

**VIGNETTES OF BOLLYWOOD 1990-PRESENT:  
A SCHOLARLY APPROACH TO INDIAN CINEMA**

A Thesis by

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in Women's Studies.

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Deborah Gordon, Committee Chair

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## **DEDICATION**

To my loving husband, for sitting through many hours of good (and not-so-good) Indian films in support of my research and the realization of my dream.

The Indian film industry, for capturing my imagination from the first time I laid eyes on a Bollywood film.

Last but not least, to my family, and most importantly my mom, for all your love and support. You have pushed me to dream big and shown me how to make those dreams come true.

Cinema in India is like brushing your teeth in the morning. You can't escape it.

– Shah Rukh Khan

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## ABSTRACT

This project highlights the importance of the Indian film industry as a legitimate field of scholarly and academic research. Through interdisciplinary eyes, the Indian film industry and its byproducts are examined through a multitude of different approaches including gender, film, and cross-cultural studies. The films mentioned in this research are the highest grossing, have the most famous actors and actresses, and are from the 1990s to present. Films were watched with a critical eye to see what exactly was shown and examined. Other scholars' and critics' work was read, films discussed, and critical assumptions were made based on all of the information gathered and perspectives observed. The reason research was conducted on this subject and in this fashion is because there was none of its kind that dealt specifically with Indian cinema in a critical light. Any research referenced is older and discusses older films. If society were really able to understand culture today in a world of generalized hybridity, scholars must study objects such as Bollywood. With the industry's mobility, it creates new kinds of audiences who do not speak the same language, share the same local knowledge about cinema, but instead find themselves as active participants in reading, enjoying, and interpreting film. By doing this, new viewers are exposed to Bollywood as well as new meanings and ways of looking are created. Hopefully with the advent of this thesis, it will inspire others to view Bollywood film as a legitimate field of scholarly and academic research.

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## CHAPTER 1

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF BOLLYWOOD AND ITS BEGININGS

“Picture abhi baki hai mere dost” literally means “the film is not over yet my friend,” and neither is the Bollywood film industry. In *Bollywood: A History* Derek Bose says, “The sheer might of Bollywood is now impossible to ignore. Every year the Indian film industry produces more than a [thousand] feature films, every day fourteen million see a movie in the country, a billion more people a year buy tickets to Indian movies than they do to Hollywood ones” (26). Bose continues by saying, “It is not merely in numbers that Bollywood has trounced Hollywood. Bollywood is the first and only instance of a non-Western society taking a Western product and so changing it that it can now claim to have created a new genre, one that reaches audiences that the original cannot” (27). However, Bollywood was not always the expansive film industry known to the world today. The Lumiere Brothers first introduced soundless movie clips to India in 1899. Out of these soundless clips, the first soundless Indian film, *Raja Harishchandra*, was created in 1913 by the first Indian director Phalke (Darr). The first Indian films were used as a way to preserve Indian history, many of the films re-telling Hindu religious stories and significant historical events. (Bose, Mihir). The industry took off, and the 1920s saw several directors trying their hands at making silent movies. The first sound film was made in 1931 entitled *Alam Ara*. The success of *Alam Ara* inspired other regions of India to start producing films. The name Bollywood was created from the name Hollywood and Bombay, the former name of Mumbai, because Mumbai is “the heart of Indian film production” (Darr).

Bombay hosted its first film festival in 1932; this inspired directors such as Satyajit Ray and Mrinal Sen to produce better quality films focusing on world cinematic audiences. Soon

color films were made, and director K. Asif directed the infamous classic film *Mughal-E-Azam*. The 1960s saw the rise of the star system. Actors and actresses dominated the screen as well as popular playback singers. The 1980s brought Amitabh Bachan as the hero fighting injustice, and “over 800 films” were produced (Darr). The 1980s and 1990s focused more on “family issues and social values” (Darr). Films also portrayed the lives of Indians living abroad. Shahrukh Khan gained immense popularity and earned the title of King Khan. As of recent, directors have tackled more taboo subjects such as female sexuality, racism, and class divisions in India. “Today the Bollywood film industry is the largest film industry in the world. In June 2007 Yorkshire hosted the International Indian Film Academy Awards [...] an event watched by 500 million people in 110 countries around the globe” (Darr). Bollywood’s technology has improved drastically in more recent years as it prepares itself for the world stage. Even with technological advancements, the elements that audiences love about Bollywood, the song and dance, elaborate costumes, emotions, and drama keep the masses coming back for more and more.

## CHAPTER 2

### INTERDISCIPLINARY METHODS IN RESEARCH

The synthesis of perspectives, knowledge, and epistemologies is imperative for interdisciplinary studies. Traditionally disciplines are seen as bounded and mutually exclusive, while problem centered study requires moving beyond a single method that is then applied and understood from that singular perspective. Interdisciplinarity is critical of institutionalized disciplines and the segmenting of method and thus knowledge. The most difficult thing about interdisciplinary studies at Wichita State University is guidance and negotiating a coherent view of a subject. However, cultivating this plurality within education and research is essential to creating individuals who excel in analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing information from many sources to render a greater understanding. My research is based on an interpretive approach rather than a logic-centered one. A logic-centered approach requires the adoption and application of a pre-designed method and places a great deal of emphasis on objectivity. However, an interpretive field already knows that this “objectivity” can never be achieved and is idealistic. The interpretive field embraces the perspective and what has brought a person to the point where he or she can address a subject.

There are many barriers to a multi-faceted approach. Most advisors and educators have been trained within traditional disciplines and must learn to appreciate the alternate perspectives, methods, and ways of thinking that interdisciplinary research has to offer. Interdisciplinary work may be seen as lesser work or some kind of dilettantism, but it is a lack of intellectual and methodological imagination that places barriers on scholarship that crosses boundaries because it is forced to understand a problem, such as the place of Bollywood films in a moment of

globalized hybrid cultural production and reception. Another essential element and potential barrier is autonomy. Projects and research of an interdisciplinary nature must have sufficient autonomy in order to excel and not be bound as traditional disciplines are.

When thinking about a traditional methods section for this thesis, it would simply not work. The “objective” researcher performing tests and analysis is not what this thesis is about. This thesis is about how my perspective has been informed and placed in a certain position in order to critically look at Indian film and the Bollywood film industry. My standpoint and upbringing influences my reading of Bollywood films. In a sense, I have become Indianized through reading Bollywood film. As with crossover films, I too inhabit a place that is not totally Western or fully Eastern. The object produced in this thesis is not wholly from film studies, gender studies, English, sociology, or anthropology but an amalgamation of all without sole membership in any of them. This piece of writing involves connecting different schools of thought and perspectives across academic disciplines and has brought many disciplines and approaches together while modifying them. The new result is an accomplished understanding to the subject at hand.

Bollywood generates thousands of films a year, so one must ask where to begin. Generally, the highest grossing films were selected from the 1990s to present. On occasion an older film will be referenced, simply because it is critically acclaimed and has had influence on other films or ways of thinking. The majority of the films include the most popular actors and actresses from the time period, but if a film was particularly progressive or shocking, it is also incorporated. The majority of the films mentioned in this research were the highest grossing, had the most famous actors and actresses, and were in the time period from the 1990s to present.

Thus, I selected these films because I am interested in them as artifacts of culture that the masses seek to consume.

I then watched the chosen films to see what exactly was shown and applied my critical approach to them, read other scholars' and critics' work, discussed films, and made critical assumptions based on all of the information gathered and perspectives observed. The reason research was conducted on this subject and in this fashion is because there was none of its kind that dealt specifically with Indian cinema and film, gender, and cross-cultural studies in a critical light. Any research referenced is older and discusses older films and does not bring in these fields. One problem that was encountered was the unavailability of academic writing on the subject. The end result is a mixture of popular culture references and scholarly approaches that were also found along the way. The problem seemed daunting at first; however, as the project continued, I discovered and incorporated more and more research into this project.

## CHAPTER 3

### WHAT IS A BOLLYWOOD FILM? A PROPOSED FORMULA

What exactly makes a movie a Bollywood film? Based on my research and viewing, a movie must have several elements in order to be considered a Bollywood film. First of all the film must be produced in the Mumbai based film industry. If this is not the case, the film may be considered more of a crossover production. Next, the film must be in the Hindi language. Even though some Bollywood films are not solely in Hindi (they incorporate small amounts of English that have crept into the vernacular over time) the predominant language of the films is Hindi. Some exceptions include a film that is shot in a different country; in this case, another language might be included, but 90% is still Hindi.

Next, a Bollywood film must have an elaborate melodramatic storyline that tells a story about India or Indian culture which can adhere to the same genres familiar to the West such as romance, comedy, action etc. However, more common among Bollywood films is the masala movie. Masala refers to a mixture of different spices. When applied to Bollywood films, this means the film incorporates many of the genres rolled into one production; for example, a film could be a romantic comedy with several action sequences thrown in. This is an interesting idea because the film then appeals to a wider audience verses the Western “chick flick” that is stereotyped as only appealing to women. The masala movie opens up the film to appeal to a wider range of people; however, this is also where many Bollywood films get a bum rap for being extremely lengthy productions, on average lasting two-and-a half to three hours.

Another extremely important characteristic of Bollywood movies, and perhaps what they are most famous for, are the song and dance routines. The songs from Bollywood films are

prerecorded by professional singers. Then they are lip-synched in the film by the actors. Lip-synching is not frowned upon in Indian society as it is in the West. Everyone is well aware of who the singers are, and they have quite a following with people flocking to movies sometimes just to hear their favorite songs in a film. Songs can often make or break a film. Dancing is also incorporated with the singing. In older Bollywood films traditional Indian dances would be showcased, but now it is common to see modern dance moves incorporated with traditional dances. Sometimes the song and dance routines symbolize a dream or fantasy or can even represent a sexual encounter. These routines may comment on the action currently taking place in the film being worked into the plot or can give viewers a clue into the internal thought process and feelings of the hero, heroine, or both. These routines are commonly referred to as item numbers, and a movie would have anywhere from five to eight in a film. Based on my research these four criteria must comprise a film in order for it to be a Bollywood production.

## CHAPTER 4

### CROSSOVER FILMS: DIFFERENT WOOD SAME TREE?

Indian cinema, as with any other movie-making industry, reflects and is reflected through the country's political, economic, social, and cultural aspects. Many levels of cinema represent India; however, one can basically divide them into two categories: "artistic" and "popular." Recently more "artistic" Indian films have been seen at international film festivals. These are realistic and many times biographic films like *Gandhi* or *Bandit Queen* and often avoid glamour and glitz. Many differences in theme, style, and technique separate the two categories. Popular cinema depicts "most vividly the 'Indianness' of Indian cinema" (Gokulsing and Dissanayake). Popular films may not explore the same kinds of themes as artistic films, but "in terms of popular response and how popular imagination is shaped, they are highly significant. With their unique combination of fantasy, action, song, dance, and spectacle, Indian popular films constitute a distinctively Indian form of mass entertainment" (Gokulsing and Dissanayake). Crossover films attempt to bridge the two categories with a result that is more appealing to Western audiences while still keeping Indian culture intact. Many names describe these kinds of films. Some refer to them as hybrids or diasporic films; however, the term "crossover film" is more accurate because the films are crossing over from a purely Bollywood audience and production into a more "multicultural" arena appealing and targeting a wider array of viewers.

When discussing crossover films, one should note they are not purely Bollywood nor are they purely Hollywood productions; they inhabit a space between the two much like the people involved in their production. They are branches of the same tree. Something unique about crossover films is that many of the directors are NRIs (nonresident Indians) who live abroad in

Western countries. In some cases, they are not Indian at all. A few popular examples of these crossover films are *Bollywood/Hollywood*, *Bride and Prejudice*, *Monsoon Wedding*, *Bend it Like Beckham*, and *Slumdog Millionaire*.

*Bollywood/Hollywood* and *Bride and Prejudice* are the most similar to Bollywood cinema out of the five crossover films mentioned above. *Bollywood/Hollywood* is directed by Deepa Mehta and was filmed and takes place in Toronto, Canada. The story revolves around the Seth family, particularly the oldest son Rahul. Rahul is a young rich Indo-Canadian. He was dating a Canadian pop star named Kimberly who dies early on in the movie. His sister Twinky is planning to get married to Bobby. Their mother says that if Rahul does not find a new Indian bride to be engaged to, the wedding for Twinky is off. Twinky confides in Rahul that she is pregnant and must get married to Bobby as planned so a scandal does not break out. Rahul is depressed because of the family pressure and goes to a bar where he meets Sue. He thinks she is a Spanish escort and hires her to act as an Indian girl he is interested in getting engaged to. Rahul eventually finds out that Sue stands for Sunita, and she is actually Indian. He is a little angry at first but tries to push that aside. A few other twists are thrown in to add more drama; however, all ends well, and Rahul and Sue end up together (*IMDb*).

*Bride and Prejudice*, directed by Gurinder Chadha, follows the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* very closely with many elements compacted and Indianized. The story has a cross cultural reference because the Lizzy character Lalita falls in love with an American Darcy (*IMDb*). Basically visualize the *Pride and Prejudice* story set in India, and this is a good idea of what *Bride and Prejudice* is like.

*Bollywood/Hollywood* and *Bride and Prejudice* are similar to Bollywood because they tell stories revolving around Indian families. They differ because they are both in English with only a few Hindi words and phrases in the dialogues and songs. An element that both films adhere to is the element of song and dance with many Bollywood-esque routines throughout the movie. The song and dance routines add commentary to the storyline and provide entertainment as they do in Bollywood films. Another thing that makes them different from Bollywood films is they are not as idealistic and show more of a reality; that is, the families in both films have their problems and are not stereotypical images.

*Monsoon Wedding* and *Bend it Like Beckham* are crossover films as well; however, they are a little bit less like the typical Bollywood film. *Monsoon Wedding* is directed by Mira Nair and conveys the story of a father trying to organize a wedding for his daughter in India. The bride Aditi is nervous because she has been involved with a married man and is still not completely certain that she wants to leave him and marry an American based Indian man. Multiple subplots ensue. Ria a cousin of the family was sexually abused by her uncle who is considered the most successful in the family. Ria is now older and intervenes before the uncle can do this to another member of the family. The wedding coordinator falls in love with the family's maid. Aditi's younger brother struggles to gain his father's approval, and the film suggests this because of his implied homosexuality. Ayesha another relative engages in a mild flirtation with Aditi's cousin Rahul from Australia (*IMDb*).

*Bend it Like Beckham* is another movie directed by Gurinder Chadha. In the story Jesminder or Jess is the daughter of a Punjabi Sikh family living in London. Juliette or Jules is a daughter of a typical English family. The two run into each other in the park and become fast friends because of their mutual love for soccer. Jess' family gets to the point where they ban her

from playing soccer, but she still sneaks off to play with the boys and her good friend Tony, also South Asian and a closet homosexual. Jules encourages Jess to join a woman's soccer team with her. Jess does but hides it from her family. Jo, the coach, is at first skeptical of Jess' ability because she does not have the proper shoes, but he lets her join the team anyway. Eventually, Jess develops an attraction to Jo. The relationship furthers on an away game trip to Germany. At the end of the night, they are about to kiss when Jules walks in; she is also attracted to Jo. This immediately messes up their friendship. Jess comes over to Jules' house to apologize, and Jules' mom overhears the conversation and concludes that the two are in a lesbian relationship, which is not the case. Jess' parents find out that she has been lying to them and become stricter about her playing soccer. The final tournament is on the same day as Jess' sister's wedding. However, her dad finally understands her passion and takes her to the game. She gets to play, and both girls are offered scholarships to Santa Clara University in California. Jess' family is reluctant but eventually gives in and lets her attend the college. On the day the two are leaving at the airport Jo finally comes and confesses his love for Jess in front of the family. Jess agrees and says she will sort out the mess and her family when she returns on winter break (*IMDb*).

*Monsoon Wedding* and *Bend it Like Beckham* are similar to Bollywood in the way the movies are stylized. *Monsoon Wedding* could very well be a "Bollywood" movie; however, a few of the necessary criteria are not present. The movie was produced by IFC Productions (Independent Film Channel). Next, the movie is largely in English, and finally the themes of the film do not seem to fit with other Bollywood movies. In some instances, the director is commenting on serious situations that most likely would not be focused on in the typical escapist Bollywood film. *Bend it Like Beckham* mostly chronicles the story from an NRI woman's perspective. She has to deal largely with her traditional family getting in the way of her dreams.

The film is also all in English but does have cultural elements to it. Neither film employs song and dance routines. A couple of instances occur where song and dance is seen at a wedding in each film, but it does not follow the same way as a Bollywood film. The main difference between *Monsoon Wedding* and *Bend it Like Beckham* and *Bollywood/Hollywood* and *Bride and Prejudice* are the overall attitudes of the film and the song and dance routines. *Monsoon Wedding* and *Bend it Like Beckham* have more serious storylines and do not incorporate song and dance in the same Bollywood fashion as *Bollywood/Hollywood* and *Bride and Prejudice*. *Monsoon Wedding* and *Bend it Like Beckham* were more successful in the West because they were targeted towards a more Western audience or even a NRI audience. *Bollywood/Hollywood* and *Bride and Prejudice* focused more on Indian values and Indian culture and were not quite as popular when they were released.

Finally, a movie that must be discussed is *Slumdog Millionaire*. *Slumdog Millionaire* is a British film directed by Danny Boyle. It takes place in India and tells the Cinderella story of a boy from the slums of Mumbai. The main character is Jamal who is about to experience the biggest day of his life. With the whole nation watching, he is just one question away from winning India's version of *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* But when the show breaks for the night, police arrest him on suspicion of cheating; how could a street kid know so much? Desperate to prove his innocence, Jamal tells the story of his life in the slum where he and his brother grew up, of their adventures together on the road, of vicious encounters with local gangs, and of Latika, the girl he loved and lost. Each story reveals the key to the answer to one of the game show's questions. Each chapter of Jamal's increasingly layered story reveals where he learned the answers to the show's seemingly impossible quizzes (*IMDb*). But one question

remains a mystery: what is this young man with no apparent desire for riches really doing on the game show?

*Slumdog Millionaire* was a huge hit in the West; taking home almost all of the ten Academy Awards it was nominated for. With such popularity in the West some have referred to it as the first critically acclaimed Bollywood movie, but is it really? The film does not adhere to the formula. It is a British production with a British director, is almost entirely in English, even though it is set in India. The film incorporates one song and dance routine as the credits role which is reminiscent of Bollywood. *Slumdog Millionaire* has an amazing soundtrack. The film does however show Indian culture and has fallen under some controversy considering the way it portrays the slums.

The one thing that these crossover films have in common is they inhabit a space between Bollywood and Hollywood. The filmmakers take on the position of informant and shed light on India and its culture (Desai 39). Crossover films have achieved “mainstream exposure and feature aesthetics from Bollywood cinema” but cannot be considered Bollywood films (Dudrah 156). These directors have succeeded in making Western oriented films that bring attention to Indian culture while being financially successful. It is incorrect to label them Bollywood because that label would be a misnomer.

## CHAPTER 5

### NEGOTIATING EAST AND WEST

#### **5.1 Consuming Bollywood from Mumbai to Wichita: Construction of the Homeland in the South Asian Diaspora**

Wichita, Kansas, a budding metropolis of the Midwest, is not necessarily recognized as a large hub for South Asians. No, in fact other areas in the United States are more likely to be associated with large South Asian populations like Edison, New Jersey or Artesia, California. A little closer to Kansas are Chicago, Illinois and Dallas or Houston, Texas. That being said, it was not until February 4<sup>th</sup> of 2010 when I actually thought of Wichita as housing a growing South Asian diaspora.

Wichita has quite a few South Asian restaurants and grocery stores. However, unlike larger cities with larger South Asian populations, Wichita does not have its own Hindi movie theater. Dallas has quite a large multi-screen movie theater called FunAsiA. FunAsiA shows several Indian films and also has banquet halls for weddings or other social events. When frequenting South Asian restaurants or grocery stores in Wichita, I would come across an advertisement for a screening of a popular Hindi film. This happens one or two times a year when there has been a lot of hype about a particular film. These showings are usually just for the weekend, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, and after that the film is no longer shown. These showings usually take place at a lower budget theater like the Pink Palace on the west side of town. When I have attended these screenings, quite a large number of people attend. When attending *Love Aaj Kal* in the summer of 2009 at the Pink Palace on a Saturday night, the entire theater was full of couples, groups of friends, and families. However, in February of 2010,

something different happened. I went to the store that I usually go to for South Asian groceries and saw a movie poster advertising Aamir Khan's new movie *3 Idiots*. However, this time it was showing at the upscale Warren Theater for an entire week with three screening times each day; this had never happened before. I was thoroughly impressed and decided I must go watch the film in support. After watching the film as I exited the Warren Theater, I realized Wichita had its own growing South Asian diaspora. This event may not seem significant to some, but it is important to the South Asians in Wichita who use Bollywood to connect with their culture by consuming films.

Visual culture permeates every part of people's lives. With the growth of the computer, visual images even videos are available within seconds of turning the machine on. One must ask the question, what does the consumption of these visuals mean, and how does it affect people on a daily basis? For example, when watching a movie, "the meanings and pleasure we derive from it might be drawn, consciously or unconsciously, from associations with things we have seen in [other] movies, works of art, or advertisements. [...] Our visual experiences do not take place in isolation; they are enriched by memories and images from different aspects of our lives" (Sturken 2). By consuming Bollywood movies, the South Asian diaspora is able to connect with their roots because the films are enriched with memories of the homeland. In turn, the films in a sense become the culture.

So what exactly is culture? *Practice of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* provides an excellent definition and example:

Culture is not so much a set of things but more so a set of processes or practices through which individuals and groups come to make sense of those things. Culture is the production and exchange of meanings, the giving and taking of meaning, between members of a society or group. Hall states, 'It is the participants in a culture who give

meaning to people, objects, and events. . . . It is by our use of things, and what we say, think and feel about them – how we represent them – that we give them a meaning.’

It is important to keep in mind that in any group that shares a culture [...], there is always a range of meanings and interpretations ‘floating about,’ so to speak, with regard to any given issue or object at any given time. Culture is a process, not a fixed set of practices or interpretations. For example, three different viewers of the same advertisement who share a general view of the world may differently interpret its meaning, based on their respective experiences and knowledge. These people may share the same culture but still subject the image to different interpretive processes. These viewers may then talk about their responses, influencing one another’s subsequent views. Some viewers might argue more convincingly than others; some might be regarded as having more authority than others. In the end, meanings are produced not in the heads of the viewers so much as through a process of negotiation among individuals within a particular culture. [...] Interpretations, then, are as effective as the visual artifacts [...] that generate them in influencing a culture’s or group’s shared world view. (3-4)

Culture and interpretation are essential in creating significance and meaning within the film of South Asian diasporas.

Diaspora comes from the Greek word *diaspeirein* which suggests the scattering of seeds. It is important to think of this image when defining diaspora. The plant is from one particular area ie the “homeland,” and the seeds move to other areas away from the plant to create a new home. The moving of different groups to new homelands for whatever reason is not a new phenomenon; however, it has lead to a growth of people who are “linked by social characteristics like ethnicity, language, religion and culture” (Karim 1). These people coming together create diasporas that have developed their own “networks of communication [using] a variety of media that include mail, telephone, fax, film, audiotape, videotape, satellite television and the Internet” (Karim 1); in turn, creating different “mediascapes” from which to discuss (Appadurai). For South Asian diaporas, “Indian films contain models of celebrity and of consumption that are pivotal to the new public culture” (Appadurai 8).

The new public culture is made up of popular Hindi cinema. In *The Cinematic ImagiNATION: Indian Popular Films as Social History*, Jyotika Viridi gives some important background knowledge about Bollywood and its impact on the masses:

Films have fascinated and entertained the Indian public for a hundred years since the Lumiere brothers first exhibited this craft in 1895. Yet serious intellectual attention to commercial cinema, the popular form dominated by Hindi films has only just begun. [...] Hindi cinema is the largest film industry in the world with the most prolific rate of production – a staggering 800 films a year – screened for approximately fifteen million people a day. It is *the* dominant cultural institution and product in India, providing affordable entertainment to audiences drawn primarily (though not exclusively) from the working class in urban centers. Though Hindi is a regional northern language, Hindi cinema's audience transcends lingual-regional boundaries within the nation, making it fit the national cinema billing like no other. Beyond national boundaries its aesthetic and affective mode attracts nonwestern audiences[, and] [...] [i]t resonates powerfully with the Indian diaspora, often becoming their only connection with the homeland and the main intergenerational culture diasporic families share while located in places [abroad] (1-2).

Viridi also points out the pleasure and desire commercial film offers and creates is “a vital part of popular culture and a critical site of cultural interpretation” (2). With the Indian diaspora being the largest and fastest growing diasporic community in the world with numbers in the millions deposited in various countries, these NRIs (nonresident Indians) have “become an important market of popular culture as well as a site for its production (Mishra 235-236). “First generation NRIs desperately try to hang on to the values that mark their difference from the rest of the nation-state” (236). The NRI population produces and reproduces “India” through Bollywood films and is “crucial in bringing the ‘homeland’ into the diaspora as well as creating a culture of imaginary solidarity across the [...] groups that make up the South Asian diaspora” (237). Bollywood then “brings the global into the local, presenting people [...] with shared ‘structures of feeling’ that in turn produce a transnational sense of communal solidarity. [...] The various

Indian diasporas are, in a sense, imagined communities that read Bollywood Cinema as a very culture-specific, self-contained phenomenon without any critical reference to other” national cinemas (238). Bollywood then takes on a new meaning and significance in their lives. The bond between themselves and India “has been one of imagination. With time, as memory of ‘roots’ – the *real* India – was fading away, films took over the responsibility of constructing an empty, many-coloured space through its never-ending web of images, songs, ‘dialogues’ and stars” (Ray 23). Bollywood then creates its own public space for people to interact. Instead of yearning for the roots of one’s homeland, the culture is reconstructed from an imagined homeland culture in new surroundings. In many instances, the individuals that make up the diaspora have no desire to return “home” but do desire to be connected for reasons of identity and cultural values. Bollywood amply provides a romanticized version of Indian culture for them to connect with (26-27).

Diasporas not only consume the culture of Bollywood, but Bollywood also consumes the culture of the diaspora. Bollywood has taken advantage of this new situation by enlarging its terrain (Ray 31). Bollywood now features more and more films addressing the NRI group and the challenges it faces. Older Bollywood movies did not need to address the community “out there” because the focus was purely on the homeland; however, now the NRI is very much a part of the audience that Bollywood actively addresses (31-32). Ray says “this enmeshing of identities has enabled Bollywood to address the moral and cultural alienation” NRIs face (32). One cannot deny that “Hindi films were (and still are) an important element of this diasporic South Asian public culture. Their consumption [...] helped sustain a link with ‘the old country,’ however much it was predicated on fantasy and modified by contingent realities” (Kaur 19). The film narratives offered a refuge to the audiences “who, in everyday life, struggled under the twin

yoke of workplace discrimination and old-country expectations” (19). Now, “Bollywood[’s] representation establishes the ‘India[n]’ community as a national but global community” (Ray 32-33). One cannot help but focus on the “South Asian diaspora’s widely agreed ability to re-create their cultures in diverse locations and locates the element of the luminal within the nitty gritty of this changing history” (34).

A concrete example of Bollywood films that are targeted towards the South Asian diasporic communities are *Pardes*, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, and *3 Idiots*. Each of these movies has elements of Indian culture that must be preserved as well as identifying with the NRI population. The commonality between these three movies are the narratives which are all based in India and are relatively very popular and well know. *Pardes* literally meaning foreign land tells the story of a pure Indian girl named Ganga. She lives in a rural village with her family. Her father is friends with a man named Kishorilal who relocated to America. Kishorilal has one son who was born and raised in America and wants him to marry an Indian girl from India. He also has taken in Arjun, who is his foster son; the two boys are around the same age. Kishorilal is determined to get his son Ranjiv to India and have him marry Ganga. He sends Arjun to make all the arrangements. Arjun and Ganga slowly fall in love with each other. However, Rajiv has accepted the idea of marrying Ganga. Rajiv is not the person who Ganga thinks he is; he smokes, drinks, and has had relationships with girls in America. Ganga’s family agrees to let her visit America before the wedding to help in her decision. While seeing the sights Rajiv tries to rape Ganga. Ganga escapes to Arjun, and he takes her back to India and convinces the families that they love each other and should be together (*IMDb*).

In the movie, the viewer gets the sense that Ganga represents the ideal embodiment of India, the pure India, and Ranjiv the American born man from Indian origin can never be a good

match with her. The perfect version is Arjun a man who grew up in India for most of his life, learned the culture and values, and then went abroad. Krishorilal also says in the movie that the NRIs need the kind of women like Ganga because they preserve the culture in the home even if they are abroad. *Pardes* was a popular movie overseas because it identifies with the plight of NRIs looking for a spouse and sheds light on the culture shock of people migrating to new lands.

Released a year later and even more popular in India and across the globe is *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, literally meaning something happens as in the tagline of the movie “you know you are in love when *something happens*.” In the film Rahul and the tomboyish Anjali are friends attending the same college. One day the principal’s daughter Tina comes from London to attend college in India. She is the epitome of femininity and exactly opposite of Anjali. Rahul falls in love with Tina as soon as they meet. With the new competition for Rahul’s affection, Anjali realizes that she is in love with Rahul. Since Anjali and Rahul are really close friends, Rahul eventually confides in Anjali that he is in love with Tina. Anjali leaves the college suddenly vowing to forget the heartbreak. Tina and Rahul get married and have a daughter which Tina names Anjali. Tina dies shortly after the childbirth but has written a series of letters that are to be given to Anjali each year on her birthday. On Anjali’s eighth birthday she opens the final letter and the history behind her name is revealed including the story of the entire love triangle. The young Anjali believes that the older Anjali could be exactly what her father needs to make him happy again. Eventually the two are reunited at a camp where the young Anjali will attend. The older Anjali has blossomed into a beautiful woman, and Rahul’s feelings ignite once he sees her; however, she is engaged to someone else. In the end, fate takes over and the two are united at last (*IMDb*).

*Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* was such a successful film because it appealed to both audiences. The film is set entirely in India; however, it also strikes a chord with the population in India as well as the diasporic community abroad. “It works as a complex screen upon which very diverse ideas of Indianness and modernity are projected. In India itself, it is rather obvious that this and other films in the genre have little if any relationship to the actual lived reality in the country” (Hansen 257-258). *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* was “produced within the conventions of a rather light-hearted and ‘over the top’ genre, as a grand story of true love and romance, loaded with significance and signs of Indianness” (258). The film portrays a “dreamy and hazy but also attractive space of recognition: a global Indian diasporic space imagined to be more hospitable and generous [...] yet distinctively Indian and modern” (259). Hansen continues by saying, “The virtual, floating and rather abstract sense of being Indian articulated through sensuous and visceral signifiers such as films, music or religious devotion appear much more attractive and non-controversial than conventional notions of lineage, blood or political loyalty” (259). Hansen also points out that “this resonates more clearly with [...] [the] ‘diaspora as a mode of cultural production’ which nonetheless also revolves around themes of renewing and recasting the meanings of ‘Indian culture’ in the face of its absence in everyday life” (259). *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* was such a success because both the NRIs and the Indians still living in India could strongly identify with the narrative and culture produced.

*3 Idiots* is the most recently released and greatly anticipated movie of the three. It is also the first movie to officially be released on You Tube twelve weeks after its release. By releasing the film on You Tube, the diasporic communities are directly targeted, since it will make it so much easier to access the film through the website. The film is set in India and tells the story of three close friends who meet at an engineering college. Rancho is the leader of the group of

friends inspiring all who come in contact with him. He is naturally smart and goes to school because he loves exploring and learning new things. His two friends on the other hand go to school because they need to find jobs to help support their respective families who are both from modest backgrounds. The director of the school is a terror making all the students' lives hell, applying insanely high expectations even causing one of the students to commit suicide because of the pressure. However, Rancho meets his daughter, and they develop feelings for one another. Rancho turns out not to be who everyone thought he was. He was actually the servant's child of a wealthy family with a child around the same age. The wealthy boy did not like going to school, so Rancho switched with him. The wealthy father knew his son would not be able to complete the engineering degree, so he asked Rancho to continue the charade. Rancho did what he agreed and then left. However, his friends and the school directors' daughter went to find their long lost friend. The movie ends on a positive note evoking the theme of the movie, "aal izz well" (*IMDb*).

*3 Idiots* highlighted the struggles that every student faces in a competitive program. It also focused on the close bonds of friendships made in college. These themes go beyond India and even the diaspora communities. This is the major reason, Westerners could also identify with the movie. It appealed to the teenage theater worker because it invokes the feeling of Hollywood productions like any of the *National Lampoon* movies while still displaying Indian culture. The film is considered Bollywood's highest grosser to date kicking out another Aamir Khan movie *Ghajini* from its throne. It is also given credit "as the highest grossing Indian film ever to release in the US, Middle East, Australia, South Africa, Pakistan, Kenya and Fiji" ("*3 Idiots* Grosses ..."). The film is also in the top ten at the British Box Office ("*3 Idiots* Grosses ..."). It is no wonder the Warren Theaters in Wichita wanted a piece of the action.

On the other hand, the Bollywood film industry's use of the NRI situation as the main focus of films is a newer phenomenon. By doing this the industry enlarges its terrain and produces films that directly target the diaspora groups. Concrete examples of such films are *Salaam Namaste*, *Namastey London*, and *Love Aaj Kal*. The commonality between these three movies is they all take place outside of India for the most part and are an example of Bollywood appropriating the diaspora story; they also include many of the characters taking on Westernized versions of their Indian names, ie Nikhil becomes Nick and Jasmeet becomes Jazz, and they are all popular films. *Salaam Namaste* the first of the three tells the story of two NRIs Nick and Ambar. The plot is similar to other love stories; initially the two cannot stand each other, but in the end, they fall in love. *Salaam Namaste* is different because it was the first Bollywood movie to be entirely filmed in Australia and was the most successful film in 2005 in India and the overseas market (Phillips). *Salaam Namaste* also covers some new territory because Nick and Ambar have left their homes in India and want to make a new life for themselves in Australia. When the two meet in Melbourne, at first they cannot stand one another but end up living together as roommates and grow to love one another. If that was not enough, Ambar gets pregnant which shocks Nick that she decides to keep the baby. Eventually Nick catches up, and the two get back together (*IMDb*). These are new themes for Bollywood cinema to highlight, and one cannot deny the NRI population's influence.

*Namastey London* is a film about Jasmeet or Jazz who is Indian, but identifies herself as British because she was born and raised in Britain. Jazz tries to distance herself from her Indian roots, and her parents who were born and raised in India have a difficult time understanding their daughter. Jazz is interested in a British playboy who proposes to her; however, her father wants her to consider an Indian man and suggests that she go to India before she makes her decision.

He secretly has a plan to get her married on the trip to Arjun whom they meet in India and is friends with the family. Jazz slyly agrees, but when the family returns to Britain, she tells them that the marriage would not be recognized in Britain because it was not registered in India before they left, and she has plans to marry the British playboy Charles. Jazz continues to make arrangements with Charles, but after visiting India, she has a slow but new found pride for her heritage, which Charles and some of his British friends do not appreciate nor understand. Jazz slowly begins to develop a connection with Arjun whom she has to start spending more time with since Charles is not interested in planning the wedding, after all it will be his fourth marriage. On the wedding day, Arjun is giving away Jazz acting as her best man. Finally, Arjun tells Charles to take care of Jazz in English. This surprises Jazz because she thought the entire time he could not speak English. When it comes to saying “I do” Jazz says no and runs off to Arjun and chooses to be with him (*IMDb*).

A side story in *Namastey London* includes a friend of Jazz’s named Imran. He is also born and raised in Britain but is Pakistani. He is in love with a white British woman named Suzanne. The two shock everyone when they choose to live together before marriage. They also decide they want to marry; however, the last straw breaks when Suzanne’s family wants Imran to change his name and his religion which he refuses to do (*IMDb*).

The film was pretty popular in India and abroad. The NRI situations in *Namastey London* are evident even by the tagline, “A British brat meets a ‘Funjabi’ boy” (*IMDb*). However, when watching the movie the themes are even more apparent. The mixing of British and Indian cultures and trying to identify or negotiate those boundaries in a true coming of age tale from Jazz and Imran’s behavior; the audience receives many points of view from the diaspora community. The film also to a lesser extent highlights the culture shock of coming to a

new country with Arjun's tale. The themes in *Namaste London* may not be all that different from *Pardes*, but the location is in London which adds a new element to the mix.

*Lova Aaj Kal* which literally means "love these days" refers to love in modern times, which aptly describes the movie. The film is made up of two story lines: The NRI couple of Jai and Meera's love story from the present, and Veer and Harleen's story from the past. By using stories from past and present, the film gains attention from two audiences the NRI audience and the more traditional native Indian audience. The film is set in London for the most part with Jai ending up in San Francisco for a while and Meera in India. Jai and Meera begin casually dating and do not want to tie each other down; however when career opportunities separate the couple and take each of them to other parts of the world, the two cannot forget the relationship that they had and other lovers cannot measure up. The flashbacks of Veer and Harleen's story are set in various locations in India. The two are fond of each other, but Harleen's family has already chosen a man for her to marry. Veer finally gets up the nerve and basically whisks her away before the marriage takes place (*IMDb*). The two stories point out that true love never changes, even though the circumstances around it do. The theme of *Love Aaj Kal* is new and interesting, not the same kind of love story but more philosophical in the questions it asks: What is love? How does a couple know they are in love? Does love happen in an instant or something that grows with time? What is the main priority in life a career or love? And most importantly, do people only have one chance at love? The film was also very popular at home in India as well as in overseas markets coming in just behind *3 Idiots*. It also had the highest number of daily showings across theaters around the world when it was released ([boxofficemojo.com](http://boxofficemojo.com)). The film presents the questions in a style that calls the most attention from the NRI community; however, it still engages the native community as well with the juxtaposition of the two tales.

The movies outlined in this section barely scrape the tip of the iceberg when discussing films that target the South Asian diaspora. One could choose to look at many other films made by Bollywood. However, these films are among the most popular and needed to be discussed further. There is no doubt the South Asian diaspora uses Bollywood to construct elements of its cultural roots, and the films act as a way to transport Indian culture to places where it is not as prevalent. Bollywood has an extremely important place in the hearts and minds of NRIs and their connection to the homeland whether they consciously recognize it or not.

## **5.2 *Ghajini* a Better Version than the Original?**

Bollywood is known for “borrowing” storylines from its rival Hollywood. In several reviews Bollywood is “called out” for borrowing a little too much from other films: “This isn’t the first time that we see very obvious similarities in premise and characters being adopted for Bollywood’s own productions” (Stefan). This review refers to *Ghajini*, an “Indianized” version of the cult classic *Memento*. Obviously similarities link the two films, but one must also acknowledge the differences.

*Memento*, directed by Christopher Nolan, tells the story of Lenny, played by Guy Pearce. The storyline seems simple enough: “A robber attacks a married couple, killing the woman and leaving the man for dead. [...] The man struggles to overcome amnesia through the chaos of memory loss induced by his injuries. Finding himself within rag-tag moments of his past, he attempts to remember the vital details and solve his wife’s murder” (*MRQE*). However, the way in which Lenny’s story is presented makes the film truly unique. The audience sees everything from Lenny’s perspective. Lenny takes Polaroids of the people and places he needs to remember. A feeling of watching the film in reverse is achieved because the audience receives

information in bits and pieces the way someone with no short term memory would. The ending of the film has the audience questioning what is happening and what has happened throughout the movie as well as his or her own memories and truths. The subjectivity of memory and the partial perspective is highlighted (*IMDb*). The moral at the end of this movie is “our reality is what we make it.” *Memento* lends itself to a deconstructionist reading because it is ambiguous, and no single interpretation of the film can be applied; all are correct (Murfin 369). Ambiguity makes this a great film; however, this also places limitations on the audience. Being a cult classic, it has a relatively small but devoted fan base. A.R. Murugadoss addresses this issue in his version of the film *Ghajini*.

*Ghajini* follows *Memento*'s storyline closely. The elements of memory loss, photographs and tattoos, and revenge in the name of love are all the same. However, the differences between the two movies cannot simply be overlooked. A.R. Murugadoss expands the story and makes the film accessible to a larger audience. Several movie reviews also point this out. Joe Leydon from *Variety* describes *Ghajini* as a better version of *Memento*:

For those who thought “Memento” would have been a better movie with a few more songs and a lot more ass-kicking, writer-director A.R. Murugadoss offers “Ghajini,” an exuberantly excessive and unreasonably entertaining mash-up of musical-comedy romance, action-movie mayhem and psycho-thriller suspense. Even auds accustomed to the anything-goes outrageousness of many Bollywood multi-genre masalas may be left slack-jawed and breathless after experiencing this singularly wild ride. Pic has opened to boffo biz in India and likely will help expand the North American crossover market for similarly idiosyncratic imports.

According to Leyton, *Ghajini* is obviously more than a remake. Aspects of *Memento* have been used; however, *Ghajini* is an “Indianized,” “unique story of love and revenge” on its own (Bhasin). Shruti Bhasin from *Planet Bollywood* has even gone as far as to encourage viewers to

skip watching *Memento* and go straight to *Ghajini* with a fresh mind. She says that “no comparisons are necessary.”

*Ghajini* is more successful because the director has widened the story to incorporate a range of genres. Another reason *Ghajini* is successful is pointed out by Raam Tarat:

[*Ghajini* is] a throw back to what Hindi films used to be in the 80's – a three hour extravaganza of two dimensional romance, superfluous comedy, musical set-pieces, comic-book action and maudlin drama. The film's amplified action scenes (one punch flinging five guys 20 feet – Superman kinda shit) are more attuned to a south Indian audience, but in a weird kind of way, it works. [...] Add in a hackneyed villain, stunning dream sequences and a near psychotic leading man, and you have a very interesting viewing experience.

*Ghajini* draws on classic Bollywood action films from the past but also incorporates a fresh *Kill Bill*-esque cinematography. The cinematography makes the film very different from the original *Memento*. *Memento* incorporates more of a “thinking man who questions and second guesses himself” (Stefan). *Ghajini* adds two parts to the storyline: the enraged, revenge-seeking Hulk figure, and the sensitive mild-mannered man in love (Stefan). The second aspect of the storyline in *Ghajini* allows the audience to share in the main character's pain. *Memento* has the audience encounter more frustrating issues with memory loss and amnesia through the main character's narrative; however, *Ghajini* takes the ambiguity out of the storyline and offers a more linear approach, so the audience connects more with the characters in the film (Stefan). Stefan further expounds on this in his review: “Ghajini doesn't adopt or try to adopt those very cerebral mind-f\* moments from Memento, but as I mentioned plays it out more like a straight forward action thriller, with a handful of inevitable moments of watching our protagonist get taken advantage of because of his condition. No other structural styles are used besides flashbacks.”

The issue is not if one film is better than the other, but the main point is *Ghajini* is not simply a remake of *Memento*. A.R. Murugadoss has taken *Memento* and created a film which implements Indian traditions, storylines, and the iconic history of Bollywood and exposed an audience to a movie which they most likely would never have seen.

### **5.3 Adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* and Cultural Criticism of *Bride and Prejudice***

Many have said that Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* has been worked and reworked too many times, especially for the big screen. Whether or not these adaptations are "good" or not is not an accurate way of evaluating them. "Adaptations claiming fidelity bear the original as a signified, whereas those inspired by or derived from an earlier text stand in a relation of referring to the original" (Andrew 96). Some adaptations follow the original work exactly; however, others simply acquire inspiration and evoke the spirit of the original. The 1995 version, 2005 version, and the Bollywood version have all been adapted from the same text; however, they are all very different.

In 1995, the BBC released a made for television version of *Pride and Prejudice*. For many, this is the "be all, end all" film version of the text and has been re-released on DVD twice already. It is directed by Simon Langton and stars Colin Firth as Mr. Darcy and Jennifer Ehle as Elizabeth Bennet (*IMDb*). One reason many hold this version in such high esteem is because it follows the original very closely, so fans of the text are more than likely going to become fans of this film version. In this case, "the film *is* the novel as seen by cinema" which is not usually the case (Andrew 99). The film is described as "flawless" and "one of the finest literary adaptations ever done" (Jawetz). The themes of "pride" and "prejudice" are carried throughout and well

developed. However, one slight downfall occurs; because it follows the text so closely, it is a five-hour movie which would turn off some audiences.

The character development is exceptional in the 1995 version. Because the film has five hours to work with, the audience is able to develop a connection with each character, has time to respond, and understand the changes the characters experience throughout the film. Darcy, Mr. Collins, and Elizabeth are three very important characters to analyze more closely. Collin Firth's portrayal of Darcy is one of his most notable performances. It all started with the BBC version, and has led him to other portrayals of Darcy in films, such as *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001) and *Bridget Jones's Diary: The Edge of Reason* (2004). Firth has also starred in many period films since. In the 1995 version, Firth hits the mark with his portrayal of Darcy. At first, the audience sees a snobbish man from high society thrown into a party with country folk. He sympathizes more with the snotty Caroline Bingley in the beginning. Slowly the audience sees his gradual change from a prideful man with many misconceptions about the people around him to a softer awkwardly shy man. He develops a strong love for Elizabeth and tries ever so diligently to right the wrongs he has committed from his prejudices, specifically keeping Bingley and Jane apart. For many people, Firth is the ultimate Darcy.

The Mr. Collins character also needs to be mentioned. David Bamber portrays him as a “sniveling, sweaty cleric [who] is one of the most convincing, consistent, and specific performances. [...] [He] is not a character easily forgotten” (Jawetz). Bamber's portrayal of Mr. Collins is also one of the best in the 1995 version of *Pride and Prejudice*.

Last but not least, “Jennifer Ehle delivers an enormous portrayal as Elizabeth. She communicates the complexities of her famous role with expertise and warmth. [...] [S]he is one

of the funniest, most vibrant, alive personalities ever committed to film” (Jawetz). Ehle also makes sure to stay very close to the norms and etiquettes of the novel and film; she is bold and witty as Austen creates her, but Ehle does not overstep and bring a modern headstrong girl to the screen. The ways in which she communicates this are brilliant by using her eyes to do much of the sly communication rather than talking in a much rougher manner; however, she does give a sharp retort when one is required.

A shorter and more recent adaptation to *Pride and Prejudice* is the 2005 version by the same title. Mixed reactions attend this particular release. Many critics have said that it is close to the text but only in spirit rather than accuracy. However, this should not count against the 2005 version because “the success of adaptations of this sort rests on the issue of their fertility not their fidelity” (Andrew 99). Many of the differences between the novel and the film are more “Hollywood-esque touches.” Specifically, the gentry are shown as more grand than portrayed in the novel, and instead of a portrait of Darcy at Pemberley, a white marble bust of him appears in a room of other statues. Plus, Lady Catherine has a different air about her simply because Dame Judi Dench’s portrayal of her. Donald Sutherland’s portrayal of Mr. Bennet is one of a more caring and sensitive man than was originally written. For the most part, the story manages to hit all the high pints of the novel while adding some modern twists and drama (Dana). Unfortunately to get the entire story into two hours is quite difficult, and some large parts of the plot were cut, but this is the price that is paid when adapting stories to film; either they are long novels and need to be cut, or the stories are short and need some padding.

The character development in the 2005 version includes good points and bad points. Matthew Macfadyen does a fair job playing Darcy, since he does have some pretty big shoes to fill when following up Colin Firth. One article described him as a “noble profile just this side of

surly and a 32ehav voice of such sullen quietude then you see how Lizzie might take it as dismissive. [...] Darcy's 'pride' [is] a cover for his buried ambivalence about love: never bitten, but still shy" (Gleiberman). This is a very good summary of his performance; however, he is not as memorable as Colin Firth's portrayal.

Tom Hollander plays an exceptional Mr. Collins in the 2005 version. He brings a different approach to the character and makes him just ever so slightly more comical. Hollander's portrayal is more of a bumbling fool rather than the more mean-spirited character from the novel. Hollander also added the joke about the word intercourse while Mr. Collins gives his sermon.

Keira Knightley's portrayal of Elizabeth Bennet also has some mixed reviews. One reviewer describes her as "sharp and headstrong, with a perky dimple of skepticism" (Gleiberman). Darcy and Lizzie's encounters are described as "never predictable or coy, and that's because Keira Knightley, in a witty, vibrant, altogether superb performance, plays Lizzie's sparky, question nature as a matter of the deepest personal sacrifice. She's not a feminist but a confused, ardent girl charting her destiny without a map" (Gleiberman). However, one might think that Keira Knightley's portrayal of Elizabeth Bennet is not much different than the rebellious female characters that she played previously in *Bend it Like Beckham*, *King Arthur*, and *Pirates of the Caribbean*. One reviewer put it simply as "no one's going to sit Keira in the corner." Others might argue that Keira plays the character too hard by giving her too much roughness around the edges for the time period and speaking up a little too much.

Overall the 2005 version of *Pride and Prejudice* will strike a chord with a younger audience, who may or may not have read the original text. The movie is enjoyable either way.

In *Concepts in Film Theory*, Dudley Andrew says, “In the history of the arts, surely ‘borrowing’ is the most frequent mode of adaptation. Here the artist employs, more or less extensively, the material, idea, or form of an earlier, generally successful text” (98). Andrew then continues by saying, “the adaptation hopes to win an audience by the prestige of its borrowed title or subject. But at the same time it seeks to gain a certain respectability, if not aesthetic value, as a dividend in the transaction” (98). This is exactly what occurs with *Bride and Prejudice*.

*Bride and Prejudice* is a 2004 released Bollywood version of *Pride and Prejudice*. The film’s headliner is Bollywood actress and former Miss World, Aishwarya Rai. In his review of *Bride and Prejudice*, Mandeep Bahra has much to say about the movie:

After the mega-success of *Bend It Like Beckham*, director Gurinder Chadha seems to have gained the confidence to experiment with genres. Bringing together Hollywood, Bollywood and the much loved Britflick genres is a very ambitious task. Does Gurinder succeed? Not totally but she gets full marks for trying. Those familiar with Jane Austen’s classic novel “*Pride and Prejudice*” will delight in recognizing the character counterparts: The Bennet family are represented by the Bakshi’s, a Punjabi family living in Amritsar; Lizzie Bennet is now Lalita Bakshi; the bumbling Mr.Collins is transformed into Mr.Kohli; and Darcy is an American hotelier.

Since the film is set within Indian culture several changes occur. As stated above, many of the names become Indianized; the balls become Indian style weddings; the idea of the “true” India is added, to name a few. The Indian elements, even the Bollywood style song and dance routines throughout, are not what detract from the film, but it seems as though much of the storyline that everyone adores about Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* is lost. Yes, the main characters are there and the basic plot is there but the spirit of the film is not, as well as the theme of overcoming “pride” and “prejudice.” It is replaced with becoming more culturally sensitive and aware.

This cultural insensitivity is seen in the Darcy character from *Bride and Prejudice*. Instead of the shy, proud, socially awkward Darcy in the other versions, the audience is confronted with a spoiled American man who is insensitive to Indian culture. Darcy is, for the most part, misunderstood and is questioned by the Elizabeth character, Lalita, as to whether or not he appreciates Indian culture or just wants to change it. Martin Henderson's portrayal of Darcy is the typical bad American tourist; who has the audience wondering when he is going to ask to go to a McDonalds versus enjoying the regional cuisine. Fortunately, he never gets to that point but does insult Indian wedding and dancing customs. It takes a good amount of the movie for the audience to realize he is changing, and some might question if he ever really changes.

As for the Mr. Collins character in *Bride and Prejudice*, his name was changed to Mr. Kohli. He is a cousin of the Bakshi family and a NRI (nonresident Indian) who lives in America. He does a very good and comical portrayal of the role; however, it is nothing like the Mr. Collins from the other adaptations or the novel. One reviewer says that, "Nitin Ganatra steals the show with his portrayal of Mr.Kohli [...] and is one of the funniest [...] things I've seen in a long time" (Bahra).

As for the portrayal of Elizabeth Bennet in this version, Aishwarya Rai plays Lalita Bakshi. However, "one wonders what happened to the vivacious sparkling Lizzie. [...] Lalita is such a disappointment. Her supposed intellectuality is restricted to mouthing platitudes about the 'real India'" (Nair). Deepa Nair also argues that Lalita does not change as Elizabeth does in the other adaptations:

Lalita never grows in the course of the film. The viewer hardly comprehends her transition from a prejudiced woman to a more perspicacious one, who learns to appreciate Darcy. It's almost impossible to decipher the changes (if any) in Lalita's attitude towards Darcy. The multilayered themes of "pride" and "prejudice" could have been worked out

in a better manner. Some of the best moments in the novel are either missing or are distorted in the film.

Lalita does not experience the change throughout the film as one sees with the Elizabeth character. Another point that Nair makes is in regards to the choice of Aishwariya Rai for the character of Elizabeth/Lalita. She says, “Aishwariya Rai (one wonders why she was given Elizabeth’s role), is all glamour and nothing else. In some scenes the furnitures emote better than her. She fails to display the sparkle in Elizabeth’s character.” It is interesting that a former Miss World would be given the role of Elizabeth/Lalita, and the Jane/Jaya character in *Bride and Prejudice* is an actress that no one has heard of. In all of the other film adaptations and the novel, Jane is described as more beautiful than Elizabeth. Namrata Shirodkar, who plays Jaya, is a beautiful woman, but does she measure up to Rai who has been called one of the most beautiful women in the world? Even in Bollywood, Shirodkar has not been in any immensely popular films. This casting decision is something that only the director can answer.

One theme that occurs in *Bride and Prejudice* that does not occur in the other adaptations is this exploration of Indian culture. The relationship between the Ameircan Darcy, NRI British Bingleys/Balrajs, NRI American Mr. Collins/Mr. Kholi, and the rural Indian family of the Bennets/Bakshis is very interesting. The different ideas of culture from each group emerge and compete “with other forms of discourse within a given culture” (Murfin). One must “seek to understand the social contexts in which a given text was written, and under what conditions it was – and is – product, disseminated, read, and used” (Murfin). Instead of using “pride” and “prejudice” in the general sense, it seems as though Gurinder Chadha is trying to implement the ideas of a “cultural pride” and “cultural prejudice” in its place. Deepa Nair also points out,

Bride and Prejudice, manages to bring out (though weakly) some very novel ideas. If it was Darcy's aristocratic class concerns that prevents him from acknowledging his love for Elizabeth in Austen's novel. Here, it is Darcy's orientalism. He looks at India from his coloured western eyes. Finally, it is his love for Lalita that teaches him [to] understand the Real India. One sees a changed Darcy (Indianised complete with the tilak and drums) in the last scene.

The use of a cross cultural relationship with the American Darcy and Indian Elizabeth/Lalita character brings even more depth to the themes of "pride" and "prejudice" that could have been explored in addition to the themes of the original adaptations; however, it seems as though these cultural themes are addressed at one point in the film but are dropped at the next.

Again these comparisons and criticisms of the cinematic adaptations are not bound to the words "good" or "bad." One must realize "the adaptation is a new original [...] [and look] for the balance between preserving the spirit of the original and creating a new form" (Seger 9).

#### **5.4 *Om Shanti Om* vs. *Saawariya*: A Competition of East vs. West**

India is one of the most populated areas in the world and is a place where two national obsessions rule: cricket and movies. Going to a movie is made into a big affair: Movies have intermissions with gourmet concessions, and live bands have been known to play. Hollywood likes to think of itself as the major movie city; however, "those billion-plus movie-mad Indians are served by a home-grown movie industry" (Sydell). This movie industry is Bollywood, and it "annually puts out more than twice as many movies as its U.S. competition. Hollywood, no surprise, is hungry for a piece of that market. India's film industry will more than double in size over the next four years, from just over \$2 billion in revenue to close to \$4.5 billion. With numbers like that, it's no surprise that all the big American studios want a cut" (Sydell).

At first Hollywood started dubbing films in the local languages, which was something that had worked in other areas of the world. However, this brought limited success. One reason this strategy did not work as well in India is given by Uday Singh, managing director of Sony Pictures in India: “Culturally, India is much more connected with [their] own movies and [...] stars” (Sydell). “Here, 95 percent of the business is local film. So if you want to be a meaningful player ... you have to participate in that big chunk of business” (Sydell). This is the reason Sony became “the first major Hollywood studio to produce a Hindi language film” (Sydell). They chose a script called *Saawariya* (Beloved) and put all they had behind it including plenty of money for advertising. Sony arranged for *Saawariya* to be released the weekend of Diwali which is a big time to attend movies in India. However, little did Sony know that Farah Khan’s *Om Shanti Om* was also scheduled to be released the same weekend (Sydell).

*Om Shanti Om* “was as flashy as a Hollywood blockbuster like *Pirates of the Caribbean*, and Sony’s first foray into the Indian market – the artsy, literary, Bergman-esque *Saawariya* was hardly a match for it at the box office. The India media” went crazy with newspaper headlines and TV reports using words like “debacle” and “disaster” (Sydell). At first audiences came out in large numbers to see both of the films during the opening weekend; however, “as the reviews poured in, ticket sales tapered off for Sony’s movie and kept rising for *Om Shanti Om*” (Sydell). Shahrukh Khan, the star of *Om Shanti Om* even suggested “that seeing his film was a way to fight against a Hollywood giant trying to take over the Indian film industry” (Sydell). Komal Nahata, an editor of the Mumbai-based *Film Street Journal*, said that “Sony stepped into territory which it doesn’t understand. [...] And they did not think it fit to take the opinion of people who understand, because they wouldn’t have made this mistake otherwise” (Sydell). What Nahata says is interesting and may be true; however, if one analyses *Om Shanti Om* and *Saawariya*, one

can see that *Saawariya* did not have a chance against *Om Shanti Om*. The main reason being based within a cultural critique of the two films.

*Om Shanti Om* was written and directed by Farah Khan and pays “homage to all things Bollywood” (Sinanan). The Hindu belief of reincarnation is a key element in the storyline making it very complex. The story begins in Bollywood in the 1970s. The headline actor Shahrukh Khan plays Om a junior artiste struggling to find fame and love. Through a series of events, the audience is also introduced to Shanti played by newcomer Deepika Padukone; she is the superstar of the time but wants nothing more than to be the girl next door. Om is Shanti’s biggest fan and secret admirer. Shanti and Om meet and develop a quick friendship; however, the audience can tell that there is more than friendship in both of their hearts. Shanti finds out she is pregnant with her boyfriend and producer’s child. He cannot have a successful pregnant star, so he kills Shanti, and Om dies trying to save her. Then the intermission happens, and the audience is taken to the present day. Om has been reincarnated into OK a successful and talented actor. Through flashes OK discovers what had happened 30 years before and decides to avenge Shanti’s death.

From a Western point of view the story seems extremely farfetched; however, that does not detour audiences in Bollywood. Once the audience is willing to suspend all disbelief the visual spectacle can ensue, and all will be pleasantly surprised. The film works simply because it is a crowd pleaser. It is a witty and campy entertainer; escapism at its finest. It is classified as a Masala movie because it has a little bit of everything: “a drunken banter scene, a digitally enhanced dream sequence, a Village People style disco track, a spoof on film award functions. Best of all is a lengthy title song and dance number featuring over thirty past and present stars of

Bollywood's elite" (Sinanan). Another reason the movie is so successful is because it pays tribute to Indian movies from the 70s and 80s. Raam Tarat further describes the film:

Bollywood kitsch personified in that it gladly incorporates and celebrates every cliché in the book. [...] *Om Shanti Om* is a movie that never takes itself too seriously and that's where its' success lies. It simply celebrates all things *Bollywood*. [...] It also exuberantly showcases every cliché in your *classic* Indian film script. Not just your typical love story or revenge drama, but also life after death and reincarnation; saving the damsel in distress and subsequent wooing; mother and son lost and re-united; 'double-roles'; South-Indian stereotypes as well as many in-jokes.

*Om Shanti Om* pays homage to the formula film and classics that came before it. The potboilers of the 70s and 80s had a mixture of drama, music, comedy romance, action, and full of clichés. They were mainstream movies with many big actors and actresses designed to give the audience a little bit of everything (Tarat). *Om Shanti Om* is superbly executed and is an obvious crowd pleaser. The performances of all the actors are phenomenal even from Padukone's debut. The music is also catchy and memorable. However, Tarat does warn that the film is "a celebration of the seventies – If you like Bollywood for essentially what it is, you'll love this. If you don't like Bollywood, this may answer a lot of questions, and likely leave you with a smirk on your face regardless." *Om Shanti Om* is the kind of film that needs to be seen to be believed.

On the other hand, *Saawariya* is the first Bollywood film to be "co-produced and financed by a Hollywood studio" (Anderson). Since many prefer their own style of movies over American imports, it is a good strategic move on Hollywood's part. The end result is supposed to have the same look and feel as a Bollywood movie; it is not an attempt to turn out some sort of hybrid which is still a challenge for movie makers to get just right. However, many from the East and the West have not been happy with *Saawariya*. It has been described as an "ambitious misfire" and "pretentious and unimaginative" (Sinanan).

The storyline seems appealing enough to a Western audience, but does it have the same impact in India? *Saawariya* is based on Fyodor Dostoyevsky's "White Nights," and tells the pleasure and pain of unrequited love. "A slightly goofy musician named Raj (Ranbir Kapoor) arrives penniless in a storybook town that resembles Venice, by way of old New Orleans. The bowler-clad songster spots a distressed woman during a nocturnal jaunt, and he's smitten. [...] Delicately beautiful Sakina (Sonam Kapoor) turns out to be hooked on her own obsession, a lodger (Salman Khan) who left her grandmother's house but promised to return" (Rapold).

The film is more high brow than *Om Shanti Om*; however, the story is repetitious and seems to fall flat. The flatness may or may not be from newcomers Ranbir Kapoor and Sonam Kapoor. They fade from the memory and lack spark. However, veterans Salman Khan and Rani Mukherjee's performances are phenomenal, even though they hold relatively smaller supporting roles. The Kapoors seem bland up against the intensity of Khan and Mukherjee (Rapold). However, the sets for *Saawariya* are amazing; think of *Moulin Rouge*. Both films are similar, but "Moulin Rouge actually backed up its ambition with a love story that could measure up, *Saawariya* finds itself in a more unfortunate position" (Hakari). The script does not seem to "do enough to involve viewers in all the relationships and love triangles beyond the most basic level. [...] The story grows pale and repetitive" (Hakari). A review from the *New York Post* asks, "How can it be that a movie as beautiful to look at as 'Saawariya' is so ... boring?" He then continues saying that perhaps Hollywood sucked the life out of the material: "The story drags, [...] the characters fail to grab our interest, and the songs (10 of them) are instantly forgettable. [...] [This] is yet another example of Hollywood trying to please everybody and, as a result, pleasing nobody" (Musetto). Nevertheless, Hollywood's attempt at *Saawariya* is "more bauble

than jewel, there being little of interest beneath its dazzling surface. [...] Hollywood's stealth campaign to get a bigger slice of India's movie business may have hit its first snag" (Anderson).

Unfortunely, *Saawariya* did not have a chance against *Om Shanti Om*. This is mainly because Hollywood was not able to produce a film which addressed and represented the audience accurately. *Saawariya* was artificial and disposable when compared to the thick layers and history of *Om Shanti Om*. For Hollywood this one is a miss, but who knows what is in store for the future.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONTROVERSY IN BOLLYWOOD

#### 6.1 Censorship Rears Its Ugly Head

Some films in Bollywood go unscathed past the censorship board; however, others are banned not once but many times. What exactly is the cause behind this? It is not simply nudity or lewd behavior. Other forces are at play when a film is forcibly edited or banned. Some films that must be looked at are *Maya Memsaab* and *Bandit Queen* along with a few others.

The first thing that one might notice when watching Indian films is the absence of kissing, more specifically open mouth kissing. The media has brought more attention to this in real life specifically with the Richard Gere/Shilpa Shetty scandal. A headline from one article in *The Guardian* reads, “The Richard Gere/Shilpa Shetty Kiss: Made in Bollywood,” but not really. The incident raised many eyebrows, and a rumor circulated that the Indian government would take some sort of legal action towards Gere for kissing the cheek of the Indian actress at a charity benefit. Another article from *Slate* also featured on *NPR*’s “Day to Day” program asks the question, “What Are the Rules of Bollywood? Is There Really No Kissing Allowed?” The answer is yes and no. For the most part, the rules are unclear and inconsistent in their application. Generally, French kissing is not shown, and nudity is frowned upon. Modest closed mouth kisses are becoming more and more popular as of recent, and the implication or façade of kissing has been around probably since the first Bollywood film was made. If a sexual encounter is going to be portrayed, it is done so in the form of a song and or dance routine.

Official censorship comes from the government run Central Board of Film Certification and is comprised of actors, writers, scholars, and politicians among others. Every movie made in India is screened and assigned a rating. The board also reserves the right to refuse a film for public exhibition and distribution and uses this power to enforce the editing of “offensive” material. Producers can appeal but many times rulings are final; to appease the government censors, directors often times shoot more footage with alternate endings etc. to use in the final cut. When assigning ratings, the censorship board takes into consideration scenes of excessive violence, those that promote drinking, drug use, sexual perversion, and criminal activity. “Sexually explicit images and language are also cause for censorship. Any scenes that undermine the sovereignty or security of India or its ‘public order’ are also forbidden” (Engber). Members of the film industry also provide some self-censorship with many actors and actresses being uncomfortable with filming on-screen kissing (Engber).

*Maya Memsaab* is an example of a controversial film. This film stays pretty close to its inspiration, *Madame Bovary*. For the most part the beginning of the film plays out as any other Bollywood movie, dramatic, with song and dance routines, and basic love story; however, one feels as though this film is a little different. Something seems a little odd about Maya the female lead in the beginning. As the film continues, the viewer sees that this movie is indeed different and has a more avant garde feel to it. As with the story of *Madam Bovary*, Maya takes on a few lovers. With the first lover, a sexual encounter is implied. The two begin holding each other by a large waterfall, the camera pans downstream, and the sari that Maya was wearing is floating away with the current. The scene with the first lover is a standard Bollywood version of a sexual encounter; it is however a little risqué for a married woman to be shown having an affair. Maya slowly continues to fall into darkness, and her fantasy world begins to take over.

The larger controversy concerns the second lover Lalit, played by no other than an up-and-coming Shah Rukh Khan. In the movie, an older Maya and a young Lalit are very fond of each other, and this blossoms into an extra-marital affair. Maya tells her husband that she is taking voice lessons in the next town and secretly visits Lalit. Instead of an implied sex scene, an actual more realistic sex scene is shown in the movie minus the song and dance. Maya and Lalit are seen rustling around in bed sheets and briefly up against a wall in a very PG-13 version of a *Basic Instinct* sex scene complete with back scratching, neck biting, and finally an actual shot of Maya's breasts. Many would be surprised that this was not cut by the censorship board. The film has a very different feeling from mainstream masala movies, and this is the reason the scene was left intact. Derek Bose also points this out in *Bollywood Uncensored: What You Don't See On Screen and Why* saying that the censors react differently to art house movies or avant garde films (40).

On radiosargram.com's list of top ten controversial Bollywood films from the 1990s to present, *Salaam Namaste* is featured on the list at number ten. This film features two fairly well known celebrities, Preity Zinta and Saif Ali Khan, who engage in a live-in relationship that turns intimate with Preity Zinta's character becoming pregnant before marriage. *Rang De Basanti* starring Aamir Khan comes in at number nine for shining light on corruption within the Indian government and violent reactions to youth lead revolts throughout the film. Another Preity Zinta film is on the list at number eight featuring the actress as a prostitute, reminiscent of *Pretty Woman*. *Chori Chori Chupke Chupke*, also starring Salman Khan and Rani Mukherjee, is one of the first Indian films to handle the taboo subject of surrogate childbirth. It was also rumored to be funded by the Mumbai underworld. These are some of the more popular mainstream films featured on the list.

*Rang Rasiya* is a newer released controversial film. This film portrays the life of the nineteenth-century Indian painter Raja Ravi Varma. In the movie, the artist finds his muse Sugandha played by Nandana Sen (*IMDb*). Nandana Sen has created quite an uproar because she poses nude for the painter in the movie. Many are referring to her as the first Bollywood actress to go nude. The nudity is warranted because one of the film's main themes is a commentary on censorship within painting and fine art, since Verma dealt with these same issues. It also reflects nicely on censorship and film. The scene features a full frontally nude Sen and is considered "crucial to the film's narrative. It was feared that the scene would come under the Censor scissors, but surprisingly, the board has cleared the shot" (*ApunKaChoice*). Sen previously denied offers from other film makers in Italy and abroad because their films required a nude scene. Sen says posing nude in this instance hits at "the very core of the film." Surely the members of the board also recognized the important theme, and that is why the scene has been cleared; however, they did not allow it to also be shown in the opening credits (*ApunKaChoice*).

Finally, a controversial Indian movie that must be discussed is *Bandit Queen*. It also appeared on *radiosargram.com*'s top ten list of controversial Bollywood films from the 1990s to present coming in at number four. The film was delayed for three years before it was released in India, and after a short run, it was banned again by the government. The film was extremely popular all over the world including the Cannes film festival and won many awards elsewhere.

*Bandit Queen* tells the true story of Phoolan Devi and is a gut-wrenching tale of betrayal, rape, violence, brutality, and abuse. The story begins as eleven year old Devi is sold to a man in a "child marriage" where she is molested, raped, and physically abused by the man. She eventually runs away back to her family. Next the movie shows an older Devi; as she matures

she is exposed to the realities of being in a lower caste in a strict caste system and is repeatedly fondled and groped by the men of her village. She is eventually banned from her village and comes across a group of bandits. Devi goes to the cops in order to have her ban lifted; however, she is raped, brutally beaten, and arrested by them. The leader of the bandits then buys her, toting her around basically to rape her whenever he feels like it. One day, Vikram, one of the bandits, shoots him in the head as he is raping Devi. Vikram takes over the gang and Devi slowly grows to share a positive romantic relationship with him. Devi and Vikram lead the gang together and become known throughout the land until the upper caste gang leader is released from prison. He comes back to claim his gang, eventually kills Vikram, and rapes Devi several times along the way. After this, Devi gets her own gang and seeks out revenge; she brutally beats her previous “husband,” kills many of the men who groped and raped her from her old village, and tries to avenge Vikram’s death. While doing this, she makes a name for herself among the lower caste people. Now the government is out to get her to surrender. She eventually does but only on her terms while receiving protection for herself, her friends, and family especially the women and children. The film ends with her surrender, and the end credits inform that all charges were eventually dropped.

This is a film that drags the viewer along the painful journey of Devi. One review described it as a deafening song, an explosive symphony that “stunned everyone into breathless silence” (Tejpal). Tejpal continues his description of *Bandit Queen*:

At that point, pristine from the director's palette, not yet set upon by the armies of media and morality, it was a flaming raw wound of a film, compelling and repelling examination at the same time, lodged as it was firmly in the classic artistic terrain of shifting values and relative truths. To the discerning viewer—bored senseless by the sheer unreality of Bollywood cinema—this was clearly a path-breaking film. The *Bandit Queen* is not, as all Bollywood films are, a comic book created to tease and sate adolescent fantasies, starring hugely bloated yet un dimensional lovers and avengers. In

real life people do not speak in speech bubbles; in real life people do not sing and gyrate around trees. These are realities of the comic book, and of Bollywood cinema.

This is the reason the film was banned and censored. It broke away from the normal stereotypical Bollywood film. *Bandit Queen* is hardly the fantastical escapist movie that normally runs in Indian cinema, and this is why the censorship board banned it. After all, it hit too close to home by commenting on child marriage, the caste system, violence, and role of women in Indian society. It sheds truthful light on the reality and is unafraid to engage the uncomfortable questions. “This is what Phoolan Devi’s story is all about: about the circumstantial horrors that can befall a woman in a male-dominated, caste-ridden society. And more particularly, how the singular woman can wreak vengeance in folklorish fashion” (Tejpal). For some reason this movie in particular has stuck in the craw of the moral police. Tejpal is very critical of the censorship board, saying that with a country as rich with art as India, “we continue to display a comic book sensibility, forever getting into knots about banning books and films, which any adult should be able to negotiate routinely. The toiling masses are inevitably credited with less commonsense than they possess.”

*Bandit Queen* has undoubtedly collected some strange abuse. Some try to say it is denigrating women; however, it does the exact opposite by showing a woman who rises above even after being beaten down in every way possible. “There is the endless controversy about the brutality, the nudity, and the profane language. But that is the film” (Tejpal). It must show how people talk in reality, the brutality of rape, and the physical body even if it might make a few people uncomfortable. There have been good films that only deal with the existential angst of the individual, but this goes beyond that; more importantly, it is the first major credible

biographic film made by an Indian. Tejpal continues criticizing the censorship board and asks why these kinds of films receive the resistance that they do:

Shekhar's film has been hailed by critics everywhere, and the peerless Barry Norman named it one of the best five in the world last year. Lakhs of Indians have seen it, and presumably not left the halls degraded beasts; it has ridden controversy to more money than Channel Four ever dreamt of; yet it continues to convulse. We do not censor our papers for violence, we do not censor Khajuraho for its orgiastic sculptures, our art and fiction are allowed to say what they will, why do we insist on reducing our cinema to infantilism. Even in the worst case, the profanities of *The Bandit Queen* are tolerable, the excesses of art not worrying: what is to be feared are the facile orthodoxies of smooth-faced morality marshals, for they patrol the road that ends in the frozen silence of the gulag.

Certainly one has to wonder if *Bandit Queen* would have even made it to audiences if it was not for the British based Channel Four Films. Many Bollywood films are labeled controversial for their content; however, not very often do the masses realize that such films try to unveil a trend in society which needs to be addressed but too often times gets left on the cutting room floor.

## **6.2 Censorship and the Importance of the Wet Sari in Indian Cinema**

*Other clothing is on you, but it is not with you. But the sari is with me. I have to constantly handle it. I just can't let it lie. The whole thing creates movement and one is moving with it all the time. That is why the pallu is not stitched. And that is the grace of the sari.*

Deena Pathak, actress

The folding fabric, the swishing pleats, the very cloth it is made from has captivated people from all over the world for ages. The sari, with its mysterious origins, has enticed all who

look upon its beauty. Linda Lynton describes this garment in her book, *The Sari: Styles, Patterns, History, and Techniques*:

The sari is the quintessential Indian female garment. Nothing identifies a woman as being Indian so strongly as the sari. [...] Saris come in all shapes and sizes, from textured hand woven fabrics [...] to sheer luxurious silks. Even today, after two centuries of disruptions [...] a multiplicity of traditional saris still exists, created in a wide range of fabrics and designs, reflecting the subcontinent's great cultural diversity. (7)

If the sari is identified strongly with the ideal Indian female, then one can see why it is very important for the heroine to wear a sari in Bollywood films.

What exactly does a sari consist of? The sari is a strip of cloth measuring from thirteen to twenty-six feet long by four feet wide, "which is draped around the entire body" (Lynton 12). Depending on how it is draped is also important. In *The Sari* many Indian women's perspectives are gathered in regards to wearing the sari and the meaning behind it. One lady remembers that her aunt scolded her for wearing her sari too high that people would think she was a maid (74). Another lady recalled different groupings of girls at school. She said that the "artsy-fartsy" types wore their saris with really low cut blouses in the front and the back but had longer sleeves, "so it was an enticing kind of a thing in a sense. But the sari was worn low, below the navel and in slightly careless fashion, it was never pinned and the *pallu* was always falling off" to expose the chest or cleavage (74). "Differences in the ways in which girls use [...] the sari to expose or cover their bodies" occur (75). This manipulation of the fabric is described further in *The Sari*:

A college girl who wears a long-sleeved blouse which comes low over the midriff, where it meets a petticoat that has been tied above the navel, hopes thereby to look respectable and modest, but she is likely to overhear other girls describing her as a "nun" (many of whom teach in schools and colleges). Another who comes to college with a blouse cut low at front and back and her navel very much to the fore will certainly attract attention from the boys, but risks being branded "filmy" by her peers. (75)

One actress in particular is known throughout Bollywood to wear her sari dangerously low, and that is Shilpa Shetty. One blog says, “Shilpa Shetty is our favorite ‘it’ girl for ‘How low can she go’ (remember Om Shanti Om and the famous sequence in the just-north-of-potential-mishap sari?)” (sareedreams.com). One can see that the way in which one wears a sari is very important to the way in which she is perceived.

The pleats of the sari also correlate with the way the sari is worn. Sanskrit literature “from the Vedic period insists that pleating is absolutely necessary for a woman to be a true woman. These pleats must be tucked in at the waist, front or back, so that the presiding deity, Vayu, the wind god, can whisk away any evil influences that may strike the woman in two important regions, the stomach and the reproductive system” (*Saris of India* 5).

Colors are also a very important part of the sari and are ruled by caste and social customs. A pamphlet for an art exhibit from California State University, Northridge, entitled *Saris of India*, says, “Colors are held to create moods: Yellow, green, and red create a festive mood as well as endow auspiciousness and fertility. Red also evokes passion” and is commonly used on the wedding day or for pregnancy ceremonies. “A pale cream color is thought to both soothe on hot summer evenings and symbolize purity.” A completely white sari is usually reserved for women who are widowed because “life without a husband is considered colorless for a woman. Black is also a restricted color” but is appearing more frequently now. However, “it must be mixed with another color, as black alone is thought to bring misfortune. Blue evokes the thirst-quenching, life-giving force of the monsoon and the beautiful boy-god, Krishna. Because certain colors are thought to evoke and symbolize ideas and mood, they are prescribed for the

most important occasions of a woman's life" (5). The sari is as complex as each individual woman who wears it.

Those who truly understand the importance of the sari will see that a self-consciousness may develop because "what one [is] wearing [is] not simply the traditional local draped garment of a region (described in several languages simply by the local word for 'cloth') but rather 'the Sari,' the emblem of" India as a nation (Banerjee 219). The foundation has been set for the sari as the symbol of India, and it will continue to be a symbol for the women of India.

In order to fully understand the significance of the wet sari in Indian cinema, one must understand the role of censorship in Indian films. The beginning of the Indian censorship code for films begins on a positive note. It informs that "film certification ought to be responsive to social changes, uphold artistic expression and that creative freedom must not get unduly curbed" (Bose, Derek vii). It also states that "the medium of film should provide clean and healthy entertainment and remains responsible and sensitive to the values and standards of society and that, as far as possible, the film is of aesthetic value and cinematically of good standard" (vii). This is a summary of the main objectives of film censorship as outlined by the Indian Cinematograph Act of 1952 (vii). In *Bollywood Uncensored: What You Don't See on Screen and Why*, Derek Bose explains more background concerning censorship:

The censors, who form the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), are further guided by a Supreme Court directive: "Film censorship becomes necessary because a film motivates thought and action and assures a high degree of attention and retention as compared to the printed word. A combination of the act and speech and sight and sound in the semi darkness of a theatre, with the elimination of all distracting ideas, has a strong impact on the minds of the viewers and can affect emotions. Therefore, it has as much potential for evil as it has for good and holds equal potential to instill or cultivate violent or good behaviour. It cannot be equated with other modes of communication. Censorship by prior restraint is, therefore, not only desirable but also necessary." (vii-viii)

These explanations really explain why censorship is “a legal anomaly directors and producers in the world’s largest and most prolific film producing country have to contend with” (viii). Bose continues by saying that “the Constitution of India specifically lays down that cinema should be free of state controls and along with the press, must necessarily remain a private enterprise. This protection flows from the right to freedom of speech and expression as enshrined in the Directive Principles of State Policy” (viii). However, the state enforces its “stranglehold” on filmmaking with the Cinematograph Act by “making it obligatory for every producer to obtain clearance of the CBFC” before a film, any kind of video, or CD is released for the public (viii). Failure to follow the laws results in strict fine and possible imprisonment. The censors look at three areas when judging a work which include: politics, violence, and sex (viii).

Of these, sex is the one that is most relevant to the subject. The Act states specifically that scenes in which “human sensibilities are offended by vulgarity, obscenity or depravity”; with “dual meaning words as obviously catering to baser instincts”; “degrading or denigrating women in any manner”; “scenes involving sexual violence against women” (ie. rape/molestation); and “scenes showing sexual perversion” are all subject to the approval of the censorship board (Bose, Derek ix). India comes from a history of censorship where kissing on the lips is still somewhat taboo in films and hardly any outright nudity is seen. The emergence of the erotic wet sari came into being to remedy this.

Rachel Dwyer’s article, “The Erotics of the Wet Sari in Hindi Films,” explores this concept with a cultural criticism and feminist approach in mind. She says that Western readers might be surprised to find that “western clothes are seen as more figure revealing than the sari. This is to do with the erotics or modesty codes of different areas of the body and ideas of

concealment. [...] These codes are not just signs of cultural difference; these garments carry inherent codes within them” (147). A good example comes from the movie *Chocolate*, the Indian version of *The Usual Suspects*. In the movie an older Urdu song called “Bheega Bheega Sa Ya December Hai” is performed by the lead actress Tanushree Dutta. The main line translates roughly as “it is going to be a cold, wet December without you.” At the beginning of the song sequence, one of the male actors accidentally shoots a water pipe in the factory; this pipe then sprays Dutta with water until she is thoroughly soaked. The guys laugh, and a body shot of Dutta in a skin tight pink strappy dress fills the screen. She whips her hair and the song begins with the line, “it is going to be a cold, wet December without you” all the while she straddles a motorcycle and accentuate the curves of her body with her hands (*Chocolate*). No nudity occurs, but the end result is extremely erotic.

Dwyer continues to point out that the sari fulfills the requirements of modesty within Indian society. If “a woman who commits the social *faux pas* of letting the sari slide off the shoulder [she is] seen as drawing more attention to her breasts than a woman wearing a tight shirt in a western-style” (147). Examples of the sari slipping off the shoulder are seen a couple of times in *Om Shanti Om*: the first instance occurs during the Film Fare Awards in a video clip, and the second instance happens when Dolly steps out of the limo; her sari falls, and she very gracefully, in slow motion slings it back over her shoulder with all eyes on her. Dwyer says that this kind of “display of cleavage during the day may even be permissible in India, while the display of female legs is frowned on. [...] Thus the sari, is seen as being able to fulfill all the requirements of modesty” (147). The sari serves as a visual symbol of the ideal Indian woman and with it carries this particular eroticism (147).

Rachel Dwyer continues her argument that clothing has certain kinds of eroticism surrounding it in Indian cinema. She says that “nakedness features very rarely in the Hindi movie. [...] Hindi filmmakers have evolved their own codes for showing the maximum amount of bare female flesh, while keeping the breasts and genitalia concealed. The minimal amount of clothing worn in the movie is the [...] bikini” (148). For the most part, “scenes of semi-nudity have the actress partially clad because [...] the Indian cinema has a specific erotics of clothing, whereas nakedness is seen as a source of shame and fear” (148). Another reason the use of the wet sari in Indian films might seem strange is because it is “an eroticism which is not based on a pornographic genital excitement but rather in a totalizing sensual experience of lover, mutual pleasure, desire enacted within a strict code of language and of conduct” (150). This is drastically different from many western films.

One must also examine the sari in relation to the heroine in Bollywood films. A heroine is the perfect female specimen. She is almost always a well know actress and must be “beautiful, young, virginal and innocent but ready to fall in love” (Dwyer 150). She may begin the film by wearing sporty clothes or even salwar kameez, but by the end she has matured and wears a sari; a good example of this is Anjali in *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*. “The heroine’s body, while famously slimmer than most of the heroines of previous decades, has full breasts and hips, with a small waist. [...] Raj Kapoor has stated that this is the source of his imagery” (150). The sari’s drape accentuates the heroine’s body perfectly by highlighting “the ‘acceptable’ erotic zones of the breasts, waist and hips, even while covering them, but which conceals the shape of the legs” (150). It accentuates the female body parts that are associated with fertility, the breasts and hips, and it reveals the slender waist and deep navel “associated with virginity [...] while hiding the legs and genital region” (151). The sari is the perfect display of the Bollywood heroine’s body.

Directors also have a lot of power when deciding what the audience see or focuses on in films. “The camera often closes in on these three erotic areas which are often further accentuated by dance movements, some directors seeking a sensual look, while others have to balance an appeal to some sections of the audience who may appreciate the sometimes grotesque thrusting and shuddering and invasive camera” (Dwyer 151). All the while directors walk a thin line between acceptable and not acceptable to the censors. Directors feature many dream sequences that also feature song and dance routines. Directors employ some kind of wet sari scene to create a sensual or pornographic effect, which maximizes “the eroticism of the female body. [...] [This is] where the semantics of the sari, [and] the form of the female body come together in ways which can be constructed as ‘tasteful’” by the censors as well as the family audience “while being simultaneously erotic” (151).

A few very famous examples of wet saris scenes from Indian films include the end of *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* and several scenes from *Satyam Shivam Sundaram: Love Sublime*. In *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, Shahrukh Khan and Kajol are seen in a gazebo after running from the rain. Both are drenched with water and decide to dance together. A very sensual scene follows with Khan tracing Kajol’s wet body with his finger tips as they imagine their own music off in their own “dream sequence.” The final example is perhaps one of the most famous. Director Raj Kapoor’s film *Satyam Shivam Sundaram: Love Sublime* features a young model/actress Zeenat Aman. From the beginning Kapoor had many problems with the censors because the opening scenes had ejaculatory symbols (Dwyer 156). Aman’s body is the main attraction to this film with her displayed in skimpy, barely-covering outfits and drenched in water. Kapoor himself even said in an interview, “Let people come to see Zeenat Aman’s tits, they’ll go out remembering the film” (157). The opening scene of the film features Aman in a thin white cotton sari barely covering

her bosom. As water spurts out suddenly, she collects it to clean the temple steps as she sings at dawn. Later in the film there are several sequences of her bathing in a waterfall. Specifically during the song “Bhor Bhaye Panghat Pe” Aman is walking through the woods hot and sweaty as she makes her way towards a waterfall to bathe and cool off. These scenes are important in Bollywood cinema because they create and display the desire that is created between the lead hero and heroine.

The significance of the wet sari is obvious in Indian cinema. The sari moves from simply being a piece of clothing for women to an entire set of ideas concerning sexuality and the ideal Indian woman within the state. The Central Board of Film Certification also contributes to these ideas because of the censorship and strict guidelines concerning nudity and the female form that are enforced on filmmakers. However, one could also argue that the wet sari scenes are also a celebration of the erotic. The body is fully clothed but is so “sensualised to the point of being orgasmic. [...] In the Hindi film, the specific cultural associations of [...] sexuality and bodily beauty show how female sexuality is a crucial part of the semantics of the sari, and thus sexuality is woven into” this notion of the ideal woman who represents the nation (Dwyer 159).

## CHAPTER 7

### UNPACKING BOLLYWOOD: NEW THEMES IN GENDER

#### 7.1 Gay Men in Bollywood and the Reshaping of a Cultural Identity

The Indian film industry, better known as Bollywood for many, produces a large quantity of films every year. These films cover all genres with different subjects and themes. However, some themes that are still considered taboo in Bollywood. The portrayal of homosexuality is one of those themes. More recently a number of films have tried to address the issue of homosexuality. Some Bollywood films are “appearance” and others are “reality,” and Bollywood profits by using this duality in its film-making efforts. Whether or not these films highlight serious issues for the gay community in India or are simply parodies for the audience’s amusement, one can see that the cultural identity of mainstream India is undergoing a transformation.

Homosexuality is explicitly against the law in India; “Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code formulated in 1833 states that any person who voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman, or animal, shall be punished by imprisonment for life. Carnal intercourse against order of nature includes the acts of sodomy, fellatio, and cunnilingus” (Shahani 146). Several films since the 1990s have addressed homosexuality. However, many of them failed to make a large impact on society. Many of them did not have well known actors or actresses, or they were more low-budget (Sinanan). Recently with the release of *Dostana* (Friendship) in November 2008 and *Fashion* in October 2008, one can see the theme of homosexuality take on a new role within the Bollywood film.

The movie *Dostana* offers an interesting example because it does not necessarily directly target the gay community. It targets all audiences who enjoy a hip comedy. The two main characters pretend to be a gay couple in order to get closer to their female love interest (Sinanan). Even though the two male characters are exaggeratedly macho and their portrayal of gay men is very stereotyped, they do explore issues that are relevant to gay couples living in India and abroad. An example of one issue includes the difficulty in “coming out” to one’s family, which *Dostana* at first makes fun of, but then shows a tender moment of acceptance between the mother and the supposedly gay boyfriend. Another issue that *Dostana* raises involves same-sex couples and the immigration process. Even though the characters in *Dostana* are not supposed to be taken seriously, here again is the duality of Indian cinema: treating a serious social issue as a comic story. By doing this in a lighthearted way, the director can draw awareness to a subject that would be taboo for much of Indian society.

Another film that explores homosexuality in a more indirect way is *Fashion*. *Fashion* mainly discusses the ups and downs of India’s fashion industry. However, many of the male designers and models in the film are gay. *Fashion* is a dramatic film that takes a more serious look into the lives of gay men in India but does have some of the same themes as *Dostana*, such as “coming out” to one’s family. However, one can see that *Fashion* portrays a more realistic view of the difficulties of being gay in India. An example of this occurs when one of the main characters tries to communicate to his mother that he does not want to get married; there is an unspoken understanding between the two of them. However, he still marries a woman to make his mother happy in the end. Another commonality between *Fashion* and *Dostana* is that the characters are portrayed as real people with real emotions. Instead of ostracizing or “othering” the gay man, the films show characters that society can relate to, whether they are gay or not.

Whether the film is serious or ironic, the fact that these themes are almost normalized in Bollywood today is evidence that India is undergoing a reshaping of their cultural identity.

One may ask why increase the portrayal of gay men in Bollywood films? There are many answers to such a question. If one looks at Bollywood as “not just the cinema that emerges out of the Bombay film industry but a state of mind, [then one can see] it seeps into everything else around, especially within the creative content in India” (Shahani 147). If the themes of Bollywood are everywhere, Bollywood clearly has a huge influence on the culture and identity of India. Culture does not always mean high culture (Murfin 566). Even if one considers Bollywood films to be “low brow,” they have an influence on the ideas, thoughts, and ideologies of the masses. Homosexuality in Bollywood was once unarticulated but now finally has found a voice. This new found voice could have emerged because gay activism and same sex relationships have become normalized within mainstream Indian society. The use of mass produced and mass consumed films has enabled this once taboo subject to become part of the cultural identity of India and become part of everyday life (Murfin 565).

One could also say that the emergence and acceptance of gay men in Bollywood films was inevitable. A few films before *Dostana* and *Fashion* tested the waters by showing same-sex female relationships on the big screen. These films did not make a big impact; however, they helped shape the social context in which popular films like *Dostana* and *Fashion* were produced (Murfin 566). Even though many are receptive to the new theme, culture is not “static or monolithic, culture is really a set of interactive *cultures*, alive and changing,” so there are also individuals who are resistant to the change (Murfin 567). For example, religious Hindu groups and members of the government have said that movies with gay themes are “against Indian culture and tradition,” and “the film’s theme is alien to our culture” (Sinanan). However, these

individuals are incorrect to discuss Indian culture and traditions as one whole entity because many layers of culture exist. These responses are good examples of cultural forces that shape the consciousness of the masses (Murfin 569). These cultural forces could be a reason why it took longer for gay men to enter Bollywood films and take on a substantial role.

“Culture is not fixed and finished but, rather, living and evolving” (Murfin 571). One can see it is clearly up to the masses to decide what themes are acceptable, and with the popularity of such films as *Dostana* and *Fashion*, the result is evident. The director of *Dostana* hopes that his film will cause a repeal of Section 377 and says that “this law is stealing people’s rights. [...] Everyone should be free to love whoever they want.” He also says that these “barriers have to be removed slowly, rather than torn away” (Sinanan). “People have the freedom and power to struggle against and shape ideology, to alter hegemony, to break out of the weblike system of prevailing assumptions and to form a new consciousness” (Murfin 573). With the entrance of gay men in Bollywood films, one can see a new consciousness being formed and India’s cultural identity taking on a new shape.

## **7.2 Women in Bollywood: More Complicated than Virgin or Whore**

After watching a few Bollywood films many people say “once you’ve seen one, you’ve seen them all.” This statement is quite often times applied to other aspects of Hindi films, especially the heroines. Many stereotypes of the female lead reside within Bollywood: She must be thin but curvy, have fair skin, and long dark hair. Another stereotype that has gotten attention is the difference between the “Mother India” type and the “vamp,” more easily put the virgin or whore. Many identify only two roles for female leads within Bollywood; however, that is not the case. The roles for women are much more complicated than these two categories suggest.

When analyzing films from a feminist perspective, one easily finds many aspects that can be classified as degrading to women. In “Feminist Criticism and *Gulliver’s Travels*,” French feminists critique the mainstream’s use of language and the female body. If differences are accentuated heavily, then the feminine is reduced “to a biological essence or [...] [is elevated] in a way that shifts the valuation of masculine and feminine but retains the binary categories” (Murfin 307). In a sense French feminists are trying to highlight what is unique and special to women and advocate for a re-analysis of language; however, they perpetuate oppressive binary categories. These binary categories are also carried over to Govindan and Dutta’s “From Villian to Traditional Housewife! The Politics of Globalization and Women’s Sexuality in the ‘New’ Indian Media.” The main thesis of the article seems accurate: “Actresses are expected to represent globalized images of a liberated female sexuality, but are still circumscribed by shifting yet narrow definitions of ‘Indian’ femininity” (181). However, the article seems to take a different direction when analyzing the films saying that Indian women have little room for maneuvering between “admirable” and “trashy” roles (Govindan and Dutta 181). On the contrary, the kinds of roles Indian actresses play are more complicated than this.

The two main films discussed in the text are *Aitraaz* (Objection) and *Murder*. *Aitraaz* was released in 2004 and directed by Abbas and Mastan Alibhai Burmawalla (*IMDb*). *Aitraaz* is based on the 1994 Hollywood film *Disclosure* directed by Barry Levinson. The film stars Akshay Kumar as the Michael Douglas character, with Kareena Kapoor taking on the role of his wife, and Priyanka Chopra as Demi Moore’s character. Overall, the same storyline is followed: new female boss pursues the man, and he then sues for sexual harassment. The other film discussed in the article, *Murder*, was also released in 2004 and was directed by Anurag Basu. *Murder* is based on the 2002 Hollywood film *Unfaithful* directed by Adrian Lyne. *Murder* stars

Malika Sherawat as Diane Lane's character (*IMDb*). The same storyline in *Unfaithful* is followed with a few added scenes toward the end.

Both female leads in the films are strongly sexual: Chopra in *Aitraaz* pursues and tries to seduce a married man, and Sherawat has an affair while she is still married. Both characters can easily be stereotyped as vamps. Govindan and Dutta describe a vamp as “not so much the ‘wicked’ woman as the ‘naughty,’ sexually alluring, immodest one, coded by her erotic and nimbly performed” scenes (187). In a review from the *MRQE*, Chopra is described as “perfectly evil in this film and succeeds in convincing the audience” (Gosal). In another review from the *MRQE*, *Murder* “revolves around Mallika Sherawat. [...] Lucky for her she has the chops to pull off a role like this one. She’s confident and sexy as Simran and handles her emotional scenes with dignity. However dignity goes right out the window with the sex scenes, but Mallika is obviously not a shy girl. [...] The combination of decent acting skills and willingness to expose make Mallika perfect for Simran’s role” (Gosal). It is easy to cast these women into the reprehensible category; however, many layers complicate the characters they portray on screen.

Several examples in both films complicate the easy association of Chopra and Sherawat as typical vamps. There is “always a morality play hidden in the sub-text” to redeem or damn the woman in the end (Bose, Derek 55). In *Aitraaz*, Chopra finally realizes she is actually in love with Kumar’s character and wants to be with him. Her sexual advances are acceptable because they were romantically involved before he married someone else, and she simply wants him back. In *Murder*, Sherawat has “a justifiable reason for straying and in the end, she exonerates herself. Her husband neglects her because he still loves his wife who died in a plane crash. [...] The protagonist had given her sister the ticket and racked by guilt, she now looks after the sister’s son too. In the original *Unfaithful*, the heroine is in it for pleasure and nothing

beyond” (Bose, Derek 55). The characters in the two films are much more complex than the simple dichotomy of virgin or whore.

Even though the characters are more complex than the binary categories, what is the reason behind perpetuating this stereotype? Govindan and Dutta say the problem is in the mediascape, which has expanded a great deal, but the positions available for actresses have not grown: “the media scene has witnessed a proliferation of outlets; however, this enlarged media space has not expanded the subject positions available to actresses as one would predict, especially with respect to their sexuality” (181). The result is contemporary actresses may be negotiating their public image using all types of media and taking on daring or strikingly different roles in Hindi films, but no matter what they do they are “caught between the competing subject positions” of virgin and whore (181).

### **7.3 Woman as Spectacle in *Chocolate***

When discussing the spectacle and gaze, John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* is an excellent resource to begin with. He is an author who has inspired many to continue writing about these ideas. He points out that a woman’s social presence is different than a man’s. A man’s presence is dependent on the power in which he embodies. “A man’s presence suggests what he is capable of doing to you or for you. [...] The pretense is always towards a power which he exercises on others” (45-46). However, a woman’s presence “expresses her own attitude to herself, and defines what can and cannot be done to her. Her presence is manifest in her gestures, voice, opinions, expressions, clothes, chosen surrounding, taste – indeed there is nothing she can do which does not contribute to her presence” (46). Berger continues commenting on women by saying that to be born a woman is to inhabit a “confined space, into

the keeping of men” (46). A result of living in such a limited space means that a woman’s self is split into two separate beings. In the end, “a woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself” (46). She must survey herself continually and consider the surveyor and surveyed elements of her identity. “She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance” for her success (46). The way in which men survey women is of utmost importance because “men survey women before treating them” (46). “How a woman appears to a man can determine how she will be treated” (46). To gain some control over this process a woman must “contain it and interiorize it” (46). The way a woman treats herself adds to her presence, and a woman’s presence “regulates what is and is not ‘permissible’” (46-47). Berger simplifies this by the popular phrase, “men act and women appear” (47). He explains, “men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turn herself into an object – and most particularly and object of vision: a sight,” a spectacle (47).

When discussing the issues of woman as spectacle and applying Berger’s concepts within the musical, as outlined by Mulvey and Mellencamp, a scene from the Bollywood film *Chocolate* comes to mind. Even though *Chocolate* is not an American musical, it follows many of the same conventions that Mulvey and Mellencamp employ.

*Chocolate* is the Indian version and remake of Hollywood’s *The Usual Suspects*. However, like any Bollywood film, several song and dance routines occur throughout. In the movie an older Pakistani song called “Bheega Bheega Sa Ya December Hai” is performed by the lead actress Tanushree Dutta. The main line translates roughly as “it is going to be a cold, wet

December without you.” In the Pakistani version of the song, a male performs the song to his beloved because he cannot be with her. In the movie *Chocolate*, the lead actress sings the song and is very much made into a fetishized spectacle for the audience and the surrounding male actors to feast their eyes on while being reassured instead of threatened by her presence (Mulvey 64).

At the beginning of the song sequence, one of the male actors accidentally shoots a water pipe in the factory; this pipe then sprays Dutta with water until she is thoroughly soaked. The guys laugh, and a body shot of Dutta in a skin tight pink strappy dress fills the screen. She whips her hair and the song begins with the line, “it is going to be a cold, wet December without you,” all the while she straddles a motorcycle and accentuates the curves of her body with her hands. No nudity occurs, but the end result is extremely erotic. Her body is arranged to display it to the men looking at her; the image is made to appeal to their sexuality and has nothing to do with her sexuality (Berger 55). Next, she walks over to two of the men, who are also singing in the background, and dances between them. The instance is very short, maybe two seconds long but is reminiscent of a threesome sexual encounter. There is also a shot of one of the other men sitting back on a sofa watching the encounter in a voyeuristic manner. This reassures the audience that it is okay to look at what is taking place within the film and the spectator can “indirectly possess her too” (Mulvey 64). Yet another instance features Dutta sitting on a crate placed upon a table, elevating the height of the performer and bringing the audiences’ attention to her as also pointed out in Mellencamp (32). Dutta’s sexual passion and power is minimized throughout the sequence, so the spectator “may feel that he has the monopoly over such passion [and power]. Women are there to feed an appetite, not to have any of their own” (Berger 55).

The song functions as an “enclosed unit within the larger narrative” bracketed by the beginning and ending of the musical sequence (Mellencamp 32). The spectacle of Dutta “denotes ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’ and is placed in the center for all to see (32). In this performance, the audience is comprised of the four other men standing around watching Dutta as she sings as well as the audience viewing the film. As Mellencamp points out, this is certainly a celebration of the body and the voice and is an excessively pleasurable moment in the musical (33). The audience’s look “turns into a stare, the drama of vision becomes the spectacle of vision” (33). This scene “is also a source of sexual pleasure, the pleasure of scopophilia in relation to the ‘star’ which ‘takes other people as objects subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze.’ Sexuality is coded by [Dutta’s] movements, the love lyrics, and an often lush mise-en-scene which intensify the pleasurable fantasy of the body and the voice” (34). There is a pleasure of looking at Dutta “as sexual object of unbounded exhibitionism, and the excessive style of the spectacle” (35). The ego, however, constructs “the erotic basis for pleasure in looking at another person as object” (Mulvey 60). However, the viewer is “caught in the moral ambiguity of looking” (67). The scene also provides satisfaction for the viewer before the ending of the narrative or the end of the movie (Mellencamp 28).

Rachel Dwyer explains the importance of the song and dance routines within Bollywood:

In Indian cinema the ‘relationship between narrative, performance sequence and action spectacle is loosely structured in the fashion of a cinema of attractions.’ In other words, this is an exhibitionist cinema in which linear narrative, driven by characteristics and the logic of narrative itself, and the realist illusion of film are interrupted by spectacle and other ‘attractions.’ The song and dance sequences form one of the major attractions in the Hindi film. Although they can have a place within the logic of the narrative, they more usually violate all sorts of continuity codes (place, time and costume) that are maintained by the narrative. [...] They function mostly as erotic digressions from the main plot in the film, to allow ‘areas of heightened transgressive pleasure.’ They provide voyeuristic pleasure although they often disavow their own voyeurism through various mechanisms such as refracting the audience’s glance through an on-screen viewer. (289-290)

Dwyer's comments support those of Mulvey and Mellencamp. Even though Mulvey and Mellencamp discuss Hollywood based musicals, Dwyer's comments in regard to Bollywood films parallel their assertions. The song from *Chocolate* is an excellent example of what Mulvey, Mellencamp, and Dwyer discuss in their articles. Even though *Chocolate* is not a Hollywood musical, it certainly has been influenced by Hollywood and is not exempt from the elements of spectacle that are at play.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION AND FINAL THOUGHTS

This piece of writing came into being based on one simple observation. There are thousands of Bollywood films produced each year and the majority of writing found is not of academic nature. With such a far reaching audience, Bollywood films must be examined from a scholarly standpoint. Some ambitious writers have tried to do this in the past, and there are several up-and-coming scholars that have taken it upon themselves to start seriously researching this area and have been referenced throughout this thesis. A pleasant discovery is more and more scholarly materials have been uncovered. However, many focus on Bollywood as an industry, and the films themselves are overlooked or are not closely interpreted or critiqued.

What will happen to Bollywood in the future? The industry is only going to get bigger. With such a long history and prolific production rate, Bollywood is only going to expand, and markets for Bollywood films will also expand. Bollywood actors and actresses are becoming more widely recognizable around the world, and the quality of the films has improved drastically since the early 1990s. Indians, Pakistanis and other South Asians are already large consumers of Bollywood film. However, Germany, South America, Asia, and the Middle East are growing in their viewership. England and the United States are a little slower to jump on the Bollywood bandwagon, but the good thing about Bollywood movies is that one does not have to speak or understand the language in order to analyze the films. The films have subtitles in a variety of different languages; this is the globalized nature of Bollywood. If society were really able to understand culture today in a world of generalized hybridity, scholars must study objects such as Bollywood. With the industry's mobility, it creates new kinds of audiences who do not speak the

same language, share the same local knowledge about cinema, but instead find themselves as active participants in reading, enjoying, and interpreting film. By doing this, new viewers are exposed to Bollywood as well as new meanings and ways of looking are created. Hopefully with the advent of this thesis, it will inspire others to view Bollywood film as a legitimate field of scholarly and academic research. The most appropriate last line would be where this journey began: “Picture abhi baki hai mere dost.”

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