

New Cosmopolitanisms: South Asians in the US

Gita Rajan and Shailja Sharma
Editors

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SOUTH ASIANS IN THE US

Edited by

Gita Rajan and Shailja Sharma

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Bollywood Abroad: South Asian Diasporic Cosmopolitanism and Indian Cinema

JIGNA DESAI

In studying South Asian American cosmopolitanism, attention must be paid to the production, consumption, and impact of the influential cultural medium of film.¹ Cinema, particularly Indian and diasporic films, is central to thinking through pleasure and power and how they impinge on the cosmopolitan constructions of South Asian American subjectivity. Within Indian cinema, Bollywood, Bombay's Hindi language cinema, is not only nationally popular, but is also one of the most important cinemas in the world. It is a global cinema that consciously positions itself against the hegemony of Hollywood. It has been and continues to be an international cinema familiar to viewers from the Middle East to Russia and parts of Africa. More recently, with the transnational migration of South Asians in globalization, Bollywood too, has been reterritorialized with an increasing presence in North America and Europe. As such, many hopes have been pinned on the success of Bollywood as a global cinema for transnational, cosmopolitan, and diasporic viewers. From the showcasing of the film *Devdas* at the Cannes festival and the nomination of the film *Lagaan* for an Oscar award to the opening of Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *Bombay Dreams* in London and New York, and the Golden Globe nomination for best comedy film of Gurinder Chadha's *Bend it Like Beckham*, expectations are high for the diasporic and crossover appeal of Bollywood and diasporic cinema, and attendant productions for cosmopolitan and Western audiences.²

This essay examines South Asian American cosmopolitanism through surveying the ways in which cinema functions to produce and articulate transnational cosmopolitan subjects. It first introduces the central features of Bollywood cinema abroad attending to the location, distribution, and reception of films. It then considers the impact of Bollywood films on diasporic and dominant cultural production. Finally, the essay concludes by focusing on the particular pattern of diasporic consumption of Bollywood films and its relationship to the production of cosmopolitanism within South Asian America. Throughout the essay, I argue that Indian and diasporic cinema contribute in complex ways to South Asian cosmopolitanism. Cinema addresses issues of national belonging and citizenship and correlates media technologies with sexual, class, and community politics. Employing a transnational feminist and queer critique,³ this essay considers how South Asian American cosmopolitanism negotiates a complex and ambivalent location in nation-state and global processes that is due to contradictory relations between capital and racial formations.

Most commercial Indian films are often characterized as unappealing to Eurocentric Western viewers (even to those art house audiences interested in foreign films) because of their content and aesthetic forms that derive from diverse Indian sources including Parsi theater and Hindu performances. These three-hour films often feature a multigenre form that includes elements of comedy, (melo)drama, action, romance, and music that do not fit Western aesthetic expectations; in particular, the melodrama and the elaborate and often extradiegetic (outside of the film's diegesis) song and dance numbers, usually 6–8 per film, often pose difficulties for Western viewers. Other Indian films, such as the work of Satyajit Ray, have been visible in the West through the category of art cinema in the United States, but popular Indian cinema has been seen until recently, for the most part, as kitschy and unrefined. One other factor hampering the crossover success of films is the disdain that many American and Western viewers have for subtitled films. Hybrid and diaspora films in English pose less difficulty to viewers who are unaccustomed and unwilling to read subtitles. Hence, films by diasporic directors such as Gurinder Chadha and Mira Nair with their crossover cosmopolitanism appeal more to Western audiences.

The recent emergence of Bollywood cinema in dominant Western cultures has been made partly possible due to the exposure engendered by the centrality of Indian cinemas to South Asian diasporas. This success hinges

on luring not only first generation South Asian migrants into theaters, but also second and third generation South Asians and non-South Asians⁴ as well. Hence, Bollywood films have sought to appeal to multiple generations through the production of narratives and images that often reflect a diasporic cosmopolitanism. Currently, the largest markets for films outside of South Asia are in the United Kingdom, the Middle East, the United States, Australia, and Canada, all locations with large diasporic populations. The overall popularity of the films has been fostered generally by South Asian diasporic audiences viewing films at home and in theaters. Films, televised serials, and music, in many languages including Hindi, Punjabi, Tamil, and Telegu, have generally not had great access to mainstream networks and have increasingly circulated in diasporas through formal and informal networks. Additionally, diasporic filmmakers have also employed these same networks of distribution. *American Desi*, for example, has had little access to mainstream theaters and has instead played at venues in major metropolitan locations with South Asian communities that regularly feature Bollywood films. On video, *American Desi* was primarily rented and sold (both legal and pirated versions) through the many South Asian video stores distributed throughout the United States and Canada. Cultural products, especially diasporic and Bollywood films, and also videos and DVDs, satellite television, and live performances, greatly contribute to the production of transnational ties as well as ethnic, gender, and class identities.⁵

The multiple effects of Bollywood on South Asian diasporic filmmaking attests to the centrality of Bollywood itself to those in diaspora. One primary example is the frequency with which Bollywood is referred to thematically within diasporic films themselves. I discuss just a few examples of the many films that feature Bollywood elements in their plots, narratives, and aesthetics here. Topically, many diasporic cosmopolitan texts make reference to Indian cinema. *Bollywood Calling* by Nagesh Kukunoor, for example, is a dark and comic take on the Indian film industry. Told from the perspective of a white American actor financially forced to participate in the Indian film industry, it lampoons Bollywood cinema's production process, content, and aesthetics. Displaying neither a Western nor Bollywood cosmopolitanism, the film had difficulty finding an audience to appreciate its parody of the Indian film industry. The hugely popular *Bombay Dreams* (the Andrew Lloyd Webber musical) similarly centers on the Bollywood film industry, but also focuses on the myriad of fantasies it produces in the lives of the rich and

the poor. This extravaganza, in contrast, has proven successful in London's West End and has been released on Broadway as well. The diasporic film *American Desi*, though not focused specifically on the Indian film industry, posits that a familiarity and appreciation of Bollywood is essential to a nonassimilated South Asian American ethnic identity. Within the film's logic, the whitewashed protagonist leaves his courtship of his South Asian American girlfriend in shambles when he demonstrates no familiarity with Bollywood-style romance and a disdain for the narrative and aesthetics of such films. His reconciliation with her hinges on his learning to dance to Bollywood and other Indian music at the college South Asian American college fete. These last two productions attest to the ways in which these texts suggest that Bollywood plays a feature role in not only constructing South Asian and diasporic identities, but also significantly participates in structuring the pleasures and desires of these subjects as well. Additionally, the impact of Bollywood extends beyond the content of films, appearing often in the filmic conventions that are reflected in the aesthetic forms and narrative structures in a variety of films. *Masala* and *Bhaji on the Beach* employ musical sequences, while *Mississippi Masala* and *Fire* feature Bollywood music both as background music as well as part of the narrative structure. *Bollywood/Hollywood* literally and figuratively merges the two cinemas with its psychosocial dialogue accompanying romantic comedy, family drama, and musical numbers.⁶

These hopes of crossover and diasporic appeal result partially from the increasing commercial success of Indian films recently in Britain and North America. A significant minority presence in England, British Asians have propelled Bollywood films into dominant public culture and multiplexes in complicated ways, thus luring not only multiple generations of British Asians, but also white British to the theaters. Films like *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, *Hum Aapke Hai Koun*, *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, *Devdas*, and *Taal* have consistently appeared in the annual list of top twenty most popular foreign-language films in Britain for the last decade. For example, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* was the top grossing foreign language film in 1998, earning almost 1.5 million pounds (Dyja 1999). In 2002, the British Film Institute launched its focus program on South Asian and diasporic films entitled *ImagineAsia* (British Film Institute 2002). This program was designed to boost the visibility and presence of non-Hollywood films in Britain, as well as recognize the significance of South Asian cinemas. Also in 2002, Gurinder Chadha's

film *Bend it Like Beckham* surpassed all expectations at the box office, becoming one of the top grossing British films of the year domestically and internationally (British Film Institute 2004). More recently, Chadha completed her Bollywood-Hollywood film *Bride and Prejudice* that remakes Jane Austen's novel with a hybrid Bollywood musical format.

Quite differently, in the United States, because of the dissimilar migration patterns of South Asians to North America, the visibility of South Asians and popularity of Indian cinema is more muted, but nonetheless present.⁷ The mainstream fascination for Asian films includes an interest, in part, in the aesthetics, forms, and narratives provided by other Asian cinemas (for example, Hong Kong and Taiwanese) that are seen to revitalize Hollywood. In particular, the commercial and critical success of Ang Lee's hybrid *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* has prompted an increasing awareness and interest in alternatives to nonrealist form and content associated with certain Asian cinemas. Similarly, the recent popularity of *Chicago* as well as *Moulin Rouge* suggests that American audiences are receptive to musicals, a key aspect of many Bollywood films. Hence, the popularity of Chadha's films as well as Mira Nair's hybrid *Monsoon Wedding* increased the visibility of South Asians in the American popular imaginary. Additionally, references to Bollywood in films such as *Moulin Rouge*, *The Guru*, and *Ghost World* as well as sampled in music videos by singers such as Missy Elliott, have made Bollywood cinema and music familiar exotica to audiences in North America. But these brief references are a far cry from a public acceptance, appreciation, and hunger for Bollywood films, South Asian American cultures, or South Asians themselves; a quick flash in the pan reference hardly suggests that mainstream Western viewers will readily pick up an Indian film at their nearest blockbuster video store or pay at their local multiplex. However, an increasing audience appears willing to attend art house theaters for these films.

The disjuncture between American Orientalist conceptions of South Asia, especially since 9/11, and the complex realities of South Asian lives is one that is not easily bridged through the appealing idea of the crossover film. Ironically, and perhaps tellingly, the interest in and consumption of specifically *Indian* and South Asian diasporic cinema by American viewers comes most crucially during a resurgence of and proliferation in xenophobia and racism against South Asian, Arab, and Muslim Americans, a time when it seems necessary to distinguish between "good" (model minority) and "bad" (monstrous terrorist) South Asians. This correspondence, I believe, is no

coincidence but a manifestation of the complex racial formation, cultural and state citizenship, and class location of South Asian Americans who are necessary to the transnational economy of the United States, but also simultaneously always rendered expendable or dangerous within dominant national culture. It is this binary that engenders the tensions that undergird South Asian cosmopolitanism. Distinguishing between those “good” and “bad” South Asians relies on ambivalently including and incorporating those docile citizens who can be constructed as model minorities, while rejecting racialized others as terrorist monsters.⁸ This dichotomization occurs partly in relation to differentiating national origins and cultures. The American fascination with South Asianness is a fascination with Indianness specifically, and in particular, with an exotic Hindu middle class Indianness. In contrast, other South Asians, for example, Sikhs, Muslims, Pakistanis, or Sri Lankans, are demonized or made invisible.

In turn, South Asian cosmopolitanism reflects a negotiation with these racial formations, employing differences such as class, religion, generation, and nationality also to distinguish between docile and monstrous citizen-subjects. Most recent diasporic films further a certain form of cosmopolitanism that does not challenge the formation of South Asians as terrorist Others, but forwards a docile and nonthreatening bourgeois subject who complies with a multicultural nationalism and global capitalism, one that is modeled on the good Indian Hindu immigrant subject that can be a citizen-self, rather than Other, of both the West and India. These films provide a purported glimpse of the lives of these intimate strangers that does not dismantle immediately the ease with which a benevolent curiosity about good Indians is coupled with an association of Muslims and others with racial terror.

It is not clear, however, that Eurocentric viewers know quite what to expect from these passing allusions to Bollywood in dominant media; armed with their long-standing Orientalism and their contemporary benevolent compassion, many may be quite surprised by their experiences at the theaters. With many Indian films thematically battling over the binary of tradition and modernity, few Western viewers will be able to reconcile the MTV-inspired choreography, mini-skirted and designer-clad characters, and palatial homes with their colonial and Orientalist images of dust and poverty or chaos and terror.⁹ Expecting images of Indiana Jones, the British Raj, or the Kama Sutra, these viewers may not welcome more recent films such as the

four-hour nationalist *LoC* (*Line of Control*) that focuses on the Indian-Pakistan war over Kashmir, or the romantic comedy set in New York *Kal Ho Naa Ho*, with homophobic comic relief. Those that do may still see them as novelties, culturally different amusements rendered up for their benevolent Eurocentrism. What may appeal and has appealed to audiences has been the historical epic such as *Lagaan* that depicts the battle against colonialism that allows all to cheer for thrashing the British without any sense of immediacy, guilt, or contemporaneity—in other words, a safe critique of colonialism that does not question current imperialism, global capital, or racial formations. Similarly, films that emphasize contemporary ethnic cultural practices as traditional, that is, as signs of quaint cultural differences, have been popular. For example, like *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* delivers an ethnic family and festivities for consumption. Beside historical epics, the crossover success of films like *Monsoon Wedding* and *Bend it Like Beckham* suggest that Western viewers may well be interested in films that confirm their own nostalgia for close-knit and extended families and that support an anthropological gaze of cultural "traditions" linked to their own ideas of cosmopolitanism. Here, cultural differences are offered up within a Eurocentric framework that does not dismantle the ways in which imperialism, global capitalism, and Eurocentrism operate.

In this regard, diasporic films are more likely to be appealing to crossover audiences than Bollywood films. Because South Asian diasporic filmmaking often employs the aesthetics, form, and sensibilities of Indian and Western cinemas, they may be better positioned than Indian filmmakers to create hybrid films for consumption. For example, Mira Nair and Deepa Mehta, whose films are constructed simultaneously for multiple audiences, pursue the possibility of maximum exposure within India for their films, attempting to simultaneously locate them within North American national cinemas as well as in relation Indian cinemas. Nair, for example, forwarded *Monsoon Wedding* as India's nominee for Best Foreign Film for the US Academy Awards; the film, however, lost the nomination to *Lagaan*. Like *Fire*, *Monsoon Wedding*'s self-identified bid as an Indian film suggests the possibilities of films with complex locations in transnational public spheres and specifically in the formation of new cosmopolitan cinemas. In the examples above, at times, Bollywood and Indian cinemas can be seen as providing an oppositional aesthetic to that of Hollywood to diasporic filmmakers; consequently, aesthetic strategies as well as production modes are frequently

employed in order to render the complex historical and social conditions that produce migratory cultures. Therefore, references to Bollywood and Indian cinematic forms and aesthetics signify not only alternatives to dominant Western cinematic practices, but also a self-reflective claim to the cinematic apparatus itself in the name of the non-Western. However, this is not to suggest that diasporic films are embraced and easily folded into Indian cinemas and national public cultures; diasporic films may share a contested relationship with Bollywood as well as with Hollywood, as is the case with *Fire*.

The most recent attempts at this crossover are the films of Gurinder Chadha. *Bend it Like Beckham* has done well in Britain and the United States. More recently, her *Bride and Prejudice* produces its own understanding of cosmopolitanism as hybridity by purporting to marry Hollywood and Bollywood, claiming Jane Austen as a "Punjabi girl in a previous life" (Bushby 2003). In the selection of *Pride and Prejudice* as its subject, Chadha simultaneously reifies the notion of British national cinema as tied to British literature (frequently to canonical figures such as Shakespeare and Austen) and rewrites the British canon via Bollywood. In doing so, she is able to rely on residual and emergent notions of a national British cinema (Austen and Bollywood) within a British context, as well as market this hybridity for a South Asian cosmopolitanism within the American context. The film's preview emphasizes that the shooting of the film occurred on three continents and brings together various casts in its use of Bollywood stars such as Aishwarya Rai and Anupam Kher, diasporic actors such as Naveen Andrews, and Hollywood actors such as Martin Henderson to reflect a "global point of view." Though British films, Chadha's two latest films savvily include the United States in ways that offer US audiences a point of identification with the films: *Bend it Like Beckham* ends with the realization of the young women's dreams to play soccer in America, and in *Bride and Prejudice* Darcy becomes a wealthy American. Articulating more clearly that it is the visibility of South Asian cosmopolitanism in America that matters, Chadha states, "My intention with this film is to introduce Bollywood cinema with a British twist to all the towns and cities and the heart of people across America" ("*Bride and Prejudice*" 2003). It is this kind of prudence and calculation that has encouraged Miramax Films to prepurchase the North American and Latin American distribution rights to the film and to release it as a major, rather than as an art house, film.

However, while Chadha is well poised to make a popular and cosmopolitan Bollywood film, it is not clear that it will be perceived as such to all audiences or will be without contestation. During the recent shooting of the film in Amritsar, two Hindu nationalist groups, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal, deemed the film offensive and vulgar, calling for the ceasing of the shoot and the ban of the film by the censor board (Lalwani 2004). This scenario is a familiar and repeated one in which diasporic cosmopolitan filmmakers like Chadha, Nair, and Mehta have been accused by Hindu nationalists of violating the standards and values of "Indian" culture. Interestingly, Chadha's response to such charges is her claim that she wishes to bring Bollywood and its stars (including Aishwarya Rai) to mainstream audiences; here, this must be read as Western audiences. It seems that diasporic films like *Fire* and *Bride and Prejudice* rely on particular notions of South Asian cosmopolitanism that align themselves with a Western cosmopolitan consumption and sensibility and conflicts with dominant South Asian nationalisms. As I argue elsewhere, diasporic cosmopolitan cultural formations and identifications are often contested and challenged by those South Asians who have their own investments in claims to the nation, modernity, and representing cultural difference.¹⁰ Hence, diasporic and Bollywood films compete to forward South Asian cosmopolitanisms, characterized by their representations of cultural difference that do not dismantle Eurocentrism, to Western audiences.

The Indian film industry produces a variety of films appealing to multiple and different audiences. Frequently, different films are popular within India with different audiences, and often, different films are popular in India than in the diasporas. For example, *Gadar*, an anti-Pakistani and anti-Muslim film, was immensely popular in India breaking many box-office records, while its patriotic narrative seemed of less interest to many diasporic and cosmopolitan viewers (not necessarily because they are not anti-Muslim). This lack of popularity may be in part due to the significance of generation to the diasporic consumption of Bollywood films as many second generation viewers found its historical theme of Partition not only divisive in terms of imagining South Asian *American* communities, but also of little interest in their cosmopolitan understandings of Indian culture and values that are presented most often in the genre of romance and family films and less relevant to their contemporary understandings of terrorism and Muslims.

In order to accommodate regional and geographic differences, the Hindi film industry distributes films based on a territory model that divides India into six major territories with the overseas market (primarily the United States and the United Kingdom) counting as a seventh territory. Generally, by an advantageous currency rate more than by number of viewers, the significance of this seventh territory fluctuates with certain types of films (that is, romances and family dramas) doing well abroad. Hence, the Indian film industry within global capitalism and the neoliberal nation-state is characterized by flexibility in its ability to target different viewers and audiences by making and circulating a wide range of films. However, this is not to suggest that region, location, or territory are the only significant factors in explaining differentiated consumption and reception—gender, class, and religion, for example, are also salient. As I argue below, class and cosmopolitanism appreciably influence film production and reception as well.

By the mid 1990s, the Indian film industry was beginning to seriously attend to the presence of diasporas not only in the accounting ledgers, but also in the reformulated national imaginary. Until then, Bollywood films frequently employed the West (for example, Switzerland) as beautiful and exotic foreign backdrops documenting and displaying the production costs of the films as well as promoting a reverse exotic tourism of the metropolises; but seldom were the films concerned with the subjectivities, experiences, or oppressions of those who lived elsewhere. Occasionally, South Asians abroad were depicted as sophisticated and cosmopolitan modern citizens of the world—ones who could appreciatively and comfortably travel through Europe and America, but return safely home to live as modern globalized Indian citizens. At other times, when diasporic characters appeared, it was often as foils to the “heroic” non-Westernized protagonists. They often represented the dangers of Westernization that occur through migration from the homeland. These earlier films featured characters who lost their connections to India, “traditions,” and family simply by their presence in the decadent West. Thus, South Asians in diaspora were often depicted as immoral, corrupted, and unchaste, that is as Westernized in films such as *Purab aur Paschim*.

In the last decade, the Indian nation-state has changed its economic protectionist policies in response to globalization processes, leading to increased privatization and the presence of multinational corporations. During the 1990s, acting in the interests of global capital and the restructuring

of the neoliberal nation-state, the Indian state furthered deregulation and privatization policies. With increasing national debt, India has increasingly turned to its diasporas as reterritorialized national “citizens” (its Non Resident Indians or NRIs) with capital to send remittances and investments. These capital-carrying Non-Resident Indians, usually located in Europe, North America, and Australia, are courted members of the diaspora, unlike those other transnational past or present migrants (for example Middle Eastern guest workers or Caribbean ancestors of indentured servants), who carry little economic or political clout. Further policies encouraging foreign investment through incentive programs, many of which were targeted to NRIs, also emerged. NRIs, thus, were increasingly positioned as significant to the geopolitical and economic stability of India and were wooed to invest in the private and public sphere. In exchange, new categories of citizenship and affiliation were proposed only for those deemed desirable reterritorialized Indian migrants (those with capital) to mark the national belonging represented by NRI participation in the political and economic realms.¹¹

Cultural narratives and identities attesting to such connections were fostered by state policies and popular discourses including those present in Bollywood cinema.¹² In its recent discourses about dual citizenship, the state imagines and constructs diasporas, constituting India as the spiritual home for the fragmented and reterritorialized splinter of the desired imagined nation living abroad. These discourses portray the nation-state as able to negotiate these distant but powerful transnational and cosmopolitan communities located primarily in the West by attempting to (re)incorporate them into the fold of its cultural imaginary, often employing the trope of the global family in its discourses. Thus diasporas are constituted by the nation, not so much as outsiders to Indian culture, but inversely, as insiders removed and reterritorialized as NRIs. NRIs appear here central to the construction of national identity due to the import of transnational economic and cultural capital in favor of the state. Moreover, this potential capital investment engenders popular discourses that herald the NRI often through the conception, production, and distribution of Indian films.

Although cosmopolitanism may imply a lack of national affiliation, within Bollywood cinema, frequently the reterritorialized national subject is sutured to the homeland nation-state through the gendered and sexualized cultural logics of cosmopolitan transnationality mobilized in the trope of the family. Specifically, national desires become eroticized and framed within the

heteronormative romance that must conform to the needs of the family. Subhash Ghai and Aditya Chopra, in particular, have been influential in producing films that reflect these kinds of narratives. Ghai's diasporic "trilogy" *Pardes*, *Taal*, and *Yaadein* as well as Chopra's *Mohabbatein*, *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, and *Mujhse Dosti Karoge* have focused on cosmopolitan Indians abroad. Ghai's proclamation that his trilogy was made for Indians abroad did not ensure its popularity as films such as *Taal* did well, while *Yaadein* (*Cherished Memories*) failed to spark much interest after its opening week. Thematically and ideologically, the films are similar in their evocation of remaining Indian while abroad. As I mentioned earlier, certain actors, genres, narratives, and aesthetics are more popular in the overseas market. In particular, in suggesting that the trope of marriage and family is central to diasporic and national identities, I am consequently forwarding that the genre of the romantic musical is also, therefore, the most popular and influential.¹³ As I discuss below, both romance and family are significant to configurations of cosmopolitanism and "Indianness."¹⁴

Pardes illustrates the proper suture of homeland and cosmopolitan migrant through its dichotomous depiction of the good NRI versus bad NRI hero. The rich American playboy Rajiv is undeservedly betrothed to Ganga (named after the Hindu sacred river Ganges in India) the sweet innocent homeland heroine who sings "I Love My India" upon arrival to the United States to convert him from his corrupt ways. His drinking and carousing prove him unworthy of the homeland heroine who is saved from his clutches by his poorer, but non-Westernized, fatherless musician friend Arjun (played by Bollywood megastar Shahrukh Khan). The film suggests in quite clear terms that it is possible to remain Indian in America by maintaining Indian values in the face of Westernization (that is, drinking alcohol, not respecting family and marriage, and being sexually active). It is Arjun's cosmopolitanism (not via political patriotism, but rather cultural nationalism) as opposed to Rajiv's wealthy Westernization that is forwarded by the film. Interestingly, in Ghai's trilogy, it is the super-wealthy NRIs, rather than the modest middle class that most often lose their path in maintaining their "Indianness," as here Westernization is equated with a selfish capitalism, one that seemingly rejects emotional and financial investment in the homeland. For example in *Pardes*, the contrast between Rajiv and Arjun is emphasized through the corruption of wealthy Rajiv by the consumption of alcohol, gambling, and womanizing, all of which accompany a disregard for Ganga and India. In both *Yaadein* and

Taal, this theme of elite versus bourgeois cosmopolitanism is repeated as the elite place the consolidation of capital and bloodlines ahead of the bourgeois values of the individual, family, and community. *Taal*, in fact, demonstrates that the wholesome Indian woman of modest means can become wealthy, cosmopolitan, and well traveled while still remaining Indian; while, the proper male NRI may prove himself by being well versed in Sanskrit and his appreciation of rural Indian beauties. Moreover, as I discuss later, in all of these films, the declaration and performance of “Indianness” does not correspond to the older first generation in the films; most frequently, it is the heroes and heroines themselves as young migrants that espouse and are associated with “Indianness.” These films suggest that a further examination of the complex nexus of generation, gender, class, and migration within South Asian cosmopolitanism is required.

Like Ghai’s trilogy, other recent films such as *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, *Kal Ho Naa Ho*, and *Khahi Khushi Khahie Gham* all predominantly feature NRI characters that remain “Indian at heart” and often Western in wealth to render their precarious locations in relation to the nation-state and global capitalism. However, in contrast to Ghai’s films, several of these films specifically highlight the Western designer clothing, palatial dwellings, and expensive sports cars of the cosmopolitan characters and their high consumerism. Thus, some suggest that it is possible to be in the West, be wealthy, and be Indian—a narrative that clearly complicates the previously described narratives about class and cosmopolitanism; cultural difference is nonthreatening and benign; moreover, it does not dismantle or disrupt Eurocentric, imperialist, and capitalist processes. In these films, Indianness is now determined less by geopolitical location *or* wealth than by the performance (“maintenance”) of religio-cultural and “traditional Indian values” that encapsulate the “real India.” It is no surprise that these films have proven more popular than those that implicate wealth as already corrupt and Western.

In contrast to Ghai’s trilogy, one of the most popular Bollywood films of the nineties, *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (*The Lover Takes a Bride*), opens with Indian and diasporic cinema actor Amrish Puri feeding pigeons in London, gazing into the distance, nostalgic for the mustard fields and untainted culture of Punjab. Focused on the lives of NRIs, the film was significant in its depiction of the shifting relationship between the diaspora and the homeland in the light of globalization processes including the political and economic neo-liberalization in India. Constructing the ideal NRI

subjects *DDLJ* counterposes the diasporic heroine (Simran played by popular superstar actress Kajol) and the cosmopolitan hero (Raj played by Shahrukh Khan) with the reterritorialized national subject of the pained patriarch who reminisces simultaneously about the fertile land and maidens of home. The film opens with Baldev comparing the search for sustenance by the homeless pigeons with his own experiences of migration; his monologue articulates his alienation in and from a land to which he is chained for his daily bread. Here “home” is produced not only as a territory, community, nation-state, and place (rural and pastoral Punjab as metonym of India), but also as a structure of feeling associated with a particular time for the older noncosmopolitan generation. Meanwhile, the balm for this suffering is the desire and dream to return to India, especially his Punjabi village. The contrast between London and the Punjabi village visually encapsulates an entire host of implicit comparisons within the film for this noncosmopolitan male character. More importantly, while the visual images foreground the object of nostalgia, Punjab, the film’s dialogue prioritizes the subject of nostalgia—Baldev, who experiences nostalgia as a response to displacement and disenfranchisement.

In *DDLJ*, it is the noncosmopolitan sojourning patriarch who longs for the homeland and finds the West threatening in terms of contamination and corruption; in contrast, for most of the other characters, diaspora is home. Simran, as well as her sister and mother, dance happily to the radio until the father arrives home; similarly, Raj, the son of a wealthy father, appears quite comfortable in Britain, playing rugby, bowling, and riding his motorcycle. Hence, the film configures the displaced patriarch as emasculated and disempowered by race and class in the postcolonial metropolis. His loss of home is a consequence not only of displacement, but also of the resultant destabilization of the patriarchal and heteronormative formulation of family. In particular the daughters, symbolic of tradition within the national imaginary, become the objects of heteropatriarchal surveillance and law manifested in the institution of marriage and conducted as an exchange with homeland patriarchy. Not surprisingly, Simran and her sister do not express or experience this kind of nostalgia. Nevertheless, it is Baldev’s desire that Simran marry his friend’s son Kuljeet in India. Kuljeet, the willing groom turns out to be scheming and opportunistic, with a passion that is stronger for settling abroad than it is for Simran.

The true modern Indian proves to be the cosmopolitan and wealthy British Asian Raj, who is both honorable and loyal. Raj is shown to be more than

capable of maintaining his “Indian values and culture,” although wealthy and residing abroad; and, he refuses to elope with Simran, demanding instead that they stay and win the approval and blessings of the father. In contrast to both Kuljeet and Baldev, it is Raj (and his father) who demonstrates South Asian cosmopolitanism as being compatible with Indian cultural nationalism. Their extreme wealth, which previously might have signaled Westernization and corruption, here is shown to be compatible with hybrid diasporic Indianness; in fact, his modern wealthy NRI status is what defines him as the perfect Indian—the NRI that is desired by the neoliberal and deterritorialized nation-state. In the end, Baldev reluctantly acquiesces to the union and consequently remains in Punjab with his wife and younger daughter, having returned to the desired homeland, while Simran, Raj, and his father head “home” to England. Although aggressively equating Indianness with the support and replication of patriarchy, the film simultaneously decouples this Indianness from the specific territory of the Indian nation-state and from its previous association with only the middle class; the wealthy but Indian-identified Raj is the new king of the Indian nation-state wrestling with global capitalism and migration. The popularity of this film in particular can be at least in part contributed to its willingness to combine these two factors in producing a cosmopolitanism that nevertheless mitigates transnationality through gender and generation.

Like *DDLJ*, films by Karan Johar—*Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, *Kal Ho Naa Ho*, and *Kabhi Kushi Kabhie Gham* (*K3G*)—are also seen to be made primarily with the overseas market in mind, producing narratives on cosmopolitanism focused on issues of family, marriage, and cultural values. For example in *K3G*, like *Mohabbatein*, Amitabh Bachchan (the most popular Indian performer ever) as the wealthy father is shown to be “traditional,” demonstrating elitist noncosmopolitan values: he disapproves of his son’s selection of a fiancée as she is not of the elite class. The son, played by Shahrukh Khan, rights wrongs and voices the modern cosmopolitan challenge to these anachronistic notions of tradition, but not before being forced to leave his familial home for England. Similarly, in Nikhil Advani’s *Kal Ho Naa Ho*, it is the younger generation, played again by Shahrukh Khan, who preaches and teaches the older generation, as well as the young lovers, how to be happy and harmonious. Additionally, here too, affluence is acceptable and necessary—the younger actor Saif Ali Khan plays a prosperous cosmopolitan Gujarati, Rohit, from a somewhat provincial family—the desired modern NRI man within the nation-state’s imaginary. In both of these films,

generation correlates strongly with concepts of modernity, cosmopolitanism, and Indian culture, ensuring their popularity with second generation viewers and ensuring a vision of South Asian Americans as model minority citizens, ones who embrace American empire and capital along with residency, but nevertheless hold some affiliation with the homeland nation-state.

However, in the latter film, one can also read against the grain and see the ways in which material wealth accumulated through insertion into global capitalism and imperialist racialization processes also produces anxiety, displacement, and unhappiness. In the film, the heroine Naina (played by Preity Zinta) and her family suffer economically upon the death of her father; it is only with the help of Aman (Shahrukh Khan) that the family's failing diner is ethnicized, indigenized, and converted to a successful hip Indian restaurant. However, the film can be seen to do more than just celebrate wealth—it seems to indicate the ambivalent position of South Asian Americans within racist economic structures of transnational capital. Although the now-Indian restaurant indicates the possibility of remaining Indian and being profitable, it also attenuates that success, in this case, is based on the ambivalent manufacturing and commodification of ethnic cultural difference in the guise of cosmopolitanism, one in which Indianness may be about performativity and ambivalent relations to capital and nation-states. Furthermore, the film toys with the anxiety associated with the failure of the bourgeois family by employing the “misrecognition” of the relationship between Rohit and Aman as homosexual as a form of comic relief. Here the anxiety is that heteronormativity itself is threatened and displaced. *Kal Ho Naa Ho*, like, the other films, strives to soothe this alienation and dis-Orientation through narratives of heteronormative romance and family. The film, set in a nonthreatening post 9/11 New York, evokes the event and its consequences only by its setting with no reference to it in the narrative or images. But, this Bollywood film with its Muslim actors cannot go as far to engage with broader issues of US foreign policy, imperialism, racial formations, and terrorizing of Muslims, instead, the specter of this challenge to benevolent cultural difference remains invisible and unspoken in the film. The film soothes these larger anxieties by sublimating them onto the family. It should, therefore, be of no surprise that the comforting *Kal Ho Naa Ho* has achieved strong economic and popular success in both the United States and the United Kingdom, collecting nearly \$5million dollars through box office receipts and video/DVD sales (Nag 2004).

To Indian viewers, Bollywood films are presumed to provide comfort or familiarity as emblems of national homeland culture to homogenous NRI audiences. These films are seen to emphasize an idealized India, and in particular an idealized “traditional” Indian family and culture, but again one that can be reterritorialized. As one critical reviewer writes:

In *K3G* India doesn't exist. What exists is a strange mutant, a beautiful, savagely dumb, ritual-driven wasteland where rich people sing adrenaline-thumping bhajans and, in times of stress, the national anthem. It is also a chilling film. Chilling because here is India, Hinduism, Jana Gana Mana made into glossy laughable commodities to be purchased for a high price. The film is designed to make NRIs thankful that the Old Country is as beautiful, as backward and as resoundingly traditional as he wants it to be In the NRI cultural imagination, India must remain a vast stretch of villages, fakirs, sadhus and cool spirituality. The recognizably modern, the sensible, the commonsensical or indeed the ordinary business of life merits no attention because such features are simply not what the NRI would like to remember At the risk of sounding sensationalist, Indian culture itself stands in danger of being colonized by NRIs, precisely because of their power and success The NRI doesn't vote in India, he [sic] doesn't pay taxes in India, he will never do military service here, yet he wants to create a nostalgic dream world through sponsorship of a certain kind of culture. When you don't actually live in the country to which you profess to belong, then you naturally begin to create an imagined homeland which is designed only to suit your own needs rather than be true to the country which you left behind. (Ghose 2001)¹⁵

In her critique of the film, Ghose raises questions about the material impact of overseas consumption of Indian films. She lambasts, in particular, the nostalgia that she identifies as the underpinning mechanism of NRI media consumption and the lack of political consequences and material responsibilities of the *male* NRIs. This nostalgia, she argues, has led diasporic viewers to hijack Bollywood from its rightful place as a national cinema. Additionally, Ghose suggests that not only does the NRI imagine India, but that the masculine gendered NRI with cultural and economic capital who does so produces material repercussions that are also damaging to the *actual* citizens of the nation-state. Ghose's critique implies that NRIs have sequestered the film industry from its properly national moorings in service of its own fantasies. These fantasies consist of Hindu-normative paeans to the family as

nation and are rampant in many films, not just *K3G*. Moreover, these imaginings, suggests Ghose, are removed from any material, political, or ethical responsibility. The NRI viewer here watches Bollywood films in order to produce an idealized India that does not satisfy the needs of the country “left behind” as is appropriate to a national cinema.

There does seem to be an increasing consideration of the seventh territory of the Indian film industry—the overseas market in the United Kingdom and the United States. However, not all the narratives forward paeans to Orientalist fantasies as Ghose suggests. Ghose attributes all of the agency and power within these dynamic processes to diasporic subjects. One may contest this construction in many ways, including with consideration that the nation-state itself may be seen to be involved in interpellating diasporic subjects as NRIs. In fact, one may see the films as forwarding the notion of India as home as a form of cultural capital in which diasporic affiliation is strengthened in relation to economic, political, and cultural interests of the homeland nation-state by seeking increased transnational activities in processes such as remittance, investment, outsourcing, support of *Hindutva*, and marriage arrangements.

Although suggesting that Hindi films are seen as providing narratives of desire and fantasy, Ghose also implies that they are satisfying narratives of a homogenous group of NRIs, not a diverse range of cosmopolitan diasporic viewers. These viewers, however, are assumed to be passive and nostalgic consumers of Bollywood cinema and televised serials who homogeneously desire one vision of India, one that is Orientalist, anachronistic, and fossilized. Most viewers are seen to consume the films as prefabricated transnational commodities providing comforting and familiar emblems of normative social values neatly wrapped in packages of glossy celluloid. The film is designed to make NRIs tearful, but it is also designed to encourage the consumption and conflation of family and capitalism in India for the cosmopolitan bourgeoisie. What needs to be registered here is that the diaspora and the India are both heterogeneous so that a film is made as much an audience specified by generation, religion, and class as by geographic location. Furthermore, it is significant to note that nostalgia and consumption are not the sole property of diasporic viewers. The popularity of films like *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* (HAHK) attests to the power of nostalgia and desire of viewers within India as well.¹⁶ The film manufactures nostalgia for the joint and extended family for Indian and diasporic viewers alike. In other words,

it is not only for the United States and the diasporas that nostalgic Hindu families are constructed on the screen in order to negotiate tradition and modernity within the national imaginary. The popularity of this film (one of the all-time top grossing box office hits in India) attests to the nostalgia that underlies many of these films that are not purportedly targeted particularly to diasporic audiences. Furthermore, it seems that the cosmopolitanism of many of these films appeals to both Indian and diasporic viewers in complex ways.

Finally, we may want to read the films in ways that suggest that heterosexual narrative closure regarding romance and family is always inadequate; additionally we may need to consider that it is anxiety and ambivalence that draws viewers to the films. *Kal Ho Naa Ho* provides one indication that South Asian/American cosmopolitanism is deeply rooted in ambivalence, an ambivalence that reflects an imbricated and unsatisfying relation to imperialism, modernity, globalization, racialization, citizenship, and migration. Although South Asians in South Asia and abroad are located differently, they both employ certain notions of cosmopolitanism to ease their uneasy locations within contemporary geopolitics. Those who have migrated to the economic North have contradictory and negotiated relations with the nation-state, capitalism, and imperialism that appear to be soothed with narratives of cultural difference couched in terms of gender, sexuality, and family. South Asians find themselves in an embattled position in which postcolonial migration and residence in the United States after 9/11 creates contradictory and complex positions in these shifting relations of power, but neither are simple narratives of belonging to the homeland sufficient to negate or neutralize these anxieties and displacements. If this is the case, we may want to pay closer attention to the contradictions that appear in cinematic narratives and representations of affect, to ascertain more fully how cosmopolitanism is employed to imagine and negotiate this difficult position in terms of global capitalism, as well as competing and estranging nationalisms, in the heart of the beast.

Notes

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essay. I dedicate this essay to my sister Seema Desai and my son, Rohan Desai-Hunt. May you both transform the present with a vision of a different future.

1. In relation to film, research by Marie Gillespie (1995) and more recently by Rajinder Dudrah (2003) examines the consumption and viewing practices of British South Asians. Similarly, scholarship by Purnima Mankekar (1999) has probed the general viewing practices of Indian audiences of Indian television serials. Mankekar's scholarship, like that of research on Indian cinemas, focuses on the function of media in a national context, seeking to understand the links between nationalism, cultural reception, and subjectivity. This type of analysis has barely begun to be considered in the case of South Asian Americans and their consumption of Indian cinemas.

2. Many discussions of "audience" are problematic as they rely on assumptions of clear boundaries and shared viewing experience based on essentialist notions of subjects as viewers. Here, my discussion of audience allows for viewers with different pleasures, interests, and interpretations in its definition.

3. I elaborate the specificities of a transnational feminist and queer critique in *Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film* (Desai 2004). To briefly summarize, a transnational feminist and queer critique integrates a critique of globalization (global capitalism and empire), nationalisms, and the various normativities (including heteropatriarchy and Hindu-normativity) that support and further them.

4. Even during the early years of Indian independence that saw the formation of Indian cinema as primarily a national cinema, Indian cinema was a popular non-Western cinema and circulated to places such as Russia, China, and East Africa. With the exception of Satyajit Ray's work, Indian's popular cinema has remained invisible to Western eyes. The last two to three decades have witnessed an increased global consumption of Indian films in and out of the diaspora. Popular films, exchanged as part of world communications, foster economic, cultural, and social ties between the Indian homeland and its diasporas.

5. See Rajinder Dudrah's essay "Zee TV—Europe and the Construction of a Pan-European South Asian Identity" (2002) for a similar argument.

6. Also, there is crossover in terms of performers: Shashi Kapoor, Zohra Seghal, Om Puri, and Shabana Azmi are all actors who have appeared in Indian and diasporic productions.

7. South Asian migration and settlement patterns to Britain differ greatly from the American due to the specific shared history of colonialism. South Asians of many different classes, religions, and nationalities, not only from the Indian

subcontinent, but also from Africa and the Caribbean, as members of the Commonwealth, have migrated to and greatly impacted the metropolises. While South Asians were present in the United States throughout the twentieth century, if not earlier, it is the migration after 1965 that has slowly made South Asians visible in dominant national cultures. Smaller in number than their British counterparts, South Asian Americans remain on the margin of the national imaginary. The first wave of South Asian migration after 1965 to the US also consisted of many professional and middle class immigrants. Hence, South Asian Americans have high median incomes compared to their British counterparts.

8. See Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai's (2002) "Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots" for an elaboration of the conflation of monster and terrorist.

9. One would expect that anti-Pakistani and anti-Muslim Indian films such as *Gadar* would actually resonate with American audiences, but this has not yet proved to be the case, partly, one can speculate, due to the provincial unfamiliarity of most Americans with the historical and political tensions between India and Pakistan.

10. See *Beyond Bollywood* (2004) for further discussion of these tensions and relations of power.

11. More recently, India has been careful to suggest that it is interested in making accessible citizenship for all those who would be interested in and eligible for dual citizenship based on the policies of the host countries.

12. This project began as a counterpoint to my previous work in which I analyze constructions of diaspora and homeland in South Asian diasporic cinema. I became interested in the increasing popularity and impact of Indian cinemas on diasporic communities and identities. Moreover, during this time, I began to note a shift so that the Indian diaspora was also being represented in Indian cinema and became interested in the construction of diaspora by the homeland.

13. One significant aspect of the films is their production and reformulation of religious practices and identities. It is important to note that for many viewers, the films function pedagogically in establishing, often, hegemonic interpretations of South Asian religions. That South Asian American cosmopolitanism does not promote itself as secular is remarkable in, and of itself. An understanding of the ways in which these films participate in forwarding religion as part of this cosmopolitanism is salient and requires further elaboration elsewhere.

14. While I do not specifically discuss the importance of music to this genre in this essay, I argue that a study of the consumption of Indian cinema cannot be decoupled from the consumption of music. My own research with second

generation South Asian American youth suggests that music and dance play salient roles in the formation of South Asian American social identities and communities.

15. "E-mail Nationalism: Does India exist only in the emigre's imagination?" (Ghose 2001)

16. See Patricial Uberoi's (2001) study of *HAHK*.

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