and process here is almost counter-cinematic, but unlike the avant-garde work of Jean Luc Godard, such a technique is not intended to be as destructive or dissatisfying for the audience (and is therefore relatively unnoticed and under appreciated).

Some have argued that films like *Kaante* mark the end of Bollywood cinema, claiming that it has sold itself to the West. However, I believe the cinema's shift is not towards Hollywood but towards a new globalised postmodern cinema aesthetic. Such films belong to a cinema that is not quite itself (Indian) or its Other (Western). Thus the Bollywood-Hollywood remake, with its lost or

fragmented identity, becomes a classic case for what Ross Chambers (1990) describes as the 'remake alter-ego':

The [remake] text defines itself by defining an intertext as that which it is not; and the text defines itself as 'text', in similarly negative fashion, against its own discourse, with which it should not be identified. In each case then, no positive term can be identified: we can say only that the text is not its 'alter-ego', it is *not not-I*, whether 'not-I' is the intertext against which the text is defining itself, or the discourse that traverses it and from which it is 'distanced' (Chambers: 143).

Kaante's cross-cultural referencing is an example of Bollywood endorsing the 'naïve confusion' of American culture as a universal concern (Forrest and Koos, 2002: 28). However, as Richard Dyer notes with regards to cinematic pastiche: 'Closeness to the forms of the colonising culture may feel perilously like voluntarily ceding to its previously imposed authority, yet the act of pastiching is also always an affirmation of the position of the pasticheur ... it may form part of a politics of undermining and overthrow or also one of consolation' (Dyer: 157). McFarlane and Dudrah have both also attempted to determine the outcome of this remake rhetoric. From McFarlane's perspective, the sheer excess of appropriating Hollywood/American aesthetics in this way concurrently weakens their impact, influence and power (McFarlane: 145), whilst for Dudrah, Homi Bhabha's notion of 'cultural mimicry' can be applied to further explain Bollywood's critical engagement with Western mainstream modes of filmmaking. In mimicking the Western-Other, the Other's colonial authority is visualised, disrupted and unmasked. Dudrah sees this act of copycatting as a strategy in which Western difference and power can be 'translated' into the Indian context (Dudrah: 144). In *Kaante*, the Indian film industry's fantasy of 'being Hollywood' is realised in order to eliminate its Western superior. This form of mimicry is thus a symptom of the remake's ambivalent feelings of adoration and abhorrence towards its predecessor – its intimacy and distancing, valorisation and denial, and ultimately, its *disavowal* of its counterpart (see Leitch in Forrest and Koos: 53).

As Mira Reym Binford rightfully comments, Bollywood has indeed been influenced by American mainstream cinema, but such an 'effectively indigenised form [also] functions on its own terms, continuing to absorb and *transform* the foreign fertilizer fed to it' (Binford, 1998: 82)¹³⁶. *Kaante* becomes one of the best examples of a postmodern Bollywood cinematic movement which 'interrogates the status quo of cinema' (Virdi, 2003: 211). The film illustrates contemporary Bollywood's potential to be critically evaluative not only of itself, but also other forms of dominant cinema. Ironically it seems that the very cinema which Western critics and audiences still consider

¹³⁶Emphasis added.

to be too exclusive or different can in fact provide an interesting commentary on universalised modes of cinematic presentation. By studying hybrid remakes like *Kaante*, we can think beyond criticisms of contemporary Bollywood texts as simply “flawed” filmmaking and instead embrace this fragmented mess of texts as enabling us to view Hollywood (and Bollywood) cinematic techniques in a new and *critical* light.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown how intrinsic remaking, repetition, intertextuality and reflexivity are to Indian filmmaking, and therefore why they require more critical attention in Indian film studies. Popular Indian cinema has always been engaged in cultural borrowing and textual appropriation. However, through my analysis of newer Bollywood texts, we can see that contemporary Bollywood is utilising these strategies more consciously, critically and progressively. Remaking and intertextuality (in their many forms) have moved from being occasional devices used intermittently for the sake of novelty, and instead now serve as signature characteristics of Bollywood filmmaking in the twenty-first century (prevalent, though by no means ubiquitous). Remaking is without doubt a dominant phenomenon of contemporary Bollywood cinema.

The very fact that Bollywood is not held back by copyright laws has allowed the remake and cross-cultural referencing to flourish in India. The attraction to cross-cultural referencing is more a result of the Indian consumer and film industry becoming more globalised. The majority of film remakes I have identified through my research appear post-millennium and have been produced as high-concept productions with A-list stars and generous financial backing. Many of these films have been promoted and distributed through global marketing and, at the very least, produced with the *expectation* of high box office returns.

There are so many arbitrary moments of remaking within contemporary Indian cinema that it is difficult to account for all of these myriad processes here. Furthermore, the degree to which a text borrows and remakes another will vary from film to film. Nevertheless, it is clear from the selection of remakes I have explored that many of these newer films have an affinity towards certain modes of referencing. Pre-2000 Bollywood-Hollywood remakes may have predominantly tended to borrow and ‘Indianize’ elements of the narrative, plot and storyline of the original work (as noted by Nayar and Ganti, and as seen in the earlier films of Vikram Bhatt) but those of the 2000 decade are more so inclined towards pastiche, parody and mimicking the visual style of other texts. Even if its story may remain more or less intact when remade, the foreign-original text may now alter or readjust the visual dynamics of Hindi film (as in the case of *Zinda*). A Bollywood film may have an original script, yet still blatantly evoke films like *The Matrix* or *Mission: Impossible* through its visual iconography and coding.

Bollywood's recent urge to remake films can primarily be explained through issues of accessibility and translation. As Bazin explains, the adaptation text as 'digest' makes its original more accessible to its audience not by simplifying it, but by presenting it through a different mode of *expression*. In Bollywood's case, the remake text alters the film lingo to better suit the Indian audience. It is, as Bazin crudely describes the process of adaptation, 'as if the aesthetic fat, differently emulsified, were better tolerated by the consumer's mind' (Bazin: 26). But it is not enough to assume that this need for the 'digestion' of Western texts by Bollywood is a simple issue of language or cultural incoherencies (although, no doubt this would be the argument of many a sociologist). Rather, I believe that Bollywood remakes have sprung from the Indian audience's need for different methods of enunciation i.e. figural excess providing greater levels of emotion and sensation, as well as their growing demand for novelty. In the case of the former, there appears to be a need to transfer what is literal into the figural as images and symbolism elicit more pleasure than merely discursive storytelling. In the case of the latter, the experimentalism and commercial success of new remakes may be a sign of the coming-of-age of the modernised, globalised, multiplex-going Indian cinema audience. Filmmakers have begun to realise that their audience is becoming more tolerant of (or attracted by) Westernised iconography and conventions,¹³⁷ unlike in the past where these would be the first things to be changed and considered alienating and inappropriate (see Ganti, 2002). I would therefore assert that foreign texts are now less in need of 'Indianization' in the way that Ganti suggested of 1990s Bollywood cinema. Rather than seeing remaking as purely a process of reactionary filmmaking (keeping it all "Indian"), I suggest that it can also doubly serve as a way of *liberating* Bollywood cinema and its audiences.

Of course, adjustments to an original text's storyline do still occur and often in order to accommodate Indian ethics and censorship¹³⁸. In some senses, Bollywood can never justifiably remake other texts due to its deep rooted differences in terms of its film language, but this goes even further to support the fact that these films should rarely be seen as plagiarisms but rather reinventions. One could argue that a film such as Arthur Penn's *Bonny and Clyde* can never be remade in Bollywood due to the fundamental sensibilities which Indian cinema and its audience rely upon: the film cannot be without colour, dishonest and sinful heroes must repent, even the anti-heroes' motives must be morally justified, and the favoured protagonists must live. Thus, in *Bunty aur Babli*, the realist and gritty style that lay at Penn's original text's core is transformed into a colourful tongue-in-cheek Rom-Com caper, to the extent at that the film bears little or no resemblance to its original and becomes an as-good-as-original in its own right. As Horton and

¹³⁷The fact that Bollywood films now incorporate non-chronological narratives, as in box office hits like *Chocolate*, *Saatiya* and *Ghajini* further confirms this new level of tolerance.

¹³⁸As in the case of *Zinda*, where the oedipal-twist ending of *Oldboy*, seen as too problematic, is replaced with a portrayal of the 'immoral' Bangkok virgin sex trade.

McDougal observe, film remakes ‘constitute a particular territory existing somewhere between unabashed larceny and subtle originality’ and even ‘problematize the very notion of originality’ (Horton and McDougal: 4). With this in mind, there is *always* a sense of failure that accompanies the Bollywood-Hollywood remake.

Looking over my list of contemporary Bollywood remakes, we can see a pattern of key attributes that provide further reasons for the recent boom in cross-cultural remakes in addition to those mentioned above. Many of the original films carry some form of critical credibility in the West, either as award winners (*Reservoir Dogs*, *Oldboy*, *The Miracle Worker*, *The Godfather*) or much talked about repeat-view-friendly cult movies (*Fight Club*). Many of the referenced texts have also been celebrated for their shock plot-twists (*The Usual Suspects*, *What Lies Beneath*, *Matchstick Men*, *U-Turn*, *The Gift*). These are all features in short supply in an industry that has a reputation for struggling to commit to pre-scripted film production. Furthermore, many of these remade films borrow from supernatural thrillers (*Powder*, *The Gift*), Horrors (*The Ring*, *The Eye*) or the sci-fi superhero film (*E.T.*, *Superman*, *The Matrix*, *Daredevil*), suggesting that Bollywood is using remaking as a way of pushing itself towards catering for genres that are not as readily or easily produced through its traditional filmmaking formula¹³⁹. I have also discussed how another attraction to sourcing Hollywood texts lies in the masculine-orientated stories and perspectives they offer, which perhaps the usual masala melodrama cannot fulfil. Film remakes like *Kaante*, *Fight Club: Members Only*, *Zinda*, *Ek Ajnabee* and *Sarkar* all borrow from texts which focus on male characters. Each of these films evoke masculine styles and sensibilities and more noticeably absent or redundant female characters. Male comrades, machismo, revenge, repentance, alcoholism, patriarchal politics, danger, daringness, father-son relationships and betrayal are the more central themes of these films. This is not to suggest that movie remaking is purely a masculine field in Bollywood¹⁴⁰ but that it is used in abundance when producing male-orientated genres.

There is also a particular pleasure and gratification to be found in the act or experience of cross-cultural translation itself. This unique pleasure is exemplified through the prior examples of reverse colonialism via cultural mimicry, and through the fact that Indian audiences thrive on seeing Bollywood film personas hybridise with those in the West. They enjoy seeing Amitabh Bachchan as Marlon Brando (*Sarkar*), Shah Rukh Khan as Tom Cruise (*Main Hoon Na*), or Hrithik Roshan as Batman (*Krrish*). Just as Western spectators superimpose their faces onto their on-screen heroes in the theatre auditorium, Indian audiences doubly enjoy viewing the superimposition of their national heroes onto global iconic heroes. Considering this form of cinematic hybridisation it is clear that

¹³⁹I would also add that, as such, this remaking has led to an increase in murder-mystery films (*36 China Town* and *Murder*) and disability-dramas like *Black* and *Main Aisa Hi Hoon*.

¹⁴⁰Indeed there has been a series of romantic movies and “chick-flick” remakes during this period including *My Best friend's Wedding*, *Heartbreakers* and *Meet John Doe*.

the Hindi remake text offers its audiences a unique pleasure that it could not produce, were it an original.

The aforementioned Bollywood remake texts offer us insight into how cross-cultural referencing can impact upon genre, film form, and audiences. They demonstrate how the term 'remake' is in fact a complex and fragmented variable, and as such, cannot be exclusively detained within a dogma of crystal-clear authorial intent and institutional endorsement. As to whether these films should be regarded as quotation or plagiarism, I would argue that they are at once both and neither. A postmodern approach to these texts suggests that they enter as plagiarism, but once engaged with they become quotations if not *reinventions*. As seen in the case of *DCH*, contemporary Bollywood cinema, in appropriating its own past cinematic styles, will mock or critique its traditional conventions in order to differentiate itself. This pastiche is its way of distancing itself from the very past conventions it continues to be trapped within. It utilises postmodern methods in order to strive to say something new within a vernacular of the old.

It is clear from the range of texts discussed in this chapter that the level of recognition or acknowledgement of a film remake is particular to each film. In some cases a spectator may be forced to recognise a momentary reference (such as the rickshaw sequence in *Main Hoon Na*). In others, a blatant remake can pass unnoticed due to the obscurity or lack of exposure and circulation of the original (*Zinda*), and in the case of texts which borrow *style* rather than narrative (such as *Dhoom*), the recognition of a film's original influence is subconscious. Many would argue that the average film-illiterate cinemagoer in India remains oblivious to the complexity of film referencing present in the modern Indian cross-cultural remake. However, I would argue that as film consumption in India moves towards the multiplexes, and as Indian cinema itself becomes more sophisticated and experimental in its pursuit of international success, this may not necessarily be the case for long. Even if the film remakes mentioned are produced with naivety and no active intent for conscious cross-cultural critique, and even if these texts are anticipated as unacknowledged references for the sake of simple pastiche or fast-track filmmaking, there is still potential for a writerly reading by an active spectator. At least for its globalised multiplex audience (those with access to a broad consumption of different cinematic product), the Bollywood remake offers a schizophrenic reading experience and two kinds of viewing pleasure: that which comes through a position of voluntary suspension of disbelief, and that which comes through witnessing and indulging in the cross-cultural collision of multifarious cinematic forms.

Remaking is widespread in contemporary Indian mainstream cinema and yet it still requires affirmation as it does not quite fit into the remake categories currently available to us. So what existing adaptation categories does the Bollywood remake genre fall into? Geoffrey Wagner's (1996) three categorisations accounting for the different forms of adaptation are useful here. Certainly, the

Indian remake can never fit his first category of 'transposition', which involves a direct transposition with minimal interference (Wagner cited in McFarlane: 10). With the Indian remake, there is always a distinctive difference from its foreign original (especially in terms of affect), even when things seem almost identical (such as the shot-for-shot replication in *Zinda*). With regards to his second category of 'commentary' – where the original is purposely altered or 'violated' for the filmmakers' different agenda (ibid: 10) – Bollywood remakes clearly lack the required level of subversive intent to be regarded as social commentary. However, if we interpret this category to concern not social reform, but rather a politics of representation, then it becomes possible to view these remakes as a form of *discourse* (Andrew: 37), regardless of whether their message arrives through intention or interpretation. Wagner's third category concerning a textual adaptation's departure from its original 'for the sake of art' is perhaps closest to the real agenda. But yet again this notion is problematic if the kind of artistic integrity referred to here is restricted to Western perceptions of art. Ultimately, it seems that the Bollywood remake's agenda sits and shifts simultaneously between profit and capital, exploitation, cultural-political commentary, a postmodern art-for-arts sake sensibility, and *accident*.

Although the current output of remakes may be masterful in their visual design and effects (*Krrish*), there appears to be something deeper rooted in the films' style and semiotics that repels and alienates the Western eye. Perhaps, as suggested with *Devdas*, some cannot endure the emotional voltage of the cinema and its exposed stylisation. Perhaps Western audiences are more favourable towards cinematic representations of *fake reality* and unable to stomach fantasy unless it is situated in some form of simulated logic or reality. They may struggle to be persuaded by the "un-coolness" of the Indian-cool aesthetic. Their ability to engage with the text may become difficult when the visual cues on offer and the reading-logic required for the Bollywood text contradict or clash with their own. Even in cases where a film such as *Zinda* adopts a seemingly identical story and visual set up, Bollywood still produces divergent levels of emotion, tone, narrative pacing and story chronology which may alienate Western audiences.¹⁴¹ The resemblance of the Indian remake to its original is often uncanny – familiar yet very different. It is this uncanniness that makes the Bollywood remake all the more unsettling and contributes to the negative reactions by non-indigenous audiences to this particular mode of filmmaking. With this in mind, there is clearly a need for Indian film studies to also begin investigating non-Indian spectators' responses to Bollywood cinema – particularly towards those texts which are remakes of films that they have previously enjoyed or held in high regard. It would also be interesting to investigate what needs to be changed in order for a Bollywood original to be suitably remade for Western audiences. For example, Twentieth Century Fox's recent purchase of the Bollywood film script for *Munna Bhai*

¹⁴¹We have yet to develop appropriate strategies to help us adequately measure, analyse and illustrate the differences in variables such as tone and pace in cross-cultural remaking.

MBBS will see the West conversely adapting an Indian text into a Hollywood comedy¹⁴². These kinds of further studies can help us better understand the barriers and differences in Bollywood and Hollywood filmmaking and such a polarisation of audience viewing processes.



Figure 24: Box office hit *Munna Bhai MBBS* is the first Bollywood film to be remade in Hollywood

Devaluations of Bollywood remakes as “rip-offs” and “cheap imitations” carry with them a certain level of ignorance. These negative stigmatisations are ‘loaded with Western signs and meanings of power’ and can be seen to imperialistically mark ‘Other’ cultures as ‘inferior’ (Dudrah: 142). Indeed, there is a certain level of threat involved here, particularly due to the inability to police Indian cinema’s level of appropriation or prevent Bollywood texts from presenting their borrowed material as organic or indigenous elements of the cinema. Furthermore, as I have suggested, once films such as *The Matrix*, *Mission: Impossible 2* and *Reservoir Dogs* have been manipulated, mutated and exposed through Bollywood remaking, a certain level of lost aura (an original text’s authenticity, distinctiveness and impact) takes place as a consequence. Hollywood codes, once consumed through parody or pastiche, are no longer as monolithic. Tarantino’s cool no longer has the same effect once we see it in exaggerated form in a film like *Kaante*. Worton and Still have commented on the remake’s simultaneous eroticism and violence, stating that ‘the object of an act of influence ... does not receive or perceive that pressure as neutral’ (2). In the contemporary Bollywood remake intertextuality is at once seductive and *destructive*, appealing and *repulsive*, and the text aims to both appropriate and *resist* its indigenised style.

The remake phenomenon has also caused Bollywood to lose its own identity in terms of its traditional formal style and conventions. The lack of controlling or sanctioning appropriation in Indian films has led remaking to proliferate so much that it now forms part of Bollywood cinema’s

¹⁴²Forthcoming at the time of writing. The film is to be remade as Hollywood production *Gangsta M.D.*, starring Chris Tucker and directed by Mira Nair.

generic identity. It has become increasingly difficult to separate and distinguish borrowed foreign styles and techniques from the normative style of contemporary Bollywood texts. Bollywood mainstream cinema is in a state of flux where a bricolage of multiple genres, styles and conventions continues to cancel out or invalidate one another. The remake is the prime example of the current identity collapse of Bollywood cinema – however it also paradoxically signals the beginnings of a new form of cinema.

Although the above remake films may at times question the integrity of contemporary Bollywood films and pose a threat to Hollywood, the postmodern Bollywood cross-cultural remake nevertheless offers us new ways to investigate our own familiar positions of spectatorship and modes of filmmaking:

a postmodern artist has no other way to “interview” reality but through an interpreter of another culture ... the cultures must vary ... [but] in any case, the remake remains a metacultural medium that has to cross borders, temporal or spatial in order to connect (Brashinsky, 1998: 169-170).

The film remake should not be underestimated, for it too is a ‘species of interpretation’ (Braudy, 1998: 327) and it is only in its self-destructive state (as a remake) that the Bollywood text can begin to critically pull apart not only its own, but other more universalised cinematic techniques, such as those of Hollywood. In contemporary Bollywood, Hollywood cinema is ‘recast to fit the nuances and developments in the cultural landscape of popular Hindi cinema’s audiences’ (Dudrah: 146). However, simultaneously, Bollywood too is being recast and remoulded to fit the international market. This circular process has resulted in producing an ultimately confused, fragmented, schizophrenic postmodernesque form of self-destructive Indian cinema. Ironically, despite their countless moments of borrowing, intertextual referencing and blatant plagiarism, these contemporary cross-cultural remakes serve as examples of Bollywood filmmaking at its most inventive and innovative – a classic case of art renewing itself through creative mistranslation (Stam: 62)

Chapter 5

Conclusion: A Bollywood *Renaissance*?



Figure 25: Holy men in Allahabad and spectators at Nehru Planetarium, New Delhi watching India's Solar Eclipse, July 22nd 2009

Summary of thesis objectives

The structure of this thesis has consisted of three chapters dealing with very distinct issues and agendas (most essentially: the lack of scholarly appeal, the postmodern aesthetics, and the remaking strategies of new Bollywood cinema), but there are several fundamental themes and notions running throughout them – all of which have helped stitch together the thematic framework and serve the overall agenda of this project and are worth reiterating here.

Throughout this thesis, I have aimed to demonstrate some of the fundamental (and peculiar) ways in which Bollywood cinema has formally changed after its economic liberalisation at the turn of the twenty-first century. All of the film texts that I have analysed, which spring from this millennium period, incorporate some form of aesthetic enterprise serving the principles and traits of the postmodern. My case studies have verified that Bollywood, as well as being global and transnational, has reached a postmodern stage and that this postmodern tendency has enabled the cinema to adopt new critical tools (such as self-critique and dismantling the authority of other dominant cinematic forms), thereby offering up new ways of reading Bollywood.

I have explored how certain aspects of Bollywood filmmaking, previously regarded as primitive, formulaic or mediocre, have become the very attributes fuelling Bollywood's creativity and artistic experimentation today. Figural excess and hyperrealism are two such devices at the core of Bollywood's unique cinematic language, which enable the cinema to operate differently as an art

form and film language. I have elaborated on how these rather complex traits function to provide a particular kind of pleasure and experience for their audiences, such as offering access to sublime emotions, a greater level of submersion in the text, multi-dimensional perspectives and synaesthesia, whilst also demonstrating how these traits may be the very aspects of Bollywood cinema that cause displeasure for the Western critic or spectator and therefore ultimately obstruct the cinema's ability to perform well commercially in other parts of the world.

This thesis has also challenged the common assumption that contemporary Bollywood cinema still works to maintain and preserve a pure sense of Indian national identity and cultural tradition by having them conflict with and prevail over representations of the 'modern' and the 'West' as Other. I have demonstrated how in newer films, clear distinctions between modern/traditional, East/West and Western/Indian no longer stand. Bollywood films no longer work to unambiguously serve certain socio-political or nationalist sentiments. Instead, they now actively seek to blur or intersect these binaries in order to produce an altogether fragmented, dismantled and often contradictory representation of global Indian identity.

Further to the above, I have also revealed how these post-millennial films embrace a dissolving of distinctions between, and an *alignment* of, Hollywood and Bollywood formal aesthetics. Particularly in the case of films such as *Kaante*, these two cinemas' filmic conventions overlap and eventually cancel-out one another, often with the intended effect of depriving Hollywood of its lustre. American cinema loses its brilliance as we witness a dimming of the affect of its most revered conventions, such as its Tarantino-esque masculine "cool" aesthetic, its cutting-edge special effects, its fast paced dramatic editing techniques, or its verisimilitude. By appropriating, mimicking, parodying, pastiching and dismantling these characteristics, Bollywood endeavours to overshadow the significance of Hollywood, attempting to block out its global dominance – a process which I have described as a kind of cinematic *reverse-colonialism*.

This thesis has also given much attention to the process of remaking in Bollywood – another signature characteristic of noughties Bollywood that continues to receive much international criticism. Through analysing the diverse ways in which Bollywood remakes reference other material, I have argued against the claim that remaking is a purely a means of plagiarism and unoriginal production in Bollywood, and therefore something to be expelled from "faithful" definitions of the cinema. My case studies have instead presented remaking as contemporary Bollywood's most significant and effective means of achieving creative innovation. Remaking is a prevailing feature of Bollywood cinema in the 2000 decade, so much so that it operates as a genre in its own right. Textual recycling in Bollywood does not work like before, but has evolved. It is now being used as a self-reflexive device, an indicator of Bollywood's current situation as a cinema at once escaping from and imprisoned by its formulaic roots (as exemplified most explicitly in the case of *Om Shanti*

Om). In postmodern fashion, film remakes paradoxically allow Bollywood to achieve change and progress through repetition and the past. Remaking thus proves to have both creative and destructive implications for Bollywood, on the one hand assisting creativity (and offering audiences a unique kind of reading and viewing pleasure), and on the other, self-destructively marking the cinema's loss of authentic originality and distinctive identity as it shifts to a new era of endless postmodern parodic production.

As with other established postmodern texts, parodic reflexivity in newer Bollywood films 'becomes the way – possibly the only way – to inform contemporary creativity' (Degli-Eposti, 10). Particularly with regards to its remake phenomenon, postmodern Bollywood's 'activities of replication... have turned into a real "pleasure of repetition" for which everyone can enjoy a different kind of experience where the practice of replication melts into a multiplicity of signifying worlds' (ibid, 13). Thus it seems that contemporary Bollywood too, to paraphrase an important point made by Lyotard, can only be modern by first being postmodern. It has become a cinema which accesses the new and modern by creatively pastiching, borrowing, recycling and *reworking* rather than inventing something wholly original.

Using postmodernism to understand contemporary Indian cinema

My investigation has highlighted several problems with regards to current attitudes and perceptions of contemporary Bollywood cinema. The cinema's recent global shift may have seen a rise in its international profile, but this has also resulted in a diminishing of its artistic reputation. I have explained how many critics and scholars of Indian cinema have seen its current phase as its downfall, marking a decline in the cinema's production of sophisticated and original films in favour of mass-produced, sensationalist and trivial reproductions. Bollywood's global economic restructuring has been accused of obscuring, darkening or extinguishing the credibility of Indian cinema, so much that it has been described in extreme terms as a cinema that has run out of ideas and is at its "end". There is indeed something affecting Bollywood cinema in a way that causes it to lose temporarily its grasp of "authentic" Indian-ness and traditionalist modes of representation. However, as I have argued, this postmodern veil that has been cast over the film industry in recent years has clouded our understanding of popular Indian cinema, and as such, refreshingly works to obstruct (and thus challenge) older models of Indian film criticism, instead encouraging us to seek and offer new perspectives, definitions and approaches to the cinema.

As Degli-Eposti has duly noted, there are multiple ways in which images can be perceived as postmodern and many 'different perspectives on what can be defined as postmodern filmic expression' (14). My investigation into contemporary Bollywood cinema has helped to illustrate the fact that postmodernism is not simply a predicament of Euro-American and first world high-tech

Asian societies, but a *global* phenomenon that can be applied to less developed non-Western cultures (ultimately postmodernism cannot be constrained by its West-centric capitalism-driven definitions as this defeats its very concept of border crossing). Through this global prism, we are able to witness postmodern art's dissolving of grand narratives and binaries on an escalated scale: postmodern films are not purely a marginal phenomenon produced by a small selection of surrealist mainstream auteurs. Rather, I have revealed how postmodernism has come to shape the fundamental characteristics of an entirely new genus of popular cinema consumed by millions world-wide. In India, postmodern aesthetics are being used to facilitate global and cultural exchange and have become part of the film industry's international economic operations. Postmodernism is thus by no means an exhausted concept. It can be viewed in new contexts as something that is always evolving and diversifying in both form and application.

We need to seriously consider the possibility of using postmodern theory to study contemporary shifts in Indian popular cinema, particularly its potential to help broaden the cinema's definitions, accessibility and applicability in Western academic film studies programmes. Instead of leaving Western students with an acute, outmoded or pessimistic understanding of global Bollywood cinema, postmodern analysis may help illuminate why and how Indian cinema aesthetics choose to operate and provide pleasure in ways that may at first seem vulgar or insincere. As I have shown, this postmodern perspective helps us to better view the effectiveness of Indian popular cinema through its aesthetic dimensions, rather than simply through its discursive frameworks and socio-political rational – allowing us to appreciate Bollywood as an art form in its own right. A heightened appreciation of the artistic practices of new Bollywood also calls us to rethink or reconfigure the universal discourses and processes we would normally use to value “good” cinema, as they now appear problematic, particularly with regards to their overvalued obsession with cultural authenticity.

As I have illustrated in my own investigation, the level of postmodern sensibilities in Bollywood varies from text to text. In some situations it is a case of actively applying a postmodern reading strategy to a text in order to speculate on the transgressive potential a certain film may have if read by particular audiences in particular ways in specific contexts, whilst others arise from filmmakers themselves *intentionally* seeking to achieve postmodern ends (such as Farah Khan). Naturally, there are always problems inherent when applying any Western-born condition to a non-Western culture, and in the case of postmodernism, a certain level of resistance comes expected with the territory. Many will continue to find my postmodern application objectionable for its danger of making Western values appear universally applicable. Comparisons between Hollywood and Bollywood are particularly prone to this kind of criticism, although simply denying the cross-cultural exchange going on between these cinemas is not an ideal solution either. Certainly, if the aesthetic conventions of Hollywood are being “normalised” by Bollywood, these cinemas may also begin to

overlap in terms of their intentions, effects, goals and agendas. This normalisation of foreign conventions may also have negative financial implications for Hollywood as the elements of American cinema that would normally offer product differentiation in order to attract Indian multiplex audiences are already being appropriated and supplied by Bollywood films (if in somewhat subversive ways). There are also cultural and political implications to such a process. In these hybrid productions, Indian-ness is displaced as the visual and stylistic codes that would normally mark cultural distinctions between 'American' and 'Indian' are merged, confused and broken down. The inclusion and indigenisation of Hollywood stylistic traits in Indian films is also a political act on Bollywood's part to critique American filmmaking practices and attempt to overshadow this hegemonic Western cinema. Through this process of cultural appropriation, Bollywood instead asserts its own (imagined) authority as a globally dominant cinema.

The Bollywood features I have identified as postmodern are such because they share certain intentions and purposes associated with other postmodern (Western) texts, but that is not to say that these intentions do not also serve other purposes specific to Indian cinema. In the films I have analysed, these postmodern devices have the effect of questioning modes of representation (reality, identity) and dismantling or obscuring grand narratives like religion, science, nation, Indian-ness and Hollywood. They openly address and draw attention to their own textuality and thus their status as mass produced, manufactured commodities. They help provide a commentary on how Bollywood cinema is trapped in a cycle of repetition, unable to be authentic, original or novel in the purest sense. They help celebrate and stage the saturation and circulation of images in Indian society. They reinforce the dominance of the figural and the redundancy of the discursive. They take acclaimed "artistic" works and turn them into profit-and-capital commodities (mainly through remaking) and in doing so cause us to question institutionalised, universalised value-judgments of cinematic art. They retaliate against fixed categories and identities, instead presenting more fragmented versions of the self which perhaps better account for the Indian's experience in the current global consumer climate.

Redefining contemporary Bollywood

Through the above investigations, I have argued how and why this latest decade of Bollywood filmmaking needs to be differentiated from previous ones. Both filmmakers and audiences have become much more open to novelty and aesthetic experimentation, though not entirely in a way that does away with past conventions and formulas.

There may no longer be a prominent parallel or alternative art cinema in India, but I have explained how there is nevertheless a different kind of challenging, radical experimentation and disruptive playfulness being generated from within mainstream Indian cinema itself. Popular Indian films too

have the ability to question and unveil established modes of cinematic presentation. Through dismantling formulas and conventions, and by adopting inventive avant-garde techniques, they are able to render “authenticity” and the “real” as suspect. Often consciously inauthentic (particularly through their abundant appetite for appropriation), they can have a more ambiguous approach to Indian culture, tradition, identity and the past. Contemporary Bollywood texts are also often self-critical, mocking their own fictional customs whilst simultaneously exploiting them for profit – thus drawing attention to themselves as manufactured commercial commodities.

Based on the results of this thesis’ investigation, we can reformulate our understanding and description of contemporary popular Indian filmmaking as follows: Post-millennial mainstream Bollywood films are often marked by a highly cosmetic visual setup, fetishised supermodel film stars and a visceral, excessively figural style – including ornamented frames, image layering (that sometimes dispenses with perspective), and a vivid, saturated use of colour. More is conveyed through images and synaesthesia than through discursive devices such as story or dialogue. The kind of picturesque imagery previously reserved for song sequences (which are now sometimes entirely absent from the text) now features throughout the film, irrespective of the situation or context of a scene. Through this figural excess, Bollywood films achieve a kind of hyperrealism which conveys sublime experiences and emotions that realist or traditional cinematic modes of presentation fail to provide. Newer Bollywood films also exhibit a heightened interest in self-conscious technical experimentation, drawing attention to their use of special effects, CGI, animation, fluid camera work, rapid editing, dramatic lighting and sound design. These films also mark a departure from masala filmmaking in favour of packaging their films into blatant genre categories familiar to the West: science fiction, the gangster film, the heist film, the horror film, the action movie. However, even within these genre categories, Bollywood still maintains a kind of eclecticism, particularly through utilising a schizophrenic style and modes of presentation which may deviate from its generic labelling.

Contemporary Bollywood is also marked by its increased production of film remakes, which are so abundant that they occupy a genre all on their own. This remake genre indulges a distinct kind of audience pleasure (cinophilia) and employs a broad yet distinctive set of appropriation techniques. Contemporary Bollywood’s remakes engage in a dialogue with (and investigate) both foreign and the Indian film industry’s own cinematic histories, and it is evident that Bollywood now uses its remakes as a means of constructing its own mythic film canon.

The above changes all go hand in hand with the cinema’s recent increased sexual openness, penchant for big-budget wealth and luxury, and its trend for global travelling, as discussed by scholars who have already published on this latest phase of filmmaking. In the case of the former, we need only look at Bipasha Basu’s bikinis and transparent outfits in *Dhoom* and *Body Heat/Double*

Indemnity remake *Jism*, Aishwarya Rai's dominatrix persona in *Dhoom 2*¹⁴³, Shah Rukh Khan's satirical wet dream in *Om Shanti Om*, and the topicality of sex before marriage, homosexuality, divorce and adultery in *Salaam Namaste*, *Dostana*, *KANK* and *Murder* respectively, to see that films have become more sexually charged and risqué. However, in the case of the latter trait of the travelling global Indian (usually academically explored in the form of the diasporic hero) I would add that new Bollywood no longer purely focuses its attention on the NRI. Considering the aspirations and empowering motives of the Bollywood-backed *India poised* campaign, the notable indigenisation and normalisation of Hollywood conventions, and the fragmented identities offered in the aforementioned contemporary films, it is clear that the industry's audience targets are no longer primarily fixated on the NRI. Postmodern Bollywood also draws its attention to the fragmented, modernised Indian in India. Since India is now often presented as modern and urbanised, and the West is represented through Indians (be they in Western drag), our prior conclusions of how the Indian, the NRI, the Western, the modern and the traditional present themselves in Indian films need to be reinvestigated. Postmodern Bollywood thus enables us to move past the exhaustive dominant trend of post-1990s discussions surrounding Bollywood's fascination with national identity preservation and diaspora.

This post-millennium decade could be described as a renaissance period for popular Indian cinema – an apt term considering how this change has been achieved partly through the rebirth of old styles, the reincarnation of other texts, and the reinvention of past conventions. Indeed, this aesthetic shift cannot wholly help Bollywood finally break free of its formulaic trappings and achieve total modernisation and international success, particularly as it simultaneously dismantles the authenticity, individuality and identity of its cinema. Nevertheless, films such as those discussed in this thesis should be given more critical attention as they can reveal much about how global Bollywood is currently in a state of crisis. What we need to decide is whether we want to see this current period of film production as many Indian film scholars do, as the end or “fall” of Indian cinema, or whether we want to see this as the re-birth of a strange new era of Bollywood filmmaking, which we might call *postmodern*.

The future of Bollywood

In July 2009, as millions of Indians prepared to watch a total solar eclipse through high-tech solar viewers (or lock themselves away from it through fear of superstition), Bollywood – an industry that had experienced its own kind of eclipse over the past decade – was attempting to recuperate from a recession-related mass strike which had its producers boycotting multiplex theatres in a

¹⁴³ In the song *Crazy Kiya Re [You made me crazy]*, Rai's tight black leather corset and whipping and slapping dance movements connote the bondage and disciplinary sexuality of a dominatrix.

stand-off dispute over box office takings.¹⁴⁴ Although by this time a settlement had been reached, the film industry was nevertheless left with a traffic jam of films awaiting release, as well as numerous stalled productions, delayed film premieres, major film projects struggling for buyers, a huge dip in star salaries, a loss of satellite and music rights and a series of non-profitable “flop” releases. In light of this recent event, it has become unclear whether the kind of films and style of filmmaking I have investigated in this thesis will continue, or whether these traits and features are to characterise only a single decade. Responses from Bollywood’s biggest moguls suggest the latter. For example, Mahesh Bhatt recently stated that the strike was a sign that “Bollywood cannot afford to make bad, expensive films any more. It has to get real” (Bhatt cited in Kaveree Bamzai, 2009: 4).

Despite Bhatt’s call for Bollywood to redirect itself in light of the recession, when one looks at film projects and recent releases of 2009 it does not look as though things are about to change in a hurry. The industry has more special effects and science fiction films awaiting production, such as the time-travel movie inspired *Action Replay*. There is also evidence of more complex forms of remakes emerging, demonstrating that this impulse for recycling texts is no temporary short term fad. For example, Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s all the more figurally excessive cinematic painting¹⁴⁵ *Saawariya* (2009) showcased a strange kind of “aesthetic feedback” or ‘self-impersonation’ (Wendy Doniger, 2005) by taking its visual influence from a Hollywood musical which had itself already been modelled on Bollywood (*Moulin Rouge*). Kunal Kohli’s *Thoda Pyaar Thoda Magic* (2009) took the cinema’s dialogue with Hollywood to another level by offering us an unusual kind of hybrid film, this time borrowing from the Hollywood musical genre canon – most explicitly, *Mary Poppins* and *The Sound of Music*. Also this year, Karan Johar announced that he was producing an animated remake of his hit nineties Rom-Com *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, with the film’s original actors providing the voices for the remake’s lead animal characters.

¹⁴⁴ The strike was the result of film producers wanting a higher share of the multiplex owners’ revenues. It lasted two months from April to June 2009, with multiple theatres shutting down and films ceasing to be screened. The boycott resulted in a Rs 250 crore loss for multiplex owners and a Rs 100-crore loss for producers in interest costs (see Bamzai, 2009).

¹⁴⁵ In the film’s press kit, cinematographer Ravi K. Chandran’s production notes describe the film as being “like a painting rather than photographic images”, partly based on the Orientalist paintings of Frederick Arthur Bridgeman.

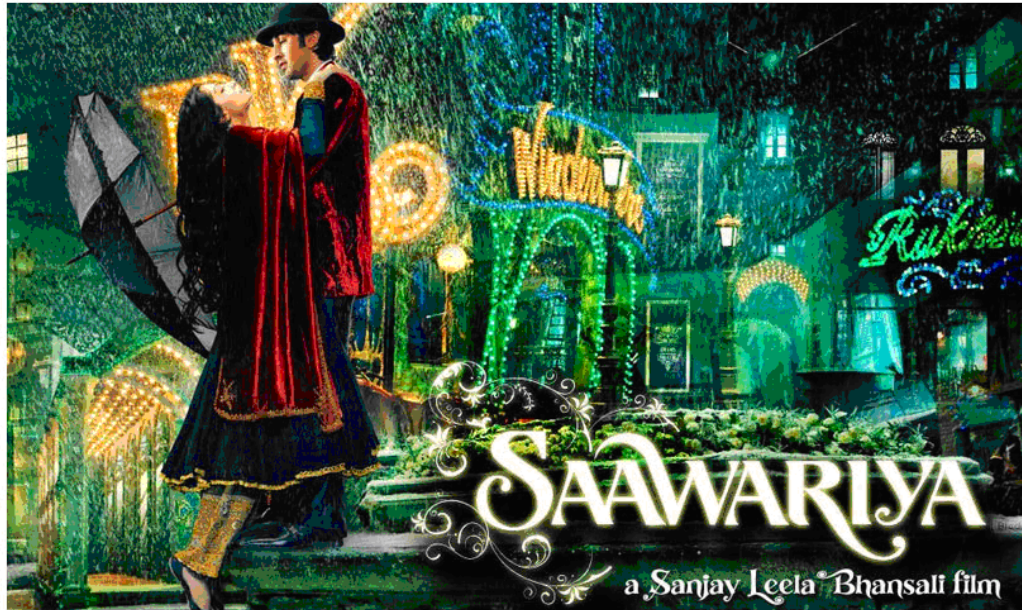


Figure 26: Bhansali's "cinematic painting" *Saawariya*, with set pieces evoking Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge*

The landscape of Bollywood cinema is also becoming evermore transnational as 2009 saw a rise in global casting. This year Australian pop star Kylie Minogue is to appear in a song sequence with Akshay Kumar in *Blue*, Ben Kingsley and Johnny Depp have both signed up to work on films with Amitabh Bachchan (Leena Yadav's *Teen Pati* and Mira Nair's forthcoming film adaptation of Gregory David Robert's novel *Shantaram*), and Sylvester Stallone recently revived his action-star persona in *Kambhaqt Ishq*, a romantic comedy set in L.A. (also featuring Hollywood actress Denise Richards). Meanwhile, Bollywood actors have also continued to venture West. For example, Anil Kapoor's success in *Slumdog Millionaire* has landed him a permanent role in the Fox Broadcasting company's flagship television show *24*. Also, just as Aishwarya Rai added another film to her modest list of international productions by starring in Hollywood's *Pink Panther 2* this year, many other actors such as Irfan Khan (*Slumdog Millionaire*), Anupham Kher (*Lust, Caution*), Malika Sherwat (*Hiss*) and Hrithik Roshan (*Kites*, [forthcoming]) are following in similar footsteps. These global transactions have also increased in other areas of film production. Music composer A R Rahman who recently won an Oscar for his *Slumdog* score has since agreed to compose for other international projects, such as Walt Disney's *19th Step* (a film that sees the unusual pairing of Kamal Haasan with Japanese star Takeshi Kitano). Jennifer Lynch (daughter of director David Lynch) is also to release her first Indian-American co-production, a modern interpretation of Hindi film classic *Nagina* (*Hiss*). However, Bollywood's increased interest in foreign production has also seen a shift in agenda and thus a moving *away* from Indian content altogether. For example, Indian production company UTV has financed *ExTerminators*, a film exclusively starring Hollywood actors

with no Indian angle in its script, Bollywood film director Vidhu Vinod Chopra has signed up to direct an all-American gangster movie called *Broken Horses*, and Indian-owned Media conglomerate Reliance Big Entertainment (one of the corporations responsible for dropping several forthcoming Bollywood productions in the aforementioned strike) recently announced that it would put up ten billion dollars to produce ten Hollywood films starring top American stars such as Brad Pitt, Jim Carrey, Tom Hanks and George Clooney (Dalya Alberge, 2008).

Whatever the result of the above projects may be, it is clear that India's transnational and postmodern productions have been proliferating in the past ten years and that they have been marked by a (perhaps desperate) call for experimentation. Interestingly, whereas in the West postmodernism was often regarded as marking the *end* of the *new* (we can only go backwards as we have exhausted everything new, modern and original), India's Bollywood cinema – which has always fundamentally worked through some form of repetition – proves to surprise us and provide us with something altogether strangely refreshing.

The crisis of postmodernism (the loss of authenticity and global commodification) in Bollywood is perhaps best exemplified by film stars such as Shah Rukh Khan, who now openly acknowledge and advocate their own status as postmodern commodities. Khan in particular has seen postmodern techniques like self-reflexivity, replication, pastiche and intertextuality as an opportunity to manufacture, saturate the media with, and comment on his own star image – whether this be achieved by unveiling a wax replica of himself at Madame Tussaud's museum in London, producing collectable life-like Shah Rukh dolls¹⁴⁶ or by appearing as pastiched or parodic versions of himself in films such as *Om Shanti Om*, *Billu*, *Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi*, *Lucky by Chance*, and *My name is Khan* (forthcoming). Khan's postmodern replication of his star persona in his recent films is perhaps the most pertinent and iconic example of how Bollywood cinema has become lost in its own circle of images, or how it self-reflexively responds to (and is capitalising on) a postmodern world by giving it what it wants – copies of copies. These recycled images have assisted Bollywood in the branding, mass production, marketing and dissemination of its cinema across the globe. The success of Khan's image-recycling in India (all of his above mentioned films were commercially successful) confirms that the Indian public too has surrendered to postmodern image consumption. Considering this fully-fledged investment in the postmodern, one wonders if the Bollywood film industry will ever produce another realist and truly "authentic" text. The cinema, its filmmakers, its film stars and its audience have become caught in a playful game of inauthentic reproduction, intertextual referencing and cultural appropriation. Bollywood is lost in its own simulacrum. It is no

¹⁴⁶ The 'Bollywood Legends' Shah Rukh Khan doll was one of four Indian star-based toys produced by India's leading toy manufacturer, Funskool. The dolls were launched in 2006.

wonder that Khan, when recently asked about his status in contemporary Bollywood and the world, commented: “I live in an unreal world, my persona is unreal, I myself am unreal”¹⁴⁷.

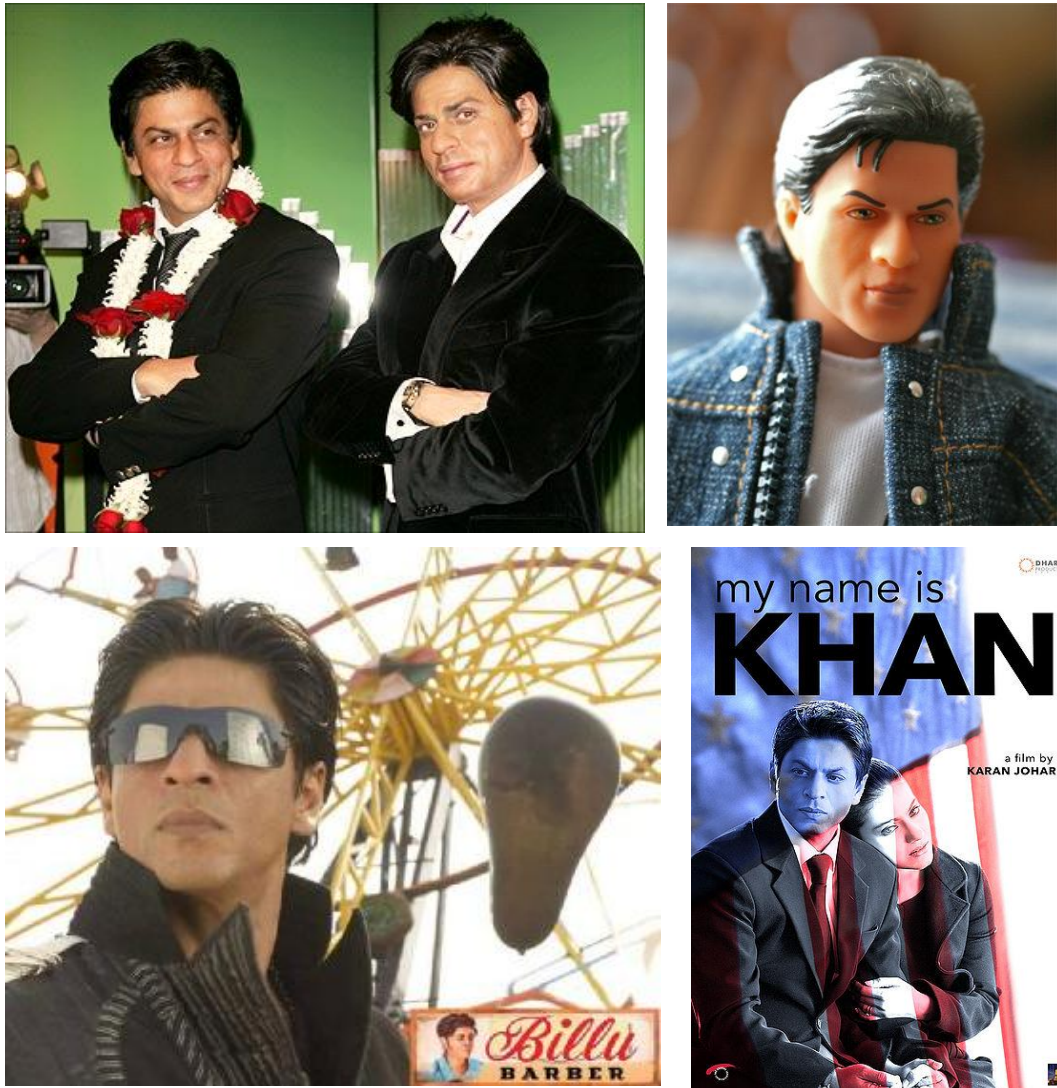


Figure 27: The postmodern commodification of Shah Rukh Khan: As a life-size wax figure (top left), a collectable doll (top right), as Bollywood movie star Sahir Khan in *Billu* (bottom left) and the forthcoming film *My name is Khan* (bottom right)

¹⁴⁷ Shah Rukh Khan cited in Anupama Chopra (2007: 221-222)

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APPENDIX 1: LIST OF POPULAR INDIAN FILM REMAKES

Film Remake	Year	Original Source(s)	Year
3 Deewarein	2003	Shawshank Redemption	1994
36 China Town	2006	Once Upon A Crime...	1992
71/2 Phere	2005	Ed TV	1999
Aapko Pehle Bhi Kahin Dekha Hai	2003	Father Of the Bride / Meet the Parents	1991/2000
Abraa Ka Daabra	2004	Harry Potter	2001
Agni Sakshi	1996	Sleeping With the Enemy	1991
Agneepath	1990	Scarface	1983
Aitraaz	2004	Disclosure	1994
Alag	2006	Powder	1995
Akele Hum, Akele Tum	1995	Kramer versus Kramer	1979
Ajnabee	2001	Consenting Adults	1992
Anjaane: The Unknown	2005	The Others	2001
Aunty No.1	1998	Mrs Doubtfire	1993
Awara Paagal Dewaana	2002	The Whole Nine Yards	2000
Baazigar	1993	A Kiss Before Dying	1991
Bachke Raina Babu	2005	Heartbreakers	2001
Banda Yeh Bindaas Hai	2009	My Cousin Vinny	1992
Bheja Fry	2007	Le Dinner De Cons	1998
Bichhoo	2000	Leon	1994
Bhagham Bhag	2006	Mannar Mathai Speaking	1995
Black	2005	The Miracle Worker	1962
Bluff Master	2005	Matchstick Men	2003
Bunty Aur Babli	2005	Bonny and Clyde	1967
Chachi 420	1998	Mrs Doubtfire	1993
Chak De India	2007	Miracle	2004
Chocolate	2005	The Usual Suspects	1994
Chor Machaaye Shor	2002	Blue Streak	1999
Churalia Hai Tumne	2003	The Truth About Charlie	2002
Commando	1988	American Ninja	1985
Criminal	1995	The Fugitive	1993
Dansh	2005	Death and the Maiden	1994
Darr	1993	Dead Calm	1989
Devdas	2002	Devdas	1955
Dewaangee	2002	Primal Fear	1996
Dewane Huye Paagal	2005	There's Something About Mary	1998
Dhoom	2004	Point Break / The Fast and the Furious	1991/2001
Dhoom 2	2006	Dhoom	2004
Dil Ka Rishta	2003	Magnificent Obsession	1954
Dil Hai Ki Manta Nahin	1991	It Happened One Night	1934
Don: The Chase Begins	2006	Don	1978
Duplicate	1998	Desperado/Multiplicity	1995/1996
Dus	2005	Usual Suspects/Sum Of All Fears	1994/2002
Ek Ajnabee	2005	Man On Fire	2004
Ek Din 24 Ghante	2003	Run Lola Run	1998
Ek Chhotisi Love Story	2002	Krotki Film O Milosci	1988
Fareb	1996	Unlawful Entry	1992
Fight Club	2006	Fight Club	1999

Ghajini	2008	Memento	2000
Ghulam	1998	On the Waterfront	1954
Bewafaa	2005	Gumrah	1963
Race	2008	Goodbye Lover	1998
Raghu Romeo	2003	Tie Me Up, Tie Me Down	1990
Hawa	2003	The Entity	1981
Heyy Baby	2007	3 Men and A Baby	1987
Hiss	2009	Nagin/Nagina	1976/1986
Hum Hai Kamaal Ke	1993	See No Evil, Hear No Evil	1989
Hum Hai Rahi Pyaar Kain	1993	Houseboat	1958
Hum Kaun Hai	2004	The Others	2001
Hum Kisi Se Kum Nahin	2002	Analyze This	1999
Hum Tum	2004	When Harry Met Sally	1989
Janni Dushman: Ek Anokhi Kahani	2002	Nagin/ Jaani Dushman/The Matrix/Face/Off/MI2	1976/1979/1999/2000
Jism	2003	Double Indemnity/Body Heat	1944/1981
Jo Bole So Nihaal	2005	Crocodile Dundee	1986
Jo Geeta Woi Sikander	1992	Breaking Away	1979
Josh	2000	West Side Story	1961
Judaii	1997	Indecent Proposal	1993
Jung	2000	Desperate Measures	1998
Kaante	2002	Reservoir Dogs	1992
Khal Naaikaa	1993	The Hand That Rocks the Cradle	1992
Kahin Pyaar Na Hon Jaye	2000	The Wedding Singer	1998
Karobaar: The Business Of Love	2000	Indecent Proposal	1993
Karzzzz	2008	Karz	1980
Kasoor	2001	Jagged Edge	1985
Killer	2006	Collateral	2004
Koi Mil...Gaya	2003	E.T.	1982
Krrish	2006	The Matrix/Daredevil/Paycheck	1999/2003/2003
Krishna Cottage	2004	The Ring	1998
Kuch Khatti Kuch Meethi	2001	The Parent Trap	1961
Kucch To Hai	2003	I Know What You Did Last Summer	1998
Kyon Ki.....	2005	One Flew Over the Cuckoos Nest	1975
Kyo Kii... Main Jhuth Nahin Bolta	2001	Liar Liar	1997
Mahakaal	1993	Nightmare On Elm Street	1984
Main Aisan Hi Hoon	2005	I Am Sam	2001
Main Azaad Hoon	1989	Meet John Doe	1941
Main Hoon Na	2004	MI2/ The Matrix	1996/1999
Maine Pyaar Kyun Kiya	2005	Cactus Flower	1969
Malamaal Weekly	2006	Waking Ned	1998
Manorama 6 Feet Under	2007	Chinatown	1974
Masti	2004	The Seven Year Itch	1955
Mazaa Mazaa	2004	13 Going On 30	2004
Mere Yaar Ki Shaadi	2002	My Best Friends Wedding	1997
Mohobatein	2000	Dead Poets Society	1989
Mother India	1957	Aurat	1940
Mr India	1987	Indiana Jones & the Temple of Doom	1984
Mr Ya Miss	2005	The Hot Chick	2002
Munna Bhai	2003	Patch Adams/Analyse This	1998/1999

Murder	2004	Unfaithful	2002
Musafir	2004	U Turn	1997
Naina	2002	The Eye	2002
Naksha	2006	The Rundown / Indiana Jones trilogy	2003/–
Naqaab	2007	Dot the I	2003
Omkara	2006	William Shakespeare's Othello	–
Om Shanti Om	2007	Karz	1980
Padmashree Laloo Prasad Yadav	2005	Fish Called Wanda	1998
Paheli	2005	Duvidha	1973
Parineeta	2005	Parineeta	1953
Partner	2007	Hitch	2005
Phir Hera Phiri	2006	Hera Phiri	2000
Plan	2004	Lock Stock	1998
Pyaar To Hona Hi Ta	1998	French Kiss	1995
Pyaar Tune Kya Kiya	2001	Fatal Attraction	1987
Qayamat	2003	The Rock	1996
Raaz	2002	What Lies Beneath	2000
Race	2008	Goodbye Lover	1998
Rakht	2004	The Gift	2000
Ram Gopal Varma Ki Aag	2007	Sholay	1975
Saaya	2003	Dragonfly	2002
Sadak	1991	Taxi Driver/Lethal Weapon/Cyborg	1976/1987/1989
Salaam-E-Isque	2007	Love Actually	2003
Salaam Namaste	2005	Nine Months	1995
Samay	2003	Seven	1995
Sangharsh	1999	Silence Of the Lambs	1991
Sarkar	2005	Godfather	1972
Sarkar Raj	2008	Sarkar	2005
Sauda – The Deal	2005	Indecent Proposal	1993
Sholay	1975	Sergio Leone's Spaghetti Westerns	–
Speed	2007	Cellular	2004
Taarzan: The Wonder Car	2004	Christine	1983
Ta Ra Rum Pum	2007	Days Of Thunder	1990
Tathastu	2006	John Q	2002
Teen Patti	2009	21	2008
The Train	2007	Derailed	2005
Umrao Jaan	2006	Umrao Jaan	1981
Viruddh	2005	In the Bedroom	2001
Yaarana	1995	Sleeping With the Enemy	1991
Ye Dil Lagi	1994	Sabrina	1954
Yeh Kya Ho Raha Hai	2002	American Pie	1999
Yes Boss	1997	For Love Or Money	1993
Yuvraaj	2008	Rain Man	1988
Zeher	2005	Out Of Time	2003
Zamaanat	2009	Justice Chowdhary/Scent Of A Woman	1982/1992
Zinda	2006	Oldboy	2003

FILMOGRAPHY

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Abhay aka *Aalavandhan* (2001) dir. Suresh Krishna

Action Replay (2009) dir. Vipul Amrutlal Shah

Amores Perros (2000) dir. Alejandro González Iñárritu

Amrapali (1966) dir. Lekh Tandon

An Evening in Paris (1967) dir. Shakti Samanta

Asoka (2001) dir. Santosh Sivan

Anaara Pagal Deewana (2002) dir. Vikram Bhatt

Being John Malkovich (1999) dir. Spike Jonze

Billu (2009) dir. Priyadarshan

Black (2005) dir. Sanjay Leela Bhasali

Blue (2009) dir. Anthony D'Souza

Body Heat (1981) dir. Lawrence Kasdan

Bonny and Clyde (1967) dir. Arthur Penn

Bride and Prejudice (2004) dir. Gurinder Chadha

Broken Horses (2010) dir. Vidhu Vinod Chopra

Bunty aur Babli (2005) dir. Shaad Ali

Cash (2007) dir. Anubhav Sinha

Chak De India (2007) dir. Shimit Amin

Chandni Chowk to China (2009) dir. Nikhil Advani

Chocolate (2005) dir. Vivek Agnihotri

City on Fire (1987) dir. Ringo Lam

Company (2002) dir. Ram Gopal Varma

Coolie (1983) dir. Manmohan Desai

Daredevil (2003) dir. Mark Steven Johnson

Darna Zaroori Hai (2006) dir. RGV and various

Dead Poets Society (1989) dir. Peter Weir

Dev.D (2009) dir. Anurag Kashyap

Devdas (2002) dir. Sanjay Leela Bhansali

Dhoom (2004) dir. Sanjay Gadhvi

Dhoom 2 (2006) dir. Sanjay Gadhvi

Dil Chabta Hai (2001) dir. Farhan Akhtar

Dil Se (1998) dir. Mani Ratnam

Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge (1995) dir. Yash Chopra

Don (1978) dir. Chandra Barot

Don: The Chase Begins (2006) dir. Farhan Akhtar
Dostana (2008) dir. Tarun Mansukhani
Double Indemnity (1944) dir. Billy Wilder
Dus (2005) dir. Anubhav Sinha
E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial (1982) dir. Steven Spielberg
Ek Ajnabee (2005) dir. Apoorva Lakhia
Ek Hasina Thi (2004) dir. Sriram Raghavan
Eklavya: The Royal Guard (2007) dir. Vidhu Vinod Chopra
Face/Off (1997) dir. John Woo
Fight Club (1999) dir. David Fincher
Fight Club: Members Only (2006) dir. Vikram Chopra
Ghajini (2008) dir. A.R. Murugadoss
Ghost World (2001) dir. Terry Zwigoff
Ghostbusters (1984) dir. Ivan Reitman
Girlfriend (2004) dir. Karan Razdan
Golmaal Returns (2008) dir. Rohit Shetty
Gone with the Wind (1939) dir. Victor Fleming
Guide (1965) dir. Vijay Anand
Hanuman (2005) dir. V.G. Samant and Milind Ukey
Hey Ram! (2000) dir. Kamal Haasan
Hindustani aka Indian (1996) dir. S. Shankar
Hisss (forthcoming) dir. Jennifer Lynch
Hitch (2005) dir. Andy Tennant
Hum Aapke Hai Kaun (1994) dir. Sooraj R. Barjatya
Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam (1999) dir. Sanjay Leela Bhansali
Hum Tum (2004) dir. Kunal Kohli
Humjoli (1970) dir. Ramanna
Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom (1984) dir. Steven Spielberg
It Happened One Night (1934) dir. Frank Capra
Jaani Dushman: Ek Anokhi Kahani (2002) dir. Rajkumar Kohli
Jai Vejay (1977) dir. L. V Prasad
Jewel Thief (1967) dir. Vijay Anand
Jism (2003) dir. Amit Saxena
Jodha Akbar (2008) dir. Ashutosh Gowariker
Kaante (2002) dir. Sanjay Gupta
Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna (2006) dir. Karan Johar
Kabhi Kabhie (1976) dir. Yash Chopra
Kabhi Kushi Kabhie Gham (2001) dir. Karan Johar

Kaho Naa... Pyaar Hai (2000) dir. Rakesh Roshan
Kal Ho Naa Ho (2003) dir. Karan Johar
Kambhaqt Ishq (2009) dir. Sabir Khan
Karṛ (1981) dir. Subhash Ghai
Khal Nayak (1993) dir. Subhash Ghai
Kites (2009) dir. Rakesh Roshan
Koi...Mil Gaya (2003) dir. Rakesh Roshan
Krishna Cottage (2004) dir. Santram Varma
Krrish (2006) dir. Rakesh Roshan
Kuch Kuch Hota Hai (1998) dir. Karan Johar
Lagaan: Once upon a time in India (2001) dir. Ashutosh Gowariker
Lage Rabo Munna Bhai (2006) dir. Rajkumar Hirani
Lucky by Chance (2009) dir. Zoya Akhtar
Lust, Caution (2007) dir. Ang Lee
Main Hoon Na (2004) dir. Farah Khan
Maine Pyaar Kiya (1989) dir. Sooraj R. Barjatya
Mamma Mia! (2008) dir. Phyllida Lloyd
Mary Poppins (1964) dir. Robert Stevenson
Mast (1999) dir. Ram Gopal Varma
Matchstick Men (2003) dir. Ridley Scott
Memento (2000) dir. Christopher Nolan
Mohabbatein (2000) dir. Aditya Chopra
Monsoon Wedding (2001) dir. Mira Nair
Mother India (1957) dir. Mehboob Khan
Moulin Rouge (2005) dir. Baz Luhrmann
Mr India (1987) dir. Boney Kapoor
Mujse Shaadi Karogi (2004) dir. David Dhawan
Munna Bhai M.B.B.S (2003) dir. Rajkumar Hirani
Murder (2004) dir. Anurag Basu
Musafir (2004) dir. Sanjay Gupta
My name is Khan (forthcoming) dir. Karan Johar
Naach (2004) dir. Ram Gopal Varma
Nagina (1986) dir. Harmesh Malhotra
Nigahen (1989) dir. Harmesh Malhotra
Oldboy (2003) dir. Chan-wook Park
Om Shanti Om (2007) dir. Farah Khan
Pabli (2005) dir. Amol Palekar
Parineeta (1953) dir. Bimal Roy

Parineeta (2006) dir. Pradeep Sarkar
Partner (2007) dir. David Dhawan
Perhaps Love (2005) dir. Peter Chan
Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani (2000) dir. Aziz Mirza
Pleasantville (1998) dir. Gary Ross
Powder (1995) dir. Victor Salva
Raaz (2002) dir. Vikram Bhatt
Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi (2008) dir. Aditya Chopra
Race (2008) dir. Abbas and Mastan Alibhai Burmawalla
Raja Harichandra (1913) dir. Dhundiraj Govind Phalke
Ram Gopal Varma's Aag (2007) dir. Ram Gopal Varma
Rang De Basanti (2006) dir. Rakesh Omprakash Mehra
Rangeela (1995) dir. Ram Gopal Varma
Reservoir Dogs (1992) dir. Quentin Tarantino
Return of the Jewel Thief (1996) dir. Ashok Tyagi
Ringu (1998) dir. Hideo Nakata
Roadside Romeo (2008) dir. Jugal Hansraj
Saawariya (2009) dir. Sanjay Leela Bhansali
Sachaa Jhuta (1970) dir. Manmohan Desai
Salaam Namaste (2005) dir. Siddharth Anand
Sarkar (2005) dir. Ram Gopal Varma
Sarkar Raj (2008) dir. Ram Gopal Varma
Satya (1998) dir. Ram Gopal Varma
Shabd (2005) dir. Leena Yadav
Shahenshab (1988) dir. Tinnu Anand
Shantaram (forthcoming) dir. Mira Nair
Shoeshine (1946) dir. Vittorio De Sica
Sholay (1975) dir. Ramesh Sippy
Slumdog Millionaire (2008) dir. Danny Boyle
Superman (1978) dir. Richard Donner
Swades (2004) dir. Ashutosh Gowariker
Sweeney Todd (2007) dir. Tim Burton
Teen Pati (2009) dir. Leena Yadav
The Curious Case of Benjamin Button (2008) dir. David Fincher
The Dark Knight (2008) dir. Christopher Nolan
The Eye (2002) dir. Oxide Pang Chun and Danny Pang
The Gift (2000) dir. Sam Raimi
The Godfather (1972) dir. Francis Ford Coppola

The Guru (2002) dir. Daisy von Scherler Mayer
The Matrix (1999) dir. Andy and Larry Wachowski
The Pink Panther 2 (2009) dir. Harald Zwart
The Ring (2002) dir. Gore Verbinski
The Sound of Music (1965) dir. Robert Wise
The Truman Show (1998) dir. Peter Weir
The Usual Suspects (1995) dir. Bryan Singer
The Wizard of Oz (1939) dir. Victor Fleming
Thoda Pyaar Thoda Magic (2009) dir. Kunal Kohli
Three Men and a Baby (1987) dir. Leonard Nimoy
Titanic (1997) dir. James Cameron
Toofan (1989) dir. Ketan Desai
Umrao Jaan (1981) dir. Muzaffar Ali
Umrao Jaan (2006) dir. J.P. Dutta
U-Turn (1997) dir. Oliver Stone's
Vaastav (1999) dir. Mahesh Manjrekar
Waqt (1965) dir. Yash Chopra
What Lies Beneath (2000) dir. Robert Zemekis
When Harry Met Sally (1989) dir. Rob Reiner
Zinda (2006) dir. Sanjay Gupta