

ABSTRACT

TITLE: *Of Innocence & Other Monsters: Love & Violence in Contemporary Bollywood.*

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The dissertation seeks to study the conditions for the emergence of contemporary Hindi cinema or New Bollywood, as it is sometimes called: Hindi films beginning roughly from the late-2000s till today. In an effort to locate the precise difference between the old and the new films, the study looks back at traditional Hindi cinema, from the 1930s till the 2000s, in order to identify certain dominant features which influence its form (the manner in which the scenes are arranged).

The first is a recurrent logic of transgression and punishment: a character is punished for his or her deeds (e.g. theft or murder), which are deemed wrong by the film's moral law. This logic of punishing a 'crime' appears to be at work not only at the end of a film (the good rewarded, the evil punished) but, more importantly, in crucial segments of the film as well, which we perceive as its melodramatic moments (a thief in *Do Bigha Zamin* is punished by his mother's accident in

the next scene). Secondly, several films include a maternal figure (love) and the paternal figure (law), whose combined efforts are directed at taming rebellious subjects (e.g. romantic love), though the two figures often appear to contradict each other (mother frequently takes the side of her child against the father).

Third, the massive appeal of Hindi cinema lies in the fact that many of the great films feature radical protagonists (e.g. the angry young man of the 1970s), whose revolt against society leaves the film in a tricky position: how far should one allow this revolt? The film's solution is to often highlight these radical or courageous acts but at the same time finds ways to stifle the effects of these actions or secretly convert them into a palatable form (though there are rare films which refuse this compromise). A good example is Amitabh Bachchan's temple scene in *Deewar*: it is both radical (in his verbal tirade against God: "*khush toh bahut hoge tum...*") and marks his complete surrender to God as he begs for his mother's life.

The dissertation compares these key features of traditional Hindi cinema with the emerging patterns of New Bollywood and discovers various continuities and a few radical discontinuities, especially in the unprecedented freedom today's films offer women: career, sexual freedom, a more thorough equality with the man as compared to the past.