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GLOBALIZING BOMBAY CINEMA

Reproducing the Indian State and Family

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the changing relations between Bombay cinema and the Indian state in a global context. In 1998, the Indian state recognized film as an industry. This dramatic shift in state policy occurred during the same period as two other notable developments. First, the Bombay film industry produced and successfully distributed what the Indian state and audiences approvingly referred to as ‘family films’. Second, Indian diasporic communities emerged as valued audiences in Bombay’s box-office figures and as desired investors in the Indian state’s political, economic, and cultural plans. By examining this historical conjuncture, I seek to show how processes of globalization contribute to the (re)production of Hindi commercial cinema, the Indian state and family.

Key Words ◇ cinema ◇ diaspora ◇ globalization ◇ India ◇ state

Opening

On 11 May 1998, news of India’s nuclear test exploded onto world headlines. The previous day, another explosive situation was resolved by the Indian government, this one, however, barely generating a murmur in national and international media. On 10 May 1998, after 50 years of independence, the Indian state finally recognized film as an industry ‘proper’. In the past, prominent members of the film industry had discussed with various governments the possibility of gaining recognition as an industry; each time, they had been refused. However, on 10 May 1998, when members of the film industry met with the representatives of the government at the national conference on ‘Challenges Before Indian Cinema’ in Mumbai (Bombay), they received an unexpected response.1 Surprisingly, without any argument or debate whatsoever, the Union Information and
Broadcasting Minister Sushma Swaraj announced that the government had decided to grant industry status to film. This new status meant that the film industry would finally be eligible for the infrastructural and credit support given to other industries.

This noteworthy development was soon followed by a series of other changes instituted by the state. In 1998, Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha granted many long-standing demands of the film industry, including reduction in custom duties on cinematographic film, exemption of recorded audio and video cassettes from excise duties, and tax incentives, to name a few. In 2000, Sinha added further concessions including a complete exemption on export profits, further reduction in import duties on cinematographic equipment, and more tax incentives. In October 2000, under the Industrial Development Bank Act, the film industry became eligible for financial support from ‘legitimate’ institutions. In May 2001, for the very first time, a 25-member team led by Sushma Swaraj went to Cannes in order to promote overseas sales of Indian films.

This dramatic shift in state policy towards the commercial film industry occurred during the same period as two other significant developments: First, in the 1990s—the era of economic liberalization—the Bombay film industry began producing what the Indian state and audiences approvingly referred to as ‘family films’ which wove a happy marriage between Indian ‘traditions’ and the global market. Second, during the same period, both the Bombay film industry and the state began pursuing Indian diasporic communities.

How do we make sense of these developments? How are they related to one another? In this article, I seek to examine this historical conjuncture, focusing on how globalization reconfigures the relation between the Indian state and Bombay cinema. Specifically, I will be pursuing the following questions. By which processes and mechanisms does ‘India as nation state’ reproduce itself in the context of globalization? What has been the process of negotiation between the Bombay film industry and the state apparatus? How and why did ‘family films’ become central to the agendas of the film industry and the Indian state?

In the 1990s, despite the successes of *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun/What Is My Relation To You?* and *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge/The Brave-Hearted Will Take Away The Bride*, the Bombay film industry came to the conclusion that chances of producing an ‘All-India hit’ were increasingly low; therefore, it began to pursue diasporic markets to obtain more revenue. This turn to diasporic markets is part of a larger process of market segmentation which is visible in the emergence of a new mode of exhibition in India, namely, the multiplex. Multiplexes provide a menu which, depending upon the region, can consist of various combinations of Hindi, regional, art, crossover, art-commercial hybrid, and Hollywood films (Sharma, 2003). Due to an increased number of screens via multiplexes and a larger number
of prints which get distributed, a film can become a hit without necessarily filling theatres. The steep cost of tickets at multiplexes and the high currency exchange rate vis-à-vis the rupee, especially from diasporic markets in the US and the UK, further ensure that a film with a smaller audience can be successful. Consequently, producers and distributors no longer need to aim for an ‘All-India hit’; by earning enough money in profitable segments their films can be financially viable. These changes have both marginalized less profitable segments and have impacted the informal economy, namely, scalping which feeds off high demand for tickets (Joshi, 2005).

Unlike the Bombay film industry which sought new markets of its own volition, the advent of liberalization in the 1990s imposed certain economic imperatives on the Indian state, which forced it to open its markets to western products and culture, and to become a player in the global market. This, it could be said, is a part of ‘globalization’. Sassen points out that ‘Global markets in finance and advanced services partly operate through a “regulatory” umbrella that is not state centered but market centered’ (1998: xxvii). These markets, she explains, make ‘new claims on national states to guarantee the domestic and global rights of capital’ and ‘national states respond through the production of new forms of legality’ (1998: xxvii). Understood in this context, in granting film the status of an industry, the Indian state sought to accomplish two tasks: first, to harness the enormous export potential of commercial films, in particular, ‘Bollywood’ films; and second, to tailor the industry to international standards by transforming the mechanisms of film production.

I would argue that by designating film as an industry, and thereby bringing an ‘unorganized’ and ‘informal’ sector of the economy under its purview, the state is actively attempting to (re)inscribe its authority in the context of globalization. By tracing recent events and processes, I suggest that this new legality is productive of a different kind of state, one in which financial institutions assume prominence. One could end the analysis here and say that fiscal reasons compelled the state to grant commercial cinema the status of a legitimate industry. This fiscal rationale does not, however, explain two important developments. (1) The government sought to bring an unregulated sector of the economy under its wing, while it was busy deregulating other sectors. (2) The state began to support big-budget ‘family films’. I would explain the first development by noting that, while the state needed follow the rules laid out by the global market, it also had to show its citizens that it was not powerless to counter one of the most compelling arguments against liberalization, namely, that the state would be controlled by market forces.

Regarding the second development, namely, the state support of ‘family films’, I contend that it is through the process of regulation that the state seeks to produce ‘good cinema’, one which is simultaneously attentive to the global market and to the reproduction of the Indian nation. Thus, state
recognition of the film industry can also be seen as a means of controlling content in ways that are more subterranean, more effective, and less public than through the censorship battles of the 1990s to which I refer later in the article. From independence until the mid-1990s, the state had, more or less, viewed the commercial industry as a social vice and subjected it to censorship and taxation. After this period, the repressive apparatus, e.g., censorship and taxation, does not disappear. Rather, a generative apparatus emerges alongside it. This apparatus enables a distinction between ‘good’ commercial films, i.e., family films, such as *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun/What Is My Relation To You?* (1994), *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge/The Brave-Hearted Will Take Away The Bride* (1995), *Pardes/Foreign Land* (1997), *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai/Something Happens* (1998), *Aa Ab Laut Chalein/Let us Return* (1999), *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam/I have Given my Heart* (1999), *Hum Saath Saath Hain/We Are United* (1999), *Yaadein/Memories* (2001), *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham/A Time for Sadness and a Time for Happiness* (2001), etc. and ‘bad’ commercial films which contain vulgar songs such as ‘Choli peeche kya hai’ (What is Behind the Blouse), from *Khalnayak/The Villain* (1993), ‘Sexy, Sexy, Sexy, Mujhe Log Bole . . . ’ (People Say I am Sexy, Sexy, Sexy) from *Khuddar/Self-Respecting Person* (1993), ‘Meri Pant Bhi Sexy . . . ’ (My Pant is Sexy) from *Dulaara/The Loved One* (1993); ‘Sarkayleo Khatiya Jara Lage . . . ’ (Bring your Cot Closer, I am Feeling Cold) from *Raja Babu/His Lordship* (1993), etc.

In order to elaborate upon these arguments, I will focus on four related issues: first, the state’s and the commercial film industry’s recent efforts to find legitimate means for financing films; second, the state’s claim that clean financing is crucial for producing good cinema; third, the state’s role in defining good cinema; and last, Bombay cinema’s and the Indian state’s persistent efforts in the 1990s and the present to woo diasporic communities. In making these arguments, I seek to intervene in the fields of global studies and film criticism. I contribute to a growing body of work by scholars which interrogates arguments that, regardless of political orientation, presume that globalization is a phenomenon limited exclusively to the expansion of Hollywood (see e.g., Ciecko and Lu, 1999; Iwabuchi, 2002; Larkin, 2003; Lau, 2003; Lu, 1997; Naficy, 2001; Shohat and Stam, 1994, 2003; Srinivas, 2003; Wong, 1999). This scholarship not only intensifies debates on globalization and cinema, but also questions the very theoretical grounds through which we comprehend globalization itself. This scholarship, however, has not attended to the changing relations between the state and media in the era of globalization. I hope to expand this scholarship by examining these issues.

For the most part, in film studies, there has been an insistence upon separating questions about political economy and representations; this separation is manifest in the formation of film studies and mass communications, where the former largely addresses questions of representations.
and the latter is concerned with political economy. This is, of course, part of a larger divide between the humanities and the social sciences. Studies on Bombay cinema have often reiterated this division by focusing on cinematic representations and overlooking the specific technologies and capital which enable the production, distribution, and exhibition of these representations. Unlike these studies, I seek to locate questions of representation in a wider social field by placing questions of representation alongside political economy.

From Black Market to Legitimate Financing: The Production of a Different State

Film financing in India has generally been a creative endeavor. Given the high risks and lack of state support, banks have tended to refuse to lend money for film productions, ‘thus forcing filmmakers to turn towards alternative means, which include clear funding of future profit potential or high-cost borrowing from the dubious and the not-so-dubious’ (Aiyar and Chopra, 1998). Currently, in the Bombay film industry, prominent producers such as Yash Chopra, Subhash Ghai, Indra Kumar, and the Barjatyas generally do not borrow money. They have, ‘with repeated success, built reputations strong enough to sell their films the day they are announced’ (Aiyar and Chopra, 1998). Hence, they are able to acquire funds from distributors.

However, others have been neither as successful nor as lucky:

Nearly 25 percent of the under-production films are financed by conventional money-lenders, who have traditionally lent money to the film industry at interest rates of 36 to 40 percent per annum. Some are backed by non-conventional but corporate financing while others use the widely-prevalent hundi-system (money raised through promissory notes) to fund their projects. Less than 5 percent of the films are funded by the infamous underworld sources and the remaining 70 per cent-odd producers get their money from assorted businessmen—builders, jewellers, traders—who, attracted by the glamour, pump in money. (Aiyar and Chopra, 1998)

In an interview, Swaraj alluded to this ‘convoluted state of affairs’ and identified film’s new status as an industry as a solution to these problems:

If you are committed to good cinema, you will have to provide good finance. By according the status of industry, we have given pictures the much-needed eligibility to seek funds from legitimate places. Thus, a semblance of order is now possible in what has been a rather confused and convoluted state of affairs. A great step, indeed. (The Hindu, 1998a)

If we consider that ‘black’ money has funded film productions in India since the 1940s and that the involvement of the mafia in the industry can be traced to the 1970s, we may wonder why the state has chosen to turn its attention to these issues at this juncture. I suggest two reasons for this
recent focus on weeding out ‘mafia-black’ money: first, we know that in the international arena Third World nation states have always been characterized as ‘corrupt’. In order to become a worthy contender in the global market and to present India as an attractive and safe site for foreign investment, the Indian state is compelled to erase the blemish of ‘corruption’. Second, the process of constructing and then policing corruption produces another opportunity for the state to ‘act’ and to (re)inscribe its authority. In the era of liberalization, this assumed significance because the state needed to demonstrate to its citizens that it was a potent force and not merely a puppet of market forces.

The relations between the state, Bombay cinema, and ‘mafia-black’ money have always been complex. In state discourses, ‘black’ money, that which the underworld supplies, is part of the larger problem of corruption—a problem which the state is ostensibly hard at work locating and eradicating. While in public discourse the state attempts to distance itself from corruption, a cursory glance at the workings of bureaucracy and politics shows that ‘illegal’ activities supplement the income of officials and politicians, and state coffers. With the pressure of globalization, the state has become more zealous in its efforts to remove corruption. In 2001, the Bombay police arrested film financier Bharat Shah and director/producer Nadeem Rizvi, and seized the prints of a commercial Hindi film Chori Chori Chukpe Chupke/Secretly, Quietly on the grounds that the money for its production had come from the underworld. The film was eventually released, but the monies from the sale of the prints to distributors were appropriated by the state. Curiously, one of the distributors for the film happened to be Bharat Shah who was under arrest at the time. This incident not only highlights how ‘corruption’ assists in increasing the economic productivity of the state but also the difficulty of the state in disentangling itself from corruption.

Corporatization, or ‘Clean’ Industry and Clean Films: The Increasing Regulative Authority of State-Supported Financial Institutions

As members of the film industry discussed Swaraj’s unexpected announcement, they wondered about a series of issues. What would be legitimate sources of finances? If banks provided funds for films, what would they demand as collateral? Would these new institutions interfere with the process of filmmaking? How would these institutions affect the industry’s ‘work-culture’? Newspapers and magazines generally reported that the film industry was happy with this new state of affairs. In fact, Plus Channel CEO Amit Khanna suggested that these processes would produce a

\[\ldots\] Bollywood where films will be insured—banks will not lend without insurance—therefore scripts will be finalised, artists will sign completion bonds and films will be
completed in a stipulated period of time. Black money will be totally weeded out and a system of valuation experts will evolve. . . . ‘There will be a transparent accounting system and underworld rumours, a bad memory’. (Aiyar and Chopra, 1998)

Some sections of the industry undertook efforts towards materializing this future. For example, in 1999 director/producer Subhash Ghai set a precedent by insuring his film Taal/Rhythm (The Times of India, 2000). In early 2000, the All India Film Producers Council (AIFPC) commissioned the Arthur Andersen Corporation to do a study of the industry and create corporate benchmarks for key players in the future (Economic Times, 2000). Later in the year, Subhash Ghai went public with his production company Mukta Arts, laying a new road ahead for the country’s film industry. Soon after, music giant TIPS Industries and content provider Pritish Nandy Communications followed Ghai’s example. These efforts on the part of certain sections of the industry suggest that corporatization of cinema is not simply a vision imposed by the Indian state. Clearly, the industry, ‘Bollywood’ in particular, is eager to become a contender on the stage of world cinema; however, the rules for its entry onto this stage are governed by a global market which demands corporatization. While ‘Bollywood’ seeks many benefits that come from corporatization, such as legitimate financing and larger markets, this process also extends the authority of state-supported financial institutions through a new set of rules imposed on the production and marketing of films.

While the government officials as well as members of the film industry have welcomed these new changes, the financial institutions have been more apprehensive about investing funds in such a risky industry. After more than two years of discussion, the entertainment industry, including film production, was made eligible for financing from banks. According to a notification issued on 16 October 2000 under section 2(C)(xvii) of the Industrial Development Bank of India Act, 1964, the entertainment industry was recognized as an approved entity under ‘industrial concerns’ (Business Line, 2000a; India Abroad Daily, 2000).

Approximately six months later, the Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI) issued a set of ‘norms’ for financing films:

The IDBI has said that to be eligible for its film-financing scheme, the movie should have a capital of Rs. 5 crore [50 million] to Rs. 25 crore [250 million] for Hindi films and Rs. 30 lakh [300,000] to Rs. 10 lakh [100,000] for regional films. The scheme says no two films should be the same and the investment would vary depending on the ‘treatment’ of the story or concept and scale of production. Materials and technicians cost should constitute about 55% of the capital outlay. Said IDBI executive director RS Agarwal, ‘The film should be comprehensively insured and a guarantee for the timely completion within the estimated cost of film should be provided by the applicant. The borrower should be a corporate entity, backed by established directors/producers having a satisfactory record. The quantum of assistance will be normally not less than Rs. 5 crore and not exceeding 50 percent of the film’s cost. The promoter’s contribution should be normally not less than 30 percent of the cost of the film. The period of loan...
should not be more than two years. The security towards the loan will be a lab letter, assignment of Intellectual Property Right of the proposed films as also existing rights on old films, hypothecation of movable assets, personal guarantee and receivables IPRs to be routed through TRA.' (Financial Express, 2001)

The IDBI policy is no simple program for providing finance to the film industry. Rather, through a host of rules mandated and enforced by state-supported financial institutions, the policy seeks to transform the nature of the film industry. The objective of these rules is to produce a disciplined Indian film industry by increasing professionalization and in the process weeding out ‘non-professional’ filmmakers and ‘amateur’/’lower-grade’ films. While earlier rules limited the assistance to films with a budget of at least 10 crores, the recent guidelines have reduced this amount to 4 crores, but even the reduced amount excludes low-budget filmmakers. For example, the successful, progressive film, My Brother Nikhil (2005), which was made on a budget of 2.25 crores, would not have been eligible for assistance from IDBI (Jha, 2005). Government officials, bankers, and members of the industry hope that in this professional environment, film production will decrease, but the quality of films as well as film marketing will increase. In their view, these transformations would create a truly productive film industry (see e.g. Aiyar and Chopra, 1998; Financial Express, 1998; IndiaInfo.com, 2000; Rediff on The Net, 1999; Responservice, 2000). In recognizing film as property, the state which is formally in charge of protecting and safeguarding the rights to property is able to control the kind of films produced. In making a distinction between Hindi and regional films and prescribing a larger amount of initial capital for the former and a lesser one for the latter, this policy seeks to (re)inscribe the dominance of Hindi and Bombay cinema both nationally and internationally.

Making Good Cinema: The Role of the State in Producing the Nation

In the following section, I seek to explore why the state’s investment in family films occurs at the same moment as financial regulation of the industry. I ask how it is that family films become the cultural articulation of liberalization, and analyze the conjuncture of such films with the development of the diaspora market. In the 1990s, the state sought to regulate film production not only through film financing, but also through official and unofficial measures aimed at defining good cinema. Government officials endorsed and gave awards to big-budget, family films; this new genre emerged in the 1990s and has been very successful in India and abroad (The Hindu, 1998b). Discussions about genre have focused on three primary issues: (1) the semantic elements through which one can identify a genre, (2) genre as a site of negotiation between the film industry and audience,
and (3) genre as reflective of ideology or a particular historical period. I would like to suggest that through mechanisms of censorship as well as national awards the state plays a crucial role in producing genres. Furthermore, genres, in this case, the family films, in turn contribute to fostering new relations between the Bombay film industry, the Indian state, and the Indian diasporic communities. In the era of globalization, family films have played a significant role in reimagining the nation, audiences, and markets. These films affirm India’s moral foundations by representing its ‘traditions’ and announce India’s triumphant entry into the global market by managing to persistently include a wide array of multinational brand names in its narratives. In these films, women become pivotal for the production of the patriarchal Indian family and men are charged with spreading seeds of liberalization within and beyond the borders of the Indian nation state.

In the era of globalization, Indian diasporic communities have emerged as valued audiences in Bombay box-office figures and as desired investors in the state’s political, economic, and cultural plans. The family has been an important site for the construction of diasporic communities. The gendered division of labor operative within the territorial boundaries of the nation state has been intensified in the diaspora, which assiduously seeks to (re)create Indian traditions. The narratives of Bombay cinema have become increasingly significant in accomplishing this task. The desires of the diaspora appear to have been inscribed within the texts of ‘Bollywood’ films, which often contain characters who live in the UK or the US and continue to maintain Indian traditions. These films invite the diaspora to make libidinal and material investments by supporting Indian traditions and commercial film production. In making these investments, the diaspora is being both imaginatively and materially drawn into the nation. Scholars have noted the importance diasporic markets for the Bombay film industry (Dwyer and Patel, 2002; Ganti, 2004; Mankekar, 1999; Mishra, 2002; Pendakur and Subramanyam, 1996). Ganti points out that Hindi film distribution has been divided into five major territories in India; a ‘sixth territory, known as the “overseas territory”, previously used to be undifferentiated from the point of view of distributors in India, but is now subdivided into North America, United Kingdom, Gulf States, South Africa etc’ (Ganti, 2004: 57–8). According to box-office collection figures, the earnings of ‘family films’ from the overseas market range from approximately 15 to 45 percent of the film’s total collections. Interestingly, most websites and trade analysts that provide box-office figures for overseas territories focus on the earnings from the US and UK markets.
To elaborate and extend these points, I would like to examine *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, the 1995 blockbuster which has become the longest running film in the history of Indian cinema. *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* followed on the heels of the immensely successful film, *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* which began the trend for big-budget family films. Both films are credited with bringing audiences who had been lured away by other technologies, namely, videocassettes and cable television, back to the theaters. It is important to situate these films as well as the genre that they heralded in the context of economic liberalization. The plans for economic liberalization were crafted by Dr Manmohan Singh (the Prime Minister of India at the time of writing) and implemented under Congress rule in the early 1990s. It is important to note that debates about the liberalization process in India centered not just around economic disadvantages of opening up the markets, but also about the impact of the ‘West’ on ‘Indian culture’. Both supporters and opponents of the process framed their arguments in terms of the need to protect ‘Indian culture’ from the West and of the strength of ‘Indian civilization’.

In this era, the state and the film industry encountered a powerful adversary in the form of satellite television. Since satellite television was not subject to state censorship, it provided viewers easy access to films and programs that were prohibited by the state. As satellite television easily breached state authority, state censorship appeared to be a superfluous activity. The film industry added to the troubles of the state by pressing for more liberal censorship guidelines with respect to sex and violence so that it could compete with satellite television. The vociferous censorship battles in the 1990s reflected the anxieties of the state, the film industry, and the citizenry with regard to these changes. How would the state re-establish its authority? How would the film industry compete with new forms of entertainment? How would the social fabric change due to both the quantity and quality of entertainment available? How could India protect its *culture and traditions* from the onslaught of western culture and values represented in films, sitcoms, and soap operas shown via satellite television?

In order to address these concerns and to bolster its own authority, the Congress government, in 1991 and 1994, asserted that various complaints regarding objectionable scenes and songs compelled it to revise and reissue the censorship guidelines. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting issued the following list of objectionable visuals and asked the Central Board of Film Certification to ensure that:

- human sensibilities are not offended by vulgarity, obscenity or depravity; such dual meaning words which obviously cater to baser instincts are not allowed; scenes degrading or denigrating women in any manner are not presented; scenes involving sexual
violence against women like attempt to rape, rape or any form of molestation, or scenes of a similar nature are avoided, and if any such incident is germane to the theme, they shall be reduced to the minimum and no details are shown... (1992a: 8–9)

In addition, the guidelines urged the Certification Board to ensure that a film which is granted a ‘U’ certificate is ‘suitable for family viewing, that is to say, the film should be such that all members of the family including children can view it together’ (Minstry of Information, 1992b). Through these guidelines, the state sought to regulate representations of sexuality which were the sites for debates on Indian traditions and culture.

It appeared that in films such as *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun*, *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* and their subsequent reincarnations, the state had found allies for combating the ‘vulgarity, obscenity, depravity’ which presumably plagued Indian screens. These family films assisted the Bombay industry in securing its domestic market and in reaching the diasporic market, while educating Indian nationals, both at home and abroad, in ‘Indian traditions’ and the pleasures of consumerism. Released in theaters in India, England, and the US, Aditya Chopra’s *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, affectionately known as *DDLJ*, became a mega box-office hit; *DDLJ*’s success helped establish the overseas territory as a major market for Bombay filmmakers. The film bagged all the important Filmfare awards—the Oscars of India. Aditya Chopra was effusively praised for his first effort at direction and screen-play writing. He was commended for the script, cinematography, the picturization of songs in scenic European locales—and most importantly—for creating a good family film, one devoid of vulgarity and violence. The Indian government expressed its approval for the film and assisted in its marketing by giving it the award for the ‘BEST POPULAR FILM PROVIDING WHOLESOME ENTERTAINMENT.’ As a national award winner, *DDLJ* was also granted the privilege of being *tax-free*. Relieved of the extra charge ranging from 25 to 70 percent depending upon the state, *DDLJ* could be enjoyed for a reasonable price.

Earlier, *DDLJ* had sailed smoothly through the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) in Bombay which granted it a clear ‘U’ certificate. According to censorship guidelines which were introduced by colonial administrators and subsequently maintained by the postcolonial state, the letter ‘U’ stands for unrestricted exhibition, allowing all audiences to see the film. As stated earlier, the 1991 censorship guidelines reasserted that only those films which were appropriate for ‘family viewing’ be granted a ‘U’ certificate. Cognizant of these guidelines, the CBFC’s examining committee’s report on *DDLJ* states that ‘Subsequent to the screening of the film and initial reactions, members felt the film is made for the family audience and there is nothing objectionable in the film hence the film may be recommended a clear “U” certificate’ (Central Board, 1995). Since the state certificate assists in classifying films and identifying proper audiences for films, one could argue that the state contributes to the production of
genres. Moreover, the letter rating serves as a marketing device. It appears in advertisements about the films, indicating to habitual audiences the content of the film as well as the state-designated audience. In light of this, one could claim that the mechanisms of censorship not only assist in producing genres, but also that the letter rating itself represents a genre.

While the process of certification deemed *DDLJ* as a film suitable for the ‘entire family’, one wonders what kind of film is considered suitable for the family, specifically the Indian family? To answer this, I’d like to quote the summary of the film provided by the examining committee:

*The film is a family love story. Raj and Simran fall in love when they meet each other in Europe. Baljit father of Simran believes in arranged marriage and wants Simran to marry Kuljeet son of his friend. Simran is heart broken but Raj travels all the way to Punjab from London. As the marriage preparations for Simran and Kuljeet’s wedding begin, Raj enters the family as a stranger’s friend and wins the confidence of all the family members with his friendly behaviour. Finally Baljeet becomes very angry knowing the intention of Raj. However, he agrees at the end to give away his daughter to Raj when he knows that his daughter is really in love with Raj and not Kuljeet. (Central Board, 1995)*

The examining committee members are the first to identify this genre precisely, calling it a ‘family love story’. The appellation is ironic considering that the love story in popular Hindi films generally, *DDLJ* among them, takes place against the wishes of the family. In what way then would this film be a ‘family love story’? If one thinks of *DDLJ* in the context of film production in India in the late 1980s and 1990s, I think the answer becomes clearer. While the love story has always been prominent in Hindi films, there was a palpable shift at this time. The romantic pair moved to the forefront in a way which diminished the role of other characters and other relationships, specifically familial ones.

Unlike most of its contemporaries, *DDLJ* re-establishes the importance of familial relations even as it appears to imagine their transgression. Most obviously, within the story, the family is accorded significance and value. For example, within the narrative, Raj, the hero of the film, refuses to elope with Simran, his lover, despite her many pleadings. He repeatedly tells her that their union needs to be blessed by her family, in particular her father. The family’s prominent position is reinforced by the amount of screen time given to characters who play aunts, uncles, parents, siblings, and grandparents. Finally, the references within *DDLJ* to previous commercial films—in other words, inter-textuality—weave a relation between Bombay cinema present and past, constructing *DDLJ*’s genealogy and in the process producing the cinema as familial. The title of the film is taken from a song in *Chor Machaye Shor!/A Thief Creates a Commotion* (1974), and within the diegesis, the family members play *antakshari* (a collective singing game) which refers to older film songs. The most moving reference to Bombay cinema’s past occurs during the pre-wedding festivities when Baljeet sings
a song to his wife from *Waqt/Time* (1965)—an evocative film about a family which is separated and then reunited. The reference is perhaps made more poignant by the knowledge that the actress who plays Baljeet’s mother in *DDLJ* was the heroine in *Waqt* to whom the song was sung. *DDLJ* is read as a film which is attentive to both the family and the love story. Hence, the appellation family love story.

So far, I have primarily discussed the role the state plays in identifying and producing a genre. I would like to now discuss the ways in which this genre assists in reformulating the relations between the Indian state, Bombay cinema, and the Indian diasporic communities. In order to do so, I’d like to discuss two scenes from *DDLJ*. The first scene that I would like to examine takes place early in the narrative as a postman arrives bearing a letter from India concerning Simran’s engagement. After accepting the letter from the postman, Baljit enthusiastically runs into the kitchen announcing that a letter from his friend in Punjab has arrived. Strains of ‘Ghar Aaaja Pardesi’ (Come home, foreigner) play in the background as Baljit twirls Lajhoo around, telling her to smell the fragrance of Punjab which is enveloped in the letter.\(^{15}\) The dialogue, the music, and Baljit’s excitement indicate that, even though he has lived in London for 20 years, he is still quite attached to ‘India’. For him, ‘India’ is a series of cultural values and traditions largely associated with Punjab.

Baljit, Lajhoo, and Chutki (Simran’s younger sister) gather around Simran in what appears to be a picture-perfect family portrait as she begins to read the letter. Simran’s crisp and clear pronunciation in Hindi establishes that, despite being raised in London, she is literate in India’s national language.\(^{16}\) Her smooth reading falters when she arrives at the section of the letter where Baljit is asked to honor a promise made between the two friends, namely, the marriage of their respective son and daughter, the reproduction of tradition. She ceases to speak Hindi at the moment when the totality of which it is a part—Indian tradition—that threatens to envelop her or more precisely, her desire. It is a traumatic moment. Simran’s voice fades and the camera pans to the left, briefly holding Lajhoo and Simran in a frame. Simran shoots a troubled glance at her mother and hands her the crumpled letter before quickly exiting the living room. Baljit misses this glance because he is positioned to the right of his daughter in such a way that her reaction does not fall within his field of view. The framing suggests that a relation, one of mother and daughter, enables insight; we as privileged spectators are shown this insight and are invited to sympathize with Simran’s predicament.

Blind to his daughter’s state of mind, Baljit is thrilled by the proposal and interprets his daughter’s unwillingness to meet his eyes and her exit not only as consent to the marriage, but also as a sign of modesty. He misreads her refusal to embody the promise, and by extension, tradition, as its very opposite: the extension of tradition, its reproduction. In his view, she
exhibits a ‘proper’ reaction, namely embarrassment, when the topic of marriage is raised in the company of her father. He proudly declares to Lajhoo that, even though Simran has been raised in London, her embarrassed reaction demonstrates that he has been successful in raising a good Indian daughter. Simran’s identity as a ‘good Indian daughter’ is crucial for constituting Baljit as a ‘good Indian father’—and for reproducing the Indian family.

While one consequence of Baljit’s promise to his friend is Simran’s imminent engagement, another is a trip to Europe on which Simran will meet Raj, her dream lover. Simran requests her father to send her on a Eurorail trip with her friends so that she can enjoy their company before departing to India to marry a stranger. On this trip, she encounters Raj who continually harasses and annoys her. We, as privileged spectators, know from a previous song sequence that Raj is her dream lover. We are invited to read Raj’s pranks not as signs of sexual harassment, but as rituals of courtship. One such event takes place when Simran and Raj accidentally miss the train and spend a night in Switzerland. After Simran drinks too much cognac, Raj brings her to a bed and breakfast. Simran wakes up, she notices that she is wearing a man’s shirt—and the camera slowly moves about the room to show us her strewn clothes. Simran’s confusion is heightened when Raj enters the room with a tea-tray and a rose. In a series of tight close-ups, the camera makes Simran’s distress visible as she begs Raj to relate the previous night’s events. He insinuates that they slept together and when she does not believe him, he provides the lipstick marks on his chest as evidence.

Whereas the camera shows us Raj’s suppressed laughter, Simran is not granted this view. Our privileged glimpse not only enables us to read the scenario as yet another prank, but also to see that Simran has retained her ‘honor’, namely, her virginity. Meanwhile, Simran believes that she made those marks and as such, is ‘marked’, i.e. she is no longer a ‘virgin surface’ and is cut off from tradition. When Simran begins to cry, Raj realizes the joke has reached its limit and quickly tells her that he stole the lipstick from her purse and painted his chest and that nothing happened between them the previous night. Through Raj’s confession, tradition is reaffirmed: Simran is still a virgin, which is to say she is still within the scope of tradition. When Simran continues to wail, he pulls her head back and asserts:

Listen to me, Simran—Listen to me. I know what you think about me. You think I’m a no-good, low-down creep, but I’m not a creep. I’m an Indian. I know what an Indian girl’s honor means to her. I would never even imagine doing such a thing to you. I’m telling you the truth—nothing happened last night. It was a joke. (Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge, 2001; my translation)

In this gendered version of Indian cultural values, a woman’s honor is lodged in her body; it is sexual purity that constitutes her as an Indian
woman. And an Indian man is one who recognizes the importance of sexual purity. Raj’s explanation reinforces an old patriarchal association between sexuality, honor, and the female body. This association is fueled by both Simran’s initial distress and her subsequent relief upon hearing Raj’s explanation. Embracing Raj, she tells him, ‘Don’t ever joke like that—you don’t know what I would have done’ (Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge, 2001). Later in the film, Raj gains access to Simran’s family and her future in-laws by posing as a non-resident Indian (NRI) who wishes to open a Stroh’s beer factory in Punjab. As Mankekar notes, DDLJ re-establishes the male hero as an agent by constructing him as a NRI investor as well as the guardian of an Indian woman’s sexual purity and by extension, the virtue of the nation (Mankekar, 1999: 750–1).

The construction of the NRI as a potential investor, the assertion of Indian national identity, the identification of particular cultural values as Indian, the expression of a commitment to those values as shown in films like DDLJ overlap with the Indian state’s political, cultural, and economic agendas, which seeks to attract the investments of non-resident Indians and to constitute new national subjects. In the Union Budget speech given a month after film received industry status, Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha stated:

I believe NRIs constitute a huge, untapped potential for India’s development. I propose the following steps to encourage NRIs to participate in the development of their country of origin: (purchase shares, easier procedures, buy bonds, bank in India—)I have one more significant announcement to make for the NRIs. The Government has decided to draw up a scheme for issuance of a Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) Card for those living abroad and having foreign passports. The PIO Card, would be extended to persons of Indian Origin settled in countries to be specified by government would besides introducing a visa-free regime, also confer some special economic, educational, financial, and cultural benefits. The details are being worked out.20

I would argue that that cinema is central to forging this new relationship with non-resident Indians. It is through cinema that the state (re)imagines the nation, one which is not bound by territory—a nation which includes the Indian diasporic communities.

I believe that this new relationship between Bombay cinema and the Indian state is illuminated by a quip made by Sinha after granting the film industry a series of concessions: ‘I hope these concessions combined with what I have already done on the indirect tax side will reassure the entertainment industry that Hum Saath Saath Hain [We Are United] . . .’ (Business Line, 2000b). Sinha’s use of the title of a big-budget Bombay ‘family’ film to characterize the relationship between Bombay cinema and Indian state was by no means insignificant. It not only highlighted the twin goals of the Bhartiya Janata Party (the Hindu Nationalist Party in power at the time), namely, to globalize but in the Indian way, but also pointed to the patriarchal alliance between the state and Bombay cinema. While
the Congress-led government, which came to power in 2004, has installed its own representatives at key cultural institutions, it has not changed the BJP’s policies towards the film industry, e.g. it has not rescinded industry status for film. Furthermore, it has recently announced that it will soon offer dual citizenship to non-resident Indians; in doing so, it is continuing an initiative formulated by the BJP. Let me end by recalling the nuclear explosion that I referred to at the beginning of this piece. I suggest that the explosion and the recognition of film as an industry are part of the same process, the production of a different kind of state in the era of globalization.

NOTES

I have drawn upon sections of my dissertation (Mehta, 2001) in writing this article. I would like to thank Rajesh Bhaskaran, Anupama Prabhala-Kapse, Latha Varadarajan, and Kamala Visweswaran for their comments.

1. The event, ‘Challenges Before Indian Cinema’, was co-organized by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and the Film Federation of India.

2. After independence, the film industry hoped to participate in the task of nation-building by developing film as an industry. To achieve this goal, it asked the government to recognize it as a legitimate industry and, as such, to grant it the infrastructural and credit support that the economic policy promised for other industries. The ‘developmentalist’ Indian state had no time for such frivolous pleas. It reserved its economic aid for useful projects such as agriculture and heavy industry. It viewed commercial cinema as excess—at best, an entertaining luxury that needed to be heavily taxed and, at worst, a corrupter of morals which needed to be regulated via censorship. For further information on the Bombay film industry and the postcolonial Indian state, see Mehta (2001). For articles on the granting of industry status, see Indian Express (1998a, 1998b, 1998d).

3. See n. 2.

4. Although the statistics indicate that the amount of money supplied by the underworld is quite small, the state, in its efforts to curb illegitimate financing, has focused on the underworld. Various accounts in the media show that the state has cast the ‘underworld’ as the ‘villain’ so that it can play the ‘hero’.

5. Black money and white money are terms used to describe illegitimately and legitimately acquired wealth. This distinction is of course open to debate. It is also important to consider how the terms black and white as ways to distinguish illegitimate and legitimate money (re)produce racist discourses in the context of India.

6. Approximately a month before the BJP government announced its decision to grant industry status to film, the Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi declared that the government was considering proposals which would ‘enable filmmakers to tap institutional sources for finance’, thereby decreasing filmmakers’ dependence on ‘mafia-black’ money. He appealed to ‘the talented and nationalistic sections of the film industry to
support the government in its bid to rid the industry from the clutches of the "mafia". See *Indian Express*, 1998c.

7. The emergence of the term 'Bollywood' in the 1990s indicates a desire to be like Hollywood, as a large-scale, if a much less socially and financially legitimate, form, but with similar drives. The goal is to establish a form which is both national and international and which can move into non-national territories with considerable success. For further discussion regarding this term, see Rajadhyaksha, 2003; Prasad, 2003.

8. The more recent guidelines on the IDBI website state that the IDBI will not grant assistance of less than 2 crores (IDBI, 2005).


11. Patricia Uberoi (2001) provides an engaging analysis of *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun*. In her article, she interviews a set of middle/upper-middle class viewers in Delhi to analyze the appeal of this film.

12. The state did institute the Cable Television Networks Rules in 1994, and the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995, in an effort to regulate the influence of cable and satellite programming (Ministry of Information, 1994, 1995).

13. According to an agreement among all the states, films which are national award winners are tax-free.

14. Instead of spending 40 rupees ($1) or more per ticket, one can buy tickets for Rs 9 (25 cents) for stalls, Rs 11 (26 cents) for family circle seats and Rs 13 (27 cents) for balcony seats. At this rate, the film is affordable entertainment for many. (These figures are based upon the exchange rate in 1996.)

15. Punjab is a state in India. Punjabi immigrants were and continue to be important contributors to the Bombay film industry.

16. The question of language is interesting here as Hindi is the official language of India—not of the Punjab, although many Hindu Punjabis after the Partition of India claimed Hindi rather than Punjabi to be their mother tongue. In doing so, they not only distinguished themselves from the Muslim Punjabis but also the Sikh Punjabis. Language in this case was linked to religion: Urdu for Muslims, Hindi for Hindus, and Punjabi for Sikhs.

17. In this scene, Simran at first refuses to drink alcohol and scolds Raj for drinking in front of a woman. Presumably, Indian women are supposed to refrain from consuming alcohol. In commercial films, this is a device for distinguishing the ‘vamp’, the ‘western’ or ‘westernized’ woman, from the ‘Indian’ woman.

18. In a television show about the making of *DDLJ*, the stars of the film, Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol, revealed that this shot had been completed after 20 takes, largely because one or the other would begin laughing when ‘Raj’ pulls down his shirt zipper to show the lipstick marks.

19. *Hindustani* is commonly translated as ‘Indian’. More specifically, the word refers to a person who lives in Hindustan, namely, the place of Hindus.

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