

GLOBALIZATION AND NEW BOLLYWOOD'S *HAT-KE* (DIFFERENT) DIRECTORS:
NATION, GENDER, AND IDENTITY IN THE FILMS OF VISHAL BHARDWAJ,
ANURAG KASHYAP, AND ABHISHEK CHAUBEY

by

Madhavi Biswas

APPROVED BY SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

Adrienne L. McLean, Co-Chair

Sean Cotter, Co-Chair

Pamela Gossin

Matthew J. Brown

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To my grandfather: George Anil Kumar Lall

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by

MADHAVI BISWAS, BA, MA, M.PHIL

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Supervising Professors: Adrienne L. McLean, Co-Chair
Sean Cotter, Co-Chair

The linked impact of globalization, economic liberalization policies, and the introduction of cable television in India introduced major changes in the popular and largely unregulated Mumbai-based Hindi film industry in the 1990s. It was formally recognized as a legitimate industry and with the backing of an economically and culturally powerful Indian state, it positioned itself as New Bollywood cinema offering slickly-packaged entertainment that gained global visibility. This project seeks to identify the defining characteristics and dominant concerns of a sub-group of experimental films loosely referenced as *Hat-ke* (different) films. It contends that *Hat-ke* films are an important category in New Bollywood cinema whose “experimentations” require further definition. Not much work has been done on these films as a specific movement.

The project focuses on three directors, Vishal Bhardwaj, Anurag Kashyap, and Abhishek Chaubey, whose films emerge from the heart of commercial cinema and are central to Hatke

cinema. The analysis details how these films, as products and participants in the process of globalization, imagine the nation, gender, and identity in the new millennium in unique ways that intertwine the local with the global. These directors are also very conscious of their position within their national cinematic tradition and self-consciously address their artistic choices and practices within their cinematic narratives. The chapters focus on three areas of the “mediascape” and “ideoscape” that enable the films to circulate globally and yet retain their local identities: adaptation practices (both textual and generic), translation moments on screen, and the production of song-and-dance sequences.

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INTRODUCTION

Globalization has brought about inevitable changes in the production, distribution, and reception of Bollywood films. The 1990s was a defining decade in Indian cinema in which clear shifts in the national policy that promoted the liberalization of the Indian economy had a palpable effect on how Indian films were produced and viewed. *Hat-ke* (different) films emerged as a particular kind of experimental cinema in the post-liberalized climate of India and now circulates in a globalized world where notions of the “national” are rapidly being redefined. This cinema, which developed roughly in the first two decades of the new millennium, is an important movement closely linked to globalization whose “experimentations,” I contend, require further definition.

As *Hat-ke* films are such a loose category, they are difficult to pin down. The films I discuss are auteur-driven, made by a group of directors engaged with specific ideas and formal experimentations over a period of time – keeping in mind their ability to make successful films from within mainstream cinema. The point is not to impose a narrow and definitive account of films or directors that can be included under the *Hat-ke* umbrella but to pay attention to some common concerns of this group and their representation of the globalized present. *Hat-ke* directors do not merely represent their global moment; they also reflect that particular impulse in globalization to shrink time and space by including disparate elements of the past with the present and mixing the local with the global. This “glocal” impulse defines a little more concretely the “experimental” element in *Hat-ke* films. This impulse is not merely a reaching out for the new but a re-orientation of the relationship between the old and the new, and the self and the foreign.

A powerful defining mode of *Hat-ke* films is their intertwined self-consciousness about their “global” and “Bollywood” identity that often disrupts the narrative flow of the films and consequently questions their formulations of nation, gender, and identity. This self-consciousness is central to these films in which the categories of the “global” and “local” are used to interrogate the “national” and the “modern.” I focus on three directors, Vishal Bhardwaj, Anurag Kashyap, and Abhishek Chaubey. This project focuses on some of their seminal films such as *Maqbool* (Bhardwaj 2003), *Omkara* (Bhardwaj 2006), *Dev. D* (Kashyap 2009), *Ishqiya* (Regarding Love, Chaubey 2010), *Gangs of Wasseypur 1 and 2* (Kashyap 2012), *Dedh Ishqiya* (1 ½ Times Love, Chaubey 2014) and *Haider* (Bhardwaj 2014) that manifest the defining characteristics of this movement.

My thesis focuses on the distinct element of self-reflexivity in this cinema and seeks to situate itself in similar attempts by Sangita Gopal, Rachel Dwyer, and Madhava Prasad¹ to define *Hat-ke* cinema. While the idea of the self-reflexivity of Bollywood cinema has received critical attention, it has often been in the context of the commodification of mainstream New Bollywood films. *Hat-ke* cinema’s self-reflexivity, through which it interrogates its global moment and its Bollywood aesthetics, has not been addressed in much detail.

Bollywood films have always had an international circulation. However, in the past two decades, the expansion of Bollywood’s markets in the Global North, India’s increasing economic clout and resultant cultural prominence, its burgeoning diaspora, the growing importance of the Global South, and an increasingly interconnected “mediascape” and “ideoscape” have provided

¹ Discussed later in Section 3 of this chapter. Madhava Prasad does not term it “*Hat-ke*” but instead calls it “Non-Bollywood” cinema.

high visibility to Bollywood films. My dissertation will focus on three aspects of this interconnected ideoscape and mediascape: film adaptations, the production of song and dance sequences, and translation moments in films.

Adaptation is a valuable space that allows for the interrogation of both nation and modernity. I explore the dynamics of *Hat-ke*'s intermixing of "high" cultural texts such as Shakespearean tragedies and Sarat Chandra's iconic novella *Devdas*, written in 1913 (which has been adapted for the Indian screen multiple times), with a range of "high" and "low," "national" and "global," and "contemporary" and "classic" intertexts. Genre adaptation in *Ishqiya* and *Dedh Ishqiya*, which plays with the generic boundaries of buddy movies, heist, comic noir, and noir, is another such global space that the *Hat-ke* movies employ to question local boundaries and in particular, the ways in which gender and Bollywood itself are imagined. Similarly, translation moments in these films address notions of linguistic identity complicating the national with the global, regional and familial. These films introduce the "foreign" (as a word, phrase, accent, or a person) as a category to disturb notions of identity and "otherness."

Bollywood circulates in the global space as "Indian" cinema even though the Indian film industry has other big regional centers of film production besides the Mumbai-based Bollywood industry producing films in Hindi. However, the post-Independence Hindi film industry surpasses all the other regional centers in terms of its national circulation and its box office returns,² and it has taken on the mantle of representing the entire nation. The term "Bollywood"

² A recent, notable exception is the huge success of the film *Baahubali 1 & 2* (Rajamouli 2015 and 2017) produced by the Telugu film industry that far outpaced the Hindi film blockbusters of the past few years.

was loosely used in the 1970s as a tongue-in-cheek response to Hollywood. It has now become a term that has global currency as a specific form of filmmaking that largely defines the popular and prolific Hindi film industry. It typically includes elaborate song-and-dance tracks and big stars packaged in a glamorous mixed bag, “masala” formula including romance, comedy, fight sequences, and melodrama.

My reading employs recent studies on globalization to interrogate the unified imaginaries of the nation. Arjun Appadurai, for example, views global spaces as fluid and as incorporating both the elements of heterogeneity and homogeneity.³ Globalization is not necessarily even and often interacts with local processes and technology to create new forms. Bollywood in its global circulation is thus not just identified as a homogenous “national” “counter-flow” to the flow of “Hollywood,” but as generating its own flows and counter-flows, merging local ideoscapes with global mediascapes. This is particularly evident in the *Hat-ke* film’s use of intensely localized milieu framed in the “global space” of adaptation.

These “global spaces” in *Hat-ke* films can be eclectic references to global cinema that include Hollywood, Korean, Japanese, Hong Kong, European, and previous Hindi films. They can also be adaptations of globally recognized texts or popular genres. Their experimental modes use commercial formats and hybrid forms intermixing “high” and “low” and “foreign” and “national” genres. Such juxtapositions realign our expectations about world cinema as a diverse collection of locally-representative national cinemas. These films are very conscious of their

³ Arjun Appadurai, “Disjunctive and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” *Theory, Culture, and Society* 7, no. 2-3 (June 1990): 295-310.

situation within a transnational media space that cannot be imagined merely in terms of discrete national spaces.

Globalization shrinks space as well as time. It is associated with fast-paced and uneven change and is both a condition of modernity, as well as a concept to interrogate it. Appadurai, for example, critiques modernity's binaries of traditional vs. modern, urban vs. rural, and its desire for universal applicability, arguing instead for paying attention to the unevenness of change brought about by media and migration. I analyze how *Hat-ke* films imagine modernity and how uneven change, modern technology, and media complicate notions of modernity.

The dissertation provides close readings of some of the films of Vishal Bhardwaj, Anurag Kashyap, and Abhishek Chaubey. Both Vishal Bhardwaj and Anurag Kashyap are producer-directors who began their careers by directing their films under other producers and later sought to exercise some control on the kinds of films they prefer to direct by establishing their own production companies. This allows them directorial freedom and enables them to produce and promote the films of like-minded directors. Abhishek Chaubey began his career as Bhardwaj's scriptwriter and assistant director and then branched out to develop his own production company, MacGuffin Pictures. Similarly, Kashyap's assistant, Vikramaditya Motwane, whose films are also easily identifiable as *Hat-ke*, collaborated with Kashyap and two other directors to form a production company called Phantom Films,⁴ which has produced and promoted a variety of commercially successful and critically appreciated films, most of which fall within the spectrum of *Hat-ke* films. This spectrum accommodates a non-conventional film like *Trapped* (Motwane

⁴ Phantom Films was recently dissolved following a #MeToo scandal involving one of its prominent partners and directors, Vikas Behl.

2017) and the hugely successful *Queen* (Bahl 2013). While the production companies of the *Hat-ke* directors are small, their independence enables them to produce commercially viable Bollywood films while sustaining their experimentation within the industry. This is what distinguishes them from the big-budget Bollywood films as well as the earlier state-sustained “parallel” cinema of the 1970s. Even though their attempts to expand their particular brand of cinema have had some success, their works are surprisingly under-explored, and their experimental approach necessitates much more sustained critical attention.

History of Indian Cinema: Post Independence to Post Liberalization

In 1995, Yash Raj Films (YRF), one of India’s top production companies, released *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (The Big-Hearted Will Take Away the Bride, Aditya Chopra). *DDLJ*, as it is popularly called, became the biggest hit of the year and is now considered one of the most successful Indian films of all time. The story is not particularly original: a boy and a girl fall in love; the girl’s father disapproves and insists on getting her married to a boy of his choice; the boy refuses to run away with the bride without the father’s approval and eventually wins him over. However, it is the spaces the characters occupy and their resultant identities emerging out of those spaces that were unusual at the time of the film’s release. The film is neatly divided into two halves; the first half takes place in London and Switzerland, and the second half in Punjab, India. The boy, Raj, the girl, Simran, and her father, Baldev Singh are all non-resident Indians living in London. Time seems to have stopped for Baldev Singh, who yearns to return to India. He brings up his two daughters strictly in compliance with “Indian values,” and accordingly arranges his daughter’s marriage to his friend’s son in India. He allows Simran to go to Switzerland for a holiday, where she falls in love with Raj. Baldev Singh and his family depart to

India for Simran's marriage. In the second half of the film, Raj Malhotra follows Simran to India and despite the trepidation and warnings of Simran and her mother proceeds to woo Baldev Singh, who is not aware of his identity. In the end, Raj "proves" to Baldev Singh that despite being raised in London, he is the one with the true "Indian" values. Not only does he manage to win the bride with the father's approval, but he also gets to return to London with his bride and with his "Indian-ness" intact and reinforced.

This attractively packaged film, featuring top Bollywood stars Shahrukh Khan and Kajol, made the NRI (non-resident Indian) profile look glamorous and romantic for the first time in Indian cinema. After years, the Indian diaspora, which had consolidated its imagined community and resultant identity primarily from within the parameters of popular Indian cinema and film music, was finally acknowledged and privileged within the frame of that cinema. Whereas in earlier Hindi films nationalism and identity were inevitably linked to territoriality, this film explicitly delinks "Indian-ness" from its territorial constraints, providing it a portability that is allowed to fit neatly within the NRI's "heart."

There are two issues at stake here – one is the deterritorialization of the "Indian" identity, and the other is the reaffirmation of what is constructed in the film as the "essential" Indian identity. Thus, it is not just the alienated Baldev Singh, who has lived in London for decades yearning for his motherland, who believes in Indian values. The modern young couple cavorting on the Alps in designer clothes also adheres to these values of upholding the sexual purity of the Indian woman and deference to the patriarchal head of the family. The return to the motherland is no longer a unidirectional journey, tinged with guilt and nostalgia, from "Pardesh" (another country) to "Swadesh" (own country) that is undertaken by the expatriate with a long memory. It

also resides and is celebrated in the hearts of the modern youth who might not have any experiential ties to the motherland nor the desire to return to it. The post-liberalized Indian state and the film industry were aligned in wishing to include the prosperous Indian diaspora in the West, who formed an important part of Hindi cinema's global reach, as an intrinsic part of the national imaginary.

DDLJ as the iconic harbinger of the new socio-political and economic turn of a post-liberalized India has been referenced by several recent critics of Bollywood, from Tejaswini Ganti in her seminal anthropological work on Bollywood Cinema, *Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema* (2004),⁵ to Priya Joshi's more recent *Bollywood's India* (2015).⁶ The film's sleight of hand legitimating the conflicting desires of two distinct generations crisscrossing two nations provides a dramatic window into the rapid economic and social changes that were particularly accelerated in the 1990s in India – some of which had very specific repercussions for the Hindi film industry and its visibility on the global stage.

The post-Independence⁷ Indian economic policy, which was a response to the colonial experience and influenced by Nehruvian⁸ socialism, favored protectionism and state-controlled regulation of manufacturing and production. It held sway from the 1950s to the 1980s, and these

⁵ Tejaswini Ganti, *Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004).

⁶ Priya Joshi, *Bollywood's India: A Public Fantasy* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2015).

⁷ India was granted independence from British rule in 1947.

⁸ Jawaharlal Nehru actively participated in the freedom struggle and was elected the first Prime Minister of Independent India. His idealistic, slightly modified version of Fabian socialism was very influential in molding the economic policy of post-Independence India. He believed that equality and the distribution of power and wealth had to be established through state-controlled means of production.

years were marked by slow annual growth choked by state-controlled licensing that was responsible for widespread stagnation and bureaucratic abuse. The market-oriented economic reforms implemented by the Indian government in 1991, encouraging de-regulation of industry and trade, were promoted as beneficial to the economy, and, to a large extent, managed to integrate the national economy with the global economy. Despite critics' reservations about the unequal effects of the reforms, which favored the middle class at the expense of the poor, the resultant free flow of business, investment, and capital dramatically turned around the Indian economy, enabling it to sustain an annual average growth rate of 6.6 percent between 1990 and 2010.⁹

This economic liberalization, along with the entry of satellite television in 1992, changed the media landscape in India. The television industry, previously monopolized by the state-run *Doordarshan*, had to quickly adjust itself to the influx of sophisticated and competing television networks from within India and abroad. The Hindi film industry suddenly found itself competing with television for a rapidly expanding middle-class audience. This enforced a standardization and internal reorganization of the production and distribution practices of this vast and previously informally organized industry.

Along with such inevitable streamlining, the Hindi film industry was finally accorded the long-awaited recognition of a legitimate industry by the Indian State in 1998, which was formalized in 2001. Despite its considerable contributions to the national economy and the

⁹ PTI, "India's annual average GDP Growth at 6.6% in 1990-2010: Govt.," *The Economic Times*, August 18, 2011, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/indicators/indias-annual-average-gdp-growth-at-6-6-in-1990-2010-govt/articleshow/9649042.cms>.

national imaginary, the film industry has had a peculiar relationship with the Indian State. India's long history of film production parallels that of Western cinema's earliest film productions going back to 1897. Unlike other countries under colonial rule whose cinematic history often developed after they gained independence, Indian cinema had the distinction of being the third largest producer of films in the world even when it was under colonial rule.¹⁰

Though Indian cinema did not get much support from the British government during the colonial rule, the situation for the industry did not change after the country gained independence in 1947. It became worse in post-Independent India, which was at the time dealing with the dual exigencies of post-World War II product shortages and the Partition¹¹ that had ripped the social, economic and political fabric of the country. The independent Indian nation-state did not consider filmmaking an essential economic activity. However, it was well aware of Hindi cinema's popularity and its potential as an important source of revenue, and thus chose to impose heavy taxes on it. Taxes went up from 12.5 percent before World War II to almost 60 percent by 1950.¹²

Nor did the state ever consider harnessing the Industry's tremendous popularity consciously as a tool in nation-building in a country where a large number of the population was

¹⁰ Ganti, *Guidebook to Bollywood*, 3.

¹¹ The Partition was the division of the Indian sub-continent in 1947 into the two separate nations of India and Pakistan along mainly sectarian lines. The north-western, largely Muslim regions became Pakistan and parts of the northern and eastern predominantly Hindu sections and the south became India. The north-western fertile region of Punjab which had an intertwined, mixed population was split in the middle between Lahore and Amritsar, which triggered a traumatic, large-scale migration of at least 10 million people fleeing to their preferred side of the border. It was accompanied by mass killings, looting, and displacement. The event has cast a long shadow and still triggers communal tensions in India which had declared itself a secular country, and thus still has the third largest Muslim population in the world.

¹² Ganti, *Guidebook to Bollywood*, 28.

uneducated. Censorship became stricter and more arbitrary as the new nation-state, adopting the colonial attitude, viewed the film industry as a corrupting agent. This overarching view of the Hindi film industry, as at best frivolous and at worst an agent of vice, set the tone of their relationship for the next five decades. Even though this popular industry informally took the project of nation-building upon itself,¹³ the pre-liberalized Indian state largely ignored it, making few attempts to redress the burden of taxation or to address in any detail the Industry's concerns regarding finance, distribution, and exhibition.

Nevertheless, the history of post-Independence popular Indian cinema is often viewed through the lens of its nation-building concerns. It is common for critics of Hindi cinema to see it as national cinema invested in the project of imagining the new nation and to divide its history into three broad eras triggered by major national events: The Independence in 1947, the Emergency in 1975, and the economic liberalization in 1992. The first, loosely referenced as the Nehruvian era, held sway during the 1950s and the 1960s. Films of this era often focused on the social and economic problems that beset the new nation. They reflected the tension between the national mood of idealism and faith in the new government which had successfully fought for independence, and concerns about the government's uphill struggle to tackle the looming issues of poverty, large-scale migration, and displacement of labor brought about by the political upheavals in the country. Film narratives often linked the discourse of modernity and social amelioration to that of nationalism which was popular in the aftermath of the intensity of anti-colonialism.

¹³ This line of criticism is central to all the major critics of Indian cinema from Ravi Vasudevan, Madhava Prasad, and Ashish Rajadhyaksha to Sangita Gopal, Ajay Gehlawat, and Priya Joshi.

Ravi Vasudevan's influential work on Indian cinema¹⁴ reads the films of the 1950s (the decade following the Independence) as sites for negotiating the project of modernity, which was the central concern of the new nation as it sought to establish its identity. In one of his earlier essays,¹⁵ he discusses *Andaz* (Flair, Mehboob Khan, 1949) as heralding the prototypical film of the 1950s. He argues that the new nation flirted with the project of modernity in the film's depiction of the modern woman as an "emergent figure of modernity." Her containment in the end by the masculine and patriarchal nationalist authority reflects, for him, the underlying tensions in the much-promoted belief in "nation-building as a modernizing enterprise."¹⁶ It was a concept supported by an elite intelligentsia which was critical of, yet unwilling to sever its roots from the feudal, patriarchal structures that kept it in power. The glue for social unity was national identity that popular film promoted as a pan-Indian one and such projects inevitably sidelined linguistic, regional, and gender differences.

The 1970s, riddled with economic and political unrest, distinctly altered the public perception of the Indian state. Widespread economic anxiety, the toll of the ongoing wars with Pakistan and China, and the clamping down on civil liberties during the infamous period of the Emergency¹⁷ enforced by Prime minister Indira Gandhi fueled a growing disaffection with the

¹⁴ R. Vasudevan, *The Melodramatic Public: Film Form and Spectatorship in Indian Cinema* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

¹⁵ R. Vasudevan, "You Cannot Live in Society – and Ignore It': Nationhood and Female Modernity in *Andaz*," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 29, no. 1-2 (January 1995): 83-108.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁷ The Emergency was a twenty-one-month period in India from June 25, 1975, to March 21, 1977, that was initiated by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. She was accused by the opposition of rigging the elections and she invoked Article 352 of the Indian Constitution to give herself extra-judicial powers. During this period fundamental rights were suspended, the opposition leaders were jailed, and the press was heavily censored.

Indian state. It fostered a cynicism about the State's ability to address the widespread issues of poverty, unemployment, and corruption that affected the lives of ordinary citizens. Lalita Gopalan and Priya Joshi in particular focus on the films of the 1970s and 1980s and the films' glorification of violence, revenge, and action-packed sequences viewing them as a clear turning point in popular Hindi cinema. The anti-establishment mood of this age was defined by the iconoclastic persona of the "angry young man" played in numerous, very successful films such as *Zanjeer* (Chains, Prakash Mehra, 1973) and *Deewar* (Wall, Yash Chopra, 1975) by Amitabh Bachchan, the superstar of the 1970s and 1980s. The rhetoric of modernization was, to a large extent, subsumed by the rhetoric of anger, violence, and revenge in these two decades.

The liberalization of the Indian economy in the 1990s ended the period of "Nehruvian socialism," marking a distinct shift in India's domestic policy and its position in the globalized world. The rise of a powerful and proliferating middle class with spending power within the country went hand-in-hand with an expanding diaspora that the Indian state was keen to cultivate. India's growing economic power gave it cultural visibility on the world stage. The surge of academic interest in Bollywood (a term that will be defined in some detail later in this chapter) and its increasing popularity in the Global North gave it respectability that the Indian state was not averse to utilizing to its benefit. Thus, though the Indian state's declared purpose in granting industrial status to the film industry was to rid the industry of its dependence on black money,¹⁸ it was equally motivated by an altered perception of the Indian film industry as a

¹⁸ A commonplace term in India. It refers to illegal money on which income or other taxes have not been paid.

cultural asset rather than an embarrassment. The 1990s also saw the rise of a militant Hindutva¹⁹ that led to the electoral victory of the right-wing BJP government whose exclusivist ideology sought to impose a Hindu identity on the nation. This version of nationalism, while certainly not absent during the struggle for freedom and in the post-Independence era of Nehruvian socialism, has gained a much more vocal and influential cultural currency in post-liberalized India.

This economic and cultural shift is reflected almost seamlessly in the glitzy, sophisticated family dramas of the 1990s and the following decade, which proved to be huge hits in India and abroad. These films focused on storylines of prosperous, cosmopolitan Indian families and urban lifestyles which were designed to attract an upwardly-mobile, middle-class domestic audience with the spending power to watch films in upscale, urban metroplexes²⁰ as well as nostalgic diasporic audiences in prosperous countries. While the diaspora's interest in popular Hindi cinema is not new, the legal channels of distribution and exhibition that globalization has opened up are a recent phenomenon. These have been noted and targeted by producers as sources that can be monetized and regulated for lucrative returns. Such focus often meant not only the erasure of poverty and strife from the narratives of these films but also resulted in a certain essentializing of the Indian identity in majoritarian terms as a specifically Hindu identity.

¹⁹ A dominant form of Hindu nationalism in India based on cultural homogeneity. It is championed by political parties such as the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) and organizations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP).

²⁰ Multiplex movie theaters with multiple screens often situated in malls burgeoned in urban areas in post-liberalized India. With high ticket prices and an urban orientation, they clearly targeted a more affluent and educated middle class audience that has been the biggest beneficiary of the liberalization of the Indian economy. Multiplex theaters have altered the way films are distributed, produced and received in contemporary India. These theaters have been linked to the rise of experimental cinema.

A classic exemplar that reflects this shift is *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* (Sometimes Happiness, Sometimes Sadness, Karan Johar, 2001), which is popularly known as *K3G*. It was a big box-office hit that had both the current superstar Shahrukh Khan and the previous superstar Amitabh Bachchan in major roles. The intergenerational family drama, centered on the estrangement between the father, Raichand and the son, Rahul, plays out against the lush backdrop of a palatial house in Delhi and shifts, in the second half, to an equally lavish apartment in London. The film's end reestablishes the patriarchal setup with the rich, conservative father firmly entrenched at the center of the regrouped family. This joint, extended family feeding on the nostalgia for the past is constructed in the image of the Hindu feudal family supported by resonant Hindu rituals. Ironically, it is Amitabh Bachchan, the angry, anti-establishment icon of the 1970s, whose star power provides him the legitimacy to play the new avatar of the benevolent patriarch, a role that he has reprised to great effect in a number of his post-*K3G* films.

Concomitant with the exaltation of the family is its conflation with the nation in *K3G*. The evocation of the Indian national anthem against the backdrop of London is deliberately interlaced with two emotionally charged familial regroupings in the film. The London-based, global family of Rahul has clearly not forgotten any of its traditions which are visually underscored in the film by the huge portrait of the parents, graced by incense sticks and lovingly maintained and attended to by Rahul in his London house. As a concession to national integration, the family's Muslim governess, who has left her own family to look after Rahul's family, has a much more elevated position in London than she had as Raichand's sons' nurse in India. The intense emotion between the father and the son is seen in nationalistic terms in which

the son's devotion towards his family is also read as his love and devotion towards his motherland.

The above critique is a representative rather than a unique reading of *K3G*. Both *DDLJ* and *K3G* have been analyzed (Jyotika Viridi, Sangita Gopal, Priya Joshi, Rini Bhattacharya Mehta) as exemplifying the complex dynamics of the neoliberal Indian state and its global aspirations. Recent criticisms of Bollywood cinema often view its post-liberalization phase as marking a new collusion between the nation-state²¹ and the recently industrialized Bollywood. From this perspective, Bollywood rather overtly reflects the soft power agenda of an economically more powerful as well as a more conservative and communalized India.

Though one needs to be alert to the underlying political implications of these attractively packaged family melodramas, to view these films as merely promoting the agenda of the state ignores the gaps and fissures that such films inevitably open up. For example, while it is impossible to deny the reestablishment of the patriarchal set-up in *K3G*, Rahul, the elder son of the family who is poised to inherit the mantle from his father, is temperamentally very different from his patriarchal father, his family in London is starkly different from that of his parents, and he is also an adopted son. The reconciliation at the end of the film is the father's capitulation to the younger generation's point of view that includes both Raichand's sons and daughters-in-law who are temperamentally very different. These facts create fissures in the rationale of patriarchy,

²¹ Nation-state: While the use of the term goes way back to the 18th century, my use of the term references the debates emerging out of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983), and incorporates the recent soft-power arguments initiated by Joseph Nye in *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004). It references the state as a political entity and the nation as an ethnic-cultural entity and the attempt – often contested by resistant discourses – of the nation-state to promote its legitimacy and power by promoting a strong link between the two.

and, to be fair to the film, it makes an understated point about the very obvious social elitism of the father not affecting his love for his adopted son. Similarly, in *DDLJ*, the anxiety that the wife and daughters feel about incurring the wrath of the father introduces a sense of discomfort in the film, which, it can be argued, is not entirely erased by the father's change of heart and the film's happy ending. Thus, to borrow a Jamesonian argument,²² irrespective of whether this particular manifestation and phase of Bollywood films might be promoting a specific agenda of the nation-state, the fissures that are inherent in the cinematic form itself makes it a vehicle for critiquing the nation-state and the status quo.

Keeping in mind the Jamesonian argument about the potential of even the most commercial of art forms to open spaces for social critique, my argument nevertheless seeks to distinguish between different kinds of twenty-first-century Bollywood films which are all grouped loosely as New Bollywood, and to identify and further define a particular category of Bollywood film, namely *Hat-ke* cinema, as specifically questioning the status quo. This category of films is different from films such as *DDLJ* and *K3G*, even though it is, like them, both a product of globalization and an intrinsic part of Bollywood. My contention is twofold. I argue that *Hat-ke* cinema needs to be considered as a historical and cultural phenomenon emerging out of the twin contexts of globalization and bollywoodization. Furthermore, this cinema needs to be distinguished as a distinct category because of the interrogation of its position within its

²² Refers to Fredric Jameson's argument in "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," written in 1979. Jameson critiques the valorization of the high art of the modernists vis-à-vis mass culture, arguing that both are marked by the commodification of art. Discussing *Jaws* and *Godfather* as products of popular culture, he contends that all art forms, including mass culture, are ideological and yet have aspirations of utopia: "...all contemporary works of art – whether those of high culture and modernism or of mass culture and commercial culture – have as their underlying impulse – albeit in what is often distorted and repressed, unconscious form – our deepest fantasies about the nature of social life, both as we live it now, and as we feel in our bones it ought rather be lived." *Signatures of the Visible* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 34.

historical moment. The following sections describe how “bollywoodization” and “globalization,” are used in my argument. However, before that, it is relevant to provide a parallel historical context for an important defining feature of Bollywood, namely its song and dance sequences.

Indian Film Songs and the *Hat-ke* Intervention

A great deal of the identity of Bollywood cinema is linked to its song and dance sequences even though opinions about this feature remain polarized. While some critics consider them extraneous and unnecessary, others view them as markers of the uniqueness of Indian cinema. Satyajit Ray famously expressed his bafflement at Indian commercial cinema having to produce five to six songs for every single film, setting the tone for a critique of the form as extraneous, unrealistic, and ultimately detrimental to the narrative. Other critics like Nasreen Munni Kabir view songs as providing the only element of originality in a film form that does not pretend to offer unique storylines.²³ In *Global Bollywood: Travels of Hindi Song and Dance*, editors Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti recount an anecdote by Amitabh Bachchan to illustrate how, for Hindi film fans, songs often stand in for the film itself:

Songs seem to condense and stand in for the films of which they are a part – thus, megastar Amitabh Bachchan reminisces, “I was walking down London’s Piccadilly Circus when I saw this group of Kurds running towards me. (Laughs). I thought they wanted to assassinate me. But they stopped right there and started singing songs from *Amar Akbar Anthony* and *Muqaddar Ka Sikander*.”²⁴

²³ Nasreen M. Kabir, *Bollywood: The Indian Cinema Story* (London: Channel 4 Books, 2001), 15.

²⁴ Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti, “Introduction,” in *Global Bollywood: Travels of Hindi Song and Dance*, eds. Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2008), 3.

In the book, Gopal and Moorti identify song and dance sequences as “the single most enduring feature of popular Hindi cinema.”²⁵ They highlight the various functions and roles of the song-and-dance sequences and, following Richard Dyer’s famous line of argument in “Entertainment and Utopia,” emphasize song’s ability to “code the inexpressible and the transgressive”²⁶ thereby highlighting its utopian thrust.

However, critics such as Ian Garwood²⁷ and Sangita Gopal²⁸ have noted a gradual shift away from the standard deployment of the five-to-six-songs-per-film formula of Hindi commercial cinema. Gopal’s 2015 article argues that the song sequence is gradually getting “disaggregated”²⁹ from the narrative, a process that began in the 1970s and continued to the 1990s, after which songs have become extraneous to the characters that lip-synch them on screen. While the “disaggregation” argument is debatable, her observation that the “lip-synched” romantic duet is gradually diminishing in importance in Hindi films is a useful point to note. Romantic songs, however, have not disappeared from the film tracks even though their visualization might have changed. Moreover, Hindi songs are not limited to romantic duets: romantic solos, pensive solos, group songs celebrating festivals and weddings, *qawwalis*, *mujras*, and dance tracks are also part of the stock repertoire of Hindi film songs. It is true that songs in

²⁵ Ibid., 1.

²⁶ Ibid., 5.

²⁷ Ian Garwood, “The Songless Bollywood Film,” *South Asian Popular Culture* 4, no. 2 (2006): 169-83.

²⁸ Sangita Gopal, “The Audible Past, or What Remains of the Song-Sequence in New Bollywood Cinema,” *New Literary History* 46, no. 4 (2015): 805-842.

²⁹ Ibid., 831.

Hindi films are changing, but it is worth remembering that while songs have been a constant feature in Hindi films, they also have a history of evolving with the changing times.

Globalization brings the issue of song and dance sequences in Indian cinema into singular focus because Hindi cinema of the new millennium is attempting to streamline its plots to adjust to a rapidly expanding global market and a gradually changing national audience exposed to an unprecedented range of global media. On the other hand, the industry is well aware of the commercial imperative of including the sequences and promotes their “uniqueness” as an important brand identity of Indian cinema. The tension between identifying with the tradition of Hindi film songs and critiquing them is particularly evident in the work of directors such as Vishal Bhardwaj, Abhishek Chaubey, and Anurag Kashyap who use this feature in both typical and unusual ways to self-reflexively establish continuities and mark their differences from preceding ages in Indian cinema.

Songs and dances in Hindi cinema are, as has often been noted by critics, not part of a particular genre like the Hollywood musical. They are present in every genre, including romances, action, melodrama, socials, or thrillers. They have been an intrinsic part of commercial Hindi cinema since the introduction of sound in the film *Alam Ara* (Light of the World, Irani) in 1931 and even before that when live bands accompanied silent films.³⁰ Hindi cinema traces its roots to urban, folk, and classical theater in India, all of which included songs and dances. Alison Arnold’s doctoral thesis, written in 1991, traces the urban theater roots of Hindi film songs which, she claims, from their inception were a hybrid form that included Indian classical, Indian folk, Western classical and jazz, and Latin American influences.

³⁰ Anna Morcom, *Hindi Film Songs and the Cinema* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 3.

The huge success of *Alam Ara's* songs and the even greater success of the songs of the following talkie, *Shirin Farhad* (Madan 1931), almost mandated the inclusion of songs in all subsequent Hindi films of the 1930s. *Indersabha* (Indra's Court, Madan 1932) with seventy-one songs (many of which were probably snatches of sung poetry) holds the record for the largest number of songs in a Hindi film. Since music in films was so popular, the top studios hired and nurtured autonomous music teams, which included music directors, singers, lyricists, and full orchestras, to compose music for films. Moreover, the system of playback singing introduced in the mid-1930s separated the production of music from the shooting. This introduced greater sophistication in the production of songs, encouraging a modular strategy of music composition that began in the initial stages of film production in tandem with the script and the selection of film stars.

The 1940s entrenched the music team within the film industry and ensured the inclusion of songs in Hindi films as playback singing (along with post-dubbing of sound) became the norm, which further freed the musical composition from the actors lip-synching them on the screen. The decline of the studios meant more freedom for the music directors and singers to establish separate identities. The form of the film song, which was roughly three and a half minutes in length and had a basic refrain-verse structure of two or three stanzas, became established as the norm, which remained almost unchanged until recent times. The formation of the newly independent India in 1947 also meant the Partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan, which saw some talented musicians and singing artists leave India for Pakistan. Singing styles, especially for the female singers, changed from the nasal to the high-pitched solo,

which is the signature style of Lata Mangeshkar, who dominated the film industry as the premier playback singer for the following fifty years.

The 1950s, which is considered the golden age of Indian music, saw the rise of many talented music directors like Naushad Ali, S. D. Burman, Shanker Jaikishan, and O. P. Nayyar. Despite being largely based on classical ragas, Hindi film music continued to experiment with Western music. Amongst the singers, the female playback scene was dominated by Lata Mangeshkar who sang for all the top female stars, followed by her sister, Asha Bhonsle, who was considered more versatile by virtue of being offered the “vamp” tracks along with the lead songs. Mohammad Rafi, Talat Mehmood, and Mukesh were the popular male lead singers of this decade and Rafi emerged as the clear forerunner in the 1960s. While film song aimed to use simple lyrics in Hindustani (a mix of Urdu and Hindi), the dominant lyricists of the time included talented poets such as Sahir Ludhianvi, Majrooh Sultanpuri, and Shailendra who often calibrated their poetic sensibility to produce resonant lyrics in the simpler and more “fixed” Hindi film song format. The 1960s were marked with open experimentations with Western jazz and pop along with the inclusion of classical and folk music in songs. The 1970s saw the rise of new music directors such as R.D. Burman and Laxmikant Pyarelal and the meteoric rise of the male lead singer Kishore Kumar. R.D. Burman achieved cult status amongst the youth of the time with his experimental music and his collaboration with Kishore Kumar. The Mangeshkar sisters, however, continued to dominate female playback singing well into the 1980s.

A major technical innovation in the music film industry in the 1980s came in the form of cassettes. Peter Manuel in his book *Cassette Culture*³¹ argues how this technical innovation democratized the music industry. Even though film music formed and continues to form the bulk of popular music in India, cassettes enabled the circulation of regional music, folk music, “non-filmi” bhajans,³² qawwalis,³³ and disco music. The new medium enabled newer voices of singers other than the Mangeshkars and Kishore Kumar to be heard. Bappi Lahiri was one of the most commercially successful music directors of the 1980s and his popularization of disco music in this decade has not been viewed sympathetically by most Hindi film song historians who often view the 1980s as epitomizing the lowest point in Hindi film music. Despite the accusations of plagiarism aimed at some music directors in the 1980s, experimentations with new music forms and technical innovations in recording and newer, cheaper media encouraged newer forms of music to circulate without challenging the primacy of Hindi film songs. Despite being devalued at various points in its history, the hybridity of Hindi music and its commercial impulse has remained its strength. Anna Morcom notes this hybrid impulse in Hindi film music as an important aspect of its modernity.³⁴

The 1990s refocused on melody and newer singers, stars, and music directors captured the limelight. This is also the watershed moment of the liberalization of the Indian economy and

³¹ Peter Manuel, *Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in North India* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993).

³² Songs with a religious or spiritual theme.

³³ A form of Sufi devotional music that aims to inspire its listeners to a state of religious ecstasy.

³⁴ Morcom, *Hindi Film Songs*, 4-5.

the swift changes it brought into Indian cinema and consequently into Hindi film music. Higher production quality and digital technology transformed what Gregory Booth terms “old Bollywood sound” into the post-1980s “new” Bollywood sound. He attributes the change to “a younger generation of technicians who had excellent educations and expectations, heightened by a global perspective,” as well as an audience whose expectations were transformed by “the surge in transnational influences.”³⁵ This moment was captured most dramatically by composer A. R. Rehman who burst onto the Hindi film music scene with a relatively small-budget dubbed film *Roja* (Ratnam, 1992). He dominated the decade and the following ones with his innovative mixing of classical Indian and Western music along with global popular music and his acclaimed digital sound-mixing effects. The international recognition of his Oscar-winning composition “Jai Ho” played an important role in Hindi film music’s emergence as a global player.

The new millennium has revived debates about the association of good cinema and realism. Hindi film songs and dances have now gained new respectability in the debate as markers of the distinctive identity of Bollywood cinema. *Hat-ke* films, as distinguished from mainstream New Bollywood films, have a particularly interesting position in this debate especially regarding the employment of songs in their films. As pointed out before, the *Hat-ke* directors consciously seek to bridge the gap between mainstream and experimental cinema. Satyajit Ray’s neorealist work in the 1950s had sought to establish a distinct difference between itself and commercial cinema. Though Ray seriously experimented with music in his own films, he considered the “five to six songs per film” formula a deterrent to making good cinema. The state-supported parallel cinema movement, despite encouraging excellent experimental work in

³⁵ Gregory Booth, *Behind the Curtain: Making Music in Mumbai’s Film Studios* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), 7.

cinema, largely failed to capture the public imagination. Though some of the films did include songs, the movement remained defined by its emphasis on social realism and its effort to disassociate itself from the typical song and dance routine of mainstream cinema.

What is striking about the *Hat-ke* directors, particularly in the case of Vishal Bhardwaj, Abhishek Chaubey, and Anurag Kashyap who led this early movement, is that some of their most commercially and critically successful films are supported by hugely successful and very elaborate song albums. Moreover, the commercial success of these songs is not merely a concession to the demands of the box-office. These songs are also central in defining their films, which are committed to experimentation and innovation while using the well-recognized tropes of Hindi cinema.

Bollywood, Globalization, and Modernity

Addressing the history of Hindi films and Hindi film songs does not, of course, entirely complete the definition of Bollywood. This section discusses the fraught term “Bollywood” in the context of globalization and how *Hat-ke* directors address modernity in their films. My approach to globalization is similar to my approach to “Bollywood”—it is best viewed as a specific manifestation of popular culture. Thus, while my critique is alert to the dangers of globalization, it also sees globalization as invariably providing complex spaces that can be opened up for self-critique and interrogation.

Globalization is a process propelled by technology that leads to an increasingly interconnected world. Such interconnections were undoubtedly present in earlier centuries, but globalization is peculiarly determined by the scale and speed of these interconnections. It is premised on the opening-up of national economies and markets creating the free flow of capitals,

goods, and services between countries. It involves political processes that include transnational institutions functioning beyond national boundaries thereby reconstituting previous power structures. Such power structures are also inevitably reoriented by the accompanying – coerced or voluntary – large-scale migration of people around the world and the resultant formulations of new communities and identities. Anthony Giddens, one of the early theorists of globalization, defines it as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.”³⁶ This unique ability of globalization to bring the global and the local together has unprecedented cultural repercussions.

As has been pointed out often enough by its proponents, globalization is a heavily contested term. Though most would agree that globalization concerns the above economic, political, cultural, and social phenomena and how they affect each other, there is a great deal of disagreement over its origins, its impact, and even its existence. While the globophilia arguments stress the inevitability of globalization and advocate an adjustment to its effects, the globophobia arguments focus on the threat of homogenization and the erasure of distinct cultural practices. A recognition of the market pressures of homogenization and the concern over neoliberal ideology is crucial to an analysis of globalization. However, it is equally necessary to emphasize the complexity of interactions when erstwhile local cultures enter the global stage. When the local and the global occupy the same space, the homogenization argument needs to account for the “flow” as well as the “counterflows.” Moreover, globalization does not reformulate just our

³⁶ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1990), 64.

spatial consciousness; it shrinks both space *and* time. The past and the present are brought together in ways that question the notion of linear time and the developmental model of progress and modernity.

William I. Robinson, in “Theories of Globalization,”³⁷ lists a set of important issues that globalization raises. One is its relationship with modernity, post-modernity, and the nation-state. The other is how globalization re-structures the relationship between social structures and territoriality and between the local and the global. My argument considers how the consciousness of globalization reconstitutes the relationship between the discourses of the nation-state and modernity. It also examines how these discourses are disseminated to and received by increasingly mobile communities that are in flux, spurred by physical migration as well as by new technologies.

It is in this context that Arjun Appadurai’s formulation of overlapping “scapes”³⁸ or spaces provides a useful model for contesting the unified imaginaries of the nation. He finds the center-periphery models inadequate, even those that might accommodate “multiple centers and peripheries.” Proposing a less defined model, one that might look different from different perspectives, he uses the term “scapes” to suggest the irregular ways in which the different categories interact in globalization. He considers the “new global cultural economy” a “complex, overlapping and disjunctive order,” comprising ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, financescaples, and ideoscaples. This framework supports my notion of global spaces as fluid and

³⁷ William I. Robinson, “Theories of Globalization,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Globalization*, ed. George Ritzer, 2nd. ed. (Malden, MA; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), 127-128.

³⁸ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1996), 32-33.

as incorporating both the elements of heterogeneity and homogeneity. Globalization is not necessarily uniform in its effects and often interacts with local processes and technology to create new forms such as the glocal. Roland Robertson has popularized the term “glocalization” as meaning “simultaneity – the co-presence of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies.”³⁹ The random points of contact between the global and the local create unique spaces for inverting power relations even if they are temporary and individually oriented. Within this context of globalization, I view Bollywood as a flow in global circulation and hold up for interrogation both its identity as Indian national cinema and the intersection points of the global and the local that it provides.

In this model of globalization, Bollywood, with its attendant problems of representing “Indian” cinema, can be defined as a “counterflow” to the “flow” of Hollywood. In a similar vein, Bill Ashcroft’s essay discussing Bollywood in the context of globalization and modernity posits Bollywood as “a powerful example of transformative cultural resistance” against the homogenizing influence of Hollywood. This position enables Bollywood to stand for a modernity that is not teleologically oriented and as resistant to a developmental model of progress. In the following quotation Ashcroft describes how Bollywood signifies the emergence of a different kind of modernity that understands modernity itself as plural:

This may be the most significant consequence of the Bollywood phenomenon: not only is it an example of cultural transformation but of the way in which modernity multiplies along diverse and culturally distinct lines. To think of the complex array of alternative modernities that now constitute “Modernity” is not to abandon the fact that modernity as an epoch, a questioning of the present, an orientation to the future, and at the same time an ethic valuing the present over the past, emerged in the West. But it does remind us that

³⁹ Roland Robertson, “Comments on the ‘Global Triad’ and ‘Glocalization,’” paper presented at the Conference “Globalization and Indigenous Culture,” at the Institute of Japanese Culture and Classics, Kokugakuin Univ., 1997, <http://www2.kokugakuin.ac.jp/ijcc/wp/global/15robertson.html>.

today modernity is plural, and it confirms the fact that the historical trajectory of Western modernity was not simply a sign of temporal progress (an assumption embodied in the idea of “the modern”) but a culturally situated phenomenon. Arguments for “alternative modernities” confirm the need for cultural theories of modernity – theories that foreground place as well as time – but also lead us inevitably to the issue of local agency. This is demonstrated radically by the Indian film industry – a form of modern entertainment that could not have arisen in any other place in the world.⁴⁰

Ashcroft here considers the basic tenets of “Modernity” to be “a questioning of the present and a reorientation towards the future.” However, he points out that its history is regarded as rooted centrally in Western culture and linked to the institutions of imperialism and capitalism, and that it is often viewed in terms of temporality (for example, the idea of the march towards progress). He argues that if modernity itself is considered plural, then the idea of “alternative modernities” opens up the possibility of viewing modernity as “operating rhizomatically,” in spatial and cultural terms. Such a reading of modernity exposes Western modernity’s “progressive” model as predicated on the “backwardness” of the local and the rural. This Modernity often ignores that the local has been the site of “the emergence of alternative modernities.” This critique of Modernity’s devaluation of the rural and the local at the expense of the urban and the industrial reverses the relationship, empowering the former sites as the generators of alternative modernities. It enables “other” sites to be the purveyors of “other” modernities.

From such a perspective, Bollywood can stand for a different model of modernity.⁴¹ Instead of being held accountable for its “imperfect” aspiration towards classic Hollywood

⁴⁰ Bill Ashcroft, “Bollywood, Postcolonial Transformation, and Modernity,” in *Travels of Bollywood Cinema: From Bombay to LA*, eds. Anjali Gera Roy and Chua Beng Huat (New Delhi, India: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012), 3.

⁴¹ A classic example of such a reading is Brian Larkin's “Indian Films and Nigerian Lovers: Media and the Creation of Parallel Modernities,” *Africa* 67, no.3 (1998): 406-440. The popularity of Indian films

realism, its “masala” (spicy) elements such as the song and dance sequences, its narrative mode riddled with interruptions (Gopalan),⁴² and its melodrama, can all be read as alternative sites of mobilization towards modernity. Such a model would view Bollywood as the “local” resistance to the homogenizing influence of “global” Hollywood.

There is, however, an alternative critique of “Bollywood” that is located in the term itself and which inverts the power relationship in the previous model. It makes Bollywood and its attendant language, Hindi an attempt to represent the nation, a homogenizing move that quells local or regional differences. Recent criticism of the “Bollywood” phenomenon evaluates it as not just a specific entertainment formula that started with the emergence of the term “Bollywood” in the 1970s but as a term that has acquired a somewhat ambiguous cultural capital as it circulates in global space in the new millennium as a national cinema. Ajay Gehlawat, in his book *Twenty-First Century Bollywood*,⁴³ covers the term in some detail. A summary of some of the definitions provides an insight into just how complicated the term has become: It is considered a loosely applied and slippery term that nonetheless has managed to define all of “Indian” cinema (Prasad).⁴⁴ Ravi Vasudevan considers it a term that is applied to previous Hindi

in the predominantly Muslim, conservative Hausa society in northern Nigeria, Larkin argues, is that Indian films offer an “alternative style of fashion and romance that Hausa youth could follow without the ideological baggage of ‘becoming western.’”

⁴² Lalita Gopalan, *Cinema of Interruptions: Action Genres in Contemporary Indian Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 2002).

⁴³ Ajay Gehlawat, *Twenty-First Century Bollywood* (London and NY: Routledge, 2015), 10-39.

⁴⁴ Madhava Prasad, “Surviving Bollywood” in *Global Bollywood*, eds. A. Kavoori and A. Punathambekar (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2008), 41-51.

cinema in no particular chronological order thus “retroactively” reshaping its history.⁴⁵ Ashish Rajadhyaksha’s essay⁴⁶ argues that the Mumbai film industry itself constitutes just a small part of the term “Bollywood.” In its current manifestation, Bollywood has expanded to become a vast, corporatized, culture industry that “include[s] a range of distribution and consumption activities.” For Madhava Prasad, the term does not symbolize Indian cinema’s derivativeness nor its “difference” or otherness but rather its commercial imperative: “Today we no longer merely make song-and-dance films; we make song-and-dance films because we know that that is what is distinctive about our cinema.”⁴⁷ Both Rajadhyaksha and Madhava Prasad interpret this Bollywoodization as a recent phenomenon that commodifies its “otherness” and is complicit with the neoliberal state’s attempt to redefine and promote “India” and “Indianness.” This is particularly revealed in films such as *DDLJ* and *K3G* that address the upwardly-mobile globalized Indian in the image of the NRI (non-resident Indian) and promote this figure as the “sole guarantor of the Indian identity.”⁴⁸

Thus, the term “Bollywood” might define the cinema of both pre- and post-liberalized India, while “Bollywoodize” might be taken to reference Indian cinema’s corporatization and its global circulation. As it gathers more visibility on the global stage, Bollywoodization inflects

⁴⁵ Ravi Vasudevan, “The Meanings of ‘Bollywood,’” in *Beyond the Boundaries of Bollywood: The Many Forms of Hindi Cinema* eds. R. Dwyer and J. Pinto (New Delhi: OUP, 2011), 3-29.

⁴⁶ Ashish Rajadhyaksha, “The Bollywoodization of the Indian Cinema: Cultural Nationalism in a Global Arena,” in *Global Bollywood*, eds. A Kavoori and A Punathambekar (New York: NYU Press, 2008), 17-40.

⁴⁷ Madhava Prasad, “From Cultural Backwardness to the age of imitation: An essay in Film History,” in *Routledge Handbook of Indian Cinemas*, eds. K. Moti Gokulsing and Wimal Dissanayake (London: Routledge, 2013), 14.

⁴⁸ Prasad, “Surviving Bollywood,” 44.

Hindi cinema's narrative and form, enabling this cinema to promote and exaggerate its own characteristics. In the closing observation of his influential essay, Rajadhyaksha notes that Bollywood evokes memories of past Indian cinema in a series of simulated cinema effects and promotes itself as representing all "Indian" cinema even as it reduces Indian cinema itself to a "nostalgia industry."⁴⁹

The term poses problems even when used exclusively to define films and not the entire industry. Priya Joshi and Sangita Gopal have introduced terms to distinguish pre- and post-liberalization Bollywood films, attempting to define post-liberalization films that focus on this "commercialized" self-reflexivity in Bollywood films (referencing previous films, songs, stars, and acting styles) as "Bollylite" and "K-Jo"⁵⁰ films respectively. In opposition to these films, Joshi considers "Bollywood" more of a "heuristic device," and describes it as a "popular cinema made in Bombay that has claimed a social purpose and enjoyed a certain kind of popularity that is maintained across time and audiences."⁵¹ For Joshi, "Bollylite" is a "recent fabrication that heavily pillages formal characteristics from Bollywood cinema while shearing much of that cinema's social substance and political edge."⁵² This "lightening," according to her, enables disparate films like *DDLJ*, *K3G*, and *Monsoon Wedding* to "travel" as global products in the new millennium. Thus "Bollywood" and "Bollylite" are distinguishable categories in her reading,

⁴⁹ Rajadhyaksha, "The Bollywoodization of the Indian Cinema," 39.

⁵⁰ K-Jo is short for Karan Johar who produced lavish family dramas such as *K3G* and *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Something Happens, 1998) in the early millennium.

⁵¹ Joshi, *Bollywood's India*, 95.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 93.

which though similar in form, are different as the latter avoids “confrontation with social problems” and “exuberant[ly] embrace[s] the culture of consumer capital.”⁵³

Joshi does recognize the problem of clearly distinguishing between them and admits to a seepage between the two terms. Moreover, in her epilogue to her book, she does not wholly dismiss commercial films from the present century as having lost their political edge. She concedes that “Bollywood” still endures in newer films like *Munnabhai M.B.B.S* (Hirani 2003), *Lage Raho Munnabhai* (Keep at it, Munnabhai, Hirani 2006) and *3 Idiots* (Hirani 2009). Her categories, however, do not account, except in passing, for a range of off-beat films made by directors such as Ram Gopal Varma and Mani Ratnam that were competing for attention in the 1990s and further experimentation continued into the next decade by directors such as Vishal Bhardwaj, Anurag Kashyap, Abhishek Chaubey, Vikramaditya Motwane, and Dibakar Banerjee.

Sangita Gopal’s definition of “Bollywood” differs from Joshi’s. She considers it a phenomenon of the 1970s when the impulse in Hindi cinema shifted from its “social” orientation to entertainment or “masala.” In its post-liberalization phase, this cinema becomes extreme. She terms it “New Bollywood” cinema that is conscious of its global position and consciously markets itself as such. “New Bollywood” for her encompasses both “K-Jo” (similar to Bollylite) films and *Hat-ke* (off-beat) films. Gopal views the impulse in all of “New Bollywood” as a shift in focus from the romantic to the “post-nuptial couple” and as the nucleus of a new global economy. She does differentiate *Hat-ke* as a category that is more diverse and experimental. However, her definition of *Hat-ke* cinema as “marked by its addiction to the new” as opposed to

⁵³ Ibid.

K-Jo films that “invent a new relation to the old,”⁵⁴ does not entirely take into consideration *Hat-ke* cinema’s involvement with and invocation of old Bollywood.

Both “Bollylite” and “*Hat-ke*” films are obviously the products of the post-liberalization policies of the Indian state after the 1990s and reflect the consequent reorientation of the Hindi film industry’s production patterns. Both, moreover, register the increasing importance of a rapidly expanding, urban, middle-class domestic audience, as well as the growing presence of a transnational audience reflecting Bollywood’s immersion in the global economy. However, it is the Bollylite films that have garnered a great deal of critical interest as epitomizing the dramatic impacts of globalization.

Hat-ke (different) films, on the other hand, are viewed as sporadic attempts at reaching out for something new or missing in Bollylite films. It is worthwhile to continue the effort of critics like Sangita Gopal and Rachel Dwyer (whose argument follows this paragraph), and view the films as a group rather than acknowledge them as individual attempts at something new. These films, some of which are labeled “indie” or independent films, have sometimes been compared to the parallel cinema movement of the 1970s.⁵⁵ This comparison is limited in its usefulness. Parallel cinema in the 1970s positioned itself as a high-brow cinema in opposition to popular Hindi cinema. The relationship between Bollylite cinema and *Hat-ke* cinema is more complicated than that involving a binary opposition of popular vs. “parallel” cinema.

Parallel cinema began as a movement in the 1950s in Bengal whose influential proponents were Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, and Ritwik Ghatak. Influenced by Italian neorealism

⁵⁴ Gopal, *Conjugations*, 90.

⁵⁵ Ashvin Immanuel Devasundaram, *India’s New Independent Cinema: Rise of the Hybrid* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

and the Japanese and French New Waves, it focused on contemporary socio-economic concerns that beset the nation. It defined itself in opposition to commercial cinema, particularly rejecting its “song-and-dance” sequences as unrealistic and formulaic. The parallel movement, which spread beyond Bengal to most other regions of India, was backed by the Indian State in the 1970s to promote “meaningful” cinema. This state-sponsored parallel cinema encouraged experimentation and undoubtedly supported several talented artists and directors who would otherwise have never been able to compete with the big commercial productions at the time. However, these films were often viewed as catering to an elite, educated audience, and since they were funded and promoted by the government, the commercial imperative of competing with popular cinema was absent. Unfortunately, they were often labeled as unglamorous and as too obsessed with the themes of poverty and the depressing depiction of social evils. This perception was compounded by parallel cinema’s efforts to distance itself from what it considered the vulgarity and frivolousness of popular cinema.

Hat-ke cinema, like parallel cinema, does cater to a middle-class audience but it is one that has shifted profoundly under the impact of globalization. Rachel Dwyer provides a useful analysis of the composition of this middle class in India as the main consumer of Bollywood films. She borrows Gopal’s term *Hat-ke* and defines it as “middle-brow cinema,”⁵⁶ linking it to the rise in multiplexes and the changing “taste” (using Bourdieu’s theory of social classes) of the middle-class audience in India. She divides the middle class into two categories, the old middle

⁵⁶ Rachel Dwyer, “Zara Hat-ke (‘somewhat different’): the new middle classes and the changing forms of Hindi cinema,” in *Being Middle Class in India: A Way of Life*, ed. Henrike Donner (New York: Routledge, 2011), 184-208.

class (“highly-educated professionals”) and the aspiring new middle class.⁵⁷ The latter is identified as having benefited the most from liberalization, as being more conservative, and as generally inclined to favor the right-wing Modi government that currently holds power in India. She suggests, interestingly, that an important element of the middle class is its rarely-analyzed youth component, which complicates the old and new categories. She argues that while the audience for the blockbuster Bollywood films (by which she means the Bollylite and K-Jo categories) is all of the middle class, the audience for *Hat-ke* cinema is a combination of the old middle class and the urban youth. Her article also claims that both these cinemas ignore an entire class, namely the rural poor. They form nearly 37.2 percent of the population of India and are, according to her, completely unrepresented in New Bollywood, which was not the case until the 1980s in Hindi cinema.

Dwyer’s insightful article about the middle-class imaginary of *Hat-ke* cinema is largely true of the “urban” focus of *Hat-ke* cinema, and the Bollywood blockbusters certainly seem to have forgotten this “class.” However, I argue that *Hat-ke* movies do make gestures towards this “excluded class” in terms of their emphasis on the “regional,” which does not include the entire group as Dwyer rightly points out. But the effort to bring in this “other” India, as I argue, is consistent in the films that are discussed here. This goes hand in hand with the other point Dwyer makes, that of the distance between the regional cinemas and mainstream Bollywood. While *Hat-ke* films have certainly not closed that gap, their films, in their emphasis on linguistic realism and their effort to use local talent, have made a much stronger effort to incorporate the regional than at any other time in Hindi film history. It is their stylization of the local in

⁵⁷ Dwyer, “Zara *Hat-ke*,” 185-187.

intermeshing it with the global and their intense self-consciousness about their position in Hindi cinema and their aesthetic practices, that I claim defines this cinema. *Hat-ke* cinema's self-reflexivity, as I pointed out earlier, has not received much attention.

In a 2013 essay, Madhava Prasad discusses New Bollywood Cinema and attempts to identify and define what constitutes its "experimental" thrust.⁵⁸ Ironically, he chooses this specific element of Bollywood cinema, namely the self-consciousness of Indian cinema about itself as "Bollywood," as the distinguishing feature between "Bollylite" films and *Hat-ke* films. He terms mostly Bollylite films as "Bollywood" cinema, identifying it as a "reflexive commodity." To this, he adds another category, the "remix," which he considers to be a similar commodification. However, he pits another category against these two categories, which he calls "non-Bollywood" cinema. This "non-Bollywood" cinema seems very close to what I have attempted to define as *Hat-ke* cinema.

Attributing a kind of creative fragmentation to this cinema, Prasad applauds its ability to incorporate "different film styles, from Hong Kong to Hollywood" and combine it with a focus on "local detail." He considers this mixture of foreign styles and the intense realism of local details as a different order of borrowing: "The new filmmakers no longer borrow or steal in the old sense. They seem rather to imitate. In general, it could be said that imitation is the new modality in which Indian filmmakers are relating to world cinema...They are...learning to make a 'foreign' film rather than making a typically Indian film with a borrowed plot." He goes on to underscore the historical significance of this new "imitation," arguing that we need to

⁵⁸ Prasad, "From Cultural Backwardness," 7-18.

“appreciate [them] differently.” These films, he suggests, are not striving to express their unique “Indian-ness,” or India’s exceptionalism, but acknowledging the necessity of “the integral place of the foreign in our psychic structure.”⁵⁹

Prasad’s introduction of the idea of the “foreign” and its importance in the globalization-modernization-Bollywood debate is particularly useful and introduces a new way of looking at “national” cinema. He critiques global homogenization, commodification, and cultural exceptionalism, while at the same time calling for a modernization that needs to go beyond the postcolonial bind, which according to him is still obsessed with the idea of the nation-state:

For a long time, we tried to assert our unique status in the assembly of nation-states; we tried to play the role of nation with dignity, but it was never a smooth affair. Popular cinema has always been less ashamed about the structural necessity of the Other to our sense of oneness. The ruling elite, on the other hand, which owes its existence to the colonial master and continues to serve it, is at pains to overstate India’s exceptionalism. The cinema, a modern cultural industry, has no constitutive need to do so.⁶⁰

With my background in translation theory, I find it particularly amenable to use the category of the “foreign” to interrogate the national and the global and use it as a tool to facilitate an alternative modernity. Prasad associates the recognition of the importance of the foreign as the distinguishing feature of *Hat-ke* cinema even though he decides to call it “non-Bollywood cinema.” All my chapters, including the one on song-and-dance sequences, explore how the “foreign” is encountered in *Hat-ke* cinema. However, Prasad’s wholesale dismissal of Bollywood’s reflexive commodification fails to recognize that this reflexive element has a strong presence in *Hat-ke* cinema too. *Hat-ke* cinema’s borrowing of the foreign is complemented by its

⁵⁹ Ibid., 15-16.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

self-conscious about its Bollywood identity, and this reflexivity is a productive one. It allows the cinema a certain continuity with earlier Indian cinema and provides spaces for the expression of nostalgia and desire even as it interrogates those spaces. When Prasad talks about the productive element of imitation, it is worthwhile, I think, to view *Hat-ke* cinema's very deliberate imitation of previous Hindi cinema as an important factor in the dynamics of its experimentations.

Chapter Organization

My first and second chapters deal with adaptation, focusing on the interrogation of both nation and modernity in *Hat-ke* films. Chapter 1 provides close readings of Vishal Bhardwaj's two Bollywood adaptations of Shakespearean tragedies, namely *Maqbool* (2003), and *Haider* (2014). Using contemporary theories of intertextuality in Adaptation Studies,⁶¹ my chapter discusses how these films negotiate the global space that allows for not just a one-on-one comparison between the Shakespearean text and its "Indian" adaptation but includes a range of other literary, cultural, popular texts and media.

As the *Hat-ke* directors establish a place for themselves in global circulations and address expanded audiences both within and outside the nation, intertextuality enables them to incorporate the local and the global on an equal footing. Thus, Bhardwaj's Shakespearean tragedies *Maqbool* and *Haider* reference the Shakespearean *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* in tandem with Japanese and English film adaptations such as *Throne of Blood* (Kurosawa 1957) and Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000). They have film noir settings and characters, invoke gangster films,

⁶¹ Thomas Leitch, *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to The Passion of Christ* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 2007), and Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

and use Bollywood songs, Faiz Ahmad Faiz's poems and autobiographical novels, and they might incorporate short stories from local authors whose name would be barely familiar to an Indian audience, let alone a global audience.

Filtered through multiple texts, *Maqbool*, follows the rise and precipitous descent of an ambitious character, Maqbool, dogged by questions of legitimacy. As the action plays out in the city of Mumbai, it ironically reflects upon the culture of an erstwhile, nostalgically, and perhaps incorrectly remembered more cosmopolitan Bombay, which tangentially comments on a nation that is progressively getting more insular. *Haider*, similarly filtered through several texts, is set in the state of Kashmir in which the critique of the nation and issues of citizenship and legitimacy become palpably urgent. Dealing with contested notions of nationhood and freedom in which with the specter of terrorism touches the lives of all its Muslim characters, the Shakespearean themes of "being" and "revenge" are reframed in the context of the imperiled state of Kashmir.

Just like Bollylite films, these films also address the links between nation and the family and self-consciously reference Bollywood. However, they do it with a much more critical eye, and in the process provide a darker, more cautious assessment of their present global moment than perhaps the Bollylite films that reflect the new, more attractively packaged face of the nation. Their assimilation of global cinematic and popular forms extends to the inclusion of local art forms and popular literature that provide these films a rich, allusive vocabulary and form that balance entertainment with self-reflection and an ability to provide a critique of their artistic practice and moment.

Chapter 2 focuses on the adaptation of global and local genres and how they construct the gender identities of the modern male and female who represent the new nation. *Dev. D* (Kashyap 2009) adapts a century old, spectacularly successful and repeatedly adapted text *Devdas*, whose tragic male protagonist is an iconic figure in Indian culture. Kashyap converts the enduring tragedy of Devdas and his inability to accept the mark of modernization into a contemporary non-heroic tale of the destruction wreaked by a young global Indian male set adrift in an alienating city who pulls himself back from the brink of self-destruction to re-start his life.

Ishqiya (Regarding Love, Chaubey 2010), *Dedh Ishqiya* (1 ½ times love, Chaubey 2014) have female protagonists who are neither urban nor modern in the obvious sense. The construction of identity, specifically gender identity, in earlier Hindi cinema was frequently framed through the familiar epic characters of Seeta, Radha or Meera, and centered on issues of fidelity and sacrifice. Films like *Ishqiya* and *Dedh Ishqiya* use a medley of genres such as noir, action, buddy movie, road movie, and heist movie, which have rarely been used in Hindi films, and combine them in unusual ways with local genres such as the Muslim social, story within a story, the short story with a moral, and other cultural and literary forms such as *latifa* (joke) and *thumri* (semi-classical dance). *Ishqiya*, for example, plays with the different generic expectations of the role of the grieving widow and the “femme fatale” while upsetting rural-urban binaries. The narrative twists in both the films depend on a misreading of both gender and genre, thus playing with intertextuality at the level of generic recognition and unexpected hybridizations. This chapter also considers whether the generic pastiche employed in the films provides a viable model for a critique of modernity’s formulations of gender and identity and national prototypes of the liberated female.

Chapter 3 examines song-and-dance sequences, which are considered a characteristic feature of the Bollywood style. Sangita Gopal suggests that one way of distinguishing experimental films from Bollylite films is the “far more self-conscious use” of this feature in the former. While such a reading can be applied to Anurag Kashyap’s films such as *Dev D* (2009) and *The Gangs of Wasseypur I and II* (2012) in which he takes experimentation with the film songs to an extreme, it is not true of the films of the other two directors. Music and songs are particularly important in the films of Vishal Bhardwaj, who started his career as a music director, and there is a certain continuity as well as an intensified use of song and dance sequences in his films, and particularly so in the case of *Omkara* which features as many as eight songs. Kashyap’s experimentations too, as I argue, emphasize rather than diminish the importance of songs and dances in Hindi cinema.

This chapter also asks larger questions about how these Bollywood song-and-dance sequences circulate in the global space. Their dense intertextuality involves the “Indian” aspects of culture but also foregrounds regional elements, highlighting other binaries such as the rural-urban and regional divisions which contest their pan-Indian identity. Lalita Gopalan’s *Cinema of Interruptions* (2002) considers the song sequences as “interrupting” the narrative. This observation can be extended in order to position the film and the songs in the framework of media assemblage that foregrounds and explores the relationships between the parts and the whole. These “detachable” sequences are viewed and consumed on their own, becoming central moments in the film, disrupting the continuity of narratives and the stability of imagined identities.

Chapter 4 explores translation moments in these films that include slippages, vignettes about accents, multilingual moments, hybrid languages, and deliberately mistranslated words. Most translation theories of media and cinema, in particular, remain restricted to discussions about dubbing and subtitling. Michael Cronin in *Translation Goes to the Movies*⁶² observes that rarely do discussions of translation enter the narrative space, and he makes an argument for looking for translation themes and figures in the narratives themselves. Extending this idea into looking at translation moments in films will enable a discussion of the notions of linguistic and national identity, and the complicated and transient evocations of “otherness” such scenes bring to the film. *Hat-ke* films, in particular, highlight translation spaces where the introduction of a “foreign” word or an accent creates specific dissonances in the film. The arbitrary introduction of the word “chutzpah” in *Haidar*, and the many attempts, within its diegetic space, at defining its meaning, along with the deliberate mistranslations or redefinitions of the word, is one such example. What is particularly interesting about this group of films is their regional localization and their attention to detail about linguistic variations which invariably question the hegemony of the pan-Indian Urdu-Hindi adopted seamlessly by most Hindi cinema.

⁶² Michael Cronin, *Translation Goes to the Movies* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2009).

CHAPTER 1

INTERROGATING THE NATION: SHAKESPEAREAN ADAPTATIONS AND BOLLYWOOD IN VISHAL BHARDWAJ'S *MAQBOOL* (2003) AND *HAIDER* (2014)

The space of adaptation inevitably involves an encounter between the global and local in terms of negotiation, confrontation, appropriation, or collaboration. With Shakespearean adaptations, the adaptation space acquires higher visibility as it becomes invested with issues of literary prestige, colonial heritage, national definitions, and more recently, local redefinitions. This visibility shines a light on the global, sometimes revealing its entrenched hierarchies. However, it also enables the local to redefine its position as well as confront its own hierarchies. The encounter inevitably changes both the global and the local.

Mark Thornton Burnett, in his book *Shakespeare and World Cinema*, critiques the “limiting imaginary”⁶³ that defines Shakespeare films as exclusively English language films. He argues for a recognition of alternate sites as necessary for a revitalization of Shakespearean cinema as he notes the waning of the enthusiasm generated during the Kenneth Branagh dominated period of Anglophone Shakespearean cinema: “Certainly, as we enter an era in which the Bard is cementing his place as a global marker, a more ambitious awareness of Shakespeare’s international screen presence is called for.”⁶⁴ Burnett’s book is a comprehensive step in this direction. The hegemony of this Anglophone global tradition of cinematic Shakespeare, however, one must remember, has also had to accommodate Akira Kurosawa’s and Grigory

⁶³ Mark Thornton Burnett, *Shakespeare and World Cinema* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012), 2.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Kozintsev's Shakespearean adaptations for a while now. The local also gets renegotiated in the space of adaptation. Thus, one might categorize individual films in regional, geographic terms such as "Asian" adaptations of Shakespeare or "Indian" adaptations of Shakespeare.

Alternatively, as I argue, they can be viewed as critiques of the category the nation and of entrenched ideas about gender and religious identification, and their relationship with the nation.

Adaptations force a definition of nebulous notions of the global and the local and bring about changes in both categories. In Vishal Bhardwaj's films, the Shakespearean space is intermeshed with a range of intertextual elements. Using intertextuality as a methodological tool invariably shifts the analysis from a product-oriented approach of a source-versus-adapted-text model to a study of adaptation as a process involving multiple texts and contexts. While this chapter is concerned with examining how a range of intertextual elements including Bollywood and Shakespeare redefine each other in *Maqbool* (2003) and *Haider* (2014), it also points out how metatextual references to "Bollywood" brings this interplay into focus, particularly in these two films.

When *Maqbool* was released in 2003, Vishal Bhardwaj, a relatively unknown one-film director, managed to bring an "Indian" screen adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* into the global limelight. This Indian screen version of Shakespeare defined the local in many ways. It is a "Bollywood" film that includes stars, songs, dances, and a gangster-thriller plot. It is also local in its realistic evocation of the city of Mumbai, and its detailing of the Muslim underworld of the city. It places itself within a global tradition of Shakespearean cinema in its open acknowledgment of Shakespeare and Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957) as its pre-texts. It extends that space by introducing alien elements such as distinct visual and thematic traces of

noir, and a cinematic nod to Marlon Brando's portrayal of Vito Corleone in *Godfather* (Coppola 1972).

The adaptations also dramatically changed the landscape of Shakespearean adaptations in India. Despite a long and rich theatrical tradition of Shakespearean plays in India, direct and acknowledged Shakespearean adaptations have been rare in Indian cinema. There are strong traces of unacknowledged borrowings of Shakespearean themes in many Indian films. These are often directly linked to the liberal borrowing patterns of the Parsi Theatre which was a prevalent form of entertainment from the 1870s to the 1940s in India. The relatively fewer, directly acknowledged adaptations such as *Romeo and Juliet* (Hussain 1948) and *Hamlet* (Sahu 1954) were produced in India during the 1940s and 1950s, and they fared rather poorly at the box office.⁶⁵ The only successful acknowledged adaptation of Shakespeare in the previous century in Indian cinema had been *Angoor* (Grapes, Gulzar), which was released in 1984. It is an adaptation of *The Comedy of Errors* that successfully transported the Shakespearean plot and characters to a contemporary middle-class Indian milieu. Hindi film directors after that had left ambitious Shakespearean adaptations largely alone.

There have been some Indian films such as *Shakespearewallah* (Shakespeare-man, Ivory 1965) and, more recently, *The Last Lear* (Ghosh 2007) and *Life Goes On* (Datta 2009), which have used Shakespearean texts very consciously as inter-texts. However, these films made in English or "Indian-English" are more inclined to be associated with the "parallel cinema" of

⁶⁵ Rajiva Verma, "Shakespeare in Hindi Cinema," in *India's Shakespeare: Translation, Interpretation, and Performance*, eds. Poonam Trivedi and David Bartholomeusz (Newark: Univ. of Delaware, 2005), 271.

India, and they target a very small elite audience. Apart from brief viewings at film festivals, they did not get much traction in the Indian domestic market or the global market.

Maqbool, which was followed by *Omkara* in 2006 and *Haider* in 2014, wrested Shakespeare from its high-icon shelf and placed him squarely in the middle of the Bollywood world of entertainment, melodrama, and song-and-dance sequences. Though these films were not blockbuster hits backed by megastars, they have been modest successes. This itself is a feat in the Hindi film industry that invariably produces many more flops than hits every year. It is not just their financial success that is noteworthy, *Hat-ke* films are also significant for their influence on subsequent more commercial film adaptations of Shakespeare. Of particular note are three versions of *Romeo and Juliet*, all of which were made within a year of each other: *Ishaqzaade* (Lovers, Faizal 2012), *Issaq* (Love, Tiwary 2013), and *Goliyon Ki Raasleela, Ram-Leela* (Bullet-Ridden Drama of Ram-Leela, Bhansali 2013).

Categorizing *Maqbool* as an Indian adaptation of Shakespeare ensures it a global circulation, and identifying it as neo-noir expands that global register even as the film maintains its authentic, locally-flavored Mumbai gangster-film emergent form. James Naremore, borrowing Arjun Appadurai's term, calls the neo-noir a "mediascape" that processes classic Hollywood noir as well as the global interactions with the concept of noir. Naremore envisions it as a space where notions, fashions, and images of noir circulate and inter-mix a-historically through various channels of modern information technology such as "newspapers, magazines, television stations, film production studios, computers and so on."⁶⁶ Hence, he calls for

⁶⁶ James Naremore, *More than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts* (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 2008), 255.

recognizing noir as a “much more flexible, pervasive, and durable mood, style, or narrative tendency than is commonly supposed and [that] embraces different media and different national cultures throughout the twentieth century.”⁶⁷

The excitement about playing with global art forms is very evident in the works of *Hat-ke* directors. Thus, Vishal Bhardwaj, in an interview just after the release of his film *Saat Khoon Maaf* (Excused for Seven Murders, 2011) about a female serial killer, can reference both Quentin Tarantino and Takashi Kitano as filmmakers who inspired him. He envisions his kind of films as targeting an audience that is gradually coming to an awareness of international cinema:

Earlier, the conditions of theatres were terrible, people who had money didn't go to theatres, now with multiplexes, the crowds are coming in. At the same time, with cable and satellite television, people have been exposed to all kinds of world cinema; their sensitivities have changed, and there is much greater scope for experimentation.⁶⁸

He nods at audiences who can afford multiplex tickets and at the same time signals his recognition of the other channels through which his films circulate. These, he suggests, make his films accessible to a less affluent audience, and make this audience more open to experimentation. He seems more excited about these promising developments in his audiences, even though his discussion focuses on the commercial viability of his films.

Noir is often used as an experimental category amongst this group of *Hat-ke* filmmakers. Lalitha Gopalan, in her essay “Bombay Noir,” references *Parinda* (Bird, Vinod Chopra 1989) and *Satya* (Truth, Varma 1998) as path-breaking films in this category. She identifies the Indian

⁶⁷ Ibid., 261.

⁶⁸ Vishal Bhardwaj, “The Vishal Bhardwaj Interview,” Interview by Arghya, *Critical Twenties, Media and Popular Culture*, January 11, 2013, <http://www.criticaltwenties.in/mediapopularculture/the-vishal-bhardwaj-interview>.

neo-noir as being a specific kind of crime film, namely the “gangster films” which, according to her, “rely on the topos of the modern city” and use a certain visual style reminiscent of the noir.⁶⁹ She also credits its emergence to Ram Gopal Varma and his brand of gritty, commercially-viable films that his production company, named “Factory,” churned out with well-paced regularity in the 1990s and later. He provided both inspiration and material support for the new group of emerging directors who were often part of his productions. Gopalan’s essay credits this group of directors, which includes Ram Gopal Verma, Vidhu Vinod Chopra, Sudhir Mishra, Anurag Kashyap, Vishal Bharadwaj, Shivam Nayar, and Sriram Raghavan, for attempting to develop a kind of counter-cinema to the bigger, more glitzy Bollywood films that seem to dominate the global space of international cinema as the only representative of Indian cinema:

In their dystopian vision of city life, these films were a stunning retort to the love stories and melodramas that characterized Bollywood, a term that was gaining traction internationally. Varma’s response to the heady period of globalization and liberalization of the 1990s was to depict intrigue and betrayals among Bombay gangs whose structures of operations on a global stage were no different from the legitimate corporations that were exploiting the loopholes of the changing tax structure; white-collar crime was not that different from the organized structure of the underworld.⁷⁰

These “gangster films” in their sustained critique of modern life, often focus on the modern city and themes of urban crime, decay, and claustrophobia. These themes become markers of a critical response to the “ground reality” of post-liberalized India even as they seem remarkably similar to the noir concerns of the Hollywood of almost eight decades ago. The films express the anxiety of large parts of the domestic audience who are increasingly getting

⁶⁹ Lalita Gopalan, “Bombay Noir,” in *A Companion to Film Noir*, eds. Andrew Spicer and Helen Hanson (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), 497.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 500.

marginalized by the new socio-economic changes taking place in India, and who find very little representation in the new global, artistic forms that reflect this change. Thus, while there is a self-consciousness in this new group of directors about using certain “global” noir techniques and themes, these are mediated through a complex interplay of responses to socio-economic conditions that give them local immediacy.

Maqbool follows the Shakespearean text closely, cleverly adapting it to the intricacies of the Mumbai underworld but effecting some spectacular changes, such as making Nimmi (Lady Macbeth) the mistress of Abbaji (Duncan), bestowing a premature child on the Macbeth couple, and making the supernatural plebian by changing the three witches into two thoroughly corrupt local Hindu policemen, Pandit and Purohit. It also makes a few less spectacular but very consequential changes, such as keeping Abbaji alive through more than half the film and intricately working out the notion of familial relationships that are reflected in the names and nicknames of characters. The changed role of Lady Macbeth, the setting of the Shakespearean plot in the world of gangsters and criminals, and the importance given to the city, Mumbai, give the film an insistent local register in terms of realism and genre.

Maqbool is the story of Maqbool (Macbeth), the ambitious protégé of Abbaji, who is an aging Muslim Don. Maqbool is secretly having an affair with Abbaji’s mistress, Nimmi. Threatened by the approaching marriage of Abbaji’s daughter to Guddu (Fleance), who is the son of Abbaji’s right-hand man Kaka (Banquo), and instigated by Nimmi, Maqbool murders Abbaji. The ensuing drama of violence and guilt adheres closely to the Shakespearean text, highlighting the murder of Kaka, the hallucinations that beset Maqbool, the blood stains that haunt Nimmi, the final closing in of the forces that oppose Maqbool in the guise of rival gangs,

and the murder of Maqbool's loyalists. Birnam Wood's move to Dunsinane is transposed to the motif of the surrounding ocean that "enters" Maqbool's house as Indian Customs officials raid his house on the heels of a botched attempt at smuggling forbidden goods. A hounded Maqbool, who tries to escape to Dubai after Nimmi's death, is shot by Boti (Macduff) as he walks out of the hospital after catching a glimpse of his premature son.

Maqbool's Mumbai: Noir City and its Denizens

If Shakespeare and noir provide the global dimensions of this drama, the local space of the plot is crucial to the film, informing one's understanding of its characters and their actions. The tragedy is transposed to the city of Mumbai that functions almost as an entity as well as a physical space in the film. It is visually evoked in the opening shot of the film. The film opens on the astrological chart of Mumbai drawn by a disembodied finger on the misted window pane of a van (see Fig. 1.1). In the meantime, a voice seems to be chattily narrating a murder disguised as an "encounter." The term is readily recognizable in India, because of its repeated use in police files as an easy cover for police brutality and murder, enabling the department to evade accountability.

The scene is shot entirely in shadows and Hemant Chaturvedi, the photographer of the film, uses a dark blue tint to enhance the mystery and underscore the terror that slowly develops in the dark cramped interiors of the van. As the conversation swings between eerie prophesy and cruel humor, the witches are introduced as two corrupt cops on Abbaji's/Duncan's payroll, playing a cat and mouse game with a member from a rival gang. They force a confession from him and callously kill him, splattering his blood on the window pane (see Fig. 1.2). One of the cops (Pandit) prophesizes that Maqbool is the "future of Mumbai" and "Miya Maqbool will rule

the city,” as the first shot of *Maqbool*, played by Irfan Khan, is superimposed on the astrological chart of Mumbai, linking the two visually. The image of the face crossed by the lines of the map is strongly reminiscent of the noir image of faces barred by shadows suggesting entrapment (see Fig. 1.3).

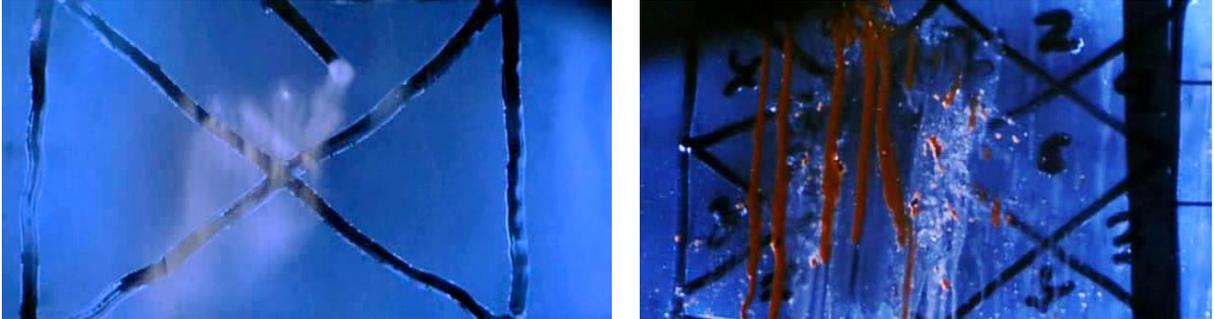


Figure 1.1. and 1.2. The opening shot and the blood-splattered astrological chart of Mumbai. Source: *Maqbool*. Director. Vishal Bhardwaj. Eagle. 2003.



Figure 1.3. *Maqbool*'s face superimposed on the chart
Source: *Maqbool*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj. Eagle, 2003.

This city is not envisioned as the shining city of the new global India. In tune with its gangster lineage, going back to films like *Parinda* (Bird, V.V. Chopra 1989), *Satya* (Truth, Varma 1998), and *Company* (Varma 2002), the film is about the Mumbai underworld and its

nexus with the politicians who exploit it to keep themselves in power. Even though Maqbool is hailed as the heir apparent of this Mumbai, it is a contested space. Various gangs attempt to capture it in bloody internecine gang wars, and different political factions try to assert their power over it, each viewing it differently according to his own stake in the game.

Abbaji, the Muslim don, controls Mumbai with an iron hand and a serene old-fashioned courtesy. He has myriad alliances with the local police and the big political power brokers of the city. He is also part of an older order. At one point in the movie, where parallels between him and Vito Corleone seem particularly strong, Abbaji rejects a lucrative deal closely associated with terrorism. His attachment to Mumbai seems to be of a different order: “Mumbai hamari mehbooba hai miyan. Ise chod kar ham Karachi ya Dubai mein nahin bas sakte.” (Mumbai is my lover, sir. I will not be able to leave her and settle in Karachi or Dubai.) Asserted in poetic Urdu, Abbaji invokes a nostalgic attachment for an older Bombay, which recalls a more liberal and cosmopolitan Bombay before it was renamed in 1995 in the wake of the rise of the right-wing Hindu Shiv Sena Party. This does not, however, undercut the irony of Abbaji’s illegitimate grip over the city.

We are reminded intermittently that on the edges of the power dynamics of Abbaji’s illegitimate underworld, the ruling alliance (propped up by the support of the minorities) holds on tenuously to legitimate power in the state. Neither is much different from the other, and those poised to take on power are no better. The political opposition, which is seeking to usurp the chief minister Bhonsle (a Hindu who has Abbaji’s backing and hence the backing of the minority Muslim community), is led by the tactless Palekar, who has no idea about the cultural observances of the Muslim community that he is trying to court through Abbaji. At one point,

one of the party members on Abbaji's payroll refers to Mumbai as "Jai Maharashtra" (long live Maharashtra) to shore up their solidarity that is being threatened by Palekar. Ironically, this is a verbal reminder of the actual Shiv Sena's political sloganeering, a rallying cry that enabled its rise to power on the exclusionary politics of the purity of the Maratha people, and that sought to rid the state of all other communities and migrants.

Mumbai, however, is also associated with the two cops, Pandit and Purohit, who are the witches in *Maqbool*. With names blatantly associated with high caste Hindu Brahmins, they start the sequence of events in the film with their casual, playful violence. It is Pandit who draws the chart of Mumbai, and it is Purohit who splatters it with blood, layering the claustrophobic ambiance with dread. The parts are played by veteran actors Ompuri (Pandit) and Naseeruddin Shah (Purohit), whose presence alerts the audience to the importance of their role. While they are marginal to the action of the play, the two cops are a strong visual presence in most shots of the city (see Fig. 1.4). They function with frightening ease at its borders as well as within its confined interiors. They never interfere directly with the main action or the players but manage to control the action through minor interferences that go unnoticed by the main players. They refer to their actions jokingly, in their private conversation, as "shakti ka santulan" (the equilibrium of power).



Figure 1.4. The Witches loom large in the city – against old buildings and crowded bazaars.
Source: *Maqbool*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj. Eagle, 2003.

The supernatural in *Macbeth* is effectively brought down to the banal criminality of the two lowdown cops, their superstitions, and their peculiar version of gallows humor. Bharadwaj often singles out Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957) as being his inspiration for *Maqbool*. The *Throne of Blood* famously changed Macbeth's three witches to a single frail old woman spinning the wheel of time. The forest and the castle in Kurosawa's adaptation are sites that are viewed in oppositional terms both visually and thematically. If the castle with its ordered symmetry suggests human endeavor or ambition, the forest, which is the domain of the supernatural or natural forces, is the circuitous, maze-like exterior that defeats human endeavor. The spirit who sits spinning in the forest in the fake castle of twigs is a figure on the outside, just as in Orson Welles's *Macbeth* (1948) the witches circle the castle from the outside. In both versions, the

supernatural mocks the world of human ambition from the outside. However, *Maqbool's* supernatural is situated inside the heart of the city, suggesting a corruption at its very core. The city dominates Bharadwaj's *Maqbool*. Kurosawa's forest in *Maqbool* has dwindled to thorny shrubs and a dried-out landscape on the outskirts unable to provide that contrast; and Bhardwaj brings the witches into the heart of the city as the two cops take over the city without anybody noticing the move.

The juxtaposition of the inside and outside spaces in *Macbeth* films plays slightly differently in the urban landscapes of noir films. Edward Dimendberg, in his book *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (2004), foregrounds a centripetal/centrifugal binary in the visual representation of the tight centers of noir cities and the widening action that plays out in the freeways and the suburbs that surround it:

Nostalgia and longing for older urban forms combined with a fear of new alienating urban realities pervade film noir. The loss of public space, the homogenization of everyday life, the intensification of surveillance, and the eradication of older neighborhoods by urban renewal and redevelopment projects are seldom absent from these films. Thus, it is hardly surprising that the movement of protagonists from urban center to periphery is a pervasive spatial trope.⁷¹

He locates this tension in the protagonists of film noir who are “cursed by their inability to dwell comfortably anywhere,” arguing that noir recorded and interpreted the shift from tight city centers, functioning as the repository of meaning to the chaos and lack of cohesion and community represented by the freeways and the suburbs surrounding the interiors. *Maqbool* dramatizes the core/periphery binary through the character and actions of both Abbaji and Maqbool, revealing both to be rotten. Abbaji, positioned within the city's tight center, seems

⁷¹ Edward Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2004), 7.

comfortable in its environs while his exquisite and old-fashioned Urdu evoke a nostalgic past. Maqbool, on the other hand, is set up as a transitional figure shuttling between the center and the periphery at a transitional moment in the city. He seems to be constantly on the move, driving incessantly between the city and its borders, unable to settle anywhere.

The film foregrounds the action of moving between the city and its outskirts with almost dizzying repetitiveness, highlighted by scenes in which actors are often stopped at the borders or are assisted across borders by the two cops. After killing Abbaji's main rival, Maqbool and Kaka go to Maqbool's farmhouse. On Nimmi's insistence, Abbaji's gang goes to the *dargah* (place of worship) of the Sufi saint situated on the outskirts of the city. As they return, Pandit and Purohit warn them against entering the city as there is a warrant against Abbaji's name. Abbaji's daughter's engagement takes place in Maqbool's farmhouse, which is on the outskirts of the city. This is the site for the illicit romance of Maqbool and Nimmi and for the murder of Abbaji. The shuttling between the city and its borders increases after Abbaji's death, as Maqbool moves out to pacify Kaka (Banquo), and Kaka, in his turn, drives into the city, only to be killed on its borders. Maqbool attempts to move his business out into the surrounding ocean in a last act of desperation but is not successful. In the end, he drives a sick Nimmi back to the farmhouse where they had murdered Abbaji and upon her death, he drives back to the hospital to catch a glimpse of his son before escaping to Dubai, which he never accomplishes, as he is shot in the back by Boti.

The film also functions as an actual record of an older city as it captures the older, poorer sections of Mumbai, which are gradually being modernized and absorbed into the new Mumbai, leaving many of its poorer inhabitants dispossessed. In much the same way as the classic noirs

documented many of the cities in which their plots unfolded, the film records names and places that are gradually passing away, like the old-fashioned world presided over by Abbaji in the film. Many of the visuals of the film are of the older parts of Mumbai – they are not the high-rise buildings and malls that represent the modern face of Mumbai. The camera records the details of the crowded, rundown areas of the city with dirty, cracked walls and shabby facades that sometimes hide old-fashioned buildings with huge verandahs in congested areas, much like Abbaji’s house. The exterior of Abbaji’s old style house strikingly contrasts with the lavish spaces inside it when it is glimpsed in an aerial shot as he is arrested by the new police commissioner. It is situated in a rundown neighborhood with dilapidated roofs and untidy telephone lines crowding the tops of the buildings. Another shot frames him against a long crack on the wall of his house (see Figs 1.5 and 1.6).



Figure 1.5. Abbaji’s House: Aerial view
Source: *Maqbool*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj. Eagle, 2003.



Figure 1.6. Abbaji’s House: Cracks on walls
Source: *Maqbool*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj. Eagle, 2003.

The dominant images of the city are of crowded, dilapidated buildings and narrow, choked streets with people jostling against each other in a flurry of movement that serve to enhance *Maqbool*’s alienation. The two cops, on the other hand, are a dominating presence in many shots of the crowded city. In between the major actions they take over the center – controlling, observing, and interfering in minor moves that nevertheless affect all the major

characters. They are the unrecognized “movers” in the city, directing people in the narrow streets of Mumbai, eating in the crowded marketplaces, plotting against the walls of seedy apartment buildings. And inciting and colluding with the different factions, thus maintaining, in their words, the “equilibrium of power” (see Fig.1.4).

The only time the film references the modern Mumbai skyline is at the moment of Maqbool’s death in a point of view shot of vast empty spaces that frame a modern skyscraper (see Fig. 1.7). In the last scene, the camera tracks Maqbool leaving the glittering, efficient interior of the posh new hospital where his son is born against the background of an “Om” sign (a Hindu sign of auspicious beginnings) imprinted on the Hospital wall (see Fig. 1.8). His son has been adopted graciously by Guddu and Munira, and this new Mumbai of the high-rises and glittering modern interiors has no place for him. The opening and ending of the film trap Maqbool against the backdrop of Hindu symbols. He never gains legitimacy in Mumbai despite being crowned its heir through Purohit’s astrological chart in the opening sequence of the film. His alienation and death at the end are also played out against the subtle Hindu visual coding of the “Om” sign.



Figure 1.7. Last scene: Maqbool’s death and a rare view of high-rises.
Source: *Maqbool*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj. Eagle, 2003.



Figure 1.8. Last Scene: Posh interiors and the “Om” sign.
Source: *Maqbool*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj. Eagle, 2003.

The implicit dualism of the city in *Maqbool*, with its corrupt core wrapped in nostalgia, is reiterated in the character of Abbaji, whose name means the benign patriarchal head of a family. The older Bombay, in which Abbaji reigns with clear rules for his “family,” does have a semblance of strong relationships and inter-cultural loyalties. Maqbool, who is an orphan has been brought up like a son in Abbaji’s household. Kaka, whose dress code and “tilak”⁷² identify him as a Hindu, is one of Abbaji’s right-hand men, and he and Maqbool consider themselves brothers. The criminal underworld, for all its brutality, functions on an established code of conduct both at the personal and professional level. Thus, Abbaji decides to forgive Boti, who killed his brother, against the advice of his gang members. He also refuses to get involved in terrorism, asserting that those whose sole motive is to spread destruction are dangerous. It is a code that is declared in the opening scene of the film by Pandit:

Pandit: Do you remember, or have you forgotten the first tenet of [the] business?

Saadiq: One never targets members of the family, Sir.

However, the preservation of this “family” depends on the erasure of another family, that of Mughal, his rival. As Pandit declares an instant later: “By morning your family will be finished. The End.” “Family,” as in *Godfather*, is an important word in *Maqbool* and is likewise held up for interrogation. The family is also an essential marker of Bollylite’s Indian identity, which upholds and celebrates ideal images of large joint families whose strong bonds of loyalty might be tested but are finally vindicated. In *Maqbool*, the family is set up as an alternate moral frame for the underworld that is consistently punctured. There is a persistent gap between its surface usage and its intended meaning every time it is used.

⁷² Mark on the forehead

The dissonance of the usage of “family” in the context of Abbaji’s constructed family is often highlighted. For example, it is used by Nimmi with regard to Guddu when Maqbool tries to expose the affair between Sameera and Guddu with unexpected consequences. Abbaji, instead of rejecting the inter-religious union as Maqbool had anticipated, accepts Guddu as his potential son-in-law. Nimmi in an apparent gesture of acceptance, which also serves as a taunt to Maqbool, says of Guddu, “He is the successor of our family...Isn’t he?” Immediately following this scene is an unusual scene of filial bonding between Guddu and his father, Kaka. Guddu, who has been bruised badly by his own father in an effort to deflect Abbaji’s anger, is being fed by his father as he listens wryly to his barrage of abuses. When Guddu reveals his suspicion about Maqbool’s ambitions, Kaka seems to reject it violently:

Kaka: Bloody...we have faced bullets for each other. Sameera is his sister-daughter. If it was someone else in your place, you idiot, he would have been dead by now.
Guddu: (Limping towards his father): Don’t indulge in dramatics, Dad. Eat your food.
Kaka: I am not hungry. Look, Guddan. This is a small family of ours. Do not mix poison in it. It will break.

The following visuals undercut his statements as Guddu eloquently raises his eyes at this, and distracts him by teasing him with the food. Kaka is using a term here that even he does not quite believe in, and about which his son is openly skeptical. Guddu, moreover, as the legitimate heir of Abbaji’s ill-gotten gains is almost the parodic specter of the affluent protagonists of the “family-friendly” blockbusters in his smooth progress towards success that Maqbool is denied at every step. Guddu shares a genuinely strong bond with his father, romances Abbaji’s daughter, becomes Abbaji’s potential heir, and good-naturedly accepts Nimmi and Maqbool’s child at the end. He is the “legitimate” heir of all of Maqbool’s illegitimate desires. Dwyer’s comment about

the “excluded” class finds representations in such contrasts which reference both economic gaps and religious differences.

The film also maintains a sustained irony towards the idea of the “family” in its use of names and nicknames such as “Abbaji” (father), “Bhai” or “Bhau” (brother), “Kaka” (Uncle), “Miyani” (Mr. or husband), that proliferate in the movie. At one level they are ethnographically correct, reflecting the close-knit familial and community ties through which the underworld community in Mumbai operates. However, the ideal that these terms reference is dangerously superficial in this drama of ambition and murder.

The language in *Maqbool* is replete with such ironies. The term “Biba,” which Abbaji uses for Nimmi, is a common term of affection for female members of the family and means “decent.” The term “Jaan,” which Nimmi uses for Abbaji, is a shortened version of his name “Jahangir.” It is also a term that is commonly used between lovers, but it means “life,” which is something that she wrests from Abbaji. Maqbool is addressed affectionately as “Miyani,” which is a term for both mister and husband. “Maqbool,” which is phonetically similar to Macbeth, literally means “the accepted one.” His position and his actions ironically undercut the associations of legitimacy in both his names. He is not the legitimate husband of Nimmi, who is Abbaji’s mistress, and neither is he the legitimate heir of Abbaji’s Mumbai. Likewise, he cannot be sure if his child is Abbaji’s child. Abbaji’s past, in any case, makes questionable his own claim to legitimacy. Moreover, in the larger scheme of the story, this battle for legitimacy is being fought for a title in the underworld whose very existence is illegitimate.

This linguistic undercutting of the family parallels the persistent actions or references to actions that create internal fissures and disloyalties in Abbaji’s “family.” Abbaji kills his brother-

in-law when he learns about his treachery. Maqbool is treated like a son by Abbaji, and this guilt haunts him even before the murder. This weakness finally lies at the very heart of Abbaji's organization – it lurks in the rumors of Abbaji's ruthless rise to power after killing his father-like mentor and maintaining the façade of grieving over the “treacherous” act.

The character that reveals Abbaji's duality most effectively is Nimmi. She is from the noir world who complicates the Shakespearean plot by splitting the ambitious Macbeth duo's central motivation. Set up as an alternate site of desire as Abbaji's mistress, she adds the classic noir compulsion of lust to the motivations of ambition and greed in the murder of an older husband figure. In her role as the femme fatale, Nimmi encourages Maqbool to have an affair with her, incites him to murder Abbaji/Duncan, and after his death warns Maqbool to get rid of Guddu (Fleance), who is engaged to Abbaji's daughter, Sameera.

Nimmi in her role as a femme fatale is positioned to disrupt the family. Sylvia Harvey discusses the representation of the family as the classic ideological site for establishing existent social values in Hollywood films. She describes it as “one of the cornerstones of western industrial society,” embodying “a range of traditional values: love of family, love of father (father/ruler), [and] love of country, [which] are intertwined concepts.”⁷³ This ideological site, Harvey points out, offers itself as a hierarchical model that deflects class tensions and monitors, legitimates, and ultimately conceals female sexuality. Film noir destabilizes the hierarchical family model with its disruptive femmes fatales who function outside the domain of the family, often murdering the older, impotent husband/father figure. Their sexuality, even though punished

⁷³ Sylvia Harvey, “Woman's Place: The Absent Family of Film Noir,” in *Women in Film Noir*, rev. ed., ed. E. Ann Kaplan (London: BFI Pub., 2005), 36.

at the end, is visually centered in these films. The ideological function of the family in classic Hollywood films is not merely similar in Hindi commercial cinema; it is further entrenched in the latter by religious and epic prototypes that still wield a great deal of cultural and social power.

Since female sexuality is particularly under-explored in Hindi cinema, the figure of the femme fatale provides filmmakers an alternative model to work with. It has the potential to open up fissures in the ideological model of the family that the entertaining international “family dramas” usually gloss over. The recent interest in the femme fatale in Indian films could also be a complex reflection of social anxieties generated by a changing India in the throes of modernization. A new mobility affecting both men and women, which is not just global but intra-national, often among the poor and the lower-middle classes, is rarely allowed to intrude in most “Bollywood” films. *Hat-ke* films often reflect the anxieties arising out of these wide-spread social changes and moves that have affected many traditional familial structures. Nimmi has small-town origins in the film: she has come from Lucknow to Mumbai, but her mobility is severely restricted as she cannot return to her family after having openly lived with Abbaji as his mistress.

Nimmi is an ambiguous character in the film – she is not an overtly sexual presence but functions more as Abbaji’s wife, serving food and interacting with the other members of his gang who call her “Bhabhi” (brother’s wife), which provides her social recognition in the circles they move in. Abbaji treats her with respect and affection and calls her “Biba,” which is a term of affection meant for one’s female family members, especially for a wife. He tolerates her religious eccentricities with the wry acceptance of a husband. Her affair with Maqbool on the

other hand, which she claims that Maqbool would never have dared to initiate on his own, has all the elements of a sexual transgression. Despite her open use of her sexuality to hold Maqbool in her thrall and her guiltless disloyalty towards Abbaji, she is portrayed as a sympathetic character even before the couple is racked with guilt over their actual crime.

This is primarily because of her social vulnerability as Abbaji's mistress. Her complete dependence on Abbaji is evident from the beginning and is further dramatized in the film as her position is dangerously destabilized when Abbaji's attraction for a more glamorous dancer from "Bollywood" named Mohini becomes increasingly obvious. In the scene just before Abbaji's murder, when she openly attempts to persuade Maqbool to commit the act, she puts on the garland of the goat that has just been sacrificed for the engagement feast (see Fig. 1.9). The cleaning of the goat's blood, an uncomfortable event that the film forces the audience to register, is followed by her insistence that Maqbool acknowledge the parallels between her position and the goat's: "Set me up as a sacrifice too. Jahangir has found his new Biba. How will I return home? Everyone knows I am Jahangir's mistress. He looks so repulsive when he is naked. He must be my father's age." As Maqbool violently rejects the idea, reminding her that Abbaji *is* his father who had raised him when he was orphaned, his reference to the act as a terrible act of parricide is nonetheless framed within her bitter claim that she ought to be considered Abbaji's child and not his mistress.



Figure 1.9. Nimmi is visually presented as a sacrifice
Source: *Maqbool*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj. Eagle, 2003.



Figure 1.10. Nimmi with Abbaji in Maqbool's dream
Source: *Maqbool*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj. Eagle, 2003.

The skewed relationship between Abbaji and Nimmi frames the illicit love affair between Maqbool and Nimmi and her central role in instigating the murder of Abbaji. She is not his legal wife even though everyone around them pretends that she is, and his affectionate indulgence towards her hides the unnatural underbelly of his lust and her total dependence on him. Thus, the moral code that Nimmi and Maqbool transgress is already infected by abnormal relationships that seem normative. Nimmi's presence holds up a mirror to the hidden dimensions of Abbaji's personality and his position as the benign patriarchal head of his gang. Abbaji's exploitation of Nimmi is visually underscored in a point-of-view shot of Maqbool's dream sequence when he imagines Abbaji and Nimmi in bed together. In the shot, Nimmi's distorted face mutely confronts him and forces the audience to register it (see Fig.1.10).

Macbeth's conflicts are detailed in the power politics of the Islamic faction of the Mumbai underworld and the nexus between the police department and the politicians, most of whom are identified by their Marathi and Hindu names. The film provides detailed observations of the cultural practices of a minority culture, in this case, the Islamic culture in India whose influence is gradually waning. Blair Orfall, in his article comparing the ethnographic impulses in

Throne of Blood and *Maqbool*, suggests that like Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood*, *Maqbool* creates the tragic ethnography of a once cosmopolitan city that is gradually disappearing. In the process, he also points out the difference between Bhardwaj's film and the Bollywood family romances:

In contrast to the stereotypical "Bollywood" family romance for which Indian cinema recently has become famous and in which "the current imagination of the family drama has a manic investment in erasing all ideological fissures from its domain" (Biswas, 2006), *Maqbool*, and later *Omkara*, are set within those fissures – the lives of people from minority, nonmainstream cultures.⁷⁴

The elegiac mode that Orfall reads in the film, however, does not erase the harsh realities of the power structures the film unfolds. Abbaji's gracious Urdu hides a core of steel that is revealed in various scenes, and behind his tears of mourning for his previous boss, lurks Pandit's story about his ruthless rise to power. Similarly, embedded in the poetic Sufi song sequence, "Tu mere rubaru hai" (You are revealed before me), amid scenes of religious ecstasy, are moments of secrecy between Nimmi and Maqbool that create a sense of unease in the film.

Religion in the movie is particularly used to bring forth the contrast between appearance and reality but is itself not held up as an ideal. Instead, it remains an exquisitely detailed observance, often poetically executed by the characters, but almost always preceded or followed by conversations that involve ominous thoughts. When Maqbool wants to take revenge on the Police commissioner who slapped him, Abbaji stops him saying, "Ramzaan starts tomorrow. We'll do nothing till Eid." We see him graciously exchanging the greetings of Eid in the following scene. Both Maqbool and Nimmi are shown praying just before they discuss the deaths of Abbaji and Kaka/Banquo, revealing a certain blindness towards the religious practices they

⁷⁴ Blair Orfall, "From Ethnographic Impulses to Apocalyptic Endings: Bharadwaj's *Maqbool* and Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* in Comparative Context," *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation* (Spring/Summer 2009): 4.2. <http://www.borrowers.uga.edu/1408/show>

observe so meticulously. When Nimmi comes upon Maqbool praying, she seems fascinated by his intense concentration and asks him if he remembers all the observances of that prayer. She tells him that he looks “innocent” with complete sincerity, blind to the fact that just moments ago he had indicated to her that Kaka/Banquo, who has been his friend for years, would be murdered. Fair is foul and foul is fair indeed.

Macbeth’s “unnatural” act of regicide when transposed to the underworld of Mumbai does not simply stand out as a spectacularly heinous act of an unnatural villain. It serves to hold up some sacred cows for interrogation: namely, family, religion, and nostalgia which are increasingly becoming appropriated by the discourse of nationhood in India, and thus resist being opened up for discussion.

The Bollywood Mirror in *Maqbool*

Bollywood references in *Hat-ke* films reflect the directors’ relationship with the Hindi film industry and their identity as self-conscious practitioners of an art form that expresses their world-view. Bhardwaj’s films are particularly replete with this self-consciousness. The first actualization of Pandit’s prophesy, the equivalent of Macbeth’s becoming the Thane of Cawdor, occurs when Maqbool is granted the Bollywood “contract.”

The link between the Hindi film industry and the actual and powerful Mumbai underworld has a long history. Before the film industry gained legal status, the underworld and its black money⁷⁵ often funded film production because of the industry’s inability to obtain financing through lawful channels. These financial transactions facilitated open social interaction

⁷⁵ Illegal money, or money which has not been declared for tax purposes.

between Bollywood and the underworld. The Mumbai mafia had its own line-up of stars in colorful dons such as Haji Mastan, Karim Lala, and Varadarajan Mudaliar, who were dominant figures from the 1960s to the 1980s. They had divided up the Mumbai area amongst themselves into different zones and ran powerful crime gangs involved in smuggling, illegal gambling, illegal construction, and contract killings. They wielded considerable political power as they had the unquestioned backing of their communities, which were often underprivileged and unrepresented groups who had no other access to power.

Haji Mastan, in particular, is considered Mumbai's first celebrity gangster who had a certain code of honor. His ties with Bollywood were well-known and he actively produced some films. These three, larger-than-life figures were succeeded in the 1990s by much more efficient and lethal gangs with clear links to terrorist activities. Dawood Ibrahim, who is claimed to be the mastermind behind the 1993 Mumbai bombings and managed to escape to Dubai, was one of Haji Mastan's protégés. *Maqbool* consciously evokes this past and present history in Abbaji's character, which is an amalgam of these earlier larger-than-life gangsters along with Don Corleone. Abbaji's old-world charm, his refusal to get involved in terrorism or relocate to Dubai, and Maqbool's later, aborted attempts at fleeing to Dubai have very specific references for the Mumbai underworld and the Mumbai film industry.

Maqbool's dissatisfaction with the Bollywood assignment is evident in a seemingly inconsequential metatextual scene early in the film. He is embarrassed when asked about it and tries to disassociate himself from it: "Ghatiya filmein, ghatiya log" (Low-down films, low-down people). Maqbool's dismissal of the film industry occupies the moral high ground without any real sense of the irony of his compromised position in the criminal underworld of Mumbai. This

scene about Bollywood provides insights into the psyche of the other major characters too.

Nimmi, for example, attempting to capture Maqbool's attention, tries to bait him. When he ignores her, she intervenes in the men's conversation to assert herself the only way she can – she expresses her desire to go to the *dargah* (place of the celebration of God). The conversation that follows reveals the various levels of desire that shape Nimmi's character in the film:

Abbaji: Dearest, you make too many vows.

Nimmi: Not one of them has been answered.

Kaka: They will be answered, Bhabi. All of them. If Abbaji does not make Nimmi Bhabhi's picture this year either, I am telling you the truth; it will not be good. Tell us, Bhabhi, which director do you want? Karan Johar, Subhash Ghai, or our Ram Gopal Varma? Tell us!

Nimmi's petulant intervention to get Maqbool's attention elicits Abbaji's wry and indulgent response about her making too many vows. Nimmi's response to Abbaji's complaint, however, changes the tone of the conversation to reflect her vulnerability and her unfulfilled desires. Kaka's obsequious response to it shifts the tone of conversation yet again, referring to Nimmi's desire to become an actress, which is possibly the reason why she becomes Abbaji's mistress. Kaka's gaffe and the camera's cut to the angry look Abbaji bestows on him suggests that it is a promise Abbaji has been deferring for a while.

Nimmi's links to Bollywood that Kaka brings up inadvertently are important in the film. They are posed as tongue-in-cheek references that break the fourth wall temporarily to remind the audience about "hit" films and "hit" film directors, which *Maqbool* with its limited budget could never aspire to become. Both Maqbool and Nimmi are at pains to disassociate themselves from Bollywood, but it emerges from within the plot of the film in the overt stereotype of the Bollywood moll/prostitute, Mohini (enchantress). Mohini, with her obvious name and her unappealing role, rips the veneer of glamor and romance off the characters. Take, for example,

her brief interaction with Maqbool, who is forced to go to a Bollywood studio to extort money from her. She refuses to pay and dramatically takes off her dupatta (scarf), mock-challenging him to tell Jehangir Khan (Abbaji's actual name) that he could kill her. She forces Maqbool to recognize the reality of his situation: stripped of the romance of a gangster lifestyle, he works under Abbaji and makes his living extorting money from helpless people.

Mohini also serves as Nimmi's id in the film. Played by a relatively unknown actress, she is instantly distanced from the audience by her function in the film, which is to be Nimmi's replacement. Their positions are remarkably similar. Nimmi wanted to be an actress and ends up as Abbaji's mistress, while Mohini is an actress from Bollywood poised to replace Nimmi as Abbaji's mistress. Her trajectory is the same as Nimmi's. She is meant to be interpreted as the stereotypical moll/vamp to Nimmi's fully fleshed out, sympathetic persona, but their role as disruptive figures hovering on the edges of the familial set-up is the same. Alternately, she can also be read as an expository device to reveal the harsh reality of Nimmi's position, which is hidden under the surface charm and temporary nomenclatures bestowed on her by Abbaji and his gang. Mohini is slightly garish and she plays the role of the seductress with some flourish, but she reminds the audience that Nimmi is also playing the domesticated wife in a false familial setup that is as unreal as Mohini. It discourages the audience from normalizing Abbaji's setup, and disrupts the audience's comfortable identification with the Bollywood trope of idealized familial romances.

Such distancing and its resultant ruptures of Bollywood's narratives are also evident in the presentation of Nimmi and Maqbool's romance in the film. Nimmi and Maqbool's tryst in Maqbool's farmhouse, just before the Macbeth murder plot, is developed as a typical Bollywood

romantic interlude framed by a tragic background song that is meant to elicit sympathy for Nimmi. However, the preceding scene creates a certain dissonance and distancing of the audience by exaggerating and parodying some of the typical situations and dialogues of a Bollywood romance. As they walk by the seaside, Nimmi draws her gun on Maqbool and, laughing hysterically, forces him to repeat stereotypical romantic dialogues that seem absurd in the context of their relationship. Maqbool's awkward miming of them before his violent reaction and his brutal reminder to her of her actual position as Abbaji's mistress, shock the audience into a recognition of the impossibility of their romance, as well as the artificiality of the Bollywood trope of such romances. Poonam Trivedi points to a similar discrepancy when she notes the couple repeating the gestures of previous Bollywood romances, such as the loss of the earring to suggest marital intimacy, which seem almost parodic in the context of Nimmi and Maqbool's situation.⁷⁶

Mohini's presence also exposes Abbaji's lust and callousness. During his daughter's engagement at Maqbool's house, Abbaji tearfully reminisces about Lalji Bhai, his deceased mentor whom he is rumored to have killed, while everybody around him perpetuates Abbaji's hypocrisy by sympathizing with him. Yet, when Mohini arrives and Nimmi dryly announces her arrival, the camera dwells on Abbaji's expression as it shifts from grief to composure and finally to lust. This juxtaposition of cuts falsifies Abbaji's grief, and when Pandit whispers a different version of Lalji Bhai's murder to Maqbool, it seems a completely plausible exposure of Abbaji's

⁷⁶ Poonam Trivedi, "Filmi Shakespeare," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (January 1, 2007): 155.

ruthlessness and role-playing. In Pandit's sardonic comparison between Abbaji's hypocrisy and Dilip Kumar's⁷⁷ acting skills, once again a Bollywood reference becomes a vehicle of exposure.

The following scene, in which Abbaji forces his loyal guard, Usman, to strip and display the bullet marks on his body, is an unpleasant one and shows Abbaji at his worst. "Wow! Striptease..." says Mohini, clapping and smiling while Nimmi grimly challenges Abbaji to order Usman, a devout Muslim, to drink to prove his loyalty. The contrast could not be more obvious, and Nimmi needs Mohini as a foil to engender sympathy for her. The splitting of the *noir* femme fatale into the good and the bad enables Nimmi to function as a "heroine" within the frame of commercial Bollywood cinema, while Mohini, the enchantress, is Bollywood at its most stereotypical. She flirts, wears backless blouses, and dances a *mujra* (a courtesan dance) while Nimmi dances and sings a wedding song with Abbaji's daughter. And yet, though the film gives them separate costumes, rhythms, and spaces to execute their *Kotha* (prostitute's house) and wedding dances, they do so within the confines of the same song (see Figs 1.11 and 1.12).



Figure 1.11. Mohini performing a mujra (prostitute's dance).
Source: *Maqbool*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj. Eagle, 2003.



Figure 1.12. Nimmi and Abbaji's daughter dancing during the engagement.
Source: *Maqbool*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj. Eagle, 2003.

⁷⁷ Dilip Kumar is one of the best-known actors of Hindi cinema who was known for his tragic roles. Pandit mocks Abbaji's role-playing as hypocritically "tragic" in mourning over Lalji Bhai's death, when he himself was the murderer.

In her artifice, Mohini becomes the signifier of Bollywood that destabilizes other signifiers. Even as she exposes the motivations of the three central characters in *Maqbool*, she also destabilizes the functions of these characters and their roles in their Shakespearean, *noir*, romance, and melodramatic narratives. Nimmi's cry at the end of the film is at odds her Shakespearean and *noir* roles. Her acceptance of her guilt in the last scene is followed by her desire to distinguish her relationship with Maqbool from their surroundings where fair and foul are merged. Her last question to Maqbool, "Hamara pyar to pak tha na Miyaan...bolo na...?" (Our love was pure, wasn't it Miyaan? Tell me...?) shifts the relationship of the Macbeth pair away from its Shakespearean moorings towards a desire for moral certitude and purity. In *Maqbool's* treacherous world where the ideals of family and loyalty offer no protection and religion is limited to external observances, "pure love" is invoked to provide the moral compass for assessing the actions of the characters. Maqbool never answers her question. In fact, he remains silent from that point on until the end of the film. The trope of "pure love" is from the genre of romance and melodrama and the film does not grant that trajectory to either Nimmi or Maqbool. Purity itself is suspect in a film whose outer action records the gradual consolidation of power of a political party that has increasingly and belligerently opposed migrants and outsiders in the name of preserving a "pure" Maharashtra.

The linguistic complexities of *Maqbool* and its close analysis of the communal history and ethnography of a particular group to express its Shakespearean vision of ambition, corruption, and the entrapment of the human condition get a distinct urban focus when filtered through the visual and generic codes of *noir*. This focus allows the film to be viewed as both a document of a city and a commentary on that city. *Maqbool's* Mumbai represents a country in

transition, mired in corruption, whose past is stripped of much of its nostalgia and whose uncertain future is stripped of much of its romance, even as it uses the very codes of Bollywood romance to present its dystopian vision of a “shining”⁷⁸ India.

Haider: Kashmir and its Citizens

Haider (2014), based on *Hamlet*, is the third film in director Vishal Bhardwaj’s trilogy of Shakespearean adaptations. Questions of nationhood are addressed more directly in this film as it plays out the *Hamlet* drama in the contested space of the Kashmir Valley, which has been the source of tension between India and Pakistan since the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947.⁷⁹ The film delves into the fraught issues of the heavy presence of the Indian Army in the Kashmir valley and the plight of the ordinary middle-class Muslim community that found itself trapped between India and Pakistan in the complicated politics of the insurgency and counter-insurgency that beset the Valley in the 1990s.

Produced as a commercial venture with big stars and popular songs, the film negotiates the space Bollywood has traditionally had in the huge domestic marketplace and the relatively

⁷⁸ The term “India Shining” was a marketing slogan that expressed the economic optimism of India in the beginning of the new millennium. It was adopted by the Bhartiya Janata Party, the right-wing ruling party in India, as a political slogan for its 2004 election campaign.

⁷⁹ The dispute over Kashmir goes back to 1947 when the Indian sub-continent was partitioned along religious lines into India and Pakistan after it gained independence from British rule. Kashmir was among the many princely states that were given the choice to join either country. Despite the fact that the population of Kashmir was largely Muslim, Hari Singh, the Hindu ruler of Kashmir, decided to join India— after dithering initially between the two countries – when the Pakistani Army marched into Kashmir. Under the legitimacy of the accession signed by Hari Singh, the Indian Army moved in to push the Pakistani Army back. Since that time both the armies have established a “Line of Control” that has carved the state unofficially between Pakistan and India, leaving two-thirds of the state with India and the northern part of Kashmir under Pakistan. The Kashmiris were promised a plebiscite in which they could decide the future of their state. However, over the years, the ensuing tension between the two countries has shown no signs of abating and the fate of Kashmir remains in limbo. The rise of the Azaadi (freedom) movement in the 1990s that demanded a separate Kashmiri nation unfortunately went hand in hand with the rise of militancy in the Kashmir valley fueled by neighboring Pakistan.

more recent, global space that it has carved out for itself, and critiques both through its interrogation of nationhood. Using the dual tropes of surveillance and interrogation, the film challenges the idea of nationhood, which is a delicate venture as a great deal of the identity of “Bollywood” cinema depends on selling a certain ideal of homogenous nationhood. It critiques the idea of nationhood largely by using its own cinematic space and idiom as the “third space” in which such distancing, conscious intertextuality, and critique become possible.

The rise in militancy in the Kashmir valley in the 1990s, which led to the massacre and mass exodus of the minority Hindu population of the Kashmiri Pundits, was followed by a massive reprisal by the Indian Army. It occupied the state in large numbers, and to this day, Kashmir has a civilian population living alongside the densest military presence in the world. Bhardwaj’s choice to locate the *Hamlet* drama in the contested space of Kashmir has made the film controversial. Its release spawned popular hashtags such as “#BanHaider” and led to protest rallies and court cases. The film is accused of being anti-national for criticizing the Indian army and biased in ignoring the fate of the displaced Hindu Kashmiri Pundits. On the other hand, it is also blamed for being a weak, watered-down critique of the atrocities of the army and for finding an easy solution out of the impasse by shifting the blame to easy targets such as the corruption and the internal power struggles of the local Muslim leaders.

Vishal Bharadwaj co-scripted the film with Basharat Peer, a journalist and the author of *Curfewed Night* (2010).⁸⁰ The book, which is a haunting memoir about growing up in conflict-torn Kashmir, inspired Bhardwaj to make the film. The *Hamlet* story entwined with the memoir becomes the story about the middle-class Muslims of Kashmir. The father is a doctor; the mother

⁸⁰ Basharat Peer, *The Curfewed Night* (New York: Random House, 2010).

Ghazala (Gertrude) is a school teacher; Khurram (Claudius) is a lawyer and a local politician; Arshi (Ophelia) is a journalist, and Haider (Hamlet) is a student at Aligarh University (in mainland India), sent there by his parents to escape the tension of living in Kashmir. The movie's action is triggered by the "disappearance" of the idealistic father after he chooses to treat an ailing terrorist. The father is identified and taken into custody by the army and never returns.

When Haider returns to Kashmir, he comes back to a state where identity checks, curfews, and such "disappearances" are routine. He walks into his Uncle's house to confront a laughing Ghazala being courted by his slippery Uncle Khurram. Haider's search for his father takes him into the grim phantasmagoric reality that is Kashmir in the 1990s. Almost halfway through the film is introduced the strange character of "Roohdar" (spirit): he appears like a specter, claims to have been in the same torture chamber as Haider's father, and has, he insists, a message for Haider from his father. The rest of the film follows the *Hamlet* plot broadly, albeit skewing the time frame quite a bit: it involves Haider's discovery of his father's grave, his feigned descent into madness, Ghazala's re-marriage, Arshi's suicide, and ends, with some twists, in the graveyard.

Bhardwaj's *Haider* circulates in international film circuits as "Global Shakespeare," thus amassing cultural capital, and also positions itself as a Global Bollywood film. While benefiting from both these associations, the film also problematizes them in its key choice of location and its decision to take a "realistic" look at the Kashmir valley. It problematizes its "local" domestic circulation by shunning the dominant domestic narratives that elevate the patriotism and sacrifice of the Indian army and by taking a hard look at the politics of the Kashmir valley. Instead of enabling an easy "tourist" vantage point and using the Valley as a backdrop for stunning locales

of the beautiful lakes milling with houseboats and flowers (as was routinely used in most pre-1990s Hindi commercial cinema), it also takes the audience into the crowded market-centers and narrow by-lanes of Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir. The spaces and the people it presents cannot be easily assimilated into India and packaged as the “Indian” version of *Hamlet* when the central problematic of the film itself is a questioning of the Indian identity and the wholesale delegitimizing of an entire community. Thus, its narrative is compelled to ask very specific local questions about terrorism, national allegiances, and identities that shatter a range of homogenized narratives of global cinema as well as “local” Indian cinema.

One of the most challenging risks that *Haider* takes, which is particularly disruptive of the nationalist discourse, is its critique of the Indian Army. The focus on the excesses of the army’s occupation and its intrusion into the lives of the ordinary Kashmiris is rare in Indian cinema. The image of the Indian Army is one of the most coherent narratives of patriotism and national pride and questioning its actions makes it tantamount to a betrayal. On the face of it, the critique is watered down – the film took about forty-one cuts from the censor board before it was considered appropriate for release.⁸¹ *Haider* is framed with various disclaimers about the positive role the army played in the politics of Kashmir and acknowledgements of the Indian Army’s active assistance in local disasters such as the 2014 floods in Kashmir, which, though true, are obvious attempts at compensating for such a critique.

The film is sensitive to the complicated politics of Kashmir and in no way demonizes the army, but it does take a hard look at several human rights abuses that occurred in Kashmir during

⁸¹ Vicky Lalwani, “Vishal Bhardwaj’s ‘Haider’ Cleared with a UA certificate after 41 cuts,” *E-Times*, September 7, 2014, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/hindi/bollywood/news/Vishal-Bhardwajs-Haider-cleared-with-a-UA-certificate-after-41-cuts/articleshow/41842174.cms>.

the 1990s and holds the Army and the Indian state accountable for it. Bhardwaj openly expresses his use of the Shakespearean plot as an enabling device for political criticism in an interview: “I like to fire the shots from Shakespeare’s shoulders.... That gives me a lot of license.”⁸² He uses this license not just to critique the political excesses of the Indian state and the army vis-à-vis Kashmir, but to attack the apathy of the rest of the country towards such atrocities. The “rotteness” of Denmark is a potent image that directly references the existing political mess in the state of Kashmir and indirectly extends the reference to the entire country.

Surveillance and interrogation were part of the lived reality of the Kashmiris in the 1990s, which the film develops in some detail to disrupt the narrative of nationalism. The film extends the idea of “questioning,” which can be a powerful mode of protest, to its more ambiguous and extreme form of “interrogation,” just as “surveillance” is posited as the darker version of “witnessing,” which might be used as a political strategy of resistance. The ambiguity of the film is built on these dual, contending elements of surveillance and interrogation.

Haider: Surveillance, Terrorism and Ghazala’s Gaze

Surveillance is the central theme of the movie explored in its various manifestations from “policing” or “looking” as a mode of power to the possibilities of “bearing witness” as an interventionist strategy. Kashmir in *Haider* is a policed state under constant surveillance. The intermingling of history and fiction allows the film a great deal of liberty in terms of political critique. In the opening scene of the movie, the doctor (King), who helps a terrorist leader in

⁸² Vaibhav Vats, “Bollywood Takes on the Agony of Kashmir, through Shakespeare,” *New York Times*, 27 October, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/28/arts/international/in-haider-vishal-bhardwaj-draws-from-hamlet.html>.

need of medical help, is called upon by the morning sirens to stand in a long queue, to be “looked at” or inspected by a masked army officer whose only visible feature is his eyes. This disembodied officer determines, after a brief look, whether someone is suspicious and hence a candidate for interrogation, thus deciding the fate of the local Kashmiris by a single move of his head. This chilling scene represents a common occurrence during the 1990s in the Kashmir Valley when the morning sirens hailed all the adult men to rush out of their beds, identity cards at hand, to be checked for terrorist sympathies. It literally exposes the power of the gaze, and the helplessness of the objectified Kashmiris and its devastating consequences on the family of the doctor are the plot of the movie.

The doctor then “disappears” from the movie. This visual “disappearance” is marked by the distinctly different accents that mark the difference between the Kashmiris and the non-Kashmiris in the film. The word “disappear-ed” in the lilting accents of the Kashmiris which emphasizes the “ed” as a separate syllable, reminds the viewers of the specificity of the word for the Kashmiris. It becomes, in the movie, as it was in the mid-1990s in Kashmir, the articulation of the code word for the unwitnessed world of torture and terror and, finally, the death of thousands of Kashmiris whose families are still looking for answers.

The film explores different variations of the gaze, playing with the idea of the gaze both within (concerning characters with and without power) and outside the film (concerning the audience). The film explores the possibility that “looking at” something might allow one to witness the truth. But is it also aware of “looking” as a mode of power that wrests power away from those who are “looked at.”

This contradiction is posed centrally through the character of Ghazala. She is presented fleetingly at the beginning of the film as a Kashmiri local school-teacher describing what constitutes a home in her earnest Kashmiri-accented English. However, that identity is lost as she is swiftly sucked into the politics of Kashmir and the Hamlet narrative, and from then on is framed and looked at for her potential for betrayal or innocence. She is beautiful and sensitive, and her passionate relationship with her son with its Oedipal undertones is one of the most sympathetic portrayals of this relationship on screen. As she battles for her son's safety and argues with him about her life with his father, and as she is courted gently and successfully by the shifty Khurram (Claudius), the audience mostly sees her through the eyes of the baffled and frustrated son, registering her mysteriousness and her beauty as well as her tragedy.

She is framed in mirrors in several important scenes with Haider. As his suspicions about her complicity in his father's disappearance increase, so do his accusations about her dual nature, culminating in a scene where her face is doubled on the screen in a hazy mirror (see Fig. 1.13). For Haider, her attraction for Khurram is a betrayal of his memories about his perfect family. The audience's gaze parallels Haider's when he remembers the past in perfect images of an indulgent father and a beautiful mother in which she often appears framed in mirrors or filtered through an old family video or even a physical screen.



Figure 1.13. Haider bitterly accuses Ghazala of being double-faced.
Source: *Haider*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj. UTV Films, 2014.



Figure 1.14. Ghazala and Haider on her wedding day remembering his childhood.
Source: *Haider*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj. UTV Films, 2014.

One of Haider’s earliest memories of his childhood is admiring Ghazala in the mirror and kissing her adoringly on the neck (see Fig. 1.14). On his return from Aligarh, he first encounters Ghazala laughing with Khurram through a shimmering, diaphanous screen. His blindness towards his parents’ incompatibility is exposed only once in Ghazala’s differing account of her unsatisfactory marriage, which Haider refuses to accept. In suspecting Ghazala’s loyalty, the audience’s gaze parallels that of Haider. In Haider’s memories of his childhood, which provide the audience’s perspective, the father is the benevolent patriarch who can do no harm, and Ghazala’s attraction for Khurram can only be viewed as a betrayal.

Ghazala’s marital dissatisfaction and her suspected “betrayal” of the father suggest parallels between Haider’s fascination with Ghazala’s framed beauty and Kashmir’s problematic relationship with India. India’s pride in the famed beauty of the state and its one-dimensional perspective on Kashmir is also reflected in several films that circulate stereotypical images of Kashmir. Kashmir’s beautiful gardens, the Dal Lake, and the river Jhelum milling with flower-laden *shikaras* (Kashmiri house-boats) have been standard props in Hindi cinema for romantic song sequences. This romantic image of Kashmir was shattered in the 1990s during the “Azaadi”

(freedom) movement which particularly impassioned the youth in Kashmir. This local movement for independent statehood was and still is viewed as a betrayal by the rest of India which considers Kashmir an intrinsic part of the country. In places, Ghazala almost seems to embody the spirit of Kashmir in Haider's bittersweet attraction for her.

An oddly still and disconnected moment in the film underscores this. After Khurram wins the local elections, Ghazala and Khurram attend a folk-play as part of the post-election celebrations in which a journalist expresses the official jargon of "the new hope ...of a new Kashmir...a peaceful Kashmir..." that the elections had hoped to accomplish. The shot cuts to a smiling Tabu⁸³ watching the performance. She turns, as if on cue, to face the camera and gazes directly at the audience with an inscrutable smile on her face, her eyes hidden behind dark glasses. She then turns back again to the performance (see Fig 1.15). The pause in the narrative logic of the film with such stills encourages parallels between her and Kashmir suggesting the following questions: Is she the inscrutable face of Kashmir? Does her choice of Khurram suggest the Kashmiris' "betrayal" of India in their ambiguous alliances with Pakistan and suspected collusion with terrorists? Or, are they the disenfranchised victims caught between two warring countries who are demanding the right of self-definition?

⁸³ The actress who plays Ghazala. She also played Nimmi in *Maqbool*.



Figure 1.15. Ghazala watches the play and turns to look directly at the audience
Source: *Haider*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj. UTV Films, 2014.

The last image of Ghazala in *Haider* is particularly important in this context. After she fails to persuade Haider to surrender to Khurram, she walks out into the heavily-surrounded graveyard and sets herself off as a human bomb (see Fig. 1.16). The image aligns her visually with terrorism, a cause she resists throughout the film. It is Ghazala who sends off the young Haider to Aligarh when she discovers a revolver in his schoolbag. Even after her marriage with Khurram, her greatest fear is that Haider's frustration might lead him "sarhad paar" (across the border) to Pakistan. From her initial introduction as a teacher talking in her accented English about what constitutes a home to her ghastly and alienated final image, Ghazala has traveled a long way.



Figure 1.16. Ghazala as a human bomb
Source: *Haider*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj. UTV Films, 2014.

The film unsettles and contests the one-dimensional, global images of terrorism and “the terrorist” through its insistent focus on the local politics of Kashmir. Though the issue of terrorism is explored more centrally through Roohdar and the slippages in his identity, it is, ironically, Ghazala’s body replacing that of Roohdar that provides the final image of the terrorist. The complicated roots of terrorism and the inroads it makes into the lives of ordinary people is referenced most clearly in that image. As she turns her gaze upwards and her hennaed hands pull the cord that detonates the bomb, her burning body and the destruction it wreaks visually epitomize the stereotype of the global body of the terrorist even as her role contests it.

The last image of Ghazala as a “terrorist” is superseded by her voice echoing the Gandhian precept that “revenge only begets revenge.” It intervenes in the Shakespearean revenge drama, contesting not just the previous visual but the doctor’s call for revenge, and it changes the film’s plot, deterring Haider from taking revenge. Adored by her husband, son, and brother-in-law and yet silenced by all of them, it is Ghazala’s voice that determines and influences the final plot of the film. She remains an enigma till the end of the film in her possible betrayal of the father, her instinctive attraction for Khurram, and her intense relationship with Haider which

takes precedence over all her other relationships. Her various images in the mirror, the dual images of her framed in the hazy mirror, her dark glasses staring back at the audience, and her final image challenge and resist the gaze of her son and of the audience in attempting to define or “other” her.

Haider: Interrogation and Roohdar’s Multiple Voices

Surveillance and responses to it highlight the operations of brute power. The disembodied gaze of the masked officer attempting to define Kashmiris as terrorists emphasizes the constant state of surveillance the Kashmiri Muslims live under and it is counteracted by Ghazala’s refusal to allow the gaze to define her. It is also associated with blindness and defective vision, as well as a seer-like, strong inward vision. This is most obviously suggested through Roohdar’s/the spirit’s character which is a “special appearance” in the film by Irrfan Khan, a well-respected actor who had played the eponymous Maqbool (Macbeth) in Bhardwaj’s earlier film.

Along with Ghazala, the film’s visuals and narrative also posit Roohdar, the spirit of Haider’s father, as the alternative face of Kashmir. The non-narrative shot that highlights Ghazala’s inscrutable, smiling face gazing back at the audience behind dark glasses is swiftly followed by the dramatic introduction of Roohdar’s blurry image, which gradually focuses on his face wearing thick dark glasses, suggesting a visual link between them. The parallels between Kashmir and Ghazala might well be extended to this other, equally ambiguous character and his development in the film. The hope for a “new,” “democratic,” Kashmir that the Indian government wished for, after what the Kashmiris considered an unrepresentative election, cannot ignore what Ghazala and Roohdar represent, which is an existence irrevocably touched by terrorism.

Roohdar's near blindness highlights the film's preoccupation with gazes and perspectives. Introduced late in the film, heralded by the faint sounds of crows and the gradually resounding beats of the music of a nihilistic song, he limps towards Srinagar from the outside. As the camera tracks his approaching figure, it remains out of focus on the screen for a full twenty-two seconds, allowing the music to define his presence before his face comes into focus as the face of a blind man. His first deliberate gesture of brushing the snow off his heavy dark glasses with music pulsing in the background (see Fig. 1.17) highlights that impression.



Figure 1.17. Roohdar's face gradually comes into focus and he brushes off the snow
Source: *Haider*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj. UTV Films, 2014.

The following scene opens with a point-of-view shot of a newspaper article that Roohdar reads through his heavy dark glasses. He becomes the medium through which the audience reads the article about the disappearance of eight thousand people in the valley. Despite his defective vision, the audience is still pulled into viewing events from his perspective. In the rest of the scene where he speaks for the first time, he is given the authority of the interpretative voice of the local author of a Kashmiri short story, "New Disease." This satirical short story by the well-known writer Akhtar Mohiuddin was bought by Bhardwaj and inserted as a vignette in *Haider*. It is a mocking exaggeration of the panoptic mentality (which finds a fertile context in Kashmir)

about a silent man (enacted by playwright Basharat Peer) who stands and stares at the doorway of his house for hours, refusing to enter it until he has been thoroughly inspected and interrogated.⁸⁴ Roohdar's mocking explanation gives voice to such regional, marginalized narratives just as *Haider* ensures the inclusion of local, compelling narratives (which would otherwise be ignored) in the global circulation that a Shakespearean adaptation ensures.

Roohdar provides a voice for the local Kashmiri who, as the story suggests, have been silenced by the official Indian narrative of the army and the local police. He reports, narrates stories about torture chambers, relays messages, and quotes poetry. Visually, however, he is seen in the company of terrorists. This bitter group of local fighters clearly receives arms and training from "sarhad paar" (across the border). They also offer shelter to the locals whose relatives have "disappeared," and aggressively demand a rationale for why their fight for freedom is labeled "terrorism" when the Indian demand for freedom from the British was deemed patriotic. Roohdar seems to have a position of authority in this group though his narrative suggests that he has taken shelter among them. He claims he had been in the same prison camps and had shared the same tortures as Haider's father. The close-up of his face reveals milky, watery eyes, suggesting tortures he might have undergone in those prison cells, but they could just as easily reflect a clouded, muddied vision. This dual realistic/metaphoric suggestion is underscored by Roohdar's action of intermittently dabbing his eyes as he recounts the horrors of their imprisonment and torture to Haider.

⁸⁴ For details on this famous local writer, whose son and son-in-law "disappeared" in the mid-1990s, see Chapter 4, pgs. 184-85.

The truth claims of Roohdar that Haider is initially suspicious about are framed in two other literary echoes that contradict each other. Haider's skepticism is quelled when Roohdar quotes two specific and easily identifiable lines from a poem by Faiz Ahmed Faiz.⁸⁵ Faiz's revolutionary poems – many of which were composed when he was imprisoned by the Zia-ul-Haq dictatorship in Pakistan – are tremendously popular in both India and Pakistan. These poetic lines carrying the weight of Faiz's revolutionary zeal have authority in the film when spoken by Haider's idealistic father. They also have personal resonances for Haider (whose research is on revolutionary poets of the subcontinent), as his father particularly loved those lines and had transferred his love for Faiz's verses to his son. Roohdar's echoing of those lines casts a pall over their idealism, especially when they are entwined with the Shakespearean echo of the Spirit's call for revenge.

They give credence to Roohdar's narrative about the tortures that he and Haider's father underwent and witnessed in the various prisons. As the camera takes the narrative into undisclosed prison-houses and scenes of torture, another Faiz song resurfaces in Haider's father's voice, "Hum dekhenge" (We shall witness) and is interrupted by voices of interrogations and the screams of tortured prisoners which suggest chilling scenes of terror. Inflected by these other sounds, Roohdar's final message to Haider, "Haider, mera inteqam lena. Uksi aankhon mein do goliyan daagna/jin aankhon ne teri ma par fareb daale the" (Haider, take my revenge. Shatter his eyes with two bullets/those very eyes that cast a spell on your mother), become

⁸⁵ "Gulon mein rang bhare baad-e-naubahaar chale/Chale bhi aao ke gulshan ka karobaar chale" (The flowers are laden with colors, let the spring breeze flow/Come, we implore, so the garden may continue its business...)

almost a hypnotically compelling argument for revenge, not just for Haider, but for the Kashmiris who have undergone similar tortures.

The authority of Roohdar's voice is underscored by another brief and odd conversation between him and the doctor where his voice seems to take on oracular overtones suggesting an overarching Kashmiri identity that subsumes religious and political ones. In this oracular mode, Roohdar defines himself as all of Kashmir – encompassing and subsuming all the warring sects, including its rivers and trees. The secular, philosophic message of this poetic pronouncement is an odd message coming from a presumed, visually-codified terrorist. Such a presentation grounds terrorism in passionate grievances and visceral moments that become dangerously persuasive. He very well might be the other face of Kashmir, as ambiguous as Ghazala, but armed with a more insidious and compelling logic.

The film leaves open the possibility that Roohdar is lying. Roohdar's narrative is contradicted by Khurram's story of the doctor's death. Khurram provides Haider with a completely plausible story supported by several photographs and identity cards of Roohdar. He claims Roohdar is a double agent, a Pakistani intelligence agent, who changed sides and who got Haider's father killed because the doctor had recognized him. Even though Khurram's story might not be completely true, it could very well have many elements of truth in it. Roohdar's associations with terrorism are very different from Ghazala's and yet, no less complex than hers. His articulations resist authority, parodying and mocking it, often recounting and revealing the dark truth behind appearances, and sometimes twisting the truth into something as incomprehensible as Ghazala's last despairing act.

Terrorism also touches Haider. At the height of the Azaadi movement in Kashmir, Ghazala discovers a pistol, lent by his friend, in Haider's schoolbag. He is immediately sent out of the state to study in mainland India. On his return when he discovers the truth about his father's murder, he is once again given a pistol to kill his Uncle. Haider, like Hamlet, hesitates to kill his Uncle. For Haider, the issue of being is also linked to terrorism and his wavering identity as an Indian citizen. In the end, when he chooses not to kill Khurram, it is Ghazala's voice in his head that prevents him, just as it is Ghazala's voice over the phone that stops him from going across the border when he is on the run from the police.

Haider: Intertextual, Aesthetic Space

Haider focuses on the human toll in Kashmir and the impossible choices before ordinary people who are sucked into its politics and tragedy. Amid the despair, Bhardwaj also interrogates the artistic space, evaluating how his artistic practice is also implicated in the tragedy of Kashmir. In the process, he provides one of the sharpest critiques of Bollywood from within the industry.

His aesthetic evaluation includes films and extends to other literary and art forms. Poetry, for example, is a privileged mode of expression in the film but its articulation is not straightforward. It is closely associated with Haider's father and by extension with Roohdar, who echoes it. Haider's father is a Faiz enthusiast who loves to quote the poet's lines, especially the poem "Gulon Mein Rang Bhare" (The flowers are laden with colors). The many layers of meaning in the poem find several reverberations in the film. The specific form of the poem, which is a romantic plea of the poet protesting his beloved's neglect, has obvious parallels with Ghazala's "betrayal." However, the underlying revolutionary potential of the poem encourages

parallels between the traditional romantic image of the imprisoned nightingale and actual prisons, offering an implicit critique of the power of the state to imprison and suppress public opinion. Faiz's romantic poetry often uses the traditional images of Urdu love poetry, such as the lover's helpless desire for his mistress, and makes it resonate with revolutionary zeal. Their popularity across the subcontinent and the associated history of their adoption by other artists to protest social injustice have given some of his lines a permanent association with rebellion.

The rebellious associations are underscored by another fragment of a Faiz poem the Doctor sings in prison: "Hum dekhenge/Wo din ke jiska waada hai/Jo lah-e-azal mein likha hai/ham dekhenge..." (We shall witness/That day which was promised to us/ which were written on the slate of eternity/We will witness...) These lines have an even more complicated revolutionary-artistic resonance. It was penned by Faiz but it was also made famous by another singer-artist, Iqbal Bano, who in a gesture of defiance against the Pakistani government's incarceration of Faiz and its conservative policies, wore a black sari (which was banned in Pakistan as non-Islamic) and sang these lines to a packed auditorium. The song, in the popular imagination in Pakistan and India, is thus associated with any form of popular protest and asserts the artist's power to raise her voice against the state. To hear Haider's father, who articulates the idealism of Faiz's poetry, later speak the words of Shakespearean revenge sets up dissonances that parallel the dissonances in Roohdar, who has clear visual ties with terrorists yet speaks the message of Sufi unity.

The doubling or layering of voices and the inaccessibility of images foreground ambiguity, which is viewed as empowering as well as dangerous, and becomes both the form and the theme of the film. *Haider* addresses the politics of Kashmir while evoking the intertwined

political and aesthetic history of two countries who now define themselves in opposition to each other. Moreover, in politics, ambiguity becomes an issue of power. The film suggests that questions about what gets articulated and who gets to “gaze” are important, but equally important are the responses, which are not direct but double up in incomprehensible and contradictory ways.

In keeping with the film’s mode of emphasizing its own medium, the textuality of the Shakespearean line, “To be or not to be,” which is arguably the single most famous line in Shakespeare, is highlighted and articulated by different people in a number of contexts that resonate at various levels in the film. “Do we exist or do we not?” shouts the crowd with Haider holding banners of the phrase, protesting the disappearance of loved ones who never returned from their prison camps. It emerges in the words of a song, “Sometimes we were...and sometimes not,” about the attractive lure of death. This song, which so tellingly defines the mood of the film, is absent from it. It crops up again in a comic context when the two Salmans (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) shadow Haider but cannot pick up the courage to go into the crowded downtown area (which was the heart of the *Azaadi* movement in the 1990s) that Haider enters. “To go?” ponders one of the villains/comedians in English; “or not to go...?” completes the other Salman. They decide not to. Haider repeats it when he feigns madness and harangues against the injustices of the two warring countries whose politics have made the state and the people of Kashmir invisible: “Do we exist or do we not!” The same phrase verges into nonsense in the same speech in Lalbagh Chowk, the place where Nehru, the first prime minister of independent India, had promised a plebiscite to the Kashmiris. It is brought up again in a personal context when Haider muses over whose narrative to believe, “Do I exist or I do not?” he

asks. He continues, “[T]hat is the question. And the answer is also a question.” He speaks these lines to an uncomprehending Arshi (Ophelia) as his mood veers unsteadily between laughter and sadness layered with intense lyricism and sorrow. The lines remind the audience about disappeared bodies and a disappeared state that seem not to have registered to most people outside Kashmir. Both mode and content become important here – questioning involves expressing dissent and articulating despair. It also involves contemplation and remembrance even though it can emerge in its most violent form as interrogation.

The layering of voices through lines repeated by different characters becomes an effective way of establishing ambiguity. The idea of revenge, for example, is expressed by different characters in the film. It is introduced at the beginning of the film through the words of Haider’s pacifist grandfather. His comment on the political conflict of Kashmir “Inteqam se sirf inteqam hi paida hota hai” (Revenge can only breed revenge), is an echo of the Gandhian version of non-violent protest, which the old man believes was effective in bringing about an earlier “freedom.”⁸⁶ It takes a very personal turn in Haider’s father’s voice when he echoes the word “Intequam” (revenge) on learning of his brother’s treachery. The violent message of his father is however articulated through the voice of Roohdar, who wants Haider to act for his own political or personal ends. The voice of family revenge thus gets entwined with the politics of borders and other people’s agendas. Haider’s final decision to not take revenge is specifically triggered by the voice of the dead Ghazala, who articulates the exact lines of Haider’s grandfather. But the decision not to take revenge is not just a political message of pacifism; it also indicates an artistic choice in the film’s decision as an adaptation to not be a “revenge”

⁸⁶ A reference to Gandhi’s leading role in bringing about India’s independence in 1947.

drama. Haider chooses not to kill Khurram. In the bloody visuals of the last scene of the film, as Haider is surrounded by dismembered bodies along with Khurram's half-disappeared body pleading with him to kill him and relieve him of his misery, it might well be an empty choice, but it is nonetheless asserted in the film.

While the aesthetic realm or the “space of adaptation,” is posited as the space where such a critique can take place and where it might be possible to exercise some form of choice, it is also problematized as a space riddled with ambiguity. This critique is made most provocatively through the inclusion of two crazed, star-struck fans of Salman Khan,⁸⁷ who stand for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in the film. Both are addressed as Salman and they provide comic relief, swinging exaggeratedly to the popular Salman Khan film tracks of the 1990s, grotesquely creating themselves in the image of the star while they are employed to spy on Haider. The payoff for the choice to include these two extremely marginal characters – who nevertheless have their own theatre history⁸⁸ – comes later when the comic overtones of their characterization become laced with cruelty. Asked by Parvez/Polonius to kill Haider, their cruelty and peculiar pleasure in pursuing and pinning down Haider are stunningly turned around in one of the most violent scenes in the film when Haider bashes their heads in with a stone.

The visceral violence of this scene and its underlying cruelty find correspondence in a previous scene which juxtaposes the image of the popular matinee idol singing a typical romantic Bollywood song behind the line-up of tortured and “disappeared” prisoners of Roohdar's narrative. The vigorous dance moves of the star and the manic beat of the pulsating song with

⁸⁷ Salman Khan is a very popular Bollywood idol of the 1990s who still remains a contemporary megastar with a huge box-office draw.

⁸⁸ *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1960) is an absurdist play written by Tom Stoppard.

lyrics like “One two three/Baby give me a kiss” playing on the screen behind the lined-up, shackled prisoners make the scene surreal and frightening. It pushes out the grim reality of torture from behind the screen to confront a nation so obsessed with screen images that it allows such human rights violations to remain disregarded and unchallenged (see Fig 1.18).



Figure 1.18. The prisoners lined up against the Bollywood screen.
Source: *Haider*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj. UTV Films, 2014.

The film extends from a critique of nationhood to an attack on the Hindi film industry, and particularly the early post-liberalization period of Bollywood that often chose to ignore political engagement and concentrate instead on pure entertainment. The same implicit critique underscores the director’s artistic choice to present a very different visual narrative of Kashmir which is perceptibly different from its depiction in most of Hindi cinema as a scenic and romantic backdrop for singing stars. The director’s decision to meticulously shoot the movie in Kashmir, often in brutally cold temperatures, and to employ many local artists as well as use the local art forms of Kashmir, is a conscious choice. It offers a material critique of the Industry’s practice of using canned shots and other substitute locales in their films referencing Kashmir for

economic reasons, and to avoid the inconvenience of shooting in a state that is politically volatile.

The critique expands beyond Bollywood to the cinematic medium itself. The scene where the prisoners are lined up in front of the screen playing the Bollywood song ends with the lights being switched on in the cinema hall and the camera being turned on the audience, who are, in this case, all police officers (see Figures 1.18 and 1.19).



Figure 1.19. Parallels between the policemen and the audience.
Source: *Haider*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj. UTV Films, 2014.



Figure 1.20. The prisoners (Roohdar and Haider's father) look back at the audience and Khurram.
Source: *Haider*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj. UTV Films, 2014.



Figure 1.21. Khurram in the projection room identified as the betrayer.
Source: *Haider*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj. UTV Films, 2014.

This scene is underscored by further visual and aural references to the gaze as “exposure” of guilt. It involves a moment which Roohdar refers to as “pardah phaash” (exposure of guilt) when the doctor finally “looks” at the person (Khurram) who betrayed him. The helpless prisoners lined-up on the stage, who are “looked at” by the audience of policemen, are allowed a rare moment of power when they look back at the “audience” and identify the perpetrator of the crime as Khurram, suddenly revealed in the projector room as part of that audience (See Figs 1.20 and 1.21). It is a rare meta-cinematic moment in which the audience, which has held the power of the gaze, becomes part of the narrative and finds itself projected on the screen, merged into the dual identities of the “policemen” and the “criminal,” Khurram. During this brief moment, the audience itself becomes the object of the gaze. The parallels between voyeurism, policing, and criminality extend beyond the narrative to directly address the audience watching the film by foregrounding its complicity in the abuse.

Khurram, who is identified as the villain in both his Shakespearean role as well as his role in the Kashmir conflict (as colluding with the Ikhwaan⁸⁹), is explicitly positioned as the “audience” watching “performances” in three crucial scenes in the film. He holds a position of authority in the “new” Kashmir as he watches the local *Bhand* dance with Ghazala after winning the elections. In the Salman Khan song sequence, he cowers as a guilty villain when he is identified by the Doctor and Roohdar, as they look back from the cinema hall stage. Finally, he is confronted with his actions when he watches Haider’s mousetrap performance (recreated as the “Bismil” [wounded] song sequence) with Ghazala by his side. The song is an elaborately

⁸⁹ The Ikhwaan were Kashmiri militants who had surrendered to the Indian military and were paid by the military and the Indian government to form a group to counter and weed out the pro-separatist militants in Kashmir.

wrought visual and oral recreation of Khurram's guilt, and once again the setup makes the larger audience complicit with his guilt. The wordplay in the song, as Haider warns the wounded "bulbul" (nightingale) to not trust the poison-laden "gul" (flower), exploit the traditional images of Urdu romantic poetry of the mutual attraction between the bird and the flower. They get intertwined with the Shakespearean associations of the poison used to kill Hamlet's father and the counterterrorism code, "Operation Bulbul," used to pit Kashmiris against each other to weed out terrorism. "Let the bulbul sing," orders an Indian intelligence officer efficiently, and the film records the devastating consequences of that song.

As films like *Maqbool* and *Haider* gain critical acclaim in their global circulation as Indian versions of *Macbeth* or *Hamlet*, the local rather than the national becomes the site of struggle. Moreover, the local is not overwhelmed by the national. Instead, it is pitted in opposition to the national, providing a view of its citizen-subjects as divested, to an extent, from their national identities. Thus, in *Maqbool*, the main characters are denizens of the criminal underworld of Mumbai who live under constant threat of the local police and the government which are as corrupt as Abbaji's gang. In *Haider*, a whole community and a state are criminalized under the nation. It is the hint of illegitimacy underlying the national identities of the central characters of *Maqbool* and *Haider* that enables them to provide a critique of the nation that both reflects and distorts them. The insertion of the global in this national space further enables the national critique to incorporate experimentation with different art forms and character types and promises a wide circulation that allows such experimentations to be economically viable and politically impactful.

CHAPTER 2

MODERN SUBJECTIVITIES AND ADAPTATION: *DEV. D* (2009), *ISHQIYA* (REGARDING LOVE, 2010), AND *DEDH ISHQIYA* (1 ½ TIMES LOVE, 2014)

The previous chapter details how Vishal Bhardwaj's Shakespearean adaptations express critiques of the nation and nationhood even as they are identified in the current, profitable global circulation of Shakespeare as the Bollywood or the "Indian" versions of Shakespearean plays. This spatial niche magnifies the impact of these films which would otherwise be overshadowed by the mega-blockbusters that dominate the Indian domestic and NRI⁹⁰ market. Bhardwaj localizes the global Shakespearean space to interrogate the nation in its present manifestation, focusing on the complexities of identity politics and terrorism that also involve questioning sacrosanct institutions such as the family and its role in imagining the nation.

This chapter looks at *Hat-ke* directors' adaptation of global and local genres to fashion modern subjects who are defined within national and global parameters. At its most obvious, globalization has provided directors and their audiences easy access to a variety of global and local media, as well as global production and distribution partnerships. *Hat-ke* directors use this new dynamic to position their films within their domestic cinematic history while also seeking to distinguish their films from it. Sometimes the difference is highlighted by looking for reference points in global cinema. On the production side, their intermittent collaborations with big names associated with Bollywood blockbusters, like Karan Johar and Yash Chopra productions, enable

⁹⁰ Non-resident Indian.

these two kinds of cinema to influence each other. One major influence is the accelerating, recent interest in the current decade in exploring gender roles in mainstream Bollywood films.

While both blockbusters and *Hat-ke* cinema attempt to capture the present moment and new emergent subjectivities in their films, the blockbusters, especially of the previous decade, have often been criticized for perpetuating gender stereotypes in new garb. *Hat-ke* cinema with its urban, multiplex audience and relatively smaller budget, is able to take risks and explore more unconventional subjects and forms. This freedom often enables it to take the lead in depicting hitherto unexplored relationships and providing a nuanced gendering of its characters which emerge from recording shifts in familial structures, intra-national migrations, new economic patterns, new technologies, and media. *Hat-ke* films often express these new relationships in new vocabularies.

This chapter focuses on how Anurag Kashyap's *Dev. D* (2009) and Abhishek Chaubey's *Ishqiya* (2010) and *Dedh Ishqiya* (2014) imagine modernity, gender, and genre in the new millennium. Anurag Kashyap's experimental adaptation of a canonical Indian text, *Devdas*, takes a popular Indian text and an archetypal "Indian" protagonist, Devdas, and holds up the text and the male archetype to scrutiny by providing them a global context. In *Dev. D*, Kashyap very consciously breaks with some of the most identifiable elements of the *Devdas* "tradition" to present contemporary, global characters in a swiftly changing India, and like Bhardwaj, provides a critique of the modern Indian nation. Abhishek Chaubey's black comedies explore female sexuality and agency, creating new female characters in distinctly non-urban milieus and modeled on a number of local and global genres, who suggest alternate sites of female modernity.

Devdas as a National Male Archetype and the *Hat-ke* intervention

Devdas occupies a unique place in Indian cinema as the most adapted text of Indian literature. It was written in 1901 by a young Sarat Chandra Chatterjee (1876 – 1938) but was published sixteen years later in 1917. Devdas, the protagonist of the novella, is the younger son of a rural landlord. He is in love with his childhood sweetheart, Parvati (aka Paro), but cannot marry her because of class differences and familial opposition. Devdas is sent from his village to the city (Kolkata) to acquire an education, where he adopts “modern” ways that include smoking, drinking, and wearing western clothes. Parvati is married off and Devdas, who cannot forget her, goes down the path of self-destruction, drinking and visiting prostitutes in the city.

Chandramukhi is a prostitute who falls in love with him and gives up her lifestyle for him. The book ends with Devdas undertaking an arduous journey to Parvati’s village to die at her doorstep to keep his promise of visiting her before his death.

Critical assessments of the novella and its screen adaptations invariably center on the issue of “modernity” that Devdas’s dilemma represents. The novel and films’ seemingly inexplicable and sustained popularity have provided fertile ground for historical, cultural, and especially psychoanalytical perspectives. Chidananda Dasgupta, an influential early film critic, who considered the novel “immature” and critiqued the character as a “self-indulgent weakling,” nevertheless labeled him a national archetype. He marveled at the character’s hold on the Indian psyche, conceding that “[p]erhaps...the dream of surrendering life’s troubles to the solace of drink and the arms of a lover-mother is too attractive an escape to be banished altogether from

our secret selves.”⁹¹ Such referencing of a “national archetype” through the character of Devdas gains urgency given the story’s sustained popularity over a century. What Dasgupta critiqued as escapism is also an aspect of Devdas’s modernity. Devdas is a modern figure trapped between his rural past and the urban present. He cannot forget his traumatic wrenching from his past (his village and Paro) and yet his move to the city (Kolkata and Chandramukhi) changes him forever, making him a tragic misfit. P.C. Barua, who made three successive screen adaptations of Devdas, was one of the earliest shapers of the Devdas mythos. He highlighted this conflict within Devdas by focusing on his incessant shuttling between the village and the city, using the train as a central motif of the movement towards modernity in his film adaptations.

The perception of Devdas’s modernity shifts over time. By setting his realistic novella set in early twentieth century colonial Bengal, Sarat Chandra makes Devdas the representative of the upper-middle class Bengali. Devdas is torn between a feudal lifestyle and the gradual absorption of modernization through westernized education and values, and the narrative records the tragic consequences of this dislocation. Viewed through the lens of post-colonial criticism, Devdas’s self-inflicted downward spiral becomes the reflection of the dislocated psyche of the colonized upper-class Indian male unable to shake off the shackles of the colonial mindset. Poonam Arora in her provocative essay “Devdas: India’s Emasculated Hero, Sado-Masochism and Colonialism,”⁹² provides a gendered perspective on the nation’s continued fascination with what

⁹¹ Chidananda Dasgupta, *The Painted Face: Studies in India’s Popular Cinema* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 1991), Ch. 3, cited in Asis Nandy, *An Ambiguous Journey to the City: The Village and Other Odd Ruins of the Self in the Indian Imagination* (New Delhi: OUP, 2001), 51.

⁹² Poonam Arora, “Devdas: Indian Cinema’s Emasculated Hero, Sado-masochism and Colonialism,” *Journal of South Asian Literature* 30, no. 1 / 2 (January 1, 1995): 254.

she calls Devdas's "lack of political and sexual agency." She argues that Devdas's inability to commit to a relationship with either of the two women who love him dramatizes the social and political tensions between the colonizer and the colonized by displacing the tensions onto the "psychosexual dynamics of a sadomasochistic relationship between a man and a woman."

It is Devdas's flaw or his dislocated psyche that makes his character so emblematic of Indian modernity across different time periods in widely differing contexts. Corey Creekmur's analysis⁹³ of the sustained success of *Devdas* shifts focus from the protagonist's psychology to the film's reception by the Indian audience and its mythic quality. He compares the response of the Indian audience to *Devdas* as similar to that of the epics, *The Mahabharata* and *The Ramayana*. He argues that the *Devdas narrative* is as deeply embedded in the Indian psyche as the stories and characters of the two epics. Thus, he suggests that *Devdas* is never viewed by the domestic audience as a first-time experience; it is always experienced as a repeat viewing. The broad strokes of the story are indeed well-known: it is the eternal tragic triangle consisting of Devdas, Paro, and Chandramukhi who never achieve their desired union. The high points of the narrative, such as Devdas's forced eviction from the idyllic childhood in the village to experiencing the perils of the big alienating city, Paro's bold midnight visit to Devdas's room, Chandramukhi's selfless devotion to Devdas, Devdas' scarring of Paro's face just before her marriage, his descent into drunkenness, and his final painful journey to Paro's village to die at her doorstep do not come as a surprise to the audience. They are anticipated moments in the adaptations that gain a mythic quality through their varying repetitions.

⁹³ Corey Creekmur, "Remembering, repeating, and working through *Devdas*," in *Indian Literature and Popular Cinema: Recasting Classics*, ed. Heidi Pauwels (New York: Routledge, 2007), 173-176.

The epic analogy in Creekmur's analysis is useful as it de-emphasizes the plot and points to the constant repetitions that accrue to the original, blurring the lines between the original and the copies. Thus, *Devdas* does not simply signify the original text but the entire gamut of adaptations that have left their imprint on the story and the characters. This chapter references the initial Bengali adaptation and the four successive Hindi adaptations directed by P.C. Barua in 1936, Bimal Roy in 1955, Sanjay Leela Bhansali in 2002, and Anurag Kashyap in 2009. The book and the three most popular subsequent Hindi film versions have been extremely successful and influential films in Indian cinema. Major Indian film forms such as romances and tragedies, and Indian film characters, both male and female, have been invariably marked by this book and its film adaptations.⁹⁴ The different *Devdas* adaptations over a century have built the mythos of Devdas, obscuring lines between real personalities, characters, directors, and actors even as they provide a fascinating perspective on the development of Hindi cinema and its appeal. A great deal of that appeal lies in the oscillation between the mythos and the modernity of Devdas.

While Anurag Kashyap's *Dev. D* (2009) was not a mega-blockbuster like the previous adaptations, it is nevertheless considered an important milestone in Indian cinema that defines its characters' "modernity" in the new global order. Even though it differs dramatically from the earlier films, its self-referentiality underscores and dramatizes the dialogue between the various *Devdas* adaptations. It highlights, in this fashion, the central impetus of *Hat-ke* cinema as confidently establishing its difference from previous Bollywood cinema even as it pays homage to it.

⁹⁴ For example, Guru Dutt's films and even Amitabh Bachchan's films have been viewed through this prism.

The Devdas myth and its various iterations have notable continuities regarding its directors and actors that reveal its hold over wide-ranging audiences and its high-profile creators' close identification with the character. The novel was first adapted into a silent film in 1928. Director Pramathesh C. Barua, under the New Theatre banner in Calcutta in 1935, directed the first definitive, "talkie" adaptation of *Devdas*. P.C. Barua, who is considered the first myth-maker of Devdas,⁹⁵ both directed and played the main role in the Bengali adaptation of *Devdas*. He openly acknowledged his fatalistic identification with Devdas and his repeated desire to return to it: "*Devdas* was in me even before I was born, I created it every moment of my life much before I put it on the screen and yet, once it was on the screen, it was more than a mirage, a play of light and shade and sadder still, it ceased to exist after two hours."⁹⁶

The above quotation underscores both the close, personal identification with this fictional character that many of its creators admitted to, as well as the obsessive desire to repeat it through the magic of cinema. This is paralleled by the audience's fascination with all its hugely successful adaptations. The persistence of such identification, with a number of personalities associated with the character, suggests a generic quality to Devdas. This generic quality was noted by Dasgupta who considered him a "national archetype." Barua came from an aristocratic family in Assam and he was sent, like Devdas, to acquire a "modern" education in Calcutta that wrenched him from his native village forever. This move from the village to the city at the turn of the previous century was a typical move experienced by a cross-section of society and it was

⁹⁵ Sarat Chandra's life has also been scoured by critics and fans looking for parallels between his life and Devdas's life.

⁹⁶ Pran Neville, *K.L. Saigal: The Definitive Biography*, eBook (Penguin Books, 2011), "Devdas," https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B06XYPL1RC/ref=dbs_a_def_rwt_hsch_vapi_tkin_p1_i3.

complicated by colonization. Barua's extravagant, "western" lifestyle, his numerous affairs, his alcoholism, and his close relationship with his wife and mother provided plenty of parallels with Devdas's life and seemed to ring eerily true when Barua died at the early age of forty-eight due to alcoholism.

In the film's Hindi remake, Barua, conscious of his accented Hindi diction, chose K.L. Saigal, a Punjabi, to play the part of Devdas. Barua's wife, Jamuna Devi, played Paro in both versions but he inexplicably chose to play the relatively insignificant role of Paro's adult stepson in the Hindi adaptation (thus playing Paro's lover and son in consecutive adaptations) – a move that could be interpreted as emphasizing the Oedipal element in *Devdas* across the two adaptations. This Oedipal element in the character of the tragic hero is not simply a reminder of Barua's personal identification with the character and his desire to obsessively repeat the story. It is also a recurring motif in the emphasis on the psychological analyses of Devdas's character from critics such as Chidananda Dasgupta, Asis Nandy, and Poonam Arora. Moreover, as noted by Asis Nandy and Creekmur,⁹⁷ it encourages unlikely links between the romantic Devdas and the numerous, mother-obsessed roles played by another, more action-oriented tragic hero, Amitabh Bachchan, suggesting the persistence of that motif in Hindi cinema.

The Bangla and the Hindi versions of *Devdas* are almost identical, yet Saigal's physical presence (as a tall, sturdy Punjabi in contrast to the slender-framed Barua) provided a different interpretation of a more headstrong and impetuous Devdas. The Hindi version, which included the very successful songs sung by Saigal, was an even greater success than the Bangla version. Saigal became a cult figure because of the film, and his early death due to alcoholism at the age

⁹⁷ Creekmur, "Remembering Devdas," 178.

of forty-two served to further merge the personalities of the actor with the character of Devdas. At the time of his death, the popular actor was mourned by the entire nation and conflated by the press with the character as the radio stations played the *Devdas* songs round the clock in homage. The massive fan-following of Saigal, the markedly different personalities of Barua and Saigal, and their different interpretations of the character of Devdas fed into the Devdas myth, creating a tragic hero on a very different scale from that of the character in the novella.

Devdas was remade in 1955 by Bimal Roy, the erstwhile cinematographer of P.C. Barua's *Devdas*, who was responsible for some of the iconic train shots of the earlier films. Roy made the film in his characteristic understated realist style and cast Dilip Kumar in the role of Devdas. Roy went back to the novella and introduced the lovers as young children quarreling and bonding amidst nature, which becomes a key component in understanding their love. This version of *Devdas* is the most revered of the various adaptations, as the naturalistic acting style appears more familiar to contemporary audiences than the more stilted dialogue delivery of the characters of P.C. Barua's *Devdas*. Dilip Kumar, a deliberate, Method-oriented actor, chose to play the role with a mixture of calm fatalism and intensity which was very different from the youthful quick-silver performance of Saigal. His brooding performance gave the tragic persona of Devdas a dignity which is still remembered with awe by audiences. His dialogue: "Kaun Kambakht hai jo bardasht karne ke liye pita hai. Main to peeta hoon ki saans le sakun," (Which cursed fool drinks to be able to tolerate, I drink so that I might breathe) is still quoted as one of the definitive lines of his career. It also served to glamorize the character's alcoholism into a philosophical stance that became a standard device to depict intense and unfulfilled love in Indian cinema.

Roy's meticulous recreation of the rural Bengal of Sarat Chandra's novella was intertwined with an inclination to romanticize the character of Devdas. It is most obvious in Paro's near deification of Devdas, an element that is missing in Barua's version that depicts a much more critical assessment of Devdas's character by Paro. This provides a space for Dilip Kumar's different rendition of Devdas, layering the character with a brooding intensity and a tragic, fatalistic dignity that are absent in the novella and Barua's version. It would not be too far-fetched to view the success of this *Devdas* as reflecting the nation's nostalgia for a unified, rural past that was fast vanishing as it adjusted to its new independent status after having undergone the trauma of the Partition. As in the case of Barua and Saigal, the role threatened to spill beyond the plot to affect Dilip Kumar's professional and personal life. Kumar admitted to being burdened by the success of the previous Devdases during the shooting of the film. Moreover, after the film, his own successful rendition of the tragic, self-destructive persona threatened to overshadow his career and he had to deliberately choose more swashbuckling roles to shake off that screen image. This close identification of the actors and directors with the character of Devdas and its influence on their careers provided the character a glamor that is absent in the novella, grounding the excesses of his personality and his weaknesses in the tragedies of real-life star personas.

When Sanjay Leela Bhansali's over-the-top and lavish adaptation of *Devdas* was released in 2002, Shahrukh Khan, who plays Devdas in this version, was aware of the comparisons that would be made of him and Dilip Kumar. He chose to emphasize Devdas's haplessness and vulnerability with a certain flair for excess that clearly distinguishes his portrayal from Dilip Kumar's restraint. Bhansali's choice to have Indian superstar Shahrukh Khan play Devdas

reflects his approach to his adaptation. His Devdas returns to his village not from Kolkata but from London. The hugely successful NRI characters played by Shahrukh Khan in his earlier films thus shape this interpretation of Devdas, making him modern in strikingly different ways than the previous Devdases. The adaptation ostensibly keeps the rural Bengal setting of the novella and the previous two films but guts its socio-historical roots by placing the characters in a fairy-tale setting of lavish courtyards and palatial buildings. This perhaps was not an unwise choice which enabled the Bhansali adaptation to address a global, millennial audience that is distanced in terms of both time and space from the Devdas story of a century ago.

Modern Indian Masculinity and the Global City in *Dev. D*

The 2009 version by Anurag Kashyap plays upon the cinematic tradition of all these *Devdas* films, paying both homage to the tradition and clearly marking its difference in his depiction of the characters' modernity. The film is a musical of sorts, located in Punjab rather than Bengal, and is switched, rather outrageously, from a tragedy to a comedy. It undercuts all the traditional signposts of the Devdas myth and yet is, in a way, closer to the original Sarat Chandra text in its deglamorization of its protagonist's flaws. However, like the other *Devdas* adaptations, it deals with the tragedy of a protagonist marked by change who is pulled by his desire for the past and attempts without success to return to it. In *Dev. D* however, he finally learns to accept the change, which finally provides him a dignity that is denied to him in the rest of the film.

Kashyap's *Dev. D* underplays the grand mythos of the tragedy of Devdas in its decision to cast Abhay Deol,⁹⁸ a lesser known, non-glamorous star to play the much-coveted role of Devdas. The film's mixture of realistic cityscapes and the psychedelic, mood-oriented recreation of Dev's drug-induced visions were, as acknowledged in the film credits, influenced by Danny Boyle. It also chooses to acknowledge the previous versions of *Devdas*, as Creekmur notes, in a fleeting, tongue-in-cheek reference to Dev's lawyer as "Bimal Barua." Even though its mood and visual style are in striking contrast to the glittering opulence of Bhansali's blockbuster version of *Devdas*, Kashyap's film also makes many visual references to Bhansali's version, such as including the *Devdas* poster and two fleeting clips of the song-and-dance sequences of Chandramukhi, played by Madhuri Dixit, in Bhansali's *Devdas*. And, perhaps most tellingly, Kashyap's film echoes Bhansali's decision to get Devdas to "return" from London instead of Kolkata as marking the global context of the story. The film builds upon Bhansali's additions far more outrageously, doing away with the historical, cultural, and colonial specificity of Bengal altogether and situates the story in modern-day, semi-industrialized rural Punjab and Delhi as the new locus in which to play out the contemporary, global version of the Devdas story.

The dual effect of "mythicization" and the "modernization" of the Devdas story is evident in each successive adaptation of *Devdas*. Anurag Kashyap refers to this aspect of Devdas in his following comment: "*Devdas* has gone beyond being a book or a movie, it has become an adjective... The idea was to try and explore that adjective that it had become and through which I

⁹⁸ Abhay Deol is credited with providing the germ of the story of an irreverent, unglamorous, modern Devdas to Anurag Kashyap.

wanted to talk about the youth....”⁹⁹ His choice of the word “adjective” instead of “mythicization” reflects his attempt to de-glamorize the grand tragedy of Devdas while acknowledging its relevance in understanding a contemporary “national” archetype.

All the Devdas adaptations provide parallel attempts to “mythicize” and “modernize” the Devdas story. Despite Barua’s self-identification with Devdas, his version clearly emphasized Devdas’s narcissism and his weakness. However, it was Barua’s removal of the narratorial voice for the film that first allowed the audience to experience Devdas’s tragedy directly. His innovative use of parallel editing visually linked Paro and Devdas’s reaction to each other defying physical space. Cinematic technique elevates the bond between the lovers to a mystical one that is absent in the more realistic novella.

Barua’s film also embellished the ending of the novella, with the approval of the novelist who famously admitted to finding the film’s conclusion superior to his own. In the novella, Parvati hears of Devdas’s death days later, after the reader receives a bleak description of the Devdas’s abandoned, half-burned dead body scavenged by birds and animals. In Barua’s version, Parvati, upon hearing that the anonymous person who died outside her mansion is Devdas, runs down the stairs and across the courtyard to meet Devdas but never manages to step out, as the doors of her mansion close on her upon her husband’s orders. The long tracking shot of her, running across her mansion with disheveled hair as the huge doors close on her, have become the staple of all film versions of *Devdas*, emphasizing the tragic separation of the lovers.

⁹⁹ Anurag Kashyap, “Anurag Kashyap’s Journey with Dev. D.,” *MovieTalkies.com*, accessed January 24, 2019, <https://www.movietalkies.com/interviews/anurag-kashyaps-journey-with-dev-d/>.

Kashyap chose a completely different ending for his film in which, instead of undertaking the arduous journey back to the village and dying at Parvati's doorstep, a somewhat chastened Devdas drives back into the city with Chanda (the prostitute who loves him) to own up to his irresponsible actions that had resulted in the death of several people. Before discussing the implications of this dramatically different ending, it might be worthwhile to discuss the much less frequently discussed first meeting of the adult lovers after Devdas returns from the city. This scene, marking Devdas's alienation from his rural life and Paro, provides a window into the "tragedy" of Devdas and the progressive "mythicization" of the Devdas-Paro romance in Hindi cinema while it clarifies the scope of Kashyap's intervention in the Devdas story.

In Sarat Chandra's novella, Devdas's alienation from the village and Paro is gradual, over a series of returns to the village, even though the novel does highlight a key meeting between them as they step into adolescence. Devdas, who has just returned from Kolkata, goes to Paro's house and is sent upstairs where he encounters Paro lighting the evening lamp. They greet each other a little awkwardly, each conscious of the other. Unable to get back to their previous childhood bonding, Devdas leaves quickly out of shyness. In Barua's version, this moment is highlighted as an important turning point in the film. Devdas's return to the village is marked by his ostentatious western attire, his white sola topee, and his swinging cane and is dramatized in Paro's apprehension upon viewing Devdas's drastic change of appearance. When Devdas meets Paro in the prayer room lighting a lamp, her pleasure in his return is marred by her recognition of his changed appearance: "Why have you become like the others, Devdas?" she asks, as Devdas almost preens before her (see Fig. 2.1). Devdas's sartorial change underlines the inevitable

psychological change that he has undergone, which he tries to bridge with his incessant attempts to return to a past that is no longer accessible to him.



Figure 2.1. Devdas marked by his modernity sporting a sola topee and cane. Paro is apprehensive.

Source: *Devdas*. Dir. P.C. Barua. New Theaters. 1935.

This disjunctive moment is projected differently in Bimal Roy's *Devdas* (1955) which downplays Devdas's changed appearance. The scene focuses instead on the almost incidental presence of the lamp in both Sarat Chandra's novella and Barua, and turns it into an important visual and devotional moment. In Barua's version, there is no attempt at a deification of Devdas. Instead, the scene provides the occasion for Paro's critique of him. In Roy's adaptation (which is closer to the description of the meeting in the novella and yet different in the objects he emphasizes in the sequence), when Paro hears Devdas's familiar voice and footsteps in her house she shyly runs up to her room to postpone the imminent meeting under the pretense of lighting the evening lamp. Both the audience and Paro hear how Devdas has changed but they have yet to see it for themselves, as they are primed by the sound of his footsteps ascending the stairs. As Devdas's face slowly comes into focus, the audience follows a point of view shot of him from Paro's perspective: she first sees his shoes and then brings up her gaze to his face which slowly

reveals itself in the light of the lamp to the sound of the conch shells in the background (See Fig. 2.2.).¹⁰⁰ The juxtaposition of the sound and visuals provides the scene a devotional context that sets the tone of their relationship in which Paro's devotion to Devdas is viewed in a mystical and religious light. This is in line with Roy's adaptation that provides a much more fatalistic interpretation of Devdas's tragedy in which change, like the changing seasons he highlights, seems almost inevitable.



Figure 2.2. Deification of Devdas in three successive shots: his feet, his face, and Paro's face as she looks at him coincides with the lighting of the lamp and the sound of a conch shell.

Source: *Devdas*. Dir. Bimal Roy. Shemaroo. 1955

In Bhansali's over-the-top Bollywood adaptation of the novella, objects and glamor take center stage. The ordinary, everyday lamp become an exquisitely-wrought, exaggerated symbol of Paro's devotion: she has, impossibly, kept it unextinguished for ten years and it also becomes the occasion for a full Bollywood dance of the "heroine" inside the mansion with a bevy of extras (see Fig. 2.3). Though panned by some critics, Bhansali's adaptation choices provide a fascinating window into the conversation between adaptations. Just as Roy had acknowledged

¹⁰⁰ Ravi Vasudevan in *The Melodramatic Public: Film Form and Spectatorship in Indian Cinema* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), discusses this scene as emblematic of the "darsenic" gaze that he considers predominant in the 1950s films. He discusses how the audience's gaze merges with Paro's in this sequence.

Sarat Chandra, Barua, and Saigal in the opening credits, Bhansali acknowledges and positions himself within the Devdas tradition that includes Sarat Chandra, P.C. Barua, and Bimal Roy. Bhansali's version moves away from the novella and builds on the Devdas mythos by not focusing as much on the psychological or social implications of Devdas's modernity. His *Devdas* is a reaction to the previous Devdases and the star persona of Shahrukh Khan, and he focuses on the audience's negotiation with the grand myth of *Devdas*. In 2002, in the post-liberalization phase of Indian cinema, Bhansali's Devdas returns from London in the guise of the superstar Shahrukh Khan. He exaggerates the emotions and glamorizes the landscape of a story which, he is well aware, has become legendary, and he focuses instead on retelling a grand and glamorous tale for a new audience that might have no connection with the setting or the story of *Devdas*.



Figure 2.3. Paro's Bollywood dance with the lamp
Source: *Devdas*. Dir. Sanjay L. Bhansali. Eros. 2002.

Shahrukh's ostentatious and slightly ridiculous first appearance in a polka-dotted bow-tie and hat (see Fig. 2.4) is perhaps a nod at Barua's Devdas, emphasizing the character's complete alienation from his surroundings. It is also a response to the grand visual moment that Roy, despite his understated direction, displays in the 1955 version of *Devdas*, by focusing on

Devdas's deferred appearance and Paro's gaze when she and the audience finally catch a glimpse of Devdas. In Bhansali's version, the change in Devdas has been indicated by Devdas's dramatic appearance which the audience gets to see before the lovers meet each other. The rest of the scene does not focus on establishing the relationship between Devdas and Paro. Devdas's modernity is a play of images, just as the love between Devdas and Paro is a mythologized gesture by now; it does not need psychological or sociological rationale. Their romance is pre-established by the previous adaptations – thus Devdas's love for Paro is eternal, and it is exaggerated by his memory of the exact number of days, hours and minutes he spent away from Paro, just as she has kept an unextinguished lamp burning for ten years in his memory. The film does not attempt to establish realism but seeks to express the grand emotions experienced by these characters and the audiences' predetermined acknowledgment of it.



Figure 2.4. Devdas returns from London.
Source: *Devdas*. Dir. Sanjay L. Bhansali.
Eros. 2002.



Figure 2.5. The lovers defer their gaze.
Source: *Devdas*. Dir. Sanjay L. Bhansali. Eros.
2002.

Thus, Bhansali's version of the first meeting of the lovers focuses instead on an elaborate scene in which the lovers flirt and defer their own meeting to feed their desire (see Fig. 2.5). It highlights the deferred cinematic moment of gazing that combines and plays with the lovers' and the audience's desire to witness that reunion. This nod at the cinematic medium and Bhansali's

positioning of himself within the tradition of *Devdas* adaptations sets the tone of this new adaptation in which Devdas and Paro's romance is replete with images of binoculars and "gazing," amping up the myth of Devdas to an ornate feast for the eyes and senses. In true "Bollylite" fashion it is self-conscious about its Devdas-ness and feeds the audience's hunger for visual and aural excess.

Kashyap's adaptation reveals a similar self-consciousness but engages with the Devdas myth critically from its present position. Dev is stripped of his heroism and charisma, and is presented as a typical and rather banal product of the new millennium. The film's initial sequences present a casual, jean-clad Dev in London communicating obsessively with Paro over the web and on phones. The difference between the lovers is easily bridged by modern communication devices. Dev and Paro indulge in sex talk over phones, emails, and online chatting, sporting IDs like "Chammak Challo" (Flirt) and "The Dude." (see Figures 2.6 and 2.7). He requests a nude picture of her which becomes the compelling reason for his return. The opening shatters any hint of mysticism or spirituality that underpinned the earlier Devdas-Paro relationships. The lovers are sexually curious about each other and have the communication gadgets to indulge that curiosity. Their first encounter upon his return from London is, however, a desperate and ultimately unsuccessful attempt at coupling amid a busy wedding which quickly becomes comical as they are interrupted by the guests walking in and out of the room.



Figure 2.6. Paro as “Chhamak Chhallo” (Flirt)
Source: *Dev. D* Dir. Anurag Kashyap. UTV.
2009.



Figure 2.7. Dev as “The Dude” in London
Source: *Dev. D* Dir. Anurag Kashyap. UTV.
2009.

This meeting sets the tone of their contemporary relationship just as it did with the other adaptations. As representatives of the new, global generation, the issues of gender and class do not initially seem to pose as much of a problem in this relationship. Paro is easily able to be in touch with Dev, and she is an equal partner in their sexual conversation. Devdas, lounging in jeans at an airport drinking Coke, is marked visibly by the changes that globalization has brought about in the metropolises. However, this moment of change has affected Paro and her small town too. Determined to continue their ongoing relationship, Paro goes to a nearby town to get her nude picture printed out. She shows the same determination in her attempts to find a private space for themselves in the middle of a mustard field to initiate their sexual relationship and later, upon being rejected by Dev, decides to marry a rich widower who loves her. The opening scenes emphasize Paro’s agency and focus on the various communication devices the lovers have at their disposal to be in touch with each other. Paro seems much more capable of action whereas as a modern, alienated Dev hiding behind communication gadgets seems casually self-centered and irresponsible.

This adaptation emphasizes the physical attraction between the lovers, but their inability to have a sexual relationship is initially comical rather than tragic. Later, Dev's rejection of Paro's sexual overtures exposes his sexual hypocrisy and his surface modernity. The difference between him and Paro is not that she represents the past, but that she lives in the practical present. However, like the earlier Paros in the *Devdas* tradition, she is not only willing to flout tradition but is also capable of moving on with her life when her relationship with Dev does not work out. Even after her marriage she agrees to meet him and is capable of being hurt by his sarcasm. She does not, however, idolize him and lets him know his behavior is childish and selfish. The reason for their breakup is not social or economic inequality but solely Dev's sexual jealousy and his inherent class snobbery, which makes him angrily mock Paro's appearance and her social aspirations. The "crisis" of modernity in this *Devdas*'s life is his internalization of class and gender hierarchy and his sense of entitlement revealed in the initial scenes in his guiltless sexual encounters with different partners, and his inability to accept similar sexual standards for Paro.

Dev. D also marks its difference from the other *Devdas* adaptations by giving equal attention to the two women who love Devdas, and in its engagement with the city. The film is clearly divided into three chapters titled, "Paro," "Chanda," and "Dev. D" The contemporary tragedy of *Dev. D*, as it unfolds against the backdrop of stale cokes, burgers, alcohol, and drugs, is also the story of a sexually curious and practical Paro, and a runaway, half-French school student, Chanda, haunted by a cruel sex-scandal that rips apart her life, but who gradually rebuilds it as a prostitute in the city. The film ensures that the "tragedy" is not centered on the character of Devdas; it is shared or experienced by all three characters as they are displaced from

their original moorings and land in Delhi. Delhi is central to their experiential reality and all three experience it very differently. Chanda moves out of the upper-middle class southern neighborhood of Delhi to the seedy Paharganj area. Still nursing the wounds of her betrayal by her family, she earns her degree and learns to deal with her clients. Paro moves from Punjab to the southern neighborhoods of Delhi after marrying a rich widower. Despite her grief, she learns to adjust to her new family. Neither of them is satisfied, but both are strongly inclined towards self-preservation. Moreover, both, in their own ways, attempt to assist Devdas as he aimlessly attempts to self-destruct in the brothels and drug dens of Paharganj. All three characters are required to come to terms with the city to move beyond their individual tragedies.

The country-city dichotomy that upheld a certain nostalgia for the country in the *Devdas* adaptations of the previous century no longer holds in either of the newer *Devdas* adaptations. Bhansali's *Devdas* barely lets the audience get a glimpse of the exteriors of the country or the city. The childhood sequences between Devdas and Paro are excised. His drama takes place in the impossibly lavish rooms of Devdas's palatial house, which are almost rivaled by the extensive corridors and glittering rooms of Paro's neighboring house. When the action of the film shifts to the city, the grand interiors of Chandramukhi's kotha (brothel) do not offer much of a visual distinction either.

In *Dev D*, this absence of the country as a nostalgic ideal of lost innocence is actively undercut in the Chanda section when she experiences the palpable threat and cruelty of her country relatives upon being sent to her father's village as punishment for her "transgression." *Dev. D* does show the childhood sequences between Dev and Paro, but instead of establishing the primal, natural bond between the lovers amid the natural beauty of woods and streams of the

village, the fights between the young lovers take place against the moss-and-sludge-covered brick wall of a dam that channels the local river. The first outside shot of a grown-up Paro is indeed against the mustard-covered fields of the Punjabi countryside which has been romanticized in endless Hindi movies, especially in Yash Chopra's films right up to *DDLJ* (1995). However, the film makes a point by quickly overwhelming it with images of a semi-industrialized village of dams, cramped chicken-farms, and sugar-cane factories that serve as a backdrop for the lovers' escalating estrangement (see Fig. 2.8).



Figure 2.8. Dev and Paro's semi-industrialized village with sludge filled streams, crowded chicken farms and sugarcane factories.
Source: *Dev. D* Director Anurag Kashyap. UTV, 2009.

The city is central to *Dev. D*, and shifting the locale from Kolkata to Delhi wrests this adaptation away from the colonial history of Kolkata to Delhi as the new global locus of contemporary culture and change. The Delhi scenes in *Dev. D* do not dwell on the glittering malls and bungalows that are often shown in the turn-of-the-century blockbusters. The film depicts congested and dirty north Delhi streets that change in mood and tone, becoming drug-

riddled dens, and the surreal, culturally mixed, urban red-light area of Paharganj at night (see Fig. 2.9). Kashyap specifically wanted to depict the “Israeli” street in the Daryaganj area: “All the white women looking for nirvana end up here with some junkie or a peddler or a pimp. This place is like none else. This is where all the rich kids land up to have the white experience.”¹⁰¹ This was his bleak version of the global hybrid space that epitomizes the exploitative notions of otherness that provide a brief meeting ground for different cultures in his film.



Figure 2.9. North Delhi in *Dev. D* Crowded in the mornings and surreal at night.
Source: *Dev. D* Dir. Anurag Kashyap. UTV. 2009.

This “Delhi” flavor that Kashyap brings into the film is further highlighted by including two contemporary scandals that both localize the space and establish it as the prototypical global city of reckless, alienating consumerism and modern technology. The first provides the backstory of Chanda’s past. As a schoolgirl, she was taped having sex with her boyfriend whose posts of

¹⁰¹ Anurag Kashyap, “*Dev. D* – the look and the style,” Blog. *Passion for Cinema – Archive*, Jan 2009, accessed January 25, 2019, <https://passionforcinema-archive.blogspot.com/2016/06/devd-look-and-style.html>.

the act go viral. The scandal shatters young Leni's life, who runs away from home, gets sucked into the world of prostitution and changes her name from Leni to Chanda. The earlier part of the story is a direct reference to the Delhi MMS scandal of 2004 that involved two eleventh graders of Delhi Public School, which has become a cautionary tale about the devastation that social media can wreak upon young people. In a later scene in the film, a drunk and depressed Dev drives his new BMW and crushes several people sleeping on the pavements. This incidence references an actual, well-known hit-and-run case in 1999 that involved a rich young boy, Sanjay Nanda, who in a drunken stupor drove into and killed a number of poor laborers who slept on the Delhi pavements. Dev's social alienation, feckless consumerism, and lack of empathy literally becomes a danger to society and unfortunately destroys the most vulnerable.

The film, oscillating between actual incidents and intensely realized city locales interrupted by artificial chapters, songs, and non-realistic characters, highlights the encounter of modern Indian youth carrying the baggage of traditional Indian masculinity and sexual taboos with easy wealth, sex, and modern technology. The film links this lack of accountability and self-destructive behavior ultimately to an irresponsibility towards the lives of others. Dev's attitude, reflected in his careless cruelty towards the three women who love him (Kashyap adds a third woman, Paro's sister-in-law, to the list) is ultimately similar to his irresponsible crime against the vulnerable pavement dwellers.

Previous *Devdas* adaptations mitigated Devdas's self-centeredness and immaturity by contextualizing them against the social taboos that overwhelm him. In most of the *Devdas* adaptations, it is the conflict between Devdas and his father that expresses the opposition between emergent modernity and social taboos. In *Dev. D*, Dev's father, rather than being

against the union, actively encourages his son to marry Paro. Dev is solely responsible for the break-up of him and Paro. The film deglamorizes Dev's lack of empathy, his addictive, obsessive personality, and his self-destructive descent into drugs and destitution. He is neither heroic nor attractive, and none of the women glamorize his behavior in any way. He is less a hero than a "type," epitomizing and bringing to a crisis the peculiar alienation proliferating amongst millennial youth's consumerism and engagement with modern technology. Breaking the narrative continuity by dividing the film into chapters and having "chorus"-like characters comment on the story further encourages a distancing from its protagonist.

However, Kashyap's adaptation, without mystifying Devdas' obsession with Paro or elevating his tragedy, also allows him a certain redemption by enabling him to turn his life around. Kashyap's Dev is not a figure of romance, he is responsible for the deaths of many people, yet he does not die. Shocked out of his depression and obsession by a close death encounter which he escapes out of sheer luck, he does not attempt the final return to Paro. Instead, at the end, apparently ready to shoulder his responsibility for the deaths of the pedestrians he ran over, he drives back into the face of the audience with Chanda, who teaches him some empathy.

This new Dev, reliving the tragic fatalism of the Devdas myth amid the clutter of consumerism and the unrelenting fast-paced culture of globalization, is given a choice. This is the difference in *Dev. D's* vision of modernity in the global age: the very consumer culture and modern communication tools that define Dev's alienation and dislocation and trigger the tragedy of the two women also offer choices to the characters. The choices, enabled by their mobility, do not fulfill their desires, but they provide options. These choices, however compromised – and

they are clearly far more compromised for the women – are open to all the three characters. Paro accepts it early in the film, in her marriage to a rich businessman who loves her but cannot satisfy her sexually or emotionally. Leni is offered a similar choice by a pimp, and she chooses to become a prostitute and complete her education instead of returning to her family who abandoned her. For Dev, there is no return to Paro. He chooses Chanda and perhaps a prison sentence for the manslaughter charges pending against him, but he chooses not to die on the streets.

Dev, as the new global hero of the new millennium, learns some basic and long overdue lessons about female sexuality. He comes full cycle from his initial, cruel dismissal of Paro as a “slut” at the beginning of the film to a recognition of his culpability. In his confession to Chanda, he turns the term around to define himself: “You are right you know, I am a slut.” For Chanda, the word was a searing reminder of her humiliation after the scandal and the sense of abandonment she experienced when her parents did not provide her the support she desperately needed. Despite his immaturity, Dev’s ability to empathize with Chanda’s trauma is one of his few redeeming qualities. Chanda had repeated the term to insult Dev and express her hurt when he self-obsessively insists on his love for Paro in front of her. His statement becomes his acknowledgment of his earlier insensitivity. His denial of his love for Paro and his lie that affirms Chanda’s mistaken belief that an engagement ring was meant for her, establish the initial steps that he must take towards being a newer, less self-centered “hero.” His “gender sensitivity,” requires his acknowledgement of social responsibility too, which is suggested in the last shot of Dev’s drive back into the city with Chanda.

This Dev's dislocation is more internalized, yet he is able to "change" and "move on." Kashyap's cinema does not cause an "entire generation to cry over Devdas," but it does return to the Devdas mythos and gives the myth a turn, attempting a less glamorous critique of Devdas's tragedy: his alienated Dev is more commonplace and perhaps because of this he is given a chance to opt out of repeating the tragic cycle. Dev is a product of his age albeit not a glamorous one. He is also, like the other Devdases, marked by his "modernity" that is triggered by his love for Paro and his early displacement. But his situatedness in the contemporary age provides him a compromised second chance (he has to live with the consequences of his actions, but he manages to get back with Chanda), and to his credit, he takes it.

Glocal Women in *Ishqiya* and *Dedh Ishqiya*: Gender, Genre, and Performance

The first wave of post-liberalization Bollywood is awash with images of gym-toned women who look strikingly confident in their "modern" global dress codes, urban consumer lifestyles, and steadily increasing mobility. The blockbusters of the late 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century registered the glamor and appeal of new lifestyles ushered in by globalization and simultaneously codify a certain entrenchment of the familial, patriarchal set up bolstered by the concomitant rise of Hindu nationalism that promotes largely conservative models of female conduct and sexuality. While these films do register female discontent, it is swiftly subsumed by the romance narratives and their inexorable progress towards a wedding, which is yet another marketable feature of big Bollywood films. Abhishek Chaubey's directorial debut, *Ishqiya* (Of Love, 2010), centered on a strong female character, upended many female stereotypes at the time of its release. Female-centric films are rare in Hindi cinema, so the noir-

heist-comedy hybrid form set in small-town India featuring a down-to-earth, rustic female unapologetic about her sexuality, was highly unusual at the time of its release.

Female roles in Indian cinema since its inception have been modeled on the mythological figures of Sita and Radha who often serve as models of sacrifice and patience, which provide the diverse and mammoth domestic audience with recognizable prototypes. The acknowledgment of female sexuality has not been completely absent in Indian cinema but these have either been pushed to the sidelines and linked to soft pornography – notably the purview of B grade and horror films – or they have been sporadically explored by parallel cinema, which has a very limited audience. The exploration of female sexuality is a common thread in the films of *Hat-ke* directors, and characters like Nimmi¹⁰² in *Maqbool* (Bhardwaj 2003) and the films discussed below have heralded some much-needed shifts in the portrayal of female characters in Hindi cinema. Chaubey's shift of venue from the metropolises to small-town India, focusing on the lower-middle classes or the "excluded" class, has led the way for a surge of interest in depicting how change is gradually transforming the smaller towns of India. The emphasis on exploring female sexuality is reflected in the recent success of films such as *Lipstick Under my Burkha* (Shrivastava 2016) and *Veere di Wedding* (Friend's Wedding, Ghosh, 2018) which, despite their problematic sexual politics, deal openly with female sexuality. However, the discourse of female sexuality in Indian cinema remains restricted and female sexual choice is heavily monitored notwithstanding the eagerness of Big Bollywood to embrace the pro-market, pro-choice vocabulary of globalization.

¹⁰² See Chapter 2 for a discussion of Nimmi's role as a femme fatale in *Maqbool*.

Abhishek Chaubey's debut film, *Ishqiya* (Regarding Love, 2010), and its sequel, *Dedh Ishqiya* (1½ Times Love, 2014), enthusiastically combine popular global genres such as noir, heist, and road movies with Bollywood "masala," fantasy, satire, and local realism. They are particularly relevant examples of *Hat-ke* Cinema's impulse to intersect the global with the local to create new ways of articulating female sexual desire through a heady blend of wildly different genres. Both *Ishqiya* and *Dedh Ishqiya* have central female characters who are amalgams of local realism and genre construction. Krishna's character in *Ishqiya* has definite echoes of the femme-fatale of film noir, the bride in Tarantino's *Kill Bill* Vols.1 and 2 (2003, 2004) and Korean action dramas. Begum Para and her faithful companion, Muniya in *Dedh Ishqiya*, on the other hand, seem to emerge straight from the pages of a folk-tale or a "Muslim Social,"¹⁰³ while simultaneously managing to evoke elements from *Thelma and Louise* (Scott 1991), Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, and Ismat Chughtai's controversial Urdu short story "Lihaaf" (The Quilt, 1942). Furthermore, Krishna, who is a minutely observed study of a north Indian semi-rural woman, and Muniya, a practical, small-town woman who aspires to travel the world, ground the multiple generic prototypes in a contemporary small-town India slowly but inexorably transforming under the impact of globalization.

The sexual promiscuity of these semi-rural women skews the urban, largely middle class model of the New Woman of liberalized India that Rupal Oza has identified as having become

¹⁰³ The Muslim social is a film genre that was popular in the 1950s and 1960s in Indian cinema. It focused on the minority Islamic culture in India either harking back to Islamic nobility or focusing on modern middle-class Muslim families in India. It often included musical forms associated with Islamic culture such as ghazals, qawwalis, and Urdu poetry.

the site on which the identity of the new, global India is being defined.¹⁰⁴ The characters of Krishna, Begum Para, and Muniya provide a glocal perspective in the discourse of the New Woman that resists an easy contextualization within a purely nationalist discourse. These women's sexuality cannot quite be termed "westernized" or elitist and thus be easily dismissed as aberrant modernity, as they represent a shifting social landscape that is much less difficult to categorize in the easy predetermined dichotomies of East vs. West or national vs. the foreign. Apart from their social representativeness, they are also generic constructions of global literary and artistic forms, and thus address a considerably less homogenized audience that instead views the women's deviant desires and generic trajectories from multiple perspectives. These multiple frames of reference provoke and engage the audience directly, enabling it to be both duped by and yet empathize with the women's strategies of survival and resistance that are central to both the plots.

Krishna and Begum Para, though strikingly dissimilar in terms of their class, community, and temperament, have one thing in common – they have dead husbands. As widows, they are marginalized socially but are also somewhat dangerously untethered, and both films involve plots that ostensibly deal with romancing them back into the social fold. In the process, the films also address the issue of sexual choice. "Choice" is a favored term in the vocabulary of globalization, but when dealing with the issue of female sexuality, these choices can be

¹⁰⁴ Rupal Oza, *The Making of Neoliberal India: Nationalism, Gender and the Paradoxes of Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2006). Oza evaluates the image of the New woman (as modern, sexually liberated, and domesticated) in India that has emerged as a direct result of the post 1990s Neo-liberal policies, rise of the Hindu Right and rise of the middle classes in India. She discusses how it become a contested site as both the Right and the Left attempt to control the representation of women's sexuality that finally result in desexualizing the woman. I argue that Chaubey's "New Women" are not as dependent on the middle-class imagination of the liberalized woman.

surprisingly limited. The romance narrative and the endgame of the romance in both films is to re-situate the widows in their secure gender roles as wives and sweethearts. The divergent and disruptive goals of the two women revealed in the final twists in the plot play with the gender perceptions of the characters in the film as well as those of the audience watching the film.

Both *Ishqiya* and *Dedh Ishqiya* are connected through their titles and the larger framing plot of a male duo of small-time crooks from Bhopal, who are an uncle and nephew team named Iftekar a.k.a. Khaalujaan and Babban. They are on the run from Mushtaq, an equally small-time colorful don with global aspirations of modeling himself on the Batman.

Ishqiya (Regarding Love, 2010)

In *Ishqiya*, the duo takes refuge in the small town of Gorakhpur in the widowed Krishna's house. While the main plot of the film concerns a carefully detailed kidnapping plan hatched by Krishna, Khalujaan, and Babban, the title "Ishqiya" suggests romance, ostensibly referencing the duo's infatuation with Krishna. The title is turned on its head when the romance morphs into a heist, which is then revealed as a revenge drama plotted by Krishna to get even with her husband. Thus, the title might with equal justification reference Krishna's fatal love for her husband. The shifts between buddy movie, romance, heist, and revenge narrative challenge the male duo's and the audience's perception of both genre and gender. Globalization offers a plethora of choices and despite its extensively critiqued perpetuation of unequal power relationships, it does not completely restrict those choices from being available to both the powerful and the powerless. In Chaubey's dark comedies these choices multiply dramatically, but they do not simply gratify desire – they are also disruptive, coercive, and contradictory. In *Ishqiya* and *Dedh Ishqiya*, they are appropriated by the marginalized who often "perform," in

Judith Butler's sense of the term, to strategize self-preservation. Butler, building upon Foucault's notions of the pervasiveness as well as the instability of power, uses the idea of performativity not simply as a retaliatory, singular, or deliberate act but as something that is created and made normative through reiteration. She allows for the possibility of individual action or resistance, but not outside socially codified roles. Consciously reiterating them for parodic purposes or finding a space within that "performance," according to her, allows for the possibility of creating fissures within it.¹⁰⁵

Krishna is not made in the urban mold that fits the image of the contemporary New Woman. She is a confident, rural woman completely at ease in her surroundings. She is sexually assertive and manipulative, and it is through her normalization of her sexuality that the film seeks to address the sexuality of the New Woman. Female sexuality is, obviously, neither new nor urban, but the discourse of the New Woman, though riddled with contradictions, does provide a new space to address her sexuality. The film addresses the contradictory and complex negotiations involved in the discourse by dramatizing the male responses to Krishna's sexuality and contrasting her fairly obvious intellectual superiority with them. All three men demonstrate their discomfort with Krishna's sexuality in different ways and at varying levels.

Clad in unglamorous saris, Krishna offers board, food, and romance to the uncle-nephew duo, appearing exactly as they wish to see her. She enchants the older Khalujaan with her classical singing and her enthusiasm for old Hindi film songs. With her sexuality contained firmly within the frames of domesticity, she can be desired from a discreet distance by the

¹⁰⁵ Judith Butler, "Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler," *Radical Philosophy: A Journal of Socialist and Feminist Philosophy* 67 (Summer 1994), 32-9.

romantic Khalu. With the earthy Babban, whose initial wariness of her shifts rather quickly to an appreciative description of her as a “desi sutli-bomb,” (a local firecracker), she is not coy about her sexuality. In this context of performativity, Krishna might well stand for the kind of cinema that *Hat-ke* directors like Chaubey are creating, with the more genteel Khalujaan and the cruder Babban doubling up as precisely the two kinds of genteel and populist audiences that this experimental cinema attempts to combine and woo.

Krishna’s personality shift with her seduction of Babban comes as a shock to Khalujaan as well as the audience. These shifts are highlighted through her clothes as well as her actions. Chaubey has pointed out this emphasis on her dress code and her visual presence in an interview, identifying her as a “femme fatale in a polyester sari.”¹⁰⁶ She dresses up or down in accordance with her “performance,” or is dressed in accordance with the onlooker’s imagination. Thus, when Khalujaan, an old timer addicted to older Hindi romantic films, dreams of romancing the widow gently swaying to his melodious song, “Dil to Baccha Hai Ji” (The heart is a child), her decorous Hindu dress-code of the nondescript widow changes to a burkha-clad woman and a Muslim bride coyly responding to his lyrics (see Fig. 2.10).

¹⁰⁶ Roshmila Bhattacharya, “Abhishek Chaubey on Dedh Ishqiya's Unexpected End,” *Mumbai Mirror*, 11 Feb. 2014, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/hindi/bollywood/news/Abhishek-Chaubey-on-Dedh-Ishqiyas-unexpected-end/articleshow/30207325.cms>.



Figure 2.10. Krishna as a Hindu widow, a Muslim bride, and a Muslim woman in Khalu's dreams
 Source: *Ishqiya*. Director Abhishek Chaubey. Shemaroo. 2010



Figure 2.11. Krishna's performance for Khalu on the left and Babban on the right.
 Source: *Ishqiya*. Dir. Abhishek Chaubey. Shemaroo. 2010.

That dream is shattered when he witnesses her in Babban's arms. The loud, contemporary Hindi film song to which Krishna dances in her post-coital enthusiasm is starkly contrasted to the melodious romantic songs "Badi Dheere Jali Raina" (The night burned very slowly), and "Dil to Baccha Hai Ji" (the heart is a child), that would be naturally appealing to the middle-class audience as well as to Khalujaan. Moreover, the image of Krishna dressed in Babban's loud shirt and green pants sporting his sunglasses, primes this audience to experience Khalujaan's shock (see Fig. 2.11). The natural alignment between Khalujaan's improbable dreams and the audience's romantic expectations are revealed as the film forces them to reassess Khalujaan's expectations in the face of Krishna's unapologetic sexuality. She is, after all, a young woman

closer to Babban's age than Khalujaan's. Her delicate and decorous flirtation with Khalujaan, mirroring the gestures of a typical Hindi film "heroine," lulls the audience into accepting the ridiculousness of the pairing as romantic. The film does not grant any moral authority to Khalujaan's sense of betrayal when he finds her sleeping with Babban, focusing instead on Krishna's cold dismissal of his right to question her actions. Moreover, in the ensuing fight over her, both men are made to look ridiculous. Khalu's genteel exterior is ripped to reveal ugly biases as he insults his own sister and Babban's mother in his sexual jealousy.

However, even as both the men feel cheated by Krishna, the film also presumes an audience that is different from previous audiences of Hindi films. It addresses an audience that has alternative models, in this case, the noir and the heist with which to filter Krishna's role in the film. She is made in the mold of the femme fatale of noirs, but unlike the moral universe of the noir where the femme fatale is clearly viewed as transgressive and is often punished for that transgression, Krishna is not. Krishna's moral authority is underscored in the aftermath of the fight as she takes a leading role in the heist exhibiting her wits by swiftly turning the tables against the two men squabbling over her and taking charge of the prisoner. Such unexpected glitches and counter-moves are typical of the heist genre, and as Krishna's swift reactions reveal, she is more than capable of fitting in this "genre" role in keeping the action moving along. The duo's change of heart at the end regarding her does signal an acceptance of her sexuality albeit in the context of viewing her as the victim of her husband's machinations.

Krishna asserts her right to choose, contradicting the romance logic of the film and of the duo by rejecting Khalujaan as well as Babban. However, she is not averse to sampling the choices in front of her, spending the night with Babban even as she flirts with Khalujaan over

romantic Hindi songs. Her switch from the role of a widow of a romance narrative to the role of a noir widow is a performative switch, which is disorienting and disrupts the expectations of the uncle-nephew duo and the audience. Yet, this disruption for both the audience and the duo is not too extreme as both are presumed to be educatable, unlike her husband with whom she is involved in a deadlier game.

Krishna as a bride romancing her husband performs yet another switch in the opening and closing sequences of the film. Stretched out in bed in bridal red and humming a song in the opening shot of the film, she presents the classic picture of domesticated sexuality. Such sexuality, contained within the legitimacy of marital bonds, is not uncommon in Hindi films. Any anxiety generated by her slightly excessive sexuality and her clear linguistic superiority to her husband is quickly subsumed in the following dramatic explosion and her reappearance as the domesticated widow of Khalujaan's dreams. But her excessive sexuality and demands do unsettle her husband who, as is revealed later, decides to kill her because her demands intrude upon his goals.

Underlying the active agency of Krishna's exhilarating performative strategies is the constant reminder that her life in the film has, since the opening scene, been constantly under threat. As the film switches to a revenge drama with shades of *Kill Bill* in the final scene, Krishna deliberately dons her red sari and sets the stage to confront her husband. This Krishna in bridal red has a different impact from the opening scene. The audience, along with Khalujaan and Babban, reorients its expectations several times about Krishna's role in the film. Her role is not a simple progression from a bride to a widow required to choose between Khalujaan and Babban – Krishna is involved in a deadlier plot. The climax of the film is set up as a

confrontation between the wife and the husband. A tied-up Krishna anticipating the return of her murderous husband visually represents the threat she has been under throughout her married life. Despite the ostensible difference between the opening and concluding scenes, Krishna's life has always been under threat by her husband, who chooses to get rid of her because her existence restricts his choices, even though he admits to her that he loves her.

This Krishna does not merely evoke the sympathy of Khalujaan and Babban as they regretfully race back to help her. She has the unequivocal support of the village community, most notably Nandu and her old woman companion who express their loyalty to her in socially extreme acts. Nandu rescues Khalu and Babban whom he is supposed to kill as an initiation rite into his armed community, and the old woman burns the house down, which finally kills Krishna's husband. It is hard not to view these as symbolically providing Krishna cover for her socially disruptive act of leaving her husband to die in the end. The unaccountable support that she gets from Nandu and the old woman and the final sequence that reminds the audience of the husband's betrayal provides her a melodramatic cover for her "heartlessness," in leaving her husband to die a painful death. Such "tit for tat" is an old strategy of revenge drama and Hindi film audiences would certainly remember countless films in which such "flashback" scenes occur when the "hero" or "heroine" is about to execute a particularly bloody or questionable action. Thus, straddling both the "heroic" and the "sympathetic" spaces, Krishna at the end is poised to cut the ties that have trapped her within her house. The audience propelled by such generic nudges roots for Krishna's escape in the concluding scene. However, one needs to pause to consider exactly where her escape takes her. Despite her escape, there is no socially codified

role for her as she moves out of her rooted surroundings, leaving her village and the burning house behind to join the duo on the road.

As Krishna performs her roles as wife and widow to preserve herself from danger, she also progressively rejects the socially coded choices that are provided to her in the film: she rejects Khalujaan, Babban, and finally her husband because her desires do not align with the social and sexual choices available to her. However, the generic flexibility of the film gives her more choices. Her exhilarating final act of leaving her half-burnt husband as he raises his hand towards her and joining the duo to make an impossible trio on the road, pushes the film back to its buddy movie origins, which now potentially incorporates within it a role for a newly mobile female.¹⁰⁷

This conclusion does not end her endangerment. In fact, she joins the constantly threatened, albeit comic precarity of Khalujaan and Babban, who are literally in the crosshairs of Mushtaq bhai's gun in the beginning and end of the film. The film declares itself a product of globalization focusing particularly on two of its elements – mobility and choice. The best it can do is to problematize these elements and not romanticize them, and it negotiates the precarity of its protagonists, particularly the woman, in terms of performativity, story-telling, and genre-bending.

¹⁰⁷ Dogging Krishna's performance as a "widow" is the shadow of the young widow enacted by Jaya Bhaduri in the classic *Sholay* (Flames, Sippy 1975), which was also one of the most celebrated buddy-road films of Hindi cinema. Such echoes evoke both homage and assertion of difference that *Ishqiya* uses to position itself in the tradition of Hindi cinema.

Dedh Ishqiya (1 ½ Times Love, 2014)

Dedh Ishqiya (hereafter *DI*) has two females at the center of its plot and a fairy-tale setting that harks back to the old-world niceties of Urdu poetry and romance. With Khalujaan and Babban still on the run from Mushtaq Bhai, the title of the film announces itself both as a sequel and as 0.5 times better than the original. The focus is again on love, and, yet again, the twist in the plot concerns the male duo's mistaken assumptions that the title references their romance.

The men have absconded this time with a precious necklace, and Khalujaan, who almost gets caught, decides to disappear with it. Unable to control the tremble in his hands and conscious of his growing age, he plans to fall in love one last time to live life to the fullest. He focuses his attention on a beautiful widow, Begum Para, who hosts a lavish poetry contest every year in the small town of Mahmudabad to choose a husband. Attracted by Begum Para's wealth and beauty, Khalu proceeds to impress her with his fake noble lineage and his genuine poetic skills, falling in love with her in the process. Babban, hot on his trail, arrives in Mahmudabad and promptly falls in love with Begum Para's devoted maid and companion, the down-to-earth and efficient Muniya. As the two crooks devote their time and effort to falling in love with the two women and on undercutting Jaan Mohammad's pursuit of Begum Para, they are duped into helping Begum Para and Muniya only to realize later that they feature nowhere in the women's future plans.

DI, like *Ishqiya*, also plays with perceptions and appropriations of choices. Begum Para and her faithful companion Muniya host the *mushaira* (poetry contest) every year to choose the right husband for Begum Para as desired by Begum Para's late husband. This film also provides

the woman with an ostensible array of choices. In this case, Begum Para has many men to choose from. While this marriage clause is reminiscent of Portia and her caskets or classic fairytales in which the princess's hand is given in marriage to whichever suitor proves his "worth," here the woman has, ostensibly, some degree of freedom in choosing her partner. She hosts this *mushaira* and will judge it too. But the film reveals later just how limited her choices are regarding her husband and her suitors, especially when it concerns her most persistent suitor, the local politician, Jaan Mohammad.

Khalu and Babban, who are vying for different women this time, are once again sexually duped into imagining the situation to be their romance narrative, in which they can trick Jaan Mohammad and win the women and the wealth they imagine the women possess. The entire *mushaira* is, of course, an elaborate ruse by the women to keep Begum Para's most persistent suitor and main creditor, Jaan Mohammad, at bay. This, however, is only the first layer of role-playing by the impoverished Begum. The imminent threat posed by the impassioned Jaan Mohammad is compounded by the threat from the past represented by Begum Para's late husband, the Nawab of Mahmudabad. His extravagant lifestyle and drinking had left the Begum with nothing but debts and a crumbling, mortgaged mansion. The ostensible romance and glamor of the Begum's past, so attractively framed and presented to her suitors by her and Muniya, hide an unfulfilled life with an indifferent husband of noble lineage who was a closet homosexual. It is further exacerbated by her inability to act upon that realization because she lacks familial and monetary support. However, the most dangerous of the secrets that the Begum is hiding is her possible lesbian relationship with her maid, Muniya, which, if exposed, would make both the women social outcasts.

The film's final revelation turns the tables on Khalujaan and Babban as well the audience. The trappings of romance that the film sets up – the seven stages of love that Khalujaan is fond of itemizing eloquently and half-seriously in Urdu; the nostalgia of a past, adolescent romance between Begum Para and Khalujaan; and their shared passion for the pleasures of dance and exquisite poetry – beguiles the audience into emotionally investing in the romance of Khalujaan and Begum Para. The final revelation forces the audience as well as Khalujaan and Babban to reassess their perception of the two women. In the film, the women escape the repercussions of their choice, even though Babban's spurt of sexual jealousy and violence provide a glimpse into the dangers they face in society. Though their elaborate kidnapping plot fails, they do manage to escape to an unknown place with the necklace and create a safe haven for themselves, but it is a retreat that has no connection with their previous life. Like Krishna, Begum Para's desires are in excess of the choices available to her, and she can only take recourse to role-play and escape to preserve herself and Muniya.

Begum Para, like Krishna, is neither urban nor contemporary in terms of her demeanor or consciousness. The desires of the two women are not "new," or "modern," but their desires are in excess of the societies they inhabit. Krishna's "excessive" sexuality threatens her husband as well as her lovers. Begum Para's lack of sexual interest in men is equally threatening to the men around her. The film, albeit in comic mode, underscores Khalu and Babban's inability to accept the seriousness of the women's desires. The film has an important post-climax sequence which occurs "one and a half" months after the "villain" Jaan Mohammad has been humiliated, the women have fled the scene, and Khalu and Babban are back in jail. They receive letters from Begum Para and Muniya, informing them that the women have built a modest life for themselves

and are at peace, having opened a dance academy after selling the precious necklace that Khalujaan had, after all, given to the Begum as a gift.

Begum Para's first word in the letter is "freedom," acknowledging it as the most precious gift that the duo enabled them to achieve at the expense of their own freedom. In a dual voiceover, both women commend Khalujaan and Babban for their capacity to love while letting them know that they were incapable of returning that love. However, Begum Para graciously invites them over to their "little world" at the end of her letter without providing them the address: "In our world, life has come to a standstill. Come over sometime, and we will sit still like statues." As the two read the letters, they are informed of their early release from custody, and they immediately assume that it is the two women who have come back to bail them out. It is as if the previous disclosures and the recent letters have had no effect on them. They blithely imagine themselves romancing and marrying the women before they are disabused of the idea upon spotting Mushtaq Bhai waiting for them.

The film clearly depicts the women as having disparate goals than the men, and as Khalujaan, Babban, and Jaan Mohammad pursue the goal of heterosexual, romantic love in consonance with the title of the film, Begum Para and Muniya categorically resist it. Begum Para tries to gently let Khalujaan know of her romantic disinterest in him, even though she might have harbored some feeling for him in their adolescent years. Muniya tells Babban of her fear of love much more directly. She is not averse to sex, but she is repulsed by Babban's claim that he loves her. The men, however, seem incapable of imagining the women in any other role except a romantic one.

The celebration of love becomes the occasion for the eloquent ghazals that Khalujaan and the other suitors, including the villain, Jaan Mohammad, sing for Begum Para (Madhuri Dixit). It is also extolled in its myriad nuances in Khalujaan's cataloguing of the seven different stages of Sufi love namely *dilkashi* (attraction), *uns* (attachment), *mohabbat* (romance), *akidat* (trust), *ibadat* (worship), *junoon* (madness), and the final stage, *maut* (death). However, these definitions and expressions of love cannot accommodate the women's relationship. Hence the only vocabulary they have is that of rejection. Khalujaan and Babban drunkenly identify sex as missing from the different stages of love and decide to embellish the list by interspersing each stage with the word "sex." When Babban pontificates about the seven stages of love in front of Muniya, sex is the only element that she does not reject. She cuts him short by dismissing all the other stages as "ch*," a commonly used Hindi profanity that expresses her aversion to all forms of love.

The film hints at what remains in the shadows and does not have a clearly recognizable tradition of expression: namely, Begum Para's relationship with Muniya, whom she calls her "sister, friend, and life." It is a relationship that remains hidden in plain sight, evident only in the final scenes in the literal shadow-play between Begum Para and Muniya, forcing the audience to reassess the title that hints at the existence of half-numbers between two numbers, and the strong bond between the mistress and her maid. Moreover, Khalujaan's satiric query, "Lihaaf laa doon?" (Should I get you the quilt?), directly references writer Ismat Chughtai's famous short story, "Lihaaf" (Quilt), about a lesbian relationship. It firmly establishes such an exploration of female sexuality from within the local tradition of Urdu literature rather than progressive Western literature. Yet, the strong elements of heist and con give such an exploration a different

mood and pace in which the lesbian relationship is not the ultimate disclosure; instead, it is subsumed in the audience's interest in finding out who ultimately wins the heist game.

In "Lihaaf" (Quilt) – which gained immediate literary notoriety when it was published in 1942 – the Begum's entrapment in her mansion and her relationship with her maid, which are filtered through the consciousness of a young girl, emerge out of closely observed details of a realistic and oppressive milieu. Begum Para and Muniya exist in a different world that is a mixture of literary tropes and realistic vignettes of the uneven impact of globalization in a small town. Their world is accordingly peopled by the larger-than-life characters who are fantastically idiosyncratic and yet speak of concerns and events in eerily contemporary language. Thus, while the mistress-maid relationship between Para and Muniya echo Begum Jaan and her maid in "Lihaaf," the Shakespearean and Persian fairy-tale roots of the beautiful-mistress-clever-maid trope nudge the audience to anticipate gender battles and wily outsmarting. The contrasting personalities of Begum Para, who speaks the language of Urdu poetry and is the epitome of old-world grace, and the practical Muniya, who lures Babban into sexual intimacy and aspires to travel from Hong Kong to Honolulu, alert the audience to anticipate shifting perspectives on sexuality and gender that mix the past and the present in unusual ways.

The contrast set up between the past and the present is also reflected in the contrasting courtship of the two couples. While Khalu and Begum romance through the strains of Urdu poetry and references to the moon, Muniya and Babban's flirtations involve references to Chinese noodles and iPhone pixels, and making love passionately in the decaying corridors of the Begum's mansion. This romantic, normative coupling that seems so inevitable in terms of their desires and the parity in their ages, however, is constantly dogged by alternative models

that in the film triumph over the romantic one. By the end of the film, the couples regroup as the uncle-nephew and the maid-mistress team, as the real action of the film swings from romance to heist.

The mixture of genres creates shifting perspectives on gender and sexuality as well as class, notions of love, and the perception of the other characters, namely the villains. The character of Jaan Mohammad, the main villain of the film, is constructed at the intersection of different genres. He is the local politician, is surrounded by yes-men, and speaks the street language of a goon who is not averse to bullying or kidnapping. He is Begum Para's creditor and suitor who hopes to gain respectability by marrying her. Born on the wrong side of the tracks, as he discloses to the poet Italvi – whom he has kidnapped to provide him with some genuine poetry with which to woo the Begum – he has always aspired to gain the respect of people like the Nawab of Mahmudabad. He might lack, as he so profoundly feels, the class to write great poetry but his emotions are Shakespearean. Extending the *Merchant of Venice* references in the film, he expounds a Shylockean line in front of the unimpressed Italvi as he cuts his fingers on the blade of the Nawab's sword: "Isn't this the same blood in your veins...red...then what is that thing that I do not have, to become the Nawab of Mehmoodabad?" In true comic style, Italvi's answer is a contemplative "DNA," to which Jaan Mohammad's instinctive, practical response is to inquire where and how he can switch that "NDA," as he terms it.

Jaan Mohammad's character is created from a global range of genres including local realism, Shakespearean drama, Mexican standoffs, Westerns, and Hindi film melodrama. A great deal of the comedy arises from his being inserted into the anachronistic "Muslim Social" genre world of Urdu poetry that is completely at variance with his personality. Despite his bullying and

his social ambitions, his humanity is glimpsed sometimes in a surprising code of honor, his love for Begum Para, and his frustration with her preference for Khalujaan over him. When he is defeated in the end in a campy, western style shootout, his humiliation at the hands of the police and Italvi seems rather excessive and might once again remind the viewers of the “Shylockean” elements in his character. Both the comic and tragic dimensions of Jaan Mohammad’s character arise from the completely different generic elements that constitute his character. Reviewed favorably by nearly all the film critics, much of the credit for his success can be attributed to the acting skills of Vijay Raaz. However, the success of such a character is also a testament to the audience’s familiarity with both global and local genres and the ease with which they can switch between them.

The other comic villain of the film, Mushtaq Bhai, who remains outside the immediate plot of the movie, is another important and larger-than-life character built from a variety of global and local stock characters whose global aspirations are clearly foregrounded. Spouting campy one-liners and armed with a cell-phone and a bevy of goons, his character makes no attempt at simulating realism. He initiates the original cycle of escape and capture for Khalujaan and Babban, a gesture that is repeated at the beginning and end of both films. While Mushtaq Bhai seeks to escape his marital constraints in hot pursuit of Khalujaan and Babban, his wife, whom Khalu considers his sister, calls him up from time to time to keep tabs on him and the duo he is after. He spouts impossibly cliched lines such as “koi aakhri khwaish?” (Any last wish?) and has attendants who treat him like a dreaded villain as he pursues Khalujaan and Babban relentlessly in both the films. The predominantly comic thrust of his role is complemented by another important element in his character – he knows that his role-playing as a dreaded gangster

is dependent on Khalujaan and Babban being perpetually on the run, and he also doubles up at times as the audience for their artistic endeavors.

Ishqiya opens with the duo on the run from Mushtaq Bhai after absconding with his money. While standing inside the grave dug for them, they are granted a final wish by him and like Scheherazade they buy time by entertaining Mushtaq Bhai with a *latifa* (a joke) and escape. The film ends with the duo and Krishna in his crosshairs as they leave Krishna's village. Exceptionally polite to his wife and observing all the niceties of a devoted husband, he lies to her pretending to be still looking for them. His wife calls him a child at heart who loves to play at being a cop and rather darkly advises him to blast off the duo the next time he finds them.

The *Arabian Nights* analogy of stalling death with the art of storytelling is extended by adding other local "low" art forms such as *latifa*, *afsana* (story) and *thumri* (semi-classical dance form) to the repertoire. Mushtaq Bhai's role emerges out of these Persian and Indian storytelling forms as much as it is rooted in Jean Godard's *Breathless* (1960) and the classic Hollywood chase sequence of an action film or a Tom and Jerry cartoon. Mushtaq Bhai proposes a much trendier lineage for his role in the chase – he is a fan of *Batman*. *DI* opens on a similar scene with Babban in the grave repeating the same joke that was left incomplete in the first film, which he finally completes with an anti-climactic one-liner that fails to engage the Don. On this occasion, he buys time by recounting an *afsana* (story). One *afsana* and a Mexican standoff later, Babban manages to escape. Mushtaq Bhai's "game" is noticed by his chief goon who rather exasperatedly asks him why he lets the duo escape every time, to which Mushtaq Bhai answers: "Batman ka naam suna hai?... Agar Joker mar gaya to sasura Batman kya karega?" (Have you heard of Batman?... If the Joker dies then what will the wretched Batman do?") He knows, as an

aspiring Batman, that his fortunes depend on the Joker being alive or else he will be relegated to, in his words, “kneading dough at home.”

Though not all the characters are as self-conscious as Mushtaq Bhai about their role in the film, *DI* provides similar global aspirations and a global consciousness for many of its small-town characters, sometimes in the most absurd of contexts. It includes a kidnapped poet whose mother is Italian and hence his pen-name Mohammad “Italvi,” which is an Indianization of Italian. When Babban’s *gilli* (penis) is in danger of being chopped off by Mushtaq Bhai’s goons, he attempts to negotiate with them by offering them both his little fingers as compensation in the manner demanded by Japanese gangsters. Global aspirations literally frame one of its central characters, Muniya, as she sits in her room against a wall plastered with tourist brochures and posters of Australia, Sicily, Hollywood, and Shanghai. She is a character poised on the edge of her world who aspires to escape and travel from “Honolulu to Timbuktu,” but she does not want it to come with the trappings of a honeymoon. When the street-smart Babban attempts to entice Muniya on a date to sample “Chinese noodles,” Muniya, who is more ambitious, wants to eat her noodles in Shanghai, burgers in New York, and pizza in Naples.

The film’s wild mixing of local and global genres including campy imitations of Mexican standoffs and a train-station climax typical of Westerns, while referencing the *Merchant of Venice* and heist motifs, are complemented by sharp insights about small-town life in contemporary India. An early cultural joke in the film illustrates this technique succinctly, namely that Mushtaq Bhai’s assistant, who has also heard about Batman, is not quite sure whether Mushtaq Bhai imagines himself as Batman or the Joker. A warning rifle shot from Mushtaq Bhai clarifies his thoughts rather quickly and he answers “Batsman” to Mushtaq Bhai’s

query. The joke depends on the audience’s recognition of the slippage between the words “Batman” and “batsman.” “Batsman” is a culturally familiar word associated with the game of cricket, which is the most popular game in India. It is a national obsession, equivalent to Hindi films, and is played on practically all the back streets of the nation, from the big metropolises to the small villages. The game itself is a cultural export from Britain, testifying to earlier global interactions that have become integral to an Indian identity. The fast-paced changes in contemporary India seem new and wide-ranging, but the country also has a history of earlier international influences. The slippage is underscored by an immediate cut to the road song, “Horn O.K. please,” which begins with the back shot of Mushtaq Bhai’s stolen van that Babban gleefully escapes in. It flourishes a Batman sticker on its back and is immediately followed by the shot of young batsman hitting a cricket ball (see Fig. 2.12).



Figure 2.12. The successive shots of the van sporting the Batman sticker and the young batsmen on the streets

Source: *Ishqiya*. Dir. Abhishek Chaubey. Shemaroo. 2010.

The slide between “Batman” and “batsman” is a telling example of the proliferation of a new globalization that creates a character such as a small-time goon who is a fan of a Hollywood blockbuster, and it neatly captures its slippage into another, more than a century-old cultural import such as cricket, which has been completely assimilated into the national culture.

Moreover, the song, “Horn O.K. please” is itself a hybrid Hinglish¹⁰⁸ phrase that is painted colorfully on the backs of most trucks in India, reminding highway drivers to blow their horns to request a pass, thus providing a peculiarly local context for the road song.

DI, like *Ishqiya*, offers restricted choices and mobility to its female protagonists. While Krishna escapes with Khalujaan and Babban to form an unusual trio, Begum Para and Muniya’s escape suggests a more complete rejection of their world. The “little world” they create in their dance academy is wholly female. The last scenes involving them offer a striking visual contrast to the earlier scenes in the film in which the two women are surrounded exclusively by men. The film ends on a *thumri* (a classical song and dance performance) in which Begum Para performs at the center, surrounded by her young female students and Muniya. The use of *thumri* is a particularly resonant choice, as the actress Madhuri Dixit, who plays Begum Para in the film, is trained in the classical dance form *kathak* that is typically used in *thumri*. *Thumri* historically has been a performance dominated by women artists, and its lyrics, known for their poetry and eroticism, often revolve around the romance between the Hindu God Krishna and his beloved. Begum Para’s agency at the end of the film is a layered one. From the frail and delicately-retiring beautiful Begum attended to by her maid in most of the earlier scenes in the film, Begum Para actively establishes her dance academy and teaches and performs the art form she is passionate about. In her dance performance, she plays the forlorn beloved craving for her male lover’s attention, but it is a skill that she excels in, the performance is controlled by her, and the audience is well aware of the irony of the situation.

¹⁰⁸ See chapter 4 for a discussion of Hinglish.

DI clearly presents art as providing an escape route for Begum Para and Muniya as well as Khalujaan and Babban. What saves the duo, in the manner of Scheherazade, is the ruse of a joke (*latifa*) or the offer of a story (*afsana*) to their hooked audience that is Mushtaq Bhai. While Mushtaq Bhai's imagines his role as a performative one – he aspires to be Batman and acts like a corny gangster-boss – he also has an important role as an audience whose existence depends on the performers. At the end of *DI*, when Khalujaan and Babban are back in the freshly dug grave begging for their lives, they offer Mushtaq Bhai another local art form, the *thumri*, to defer their death. As Mushtaq Bhai bursts out laughing, this time the audience is not cheated but pleased into acceptance as Begum Para's performance begins and the end credits roll in.

Conclusion

The detailed analysis of the above three films provides a sense of a wide range of references that Hat-ke directors employ to create “new” male and female protagonists and even villains who might double as audiences. Their commitment to reflecting upon or commenting on social reality might not be completely divergent from the goal of the parallel cinema of the 1970s and 1980s, but they have consciously moved away from the largely “realist” mode favored by directors such as Shyam Benegal and Sayeed Akhtar Mirza. On the other hand, their self-conscious references to older Bollywood films and music might suggest similarities with similar celebrations in “Bollylite” films. However, entwined in such celebrations is a serious assessment of the implications of their artistic practice that encourages debate. The global parameters of their artistic references that push beyond the national mark them as different from both parallel cinema and Bollylite cinema. They reflect the new “social reality” of a global India which is different from the old one. The new reality has not erased economic disparities, and power

equations proliferate in different guises, but perceptions of that reality have certainly shifted. Globalization offers new mobilities and choices, and as compromised as they are, they inform and expand the imaginations of the characters as well as the audience. The ideoscape, as Appadurai describes it, is impossible to imagine in narrowly nationalistic terms. It has shifted for the *Hat-ke* directors and their audience, and *Hat-ke* films, in particular, have seized the moment to reflect it in the language and genres of the new reality and the new characters that inhabit it.

CHAPTER 3

IMAGINING MODERNITY: SONG SEQUENCES AND *HAT-KE* FILMS

Song-dances are quanta, packets of bound energy, that tantalize us with the notion of possibility.
– Gopal and Sen¹⁰⁹

The new millennium has revived debates about the association of good cinema and realism in Indian cinema. Hindi film songs and dances have now gained new respectability in the debate as markers of the distinctive identity of Bollywood cinema. However, some consider the same feature a liability in the global market. *Hat-ke* films, despite being known for their sharp turn towards linguistic realism, have held on to this feature, and indeed have expanded it in some of their films. This “different” relationship with song and dance marks their distance from earlier parallel cinema that was associated with realism. Satyajit Ray’s neorealist work in the 1950s had sought to establish a clear difference between itself and commercial cinema. Though Ray seriously experimented with music in his films, he considered the “five to six songs per film” formula a deterrent to making good cinema. The state-supported parallel cinema movement, despite encouraging excellent experimental work, largely failed to capture the public imagination. Though some of the films did include songs, the movement remained defined by its emphasis on social realism and its effort to disassociate itself from the typical song and dance routine of mainstream cinema.

¹⁰⁹Sangita Gopal and Bish Sen, “Engines of Desire: Song and Dance in Bollywood Cinema,” in *The Bollywood Reader*, eds. Jigna Desai and Rajinder Dudrah (London: Open Univ. Press, 2008), 155.

What is striking about Vishal Bhardwaj, Abhishek Chaubey, and Anurag Kashyap's films is that some of their biggest critical and commercial successes have been supported by hugely successful and very elaborate song albums. Moreover, the commercial success of these songs is not simply a concession to the demands of the domestic box-office. These songs are also central in defining their films, which are committed to experimentation and innovation while using the well-recognized tropes of Hindi cinema. This chapter discusses the song albums of *Omkara* (Othello, 2006), *Haider* (Hamlet, 2014), *Ishqiya* (Regarding Love, 2010), *Dedh Ishqiya* (1 ½ Times Love, 2014), *Dev. D* (2009), and *Gangs of Wasseypur* (2012) to demonstrate the importance of songs and song-and-dance sequences in these films, and the innovations the directors have brought to the feature.

Vishal Bhardwaj and the Item Numbers of *Omkara*¹¹⁰

Vishal Bhardwaj's films and his music are particularly relevant in this context as he established himself in the Hindi film industry initially as a music director. Though his debut was not as dramatic as A.R. Rehman's,¹¹¹ his compositions for the film *Maachis* (Matchstick, Gulzar 1996) and *Satya* (Truth, Varma 1998), in combination with Gulzar's lyrics, were very well received for their evocative music and their innovative arrangements. Despite his winning the national award for best music direction in 1999 for *Godmother* (Shukla), he was not getting enough work as a music director at the time. He claims he turned to direction to continue

¹¹⁰ This section on "item numbers" has been published previously, with some changes, as "Light the Cigarette with my Heart's Fire, My Love: Raunchy Tracks and a Golden-hearted Prostitute in Vishal Bhardwaj's *Omkara*," in *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation*, X.2. Spring 2017, <http://www.borrowers.uga.edu/783482/show>.

¹¹¹ See Chapter 1, second section on Indian Film Songs.

working in the film industry: “I became a director so that I can survive as a music composer; so I can employ myself as a music composer.”¹¹² Even now, after a much more successful career as a director, Bhardwaj composes the music of all the films he directs and produces. He also occasionally composes for other directors such as Anurag Kashyap and Abhishek Chaubey. He considers music to be his passion, and this is reflected in many of his films.

Omkaara was Bhardwaj’s second adaptation of a Shakespearean tragedy after *Maqbool*. With a big-budget star cast, glossy production values, and popular song-and-dance numbers interspersing the narrative – elements that are often associated with the “Bollywood” style of Hindi cinema – this film, at the time of its release, was Bhardwaj’s most commercial and ambitious venture. *Maqbool* had been a sleeper hit, and its elaborate album, featuring seven songs and four instrumental pieces, was a mixture of Indian folk, Indian classical, and *qawwali* (religious poetry that invokes a state of ecstasy) music infused by Sufi lyrics and sentiment. *Omkaara*’s equally elaborate album features seven songs and one instrumental piece. Unlike the common practice of not including all songs of the album in the film, each song in the *Omkaara* album is used. The album has a range of typical Bollywood tracks that include romantic songs, a lullaby,¹¹³ a background mood song, and, most importantly, two “item” numbers in tune with its commercial setup.

“Item” numbers in Indian cinema are very popular song-and-dance tracks that are not necessarily connected to the plot of the film. These songs, often centered on the female body,

¹¹² Vishal Bhardwaj, interview by Shekhar Gupta, “Walk the Talk with Vishal Bhardwaj, Part 2” *YouTube* (NDTV, December 21, 2013), accessed November 5, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AnwbrhJBcuU>.

¹¹³ It is actually a reverse lullaby, a song about waking up rather than sleeping.

have catchy tunes and sexually suggestive lyrics. The visuals underscore the sexual innuendoes by focusing on the female body and obvious pelvic thrusts and breast heaves. These “item” numbers are not necessarily a recent phenomenon. They were the nightclub and cabaret numbers of Indian cinema since the 1950s that were given to “vamps,” the westernized, sexually provocative women who were set up as foils for the more conservative and, by that logic, morally superior “heroines.” This dichotomy between the “heroine” and the “vamp” became less striking in the 1970s with the introduction of “westernized” heroines like Zeenat Aman and Parveen Babi who sang some tremendously popular “club” numbers such as “Aap Jaisa Koi” (Someone like you)¹¹⁴ and “Jawaan Jaaneman Haseen Dilruba” (A young lover and a beautiful woman).¹¹⁵ In the 1990s, top stars like Madhuri Dixit and Urmila Matondkar agreed to perform these sequences including more risqué dance moves supported by suggestive lyrics that made the item number very popular.¹¹⁶

Since the new millennium, Bollywood’s approach to item numbers has shifted, reflecting the changing modes of production and circulation of Indian cinema. As Bollywood has gone global, these song-and-dance tracks have become trademarks of the “Bollywood” style of cinema. These item numbers have become a way of publicizing the film on television and other streaming media. They often appear on trailers that give the producers a sense of the box-office potential of a certain film, and ensure it a spectacular opening week. Since the distribution and

¹¹⁴ From the film *Qurbani* (Sacrifice, Khan 1980).

¹¹⁵ From the film *Namak Halal* (Loyal servant, Prakash Mehra 1982).

¹¹⁶ A particularly notorious example of the “Item number” is the “choli ke peeche kya hai” (What is behind the blouse) song from the film *Khalnayak* (Anti-hero, Ghai 1993) that triggered a debate about whether the song was vulgar or if it followed folk traditions that often involve risqué lyrics.

screening of films have also changed with the popularity of multiplex theaters, getting big returns in the initial weeks has become essential. These numbers also command huge returns for the performers and often big stars perform these dance numbers by appearing in the film tagged as “special” appearances. Moreover, item song-propelled stars such as Malaika Arora and Mallika Sherawat prefer the less rigorous schedule of doing the brief item numbers instead of a full-fledged role, particularly as the monetary returns and star ratings they receive are substantial.

Despite arguments about female objectification in item numbers, their commercial success has attracted both monetary and artistic investment. Moreover, as well-known actresses accept these item numbers, their star image gets “sexualized” by these songs, just as the songs themselves get more “gentrified,” in terms of their glossy production values and artistic investment. This sexualization needs to be assessed not just in terms of the objectification of women, but also as undercutting, however unevenly, the long-held, impossible stereotypes of the pure and virtuous heroines of Hindi films. *Omkara* has not one, but two item numbers, and an analysis of these songs provides an insight into how *Hat-ke* directors take certain “typical” elements of Bollywood cinema and experiment with them. It reflects their close identification with Hindi commercial cinema as well as their ability to distance themselves from it to provide a critique of the medium. The two item numbers of *Omkara*, “Beedi jalaile jigar se piya” (Light the cigarette with my heart’s fire, my love) and “Namak ishq ka” (The salt of love) have lyrics that are riddled with racy *double entendres* that rival the most commercial and provocative songs coming out of big-budget Bollywood. Both songs are performed by Billo Chamanbahar who corresponds to Bianca in *Othello*. While the songs do not directly affect *Omkara*’s plot, they are, in many ways, central to the theme and the mood of the film.

Omkaara, situated in the hinterlands of Uttar Pradesh (hereafter U.P.), which represents the heart of small-town India, tackles very relevant issues about female sexuality in India. The film develops the Othello-Desdemona relationship from this perspective and expands the role of the other two female characters, Emilia and Bianca, to focus attention on the monitoring of female sexuality, which is rare in Indian commercial cinema. A brief discussion of the role of the three female characters Dolly (Desdemona), Indu (Emilia), and Billo (Bianca), and the parallels and contrasts set up between the three women will provide a context for the following discussion of the two item numbers that tread a delicate line between the exploitation of female sexuality and providing a simultaneous critique of its monitoring.

Bhardwaj's *Omkaara* follows the story of Omkara (Othello), a small-time leader of a criminal gang who gains a degree of legitimacy by being the coercive arm of the corrupt local politician, Bhaisahib (Duke). Omkara abducts Dolly, the upper-class college-educated daughter of a well-known lawyer of the town, on her wedding day upon her instigation and against the bitter opposition of her father. Iago is Langda (Lame) Tyagi, who is Omkara's henchman. Langda is disappointed when the second-in-command position is bestowed upon Kesu (Cassio), nicknamed "Firangee" (foreigner) by his group as he is young, college-educated, and seems more "westernized" to them. Langda gets Kesu drunk during a rowdy celebration party and instigates a brawl, which angers Omkara and results in Kesu's dismissal. Kesu, who is Dolly's classmate, asks Dolly to intercede on his behalf. Omkara's jealousy, fostered by Langda, finally leads him to murder Dolly on their wedding night.

The film remains close to the Shakespearean plot with a few notable exceptions, such as the shifting of the marriage of Dolly and Omkara to the end of the play, and the expanded roles

of Indu (Emilia) and Billo (Bianca). The marriage of Dolly and Omkara takes place at the end of the film before which Dolly lives openly with Omkara. Such behavior would be considered a transgression of social norms – both within the diegetic space of the film as well as outside it – as large sections of the middle-class Indian audience would be uncomfortable with the concept, if not outright reject it. The “innocence” of Dolly is problematized deliberately by postponing the marriage of Dolly and Omkara to the end of the movie. Rather than the “half-caste” Omkara, it is she who is consistently “othered” in the film – a condition highlighted at various points in the narrative. This deliberate conflation of the issue of Dolly’s innocence regarding her fidelity and sexuality is further linked to the expanded roles of the other two female characters, Indu and Billo, whose social positions are explicitly compared and contrasted with Dolly’s. Both Dolly’s and Billo’s social positions are constantly under threat in the film because they are not legitimately married.

Indu’s social position, however, is the least unstable as she is the legitimate wife of Langda Tyagi. She is also the mother of a male child, a position that still carries tremendous social currency in contemporary India with its lopsided sex ratio – recorded in the latest census as 940 women per 1,000 males.¹¹⁷ She considers herself Omkara’s sister, teasing him on occasion, and she occupies an authoritative social space as the “fulfilled” married woman or *bhabhi* (sister-in-law), a role that has been simultaneously de-sexualized and celebrated in countless Hindi films. This authoritative space is further strengthened by casting Konkana Sen, who is widely known for her acting prowess, in the role. *Omkara* both employs and deliberately

¹¹⁷ Census Organization of India, “Sex Ratio in India,” *Census 2011*, n.d., <https://www.census2011.co.in/sexratio.php>. This lopsided ratio is the result of the high rate of sex-selective abortion in India.

overturns this social and “Bollywood” image by registering her sexual dissatisfaction in her marriage in fleeting shots of her silences that indicate her lack of a vocabulary to express that dissatisfaction. Even though she embodies the moral compass of *Omkara* and offers a sense of feminine agency in killing her husband at the end of the film, her personal fate remains mired in a dead end as suggested by the final shot of her leaning over the well, desperately contemplating suicide.

While Indu’s role in the film speaks directly to issues of female agency, Billo’s expanded role negotiates a similarly complicated and compromised space. She is a prostitute in Shakespeare’s play, but in *Omkara*, she is Kesu’s special lover. As a prostitute her position in society is that of a sexual object, making her vulnerable to exploitation, and it places her at the other end of the gender spectrum as the most obviously “othered” character in the narrative. As Kesu’s love interest, Billo’s personality is fleshed out, obviously aimed at building her up as a sympathetic character. Her cynicism and foul colloquial slangs are balanced against her powerful attraction for and her vulnerability towards Kesu. Her earthy language brings a strong dose of realism to her character, which obviously contrasts with the Hindi screen prostitutes who either speak a courtly polite Urdu or a non-region-specific polished Hindi. On the other hand, her role does derive from the standard stock character in Hindi cinema – the courtesan/prostitute with a heart of gold who often ends up sacrificing her life for the “hero.”

The Indian screen stereotype of the golden-hearted courtesan, who is often sentimentalized and appropriated into the larger discourse of patriarchy to contain her sexuality, is elaborated in some detail in Sumita S. Chakravarty’s book, *National Identity in Indian Popular*

Cinema 1947-1987.¹¹⁸ Discussing the emancipatory possibilities of the popular “courtesan genre” in Indian cinema, Chakravarty points out that the courtesan’s profession gives her a certain inevitable economic independence and autonomy to function outside societal norms. However, the potential of the role gets dissipated by “romance” and “purity” narratives once she falls in love with the protagonist, upon which she transitions into the traditional role of a committed married wife. Thus, the courtesan’s “tragedy,” and the subsequent sympathy generated for her pivots around empathizing with her thwarted desire for not being accorded the recognition or status of a married wife, which supports the very status quo that her role potentially disrupts. Billo’s dreams of marrying Kesu certainly reference this stereotype. However, the consistently egalitarian, on-screen depiction of the Billo-Kesu relationship negates the stereotype of the subservient wife/lover both visually and verbally. Billo is often positioned on top of Kesu and her playful abuses aimed at him far outnumber his comebacks.

The space from which Billo speaks to gendered “othering” is further complicated by her participation in the two sexually provocative item numbers. Her narrative positioning as the most marginalized or “othered” character in *Omkara* is visually contradicted in the song sequences, where she is at the center, framed as the obvious object of desire for the exclusively male crowd that surrounds and lusts after her. Both the issues of scopophilia and “commercialization” evident in these songs need to be informed by the complex cultural and social history of songs and dances in Indian films. In *Omkara*, Billo is played by Bipasha Basu, a model turned popular “A-grade” star. Apart from being offered substantial roles in big-budget films she also does guest

¹¹⁸ Sumita S. Chakravarty, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema 1947-1987* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1993), 269-305.

appearances thus increasing their commercial value. Bhardwaj was well aware of the commercial value of the song – the following quote from an interview before the release of the film reveals his attempts to balance his commercial concerns with his artistic ambitions: “For the ‘Beedi...’ song I told him [the lyricist, Gulzar] I wanted an item song bigger than ‘Paan khayon saiyyan hamar’ and ‘Jhumka gira re.’ These were mass-oriented songs, but still so classy. Only Gulzar saab could do it.”¹¹⁹

The raunchy lyrics of the song “Beedi jalaile jigar se piya/jigar mein badi aag hai” (Light the cigarette with my heart, my love/My heart’s full of fire”) is often referenced as typifying the “Bollywood” element of *Omkara*. However, analyzing both the lyrics and the dance in the context of the folk tradition, which has a very specific, local feel of rural, northern India, provides a different context for the song. It harks back to the long tradition of *Nautanki*, which is a form of folk theater including song, dance, and comedy routines. *Nautanki* involves both epic and bawdy elements and exists as a form of vaudeville that was the most popular mode of entertainment in rural north India before the advent of films and television. In the interview, Bhardwaj references a very popular song “Paan khayon saiyyan hamaar” (My lover chews betel leaves) from a well-known Hindi film *Teesri Kasam* (The Third Promise, Bhattacharya, 1967) that is based on a literary novella about a *nautanki* dancer. The song evokes the rural folk tradition of India and is considered a classic in Indian film history. Bhardwaj’s quote thus references not just the theater history of *nautanki*, but its film history as well.

¹¹⁹ Vishal Bhardwaj, “Celebrity Interview: *Omkara* Director Vishal Bhardwaj,” *Bollywood.com News*, July 30, 2006, accessed November 5, 2014, <http://www.bollywood.com/celebrity-interview-omkara-director-vishal-bhardwaj>.

The *nautanki* feel of the “Beedi” song, epitomized by its leading image of the popular *beedi* (a locally-made, poor man’s cigarette), has been glamorized by the presence of a svelte Bipasha Basu and the voice of Sunidhi Chauhan, who is considered by the media as the “queen of item songs.” However, the folk elements remain strong in the lyrics, the music, and the style in which the song is performed. The layered lyrics of the choric chant of the song are worth noting: “Na Gilaaf, Na Lihaaf, Thandi Hawa ke khilaaf, Sasuri/Itti Sardi hai kisi ka lihaaf lai le/Ja padosi ke chulhe se aag lai le” (No covers, no blankets, bracing this chilled wind, the wretch!/ It is freezing go get someone’s blanket/Go get the fire from the neighbor’s place). The song’s lyrics evoke the freezing winters in northern Indian villages when people gather around fires and sing songs to beat the winter’s chill. The dominant images of beds and blankets are suggestive of illicit affairs as well as a sharing of scarce resources, as is the allusion to getting the fire from the neighbor’s house. Such suggestive, bawdy lyrics are an intrinsic part of the generic folk tradition, even as they playfully pick up the specific theme of extramarital deceit which is the central concern of the plot.

The dance sequence plays up the thematic concerns of the film in a number of its dominant images and throwaway lines that include premonitions of Dolly’s fate. The dance pulses with the leashed excitement of the male crowd reflected in their sexually aggressive dance moves and lyrics as Billo and Kesu flirt with words in the foreground. Kesu’s line, “Na kasoor, na fa-toor, bina jurr-am ke hajoor, mar gaye,” (No fault, no mischief...without a crime, my lord ...we die) fits in smoothly with the use of such words and phrases in typical romantic songs,

albeit with a regional flavor.¹²⁰ At one point Billo cajoles him to “call a court” one afternoon, involving just the two of them for which she promises to come dressed in anklets. And yet, words such as *kasoor* (fault), *fatoor* (a mispronunciation of “fitoor” that means mischief), *jurm* (crime), *kachehri* (court), and *mar gaye* (dying), expressed playfully and provocatively, become unmoored in the song, carrying ominous undertones which finally extend beyond the confines of the plot.

The lyrics underscore the crucially unstable position of women in a society where the undercurrent of violence is often masked by the blanket of respectability that the institution of marriage provides it, and the romance which cinema, in particular, imbues marriage with. The sequence’s self-reflexive participation in romanticizing and glamorizing such sexual monitoring is peculiarly efficacious in its balancing of many contending social, artistic, and thematic resonances, and particularly so when the song is intercut right in the middle for thirty-eight seconds with an intimate scene between Dolly and Omkara. This “interruption” within the “interrupted” space of the song foregrounds the waistband, which in the film is the repository of both tradition and sexuality, and is the agent that propels the romance of Omkara and Dolly towards violence and murder.

Moreover, nestling within evocative words such as *kachehri* (court), and erotic phrases such as “aisa kaate ki daant ka nisan reh jaaye” (A bite that leaves teeth-marks), rest archaic meanings of words and phrases that point to both local and national histories that are lost to contemporary usage. *Kachehri* for example, according to its lyricist Gulzar, is the deliberate

¹²⁰ The regional flavor is evident in the pronunciation of the more formal *jurm* (crime) as “jurr-am.” and the use of the “j” sound instead of the more formally pure “z” sound in the Urdu “hajoor” (sir).

evocation of a forgotten feudal tradition that is termed “diwankhana” that involved traditional festivities involving nautch-girls, held in the courtyards of the zamindars or landlords.¹²¹ In another interview, Gulzar claims that “Beedi Jalaile is about the zamindaarana (feudal) system.” The phrase, “Aisa Kaate ke...,” he points out, “is where I compare zamindaars to Alsatian dogs who leave bite marks. What people took away from the song is a different thing.”¹²² The same lines, “Na [Qu]soor, na f[i]toor, bina jurram ke huzoor, mar gaye” (No fault, no mischief...without a crime, my lord ...we die), in this context take on a different meaning as a protest against the excesses of the feudal system. The “Beedi” song’s ability to hold these contradictory meanings requires such “thick” descriptions to understand its evocation of the intertwined elements of theater, cinematic tradition, regional literature, and culture even as it distinguishes itself from earlier more genteel film renditions such as *Teesri Kasam* (Third promise, Bhattacharya 1966) as literally a more “vulgar” and hence more “realistic” reflection of the local culture.

The visual register of the dance sequence provides a carefully detailed background evoking the semi-rural atmosphere of a small town in U.P. At the same time, it maintains the glamorous and controlled dance in sync with the sophisticated lighting and orchestration of a “Grade A” Bollywood film production that won Ganesh Acharya, the film’s choreographer, the prestigious Indian Filmfare Award for choreography. The opening shots of the dance provide an interesting vignette of this transition when Billo, covered and positioned in front of the

¹²¹ “Gulzar reveals the meaning behind ‘Bidi Jalaile.’” YouTube video, 5:54, posted by glamsham.com, July 11, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0mWP6EyS95k>.

¹²² “Gulzar on How an 80-year-Old Urdu Poet Stays Relevant in Bollywood.” Interview by Nihit Bhawe, Hindustan Times, May 4, 2015, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/brunch/gulzar-on-how-an-80-year-old-urdu-poet-stays-relevant-in-bollywood/story-gnJGk8TEBgnxE25aDvwT2I.html>.

harmonium in a more “traditional” style of the song, suddenly throws off her *dupatta* (scarf) at the crowd to reveal her more glamorous attire which corresponds with her later, more modern “Bollywood jhatkas” (shaking of the hips associated with Bollywood dance moves – see Figures 3.1 and 3.2).



Figure 3.1. The Opening shot of Billo as a typical Nautanki singer.
Source: *Omkara*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj. Shemaroo Films, 2006.



Figure 3.2. The Beedi Dance, “Bollywood Style”
Source: *Omkara*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj. Shemaroo Films, 2006.

The dance sequence takes place amongst the celebrations outside the building where Omkara and Dolly consummate their relationship. The exterior shots of that building with its latticed balcony and the *shamiyana* (temporary celebration tent) are as carefully detailed as the close-ups of the makeshift stage where Bipasha Basu as Billo dances surrounded by her musicians. The background of a big satin banner announcing the name of her company, “Billo Chamanbahar and Orchestra” – the English phrase written in Hindi along with her phone number – keenly evoke the air of a small town and the local “dancer’s” humble attempt at entrepreneurship, responding to shifts in the local economy. Minute details such as the odd beer in *firangee* Kesu’s hands, contrasting with the local rum in the hands of the others in the crowd, and the ubiquitous *charpais* (stringed, wooden beds) on which they sit and finally hoist Billo and

Kesu in drunken, enthusiastic celebration, are as region-specific as the language and the clothes that ground the plot in the semi-rural milieu.

The second song and dance track, “Namak Ishq Ka” (The salt of love), featuring Billo, also pays close attention to minute background details. It is much more obviously related to the plot of the film. Billo, who has accepted Kesu’s proposal, agrees to help out Omkara’s gang and is sent as a decoy to the police station to trap the members of a rival gang who are plotting against Bhaisahib. Once again, the setting, lyrics, and visual and aural registers of the song extend beyond the scope of the plot and narrative. In this context, Susanne Gruss’s analysis of *Omkara* concerning the realism of the two songs featuring Billo is worth noting: “Billo is, however, neither filmed in a sumptuous setting, nor is her choreography as elaborately staged as audiences might expect. The gritty realism of both bar-scenes is a decided move away from the anti-realism of comparable scenes, the colors are subdued instead of luminous and saturated, neither scene is brightly lit”¹²³ While Gruss’s article certainly counts as a rare instance (along with Poonam Trivedi’s article, “Singing to Shakespeare in *Omkara*”)¹²⁴ in which Hindi songs are discussed in some detail, Gruss’s observations and comments misrepresent these particular songs. As a detailed description of the songs was not within the scope of the essay, it reflects, perhaps inevitably, a tendency to homogenize the songs while defining their stylistic variations from other “Bollywood” songs.

¹²³ Susanne Gruss, “Shakespeare in Bollywood? Vishal Bhardwaj’s *Omkara*,” in *Semiotic Encounters: Text, Image and Trans-Nation*, eds. Sarah Sackel, Walter Gobel and Noha Hamdy (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 233.

¹²⁴ Poonam Trivedi, “Singing to Shakespeare in *Omkara*,” in *Renaissance Shakespeare: Shakespeare Renaissances: Proceedings of the Ninth World Shakespeare Congress*, eds. Martin Prochazka et al. (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 2014), 345-353.

While it is true that both the dance sequences are realistic, they are realistic in very different ways. The first song is sung on an open stage and it uses bright, gaudy colors that are typical of the *Nautanki* style, even though it is a glamorized version of the style. The second song sequence which is almost a *thumri*¹²⁵ is sepia-toned and it is choreographed by a different artist, Bhushan Lakhandri. Its use of coordinated color tones, balancing the khaki uniform of the crowd with the browns of Billo's dress, and her muted yet perfect makeup, lend the scene the glamor of a more generic, high-end Bollywood production. It does, however, use the very realistic backdrop of a local police station (see Fig. 3.3), not a "bar-room," and the drinking and dancing policemen, in the very identifiable Khaki uniform of the U.P. police force, are indulging in an illegal practice of getting a "nautch girl" for entertainment in the office. The "gritty realism" of this scene emerges out of closely observed details about the building, which is a typical, run-down colonial British-style building with wide rooms, peeling walls, and solid, wooden doors and windows coated thickly with green paint (see Fig. 3.4). These buildings are still commonly used in post-Independence India as government buildings, especially in small towns that have not undergone the fast-paced changes of the Indian metropolises.

¹²⁵ A semi-classical song and dance performance.



Figure 3.3. Exterior shot of the police station
Source: *Omkara*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj.
Shemaroo Films, 2006.



Figure 3.4. Interior of the police station
Source: *Omkara*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj.
Shemaroo Films, 2006.

The “Namak” song also begins with a very identifiable idiosyncratic flourish by its lyricist who often references the moon in his lyrics: “Main chand nigal gayi hai daiyya re (I swallowed the moon, my goodness!). The bawdy connotations of the song might not have been intended by the lyricist but they fit in with the rural ambiance the song creates. Even though the dance sequence in the film deletes nearly a whole minute of the song, all audio versions include it. The rest of the song is strewn with colloquialisms such as *tej tha tadka* (The seasoning was spicy), *phat se* (at once), *dali bhar* (large amount), along with the pronunciation of the word *ishq* (love) as *isk*, using the “s” sound instead of the “sh” sound, all of which are typical of the U.P.-Bihar, northern-rural belt of India. Gulzar is particularly known for juxtaposing such commonly-used terms with high Urdu in his poetry. Furthermore, Bhardwaj’s music underscores this regional variation in the rhythm and the use of different pitches in the song. The audience’s pleasure would incorporate the recognition of the regional elements and crude suggestiveness as well as the literary and poetic flourishes of the song. The lines also contain images and phrases that extend beyond the context of the song: “Sabhi cheden hain mujhko, sipahiye baanke chamiye/ udhaari dene lagen hain, gali ke baniye baniye...” (Everyone teases me, the policemen,

the fancy gentlemen ...I get loans from all the merchants down my street...). The shift from the *zamindaraana* (feudal) system to semi-urban manifestations of capitalism has imposed its own chains of command and exploitation.

These nuances of the backdrop and the various cultural-historical sources that the songs draw upon get lost in cursory readings. Both songs and the resultant readings would benefit from being analyzed with a much closer eye to detail and history which takes into account their inconsistencies, the oscillations between “realism,” star appeal, recognition of stylistic flourishes, and the fulfilment of generic expectations, all of which are important elements in the pleasure such songs generate.

The songs’ relationship with the narrative is not “logical” but they inflect the narrative in specifically visual ways. Positioned at the center of both is the glittering, heavy waistband studded with jewels and layered with filigreed chains, which is the equivalent of the handkerchief in *Othello*. In the “Beedi” song, it appears right in the middle, wrapped around Dolly’s waist, and is on Billo’s waist in the “Namak” song. In *Othello*, the handkerchief is a gift from his mother, ostensibly memorializing his parents’ romance, while within its delicate folds lurks a darker cultural history. Similarly, in *Omkara*, the waistband’s elaborately wrought glittering surface conceals a complicated history. It is a family heirloom from his father’s side of the family. Omkara’s mother’s claim to the heirloom is tenuous because she is not his father’s “legitimate” wife, which is also the reason why Omkara is considered a “half-caste” in his community. It is a family heirloom, carrying with it the burden of tradition and family honor, as Omkara explicitly and proudly points out to Dolly, exhorting her to keep it with care. This is particularly ironic, as his own mother, who is considered a “prostitute” by his father’s legitimate

family, is excluded from that “tradition” that Othello inherits and finally perpetuates in his treatment of Dolly. In the middle of the rambunctious Beedi song and dance sequence, the camera cuts to an intimate scene between Dolly and Omkara, tracking Dolly’s silent walk down towards the bed, wearing the waist ornament for the first time as Omkara gazes at her, anticipating their first love scene (see Fig. 3.5). At this early point in the film, the intercutting of exterior shots of Billo as the object of desire surrounded by a crowd of men, and the interior ones of Dolly as the object of Omkara’s gaze, serve to highlight their contrasting positions. Yet, such visual juxtapositions inevitably suggest an underlying comparison that gradually gathers force by the end of the film.



Figure 3.5. Thirty-eight-second interspersed shot of Dolly’s waistband as she walks towards Omkara.

Source: *Omkara*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj. Shemaroo Films. 2006.

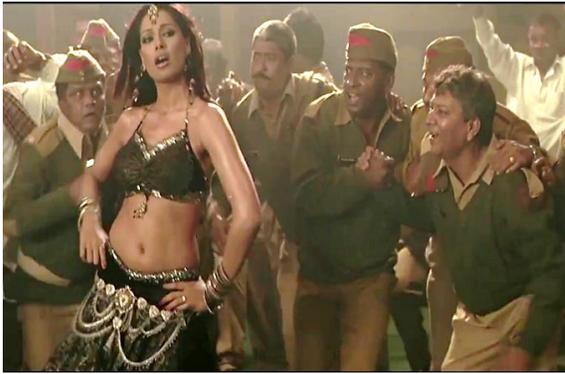


Figure 3.6. Scopophilia/Policing in the Namak song.
Source: *Omkara*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj. Shemaroo Films, 2006.



Figure 3.7. The interior “control room” transliterated in Hindi.
Source: *Omkara*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj. Shemaroo Films. 2006.

The waist ornament is also positioned visually at the center of Billo’s second song-and-dance track. She is sent as a decoy to the police station to trap the members of a rival gang that is plotting against Bhaisahib. She wears the waistband that Kesu has given her, and Omkara recognizes it immediately as he comes in. The numerous shots of her waist framed by the waistband, amongst a crowd of policemen with their eyes trained on and lusting after her, provide a visual symbol of female sexuality, both exploited as well as literally “policed” (see Fig. 3.6), as she dances against the background of a rather appropriately named “control room” transliterated in Hindi (see Fig. 3.7).

Omkara, disguised as a police officer, “looking” at Billo, finds the “ocular proof” of Dolly’s guilt and visually participates in the exploitation at this turning point in the film, as the sexual pleasure of “looking” takes on the darker hue of “policing,” triggering the film’s escalation into violence. This becomes clearer in the scene immediately following the song when Langda Tyagi regales his group with crude details about how he had been a reluctant witness to Billo and Kesu’s lovemaking when Billo had been wearing nothing but the waistband in bed. For

Omkara – who has just seen Billo wearing that ornament in the song that confirms his suspicions about Dolly’s affair with Kesu – Billo becomes interchangeable with Dolly. Both Tyagi and the audience are keenly aware of this as Tyagi plays his psychological game with Omkara in front of his gang. Omkara’s demand for “ocular proof” has just been satisfied by Tyagi’s lewd narrative that intertwines Billo’s and Dolly’s sexuality together, perverting both of them in the process. The various elements of “looking,” involving pleasure, perversion, and violence, coalesce here with the gradual erasure of the difference between the onlookers, identified here as the male crowd, Langda Tyagi, and Omkara. This association of the male characters is visually anticipated in the “Namak” song when Langda Tyagi and Omkara, disguised as cops, merge with the dancing crowd at the end of the song.

Omkara effects an important visual register shift when it transforms Desdemona’s handkerchief into a heavy and elaborate waistband. The beautiful, ostentatious symbol passes through several hands in the film and is present in various scenes in the movie, gathering, in the process, a range of associations about female sexuality, its perversion, and the ominous aspects of its monitoring in the name of tradition and familial honor. The waistband is worn by all the three women in consequential and highlighted shots in the film and is particularly central to both the song-and-dance sequences. In this sense, the dance sequences themselves can be viewed as microcosms of the film-watching experience where the dancing Billo and the waistband become interchangeable objects of desire, both celebrating the audience’s pleasure and reflecting its darker desire to control the object of that pleasure – a desire that can easily escalate into violence and destruction.

The two item numbers in *Omkara* thus function tantalizingly on the outskirts of the logic of the plot, incorporating contending elements of region-specific “realism,” generic coding, star power, glamor, and commercial and artistic investment while bearing the distinct signature of the lyricist and the auteur director. Operating on a “parallel” logic and holding these disparate elements in tension, they provide a familiar site that both gratifies the audience’s expectations and provides a self-reflexive mirror that holds up that pleasure for interrogation.

Performance and Songs in *Ishqiya* and *Dedh Ishqiya*

Abhishek Chaubey’s first two films *Ishqiya* (2010) and *Dedh Ishqiya* (2014), hereafter *DI*, repeat the Vishal Bhardwaj-Gulzar combination that is a staple of Bhardwaj’s films. Chaubey began his career as Bhardwaj’s assistant director, and both the films are also produced by Vishal Bhardwaj. The close collaboration between the two directors is reflected in a similar treatment of song sequences in Chaubey’s films, with some differences. While Bhardwaj’s experiments often emerge out of stock song situations in Hindi films such as a wedding song, a romantic number, or an item number, Chaubey’s songs are more self-conscious and “integrated” within the plot. *Ishqiya* is a leaner album with four songs: a road song, a male romantic solo, and two pensive female solos. They all have the signature wordplay of Gulzar and the unusual musical arrangements of Bhardwaj, falling well within the tradition of Hindi film songs. Yet, the melodious tracks hide depths that trip unwary listeners. The song “Dil to bacha hai ji” (The heart is a child), for example, harks back to the nostalgia of the Hindi film songs of the 1960s. The opening melody of the acoustic guitar supported by an accordion evokes memories of a Raj Kapoor film. Rahat Fateh Ali Khan’s voice, famous for his passionate, high-pitched Sufi tracks, croons a leisurely romantic song, expressing an aging man’s hesitation about falling in love with

a woman. The lyrics and the visuals uphold the emotion even as they simultaneously ironize it when the song comes to a close on interspersed shots of the raw passion of Babban and Krishna's lovemaking, and Khalujaan leaving the long cherished and worn-out photograph of his young, deceased wife (one assumes) on the table, in anticipation of moving into a new relationship with Krishna. The other song, "Ibn Battuta,"¹²⁶ which is discussed in detail in Chapter 4, is seemingly a breezy nonsense-rhyme version of a road song, which also establishes an alternative way of viewing the men's identities and role in the film.¹²⁷

The two female solos use the deep voice of Rekha Bhardwaj to express the passion of Krishna's character. The lyrics of the semi-classical *thumri*, "Badi dheere jali raina" (The night simmered very slowly), express Krishna's passion, as the visuals dwell upon the intense concentration of a woman doing her morning *riyaaz* (vocal practice) and shots of an entire village leisurely waking up to the morning. Khalu's fascination with the peace and humble charm of village life and the widow playing the sitar lead him to misjudge the simmering passions hiding behind both. The other song, "Ab hamein koi intezaar kahaan" (Now I do not wait) is sung twice in the film. The film opens with Krishna in a bridal red sari humming this song of ostensible contentment. The following sequence contradicts the mood of the song, exposing the wife's frustration at the husband's frequent absences, and the scene ends with the fatal fire that ostensibly kills the husband. The song reappears as a background song against the visuals of both Khalujaan and Babban falling for the now-widowed Krishna and attempting to woo her. In both instances, there is deception lurking behind the passion.

¹²⁶ The name of a famous fourteenth-century Muslim traveler.

¹²⁷ Check Chapter 4 for a discussion of the song "Ibn Battuta."

Apart from its four original songs, the film is also full of references to older Bollywood songs that are used to provide insights into the characters or the plot, or to ironize a sequence. For example, Khalujaan and Babban are introduced in the film dancing drunkenly to a 1960s classic, “Ajeeb dastaan hai ye” (This is a strange story),¹²⁸ which makes obvious their proclivity for flouting decorum while the lyrics hint at the strangeness of the current film’s plot. The villain Mushtaq Bhai’s ringtone reveals the universal favorite Hindi song of most aging men who seek to romance their wives with grace and flourish, “Aye meri zohrajabeen” (O my beautiful one).¹²⁹ Babban selects prostitutes in the red-light area to the rhythm of “Dhanno ki aankhon mein” (In Dhanno’s eyes), which is a cult favorite of all R.D. Burman fans. All these songs would be naturally appealing to most Hindi film song fans.

Ishqiya actually provides the audience an image of such fans in Khalujaan and Krishna. The film songs serve as a backdrop for the romance between them, enticing the audience into participating in these melodious interludes even as they serve a cautionary purpose revealing ironies and depths that unsettle the viewers. Khalujaan and Krishna’s romance is underpinned by their mutual passion for old Hindi film songs and the genuine pleasure of those shared moments. Many snatches of classic Hindi film songs such as “Tumhein dekhti hoon” (When I see you),¹³⁰ “Kuch dil ne kaha” (the heart said something, *Anupama*[Incomparable, Mukherjee 1966]), and “Ye raatein ye Mausam” (These nights, this weather)¹³¹ are played in the background and at one

¹²⁸ From the film *Dil Apna Aur Preet Parayi* (The Heart is Mine and My Love Belongs to Someone Else, Sahu 1960).

¹²⁹ From the film *Waqt* (Time, Chopra 1965)

¹³⁰ From the film *Tumhare Liye* (For You, Chatterjee 1978)

¹³¹ From the film, *Dilli ka Thug* (The Trickster of Delhi, Narang 1958).

point sung by Krishna in the film. Their romance is bookended by “Tumhein dekhti hoon” in which they discover their common passion for old songs and the melodious “Kuch dil ne kaha,” in which a light exchange suddenly builds up into a raw confrontation between the two. The discussions between them regarding singers and music directors such as Jaidev, S.D. Burman, and Hemant Kumar clearly evoke the nostalgia for classic Hindi film songs that has captivated the Indian domestic audience cutting across class, gender, and age barriers. Yet, the sexual jealousy and the underlying violence that rush to the surface after the *Anupama* song exposes the fragility of those links.

The romance between Khalu and Krishna becomes a possibility because of the appeal of the songs to the characters’ and the audience’s nostalgia for these songs. The director’s enthusiasm for this musical tradition and his identification with it is evident in such “geeking out” about old films songs. However, his use of songs to expose Khalu’s blindness and Krishna’s exploitation of them keeps that fascination under a critical eye. Even the villain of the story, the rich and wily Kamal Kant Kakkar, enacts his sexual fantasies blindfolded in a massage parlor to the tune of a sensual and rare cabaret number by Lata Mangeshkar, “Aa jaane jaan” (Come, my love),¹³² followed by declarations of loyalty to his mistress as he cheats on his wife. The layers of self-deceit involved in that enactment are baldly exposed in the scene, yet it is not without a wry understanding of the pervasiveness of Hindi film songs and their power to arouse deep emotions.

¹³² From *Inteqaam* (Revenge, Nayyar 1969).

The album of the sequel *DI* harks back to the nuances and romance of Urdu poetry and is much more geared towards a niche audience and a tight plot. It includes two male solos, the Sufi inspired “Dil ka mizaaj ishqiya” (The mood of the heart is romantic) and a ghazal “Zubaan jaleh hai” (The tongue burns) by Rahat Fateh Ali Khan. Rekha Bhardwaj sings two semi-classical *thumris*, “Jagaave saari Raina” (Keeps me awake all night) and “Hamari ataria pe aaja re sawariya” (Come to my balcony, my love). It also includes a long *qawwali*, “Loot liya” (Cheated), in keeping with the Urdu shayari (poetry) dominated ambiance of the movie and a road song “Horn O.K. Please,” which can be considered a companion piece to *Ishqiya*’s “Ibn Battuta.”

Begum Para played by Madhuri Dixit and Khalujaan played by Naseeruddin Shah are both connoisseurs of art and poetry in the film. The film recreates a fictional world of beauty, art, and poetry, and music plays a major part in building that up. The seductive beauty of the delicate, slightly aging Begum who entralls the various suitors vying to court her through poetry and music is highlighted by the poignant songs of Rahat Fateh Ali Khan and the half-sung poetic verses that Khalujaan excels in enunciating in perfect Urdu. As in *Ishqiya*, music and poetry seduce both Khalu and the audience into investing in the romance between Khalujaan and Begum Para.

The songs function on nostalgia and passion even as they are enmeshed in deception in the film. Thus, the comic villain, Jaan Mohammad, kidnaps a poet to write his verses for him, just as Khalujaan is a con artist pretending to be a Nawaab, even as he expresses himself in eloquent poetry. When Khalujaan rhapsodizes about Begum Para “becoming one with the dance,” the passionate danseuse and diva is also not quite what she seems as she twirls in her

crumbling mansion, dancing to the song “Jagaave saari raina” (Keeps me up all night). However, the deceptions, at various levels, are for self-preservation, and the film makes a case for sympathizing with even the least favored of the performers, namely Jaan Mohammad Khan. Begum Para is the performer par excellence, and the triumph of her performance is asserted in her song and dance numbers, namely the two *thumris* that are central to *DI* in almost the same way the two “item numbers” are to *Omkara*.

Though the plot of the film is dominated by the male mushaira (poetry competition) in Mahmoodabad, with all the men involved in it vying to impress the Begum and win the competition, it is the *thumri* and the female performer of the classical song and dance form that imbue the mood of the film and emerge triumphant at the end.¹³³ Krupa Shandilya in her article “The Long Smoldering Night,” provides an excellent analysis of the use of *thumri* as masquerade in *Ishqiya* and *Dedh Ishqiya*.¹³⁴ Song and dance numbers in this context indeed become an instrument of power wielded by the women as they appropriate them for survival and escape. However, this notion of performance as survival concerns not just the women but also the male characters in the film. Moreover, Chaubey complicates this dynamic by dramatizing a complex relationship between the audience and the performance through his use and placement of the *thumri* and *ghazals*.

Begum Para is associated with the *thumri* as an art form even before her ability to perform it is revealed in the film. The very popular *thumri* “Hamri atariya pe aaja re sanwariya”

¹³³ For a discussion on *thumri* and *Dedh Ishqiya*, see final section of Chapter 2.

¹³⁴ Shandilya Krupa, “The long smoldering night: Sex, songs and the desi feminist noir,” *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* 12, no. 1/2 (June 2014): 97-111.

(Come to my balcony, my love) sung by its most famous exponent, Begum Akhtar, plays in the background as Begum Para is introduced in the story, framed in a backshot, gazing out from her palace window watching her suitors arrive. The back shot of Begum Para, her gaze from the window, and the aural backdrop of Begum Akhtar's rendition of the *thumri* subtly hint at some mystery behind the Begum's story even though the song establishes an ambiance of nostalgia. It hints at but does not disclose that the Begum's gaze and the *thumri* control the entire suitor hunt in Memoodabad, which will be revealed as pure performance at the very end of the film in Begum Para's version of the same *thumri*. It gets overshadowed in the next, more ostentatious introduction of the Begum by Muniya, who defines her as delicate and beautiful. The Begum appears exactly as Muniya describes her, playing the part to perfection in front of her suitors, standing framed in the window of a high balcony, gazed upon as the object of desire by the male contestants (see Fig. 3.8).



Figure 3.8. Begum Para's two different introductions.
Source: *Dedh Ishqiya*. Dir. Anurag Chaubey. Shemaroo. 2014.

While the suitors simply see the delicate and beautiful Begum as the passive audience to their songs, there are many more facets to her. She is also a passionate, accomplished dancer, a fact that only Khalujaan, who knew her in the past, remembers. With Khalujaan's encouragement, she performs her first *thumri*, "Jagaave saari raina" (Keeps me awake all night),

as Khalujaan watches her through the dusty windows of her room. Begum Para, wearing the stolen necklace that Khalujaan had presented to her, dances in ecstasy, triumphantly twirling with Muniya at the end of the song. There are layers to that performance that Khalujaan is unaware of – Begum Para both knows Khalujaan is watching her and her playfulness with Muniya has depths that Khalujaan and the audience have yet to understand.

That is not the case in the second *thumri*, which plays at the very end of the film. As Begum Para dances on stage surrounded by her young female students and Muniya, she is playing to two different sets of audiences. One is the absent stage audience who is unaware of her story. The other audience includes Khalujaan, Babban, and Mushtaq Bhai whose perspective is now aligned with the film's audience, and they are all willing to be duped by the seduction of her performance and are pleased by it. This other audience is aware of the many facets of her personality. The frail and beautiful Begum attended to by her maid in most of the earlier scenes in the film is revealed as having plotted with her companion and lover to escape her stifling existence by conning a group of suitors. She also actively establishes her dance academy, lives with her lover and companion, Muniya, and teaches and performs the art form she is passionate about. In her dance performance, she plays the forlorn beloved craving for her male lover's attention. The irony of the situation is not lost on the audience who knows that it is her female lover that she desires and depends on, and that she has actively avoided the heterosexual romance that she so eloquently sings about. The audience is also well aware that it is a skill that she excels in and that she is very much in control of her performance. The issue of the audience's willing participation in the performance is underscored at this point by the intrusion of Mushtaq Bhai into the Mehmoodabad plot and the detachment of the song from the rest of the narrative.

The Mehmoodabad plot ends with the women escaping while Jaan Mohammad and the uncle-nephew duo end up in prison. Begum Para's letter to them lets them know that the women are content in an undisclosed location having opened a dance academy from the money they received from selling the stolen necklace. When the duo is let out of jail, they mistakenly imagine that the women are in love with them and had provided the money for their bail, only to realize that they are back in the clutches of Mushtaq Bhai. The story comes back full circle when they find themselves back in freshly-dug graves begging Mushtaq Bhai to spare their lives and offer to show him a *thumri* performance to defer their death. Mushtaq Bhai's pleased laughter that heralds the last *thumri* performance of the Begum suggests the audience's acceptance of the performance on the Begum's terms. This stylized beginning and ending mock-echoes the narrative strategy of the *Arabian Nights*, making story-telling, art, and performance a matter of life and death. Performers can change, and at this point in the story, it is the male duo who is performing for Mushtaq Bhai. He is the tyrannical audience who is tricked every time by the duo, but he is also the one who is the most invested in playing the game. While the central impetus in both of Chaubey's films is female performance, he also considers the interchangeability of the players and the complicity of the audience in the performance. The film makes it evident that there is genuine emotion involved when Khalujaan sings to impress the Begum or when Mushtaq Bhai, despite being duped every time, wants to continue playing the game. *Thumris* and song-and-dance routines might be deceptive, but they rise from deep-set emotions and are desired by the audience.

Chaubey makes the *thumris*, and by extension the song-and-dance routines, not just central to the theme of performance, survival, and desire in his film, he also uses them at central

transitional moments. The Mahmoodabad plot, which concerns a male poetry competition, opens with the seductive *thumri* of Begum Akhtar playing in the background, suggesting its grip on the plot. When the romance plot of the film gives way to heist, Chaubey makes the *thumri* function not just in the world of old-fashioned Urdu niceties but also makes it relevant in a contemporary heist story. Thus, when the leisurely Urdu romance narrative is pushed aside for a counterplot by the women to escape with the money, the pace of the film moves swiftly to action sequences that include kidnappings and violence, culminating in a mock-Western style shootout in a train station against the implausible backdrop of a romantic *ghazal*.

Before the shootout, there is an entire discussion between the villain and his accomplices about their exhaustion with boring *ghazals* and classical singing, and they mockingly demand an “item number” from Begum Para and Khalujaan, who refuse to perform in front of them. The issue of performance is thus brought directly into the narrative along with tongue-in-cheek references to current audience preferences, and the film’s firm denial of that desire. In the shootout that follows, Chaubey, in a daring and provocative use of the *ghazal* form, employs another Begum Akhtar *ghazal*, “Wo jo ham mein tum mein karar tha” (That love between us) as an aural backdrop for the entire shootout to counteract the preceding discussion by the villains. The sequence is not simply provocative; it also culminates in Khalujaan finding the remedy for the tremors in his hands. When Begum Para binds them with her scarf, the tremors cease as he realizes he has fallen in love with her, despite her being unable to return his love. It is a brief moment that reminds the audience that the strength of the bond between Khalujaan and Begum Para is their common love for songs and poetry. However, the moment does not last, quickly

shifting to action and parody, suggesting both the strength and the transience of the emotions that songs evoke.

These examples of the use of song and dance sequences in Chaubey's films focus on the individual artist or character performing the song sequence in the plot, but they are also linked to the larger issues of performance and audience compliance or complicity, issues that are also important for Bhardwaj's films.

Anurag Kashyap's *Dev. D* (2009) and *Gangs of Wasseypur Parts 1 and 2* (2014).

While Vishal Bhardwaj and Abhishek Chaubey choose to extend the traditional use of song and dance sequences in Hindi cinema in unusual and experimental ways, Anurag Kashyap's choice of a new music director, Amit Trivedi, for his film *Dev. D* (2009) led the way to a different mode of experimentation that pushes back against the more traditional use of song and dance sequences in Hindi films. Kashyap had collaborated with Bhardwaj in his early films, and their shared interest in experimentations with songs is evident in films like *Paanch* (Five, Kashyap 2003), his first film, and *No Smoking* (Kashyap 2007). *Paanch* (Five), which was about a college rock band, was never formally released because of problems with the censor board of India. However, the "Preview" copies of the film are easily available on YouTube. The song "Main Khuda" (I am God), is considered one of the first Hindi-metal tracks in Hindi cinema. Bhardwaj avoided synthesized sounds, highlighting the feel of live music in many songs of this album, which sound markedly different from usual film songs. Though it never became a chartbuster, the song has its cult following amongst rock fans. Kashyap and Bhardwaj collaborated again for *No Smoking*, a psychological thriller based loosely on the short story

“Quitters, Inc.” by Stephen King. For this film, the Bhardwaj-Gulzar team created an entire album of songs solely focused on smoking.

This penchant for using music in unusual ways becomes far more pronounced in Kashyap’s *Dev. D*, which was his first commercially successful film. Kashyap had been working on a contemporary adaptation of *Devdas* based in Delhi, and he used a new music director Amit Tripathi, whose music impressed him so much that he chose to rewrite his entire script as a musical. Thus, *Dev. D* has an incredible eighteen songs, or song and music fragments, which add up to nearly an hour-long soundtrack, and each song is used in the film, and one of the songs are lip-synched by the main characters. However, these “background” songs are central to the film, which relies less on dialogue and more on the songs to build the mood and express the characters in the film. The album includes a range of influences from Punjabi and Haryanvi folk, Awadhi, pop, trip-hop, rock, and fusion. Geared firmly towards a niche youth audience, this album was hailed as one of the most innovative film albums since A. R. Rehman’s *Roja* (Ratnam 1992) that is credited with changing the musical landscape of Indian cinema.

Dev. D radically adapted the 1912 Sharad Chandra novella to the realities of contemporary India, not shying from shifting the setting from the intensely localized nineteenth-century Bengal and Kolkata to contemporary Punjab and Delhi, or from recreating the grand tragedy as a musical comedy. Despite the spectacular differences and the creation of an unheroic Devdas shorn of his tragic grandeur, Kashyap’s *Dev. D* remains surprisingly true to the mood of the original novella.¹³⁵ In a film that has few dialogues, Dev’s self-destructive personality is

¹³⁵ For more details about *Dev. D*, see Chapter 2.

established through the songs. Moreover, the songs are central to creating the ambiance of the three spaces in which the film is set – the Punjab countryside in the “Paro” chapter, the upper-middle-class neighborhoods of South Delhi in the “Chanda” chapter, and the nightlife of the Daryaganj-Paharganj area in North Delhi in the “Dev. D” chapter.

The visuals and audio of songs such as “Pardesi” (Stranger), “Nayan tarse” (Yearning eyes), and “Saali Khushi” (Wretched happiness) in the “Dev. D” chapter aim to express the alienation of the new generation, capturing their aimless restlessness and the numbing drug-hazed ambiance of an urban dystopia with remarkable success. Kashyap credits Danny Boyle with showing him the technique of “camera tripping” and Amit Trivedi’s music for creating the much-appreciated mood of the film: “Instead of showing the drugs, I just showed Dev [Abhay Deol] going for them with the camera starting to tripping. This was further pretty well aided by Amit Trivedi’s music.”¹³⁶

The *Dev. D* album is often hailed as expressing the alienation of urban youth. However, the centerpiece of this album is the song “Emo-sa-nal Atyachaar” (Emotional torture), which has two versions, a brass band version and a hard rock version. The brass band version involves vocals and music with a rural rather than an urban feel. This version plays against the backdrop of Paro’s wedding after she decides to marry a rich widower upon being rejected by Dev. A pair of Elvis impersonators from Patna, wearing cheap white suits studded with gaudy rhinestones, sing it and their lyrics and rendition verge on the ridiculous. Lyrics such as “Smoking, smoking, nikle re dhuan /Whaat to tell you daarrling kya huan ” (Smoking, smoking, the smoke comes

¹³⁶ Anurag Kashyap, “Dev.D – The Look and the Style.”

out/I cannot tell you darling what happened) and “Bol bol why did you ditch me/zindagi bhi lele yaar, kill me/Whore (Tell me why did you ditch me/Take my life too, my friend, kill me/Whore...), are hardly flights of poetic fancy. Moreover, the music, rather daringly, involves the street brass band and intrusive, high-pitched nasal voices. Using both camp and rage to express overwrought emotions, this song captures the ridiculousness of the situation as well as its tragedy.



Figure 3.9. The “Emo-sa-nal Atyachar” Song.
Source: *Dev. D*. Dir. Anurag Kashyap. UTV. 2009.

The shots of the Presley impersonators, interspersed with images of a stone-faced Dev downing bottles of rum and throwing up, and the husband’s stunned expression upon watching his ostensibly shy bride’s sudden burst of overenthusiastic dancing have given this song a cult status (see Fig. 3.9). Anurag Kashyap acknowledged many influences for this sequence ranging from Emir Kusturica to *Om Darbadar* (an experimental Indian movie that was made in 1988 but was not released commercially till 2014).¹³⁷ The rock version of the song, which gives it a completely different urban feel, is sung by ex-Kolkata rock singer, Bonnie Chakraborty. It opens quietly, building up to a crescendo of rage and bafflement that are as compelling as the brass

¹³⁷ Anurag Kashyap, “Dev.D – Emosional Atyachar,” *Passion for Cinema*, June 5, 2016, <https://passionforcinema-archive.blogspot.com/2016/06/devd-emosional-atyachar.html>.

band version. The visuals for this are a combination of the real and hallucinatory, reflecting Dev's alienation as he walks the night streets of north Delhi. The term "emotional atyachar" (emotional torture) has become such a part of the urban jargon that it has spawned not only a Facebook page devoted to the phrase but also an entire TV show sporting that name that is geared towards helping its audience avoid "emotional atyachar" in their lives.

For *Gangs of Wasseypur* Parts 1 and 2 (2012), hereafter *GoW*, Kashyap used another less-established music director, Sneha Khanwalkar, who took *Dev. D's* experimental approach to music even further. In her interviews,¹³⁸ Khanwalkar has described her method of traveling extensively and recording ambient sounds to recreate the authentic feel of a place. She had already done this kind of experimentation for a popular MTV serial titled *MTV Sound Trippin'*, in which she back-packed to the interiors of India to capture raw sounds of places on her recorder. Khanwalkar uses a similar strategy in *GoW*, incorporating the ambient sounds of Bihar and Jharkhand where the story is set, to provide a palpable sense of the local and comment on the area's politics and history. Khanwalkar had used this technique in *Oye Lucky Oye* (Hey Lucky, Lucky Hey, Banerjee 2008), but her *GoW* album with its ambitious and unique twenty-seven song soundtrack goes much further.

Khanwalkar employed local singers for a number of her songs and recorded live at times. For the "Womaniya" song, she convinced a local housewife, Rekha Jha, who did not sing outside her house to sing for her album by recording at her house and mixed with the sound of another local singer, Khushboo Raj from Varanasi, to get contrasting flavors of similar dialects and

¹³⁸ Sneha Khanwalkar, "Sneha Khanwalkar's Quest to Find Her Groove," interview by Sankhayan Ghosh, *Film Companion*, September 17, 2018, <https://www.filmcompanion.in/sneha-khanwalkar-interview-gangs-of-wasseypur-manto/>.

different pitches.¹³⁹ This album uses raw, local voices over professional singers and mixes them with experimental sounds and rhythms that borrow from both local and global forms. For example, for her “I am a hunter” song, she traveled to Trinidad, which has a Bihari migrant population, and recorded the song in the Chutney Music style, which is a local Trinidadian style of music developed by the migrant population that settled there. She mixed the voices of the Trinidadian singers with singers from Bihar who never met each other. Hindi films rarely use complete regional songs in films, and sometimes intersperse a phrase or a line in a regional language to provide the regional flavor, if the story is set in a recognizably specific place. This has changed with music directors such as Amit Trivedi and Sneha Khanwalkar. The *GoW* album, in particular, took a considerable risk in using local singers and local styles which had never before been used in Hindi films. By mixing them with contemporary sounds, Khanwalkar made regional and rural sounds fashionable amongst urban youth.

GoW is a violent action film spanning more than half a century, and it deals with the saga of a family’s rise and fall in the coal fields of Bihar and Jharkhand. The use of songs in such a genre is in itself a surprising feat, and Kashyap pushes beyond that to make the soundtrack essential to the film. The songs crop up in the plot as unpredictably as the actions of the characters in the film, serving a variety of unusual functions. They provide the backdrop for action or chase sequences, enhance comedy or irony, and, within the space of a single song, shift the mood from wry romance to stunning cruelty.

¹³⁹ Sneha Khanwalkar, “‘Gangs of Wasseypur’ music composer Sneha Khanwalkar Speaks,” interview by Subhash K. Jha, *Businessofcinema*, June 6, 2012, <https://businessofcinema.com/bollywood-news/gangs-of-wasseypur-music-composer-sneha-khanwalkar-speaks/36080>.

A song such as “Kala re” (Black one), for example, juxtaposes the dark lyrics against the visuals, underscoring the droll courting scenes between Faizal Khan and Mohsina, while the music, opening to the beat of shovels, localizes the unfolding romance in a small town in the coal fields of Jharkhand. It is a dark song full of foreboding, sung in a mellow tone that plays right through the romance to the violent shooting sequence at the end. It forces a reassessment of the lyrics, which one tends to forget when following the visuals of the unfolding courtship between the characters. Often the songs do not end neatly after a single scene. Instead, they carry into the dialogues and merge with the narrative, or as in “Kala re,” pause and restart in a completely different context creating a sense of continuity between the wildly different facets of Faizal Khan’s personality.

Discussing all the songs of *GoW* is beyond the scope of the chapter¹⁴⁰ but it is worth briefly pointing out Kashyap’s use of film songs in *GoW*. Besides the twenty-five song tracks composed especially for the film, numerous song fragments from other films are littered through its narrative. Hindi film songs are a strong presence in the films of *Hat-ke* directors and discussions of films and film songs often spill into the narrative. The characters of Wasseypur dream through Hindi cinema and, as the central villain of the film, Ramadhir Singh, points out rather accurately, each one of them is the hero of a film running in his head. Hindi films and Hindi film songs dominate the imagination of the characters in *GoW*. Thus, Faizal Khan imagines himself to be Amitabh Bachchan, hating his father and suffering silently to protect his mother’s honor, while his lethal younger brother, “Perpendicular,” is a Sanjay Dutt fan. The anti-

¹⁴⁰ Some of the songs are further discussed in Chapter 4.

social “Definite” chooses to assert his masculinity with prostitutes by quoting the villain’s lines from *Maine Pyar Kiya* (I fell in Love, Barjatia 1989), and Ramadhir Singh’s bullied and murderous politician son shamefacedly admits to his father that he was missing in action because he had gone to watch *DDLJ* (The braveheart will take the bride, Chopra 1995).

While tongue-in-cheek, shared cultural references promote nostalgia, they also make the sudden, brutal actions of the characters shocking and alienating, shattering the haze of nostalgia for Hindi cinema that the audience might share with the characters. In one sequence, for example, a drunk group of goons drive at night singing the very popular song “Pag ghungroo Mira naachi thi” (Mira danced wearing her anklets)¹⁴¹ and forcibly pick up a girl walking by to gang-rape her. The comment made by one of them, “Dekho Smita Patil jaa rahi hai” (Look Smita Patil is walking by), referencing the actress who is part of the song sequence, shows the easy translation of the film songs and sequences into brutal acts of aggression, enacted in part out of the excitement that Hindi films and songs generate among its avid consumers.

Hindi film song fragments permeate the cultural texture of life in Wasseypur. They are heard on radios, loudspeakers, television sets, and on the ringtones of cell phones. Faizal Khan and Mohsina fall in love to the tune of “Salaam-e-Ishq” (Love’s greetings)¹⁴² and Khan’s comical and failed attempt at propositioning Mohsina is set against the backdrop of the sexually suggestive song “Maang Meri Bharo” (Marry me)¹⁴³ playing on the television set that Mohsina watches intently. On Faizal’s request, while he is in prison, Mohsina sings “Dil to pagal hai”

¹⁴¹ From the film *Namak Halal* (Faithful, Prakash Mehra 1982).

¹⁴² From the film *Muqaddar Ka Sikander* (King of Fate, Prakash Mehra 1978).

¹⁴³ From the film *Sabse Bada Khiladi* (The Biggest Player, Umesh Mehra 1995).

(The heart is crazy)¹⁴⁴ over the phone which seems to offer him genuine comfort. Film songs accompany marriages and deaths; they are used to challenge and humiliate opponents, and to celebrate election victories. These songs provide a sense of the chronology of the sprawling fifty-year saga of the Khan family. Hindi film songs become part of the lived experience of these characters, and in this context, it is not the classic golden era songs that Kashyap evokes in his film, but songs from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Many of the songs that he picks out are from the much-maligned 1980s, which were considered the low-point for music in Hindi films.

Moreover, many of the film songs are sung by the characters in the film, and human agents bring their own personalities and local flavors to them. Thus, the Faizal-Mohsina pair conduct their unusual romance through songs. The local singer, who is brought to sing popular songs during weddings and funerals, sings with a local accent and incorrect pronunciation which, as Madhuja Mukherjee suggests, is reminiscent of camp.¹⁴⁵ And, in the manner of camp, it also carries the weight of the moment, allowing the viewers to distance themselves as well as identify with the characters. *GoW* palpably depicts how the story, the characters, and their tragedies, passions, and brutality are inextricably intertwined with Hindi films and its songs.

A brief analysis of the first ten minutes of *GoW* 1 provides a window into the extensive use of song fragments in the film. *GoW* opens on an extended shot of the title song of the serial *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* (Because the mother-in-law was once a daughter-in-law), hereafter *KSBKBT*, which was one of the most popular soaps in India running from 2000 to

¹⁴⁴ From the film *Dil to Pagal Hai* (The Heart Is Crazy, Yash Chopra 1997).

¹⁴⁵ Madhuja Mukherjee, "Music, Sound, Noise: Interposition of the Local and the Global in Anurag Kashyap's *Gangs of Wasseypur*," in *Music in Contemporary Indian Film: Memory, Voice, Identity*, eds. Jayson Beaster-Jones and Natalie Sarazzin (New York and London: Routledge, 2017), 183.

2008.¹⁴⁶ It depicted an ideal Gujrati joint-family helmed by an ideal daughter-in-law whose depiction would be as far as possible from the Khan family in Wasseypur that watched it avidly every evening, as did the entire nation. The television and the gathering are shattered by a barrage of bullets as the Wasseypur story opens, *in media res*, into the new millennium, and in the narrow lanes of Wasseypur. The song sets up the contrast between the worlds of *KSBKBT* and Wasseypur, and provides a chronology for the action that is set at a time when television in India was proving to be a tough competitor for Indian films, even though Indian films held their own at the time.

Following the shock of the extended and violent shootout, a pause ensues as Faizal Khan's family cowers inside a room, hiding from the attackers. The silence is shattered once again by the ringing of the cell phone playing a popular song, "Nayak nahi khalnayak hoon main" (I am not the hero, but the anti-hero).¹⁴⁷ The intruder calls the phone of Faizal Khan as the family gathers around the shrill phone hoping to remain undetected. Once he is satisfied that no one is left alive, he leaves mocking the fate of the owner of the phone: "Khalnayak khatam" (The anti-hero is finished). The use of the *Khalnayak* song functions at various levels: it provides an introduction to one of the central characters, Faizal Khan, whose cell phone the intruder calls; it serves as a dramatic tool to heighten the tension of the moment; and it reveals how the music industry has, with the help of technology, found new outlets to channel the huge popularity of Hindi film songs.

¹⁴⁶ Produced by Ekta Kapoor for *Star Plus* channel.

¹⁴⁷ From the film *Khalnayak* (Anti-hero, Ghai 1993).

Kashyap does not shy from using songs atypically in his films, whether it is to use them to introduce tension instead of dispelling it, or to play loud and unappealing music that might not have aged well. Music is not just an object of art but is part of the everyday existence of his characters through which they express themselves.

Song Fragments and Absent Songs in *Haider* (Bhardwaj 2014)

The last section of this chapter discusses Vishal Bhardwaj's film *Haider* (2014) from a slightly different perspective. It focuses on how new media and different distribution channels affect the use of film songs, particularly in the works of *Hat-ke* directors. The *Haider* album is a useful one to discuss as it is a later work by Bhardwaj, and it attests to his continued enthusiasm for elaborate albums. It includes a background score of almost forty-two minutes, in addition to a forty-one-minute vocal soundtrack that includes nine songs. It is an eclectic album that includes a romantic song, a background song addressing the local river Jhelum, a fairly typical song of separation interspersed by snatches of a folk song in Kashmiri, a central song-and-dance track, "Bismil" (wounded/lover) that adapts the Hamlet mousetrap sequence, and two poems by Faiz Ahmad Faiz set to music by Bhardwaj.

The previous sections employed close textual analysis to discuss the different ways in which songs function within a film. They can bring in a range of local, cultural, and literary contexts into a linear plot such as *Omkara*, or flesh out a character such as Dev, who spends most of his time in *Dev. D* in a drug-induced haze. Songs can localize and glamorize a small town such as Wasseypur and its inhabitants, or revive a neglected art form such as the *thumri* and be crafted to function in a heist film. The *Haider* album yields a similar rich intertextuality and range that I will note in passing before focusing on the use of song fragments in the film. Song

fragments are becoming common with the proliferation of new media and changing consumption patterns of films and film songs.

Hindi film songs are changing in response to the shifts in circulation and medium. With many different platforms and the focus on one “hit” song to carry the entire album, the impulse to not invest in the entire album is on the rise, as Jayson Beaster-Jones¹⁴⁸ points out. As is the new trend of having multiple music directors compose for a single album, in the hope of bettering odds that one song out of the album might emerge as the winning “item number” that ensures the film a huge opening week. Thus, entire songs are often deleted or only parts of the songs are used in the actual films. Songs in this sense have become separate from the narrative and contemporary circulation trends have split audiences on an unprecedented scale as songs circulate on different screens such as film, television, radios, computers, and mobile phones. Keeping in mind that Hindi film songs have always been composed in a modular format, these recent developments warrant a closer look at how songs function in this new environment, which provides possibilities of unpredictable associations and audience interventions that cannot be monitored completely from a director’s point of view.

A popular streaming site such as YouTube provides numerous examples of such potential. In such readings, rather than considering films as self-enclosed entities it might help to view them as open-ended, incorporating within them previews, trailers, promotional material, deleted material, and reviews connecting across different media in different combinations. The following analysis addresses a central song in Haider, “Aao Na” (Come on now), in relation to

¹⁴⁸ Jayson Beaster-Jones, *Bollywood Sounds: The Cosmopolitan Mediations of Hindi Film Songs* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), 169-172.

the film's promotional videos on YouTube, which used this song as the aural node linking the visual clips of the film, and discuss its absence rather than its presence. As song fragments have become a common feature in contemporary Hindi films, this section will focus on other song fragments rather than the full-fledged songs in *Haider* to consider Bhardwaj's engagement with this form.

Haider is an adaptation of *Hamlet* set in the 1990s in the politically volatile state of Kashmir. The elaborate music album of *Haider* reflects both these influences including major songs such as "Jhelum," that localize the film, and "Bismil" (Wounded lover), that adapts the Player king episode into an elaborate dance drama. A brief discussion of the Faiz song fragments provides an argument for the range of intertextual material they bring into the film. These lines emerge through brief allusions set to music that trigger affective modes of perception that do not require a complete knowledge or comprehension of the entire text. Two of Faiz Ahmad Faiz's poems, the popular "Gulon mein rang bhare" (The flowers are full of color), and the lesser known "Intesaab" (Dedication), bring the permanent aura of revolutionary fervor to the politically fraught opinions about Kashmir that provides the landscape of the *Hamlet* drama. The first poem, fashioned as a romantic plea to the mistress, which Faiz composed in 1954 in Rawalpindi's Montgomery Prison, has been appropriated by many political movements and protests in both India and Pakistan. This basic information along with the opening lines of the poem is such common knowledge that a full engagement with the poem and its words are not required to evoke feelings of sympathy. This song complicates notions of good and evil, and perceptions of the figure of a "terrorist," when it is associated with three different personalities in the film: the passionate Haider, his idealistic father, and his enigmatic spirit, Roohdar, who all

sing or recite fragments of the song at different points in the film, its fragmented form reflecting the irreconcilable tensions between rebellion, terrorism, and revenge epitomizing the complicated politics of Kashmir.

The other Faiz poem “Intesaab” (dedication), is literally used as a dedication at the end of the film. It complicates the nationalist narrative with its listing of the common, unsung people and their suffering which comprises the nation for Faiz. The lines dedicated to “today” or “this day” and its sorrows, and Faiz’s definition of his country as “zard patton ka ban jo mera des hai/Dard ki anjuman jo mera des hai” (this forest of yellowed leaves that is my country, this collection of hurt that is my country), becomes a poignant critique of the jingoism of nationalism that ignores the history of such people and their suffering. Such rich intertexts using the progressive literature of the subcontinent (that include both India and Pakistan) provide local contexts that intervene in global narratives that usually form the dominant perceptions of nationalism or terrorism. This basic analysis of the lyrics can be developed even further by focusing on musical traditions and voices. The fact that progressive Urdu poetry has a long tradition of being sung and recited by singers such as Iqbal Bano, Nayyara Noor, Farida Khanum, Begum Akhtar, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, and Mehndi Hassan for political protest brings its own intertextualities to such recitations. These references evoke local histories that move across national borders and rupture the coherence of more rigid nationalist discourses that call for blind “pro-Pakistani” or “pro-Indian” positions. The film’s deployment of such literary fragments as film songs (given the sheer dominance of Hindi film music above all other popular music in India) repackages those literary poems and arguments in more attractive forms. They

might appeal to a newer generation of listeners who might not relate to the tradition of Urdu revolutionary poetry, even as they cater to the nostalgia of a generation that does.

These fragments from other literatures echo the function of the main songs in *Haider* in intertwining the local and the global. The “Bismil” (Wounded/Lover) song and dance sequence, for example, adapts the mousetrap sequence in *Hamlet* to a dance performance by Haider who seeks to expose his Uncle’s guilt. Besides being an elaborately wrought visual and oral recreation of Khurram’s guilt, the song is a blend of Kashmiri folk and western opera music. Gulzar’s characteristic wordplay makes the song highly allusive, combining typical motifs of Urdu poetry with references to the local politics of Kashmir. It is also a testament to Bhardwaj’s determination to use local music and traditional art forms of Kashmir that are gradually dying. Such intense “localization” of the songs however, also incorporates the Shakespearean context, opera, and modern dance moves with imaginatively re-conceptualized puppets. A close reading of the pensive background track, “Jhelum dhoondhe kinara” (The river Jhelum seeks its shores), would yield similar results about local politics and cinematic choices. Even the weakest song, the romantic “Khul kabhi to” (Open sometimes) that Sangita Gopal¹⁴⁹ most recently has picked out to make a thought-provoking argument about the dwindling role songs play in experimental films, can be analyzed to focus how the song exemplifies the politics of localization. Shot in freezing temperatures, the song’s backdrop contests the long-practiced use of Kashmir as a picturesque backdrop for lovers’ songs in Hindi films. While avoiding the cliched tropes of Kashmir’s gardens and flower-laden shikaras (house-boats) floating on the glittering Jhelum, it captures the stark beauty of Kashmir’s pristine peaks and ice-laden slopes. This landscape is not

¹⁴⁹ Gopal, “The Audible Past,” 815-819.

an escape to the canned beauty of Kashmir but a locally grounded appreciation of its surroundings. Songs, particularly in the films of *Hat-ke* directors, often become the repositories of such localizations contesting the homogenization that threatens global forms.

While Bhardwaj's dedication to film music is evident in all his albums, *Haider* includes a surprisingly sharp critique of film songs in a bitterly self-reflexive moment. He includes a song from a generic Salman Khan film at two separate points in *Haider*. The song involves banal lyrics such as "Kiss, kiss, kiss/Baby give me a kiss/Sweet sixteen give me a kiss...." The visuals of a young Salman Khan "mock-roughing" up an annoyed Manisha Koirala would be considered a stock song situation in Hindi cinema, especially during the 1990s when such a sequence was accepted as a prelude to a romance. Salman Khan is a superstar of Hindi cinema whose popularity was on the rise in the 1990s, the decade in which the film is set. *Haider* uses this sequence twice, once when Haider hunts hopelessly for his missing father in all the makeshift prison camps of Srinagar, and the second time when Roohdar, who shared a jail cell with Haider's father, tells Haider about his uncle's treachery.

In the first instance, which is a song within a song, Haider walks into a movie theater with his fiancée, Arshi, desperately searching for his missing father. Movie theaters in Srinagar in the 1990s had indeed been converted into makeshift army camps that often served as temporary detention centers for suspected terrorists. The police officer in charge of the camp is busy watching a film song inside the theater. The shots of the Salman Khan song are intercut with Arshi requesting a meeting with the officer who comes out and seems not to recognize the picture of Haider's father. The entire episode lacks dialogue as it is part of the background song sequence "Jhelum, Jhelum dhoondhe kinara" (The river Jhelum seeks its shores). The "Jhelum"

song sequence provides Bhardwaj the opportunity to present the poignant beauty as well as the devastated landscape of Srinagar in the 1990s, as Haider and Arshi go into different makeshift camps in Srinagar asking disinterested officers and policemen for any information about Haider's father. The juxtaposition of the images of the anxious couple, hopelessly looking for a missing parent, with images of Salman's attempts to kiss the annoyed heroine makes the Salman song fragment look unpleasant and intrusive.

The contrast is even more jarring when the song reappears in Roohdar's narrative in which he recounts how he and Haider's father were tortured in various camps with surreal names like Bobo Land, Mama 2, and Faraaz Cinema. After scenes of brutal torture in those camps, the prisoners are led handcuffed into a movie theater, and the same Salman Khan song sequence plays loudly as they march down the aisle and stand in line in front of the screen. The raucous lyrics and hectic gestures of the actors look menacing instead of comical juxtaposed against the silent prisoners lined up against the movie screen facing an audience of local policemen and the army (see Fig. 3.10).

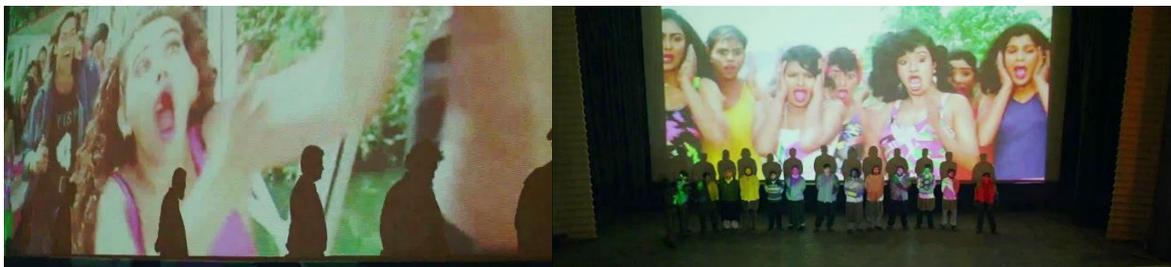


Figure 3.10. Bollywood songs and the prisoners lined up in front of the screen.
Source: *Haider*. Dir. Vishal Bhardwaj. UTV Films, 2014.

In this rare and satirical metatextual moment – and this is underscored by the projector being turned off and the lights coming on inside that theatre – the camera seems to turn on the

audience instead of on the narrative, forcing a comparison between the audience watching the film and the audience of policemen watching the Salman song. Moreover, this is the moment when Roohdar points out the presence of the lurking Khurram among that audience to Haider's father, who finally realizes that the person who betrayed him is his own brother. The narrative seems to pause as the associations of policing, voyeurism, betrayal, guilt, and crime are pointed right back at the audience (see Figs. 1.18, 1.19, 1.20 and 1.21 in Chapter 1).

The song and the Salman Khan references in the film certainly point to the huge popularity of Hindi films in India. However, the use of these film-song fragments does not hold up in favor of the typical Bollywood song. Instead, the indifference of the police and the army become a trope for the apathy and indifference of the Indian audience towards the humanitarian abuses happening in Kashmir while it remains obsessed with images on the screen. It is noteworthy that this critique comes from Bhardwaj, who is particularly invested in Hindi film songs. The tension between pleasure and self-critique that is evident in Bhardwaj's employment of the item numbers in *Omkara* intensifies into a more bitter critique of his own medium in *Haider*.¹⁵⁰ Bhardwaj does put some distance between the "typical" Hindi film songs and the songs in his films. The silent Salman song fragment in the first instance is interspersed in a haunting *Haider* song sequence (Jhelum...) which does present itself as more "authentic" in capturing the suffering of the common Kashmiris as well as expressing the beauty of the Kashmiri landscape.

¹⁵⁰ Bhardwaj's *Rangoon* (2018), which has a female protagonist who is a film actress from the 1940s, presents a more positive portrayal of Hindi film songs.

Moreover, the critique does not restrict Bhardwaj's employment of songs in his films. As in previous Bhardwaj films, the songs of *Haider* are central. However, when an important song such as "Aao Na" is not used in the film, it warrants a discussion of its absence. "Aao Na" (Come on now), like "Bismil," was pitched as one of the central songs in the pre-release videos of *Haider*, but was absent from the film itself. It does emerge as a brief chorus at the end of the film and as a musical motif associated with a character. It might be worth analyzing this unusual "absence" of the song in *Haider*, not as indicative of the attenuating space for songs in recent films, as some critics have argued in the context of post-millennial, global Bollywood, but as a complex response to the challenges and opportunities provided by new media and new modes of circulation.

This song, with its despairing, disjointed lyrics, was the first audio track to be released. The entire song is sung to a rock beat that undercuts the despairing pessimism of the lyrics. The song has two versions, a long, upbeat rock version and a short choric one, and it is an obvious choice for the lead song. The following is a brief translation of portions that convey the bleak perspective that is central to the portrayal of Kashmir in the film:

Burning, burning burning

Like a burning lamp...my life
Is not snuffed, not snuffed out...by the wind... this life

That one puff of breath Sir, cleared the smoke...
That catch in the breath, that itch in the throat...cleared
That choke in the chest is gone...the restlessness... the illnesses are gone
Come on, dearest, my life, come on
Come on, now that life exits

That world is lost...sleep now, come now that life tires...sleep

...

Come on Sir...be patient, choose your grave,

Come on home...come on now...

This song seems perfectly pitched to be the lead song of the album. The trailer and most of the promotional videos of the film feature this song playing in the background against selected shots from the film. Moreover, this song that so tellingly reflects the mood of the film is also sung by Vishal Dadlani and is clearly positioned as a high-profile song, intended to repeat the earlier successful pairing of Dadlani and Bhardwaj of the “Dhan te nan” (sounds) song from *Kaminey* (Rascals, 2006). While the practice of not using all the songs of a film album is becoming increasingly common in the cinema of the new millennium, it is odd and risky to find a central song such as this missing from the film, especially after its heavy promotion in the trailers.

However, it is an absence that almost seems to call attention to itself. This is a song about disappeared people, a ravaged state, and of dead men and spirits. While the trailer associated the song with Haider and multiple images of death, in the film it is associated with Roohdar (the Spirit). Separated from its vocals, it is referenced by the distinctive opening guitar riff that follows the strange character of Roohdar as he is introduced, rather dramatically, late in the film. It follows him throughout the film and finally reappears in choric form in the grave-diggers’ song as the old men of “disappear-ed” sons dig up graves and lie in them, satirically inviting whoever cares to listen, to rest in them.

Roohdar is an ambiguous figure in the film. Literally named “Rooh” or Spirit, he is Hamlet’s father’s spirit in a sense, who claims to have shared the prison walls with Haider’s idealistic father, and who relays his father’s desire for revenge to Haider. He is visually linked to the terrorists, appearing to reside with them, and yet is given a prophetic voice that rather

uncharacteristically seeks to represent the unified spirit of Kashmir. The gravediggers are ordinary citizen-parents of “disappear-ed” sons, who in the end are shown holding the guns supplied by terrorists. So does Haider, who early on in his life is sent out of Kashmir by his parents because of their fear that he could be seduced into joining the terrorists. The shadow of terrorism dogs all these figures, and the absent-present, despairing “Aao Na” song suggests the affective links between them, encouraging the audience to make such connections. Such a depiction would also be far more controversial in a polemical format. Moreover, Bhardwaj has often, in his interviews on the film, referenced Kashmir as a character.¹⁵¹ The suppression of a definitive visual image in association with the song might well be to establish the dominance of the landscape of Kashmir over its various characters.

Such a reading of the auteur director’s vision requires the audience to include not just the film but the promotional material surrounding it. The recognition of the song and the context of the lyrics thus must be brought into the film by the audience from outside as it circulates in separate media such as television, laptops, or cell phones. The film thus gets dispersed over different media, which may or may not be reassembled by the audience. Some of the recent comments on YouTube on the trailer (that plays the “Aao na” song juxtaposed against shots from the film) attest to the variety of responses to the song. They include enthusiastic appreciations of the music and the lyrics, the anticipation of the fans regarding the film and its popular stars, and heated arguments over Kashmir mainly along communal lines that invariably get heated and

¹⁵¹ Harneet Singh, “Kashmir Is the Hamlet of My Film,' Says Vishal Bhardwaj on *Haider*,” interviewed by Harneet Sing, *The Indian Express*, The Indian Express, October 5, 2014, <https://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/bollywood/kashmir-is-the-hamlet-of-my-film/>.

devolve into obscurities.¹⁵² It captures the different ways in which the songs and visuals of the film engage the audience, which continues long after the film is over.

It is not necessary to make a case for auteurial intentionality either, if one considers the “Do Jahaan” (Two worlds) song. Composed as a typical song of bereavement, expressing Arshi’s (Ophelia) sorrow, it intersperses the Hindi lyrics with a traditional Kashmiri folk lyric of bereavement. Only one line of the song was included in the film, probably due to the film’s length and because Shraddha Kapoor, who renders the song on screen, is not a big star in comparison to the other heavyweights such as Tabu, Shahid Kapoor, and Irrfan Khan. This “unintentional” absence of the song from the film has not stopped fans from attaching the song back to the film as well as detaching it. The video of Shraddha Kapoor in the process of recording this song for *Haider* has attracted comments about Kashmir, Shraddha’s accent, nostalgia about the Kashmiri language and its diminished usage, and appreciation of Shraddha’s stardom – all of which become part of the *Haider* experience.¹⁵³

This is not the kind of response that the director can control or monitor and it does provide a glimpse into how the film text becomes, in the process, a fragment that needs other texts to complete it. Songs and dances in films have this alternative circulation as such fragments that may or may not fit neatly into the film’s narrative. They allow possibilities of expanding these narratives which extend far beyond the plot. They may also showcase what is inevitable in

¹⁵² Movieclips Indie, “Haider Official Trailer 1 (2014) – Drama Movie HD,” YouTube Video, 2:23, September 10, 2014, accessed July 30, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZmN_VSo8DOo.

¹⁵³ Times Music, “Shraddha Kapoor sings Kashmiri Folk Song/Haider/Live Recording,” YouTube video, 1:51, September 23, 2014, accessed July 30, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=31bCOaLnE9M>.

any text – a fragmentation that may lead to an unraveling of a coherent text just as easily as it can lead to new formations.

As these examples reveal, *Hat-ke* directors' employment of Hindi film music affirms their active engagement with the medium. Their close identification with Hindi film songs and a sense of being part of a tradition goes hand-in-hand with an assertion of their individuality and a critique of the form that also intervenes in their narratives and plots. Yet, all the films discussed in this chapter would not function without the songs. The elaborate albums do not indicate a gradual waning of interest but rather an enthusiastic exploration of the medium and a testing of its potential and its pitfalls. It is not a placid but an active embrace of the medium, and in their individual ways, all three directors attest to music's importance in their films.

CHAPTER 4

TRANSLATION MOMENTS IN *HAT-KE* FILMS

Hat-ke directors sought to distinguish their films from older Hindi films through their emphasis on linguistic realism. Hindi cinema, as has often been noted by its supporters and detractors, has its own stylized language and culture that does not have much to do with the many languages and dialects spoken in India. Javed Akhtar, a well-known Indian scriptwriter and lyricist, points this out in his attempt to explain the audience's response to it:

Hindi cinema has its own traditions, its own culture, its own language. It is familiar and recognizable to the rest of India and the rest of India identifies with it. Shall we say that Hindi cinema is our nearest neighbor? And we know our neighbors well and we understand them. In Hindi cinema, a son can tell his mother, 'Ma, mujhe samajhne ki koshish karo' ['Mother, try to understand me']. Now, in India, no son would ever say such a thing to his mother....¹⁵⁴

Akhtar describes the Indian audience's patience with such stylization as bred out of familiarity. Such usage started to change visibly around the turn of the century in post-liberalized India when the mushrooming of multiplex theaters, new circuits of film distribution, and the new media environment opened up a space for more experimental cinema. *Hat-ke* films used this opening to their advantage, and one of their most distinctive features is linguistic realism that often enables them to define local spaces through a kind of linguistic specificity, which has not been attempted very often in earlier Hindi cinema. Such an emphasis on locality extends to its unabashed use of crude language, which stands in stark opposition to the generic, genteel Hindustani that has long been the staple of Hindi cinema.

¹⁵⁴ Javed Akhtar quoted in Nasreen Munni Kabir's *Bollywood: The Indian Cinema Story* (London: Channel4 Books, 2001), 3.

One of the most distinguishable and critically appreciated elements of Vishal Bhardwaj's *Omkara* (2006), his local, Western U.P. take on *Othello*, is the use of raw Khariboli¹⁵⁵ in place of the standard cleansed Hindustani of mainstream Hindi films. Incidentally, it was also the reason why the film did not fare as well as expected at the box-office. It was considered not "family-friendly,"¹⁵⁶ shocking the audience with the very first line of the film that is littered with abuses. This "shocking" language is an assertion of realism which the director clearly considers a badge of honor:

Unfortunately, mainstream Hindi cinema has always played safe in terms of its language, dialect or realism. It lives in a kind of hypocrisy – claiming to reflect the inner being of the masses. Over the years we have made our own filmy language, in which people don't talk as they do in reality.... This always bothered me as India has a variety of beautiful dialects which change every 100 kilometers.¹⁵⁷

This consciousness about language is typical of all his films. It is not simply an attempt to depict regional dialects as closely as possible, but an alertness towards it that makes him define his characters through their language.¹⁵⁸ It also makes him push for odd moments in his films where the plot seems to pause for such "translation moments." Translation moments can occur when characters translate from one language into another or when one language is juxtaposed

¹⁵⁵ Khariboli is spoken in the rural, surrounding areas of Delhi, Western U.P., Southern Uttarakhand and neighboring areas of Haryana in India. It is a dialect of Hindustani on which standard Hindi and Urdu are based.

¹⁵⁶ TNN, "Families Stay away from Omkara," *ETimes*, August 1, 2006, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/hindi/bollywood/news/Families-stay-away-from-Omkara-/articleshow/1833494.cms>.

¹⁵⁷ Vishal Bhardwaj, "Preface," in *Omkara: The Original Screenplay (with English Translation)*, eds. Vishal Bhardwaj, Robin Bhatt, and Abhishek Chaubey (Noida, U.P.: Harper Collins Publishers, 2014), v.

¹⁵⁸ Bhardwaj has always been closely involved with writing the dialogues of his films, often doubling up as the scriptwriter and dialogue writer of the films he directs or produces. In *Omkara* Abhishek Chaubey, his assistant director, and Robin Bhatt are credited with writing the dialogue.

against another, as during code-switching or code-mixing,¹⁵⁹ which is not unusual in India's multilingual environment. However, these translation moments in Bhardwaj's films do not simply enable information or meaning to transfer from one language into another, they also stand as "untranslatable" moments or pauses in the film when meaning becomes impossible to translate or is deliberately not translated.

I use "untranslatable" the way Emily Apter and Gayatri Spivak use it. Apter defines it as a "negative gesture" that disqualifies "First-World normative notions of 'equality' that presume linguistic and cultural equivalence."¹⁶⁰ This gesture, which she equates to "the Spivakian Not-translated," is posited as a political gesture against "the condition of translational inequality created by Globish."¹⁶¹ Apter sets up "untranslatable" as a political act of resistance against another kind of non-translation that Globish leads to. Spivak takes it further. Her often-quoted description of translation as an "intimate act of reading" in which the reader "surrenders to the text"¹⁶² views translation as a double bind that is both "impossible" and "necessary." Not only does she counterpoise the "impossible" against the "necessary," but she also complicates "impossible" as an epistemological problem. Translation for her is the consciousness of alterity that takes place in language. It repeats the original primordial gesture of striving to become

¹⁵⁹ Both occur in bilingual situations. Broadly, code-mixing means using words within the grammatical structure of another language, whereas code-switching means switching from one language to another in the middle of a sentence.

¹⁶⁰ Simona Bertacco and Emily Apter, "An Interview with Emily Apter," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 16, no. 1 (2016): 16.

¹⁶¹ Globish is the impulse to translate literatures from all languages into English.

¹⁶² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Politics of Translation," in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed., Laurence Venuti, 3rd Edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 315.

intimate with that sense of the other to create meaning, yet it is co-existent with the knowledge of the impossibility of the task.¹⁶³

These translation moments that I discuss in the films can also be compared productively to the notion of song-and-dance sequences in Hindi cinema as “interruptions,” standing outside the logic of the plot. However, unlike song-and-dance sequences, translation moments are not part of the tradition of earlier Hindi cinema which, with rare exceptions, is predominantly in Hindustani.¹⁶⁴ This is one of *Hat-ke* directors’ most original contributions to Hindi cinema – they are very conscious of the minute variations in the many languages and dialects that they encounter and include in their films. Many of them are industry outsiders, and thus bring a different sensibility that is particularly aware of linguistic and cultural differences. This awareness has been accelerated by the kind of immediate access to information and technology

¹⁶³ ILF Samanvay, “Gayatri Spivak’s Lecture – Necessary and Impossible: Culture as Translation,” Filmed [2018] in Delhi, YouTube video, 1:48:60, Posted [April 9, 2018], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBvYS1bwy2U&t=218s>. A section of her lecture is worth quoting where she talks about “deep learning languages” and loving the original language: “This is why the translator must inhabit the original taking the idea of the right to an original beyond positive law. Where translation is necessary, we are produced. Where translation is impossible, we surrender actively to the impossibility to make our practice stronger. Where translation is a task, we forget the first two and hunker down to be as responsible to the original as possible. In this translating, we must not translate from the imperial language translations of other texts. I speak to the many translators present in the audience. Don’t let English help you avoid intellectual labor...learning to love the language of the underived [?] original. Necessary and impossible. Claim it as a task. Get yourself invited to an adventure...This is how I see the necessity and the impossibility and the question mark...It [translation] is not necessary *yet* impossible. It is necessary *and* impossible.”

¹⁶⁴ Hybrid language and inter-linguistic play were mainly used for comic purposes. Films like *Chupke Chupke* (Hush-Hush, Mukherjee 1975) and comic actors such as Mehmood and Kishore Kumar used them very effectively. The mispronounced word “cho-chalist” (socialist), which was used by Raj Kapoor’s character in *Jis Desh Mein Ganga Behti Hai* (The Country in which the Ganges flows, Karmakar 1960), comes to mind as a rare exception in which a mispronunciation is used to suggest the underlying ideology of a film.

that is available to contemporary artists.¹⁶⁵ *Hat-ke* directors relish encounters between languages in a multilingual society and highlight them as translation moments in their films.

Bhardwaj's *Omkaara*: Untranslatable Love in Meerut

In Bhardwaj's *Omkaara* (2006), one such translation moment occurs when Dolly (Desdemona), in front of an assembly of men that includes her father, Bhaisahab (the Duke), and Omkara, recounts the letter in which she declares her love for Omkara. Her letter, which is in Khariboli,¹⁶⁶ ends with: "I love you, O. Yours forever, D." Not only is her dialect markedly different from the dialect spoken by Omkara and his gang, her last phrase in English also stands out as an oddity against her language in the rest of her letter. Though code-mixing and code-switching between Hindi and English are common in India, code-switching is far more common in the metropolises. Dolly, as a college student conversant in English, might plausibly have used it, but it is difficult to imagine the lovers using the shortened "D" and "O" to address each other. Furthermore, the code-switching strikes a different, more abruptly cosmopolitan tone from the rest of the letter. The rest of the letter is in genteel Khariboli,¹⁶⁷ which is far more reflective of the typical phrases a young girl from a small-town milieu might use to express her love. Keeping

¹⁶⁵ This can be as simple as access to the internet, or the ability to travel to the interiors of the country. For example, the ability to travel cheaply, record, and reproduce ambient sounds of a place, as Sneha Khanwalkar did for creating *GoW's* songs, would not have been possible even twenty years ago in India.

¹⁶⁶ Khariboli is loosely described here as the dialect spoken in Delhi and its environs. Hindi would include Khariboli and other dialects. Khariboli can be further distinguished – it might include more Urdu (Dehlavi) or be closer to the local languages like Haryanavi (in Western U.P.), which inflects the speech of Omkara and his gang, or Awadhi in Eastern U.P. Broadly, Dolly's dialect seems closer to Dehlavi, which is more prevalent in central Delhi and Lucknow. Dialects are heavily contested terms in India, so most of the definitions are used broadly. There is no attempt here to accurately identify all the accents and dialects with their various inflections. The point is to note the difference in Dolly's and Omkara's spoken dialects.

¹⁶⁷ Probably, Dehlavi.

in mind that the meaning of an overused phrase such as “I love you,” would be comprehensible even in a remote corner of India, Bhardwaj, rather counter-intuitively, positions it as an “untranslatable” sentence in *Omkara*.

Omkara is set in the semi-rural hinterland of Uttar Pradesh. Omkara is no esteemed general; he is a local henchman who leads a gang that supports a corrupt politician, Bhaisahab. When Dolly is summoned by Bhaisahab on her father’s behalf, it is Dolly, not Omkara, who narrates the blossoming of their romance. The director uses a song “Naina das lenge” (the eyes will sting you), interspersed with Dolly’s story in a montage sequence. The sequence depicts how the two got intimate when an injured Omkara showed up at Dolly’s place and she nursed him back to health. Despite being engaged to another man, Dolly takes the bold step of protesting against her impending marriage and declares her love for Omkara in a letter that ends with the English code-switching line.

The attention to detail in the film regarding the variations in the dialect within a region are evident in this scene. While the region-specific contemporary “Khariboli” employed for the entire film grounds the characters in Western Uttar Pradesh, this scene, early on in the film, makes evident the variations within the dialect. The song, “Naina das lenge” (the eyes will sting you), which plays as a background track for their romance, is in poetic Khariboli. This poetic, Sufi version of Khariboli is different from the conversations between Omkara’s henchmen which are a more Haryanvi inflected version of Khariboli. Dolly’s use of “ham” instead of “main” (both words translate as “I”) distinguish her version of “Khariboli” as different from that of the other characters’ in the film. Khariboli’s mixed lineage includes not just Hindi and Urdu but also English. Thus, a character from this milieu might code-mix with perfect plausibility: “Katayi

mistake nahi thi hamari” (It was certainly not my mistake). In a film that incorporates such differences within a dialect, Dolly’s code-switch in English calls attention to itself and sets her apart from the other characters.

The relevance of this abrupt and somewhat gratuitous code-switching becomes evident later in the film in a similar scene involving English usage and pronunciation, which seems equally unnecessary. Kesu (Cassio) is banished from Omkara’s presence for his drunken behavior and he requests Dolly to put in a good word for him in front of Omkara. Dolly agrees but asks him for a favor. She requests him to teach her the Stevie Wonder song, “I just called to say I love you” that she plans to sing to Omkara. What follows is a fairly long scene in which Dolly practices the song and gets the accent of “bottom” wrong multiple times. She pronounces it as “bot-tum,” which is a common Indian way of pronouncing the English word. She does not register the shift in the accent despite Kesu’s several attempts to change her pronunciation. The insertion of the Stevie Wonder song is odd enough in the *Othello* plot, but the scene about the mispronunciation of a word draws attention to itself because it does not progress the plot or develop the characters in any way.

The Stevie Wonder scene involving the mispronunciation that is preceded by the phrase “I love you,” alerts the audience once again to the attention to detail about language usage in distinguishing Kesu’s English from Dolly’s. It is a distinction that would be barely comprehensible to the domestic Indian audience or the first-generation diaspora. The film’s employment of this dialect is unusual enough, but the “English” insertions in both these scenes set the characters who speak it apart from the others in the film. Thus, Dolly’s declaration of love and Kesu’s attention to detail over the correct accent of “bottom” reveal close attention to detail

about the variations in the English spoken in India, just as the film is sensitive to the distinctions within the Khariboli dialect in the film. However, despite the disparities in their spoken English, its usage forges a bond between Dolly and Kesu and sets them apart from the other characters in the movie.

Dolly and Kesu are different from the rest of the characters in the film. Kesu's nickname "Firanghi" (foreigner), is a further indication of his separation from the rest of the characters. Kesu is a student leader and is called by this nickname because he is fluent in English unlike the other members of Omkara's gang. Kesu is the only other person in the film who speaks a complete sentence in English, and the usage again concerns a declaration of love. "Billo Baby, I love you," he states playfully to Billo (Bianca), who refuses to take him seriously. English would certainly be perceived as "alien" by the characters in this milieu, but the film employs it in a surprisingly different context. In this film, English is not overwhelmingly and solely the language of power, which it often is in the context of colonial and post-colonial India. In *Omkara* it marks alterity. In a film that is centrally concerned with revealing the stranglehold of tradition and patriarchy over gender, English becomes the language of the assertion of equality, and the articulation of love becomes an attempt to connect with "the other" person.

Dolly uses it to cast herself out of her community in an unequivocal assertion of her love for Omkara. The film seeks to highlight the deeply entrenched patriarchal mindset within which the characters function. Dolly is required to be obedient towards her father and accept her arranged marriage. When Omkara abducts her, she is brought before an audience of men that include her father, Bhaisahab, and Omkara to corroborate Omkara's assertion that she had willingly run away with him. She does explain her actions to an extent, but the last line in

English, juxtaposed against the more apologetic tone of the preceding letter comes across starkly and baldly as rebellious. It is an “untranslatable” sentence in a milieu that does not understand the concept of love, especially one that enables the woman to be an equal participant in a relationship. Thus, Bhardwaj employs the common phrase, “I love you,” which, as stated before, would probably be understood in the remotest of rustic settings in India, as an “untranslatable” sentence to underscore a core idea in his film, the often-naturalized othering of gender and the difficult task of overcoming this mindset.

Dolly’s “I love you” resists translation in her milieu. And her father is the first to react to this and posit another phrase in opposition to it, which unfortunately is a phrase that translates very easily in the crushingly patriarchal milieu of Meerut. Right after her statement, her father, much like Desdemona’s father, warns Omkara with the following lines, “Bahubali, aurat ke tariya charitra ko mat bhoolna. Jo ladki apne baap ko thag sakti hai wo kisi aur ki sagi kya hogi” (Strong-arm, do not forget a woman’s nature. A woman who can cheat her father...how can she be loyal to anyone)? To Shakespearean readers, this warning is very similar to Brabantio’s, “Look at her Moor, if thou hast eyes to see:/she has deceived her father and may thee” (1.3.288 – 289).

To Omkara, however, the warning is easily translatable and culturally accessible because of the term “taria charitar” (woman’s nature) that Dolly’s father uses to describe Dolly. It is a well-known reminder from ancient Hindu Scriptural texts, “Triya charitram purushasya bhagyam, devo na janati, kuto manushya” (A woman’s character, a man’s fate/even the gods do

not know, let alone humans).¹⁶⁸ The phrase is a common misogynistic expression that has long been used to demoralize women by putting the weight of ancient scriptures against them, and Dolly's father's use of the term is not unusual. Omkara mentions it twice to Indu (Emilia), who instantly understands this reference and bitterly absolves him of individual responsibility, protesting against the powerful ancient scriptures for tipping the scales against women. The scene highlights the extreme linguistic misogyny that informs the cultural milieu of Meerut. It is in this constrained environment that Dolly's English sentence resists translation.

When Dolly uses the phrase a second time in the Stevie Wonder song, "I just called... to say I love you," the context has shifted slightly. She is living with Omkara and tries to communicate her love for him, once again in a foreign language, but it is too much of a barrier for Omkara. She is trying to articulate something that is culturally not available to either her or Omkara. Living openly with a man without the sanction of marriage in that milieu would be considered, at best, a scandal. Omkara is well aware of it as he aggressively fights off lewd innuendos about their relationship. Dolly's "transgression," even though she commits it with him, makes him uneasy. This untranslatable line becomes a problem for Omkara. It is telling that he laughs at the end of Dolly's song and teases her with the line: "Meri samajh mein nahin aata ke tum lool ho ya chudail" (I don't know whether you are a fool or a witch). The untranslatable line has become a difficult barrier for Omkara to cross. It is also telling that Billo never quite believes that Kesu genuinely loves her, and both she and Omkara are easily manipulated by Langda (Iago) who manages to destroy both the relationships.

¹⁶⁸ A common misogynistic phrase whose origins are not clear but which is loosely ascribed to ancient Hindu scriptures.

Though Omkara is not able to translate Dolly's sentence he is forced to become sensitive to the use of language. He is a singularly inarticulate Othello who functions well in the masculine world of guns and aggression. He does, however, sing a song, "Jag ja ri Gudiya" (Wake up, Doll) in *Omkara* despite being the most unlikely character in that setting to be singing a song. Apart from Billo's two "item numbers," which involve group singing, he is the only character who lip-synchs a song in the film. The song he sings to Dolly is an odd, infantilizing lullaby to express his love, almost as if he is learning a new language. That language is quickly suppressed when Landa Tyagi (Iago) begins to turn him against Dolly. Before he strangles her on their wedding night, his language becomes uncharacteristically ugly and crude, resembling Langda's. After he smothers Dolly with the pillow, he bitterly uses both the phrases "na apne baap ki sagi hui na kisi aur ki" (she was never faithful to her father nor anyone else) and "tariya charitar" (woman's character), once again in front of Indu, because that is the language he understands. However, after he realizes his mistake, the same lullaby is played back when he is alone with Dolly's dead body. This time, he haltingly mumbles some of those words incoherently. The garbled words against the backdrop of the song effect a distance between the words and their articulation. Omkara is literally unable to speak the language of love.

In the final scene of the film, Omkara's language seems to be oddly dislocated every time he speaks. This dislocation becomes extreme just before he kills himself in front of Kesu (Cassio). Omkara stops Kesu from speaking and asks him to remember their accomplishments, which are all brutal killings, that he repeatedly defines with the odd word "boom." In direct contrast to the eloquence of his counterpart Othello, the final word Omkara utters before shooting himself is "boom." Omkara's attempts at translating love into his language prove to be

too garbled. It does make him bitterly conscious of the “otherness” of his language, and his parodying of it destroys him.

Between Chutzpah and AFSPA: To be a Kashmiri Hamlet

Bhardwaj’s later films *Haider* (2014) and *Rangoon* (2017) include characters and situations that involve the use of languages other than Hindi or English, and he draws attention to these differences in several ways that often involve translation moments. In *Haider*, which is set in Kashmir, the characters speak in Hindi instead of their local language, Kashmiri. While this would be an accepted convention in previous Hindi cinema, in Bhardwaj’s movies there is always an effort to emphasize linguistic realism and a compulsion to make this evident. In *Haider* it is highlighted through accents. It is also apparent in the team he got together for the film and the difficult circumstances under which he shot almost the entire film in Kashmir. He did not just buy the rights of Basharat Peer’s¹⁶⁹ book but employed him as a co-scriptwriter for *Haider*. Both the female leads, Tabu and Shraddha Kapoor, were coached painstakingly on their accents by one of the actors in the film who is a local Kashmiri.¹⁷⁰

Accents are important in *Haider*. All the characters, for example, pronounce “ghar” (house) as “grr” instead of the aspirated “ghhar” (a combination of “g” and “h”), which would be

¹⁶⁹ The Kashmiri journalist writer of *Curfewed Nights* whose book inspired Bhardwaj to set the Hamlet story in Kashmir. It is an autobiographical account, from a child’s perspective, of growing up in Kashmir in the 1990s. Once Bhardwaj had decided to use parts of Basharat Peer’s story for *Haider*, he hired Peer to co-write the screenplay.

¹⁷⁰ Anil Merani, “Sumit Kaul: my inputs for *Haider* were properly developed and used in the film,” *Bollywoodlife.com*, October 8, 2014, <https://www.bollywoodlife.com/news-gossip/sumit-kaul-my-inputs-for-haider-were-properly-developed-and-used-in-the-film/>.

the normal Hindi pronunciation. In *Omkara* “Khariboli” could be used instead of Hindi because the languages are similar, which is not the case with Kashmiri. Accents in *Haider* create a distance, reminding the audience that the story is set in Kashmir. It affects the characters’ Hindi and English accents, making them distinct. So “loved” is pronounced with two syllables as “Love-ed,” and “kicked” becomes “kick-ed.” As is typical of Bhardwaj’s films, there is an almost extraneous sequence in the film where Haider attempts to correct Arshi’s accent. He teases her about it, making her articulate a string of such words that make her accent evident. This focus on accents goes beyond simply reminding the audience of the quaintness of the Kashmiri accent when it comes to the word “disappear-red.” It is a very specific word in Kashmir, used to reference thousands of Kashmiri men who were picked up as suspected terrorists by the Indian army under AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act), and who never returned to their homes. Words such as “A-fus-pa”¹⁷¹ and “disappear-red” remain untranslated in the film becoming specifically resonant words for the Kashmiris.

Haider is a political film that treads on dangerous waters. The film is situated in Kashmir, a state that has been the bone of contention between India and Pakistan since the partition of the Indian subcontinent into the two countries in 1947.¹⁷² The film is set in the mid-1990s, which was a particularly troubled period in Kashmir. The rising insurgency amongst the Kashmiri youth for an independent Kashmir was complicated by the influx of terrorism from across the border of Pakistan. The Indian army was deployed in heavy numbers across the state and

¹⁷¹ The acronym is fully detailed thrice in *Haider* and never explained in Hindi or Kashmiri.

¹⁷² Check footnote 11, Chapter 1.

provided protection under the dreaded AFSPA,¹⁷³ which gave the Army unprecedented powers to hold and interrogate people. *Haider* is the story of middle-class Muslims who lived in the shadow of terrorism and army occupation at the time.

Bhardwaj's critique of the role of the Indian army in Kashmir is not one-sided. The film points out its necessary role in countering terrorism from across the border. Anticipating such a critique of the military being labeled anti-national, Bhardwaj includes disclaimers at the beginning and end of the film that note the role of the Indian Army in providing civilian assistance during natural disasters and wartime. These additions did not prevent critics from labeling the film either anti-national or too watered-down. However, *Haider* goes a great deal further than any other commercial film on Kashmir in exposing the abuses of the AFS-PA that resulted in the "disappearance" of thousands of ordinary Kashmiri citizens. Apart from providing direct accounts of the abuses committed under the cover of the AFSPA (e.g. through Roohdar's account), Bhardwaj uses two "translation moments" in his films to express the frustration and desperation of the Kashmiris who were forced to live under a constant state of surveillance, which involved random spot checks, night curfews, and arbitrary detentions.

A satirical sequence in the film concerns a man standing silently outside his house refusing to go in, who is observed by bystanders Roohdar (Spirit) and Arshi (Ophelia). The man remains stubbornly silent despite being repeatedly asked by his wife (in Kashmiri) about what ails him. He only ventures to go inside his house after Roohdar intervenes authoritatively, asks him for his "I.D.," and mock frisks him, to which the man complies submissively. As Roohdar

¹⁷³ AFSPA was a parliamentary act enacted in 1958 in India, which gave the Army special and often arbitrary powers in "disturbed areas." It has since received criticism over issues of human rights violations. In the 1990s, it had become one of the most hated words in Kashmir used as a cover-up for disappearances and arbitrary arrests.

explains to Arshi in Hindi, people have become so used to being frisked that they don't dare to enter their own houses without being interrogated. His explanation involves translations and code-switching between English and Hindi:

“It's a psychological disorder called ‘New Disease.’ Doctor boltein hain nai bimari hai”
(The doctors call it a new disease).

This scene is an adaptation of an actual short story titled, “New Disease” written by distinguished Kashmiri writer Akhtar Mohiuddin (1928 – 2001). Akhtar Mohiuddin, who received the *Padma Shri*¹⁷⁴ in 1968, is considered one of Kashmir's premier modern short story writers. While his early writing dealt with the lives of ordinary Kashmiris, in the 1990s his writings increasingly took a political turn. He returned his award to protest against what he considered to be the unlawful massacre of innocent civilians in the 1990s, which also claimed the lives of his son and son-in-law. Bhardwaj bought the rights to Mohiuddin's short story and incorporated it in *Haider*.

The story is placed in the narrative almost as a set piece highlighting its difference from the rest of the plot. This is one of the rare occasions when Kashmiri prose is heard in the film. The wife speaks in Kashmiri to her silent husband. She switches to Hindi when she answers Arshi's queries. Roohdar speaks in both English and Hindi, translating his own English into Hindi when he calls the man's condition a “New Disease.” The political thrust of the scene is underscored by the choice of the actor who plays the silent man. It is played by Basharat Peer, the scripwriter of the film and the Kashmiri journalist, who in his book *Curfewed Night*,

¹⁷⁴ Fourth highest civilian award in India.

provided an eyewitness account of what happened in Kashmir in the 1990s. He is also the English translator of Mohiuddin's short story.

This sequence reflects the many different levels at which translation occurs with regard to the story. The short-story written in Kashmiri by a Kashmiri writer would get a minimal audience in India, which might expand to some extent if translated into Hindi. When texts such as these get translated in English (as it was by Basharat Peer), the audience for the story would be substantially larger, both within and outside India. However, the widest audience is reached when the text is translated into the cinematic medium, whose primary language is Hindi. Of the three languages heard in this scene, it is obviously Hindi and English which are finally used to translate and articulate the "disease" of the silent Kashmiri. The sequence gives voice to the situation in Kashmir, and to a distinguished regional writer in front of a national and global audience. Roohdar's code-switching also throws light upon the shifting hierarchies among languages in translation in different media.

At the speculative level – as per Cronin's suggestion that the role of translators or interpreters in a film ought to be analyzed carefully – there are two translators in the sequence, Basharat Peer as the silent man and Roohdar. One of them remains silent and tormented. The other character, Roohdar, becomes an "interpreter of maladies," and has tantalizing similarities with many of the characteristics used to define a translator. He is a mysterious, slippery character who is introduced as a stranger walking towards Srinagar from the outside. He is accused of being a double agent by Khurram, and the audience notes his visible ties with the insurgents even as he makes savant like proclamations. He claims to have been in the same prison cell as Haider's father, and brings his father's message to Haider, thus doubling up as his spirit. His

message to Haider from his idealistic father is “revenge,” and he does seem to encourage both Haider and Ghazala to extreme actions. Yet, he suffers the same tortures as Haider’s father and lives to bear witness to those tortures. He speaks very persuasively for Kashmir in one of his philosophical proclamations. In the short story sequence, he speaks with authorial authority as the interpreter of the silent Kashmiri. In his role as a translator, he suggests that translation as bearing witness does not necessarily bring about a resolution but instead can exacerbate the situation. However, even though he is ambiguous and possibly dangerous in his influence, he brings attention to that situation.

Untranslated English words like “disappear-ed,” “and “half-widows”¹⁷⁵ stand out in the film drawing attention upon themselves. In this mix, Bhardwaj throws in the word “chutzpah” that is translated several times in the film, and each time it is translated slightly differently. For an Indian audience, “chutzpah” would not be as familiar a word as it would be to an American audience. Introduced as a foreign word, it is then idiosyncratically defined thrice in the movie, twice by Haider, and once by the two Salmans (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern). “Chutzpah,” as Haider explains to the two Salmans in an early scene, occurs when a boy who has murdered his parents requests the judge for mercy on account of his being an orphan. A giggling Salman points out how closely it rhymes with AFSPA (pronounced Afs-pah). The word “chutzpah” is mispronounced in the film as “chuts-pah” (ch is pronounced as the ch in “chat”) making the first part sound like a well-recognized abuse in Hindi. The deliberate pairing of the words: “Chutzpah” with “AFSPA” and the unsaid abuse offer a protest every time it is spoken in the film.

¹⁷⁵ Widows of the disappeared men, who waited endlessly for their husbands to return.

The arbitrary incantatory and visual association of “chutzpah” with violence, cruel irony, and brazen shamelessness occurs at several key points in the movie. It crops up again in Haider’s speech in Lal Bagh when he pretends madness, claiming that chutzpah has “happened” to them as Kashmiris with the enforcement of AFSPA. Haider belongs to the educated middle class and thus code-switches between Hindi and English frequently, and it is particularly evident in this speech in which he spouts the entire definition of the law in English to underscore its implacable authority. He mocks the acquiescent response of the Indian officers granted this authority with a repetitive, staccato “Ji janaab” (Yes, sir). It dramatizes Haider’s outrage at how this mockery of “law and order” has been used to suppress and silence the Kashmiris brutally. However, the word that most clearly expresses his outrage at what is happening to his state and his family is, what he calls, a “Hebrew zuban ka lafz” (a word from the Hebrew language). He provides the audience with the second definition of “chutzpah,” urging the audience to imagine a bank robber who robs a bank and then attempts to open an account in the same bank with the stolen money. As he explains, veering between laughter and anger: “Ye hota hai chutzpah. Besharam, gustakh, jaise AFSPA” (This is chutzpah. Shameless, brazen, like AFS-PA). A mispronounced foreign word enables him to express his rage and frustration about being a Kashmiri trapped in a humiliating situation.

The word is particularly associated with the two Salmans, who represent Bhardwaj’s critique of Bollywood’s obsession with stars and its willful blindness towards the situation in Kashmir.¹⁷⁶ The word crops up arbitrarily in the two Salmans’ attempts to hard sell film videos to a bewildered tourist. As they struggle to explain to the tourist, in English, why she ought to

¹⁷⁶ See Chapter 1 for a discussion of Bhardwaj’s critique of Bollywood.

watch a Salman Khan film, one of the Salmans comes up this inspired phrase: “You know...this fillim was ...was...chutzpah.” “What is chutzpah?” asks the confused tourist. The other Salman answers obligingly: “Big fillum...big hit...big chutzpah in India.” Mistranslations and mispronunciations in the film become tools for critiques that range from the political to the artistic and, most importantly, suggest links between the two.

Bhardwaj’s keen sensitivity to language is not limited to defining specific regional landscapes. In *Kaminey* (Scoundrels 2009), which is a caper film, Bhardwaj depicts a contemporary, cosmopolitan Mumbai that hums with the sound of different languages, such as Marathi, Bengali, Hindi, English, and even a bit of Nigerian, while it registers the rise of linguistic nationalism and migrant-phobia epitomized in a language purist who is the main villain in the film. The film’s identical twin “heroes” suffer from speech defects – one lisps and the other stutters. Yet, outrageously, the street-smart twin who dreams big and claims that there are two ways of making a fortune – “fortcut aur chota fortcut” (Shortcut and small shortcut) – is also the loquacious narrator of the film. Language is always a site of struggle in Bhardwaj’s films.

In *Rangoon* (2017), Bhardwaj shifts the action from India to the Indo-Burma border during the Second World War. The film is a love story between Julia, a stunt film actress who is the mistress of a rich and powerful film producer, and Nawab Malik, a soldier in the Indian Army who had defected to the Azaad Hind Fauj (Indian National Army)¹⁷⁷ of Subhash Chandra

¹⁷⁷ The Indian National Army or INA was formed under Subhash Chandra Bose who believed that to gain independence from British India, the Indians serving in the British Indian Army should not participate in the Second World War on behalf of the British. He forged a treaty with the Japanese and cobbled an army of Indian soldiers who were mainly POWs in the Japanese prisons. After the war, the INA members were tried for treason by the British. This was extremely unpopular amongst the Indians who viewed them as freedom fighters. They are still widely idolized as patriots in Independent India for resisting British dominion.

Bose. In the Bombay of British India, rich and powerful men like Julia's lover, Rustom Billimoria and the Rajas still warily socialize with the British, and code-switch seamlessly between Hindi and English. The British are represented by an ostensibly genial Major General Harding, who speaks fluent Hindi and loves Indian poetry and music. While Russi Billimoria wears perfectly fitting suits and bow ties, and is on first name terms with the British, Harding, in Indian kurta-pajamas (top and bottom) and spouting fluent though heavily-accented Urdu poetry, reveals the inequality behind such social camaraderie when he coerces a reluctant Billimoria to send Julia to the front to entertain the soldiers. In fact, his Hindi is so good that at one point in the film it has to be translated back in English to Julia:

Harding: Aapke naye film ka unwan kya hai? (What is the title of your new film?)

Julia: Unwan? Wo kya? (Unwan? What does that mean?)

Harding: Title. What is the title of your new film?

Harding's villainy in the film is revealed through his cultural appropriation, which serves to emphasize his racism rather than diminish it. Though Harding in the second half of the film becomes an almost cartoonish version of a villain, the equation between linguistic appropriation and "villainy" is unusual. It enables the characterization to be neatly interpreted from within the parameters of translation theory and its caution over the danger of falling into such traps.

The film ventures beyond the encounters between Hindi and English, and considers the encounter between Hindi and Japanese, which would be a foreign language for an Indian audience. When Julia and her escort, Sardar Malik, get lost in Burma, they capture a Japanese soldier and force him to show them the way to the bridge between Burma and India. The Japanese soldier, Hiromichi, does not know English, and Julia does not know any Japanese but Sardar Malik, who has been a Japanese POW, knows Japanese. Half-lost in the woods, starving,

and on edge, Julia, Malik, and Hiromichi manage to communicate with each other both out of necessity and the need for company. The communication is often shattered by betrayal and violence, but resumes haltingly out of necessity.

As the trio make their way towards the border, the relationship between Julia and Hiromichi develops very differently from the relationship between Malik and Hiromichi. There is instinctive empathy between Hiromichi and Julia even though they cannot understand each other. There is a long conversation between them in which they talk at cross purposes, but they participate in it anyway, while it is the audience (because of the subtitles) and Malik (because he knows both languages), who get the jokes and who are provided a deeper understanding of Julia and Hiromichi. Julia reveals how she was bought from her mother for a thousand rupees by Billimoria, who groomed her, and Hiromichi tells her his about his favorite food and his training as an aspiring music graduate. Even though there is no translation between the two engaged in the conversation, translation fleshes out both the characters for the audience. Their interactions, unmediated by translation, are in perfect sync when Hiromichi plays the mouth organ to accompany Julia's humming.

Hiromichi's relationship with Malik is very different. It is mediated by language and they remain suspicious of each other. However, in the end, despite Hiromichi's attempt to kill him, Malik lets him go. Hiromichi's actions do not make sense until he reveals to Malik that he cannot go back in defeat. Malik lets him go reminding him his mother will understand. This brief understanding between them that averts violence would not have been possible without translation, because unlike Malik, Julia knows nothing about Hiromichi's life.

Hiromichi's presentation in the film is an odd mixture of present and absent subtitles. Some of the Japanese conversations and Hiromichi's song are not subtitled. The initial conversation between Julia and Hiromichi, when she is attempting to get information from him about the route back to India, is not subtitled. The audience does gather that Hiromichi is bullied in his brief interactions with the Japanese soldiers, but he is distanced from the audience because of the impenetrability of his foreignness. The subtitles begin after Malik intervenes and they humanize Hiromichi. There is no translation between him and Julia, and it does not seem necessary as they bond through music and songs. However, it is Malik's ability to understand Hiromichi that provides closure to their encounter. The relationship between the three points to the strengths and limits of translation.

***Ishqiya* (Regarding Love, 2010) and *Dedh Ishqiya* (1 ½ Times Love, 2014) through the Micro-Cosmopolitan Lens**

Michael Cronin coined the word “micro-cosmopolitanism”¹⁷⁸ in 2006 to provide a further nuance to cosmopolitanism. He places his term in opposition to “macro-cosmopolitanism,” which, he points out, could become susceptible to both a privileged positioning and an assumption that only larger socio-political systems can support a humane, flexible pluralism, and an openness towards alterity. Consequently, “macro-cosmopolitanism” might ignore or associate the local with essentialism and hostility to cultural variety. Micro-cosmopolitanism, Cronin suggests, while sharing macro-cosmopolitanism's core ideals, “such as a concern for freedom, an openness to and tolerance of others, [and] respect for difference,” seeks to “diversify or

¹⁷⁸ Michael Cronin, *Translation and Identity* (Routledge: London and New York, 2006).

complexify the smaller unit.” Calling it an awareness of “fractal differentialism,” Cronin argues that it opens the possibility of noting not just the “remarkable richness of... reduced spaces but also the omnipresence of traces of foreignness, of other languages and cultures” at the local level.¹⁷⁹ This idea of micro-cosmopolitanism filtered through translation theory seems very similar to the idea of the “glocal,” though micro-cosmopolitanism also involves the mediating consciousness of the figure of the translator as the micro-cosmopolitan. Micro-cosmopolitanism, thus, would involve noting the differences in language usage within a local community, and it could also uphold the agency of small-town or local inhabitants in their ability to be “cosmopolitan” in their outlook without having the benefit of travel or of consciously having encountered the foreign.

Chaubey’s debut film reflects this consciousness by focusing sharply on the local, which in this case is a small town in Eastern Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) called Gorakhpur, and by tentatively suggesting the possibility of the “micro-cosmopolitan” consciousness being available to the two main characters who are small-time crooks perpetually on the run from their latest offense. As these two marginalized Muslim characters enter the predominantly Hindu village of Gorakhpur, they often become the mirror that exposes the subtle differences and similarities that exist amongst the various entities in the small town who are divided in terms of class, caste, gender, and religion.

Most characters in this town speak different versions of Hindustani, and as the focus sharpens on the variations in the language used by the local characters, it becomes apparent how each character uses it differently. These fissures in the language within such a small community

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 14-16.

are then used to point out the differences that both determine and undermine their identities. At the same time, a phrase or a sudden common usage might point to surprising alliances that cut across identities. The film opens with two separate pre-credit sequences and a road song that accompanies the credits, and all three sequences are worth discussing in this context.

The film opens in the most intimate of social spaces: the conversation between a married couple in the bedroom and it involves the interaction of two languages, Hindustani and English, and the Bhojpuri dialect. The couple is obviously in love, but the wife is unhappy with the husband's frequent and long absences and asks him to "surrender" to the cops. The husband gets annoyed but later relents. However, the house catches fire suddenly, and one presumes that the husband dies in that fire. The physical chemistry between the couple and their role-playing as Shahjahan¹⁸⁰ and his wife suggest a strong physical intimacy between them. However, the couple doesn't speak the same language. The wife speaks an upper-class "Lucknawi" Hindustani strongly marked by Urdu, and the husband speaks a more rustic and less-educated Hindustani marked by a Bhojpuri accent and a labored English. This difference suggests fissures between the couple despite their physical intimacy.

The film opens with her singing an Urdu infused song, "Ab mujhe koi intezaar kahan/who jo behte the aabshaar kahan" (I don't wait now/Those flowing waterfalls are gone). Islamic references abound in their conversation, she calls him "Jahanpanah," (Emperor) and he gives her a locket in the shape of Tajmahal, the mausoleum that Shahjahan build to commemorate the death of his beloved queen, Mumtaz Mahal. The heavy Urdu flavor in their conversation would normally be associated with the Muslim community, but their names identify

¹⁸⁰ The seventeenth-century Mughal emperor of India.

them as a Hindu couple, undercutting the assumed clear separation of Hindu and Muslim identities in India. Moreover, the husband's Bhojpuri accent and his mispronunciation of "surrender" as "cylinder," which his wife corrects, mark him as probably socially inferior to his wife. Apart from that being a lethal slip (that is exactly how he plans to stage their deaths and avoid "surrender/cylinder[ing]"), Krishna's correction of the English word and her upper-class Hindustani set her apart both from her husband and the other characters in a community in which she seems so deeply immersed.

The next pre-credit sequence introduces Khalujaan and Babban, singing and dancing drunkenly to a popular, old Hindi film song that could well point towards the story unfolding in front of the audience: "Ajeeb dastan hai ye/Kahan shuroo kahan khatam/Ye manzilein hain pyar ki/Na who samajh sake na hum" (This is a strange story/It begins somewhere and ends somewhere else/These are the destinations of love/Neither he nor I could anticipate"). The song, like typical Hindi film songs, has many Urdu words such as "dastan" (story) and "manzilein" (destinations). But the drunken duo, dancing in their odd clothes, disperses rather than affirms the nostalgia generated by the song as they irreverently parody romantic film dialogues and inflated Urdu words such as "Chal chaliein. Kahan? Jannaton mein" (Let's go. Where? To paradises). The old Hindi film song and the Urdu words are disassociated from both Khalujaan and Babban in the scene. This sequence highlights their identity as lower-class crooks, which is overturned in Khalujaan's later conversations with Krishna that are laced with Urdu words and presents Khalujaan as a connoisseur of old Hindi film songs.

Captured red-handed with the stolen money in the middle of their drunken revelry by Mushtaq Bhai and under threat of being buried alive, the duo buys time by requesting they be

allowed to narrate a *latifa* (joke). The joke is a linguistic one concerning *Maulvis* (Muslim priests), *Kazis* (Muslim learned men/judges), and a foul-mouthed female parrot who potentially corrupts two very pious male parrots. As Babban progresses towards his punch line, Mushtaq Bhai and his goons lean into the grave expecting a dirty joke, and the duo uses that moment to wrest the gun from Mushtaq Bhai and escape. The reference to the *Maulvis* and *Kazis* in the joke establishes the duo's Muslim identity, which is underscored by their names, Mushtaq Bhai's attire, and Babban's khol laden eyes. Their earlier identity as irreverent con-men is revised as their religious identity becomes more prominent in this sequence.

However, cutting across Babban's "Muslim" identity is his heavy regional accent, which is a very identifiable "Bhopali" accent. Moreover, Khalujaan's Muslim identity is also disrupted when he reminds Mushtaq Bhai that his wife is Khalujaan's "Rakhi"¹⁸¹ sister. The film does not clarify why Muslim characters observe these Hindu customs, but these social observances upend the common stereotype of rigidly differentiated Hindu-Muslim cultures. Moreover, Babban's cavalier use of the *Maulvis* and *Kazis* in his joke reflects not just a personal refusal to abide by such religious hierarchies, it also highlights how such irreverent local art forms are part of subaltern popular culture that provides a very different picture from the national stereotype of a rigid Islam that brooks no questioning of authority.

Just as the first sequence undercuts the notion of the rigid Hindu identities of the Gorakhpur couple, the second sequence complicates the Muslim identity of the Uncle-nephew duo. The film tackles the common perception of the strict Hindu-Muslim divide in the country by

¹⁸¹ Rakhi or "Raksha Bandhan" (Bond of protection) is a popular Hindu festival in which sisters tie a thread or amulet (rakhi) on their brothers' wrists as a symbolic bond of mutual protection and care. If a rakhi is tied to a non-relative, it is supposed to socially establish a bond similar to that between biological brothers and sisters.

questioning it through its micro-cosmopolitan characters. Though this divide is pointed out by Khalujaan and Babban themselves, their roles undermine and challenge such rigid notions of identity. When Krishna comments that Khalu and Babban are as different as the earth and the sky, Khalu quips back stating that the difference is wider – as wide as that between a Hindu and a Muslim. Both Khalujaan and Krishna accept it as a truism even though Khalujaan expresses it precisely at the moment when he is attempting to establish a romantic rapport between himself and Krishna. A romantic relationship between Khalujaan and Krishna or Babban and Krishna would prompt a great deal of social opposition because of their religious identities. The film’s refusal to view this as problematic is deliberate, and by doing this it puts itself in the tradition of the few Hindi movies that have depicted Hindu-Muslim marriages. It differentiates itself even further by not making it the central issue of the film.¹⁸²

The other time this communal divide is pointed out is when Babban goes into the interiors of the village looking for Nandu, the fifteen-year-old who does odd jobs for Krishna. Though Nandu had warned him about the deep, internecine rifts that existed between different castes among the Hindus, Babban is shocked by the reality of gun-toting young children and the violent antagonism he faces when he enters the village. He returns to tell Khalu they need to leave the place immediately: “Khalu main keh riya hoon ye jagah bahut danger hai. Apne yahan to Shia-Sunni hote hain, yahan pe to Thakur, Yadav, Pandey, Jaat sabne apni fauj bana rakhhi hai” (Khalu, I tell you, this place is very dangerous! With us, there are Shias vs. Sunnis, here Thakurs, Yadavs, Pandey, and Jaats – they all have their individual armies). He plainly

¹⁸² Inter-religious marriages, especially Hindu-Muslim marriages, are still relatively rare in India where even inter-caste marriages are frowned upon. Hindi films have been very conservative about showing Hindu-Muslim unions. One of the first films to depict a Hindu-Muslim marriage openly was *Bombay* (Ratnam 1995).

distinguishes himself from the Hindus here, but just before this incident he bonds impulsively with the practical Nandu, which is a relationship that saves him and Khalujaan in the end. Moreover, right after this scene he decides to focus his amorous attention on Krishna. These interactions suggest the duo's flexible identities and their ability to make instinctive connections with characters who might otherwise be very different from them.

Representation of minority communities of India in Hindi films often feed into and help further entrench stereotypes about that community. For example, most recent portrayals of Muslims, including sympathetic ones, often categorize Muslims in binary terms as either patriots or terrorists. Earlier films with central Muslim characters were often identified as "Muslim socials," which focused heavily on the Muslim community. It inevitably had the effect of ghettoizing the community. All three of the *Hat-ke* directors have Muslims as central characters in their films, which is rare in Hindi cinema, but what is even more unusual is their emphasis on their regional identities.

In *Ishqiya*, Chaubey provides further nuances to those regional identities that outwardly seem fixed, but become unstable when the focus is intensified on them. A focus on language and the identities negotiated through it reveal Khalujaan and Babban as small-time vagabond crooks who are obviously Muslim, yet with identities that are not indelibly attached to their religion or a particular language, like Urdu – which is a common way of stereotyping Muslim characters, perpetuated to a great degree by Hindi cinema. Khalujaan and Babban's language is not uniform but mixed up with regional accents, rustic, scatological terminology, profanities, and genteel Hindustani. Thus, Khalu, who is a connoisseur of Hindi film songs, can appreciate the Sanskrit inflected Hindi pre-dawn classical song, "Badi dheere jali raina" (the night simmered slowly)

that Krishna sings in her prayer room on the sitar, and proudly assert his family's connection with the Indore Gharana.¹⁸³ At the same time, he can, with perfect sincerity, express his vision of pure happiness as “farting under the Peepul tree and shitting near the river, with the cool air gently caressing [his] backside.”

Khalujaan and Babban are perpetually on the run from Mushtaq Bhai, and are, by virtue of that, travelers. That is how the third opening sequence of the film, the song “Ibn Battuta,” which colorfully depicts their journey against the background of the opening credits, presents them. They are the subaltern version of the fourteenth-century Moroccan scholar and traveler Ibn Battuta, who left an account of his thirty-year travel in the autobiographical text popularly known as *Rihla*. The song, “Ibn Battuta/ Bagal mein joota/Pehne to karta hai churrrrr...” (Ibn Battuta/With his shoes under his arms/ When he wears them, they go chhurrrr), is a near nonsense rhyme which fleetingly references the name “Ibn Battuta” in its chorus. The rest of the song is a collection of colorful phrases and warnings like, “Marne ki bhi kya jaldi hai?” (Why are you in a hurry to die?) or “Durghatna se der bhali hai” (Better be late than never), that are painted on the backs of most commercial trucks in India. The Battuta reference provides the links between the identity of the cosmopolitan traveler Ibn Battuta¹⁸⁴ and the thieving duo, who despite their humble origins, provide the subaltern view of the north Indian heartland as perpetual outsiders.

¹⁸³ One of the well-known “houses” in Hindustani Classical Music. These “Gharanas” (roughly, houses) develop a specific style of singing that is practiced by a group of artists and their followers.

Unlike the educated, cosmopolitan Ibn Battuta, Khalu and Babban are the rogue micro-cosmopolitans as they traverse the countryside trying to dodge Mushtaq Bhai. The song is interspersed with phone conversations that provide a glimpse of a cross-section of the Hindustani-speaking belt of northern India in all its dialectical diversity. The interruptions include the nervous Bhopali at the ticket counter who warns Babban not to return; the friendly Punjabi who is in prison for the 1984 riots that had led to the massacre of Sikhs; the offended eastern U.P. matriarch whose daughter Babban had impregnated the last time they had taken refuge; and a breezy travel agent from Nepal who invites them to Nepal, dismissing the threat of Mushtaq and Musharraf (the Prime Minister of Pakistan at the time) in the same breath. Asif Nepali's casual code-mixing with English words such as "Isse safe jagah tumhein kahin na mile" (You will not find a safer place than this) is echoed at the end of the song by the young boy's "Ma tum mujhe disturb..." (Mom, you are disturbing...) just before his bike is stolen by the two. The song ends with a very crude and common Hindi abuse that the boy helplessly throws at the duo as they steal his bike. The next shot that follows the song is the official city board that welcomes them into Gorakhpur in formal Hindi: "Gorakhpur Vikas Pradhikaran Aapka Swagat Karta Hai" (Gorakhpur Development Authority Welcomes You). Most of the characters in the town would find that phrase completely alien and would be hard-pressed to translate or indeed understand all the words on that board.

Positioned as outsiders in terms of their religious and their regional identities, Khalujaan and Babban provide the outsiders' perspective on the brutal caste wars that dominate the poorer section of the countryside. When they stalk the businessman Kakkar with the intention of kidnapping him, they also provide a glimpse into the tremendous income disparity between the

poor and the rapidly rising middle class of the region which is quickly and quietly amassing great wealth in the current economic boom in India.

As travelers, they also know how to negotiate differences, as is evident in their attraction for the mysterious and unpredictable Krishna. It is not just Krishna whom they befriend but also the young Nandu and the old lady who lives near Krishna's house. Despite being strangers in Gorakhpur, they manage to bond with Nandu and the old woman through their ability to quickly absorb the local language. Central to their interactions with both the old woman and Nandu is the use of two local words, *sulfate* (stupid) and *tamancha* (local gun) which would be as alien to most Hindi users as it is to them.

They meet the old woman as soon as they enter Gorakhpur and ask her for directions to Vidyadhar Verma's (Krishna's husband) house. Instead of answering them, she asks them in Bhojpuri, "Cigarette piyat hai?" (Do you smoke cigarettes?) and then mocks them for their bewilderment, calling Khalu a *sulfate* (stupid) for not noticing that she wants to light a torch. *Sulfate*, which is probably a vague derivative of "sulfur," is an untranslatable word that despite its obscure English root becomes closely identifiable with the town. The duo adroitly and good-humoredly adjusts to the spirit in which the term is thrown at them, disarming the old woman who takes them to Krishna's house. Then, as she knocks on Krishna's door, her suspicions return:

Old Woman: Aye, tum kaun ho ...daku ho kya? (Hey, who are you...a bandit?)

Babban: Nahin (No...)

Old Woman: Phir...chor ho? (Then...are you thieves?)

Babban: Nahin, Nahin (No...no)

Old Woman: Phir kya (What then?)

Khalu: Sulfate...

The answer triggers a burst of laughter that signals her unstated acceptance of the strangers. It is their quick absorption of the new word and their ability to define themselves through the word that enables them to get doors opened in this community, where it exists as a flexible, catch-all word that expresses a variety of emotions. Both Nandu and Krishna use the term, *Sulphate*, the latter adding a crude prefix to it, thus changing the meaning of the word to a much stronger abuse. Babban bonds with Nandu similarly over a commonplace word, *tamancha* (gun). Nandu corrects Babban's word for gun, *bandook*, definitively as "Bandook nahin, tamanchha hai be" (Not a *bandook*, it is a *tamanchha*) and offers to fix the trigger for him. The shockingly crude phrase casually flung by Nandu to signal the overwhelming presence of guns in the town in his following comment has become one of the more identifiable lines of the film. Babban quickly adjusts to the omnipresence of *tamanchas* in this place and his later appreciation of Krishna as a "desi tamanchha" (local gun) rather than "rui ka paha" (pile of fine-spun cotton) once again indicates his instinct for understanding and adapting to the local language, absorbing parts of its foreignness into his own vocabulary.

Their micro-cosmopolitan sensibility informs their reactions to Krishna even when they feel cheated by her. Neither of them has the "right" gender sensibility as their jealous outbursts make abundantly clear, but they are open to understanding difference and are educatable. Though initially they leave Krishna tied up and helpless in her house, they race back to help her later. It is also evident in their refusal to commit murder in two similar scenes in the film. In the first sequence, when they tie up Mushtaq Bhai, Babban advises Khalu to kill him. Khalu's answer is a very Hindi-film-style retort: "Nahi...apne haath se apni behen ka ghar ujaadh doon...ye mujhe sala mane na mane main ise sacche dil se jija manta hoon... Rassi taight to nahi

hai jijaji?” (No, how can I destroy my sister’s house with my own hands...he might not accept me as his brother-in-law, but I truly do...The rope is not too tight I hope, brother-in-law?). That exaggerated Hindi-film-sensibility is drily incorporated in their micro-cosmopolitanism. They repeat that sentiment with Krishna when they leave her tied up in a chair and cannot make themselves kill her, even when they think that leaving her alive might endanger them. Khalu’s refusal, stating, “Kyunki mujhe is haraamzaadi se ishq ho gaya hai” (Because I have fallen in love with this b*) reveals his inability to commit murder. Babban’s frustrated response, “Tumhara ishq, ishq haan? Our hamara ishq sex” (Your love is love, and my love is sex?), highlights Babban’s resistance to mistranslating his love as “sex.”

Anurag Chaubey’s next film *Dedh Ishqiya* (1 ½ Times Love, 2014) is set in an almost bygone era of *nawabs*, *kothis* (mansions), and *mehfils* (where Urdu poetry competitions take place) in which Urdu and Urdu poetry infuse the atmosphere. Both Chaubey and Bhardwaj, who co-wrote the script, are enthusiasts of Urdu poetry, and Chaubey claims to have revised the script to ensure that the Urdu was not too difficult for the audience.¹⁸⁵ It still required subtitles for the audience to understand it. The film is about nostalgia for an almost irretrievable past and a language that seems to be losing touch with the present, and the film makes a notable effort to translate the older art forms and language for a contemporary audience. In the film, love for the language and the desire to revive it is evident in many of the *shayari* (recitation of Urdu poetry)

¹⁸⁵ Abhishek Chaubey, “‘Madhuri-Huma friendship is so beautiful’ – Abhishek Chaubey,” Interview by Subash K. Jha, *Bollywood Hungama*, January 16, 2014, <https://www.bollywoodhungama.com/news/features/madhuri-humas-friendship-is-so-beautiful-abhishek-chaubey/>.

and the song sequences. What makes the effort notable is the director's recognition that the language being revived in the film cannot live in isolation from the world around it.

Thus, Chaubey sets up several linguistic and character juxtapositions in the film. While the Khalu-Para Jaan romance progresses through the nuances of Urdu poetry, the Babban-Muniya romance progresses through references to iPhones and Chinese take-out dinners. Even Khalu's character is split between an Urdu poet and a rogue. At the linguistic level, it is best expressed by several attempts to express the meaning of *ishq* (love) often by juxtaposing it against English or colloquial Hindi. The juxtapositions are not at the expense of English or Hindi but serve to articulate a gap or something missing in the Urdu expression. For example, when Khalu expostulates about the seven stages of love in exquisite Urdu – *dilkashi* (attraction), *uns* (infatuation), *mohabbat* (love), *akeedat* (reverence), *ibadat* (worship), *junoon* (obsession) and *maut* (death) – it has to be offset by a drunken scene between the duo in which Babban asks with perfect sincerity: “Khalujaan, isme to sex hai hi nahin!” (Khalu, there is no sex in it!). The duo promptly redefines the steps, interspersing each stage with “sex.” However irreverently they express it, the redefinition of *ishq* by incorporating “sex” seems necessary in the plot. What they do not realize yet is that further re-definitions of both *ishq* and “sex” will be required in the final unraveling of the plot.

In another sequence when Babban tries to declare his love for Muniya, trying to impress her by repeating the seven stages of love, she juxtaposes them with “ch*” a common abuse in Hindi. The scene quickly escalates from comedy to violence when she refuses to accept Babban's *ishq*, preferring to use the word “sex” to define their relationship. The violence underpinning the scene serves as a reminder that the seven stages of exquisite love are

definitions expressed by men that might involve histories of coercion that do not show up in the language. Furthermore, there is Jaan Mohammad's declaration to Begum Para: "Wajah hai issak" (The reason is love). His inability to say "sh" instead of "s" in his pronunciation of *ishq* as "Issak" reveals his humbler social status. His genuine love for Begum Para requires a recognition of the word "Isaak" and its inclusion in the lexicon of love. Even then *ishq* does not cover all the possible interpretations of love. As they realize by the end of the film, they have not even begun translating the fractions of love existing between those seven stages.

Anurag Kashyap: Going Beyond Urban Hinglish in *Gangs of Wasseypur* (2012)

"Ye Dil Maange More" (This heart wants more) is a classic advertising slogan that was coined by Pepsi in 1998 to attract the young urban crowd in India that has increasingly been accepting code-switching and code-mixing between Hindi and English as "cool." Hinglish can broadly be defined as language mixing between Hindi and English, as well as the mixing of other Indian languages such as Punjabi, Gujarati, and Marathi with English. It was present even in colonial India but was historically not encouraged either by the elite English-speaking Indians, who considered it a sign of weakness to mix Hindi in their English, nor was it encouraged by the promoters of Hindi, who considered it a misguided detour that would not be effective in promoting the importance of Hindi.¹⁸⁶ It was popularized in the much smaller English literary circles in the 1980s by Salman Rushdie's coinage, the "chutnification of English," but it skyrocketed in post-liberalized India. The celebration of Hinglish is this period, particularly in

¹⁸⁶ Harish Trivedi, foreword to *Chutnefying English: The Phenomenon of Hinglish*, eds. Rita Kothari and Rupert Snell (New Delhi: Penguin, 2011), xii-xvii.

advertising, has been attributed to big multi-national companies wanting to pitch their products to a rapidly expanding middle class with social aspirations and purchasing power. However, the rise of “Hinglish” cannot simply be attributed to the MNCs. Its use has become widespread in India in its urban metros and most college campuses, among young people, who are mostly bilingual or trilingual.

Hinglish is gradually being used more frequently in Hindi films though its usage is often unmarked or used for light comedy. *Dev. D* (2009) was among the first films to introduce the cult-phrase “emotional atyachaar”¹⁸⁷ (emotional torture), into the cultural lexicon, which expressed the new hybrid language that is becoming a common mode of communication among modern Indian youth. The Hinglish in this phrase is neither being used for comic effect nor is it being used to suggest the “cool” of multi-nation product advertising. It is reflective of the actual language of modern urban youth in referencing contemporary experience.¹⁸⁸

In *Gangs of Wasseypur 1 & 2* (Kashyap 2012), Kashyap takes Hinglish much further into the heartland and experiments with its usage on characters who would not be able to speak English with any kind of fluency. *GoW* is a violent, inter-generational family drama that concerns the gang rivalry between the Khans, Singhs, and Kureishis in the coal-rich town of Wasseypur in Jharkhand. In a film that is spilling with violence and extreme characters, two characters stand out as the most extreme, Perpendicular and Definite. Perpendicular, who is

¹⁸⁷ Though Amitabh Bhattacharya has written the lyrics of the song “Emotional Atyachaar,” the phrase itself was coined by Anurag Kashyap.

¹⁸⁸ Palash Krishna Mehrotra makes this point with many examples in his article, “Run D.K. Run: dirty lyrics that run perfectly true,” First Post, January 5, 2012, <https://www.firstpost.com/ideas/run-dk-run-dirty-lyrics-that-ring-perfectly-true-34040.html>.

fourteen, is Sardar Khan's youngest son and is the most feared of all the brothers. He flicks a blade in his mouth with his tongue that gives him his nickname, "Perpendicular." The voiceover informs the audience that he simply knows that to wield the blade at a "perpendicular" angle kills and to wield it at a "tangent" merely cuts the skin. He brags and bullies the local merchants with his brother's name and loves Sanjay Dutt's films. Definite's nickname is also provided an explanation. Coached by Ramadhir Singh, the Khans' arch-rival, the young boy, who is Sardar's Khan's son by his second wife, explains the rationale behind his name: "Kahe ki hamko hamara maqsad definite ho gaya hai" (Because I am definite about my goal), which is to kill Sardar Khan. However, Sardar Khan dies before Definite grows up and the name sticks without anyone knowing the history behind the name. The linguistic logic behind Perpendicular and Definite's names localizes them in their milieu while the cinematic logic is a nod to Tarantino, which translates them into stylized characters who would be recognizable in global cinema without losing any of their local authenticity.

The use of English names, particularly a tongue-twister such as "Perpendicular," ensures that everyone in the town uses his name with an accent. Perpendicular lisps, so his pronunciation of the name is even more pronounced. This kind of marked exaggeration ensures that the audience notes its use. This exaggeration goes hand in hand with the naturalized and unmarked use of English in the conversations between characters. Phrases such as "Hum jo technique use karenge tum nahi karega," (You will not use the technique I use) or "Par-mee-san leni chahiye" (You should take permission) and "Baccha hai koi baat nahin, mishtake ho jata hai (It doesn't matter, he is a child...mistakes happen) are used unselfconsciously in Bihar and Jharkhand, where the film is based. For the citizens of Wasseypur, the names are as naturalized as the

unmarked use of English in the town. This kind of usage is not something that has seeped into the interiors from the cities over a couple of decades but suggests a more extended interaction between the languages. The juxtaposition between linguistic realism and the extreme stylization in the naming of some of the characters provides an insight into Kashyap's style of filmmaking that is typical of all Hat-ke directors. They reference the local in their heightened awareness of the multiplicity of languages that exist within a small area, note the odd hybridities that occur between languages, and offer stylistic flourishes that gesture towards popular trends in global cinema.

While the audience is aware of the meaning behind Definite's name, Faizal Khan, who takes over as the head of the family after his father's death, does not. This leads to one of the most comical scenes in the film when he tries to get Definite out of prison. The confusion about his name is, at one level, a translation joke:

Faizal Khan: Definite ka matlab ka hota hai? (What does definite mean?)

Nasir Ahmed: Definite (It means Definite)

Faisal Khan: Uska asli naam ka hai? (What is his real name?)

Nasir Ahmed: Definite (Definite)

The conversation goes around in circles:

FK: Haan to Definite ka matlab ka hota hai? (O.K. Then what does definite mean?)

Guddu: Jo definite hota hai usi ko definite kehte hain (Whoever is definite is called definite)

FK: Abe to definite ka hota hai (What the heck is definite?)

Guddu: Bhaiyya, def ka matlab to behra hota hai (Brother, def means deaf)

Nasir Ahmed: Aur nate ka matlab jaali (And nate means net)

Ikhlahk: Jo na pakka ho use definite kehte hain (Definite means that which is certain)

Voiceover: (Faizal did not speak English. Nobody in his gang spoke English. But Ikhlahk did. And Faizal liked this.)

Faizal's frustration at the untranslatability of "Definite" and the group's circular arguments over the name are largely comic, but such moments provide an opportunity for

making evident the usually transparent and arbitrary process of the translation of meaning into language. As a name, irrespective of whether “Definite” is an English or a Hindi name, it does not need to be translated, and that is exactly how the practical members of Faizal’s gang view it. But the sequence also makes clear their inability to speak English and Faizal’s awareness of the social currency of English that makes him keen to include Ikh lakh in his gang. Ikh lakh has been sent by Ramadhar Singh, Faizal’s arch enemy, to kill Faizal. It is Ikh lakh’s ability to translate that gets him a position in Faizal’s gang, and it gives him a social mobility that is not available to Faizal and his gang.

Ikh lakh’s education enables him to translate between English and Hindi as well as between formal and informal Hindi which, as the following comic scene reveals, is even more alien to Faizal Khan than English. As they walk down the corridor after bullying some merchants and coercing their consent, Ikh lakh tells Faizal he had used the wrong word while “requesting” their support:

Ikh lakh: (Instead of *samarthan* you said *samarpan*.)

Faizal: (What does *samarthan* mean?)

Ikh lakh: (Total support.)

Faizal: (And *samarpan*?)

Ikh lakh: (Total surrender.)

Faizal: (Then what I said was fine...)

The joke depends on the recognition that the languages are switched. Faizal, who cannot speak English, cannot understand the difficult “Sanskritised” Hindi terms and needs the words to be translated into English which he understands perfectly. Formal Hindi is as alien or even more alien than English in this translation joke, and it reveals the disconnect between common people and the official languages that deny them access to social mobility.

Hinglish is used unselfconsciously by the characters in Wasseypur, without the “cool” factor it has in the metros. The perception of “Hinglish” as an urban phenomenon that is gradually percolating into the interiors of the country is only partially true. The relationship between languages in the interiors are very different from in the cities and the Hinglish used in Wasseypur is very different from the Hinglish used in the cities. Moreover, while neither English nor Hindi can adequately translate the Wasseypur locals’ experiences, Bollywood with its high melodrama and inflated dialogues does provide them a language for translating their experience and expressing their personalities.

Faizal Khan is obsessed with Bollywood and Amitabh Bachchan. As a young man sitting in the darkened theater watching Amitabh Bachchan swearing to avenge his mother’s abandonment by his rich father, he understands the humiliation his mother undergoes when his father, Sardar Khan, periodically abandons her and their family for his mistress. When Faizal Khan murders his childhood friend for betraying him, he filters it through his conscious decision to be the avenging character his idol plays in various films. He is determined he will not accept the situation like the “side-hero” (usually played by Shashi Kapoor) of a Bachchan film: “Hum to sochte the ki Sanjeev Kumar ke ghar mein hum Bachchan paida hue hain. Lekin jab aankh khuli to dekha ke hum salaa Shashi Kapoor hain. Bachchan to koi aur hai.” (I thought that I was Bachchan born in Sanjeev Kumar’s house. But I woke up to find myself transformed into bloody Shashi Kapoor. Bachchan was someone else”).

In *GoW* Bollywood is not employed simply in terms of parody. The romance between Faizal Khan and Mohsina, which reveals Faizal’s softer, more attractive side, is expressed entirely through their mutual passion for Bollywood that humanizes them, showcasing the

couple's wit, individuality, and commitment towards each other. Moreover, it is not just Faizal Khan who is particularly obsessed with Bollywood. In Wasseypur, Bollywood has social sanction because it is a part of everyone's life. Each person knows and can repeat the lyrics of all the popular Bollywood songs and the dialogues of popular films. Thus, when a woman is raped by Ramadhir Singh's men, Sardar Khan (Faizal's father) ventures in Ramadhir Singh's territory to protest against it. He does it with the help of a loudspeaker and a singer dressed as a fake Mithun¹⁸⁹ singing the following lines:

“Ye koi jaane na tune kya chhal kiya hai/Sangdil hay tujhe zulm ka ye nasha hai/ Aaj dekheinge hum tujh mein kitna hai dum/Aaja, o aaja, Beraham,” (No one knows what deceits you have practiced/Merciless, you are intoxicated by injustice/Today we will test your strength/Come on, Heartless).

The tacky set-up and the inflated language pose an effective challenge that Ramadhir Singh does not take lightly. It registers with even the thrilled young boys in the crowd that Ramadhir Singh is being cast as a villain and that Sardar Khan's challenge has real consequences. This is a language they all understand.

Kashyap however, does not just bank on nostalgia in staging encounters with the Bollywood of the 1980s and the 1990s in his films. *GoW* is about contemporary language encounters and the mixture of both realism and stylization – not in the metropolises, but the poor and least developed interiors of the country. It is reflected in the use of Hinglish in songs such as “O Womaniya, or “Frustiyao nahi moora.” The combination of “wa” or “ya” are common

¹⁸⁹ A popular action hero and dancing-star of the 1980s.

suffixes to nouns in Bihar that suggest a degree of familiarity with the person or the object addressed. The song, “O Womaniya,” sung in the raw, rustic voices of local singers Rekha Jha and Khushboo Raj together with a chorus of untrained singers,¹⁹⁰ is filmed as a background song playing against the seduction of Durga by the married Sardar Khan. It is a cautionary song warning women to avoid the lusty advances of cheating men, which is precisely what Sardar Khan is attempting here. Durga succumbs to his advances, but she knows a great deal about self-preservation, as does Khan’s first wife, Naghma. Both women know how limited their options are in the unapologetically testosterone-driven world of Wasseypur and how to fight back in different ways. Sneha Khanwalkar, the music director of *GoW*, used the two different pitched voices of the women to suggest those differences.¹⁹¹ The voices complement the Hinglish term which encompasses the spirit of all the *womaniyas* of Wasseypur, including the sharp-witted Mohsina who keeps her romance and marriage with Faizal Khan on an equal footing by speaking her mind and often getting the better of her husband in their intimate spats. The use of dialect in the stanzas and the images of village life give the term *womaniya* a very specific non-urban flavor as it becomes an ode to the struggle of women to establish an identity in a staunchly patriarchal community.

Many of the tracks of *GoW* include Hinglish such as the “Kala re, piya kala re” (Black one, my lover is black) song, which has the one line “piya kartein hain coal bajaari” (My lover deals with illegal coal) that entrenches the song in the local life and politics of the specific

¹⁹⁰ Mukherjee, "Music, Sound, Noise," 186.

¹⁹¹ Viacom 18 Motion Pictures, “Making of Womaniya | Gangs of Wasseypur | Anurag Kashyap | Sneha Khanwalkar | Varun Grover,” Filmed [2012], YouTube video, 4:37, Posted [June 15, 2012], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nq-Hz7eHQLw>.

Dhanbad area of Jharkhand. Another song, which provides the backdrop of a detailed chase sequence in a traffic jam, has the following lyrics: “Mera jutta fake leather, dil chhi-chha ledar” (My shoes are fake leather and my heart is a complete mess). The words don’t make sense but the sonic similarity between the English “leather” and the colloquial term “chi-cha-lethar” (complete mess) makes an argument for preserving and showcasing words that do not have formal currency but are very much a part of the local vernacular. The leather song is sung by a young fourteen-year-old singer, Durga, an actual street singer who sings on the local trains of Mumbai. Sneha Khanwalkar, the music director of *GoW*, mixes the high pitched, untrained voice of the singer with a fast-paced, repetitive beat to provide authenticity as well as the thrill of a chase in a traffic jam sequence. Such songs had not been heard before in mainstream Hindi films – the regional colloquialisms, the raw voices, and the pitches mixed with contemporary arrangements and experimental music made the songs very popular. The songs defamiliarized language, suggested unpredictable associations, and overturned long-held conventions about Hindi film songs. They also managed to bring together regional and mainstream Hindi film music, which otherwise have very different audiences.

Two more songs in the unusual album merit discussion in the context of bringing attention to the relationships between different languages. Mohsina sings a song to Faizal when he is in jail to keep his spirit up. The lyrics of the song blend English and Hindi in unusual ways: “Frustiayo nahin moora, nerbhasao nahin moora/anytime moodwa ko, upsettao nahin moora” (Don’t be frustrated, foolish one, don’t be nervous, foolish one/ Do not get your mood upset anytime, foolish one). The first three lines of the song “Frustiao nahin moora” (Don’t be frustrated, foolish one) includes two languages (English and Hindi) and a dialect (Bhojpuri).

Words like *frustiao* and *nerbhasao* are picked from actual usage in Bihar and Jharkhand. Such usage has never received formal recognition in either English or Hindi and is usually associated with an inability to speak English correctly. The cultural medley this kind of blending suggests is not just a reflection of contemporary usage; it celebrates the vibrancy of such hybridity and confronts notions and biases about linguistic usage.

The “Hunter” song creates another unusual language encounter, interspersing stanzas of English lyrics, full of bawdy double entendre, with Bihari inflected stanzas that briefly translate the lines, then keep some logical and sonic parallels before veering off completely to an ostensibly different subject and a “bhajan” (religious) mode of singing. Thus, the song starts with lyrics such “I am a hunter, she wants to see my gun/When I pull it out boy, the woman start to run.” After a couple of stanzas, Bihari accented lyrics provide a brief Hindi translation, “Hum hai sikaari sikaari” (I am a hunter), then provide sonic support with “Tan tan tan tan/Daily goli nikle/Automatic tan tan...” (Bang bang bang...daily the bullets shoot out, automatic bang bang) and end with “Door tak hai femous, kar de sabko bebas/Usko milta darsan jisko man mein hai lagan/laagi lagan laagi lagan” (It is famous all over, it makes everyone helpless/The person who is earnest gets a glimpse of it/it has entranced me ...it has entranced me). The last two lines of the stanza are bawdy simply because of their juxtaposition with the English lyrics and would otherwise be commonplace lines in bhajans (religious songs).

While the comic outrageousness of the song draws attention upon itself, the song’s placement and the choice of singers provide it a situational and cultural logic that makes the song densely evocative. Khanwalkar used a Chutney style of music for which she traveled to Trinidad to record the English parts of the songs, which are sung by a local band of Caribbean singers of

Indian origin. For the Bhojpuri-Hindi parts of the song she used a group of singers who had never been outside Bihar. Khanwalkar references the history of migration of the Biharis who traveled as indentured laborers to the distant Caribbean through this combination. The song highlights the modern technology and artistic investment that connects these two groups who have common Bihari origins and without having stepped into each other's local spaces, are linked in the common space of a song. Khanwalkar is very conscious of this glocality which suggests an expanding range of hybridities as she talks about the mixed heritage of the song: "...they all have their origin in Bihar. And they are singing "Hunter" in English, but their accent is Caribbean, and they are also grooving to the *dholak*."¹⁹²

The song is sung by what seems to be a college band on a train, which is not an unusual occurrence on a train journey in India. This "gun" song is also a journey song that translates Faizal Khan's exhilarated sense of stepping into manhood in the course of a local train journey from Patna to Dhanbad. He has just murdered a gun trader who had cheated him, and outsmarted the policemen who were in on the scheme. Moreover, he has opened up a new avenue for himself by getting involved in the sale of illegal guns. Unbeknown to himself, he has also avenged his grandfather's death whom the gun trader had murdered, and he is participating in a series of migrations that have been part of his family tradition and will continue after his death.

Such language juxtapositions, translations, and glocalization wrench the term "Hinglish" from its metropolitan, MNC roots and reveal the heartlands as vital spaces where such palpable, multiple language transactions, borrowings, and hybridizations occur continuously.

¹⁹² Sneha Khanwalkar, quoted in Shikha Jhingan, "Backpacking Sounds: Sneha Khanwalkar and the 'New' Soundtrack of Bombay Cinema," *Feminist Media Histories* 1, no. 4 (2015): 83.

Hindi cinema's self-imposed isolation from regional languages and dialects has certainly been questioned by the *Hat-ke* directors' impulse to not only bring in a wide variety of languages into mainstream cinema but also to juxtapose them in unusual ways. Their lexicon includes high, abstruse Urdu, the stark crudities of abuses, and strong dialects that had been shunned by earlier cinema to cater to a wide audience. Digital technology has certainly made it easier for them to incorporate language encounters as theaters can run subtitles with the screenings that can translate regional dialects for the audience. However, it is their micro-cosmopolitan sensibility expressed in these translation moments in their films that highlights their willingness to embrace the foreignness of the local as well as the global.

CONCLUSION

The common impulse among *Hat-ke* directors to address the “foreign” in their films is central to my thesis. Whether that confrontation with the “foreign” involves crossing national borders, digging deeper into the regional interiors of the country, spanning across time periods to a distant past, or experimenting with older art forms, the consciousness of otherness and the impulse to address it are vital to the films I discuss. Vishal Bhardwaj, Abhishek Chaubey, and Anurag Kashyap’s films emerge out of their historical moment, but the conscious analysis of these moments within their films is what makes them different from mainstream commercial films. Moreover, even though their films have not been spectacularly successful at the box-office, they have been influential in nudging mainstream Bollywood into following their lead, particularly in addressing gender issues and in attempting a hitherto unexplored variety of genres.

The first chapter discusses Vishal Bhardwaj’s Shakespearean adaptations. *Maqbool* (2003) was Bhardwaj’s second film, and it was made on a small budget. However, it dramatically changed the way Shakespeare was adapted in Indian films. Shakespeare has a long theatre history in colonial and post-colonial India, but it had never really been successfully adapted in Indian cinema except for Gulzar’s *Angoor* (Grapes, 1982), which was an adaptation of *The Comedy of Errors*. Adapting a Shakespearean tragedy and making it into a gangster-noir Bollywood drama in which Lady Macbeth sings a wedding song made Shakespeare accessible to the vast and divergent Indian audience of popular cinema. It encouraged other directors as well as Bhardwaj, who made two more equally successful adaptations of Shakespeare’s *Othello* (*Omkaara* 2006) and *Hamlet* (*Haider* 2014), to attempt further explorations of Shakespeare from

within mainstream cinema. Going against the grain of the blockbusters of the time in which affluent protagonists already lived the aspirational lives that globalization and the post-liberalized Indian economy promised to its citizens, *Maqbool*'s protagonists' aspirations lead to a bloodbath that destroys everything around them and makes a mockery of those aspirations. Bhardwaj's localization of a "foreign" text by creating an "Indian" Macbeth, also reveals his *Maqbool*'s "foreignness" in a country that has no place for him. This darker version of India expresses a reality that is not readily evident in the "Shining India" model promoted as modern India's official global profile, which has been smoothly adopted by mainstream films. *Haider* explores an entire state that has been "othered" by a country that exploits it as an exotic possession and chooses to ignore the plight of its citizens in Kashmir. Bhardwaj's "Indian" *Haider* is a protagonist who questions his Indian identity because he is othered by his own country. Adapting Shakespearean tragedies enables Bhardwaj to ask essential questions about the nation, national identity, and terrorism as the films darkly register the contemporary moment of globalization in strikingly different ways in the two adaptations discussed here – as an artificial Mumbai gangster tale and a realistically detailed Kashmiri family tragedy.

Shakespearean film adaptations are prestige projects that have in the past involved big names such as Laurence Olivier and Orson Welles, but these have also been dogged by the checkered history of their commercial success. The English Shakespeare-on-screen boom in the last decade of the twentieth century, propelled to a large degree by Kenneth Branagh, has not managed to continue into the twenty-first century. However, Asian and African relocations of Shakespeare have thrived in the new millennium. In this context, a great deal of credit is to be

attributed to Vishal Bhardwaj who almost single-handedly put Bollywood adaptations of Shakespeare on the map of Global Shakespeare.

Shakespeare has been adapted globally for a variety of reasons, which can range from resistant post-colonial readings to highlighting the inherent “dialogism” in the Shakespearian text and appropriating it to one’s local situatedness. Modern Shakespearean adaptations often put Shakespeare, as Craig Dionne and Parmita Kapadia point out, “at the heart of many of the most volatile nationalist and progressive debates about the nature of democratic government, the strictures of colonial and postcolonial identity, the construction of the nation-state, and the limits of Western liberalism.”¹⁹³ Bhardwaj adapts Shakespeare to trigger similar discussions, not simply within the country but also in global circulations where it resists the precise identity – i.e., the “Indian” adaptation of Shakespeare – that provides it that space.

Bhardwaj also uses this space to assess his artistic practice. As global Bollywood, his films have song-and-dance sequences, melodrama, and big stars, and his aesthetic sensibility emerges out of this tradition. In both *Maqbool* and *Haider*, he brings his “Bollywood” identity overtly into his narratives. In *Maqbool*, it is through self-conscious references to Bollywood and through the peripheral character of “Mohini,” who shadows Abbaji’s and Nimmi’s life, and who Maqbool is at pains to disassociate from himself. She is enticing, grasping, and embarrassingly obvious, but she is a professional actress and a negotiator who reveals tough truths about the characters who come in contact with her. In *Haider*, the critique of Bollywood is much sharper and wider, encompassing its industrial practices as well as its propensity to avoid “sensitive”

¹⁹³ Craig Dionne and Parmita Kapadia, “Introduction,” in *Native Shakespeares: Indigenous Appropriations on a Global Stage*, eds. Craig Dionne and Parmita Kapadia (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 2.

issues. Moreover, the film, while wooing the audience with melodious tracks and melodrama, also targets the audience for its apathy. This critique is not merely restricted to Bollywood aesthetics but extends to the larger issues of cinematic voyeurism and pleasure that Bhardwaj explores repeatedly in his films.

Bhardwaj has not limited himself to Shakespearean adaptations. He has adapted Brecht (*Matru ke Bijli ka Mandola* [Matru's Bijli's Mandola, 2013]), Ruskin Bond's novels (*The Blue Umbrella* [2005], *7 Khoon Maaf* [Seven Sins Forgiven, 2011]), and most recently, a short story of Charan Singh Pathik (*Pataakha* [Firecracker, 2018]). None have been as well received as his Shakespearean adaptations. He has, however, managed to include multiple adaptations within his adaptations, which is a consistent practice in his films. Thus, *Maqbool* references the Shakespearean text, Shakespearean film adaptations (most notably Kurosawa), noir films, and Bollywood films. *Haider* is a medley of texts that include the textual *Hamlet*, the film versions of *Hamlet* (specifically Almereyda's *Hamlet* [2000]), *The Curfewed Night*, Faiz Ahmad Faiz's poems, Salman Khan's films, and Akhtar Mohiuddin's short story "New Disease."

The second chapter deals with a range of adaptation practices employed by two other important directors of the *Hat-ke* group, Anurag Kashyap and Abhishek Chaubey. The first section deals with Anurag Kashyap's film *Dev. D* (2009) which is a significant milestone in the group's adaptation strategies. If Bhardwaj's adaptations engage with one of the most prominent literary and cultural icons of the West, Kashyap's adaptation of *Devdas* deals with one of the best-known stories in India involving three iconic characters, Devdas, Paro, and Chandramukhi. While Bhardwaj's films turned Shakespearean characters into familiar Bollywood characters,

Kashyap's film de-familiarizes characters who have appeared on the Indian screen countless times.

It is difficult to find anyone in India who does not know who Devdas is, not because they have necessarily read the novella that was published in 1917 (though the book was popular in its time), but because it was adapted relatively quickly into a film in 1935. It took the country by storm and created mega-stars out of the actors who portrayed the characters, particularly the male protagonist, Devdas. These were also the early, heady days of cinema and the story of Devdas has become inextricably woven with the history of cinema in India and its leading directors, singers, and lyricists. The tragic, melodramatic tale of Devdas, who refuses to marry his childhood sweetheart Paro and then drinks himself to death pining for her, and in the process destroys the life of the prostitute Chandramukhi who loves him, has become the stuff of legend wrapped in the glamor of its stars. The actors who achieved cult status from playing this role were P.C. Barua, Saigal, Dilip Kumar, and nearly half a decade later, Shahrukh Khan. As Kashyap correctly claims, the word Devdas has become an adjective in India, which is applied to all lovers pining for their beloved.

While all the Devdas adaptations have reoriented and modernized the character of Devdas in subtle ways, Kashyap's adaptation is the most iconoclastic. It changes the setting and turns the story into a musical comedy of sorts. Kashyap's Devdas is turned into an unfamiliar character and a thoroughly unappealing one. Initially presented as a self-absorbed and spoilt young male surrounded by communicating devices that serve to gratify him instantly, he progresses to a self-destructive drug addict wandering in a nightmarish cityscape that caters to his aimless and careless spending. The spilled left-overs in the dirty room where Dev sleeps in

his drug-induced haze are the flip side of the clutter of objects in Chanda's hyper-pink room where she conducts phone sex with her clients. Against this depressing backdrop, Kashyap presents the disaffection of contemporary Indian youth that turns toxic when mixed with generations of ingrained sexism. Yet, Kashyap allows this Dev to resist a tragic end and turn his life around. Through their adaptations, both Bhardwaj and Kashyap confront their present moment with some significant reservations. Just as *Maqbool* represents the darker elements of the aspirational life that globalization promises, *Dev. D* represents the alienation that besets those who achieve the promised lifestyle.

Kashyap's adaptation also enables him to assess his aesthetic practice against the tradition of cinematic Devdases. Kashyap, like Bhardwaj, is heavily influenced by Bollywood aesthetics. Thus, through adaptation, he looks back at the tradition of Hindi cinema and its various Devdases, acknowledging influences and noting similarities. However, he also seizes the opportunity to assert his independence through it. Such oscillations between similarity and difference marks the *Hat-ke* directors' relationship with Bollywood.

The next section focuses on generic adaptations. Both Bhardwaj and Kashyap adapted iconic texts and films, but Abhishek Chaubey in his debut film does not adapt any specific text. Instead, he adapts many high and low genres and modes of storytelling. He uses a multiplicity of genres like noir, heist, buddy movies, road movies, revenge films, or even fragments of chase and fight sequences to build a film. With its intricate plot of tales within a tale, its blend of global and local genres, its central duo of peripatetic small-time crooks and a comic villain hot on their pursuit, Chaubey's dark comedies ultimately provide unforgettable female characters who leave their stamp on all the genres that the plots embroil them in.

At the heart of his adaptations lie the female figures Krishna, Begum Para, and Muniya. Krishna is a combination of a typical practical woman bred in a semi-urban area who is skilled in dealing with tough situations, and a noir femme fatale who is willing to exploit her sexuality to get what she desires. Krishna performs, just as Begum Para and Muniya perform, to survive in a masculine world. They are not afforded the luxury of travel or mobility, but by the end of the films, all three have carved ways to help themselves get the freedom they desire. They radically redefine notions of female sexuality in their small-town situatedness and offer a remarkably unexpected alternative to the urban version of the contemporary New Woman in India.

Both Bhardwaj in *Omkara* (2006) and Chaubey in *Ishqiya* (2010) and *Dedh Ishqiya* (2014) set their plots in the regional interiors of the country, as does Kashyap in *Gangs of Wasseypur* 1 and 2 (2012). The attention to detail in recreating the small towns of India is gradually seeping into mainstream cinema, which in this decade has increasingly shifted to cashing in on the trend of detailing the eccentricities of the inhabitants of small-town India. Chaubey's *Gorakhpur*, set on the border between Nepal and India, was one of the first such representations. It provided a rare window into how globalization was gradually taking shape in the interiors of India. In the outskirts of Gorakhpur reside the rural poor, who live divided into armies bent on fighting for survival and eking out a living amid extreme violence. In the interior of the city lives Kamal Kant Kakkar, the "smallest" millionaire who neatly caricatures the rapidly rising middle class that live in closely-guarded mansions and stash their extra cash in microwaves and fridges to avoid getting "kidnapped." The extreme inequality of the lifestyles bred by globalization is just one of the angles that Chaubey's adaptation explores.

Chaubey's films also highlight his aesthetic practices. He extends the idea of performance, which his female leads excel in, and applies it to his male characters as well as his villains, viewing it as a larger aesthetic and existential practice that functions on a close relationship between the performers and their audience.

The third chapter looks at one of the most identifiable features of Bollywood films, its song-and-dance component, and analyzes this feature in four different ways. The first section offers a detailed analysis of two song-and-dance numbers in Bhardwaj's *Omkara*, employing and extending Lalitha Gopalan's interpretation of this feature as "interrupting" the narrative. Both songs are "item numbers" which is a popular convention in Hindi cinema and has gained currency since the 1990s. Item numbers feature provocative dances with suggestive lyrics and usually focus on the body parts of the female dancer who lip-syncs the song. The shift in the distribution and circulation patterns of Hindi cinema, which require big opening weeks for films to succeed at the box office, encouraged the proliferation of item numbers in Hindi films. Item numbers in Hindi cinema are used heavily in the promotions of the films as teasers and have become a big draw for the audience in the early weeks of a film's release.

The problematic use of the sexualized female body and the celebration of the male gaze that these songs propagate are issues that *Hat-ke* directors, in particular, have to contend with, as they often take the lead in highlighting gender issues in their films. *Omkara*, in particular, drew attention to gender issues and the monitoring of female sexual desire. However, the film had big stars and was touted as the most "Bollywoodish" of Bhardwaj's movies. The "Beedi" (Cigarette) song is thus compelled by market considerations as well as aesthetic principles. This chapter

discusses how the sequence incorporates some of these very tensions that are a part of Bollywood aesthetics and encourages a discussion of wide-ranging cultural and artistic concerns.

On the one hand, the song is part of a tradition of glamorized folk songs that hark back to a revered classic such as “Paan Khaye Saiyan Hamar” (My lover chews betel leaves). Such folk songs have always been bawdy, so the song considers itself part of that tradition. Gulzar’s lyrics add weight to the song in their evocation of rural life and in incorporating forgotten words that serve as reminders of forgotten histories. While thematically intrinsic to the film, the song also distances itself from the plot, bringing into the film cultural elements that the narrative could never otherwise hope to include. Moreover, by framing this in terms of desire and pleasure, and invoking parallels between Dolly (Desdemona) and Billo (Bianca), the song caters to that pleasure even as it brings attention to its darker elements. By bringing all these considerations to weigh upon the song, Bhardwaj is not entirely trying to have it both ways – voyeurism and the male (or female) gaze are issues that extend beyond the item numbers to the cinematic medium itself.

Chaubey, like Bhardwaj, sees himself as continuing the Bollywood tradition, especially with regard to its songs. Thus, his films might not have item numbers but they have dance numbers and are full of references to classic Hindi film songs. His song albums are more classically oriented but they incorporate the traditional repertoire of Hindi film song albums. They include road songs, male and female solos which can be considered romantic songs, and for his second film, a *qawwali* and two *thumris*. His road songs and romantic solos employ the traditional tools of Hindi film music. They express the inner life of the characters, incorporate a wide variety of cultural and social references that the narrative might not otherwise be able to

accommodate, and offer affective connections between the audience and the characters. Chaubey extends their use in both films to highlight their performative role. Thus, the classical singing of Krishna and Begum Para's *thumris* hide secrets and desires that their audiences might not be aware of, both within the narrative and outside it.

Chaubey, like Bhardwaj, views songs as essential additions to his cinematic repertoire and as vital to his aesthetic practice. He differs from Bhardwaj in his more positive view of song and dance as performative arts, which for his characters at least, are crucial for survival. He both participates in and critiques the nostalgia for older film songs in his films.

Anurag Kashyap takes more obvious risks with songs in his films. He collaborated with Bhardwaj in his early films, *Paanch* (unreleased but freely available on YouTube) and *No Smoking* (2011). *Paanch* was the first album to include a song that was a live recording of a performance. However, Kashyap's films became cult films to a large extent because of the innovative albums of *Dev. D* and *Gangs of Wasseypur* that included eighteen and twenty-seven songs respectively. The wide-ranging album of *Dev. D* created by newcomer Amit Tiwari included Punjabi, Haryanvi, Hindi and Awadhi songs that was a huge commercial and critical hit. While folk songs have always been a part of Hindi film songs, in *Dev. D* the folk tracks are mixed with modern rhythms, electronic sounds, and unusual arrangements that became an intrinsic part of the urban youth culture immediately after its release. The "Emo-sa-nal atyachar" (emotional cruelty) song was unusual in its use of regional accents and instruments such as the street brass band.

The *Gangs of Wasseypur* album is an even more experimental album which was set to music by Sneha Khanwalker, a rare female musician in the heavily male-dominated Hindi film

music industry. In sync with its regional orientation, the *GoW* album went even further than *Dev. D* in getting the flavor of regional music into mainstream Hindi film music. Khanwalkar had already developed her unique style of composition by getting out of the studio. She visited remote corners of the country and recorded ambient sounds on her recorder that she incorporated into her songs to evoke the particularity of a place. Instead of using trained voices, she got local singers to sing many of the songs in her album. Her unusual choice of singers, style of recording, use of technology, and the patience with which she created the albums brings a strong sense of authenticity to them. Like Amit Trivedi, she mixes the regional with the contemporary and the global. The lyrics in this album, which juxtaposed languages and dialects in very innovative ways, are central to the excitement that her songs generated. Kashyap's films have brought regional musical traditions into mainstream Hindi cinema, and instead of framing them as quaintly folk or ethnic, he has made them part of contemporary music.

Kashyap songs are integrated into his narratives. Thus, his use of songs distances him from the traditional way in which songs were employed in Hindi films. Though his songs are as carefully crafted as the songs of Bhardwaj's and Chaubey's films, they are not melodious in the traditional sense, and the lyrics are less poetic. They are much more likely to include dissonance and give the impression of a rawness that he requires in his plots.

The last section of chapter three discusses film song fragments in *Haider* that are truncated or absent from the film, and focuses on the songs' unmonitored travel trajectories which generate discourses about the film that might not be entirely predictable. It speculates on the unusual decision to not use the central song "Aao Na" for *Haider*, and how a song's absence might affect a film in making viewing more participatory. In this context, I also discuss the

different ways in which the audience encounters music albums as fragments separated from the film. This section discusses the role of the audience in consuming songs in ways that cannot be controlled by the usual distribution and circulation channels.

The importance of the song-and-dance sequences is evident in the films of all three directors. Their association with experimental cinema does not make them discard this feature. Besides being extremely flexible and profitable elements of a film, the directors acknowledge the strong influence of this feature in their development as filmmakers. Their engagement with this feature is not simply one of acceptance; it is an intense engagement, and they identify with it even as they interrogate it.

The last chapter concerns translation moments in *Hat-ke* films. It discusses these films not from the perspective of dubbing or subtitling, but in terms of the representation of translation moments in the narrative or the story. Yet, some observations about subtitling need to be made. Subtitles for Hindi films, which till recently were of inferior quality, have improved for a variety of reasons. One is the use of regional languages in mainstream Hindi films that necessitates subtitling for its domestic audience. *Hat-ke* films, in particular, should be subtitled with great care because they increasingly incorporate regional languages in their films due to their focus on linguistic experimentation. Hindi film songs are often not subtitled for unaccountable reasons and this practice, which often feeds into the perception of Hindi film songs as extraneous and dispensable, needs attention.

Michael Cronin's book *Translation goes to the Movies* provides a rare entry point into cinema from the perspective of translation theory. The fourth chapter is inspired by Cronin's argument that it is as necessary to observe how translation works on the screen as behind the

screen. Thus, he advocates identifying translators and interpreters in various mainstream films and analyzing the importance of their roles and actions in the narrative. Expanding this idea, this chapter looks at “translation moments” rather than focusing on translators and interpreters in films. These translation moments can be viewed as “interruptions” or pauses in the narrative, highlighting linguistic-artistic interrogations, just as the song sequences pause the narrative to include a range of cultural perceptions which would otherwise be considered extraneous to the narrative. However, since translations involve language, some of these moments are also an intrinsic part of natural, unmarked communication that is entirely “realistic,” while they trigger a double consciousness in the audience. Since India is multilingual, there are many such obvious language moments in films. Even if they do not directly involve the translation of one language into another, they juxtapose various languages against one another that provide, like the song sequences, an alternative perspective on the narrative. Bhardwaj’s movies, in particular, are full of such “pauses” or self-conscious and odd language moments that do not ostensibly progress the narrative in any way.

The first section discusses the film *Omkara* and the use of the English statement, “I love you,” in Meerut. The use of an English sentence in the middle of Hindi is not an uncommon phenomenon in Indian cities, but Bhardwaj chooses to problematize it. This section looks at how such usage affects the characters and the story when the theoretical concept of untranslatability is employed to read it. The second section discusses two more Bhardwaj films, *Haider* and *Rangoon*. *Haider* employs a “foreign” word “chutzpah” that is entirely unfamiliar in the Indian context – which is translated several times in the film in completely unrelated contexts. This

chapter examines how “chutzpah’s” translations, and its mispronunciation are used for political commentary and satire.

“Micro-cosmopolitanism” is another term conceptualized and popularized in translation theory by Michael Cronin that proved useful to analyze notions of identity. All three directors explore specifically minority identities in their films. Some of their major films have Muslim protagonists who belong to the minority community in India, and are increasingly in danger of being marginalized or othered in the steadily growing neo-conservative political atmosphere in the country. In Chaubey’s dark comedy *Ishqiya*, the regional interiors of the country are observed from the micro-cosmopolitan perspective of the rogue uncle-nephew duo who travel across the country seeking to avoid the villain who relentlessly pursues them.

Kashyap’s *GoW* experiments with the use of Hinglish (a mixture of Hindi and English or other regional languages and English) that is increasingly becoming almost an alternative language in India. However, it is often viewed as an urban language prevalent among bilingual English and Hindi speakers. Instead, Kashyap’s *GoW* foregrounds how English is used in the interiors of the country amongst people who might not be able to speak much English. *GoW* explores language as a powerful tool in the construction of identity. In Bhardwaj’s *Omkara*, English becomes a mode of asserting one’s difference, while in Chaubey’s *Ishqiya*, the use of peculiar local terminology becomes a way of forging links. Kashyap’s *GoW* explores hybrid languages and their role in constructing regional identities.

Discussing the categories “adaptation,” “translation,” and “songs and dances” in the works of the three directors help identify their views on nation, gender, and identity. Their films raise contemporary concerns about imagining the nation, its citizens, and the modern subject in

an age of globalization. The directors focus intensely on the local and yet bring in a global perspective that reorients the local's connection with the national. Their self-reflexivity about their aesthetic practice and the cinematic form do not remain abstruse exercises but involve the audience intimately in a relationship with their cinema.

The three directors discussed here are not the only directors who merit inclusion in the category of *Hat-ke* directors. This category is an open-ended one, influenced on one end by an independent, small-budget cinema with links to the parallel cinema movement of the 1970s and on the other end by big production houses such as Karan Johar's Dharma Productions or Fox-Star Studios that produce "blockbuster" films. Moreover, the distinctions get even more blurred when small budget films are distributed by bigger production houses or when the *Hat-ke* directors jointly produce a film with them. One of the problems of focusing on just three directors and a very small body of their work is to leave out directors and films that should have been included in this discussion. I choose to view this project as open-ended and suggest that more directors and their work need to be discussed in detail.

The directors who loom large in terms of their absence in this project are Dibakar Banerjee, Sriram Raghavan, and Vikramaditya Motwane who have a worthy line-up of films such as *Ek Hasina Thi* (Once There was a Beautiful Girl, Raghavan 2004); *Khosla Ka Ghosla* (Khosla's Nest, Banerjee 2006); *Johnny Gaddaar* (Johnny the Traitor, Raghavan 2007); *Oye Lucky, Lucky Oye* (Hey Lucky, Lucky Hey, Banerjee 2008); *Udaan* (Flight, Motwane 2010); *Love, Sex, aur Dhokha* (Love, Sex and Betrayal, Banerjee 2010); *Shanghai* (Banerjee 2012); *Lootera* (Thief, Motwane 2013); *Trapped* (Motwane 2017); *Bhavesh Joshi Superhero* (Motwane 2018); and *Andhadhun* (Blindly, Raghavan 2018) that all merit detailed discussion.

Just as the influence of the *Hat-ke* directors has affected mainstream Bollywood cinema, they might be poised to make their presence felt more strongly in global cinema. The recent trends in streaming media are once again changing the way films are consumed. Anurag Kashyap's almost six-hour long *Gangs of Wasseypur*, which had to be split into two parts for cinema audiences, has recently streamed successfully on Netflix as a six-part web series. All three directors and many other directors who fall in the category of experimental filmmakers have found a platform on Netflix and Amazon Prime. These platforms, particularly Netflix, have provided them access to a global audience which, in its turn, has gradually been shedding its earlier viewership habits of avoiding subtitled films and serials. The success of web series such as *Narcos* (2015) and *El Chapo* (2018) have attuned the viewership to accepting subtitles. They set the stage for the success of its first Indian web series, *Sacred Games*, that premiered on Netflix in 2018. Based on Vikram Chandra's novel of the same name, it has eight episodes directed by two directors, Anurag Kashyap and Vikramaditya Motwane, who produced it under Phantom Films.

Sacred Games has earned itself another season on Netflix and its success has paved the way for at least eight other web series from India involving experimental directors, who are keen to try this new form that seems to be a hybrid of films and television series. Anurag Kashyap, who has always been open to experimentation with form, has already collaborated with Netflix for *Lust Stories*, which is a collection of four, roughly forty-minute films made by different directors. Such forms of truncated or extended films still do not have many distribution avenues in India except for YouTube. A dedicated global platform like Netflix is very attractive to these directors and actors who want to push against the defined bounds of artistic forms and "box-

office” concerns even as they get grouped with similar programs on a global scale. *Sacred Games* is another hyper-violent and stylishly made saga about the intertwined lives of a colorful gangster from the provinces and a mildly intransigent and vaguely conscience-ridden, pill-popping cop with relationship issues against the backdrop of Mumbai. Its comparison with serials like *Narcos* has already provided it global parameters of comparison and moved it away from its niche “Indian” identity, which must hearten its creators. Vishal Bhardwaj, who has not yet ventured too far away from feature-length films, is also poised to adapt Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* for Netflix.

This latest step toward a global platform augurs some very interesting, further experimentations with language and adaptation for these directors. Kashyap and Motwane decided to translate Vikram Chandra's Mumbai-based English novel of the same name into a mixture of Hindi, English, and other regional languages at considerable time and expense. This raw and colorful language is subtitled back again into English for the Netflix audience. The idea of an original language is turned on its head by overwhelming it by the number of translations that occur in the process of its creation and transmission. Bhardwaj is planning to do the same with *Midnight's Children*, which in 1982 had claimed to “chutnify” English. Their timing and formal experiments seem to be in sync with the rapidly changing taste of a contemporary, global audience, which just might savor such chutnification in its consumption of the shifting forms of global cinema.

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Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge. Directed by Aditya Chopra. Mumbai: Yash Raj Films, 1995.

Gangs of Wasseypur I and II. Directed by Anurag Kashyap. Mumbai: Jar Pictures, AKFPL, Bohra Bros Productions, 2012.

Godfather, The. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola. Hollywood: Paramount Pictures, Alfran Productions, 1972.

Goliyon Ki Raasleela Ram-Leela. Directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali. Mumbai: Bhansali Productions, Eros International, 2013.

Haider. Directed by Vishal Bhardwaj. Mumbai: UTV Motion Pictures, 2014.

Hamlet. Directed by Kishore Sahu. Bombay: Hindustan Chitra, 1954.

Hamlet. Directed by Michael Almereyda. New York: Miramax Films, 2000

Indrasabha. Directed by J.J. Madan. Bombay: Madan Theaters, 1932.

Isaaq. Directed by Manish Tiwary. Mumbai: Pen India Limited, 2013.

Ishaqzaade. Directed by Habib Faisal. Mumbai: Yash Chopra Films, 2012.

Ishqiya. Directed by Abhishek Chaubey. Mumbai: Shemaroo Entertainment, Vishal Bhardwaj Pictures, 2010.

Jis Desh Mein Ganga Behti Hai. Directed by Radhu Karmakar. Mumbai: R.K. Productions, 1960.

Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham. Directed by Karan Johar. Mumbai: Dharma Productions, 2001.

Kaminey. Directed by Vishal Bhardwaj. Mumbai: UTV Motion Pictures, Vishal Bhardwaj Pictures, 2009.

Kasam Paida Karne Wale Ki. Directed by Babbar Subhash. Mumbai: B Subhash Film Unit. 1984.

Kill Bill: Volume 1 and Volume 2. Directed by Quentin Tarantino. Hollywood: Miramax, 2003 and 2004.

Last Lear, The. Directed by Rituparno Ghosh. Kolkata: Planman Motion Pictures, 2007.

Life Goes On. Directed by Sangeeta Dutta. London: S.D. Films, Storm Glass Productions, 2009.

Lipstick Under My Burkha. Directed by Alankrita Srivastava. Mumbai: Prakash Jha Productions, 2016.

Maqbool. Directed by Vishal Bhardwaj. Mumbai: Kaleidoscope Entertainment, 2003.

Narcos. Directed by Brancato, Chris, et al. Gaumont International Television, *Netflix*. 2018.

No Smoking. Directed by Anurag Kashyap. Mumbai: Big Screen Entertainment, Eros Entertainment, Panorama Studios, 2007.

Omkara. Directed by Vishal Bhardwaj. Mumbai: Big Screen Entertainment, Panorama Studios, Shemaroo Videos Pvt. Ltd., 2006.

Paanch. Directed by Anurag Kashyap. Mumbai: Padmini Tele Media, Star Talaash Promotions, 2003.

Parinda. Directed by Vidhu Vinod Chopra. Bombay: Vinod Chopra Films, 1989.

Queen. Directed by Vikas Bahl. Mumbai: Phantom Films, 2013.

Rangoon. Directed by Vishal Bhardwaj. Mumbai: Nadiawala Grandson Entertainment, VB Pictures, Viacom 18 Motion Picture, 2017.

Roja. Directed by Mani Ratnam. Madras: Madras Talkies, Hansa Pictures Lmt. Kavithalaaya Productions, 1992.

Romeo and Juliet. Directed by Akhtar Hussain. Bombay: Nargis Art Concern, 1947.

Sacred Games. Directed by Anurag Kashyap and Vikramaditya Motwane. Phantom Movies, Netflix, 2018. <https://www.netflix.com/title/80115328>.

Satya. Directed by Ram Gopal Varma. Mumbai: Varma Corporation, 1998.

Shakespeare Wallah. Directed by James Ivory. London: Merchant Ivory Productions, 1965.

Shirin Farhad. Directed by J. J. Madan. Bombay: Madan Theaters, 1931.

Sholay. Directed by Ramesh Sippy. Bombay: Sippy Films Pvt. Ltd., 1975.

Thelma and Louise. Directed by Ridley Scott. Hollywood: Pathe Percy Main Productions, Star Partners III Ltd., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer: 1991.

Throne of Blood (Spider Web Castle). Directed by Akira Kurosawa. Tokyo: Toho Studios, 1957.

Trapped. Directed by Vikramaditya Motwane. Mumbai: Phantom Films, 2016.

Veere de Wedding. Directed by Shashanka Ghosh. Mumbai: Balaji Motion Pictures, Anil Kapoor Films and Communication Network, Saffron Broadcast & Media, 2018.

Zanjeer. Directed by Prakash Mehra. Bombay: Prakash Mehra Productions, 1973.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Madhavi Biswas was born in Patna, India and completed her BA, MA, and M.Phil. in English from The University of Delhi, India. She joined the doctoral program in Humanities at The University of Texas, Dallas. Her research interests include adaptation, translation, global media, and fandom. She has taught Rhetoric and World Literature at UT Dallas and other community colleges in Dallas. She is currently a Graduate Research Fellow at the Edith O'Donnell Institute of Art History at The University of Texas at Dallas.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Madhavi Biswas

School of Arts and Humanities, The University of Texas at Dallas
800 West Campbell Road, Richardson, TX 75080
Madhavi.Biswas@utdallas.edu

Teaching and Academic Experience

Graduate Fellow – Edith O’Donnell Institute of Arts and Technology, Aug 2018 – Continuing.
The University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, Texas.

Instructor of Record – World Literature: Twenty-first Century Global Literature and Media.
Aug 2016 – May 2018

The University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, Texas.

Instructor of Record – Rhetoric 1302. Aug 2013 – May 2016
The University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, Texas.

Adjunct Instructor – English 1302. Composition and Rhetoric. Aug 2007 – May 2012
North Lake College, Dallas County Community College District, Texas.

Lecturer – English Literature: Early Twentieth Century Modern Drama and Poetry. 1995 –
2000.

University of Delhi, Delhi, India.

Education

PhD Student in Arts and Humanities majoring in Studies in Literature

ABD – Dissertation Defense in April 2019.

Dissertation: Globalization and New Bollywood’s *Hat-ke* Directors: Nation, Gender, and Identity
in the Films of Vishal Bhardwaj, Anurag Kashyap, and Abhishek Chaubey.

Areas of Interest: Adaptation Studies, Film Studies, World Literature, Translation, and Anime.

The University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, Texas.

MPhil in English

The University of Delhi, Delhi

MA In English

The University of Delhi, Delhi

BA Honors in English

The University of Delhi, Delhi

Participation and Recognition

Senate Member, Graduate Student Council, the University of Texas at Dallas. 2015 – present. Helped organize talks, graduate student activities, and the Annual Graduate Seminar, RAW, for three years.

Chair of Session on Global Film at the South-Central Modern Languages Association, Tulsa, OK, October 2017.

Organizer of the Biennial Graduate Students Translation Conference, “Translation and Performance,” The University of Texas at Dallas. May 26 – 28, 2017.

Adjunct Teacher of the Year at North Lake Community College, Irving, Texas. 2008.

Papers Published

“Light the Cigarette with my Heart’s Fire, My Love: Raunchy Tracks and a Golden-hearted Prostitute in Vishal Bhardwaj’s *Omkaara*,” *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation*, X.2. Spring 2017.

“Shahid Kapoor: Multi-platform Mediations of a Mid-Level Star,” forthcoming in *Stardom in Contemporary Bollywood* eds. A. I. Viswamohan and C. Wilkinson, Palgrave-Springer, 2019.

Selected Conference Papers

“Global Genres and Local Women in the New Bollywood Films of Vishal Bhardwaj and Abhishek Chaubey,” presented at Modern Languages Association, New York, Jan. 4 – 7, 2018.

“Re-turning Devdas,” presented at Association of Adaptation Studies, Leicester, UK, Sept. 18 – 19, 2017.

“Melodious *Omkaara*: Small Town Othello via Big-budget Bollywood,” presented at South Central Modern Languages Association, Nashville, TN, Oct. 30 – Nov. 2, 2015.

“Between Chutzpah and AFSPA: To Be a Kashmiri Hamlet” presented at the Second International Shakespeare Conference, The University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Sept. 18 – 20, 2015.

“Nature, Technology, Metamorphosis, and Gender in Hayao Miyazaki's Anime: From *Nausicaa* to *Ponyo*,” presented at the RAW Graduate Conference, The University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, Texas, March 6 – 7, 2015.