

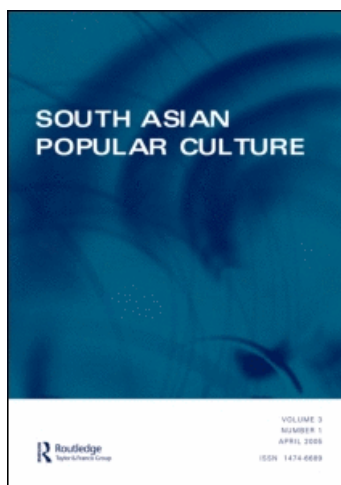
This article was downloaded by: [Joshi, Priya]

On: 5 November 2010

Access details: Access Details: [subscription number 929143337]

Publisher Routledge

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South Asian Popular Culture

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713689797>

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Online publication date: 05 November 2010

To cite this Article Joshi, Priya(2010) 'Bollylite in America', South Asian Popular Culture, 8: 3, 245 — 259

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/14746689.2010.501554

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14746689.2010.501554>

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Bollylite in America

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Slumdog Millionaire's success in the US invites a broader question: have the film's many Bollywood flourishes and references created a wider appetite for its 'ancestors' from Bollywood? In addressing the question of Bombay cinema's penetration into the US mainstream, the paper argues that the germane issue is not the influx of Bombay cinema *en masse* into America's screens but rather the *specific* forms from Bombay that have captured the interest of US audiences. This form is such a departure from the internal conventions of Bollywood that it is more properly understood as Bollywood Lite, or Bollylite. Bollylite pillages formal characteristics from Bollywood while shearing much of that cinema's fabled social substance and political edge. Thus lightened, Bollylite travels, though with a remarkably limited commercial and critical half-life. Observing Bollylite's fortunes and the material conditions that produce it, the paper examines Bollylite films that have enjoyed successful distribution in the US market, most notably Karan Johar's 2001 hit, *K3G*. The conclusion contrasts the narrative logics separating Bollywood from Bollylite and offers remarks about their respective futures.

Eight Oscars, seven BAFTAs, five Critics' Choice, and four Golden Globes: *Slumdog Millionaire*'s (2008) landslide victory in just about every international film award competition seems to echo a lesson from the year's triumphant Obama playbook: yes, Jamal can; yes, India can; even maybe, yes, Bollywood can. While Danny Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire* borrows vividly from the British docu-realist tradition, it is in equal part an homage to popular Hindi cinema of the 1970s in the period when that cinema was beginning to be named Bollywood.¹ Thus, the first question Jamal is asked in the quiz show is the name of the actor who starred in the 1973 blockbuster, *Zanjeer*. Jamal knows the answer, of course, just like most Indians of a certain age would, regardless of their class or social standing. Yet, the real question is not *who* played the angry young man in *Zanjeer* but *why* that figure continues to be relevant in the India of the 1990s and beyond which is when Jamal, probably about five years old, dives through shit to get Amitabh Bachchan's autograph when the god himself descends from the firmament in his helicopter. Jamal's devotion to a screen idol well past his prime is of a piece with the ecstatic, excessive response that certain blockbusters from Bombay enjoy, not just among slum-dwellers like Jamal in that coastal city or amongst most other cinemagoers in India, but among viewers across most parts of the globe where Bachchan and Raj Kapoor and Nargis and Shah Rukh Khan among other Bollywood superstars elicit similarly frenzied adulation long after their blockbusters are decades old.

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Slumdog Millionaire's richness for some viewers is in just this detail: not only does the film capture what Danny Boyle has repeatedly rhapsodized as the 'spirit' of the Mumbai slums, it also conjures the blockbusters of Bollywood cinema that sharply comment on the incredible India that frames those slums alongside high-rises, criminals alongside pacifists, global industry alongside post-industrial squalor, often within a single shot.

Slumdog Millionaire's massive critical and commercial success in the US in part invites a broader question: might the film's many Bollywood flourishes and its layered references to that cinema finally augur Bollywood's fuller penetration into the US market that showered *Slumdog Millionaire* with such fulsome encomia? *Slumdog Millionaire*'s remarkable transformation from a small budget film released in 10 prints in US art house theatres to one that saw its distribution surge to almost 3000 prints circulating widely in the US suburban multiplex circuit makes some ask if it might have created a wider appetite for the film's 'ancestors' from Bollywood.² Is it possible that Bombay cinema's time in the US has come? That thanks to *Slumdog Millionaire*, the multiplex in Minneapolis will soon be mobbed on opening night of the latest Shah Rukh Khan film the way it is in Mumbai, and Madagascar, and Moscow? In short, can the world's largest film industry capture the hearts and wallets of average filmgoers in the American heartland the way it already appears to have done so effortlessly in the rest of the world where India's billion Bollywood viewers are matched by close to a billion more in China, the former Soviet Union, South and Central America, South East Asia, the Middle East, and continental Africa?

Some film watchers might insist that Bollywood's time had already arrived at the onset of the new millennium when Baz Luhrmann's musical hit, *Moulin Rouge* (2001), primed the US market for things Bollywood followed by *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), not a Bombay film by any means, but one that shamelessly pilfered aspects of the industry's popular culture formula, sterilized it, peopled it with Delhi's consumerist elites, and purveyed the confection with hitherto unimaginable success to mainstream multiplex audiences in the US to the extent that its director called it 'a Bollywood movie, made on my own terms' (qtd. in Hoffman 28). Indeed, *Monsoon Wedding* remains the top grossing Indian film in the US with receipts of almost \$14 million, with another Bollywood knockoff, Gurinder Chadha's *Bride and Prejudice* (2004), in second place with receipts of \$6.6 million.³

As if to aid the cinematic conquest, today's fast moving global media industry has encountered restless audiences looking for more satisfying fare than Hollywood has been able to provide. Global ticket sales for Hollywood films have remained relatively flat since 1997. In 2005, Hollywood saw its US box office further slip by 6% from a high in 2002 while domestic theatre admissions declined 15% in the same period. The drop in box office revenues and theatre admissions came despite a 20% increase in Hollywood's marketing budgets and a 22% increase in the number of films released (MPAA 11, 14).⁴ Meanwhile, in 2005 MTV reported that MTV Desi, a channel with programming targeted toward individuals claiming origins in the Indian subcontinent, was its most popular product among US viewers regardless of ethnic background.⁵ Observing the confluence of economic and cultural factors, it seems fair to ask if Bollywood cinema will finally manage to cross the previously insurmountable cultural barriers and make its considerable worldwide appeal felt among US audiences in US multiplexes. Or, will interest in it spawned by *Slumdog Millionaire*, like the success of *Mother India* from half a century ago (when it lost its Oscar bid to Fellini's *The Nights of Cabiria* [1957]) be a momentary flash in the pan, soon to be overtaken by other more successful international products such as Hong Kong action films and Japanese animation?

This essay is an effort to address the question of Bombay cinema's penetration into the US mainstream. In many ways, the germane issue is not the influx of Bombay cinema *en masse* into America's screens but rather the *specific* forms from Bombay that have been able to capture the interest of mainstream audiences in the US. This form, exemplified in exports such as *Monsoon Wedding* among others, is, I propose, such a major departure from the internal conventions of Bollywood that it is more properly understood in a concept I define as Bollywood Lite, or Bollylite. Bollylite, I argue, is a relatively recent fabrication that heavily pillages formal characteristics from the Bollywood cinema that *Slumdog Millionaire* honors while shearing much of that cinema's fabled social substance and political edge. If Bollywood keeps both slums and high-rises in its view, Bollylite extols the high-rises only as it altogether erases the surrounding slums from view. Thus lightened, Bollylite travels – though, in contrast to Bollywood, with a remarkably limited commercial and critical half-life.

Observing Bollylite's fortunes and the material conditions that produce it allows one to observe the stubbornness of Bollywood's cultural product despite the onslaught of a renewed global machinery of new capital and old ideas. At a time when increased despondency has accrued in many quarters at the apparent demise of popular culture, Bollywood's persistence – captured in Jamal's enthusiasm and in Danny Boyle's film – tells a very different story that shifts the locus of cultural study from the US to India where popular and mass culture have managed to coexist and may even be the same thing.

This paper proceeds in three parts. Following a brief overview of Bollywood's main characteristics, the paper examines a handful of Bollylite films that have enjoyed successful distribution in the US market, most notably, Karan Johar's 2001 hit, *K3G*. The final section contrasts the narrative logics separating Bollywood from Bollylite and offers remarks about their respective futures.

The world according to Bollywood

Offensive to some for its homophonic semblance to the putatively 'real' cinema of Hollywood, 'Bollywood' was initially used to dismiss a cinema regarded as frivolous, spectacular, and escapist. Today, the term Bollywood captures not just these earlier dismissals but also a culture industry that remains constitutively international in production and global in consumption. It conveys as much a kind of cinema as a kind of response to cinema: the often extravagant spectacles of its productions being matched by the outsize popularity that its blockbusters enjoy. Thus, to use the term Bollywood is to convey the cinema of Bombay that is also a cinema of excess in all its forms.⁶

In the usage I prefer, Bollywood is a heuristic device: neither epochal nor Bombay cinema *tout court*, it is a simple clarifying term to refer to a cinema made in Bombay that has enjoyed a certain kind of popularity that it has maintained across time and audiences. Bollywood does not convey a national cinema, though Bollywood's subtly evolving nationalist imaginary is an important component of its continued success both in India and overseas (Rajadhyaksha). Despite recent efforts to professionalize its practices and formalize its funding, the Bollywood industry remains a profoundly disparate and diffuse site of production with intimate if unsystematized ties to its audiences. Where Hollywood mobilizes blockbusters to make money, Bollywood's blockbusters have made the nation. Within a diversity of offerings that include mythologicals, stunt films, Muslim socials, melodrama, detective and crime thrillers, historical sagas, social films, romances, action, drama, war films, and slapstick, the cinema has certain formal elements of music and dance around a shared cinematic vocabulary: a particular handling of shots, an increasing

affection for exotic locations, a persistent crossing of generic boundaries, an acting style that veers toward the broad gestures of skeoграфия, and a frequent disregard for the unities of time, place, and action that have undoubtedly been one reason for mistaking the part for the whole and regarding the cinema, dismissively, as formulaic and undifferentiated.

Recent innovations notwithstanding, the 'typical' Bollywood film is still largely screened not in a multiplex in India but in a large single-screen theatre not unlike a nineteenth-century opera house (the name, incidentally, of one of Bombay's grandest movie theatres) with a thousand-plus seats divided into carefully niched classes according to a staggered economy that places the unwashed masses in the front stalls, on benches, or on the floor, with ladies and middle class families spread across the balcony and dress circle. Despite the rapid increase in multiplex construction, these screens comprise less than 5% of India's total screens. Moreover, in 2007, 70% of India's total box office returns were still made in single-screen theatres (Mahesh). Because of the sheer size of such theatres, a film had to play to every sector of the audience, not all of the time, but enough of the time to draw every sector in for the three bread and butter showings at noon, 3, and 6pm.⁷ Under these material conditions, a Bollywood film must purvey a bedrock of familiarity to signal its widest possible appeal. A filmmaker could not make a niche film and expect financial success; nor could the theatre owner count on a niche audience to fill a thousand-seat hall day after day, year upon year.⁸

The typical Bollywood film remains a compromise solution to the conflicts of its time. Wreathed in spectacle, suffused in music and dance, the public traumas of the day – be they Partition, dowry murders, terrorism, class violence, or political corruption – are given shape and voice in dark movie halls. Like dreams that process in the subconscious that which cannot or should not be brought to the surface, Bollywood's three hour sessions in giant halls with names like Eros and Regal address recurring hurts that lie just below the surface. Therefore, while some Western audiences have balked at the many elaborate dance and dream sequences, the stylized fight scenes, and the musical interludes that they frequently complain as being disruptive and 'unrealistic,' for Bollywood's Indian audiences these 'unrealistic' sequences become occasions to sort through the dilemmas and conflicts presented in the plot (see Gopalan).

As an example, while the plot and staging of a blockbuster such as Raj Kapoor's *Bobby* (1973) manifestly celebrate the theme of unbridled adolescent passion, the songs in the film interrupt that continuity and *latently* forbid or correct its overt endorsement. The Raja-Bobby duet, 'Jhoot boley' ('Don't you lie or a crow will bite you'), performed as a skit by the teen lovers at a neighbor's wedding cautions women in particular that leaving a family for a forbidden love is dangerous: the love can turn and the woman, always vulnerable, has no recourse or support from a neglectful spouse.

Bobby's manifestly frothy love story with its bikini-clad heroine and denim-sporting hero masks the latent narrative of social violence on another level as well: the conclusion of the Raja-Bobby love story recreates the status quo of the capitalist male claiming total mastery over working class labor that remains typically female (Figures 1 and 2). That this ominous outcome is gestured in a song ('Jhoot boley') in which the hitherto fashionably Western Bobby is costumed as fisherwoman underscores that romantic love notwithstanding, Bobby's origins as a fisherman's daughter indicate her class's destiny in her union with Raja, an industrialist's son. This form of narrative irony where manifest and latent content coexist without apparent disruption to the pleasures of spectacle is exactly what recedes in later Bollylite productions with their singular narrative plane that harbors no depth or complexity beyond spectacle.



Figures 1 and 2. 'I won't leave you; I'll observe my marital vows.' Rishi Kapoor and Dimple Kapadia, *Bobby* (1973). Source: Yarshrajfilms.com.

In the 1990s, when Jamal takes his fateful dip through shit to capture the autograph of a 1970s screen god, a new type of cinema was beginning to emerge in India. Rejecting angry, male-centric films like *Zanjeer* and *Deewaar* (1975) of the 1970s and 1980s that had begun to keep families from theatres and that ushered the decline of the industry, a new breed of younger filmmakers such as Sooraj Barjatya returned the family film experience in the 1990s by producing lavish romantic musicals like *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun?* (*Who am I to you?*, 1994). Audiences returned in droves to the theatres, and Bollywood's fortunes seemed to have revived just in time for the new millennium. *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* grossed beyond expectation at the box office and was followed by Aditya Chopra's *DDLJ* (1995), the longest-running Hindi film at over 700 weeks, while *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* (2001, known as *K3G*), made by Chopra's childhood playmate and colleague, Karan Johar, remains one of the most financially successful Indian films to circulate in the US and the UK. A new cinema appeared to be born.

Of the three, both *DDLJ* and *K3G* were hits in the US, even in its multiplexes – but only among the diasporic audiences who frequented 'ethnic' multiplexes. Yet, even while some Bombay films from the period continued to gross wildly in the West (the teen school romance, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* [1998] started the trend when it earned a hitherto unimagined £1.75 million in the UK and \$2.1 million in the US; *K3G* almost doubled that amount in 2001), these films never enjoyed screenings for US critics or distribution amongst US audiences, so they never made it to the local multiplex at the mall. As the scholar Corey Creekmur documents, *K3G* created a 'minor scandal' when 'the film should have appeared within the top-10 box office in the United States on *Variety*'s lists for late 2001, but [it] was omitted because the [*Variety*] editors apparently couldn't believe that an "unknown" film was doing "house full" business in American theatres (albeit those catering to Indo-American audiences)' (Creekmur).

Reviewing these statistics, some might urge that Bollywood's muscle is indeed already apparent in the US; that its popularity among loyal viewers is the point, not the viewers'

ethno-chromatic hues. They might urge that the box office returns, puny when compared to Hollywood's if Table 1 is a guide, are in fact substantial in Bombay's own terms when its lower production costs and purchasing price parity (PPP) are taken into account. These would be fair reminders, and they urge a renewed reckoning of Bollywood and Bollywood-themed imports into the US. Might reviewing *which* films succeed over others render clarity over what imports travel better than others in the US markets?

Bollylite in America

Consider the following figures:

Table 1. Top grossing Indian films in the US.

Film	US box office gross
<i>Monsoon Wedding</i> (2001)	\$13.9 million
<i>Bride and Prejudice</i> (2004)	\$6.6 million
<i>K3G</i> (2001)	\$3.1 million
<i>Veer Zara</i> (2004)	\$2.9 million
<i>Devdas</i> (2002)	\$2.7 million

Sources:

Figures adjusted for inflation.

International Business Overview Standard: <http://ibosnetwork.com/usatopgrosses.asp>;

<http://ibosnetwork.com/uktopopenings.asp>, accessed 15 Mar. 2006;

boxofficemojo.com, accessed 15 Mar. 2006.

The data in Table 1 illuminate several points: first, of the five top grossing Indian films in the US market, those made in Bombay in Hindi with locally grown directors, financing, production, and distribution, have trailed in the US box office far behind the carefully deracinated versions that grossly copied its affects (thus, *K3G*'s \$3.1 million in the US in contrast to *Monsoon Wedding*'s \$13.9 million).⁹ Second, returns in the US box office notwithstanding, the three top grossing Bombay films in the US market are in fact considerable laggards among the 200 all time top grossing Bombay films adjusted for inflation. In this pantheon, the trio on Table 1 appear nowhere near the top: *K3G* is at #56, *Veer Zaara* at #143, and *Devdas* (2002) at #187. Meanwhile, *Sholay* (#1), *Mother India* (#3), *DDLJ* (#7), *Bobby* (#8), and *Amar Akbar Anthony* (#9) all appear in the list as top ten worldwide grossers; *Awara* (#19) in the top 20, and Bachchan's angry young man films *Don*, *Trishul*, *Coolie* all in the top 25, with *Zanjeer* at #36.¹⁰

These two details indicate complex back-stories about the nature of Bollywood's hits, and they are worth scrutinizing with some care. There is no doubt that the financial statistics that profile these films are highly suspect. The industry notoriously underreports its profits at every level to avoid tax liability, and the figures are routinely 'adjusted' to account for this. Yet, the statistical corruption is so widespread and widely acknowledged that the figures, however distorted, are the best index (in fact the only one) to profile the industry. That they quantitatively corroborate the symbolic capital that specific films have accrued as evident from qualitative sources (including Jamal's fateful dip) affirms their general, if not particular, accuracy.

It should be no surprise that films that are popular in one context may not be in another. Therefore, that a version of Bollywood I call Bollylite sold better in the US multiplex than in India should not be surprising. Bollylite's specially charged confection of sexual predation, expensive automobiles, and romance appears destined to cross borders with

little obstacle as *Monsoon Wedding* so successfully demonstrated. The critical story for our purposes, however, lies in the US fortunes of the films in Table 1 that were produced and made in India for an Indian audience before traveling west: *K3G*, *Veer Zaara*, and *Devdas*. Examining the success of these Bombay productions in US theatres may explain something about the forms of Bollywood that can make the journey to the US and find commercial success there. Unfreighted of many of Bollywood's familiar locational and cultural markers, Bollylite, as I name these forms, is both leaner than its shaggy antecedents, and possibly lesser. The suffix 'lite' then gestures at least initially toward the pruning of a cultural brand in preparation for the US market. Whether 'lite' also comments on the substance in these films will become clearer shortly.

It ought to be noted that the US success of Bombay films such as *K3G* has often been explained by their extraordinary production savvy that can hold their own against just about any Hollywood export, in marked contrast to the far rawer *Zanjeer* and *Deewaar*, both of which *Slumdog Millionaire* repeatedly references. Packaged for theatrical release and video sales with slick advertising and catchy bylines that circulated on the Internet, these Bombay films from Table 1 were widely subtitled in more languages spoken outside the subcontinent than within, including English, French, German, Spanish, Arabic, Dutch, Malay, Japanese, and Hebrew. Their content reveals a skillful command over style, fashion, editing, color, and makeup to render them visually current with global trends if not fully coherent. Furthermore, *Veer Zaara* twinned the surefire brew of India and Pakistan tensions with a story of lovers separated by subcontinental geopolitics; *Devdas*, already beloved from multiple earlier remakes, was the most expensive Indian film produced to date with the buzz of competitive screening at Cannes to help it travel into diasporic pocketbooks. Meanwhile *K3G*'s non-resident Indians (NRIs), with their knock-off Armani suits, designer saris, and gaudy gemstones provided a relentless spectacle of an *au courant* consumer utopia unfettered by taste or modesty to become the highest grossing Bombay export in the US box office.

'Bollywood' in form, these films (with the exception of *Veer Zaara*) depart markedly from earlier blockbusters in their systematic embrace of the material world. Produced at a moment when new financial instruments and technological innovations such as venture capitalist funding, script testing, and stock market IPOs enabled the enhancement of the Bombay film industry, these particular films that I dub Bollylite illuminate a cinema in which new technology and financial priorities have penetrated and *become* the inner logic of everyday life. No film better elaborates the idea of Bollylite than Karan Johar's *K3G*.

Dubbed 'The Indian Family' in France and Germany, *K3G* paired reigning screen star Shah Rukh Khan with Amitabh Bachchan in a reprise of their blockbuster pairing from *Mohabbatein* (dir. Aditya Chopra, 2000).¹¹ Inhabiting a Delhi house curiously identical to Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild's Waddesdon Manor in Oxfordshire, this Indian family consists of stern industrialist father, Amitabh Bachchan, successful corporate son, Shah Rukh, and a bevy of characteristically doting and devoted wives alternating saccharine smiles and domestic piety as if their lives depended on it. The remark is not in vain: their lives *did* depend on diligent devotion to something Corey Creekmur has wryly called industrial strength patriarchy (Creekmur). The son crosses the father by marrying a woman of his choice; the father disowns the son who leaves India for London where he makes an easy million or ten at a job where he can leisurely get to work by lunchtime; the two eventually re-meet in a British shopping mall and reconcile after a decade-long estrangement.

It is no coincidence that labor is invisible in *K3G*: it tends to be that way in most Hindi films that deal with the wealthy. What *is* visible in this film is surplus capital, repeated over

and over again in the lavish display of name brand luxury. That the estranged father and son can only reconcile, not in the family home in Delhi but in that special emporium of consumption, the mall, is an irony unremarked upon in this connection, for Bollylite has little time for such narrative subtleties.

In *K3G*, the logic of the marketplace replaces all human relations, even filial piety. Whereas the mother cuddles her son in the prayer room at home, the father reserves parental cuddling for *his* place of worship, namely, a well appointed suite at his corporate headquarters where he emotionally hands *his* family (i.e., his business) to his heir (Figure 8). The son reaches his father's stature not by his moral integrity (in keeping his word to the woman he loves) but by the acquisition of millions which makes them equals by the end of the film. The father punishes the son's breach of family honor not so much by cutting family ties, but by cutting him from his share of the family corporation. The exile the son chooses is not so much to remove himself from his father, but to find economic opportunities that best his parent's. And while in London yearning for the paternal embrace, the son reverentially places a giant photo of his parents above his household gods, specifically, a giant state-of-the-art flat panel television (see Figure 3).

'It's all about loving your parents,' claimed the publicity banner (Figure 4) for a film in which that love finds its best mediation in models learned from the media and television that the flat panel displays (Figure 3). The media is the message here, and it could not be more chilling or severed of substance.

Larded with patriotism stirred up by the indiscriminate playing of all three of India's patriotic anthems, the son's diasporic family gets teary-eyed longing for 'home,' all the while impervious to the transformations that 'home' is undergoing as a consequence of the capitalist values they usher into it. The concepts of family, duty, and nation exist in the ether in this film. Anchored to a fantasy of 'tradition' comprised of consumer goods and massive mansions, *K3G* provides a special form of comfort to salve the nostalgia of India's recently affluent diasporic elite. Money, love, and family become interchangeable here: having the first generates the others, or some simulacrum thereof. The prayer room has given way for the television, the family table for the mall. Cinema's self-critique of media made famous in Douglas Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows* (1955) – with Jane Wyman's despair blankly reflected off the new television set meant to assuage a loneliness that only the forbidden hunk Hudson can dispel – has gone the way of irony in Johar's Bollylite exemplaire.



Figures 3 and 4. The immigrant home in London, where 'it's all about loving your parents' – and your stuff. *K3G* (2001). Source: Yarshrajfilms.com.

I make these fleeting remarks to underscore the unmitigating superficiality of this hit that even its director has since called 'candy floss' (qtd. in Jha).¹² The tension between a film's manifest and latent content evident so consistently in Bollywood blockbusters such as *Bobby* has largely disappeared. *K3G*'s conservative social values and closet misogyny are rendered attractive by the visual glitz of its production values. Form *is* content in Bollylite, and the two are seamlessly packaged to slide by any onerous demand for value. What you see is what you get in this new kind of blockbuster that played so well to the diasporic crowd at the US multiplex.

The multiplex's smaller screens were warmly justified in India on the grounds that they enabled smaller films to prosper: those made on smaller budgets, with smaller stars, and on smaller scale. But Bollylite's offerings have equally prospered in the multiplex, with their large size and lavish scale balanced by a considerable diminishment in subtlety and substance. The exigencies that dominate the single-screen thousand-seat theatres still operating in India mean that film producers still have to entice a variety of viewers in order to expect many happy returns. Smaller screens pitched at the aspiring classes both in India and elsewhere remove some of that urgency, but they also diminish the cinematic product.

It would be too simple to claim that multiplexes create vapid fare. But the changing economics of the Bombay film industry, with new forms of financing, new business models, new investors, new distribution networks, and new corporate ownership of exhibition spaces is certainly having an effect on the industry's products. In 2002, an optimistic entrepreneur exulted at the 'latent demand for destination entertainment' in the country (Bhushan). The rise of the multiplex alongside India's new shopping malls gave new purpose to brand identities: the cinema spun a visual fantasy that the mall then delivered in the commodities it purveyed. The two became what the writer Ratna Bhushan calls 'synergistic retail partners,' both hedging risks on their investment. Should the film not deliver a purchasing fantasy, the mall and the film both flop in this sort of relationship. To avoid that outcome, one multiplex executive insisted, 'we will backward integrate into film distribution and subsequently into film production. That will evolve as a general industry trend' (qtd. in Bhushan).¹³ How plausible that relationship might be for the long term remains to be seen.¹⁴

Products like *K3G* point to one possible outcome of the new relationship. There is no evidence available of backward integration in producing this film, but there is every indication that its content collaborates well with the consumer values of the new post-liberalization economy both in India and in the US. *K3G*'s success as the top grossing Indian film in the US says as much about the particular film's ability to travel as the conditions under which that journey is possible. For when it comes time for Bollylite, the multiplex stands ready to offer it a screening success before the candy subsides into floss. While the considerable industry muscle of Johar's company, Dharma Productions, got him permission to shoot lavish dance sequences in Leicester Square and even the venerable British Museum, none of that gave *K3G* the symbolic (or even box office) capital that *Sholay* or *Awara* continues to enjoy in the decades since their release.

I do not for a moment mean to suggest that blockbusters of the earlier period did not contain their own commodity fantasies: indeed, both *Awara* and *Sholay* are centrally about the quest for stability that comes with financial security. So, when Veeru asks Jai in *Sholay* about settling down in Ramgarh, it is fully evident that the migrant laborer can only dream of acquiring a home because the cash to purchase it has finally come into sight. In *Awara*, meanwhile, the quest for financial stability is layered with the search for paternity and the social integration it affords. Yet the fiduciary objects are not ends in themselves as the luxury goodies in *K3G* are. Virtually all the vagabond protagonist's exploits in *Awara*

involve getting things for the women in his life that his biological father has withheld from them.

In these earlier films, commodities, economic stability, and the market are means to an end far bigger than the sum of the parts. At the same time, each part is also subject to critique for obstructing individual agency and social decency. Thus, when Raj in *Awara* attempts to reform from his life of crime, his exploitation in the hands of a local factory owner is critiqued just as is the poverty that criminalizes him in the first place. Neither the commodity nor the market of which it is part is fully embraced in these films, even while both are being eventually mastered by protagonists as different as Raj and Veeru. In Bollylite, to the contrary, the market *is* the end, and mastering it *is* the happy ending that arrives in a mirage of goodies meant to fill a void that must not be named.

As India's economic liberalization program concludes its second decade and the distance between it and the West shrinks, the earlier clashes with modernity that characterized the cinema of *Awara* and *Deewaar* have now become full-fledged warfare. If Raj Kapoor's *Awara* showed the clash between three generations and three economic orders (the feudal class of landed property, the professionalized post-Independence elite that sprang from the squirearchy, and the 'new' class represented by the tramp; see Figures 5–7), the clash these days is between two generations (father and son in *K3G*), both inhabiting the same economic order (Figure 8).

The earlier critiques of a market dominated logic, the insistence on separating economic wealth from social worth that was so keenly detailed in Kapoor's films of the 1950s and that persisted variously in Salim-Javed's hits of the 1970s, in Hrishikesh Mukherjee's comedies of the middle classes, and in Manmohan Desai's blockbusters for the masses have largely disappeared. Bachchan's angry young man has given way to what the film critic Sudhanva Deshpande has trenchantly identified as 'the consumable hero of globalised India,' a figure played to mass appeal by Shah Rukh Khan in films of the later 1990s and on (Deshpande 186ff). The subalterns and their struggles have no place even in Bollylite's hairline margins. And Bollylite's issue is no longer making it ('it' being financial security, social position, community integration): those things are given, if we believe Bollylite's tales of fabulously successful NRIs. The real issue now is *being it*: 'it' being the good Indian who has evaded any conflict from succumbing to the pleasures of unregulated capitalist desire in the climate of economic liberalization. In this regard, *Monsoon Wedding* may not be as different from *K3G* as its box office returns in the US might have one anticipate, even as both are profoundly dissimilar from the cinema christened Bollywood and detailed in the first section of this essay.



Figures 5 and 6. Prithviraj Kapoor as landowner and judge; Figure 7. Raj Kapoor as tramp. *Awara* (1951). Source: Yashrajfilms.com



Figure 8. Amitabh Bachchan and Shah Rukh Khan in *K3G* (2001). Source: Yashrajfilms.com

Table 2 gathers some of the most striking differences between a cinema of substance and one of image conveyed in the terms Bollywood and Bollylite, respectively. For Bollywood to travel to the US multiplex, it would need to be shorn of its substance, its tensions, and its coherence. Indeed, its success in the US multiplex depends largely on refashioning its product and peopling it with Western clones often more likely to be inhabiting Brooklyn than Bombay, in contrast to Bollywood's blockbusters such as *Mother India* (1957) that traveled worldwide with – or despite – their relentless, even rural, regionalism.

Table 2. Bollywood vs. Bollylite.

Dominant Features	Bollywood	Bollylite
<i>Family</i>	dislocated, incomplete, truncated	entrenched, extended, established
<i>Social space</i>	city, slum	home
<i>Economic order</i>	in transition	stable
<i>Social mobility is</i>	governing ethos and <i>raison d'être</i>	irrelevant to plot
<i>Conflict and/or violence</i>	between classes	within family
<i>National identity conveyed by</i>	struggles within and for the public	struggles and anguish within the individual
<i>Cinematic meaning resides</i>	between latent and manifest content	in manifest content; latent content largely eliminated

The table is indicative rather than prescriptive. It condenses the analytic arguments preceding it in an effort to sharpen an understanding of a cinema at a moment of transition as that cinema crosses its Rubicon – or the Mississippi. One can immediately think of exceptions: Bollywood films such as *DDLJ* with many of Bollylite's formal characteristics, or Bollylite films such as *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun?* (1994) with numerous typically Bollywood features. Both sorts clearly proliferate and indeed coexist: Table 2 simply highlights a set of dominant features of the cinemas that I differentiate into the

forms, Bollywood and Bollylite. These are by no means the only features that characterize the differences between the two: they simply happen to be most marked from my reading. Moreover, the seepage of features across the two cinemas is to be expected: Bollylite owes its identity and origin to Bollywood and adeptly borrows from it when it can, even as it brutally unfreights itself of matter deemed too heavy for its global travels. In this, Bollylite distills certain characteristics of Bollywood even as it repackages itself as Bollywood. Thus, the clarity of formal features as outlined in Table 2 is not perfectly reflected in this fecund industry, nor should the difficulty with taxonomic precision necessarily obviate the larger argument in Table 2.

Conclusion

The real question may not so much be whether Bollywood travels to the US as Bollywood's travels in multiplex circuits both in the US and in India. The Indian multiplex phenomenon is an index to a larger transformation of a booming globalized economy and its domestic social changes. For some observers, this 'new' Indian world resembles the US in more ways than one, with a markedly alienated and depoliticized relationship between culture and consumption. Social capital is in decline in this world; reified commodity capital appears in some quarters to have taken its place. In such an environment, where the NRI and the aspirant NRI are such visible players, films such as *K3G* have considerable appeal. *K3G*'s travels, thus, gesture toward the proliferation of a set of values that, however divergent, nonetheless coexist with those that Bollywood purveyed in the post-Independence period.

Scholars such as Ashish Rajadhyaksha suggest that the granting of industry status to Indian cinema in 1998 resonated closely with the country's desire to market itself and its global aspirations, a project in which certain forms of cinema were especially appropriate (Rajadhyaksha passim). There appears no better product for this branding exercise than Bollylite films and no better ambassador than Shah Rukh Khan whose character, Rahul, played in numerous films of the late 1990s and early 2000s, uncomplicatedly rose above the incoherence and contradictions of what biographer Anupama Chopra calls the sunshine cinema of the 1990s to become a global icon of candy floss (Chopra 143). Notably, Bachchan's return to films took place alongside the ascendance of candy floss Khan himself in the 2000 *Mohabbatein*, a pairing reprised in Karan Johar's *K3G* the following year. In both films, as in the tsunami of roles that have followed, Bachchan's hungry angry young man of the 1970s, whose rage captured the social injustices of the day, has been replaced by an affluent angry old man whose rage reveals a wounded patriarchal ego. Bollywood's desire to confront social problems stemming from profound economic inequities is transformed in Bollylite to an unabashed embrace of the inequitable system in toto. In an interview of 2001 (the year of *K3G*'s release), Shah Rukh Khan boasted of his recent roles: 'If the 1970's hero was anti-establishment, as a yuppie I promised a better world... He doesn't have to kill in the battlefield, he can make a killing in the share market. The yuppie believes in capitalism, not communism' (qtd. in Deshpande 186). None of these Bollylite films, nor this reborn Bachchan, or his yuppie offspring, inspires the prestige that *Zanjeer* or *Deewaar* does, nor the fateful dip that Jamal made to honor the earlier star and the cinema of which he was part.

Bollywood, it must be emphasized, has yet to disappear as the success of recent hits such as *DDLJ* and *Bunty aur Babli* (2005) attest. Nor has the cinema retreated from its dominant position as a form of critique inhabiting the space between mass and popular culture. True, India's media ecology has seen dramatic changes since the 1950s and 1970s

when there was one radio station, one (state-owned) TV network, and the cinema, to today when there are literally hundreds of cable television channels, radio stations, the Internet, and a swarming media assemblage in multiple formats where information, entertainment, advertising, and analysis compete for audience share. Rather than retreating in this slick and slippery image-saturated zone, Bollywood, for now, coexists with Bollylite. Both products in this iteration serve as compensatory narratives in all senses of the term. The greater India's embrace of modernity, the firmer its step into the dance of global capital, the stronger the likelihood of Bollylite's proliferation. But that proliferation remains destined for the multiplex, and its fortunes tied to a form that even today plays to a minority of the 20 million a day who go the movies in India.

The US proclaims its multiplexes break even with 10 per cent occupancy. With such figures, one has little to fear that the multiplex will transform a cinematic form that has kept billions rapt across the last century. Bollywood may not travel to the multiplex; but Bollylite will and will likely prosper there. And one day it may even awaken its audience for the real thing. But till that day comes, there is always *Slumdog Millionaire* and the exhilarating and gasping dive through shit to see the real stuff.

Acknowledgements

This essay has benefitted most from Orfeo Fioretos' clarifying intelligence. Never having sat through a Bollywood film, he knows exactly what they're about and how Bollylite has changed them. Grateful thanks for their detailed comments to Lawrence Cohen, Corey Creekmur, Rajinder Dudrah, and Sangita Gopal; to audiences at the University of Chicago and Penn; and to Daniel Ryan Morse for his timely research assistance.

Notes

1. The *Oxford English Dictionary* establishes the etymology of 'Bollywood' to H.R.F. Keating's *Filmi, Filmi, Inspector Ghote*, a cult detective novel from 1976; the year, incidentally, when BAFTA was also founded 'to promote British film and television.'
2. For statistics on *Slumdog*'s circulation, see <http://www.thenumbers.com/movies/2008/SLUMD.php>.
3. *Monsoon Wedding*'s 'foreign' (i.e., non-US) gross was \$16.9 million, with a worldwide box office of \$30.7 million; *Bride and Prejudice*'s 'foreign' gross was \$18.5 million for a worldwide box office of \$25 million. More on these films follows in the third section of this essay. See <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=monsoonwedding.htm>; and <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=brideandprejudice.htm>; accessed 3 Oct. 2006.
4. The US saw domestic box office increases top the 2002 figures for the first time in the decade. Ticket sales, perhaps a more revealing index than dollar returns, have remained largely flat since 1997 and even declined since a high in 2001. See 'MPAA Theatrical Market Statistics: 2007' 3–4.
5. Despite the fanfare that inaugurated MTV Desi in 2005 on an enormous screen in Times Square, the channel was shut down in 2007, another casualty blamed on the economic crisis though more likely caused by the myopia of the channel's accountant-bosses.
6. It remains an important exercise to date *when* precisely the cinema of Bombay embraced excess as its constitutive mode. Raj Kapoor's dream sequence in *Awara* (1951), for instance, is spectacular visually and cinematically, but its connection to the plot and to the characters is indisputable. One might say the same for Kapoor's 1964 hit, *Sangam*, with its long interlude in London, Venice, and Paris that is consistent with the plot (the couple are on their honeymoon) but is not necessary to advance it. By the 1970s, hits such as *Amar Akbar Anthony* (1977) and *Don* (1978) dispense entirely with linearity, and with it, with most visual unities. In some ways, these narrative disruptions and their extravagant expression are regarded as the 'Bollywood' element, though again, *when* one could date their suffusion in the industry remains an exciting project. Sangita Gopal makes the compelling argument that 'many of the features we now associate with Bollywood were already present in the "masala" films of the 1970s and may very

- well be described as Bollywood's first incarnation.' See her 'Introduction,' ms. p. 3. On the term 'Bollywood's origins and the tensions around its usage, see Prasad.
7. Evening showings at 9pm and midnight are generally reserved for B-films and for adult fare which have been known to draw an unsavory crowd given to tearing apart a theatre at great cost to the owner. Theatres that show these films are often so ravaged by abuse that they can no longer draw a respectable crowd to their regular shows.
 8. The multiplex boom has largely ridden on the promise to support and screen niche films for specialized audiences that the single screens have not encouraged. Whether this is a promise that can be sustained over the long term remains to be seen. Sangita Gopal provides keen insights on the subject in her chapter, 'Conjugal Assembly: Multiplex, Multiplot, and the Reconfigured Social.'
 9. One is always likely to get in trouble when venturing views on what makes a real Bollywood film. Stars are clearly one component, but not the only one if *Monsoon Wedding* and *Bride and Prejudice* are taken into account. Lillette Dubey, Naseerudeen Shah, and Vasundhara Das (from *Monsoon Wedding*) have all appeared in enough blockbusters to make them genuine Bollywood figures, though they all have also appeared in enough alternates to the industry and, in the case of Shah, in the parallel cinema of the 1970s and 1980s, to be regarded in multiple ways. Meanwhile, Aishwarya Rai and Anupam Kher from *Bride and Prejudice* are seeped in Bollywood productions, so they would appear to be the genuine articles performing in Chadha's film. Yet the casting of stars is simply not enough to render a film a Bollywood production: its director, writers, sequencing, editing, production, dialogues, music, financing, and distribution go a long way in defining the film's provenance. While both of the aforementioned films did well in the US (and UK) box office, neither appears in the top 50 list of gross receipts for India. (Rai, former Miss World 1994, more starlet than star, seems more talked about in the US these days than in India where she has yet to deliver a box office hit in a decade in Bollywood.)
 10. Source: International Business Overview Standard.
 11. It may be worth noting that Shah Rukh Khan starred in all three Bollywood films on Table 1; Amitabh Bachchan in one (*K3G*, with a small role in *Veer Zaara*); Rani Mukherjee had supporting roles in *K3G* and *Veer Zaara*. The two male stars have had other hits that were in the top grossing list but never crossed over to the US (such as *Sholay*, *Amar Akbar Anthony*, *DDLJ*), so while their presence in a film might go some way in making it a blockbuster, it does not do much to predict the film's eventual success in the US box office.
 12. Mulling over his oeuvre, the director Karan Johar observed of *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (2006), his feature on marital infidelity among NRIs in New York: 'This time I've given no candy floss.... I've matured. I've changed.' See Johar's interview in Jha.
 13. The remarks come from Tarun Mehrotra of Satyam Cineplexes in response to a concern he acknowledged: 'What if no good movies are made next year? Software is one area we have no control over.' As quoted in Bhushan's industry survey.
 14. The Hollywood film industry too once vertically integrated, with studios owning production, distribution, and exhibition of films till 1948 when the Supreme Court forced studios to sell their stakes in exhibition halls. Today, studios and independents in the US compete for screens, with distributors apparently having the upper hand in bringing a film to screen.

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