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## NATION, FANTASY, AND MIMICRY: ELEMENTS OF POLITICAL RESISTANCE IN POSTCOLONIAL INDIAN CINEMA

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Aparajita Sengupta

The Graduate School  
University of Kentucky

2011

NATION, FANTASY, AND MIMICRY: ELEMENTS OF POLITICAL RESISTANCE  
IN POSTCOLONIAL INDIAN CINEMA

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the  
College of Arts and Sciences  
at the University of Kentucky

By  
Aparajita Sengupta

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Michel Trask, Professor of English

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### NATION, FANTASY, AND MIMICRY: ELEMENTS OF POLITICAL RESISTANCE IN POSTCOLONIAL INDIAN CINEMA

In spite of the substantial amount of critical work that has been produced on Indian cinema in the last decade, misconceptions about Indian cinema still abound. Indian cinema is a subject about which conceptions are still muddy, even within prominent academic circles. The majority of the recent critical work on the subject endeavors to correct misconceptions, analyze cinematic norms and lay down the theoretical foundations for Indian cinema. This dissertation conducts a study of the cinema from India with a view to examine the extent to which such cinema represents an anti-colonial vision. The political resistance of Indian films to colonial and neo-colonial norms, and their capacity to formulate a national identity is the primary focus of the current study.

**KEYWORDS:** Indian cinema, nationalism, post-independence cinema, mimicry, film studies.

Aparajita Sengupta

January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011

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By

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January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011  
*Date*



DISSERTATION

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

#### Critical Perspectives on Indian Cinema: Working from the Ground Up

A scandal in cinema studies of the last few decades has been the lack of attention paid to Indian popular cinema, the world's largest film industry. At a recent Society for Cinema Studies' plenary a panelist's speculations about the vanishing 1970s' style energy in film studies initiated an animated debate. The discussion failed to acknowledge that underlying this stagnation is the field's saturation with Hollywood and western cinema—that film studies stands at the brink of a sea change if we “unthink” Eurocentricism, decenter Hollywood/western cinema, and explore nonwestern film cultures, and that multicultural comparative film studies curricula will provide the sorely needed disciplinary reinvigoration. Though attention to national cinema is an index of growing interest in “other” cinema literatures, it is still light years from dislodging Hollywood's centrality in film studies.<sup>1</sup>

The lack of critical attention towards the cultural presence of Indian cinema, bemoaned by Jyotika Viridi in the introduction to her book *The Cinematic ImagiNation*, is hardly the only problem that seems to plague the contemporary Indian film scenario. Like most films made in the Third World, Indian films have long suffered, along with the lack of attention from historians, a simultaneous disinterest from theorists of film. In a global scenario where most films are judged primarily by the accolades of the West, it has been difficult to emphasize the distinctive nature of postcolonial Indian films, let alone establish a theoretical basis for them.<sup>2</sup> The various recent endeavors to theorize postcolonial films, including Stam and Shohat's *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, Roy Armes's recent *African Filmmaking North and South of the Sahara* or John King's work on Latin American cinema, typically attempt to simultaneously deconstruct colonial films, and analyze postcolonial films—Stam and Shohat perform an extensive survey of representations in colonial films, Armes refers to the treatment of Africa and Africans in

French colonial filmmaking and John King examines the Hollywood stereotype of the Latino man. Although a similar analysis with representations is also possible with Indian film, I have felt the need for a more specific theoretical basis for postcolonial films from India. These films have gained exponentially in global popularity over the years, so much so that the Indian film industry is now both a cultural and an economic presence to reckon with. My project will assess the lasting effects of empire, not by the examination of colonial filmic texts, but more on the lines of theoretical analysis of the postcolonial films themselves. Most importantly, I wish to establish a theoretical basis for Indian film produced in the sixty years after independence in 1947, by delineating a concept that will help to analyze both the content of postcolonial Indian films and modes utilized by the filmmakers, ultimately indicating how such film is capable of articulating powerful anti-imperialist or postcolonial vision.

However, even before one broaches the subject of a wider theoretical understanding, there needs to be certain clarifications in the popular understanding of Indian cinema. It should be noted that in spite of the substantial amount of critical work that has been produced on Indian cinema in the last decade, misconceptions about Indian cinema still abound. The popularity of Indian cinema might have grown significantly in the past couple of decades, but basic conceptions about the subject are still muddy, even within prominent academic circles. A project like this, therefore, arises out of the need to provide basic clarifications for the field on one hand, and to establish a larger theoretical framework for Indian cinema on the other. The majority of the recent critical work on the subject endeavors to correct misconceptions, analyze cinematic norms and lay down the theoretical foundations for Indian cinema, all healthy signs of an emerging discipline, but

the discussion is yet to mature into a prominent academic field. One must understand that the global culture that brings Indian cinema to audiences worldwide operates very selectively; the films might be circulating worldwide, but they do not come with a handbook that elucidates the history or the socio-political conditions of the nation. If there is a concern that misconceptions and stereotyping could arise out of a situation where the films are viewed without a context, it could easily be dismissed by claiming that cinema is a form of entertainment, and that it could be enjoyed without a grounding in the conditions of the country it hails from. However, it becomes hard to overlook the need for such grounding because of two reasons. First, some of this lack of understanding percolates into the critical/academic perspectives on Indian cinema, and comes to affect the position of Indian cinema within the Anglo-American academy, ultimately discouraging quality critical work on the subject. Second, such incomplete viewing seems to encourage simplistic stereotypes about India in the first world, some of which bear uncanny resemblance to colonial stereotypes about India. Indian films are taken out of the context of postcoloniality and termed simplistic, infantile and removed from reality, in a manner that recalls the colonial discourse on native infantilism and lack of imagination. Madhava Prasad articulates the extent to which the progress of the field itself could have been affected by such allegations: “[S]tudents of mainstream Indian cinema confront... a pre-emptive force that defines it in advance as a *not-yet-cinema*, a bastard institution in which the mere ghost of a technology is employed for purposes inimical to its historical essence.”<sup>3</sup> The primary concern in this statement is, once again, that Indian cinema is still an immature form, an infantile mode of expression in the process of *becoming* actual cinema.

The other problematic aspect in the global reception of Indian cinema is the first world's condescension and horror at the extent of poverty in India. Film genres that approach social and political issues from India are misunderstood both within India and without; the native media bemoans the advertisement of the national economic condition for the purpose of profit, and the first world obsesses over the aspects of poverty over and above all artistic intensions of such films.<sup>4</sup> I remember being mildly exhilarated by the release of Danny Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire* in 2009, and a little surprised by all the criticism being aimed at it by the Indian media for representing the poverty of the Mumbai slums.<sup>5</sup> Surely the global audience had matured enough, I thought, to recognize the humor of the film or its casual mode of parody and not to interpret it as a criticism of poverty in India? To me, audiences and the media at home seemed to be overreacting to the portrayal of urban economic crises in India—it was as if the first world had violated the privacy of India and had exposed the embarrassing truth about India at a moment when the country was fully invested in advertising its growing prosperity through statistics such as the growth of its GDP. I assured myself that there was no need to interpret the film as a commodification of poverty in India; “selling” India's poverty to the first world, something Mira Nair's *Salaam Bombay* (1988) was also accused of, could not be its ultimate interest. I had also assumed that common knowledge about Indian films was now sufficient for the majority of its audience to perceive it as I had—a parody of popular Hindi film, nevertheless with vital references to the socio-economic conditions of India.<sup>6</sup> I had found the positioning of the outsider in India to be very nuanced and funny. The incident where Salim and Jamal con white tourists near the Taj Mahal

appeared to be the perfect instance of postcolonial laughter as described by Michael Meyer when he writes:

[T]he question is to which extent the “Western” critic is able to acquire a sufficient, let alone thorough, understanding of “Eastern” laughter? For our stories in question, a fundamental insight of an American Professor in India leads the way to the minimal requirement for understanding postcolonial parody; Lee Siegel almost despaired of finding evidence of contemporary Indian laughter until he encountered it unexpectedly: “[T]here was, in fact, laughter in the streets—people were laughing at me.”<sup>7</sup>

When Jamal pretends to be protecting the interests of the American tourist couple, and is beaten up (by his friends who are part of the scam), he tells them that they are witnessing the “real India.” The lady appears to be very distressed at this encounter with the “real India,” and hands him a hundred dollar bill with the words “And this is the real America, son.” To me, this incident was the highlight of the postcolonial laughter in the film, where the postcolonial subject not only intensely aware of the first-world gaze, he is able to use it to his own advantage. However, in discussing the film with my colleagues at the university, and in the Introduction to Film class that I was teaching at the time, I found that many of the fears that the Indian media had expressed turned out to be true. Many of my undergraduate students would use the term Bollywood interchangeably with Indian cinema, and quite a few held the misconception that *Slumdog* itself was a Bollywood film. Many of them were interested to know if the film was an authentic portrayal of the conditions of India, and saw no humor in the film. Apparently, my manner of interpreting *Slumdog* was completely different from how my students had viewed the film, and their viewpoints resonated oddly with some of the concerns raised by the Indian media. Even though the impression of an undergraduate class is far from being representative of the impression of the academia in general, this particular experience helps to articulate the

complexities surrounding Indian cinema today. It shows how the issues of identity and self-representation, and the confusion arising from a global scenario where Indian films gain prominence in the United States via a film on India made by a British director, are all vital elements in the assessment of Indian films today.

One has to be constantly aware, even in analyzing the social and political context and import of Indian cinema that basic misconceptions would have to be addressed at the very beginning. Even though, for example, “Bollywood” has become the representative term for Indian cinema, it does not represent the gamut of Indian films. Even though cinema enthusiasts and film textbooks will often point out the genres of Indian films, the knowledge seldom gets conveyed into popular discourse on Indian cinema.<sup>8</sup> But when it comes to the basic genres of Indian cinema, even recent film texts, especially those published outside India, are unable to outline the range of Indian film genres. Broadly speaking, the genres are as follows: popular Hindi cinema, parallel (also referred to as New Wave) and middlebrow Hindi films, popular and parallel regional language cinema, diasporic Indian cinema (made by diasporic filmmakers, usually in English), and English language Indian films. Apart from mainstream Hindi cinema, popularly (and increasingly in academic circles) referred to as Bollywood, the only other area of favor for academic film texts is the parallel Bengali cinema of Saytajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak. Ray in particular is the favorite of the western academic film world, as references to his work in numerous film textbooks and above all, the Lifetime Achievement Oscar awarded to him in 1992 seems to indicate. Apart from the fact that this distinction between popular and parallel cinema seems to ignore everything in between in the Indian film scene, most texts on Indian film seem insensitive to the need to explain the connection between what



they perceive to be the two extremes of Indian cinema. In emphasizing the differences between these two apparently unrelated genres of cinema so strongly, critics seem to have ignored the fact that both genres are representative of a postcolonial nation-state troubled by various socio-political issues. The over-simplified, summarized description of the range of Indian films is as follows: serious, well-made parallel regional cinema on one hand, and infantile, escapist popular films on the other. It is beyond the scope of the current project to chronicle the history of every filmic genre from India. However, the project looks to question the above-stated simplification in the categorization of Indian cinema, and to analyze some of the obvious overlaps between these two genres arising out of their contemporaneity and their investment in the political discourse of India.

Jyotika Virdi has shown that popular Indian films mirror social conditions of the country; it can be established that films in general, being in tune with the psyche of the nation even more than literary texts, are representative of the political condition of the postcolonial nation.<sup>9</sup> It should be clarified that films in India are rarely made with a clearly defined political agenda, just as they are not designed to propagate a specific social agenda. However, as Jameson's idea of the political unconscious proposes, national politics creeps into the fiber of films in India.<sup>10</sup> This project endeavors to establish how, in the context of the postcolonial nation, this politics is essentially one of resistance to colonial and neo-colonial norms. Indian cinema, both popular and parallel, has been the vehicle of anti-colonial sentiment expressed in a variety of ways. Primary among these are the following: the construction of a unique national identity, which stands in direct opposition to colonial stereotypes of the Indian national character, the development of an *unreal* cinematic discourse that emphasizes the postcolonial condition

in the manner of magical realism in postcolonial literature, and the use of mimicry and self-parody as a manner of political resistance to neo-colonial norms. My objective in defining an outline for the project would be based on what I perceive to be the ideal direction for postcolonial film studies. Stam and Shohat write:

In the face of Eurocentric historicizing, Third world and minoritarian filmmakers have rewritten their own histories, taken control over their own images, spoken in their own voices. It is not that their films substitute a pristine “truth” for European “lies,” but they propose counter-truths and counter-narratives informed by an anti-colonialist perspective, reclaiming and reaccentuating the events of the past in a vast project of remapping and renaming.<sup>11</sup>

The major element of overlap, and the overall focus of this project is the capacity of both popular and parallel films to be representing an anti-colonial discourse. The major elements of the discourse discussed in this project are the ones that have been pointed out in recent criticism as the weakest elements of Indian cinema, elements that seem to indicate the infantile and immature nature of Indian films. The texts of Indian films are quite similar to postcolonial literary texts; like them, they often operate in a zone between the real and the unreal, and participate in parody, pastiche and play. The overarching focus of this project is therefore the relationship between cinema and nationalism in India, with specific attention paid to the following factors: the creation of a cinematic discourse on the nation, the so-called unrealistic elements in Indian cinema and their relationship to nationhood, and the issue of nationality and national identity in the context of colonial and postcolonial mimicry and parody. Even though I have emphasized the generic divisions of Indian cinema, I must clarify that such a division is meant to facilitate an outsider’s academic understanding of the range of Indian cinema. The theoretical approach adapted for this dissertation endeavors to demarcate the basic similarities of these films in dealing with the concept of the nation. I have therefore

included in the discussion films from various genres with a view to stressing the use of recurring tropes of nationalism. In spite of the perceived differences with regard to filmmaking style, budgets, target audience, language and critical reception, certain specific elements of nationhood (the national character, women, Tradition) come to be utilized by the majority of filmic genres from India. An examination of sacrifice of personal interests for family or community values in a woman in this project, for example, takes into account the common pattern in popular Hindi film and regional cinema alike. The discussion of women in Chapter One, for example, elucidates the role of sacrifice in Bengali parallel cinema and in popular Hindi film. Although it is toned down several levels from the melodramatic standards of popular cinema, sacrifice determines the value of the woman as a marker of community identity in parallel cinema as well. If this project seems to have limited regard for the established divisions of genre, it is because it is invested in the theorization of nation in cinema across the spectrum of film genres in India.

### **Is the Nation Relevant Any More? Interweaves of the Argument on Cinema**

Judging from recent conversations among third-world intellectuals, there is now an obsessive return of the national situation itself, the name of the country that returns again and again like a gong, the collective attention to “us” and what we have to do and how we do it, to what we can't do and what we do better than this or that nationality, our unique characteristics, in short, to the level of the “people.” This is not the way American intellectuals have been discussing “America,” and indeed one might feel that the whole matter is nothing but that old thing called “nationalism,” long since liquidated here and rightly so. Yet a certain nationalism is fundamental in the third world (and also in the most vital areas of the second world), thus making it legitimate to ask whether it is all that bad in the end.' Does in fact the message of some disabused and more experienced first-world wisdom (that of Europe even more than of the United States) consist in urging these nation states to outgrow it as fast as possible? The predictable reminders of Kampuchea and of Iraq and Iran do not really seem to me to settle anything or suggest by what these nationalisms might be replaced except perhaps some global American postmodernist culture.

The veracity of Jameson's statement about the death of nationalism could be established fairly conveniently if intellectuals ran governments or determined the direction of the public psyche. Unfortunately, that is hardly the case in the third world or the first. Just as academic discussion of nationalism in America has had very little impact on the political jingoism, foreign policy-making, or the popular attitude to nationalism in the country, third-world nationalisms are also impervious both to "first-world wisdom" and native intellectualism. Intellectuals, irrespective of their geographical location, are eager to announce the *liquidation* of nationalisms, but it continues to remain fundamental to personal and political identity everywhere. The need to discuss third-world nationalism is imperative at the current moment not so much because it continues to exist after nationalism has died a natural death in the first world, but because it exists in spite of first-world nationalism. The pervasive "global American culture" that Jameson fears (and rightly so) will replace existent forms of third world nationalisms has its roots in the undead nationalism of the first world. The all-consuming global culture actually derives from a thriving discourse of identity and exceptionalism in the first world. This global culture has not self-procreated; it thrives because it is constantly fuelled by first world discourses of superiority and dominance, part of which, it can be argued, are directly derived from the discourse of colonialism.

As an art form and a medium of entertainment, cinema reflects a zone where the questions of nationalism, identity, and culture come face-to-face with the extent of the first world's influence in supplanting native cultural norms for the global/first world norms, both in colonial and postcolonial scenarios. The specific distinctions between

colonial and postcolonial/global influences on cinema must be clarified at the onset; because of its direct control of native political, economic, and social norms, colonialism had a comparatively uncomplicated influence on cinema, one that can be summarized as a process of hegemony and resistance. (The forms of resistance, however, were by themselves multifarious and complex). Once the direct systems of political/economic domination were removed post-colony, more complex systems of rejection and reception of global/western norms came into play. The current project aims to provide a reading of Indian cinema against the grain of the prevalent critique of the lack of maturity and overall political sterility of the films, by stressing their capacity to have maintained a discourse of a distinct national identity in the face of obtrusive cultural influence. This becomes a particularly difficult enterprise given the current academic understanding of nationalism as artificial and obstructive to liberal thought, but this manner of syncretism is necessitated by the conditions of postcolonial India. Global culture, be it in colonial political form or post-globalization economic form, has always been a factor in shaping national culture in India, including the culture of cinema; any discourse that protests the hegemonic replacement of native norms for global/western norms, however, can easily be confused with the traditionalist discourse of the right-wing Hindutva mob. The current discussion is positioned along the (now) precarious boundary of these ideologically opposing forms of discourse. The rising tide of Hindutva on one hand and the gradual loss of native language and culture in a globalized world on the other confer new difficulties on any analysis of cinema grounded in postcolonial studies. Even though postcolonial theory has long ago outlined the concepts of native identity, nationalism, political resistance and the role of hegemonic discourse in supplanting these, the

influence of the right wing and the lack of a clear colonial adversary makes the use of these terms almost impossible in the context of twentieth century India. At the same time, any analysis of the strengths of Indian cinema remains incomplete without an examination of the extent to which it resists global/western influences and stereotyping through the concepts of nationalism and national identity. This is the possible explanation for the third-world intellectual interest in nationalism that Jameson refers to, rather than the belated arrival of first-world wisdom regarding the reductive nature of nationhood.

### **Nationhood and Political Resistance to Colonial Norms**

The basis for this project is, as I have emphasized, postcolonial nationalism as an instrument of resistance against colonial and neo-colonial norms. It is therefore introduced through an examination of anti-colonial expression in Indian cinema.

Although the overall focus of Chapter One is the period between independence in 1947 to introduction of an open-market economy in 1991, it also takes into account the role of pre-independence cinema in shaping the discourse of nationalism. Without direct critiques of colonial norms, Indian cinema has strived to create a national character that is the diametric opposite of both the colonial figure and the colonial impression of the native persona, a trend that has its roots in the pre-independence cinematic traditions.

This discussion also provides the context to historicize the issue of the national character in cinema—the Indian character of the nationalist discourse evolves out of a changing colonizer-native subject relationship, whereby the more casual relationship of cultural exchange in early years of colonization gives way to a stricter system of cultural hierarchy after the Mutiny of 1857.

This section approaches the question of national identity in the political discourse of the freedom movement in India and its relationship to cinema. Cinema comes to India (and to most parts of the world) in the first decade of the twentieth century, at a time when the independence movement in India is in full swing. The issue of national identity in pre-independence Indian cinema automatically draws on the political discourse of indigenous Tradition, but takes on colorful and complex cinematic expressions because of colonial censorship. A number of contemporary critics have stressed the emphasis on the concept of Tradition as a determining factor in the Indian identity of cinema, usually by outlining the artificiality of the concept.<sup>13</sup> Most recent criticism points out that there is no homogenous Indian Tradition per se, and that the concept works through a system of coercion. Whoever the patriarchal order arbitrarily assigns to bear the signs of Tradition must do so; in cinema, women and rural populations are held responsible for upholding Traditional values. This chapter looks to revisit the issue of appropriation of women's figures for the sake of nation and the (justified) critique of such a mode, simultaneously considering the effectiveness of such a move in defining national identity. Even though the Indian nation's claim on the figure of the woman is particularly associated with popular cinema, parallel filmmakers, even ones who are not invested in the idea of the nation, tend to fall back upon similar metaphors connecting women and national identity. A look into what Partha Chatterjee calls the Tradition-modernity debate of colonial India, in fact, establishes beyond doubt that the connection between women and nation was an intrinsic part of the anti-colonial discourse.<sup>14</sup> "Indian nationalism, in demarcating a political position opposed to colonial rule," Chatterjee writes, "took up the women's question as a problem already constituted for it: namely, a problem of Indian tradition."<sup>15</sup>

Because colonial discourse had already outlined the “women’s question” as a problem with the Indian national character, discussions regarding the new nation inevitably address the question of the “new woman”:

[T]he “new” woman was quite the reverse of the “common” woman, who was course, vulgar, loud, quarrelsome, devoid of superior moral sense, sexually promiscuous, subjected to brutal physical oppression by males. Alongside the parody of the Westernized woman, this other construct is repeatedly emphasized in the literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century...It was precisely this degenerate condition of women that nationalism claimed it would reform.<sup>16</sup>

This discussion stresses that the origins of the woman-nation connection actually lie in colonial India, and that the connection was forged primarily as a reaction to colonial discourse on Indian women. The most problematic aspect of signifying nation through the figures of women or through Tradition in cinema is that even though it is an artifice, a means of patriarchy to artificially attribute qualities to the Indian woman with no regard for factors such as class or regional character, such signification has undeniably also been an useful strategy in outlining a distinct national identity for India.

### **The Nature of Resistance in Post-globalization India**

Chapter Two analyzes the changing face of nationalism and national identity in post-globalization Indian cinema. One might suggest that in the decades following independence, Indian society and cinema moved gradually away from the experiences of colonialism to a point where the question of resistance to colonial norms is no longer useful. However, the national identity that Indian cinema had etched out for itself in the decades following independence remained as the dominant form in cinema for many years to follow. The (often simplistic) equation of the west with decadent moral standards, wealth earned through dishonest means and spiritual lack continues in popular



cinema; parallel cinema reflects similar ideas, but its representations are often more sophisticated.

The major break in this trend comes with the changes in economic policy that the Indian government brings about in 1991. The welfare-influenced economic model of post-independence India gives way to the open market policy, changing, along with popular attitudes about wealth and commodity culture, the face of the national character in cinema. This section of the discussion aims to track the changes in cinematic concepts of nationalism, and to establish the connection between colonial and global neo-colonial influences.

### **The Alleged Unreal and the Postcolonial Nation**

Chapter Three assesses the common allegation that popular Indian cinema is unrealistic, and establishes how the choice to utilize unreal modes establishes a form of national identity. The basic premise of this chapter is the similarity of cinematic texts to postcolonial fictive narratives, and the intentional distancing of both from realistic narrative traditions. This chapter analyzes the alleged overuse of “unrealistic” devices in popular Indian cinema, and further examines this lack of realism in comparison with various western theoretical conceptions of the nature of realism. The overuse of apparently clichéd cinematic tropes such as coincidences, twinning, amnesia, sudden and unexplained changes of locale for dream or song sequences and similar elements of Indian cinema have faced an immense amount of criticism at home and abroad. Even though many of these have been stock devices for literature and cinema over the centuries, their presence in the popular cinema of India leads to the idea that cinema from India is yet to mature. I analyze elements such as twinning and amnesia with a view to

establishing that such devices underline the national consciousness of Indian cinema; like magical realism in Latin American literature, the *unreal* of Indian cinema proclaims the postcolonial condition of the Indian nation. It is a way to advertise both the essential difference of the postcolonial Indian consciousness, and the specificity of the Indian national character. The *unreal* elements of Indian cinema are metaphors for post-partition Indian nation; the violence associated with the creation of the nation, and its continuation in contemporary India is therefore the primary theoretical basis for this chapter.

### **East is West: Mimicry and Parody in Postcolonial Nationhood**

Chapter Four examines the issue of colonial and postcolonial mimicry as a form of resistance to colonial and neo-colonial norms. It has increasingly been the case that postcolonial identity in India, particularly that of the educated upper-middle class urban population, is in a perpetual conversation with the west. Issues regarding borrowing and mimicry, the original and the imitation, the Traditional and the western continue to command influence particularly on the cultural, but also the economic and political makeup of the country. The discourse of mimicry has a long history in colonial and postcolonial studies. Colonial mimicry of native customs, colonial strategies to reform the native subject, and mimicry of the colonial norms as a process of internalizing the systems of colonial hegemony have all been subjects of critical interest. This chapter approaches the question of self-reflexivity in recent Indian via a historicization of the issues of mimicry and parody in India. Having gone through the various stages of mimicry in colonial and postcolonial settings, the Indian national identity in cinema stands at the verge of a confident self-recognition, made apparent through its tendency to parody itself; by parodying and reflecting upon itself, Indian cinema is now proclaiming

its own unique identity to audiences and critics alike. I have attempted, throughout this dissertation, to point out how Indian cinema establishes a sense of national identity to counter colonial and neo-colonial norms. As this tendency declines with the rapid influx of global culture in the recent decades, self-reflexivity seems to introduce a new zone of resistance. This section demarcates how national identity comes to be defined in increasingly flexible terms, but still does not lose currency in the postcolonial scenario.

As the lucre of globalization overwhelms the public psyche in India and the rhetoric of “development” takes over domestic politics, cinema is going through many changes. The impact of a globalized economy is apparent in all forms of Indian cinema. However, because Indian cinema continues to address issues of cultural conflict, originality, Tradition, internalization and ultimately of national identity, it leaves open an avenue for the discussion of the influence. Indian cinema began as an anti-colonial enterprise; I have argued in this dissertation that in spite of many allegations of its infantilism, it is one of limited platforms for continuing political resistance against influences that devalue the cultural complexity of the Indian nation.

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<sup>1</sup> Jyotika Viridi, *The Cinematic ImagiNation: Indian Popular Films as Social History*. (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> The DVD cover of Satyajit Ray’s *Pather Panchali* quotes the *Time Magazine* and Truffaut’s comments on the film to establish its merit. The trend is common for most films produced in the third World.

<sup>3</sup> Madhava Prasad. *The Ideology of Hindi Film: A Historical Construction*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 2.

<sup>4</sup> My anecdotal evidence in showing Iranian director Majid Majidi’s classic film *Children of Heaven* in my undergraduate classrooms could be included here. This film, a beautiful metaphor for familial affection expressed through a pair of lost shoes, seemed incapable of conveying its message in my undergraduate classrooms time and again, because students were too overwhelmed by the family’s inability to buy a pair of shoes to pay attention to other aspects of the film.

<sup>5</sup> *Slumdog Millionaire*, DVD, directed by Danny Boyle. Perf. Dev Patel, Anil Kapoor, Saurabh Shukla. (Twentieth Century Fox, 2009).

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<sup>6</sup> I have elucidated in the fourth chapter that Danny Boyle admits to have been greatly influenced by Indian cinema in the making of this film, and that scriptwriter Simon Beaufoy familiarized himself with the work of Indian scriptwriters before writing the script for *Slumdog*. For an audience that recognizes the elements from Bollywood (like Jamal imagining that he pounces on Salim and they both fall off the building), the effect is humorous.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Meyer, "Swift and Sterne Revisited: Postcolonial Parodies in Rushdie and Singh-Toor", in *Cheeky Fictions: Laughter and the Postcolonial*, edited by Susan Reichl and Mark Stein (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 118.

<sup>8</sup> A look at popular world cinema textbooks, like Roy Armes' *Third World Filmmaking and the West* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987) will establish these generic divisions.

<sup>9</sup> *In The Cinematic Imagination: Indian Popular Films as Social History*.

<sup>10</sup> Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1982), 17-18.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Stam and Ella Shohat, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 249

<sup>12</sup> Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism". *Social Text*, No. 15 (Autumn, 1986), 2.

<sup>13</sup> I use Tradition in the upper case to indicate the term as applied, in critical discourse and popular culture alike, to signify those particular elements of religious and social culture that are perceived in the popular psyche to enrich the Indian cultural identity. The term indicates social or religious norms whose antiquity often serves as a strong justification for their continued practice and enduring appeal. All other uses of the term appear in lower case.

<sup>14</sup> Partha Chatterjee. "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonized Women: The Contest in India", *American Ethnologist*, 16.4.(Nov. 1989), 622-628.

<sup>15</sup> Chatterjee 623.

<sup>16</sup> Chatterjee 627.

## Chapter Two

### Nation and Nationalism in Postcolonial Indian Cinema

In this chapter, I will discuss the evolution of the concepts of nation and nationalism in Indian film in the period between political independence from the British in 1947 until the time when Indian economy adopts an open market policy in 1991. The emphasis is on tracing the connection between Indian nationalism as a political concept and the portrayal of nationalist sentiments in cinema, and how these two are often in conversation with each other. In the sixty years after achieving self-governance, Indian cinema has provided its audiences with a dynamic conception of the Indian nation, often aiming to define and outline the characteristics of nation and nationalism with the help of ideas that are strongly tied to the changing socio-economic conditions of the nation-state. Gradually, the political discourse has also mediated the filmic construct of nation. In this chapter, I will outline how nationalism is interpreted by Indian cinema post colony, and why the expression of nationalist sentiment in cinema represents an anti-colonial sentiment. The primary touchstones of the cinematic formulation of nation in India are the following: Tradition, an Indian national character marked by an innate *core* of Indianness, and the identification of women as markers of national identity.<sup>1</sup> All of these trends have been the target of recent criticism on Indian cinema, especially of popular cinema; contemporary critique emphasizes that the issue of nationalism overall, and these trends in particular, establish the naiveté of Indian cinema. This discussion looks to address the shortcomings of late twentieth-century critiques of colonial nationalism, like that of Benedict Anderson, with anti-colonial and postcolonial nationalism in India, and its representation in cinema.<sup>2</sup> The comparative value of nationalism in India, both as a

political concept and a cinematic formulation, rests on its utilization as a form of resistance to colonial impositions on the native society, culture and politics. However, until the intervention of the Subaltern School in the 70s, the value of nationalism to India's postcolonial status was dismissed by citing either of the two following reasons: that it was a construct like every other form of nationalism, and that it was not original, but derived from European ideas of liberalism.<sup>3</sup> Film criticism has followed a similar line of argument in the discussion of nationalism in Indian cinema, a concept that this chapter aims to question by examining the efficacy of nationalism as a form of anti-colonial discourse in cinema.

### **Political resistance in colonial-era Indian cinema**

Since its inception, Indian cinema has strived to create an indigenous version of nationalism on screen, one that is shaped and influenced by the political climate of nationalist movements, but also by various indigenous social norms and histories. Since cinema in India came into being during a moment of surging nationalist movements in a nation still under colonial rule, any examination of nationalism in Indian cinema calls for an in-depth analysis of colonial-era films. Many of these films are ostensibly restricted in their portrayal of nationalist sentiments because of existing colonial censorship, which is deeply invested in maintaining and possibly valorizing the imperial project in India. However, as Prem Chowdhry shows in his discussion of empire cinema, the question of censorship in colonial India was made considerably problematic because of disagreements among British censorship officials in England and those in India on the issue of cinematic content suitable for colonial audiences.<sup>4</sup> Chowdhry stresses that there

was a basic consensus among censorship officials regarding the nature of the imperial project, even though the process of censorship was often chaotic:

Despite these differences, British officials (both in London and in India) were united in their analysis of Indian society and in their belief that the British were civilizing agents acting for the benefit of the colonized... The discordant and cautionary voices of officials were in favour of stricter censorship, but remained within the ambit of imperial politics than in opposition to it.<sup>5</sup>

Even though Chowdhry's comments specifically refer to the empire films, the same censorship board is responsible for monitoring films produced in India, and if the crux of the conversation on film censorship in India seems to be the maintenance of imperial interests, then even the slightest references to nationalist ideas could not be allowed by this board. However, nationalistic discourses do make their way into early cinema in subtle forms, and often cannot be recognized as such by colonial censorship authorities. Even though popular film in India is never a medium of political activism, the level of its investment in contemporary political discourses should be emphasized here; the early cinema of India indicates that even if Indian filmmakers are not participating in an organized anti-colonial movement, they nevertheless re-emphasize pre-colonial Indian identities and firmly establish cinematic modes that respond to contemporary nationalist discourses. Indian cinema of the colonial era initiates the characterization of a national identity—what the Indian character and the Indian nation stand for—through the same emphasis on Tradition that the primary discourses of Indian nationalism establish and uphold.

By the time there was a steady stream of feature films being produced in India in the 1920s-30s, the nationalist movement was in full swing, with M.K. Gandhi at the helm of the Indian National Congress. All three primary schools of Indian nationalism pointed

out by Appadurai—Gandhian nonviolence, Nehruvian socialism, and the violent expatriate/rogue nationalism of Subhas Bose and the Indian National Army—emphasized, in varying degrees, the importance of a national character as a form of political resistance to the colonial presence.<sup>6</sup> Even though the nation's early leaders were not quite receptive to cinema, (Gandhi was completely adverse to the idea of film, and Nehru would accept it only if it used as a medium of education and instruction), cinema not only appropriated the discourse of nationalism but became an extension of it.<sup>7</sup> Some filmmakers, like Phalke, openly advertise their sympathy to the nationalistic cause, especially to the Gandhian Swadeshi movement.<sup>8</sup>

The earliest feature films from India seem to draw upon contemporary political discourse in underlining a distinct Indian character, even though none of them are overtly nationalistic in tone or content. The question of the Indian national character, however, seems to be problematic from the critical perspective, not only because it is an artificial construct (in the context of India's heterogeneous culture), but also because a colonial idea of the Indian character had already been established in the two previous centuries of contact with England. It seems that the latter reason, the fact that the British had already formed and circulated an impression of the Indian, leads Indian nationalist movements to create a version of Indianness in sharp contrast with the colonial stereotypes.

Postcolonial critics have commented extensively on the Englishman's disapproval of the habits and customs of the Indian. In the eyes of the colonizer the primary problem with the Indian character was its difference from mid-Victorian ideas of Englishness. Dipesh Chakrabarty notes that “the eighteenth century European idea of ‘civilization’ culminated, in early nineteenth century India, in a full-blown imperialist critique of



Indian/Hindu domestic life, which was now held to be inferior to what became the [English] ideals of bourgeois domesticity.”<sup>9</sup> The rationale of colonization, needless to say, is often the native population’s *need* to be liberated from debilitating religious/cultural practices; even liberal British philosophers like John Stuart Mill were convinced of the comparative inferiority of Indians.<sup>10</sup> Once established in the colonies, the colonial attitude towards native custom, religion and literature is mostly marked by dismissiveness and condescending attempts at socio-religious “reform”. There might have been a brief period of cultural exchange during the early years of British presence in India, a bi-directional conversation of cultures that could have been made possible only by a certain amount of reverence for the native cultural forms on the part of the colonizers. However, as William Darymple/Pankaj Mishra conversation on the subject of cultural assimilation of the Englishman in India seems to indicate, if there was indeed a period of multicultural exchange, it lasted only during the initial years of the East India Company’s rule in India.<sup>11</sup> Durba Ghosh’s work on the multicultural family in India in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries underlines the contacts between the British colonizers and native Indian life until 1857. She says:

By many accounts, the ideal eighteenth-century East India Company man was one who learned local languages, participated in native customs...and lived intimately and had a family with a local woman. A collaborative Raj was phased out by a coercive Raj, and the native female companions were replaced by the influx of white women from Europe. By 1857, when Indian soldiers rose up against their British masters and gave Britons cause to establish more rigid racial hierarchies, an age of many kinds of partnership between Britons and those they ruled on the Indian subcontinent came to an abrupt end.<sup>12</sup>

From the imperial perspective, multiculturalism or cosmopolitanism was acceptable during the Company’s rule, but the first major instance of native resistance to political domination of the British leads to the reassessment of social contacts between the

colonials and their subjects. Eventually, the subject position of the Indian came to be emphasized much more strongly in the colonial discourse, leading to the replacement of complex/multidimensional forms of cultural contact with an attitude of caustic criticism for the Indian, whereby any earlier multicultural contact had to be replaced by a critique of the native character and customs. This particular juncture is also marked by an increasing obsession about racial purity (and accompanying fears of emasculation by the native male) among the ruling class:

The later British vision of the Indian male as a sexually threatening creature from whom the angels of Albion should at all costs be protected came only in the wake of 1857. There is strong evidence that the Victorian's obsession with race, "miscegenation," and skin color was relatively absent at this earlier period, and many of the children of British-Indian liaisons rose to the top of British society.<sup>13</sup>

Attitudes change drastically, as Darymple asserts, after the Mutiny of 1857, whence the objective of the British in India transmutes primarily to "reform". The emphasis laid on the mutiny as the historical marker for the reversal of the social positioning of the British in India goes to show the impact of active political resistance on colonial attitude. What was, before the mutiny, a space where casual indulgence in cultural exchange was in no apparent conflict with the political and economic interests of the British, changed afterwards to a hostile locale inhabited by native characters to be suspected, critiqued and *reformed* at every possible opportunity.

From the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British sought overwhelmingly to denigrate what the Indian national character represented, often suggesting ways to reform this character according to the ideals of the British national character. Homi Bhabha explains that the extent of such disapproval makes it the primary aim of the colonizer to create a mimic colonial subject, "a reformed, recognizable Other...a subject of a

difference that is almost the same, but not quite.”<sup>14</sup> Bhabha’s formulation of colonial imitation states how the “reforming, civilizing mission” of colonization refashions the colonial subject to imitate the Englishman, without allowing him to *become* an Englishman.<sup>15</sup> This process of refashioning must be initiated at the basic level of formal education, where the native subject must be, first of all, introduced to English education, the unquestionable value of which was often established through a criticism of native texts. The systematic efforts of the colonial discourse to undermine the value of classical Indian texts, for example, is apparent in Macaulay’s *Minutes* of 1834, where speaking on the introduction of English education in India, the author discusses “the immense superiority of English literature as compared to the historical information collected in all the Sanskrit texts.”<sup>16</sup> This is one of the several instances that demonstrate how, from the stance of the postcolonial scholar, the project of providing English education for Indians, famously introduced as a way of creating a class of clerks in the colony, can also be interpreted as a project of undermining native culture in the true imperialist mode.

Bhabha refers to Macaulay on the issue of colonial mimicry as follows:

At the intersection of European learning and colonial power, Macaulay can conceive of nothing other than “a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern- a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect”— in other words a mimic man raised “through our English School,” as a missionary educationist wrote in 1819, “to form a corps of translators and be employed in different departments of Labour.”<sup>17</sup>

Even though creating such a class actually serves the purpose of the empire (financial and historical record-keeping), the colonial discourse justifies it as a necessary step in *educating* the natives, or providing them access to the literary treasures of the English language because their own culture lacks literary excellence.

The lineaments of the Indian national character emerging at this historical moment were determined to a large extent by the colonial attitude towards the socio-religious structure of India. Since the colonial project in India was distinctly marked by a critique of socio-religious traditions of the nation, one of the primary concerns of the anti-colonial nationalistic discourse is to redeem the value of such tradition. Partha Chatterjee's examination of Indian nationalist ideology in the early twentieth century highlights the positioning of this national character with respect to that of the colonizer. Chatterjee explains, "a central element in the ideological justification of British colonial rule was the criticism of the 'degenerate and barbaric' social customs of the Indian people, sanctioned, or so it was believed, by their religious tradition."<sup>18</sup> For the Indian nationalist at the beginning of the twentieth century, independence from the colonizers is synonymous with the establishment of a nation-state to be governed by modern (western) ideas of democracy and secularism, but to accept modernity unconditionally is to concede to the ideas of the colonizers. Roy Armes presents the argument that the driving force behind nationalist movements in most colonial nations were the western-educated elite, the group that, "humiliated and frustrated in its everyday contact with the colonial power...came to form an opposition that was a kind of shadow image of the colonial state."<sup>19</sup> Armes implies that these groups, like the *illustrados* of Philippines, the *bhadralok* of Calcutta, India, or the *assimiles* of West Africa, who inherited the power at the moment the colonizers depart, were also the inheritors of colonial/western political ideologies of democracy and freedom of the individual. Their mode of education necessitated their ideological affinity to the departing colonizers, even though their mutual interests were apparently at odds with each other. Armes says:

The style of nationalism adopted by the elite was conceived before independence as an opposition to colonialism, and it took Western political forms. It was in fact a search for political independence within a framework of foreign economic and ideological dominance... The nationalists did not seek to revive a traditional form of society or to mobilize mass support for the independence movement in terms of ethnic identity—denigrated as “tribalism” by the colonizers. Instead, their ambition was to create a modern state, using concepts of democracy, elections, and political parties borrowed from the West.<sup>20</sup>

Even before we verify the truth of this statement in the case of India, it is important to point out how Armes, in his apparently well-intentioned acknowledgment of the merits and originality of Third World cinema, seems to ignore the dilemma of the colonial nationalists. It seems for them to ignore the so-called modern ideologies of freedom and democracy is to endorse “tribalism,” but to imbibe these values is to “borrow from the West.” The latter is, in fact a very prominent part of the Indian nationalist discourse—all major freedom movement figures are conscious of the implications of borrowing from and mimicry of the west. Their caution might have arisen from the common allegations of a lack of originality or imagination in the colonial subject. Colonial discourses have often emphasized that the colonial subject is unoriginal, unimaginative and essentially child-like.<sup>21</sup> The need to emphasize a national identity/character is vital at this time, as is that to counter the assault on the customs of the nation. Caught in a conflict between tradition and modernity at this time, the Indian nationalist has to find a definitive place for tradition in the nationalist discourse. Chatterjee’s model for the possible resolution for this conflict is as follows:

[T]his resolution was built around a separation of the domain of culture into two spheres—the material and the spiritual. It was in the material sphere that the claims of Western civilization were the most powerful. Science, technology, rational forms of economic organization, modern methods of statecraft—these had given the European countries the strength to subjugate the non-European people and to impose their dominance over the whole world. To overcome this domination, the colonized people had to learn those superior techniques of

organizing material life and incorporate them within their own cultures. (However,)...as Indian nationalists in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century argued, not only was it undesirable to imitate the West in anything other than the material aspects of life, it was even unnecessary to do so, because in the spiritual domain the East was superior to the West.<sup>22</sup>

This “selective appropriation of Western modernity,” therefore, has precipitated an emphasis on the spiritual wealth of India, its religious and cultural traditions, in every form of nationalist discourse, including cinema.<sup>23</sup> Chatterjee’s own corollary to this initial formulation is that this material/spiritual divide becomes, by extension, also a divide between the inner and the outer, or the home and the world. The nationalist would see the material world as practical but external, and hence less important than the inner world of spirituality, which was to be protected at all costs. The dilemma of the Indian national character could be resolved through an emphasis on tradition because “as long as India took care to retain the spiritual distinctiveness of culture, it could make all the compromises and adjustments necessary to adapt itself to the requirements of a modern material world without losing its true identity.”<sup>24</sup> Indian nationalism has therefore emphasized an inherent Indian *core*, an inner sanctum of tradition that remains unscathed in every *true* Indian, even as external signifiers might change. The same binaries of inside/outside, spiritual/material that anticolonial nationalists utilized also seem to guide the national ideal of film in popular consciousness.

This emphasis on Tradition, however, is one of the major criticisms that Indian popular cinema continues to face. A large part of the contemporary criticism of popular Indian cinema is that it draws on Tradition as a defining factor, even though this Tradition is neither universal nor constant. In addition to the arguments presented above as to why Tradition *becomes* a defining factor for Indian nationalism, it is necessary to

emphasize that Tradition was not *invented* for India per se. In other words, not only are there specific reasons, like those discussed above, for Tradition to have been emphasized in the discourse of Indian nationalism and Indian cinema, but a large part of this Tradition is real, and still on popular use. Hence to say that “governments invent tradition” is to suggest that the Tradition itself was non-existent.<sup>25</sup> If that Tradition is indeed invoked to strengthen “transient political form,” especially those that owe their transience to systematic efforts by Anglo-European colonial powers to render them weak, to represent it solely as a right-wing political agenda is to dismiss its contribution in shaping an anti-colonial discourse in cinema.<sup>26</sup> For post-colonial nations, the aim is to consciously rebuild a lost identity, and retell lost little narratives (*petits récits*) buried under grand colonial narratives. It might be artificial, but it was one of the few available methods to counter circulating colonial arguments regarding the shortcomings of Indian culture. Indian cinema’s attempt to rewrite the nation right after independence is in part a postcolonial rewriting, because it offers native (re)-readings of the very stereotypes that the colonials attached to the nation. What part of the history or culture (Tradition) gets rewritten, however, is guided by native norms of hierarchy—an unfortunate but inevitable reflection of colonial mythmaking, whereby upper caste Hindu sentimentalities often act as the guiding principles in popular cinema.<sup>27</sup> In spite of this shortcoming, early Indian cinema represents an active body of postcolonial texts simply because it creates a national identity, which could be incomplete or lop-sided, but nevertheless a form of identity that a nascent nation, barely emerging out of the shadow of colonialism, is able to claim as its own. I also believe that there are sufficient exceptions to this norm if we are to look at Indian cinema as a complete picture, and not merely at popular film.

Parallel cinema does take some very bold steps in both defining and critiquing the new nation and its existent social hierarchies, and even within popular modes, there are attempts to step out of the boundaries I mentioned above.

On a broader scale, the obsession with an Indian national character in cinema is identified as a signifier of a level of naiveté, especially of popular cinema in India. Since the publication of Benedict Anderson's analysis of nationalism, and increasingly in the related critical work of the late 1990s, the critique of nationalism as a "cultural artefact" makes it difficult to continue discussing nationalism as a concept necessary to certain scenarios.<sup>28</sup> In the third world, for example, nationalism could operate as form of social or political resistance to colonial/ western norms. The fact that the form of national identity particular to India seems to draw heavily on mainstream Hindu social norms, constructs the Indian nation as a homogenized cohesive whole, and simplifies the connection between culture and morality, makes the discussion even more problematic. Given the overlap of the cinematic critique of *western* norms with the recent criticism of modernity by the extreme right-wing Hindutva movement in India, it seems nearly impossible to extricate the argument that nationalism represents a form of anti-colonial resistance in India. Dipesh Chakrabarty sums up the anxieties surrounding the "critique of modernity debate" in the atmosphere of right-wing fanaticism in late 20<sup>th</sup>- early 21<sup>st</sup> century India:

[I]t does seem to me that the way the 'critique of modernity' debate has been positioned by some Indian Marxist and left-liberal intellectuals in their rush to fight the so-called Hindu fundamentalists, forecloses the space for critical thinking instead of expanding and enriching it. Faced with the Hindu challenge, these intellectuals have gone back to some of the classical shibboleths of Marxism and liberalism... They express the fear, as some do in the west, that to develop a critique of the legacies of Enlightenment thought at this moment of (Indian) history is to betray the cause of Marxism and liberal principle and thus play into the hands of the 'reactionaries', (in this case, the Hindutva mob).<sup>29</sup>



If there is indeed a way for “expanding and enriching” the debate on tradition and modernity in India instead of only reacting with apprehension to its similarities with right-wing discourses such as that of Hindutva, it could entail appreciating the impact of Tradition in shaping the concept of nationalism and corresponding anti-colonial sentiments in India, while simultaneously being critical of its excesses.

Among the many and varied signifiers of the Indian national identity in cinema, the figure of the woman is a well-established and increasingly much-discussed one. It also goes without saying that employing the figure of the woman as the primary signifier of a national identity is possibly the most problematic aspect of nationalism as political resistance. In saying that Indian women are “pawns in a nationalist discourse,” for example, Jyotika Viridi underlines the extent to which the filmic discourse of Indian nationalism appropriates the figures of women for self-definition.<sup>30</sup> She shows that both in social history and in cinema, women are the symbols of the integrity of a nation or community, a statement she establishes through the example of the Shah Bano case, where a woman’s claim to legal empowerment was denied because it threatened community identity.<sup>31</sup> In cinema, there is constant pressure for the Indian woman to uphold the national identity, be it through her manner of dressing, her demeanor, and in certain cases, through a curtailing or sacrifice of her own rights or requirements. It was unacceptable (for a considerable period of time after independence) for a central woman character to drink, smoke or dress provocatively. Loss of chastity, both willing and unwilling, is usually punishable by death or a lifetime of sacrifices. If Tradition is the talisman for an Indian identity, women are compelled to become the markers of Tradition. It must be noted that both the colonial and the anticolonial discourse

appropriate the figures of women to perpetuate their own arguments. The colonials had determined that one of the primary “civilizing” projects in India was to liberate the native female subject from existing social customs and the savage native male, while the native nationalist, eager to salvage the Indian character from colonial slurs, decides that the woman must bear the weight of Tradition.<sup>32</sup> Partha Chatterjee establishes that the connection between women and nation was an intrinsic part of the anti-colonial discourse. He says, “Indian nationalism, in demarcating a political position opposed to colonial rule, took up the women’s question as a problem already constituted for it: namely, a problem of Indian tradition.”<sup>33</sup>

India’s contact with England over a period of almost two hundred years might have been glossed over in pre-independence Indian films, but it is clear that the films are in conversation with the dismissive colonial discourse on the Indian national character. Most of these are vernacular language films (Hindi and Marathi) even though the filmmakers are mostly English-educated; most of these films also overtly emphasize the religious/cultural traditions of India. The first completely Indian venture, *Raja Harishchandra* (1913), paves the way for a number of vernacular films at least three decades before India achieves self-government. Even though this chapter focuses more on post-independence films as postcolonial projects, it might be worthwhile to note that these early films seem to emphasize a certain interest in the history and culture of India. The subjects of these films, initially at least, were drawn from Indian mythology, an area which has traditionally been upheld as a marker of ancient Indian heritage. In other words, referring to the mythological traditions of India implies a reference to its spirituality and the antiquity of its culture, one of the primary tenets of Indian nationalist

thought. Roy Armes mentions in *Third World Filmmaking and the West* that early mythological films from India were imbibing popular traditions rather than classical Sanskrit traditions, possibly implying that these were derived more from the low-brow forms of popular entertainment than from the classical forms which could rightfully claim the antiquity that nationalistic discourse is referring to at this point.<sup>34</sup> However, despite their immediate origins, *Harishchandra*, *Sati Savitri* and similar mythological films suggest that early Indian filmmakers like Dadasaheb Phalke were invested in consciously reclaiming Tradition and history in order to instill in viewers the very sense of pride that Indian nationalist movements were attempting to kindle. In these films, subjects that had ostensibly been pushed into oblivion by the imposition of western education in India and by the gradual disappearance of indigenous school systems like Sanskrit “tols” were marginally revived.<sup>35</sup> By reclaiming these texts, which were part of a thriving historical and dramatic tradition of pre-colonial India, early filmmakers seem to have initiated an anticolonial project in their filmmaking strategies that reflected the discourse of contemporary anti-colonial movements. Audiences are often proactive in reading into the mythological texts and interpreting them as nationalist narratives, as was the case with Phalke’s 1919 film *Kalia Mardan*, where “viewers [were] reported to have reacted with shouts of *Vande Mataram* when Kalia was killed...by the child Krishna.”<sup>36</sup> The mythological slaying of evil is equated with the end of empire, and becomes an inspiring anti-colonial moment through the nationalistic viewership. It must be noted, therefore, that pre-independence Indian films take advantage of the political climate to transform apparently benign traditional subject matters into potent nationalist narratives. As Partha Chatterjee says, “anticolonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within

colonial society well before it begins its political battle with the imperial power.”<sup>37</sup> In certain instances, the very subjects that colonial authorities encourage because they are deemed harmless become potent avenues for the expression of nationalist sentiment. Prem Chowdhry points out how censorship officials in colonial times specifically identified religious/mythological films as being suitable for colonial viewership, failing to recognize how these very forms could be appealing to nationalistic sentiments.<sup>38</sup> If we look into the evolution of the filmic genres in India, it becomes apparent that the nationalistic discourse of Indian cinema is a reaction to existing colonial discourse. Because cinema arose in a culture of colonialism, it is no surprise that it operated as a tool for empire; but the versatile nature of the medium ironically renders it with the potential to also become a vehicle of anti-colonial sentiments.

Soon after the formation of the nation as a political space, popular films strive to establish and celebrate the concepts of nation and nationality. Even as they deal with rural poverty or moral degeneration in urban centers in the aftermath of independence, Indian popular cinema of the 50s and 60s consciously rebuilds the Indian national character, primarily by establishing it as in being stark contrast to *western* identities. There is no direct criticism of the Englishman (or woman) per se, but the Indian national character is mostly defined as the diametric opposite of an imaginary prototype of a materialistic, promiscuous, spiritually lacking west. The discourse of popular cinema utilizes the elements outlined earlier in this chapter in introducing the idea of the national character—the innate core of nationhood, the value of Tradition and spirituality in the East, and the emphasis on women as the primary bearers of national identity are trends established in post-independence Indian cinema from the late 40s and early 50s. The

premise of the discourse is of course the Indian *core* in every character, perhaps best represented by the popular song from Raj Kapoor's *Shri 420* (1955), "Mera Juta Hai Japani," which emphasizes the protagonist's *Indian heart* even though externally, he is in multicultural garb. Rushdie translates this popular song in *The Satanic Verses*: "O, my shoes are Japanese... These trousers are English, if you please. On my head, red Russian hat; my heart's Indian for all that."<sup>39</sup> The song, an enduring classic in India's cultural memory, serves to highlight the positioning of the postcolonial self as a multicultural entity but for the *heart*. (Interestingly, women seldom get away with a similar multicultural sense of fashion within the domestic sphere at this time). In spite of the wide range of characters that post-independence popular Hindi cinema presents, a constant reference to this quality of an *inherent Indianness* is almost always given, whatever their external qualities may be. For men, this quality is expressed through their respect for cultural norms (Tradition) and the elderly, love for the land and the people. Women are chaste (in a manner that seems to reflect the Victorian ideas of female chastity), ready to sacrifice themselves for their families, and strong in the face of any adversity that threatens their homes. In spite of the various types of characters we see in these films, it is quite apparent that the directorial voice, more often than not, is more sympathetic to the cause of the poorer sections of society, an element that leads me to argue that it is a quality of the Indian national character to appreciate the comparative importance of moral righteousness, even within an economic crisis. According to the norms of melodrama, the poor are often in focus in popular films, which simultaneously cast prosperous characters in villainous roles. Films that focus on the rich must establish the moral qualities of the central characters. Popular films rarely celebrate capitalism, a

sign that the governmental economic policies come to define what the national character should be like: early Indian cinema reflects the welfare-influenced economic model of India quite strongly, and to be truly Indian, one has to be comfortable about, and accepting of poverty as a quality that could help to retain moral goodness or help build character.<sup>40</sup> Popular Hindi cinema in the two decades following independence try to establish this supposed connection between economic prosperity and moral depravity, a trope that is also often evoked in with connection to the west (the west is prosperous, *hence* amoral).

In discussing the changing relationship between cinema and the concepts of nationalism in India, it is therefore vital to assess the impact of particular socio-economic trends within the country in the sixty years after 1947. Immediately after independence, the Congress party in India seems particularly open to adopting certain principles of Soviet communism. This is not surprising given that India's political climate in the decades before independence was overall conducive to socialist principles. Even though Gandhi was thoroughly opposed to communism "because it sanctioned violence, involved dictatorship, and was utterly alien to Indian culture," Nehru (even though he acknowledged the totalitarian nature of communist governments) seemed to

...have profound admiration for the achievements of the Soviet Union in the domestic sphere, especially the education reforms, supposed establishment of racial, economic and social equality, the supposed solution of the problem of nationalities on the basis of freedom and equality, and the *rapid economic progress*.<sup>41</sup>

It is no surprise then, that in establishing the economic foundations of independent India, he leaned heavily towards the socialist model. Until the major change to this model was introduced at the beginning of the 1990s, Indian nationalism comes to be characterized in

a very specific manner, both by the state and in cinema. According to this characterization, the Indian nation is a homogenous entity in spite of its diversity of language and religion. The primary basis for the connectedness of its various communities is a stark contrast to all forms of western norms and practices—it must be noted that there is no direct reference to British cultural practices, but the term *western* seems to encompass all that is foreign/colonial. Post-independence popular cinema's critique of western norms and customs often follows the nationalistic trope of critique.

*Shree 420* (1955), belonging to the group of popular films that Raj Kapoor directed and played the lead as the Chaplinesque tramp in the 50s, is a representation of the traits that are so defining for the cinematic making of the Indian nation at this time.<sup>42</sup> The film constructs the nation with an emphasis on the ideal national character, without necessarily being blatantly focused on patriotism. The political and intellectual inclinations of the Kapoors, including their involvement in socialist theater groups of the 50s, is of course a clear indication of the indirect (also somewhat simplistic) critique of capitalism in their films.<sup>43</sup> There is no doubt that their politics influences the characterization of the Indian nation and nationalism in these films. *Shree 420* (its title refers to the article on cheating and fraudulent activity in Indian penal code) is about the lure of the prosperous urban life, and the dangers that accompany it. The film's conflation of economic prosperity, fraudulent activity and western cultural norms brings into focus the issues that have been prescribed (by the nation's leaders, especially Nehru) for the newly liberated nation. The welfare state warns against the excessive accumulation of or obsession over wealth, the rising tide of corruption, and the imitation of what the nation has recently and ostensibly rejected—the values of the West. All of these factors are

conveniently given the form of a metaphor on the binaries of wealth and poverty, morality and immorality, city and country.

For Raj, the protagonist of *Shree 420*, the task is to make the correct choices in accordance with the prescribed qualities of the Indian national character. The main conflict of course is whether he chooses to be morally upright and poor, or immoral and wealthy. Because it is common for popular Indian cinema at this time to conflate western norms with wealth and immorality, Raj proves himself to be an Indian at heart by choosing to be poor but honest through a series of difficult choices that keeps the audience on edge.<sup>44</sup> The wealthy people that Raj comes across in the city have all earned their wealth through dishonest means, and they have created a Western-inspired universe of capitalist excesses for themselves—a world of expensive parties, drinking, and dancing, one without any redeemable moral qualities. The contrast between the two worlds that Maya and Vidya (their names can be loosely translated as illusion and knowledge respectively) inhabit is emphasized strongly in the Dewali festival scene, which also helps to define the norms of the Hindustani (Indian) life as based on faith, modesty and simplicity, especially on the part of the woman. The scene is used to manipulate audience reaction, as it initially seems to portray a traditional Indian festival night emphasizing the defining values of Indian life, but moves on to a contrasting celebration in Maya's circle. As Raj brings a gift (an expensive sari) for Vidya on the night of the festival, pays his respects to her father, and offers to take her out to the Laxmi temple, he seems to be following the particular religious and social norms of a young man of his age and social stature.<sup>45</sup> However, he actually takes Vidya out to a club, where his acquaintances from the upper class have gathered to drink, dance and gamble



on the occasion of Dewali. He explains to the confused and somewhat scared Vidya that metaphorically, this is the temple of Laxmi, because this is where money is made. In few minutes following their entry into the club, Vidya's values about Indian womanhood are all under attack; she sees Raj lying about her identity as he introduces her as a princess, she is suddenly the center of attraction for a lot of strange men expressing uncouth interest in her, and Maya (herself dressed in a gown and smoking a cigarette) mocks her modesty by throwing off her pallu (the end of the sari that hangs down, or is wrapped around the shoulders) from her shoulders. Vidya's miserable exit from the scene, and Raj's seduction by Maya's song completes the metaphorical humiliation of Indian values, and serves to underline the threat to the culture from a westernized value system. It ostensibly shows the moral corruption of both women and men brought about by a code of values that deviates from the traditional Indian norms.

Even though the Indian nation's claim on the figure of the woman is particularly associated with popular cinema, parallel filmmakers, even ones who are not particularly invested in the idea of the nation, tend to fall back upon similar metaphors connecting women and national identity. I will begin my discussion of post-independence conflation of women and nation by referring to Satyajit Ray's 1963 film *Mahanagar*, because the context of the film necessitates the characterization of the postcolonial nation with reference to women.<sup>46</sup> The conflation of the woman and the nation in popular cinema has been under critical scrutiny, the assumption often being that parallel cinema presents more mature characterizations. However, *Mahanagar* establishes the common agenda of popular and parallel cinema in utilizing women as signifiers of the nation. The film does not present or promote the idea of nation as popular film sometimes does, but

nevertheless outlines contemporary expectations about the nation and national identity specifically through expectations surrounding women, tying them irrevocably to community and national identity in the manner similar to popular cinema. This similarity in the utilization of the woman-nation metaphor establishes the overarching reach of the nationalistic discourse in Indian cinema; the instances from parallel and middlebrow films presented here emphasize how supposedly modern/liberal cinematic viewpoints also draw on the discourse of Tradition. Tradition or the woman-nation conflation, therefore, can hardly be a purely a right-wing conception.

The narrative of *Mahanagar* is focused on Arati, a middle-class housewife from Kolkata, who is part of the first generation of Indian women who join the workforce in urban centers, prompted mainly by the postcolonial financial crisis. The conditions in this joint family of six are all too common in the literature and cinema of the time: Arati's husband Subrata slaves daily at his small job at a bank, but is still unable to bear the expenses of his family (his parents and sister, as well as his wife and son).<sup>47</sup> Arati brings up the idea of finding a small job herself in order to make ends meet, and Subrata, seemingly enthusiastic about the idea, helps her find a job. Once Arati gets the job and starts bringing home the money, however, predictable problems surface in the relationship between husband and wife, as well as in the rest of the family.<sup>48</sup> Even though the primary focus of the film is on the changing nature of the family structure in the context of postcolonial India, and post-partition Bengal, it provides extremely valuable insights into the state of the nation. The inherent critique of the state of the nation, particularly the financial crises in the decades following independence forms the basis for the plotline, but the core of the film is its analysis of the financial role of women, and the

social positioning of men with respect to such role reversal. As I have implied, and as Viridi shows through her examination of the Shah Bano case, women are often the defining factors when it comes to a national identity in Indian social history and on film.<sup>49</sup> From the perspective of the narrative, the film clearly advocates the right of women and their necessity to evolve into something more than “housewives,” but simultaneously anticipates the obstacles in the way of such a vital social transformation, for both men and women. At one point in the film, in response to Arati’s proud claim that Subrata would not recognize her when she is at work, he expresses concern at being able to recognize her at all. Arati moves close to him, asking him to look carefully at her: she assures him that she is still the housewife, the woman of the household (*ghorer bou*). Her assurance is extremely sensitive to his insecurities about her and his own social position, and by extension, the structure of middle-class Bengali society of the time. Throughout the film, she has to strive to protect her reputation as the respectable yet independent woman, because quite often, her chasteness is under scrutiny by men, including her own husband. Such scrutiny is ultimately quite effective in assuring the audience that in spite of lurking fears regarding promiscuity in working women, it could be possible for the society (and the nation) to accept such a sea change in terms of women’s roles in the family. Subrata’s attitude, on the other hand, is assurance of another form: that it is normal for the educated and loving husband, initially excited about the wife’s decision to work, to be going through anxieties and suspicions about the real extent of his wife’s freedom. In other words, the narrative of *Mahanagar* emphasizes that the threat to the structure of the nation from women’s decision to work is benign, but it is also prescriptive in the sense that it pushes for the restructuring of the nation on the basis of

women's employment. It is almost like a case study of first generation working women in India, which makes its message all the more convincing for those who are examining the possibility of a social restructuring. However, it follows the trope of popular cinema's use of women as signifiers for a national identity, only from the reverse or non-traditional stance. Where popular cinema in the 50s and 60s is invested in underlining the sense of tradition in women (their respect for, and enjoyment of the home, for example) as an identifying characteristic for the nation, parallel films like *Mahanagar* emphasize the change required by the nation at this point, albeit also to be brought about through the figure of women.

*Mahanagar* also captures the postcolonial Indian identity caught in the throes of an acute economic crisis, a realistic portrayal of the Indian middle-class in the aftermath of partition, quite unlike the romanticized poverty of contemporary popular films, or the glossing over of poverty in India in later films. There is no direct critique of empire, but the film's background of economic deprivation is a constant reminder of the economic struggle of the country in the decades following independence. The middle-class families (who are also possibly new immigrants from East Bengal) are seen in a constant struggle for survival, where the traditional joint family structure of the past is threatened by the inability of the single earning member to support them any more. In the urban setting and the quasi-capitalist structure of postcolonial India, is it increasingly difficult for Subrata to provide for what is still the normal family in Bengal (and a large section of the population in India)—his parents and sister, and his own wife and child. In a way, the film points out the imbalance between the pre and post colonial realities in India: the extended family has always been a part of the social structure, a signifier of social

identity, but given the economic condition of urban centers, it is under serious threat at this time. Subrata cannot provide for them with his income, and even the additional income from tutoring students after work is not sufficient to make ends meet for this family. In order for things to be smooth, there are only two options: either Subrata works a second job, or Arati finds one. The constant conflict in their house about things as basic as a pair of glasses for Subrata's father, and the condition of the household (in comparison to, for example, some of the houses that Arati visits as a salesgirl) makes it clear that Subrata's formal education is useless in the face of a national economic crisis. The critique of the political condition is apparent, but the reasons behind the crisis are not broached directly. Although the film possibly gives a better picture of the economic conditions than popular cinema of the times, it can hardly be deemed a critical assessment of the actual problems plaguing the nation. In fact, conversations carefully skirt any analysis of the reasons behind the struggle that the family faces.

Nationality and identity are similarly constructed by defining the alien or the foreign, mainly through the character of Edith, Arati's Anglo-Indian colleague. Mr. Mukherjee insists that her moral character has to be doubtful because of her racial background. The actual source of Mukherjee's prejudice is doubtful, because it could either be related to the common stereotypes of Western women, or to the fact that the Anglo-Indian women represent the first group of Indian women to enter the professional sphere. Whatever his logic, Edith stands for whatever the Bengali community *does not* want to represent. This is a vital sub-plot in the film because it brings the issue of middle-class women professionals into the context of the group that precedes them. It also underlines the reverse stereotyping of women of partial British origin within the

postcolonial nation. Edith's hybridity makes her all the more suspicious—she might not have faced (or have been required to face) similar prejudice as a woman of *pure* British origin. In the conversation between Subrata and Mr. Mukherjee when the former comes to meet his wife in her workplace, they seem to share ideas about Edith's moral character. Mukherjee seems to imply that the basis for their bonding (apart from their gender) is their common origin in East Bengal. The sense of identity is in this case, defined by the fact that they are both immigrants, and also indirectly by the fact that their identity is different from that of Edith. Subrata is not as blatant in his attack of Edith either to Arati or to Mr. Mukherjee, but his attitude on the matter is clarified symbolically. Around the time when he stays at home after losing his job, he notices that Arati has acquired the habit of wearing lipstick, something the audience recognizes as a direct influence of Edith. She coaxes Arati into using lipstick at an early stage in her job, and actually gives Arati her own lipstick. As Arati leaves for her job one day at the time Subrata is jobless, he asks her pointedly: "Aren't you going to put on lipstick?" Arati is visibly upset by the implication of the statement, and throws her lipstick out of the window, with an appeal that sounds almost pathetic in the context of the film: "Whatever you do, please don't misunderstand me." She can evidently guess that sarcasm in her husband derives from his association of the lipstick with moral laxity. This might be a momentary reaction, given Subrata's extreme mental anguish at a time when he has been forced to swallow his chauvinistic pride, but it also sends a clear signal to the audience about his level of tolerance of women's liberation. He is seemingly accepting of— even attracted to— the idea of his wife working, but he certainly does not anticipate the related changes. He is as disturbed by the connection between his wife being in the public eye and her

presentability/attractiveness, as Mr. Mukherjee is about Edith's comparative candidness about such matters. Mukherjee is comfortable with dismissing these elements in Edith as her racial characteristic, but Subrata can hardly do the same with his wife. He is unsure of where the exact boundary between women's liberation and promiscuity lies, and is tormented throughout the film because of that reason. This could very well have been a personal concern for him, but in the context of the film, it becomes a concern about national/community identity. Like men in popular cinema, the men in *Mahanagar* are also anxious about the level of freedom they can grant "their" women, and problems arise as soon as women step out of any imagined boundaries. Mukherjee's actual dismissal of Edith might have taken place at the end of the film, but it is evident that she cannot ever have a place in his conception of the national/community ideal of women. He is very careful about placing the other middle-class Bengali women in his office in a separate category—they might work, but they are still genteel ladies (*bhodromohila*). Arati's mistake (apart from her arrogance in the face of male authority) is that she steps beyond that boundary to display camaraderie with Edith. Subrata, on the other hand, is willing to experiment, but is extremely disturbed as soon as his wife oversteps the boundaries *he* had in mind.

Ritwik Ghatak's films, hailed as the most moving representations of the effects of partition of Bengal in parallel cinema, approach the question of nation from a much more critical perspective. Ghatak's personal attachment to the aftermath of the partition imbues most of his films with a deep suspicion of the new nation, whereby the criticism of the displacement simultaneously proclaims a loss of regional identity. The partition of Bengal had vast implications for the Bengali film industry as a whole, because most

importantly, it meant that more than half of the market for the Bengali film industry was being lost. Pakistan's decision to ban Indian films altogether (1952 in West and 1962 in East Pakistan) led to a complete fragmentation of the Bengali entertainment industry<sup>50</sup>. Poignant as Ghatak's films are on the issue of displacement, they rarely question the role of the departing colonizers in the post-partition violence and turmoil in the bordering states. However, the formation of the nation at the cost of the lives and livelihood of the people from these states is a question that is raised time and again in his films: both *Subarnarekha* and *Meghe Dhaka Tara* present dysfunctional family structures as metaphors for the fragmented nation.<sup>51</sup> The separation of families is naturally a common condition in the greatest human migration in modern history, and Ghatak uses and expands it to underline the threat to the institution of family in the contemporary political atmosphere. In a way, therefore, Ghatak's work stands as a major negation of India as a nation—the birth of the postcolonial Indian nation is taken to be doubly damaging, because it destroys the family, and puts an end to a specific regional identity. Ghatak shows how the very structure of the family is corrupted: the political condition contorts familial relationships (between sisters in *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, between brother and sister in *Subarnarekha*), and forces ordinary characters into situations in which their relationships to each other are utterly devalued. *Subarnarekha* avoids possible incest with a suicide, and *Meghe Dhaka Tara* shows a younger sister lure away the elder's lover, both indications of an eroding system of values post partition. The films specifically outline the impossibility of maintaining familial norms in the face of economic deprivation and the sheer commotion of migration. This loss is mostly understood as a loss of *moral* values by the characters, but it is clear that most of these help to define a



*community* (and national) identity: if adherence to caste systems or unwillingness to ‘let’ women work must be given up because of the political condition, it directly affects the self-perception of a community. Like Arati’s in-laws, Nita’s father is uncomfortable about public reaction to his daughter going to work (*Meghe Dhaka Tara*), because it affects his community identity. Stripped of all markers of identity in mid-life, and forced to reside in a mingled community where class, caste and economic status— vital identifying elements even a few months ago—have no relevance anymore, older residents of the refugee colonies try to grapple with a changing community and national identity.

*Subarnarekha* points out that irrespective of their moral positioning, the political turmoil of partition and immigration brings every individual into a vortex of chaos, where all their ideas regarding community identity are overturned. The narrative revolves around Ishwar’s small family, his sister and the foundling Abhiram, as they try to carve out a normal life within the chaos of partition. After emigrating from East Bengal, Ishwar finds himself in a refugee colony, where he adopts Abhiram when he is separated from his mother. He accepts the very first chance to leave the colony, much to the chagrin of fellow resident Haraprasad, the idealistic ex-schoolteacher, who believes he is a deserter. Ishwar shows little interest in bettering the lot of fellow refugees, ostensibly because he is more invested in the well being of his family. He accepts a job in a small village, and moves away from the colony to raise Abhiram and his sister Sita. Here, on the banks of the river Subarnarekha, he seems to have achieved a quiet recluse from the turmoil of the colony, and to have kept Sita and Abhiram unscathed. Within this idyllic space, they do grow up practically untouched by the violence, but they can hardly escape it forever. As Abhiram and Sita fall in love, Ishwar objects to their union because Abhiram has recently

discovered that he was born to low-caste parents. Ishwar refuses to acknowledge the changing dynamic that has thrown people from all walks of life together; instead, he holds on to his pre-partition sense of identity where marriage to a low caste person would be out of the question. Even though he attempts a near-stoic separation from his community, it is evident that he is still sensitive to identity issues. His intentional severing of ties with the community is hardly an effective strategy to stay clear of the political turmoil, because he is ultimately drawn back into it again. Sita runs away to marry Abhiram, and after a brief period of happiness in the city, Abhiram is lynched by a mob when he runs over a little girl. Both Sita and Ishwar are again caught in the vicious urban cycle, which imperceptibly brings them closer to each other, albeit in a bizarre subversion of their earlier closeness. Sita is cajoled into prostitution in order to provide for her child, and Ishwar, depressed and broken-spirited, runs into a completely disillusioned Haraprasad, and the two go out for a night in the town. Opening the door to her first “customer,” Sita finds herself face to face with her own brother; in an impulse, she kills herself with a sickle. This extreme form of violence is the only possible means of retaining social and familial order in an atmosphere otherwise polluted by the partition. As her blood spurts out on her brother’s face and body, she seems to have performed a sacrificial cleansing of their socio-political condition, marking a break from the cycle of suffering, and creating a possibility that her son be detached from her reality and be given a relatively untroubled life. Contrary to expectations of comparatively sophisticated and unbiased portrayals of women’s roles in parallel cinema, even in highbrow parallel film like *Subarnarekha* presents Sita as the sacrificial female figure, much in the mode of Indian mythology and popular film.<sup>52</sup> Thus, even as parallel cinema strives to break away

from the mold of popular concepts of national and community identity, it can fall back into the very same patterns; Ghatak might favor regional identity over the national, but he is nevertheless affected by well-defined and well-used notions of national identity.

The clearest reason for Ghatak to be displeased with the nation is, as I have emphasized, the effect that the creation of the new nation has on regional identity and the structure of family. At the same time, Ghatak shows that no matter where the characters stand with regard to their own opinion on the new nation, there is no escape from the political reality for any of them. Haraprasad chooses to face hardships because he believes that over and above the personal suffering that partition brings him, he can respect the new nation. But he ends up at the very same situation that the escapist Ishwar does, at least emotionally. If Ishwar's selfish acts can be redeemed by anything, it is his decision to take in Abhiram with no apparent concern about his background. The boy turns out to be his only real connection to this world torn apart by partition. In the end, even this minor connection to his turmoiled community can tear the rest of his world down. The director's extreme anger with the nation becomes apparent at the instance where Haraprasad tries to keep the children from witnessing the forced removal of refugees by the landlord's men by asking them to chant "Bharat Mantra," or the praise of the nation. His final fate also emphasizes the disillusionment regarding the decision to remain loyal to the nation. Ghatak underlines the power of their common political condition to push them towards a shared fate. Even if the audience can find the moral justification for Ishwar's suffering in his earlier apathy to his people, there is no such justification for Haraprasad's fate, and they both become an expression of the director's personal anger and mistrust of the Indian nation. Ghatak might have, as in popular

cinema, utilized the figure of the sacrificing woman in his outlining his concept of the Indian nation, but it must be admitted that his trademark anger is a departure from popular cinema's trust in not just the nation, but the existence of a clear set of characteristics for nationhood.

The trope of nationhood continues in the four decades following independence, varying only slightly in accordance with social history. Popular cinema of the seventies upholds nationhood in the face of moral degeneration and political corruption, and the films from the eighties re-emphasize the Traditional family as the basic unit of the nation, but the basic emphases on the tenets of nationhood remain the same. A handful of movies promote jingoistic nationalism, some of them directly naming Pakistan as the political adversary, but find a limited audience. Starting from the 90s, however, one can discern a trend of representing a brand of nationalism that would appeal to a wider range of Indian audiences irrespective of their location. This is also the moment when long-standing distinctions between the east and the west begin to disappear from popular cinema, owing to the increasing influence of globalization and inflating diasporic populations.

Recent Indian cinema, along with catering to the needs of Indians based in India, must also keep the five million diasporic Indians in mind. Appadurai says of diasporic communities in the United States:

Even as the legitimacy of nation-states in their own territorial contexts is increasingly under threat, the idea of the nation flourishes transnationally. Safe from the depredations of their home states, diasporic communities become doubly loyal to their nations of origin and thus ambivalent about their loyalties to America.<sup>53</sup>

Even though one might not acknowledge the validity of his initial assumption about the legitimacy of nation states in current times, it seems evident that Appadurai's idea of

nationalism is being nourished *at least* in the diasporic communities. These transnational forms of nationalisms can therefore become partially responsible for the continuing reference to nationalism in cinema even after the postcolonial moment of resistance has come and gone. As the memory of empire diminishes in the Indian psyche, there comes the shift of economic power from Europe to the United States, whereby promoting the Indian national character of the post-independence decades becomes an exercise in futility, and the so-called western norms can now be tolerated in moderation. The power of the diaspora in redefining nationalism can be felt strongly in the case of popular Hindi film in particular. Popular Hindi films earn more money abroad than at home (primarily because of higher currency values in Europe and America, even though ticket sale numbers are much higher in India). Non-resident audiences, in their eagerness to advertise identity within heterogeneous populations, are possibly more invested in the idea of nationalism than native populations. This has created for each diasporic community, as Appadurai points out, “a delocalized *transnation*, which retains a special ideological link to a putative place of origin but is otherwise a thoroughly diasporic collectivity.”<sup>54</sup> This ideological link for Indian diasporas in Europe and the United States is often a nostalgic remembrance of the nationalistic discourse of the cinema of the 50s and 60s, of which there now needs to be a modern recreation in cinema. Empowered primarily by their economic potential, diasporic Indian populations now indirectly dictate the shaping of nationalism in Hindi film, such that the very nature of that nationalism is being defined according to their tastes. Nandini Bhattacharya’s study of diasporic Indian women’s viewing of popular Indian cinema discusses the role of the diasporic audience

in shaping the content of cinema. She emphasizes that the exact process of interaction between diasporic audiences and the content of cinema is a subject of debate:

In this regard, the single most undecided issue is whether Bollywood cinema seeks to make diasporic viewers retrospective and nostalgic, or if it is a dynamic and dynamising medium that allows the viewer to produce or invent and not merely receive or consume codes of culture and identity.<sup>55</sup>

The nature of popular Indian cinema from the early 90s onwards has proven that it does, in fact, allow itself to be produced and invented on some scale. The issue of nationalism, in particular, must now provide viewers with a brand that has a global appeal. The recent nationalistic films produced by Bollywood are dealing out a specific kind of nationalism, a pattern that can address the various complexities regarding Indian nationhood.

Questions of language, pride and belonging are provided with possible solutions with regard to a global Indian population. In fact, many such attempts at representing this pan-Indian sensibility have been criticized in India for what is often a pandering to the tastes of the diaspora, rather than appealing to the native population. In the case of Indian films set outside India (like *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, 1995), Ganti mentions how “The Indian press castigated Bombay filmmakers for their lack of initiative and imagination and diasporic audiences for their nostalgic and narrow taste in Indian cinema.”<sup>56</sup> This particular argument leads to the discussion in the next chapter of the treatment of nationalism in the Indian cinema after 1991, particularly right after India adopts an open-market economic policy.

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<sup>1</sup> See note on Tradition in Introduction.

<sup>2</sup> Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (London: Verso, 1991) Anderson identifies the late 18<sup>th</sup> century as the “dawn of the age of nationalism” (11) in Western Europe, relating the birth of nationalism to the height of colonial imperialism both spatially and temporally. It must also be noted that even though Anderson’s ideas on nationalism are widely quoted and

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circulated, his expertise is self-confessedly mostly on South East Asia. His discussion of third world colonial nationalisms in the chapter titled *The Last Wave* is mostly focused on Indochina. Even though language is central to his discussion of the transformation of the “colonial-state into the nation-state” (115) he does not consider the fundamental differences of Indochinese nationalisms with anti-colonial nationalism in a multi-lingual space like India.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed overview of the subaltern studies viewpoints on nationalist historiography see Gyan Prakash. “Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism”, *American Historical Review*. 99, No. 5 (December 1994), 1475-1490. It seems, in fact, that the latter idea (that Indian nationalism is an unoriginal concept) is somewhat derived from the former (that it is a construct). Anderson seems to imply that the idea of nationalism was *received* by the post-colonial nation states from the colonial states. His analysis of the process unwittingly assigns a form of passive reception in the part of colonial nationalists whereby colonial nationalisms (already established as artificial) are inherited by the native elite through colonial systems of language and education. (Anderson 114-116). Also see Ranajit Guha. “On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India.” *Subaltern Studies; I*. (Delhi; Oxford University Press, 1982) for an analysis of how the history of Indian nationalism is deliberately connected to European liberalism in western academic discourse.

<sup>4</sup> See Prem Chowdhry. *Colonial India and the Making of Empire Cinema: Image, Ideology and Identity*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.2000. 1-2. Chowdhry defines empire cinema as “...the British as well as the Hollywood cinema made mainly during the 1930s and 1940s, which projected a certain vision of the empire in relation to its subjects...emphasized the unique imperial status, cultural and racial superiority and patriotic pride not only of the British but of the entire white western world”.

<sup>5</sup> Chowdhry 22

<sup>6</sup> Arjun Appadurai, “Patriotism and Its Futures.” *Public Culture* 5: 3 (1993): 411-429.

<sup>7</sup> Tejaswini Ganti. *Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 46-47.

<sup>8</sup> Chowdhry 12.

<sup>9</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty. “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for Indian Pasts?” *Representations* 37 (Winter 1992), 1-26.

<sup>10</sup> “Mill assumed that Indians were an inferior race and had to mature before they could accept the good things—democracy, economic freedom, science, culture—that the West had to offer them.” Pankaj Mishra. “More Trouble Than It Is Worth.” *Common Knowledge* 11:3 (2005), 432-444.

<sup>11</sup> See *Common Knowledge* - Volume 11, Issue 3, Fall 2005, for both articles.

<sup>12</sup> Durba Ghosh. *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: the Making of Empire*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2.

<sup>13</sup> William Dalrymple. “Assimilation and Transculturation in Eighteenth-Century India: A Response to Pankaj Mishra.” *Common Knowledge* 11:3 (2005), 445-485.

<sup>14</sup> Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse”. *Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis* 28, (Spring 1984), 125-133.

<sup>15</sup> Bhabha 127.

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Minute on Indian Education," in *Selected Writings*, edited by John Clive. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 249.

<sup>17</sup> Bhabha 125-133.

<sup>18</sup> Partha Chatterjee. "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonized Women: The Contest in India." *American Ethnologist*, Vol.16.4, (November 1989), 623.

<sup>19</sup> Roy Armes, *Third World Film Making and the West*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987),16.

<sup>20</sup> Armes 22.

<sup>21</sup> See Bill Ashcroft. "Primitive and Wingless: the Colonial Subject as Child." In *Dickens and the Children of Empire*, edited by Wendy Jacobson. (New York: Palgrave Press, 2000)

<sup>22</sup> Chatterjee. 623.

<sup>23</sup> Chatterjee 624.

<sup>24</sup> Chatterjee 624.

<sup>25</sup> Viridi 29.

<sup>26</sup> Viridi 29.

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of colonial myth-making for the purposes of political categorization, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Modernity and Ethnicity in India: A History for the Present". *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30:52. (December 30, 1995), 3373-3380. Chakrabarty discusses how caste and religion were categories emphasized in British record-keeping, like the British censuses in India, even though religion was never a part of the information required by the British censuses in England.

<sup>28</sup> Anderson 4.

<sup>29</sup> Chakrabarty 3373.

<sup>30</sup> Viridi 72-73.

<sup>31</sup> Shah Bano, a Muslim woman from India, demanded a paltry alimony from her husband after her divorce in 1985. Her case became the highlight of the decade when under pressure from the minority leaders, the state suspended its earlier decision of granting her the alimony. The Muslim leadership claimed that the state's ruling was against the Shariat, or the Muslim code of law. The case is considered a symbol of conflict between minority interests and women's rights.

<sup>32</sup> Chatterjee 622-633.

<sup>33</sup> Chatterjee 623.

<sup>34</sup> Armes 19. Citing Satish Bahadur in his discussion on Dadasaheb Phalke.

<sup>35</sup> Tols were traditional Sanskrit school systems.

<sup>36</sup> Chowdry 140.

<sup>37</sup> Partha Chatterjee, "Whose Imagined Community?" *Journal of International Studies*, Vol 20.3, (1991).

<sup>38</sup> Chowdry 16. "The fact that the mythological and the devotional genre lent itself easily to nationalist reading was lost on British officials".

<sup>39</sup> Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*. (New York: Picador, 1988). 5.

<sup>40</sup> Even though this is the dominant pattern for melodrama in general, this trend undergoes a complete reversal in post-globalization melodramas. Even though a valorization of poverty is not typical to Indian cinema, its connection to economic policies of the nation, and the global attitude to wealth cannot be ignored.



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<sup>41</sup> Bandhopadhyaya 35. Emphases mine.

<sup>42</sup> *Shree 420*, DVD, directed by Raj Kapoor, (1955; Bombay:Yash Raj Films)

<sup>43</sup> The Kapoors, starting with Baseshwarnath Kapoor, are five generations of actors, directors and film personalities in the Mumbai film industry. Raj Kapoor was an active participant in leftist theater groups in his youth. See Madhu Jain, *The Kapoors: The First family of Indian Cinema* (Penguin, Viking, 2005).

<sup>44</sup> Raj the vagabond arrives in the city to look for a living. Not a particularly virtuous character from the beginning (he pretends to faint in order to get a ride when he is too tired to walk), he is caught between the two lifestyles the city offers him, represented in the two women Vidya and Maya. He falls in love with Vidya, the poor and honest teacher, but Maya the socialite seduces him into the high life by encouraging him to use his natural talent in cheating at cards. Raj gets drawn further and further into a circle of swindlers, and eventually, Vidya leaves him because she disapproves of the way in which he has come into the wealth, and his ultra-Western lifestyle. It takes a final test of Raj's conscience for him to return to his true (Indian) identity.

<sup>45</sup> Laxmi is the Hindu goddess of wealth, and is traditionally worshipped on Dewali, the October festival of lights in Northern India.

<sup>46</sup> *Mahanagar (The Big City) [VHS]*. VHS, directed by Satyajit Ray. (Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures, 1963).

<sup>47</sup> Joint family is the term used in common discourse in India to signify non-nuclear families, typically ones that include parents and siblings on the paternal side. The term extended family, if used, signifies distant relatives.

<sup>48</sup> Subrata asks her to quit her job, but is forced to reconsider his order when the bank he works in fails. He calls Arati at the very last moment, asking her not to submit her resignation letter. In the days that follow, Subrata sits at home looking for jobs, while Arati constantly excels in her own. As she gradually becomes comfortable and confident in her own sphere, Subrata is caught in the complex psychological angst of watching her prosper and change. Arati now wears makeup, meets and greets men confidently, makes new friends and acquaintances, and frequently discusses her success in the workplace—things that make the already unconfident and possibly jealous Subrata indirectly question her morality. Arati finally quits her job because she gets into a conflict with her boss regarding Edith, her Anglo-Indian colleague. The boss, Mr. Mukherjee, fires Edith because he thinks she (and Anglo-Indian women in general) is morally loose and prone to lying, an opinion that Arati will not tolerate. She ends up quitting because Mr. Mukherjee refuses to apologize to Edith. The film ends with husband and wife, both jobless now, reconciled and looking forward to a hopeful future as they decide to look for jobs together.

<sup>49</sup> *Virdi* 71.

<sup>50</sup> *Ganti* 22.

<sup>51</sup> *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, DVD, directed by Ritwik Ghatak (Calcutta: BFI, 1960) and *Suabrnarekha*, DVD, (Calcutta: BFI, 1962).

<sup>52</sup> Sita's name might be a coincidence, but it cannot be ignored that she is named after Rama's wife from the Hindu epic Ramayana, a woman who has to prove her chastity publicly to her husband and his subjects after she is rescued from the demon Ravana. She has to pass through fire to prove that in her long years of bondage, she had remained

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sexually pure. In popular discourse, Sita's name is often associated with the self-sacrificing chastity and loyalty expected of Hindu women.

<sup>53</sup> Appadurai 424.

<sup>54</sup> Appadurai 424.

<sup>55</sup> Nandini Bhattacharya. "A 'Basement' Cinephilia: Indian Diaspora Women Watch Bollywood." *South Asian Popular Culture* 2: 2, (October 2004), 161–183.

<sup>56</sup> Ganti 40.

## Chapter Three

### **Global India: Cinema and Nation After the Liberalization of the Indian Economy**

The most problematic factor in any current assessment of Indian cinema is that while the Indian nation, a post-colonial entity just over 60 years old, is on the verge of establishing a national and socio-economic identity to the rest of the world, that identity is also heavily influenced by recent phenomena such as the globalization of the economy and communications. In the case of cinema, just as the means for generating an interest in and reaping revenue from postcolonial/third world films are improving, the content of such films is also increasingly being dictated by the dominant economic and cultural presence of the Anglo-American world. In India specifically, the recent trend has been a self-congratulatory attitude towards the growing economy, so it is no surprise that the popularity of Indian films is being understood as a reflection of India's growing cultural impact on the western world. However, as a number of film critics have been quick to point out, the films themselves have responded to globalization to undergo transformations more drastic than ever before, especially on the context of national identity:

The specter of "India Incorporated" that became part of global political parlance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century was in the making throughout the 1990s, and Indian Popular Cinema underwent profound changes in that decade. In retrospect, the 'transition' of the 1990s proved to be a productive period for Bollywood, as it coordinated and re-arranged its various generic orientations to adapt to an increasingly neo-liberal attitude towards economics and culture.<sup>1</sup>

Indian cinema, therefore, has transformed in tune with this contemporary global discourse on the success of capitalist economic systems. The majority of such transformations are sensitive to the global/western taste to the extent that the basic formulations of nation and nationalism in circulation in the forty years after independence

have taken on completely new dimensions post globalization. Even as concerns about national identity and Indianness persist, the threat of what has been deemed *foreign* by cinema in these forty years is actually much stronger in this particular historical moment, but it is not perceived as such. On-screen characters have become much more westernized in terms of appearance and attitude, women are far from the *Hindustani* ideal in many respects, and Tradition appears in new and complex forms, but the sense of outrage that one would expect in a situation like this is entirely missing in the public psyche. If Indian cinema has searched high and low for the *true* Indian identity in the forty years after independence, primarily endeavoring to upset colonial stereotypes, that effort could very well be undermined by this recent tendency to abide by rules that are, by the definition of Indian cinema itself, foreign/western. Viridi underscores the confusion of identity in this moment of transition:

The present moment of flux has unleashed intense confusion and debates between intellectuals on the left and right as to whether these changes signal opportunities for growth or whether they further consolidate entrenched hierarchies. What these changes bode for colonial relationships is uncertain; however, they raise unsettling doubts about colonialism remaining a thing of the past.<sup>2</sup>

Metaphorically speaking, in the same way that India as a colonial space perceived by colonizers was not particularly focused on the native people, a globalized India has completed the cycle, where once again, Indian films are not about the *true* India. It is of course evident that there never is, or was a *true* India per se, but the idea is an integral part of the popular psyche because cinema, particularly popular cinema, had sustained the pretense that there is a set of characteristics that denote true Indianness.<sup>3</sup> It is surprising therefore that after the 1990s, the loss of some of these characteristics did not affect the idea of the Indian core. Rather, the changes were seamlessly integrated into the new

Indian national character on screen. Given the nature of the current globalized economy and the economic clout of diasporic Indian populations, Indian nationalism becomes a curious formulation post-globalization, a multi-faceted entity that strives to balance such diverse elements and issues of contemporary Indian identity as transnationalism and the diaspora, commodity culture, media representations as well as the rise of fundamentalism and regional terrorism. As a result, the Tradition versus modernity debate of Indian nationalism has returned to the screen with new meaning, where the western/Indian or home/world discourse continues, but in the absence of a distinct colonial adversary, it has tended to overcome the simplistic binaries of the past debate and reformulated the elements of innate Indianness.<sup>4</sup> Part of this change has also meant that diasporic communities, significant after the 1990s in terms of both their size and economic potential, have gradually become arbiters of nationalistic sentiments. One might suggest that because of this, Indian nationalism has undergone a detachment from the native population; as a form of nationalism displaced from the nation, some aspects of it must now be defined not with reference to the actual population in India, but to people and places outside the geographical space of the nation.

This chapter analyzes the effect of the Indian economy's move to an open and globalized market, especially on the portrayal of nationalism in cinema. Of the many socio-political changes occurring over this period of time, India's adoption of an open market economic policy has been deemed as the major turning point, in the sense that it marks the first major break from the welfare-influenced economic model that India adopted after independence. However, the open market economy and the tide of capitalism that followed it have had many other impacts on the nature of Indian cinema

and its approach to nationalism. As Rini Bhattacharya Mehta says, “ Nation, despite not having gone away anywhere, has come back with a vengeance in globalized India.”<sup>5</sup> The history of Indian film is a social history no doubt, but in the recent times, it has increasingly been established as an economic history.<sup>6</sup> The issue of nationalism in Indian films has followed a trajectory, and its movement closely corresponds to the status of the capitalist economy within India. The most vital transformation in cinema (and possibly also in the nation) post-globalization is the changing attitude towards wealth and the portrayal of particular economic classes in popular Indian cinema. Additionally, there is an increasing flexibility in representing Tradition in cinema, specifically with regard to how women characters derive limited respite from the burden of representing the Traditional national identity.

A general overview of Indian films, particularly popular films, will establish that the primary focus of cinema shifts across the class spectrum over the years, whereby the films gradually move from representing lower to upper economic classes. This is also accompanied by an evolving difference in attitude towards economic prosperity and members of the prosperous classes, whose characteristics change along with changing economic conditions. I will argue that the evolution in national economic policy comes to affect a number of filmic choices including focus, characterization and quite often, the moral message of a film. A culture that proudly portrayed and even celebrated economic deprivation as a departure from the colonial culture of excesses in the decades after political independence from a colonial power gradually comes to ignore the apparent conflict between economic prosperity and moral excellence.<sup>7</sup> Bhaskar Sarkar points out

how early Hindi film often takes on melodramatic forms *because* of this equation of capitalist economic prosperity to criminality:

Broadly speaking, in the Hindi films of the first decade, melodrama is yoked to reformist socials to intimate the disorientations wrought by capitalist modernization and to project the demands of nationhood in an affective register. For instance, melodrama in the early films of Raj Kapoor takes on a somber tone reminiscent of film-noir: overwhelmed by the flux of life, their protagonists lurch between noble autonomy and abject criminality.<sup>8</sup>

From one perspective, the new trend is definitely a welcome alternative to such naïve equations of wealth and unscrupulousness; on the other hand, it is possible to read this move as a gradual loss of postcolonial resistance and increased acceptance of a globalized capitalist economy and culture. Because the Indian national character has long been celebrated on screen as particularly averse to the procurement and enjoyment of wealth, a departure from that norm marks a break from that particular form of identity. There seems to have occurred a simultaneous movement *inward* in the case of post-globalization Indian nationalism: simplicity and aversion to wealth were the determining aspects of the Indian national character, but post-globalization, nationalistic sentiment becomes more and more *internal*. Economic prosperity is no longer a detriment to nationalist sentiments in a character. Additionally, to be truly Indian, one does not have to stay within the geographical boundaries of India, or to return to the country to prove the strength of such sentiments, as characters from earlier cinema did.<sup>9</sup> The Indian *core* of the earlier nationalist discourse also becomes more *internal* post-globalization. Bhattacharya Mehta points out the how celebration of rural values in post-independence cinema parallels that of nationalist sentiments in transnational spaces post globalization:

A real village was not always needed to perpetuate the romantic generalizations like ‘simplicity’, innocence, virtue etc. The Bombay pavement dwellers in *Shree 420*, for example, were villagers at heart, living in an island of innocence in the

ocean of greed teeming with black-marketeers, money launderers, gamblers, small and big-time thieves and crooks. A parallel in the context of the representation of the NRI world would be an essential Indian-ness residing in the hearts of expatriates.<sup>10</sup>

Just as one did not have to be physically present in the village in order to express values that were essentially rural, post-globalization conditions do not call for external manifestations of nationalism in Indian cinema. Economic status and geographical location, as mentioned above, become external to the existence of nationalistic sentiments.

These phenomena demand more attention in the context of the current global economic crisis. In the period following the opening of the market, the enthusiasm regarding the economic boom in India had come to influence both government policies and public sentiment regarding the new image of a prosperous country. After decades of hopelessness following independence, this economic model seemed to open up the floodgates of prosperity; there were more jobs than ever before, and the booming information technology industry seemed to be the lifeblood of renewed economic activity in India. “India Rising” and “India Shining” were phrases being thrown around optimistically, both within the country and without. *Newsweek* did a cover story on “The New India” for its March 6, 2006 issue, with Fareed Zakaria describing India as the “rising star” in the world economy, destined to be in third position in world economy by 2040. The indices for India’s prosperity at the particular moment, however, are all described in the context of the global, particularly the American economy. India’s economic and cultural growth is measured, in this article at least, by the presence of American multinationals, by increasing consumerism, and by the growing affinity for American culture and ways of life. It is not so much a question of measuring the value of



the rupee against the dollar, as the extent of Americanization of the lifestyles Indians. The economic change is summarily denoted as a welcome alternative to India's socio-economic condition of the previous decades: "As young people are making more money than their parents, they're less willing to obey traditional rules about sex and dating. More women are staying single. Bollywood movies, TV and magazines are getting spicier. And everybody is going shopping."<sup>11</sup> The underlying reassurance seems to be one regarding the similarity of this new culture to the accepted western culture—the exotic of colonial times is not to be feared any more, because the last phase of neo-colonial economic activity has finally made it familiar. The images accompanying the article underline the familiarity between the two forms of culture—a centerspread of western-looking young women dancing in a club, burkha-clad women outside a McDonald's, an Indian actress in a chic dress and sunglasses holding a champagne glass in one hand and a Chihuahua in the other, sari-clad middle-aged women at a bowling game—all emphasizing the closeness of the culture to its American counterpart, albeit with a few interesting differences that almost seem to be a comical attempt to mimic American culture and still be true to Tradition.<sup>12</sup>

This change of economic policy is particularly significant because it marks the instance where an ex-colony finally grants global (primarily American) capitalism entry into its market, a market that was, for almost 50 years, partially protected from the effects of free trade. Having become a considerable and potentially powerful arbiter of American businesses, as well as a potential receptor of American social norms in Asia, India also becomes the location of a new debate on Tradition, part of which post 1990s cinema undertakes to interpret. Rini Bhattacharya Mehta explains the complex positioning of

India with respect to the United States, and the relationship of this particular positioning to cinema.

Since the reconfiguration of the Third World as a geopolitical entity in the new world system, India as an archetype of non-Western nation-state in this system has renegotiated its commodity value. As the Western news and media have nurtured and projected India's turn of the millennium image as an emerging super-power, a force to be reckoned with, a 'democratic', tamable alternative to red China, the official and unofficial apparatuses in India have reflected and embellished the image, to be perpetuated at home and out in the world. One of the significances of Bollywood lies in its self-positioning as an unofficial ideological apparatus.<sup>13</sup>

What has happened in India in the decade immediately following this particular policy change (outsourcing of jobs by the United States to India, the creation of a wealthy upper middle class whose wealth is contingent upon catering particularly to the needs of American businesses, and the subsequent creation of a market for American consumer goods in India) leads me to analyze India's adoption of the open market policy as a reflection of the colonial economic model. Sartre explains the blueprint for colonial economic exploitation with reference to the French colonial plan for creating a market in occupied Algeria, a model that seems uncannily similar to current systems of trade in developing countries.<sup>14</sup> This connection is all the more vital in the given context, because it helps to bridge the gap between apparently unrelated issues of British colonialism and the current globalized capitalist economy. Referring to the American brand of capitalism in discussing the postcoloniality of Indian films might seem to be an unwarranted conflation of historically discrete phenomena, but as Sartre's model shows, the core rationale for colonialism and capitalist globalization are very similar. In fact, it could also be argued that the two are not even philosophically discrete; capitalist globalization is in

effect a continuation of the colonial philosophy, and the former is conceived at the moment it becomes impossible to humanely and rationally carry out the latter.

But whether or not the policy of adopting an open market marks an opening of floodgates for the globalized neocolonial capitalist economy in India, this move definitely influences the concept of the nation in India, particularly in cinema. Tejaswini Ganti refers to unprecedented developments in the economics of the Indian film industry after India opens up the market in 1991:

While Hindi films have been circulating internationally since the 1930s, and have been popular among African, eastern European, Arab, and central Asian audiences for many decades, only recently have Bombay filmmakers been able to reap revenues from the international circulation of their films. Hindi filmmakers are now consciously seeking wider audiences outside India by opening distribution offices in New York, New Jersey, and London, creating websites to promote their films, dubbing films into English, Spanish, and French, and subtitling them in English, Hebrew, and Japanese.<sup>15</sup>

This departure from the “mixed socialist economy” of the past, coupled with the transforming political climate of the country and the availability of technology, has definitely come to affect how the nation perceives itself.<sup>16</sup>

The euphoria surrounding the meteoric rise of the economy predictably suffered a setback as the United States market crashed in the middle of 2008. However, this brief period of excitement influenced popular Indian cinema in more than one way. Beginning right after the opening of the markets in the early 90s, this chapter will trace the most noticeable changes in popular Indian cinema. In the first section, I examine the changing nature of Indian nationalism in cinema post-globalization. In the section following it, I examine in further detail the changes in characterization, specifically that of heroines, mother-figures, and villains (following Rosie Thomas’ discussion of the markers of morality in Hindi film), and the changing face of Tradition in recent Indian cinema.<sup>17</sup>

## **Indian Nationalism in Post-Globalization Cinema**

The previous chapter analyzed the brand of Indian nationalism made popular by Indian cinema after independence as a form that is artificial yet politically resistant to colonial influences. The nationalism that Indian cinema promotes after independence, and with minor changes up until the 90s, rejects whatever it perceives to be *western* in favor of what is Traditionally Indian. In establishing the nature of nationalism, characters often become more important than explicit nationalist discourses. The apparent unity of the nation in spite of its diversity, and the homogenous nature of Indian nationalism and Tradition are stressed on screen time and again.

The brand of nationalism that emerges in cinema after the 90s intuitively serves the purpose of the nation best at this particular juncture and is therefore in keeping with the upbeat mood regarding the economy; it also has a wider appeal, because it is meant for Indians residing both inside and outside the country. At this juncture when the idea of the nation itself is being problematized by the presence of transnations, nationalism makes an invigorated return to the screen. Asutosh Gowariker's films *Lagaan* (2001) *Swades* (2004) and Omprakash Mehra's *Rang De Basanti* (2007) re-introduce the idea of the nation in popular conversation.<sup>18</sup> Both films present revised versions of the elements of the earlier nationalist discourse: Tradition, the Indian national character, and the Hindustani woman are revisited and reformulated in the mode of the new nationalism of post-globalized India.

*Lagaan* has been viewed and understood as a nationalistic film, primarily because Gowariker's inherent argument is that the nationalist rhetoric was being shaped in India long before organized anti-colonial movements were formed. The crisis in *Lagaan* is as

follows: the villagers of Champaner, a village in colonial India, are faced with a drought and an order to pay double their usual tax, and decide to take up the challenge of playing a game of cricket with the officers of the British Cantonment. The challenge comes because Captain Russell, the resident British military officer, thinks the protagonist Bhuvan insults the game of cricket by comparing it to its native counterpart. The contest that ensues is an inspiring nationalist metaphor that depicts the villagers coming together in the face of opposition in spite of internal factions such as caste divisions and untouchability. It might be noted, however, that the impulse behind such opposition has very little to do with actual resistance towards the colonial presence. From the villagers' point of view, nation as a concept is distant and vague. The adversary that the villagers must face is not representative, at least to them, of a power that has occupied their land. They must put up a fight because there has been a lack in the usual routine of payment of taxes through the claim for the double payment by Russell. When Bhuvan and his mates come together "like a fist," as they call it, the film-maker makes sure that there is sufficient diversity within the team—we have Ishmail, the Muslim potter, Deva, the Sikh and Kachra, the untouchable. This composition (a device that is well attested in earlier Hindi film) is indicative of the later patriotic construct of diversity whereby the filmmaker creates an environment of nationalism even under circumstances where there is no conceptual understanding of the ideal. Therefore, *Lagaan* is more a metaphor for organization and strengthening from within at a moment of crisis than attack or resistance directed at a colonial adversary. The characterization, however, reflects the nationalist and cinematic discourse on cultural diversity as a strength rather than a drawback of the Indian national character.

In trying to demonstrate how the nationalist zeal declined post independence, these films evoke the post-independence Nehruvian nationalistic ideals of nation building, because that is a viable location of pride in the nation, and possibly more acceptable to the liberal educated class of Indians than the rhetoric of warfare. This is a way to question what went wrong in keeping up the nationalistic spirit, and re-establishing the pride in the nation through positive contributions to the rebuilding. This might be done by taking up responsibilities individually, be it for rural development in *Swades* or for the restructuring of corrupted political systems in *Rang De Basanti*. It is not coincidental that in both of these films, protagonists stumble upon their responsibilities—they are not implicated in these developmental or revolutionary activities of their own accord initially, but arrive at a situation where it becomes their moral responsibility to do so. In *Swades*, Mohan Bhargav is apparently satisfied with his life as a scientist at NASA, and his decision to pay a visit to his village in India to bring back his nanny with him takes an unexpected turn when he decides that he has a role to play in the uplift of this village. In *Rang De Basanti*, a group of youngsters are inspired by acting in a film on Bhagat Singh, the legendary freedom fighter, and subsequently decide to speak out against a contemporary incident of injustice and political corruption. Now, the fact that both films choose such accidental involvement of protagonists in the act of improving the nation implies that any person, however insignificant or nonchalant, can be drawn similarly into the task of nation-building. This renewed and energetic call to be involved in the nation is a specific characteristic of post-globalization India, which emphasizes that the rising India is worth investing in emotionally. Such a sentiment would obviously appeal to the post-globalization audience, a section that might have

earlier felt excluded from the task of uplifting the nation. This film assuages the immigrant's guilt, because it creates the possibility of unconditional inclusion of individuals within the field of patriotic duties, thereby increasing the appeal of patriotic duty for a wider audience. It is also possible to argue that this toned-down version of patriotism is actually a function of the role diasporic audiences are comfortable assuming within another nation, where their expression of feelings for India must be kept in check because of their status as minorities or as naturalized citizens of the host nation.

Both of these films are clearly sensitive to the tastes of the diasporic population and their concern with nationalistic feelings. *Swades* has a non-resident Indian as its protagonist; Indians in the diaspora will identify with him because he is apparently an unlikely candidate for exhibiting strong nationalistic feelings. So when he is moved by the plight of his country and offers to "light his bulb," the action is much more moving to millions in the diaspora, for whom this is an assertion of potential roles of immigrants in the uplift of India. Both *Swades* and *Rang De Basanti* use an outsider's view to shed light on the dire state of affairs within India—both Mohan and Sue were practically unaffected by these conditions in their ordinary lives, but once they become involved in it, they are drawn into the events. They are both outsiders looking in, albeit in different ways—Mohan wishes to maintain a certain distance from Charanpur, as his arrival in an RV indicates; Sue slips into the ordinary existence of Delhi from the moment she arrives. However, as outsiders, they are able to see what ordinary Indian citizens fail to see, and can therefore act as a force that helps to bring internal factions together. Theirs is the vision of the diasporic audiences, who are similarly outsiders looking in to what they essentially identify with, but also allegedly possess the objective distancing that allows

them a certain self-critique or evaluation. Mohan is the typical disillusioned non-resident who initially expresses his lack of belief in the system, when Geeta points out that she is at least offering to help by working at the grass-root level, while he simply chooses to be dismissive of any positive action. Scenes like these are the defining moments for the new Indian patriotism: the filmmaker is reaching out to his diasporic audience by challenging them to reassess their critique of India, and replace it with a more positive ideal of rebuilding.

It might not be correct to assume that this displaced nationalism is the only form of nationalism available to India now. As always, the complexity of the Indian nation makes other forms simultaneously available. The tide of Hindu fundamentalism that has plagued India since the 80s, for example, has attempted to redefine nationalist ideals on the basis of religion, and regional politics and separatist politics within India continue to create newer forms of nationalism and patriotism. Given the cultural presence of popular films, however, it is impossible to deny how the diaspora now seems to have the capacity to redefine Indian patriotism by displacing it from the nation itself. We must admit that by taking into account the new kinds of desires (like participation in the nationalist cause) in the audience, popular films are gradually shaping Indian nationalism to a version that is potentially more suave than earlier, and by moving away from the rhetoric of attack, it is slowly projecting a celebratory attitude that helps to underscore the elements of pride in Indian culture, not simply in terms of the content, but in the very manner of presentation. The concern, if indeed there is one, is created by the apparent detachment of the sentiments from the actual native population, and the tendency of diasporic Indian populations of viewing India from the perspective of the west. Even as this new form of



nationalism seems to provide a more sophisticated and positive outlook on the future of Indian nationalism than was possible earlier, its connection to the global economy can hardly be dismissed.

### **Visual Changes Post–Globalization**

The other distinct difference in cinema after 1991 is the change in the use of visual elements and their connotations. The use of more advanced technology makes the films visually more appealing, but the manner in which certain common visual elements, especially location, are utilized undergo a vital transformation. It might be noted that foreign locales are no longer intended to add to the glamour of films; except for a few glimpses of Mohan Bhargav's life in the United States, *Swades* seems little concerned with natural locations and glamorous cityscapes from outside India, elements that were key selling factors for Hindi film until quite recently. Similarly, when *Rang De Basanti* offers flashbacks of Sue's life in London, it is through unimpressive indoor shots of her workplace. In other words, these locations are not intended to glamorize the west anymore so much as to create familiar backdrops for a large part of the audience. Conversely, India becomes a glamorous location, a place so romantic and beautiful that it evokes nationalistic feelings in many characters. The squalor of rural India magically transforms into a set of exquisite visuals in *Swades* — romantic and artistic huts, beautiful swaying fields of paddy or mustard, and vibrant religious festivals. The Ramleela, for example, is typical of the Indian exotica that apparently appeal to a global audience and is therefore a reason for making Indians proud of their national culture, notwithstanding the fact that it is strictly a Hindu form of entertainment.<sup>19</sup> Similarly,

Jantar Mantar transforms into a romantic fire-lit hub for trendy youngsters in *Rang De Basanti*, a club-like atmosphere that simultaneously proclaims its ancient heritage.

[T]he filmmaker meets the four protagonists in a peculiarly cinematic space, apparently a bohemian get-away for students, set against the backdrop of a glittering sky line, but itself dimly lit, surrounded by a placid body of water, and thus cloistered from the steamier aspects of the third-world metropolis. As a radical 'elsewhere' to the frenzied clamor and swooping mobs of the 'native' scene outside the airport, this is a languidly buoyant setting, peppered only intermittently with the sprightly movements of young, frolicsome, cosmopolitan bodies, some drinking, some painting wall graffiti, some swaying to music.<sup>20</sup>

Contrary to the earlier confusions regarding the location of pride, there is now a new and exotic India that, visually at least, appeals to a global audience. The fact that this particular section of the film's audience is displaced from the nation increases the possibility that it assumes the gaze of the outsider/western. The obvious parallel, once again, is the colonial gaze; it is as if the nation has been displaced from itself, and must now look upon itself from an outsider's perspective.

There have been major changes in specific signifiers of nationalism, like the figures of women, and their responsibility to represent Tradition. The figure of the sacrificial Indian woman as the signifier of the community and the cultural sign of Indianness has been discussed. The figure of the mother, as shown in the following chapter, is also often the symbol for the motherland in Indian cinema. It might be assumed if the motherland changes, the figure of the mother in cinema will change as well. The mother figure begins to shed its specific associations as a signifier of nation, community or other patriarchal interests to move towards multilayered representations of women in India. Throughout the 80s and 90s, "middle" cinema brought a number of narratives based on women's experiences of emancipation that portrayed women beyond the roles of wives and mothers, but popular cinema has been reluctant to allow any

significant changes in characterization. Viridi points that a particular popular cinema genre—the rape-revenge genre—that became increasingly popular in the 80s empowers women by granting them the capacity to avenge injustices such as rape. In these films, women are “sexual and violent, capable of wielding guns and taking control.”<sup>21</sup> The rape-revenge genre seems to establish a new role for women in cinema, where they are able to carry their own agenda without help from male partners.

Throughout the 1980s, the avenging woman figure became a trend: the “angry woman” replacing the “angry man” of the 1970s. The appearance of “rape-revenge” films in other cultures has been described as feminism’s gift to popular culture: “The marriage of rape to revenge was made in movie heaven... Ironically enough, it was a match for which the matchmaker was the women’s movement, for in terms more or less explicitly feminist, rape became a not only a deed deserving of brutal retribution, but a deed that women themselves (not cops, boyfriends or fathers) undertook to redress.”<sup>22</sup>

This might be seen as a vital change to the portrayal of women in popular cinema, but the voyeuristic implications of an on-screen rape still leaves the status of women questionable. In other words, the comparative power allowed to women in this particular genre is possibly balanced out by the portrayals of rape as a sexual performance meant to provide (if even accidentally) male spectatorial pleasure.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, this particular type of women is different from the women of post-1990 cinema not so much in terms of empowerment, as with regard to how the different aspects of intermeshing cultures control the levels of power in cinema—the women in post-globalization cinema are, unlike the avenging women of the earlier decades, more a product of a global cultural dynamics than of national social conditions. Since their interests are tied less to those of the postcolonial nation state, they are less burdened by the responsibility to perform as markers of national identity.

Before we discuss the women of the globalized cinema industry, a look at the non-Bollywood cinemas of the 70s through the end of the 80s might prove to be valuable with regard to the overall variety in characterization of women in Indian cinema. Before 1991, only middle cinema (most of these are Hindi films, but they were not considered mainstream because of reasons presented in the Introduction) brings us a variety of portrayals of women characters placed at the core of the films. In fact, many of these films are about concerns specific to women, and possibly related to the same social history of women's movements that gives rise to the rape-revenge genre in popular cinema. While popular cinema presents these social changes in the problematic revenge mode (problematic because it allows for voyeuristic male pleasure in the context of rape), parallel and middle cinema refer more directly to feminist agendas from women's perspectives.<sup>24</sup> Hence we see characters such as Pooja in Mahesh Bhatt's *Arth* (1982), and in Kavita in Sai Paranjpye's *Sparsh* (1980) elevate individual choice and freedom for women above and beyond Tradition. Middle cinema brings audiences the first set of women characters liberated from the burden of representing national identity; audiences get a glimpse of strong, determined women characters, both urban and rural, who step out of oppressive social and familial conditions to fend for themselves.

Women change significantly in popular cinema only after globalization, and it can be argued that such changes remain merely external for a period of time. Aditya Chopra's 1995 romantic blockbuster *Dilwale Duhaniya Le Jayenge* (henceforth *DDLJ*) is often deemed as the first major landmark in post-globalized Indian popular cinema.<sup>25</sup> It makes use of its huge budget (made possible to an extent by the expanding market for Indian cinema) to bring diasporic Indians into focus, setting the trend for many similar films to

follow. *DDLJ* is based on a plot that has apparently been used countless times in the history of popular Hindi cinema, but Chopra's handling ends up making it one of the most popular and profitable films of the decade. The first half of the film is set in England, where Indian immigrant storeowner Baldev Singh strives to bring up his two daughters according to his idea of Indianness. In his presence, they dress and talk demurely, listen to Indian music, and are constantly reminded of the need to respect their original culture and religion. The girls enjoy some break from this routine with their mother, but all three keep up the appearances at home. The elder daughter Simran dreams of a life free of the restrictions of Tradition that her father imposes on the family. Her primary daydream is that of a lover/husband she chooses herself, but her father has already decided that she should be married to his friend's son back in India. Simran apparently accepts the arrangement without any outward sign of anguish or rebellion, but asks permission to go on a trip around Europe as a last chance to "live her life." Her father relents, and while on this trip, she meets and falls in love with Raj, another British-Indian like herself. When her father learns of the affair, she is immediately rushed off to India for her wedding. Raj follows her, enters her family pretending to be a relative, and immediately wins the hearts of everyone. Even as Simran and her mother insist that the couple run away and get married, Raj determines that he will have Baldev's permission before he marries Simran, emphasizing that he will take the bride only if she is given away by the father. Following a series of dramatic events, Baldev relents at the last minute as Raj's train is leaving the station, letting go of Simran's hand to finally unite the lovers.

This typical boy-meets girl plotline, replete with parental resistance to the union, and a happy ending following several complications, redeems itself through the construction of a new form of Indian identity that is not defined any more by exterior signs. In other words, neither male nor female characters can be judged by how westernized they are externally, but by how they might still have retained an Indian core in spite of external signs that denote the contrary. While this concept of the Indian *core* is not new at all, and men dressing in western or semi-western attire have never been in contradiction to their Indian identity, this particular assertion becomes significant in two areas: the extent to which the violation of earlier norms is allowed to men without any ostensible threat to their Indian identity, and the comparative relaxation of rules regarding women's attire and behavior while still portraying them as proper Indian women. There is a certain amount of space, therefore, that is allowed to women in terms of "westernization," without threatening Indian identity or moral goodness. *DDLJ*'s heroine Simran wears western clothes, including short dresses and strapless gowns behind her father's back, and also drinks up an entire bottle of cognac (not for fun, it should be noted, but because she was feeling cold) and goes off on a drunken spree, without causing the characters in the film or the audience to once suspect her moral standards. The west, or least some aspects of it that were to be dreaded earlier, now seems less threatening than it was before. Interestingly, the acceptance of western clothing is usually represented in cinema through the lead actors and actresses wearing multinational name brand clothes (Gap and Nike being the most popular), a trend that is made more popular by later 90s films like *Dil to Pagal Hai*. So while popular Indian film seems to have moved on from conservative ideas of what constitutes Indianness, the alternative, at least

in terms of appearances, is embracing the American consumerist economy. *DDLJ* is the trendsetter in this respect, but it tends to present a delicate balance in terms of a postcolonial national identity through its characters. Even though films from later in the decade also tend to measure progress and sophistication against American/ western norms, this film seems to mark a point of transition that mirrors the recent transformation of economic policies. As Patricia Uberoi points out in her essay on *DDLJ*:

While the sexual behaviour and marriage choices of first and second generation Indian emigrants are a matter of major concern for the NRI community, both in real life and in diasporic fiction, drama and cinema, these are not questions that have hitherto specially concerned the home community. But with *DDLJ*, *their* problems of being Indian in a foreign setting are projected as *our* problems of identity as well. Conversely, our problems of constituting a 'moral universe' of family relations are seen to be their problems as well. That is, the challenge of being (and, more importantly, remaining) Indian in a globalised world is one that must be met equally by those who stay at home and those who live abroad, by the "yuppy/puppy" as much as by the NRI.<sup>26</sup>

Even though it seems that the woman is still restricted to the role of mother, lover and wife in *DDLJ*, the figures of women in this film represent a fascinating narrative of negotiation, resilience, and power. The mother is especially remarkable in the manner she manipulates control within a patriarchal society without taking any drastic measures. She pays lip service to, and sometimes seriously regrets, the Indian woman's position of subjugation, but she is relentless in finding the gaps in the fortress of patriarchy. She is ready to utilize any possible means of manipulating the circumstances for her daughter, especially those she had no control over as a young woman herself. In a way, the figure of the mother in Indian popular in a recently globalized scenario marks a step in the transition of the woman in Indian cinema, looking ahead to a generation of women who evolve from signs or signifiers to actual personalities. Simran's mother Lajjo is the first generation of Indian mothers in cinema who are no longer responsible for upholding

community identity or tradition, because they place more emphasis on personal happiness than on what the nation or the community might represent. She might not have been able to be as assertive in her own life, partly because she was young and did not realize that there could have been other choices, but she wants her daughter to escape the cycle of subjugation. Her method, however, never suggests confronting the patriarchal figures, or challenging authority directly. This is evident in an early scene in the film where Lajjo and her daughters are listening to upbeat western music at home, having fun, Lajjo even dancing a little bit as she goes about her chores. The scene transforms entirely as soon as Baldev rings the doorbell; the music changes, and so does the entire atmosphere at home. The girls sit down and pretend to study, and Lajjo appears before the door as the demure wife, veil in place, and eyes lowered to the ground. This minute violation of rules in opportune ways, a form of discreet rebelliousness always kept secret by Lajjo, represents a tiny zone of liberation for her. She knows that she will never challenge her husband's choices without upsetting the orderly universe around her, on which she herself is also possibly dependent for survival. But she can, and will, bend the rules wherever possible, taking advantage of the happiness it can bring her and her daughters. In a way, this shows that her spirit is indomitable, and even though she does sometimes regret her position and her former choices, she will not be denied happiness entirely. The sadness in her character becomes apparent when she explains to Simran how restricted her own life has been-- she fears the same for her daughter, and constantly prompts her to run away with her lover without confronting her father.

It might be noted that her daughter has also picked up some of her skills of manipulating and negotiating patriarchy. Simran's manipulation of her father when she



wants to go on the tour to Europe is a classic example of her mother's brand of non-confrontational negotiation with the patriarchal order—she gets up early in the morning, dresses in traditional Indian clothes, and sings a prayer before the idols just as her father comes down the stairs. Baldev is extremely impressed by his daughter's devotion to tradition and religion, and prides himself on his own ability to have instilled such values in his children. Taking advantage of this moment of weakness in her father, Simran asks for his permission to go on the trip. She emphasizes her constant respect for his authority, promises to continue to be submissive, and refers to this trip as an opportunity for her to “live” all at once, before she hands it over to her father again. The audience knows that she is probably pretending to elevate her father to a position of authority much higher than she actually grants him, but her apparent submission to his absolute authority is the best ploy to have her own wish granted. Although her subjugation is still apparent in the almost pathetic manner that she seeks permission from her father, it is clear that she negotiates with his authority with no qualms for her pretense. Her expert handling of her father's character is highlighted more than her lack of scruples in manipulating her father. Sacrifice and complete moral goodness are now less important than a woman's will to fulfill her own desires.

Farhan Akhtar's 2001 film *Dil Chahta Hai* is also very fresh in its portrayal of different character types in women, introducing what appears to be the newest variety of characters in popular cinema.<sup>27</sup> The film's treatment of the mother-son relationship, and a young man's affair with an older woman could be seen to be indicative of a liberal, cosmopolitan culture flourishing in post-globalization India. Such themes would have been rare in mainstream cinema even in the previous decade, but do not seem to be in

conflict with the idea of an Indian identity in recent times. Such trends help to establish that popular cinema's previous restrictions on the postcolonial identity seem to have relaxed, ostensibly through increased contact with the rest of the world. The film follows the lives of three upper-class young men right after they graduate from college, the primary focus being on their friendship, and their romantic involvements with women of their choice. Akash, Sameer and Siddharth are friends from college, but Siddharth's love for Tara, a divorced older woman, seems to destroy the dynamics of their friendship. The inclusion of such a relationship in popular cinema, as I have indicated, is surprising in itself; in spite of its enduring interest in heterosexual love, popular cinema has hardly ever gone beyond the conventional romance between a young couple. Class seems to have been the only impediment to romantic relationships so far, and even issues relating to caste are extremely rare. Unconventional relationships like that of Siddharth and Tara have appeared in parallel or middle cinemas, but most of these also appear after 1991.

Siddharth does not have a romantic relationship per se with Tara. He merely confesses to his friends (and later to his mother) that he loves Tara, and even that is sufficient in causing distress and conflict. The major transition, however, is the positive connotation in Tara's characterization. A middle-aged divorcee with a daughter she has lost custody of because of her alleged alcoholism, Tara is the exact opposite of the virginal girl/woman of popular cinema, and yet she is closer to the heroine than the vamp. In spite of her social status and her "drinking problems," her friendship with Siddharth seems to receive unprecedented directorial sympathy. However, it must also be noted that she is also curiously close to the sacrificial "bad woman" type, even though she has been paired with a positive character. Her life is a saga of sadness and tragedy, and she herself

is a victim of her circumstances. Even though her characterization is much more sophisticated, she cannot escape the usual fate of the morally sacrificial social misfit. At the end, she dies in the true sacrificial manner, never having a chance to cultivate a serious relationship with Siddharth. In this regard, the director's own point of view behind the manipulation of desire in this relationship might be referred to. In an interview with Madhavi Menon, Akhtar says:

I don't see anything forbidden in their relationship. A lot of people have asked me if I killed Tara in the film because she and Siddharth could not be together? No, that's not the reason I killed Tara. I think Tara had to die for many other reasons beyond the fact that she could not be with Siddharth.... For me, it was to bring Siddharth emotionally to a particular point. I think the fact that he gets his friend back before he loses something else so important to him was very crucial for me. For me the thing that had to happen was he had to meet Akash. That had to happen. It couldn't happen that Tara lived and he didn't meet Akash. That could not have happened, and I did not want to give Siddharth the best of both worlds.<sup>28</sup>

The director's response to this reading of the relationship is to negate the impact of Tradition on his choice. However, he makes it clear that a resolution where Siddharth and Tara actually have a relationship *and* the two male characters renew their friendship is not possible. Whether or not we trust the explanation of his choice to let Tara die, it is undeniable that even in post-globalization cinema, Tradition continues to negotiate the discourse of desire to a great extent.

In addition to typical elements like the death of the unconventional woman, the film also only refers to the possibility of an undefined friendship between this unlikely couple, and not a romantic relationship per se. On his part, Siddharth never hopes for a relationship, choosing to keep his emotions hidden from her. In fact, he never lets Tara know about his emotions until she accidentally overhears a conversation between him and his mother. The point in the film where his mother wants to know if he loves

someone, he opens the conversation with, “You will never understand it.” He mentions Tara’s name as she keeps on pressing him, and once he does, she bursts into an angry monologue, mostly blaming Tara for enticing him. Tara happens to walk in on this emotional scene, and overhears part of the conversation. As she hurries back to her apartment, Siddharth follows her, and counters her outburst (she feels that Siddharth had taken the possibility of a relationship with her for granted) with the assurance that he expects nothing from her. He says that it was his intention to always hide his emotions from her, making it clear that he had wished to steer clear of any social outrage. This particular relationship signals a change only in that Siddharth wishes to confess his love for an older woman to his friends and his mother. Additionally, when Tara finds out, he apologizes for hurting her feelings, but says that he does not regret the fact that he fell in love with her.

If this film denotes major social changes in a globalized economy, then it should also be noted that what appears to be radical at the surface actually represents forms of benign social change upon examination. In the scene after he returns from Tara’s apartment, Siddharth goes back to his mother, and asks her to accompany him on his next trip. She holds out her hand, and reconciliation between mother and son follows as the threat of a possible disruption to social life is put to rest. At the end of the film, the three friends, now also reconciled, appear with their respective partners; in the final scene, Siddharth is in the company of a young girl whose identity is not revealed to the audience, but she definitely appears to be an appropriate in terms of age and social status. The film only raises the possibility of a disruption, but shies away from dealing with the matter in a serious way. It is as if the possibility for certain changes within the Indian

social order is raised, but characters still seem willing to uphold the so-called values of society at the cost of personal happiness, and Tradition still remains strong. In fact, even as women's issues are self-consciously pushed to the foreground in recent times, the age-old obsession regarding women as the representation of nation surfaces time and again. As Sudeep Dasgupta points out, Rajkumar Santoshi's 2001 film *Lajja* is introduced by 'a dramatic and seemingly rhetorical question by the director: "After all, isn't the measure of a nation's greatness measured by the status of its women?"<sup>29</sup> The nationalist discourse that drives the positioning of women in cinema, therefore, seems to have remained partially unaltered in many instances even within the globalized cultural sphere.

If there is indeed a change, it is more in the nature of appearances, and what counts as an Indian identity. In fact, the characters seem so casual about their western lifestyles that it hardly seems to matter that they are Indian. Had it not been for these subtle references to Tradition and what is acceptable in society, the characters of the film would appear to inhabit a truly global scenario, participating in a highly consumerized capitalist economy in an extremely casual manner. The main characters of the film come from upper-class families, and their lifestyles reflect nothing of the condition of the majority in India. If *DDLJ* brings us magnificent locales from Europe and designer wedding attires, *Dil Chahta Hai* seems to imply that Mercedes Benzes, trendy discos and restaurants, expensive holidays and trips across continents are everyday fare for the new generation of Indians. Every home has plush interiors, every item of clothing is designer-made, and forms of entertainment go beyond traditional festivals to include operas and rides in theme parks. The characters unselfconsciously present themselves as global consumers who are equally comfortable in Mumbai and Sydney. They do not seem to

notice that a large portion of their lifestyles derives from norms that would be labeled as overtly western even a decade ago.

In spite of carrying these signs of globalization, most of the main characters betray traits that denote a Traditional Indian identity. By the global standards by which their lives seem to be determined, the relationship between Siddharth and Tara should not have been the cause for so much conflict. The tendency to fall back upon Traditional norms is seen in the other relationships as well; both Sameer and Shalini portray their connection to their native culture despite the fact that they appear outwardly “globalized.” Sameer is somewhat of a playboy, and seems to take sexual relationships with the ease of the new liberal generation. He certainly does not find it possible or necessary to stick to one partner, and on one occasion, decides to stay back in Goa at the end of a vacation with Siddharth and Akash, simply because he wants to spend time with a European girl he just met. Not only does he seem to have come a long way from the type of male characters searching for the “simple, sari-clad Hindustani woman,” his desire to explore his sexuality is portrayed as a healthy sign of his times.<sup>30</sup> His friends laugh at his fickleness, but raise no moral objections to his staying back. The matter ends in jest as the woman turns out to be a swindler who gags and binds Sameer and runs away with his belongings. Ultimately, there is no moral angst regarding the matter, neither from the directorial perspective, nor from that of the characters. However, when it comes to marriage, Sameer ends up with the girl his parents arrange for him to marry. Even though he mildly resists the idea of an arranged marriage, he falls in love with the girl that he is introduced to. Initially, they both discuss the absurdity of an arranged marriage, and the girl even admits that she has a boyfriend. Sameer himself is somewhat

embarrassed by this clear departure from his liberal/globalized identity, but that does not stop the relationship from developing.

Akash's love interest Shalini appears to be similarly modern and hip, even though she is clearly dominated in her relationship to her boyfriend. Even though she exercises her own will in spending time with Akash when they are in Sydney, it is a mystery why she puts up with an insanely jealous and controlling boyfriend, or why she is about to marry him. Not only does this part of her character seem totally unexpected in a woman who is part of this new global crowd, there also appears to be a vestige of the sacrificial Indian woman in her character as well. When Akash finally shows up at her wedding to propose to her, she confesses to her adoptive family that she was about to marry their son out of gratitude. This desire to sacrifice on the part of a woman is so much a part of Indian film culture that the audience accepts it as a plausible explanation for her silent suffering, not quite questioning why this young and independent woman whose life seems to be governed by global norms in every other aspect, is so willing to marry for the sake of gratitude. It appears that if Akash had not made the move, she would have silently continued with this act of self-sacrifice, which to her was the only way to express her indebtedness to her benefactors. Given the climate of capitalist excesses that surrounds her, it is surprising that the woman still has no other way of repaying a debt than with her own self. In a way, if the open market and the celebration of capitalist economy following it in India does affect cinema, it is unable to significantly alter the traditional core of so called Indian values, be it for better or for worse.

As the focus of cinema shifts to the upper economic class, first person accounts of the lives of average Indians disappear from mainstream cinema. There is practically no

acknowledgment of the economic problems of India, and if there is, then it is from the point of view of a protagonist who is a representative of the upper class, but appears as a benefactor. *Swades*, for example, deals with the socio-economic problems of rural India from the perspective of a non-resident Indian. The major change, one might say, is the increasing tendency to separate wealth from moral vice. Just as a woman drinking a glass of wine does not signify promiscuity any more, an upper-class person does not necessarily denote moral corruption. This is not to suggest that pre-1991 films had never had a rich character who was also morally good; rather, it comes to establish that the celebration of poverty that I have discussed in the last chapter is not common any more. Protagonists are not only comfortable being rich, but also to display and celebrate their wealth now. In terms of characterization, it means that antagonists must be defined with reference to other forms of vices, while in terms of focus, popular cinema moves away from the portrayal of social vices and suffering common in the 70s. Family dramas and romantic comedies, most often set in incredibly well off families, become the most popular fare of the day. Films from 90s and early 2000s, including *Hum Apke Hain Kaun*(1994), *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*(1998), *Dil to Pagal Hai*(1997), *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001), and *Kaho na Pyaar Hai* (2000) create a dazzling paradise of consumerism for audiences.

### **The Transnation: India Outside India in the 1990s**

Discussions of Indian cinema are not complete anymore without referring to films made by diasporic filmmakers. Many of these films are better recognized by a global audience because they are often in English. The films of Mira Nair and Gurinder Chadha are viewed and recognized as Indian (often also mistakenly as Bollywood) films)<sup>31</sup> by the



majority of the audience for such films. There is no doubt that the directorial position on nationalism is much more complicated when it comes to diasporic cinema: such a position can be said to be both inside and outside the nation, especially post-globalization, when geographical positions have been rendered fluid by technological advancements. Appadurai's concept of the transnation has warned us of the energetic continuation of the nationalist discourse within the diaspora:

Because they are so often the product of forced as well as voluntary diasporas, of mobile intellectuals as well as manual workers, of dialogues with hostile as well as hospitable states, very few of the new nationalisms can be separated from the anguish of displacement, the nostalgia of exile, the repatriation of funds, or the brutalities of asylum seeking. Haitians in Miami, Tamils in Sri Lanka, Moroccans in France, Moluccans in Holland are the carriers of these new transnational and postnational loyalties.<sup>32</sup>

In the case of the Indian diaspora, many of the issues mentioned in this statement have helped to shape a form of diasporic transnationalism that is mediated more and more quickly by social and political changes as they happen at "home." The construction of the Indian woman in diasporic cinema, for example, is variously shaped by feminist thought at home and abroad, policy changes in India and marketability in North America and Europe: the Indian woman of the diasporic film is a representation of the Tradition/modernity debate mediated by western feminist conceptions of the South Asian woman's perpetual subjective status.

Gurindar Chadha's *Bend it Like Beckham* approaches the opposition of individual choice and community expectations within the diaspora.<sup>33</sup> Jasminder (Jess) is constantly restricted in her choice to play football because her family deems it untraditional, something that affects their social position. Their idea of Tradition is much more strict than it would possibly would have been in contemporary urban settings in India, because

they must abide by the antiquated norms of the transnation. The social circle that surrounds Jess and her family is representative of the particularities of diasporic community that carries and retains through generations the values that are antiquated in the “mother country.” From this perspective, Tradition makes a comeback to the screen of Indian cinema not because the nation values it, but because a certain portion of the community (albeit one with substantial economic clout) is still invested in it. From the point of view of diasporic filmmakers who deal with the dilemma of second-generation immigrants in the face of a Tradition/modernity debate happening in diasporic spaces, the east/west conflict of popular Indian cinema is a more real and direct concern even though they are physically distant from India the geo-political space. Such conflicts come to affect vital aspects of immigrant life, such as identity and familial relationships (*The Namesake*), career choices (*Bend it Like Beckham*) or courtship and marriage (*Monsoon Wedding*).<sup>34</sup>

In diasporic contexts, the very concept of nationhood is synonymous with the idea of Tradition. In the diaspora, the nation is understood neither as a space or a political entity, but as an ideological collective of social norms and codes of conduct that must be maintained for the sake of maintaining national identity.

[I]t is the Indian family system that is recognised as the social institution that quintessentially defines being ‘Indian’ (cf. Thomas 1996). It is an institution that is now projected as portable. And it can remain firm--or so it is fervently hoped--even when all else changes. Whether in accounting for the superior academic achievements of second generation Indians, or for the fortunes that have propelled some of the emigrants into the roll-call of the richest Britons today, Indian ‘family values’ are proposed as the crucial markers of Indianness.<sup>35</sup>

Ironically, diasporic cinema is often critical of these values for restricting individual freedom of choice, especially for second-generation Indians in the diaspora.

For them, questions of national identity usually intersect with those regarding the oppressive role of Tradition in the path to seeking individual happiness, be it in one's career, marriage, or sexual preference. Nationalism often becomes a balancing act under such scenarios, a complex matter of negotiation and acceptance, whereby diasporic populations reformulate the idea of nation by testing the limits of Tradition. The title of *Bend it Like Beckham* might be seen as referring to how the basic element of this balancing game is not to *break*, but to *bend* the rules just enough for both the nation and the individual to survive in the diaspora.

The film deals with the deficiencies in the very concept of national character that Jess' Punjabi immigrant parents carry, including their idea of how Tradition should decide the course of their daughters' lives. Their beliefs gain further strength from the fact that their community, composed of Punjabi immigrants like themselves, abides by the same norms and would criticize them for bringing up *westernized* daughters. As parents, they are unable to discern that the conflict is more generational than a result of their space (not Punjab/India but England), and they constantly blame the immigrant condition for the un-Traditional traits in their daughters. In *Bend It*, the question of national identity is subsumed by the quest for personal fulfillment and happiness, as Jess overcomes her parents' opposition to playing football and dating a non-Indian man, and goes off to America in pursuit of her dreams at the end of the film. Mira Nair's *Namesake*, on the other hand, in approaching the more complex question of national/cultural identity in second-generation Indians, gives the impression that the idea of the rebirth of nationalism in the form of transnational nationalisms is possible only in first-generation immigrant groups. For second-generations, the idea of national identity

becomes problematic given that their group is not Indian by birth, and somewhat separated from the nationalist discourse of their parents' generation because of their bi-lingual and bi-cultural status. Appadurai's formulation of transnational nationalisms remains valid only because there continue to be new waves of first-generation immigration, giving birth to discrete groups spread over continents, but unified by their urge to reestablish the nationalist rhetoric outside the nation. Indian nationalist ideals of character, femininity and Tradition are evoked once more in cinema after the 1990s in two ways: diasporic cinema seeks to question and problematize the role of Tradition as restrictive or formative for second-generation characters in the diaspora, and popular cinema made in India overcomes the external lack of Tradition in Indian characters, but revalidates it through the lifestyles of the new generation. Sangita Gopal points out that oppositional parental figures disappear in the popular cinema post 90s, and having no one to rebel against, younger characters take it upon themselves to uphold the value of Tradition. She draws on various instances of parental figures facilitating filial intentions in cinema from the 90s and 2000s:

[T]he widower-hero Rahul's... mother in *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* conspires with his 8-year old daughter to orchestrate a romantic liaison between Rahul and his best friend from college... The grandmothers in *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* initiate a chain of events that reconciles an autocratic father Yash to the son Rahul that Yash had cast out.<sup>36</sup>

Since the essence of the popular social melodrama was the valorization of Tradition through generational conflict, post-globalization cinema can hardly utilize a similar method any more. The new generation must therefore be invested in Tradition of its own accord:

If the old are not enforcers of the law but facilitators of desire, the young, in effect, have nothing to rebel against. Rather than opposing tradition since it no

longer wields any real power, the young invest it with sentiment. Thus they don ethnic gear and dance at festivals, perform rituals and mimic gestures that memorialize tradition from a vantage that is utterly contemporary.<sup>37</sup>

Tradition “wields power” in their case by endowing them with a specific national identity in the transnation, albeit by playing up those very aspects of Tradition that are considered attractive or *hip* by western standards. The new and acceptable exotic includes, for example, fashion and dancing (the two things that Gopal mentions). But the essential argument to be made here is that this generation performs a ritualistic form of *mimicry* by carrying a convenient and modern version of nationalism that would not hinder assimilation to a global/western lifestyle.

Jess’ experience in *Bend It* is mostly about battling parental expectations about an Indian woman, which are, in turn, derived from the discourse of nationalism discussed in the previous chapter. She must be Traditional—docile, domestic and religious— because her parents think they would be shunned by their society otherwise. However, the director juxtaposes her plight with that of her friend from the football team—Juliet (Jules), whose mother suffers from similar fears of social repercussion owing to her daughter’s nonconformity. Jules’ mother is in constant fear that by choosing to play a masculine game, Jules is giving the impression that she is not feminine enough, or that she is a lesbian. From Jess’ perspective, her parents’ obsession about retaining national and community identity appears simply to be a generational opposition to the achievement of personal freedom, a hindrance to finding her own identity, one in which nation is of no consequence. This experience is no different in her vision from what Jules faces from her mother. In Jess’ experience, identity is defined more on the basis of personal choice than national/racial background, a distinct departure from the attitude of

the previous generation. As her father reminisces regretfully about how he had given up playing cricket because of racism in the clubs, the audience realizes that his generation's investment in nationalism is much stronger than his daughter's would ever be.

There is hardly any parental opposition to the children's assumption of an identity of their choice in *The Namesake*, but the children, especially Gogol, are deeply impacted by their parents' cultural background. Gogol's parents show no verbal opposition as he switches names from Gogol to Nikhil to Nick and back to Gogol again, or to his choice of partners, but through the problems he faces in the process of assimilating as an American, he gradually becomes invested in his Indian identity. As he seeks to assume an American identity in his early life, his parents, unlike Jess's, mostly respond with "As you wish," implying that they are neither happy nor sad with their son's decisions. The parents hardly refer to Tradition or Indian identity, but Ashok's death finally triggers an internal conflict in Gogol, which makes him face his own psychological conflict in balancing his two nationalities, a phenomenon described by Indian-American author Jhumpa Lahiri as follows:

When I was growing up in Rhode Island in the 1970s I felt neither Indian nor American. Like many immigrant offspring I felt intense pressure to be two things, loyal to the old world and fluent in the new, approved of on either side of the hyphen. Looking back, I see that this was generally the case. But my perception as a young girl was that I fell short at both ends, shuttling between two dimensions that had nothing to do with one another.<sup>38</sup>

Gogol's reaction to his parents indexes this shuttling in more than one way; he is dismissive to his parents—he does not pay attention, for example, when his father gives him a book by his namesake, the Russian author Nikolai Gogol after he graduates high school. He also avoids his parents while in college, and does not seem to notice that most of his wishes are granted, albeit begrudgingly, by them. He tells his American girlfriend

Maxine that he does not care what his parents want when she implies that his parents might not want him to marry her. However, his attitude changes rather abruptly when his father dies; he arrives at the funeral with his head shaved according to tradition, and performs the traditional rites of his own accord. Maxine's awkwardness at the funeral also seems to indicate to him a lack of compatibility in their relationship, leading him to break up with her. Farha Shariff conducts a study of second-generation Canadian Americans' reactions to Nikhil/Gogol's identity confusion. She uses a "Lacanian analysis of the identity struggles as faced by the protagonist to highlight those of second-generation South Asian Canadians," applying Lacan and Zizek's discussion of names and ego to Gogol's choice of names in trying to assimilate with American culture. She says:

Adolescence is commonly known as a time of peer identification. Situational and cognitive factors during adolescence create a disconnect and shift in the identification with an ethnic name. In the film of *The Namesake*, Gogol goes to great lengths to begin the process of dismembering his name from his identity. He changes his name from 'Gogol' to his good name 'Nikhil', which later becomes anglicised to 'Nick'. Many South Asians experience similar dissonant and conflicting feelings associated with their nicknames and the accompanying new identity that comes with trying to negotiate multiple identities that are highly dependent on situational factors. The ensuing struggles to define themselves in the contexts of family and two diverse cultures throughout early adolescence and well into adulthood are evident in the narratives of the participants.<sup>39</sup>

It becomes evident from this study that for the immigrant trying to assimilate to mainstream culture, the struggle with multiple identities is a persistent and deeply psychological conflict. Shariff avoids the more complex issue at hand by choosing not to discuss the national allegiance of these second-generation immigrants, but it is the inevitable question arising out of the context. In analyzing how diasporic cinema approaches nationalism, the obvious problem is the lack of specific references to the nation. There is little doubt that even though he never raises questions about his own

national affiliation, the crux of the Gogol's conflict is one of *national* identity. The India that molds his identity is India the cultural space— his life is also significantly dictated by his cultural roots, and he is inspired by a childhood visit to the Taj Mahal to be an architect.<sup>40</sup> One might suggest that as a cosmopolitan subject, he has no need for a national affiliation, but the filmmaker shows that there is sufficient pressure on him from his environment to act as a bearer of his nationality: he often finds himself the target of stereotypical stories about India, which he attempts to brush off by saying that he was born in New York. As long as he is perceived to be a person of Indian origin, he is in need for a national identity, however it might be tailored for his particular situation.

The idea of nationalism and national affiliation in Indian cinema naturally acquires an increasingly abstract status post globalization, but nation stays alive as a concept. It recedes, as the above discussion shows, more and more *inwards*, becoming a more a sentiment and less an expression. In many cases, external signs such as manner of dressing, social behavior, use of language or economic status gradually lose potency as determinants of nationalistic sentiments in a character; the emphasis on the core of Indianness increases, but the signs to identify it are dissipated. On one hand, this dissolution of external signs might indicate the unmistakable demise of nationalism as a concept—since no finite set of external signs can encompass the current breadth of the concept, it grows abstract to the point of being non-existent, and cannot survive as anything but a vague sentiment that the bearer has no means of signifying in concrete terms. On the other hand, however, it is still strongly manifest in various forms— be it the curious phenomenon of transnational forms, or the bizarre one of religious fundamentalism. Post-globalization cinema, through its continuing focus on the nation,



remains intent on capturing the Janus face of Indian nationalism and the complexities manifest therein.

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<sup>1</sup> Rini Bhattacharya Mehta, “Bollywood, Nation, Globalization: An Incomplete Introduction,” in *Bollywood and Globalization: Indian Popular Cinema, Nation and Diaspora*, edited by Rini Bhattacharya Mehta and Rajeswari V. Pandharipande (London and New York: Anthem Press, 2010), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Jyotika Viridi, *The Cinematic ImagiNation: Indian Popular Films as Social History* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 4.

<sup>3</sup> The primary among these characteristics—the homogenous Indian national character, the chaste women, Tradition and the Indian core—are the highlights for this chapter’s discussion of major changes post-globalization. In looking for so called ‘changes’, these factors are once again the key elements.

<sup>4</sup> Partha Chatterjee’s formulation of the Tradition/modernity debate addresses the timeline preceding and immediately following independence, but the debate is potent even outside the context of anti-colonial discourse, and continues to be so in the current post-globalized context.

<sup>5</sup> Bhattacharya Mehta 2.

<sup>6</sup> Jyotika Viridi relates tendencies in Indian cinema to the social history of India in her book, *Cinematic ImagiNation*, which is subtitled “Indian films as Social History”. Bhattacharya Mehta says: “Whether we choose to read Indian Cinema as ‘social history’ or not, the ‘social history’ of Indian Cinema has been intricately bound with that of the nation.” (3)

<sup>7</sup> See Viridi 4: “In the 1990s India opened its doors to transnational corporations, abandoning the lip service it once gave to the idea of a mixed socialist economy during the Nehruvian era.”

<sup>8</sup> Bhaskar Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 68.

<sup>9</sup> In *Purab Aur Paschim* [DVD, directed by Manoj Kumar (1970)], the hero returns to India from England to prove his love for the nation, and his wife, an Indian brought up in England, must undergo sufficient Indianization in order to be accepted. For discussions of the film, see Bhattacharya Mehta 9, and Viridi 63-65.

<sup>10</sup> 8.

<sup>11</sup> Fareed Zakaria, “India Rising,” *Newsweek*, March 6 2006, 32-42.

<sup>12</sup> Bhabha's discussion of mimicry in colonial subjects [See Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” *Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis* 28, Spring (1984): 125-133.] is pertinent in this context again. Granted there is no actual colonial presence, but similitude to the western/global lifestyle is still a marker of social status for the Indian population. In the current scenario, the conscious agent pushing for the creation of this particular social class is represented by multinationals advertising the westernized lifestyle as a way of climbing the social ladder.

<sup>13</sup> Bhattacharya Mehta 2.

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<sup>14</sup> Jean Paul Sartre, "Colonialism is a System," *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, edited by Haddour, Brewer and McWilliams. (London and New York: Routledge, 2001). He explains how France's industry, having a monopoly over the Algerian market (unlike in the international market where prices could be too high) creates an artificial consumer class in Algeria to which to sell French consumer goods. This is accomplished through a complex but efficient process: French colonists in Algeria gradually take over land from the native Algerian population under various pretexts, and use this land to produce food products and raw materials that is sold to France; this allows them to gain the buying power that enables them to buy manufactured goods from France. The French capital can multiply without ever having to leave France or competing in the international market. The only victims are the native Algerians, who gradually lose their food growing land to colonists who use them to produce luxury items such as wine and oranges. (32-39)

<sup>15</sup> Tejaswini Ganti, *Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 37-38.

<sup>16</sup> See Virdi 4 for an explanation of the "mixed socialist" economic model.

<sup>17</sup> See Rosie Thomas. "Melodrama and the Negotiation of Morality in Mainstream Hindi Film," *Consuming Modernity*, edited by Carol Breckenridge. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 157-82.

<sup>18</sup> *Lagaan*, DVD, directed by Ashutosh Gowariker (2001). *Swades*, DVD, directed by Ashutosh Gowariker (2004). *Rang de Basanti*, DVD, directed by Rakesh Mehra (2006).

<sup>19</sup> Ramleela is an enactment, often a musical representation, of the struggle between Rama and Ravana according to the mythological text *Ramayana*. It is widely popular as a metaphor of the fight between good and evil.

<sup>20</sup> Manisha Basu. "Rang De Basanti: The Solvent Brown and Other Imperial Colors," *Bollywood and Globalization: Indian Popular Cinema, Nation, and Diaspora*, edited by Rini Bhattacharya Mehta and Rajeswari V. Pandharipande. (London and New York: Anthem Press, 2010), 94.

<sup>21</sup> Virdi 169.

<sup>22</sup> Virdi 168. Cf. Carol Clover.

<sup>23</sup> Virdi 170. Cf. Asish Rajadhyaksha.

<sup>24</sup> The problem with the visual representation of rape is that the sexual content of the scenes can override the impact of violence and violation, ultimately providing voyeuristic pleasure to certain sections of the male audience. Some rape-revenge films gain popularity (often contrary to directorial intent) because of the sexual content of the rape scene.

<sup>25</sup> *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge*, DVD, directed by Aditya Chopra (Mumbai: Yash Raj Films, 1995).

<sup>26</sup> Patricia Uberoi. "The Diaspora Comes Home: Disciplining Desire in DDLJ," *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 32: 2, (1998), 305.

<sup>27</sup> *Dil Chahta Hai*, DVD, directed by Farhan Akhtar (2001).

<sup>28</sup> Madhavi Menon. "Working Notes. Bollywood Filmmaker Farhan Akhtar, Interviewed by Madhavi Menon," *South Asian Popular Culture*, 5:1, (2007): 77 – 85.

<sup>29</sup> *Lajja*, DVD, directed by Rajkumar Santoshi (2001).

<sup>30</sup> Sudeep Dasgupta, "Visual Culture and the Place of Modernity", in *Internationalizing Cultural Studies: An Anthology*, edited by M. Ackbar Abbas and John Nguyet Erni.

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(Cornwall:Wiley Blackwell, 2005), 236. See discussion of *Seeta Aur Geeta*[directed by Ramesh Sippy (1972)] in last chapter.

<sup>31</sup> From my personal experience, the confusion seems common enough. The Student Activities Board of the University of Kentucky arranged what they called a “Night of Bollywood” last year. On being asked to introduce the film, I realized that the organizers had chosen Gurinder Chadha’s *Bride and Prejudice* to represent Bollywood. The majority of the audience, when asked if they knew the film they were about to watch was not a Bollywood film, answered in the negative.

<sup>32</sup> Arjun Appadurai, “Patriotism and Its Futures,” *Public Culture* 5, no 3 (1993): 411-429.

<sup>33</sup> *Bend it Like Beckham*, DVD, directed by Gurinder Chadha (Tucson: 20th Century Fox, 2003).

<sup>34</sup> *Monsoon Wedding*, VHS, directed by Mira Nair (Washington DC: Universal Studios, 2001) and *The Namesake*, DVD, directed by Mira Nair (Tucson: 20th Century Fox, 2006).

<sup>35</sup> Uberoi 307-308.

<sup>36</sup> Sangita Gopal, “Sentimental Symptoms: The Films of Karan Johar and Bombay Cinema,” *Bollywood and Globalization: Indian Popular Cinema, Nation, and Diaspora*, edited by Rini Bhattacharya Mehta and Rajeswari V. Pandharipande (London and New York: Anthem Press, 2010), 24.

<sup>37</sup> Gopal 26.

<sup>38</sup> Jhumpa Lahiri, “My Two Lives,” *Newsweek*, March 6 2006, 43.

<sup>39</sup> Farha Shariff, “Straddling the Cultural Divide: Second-Generation South Asian Identity and *The Namesake*,” *Changing English* 15, no 4 (2008): 457 – 466.

<sup>40</sup> He marries Moushumi in the height of his identity confusion partly because she is Bengali, but comes to regret the decision afterwards.

## Chapter Four

### Twining and Amnesia: The Alleged Unreal as a Metaphor for the Nation

Rashid the rickshaw boy was seventeen and on his way home from the cinema. That morning he had seen two men pushing a low trolley on which were mounted two enormous hand-painted posters, back-to-back, advertising the new film *Gai-Wallah*, starring Rashid's favorite actor Dev. FRESH FROM FIFTY FIERCE WEEKS IN DELHI! STRIGHT FROM SIXTY-THREE SHARPSHOOTER WEEKS IN BOMBAY! the posters cried. SECOND RIP-ROARIOUS YEAR! The film was an eastern Western. Its hero, Dev, who was not slim, rode the range alone.<sup>1</sup>

Rickshaw boy Rashid's immersion in the discourse of popular cinema and the way in which his obsession determines the course of the narrative of *Midnight's Children* is one of the many instances which indicate that Salman Rushdie chooses to utilize popular Hindi cinema as both the background and the narrative framework for this novel.<sup>2</sup> The life of the protagonist, Saleem Sinai, is a close replica of a formulaic plot from popular cinema, marked by elements such as babies switched at birth and temporary amnesia. This reflection of popular cinema's generic conventions in a work of postcolonial fiction is more than a stylistic choice; the characteristic elements of Rushdie's novels in general tend to be inherently similar to those utilized by popular Indian cinema. These two apparently unrelated genres share various zones of overlap, among which there seems to be at least one aspect that clearly binds the two—the way in which both genres approach realism. Postcolonial fictive narratives often tend to rely on magical realism for narrative purposes, while critics frequently see popular Indian films as “unrealistic,” having no regard for western modes of cinematic realism. It should be conceded here that the parallel I draw between popular film and postcolonial literature operates more on the level of postcolonial political consciousness than on similarities of technique. The alleged unreal of Indian cinema arises, in other words, out of the narrative

needs of the postcolonial subject. This chapter examines the causes behind allegations of unrealism in popular Indian cinema, and seeks to analyze the theoretical import of unrealistic cinematic elements in socio-political terms.<sup>3</sup>

It is evident that in spite of the tremendous popularity of these films both at home and abroad, the concern with the “unrealistic” nature of these films, especially as compared to European and Hollywood productions, still abides. There continue to be caustic attacks on these films by critics at home and abroad, as if the extent of their unrealism somehow goes beyond that of other popular genres. Even as Hollywood, for example, continues to churn out blockbusters on subjects that range from the improbable to the incredible, the critique of Indian cinema’s lack of realism remains mostly as a reminder of the infantilism of an erstwhile colony.<sup>4</sup> The comparison to Hollywood is also a consistent feature of this manner of critique. Referring to Madhava Prasad’s comment on the lack of realism in popular Hindi cinema Gayatri Gopinath writes: “[Many] film scholars have pointed out that, in a departure from the realist aesthetic and commitment to narrative integrity that mark classical Hollywood cinema, popular Hindi cinema is instead ‘distinctly and consistently anti-realist.’”<sup>5</sup> That Gopinath reads Prasad’s comment with reference to classical Hollywood goes to show two things. It indicates, first of all, the level of acceptance that Hollywood has garnered as the center for cinematic realism in spite of much evidence to the contrary. It also shows that the majority of academic conversations on Indian cinema take Hollywood as a point of reference. I believe the subject of realism, at least for the purpose of cinema, is best approached through a categorization of the term into visual, logical and narrative realisms. It should be noted that the critique of Indian cinema often confuses the issue of visual realism with that of

logical realism. Hollywood does painstakingly establish visual realism (like in period details), but it often has very little regard for logical realism; there is no dearth of the improbable there as well. The nature of realism in any national cinema is neither well defined nor constant, but the accusations regarding the lack of realism in Indian films are especially prominent. In fact, this impression is so strong, that it has also given rise to a persistent tendency in critics to undermine Indian films as immature or ill constructed. Sheila J. Nayar quotes *The Film Encyclopedia* describing popular Hindi cinema as “long, glossy, semi-literate, replete with stock situations and moralistic clichés...escapist entertainment.”<sup>6</sup> Until very recently, the collective critique of popular Indian cinema (often by Indian critics from within the academic diaspora) is nothing short of a commentary on the shallowness of the Indian national character. In an article titled “Bombay Films: The Cinema as a Metaphor for Indian Society and Politics,” published in 1992, Akbar S. Ahmed introduces his subject with an apology for “the vulgarity and extravagance of the popular Indian film,” and goes on to suggest:

The Indian capacity either to adapt seriously or to plagiarize effectively is weak. The concentration span of the Indian audience is brief, and its interest cannot be sustained for long. It vulgarizes what it touches. History is reduced to *bazaar* stereotypes...and English literary classics to Indian tearjerkers with convoluted plots and sub-plots through which the outlines of the original are barely visible.<sup>7</sup>

Not only are the films in a category that must be clearly demarcated from “English literary classics,” they apparently bear the telltale signs of a deficient and infantile national character. The article is proof that even though Indian popular cinema has visibly marketed itself as an entertainment genre targeting low and middle-brow audiences, the sentiment that Indian popular cinema lacks critical thought and is somehow inferior to other national cinemas is clearly predominant in the 1990s.

The majority of contemporary critics of Indian cinema seem embarrassed by Indian popular cinema's melodramatic modes, its tendency to rehash formulaic plots, and its carnivalesque song and dance routines, but they never acknowledge that many a genre of popular cinema around the world operates on exactly the same principles. Even though the most recent scholarship has presented more balanced critical analyses of Indian cinema, the sentiment that popular cinema is not quite realistic is still a lingering concern in the current decade. Jyotika Viridi writes, "Even though they abide by other realistic conventions, such as cause-and effect linear narratives, continuity editing, and spatial/temporal unity, the films show scant regard for looking 'authentic' or bearing a similitude to realism."<sup>8</sup> The realism that critics are looking for, it should be noted from this comment, often assumes vague proportions, whereby the actual nature of the alleged unrealism cannot be gauged unless it is with reference to other forms of cinema.

However, a closer look at such critiques does seem to indicate particular disapproval from critics of certain specific elements in popular cinema, like the overuse of coincidences, twinning, amnesia, or sudden and unexplained changes of locale for dream or song sequences. Even though most of these elements have been part of the cinematic stock for films from all over the world, the common allegation is that popular Indian cinema rests heavily on all or most of these, and continue to do so even after such trends have long ceased to be utilized elsewhere. In truth, however, many of these tropes actually continue to be extremely popular in various mainstream national cinemas. A recent article from the British Medical Journal compares medical cases of amnesia with filmic representation of amnesia in mainstream Hollywood films, and provides various examples of amnesia from this particular genre.<sup>9</sup> The article draws on the *Bourne* series

starring Matt Damon as the most recent and easily recognizable example of the depiction of amnesia on film, and provides an impressive list of Hollywood blockbusters that utilize this device. The writer emphasizes that the disconnect between actual amnesia cases, and establishes that the cinematic representation of the ailment in Hollywood is often *unrealistic*, at least in terms of logical realism:

In the real world, most profound amnesic syndromes have a clear neurological or psychiatric basis. True dissociative amnesia or fugue states are rare, but people with such conditions are able to learn new information and perform everyday tasks in the context of a profound retrograde amnesia triggered by a traumatic event. The most commonly agreed features of organic amnesic syndromes include normal intelligence and attention span, with severe and permanent difficulties in taking in new information. Personality and identity are unaffected. These distinctions, which in a medical setting are critical in terms of prognosis and treatment, are often blurred at the movies.<sup>10</sup>

Unrealism in dealing with medical conditions like amnesia then, is also a typical characteristic of film genres other than popular Indian film, and even though the accusations of unrealism in Indian cinema remain persistent, elements such as amnesia are quite common devices elsewhere. This chapter scrutinizes popular post-independence Hindi films, especially those that have become classic examples of these “unrealistic” devices. The twinning trope in films like *Sita Aur Geeta* (1972) and *Gol Maal* (1979), fraternal conflict in *Deewar* (1975), religion and fraternity in *Amar Akbar Anthony* (1977), amnesia in *Sadma* (1982) and *Henna* (1991), and instances of coincidences examined in this chapter indicate that the unrealistic elements of popular cinema provide a commentary on the conditions of the nation-state of India. Twinning and amnesia become metaphors for the Partition of the nation, post-independence and contemporary communal violence, diversity and national fraternity.



The overuse of these elements in popular cinema lends itself to various interpretations, but its connection to concepts of nation, nationalism and the Indian national character is unmistakable. This chapter examines how, like postcolonial fiction, postcolonial Indian cinema often undertakes to incorporate elements that seem unreal, but actually operate as political signifiers for the Indian nation and its anxieties. I examine common, and often clichéd elements that might assume metaphorical meanings in popular literary and cinematic narratives (twin brothers representing good and evil, for example) to analyze how Indian popular cinema extends these metaphors to represent socio-political conditions particular to India (twin brothers in conflict representing Hindu and Muslim communities). Extended discussions of the metaphorical relationship between stock cinematic devices like twinning or fraternal conflict and the Partition of India have been part of the critical discourse on Indian cinema for some time now. Bhaskar Sarkar's work on post-Partition Indian cinema points out how doubling, amnesia, accidents, natural disasters, homelessness and cross-dressing become metaphors for different forms of trauma suffered through Partition. He says:

A set of beguiling thematic displacements enabled popular cinema to simultaneously deflect and present, as enigmatic runes, the ordeal of the Partition. The loss of a unified community and of territorial integrity thwarted the dream of a national family—the compelling ideological edifice that anchors many a modern nationalist movement. Not surprisingly, in the post-1947 era, the inversion of this foundational allegory became a primary source of registering the widely felt disillusionment.<sup>11</sup>

By this formulation then, the unreal of popular cinema is a continuation of the nationalist discourse in cinematic terms. The variety of these metaphors points out the continuing need of the population to overcome the trauma by re-living it. If Partition and the communal violence ensuing from it limited the possibility of a conversation on national

unification, then the so-called unreal of popular cinema becomes one of the few possible ways to approach the subject. The different forms of unreal assume metaphorical value in the context of the political violence. If this unreal is indeed a form of fantasy, it does not represent the category of fantasy that provides audiences with the pleasure of escaping their socio-political conditions; contrary to the critical opinion that popular Indian films are little but unimaginative repetitions of cinematic formulae, the films can actually lead audiences to reassess the impact of political situations post-independence. Rebecca M. Brown analyses the trope of separated brothers in the 1965 film *Waqt* as a metaphor for the Partition of India:

Because of the sensitivity of the topic, the film *Waqt* does not directly portray Partition, but instead uses an earthquake as a metaphor for this break... the film participates in a certain nostalgic melancholy for pre- Partition India, a longing for a simpler time prior to the devastation of the earthquake/Partition.<sup>12</sup>

Even though pre-partition India was hardly a “simpler time,” and Brown’s argument could be true for any form of separation under similar circumstances, she establishes that the earthquake in *Waqt* operates as a the metaphorical event that marks the disintegration of the family/nation in the film. Separation of families is not uncommon in film or literature, and certainly not exclusive to the Indian political context. However, the efficacy of the separation metaphor for India has been established through repetitive cinematic usage in such a way that even though such metaphors are not specific to India, they have become elements particular to the Indian political condition. Eventually, repetition has led to a popularly recognizable connection between nation and separation/amnesia, a pattern further reiterated in postcolonial fiction. The fact that *Midnight’s Children* employs many stock cinematic devices for the purpose of political satire, for example, emphasizes the potential of unrealistic elements for social and

political commentary on the nation. Taking Saleem Sinai's journey across the Pakistan-India border in a basket as an example, it is possible to see how the real/unreal operates within the postcolonial sphere. Parvati-the witch puts Saleem in a wicker basket, and makes him disappear: "Without passport or permit, I returned, cloaked in invisibility, to the land of my birth; believe, don't believe, but even a sceptic will have to provide another explanation for my presence here."<sup>13</sup> The metaphor of invisibility in crossing a border is apparent here, as is the emphasis on the unreal nature of the act ("believe, don't believe"). Magical realism emphasizes the political import of invisible border-crossings in a postcolonial space where borders have recently and arbitrarily been laid down, and where "passport or permit" would have been unnecessary in the recent past.<sup>14</sup>

Postcolonial fiction tends to rely on unrealistic devices mostly in the form of magical realism in order to symbolize the national and transnational positioning of the postcolonial subject. The postcolonial space needs to be represented through fantasy because its specificities cannot be described with the dominant discourse. Rushdie explains the rationale of the unreal as follows:

As Richard Wright found long ago in America, black and white descriptions of society are no longer compatible. Fantasy, or the mingling of fantasy and naturalism, is one way of dealing with these problems. It offers a way of echoing in our work the issues faced by all of us: how to build a new, 'modern' world out of an old, legend-haunted civilization, an old culture which we have brought into the heart of a new world.<sup>15</sup>

From the dominant western perspectives, the conditions of *Others'* spaces often seem "unreal," specifically because the older spaces are in conflict with the modern worlds, and the only possible way to bridge the two is through the unreal. It might be added that the conflict of the modern and the antiquated is not the only possible conflict here; the unreal might also be born out of the conflict between what is apparently the norm and any

deviations from it. To go back to Rushdie's reference to Wright, if whiteness is the norm, then blackness must be unreal. There is no doubt that realism, as we know it, has been theorized as a western conception—from Plato's understanding of the real as the transcendental, to the emphasis in 19th century Europe on realism and its offshoot, naturalism, the subject of realism remains as a comparative term, always reemerging as a reaction to something that is less real. According to Milicent Marcus,

[T]he realist perspective means a grasp of the underlying dynamics of historical development, a corresponding vision of the future which will emerge from the movement of history so discerned, and a belief that the social order is modifiable, and therefore perfectable.<sup>16</sup>

Realism, in other words, ensures progression towards a *perfectible social order*, the promise of social betterment through the portrayal of the real. It is possibly this inherent promise of progress that establishes realism as the marker of *better* cinema. Sumita Chakravarty says, "the achievement of realism in a film becomes a mark of value, a sign of sincerity and truthfulness on the part of the filmmaker and of 'authenticity' of the material presented."<sup>17</sup> This concept of social progression, it must be noted, bears a certain similarity to the colonial projects of *betterment* of non-western societies. The argument of unrealism as applied to Indian popular cinema, it might thus be said, focuses on its existing distance from the more perfect order of the west. However, the category of western realism has never been able to capture the socio-economic realities of the third world, one of the reasons that might provide a valid basis of its rejection by third world film. The category of postcolonial cinematic realism can never be on the same plane as that of either colonial or neo-colonial cinematic traditions; as in literature, the narrative must make significant departures from the established and dominant modes of discourse to capture the nuances of third world reality. Indian cinema seems to have established its

own mode of realism, or the lack of it, much in the mode of postcolonial fiction. This acts as an effective point of reference for the analyses of the unrealistic devices in Indian cinema. Certain generic conventions are perceived as unreal, because irrespective of the critics' location, "western realism" is the cinematic norm. Any deviation from that norm is cause for embarrassment, leading to, in extreme cases, a self-berating comparison to western modes of filmmaking. It must also be said that the genre of popular cinema in India has established its codes well enough for any criticism regarding its unrealism to be unacceptable any more; it follows certain well-established formulae, no more unrealistic than those utilized in any other popular genre.

The nature of the unreal in Indian cinema, however, merits a detailed discussion. Homi Bhabha calls magical realism "the literary language of the emergent postcolonial world," a statement when extended to the realm of film, could be taken to explain why Indian cinema, as a particular brand of postcolonial film, has intentionally taken on "unrealistic" modes of expression.<sup>18</sup> Rushdie says the following with reference to magical realism of Garcia Marquez:

*El realismo magical*, magic realism, at least as practiced by Marquez, is a development out of Surrealism that expresses a genuinely 'Third World' consciousness. It deals with what Naipaul has called 'half-made' societies, in which the impossibly old struggles with the appallingly new, in which public corruptions and private anguishes are somehow more garish and extreme than they ever get in the so-called 'North', where centuries of wealth and power have formed thick layers over the surface of what's really going on. In the works of Marquez, impossible things happen constantly, and quite plausibly, out in the open under the midday sun.<sup>19</sup>

It must be acknowledged, however, that the unreal of popular Indian cinema is not magical realism; however improbable, it is never fantastic in the sense that the fiction is. The form utilized by Indian films is not magical realism per se, both because the term is a

distinct literary appellation that is not commonly associated with cinema, and because the term does not describe the unrealistic modes particular to Indian cinema. The unrealistic elements of Indian cinema owe their unnaturalness not to the physical improbability of occurrences in the narrative, but to their overuse in the genre as a whole, and their improbable concentration in a single film. In other words, the flying carpets of Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or the physical transformation of the protagonist into a goat in Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* are not to be expected here; rather, couples run into each other accidentally countless times in a film, lost brothers chance upon each other miraculously, and memories are lost and regained with little regard for the actual statistics for amnesia. There can be, for example, countless coincidences in a single film, as well as formulaic coincidences like lovers literally crashing into each other on the streets. We might remember the Salman Khan- Madhuri Dixit encounter in *Saajan* (1991) as a classic example of the chance encounter. The status of such devices as clichés is further strengthened by the fact that in later films like *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995), chance meetings are replaced by chance passings-by without the lovers-to-be being actually aware of each other's presence, a move that is hailed to be fresh in Bollywood. Nevertheless, coincidences like chance meetings remain extremely popular in commercial film. In other words, these are not fantastic elements per se, but elements that could be expected in cinema, and often rendered acceptable to audiences via a willing suspension of disbelief. Kieslowski's *Blind Chance* (1987), for example, is a comparatively highbrow film about the role of chance in determining the fate of characters; it analyzes coincidence from a philosophical perspective following the conventions of western cinematic realism. Elements like coincidence, in other words,

occur commonly in cinematic narratives, but popular cinema in India makes these elements a common device for plots.

The incidents themselves then, are not unreal or improbable, but they are definitely “more garish and extreme than they ever get in the so-called ‘North’.”<sup>20</sup> Even if this particular quality is designated as somehow *unreal*, it can be argued that this attitude of looking into a world of impossibilities is entirely self-willed; its presence is neither accidental nor unthinking. The postcolonial audience of India is acutely aware of western trends and fashions because it is constantly exposed to it; viewers are very much aware, for example, that the popularity of the musical has completely declined in Hollywood.<sup>21</sup> The fact that in spite of such awareness, musicals continue to be the most popular form of cinematic expression in India is indicative of how, not unlike a willing suspension of disbelief for the sake of cinematic pleasure, the population willingly participates in a delusional world.

Psychologist and film-critic Sudhir Kakar’s article in *Indian Cinema Superbazar* analyzes the collective consciousness of the Indian population by referring to popular Hindi films as “a collective fantasy containing unconscious material and the hidden wishes of a vast number of people.”<sup>22</sup> If we are to accept Kakar’s understanding of the popularity of mainstream Hindi cinema as a form of pleasurable escapism or fantasy, we tend to ignore the political implications of “escapism.”<sup>23</sup> If this blatant disregard for the probable is indeed triggered by escapism, then what exactly is the audience being tempted to escape? It is evident that the aspects of lavishness and exotic settings in popular Indian film are in fact clear reactions against the economic conditions of the postcolonial state, spectacles made necessary by the commodity fetishism of western

colonialism that every postcolonial nation has inherited. Popular film has become, for all practical purposes, the display window that merely emphasizes the incompatibility of the world of film and the real world of postcolonial economic deprivation.

As might be expected of an industry that regularly constructs and markets films on the basis of star power, song-and-dance sequences that frequently seem irrelevant to the overall story, a script that is nearly always hastily cobbled together and largely predictable endings, the chief description of Bollywood cinema is that it is pure fantasy... If the cinema provides them with the opportunity to temporarily escape the rigours of poverty, political turbulence or family discord, then, some filmmakers argue, escapist drama owes no apologies to its critics.<sup>24</sup>

It must also be kept in mind that popular cinema, irrespective of its origins, has long been established as a form of escapism for Indian cinema to be exclusively connected to spectatorial wish fulfillment through fantasy. In contrast to this analysis, Bhaskar Sarkar's psychological analysis of popular cinema reads any possible escapism as post-traumatic silence. He suggests that the primary analytical method in this case should be one of "hermeneutic association," whereby the apparently unrelated cinematic practices can be understood as a collective reflection of social trauma. He says:

Such a reading practice is motivated largely by retrospective constitution of the experience of Partition as a collective trauma, a frame suggested by the curious trajectory of the experience itself—the initial disorientation and silence, the gradual return of the repressed, and the recent outpouring of memories and representations... There is something about the medium of cinema that renders representations of traumatic experiences particularly problematic: its power to "bring to life" ontological reality threatens to make such experiences uncomfortably palpable.<sup>25</sup>

In other words, audiences who might have suffered the trauma of Partition firsthand, would not be willing to witness direct or graphic references to the event. Indian cinema has moved from the metaphors of Partition to actual depictions slowly, in the manner of a recovering trauma patient.



One primary question in this context is one of directorial intent. It is necessary to examine whether filmmakers recognize the political import of these metaphors. To answer such a question, it is vital to refer to Frederic Jameson's concept of the political unconscious. Jameson's theorization that every text is not merely political, but generated by politics, helps to explain the specificities of Indian cinema's use of unrealistic devices. In introducing the interpretation of literary texts, Jameson emphasizes that:

It [his book] conceives of the political perspective not as some supplementary method, not as an optional auxiliary to other interpretive methods current today—the psychoanalytical or the myth-critical, the stylistic, the ethical, the structural—but rather as the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation.<sup>26</sup>

It is from this perspective that the textual interpretation of Indian cinema is plausibly connected to the political condition of the postcolonial nation state. This connection, however, is hardly a direct conversation of the politics and cinema; the political discourse of postcolonial India, its anxieties surrounding existing problems with political divisiveness or communalism, are often translated to cinematic language through the unreal and the clichéd.

### **Twins and Siblings: Reflection, Separation, Nation**

The trope of separated twins or siblings is by no means specific to postcolonial fiction or film. It has a long literary history, dating back at least to the European Renaissance. The twins of British Renaissance drama are well loved the world over, and have become a part of the stockpile of global fiction, often easily recognized as a universal narrative device. Juliana de Nooy relates the literary history of twins and doubles:

Tales of twins and doubles are noticeably abundant in myth and legend, in the theatre of antiquity, and at two periods during modern times in Western literature: the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries... In English Renaissance and French

Classical theatre, twins appear above all in comic theatre. Shakespeare and Moliere find an antecedent in the Greek comedies of Menander and the Roma plays of Plautus... Then, after a relatively idle period of a century or so, doubles... regain prominence across Europe, tending to meet a tragic end in Romantic and fin de siècle prose fiction and gothic novels.<sup>27</sup>

Plot complications made possible by identical twins, or the accidental separation of twins (or siblings) at birth or in childhood and their eventual reuniting are well-established formulae for enduring comedic plots, as well as for tragedy. In India, the tradition of plots involving doubles might have derived from their European narrative counterparts, but the twin/double plot has been claimed by popular cinema, even more than in literature, as a device to be utilized over and over again.

This reliance on clichés is partially related to the issue of national myth-making. In pointing out how the tales of twins and doubles are recounted and retold in conversations, or reinvented in fiction and drama innumerable times, de Nooy underlines the mythic nature of the tales. Recounting the experiences of the author Michel Tournier (that audiences would often narrate some version of a twin anecdote even before knowing what the actual subject of his novel on identical twin brothers was), de Nooy says, “If Tournier’s point is that a myth is a story that is always already known, he demonstrates that it is a story that demands constant retelling.”<sup>28</sup> I have already emphasized in my discussion of pre-independence Indian cinema the inclination of popular Indian cinema to draw on myth; it also becomes apparent here that the compulsive retelling (compulsive because it “*demands* retelling”) of a story that is already known within a particular culture is a means of replicating cultural norms, a process through which cultural identity is re-established through the performative experience of participating in the process of storytelling. As a process, it is more active than passive, addressing audiences whose

interest in the story stems from the very fact that it is known to them. Hence, recognizing the myth provides the basis for spectatorial pleasure. This process of participating in a recognizable mythical narrative applies not merely to the issue of twins, but to the issue of repetition and retelling in general. Myth-making is an essential element of many forms of popular culture, guiding phenomena such as fandom or cult traditions, and the so-called problem of repetition in popular Indian cinema only goes to show that the generic conventions of these films have been established strongly enough them to have become a cultural exercise. Audiences enjoy the immersion in the interactive cultural experience instead of being disappointed by the repetition.

In spite of the popularity of twins and doubles in popular Indian cinema, there are slight variations in the manner in which the doubling is achieved. In other words, there appears to be a finite variety of formulae within this broader pattern of doubling. The films discussed in this section differ from each other in the ways that they employ the doubling. Doubling can be achieved through the characters of identical twins separated at birth, as in *Seeta Aur Geeta* (1972); it can be a case of unexplained similarity of appearance, as in *Don* (1978); it could also be the case of a single person forced to pretend that he has a twin, and hence play both roles, as in *Gol Maal* (1979); and finally, the doubling could often merely be a directorial choice in casting the same actor in two roles, usually that of mother/ daughter or father/son, as in *Aradhana* (1969) and *Lamhe* (1991). Although not all of these plots could be labeled as twinning per se, they bring into focus issues related to both personality (related to mirroring, reflection, and narcissism) and identity (national, religious or sexual).

The analysis of sibling relationships will often lead into psychoanalytical approaches to film theory. Especially, narcissism and sibling rivalry are terms that seem to surface time and again in the discussion of twins and siblings. However, I am skeptical about the application of psychoanalytical film theories to postcolonial film for a number of reasons. Firstly, the limitedness of Freudian psychoanalysis applied to cinema in general has been established beyond doubt, and the validity of applying a male-centric analytical methodology to all films is already suspect.<sup>29</sup> Secondly, in analyzing familial relationships, psychoanalysis draws on the primarily western model of filial interactions, often having ignored sibling relationships. Juliet Mitchell identifies the absence of the analysis of sibling interactions in psychoanalysis, and calls for a paradigm shift within the field:

Internalized social relationships are the psyche's major elements. ...the work here considers that siblings have, almost peculiarly, been left out of the picture. Our understanding of psychic and social relationships has foregrounded vertical interaction—lines of ascent and descent between ancestors, parents and children. During the larger part of the twentieth century the model has been between infant and mother; before that it was child and father... Why have we not considered that lateral relations in love and sexuality or in hate and war have needed a theoretical paradigm with which we might analyze, consider and seek to influence them?<sup>30</sup>

The answer to Mitchell's question possibly lies outside the sphere of psychoanalysis. The stress that psychoanalysis lays on the vertical (father-son/mother-daughter) structure of social interactions derives from the anthropological structure of western societies. In certain aspects, sibling relationships are markedly different in western and non-western societies. Non-western societies, for example, emphasize both vertical (parental) and lateral (inter-sibling) relations in social discourse. In an anthropological study of siblings in South Asia, Thomas S. Weisner differentiates between dominant cultural practices that distinguish sibling relationships in North America and South Asia:

Siblings in South Asia participate in shared activity settings *throughout their lives*. As in many parts of the world, South Asian siblings are likely to live with or near each other throughout life or if not, feel compelled to produce culturally acceptable reasons why not. They are also likely to share important subsistence resources and decision-making roles regarding the allocation of these resources. Siblings remain involved in decades-long negotiations and interdependent decisions about marriage, wealth, and residence.<sup>31</sup>

These cultural interactions show that the sibling relationships analyzed in this chapter are almost as vital as parental relationships. If indeed a psychoanalytical discourse be applied to them, it cannot be over-emphasizing vertical (parent/child) social structures. (I might also add that though Freudian psychoanalysis locates parent/child incest as the primary form of incest, sister/brother incest would fall into the same category in the South Asian context). Given this, the non-relevance of psychoanalytical theory as a whole in the context of Indian cinema becomes apparent. Certain aspects and terms might still be relevant, but it is especially not worthwhile to be making connections between narcissism or psychological identity and sexuality in siblings.

The plot of *Seeta Aur Geeta* conflates the psychoanalytical trope of twin identities and the moral divide of Romantic twins<sup>32</sup> with class issues and gender stereotyping in a specifically South Asian context.<sup>33</sup> Through a highly entertaining plot about sisters who look alike but have completely different personalities, the film helps to establish Seeta and Geeta as in two in one, each complementing the other. In playing each other's roles, they enact a wish fulfillment for the audience; meekness and audacity are put to their best uses, thereby completing what was lacking in their respective lives, without compromising their individuality. As one looks at the other, it becomes evident that they are reflections of each other, but also more perfect than in their individual forms. The narcissistic purpose of twinning becomes most evident when the two sisters finally come

face to face towards the end of the film. Geeta breaks into the room where Seeta is held captive, and introduces herself as her sister's "other *roop* (incarnation)," an implication that they are, in fact, different versions of a female avatar.<sup>34</sup> The associations with the avatar forms of female Hindu deities are clear here; Seeta is calm, acquiescing, yet victimized in her particular *roop*/avatar, but her sister complements her through her overbearingly just and powerful persona. In this particular case, the female twinning has been utilized as a warning against the hidden potential of the woman, who can, when pushed beyond endurance, appear in her other avatar to chastise her oppressors. In fact, from the perspective of Seeta's aunt and her accomplices, this is exactly what happens in the film. Since they have no idea that there has been a replacement, they see her essentially as the same person with a completely different personality. The morning after the runaway "Seeta" is brought home by the police is possibly the most entertaining and satisfying section of the film for any audience because it denotes just retaliation to the violence committed against the docile sister. To the utter shock and surprise of her aunt and her daughter, "Seeta" retaliates their abuse by kicking her cousin when she attempts to pull her out of bed, and twisting her aunt's arm when she hits her. Once she gets up, she orders the now cowering mother and daughter around, sending one to cook, and the other to clean. With this initial show of force (and following it up with more whenever necessary), she is able to gradually restore a new order to the household. She ensures that the wifely responsibilities rest with her aunt, that the elderly servant in the household gets his due respect, and that house keys and the right to sit at the head of the table are reinstated to the old grandmother. Even though the members of the household have no idea what caused this transformation, they do not seem to doubt that this is in fact the

same person; the physical similarity between the sisters not only establishes them as reflections of each other, but also as balanced and more complete versions of each other. Like Geeta, Seeta fills in the gaps in her sister's character by caring for her lower-class surrogate family, setting examples of kindness and gentleness to them, and reminding them of the importance of religion. This, when examined closely, also is a reestablishment of lost order, albeit without the drama. The purpose of twinning in this film therefore carries positive connotations of balance and completion, a factor that possibly prevents the permanent disorder (often culminating in death) of psychoanalytical narcissism.<sup>35</sup>

However, the twinning in *Seeta Aur Geeta* has a complex relation to the discourse on the national character I have described previously. There is no doubt that women remain signifiers of national identity in this film, often following prescriptive notions presented by men, but these are also often bypassed or violated in the film. Ravi, the man who wants to marry Geeta, initially refers to his conception of a true Indian woman when he describes his ideal match, but does not seem to follow through on this concept when it comes to choosing a bride. Early on in the film, after being praised by an elderly golf partner for returning from England with only a degree, and not a British wife in tow, he explains his tastes. He says he is looking for a "simple, sari-clad Hindustani woman," and even though he holds no prejudice against British women, he mentions a "difference in culture." The description he provides is by no means his own; he simply reiterates, without actually referring to moral virtues, the very distinction that the Indian nationalist discourse seems to make between Indian and western/westernized women. In the context of the film, his description seems to fit one of the sisters (Seeta) perfectly.<sup>36</sup> When he

goes to see Seeta, however, her aunt forces Seeta to appear before Ravi and his parents dressed in revealing western clothes, successfully creating the wrong impression. When Ravi meets her again, he has no idea that there has been a swap, and falls in love with Geeta in spite of her apparent deviations from the norms he had previously set for himself. Even though he seems to be a stickler for tradition in every aspect, he seems to overlook the fact that the woman he finally chooses is by no means the traditional Hindustani woman. He finds her wandering alone, readily accepting of his offer to go to a different town with him, and publicly drunk on their wedding day (Geeta's ploy to avoid getting married because Ravi does not know her true identity), but still ends up marrying her. For someone who comes to propose marriage to the woman he loves by first approaching her uncle saying, "Mom and Dad have sent me," or makes Geeta cover her head before approaching his parents, a street acrobat with an intensely rebellious character hardly seems to be the ideal choice, neither in terms of social class nor according to national/traditional beliefs. However, this indicates that the film itself and the twinning in particular signify a balance between social classes on one hand, and tradition and modernity in the other. Jyotika Viridi points out the discrepancies in portraying Geeta's character as the powerful feminist figure in the film. She explains that Geeta's role in the film is somewhat of an exception from the norms of popular film, because this carnivalesque overturning denotes

An interesting reversal of the conventional Indian feminist self-aggrandizing historical narrative, wherein the bourgeois woman "saves" lower-class women from social evils such as illiteracy, coercive reproductive control, and abusive marriages.<sup>37</sup>

This is a reversal not merely of social class whereby the lower class sister is in a position to rescue the other sister then, but also of the traditional narrative. The wayward and



rebellious figure is actually more empowered. However, it must also be noted that although Geeta herself is a social rebel (it is clear that she is used neither to housework nor to the role of the demure Indian woman), the order she seeks to reestablish is strictly traditional. The means she has to undertake for the purpose might be fiercely chauvinistic (physical abuse, including hitting her aunt and cousin, even whipping her aunt's lusty brother Ranjit; usurping economic control), but the values she wishes to uphold are very similar to the Indian values that Ravi refers to. In the scene (referred to above) where she claims control of the household from her aunt and cousin, she finds out that in Seeta's absence, her uncle was serving tea in the morning. Even though her uncle has been introduced as a kindly soul bullied constantly by the aunt, her justification in sending her aunt off to the kitchen seems to stem from her concern regarding traditional roles in a household. Her uncle also takes this rare opportunity to taunt his wife's neglect of her traditional role when he asks her if she remembers which way the kitchen is. The significance of this particular instance is that even Geeta, the absolute opposite of Ravi's idea, imbues very traditional values—the reason why Ravi possibly accepts her at the end. Her masquerade might seem to be in complete contrast to her sister's character, but there is an actual religious basis for her actions even here: in reading the *Gita* with her grandmother, Geeta is told that a lie used to restore justice and order is justifiable.<sup>38</sup> She uses this logic to justify her impersonation of Seeta, but would not go to the extent of marrying Ravi without having revealed her identity.

In some films about siblings with different personalities, the conflict has been identified as purely moral; *Deewar* (1975) is a classic example of a seemingly moral conflict between brothers, one a police officer and the other a gangster. In *Seeta Aur*

*Geeta*, the difference in the sisters' personalities is more a source of mischief than an impetus for moral melodrama. Both Rosie Thomas and Jyotika Viridi apply melodrama as the primary analytical framework for this particular film, but readings based on the film's "negotiation and redefinitions of the moral order" are essentially reductive, because they undermine both the particular nature of sibling relationships in the Indian society, and the metaphorical impact of the conflict.<sup>39</sup> In *Deewar*, the fact that the protagonists are brothers, but not twins, establishes a framework for opposition and contrast that also functions as a metaphor for a socio-political conflict within the Indian nation. Usually, the fact that the brothers are born of the same mother facilitates the metaphor of the nation because the figure of the mother can be treated as the motherland torn apart by fraternal conflict. Viridi interprets this particular aspect:

In *Deewar*, melodrama is mobilized by making the family the site of discourse about the State in terms of "nationalist" and "anti-nationalist" conflict and rhetoric. The mother (read motherland) is torn between two sons — a smuggler, Vijay (the lawless, anti-nationalist) and Ravi, a police officer (lawful, nationalist) — in fact the kernel of state power.<sup>40</sup>

However, she emphasizes the melodramatic elements of the film by interpreting (and to some extent simplifying) this particular metaphor for national conflict as a moral conflict between good and evil. That she also construes the conflict in *Deewar* as representing the political condition of 1970s India is further proof that the metaphor of the mother (usually of two sons) as the symbol for the motherland has been reduced to a simplistic and melodramatic moral conflict, the product of a specific political/historical time period. However, we must also note that the conflation of the (Hindu) mother figure with the motherland has been popular since the time of *Mother India* (1957).<sup>41</sup> This particular trope, overused and often over-dramatized by popular Indian cinema, stands for more

than a politically and ideally polarized nation at a particular historical moment. Rather, it is a politically motivated call for the ideological unification and moral betterment of the nation, often at the cost of familial bonds. If it were indeed merely a moral conflict between good and evil, the evil sibling would not necessarily need to be killed by a member of his own family.

It might be worthwhile to notice that in such cases, the wayward son is not a complete moral degenerate, but rather a voice that seeks to validate violence or lawlessness as acceptable counters to the postcolonial socio-political chaos. However, to stray from the path of honesty or integrity in popular Hindi film is to threaten the integrity of the national ideal, an offense punishable by death in the hands of a family member (the mother in *Mother India*, and the brother in *Deewar*). It is therefore not a punishment for evilness in the melodramatic mode, but a metaphorical reinstatement of national ideals, often accompanied by a sympathetic acknowledgment of the social/psychological reasons behind the antagonists' crimes. The wayward brothers in both the films point out the greater evils within the system—the comparative immunity of moneylenders, black marketeers, corrupt lawmakers and businessmen are set up as the impetus for smaller crimes committed by these men. When Vijay and Ravi's mother comes to know that the source of his wealth is illegal, Vijay tries to establish his comparative innocence by pointing out the actual perpetrators of the socio-economic oppression that he and his family have long suffered from. On being asked to confess his crimes by signing on a paper his brother (the police inspector) has prepared for him, he asks that the rich people who had exploited his family for so long sign it first. He sees and projects his crimes as the inevitable psychological repercussion of the injustice

directed at him since his childhood. His mother and his brother do not offer counterarguments to his rant; it is as if their choice to remain honest under similar circumstances speaks for itself. When his mother, a woman who raised her two sons without compromising her chastity, decides to leave his stately house for Ravi's modest apartment, she silently points out the flaws in Vijay's arguments without actually arguing with him. Vijay might be raising the same questions as any disgruntled citizen of the postcolonial state, but his family underlines the unquestionable value of honesty in the Indian national character. Employing the figure of the brothers in conflict helps articulate the doubts regarding the basic principles of such a character—the significance of honesty, generosity, or even religion in a country whose political system seems to be crumbling under the weight of corruption and malpractices are all brought into question. The film's answer to such questions, however, discourages straying from the established national ideals no matter how strong the impulse is, and issues a warning that such a choice might result in unnatural acts such as fratricide (read communal violence) within the family structure.

Similar concerns about national ideals, albeit in a completely different tone, are to be found in Hrisikesh Mukherjee's *Gol Maal* (1979). The film employs a false twinning in a hilarious plot that primarily parodies traditional/national beliefs regarding gender, marriage and respectability.<sup>42</sup> The false twin Laxman must be brought into the picture because Ram Prasad, the modern Indian male, falls below the expectations of his employer. These expectations, when scrutinized closely, are found to correspond to the post-independence ideals of Indian maleness, with a certain amount of eccentricity thrown in for the sake of humor. Bhabani Shankar's prescription characterizes the Indian

male who fits the mold of pure Indianness (outlined earlier)—honest, un-westernized, religious, humble, and respectful towards elders (especially mothers). Ram Prasad is not only able to convince his employer that he embodies all these qualities; he ensures that the conning is complete by speaking very formal Hindi (completely avoiding English words and often utilizing archaic expressions), dressing extremely austere, and taking every opportunity to prove his devotion to Indian values. He constantly pretends to treat his mother (actually a hired actress) with utmost devotion and respect, keeps mentioning his ideals in his speech, and gives the impression that he is intensely religious. His (imaginary) twin accommodates all the undesirable qualities of Indian maleness. Ram Prasad's love of music and games, his western attires and smart haircuts, and even his sexuality are all conveniently displaced in the imaginary twin. By inventing this twin, he exaggerates both his own goodness (or what counts as goodness on his employer's terms) and his imagined brother's waywardness, splitting his own personality into its extremes.

The apparent justification for his action is to manipulate his boss's eccentricity in order to keep the job he is genuinely worthy of. However, once the twin is introduced, he invites complete chaos into his life; he is forced to change clothes and put on or take off his false moustache constantly, keep on improvising lies in order for his deceit to remain undiscovered, and even has to invent a false mother. In spite of all his efforts, however, he is caught red-handed by Bhavani Shankar. The chaos that derives from his decision to split up his personality underlines the impossibility that the ideal Indian male character might even exist—Bhavani Shankar's ideal is just a figment of imagination, and even in trying to create a real character out of that ideal, Ram Prasad is only able to create a carnivalesque lack of order and sanity. *Gol Maal's* treatment of the mother figure is

similarly a parody of expectations regarding mothers and motherhood in popular Hindi film. Unlike the idealistic, sacrificial mothers of popular cinema, the mother in *Gol Maal* is actually an actress, a society lady in her real life, playing the role of the loving widowed mother of two sons. In order to help Ram Prasad when his boss arrives unexpectedly (he is apparently so moved by the motherly qualities in her that he shows up to pay his respects without notice), she has to climb in through the kitchen window. Like the false twinning, this caricature of the most sacred figures in Indian cinema once again underlines the unrealistic nature of national ideals commonly portrayed in film.

The impact of the twinning trope on the popular consciousness becomes evident in the Bengali film *Gupi Gyne Bagha Byne* (1968).<sup>43</sup> This film is often included in Satyajit Ray's prominent group of children's films, but like its sequel *Hirok Rajar Deshe* (1980), the film carries a covert political message. The main characters in this film are not twins, but two brothers (both played by the same actor), who rule the fictional rival kingdoms of Shundi and Halla. It might be noted that even though a parallel filmmaker like Roy utilizes the twinning trope, it can only appear in a children's film. The apparent conflict between the brothers, in this case, is hardly a real conflict because the king of Halla is involved in it unwillingly. Metaphorically, this is also the image of a split nation, where there is no actual reason for conflict, and the parties involved are unwilling participants in the war because they recognize the value of familial ties. The conflict, therefore, is caused by an outside malignant force, and is almost successful in pitching the brothers, who are actually mirror images, against each other. Every time the evil minister of Halla drugs the king, he changes in attitude as well as in appearance—his beard and moustache appear twirled in the exaggerated melodramatic mode of fantasy

and fairytale, and he starts looking distinctively different from his brother. Once he returns to his actual state, he looks more like his docile brother. The final scene, where the brothers come face to face and embrace, highlights the fact that they are physically similar, and hence non-threatening to each other. With the divisive forces now in check, the two brothers and their two warring kingdoms can come together as single harmonious state.

This particular film might establish why the splitting symbolized in brothers or twins is often read as a symbol of the *anxiety* derived from national divide, a concept that is especially significant in the historical context of the Indian subcontinent. The theory that separated twins often act as a symbol for the divided Indian nation in Indian film and literature has increasingly gained critical approval. The primary thrust of the argument is on the sensitivity of the subject even in the current context; as religious conflicts continue unabated in India, cinema finds it more convenient to employ a metaphor to refer to the subject. Even though the use of twins has been a popular trope in literature from all over the world, it is possible to see how it serves as a suitable metaphor for the post-Partition Indian nation and continuing religious conflicts within the nation. Without actually referring back to the history of the country, the figures of the separated twins serve to emphasize the various positions available to the Indian population in terms of class, caste, or religion; the fact that characters in a film are twins or siblings then establishes the all-surpassing familial/national bond between them, and by extension, between the citizens of the nation. This metaphor for socio-political unity (even though the emphasis rarely shifts from a dominant north-Indian culture) might be read in a number of ways: as representing a thinly camouflaged governmental agenda in promoting national unity, a

sentimental hearkening back to a partly imagined pre-independence harmony, or a simplistic yet sincere attempt at pointing out the possibility of a harmonious society within a nation of multiplicities.

A number of popular films have aimed to underline national unity in a nation divided by such conflicts through the figures of twins/brothers separated at birth, and brought up in different class and religious settings. Manmohan Desai's 1977 film *Amar Akbar Anthony* is the most prominent of the films in this genre where separated brothers with different religious and class identities represent the split motherland. Through a series of coincidences, the three brothers are brought up as Hindu, Muslim, and Christian after they are separated from each other from the base of a Gandhi statue on 15<sup>th</sup> August, the anniversary of India's independence. The metaphor of the motherland is thinly disguised in the figure of the blind mother, and the conflict between brothers is almost always in jest. This film is hardly similar to the serious conflict in *Deewar*. Rather, the point of the film is the strength of the familial bond between the brothers (who initially do not recognize each other as brothers) irrespective of their religious and class differences. They are steadfast in their respective faiths, but never let religion interfere with their relationships to each other. This apparent tolerance and respect for religion is however, slightly undermined by the fact that the brothers are all Hindu by birth, and they each find partners from their own communities in spite of what seems to be significant inter-religious socialization.<sup>44</sup>

But since Hindi cinema's approach has always been to attend to mainstream sensibilities, any attempts to deal with minority subjects and society, as many critics have pointed out, seems superficial or condescending. As Faiza Hirji points out:



Bollywood has been extensively studied for its nationalist themes, its widespread popularity, and its emphasis on tradition and ritual. For the most part, these traditions and rituals tend to be derived from Hindu mythology and symbolism, presenting an interesting paradox given that its audience is not composed exclusively of Hindu viewers. This contradiction is deepened by the fact that Bollywood's production and content are touched by the influences of other cultures and religions, including Islam... Given India's complicated political, cultural, and religious history and the more global concern with Islam's meaning and significance, Islam inevitably plays a significant – and somewhat transformed – role in popular Indian cinema. However... it also carries familiar associations with terrorism, violence, and intercultural misunderstanding.<sup>45</sup>

This essay provides an excellent analysis of the trends in representing a Muslim minority in popular Hindi cinema. The problems with the inadequate or incorrect representation of minorities are specifically important to our current metaphor of twins representing diversity in popular cinema, because ostensibly, it is this very divide in the population that the films serve to address.

### **Amnesia: Forgetting the National-Political Ideal**

Incidents of amnesia in popular Indian cinema, like the trope of twinning, denote a psychological anxiety about the divided nation. However, its connection to memory and remembrance relates it undeniably to the post-traumatic phase of the postcolonial experience; amnesia is effective in denoting the loss of memory pertaining to a form of socio-cultural or political experience that is derived from colonialism. Twinning is the first step, so to speak, through which the postcolonial subject distances herself from the experience of colonialism by displacing the problems of the divided nation to the figure of twin sisters or brothers. Amnesia is the second level of intentional distancing, whereby the postcolonial subject loses memory of the colonial experience, particularly that of Partition. It could help to achieve, for example, the ideal womanhood devoid of colonial/western influence (like in *Sadma*), or the undivided selfhood of the pre-colonial

and pre-Partition Indian nation (like in *Henna*). The effect is to produce the illusion that the colonial experience or Partition never really happened in India.

*Sadma* narrates the character of a single woman in two states—in and out of amnesia—as representing and contradicting, respectively, the figure of the ideal Indian woman. In *Sadma*, Laxmi, a modern, seemingly independent young girl, turns into a child-woman after losing her memory in an accident. The character is played by the extremely popular 80s actress Sridevi, whose glamorous public image was completely contrary to that of the unkempt and child-like woman she plays for the majority of the film. In her initial persona, she is dressed in western clothes (she is wearing trousers and a shirt, but most of her women friends are in bikinis), and is seen enjoying a vacation with her friends. She is without a chaperone, singing and dancing on the beach in the company of male and female friends. This small and apparently unimportant section of the film (it does not employ any dialogue), however, conveys a significant amount of information to the audience, who recognize her as an exception to the mold of the Hindustani woman—she is independent, willful and sexually attractive, or in other words, threatening to the male persona. Amnesia renders her helpless, and this section of her life successful brings her closer to the ideal Indian womanhood, and hence much less threatening. On the other hand, she is far from perfect even in this state, something that prevents the possibility for the audience to see her in the role of wife or mother. Even as a clichéd device, therefore, amnesia in this particular instance is successful in establishing the various levels of complexity in depicting womanhood in Indian cinema.

Laxmi's amnesia prevents her from recollecting anything regarding her past identity, and finding her lost and helpless, young schoolteacher Somu brings her home

with him. He starts taking care of her, and names her Reshmi. Along with her identity, Reshmi seems to have lost all consciousness regarding her sexuality, and assumes the mental maturity of a six-year old. She needs to be fed, clothed and taken care of, and often throws tantrums, but has the overall disposition of a happy and carefree child. Her caretaker does all in his power to care for her, but is also intensely aware of her sexuality. He even ignores the advances of another woman, both because he cares for Reshmi, and because he finds the other woman's forwardness inappropriate. At the end, Reshmi regains her memory, but simultaneously loses all recollection of her time with Somu. As she leaves with her parents, Somu runs to meet her, and since her train is already leaving, he can only hope to remind her of these intervening months by reenacting some of the antics that made her laugh in her previous state. She cannot recognize him, and upon seeing his apparently insane antics, remarks that he must be a madman.

This pattern of womanhood, from hip and independent to naïve and childlike is made possible through the use of amnesia. *Sadma* offers only two possibilities for Indian womanhood—the westernized, wayward and independent woman, and the child-like dependent. However, the film also makes some serious exceptions in making the male figure the primary caregiver, and the woman completely devoid of the sense of domestic responsibility. It is a regression into childhood and naiveté, an ideal state of womanhood because it does not carry the threat of independent feminine figures. At the same time, the shortcomings of such a figure are heavily regretted by Somu—at one point in the film, he brings Reshmi a sari, a “grown-up” dress, as a present. As she goes inside to put in on, he dozes off, and dreams of her appearing in the sari as a sexually alluring woman offering him a drink (the traditional bridal gesture on a wedding night). The fact that she

appears as both the potential sexual partner and the caregiver is an indication of the ways in which the child-woman falls short of the expectations of ideal womanhood. When she finally reappears before him, she has not been able to tie the sari, and cuts a pathetic, childish figure instead of the desirable woman he was dreaming of. However, even as he wants her to be sexually desirable, he would also like to retain control over her sexuality. A woman's unbridled sexuality is no less threatening to him: he is constantly threatened by his boss's wife Soni, who tries to seduce him on several occasions. Her figure is a reminder of the sexual threat of a woman, and hence his fear of losing control. In an article on the use of psychoanalysis in Hindi cinema, Dinesh Bhugra and Susham Gupta discuss how amnesia is used in popular Hindi cinema as a metaphor of the split between the Traditional Indian woman and her modern counterpart.<sup>46</sup> In discussing the central female character's split personality in *Raat Aur Din* (1967), the authors point out that this character suffers from a confusion between her westernized and Indian self—she is the cigarette-smoking, club hopping socialite in one instance, and the docile, domestic Indian wife in the next, a condition that calls for her cure with the help of *traditional* exorcism as well as *modern* psychiatry. This discussion further establishes that the tradition/modernity conflict in India often comes to be expressed through psychological conditions such as amnesia.

In *Sadma*, Reshmi's amnesia also leads to a lack self-consciousness regarding her own sexuality, a fact that renders her much more desirable to Somu, even as he regrets the fact. By taking care of her as he would of a child, Somu ensures that she is now at the extreme opposite end of the spectrum in terms of dependence; not only is she no longer the independent woman with many male acquaintances as at the beginning of the film,

she is now under the complete care and protection of a single male character, who is also her father-figure. This conflation of the father and the lover in Somu might seem problematic, but it is explained quite well if we acknowledge it as only as a role that ensures only a greater level of dependence by the woman.<sup>47</sup> Somu not only feeds Reshmi and plays with her, he literally carries her like a child on his back in the film. Stripped of the capability to appear threatening to him in any measure, she partly fulfils his (and the audience's) dream of the perfectly docile and controlled woman. But because she fails to be any more than the child in terms of sexuality, the possibility that she might actually be a lover or wife for Somu upon regaining her memory is completely absent. When she can remember who she is, she simultaneously loses all memory of her dependent state. She seems to be dressed more demurely than in her past, but there is little doubt that she will revert back to her pre-amnesia persona, a state which similarly forbids her from playing the traditional role of lover or wife or mother. In the case of *Sadma*, amnesia operates as a tool for male wish fulfillment, whereby the nostalgic longing for the national ideals of womanhood to be reinstated in the figure of the Indian woman is achieved because the woman *forgets* her modern self.

In *Henna* (1990), the national metaphor is expressed through an instance of amnesia symbolic of apparent loss of memory regarding the border between India and Pakistan. The protagonist Chunder, an Indian, falls into the river Jhelum on the boundary of India and Pakistan, and is rescued by Henna, a Pakistani woman. He loses memory of his life in India, and is to marry Henna when he recovers from his amnesia. He now knows that he was about to be married to his fiancée Chandni right before his accident, and must return to India. An army officer, Shahbaaz Khan, hampers his passage back,

and even though he finally gets across the border, Henna is killed by army crossfire in helping him get to India. To Jyotika Virdi, the religious unity that the film apparently tries to achieve “reveals an uneasy fit between the two levels of appeal, pointing to a fault line in the imagined nation.”<sup>48</sup> However, in negating the appeal for a unity across national and religious lines that the film presents, Virdi ignores the fact that the trope of unification is evoked with a typical unrealistic device. In other words, the film offers tacit acknowledgment of the difficulty of the subject; what Virdi reads as a simplistic and half-hearted reference to unification should be interpreted instead as popular cinema’s attempt at questioning the issue of nationalism for a country divided by the backlash of achieving political independence. The use of the unreal in this case emphasizes the impossibility of actual unification for two countries that could have been, in essence, one. The generic element of amnesia is the marker that national/cultural unification between India and Pakistan is fantastic, at least in the present scenario. One should also note the references to national/cultural unification between nation states with a history of persistent wars is not particularly common in popular cinema anywhere.

The unreal of Indian cinema, far from being a marker of an immature cinematic mode, has established itself as a generic characteristic that calls for informed spectatorship. Native viewers recognize the tropes and willingly participate in the tradition of the unreal. It has come to be a discourse on the nation, an evolving metaphor that is cued to the popular psyche of the nation. By reading these unrealistic devices as an extension of the nationalistic discourse, rather than merely a *replacement* of direct references to violent political incidents, one can appreciate the connections they forge with the key elements of cinematic formulation in India. In a way, therefore, these

unrealistic devices go above and beyond the question of the nation, and allow one to open up issues ranging from the psychology of politics to minority subjectivities.

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<sup>1</sup> Salman Rushdie. *Midnight's Children*. (London: Vintage, 1995), 49.

<sup>2</sup> Rashid is so inspired by this film that he imitates the hero's yell, managing to unwittingly scare away Nadir's assassins. Nadir survives, takes refuge in Dr. Aziz's house, and eventually marries his daughter Mumtaz. This chain of events is triggered by Rashid's love of the popular Hindi cinema.

<sup>3</sup> The elements analyzed here are called unrealistic only because the existent critique has dubbed them as such. I do not perceive these to be unreal, because these are probable even if they are not plausible.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to the references provided on the subject, there is a plethora of reasons to interpret the tendency towards the unreal as one arising out of the naiveté typical of postcolonial nations. Film criticism has ascribed 'realistic' cinema more value than fantastic or unreal genres, possibly because of realistic cinema's perceived potential for social change. See the discussion of Millicent Marcus's views on the subject of progress and realistic cinema later in this chapter. By this argument, the unreal embodies backwardness or a lack of maturity.

<sup>5</sup> Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 98.

<sup>6</sup> Sheila J Nayar, "The Values of Fantasy: Indian Popular Cinema through Western Scripts", *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 31:1, (1997), 73-90.

<sup>7</sup> Akbar S Ahmed, *Modern Asia Studies*. 26:2, ( 289-320. (289, 293-4)

<sup>8</sup> Jyotika Virdi. *The Cinematic Imagination: Indian Popular Films as Social History*. (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>9</sup> See Sallie Baxendale. "Memories Aren't Made of This: Amnesia at the Movies." (*BMJ* 329, 2004). 1480-3.

<sup>10</sup> Baxendale 1480.

<sup>11</sup> Bhaskar Sarkar. *Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 106.

<sup>12</sup> "Partition and the Uses of History in Waqt/Time". *Screen* (48:2 Summer 2007).

<sup>13</sup> *Midnight's Children*. 381

<sup>14</sup> Note that this incident, like other examples of magical realism in Rushdie's work, ultimately tends to comment on the problematic aspects of the formation the Indian nation.

<sup>15</sup> Salman Rushdie. *Imaginary Homelands*. "Imaginary Homelands." (London: Granta Books, 1992), 19.

<sup>16</sup> See Millicent Marcus for a comprehensive history of cinematic realism in *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986. Marcus outlines how prominent film critics have defined cinematic realism in terms of a previously existing theoretical concept. He says: "In the history of style...realism is always defined in opposition to something else, be it romanticism in nineteenth-century literature, modernism in twentieth-century art, nominalism in medieval philosophy, or idealism in

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eighteenth century thought. In film, realism is set against expressionism, aestheticism, or more generally, against illusionism.” 4-9.

<sup>17</sup> *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema 1947-1987*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993).

<sup>18</sup> Bhabha, Homi K.. “Introduction: Narrating the Nation” in *Nation and Narration*, edited by Homi K. Bhabha. (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 1-7.

<sup>19</sup> *Imaginary Homelands*. “Gabriel Garcia Marquez.” 301-302

<sup>20</sup> See previous note.

<sup>21</sup> This is not to imply, of course, that these films must be guided somehow by the criteria that Hollywood presents. I am merely suggesting that the Indian audience is familiar with the so-called western conceptions of realism.

<sup>22</sup> Vasudev, Aruna and Lenglet, Philippe. *Indian Cinema Superbazaar*. (New Delhi: Vikas, 1983).

<sup>23</sup> Kakar, Sudhir, *Intimate Relationships: Exploring Indian Sexuality*. (New Delhi: Penguin, 1989).

<sup>24</sup> Faiza Hirji. “When Local Meets Lucre: Commerce, Culture and Imperialism in Bollywood Cinema.” *Global Media Journal*, 4:7, (Fall 2005), 1-18.

<sup>25</sup> Sarkar 97.

<sup>26</sup> Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1982), 17-18.

<sup>27</sup> Nooy, de Juliana. *Twins in contemporary literature and culture: Look Twice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 11.

<sup>28</sup> De Nooy 1-2.

<sup>29</sup> I am pointing primarily to the argument between Judith Mayne’s counter to Laura Mulvey’s celebrated 1975 essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”. In *The Woman at the Keyhole: Feminism and Women’s Cinema*, Mayne explains the dangers involved in the dichotomies of representing women as submissive, masochistic, lacking, and men as sadistic, voyeuristic and endowed with the mythical penis.

<sup>30</sup> Mitchell, Juliet. *Siblings: Sex and Violence* (Cambridge Polity Press, 2003).

<sup>31</sup> Thomas S. Weisner. *Siblings in South Asia*, edited by Charles Nuckolls. (Guilford, 1993).

<sup>32</sup> De Nooy 23-24. De Nooy says, “Unlike the fraternal twins of legend, usually divided by appearance as well as by tastes, Romantic twins and doubles are often outwardly identical, but diametrically—even diabolically—opposed in character. The divide is primarily a moral one.”

<sup>33</sup> Seeta and Geeta are identical twins separated at birth. They are orphans, the meek Seeta living an oppressed life with her aunt and uncle (even though the property legitimately belongs to her), and the strong-willed Geeta growing up on the streets as an acrobat. As they come to replace each other accidentally, Geeta is able to teach a lesson to the cruel relatives who previously took advantage of Seeta’s meek personality. The girls pair up with suitable lovers, and after a series of trials, power and property are restored to the rightful claimants. (See Viridi 153-4 for a complete plot summary). De Nooy says, “Unlike the fraternal twins of legend, usually divided by appearance as well as by tastes, Romantic twins and doubles are often outwardly identical, but



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diametrically—even diabolically—opposed in character. The divide is primarily a moral one.” 23-24.

<sup>34</sup> She refers to herself as another ‘roop’ of Geeta, a word commonly used to refer to a version, an incarnation, or a godly avatar.

<sup>35</sup> See de Nooy 25-6.

<sup>36</sup> The mythical associations of Seeta’s name are very apparent to the audience of Hindi cinema. In the Hindu epic Ramayana, Rama’s wife Seeta is abducted and held captive by the demon Ravana. She disregards all attempts by Ravana to win her over, and patiently waits for Rama to come and rescue her. However, after she is rescued following an epic battle between Rama and Ravana, she is required to prove her chastity to her husband and his subjects by walking through fire. Her name carries the associations of utmost chastity and loyalty in popular culture (along with unmistakable references to captivity and restriction in the modern context). It might be noted that Seeta puts up with every kind of injustice from her aunt and her accomplices, but she decides to commit suicide after Ranjit tries to molest her.

<sup>37</sup> Viridi 157.

<sup>38</sup> Note the similarity of Geeta’s name with the Hindu religious text.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas 171.

<sup>40</sup> Viridi.

<sup>41</sup> See Faiza Hirji. “Change of Pace? Islam and Tradition in Popular Indian Cinema.” *South Asian Popular Culture*. 6:1, (April 2008), 57–69.

<sup>42</sup> The central character Ram Prasad has to invent a wayward twin brother for the sake of his job. His employer, the eccentric Bhavani Shankar insists on certain qualities in the Indian male; they must be masculine (which for him is signified by the moustache), austere in their lifestyles and manner of dressing, formal in their speech, and not prone to while away their time in any form of amusement. When he gets caught by his employer at a game, he has to invent a twin brother. He plays both, with and without wearing a false moustache. As the responsible mustached brother, he works for his boss and pretends to uphold all his values. As the clean-shaven wayward twin, he teaches music to his boss’s daughter and dates her. As it gradually becomes impossible for him to maintain both personas, there are various hilarious episodes of confusion until he gets caught by his boss. However, in the manner of true comedy, he gets the girl, and all ends well.

<sup>43</sup> *Goopi Gyne Bagha Byne*, directed by Satyajit Ray (Calcutta: 1968)

<sup>44</sup> Amar Akbar and Anthony are brothers accidentally separated at childhood, left symbolically at the foot of Gandhi statue on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August by their father. See [imdb.com](http://imdb.com) for a full plot summary.

<sup>45</sup> Faiza Hirji, “Change of Pace? Islam and Tradition in Popular Indian Cinema”, 57-69.

<sup>46</sup> Dinesh Bhugra and Susham Gupta, “Psychoanalysis and the Hindi Cinema.”

*International Review of Psychiatry*, 21:3, (June 2009) 234–240.

<sup>47</sup> It is easily explained in Freudian terms, but it even without the context of psychoanalysis, the concept of the idealized womanhood helps explain the tension between the two types of roles.

<sup>48</sup> Viridi 34-36.

## Chapter Five

### The Self-reflection of Indian Cinema: Mimicry and Parody from Colonial Times to the Present

The increasing tendency in post-globalization Indian films to become accepting of cultural norms that were deemed to be *western* in the previous decades might suggest that the recent trends of a global economy have successfully destroyed all attempts of Indian cinema to retain a distinct national character. However, one might argue that in spite of the invasion of brand names, a jet-setting generation of characters, and reversals of established cultural practices, the text of popular Indian cinema still presents some obstacles in the way of a complete homogenization of cultures. In fact, the format of popular cinema in India now represents an inter-textual zone, where a variety of film discourses come to intersect with each other, imitating, parodying and reflecting on each other in the mode of postcolonial narratives. The parody in postcolonial fiction is often said to signify the subversion of colonial norms by the postcolonial subject. Michael Meyer analyzes the postcolonial parodying of colonial texts in Salman Rushdie's "Yorik," which rewrites *Hamlet* following Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, and Matthew Singh-Toor's "Samhadrarow and the Partial Exchange," which parodies Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. According to Meyer,

[T]he rewriting of eighteenth-century English satires, such as *Gulliver's Travels* and *Tristram Shandy*, is attractive to these postcolonial writers because these texts often ridicule the subversion of reason and moral ideas by the passions of the body within British culture, revealing an internal split, which the colonial discourse externalizes and projects upon the relationship between white civilized European minds and barbarian bodies of other races and cultures.<sup>1</sup>

Meyer looks specifically at the postcolonial parodies of British satires with a view to show how postcolonial parodies of these texts reflect internal subversions of the colonial

British society. He utilizes Bakhtin's concept of how parody is a "laughing double, like king and jester, who looks with 'Other' eyes on the style and ideology of the dominant discourse," and "complements the 'original' with an alternative world."<sup>2</sup> Indian cinema has likewise parodied colonial norms with the intent of providing alternatives to the absolute colonial norms. In its current state, popular Indian cinema can be thought of as postcolonial metatexts, because its purpose is to reflect on its own norms. In this newest format, they act as self-reflexive vehicles for parody and pastiche. The subject of parody is no longer the colonial texts or characters, however. Usually the version of the native character that has been circulated by imperial and neo-imperial narratives gets parodied in these cinematic narratives. Postcolonial theorists frequently interpret the capacity and intent to parody colonial norms by postcolonial subjects as a form of political resistance. I suggest in this chapter that the capacity to parody empowers postcolonial texts, including cinematic texts, to remain politically resistant to global-imperial influences to a certain extent even within the current scenario. In explaining the process of colonial assimilation, Linda Hutcheon observes "double-ness and difference are established by colonialism by its paradoxical move to enforce cultural sameness."<sup>3</sup> In analyzing this irony of "double-ness" in the colonial/postcolonial subject, Hutcheon draws upon several critics to arrive at the conclusion that the final stage of assimilation of colonial characteristics is "a stage of open revolt," a stage which then continues with the help of subtler modes of resistance such as irony and doublespeak:

As Raymond Williams has argued...all national literatures develop in this sort of way - up to a point: from imitation of a dominant pattern to assimilation or internalization of it ...but then to a stage of open revolt where what was initially excluded by the dominant pattern gets revalorized. Is the last one here the post-colonial stage, as most critics suggest? If so, then it can still be argued that its revolt continues to operate within the power field of that dominant culture, no

matter how radical its revalorization of its indigenous culture. This is why irony, the trope that works from within a power field but still contests it, is a consistently useful strategy for postcolonial discourse.<sup>4</sup>

Because the last or post-colonial stage of resistance is one of open revolt, and a reaction to colonialism, it still renders agency to the colonial discourse, which would otherwise be somewhat insignificant in a decolonized society. This unintended reinstatement of power to the colonial discourse can only be countered by double-ness and irony. This is the reason why post-globalization cinema, which has otherwise experienced an external loss of resistance to colonial-western norms, can be perceived as a continuing discourse of resistance because of its double-ness. In other words, Indian cinema, by parodying and thereby reinstating its own narrative structure, self-consciously resurrects the political resistance that is diminishing because of recent socio-economic impositions from outside. This is simultaneously a resurrection of national identity, because the self-parody establishes that these texts are keen to assert, even advertise, the existent form of identity for the nation and its population to the rest of the world. This chapter traces the performance of mimicry under colonial and postcolonial conditions, with a view to establishing how mimicry, contrary to all intuitive understanding, stands in the way of cultural homogenization. The process of postcolonial mimicry is complex to say the least, and to examine the phenomenon of mimicry calls for a consideration of the socio-economic reasons for mimicry in colonial and postcolonial subjects, and of the impact of mimicry on both sides. The current analysis begins with an examination of colonial and postcolonial of mimic subjects, and subsequently arrives at the subject of self-reflexivity in post-globalization popular Indian cinema. I wish to establish that the issue of mimicry is a colonial phenomenon that retains its potency under the contemporary conditions of

an invasive global capitalist economy. This chapter approaches the self-reflexive norms of post-globalization cinema to analyze how this recent phenomenon derives from well-established practices of mimicry, parody and irony in colonial and postcolonial societies. Many of the recent mainstream films from India indulge in self-parody instead of taking affront at the constant criticism directed at them, in a manner that is part celebration of this vital segment of the Indian identity, and part acceptance of the critique. This chapter analyzes the self-consciousness of recent Indian cinema, and interprets it as the reflection of a gradually solidifying national consciousness. By looking at itself and pondering on its own reflections, popular Indian cinema establishes its own sense of self, of which national identity is a crucial component. If cinema is able to refer to its own norms and conventions, and is able to mimic or parody some of these norms, it establishes that it has come to perceive itself as a completely formed entity, one that is also able to give concrete shape to a national identity. Just as parody and mimicry underline a consciousness about the postcolonial condition in fiction, the recent trend of emphasizing the norms of popular cinema through parody and self-reflexivity establishes the maturation of popular Indian cinema's formulation of the national identity.

### **Mimicry, Irony, Allegory: The Double-ness of Discourse**

It is essential at the onset of this discussion to revisit the idea of colonial and postcolonial mimicry and its relationship to cultural and political resistance. Graham Huggan traces the intrinsic connection between colonialism and mimicry in his essay "A Tale of Two Parrots: Walcott, Rhys, and the Uses of Colonial Mimicry" by comparing the analyses of colonial mimicry by Frantz Fanon and V.S. Naipaul in the context of Caribbean literature.<sup>5</sup> He establishes that the essential difference between these two

approaches to the issue of mimicry lies in Naipaul's departure from Fanon's forceful but unidimensional explanation of mimicry. Huggan says:

The debate on mimicry in the Caribbean context, initially associated with the nineteenth-century phenomenon of "literary servility, has been linked more recently with the names of Frantz Fanon and V. S. Naipaul. For Fanon, mimicry is the result of a colonial indoctrination process through which Caribbean men and women, denied an autonomous cultural identity, have been coerced into seeking legitimacy through the imitation of Western models—through the strategic adoption of "white masks." Fanon urges Caribbean writers to free themselves from mimicry; Naipaul is less sanguine. . . . One of the primary characteristics of a colonial society, suggests Naipaul, is its propensity to mimic its more powerful metropolitan counterpart. This symbiotic relationship between colonialism and mimicry becomes one of the premises behind Naipaul's uncompromising investigation into the cultural politics of the Caribbean; and it is one of the premises, too, behind his own writing—that self-parodic, often self-demeaning mimicry of mimicry, persistently made to reflect on its own derivative status.<sup>6</sup>

Fanon approaches mimicry as the inevitable fallout of colonial systems of cultural imposition: since whiteness is established as the only form of physical, cultural and political perfection, the Other must put on the mask of whiteness in order to have access to acceptable cultural identity. Naipaul, on the other hand, acknowledges the complexity of mimicry as performance:

Naipaul's views seem diametrically opposed to Fanon's; but they are not so easily pigeonholed, and although mimicry can certainly be identified as a primary symptom in his diagnosis of the "insecurity" of colonial cultures, it also provides him with a means of undermining the "secure" relationship between European centers of power and the colonies that they seek to create in their own likeness. Mimicry, in this last sense, does not connote subservience, but rather resistance: by showing the relationship between metropolitan and colonial cultures to be based on changing strategies of domination and coercion rather than on the static comparison of "essential" attributes, mimicry may paradoxically destabilize even as it reinforces. The colonial "mimic man" may set off to the metropolis in search of "genuine" culture, only to find there other, metropolitan "mimic men."<sup>7</sup>

This particular moment in which mimicry ceases to be a pathetic aspiration for the desired cultural identity and instead becomes a twisted reflection of colonial selfhood with the power to critique and parody is also a moment of political resistance. The self-

parody of Indian cinema is a reflection into several layers of mimicry, starting with the issues of mimicry in the colonial and the postcolonial subject imitating the British and the global/western identity, and culminating in a self-parody that is intensely aware of existent criticisms of its own cinematic norms.

The double-ness in the discourse of postcolonialism that Hutcheon refers to as *irony* is a term easily interchangeable (she indicates) with the term *allegory*. She points out the overlap of the term irony, in terms of political subversion, with Slemon's analysis of postcolonial allegory: "[I]ndeed irony (like allegory, according to Slemon) has become a powerful subversive tool in the re-thinking and re-addressing of history by both postmodern and post-colonial artists."<sup>8</sup> It should be pointed out that Fredric Jameson also utilizes the term allegory in referring to what he calls third world literature in his highly critiqued essay "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism."<sup>9</sup> Even though Jameson's excessive emphasis on the essential differences between the literature of the first and the third worlds has been the target of profuse criticism, this particular article helps to emphasize the quality of duality in postcolonial texts and its relationship to nationalisms.<sup>10</sup> The thrust of Jameson's argument is that the element of allegory is a notable quality of postcolonial literature, and postcolonial texts represent the public/political discourse in the guise of the personal without exception:

Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic—necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society.<sup>11</sup>

The other half to the argument presented here is that the rationale for the presence of the allegory is tied to the impossibility of representing the political directly; this allegorization, then, is a form of political resistance necessitated by the postcolonial

condition. Popular Indian cinema of recent times represents similar irony and allegory in a variety of ways through the duality of its discourse, but the issue of mimicry in particular brings under scrutiny India's assimilation to colonial/western norms, and the variant forms of resistance to such assimilation.

Mimicry in itself is evocative of the process of cultural assimilation under colonial and postcolonial conditions; the act of mimicry, one might suggest, ties the two conditions together, because once the systems of direct political imposition are removed, hegemony operates through the need and the will to mimic colonial norms by postcolonial subjects. In the presence of invasive global/neo-colonial socio-economic norms, mimicry often becomes the factor ensuring the success of corporate businesses in the developing world. Brand name commodities and multinational fast food chains are gaining popularity in India partly because consumers believe these allow them access to a westernized lifestyle, which also translates to having a higher socio-economic status within the community. The issue of mimicry moves through different phases of signification in the context of a postcolonial nation; it evolves in form from the colonial to the postcolonial historical moment, and in its most recent version of self-parody, it renders itself to various and complex interpretations of national identity. For India, mimicry is a colonial-era issue in terms of the following: mimicry of native norms by colonial masters at the early stage of the colonial rule, mimicry in the *remaking* of colonial-era Indian subjects for British interests, and mimicry of British norms by colonial subjects, especially by the class that is created through access to British systems of formal education. Homi Bhabha examines the subject of mimicry through a series of essays—"Of Mimicry and Man", takes into account the creation of mimic Englishmen,



for the purpose of facilitating the work of the empire through the spread of British education; “Representation and the Colonial Text”, “Signs Taken for Wonders”, and “The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism” explore the subject of mimicry, mostly taking into the account the colonial performances of mimicry.<sup>12</sup> However, as Hutcheon states, mimicry and irony are not merely colonial modes, because the terms also represent an essentially *postcolonial* condition, “a way of resisting and yet acknowledging the power of the dominant.”<sup>13</sup> If a history of mimicry is to draw out according to the different applications of mimicry mentioned above, Bhabha’s work traces the role of mimicry to the early part of that history. It is true, as he shows, that mimicry is a colonial mode to the extent that the colonials create mimic men modeled after the mythical proportions of the Englishman. It is also evident, however, that mimicry is equally a concern for the postcolonial condition in India, because in spite of attempts to create a national character devoid of all western characteristics, socio-economic values attached to such characteristics are hard to destroy. To speak and act like a westerner positions the postcolonial subject higher up in terms of social perspective. So long as that perception remains, mimicry of the west will continue to be present in postcolonial societies. Indian cinema has been intent on finding the middle ground between retaining the Indian national identity and accepting the global/western standards. It has felt the need to be self-reflexive, to assess its own value through the global perspective, and hence been led to irony and parody. It assumes, in other words, the global gaze, and looks at itself through the eyes of the west.

## Colonial Mimic Men

Once the initial phase of cultural exchange between British colonizers and Indian colonial subjects was over, mimicry became a measure of the native man's investment in the figure of the white man, and the process of mimicry outlines the stages of cultural assimilation of the colonized population into western norms.<sup>14</sup> It has been noted, for example, that the tendency to mimic western/colonial norms is particularly strong among the so-called elite English-educated class. Jenny Sharpe cites the case of Rammohun Roy, the English-educated social reformer from seventeenth century Bengal best remembered for his initiative in abolishing *Sati*, as a mimic man.<sup>15</sup> This is a case worth examining in detail because it represents how mimicry often represents the subversion of colonial norms. Sharpe presents an account of Rammohun Roy's visit to England:

All of England was soon to marvel at the splendid possibilities of colonialism, when, in 1831, Rammohun visited London. As a Westernized Hindu "who spoke our language in marvelous perfection" (Carpenter 80)<sup>16</sup>, he caused quite a sensation. Here indeed was Macaulay's vision of an Indian who was English in every regard but blood and color. Yet for all his mastery of Western thought, for all his perfection of English language, Rammohun could not escape the inferiority of his race. It was as though his education cloaked him like the Emperor's new clothes and only the native speaker of English could see his nakedness. One admirer confesses in a public letter to Bentinck that Rammohun Roy "appeared to be inoffensive and for an Indian was an enchanting instance of what may be effected in time. But he still carried about with him the duplicity which seemed to be inseparable from his nature." The English letter-writer resorts to the racial stereotype of Asiatic "duplicity" in order to disavow the double image of an Anglicized "Hindoo" that he finds so disturbing. Rammohun Roy, mimic man, an imperfect double of the English gentleman, inhabits the space of what Bhabha calls the "not quite /not white".<sup>17</sup>

Sharpe explores the evidence that this figure of the successful colonial enterprise of producing mimic men is subverted by the evidence of a piece of writing by Rammohun Roy, discovered after his death. In this piece, Roy presents a conversation between two Bengali men, regarding the replacement of English for Bengali for the British officials

stationed in India, and quantifies the qualitative merits of Bengali as a language compared to English.<sup>18</sup> Even though she admits that this minute moment of resistance does not significantly alter the “binary opposition between colonizer and colonized,” this piece of evidence calls attention to the complex nature of mimicry in the colonial scenario.<sup>19</sup> It can additionally be pointed out that even the colonial authorities have not quite thought through the process of mimicry in the production of these men, which is why they are uncomfortable in the presence of what could be the best examples of mimic men. It is as if they had not expected the mimicry to be so successful— if a man of color can indeed mimic the white man so well, the discourse of racial superiority appears to be under some threat. Once the colonizer faces that fear, however, there is a way out; the “duplicity” in the mimic man he is so uncomfortable about, is traced not to the internal insecurities of the colonizer, but to the stereotypical characteristics, the alleged inherent dual nature of the non-white races. Mimicry within the postcolonial sphere and as it applies to cinema lends itself to similar layered interpretations; the manner in which postcolonial cinema performs or resists mimicry is tied to the positioning of the colonial subject with respect to the norms of the erstwhile colonizers and of neo-imperialism.

In this context, the most successful instances of mimicry in colonial times appear to be the impersonation cases, some of which are discussed in depth in Shompa Lahiri’s article “Performing Identity: Colonial Migrants, Passing and Mimicry Between the Wars.”<sup>20</sup> Lahiri presents accounts of mimic men in colonial times, whose convincing performances as white men (usually carried out for dishonest purposes) encapsulate social, political and historical significances of mimicry. Her primary focus is on the life of colonial migrant and impersonator Satyendranath Chatterjee, who successfully

impersonated a plethora of characters including that of a British official and an Indian prince in the inter-war years. Chatterjee's crimes included larceny, bigamy, deception and fraud, acts for which he was captured and incarcerated more than once. However, his ability to pass himself off variously as Indian, Middle-Eastern and European, Lahiri explains, is made possible by the conditions under colonialism. She points out the extent of Chatterjee's capacity to pass as all these racial variants:

British Intelligence was convinced of his authenticity and was impressed by Chatterjee's (or Swasabji Roy, as he was known) grasp of imperial masculinity, which provoked one official to write:

Swasabji Roy is of military bearing, wears a small moustache, is of medium height and slim; distinctively good-looking, complexion dark olive . . . He is stated to speak excellent English and to have a very good manner and general bearing and to give the impression of being a varsity man of more than average intelligence.

This description of Chatterjee is evocative both of Parama Roy's interpretation of the 'thuggee' in India, as 'a figure who passes in a law-abiding society with "unsettling" ease' and of Homi Bhabha's 'not quite/not white' colonial mimic man.<sup>21</sup>

The authenticity of impersonation here is a measure of the "success" of the colonial project. Since only a complete internalization of English norms could have made such passing possible, Chatterjee represents the extremes of colonial fear about creating mimic men—the mimicry has been so successful that boundaries between "real" whiteness and its mimic version have been obliterated, and the mimic man is using it to his socio-economic advantage. Lahiri draws connections between the performances of mimicry and the issues of racial identification, social class, and Orientalist assumptions in colonial times:

Through migration some colonial migrants were able to acquire the cultural capital necessary to refashion themselves by relinquishing humble origins and unsavoury pasts, in order to adopt new middle-class and even aristocratic disguises, by posing as students and princes. This was possible in part because ignorance of colonial peoples was widespread at all levels of British and

European society. ...Colonial migrants who indulged in various types of “passing” challenged as well as reinforced prescribed categories of race and class in order to access opportunities denied by the lottery of birth. Wealth, education, professional status and even racial identity became available for usurpation.<sup>22</sup>

This account is specifically pertinent to the current context of mimicry in post-globalization Indian cinema for a number of reasons. First of all, even though globalization is understood as a late twentieth century phenomenon, the extent of “globalization” in Chatterjee’s time—the years between the wars—is considerable. The amount of flexibility available to him as an English-educated upper-class Indian man, to travel from continent to continent, as well as the range of personalities he impersonates, points out that the fluidity of national boundaries so applauded in the post-globalization world was a natural function of the colonial world. The underlying argument in this similarity of conditions is the possibility that the theme of mimicry has continued uninterrupted in colonial and postcolonial times, that the mimicry of western norms by postcolonial subjects is in fact a continuation of a colonial practice: both have socio-economic advantages for the third world subject mimicking western norms. There are no available means to segregate the mimicry of western norms in a globalized world from previous forms of colonial mimicry. If popular cinema has castigated the mimicry of western norms until the advent of globalization, it has, in fact expressed a postcolonial political sentiment, because it was countering a phenomenon that originally arose out the colonial conditions. I therefore interpret the significant changes that this political standpoint underwent post-globalization as a reversal of that resistance. However, Indian cinema has replaced the practice of parody with that of self-parody in recent cinema, a phenomenon that could be interpreted both as a loss of resistance, or a new form of it. We either assume that the shift of focus in parody means that cinema has now completely

assumed the global/western gaze which mocks the norms of Indian cinema, or that it is trying to find the balance between the two perspectives because it is no longer able to ignore the impact of the outsider's gaze.

### **Postcolonial Mimicry and its Variants**

In locating mimicry as a *postcolonial* issue, it seems evident that it be approached in the context of the Tradition-modernity debate, because the debate itself brings into question the extent of mimicry of norms that are originally derived from the west.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, because of persisting ideas of beauty, desirability or social status associated with being western or westernized, the issue of mimicry remains pertinent within the postcolonial sphere. Parody/irony can essentially represent the only possible manner of expression for the postcolonial writer/filmmaker:

The way post-colonial critics talk about this literature suggests the potential importance of irony as the subversive force operating from within: "the challenge is to use the existing language, even if it is the voice of a dominant 'other'— and yet speak through it: to disrupt ... the codes and forms of the dominant language in order to reclaim speech for itself." Irony is one way of doing precisely this, a way of resisting and yet acknowledging the power of the dominant. It may not go the next step - to suggest something new - but it certainly makes that step possible. Often combined with some sort of self-reflexivity, irony allows a text to work within the constraints of the dominant while foregrounding those constraints *as constraints* and thus undermining their power.<sup>24</sup>

Self-parody might precisely be the *new step* referred to here, because it appears to be the final step in the tortuous history of postcolonial parody. The self-parody of postcolonial fiction and cinema in India draws upon the cumulative history of mimicry in the postcolonial context; it is the final level of mimicry where the postcolonial subject turns back upon himself/herself to parody the new Indian identity, which is itself part imagination and part colonial mimicry, with a view both to mock and celebrate. This act, it must be noted, can hardly be achieved without a level of confidence in the emergent

identity, and is the most effective in establishing a strong national identity among all the variants of mimicry associated with the postcolonial Indian psyche. In this regard, it is possible to go back to Jameson's formulation of the relationship between the allegorical nature of postcolonial literature and nationhood:

One important distinction would seem to impose itself at the outset, namely that none of these cultures can be conceived as anthropologically independent or autonomous, rather, they are all in various distinct ways locked in a life-and-death struggle with first-world cultural imperialism—a cultural struggle that is itself a reflexion of the economic situation of such areas in their penetration by various stages of capital, or as it is sometimes euphemistically termed, of modernization.<sup>25</sup>

It must be noted that Jameson's basic premise for the argument presented is the common struggle of postcolonial nations with *cultural imperialism*, a function of economic modernization. Since modernization, especially post-globalization modernization, can be translated to mean the capacity and willingness to accept (or in other words to mimic) the dominant global culture, *progress* continues to be a measure of mimicry in the postcolonial world-view. The issue of mimicry in postcolonial texts, cinematic and literary, is a political issue for that reason. Post-globalization Indian cinema's performance of self-parody is hence more a political statement than a stylistic one.

### **Self-Parody in Post-globalization Indian Cinema**

The phenomenon of self-parodying was initiated mostly through songs in popular films, possibly because they could be used to represent unspecified dream/reality locales that would allow for brief and seemingly external commentary on the conventions of popular cinema. I will discuss here the visualization for two songs to analyze how popular cinema's self-reflection is initiated. The first, a song from Farhan Akhtar's *Dil Chahta Hai* (2001), takes audiences through a visual journey of the trends of popular cinema over the years, specifically underlining how fashion and music trends change, but

plotlines tend to remain the same.<sup>26</sup> The positioning of the actors is deliberately muddled in this song. Conventional song sequences usually utilize two forms in popular cinema; one in which actors lip-synch to a song playing in the background, and a second in which actors do not lip-synch, and the song merely plays in the background. Here, the actors are simultaneously the viewers and the on-screen singers. Sameer and his would-be girlfriend Pooja go to watch a film, and see themselves as the actors in a song in the film, so they are ostensibly projecting themselves as the lead characters in the film they are watching. However, they also join in the song at the end, accompanied by the rest of the audience sitting with them in the theater. The song shows them as actors from three distinct cinematic time periods: in the first part, shot in monochrome, the actors appear on a set from the 1950s, with a mustachioed Sameer in a white suit and bow-tie, and Pooja in a gauzy white dress. The *mise-en-scène* transforms to the nineteen seventies for the second part of the song, and the couple appears on a car, Pooja donning a headband and hoop earrings, and Sameer in a long-collared graphic shirt. The scene copies the technical limitations of the time period by shooting the car scene with a stationary car placed between moving scenes and intentional artificial lighting. The song concludes with Sameer and Pooja dressed in trendy nineties film garb, prancing around on location atop lush mountains, distinctly imitating well-known actors from the decade. This section is filmed with a medley of shots, including helicopter shots typical of nineties blockbusters. At the end of the song, Sameer and Pooja join in the refrain, along with the rest of the theater audience, and the song changes its diegetic positioning again, so that it is at once a song that Sameer and Pooja watch at the theater, a dream sequence where they declare their love for each other, and the same declaration in their real lives. Although this is a



simple trick, the random play with the song with respect to the real time and space of the film points to a level of self-consciousness about similar confusions in popular musicals.

The second, more recent film song to be discussed here undertakes a more direct approach to self-parody through the lyrics. In the refrain of this dream-sequence song from Rajkumar Hirani's 2009 film *3 Idiots*, the lovers describe their situation as "exactly how it happens in films."<sup>27</sup> The song mimics established cinematic norms at the visual and the verbal level. The song positions itself to the audience clearly as a dream, because it goes over the accepted limit of realism; surreal *mise-en-scène* elements—flying through the air, a cast of characters frozen mid-action in the background—ostensibly appear in a dream shared by the lovers. The lyrics describe the on-screen action as events that usually happen in such sequences; blooming flowers, singing birds hovering bees appear "exactly how it happens in films," letting the lovers realize that they must be in love if these things are happening. The three stanzas from the song describe typical dream sequence locales such as sunlit cheery morning scene, a moonlit night, and a rainy scene. The reference to the explicitly sexual image of the heroine in a wet sari in the rain scene emphasizes that this is a performance of mimicry—her lover says, "Here you are prancing about in a wet sari," a statement that positions him as someone who is both inside and outside of the performance.<sup>28</sup> He appears in the song, but he can also mimic the norms because he has looked at this particular cinematic form from the outside. He informs the audience, in other words, of his awareness of the male gaze on the female body on display, but it is definitely done with levity.

Along with the mimicry at the verbal level, the song undertakes a number of visual elements of mimicry. Like in the song *Woh Ladki* from *Dil Chahta Hai*, it mimics

mise-en-scène elements like costumes and set design from recognizable cinematic time periods; the white suit and flowing white dress is paired with an (intentionally) unconvincing Venice-style set with bridges, gondolas and an artificial moon. The song also utilizes a momentary black and white clip of the actors, as if from an old and poorly preserved reel, during the refrain of the song (the refrain, as already mentioned, underlines the aspect of mimicry in the song). The entire song is a play on the issue of unrealism and its existent critique; during a musical interlude in this song, Pia is shown sitting with her father as he switches channels on the television, and the characters on television appear to her as Rancho. As he appears, in her vision, as a weather reporter, he announces that the weather is fine, but it will rain on anyone who is in love. This reference to the impossibility of frequent rain scenes associated with lovers' meetings in song sequences leads audiences into the next scene of the typical rainy night with Pia and Rancho dancing in the rain. Participation in the formulaic plot of popular cinema operates at two levels in this song: the audience is reminded time and again that they are participating in this act of sharing the well-known plot, and that the actors are performing and mimicking at the same time. The issue of spectatorship becomes complex these premises, because the audience is made self-conscious of their tendency to accept seemingly ridiculous plots. But this message is far from a harsh critique; instead, it helps to create a common zone of participation between filmmaker, actors and the audience, a shared experience that renders all concerned with a common sense of identity. By accepting these norms and consciously participating in them, the audience acknowledges it as a part of their identity, and that of the nation.

The self-consciousness regarding the elements that are most widely critiqued in popular Indian cinema—the unrealism, the clichés, the formulae repeated endlessly—appear in popular cinema during the 1990s, mostly as discrete elements in films that otherwise take themselves seriously. Nagesh Kukunoor's overuse of clichéd devices in his English language films represents a zone of mimicry where non-mainstream cinema picks elements from the mainstream and parodies them. Kukunoor has a penchant for using elements like the last-minute rescue and bizarre coincidences, even though the actual plots for his films presuppose a rational environment. Even as he deals with subjects such as the life of a filmmaker filming a documentary on prison inmates with life sentences in *Teen Deewarein* (2003), the coming-of-age of residential school adolescents in *Rockford* (1999), or a terminally ill American man who decides to accept an offer to act in a popular Hindi film (*Bollywood Calling*, 2001), Kukunoor borrows from the stockpile of traditional clichés of popular cinema. His choice makes it evident that even filmmakers outside of the popular canon acknowledge the impact of these elements on the audience, and their parodying or borrowing is a nod to the audience's immersion in the culture of clichés. Kukunoor's use of clichés, being intentional and instinctive at the same time, points out to the contemporary audience the fact that as viewers, they are informed of the cultural memory of Indian cinema, and knowingly or unknowingly, become a part of this complex and colorful mode of storytelling that is unique to the Indian film. To a certain extent, the filmmaker makes a point of blurring the boundary between the actual role of the clichéd element in his plot, and his attempt to parody it; the mimicry itself becomes an element of play, a way to tease the audience about their

knowledge of and tolerance to these common cinematic elements. The cinematic text becomes a zone of readerly interaction, much like postcolonial novels.

*Bollywood Calling* exemplifies this best, because it is a film within a film where Kukunoor utilizes every chance of muddling the popular and the non-mainstream modes of Indian cinema; the melodramatic modes of the popular inevitably creep into the actual text of his film. The film is, as already mentioned, about an American actor who has cancer. A B-grade actor in America, Patrick receives an offer to work in a Bollywood film just as his illness threatens to ruin his career. Plagued by his medical problems and a marriage on the rocks, he decides to accept the offer and go to India. Once he arrives, he undergoes a series of surprises, both pleasant and unpleasant, as he gradually acclimatizes to the filmmaking world of Mumbai. Kukunoor casts him as the outsider who is extremely suspicious of the standards and conventions of popular cinema, and is both amused and angered by what is to him, its excesses. He cannot understand, among many things, the rationale for melodrama in every possible instance. In a hilarious exchange with the director, he tries to confront him demanding that a protagonist who “fights the tears” instead of crying melodramatically would be more appealing to the audience, because crying is an expression of self-pity. Subramaniam, his director, begins to explain that Pat does not understand “Indian sentiments,” and at the end of Pat’s angry monologue, rendered with a lot of passion, about what the audience might prefer to see in a film, Subra explains plaintively that he did not follow Pat because he was speaking too fast. Pat decides to give up his intentions of helping Subra make *better cinema* because he is too frustrated by the exchange, but Kukunoor implies to his audience that Pat might have raised questions that are pertinent to his own emotional state at the moment. Not

only is Pat proven wrong about the overuse of emotion when the film goes on to become a smash hit in the future, he does not realize until later that it helps him become more expressive. When he returns home, he goes to serenade his estranged wife with a song from the film playing on his car stereo. Even as Kukunoor mimics the modes of Bollywood in his film, he implies that the intense emotional exercise that it provides has a therapeutic effect on audiences, or in this case, the performer. Pat is so influenced by the norms of popular Indian cinema, that he performs a mimicry of them in his own life, even though he recognizes, what is in his vision, their absurdity.

The extent of mimicry of popular norms in Kukunoor's work is apparent; he makes it a point to underline particular forms of mimicry in his films so that they stand out. A film like *Teen Deewarein* (2003), for example, can almost madden a rational viewer with its loopholes, all the more so because the content of the film presupposes a rational environment. Expectations about the experiences of a documentary film-maker interviewing prison inmates with life sentences never verge on the dramatic, simply because the Indian audience perceives this to be a practical issue, concerned with a world that is non-dreamy by virtue of its own confessions. Instead, it turns out to be a narration of incidents interconnected by coincidences and freak accidents. There are some obvious questions that the film fails to answer, and some of these will tend to disturb even an audience brought up with training in the *unreal* of popular cinema. For example, why does the autopsy of the dead wife not reveal that she died of a fall from the stairs, and not from multiple knife stabs?<sup>29</sup> Jaggu would evidently have been acquitted on the basis of that report. This is one of the many instances that indicate how on closer examination, *Teen Deewarein* appears to be a collection of elements that any audience of popular

cinema would recognize, and be willing to participate in. Following the basic principle of mimicry, Kukunoor specifically mimics the most easily recognized of these elements in his cinema, sometimes taking them into exaggerated extremes.

A last-minute change of plan is another device that Kukunoor borrows from Bollywood. The climax of *Hyderabad Blues* and that of *Teen Deewarein* are both characterized by intense suspense: in *Hyderabad Blues*, Aswini and Varun are to be married off to different partners, and the situation hangs on a balance till the very last minute; in *Teen Deewarein*, Ishaan's last minute confession saves Jaggu's life by a hair. Valiant last minute rescues have always added to the (otherwise limited) suspense in mainstream Hindi film, and often helped to alleviate complications in relationships. Audiences of Hindi films have been trained to keep their hopes up till the very last minute, especially when the life or marriage of a protagonist is concerned, because they are used to protagonists like Sam (Shammi Kapoor) in *Evening in Paris* or Devendra (Sanjeev Kumar) in *Anamika*, to come to the rescue of the women in the last minute, putting an end to all past misunderstandings.<sup>30</sup> More recent mainstream movies like *Dil Chahta Hai* (2001) have also retained the same suspense concerning marriage.<sup>31</sup> The ending of *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995), where the romantic union is confirmed in the last few minutes of the film, is also a classic example. Kukunoor's adaptation of the last-minute histrionics is worthy of analysis, because he seems to use it for the purposes of achieving crowd-pleasing conclusions in the mode of popular cinema. His brand of filmmaking is far from the melodramatic romance plots of mainstream Indian cinema; his choice to make films in English, and the variety in the scripts he has worked with imply that he deliberately chooses so stay out of that mold. But he mimics it with

relish, and deliberately underlines and repeats the patterns of popular cinema. Both *Hyderabad Blues* and its sequel manage to bring the couple together at the end, although there is little evidence of actual reconciliation between them in the films.

There is also considerable tendency for typecasting peripheral characters in the films of Nagesh Kukunoor, even though Kukunoor's lead characters are always created with an eye to detail. Chandrika, the protagonist of *Teen Deewarein*, for example, stands out as a sensitive and intelligent woman. Chandrika's husband, on the other hand, is handed out the cast of the bad husband in Hindi film—he is the drinker/wife-basher/sexual-abuser who devalues love and domesticity, a prototype which surfaces time and again in the history of popular Indian cinema. Even more recent films like *Yuva* (2004) could not have given it up.<sup>32</sup> Granted that Lalan is a lower class goon, but the picture of his villainy is hardly complete without his drinking and wife beating. For popular cinema, even if the handling of this particular subject has become slightly more sophisticated over the years, there is no doubt that the existence of such prototypes gives the director a chance to move on quickly to more important subjects in the film. The audience “gets the idea,” so to say, of the nature of the woman's distress. So Chandrika's husband is represented as someone who drinks and ogles at the television, beats her and rapes her, a character twisted out of proportion in order that his villainy is credible to the audience. It does not matter if he is accused of being over-sexed and sexually impotent at the same time: we might remember how, although he seemingly practices marital rape, when he tries to destroy her partly-filmed documentary a little further into the film, she accuses him of being impotent. At this point, the truth about his sexual prowess is less important than whether he fits into the mold of the bad husband perfectly. While

Kukunoor should be credited with introducing the *play* with popular film norms in his cinema in the nineties, popular cinema introduces the trope of self-parody in the early years of the twenty-first century.

The best example of a parodic metatext in recent times is a mainstream commercial film called *Om Shanti Om* (2007).<sup>33</sup> Even though the film itself is based on a formulaic plot, it is a unique experimentation in mimicry, and manages to position itself simultaneously on the inside and outside of popular cinematic modes. The element of parody in the film is represented through its performance of a formulaic plot with complete self-awareness, and by the extent to which it depends on audience recognition and participation in the performance. The plot is a rehashing of the formula of reincarnation, but it integrates the parody into the narrative. *Om Shanti Om*, like some of Nagesh Kukunoor's films analyzed earlier, is a film about a film, a narrative that revolves around popular cinema because its theme is, by design, the world of directing, producing and acting in the popular Hindi cinema of Mumbai.<sup>34</sup> The reincarnation plot, often utilized in popular cinema, involves the death, followed by rebirth/reincarnation of a central character. Even though the character is reincarnated as a different person, his or her appearance remains the same, the unwritten convention in popular cinema being that both characters are played by the same actor/actress. This convention is, in effect, another form of the twinning trope, where the same actor appears in two different character roles in the film. The reincarnation plot was used in classic Bollywood productions such as *Madhumati* (1958) and *Karz* (1980), but the success of *Om Shanti Om* can be assigned to its handling of the parody. The film picks up elements specific to the reincarnation/ghost story plot; ominous characters, chiaroscuro lighting themes, sets and costumes all



comment on the director's consciousness of the mimicry. The film, however, is not merely a spoof of the reincarnation theme; the main narrative of melodrama and romance could have progressed very well without the help of the parody, because films based on similar plots have been successful in the past. However, the reason behind the parody might be that the performance of an *unreal* plot needs to be framed by the narrative of parody in the post-globalization scenario, when the audience and the filmmakers are aware of the critique of popular cinema. Even though the popularity of such a plot has not declined, the parodic framing underlines the self-consciousness of the post-globalization director in working with such a plot.

*Om Shanti Om* not only mimics the set, costumes and makeup of 80s Bollywood, all visual elements associated with the film—publicity promotions, trailers, posters—also mimic the color schemes and graphic design of 80s film style. It mimics the language of cinema in the dialogue, and presents parodic scenes where popular cinema norms are blatantly spoofed. Numerous scenes take the audience *inside* popular cinema to unravel wonders that might awe audiences in theaters but appear to be juvenile tricks when seen up close. The film includes various scenes of film-shooting; in the scene where Om wants to impress Shanti by pretending to be a megastar from South India, he sets up a fake film-shooting, fights a stuffed tiger, and “flies” through the air propped on a wheeled cart. In later scenes of Om as the cinema superstar, audiences get to see him “flying” again as a superhero in appropriate garb (there is a hilarious exchange between Om and his costume designer regarding the Superman-style red brief he wears, unmistakably poking fun at the norms of Hollywood), this time on a cable and pulley system. The film successfully unravels and makes fun of the magic of the movies through these images, but there are

instances where the same element is a part of both the parody and the main sentimental plot. Once Om Prakash Makhija dies and is reborn as Om Kapur, his mother recognizes that he has been reincarnated. She stalks him as he arrives and leaves the studio in his car, appearing to be an old, witch-like figure from ghost stories, often banging on the windows of his car to get his attention. Before Om remembers his past life, he appears to be afraid of her. Afterwards, as they get ready to extract a confession from Mikey, the man Om recognizes from the memories of his past life as the murderer of Shantipriya, she is asked to do the same to him so that he is already scared by the time the fake Shanti appears as a ghost. Om's mother enjoys this role thoroughly, and takes the pains to appear the *authentic* scary hag of the ghost/horror genre. This second appearance by her is therefore a parody of a similar appearance earlier in the film, and a parody of similar scary roles in popular cinematic norms. In the second instance, she jokes about the impact of her appearance (complete with black robes and bushy eyebrows) on Mikey, even though she performed the same actions, in earnest, with Om earlier in the course of the narrative.

The effect of the elements of parody in the film is somewhat comical, as one should expect of parody, but the overall effect is that of the typical mainstream melodrama. Shantipriya's situation in the first half of the film is also a serious ironic reversal of mainstream film norms. Om falls in love with her, and the attention she gives him for saving her life seems to indicate to the audience that they are soon to become a couple. However, despite the absence of usual melodramatic hindrances like parental resistance, the union does not happen. Om overhears a conversation between Shanti and Mike, and it is revealed that the innocent, virginal belle of popular cinema is not only

secretly married in this case, she is also pregnant. Even though Om does not seem to have lost his infatuation for her, the scenario is somewhat unfamiliar to the audience, especially with the nature of the courtship that precedes the incident. Om falls in love with Shanti even before he knows her—she is the “Dreamy Girl” of movies, and he is the mesmerized fan. He saves her from a fire, she offers friendship out of gratitude, and he courts her on a movie set on their first date.<sup>35</sup> (This scene, a song sequence that self-consciously utilizes cinematic elements to show the audience how it is done on a movie set, is another attempt at an inside look at films. Even though the song itself is a part of the narrative, the audience gets to see what actually goes on behind the scenes in such sequences: as Shanti and Om dance to the music, Om’s friend tinkers with the machinery on the set to activate typical elements such as a huge moon dropping behind them, and car scenes shot with the car placed between projections of moving scenery.) Everything had been going according to audience expectation when the heroine is revealed to be married and pregnant. The effect of self-parody can be comical in the majority of instances, but reversals such as this one also question the viability of established cinematic norms in a postcolonial scenario, although only to repeat the formula once the subject has been dealt with. Shantipriya’s case is more the real of the situation in the film industry than a romantic plot for the films, because it brings to light the sexual exploitation and violence that an aspiring actress is likely to face there. The main plot of the film, however, implies that film actor Om and the actress hired to play the part of Shantipriya are a happy couple at the end, following the norm of popular cinema.

The recent global interest in the form of the popular cinema seems to indicate that the text of popular Indian cinema has finally been accepted for what it is—a particular

cinematic language that, in spite of its apparent shortcomings, is capable of appealing to large masses of people and generating considerable revenue. Danny Boyle's 2008 film *Slumdog Millionaire* is a clear indication of the arrival of popular Indian cinema in the global discourse on film, but it is even more pertinent in the current discussion of mimicry because it is a British film mimicking the norms of Indian cinema.<sup>36</sup> Even though it is ironic that Bollywood could only be introduced to mainstream Hollywood and particularly to the Oscars via a British filmmaker, this semi-parody of a popular Indian film helps a widespread establishment and celebration of the norms of popular Indian cinema.<sup>37</sup> In its form, *Slumdog* is very close to the postcolonial fictive narrative; the plot is chaotic and *unreal*, because at least to western audiences, elements like the song and dance number are completely unexpected. It is in itself a conscious parody of popular Indian cinema that also refers to the influence of film on the Indian psyche. Much like *Midnight's Children*, it is both inside and outside of popular cinema, recognizing the unreal in cinema and yet reflecting those very unreal elements in the real life of postcolonial existence.

At the same time, as much of the criticism directed at the film indicates, it is undoubtedly the first world director's look at the third world. Part of the unreal derives from the disbelief of the first world point of view of India, at a moment when the country is eager to gloss over its poverty to claim a place in the glitzy realms of modern capitalism and consumerism. The film is an expression of mixed standpoints: it is possible both to interpret it as a deliberate exploration of third world poverty and to simultaneously read it as a postcolonial narrative, a complexity of purpose made possible by the various interpretations that the text lends itself to. In a way, this multiplicity of

purpose in *Slumdog* serves to establish popular Indian cinema's position in the modern world, and helps draw attention to its market, scope and influences. *Slumdog* performs, beyond doubt, a mimicry of popular Indian cinema. Danny Boyle has conceded, in several interviews, the extent of Bollywood's influence on this project. In the following interview with Alkarim Jivani of BFI, Boyle lists the specific films that influenced him:

AJ: The obvious reference point for 'Slumdog Millionaire' is Mira Nair's "Salaam Bombay!" which also uses the city's street kids to act out versions of their own lives. What were your other influences?

DB: I've watched all of Mira Nair's films, and I watched *Pather Panchali* and then Loveleen (Loveleen Tandan, co-director) was my touchstone about more contemporary stuff and she recommended things like *Satya* (Ram Gopal Varma, 1998) *Company* (Ram Gopal Varma, 2002) *Black Friday* (Anurag Kashyap, 2004). I then watched films by Aamir Khan like *Lagaan* (2001) that he appeared in and ones that he directed like that amazing one on dyslexia (*Taare Zameen Par*, 2007).<sup>38</sup>

Boyle's choice to follow the cinematic form of Bollywood in this film about India is clear, but whether he mimics to celebrate or to degrade remains open to interpretation. The question is particularly problematic for current critics of Indian cinema because neither answer can be established objectively, but it might be suggested that the film could have done both, without necessarily intending to do either. *Slumdog* is an example of a film where the film's interpretation is overwhelmingly determined by its viewership, and the directorial intent is rendered somewhat insignificant in the face of opinionated spectatorship. The visual impact of the poverty on a first world audience made it extremely difficult to stress the interests of the film to celebrate the form of Bollywood films.

At the level of plotline, *Slumdog* adapts some of the most common elements of popular Hindi cinema. It borrows, for example, the trope of brothers in conflict, the

contrived happy ending to the romantic plot, the anticipated rescue in the last scene (except that the woman comes to rescue here), and a song and dance routine. J.M Tyree remarks that Danny Boyle is “inventively self-aware” in mimicking the norms of popular Hindi cinema, implying that Boyle has made very conscious choices with regards to the elements he mimics.<sup>39</sup> Boyle does choose to incorporate some well-tried formulae into his film, but one is led to question his rationale of borrowing from Bollywood, particularly because his basic plot does not resemble the typical social melodrama. The script, based on a novel titled *Q&A*, undertakes an exploration of the gritty realities of modern India, taking into account incidents from the life of a young Muslim slum boy from Mumbai.<sup>40</sup> Jamal’s account of his own life, recounted in a television game show similar to “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire,” covers the gamut of the lower class postcolonial experience in India—religious, social and economic—and ranges from the bizarre to the gory. The film turns out to be curious concoction, because it approaches a number of difficult subjects in the guise of a feel-good melodrama production. Tyree says, “[T]his is a supposedly touchy-feely feature replete with platitudes about eternal love that indulges in backroom police torture, child prostitution, begging rackets, and anti-Muslim massacres in the alleys of Mumbai.”<sup>41</sup> The film’s investment in these subjects positions it far away from popular Hindi film, especially from the current affluent productions of post-globalization India. Why then, does Danny Boyle mimic elements of popular Indian cinema for his film?

The explanation for Boyle’s choice lies in the current position of popular Indian cinema with regards to the Indian identity. He could not tell this Indian story, in other words, without the help of what has been established as the accepted manner of

storytelling in India. When asked about the influence of the Bollywood genre in the BFI interview, Boyle replies that he does not believe in the stark distinctions between genres, indicating that he does not feel that Bollywood elements in his film would be out of place.<sup>42</sup> One might argue that this was a very smart experimental mode of narration like some of Boyle's earlier films, and one that proved its worth through major commercial success, but Boyle's format of choice also proves the extent of influence that popular Indian cinema now holds. Jamal's story mimics several popular film plots, the most recognizable being *Deewar*.<sup>43</sup> Like the classic and well-recognized confrontation between estranged brothers in *Deewar*, the brothers Jamal and Salim confront each other after years owing to a long-standing moral conflict.<sup>44</sup> Both films portray a lower-class single mother struggling to bring up her sons in the port city of Mumbai, attempting to provide them with formal education so that they are able to escape the cycle of poverty and the slums. Both films demonstrate how different moral characteristics take the brothers to different walks of life, and the climax builds up to the confrontation where the conflict between good and evil must be resolved once and for all. The major difference between the two films, however, is how the ideological issues encountered in both films are significantly complicated in the context of the socio-political situation of the India of *Slumdog Millionaire*. Religion, politics and the nation are zones of greater confusion in the later film, because moral conflict is not restricted any more to the figure of the angry, once-exploited protagonist who questions the value of morality in an imperfect world. In fact, the focus has unexpectedly shifted to the good brother in this case, the better human being who suffers in spite of the strength of his moral character. The only suffering, so to speak, for this particular character in *Deewar* was his meager salary as a police officer;

his rewards included the valorization of his character's moral strength in the face of economic difficulty, marked specifically by his mother/nation's pride in his choices. In *Slumdog*, the metaphorical figure of the mother/motherland is no longer present, because the mother has been abruptly and violently killed in religious riots earlier in the film. The mother-nation figure having been engulfed by religious riots, nation cannot act as the stabilizing force in a moral conflict any more. If Indian cinema of the 1970s called on the interests of the nation in order to assuage the legitimate anger of the decade, the India of *Slumdog* can no longer call upon that metaphor any more, because the very image of the nation has been destroyed by internal strife in the aftermath of the demolition of the mosque in Ayodhya and the Gujarat riots. The increasing emphasis on Hindutva with regard to the discourse of nationalism has eliminated the possibility of a national character that accommodates the multiplicity of the Indian condition.

One of the primary elements of mimicry in *Slumdog Millionaire* concerns its conscious replication and parody of the common religious/mythical tropes of mainstream Hindi cinema. The rabid Hindutva in the BJP-RSS style might be a comparatively new phenomenon, but the discourse of Hindi film has always been in accordance to Hindu sentiment, an element that Boyle's mimicry helps underline. The life of the protagonist, a Muslim in this case, becomes a postcolonial pastiche of the particular form of Hindu religious experience that Indian popular culture commonly upholds. The morally corrupt elder brother of *Deewar*, having refused to practice religion all his life, confronts a Hindu god in a temple after being mortally wounded at the end of the film; this is also where he meets his mother again. Right before his death, he is reconciled with religion and nation (as mother); having voiced his protest against the imperfections in his society, he



ultimately acknowledges the authority of both, thereby emphasizing the connection between the two in the postcolonial experience. In *Slumdog*, Jamal is a Muslim, but his experiences are always bracketed by similar references to popular cinema's immersion in Hindu practices, a particular choice in Boyle's method of mimicry that renders complex undertones to the impact of religion in the lives of his protagonists. As members of a religious minority group growing up in an atmosphere charged with the fanaticism of right wing Hinduism, the brothers are caught in a complex relationship with the religion of their birth, even though their economic conditions allow them little time to actually practice Islam. The power that religion holds over their lives as religious others is most apparent in Jamal's response to the question regarding the weapon in Rama's right hand; the question prompts a series of traumatic memories in his mind, beginning with the sudden and violent death of his mother in the hands of Hindu extremists and culminating in the brothers' dramatic encounter with a child dressed as Rama. This child, representing what is an apparently harmless begging outfit under ordinary circumstances, takes on the form of a malicious religious icon, potent enough to threaten the existence of the brothers. This overt reference to religion is paralleled further in the film through most of the other questions that Jamal is asked, and as he recounts his own life through the answers, he underlines how his own social identity, even as a Muslim, must always be understood in the context of the prominent Hindu culture of Indian cinema. But because he is Muslim, this application of the Hindu form to his life often yields problematic results. The sight of the child dressed as a Hindu god, for instance, is a reassuring spiritual moment for a Hindu; like scores of Hindu protagonists who make peace through monologues with prominent deities in temples, Jamal could have read the appearance of

the child as Rama to be signifying divine reassurance after his mother's death. Mimicry, in this case, takes on the form of ironic commentary on Jamal's status as a Muslim in a world where the majority of narratives are framed by Hindu sentiment, thereby allowing the filmmaker to delve into realms unexplored by popular film, albeit with the help of devices from the popular films themselves.

The majority of the action sequences from the film, including chases and fight scenes, closely follow the pattern of popular cinema. In the climactic confrontation between Jamal and Salim in a high-rise building under construction, for example, the brothers come face to face, Jamal pounces upon Salim, and the two brothers are shown to fall flying out of the building together in the high melodramatic mode of popular film, with accompanying high-pitched background score. The situation is then revised to show Jamal only striking his brother down to the ground with a powerful punch. The scene mimics the extreme emotions of popular Hindi film only to revise and tone it down for a global audience, also marking the limit to which the mimicry can be taken—it is essential that the audience recognizes the action, because the intensity of Jamal's emotion cannot be communicated otherwise. At the same time, the realistic premises of Boyle's film cannot actually allow for that extreme. Boyle consciously brackets off the elements he feels would be interfering with his audience's sense of realism. The song and dance number appears, therefore, at the end of the film, and not in the middle. As Salim dies, and Jamal and Latika are finally united, the film ends in the contrived bittersweet mode of popular cinema. The song appearing at this point highlights the desire to mimic, without necessarily interrupting the narrative of the film.

Jamal's involvement with the world of Bollywood even as a child marks one of the film's iconic scenes, where covered in feces, he emerges jubilant after having procured an autograph from Amitabh Bachchan, the superstar of the 70s. This particular scene, one that also faced bitter criticism in India from audiences and the press alike for maligning the national image of India, approaches the subject of the immensity of stardom in India. Boyle shows how Jamal the slum boy, someone who does not have access to the most of the basic amenities of life, still has to chance to participate in the film culture of Mumbai. Upon hearing the name of the superstar, who apparently comes on a benevolent visit to the slums in his helicopter, a series of images from the films flashes through the mind of the young Jamal, who is ready to jump into a cesspool in order to get his autograph. We also have a glimpse of private film-viewings in the slum when Salim goes to sell the autograph thus procured; the middle-aged man shown watching a film on antiquated equipment is extremely eager to buy the autographed picture from Salim. These incidents, and the snippets from the films appearing throughout *Slumdog* remind the audience that the fandom of Amitabh Bachchan had assumed mythic proportions in the 70s, with temples being built in his name, and prayer services held for his recovery after an on-set accident. He is, in fact, the cinema star on whom Salman Rushdie partly bases the character Gibreel Farishta from *Satanic Verses*, including realistic references from his life, such as the accident mentioned above, in the novel.<sup>45</sup>

The question that leads Jamal through this particular part of his memory is the first one he faces in the game show, and in explaining to the interrogating police officer how he could answer it, Jamal says that one need not be a genius to be able to answer that. This knowledge of the superstar's name is a given, therefore, for any Indian—it is an

essential component of the national character. In referring to the extent of Bachchan's fandom, Boyle's method is obviously exaggerated. The slum boy dunked in feces might be a particularly abhorrent image of India to be in global circulation, one that has been interestingly called 'unrealistic' or an 'untrue' image of India by critics at home, but the excesses of the image could easily be explained as the director's method of pointing to the bizarre (at least to an outsider) extents of fandom and the impact of popular cinema on the public psyche in India.

*Slumdog Millionaire*, in spite of the chances of first-world interpretation it carries within itself, has established that the norms of Indian cinema are now easily recognizable. On its own part, post-globalization Indian cinema advertises its self-consciousness beyond any doubt. Recent films go to show how, through a process of self-reflection, popular Indian cinema continues to problematize the colonial/postcolonial issue of mimicking western norms. If this is indeed the last phase of colonial mimicry, it has, in fact, helped mainstream Hindi film to move beyond formulaic renditions of rehashed plots into a number of complex and experimental cinematic forms, as the host of experimental films made in the recent past goes to prove.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Meyer, "Swift and Sterne Revisited: Postcolonial Parodies in Rushdie and Singh-Toor", in *Cheeky Fictions: Laughter and the Postcolonial*, edited by Susan Reichl and Mark Stein (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 117-30.

<sup>2</sup> Meyer 118.

<sup>3</sup> Linda Hutcheon, "Circling the Downspout of Empire: Post-Colonialism and Postmodernism," in *Unhomely States: Theorizing English-Canadian Postcolonialism*, edited by Cynthia Conchita Sugars (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2004), 71-93.

<sup>4</sup> Hutcheon 14. Cf. Marchak, Patricia, "Given a Certain Latitude: A (Hinterland) Sociologist's View of Anglo-Canadian Literature." In *In Our Own House: Social Perspectives on Canadian Literature*, edited by Paul Cappon (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1978), 178-205 and Helen Tiffin, "Post-Colonialism, Post-Modernism and the Rehabilitation of Post Colonial History." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 23.1 (1988), 169-81.

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<sup>5</sup> *Contemporary Literature* 35:4 (Winter 1994), 643-660.

<sup>6</sup> Huggan 2.

<sup>7</sup> Huggan 3.

<sup>8</sup> Hutcheon 6, Cf. Slemon, Stephen. "Magic Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse." *Canadian Literature* 116 (lg88): 9-23.

<sup>9</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Social Text*, No. 15 (Autumn, 1986), 65-88.

<sup>10</sup> See Imre Szeman, "Who's Afraid of National Allegory? Jameson, Literary Criticism, Globalization." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 100:3 (Summer 2001): 803-827. Szeman says: "The presumption that it is possible to produce a theory that would explain African, Asian, and Latin American literary production, the literature of China and Senegal, has been (inevitably) read as nothing more than a patronizing, theoretical orientalism, or as yet another example of a troubling appropriation of Otherness with the aim of exploring the West rather than the Other. Aijaz Ahmad's "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory'" remains the most well-known criticism of Jameson's essay along these lines. More informally and anecdotally, however, within the field of postcolonial literary and cultural studies, Jameson's essay has come to be treated as little more than a cautionary tale about the extent and depth of Eurocentrism in the Western academy, or, even more commonly, as a convenient bibliographic marker of those kinds of theories of third world literature that everyone now agrees are limiting and reductive."(803)

<sup>11</sup> Jameson 6.

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter I 6-7, and Chapter II 7, *The Theory of Reading*, edited by Frank Groversmith (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1984), *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1985), and *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, edited by Houston A. Baker, Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindborg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 87-106.

<sup>13</sup> Hutcheon 14-15.

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter I 6-7 for a discussion of how the trend of multicultural exchange is reversed after the Mutiny of 1857. The proportions of the compulsion to imitate is best outlined by Frantz Fanon's work, particularly in his seminal psychoanalytical study *Black Skins White Masks*, (Grove Press, 1967). See also 5-6 of this chapter for Fanon's approach to mimicry.

<sup>15</sup> "Figures of Colonial Resistance", *Modern Fiction Studies*, 35:1, (Spring 1989), 137.

<sup>16</sup> Cf Mary Carpenter, *The Last Days in England Of the Raja Rammohun Roy*.1866. (Calcutta: Riddhi, 1976).

<sup>17</sup> William Bentinck was the Governor General from 1828-1835, and responsible, primarily on the urging of Rammohun Roy, for the formal abolition of *Sati* in 1829. Sharpe 8. Cf Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis* 28, Spring (1984) and William Cavendish Bentinck, *The Correspondence of Lord William Cavendish Bentinck, Governor-General of India, 1828-1835*, edited by C.H. Philips. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977).

<sup>18</sup> Sharpe 145-6.

<sup>19</sup> Sharpe 146.

<sup>20</sup> *Cultural Geographies* 10: 4, (October 2003), 408-423.

<sup>21</sup> Lahiri 8. Cf. PRO, MEPO 3/ 950 and P. Roy, *Indian traffic: Identities in Question in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998).

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- <sup>22</sup> Lahiri 13.
- <sup>23</sup> See Chapters I (9-11) and II (31, 39) for Partha Chatterjee's formulation of this debate.
- <sup>24</sup> Hutcheon 14-15. Cf. William H. New, *Dreams of Speech and Violence: The Art of the Short Story in Canada and New Zealand* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).
- <sup>25</sup> Jameson 5.
- <sup>26</sup> *Dil Chahta Hai*, DVD, directed by Farhan Akhtar (Bangalore: India, 2001).
- <sup>27</sup> "Jaisa film-mo mein hota hain, ho raha hai hubabu," is the Hindi version. The translation and transliteration are mine.
- <sup>28</sup> "Bhigi bhigi sari mein, iyun thumke lagati tu"
- <sup>29</sup> Jaggu, one of the inmates that Chandrika interviews, recollects the events that lead to his incarceration. He is discovered beside his dead wife's body with a knife in hand, but he swears and the audience is made to trust the fact that she dies by falling from the staircase.
- <sup>30</sup> These characters are often played by popular actors with immense fan followings, and audiences feel betrayed if the character is unsuccessful.
- <sup>31</sup> See Chapter 2, 23-4 for a summary of the film.
- <sup>32</sup> *Yuva*, DVD, directed by Mani Ratnam (Mumbai:Eros Entertainment, 2004). The film presents the interconnection of the lives of three male characters. Lalan is the lower-class criminal, and part of his villainy is his attitude towards his wife. See <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0382383/> for a summary.
- <sup>33</sup> *Om Shanti Om*, DVD, directed by Farha Khan (Mumbai: Eros Entertainment, 2007)
- <sup>34</sup> The film's basic plot revolves around the reincarnation of Om Prakash Makhija, a B-grade actor, as Om Kapoor, a Bollywood superstar. Om Makhija witnesses the murder of Shantipriya, an actress he is in love with, right before he dies in an accident, is reborn as Om Kapoor, remembers his past life, and hatches a plot for taking revenge on Shantipriya's killer.
- <sup>35</sup> A play on the epithet "Dream Girl", applied to popular actress Hema Malini after her appearance in a film of the same name.
- <sup>36</sup> *Slumdog Millionaire*, DVD, directed by Danny Boyle. Perf. Dev Patel, Anil Kapoor, Saurabh Shukla. (Twentieth Century Fox, 2009).
- <sup>37</sup> There have been earlier references to Bollywood in Hollywood, like the Hindi film song "Chhamma Chhamma" in the musical *Moulin Rouge* (2001), but *Slumdog* brought Bollywood into the limelight of the Oscars, almost making it the theme of the ceremony in 2009.
- <sup>38</sup> Danny Boyle, interviewed by Alkarim Jivrani. "Mumbai Rising." BFI. <http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/feature/49511>, accessed 2010-11-12.
- <sup>39</sup> J. M. Tyree, "Against The Clock: *Slumdog Millionaire* and The Curious Case of Benjamin Button", *Film Quarterly* 62.4 (2009), 34-38.
- <sup>40</sup> Vikash Swarup. *Q&A*, (New York: Scribner, 2005).
- <sup>41</sup> Tyree 1.
- <sup>42</sup> In "Mumbai Rising."
- <sup>43</sup> The influence of Deewar has been established both by Boyle's own confession in interviews, and through the Indian media's assessment of his influences for the film. See Amitava Kumar, "Slumdog Millionaire's Bollywood Ancestors" in *Vanity Fair*, 23

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December 2008, <http://www.vanityfair.com/online/oscars/2008/12/slumdog-millionaires-bollywood-ancestors.html>, accessed 2010-11-12.

<sup>44</sup> See discussion of fraternal conflict in *Deewar*(1975) in Chapter 3, 22-24. *Slumdog* draws on several elements from the film, including signature devices of the scriptwriter duo Salim-Javed. Loveleen Tandan, co-director of *Slumdog*, says in an interview with *The Hindu* that “The writer Simon Beaufoy studied Salim-Javed’s kind of cinema minutely.” *The Hindu*. 11 January 2009, <http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/holnus/009200901110925.htm>, accessed 2010-11-12. The Alkarim Jivrani interview (see note 36) refers in particular to the Salim-Javed style montage of the brothers jumping off the train.

<sup>45</sup> Salman Rushdie. *Satanic Verses*. New York: Picador, 1988.

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