

Bollywood and Globalization
Indian Popular Cinema,
Nation, and Diaspora

Edited by

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present in the past – the monumentality of the singular event motivated by desire against the law.

That *Guidar*'s story of redone recovery – or recovery done twice – is a jingoistic appropriation of national space vis-à-vis the woman's body (if the women of Pakistan want to return to their Indian lovers, shouldn't Pakistan itself regret its rapturous rupture?) might take a little while to uncover. In *Feer-Zaana* a very similar double recovery adopts similarly duplicitous modes of writing political structures as individual destinies whose triumph over nation-state politics drives aground more completely any redemptive plot of neighborly understanding: the 'progressive' transnational romance legitimates the distorting representation of the ethnic other whose past is read as the problem of the national present. The gender of citizenship is the fault-line along which the failed dialectic of structure and event in historic memory diverges to make Indian cinema's representation of romantic rapture analogous to that of political rupture.

Chapter Nine *Week 11*

'IT'S ALL ABOUT LOVING YOUR PARENTS': LIBERALIZATION, HINDUTVA AND BOLLYWOOD'S NEW FATHERS

Meheli Sen

The becoming cultural of the economic, and the becoming economic of the cultural, has often been identified as one of the features that characterizes what is now widely known as postmodernity. In any case, it has fundamental consequences for the status of mass culture as such.²

In the battle between love and fear, fear will always win.³

India's socio-economic and political arenas underwent unprecedented transformations over the course of the 1990s. In fact, the national public sphere went through changes that altered the fabric of the nation and state in ways that were radical and irreversible. The most salient and powerful transformations were tethered to two processes: the advent of economic liberalization and the concomitant and meteoric rise of Hindu nationalism. Despite the suddenness with which the two phenomena appeared to annex the affective and political energies of the nation, their genesis was in fact in the making for several decades.⁴ For my purposes, however, the break that characterized the 1990s to the present is most crucial to underscore.

In July 1991, after a few decades of tentative pro-liberalization rhetoric and under heavy pressures from international lending agencies such as the International Monetary Fund, the Congress government under Prime Minister P V Narsimha Rao undertook concrete steps to liberalize the Indian economy. Economists and 'trade pundits' formed a powerful consensus with the elite bourgeois groups, and liberalization was offered as the 'mantra for growth and development of the 'sleeping giant'; the frustrations and disillusionments that informed the 'failure' and 'stagnation' of the planned economic structure and state control were sought to be conjured away by the genie of *laissez faire*.⁵

While the Congress government initiated these processes, it was unable to capitalize on the changes that liberalization both implied and concretized; as the party of the independence movement and of the Nehruvian planned economy, its public image was too strongly associated with the 'past' that the nation was supposedly desperate to overcome. The BJP - Bharatiya Janata Party, the political party of Hindu nationalism, usurped the public terrain as the force that could galvanize both the economy and the Hindu majority of the nation. Thus, 'Hindutva' - or Hindu-ness - in its latest avatar, came to be constitutively tethered to the exultant discourses of economic liberalization. Arvind Rajagopal provides an excellent reading of BJP's canny annexation of the rhetorical terrain unleashed by liberalization:

Hindu nationalism worked at two levels, on the one hand offering the cultural and ideological accompaniment to liberalization for middle and upper classes, and at the same time translating it into a religio-mythic narrative that would win popular consent....The alliance between economic liberalization and Hindu nationalism was opportunistic and unstable, but nevertheless, in the context, developed a considerable force and momentum.⁶

Hindu nationalism and its multiple incarnations have elicited much scholarly inquiry.⁷ In the simplest of terms, the move towards Hindutva meant a recasting of India as 'Hindu Rashtra,' obliterating India's long standing, if barely understood, commitment towards secularism.

It is crucial to understand Hindutva as more than simply a religio-political movement that gained visibility at a particular historical juncture. Hindutva - in its myriad guises, forms and habitats - fundamentally and constitutively transformed the socio-cultural fabric of the Indian nation-state. It not only changed how people thought of themselves and each other, but it also altered the collective imaginary of nationhood. The many arms of Hindu nationalism interestingly became fervent proponents of the economic reforms. The decade of the 1990s saw a curious echo chamber effect between economics and ideology, such that, 'each tells the story of the other, ideology that of the economy, and the economy that of ideology.'⁸ Liberalization comes to be as much a 'cultural' imperative as a matter of restructuring the national economy. Conversely, Hindu nationalism self-consciously became the handmaiden of the free market ethos that characterized much of the period.⁹ Together, they formed the dyad that best encapsulates the decade politically, economically and culturally.

However, apart from the mutually beneficial, semi-symbiotic relationship described here, Hindutva and liberalization shared other, more profound

similarities. Each of these processes contained within itself a curious paradox: while some of its consequences and effects were concrete and tangible - and thus effective - others remained peculiarly diffused and imprecise, and in turn efficacious for this imprecision. This paradox is best evidenced at the level of the dispersal of specific ideas. For example, economic liberalization did not simply mean that internationally visible logos such as Nike and Coca-Cola flooded the market; it simultaneously ensured that these labels and the meanings that accrue to them were rendered both invisible and 'valuable.' By a similar token, Hindu nationalism did not just affirm a certain kind of religiosity; it also brought in its wake an increased investment in seemingly unrelated institutions, such as the Hindu feudal family. I argue that the success with which the dyad informed the diverse components of public culture in India could be understood if we remain sensitive to this duality of its operation - a simultaneous tendency towards concretisation and abstraction.

I contextualize Bombay's new melodramas within this historical moment. Bombay or Bollywood - its new avatar - fashioned a new kind of cinema to respond to the compulsions of this era. With the hindsight now available to us, we can clearly delineate the changes that have animated the industry and its products in the last decade. Before discussing this genre and the films themselves, however, it is useful to reflect more generally on Bollywood's negotiation of nation-ness in the 1990s.

Whose Imagined Community? Bollywood in the Era of Liberalization

It has been repeatedly argued that Hindi cinema is the most salient bearer of nation-ness and national identity in India.¹⁰ This ability to 'imagine' the nation - inscribe it textually, as it were - functions as the strongest legitimization of Bombay cinema's claim to the status of 'a national cinema proper.' Not surprisingly then, the popular Hindi film did not remain insulated from the changes that were sweeping across India over the 1990s.

In terms of formulating a new terrain of visualities, liberalization heralded the arrival of satellite and cable television, and soon hundreds of channels, carrying information and entertainment from all over the globe were beamed into Indian middle-class living rooms. While the state-owned Doordarshan scrambled to overcome its torpor and cultural conservatives blustered at the cultural 'invasion', the film industry found an ally in the satellite channels. Simultaneously, seduced by the possibility of a massive transnational market, Hindi cinema went aggressively global; an increasing number of primarily big-budget Hindi films began to be screened for international audiences. The Indian diaspora has been growing in leaps and bounds over the last several

decades, however, it only became a viable target audience for the Bombay industry starting in the 1990s.¹¹

Given the potential for earning foreign revenue that the free market enabled, the industry began to woo diasporic audiences with a zeal that was unprecedented. This commitment towards expanding its audience base meant that Hindi cinema had to transform itself in crucial ways. The two most significant changes involved: first, the Bombay product had to somewhat revamp itself to compete as an equal in the global marketplace of images,¹² and second, the diasporic citizen had to be interpellated as an 'Indian' subject within the filmic fantasy.

Feudal Family Romance: Why Patriarchy?

As is clear from my brief and schematic discussion, the massive upheavals that made the 1990s an epochal decade for the nation-state also transformed its most powerful and beloved cultural artifact – the Hindi film. While, some of the changes reflected the workings of the industry, others animated specific genres and films. The Hindutva-liberalization dyad, which gathered considerable ideological and rhetorical momentum over the decade, exercised a profound influence on Bombay cinema.¹³

The Hindutva-Liberalization dyad contained within itself a plethora of meanings and ideas and not all of these were immediately discernable. The national public sphere—all terrains for the dissemination of properly national discourses, including obviously the popular film—was brought into the dyad's orbit of influence. The dyad managed to perform a superstructural overhaul: the ideological matrix of the national public sphere became, at least for a while, completely enthralled by the all-pervasive, mesmerizing appeal of the dyad.¹⁴

It is this recasting of the larger public sphere that we must be attentive towards, while reading Bollywood's new romance with melodrama. The family melodrama became, over the 1990s, Bollywood's answer to the violence that characterized other genres – notably the hypermasculine action film or the nationalistic genre. While melodrama has always been Hindi cinema's staple generic modality, the narrative centrality of the family had become somewhat obscured in the 'blood and gore' decade of the 1980s. The 1990s witnessed the family melodrama's triumphant return, complete with overwrought emotional registers, soulful music and 'excessive' mise-en-scene.¹⁵

A certain fantasy of the Hindu feudal family unequivocally occupied the core of this new melodrama. Melodrama persistently displaces all socio-cultural struggles into the domain of the family. Hindi cinema, too, projects the imagined nation on the terrain of the family, heterosexuality, and community through contestations that throw into relief its social structures and

realignments.¹⁶ The moment of the 1990s refurbishes this axiomatic formulation: the historical juncture was fundamentally novel, thus Bollywood fashioned a new family to articulate the nation's contemporary vicissitudes. I argue that the most relevant bearer and – perhaps more importantly – arbiter of the nation/family's vexed conflicts is the Father; the Phallus, Paternity and Patriarchy coalesce in a marvelously overdetermined manner in Bollywood's new family romance.

While scholars have noted Bollywood's renewed investments in 'tradition,' the family, etc.,¹⁷ the salient figure of the new, Hindu Father has been subsumed under generalised discussions of 'patriarchy,' which do not do justice to the complex miscellany embodied by the figure. This patriarch draws on the new discourses of Hindutva in multiple ways: at the level of plots, his claim to the films' moral/ethical centers is generously inflected by his religiosity. On a more abstract register, he gathers around himself the deeply masculinist discourses that are espoused/disseminated by the Hindu Right. I would argue that the Father deserves special attention – not only as the most vital carrier of 'tradition,' but also because he often emerges as a powerful repository of 'modernity' – which, in this context, refers to the multitude of meanings that inform popular understandings of globalization/neo-liberalism. The meanings, which gather around Bollywood's new patriarch, are flexible and varied, and an inquiry into these can give us a point of entry into contemporary India's dominant cultural and ideological discourses.

I argue that this recent phase in Indian cinema has given rise to vastly reactionary narrative modalities. The new investments in the patriarch have specific ramifications for the representation of the individual citizen-subject, marginalized groups, as well as the heterosexual couple and/or the nuclear family. However, the 1990s also witnessed the triumph of liberalization – with its attendant emphases on consumer choices and the overvaluation of the bourgeois citizen as consumer.¹⁸ Within this matrix, the individual's right to 'choice' emerges as an important locus of meaning. By choice, I am referring to a broader cultural logic of a free-market economy, i.e., the system that determines subjects' right to choose between multiple commodities also governs other aspects of existence. The logic of consumption becomes an overarching framework that organises all aspects of life. However, through textual analysis of several recent commercial hits, I demonstrate that the Father and the discourses that he embodies, in fact legitimize a certain delimitation of 'choices,' in effect, this new patriarch renders the idea of choice or will obsolete. These choices and their inevitable frustrations mostly involve romantic/sexual decisions; the Father and his rhetoric fundamentally seek to oversee the domain of (hetero)sexuality. Thus, the desire of the individual subject-citizen and the authoritarian might of the Father are held in tension in many of these films.

My focus on the patriarch is aligned to the nation's larger investment in a fundamentally masculinist historical moment. The discourses that dominated the Indian public spheres in the 1990s were tethered to constitutively phallic constructs. For instance, a certain aggressive militant Hindutva gathers within itself other resonances that can be characterized as 'male,' the epic hero Ram's transformation from a gentle god to an aggressive crusader; the promise of a 'hard state,' a tough military stance against Pakistan, an enormous financial and affective investment in India's future as a nuclear power; a hawkish crackdown on minorities and illegal immigrants – all of these imperatives can be read as significant components of an overarching Phallic regime. This was a time when India embraced a specific kind of masculinity, the rhetorical dispersal of which was along several axes. Certain representations come to be salient in certain ideological climates. And it is in this larger context of the political economy that the figure of the Bollywood Patriarch is locatable. In a national/cultural terrain geared toward romancing authoritarian power, the figuration of a triumphant symbolic Father is no accident.

A key analytical vector of this inquiry is the stardom of Amitabh Bachchan. While much scholarly work has focused on Bachchan's performance of the 'Angry Young Man' in the 1970s and 1980s, his more recent phoenix-like return from the ashes of a flagging career has not elicited as much critical discussion.¹⁹ Partially, this is an effect of the roles he has chosen in this second stage of his career: while the first phase enabled scholars to read an 'aesthetic of mobilization'²⁰ in his 1970s hits, his more recent avatar has become a profoundly visible spokesperson for elite authoritarianism. However, I argue that the compelling force gathered by his persona owes much to his earlier stardom. While the roles/characters Bachchan has played in recent years may be far cries from the proletarian hero in *Deewar* (The Wall, 1975), *Lavanya* (The Bastard, 1981), or *Coolie* (1983), the compelling meanings that gathered around that figure continues to infect Bachchan's recent performances. The mannerisms – the hooded eyes, the deep voice, the suppressed violence and the curious stillness²¹ that gave his violent and ravaged body so much of its power at that fraught moment in history are being redeployed, only to significantly different ends. In this context, it is fruitful to note that Bachchan is almost always a 'parallel text,' that is, he is able to 'move in and out of the film as a star whose presence transcends the text.'²² It has been contended that Amitabh Bachchan's brutalized body inscribed the violence and trauma of the emergency years; I argue that his stardom continues to resonate with India's political present. In fact, one could map the nation's multiple schisms onto the contours of his long and successful career. Bachchan is the star-text whose body and performance most powerfully registers the multiple tenors of Liberalization-Hindutva dyad in the 1990s and beyond. In a provisional taxonomy, I discern three somewhat discrete

configurations of Bollywood's patriarch; interestingly, Bachchan has embodied all three types.

The Phallus Unveiled and the Phallus (Dis)guised: Fathers, Son's and Lovers

The first of these patriarchs is Phallic in the most immediate sense – the locus of authority that is most transparently aligned to a certain glamorised conceptualisation of a revamped feudalism. What I argue sets this father apart from Hindi cinema's earlier paternal figures is both the deep reverence with which he is figured and the equally profound desire to surrender to his regime. Oppositions become mere smokescreens; concealed behind the spurious resistance is a deep desire for non-modernity, to inelegantly rephrase Prasad.

Mohabbatein (Loves, 2000) was the first indication of things to come, as Bachchan's much hyped 'comeback film.' It was also the film that I argue, inaugurated the cleverly veiled thematics of surrender; collusion and compliance vis-à-vis the renewed investment in the patriarch and the stardom of Bachchan.²³ In this film, Narayan Shankar (Bachchan) is the headmaster of Gurukul – the exclusive private college for young men. As a premier educational institution of the country, Gurukul's stature and standing has much to do with its principal's formidable reputation. Conversely, Shankar's authority is buttressed by the school's impressive status and the successful lineage of its students.

I further argue that despite the importance of Raj Aryan (Shahrukh Khan) in the plot, Shankar remains indubitably the flawed 'hero' of *Mohabbatein*. This centrality has to do with narrative imperatives as well as the visual regime within which the film situates the star Bachchan. Shankar is the focal point of the text's fetishisation of feudal authoritarianism. This positioning is amply demonstrated in the film's pre-credit prologue, when three young students, Karan (Jimmy Shergill), Vicky (Uday Chopra) and Sameer (Jugal Hansraj) first arrive at Gurukul. The spectator participates in the point of view shot that first enables us to witness Shankar's physical bearing through an open window as the patriarch pays his daily obeisance to the sun. Thus, we share the reverential gaze of the young men, as Shankar's body is fragmented into component parts of eyes, hands, etc., over several shots—a dramatic jigsaw that finally culminates in the iconic presentation of Bachchan's entire body. The specular/visual mechanisms deployed in this expository occasion remain crucial, because these strategies of representation sustain throughout *Mohabbatein*'s staging/ placement of the Bachchan persona. As Shankar turns around, resplendent in the rays of the early morning sun, the camera tracks in slowly to augment the iconicity of the image; with non-diegetic drums on the soundtrack to signpost the significance of the moment, Shankar walks toward the camera in spectacular slow-motion.

This initial frontal/ iconic staging of Shankar's body congeals in the very next sequence when the stern headmaster meets his charges in the massive assembly hall. As he effortlessly dominates the imposing contours of the room, Shankar introduces his phallic regime by invoking the hoary trinity that defines Gurukul: Tradition, Honour and Discipline. In this sequence, Shankar delivers a series of barely veiled threats regarding the dire consequences of transgressing the Law of the Father. Mise-en-scene, cinematography and editing are absolutely instrumental in concretising the meanings of the sequence: the students stand en masse dressed in identical uniforms; they are an undifferentiated block of bodies captured by a craning, tracking, extremely mobile camera. Shankar, on the other hand, stands apart on a podium gazing down at his students, carefully dressed in monochromatic somber black. The lighting remains warm, and Shankar is framed by the rays of a painted sun, the often-visible logo of Gurukul, which lends to him a literal halo. The faceless, generalized crowd underscores Shankar's monumental singularity – he remains very much the phallic spectacle obsessively centered by the framing in this sequence. The cinematic apparatus presents this splendor of fascist authoritarian will: we share in the awed contemplation of phallic power via a careful deployment of shot composition, camera movements and points of view. *Mohabbatein's* frank reverence for the Bachchan/Shankar brand of masculinist aggression does not end here; whenever Shankar is framed, the film does so in a manner that underscores the grandeur and majesty of his persona – he is insistently framed through large arches, magnificent corridors and against imposing edifices.²⁴ Shankar's awesome might and presence is inflected by his deep religiosity: a devout man, he insists on a strict observance of Hindu rituals. This is where the film lays bare its allegiances with the meanings harnessed by the Hindu Right; Shankar's heroism is considerably mediated through his embodiment of a specifically Sanskritized, upper-caste Hindu masculinity.²⁵

Into this domain, overseen by the relentless, unchanging Law walks Raj Aryan, 'with a violin in his arms and a smile on his lips.' As an errant son, he immediately seeks to topple the patriarch from the pedestal, and literally and figuratively break the gates that enclose all within Gurukul. In fact, the rest of the text is meant to be read as a battle of epic proportions, a clash of wills that pits 'love against fear'. Aryan's transgressive strategies are fairly transparent and range from wheedling permission for his students to find employment outside the institution's robust gates, to sneaking women into Gurukul from a neighboring college for a dance party.²⁶ This last misdemeanor prompts a demand for Aryan's immediate resignation, for it is fundamentally the domain of sexuality that the Phallic Father seeks to oversee. As a defiant Aryan cites his contractual right to remain at Gurukul, we become privy to the history of enmity that binds the two protagonists inexorably to each other.

We learn that Raj Aryan Malhotra was a former student of Gurukul, who had audaciously fallen in love with Shankar's daughter Megha (Aishwariya Rai). Enraged by this unacceptable display of desire, Shankar had unceremoniously expelled Aryan from Gurukul without so much as a meeting. Megha had committed suicide in anguish and this tragic event has hardened Shankar further, instead of softening his aging mien. Before we move on to the nature of the lovers' rebellion however – as a wraithlike Megha resolutely joins Aryan after the declaration of war – we must dwell briefly on what is arguably the affective core of the text: Shankar's obsessive desire for his daughter and its corollary, the desire to police his daughter's sexuality. We first see Megha alive through Shankar's flashback, as she offers morning prayers at a shrine. She greets her father affectionately and the spectator is allowed a glimpse into an affective realm where Megha operates not as a daughter, but as a surrogate for her mother. Like a dutiful wife, she takes care of her father's personal needs, keeps his house for him and indulges his whims. In a particularly revealing moment, she masquerades as a bride with a veil and 'mangalsutra,' which had once belonged to her mother. Shankar contemplates his daughter in her bridal finery and proclaims that his 'daughter is more beautiful' than her mother ever was.

After this rather frank verbalization of desire, Shankar finds Megha's love for Aryan unacceptable, when she confesses to her misdemeanor at his feet. She is left to grieve alone, as Shankar rushes out to take punitive action against the imposter who has challenged his primary claim over his daughter's body. While Megha initially appears to accept her father's inexplicably harsh verdict – she tells him she is happy if he is, sitting on his bed in an intimate glow of light – she nevertheless asserts her agency by refusing to live without Aryan. In Shankar's fantasy, she tells him she loves them both and returning the 'mangalsutra' to him, jumps to her death. The refusal to live without Aryan is, significantly, also a rejection of Shankar's desire – hence the meaningful black beads of Hindu matrimony are returned to him. This tragic event, then, is Shankar's albatross and Aryan's Holy Grail – the love of a woman who has paid with her life for having failed to privilege one of them above the other.

After the narration makes us privy to this Oedipal history, the spectator is urged to read the rest of *Mohabbatein* as a massive confrontation between the Phallic Father and the errant Son – two differently configured masculinities, a clash of wills wherein at stake are abstractions such as 'love,' 'fear,' and 'transformation.' While a resolute Aryan vows to irrevocably transform the terrain of the Father that Megha has sacrificed herself for, the patriarch responds with an answering battle-cry from an undying fountainhead of hatred: this confrontation, he declares, has given him 'an old man of fifty five, a reason to fight all over again.' Hence, the text positions us to read the rising action and

dénouement of the narrative as a series of skirmishes between two contradictory but equally inplacable masculine positions.

However, this carefully erected edifice of opposition, contradiction and difference – conflicts that the text configures as dialectics between two apparently incommensurable poles – crumbles decisively at the climax when the futures of Vicky, Sameer and Karan come to be threatened. For having flouted one too many rules of Gurukul, Shankar expels the young men as much for their lack of contrition as for the transgressions themselves. Anguished but helpless, Aryan comes to him to concede defeat and beg for his students' lives. Shankar gloats at this victory of fear over love, only to be reminded of his own losses by the younger rival. What remains startling about this climactic confrontation is not so much the hyperbole of the dialogue, as the surprising inversion of terms via which Aryan delivers his final blows. Aryan confesses that he had not come to fight at all; what was being interpreted as opposition and rebellion was merely a desire to demonstrate the power of love. Aryan has returned for 'the father of the girl [he] loved... to break the shell of hardness that surrounds' him. Moreover, he has come back for Megha, to show Shankar that she exists wherever there is love; he has also returned to 'complete Megha' because she remains incomplete without both of them. Finally, Aryan delivers the harshest sentence – he condemns Shankar not only to the loss of a daughter, but also the loss of a son – himself. From Aryan's perspective, Shankar remains a 'stubborn defeated man... who has turned his back on the two people who love him most', i.e., Megha and himself.

This, then, is the surprising twist of *Mohabbatein*: the discovery that conflict, struggle, dissent and defiance merely veiled a profound desire to surrender, to comply and collude – in other words, to love. While much of the film traces the ostensible difference between the two principal male protagonists, the closure disperses a different set of meanings. While paying obeisance to the sun, Aryan had asserted his right to do it his 'own way'; at the conclusion, he admits that his goal has been an aspiration to reconciliation, to an ironing out of difference.³⁷ Having witnessed this 'climax', the spectator is prepared for Shankar's final speech, which, unsurprisingly, is delivered within the imposing assembly hall. In his final discourse, Shankar accepts the error of his ways, accepts that 'tradition, honour and discipline', the three pillars on which he has built and nurtured Gurukul, are inadequate for a successful life. Life, he concedes, 'is all about giving and receiving love.' Having experienced this epiphany, Shankar willingly passes on the baton to Aryan, because he wants to herafter, 'proudly declare that a Raj Aryan exists within each of my students.' Thus, the closure is about the old generation changing its traditions 'so that a new generation can create its own'; it is about the transgenerational transmission of patriarchy – the family of the Father dissolving into families of brothers. It is crucial to understand the tenor of

the conclusion, if we are to remain sensitive to the meanings dispersed by *Mohabbatein*: Shankar is emphatically 'not a villain' in this text; he remains a misguided, but noble patriarch, who has simply failed to recognize the rightful son. He is not diminished by his 'defeat'; in fact, the majesty of his persona is augmented by the graceful (if belated) willingness to usher in the changes that are heralded by Aryan. Aryan, now the worthy heir to the Father's mantle, finally seeks and receives the blessing that he has craved all along. Father and Son mirror one another in a profoundly mimetic moment of mutual recognition. This is the occasion when the text seamlessly brings together the contradictory valences of liberalization and the Hindu right; the opposing male protagonists have embodied two discursive strands, and now they appear before us reconciled, united, unified. Contemporary India's myriad schisms and fissures are thus magically conjured away.

Adding to the startling transformation of rebellion into reconciliation is the figuration of a transgenerational erotic triangle. The final shots of *Mohabbatein* feature Father, Daughter and Lover together walking toward Gurukul's imposing contours; Megha is finally 'complete', an effect of the collusion between two differently garbed patriarchies. She wears her mother's 'mangalsutra' as a gesture of acceptance of Shankar's desire; she walks between the two men, no longer haunted by their difference but now finally secure in their fundamental sameness.

Mohabbatein is remarkable for its reverential presentation of Phallic power; it transforms a non-modern, authoritarian ethos into a fetishized spectacle. The text's success hinges on a monumental masquerade – the performance of 'difference,' the narrative emphasis on conflict, which we only belatedly recognize as a thematic of collusion and compliance. This novel inscription and elaboration of patriarchy is what defined post-1990 Bollywood. Embodied by Bollywood's new fathers – but also its new sons and lovers – the patriarchal consensus reinvents itself in the decade through new guises and manners that are not necessarily immediately recognizable as such. And this is the juncture in which the liberalization-Hindutva dyad gains its salience. *Mohabbatein* is a deeply conservative film but appears not to be; our identification with Aryan makes us complicit in an ideological nexus that is far subtler and thus more effective, than an alliance with Shankar's more open chauvinism would entail. The spectator is left enthusiastically cheering for the harried lover, willing for him to 'win' the battle of love against oppressive, feudal forces only to realise that the battle has already been won elsewhere.

Mohabbatein was also the first film that was able to capitalize on the phallic potential inhabiting the Amitabh Bachchan star text. Hereafter, Bachchan would embody the phallus in countless films, many of which would create box office

history both within the sub-continent and in diasporic hubs worldwide. Bachchan would soon become the contemporary moment's most emblematic Father.

The Family of Business and the Business of Family: Fathers, Big Business and Errant Sons

If a certain kind of patriarchy is revered, fetishised and simultaneously veiled in recent popular cinema, modernity—or more accurately, a particular vision of globality—is also inducted into this discursive domain as a necessary ally. I have argued that Bollywood's plush family dramas pitted the patriarch and his discourses against a younger figure—the Son or the Lover who could carry on the patriarchal baton without ever appearing to do so.

However, at this time the Bombay film also imagined another patriarch—a new Phallic Father who is 'himself a signifier of modernity.' This modern-global figuration of phallic authority gathers much of his political and emotional charge from his ability to speak from positions that are emphatically those aligned to the new India being envisaged by the bourgeoisie at this time. This Father is aligned to the world of big business—ranging from heavy industry to corporate finance. In the era of economic liberalization, the new India being visualized by its proponents relies heavily on discourses of corporate competence, on an assemblage of images that resonate with India's triumphant entry into the global market. Bombay film was also fashioning a new iconography to legitimise/celebrate India's new economic culture. From a figure that articulated feudal authoritarianism and 'traditional values,' the Patriarch morphed into a corporate colossus, effortlessly and comfortably at home in Bollywood's imaginings of a market driven economy. Indeed, 'at-home-ness,' becomes his special weapon; the ease with which he presides over public and private spaces, the aura of inhabiting the home and the outside world with power and grace come to be hallmarks of the revamped Father. However, his most efficacious source of power is aligned to the particular economics he straddles—his control of capital.

The world of the Hindi family melodrama is awash with wealth; from consumable objects that are dispersed throughout the filmic frame to the championing of consumption as lifestyle, this cinema is wholly invested in the euphoric rhetoric of the market. One of the key factors in the creation and maintenance of this mise-en-scene of plenitude is the absolute erasure of labour. Completely unmoored from the domain of production, consumer objects/lifestyles float freely through the films, securely legitimised by narrative/national ideology.

It is in this context that a film like *Ek Rishtaa: The Bond of Love* (2001), directed by Sunel Darshan, becomes exceptional. *Ek Rishtaa* is one of the only films of

the period that locates industrial labour and capital within the story of a family. The film is heavily melodramatic both in terms of style and content, with a florid, excessive mise-en-scene and many emotionally charged moments of confrontation. It tells the story of the rise, fall and eventual victory of patriarch/industrial tycoon, Vijay Kapoor (Amitabh Bachchan). In a marvelously adroit sleight of hand, *Ek Rishtaa* extends the domain of the organic, extended Hindu family to include the factory, its spaces/modes of production and its members, the urban industrial labour pool. The melodramatic mode operates on a much broader canvas, as 'outsiders' are inducted into a system of synthetic kinship. *Ek Rishtaa* personalizes the impersonal workings of industrial and late-industrial capitalism primarily through the figure of the patriarch and by deploying the family as a metaphor in order to contain and neutralize threats that beset him from both within and without.

The film opens with a huge baroque mansion being threatened with liquidation via an auction notice from the state. The plot is largely narrated through a flashback as the ailing Vijay Kapoor mulls over the events that have led to his present state of ruin. The very first public memory is that of a business symposium where the respected industrialist delivers a speech outlining his vision of a successful business enterprise. Immaculately clad in a designer suit, Vijay Kapoor intones in his deep baritone:

Behind every successful industry or enterprise there are three crucial components—the owner, the management and the workers. Often workers will have complaints against the company. Owners often have problems with workers; management and workers cannot agree. But the owner is responsible, answerable for the company. In a situation like this, if a monthly meeting is organised between all three divisions—where they can have straightforward conversations—then a *relationship* will develop between the owner, management and workers. Then the whole establishment comes to be well organized—*woven into a strong family*. And as far as I know *no family in the whole world has ever gone on strike!* If owners are able to do this (organizing), the problem of sick industries will be resolved forever.

While the glib naïveté of this reading of industrial conflict and ailing industries may seem laughable at first glance, the ideas propounded in the speech fit perfectly into the narrative organisation of *Ek Rishtaa* where Kapoor's business and family come to be organized along similar lines. Vijay Kapoor's business is a 'Hindu Family Business,' in which the control of capital and resources—much like a Hindu extended family—is fairly centralised, with a strict vertical hierarchy of power and authority. The conflicts of *Ek Rishtaa* arise when the line between 'organic family'—father, mother, children—and

'synthetic family' – industrial workers and other outsiders as kin – disappears completely. The entire film is structured as a series of crises that beset Kapoor as he struggles to keep his 'family' (both real and metaphorical) together. As Father/Owner – and in the film the roles constantly slip and slide together – he is 'responsible and answerable' for the health of his empire.

A close reading of the factors/agents of threat to Kapoor's universe enable us to unravel the film's rather complex figuration of the family business. Trouble begins simultaneously on two fronts – his son Ajay (Akshay Kumar), returns with a business degree from the United States and his own ambitions and Preeti (Juhi Chawla), his pampered daughter, falls in love with Rajesh Purohit (Mohnish Behl), an employee of managerial rank. Much impressed by Rajesh's honesty and integrity, Vijay Kapoor blurs the division between employer and employee even further, by conferring upon him the title of his 'son' as he marries Preeti and invites the couple to live in his home.

Ajay, on the other hand, dreams of starting his own information technology business and seeks his father's financial and emotional support. Vijay does not believe that any business can flourish without experience and urges Ajay to join his own company instead. The clash of opinions and desires between father and son are presented as a face-off between 'experience' and 'education.' Interestingly, the conflict here is also one that India is struggling to resolve in the present moment: what we have here is the transition – the moment of dislocation – between an economy of 'high capitalism' – characterized by heavy industry and manufacture, and, an economy of 'late capitalism,' where capital is globalized and labor, manufacture and distribution/consumption have become entirely separated from one another. The narrative of *Ek Rishtaa* attempts to allegorize the alternatives that confront newly liberalized India²⁸ – the choices between 'Fordism and flexible accumulation,' to borrow a phrase from David Harvey – through a melodramatic confrontation between two generations.²⁹

Initially obedient to his father's dictates, Ajay acquiesces and joins the company. Vijay however, insists that his son reach the pinnacle of the company pyramid through hard work and experience; simple inheritance ought not to bestow upon Ajay an entitlement of privilege. Having internalised this noble work ethic, Ajay begins at the bottom of the totem pole – in the factory floor as a machine operator. When an altercation with union leader Hari Singh for violence and gambling in the factory precipitates a strike, a furious Vijay reprimands Ajay by pointing out that he has not suffered a strike in 25 years because he has learned to live with and has negotiated with union leaders – as necessary evils. He proudly declares that he uses the union leaders 'as dogs... and I keep them at my feet.' Following a humiliating public apology ordered by his father, Ajay resolves to start his own business, in spite of Vijay's disapproval.

This then is the first threat of dismemberment; and as the conflict gathers momentum, Ajay borrows money from the market to start his own IT firm. This leads to another momentous confrontation between father and son, as Vijay balks at the idea of his son taking a loan from 'outsiders.' After several highly dramatic altercations and melodramatic twists aided and abetted by Rajesh's ingratiating presence, Vijay orders his son to leave the mansion: 'In this house every word I speak is the Law, I'm now ordering Ajay to leave this house. Get out of here!' he thunders in front of a stunned family. A devastated Ajay leaves home despite entreaties from Protima (Rakhee) and his siblings. He marries Nisha against her father's wishes and they set up a nuclear home; Ajay also starts his firm. Ajay's many transgressions straddle the 'inside' and 'outside' dynamics that the film sets up in crucial ways. First, Ajay wants to break away from the family business; in the film's terms, this is tantamount to breaking away from the family itself. Second, he jeopardizes the factory by antagonizing the evil union leader, Hari Singh. He constantly pits his education against his father's vast experience in the workings of industry. But finally his most serious offense is understood by Vijay as an attack on his selfhood and authority as patriarch. Ajay is not only disrespectful towards his father, but he also insults Rajesh – the outsider whom the patriarch has adopted as son. Rajesh's supposed humiliation finally becomes the catalyst for Ajay's eviction from home. All members of the family pay this price because Vijay Kapoor's conceptualization of family and business must be maintained at all cost.

The second threat is posed by Hari Singh – the smarmy labour leader who joins hands with Rajesh to ruin the family/business. Here too, Hari Singh's status as labour leader is mediated through his connections with family.³⁰ Rajesh is the typical villain who enters the home as Preeti's husband and adopted son and subsequently betrays the family's trust in the name of 'doing business.' He, more than any other agent, destroys the family from both within and without by stripping Vijay Kapoor of his company's control. Kapoor is harassed by creditors and pushed towards the brink of bankruptcy; the patriarch is able to negotiate threats as long as they come from the outside; estranged from his biological son and devastated by his adoptive son's betrayal, Kapoor falls seriously ill. The potency of this patriarch is heavily mediated by his control of capital and labour; once these cease to scaffold his authoritarian persona, he literally collapses. The financial doom heralds the possibility of both home and factory being auctioned off. At this juncture the synthetic family envisaged by Kapoor starts crumbling, and, it becomes necessary to re-sketch lines between private and public, insiders and outsiders, the home and the world. At this moment, the film returns from flashback to a narration in the present tense.

Ajay rushes home to support his father in his darkest hour and vows to save the family home and factory – his father's 'honour.' The biological family rallies

around the patriarch and looks ready for a new consolidation. However, another crisis forestalls the process: Nisha, Ajay's pregnant wife demands that he choose between their conjugal home³¹ and his natal family because she is unwilling to share his love with others. Nisha is squarely placed in the domain of affect and, as such, the threat she presents would involve only the personal, private sphere. However, *Ek Rishtaa*, as I have outlined above, elides the distinctions between business and family such that each term comes to define the other. Thus, Nisha, the wife speaks the language of business transactions: she insists that Ajay rebuff his natal family in exchange for her love. She withholds her affection because in her understanding Ajay violates the contract between them that they would both leave their natal homes to build a home together. Ajay refuses to break old relationships to sustain a new one, and a distraught Nisha returns to her father's home. This sets up a parallel narrative of dismemberment as the Kapoor clan struggles to come together and overcome the colossal odds that beset them. Preeti returns to her father's home as well, unable to make Rajesh recognize the error of his ways. Rajesh, on his part, insists that he has not acquired the money by unfair means (i.e., he was not doing anything illegal when he abused the power of attorney); he has merely done 'business with a foolish, weepy family.' Though within his legal rights when he appropriates Kapoor's money and assets he breaks a much more serious law: for *Ek Rishtaa*, the Law of the Father far supercedes the law of the land,³² and it is for the transgression of the former that Rajesh must be brought to justice.

The narrative sets up a series of bipolar oppositions between 'good' and 'bad' family business: while Vijay Kapoor's business ethic is built on strong principles of honesty, trust and kinship, Rajesh's business acumen is unworthy, for it rests on his clever tongue and his capacity for treachery. Ajay is young and impetuous and lacks the necessary experience to make things work. Hari Singh is merely a mercenary pawn who can be bought and sold. And Nisha and her father dishonour the sacred ties of business and family by swapping one for the other – never mind that Kapoor himself does the same on several occasions. These then, are the crises that confront the embattled Kapoor clan. While the threats posed by the film can be read as a series of slippages between family and business, the resolutions offered are startling insofar as they refuse to engage the questions raised by the film. Threats are either brutally neutralized or magically conjured away.

The factory/family must be restored to the patriarch and the hierarchical organisation of these institutions must be recuperated under the aegis of his authority. Led by a repentant Hari Singh – who realizes that 'if the master's home is in darkness, there cannot be any light in worker's homes' – and Ajay, the workers storm and vandalize Rajesh's home over a long, drawn out climax. Threatened with lynching, a terrified Rajesh seeks refuge in the only haven of

safety – Vijay Kapoor's office. As he begs for Vijay to save his life, the Patriarch – now re-enthroned on his rightful chair asks: 'How much would you say is the price of your life?' Since refusal to pay back would mean death, Rajesh relents and promises to return Kapoor's money/property/factory and other assets. Vijay Kapoor metes out punitive justice that is entirely pre-modern and extra-legal. The police do not make an appearance to protect Rajesh or his rights as citizen. This is the moment at which *Ek Rishtaa* finally embraces the non-democratic ethos it has cleverly veiled; the final dénouement, the brutal use of industrial labour to stage a violent coup lays bare the film's ideological propensities. The Patriarch's spectacular vindication and revenge collapse the family-business dyad one last time as he is rehabilitated as both Father and Owner: Rajesh thus learns the family business by paying a high price; the proximity to death 'cures' him, as it were, and the Kapoor family welcomes him back as repentant son and grateful employee. However, his punishment gains another dimension as Preeti refuses to forgive the pain he has caused her family. The film does not attempt to recuperate the couple.

Ajay's ambition – his dream of starting his own IT firm – is simply disavowed. Since the joint Hindu family business gathers its power from the Patriarch's position at the helm as both father and owner, Ajay's defection would leave him semi-castrated, maimed. Vijay Kapoor must, of necessity, continue as lord and master of both home and factory for his authority to be reinstated in full. Interestingly, this also translates as the triumph of high capitalism over late capitalism. In Bollywood's grammar, corporate finance must wait in the wings until an older model of manufacture and development is ready to relinquish the reins. While this is not a reflection of any visible reality in India, the popularity of films like *Ek Rishtaa* reflects the larger need for the sustenance of such a myth.

Nisha and Ajay had been unable to reconcile and their separation causes each of them much pain. *Ek Rishtaa* however, cannot allow this particular couple to remain unconsolidated. As the son and heir, Ajay would carry the family line forward; hence his offspring must be brought back into the fold. Furthermore, the desire of the modern couple for privacy has already been articulated by Nisha, and in order for *Ek Rishtaa*'s grammar to work, this desire must be neutralized. Rejoining the Kapoor family with her newborn son, Nisha apologises to her parents-in-law for her desire to build her own, independent nuclear home. This individualistic desire, she says contritely, was a result of her flawed upbringing *sans* a mother; in other words, having grown up in a nuclear and thus 'incomplete' family, Nisha had been unable to appreciate the fulfillment and generosity inherent in an extended family. Thus Ajay and Nisha both willingly relinquish their dreams of branching out on their own; in *Ek Rishtaa*'s spectacular recuperation of Patriarchy(y), the individual citizen-subject, the modern heterosexual couple, urban labour, modes of production – the very

desire for modernity in its multiple guises – are simply subject to erasure. The Hindu family business cannibalises all else; the patriarch Vijay Kapoor renders all dissent obsolete. In *Ek Rishtaa's* ideological and narrative syntax 'the feudal is disabled, if not overturned.

There is a kind of plenitude in this operation of neutralizing dissent. The film manages its own contradictions with a kind of competence that is remarkably consistent. As Vijay Kapoor adds an 's' to a sign reading 'Vijay Kapoor and Son(s) Industries', he effortlessly inducts Rajesh, Ajay, Hari Singh, the labourers, and even Nisha back into the Family Business. *Ek Rishtaa's* success as a text is secured by this competence – it never slips up and exposes the labor that goes into the management/erasure of oppositional discourses.

The Abject Father and the Poetics of Suffering: *Baghban*

Ravi Chopra's *Baghban* (The Gardner, 2003) undercuts and even reverses many of the meanings that gather around the Phallic patriarch in the 1990s family melodramas. As mentioned above, the authoritarian stature of the Patriarch in films like *Ek Rishtaa* and *KKG* is buttressed by the Patriarch's control of wealth and capital. A complex series of narrative and ideological scaffolds maintain and uphold, as it were, the massive construct of the patriarch. The dispersal of Amitabh Bachchan's massive star-presence also undoubtedly contributes to the visual and ideological strength garnered by the Father. And this is partially the reason for *Baghban's* emotional power: here again we have Bachchan as Raj Malhotra the father, but a different set of meanings accrue to his character in this film. How these alternate meanings are arrived at, is of special interest to this discussion of patriarchy in the 1990s.

Baghban's most powerfully iconoclastic gesture is to humanize the patriarch. In lieu of narrative and style colluding to 'produce' the spectacle and splendor of phallic authority, *Baghban*, in a certain sense, cuts the father down to size. Raj Malhotra is a middle-class man, who works in a bank and by his own admission, 'is used to working under a boss.' The transformation of the Bachchan father from capitalist mega-magnate to service sector employee considerably impacts the meanings – both affective and narrative – that attend to this figure. Malhotra is a 'common man,' insofar as Bachchan can embody a certain quotidian, middle class subject position. He is loving, accessible and is entirely devoted to his wife Pooja (Hema Malini) and his grown up children. Hence, the nature of allegiance demanded by the father is also markedly different: Raj Malhotra asks for love, not obedience.

This middle-class-ness perhaps also accounts for Malhotra's modernity – he is, quite emphatically, a bourgeois subject. While his profession and general

'IT'S ALL ABOUT LOVING YOUR PARENTS'

demeanor signposts this, what fundamentally corroborates it is his relationship with Pooja. In a remarkable departure from the standard Hindi film's desexualisation of parental figures, *Baghban* represents Raj and Pooja as a modern companionate couple. The film begins with their fortieth wedding anniversary, and, takes great pains to establish the mutual attraction and romance that animates their marriage; the romance between Raj and Pooja is a primary conduit of meaning for *Baghban*. This love story, in fact, forms the affective fulcrum for the text; it is their separation that will propel the narrative forward. In tandem with this configuration of the modern couple, Raj and Pooja are never shown to regulate their children's lives; in fact when Aloke (Salman Khan), their *de facto* adopted son, calls from London to seek permission to marry his girlfriend Arpita (Mahima Chowdhary), they joyfully give their blessings and consent. The film provides many such instances where Raj and Pooja's warmth, generosity and supportiveness of their children's desires. Raj depletes his life's savings in order to fulfill his children's needs, on an assumption that they are his 'fixed deposits,' his assets to count on after retirement.

The fundamental crisis of the narrative revolves around Raj and Pooja's desire to move in with the children after Raj's professional retirement. Finding themselves increasingly lonely for their companionship, Raj and Pooja invite their three sons and two daughters-in-law to decide where they should live together as a family. This decision alarms the children considerably, since none of them are able to make room for the older couple in their carefully organized nuclear homes and hectic lives. Reluctant to reject Raj's proposal offhand, the younger generation devises a cruel strategy: they propose to divide the couple between them, and take turns in allowing each parent to spend a few months in their homes. In effect, this would mean that Raj and Pooja would be forced to live apart, after forty years of coupledom. The plan is predicated on a crucial assumption – that Raj and Pooja will never agree to the separation, and their request to move in will die a natural death. This however, does not happen. On the contrary, Pooja practically forces Raj to agree to this strange proposal; she is unable to gauge the enormity of her children's heartlessness and urges Raj to 'not suspect his children's motives.'³³

Thus, in a melodramatic gesture par excellence, the second generation's cruelty and Machiavellian manipulations are counterpoised to the parents' warmth, love and 'goodness.' This is not the only instance of a bipolar confrontation between 'compassionate' and 'bad' modernities in *Baghban*, but it remains one of the most compelling emotional moments in the film. Amidst a great deal of sadness and despair, the couple goes their separate ways; in a moment of overdetermined pathos, their pet dogs go with the youngest son because Raj 'cannot bear to see them separated.'

Hereafter, the plot consists of a litany of deprivations and daily humiliations that Raj and Pooja endure in their uncaring children's homes. Ranging from Raj being disrespectfully asked to vacate the head of the table and relinquish the morning newspaper, to Pooja having to sleep in the maid's room because the granddaughter Payal (Reemi Sen) refuses to share her bedroom, *Beghban's* singular achievement is in organizing the suffering of the elderly parent in fairly convincing ways. Some privations are large and some not, but each moment of suffering cumulatively impacts the affective register of the film. However, the most gut-wrenching experience – for the protagonists and by extension for the spectator – remains the separation itself. Raj and Pooja's acute need for each other's company and presence accounts for the considerable emotional power of the text. And the fact that each must conceal their pain from the other, adds yet another layer of poignancy to an already overwrought scenario.

One of the most compelling instances of Raj's pain remains the moment when his eye-glasses break, for this leaves him unable to read Pooja's letter. Raj tentatively requests his son to get the glasses repaired but in yet another telling display of callousness is insensitively rebuffed. When his little grandson spends the money allotted for buying shoes in repairing the glasses, he is yelled at and beaten up by Reena (Divya Dutta), the daughter-in-law. The castration of the Father is complete – *Beghban*, the final text of the series, strips the Patriarch of wealth, power and even dignity within the domain of the modern nuclear family. An abject³⁵ figure of lack and suffering, this father must find solace outside of biological kin in a café run by a Gujarati couple Hemant (Paresh Rawal) and Shanti (Lilette Dubey). They call him 'mova bhai' (elder brother) and treat him with respect and kindness. The café becomes a surrogate home for Raj, and the owners and young customers, his kin. Meanwhile Pooja has no such respite and continues to suffer in her own exile, enduring insensitivity from her son's family.

We must pause at this juncture and evaluate the nature of Raj and Pooja's suffering. Clearly, being separated from one another by their 'uncaring' offspring is the first and unkindest gesture of all. Hereafter, everything that happens to Raj and Pooja – their daily tribulations within the cold contours of the modern nuclear family – comes to be framed within this larger narrative of suffering that is already in place. *Beghban's* masterful move is to organise the distinct occasions of suffering in a manner that collapses the distinctions between them. In other words, the mistreatment that Raj and Pooja receive at the homes of their sons – which the film expends significant narrative energy in presenting – comes to be a single narrative of 'bad modernity'. It is the coherence – the singularity, as it were – of this narrative of pain and endurance that demands further unpacking.

The seriousness of the offenses against the parental figures is wide-ranging. There is neglect and indifference, often coupled with aggressive or harsh behavior, but there are also demands of modern existence that the film

circumscribes within the previously described metatext of suffering.³⁵ *Beghban* makes no distinctions between particular acts of insensitivity or cruelty undertaken by the children and the general vicissitudes of modern, metropolitan existence. Since the film organizes all these disparate moments and occasions within the metatext of suffering and endurance, it becomes possible to elide the distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate demands/treatment; the constitutive difference between inflicting pain/humiliation on an elderly parent and exercising one's basic rights as a modern subject collapses in such a melodramatic arrangement. In disempowering the Father and recasting him as a figure of abjection, the film mounts a critique of modern metropolitan life and the nuclear family that completely annihilates both, as emotionally bankrupt and devoid of human values. Invalidation of the quotidian expectations/entitlements of modern subjectivity – by framing it within a larger narrative of filial cruelty – is only one avenue through which *Beghban* articulates this critique. A second avenue is explored through the good Son, Aloke, and his wife Arpita.

Aloke, the non-biological son comes to be a repository of 'good' values in *Beghban*. In vivid contrast to the morally dissipated representations of Raj's biological offspring, Aloke and his wife Arpita embody a refashioned modernity, one that is in tune with the parents' value system. This couple and the discourses they stand for, therefore, deserve some scrutiny. Aloke and Arpita have both studied in London; in Hindi cinema's shorthand, this comfort in inhabiting different national terrains and spaces makes them citizens of a global order. However, in spite of the 'western' allegiances Aloke and Arpita deeply cherish 'traditional Indian' values, among which respect for elders features predominantly. Aloke and Arpita repeatedly find themselves and their home 'empty and incomplete,' without the warmth and benevolent parental presence.³⁶ They plead for Raj and Pooja to grace their home for a few days, because, Aloke proclaims that it has been his dream to have his parents live with him. Moved by their love and generosity, Raj and Pooja concede to spend a few days at this 'ideal' nuclear home. Aloke refuses to leave their side, preferring to spend his nights at their bedside. This startling gesture not only privileges the bond with parents over the relationship with spouse, it also dismantles the very construct of privacy between the conjugal couple as obsolete.

This then is the family, and this is the modern couple 'worthy' of parental love. The trials and tribulations, the long months of painful separation that Raj and Pooja undergo at the homes of their own kin are nullified and compensated for in Aloke and Arpita's house. This vision of a non-modern familial utopia, where the Father (and by extension, also the mother) is venerated as divinity comes to operate as yet another significant component of the indictment of modernity. *Beghban* is remarkable as a text for it performs an ideological gesture of great dexterity; it castrates the Father, disenfranchises him and restores him

of lack, as a victim par excellence. As an abject victim Raj Malhotra – already Amitabh Bachchan as well – comes to be the hero, the primary locus of spectatorial identification. The tale of paternal suffering however does not conclude here; it closes on a reification of the non-modern – and this recuperation of the Father as Phallus is what I turn to now.

The warmth and affection Raj and Pooja receive at Alope's home restores their shattered spirits somewhat. They return to their old home and community of friends, with their 'new' children in tow. The film could have ended here; this moment of reunion provides an occasion for a satisfactory closure, for the couple is restored to their former happy life. However, the text forcefully reminds us of what is at stake here – the Father must have his vengeance in order to be completely reinstated. How *Baghban* arrives at this recuperative moment is worth dwelling on, because it forcefully affirms the terms of this analysis. Raj had once written of his suffering at the hands of his children; he had, in the long months of incarceration and anguish, transcribed his experiences on paper. This crucial testimony had been left behind in Hemantbhai's café, his former haven of peace and companionship. Via a complicated series of coincidences the manuscript is finally recovered and published as a book – titled *Baghban*. This resonance between book and film titles is no coincidence; the film is about nothing and no one else, but the Father – text mirrors testimony in powerful communion. The Father is the gardener – the compelling central metaphor of the film – the one who carefully and painstakingly tends to his saplings, only to be cast aside as the garden matures and begins to bloom on its own. Leaving this unworthy garden behind, the Father rises again to claim his rightful place and to judge and to assign guilt and punishment. The title – mirrored as book – reminds us that we, as spectators, have been the privileged recipients of the Father's Word. Raj Malhotra's book is nominated for the Booker Award. *Baghban* (the book) becomes logos (the Word) a text that holds within it the might of the Phallus. And what, we may ask, of the film? How can we tell the two apart? The point here is the absence of that gap – the collapse of the two texts – their singularity, as it were, is what makes the film compelling: what we have been privy to, we retrospectively recognize, is that narrative which refuses a radical separation from the Father's Word. Poststructuralist/ Feminist theorists have long remarked on the inherent masculinist underpinnings of Language, Philosophy, Culture, via the term phallogocentrism – the inherent power of the Word that is always already masculine. In a marvellously overdetermined manner, *Baghban* makes this connection between the symbolic authority of the speaker and the spoken word literal.

The authority of the Father's word – and this is a key signifier of his legitimacy – remains unexamined. The book is beyond scrutiny or assessment,

because that would be unnecessary and indeed impossible, for it would have to mean a re-telling of the film itself. We, as spectators, already know the veracity of *Baghban's* narrative substance. However, the book does have a diegetic audience – the reading public who gather to pay homage to the Patriarch in the final moments of the film, at a reception organised to celebrate the success of the book. This public – along with the spectator – is the addressee of the text, is the privileged recipient of the Father's traumatic testimony. Indeed, the spirit of bearing witness to a long and agonizing journey is writ large on this sequence as Raj declares, 'I am not a writer... I have only written what life has taught me.' The reversal of the Father's fortune, the undoing of his abjection makes this a key moment in the film: the moment when the Father can reclaim the Phallus, the moment when the Patriarch – character, star and symbolic construct – will be reinstated by Hindi cinema. And *Baghban* closes with him in his moment of triumph and vindication. This is also the crucial occasion of assigning guilt and taking punitive action. As Raj Malhotra embraces Alope as his rightful kin and heir, he also metes out crushing punishment to the biological sons.

After the speech, which he concludes by affirming his love for Pooja, Raj is asked by reporters what he would have done if *Baghban* were to be his own story. Unflinchingly Raj – now securely refortified – replies, 'Those children who are not able to give their parents love, or shelter or respect – I would never forgive them; I would punish and disown them.' The guilty sons and their spouses grovel for forgiveness, but even Pooja remains implacable. As the Father transforms from a kind, affectionate man to a vengeful god, the only ones within the hallowed circle of his embrace are Alope, Arpita and his grandchildren. The repentant offspring remain forever banished for having locked horns with the Law. Modernity – as we understand it – is also deconstructed in the same moment.³⁷

I have explored some of the transformations that attended to Hindi cinema in the 1990s and beyond. I have argued that the new idioms, the new languages of this cinema must be understood within a larger national-political context. This large terrain was itself being decisively reordered at this time – the rise of Hindutva and the liberalization of the national economy altered the public culture of India almost beyond recognition. While the visual texture of the popular film embraced new global technologies and disparate regimes of visibility such as the music video and the advertisement film, the content of Hindi cinema looked inward to focus on the family, nation, religion and tradition. This is why, I argue, that recent Bombay cinema is best analyzed by interrogating its allegiances with the liberalization-Hindutva dyad. Both of these processes harness a wide range of events and meanings, but the family melodrama managed to inscribe these in fairly consistent ways through its own visual and narrative grammar. I have further argued that a particularly compelling locus of meaning comes to be the Father – the figure

who becomes salient in the dispersal of such terms as 'tradition', 'family', etc. A deep conformism, indeed conservatism, colors the ideological propensities of Bollywood's slick new products.

This Father ought not to be subsumed within generalised discussions of an abstraction called 'patriarchy'. As a central and iconic construct of this new melodrama, the Father is also a crucial carrier of modernity and globality – terms which have gained much currency in post-liberalization India. In other words, the comforting binaries that simplify our understandings of 'tradition' and 'modernity' as dialectical opposites have collapsed in this new Bollywood. The terms on each side of the binary now slip and slide into one another, such that a radical distinction becomes virtually impossible. Paradoxes abound, as a 'new tradition' seeks to replace the 'old modern'. However, this state of affairs – indeed this competence with which Bollywood continues to confound our critical paradigms – should not paralyze critique. The somewhat comforting critical position that enables a recuperation of another vague abstraction, 'people,' demands careful and sustained scrutiny. The Father – and his Sons – in all their masquerades, garbs and guises must be subjected to critical scalpels. If not, his regime will continue to interpellate us as scholars and spectators in an idiom that is deeply undemocratic.

NOTES

Chapter One. Bollywood, Nation, Globalization: An Incomplete Introduction

- 1 Viridi, Jyotika. *The Cinematic Image/Nation: Indian Popular Films as Social History*. NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003, p. 192.
- 2 Jameson, Frederic. *The Geopolitical Unconscious: Cinema and Space in the World System*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 3.
- 3 Spivak, Gayatri C. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1999, p. ix. Spivak's reference to 'a certain postcolonial subject' is directed towards the metropolitan postcolonial scholar.
- 4 Bhaumik, Kaushik. 'Lost in Translation: A Few Varieties of the Alphabet Game Played Between Bombay Cinema and Hollywood,' In *World Cinema's Dialogues with Hollywood* (Ed.) Paul Cooke, Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- 5 Rashdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. Penguin: Delhi, 1991, p. 162.

Chapter Two. Sentimental Symptoms: The Films of Karan Johar and Bombay Cinema

- 1 A quick survey of box-office returns indicates that in 2006 *Dyaar ke Side Effects* (The Side Effects of Love, directed by Saket Chaudhury) and *Khosla ka Ghosla* (Khosla's Nest, directed by Dibakar Banerjee), with returns of 84 and 45 millions respectively were judged multiplex successes, while in 2007 *Life in a... Metro* (directed by Anurag Basu), *Honeymoon Travels Pvt Ltd* (Reema Kagti) and *Bhiga Fry* (Sagar Bellary) were considered hits with returns of 162, 115 and 79 millions respectively. All figures in Indian Rupees. <http://www.boxofficeindia.com/showProd.php?itemName=MjAwNw=>
- 2 This practice might be viewed as part superstition (the letter 'K' proved lucky for Karan) and part branding. The Hindi film industry is famously superstitious but as Ekta Kapoor's Balaji Telefilms showed, a preference for the letter 'K' also helped create one of the most recognizable brands on television. Johar is a big fan of Kapoor's whose soaps have revolutionized television programming. Her success might be attributed to a synergistic production model and efficiencies of scale applied to a winning 'formula.' These films resemble the 'KJo' film insofar as they are family sagas that combine elaborate displays of ritual and festivities with fairly racy, soap-style subject matter. For more on Ekta Kapoor's work see Shobini Ghosh. 'Married in the Family.' *Cultural Anthropology* 18.4.