

## ‘Shining Indians’: Diaspora and Exemplarity in Bollywood

Ingrid Therwath

---



**Electronic version**

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/samaj/3000>

DOI: 10.4000/samaj.3000

ISSN: 1960-6060

**Publisher**

Association pour la recherche sur l'Asie du Sud (ARAS)

**Printed version**

ISBN: 1960-6060

**Electronic reference**

Ingrid Therwath, « 'Shining Indians': Diaspora and Exemplarity in Bollywood », *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* [Online], 4 | 2010, Online since 17 December 2010, connection on 30 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/samaj/3000> ; DOI : 10.4000/samaj.3000

---

This text was automatically generated on 30 April 2019.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

---

# *'Shining Indians': Diaspora and Exemplarity in Bollywood*

Ingrid Therwath

---

- 1 Popular Hindi cinema has, since the first film was made in India in 1913, played a central role in the formulation of the national identity and in the promotion of normative behaviour. So much so that 'film is perhaps the single strongest agency for the creation of a national mythology of heroism, consumerism, leisure, and sociality' (Appadurai & Breckenridge 1996: 8). However, the low-brow, elusive and largely unrealistic nature of the screenplays confined the study of the films' social, cultural and political implications to a footnote in historical and sociological works for several decades. In this context, the unrelenting interest political parties and successive Indian governments have taken in the production of exemplarity on the big screen and in the control, mostly through censorship and taxation, of cinema is striking. Then, in the 1990s, the rise of Hindu nationalism, the liberalization of the Indian economy and the renewed affection of the Indian middle class for cinema halls, previously deserted in favour of home entertainment, generated more production and more revenue. This period coincided with a new academic interest in Bollywood (Gopal & Moorthy 2008, Silva 2004, Viridi 2003: 210, Prasad 2003).<sup>1</sup> Reputed writers specializing in the theory of globalization and cultural studies like Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge, although their analysis of cultural consumption and Indian modernity is not based on cinema, nonetheless started to take into account the importance of the big screen in the national imagination. To quote the words of D. Bhoopaty, 'cinema is widely considered a microcosm of the social, political, economic, and cultural life of a nation. It is the contested site where meanings are negotiated, traditions made and remade, identities affirmed or rejected' (Bhoopaty 2003: 505). Besides, a growing number of studies by Jyotika Viridi, M. Madhava Prasad, Sumita Chakravarty, Tejaswini Niranjana, Ashish Rajadhyaksha, Rustom Bharucha, Patricia Uberoi, Anthony Alessandrini, Ravi Vasudevan and Rachel Dwyer and Christopher Pinney insist on the concurrence between India's political and social history and its cinema.

- 2 Indeed popular Indian cinema in Hindi constitutes a particularly interesting area of study as much because of its history as because of its key role in the creation of the national identity and its place in the collective imagination. Directors, producers, distributors, financiers, officials in the Central Board of Film Certification (Censor Board) all seek to ensure the projection of lucrative, aesthetically pleasant and acceptable contents. This results in a prescriptive and normative body of works that have, over the years, reflected and mostly shaped ideas of national identity, gendered behaviour, and acceptability. As Ashis Nandy noted, 'the popular film is low-brow, modernizing India in all its complexity, sophistry, naiveté and vulgarity. Studying popular film is studying Indian modernity at its rawest, its crudities laid bare by the fate of traditions in contemporary life and arts. Above all, it is studying caricatures of ourselves' (Nandy 1998: 7). These distorted reflections, one might add, not only exaggerate features but also paradoxically dictate patterns of normality. In this sense, they shape and impose exemplarity by broadcasting role models, figures of idealization and identification at once. Popular cinema is thus a major actor of social engineering.
- 3 The character of the expatriate Indian perfectly illustrates this phenomenon. Once exposed as a counter-model, it became in the past twenty years the symbol of the Indian achiever, a kind of *über* Indian able to assert his ethnic and national identity in a globalized world: successful, capitalist, male, family-oriented, technology-savvy and a devout Hindu all at once (Hariharan 2002). A few films like *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (DDLJ, Aditya Chopra 1995), *Pardes* (Subhash Ghai 1997), *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Karan Johar 1998), *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (K3G, Karan Johar 2001), *Kitne Door... Kitne Paas* (Mehul Kumar 2002) and *Namastey London* (Vipul Amrutlal Shah 2007) have given him pride of place and have generated new practices (fashion trends, tourism in the locations shown on screen, see Ramdya 2009) or rejuvenated old ones (like the rekindled observance of the *Karva Chauth* festival in Northern India). The elites of the popular Hindi film industry, like producer-director Yash Chopra, are very conscious of their role. He for instance declared, during his address at the first Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD), a government-sponsored conclave for the Indian diaspora, that 'our moral responsibility is to depict India at its best. We're the historians of India [...]. The Indian Diaspora must maintain its identity, its roots' (Chopra 2003).
- 4 A very culturalist, essentialist and majoritarian view of Indian identity underlines this assertion. Ethnic nationalism and pan-Indianism gained currency during the 1990s while the country's economy was being opened up after the first liberalization measures in 1991, which benefited most the middle classes and the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The party's slogan 'India Shining', a peon to urban, yuppie, capitalist growth embodied by the IT sector, symbolized this period. Hence it is not surprising that the Non Resident Indian (NRI),<sup>2</sup> who is imagined to be necessarily rich and westernized but who is also known to contribute financially to the *Sangh Parivar*, became a role model for a fast growing middle class facing the challenges of globalization and its own anguish or feeling of guilt due to a possible acculturation. Unsurprisingly, the popularity of themes related to the diaspora and the nationalist ethnic and cultural discourse aimed at people of Indian origin living abroad reached a peak during the period corresponding to the BJP-led governments (1998-2004). The 1990s and early 2000s could in fact be considered the Golden Age of the NRI, heralded as the emblem of the emerging middle class and the new material aspirations of an India in the midst of economic liberalization.

- 5 In this context, Indian culture is portrayed as family-oriented, Hindu, the preserve of women within the home and yet 'portable' (Uberoi 1998: 306) thus possibly transnational. Cinema, more than other media like television, mobile phones or the Internet, constitutes a medium for the enacting, teaching and dissemination of this nationalist discourse heralding the combined virtues of consumerism and devotion and of cosmopolitanism and roots. Chopra confirms this when he confides that 'Indian films teach in a subtle way, they teach the social conventions, a sense of duty' (Chopra 2002). This paper shall therefore go beyond the synoptic description and focus on the lessons in Indian identity and desirable conduct given in the last fifteen years through one of Yash Chopra's favourite characters: the NRI. Once unloved and portrayed as the epitome of moral corruption, he became in the past fifteen years the embodiment of the national ethos as well as of a triumphant capitalism.

## Role models central to the definition of national identity

### Exemplarity, nationalism and the State

- 6 All through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, popular cinema evolved apace with Indian nationalism and politics and developed pro-independence, socialist, reformist, neo-traditional, capitalist, globalized and ethnic themes (Farges 2000: 158). As Joël Farges explains, cinema is a 'distant and distorted echo of periods of Indian history, from the independence movement to the state of emergency' and 'acts (in the viewer's imagination) like a collective and individual memory and which has had the time, over almost a century, to 'become' India' (Farges 2000: 164, 168). Right from the 1900s and through the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the big screen became the blank page on which nationalist pride was inscribed in a mythological vocabulary. Cinema, a medium which Indians took to with great ease and rapidity, has indeed been part of the nationalist historiographic project since the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Twenty films were made in India in the 10 years after the first Indian motion picture was released in 1913. Seven years later, at the time when the country was embarking on the *swadeshi* movement, a first Film Enquiry Committee was set up in order to recommend the substitution of British imports with locally-made films and an Indian magistrate named as its director. In spite of British censorship, the number of films with a social concern and pro-independence stance increased in the 1920s and 1930s (although the films dwelling on social issues generally insisted on the civilizing impact of colonization). During the Second World War, the quick pace of industrialization facilitated important investments in cinema while the reduced sea traffic gave rise to a large black market. Cinema became at the time a real local industry that mattered in the national economy.
- 7 Soon, after independence, regional parties, like the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) founded in 1949 in Tamil Nadu, used this media to voice regional demands. Realizing its potential in terms of control/subversion, publicity, and social engineering, the central government very rapidly tried to assert its control over this industry through the creation of the Central Board of Film Certification in 1951 and the setting up of the Film Finance Corporation, an all-India public funding body, in 1960. The state-control over cinema became blatant during the Emergency when the movie *Kissa Kursi Ka* (whose director, Amrit Nahata, happened to be an opposition MP from the Janata Party) was

banned and the prints confiscated or even destroyed in 1977 because of its hardly veiled criticism of Indira Gandhi's regime (Bhoopaty 2003). The intervention of the state raises the question of agency and reception: who dictates the terms of exemplarity? And can it be dictated at all?

- 8 Of course, the government or state departments do not provide film-makers with guidelines regarding the heroes on the big screen. However, all through the years of Nehruvian socialism, screenplays reflected the ideals of the young nation-state. During the 1960s, with the 1962 war with China and the 1965 war with Pakistan, films adopted a more belligerent and chauvinistic tone. Later, in the 1970s, while the country was undergoing a profound social transformation, Amitabh Bachchan embodied the angry young man perhaps symbolizing the nation going through a crisis. The 1990s, following the rise of Hindu nationalism during the 1980s and the country's economic liberalization in 1991, witnessed the emergence of a new generation of films glorifying consumerism even as they made religion and feminine docility the core of the definition of Indianness. Admittedly, 'in essence, cultural practices and products do not have any political leanings' (Martin 2000: 178) and culture only acts as a pointer. Nevertheless, one should be careful not to disregard the highly symbolic aspect of the representations portrayed as authentic and apolitical (Sircar 1995: 326). As a matter of fact, irrespective of the historical period, Indian cinema has always crystallized a view of Indian identity that it later projected and imposed more or less forcefully in order to comply as much with the current governmental ideology as with the market. The shift from the expatriate as a counter-model to the NRI as the epitome of modern India follows the same logic.

### Once unloved and deprived outsiders...

- 9 The presence on screen of characters of Indian origins who are settled abroad is not a new phenomenon. It has however not been given due academic consideration (with exception to Deshpande 2005, Brosius & Yazgi 2007, and Mehta & Pandharipande 2010). The very first Indian documentary, shot in 1902, focused on a certain Mr. R. P. Paranjpye, a former scholar at Cambridge (Alessandrini 2001: 320). Less than twenty years later, in 1921, *Bilet Pherat* [On Returning from Abroad, N. C. Laharry], the first Bengali film, dealt with loss of one's roots and the corruption of Indian values after living abroad. But the expatriate Indian did not gain currency on the big screen until 1967 with *An Evening in Paris* (Shakti Samanta) and *Purab Aur Paschim* [East and West, Manoj Kumar] three years later (the terrain had been prepared by *Sangam* in 1965, which shows foreign locations and Indians moving freely around the world for leisure). This period corresponds to the coming of age of the first generation of Indian migrants in the United Kingdom, the adolescence of the second uprooted generation and the mass influx of educated Indians in the United States after the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965. However, the overseas Indians are portrayed in both films as deprived persons or as outsiders whose very Indian identity is dubious. In *An Evening in Paris*, for example, there is no question of immigration as the hero Sam, played by Shashi Kapoor, is not Indian and is neither presented as a *videshi* [foreigner] nor as a *pardesi* [outsider]. Even though Sam is visibly Indian, speaks Hindi fluently and strongly defends the honour of Indians when arguing with his friend Michel, he introduces himself as a Frenchman as if his place of residence were a determining factor for defining his nationality. This illustrates the way Indian nationality was viewed at that time: it was based above all on the law of the soil and circumscribed by national borders before mass migrations redefined the sense of national belonging.

- 10 In *Purab Aur Paschim*, the emigrant, whose Indian origin is this time not denied, is presented in an extremely unfavourable light. The young hero played by Manoj Kumar is called Bharat [India] and quite explicitly embodies the nation. He visits London to meet the Sharmas, friends of his father. Mrs. Sharma, brought up in England, drinks, smokes and calls her husband 'Darling' (according to conservative Hindu etiquette, the wife should not use her husband's first name and always treat him as *parameshwar* [god]). Their daughter, Preeti, smokes and drinks like her mother, wears mini-skirts and, in a supreme gesture of acculturation, has dyed her hair blond. The son's name drives the point home: Orphan. Manoj Kumar, who is also the film's director, paints a psychedelic picture of a metropolis obsessed by consumerism and sex. Living abroad means here living in a den of depravity and uncensored appetites and losing or renouncing one's original values. In these conditions, emigration can only be shown as a negative phenomenon and the migrant as 'the moral antithesis' of the real Indian (Uberoi 1998: 308). Manoj Kumar however grants his characters redemption at the end of the film: either through death (for Orphan) or a return to the native country (for Preeti). In the 1980s, this trend continued 'amidst angry heroes who were fighting against corruption and coming to terms with social upheavals in India and its role in the capitalist world order' but, by the end of the decade 'film sets and costumes began to illustrate a look and feel of urban centres (openly displaying the brand names of Coca-Cola, Ralph Lauren, Nike, etc.)' (Dudrah 2006: 67-8).
- 11 Until the 1990s, the foreigner was thus an absolute counter-example and anti-hero whose salvation lay in a dramatic change of status, like Orphan or Preeti. This ideological construct of migration as a morally reprehensible act, Rosie Thomas (1996: 170) points out, is deeply rooted in Indian lore and goes back to the character of Ravana, the king of Lanka, in the *Ramayana*. Until the late 1980s, emigration still bore the seal of moral disgrace. At the time, prominent economists like Jagdish Bhagwati went to length to evaluate the actual cost of the brain drain in order to levy a tax from expatriate Indians (Bhagwati & Dellafar 1973). This attitude starkly contrasts with the peons the successive governments have sang of NRIs in the past ten years, priding themselves on the potential benefits of migration in the form of remittances, FDI, image and lobbying.
- 12 Nevertheless, during the next decade, foreign characters of Indian origins suddenly acquired a totally different connotation. The term *vilayat* gave way to *pardes* to designate the place of residence of overseas Indians. *Vilayat*, a Persian word derived from the Arabic *vilaya* meaning 'province' in contrast to the Persian homeland of Mughal rulers, was used during the colonial era to designate England and Europe, *i.e.* what was outside India, and was always associated with immorality and social aberration. The root of the word *pardes* is *des*, meaning country, home. The suffix *par-* corresponds to both *per-* and *pro-* in Latin, evoking an idea of movement and of being proactive. *Pardes* is therefore much more positive than *vilayat* and does not actually entail either a spatial or a moral distance with the homeland (*pardes* can even sometimes designate a place within the national territory). Actually, more than half the films with the word *pardes* or *pardesi* in their title seen between 1931 and 2010 were made after the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> These recent films always vehemently champion Indian values through a dominantly essentialist and culturalist discourse, but these values can now be transposed outside the national territory. In the moral code upheld in this type of film, some values occupy a central place and are mentioned frequently like *sharm*, *lihaz*, *izzat* [shame, modesty, honour], three virtues presented as the preserve of women (Karudapuram 2001). This new generation of neo-

traditional films combining ethnic nationalism and the praise of materialism therefore also seek to champion a patriarchal structure that idealizes the woman sublimated by either virginity or motherhood while insisting on her submissiveness. In addition, the emigrant is no longer accused of forgetting his roots and values: it is the host country (for example, *firang* (foreign) or *Angrezi* (English) culture) and, more generally, Western culture that are held responsible if at all. Ideal Indians have hence become deterritorialized models of national identity.

### ... then portable tenets of Indian identity

- 13 J. C. Sharma, a former Indian diplomat and member of the government-appointed High Committee on the Indian diaspora, remarked that 'Bollywood was selected long back for the purpose of connecting the Indian people residing across the world. Hence both intra & inter connectivity is facilitated by Bollywood. Showing of an Indian film became a focal point of connectivity' (Sharma 2010). In addition to fostering a sense of community going beyond the national borders (Deprez 2010: 145, Gowricharn 2009), most of the recent films with expatriate characters show that being a part of the national ethos is no longer determined by nationality or place of residence but by blood ties and morality.<sup>4</sup> This new generation of films made during the last fifteen years thus reflects the insidious change from a *jus soli* to a *jus sanguini* conception of citizenship. The migrant, promoted to the rank of blood brother, has therefore ceased to be a symbol of the 'Other' and has become instead the prototype of the new Indian, globalized and modern, but always a nationalist at heart. The fact that he belongs to the nation is constantly underlined through the use of the possessive pronoun before the words 'country', 'India' or 'Hindustan' and, despite going through all types of ordeals, his 'Indianness' is always reaffirmed at the end of the film. For instance, the rich American of Indian origin played by Amrish Puri in Subhash Gai's *Pardes* sings 'I Love My India' and recites '*Karam Mera India, Dharam Mera India, Vatan Mera India, Sajan Mera India*' [India is my destiny, India is my religion, India is my motherland, India is my beloved]. As for the expatriates in *DDLJ*, they talk with great emotion of '*apna desh*' [my country], '*meri hi mitti*' [my soil], '*hamare desh ki mitti*' [our country's soil]. To borrow Benedict Anderson's words, 'in these 'natural' ties, one senses what one might call 'the beauty of *Gemeinschaft*'" (Anderson 1983: 143). Far from being isolated cases, these examples are representative of the ethnic nationalist discourse developed for the diaspora in films made during the years 1990-2000, and remind one of the slogan 'Global Indian Family' devised by the Indian government for the first PBD. Punathambekar noted that 'in positioning and drawing the diaspora into the fold of a 'great Indian family', *K3G* articulates everyday struggles over being Indian in the diaspora to a larger project of cultural citizenship that has emerged in relation to India's tentative entry into a transnational economy and the centrality of the NRI (non-resident Indian) figure to India's navigation of this space' (Punathambekar 2005: 152). The same holds true for other movies of that period.
- 14 These Bollywood films project the NRI as the model Indian using very classical tropes of nationalist discourse and representations like anthems, flags, references to the motherland, etc. Two basic principles govern the visual, structural and textual organization of these NRI-centric films: ubiquity and synchronicity, the ability to match place and time. Popular Hindi cinema actually illustrates the idea of the nation elaborated by Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*: it is above all a narrative and discursive



strategy in which temporal and spatial representation holds a central place. He agrees on this issue with A. D. Smith and Benedict Anderson and remarks that 'the difference of space returns as the Sameness of time, turning Territory into Tradition, turning the People into One' (Bhabha 1994: 140-1, 149). Following the same logic, recent Bollywood films focusing on the diaspora and heralding a set of conservative and essentialized Indian values, seek to do away with the distance separating the expatriates from India, rebuild an 'ethnoscape' and bring together the permanence of tradition and the time of modernity to create an 'ethno-history' (Smith 1996: 450, 454) that will give the viewers a sense of national continuity and pride embodied by the NRI. Long tracking landscape shots and quickly alternating views from India and abroad testify to this desire to recreate a new geography. The first scene in *DDLJ* is a perfect illustration of this technique. As the viewer discovers Choudhury Baldev Singh (Amrish Puri), England and Punjab are juxtaposed (just as in the film's narrative structure) through the frequent mention of 'apna desh', 'apna Punjab' [my country, my Punjab] as well as through back and forth cuts. 'Punjab', the final word in Choudhury Baldev Singh's introductory monologue, signals the start of the narration while the camera moves from an easily identifiable Trafalgar Square to an equally emblematic although unidentified Punjabi mustard field with young *shalwar qamiz*-clad [a traditional suit] girls running to the score of 'Ghar Aaja Pardesi' [Come back home, outsider].

- 15 The arrival of Rohan in London in *K3G* is another instance where ubiquity and palimpsest are effectively used as nationalist rhetoric devices. When the young man arrives in the British capital, wide-angle shots of London's celebrated monuments (Westminster Abbey, the Tower of London, the London Eye) taken from a helicopter precede a panoramic view of the city followed by a succession of quick shots showing signs of the London Underground and the big department stores playing on the effect of consumerist accumulation as in *Pretty Woman* (Garry Marshall, 1990) and *Purab Aur Paschim*. But, while the viewer is discovering London, *Vande Mataram*, India's national song, can be heard in the background as young girls walk down the streets in *shalwar qamiz* with orange and green *dupattas* [scarves] to recreate the *tiranga*, the national tri-colour (while a group of white girls perform a few Bharatnatyam moves). At the end of the sequence, the scenes of London make way for indoor shots. The viewer sees the back of a woman walking through a house holding a worship platter in her hands. She bows down before a very large portrait of her parents-in-law then turns to face the camera as the scene closes on the notes of the patriotic song 'Sare Jahan Se Accha' [The best country in the world]. Anjali, as a woman, represents India (besides, she is the only character who wears traditional clothes) and ensures a religious, symbolic and geographical continuity while holding together the family living abroad (Uberoi 1998). The *akhand bhartiya parivar* [undivided Indian family] also symbolizes a new version of *akhand Bharat* [undivided India, as dreamt by the Hindu nationalists], the stability and perpetual unity of Hindu and North-dominated India even outside the national territory. Films like Karan Johar's *Kal Ho Naa Ho* (*KHNNH*, Karan Johar 2003) go even further in exploiting geography for nationalist ends. As Namrata Joshi observes in the magazine *Outlook*: 'Karan may have got the geography of New York all wrong, but, quite interestingly, manages to portray it like an Indian city, a place where Gujjus and Punjabis can melt. In fact, the boisterous old grand-mom considers Punjab a part of New York. 'NRIs in *KHNNH* don't carry the baggage of roots. They need not keep coming back to India. They can die in America and still remain Indian,' says [the social scientist Shiv] Visvanathan' (Joshi 2003). Religious hymns and national anthems, like in the 'Jana Gana Mana' scene in *K3G*, further emphasize the conflation of



spaces and strengthen, when performed on screen and inside cinema halls across the world, a sense of belonging to the Indian national fold. Indeed, 'there is a special kind of contemporaneous community which language alone suggests—above all in the form of poetry and songs. Take national anthems, for example, sung on national holidays. No matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity. At precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody. The image: unisonance' (Anderson 1983: 145).

- 16 Two particular scenes, one extremely well known and the other often overlooked, offer very telling examples of the type of model Indian the *filmi* NRI embodies. The former comes from *DDLJ* after the two young and unmarried Raj and Simran have a drunken night in Switzerland. When Raj lets her believe that they have slept together, she bursts into tears of rage and covers her face in shame. He then proceeds to reassure her by telling her:

*main janta hun ki tum mere bare mein kya sochti ho. Tum samajhti ho ki main bahut hi ghatiya kism ka awara larka hun. Par main itna bhi gira hua nahi hun Simran. Main ek Hindustani hun aur main janta hun ki ek Hindustani larki ki izzat kya hoti hai. Main sapne mein bhi tumhare sath aisi harkat nahi kar sakta [I know what you think about me. You think that I am a worthless boy but I am not that bad. Simran, I am an Indian and I know what her honour means to an Indian girl. Even in my dreams I could not do something like that to you].*

- 17 Raj, the almost generic name of Bollywood heroes, can remain Indian even in migration and defines his Indianness by his upholding of patriarchal values. The genre of the romantic comedy is by essence conservative since it is based on the assurance of a return to a moral and social order. Hindi romantic comedies projecting NRI role models go even further since they do not merely seek to reconcile individual aspirations with duties to the community: they seek to recreate and propagate a fetishized version of tradition and normalize reactionary if not sometimes illegal practices (like forced marriages in *Namaste London*).
- 18 The other scene, in *Pardes*, demystifies the idea of a unified transnational Indian community and identity. The family of Baldev Singh, settled in the USA but still Indian at heart, is contrasted to the family of Amirchand. Amirchand's son and wife, who have just witnessed Baldev Singh's celebrated arrival, resent the difference in treatment they are getting from their neighbour Suraj. They point out that Amirchand too is an NRI... from Sri Lanka. The point of this juxtaposition is comic relief as well as providing a clarification about the much-desired NRI status. Indeed, the model Indian is not only a man who has retained conservative family values while living and earning money abroad: he must have done so in an appropriate country, preferably the USA, the UK or Australia, a white capitalist country (Deprez 2010: 143-4). All else is subject to ridicule in films that 'have relocated what we might call the seismic centre of Indian national identity somewhere in Anglo-America. In other words, it has brought the NRI decisively into the centre of the picture, as a more stable figure of Indian identity than anything that can be found indigenously' (Prasad M. 2003). And yet, the NRI became a central component of the definition and projection not of Western but of Indian modernity.

## 'The new aristocrats' of Indian modernity

### The economic agenda of NRI exemplarity

- 19 The film *Hum Aapke Hain Koun...!* (Sooraj R. Barjatya 1994) really serves as a landmark in the recent evolutions of commercial Hindi cinema. It marked the renewed affection of the middle class for cinema halls, breaking hence all revenue records, and began, only three years after the liberalization of the Indian economy, a trend of unabashed consumerism advocated on the big screen (Alessandrini 2001: 324-5). All major blockbusters in the next ten years, a majority of which focused on NRIs, promoted consumption of generally imported brands through international product placements while key actors became known as brand ambassadors and dramatically increased their income through advertising (Rao 2007, Uberoi 1998: 314). These films showcase a 'designer India' (Punathambekar 2005: 158) and NRIs act in them as facilitators (Prasad M. 2003) of the transition between a State-controlled Nehruvian socialist economy and an increasingly open national market. Indeed, 'in the romance genre the Non-Resident Indian provides an imaginary terrain in which to explore the 'iconography of abundance'. It adds a twist to the trajectory of commodity fetishism in the decade of sudden economic changes at the close of the twentieth century in India. The NRI is Hindi cinema's new aristocrat' (Virdi 2003: 202).
- 20 The NRI, a synthesis of modernity and tradition, provides an answer and a new model at a time when the Indian identity is undergoing a transformation (Pulkit 2008: 37) and is 'the consumable hero of globalized India' (Deshpande 2005). As Purnima Mankekar noted about *DDLJ*, the NRI is largely represented as a man who comes to India to invest in a business venture or in a life-partner (Mankekar 1999). Other films like *Pardesi Re* (Kewal Krishna 2002) testify to this change: in this film, Rangini comes to India as the President of the London 'NRI Association' to recruit a classical singer. In *K3G*, Rohan drives a Lamborghini and luxury sports bikes, while the elder brother moves around in helicopters which make his father say casually (and in English) that 'we must get a couple more of those'. Actually, popular Indian cinema in Hindi always revolves around a series of binary oppositions depicting a conflict or a major social change. The NRI/*desi* [local Indian] couple thus offers a new way of interpreting the tension between neo-conservatism and consumerism, *swadeshi* patriotism and Anglo-Saxon style capitalism. The choice of capitalist role models, by contrast with the Nehruvian type embodied by Raj Kapoor or the anti-State angry young man interpreted by Amitabh Bachchan, does not only stem from changes in attitude towards consumption in India after 1991, but is also largely dictated by economic motivations. After all, the overseas territory has over the years become a crucial financial component of a film's total revenue and directors and producers also cater to an increasingly lucrative niche market that adds to the equally increasing urban yuppie audience in India. Exemplarity in this case is therefore also meant to please a particular audience, which will identify the NRI figure as a modern achiever.
- 21 In 1997, the *Financial Times* wondered somewhat cynically, 'Which of us in London or Los Angeles has ever seen a Hindi popular movie?' (Andrews 1997). This type of remark would be more unlikely today since most of the major international capitals have hosted Bollywood festivals and films been broadcasted on mainstream TV channels. The

Government of India set up the Export Promotion Council as early as in 1958 to promote the export of Indian films mainly to the United States and United Kingdom and, in the early 1980s, Indian films were being distributed in over a hundred countries (Bhoopaty 2003: 159), in addition to being present wherever the Indian diaspora settled since the days of silent films. Successive Indian governments as well as distributors have always tried to exploit a captive expatriate market by providing the Indian diaspora with a common national cultural identity through the audiovisual media. This strategy, although focused primarily on the expatriate Indians, now aims to reach a broader non-ethnic audience (although in 2009, the cinema industry's growth has decreased and was mainly based on domestic theatrical collections, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry; KPMG: 17-18), along with the Indian high income, urban and young audience. The NRI role models on screen aim at pleasing these audiences, already familiar with international migrations and capitalism.

- 22 The distribution network for popular Hindi films is divided into seven territories: Bombay, Delhi/Uttar Pradesh, North India/West Bengal, Central Circuit, Eastern Circuit, Southern Circuit (the six major domestic territories are further divided into 14 territories), and Overseas Territory. Even though the receipts collected in the seventh territory are subject to international taxes and NRIs represent only a small fraction of the population, some types of films, like romantic comedies and family psychodramas (types of films that have been increasingly made since the 1990s), are particularly successful at the box-office. Thus the Overseas Territory often brings in as much money as the last two national territories taken together.<sup>5</sup> In the early 2000s, up to 70% of receipts could be generated by sales abroad (Jaisani 2002). For example, the film *Agni Varsha* was distributed in 22 countries and made 70% of its profits outside India. More recently, *3 Idiots* was released overseas with almost 400 prints of which 210 were in the USA (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry; KPMG: 21). In addition, FRAMES, the annual conference of professionals from the commercial Indian cinema sector, has been devoting an entire section to 'Cross-Over Cinema' for several years in an effort to optimize the links with the Indian diaspora in the United States, particularly through The Indus Entrepreneurs (TiE)—a group of Indian entrepreneurs based in the Silicon Valley—and the Indian National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM) to fully exploit the 'seventh territory'. Another sign of openness is that a section devoted to India on the international stage has been included in the Delhi International Film Festival since 2000<sup>6</sup> and popular cinema also occupied an important place in the discussions of the successive PBD. Furthermore, big screen stars now go more frequently on promotional tours to the United States and the United Kingdom where their films have been top box-office hits for several years, while major blockbusters increasingly have their premieres overseas. Yash Chopra even received an award from the British Tourism Authority in 1998 for having shot his films in Britain and for thus promoting tourism, while being conferred an honorary doctorate by the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, in 2010. Besides, the British Tourism Department has devoted an entire chapter to 'the romance between Bollywood and Britain' on its website.<sup>7</sup> Since 1997, following the rise of films meant for the diaspora, the biggest Indian distribution and production companies of opened offices in the United States (Power & Mazumdar 2000) and more and more films are now being produced in partnership with Western production companies, like *My Name is Khan* (MNIK, Karan Johar 2010) co-produced by Karan Johar's Dharma Productions, Shah Rukh Khan's Red Chillies

Entertainment and Fox Studios (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry; KPMG 2010: 17).

- 23 Another factor that led to NRI-centric films catering to a niche of expatriate Indians and yuppies is the decrease of cinema seats: earlier, cinema theatres could seat more than 2,000 persons but they are being progressively replaced by multiplexes that can accommodate only 200 to 300 viewers (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry; KPMG 2010: 26-27, Joshi 2001: 331). Finally, the preference for expatriate role models settled in Western English-speaking countries can also be linked, along with the ideological agenda of unhindered capitalism, to the 60 to 66% share the USA, Canada, the UK and Europe have in the revenue contributions within the overseas territory and to the steady income generated by the urban Indian audience who can afford to pay between 100 and 600 rupees per ticket in multiplex cinemas (the first multiplex opened in India in 1992) compared to 1 to 150 rupees in a single-screen hall in one of the big metropolitan centres of the country. The exemplarity of NRIs stems therefore from their simultaneous position as long-distance nationalists, transnational capitalists and lucrative viewers.

### The political agenda of NRI exemplarity

- 24 Through the NRI models, the romantic or family comedies with a NRI hero sell 'Brand India' to the world while furthering the cause of capitalism and social conservatism in India.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, they provide the Indian elite, both private and governmental, with a way to celebrate the advent of India on the world stage. Bollywood films constitute a source of pride because Indian commercial cinema is now the subject of exhibitions, festivals, televised documentaries, courses conducted in prestigious universities and special functions (Silva 2004). An Indian can therefore rejoice that 'today, *apna* [our] Bollywood has become cool' (Kabir 2005). These films, whose screenplays are adapted to meet the expectations of NRIs as well as to provide Indians with guidelines to liberal modernity, are also part of the larger ambitions of India as a visible country and constitute an important component of its soft power (Dunoyer 2010: 43-50). Interestingly the 2004 BJP election campaign slogan 'India Shining', which was vilified for disregarding the gruesome realities in the lives of many Indians, was initially meant to serve, along with the 'Incredible India' line, as an international promotional tool. The depiction of NRIs as 'Shining Indians' serves the same publicity goal well beyond the changes in government. In 2008, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, for instance, acknowledged, in front of Indian Foreign Service probationers, that

the soft power of India in some ways can be a very important instrument of foreign policy. Cultural relations, India's film industry—Bollywood—I find wherever I go in Middle-East, in Africa—people talk about Indian films. So that is a new way of influencing the world about the growing importance of India. Soft power is equally important in the new world of diplomacy (Singh 2008).

- 25 Amit Khanna, a senior executive in the industry, even talks of '*Pax Indica*' established thanks to India's film exports, a cinematic '*Pax Indica*' that resonates well in developing countries and in the Arab world because of the conflation of conservatism and consumerism. As for the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, it celebrated, in the March 2010 issue of its publication, the commercial success of *MNIK* outside India while noting that it 'has a universal story to tell' (Pravasi Bharatiya 2010: 36-37, Power & Mazumdar 2000: 54). Throughout the 1990s and well into the 2000s, the NRI was heralded as a role model for Indians at home thanks to his encounter with the West, his absorption of a

certain consumerist version of modernity associated to his retention of core traditional and often patriarchal values. A film like *MNIK* actually constitutes a particularly striking example of the evolution of exemplarity on the Indian big screen. Here, the expatriate Indian is not so much presented as a model for his compatriot. On the contrary, he is presented as a model for Westerners thanks to his sense of solidarity and courage in the face of adversity. This, and the fact that the film is almost entirely set in the USA, that it offers a reflection on race relations in America only and that it does not dwell on distinctive Indian topics, may be construed as the sign of the coming of age of Bollywood as a truly global media addressing a global audience and as a symbol of the ambition of India as a world power. Indeed, it is now for Westerners and not fellow Indians to learn from NRIs.

## Conclusion

- 26 Expatriates portrayed in Bollywood films inform the relationship of most Indians with their non-resident *alter egos* and, through them, with the West and its economic model. The diaspora also represents a sizeable market for films whose protagonists are a definition or reaffirmation of the Indian identity transformed by globalization. However, while the agency of film financiers and government policies explains the advent of the NRI as a new 21<sup>st</sup> century Indian role model, it raises the inevitable question of reception. The success of exemplarity, once carefully crafted and floated out, lies in its adoption, its embrace by the targeted audiences. Film-watching is a central practice in the re-enactment of Indianness (through the congregation of, very often, ethnic-clad but geographically dispersed migrants) in diaspora, while being one of the most common forms of entertainment in India. But this does not systematically entail the adoption of *filmi* NRIs as role models as a few ethnographers have found out (Rao 2007, Punathambekar 2005). On the one hand, migrant audiences seem to appreciate the references to a lifestyle certified as authentic, to religion, respect for the family and the patriarchal system, *i.e.* to a fetishized India manufactured in Bombay (Deshpande 2005: 203). As Nikhil Khattau, the General Secretary of the Indo-US Association, an organization aimed at facilitating cultural understanding and providing material assistance to Indians leaving for the United States and Americans arriving in India, once remarked, 'I did not like *K3G* all that much. There are too many tears, too much nostalgia, too many festivals. The characters spend their time praying and fasting. Real India is not like that but that is how the diaspora wants to see it' (Khattau 2002). The spectacle of clean and centrally approved ethnicity can indeed be a useful tool for migrants trying to project the image of a model minority and make away with old stereotypes of Indians as snake-charmers (Punathambekar 2005: 157). It is also very much used in order to teach acceptable gendered behaviour, especially by mothers to their daughters (Punathambekar 2005: 159).
- 27 However, while this holds for the affluent section of the Indian diaspora in North America mostly, the many Indian migrants struggling with income and a hostile living or working environment have a much more critical take on the exemplarity of *filmi* NRIs. One Balwinder Sodhi, a NRI working in a hotel in Boston and supporting his family in Punjab with his salary, feels for example that 'one has to really struggle to experience a good life in America... and why do movies not bother to depict the struggles Indians like me go through? Just our everyday life... it is not like the families in the suburbs who only think

of us when they go to a restaurant or take a cab in the city' (Punathambekar 2005: 158). He echoes the discontent of many expatriates, concomitant with the distortion between the projected NRI figures and the often less glamorous realities of emigration. In India also, the NRI role model does not always meet acceptance, particularly in provincial towns where film-goers sometime feel alienated by the new Indian modernity and its 'Shining Indians' on screen (Rao 2007: 13). In these places, audiences can actually enjoy another kind of films, different from the upmarket Yash Raj and Dharma productions, made in regional languages and focusing on a different, and often more realistic, picture of migration. These films, not strictly Bollywood, are predominantly made in Bhojpuri and Punjabi.

- 28 In addition, fewer films in the past few years have continued this trend of showing NRI heroes as champions of ethnic nationalism and unabashed liberalism. This change reflects the evolution of the entertainment market and of the political discourse, mostly after the Congress party's return to power in New Delhi in 2004. Ethnic nationalism has lost currency, and speeches about 'inclusive growth' have replaced those about 'India shining'. Moreover, the cinema industry is becoming more regional thanks to new corporate investments in a previously untapped market while the audience is increasingly segmented into niches, and the 'aspirational middle class' genre of the 1990s 'targeting metro and NRI audiences' has given way to other more diverse and, to borrow the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry's terminology, 'Indianized' contents (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry; KPMG: 32, 34, 170, 171). However, some films like *Hum Tum* (Kunal Kohli 2004), *Salaam Namaste* (Siddharth Anand 2005), *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (Karan Johar 2006), and *Love Aaj Kal* (Imtiaz Ali 2009) still revolve around NRIs, but they do not directly address the issue of migration, which merely provides the excuse for exotic foreign locations. The NRI, not so much of a role model anymore, has become one of the normalized figures of Indian society on the big screen, not as much because of the world economic crisis or because of return migrations as because he has been fully integrated into the mainstream imagination of Indianness. At the same time, while films can show NRI characters without emphasizing their status or migration, NRI actors known for their weak Hindi, like Katrina Kaif, have become over the past few years new role models and trigger the desire for a reconciled modernity that could transcend territorial and linguistic barriers.
- 29 Nevertheless, a few films do deal directly with the issue of migration. *Ramji Londonwale* (Sanjay Dayma 2005) depicts the adventures of a young Bihari forced to emigrate to the United Kingdom. In this Hindi version of a film originally made in Tamil, emigration is shown in the most negative light where the immigrant is seen as a victim of racism, economic exploitation and a legal system beyond his comprehension. He ends up by opting to return to India even though the British government offers him a residential permit.<sup>9</sup> In *Singh is Kiingh* (Anees Bazmee 2008), the village council views migration as a way to get rid of an unruly boy. Some of these films go even further and revert to the old approach of the NRI as a perverted Indian whose redemption can only happen at the cost of relocation into the homeland. *Swades: We the People* (Ashutosh Gowariker 2004), for instance, departs from the ethnic nationalism of the earlier films and resorts to a more classical nationalist treatment centred on the national territory, as indicated by the title and focuses on the accomplishments of a rich young NRI working for NASA upon his return to his village. In *Virrudh... Family Comes First* (Mahesh Manjrekar 2005), the main female character, Jenny, a young Indian girl in the United Kingdom, sometimes gets



drunk, wears mini-skirts and sports blond streaks in her black hair. She is the modern version of Preeti in *Purab Aur Paschim* and, like her, she becomes Indian again and returns to her country to marry an Indian, wears a *shalwar qamiz* and makes an effort to speak Hindi. At the end of the film, when she is shown as a mother and a widow, she has become an integral part of her husband's family and behaves like an ideal daughter-in-law. On a similar line, *Namaste London*, a film that tries to show the conflicts between the generation of NRIs born in India and their British-born and raised children, offers redemption to Jasmeet (who, like Preeti and Jenny, wears mini-skirts and gets drunk in London while going by the nickname of Jazz and is introduced on the film poster as a 'British brat') through her forced marriage to and gradual acceptance of Arjun Singh, a village boy from Punjab (a 'funjabi boy' as per the poster).<sup>10</sup> The last scene shows the two of them, dressed in ethnic clothes, Jasmeet sitting on Arjun's bike-frame in the middle of Punjabi mustard fields...

- 30 These few examples reveal that, since the mid-2000s, while NRIs continue to bring in money at the box-office and therefore to assert their presence—albeit often negative—on the big screen, they are not necessarily objects of envy or role models anymore. Exemplarity and the imposition of strict behavioural and aspirational patterns are indeed dependent on the political and economic context and, like them, extremely volatile.

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anderson, Benedict (1983) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London & New York: Verso.

Alessandrini, Anthony C. (2001) 'My Heart's Indian for All That': Bollywood Film between Home and Diaspora', *Diaspora*, 10 (3), pp. 315-40.

Andrews, Nigel (1997) 'Bullets over Bollywood', *Financial Times*, 22 November.

Appadurai, Arjun; Breckenridge, Carol A. (1996) 'Public Modernity in India', in Carol A. Breckenridge (ed.), *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in Contemporary India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 1-20.

Bhabha, Homi (1994) *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge.

Bhatia, Michael V. (ed.) (2005) 'The Politics of Naming: Rebels, Terrorists, Criminals, Bandits and Subversives', *Third World Quarterly*, 26 (1), 213 p.

Bhagwati, Jagdish; Dellafar, William (1973) 'The Brain Drain and Income Taxation', *World Development*, 1 (1-2), pp. 94-101.

Bhoopaty, D (2003) 'Cinema and Politics in India', in Kiran Prasad (ed.), *Political Communication: The Indian Experience*, Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, pp. 507-17.

Blom Hansen, Thomas (2005) 'In Search of the Diasporic Self: Bollywood in South Africa', in Raminder Kaur & Ajay J. Sinha (eds.), *Bollyworld: Popular Indian Cinema through a Transnational Lens*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, pp. 239-60.



- Breckenridge, Carol A. (ed.) (1996) *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in Contemporary India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Brosius, Christiane; Yazgi, Nicolas (2007) '“Is There No Place Like Home?” Contesting Cinematographic Constructions of Indian Diasporic Experiences', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 41 (3), pp. 355-86.
- Chakravarty, Sunita (1993) *National Identities in Popular Indian Cinema 1947-1987*, Austin: Texas University Press.
- Chattarji, Subarno (2004) 'An Analysis of Representations in the Indian Media of the Indian Diaspora in the UK and US', *The Hoot*, 23 February.
- Chopra, Yash (2002). Interview by author, 26 December, Bombay.
- Chopra, Yash (2003) 'Address', *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas*, 10 January.
- Deprez, Camille (2010) *Bollywood: cinéma et mondialisation*, Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presse Universitaires du Septentrion.
- Deshpande, Sudhanva (2005) 'The Consumable Hero of Globalised India', in Raminder Kaur & Ajay J. Sinha (eds.), *Bollywood: Popular Indian Cinema through a Transnational Lens*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, pp. 186-203.
- Dudrah, Rajinder Kumar (2006) *Bollywood: Sociology Goes to the Movies*, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Dunoyer, Marie (2010) *India's Peaceful Conquest: Resources and Prospects of the Indian Soft Power in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, M.A. Dissertation, Paris: Institut d'Etudes Politiques.
- Dwyer, Rachel; Patel, Divia (2002) *Cinema India: the Visual Culture of Hindi Film*, London: Reaktion Books.
- Dwyer, Rachel; Pinney, Christopher (eds.) (2001) *Pleasure and the Nation: the History, Politics and Consumption of Public Culture in India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Farges, Joël (2006) 'Le cinéma en Inde: Rasa cinématographique', in Christophe Jaffrelot (ed.), *L'Inde contemporaine de 1950 à nos jours*, Paris: Fayard/CERI, pp. 689-716.
- Farges, Joël (2000) 'Le cinéma populaire indien: un parfum d'opium...', *Critique internationale*, 7, April, pp. 157-68.
- Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry; KPMG (2010) *Back in the Spotlight. FICCI-KPMG India Media & Entertainment Industry Report*, New Delhi: FICCI.
- Freitag, Sandria B. (2001) 'Visions of the Nation: Theorizing the Nexus between Creation, Consumption, and Participation in the Public Sphere', in Rachel Dwyer & Christopher Pinney (eds.), *Pleasure and the Nation: the History, Politics and Consumption of Public Culture in India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 35-75.
- Gowricharn, R. R. (2009) 'Address', *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas—Europe*, The Hague, 18-19 September.
- Grimaud, Emmanuel (2006) 'Être ou ne pas être *filmi* ou la 'bollywoodianisation' en chantier', in Christophe Jaffrelot (ed.), *L'Inde contemporaine de 1950 à nos jours*, Paris: Fayard/CERI, pp. 717-28.
- Gopal, Sangita; Moorthy, Sujata (eds) (2008) *Global Bollywood: Travels of Hindi Song and Dance*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hariharan, K. (2002) 'Bilkul Nahin Khushi, Itna Sara Gham: Why So Much Dislike of the NRI?', *Little India*, February, URL: <http://www.littleindia.com/India/Feb02/bilkul.htm>

- Jaisani, Leela (2002). Interview by author, 23 December, Bombay.
- Joshi, Lal Mohan (ed.) (2001) *Bollywood, Popular Indian Cinema*, London: Pakini Books.
- Joshi, Namrata (2003) 'The K. Jo Effect', *Outlook*, 22 December.
- Kabir, Nasreen Munni (2005) 'Now, Apna Bollywood Has Become Cool', *Daily News and Analysis*, 24 September.
- Karim, Karim H. (1998) 'From Ethnic Media to Global Media: Transnational Communication Networks among Diasporic Communities', *Transnational Communities Program*, URL: <http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/working%20papers/karim.pdf>
- Karudapuram, Supriya E. (2001) 'The language of honour (*izzat*) and shame (*sharm*): national and gender identities in *Apna Ghar*', *International and Intercultural Communication Annual*, 24, pp. 106-131.
- Khattau, Nikhil (2002). Interview by author, 27 December, Bombay.
- Kaur, Raminder (2005) 'Cruising on the *Vilayeti* Bandwagon: Diasporic Representations and Reception of Popular Indian Movies', in Raminder Kaur & Ajay J. Sinha (eds.), *Bollyworld: Popular Indian Cinema through a Transnational Lens*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, pp. 309-29.
- Kaur, Raminder; Sinha, Ajay J. (eds.) (2005) *Bollyworld: Popular Indian Cinema through a Transnational Lens*, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Mankekar, Purnima (1999) 'Brides Who Travel: Gender, Transnationalism, and Nationalism in Hindi Film', *Positions*, 7(3), pp. 731-61.
- Martin, Denis-Constant (ed.) (2002b) *Sur la piste des OPNI (Objets Politiques Non Identifiés)*, Paris: Karthala.
- Martin, Denis-Constant (2002a) 'Introduction: Les OPNI, l'essence du pouvoir et le pouvoir des sens', in Denis-Constant Martin (ed.), *Sur la piste des OPNI (Objets Politiques Non Identifiés)*, Paris: Editions Karthala, pp. 11-45.
- Martin, Denis-Constant (2000) 'Cherchez le peuple... Culture, populaire et politique', *Critique internationale*, 7, April, pp. 169-83.
- Mehta, Rini Bhattacharya; Pandharipande, Rajeshwari (eds.) (2010) *Bollywood and Globalization: Indian Popular Cinema, Nation, and Diaspora*, New Delhi: Anthem Press.
- Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (2010) "'My Name is Khan' Creates History', *Pravasi Bharatiya*, March.
- Moti Gokulsing, K.; Dissanayake, Wimal (1998) *Indian Popular Cinema - A Narrative of Cultural Change*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman.
- Nandy, Ashis (ed.) (1998) *The Secret Politics of Our Desires. Innocence, Culpability and Indian Popular Cinema*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Ong, Aihwa (1999) *Flexible Citizenship: the Cultural Logic of Transnationality*, Durham: Duke University Press.
- Power, Carla; Mazumdar, Sudip (2000) 'Bollywood Goes Global', *Newsweek*, 28 February.
- Prasad, Kiran (ed.) (2003) *Political Communication: The Indian Experience*, Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation.
- Prasad, M. Madhava (1990) *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

- Prasad, M. Madhava (2003) 'This Thing Called Bollywood', *Seminar*, 525, May, URL: <http://www.india-seminar.com/2003/525/525%20madhava%20prasad.htm>
- Punathambekar, Aswin (2005) 'Bollywood in the Indian-American diaspora: Mediating a Transitive Logic of Cultural Citizenship', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 8 (2), pp. 151-73.
- Pulkit, Datta (2008) *Bollywoodizing Diasporas: Reconnecting to the NRI through Popular Hindi Cinema*, B. A. Dissertation, Oxford, Ohio: Miami University.
- Ramdyia, Kavita (2009) *Bollywood Weddings: Dating, Engagement and Marriage in Hindu America*, Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Rao, Shakuntala (2007) 'The Globalization of Bollywood: An Ethnography of Non-Elite Audiences in India', *The Communication Review*, 10, pp. 57-76.
- Ravindran, Visa (2003) 'Values in Transition: Media, Technology and Communication', in Kiran Prasad (ed.), *Political Communication: The Indian Experience*, Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, pp. 149-65.
- Sharma, J.C. (2010) 'Address', GOPIO Convention, New Delhi, 6 January.
- Silva, Judi (2004) 'MIT Gayin Doorriyan', *Little India*, December, URL: <http://www.littleindia.com/december2004/MITGayinDoorriyan.htm>
- Singh, Manmohan (2008) 'PM's Address to IFS Probationary Officers', New Delhi, 11 June, URL: <http://pmindia.nic.in/speech/content.asp?id=689>
- Sircar, Ajanta (1995) 'Of 'Metaphorical' Politics: Bombay Films and Indian Society', *Modern Asian Studies*, 29 (2), May, pp. 325-35.
- Smith, Anthony D. (1996) 'Culture, Community and Territory: the Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism', *International Affairs*, 72 (3), pp. 445-58.
- Thomas, Rosie (1996) 'Melodrama and the Negotiation of Morality in Mainstream Hindi Film', in Carol A. Breckenridge (ed.), *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in Contemporary India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 157-82.
- Thoraval, Yves (1996) 'Le cinéma indien: entre évasion et réalités', *Historiens et géographes*, (356), pp. 281-90.
- Uberoi, Patricia (1998) 'The Diaspora Comes Home: Disciplining Desire in DDLJ', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 32 (2), pp.305-36.
- Vasudevan, Ravi (2010), *The Melodramatic Public: Film Form and Spectatorship in Indian Cinema*, New Delhi: Permanent Black.
- Virdi, Jyotika (2003) *The Cinematic ImagiNation: Indian Popular Films as Social History*, New Brunswick & New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

## NOTES

1. Bollywood is a problematic word, which some involved in the Bombay film industry refuse because it is modelled on an American production model while others still use for its easily identifiable quality. We have chosen to use it for the same reason. For more discussion on this term, see Prasad (2003) and Vasudevan (2010: 346-361).
2. The acronym NRI, Non Resident Indians, only designates Indian citizens residing abroad. PIOs, foreign citizens of Indian origins, actually dramatically outnumber NRIs amongst the 25 million

members of the Indian diaspora. However, since this distinction does not impact the representations of the diaspora on screen, the distribution of films or even the choice of themes, this paper shall use NRI indiscriminately as is currently done in India.

3. This figure was reached through an appraisal of the data base available on the site <http://www.IndoFilms.com>

4. In *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, Singh prefers Indian pigeons but Rahul explains to him that even in England he can find pigeons from his country which will recognise him and understand him. Identity, in this case, is determined less by the country of residence and more by the country of origin.

5. *International Business Overview Standard*, available on: <http://www.ibosnetwork.com/bopaper.asp> Although, according to the last FRAMES report, the overseas territory accounts for about 7% and the domestic territories more than 70% of the total theatrical revenues.

6. I am grateful to Mohan Agashe, actor and former Director of the Film & Television Institute of India, for this information.

7. Vineet Lal, 'Screen Magic: The romance of Bollywood and Britain', available on [http://campaigns.visitbritain.com/moviemap/bollywood/home\\_text.asp](http://campaigns.visitbritain.com/moviemap/bollywood/home_text.asp)

8. According to Thomas Blom Hansen (2005: 239-60), the film *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* owes its success in Durban less to the choice of the diaspora as its theme than to the projection of India's modernity which enables Indians in South Africa to put behind them the opposition between European modernity and Eastern backwardness.

9. *Aa Ab Laut Chalen* (1999) is another of the rare recent instances where migration to a Western country, in this case the USA, is seen as a difficult and sometimes disappointing process.

10. Interestingly this film was seen by many critics and commentators as a new version of *Purab Aur Paschim*. The character of Arjun even alludes to Manoj Kumar's classic when he lectures a racist Britisher on the merits of India and finishes his monologue by saying: '*Agar Bharat ke bare mein jyada janna ho to main Manoj Kumar ki film Purab Aur Paschim ka DVD bhej dunga*' [if he wants to know more about India, I'll send him the DVD of Manoj Kumar's *Purab aur Paschim*].

## ABSTRACTS

Commercial Hindi cinema plays a central role in the negotiation of national identity. For decades, the expatriate Indian served as a counter-example for acceptable behaviour, a living testimony of inappropriateness. In the mid-1990s, following the liberalization of the Indian economy, the rise of Hindu nationalism and the advent of a multiplex-going urban middle-class, the stereotype was turned around. The Non Resident Indian (NRI) became the epitome of Indianness and embodied at once capitalist and consumerist modernity and patriarchal, Northern and Hindu traditionalism. This change was meant to cater to a lucrative niche market and reflected an uneasy transition period. In addition, the on screen NRI role models were seen as an instrument of Western modernity in India and of India's recognition as an international power in the West.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** diaspora, cinema, role models, achievers, exemplarity, Bollywood, films, NRI, capitalism

AUTHOR

**INGRID THERWATH**

Senior Research fellow, Centre de Sciences Humaines, New Delhi