

BOLLYWOOD

SOCIOLOGY GOES TO THE MOVIES

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TOWARDS A SOCIOLOGY OF CINEMA

SOCIOLOGY OF CINEMA: AN OVERVIEW

Perhaps of all the areas of culture and society explored within the discipline of sociology, the topic of cinema has been less comprehensively served. Whilst there has been an ongoing exploration of the sociology of the mass media, more generally the study of cinema has been accorded sporadic attention.

Andrew Tudor (1998) offers a useful account of the sociology of cinema in the United States (US) and in Western Europe and it is worth summarising that history here. Early sociological studies of the cinema can be traced back to the twenties and thirties in the US. Fuelled by public concern in the US at the end of the twenties, the Payne Fund financed a series of research projects that brought together sociologists and social psychologists to explore the impact of motion pictures upon youth (for example, Bulmer 1933; Peterson and Thurstone 1936). The Payne Fund Studies set the tone for interwar and post-war sociological approaches to film. They were primarily concerned with the measurable effects of film on particular social categories of audience, with particular focus being made on the perceived negative effects of film in changing behaviour amongst young people.

By the forties and fifties, and across both sides of the Atlantic, mass communications research became the dominant paradigm under which popular culture came to be studied and the early sociological approaches to cinema also took shelter under this umbrella of work. Mass communications research was increasingly concerned to measure the effects of the media as symptoms of modern society as a 'mass society' (Brooker and Jermy 2002; Swingewood 1977). Common assumptions put forward by mass society theorists, and taken up by its researchers, included notions that mass culture was crude and that its consumers were little more than indiscriminating dupes who were being injected with, and taking on board, media messages wholesale. The mass society thesis set up a framework for sociological analysis that failed to examine both the variations within the audience and the polysemy of many popular cultural texts, thereby neglecting the complexity of the cinematic apparatus.

By the sixties the mass culture and society thesis came under sustained attack with the onset of structuralism and semiology that sought to re-evaluate Hollywood films by film critics, first in France and then in Britain. For a short while there was a genuine possibility for film studies and sociology to begin to share its analyses of cinema across aesthetic, theoretical and methodological lines (cf. Wollen 1969). This alliance, however, was not taken up seriously as sociology and film studies began to diverge by the late sixties due to intellectual differences around the perceived lack of a reflective empiricism in sociology by film theorists (Tudor 1998: 192).

The seventies witnessed the mushrooming of screen theory in a direction that gave more credence to close text-based analyses of film. This kind of work was particularly prolific in the journal *Screen* of the period (see, for example, the selected chapters in Kuhn and Stacey 1999 on this history). Here, analysis tended to focus on the language of film and less attention was paid towards developing an understanding of the context in which film texts were made and comprehended. Thus, less scope was made available to adequately think about individual spectators or social structures in early semiotic accounts of cinema. When the social dimension was brought into theoretical analyses of film it was made not through the application of sociological theories or methods but instead through the concept of ideology, borrowing most notably from Lacanian-derived Althusserian approaches where the subject of cinema is considered

as constituted by and through the film text (i.e., film as an example of a system of discourse) and is thereby caught within ideology. By focusing on the textual constitution of subjects, seventies film theory encouraged a method based in structural psychoanalysis rather than allowing emphasis to be placed on social contextual issues which would have enabled a more sociological approach. Thus, the terms of film theoretical discourse that became commonplace during the seventies and eighties relegated sociological considerations to the periphery.

Over the past 30 years and more there have been sporadic attempts to consider film through sociological examination, but these have been far and few between. The academic studies of Jarvie (1970) and Tudor (1974) were social accounts of Hollywood and European cinemas in terms of key films and as attempts at understanding the social role and function of cinema and its film-makers. Both were more interested in the social contextual concerns of cinematic exploration and accorded less attention to questions of aesthetics or textual analysis. The sociology of film offered neither by Jarvie nor Tudor has not been followed by others. However, repeated calls for a return to, and renewal of, the sociology of film have been made in disparate journal articles (for example, Alfonsi 1999; Dowd 1999; Pendergast 1986).

Since the eighties and nineties the rise of media and cultural studies as academic disciplines in their own right have provided an intellectual space for more complex and sophisticated accounts of texts, audiences, and their social context and relations to be articulated more fully, wherein sociologically informed researchers have been able to contribute further to understandings of film.¹

Norman Denzin's Sociology of Cinema

In this vein, one academic who has perhaps almost exclusively been putting forward a sociology of cinema is Norman Denzin, Professor of Sociology and Communications, in *Images of Postmodern Society* (1991) and *The Cinematic Society* (1995). In the former, Denzin studies the postmodern self and its representations in two sites: in postmodern social theory, and in a select number of contemporary mainstream Hollywood movies (Denzin 1991). Here, Denzin concerns himself with examining how contemporary US and other

Western societies come to view themselves through the signs and images available to them through cinema, which itself is a refraction and an emblem of wider culture and society across race, gender and sexual lines. In particular, Denzin draws on the sociological imagination of C. Wright Mills (1959) and puts it to use in his analysis of Hollywood cinema (Denzin 1991: Chapter 4). Simply put, the sociological imagination is one that intervenes in the modern cultural and social spheres of life by questioning the common sense assumptions about these areas of activity and probing them further. Mills' sociological imagination was originally concerned with the distinction between the personal troubles that occur in the immediate worlds of experience of interacting individuals and the public issues of social structure. Mills theorised that personal troubles are often to do with the self, its emotionality, its life-projects, and its relations with others; troubles are personal matters which spill over into families and groups and they occur in the immediate social context of the person. Public issues, on the other hand, transcend personal troubles. They have to do 'with the organization of many such milieux into the institutions of an historical society' (Mills 1959: 8). They involve the social, economic, moral and cultural fabrics of a society and the ways in which these fabrics 'overlap and interpenetrate to form the larger structure of social and historical life' (ibid.). Public issues, then, are matters that often involve a perceived crisis in current institutional arrangements that threaten cherished values. Denzin considers the personal and collective social struggles organised around the personal experiences and social structures of race, gender and sexuality as brought to life in Hollywood cinema.

Developing these concerns through to *The Cinematic Society*, Denzin (1995) argues how the US has become a cinematic culture and society. Taking as his starting point Thomas Edison's invention of the kinetograph through to the start of mass cinema going in the nineteenth hundreds, to the advent of sound in the twenties, to the setting up of the Hollywood studio system by the thirties, Denzin is concerned with how, over three decades, American society became a cinematic culture—a culture which came to know itself, collectively and individually, through the images and stories that Hollywood produced. Denzin alerts us to the type of viewer that has been constructed in a cinematic society, a kind of social voyeur who is often privileged across race, gender and sexual lines. At the heart of Denzin's argument, then, in *The Cinematic Society* is a concern to

consider who is looking at whom, and why. And, how and why is it through cinema that particular kinds of representations about gender, race and sexuality continue to hold sway. Together, Denzin's two publications can be considered as explicit attempts at taking up an alliance and fostering a cross-disciplinary dialogue between sociological studies of cinema (i.e., why the study of cinema matters in a society), film studies (where close attention is paid to the analysis of film texts) and cultural studies (where questions of representation and power are elaborated by way of reference to ethnographic observations of the cultural and social dimensions of cinema).

Before moving on to consider the merits of Denzin's sociology of film as in conversation with existing studies of Bollywood cinema let us consider the development of the study of Indian cinema from scholars writing within and outside India, as this rich body of work has also drawn on developments in Western cultural and social theory to illuminate the mosaic that is popular Hindi cinema.

Indian Scholars and Popular Hindi Cinema

Early scholarly studies in India, whilst offering an overview of the history and development of its popular Hindi cinema, considered it to be an escapist fantasy for a mass audience. They further followed theoretical models broadly based around the Frankfurt school view of mass culture and society as standardised and ideologically deceptive (for example, Das Gupta 1981, 1991; Rangoonwalla 1975; Valicha 1988). Western film criticism also paid scant scholarly attention to Indian cinema and, when it did, it was accorded a marginal and patronising status along the aforementioned lines (for example, Cook 1996: 861). By the mid-nineties a number of studies began to emerge, both in and beyond India, that began to offer more complex accounts of the relationship of the cinema, filmic texts and its audiences; partly informed by the development of film, media and cultural studies as fields of academic study, and partly as a rebuff to simple analyses of popular Indian cinema (for example, Chakravarty 1996; Dissanayake 1994; Dissanayake and Sahai 1992; Dwyer 2000; Ganti 2004; Gopalan 2002; Kaur and Sinha 2005; Kazmi 1999; Mishra 2002; Nandy 1998; Prasad 1998; Rajadhyaksha 1998; Thomas 1985; Vasudevan 2000; Virdi 2003).²

TOWARDS A SOCIOLOGY OF BOLLYWOOD CINEMA

Perhaps this would be an appropriate moment to pause and make clear the hitherto implicit question that has been running throughout the previous pages—why is a sociology of cinema being advocated? Moreover, why is a sociology of Bollywood cinema being considered and what might it entail? In response to these two questions, I would like to introduce summaries of two conversations that I had in the summer of 2004: one with a radio programme producer working for a national media broadcaster, and another with a university sociology lecturer, both in the city of Manchester, UK.

In the first exchange the producer had got in touch with me as he was in the process of getting ready to go to Mumbai, India, to record a programme in which he wanted to explore Hindu nationalism and its reception amongst audiences in Bollywood movies. In our initial conversation we chatted at length over the phone, for about some 20 minutes, in which duration we discussed topics ranging from the historical emergence of popular Hindi cinema to its global outreach in the present day. The producer seemed quite keen to put forward the argument that Hindi cinema was escapism for the masses and had troubling levels of right wing and conservative politics enshrined in its movies. During the phone conversation I suggested that he might offer a more complex argument than this, as should he persist in his line of reasoning he would be producing a programme that was outdated in its thinking and simplistic in its analysis. I suggested that in addition to these aspects of Bollywood films there was a need to think through what we might mean by cinema as escapism, and whether or not the conservative politics of the films were being taken on board wholesale by Indian audiences. I invited him to a seminar at the University of Manchester in which my colleague and co-researcher, Dr Amit Rai of Florida State University, and I were giving a work in progress paper on the findings of our Bollywood cinema going research in New York City (see Chapter 4). The seminar was scheduled a few days before the producer was to make his trip to India. He and I felt that perhaps his attending the seminar might be useful for us both as a dialogue around thinking about Bollywood cinema and its audience in more complex ways. The radio producer attended and listened to our talk. During the question and answer session his familiar agenda appeared again, and

In contradistinction to the development of Western film theory, Indian film theory followed lines of flight that were more readily inclusive of the social and political dimensions of cinema within India.³

Ashish Rajadhyaksha (1998) highlights three phases in the development of popular Indian film theory. The first phase is concerned with the films of the seventies, commonly regarded as a well-researched socio-political area, wherein India as a nation state underwent a series of domestic and international crises culminating in the declaration of national emergency by the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, in 1975. The second phase is accredited to the formal entry of post-colonial theory in the mid to late eighties and the reinvestigation of the history of Indian nationalism that was opened up via a biography of the nation state. Scholars and historians conducting work that came to be known as subaltern studies (for example, Chatterjee 1986), and also the interdisciplinary arts- and humanities-based work submitted to the *Journal of Arts and Ideas* in India, are two examples of this phase. The third phase is the opening up and introduction of film studies in India through various postgraduate departments that led to the growing acceptance of film studies in previously orthodox literature, history and social science departments.

Consequently, existing scholarship on popular Indian cinema has proceeded along the following axes: audience identificatory processes (for example, Dwyer 2000; Mishra 2002; Nandy 1998; Vasudevan 2000); cinema as an ideological apparatus (Kazmi 1999; Prasad 1998); and, film as a national archive (Chakravarty 1996; Virdi 2003). Furthermore, and in ways that are not too dissimilar from Denzin's sociologically imaginative engagement with mainstream US cinema and society, the critical work of recent scholars of Bollywood cinema have also interpreted its role in the formation of a national consciousness that sets into play dominant and subordinate Indian and South Asian subcontinental identities in an uneasy and complex relationship that begs further questioning and analysis. Such identities include, for example, the representations of religion, caste and gender; the Muslim minority in India; India's relationship with its political neighbours; corruption in public life and so forth. Of note here too, is that as in the development of film studies in the West, the history of contemporary Hindi film theory also lacks an explicit engagement with issues of sociological method. But why should this matter?

he went as far as to say that we were according too much importance to the popular Hindi cinema of India as, for him, it amounted to no more than 'fluffy masala' and 'dreamlike' and 'escapist' movies.

In the conversation with the sociology lecturer during an informal drinks gathering one summer evening, my research interests into the cultural and social importance of popular film, particularly Bollywood, were being seriously challenged. He considered them to be secondary to 'proper' and 'serious' sociological research. For him, sociological research was quantitatively defined—'How many people go to the cinema everyday in India? How can you determine that cinema impacts on everyday Indians?' He even suggested that my interest in Bollywood was fine for now as long as I remembered to move on to do 'serious' social research that engaged with actual subjects and community-based organising and social movements.

The summaries of both these conversations reveal instances of the longstanding populist criticisms often directed at popular cinema and Bollywood films in particular. They also suggest a kind of unease with the emerging study of Bollywood cinema that is attempting to set about new directions in film criticism and social and cultural analysis that do away with exactly these kinds of uninformed allegations. The comments made by the radio producer illustrate a viewpoint, long held within Western and conservative interpretations about Bollywood cinema and its audiences, as patronising and unable to develop a serious engagement with the popular Hindi cinematic form. The producer appeared to have a pre-existing agenda about Bollywood cinema that he wanted to prove, rather than set out on a programme of exploration and discovery. The fact that I was suggesting another viewpoint as a different possibility to think about Bollywood cinema unsettled him and hence his retort of 'fluffy masala' movies. Interestingly, during my exchange with the producer he admitted that he hadn't seen very many Bollywood films at all.

The comments made by my colleague in sociology however perhaps surprised me more, not least because of his limiting version of what constituted cultural and social research, but more so because of his lack of a sociological imagination to consider more widely the topics of socio-cultural research. For him, a focus on social movements and actual social subjects are the fabric of 'good' and 'serious' sociology. Yet, funny enough, he is unable to think about Bollywood cinema along such lines. In a response to these two conversations, themselves illustrations of ongoing and over-stressed alleged

criticisms of popular Hindi cinema, I wish to highlight in this book the need to counter and move away from such commentaries and, perhaps more importantly, to situate the study of cinema, and in this case Bollywood cinema, in relation to cultural and sociological inquiry that demonstrates explicitly the role and nature of the cinematic form as part and parcel of cultural and social processes and elaborated on, although not exclusively, through an engagement with actual social subjects too.

What this book aims to do, then, is to reinvigorate and continue the dialogue that was initiated about 30 years ago and taken up sporadically across the disciplines of sociology, film and media studies, and cultural studies. Which brings us back to consider how the sociological imagination applied to cinema by Denzin (1991, 1995) can be usefully considered alongside and brought into dialogue with contemporary cultural and social studies of popular Hindi cinema. Using the example of Bollywood cinema as a social, cultural and media phenomenon, *Sociology Goes to the Movies* intends to offer aesthetic, cultural and social analyses of the cinematic form through the interdisciplinary subject enquiries of related fields in the arts, humanities and social sciences; namely across the aforementioned academic subject areas. The use of interdisciplinary and critical theoretical and methodological frameworks—germane to the subjects of sociology, film and media studies, and cultural studies—are selectively used in an attempt to establish and elaborate on some of the relationships between cinema and culture and society through the case study of Bollywood. Thus, a contemporary sociology of cinema that is put forward in this study is one that draws on interdisciplinary schools of thought and that addresses cinema in terms of its workings as a global industry, films as popular cultural texts; and the relationships that film fosters with its audiences. In essence, this book aims to view Bollywood cinema through an interdisciplinary sociological and cultural lens that argues for and suggests the need to think sociologically about cinema. Put another way, it advocates the need to think imaginatively about cinema as a global industry, films as popular cultural texts, and the relationships that are possible between cinema and its audiences. By taking sociology to the cinema, and vice versa, it is argued that we need to look at the range of intellectual and interdisciplinary possibilities that are available to us in order to renew a dialogue between sociology and studies of the cinema, thereby reviving the possibilities of how

we might be able to think imaginatively about sociology and cinema. In other words, how might we be able to think about what happens to the analysis of Bollywood cinema through sociological enquiry? And, what happens to sociology when it considers a complex social, cultural and media phenomenon such as Bollywood cinema? These are two questions that we will need to revisit in the concluding chapter.

Let us now consider the remit of this book by outlining the aspects of Bollywood cinema that are taken up for comment and analysis through cultural and sociological enquiry in the pages that follow. First, what exactly might we mean when using the term 'Bollywood'?

WHAT IS 'BOLLYWOOD'?

Bollywood, the moniker for popular Hindi cinema from Mumbai, India, has become an important catchword in the vocabulary of global South-Asian popular culture. Bollywood not only signifies the large number of films made and viewed in the city of Mumbai (estimated at around 200 films annually), but also the distribution, subtitling, dubbing and watching of these motion pictures worldwide. Bollywood films are viewed in all of South Asia, Africa (including the Maghreb countries of North Africa), South America, Eastern Europe and Russia (Kasbekar 1996: 366). These films are also imported to all the major metropolitan cities with sizable diasporic South Asian populations through cinema halls, and into homes via non-terrestrial cable and satellite channels. Bollywood is only one of several regional film centres within Indian cinema. Nonetheless, given its broad-based language appeal—i.e., Hindi—and the fact that it has been subtitled and dubbed into several Asiatic and European languages (more than any of India's other cinemas) makes it by far the most popular.

Outside South Asia and its diasporas, the popularity of Bollywood films in developing countries such as Nigeria, Egypt and Zanzibar has been attributed to the ways in which some of its themes and representations of Indian rural traditions and urban modernity, as coming to terms with one another, are seen as culturally familiar (Larkin 1997; Power and Mazumdar 2000). Furthermore, popular Indian cinema's characteristics of melodramatic oral performance (for example, the Hindu mythologicals and religious tales of the

Mahabharata as recounted in the genre of post-1947 independent Bollywood social dramas) have been offered as an explanation of why Hindi films would engage global audiences of similar orally-transmitted narratives (Nayar 2004).⁴ In this way, Bollywood is more than just popular Hindi cinema for Indians alone. Millions of people, besides Indians and other South Asians, partake in, derive pleasure and construct social meanings from this cinema. Throughout this book, then, whilst it is acknowledged that India is the primary intended audience for Bollywood films, we need to take into further account how Bollywood cinema equally and simultaneously appeals to wider audience constituencies, not least the audiences in South Asia and its diasporas. *Sociology Goes to the Movies* specifically addresses Bollywood's popularity not only in India but also across its imagined South Asian diasporic audiences.

The viewing of Bollywood films also entails the consumption of other related cultural products that are mass produced in demand to the popularity of the Bollywood media phenomenon. These include the ensuing film music albums sold in hundreds of thousands across the world; readership of several international film magazines such as *Cineblitz*, *Movie* and *Starburst* with film reviews, gossip and star profiles; film posters and postcards; and, the countless number of electronic pages on the worldwide web with Bollywood pictures and texts which incorporate fanzines for the adoration of favourite films, actors and actresses. Bollywood film stars, singers and musicians appear together each year in entertainment shows in the metropolitan cities of the South Asian diaspora such as at the NEC Arena in Birmingham, UK. These shows comprise actors singing, dancing and re-enacting favourite film scenes and dialogues to packed and excited audiences. During 28–29 August 2004, for example, a few of the current favourite Bollywood stars Shahrukh Khan, Preity Zinta, Rani Mukherjee, Saif Ali Khan, Arjun Rampal, and Priyanka Chopra appeared in Birmingham and at the Wembley Arena in London for a weekend of shows, entitled *Temptation 2004*.⁵ Ticket prices ranged from £15 to £55, and with the V.I.P. tickets (including an after show meet with the stars) costing much more. Such shows have elaborately followed in the footsteps of earlier Bollywood stars who visited England for the first Indian Film Festival in 1957. The 'legends' of fifties Bollywood—Guru Dutt, Mehboob Khan, Nargis, Nutan, Shamma Kapoor, Waheeda Rehman and others—all came, arousing excitement that was akin to going to see The Beatles or Elvis in concert (Bhuchar 1996: 90).

Bollywood film songs are also an important part of the scheduling of South Asian radio broadcasting played daily and for several hours on radio stations throughout the diaspora. Bollywood video outlets, popularly known as 'Asian video shops', are abundant. In Britain alone, in the late nineties, it was estimated that there were over 4,000 video outlets catering to the regular demand for Bollywood films (Network East 1997). Furthermore, Bollywood movie houses like the Piccadilly Cinema on Stratford Road in Birmingham (UK) run by local South Asian entrepreneurs have mushroomed since the mid nineties regularly featuring the latest releases on the big screen. The mainstream cinema chains of Odeon, UCI and Virgin in the UK also show Bollywood films, thereby cashing in on the popularity of the movies. For example, the CineWorld multi-screen complex, Wolverhampton (UK), has been daily showing one of the latest Bollywood movies since 1995. However, the history of Bollywood film viewing in Britain dates as far back as 1926, when King George V and Queen Mary held a command performance of *Prem Sanyas* (Light of Asia) at Windsor Castle. This film was made in 1925 and co-directed by the Indo-German team of Himansu Rai and Franz Osten (Bhuchar 1996: 89).

Despite their popularity, Bollywood films are also a source of derision for some South Asians and non-South Asians alike. Common labels hurled at Bollywood films include 'unrealistic, emotional and over the top', and, 'formulaic entertainment for the masses'. Bollywood movies are often constructed as an amorphous mass in the uncritical popular imagination that is unable to see and differentiate between the variety of films on offer. Edward Johnson, although more concerned with the art of Indian film posters, captures well the contemptuous attitudes towards Bollywood and other popular commercial Indian films as he writes:

Indian cinema has a reputation in the West founded more on myth than reality. 'Art' directors such as Satyajit Ray are given fulsome praise whilst the majority 'commercial' cinema receives nothing but ridicule and the entire industry is pilloried as specious dress by people who then often confess to never having seen any of the films in question (Johnson 1987: 2).

Contrary to such common assertion, Bollywood comprises several genres of films, each with a dynamic of its own. A number of Indian film commentators have outlined the different genres of Bollywood

films (see, for example, Garga 1996; Johnson 1987; Gokulising and Dissanayake 1998; Ramachandran 1985; Rangoonwala 1982; Vasudev and Lenglet 1983). Edward Johnson (1987), in particular, offers a useful introductory taxonomy of Bollywood films. According to Johnson five generic strands of films can be loosely identified. Devotional Films, Historical Films, Social Films or Topicals, Muslim Social Films, and Masala Films. Moti Gokulising and Wimal Dissanayake (1998) describe a sixth genre, that of Romantic Films (see Appendix). At a basic level of description a familiar feature of Bollywood movies is their recurrent themes of boy-meets-girl love story, and binary oppositions in the representation of East and West, tradition and modernity, rich-and-poor, the-village and the city, and so forth. However, as is discussed in the reading of the film *Pardes* (Foreign Land, dir. Subhash Ghai, 1997) in Chapter 3, such themes are actively challenged by Bollywood viewers and with the emergence of the diaspora as an important export market for the films since the nineties, film-makers are rethinking their approaches to established conventions and genres in the light of contemporary audience expectations.

It is important to note that Bollywood movies are not indiscriminately viewed. Of the 200 annual films made, only 20 per cent, at the very best, go on to be successful at the box office in India (i.e., manage to recuperate back their initial investment plus some profits), and only one or two become real blockbusters in terms of popularity with audiences and incredible profits. This 20:80 ratio of successes over failures has continued for at least two decades now (Chopra 1997a; Katiyar 1994). Evidently, the bulk of Bollywood films are not easily accepted by Indian audiences. Neither top stars, nor film music, nor storyline can guarantee box office success. The ability of being able to appropriately assess the 'mood' and expectations of film audiences is a skill only few film-makers have.

Furthermore, the movies that flop or make it big in India may perform quite differently in box offices across planet Bollywood. For example, the 1998 film *Dil Se...* (From The Heart), a love story between an All India Radio reporter (Shahrukh Khan) and an Assamese freedom fighter (Manisha Koirala) directed by south Indian director Mani Ratnam, became the first-ever officially recorded Bollywood box-office success in the UK, attracting national and international media attention as a result (Chaudhary 1998; Goldenberg and Dodd 1998; Joshi 1998). It earned a remarkable £66,000 from just eight screens after two weeks of release. Ratnam's film grossed only £10,000

less than *The Avengers* (dir. Jeremiah S. Chechik, 1998, starring Sean Connery and Uma Thurman), from 152 fewer screens (*Empire* magazine, November 1998: 18). Since the success of *Dil Se...* the film magazine *Screen International* now features the ranking of box-office positions of the latest Bollywood movies alongside mainstream Hollywood ones that make it into the top 10 box-office listings in the UK. Interestingly, *Dil Se...* failed at the box office in India. The film's overt political agenda of the trials of the Assamese people on the India-China border, interwoven with a love story on the eve of India's 50 years of Independence celebrations, was said to have proved too much for Indian audiences. In contrast, Bollywood-goes in Britain were reported to have acclaimed the film's handling of an original politicised plot through a populist convention, and the fact that current heart-throb Shahrukh Khan was playing the lead, coupled with A.R. Rehman's pulsating music score meant that *Dil Se...* became a 'must see movie' in the UK well ahead of its release (see Joshi 1998). In fact, for the first two months after its release in September *Dil Se...* was shown on five screens, five times per day, at staggered intervals at the 14-screen Cineworld complex in Feltham, west London. Each show was a complete sellout as an average of 3,000 spectators per day watched the film in this one cinema alone (Chaudhary 1998).

Bollywood vs. Hollywood

The exact origins of the formation of the term 'Bollywood' are unknown but as Satvinder Rana, BBC Radio Derby (UK) presenter of the *Aaj Kal* (Today Tomorrow) show and columnist for Birmingham's *Spice* magazine in the summer of 1996, speculates:

I'm not sure why it [Bollywood] has become such an acceptably standard word in our language, especially since it was probably conjured up by some cocky white journalist to describe the Indian film industry in a somewhat idiosyncratic and derogatory manner.

Uncertainties aside, however, Bollywood is more popularly described in relation to, and against, the hegemony of Hollywood. As an album sleeve for a compilation tape of contemporary Bollywood film songs announced on the front cover of *Cineblitz* magazine (Summer 1997),

'Bollywood vs. Hollywood'. The naming and popular usage of the Mumbai film industry as 'Bollywood' not only reveals on a literal level an obvious reworking of the appellation of the cinema of Hollywood, but, on a more significant level, that Bollywood is able to serve alternative cultural and social representations away from dominant white ethnocentric audio-visual possibilities.

In qualitative interviews that I conducted with audiences of Bollywood films and popular culture in Birmingham, UK, respondents pointed out that they had social investments in Bollywood media as for them it articulated an affirmation of their eclectic British-South Asian cultural identity (Dudrah 2002a). A common talking point that came up in the interviews was that there was an issue of representation at stake in seeing Indian film stars relating to a South Asian imaginary that conveyed on-screen pleasures for South Asian audiences in complex and varied ways across different film genres and played out by different actors and actresses. Representations that depict a myriad sense of South Asianness are actively sought, particularly given the limited range of images depicting South Asians in the mainstream mass media in the West (see also Shakur and D'Souza 2003).

Furthermore, outside the film capital of Mumbai, Bollywood is also one signifier, among many others, of the wider Indian film industry as the largest in the world.⁶ The total production of films from India is calculated at about 900 annual films (Kasbekar 1996), and in monetary terms it is second only to Hollywood. On a Birmingham (UK) Asian radio show it was announced that throughout India's 800 cinemas, 10 million official tickets sales are exchanged daily, and 5 billion annual visits are made to the theatres (four times as many than in the USA) generating an estimated income, in the region, of £500 million. Furthermore, India's combined cinema industries employ over 500,000 full-time workers (BBC Asian Network 1997).⁷ These figures make for an interesting comparison to those of film-going in the West where the sporadic make up of cinema audiences, growth in leisure services, advent of non-terrestrial television, video and DVD rental sales, and proliferation of home-based entertainment technology has seen a decline in cinema attendances. In Britain, for example, annual cinema attendance figures in 1999 were recorded at a maximum high of 139.5 million, having risen from a low of 54 million attendances in 1984. Even then, the high of 139.5 million visits to UK cinemas in 1999 is slightly higher than cinema attendance

figures in 1979, illustrating not so much an increase in the activity of cinema going but a moderate return to watching predominantly Hollywood movies on the big screen (see Murphy 2000).⁸ In comparison, in spite of the modernisation and increase in leisure pursuits in urban South Asian societies cinema going remains, at present, much more of a public event to people in India than in the West (see Breckenridge 1995).

The list of aforementioned examples help to briefly illustrate the scope, size and appeal of the Bollywood cultural phenomenon, and to indicate potential areas for further research which would require careful examination. This would involve taking into account, amongst other issues, questions of film as an economic and cultural industry,⁹ high culture versus mass culture debates, culturally specific notions of aesthetics and audience preferences, and the role of popular forms in responding to and engaging with global cultural identities. What this book aims to do through select areas of analysis is to elaborate on an interdisciplinary dialogue between sociology, film, media and cultural studies as compatible and appropriate fields of subject enquiry to illuminate some of the social and cultural possibilities that are rendered through the global workings of Bollywood cinema as a film and media industry that seeks to popularise its films for maximum economic profit and in turn is entered into an unpredictable relationship amongst its audiences. The methodological imperative for taking up select areas of Bollywood cinema for socio-cultural consideration and aesthetic analysis across interdisciplinary boundaries operates through the following organising frameworks that enable this book to set out its project of a sociological dialogue with studies of the cinema. The organising frameworks are: the relationship between Bollywood and its South Asian diasporas; the performance of social identity in Bollywood cinema; Bollywood cinema as a cinematic assemblage; and, the possible futures of and beyond Bollywood cinema.

NOTES TOWARDS A METHODOLOGY: DOING SOCIOLOGICAL AND FILM RESEARCH TOGETHER

Methodologically, this book operates at the intersection of research analyses and frameworks across sociology, film and media, and

cultural studies as a dialogue towards exploring the workings of a media phenomenon, that of Bollywood cinema, as it mediates and functions socially across some of the aspects of its production through to its life as a cinematic screen text—i.e., the film—through to its articulation as a wider popular cultural form that is used by its audiences in varying ways.

Select films are used throughout the book for analysis and elaboration that have proved popular at and beyond their initial box-office release amongst Indian and diasporic South Asian audiences over the years. Where possible key films have been chosen that are readily available not only on video but also on DVD where the option of viewing the film in a number of subtitled languages, not least in English, is available, thereby allowing readers of this book to cross reference and make their own minds up about the analyses of the individual films that are offered throughout.

The kinds of cross-disciplinary analysis that are taken up in this book include not just formal and aesthetic analyses of the film texts (a traditional concern of film studies) but also to think further about Bollywood popular culture beyond the film texts through to its cultures of songs and music, cinema going, Bollywood dance clubs in the diaspora (predominantly the focus is on Bollywood cinema's translation at a queer club night), and the mainstream Western interaction with Bollywood films and popular culture. A focus on these latter kinds of textual examples is firmly located within cultural and social theoretical discourses of social interaction, cultures of production and social meaning-making, as well as examining the intersection of representation and social power relationships in the film texts themselves, to the social possibilities that are interpreted by audiences. This latter and simultaneous focus, then, derives much from the tools and methods of sociology, film and media, and cultural studies that are brought together to initiate and actualise the dialogue across these different and related subject disciplines. Thus, *Sociology Goes to the Movies* advocates and illustrates ways in drawing together methods such as participant observation, the use of qualitative extended interviews (on the use of these methods as applied in media settings, see Jensen 2002; Schroder et al. 2003), alongside the textual analysis of films and film cultures (Bordwell and Thompson 2001; Cook 1999; Hayward 2000; Monaco 2000).¹⁰ In this way aesthetic analysis is articulated with socio-cultural commentary and critique to offer a flexible and idiosyncratic sociology of Bollywood cinema:

one that uses cinematic and popular cultural sources qualitatively to read culture and society.

Bollywood and the South Asian Diaspora

The Indian and South Asian diaspora more generally is now almost always an important consideration in the production, distribution, anticipated monetary returns and potential audience reach for Bollywood cinema, especially where films are centred on urban settings or characters. The Indian diaspora alone has been conservatively estimated at 11 million people around the world and is considered as one of the fastest growing global diasporic communities (see Mishra 2002: 235–41).¹¹ Of late, the diaspora's prominence becomes apparent not only at the level of diegetic activity in Hindi cinema but also in terms of creative collaboration. Cultural producers from the South Asian diaspora are also making their input in Bollywood films through production possibilities. For example, the film *Hum Tum* (Me and You, dir. Kunal Kohli, 2004) features the musical and vocal talents of British Asian RnB fusion artists Rishi Rich with Veronica and Juggy D on a song of the music album, entitled *U n I*. This song accompanies the international travels of the two main urban Indian characters Karan (Saif Ali Khan) and Rhea (Rani Mukherjee) whilst their love story develops throughout the film across India, the Netherlands, New York and Paris.

U n I follows in the footsteps of earlier British South Asian and Indian collaborations in the production of Bollywood cinema. For instance, Birmingham based remix artist Bally Sagoo worked on the music soundtrack of *Kartooos* (Weapon, dir. Mahesh Bhatt, 1999), and almost two decades earlier the late British Asian singer Nazia Hassan playbaked on the soundtrack of the film *Qurbani* (Sacrifice, dir. Feroz Khan, 1980) to the eighties disco-style 'Aap jaise koi' (Someone Like You) track.

Diasporic South Asians who partake in the cultures of watching Bollywood films and their related popular cultural activities are also amalgamating and recreating Bollywood film cultures into their everyday social lives. By way of an example consider the following mobile text message that was sent to me by my 15-year-old cousin, who received it from one of her girlfriends at school:

Life brngz 'kabhi kushi kabhi ghum',
how long each lasts 'na tum jano na hum',
thru thick n thin 'hum saath saath hai',
no1 noz 'kal ho naa ho',
neva 4gt 'main hoon na' x

The message roughly translates into English as 'Life brings sometimes happiness and sometimes sadness, how long each lasts neither you know nor I, through thick and thin we are always together, no one knows whether there will be a tomorrow, never forget I'm here now, kiss.' This message was doing its rounds in a high school South Asian youth culture in London and was then sent on to me, as well as possibly to others around the country, and even abroad—my cousin tells me that she also sent it to our relatives in India. It draws on the titles of contemporary Bollywood films and songs and is written and recreated in the shorthand and eclectic language of text messaging and diasporic South Asian youth culture—the text is a hybrid of compacted and urban street slang with the vocabulary of Hinglish (spoken Bollywood film Hindi and English words articulated together). What is further interesting about this text message is its possible source—was it originally made up in India and then sent around the world via mobile phone technology, or was it created somewhere in the diaspora, in the UK or in the US for instance, before being circulated up and down the country and then on to other parts of the world?

Both examples of the text message and the film music productions between India and the UK, are indicative of the ways in which Bollywood films have become a part of the diasporic South Asian popular culture more generally and also of the alliances, collaborations and routes that are possible in the movement of this popular culture in globalisation.

However, the cultural fluidity of these two examples also sits alongside a critique of Bollywood cinema's relationship to the Indian diaspora. Whilst the diaspora is becoming a regular feature of contemporary Bollywood cinema, some commentators have criticised the representation and use of the diaspora in popular Hindi cinema as being limited by the nationalist and narrow concerns of its filmmakers (see, for example, Mankekar 1999; Mishra 2002: Chapter 8; Uberoi 1998). It has been argued that much of contemporary Bollywood cinema engages the diaspora diegetically in terms of a

space of desire; a desire that is set in urban India and in the overseas space (especially in the West), of wealth and luxury accumulation that Bollywood cinema endorses. Furthermore, Mishra (2002: 245–47), by drawing on the work of Marie Gillespie on Hindi video film consumption amongst British Indian families in Southall, west London (Gillespie 1995), unfortunately goes on to repeat Gillespie's flawed claim that a generational split can be detected in the ways in which first and second-generation diasporic South Asians read popular Hindi cinema—the former as purveyors of cultural tradition and the latter as struggling to come to terms with cultural negotiation between the two generations.¹² Mishra is therefore unable to suggest or demonstrate more detailed readings or complex uses of Bollywood film cultures by its diasporic audiences, and instead turns to cite the filmic works of Hanif Kureishi's *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) or Srinivas Krishna's *Masala* (1991) as more appropriate examples of reflexive engagements with the South Asian diaspora (see Mishra 2002: 241–44).

Counter to such readings, Chapter 3 in this book draws on qualitative interviews that were conducted in the city of Birmingham, UK, with young British South Asians who viewed Bollywood films as part of their cultural activities. In particular, readings of the film *Pardes*, a romantic blockbuster that deals with relationships between South Asia and the South Asian diaspora through the pursuit of love across India and America, are offered by my respondents and ultimately by myself, through the interpretations that I place upon their readings, as an invitation to consider further the possible ways in which Bollywood cinema represents the diaspora, and moreover how Bollywood cinema is itself read and understood by sections of the diaspora that actively partake as its audiences.

Throughout this book, then, the social processes of globalisation—the expansion of capital and capitalism, the compression of time and space, increased cultural commodification, the interactions between the local and the global, all increasingly occurring in and indicative of the late modern era (Harvey 1989; Jameson 1991; Sassen 1998)—and the social condition of the diaspora as an expression of the social, cultural and political dimensions of globalisation as setting into play a relationship between the homeland of ancestral origin and the new place of migratory settlement through actual and imagined social and cultural movements (Appadurai 1990; Dudrah 2004; Tololyan 1996) are elaborated on in this work. The engagement with sociological

concerns of globalisation and the diaspora are deciphered through the textual representations that Bollywood cinema is able to offer of these processes aesthetically. Furthermore, these textual representations and their wider social meanings are interrogated further and complexified through the use of cultural and social methods such as qualitative interview research (Chapter 3) and participant observation (Chapters 4 and 5). How Bollywood cinema itself is an example of the socio-cultural flows and routes of globalisation is also taken up for comment and analysis in this book (Chapter 6).

The Performance of Identity

Perhaps one of the diverse yet complex ways in which cinema interacts with its audiences is through a relationship of familiarity and repetition. One is not thinking here of the familiarity or the repetition of film genres alone that draws audiences to particular kinds of film events and narratives (cf. Neale 2000: 9–29), but rather I am alluding here to the immediate way in which films translate a sense of our social selfhoods as refracted on the screen. The products of cinema—films—provide an immediate visual encoding of the human form on screen. This form is most often agile—it appears, it moves, it disappears and then re-appears again through the staged movements of the performers, as well as through edit cuts. The human form is further punctuated by, and given additional meaning through, the film's soundtrack, or through the absence of, or selective use of, sound and music. In this way, we get to see a body on screen represented as a stand-in, as a familiar presence that moves through repetition, as a character for the audience's possible identification.

This identification can work across a nexus of aesthetic and social relations that come together to offer an intended message of identification (of race, gender, class, and nation for example) that has been crafted together by the film's production team, where the director directs the actor/actress to perform, who in turn nuances a particular kind of action of that direction, that is captured in particular ways by the camera movement, lighting, post-production digital manipulation and so forth. These technical instances of the production process come together as the filmic text, that are mediated further by the audience's interaction with the intended messages. A

kind of performance that purports to be like the audiences' everyday familiarity, or at the very least within the audiences' realm of comprehension, is set into play that aims to engage the audience through its characters, stories and messages as not too unlike them. How this performance, its very nature and its composition, sets about in using the human body, as it is captured by the technical equipment and translated in possibly numerous ways by different viewers, is the subject of the second part of Chapter 3. In particular, the second section of this chapter considers the performance of urban and diasporic Indian identity as it is enacted through the star body of actor Shahrukh Khan. In fact, as is suggested in Chapter 3, we need to be aware of the cultural and social capital of some actors/actresses over others; those who go on to become 'stars'; those who earn multi-million rupees, pounds and dollars through lucrative commercial deals and sponsorships that are a part of cinema's global distribution and circulation; and those who go on to create an affinity with their fans around the world. How certain stars are able to perform a particular kind of urban and diasporic Indian and South Asian identity, as telling of the ways of the embodiment of cultural globalisation in contemporary Bollywood cinema, is explored in the latter half of the chapter.

Bollywood Cinema as an Assemblage

Implicit in some of the more recent studies of Bollywood cinema is a notion of desire as operating in the films that offer its Indian and diasporic audiences an on-screen diegetic activity that addresses facets of their selfhood at the individual, nation state and/or transnational levels (see, for example, Chakravarty 1996 and Nandy 1998 on individual and nation state melodramatic trials and desires; and, Mishra 2002 on diasporic desire). Mishra's book in particular is subtitled 'Temples of Desire' referring to the complex, dream-like and psychoanalytical ways in which the films are said to encourage a relationship between audiences as viewers through which psychosocial dynamics are played out in the dark theatre auditoriums on the canvas of the cinema screens. However, what is missing from these contributions is a sense of how desire is actualised, and how it comes into being. In these studies, desire is also only considered as formulated at the moment of the audience's viewing of that which

is represented on screen; they rarely take us beyond considerations of representations at the textual level. What is further unclear in these studies is whether desire can work outside of the immediate cinematic screen. Put another way, is desire only available in the viewing process, or is it also a part of, and connected to, other social and cultural processes? And, how might we usefully think of desire beyond textual representations alone?

In order to elaborate on the kinds of desires available in films and to consider how desire works in and through the popular cultures of Hindi cinema, this book considers Bollywood cinema as an assemblage. The term 'assemblage' is used throughout this book as implying a particular understanding about the production of desire. I am indebted, here, to John Rajchman's (1977) reading of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari as offering an understanding of the processes involved in the production of desire through the coming together of cultural and social assemblages. In this view desire is considered as part of the formation of an effect, a sensation that is part of and articulated between actual and metaphorical bodies—the actual and metaphorical body of cinema as a cultural and entertainment industry interacting with the actual body of its audiences. Cinema can be likened to a metaphorical body as its audiovisual signs and codes signify a range of meanings (for example, race, gender, class, sexuality, the nation state, and so forth). It is also an actual body in terms of the functioning of its materiality (for example, capital, film production teams, cinematic technology and equipment, cinema houses, cinema's global networks of distribution and circulation, and so forth). The actual body of the cinematic audience is a physical and biological as well as a social and cultural construction that interacts with the body of cinema in terms of affects and sensations that produce particular kinds of desires (for example, around caste, race, class, gender, sexuality, and so on). These desires are partly in circulation in the immediate social and cultural worlds of the audience and are then mediated further through an interaction with the cinematic assemblage. In Chapter 4, the cinematic assemblages of the Eagle Theatre in the borough of Queens, and the Loews cinema in Time Square in New York City, are elaborated on and contrasted as criss-crossed by socio-cultural intensities, affects, flows, voltages and vibrations as part of an actual and metaphorical machine (i.e., cinema) that can be considered as a non-human body. The socio-cultural flows and affects of this body are effects (hence

affect-effects) of a desiring-production, of energies, and materialities of force that enable the assemblage to enter into new connections, networks and articulations. In this way we are able to think of cinema, its filmic products, and their interaction with audiences in actual spaces as moving beyond the representational. This also allows us to consider further the connections and the workings of representation as part of a wider circuit of social, cultural and economic relations in the era of globalisation. Chapter 4 utilises participant observation alongside textual analysis to elaborate on and refine the theoretical developments in film studies (haptic codes in the cinematic experience, metaphors of the body and skin, and Indian *rasa* theory), urban sociology and cultural geography (the location of places and spaces as informing subjectivity formation), and in cultural studies (identity, representation and diaspora studies) to situate and offer an exploration of diasporic South Asian identity formation *vis-à-vis* Bollywood cinema going at these two sites in New York City.

Beyond Bollywood

An analysis of popular Hindi cinema through an interdisciplinary social and cultural lens would not be complete without considering how this assemblage is connected to, and quotes from, other cultural and social sources and referents. Bollywood draws from a range of references in the composition of its films and music ranging from South Asian religious texts, to historical folk tales, to other Asiatic cinemas; from regional South Asian musical genres and lyrics to Western pop and rock music. Perhaps Bollywood cinema's use of references from mainstream Hollywood cinema has caused the most concern. Bollywood cinema has been considered to be either an imitation of Hollywood films and storylines in popular journalism and in sections of academic criticism, or as more usefully borrowing these sources and reconfiguring them through its own sensibilities. Chapter 6 considers some of these criticisms levelled at Bollywood cinema and questions their purpose. The chapter goes on to consider the movement and growth of Bollywood cinema *vis-à-vis* the stage of international popular culture and entertainment through the use of Bollywood's hybrid aesthetics by diasporic South Asian film-makers and by mainstream Western film-makers too. How and in what ways is Bollywood used as a cultural reference and resource in these

different constituencies of cultural production is taken up for comment and analysis. The increasing interest in Indian audiences and in Bollywood cinema by transnational corporate players from the American cinema industries, and also by non-resident Indian (NRI) venture capitalists is considered in terms of Bollywood cinema's arrival as a player in the global cultural commodity markets.¹³

These frameworks, then, set into play a methodology that is interested in the cultural and social dimensions of Bollywood cinema as a global film industry; one that operates as films and wider popular culture, that in turn are entered into unpredictable relationships with and made sense of by its audiences in varying ways. Thus, the chapters that follow offer the following: Chapter 2 introduces an important aspect of Bollywood films—songs and music. Together these are considered as a way into the cinema's eclectic aesthetic composition, into areas of its production process, and as a way into accessing some of the key thematic issues that recur throughout Bollywood cinema—the depiction of love and romance, and an engagement with tradition and modernity.

Chapter 3 offers an analysis of the film *Parades* as read by diasporic British South Asian audiences by drawing on qualitative interview research. The chapter also offers a reading of the on-screen performances of urban Indian and diasporic identities through a case study of the actor Shahrukh Khan as a contemporary 'star' in Bollywood cinema's circulation amidst cultural globalisation. Taken together, these two sections consider the role and representations of urban India and the diaspora in recent Bollywood cinema.

Whereas in the previous chapters, the notion of the cinematic assemblage is touched upon and alluded to throughout their topics and analyses, Chapter 4 explicitly engages with the cinematic assemblages of two cinema houses in New York—the Eagle in Jackson Heights and the Loews in Times Square. Drawing primarily on participant observation methods and fieldwork notes to elaborate on and refine select cultural and social theory, this chapter sets into play a consideration of the actualisation of desire in the act of Bollywood cinema going across considerations from urban and cultural geography, diaspora and globalisation, and the textual representations of Bollywood films as partial scripts of local and global affects.

Chapter 5 offers a commentary and analysis of the redeployment of Bollywood's boy-meets-girl love stories and song and dance

sequences in the urban diasporic space of the queer club night. The social analysis of Bollywood's queer audiences using the original Bollywood film texts and transforming them into new cultural translations and possibilities is set in context amidst the recent fascination of Bollywood popular culture by the mainstream Western entertainment and cultural industries. The way in which Bollywood songs, music and dance are reconfigured by queer audiences to interrogate the relationship between cultural politics in the homeland and in the diaspora is also highlighted.

Chapter 6 situates Bollywood cinema further within the context of globalisation both textually, in terms of the changes that are occurring in the aesthetics of the films as sources of cultural mimicry, and in operational terms through the increasing co-production possibilities that are taking shape between different players in its local and global industry. It also discusses how the aesthetics of Bollywood cinema is being redeployed by diasporic South Asian film-makers, as examples of global cultural production and film-making practice. The chapter offers a social commentary and critique about how the lives of diasporic South Asians has been depicted by this group of film-makers as well.

SINGING FOR INDIA: SONGS IN THE BOLLYWOOD FILM

In India life begins and ends with music. For instance, a newborn baby is greeted into the world by songs ... there is a song and dance when he weds and dies.

—Kalyanji, music director¹

This chapter examines the development of Bollywood cinema as a cultural form which through its use of song and music spans both film and popular culture. It primarily explores the origins of song and music in Bollywood film and also examines the position of song and music vis-à-vis the movie's narrative and economy. In addition, this chapter explores both the stylistic features and the production processes of Bollywood films and also pays attention to a recurring theme within contemporary Bollywood cinema—of the negotiation of tradition and modernity. This is followed by a textual analysis of key musical moments in the film *Hum Apke Hain Koun..!* (Who am I to you!, dir. Sooraj Barjatya, 1994), one of the most significant blockbusters of Bollywood cinema, and an ostensibly conservative love story which plays out tensions between tradition and modernity. The discussion of the film will move beyond the contribution of the film director to consider the collaborative input of music directors, musicians, playback artists and performers, to show that Bollywood film and music function in a symbiotic relationship markedly different

India and the 'real' India is constantly left suspended and unresolved. It is often this very interplay that drives song and dance in Bollywood cinema and makes it a lynchpin of film culture.

In fact, the film song is not only central to film culture and to music culture, but it has become a significant aspect of diasporic Indian and diasporic South Asian life. Across India, beggars perform film hits in the streets and on the trains, and film songs blare out over loudspeakers to mark national holidays and religious festivals. At Indian wedding parties throughout the world children imitate the dance steps of the stars as a band plays cover versions of film hits. In England, on Birmingham's Soho Road and in West London's Southall Broadway, Bollywood songs play while British Asians shop and eat. And, on British Asian radio stations, film music plays endlessly across the airwaves of the diaspora. The multifarious reality of India and its diasporic culture is a far cry from the idealised middle-class paradigm seen in contemporary Bollywood, yet this shared fantasy provides a link between these diverse communities in ways yet to be fully analysed. Not only do the playback singers and the stars of Bollywood 'sing for India', but the Bollywood audience, in India and throughout the world, joins in the song.

READING POPULAR HINDI FILMS IN THE DIASPORA AND THE PERFORMANCE OF URBAN INDIAN AND DIASPORIC IDENTITY

This chapter considers some aspects of the role and representation of the diaspora in Bollywood cinema. It offers a reading of the film *Pardes* (Foreign Land, dir. Subhash Ghai, 1997) as following in a line of movies that marked the arrival of the diasporic in contemporary Bollywood cinema. It uses qualitative responses from semi-structured interviews that were conducted in an attempt to understand young British Asian viewers' engagement with recent Hindi films that encompass representations about diasporic South Asians.¹ Rather than make readings of *Pardes* through film theory and the context of its production and reception alone, I have also taken into account my respondents' readings of the audio-visual signs that they comprehended while viewing the film. In this way I attempt to open up a dialogic assessment of *Pardes* by amalgamating text-based readings with the audience response.

This chapter then moves on to consider the emergence of a particular kind of Bollywood star who has risen to prominence in tandem with the growth in production of contemporary urban Indian and diaspora-themed films. The case study of the urban/diasporic Indian character—most popularly played by current leading man Shahrukh Khan—is taken up as revealing an insight into the workings of the star system in Bollywood cinema, both in the context of

LOCATING PARDES: FILM BACKGROUND

Pardees follows in a line of big screen spectacles from the nineties that were made keeping in mind both the Indian middle class and the diasporic Indian audiences. Such movies are appealing not only in terms of the big budgets spent on them affording them the most renowned directors, producers, music directors, scriptwriters, playback singers, actors and actresses, and production teams all working together to produce memorable cinema, but also because of the lure of the thematic content of the motion pictures which cross subcontinental and diasporic boundaries.

Film-makers in Mumbai took note of the themes that were clicking with audiences at home and overseas and the potential to develop storylines that could reach across continents. In this way the diaspora, and in particular Britain, became classified as one of Bollywood's key distribution territories. The distribution of Bollywood films is divided along six territories: five in India and the sixth as the 'overseas territory' (see Ganti 2004: 56–62).² A film is classified as a blockbuster if it makes twice the amount invested in each territory. Britain is now classified as a territory and the Bollywood film industry is keener than ever for maximum exposure of a new film overseas, anticipating that it will attract large audiences and revenue, contributing to its status as a blockbuster. With globalisation and the diaspora very much part of Indian society—from holiday travels to visit kith and kin, business trips for the middle and professional classes, exchange of cultural commodities, and the increasing gap between rich and poor—film-makers were apt in capturing these uneven flows and routes on to the big screen.

A quick glance at a few of the movies that have proved popular with Bollywood-goers in Britain in recent years include: *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* or *DDLJ* (The Braveheart Will Take the Bride, dir. Yash Chopra, 1995) in which a rich and spoilt British Asian boy (Shahrukh Khan) falls for a British Asian girl (Kajol) on an inter-rail trek across Europe, and then follows her to India to win over her family in accepting their marriage;³ *Pardees* as discussed in this chapter; *Aa Ab Laut Chalen* (Come Let Us Return, dir. Rishi Kapoor, 1998), set in the US is about the dreams of a young lower middle-class graduate Rohan (Akshaye Khanna) who finds it hard to get a job in India and thus migrates to New York in search of a better life.

There he finds crass materialism amongst the South Asian bourgeoisie, and love and simpleton ways, albeit in clichés, amongst the migrant working classes in New York's Jackson Heights. To complicate matters he discovers that his father (played by seventies Bollywood star Rajesh Khanna), who was thought to be dead, is now a wealthy American businessman who also left India in search of a better life. During his travels Rohan meets and falls in love with Pooja (Aishwarya Rai). The film ends by contemplating what is lost and found on the road to making one's riches and leaving the motherland behind. Some other films which invariably deal with middle-class India and the diaspora include: *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Something is Happening, dir. Karan Johar, 1998), *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* (I Have Given My Heart Away My Love, dir. Sanjay Leela Bhansali, 1999), *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* (Still the Heart is Indian, dir. Aziz Mirza, 2000), *Dil Chahta Hai* (What the Heart Desires, dir. Farhan Akhtar, 2001). In the new millennium the list continues to develop.

Since the nineties Bollywood films with diasporic interests have developed the theme of migrancy and settlement in Hindi cinema from earlier years. Most notably, films of the sixties and seventies dealt with the representation of migrants from India to overseas. Films of this period invariably cast those who went abroad in side roles or as villains, depicting them as harbingers of the bad ways of the West—a corrupting influence, or counter-reference to Indian values. As director Govind Nihalani reflecting on the change of diasporic characters in a magazine interview put it:

The camera would start from those new shoes and tilt up, the trousers, the face with the cigarette hanging from the mouth. The foreign-returned had an affected manner, the girl had bobbed hair, a mini skirt. They had lost their Indianness and become alien (Jain and Chowdhury 1997).

This image was perhaps best captured in, and often quoted in other movies after Manoj Kumar's version of *Purab Aur Paschim* (East and West, 1970), in which Saira Banu plays the wild Western girl with blonde wig who is tamed by the hero at the interval and becomes a Hindustani girl.

The eighties continued this trend of 'the West as bad' amidst angry heroes who were fighting against corruption and coming to terms with

social upheavals within India and its role in the capitalist world order. In contrast, Bollywood of the nineties took note of the non-resident Indians (NRIs) as cosmopolitan in mind, speaking in English or American accents, but with their hearts and souls in the right place, i.e., respecting all things Indian. Film plots since the nineties have spanned several cities across several continents with diasporic characters taking centre stage. Film sets and costumes began to illustrate a look and feel of urban centres (openly displaying the brand names of Coca-Cola, Ralph Lauren, Nike, etc.) in which the characters could be in middle-class India or the urban diaspora of the West thereby opening up affinities with audiences across the globe. However, film critics in India have questioned some of the more city-centric film gloss which has been on the ascendancy in some of the big movies since the nineties as ignoring the plight of rural India and its culture (Chopra 1997a).

Pardes was released worldwide in August 1997 in the run-up to the celebrations marking India's 50 years of Independence on 15 August. It started off to a slow but steady reception in India and then had a successful run for several months on end, particularly in the urban centres ('Film Reviews', *India Today*, 10 November 1997). In Britain it was an instant hit and remained on the big screen for months. For instance, the film was still showing at the Piccadilly cinema in Birmingham, UK, in March 1998. In the US too it was reported as doing well with Bollywood audiences on the East and West Coast.⁴

Pardes' favoured reception amongst three main distribution territories can be accredited to its thematic content: a modern-day love story across the nation state and cultural boundaries of India and the US. The film's main publicity image on hoardings, posters and music album sleeves distributed around the world is interesting. The film poster reads 'American Dreams, Indian Soul' (see Figure 3.1). Its hero and heroine embrace each other in the middle of a still which captures a pre-9/11 New York skyline on one side and the Taj Mahal on the other, set beneath atmospheric clouds of change. The 'American dreams' are those of the heroine Ganga (Mahima Chaudhary) who contemplates new horizons, and the 'Indian soul' is that of the hero Arjun (Shahrukh Khan) who, although an American citizen, is still attached to the motherland (India). As the title and publicity of the film suggest, *Pardes* captures well many of the sensibilities which constitute the diasporic subject: displacement, new

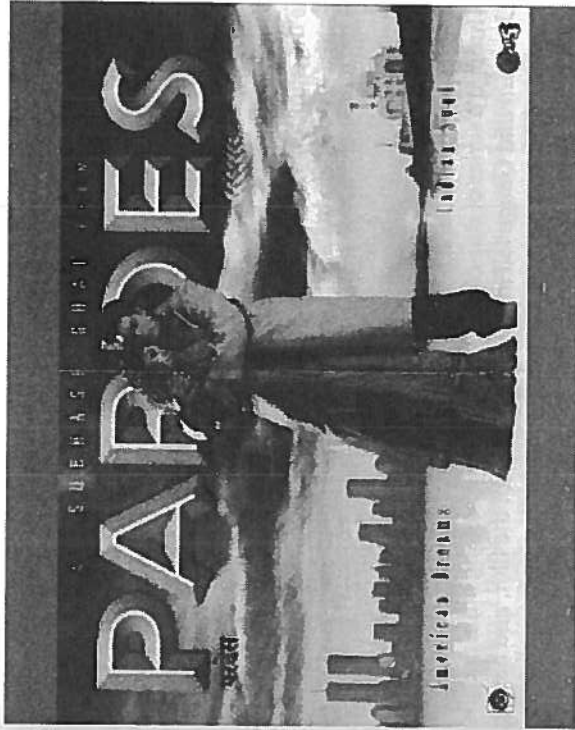


Figure 3.1: Film poster of *Pardes* with the hero Arjun (Shahrukh Khan) and heroine Ganga (Mahima Chaudhary)

beginnings and issues of belonging and alienation. Such sensibilities proved popular amongst the film's urban Indian and diasporic audiences, who themselves were experiencing social and cultural shifts in their attendant societies which were undergoing modernisation.

Another possible reason for the film's popularity was the fact that it was Subhash Ghai's brain child. Ghai wrote the story and screenplay, and independently produced and directed it under his banner of Mukta Arts Films, a private limited production and distribution company based in Mumbai. Ghai has often been dubbed 'one of the few great showmen' of contemporary Bollywood cinema in the South Asian entertainment press working on only one film at a time and producing memorable big-screen spectacles (see Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 1994: 95 for brief career history and filmography of Ghai). *Pardes* was released four years after Ghai's last film *Khainayak* (The Villain, 1993) which had attracted censorship problems in India because of the performance of the erotically charged song 'Choli ke peeche kya hai?' (What is beneath the

blouse?). This song was written by lyricist Anand Bakshi to the music of Laxmikant and Pyarelal and provocatively enacted on screen by the then leading Bollywood actress Madhuri Dixit. Interestingly, the track 'Choli ke peeche kya hai?' was an instant hit across India and in Britain too where it was successfully re-mixed by Bally Sagoo on his 1994 *Bollywood Flashback* album with Columbia records. Thus, being produced and directed under the auspices of Subhash Ghai, *Pardes* was an anticipated film.

Briefly, the story of *Pardes* is as follows: Arjun (Shahrukh Khan) is the adopted son of American NRI billionaire Kishori Lal (Amrith Puri) who is sent to India to help arrange the marriage between Ganga (Mahima Chaudhary), Kishori Lal's lifelong friend Sooraj Dev's (Alok Nath) daughter, and his adoptive father's biological son Rajiv (Apuva Agnihotri). Rajiv, however, is far from the perfect bridegroom for Ganga—he tries to rape her whilst on a pre-marital visit to Las Vegas. Through a series of star-crossed encounters spanning India and the US Arjun and Ganga fall in love. At the end of the film, and having convinced parents on both sides of the family that they are right for each other, Arjun and Ganga are married.

READING *PARDES*

Pardes was recalled by my respondents as one of the most recent films they had seen either at the cinema hall or on video, and one which they had enjoyed and were therefore able to discuss. As a result of the extended interviews the following themes emerged through which my respondents made sense of and related to the film *Pardes*: *Pardes* as a commentary on South Asia and the diaspora; the role of the female character Ganga; and the love story of Ganga and Arjun.

'*Pardes*' as Text on South Asia and the Diaspora

The story of *Pardes* is set across a village in Dehradun (north-east of the capital New Delhi) in India, and sporadically over North America and Canada, though most notably on the west coast of the US in Los Angeles. In essence the film is a meditation on the union

and relationship between Indians in India and Indians living overseas in the urban centres of the West in the contemporary period. Although the Indian diaspora depicted in the film is one set in the US and is very class specific—Kishori Lal's family is the richest of the South Asian-Americans—my respondents identified the film as a general commentary on South Asian cultural values and traditions, and their translations in the diaspora in Britain too.

RD: What did you think of *Pardes*?

Reshmo: I really liked *Pardes* because it was basically trying to tell you about your roots and everything.

Babs: I liked that because that was more the way things really are, you know, I could relate with the film more rather than those with jumping around in a field and singing songs in it which doesn't really happen (laughs).

Madhuri: I think it was a brilliant film, it's the kind of film you can watch again and again and pick up something new each time. There was just something about it.

Nahid: I think it was talking about British Asians more, the main actress she's come from abroad, she's experiencing how we are supposed to live here, it's totally different, she finds it hard to adapt to the life here, and the film addresses the issues why in its own way.

References to the US in the film, either through direct location shots or through dialogue, acknowledge it as 'the big brother' of world socio-political relations, but the US is also used to invoke 'the West' more generally. The opening credits of the film are interesting in this respect. As my respondent Bally said: 'You knew the film was different and that it was going to deal with British and Indian experiences because right from the start when the titles come up it shows shots of India and abroad.'

The credits in *Pardes* role with images of US skyscrapers, lit up against a night sky, and are interspersed with images from India, most notably with rural village landscapes thereby setting up a contrast between East and West. Arjun is briefly shown and so too is Ganga on either side of the Atlantic, both contemplating their ideal partners. Arjun is seen painting a picture of an Indian woman in rural attire and Ganga is on the river shores lost in thought. The contrast between East and West is not as clichéd as one might easily assume but is

rather intriguing, one that is carefully put together by the film's artistic team under Subhash Ghai's direction. The editing of shots between the US (*pardes* or foreign land) and India (*des* or homeland) is not abrupt or obtrusive but smooth. They follow and flow into one another and have been skilfully handled by Renu Saluja, the film's editor.

The opening credits are supported by a moving music score which changes mood according to the images on screen and has been composed by music directors Nadeem and Shrawan and Vantraj Bhatia who arranged the background music. The music signals both *pardes* and *des* in different but connected ways. The US is depicted as overwhelming by the sheer size of its buildings and the people as anonymous amidst the million others who dwell there. South Asians in the US are shown as being there primarily for work and better livelihoods and this is affirmed through the images of the industrial workplace with the music pounding away to replicate the sounds of manual and automated machinery. India, on the other hand, is shown as the land left behind which is poor, simple and scenic, at least in its rural form. Even then, the film makes constant reference to the changing pace of development as it trickles into the rural setting amongst those who can afford it. A large wind powered electricity-generating fan and a satellite communication dish adorn Ganga's parental home in the village. The constant oscillation between the images of *pardes* (US) and *des* (India/homeland)—and the fact that the film's main protagonists are located in the two different worlds and yet are contemplating their ideal partners where ever they may be—link the two protagonists together in complex ways which is commensurate with the diasporic condition. For one can be located, geographically, in one part of the world but yet be culturally affiliated and rooted in a social system/tradition which may be elsewhere, miles away.

As the opening credits come to a close an Air India jumbo jet is seen landing in India with the voice-over of Kishori Lal (Amrishi Puri) rusing over his affectionate bonds with his motherland:

It's been 35 years since I have been living in America. Every time I return to India I get excited. It is like I'm returning into the lap of my mother ... I do not care whether India may or may not have much, but one thing it surely has is love.

The final image of the credits is the Taj Mahal, built by the Moghul emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal, an internationally recognised monument celebrating the ideal of love. In this way the romantic story set across *pardes* and *des* is set into motion and the credits function explicitly to narrate the contents of the movie to the viewer.

The film *Pardes*, both as a commentary on the relationships between South Asians in the subcontinent and South Asians overseas, was welcomed and critically appreciated by my respondents. As the following responses illustrate:

Taran: Like Mahima's (the actress who plays Ganga) parents' house, did you see how big and fantastic that was? They obviously weren't the poor family from the normal village, but also it was nice to see them in that setting because India isn't just all about poverty.

Bally: The family in America, on the whole they came across as completely American apart from one or two of the characters. They really didn't like India at all, or things Indian. I thought that that was a bit extreme to show them like that but then you do get people who turn their back on their own culture and people.

Kully: Like when I watched *Pardes* I asked my mum is this how it is in India, how it's shown in the film. Sometimes she agrees with the film, at other times she doesn't. If she doesn't then I'll just take it in for myself and it's interesting to see how they portray India and Indian things.

The desire to see the complex and multifaceted nature of South Asians in and through representation was very strong in my respondents. The images in *Pardes*, both complex and clichéd, which represented South Asian characters were simultaneously acknowledged and contested by my respondents. The images helped them understand their own perceptions of South Asians as predominantly backward and poverty-stricken as often portrayed in the Western mainstream media. In particular, the role of the female character Ganga emerged as a talking point in the interviews through which the respondents made sense of a number of social messages that the film was relaying.

Ganga: The Woman of *Des* and *Pardes*

The role of the character Ganga in *Pardes* serves two purposes. At an obvious and basic level Ganga is the female romantic lead of the film. More importantly, her character functions as a way of understanding the move towards a union between *des* and *pardes*, particularly as experienced by a young Indian woman. Ganga is very much the central character of the film. In fact, Subhash Ghai in an Indian film magazine interview recalls how he initially thought of naming the film 'Ganga' (see 'Midas Reclaims His Touch', *Movie*, September 1997: 26–29). One respondent Taran, made an explicit link with the story of Ganga's travel from India to the US, to get married and start a new life, as one that resonated with the experiences of her mother. In Taran's words,

Pardes was so true, my mum's a *pardesan* [female foreigner], she came from India, she's come to *pardes* now. To her this [the UK] is her *pardes*. People do go abroad, get married, settled down or whatever, so it does happen.

Ganga, played by Mahima Chaudhary in her debut role, is depicted in a complex way that addresses the dual sensibilities of being both Indian and Western according to the context. In India Ganga is shown to be the essence of the rural Indian woman—innocent and virginal. The name Ganga is itself an explicit reference to the river Ganges in India, thereby immediately conjuring images of the rural idyll and a strong attachment to gendered notions of landscape. Ganga is often pictured running through green fields and playing with younger children by the riverside. She is also the darling of her household playing beloved granddaughter and daughter to her grandmother and parents respectively, and elder sibling to her brothers and sisters. However, whilst Ganga emanates the rural ideal she is also a graduate in English Literature, competent in speaking English and fully capable of using modern communication and technology. Ganga's house in the village is equipped with all the facilities available in urban homes such as televisions, videos, computers, and mobile phones, but in the film these are always present in the background in a matter of fact way and are rarely seen used. Through this imagery Ganga becomes the personification of an ideal of modern India—educated

values which are very much Indian. Ganga is able to switch easily between the two worlds of India and the US in terms of dress and language but her heart remains with India. Reshmo, a respondent, noticed the way Ganga was characterised through her costumes:

RD: What did you think about the role of the character Ganga in the film, played by Mahima?

Reshmo: She was really nice actually. The outfits she was wearing compared to other films was really nice, and she was a new actress in that film, it was her first film, so the way the outfits and that brought her out was really good.

Ganga's costumes adhere to the traditional layout of the *salwar kameez* yet they are modern in their aesthetic and cut. Even when Ganga is adorned in white garments signifying purity of heart and virginity, she also dons a bright scarf around her neck and dazzling jewellery which suggests there is more to her than meets the eye. In the more dramatic and confrontational scenes the colours of her dresses are bright and daring; oranges and reds are used to good effect, and in the song and dance sequences her costumes flow freely according to her movements. Ganga is not restricted in any easy sense either through characterisation by Mahima Chaudhary or by the audio-visual signs that accompany her on screen. My respondents acknowledged the character of Ganga as defying easy dichotomies of tradition and modernity and as challenging stereotypical notions of Indian femininity as passive (see Figure 3.2).

Babs: She [Ganga] knew what she wanted and what she didn't want. She wasn't portrayed as some, you know, poor defenceless girl who didn't know how to cope. She wanted to go to America, she wasn't forced, but when she was being forced to do things she stood up for herself which was good.

Reshmo: I found when she [Ganga] was in India she wasn't all that strong, maybe because she was surrounded by her own people. But when she went to America she was largely on her own and I reckon she came across a lot stronger than compared to when she was in India.

Madhuri: Some British Asians probably thought she [Ganga] was a typical village girl, which was probably true in some sense

her character than that. Like she was right in her own way when she was putting her foot down and saying she wouldn't do certain things that she didn't like.



Figure 3.2: Ganga (Mahima Chaudhary) as the village girl in India and in cosmopolitan dress in the US

Ganga leaves her parental home for the US with the intention of marrying Rajiv and starting a new life. However, upon his return to America, Rajiv continues to see his girlfriends, appears to be an alcoholic, and even forces himself upon Ganga for pre-marital sex. It becomes clear that Rajiv is the extreme opposite of Ganga and the worst example of Western hedonism. As Rajiv sums up for Ganga the idea of individualism in America: 'In America if people want to

be left alone, we leave them alone.' When Rajiv and Ganga occupy the same frame on screen they are depicted as polar opposites in their body language and attitude towards each other. As one of my respondents said:

Kully: The American guy was totally the bad American guy, brought up looking down on people, thinking Indians were rubbish. The Indian girl was brought up the traditional way and that's why she was different to the American guy.

In the attempted rape scene between Rajiv and Ganga, Ganga refuses to become an easy victim. She is signalled as a fighting goddess who knocks out the drunken assailant and manages to hold back her anger in time and avoid stabbing him with a knife.

The Arjun and Ganga Love Story: When *Pardes* is Possible

Meanwhile, Arjun and Ganga are brought closer together in a world in which making money is given priority and people's feelings and relationships are marginalised. Their coming together is gradual and not enforced. They both discover what it is to love one another—largely mutual respect—and the film consists of many scenes in which their love is tested right until the film's end. One scene that was recalled by more than one respondent was Arjun's birthday party.

Reshma: I remember the scene when she left her fiancé's family in America and went to Shahrugh Khan's birthday party, to wish him a happy birthday, which went against the family's wishes.

And as Nahid and Madhuri said:

Nahid: Like going to Shahrugh Khan's birthday party isn't something expected from a girl who has just come from India, you know, and going to a male friend's party.

Madhuri: Though that would depend from where you came from, the village or the city. I think the film was trying to say we don't all come from mud huts you know.

Arjun decides to spend his birthday alone away from his close friends and, in particular, away from Ganga whom he dare not admit to

loves. Ganga and Arjun's best friends plan a birthday party for him, much to his surprise. Halfway during the party Rajiv's aunt phones Ganga and argues with her urging her to come home immediately. Ganga flatly refuses and Arjun and Ganga's declaration of love for each other is announced through the song and dance of 'Meri mehbooba' (My beloved, playbaked by Kumar Sanu and Alka Yagnik).

Like most Bollywood films of the romantic genre the love match between the hero and heroine has to 'work' if it is to be believed and appreciated by audiences. The genre of romantic films sets up an expectation amongst its audiences: they know that a couple will be matched, obstacles placed in their way, but their union will almost always be achieved by the film's end. However, innovative filmmakers are ever more eager to excite their audiences either by casting different actors to play the same storyline in different ways, or by adding new, additional elements and twists to the traditional love story. In *Pardes* the love story of Arjun and Ganga is complicated by two factors: Ganga is already in the process of an arranged marriage to Rajiv before they meet; and, Ganga and Arjun's coming together must bridge the cultural distance between *des* and *pardes*. For my respondents, at least, the Arjun-Ganga love story worked not only because the love of the two characters was depicted as undying and true in a chivalric sense, but also because the story offered a balanced depiction of the two families involved.

RD: What was it about *Pardes* that was so special for you?
 Nahid: When Shahrukh Khan fell in love with the girl [She laughs]. The way Shahrukh Khan helps her out through every difficulty is really brilliant. I really liked the scene in *Pardes* when Mahima turns round to him and says 'Look at yourself. I want someone like you!' and the way he was stunned by that phrase I think he looked really nice there. And the way she says it is really good as well, I think she acted really well.

Bally: The love story was different because they [Arjun and Ganga] weren't necessarily going against the family's wishes. Even when they knew they liked each other they kept apart but they only really came together when they had their parent's approval on either side. They had to win them over, and the American guy just wasn't right for her.

After Rajiv's rape attempt, Ganga escapes and seeks Arjun's help and together they leave America and return to India as persons in exile to Ganga's parents home. Rajiv in the meantime lies to his family about why Ganga has left, accusing Arjun of eloping with her. Kishori Lal telephones Suraj Dev and blames Arjun. Sooraj Dev in turn becomes enraged and refuses to hear Arjun and Ganga's story. He attacks Arjun and banishes him from his house. Arjun leaves with Ganga in pursuit challenging him to stay on and marry her. Rajiv returns to India to take Ganga back and hires hoodlums to attack Arjun. Kishori Lal also arrives in India and, together with Suraj Dev's family, they also go after Arjun, Ganga and Rajiv to confront them. The closing scenes of the film are interesting not least because of their exciting build up to a climax which keeps the spectator engaged and guessing as to how the film will conclude, but also as they bring together the whole family across three generations to resolve what went wrong in the union of *pardes* and *des*, and to decide who Ganga will end up marrying.

Ganga's grandmother or *Daadi* (played by Dina Pathak), Ganga's parents, Kishori Lal, Arjun, Rajiv and Ganga are all present in the deciding moment of the film. Ganga explains the trials she has been put through as a daughter, daughter-in-law to be, and prospective wife. She even uncovers her shoulder to reveal the bruises inflicted on her by Rajiv when he tries to rape her. However, Ganga refuses to unilaterally decide whether to leave Rajiv and be with Arjun. She does not wish to be the lone radical in bringing about change and in reconciling the union between *des* and *pardes*. She interpolates all those present as responsible for the predicament she is in and asks for a concerted effort by them to correct the wrongs and do the right thing. Else she is ready to sacrifice her hopes and desires by marrying Rajiv who will do no more than consume her and cast her aside. As the following translated dialogue from the final scenes of the film illustrates:

Ganga: [To the parents] If you tell me to jump into this fire then I will, because you are our parents. If you tell me to drink this poison then I will.

Daadi: [Cutting in] Why should you drink this poison, why should you?! For years women have been drinking poison. First listen to your parents, then listen to your husband, then your children. You will definitely not drink this poison.

Suraj Dev: Mother you keep out of this.

Daadi: You keep quiet! You have made a mockery out of your daughter, the lot of you. [To Kishori Lal] Kishori Lal you used to go around singing 'my land is India, my duty is India'. You wanted to send a daughter of India to America, you wanted to settle India in America. Well you really have done well haven't you?! I ask you Kishori Lal why try and set up something which does not match, which has no matching rhythm or beat?

Daadi represents the oldest of the three generations and in the earlier scenes of the film is seen as quietly reading the Bhagavad Gita (holy book of the Hindus). By implication one might be tempted to interpret her character as firmly rooted in 'tradition' and as a preserver of culture in a conservative manner. However, it is Daadi who urges Ganga to pursue Arjun once he has been thrown out of the house by Suraj Dev, and it is Daadi who staunchly criticises the manipulation of women whilst fulfilling their roles in a patriarchal society. Surprisingly, Daadi goes one step further than Ganga and uses her position as the family elder to speak above everybody else, including the men. Instead of endorsing cultural tradition she sets about to alter it. According to her Rajiv and Ganga's union is impossible as there is no respect or love in their relationship, they are at odds with one another and have 'no matching rhythm or beat'. They represent the irreconcilable ends of *pardes* and *des* respectively. In contrast, Arjun and Ganga not only love each other and are comfortable in the ways of *pardes* (the US), minus its excesses, they also respect and communicate the ideals of *des* (India) and are therefore poised for a union that is bound to last. Daadi's timely intervention prompts Kishori Lal to slap Rajiv and condemn him back to America and together with Suraj Dev agree that Arjun and Ganga be married and begin their new lives in America together.

The film *Pardes* ends with the union of Arjun and Ganga on Indian soil but with the end credits displaying images of their new life together as a married couple in America. In this way the diaspora in *pardes* is possible without having to compromise how one is constituted as a South Asian in terms of relationships and customs with the *des* and by neither having to give up a new found identity, nor the creation of new cultures in the West. Furthermore *Pardes* advocates for a new place of settlement in which love and respect for one another is given

through dialogue with elders as well as peers. *Pardes*, then, is as much a movie about the notion of home for South Asians living in the diasporas of the West as it is about the renewal and remaking of the West through affiliations with and visits to South Asia in collaboration with one another. My respondents took pleasure not only from the 'happy ending' of the film but also the way in which it related to some of their own familial connections across *des* and *pardes*:

Bally: I enjoyed the ending because it didn't isolate the family members from each other. It was basically saying people have to come together and work their differences through rather than diss the family set up which I really liked. Being able to keep in touch with your family in India is important and I could relate to that.

↳ QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Rita: Shahrukh and Mahima were allowed to get married and go back to America as well as have that connection with the family in India, rather than be cut off. That was nice.

Manjit: The ending was a bit utopian perhaps, you know, another happy ending in Bollywood [smiles]. But it made me think about India, Britain, America or wherever and how I could be connected with these places.

RD: How do you mean? Could you say a bit more?

Manjit: You know, like my relations who are settled there and how we might relate with each other, our differences and outlooks, stuff like that.

Although my respondents and my own analysis of *Pardes* have paid attention to the fluid diasporic representations and possibilities inherent in the film there are other readings possible; for example, of the role of the Daadi character and the way in which the climax of the film ultimately works. For instance, one could argue that the film uses a hegemonic resolve in which 'all is well', the patriarchal family structure is adhered to, and conservative male and female gendered roles are kept intact. In this way one could argue that the film's moral and social ideological agendas are left unchallenged. For example, Patricia Uberoi (1998) in her readings of *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (DDLJ) and *Pardes* considers the male NRI/diasporic figure, at best, as a response to threats to Indian identity in the age of globalisation wherein the nation is re-imagined through the summative attachments that he has to the homeland. *Dilwale*

Mankekar in her reading of *DDLJ* argues that the film privileges the Indian male's agency by casting him in the figure of the economically mobile NRI and guardian of the Indian woman's sexual purity, thus replaying the classic woman/nation conflation (Mankekar 1999: 750–51).⁵ Both authors further consider the depiction of women's protest in diasporic-themed films such as *DDLJ* and *Pardes* that challenge the injustice of tradition. However, they both discount any subversive potential that is rendered by such a challenge and point to the patriarchal negotiation that takes place between the father and prospective male suitor before marriage approval is given to the two lovers. This, for them, casts the woman as an object to be socially transacted. On the other hand, Jyotika Virdi inserts the issue of feminist agency that is overlooked by these two authors and argues that this is important in terms of understanding how the films give agency to the young couple in terms of pickin a romantic partner which contravenes social conventions (Virdi 2003: 198). Contributing to these interpretations of films such as *Pardes*, my own argument—drawing on an understanding of the way in which my respondents made sense of the film—argues that one-off readings of such Bollywood films, as in the case of Uberoi and Mankekar, need to be left open-ended. As indicated by my respondents the film *Pardes* is a polysemic text, laden with multiple meanings about South Asia and its diaspora (for example, how does one belong?), and about the characters who signify particular ideals and non-ideals (for instance, Arjun and Rajiv). As with any other cinematic text, Bollywood films are also invested with meanings, ideological or otherwise, and like any other cinematic audience Bollywood audiences read the films in different ways. My respondents made sense of *Pardes* as a film containing elements of reality and fantasy and their articulations as coming together to offer the audience a flexible understanding and construction of diasporic sensibilities and familial connections in Britain, South Asia and elsewhere.

This chapter, then, has so far considered the depiction of the diaspora in Bollywood films, focusing on the case study of the film *Pardes*. Whilst Bollywood has and increasingly does take on board representations relating to the South Asian diaspora these are themselves refracted in Bollywood cinema through an idiosyncratic understanding of the relationship between the homeland and its diaspora

profess more fluid social possibilities about the diasporic condition. As the extracts from my respondents indicate, the clichés are not taken on board unproblematically. They are reinterpreted and translated in the light of the actual diasporic contexts in which Bollywood audiences find themselves, whether in the UK or elsewhere and read these films as offering select possibilities in the formation of their subjectivities.

THE URBAN/DIASPORIC BOLLYWOOD STAR

This chapter now considers another important factor contributing to the rise of the appeal of Bollywood cinema throughout urban centres in India and in the diaspora: that of the role of a particular kind of film star who is able to communicate with both constituencies simultaneously. The star system in Bollywood cinema is perhaps the most important starting point in terms of film inception right from production through to its perceived success at the box office. In fact, the star system in Bollywood is a more crucial feature of the production process than in Hollywood cinema; more often than not, the star and increasingly the male hero is a more important consideration for producers and directors than the other stages of the production process.

Commenting on the star system in popular Hindi cinema and in an analysis of perhaps the most well known of Bollywood stars of all time, Amitabh Bachchan, Mishra (2002) draws on the work of Dyer (1979) and Ellis (1982) about the construction of the Hollywood star as a heuristic model that is summarised in the following ways:

1. the star's roles should be examined in regard to a culture's precursor text(s);
2. through these manifold roles or narrative placements on screen a star gradually accumulates his or her own symbolic biography;
3. the screen biography and the star's actual life intersect, often generating industry deals and occasional political placements.

5. the star is iconic whose public reception is manifested in shrines, calendar art, comics, T-shirts, and so on.

Mishra goes on to advance this model in order to account for the Indian star, considering further an analysis of the song and dialogic situations that constitute two overarching systems that lead to the construction of the star in popular Hindi cinema (Mishra 2002: 126–27). For Mishra, Bachchan can be considered as ‘the actor as parallel text’ (ibid.: Chapter 5) whose star persona exists in and beyond the diegesis and also in the real life drama of the actor as a parallel and often simultaneous activity. Mishra analyses the formation of Bachchan’s stardom through his on-screen persona as the angry young man of Indian cinema that is a halfway house between the heroic and anti-heroic virtues as found in the Hindu epic of the Mahabharata. He outlines the star’s alleged romantic affair with the actress Rekha that was widely reported in fanzines and the tabloids. He reports on how large parts of India came to a standstill when the actor was rushed into hospital and operated on after being seriously hurt during the shooting of a fight sequence on the sets of a film. Bachchan’s formal entry into Indian politics as a parliamentary candidate during 1985–87, surrounded in controversy of bribery and corruption but never proven, is also discussed. And, the use of song and dialogue by Bachchan is finally put forward as testimony to how these two features act as the key modes of identification through which narrative and identificatory transactions occur between the Indian star and spectator. Bachchan is well known for his appropriation of Indian folk songs, for his articulate command of the Hindi language and for his imposing voice that has delivered some of the most memorable dialogues in Hindi cinema, especially in action and melodramatic sequences. In this way, for Mishra, Bachchan transcends the status of stardom and becomes a text in his own right.

Rather than follow Mishra’s heuristic model and offer a reading of Shahrugh Khan as another parallel text, I would rather examine the construction and performance of Shahrugh Khan in two related ways. First, to consider Shahrugh Khan as a type of an Indian star who since the mid-nineties, has been able to command an interesting relationship with both urban India and the diaspora. Second, to offer a reading of Shahrugh Khan as a literal and metaphorical embodiment of an actor-cum-star who is able to perform most successfully

the anxieties, hopes and fantasies of urban India and its related South Asian diasporas. This approach differs from Mishra’s as it offers a close reading of the star not only by focusing on the on- and off-screen capabilities of the actor alone, but by also drawing attention to the ways in which the star is constructed and achieves a material phenomenon with and through the assistance of film technology and its wider articulations in the cinematic assemblage.

Shahrugh Khan: An Urban/Diasporic Indian Phenomenon

Shahrugh Khan has emerged in the millennium as the premier actor of the moment in popular Hindi cinema. He is sought after by film producers and directors alike for their big budget films, he has a host of adulating fans around the world and is one of the few actors to command the highest acting fees in Bollywood. He has also signed endorsements with Pepsi and Airtel Communications thereby securing lucrative financial deals with them through advertising and brand association. He has also, together with actress Juhi Chawla and Bollywood film director Aziz Mirza, ventured into film production with the launch of their media production company Dreamz Unlimited.

Shahrugh Khan started his media career in television. It was his role in the television series *Fauji* (Soldier, 1988) as the young soldier Abhimanyu that won him instant recognition. Shahrugh Khan’s early film career can be characterised as strongly ‘filmi’—his first films saw him give performances that were edgy, unrefined and highly melodramatic in his part as the obligatory romantic hero in a main or supporting role. In fact these were traits that he fostered well in his anti-heroic and dark roles in *Baazigar* (Player, dirs. Abbas Alibhai Burmawalla and Mastan Alibhai Burmawalla, 1993), *Anjaam* (Result, dir. Rahul Raiwal, 1994), and *Darr* (Fear, dir. Yash Chopra, 1994) through which he really rose to fame as portraying a psychotic lover. In *Darr* he stalks the character Kiran (Juhi Chawla) to the point of terror in an attempt to gain her love, and his dialogue is also constructed as part of his troubled state of mind—he is incapable of pronouncing Kiran’s name without stuttering ‘K-K-K-Kiran’.

A year later, in 1995, amidst his popularity as an anti-hero, Shahrugh returned to playing the romantic lead in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (*DDLJ*) which went on to establish him as contemporary

urban India's and the diaspora's favourite hero. In fact, *DDLJ* made under the prestigious Yash Raj Films banner has become a landmark film in popular Hindi cinema marking the arrival of a trend for characters and diegetic activity that deal with issues of the homeland and the diaspora through the lens of Bollywood (Chopra 2003).

As we have seen in the discussion of the film *Pardes* earlier, Shahrukh Khan has gone on to be increasingly cast as the preferred mediator between the homeland and its diaspora. In several of his films since *DDLJ* he is seen playing the urban Indian and/or diasporic hero: *English Babu, Desi Mem* (dir. Praveen Nischol, 1996), *Yes Boss* (dir. Aziz Mirza, 1997), *Dil to Pagal Hai* (dir. Yash Chopra, 1997), *Pardes* (1997), *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (dir. Karan Johar, 1998), *Dil Se...* (dir. Mani Ratnam, 1998), *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* (dir. Aziz Mirza, 2000), *Mohabbatein* (dir. Aditya Chopra, 2000), *Kabhi Kushi Kabhie Gham* (dir. Karan Johar, 2001), *Devdas* (dir. Sanjay Leela Bhansali, 2002), *Chalte Chalte* (dir. Aziz Mirza, 2003), *Kal Ho Naa Ho* (dir. Nikhil Advani, 2003), *Main Hoon Na* (dir. Farah Khan, 2004) and *Swades* (dir. Ashutosh Gowariker, 2004). Other contemporary actors and swades have also played similar roles but it is Shahrukh Khan who has captivated audiences in urban India and around the world as the favoured metropolitan Indian and NRI protagonist time and time again.

Shahrukh Khan's rise as the urban/diasporic Indian on screen has been in tandem with the circulation of Bollywood in the moment of globalisation, as is discussed throughout this book. Anne Ciecko (2001) in her study of the global appeal and marketing of the star in Bollywood cinema argues that contemporary Bollywood stars, and male stars in particular, are interfacing with the increasing capital possibilities afforded to them through advertising and tie-ins with global multinationals, and through their appearances at global film shows, and their circulation as cultural icons on the Internet. In this way the actors expand their star value and operate discursively as a 'author function' that becomes central to the nexus of production, exhibition, distribution and reception of popular Hindi films. Bollywood movies and their stars are further implicated in the diasporic formation of imagined communities, made possible through the processes of globalisation and post-colonialism (ibid.: 130–31). Ciecko goes on to outline the importance of Shahrukh Khan as a key player amidst such global, cultural and economic articulations through the example of his personal entrepreneurial website, www.SRKworld.com. Here,

Shahrukh Khan often engages, through chat, with his fans about his movies, his star image, female co-stars, rising star hero rivals, family values, and his commercial endorsements such as Pepsi. Here fans can also enquire about where and when his next national and/or international personal appearance will be, either at film promotional tours, star shows or charity functions. In this way, Shahrukh Khan, by being cyber present and vocal, is an example of Bollywood and especially of its commodified male star as being global—being local and global simultaneously (Ciecko 2001: 133).

Shahrukh Khan and the Performance of Urban and Diasporic Representation in Bollywood

But what of the performativity on screen that has made Shahrukh Khan the popular emissary of the global moment in Bollywood cinema that appeals to both urban India and the diaspora, thus making him transnational? To this end, we need to turn towards an analysis and reading of the ways in which Shahrukh Khan, through the cinematic assemblage of Bollywood, makes possible the desires, fantasies and anxieties of urban/diasporic India as an identity through his performances. Here, I note two lines of interdisciplinary thought that are useful as a framework for developing this kind of analysis: (i) identity as performance; and (ii) identity as represented through the medium of film.

In sociology the idea of identities as constructed through a performance of selfhood can be traced back to the work of Erving Goffman (1959) where he posits that there is a sense of theatricality to everyday life. This entails the idea that selfhood is performed through various roles and functions in particular spaces and it is through this kind of social activity that people come to assume personas, roles and take part in social performances. Goffman draws on dramaturgical references to outline the nature of social performativity but only in a metaphorical way, i.e., he uses the dramatic metaphor as a useful way of describing the way things are. In order to elaborate on the nature of social performance beyond metaphor, the work on identity as performance in Drama and Theatre Studies is perhaps a useful contribution to understanding the construction of selfhood as a constant performance. This line of thinking

relation to, an already constituted 'real self' (see, for example, Schechner 1985).⁶ Here identity and performance are understood as articulated through a reciprocating relationship wherein identities are made sense of through a performance (whether on stage and/or in actual life), which encompass an affective and tangible understanding of the identities that are being performed. Furthermore, it is often through the use and performance of the body in its actual and symbolic forms that constructions of cultural identities are rendered socially visible.

If we extend this understanding of identity as arising out of a constant performance to cinema—a performance as taking place in actual life and as also reciprocated through various media—we need to take on board how a performance of selfhood is further represented on screen through the cinematic apparatus. This incorporates acknowledgment that the medium of film is about the juxtaposition of sounds and images through which the body appears and reappears in a directed manner and through which an illusion of the everyday and everyday identities are enacted with the assistance of technology (Chow 1998). This kind of enactment asserts an identifiable realism that arises from the performance of selves in the diegesis and an understanding of the performance of selves on the part of the audience as in tandem with, or incongruent to, each other. The performance of cultural or social identity through the medium of film, then, can be usefully thought of as the representation of the agile movements of the human body as captured by the technical equipment with an intended meaning, and translated in numerous possible ways by different viewers.

In order to consider Shahrugh Khan's performativity as the urban/diasporic Indian within this framework, I offer a reading of one of his hit films from the summer of 2004, *Main Hoon Na* (I'm Here Now, dir. Farah Khan). *Main Hoon Na* is the story of Major Ram Prasad Sharma (Shahrugh Khan) of the Indian Army who becomes embroiled in a series of events to ensure that 'Project Milaap (Unity)'—the releasing of innocent captives on either sides of the border of India and Pakistan—can take place as a sign of trust and movement towards peace between the two nations. Opposed to this project is an ex-Indian Army officer, who parades under the pseudonym of Raghavan (played by Sunil Shetty), who together with his group of ex-army militants terrorises those involved in Project Milaap in an

kills Ram's father, Brigadier Shekhar Sharma (played by Naseeruddin Shah), in a shoot out. On his death bed, Ram's father tells him the story of how Ram's stepmother left home with his younger stepbrother as she refused to accept Ram as the elder son in the house. It is revealed that Ram is Shekhar's illegitimate child from his affair with another woman. Shekhar pleads with Ram to find his mother and brother and to unite the separated family. Under the request of General Bakshi (played by Kabir Bedi), Ram is sent to a college in Darjeeling under the guise of a mature student to protect the General's daughter Sanjana (Amrita Rao), who has been threatened by Raghavan. As it turns out his stepmother and stepbrother are also located in the same town. Whilst at college Ram also searches for his separated stepbrother Lakshman/Lucky (played by Zayed Khan) and stepmother Madhu (played by Kiran Kher) and manages to move in with them as a paying guest with a view to fulfil his father's last wish. During the course of the film, Sanjana and Lucky fall in love and Ram falls for his chemistry teacher, Miss Chandni (played by Sushmita Sen).

The file *Main Hoon Na* has been made in the mould of a classic masala film with ample ingredients of action, romance, melodrama, and elaborate song and dance sequences. Like almost any other Bollywood masala film it too draws on one of the predominant mythic and religious texts of India, the Ramayana. Evidently, Shahrugh Khan is cast as Ram, his younger brother literally as Lakshman, the villain is a reworking of the name of the demon king Ravan, and Shahrugh Khan's role can be read as averting a threat to the nation, India. In addition, Ram also has to bring together his separated and bickering family. However, the film's creative team, headed by renowned dance choreographer Farah Khan in her directorial debut, has deliberately gone against the grain of applying this Hindu text in a right-wing nationalist vein. *Main Hoon Na* can be situated in recent popular Hindi cinema as following on from the anti-Pakistan, anti-Muslim slanted films of late such as *Gadar* (Revolution, dir. Anil Sharma, 2001) and *The Hero* (dir. Anil Sharma, 2003), both starring Sunny Deol. *Main Hoon Na* is a deliberate and conscious attempt to move away from the depiction of Pakistan as the constant wrongdoer or sole villain. Instead it reinterprets the Ramayana predominantly as a story of reconciliation and diplomacy in which India as a nation has to deal with its internal enemies and terrorists—as depicted by the character Raghavan—who pose a threat to the

possible peace process between India and Pakistan. The allegory of Ram's bickering family unit, a metaphor for the social condition of the nation, must also be restored through dialogue and love.

Shahrukh Khan's role in *Main Hoon Na* follows his trajectory as a mediating signifier, especially one that shifts between the homeland and the diaspora. In his previous films that have been popular with diaspora audiences we see him cast invariably as mediating relationships and social disputes of sorts across nation state boundaries, whether in *DDLJ*, *Pardes*, *Mohabbatein* or *Kal Ho Naa Ho*. In *Main Hoon Na* he has the additional complex task of ensuring that Project *Mitaaap* will take off with a view to arbitrate an amicable position between long-standing rivals India and Pakistan. In this way the film enters into a public discussion about the enmity and possible friendship between India and Pakistan that resounds throughout the South Asian diaspora too. Moreover, whilst *Main Hoon Na* is not set specifically between India and one of its diasporas—an anonymous urban city and predominantly Darjeeling are the two frames of reference wherein the film is set—the film's mise en scène deliberately depicts a look and feel of an urban India that is amalgamated with references from the diaspora. The location scenes at the college campus in Darjeeling are especially telling here as the costumes and performances of the bodies of Ram, Lucky, Sanjana and Miss Chandini, are all intelligible as emerging from and quoting the diasporic-infused college sets from earlier film like *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, *Mohabbatein* and *Kabhi Kushi Kabhie Gham*. Here characters wear attire and perform sociality in the happy-cum-comedic days of being at college that is a colourful mix of East and West—ethnic chic, Levis, retro-seventies garb, modern gadgets and transnational consumer goods such as Apple laptops and Pepsi beverages. Body postures and movements are confident and constantly on the go whether students are on the track field, attending classes, or singing and dancing at the American-style prom night reminiscent of the sixties. The language spoken throughout the student campus is Hinglish, a hybrid and cosmopolitan mixture of Hindi, English and urban American slang, so that phrases such as 'whassup' and 'say what?' sit comfortably alongside filmi Hindi. It appears that these students typify the transitory and mobile features of urban India and the diaspora as informing each other through oscillating cultural sensibilities, dress codes, linguistic vernaculars and consumer durables. What the overall mise en scène and narrative impetus of *Main Hoon*

Na demonstrates, then, is that post-*DDLJ* and Shahrukh Khan's emergence as the premier urban/diasporic Indian figure in global post-nineties Hindi cinema, and even when an urban film is not set immediately in the diaspora or is about the homeland and diaspora, elements of the two are strategically invoked in the diegesis that aim to appeal to both constituencies simultaneously for profit and pleasure at the global Bollywood box office.



Figure 3.3: Ram (Shahrukh Khan) and Miss Chandini (Sushmita Sen) dance at the Indian-American style prom night in *Main Hoon Na*

Shahrukh's individual body—literally and metaphorically—is further interesting in an analysis of the performance of urban/diasporic Indian identity. The idea of the social as embodied through actual human subjects, both in a material and metaphorical sense of the body, now has a growing literature in the social sciences and in contemporary sociology in particular (Shilling 1993; Turner 1992). The body also becomes an increasingly metaphorical component in the organisation of modern social systems wherein the well-being of the nation is often illustrated through political and popular discourses to do with the functioning of a healthy or dysfunctional body politic (Baty 1995). The individual body of the star, and often the male star,

in Hindi cinema has long been a trope for wider socio-cultural, economic and political aspirations, anxieties and comment. For example, the body of actor and star Amitabh Bachchan has been discussed elsewhere as providing a trope upon which the trials, tribulations and fantasies of the lower classes in India were played out in the seventies and eighties (Mishra 2002: Chapter 5; Sharma 1993). It is through the physical and symbolic body of Shahrukh Khan, standing at an average 5'9" and of slim stature, that particular kinds of performances are enunciated that come to signify certain kinds of urban Indian and diasporic possibilities. We have already noted that Shahrukh Khan is the current esteemed global ambassador of Bollywood cinema through his dress and performance that mediate homeland, diasporic and transnational sensibilities. In addition he is an important player in the film industry who through product placements, production deals, and the setting up of his own media company, espouses an ideal towards increased upward mobility and opportunity for wealth and leisure accumulation as a sign of an aspirational commodified lifestyle for both urban and diasporic India. The articulation of urban and diasporic India vying for a comfortable and upwardly mobile lifestyle is often striven towards amidst melodramatic trials and a climactic resolve in which the body is often challenged in extreme ways before the anxiety is relieved and the aspirational attained in Bollywood cinema. In *Main Hoon Na* the melodrama of the nation and the family are intertwined and put through a series of trials played out through the bodies of the protagonists.

As the film *Main Hoon Na* heightens towards an explosive action finale, the students are held hostage at the college campus by Raghavan and his men in a final attempt to halt Project *Milaap*, and Ram is challenged by Raghavan to a battle in which only one will emerge victorious. While Ram embarks on his showdown with Raghavan, his mother on the road to reconciliation with him asks for the safe return of her two sons: '*Ram, mujhe mere dono bete wahpas chahiye*' (Ram, I want both my sons back). As Ram and Raghavan battle it out, fist to fist, images of the prisoners on both sides of India and Pakistan being released and reunited with their families are interspersed with the fight scene (see Figure 3.4).

This climactic fight sequence between Ram and Raghavan is also indicative of another coming of age of Bollywood cinema under the aegis of globalisation. The fight is highly choreographed involving the



Figure 3.4: Fighting personal and national battles: Ram (Shahrukh Khan) combats with Raghavan (Sumil Shetty) in their final showdown as prisoners are released on either side of the Indo-Pak border

two actors, two martial arts stunt doubles from Bangkok,⁷ the use of black-wire sequencing, and freeze time and digital technology post-*Matrix*. The culmination of these factors produce an on-screen action event of just under five minutes that seems much longer, akin to the heroic and lengthy battles between Ram and Ravan from the story of the Ramayana, due to the intensity of the sequence and the switching between the use of sharp, slow and fast-paced transitional editing via digital technology. Digital technology in Bollywood cinema

has been increasingly used since the late nineties (Gopalan 2002: 182–83), and digital intervention in the filmic medium has invoked a reconsideration of the ways in which diegetic time frames and actual audience time frames coalesce and diverge, producing an experience and sensation of immediacy and other worldliness simultaneously (Prince 2004). *Main Hoon Na* flaunts these developments, especially in its numerous action sequences, partly due to the large budget accorded to the film (approximately Rs 24.7 crore or Rs 247 million),⁸ and partly by incorporating these technological moves as central to the diegetic narrative and character development as well. Shahrukh Khan is not only cast, yet again, as the prime urban/diasporic protagonist, he is also accorded a central status as a modern Indian Army soldier. In fact, as is acknowledged in the film dialogues, he is the best the army has to offer. Thus, Shahrukh Khan's/Ram's action sequences and his retort to his enemies have to be displayed at their ultimate best—a post-millennium Hindi cinema masala hero whose action is at par with his Hong Kong and Hollywood counterparts, using the technology advanced by Hong Kong and Hollywood cinemas initially, and then culturally translated in the specific idiom of Bollywood's mythic, religious, socio-political and everyday battles on screen. Ram and Raghavan, both before and after this battle finale, exchange dialogues directly referencing their namesakes from the original religious text as a referent to their own stand-off. Ram's body is battered and bloodied, as is expected of the action hero, conveying not only physical embellishes but also symbolic body politic bruises of internal struggles that need to be wrought with and overcome in an effort towards the peace process with Pakistan. The culmination of this bloody and explosive finale (Ram literally has to escape by running off an exploding roof and leaping on to a helicopter in order to survive) raises the stakes in the action capabilities of Hindi cinema. These possibilities, aided with developments in cinematic technology, further advance Bollywood cinema's foray into digital technology that translate into potential readings about the urban/diasporic Indian as achieving ultimate masala goals—resolving melodramatic trials, overcoming personal and physical struggles, executing song and dance sequences excellently, mediating a relationship between long-standing religious texts and globalisation—all performed through the agile human body as a literal and symbolic referent through which projects of selfhood are projected on screen.

possibilities rendered by Bollywood cinema that simultaneously offers audiences ideologies as well as new understandings and belongings. He is the epitome of the 'now' of global Bollywood's cinematic assemblage.