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Imagining the Family An Ethnography of Viewing *Hum Aapke Hain Koun . . .!*¹

PATRICIA UBEROI



I'm for the joint family system, because the joint family represents Indian culture; nowhere else in the world have they got this system still.²

LIVING IN DELHI, there is one way of deciding whether a movie has caught the popular imagination: a catch-phrase from the film will be found inscribed on the backside of a three-wheeler auto-rickshaw. Jostling for space and visual attention along with numerous other insignia of the owner's social and sectarian identity—salutations to gods and goddesses, expressions of gratitude to *gurus* and parents, salacious comments and naughty verses, aphorisms and proverbs, warnings to other road users and curses on the Evil Eye—these evocative phrases index both the extent of the movie's box-office appeal, and its privileged iconic status across several domains of popular culture. Even today,³ mementos of the 1975 blockbuster, *Sholay*, remind harried commuters of a larger-than-life epic contest between Good and Evil, enlivened on the sidelines by romance and sacrifice: 'Chal Basanti'. Numerous three-wheelers still carry the expressive legend, *Maine pyar kiya* (I'd fallen in love), the title of Sooraj Barjatya's 1989 romantic hit. But the really contemporary graffito for the Delhi roads is the teasing title of Barjatya's latest blockbuster, the spectacular *Hum Aapke Hain Koun . . .!* (What am I to you!) (1994).

In a year of numerous box-office 'flops', the romantic family drama,

Hum Aapke Hain Koun . . .! (*HAAHK*, as it is familiarly referred to, and as will here be termed or it henceforth), was a phenomenal commercial success, reportedly grossing more than any other film in the history of Indian cinema.⁴ After more than six months, the film is still showing to packed houses in Delhi and elsewhere;⁵ tickets for matinee shows continue to be sold 'in black'; and many viewers—and not only the ethnographer are returning for their third, fourth, and fifth viewings,⁶ clapping, cheering, and weeping at appropriate moments, anticipating the dialogues, and strumming to the beat of its very popular songs. Delighted distributors compare the film to some of the great blockbusters of yesteryear—*Sholay* and *Mughal-e-Azam*, for instance. With opulent sets, no fewer than fourteen melodious songs,⁷ a star-studded cast with Madhuri Dixit and Salman Khan in the lead roles,⁸ and a canny marketing and distribution strategy,⁹ this movie has enticed cinema audiences back to the theatres in unprecedented numbers, allaying industry fears that Indian commercial cinema had entered a phase of irreversible decline. In a single stroke, *HAAHK* appears to have neutralized the subversive effects of the contemporary alien 'cultural invasion' and the debased cultural values of the front-benchers, bringing back nostalgic memories of a bygone golden era of Indian cinema.

This is nothing short of remarkable, for *HAAHK* completely lacks the 'masala' (spicy) ingredients of sex, sadism, and violence that are believed to be the *de rigueur* for a successful 'Bollywood' production. Action, such as it is, begins only well after the interval when the film becomes, for better or worse, 'just like other movies'.¹⁰ And though the music is undeniably catchy, it is certainly not as innovative and varied as that of some other recent films, *Roja*, *1942: A love story* or *Bombay*, for instance. Besides, it is well-known that even exceedingly popular song-and-dance items cannot redeem a film otherwise destined to 'bomb' at the box-office; or rather, with the expansion of cable and satellite TV, the films and their songs increasingly follow an independent trajectory of popular appeal (Doraiswamy 1996).

It is now conceded, with a mixture of wonder and relief, that the unprecedented commercial success of *HAAHK* may actually lie in the fact that it is *not* a *masala* movie. *Post facto*, film critics have been attempting to construct a genealogy for this rather unanticipated development in popular Hindi cinema. For instance, Nikhat Kazmi, the well-regarded film critic of *The Times of India*, has seen the film as indicating an emerging trend—a pendulum swing in 'low brow' taste away from 'blood and gore' and back to the uplifting themes of 'the family, the nation and love' (cf. Mayaram n.d.: 11). Postulating a sort of psychological saturation of Indian cinema audiences with themes of violence and revenge, Kazmi writes:

Clean: this is the current new word in the common man's lexicon for good cinema. In an age when cinema seems to have lost its soul to the nasty, brutish hero, both the viewers and the film makers have had their fill of the death wish. Now, they are turning from revenge, the reason for all the blood and gore in popular Bollywood cinema, to the family, the nation and love. There is a ubiquitous demand for good, clean cinema. A demand which is reflected in the stupendous success of *Hum Aapke Hain Koun*, a film which has nothing more than good, clean music, nice characters and a drama that falls soft and easy [Kazmi 1995a].¹¹

As a good 'clean' movie, Kazmi puts *HAAHK* in a series with the recently released patriotic melodramas, *Roja*, *Krantikshetra* and *Krantiveer*, and latterly *Param Vir Chakra*, to which she could well have added the romantic *1942: A Love Story*, a film set against the background of the freedom struggle. But the singular feature of *HAAHK* in this series, which the present chapter seeks to address, is that it is quintessentially what is classed in popular parlance as a 'family' film—'family' understood in the double sense of (i) *for* a family audience; and (ii) *about* family relationships, inclusive of, but much broader, than, the true romance that provides its storyline. As one viewer is reported to have said:

The family in this film is very important. It's not a Madhuri or a Salman film [the romantic leads] but the story of a family [Mishra 1995].

Mopping her tears, she further explained to the interviewer that:

[e]verytime she watched it she cried in the same scenes, because she lived in a joint family and could relate to the happy and sad moments [Mishra 1995].

Despite the supposed authenticity of detail, on which many viewers commented, *HAAHK* is not actually a work of cinematic realism (see also Section III here). As Madhuri Dixit conceded while accepting the *Filmfare* Award for Best Actress of 1994: *HAAHK* presents 'a perfect utopia'—about 'simple values and guileless people'.¹² In other words, the film is not about the family as it *is*, but the family as people would like it to be: 'I would want my daughter-in-law to be as nice and sweet and domesticated' as Madhuri and Renuka, a middle-aged businessman was reported to have remarked (Mishra 1995)—suggesting, perhaps, that not all daughters-in-law match these exacting standards. Indeed, several viewers self-consciously recognized and took pleasure in the fact that this film portrayed an *ideal* of family life. Said Asha:¹³

What I liked is that everyone has good relations with each other, which is not generally found in families. . . . This is how it *should* be. It's an ideal family.

Clearly, *HAAK* is the story of the Indian family as a form of 'imagined community' (to rather stretch the meaning of Anderson's felicitous concept [1983]). Beyond this, as I seek to illustrate in this chapter, it is also about the family as an icon of the national society.

For some time now, social scientists, cinema critics, and concerned citizens have been at pains to find explanations—material, social, or psychological—for the high levels of sadism and violence in Indian popular cinema (e.g. Nandy 1995a; 1995b; 1995c). Indian feminists have recently begun to keep a vigilant eye on the stereotypes of femininity purveyed by the film industry, the commoditization of women's bodies, and the violence against women routinely displayed on the Indian screen.¹⁴ A new generation of film critics and historians of cinema have utilized the optic of psychoanalytic film theory to speculate on the play of desire that the cinematic fantasy sets loose (Vasudevan 1995; see also Kakar 1989; Nandy 1981). And there has also been a measure of interrogation of the political agenda believed to inform the recent series of patriotic films, Mani Ratnam's *Roja* in particular, linking this to the class and communal character of the Indian state (Niranjana 1994; n.d.). But until the unexpected phenomenon of *HAAK*, romances and clean family films had not attracted the same degree of critical attention or hermeneutic effort.¹⁵ Perhaps the general feeling is just one of enormous relief that family movies like *HAAK* can be commercially viable after all. Indeed, critiques of the politics of representation of such movies tend to be greeted with some resentment. As a middle-aged woman lecturer at a Delhi women's college asked me aggressively, after one such exercise:

That's all very well. But tell me the truth now. Didn't you *enjoy* it?¹⁶

And a young reporter, attempting to probe the 'anti-emancipatory' female stereotypes she found in *HAAK* was told firmly by a college girl interviewee:

Oh, come on. Don't give it a feminist angle. I would love to get married and lead such a life [Mishra 1995].

On the contrary—and here I draw sustenance from Rustom Bharucha's critique of the same film (1995)—I would insist that clean family movies are just as demanding of critical and political interpretation as the 'blood and gore' films that have attracted so much public and media attention: and that, not merely because they have proved exceedingly profitable. In this chapter, I look at some of the responses to *HAAK* of film industry personnel

(directors, stars, producers, distributors), film critics, and north Indian viewers, privileging the voice of the latter and seeking to understand what exactly is meant by the universal classification of this film as a clean and morally uplifting 'family' film. I then look, as a sociologist of the family, at the ideal image of the family that the film narrative of *HAAK* seeks to construct and project, and the deliberately incomplete erasures that this process entails. Finally, I reflect on the wider social functions that such a fantasy of ideal family life might perform in the light of the sort of social science critiques referred to above.

Before embarking on the analysis, however, it would be as well to give a brief, if unsatisfactory, outline of the film plot. As already mentioned, the film barely has a storyline,¹⁷ the excessive length of the film (almost three hours) being accounted for by the unusual number of songs, rather than by the proliferation and complexity of sub-plots. In this sense, *HAAK* lacks the 'prodigality' of narrative detail that is often regarded as a hallmark of South Asian popular cinema (see Jayamanne 1992: 147). Some viewers, and the female star herself, thought this 'simplicity' an asset,¹⁸ though Bharucha, speaking as a connoisseur of the 'variety' entertainment that popular Hindi cinema usually provides, condemned it as a 'ruthless' and 'claustrophobic' levelling of narrative and dramatic possibilities (1995: 801, 804).

Kailash Nath is a bachelor industrialist, and guardian of his two orphaned nephews: Rajesh (Mohnish Bahl) and Prem (Salman Khan). Through the mediation of the boys' maternal uncle (Ajit Vacchani), a marriage is arranged between Rajesh and Puja (Renuka Shahane), the elder daughter of Prof. S.S. Chowdhury (Anupam Kher) and his lovely wife (Reema Lagoo), both of them, as it happens, old college friends of Kailash Nath's.

Side by side, through a series of life-cycle rituals of engagement, marriage, pregnancy, and childbirth, Rajesh's younger brother, Prem, is attracted to Puja's younger sister, Nisha (Madhuri Dixit), and determines to marry her as soon as he can set up independently in business. He confides in his sister-in-law, who has incidentally been charged with the responsibility of finding a wife for him.

Puja has Prem tie a necklace on Nisha as a token of his love and commitment, but immediately afterwards she falls to her death without communicating this development to the rest of the family. Both families are grief-stricken over Puja's tragic death, and Rajesh is quite distraught worrying over the upbringing of his motherless son.

Unaware of the truth between Prem and Nisha, the elders in the family decide that the best solution to Rajesh's dilemma and sorrow would be for

him to marry Nisha, who is already giving her sister's child a mother's love. Nisha agrees to the match, mistakenly believing she is to be married to Prem, while Prem conceals his personal anguish out of love and concern for the well-being of his elder brother and infant nephew, and obedience to the will of senior family members.

As the marriage of Rajesh and Nisha is about to take place, Lallu, the loyal family servant and Prem's confidant and friend, appeals to Lord Krishna to intercede. With the help of Tuffy the dog, the true situation is revealed in the nick of time. Prem and Nisha are united with family blessings.

I. What Makes a 'Clean' Movie?

There are obviously several different components to the widespread categorization of *HAHK* as a clean and morally uplifting movie, suitable for 'family' viewing as contrasted by the same token with the majority of Bollywood *masala* productions. I will deal with these features separately, while suggesting that there is an intrinsic conceptual link uniting them.

(i) *The Lack of 'Vulgarity'*

For the last several years, the Indian media and the general public have been obsessed with the sexual content—what is euphemistically called 'vulgarity'—in popular cinema, particularly in the song-dance items. The charge of vulgarity is not at all a new one: it has been made from the very early days of Indian cinema (Kakar 1981: 11). But it certainly reached a crescendo in 1993–4 with the notorious (and indubitably catchy) song, '*Choli ke peechey kya hai?*' ('What's she got behind her bodice?'), from Subhash Ghai's film, *Khalnayak*¹⁹ (a song, incidentally, picturized on *HAHK*'s heroine, Madhuri Dixit).

Cinematic vulgarity is popularly believed to stem from two distinct sources, operating in baleful combination: from the culturally alien and morally corrupting influence of Hollywood movies; and from the debased cultural values of the lower classes, on whose patronage the success of any movie ultimately depends (Kakar 1981: 12–13). From its early days, the Bombay movie industry has imitated, indeed often plagiarized, Hollywood movies, but this process of mediated adaptation has recently been threatened by the direct entry of western films into the Indian scene: for the middle classes and urban dwellers through the satellite and cable TV channels; and, more generally, through the dubbing into Hindi of Hollywood films, beginning with the commercially successful, *Jurassic Park*. These developments had caused panic in the Indian film industry, at least momentarily, but *HAHK*

now appears to have restored confidence that clean, indigenous, 'vegetarian' products can hold their own commercially while simultaneously stemming the supposedly rising tide of sexual promiscuity and moral depravity. In fact, the Barjatyas are credited with taking 'an explicit position against erotic, abandoned sexuality . . . in favour of a restrained sexuality' (Mayaram n.d.: 12).

In all interviews, my informants were at pains to stress that *HAHK* contained no 'vulgarity'. This is clearly one aspect of its classification as a 'family' film, that is the whole family (grandparents, parents, and children) can watch it together without embarrassment, and it is a criterion that apparently carries great weight in the popular mind (Mishra 1995; Zaveri 1994a). The songs and dances are deemed clean—*saf-suthra*—and 'tasteful' (Zaveri 1994a). Thus, while Salman gets a drenching on two occasions, Madhuri correctly passes up the opportunity to get soaking wet too and 'burst into an obscene number' (Mishra 1995). (Indeed, a sceptical onlooker, presumably a distributor-financier, witnessing the filming of the movie's most spectacular song, '*Didi, tera devar divana*', had declared that such a song would never catch on with the general public unless it had at least a dash of 'rain' to jazz it up [Zaveri 1994a]!) Moreover, as Asha pointed out to me, 'There is no single bedroom scene: the 'first night scene' and the 'honeymoon scene', those staple ingredients that she insisted were often 'deliberately created' in commercial Hindi cinema—and given the stress on pre-marital virginity, the focus of much sexual fantasy and anxiety²⁰—are carefully 'avoided'.

Curiously, Asha's comment ignores the chase after the groom's shoes that fortuitously lands Prem and Nisha together on a bridal-type double bed, to the whistles and applause of the audience. Curiously, too, neither she nor anyone else took offence at, or even bothered to remark on, the blatant suggestiveness of Prem's symbolic seduction of Nisha on the billiard table: Prem acknowledges her as the woman he's been waiting for; their eyes meet across the table; and with calculated precision and understated exhilaration, he shoots the billiard ball into the waiting hole.²¹

Asked how she viewed the relationship between Nisha and Prem, 82-year-old Daljit Kaur²² deemed it a bit 'free' (English term). On investigation, however, it appeared that she was not referring to their romance and its rendering in song and dance, but to the initial joking relationship of the pair as affines, that is as the younger sister and younger brother of the bride and groom respectively. However, as she then went on to explain, the latter relationship was still quite within proper limits. This, she said, was shown by the fact that, when Prem was leaving Nisha's home after the marriage

and the customary tussle between the bride's 'sisters' and the groom's party over the groom's shoes, he had whispered to her: 'Please forgive me if I've done anything wrong while having fun,' thereby disarming would-be critics and showing that it really was just good clean fun after all.

Daljit's comment draws attention to an interesting aspect of the relationship of Prem and Nisha as it develops through the course of the film. From a carefree, mischievous, chocolate-licking lass on roller skates, Nisha becomes increasingly demure, soon expressing her growing affection for Prem in rather 'wifely' ways: waiting up for him when he is working late; cooking for him and serving him at table (including paring his apple for him); preparing his favourite *halwa*; and sharing with him the baby-sitting of their infant nephew. Simultaneously, she outgrows her adolescent boldness and becomes so bashfully tongue-tied that she finds herself, at the critical moment, unable to confess to her love for Prem and to reject the proposal of marriage to Rajesh (even when she is given a good opening by Rajesh himself). Similarly, Prem matures from a teasing kid brother to a young man in love—'Shit! I love her,' is his exclamation of delighted self-recognition—to an established man-of-the-world with a business of his own, prepared to sacrifice his personal happiness for the higher good of his brother and family. In other words, the blossoming of romantic love and maturing sexuality is not scripted as increasing licence, but as increasing inhibition—the end of playfulness and an induction into the discipline of conjugality, within the larger discipline of joint-family living (cf. Niranjana n.d.: 6, 10).

There seems to be some substance, then, in the disenchanted *Filmfare* reader's observation, already referred to, that both Puja and Nisha are ultimately 'true to their traditional role models' as Hindu wives—domesticated and bashful—despite their liberal upbringing and, in the case of Nisha, apparent boldness.²³ Sunita, an outspoken young woman lecturer, was more explicit. Declaring the film to be 'nauseatingly' conformist, she complained that it had managed to eliminate 'sex' from the very place it should be—the conjugal relationship—while shamelessly celebrating fecundity.

In an anthropological perspective, however, Sunita's reaction appears rather superficial. Sex may not have been foregrounded, but its 'backstage' presence (cf. Das 1976) was nonetheless acknowledged, albeit relatively subtly for a Hindi movie. As film-maker Shohini Ghosh has pointed out (n.d.), in fact *all* the man-woman relationships that are explored in the course of the film disclose a greater or lesser degree of 'erotic tension'.²⁴ Particularly suggestive, however, are the customary cross-sex 'joking relations' of the north Indian kinship system,²⁵ which can plausibly be read as playful surrogates for the sexual relation of husband and wife (cf. Kolenda

1990: 144) and which are typically the subject of bawdy songs in exclusively women's rituals at the time of marriage (Kolenda 1990; Hershman 1981: 163–8, 175, 185): the relations of *jija-sali* (sister's husband/wife's younger sister); of *devar-bhabhi* (husband's younger brother/elder brother's wife); and, very often, of *samdhi-samdhan* (cross-sex co-parents-in-law).²⁶ Each of these relations is explicitly foregrounded in one or another of *HAAK*'s spectacular songs.

The north Indian culture of affinity, with its sexual overtones, is playfully invoked in the shoe-stealing incident and the song ('*Jute do, paise lo*') through which it is articulated. While the choreography pits the boys of the groom's party against the 'sisters' of the bride (a group marriage fantasy?), the libretto makes clear that the relations are of the 'groom's *salis*' and the 'bride's *devars*'. And, as already noted, the song ends with the bride's younger sister, blushing, on a bridal-type bed with the groom's younger brother. As Pauline Kolenda has remarked in reference to the set of cross-sex joking relations between affines in north Indian kinship, this song 'reiterate[s] the purpose of the contact between the two groups—to establish a sexual relationship between a male member of one group and a female member of the other' (1990: 144). Simultaneously, it also hints at the institutions of sororate and levirate, both of which emerge as dramatic possibilities in the unfolding of the film narrative (Kolenda 1990: 130, 140–1; Hershman 1981: 195–6).

Of the many viewers I spoke with who insisted that *HAAK* represents traditional Indian culture (see following pages), not one thought to point out that the content of such women's marriage songs is typically irreverent and bawdy to the point—very often—of obscenity (see S. Singh 1972; Werbner 1990: 260). (In fact, the Arya Samaj and other social organizations have worked hard over the last century to reform or eliminate these undesirable genres—genres which are, incidentally, a specifically *female* form of expression and protest [Chowdhry 1994: 392–7; cf. also Banerjee 1989].) So, while the teasing songs of *HAAK* are themselves innocuous enough, judging by cinema hall reactions, there is every likelihood that for many in the audience they conjure up recall or anticipation of the sexually explicit content of the traditional marriage songs, and of the wider popular culture of affinity in north India (Singh 1972; Srinivasan 1976).

On the surface, Rajesh and Nisha as *jija-sali* appear to have an appropriately restrained relationship, which in fact becomes more inhibited as the *sali* prepares to become the wife. But the erotic potentialities of this relationship in the idiom of popular culture are unmistakably disclosed when, in the course of a party game, Rajesh volunteers a couplet alluding

to a three-way relationship of husband, wife, and *sali*: 'Eye your sister-in-law, while chatting with your wife.' The sexual innuendo of this verse was not lost on one young woman, who wrote in her college magazine that the projection of the *sali* as the 'half-wife' was surely 'one of the most offensive concepts still prevalent in Indian society', and she went on to castigate those viewers of *HAAK* 'who find nothing questionable in a man desiring his nubile sister-in-law and then using his wife to satiate his desire' (S. Das 1995: 25).

Similarly, the teasingly affectionate relationship between Puja and Prem,²⁷ iconicized in the film's most famous song, '*Didi, tera devar divana*' (in the course of which Nisha becomes Puja and the mock *devar*—Rita in drag—is replaced by the real *devar*), would seem to have more than a hint of sexuality—or so the ethnographer believed. For instance, Rajesh is clearly rather miffed when his wife and brother (and Tuffy the dog in sunglasses) gang up against him in a family cricket match. Moreover, at one point the film narrative definitely seems to be leading towards a leviratic outcome: 'I know what will happen,' my companion on one of my viewings hissed to me when Rajesh is suddenly called abroad on business, commending his heavily pregnant wife to the care of his bashful younger brother: 'He's going to die in a plane crash, and she'll have to marry the younger brother.'

But suspicion of sexual overtones in the relation of Puja and Prem was clearly the ethnographer's.²⁸ Their relationship, she was assured by all and sundry, was exactly as it should be: affectionate and respectful. Though Puja was presumably about Prem's age, she was actually—as the film script explicitly states (overstates?) at several points—expected to be like a *mother* to the orphaned boy who had never known a mother's love. Besides, as Daljit Kaur added on my further probing, it is actually important for family solidarity that the *bhabhi-devar* relationship be close and affectionate. Perhaps she also meant that the joking and teasing may contribute actively to the growth of affection and solidarity in a situation where the bride is initially a stranger in her husband's home (cf. Kolenda 1990: 143–4).

There seems to be no agreement in north Indian ethnographies on whether the relation of cross-sex parents-in-law is typically a flirtatious joking relationship, or one of avoidance (Kolenda 1990: 135, 138–9, 147n.12; Hershman 1981: 203; Vatuk 1976: 181–6).²⁹ *HAAK* suggests something of both: a restrained relationship when the bride's mother, as her husband's wife, represents the bride-giving party *vis-à-vis* the bride-takers (see Section II.ii in this chapter); and a flirtatious, mock sexual relationship when she identifies with her daughter as an object of marital exchange. This latter,

embedded in the song '*Samdhi-samdhan*', was variously interpreted by my informants: some saw the relationship as respectfully affectionate, but not at all improper; some, like Mrs Goel (see Section I.iii here), thought the song alluded to a past affair and the 'sacrifice' by one friend for the other. A sophisticated film critic and student of Cultural Studies identified this as the moment of 'transgression' he had been waiting for, while another informant—a student of sociology—thought the song improper by 'traditional' standards. In his opinion, a woman could not, even in jest, admit *in mixed company* to a past love affair, though it might well be the subject of speculation, teasing, or ribald joking in women's gatherings.³⁰

To sum up: *HAAK*'s supposed elimination of 'vulgarity' seems to carry a double meaning: one, explicitly foregrounded, the avoidance of the *masala* ingredients found in so many contemporary Hindi movies; the second, unacknowledged, the sanitization of a bawdy folk tradition of women's songs, making them fit—or almost fit—for mixed viewing, and for representing Indian culture and tradition. Perhaps this is what has made this film so recognizably one *of* and *for* the Indian middle classes, rather than for the class of '*rickshawwallahs*', i.e. the front-benchers, who are usually regarded as the arbiters of popular cinematic style and taste.³¹

(ii) *The Display of Affluence*

Judging by several viewers' comments, another notable aspect of *HAAK*'s overall impression of decency is its unembarrassed endorsement of upper-class, indeed affluent, lifestyles—no poverty or 'simplicity' here. As Bharucha has pointed out (1995), in terms of its sets, props, and costumes, the film is a veritable parade of fetishized middle-class status symbols; in homes, cars, children's toys, clothes, etc. Even Tuffy the dog, who drew applause and appreciation for his several cameo performances, is the epitome of Indian middle-class aspirations in pet dogs. The two homes on display, including that of the less prosperous professor, were much admired by my companions (my attention was called to the beautiful kitchen, the 'tasteful' marriage decorations, etc.); costumes are gorgeous, and now much copied in the subsidiary industry this film has spawned (Zaveri 1994a: 6–7); lavish gift-giving is a conspicuous feature of all ceremonial occasions; and food is quite mouth-watering (Zaveri 1994a: 802), and frequently deployed to index the quality and intimacy of social relationships. 'Look Papa, they are eating,' said a little girl behind me at regular intervals through the film, reminding one of just how often sumptuous food was offered up for visual and gastronomic consumption.

Viewers were for the most part very appreciative of all this opulence, construing it as evidence of the elite social status of the two families. There were some minor misgivings, however. The picture-book cleanliness of the temple-ashram was thought to be a bit 'unbelievable' (cf. Zaveri 1994a: 803), while the lavish costumes of the maid, Chameli, were deemed 'over-done'. The same could well have been said of the costumes of the village belles and the appurtenances of the rural village through which the romantic pair briefly romp; but none of my informants thought to point that out.³² Asha was perturbed by one detail, however. She found very worrisome the scene of the bridegroom's party being feasted in a supposedly 'traditional' style, seated on the floor and eating off leaf plates. Rich people might do that in their homes, or in the context of a religious ceremony, she told me authoritatively; but having attended several 'high-class' weddings, she was quite sure that the bride's family would treat the bridegroom's party to a feast laid out formally on tables with all the plates, cutlery, and so on.

Asha's critical comment suggests that the film's effort to meld *haut bourgeois* lifestyles seamlessly with religiosity and with traditionalism in rituals—thereby legitimizing affluence as a value in itself—was not altogether successful. But on the whole the display of opulence was accepted without guilt, and with no indication—in the film narrative or in audience reactions—that affluence might be corrupting or ill-gained, as was so often the case in the Hindi movies of an earlier era, where poverty signalled virtue, and wealth, spiritual depravity (cf. Jayamanne 1992: 150; also Bharucha 1995: esp. 802).

The good breeding of the two families (the word *khandan* was often used in this context, both descriptively and evaluatively) was also thought to be reflected in the gracious treatment of servants—'like family members'.³³ In reverse, the mean-mouthed Mamiji and her silly niece Rita disclose their lack of genuine class by their scornful and inconsiderate attitude to the servants. The manservant Lallu is Prem's friend, co-conspirator, and trusted confidant—even more so than Prem's own elder brother, Rajesh, in whom Prem had hesitated to confide his growing love for Nisha. Symbolically—and the symbolism is very heavily laid on in a tear-jerking ('emotional') soliloquy by Lallu—Puja gives her own life in exchange for that of Lallu's sister-in-law; and she blesses the romance of Lallu and Chameli just as she does that of Prem and Nisha. In other words, fictitious kinship almost succeeds in overriding class differentiation (Bharucha 1995: 803).³⁴

The gracious treatment of servants and their incorporation into the family were spontaneously commended by many viewers. Said Satinder,³⁵ in praise of the film:

The director has given equal importance to all the characters, even to the servants of the house.

Though my socialist feminist friend found the transformation of class differences into family relationships 'phoney', one indication among several others of the film's sinister political agenda, this was not an issue that worried many others. Excepting the comment on Chameli's inappropriate attire, most viewers were content to debate whether this combination of features should be regarded as characterizing the lifestyle of a traditional 'feudal' society, or of the *nouveau riche*—or something of both. In either case, it is clear that *HAAK*'s supposed lack of 'vulgarity' implied a distancing from the carnal desires of the working classes and was metonymically linked in some subtle way to the film's consistent display of the fetishized symbols of middle-class consumerist desire.

(iii) *The Spirit of 'Sacrifice'*

Though romantic love is a prime ingredient of the popular media in South Asia, as elsewhere, it is obviously deeply problematic (Jayamanne 1992: 150; Singh and Uberoi 1994). *HAAK*, like many other popular Hindi films, sets up, and then seeks to resolve in the course of the unfolding of the film narrative, a tension between the 'desire' of the romantic protagonists for each other, and their '*dharma*' or social responsibility (in this case, to the wider family); between their exercise of free will and choice in the matter of marriage, and social (or cosmic) imperative (Uberoi 1997). And sometimes the attainment of larger social ends requires the sacrifice of immediate personal goals.

Several of my informants assured me that, in one way or another, *HAAK* is essentially a film about 'sacrifice'. As Asha explained to me:

The story wants to highlight the theme of sacrifice. That's why it makes Puja die in an accident.

You see it in the scene at Rajesh's bedside. Prem goes out of the room. Then he comes back in—and makes the sacrifice.

Prem's 'sacrifice' was superior to Nisha's, Asha elaborated, because he 'sacrificed his love and will deliberately for the sake of an ideal joint family'. Though Nisha appeared to do the same, she did so only 'under misunderstanding'. In fact, she was initially under the impression that she was to be married to Prem and then, when she realized the truth, simply 'didn't get time or chance to show her reluctance'.³⁶

Sacrifice, of course, involves a genuine dilemma: one precious thing has

to be given up for another. It is natural, therefore, that viewers should be in two minds about whether in particular instances the sacrifice was, or was not, justified. 'Why did they have to kill Puja?', a young companion asked resentfully after the show. But clearly the tragic death of Puja, a typical Hindi deathbed tableau (cf. Jayamanne 1992: 150), was essential in order to give meaning to the sacrifice that Prem and Nisha were then called upon to make for a greater good than their own love for each other. While none of my informants queried Prem's conduct (with the exception of the visiting British anthropologist, Ronnie, who declared our hero a 'wimp'), Nisha's 'sacrifice' produced mixed reactions. On the one hand was the reaction of Asha, already cited, who thought Nisha's sacrifice involuntary, and thus (compared to Prem's) imperfect; on the other the disappointment of some viewers who felt that *HAAK* still showed women 'in their traditional role models', though Nisha is initially introduced as an emancipated modern girl, with a will and mind of her own.³⁷ This dissonance of character was obviously felt by the film's leading lady who commented somewhat defensively:

There is some criticism that Nisha gives in too easily to her family's decision . . . that she's kept in the dark about a major decision like her marriage. But I would like to emphasize that once I come to know what's going on, I try to make amends. But before I can reveal my true feelings, Alok Nath [Kailash Nath] points out my soon-to-be-husband happily playing with the baby and thanks me for giving them a new life. That's when I decide to sacrifice my love to keep my sister's little family together.³⁸

For Daljit Kaur, waxing eloquent on what was obviously a favourite theme, this spirit of sacrifice was a value that was now rarely to be found in families. Illustrating her statements with examples, good and bad, from families she knows and from the plots of popular Hindi novels (which she recounted as though they were real personal histories), she spoke at length on the *unselfishness* that several of the film characters displayed. Ignoring the tear-jerking sacrifice that Prem and Nisha intended, but happily were not ultimately required, to make, she pointed instead to the unselfishness of Mamaji (the mother's brother) who took a special quasi-paternal interest in his dead sister's children and was responsible for arranging the match between Rajesh and Puja: 'He wanted to arrange the sort of marriage for Rajesh that would be good for the *khandan*,' she said. (Mamiji, his wife, was quite the opposite in this regard, as we will see [II.iii]).

She was even more admiring of Kailash Nath, the boys' paternal uncle who, while himself remaining a bachelor, had selflessly brought up his elder

brother's children as his own: 'Nowadays,' she said authoritatively, 'people only care for their own. Like a *mama* would think, "there's not enough to go round in my home [so why should I take on the burden of someone else's child?]"' (cf. Das 1976).

Asha also stressed that it requires great nobility of spirit to love another's child like one's own, adding, with her own illustrations from family histories, that once they get married and have children of their own, brothers and sisters cease caring so much for their siblings' children.

Mrs Goel, a 60-year-old housewife, suggested another dimension to the sacrifice theme, and to the nobility of Kailash Nath's character. Inquiring how much I had really understood about the film, she explained it for me as follows:

It's about 'Indian culture' [English phrase].
There were these two boys at college.
They were both in love with the same girl. . . .

When they realised it, they held a competition. One married her and the other stayed a bachelor. But when his nephew's marriage was arranged, it was with that woman's daughter. You get the story from that song, '*Samdhi-samdhan*'. The story begins there.³⁹

[P.U.]: The girl's mother had tears in her eyes when she was singing.

[Mrs Goel]: Yes, she was saying, 'Take care of my daughter. Now she's going to your house.'

(iv) *The Family as 'Tradition'*

Any number of viewers stressed—and, I like to think, not entirely for the benefit of the 'foreign' ethnographer—that *HAAK* is not only a film about the Indian 'joint family' and the sacrifices individual members have to make on its behalf; it is simultaneously a film about Indian 'culture, society and tradition'. Said Asha, summarizing the opinion of her friends:

Everyone likes and enjoys it. It shows Indian culture and society and tradition. . . . What we see in our families, we see it on the screen.

She then went on to give examples of what she meant, for instance the play of hiding the groom's shoes by the bride's sisters and friends, a practice of which she had earlier said, during a viewing of the film: 'It *was* common; not now.'

The element of nostalgia was even more prominent in the testimony of Daljit Kaur. In her rambling reflections on *HAAK*, she repeatedly emphasized that the film shows domestic rituals and family relationships as they once

were and as they *should be*, but not as they presently are in a degenerate world. In praise of the film, she noted:

It shows all the *rasmas* [ceremonials], and in a most enjoyable way.

Now this (like Asha's comment) is a rather unexpected perspective on the Indian cultural tradition, for it clearly identifies *folkways*, rather than *Sanskritic rituals*, with the essence of 'tradition'.⁴⁰ Indeed, for an anthropologist it is rather striking that *HAHK* focuses, particularly in the spectacular song-dance items, on the *non-Sanskritic* and often exclusively women's rituals that run parallel to, interweave with, and even challenge in gestures of symbolic reversal the hegemony of representation of the Sanskritic life-cycle rituals—the *sanskars* proper—that are performed by the *purohit* following the rules elaborated in the *shastras* (cf. Fruzzetti 1990; Hanchett 1988; Kolenda 1990; Inden and Nicholas 1977: esp. ch. 2; Sharma 1993, etc.). Though this evocation of the folk tradition goes rather against the grain of Indian modernism which, as already noted (I.i in this chapter) has mostly sought to purge the Indian tradition of the excrescences of the folk tradition and restore it to its pristine and uncontaminated form (Chakravarti 1989; Mani 1989; Nandy 1995c), it is consistent with an alternative modernist strategy whereby the folk tradition in its manifold forms is appropriated for nationalist and developmental ends (e.g. Rege 1995: 30–2, 35–6; Singh 1996).

In the unfolding of the story of *HAHK*, a series of life-crisis rituals—betrothal, engagement the *mehndi* and marriage ceremonies, a seventh-month pregnancy ritual, and celebrations of childbirth (including the visit of the *hijras* to bless the newborn child)—are all presented in their non-Sanskritic idioms, albeit purged of the 'obscenity' with which they are often associated. The most remarkable instance is the marriage ceremony itself, the centrepiece and indeed the *raison d'être* of the movie. Here the sacramental *saptapadi* marriage rite, the seven circumambulations of the sacred fire, is no more than a suggestive backdrop for the enactment of the 'teasing' of the young men of the groom's party by the bride's sisters and friends. 'Be careful,' Lallu warns Prem as they enter the wedding reception, 'we're surrounded by our enemies here.' The bride's sisters first try to make fools of Prem and Lallu by persuading them to sit on a specially prepared couch of crackling *papar*. Then, in a long-extended sequence, charted by the exceedingly popular song, '*Jute do, paise lo*' ('Give us the shoes, take the money'), the bride's sisters steal the groom's shoes; the groom's party, aided by the invincible combination of Lord Krishna and Tuffy the dog, recover the shoes; and finally the bride's friends regain the shoes and claim the reward, only

then allowing the groom to proceed home with his bride.⁴¹ (Of course we all know that this is a pyrrhic victory, for the extended chase after the shoes has not only landed Prem and Nisha compromisingly in a double bed together, but has given Prem the opportunity to twist Nisha's arm and—if he would—wrest the shoes from her.⁴²)

The long marriage sequence concludes with the *doli* (*bidai*) ceremony, which expresses most poignantly the anguish of the daughter leaving the love and security of her father's home (see Chowdhry 1994: 310). Many in the audience are now weeping unashamedly, as they do once again when Puja dies—an irrevocable departure. As Veena Das has pointed out, such moments of loss are those where the feminine briefly finds voice to interrogate the normative values of the patriarchal family and the justice of the cosmic order (Das n.d.). Strange indeed that such interrogative moments should be held to *epitomize* the Indian tradition and its ideals of family life!

Judging by the comments of viewers, in sum, it seems that the classification of *HAHK* as a 'clean' movie involves a complex of different features: the avoidance of the routine Bollywood *masala* ingredients of sex, sadism, and violence; the display of affluent lifestyles, effortlessly achieved and maintained; the exploration of the ennobling theme of individual sacrifice on behalf of the family (rather than, for instance, the celebration of violent revenge); and the evocation of ideals of Indian culture and tradition, subtly Hinduized,⁴³ embourgeoise-ized (to coin a horrible neologism) through the naturalization of affluence and, for that matter Aryanized, for the tradition of Indian kinship that is celebrated is a generalized north Indian one (cf. Uberoi 1990). How these disparate features hang together to constitute a contemporary sense of self and society, and the 'politics' of this construction, are questions to which we will return, but meanwhile it is important, to address the central theme of the film: the Indian family. What are the features of *HAHK*'s construction of the ideal of Indian family life? Is there a 'politics' to this construction, too? And what is the relationship between this ideal and the common assessment of the film as a good, clean movie?

II. The Constitution of the Ideal Indian Family

In an early essay on Indian popular cinema, Sudhir Kakar, had drawn attention to the important role of the family in Bollywood movies—not only in explicitly 'family' and so-called 'social' films, but in 'action' films as well. From his disciplinary perspective as a psychoanalyst, he suggested that the stereotypical roles and narrative structures of these movies are collective

projections of the anxieties generated by early childhood or adolescent experiences in the family. The chief locus of this anxiety, according to Kakar, is the mother-son relationship (and to a lesser extent the father-daughter relation), resulting in the splitting of the maternal image between the idealized, self-sacrificing mother and the cruel, rejecting mother-figure,⁴⁴ and a parallel splitting between the good and bad aspects of the self. Kakar concedes that the mother-son relation is significantly inflected by the wider context of the Indian joint family, with its underplaying of the husband-wife relation (1978: ch. 3; also Nandy 1980), but the joint family is for him merely the local backdrop for a universal narrative of psycho-sexual maturation, focused on the cross-sex dyadic relations of the nuclear family.

Undoubtedly, *HAKH* would provide some grist to the psychoanalyst's mill, particularly in regard to the interpretation of the *bhabhi-devar* relationship. Thus it is several times stressed that, of the two brothers, Prem had never known a mother's love; Puja, as the new 'lady of the house', was to be like a mother to him (and to the manservant, Lallu).

These and other hints clearly weighed heavily with my informants who, as noted, had erased all suggestion of sexuality from the *bhabhi-devar* relationship despite the familiarity of their horseplay and the unfulfilled fantasy of levirate. Mamiji was of course the very archetype of the bad mother, though neither of the boys seemed to take offence at her conduct.

However, where the psychoanalytic perspective focuses on the elementary relationships of the nuclear family, *HAKH* posits the naturalness or 'just-so' status of the patrilineal joint family within a wider system of kinship and affinity.

(i) *The Ideal of the Joint Family*

There was one aspect of the film narrative that rather puzzled me. I asked my informants: 'Why did Kailash Nath have to be the *uncle* (*caca* [FyB], of the boys? Wouldn't the story have been the same if he were their real father?' 'It's just a coincidence,' I was told. 'There's no reason!'

On closer look, however, one could say that there was a very good reason for Kailash Nath to be the boys' uncle. Apart from demonstrating his selfless nobility of character (see I.iii here), it is this crucial fact that makes this family a joint *family*, if not a joint *household* in the strict technical sense (see Shah 1974; 1996). As a moral institution, the Indian joint family is one in which the claims of individual members, the sexual relation of husband and wife, and the biological relation of parent and child are subordinated to the larger interests of the family collectivity (Das 1976). Kailash Nath exemplified the values of the joint family for the reason that he was able to

renounce his right to an elementary family life of his own, and bring up his orphaned nephews with the same love that a biological father would have shown. As my informants commented, this is a rare attribute, much to be admired.

In turn, in the next generation, the dramatic climax of the film hinges on the crucial questions of (i) whether a stepmother can or cannot give a child a real mother's love; (ii) whether a close blood relation (in this case, the mother's sister) is or is not the obvious and best substitute for the biological mother; and (iii) recalling in a way Kailash Nath's own life history, whether a brother's wife can give her nephew (HBS) the same love that she would have given had she been married to the child's father. *HAKH* rules that a close biological relation is self-evidently a more appropriate foster mother than a distant relation or outsider; but that, ideally speaking, and in the assumed context of the joint family, the fostering can be done equally well by the woman as *caci*. She does not have to become the child's father's wife.

Similarly, though Rajesh and Puja appropriately fall in love with each other after their marriage is arranged, Puja's role is, first, to be the 'house-lady' in a house which has been without one for many years (a part she plays with distinction); and, second, to produce an heir for the family (which she immediately does). And while Rajesh genuinely mourns her death, as does everyone else, including Tuffy the dog, his real worry is the upbringing of his motherless son. It is the pathos of Rajesh's situation that persuades Nisha that she should accept the elders' mandate and marry Rajesh. In caring for 'her sister's little family' more than her own love, Nisha demonstrates her internalization of joint family values; and she has only to be made to publicly acknowledge that she will care for the child as *caci* as much as she would as stepmother, for the film drama to come to a happy-ever-after conclusion.

For the last century and a half, if not longer, public opinion in India has been obsessed with the spectre of the imminent break-up of the Indian joint family system through processes of urbanization, industrialization, westernization, individualization, and the liberation of women. Many professional sociologists of the family are sceptical on this score (e.g. Shah 1974; 1996; Vatuk 1972), but even the most sceptical of them concede that the joint family is, if not a *fact* of traditional Indian society, at least a deeply held traditional *value* that continues to provide the underlying principles of household-building strategies in South Asia, though differently for different regions, castes, and communities. A.M. Shah, in typical 'sociologese', has termed this the principle of 'the residential unity of patrikin and their wives' (1974: 48 ff.).

It is notable that *HAAK*'s cinematic affirmation of joint family ideals has been achieved through the consistent *erasure* of the set of factors that characteristically puts the joint family structure under strain. Thus there is no antagonism between the father (or father-figure, Kailash Nath) and the sons, for Kailash Nath simply does not act like a despotic patriarch (cf. Mukherjee 1995); he is also not in competition with the sons for their mother's love, for their mother is long dead. There is no tension between the two brothers—the younger one willingly sacrifices for the elder when the moment comes. There is no tension between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law: for good measure, the mother-in-law role has been eliminated from the storyline and Puja comes into a home where she is the unchallenged, and very welcome, 'house-lady'. And there is no tension between sisters-in-law: had Puja not died, her *devrani* (HyBW) would have been her own, much-loved sister, a prospect with which she was obviously quite delighted.⁴⁵

All this is almost too good to be true, as my informants remarked with candour, no doubt reflecting on the complexities of their own family situations. The sort of individual sacrifice required to keep the joint family harmoniously functioning 'is not generally found in families', I was told in explanation. Nonetheless, my informants remained convinced that the ideal was possible and worthy of attainment, if not in their own families, due to various contingent reasons, at least in *other* families, or in the Indian family as it had once been. We will address this question again in due course.

(ii) *Affinity as a value*⁴⁶

Meanwhile, it can hardly be sufficiently emphasized that the joint family of *HAAK* is conceived as only a unit in a system of families linked by marriage. The film focuses centrally on the marriage of Rajesh and Puja, on the affinal relationships which this event brings into being, on the projected replication of this family alliance through the marriage of Rajesh and Nisha, and on the ultimate happy-ending marriage of the younger siblings, Prem and Nisha. There is a lot of wordplay on the transformation of consanguinity into affinity (the younger sister becomes a *devrani*);⁴⁷ and of affinity into consanguinity (the child's *mausi* [MS] becomes a *caci* [FyBW]). The most popular songs are unabashed celebrations of affinity and of the joking relations that affinity creates.⁴⁸

Once again, however, there is a consistent process of erasure at work. The characteristic feature of affinity in north Indian kinship is the inequality

of status between the inferior bride-givers and superior bride-takers which is expressed both in ritual and etiquette and in the asymmetrical flow of gifts from the bride's to the groom's family. In *HAAK*, the structural tension (and oftentimes emotional antagonism) between wife-givers and wife-receivers in the north Indian kinship system is happily neutralized by making the fathers-in-law old friends. Professor Chowdhury, the bride-giver, spontaneously says 'Thank you' to Kailash Nath when the latter, now a prosperous industrialist, comes with a proposal for Puja. But this is brushed aside by Kailash Nath who nobly demurs: 'It's I who should thank you' for providing a bride for his home and a 'mother' for Prem. A wealthy man, Kailash Nath makes it clear that he is not seeking material or social gain from his nephew's marriage; he wants only a well-bred, 'simple' (*sidhi-sadi*) girl to preside over the home and care for Prem.

Professor Chowdhury, rather improbably given the tension between wife-givers and wife-takers in north Indian marriage, positively clowns his way through the important *milni* ritual (when the senior men of the bride's side greet the senior men of the groom's party), before the two fathers-in-law embrace as friends. This clowning continues in one form or another through all their interactions, to the great delight of the audience.⁴⁹ When Puja's mother demurs that it is not correct to overstay at their daughter's married home (where they have gone to celebrate the birth of their grandson), her husband reminds her that Kailash Nath was his *friend* before he was their daughter's father-in-law. As though to emphasize this non-contradiction, notwithstanding the newly instituted affinal relation, the two 'grandfathers' wear identical costumes—by design, so that the (classificatory) *Dada* (FF) and *Nana* (MF) could be 'as one'. It would be rather difficult to devise a triter symbolic representation of their non-differentiation.

With these highly motivated erasures and structural adjustments, much of the tension that normally invests north Indian marriage is neatly disposed of. Of course, not everyone was convinced of the adequacy of this solution. Asha, as we have seen, was quite perturbed at the informal ('free') treatment of the bridegroom's party. She also felt that a great deal of unpleasantness can occur if the children of friends marry and something goes wrong—it can ruin a friendship for one thing—though she hastened to add that there is usually some other cause of tension in such cases—for instance a breach of affinal etiquette on matters like inquiring after a sick relative, or attending a funeral. Similarly, she insisted, the quantum of dowry becomes an issue in the relations between affines only when there are other sources of tension. On the whole she believed that tensions both *within* joint families

and *between* affines were less likely where material resources were ample, and people had no money worries.⁵⁰

Clearly, the credibility of the family ideal constructed in *HAAK* was closely linked, at least in the minds of some viewers, to the affluence of the intermarrying families. Though the professor was reputedly not as well off as Kailash Nath, a fact to which Mamiji rather meanly drew attention, the two families had no material cause to quarrel over anything. In this sense, the film's opulence is functional, removing what is popularly believed to be a major irritant in real family relations, and allowing the free play and development of other elements. The outcome is a highly satisfying and nostalgic fantasy of ideal family life, a mediation of desire and reality which almost, but not completely, succeeds in erasing the unpleasant truth of practical experience. As one viewer summed it up for me: 'It's an ideal nostalgic world. No rich, no poor, no villain, no obstacles. The only problem is an accident'—without which, as it happens, there would have been no story to tell.⁵¹

(iii) *The Truth-telling Voice*

There is, however, a truth-telling voice in the film, a comic yet rather unpleasant character who, at every turn in the plot, questions the sanitized ideal of the joint family and of affinal relationships that the film is seeking to construct and project. Perhaps this injection of evil is necessary, lest the film fantasy be just too unreal—all desire and no reality.

The character who takes on this important role is the archetypal 'bad mother'—the childless Mamiji (MBW)—played by a siren of yesteryear, Bindu. Vain, overdressed, selfish, opinionated, she ultimately gets her just reward, a public slap from the long-suffering Mamaji. Thus tamed, she conceives after all, and is co-opted to the possibility of a 'good mother' role; but not before she has had her say, *contra* Mamaji, at all dramatic points in the film narrative.

Mamiji's role, though a small one, clearly demands careful scrutiny. I now take up the more important of Mamiji's unpleasant interventions in the film narrative, in the order of their occurrence:

1. Mamaji and the overdressed Mamiji appear in almost the first scene of the movie, colliding with Mamiji's foolish niece, Rita ('Bum Chum' written across her roundly filled-out teeshirt), at the entrance to Kailash Nath's house. This scene establishes their contrasting characters—Mamaji's goodness and Mamiji's selfishness—in the context of arranging a match for their nephew, Rajesh. Daljit Kaur said:

If a sister dies, the brother has to take care [of her children].

Mamaji's 'character' is very good. He wants to get the sort of girl for Rajesh who would be good for the *khandan*. [Long aside on the plot of a novel of which she is reminded.]

The basic idea is that you need a good girl for the *khandan*.

With this in mind, Mamaji had been doing his own scouting, and had come up with the ideal choice. Mamiji, however, had quite a different agenda—to promote the candidature of Rita's elder sister, Sweety. Sweety's father, Mamiji announces, is a wealthy Delhi businessman, who would surely give his daughter a magnificent wedding. When Mamaji demurs that they want only a simple, well-bred girl for Rajesh, Mamiji accuses him of being out of touch with reality and the ways of the world. As Asha summed up this exchange for me:

Mamaji loved the boys like his own. That's why he took the initiative in arranging Rajesh's wedding. Mamiji was just scheming for her own nieces.

2. Having failed to promote her own candidate, the spiteful Mamiji never passes up an opportunity to point out what Kailash Nath's family are missing by turning down the opportunity of a marital alliance with Sweety's well-heeled family. As preparations for the engagement party are under way, Mamiji arrives fresh from the temple ('from the beauty parlour, more likely', remarks Mamaji in an aside). She volunteers the comment that there cannot have been any worthwhile discussion regarding the 'giving-taking' aspect of the alliance, because a professor would obviously not have been able to put aside very much for his daughter's marriage expenses.

3. Mamiji's spitefulness and bad taste are revealed again when, standing in for the lady-of-the-house, she welcomes the new bride and groom to Kailash Nath's home. After a perfunctory blessing, she taunts Mamaji for his part in arranging a marriage that has brought in so little by way of dowry. Lallu reacts defensively by telling her—rightly or wrongly—that a very ample dowry had actually been given (a TV set, diamond jewellery, an imported car, a VCR, etc.) but that, when weighed against the qualities of the new bride, these items were so paltry that the groom's party had left them all behind. Mamiji is incredulous, and again castigates her husband for his unworldliness. She adds, as Mamaji presents Puja with a copy of the *Ramayana* (a reminder of the conjugal fidelity of Ram and Sita), that if the bride had been her niece Sweety, she would have loaded her with gold.

4. Mamiji's bad taste and *hauteur* are revealed once again in her attitude to the family servants. Puja is about to return for a visit to her parents' home

along with her baby when Lallu receives a telegram that his sister-in-law is seriously ill. Puja spontaneously goes to get him some money to tide over the crisis. Mamiji is infuriated and comments, overheard by the dismayed Lallu, that servants cannot be trusted, that this is the ploy they use to extract money from their employers, and that Puja will never see either Lallu or her money again. (Puja gives Lallu a generous amount nonetheless, and together with Chameli they pray to Lord Krishna for his sister-in-law's recovery. Of course, the prayer succeeds.)

5. Rajesh is unwell, grieving for Puja and worrying over his motherless child. In an impassioned outburst, Mamiji remarks—and this is one of the dramatic high points of the film—that Rajesh would have been better off had he married her niece Sweety in the first place. But Sweety is still available, she says, and would bring a good dowry. Sweety would also be willing to marry Rajesh, on the one condition that an ayah be employed to look after the child. This fuss going on over a child is quite unnecessary, declares Mamiji shrilly. After all, babies keep coming; it's nothing special.

At this point, the normally docile Mamaji slaps her. 'It's probably because of these sort of sentiments that you have never managed to have a child yourself,' he shouts at her. (The audience is thrilled.)⁵²

6. In a final brief scene at the wedding of Nisha and Prem, Mamiji appears glowingly happy and roundly pregnant,⁵³ to the delight of the audience, who seem to find the idea of pregnancy quite funny.

Until the final taming of this overdressed shrew via motherhood, Mamiji has given voice to a range of opinions that strike at the very basis of the joint family as a moral institution. She demonstrates, first, that family members can be selfish, rather than selfless, in arranging matches for the younger generation, and it is probably not irrelevant in her calculations that Kailash Nath's family is exceedingly affluent. She is very conscious of the material transactions that go along with marriage, scorning the match between Rajesh and the less prosperous professor's daughter, mocking the sentimental gift of the *Ramayana* that her husband gives the young bride, and suggesting that Kailash Nath would have had much to gain materially through a marital alliance with Sweety's family. She makes it clear that her husband's high moral sentiments are better suited to the classroom than to real-life situations.

Equally to the point, she sees Rajesh's second marriage as an opportunity to make a materially advantageous new alliance from which she might directly benefit, rather than as the best means of ensuring the physical and psychological welfare of the infant heir to the family, which is the chief concern of all others in the family. She does not concede the biological and social uniqueness of the child, nor his need for genuine 'mothering':—after

all, 'babies keep coming, it's nothing special', is her opinion. That is why she endorses Sweety's condition that an ayah should be employed to care for the baby, and fails to appreciate that Puja's closest biological relative, her sister Nisha, a person who is 'exactly like her' and who has been caring for the child day and night, is the only person who would be truly able to bring up the child as her own. It is only consistent with Mamiji's mean character and ill-breeding that she is unable to accept the servants as fictive family members, and insists on redrawing the nearly erased line of class differentiation. Her niece, Rita, is no better in this regard, and the *halva* she attempts to prepare for Prem is salty in consequence. (Naturally, Nisha's *halva* is just right!)

III. The Pleasures of Viewing: Voyeurism, Narcissism and a Happy Ending

HAAK is a film that has given immense pleasure and satisfaction to millions of Indian viewers. It provides the pleasures of *spectacle*, but amazingly does so without the usual formulaic ingredients of Bollywood movies: blood and gore, sex and sadism. And it exploits erotic tension, short of explicit sexuality, right through to the climax. At the same time, as Bharucha convincingly argues (1995), it is very much a product of the Indian liberalized capitalist economy of the 1990s. The old antimonies of south Asian melodrama (Jayamanne 1992: 150):

rural :	urban
poor :	rich
East :	West
good :	bad

—antimonies which, it has been suggested (Kakar 1989; Nandy 1981: 81, 95–6; 1995c) are reflective of the psychic conflicts and existential circumstances of popular cinema audiences—no longer hold good. In *HAAK*, bucolic pastoral scenes are merely romantic interludes between one urban setting and another.⁵⁴ The heroines are modern, educated young women (Nisha studies 'computers'), and the heroes successful young businessmen (cf. Mayaram n.d.: 7–9).⁵⁵ Wealth is effortlessly acquired, and accepted without guilt, an effect achieved both through the display of the 'fetishized objects' of the capitalist economy, promised in unlimited abundance, and through the consistent erasure of the signs of labour and poverty. Plenitude is convincingly naturalized. The tragic death of Puja, as Bharucha points out, is only a brief interruption in the heady flow of fun and frolic in this

'non-stop roller-coaster of laughter, food, songs and games' (1995: 801). Moreover, the pleasures of consumption are subtly (or not-so-subtly) linked with the valorization of the family, reinforcing the opinion held by many of my informants that affluence is an important enabling factor in harmonious family life. Similarly, wealth is no longer opposed to, but is metonymically linked in the film with, Indian culture and tradition: indeed, some informants took voyeuristic pleasure in observing life-cycle rituals being celebrated on a scale that their own limited means would never allow:

It is impossible for a middle class father to celebrate his daughter's wedding on such a scale, so my daughter and I would rather watch it in a film [Mishra 1995].

Needless to say—and the focus on life-crisis rituals naturalizes this elision—the national tradition is assumed Hindu, 'otherness' being either excluded or co-opted through caricature.⁵⁶ As Bharucha sarcastically sums up, *HAAK* exemplifies

the ease with which the market has been embraced within a matrix of upper-class, 'traditional', Hindu cultural values, with an appropriate dose of religiosity to keep the 'family' happy, and very discreetly . . . to keep the others out. Of course, if they wish to enter this matrix, they will always be welcomed with a cup of tea and absorbed (1995: 804).

In this interpretation, the pleasure of viewing is effectively the pleasure of voyeurism, that is of being witness to a spectacle of unlimited consumption. This assessment is confirmed by several viewers' comments, and by the participatory reaction of the cinema-hall audiences: when, for instance, the new icon of Indian femininity,⁵⁷ Madhuri Dixit, comes down the stairs in her gorgeous purple and gold costume for the '*Didi, tera devar divana*' sequence, she is greeted by sighs and wolf-whistles of appreciation.⁵⁸ But the comments of viewers *also* suggest a strong, and very *narcissistic* identification with the happy family ideal, no matter what their personal family circumstances.

In the defining of 'taste' in Indian cinema, two interrelated criteria are characteristically employed to differentiate the high-brow or parallel cinema from the low-brow commercial cinema: (i) the absence/presence of music, song, and dance (see Beeman 1981); and (ii) realism (e.g. Nandy 1981: 92, 95–6; 1995c; Rajadhyaksha 1993). *HAAK*, as already noted, has an unusual number of songs—indeed, in a different cultural context it would be classed as a 'musical' or 'operetta'—but the presence of these songs does not apparently detract from the appearance of realism as far as the viewers are concerned. One might argue that this is because the film focuses on a segment of Indian social life—marriage and other life-crisis rituals in their

non-Sanskritic aspects—where music, song and dance are always much in evidence, but this of course does not explain why courtship and the declaration of love, or a lovers' phone conversation, should also be rendered in song, as indeed they are.

The deployment of the criterion of realism to discriminate the good from the bad in Indian cinema seems often to imply the rather patronizing assumption that the masses of viewers, like primitives or children, are unable or unwilling (given their individual or collective psychological compulsions) to distinguish fantasy from reality, myth from truth. It comes as something of a surprise, then, to find a wide spectrum of viewers self-consciously complimenting *HAAK* on what they see as its true-to-life, mimetic projection of the realities of Indian family life. (Of course one should not discount the possibility that ordinary Indian viewers have internalized the critique of Indian popular cinema *vis-à-vis* high and middle cinema, or Hollywood productions.) Mr Sharma's⁵⁹ comment was typical:

This is a very good film. Seeing it is like being in one's own living room, with all the family around.

Satinder had something similar to say:

Although there is no concrete story, the director has very successfully shown an ideal Indian family. While showing the family through their family functions [i.e. domestic rituals], the director has taken the audience along with him. It seems you are moving with the family.

And a middle-aged woman interviewed on television declared:

It's as though you're watching a video cassette of a marriage in your own home.⁶⁰

Significantly, interviews with the director-scriptwriter, Sooraj Barjatya, also seek to locate the genesis of the film in his real-life experiences in a way that would scarcely be conceivable for the majority of Bollywood films, particularly of the blood-and-gore variety:

[BARJATYA] When I started out I was conscious that I was going against the accepted norms. Yet the film flowed naturally. *I have lived the kind of life which is shown in the film.* I have lived in a family of wonderful *buas*, *chachas*, *chachis*, and other elders. . . .

[QU.] Like the characters in the film, do you stay with a joint family?

[BARJATYA] Yes, 15 or 16 of us stay together in our house in Worli. There's a sharing, a bond between us.

[QU.] Do you also have a wonder pet dog like Tuffy?

[BARJATYA, smiles] No, but I've seen other families doting on their pets.

[QU.] And what about those home cricket matches?

[BARJATYA] They're straight out of my family life. . . . [emphasis added]⁶¹

Conversely, criticism of the film often focused on details that, in the eyes of viewers, impaired the verisimilitude of the representation. Some of these have already been mentioned: the unbelievable cleanliness of the temple; the maid Chameli's outrageously 'ethnic chic' costume; the careless feasting of the *barat*; the *filmi* 'misunderstanding' that makes Nisha think that she is to be married to Prem until she actually holds the wedding invitation in her hands; to which one might add the detail that most offended Ronnie, Madhuri Dixit's inflexibly pointed breasts, etc.: all minor blemishes really. The intervention of Lord Krishna, though miraculous, was not adversely commented on. Perhaps viewers did not consider the idea of the participation of the deity unrealistic; and in any case this intervention is neatly naturalized through the agency of the wonder-dog, Tuffy.

The appearance of verisimilitude in *HAAK* is artfully enhanced by a number of fantasy scenes, well marked out as such. Nisha's cousin Bhola, smitten by Rita, sees her transformed into the legendary Shakuntala on every encounter. As Prem watches a video of the wedding revelries, Nisha suddenly materializes in the room with him. The '*Didi tera devar divana*' sequence (the pregnancy ritual) has two surprising fantasies—discounting, that is, Prem's swinging from the chandeliers and flipping backwards up onto the balustrade: Prem finds himself suddenly surrounded by half-a-dozen or so infants, and then, inexplicably, appears pregnant in a clinging white shift: a terrible excess of fecundity!

But these little flights of fancy, much relished by the audience, serve only to reinforce the overall impression of the verisimilitude of representation. This was the case even for those, like Daljit Kaur, who insisted that the film portrayed a bygone era more than a contemporary reality; or like Asha, who felt that it portrayed an ideal of harmonious family life that was, as she frankly put it, 'not usually found in families'.

Such is the magical illusion created by *HAAK*, that its picture of ideal family life carries the stamp of authenticity and provokes narcissistic enjoyment even when contradicted by the personal experience of viewers. In other words, it has succeeded in creating what Govind Nihalani has so aptly termed 'believable fantasies', fantasies just within—or just outside—reach (Kazmi 1995b; Gupta 1996): If not one's *own* family life, which is contingently imperfect, viewers see *HAAK* as a truthful rendition of the family

life of *others* in the imagined community that is modern India. This 'utopian' effect, as I have argued above, is in no small measure achieved by the erasure—or near-erasure—of the harsher realities of Indian family and social life, leaving only the faintest traces in Mamiji's several mean-mouthed comments. This is actually a rather unusual strategy in Indian popular cinema which characteristically (or at least until heroes began to act like thugs, and heroines like vamps) had white and black, good and evil, well differentiated, with little space for shades of grey (Nandy 1981: 89). *HAAK* is almost all white: 'saccharine-sweet', said Sunita dismissively.

Besides the pleasures of voyeurism and narcissistic identification, *HAAK* also affords the pleasure of following a stereotypical romantic story through to its happy ending, though it does so almost at the expense of the sense of realism that it has so carefully built up. This perhaps explains both the cathartic effect of the last-minute resolution of the narrative crisis (and release of 'erotic tension') for many in the audience, for whom such strategies are familiar, and the disappointment of some viewers, the more educated and sophisticated perhaps, who felt that the dramatic twists of the love story (Puja's death and Nisha's 'misunderstanding') made the film, ultimately, rather too much like other commercial movies.

As already noted, the narrative code of the *HAAK* romance is a very restricted one—'perfunctory', Bharucha dismissively terms it (1995: 801):

- (i) Prem and Nisha meet in the context of arranging the marriage of their elder siblings;
- (ii) their relationship, though initially teasing, develops slowly into love;
- (iii) they pledge themselves to each other;
- (iv) a sudden event occurs (the tragic death of Puja) and a misunderstanding arises (Nisha's misapprehension that she is to be married to Prem) to place obstacles in the way of their happiness;
- (v) a resolution of the crisis occurs through the mediation of Lord Krishna and his instrument, Tuffy the dog;
- (vi) the young couple are united with the blessings of all ('*Hum aapke hain*' [I'm yours] remains on the screen as the *koun* is erased.)

Despite its highly simplified structure, this is a universal love story (Singh and Uberoi 1994; Radway 1987), but it is peculiarly inflected by the mythic conflicts that typically structure the constitution of a romantic narrative in the cultural context of South Asian popular cinema. Following an argument I have developed earlier in reference to Guru Dutt's famous *Sahib, Bibi, aur Ghulam* (1962) (Uberoi 1997; also Jayamanne 1992: 150), these may be identified as conflicts between *dharma* (social duty) and desire,

and between freedom and destiny—conflicts which have to be reconciled before a love story can be brought to a satisfactory happy ending.

Prem and Nisha nobly renounce their desire for each other out of love for their elder siblings and concern for their infant nephew; in effect, in deference to the wider interests of the joint family as a moral institution. Yet ultimately, thanks to the intervention of Lord Krishna and Tuffy, they are enabled both to do their duty by the family as well as by themselves. Ronnie summed it up in his own English way:

The film celebrates the power of parents and the power of money.

Everyone does their duty, and love wins out!

The second conflict is that between the freedom to choose one's own partner, and the need to conform to social expectations or to the force of a higher destiny. When asked by his sister-in-law what sort of marriage he wanted—an arranged or a 'love' marriage—Prem replies without hesitation: 'An arranged-love marriage' (cf. Nandy 1981: 95). And this is what he finally gets, though for a while it seems he would have to forego his own choice of partner in deference to family elders and in the context of an unexpected and tragic turn of fate. Judging by audience reactions, the resolution of this mythic conflict at the very last minute is a source of enormous emotional satisfaction, albeit somewhat undermining the impression of mimetic realism that the film had earlier conveyed.

IV. The Emblematic Family

This chapter began with a reflection on the contemporaneity of a different medium—the moving graffiti of the Delhi roads. Quite coincidentally, Prem, our hero of *HAHK*, drives in a white jeep scrawled all over with graffiti after the style affected by Delhi 'yuppies'. Prominent among these inscriptions is the phrase: 'I love my family,' signed for good measure 'Prem'. Presumably, this unusual graffiti is an instruction on how to read the film⁶²—as the story of a young man, serendipitously named 'Prem' ('love'), who is prepared to sacrifice his individual love for the sake of his family. This gesture, as we have noted, was interpreted by viewers as an act of great nobility on behalf of an institution which epitomizes at once the singularity, and the excellence, of the Indian tradition.

For quite understandable reasons, a number of recent critiques of the mass media in India have addressed themselves to the ideological implications of the iconicization of women, or of the Hindu tradition, or of both together, as representing the modern Indian nation, and linked these motivated

representations in turn to the caste, class, and communal orientation of the governing and non-governing elites of Indian society. In this context, it is interesting to note that the promotion of the joint family ideal as an emblem of Indian culture and tradition—not only in *HAHK*, which is an outstanding contemporary example, but in a large number of movies in the century-long history of Indian cinema—is a question that has hardly been acknowledged, except in so far as it overlaps (as of course it must) with the question of feminine roles and imagery. Nor have changes in the representation of family relations been the object of the same degree of scrutiny as, for instance, have the changing roles of heroes and heroines, linked to the character of the wider social, cultural, and political order of contemporary India.

Why this should be so is a matter on which one can only speculate, given the quite inadequate charting of this field. But it is surely significant that, unlike caste, class, and religion, the family manifests as an especially unifying institution throughout Indian society. There is probably a degree of sociological accuracy in this judgement. While there are significant regional differences in styles of kinship (particularly north versus south), these differences in the culture of kinship, at least in the eyes of some authorities, are underlain by certain unifying principles, and are in any case increasingly being eroded. I have no wish to rehearse here the complex arguments for and against this proposition, but certainly it is possible that the differences across classes, castes, and religions within specific kinship regions are much less than is often supposed—that there is a commonality of underlying structure despite differences in detail at the level of individual features of kinship organization (e.g. Kolenda 1983: esp. 183–92). Perhaps this explains why *HAHK* manages to convey the impression of verisimilitude to a remarkable range of people of different class and caste backgrounds, communities and regional origin living in the city of Delhi.

Sociologist André Béteille has recently commented on the fact that, as compared to class, caste, and religion, there has been remarkably little social critique of the Indian family system. Béteille may not be strictly accurate here,⁶³ but one can only agree with him that the family is certainly a very important agency for the reproduction of social inequality in contemporary Indian society, not only through the process of child socialization, but also through the system of arranged marriage and through the deployment of 'social capital' to ensure that, in so far as is possible, children inherit or surpass their parents' social class position (1991). The only exceptions to this relative silence regarding the role of the family in modern India are a handful of disgruntled feminists, divided among themselves, whose opinions

on this issue are widely seen as testimony to the perfidious influence of an alien culture and a sinister political agenda.

For the rest, as India globalizes, and as the 'imagined economy' can no longer convincingly iconicize the nation (see Deshpande 1993), the family remains, and not merely by default, the sole institution which can signify the unity, the uniqueness, and the moral superiority of Indian culture in a time of change, uncertainty, and crisis.

HAAK, the largest grossing film in the whole history of Indian popular cinema was released in 1994, which was also coincidentally celebrated as the International Year of the Family. It is interesting to note that, albeit in a very different discursive field, this event produced a comparable linking of the family with Indian culture and tradition, similarly underlining its vulnerability in the face of mounting external challenges. As the Minister of State for Welfare remarked, inaugurating the official programmes marking this event (see Uberoi 1994):

India is proud of its ancient heritage of a united and stable family system. The Indian families have demonstrated a unique strength of keeping themselves together despite the growing stress and strain and external influences on Indian culture. An Indian family is by and large still perceived as a homogen[e]ous unit with strong coping mechanisms.

NOTES

1. I owe special thanks to Aradhya Bhardwaj and to my other companions and interlocutors at several viewings of this film in cinema halls in north Delhi between January and May 1995. For this project, I conducted informal interviews with a variety of persons, for the most part of middle- and lower middle-class status, at the theatres before and after shows, and in other settings. Valuable also were responses at presentations at the Indraprastha and Lady Shri Ram Colleges of Delhi University in January and February 1995, and the several inputs of A.M. Shah, Shohini Ghosh, Kajri Jain, Satish Deshpande, and Ravi Vasudevan.

For various contingent reasons, my informants were mostly female, though I did consciously try to remedy this bias as my study progressed. I was not able to correct the middle class and urban bias of my sample of interviewees, but viewing the film in cinema halls, rather than on video, did give some indication of the responses of the 'front stalls'. However, the reactions of rural viewers remain opaque, as do those of viewers in other regions of the country (see also n.25 here).

2. Contestant at the *Femina* Miss India International contest, asked: 'Are you for or against the joint family system?' (Metro TV, 13 February 1995). Her answer was appreciated by the audience.
3. I retain in this chapter the present tense in which the draft was written in the first half of 1995, though details have subsequently been added or corrected in the course of revision.
4. Over 100 crores of rupees, a figure subsequently equalled by another romantic family drama, Aditya Chopra's *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*. *HAAK* is similarly said to have broken all records for the sale of Hindi film music (Zaveri 1994b), the plagiarization of the music cassette generating also a notable court case.
5. It went on to celebrate its 'jubilee'—i.e. a hundred week run—at Mumbai's Liberty cinema in August 1996.
6. As with other very popular Hindi movies, viewers delight in boasting of how often they have seen the film (cf. Kakar 1981: 11–12; Mukherjee 1995). Such enthusiasts include, for instance, the celebrated octogenarian painter, M.F. Husain, who claimed to have seen the film 24 times, and to be planning another 50 visits while working on a series of paintings of heroine Madhuri Dixit (*Times of India*, *Delhi Times*, 5 May 1995; *Pioneer*, 10 May 1995). By the time his Madhuri series was completed, Husain was reported to have seen *HAAK* 54 times (*Times of India*, 13 November 1995; also Shahani 1995).
7. Two and a half songs, including the much-loved 'Chocolate—limejuice—icecream—toffees' (said to be a tribute to Madhuri Dixit's 'sweet tooth'), which echoes through the film, finally had to be eliminated to save 11 minutes of running time. These songs have now been restored to 'unabridged' versions of the film, shown selectively (interview with *HAAK*'s producers, Rajshri productions, *Filmfare* 4 [1995]). See also Doraiswamy 1996: 127.
8. Others in the cast include: Renuka Shahane; Mohnish Bahl; Reema Lagoo; Anupam Kher; Alok Nath; Ajit Vacchani; Bindu; and Laxmikant Berde.
9. For the first time in Indian cinema, the Barjatyas made imaginative use of local cable television to promote the film and to publicize the 'family' feeling that went into its making and that purportedly existed between the stars on the sets (Doraiswamy 1996: 127). Rajshri productions had imposed a moratorium on the release of video rights, releasing the film in only a select number of cinema halls: initially at only one cinema in Bombay, followed by the release of 29 prints for India and 6 overseas, to a total eventually of just 450 prints (*Filmfare* 4 [1995], interview with Kamalkumar, Rajkumar, and Ajitkumar Barjatya of Rajshri productions, following the *Filmfare* best film of 1994 Award; see also Doraiswamy 1996; Kazmi 1995b; Majumdar 1995; Sangwan 1996). This strategy of keeping 'control' over the distribution process against the widespread practice of video 'piracy' has meant much greater returns for both the producers and cinema hall owners, some of whom have been able to improve the facilities

in the theatres on the strength of the profits from *HAHK* alone (interview with cinema hall owners and a representative of Rajshri productions in the TV programme, 'Show Biz Masala', Metro Channel, 4 April 1995).

A number of my companions viewing *HAHK* remarked on how many years it was since they had last watched a movie in a suburban cinema hall—and how very shabby the theatres had meanwhile become.

10. Comment of a disappointed reviewer who had found the first half of the film engagingly 'different'.
11. A judgement reiterated by Kazmi several months later in a survey of trends in popular cinema through 1995 (see Kazmi 1995b).
12. Interview with Madhuri Dixit, *Filmfare* 4 (1995).
13. Educated working woman, aged 35. All names of interviewees are pseudonyms.
14. A 'rape' scene is often regarded as compulsory for an 'action' movie, setting the plot in motion. In the present case, Puja's tragic, and in a way inexplicable, death initiates the drama.
15. See, however, Veena Das's analysis of the exceedingly popular Indian soap opera, *Hum Log*, which, though modelled after Mexican soap operas with their proliferation of narrative detail and 'challenge to the ordinary', was on the contrary characterized by its extreme 'ordinariness' (Das, 1995).
16. A similarly resentful reaction was reported to me by a young woman who had given a critical lecture at another Delhi women's college on the film, *1942: A love story* (Udita Das, personal communication). Contrariwise, the guilt of the critic who disapproves of *HAHK*'s 'degenerate ideology' yet finds the film pleasurable is the starting point of Shohini Ghosh's deconstruction of the 'pleasure of viewership' in relation to *HAHK* (n.d.). Interestingly, the tone of Bharucha's devastating critique of the banal 'utopia' that *HAHK* presents is notably self-defensive, as though he was anticipating indignation (see 1995: esp. 801, 803).
17. According to one of the artists, Laxmikant Berde, who plays the comic- 'emotional' role of the family servant, Lallu, 'none of the artistes knew where the movie was heading, with the exception of Sooraj Barjatya, the director' (Sharma 1995: 27). Barjatya, who won the 1994 *Filmfare* Award for *HAHK*'s screenplay, felt that the lack of story put a great responsibility on the scriptwriter to construct what he called 'little-little scenes which would absorb the viewer' (interview with Sooraj Barjatya, *Filmfare* 4 [1995]).
18. Interview with Madhuri Dixit, *Filmfare* 4 (1994).
19. Ghai claims now to regret that particular number, which was responsible for spawning a series of even more bawdy songs. In a recent interview, Ghai is reported to have said:

The profundity of other songs in *Khalnayak* was spoilt by 'Choli ke peechej'. Sensationalism made my asset a liability. . . . Vices are more habit forming

than virtues, but they have a very short lifespan. Which explains why a 'vegetarian' film like *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* is a total hit (Ghai, 1995).

Ghai's classification of *HAHK* as a 'vegetarian' film may have been an allusion not only to its relative lack of vulgarity, but to the producers' self-imposed taboo on showing non-vegetarian food, and their reluctance to show alcohol 'unless it's relevant to the situation' (*Filmfare*, April 1995, interview with Sooraj Barjatya).

20. For some reflections on the symbolic role of the 'first night' in a very different type of discourse, that is contemporary judicial discourse, see Uberoi (1995: 334–42).
21. The billiard table is an important prop later on in the narrative when, at the conclusion of the love duet, Prem carries Nisha to the same table.
22. Daljit Kaur had visited the cinema house for perhaps the fifth or sixth time in her long life in order to see *HAHK*. She was, however, an *aficionado* of television soaps and serials.
23. Prize-winning reader's letter to *Filmfare* (4 [1995]: 161), concluding with the disillusioned exclamation: 'So much for women's lib!'. See also Manchanda (1996: 86, source not given), endorsing Ashis Nandy's proposition that 'the bolder the Bollywood heroine becomes in dance and dress, the more submissive they are required to be as wife and daughter-in-law after marriage' also Ravinder Kaur's comparison of two contemporary cinematic heroines—the submissive Nisha of *HAHK*, and the rebellious 'bandit queen' (1996).
24. She lists the relations of; Prem/Puja; Nisha/Rajesh; Kailash Nath/the girls' mother/ the manservant Lallu/maidservant Chameli; Bhola/Rita; Prem/Rita;⁸ Mama/Mamiji; Prem/Chachijan (the Muslim doctor's wife).
25. As some critical south Indian informants pointed out, *HAHK* presents a typically north Indian perspective on the kinship system (see also Bharucha 1995: 802). Understandably, north Indian viewers see it as simply a film about the Indian family. This naturalization of the values of north Indian kinship may be seen as consistent with a larger historical process of cultural hegemonization of the northern over the southern culture of kinship, a process that has probably intensified in modern times (see Uberoi 1993: 33–4; 45–9; Trautmann 1979).
26. Strictly speaking, the terms may refer to *either* set of cross-sex co-parents-in-law, but the joking relation, if at all, pertains especially between the groom's father and the bride's mother. One could speculate that the opposite would suggest an inappropriate reversal of the hierarchical relations of wife-takers and wife-givers. On the etiquette of avoidance between the *samdhis* and the *samdhans* see Vatuk (1976).
27. Bharucha likens it to the bantering between Renuka Shahane and Siddharth Kak on the popular TV cultural magazine programme, *Surabhi*, on which Renuka first established her media reputation, and patented her famous smile (1995: 804 n. 3).

28. Shohini Ghosh is the only critic I know of who has commented on the eroticism of this relationship (n.d.: 4–5). In fact, she virtually derives the romantic relationship of Prem and Nisha from that of *devar* and *bhabhi*.
29. Note that for anthropologists both avoidance and joking relationships are evidence of nodes of structural tension in the kinship system.
30. Similarly, he insisted, an unmarried girl would not dance and express longing in public as Nisha does in the '*Mae-ni-mae*' number, though she might express her feelings in confidence to her girlfriends or to her mother.
31. Film director Vinod Chopra, pronouncing on the success of *HAAK* and the successor blockbuster, *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge*, in interview with Nikhat Kazmi (1995b).
32. See, however, Gavaskar (1995: 35) who notes how the film erases all signs of 'work' and makes 'alienating features of the outside world . . . hospitable for relaxation and enjoyment'. One of the examples he cites is the 'toy-like yellow' handcart in the village scene, a handcart being 'otherwise a symbol of drab exclusion'.
33. Kajri Jain (personal communication) has suggested that the presence of servants in the home is one of the important markers of India as the 'homeland' for diasporic Indians. This comment points to the need for an independent *diasporic* reading of this film and its representation of notions of national 'culture' and 'tradition'.
34. Shohini Ghosh (n.d.: 2) interestingly interprets *HAAK*'s erasure of the master-servant distinction as an instance of what she terms the film's 'carnavalesque egalitarianism'. Similarly included as 'family', she notes, are Tuffy the dog, a Muslim couple who are family friends, and the family gods. This is obviously a theme that could be further developed. For another example of the erasure of class differentiation in contemporary commercial cinema, see Tejaswini Niranjana's critique of Mani Ratnam's *Geetanjali* (n.d.: 4).
35. Thirty-five year old research assistant.
36. Such 'misunderstandings' according to Asha, are typical of Hindi film dramas.
37. See here n.23.
38. Interview with Madhuri Dixit, *Filmfare* 4 (1995). Note the change from third to first person here.
39. Mrs Goel may have overinterpreted this song and the scene in which it occurs, but her reading is endorsed by Ghosh (n.d.: 3–4): 'Fleeting references to college days, looks that linger longer than usual and double entendres evoke images of unrequited love. The song they are made to sing for each other during the engagement ceremony, . . . 'There is a strange dilemma in our hearts today', can be reread as a re-working of their failed relationship and the forging of a new one. For two people who are denied the exclusive space to 'rework' their feelings the song becomes a vehicle for renegotiation. The 'carnavalesque' suspends

- judgement set by moral and social norms, thereby provoking space for the play of unconscious desires'.
40. A similar observation has been made by Pnina Werbner in reference to the wedding rituals of UK Pakistanis (1990: 260).
 41. For an anthropological interpretation of the 'joke bargaining' between the bride's sisters and the groom (in UK Pakistani marriage rituals), see Werbner (1990: esp. 278–9).
 42. That he chivalrously passes up this opportunity and thereby earns Nisha's love and gratitude provoked adverse comment from a college student who considered this scene to be 'as blatant a reinforcement of the myth that a woman needs to look up to a man as is possible' (S. Das 1995: 25).
 43. A point made by several critics, notably Bharucha (1995) and Mukherjee (1995). See also Section III in this chapter.
 44. Presumably the wife/vamp dichotomy of popular movies is another encoding of this anxiety (see e.g. O'Flaherty 1981; Nandy 1981: 93–4).
 45. Not everyone found the idea of two brothers marrying two sisters a proper solution to the typical joint family problem of the hostility between sister-in-law. Some said it would ruin the relationship between sisters, rather than consolidate that between brothers (cf. Kolenda 1978).
 46. From the title of Louis Dumont's collection of essays on marriage alliance in South Asia and Australia (1983).
 47. The indignant young college student, whose condemnation of the culture of the *bibi-sali* jokes has already been noted, saw a sinister plot here to valorize the affinal relations of sisters-in-law over the biological relation of sisterhood. Quoting the title line of the song sung by Puja in celebration of the wedding plans of her younger brother-in-law and her sister—'*Lo, chali main, apne devar ki barat leke*' (Look, here I go in the groom's party of my brother-in-law) she remarks that Puja is now 'totally the "*bhabhi*", never the "*didhi*" [older sister]', a role which both expresses her total alienation from her parental home and which gives her 'someone to rule over' (i.e. a junior sister-in-law) in her new home (S. Das 1995: 24).
 48. '*Samdhi-samdhan*'; '*Jute lo, paise do*'; '*Didi, tera devar divana*'.
 49. Anupam Kher, who plays the role of Professor Chowdhury, is highly rated as a comedian, and has received four *Filmfare* best comedian awards. Audiences were delighted with his many comic acts in *HAAK*, particularly his parody of a scene from *Sholay* during a game of 'pass the cushion'; and his loving-teasing equation with his wife.
 50. A certain empirical support for her views comes from Promilla Kapur's study of the marital adjustment of urban educated women (1970: esp. 423–33).
 51. Comment by a woman journalist. Her statement echoes Barjatya's own understanding: 'Since I was going to talk of love, warmth and family relationships

- in my film, there was no place for a well-defined villain. You can say that circumstances and fate are villains in my film' (1995).
52. After this outburst, and the threat of a stepmother neglecting Puja's child, the onlookers to the scene come round to the view that it would be best if Rajesh were married to Nisha. The initiative in this is taken by the professor, who recognizes a need, and an obligation, to strengthen the family alliance already made, and to protect the interests of Puja's child.
 53. My informants could give no explanation for this unanticipated development, 'and so quickly, too!'. On the other hand, a feminist-conscientized student thought it highly significant that Mamiji conceived only after being literally slapped into place by her husband. Alternatively, Shohini Ghosh points out (n.d.: 3) that Mamaji's slap marks the belated assertion of his manhood *vis-à-vis* his shrewish wife. This explanation is endorsed by the audience's enthusiastic applause of Mamaji's conduct. There was altogether little sympathy for Mamiji, though a student complained that her character was 'a grotesque caricature of the director's notion of a childless woman', . . . 'as though her childlessness was a result of some innate essential flaw in her nature' (S. Das 1995: 25).
 54. Indeed, as Shohini Ghosh remarks (n.d.: 2), most scenes are set in the private space of the two homes of the intermarrying families, and there is quite minimal engagement with the outside world.
 55. Interestingly, the original film on which *HAHK* was based, Rajshri productions' moderately successful '*Nadia Ke Paar*', had the heroine as a village not city girl (interview with Sooraj Barjatya, *Filmfare* 4 [1995]).
 56. For instance, the role of the poetry-spouting Muslim doctor in the film.
 57. The reference is to publicity around M.F. Husain's paintings of Madhuri Dixit (*Times of India*, Delhi Times section, 5 May 1995).
 58. It is relevant that in this song Prem is first a voyeur on a desirable spectacle ('gentlemen not allowed'), then witness to a parody of himself within the spectacle, and finally a participant in the spectacle, taking the lead and vanquishing the false '*devar*'.
 59. Fifty-five year old administrative officer.
 60. 'Show Biz Masala', Metro TV, 2 May 1995. Videotaping the marriage ceremony is almost *de rigueur* in urban areas now, even for the working classes.
 61. Interview with Sooraj Barjatya, *Filmfare* 4 (1995).
 62. After all, Prem might well have used that favourite among motorized graffiti—the bleeding arrow-pierced heart (*zakhmi dil*)!
 63. See e.g. Madan (1993: esp. 415–18) for a summary of critiques of the Indian joint family as an impediment to economic and social development. The remarkable women who were the pioneers of the Indian women's movement were also very outspoken on the evils of the Indian family system (see e.g. Chaudhuri 1995: 227–32).

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