

Freedom and Destiny
Gender, Family, and
Popular Culture in India



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CHAPTER 6

The Diaspora Comes Home

Disciplining Desire in *DDLJ*



I. PROLOGUE

In this chapter I analyse two exceedingly popular commercial Hindi films of the mid-1990s: *Dilwale Dilhania Le Jayenge* (Those with the heart win the bride), familiarly known by its acronym, *DDLJ* (Director Aditya Chopra, 1995), and *Pardees* (Foreign Land, Director Subhash Ghai, 1997).¹ The two films have much in common; so much, in fact, that the second is often deemed to be a mere 'clone' of the former. Both are love stories involving Indians settled abroad. Both identify a specific set of 'family values' with the essence of being Indian. And both elaborate certain dilemmas of moral choice that resonate profoundly in contemporary Indian society, particularly for the new middle classes.

The moral dilemmas that *DDLJ* and *Pardees* address are of two kinds, interwoven in and through the cinematic narrative. The first is the conflict between individual desire and social norms and expectations in respect of marriage choice; one could call it the animating logic of South Asian romance (see Chapters 4 and 5). Its felicitous solution is the contemporary ideal of 'arranged love marriage', that is, a style of matchmaking whereby a romantic choice *already made* is endorsed *post facto* by parental approval, and treated thereafter like an 'arranged marriage' (see Chapter 8): 'Have your cake and eat it too?'² The second is the contradiction between transnational location and the retention of Indian identity. To this latter problem, I suggest, these two films provide contrasting solutions, notwithstanding their superficial resemblances.

In their address to these two moral dilemmas, *DDLJ* and *Pardees* touch upon practical questions which have been of some interest to sociologists of Indian family and kinship. On the one hand, many sociologists had expected that the modernization of Indian society would undermine the practice of 'arranged marriage', encouraging an individualistic ethos and

subverting the rules of endogamy that have sustained both communal separatism and the hierarchical system of caste in South Asia (see, for example, Shah, 1998: Ch. 8). (This, needless to say, has not happened—or, at least, not to the extent once expected.) On the other hand, being set among Indians living abroad, the films register and comment on an important development in Indian family life in the final decades of the twentieth century: the internationalization of the middle class family and the consequent challenge of reproducing Indian identity in transnational locations. Indeed, foregrounding the social and psychological effects on diaspora, these two romantic Bollywood hits have engaged with issues that professional sociologists and anthropologists of the family have only latterly begun to confront (see Appadurai, 1997: esp. 43ff.).³ For this reason, if for no other, such films should command our urgent—and unapologetic—attention.

II. INDIANNESS: AT HOME AND ABROAD

Indians 'at home' have had quite contradictory attitudes to their own diaspora.⁴ So long as the diaspora was constituted largely of the descendants of indentured labour in the ex-colonies, of farmers and lumberjacks in Canada, or—by the 1960s—of working-class immigrants in Britain, the diaspora could be both out of sight and, mostly, out of mind. But with professional middle-class emigration in the 1970s and 1980s, and the Indian community's attainment of a model minority status in the North American context, the diaspora could no longer be ignored. Simultaneously, a new role was discovered for emigrant Indians as patriotic investors in their country's future.

The less than satisfactory outcome of the investment incentives for Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) has by now somewhat impugned their patriotism, which was in any case compromised by the decision to emigrate to greener pastures rather than serving the homeland, as well as by the association of some of them with Indian separatist movements on foreign soil. On their part, the NRIs tend to resent being treated like Kamadhenu, the wish-fulfilling cow, ever in milk. They also begrudge Indian citizenship and taxation laws which, notwithstanding official government policies of economic liberalization, appear to them to match every incentive to invest in the home country's development with bureaucratic obstacles, infrastructural snags, and generalized mistrust. Political instability at the national level, the nuclearization of the South Asian region since 1990, and the impact of international terrorism have only added to the *miasma*.

At the level of the imaginative, the emigré, or foreign-born Indian, or the excessively westernized one, has been defined as the moral antithesis of the one who stays behind, the one whose values remain steadfast. This projection of the anxieties of modernization and identity loss, typically focused on women's sexuality, has been a fairly consistent theme in Indian commercial cinema and other media of popular culture over the last half-century or so (see, for example, Chakravarty, 1996; esp. Ch. 8; Prasad, 1998; esp. Ch. 4; Rangoonwala, 1979; 47; Thomas, 1985, 1996; Vasudevan, 1996). And, one should emphasize, it certainly remains so. But *DDLJ* challenged this polarization. In this film, contemporary Indian identity is constructed not *in antithesis to*, but rather *through*, the romantic engagement, emotional travails, and psychological conflicts of protagonists who are *both* NRIs.

As in real life for the NRI community, the crisis of identity in *DDLJ* (and in *Parzè* also, as we shall see) condenses around the marriage choices of the children of first-generation immigrants. Marriage advertisements in Indian newspapers at home and abroad bear ample witness to this dilemma of continuity as parents seek to channel and discipline the romantic aspirations of their children and to ensure the perpetuation of Indian 'culture', 'tradition', and 'values' into the next generation even as they continue to enjoy the material and professional advantages of expatriate living. Indian newspapers soliciting marriage advertisements play on this parental anxiety, and Sunday morning brings a large crop of advertisements seeking mates with 'Indian values' for Indians settled abroad. A single, randomly chosen example might suffice here:

Very highly placed Hindi speaking Kayastha parents in the U.S. are seeking a very beautiful and sweet natured bride for their high achiever 27 year old son, M.B.A. from a U.S. university and employed as an international executive in a leading U.S. multinational firm. The boy is very handsome and cultured, with Indian sensibilities and international outlook, and is seeking a girl who is similar and who can adapt to a cosmopolitan life in the upper echelons of society in different countries without relinquishing rock solid Indian values and traditions. The ideal girl will be from a very well educated, refined, gentle and loving upper or upper middle class family with strong family values and will be able to receive and give love and respect with grace over a lifetime. Caste no bar. Please send details to . . . 5

While the sexual behaviour and marriage choices of first- and second-generation Indian emigrants are a matter of major concern for the NRI community, both in real life and in diasporic fiction, drama, and cinema, these are not questions that have hitherto specially concerned the *home*

community. But with *DDLJ*, their problems of being Indian in a foreign setting are projected as *our* problems of identity as well. Conversely, *our* problems of constituting a 'moral universe' of family relations are seen to be *their* problems as well. That is, the challenge of being (and, more important, *remaining*) Indian in a globalized world is one that must be met equally by those who stay at home and those who live abroad, by the 'yuppie'/'puppie'⁶ as much as by the NRI. Second, whether at home or abroad, it is the *Indian family system* that is recognized as the social institution that quintessentially defines being 'Indian' (cf. Butcher, 1999b; Thomas, 1996).⁷ It is an institution that is now projected as portable. And it can remain firm—or so it is fervently hoped—even when all else changes. Whether in accounting for the superior academic achievements of second-generation Indians, or for the fortunes that have propelled some of the emigrants into the roll call of the richest Britons today,⁸ Indian 'family values' are proposed as the crucial markers of Indianness. (Happily, and enviably, they are also believed to correlate positively with the achievement of worldly success in competitive foreign settings.) The dissident minority within the expatriate community which questions these values from a feminist standpoint is branded as shamelessly anti-national (Bhattacharjee, 1992).

At home, the iconic status of the Indian family as an institution representative of the nation was already evident in the rhetoric surrounding *Hum Aapke Hain Koun . . . !* (Director Sootaj Bhatnagar, 1994; see Chapter 5 and Ubertoi, 1996b). According to Aditya Chopra, *DDLJ*'s director, the earlier superhit had demonstrated that 'the public . . . reacted overwhelmingly to the fact that the lovers . . . were willing to sacrifice their own feelings for their families' (Mohamed, 1996a, emphasis added). *DDLJ* reiterates the *HAAHK* formula quite self-consciously, but now links it explicitly to the question of defining Indian identity.⁹ Thus, at every turning point in the film narrative, and with every existential crisis, the protagonists pause to remind themselves and each other of what it means to be 'Indian' (usually rendered as '*Hindustani*'). In fact, the gesture is so conspicuous that it is just short of comical.



I begin now by looking closely at the several dramatic situations in the cinematic narrative of *DDLJ* in which specific features of Indian family, kinship, and marriage are identified—and, one should add, *valorized*—as being especially Indian. Substantively speaking, what are these features, and what are the circumstances and modalities through which they are

manifested? However, as with every complex cultural text, one also finds in the narrative structure and ideological edifice of *DDLJ* some united ends and discrepant notes which command special attention. That is, along with the insistent valorization of the Indianness of the Indian family at home and abroad one finds also a muted and inconclusive critique of the Indian 'tradition' (*parampara*). The opposition thus posited between 'culture' (with positive connotations) and 'tradition' (negative) echoes the sort of distinction that some articulative members of the NRI community themselves seek to make when defining their Indian identity in multicultural settings.¹⁰ What are the repressive features of this 'tradition', and how are they manifested through family dynamics? And what is the line that separates the positive quality of Indianness from the impugned features of 'tradition'?

I then take up, though in rather less detail, a successor NRI-focused romance, *Pardees*. As already noted, this latter film bears close resemblance to *DDLJ*,¹¹ but it arrives at a different, and indeed more pessimistic, assessment of the possibility of maintaining Indian identity in diaspora. That is, where *DDLJ* proposes that Indian identity can survive translocation, albeit requiring renewal and replenishment through periodic return to the homeland, *Pardees* discloses a deep ambivalence with respect to diaspora—glamorizing its material benefits and enabling possibilities, while deploring its moral consequences. The dilemma was rather neatly summed up in the review of *Pardees* published in the conservative English-language women's magazine, *Woman's Era*:

The dilemma of the Indian people who migrated to the land of promises, the USA, in the 1960s and the 1970s to strike it rich there, is that they cannot detach themselves from India, where their emotional roots are planted deep into the earth, and they cannot leave America either for all the material well-being it offers them.

... So they look for excuses which would enable them to stay in America and remain Indians at the same time.¹²

In its narrative closure, *Pardees* would appear to suggest that it is indeed possible to preserve Indian family values in diasporic settings. But other voices insist there can be at best postponement, but ultimately not avoidance, of the loss of cultural identity; that, in the end, national identity has to be territorialized.

Taken together, the dissonant voices *within* the cinematic narratives of *DDLJ* and *Pardees*, and the discrepant solutions proposed, indicate that contemporary popular cinema has emerged as an important site for engagement with the problems resulting from Indian middle-class diaspora.

and for the articulation of Indian identity in a globalized world (see Appadurai, 1997: Ch. 1). They also suggest that the issue is a deeply *contested* one: a true dilemma to which there can be no easy solution, in the world of the imaginary, as also—presumably—in real life. As a cautionary note at this point, before proceeding with the analysis, one should be reminded that the Indian screen also offered through these years (as it has subsequently) quite a range of issues, besides romance and the family, through which to construct and assert Indianness: the restoration of the pristine values of the freedom movement in the face of social and political degeneration (*Hindustani*); the undeclared war against terrorism and secessionism (*Roja, Maaichis*); and the re-enacted battles to secure the country's territorial integrity (*Bondey*). It also offered some contrasting, and more deeply *conflictual*, images of family relations (*Dil*).¹³ But, as noted earlier, the assertion and endorsement of Indian 'family values' in an uncertain and globalizing world has become a conspicuous and insistent theme in popular culture in the 1990s. It is this phenomenon that I seek to address here.

III. DIKHALE DULHANIA LE JAVENGE

DDLJ was the first directorial venture of a very young and still media-shy director, Aditya Chopra, made under the 'Yashraj' banner of his father, the formidable and long-established Bollywood director, Yash Chopra.¹⁴ Aditya Chopra had directed the plot and scripted the screenplay for the film,¹⁵ and ultimately directed it, since his father was not especially fired by the idea or—alternatively—since the latter had thought this film a suitable vehicle through which to 'launch his son as a full-fledged director.'¹⁶ The primary aim of *DDLJ*, according to the younger Chopra, was simply 'to make a very honest love story . . . a love story that would make it at the box office. . . . A wholesome film which I wouldn't mind seeing again and again' (Mohamed, 1996a). Interestingly, he also wanted 'to show the international audience that India isn't a country of snake-charmers . . . to acquaint them with how we Indians live, love, think, and react today' (*ibid.*)—a rather curious ambition considering how few foreigners (excluding NRIs, with whom the film was reportedly exceedingly popular)¹⁷ would be likely to volunteer to see the movie. To these Chopra added two further, if somewhat more abstract, considerations:

I was also trying to get something out of my system. I'd be quite troubled by watching those love stories in which the boy and the girl dlope. I'd wonder how can they just cut themselves off from their parents who've done so much for them? How can they be so callous? They have no right to break the hearts

of their parents. I wanted to say that if your love is strong enough, your parents will be convinced about your love ultimately.

I also wanted to comment on the position of the girl in Indian households. In fact I'm especially proud of the scene between the girl and her mother.¹⁸ I think it describes the situation that Indian women are caught in very clearly. We may be in the 1990s, but there are certain things about the Indian family structure that haven't changed at all.

In this statement, one finds both *endorsement* of the normative order of Indian kinship, and *resistance* to it from the perspective of women (cf. Prasad, 1998: 80). This dissonance, as it reveals itself in the film narrative, will be the subject of discussion in due course.

The plot of *DDLJ* is an exceedingly simple one: indeed, it is so simple that the hero, Shah Rukh Khan, described the film as merely 'made up of so many beautiful moments', with 'no story' to it at all!¹⁹ Chopra himself claims to have deliberately restrained himself from developing intricate sub-plots in the profligate style of so many Bollywood movies, or from unnecessarily elaborating on the character of the (quasi)-villain (the heroine's jilted fiancé), the better to concentrate on the central romance (Mohamed, 1996a). I give the gist of the plot, such as it is, below: typical Bollywood.

Raj (Shah Rukh Khan), the exuberant son of a very successful self-made NRI businessman, Dharam Vir Malhotra (Anupam Kher), living in London, has just failed his degree examination. Before joining his father in business, he plans a holiday in Europe with his college friends. Coincidentally, Simran (Kajol), the elder daughter of an NRI shopkeeper, Baldev Singh Chowdhury (Amrish Puri), has persuaded her conservative and authoritarian father to allow her to go on a European holiday with her girlfriends, before returning to Punjab for an arranged marriage with Kuljeet (Parmeet Sethi), son of her father's old friend, Ajeet (Satish Shah). Temporarily separated from their friends in Switzerland, Raj and Simran spend time together and fall in love, despite the shadow of Simran's impending arranged marriage to Kuljeet hanging over them.

On return to London, Simran confides in her mother (Farida Jalal). Her mother is sympathetic, but her father, when he comes to know of it, is furious at her betrayal of his trust. The family leaves immediately for Punjab for Simran's wedding.

Sensing his son's disappointment, Raj's father persuades him not to give up the quest for Simran. Raj thereupon pursues Simran to Punjab, where preparations are already in motion for her marriage. Simran is not attracted to the uncouth Kuljeet, and continues to dream of Raj. Raj and Simran are

reunited in the golden mustard fields, but Raj refuses to consider elopement, insisting that he will marry Simran only with her father's consent and blessing.

Raj insinuates himself into Kuljeet's household (where he is incidentally identified as a suitable husband for Kuljeet's pretty younger sister, Preeti), and thence into Baldev Singh's household, where he tries to win the approval of Simran's father. On her part, meanwhile, Simran contrives to avoid ritually pledging herself to Kuljeet, secretly breaking the *Karna Chauth* fast with Raj. Meanwhile, the senior Malhotra arrives on the scene to take Raj and his bride back to London.

In a sudden turn of events, the marriage date is advanced in deference to the wishes of Simran's elderly grandmother, and a State of crisis is reached. Simran's mother, who has come to know of Raj's true identity, urges the two to elope, but Raj again insists that he will marry Simran only the 'right' way, with her father's approval.

However, when Baldev Singh discovers that Raj is the boy with whom Simran had romanced in Europe, and also recognizes him as one of a group of Indian boys who had once taken advantage of him in London, he orders Raj out of the house.

A defeated Raj and his father are waiting at the railway station when Kuljeet and his friends arrive there, armed with guns and sticks and seeking revenge for Kuljeet's humiliation. A bloody fight ensues, stopped only by the arrival on the scene of Baldev Singh and Kuljeet's father, along with Simran and her mother.

As Raj and his father get into the train to depart, Simran pleads with her father to let her go with Raj. At the very last moment, as the train is pulling out, her father relents. Acknowledging the sincerity of Raj's love and his willingness to sacrifice that love for the wider interests of the family, he finally lets go of his daughter. Simran flies into Raj's outstretched arms.

There has been little public comment on *DDLJ*, apart from the regular fare of film magazines. Perhaps film critics, feminists, and public conscience-keepers of the left and the right had already spent themselves in commenting on the commercial success, unprecedented popularity, and ideologically conservative agenda of the rather similar *HAHK* the previous year (see Chapter 5). Understandably, under the circumstances, such comment as there has been on *DDLJ* has focused on the extent to which the film resembles (in general) or differs (in detail) from *HAHK*. It is almost impossible to avoid doing likewise.

Like *HAHK*, which Aditya Chopra has confessed to greatly admiring, *DDLJ* was a stupendous success, outdoing *HAHK*'s takings within the year and confirming that the commercial success of such movies was no

mere flash in the pan but evidence of a decisive turn in public taste. Yashraj Productions followed, more or less, the canny publicity and distribution strategies developed by the Barjaryas: withholding the release of middle classes back to the cinema for wholesome entertainment (S. Charterise, 1996). Close observers have noted some minor differences in the producers' promotional strategies, reflecting on the slightly different (home-grown or cosmopolitan) audiences they were presumed to be aiming at; but this may be making rather a fine point of things (see Doraiswamy, 1996). In terms of content, both *HAHK* and *DDLJ* provide what is regarded as clean, non-violent, family entertainment, in contrast to the violence and revenge fare that had dominated Bollywood films of the 1980s and that still continues as a major idiom in Hindi popular cinema.²⁰ And in either case they do so by foregrounding marriage rituals and festivities, a strategy which, as I have pointed out in the case of *HAHK*, has the additional function of naturalizing the song-dance items and making them seem less artificial to sophisticated and westernized tastes (see also D. Gupta, 1996). That is, the songs and dances that are an almost obligatory ingredient in commercial Hindi cinema appear to blend more 'naturally' into the film narrative.

On a more critical note, it is obvious that both films endorse glamorous lifestyles, and effortless and guiltless consumption (see Bharucha, 1995; also Dickey, 1996: 147).²¹ Unlike *HAHK*, where Lord Krishna himself assisted by Tuffy the dog joins the action at crucial moments and where religiosity is very much in the air, religion *per se* does not play much of a role in *DDLJ*.²² But in terms of its *communal* cast, the superficially more secular and cosmopolitan *DDLJ* may well appear more sinister. For here we have contemporary Punjab fervently eulogized (*meera dahi, meera Punjabhi*) and soundly caricatured (the golden fields of mustard flowers, *makki di noi* and *sarson da sag*, a lot of eating, drinking, camaraderie and jollity, machismo and male bonding, hunting and horse-riding²³), with no mention whatsoever of the undeclared civil war that had driven a wedge between Hindus and Sikhs in the region, in the nation and in the diasporic communities as well. *HAHK* may have had a token Sikh decorating the front line of the boys' chorus; *Raja Hindustani* (Indian King, 1997) may have rehabilitated the comic figure of the erstwhile 'sardari' (Sikh) jokes; *Marchis* (Marches, 1996) may have confronted the problem of terrorist violence head-on . . . ; but *DDLJ* returns to the villages and mustard fields of Punjab without a single Sikh, or for that matter AK-47 rifle, in sight!²⁴

Assuming a mimeticist point of view, *DDLJ*'s erasure of the harsh fact of communal conflict (along with caste and class differences) would appear to impair the film's authenticity as a social document. On the other hand, such gestures of systematic erasure are themselves significant social facts, contributing importantly to the construction of a utopian vision of social order. That is, they are critical pointers to the film's broader *ideological* agenda (see Prasad, 1998). In practical terms, they also allow the director to focus centrally and without unnecessary diversion on the *elementary aspects of romance*, the transference of a woman from one man (and one family) to another, and on the exploration, through this romance, of the existential dilemmas of being Indian, at home as well as abroad. It is to these that we now turn.

IV. ROMANCE, INDIAN STYLE

As already remarked, throughout the film narrative of *DDLJ*, the chief protagonists are constantly reminded of the moral responsibility of being 'Indian'. Significantly, these reminders constitute major signposts and crisis-points in the unfolding of the film narrative. I set them out here in their order of occurrence:

(1) In the opening scene of the film, providing the background for the rides and credits, Baldev Singh Chowdhury is shown walking through Trafalgar Square *en route* to his shop and, as is obviously his wont, feeding the pigeons. Talking to himself, he reflects:

This is London, the biggest city in the world.

I've been here now for 22 years.

Every day I pass down this road and it asks me: 'Who is Chowdhury

Baldev Singh? Where has he come from? What is he doing here?'

What can I reply? I have spent so many years of my life here, and still this land is alien to me.

Nobody knows me here, except these pigeons.

Like me, they don't have a country; they go to the place where they get

food. Now necessity has enchained me.

But one day, definitely, I will return to my country!

The scene cuts briefly to golden mustard fields, icon of Punjab, a colourful Punjabi folk dance, and Baldev Singh in the mustard fields, feeding his pigeons.

As is shortly evident by a metonymic juxtapositioning, the questions, 'Who am I?', 'Why am I here?' have clearly been provoked not only by

the crisis of Baldev Singh's middle age, but also by the coming into maturity of his elder daughter, Simran.

Our first glimpse of Simran at her home, hair blown across her face, conveys an impression of barely controlled sensuality. She has been writing love poems—to no one in particular, she assures her mother in confidence—but the film shortly interweaves scenes of her life with Raj's to establish their destiny with each other against the background of the very sensually rendered song, *Mere khwabon mein jo aye* ('Someone has come to tease me in my dreams: ask him to come before me'). The conception of Baldev Singh's identity crisis with Simran's budding sensuality is further underlined by his joyful reaction to the coincidental arrival that very evening of Ajit's letter, redolent with the flavours of Punjab (the famous *makki di roti* and *sarson da saag*), renewing the proposal for Simran's marriage to his son, Kuljeet.

(2) Simran, reading out Ajit's letter to her father, suddenly breaks off and runs to her room. Her mother intuitively realizes that news of the proposal has upset her daughter, though Simran has been aware of the possibility of marriage to Kuljeet since she was a little girl. But her father interprets her moodiness as the 'sainyess' appropriate to a modest young girl facing the prospect of marriage and, of course, mature sexuality:

B.S. Sec, Lajo, she is feeling shy,
This is our culture. . . . Indian culture.
Even today a daughter feels shy in front of her father.
You see, I haven't failed.
I have kept India alive here in the heart of London.

In the privacy of her room, Simran tears up her love poems, the record of her unspecified longing.

(3) Raj and his friends, on a night out together, pull up to buy some beer from Baldev Singh's shop just as he is closing for the day. Baldev Singh refuses one of the boys, but Raj tries another tack. Pleading a migraine, for which he needs medicine, Raj appeals to their shared identity as 'Indians' (*Hindustani*). Baldev Singh relents and obliges him, but when Raj then tries to buy some beer, Baldev Singh realizes that he has been taken advantage of. He is furious, and demands to know how such ruffians can dare to call themselves 'Indian'. Raj makes off with the beer anyhow, tossing the payment on to the counter. Baldev Singh is still fuming over the incident when he reaches home.

Clearly, boyish exuberance is a challenge to the deadly serious role of being an emigré Indian. It is also an index of a liminal stage in the male

life-cycle—the boys will be boys', male-bonding, 'I hate girls' phase of flirtatious and teasing relations with the opposite sex, prior to acceptance of the responsibilities of adult heterosexuality. As will be seen, the attainment of mature adulthood, scripted as acceptance of Indian identity, is exemplified in the first instance in the exercise of sexual self-control (cf. Ubertoi, 1996d: xx).

(4) As their paths cross in Europe, Simran and Raj establish a teasing, attraction/hostility relation with each other. Thanks to Raj's pranks, Simran misses her train to Zurich, and attempts to hitch a ride there. The Swiss police are questioning her, when Raj comes by in his car and claims her as his wife. She peculiarly accepts a lift from him under the circumstances, but they gradually open out with each other and confirm that they are, indeed, both Indians.

(5) This confirmation of shared Indian origins is only the beginning of a major test which is, arguably, the most dramatic episode in the first half of the film. Their car having broken down, Raj and Simran are forced to spend the night together in a small hotel where only a single room is available. Mindful of the compromising situation she has got into, Simran stalks off to the barn. Raj joins her there. He tries to persuade her to eat something or share some rum with him, but she instead berates him for daring to drink in front of an *Indian* girl. He appears to drop off to sleep. As the snow falls through the roof and she shivers with cold and hunger, she eyes the rum bottle and fantasizes an intimately romantic relationship with Raj (the song, *Zara sa jhunn tun main*).

In the morning, to her consternation, Simran wakes up back in the hotel room, dressed in Raj's pyjamas. Raj, bringing her tea, comments that she looks even more beautiful in the morning, adding for good measure that this must have been her 'first time'. Greatly perturbed, she demands to know what had happened in the night, and he teasingly leads her to believe the worst. 'What happened last night is what is meant to happen,' he declares, revealing a cluster of lipstick 'love-bites' on his bare chest. She becomes quite hysterical. Suddenly, Raj stops joking and becomes serious. Looking into her eyes he swears that, rogue though he may appear to be, he is after all '*Hindustani*', and is well aware of what an Indian girl's 'honour' (*izzat*) means to her: 'Nothing happened last night that make us ashamed; I was only joking with you.' She concludes with relief that she has not lost her virginity after all, while Raj on his part promises not to make such upsetting jokes again.

(6) Something changes between Raj and Simran after the episode in the hotel, though Simran's disclosure that she is engaged to be married

casts a pall over the developing relationship. Learning of it, Raj expresses surprise that Simran could think of commending her whole life to someone she had never met:²⁵

S. I don't feel the need [to meet him]. My father has seen him. He's my father's friend's son.

...

In our society [India], that's what happens.

Nonetheless, before they rejoin their friends, Raj discloses his love for Simran.

(7) Back in Punjab, where marriage preparations are well under way, Simran and Raj are reunited. Simran begs Raj to take her away, but Raj declares:

No, I have not come here to steal you.

True, I was born in London. But I am an *Indian*.

I will persevere till I marry you, and your father himself will put your hand in mine.

(8) At a gathering at the Chowdhurys, Raj's father meets Baldev Singh. The senior Malhotra identifies himself as '*Hindastani*':

My country, my land! Everything is available [over there], but not this culture. . . .

Everywhere I go, I have India in my heart.

He announces that he has come to India to fetch Raj's bride.

(9) Simran contrives to avoid drinking water and taking food from Kuljeet at the breaking of the *Karwa Chauth* fast. She is discovered by her mother as she completes a ritual bonding, exchanging food with Raj on the terrace. At the sight of them together, her mother urges Simran not to sacrifice herself for 'tradition' (as she herself had done). Handing over a bundle of jewels, she advises the two of them to elope. Again, Raj refuses:

R. Mother. . . . I lost my own mother when I was very young.

But I remember one thing she said to me: 'There are two paths in life. One is right and one is wrong.'

Maybe one has to suffer a lot in choosing the right path, but there is success in the end. That doesn't happen with the wrong path.'

...

I want my Simran with her father's consent. Now don't you worry. She's my responsibility.

'You don't know my husband,' the mother warns. 'But your husband doesn't know me,' replies Raj. The stage is now set for the denouement.

(10) Raj seeks to win Baldev Singh's affection by sharing with him his early morning communion with the pigeons in the mustard fields. In one of these encounters, Baldev Singh confides how he has loved to feed pigeons ever since he was a small boy. This gives Raj an opening, and he asks if there is any difference between the pigeons of Punjab and those of London. Baldev Singh replies: 'I know the pigeons here, and they know me. We are of the same soil. The London ones are foreign to me.' Raj replies: 'Maybe you haven't got to know them [i.e. the London ones] properly yet.'

That Raj is the metaphorical 'London' pigeon, seeking recognition for his true self in contrast to the local pigeon is immediately made clear. A shot rings out. Kuljeet gallops by with his rifle in his hand and a wounded pigeon flutters to the earth. Raj picks it up and dresses its wounds with the healing powers of the soil of Punjab, disclosing his identity as the boy of the London episode and asking Baldev Singh's forgiveness.

(11) In the final showdown between Baldev Singh and Raj, Baldev Singh recalls this conversation, and accuses Raj of insinuating himself into the household to steal both his daughter and his honour. In a grand soliloquy, which fortunately did not make the cinema audiences either hoat or titter (indeed, it was touch-and-go, according to the director [Mohamed, 1996a]), Raj renounces his claim over Simran, and returns her to her father's care. Once again, his sentiments echo those that he had earlier characterized as being quintessentially 'Indian':

Our mother and father gave us life and love.

We have no right to disobey them.

[to Simran] I've got no right over you.

Your father was right. I'm a tramp (*awara*).

I should have known love can't fix everything.

[to Baldev Singh] Here, she's yours.

It is this simultaneous assertion of love and of the willingness to renounce it for the sake of honouring parental authority that ultimately persuades Baldev Singh to relent and forfeit his personal bond of honour with his friend Ajit. He commends Simran into Raj's outstretched arms.

Comment

As already noted, Baldev Singh's anxiety as an 'Indian' takes an acute form at the moment when his elder daughter is sexually mature and ripe for

marriage. This makes it incumbent on him to arrange her marriage without delay. The arrangement takes the form of the revival of a 'deal' made between two friends when their children were infants. Baldev Singh's honour (*izzat*) is now implicated not only in fulfilling his commitment to his friend, but in ensuring that his daughter's virtue is unimpaired. He is most reluctant to allow her to go on a holiday with her friends in Europe, and relents only when Simran promises that she will give him no cause for complaint.

The discovery of Simran's European romance with Raj threatens Baldev Singh's honour as an 'Indian' in several ways. First, it challenges his authority as a patriarch; his daughter has been disobedient to his will, and must be corrected. Second, it threatens his sacred duty as a Hindu father to *gift* his daughter in marriage, for the truth involves only the young couple, Simran and Raj. Third, it challenges the principle of 'alliance', whereby marriage is construed as a union between two *families* through the 'exchange' of women, rather than just an arrangement between two individuals setting up a new conjugal family together. Fourth, by compromising Simran's virtue, her purity as a gift-object is depreciated, and his own honour therewith.

The whole effort of the film thereafter is to provide reassurance on all these counts such that Raj succeeds in winning Simran not by eliminating or displacing her father but by becoming 'Indian' himself in his commitment to the crucial principles of the Indian culture of kinship. Thus, Raj refuses to defy Simran's father, but works to bring him round. More important, he does not contest the father's authority to bestow her. Twice given the chance to elope, he refuses to do so and vows that he will marry Simran only the 'right' way, the '*Indian*' way, that is, with the father's active consent. This tribute to paternal authority is rationalized as 'gratitude' to the parents who gave her life and brought her up. It is Raj's stubborn stand on this principle that almost spells personal disaster, while at the same time constructing him as a true Indian, respectful of parental authority to the point of self-denial. (Ultimately, of course, his willingness to make this sacrifice stands to his credit.)

Director Aditya Chopra's commitment to the authority of parental will over individual freedom of choice and youthful desire has already been quoted—in words that are in fact almost identical to those mouthed by Raj in his statements first to Simran and then, more elaborately, to her mother, as justification for his refusal to elope (see below). The final, and even more elaborate statement, eyeball to eyeball with the enraged Baldev Singh, is also to the same effect. Reading backwards one recalls that Raj

had earlier identified these sentiments as springing from his *Indian* heritage.

Apart from the director, the film's hero Shah Rukh Khan also echoed the point that gratitude to parents should take precedence over individual self-gratification. Interviewed after receiving the *Filmfare* Best Actor award for his role, Shah Rukh Khan, in an interesting conflation of his off-screen and on-screen roles, stressed his personal experience of the same moral dilemmas (as were faced by Raj in *DDLJ*) in the course of his inter-communal courtship of his wife-to-be, Gauri. It may be significant here that the script was supposedly written with Shah Rukh Khan in mind for the role of Raj.

Q : How close did you feel to Raj?

SRK : I'm like Raj in the film. I live recklessly like him. Like Raj who was so confident about winning over Simran's parents, I knew I could win over her parents and Gauri would be mine.

Q : You had to go through all those troubles even in real life?

SRK : Sort of. Gauri's parents were dead against the marriage. Her mother threatened to commit suicide. Her father called me over and said it wouldn't work out . . .

They're a typical Punjabi family. Just like Simran's . . . I managed to *patna* [butter] up all her relatives one by one . . .

Q : What about the trying times?

SRK : Ya, things weren't working out. Gauri was locked up at home . . . Like Simran in *Dilwale* . . . she would keep telling me, 'Shah Rukh, you don't know my parents . . . You take things so lightly', and I would tell her that things would be alright.²⁶

Q : You never thought of eloping?

SRK : No, like Raj and Simran we never wanted to go against the wishes of our parents. The thought of running away from home never crossed our minds. But we knew we'd get married for sure.

When I met Gauri's parents, I just couldn't get myself to say that I loved their daughter. That, I thought, was a stupid thing to say . . . because I could never love their daughter as much as they loved her. They had given birth to and brought up Gauri . . . My love would never be a substitute for their love (emphasis added).²⁷

Initially it appears that Raj's success in marrying Simran would subvert the principle of marriage as alliance between two *families* (rather than between two individuals). After all, the (chaste) consummation of young

love takes place in a setting—neither his home nor hers, neither London nor Punjab—where the protagonists have temporarily shed both their families and their respective peer groups: it is just between themselves. And God, of course.

But the satisfactory conclusion of the romance in marriage requires the active participation of the parents. Raj is in fact as quick to involve his father as Simran is to involve her mother, and it is Raj's father, identifying with his son, who urges him not to give up his quest just because Simran is promised to someone else. The senior Malhotra doesn't leave matters there. He shortly proceeds to Punjab, announcing that he has come to fetch Raj's bride home and lending a hand in various ways (including showing up Kujjeet as a rather nasty piece of work). When he finally meets the lovely Simran, who spontaneously drops at his feet,²⁸ he actively gives his approval: 'Terrific, fantastic, done, *challo* [let's go]'. True, Baldev Singh's good friend Ajit is displaced as the affine of first choice, but the principle of *'affinity as a virtue'* (to use Louis Dumont's apt term [1983]) shows every sign of robust renewal.

Finally, when it comes to the point when Raj has Simran alone and drunk, desirous and very desirable, he recalls that he is after all an 'Indian' and that he understands what an Indian girl's 'honour' means to her. It may be remarked here that Simran's 'honour' resides in her 'virginity', understood in the narrowest physiological sense, for Raj has already undressed and ravished her. Similarly, what passed between them in a subsequent night together in the mustard fields is left to the imagination, but the assumption is of continued chastity: at least in its most literal figuration.²⁹

This is all consistent with the 'blushing' reply of Aditya Chopra to an interviewer's question about the 'sexual permissiveness' of the 1990s: 'Sex is there . . .', he conceded. 'It's on everyone's mind. You just have to know when to exercise *self-control* and not take advantage of the other person' (Mohan 1996a, emphasis added). The remark is interesting for its value on 'male self-discipline',³⁰ whereas, at least going by the text of the novel, *self-control* requires either control, or else self-denial by the

THE TYRANNY OF 'TRADITION'

steps to chart the undererow of resentment and the accepted and normative culture of Indian families in particular. Significantly, in each case characters.

(1) Simran is trying to win over her father to allow her to go to Europe with her friends. She first impresses him with her religiosity (he discovers her, early morning, bathed and dressed in a sari, praying at the family shrine), confirming in his mind his success in instilling Indian values in children raised in a foreign land (see above). Simran then pleads with her father in the following terms: She is about to leave for Punjab, in deference to her father's wishes, to marry a man she has never met. And she may never come back. Before she does so, she would like to visit Europe, to have just one month of her own life for herself, to fulfil her own desires. She promises that she will do nothing to embarrass her father.

The suggestion here is, first, that a girl's desires are of little account when it comes to arranging her marriage. Though *we* (that is, the audience) now know, and her mother knows, of Simran's longing for a still unspecified object of desire, the father sees only the modesty (*sharam*, 'shame') proper to a well brought-up Indian girl discussing the prospect of her marriage with her father. Nor is there space for her exercise of free-will in the matter of mate selection: the choice of groom is entirely her father's, and her abiding by that choice a question of his personal honour. It is in this context of the negation of both desire and agency that she begs for just one month of her life to be herself, between her present role as daughter and her impending role as daughter-in-law.

(2) Following the intimate incident in the Swiss hotel, already described at some length for its crucial importance in defining male Indianness, Raj confides to Simran that he is still waiting for the girl of his dreams who will one day materialize before him. He seeks to know if Simran has a similar longing. Implicitly critiquing her own lack of agency (for she has, after all, been brought up in the same foreign setting as Raj), she replies matter-of-factly:

- S. There is no place for any unknown, unseen person in my dreams. I'm already engaged to someone in India.
 R. Oh. What's he like? He must be very handsome.
 S. I don't know. I have never seen him.
 R. You haven't seen the person you are going to marry?
 S. I don't feel the need to. My father has seen him. He's my father's friend's son.
 R. How can you think of spending your life with a person you don't know, whom you've never seen. Can you commit your whole life to him?
 S. With us, that's what happens.

(3) Simran's grandmother observes to her father that Simran does not seem as happy as a girl should be at the prospect of her marriage. Her father assures his mother that there is no problem—that Simran is merely unfamiliar with the place, the people and the food, and so on. But, recalling Simran's European romance, he tells his wife in no uncertain terms that Simran had better forget the European affair: *or else . . . !* Meanwhile, Simran's mother takes her daughter aside and cautions her:

M. When I was a little girl, my grandfather used to tell me that there is no difference between a man and a woman. Both have the same rights. But once I grew up I understood that it was not the case. My education was stopped so that my brothers' education could be continued; their education was more important than mine. After that, I sacrificed my life; first as a daughter and then as a daughter-in-law. But when you were born I took a vow that you would never have to make the same sacrifices I did. I wanted you to live your own life. But, Simran, I was wrong. I forgot that a woman has no right to make such a pledge. Women are born to make sacrifices for men, but not the other way round.

I beg you, give up your happiness and forget him [the boy]. Your father will never allow it.

S. You're right, mother. I was being foolish. I don't even know whether he [Raj] loves me or not. My father has done so much for my happiness. Can't I make a little sacrifice for his happiness?

This scene, which was regarded by the director and the actors as a crucial and challenging one, is interesting in two respects. First, though it is not explicitly stated, the mother's instinctive identification with her daughter's longings and with her present dilemma (being married to someone against her will) suggests that she herself may have had a similar and never forgotten desire in her own life,³¹ though she has been a dutiful and loving wife and mother for many years. (There is a hint, *just* a hint, of transgression here.) Second, the condemnation of the injustice of tradition (*parmpara*) is paradoxically the *very* ground on which the mother asks Simran to *give up* her own aspirations and 'sacrifice' her personal happiness. Simran is asked to be obedient to a tradition which they both recognize as unjust—for the simple reason that, realistically speaking, women in this society have no other option. The result is that an tells her mother to convey to her father her willingness to go ahead

marriage to Kuljeet.
 *ajol identified with this defecation: maybe not personally, but any girls she had known.

I will never forget that scene where Simran tells Faridaji [her mother] that she's ready to get married. And there was that scene where I break down [as Raj leaves her house]. I don't get hysterical or anything. . . . I just seem to *give up*. It was almost as if I don't care what happens to me anymore. I just give up, like many girls do in real life when they don't have an option.

. . . .
 I must have met 120 girls like Simran, girls who have fallen in love. . . . But they have not always seen a happy ending like the characters in the film. I think *Dilliana* . . . also made thousands of parents think about what happens to their children when they try to force them into marriage with someone they don't know . . . , let alone love.³²

(4) Simran's mother has discovered her on the terrace in the moonlight, breaking the *Karva Chauth* fast with Raj, and she realizes that this must be the boy Simran had fallen in love with. She now repeats her condemnation of Indian tradition, but with a different conclusion this time: defiance, not submission.

I won't let what happened to me happen to my daughter. She will not be just a daughter or a daughter-in-law. She will live her own life. . . .

You need not sacrifice your love.

[to Raj] My blessings. She will be happy with you. Take her away. I'll take care of the rest.

But, as already noted, Raj declines to run away with Simran and insists he must win her father's approval. In so doing, he identifies with patriarchal authority, with the 'law' of the father, and distances himself from the socially subversive and sentimental complicity of mother and daughter.

Comment

In the subtext of *DDL*, when women 'speak', it is to criticize a culture of kinship in which there is no space or time when they can legitimately be the subjects of their own desire and destiny: they are first daughters, then daughters-in-law, the objects of exchange between men. At the same time, when they sacrifice their personal desires, it is not seen as an assertion of individual agency, but simply as recognition of the fact that they have 'no option' in a situation which is inherently unjust.

The position is different for men. When faced with a conflict between individual desire and conformity to social values, they may *choose* to

sacrifice the former, but this exercise of agency is ultimately ennobling, not diminishing.³³ The happy ending that can result from the resolution of this conflict—parental endorsement of a romantic relationship—is for them at once an affirmation of individual agency and a consummation of desire. For women, the resolution of the crisis is just ‘good luck’. As Kajol acknowledged, Simran was simply luckier than most other Indian girls in real life: She gave in to the system, yet she was happily able to achieve the object of her desire.

VI. *PARDES*: REINSTITUTING THE CONTRADICTION OF INDIA AND THE WEST

DDLJ belongs not only in a genealogy of immensely successful ‘clean’ and ‘simple’ romantic dramas, with gorgeous backdrops, catchy music, and old-fashioned ‘family values’. It was also, as subsequent releases have demonstrated, one of a new series of popular movies in which the NRI is positioned as hero. This in itself seems to be a social trend worth watching and reflecting on—a testimony at once to the enabling opportunities of the liberalized economy of the 1990s, and to the emergence of a new transnational Indian elite class as the reference group for the upwardly mobile Indian middle classes (Arvind Das, 1997; also Appadurai, 1997: Ch. 1; Prasad, 1998: esp. 81–8).

Now, exotic foreign locales are nothing new in Indian popular cinema, and there have been times when they have seemed positively *de rigueur* for enhancing the visual pleasures of a film, and its song-dance items in particular.³⁴ But *DDLJ* had introduced an element of novelty in this practice by its attempt to define Indian identity for Indians both at home and abroad through the emotional travails of a young NRI couple in love, rather than through the more conventional confrontation of Eastern *versus* Western cultures and values. Following soon after *DDLJ*, however, Subhash Ghai’s *Parades* (1997) reverted once again to the old formula. Before commenting further on this film by way of both comparison and contrast with *DDLJ*, one must perforce, and with the usual disclaimers, try to provide a brief summary of the plot:

Kishori Lal (Amrish Puri), an NRI millionaire, has returned from America to find a bride for his son, Rajiv (Apoorva Agnihotri), brought up in the US. He selects Kusum Ganga (Mahina Chaudhary), the young and lovely daughter of his old friend, Suraj Dev, whom he meets by chance.

Back in the States, Kishori Lal asks Arjun (Shah Rukh Khan), his adopted son, to escort Rajiv back to India to meet the girl and persuade him to marry

her. Rajiv, a bit of a playboy, is reluctant, but when he meets Ganga he agrees to the marriage on the condition that Ganga first try out living in the US for a month to see if she can adjust to the change. Suraj Dev’s family members are initially disapproving, but relent when Kishori Lal assures them that Ganga and Rajiv can get formally engaged first, and that an aunt can chaperone Ganga to the US.

Once there, Ganga is dismayed to discover Rajiv’s weakness for cigarettes, drink, and women, and to learn of his earlier physical involvement with a long-term girlfriend. She comes to rely increasingly on Arjun who, despite his unacknowledged feelings for her, continues to try to smoothen things over between Rajiv and Ganga in deference to his foster-father’s commission. Their closeness is noted by Arjun’s friend, who urges him to declare his love; and by a malicious aunt, who sows suspicion in Kishori Lal’s mind.

At the malicious aunt’s insistence, Kishori Lal sends Arjun away, and Rajiv and Ganga go on a trip together to Las Vegas. Here Rajiv attempts to rape Ganga. She knocks him unconscious and runs away, but is located by Arjun who escorts her back to India.

Incensed, Rajiv and Kishori Lal pursue the couple to India. Ganga’s father attempts to kill Arjun for compromising his honour. Arjun draws his own blood on the sword, and leaves, declaring his and Ganga’s innocence.

At a Sufi shrine, while gawalis sing of divine love, a fight takes place between the rival ‘brothers’. Kishori Lal and Ganga’s father arrive to intervene. Though Arjun concedes that he has fallen in love with Ganga, he denies betraying his foster father’s faith and maintains that he has never laid hands on Ganga. Ganga displays the signs of Rajiv’s brutal attempted rape.

Recognizing the truth and purity of Arjun’s love for Ganga, Kishori Lal proposes that she should marry not Rajiv, who has proved himself unworthy, but Arjun. Father and foster-son, and father and daughter, are then happily reconciled.

Like *DDLJ*, *Parades* has been exceedingly popular with NRI audiences,³⁵ though its commercial performance in India was somewhat uneven through different circuits of the movie distribution network, and different constituencies of the viewing public. This unevenness of response may represent a degree of public saturation with the ‘clean’ NRI-as-hero formula (at least, that is what the critics and distributors seem to think), but it may also express popular discomfort with the rather unsatisfactory narrative closure that *Parades* ultimately arrives at: the storyline hinges on just too many ‘unbelievable’ details, a disappointed viewer assured me.³⁶

Detailing all the instances in *Parades* where Indianness is directly invoked, as was just done in the case of *DDLJ*, would be a thoroughly

redundant and nearly impossible exercise, for the contradiction of India and the West permeates and structures the whole text. This was not quite the case with *DDLJ*: Though set in the NRI community and show-casing the scenic attractions of England and the Continent, Aditya Chopra had used this exotic background, as he put it, simply 'to create the character of a rigid father,'³⁷ that is, someone whose patriarchal 'rigidity' in the context of a romantic drama is given plausibility by his situational alienation from his roots:

I felt that the character of Amrishi [i.e. played by Amrishi Puri] could be shown to be far away from his roots. In a sense he is a displaced person and yet his outlook is very stubborn. Without intending to, I touched upon the issue of the major generation gap that exists between Indian immigrants and their children (Mohamed, 1996a).

Parde, on the contrary, explicitly problematizes the opposition of India and the West in its narrative structure which unfolds through a series of situations of conflict between characters marked by their different degrees of Indianness. Thus, there is the aptly named heroine, Ganga, a girl so innocent of the larger world that she has never been out of her village. There is the foreign-born and bred Rajiv, who smokes, drinks, and womanizes, and despises everything about India and Indians. There is the 'Little Master', Arjun, Rajiv's foster-brother, whose roots are still in India and whose dream girl conforms to the ideal picture of the Indian woman (the picturization of the song, *Meri mehbooba*, evoking the ambience of 'calendar art' renderings of Indian womanhood). There is the millionaire Kishori Lal, 35 years resident in the US, for whom every visit to India feels like return to the love and security of the mother's lap. A caricature of the nostalgic NRI, his 'long-distance patriotism' (Arvind Das, 1997) is now focused on his self-deceiving search for an Indian bride for his son Rajiv; he needs Ganga to remove the accumulated toxins of life in America. As a villain (of the comic more than the menacing variety), there is even a phoney NRI, Amir Chand, whose claim to the prestigious status of NRI is compromised by the fact that his stint abroad was merely in Sri Lanka.

As will have been evident in the plot summary, there are two major crises in the storyline of *Parde*, both of which are privileged moments for reflection on the problematics of transnational Indian identity. The first critical point is reached when Rajiv tries to force his fiancé, Ganga, to make love to him. After all, he remonstrates with her, they are going to get married in a few days. Besides, his American friends all have sex with their girlfriends and see nothing wrong in it. Rebuffed by Ganga, who

insists that they should wait for the consecration of their relationship through the sacrament of marriage (the seven *pheras*), Rajiv gives voice to his contempt for India as a land of shit, of hypocrisy, and of sexual double standards; a land where people mouth sanctimonious platitudes about chastity but where the population goes on increasing anyhow.³⁸ It strikes, he adds for good measure, 'How dare you insult my India!', Ganga screams at him as she sends him flying. A furious Rajiv then forces himself on her until she manages to knock him out and flee.

The second crisis is the film's denouement. Following a bloody fight between Rajiv and Arjun, Rajiv is exposed for his assault on Ganga's chastity as a person morally unworthy to call himself an 'Indian' (*Hindustani*): 'Go back to America,' he is told, 'that's where you belong.' For his part, too, Kishori Lal is exposed as someone living a lie, vainly trying to stem the process of Americanization in his family by marrying his playboy son to an innocent Indian girl. And Arjun is revealed as the true hero, his love for the heroine expressed in, and ennobled by, his exercise of sexual self-restraint. Though his heart registers his love almost independently of his will (the song, *Yeh dil, diwana*), he restrains himself from declaring his love, first out of loyalty to his foster father's commission to bring about the marriage of Rajiv and Ganga, and second—even when he has the opportunity—because he is a true Indian in his respect for the sacred institution of Indian (Hindu) marriage.

Initially a mediator between Rajiv and Ganga, Arjun's ultimate victory in the love triangle is testimony to his mediating position between India and the West.³⁹ He can translate one for the other, and combines in himself the best of both worlds. Though his future will presumably lie in America, he remains emotionally and morally an Indian, as his dedication to building a music school in India in his father's memory and his spontaneous choice of a pure Indian girl as love object both indicate.

Arjun's true affinity with the motherland contrasts with that of his foster-father. 'In America,' Kishori Lal expansively informs his astonished foreign friends as they wonder at the perfection of the Taj Mahal, 'love is give and take. But in India, love means give and give.' But Kishori Lal's Indianness has been irrevocably corrupted by his wealth and power. His arrogant self-deception leads him to believe that he can re-Indianize his spoiled son by marrying him to an Indian girl. The women in his family know better, however. Whether kindly, like the *bua* (FZ) Krishna, or nasty, like the peevish *caci* (paternal aunt [FyBW]), Neeta, they can see that preserving Indian family-values through the challenges of diaspora is ultimately an unsustainable ambition. One can only 'adjust' to this fact

as best one can, while enjoying the compensatory material benefits of living in the West. Even the pure Ganga, they warn, will sooner or later have to become one of them.

VII. 'AMERICAN DREAMS, INDIAN SOUL'⁴⁰

The voices of women are not the only interrogative notes that are first registered, and then repressed, as *Parades* proceeds towards narrative closure, for the film explores not only the problematics of love and sexual desire in the context of diaspora, but the problematic desire for diaspora *per se*.

On the one hand, in matters big and small, *Parades* is manifestly an exhibition of Indian patriotism even as it is an affirmation of Indian familism.⁴¹ Released to coincide with the celebration of 50 years of Indian Independence (it begins and ends with the banner tribute, 'Long Live India: Celebrating 50 Years of Independence'), it prominently displays the tricolour logo of the anniversary celebrations; it even, rather implausibly, endorses the national carrier Air-India!

The mood is captured in one of the film's most popular songs, *I love India*:⁴²

I've seen London,
I've seen Paris,
I've seen Japan.
I've seen Michael,
I've seen Elvis,
I've seen them all, beloved,
But in the whole universe,
there's none like Hindustan.
In this world
India is like the jewel
on the forehead of the bride . . .
I love my India,
I love my India.

The song is initially sung, very early on in the film, by Kishori Lal, re-monstrating with the America-worshipping children of Suraj Dev's family. Its background (of mountains, rivers, palaces, forts, Hardwar and Rishikesh, an idol of Lord Krishna, verdant fields, a beautiful young girl ripe for love, cute children, a large happy family bursting with patriotic joy) recalls national television's promotional imagery of India as both a

charming tourist destination and as the embodiment of patriotic sentiments transcending regional and communal differences.⁴³ But the familiar sighs and nostalgic sentiments of *I love India* are subverted by the seductive visual splendour of America that unfolds in the second half of the film. As Ganga looks down in awe at the lights of New York, we hear in the background the exultant beat of a pop song, *My first day in the USA* (sung in English by Hema Sardesai), which tells a different story and indexes a different desire: the new immigrant's desire for freedom, for opportunity, for the living out of fantasies—in America:

On my way to a new place
A whole new world and new ways.
So many questions on my mind
I'll find answers here though every time.
America, America.
There's a fascination of things to come
And no doubt now can be done.
I feel a sense of freedom up above
I know this is where I'll find love.
America, America.
I'm finally here in America
It's where I want to be.
I'm finally here, with my fantasies
This is where I'll find my destiny.
Destiny, destiny.
...

Improbably, as though to neutralize the seductive spell of America, this triumphant paean to the promised land is framed at either end by a charmed invocation to the Hindu trinity, Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva (an extraordinary instance of musical fusion in the age of globalization), and followed shortly afterwards by Gangā's rendering of *I love India* for an Indian embassy function. But the splendour of *Parades*' visual imagery of America ensures that the truth of America as the land of desire and the desired land cannot be entirely suppressed.

In sum, then, the narrative structure of *Parades* is semiotically dependent on the contradiction of India and the West, a contradiction which is resolved through the agency of a hero who embodies the best of both worlds and exemplifies the possibility, howsoever utopian, of the retention of Indianness in diaspora. But other voices—and they are, once

again, *women's* voices—warn that such a solution is unrealistic, unstable, and ultimately unsustainable into the next generation, notwithstanding the hero's marriage to a heroine who is Indian to the core. These voices, contrariwise, foretell the depletion and alienation that must inevitably attend the process of dislocation; or else, even more subversively, they celebrate without inhibition the liberation of fantasies come true—in America. . . .

Interlude

It happened to meet a Sikh taxi driver of my acquaintance outside the local cinema hall after a showing of *Pardees*.

'It's a very good film,' he assured me on enquiry, and then volunteered by way of reaction: 'And it's quite true that our girls are often unhappy when they marry abroad (*pardes*). They have so many problems of adjustment.'

'Then why do their parents arrange these marriages for them?', I queried.

'You don't understand,' he said. 'These marriages are so that their brothers can some day go as sponsored immigrants.'

His comment was a reminder of another contemporary truth of the diasporic condition that *Pardees* fails to confront, even in its subversive subtext. The other side of seeking to reproduce Indian family values through the marriage of an NRI boy to an Indian-born girl is the facilitation of emigration by others in her family, her brothers in particular. In either case, of course, the girl is a raw in the games that men play before she is the subject of her own desire.

VIII. INDIAN DREAM, TRANSNATIONAL LOCATION

In this chapter, I have pointed to both similarities and differences between *DDLJ* and *Pardees* as two contemporary popular films that link the institutions of family, courtship, and marriage to the articulation of Indian identity in the context of diaspora. It remains now to detail these continuities and discontinuities and to comment on their wider sociological import.

It will have been obvious that there are many points of superficial and substantive resemblance between *DDLJ* and *Pardees*, confirming popular opinion in this regard. Apart from the commonality of two principal actors (Shah Rukh Khan and Amrish Puri), and the use of foreign locales, there is the shared focus on the NRI nostalgia for India, the return to India

for the denouement, the emphasis on family values as the core of Indianness, the attempt to discipline the younger generation by marriage with Indian partners, the prurient preoccupation with feminine virtue in general and virginity in particular, the role of women characters in critiquing patriarchal authority, and so on. There is even a bizarre coincidence which a committed structuralist would recognize as a perfect example of symbolic inversion: the fake love-bites that index Simran's fantasized but chaste desire for Raj in *DDLJ*, and the brutal teeth marks of Rajiv's real assault on Ganga in *Pardees*!

More important, as 'formula' romances set in an Indian culture of kinship, the romantic happy endings in both *DDLJ* and *Pardees* require the reconciliation of paternal authority and individual desire. In either case, the objective is achieved not by the young couple's defiance of the normative order of Indian kinship, but by their demonstration of adherence to this order. In particular, the hero is required to exercise *self-restraint* in two crucial respects. First, he should not contest paternal authority, but should concede its rightfulness even at the cost of forfeiting the object of his desire. Second, he must not allow himself to 'sexualize' the love relationship⁴⁴ in advance of its sacramental consecration, an act of self-denial that incidentally maintains the heroine as a pure object worthy of bestowal. On her part, similarly, the heroine is required to submit to an arrangement that is man-to-man and family-to-family before it is the consummation of her own desires. Interestingly, in both films, women (especially older women) and children are able to recognize and articulate the injustice of 'tradition' and the constrictiveness of 'society' from the woman's point of view, though such misgivings are discounted in the final resolution.⁴⁵

Taken together, these common features can be read as pointers to a shared ideology of family and kinship which has three important and characteristic constituents. The first, albeit relatively muted in this case (as compared, for example, to *MAHK* [see Chapter 5]), is the idealization and naturalization of the institution of the *patrilineal joint family*. Thus, for instance, both films assume that the pattern of recruitment to household membership will automatically follow the principle of patri(viri)local residence. That is how the senior Malhotra in *DDLJ* and Kishori Lal in *Pardees* both return to India to 'fetch' their sons' wives, and stand around to supervise at the melodramatic denouements.

Second, and relatedly, the family is construed as a *patriarchal* institution, ⁴⁶ the father having the authority and responsibility to arrange his children's marriages, or to endorse or reject the choices they have independently made. For the father of a daughter, this authority is scripted as

the right and duty to *giff* his daughter in marriage, and on the purity of this gift and the solemnity of his pledge is staked his personal honour as a patriarch (cf. Prabhū, 1995: Ch. 5). When this honour is compromised, he can be expected to take drastic action—to insist on the girl's marriage to the person of his choice. . . . 'or else' (as in *DDLJ*); or to attempt to kill her and her suspected lover to assuage family honour (as in *Pardes*).

Third, is the principle of marriage as alliance—family to family—rather than just an arrangement between a young couple in love. For those unfamiliar with the wider Indian culture of kinship, *Pardes* would seem to have a rather curious ending—for a *love story*. Here we do not find the young couple embracing each other, or even uniting with each other with parental blessings. On the contrary, the final scene shows father and (foster) son on the one hand, and father and daughter on the other, embracing.⁴⁷ The happy young couple merely eye each other over the respective shoulders of their fathers as the tricolour banner tribute to 50 years of Indian Independence comes on to the screen. This reconciliation of parents and children, of the conflict of parental authority and youthful desire, allows the two fathers to reaffirm their troth as affines. Indeed, at this moment Kishori Lal reminds his *samdhi*-to-be that they had simply pledged to transfer Ganga from the home of Suraj Dev to that of Kishori Lal. In the final dispensation, this troth would remain intact, with only the minor difference that Ganga would marry another—and more worthily because more 'Indian'—son!⁴⁸

In both *DDLJ* and *Pardes*, all three elementary principles of the Indian culture of kinship (that is, the institution of the joint family; the patriarchal authority to dispose; and marriage as inferfamily alliance) are challenged in the context of diaspora—and finally reaffirmed. In both films, the heroes refuse to elope with the heroines, but chasteily await paternal blessing. This not only indexes their Indianness, but also facilitates the bride's eventual patrilocal incorporation into her husband's household. It endorses the parents' authority to arrange the marriages of their wards. And it confirms that marriage is foremost an arrangement, family to family, *via* the gifting of a daughter. Women realize that they are thereby the objects of these transactions between men, that the system denies them their subjectivity; but they know that they can only 'adjust' to it all and hope for a happy outcome.

However, while *DDLJ* and *Pardes* are similar in their constitution of the moral economy of Indian family relations, with just a hint of dissatisfaction from the viewpoint of women, the two films are at variance on the question of whether or not Indian identity can survive de-territorialization. *DDLJ* proposes that Indian family values are portable

assets, which may be replenished through periodic visits to the source. But *Pardes*' answer is ambiguous. Reinstating the well-ried opposition of India and the West, at one level it endorses the hope that Indian culture can survive de-territorialization; at another it suggests that westernization/Americanization can at best be delayed. While the hero, Arjun, is able to combine in himself the best of India and the West, this is not the case with Kishori Lal, 35 years resident in the US, and his American-born son, Rajiv. Insistently, women's voices foretell the depletion that must eventually overtake the long-term immigrant, though he may sing ever so robustly *I love India*.



It may appear from the organization of this chapter and from my taking *DDLJ* as my point of departure, that I regard *DDLJ* as registering an epistemic break with certain established representational idioms of Indian popular cinema, and *Pardes*, conversely, as a retreat from that position. To some extent I do, but it is not clear which, if either of them, represents a definitive trajectory for the future. For the moment I would simply propose that, *read together*, the two films register an important site of ideological transformation and contestation as popular culture comes to terms with the new reality of middle class diaspora and its challenges to national identity—for those at home, for many of whom the West is now the desired destination, as well as for those 'pardes', nostalgically recalling the imagined homeland.

The consistently conservative agenda for the Indian family that the two films share—almost a parodic instantiation of the normative order of Indian kinship—is not merely an expression of the complacency and cynicism of the post-Independence generation, for whom the compulsion to defy family pressures and societal conventions no longer holds much attraction. Nor is it merely an index of the self-indulgent mood of the 1990s which sees no need to choose between 'arranged' and 'love' marriage when one can enjoy the social and material benefits of an 'arranged love marriage'. Metonymically linked in the cinematic narrative of both *DDLJ* and *Pardes*, this conservative construction of family values is also a reflection of the anxieties regarding national identity that have been provoked by the Indian middle class diaspora of the last two or three decades.

The new social contract that Indian Independence brought inno being a half century ago has now to be renegotiated for a globalized environment.