
THE GLOBALIZATION OF BOLLYWOOD: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF NON-ELITE AUDIENCES IN INDIA

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There has been a growing Western interest in Bollywood, India's large film industry based in Mumbai. This article attempts to find the ways in which Indian identity is being shaped by the new globalizing Bollywood and how non-elite audiences from lower middle class and rural India are understanding these images. This ethnography reveal that the non-elite audiences find themselves increasingly distanced from the images that Indian cinema is constructing. The films are creating an elitism constituted by the brand logic of transnational capital which is redefining the meaning of the masses.

INTRODUCTION

Western interest has been growing in “Bollywood,” as India’s large film industry based in Mumbai which produces more than 300 Hindi films every year (Geetha, 2003, p. 30), has come to be called. Andrew Lloyd Webber’s musical *Bombay Dreams*, with music by A. R. Rahman, has become a Broadway hit. Bollywood blockbusters are now exported in large numbers of subtitled prints to the U.S. and the UK, and western Public relations firms have taken over the publicity works. Newspapers like *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* have started publishing regular reviews of these releases and multiplexes in New York, San Francisco, and Toronto routinely premier Bollywood films. “The West may have the biggest stalls in the world’s media bazaar,” write Power and Mazumdar (2000, p. 88), “but it is not the only player. Globalization isn’t

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merely another word for Americanization—and the recent expansion of the Indian entertainment and film industry proves it.”

Perhaps the most significant question about media globalization is asked of communication scholars by Shome and Hegde (2002), “How does globalization force us to rethink culture in new ways and through new problematics?” (p. 173). Culture, Shome and Hegde write, is thrown into crisis by the “vector of uneven, unequal, and unpredictable global flows and motions . . . Global relations of capital today are utilizing spaces and places in ways that produce complex planes of exclusion and inclusion, empowerment and disempowerment” (p. 173). Globalization has to be understood as an encompassing process that, although located at national or subnational levels, involves transnational formations that “connect multiple locations in networks and complex and contradictory ways” (Desai, 2004, p. 15). Given the increased transnational circulation of images, I want to explore the positioning and distribution of identities that render some populations invisible while giving voice and power to others. This article addresses ways the non-elite audiences, particularly from poorer, lower middle class, and rural India are consuming, absorbing, and understanding the images from the new globalizing Bollywood.

The birth of the Indian cinema coincided with the national struggle against British colonialism, and therefore, from its very inception, cinema was engaged in defining a cultural identity that was Indian in its “allegory, shape, and form” (Bhaskar, 1998, p. 52). With the advent of “talkies” in the early 1930s, the Indian film industry was able to free itself from the “shackles of foreign influence” (Barnouw & Krishnaswamy, 1980, p. 69); language differences granted the Indian producers a “natural protection” (Mitra, 1993, p. 31). Films were made in vernacular languages and with “profusion of songs” (Barnouw & Krishnaswamy, 1980, p. 69); many of these songs were separately recorded and played on the radio. *Alam Ara* (1931), the first Indian talkie, included 12 songs: the advertisement of the film read “all talking, all singing, all dancing.” The drama-music form tapped into the long tradition of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, the two Indian classical Sanskrit epics, with their narrative turns, formed the basis of the cinematic storytelling (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004).

With the end of colonialism, Indian popular cinema emerged as “India’s sole model of national unity” with an emphasis on “realist aesthetics” (Chakravarty, 1993, p. 80). A tension between modernity and tradition, westernization and indigeniety, evolved in the cinematic imagination. Out of these dialectical tensions emerged a particular notion of the Indian identity. Through the 1950s and 1960s, directors like Raj Kapoor and Bimal Roy made films that portrayed the world of underprivileged, and marginalized, and which represented the Indian society as

“iniquitous and inequitable” (Chakravarty, 1993, p. 55). In films such as *Awara* (1951), *Bandini* (1963), *Do Bigha Zameen* (1953), *Jagte Raho* (1956), *Shri 420* (1955), and *Sujata* (1959), the filmmakers provided a narrative with a socio-political message. In the 1970s and into the 1980s, Hindi films became catalysts for the nation’s homogenizing mission, which appealed to the underprivileged by building faith in the “nation-state’s protective beneficence” (Virdi, 2003, p. 109). The underlying assumption was that the (poor) “angry young man” was the primary audience of these films.

The tremendous success of *Zanjeer* (1973), a film about a police officer who works outside the bounds of law, introduced the figure of the “angry young man” to the Indian screen. This hero was portrayed as a disaffected, cynical, violent, rebellious, urban/worker who was often seen single-handedly fighting rich businesses and ineffectual and corrupt politicians. In *Zanjeer* and in the evolution of the genre, the world of the “angry, young man” was steeped in crime, unemployment, and poverty: “It is the articulation of the anguish of the marginalized sector,” Kazmi (1998a) writes, “that largely explains the phenomenon of the angry young man” (p. 148). It was a device through which Hindi films ensured viewer identification with the working poor and lower middle class sensibilities. Calling it the “slum’s point of view of Indian politics and culture,” Nandy writes (1998, p. 16), “There is in the popular cinema same stress on lower-middle-class sensibilities and on the informal, not-terribly tacit theories of politics and society the class uses and the ability to shock *haute bourgeoisie* with the directness, vigor, and crudity of these theories.” By calling the slum an “unintended city” that forms the “underground” of a modern city—the one that provides “energy, cheap labor, that propels both the engine of civic life and the ambitions of the modernizing elite”, Nandy (pp. 16–17) argues that the Indian cinema represents the tastes and longings of the slums which dominate the urban public sphere.

The changes precipitated by liberalization of the Indian economy throughout the 1990s facilitated the growing internationalization of the production and distribution of Hindi films. With the entry of satellite television, Indian filmmakers began operating in a new media landscape, where a vast range of options, including easy access to Bollywood and Hollywood films, were available to viewers at home. Rajadhyaksha (2003, p. 27) has referred to the shift as the “Bollywoodization of the Indian cinema,” in which the Bollywood culture industry is to be seen as separate and distinct from the actual film production. “Bollywood is not the Indian film industry, or not the film industry alone,” he writes. “It might be best seen as a more diffuse cultural conglomeration involving a range of distribution and consumption activities from websites to music

cassettes, from cable to radio, from New Delhi to New York.” With liberalization, the financial equations in Bollywood changed too. Overseas distribution rights for a big budget film roughly doubled in price than that in the Indian market. Television and music rights additionally generated more revenues than the entire production had cost, even before a single ticket was sold. The rise of multiplexes in large metropolitan cities, where the cost of tickets was 10 to 15 times higher than the cost of tickets in family-owned, small-town theaters, increasingly focused film producers on urban and niche audiences who “pay more, buy more” and whose tastes needed to be reflected in the film content (Deshpande, 2001). According to D’Souza (quoted in Bhattacharya, 2005), a film trade analyst, the days of the “silver jubilee [a film is running for 25 weeks] are over.” He adds: “now films target small segments of primary filmgoers who constitute the paying public.” For D’Souza the “paying public” not only can pay for the movie ticket, but has disposable income and attracts advertisers. “Traditional cinema is in its terminal stages,” writes Deshpande, “time is past when people made films for the *chavanni* [a quarter in Indian currency] audience.”

In the past 10 years, some of the most popular films such as *Black* (2004), *Dhoom* (2004), *Dus* (2005), *Hum Tum* (2004), *Kabhi Kushi Kabhi Gum* (2001), *Kaho Na Pyar Hai* (2000), *Kal Ho Naa Ho* (2003), *Mohabbatein* (2000), *Murder* (2003), *Salaam Namaste* (2005), and *Yaadein* (2001) were top-grossers. All featured westernized themes; foreign locations, actors, and singers; and liberal use of English in the dialogues. Every year, a few films express Indianized themes, such as *Gadar* (2001), *Munnabhai MBBS* (2003), *Devdas* (2002), and *Veer Zaara* (2004), and do well at the box office. There are fewer and fewer films, however, that do well both in urban and rural areas of India and in the overseas market. *Rang De Basanti* (2006), a film shot in Punjab with a British actress in the lead, for instance, is a major hit in metropolitan cities of Mumbai and Delhi; future plans for the movie include an international premier. Yet *Rang De Basanti* has done poorly in smaller cities and towns, categorized as B and C film centers, and hasn’t found a distributor for most south Indian cities. Box office statistics from India testify to a growing drop in cinema attendance in theaters in smaller towns. Hits like *Dhoom* or *Kal Ho Naa Ho*, made close to 80% of their profits from urban multiplexes in India and overseas. In a multiplex in Delhi, a few Hollywood films will play along with Hindi films, but the Hindi films exhibited at these multiplexes are often perceived as urban audience-friendly. Films such as *Rang De Basanti*, *Salaam Namaste*, and *Nikki and Neal* (2005) do well in urban multiplexes, where audiences respond positively to their western themes. Such changes signify a shift in the production, distribution, and consumption of Bollywood films. This article explores ways in which such

changes are understood and interpreted by non-elite audiences living in small towns and villages of India.

ETHNOGRAPHIC AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

While much work has been done regarding ethnography and audience research especially in cultural studies and international communication, I do not wish to rehash the debates taking place in the academic arena except to say that globalization requires more such analyses which focus on audiences who are rapidly (and sometimes inadvertently) becoming part of the global *mélange*. I agree with Parameswaran (2003, p. 311) that abandoning audience ethnography and claiming that “all that has to be said about audiences has been said” prematurely closes our understanding of non-western audiences, especially given the reach of corporate globalization. Ang (2003, p. 367) reminds us that it is “ludicrous to find definitive and general theoretical answers to know in advance which strategies and tactics different people in the world will invent to negotiate with the intrusions of global forces in their lives.” Ang asks us to continue with the project of “informed ethnographic sensitivity” to the ways structural changes become integrated in specific cultural forms and specific historical circumstances (p. 367). In a country like India, which is experiencing what Rajagopal (1996, p. 442) calls “incomplete modernity” where “[modernity] offers a contested and contradictory set of values,” studies of media reception give us a window into the inner workings of globalization. We need to focus our attention on the hegemonic (and counter-hegemonic) forces at work within nation-states where globalization is creating vast ideological and material fissures. Such ethnography is informed by a method that Kraidy and Murphy (2003) have termed as a “translocal” ethnographic method which advocates that ethnography’s “importance lies more in its capacity to comprehend the articulation of the global with the local, than its supposed ability to understand the local in isolation of large-scale structures and processes” (p. 304). However, scholars, within and outside of India, have conducted textual readings of films (e.g., Kazmi, 1998a; 1999; Shah, 1950; Valicha, 1988), studies of political economy of the film industry (e.g., Pendakur, 2003), or narrative history of films (e.g., Dwyer and Patel, 2002; Gaur, 1973; Gopalan, 2002; Jain and Rai, 2002; Ramachandran, 1984), but only recently have studies of audience reception of particular film texts (e.g., Juluri, 1999; Ram, 2002; Srinivas, 2002), on film-going experiences of audiences (e.g., Derne, 2000; Dickey, 1993), and ethnographies regarding Indian film workers (e.g., Ganti, 2002) begun to emerge. While Bollywood is receiving increased academic attention (e.g., special issue in the journal, *South*

Asian Popular Culture), there have been very few ethnographies about Bollywood audiences in India.

I conducted research on audience responses to contemporary Hindi films over a period of 7 months in Patiala, a midsized city in the state of Punjab in North India, where I had arrived as a Fulbright scholar at Punjabi University in 2004. Most subjects were students and their family members, between the ages of 22–39 years. Students at Punjabi University come from Patiala or other small towns and villages all over Punjab (a small minority come from the nearest city, Chandigarh). Many come from other midsize cities in Punjab, such as Ropar, Jullundhar, Ludhiana, or Amritsar. The interviews were conducted in a mix of Punjabi and Hindi, and one was in English (a subject wanted to “practice” speaking English). Except for two subjects who spoke little Hindi, all subjects were fluent in Hindi and Punjabi. Most subjects categorized themselves as moderate viewers of films, which meant they would go to the theaters no more than once a month, and would watch one or two films a week on television. None of the subjects categorized themselves as heavy viewers. I often conducted interviews using a formal pre-prepared questionnaire, but I also spent time with the subjects in and out of the classroom, visited their villages and homes, and accompanied them to watch films. I came to know some of their families well, and would often be invited to their homes for tea. To avoid what Seiter (1990, p. 61) has called “absences” within a nondirective interview strategy, I would converse with the subjects about various social and political issues unrelated to films. Such practice often allows an ethnographer like myself “to understand the social and cultural networks that often situate an individual viewer” (Griffiths, 1993, p. 62).

In India it is very difficult to talk about socio-economic class in the traditional way class is understood in western and American sociology. Over the past decade, much has been said about the growth of the Indian middle class as a consequence of the state’s economic liberalization policies (Lakha, 1999). Research suggests that middle class continues to be an elastic term in India, where it includes a vast range of incomes and standards of living (Scrase, 2002). Class is further complicated in Punjab, where the rich do not necessarily cluster and live in urban centers. The “green revolution” in the 1970s allowed the Punjabi farming community to become wealthy compared to farming communities in other parts of India. The Punjabi farmer, in many villages, is more well-off than most middle class families in cities. For the purposes of this study, I have defined the non-elite lower middle class in terms of a particular economic bracket. On average, subjects came from families whose income ranged from 5000 to 10000 rupees (Rs.) per month (\$150–\$300). Some subjects’ families received support from family members who lived abroad, however,

and their income could be as high as Rs. 25000 (\$600). Most subjects had familial ties to farming communities, which went back generations, and had at least one or several members of their family who continue to be farmers. Several subjects were first-generation college students and, at least one was the first literate woman in her family. The self-ascription of the subjects were often couched in terms of being lower middle class, rural, and poorer compared to their urban metropolitan counterparts.

In Punjab, Sikh (who reject caste hierarchies) and Hindu families live well-integrated lives in cities and villages. Between 1980–1990, Punjab experienced tremendous sectarian violence between the majority Sikhs and the minority Hindus, but relations have remained peaceful between the two communities during the last 15 years. Little animosity existed between the two religious groups, who were equally represented among the ethnographic subjects. A number of respondents came from “mixed marriages” in which each parent followed a different religion. Some subjects were too young to remember the violent decade, but many have heard their parents or grandparents discuss the riots and mass killings. Some were old enough to remember the days of sectarian massacres, but feel that the situation has changed dramatically. Caste is an important feature of Punjabi society despite Sikhism’s objections to caste systems. Villages are divided between the higher and lower castes, although, often, these divisions can just as easily be about class. My respondents came from a mix of high and low castes. The university had instituted a policy to admit students from lower castes and lower income families to attend college, which allowed for more class and caste integration among the students and the families I interviewed. The Hindu Punjabis identified themselves by their castes more frequently than their Sikh counterparts. I found it difficult, however, to tell if their caste and religious positions played any role in their consumption or rejection of particular films.

DREAMWORLDS AND THE FORCES OF GLOBALIZATION

One respondent provided me with a use of metaphor to describe the feelings evoked by the recent films from Bollywood:

Mona: Some movies can be likened to *kalpanalok* [dreamworld] where life is absolutely unreal, beautiful, and problem-free. There are nymphets who live in this *kalpanalok* and we want to see them.

The metaphor of dreamworld, as described by Mona in the above quote, is part of the construction, consumption, and critique of the Bollywood

films by the subjects of this research. While the allusion of reality which we expect in western films is missing from Indian films (so while the storyline and dialogue is usually written in a way that project the spoken in everyday life, the dialogues often interweave with songs and then return to dialogue), the dreamworld is not about the form of the films (drama-musical) but a recognizable disconnection between the content of the films from the lives of the audiences. Krishan explains the nature of the dreamworld's distance from his life:

Krishan: They [characters in films] are not connected to our real lives.

Author: In what way?

Krishan: In every way. They move from set to set, from lavish homes to lavish offices and back. Have you noticed they never show the streets? They never show the regular people like us who are walking on the streets or the beggars or the dirt? Most of the time they are not even in India, they are in Mauritius or Vancouver. Their 'legs are dangling in the sky' [Punjabi phrase].

Krishan and others directly referred to the end of the rebellious spirit of earlier "angry young man" films and the narrative scripts that pitched the marginalized against the rich. In the new Bollywood, it is the wealthy who are the heroes. Even the actor who personified the angry young man onscreen in the 70s and 80s films, Amitabh Bachchan, plays in recent films, a multi-millionaire industrialist (in *Kabhi Kushi Kabhi Gum*) and rector of a wealthy prep school (in *Mohabbatein*). He has also been seen hosting the Indian version of "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?" (*Kaun Banega Crorepati?*) on TV. "If someone makes a film where the hero is not rich," commented Krishan, "then they call it an alternative film. Why is a film about a poor man alternative in India? Majority of Indians are poor!"

While escapist films fulfilling material and ideological desires are hardly new to India (Dwyer, 2000), in contemporary Bollywood films, the dreamworld has taken on new meanings and signifiers. Cinematic fantasy of Hindi films has historically revealed a "collective fantasy, a utopian solution to counteract anxieties such as the emphasis on family, the community and the opportunity for social mobility" (Dwyer, 2000, p. 72). Mishra's (2002, p. 29) reference to Bollywood cinema as "temples of desire" designed to "accommodate deep fantasies belonging to an extraordinarily varied group of people, from illiterate workers to sophisticated urbanites" resonates with what Karan Johar (quoted in Khan, 2002), the successful Indian director-producer, says in an interview: "I try to appeal

to as many people as I can.” The new Bollywood dreamworld, however, is represented in terms of the material (expensive cars and motorcycles), spatial (foreign locales, beaches, and mansions), and personal (speaking English and wearing designer clothing). The hero’s class has acquired high disposable incomes, a jet-setting lifestyle, shopping holidays overseas, and an increasing distance from the everyday reality of lower middle class and rural audiences. Sarbjeet, for instance, reflected my respondents’ common failure to connect with rich characters in Bollywood films:

Sarbjeet: There is no connection—his clothes, the cars he drives, the houses, going off to Canada or Switzerland—I cannot relate.

Author: That is the way [Hindi films] have always been. We had films like *Evening in Paris* or *Love in Tokyo*.

Sarbjeet: Those were one or two films—not every film. Majority of films today have one song set in Switzerland. Everyone is wearing suits that cost thousands of rupees. In earlier films, it used to be 80% reality, 20% fantasy, now it is 20% reality, 80% fantasy.

Such a dreamworld gains a supra-fantastical status; it stops being a fantasy of pleasure and, instead, becomes a fantasy of alienation. After we watched a film together, Mona said, unhappily, “They are making a *mayajal* [web of desire] for us and we are stuck in it.” Unlike Mishra who used a positive phrase (“temples of desire”), Mona used a negative phrase to explain a dreamworld she had experienced—a “web of desire” in which one gets “stuck.”

The new dreamworld of Bollywood provides the space for the “consumable hero” (Deshpande, 2001), who is an icon of transnational capital, rampant consumption, and global modernity rather than the embodiment of what Nandy calls the “low-brow politics” of the slums (p. 6). The “consumable hero” is a marketable commodity himself/herself, and takes prides in his or her space as a “brand ambassador” for one or several products (Pinto, 2005, p. 5). A star like Shahrukh Khan is “the face” of Pepsi and Santro cars, and Amir Khan the face of Coke and Titan watches. The subjects of this research reported feeling alienated from the rapidly globalizing and commercializing dreamworld of the screen. Talking about a film like *Dhoom*, an Indianized take on *Ocean’s Eleven*, which was doing well at the box offices in the urban centers, Surinder said, “They must be making these films for someone but it is not for people like me.” Surinder was born in the village of Hoshiarpur, about 35 miles from Patiala. Surinder’s father is an indentured laborer, and his brother works as a hired

help. Surinder was attending university with the help of state subsidies, and hoped to find a “government job.” While he liked the “motorcycle scenes” in the film, he rejected its social relevance:

Surinder: Where are films about corruption, hatred, unemployment, criminalization of politics? In its place, we have films like this *Dhoom* which is nothing but an advertisement for foreign motorcycles and expensive sunglasses.

Globalization of the dreamworld is connected to the materiality of over-consumption and commercialization. Some subjects critiqued the rampant use of product placement, and others critiqued advertising of brandname items from “a hero’s shoes to his helicopter.”

Rajesh: If you do a little of product placement that is fine but these films go overboard as in *Baghban* [film made in 2003]. Every scene in that film had either a bottle of Pepsi or a DHL truck or SONY TV. I ask, are you watching a movie or an ad?

Any social message that films can send to their audiences has gotten lost in Bollywood’s drive towards commercialization.

Shilpa: I haven’t seen anything in the Bollywood films that tells us that the system has to change. They spend so much money on making a film but with no message. There is never any emphasis on progressive change.

Meenakshi: Raj Kapoor’s films in the 1950s showed poor people living in Bombay’s *chawls* [slums]. Those poor people are still there but they are not in films any longer. Only when they have to show violence or terrorism, they will show the slums.

The globalization of Bollywood films via the constructions of a ubiquitously wealthy and consumption-oriented dreamworld, these subjects contend, alienates them from these films, and are far too distanced from their everyday lives.

GLOBALIZING INDIANNESS

My subjects’ critique of Bollywood’s construction of the dreamworld is connected to a critique of globalized Indianness which these films represent. The idea to globalize Indianness has evolved in the past 15

years as more and more Bollywood producers, writers, and directors have discovered the diasporic Indian communities around the world; the last decade has seen the diaspora registered in the national filmic imaginary. In order to capitalize on the growing market of South Asians abroad, Bollywood producers like Yash Chopra and Subhash Ghai have set up distribution offices in the UK and the U.S. (Pendakur, 2003, p. 44). The outcome is the production of what Shukla (2003, p. 1) has called “interpenetrating globalism”: a complicated web of narrative production and structure in which Indian producers and directors make films about Indians who live abroad, and whose lives, filmmakers hope, will appeal to Indians living both in and outside of India. According to Malhotra and Alagh (2004, p. 26) films in the 1990s started providing an ideology of Indian identity that could appeal to Indians in India as well as Indians outside the nation’s borders as a project that embraced a nationhood based on “common identity.” Starting in the mid-1990s, the nonresident Indian, popularly called the NRI, emerged as a diasporic figure in Bollywood films who “illuminates the surprising complementarity of two spheres in operation—home and abroad” (Shukla, 2003, p. 10). In occupying a category created by the Indian government in the 1970s, he gained meaning from his state of being abroad, and yet he was unproblematically represented as an Indian national.

With the success of early films like *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995; frequently referred to as DDLJ) and *Pardes* (1997), the NRI has emerged as a central narrative figure in films. In DDLJ, the hero, Raj’s father (played by Shahrukh Khan) is a rich businessman settled in London. Raj falls in love with Simran (played by Kajol) who is the daughter of a middle class Punjabi immigrant, Baldev (played by Amrish Puri), and the story evolves as Raj tries to convince Baldev to allow him to marry Simran. “DDLJ told Indians,” Chopra (2004, p. 92) writes, “that an Indian is a hybrid who easily enjoys the material comforts of the West and the spiritual comforts of the East.” So, Raj, in his Harley-Davidson leather jacket, and Simran, despite the occasional mini-skirt, are cultural conformists, what Chopra calls the “strictly, sanitized view of the lives of second-generation NRIs” (p. 92). In the decade since DDLJ’s release, there have been numerous films that depict lives of Indians who live abroad, mostly in the West. As many of the subjects observed, often the protagonists of these films are depicted as rich ex-pats who live upper class lifestyles. Since DDLJ’s success, it is not unusual to see films entirely set outside of India and dealing exclusively with the diasporic immigrant experience. As one subject said, “In older films they used to come back to India but now the film starts and ends in a foreign place.”

The large-scale migration of Punjabis, even from remote villages such as Dosanjh Kalan (whose most famous ex-pat, Ujjal Dosanjh, was a federal minister of Canada), has allowed the subjects of this research to be integrally connected to the diaspora. A number of subjects had friends and families who lived abroad and whose experiences they shared with me. For them, the NRI was not a distant or unfamiliar figure. While they accepted the global movement of South Asians to other parts of the world, they rejected the representation of the globalized Indianness of the films. NRIs in films, they observed, represented upper class tastes and consumerism (the ones “living” the material dreamworld) which had little connection to the reality of the lives of most NRIs they knew:

Sarbjee: Only Punjabi films show what NRIs are really doing like working in gas stations or working in a restaurant like in *Des Hoya Pardes*. Hindi films don't show how Indians abroad are living.

Sonal: Maybe some Indians like those from IIT [Indian Institute of Technology, an elite engineering school] are living like Shahrukh Khan's [character] in *Swades* [film made in 2004], driving that car, living in that house, or working for NASA, but my sister is not living like that. She works as a janitor at the New Jersey airport.

The disconnection that these audiences feel from the dreamworld is further heightened by the differences between subjects' experiences with the diaspora and the diaspora they see played out on the screen. The representation of the diaspora as living an exclusively extrinsic modernity (Raj, 2004, p. 6) represented by the material dreamworld and an intrinsic traditionality (representing them as more Indian than Indians living in India) is also rejected by the subjects:

Ginny: NRIs are shown as more patriotic, more knowledgeable about Indian culture. In comparison, Indians are shown as more irritated, more dogmatic, they are not as concerned with the society. Everyone here is unhappy, everyone there is happy. Is that possible?

Ginny critiques the conflation in these films of wealth with happiness and the implicit assumption that one could live in another culture and, yet, preserve all the virtues of Indian traditions such as “good Indian values and family life” (Malhotra & Alagh, 2004, p. 27). Ultimately, such representation of the NRI problematizes the identity of the Indians living in India. While valorizing the life of the NRI as materially happy and spiritually fulfilled, the films alienate the subjects who feel “left behind.” These representations create not only material alienation among the

subjects by suggesting that the NRI are all rich but also by suggesting they are more “Indian than us”; subsequently, such alienation results in the rejection of such images. With the exception of DDLJ (perhaps because it was the first film that depicted an immigrant life in popular films), films with NRI themes or with NRI heroes and heroines were not popular among the subjects of this research. No one mentioned *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gum*, *Kal Ho Naa Ho*, *Swades*, or other films depicting the lives of NRIs as appealing. One cannot conclude that the subjects are uninterested in the lives of the diaspora, but rather that they don’t connect to the Bollywood representations of diasporic Indianness.

If not by the NRI hero, the globalized Indian is represented in Bollywood films by the upper class urban Indian who has enough material wealth to cross national/cultural borders fluidly, travel to exotic locales, and be a modern day hyperconsumer. While earlier Indian films represented some modicum of reality where the hero’s financial gains would come after a protracted struggle, the globalized Indian figure in contemporary films arrives in the script with ubiquitous wealth and status. Material struggles that affect the day-to-day lives of non-elite, poorer Indians are no longer addressed in these films. Rajadhyaksha has observed that Bollywood “exports Indian nationalism itself, now commodified and globalized into a ‘feel good’ version of ‘our culture’” (2003, p. 37). While these films continually attempt to populate the world with materially successful Indians who retain traditional Indian values, subjects did not respond favorably to such constructions of Indianness. The globalized Indianness and its many representations found in contemporary Bollywood films did not resonate with the non-elite and rural audiences of Punjab.

GLOBALIZATION OF FILM SONG-DANCE

One distinguishing feature of Indian films has always been its music. While the musical lost its dominance as a genre in Hollywood in the early 1960s, largely due to the advent of rock music, India saw no such change. With the advent of talkies, Indian films introduced songs as an important element of the narrative. The main “attractions” of Hindi cinema for its fans, according to Dwyer and Patel, are the “sets and costumes, action scenes, presentation of stars, grandiloquent dialogues, and song and dance sequences” (2002, p. 30). Song sequences are used for several purposes in films. Over the years, directors have worked in different ways to incorporate songs into the narrative. Sometimes a song is diegetically part of the film; other times it is used as a dream sequence, or the lovers fantasy. Sometimes they function to allow an expression of feeling that cannot be articulated otherwise—notably the declaration of love. When music

channels like MTV and V on cable and FM radio started broadcasting in India, the Hindi film music gained even more popularity. The music is crucially important economically since the sale of music rights may recover most of the budget of the film. Recently, the film industry has been prereleasing soundtracks for films along with music videos, which are essentially clips of the songs from the film, 2 months in advance. This heightens prerelease interest among audiences.

Since the success of the song *Chaiyya Chaiyya* in *Dil Se* (1998), most directors and producers include what is popularly called as an “item number,” a song and dance sequence, in their films. Hindi films had historically had a version of the item number that would either be set as a cabaret in a nightclub, or feature a courtesan performing a *mujra* (dance) with *qawwali*, a specific kind of music attributed to the muslim *sufi* saints of India. Item numbers, however, have only recently become distinct cultural products separated from the films into which they are inserted. Item numbers have become elaborate song-dance sequences involving up to 100 dancers, usually set in what appears to be a disco, dance club, or a strip club. Many films use “foreign” (meaning White, female) dancers. In fact, Yana Gupta, a Czech model, who has found super-stardom in Bollywood films as an “item girl.” The dancing style, choreography, and wardrobe for these item numbers are largely influenced by MTV music videos and American hip-hop, salsa, and pop music. Brittany Spears’ dance moves from her video, *Baby One More Time* (1998), for instance, have become highly popular. Several item numbers use Spears’ choreography, and dancers wear versions of the sexualized high school uniform Spears wore in the video. Women dominate the coterie of dancers, and some item girls like Malaika Arora, Sameera Reddy, and Yana Gupta have become highly paid stars.

Item numbers attracted the attention of a number of subjects of this ethnography and resulted in lengthy discussions between them and myself. The subjects, no doubt, enjoy film music, and consider it integral to their experience of film viewing. “I don’t understand how people [in the West] sit in the theatre for two hours and watch a film without a single song,” commented Krishan. “Our culture is musical,” says Ginny, “we have to express some things musically. Not everything can be said in words. Even when a child is born, we say, ‘oh listen to him sing’, it is music to our ears.” The item numbers, however, are vehemently critiqued by the subjects:

Ruchi: The item girls don’t wear anything, almost nothing.

Author: Actors like Helen [star from the 1960s] wore some pretty risqué clothes for her times.

Ruchi: But this is extreme. Helen always had a role in the film. Now we have girls doing item numbers and then you will never see them in the film again. It has become an excuse to show skin. I just saw *Khakhee* which was a good film but suddenly from nowhere Lara Dutta shows up and starts dancing and singing *Aisa Jadoo Dalaa Re* [the song]? It is just to show her in a small costume because the song had nothing to do with the plot of the movie.

Ruchi's critique of the item number is twofold: first, the item numbers have no connection to the narrative of the film and second, they are often used primarily to show skin. The greatest attraction of Hindi films, writes Dwyer, has been to show spaces usually associated with "transgressive (non-marital) sexual relations" (2000, p. 68). Following strict censorship after independence, when any erotic gesture beyond a gentle embrace was banned by the censor boards, eroticism in Hindi movies became historically contained within the songs. Kasbekar (2001) notes that film songs have always been the venue in which sexual desire was most lucidly expressed. The item numbers, however, makes a clear break from the tradition of song-dance; rather than having some plot function, the item numbers exclusively cater to an "excessive voyeuristic" sexuality (Pendakur, 2003, p. 301):

Ginny: There is too much vulgarity in these songs, the way the dancers dance and sometimes they are wearing nothing but a tiny bikini.

Shiela: Even the music in those songs is filled with vulgar noises.

The overt hypersexualization of the song-dance sequence is a kind of "MTVization" of Hindi film music; the song is packaged as a 5-minute video which can advertise the film and be sold as an independent commodity. Observing the changes in the dancing and musical style Lal (1998) writes, "Whereas in older song-and-dance sequence the erotic had an element of coy and the tentative, today the erotic has in it elements of rank sexuality, brutish pride, and vulgarity. Naked feet adorned by anklets have been replaced with high leather boots and the pelvic thrusts display the hunger of a newly-unleashed sexuality. As in other spheres, in the theatre of sexuality, the Indian adventure with globalization is on display" (p. 231). Websites such as *Indiaplaza.com*, *nehaflix.com*, and *hindimovies.com*, catering to diasporic Indians, sell DVDs containing item numbers from films. Item girls frequently accompany the more established stars from stage shows outside India. Item numbers have become economic necessity for film producers, singers, and music directors who want to market themselves to a global audience, to internationalize the appeal of

Hindi film music, and to attract younger, upwardly mobile, city-based audiences. The song-dance sequences have taken on an “international” look, using a multi-cultural dance cast and hip hop-influenced wardrobes. Such tastes and representations are far too alien to the rural and lower middle class audiences. The responses of the subjects suggest a rejection of the images associated with the item numbers, because of their overt sexualization:

Kanwaljeet: I avoid films where I know there are item numbers. That way I know I can go to the film with my brother and not feel embarrassed.

The globalizing of Hindi films has resulted in cosmetic changes which, while adopting westernized visual styles, provide no room for real transgressions or progressive changes. While items numbers made respondents feel alienated, such discomfort with item numbers is one of many ways in which Bollywood films have become disconnected from the lives of people like Kanwaljeet. Similar to the findings here, Derne’s (2005) audience research among the non-elite males in North India have shown that intensification of cultural globalization in films does not imply that the audiences accept or embrace values that such images represent. Derne, for example, discovered that transnational media have not led non-elite, lower middle class men to “experiment with new gender arrangements” and has only “increased their vigorous defense of local family lives” (2005, p. 39). The subjects of this research rejected both the hypersexualization of song-dance and the overcommercialization of the film content.

RESISTANCE AND PLEASURE OF BOLLYWOOD

The subjects’ critique or rejection of particular kinds of Bollywood films does not imply the rejection of *every* film produced in Mumbai. Subjects felt they connected to a small number of films such as *Astitva* (2000), *Lagaan* (2001), *Lakshya* (2004), *Samay* (2003), and *Yuva* (2004). The film *Yuva*, while the hero and heroine wore the urbane wardrobes and haircuts, appealed to several subjects because of its representation of college politics and corrupt politicians; *Astitva* appealed to some subjects because it dealt with the issue of domestic violence, and *Lakshya* touched them because it showed that a young person needed to focus on his or her goals in life. These films were appealing because they directly confronted the issues that the subjects were dealing with in their daily lives. Sometimes films can straddle both grounds—the aesthetics or look and feel of upper middle class urban and diasporic India as well as having some critical social and political messages. It is possible that the films were appealing

also because they mix the feel-good factor of Indian film narratives with social realisms. While subjects designated some films as “entertaining” and acknowledge that cinema is often about pleasure, they did not want only entertainment. Films that had some social, political, or moral message and had some connection to their lives, the subjects said, appealed to them the most. As Mala said, “I enjoy some of films and watch them when they are on TV but I don’t remember them. I will remember *Lakshya* for a long time.”

As the subjects have limited disposable income to spend on movies, choosing a “special film” to make a trip to the theater required some deliberation. With a few exceptions, they frequently chose to go watch a Punjabi over a Bollywood film, although significantly fewer Punjabi films have been released each year. While the subjects lamented the small budgets and lack of technical glitter of Punjabi films, they enjoyed the connections they felt with the characters in Punjabi films. After watching *Des Hoya Pardes* (2004), which is a story about a Punjabi farmer (Gurshaan) who immigrates to New Jersey to seek political asylum in the U.S., two sisters, Sonia and Shilpi, told me that they thought the story of Gurshaan depicted in the film was the story of their uncle who had left his village of Malwa and made his way to Alexandria, Virginia. As stories about small towns and villages disappear from the Bollywood screen, Punjabi films are beginning to provide that particular cinematic experience. Bollywood producers/directors and small-town viewers and rural audiences are parting ways. In “prefiguring the audience” (Dornfeld, 1993, p. 229), Bollywood has marginalized people like the subjects of this research as viewers/consumers in the expansion of the liberalized, market-driven economy. The people I spoke to are acutely cognizant of their lives being “written out of the film script.” More research needs to be done in the diasporic and urban communities in and outside of India also to find the attraction to or rejection of these films (it might be that some of the urban and diasporic audiences reject these films as much as the rural communities of Punjab).

The study of globalization must address how globalization is produced, understood, and consumed in various international sites, and globalization must be analyzed as functioning within the “larger terrain of interconnected forces” (Shome & Hegde, 2002, p. 187). As Bollywood films attempt to connect to the diasporic audiences and focus on the “audience as consumer” in urban and metropolitan areas, they are leaving other economically and culturally marginalized audiences behind. Much has been written about the elitism among the film society/art society intelligentsia in India who ignore the study of conventional Indian cinema (Vasudevan, 2000). What must also be studied are audiences who are categorized by the Bollywood producers/directors as unprofitable. I contend that the

globalizing environment of Bollywood films is creating its own elitism constituted by the brand logic of transnational capital which has redefined the meaning of the masses. Bollywood recognizes its audiences as the upper middle class diasporic and urban communities whose tastes, values, desires, and consumptions are reflected and re-energized by these films. The masses of the rural, poor, and lower middle class audiences find themselves distanced from the images and dreamworlds of Bollywood, and are less and less likely to consume them in the future.

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