



Journal of Religion & Film

Volume 11
Issue 2 October 2007

Article 4

8-10-2016

Found in Translation: From Hollywood Hits to Bollywood Blockbusters

Ally Ostrowski

University of Colorado, ally.mead@colorado.edu

Recommended Citation

Ostrowski, Ally (2016) "Found in Translation: From Hollywood Hits to Bollywood Blockbusters," *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 11 : Iss. 2 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol11/iss2/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Religion & Film by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu.

Found in Translation: From Hollywood Hits to Bollywood Blockbusters

Abstract

Bollywood cinema is a proverbial machine, cranking out upwards of 800 new films each year. Recently, however, Indian directors have begun looking toward Hollywood for an abundance of storylines to reform for Bollywood consumers. In most cases the original Hollywood plotline is indiscernible amidst the Bollywood panacea of singing and dancing and Indian religious references are often inserted to validate and legitimate characterizations, situations and bring an Indian cultural atmosphere that Bollywood audiences require. This paper examines the translation of several Hollywood hits into Bollywood blockbusters and explores why religion is an integral trope utilized in making sensitive plotlines derived from an American culture palpable to an Indian audience.

Religion is nearly synonymous with the Indian film industry. The majority of Bollywood films commence with a short scene dedicated to a principal Hindu deity. In fact, one of the films included in this analysis, *Kal Ho Naa Ho*, begins with an illuminated statue of the Hindu god Ganesh as the name of the production company, Dharma Productions, appears on the screen. Not only is a God invoked before the first frame of film, the company's name is representative of Hinduism. Further, the first indigenously produced film in India was based upon the life of a famous saint.¹ Religion is also prevalent throughout the cinematic content, with scenes taking place during Hindu and Sikh wedding and engagement ceremonies and characters performing morning obeisance and offering prayers to the Gods. Bollywood films are, for the most part, predictable and encompass a myriad of entertainment properties with singing, dancing, comic relief, and of course dramatic tension. Bollywood has also begun appropriating cinematic narratives from American cinema, but is careful to reconstruct film ideologies to conform to Indian cultural practices. This paper will explore the transference of Hollywood hits into Bollywood blockbusters, and in particular how the translation of American film narratives to Indian cinema requires an addition of religious elements and what the inclusion of religion does for the storyline as well as the interpretation of the audience.

Bollywood reportedly produces 800 films per year for an audience of 15 million per day.² According to Rachel Dwyer,³ there are nearly 13,000 movie theatres in India, though Bollywood has increasingly been looking to the Diaspora for an expanded audience and innovative subject matter.⁴ Hollywood films were viewed as attractive to Bollywood producers because of the requirement to appease the diverse American population, a similar requisite for the heterogeneous nation of India and NRIs (non-resident Indians) living abroad as well.⁵ The trend for more recent Bollywood films has been to develop off Hollywood themes but construct the narrative to ensure that the presentation is very Indian.⁶ Hollywood to Bollywood translations are never direct, and alterations much always be made to account for cultural differences beyond merely replacing American actors with Indian actors.⁷ Nayar claims that Hollywood film narratives merely serve as "skeletons" ready to be filled with appropriate cultural referents. Chakravarty asserts that Indian cinema is "a microcosm of the social, political, economic, and cultural life of a nation. It is the contested site where meanings are negotiated, traditions made and remade, identities affirmed or rejected."⁸ Bollywood films allow for this venue to "play" with alternative identities or treatments of topics such as sexuality or family in a safe environment while assuring viewers a traditional resolution at the conclusion of the film. Therefore, Hollywood content is easily imported into a Bollywood framework, preserving unique storylines while still imparting familiar "Indianness" into the adaptation. This sense of Indianness

includes the reinforcement of normative ideals of behavior and action, religious elements, and the tension between including elements from outside India without losing distinctly Indian representations and interpretations.

In a sense, transference from Hollywood to Bollywood cinema has been a natural development. Bollywood utilizes a similar type of filmmaking to Hollywood, with linear narratives and a sense of closure, a strong, heroic central male figure, making some aspects of cinematic narrative construction facile to adapt for an Indian audience.⁹ Though Hindi cinema has achieved its own unique flavor of cinematic style, there is no doubt that there have always been influences from Hollywood. Gokulsing and Dissanayake¹⁰ suggest that the prominence of Hollywood musicals in the 1920s to 1950s influenced the establishment of song and dance routines in popular Hindi film. While this trope has changed somewhat in recent years, particularly in films of an experimental or independent nature, Indian cinema is best known for the incorporation of musical and dance elements with flashy on-screen antics, but this has not been the only influence of Hollywood content into Bollywood film. According to Nayar,¹¹ nearly all Bollywood films lift ideas from Hollywood films and she indicates that 90 percent of Bollywood films being produced in August of 1993 were remakes of either Hollywood or Hong Kong films (refer to Table 1 for examples).

Table 1	
Bollywood remakes of Hollywood films	
Hollywood	Bollywood
Houseboat	Hum Hain Rahi Pyar Ke
Helen Keller Story	Black
Sense and Sensibility	Kandukodein Kandukodein
Pretty Woman	Chori Chori Chupke Chupke
Autumn in New York	Kal Ho Naa Ho
A Kiss before Dying	Baazigar
Taxi Driver	Sadak
Sabrina	Yeh Dillagi
The Whole Nine Yards	Awara Paagal Deewana
It Happened One Night	Dil Hai Ke Manta Nahin
E.T.	Koy Mil Gaya
The Exorcist	Gehrayee
Ghost	Pyaar Ka Saaya
Sleeping with the Enemy	Deewana
Love Hate Love	Darr
Unlawful Entry	Takkar
Mrs. Doubtfire	Chachi 420
Sleepless in Seattle	Akele Hum Akele Tum
Rebecca	Kohra
The Godfather	Dharmatma
The Magnificent Seven	Khotey Sikkey
Some like it Hot	Rafoo Chakkar
Breaking Away	Jo Jeeta Wohi Sikandar
Seven Brides for Seven	Satte Pe Satta
Dial M for Murder	Aitbaar

This project will examine the inclusion of religious references in the adaptation of two American films for an Indian audience: the Bollywood remakes of *Pretty Woman* (*Chori Chori Chupke Chupke*) and *Autumn in New York* (*Kal Ho Naa Ho*) were selected. Though there are literally hundreds of Hollywood films that generated Bollywood versions, these two were selected for analysis because of several important reasons. First, both films were Bollywood blockbusters and

starred some of the most prominent Hindi film actors. Millions of audience members flocked to see the films, both in India and abroad, and because of certain aspects of subject matter the films were a cause for controversy in many parts of India. Finally, religion was completely absent from the original Hollywood versions, but when translating the scripts into Bollywood form, the storylines became replete with religious references and overtones, from the consecration of conceiving a child with someone other than one's wife to song and dance numbers mixing Hindi lyrics, bhangra beats, a black gospel choir, and a dancing Sikh cabby. In order to analyze the addition of religious elements to the film narratives and related sociocultural constructions in Indian culture, a basic overview of both films must be provided. Because *Chori Chori Chupke Chupke (CCCC)* is the more significant reference for the addition of religion into a Hollywood remake, it will be discussed first.

*Pretty Woman*¹² was a phenomenal Hollywood hit in 1990 and starred Richard Gere (Edward) as a wealthy and successful businessman and Julia Roberts (Vivian) as a quirky and charming prostitute. Under the guise of soliciting directions, Vivian escorts Edward back to his lavish hotel and propositions her to remain with him for a week as a companion, sexually and otherwise, in exchange for three thousand dollars. After improvements to Vivian's wardrobe, mannerisms, and behavior she is transformed in a lady with class and substance. She is simply

adorable at Edward's side, donning a designer dress and attempting to determine which fork was appropriate for escargot. Nevertheless, Vivian breaks the rules of the arrangement and develops an emotional attachment to Edward. Though he cares enough for her to defend her from attack by his associate Stuckey that sees her as merely a whore to abuse, he indicates he cannot give her "the dream" and can only offer her an apartment and some cash for a fresh start. Obviously insulted she refuses, but in the end, like most Hollywood films assure their audience, Edward comes to her rescue in his white limo, scales the deathly fire escape, and kisses his newly transformed princess and happily ever after the businessman and ex-prostitute remain. The Bollywood remake of *Pretty Woman*, entitled *Chori Chori Chupke Chupke (Sneakily, Stealthily)*, released in 2001, has a similar premise but very different plot twists and conclusions for consumption by an Indian audience.

*CCCC*¹³ begins like most Bollywood hits, with a massive ensemble scene, singing, dancing, and of course the audience's introduction to film's main love interests. Raj Malhotra (played by Salman Khan), heir to the mammoth Malhotra business corporation is attending a Sikh wedding and spots the beautiful Priya (played by Rani Mukherjee) through the panoply of colorful costumes and bodies bouncing to bhangra music. Raj and Priya engage in the give and take musical flirtation common in Indian song, challenging and responding to one another in a culturally approved fashion. Raj sings about his many wonderful attributes while Priya seems

unimpressed, often dancing in an aggressive fashion with mock face slaps and flailing her shawl towards him like a weapon. While this ritual might appear to be the interaction of two young people genuinely disinterested in or irritated by one another, it is actually a popular and culturally legitimized way for young men and women to court in the company of others, get to know one another through the wit and intellect required to construct lyrics, and begin to determine if this might be a potential marriageable match.¹⁴ After hearing of the wedding antics, Raj's grandfather, the patriarch of the Malhotra family, arranges for Priya to come to the Malhotra home to discuss the possibility of marrying Raj. The grandfather has previously consulted an astrologist and Raj and Priya's chart is clear, a subsequent step in the arrangement of a suitable match. The final phase in the marriage process requires both Raj and Priya to indicate they would be interested in such a union and then the grandfather's lifelong wish of a great-grandson and Malhotra heir may finally be realized. Though this scene was not lifted from *Pretty Woman*, the religious references serve as a means to legitimize Raj's and Priya's character for an Indian audience. Both come from good families, they met during a religious event, the marriage was arranged through properly arranged familial channels, was sanctioned astrologically, and consent was given by both the bride and groom, all important aspects of modern elite Hindu marriages.¹⁵

After Raj and Priya are finally wed during a traditional religious ceremony, again legitimizing both characters as proper Hindus, Priya becomes pregnant. However, during an unfortunate accident she falls and loses the child and subsequent complications also require a hysterectomy. Priya is left barren, causing great heartache to the couple knowing that they would never be able to fulfill the obligation to the grandfather to produce a male heir. Priya believes she is a failure and as a good selfless wife, cites an article about surrogate mothers, declaring "for the sake of our baby I am willing to share your love with another woman." The only question now for the couple is where to find such a woman to give them this child.

Driving through a remote part of the city late one evening, Raj encounters an older woman he believed was in need of a ride to her home. While driving he tells her of his dilemma, though unbeknownst to him she was actually a prostitute. Too old to bear additional children, she recommends Raj contact a young dancer and courtesan known only as Madhubaala (Madhu), played by Preity Zinta. When Madhu takes the stage her garish outfits and suggestive movements command attention. Seeing Raj in his crisply pressed suits, Madhu moves toward him and the pair engages in a singing affair. Much unlike his musical courtship ritual with Priya, the dialogue is overtly sexual with Madhu taking the dominant role. Raj eventually takes Madhu to his lavish hotel, professes his love for his wife, and offers Madhu one million dollars to carry his child.

Unlike *Pretty Woman*, the sex act did not occur immediately. Because this encounter between a well-bred Hindu man and a courtesan was for procreative purposes and not sexual enjoyment, a preparation period was required to ensure Madhu was suitable to carry the child and also be introduced to Priya as the surrogate mother Raj had chosen. As Madhu rolls around in the million dollars on the hotel bed, Raj calls Priya to indicate he had located an appropriate surrogate for their baby. He neglects to mention that Madhu is a prostitute and also instructs Madhu to conceal her occupation (sneakily, stealthily) from even Priya. After Raj is convinced Madhu is proper enough to earn Priya's approval, the trio moves from India to a chalet in Switzerland, away from prying family eyes in order for Madhu to become pregnant with Raj's child. Priya, however, is eagerly awaiting news of the pregnancy and sheds more tears at finding Raj and Madhu sleeping separately each morning. Though it is apparent that each understands what needs to occur, Raj is reluctant to approach Madhu's bed, symbolic of a conflicted Hindu man torn by the desire to remain faithful to his wife and the obligation to produce an heir. This characterization is indicative of the fine balance between being a good husband but also a dutiful son/grandson and is contrived to send a clear message about a sense of duty in Indian society. If Raj is too eager to sleep with Madhu it could be interpreted that he simply wanted to be intimate with another woman under the guise of producing a child, but because he is constantly conflicted and is forced to approach Madhu's bed by his own wife in order to fulfill familial obligations his actions are

viewed as responsible instead of sordid. Therefore, like a dutiful and selfless wife, Priya takes the lead and prompts Raj and Madhu to conceive a baby by leaving them alone in the chalet during a snowstorm while she hides herself in the sanctity of a church, asking God to bless the creation of their child.

The next scenes are perhaps the richest with religious imagery. Priya spends the evening in a Christian church, staring peacefully toward the crucifix as an intoxicated Madhu seduces Raj with liquor. He imagines her to be Priya and gets into her bed, crying as he's touching her. When the sun rises, Priya is transfixed upon the Madonna and child statue as the scene shifts to Madhu meeting Priya at the chalet door with a tousled look indicating that "the act was accomplished." Priya then takes a moment to thank God for granting her wish. It is interesting that simply fulfilling familial wishes wasn't enough for the sanctification of surrogacy and required that Priya employ religious influence to bless the procreation. It would not have seemed wholesome or reconcilable for even the most selfless of women to ask her husband to be intimate with another woman in order to have a child, but with the inclusion of religious references it becomes almost a mandate from God. In this film, a religious structure was used as a location to legitimize a "deviant" act with benevolent reasons, namely to please the elders and to produce a child to continue the Malhotra lineage.

Religious influence over the child becomes a recurring trope throughout the remainder of the film. After discovering that Priya is again "pregnant," the Malhotra family sends a sacred thread for her to wear, imbuing luck and good health onto the baby. Priya gives the thread to Madhu, thereby transferring good wishes to the child and also legitimizing Madhu as both a mother and carrier of a sacred object. Madhu is celebrated each morning by Raj and Priya by giving her juices and sweets, much like the offerings that would be presented to a goddess during daily puja (worship). It could be interpreted that Raj and Priya's actions were simply to benefit the health and well-being of Madhu and also their child, but the ritualized fashion in which Madhu is presented glasses of juice and is hand fed sweet meats appears as if she is being venerated and not simply having her health attended to.

However, like every good Bollywood film, *CCCC* offers a twist in that Madhu violates the terms of their arrangement and begins to fall in love with Raj. One evening Madhu is attacked by Ajay, an associate of Raj, who had seen Madhu in her courtesan clothing when she was first staying in Raj's hotel. Further complications abound as Raj's family travels to Switzerland for the birth of the child. To maintain appearances, Priya must wear a pillow to look pregnant and Madhu must identify herself as a friend of the family whose husband is away on business. This advances Madhu to the appearance of a proper Indian woman with good breeding from a good Hindu family who is unfortunate enough to have a

husband that is away during such an important time in her life. Grandfather gives blessings by touching Madhu's and Priya's heads and Priya's mother in law feeds both of the women sweets for their babies and even massages reluctant Madhu's feet. In Indian society, touching the feet is considered defiling while touching the head is considered a privilege for those of higher classes. Status and class is shown and maintained by those in higher positions touching the heads of subordinates and subordinates conversely touching the feet of those in power and authority.¹⁶ It is likely that Madhu, because of her lowly occupation, has never had her feet touched as there are few that would be lower in Indian culture than a whore. Though the rituals of the grandfather touching Madhu's head and the mother-in-law touching her feet, she is brought into the Malhotra family and positioned as a sister to Priya in status. Later, Madhu overhears the grandfather reading to Priya's "baby" from the *Ramayana* and is invited into the room to hear the holy texts. Though Madhu is never given a last name and it is difficult to know what caste she is from, her job as a dancer and prostitute places her outside of the learned society that possesses and reads from the Holy Scriptures.¹⁷ After the introduction of the Malhotra family into Madhu's life this is also the first time displays a tikka, a forehead marking symbolizing spirit, piety and devotion¹⁸ (Dubois, 1999). It is evident that her experiences as part of a traditional Hindu family are imbuing a sense of "properness" which includes acts and behaviors prescribed by the Hindu tradition, such as the touching of the head, hearing sacred texts, and wearing a tikka.

This change in status for Madhu's character is consummated in the ritual of returning home, a Hindu rite of bringing Indian children back to the Motherland. Raj, Priya, and Madhu return to India for this ritual. Priya selflessly asks Madhu to impersonate her to receive the blessings from the priest for the child. Madhu, disguised as Priya, is dressed exquisitely like a lovely Hindu bride as Raj places Priya's wedding band on her bare finger. With veil drawn, Madhu poses for pictures with the family and takes blessings from the priest, crying ever so softly knowing that this is really not her life or her destiny. As the lineage of the Malhotra family is recited and the final generation is named, Priya Malhotra, Madhu weeps even harder. This might be the first time in the film that Madhu has a sense of her marginalization in Indian society, despite her role as a mother and the warmth she has felt from the Malhotra family. She realizes it all to be false and remembers her place of courtesan is to be used, for sex or even for her womb, and then cascaded back into the borders.

Later that evening, Madhu's liminal status in Hindu society appears to be overwhelming. Leaving all material possessions behind, she runs through a rainstorm, clutching her swollen belly. Symbolic of a ritual cleansing, she begins her final transformation from a low class prostitute to the ideal image of a good Indian woman, but remains mindful that she can never truly be integrated into a "real" Hindu family. Madhu tells Priya she won't give up her baby and though she

is a prostitute "a mother is still a mother." At this time she falls to the ground and goes into labor. Raj and Priya take Madhu to the hospital but because of birth complications a difficult choice must be made, save the mother or save the child. Without thinking, Priya, again as the selfless wife, orders the doctors to save the mother and forsake the child she and Raj had hoped to provide for the family. However, because of karma, Priya's selfless act allows for both Madhu and the child to survive. Madhu's final transformation is then complete when she selflessly chooses to give the child to Priya. Madhu's decision could be explained as perhaps the honor she felt when Priya was willing to sacrifice the life of Raj's baby for the life of a mere prostitute or perhaps the knowledge that the act of having a child out of wedlock would not improve her station in life and place her any closer to being a part of the traditional Hindu family that she now desperately desires. At any rate, Madhu has fulfilled her obligation and prepares to embark on a new life.

In the concluding scene, Madhu prepares to leave though Priya invites her to remain with the family, Madhu refuses, saying she has no right to Raj and no desire to remain as a co-wife with Priya. It is uncertain where Madhu will go, but she does indicate she will not "go back where she came from." Madhu states bids farewell to Raj and straightens his tie and he kisses her forehead, a common act between married Indian couples. The transformation of Madhu's character from courtesan to a "good woman" figure is complete when she departs the film wearing

Priya's baby blue sari from the beginning of the film. Though Madhu refuses to take the million dollars, bus ticket, or even the clothing Raj had purchased for her, her position in society has indeed changed. Banaji¹⁹ suggests that audiences may interpret Madhu's transformation as significant because she was removed from a "polluting" occupation and elevated by being introduced into proper Hindu society, despite the fact that there was no change in her financial situation. However, it is questionable whether audiences will understand Madhu's transformation as an achievement or whether traditional Hindus will read Madhu's character changes as irrelevant and once a whore always a whore. Those would indeed be interesting questions for an audience analysis particularly based upon the level of religiosity certain members of the audience profess. I would argue that it is likely the more religious Hindu audiences would applaud Raj and Priya for fulfilling familial obligations and also assisting an unfortunate courtesan but it isn't likely that her character would be read as completely transformed and instead merely cognizant of her marginalization from "proper society." Younger and less religious audiences might, however, read Madhu's character change in a different sense and appreciate the fluidity of identity with the advent of city life and the ability to simply move elsewhere and start anew without the taint of past indiscretions and familial history. Again, these are only assumptions and interviews with audience members would need to be fully conducted to explore exactly how the transformation of Madhu's character would be read with respect to religio-social constructions in India.

Gangoli²⁰ discusses how Indian films construct these notions of Indianness most often as Hindu or at least stemming from Hindu ideology. She suggests that filmic characterizations for women tend to encompass traditional Hindu familial roles with women presented as devoted wives sacrificing and serving their husbands out of a sense of duty. In the Hindu tradition, a woman constructs her identity in relationship to those around her; her role as a wife, a mother, and a daughter-in-law. She understands what is expected of her through these familial obligations and internalizes those requirements and desires to give her life direction and purpose.²¹ The character of Priya typifies the ideal Hindu Indian wife, selfless and devoted, and this construction stems from the Hindu ideology concerning the Goddess Sita and her dedication to home and family at any cost.²² Sita was a devoted mother and wife to Rama and "the perfect model of wifely devotion."²³ Sita remains a powerful figure in the lives of Hindu women, and the portrayals of female characters replete with Sita-esque qualities would tend to be viewed by the audience, often a Hindu majority, as "empowering."²⁴

The character of Madhu, however, is constructed quite differently. Chakravarty²⁵ describes the courtesan as existing on the fringe of society in the dichotomous roles of being used by men for personal pleasure yet also being praised for independence and artistic training. Many of these ambiguities play out in the character of Madhu. Positioned against the ideal Hindu woman (Priya) who is

draped in pale earthly colors symbolizing her as virtuous and motherly, Madhu appears gaudy in her garishly bright dancing clothes, is primarily concerned with her own financial gain, and doesn't mind the prospect of carrying someone else's child for a price. However, as the film progresses and Madhu becomes pregnant with Raj's child, the two women become nearly indistinguishable; both wearing pale saris, behaving in respectful fashions, and in the end both choose the well-being of another over personal gain. Madhu's character is temporarily given a reprieve of sorts from being a whore, being fed sweets, receiving foot massages, and being given blessings by a priest, but once the child is born the Malhotra's are "done with her," in a sense, and she moves on. Madhu's character is reaffirmed as on the fringe, not as virtuous as Priya, and primarily outside of circumscribed roles in Hindu families.

As seen from the *Chori Chori Chupke Chupke* analysis, is evident that influences drift into the subcontinent from outside media, but narratives are only marginally appropriated and a strong sense of Indianness must be injected into the storyline in order for the film to be consumed by a finicky Indian audience already bombarded with a plethora of cinematic choices. For Bollywood, this "sense of Indianness" often includes aspects of religion. While wearing a tikka, touching the feet of an elder, and behaving as a dutiful wife might appear to be cultural constructions these are all nonetheless rooted in Hindu theology and mythology.

Religion functions in several ways in the *CCCC* narrative: primarily to legitimize spaces, characters, and their actions. Religious referents set the scene for places legitimacy. Raj and Priya met during a religious wedding ceremony, their match was formed through their own religious wedding ceremony, and Priya utilized a religious space to ask God to bless the union between Raj and Madhu in order to create a child. In this film, a Christian church was utilized as a legitimizing religious structure and also the iconography of Madonna and child statue serve to reinforce the impetus behind the character of Raj having relations with someone other than his wife, particularly a courtesan. Religious elements were used to legitimize characters and their actions. Priya personified the Goddess Sita while Madhu was treated as a goddess by the Maholtra family, given offering fit for puja. Though the film was controversial because of the issue of infidelity and the lowering of a man of Raj's stature by being intimate with a courtesan, it was the eventual legitimization of the actions as mandated by God that allowed for this. Madhu was refined into a suitable vessel to produce this baby but in the end she was returned to her marginalized status. The balance was restored and Hindu ideology was again confirmed.

However, this is not the only purpose that the addition of religion serves in Bollywood cinema. *Kal Ho Naa Ho (KHNH)*, a 2003 popular Hindi remake of the 2000 American hit *Autumn in New York*²⁶ that starred Winona Ryder as Charlotte

and Richard Gere as Will. Will was an older, wealthy and cultured playboy of a man who never settled on one woman long enough to develop any significant type of relationship. Charlotte was a younger and carefree woman who loved life yet didn't have long to live because of a heart condition. They haphazardly met and began a short and tumultuous but intensely loving relationship. Will denounced all other women and focused exclusively on Charlotte, awakening feelings he'd never experienced. Charlotte too, was in love but this wasn't enough to stabilize her diseased heart and reverse a terminal illness. Charlotte died suddenly and almost unexpectedly in the film, leaving Will in a realm of sorrow and loss. Eventually he ceased to regret the pain and instead focused on the emotions he was finally able to feel. *Autumn in New York* was translated into *Kal Ho Naa Ho (Tomorrow May Never Come)* with many twists, character differences, and of course, the introduction of religious references into the storyline.

*KHNNH*²⁷ focuses on the life of Naina Kapoor, played by Preity Zinta, the same actress starring as Madhu in *CCCC*. Naina is a studious undergraduate who rarely smiles, views life as a chore, and is inundated with familial unrest. Naina's character is analogous to the Hollywood role of Will in that both Naina and Will have never had the time nor temperament for love relationships and it is during the course of the film that both find that one person they'd sacrifice everything to be with. The major difference, of course, is that Will is a habitual womanizer unable

to remain faithful or focused on any one person while Naina is a perpetual student with her face in books and is unable to notice much else than her studies. Because of the private nature of sexuality in Indian society, translating Will's character to a promiscuous female, or even male for that matter, would not be appropriate and instead choosing to focus on a female student that notices only books and doesn't "live life" is arguably analogous to the American playboy that focuses on the moving from woman to woman without exploring the notion of monogamous love with one person.

Naina and her mother Jennifer live together in the Diaspora, a predominantly Indian segment of New York City, with Suvi, Naina's 13 year old disabled brother, and Gia, her 8 year old supposedly adopted sister. Lajjo, Jennifer's acidic mother in law also lives in the home after the tragic suicide of her son and Jennifer's husband a few years prior. Tensions run high between Lajjo, a critical woman tied to Indian tradition and culture, and Jennifer, an Indian woman who has embraced life in America and the Catholic religion and doesn't know how to prepare the simplest of foods from the subcontinent. The children lie somewhere in between the two, exhibiting very Westernized dress but subscribe to the notions of Hindu dharma and reincarnation. The family in general is a miserable lot, with little hope for the future and little joy in life. The Kapoor's have been under extreme stress with financial concerns, family strife, and the loss of the father figure. Naina has but one

friend, a fellow student named Rohit, played by Saif Ali Khan. Rohit brings silliness and distraction to Naina and otherwise provides her with some diversion from her familial situation. Rohit, however, was never viewed as a serious love interest and Naina simply never considered love a viable option, despite the constant pressure from Lajjo to marry a nice Punjabi man. The Kapoor family, and Rohit as well, are transformed from their states of depressive solitude when an Indian stranger comes to the city. Aman, played by Shahrukh Khan, takes residence in the adjacent apartment and becomes infatuated with the lives of the Kapoors and Naina in particular.

The audience is first introduced to the character of Aman during the evening prayers of Jennifer, Naina, Suvi, and Gia, all knelt by Gia's small bed with clasped hands and upward tilting foreheads. The picture of this praying family should seem resonant with Christian imagery as Jennifer has converted to Catholicism and the family in general exhibits a hybrid of Christian and Hindu practices and values. During this prayer time, Jennifer tells her children that Jesus was an angel and will send an angel to answer their prayers if they speak from their hearts. Incorporated into these prayer segments are images of Aman in flowing white clothing standing high on a boat bow overlooking the city. Aman is presented very purposely as portend of the angel that is coming to NYC to rescue this ailing family. "When will our angel come?" Gia wonders, at which point the audience is given a long shot of

Aman with his white shirt open and flapping like wings, with regal music playing in the background. Jennifer then asks "Dear God, please bring some light to our family" as the lights in the adjacent apartment are lit and Aman comes out onto the balcony and looks into their window. He watches the Kapoor family praying for their angel to come, and focuses on the tear-stained girl in glasses, Naina.

Throughout the film Aman takes on the role of a savior character and in many respects mirrors the character of Charlotte from *Autumn in New York*. Charlotte enriches Will's life, she gives him a reason to celebrate being alive, and teaches him how to truly love another human being. Similarly, Aman breezes into the lives of the Kapoors, he improves their financial situation by suggesting they convert their failing American diner to a unique Indian restaurant, and teaches them all to love and appreciate the lives they've been given. He even takes Naina's glasses so she is able to "see the world clearly." Aman's role in influencing Kapoor familial concerns escalates with his involvement in an ongoing conflict between Jennifer and Lajjo about the inclusion of Gia in their lives. Lajjo holds deep resentment for Jennifer taking in the little girl and finally blurts out accusations that it was because of Gia and the added financial and emotional stress that her son left his family and killed himself. Aman, imbued with almost sacred knowledge of the true events (a revealing letter mistakenly delivered to his home instead of the Kapoors), circumvents traditional roles of respecting one's elders and scolds Lajjo for her

callousness. Aman makes it clear to Lajjo that Gia was actually the love child produced when Jennifer's husband had an illicit affair. The woman didn't want the child and Jenny took her in out of generosity (another example of a selfless and devoted Sita-esque wife) and raised her as her own child. In order to legitimate this breaking of the rules when Aman confronts Lajjo, he does so with the portrait of Jesus strongly positioned over his shoulder. The inclusion of this portrait again reminds the audience of Aman's angel-like quality and imbues his actions with a religious authority that overshadows the inappropriateness of arguing with an elder. After this confrontation occurs, Jenny goes to church to pray, and Lajjo, normally resistant to Catholic and non-Hindu religiousness, enters the church to ask her forgiveness.

This scene of conflict is a turning point in the film. During the first portion, greater significance was placed upon Hindu iconography and the worship of Hindu deities with Lajjo and her friends singing praises to the goddess Saraswati, Lajjo's fixation on ensuring Naina has a proper marriage, and scolding Jenny for her inability to fulfill her duties as a proper wife and mother as well as her inability to make proper Indian food. After the revelation of Jenny's goodness as a wife, even in the face of her son's startling transgression, Lajjo embraces more of the Christian religion and more of her own family by praying with Jennifer and the kids (Jenny teaches her to make the sign of the trinity before and after prayer) and she begins

to develop a warm relationship with Gia, the granddaughter she'd always resented. It wasn't necessarily that Christianity was being presented as a preferred religious tradition to Hinduism, but that by Lajjo embracing some Christian practices she was coming closer emotionally to her family, who all practiced some level of Christianity. In this instance, she remained a Hindu/Indian woman and chose family over individuality, regardless of the rituals or religious dogma behind them. Toward the end of the film, the focus is less upon Lajjo's transformation from a bitter Indian woman to a loving grandmother and mother-in-law transfixed in a world pulling her to and pushing her from Indian tradition. She wrestles with her own religious expression, but also has to reconcile her desire for Naina to have a religiously sanctioned union while still understanding that her son's actions could be problematic when arranging for a suitable mate. Lajjo's character embodies a familiar difficulty Diasporic Indians face, holding tightly to traditions of home and family while nonetheless being influenced by the Western world. However, in *KHKN*, Lajjo's choice is framed winning on both accounts; she remains a traditional Hindu woman who chooses family over her own pride as Hindu theology would prescribe. The fact that she adds two new icons (Jesus and the Virgin Mary) to her personal altar is irrelevant.

Though the analysis this far has focused on Aman's actions as a savior to transform Lajjo and improve the balance in the Kapoor family, he has also

influenced Naina. By engaging in a common Indian process known as eve-teasing, Aman has shown his affections for Naina and she has rebuffed him like a respectable Indian girl should. Eve-teasing is a common practice in Indian society and this plays out in film with flirtations between a man and a woman. The man pursues the woman and pulls her hair, touches her, attempts to kiss her, etc. while she rejects his advances. Despite these advances by men, it is ultimately the responsibility of the woman to ensure that their sexual purity is maintained.²⁸ Aman does manage to develop feelings for her, but when Naina reveals her feelings are reciprocated, Aman lies and tells her he is actually married. Naina, impaled with rejection, talks with her friend Rohit who reveals he is actually in love with Naina. While this is a seemingly trite love triangle, the film brings the storyline back around to Indian culture and traditional Hinduism.

Aman has a terminal heart condition and knows he is going to die very shortly (akin to Charlotte's character in *Autumn in New York*). He does indeed love Naina but has no future to give and can only offer her a short time of tears and a lifetime of emptiness. Because of his love for her, he tells her the lie and suggests she give Rohit a chance. Aman suggests that Rohit would love her and take care of her, and certainly had longer to live. Though there is certainly emotion in the character of Aman, he is almost raised to angelic status again in that he cannot be touched or defiled by an earthly union, but instead his actions lie outside of a carnal

male and represent the good for all those involved. He is brought to the audience through prayer, spreads goodness, joy and love, and then takes his place on his deathbed only after sacrificing the one thing he's found that he truly loves. In a sense, Aman is martyring himself for the sake of Naina. He could agree to be with her and spend whatever last days he had as her husband, but what future would this bring for an Indian woman married but a few days? What would life hold for a widow living in a culture that fears widows, that perpetuated a practice of burning wives at the funerals of their husbands, and continues to propagate superstition surrounding the untimely death of husbands?²⁹ Could Naina ever shed the stigma that decision would cause her and ever find any sort of a life worth living? It was because of the Indianness in *KHNNH* that the character of Aman had to choose not to be with Naina and had to die so she could choose Rohit and choose a life instead of a slow, lonely death of a widow. His lie, therefore, is legitimated because of the consideration for Naina's well-being rather than both Aman and Naina's wishes.

Naina agrees to marry and engages in a traditional Punjabi engagement ceremony but during this festive occasion, Aman falls from grace, or is shown as less of an angel and more of a man with little time left on earth. He is presented like the figure of Jesus who swoops in unseen and changes people's lives, gives them hope, and then it is time for him to abandon his earthly vessel. Aman falls to his knees, the faces as a stream of colors and a haunting call are ethereal in presentation.

Aman indeed has a heart attack but it is not yet his time to pass. He has not yet completed his dharma and has not seen Naina seal her promising future with Rohit.

Naina and Rohit do marry and Aman attends the ceremony, though you can see his character struggle with doing what is right for the woman he loves and aching to have another day on earth to be with her and be the man she needs. This struggle is evident in Hindu theology as well with the dharma or duty that is expected of every Hindu man and woman, and supersedes the personal desires a person might possess. It is this dharma, a sense of religious baggage that is brought forth into the next life, directing action and ensuring right choices that are supposed to drive decisions and desires and not personal wants and whims of individuals.³⁰ Naina, too, is conflicted. She is presented as the traditional Indian bride replete with mehendi hands and a festive bindi but tearfully imagines Aman to be waiting at the altar as praises to the god Vishnu are played. As Rohi and Naina are legally bound by the guru, Aman collapses under the wedding canopy, an obvious foreshadowing that he is soon going to die and that his work here was done.

Aman is presented in a final song singing tomorrow may never come, shown in high places, and first wearing white clothing and then black clothing. The song concludes with Aman again in the hospital bed with only Rohit and Naina. Aman tells Rohit "Naina is yours in this life, but in every other life, in every birth, she will be mine. Promise me. Promise me." Even though the Kapoors are presented as

practicing Catholics, and there are obvious references to Aman as a Jesus figure / messiah to the Kapoor family, he remains a Hindu man that will sacrifice the love in this life so that during subsequent lives he can be with his soul mate, Naina, again. Hindu ideology is again re-introduced into the theology of the film and asserted for the rationale behind his selfless choice. He sacrificed so Naina could be happy and he will be rewarded through karma and enjoy life with her in all future births. The film concludes with Naina recounting the story of her first love of Aman to Gia, now a grown woman and experiencing loss in love. Naina says that God answered their prayers and sent them an angel, and that angel was indeed Aman.

For *KHNNH*, religion is used as a means to represent several facets of characterization, to legitimize seemingly inappropriate action, and to shows the interplay of different religious traditions in the lives of a typical Indian. It is obvious through this remake that religion, regardless of the tradition, plays a crucial role in the lives of Indians worldwide. In this film, all of the characters are shown as religious or exhibiting some sort of religious expression. Jenny prays daily to Jesus, she teaches Naina, Suvi, and Gia to also worship Jesus. Lajjo clings to her daily worship of the goddess Saraswati through song, holding on to her Hindu roots, while revering the Sikh Guru Nanak as she passes his portrait. Naina, also, is a hybrid of religious expression by praying to Jesus with her mother, asking Vishnu for the love of Aman, and eventually being wed in a Sikh fashion to her friend

Rohit. These characters not only show the influence of Christianity on NRIs but also elucidate religious blending in the subcontinent. Though having representations of a Hindu goddess, a Christian figure, and a Sikh teacher all in the same home might seem unusual to Americans who tend to proclaim a single religious identity, typically, for Indians comfortable with a pantheon of Gods, adding Jesus and a few gurus to the plethora of deities available is not that unusual.³¹ The interesting issue about this remake is that there are so many religious referents, regardless of the tradition, when in the original Hollywood version religion was clearly absent. It seems that in order to culturally legitimate a Hollywood remake for a Bollywood audience it is important to include religious elements, nearly regardless of precisely what tradition is being represented.

Both *Chori Chori Chupke Chupke* and *Kal Ho Naa Ho* are excellent examples of Hollywood storylines that were taken as outlines for the creation of very distinct and very Indian films for the Bollywood audience. Religion served as a means to impart cultural referents, such as the touching of the head and feet, while prescribing appropriate ways to behave and to live (wives should be ever-devoted to their families). Though there are differences between the films in the role religion plays in the plots and characterizations, it is clear that for Indian cinema and Indian life, religion is an inextricably important of culture and of life and is a required additive for films to be translated from Hollywood hits to Bollywood blockbusters.

For these films, the religion literally is found in the translation, and it is this element, for the most part, that makes these stories Indian.

¹ Chakravarty, Sumita S. (1993). *National identity in Indian popular cinema 1947-1987*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

² Viridi, Joytika. (2003). *The cinematic imagination: Indian popular films as social history*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

³ Dwyer, Rachel (2000). *All you want is money, all you need is love: Sex and romance in Modern India*. London: Cassell.

⁴ Lal, Vinay & Nandy, Ashis. (2006). Introduction. In V. Lal & A. Nandy (eds), *Fingerprinting Ppopular Culture: The Mythic and the Iconic in Indian Cinema*, pp. xi-xxvii. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

⁵ Nayar, Sheila J. (1997). The values of fantasy: Indian popular cinema through Western scripts. *The Journal of Popular Culture* 31(1), 73-90.

⁶ Kaur, Ravinder. (2002). Viewing the West through Bollywood: a celluloid Occident in the making. *Contemporary South Asia* 11(2), 199-209.

⁷ Nayar, Shiela J. (2005). Dis-orientalizing Bollywood: Incorporating Indian popular cinema into a survey film course. *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 3(1), 59-74.

⁸ Chakravarty, Sumita S. (1993). *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema 1947-1987*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, p 32.

⁹ Viridi, Joytika. (2003). *The Cinematic Imagination: Indian Popular Films as Social History*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

¹⁰ Dissanayake

¹¹ Nayar, Sheila J. (1997). The values of fantasy: Indian popular cinema through Western scripts. *The Journal of Popular Culture* 31(1), 73-90.

¹² Marshall, Garry. (Director) (1990). *Pretty Woman* [Motion picture]. United States: Screen Partners IV.

¹³ Burmawalla, Abbas Alibhai & Burmawalla, Mastan Alibhai (Directors) (2001). *Chori Chori Chupke Chupke* [Motion picture]. India: Eros International.

- ¹⁴ Booth, Gregory D. (1993). Traditional practice and mass mediated music in India. *IRASM* 24(2), 159-174.
- ¹⁵ Majumdar, Rochona. (2004). Looking for brides and grooms: Ghataks, matrimonials, and the marriage market in colonial Calcutta, circa 1875-1940. *Journal of Asian Studies* 63(4), 911-936.
- ¹⁶ Dubois, Abbe J. A. (1999). *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*. Delhi: Book Faith India.
- ¹⁷ Ghosh, Anindita. (2003). An uncertain "coming of the book": Early print cultures in Colonial India. *Book History* 6, 23-55.
- ¹⁸ Dubois, Abbe J. A. (1999). *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*. Delhi: Book Faith India.
- ¹⁹ Banaji, Shakuntala. (2006). *Reading 'Bollywood': The young audience and Hindi Films*. Houndsmills, Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- ²⁰ Gangoli, Geetanjali. (2005). Sexuality, sensuality and belonging: Representations of the 'Anglo-Indian' and the 'Western' woman in Hindi cinema. In R. Kaur & A. J. Sinha (Eds.) *Bollywood: Popular Indian Cinema through a Transnational Lens*, pp. 143-162. New Delhi: SAGE Publications.
- ²¹ Kinsley, David R. (1986). *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- ²² Ahmed-Ghosh, Huma. (2003). Writing the nation on the beauty queen's body: Implications for a "Hindu" nation. *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* 4(1), 205-227.
- ²³ Kinsley, David R. (1986). *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, p 65.
- ²⁴ Gangoli, Geetanjali. (2005). Sexuality, sensuality and belonging: Representations of the 'Anglo-Indian' and the 'Western' woman in Hindi cinema. In Raminder Kaur & Ajay J. Sinha (Eds.) *Bollywood: Popular Indian Cinema through a Transnational Lens*, pp. 143-162. New Delhi: SAGE Publications, p 146.
- ²⁵ Chakravarty, Sumita. S. (1993). *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema 1947-1987*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- ²⁶ Chen, Joan (Director) (2000). *Autumn in New York* [Motion picture]. United States: Lakeshore Entertainment.
- ²⁷ Advani, Nikhil (Director) (2003). *Kal Ho Naa Ho* [Motion picture]. India: Dharma Productions.
- ²⁸ Puri, Joyti. (1999). *Woman, Body, Desire in Post-colonial India: Narratives of Gender and Sexuality*. New York: Routledge.

²⁹ Bhat, Anitha K. & Dhruvarajan, Raj. (2001). Ageing in India: Drifting intergenerational relations, challenges and options. *Aging and Society* 21, 621-640

³⁰ Saunders, Jennifer B. (2002). Dharma, discourse, and Diaspora: When work and family demands overlap. Paper written for The Emory Center for Myth and Ritual in American Life. Accessed April 28, 2007 from <http://www.marial.emory.edu/pdfs/Saunders021-02.pdf>.

³¹ Waghorne, Joanne P. (1999). Chariots of the God/s: Riding the line between Hindu and Christian. *History of Religions* 39(2), 95-116.