OF INNOCENCE & OTHER MONSTERS: LOVE & VIOLENCE IN CONTEMPORARY BOLLYWOOD

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submitted by me for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Jadavpur University is based upon my work carried out under the Supervision of ----------------------

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DR. KIRAN KESHAVAMURTHY

And that neither this thesis nor any part of it has been submitted before for any degree or diploma anywhere / elsewhere.

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PROLOGUE: *DO BIGHA ZAMIN*

"There are two flaws in the male lead's character, which considerably detract from the force of his personality. One: He is never shown to stand up to the injustice and oppression he is subjected to; and Two: He shuns the company of friends and colleagues. The average viewer always imagines himself in the hero's shoes. Who would, however, want to identify himself with such a self-effacing and introvert hero? He is more likely to be pitied than looked up to! This was why, amongst the masses, Do Bigha Zamin did not enjoy the kind of popularity, which it did amongst the intelligentsia. To a certain extent, all our progressive art and literature suffers from this blemish. It is the foreign values and isms which we try to live up to, rather than those which are native to Indian soil".

- Balraj Sahni, *An Autobiography*[1].

While browsing through the famous Hindi films of the 1950s, widely regarded as the golden decade of Hindi cinema, I was struck by a particular sequence at the climax of Bimal Roy's magnum opus *Do Bigha Zamin* (1953) in which the film folds upon itself, splitting or doubling, however you see it, into two. A young boy, forced by dire poverty and looming debt, robs a presumably rich woman of her handbag on a busy street.

This act of theft is followed at once by a singular chain of events: a stranger tries to molest and rob the boy's mother; she flees from him towards the main road and is run over by a passing car. The

[1] Sahni, *Balraj Sahni: An Autobiography*, 2.

two scenes together are rich in connotation: the vile city preys on its most vulnerable inhabitants while the vulnerable are forced by their extreme circumstances to take resort to 'immoral' activities - crimes of desperation that, as the film makes clear, would not be committed otherwise.

However, something remarkable occurs when the film connects the two scenes: the boy sees his injured mother, presumes her dead, and screams again and again: *'I killed you, mother'*. It is at this point that the film splits in two, for we are faced with a basic crisis concerning the film's position on its suffering subjects - this little family of three, migrants under duress to the city of Calcutta.

If the boy's cry is merely a melodramatic outburst, designed to enhance the poignancy of the scene and underline the boy's own innocence, then everything stays as it is: the film remains firmly on the side of its protagonists against an evil, exploitative world. But if we take the boy's exclamation seriously, to say that *the mother is indeed being punished, not arbitrarily by evil city folk, but rightly, for her son's crime*, an entirely new world is revealed before our eyes. For one would then be forced to admit that one of the great social realist films of the 1950s, a film renowned for its ruthless inquiry into the brutal specter of urban capitalism steadily spreading its tentacles across the countryside[2], switched sides at a vital moment and held the *victims* of that system it was supposed to criticize responsible for their cruel fate.

[2] "No particular political ideology marks his protest. His indignation arises out of one man's exploitation of the other, lack of human decency and moral decay. He questions not so much the political structure but the moral base of society, for he knew that while political ideologies change, not so basic human values. In *Udayer Pathey* and *Do Bigha Zamin*, he despises the deception of the rich but not the rich per se. He was a romantic and an idealist for whom exploitation in any form -social, economic or religious - was unacceptable". Garga, *Art of Cinema,* 145.

The first explanation of the boy's cry, a melodramatic outburst signifying nothing but the child's innocence, seems intuitively true; in fact, it *is* the way one would ordinarily read the scene. Yet such a reading suffers from two key weaknesses. First, there is the uncanny coincidence of the boy's theft juxtaposed with the mother's accident. More importantly, the sequence mirrors an earlier segment in *Do Bigha Zamin* where the specter of crime had similarly arisen: the boy had borrowed stolen money from his pickpocket friend but was found out and beaten by his father (Balraj Sahni), appalled that his only child is a 'thief'. The same transgression (theft, direct or indirect) is punished twice: first by the father, second by anonymous *Fate*, an agency which establishes, behind the backs of its characters, the moral law – *theft must be punished*.

Do Bigha Zamin's harrowing denouement – the family's total dispossession - becomes infinitely bleaker once we realize that the cost of the mother's treatment guarantees all possibility of the family's repossession of their ancestral land (the eponymous '*do bigha zamin*') is lost. The boy's theft is thus a key cause of the family's eventual dispossession.

The child's crime is grievously punished indeed, but unlike say a Guru Dutt film, where the hero's transgressions receive direct and extreme punishment from *society qua society* (a punishment that renders society more evil than its offender), it is not society *as depicted within the film* (the passing car, a symbol of reckless modernity) that ultimately punishes the boy *but the film itself.* The accident is closer to an act of God, where God is none other than the film directly intervening to punish the child, a perverted *deus ex machina*.

One may find it strange, even absurd, to imagine a film 'acting' upon its protagonists. Is one not anthropomorphizing an inanimate entity, lending it human (or more precisely, Godlike) attributes? For in our account the film behaves almost like God; it punishes errant behavior, but like God, is the original scriptwriter of that deviance in the first place. Such anthropomorphizing, however, is already part of our everyday language, for instance in statements like 'so-and-so film is sexist or racist', gifting an agency to cinema, which, literally speaking, it cannot have.

This play of words betrays the fact that in our spontaneous understanding of cinema (and of art in general), we treat the film as two separate entities: as a container separable from its content ('sexism or racism is depicted in the film') and as an ethical agency ('the film is racist'). In the latter sense, the film is an entity that roughly corresponds to the filmmaker but is not identical with her, an inanimate object that animates its subjects in a particular way (distorting them, portraying them negatively, manipulating its audiences etc.)

How does one then account for the explicit narrative of *Do Bigha Zamin,* which superbly documents the capitalist-landowner nexus that had steadily begun to infiltrate the villages so as to turn them into production centers (i.e. factory sites) for cities? The answer, I think, lies in discerning at least two layers in a film, the first its official version, the second buried under. This division, contrary to appearance, is not the appearance-essence divide of traditional metaphysics, an illusion concealing the real; the two layers, of appearance and what does not appear except through analysis, are not arranged in a necessary hierarchy. Yet neither are they to be treated equivocally, surface equaling depth in importance. Instead, it is through an analysis of the singular film, the film as a singularity,

that the relative significance of each layer is discerned, according to how far each reading can explain the entirety of the film.

…

So far, a boy's transgression has been punished in the climax of *Do Bigha Zamin*'s. Does the same hold true for other key sequences in the film? The most famous scene of *Do Bigha Zamin* is the rickshaw race: a rich man boards a waiting hand-pulled rickshaw, run literally by the boy's father (Balraj Sahni), in pursuit of a woman who races ahead on another rickshaw, jeering at him.

The amorous, flippant game of the two lovers is paralleled by the father's desperation to win the race, a desperation rising dramatically with increasing promises of reward from his passenger-master, if only he could outrun the other rickshaw. The rickshaw-puller runs for his life, his face shimmering with sweat and the prospect of money. But at the very moment of victory, his own rickshaw's wheel gives way, the vehicle collapses and the ecstasy on his face is transformed into a scream as the camera tilts sideways to highlight the accident. Subsequently, we find him bedridden in his tiny room, his leg injured and unable to work for days.

This scene is rich in connotation: *power*, the stark class division (the poor literally carry the rich on their shoulders); *alienation*, the human is a mere tool for the use and pleasure of the rich; *selfishness*, the self-absorption of the rich in their own petty games, indifferent to the worker's plight; the urban-capitalist obsession with *speed*, with life itself thought as a race where those who can't catch up are ruthlessly excluded.

But if we strip the scene down to its basics without the burden of context (the father's desperation for money), that is to say, *if we treat the scene exactly as the film itself treated the young boy when he stole out of sheer desperation*, another dimension reveals itself. For if we focus on the act itself without the narrative context (the father's desperation), this scene marks the first time the boy's father is seduced by money that is not directly an outcome of honest labor (with fixed rates from location x to y), but a surplus-income which, though dependent on his excessive labor, relies to a much greater extent on the whim of his passenger. The incipient greed of the rickshaw-puller, goaded not by his rightful wages but by what are in fact bribes, a succumbing to temptation that makes him no longer an innocent victim but an active participant in the capitalist game of money for its own sake, is punished by the accident, which in turn renders him incapable of earning for many more days.

A third key sequence: at which point in the film does the cruel *zamindar* threaten the boy's father to either pay his debt or vacate his land? *Do Bigha Zamin* begins with villagers celebrating the arrival of rains after a long drought in song and dance, followed by an erotic scene: the boy's father, Shambhu, picks up his wife and they tumble over each other, drenched to the bone.

In the next scene, Shambhu and Parvati engage in erotic banter in the fields (the wife coquettishly says: *'you don't love me anymore'*) and he tries to pull her towards him. The camera quickly cuts to other villagers in the field who notice and envy their happiness and obliquely refer to their own sex lives. It is at this point that the *zamindar* first appears in the film; he shows the land to his capitalist

friends, who are suitably impressed. Next, Shambhu is called to the zamindar's mansion, where the landlord first coaxes and then threatens him to sell his land.

Note a slight detail in the sexual transgression: the couple, playfully romancing under a tree, are briefly interrupted by the arrival of their son (announced by a loud offscreen cry: 'Bapu!' (Father!)). The boy arrives precisely at the point when the woman coquettishly says: *'you don't love me anymore'* and the man leans towards her (*'you say I don't love you?'*). The man sends off the child and again tugs the woman towards him; the camera quickly cuts to the farmers observing this romance.

The transgression is thus first *contained* (through the son's presence) and then *concealed* from our view (by cutting away from the amorous couple). While the concealment of sexual transgression (most famously, the rarely shown but oft-implied kiss) is common enough in Hindi cinema, Ravi Vasudevan notices a similar containment of sexuality in Mehboob Khan's *Andaz*[3]: whenever the woman (Nargis) and her suitor (Dilip Kumar) meet in public, they are immediately joined by her best friend (Cuckoo), a stand-in for the disapproving father[4].

The pattern of transgression and punishment thus repeats itself once again: this time, a sexual transgression meets a punishment in the very next scene. Yet, just as the mother's accident had no overt connection with her son's theft (except for the boy's brief outburst), the connection in this

[3] *Andaz* (1949) is a love triangle between the daughter of a rich businessman (Nargis), an eager suitor (Dilip Kumar) who saves her life and whose attentions she does not discourage, and her foreign-returned fiancé (Raj Kapoor) who eventually marries her.

[4] Vasudevan R S. 'You Cannot Live in Society—and Ignore It': Nationhood and Female Modernity in Andaz'. Contributions to Indian Sociology. 1995;29(1-2):83-108.

case too is not explicit; instead, it is deciphered from the *arrangement of scenes* at critical points in the film.

To sum up, each moment of the family's downfall in Do Bigha Zamin is preceded by a sexual or moral transgression, so that the real causes of the family's ruin - the injustice of the zamindar, the unsympathetic court of law, the city which alternates between indifference and cruelty – are supplemented by the 'sins' of the characters themselves.

Though *Do Bigha Zamin* is a devastating exposé of the causes of rural penury after India's independence, I believe the film's central problem does not only concern an examination of these causes per se but also a different one altogether: how do the poor preserve their morality in such desperate circumstances? And behind this question looms an equally dire injunction: *'Be moral at all costs, or suffer!', or to put it ironically, 'Accept your suffering, or suffer more!'*

Isn't this secret injunction to suffer, to embrace your suffering without rebelling against the cause, characteristic of many of the great films of the 1950s and the early 1960s, including Bimal Roy's *Sujata*[5] and *Bandini*[6] as well as Mehboob Khan's *Mother India*? Birju, the errant son in *Mother India*[7],

[5] *Sujata* (1959) is the story of an 'untouchable' orphan (Nutan) raised by a Brahmin couple. She is neglected and ill-treated by her foster parents throughout her life and her reluctant love for a Brahmin man (Sunil Dutt) invites social censure.

[6] Set in the time of India's freedom struggle, *Bandini* (1963) depicts a young woman's fall from grace after an injured freedom fighter (Ashok Kumar) spends a night at her house and leaves the village shortly afterwards. Traumatized by the villagers' insinuations, who call this man her 'husband', Kalyani (Nutan) moves to the city and coincidentally finds work as the caretaker of the mentally unstable wife of that same man. In a fit of rage, Kalyani poisons the wife and spends years in jail, where a compassionate jail doctor (Dharmendra) falls in love with her. In the end, she returns to her guilt-ridden 'husband'.

[7] *Mother India* (1957) portrays the struggle of a poverty-stricken village woman Radha (Nargis) to survive and raise her sons in the absence of her husband (Raaj Kumar). The chief enemy in *Mother India* is the moneylender Sukhilala (Kanhaiyalal) who extracts three-quarters of their crop as interest for an outstanding loan and at one point offers to save the family from starvation if the destitute woman has sex with him. Radha's sons grow up; Birju (Sunil Dutt)

is killed a couple of scenes after he rebels against the vile moneylender; in Mehboob Khan's *Amar*[8], a rape survivor must defend her rapist in court; Sujata and *Bandini*'s heroine Kalyani must serve, suffer and sacrifice for the cause of family, society and 'husband' (for that is what society calls Kalyani's seducer, for a seduction which never took place); any deviance on their part is quickly and brutally punished[9].

Recall again Balraj Sahni's disappointment with his character (Shambhu), noted in the epigraph that begins with the present chapter: *"He is never shown to stand up to the injustice and oppression he is subjected to"*. By blaming this submissiveness on 'foreign values and isms', Sahni achieves a magnificent inversion of the ideology we sketched above: contrary to their depiction, the suffering-sacrificing peasant is *not* representative of the Indian masses but a foreign archetype, a device for the elites to shed crocodile tears for the unfortunate masses. In this implicit logic, only the innocent deserve empathy, and the only innocent ones are those who perpetually suffer: a subject who rebels against fate, much like Birju in *Mother India*[10], loses her right to innocence and must be quickly crushed. We shall explore this perverse logic of the 'humanist film' in subsequent chapters.

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becomes a bandit and takes revenge on the moneylender for his mother's humiliations. He proceeds to kidnap the moneylender's daughter and is shot dead by his mother when he refuses to free her.

[8] *Amar* (1954) is the story of a lawyer (Dilip Kumar) who rapes a village woman (Nimmi) and is haunted by his conscience as he tries to hide his crime. The pregnant woman finally absolves him of his guilt in court and they are married in the end.

[9] And yet, as we shall see later, there is a crucial difference between a punishment that restores the status quo (*Bandini*'s heroine eventually returns to her 'husband') and a punishment that nevertheless ushers in a new order (the moneylender's death in *Mother India* brings an era of prosperity to the village).

[10] Birju is ostensibly killed for kidnapping the 'daughter' of the village. But why does the film place this senseless abduction just after he removes from the village its primary source of evil – the moneylender? Two opposing interpretations arise: first, the film's endeavor to show that any radical act (the elimination of the moneylender) is always in danger of turning into masculine domination (kidnapping a woman). Second, a more traditional film would have let the mother successfully coax her errant son into repentance; Birju's extreme punishment in *Mother India* could signal the film's anxiety to contain his transgression before it intensifies into an organized violent revolt against feudal oppression, which in turn would directly challenge the legitimacy of the state, extolled in the end. Mother India's eulogy to the Indian state is, however, deeply ambiguous, a paradox we shall explore later.

…

Let us now extract a few points of importance from *Do Bigha Zamin*:

Thesis 1: *A logic of transgression and punishment is at work in Hindi cinema, not only in the film as a whole, but in particular sequences as well.*

This is my central thesis: while it is generally accepted that a moral law is at work in Hindi cinema - barring certain crucial exceptions, the good are rewarded and the evil punished – the claim here is that this law works not only on the film but also on its parts. Not only is harmony in the Hindi film established in the end (the good rewarded, evil punished), a secret harmony often works unnoticed to punish the transgressors *in that very segment*, contributing to the rhythmic rise and fall of characters' fortunes in the film.

Do Bigha Zamin's importance for us lies in the fact that the film's climax announces this thesis (in the boy's cry) and provides it with a textbook example: if the first scene - the boy steals a lady's handbag - shows a transgression on his part, the next scene – mother meets with an accident - depicts the punishment meted out to a loved one, and by extension, to the boy himself. I shall however not treat this thesis as a metaphysical principle, to be taken for granted; instead, the whole endeavor of this book is to *verify* whether this logic actually works in various Hindi films, spanning decades and genres, and to limit the scope of this thesis accordingly.

Yet we have a problem: even in *Do Bigha Zamin*, the theory of transgression and punishment strikes an impasse, since the 'villain' who molested the boy's mother remains unpunished. The moral law, if it works at all, works only for certain key characters in a film and not for others, whom we call *pure agents* of the moral law, cardboard cutouts devoid of any role other than inflicting a divinely ordained punishment on the hapless protagonist, after which they sink back into oblivion.

Similarly, the evil *zamindar* in *Do Bigha Zamin* occupies a spectral zone; his presence in the film is brief, one-dimensional, and defined only in a fixed relation to the farmers (oppression) and his capitalist friends (connivance); like the other villain, he too disappears abruptly once his function is over. Further, the logic of transgression and punishment implies that both villains perform an eminently *moral* function. In other words, *the villain, violator of morality par excellence, is paradoxically an agent of the moral law,* an idea we shall explore in subsequent chapters.

Thesis 2: *The Hindi film privileges action over word and circumstance.*

Film viewing, especially in popular cinema, often implicitly privileges the words spoken by a character over her actions to uncover meaning in the film. Meaning making can be distinguished from pleasurable satisfaction in the moving image (spectacles, bodies or simply a joy in movement), which for the most part escape the interpretation of the regular viewer.

Meaning is constructed intersubjectively, i.e. through the choreographed interactions of the characters, as well as through the subjective beliefs of the spectator. Unless a character's actions cross a socially defined limit of abhorrence (though its threshold varies over time), or they receive

criticism from other characters in the film, or a combination of camerawork and background music suggests that a transgression is being committed, the viewer is implicitly urged to empathize with the character's explicit intentions, i.e. her reasons for engaging in an action[11].

Yet, the viewer's empathy is belied by a film like *Do Bigha Zamin* in which a child suffers not for his *intentions* (which are unquestionably noble: saving one's family) but purely for his *action*. If this inner privileging of action over intention found in *Do Bigha Zamin* holds true for other Hindi films, we must open ourselves to the possibility that actions matter in film more than intentions, explanations or justifications of the actor or even the desperate circumstances that 'force' the character to act this way.

In such films, action is judged stripped of all immediate context, 'objectively', that is to say, in relation to the reigning social conventions of the time ('theft is wrong, whatever be its context'). Relation, though, is not identity: if each film blindly reflected the dominant conventions of its time, there would be little to separate the individual film, whose uniqueness lies partly in its creative relation to these conventions.

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[11] While there may well be an ideal spectator constructed by a film, the real spectator often picks her favourite scenes (which presumably influence her the most) in accordance with her own life-experiences and social circumstances: "Problematising charges by some academic commentators that all Hindi films play to reactionary audiences who both publicly and privately accept and even identify with their (retrograde) ideological stances, the audiences I observed in Bombay responded very differently to the two supposedly 'youth' films *Yaadein* and *Dil Chahta Hai*. *Yaadein*'s unsophisticated and ideologically crass dialogues were met with humorous scepticism or scorn by some of the 18 to 24 age group, eliciting wisecracks during melodramatic scenes. In the course of a particularly emotionally charged sequence, when the hero, Hrithik Roshan, is to be married off to an heiress from another rich family and cries out, 'I am selling myself! I am for sale!', a young female member of the audience responded at the top of her voice, 'How much for? I'll buy you!', eliciting storms of laughter and clapping". Banaji, *Reading 'Bollywood'*, 48.

To sum up, films are viewed as an arrangement of diverse elements - words, images, music, events and actions - often with an implicit privileging of the word (of what characters say they feel, or their ostensible reasons to act in a certain manner) over other elements. This work seeks to reverse the unwritten hierarchy of word over action and event and locate the meaning of a character's behavior in her deeds more than her words.

Words, of course, cannot be treated superfluously, for, as John Austin notes, they sometimes double as actions (performatives) - a signed will, the naming of a ship and a marriage vow[12]. In this study, words will retain their importance as long as they correspond with action (or if they constitute an action) but shall be treated with suspicion when they contradict (previous or subsequent) actions or when they appear as rationalizations (self-defences) to cover up actions, deeds which would have appeared obscure or disturbing to our eyes otherwise. Words shall also be given special importance when they seem enigmatic or unexpected, i.e. when they appear as symptom.

Thesis 3: *The logic of transgression and punishment works unconsciously or behind the scenes, for on the surface, the film insists on the character's innocence. The character is thus innocent in her intentions but guilty in her actions, and while the film, at one level, defends her innocence, the same film secretly punishes her for her transgression[13].*

[12] "Speaking generally, it is always necessary that the circumstances in which the words are uttered should be in some way, or ways, *appropriate*…Thus, for naming the ship, it is essential that I should be the person appointed to name her…" Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 8.

[13] We shall later clarify this point by separating the moral law working in a film from the film itself. Strictly speaking, it is the moral law that punishes, not necessarily the film itself.

In *Do Bigha Zamin*, the child's crime and punishment, though easily discernible in retrospect - why else would the son's theft precede the mother's accident? - comes to our attention only when it erupts in a traumatic outburst. A common reading of the film disregards this subtle connection between these two, apparently unrelated scenes and identifies with the boy's desperation through a simple weighing of profit and loss: the handbag of the rich lady (whose presence is de-emphasized, rendering her anonymous and insignificant) is infinitely less valuable for her than it is for our desperate protagonist, the very survival of whose family is at stake.

The film itself encourages this common reading, underlining the innocence of the child before and after the act, the former by accentuating his desperate circumstances and minimizing the loss of the rich woman, the latter by showing him spontaneously renounce the stolen money when he sees his mother dead. Yet, despite this insistence on the boy's innocence, the film works at another level to punish him (via his mother's accident) for his transgression; the boy is absolutely crushed at the sight of what he believes to be his mother's corpse.

I call the logic of transgression and punishment *unconscious*, against the obvious objection that it was brought to our notice by the conscious articulation of a child, for a single reason: the fleeting nature of this exclamation, mentioned once and never again in the film, as if the film's unconscious had erupted for a moment only to sink back into its subterranean world, so that the general viewers of *Do Bigha Zamin* would also regard this outburst purely in psychological, rather than ontological, terms, as a mere manifestation of the child's inner guilt instead of a precious clue to the film's logic.

Thesis 4: *Scenes of transgression and punishment are often, but not always, followed by a scene of redemption.*

In *Do Bigha Zamin*, punishment and redemption occur in the same scene; the child's grief at seeing his mother dead (punishment) makes him throw away the money, and in that very scene, he discovers what we already knew, that his mother is alive.

Is this logical sequence necessarily chronological, i.e. does redemption, when it occurs, always follow punishment that in turn succeeds transgression? In *Do Bigha Zamin*'s climax, the sequence of events is not so streamlined; redemption does not put an end to punishment, for the ultimate retribution for the boy's theft lies right at the end, in the permanent alienation from his family land. Punishment-as-suffering, however, may coincide with transgression in the same scene, as we saw in the rickshaw race (I shall term such scenes as scenes of *immanent punishment*).

But can punishment precede transgression? Certain films (e.g. *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*[14]) open with a suffering character, which directly contradicts the argument we have sketched so far, apparently nipping our thesis in the bud. Yet, as the film progresses, we often learn, in flashback or a verbal reminiscence, of a transgression that, in the film's buried chronology, *immediately* preceded the beginning of her suffering. In *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, the dying wife (Rani Mukherjee) admits in a flashback of her painful realization that she had inadvertently destroyed the embryonic romance between two best friends (Shahrukh Khan and Kajol), *yet this realization doesn't stop her from*

[14] In Karan Johar's *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998), a widower (Shahrukh Khan) falls in love with his best friend from college (Kajol), owing to the schemes of his eight-year-old daughter, who in turn has been instructed to bring the friends together by her own dead mother (Rani Mukherjee) in posthumous letters.

marrying the man she loves (Shahrukh). The destructive effect of her transgression can only be removed by removing her from the film, in this case by punishing her with a fatal sickness.

Through the above discussion, we have unexpectedly stepped on a powerful objection to the transgression-punishment theory: the charge of arbitrariness, composed of two parallel accusations. First, isn't the theory delineated above essentially an exercise in whim and fancy, where any arbitrary event could be picked up and called transgression, punishment or redemption as and when convenient? We require, in response to this allegation, rigorous definitions of the three terms, which I shall attempt in the next chapter.

Second, even if there is a general agreement on these three types of scenes, isn't any link connecting these scenes itself arbitrary? For instance, one could pick a scene at the beginning of a film that appears to involve a 'transgression', link it to a scene of suffering that occurs a long time afterwards, call it 'punishment', tie it down to the denouement and term *that* as 'redemption' and thus claim to have found 'evidence' for this theory when all we have obtained is an exercise in arbitrariness.

There are actually two problems here: one, the form of punishment is often unrelated to the form of transgression, for instance the mother's accident does not share any qualitative resemblance with the son's theft (except vaguely, both theft and accident occur on the road; the mother's molester is also a thief); therefore, the recognition of a scene as punishment for this or that particular crime becomes a problem. Two, the duration between transgression and punishment or punishment and redemption cannot be left arbitrary; it is imperative that the three (or at least the first two, in the

absence of redemption) occur, or at least begin to occur, within a short span of time, preferably in the very next scene.

The only exception is when the character herself makes this connection between her present suffering and/or repentance for a past crime[15], or when the reference to a past crime triggers a punishment in the same or the following scene (a case of word being superior to action). The latter occurs, for instance, in several action films when in the penultimate scene, the hero recounts the villain's crimes to him before pummeling him to death or submission[16].

Thus, even if the forms of transgression and punishment differ widely, the temporal continuity of the two scenes, where one immediately succeeds the other, makes a strong case to read the sequence of events along these lines. Yet, this requirement must be further qualified. To understand why, let me take the example of *Madhumati* (1958), another Bimal Roy masterpiece.

The woman (Vyjayanthimala), in this case, enters a castle where she is molested by a villain (Pran) and dies; this event occurs a couple of scenes after she (symbolically) marries the hero (Dilip Kumar) in secret. Yet this simple chronology of transgression and punishment is concealed by an intervening song that does not feature her, implying that by the time she enters the castle, the viewer's memory of *her* previous scenes is blurred. An analysis of transgression and punishment should thus focus not

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[15] In the case of a moral violation, the proper word is 'sin'; I use 'crime', 'transgression' and 'sin' interchangeably here.

[16] This raises the question of why in many films the villain's transgressions go unpunished, and his punishment delayed, for long intervals. This delay in punishment does not contradict our theory per se, for his *eventual* punishment (the beating or humiliation) is often immediately preceded by a severe transgression, or as we noted above, a verbal or visual recounting of his past sins. To explain why a villain's first transgressions (e.g. Gabbar's excesses in *Sholay*) are sometimes not punished immediately, we require the notion of a *cumulative transgression*, discussed later, in which a transgression is allowed to grow and flourish unchecked for a considerable duration before punishment strikes.

on consecutive scenes in general but on *consecutive scenes featuring that particular character*, scenes which, in the film's duration, may be widely separated. This is true especially for relatively minor characters like the villain or the vamp, though at times they are simply removed from the film after their transgression reaches its pinnacle (like the two villains in *Do Bigha Zamin*).

…

Thesis 5: *Transgression analysis provides us with a means to uncover the unconscious of a Hindi film. Simply put, the method is detection in reverse; instead of moving from crime to identifying and apprehending the criminal (punishment), we shall move in the opposite direction: a scene of punishment will suggest a prior transgression, which we shall strive to uncover by a meticulous investigation of the previous scenes and the overall logic of the film.*

Transgression analysis revolves around certain key points in the Hindi film which I call *traumatic moments*: scenes of death, accident, suffering, sudden or inexplicable violence; scenes often highlighted by bold background music, sharp camera angles and close-ups as well as extreme physical action or emotional outbursts, e.g. the mother's accident in *Do Bigha Zamin*. These grand scenes are often dismissed as melodramatic spectacle, yet they often conceal their real cause; they are points in the film where the narrative thread is at its weakest, as if the gaps in logic could be concealed only through recourse to spectacle.

A perpetual risk with theories like the one described above is that they spontaneously tend to turn into metaphysical principles, which after a point either require no demonstration from experience

or use the slightest evidence to confirm their veracity. To guard against such inadvertent abuse of a potentially valuable theory, I shall distinguish between strong and weak possibilities of transgression-punishment.

A *strong possibility* implies that the connection between two scenes is plausible, because a) one immediately follows the other, i.e. a relation of contiguity; b) the first scene involves an act that is commonly recognized as a transgression (e.g. crime against law) *or* is considered a transgression by significant characters within the film (e.g. love, insofar as it merits parental opposition); c) the transgression-punishment pattern is seen to repeat in multiple films in Hindi cinema, especially in that period to which the film belongs (e.g. sexual intimacy before or after marriage often has disastrous consequences for the intimate couple).

On the other hand, a *weak possibility* fulfils the first criteria of contiguity but is otherwise ambiguous. On occasion it is utterly unique (violating c); more often its social recognizability is in doubt – is the intimate friendship of a married woman (*bhabhi*) with her brother-in-law (*dewar*) normal or transgressive? My previous reading of the famous rickshaw race in *Do Bigha Zamin* is weak in both senses: the scene is, to my knowledge, unique in the annals of Hindi cinema and, further, its transgressive aspect is not immediately recognizable but requires speculation. The drawback of a weak possibility or reading is its relative uncertainty; its advantage lies in its occasional ability to produce an entirely new reading of the film in question, readings more or less believable depending on the case.

Besides these two possible forms of possibilities, there are two more: *certainty*, when the link has been admitted by a character herself (like the mother's accident in *Do Bigha Zamin* and another mother's accident in *Amar Akbar Anthony*[17], both played by Nirupa Roy) and *impasse*, where the link is as good as missing.

Such a cautious strategy should, I think, prove adequate to respond to another possible objection: transgression analysis as a case of *circular logic.* To assert the existence of a visible 'punishment', caused by a secret transgression, *and* claim that the transgression exists because it is followed by a visible 'punishment' is to go around in circles. Thus, it is vital in each case that the transgression be socially recognizable *qua* transgression. An emphasis on recognizability also answers the related objection that one is committing here the fallacy of *post hoc ergo propter hoc* ('after this, therefore because of this'): just because scene A is followed by scene B, one cannot necessarily assume that scene A (transgression) is the cause of scene B (punishment).

Thesis 6: *The transgression-punishment theory, if it withstands verification for other films, may be of both ontological and ethical importance to Hindi cinema: ethical insofar as it offers clues to the film's moral position vis-à-vis the actions of its characters; ontological because the form in which the film unfolds is influenced at certain crucial moments by this secret logic.*

[17] In Manmohan Desai's *Amar Akbar Anthony* (1978), a traumatized mother (Nirupa Roy) leaves her children behind to commit suicide. On the way, she is hit by a falling branch and collapses; when she recovers consciousness, the mother is horrified to find her eyesight gone. When her rescuer (a Muslim who immediately calls her 'sister') gently admonishes the mother of wanting to commit suicide, she replies: "Perhaps you're right. That's why God punished me and snatched my eyesight".

The climax of Bimal Roy's *Do Bigha Zamin* not only shows transgression-punishment-redemption as one of the several principles of arrangement of adjacent scenes (the others being contrast, intensification, word- or image-association such as the match cut), it also provides us a vital insight on where the film stands ethically vis-à-vis its protagonists by revealing a split between its official and subterranean layers.

But is this pattern of events widespread or limited to merely a few films? Our study is devoted to investigating the scope of this logic through a rigorous examination of a wide variety of Hindi films, with a special emphasis on three categories: the classics (films which receive critical acclaim), the blockbusters (films which receive popular acclaim), and the cult films (films which receive acclaim from a dedicated niche audience). I shall not delve into the 'great' qualities of these films, those familiar points of praise repeated *ad nauseam*, as well as the subtle beauty of certain songs, scenes and patterns discovered by more discerning critics. If anything, this dissertation is an exercise in *subtraction,* by which I mean a systematic focus on an obscure attribute of Hindi films.

INTRODUCTION: LAW & ETHICS

In *Do Bigha Zamin*, we had noticed a curious logic of transgression and punishment at work, a moral law that intervenes at critical points in the film to secretly punish the errant subjects. In the following chapters, I shall track the various expressions of this unconscious logic in Hindi cinema in general.

But first, what does one mean by Hindi cinema[18]? Strictly speaking, the films made in the Hindi language, but also in Urdu[19] in the past and a mixture of Hindi and English at present. Films overwhelmingly produced in Bombay, now Mumbai, though before independence, they were also made in Lahore[20]. And not just films, but the film industry, the entire apparatus that produces, distributes and exhibits these films. In addition, peripheral industries that depend on Hindi cinema: music, acting and dancing classes; games and toys and other merchandise sold in bulk from the days

[18] The origins of Hindi cinema are often traced back to the Parsi theatre of the late 19th century: "As such, certain forms of mass "art" and the Parsi theatre—technologically slick, urban, and produced for an emerging middle class—are the nineteenth-century forms most useful in contextualizing Bombay-based early cinema. Beginning in 1853, the Parsi theatre developed into a mobile, operatic entertainment that traversed the length and breadth of colonial and princely India and extended overseas into Southeast Asia. Its rise was simultaneous with that of other regional theatres in Bengal and Maharashtra, and it shared with them certain features—a proscenium style stage, painted backdrops, an emphasis on spectacle and melodrama, and the inclusion of song and dance". Gopal & Moorti, *Global Bollywood*, 18.

[19] "The 'Hindi film' is made in a colloquial form of Hindi, which at some registers is identical to colloquial Urdu, and given the general visual absence of writing in the film (the title is given in Roman, Devanagari and Perso-Arabic with subsequent titles in Roman and occasionally Hindi), it can be disputed whether the film is in Hindi or in Urdu", Dwyer, *Filming The Gods*, 103.

[20] Satyajit Ray observes that one of the languages employed in the films made in Madras (now, Chennai) was Hindi. Ray, *Our Films, Their Films*, 39.

of Fearless Nadia in the 1930s[21]; in short, a culture industry that has lately assumed monumental proportions under the name of Bollywood[22].

But let us move from this statement of fact to a question which demands some analysis. What is distinctive about a Hindi film? Roughly speaking, we have at least three perspectives: from the western viewpoint, the Hindi film often appears as an *oriental spectacle*, complete with gaps in narrative logic, extreme emotions and improbable coïncidences; the confusion intrinsic to the film mirrors the irrationality of the oriental mind.

In the realist's eyes, Hindi cinema is a *formulaic cinema*, which in its relentless drive to please and profit from the masses[23] ignores the beauty of Indian landscapes (escaping to artificial sets or Switzerland), the poignant stories of real men and women (escaping to fantasy and formula)[24], and the exceptional nature of the medium of cinema itself, cinema *qua* cinema.

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[21] "[After *Hunterwali*,] Fearless Nadia became a sensation across the country and unofficial merchandising followed: Fearless Nadia whips, belts, matchboxes and playing cards appeared and her famous yell 'hey-y-y' became a catchphrase". Thomas, 'Not Quite (Pearl) White: Fearless Nadia, Queen of Stunts', in *Bollyworld: Popular Indian Cinema Through A Transnational Lens*, 36.

[22] Rajadhyaksha, The 'Bollywoodization' of the Indian cinema, 25-39.

[23] "Etymologically, entertainment means 'holding between'. The cinema's work of representation performs just such an operation; its skills are used to generate fantasy spaces for its audience, spaces which are literally 'held between' phases of routine domestic and working life." Vasudevan, "The Cultural Space of a Film Narrative: Interpreting Kismet (Bombay Talkies, 1943)", in The Indian Economic and Social History Review 28, no. 2 (1991): 172.

[24] "The ingredients of the average Hindi film are well known; colour (Eastman preferred); songs (six or seven?) in voices one knows and trusts; dance — solo and ensemble — the more frenzied the better; bad girl, good girl, bad guy, good guy, romance (but no kisses); tears, guffaws, fights, chases, melodrama; characters who exist in a social vacuum; dwellings which do not exist outside the studio floor; locations in Kulu, Manali, Ooty, Kashmir, London, Paris, Hong Kong, Tokyo... who needs to be told? See any three Hindi films, and two will have all the ingredients listed above". Ray, *Our Films Their Films*, 90-91.

From the film aficionado's point of view, Hindi cinema consists of *sublime moments* - songs, scenes and dialogues[25] - etched in the minds of its audience, part of their spontaneous imagination and vocabulary. The current flood of pastiches of cinematic moments in social media (comedy skits, memes, TikTok) is both homage to their impact on collective consciousness and their collective de-realization; pastiche empties the cinematic moment of its substance (content and context) in order to revel in the hollow repetition of its external form.

Should one then study Hindi cinema through the lens of a diamond cutter, extracting brilliant gems from an otherwise shapeless grey mass? Is the singularity of Hindi cinema, in other words, only the singularity of its high moments? Such a hypothesis - of Hindi cinema as pure multiplicity - is especially tenable given what appears to be the *heterogeneous* character of the Hindi film, where the various elements – songs, fights, comic interludes - have not been subsumed into narrative coherence[27].

The jumbled, chaotic nature of so many Hindi films (the implausible plotlines, the abrupt lapses into song and dance) is not merely a product of a western, orientalizing gaze but a constitutive feature of the films themselves; *the twists and turns of a Hindi film are a mystery not just for the uninitiated,*

[25] And iconic images which reiterate themselves in popular memory: "Apart from the iconic, ever-wet Madhubala, such pervasive images as Raj Kapoor–Nargis, Sholay or Govinda on MTV, an Amitabh hairstyle in a barber's shop may extend into a more anonymous evoking of black-and-white effects, or an even more generalized fetish for some indeterminate past, for example, in heritage tourism. Such evocations are commonly to be seen in both low and high-end advertising, fashion, food, architecture and interior design, and, paralleling their rise to ubiquity, in the rise of a new market for film memorabilia". Rajadhyaksha, *Indian Cinema in the Time of Celluloid*, 100.

[27] "We are now in a position to state more precisely the manner in which a 'heterogeneous form of manufacture' operates in the Hindi film industry. It does so to the extent that the cinematic instance is not the dominant one in the production of the film text; to the extent that the component elements of the text arise in traditions that have a separate existence or in traditions that, arising in the context of film itself (like the star system), acquire an independence that retroactively determines the form of the text. The different component elements have not been subsumed under the dominance of a cinema committed to narrative coherence. The heteronomous conditions under which the production sector operates are paralleled by a textual heteronomy whose primary symptom is the absence of an integral narrative structure". Prasad, *The Ideology of the Hindi Film*, 45.

but for the film lover too, the difference simply being that the latter with time has accepted the implausible as a necessary part of her viewing experience.

One is thus left with three choices: first, to admit that Hindi cinema - the cinema as a whole and the individual film - is irreconcilably multiple, and all the lover-analyst could do is to highlight and study certain exceptional moments; second, to abstract from these and other moments certain regularities, spatial (themes and motifs) and temporal (historical shifts and trends), and third, *to investigate the possibility of one or more consistent logics in Hindi cinema*, unconscious to the eye and revealed through a systematic study of Hindi films.

A systematic study, I believe, does not contradict the principle of subtraction I had mentioned in the prologue, for the aim is not to grasp the totality of totality (all aspects of all films, essential and non-essential), but a singular logic that possibly permeates that totality, the body of work we know as Hindi cinema. As we shall see in the conclusion, the totality we speak of is itself historically limited; while its origins can be traced to the 1930s, the hegemony of this logic disintegrates somewhere between the mid-1990s and the late 2000s, though it remains a powerful force in the construction of Hindi films.

For now, the logic(s) we seek to uncover may be static or dynamic, partial or total, valid in general or related to specific periods or genres; the key requisite is that it be composed of *unconscious* connections that do not readily reveal themselves to the viewer's eye and yet are constitutive of her experience.

For instance, till recently, there seemed in Hindi cinema to be a prohibition not only on sex before marriage, almost always subject to explicit reproach, but also an implicit restriction on sexual intimacy *after marriage* (i.e. after the wedding night, or on the wedding night itself, e.g. *Zeenat*[28], where a critically injured husband has sex with his wife and dies the next morning). This buried prohibition can be discerned from the catastrophic fate of a number of married couples who shared sexual intimacy on the conjugal bed (*Kohraa*[29], *Mera Saaya*[30], *Abhimaan*[31]).

A curious paradox of sex after marriage is that, except in rare cases where it results in overproduction of children (e.g. *Aurat*[32]), excessive sex after marriage generally leads to (and is not a consequence of) a long period of childlessness. An obscure transformation must occur in the sexual relations of the couple for a child to be produced, a mystery we shall examine later.

Another example of a buried norm is the implicit link between class and caste. An enduring mystery of Hindi cinema is that even though Hindu society is essentially based on caste hierarchies, caste

[28] Shaukat Hussain Rizvi's *Zeenat* (1945) is a Muslim social which recounts the story of a young woman (Noor Jehan) who becomes pregnant after the death of her husband (Majeed) and is vilified by her new family as an adulteress, though the child is his.

[29] Based on the same novel as Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940), Biren Nag's *Kohraa* (1964) tells the story of a woman (Waheeda Rehman) marrying a rich widowed landowner (Biswajeet), yet her marital bliss is constantly interrupted by the disapproving housekeeper (Lalita Pawar) and the apparent ghost of the first wife.

[30] Raj Khosla's *Mera Saaya* (1966) recounts the mad grief of a man (Sunil Dutt) whose beloved wife (Sadhana) has died before his eyes only to return as another woman.

[31] Hrishikesh Mukherjee's *Abhimaan* (1973) depicts the love marriage of a singer (Amitabh Bachchan) and a village girl (Jaya Bhaduri), which runs into trouble once the girl, persuaded to sing in public by the husband, eclipses his fame as a singing sensation.

[32] Mehboob Khan's *Aurat* (1940), the original version of *Mother India* (1957), depicts a farmer (Arun Kumar Ahuja) fleeing away from his family on learning that his wife (Sardar Akhtar) is pregnant for the fourth time; his reason is the massive debt he owes the moneylender Sukhilala (Kanhaiyalal, who plays the same role in *Mother India* too).

itself finds such little mention in Hindi films[33], whose protagonists are mostly Hindu[34]. Apart from rare caste-oriented films like *Achhut Kannya*[36], *Rattan*[37] and *Sujata*, the problem of caste erupts in three forms in Hindi cinema: primarily as class (the prohibition on intermixing and intermarriage of rich and poor, a frequent trope in Hindi cinema, is both a caste and class problem, as is made clear in certain perceptive films); secondly, in the form of the bastard child (of unknown or unrecognized parentage) who suffers through much of the film for his or her 'impure' blood; third, in the form of the orphaned hero(ine), who often endures a similar ordeal.

The excavation of these buried discursive rules should throw some light on the essential mystery of Hindi cinema. For the basic wager of the study is precisely this, that the Hindi film is a deeply mysterious creature, as foreign to our thinking selves as it is intimate to our emotions.

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[33] "The Bombay cinema… positions other national/ethnic/socio-religious identities in stereotypical ways under an overarching north Indian, majoritarian Hindu identity. The stereotypes of the 'southerner' (or 'Madrasi', a term which dismissively collapses the entire southern region), the Bengali, the Parsi, the Muslim, the Sikh and the Christian occupy the subordinate positions in this universe". Vasudevan, 'Aesthetics and Politics in Indian Cinema', in Vasudha Dalmia ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Indian Culture*, 228.

[34] In her audience-oriented fieldwork, Shakuntala Banaji discovers the alienation of viewers of other faiths when watching several Hindi films, which are not only Hindu-in-themselves (with Hindu characters in a Hindu milieu) but, in their repeated celebration of Hindu rituals, Hindu-for-themselves: "Zahira chimed in that she had watched the film three times (Hum Saath Saath Hain) and attempted to recreate some of the dresses herself when she attended her sister's wedding. Hum Saath Saath Hain, Zahira insisted, was 'even better than Hum Aapke Hain Koun …! (Who Am I to You? Sooraj Barjatya 1994)', because it did not stress 'Hinduism' so much". Banaji, *Reading 'Bollywood'*, 22.

[36] Franz Osten's *Achhut Kannya* (1936) recounts the tale of two childhood friends – a Brahmin boy (Ashok Kumar) and a Dalit girl (Devika Rani) - who cannot marry each other because of their caste. The two are married off to different individuals; the man's jealous wife hatches a scheme to ensure that the separated couple 'accidentally' meet each other at a village fair and return home together in a cart. While the woman's infuriated husband brawls with his 'rival', she sacrifices her life to prevent a train accident, becoming a martyr to save the lives of scores of passengers.

[37] M. Sadiq's *Rattan* (1944) tells a similar story of childhood playmates of different castes being separated by marriage.

Let me then begin with three common observations that I believe any lay viewer would notice about Hindi films, barring the recent films of the past two decades, which we shall discuss in the final part of this study.

First, many Hindi films are concerned with the family and/or romance. There is often, but not always, a conflict between the two principles (fidelity to family vs fidelity to love), and, while love often triumphs, it sometimes remains unrequited (one does not love the other, e.g. *Darr*[38]) or unfulfilled (the lovers cannot unite because of adverse circumstances, e.g. *Sangam*[39]). We will turn to the topic of non-family films in a moment.

Second, most Hindi films follow the logic of transgression and punishment in the sense that the good are usually rewarded in the end and the evil punished. In other words, a transcendental moral principle (that is to say, a single God) is at work in the films, which reveals itself, most prominently in the climax, through its effects (and rarely in person, like in *Jai Santoshi Maa*[40]). A film in which the good man or woman suffers a cruel death, e.g. *Anand*[41], sometimes justifies that death in the name of a higher logic; in Anand's case, a character observes that God Himself cannot live separated from such a noble soul.

[38] In Yash Chopra's *Darr* (1993), a stalker (Shahrukh Khan) is obsessed with a woman (Juhi Chawla) who is oblivious of his identity.

[39] Raj Kapoor's *Sangam* (1964) follows an ill-fated love triangle where the lovers (Vyjayanthimala and Rajendra Kumar) cannot unite because of a third man, a war hero who comes back from the dead (Raj Kapoor).

[40] In Vijay Sharma's *Jai Santoshi Maa* (1975), the rise of the goddess Santoshi Mata (Anita Guha) in the hierarchy of gods is paralleled by the sufferings of her newly married devotee (Kanan Kaushal) in the hands of her new family.

[41] Hrishikesh Mukherjee's *Anand* (1971) tells the story of a cancer-ridden man (Rajesh Khanna) who believes in spreading happiness in the lives of others.

Third, many Hindi film scenes belong to one of the following types: scenes of sadness or suffering, of happiness or enjoyment, scenes of violence and rebellion, fear and anger, of shock and shame. This typology does not tell us anything specific, and it is probably true for films in any part of the world. Let us note in passing that these types can be crudely grouped in conventional terms (of pleasure and pain) into positive, negative and ambiguous scenes: happiness and enjoyment are often considered *positive* or desirable states for the character experiencing them, while fear, sadness, shock and shame are, as a rule, considered *negative* or undesirable in his or her eyes.

The specter of masochism, where one takes enjoyment in suffering, arises in a few Hindi films (the most famous being *Devdas*[42]) but can be safely disregarded for now since the pleasure-in-suffering is rarely declared explicitly; the masochist's enjoyment is strictly unconscious and, like Devdas, she perceives her ambiguous experience as largely painful.

The case of anger and violence is obscure; its status depends on the subject and the circumstances. A sadistic villain may enjoy beating up innocents, or a hero may take pleasure in defeating a dozen people at once in a fistfight, even if he is bruised in battle. On the other hand, a person on the receiving end of violence ordinarily experiences it as *negative*.

A third kind of violence is of revolt, where the pleasure of pursuing one's desire (or a higher cause) and the pain or suffering for the desire or cause are inextricably *mixed*. A similar point of ambiguity is that of non-rebellious sacrifice, i.e. sacrifice that aims at upholding the societal law, a violence

[42] In Saratchandra Chatterjee's famous novel *Devdas* (1917), the inspiration for a number of Hindi films, a wealthy landlord's son (Devdas) wants to marry his childhood friend (Paro) but is refused permission by his family owing to her 'low-caste' lineage, a rejection which sends him into pangs of despair and alcoholism. Alcohol consumption is itself a transgression in many Hindi films, followed in the same or next scene by a punishment.

against the self where a similar pleasure-pain can be experienced (e.g. a mother toiling for her sons in *Deewaar* or the enduring heroine in *Sujata*).

In sum, we have violence as domination or victory, violence as subjugation or defeat, violence as non-rebellious sacrifice and violence as revolt. While the first two form a couple within the shared rules of a game (when one wins, the other loses), and the third, sacrifice, is necessary to offer those rules a sublime legitimacy, the status of revolt is more ambiguous since it often seeks not simply to defeat the oppressor but also to *transform the rules of the game itself.*

For instance, the common struggle between father and son over the latter's love affair is qualitatively different from the same son's clash with a villain who covets his beloved. The first is a case of revolt and counter-revolt (in which the confrontation is between two conflicting principles, family honor and love, but also between hierarchy and equality), while the second is often a case of domination-subjugation (the struggle is over the same principle, the possession of a woman and her honor). The first consists of violence against authority, the second is violence over (the possession of) authority.

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Thesis 1: *Two key figures recur in Hindi cinema: the paternal figure and the maternal figure. The paternal figure embodies societal law; the maternal figure represents the principle of love.*

In the previous section, we were examining a fairly large subset of the Hindi film, the family romance. To take the analysis a step further, let me construct a crude archetype of an imaginary family in

Hindi cinema. Since there is no typical family as such, we include the major characters found in Hindi cinema in this mythical group: father, mother, sister, brother, subject (hero or heroine), spouse, uncles and aunts, child or children. Yet given the immense diversity of characters for each member in Hindi film, this seems to be a useless endeavor. To take one example, the sister in Hindi films can be a happy-go-lucky teenager, a chaste self-sacrificing woman, a young girl getting pregnant before marriage (*Junglee*[43]), a cute child in awe of her brother's wife or sister's husband, and so on.

I start with the crucial figures of this mythical family, characters who are generally given considerable importance in the Hindi film itself. Even though a specific character-type has tremendous internal diversity across a range of films, one can identify in a number of films at least two distinct figures: a paternal and maternal figure.

The two are distinguished by their relation to the subject (hero or heroine): the *paternal figure* tries to impose his authority on the subject, forcing him to abide by the *law*. The law, of course, has not been invented by the paternal figure but reflects wider social rules. I shall call this network of social rules the *societal law* for this reason, and though it sometimes coincides with conventional morality, the societal law can also violate ordinary morals. Two blockbuster films separated by almost fifty years – *Jugnu* (1947)[44] and *Dil* (1990)[45] - share the premise that the hero's parents wish to sell him in the marriage market at the highest bidder, a clearly immoral act but in all probability widely practiced in society. In contrast to the paternal

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[43] Subodh Mukherjee's *Junglee* (1961) raises the specter of premarital pregnancy only to predictably quash it by revealing in the end that the sister had married her lover a year ago.

[44] Ironically, the highest-grossing film of India's year of independence, Shaukat Hussain Rizvi's *Jugnu* (1947) was the actor Dilip Kumar's first major hit. The film ends in tragedy: the woman (Noor Jahan) sacrifices her love and dies; the grief-stricken man berates his selfish parents and commits suicide.

[45] Indra Kumar's *Dil* (1990) was also the highest grosser of that year and depicts a college couple (Aamir Khan & Madhuri Dixit) who overcome class differences to elope and live together, until tragedy strikes.

figure, who wishes to enforce the societal law[46], the *maternal figure* cares for the well-being of the subject, she is a force of love; together, the two are supposed to balance each other and hold the family intact.

In Hindi cinema, the paternal figure is not always the biological father but a subject-position occupied by a wide variety of characters: the biological father obviously, but sometimes the mother (Lalita Pawar), an elder brother or sister, an uncle (*Awara*[47]) or aunt (mausi-ji in *Sholay*[48]), in short, any figure who wields authority over the protagonist. The same holds true for the maternal figure, who can be the biological father (e.g. *Achhut Kannya* and *Hum Aapke Hain Koun*), mother (Nirupa Roy), uncle or aunt (*Hero No. 1*), elder sister (*Mere Mehboob*) or brother (*Hum Saath Saath Hain*), etc.

These two symbolic positions are not limited to the family film. A boss at office or an underworld don (*Satya*) is a good example of a 'father', while the 'mother' may be a friend (*Satyakam*), a friend's wife (*Anand*), a kindly neighbor, a nurse (*Khamoshi*) or a housekeeper (*Anubhav*). This observation is crucial to our study for it allows us to expand our analysis of maternal and paternal figures from the subset of the family romance to Hindi cinema in general. Even within the same film, a number of characters can perform the 'father' or 'mother' function, either simultaneously or in succession.

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[46] Though I have used the words law, norm and rule freely and interchangeably to describe the principles governing the subject's social conduct, my preference is for the word 'law', which places a binding obligation on the subject to obey. The norm on the other hand is both weaker (an obligation that is not binding) and more fluid than law; a rule is a specific aspect of law that deals with its application in a particular situation; rules tell us how the abstract law is to be materialized.

[47] Raj Kapoor's *Awara* (1951) is the story of a tramp (Raj Kapoor) who falls in love with a rich woman (Nargis), though unknown to him, her stern guardian is his own father (Prithviraj Kapoor), a man who had thrown out his wife many years ago on suspicion of adultery.

[48] In Ramesh Sippy's *Sholay* (1975), the rogue Veeru (Dharmendra), having failed to impress his lady love Basanti's (Hema Malini) *mausi* or maternal aunt (Leela Mishra) enough to procure her permission for marriage, threatens in a drunken rage to commit suicide from the top of a water tank; *mausi-ji* finally relents to this comical display of bravado.

The two poles of father and mother rarely remain stable. We often see the father succumbing to moments of weakness in enforcing his authority or realizing his folly in the end; more often, the mother furiously oscillates between love for her child and fidelity to the husband/law.

In the three great tragedies of Hindi cinema, *Mother India* (1957), *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960) and *Deewaar* (1975), the mother passes from love to law, and, in the case of all three, kills her criminal son or authorizes his murder in the name of societal law. In a few films, the mother moves in the opposite direction, rebelling against her husband for the sake of the lovers (*Raja*, where the *bhabhi* tears off her *mangalsutra*, the symbol of marriage). But gestures like these are relatively rare, and for the most part, the mother ultimately either sides with the law or is powerless to act against its agent(s), preferring to support the 'father' explicitly, weep in private or, more ambiguously, gift a symbolic token to her child as blessings without intervening directly (*Dil*, in which the mother secretly sends gold bangles to her future daughter-in-law; *Mughal-e-Azam*, where the mother blesses her son before his execution).

Instead of viewing these capitulations to paternal law as individual foibles, one should acknowledge that, despite all her love and suffering, *the mother often acts as a foil for the harsh authority exercised by the father and, in several cases, serves as the secret support of the father's authority*. The child can easily refuse the father or paternal law but not the mother, since doing so often plunges the protagonist into a guilt more oppressive than the law itself (*Deewaar*).

Thesis 2: *The mother often plays 'good cop' to the father's 'bad cop', and what is true for the police is also true for the family: the apparently conflicting principles - paternal authority and maternal love - are united in the former (law), though the latter principle (love) seems to have won in the end.*

In the good-cop, bad-cop scenario, one police officer poses as the aggressive 'father' and the other as a sympathetic 'mother'; the two law-enforcers together browbeat the suspect into confessing, a feat neither could achieve by herself. Apart from its effectiveness, this strategy also serves the purpose of legitimacy: since good and bad are relative terms, the good cop (mother) makes the overall system seem less oppressive and the bad cop makes the good cop seem nobler than she would have otherwise appeared.

The good-cop-bad-cop scenario can assume multiple forms: one cop can alternate between the two roles; two cops can argue with each other before the suspect; one cop can threaten the suspect of dire circumstances that he, the good cop, will be powerless to stop; the good cop, after siding with the suspect against the bad cop, may suddenly switch sides, stunning the suspect into submission.

In a parallel manner, the combination of love and law to either defeat the protagonist's desire or transform it into a palatable form is deployed in several manners, some of which are given below:

1. The maternal figure oscillates between law and love and ultimately decides to support the law. E.g. *Mother India, Deewaar.*

2. Two figures, maternal and paternal, take turns to influence the child; they confront each other on several occasions but at a crucial point, the maternal figure either falls into silence or reluctantly sides with the father. E.g. *Mughal-e-Azam.*
3. The parent, mother or father, remains either maternal (kind and loving) or powerless to stop the defiant subject but another agent (the villain or anonymous Fate) intervenes on behalf of the paternal law against the subject. E.g. *Andaz*, *Awara*.
4. The maternal figure(s) guides the rebellious or errant subject to the correct path through love and subtle manipulation. E.g. *Guddi.*
5. The revolting subject is haunted by a guilt induced by the maternal figure's taunts, suffering or sacrifice. E.g. *Deewaar*.
6. The rebelling subject sacrifices herself to save her loved one or another innocent person, cancelling out her revolt. E.g. *Kedarnath.*

Let us take these methods of crushing a rebellion one by one. The clearest example of love (i.e. a principle of care for the subject's well-being) as a device to bolster law is seen in K. Asif's *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960), widely regarded as an immortal love story of love defying law, without a thought to the film's title, an obvious reference to Emperor Akbar, the upholder of imperial law.

By the end of the film, Akbar (Prithviraj Kapoor) succeeds in reinforcing the law by depriving his son, Salim (Dilip Kumar), of his beloved, the low-born nautch girl Anarkali (Madhubala), yet secretly arranges her escape on condition that she leave Salim forever. Anarkali's dazed silence at this demand is ambiguous; she neglects to bow before the emperor, who asks for her forgiveness, but

at this point when it could have sided with her, the film intervenes to recite a paean to Akbar, the Great Mughal and the real hero of the film, for his act of benevolence.

The mother's role in reinforcing the father-emperor's authority is starkly visible in *Mughal-e-Azam*. Recall that the mother, Jodha Bai, is the loving maternal figure par excellence, her every breath devoted to the well-being of her son; his mere presence arouses sublime emotions in her. When forced to choose between her husband's honor and the life of her darling son, the mother hesitates. The disgusted emperor wipes off her *sindoor* and starts to leave, and at this point the mother reaches a decision: she instructs her husband to bring her son's blood to apply on her forehead as *sindoor*, a clear injunction to kill Salim, her beloved son.

Mughal-e-Azam, considered one of the greatest films in the history of Hindi cinema, is an exemplary Hindi film in its 'humanist' eagerness to redeem almost all its major characters; Salim's mother, as we have seen, blesses her son before his execution, and he praises her as an ideal mother. This scene, I believe, is a perfect example of a false or imaginary redemption of a dubious character, the mother, who had a few moments ago demanded the blood of her son.

I call this redemption false not because it appears false to the lay viewer (on the contrary, the film makes the audience believe in the essential goodness of the mother) nor for the reason that the mother seems to have changed sides again (inconsistency is natural in her turmoil), but precisely for the opposite reason: *the fact that the mother has not switched her allegiance*. The scene of her imaginary redemption (blessing her dying son) simply provides further legitimacy to the emperor's

decision to execute his son for rebelling against him; the mother's symbolic move is designed to mask the fact that she does *not* personally intervene in any way to stop Salim's execution.

This is then the definition of an *imaginary redemption*: an act or a gesture of (self-)vindication of a character which has no material effect on the movement of the plot, as opposed to a *material or real redemption*, which acts not just at the level of gesture but as an active intervention to change the state of affairs. Akbar's final apology to Anarkali, his grand gesture of pardoning her life, are examples of the same phenomenon; these acts occur only after the lovers' fate has met its doomed conclusion. And imaginary redemption does not work only for the agents of oppression; *Mughal-e-Azam* also falsely redeems Anarkali's love by making her demand that she be Salim's queen for a night, or her neglecting to acknowledge the emperor in the closing scene of the film; such scenes of blazing defiance mask their opposite truth, that Anarkali has, by this point, withdrawn from revolt and given herself up to fate.

Although in *Mughal-e-Azam,* law is strengthened by a supplement of love, the opposite is true in the common *scene of rescue* in Hindi films, where the man must save his beloved from the clutches of the villain. The rescue divides the lovers, once equal, into an unequal relationship of protector and protected; it gives the male an opportunity to assume ascendancy over the vulnerable female. It is for this reason that the rescue was often staged right at the end of the film; the hero by rescuing his beloved from the villain's clutches establishes himself as the hero, i.e. a man proper, *and* his lady love as his inferior, an object won from the villain.

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The man who protects a woman also earns the right to possess her; this perverse logic of patriarchy means that *the hero who rescues the woman is, in essence, no different from the villain who tries to possess the woman, albeit by illicit means*. An extreme example of this rule is Prakash Jha's *Dil Kya Kare* (1999): a man (Ajay Devgan) saves a stranger (Kajol) from rapists only to have sex with her that very night, an event which, years later, throws his married life into disarray.

In the scene of rescue, the supplement does not strengthen the original but replaces it: the principle of love gives way to that of law; the negative impediment against which the lovers were fighting thus far is subtly installed *within* their relationship. The installation of patriarchal hierarchy thus becomes a positive condition of their socially accepted union, their happy ending, an ending often accepted by the once-hostile parents as a fine compromise.

Another perverse example of the invisible identity of hero and villain stems from Indra Kumar's *Dil* (1990): a college youth (Aamir Khan) kidnaps his bold classmate (Madhuri Dixit) and threatens to rape her in order to teach her a lesson (that is, remind her of her honor (*izzat*) and vulnerability), and, once she breaks down, claims that he can *never* rape her; in this short mock-rape sequence, villain and hero are identical.

In Mehboob Khan's *Andaz* (1949), the heroine (Nargis), a city-bred liberal woman, consorts freely with an eager suitor (Dilip Kumar) despite being engaged to another man (Raj Kapoor). Though the woman is gently admonished by her father for encouraging the first man's advances, she remains undeterred. The father dies as she goes on meeting her infatuated suitor; the fiancé returns from

abroad and the suitor declares his love for her. Caught between the two men, the woman is seized by a sudden guilt; she flees the city with her fiancé, now husband. Once the husband realizes her real predicament, he joins forces with her inner guilt to punish the woman ruthlessly; the two forces, one external and the other within her, together form the paternal law, a law whose official representative is long dead, to torture the indiscreet woman into submission.

In dozens of films cutting across decades, films like *Char Din Char Rahein, Yaraana*, *Agnisakshi* ('O Yara Dil Lagana', which ends with the stage catching fire), *Khuddar* (Karishma Kapoor's 'Sexy, Sexy' number, after which she is kidnapped and almost forced to perform for a 'blue film')[49] and *Tezaab* (the climax of the famous 'Ek Do Teen', in which Madhuri Dixit is abducted from stage), the woman dancing in public meets with an accident or is subjected to sexual harassment or assault by a villain in the very next scene. The song-and-dance sequence in Hindi films is on several occasions counted as transgression (i.e. followed by a subsequent scene of punishment)[50], but the logic that separates regular song-and-dance from the transgressive dance sequence (i.e. which kinds of songs, lyrics and sexualized voice modulations are punished and which are not), is not clear.

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[49] The true vulgarity thus lies not in the song, which was deemed so lewd that it was censored, but in its obscene punishment: "In the early 1990s, the failure to regulate cable and satellite television encouraged the wide circulation of a number of "vulgar" songs such as the aforementioned "Choli ke peeche kya hai" from Khalnayak (The villain, Subhash Ghai, 1993); "Sexy, sexy, sexy, mujhe log bole" ("People say I am sexy, sexy, sexy") from Khuddar (The Self-respecting one, Iqbal Durrani, 1993); "Meri pant bhi sexy" ("My pant is sexy") from Dulaara (The loved one, Vimal Kumar, 1994); and "Sarkayleo khatiya jara lage" ("Bring your cot closer, I am feeling cold") from Raja Babu (His lordship, David Dhawan, 1993). Each of these songs incited vociferous debates on the incursion of debilitating alien cultures on Indian values and tradition through the Trojan horse of film music. The song "Choli ke peeche kya hai" was nearly censored, and the songs "Sexy, sexy, sexy, mujhe log bole" and "Meri pant bhi sexy" were in fact censored. The Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) asked the producers to replace the word "sexy" in these songs. Although "Sexy, sexy, sexy, mujhe log bole" was eventually re-recorded as "Baby, baby, baby," every private television channel continued to broadcast the "sexy" version". Gopal & Moorti, *Global Bollywood*, 113.

[50] That the song-and-dance sequence is not a mere interruption or attraction (though, as Lalitha Gopalan points out, it serves to delay the resolution and enhance the viewer's pleasure as well) but an *integral* part of the film is signalled by the lyricist Javed Akhtar's lament on the present state of songs in Bollywood: "Akhtar whose views echo the lament of several industry folk says, "the songs in today's film cease to have a real function within the drama. The song has become a kind of perk that is offered with the film". Gopal & Moorti, Global Bollywood 24-25.

One of the most famous scenes in *Awara* (1951) occurs when the woman (Nargis) appears in a swimsuit on a deserted beach and playfully teases the man (Raj Kapoor), until a point when she calls him '*junglee*' (wild or savage). The man breaks into a fury and in perhaps one of the most violent scenes in Hindi cinema (violent not in terms of actual gore, but a symbolic violence, a lover attacking his beloved during their passionate romance), slaps the woman repeatedly on her face and throws her on the ground. The woman's erotic transgression, sometimes read as an early celebration of sexual freedom in Hindi cinema, meets a gruesome punishment; her redemption lies in clutching at his feet and asking him to hit her further. Her crime meets its retribution in that very scene, an immanent punishment.

In several middle-class comedies of the 1970s, maternal love permeates the atmosphere of the film so thoroughly that it makes the law practically invisible. In Hrishikesh Mukherjee's *Guddi* (1971), a mischievous schoolgirl (Jaya Bhaduri) refuses to marry her arranged suitor and instead obsesses about a film star (Dharmendra), but is subtly brought into line by the clever manipulations of her family members, all in the garb of love, so that by the end, the schoolgirl, Guddi, experiences her arranged marriage as a love match.

Although *Guddi* claims to be an exposé of the artifice of Hindi films to educate youth (like the eponymous heroine who confuses cinema with reality), the film's central conceit is to use those same 'fraudulent' ways of cinema to elevate the ordinary real-life suitor into a star (by allowing him to rescue Guddi from her 'attackers', and defeat Guddi's hero, Dharmendra, in badminton), thus

manipulating Guddi into falling in love with him. In *Guddi*, the force of law is almost never used; love as agent of an invisible law is sufficient to guide the wayward girl into submission.

In Basu Chatterjee's *Rajnigandha* (1974), a young woman (Vidya Sinha) is in a dilemma concerning whether she should stay with her boring boyfriend (Amol Palekar) or move on to a former love, a man who reappears in her life as a suave, enigmatic stranger (Dinesh Thakur). Though the film allows her to fantasize freely about an alternative life with the new crush, the inscrutable man of her dreams does not reciprocate, and in the closing scene, the woman, her fantasy shattered into pieces, returns to her boyfriend in tears (repeating to herself: 'this is the only truth, that was a lie').

An audacious film by Hindi cinema standards, *Rajnigandha* is driven by the woman's interior monologue as she flits like a butterfly between memory, fantasy and reality; the film even shows her engaging in lesbian banter with a girlfriend. Law emerges only at the final moment, in the form of a letter in which the woman searches for but finds no trace of love, an unresponsive response that gently steps over the woman's budding dreams.

Yet even though their conclusions are similar (an end to the woman's naïve transgressions), *Rajnigandha* substantially differs from *Guddi*, for it allows us to develop our theory to introduce a new category of *cumulative transgression*, in which the moral law of a film gives a certain transgression considerable leeway to build and flourish (often to the brink of installing itself as the new law) before it is swiftly and decisively ended.

To summarize, I have touched upon two prominent roles in Hindi cinema - the paternal and maternal figures - who may or may not coincide with the actual father and mother in the film. The father's position is typically *masculine* (the strong man concerned with imposing and maintaining his authority), while the mother is *feminine* in a double sense: she is *sacrificing* towards her child and *vulnerable* before the law, and in many cases, vice versa (e.g. *Mughal-e-Azam,* where the mother consents to sacrifice her son for her husband's honor).

I shall denote the position of *masculine supremacy,* in this case occupied by the father, as M' (the apostrophe representing the imaginary crown on the alpha male's head), and the position of *feminine vulnerability*, which the 'mother' occupies, simply as F - a position of servility, suffering and sacrifice.

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Thesis 3: *In contrast to her 'parents', the subject is marked by ethics, i.e. a persistent response to an event which acts as a disruption in her normal life.*

If the paternal figure marks the law and the mother is marked by love (though of a wavering, even deceptive, sort), what is the distinguishing attribute of our young protagonist(s)? To decipher his or her position, we begin with the simplest observation: a film often evokes interest for the words and actions of its protagonists, when faced with a conflict that disturbs their ordinary life. A story in which nothing takes place except for the vibrations of everyday life may make for excellent cinema ('pure' cinema untroubled by narrative), but in the Hindi film universe, even in its furthest peripheries, something must occur, which disrupts this ordinary flow of life.

In other words, the film is marked by one or more disruptions from normalcy (let's call each of them an *event*) which force the protagonist(s) to respond in some way or the other; indifference is not a choice in the face of an event. The event's significance is at times recognized immediately (love at first sight) or, more rarely, much later; in either case, the event in its consequences often accumulates in significance over time. In Ritesh Batra's *The Lunchbox* (2013), a slight error of the *dabbawalas* (tiffin carriers) of Mumbai slowly leads to love blossoming between the cook (a lonely housewife) and the unintended recipient of her lunchboxes (a middle-aged officegoer).

The event cannot be quickly forgotten, for it casts a shadow on whatever occurs afterwards *and* before; the event affects the future as well as the past. The daughter who rebels against the paternal law may have been perfectly happy in her father's care until the point when she falls in love, but soon realizes that her father's affection was *always* based on an unspoken condition (marry as per my wishes!); her experience of the present colors her recollection of the happy days of the past.

An event's effect on the subject can be thwarted by a counter-event (e.g. the father's wrath or the mother's tears), but whether such a move succeeds in making matters better or worse, whether suppression nips the revolt in the bud or draws the subject into further rebellion, cannot be predicted in advance. The counter-event, again, is never a genuine event but a desperate attempt to return to a former normalcy; it is oriented towards a return to the past, unlike the event, which directs the subject towards an uncertain future.

The protagonist or subject can either choose to suppress the event (siding with law or normalcy, often at the cost of great personal suffering), or support the event (revolting against law), or maintain a contradictory affiliation to it (oscillating in her thoughts or actions between the two extremes of revolt and submission).

Three examples, one for each scenario: in *Achhut Kannya*[51], the 'untouchable' daughter obeys the social law and yearns to forget her 'upper-caste' childhood friend/lover till death. In *Qayamat* se *Qayamat Tak*[52], the lovers revolt unto death against their parents' will. In *Devdas*, the hero is prohibited from marrying his childhood friend/lover Paro and, in helpless indignation, withdraws from the scene. Throughout his short life, he is condemned to oscillate between attraction and withdrawal, a repetition of his first reaction to Paro's unambiguous declaration of love.

Thus, we come to the question of the subject's position in the film. If the father is marked by law and the mother by love, the subject, male or female, follows what can only be called a certain kind of *ethics* in relation to the event. The word must be taken in its full ambiguity; by ethics, I do not mean that what the protagonist does is by definition moral or desirable. Indeed, ethics differs from morality in that while morality offers direct injunctions (dos and don'ts) and demands obedience in return, ethics offers no clearly defined path and in return demands creativity from its subjects.

Ethics demands, in other words, a continual relation to the event that disrupted the protagonist's life, a relation that could be positive or conflictual; the subject may decide to side with the event

[51] Franz Osten's *Achhut Kannya* (1936) recounts the forbidden love story of a Dalit girl (Devika Rani) and a Brahmin boy (Ashok Kumar).
[52] Inspired by Romeo and Juliet, Mansoor Khan's *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* (1988) is a doomed romance between the lovers belonging to two warring clans.

against the law or waver between law and event. Further, any persistent relation to an event is always at least minimally conflictual, so that, on one hand, the positive relation of revolt is marked by doubt and uncertainty, while on the other, the negative relation, i.e. suppression of the event, is impossible to fully achieve. Suppression at times leads to repression, a failed burial, which may tragically erupt as nightmare in the subject's dreams or reality. In *Achhut Kannya*, the 'untouchable' heroine's attempts at suppressing the memories of her past love come to naught on the night she fatefully runs into him in a village fair; she is killed soon afterwards by an oncoming train.

One way of judging ethics as a relation to the event is to be attentive to the gap that separates the ethical action from the common morality which continually dogs it from behind, as well as the frequent collapse of ethics into normative morality at points of crisis in the film.

The threat of collapse into ordinary morality is clear from the difference between two major films, whose combined success marked Hindi cinema's decisive return to romance after the violent interregnum of the 1980s. *Qayamat se Qayamat Tak* (1987) and *Dil* (1990) resemble each other at the level of content and explicit message (lovers rebel against their feudal or corrupt parents to elope to a space of equality and freedom), yet, though in *Qayamat se Qayamat Tak* the revolt of the lovers (Juhi Chawla & Aamir Khan) is ended by a brutal punishment (a barely disguised honor killing), *Dil* adds a supplementary ending to QSQT's story: after elopement, the boy (Aamir Khan) meets with an accident and is hospitalized; the penniless girl (Madhuri Dixit), unable to pay for her husband's life, begs his parents to save him and, as part of a sinister deal, is forced to abandon him. The turning point occurs when the convalescing boy realizes he has been tricked and leaves the

family in anger. As the film closes, the boy's father ultimately repents and gives his blessings to the couple's reunion.

It may seem from this short description that *Dil* completes what was left incomplete in *QSQT*, the lovers' union in marital bliss. But *Dil* adds a conservative twist: though the boy is given considerable freedom to end his relationship with his corrupt father, the girl on the other hand is turned by the tragic accident into a helpless wreck; in the words of her father-in-law, she is now 'used goods', useless for everything else except prostitution. By the end, the free-spirited girl has been so tortured that she is thoroughly broken, a vital condition for the couple's reconciliation. The lovers' reunion can thus occur only when the rebelling couple have 'learnt' to be husband and wife, thanks to a fortuitous accident that changed their lives.

Therein lies the answer to the central puzzle of QSQT: *why did these lovers have to die*, *when numerous other love stories had succeeded*? Lalitha Gopalan observes that "[t]his tragic end to the love story is credible only if we accept the rationale for the feud – Rajput family honor and shame – and acknowledge that love is an unmanageable desire in this patriarchal economy"[53]. But is the conservative Rajput setting of the film the only explanation of this tragic end? On the contrary, the lovers are punished with such severity because they manage to accomplish something almost unprecedented in Hindi cinema, even in its most liberal families: an *equality* between the lovers[54] that remains unbroken till the end (they live together and have sex without a proper marriage;

[53] Gopalan, 'Coitus Interruptus and The Love Story in Indian Cinema', 132.

[54] "The narrative, however, betrays another story, even inverting gender roles in the heterosexual romance. In their first encounter Rashmi gazes voyeuristically at Raj's athletic body running toward her against the setting sun. She initiates their relationship and comes across as a "new" kind of heroine: demure and assertive, childlike and smart, terrified of her father yet wilful enough to put up a fight to have her own way". Virdi, *The Cinematic ImagiNation*, 184.

learning that the woman cannot cook, the man cooks for her; the couple physically build a solitary hut in the hills together).

This is the real difference between *QSQT* and *Dil*: while *QSQT* refuses to compromise in its *outward rebellion* (against conservative parents) as well as its *inner form* (by not introducing an invisible hierarchy between the lovers), *Dil* does not relent on outward rebellion (ending in the utter vanquishing of the father) but surreptitiously introduces a hierarchical relationship within the couple, the condition of the lovers' final union[55].

To sum up, I have so far defined three unique subject-positions in Hindi cinema: the 'father' (enforcer of law), the 'mother' (embodiment of love as care) and the subject (the pursuer of ethics). Let us note in passing that this triangle is by no means a frozen structure but is constantly disturbed by innumerable complications: the father's affection for his child; the mother's uncertainty between law and love; the protagonist's own respect for the father's law and guilt at betraying the mother's love; the female lover as a mother-substitute for the male and the male lover as a surrogate father to the female; actions of the mother or father which cross over from morality into ethics; and the subject's frequent collapse into patriarchal morality. Further, this triangular relationship must be supplemented by other major figures of the Hindi film, in particular, the villain and the innocent.

[55] If a radical transgression is followed by an equally extreme retribution, whose side is QSQT on? *QSQT* is unique in directly blaming the (girl's) father for the death of the lovers (unlike *Dil*, which introduces an accident to punish the deviant lovers) – the assassin employed by the father is responsible for the death of both lovers, even though the girl's father only wanted the boy dead. In a terrible irony, in which words matter more than intentions, the father had indirectly authorized the murder of his daughter by ordering the killer to shoot anyone who came in the way; further, the boy, instead of forgiving the father as in *Dil*, follows the girl's desire for them to unite in afterlife and kills himself, introducing a self-reflexive criticism of the film's moral law.

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Thesis 4: *The innocent (usually a child, a vulnerable woman or an elderly person), the most vulnerable of all characters, is often the repository of the film's explicit morality. The one who saves or protects the innocent is the hero; the one who attacks the innocent a villain.*

As a rule, the moral power of innocence derives from the innocent person's actual powerlessness; the more she suffers, the greater her aura (apart from the child, who is always already innocent). The maternal figure, by virtue of her suffering, is one of the key innocent personae in Hindi films; the suffering-sacrificing heroine of Bimal Roy (*Sujata*, *Bandini*) and Shakti Samanta (*Kati Patang*[56]) falls squarely in this category. The innocent participates in the film's explicit morality either as a *voice* (castigating the villain, protesting social wrongs, or turning social injustice into personal sacrifice) or as a *dumb object* (the woman, child or elderly protected by the hero or rescued from the villain's clutches, the defenseless Kuwaiti woman rescued by the Indian hero in *Airlift*).

The innocent's alignment with the subject's cause is crucial to elevate it as a moral cause (the clincher '*mere paas ma hai*' in Deewaar); conversely, the death or suffering of an innocent in the hands of the subject or her allies swiftly decimates the subject's legitimacy. That the innocent represents the film's explicit morality, however, does not quite explain why she suffers so much in the first place.

[56] In Shakti Samanta's *Kati Patang* (1971), a runaway bride (Asha Parekh) assumes the identity of a widow after being deceived by her husband.

Finally, just as several characters in a Hindi film (including father and mother) are ethical to varying extents, i.e. ethics is not the sole preserve of the heroine or hero, innocence too is distributed among most characters (barring the villain, though even he may be redeemed in the end). One may thus tentatively distinguish absolute innocence (e.g. the child, the powerless woman) from relative innocence (e.g. moments of suffering and vulnerability in the hero's life), tentatively since a closer reading sometimes finds that even the absolute innocent has (unwittingly) committed some wrong.

Thesis 5: F*ar from being an arbitrary source of relief or comic laughter, the comic side story (of hero or heroine's friend, of servants) as well as these side characters themselves often serve as an analogy of the main plot: they represent the disavowed excesses of the main characters or, at the very least, manifest certain undiscerned characteristics of the protagonist(s).*

Apart from song-and-dance sequences, one reason Hindi films are criticized for being chaotic and disoriented is the reoccurrence of multiple side stories, parallel tracks which seems to be a pure (and hence needless) diversion from the plot. And yet these side characters (immortalized by actors like Johnny Walker and Rajendra Nath) are vital for comprehending the film's unconscious, since these 'character artistes' often perform those actions which the protagonist cannot be seen doing (that is, without exculpating circumstances – confusion, mistaken identity, loss of memory); their irreverent actions are often a *projection* of the protagonist's repressed desires.

The insistence on the protagonist's innocence by introducing exculpating factors is a distinctive hallmark of Hindi cinema, and the sidekick is one of the major devices required to maintain this aura

of innocence around the hero or heroine[57]. In H S Rawail's *Mere Mehboob* (1963), for instance, the comedian (Johnny Walker) is a philanderer as opposed to his friend, the hero (Rajendra Kumar), a man madly in love with a woman whose face he has never seen.

Yet this simple moral opposition (loyal lover vs philanderer) is undermined by the fact that *the hero does woo another woman,* but only because he thinks *she* is his beloved; when the truth emerges, he is seized with guilt and profusely apologizes to her (without a good reason, since she hasn't made her feelings towards him clear). The confusion allows the film to let the hero serenade two women (both love him) without resembling the philanderer, his best friend.

In a subsequent chapter, we will encounter a similar logic: the villain in Hindi cinema would often turn out to be the secret alter ego of the hero's/heroine's father (that is, if the two are not already identical) or in some cases, of the hero himself.

[57] In some cases, the comic sidekick simply reflects in a tangential form a distinctive attribute of the protagonist. In *Baazigar*, the servant (Johnny Lever) notoriously suffers from short-term forgetfulness, a distorted reflection of the hero's (Shahrukh Khan) own vital quality, his deliberate suppression of his terrible past.

CHAPTER 1: TRANSGRESSION & PUNISHMENT

"And the same goes for the most successful film of all times: is Cameron's Titanic really about the catastrophe of the ship hitting the iceberg? One should be attentive to the precise moment of the catastrophe: it takes place when the two young lovers (Leonardo di Caprio and Kate Winslet), immediately after consummating their amorous link in the sexual act, return to the ship's deck. This, however, is not all: if this were all, then the catastrophe would have been simply the punishment of Fate for the double transgression (illegitimate sexual act; crossing the class divisions). What is more crucial is that, on the deck, Kate passionately says to her lover that, when the ship will reach New York the next morning, she will leave with him, preferring poor life with her true love to the false corrupted life among the rich; at THIS moment the ship hits the ice-berg, in order to PREVENT what would undoubtedly have been the TRUE catastrophe, namely the couple's life in New York - one can safely guess that soon, the misery of everyday life would destroy their love. The catastrophe thus occurs in order to save their love, in order to sustain the illusion that, if it were not to happen, they would have lived "happily forever after"".

- Slavoj Zizek, The Pervert's Guide to Ideology.[58]

[58] While rummaging through various articles and documentaries on cinema, I chanced upon the philosopher Slavoj Zizek's analysis of *Titanic*, which brilliantly captures the core of transgression analysis. Being an avid reader of Zizek, I must have internalized from him this method of reading cinema. In my limited knowledge, Zizek is the first thinker of the possibility of a connection between the moments of transgression (the lovers' plan to marry) and punishment (Titanic's downfall):

"But even this is not all; a further clue is provided by the final moments of di Caprio. He is freezing in the cold water, dying, while Winslet is safely floating on a large piece of wood; aware that she is losing him, she cries: "I'll never let you go!", and, while saying this, she pushes him away with her hands - why? Beneath the story of a love couple, Titanic tells another story, the story of a spoiled high-society girl in an identity-crisis: she is confused, doesn't know what to do with herself, and, much more than her love partner, di Caprio is a kind of "vanishing mediator" whose function is to restore

In our Introduction, we had noted that Hindi films are, by and large, moral in a very specific sense: the evil are, as a rule, punished and the good rewarded *by the end of the film*; in other words, a principle of morality seems to be at work in the Hindi film.

Thesis 1: *A single impersonal principle of morality is at work in the Hindi film.*

Taking a cue from many Hindi films which refer to God (*bhagwan*, *khuda, vidhaata* or *uparwala*, or specific gods like Santoshi Ma or Sherawali) or Fate (*naseeb*, *kismat* or *bhagya*) as a sovereign force that determines human destiny, I have used God as shorthand for this transcendental morality, irrespective of whether the films themselves refer to a God or not, or even if they seem to explicitly repudiate the divine (a rarity: two films, both named *Nastik (Atheist)*[59], feature atheists who turn to religion) or dispute with Him (the famous temple scene in *Deewaar*[60]).

As long as there is a persistent semblance of justice in the determination of rewards (scenes of joy and success) and punishments (defeat, oppression, suffering), one can presume the concealed hand

her sense of identity and purpose in life, her self-image (quite literally, also: he draws her image); once his job is done, he can disappear. This is why his last words, before he disappears in freezing North Atlantic, are not the words of a departing lover's, but, rather, the last message of a preacher, telling her how to lead her life, to be honest and faithful to herself, etc. What this means is that Cameron's superficial Hollywood-Marxism (his all too obvious privileging of the lower classes and caricatural depiction of the cruel egotism and opportunism of the rich) should not deceive us: beneath this sympathy for the poor, there is another narrative, the profoundly reactionary myth, first fully deployed by Kipling's Captain Courageous, of a young rich person in crisis who gets his (or her) vitality restored by a brief intimate contact with the full-blooded life of the poor. What lurks behind the compassion for the poor is their vampiric exploitation".

Everything is here in these two paragraphs: transgression, punishment, the intervention of Fate as punisher, the emphasis on the precise moment when punishment strikes, the false redemption ("I'll never let you go") and the deployment of all these tools to invert the reading of a film widely perceived to sympathize with the working class.

[59] I.S. Johar's *Nastik* (1954) and Pramod Chakravarty's *Nastik* (1983).

[60] In Yash Chopra's *Deewaar* (1975), a man (Amitabh Bachchan) enters a temple for the first time in years to spar with God for causing his mother's accident but ends up pleading for her life, his decades-old revolt against God defused.

of a single God in a particular film. This is not the same as saying that a fixed code of morality operates in the entirety of Hindi cinema; far from it, the God-function assumes different forms in different films. *The moral law of even the most clichéd film would be minimally unique in the choice of transgressions and the intensity of punishments.* Yet, a close analysis of the films demonstrates stark similarities that sometimes run across decades: sexual transgressions (before or after marriage), for instance, are regularly punished over decades with the eventual chastisement of the woman, though the criterion of what counts as a sexual transgression may vary over time.

The premise of a single moral principle for a singular film immediately raises an objection: why 'single'? Deviations from a presumed moral law - the villain's crimes, the hero or the heroine's deviations from the norm, the cruelty of the father - can perhaps be explained by the work of a multiplicity of transcendental principles contradicting each other; though the savage actions of a villain like Gabbar Singh[61] cannot be permitted by any *moral* law, there may exist immoral principles that support such actions in Hindi films[62]. An obscene law that runs contrary to morality could explain a number of mysterious deaths in Hindi cinema, deaths of visibly innocent characters, from

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[61] "And in Gabbar, the Indian film finds a new villain – so often played in earlier films by Pran. Pran was always redeemable; he was motivated by ordinary human emotions: greed, envy, lust, misguided loyalty. Often the villain's crime was little more than causing a misunderstanding between the hero and the heroine. In the final reel, the villain would see the error of his ways and repent or be brought to justice. But in Gabbar we are presented with motiveless, irredeemable evil. Gabbar kills for pleasure and is guided by nothing but the pure evil that is within him. To make the point, we see him shooting Thakur's infant son; evil is both the end and means for Gabbar". Sardar, 'Dilip Kumar made me do it', in *The Secret Politics of Our Desires*, 48.

[62] Sudhir Kakar points out the stark contradiction between the Hindi film's moral principle and the autonomy it often grants to the villain: "Evil, too, follows the same course it does in fairy tales; it may temporarily be in ascendence or usurp the hero's legitimate rights, but its failure and defeat are inevitable. Like the temptation of badness for a child who is constantly forced to be good, evil in Hindi cinema is not quite without its attractions of sensual licence and narcissistic pleasure in the unheeding pursuit of one's appetites. After all, it is usually the unregenerate villain who gets to savour the pleasures of drinking wine and the companionship, willing or otherwise, of sexy and attractive women". Kakar, S. (1981). The Ties that Bind: Family Relationships in the Mythology of Hindi Cinema. India International Centre Quarterly, 8(1), 13.

a little orphan child in *Mr. India*[63] who is blown up in a bomb blast to the classic daughter-in-law of *Hum Aapke Hain Koun*[64] who falls from the stairs and dies, to the massacre of an entire family of innocents at the beginning of *Sholay*.

The theory of multiple principles, moral or immoral, is attractive for the possibility of explaining the origin of evil, but it suffers from two drawbacks: first, the films themselves refer to a single God or Fate that determines their destiny, without any mention of a conflict between gods (a rare exception being *Jai Santoshi Maa*); second, evil actions are, as a rule, duly punished. It is a rare film like *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro*[65] which unambiguously depicts the good being punished and evil rewarded in the end.

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Thesis 2: *The presence and arrangement of scenes in a Hindi film can be explained by four models: the model of alternation, the functionalist model, the historical-contextual model and the model of transgression and punishment.*

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[63] Shekhar Kapur's *Mr. India* (1987) documents the story of an orphaned man (Anil Kapoor), who lives with several orphan children, in a dilapidated house. One day, he finds a device, made by his own father, which has the power to make the wearer invisible. Now a superhero, the man vanquishes the evil Mogambo (Amrish Puri) who wants to nuke-bomb India.

[64] Sooraj Barjatya's *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* (1994) showcases a grand family wedding, which is followed by the abrupt death of the newlywed wife (Renuka Shahane) and the end of a developing romance between the husband's brother (Salman Khan) and the wife's sister (Madhuri Dixit) who is asked to marry the husband, now a widower, to take care of his child. The couple agree to sacrifice their love in the interests of the family until a miracle (a letter of clarification which the family dog delivers to the widower) reunites them again.

[65] Kundan Shah's *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro* (1983) is a savage critique of the rampant corruption everywhere in Indian society – politics, bureaucracy, business, media. It ends on a pessimistic note with its idealistic heroes (Naseeruddin Shah and Ravi Baswani) wrongly jailed and the real culprits emerging victorious.

We have thus touched upon a theological deadlock: if God is morality incarnate, why does He not only allow evil, but cause evil in the first place? In Hindi cinema, we get at least five definite answers to the origin of evil, both religious and secular (apart from a common indefinite answer: the unfathomable will of God, a guarantee of the eternal separation between supra-rational God and merely rational humans).

First, God cannot bear too much happiness in humans and thus introduces sorrow to compensate for that happiness, and vice versa, which means, in impersonal terms, that Life is destined to be the alternating flow of joy and grief, pleasure and pain. This idea is already implicit in *Anand*, whose tumor-ridden protagonist embodies the principle of immanent joy, *carpe diem*, happiness-in-this-moment without a care for the future. It is not simply that the specter of impending death makes Anand want to squeeze every drop of joy from his fleeting life, but also the opposite: Anand's extreme will to happiness must, according to the balance of opposites, alternate with extreme grief, suffering and ultimately, death; the more Anand tries to seek immanent happiness, the worse his subsequent fate would be.

The principle of balance of opposites is made explicit in several films, to take one example, a song in *Mr. India* ('This is Life's ritual, victory achieved only after defeat, a few tears, some laughter; if today is sorrow, joy is tomorrow'[66]). Evil is God's way of maintaining the balance of life. Balance does not equal moderation, verified by the form assumed by *Mr. India*: scenes depicting moderate pleasures are followed by moderate pain, and scenes of extreme joy by severe suffering.

[66] The song, sung by Kishore Kumar, goes: *"Zindagi ki yehi reet hai, haar ke baad hi jeet hai. Thode aansoon hain thodi hansi, aaj gham hai to kal hai khushi"*.

Yet *Mr. India's* 'formula' is not a generalizable model of Hindi cinema: severe suffering at times erupts not after extreme joy but in a period of stasis or normalcy (recall the family massacre in *Sholay*); extreme joy similarly doesn't require paralyzing grief to precede it (the song-and-dance sequences in Hindi cinema); if anything, the relationship between scenes of joy and suffering is more complex than a simple balance of opposing emotional states.

Our brief detour into theology thus leads us back to the aesthetics of Hindi cinema: the films at times, but not always, alternate between highs and lows, joy and suffering, ostensibly to produce, through this contrast, intense leaps of emotion in the audience.

The second answer to why God causes evil is the principle of *karma*[67]: God ensures that the good are rewarded and the evil punished, though *if we take the karmic law strictly, the good, i.e. those who have consistently performed good actions, should never be punished and the evil never rewarded,* an obvious lie given the number of innocent people who suffer in Hindi films.

The karmic law in Hinduism solves this problem by taking recourse to reincarnation; the sins of past lives are brought in to explain the apparent gap between deed and reward. In Hindi cinema, we find both direct punishments and *displaced* ones; a mother may bear the consequences of her child's sin,

[67] "The three essential constituents of a karma theory are A: (1) causality (ethical or non-ethical, involving one life or several lives); (2) ethicization (the belief that good and bad acts lead to certain results in one life or several lives); (3) rebirth. B: (1) explanation of present circumstances with reference to previous actions, including (possibly) actions prior to birth; (2) orientation of present actions toward future ends, including (possibly) those occurring after death; (3) moral basis on which action past and present is predicated". Doniger, *Karma & Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions*, xi. In the above extract, A and B denote A. K. Ramanujan's and Charles Keyes's definitions of *karma* respectively. Transgression analysis shares several similarities with the above *karma*, yet I do not wish to reduce the theory to the Hindu idea(s) of *karma*, since a) many directors and scriptwriters in Hindi cinema belong to other faiths, particularly Islam; b) more significantly, the notion of rewards and punishments based on your deeds finds a vague expression in Islam and Christianity as well, a notion irreducible to the Islamic Day of Resurrection or the Christian Judgement Day.

as we saw in *Do Bigha Zamin*. However whether sins of previous births can explain evil in Hindi films is doubtful, for Hindi films rarely use the device of reincarnation, and still less frequently, use it in karmic terms. Even in *Karz*[68], one of the most famous films on reincarnation, the subject to be punished (a manipulative woman who kills her husband) is *not* reincarnated; the one reborn (the husband) is instead an agent of punishment, whose new life bears little trace of punishment for his past sins (presumably expunged in his death).

A third answer to the origin of evil in Hindi film is to look at the problem from a *functionalist* perspective. Each scene, in this view, has a specific function which contributes to the coherence of the entire film; to discern this function, one must imagine *how the film would change if this scene were removed.* Without Gabbar Singh's savageries in *Sholay* (1975), for instance, the Indian state could not be shown as thoroughly incapacitated (Thakur's dismembered body), nor could our two heroes be so easily valorized as lovable rogues, since there would be much less of a difference between their actions and Gabbar's. Similarly, Mogambo's threat to nuke-bomb India is required to create as its counterpart a single grand entity called Mr. India, an orphan who embodies the nation.

That each scene (or motif or quirk) may have a function obviously does not mean that the Hindi film scene is crudely teleological or that a scene is merely a device for the plot to move towards its denouement. On the contrary, many Hindi films, especially the films of Manmohan Desai, are (in)famous for perpetually *delaying* the denouement: father and son, separated from each other years ago, find themselves in the same room, temple or shipyard, but cannot recognize each other; a crucial piece of information which would connect the two is withheld till the last moment.

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[68] Subhash Ghai's *Karz* (1980) recounts the reincarnation of a man (Raj Kiran; Rishi Kapoor) whose wife (Simi Garewal) had murdered him for his wealth; he plans to avenge his death in this birth.

In a functionalist approach, it is a legitimate move to ask the purpose of this delay, and not just in psychological terms (the voyeuristic pleasure of the viewer who knows what the characters do not know, but whose knowledge is itself at the mercy of the film, since she cannot predict at what point the obvious denouement will occur; the film secretly plays with the viewer as much as it explicitly manipulates the characters within).

The delay in revelation may be a device to include events in the film which can occur only in the absence of the revelation (e.g. the wrestling match between father and son in *Mard*) or when, in a deeper sense, the grounds of the revelation have not yet been created: an obscure transformation must occur so that the revelation assumes its full significance.

In Aditya Chopra's *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995)[69], the girl's father does not recognize her lover till the climax, for two functional reasons. The first is obvious: the delay allows the lover to win over the girl's family, especially her mother, the doyen of morality. More importantly, a secret transformation occurs in the lover himself, who changes from a spoilt, individualistic brat to a man who cares deeply for the family's happiness, without the patriarchal trappings of jealousy (his beloved is about to marry someone else), honor (his amorous trysts in the privacy of the girl's house violates her family's honor), masculine arrogance (his total lack of interest in proving himself superior to the girl's suitor) and contempt for women and feminine tasks (he actively participates in the wedding chores, unlike his rival, who is busy hunting and making merry). *The rival suitor in DDLJ is,*

[69] DDLJ recounts the story of a couple (Shahrukh Khan & Kajol) who fall in love in Europe yet cannot unite since the girl's father (Amrish Puri) has fixed her marriage elsewhere. Instead of eloping with her, the girl's lover arrives at her home and pretends to be the groom's friend to win over the family.

in fact, an exaggerated version of what the hero himself was in his previous life: a spoilt brat who lives in the moment, a life dedicated to the pursuit of pleasure.

The moment of reunion in DDLJ, however, functions by a completely different logic: if the girl's father could only recognize her lover after a certain condition had been met: the de-masculinization of the hero and his induction into the family, he releases his daughter only after two conditions are met: the hero's masculinization, in the form of a fistfight with the rival and his cohorts, and his daughter's semi-feminization, for the bitter ordeal turns her into a suffering woman who must beg her father to relent. A functionalist approach thus reveals a deep contradiction between the two orders – liberal equality and patriarchal authority – slicing through the heart of *DDLJ*, yet unlike other films, this contradiction is not quite resolved even in the end, as I shall argue in a later chapter.

The functionalist theory could well explain the presence of *absolute evil* in the Hindi film: absolute because the persons harmed or killed had not done anything to merit their cruel fate (unlike relative evil in which hero and villain often take turns to harm each other, a prolonged cycle of revenge and counter-revenge); *they* were perfectly innocent. In a functionalist reading, the daughter-in-law in *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* was killed by a fall down the stairs for the couple to prove their subservience to the family norm, by sacrificing each other for the cause of the family; she was killed soon after she delivered a baby so that the infant becomes the symbol of innocence which gathers the grieving family together, and for whose sake, sacrifices must be made[70]. The little girl was killed in a bomb

[70] Again, imagine how different the film would have been had the problem child not been there and the heroine were asked to marry her brother-in-law simply because he is lonely. Such a scenario would have, in turn, revealed the incestuous undertones of HAHK in much starker terms. Recall that the same brother-in-law (Mohnish Behl), regarded as the epitome of innocence, had recited a lewd couplet for the heroine, which includes this line: "Jiski saali ho woh dedh guna sukh paaye, nain rakhe saali par, biwi sang batiyaye' ('When the wife's sister is around, a man is doubly happy;

blast so that the hero could have a sublime reason to take revenge on the villain, Mogambo (though this may well be a red herring, since the girl's name is not invoked even once in the climax). Thakur's family was massacred in *Sholay* so that Gabbar could be shown as absolute evil, and Thakur's bid to re-establish the feudal order acquires a sublime legitimacy.

Notice that the functionalist reading works well for certain films (e.g. *Hum Aapke Hain Koun*) but lapses into generalities in others (the sublime reason for revenge in *Sholay* and *Mr. India*). This turn towards generality does not, for instance, explain why an *orphan child* was killed in Mr. India, or *an entire family* (except one, why was the younger daughter-in-law saved?) was wiped out in *Sholay,* except that they - the family, the child - are all symbols of innocence whose lives must be protected, and their death avenged.

On the other hand, the functionalist theory works brilliantly to explain the purpose of Jai's death in *Sholay*, not to save his friend's life but to ensure that he cannot marry the widowed daughter in Thakur, a taboo in orthodox Hinduism, even when Thakur himself had consented to the match. In this little explanation, we again see, like in *Do Bigha Zamin*, a film splitting in two, between its liberal face, expressed in words (Thakur had graciously assented to a widow's remarriage) and the conservative underbelly, shown in action (the film intervenes on Thakur's behalf to prevent the forbidden marriage).

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he keeps his eyes on her while speaking to his wife'). In this reading, the film almost realizes the brother-in-law's inner fantasy while perfectly preserving his innocence, for he is never shown to show any undue interest in her apart from this couplet, itself recited 'in jest'.

If the functionalist theory is often incapable of giving a *specific* explanation of vital events in a film (for instance, the family massacre in *Sholay*), could a *historical* reading of *Sholay*, one that links the film to larger political and economic shifts in India, be of more relevance? The 1970s is widely regarded as a crisis of legitimacy of the Indian state, post a period of relative stability in the Nehruvian era. As the rule of law declines in strength, it is replaced by multiple *parallel authorities* working in the shadow of the law, represented not only by Gabbar but Thakur as well (no longer the police officer who serves the law, but the protector-avenger of his village); in this lawless world, the family, whose stability is based on the rule of law, is the first casualty. In addition, a historical reading of *Sholay* (emergence of parallel sources of authority) could well explain why Thakur *permanently* left his work as police officer to return to the village as the *zamindar* (landowner) and carry out his personal revenge and why the original ending of *Sholay* had Thakur kill his nemesis Gabbar without the police intervening.

A fourth answer to the origin of evil is that it is nothing but pure contingency; evil marks those rare occasions when God's domain meets its limit, or in secular terms, the moral law encounters a purely random event which it cannot prevent. The inexplicable, in this reading, cannot be explained by a 'deeper' logic; it is nothing but a pure chance event that has intruded into the well-structured logic of the film, a symptom that means nothing except itself, and not even that, being without any minimal substance required for self-identity.

Any theory worth its name, I believe, must remain open to such a possibility of pure contingency, of the non-totalizability of the totality, the possibility that a few or more points in a film may defy

any attempt of coherent explanation. However, I shall not assume this possibility to be the case until all attempts to define the point of contingency have positively failed.

In this sense, this study is not a deconstruction of Hindi cinema, by which I mean that the point is not to demonstrate the partiality or undecidability of all our readings or to show that the film is essentially unknowable, but to carry on the replacement of old, conservatively bound meanings with new, possibly more radical meanings, which themselves would be replaced somewhere down the road, a road which is possible only for the fact that meaning is often partial and therefore open to change. Instead, intriguing readings of film scenes which are plausible but not quite convincing shall be marked explicitly as *weak readings or possibilities*, while the lack of any plausible reading, indicating pure contingency, will be marked as *impasse*.

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Let us now turn to the second answer, i.e. the karmic logic, which gives us the connection between transgression (Gabbar's cruelty in *Sholay*) and punishment (defeat at the hands of his victim, Thakur): as the film unfolds, the viewer is reasonably certain that certain extreme transgressions will be duly punished in the end. In fact, *our division of characters into hero and villain, good and bad, rests upon the kind of transgression each commits in the film*; a hero may indulge in sexual intimacy but only a villain can deliberately harm or kill an innocent.

But does the karmic logic also hold in reverse, i.e. do the punished and the rewarded souls in a film tell us who God considers good and who evil? If a noble character undergoes intense suffering or

death in a film, does it mean that she must have committed an invisible wrong? If true, this implies not only a failure of our naive morality to read a film but also the sinister possibility that the film itself does not want to be read in this manner, as if explaining the deaths would reveal the film's own secret underpinnings.

Although I call this possibility sinister, one should be very careful not to conflate the film's unconscious foibles with the filmmaker's conscious choices, not only because she is merely one of the many persons involved in creating the film, but, more importantly, *the director is herself probably unconscious of this obscene dimension of the film* (or if this dimension is blatantly visible, complicit in it). For the director, as for the ordinary audience, these mysterious deaths are more likely a powerful device to create shock, an excuse for heightening emotion, a crisis to be overcome through strength and determination, a warning that human fate is essentially unpredictable and so on.

That is to say, I believe the filmmaker would interpret her own creation - the unwarranted death - in either functional terms (of plotting or impact on an audience) or in mystical terms (the unpredictability of Fate, the obscure will of God, and so on)[71].

Thesis 3: *The traumatic scene, which includes violence, conflict, oppression, chastising or death, is one of the privileged sites to uncover the unconscious logic of the Hindi film, its moral law.*

[71] An indication that this is the case for many filmmakers can be gleaned from the actor Renuka Shahane's memories of shooting *Hum Aapke Hain Koun*. Shahane played the daughter-in-law, whose fall from the stairs and subsequent death shatters the family and forces the young couple to sacrifice themselves before the parental law. In an interview, she recalled the director Sooraj Barjatya's narration of the script: "We were so involved with the characters that we all had tears, especially during Bhabhi's death". By 'all', I presume she means Barjatya as well, who probably saw this scene along with the others purely as a great tragedy, whose impact was magnified by its sheer unexpectedness. Seta, K. (2016, October 7). How Renuka Shahane got the pivotal role in Hum aapke HAI Koun...! – birthday special". Cinestaan. https://www.cinestaan.com/articles/2016/oct/7/2431.

This is the true wager of the transgression theory: if suffering is the privileged sign of God's punishment in Hindi cinema, a scene of suffering would be preceded by a transgression, implicit or explicit, which had merited such a punishment in the first place. I call the scene of suffering a *traumatic moment*, a moment which includes extreme violence, oppression, conflict, chastisement or death, a moment distinctive from the other scenes by a sudden leap of emotion and an amplification of background music and camera gestures, a scene in which contradiction emerges in its starkest terms, the melodramatic scene par excellence[72].

But why is the form of this scene, the annoying background music, the extreme camera movements (closeups, zooms), contorted facial expressions, so expressly *loud* in many of these scenes, a point of irritation and discomfort for even regular Hindi film viewers? Not primarily, as is commonly believed, to accentuate the emotions, to make something out of nothing, so to speak, but the opposite: *to conceal the something that has erupted in the form of the spectacular nothing*.

The traumatic scene is one in which the film itself undergoes a certain trauma, that is to say, a scene in which the film is no longer fully in control of itself, a site in which the repressed may burst out in

[72] "Melodrama, in its original sense, derives from the Greek word *melos*, or song, plus the French word *drame*, or drama. In its contemporary popular sense, the mis-en-scène of melodrama is interpreted as "sentimental." As a result, it is also seen as "prominent in the construction of women"... It is the aesthetic site where realism and excesses of fantasy become points of contention and spectatorial in the filmic space. Melodrama, unlike its realist counterpart, visualizes a battle between absolute, Manichaean emotional excesses like "good" and "evil" and eventually releases moral truths to visually "speak" that which cannot be verbalized. As an epistemology, melodrama exposes or makes transparent through excessiveness that which has been repressed (Brooks 43). Thus, it becomes "a mode of expression, as a certain fictional system for making sense of experience" (Brooks xiii). It is not a linear cause-effect pattern; rather, spectacle contributes to the emotional affect that melodrama produces". Jha, Priya. "Lyrical Nationalism: Gender, Friendship, and Excess in 1970s Hindi Cinema," The Velvet Light Trap 51 (Spring 2003): 43–53.

the open and must be therefore camouflaged using high-pitched background score crescendos[73] and camera effects that turn the scene into an easily consumable spectacle; the aim of the spectacle is, like in media and politics, to suppress a certain undiscerned truth that has, amidst all the hue and cry, quietly revealed itself before us.

A traumatic scene, like a fight between intimates (lovers, family etc.) often says a lot more than what it (officially) means; the excesses of the tongue are then either forgotten or brushed aside as unfortunate words uttered in a fit of rage. Our study, to recall, began with one such traumatic moment in which a child connects his mother's accident to his own act of theft.

Let me give an example. In *Dil Hai Ki Manta Nahin*[74], a sweet romance based on the Hollywood film *It Happened One Night*, the man, who believes his beloved has betrayed him for another, meets the woman's father to settle the minor bills he had incurred for her in their short escapade. While leaving, he suddenly explodes, retorting in anger that it is the father's fault that the daughter is spoilt ("your daughter needs a man who can pummel (*marammat*) her day and night; if you had even the slightest brains, you would have done it yourself").

This sentence, usually forgotten since it comes just after the man's admission that he still loves the girl, an emotional moment, or is glossed over as a psychological sign of his anguish (underlined by

[73] "In the case of the background score, music directors regularly imitated and reproduced generic Hollywood conventions in Hindi cinema… For instance, staccato and pizzicato styles were often used for comedic effect, while high-pitched, fast-paced violin and cello tremolos were deployed to suggest apprehension. However, as I have discussed elsewhere, the soundtrack of the early film *Barsaat* (Kapoor 1949) may be seen as a departure from the earlier applications of background music in Hindi cinema (see Mukherjee 2012). For example, the music directors Shankar-Jaikishen used a variation of Franz Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody* as a narrative device in four sequences of the film". Mukherjee, 'Music, Sound and Noise', in *Music in Contemporary Indian Film*, 272.
[74] In Mahesh Bhatt's *Dil Hai Ke Manta Nahin* (1991), a girl (Pooja Bhatt) escapes from home in order to marry her lover, but on the way she falls in love with a reporter (Aamir Khan) who wants to scoop the exclusive news of her marriage.

the background music, the main culprit in Hindi cinema that determines how a scene should be 'officially' viewed), must be seen symbolically, *precisely because it is a traumatic outburst*, for it captures the entire film in a nutshell.

What appears as a sweet love story in the first impression is, if we look at the film again, a thorough exercise in masculine domination. Throughout the film, the independent woman (who, in Hindi film convention, must be shown as rude and haughty, a spoilt child of a woman) is disciplined into submission; the woman, who had fled her father to her lover's home, a dangerous sexual transgression, increasingly becomes dependent on this man who promises, and then fails, to lead her to the lover.

Her transformation in this brief journey is underlined by her father when she returns home: "You had left as a child and returned as a woman". By the end, the woman is so dispirited that she agrees to marry her first lover (who she does not love anymore) out of sheer duty and it is only at her father's behest that she finally runs off from her wedding to her true love, the man who turned her into a 'woman'.

Apart from such revealing outbursts, the truth which the traumatic moment tries to suppress often lies in the previous scene (transgression) or, more rarely, is retrospectively made clear in a future scene. For instance, in Bimal Roy's *Parineeta*[75], a woman (Meena Kumari) continually suffering on account of the jealousy of her lover (Ashok Kumar), a hostility she has done nothing to deserve, is

[75] *Parineeta* (1953) tells the love story between an orphaned girl and her rich neighbor's son. The man is jealous of the girl's proximity to another wealthy but 'low-caste' man who has offered to pay her uncle's debt.

told by the man's mother that even the goddess Parvati had to undergo *penance* to obtain her husband, insidiously eliminating the lover's culpability in torturing the woman.

The purpose of the traumatic scene is to punish the transgressor *and* conceal or downplay her real transgression at the same time, producing, in this manner, an aura of innocence around the tortured subject. The effect of innocence, eliciting the viewer's sympathy, is a consequence of the excess of suffering over the presumed transgression: the most innocent person is the one whose suffering occurs without a visible cause (e.g. the kidnapping of a child); the least innocent is one whose extent of suffering is, in the viewer's eyes, in proportion with her transgression (e.g. the death of the villain or the vamp).

But why should only the traumatic scene occupy pride of place in our analysis? Why cannot, for instance, scenes of joy, which also communicate intense emotions, be seen as a reward incurred for a previous act? Though the scene of joy certainly indicates redemption (particularly the happy ending), providing crucial clues to which actions the film approves of, an analysis of the scene of joy as a probable reward for and revelation of a prior 'good deed' faces a problem. Many of the happy scenes in Hindi cinema belong to the category of what I have called *cumulative transgression*, a period of extended happiness in the life of a transgressive individual or couple, interrupted by a sudden blow of Fate or the intervention of an antagonist.

Further, there is a well-established link between trauma and unconscious truth in psychoanalysis, a truth which reveals itself in jokes and dreams as well. Bimal Roy's films, for instance, contain *profound jokes*, not light-hearted banter but a double-edged sword that often cuts into the heart of the film.

In *Sujata*, for instance, the Dalit girl is in the end happily reunited with her 'upper-caste' family which had disavowed her for many years; however, on the day of her marriage, the tearful father jokes: "*We tried to throw you out of the house for so long; today we are really throwing you out"*; the marriage thus succeeded in achieving what years of neglect and humiliation could not.

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Another type of scene which merits our attention is the arbitrary or the *non-functional scene*, which has no specific function in the film, and, *precisely for this reason*, is more significant than the ordinary functional scene, one of whose roles is to drive the plot forward; the non-functional scene is singular since it has no clear relation with the rest of the film.

In *Anand* (1971), such a scene arrives towards the end, just before Anand's collapse: his future *bhabhi* (sister-in-law) chances upon a tape recorder which contains a private conversation of Anand and his erstwhile girlfriend ('I wish to hold you in my arms so tightly that you dissolve in my bloodstream…'). As the lovers' exchange flows in the background, the camera stays focused on *bhabhi*'s face, an audio-visual link between her countenance and the voice of Anand's beloved.

Subsequently, Anand reveals to her that the girl on the tape is now married; she is the secret pain Anand hides from the world, which drives, along with his illness, his relentless search for ephemeral joy. The amorous liaison and the deadly tumor share a deeper connection: the intense love affair immediately precedes his escape to the hospital; Anand arrives on the very day his beloved is married. In this reading, it is this passionate relationship, compounded by Anand's decision to

preserve its sweetest slices *even after the girl's marriage*, which is the central transgression in *Anand*, an offence against the moral law which directly leads to the hero's lethal sickness: lymphosarcoma of the intestine[76].

The scene in which *bhabhi* discovers Anand's secret in the tapes is nonetheless curious for three reasons: first, this secret, which constitutes Anand's very being, is revealed only to his future *bhabhi*, his friends are and remain ignorant of its existence. Second, the scene ends without closure; Anand presents his *bhabhi* with two rings, one for her and the other for her future husband; he says he wants them to be engaged before he dies, a request in response to which *bhabhi* looks away (and not down or furtively around in shyness); the last shot shows her face in half profile, in front of Anand's face. I call this scene non-functional, for no further mention of the engagement or the rings or of Anand's lost love occurs in the film again.

And yet the scene may hold a clue to the final mystery of *Anand*: the fact that his dying wish, to have his friend (the *bhabhi*'s would-be-husband) by his bedside, was not fulfilled. Anand dies screaming '*babumoshai*', an affectionate epithet for his absent friend who arrives too late. In this weak reading, the intense mutual attachment of Anand and his friend's beloved, of *dewar* and *bhabhi*, is punished in the film not *psychologically*, by the friend's jealousy, but *symbolically*, by separation from his dearest friend at the moment of death.

[76] It could rightly be objected that we do not know whether Anand's illness occurred after or during their relationship; in fact, it is more possible that Anand sacrificed his love after knowing of his deadly disease. Let's assume for a moment that this is the case; yet even then Anand's transgressions remain intact: the intense amorous relationship compounded by the recordings of their lovers' exchanges. Thus by the time Anand arrives in Calcutta – the first time we meet him - he is carrying a lethal tumor as well as these tapes, which contain in them intimate and potentially scandalous conversations with a married woman. The girl's marital status also explains in part his extreme anxiety, amplified by the background music, when he witnesses *bhabhi* listening to these tapes; this secret, which he has never revealed to anyone, is not only heartbreaking for him but also shameful.

Recall that Anand's *bhabhi* was continuously massaging Anand's head as he lay in pain before his death, or that unlike her, another friend's wife had immediately made Anand her brother on their first meeting. All these perfectly innocent, even trivial, gestures acquire a new meaning through the strange non-functional scene we described above, a scene which juxtaposes *bhabhi*'s face with the voice of Anand's beloved and perhaps finds the only socially acceptable way for Anand to give his *bhabhi* a token of improper affection, the ring. The problem with this reading, of course, is that Anand expressly *wants* her to get engaged soon, and yet this request parallels his apparent joy, avowed in the same scene, that his beloved is now married to a "good man", a happiness that, considering his intensity of emotions for her, is at least partly false[77].

…

Apart from the traumatic scene and the non-functional scene, a third significant segment of the Hindi film is the parallel plot, which often appears as a contrast to the main plot but can also sometimes expose the main plot's buried truth. This is typically seen in the case of a romance between secondary characters in the film, for instance, the servants' intrigue, a comically obscene version of the primary couple's pure romance.

A fourth important segment in a film is its opening sequence, which, in an extremely condensed and symbolic manner, often indicates a central problem of the film, a problem which, of course, can only

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[77] Does his intense emotions for another woman invalidate our hypothesis that Anand is attracted to his *bhabhi*? Not quite, since the two women, by the visual juxtaposition of one's face with the other's voice, may have merged into one, not only for the film, but in Anand's unconscious as well.

be perceived in retrospect. The opening sequence of *Sholay* (1975), for instance, establishes the basis of the entire film: a police officer arrives at a village by train and travels across a vast expanse of rural countryside to reach Thakur's house; Thakur wants two men, both former criminals, from him, and recounts in flashback a tale of their bravery: the two had rescued him from a dacoit attack.

The entire film is condensed in this short sequence: the representative of the state must come to the village, which is formally within its rule, but for all practical purposes outside its domain (ruled by a parallel authority, Gabbar Singh); the long stretch between the railway station and the village marks the distance between the state and the village; the state representative promises to hand over two men to Thakur and through this handover, symbolically respects the landlord's feudal authority; he doubts the honesty of these two men (a suspicion which will be realized later in their bid to rob Thakur); Thakur's anecdotal reply – the flashback - is mirrored again in the film, the two criminals once more protect Thakur (and the village) from dacoits by risking their lives, as they did in that train sequence etched in Thakur's memory.

Mehboob Khan's *Mother India* (1957) too offers a condensed metaphor: the opening sequence shows a frail old woman (Nargis) bent on a freshly ploughed field, picking up a lump of soil and placing it on her head in reverence, as tractors and farming equipment are seen moving about her. In the next scene, a group of politicians led by her son (Rajendra Kumar) arrive and request her to be the chief guest at the opening of a dam ('you're the mother of the entire village'); after great persuasion, she inaugurates the dam and very reluctantly allows a man in white to garland her, cutting to the flashback of her marriage.

To state the obvious: her old, wrinkled body suggests the incredible hardships she has undergone in the past; her reverence for the soil marks her undying loyalty to the village for which she sacrificed her son; her epithet as 'mother of the village' recalls her later role as protector of the village's honor. Most significantly, her hesitation at being felicitated indicates, in a weak manner, her resistance to the state's attempt to monumentalize her sacrifice and turn her into a symbol of India's development (if true, the title of the film is itself is an appropriation of the reluctant mother). Finally, the influence of her son, a Congress leader who coaxes her through inaudible whispers to be the chief guest and accept the garland, reflects the almost complete subsuming of her sacrifice (the son's murder) into the hegemonic nationalist narrative.

And yet *Mother India* brilliantly undercuts the nationalist appropriation in its final scene: the mother inaugurates the dam, but instead of water, blood gushes out of the reservoir and into the fields as the grieving mother looks on. Though the river of blood may be thought as a natural externalization of her imagination (for it soon turns into water), the scene does not support this common reading, for it begins with the unleashing of the torrent of blood into the fields. The river of blood does not follow from the mother's gaze of unbearable agony at the flowing water (indicating her imagination at work) but precedes it. The blood that turns into water is thus the intervention of the film itself and not of a character in the film; as such, it has the dignity of objectivity ('this, indeed, is what happened') that the mother's mere imagination would not have.

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In *Damini* (1993)[78], a key problem is touched in the opening sequence[79]: a young woman in a mental asylum (Meenakshi Sheshadri) is terrorized by men covered in Holi colors; she is eventually confronted by an invisible psychiatrist who barks questions at her ('Why are you scared?... Do you want to go home? Who will you go home with? Mother won't come, they say they won't take you home...'), questions to which she is unable to reply. After a crucial question ("*Where is your house?... Tell me now*"), the doctor orders electric shocks for her, which are duly given.

This sequence, which seems arbitrarily plucked from the middle of the film, reveals a buried ideology in *Damini*: the answer to the mystery of how a woman who defends a rape victim from her own family becomes insane. The woman's madness is partly caused, of course, by the traumatic encounter with her maid's rapists in court, drenched in Holi colors. Yet the opening scene suggests that her own excommunication from her family is equally to blame; a woman without the protection of a family, in this logic, has lost all bearings in the social world ('who will you go with? They say they won't take you home'). Damini is given shock treatment precisely after the doctor orders her to tell him the address of her house, an address she has forgotten, a metaphor for her complete separation from her family.

[78] In Rajkumar Santoshi's *Damini* (1993), a woman who dances on stage falls in love with a rich man and marries him; she happily settles into her new household only to witness, on the day of Holi, the housemaid being raped by the man's younger brother and his friends. The film portrays her struggle to rebel against her family, who want the matter hushed up, and testify in court in favor of the rape victim.

[79] Madhava Prasad denotes such disjointed opening sequences as fB: "where A and B represent the two principal narrative segments, and fB a fragment that is metonymically linked to B but separated from it by segment A; or, to put it differently, segment A is sandwiched between segment B and its brief, enigmatic premonition… if we speculate for a moment about the change that might come about if the initial fragment is removed altogether… (a) t the threshold that separates A from B, there is every possibility that the spectator will perceive, not the transition to a new stage of the same narrative, but the cessation of one plot and the beginning of another, entirely different one. Two stories instead of one, which would mean a fragmentation of the narrative". Prasad, *Ideology of The Hindi Film*, 222-223.

This explains the paradox of Damini: by the middle of the film, she has been reduced to figure of pure suffering, until she is rescued, literally and figuratively, by a man (her lawyer, Sunny Deol). Damini does indeed regain her confidence as a bold, assertive heroine towards the end, but at which point? Only when a vital condition has been met: her reluctant husband (Rishi Kapoor), caught between family and ethics, has finally switched sides and now unequivocally supports her; she is once again, in the film's buried logic, a married woman who has regained her place in the world.

This reading is confirmed in the end, when Damini proves her fidelity to her husband *by privileging him over her quest for justice*: "I don't want justice, I don't want anything!", she screams in court upon learning that her husband might be dead, before proceeding to denounce the merchants (pimps) of law who sell justice to the highest bidder. Damini's brief cry, which is rewarded by her husband's arrival in court, is vital to comprehend the film's implicit politics; it is also another example of a buried truth exploding before our eyes in a melodramatic scene, before being brushed again under the carpet.

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Thesis 4: *The moral law of a certain film helps reveal the ethical position of the film vis-à-vis itself; the film's ethical position either tallies with the moral law or includes a self-reflexive critique of the moral law.*

From a largely descriptive analysis, we now turn to the question of ethics. But first, can a film be said to have an ethical position? The problem with fiction is that it is often hard to tell whether a

work of art is *depicting* a certain unjust reality or *approving* of such a state of affairs. Consider the following possibilities:

Perhaps a film has no ethical position on its contents; even if its lead characters are constantly propounding a certain ideology (of manliness in *Mard* or feminism in *Pink*[80]), the film itself is neutral and merely depicts their speeches and actions with studied indifference. In other words, a film is simply a container and not an ethical agent. This possibility would be denied by politically active filmmakers but is often used as an exculpatory reason by actors and directors to avoid identification with its problematic ethics (sexist, casteist, anti-poor and so on). But if Hindi cinema were indeed neutral, they wouldn't have ended in the triumph of the moral law: the heroes wouldn't have won, and the villains punished with such surprising regularity.

Second, the film's ethical position may be identical to the (static or changing) ethics of its protagonists; a film like *Ek Duuje Ke Liye*, whose lead characters preach free love untrammeled by regional, linguistic or family considerations and die in the process, would essentially hold the same position on love as its two lovers; that the lovers died in the process is of no real consequence. A variation of this answer would also side with the film's explicit ideology; the lovers' death in *Ek Duuje Ke Liye* does serve a purpose: it heightens our identification with the lovers and reinvigorates our sense of evil, of a world which doesn't allow love to survive on its own terms.

This possibility of films transparently mirroring the explicit ideology of their protagonists is more convincing. Yet it is belied by the recurrence of *exploitative scenes* in several Hindi films, most

[80] Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury's *Pink* (2016) is the story of three young women who are continually harassed after one of them injures an affluent man for trying to rape her.

prominently in the 1980s and early 1990s. It is hard to believe, for instance, that the graphic scenes of sexual assault in this period are unconnected with the film's moral position, though sexual assault itself is vehemently opposed by many characters in the film and, more importantly, the offender is eventually punished.

At this point, an essential secret of Hindi cinema reveals itself: the role of action and image (in this case, the graphic scenes) in contradicting the film's explicit morality. A distinction exists between the film's explicit ideology (how it wishes to be seen), voiced through the 'dialogues' of its protagonists and its own voice-over, and its implicit morality, more closely linked to *exceptional* images and action. We speak of two levels, though it is not necessary that either level be consistent and free from contradiction, which in turn allows the possibility of several readings of a film.

A third possible answer is that the film's position is multiple and fluid; it is identical to what each character, major or minor, says or does *at that moment.* In the climax of *Mother India*, the film would identify and be identified with the man who, in a fit of rage, carries off the moneylender's daughter before it switches its loyalties to his mother, who promptly shoots him dead.

This possibility of utter fluidity would have been valid had the film itself not been structured in a manner that privileges certain voices as well as counters, suppresses or rejects others; a fluid reading, though interesting in the singular details it brings to the surface, would ultimately be dissonant with the structured narrative of the film. Yet even this suggestion is not without value, since it calls us to take minor voices, actions and events in the film to account, opening the film to further interpretation.

Fourth, the film's ethical position, as it reflects the contradictions between multiple social forces, may itself be contradictory, without offering a clear resolution. In *Deewaar*, the two brothers - a criminal and a police officer - both have powerful ethical positions - against and for the system - and irrespective of the fact that the criminal dies on his mother's lap, *Deewaar's* ethical position, so the logic goes, must be seen as essentially ambivalent. If we follow this logic to its conclusion, we end up with the disturbing idea that even the sadistic villain's position has a certain ethical validity, irrespective of the tirade of attacks (verbal and physical) that he suffers in the film.

This answer seems most promising but for the fact that contradictions are often resolved in the end, i.e. one side is subordinated to the other (through the scene of redemption or with the death of the villain). But does the film *necessarily* endorse the victors? Perhaps the film, by depicting the tragedy of its protagonist, is meant as a criticism of the world which led the unfortunate antihero (e.g. Amitabh in *Deewaar*) to his destruction. We have thus again struck an impasse.

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Let's try another route: Can the moral law of a film, deciphered through an analysis of transgressions and punishments, give us an insight into the film's ethical position?

Two objections arise: first, if we think of the transcendental principle of morality as God, we do not know the nature in which God dispenses justice. There are numerous possibilities: *existential justice* where the sinners are punished from birth, for being born, as it were, into dire poverty, disability,

untouchability, unknown parentage and so on; *prompt justice*, where sinners are punished immediately after their transgressions; *accidental justice*, in which sinners are punished at an 'opportune' moment whose logic is unfathomable to us; finally, *poetic justice* in which the sinners are punished towards the end of the film, confirming the ultimate justice of God.

While poetic justice is clearly a vital part of Hindi cinema (the poet Harivansh Rai Bachchan thought the popularity of Hindi film lay in 'poetic justice delivered in three hours'), the existence of the other kinds of justice in films is obscure. This objection, however, can be empirically resolved by paying attention to the form of a film, by which I mean the manner in which the scenes are arranged in that particular film; if a certain pattern repeats again and again, it can safely be said that the form of justice it corresponds to is at work in the film.

Second, such an approach (transgression followed by punishment) would have trouble accounting for the unexpected deaths that litter the reels of Hindi cinema (sudden heart attacks, natural disasters, road or train or airplane accidents among other mishaps): from the train accident that killed the 'untouchable' girl in *Achhut Kannya* (1936) to the wipeout of an entire family at the beginning of *Sholay* (1975) to a sudden fall from the stairs which led to another daughter-in-law's death in *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* (1994).

How can an inner logic of transgression explain the death of innocents, those who have, to all appearances, never transgressed? The case of *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* is the most curious for God is invoked explicitly in the climax; the *deus ex machina* in the end is literally God Himself, who obliquely

authorizes the family dog to clear the confusion that prevents the lovers' union. Yet the same God does not intervene when the daughter-in-law of the house dies in an accident.

These accidents are one of the most confounding qualities of Hindi cinema, a constant source of irritation for the modern viewer, and yet their inner logic is sometimes startlingly simple. In Shakti Samanta's *Aradhana* (1969), a young pilot dies in an air accident shortly after he has sex with his lover in a hotel room ('Roop Tera Mastana')[81]; she, on the other hand, discovers that she is pregnant and is condemned to spend a life of shame and anonymity. On the face of it, both are innocent, even by conventional standards, since they were married in a temple without witnesses, but the film proceeds *as if that marriage has no legitimacy*; the lovers are punished (one by death, the other by a living death) all the same, as if they had never married at all, as if a marriage, in order to be recognized by society, must occur before its approved representatives.

The same paradox is seen in the final scenes of *Achhut Kannya* (1936), in which moments before she is killed by a train, the heroine runs into her former lover, who drops her home. On the way back, the two share platonic reminiscences of their past days; the heroine shies away from those memories ('don't remind me of those days'), for she is married now.

If we interpret her subsequent death as a punishment for this meeting, the film acts in the same strange manner as we had seen in *Aradhana*: despite the fact that the heroine in *Achhut Kannya* has proven her innocence by asking her former lover to stop reminding her of their lost love, the film

[81] "While popular films absorbed principles of female chastity, Aradhana was the first to explicitly associate romantic love with sexual desire. Yet harking back to chastity principles, it also shows the ruinous consequences of extramarital sex for women". Virdi, *The Cinematic ImagiNation*, 149.

proceeds *as if she hadn't said those words, as if she had intentionally met her lover in secret*, a sin for which she, a married woman, must die. We shall term such utterances as acts of *imaginary redemption*, in which, *though the heroine's innocence is restored in front of the audience, she is nevertheless punished in the film.*

But what about *Sholay* and *Hum Aapke Hain Koun,* as well as scores of other films which feature sudden and inexplicable deaths? We shall see in subsequent chapters that far from being a barrier to comprehending the film, these abrupt deaths may often hold the key to unlock an entirely new dimension of the film, a nightmarish cellar that houses the film's most obscene secrets.

Finally, if we imagine the dispenser of justice to be the film itself, it would still be unfair to claim that the distribution of rewards and punishments reveals the moral perspective of the film, i.e. the film dislikes the characters it punishes and rewards those whose conduct it approves of.

Take the case of Guru Dutt, famous for making films in which the protagonist (often played by Dutt himself) suffers no end for the injustice and hypocrisy of the surrounding world. Our argument would then imply a) that the films (*Pyaasa* and *Kaagaz ke Phool*) are punishing Dutt's characters for their transgressions, and b) they are justified in punishing the hero in such a manner, since the punishment is ordained by the film itself. While the first implication may be true, the second is surely an absurdity, given the pains Dutt takes to highlight the evils of society, the evil called society, which directly participates in punishing the protagonist.

This means that we must distinguish between the God of the film, its moral law, and the film itself: *although God, or the law of transcendent morality, is strictly speaking, the justice that is delivered in the film, deciphered from the distribution of transgressions and punishments, the film may at times include a certain self-reflexive voice, which can directly or indirectly comment on God's justice as fair or unfair.*

Yet one should be very careful of this self-reflexive voice: for instance, rapists are frequently denounced by a film's characters and receive punishment as well, yet often the scene itself, in its focus on the woman's terror and the rapist's enjoyment, clearly highlights the film's obscene enjoyment in the rape. We shall attempt to answer this puzzle of the self-reflexive voice of a film in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2: MASCULINE-FEMININE

In the previous chapter, we had considered whether a film could have an ethical position on its characters, and the various possible routes to decipher the ethical position of that film, its own morality. Let us now shift our focus to characters and investigate the various emotional states that inhabit a certain character for the duration of a film.

Take a film like *Queen* (2013), which depicts a woman suffer as long as she abides by the norm of marriage and family, yet find happiness *at the precise point* when she decides to live for herself, on her own terms. The sequence of events in *Queen* makes an ethical point: living by the patriarchal norm brings suffering; living freely is the key to happiness; *Queen* is thus an advertisement for the free woman of today.

Consider the opposite scenario in Manoj Kumar's *Purab aur Paschim* (1970): the free-spirited heroine lives in the West but, unlike *Queen*, she constantly runs into obstacles and finds no inner satisfaction while pursuing her dream of freedom; she discovers happiness only when she returns to India and to the patriarchal norm[82]. Films work here in the same manner as advertisements,

[82] "Preeti's gradual transformation leads her to reflect on the East/West divide. She is struck by the devotion of the family servant's wife, who waits forty years in her home village before her husband brings her to the city, and by Bharat's female childhood friend who never confesses her love for him, constrained by an appropriate coyness. Preeti's brother, a Hare Rama Hare Krishna cult member, expounds on lajja and sharam (coyness and shame), the "rare jewels" the Indian woman possesses. When Preeti's mother, unable to cope with the lack of creature comforts on the tour, decides

insofar as the spoken or unspoken emotional states of their characters are themselves an advertisement of a certain desirable or undesirable mode of being; they do not require an explicit message to clarify in words what is clear from the image.

Not only does image communicate ideology, the ideology communicated by image is far more pernicious than the ideology of words, for unlike words, one does not spontaneously think of the meaning of images. In *Lakshya* (2004)[83], the ideology spoken in words is of gender equality; the man and the woman share a remarkably equal relationship bereft of conventional gender norms... before she breaks up with him. Apart from the anonymous foe at the border, the enemy depicted in the film is the woman's new boyfriend, who fakes an enthusiasm for gender equality yet is furious when she does not obey him.

However, this message of true equality between woman and man in *Lakshya* is undermined in one scene, shot in the backdrop of a song ('Kitni Baatein'), in which the film allows the soldier-hero to rescue his lady love from enemy bombing near the border zone. Ironically, the lyrics, immediately before the scene of rescue, run: '*Kyun poori ho na paayi dastaan, kaise aayi hain aisi duriyan'* (Why was this tale left incomplete, how did we grow so far apart?) The answer to this pressing question, the key question of *Lakshya*, lies in the images that follow: the scene of rescue establishes the man as the man he never was.

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to curtail her visit and return to England, to her surprise she finds Preeti dressed in a bridal saree, worshipping at the temple. Gone are the leather skirts and boots. The errant girl finds her origin, embraces Indian womanhood—that defining essence of Indianness—proving Bharat's thesis about India: "apne yahaan ki mitti kuch aise hai ajnabi ko bhi sanskaar sikha deti hai" (the soil of our land is such that even a stranger learns its culture)". Virdi, *The Cinematic Imagination*, 64. The only elements missing in this accurate analysis are the regular rape attempts that play a major role in this conversion, the obscene facet of the film's grand meditations on Indian values.

[83] Farhan Akhtar's *Lakshya* (2004) marks the coming of age of a lazy man (Hrithik Roshan) who, inspired by his girlfriend (Preity Zinta), joins the army and finds his goal (*lakshya*) in life. The woman however leaves him when he briefly gives up the strenuous army training.

From now on, after this song, the woman no longer plays the role of the courageous journalist who reports on the war zone; she instead becomes a loyal pillar of support to the soldier in his mission to defeat the enemy. 'I'll wait for you to return', she tells him, and when he replies that he may not come back, she vows to wait all her life for him. This sublime moment, the declaration of eternal love, is also the point in which the film slips back into patriarchy, not because such a declaration is inherently patriarchal, but because of the context: the woman implicitly admits her mistake of moving on to another man after she parted with her boyfriend; this time, she seems to say, I shall not abandon you, except that this change of heart is achieved only once her man truly becomes a man, the day he silently rescues her from enemy bombing.

In *Lakshya*, we see the fine traces of the classical structure of patriarchy in Hindi cinema: the man and woman cannot be together precisely because they are *equal* in a dying, yet not dead, patriarchy; the deadlock must be resolved by the subtle elevation or *masculinization* of the man (via the scene of rescue and his final solo conquest of an enemy peak, in the name of his army and country) and the equally subtle taming or *feminization* of the woman[84] (via being the object of rescue and her one-sided devotion).

…

[84] "My own observation at the showing of the film Yaadein (Memories, Subhash Ghai 2001) points to the accuracy of the parts of Derné's observation which relate to some film narratives: the director unashamedly positions the female characters as the bearers of 'Indian tradition' and 'cultural value' while allowing the male characters to explore nonconformity and rebellion, albeit on a very small scale and against the clearly oppressive and 'westernised' (sic) monetarism of the Non-Resident Indian super-rich. Similarly, in Dil Chahta Hai (The Heart Yearns, Farhan Akhtar 2001), when a young man wishes to enter a relationship with an older woman, the director burdens his characters with dialogues about the dangerous modernity of the young, the importance of traditional values, and the impossibility of a union between an alcoholic divorcee and a youth of 'good family'. In both films, controlled and family-orientated sexuality is posited as the ultimate defining feature of a truly 'Indian' courtship". Banaji, *Reading 'Bollywood'*, 27.

Let me now try to define what I mean by masculinization and feminization. In both cases, though the starting point of the process is ambiguous, the goal is quite clear: phallic, dominating masculinity for masculinization; vulnerable and/or sacrificing femininity for feminization.

What follows is an exercise in the clarification of key categories to comprehend various characters in Hindi cinema. These categories are *modes of being,* not merely psychological dispositions, dependent as they are on intersubjective experience and the norms and expectations of society. The claim that these categories are immanent to Hindi cinema and not the external creation-imposition of the author may at first seem a key conceit in the development of theory (which, the argument goes, is simply a perspective imposed on a reality too fluid to be captured), yet these categories are so commonplace that they can be intuitively grasped by any viewer of Hindi cinema.

Let us start by posing a simple distinction between weak and strong characters. A weak character is one who is unable to act or who is subjected to domination, trickery or random violence, a person who at times needs a strong protector-figure. The strong character on the other hand acts effectively, at times with violence; he or she triumphs over obstacles with relative ease.

In a patriarchal scenario, strength is ordinarily associated with men and weakness with women, thus our first two elementary categories are *masculine* (strong and invulnerable) and *feminine* (weak and vulnerable). Since these are not the only kinds of masculinity and femininity seen in Hindi cinema, we shall qualify them further: the first two modes of being in Hindi cinema are the *phallic masculine*

(strong and invulnerable), denoted by M', and the *weak feminine* (weak and vulnerable), which we denote simply as F.

The phallic masculine (M') takes its name from the phallus, the male genital organ, often regarded as a symbol of masculine strength. Sexual power is a metonym of masculine power; the phallus has connotations of superiority (a bigger phallus in many cultures connotes a stronger man) and domination ('man fucks woman: subject verb object'[85]).

Phallic power works in three modes: control, domination, protection. Domination means acquiring and maintaining the possession of the object (the enemy being the subjective element of the object-woman which resists); control implies the regulation of the immanent movements of the object (scheduling of the workers' time, overseeing the woman's movements); protection implies an external enemy from which the object-woman must be guarded; a fourth mode, violation, is nothing but an attempt at domination.

In Hindi cinema, the rape attempt was a common mode of violation (on the villain's part) and solved all three problems for the phallic masculine: the hero would rescue the woman from the villain's clutches (protection); by rescuing the woman, he marked her, in patriarchal code, as his property (domination); the rape attempt itself was designed to break down the independent subjectivity of the woman, so the woman could henceforth be more docile (control).

[85] "Sexual objectification is the primary process of the subjection of women. It unites act with word, construction with expression, perception with enforcement, myth with reality. Man fucks woman; subject verb object". MacKinnon, Catharine A. Toward a Feminist Theory of the State, Harvard University Press: 1989, 124.

But is vulnerability always opposed to strength in Hindi cinema? Consider the 'angry young man' played by Amitabh Bachchan, a figure who though über-phallic (the angry man can beat scores of people at once, defeat the villain and rescue the woman) is vulnerable at certain key moments[86]: Bachchan dies in his films with surprising regularity.

In addition, the 'angry young man' has a weak spot for his mother: in *Mard*, an ode to the phallic archetype who is invincible to pain, the hero dissolves into tears at his foster mother's death, ironically uttering: *'Jo mard hota hai usko dard nahi hota'* (one who is a man feels no pain). This mixture of vulnerability and phallic masculinity is not limited to Bachchan but is shared with his younger contemporaries - 'angry young men' like Sunny Deol and Anil Kapoor - as if a depiction of pure phallic masculinity, uncontaminated by vulnerability, would not only be boring for the audience (to watch one triumph over another) but *fundamentally evil.*

This explains the occurrence of a more pure phallic masculinity in villains (e.g. Mogambo in *Mr. India* and Shakaal in *Shaan*), an invulnerability which meets its demise only at the hands of the hero; on the other hand, the hero, in order to be a hero, must overcome not just external obstacles but his inner vulnerability as well, *a vulnerability that paradoxically must never be completely vanquished, for it is a sign of innocence.*

[86] In *Zanjeer,* his first 'angry young man' film, Priya Jha notices Amitabh Bachchan's feminine gaze, his shy inability to look back as his friend sings "Yaari Hai Imaan Mera" for him: "The overturning of the hierarchy of the gaze is underscored by Khanna's inability to enjoin the spectator to participate in this space, since the spectator is already sympathetic to Khanna's position. This is done through his gaze, which, as the spectator follows it, is always leading us off the framing of the shot or completely off to the side". Jha, "Lyrical Nationalism: Gender, Friendship, and Excess in 1970s Hindi Cinema," The Velvet Light Trap 51 (Spring 2003): 43–53. Vijay Khanna is the name of Bachchan's character.

This explains why the defeat of the villain in the end is often supplemented with a scene of a tearful reunion with the family or beloved or in some cases, jail for breaking the law or even death - in each case a return to vulnerability. The opposite scenario is true as well: in Hindi cinema, it would be wrong to say that the heroine is always weak and vulnerable, since in many films she is allowed to have her moments of strength just as the hero has his share of vulnerable moments.

Thus, we have a third common mode of being in Hindi cinema, a category valorized more than even the phallic male position (which, in its pure form, belongs only to the villain). I call this mode of being, a paradoxical combination of strength and vulnerability, the *radical* position, denoted by F'.

But why radical? I use the word in its original, value-neutral sense: a radical act is one that affects or changes the fundamental nature of something. The subject's struggle between strength and vulnerability is radical to the extent that it is both subjective and objective: a) the subject transforms herself through the struggle to someone she was not before; and b) the subject's struggle marks an intervention into the situation which changes it radically, so that new situation is a marked discontinuity from the old. Yet the paradox of Hindi cinema is that radical acts at a local level (e.g. ending the villain's reign or neutralizing his power) are often the means of returning to conservative norms at a general level, as we will see later.

Is the radical position masculine, feminine or neither? At first, strength might seem to be an innately masculine attribute, yet even speaking from the point of view of tradition, this is wrong: strength (*shakti*) is a quality associated with both men and women (for instance, the strength of a mother in *Deewaar* who bears and brings up her child). Yet vulnerability is a uniquely feminine attribute; Hindi

cinema, as seen earlier, has often celebrated its male protagonist's *invulnerability* through immortal statements like '*Jo mard hota hai usko dard nahi hota*' (The one who is a man feels no pain) in *Mard*.

The difference between the masculine and feminine position in Hindi cinema is made clear if one imagines a woman, let's say a mother during childbirth, uttering an analogous line. The absurdity of this imaginary situation indicates that the woman experiences pain in its fullest sense but endures, while the man pretends not to feel pain. In other words, pain and strength are related differently in the masculine and feminine position: the man disavows pain ('boys don't cry') *yet his very disavowal implies a weakness, a fear of pain*; a woman is stronger for she accepts pain in all its terrible consequences for herself.

Pain not only hurts but threatens to shatter like glass the unity of mind and body; in intense pain, one loses the sense of a single self or an autonomous ego that controls our thoughts and actions, an ego which is, strictly speaking, a fiction. The masculine figure tries to protect himself (literally: his own self) from destruction so that he remains what he always was; the feminine figure enters this hell and burns in it so that something new could be born[87]. *The man resists pain; the woman resists the resistance to pain*:

> "Of course, I am aware that I have used "resistance" in at least two ways: first, as the resistance to vulnerability that characterizes that form of thinking that models itself on mastery; second, as a social and political form that is informed by vulnerability, and so not

[87] The idea is not to glorify childbirth or valorize women as bearers of children. Instead, childbirth is used as a metaphor for the unique strength of the feminine position, which could be occupied by both women and men to produce something radical or new in the world.

one of its opposites. I have suggested that vulnerability is neither fully passive nor fully active, but operating in a middle region, a constituent feature of a human animal both affected and acting. I am thus led to think about those practices of deliberate exposure to police or military violence in which bodies, put on the line, either receive blows or seek to stop violence as living blockades or barriers. In such practices of non-violent resistance, we can come to understand bodily vulnerability as something that is actually marshaled or mobilized for the purposes of resistance."[88]

If strength in the masculine mode is the resistance to vulnerability and the eventual conquest or taming of its source (the villain), feminine strength is the internalization of vulnerability into strength. Yet this transformation of vulnerability into strength, without eliminating the former, is no easy task; vulnerability could equally be fetishized (falling in love with your pain), secretly dismissed ('if everyone is vulnerable, no one is'), or passively accepted (suffering quietly, the enduring woman). I shall return to the ambiguity of the enduring woman of Hindi films (is she weak or strong?) later, but for now, let me define the *radical feminine* (F') as the *fusion* of strength and vulnerability.

…

In our analysis so far, a confusion has arisen about the precise meaning of *mode of being*; are characters in a Hindi film fluid, able to move between different modes of being, or static, confined to one mode of being throughout their short lives? This confusion is not just ours but one intrinsic

[88] Butler, 'Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance', 17. Butler defines vulnerability in the political sense as "a deliberate exposure to power", which is a part of the "very meaning of political resistance as an embodied enactment". Butler's use of the term is both collective and relational (our dependency on 'infrastructural conditions' and 'legacies of discourse that precede and condition our existence'); she also opposes ideals of independence as 'masculinist'.

to Hindi cinema: is the phallic figure in *Mard secretly or essentially vulnerable* just because he cries for his mother, a vulnerability that once evoked is his latent truth throughout the film? Or is his vulnerability *an exception that upholds the norm*, a ruse to humanize and make this man acceptable to his audience, a convenient device to excuse his phallic activities? Or perhaps one should one distinguish the man who cries for his mother from the man who defeats the villain, the two being different kinds of subjects?

A related problem is the vigilante, often criticized for being an über-phallic character who protects his people in the same way as the father at home protects his women: is the vigilante necessarily phallic or should he be seen sympathetically, as a large portion of the audience sees him, as a radical figure who is simply doing, in an utterly selfless way, what others should but do not do? The question of whether a character is phallic or radical can only be answered by a close analysis of the film; the solution, in part, lies in deciphering whether the phallic scenes (of beating the villain's henchmen) *alternate* with scenes of vulnerability (loss and grief), or if strength and vulnerability are inextricably mixed in the character's being and remain *inseparable* even in the final defeat of the villain[89].

To clarify, let me take two examples. In Manmohan Desai's *Mard* (1985), the hero (Amitabh Bachchan) undergoes severe hardships, initially without suffering, as if he is immune to pain, but as the film proceeds, he becomes more and more vulnerable; he is tied with ropes and electrocuted; he is made to fight a man who he does not know is his father (Dara Singh), a man who is on the

[89] There are, of course, contrary arguments which claim that any kind of victory is inherently phallic, and the only ethical option is to 'fail well', just as the only authentic love is the one not realized. Yet the problem with such pessimism is that it is not pessimistic enough; it fails to notice how failure is already a necessary part of life. Today's victory is tomorrow's defeat, though the reverse is not necessary; moreover, a subject should always be alert to the signs of a secret defeat within the moment of victory as well as traces of the vaguely new in her failures.

verge of defeating him before *he* realizes that the enemy is his son. The final scene, however, marks the hero's return to full manhood as he defeats the villain and rescues the heroine without a trace of vulnerability. The hero thus, broadly speaking, undergoes a transition of M'-F-M', a path from phallic masculinity to extreme suffering to a return to his earlier invincibility.

Yet, even in *Mard*, there is a supplementary scene in the end, which tries to establish the hero's core vulnerability: on the way to his wedding, the hero falls off his horse; exasperated, he allows himself to be carried on his father's powerful shoulders to the wedding hall. Such scenes of vulnerability are, however, largely imaginary since they do not take away his ultimate victory over the villain. This ultimate triumph over vulnerability is the phallic position par excellence, as Judith Butler notes: "the idea of a political subject that establishes its agency by vanquishing its vulnerability – I take this latter to be a masculinist ideal"[90].

In Tanuja Chandra's *Dushman* (1998), a woman avenges the rape of her twin sister by killing the rapist. *Dushman* is a fiercely feminist film, for two reasons: first, the woman's revenge is not subsumed under a male protector-figure who takes revenge on her behalf; second, the film does not masculinize the woman, turning her into a phallic avenger; though a trained fighter, she remains vulnerable to social protocols and her own fears right till the end. Her lover, a blind army major who began her training, is equally vulnerable, filled with doubt whether he deserves the woman or not. In one scene, she abandons her lover for his authoritarian ways and continues the training herself; she is not his puppet.

[90] Butler, 'Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance', 15.

And yet there is a small but troubling ambiguity: why is one sister raped and killed and not the other? The sisters are very different in nature: one is fiercely independent, to the extent that everyone, including her suitor, fears her; the other is more docile, feminine and easily scared. It is the first sister, of course, who is killed, giving rise to the possibility that the film, though ostensibly feminist, does not approve of the fiercely independent woman.

But *Dushman* also offers a very different reading: in the end, when the rapist readies to kill the woman, he recounts how her courageous sister was trembling with fear when he raped her, a fear that fueled his sadistic enjoyment. The sister, in this reading, is ultimately punished for *relinquishing her courage* at a pivotal moment, a mistake this woman does not make.

The final scene shows the ideological balance of forces in Hindi cinema; though the woman is a trained fighter, she still needs the support of the blind major to kill the rapist. Yet the man plays second fiddle to the woman in this fight; his role, strictly speaking, is of the sacrificing feminine figure (he takes a bullet on his palm) who helps the woman win.

…

Thesis 1: *In Hindi cinema, the subjugation of the woman is often conducted by three parallel forces: the father, the villain and the lover. In several films, the father and the villain are on the same side against the revolting subjects, and father, villain and the lover-hero are on the same side against the rebelling woman.*

The phallic masculine position is often intermittently occupied by three characters: the father, the villain and the hero. In scores of Hindi films, the villain attempts to succeed where the father has failed, subjugating the couple through physical and psychological wounds. *If war is politics by other means, the villain is the father by other means*. The villain attempts to feminize the woman by an obscene imposition of patriarchy; *he does what the father cannot do without losing his legitimacy*.

On the other hand, we have the (male) lover, ostensibly as much a victim of paternal authority as his beloved. Yet in many instances, the lover or husband plays a crucial role in feminizing the woman, particularly through the device of misunderstanding, which gives him the opportunity to chastise her. In *Dil*, the man and woman engage in a continual battle of wits with each other until the woman falsely accuses the man of rape; in return, the man plans a mock-rape by kidnapping the woman at night. He relents only when the woman is sufficiently terrified and begs him for mercy; the man at this point claims he could never imagine robbing a woman of her honor, his only aim was to teach her a lesson ('now you know what rape is'). By the next scene, the woman has fallen in love with him and pursues her could-be rapist until he happily relents.

In *Amar Akbar Anthony* (1978), father and villain share many similarities: both wear westernized attire and owe their wealth to illegal activities; one voluntarily goes to jail for the other's crime; finally, both end up in the same jail together. They share another crucial similarity: both are fathers to the Christian girl, Jenny (Parveen Babi); the villain is her biological father, while the father of the three heroes (Amar, Akbar, Anthony) is her guardian.

Jenny (Parveen Babi) is routinely harassed by her bodyguard Zebisko, an aide of the villain. The film gives us the impression that her noble guardian is protecting her from the villain, her own father, yet this is not true: both her guardian (Pran) and the villain (Jeevan) are suspicious of Jenny's clandestine affair with Anthony; in fact it is her noble guardian who had employed the bodyguard, Zebisko, not only to protect Jenny but also to monitor her movements, as is clear from his anger when he hears of her secret trysts. In Jenny's case, it is the triumvirate of guardian, father and father's aide who, through threats and harassment, attempt to feminize Jenny, though her symbolic feminization occurs only in the end when her lover, Anthony, rescues her from the villain. The insight of the essential identity of the father and villain against the deviant subject(s) in many Hindi films will play a vital role in our analysis of *Sholay* in the next chapter.

Thesis 2: *The coming-of-age genre in post-2000 Hindi cinema marks the transformation of an introverted protagonist (trapped in her private world of enjoyment or suffering) to an extroverted subject (a seeker of pleasurable experiences, what we now call life).*

We have so far discussed three familiar modes of being – the phallic masculine (M'), the weak feminine (F) and the radical feminine (F'). In our fourth category, honor is replaced by pleasure as the final goal. We shall refer to this category as the hedonistic masculine (M); the M-subject, instead of exposing himself to the norms of traditional, restrictive rule-bound patriarchy (domination-subjugation) searches for a domain of free enjoyment. Pockets of independence emerge, of solitary individuals (the traveller, the tramp), friends (the early Jai and Veeru in *Sholay*), and even families (in Hrishikesh Mukherjee films), which, at least on the surface, remain remarkably free of traditional patriarchal codes, privileging pleasure over obedience to authority.

The shift from honor or reputation, which is at the constant mercy of the others' gaze (underlined in the refrain: 'log kya kahenge?', what will people say), to personal enjoyment, which can not only block out the world of societal rules but does not necessarily rely on real people (alternatives include books, cinema, internet, pornography), gives this subject an aura of invulnerability.

Yet, the hedonist's distancing himself from proactive struggle (recall Jai and Veeru's first impulse to decamp with Thakur's money instead of fighting for a noble cause) weakens him in the same breath; though this person is often drawn into struggle with outside forces, his struggle is *reactive* in the sense that it is waged for his or her own survival and the preservation of his personal freedom. By shielding himself against vulnerability, the hedonist proves to be weaker than the phallic man who desires to expand his domain, reputation and influence in the world (and is thus necessarily exposed to vulnerabilities in the process), and much weaker than the radical feminine for whom vulnerability is strength itself.

Freedom acquires a paradoxical meaning for the pleasure-seeking subject; it is a freedom from disturbance, a freedom from the invasive elements of the real world who break into his shell from time to time, accompanied by another kind of freedom, the freedom to access newer pleasures. There is a contradiction between the two freedoms, for the first drives the subject further into his shell, the second draws the subject out into the dangerous world; the lumpen heroes in *Sholay*, for instance, clearly prefer the second kind of freedom, before they are transformed into phallic figures who protect the village from its violators, M to M' but with periodic returns to M (in Veeru's comic courtship of Basanti) until Basanti's rescue from Gabbar, which establishes the savior as M'.

Figures like the early Jai and Veeru, with their boundless quest of hedonism, are *extroverted* M-figures, opposed to the more reserved seekers of private enjoyment, enjoyment without risk, the *introverted* M-figures. This subtle distinction is crucial to comprehend a range of coming-of-age Hindi films after 2000, which depict an introverted subject (trapped in his private shell of pleasure or, sometimes, suffering) achieving extroversion, the seeker of new experiences and rare pleasures.

This extraordinary transformation occurs through the medium of an *angel of happiness*, who frees the introvert from her previous inhibitions. Many of these films, unsurprisingly, focus on travel (access to foreign, unfamiliar experiences): in *Jab We Met* (2007), the angel of enjoyment is first the woman (Kareena Kapoor), who rescues the man (Shahid Kapur) from his shell of suffering, and is in turn rescued from her sorrow in the end; in *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* (2011), a trip to Spain brings three friends out of their private anxieties and into a world of immanent enjoyment; in *Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani* (2013) , an extrovert (Ranbir Kapoor) rescues his female companion (Deepika Padukone) from her private life of insecurities; in *Qarib Qarib Singlle* (2017), again, a carefree extrovert (Irfan Khan), who can miss trains just to taste his favorite snack at the railway station, is the catalyst for a woman's 'self-discovery' (Parvathy), an euphemism for her transformation from introverted M to extroverted M.

Yet *Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani* and *Qarib Qarib Single* introduce a remarkable twist: in both, the angel of happiness, the fearless extroverted man, is himself revealed to be scared of the absolute risk of love, as if his desire for intense experiences was possible only on the condition that the experiences

were ephemeral; life itself could not be committed for it was an empty container of beautiful fleeting experiences, beautiful because they were fleeting.

Love, not merely care of the other, but an absolute fall in love, marks a thorough feminization of the subject, a feminization which is not possible even within the liberal confines of extroverted masculinity (though after the fall, love may again return to a paradigm of mutual enjoyment (M), care of the other (F), or a surreptitious return of gender hierarchies (M')). In *Qarib Qarib Single*, the man experiences the shattering force of love as he realizes that he cannot return to his everyday, enjoying self; in *Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani*, the man leaves his career dreams behind to be with his lady love.

…

The M-category is not restricted to men; from its early days, Hindi cinema has a rich tradition of M-heroines, from Devika Rani in *Karma* (1933)[91], Nargis in *Andaz* (1949) and *Awara* (1951), Waheeda Rehman in *Guide* (1965)[92], till the 1970s, in which the M-heroine, independent and happiness-seeking, was established almost as a norm; it was fashionable in the 1970s to show her as a resolutely westernized woman (Zeenat Aman and Parveen Babi) or a thief or petty criminal (*Zanjeer, Roti Kapda aur Makaan, Parvarish, Shaan*), a person not just outside the societal law but the legal apparatus as well.

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[91] J L Freer-Hunt's *Karma* (1933) features one of the longest kissing scenes in Hindi cinema between a princess (Devika Rani) and her lover (Himanshu Rai, Devika's real-life husband), a sign of the couple's M-subjectivity.

[92] In Vijay Anand's *Guide* (1965), the couple's happiness is broken when the woman becomes a famous dancer (Waheeda Rehman), her success overshadowing the man (Dev Anand). In the English version of the film, the woman is shown as arrogant and indifferent to her lover as well, the message being that fame has corrupted her soul; the woman was earlier shown to have slept with her lover while she was married to another man. A comparison between the two versions shows the great efforts the Hindi film takes to protect the woman's innocence, in the sense of chastity as well as her incorruptible nature.

There is a common misconception that the independent, pleasure-seeking heroine in Hindi cinema is predominantly urban and westernized (thus corrupted by Western values). On the contrary, a recurring M-woman in Hindi films was the village belle (*Amar*, *Mother India*, *Bees Saal Baad*[93]) who bore no traces of westernization; instead her existence was a contradiction at the very core of the pure Indian woman (servile, suffering, sacrificing), which showed how the notion of 'the ideal Indian woman' was almost as modern as the modernity it sought to criticize, how it was heavily influenced by Western (Victorian) values[94]:

> "The new Indian woman was superior to her European counterpart precisely because she maintained her spiritual essence. The new woman also maintained her distinction from women of lower caste and class. Uma Chakravarti points to nineteenth-century discourse that was keen to emphasize the high-caste Hindu woman's decline in status compared to ancient times. High-caste women became recast in the superwoman mold, "the spiritual Maitreyi, the learned Gargi, the suffering Sita, the faithful Savitri and the heroic Lakshmibai." Susie Tharu surmises that the emergent woman figure in the nationalist imagination was "in keeping with the now naturalized Victorian ideals of domestic virtue, patient and long suffering and autonomous, conscious of her power and of the strength she could find in tradition: a gentle but stern custodian of the nation's moral life. These two dominant strands are layered together: a tradition reinvented from the upper-caste Hindu notion of a "glorious past," and a Victorian legacy of purity and sexual restraint. Both traditions mutually

[93] In each film, the feisty woman is raped (*Amar*), abducted (*Mother India*) or attacked (*Bees Saal Baad*), marking her feminization.

> accommodate and reinforce each other. And this was the figure that was to dominate the literary imagination for several decades to come."[95]

As opposed to this F-heroine (servile, suffering, sacrificing), the M-heroine came with a crucial qualification: in most of the above films, and till well into the 2000s, she would have to suffer for her independent existence[96], either materially (facing extreme hardships) or symbolically (the rescue scene which established the man's domination over her, or her own voluntary feminization after marriage or love, in *Zanjeer*); in other words, she was required to make the transition from M to F (Basanti's kidnapping in *Sholay*) just as in mainstream Hindi cinema, the man was often required to transform from M to M' (e.g. Veeru's rescue of Basanti). The weak feminine was the final destination of the heroine for over three-quarters of a century, from at least the 1930s till the 2000s.

…

The figure of the vamp was a powerful reminder of the undesirability of the M-woman; the vamp was a westernized figure, a *femme fatale*, who was punished by attacks, humiliation or death, or simply eliminated after a point. Jyotika Virdi notes:

> "The actress Helen, who plays a Ruby-like figure in scores of films, is iconic of the vamp. In the roles she repeats time and again, Helen portrays not so much the "wicked" woman as the "naughty," sexually alluring, immodest one, coded by her erotic and nimbly performed dance

[95] Virdi, *The Cinematic Imagination*, 65-.66.

[96] "Several films also depict sexual assault as a warranted punishment for women who are non-traditional. In these movies, the woman is transformed into a very traditional and nonsexual individual after the assault as a direct consequence of it". Manohar, '(De)constructing izzat', in *Rape Cultures and Survivors*, 221.

> numbers—a wonderful medley of flamenco, jazz, modern, and belly dance movements set to adaptations of rock'n'roll or jazz rhythms. Located in the public sphere, in the world of men, she is somehow bereft of a man of her own. Desired by all, yet loved by none, she inevitably zeroes in on the hero in her search to be loved by one man. Yet within the pleasures and dangers of a liminal but exciting nightlife, the role enacted by Helen is that of the "bad," undomesticated woman. *For this she is punished with death, always an accident of fate. Not altogether insignificant are the communal overtones of Helen's offscreen minority status as a Christian. Perceived as part of the Anglo-Indian community, an "impure" breed that could never gain legitimacy in a society acutely conscious of origins, Helen plays with the pleasure and anxiety the otherized westerners' lifestyle elicits"*[97]. (my italics)

In Helen, one encounters a paradox concerning M-women in Hindi cinema: they are often simultaneously the most liberated *and* the most objectified woman. As Laura Mulvey observes, the unequal relation between women and men in cinema is not just limited to relations of word or deed but discernible in the image itself:

> "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. Women displayed as sexual object is the leit-motif of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to striptease, from Ziegfield to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire. Mainstream film neatly combined spectacle and

[97] Virdi, *The Cinematic Imagination*, 168. Jyotika Virdi's insight that Helen's Christian and Anglo-Indian roots are a crucial cause of her eventual punishment provides us an instance of an ontological transgression.

> narrative. (Note, however, how in the musical song-and-dance numbers break the flow of diegesis). The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation"[98].

Let us use Mulvey's basic insight (in cinema, *men look while women are looked at*) as a starting point to briefly investigate a domain to which Mulvey refers in her classic essay - the song-and-dance number. Consider a couple looking at each other, a mutual look. Mutual looks are of three kinds: *equal* when both are looking at each other at eye level; *male-dominant*, when a man is exchanging looks with a woman from some height (e.g. he is standing over her) and *female-dominant*, when a woman is doing the same with a man from some height (e.g. she is standing over him).

If the pair is not looking at one another, their looks could be of two kinds: *indifferent*, when the woman or man does not recognize (or seem to recognize) that the other is looking at her; and *reactive*, when she or he displays this recognition through an oblique gesture. This distinction is slightly blurred at times (one cannot absolutely know whether the recognition has taken place or not), yet it will be crucial for the analysis. For if the person recognizes that the other is looking at her, the intensity of her reaction suggests the effect of the other's gaze on her. In Hindi film depictions, her common reaction is either *irritated* or *shy*. While shyness, the inability to meet the other's eye, is largely the woman's prerogative (reinforcing her as bearer of *shame*), the man in Hindi film songs occasionally acts shyly, averting his gaze (e.g. Amitabh in 'Yaari Hai Imaan Mera' from *Zanjeer* and 'Pardesiya' from *Mr. Natwarlal*).

[98] Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 19.

On the other hand, *if the person remains indifferent to the other's look, she may remain the object of his look but not internalize that objectification in her behavior.* Consider the utter abandon with which Helen dances in a cabaret song (without being least affected by the scores of onlooking men), in contrast to the virtuous heroine's shy avoidance of the hero's gaze.

Mulvey's basic insight is that as long as films predominantly show men looking at women, the woman remains objectified. In this broader sense, Helen is no different from the virtuous heroine; her reduction for male pleasure is too obvious from the flimsy dresses she is made to wear and the camera angles that highlight her breasts or legs, or the manner in which the camera frames Helen from the point of view of the men in her audience, encouraging us to occupy their seats.

Yet the objectification of the M-woman may have startling consequences: in Helen's case, it grants her a freedom, perhaps temporary but freedom nonetheless, that is not only much greater than the virtuous heroine but even than that of the hero. If, for a moment, one brackets out her obvious objectification, Helen's constant movement from man to man (compared to the stiff heroine fixed to her chair and identity, e.g. the contrast between Helen and Asha Parekh in 'Piya Tu Ab Toh Aaja'), her total *indifference to outer threats and her complete lack of shame* makes her an exemplary role model in the M-universe.

This contradiction between *unattainable object* (the woman reduced to her body) and *inimitable subject* (the perpetually enjoying being) is found at the core of the 'item girl'. This irreconcilable contradiction reaches its high point in 'Sheila ki Jawani', an 'item number' in *Tees Maar Khan* (2009)

where the woman (Katrina Kaif) can have it both ways: she wears minimal clothes *and* is barely objectified by the camera angles or by the look and touch of her male co-dancers. Further, the song is mediated by two gazes – the director *in* the film (Farah Khan) and a wildly approving male spectator, whose excited gestures are directed not at the woman's body but at her bold assertion of narcissistic enjoyment, an assertion as much physical (like Helen) as it is verbal ('I don't need anyone else; I love myself').

Helen's songs, in contrast, often feature three kinds of men: first, the drunk admirers that watch her body and sometimes dance to her rhythms; second, an inscrutable man whose gaze remains steady or switches between mild interest and disinterest; third, an angry, upset or disapproving man or men (at times his anger is driven by lust, e.g. 'Mungra', or sometimes he is a she, the jealous heroine, as in 'Aa Raat Jati Hai Chupke Se'); this third man is at times shown in closeups of his fearsome face. In her earlier dance sequences, the angry or disapproving man was largely absent, as if the other disinterested man (Dev Anand in *Jaali Note*, Dilip Kumar in *Yahudi*) was enough to gently chastise the woman (though traces of even such implicit judgement are almost absent in 'Mera Naam Chin Chin Choo').

While the cool, mildly interested spectator enjoys in moderation and the angry viewer is marked by his inability to enjoy, Helen is enjoyment personified. Helen does not just enjoy dancing, she dances to enjoy; each step of her dance accentuates her euphoria: "gestures of self-adulation (as when she stroked her own body) or abasement (falling to the floor, rolling on it) or teasing (quick touches, lap-sitting) or even ersatz copulation (lying on her back, jerking her pelvis into the

camera)"[99]. The pinnacle of her enjoyment is reached in 'Piya Tu Ab Toh Aaja', which has her dancing in a mad sexual frenzy for her absent lover. When he finally arrives ('Monica O My Darling'), she rushes towards his cage but realizes that her dress is tied to the table. In the next shot, the camera shifts to the knot's point of the view: Helen madly struggles, teeth bared, to free her dress as we, the spectators, hold her back. In desperation, *she turns around, takes off her dress and throws it at the camera*; the song ends with a shot of consummation as the entwined bodies merge into the shadows.

'Piya Tu' is thus split between an obvious objectification (the spectator holds Helen back, as well as indirectly undresses her) and an almost unprecedented assertion of sexual freedom (not merely the act of removing clothes but its barely disguised purpose, a blatantly conscious defiance of all patriarchal restrictions), an act so extreme that the self-undressing is immediately followed by a closeup of Helen's face biting her red dress, as if to certify her as insane.

Helen's unbridled enjoyment is independent of her spectators, for at no point does one feel that she is performing *for* them, as proved by the fact that even when she focuses on one particular man, his reaction or lack of reaction rarely influences her own expressions or steps. Conversely, the scopophilia (pleasure in looking) of her spectators secretly makes *them* dependent on this 'object' for their enjoyment.

Hegel's master-slave dialectic thus both contradicts and complements Laura Mulvey's model; the male spectator is *both* master of his gaze and dependent on an external 'object', whose enjoyment is independent of his gaze; his tragedy is, being a mere viewer, he can never approximate that

[99] Pinto, 'The Woman Who Could Not Care' in *First Proof: The Penguin Book of New Writing from India 1*, 57.

supreme level of enjoyment. In parallel, the dancer is slave to the camera (ultimately all her movements are carefully choreographed for the camera) *and* radically independent (the aura of pure, spontaneous enjoyment, unmatched by any other character).

The mythical self-enjoying subject, epitomized by Helen, does not require an outside object for her pleasure; as such, her existence marks a paradox at the heart of patriarchy and its male gaze: without this aura of enjoyment (the woman simply as object, a collection of body parts), the objectification is never complete; on the other hand, this necessary supplement is the germ of a completely different order, the order of enjoyment, the M-order.

…

Through this long interlude, we have thus arrived at our starting point: a more precise definition of *masculinization* (a transition from M or F to M') and of *feminization* (a movement from M or M' to F). Before we end this discussion, let us briefly look at the ambiguities in these four categories, for they are not mutually exclusive:

M-M' ambiguity: The hedonist's pursuit of enjoyment often intersects with phallic domination. Consider the desire for an expensive commodity, a car or an iPhone; the enjoyment derived from such an object clearly has phallic connotations, signifying a higher status over others. In *Shaan*, for instance, there is a sexist comparison between a car and a woman; the two heroes gaze at two different objects, a car and a woman, and verbally imagine the joys of possessing it (her), while believing all the time that the other is watching the same object.

Many memorable villains of Hindi cinema are also steeped in this ambiguity of phallic domination and the enjoying self: in *Sholay*, Gabbar Singh plays games with his victims before killing them, using those hapless individuals as devices for enjoyment; in *Mr. India*, Mogambo's face is suffused with childlike happiness whenever he receives good news ('Mogambo khush hua'); Ajit's sexual trysts with Mona in *Yaadon ki Baaraat* are still etched in public memory.

The villains in Hindi cinema were perhaps the original free spirits, recklessly pursuing pleasure for pleasure's sake, but for a slight problem: they did not obey the liberal limit to their enjoyment, which prohibits hurting others for one's happiness. Their M-drive towards pleasure (and the medium of pleasure, money) would inevitably turn them into M'-figures, dominating and exploiting others for their advantage.

M'-F ambiguity: We have noted that although the phallic man (M', strong and invulnerable) and the weak woman (F, weak and vulnerable) are radically opposed, phallic masculinity itself conceals a weakness, the fear of vulnerability. Consider the case of the *desperate* man who, while striving to woo a woman, tries to hold her hand, kiss her or harass her by other means. This kind of spontaneous harassment is very different from a planned, systematic harassment designed to crush the woman's resistance, for here the desperado exposes his *powerlessness* over the situation; his vain gestures are a hopeless bid to restore his vanity, his phallic persona, but they clearly do not work, they are in vain.

The desperate suitor must be contrasted with the stalker, for instance Shahrukh Khan in *Darr*, a *creep* who is essentially oblivious of the woman's emotions; for him every 'no' means 'yes'. *Darr*'s stalker, a figure split between M and M', does not care for the symbolic games of proving himself superior to the woman's lover (and later, husband) in order to please or impress her; he simply wants the woman at all costs for his own happiness (though unlike the stereotypical villain, he sincerely believes that the woman's true happiness also lies with him).

A third kind is the *phallic harasser* who, as we have seen, aims to systematically crush the woman's resistance through a combination of seduction and violence; he sees the woman's independence in symbolic terms, not just as an obstacle to his desire to possess her, but as a threat to his manhood and to patriarchy per se. The phallic man sees himself as the most recent player in an ancient game of resistance and domination; he is dimly conscious of an entire history of barbarism running through his veins each time he repeats the phallic move of subjugating the woman.

…

F-F' ambiguity: The ambiguity of the feminine position, caught between strong and weak vulnerability, is underlined in Bimal Roy's heroines - enduring-sacrificing women who assume externally caused suffering as voluntary sacrifice, who through their constant struggle in harsh circumstances (excommunication and jail in *Bandini*, marginalization and caste discrimination in *Sujata*) develop the remarkable strength of endurance; women who can obliterate themselves, their desires and happiness, even their existence, for the other's sake.

The problem with this radical selflessness is not only that it serves the patriarchal law but that it is the law's sublime support; without the infinite sacrifices of this woman, the patriarchal law would be experienced by the subordinates as a harsh imposition or simply degenerate into power games; *the enduring woman's sacrifice and suffering ennoble the law.*

It is thus no coincidence that this infinitely suffering heroine became increasingly redundant by the 1970s, at the very point when traditional patriarchy was being eclipsed by a more liberal, enjoyment-centered patriarchy that would give the assertive woman considerable autonomy but punish her later. The mantle of the perpetually suffering and sacrificing woman was passed on to the mother, as if to signify that its time lay in the past, not present.

F'-M ambiguity: In many contemporary feminist films, the woman is burdened by social rules and expectations. She is forced to either revolt or create for herself a double life (*Lipstick Under My Burkha, Secret Superstar*, *Parched*) in which she pursues her desires in secret while maintaining the public face of acquiescence to the paternal law. At the penultimate moment, her secret life explodes into the public domain; at this traumatic point, we see the coincidence of the radical feminine (F') and the private seeker of happiness (M), whose desire for freedom[100] acts as a radical rupture in the community (the family in *Secret Superstar*, the village in *Parched*).

This coincidence of the seeker of happiness and the rebel against the community (family or village) also answers an elementary question regarding the inconsistency of happiness: why was the M-

[100] Freedom is defined differently for different subjects: for the M-individual, freedom lies in experiencing pleasures of various kinds (as long as they don't threaten); for the sacrificing F-subject, freedom means the ability to renounce everything; the phallic M'-subject would define his freedom as the power to make new conquests.

category (the quest for happiness), till recently, the most *unstable* category of Hindi cinema? The M-man either faced death or masculinization (or in earlier films feminization through suffering, e.g. *Awara*); the M-woman, on the other hand, was inevitably feminized.

The answer is not simply that the phallic masculine (M') and the weak feminine (F) were considered desirable modes of being for man and woman respectively, but that, in the eyes of most Hindi films, M-existence was itself evil for two opposite reasons: unrestrained enjoyment-seeking was seen as a threat to the hierarchized family or community, pleasure opposed to obedience to authority; on the other hand, the hedonistic excesses of the rich were portrayed in certain films as inherently based on the exploitation of the poor.

M'-F' ambiguity: The question of the vigilante: is this man's victory over oppressive social forces (the family, the villain) an elevation to a phallic status (M'), following the logic of domination and conquest, or is the hero a radically feminine character (F') whose final victory is genuinely subsumed into the victory of those oppressed by the villain, be it the woman, the family or the people? What if the 'hero' is a woman who takes revenge on a patriarchal man, like in *Mom*, where a mother (Sridevi) kills her daughter's rapist: is her revenge phallic or not?

As seen earlier, in the case of *Mard* vs *Dushman*, the phallic masculine figure is often presented by a film as a radical figure by disguising his machismo in the cloak of vulnerability. In films that intensely focus on the hero's vulnerability such that it is inextricably mixed with his successes, it becomes correspondingly more difficult to distinguish between the phallic and the radical.

Another significant factor lies not in the hero's actions but outside him, in the nature of the protected person or persons, for whom the hero is waging his war. If they remain F-subjects till the end, docile and suffering, the hero's war should probably be called phallic; on the other hand, if they are inspired by the hero's actions to join him *as equals*, a phallic explanation of the hero's actions becomes more untenable.

A third factor is the extent to which the hero's revolt is related to the wider system and his own consciousness about the systemic causes of his oppression; the more a film portrays his struggle as a battle against a singular villain (the fount of all evil), or abstract social forces (*desh ke dushman*, enemies of the nation), the more phallic connotations it should have, and vice versa.

M-F ambiguity: Though the M-protagonist, a person who seeks happiness above all, is increasingly accepted as the norm in Hindi cinema post 2000, she often conceals a secret vulnerability, a nagging point of suffering: in *Highway* (2014), the woman was abused in childhood; in *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* (2011) and *Dil Dhadakne Do* (2015), breakups and estrangement from family; career problems in *Pyar ka Punchnama* (2011).

In more perceptive films, a hedonistic, commodity-driven existence brings its own problems - a sense of emptiness (*Oye Lucky Lucky Oye, Cocktail*), a withdrawal from love (*Yeh Jawaani Hai Diwani*), an inability to elevate one's desire to the absolute (*Lakshya*, in the first part). In all these films, though the subject is 'living her life' (a euphemism for maximizing enjoyment), she is secretly unhappy.

Finally, the four modes of being – M, M', F and F' – must be thoroughly historicized. The pleasure-seeking rogues in *Sholay,* for instance, are very different from the upwardly mobile designer-wear hero or heroine of today; consumerism (and the corresponding exclusion of non-consumerism, i.e. poverty) permeates today's mainstream to such an extent that even the protagonist's life could be understood as a reaction to this maze of commodities around her; either a joyful celebration of the fluid means of enjoyment they offer, or more rarely, an inarticulate longing for a more stable ground of being (epitomized in *Oye Lucky Lucky Oye*).

…

Let me end this chapter by proposing three ideal categories of films, all of which have existed since the early days of Hindi cinema, yet they have achieved their high points in different periods in history. These categories are ideal in the sense that no real film completely fits into any of them; they are simply useful points of reference to track certain shifts in Hindi cinema. An exhaustive historicization of these categories, or of their constitutive modes of being, is beyond the scope of the present book, which in subsequent chapters, will only seek to establish a reliable method of enquiry into Hindi cinema.

Thesis 3: *From the inception of Hindi cinema, a popular category of the Hindi film has been of man and/or woman incessantly suffering in a harsh world, either because of a vile society or an obscure fate. The suffering couple's formula is F-F; any film in which the establishment of this couple or individual occupies a major role is part of the regime of suffering, or F-regime, its high point being from the 1930s*

to the 1950s. E.g. Devdas (1936 & 1955), *Achhut Kannya, Rattan, Zeenat, Jogan, Awara, Do Bigha Zameen, Mother India, Jagte Raho, Pyaasa, Kaagaz ke Phool.*

Corollary: *The meta-genre for the F-regime is tragedy; either complete destruction or the intervention of fate to reverse the individual's or the couple's fortunes at the penultimate moment (Parineeta, Sujata, Guide).*

Though in the F-regime man and woman roughly occupy similar positions (both are suffering/sacrificing F-figures), a subtle gender hierarchy is often installed in their relationship: the man suffers for a higher cause (or against a larger enemy), while the woman suffers for the man's sake and sacrifices for him, like in *Awaara* and *Pyaasa*.

We see the F-F logic at work even in the 1990s. In both *Roja* and *Bombay*, the tortured man is allowed to be a sacrificing nationalist by subsuming his family in the nation, but the woman is not given such a choice; her trauma concerns her immediate family, the husband in *Roja* (after being lectured on national interest, she still insists on rescuing her husband) and the children in *Bombay* (she remains obsessed with the children even as her husband gives the rioters a sermon on peace and national unity).

…

Thesis 4: *In many Hindi films, the man must achieve a masculinization (M to M') and the woman a corresponding feminization (M to F) as the (patriarchal) condition for them to finally unite. The classic*

patriarchal couple's formula is denoted by M'-F; any film in which the establishment of this form of the couple occupies a major role, is part of the phallic regime or the M'-regime, its high point being from the 1970s to the 1990s. E.g. Sholay, Tezaab, Dil, Mohra.

Corollary: *The meta-genre for the M'-regime is romance, not the love story but a tale in which the hero triumphs over tests of his strength and courage and is rewarded in the end with social approval and union with his lover. Unlike the overarching role of fate (or society) in the tragedy, the hero's victory in romance is largely determined by his own efforts.*

Madhava Prasad has argued that, from the 1950s to the 1990s at least, the feudal family romance remained the dominant textual form in Hindi cinema, an archetype it borrowed from the west: "The romance was typically a tale of love and adventure, in which a high-born figure, usually a prince, underwent trials that tested his courage and at the end of which he would return to inherit the father's position and to marry"[101].

Though it is true that the romance was quite a common narrative in the 1950s, it could not explain the enormity of suffering endured by so many protagonists in that decade, ending either in their destruction (*Mother India*, *Kaagaz ke Phool*, *Sahib Bibi aur Ghulam*) or a muted redemption (*Awara*, *Pyaasa*). The *grand* happy ending, marked by the hero's decisive triumph that enhances his phallic glory, appears to have become a *normal* feature of Hindi cinema only by the 1970s[102].

[101] Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film*, 30.

[102] The phallic regime enjoyed wide popularity till the late 1990s and early 2000s; Steve Derné notes that even in more liberal films like *Mohabbatein* and *Chori Chori Chupke Chupke*, the scene where the man rescues a woman was almost mandatory:

Thesis 5: *In many other Hindi films, the man and/or woman must carve a space of freedom, the freedom to enjoy, within or outside structures which restrict them. The enjoyment-couple's formula is M-M; any film in which the establishment of this couple or individual occupies a major role is part of the enjoyment regime, or M-regime, its high point being roughly from 2000 to the present. E.g. Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (an important precursor), Dil Chahta Hai, Yeh Jawaani Hai Diwani, the Golmaal and Masti series.*

Corollary: *The meta-genre for the M-regime is comedy, for enjoyment is the basis of the M-subject.*

Like the F-F regime, the M-M regime does not always accomplish gender equality. Though notionally equal, the man often implicitly has greater privileges (premarital sex, multiple liaisons, travelling in solitude or with friends) than the woman, what we may call a *differential patriarchy*.

The problem with the above historicization is that one can instantly think of tens of 'exceptions' to this historical sketch of Hindi cinema– the fearless Nadia films of the 1930s (counter to the F-F regime); Dev Anand and Shammi Kapoor films in the 1950s and 1960s (figures of enjoyment, as opposed to the F-F regime); the regularly dying Amitabh Bachchan, the female rogues of *Parvarish* and *Manoranjan* in the 1970s and 1980s (against the M'-F regime), and the interventions of the middle-class genre; and, finally, the macho Salman Khan and Ajay Devgan films post 2010 (against

"(F)ilms continue to present men as powerful protectors and women as constantly threatened. A hero's protection of women who are threatened is still an important theme of fighting-and-killing films which continue to play to large, mostly male, audiences even though the biggest money is in romances. In films like Officer and Zahareela… the main theme is of a hero protecting a heroine, wife, or sister who is continually threatened outside the home. (In some instances, the heroine may fall in love with the hero precisely because of this protection.) The centrality of this theme in Officer is apparent in the hoardings which celebrate the hero as "The Protector."" Derné, *Globalization on the Ground*, 178.

the M-M regime). Whether these regimes are as general as I have suggested above remains an open question, subject to detailed verification. Secondly, the question of exactly *why* these regimes gain strength at certain historical junctures belongs to the domain of a political economy of Hindi cinema (a task begun by Madhava Prasad and Valentina Vitali among others), which would complement, and hopefully be complemented by, a larger historical study in the future.

CHAPTER 3: TRANSGRESSION ANALYSIS: METHOD

In the previous chapter, we had defined four prominent modes of being (M, M', F, F') in Hindi cinema and studied their internal and interrelated ambiguities. Three regimes (F-regime, M'-regime and the M-regime) were constructed from these categories in order to briefly examine certain historical shifts in Hindi cinema.

Since the early 2000s, Hindi cinema has witnessed the rise of an M-regime of enjoyment-driven subjects: pleasure, freedom and desire are inseparable in this matrix. This recent development is in almost total contrast to many of the famous films of the 1950s, which featured innumerable scenes of brutal suffering (F-regime) in a harsh world. In the framework of transgression analysis, these poor protagonists were often being punished for their own implicit or explicit crimes (though, again, this must be confirmed in each instance). The chief function of punishment here, as elsewhere, was the *feminization* of the transgressing subject.

Let us now begin this chapter by defining certain common terms for our analysis:

Action: In the weak sense, an action is any movement in the plot of the film. The film is a flow of scenes, and each scene a flow of actions, which range from the most insignificant (a bird chirping) to the most significant (a catastrophe). In the strong sense, an action or act is any movement which diverts the flow of scenes.

Actions are of two types: a) *subjective*: action performed by a human character; b) *objective*: action that occurs without human agency (a natural disaster) or where human agency plays an insignificant part (a car accident). Objective actions are often the points at which the film itself intervenes in the flow of scenes, that is, they correspond to the subjectivity of the film.

Subjective actions are of four types: a) *pure action*, conducted in silence or without self-reference (cooking, running); b) *word-and-action,* in which words are accompanied or followed by the promised action (e.g. a person cooking vegetables may shout from the kitchen: 'I'm making dinner'); c) *word-as-action*, in which words divert the flow of scenes in a film, i.e. words intervene in fate (e.g. an advice or chastisement which changes a character's subsequent actions) and d) *word-as-symbol*, the weakest action that has no effect on the flow of scenes (e.g. chastisement that does not change a character's subsequent actions, like in *Pati Patni aur Woh*, where the husband remains a philanderer in the end, even after being chastised by his wife).

Moral law: A consistent set of rules implicitly operating in a film that determines desirable and undesirable actions and punishes the latter accordingly. Usually referred to as Fate (*naseeb, kismat*) or God in the film. In complex films, the moral law is itself found ambiguous or internally contradictory, opening itself to multiple readings.

Transgression: A subjective action that violates the moral law in the film. A subjective action is deciphered as a (possible) transgression through a subsequent scene of suffering, which is itself only a possible punishment. In addition, the transgression must be socially recognizable *qua* transgression.

Transgressions are of the following types: a) *deliberate*, when the transgression is willfully committed; b) *involuntary*, when the transgression is inadvertently committed; c) *regular,* a transgression followed by punishment in the next scene; d) *cumulative*, when the transgression is allowed to accumulate in consecutive scenes with little check until a sudden blow of fate; g) *maximum,* referring to that transgression at the end of the chain of cumulative transgressions (often its highest point); f) *ontological or structural*, when the very existence of the subject as such or her presence in a certain setting is counted as a transgression (e.g. sex worker, Dalit, transgender, orphan, bastard); g) *conscious*, when the transgression is underlined in the film (via a character's remark, voiceover, background music); h) *unconscious*, when the transgression is not underlined in the film but discerned from a punishment in the next scene; i) *symbolic*, when the transgression does not intervene in diverting the flow of events in the film, or does so only temporarily; j) *real*, when the transgression succeeds in decisively diverting the flow of events in the film.

Let me clarify with a few examples. In *Madhumati*, a tribal woman (Vyjayanthimala) commits the *deliberate transgression* of falling in love with a caste-Hindu man (Dilip Kumar) and 'marrying' him in secret. The same woman commits an *involuntary transgression* when she arrives alone at the villain's castle after being falsely told that her lover is injured; this transgression is also *regular* as it is almost immediately followed by a punishment (attempted rape and death). Her affair with the Hindu man is also a *cumulative transgression*, which though threatened by her father's disapproval and the villain's lust, carries on for a substantial part of the film. Her *maximum transgression* is the secret marriage, the highest point of her cumulative transgression.

The heroine's transgression is also *structural* as she is a non-Hinduized tribal woman (for her tribe buries their dead instead of cremating them), thus her love affair is prohibited in Hinduism. That the film views the doomed affair on these lines is confirmed in the climax: we learn that the woman has apparently been reincarnated as *a caste-Hindu woman* (Radha) and is happily married to the hero's reincarnation. A more pertinent example of an ontological transgression would be *Sujata*, in which a Dalit girl (Nutan) is adopted into a Brahmin family but always treated as an outsider (a glorified maidservant, to be precise). Her transgression is both *ontological* (related to her caste at birth and adopted status) and *involuntary* (for *she* hasn't chosen this state of circumstances).

Structural or ontological transgressions are more powerfully tied to the identity of the subject (who she is) than to her actions (what she does), even though many routine transgressions have a structural basis: a woman walking alone in the middle of the night is transgressing because of her identity (a woman) and her actions (alone at night) but a sex worker or a transgender person often randomly faces taunts, beatings and ridicule, irrespective of the setting in which she finds herself.

In *Madhumati*, the tribal woman's transgression is *conscious,* for she is chastised by her father for her affair. A conscious transgression need not be deliberate: Sujata's transgression (her caste) is conscious, continually invoked by her adoptive parents and relatives, though it is involuntary. The light-hearted sexual exchange of the boy's parents in *Do Bigha Zamin,* just before the cruel *zamindar* enters the film, is an *unconscious transgression* because nowhere is it explicitly suggested as transgression. In *Mughal-e-Azam*, Anarkali's last night with Salim or her failure to bow before the emperor in the final scene are *symbolic transgressions*, with little repercussions on the narrative; symbolic transgressions thus also double as imaginary redemption for the doer (the viewer marvels

at Anarkali's bravery). Most of the transgressions we have studied so far, however, are *real transgressions,* which decisively redirect the flow of events in a film. E.g. the boy's theft in *Do Bigha Zamin* leads to his mother's accident and to eventual dispossession from their land.

Determining the point of maximum transgression can lead to some fascinating discoveries, for instance, in *Bombay* – a love story between a Hindu man and a Muslim woman, which leads to their marriage but is brutally interrupted by the Bombay riots of 1992-93.

If we disregard the montage, communal disharmony in *Bombay* enters the couple's lives (in the form of a Hindu right-wing group asking for donations) exactly after a scene in which the man's father, a strict Brahmin, allows the Muslim woman's family into his home. The Bombay riots properly break out after the couple's sexual intimacy in bed (followed by the song 'Kuchi Kuchi Rakma', with prominent sexual undertones). The man's father is almost attacked *after* his grandson rubs out the caste marks on his forehead in fear; in the next scene, the house catches fire and both fathers die just after the Brahmin father tries to save the Quran by clutching it in his hands – the maximum transgression of this character.

The real problem in *Bombay* is thus not only the inter-religious couple's elopement and subsequent marriage (a nuclear idyll) but the intermixing of the religions of their fathers, especially the Hindu father. The Brahmin's loss of purity – by allowing Muslims into house, saving the Quran, removing his caste marks - is probably a powerful unconscious factor at work in *Bombay*, as confirmed by the climax of the film.

For when do the communal riots actually end? Just after two conditions are met: first, the hero declares himself as not a Hindu, but an Indian, cancelling his membership in Hinduism and removing any ambiguity about a possible corruption of the Hindu faith; second, the anti-riot protesters defend the victims of the opposite faith as their symbolic sisters and brothers. A final scene shows the achievement of peace: Muslims returning to their Muslim families, and vice versa. *Bombay* thus encourages *abstract* solidarity between religions (Indians as composed of Hindus, Muslims and pure faithless Indians) but it severely punishes the defiling/intermixing of religions.

…

Punishment: An infliction of suffering, chastisement or death on the transgressing subject. Punishments can often be discerned from scenes of suffering, conflict and violence in the film, melodramatic scenes *par excellence*.

Punishments are of the following types: a) *deliberate*, when the punishment is subjectively given by a character for a known transgression, punishment *qua* punishment; b) *accidental*, when the punishment occurs as an accident (car crash, natural disaster, fall from stairs); c) *regular*, when the punishment follows a transgression in the preceding scene; d) *cumulative*, when the punishment is stretched across several scenes in succession, signaling a major transgression; e) *ontological or structural*, when the subject is continuously punished for his transgressive existence (e.g. sex worker, Dalit, orphan/bastard etc.); f) *conscious*, when the punishment is underlined in the film (through crashing background music, thunder etc.); g) *unconscious*, when the punishment is not underlined in the film and therefore seems unrelated to any transgression; h) *immanent*, when both transgression

and punishment occur in the same scene; i) *symbolic*, when the punishment does not stop the flow of a transgression (in other words, a *threat*); j) *real*, when punishment stops the steady flow or intensification of a transgression.

Again, a few examples are in order. In *Madhumati*, the father harshly chastises the woman for engaging in a clandestine affair with a non-tribal man, a *deliberate* and *conscious punishment*. Yet the father's chastisement is also a *symbolic punishment*, for it cannot stop the romance from developing. In contrast, Madhumati's attempted rape and death after her symbolic marriage is a *real punishment* since it stops the transgressive romance altogether; it is also a *regular punishment* (immediately following a transgression) and an *unconscious punishment*, for the film does not make the connection explicit. Deliberate punishments are, as a rule, conscious, but not vice versa, e.g. when the punishing agent punishes the subject for a different reason (but the transgression is underlined by another character or in another manner).

The hero's prolonged suffering after Madhumati's death is a case of *cumulative punishment*. Sujata's almost endless suffering in *Sujata* is an *ontological punishment* (for she is a Dalit woman living in a Brahmin's house); ontological transgressions and punishments are always paired together, yet the *moment* at which the punishment arrives is also crucial, for the role of ontological punishments is to enhance the *severity* of ordinary punishments. The mother's accident in *Do Bigha Zamin* is, of course, an *accidental punishment*; the father's rickshaw accident as a failed bid to procure extra money is, as we observed earlier, is both *accidental* and an *immanent punishment*, for both transgression and punishment occur in the same scene.

Redemption: A restoration of the subject to the previous normalcy or to a higher level of being after her punishment or the latter directly after transgression (a reward, in other words). Normalcy may include a pardon, the extolling of transgression, the extolling of punishment as unmerited, the subjective assumption of the punishment as sacrifice, the intensification of the transgression after a brief punishment, or simply a forgetting (the punishment stops without any explanation).

Redemption is of the following types: a) *deliberate*, when the subject corrects her transgressive 'error' or begs for forgiveness; b) *accidental*, when fate rewards the subject through a miracle (a union of lovers etc.); c) *regular*, when the redemption follows a punishment in the preceding scene; d) *cumulative*, a period of continued bliss, sometimes after a particularly severe punishment; e) *ontological*, when a character is excepted from the transgression-punishment logic, though other characters around her bear the consequences of their actions (e.g. Ashok Kumar in *Kismat*); f) *conscious*, when the redemption is underlined in the film (mercy, human or divine); g) *unconscious*, when the redemption is deduced from the change in tone; h) *immanent*, when punishment and redemption lie in the same scene; i) *imaginary*, when redemption offers a brief respite from punishment but cannot prevent the flow of punishment in the following scenes; j) *real*, when redemption stops the flow of punishment.

Again, a few examples. The common scene of villains begging (and receiving) forgiveness in the end is an instance of *deliberate* redemption; the child-thief in *Do Bigha Zamin* renouncing the stolen money on seeing his mother dead and then finding her alive is also an example of the same. Additionally, the renunciation, followed by the revelation that his mother is alive, is an *immanent* redemption, for punishment and redemption occur together, as well as *conscious* (mother is safe).

In *Mere Mehboob*, a man convinces his sister to leave her dishonorable dancing profession; in the next scene, he is miraculously picked as the Urdu teacher for a woman he has been searching for since ages, an *accidental* redemption. This incredible turn of events is not underlined in the film (*unconscious* redemption) but it is a *real redemption* nonetheless, marking a decisive breakthrough in the narrative.

…

Thesis 1: *If a film does not simply depict reality as it is but constructs a fiction around that reality, the God who distributes rewards and punishments in the film is, in the final analysis, the film itself. Yet the film acts as a self-reflexive critique of this God's morality if a) the agency of punishment is the explicit oppressor or obstacle to her desire and not an act of God (a sudden illness, accident, natural disaster) or a parallel plot-line; b) the punishment is not subtly justified or extolled by the subject (as a sacrifice) or by other characters; and c) 'unrelated' or secret transgressions are not introduced into the plot in order to justify the subject's punishment.*

Corollary: *The accident (including ordinary accidents, disease, and natural disasters) reflects the ethical position of the film; they are points where the film itself intervenes to punish its characters.*

In *Achhut Kannya*, an 'untouchable' woman sacrifices her life to save the passengers of an oncoming train, a punishment for her sexual indiscretion of returning home with her lover. This punishment, which is subjectively assumed by the woman as sacrifice as well as extolled by other characters in

the end, is therefore justified by the film. The second proof that the film sides against its heroine comes from the arbitrary nature of the train accident (the explicit enemy - society, husband - is not involved in the woman's murder).

In *Kedarnath*, a Brahmin woman (Sara Ali Khan) woos a Muslim body-porter (Sushant Singh Rajput) on the way to the Hindu pilgrim site of Kedarnath. The two fall in love and all attempts to stop the heroine's audacious passion fail until the man learns of her (apparently) promiscuous nature from her sister ('I know her inside out. Every month some poor guy comes to ask her hand in marriage').

The heroine proves her fidelity to her lover by waiting outside his home in heavy rain, and he, in the spur of the moment, carries her into his house. This gesture quickly assumes a double meaning: though literally, it is nothing more than a mark of platonic concern on his part, the move is read by the heroine's family as a sign of sexual intercourse, ruining the family's reputation. The film abruptly switches tracks, and the lovers bear endless waves of suffering, including the heroine's marriage to a pre-arranged suitor, after which in another sign of defiance, she cuts her wrists.

It is at this point that the infamous Kedarnath floods arrive, and at first their significance in the story is ambiguous: though the news of the incoming floods is timed with the forced marriage, the first signs of heavy rainfall appear on the night when the man took his beloved to his house, the pivotal transgression in the film. A natural disaster could either kill the couple (a divine punishment) or unite them by metaphorically clearing the ground of hitherto stacked up traditions (paving the way for their reunion).

Unfortunately, the film takes a third path; in the tradition of James Cameron's *Titanic*, it kills the Muslim hero and saves the Hindu girl. Moreover, the lovers are materially separated by death yet both are symbolically redeemed: the poor Muslim man gives up his life to save his beloved and other Hindu passengers, while the woman remains unmarried and devoted to her lost lover (à la *Titanic*).

The inter-religious romance is thus effectively ended not by the parents themselves (which would have highlighted the injustice, instead of dissolving it) but by a neutral disaster. It is no accident that the man who sacrificed his life to save the Hindu family was a Muslim, nor that throughout the film, he continually tries to appease the Hindus by citing his own proximity to Hindu culture; *Kedarnath* gives us the ideal persona of a self-sacrificing, Hinduized Muslim who nevertheless remains an unfit husband for a Brahmin girl (hence his elimination).

Despite his spectacular sacrifice, the film sides against the Muslim porter because a) it justifies his punishment as a sacrifice that he voluntarily undertakes; b) the punishment of death is not meted by the enemy, the Brahmin family or community, but by an impersonal agency, the Kedarnath floods, an act of God, which acts on behalf of the Brahmin family to prevent the blasphemous union.

In *Mr. India,* a little child is killed in a bomb blast. The film's position, one would think, would obviously be against the bomber (Mogambo) and on the side of the little girl, but a transgression analysis indicates that the film's position on this event is thoroughly ambiguous; though the film will of course punish Mogambo by death in the end, it also introduces little complications to subtly shift the blame on to the girl. First, she is an orphan with no record of a family, a category of characters in Hindi cinema who routinely receive extreme punishment for the most minor faults. Second, if we

leave her childlike innocence or ignorance aside, she is directly responsible for her death; the child was attracted to a toy lying in the playground, and while picking it up, activated the bomb. There is a discernible tradition in Hindi cinema which punishes children's greed, which we shall discuss in the next chapter. Third, and most curiously, the child's death, though the most traumatic point of the film, is quickly forgotten; she is not invoked even once when Mr. India enters Mogambo's lair to vanquish him.

…

My final example is not from Hindi cinema, but a Bengali film, Ritwik Ghatak's *Meghe Dhaka Tara*. At first sight, the woman (Supriya Devi), who is exploited throughout the film by her family, is on the verge of death because of a completely unrelated problem: tuberculosis. Many Hindi films would have turned her disease into an opportunity for a tearful family reunion (absolving its culpability) or redefined her subsequent self-isolation as a bittersweet sacrifice for the family (normalizing the punishment), or let the woman accept her impending death as a work of God or mysterious Fate.

Yet Meghe Dhaka Tara refuses to turn the woman's impending death into a sacrifice that upholds the family norm: first, the woman holds herself responsible for not thwarting her exploitation, a self-accusation which does *not* exculpate the family, and thus also identifying the exploitation, and not the tuberculosis, as the central problem; second, the film ends with the woman's desperate cry that echoes across mountains: '*Brother, I want to live!*' In *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, even though the moral law punishes the woman, the film self-consciously criticizes this moral law, or rather reflexively redefines

it: the woman's transgression is not of dreaming of a brighter future for herself, *but of not pursuing this dream, of allowing all her dreams to be quashed by her ruthless family.*

Through *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, we are now in a position to answer perhaps the most important objection to the ethical position held by transgression analysis, the possibility that the accidents introduced into the film to prevent or stifle the subject's revolt are a *metaphor* for objectively existing social conditions, which would have anyway stifled the transgressions. The enhanced complexity of the plot through the introduction of arbitrariness is a mark of the *creativity* of the filmmaker, who wishes to maintain the separation between art (which communicates its message obliquely) and politics (which presents its message directly, and often, polemically); our analysis in this sense is nothing but a vulgar politicization of a complex work of art, a politicization that ignores the subtle politics the film itself engages in by turning oppressive social conditions into metaphors (accidental catastrophes).

In *Masaan*, for instance, the 'upper-caste' girl (Shweta Tripathi) dies in a bus accident after a relationship with a Dalit boy (Vicky Kaushal) so that the sudden loss of the girl could add layers of depth to *Masaan*'s story, lending it a soulful metaphysical air (set on the banks of the Ganges, the river of life and death) that a portrayal of explicit caste conflict could not[103].

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[103] Such a metaphorization of caste conflict in *Masaan* would, the argument goes, move us powerfully and force us to think on the great injustice of caste divides in modern India. The film certainly achieves the former goal, but does it attain the latter? Like in the case of the suffering-sacrificing heroines of yore, *Masaan* generates tremendous sympathy for the aggrieved Dalit boy, but I believe all the focus on his passive suffering comes at the cost of forgetting the political question – caste in this case. The point is not that films should be necessarily 'activist' in their outlook; on the contrary, *Meghe Dhaka Tara*'s heroine is a passive sufferer till the very end; the only difference is that the film explicitly links her mad grief with the injustice of the (family) system, a move absent in *Masaan*.

Meghe Dhaka Tara's example shows that although the woman's illness is indeed a metaphor for her social exploitation, metaphorization is not allowed to cancel the injustice but enhance it in symbolic terms, a technique possible precisely because *the woman in the end continues to underline the original problem (her exploitation at the hands of her family)*, she refuses to turn this exploitation into a sacrifice ('Brother, I want to live!'), and finally rejects any subjective guilt for transgressions that might have led to her dismal fate (in fact she assumes guilt for the opposite, for not rebelling).

In the case of Hindi cinema, metaphorization frequently leads to the opposite scenario: *the problem of social injustice is turned into a blind act of Fate, effectively depoliticizing it as the will of extra-human factors like God*; *the act of injustice is often turned into a subjectively assumed sacrifice (Achhut Kannya, Kedarnath), normalizing injustice*; *and the original problem of social injustice is sometimes wiped out by revealing it as a misunderstanding or caused by devious villains*.

Thesis 2: *The liberal humanist film (from Achhut Kannya to Bimal Roy to Hrishikesh Mukherjee and Shakti Samanta to Gulzar to Kedarnath) is often a propagator of conservative ideology, for its message frequently lies not so much in its content but in its form. Thus, an apt definition of the liberal humanist film is a film in which the liberal, progressive content is trapped in a conservative form.*

The liberal humanist film, a film which on the surface exculpates everyone in the name of an essentially flawed but always redeemable humanity, often treats one of its own protagonists as the secret enemy. The Muslim porter is therefore both the primary subject of *Kedarnath and* its biggest enemy; the 'untouchable girl' is the heroine of *Achhut Kannya* as well as the perpetrator of the most serious transgression (inter-caste romance, even after marriage) in the film, a crime she pays for

with her own life. Scores of examples from other liberal humanist films of Hindi cinema are discussed in this chapter.

…

Thesis 3: Steps of transgression analysis:

1. *Identify and observe the traumatic scenes; pay close attention to who is punished through suffering, violence, chastisement. Did this character's previous scene involve a transgression? Or is there an immanent transgression - a transgression implicit in that very scene that is being punished?*

2. *The method to discern the immediate transgression in or before the scene of punishment, concealed beneath the flow of the plot, is to remove all context from the scene and strip it down to its bare details. Remember at all times to privilege action and event over word, context and background music (all of which tell the viewer what to feel), otherwise one would be hopelessly confused. For example, in Sholay, Thakur himself shows an interest in marrying his widowed daughter-in-law to Jai, but the moral law prevents this union by killing Jai; the moral law and the paternal figure's explicit words are not the same. In Saat Hindustani, an attempt at gangraping a Christian girl is camouflaged through pleasant background music (the flute, a sign of purity).*

3. *It is necessary to renounce the liberal interpretations encouraged by the film's identifiable, relatable, loveable characters and instead read each scene as an obscene conservative would read it, finding sexual and other transgressions in the most 'innocent' of situations. While this approach would amount to arbitrary and*

even malicious overreading if the scenes are taken individually, the reading is on track if the film consistently punishes those acts in the same or the next scene or, in case it features just once, if similar acts are regularly punished in other Hindi films. For instance, an innocent bhabhi-dewar relationship becomes a major point of transgression in Alaap, and its reverse - the jija-sali relation - is a central point of conflict in Chupke Chupke.

4. *Note whether the punishment cuts short the transgression (real punishment) or allows the transgression to continue or magnify in intensity (symbolic punishment). The more a transgression is allowed to develop in a film, the greater the possibility that it becomes the new moral law.*

5. *Pay special attention to the unconscious transgression, via the inexplicable punishment that dare not reveal its cause, a point at which the film itself intervenes on behalf of the moral law: an accidental injury or death, a sudden attack by the villain or random strangers, a business loss or fraud, a fire, etc.*

6. *Through an analysis of which actions are punished, which rewarded, and which ignored, construct the moral law operating in the film. Examine whether the moral law is internally consistent, whether similar kinds of actions are being consistently punished in the film, or whether it is contradictory.*

7. *The ethical position of the film aligns with the revolting subject if: a) the agency of punishment is the explicit oppressor or obstacle to her desire and not an act of God (a sudden illness, accident, natural disaster) or a parallel plotline; b) the punishment is not subjectively assumed as guilt, justified or extolled in any manner, as sacrifice, fate, karma etc.; and c) unrelated or secret transgressions are not introduced into the plot in order to justify the subject's punishment.*

Thesis 4: *Transgression as cause may function on several levels: immediate cause, displaced cause, efficient cause and/or ultimate cause.*

Corollary*: The logic of transgression-punishment-redemption (T-P-R) is not a unilinear logic; it is a complex network in which multiple people are at times related to the same crime and are punished together or separately.*

Let me clarify this point. In *Maine Pyar Kiya*, the poor heroine (Bhagyashree) is humiliated and thrown out of a rich man's house after she falls in love with his son (Salman Khan); the official reason for their separation is the class divide separating the lovers. Yet a transgression analysis would argue that the heroine is also punished for the following reasons:

a) *Immediate cause*: The woman's immediate transgression (a rarest of the rare crime in Hindi cinema) is to try to kiss her lover just outside his house, a gesture from which he shies away.

b) *Efficient cause*: The punishment is the outcome of a series of amorous transgressions inside the father's house, including an erotically charged song on the terrace at midnight (*Mere Rang Mein*), in which the heroine, contrary to character, is clad in western clothes.

c) *Displaced cause*: The woman is punished for the unconscious transgression of her lover's mother to have chosen her as daughter-in-law without the father's approval. The mother is also ruthlessly chastised and breaks down; she can only watch helplessly as the father unleashes all his rage on her choice of bride.

This little detail, I argue, is also the solution for the mysterious death of the daughter-in-law in *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* who fell down the stairs; her fall from grace came just after she chose her brother-in-law's bride (her own sister) and, violating the protocol of paternal authority, asked him to adorn a family necklace around her sister's neck, sealing the couple's union with her own stamp.

In itself, this may appear as a weak reading of *Hum Aapke Hain Koun*, yet the pattern of a decisive mother-figure being brutally punished is a recurrent trope of all Sooraj Barjatya films in the late 1980s and 1990s: in *Main Pyar Kiya,* the mother is reduced to tears after she happily informs her husband of her choice of daughter-in-law; in *Hum Saath Saath Hain*, the mother (a reincarnated Kaikeyi from the *Ramayan*) is the villain who sends her stepson into exile and breaks up the family; she bitterly repents in the end (repeating 'I have committed a great sin').

The moral law implicit in *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* is so hard to grasp because the father, a permissive liberal, had himself asked the daughter-in-law to choose a bride for his younger son. Yet the sister-in-law's precise transgression was not to choose the bride but *to legitimate the union by herself, without male approval*. Her death is, not surprisingly, a triple punishment; it is followed by the re-establishment of paternal authority and the complete subordination of the two lovers to that law.

d) *Ultimate cause:* A key problem of *Maine Pyar Kiya* (and *Hum Aapke Hain Koun*) is therefore the subordination of the women to the men (their transformation from M to F). The woman's 'excessive' sexuality, reflected in her amorous trysts with her lover *inside* his house, is a product of her pampered childhood. That we do not see this aspect of the heroine clearly (mistaking her to be

a sweet, chaste girl) is because of the presence of another woman in the film – the westernized vamp who repeatedly tries to seduce the hero and thus makes the heroine's actions appear timid in comparison.

Once again, we confront the logic of doubling in Hindi cinema: *if the villain is the father by other means, the vamp is the alter ego of the heroine;* she does what the heroine cannot do without losing her face, the personification of her 'excessive' sexuality. And yet, the two women are indistinguishable when the heroine does commit a sexual transgression (midnight tryst with her lover); the film punishes both women in an equally brutal manner. The difference is that one woman (vamp) is explicitly targeted for her sexuality, while the other is allowed an aura of innocence; the film tries its best to assure us that this woman, an innocent victim of a brutal class divide, is being wrongly targeted.

In *Do Bigha Zamin,* recall that the mother travels alone to the city and is subsequently robbed and molested, before being run over by a car. She is arguably punished for the following reasons:

a) *Immediate cause:* An involuntary transgression – the woman enters an empty house with the stranger, a man who has promised to help her find her family.
b) *Efficient cause:* She has travelled alone to the city, without a male escort. Though she had indeed asked a relative to accompany her, they were separated on the way.
c) *Displaced cause:* She is punished for her son's theft, a link he clarifies when he sees her injured.
d) There is no clearly discernible *ultimate cause.*

In *Madhumati*, the tribal woman is subjected to rape and then falls from the castle terrace and dies because:

a) *Immediate cause:* Believing her lover to be injured and in the villain's castle, she commits the involuntary transgression of entering the castle alone after dark; again, her male escort is kidnapped by the villain's henchmen.

b) *Efficient cause*: In *her* previous scene, she had (symbolically) married her lover in secret, following a series of amorous trysts.

c) No *displaced cause* is visible for this sequence.

d) *Ultimate cause*: The lovers' ultimate crime is to transgress caste boundaries: she is a tribal, he a caste Hindu.

The variety and timing of intersecting transgressions that converge to produce a conspicuous punishment suggests that although Hindi films have been traditionally dismissed as clichéd and formulaic, the sequencing of scenes in a film is not exactly arbitrary but a work of great complexity, a web of intricacies that we ordinarily perceive as irritating, nonsensical or obscure.

CHAPTER 4: TRANSGRESSION ANALYSIS: SEX

In the previous chapter, we delineated a novel method for analyzing transgressions, punishments and redemption in a given film and deciphering its moral law. Let us now investigate a few common types of transgressions concerning gender relations in Hindi cinema:

Sexual transgressions before marriage

Though the father is typically the stern guardian of the unwed woman's sexuality, there are a number of films which feature a liberal, permissive father or, sometimes, a powerless father; in these cases, the task of domesticating the woman's sexuality is given over to the villain, and to a lesser extent, the hero.

In many cases*, the father mysteriously suffers or dies just after the daughter meets her lover, signaling a displaced punishment for her but also a collapse of paternal authority*, which must be supplemented through other means (e.g. by the villain, hero or an accident). In *Kati Patang*, the father commits suicide just after the heroine runs away to her lover; in Mehboob Khan's *Andaz*, the father dies of a heart attack just after the woman, engaged to another woman, meets her suitor at a party; even in Ritwik Ghatak's *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, the father dies just after the woman and her lover meet (possibly opening a buried layer in that film).

The father-daughter relationship has at times an incestuous dimension, yet these do not count as transgressions (i.e. there is no visible punishment). In many films, the father seeks to marry off his daughter only after the threat of romantic love emerges. Incestuous desire is indicated in a number of films: in Kamal Haasan's *Chachi 420* (1997), when the woman sings 'I don't go to my lover, his moustaches tickle me', her father brushes his own moustache; the same father is also a major cause of her divorce. In *Anupama* (1966), a father comes home drunk late at night, bends over and caresses his daughter sleeping on the bed, followed by a close-up of her hand tightening, a shot usually reserved for sexual ecstasy.

In *Awara* (1951), when the hero meets the woman's guardian, Judge Raghunath, who, unknown to him, is his own father, his proposal is rejected ('rather than marrying a vagabond like you, I'd prefer that she remain a spinster, or die'). The hero replies: 'Why not say that you want her to marry a big shot, or maybe some judge?', an answer that scandalizes the judge so greatly that he immediately asks him to get out. The judge's expression of a buried desire ('… I'd prefer she remain a spinster or die') is met with an equally oblique rejoinder ('do you want her to marry… some judge?'), a remark which nevertheless hits the mark and instantly prompts a fierce reaction ('Get out!')[104].

Other sexual transgressions include a woman staying alone or with a man who is not her husband or kin (*Ajanabee*, where the woman is killed), expressions of sexual desire (*Satyakam*, where a woman is raped by a rajah immediately after she confesses her sexual desire to the hero: 'I won't

[104] In *Andaz*, the censors excised a shot showing the woman falling on her liberal, permissive father in bed, unwittingly locating an incestuous dimension in the father-daughter relationship. Vasudevan, 'You cannot live in society – and ignore it', 86.

resist you'), walking alone at night (*Sadak*, where the woman is sold off to a brothel in the next scene) and widow remarriage (the mother's original transgression in *Awara*). In *Henna*¸ the Pakistani woman (Zeba Bakhtiar) dies just after she spends a (chaste) night alone with an Indian man (Rishi Kapoor) in a cave, ostensibly to save his life. Her death is marked by this secret transgression: in the climax, she falls over the body of this Indian man and protects him with her body against a hail of bullets.

In Mehboob Khan's *Andaz* (1949), the woman is punished for (inadvertently) encouraging the advances of a suitor other than her fiancé. Ravi Vasudevan notes a repeated pattern of transgression, punishment and redemption at work in the film: "Neena's move out of the father's space endangers her life, and the narrative introduces a masculine agency to rescue her. In the first instance, when her horse goes out of control, Dilip saves Neena; on a more farcical note, a flashback recounting Neena's first meeting with Rajen, when her car breaks down and he must put it right"[105].

Men are also frequently punished for sexual transgressions. In *Aradhana*, the man dies in a plane accident shortly after he spends a night with his beloved. In *Amanush*, though the hero (Uttam Kumar) is an orphan and alcoholic, each major moment of his downfall is preceded by a sexual transgression, either with the schoolteacher (Sharmila Tagore) or a village girl.

But why do the couple in *Amanush* not cancel their transgression through marriage? Apart from the man's alcoholism, another answer may lie in the curious case of the woman's school, which is burnt down in the end. The woman's employment as a schoolteacher and the man's corresponding

[105] ibid.

unemployment may have been a powerful unconscious factor in preventing their union; in the end, the tables are turned, consummating their marriage. Here as elsewhere, an obscure transformation must occur in the couple's relationship for them to finally unite.

Some of the most famous heroines of Shakti Samanta's films (*Amar Prem, Aradhana, Kati Patang*) are a continuation of Bimal Roy's tragic women (*Parineeta, Sujata, Bandini*), the suffering-enduring F-woman who redeems herself and those around her through her great sacrifices. The price of this nobility is politics; revolting against the system or her male oppressors is tantamount to selfishness, an inner lack of purity. Yet such a characterization of nobility partly misses the point: *the woman is noble precisely because she has fallen in the past*; her nobility, in other words, is penance (*prayaschit*) for her past sins. Any revolt against the world would therefore be a gesture of refusing her debt to Fate and society, an audacious bid to remove herself from the brutal, systemic logic of transgression and punishment.

Samanta's heroines inspire devotion (*shraddha*) and nobility in other characters, despite, or rather because of their wretched conditions. These women do not aspire to raise themselves from the grinding, zero-level existence they inhabit - a servant in *Aradhana* and *Amar Prem*, a widow in *Kati Patang* - instead they are perfectly content to fall into yet more wretchedness if it saves another life. If life were a share market, as Anand babu (Rajesh Khanna) puts it in *Amar Prem*, their obscure satisfaction lies in losing whatever little they have. The heroines are thus distinguished by their apolitical sacrifice, if by politics we mean any attempt to change the system.

At the other extreme is the 'modern' M-woman, a consumer to the core (Anand's absent wife in *Amar Prem*, forever busy in faraway parties), a scheming vamp (Shabnam, or Shabbo, in *Kati Patang*) or just plain silly (the son's girlfriend, played by Farida Jalal, in *Aradhana*). These figures, at once apolitical and embodying politics through their very existence, are either castigated or ignored (Farida is forgotten by the end of *Aradhana*). Their strongest denouncer is Anand Babu of *Amar Prem*, who mourns his loveless marriage by linking love with wifely duties (*'ghar hai, nahi hai; biwi hai, nahi hai'* (I have a home, I don't; I have a wife, I don't)); he is full of praise for his friend's wife who ensures snacks are served on the table every evening.

But this opposition between the enduring feminine and the self-seeking woman, between F and M, is, to an extent, forced, because it has been forced on the suffering, sacrificing heroine by her circumstances. Both *Amar Prem* and *Kati Patang* begin, in their opening scenes, with a revolt against patriarchy: in *Kati Patang*, she prefers love over a forced marriage; in *Amar Prem*, she leaves her marital home after being brutalized by her husband and his new wife.

Each time this *evental possibility* - not just any transgression but one that opens up a new world - is crushed right at inception. In *Amar Prem*, she is tricked into sex work; in *Kati Patang* she realizes her folly on seeing her lover with another woman. When the woman in *Amar Prem* later contemplates leaving the brothel for a new home with Anand babu, this fledgling dream is immediately shattered: in the very next scene, Anand's wife asks her through an emissary to stay away from her husband.

The meetings of *Kati Patang*'s heroine with her lover (Rajesh Khanna, again) are similarly intercut with the return of her past lover who threatens to expose her identity in public; by the end, she

must choose to leave her present lover, a living symbol of the sacrificing feminine and a continuing penance for her past liaison. The case of *Aradhana* is slightly different: the heroine's sexual freedom (coded by the lovers as a temporary loss of control) is allowed to flourish briefly before being brutally punished; within a couple of scenes, her lover is grievously injured in a plane accident and dies, while the woman resigns herself to a life of seclusion and anonymity.

These events that destroy the heroine's freedom and force her to seek satisfaction in another obscure freedom (the freedom of renunciation) are not neutral works of Fate, as the film would have us believe, but machinations of the film itself; the will of Fate and the desire of the film to see its errant protagonists punished are one and the same, precisely because the three heroines subjectivize their fate instead of rebelling against it; *they endure their misery as if they deserved it.*

In *Kati Patang*, the runaway bride declares, weeping besides her father who has killed himself out of shame, that she has committed the sin of defiling her family name and deserves to die. *Aradhana* begins with a trial in which the heroine is accused of murder (in truth, a self-defence against rape), a charge she willfully accepts. The trial is a barely concealed metaphor for her real crime - premarital sex. The prosecution demands that the court give her the harshest sentence so that people learn a lesson (*nasihat*) from her fate. The court accedes; the heroine has committed the crime willingly and deserves a life in prison.

This metaphorical rendering of crime and punishment is complemented by a telling sentence spoken by the heroine's father - not a despotic patriarch but a lenient figure - who forgives the vile society that humiliates his daughter: "*It is wrong to seek pity for my daughter when God himself has deprived*

her". The crime is not of society but of God Himself, except that God's crime is not regarded in the film as a crime but a just punishment for human transgression. *Society is thus swiftly exculpated for its vile reasons of criticizing the protagonists; the people are, unknown to themselves, merely following the will of God or Fate; they too are agents of the film's moral law.*

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In *Dil Hai ki Maanta Nahi*, we see a significant deviation from the ordinary law of transgression-punishment in which action is superior to intention; though a man and a woman spend time together on the road alone, unsupervised by paternal authority, their collective punishments begin not when they sleep in the same room (albeit separated by a symbolic partition), but when the man shows the first traces of love for the woman. In a wonderful definition of M-subjectivity, he scolds the girl: *"Actually you don't even know what you want, you're just running away from yourself".* When the girl retorts: "*Do you?*", he is left speechless; the girl's question marks his first realization of love.

This interior development is cut short by two sequences: first, the couple-to-be is attacked by thugs; the girl is captured and the boy eventually rescues her; second, the father abruptly declares his peace with his enemy, the villain and official lover of the girl, *as if the main enemy is the budding couple on the run*, confirming our suspicion that when it comes to the couple, the villain and father are often on the same side. In a later scene, the girl expresses her love for the man ('Let's run away together, nothing will happen'), a remark which scandalizes him; in her next scene, for a completely unrelated reason (lack of money), she is branded as a prostitute and thrown out of their hotel.

In K. Balachander's *Ek Duuje Ke Liye* (1981), sexual transgression is punished with separation and death. Two lovers, one from the north, the other a southerner, are parted by their cruel families for a whole year and die in each other's arms at its completion. Inspired by *Romeo and Juliet,* the film officially serves as a criticism of repressive family norms and the North-South divide, which prevent love, that egalitarian relationship which transcends all barriers, from flourishing.

Love, in *Ek Duuje Liye,* is *mirroring the other* in one's acts and gestures; the lovers, separated initially by words (she doesn't know Tamil, he Hindi), form a unique language of their own: switching the house lights on and off to indicate their mutual yearning, washing and beating clothes in different houses in the same audible rhythm. The two lovers defy all norms; they kiss before their outraged parents as a voiceover recounts: *"This episode occurs again and again. Young love knows just one language, the language of love. Old minds can only create walls in the graveyard of time, walls of language, walls of caste, walls of money, walls of hate. Since the beginning of history, this struggle between youth and old age has gone on. Neither old age has expired, nor has youth accepted defeat".*

But let us move from this official narrative, the war between opposing generations, to the first traumatic moment of the film: why does such fervent passion bow before the patriarchal norm? Strangely, not through brute force; the girl, and later the boy, agree to a *self-imposed* exile of one year in which they shall not talk or write to each other. This acquiescence is also, for them, a method to test whether their passion is indeed love (defined as fidelity to each other) or sexual desire masquerading as love (*vasna*); this insecurity about their feelings is manifested in an earlier scene, in which the boy forcibly kisses the girl by the sea, leaving her in tears ('you're not a good boy'). This

kiss marked their first separation which lasted for a few days; the second parting, for a year, is also prefaced by a kiss, this time in front of their parents.

Do the lovers pass this test, which is actually a double test - a perfect separation (without contact) *and* fidelity in separation? Strictly speaking, no; Vasu (Kamal Hassan) tries to meet his beloved Sapna (Rati Agnihotri) on the same night and speaks to her; she too listens to his tape-recorded voice in separation. The two, in each other's eyes, fail the second test of fidelity as well: Vasu believes gossip that she is marrying another man; Sapna hears of his affair with a widow.

The film wants to show that it is all a misunderstanding, yet the boy's affair is real; indeed, there are indications of sexual consummation ('a *bindi* on the mirror', a telltale sign) and the relationship infuriates the widow's brother. Vasu's belief that Sapna has betrayed him is not completely ungrounded either; he sees her suitor packing her underwear in a hotel room. In the devious logic of Hindi film, where appearances matter more than reality, Sapna has, without sleeping with her suitor, committed a grave transgression.

The famous climax scene shows the lovers being punished in parallel; the boy, by goons hired by the widow's brother, and the girl, by a lecherous acquaintance who rapes her. This rapist-figure has sexually harassed Sapna on numerous occasions; he asks her lewd questions in the library ('do you want a book on how to be a mother in ten days?') and pastes her face on a naked model in a magazine and exhibits it to her. Sapna usually responds to these transgressions with a slap; on one occasion though, she throws a cup of boiling tea on his face when, without resorting to his customary lewdness, he sincerely tells her the truth of Vasu's affair.

It is this visual flashback of *undeserved feminine anger*, not the memory of his own transgressions, that prefaces Sapna's rape in the final scene. The most striking image of *Ek Duuje Ke Liye* is a recurrent close-up of Sapna's burning eyes; they threaten to reduce their object - her family, the suitor, the rapist - to ashes. If Vasu therefore dies for his unchained sexuality, which is translated into infidelity with a widow, Sapna's feminine rage followed by her rape, which renders her useless for the patriarchal economy[106], are sufficient reason to kill her off, all in the sublime name of unrealized love.

Ek Duuje Ke Liye, ironically, begins with the camera meandering across the haunting ruins where the lovers would meet. Their voiceover declares their desire not to settle for an ordinary, boring marriage (*'if we marry, we will become nameless like other ordinary people, who no longer bond with each other, no new direction in life... if our love remains incomplete, only then will we have a story'*). This is then the third reading of the film: the climax enacts the lovers' original desire for immortality; by killing themselves, they perpetuate their love for eternity. That they kill themselves to avoid ordinariness and boredom is itself a critique of love in Hindi cinema, in which a sublime yet imaginary love (the first passions) is rarely replaced by the creative depiction of a more enduring love that does not degenerate into ordinary companionship.

[106] In the patriarchal code, rape is thus both punishment (for a previous sexual transgression or an act of defiant assertion) and transgression (the woman's inability to protect her honor). The conservative connection between Sapna's rape and her death is made explicit in the final scene: just before she jumps off the cliff with her lover, she tells him: "I had so carefully preserved my body, my love, my purity as your possession (*amaanat*) but you have come only now…" This line, for a very brief moment, subtly blames the hero for not fulfilling his responsibility of protecting his beloved's honor at all costs; his inability to do so can in turn be read as yet another transgression for which the couple finally kill themselves.

In K. Ravi Shankar's action thriller *Benaam Badsha*, a street gangster (Anil Kapoor) rapes a woman (Juhi Chawla) on her wedding night; instead of protesting, she begins to regard him as her husband and decides to convert him to the right path through the sheer force of her devotion; in one scene she even thanks the person who had sent him to rape her. Rape as de facto marriage was a trope in a few Hindi films of the 1990s (including Rani Mukherjee's debut *Raja ki Aayegi Baaraat*); but the essential question for us is: why is the woman punished through rape?

In *Benaam Badsha*, there are two reasons: first, the chronological reason is the woman's independence of spirit, reflected in her fierce activism against an orphanage which sells its children into prostitution. A more immediate reason: the flashback of rape is preceded by the woman's aggressive flirting with this man, linking a transgression in the present with a punishment in the past; a case of punishment preceding transgression. The film masquerades as progressive: the woman defies the gangster's threats and regularly confronts him, unlike the cowering slum dwellers, yet her courage stems from her wifely resolve to reform her rapist-husband.

The second traumatic scene in *Benaam Badsha* occurs towards the end when the woman dies in a blast. Again, the previous scenes present a weak interpretation of her murder: her demand for a gift from her husband; her death occurs when she impatiently opens the bomb container, which she suspects holds her precious gift.

A more effective interpretation of the woman's death lies in her husband's visual fantasy of sneaking up to bed and making love to her while she's asleep. Sexual transgressions after marriage, we know, are often punished; the woman's death acts as punishment for her husband as well. Remarkably,

although *Benaam Badsha* ends with the hero avenging her death, the final scene is supplemented by a song *before* the credits, which shows the man dancing with a bar girl (a repeat of an earlier song of his bachelor days), as if the film finally executes his fantasy of ridding himself of his tenacious wife.

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Sexual transgressions post marriage

In scores of films, including *Aan Milo Sajna*, *Abhinetri*, *Mera Saaya*, *Achanak* and *Abhimaan*, the couple is enmeshed in sexual bliss *after* marriage before they are grievously punished[107]. Persistent sexuality (M-M) is punished for it is a sign of inadequate subordination of the woman to the man (the M'-F pair) after marriage. This hypothesis is demonstrated by the form of punishment: in *Achanak* (1973), the woman resorts to marital infidelity; in *Abhinetri* (1970), she prioritizes her dancing career over marriage; in *Abhimaan* (1973), she continues her singing career at the cost of making her husband jealous. In *Mera Saaya* (1966), she flees home, leaving the husband who believes her dead all but paralyzed; subsequently, she is subjected to the traumatic procedure of having to prove in court that she is his real wife and not a lookalike.

V Shantaram's *Duniya Na Mane* (1937) features one of the boldest heroines ever to grace the reels of Hindi cinema: a young woman (Shanta Apte), married off to a middle-aged man (Keshavrao Date),

[107] "The only heroine who need a cold bath was Mala Sinha in *Suhagan* (1964). She was married to a man whose heart was so weak, he would die if they ever had sex. And so he sang, 'Tu mere saamne hai/Teri zulfein hain khuli' (you are in front of me, your hair let loose), while she bathed in cold water to cool her heated blood. Could it be a coincidence that Mala Sinha was a Christian and looked different, or is this going too far?" Pinto, 'The Woman Who Could Not Care' in *First Proof: The Penguin Book of New Writing from India* 1, 64.

proceeds to make his life a living hell. In the end, the man capitulates but instead of being overjoyed, the woman is filled with guilt, *a guilt which achieves what was not achieved by violence*: her complete transformation into a docile wife. The film redeems itself by dispensing with the man, who commits suicide, yet the message is clear: *Duniya Na Mane* is a powerful criticism of the evils of patriarchy (old men marrying young girls), but in doing so, leaves 'normal' patriarchy intact (and even sings a paean to it, in the form of the girl's capitulation). The film is an apt metaphor for the moral law, which often proceeds to attack the *evils* of a system, but *not the system itself that causes this evil.*

In Gulzar's *Achanak* (1973), this particular transgression is glaringly obvious: the man (Vinod Khanna), an army major, is obsessed with his wife (Lily Chakravarty) to the point of repeatedly violating army regulations (e.g. he carries his wife's recorded songs on the army drill, receiving an instant reprimand). The film punishes the man: his beloved wife has an affair with his best friend. The hero meets the consequences of his own M-subjectivity (pursuit of pleasure beyond social norms) in his wife's actions; in a fit of rage, he kills his wife and her lover.

Achanak is a conservative rendition of the famous Nanavati case, in which a navy commander who kills his wife's lover, apparently when the latter laughs off his proposal to marry his wife after divorce. Though the film punishes the army man for the double murders through death (sentenced by the court), it is the explicit level, the intersubjective reactions of the other characters, which is problematic, since all the major characters (the nurse, the doctor, the senior officer) are sympathetic to him and grieve over his fate, without any criticism of the jealous rage that motivated his actions (a compassion corresponding to the public sympathy received by the real-life Nanavati).

In Mahesh Bhatt's *Junoon* (1992), the problem of sexual intimacy after marriage erupts in a monstrous form. The film shows a hunter (Rahul Roy) cursed that he will turn into a tiger on every full moon night (a metaphor for excessive male sexuality). The tiger-man marries his doctor (Pooja Bhatt) yet cannot consummate their wedding night for fear of killing her; instead he kills other women in her place (women who are inevitably scantily dressed, in a swimming pool or at a club). Male sexuality becomes a ruse for controlling female sexuality: when the woman tries to seduce her husband, he turns into a tiger and she runs away in terror. In spite of its conservative subtext, *Junoon* allows the woman to move on to her former lover; the dilemma is solved when the lover saves her life by killing her tiger-husband[108].

A final example of post-marriage sexual transgression: in Mani Ratnam's *Roja* (1992), a couple's life is rent apart when the man (Arvind Swami) is kidnapped by Kashmiri militants while his wife (Madhoo) desperately appeals to state authorities to get him released. Let us risk a weak reading of *Roja*: the primary problem of the film is that the woman is originally *not* a Savitri-figure, the mythical woman who, through the force of her devotion, brought her husband back from the dead. Recall that despite her apparent devoutness, Roja *does not want to marry* in the first place; she is forced into an arranged marriage with a stranger and brought to a foreign land, a land and a husband she wants to escape. The film explains this away as a misunderstanding; after a short clarification, love blooms between the couple but is rudely cut short by an event, a total shock for the husband, for he wakes up one day to find his wife missing.

[108] The death of the tyrannical husband was a common trope in the mid-1990s, as is clear from the three remakes of *Sleeping with The Enemy*, a film about a tyrannical husband hunting for his absconding wife who has set up a new life with another man: *Daraar*, *Agnisakshi* and *Yaraana*, all released in 1995-96.

Although Roja has simply gone to the nearby temple to request God to forgive her, she meets an unknown man on the way, a tourist guide, astrologer and a medical hack rolled into one. It is at this point, when the husband sees her coming down from the stairs of the temple followed by the stranger, that the militants attack and kidnap him[109]. At what precise point does the husband free himself from his captors? The film's chronology gives us a curious answer: the man frees himself just after his enraged wife resolves to visit every house in the Valley and search for her husband, an act which would count as an extreme transgression for the Hindu wife.

If we keep these two points in mind, the moment of abduction and the moment of freedom, the form of *Roja* appears less obscure: at a buried level, the husband is paying for his wife's transgressions. Cause and effect are reversed, his kidnap and subsequent torture is accompanied by the wife spending greater time with the guide navigating strange and hostile places - the army cantonment, the jail and the streets, asking perfect strangers for her husband. Relief for the husband only arrives after the wife approaches the representative of the state, a minister, at an army parade, a public place governed by the rules of the state; at this point, the militant kidnapper undergoes a change of heart and begins to doubt his bloody mission.

In this reading, while the film officially valorizes the woman for her epic search for her missing husband, it also punishes her at the same time for this deviant act. And yet the woman's decision to radicalize her transgression, her declaration that she would visit *every* house in the Valley to find

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[109] "The crucial narrative development of Rishi's capture is set up because Roja leaves the conjugal precincts for the innocent enough activity of seeking out a mandir (Hindu temple). Her unannounced departure panics her husband, who rushes out with scant security and is thus made vulnerable to the militants. Roja threatens to exceed the existing boundaries demarcated by nuclear patriarchy and nation-state, and in such a way as to reorganize the narrative parameters of these forms. This appears to redefine and extend the narrative goal of the film, in so far as it rests on an investment in the definition of national boundaries". Vasudevan, *The Melodramatic Public*, 217.

her missing husband, becomes so extreme in the film's parameters that, in an astonishing twist, the moral law gives way and releases her husband.

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Temple wedding

Though the temple marriage appears as legal and occurs before God, the ultimate witness, God in the form of the film does not recognize it till the end. The temple marriage is frequently a source of shame in Hindi cinema, stamped by a lack of patriarchal legitimacy; the woman is branded by society as unwed, promiscuous or a prostitute, and the child regarded a bastard. In *Charitraheen* (1974), the temple wedding is preceded by the woman running away from her home; in *Aradhana* (1969), it is followed by sex and catastrophe: the man dies, the woman is condemned to a life of suffering; in *Chupke Chupke* (1975), a temple marriage is *not* punished precisely because it is orchestrated and overseen by elders.

The Workingwoman

Though workingwomen are relatively uncommon in Hindi cinema, their common fate is marital discord and estrangement from the husband. In Hrishikesh Mukherjee's *Anuradha* (1960), a famous singer and dancer (Leela Naidu) falls in love with a doctor (Balraj Sahni), gives up her career and settles into household bliss, except that bliss is not to be found in household chores; her husband is completely dedicated to his work and has no time for her. A nostalgia for her former passion

creeps in and eventually drives the woman to the brink of leaving her husband's house. She is stopped by the accidental entry of a wise father-figure, a staple of Hrishikesh Mukherjee films, who extols her wifely sacrifice before her husband; by the next morning, the husband descends from the stairs to find his wife happily sweeping the house. *Anuradha* is a meditation not only on the everyday travails of the housewife, who is not given enough credit for her sacrifice, or love in exchange for her labor.

The buried problem of *Anuradha* is how to get rid of the stubborn M-dimension of the woman, the desire for a lost career, the dream of a past life which persists years after marriage. Anuradha's source of unhappiness is not her husband's indifference to her desires but the desires themselves, her own failure to submit herself completely to the patriarchal law, a failure overcome when she receives the rare honor, from a complete stranger, of being the supreme embodiment of a wife. Contrary to appearance, it is not the doctor-husband who undergoes a transformation in the end but the wife; she is purified of her desire for care and recognition from her husband, her suffering has been completely sublimated into sacrifice, with no traces left.

It is no coincidence at all that Anuradha's was a love marriage, against her father's permission; the flashback of her decision to leave her father's house, her marriage, and her initial honeymoon period, cuts to a traumatic moment in the present: Anuradha is brusquely scolded by her husband for not letting him work. The switch between opposites, extreme happiness and suffering, intensifies our sense of her anguish, yet, the two sequences, the past and present, are not just linked by contrast but as cause and effect; Anuradha's life of lonesome suffering is an outcome of her original rebellion and her dream of happiness; her only redemption lies in fully turning this suffering into sacrifice,

without a hint of regret, the archetypal Bimal Roy formula of *Sujata*, *Parineeta* and *Bandini* (Mukherjee was Roy's assistant before he migrated into independent filmmaking).

Anuradha uses a former suitor (Abhi Bhattacharya) as a vital plot device; this man coaxes Anuradha to return to her days of glory, her singing profession; she hesitates at first but, disappointed with her husband's continued indifference, decides to follow his advice. One would expect that this man, who so passionately wants her - and wants her to sing ('it is an insult to God who gave you such a rare talent') - would be disappointed when Anuradha does not join him in the end, yet he merely smiles and drives away. A lay reading would focus on the psychology of this character; the lover who smiles at his fate of being jilted twice, yet the smile arguably has an ontological basis as well: this lover smiles because the wife has passed her test of self-sacrifice. This man is thus not merely a flesh-and-blood lover but an agent of fate who has arrived to tempt Anuradha... why? So that in a single gesture of supreme sacrifice she can get rid of all her temptations, all her buried desires which constantly tempt her into escaping her marriage.

Finally, a remarkable detail. At what point does Anuradha fall in love with the doctor, her future husband? In flashbacks, it is revealed that she had broken her leg after a fall from the stairs; the doctor had tended her for a long time before they fell in love. The mention of 'accident' should immediately alert someone who wants to test the veracity of the transgression analysis, for one of its central arguments is that the Hindi film's favored mode of punishing a character is via an accident. This is exactly what happens in Anuradha's case: she falls from the stairs just after she has delivered a dance performance on stage, a punishment for her even though everyone around her admires her song and dance.

Again and again, we see the same problematic feature of the liberal humanist film; though the apparent transgression is approved and even praised by multiple characters in the film, establishing the film's liberal credentials, the film itself works in secret to punish the transgressor; or in other words, the transgressing subject is both innocent (in our perspective, one mediated by the liberal characters) and guilty (by the secret conservative logic of the film).

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In Mahesh Bhatt's *Aashiqui* (1990), a film ostensibly about free love between equals, man and woman have successful careers; one is a musician (Rahul Roy), the other a model (Anu Aggarwal), yet modeling - the public display of the female body - is in itself a transgressive profession. The film solves this problem by introducing a rival element, an advertising filmmaker who wishes to undress the woman for the camera and take her alone to foreign locations; the casting couch is the ironic excuse for liberal patriarchy to impose its law on the woman.

The crucial scene arrives at the climax: the woman takes a bath and admires herself in the mirror (a transgression at the level of image, a reminder of her M-subjectivity); the filmmaker visits her place and wants her to accompany him to Paris; she however refuses his offer and asserts that her lover means everything to her ("he is my career"). While the gesture establishes her innocence in the viewer's eyes, the film proceeds to punish her for the visual transgression noted above. In her next scene, she is vehemently chastised by her lover for a completely unrelated reason. Traumatized by the lover's outburst ('I hate you', he tells her), she is helplessly carried away by the predatory

ad-filmmaker to the airport; meanwhile the lover, chastised by his mother for doubting her, arrives at the airport to stop her.

Aashiqui ends with a regular *fort-da reunion*[110]; the woman separates herself from the villain and sits quietly outside the airport for the man who, believing her gone, is delighted to find her again. It is not clear in the end whether her decision to remove herself from the lascivious ad-film director, with whom she had an exclusive contract, amounts to giving up modeling altogether; at the minimum, the threat of her excessive sexuality as a model (symbolized in the bathing scene) is expunged, probably to move towards a more 'decent' modeling[111].

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In Mahesh Bhatt's *Dastak* (1996), the success of the workingwoman reaches its highest limit: a crazed stalker (Sharad Kapoor) is obsessed with a Miss Universe (Sushmita Sen), to the point of killing her

[110] The *fort-da reunion* is a singular denouement in which the romantic couple lose each other, as if for ever, before they miraculously find each other again. In *Solva Saal* (1958), the woman (Waheeda Rehman) is separated in the end from her beloved (Dev Anand) and surrenders herself to fate, only to discover that the match her father has arranged for her is none other than *he*. The fort-da name comes from Sigmund Freud, who discovered a unique game played by his grandson, an infant who would throw a cotton reel out of his bed (uttering a babyish approximation of 'fort', which means 'gone' in German) and force his mother to retrieve it for him (uttering 'da', which means 'there'). While Freud interpreted this game as the child's attempt at imaginary mastery over an unhappy situation (loss, 'fort'), I use this term to denote the film's demonstration of its mastery over its own subjects by creating a situation in which everything seems irrevocably lost – the traumatic separation – before the torn couple are almost magically brought together again; Fate and the film are indistinguishable in this brief cycle of separation and reunion.

[111] Modelling is a key transgression in B. R. Chopra's *Insaaf ka Tarazu* as well: "It is no accident that Insaaf chose an upmarket model as the victim of rape. By showing a woman voluntarily "selling" herself in the world of advertising, the film operates through the same double-speak... By focusing on Bharati (played by Zeenat Aman, who herself won the 1969 Miss Asia title), the film plays on the extra-textual information the audience has about the star, situating itself in the space between the star's real life and the character she plays on screen. Insaaf, unlike Teesri Manzil or Aradhana, set the new trend of eroticizing the heroine's body. Bharati's job of striking poses and openly flaunting herself before the camera centres attention on her body. The centrality of Bharati/Aman's body has the effect of misleading the audience into drawing incorrect conclusions regarding beauty, desire, lust, and rape. The subtext of this is the most insidious of rape myths: "she asked for it." While such a critique rings true, it is equally pertinent that the film's second half subverts the argument of the first half". Virdi, *The Cinematic ImagiNation*, 171.

loved ones and abducting her; the other man in the film (Mukul Dev) is a police officer in charge of saving the beauty queen from her obsessive lover's clutches. The woman's crime is her massive success, which makes her the cynosure of millions of eyes. Both men, the officer and the stalker, wish to take the woman away from the admiring gaze of millions into a private world: the stalker, to marry her, and the police officer, to save her. Hero and villain perform the same function, of pushing the unattached woman to lose her circle of close friends and be utterly helpless and dependent on a man. The climax (hero rescues heroine from villain, but she ends up killing the latter) is followed, though, by a thoroughly ambiguous ending: Sushmita releases a memoir of the kidnapping (titled *Dastak*) and is immediately flooded by pleas for autographs.

It seems that Sushmita, the ultimate career woman, has returned to her starting point of assertive independence, except for three suggestive points: first, she is now attached to a man, the police officer, who is the condition of her safety; second, she wears a saree in the film for the first time; third, Sushmita pardons her stalker; he was, for her, merely an unloved man seeking love; his rage was an outcome of the world mistreating people like him.

An investigation of the film and its context presents us with the opposite conclusion: the stalker is not an exception but the very embodiment of a dying patriarchy which seeks to control the free-spirited woman, a patriarchy whose decay is evidenced by the trio of *Sleeping with The Enemy* remakes, released around the same time as *Dastak*. In each of these films – *Yaraana* (1995), *Agnisakshi* (1996), *Daraar* (1996) – not only is the possessive husband killed, but unlike *Dastak*, the hero, i.e. the woman's new lover, in these films participates only minimally in vanquishing the husband; the hero's almost total lack of phallic display, the fact that he need not prove himself as

the superior man in the triangle, marks a decisive shift towards the more gender-egalitarian, enjoyment-oriented cinema we see today.

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In Shekhar Kapur's *Masoom* (1983), the very first sequence establishes the workingwoman (Shabana Azmi) as the authority-figure in the family; husband (Naseeruddin Shah) and children are all scared of her. While the woman relapses into the maternal mode towards her husband and children from time to time, the opposite doesn't occur: the father never switches to the paternal mode to lay down the law of the house, except for his reluctant desire to include his illegitimate child (Jugal Hansraj) into the family.

Masoom is structured as a melodramatic Hindi film sans the melodrama: the 'father' who lays down the law is the maternal figure, while the mother, conflicted between law and love, plays the father; the subject is the lovechild who desires acceptance from the family (i.e. from the woman as authority) but his plea is denied. Finally, the moral support of other innocents (the two legitimate children) is crucial for granting the child's claim to the family a moral legitimacy; love replaces law (barring illegitimate children from family) in the end.

However, the above reading is partly mistaken: the woman is not merely an agent of paternal law but also a staunch proto-feminist who is shocked by her husband's callous injustice towards her. Recall that the man's extramarital affair is not love, which needs no guarantee outside itself, but a momentary ignition of desire; it occurs precisely at the point when his wife is pregnant and at her

most vulnerable; the husband's brief sympathy for the other woman, which ostensibly led to their sexual encounter, is undermined by his complete apathy towards her subsequent fate.

This is also why the father's transgression, his one-night stand, is not ethical, an inchoate revolt against the strictures of monogamous patriarchy; instead it is the obscene foundation of patriarchy, the superego to the patriarchal law, a secret law which allows the man, but not the woman, to covertly indulge in such a transgression. And this is the reason the woman's gesture is ethical; she refuses to accept what the husband and the film, through its excessive focus on the child's innocence, want her to accept: the normalization of this obscene side of the law.

The injustice, in other words, stems from the fact that the man's casual affair and his desire to include the son into his family is a male privilege, proved by the fact that not once does the film ponder about the opposite scenario: if the man would have adopted his wife's lovechild. And yet the central problem of the film - the imposition of the man's innocent desire as an obscene patriarchal law on the woman - is raised briefly only to be gradually occluded through the rest of the film; the focus of the film shifts steadily from the injustice suffered by the woman to her own callous behavior towards the innocent child.

The shift is paralleled by a side-story of an ostensible feminist (Tanuja), who leaves her husband over a similar problem and eventually returns to him, confessing to Shabana: '*Once a mother's feelings are aroused, no woman can stand in her way*', a line I believe captures the real tragedy of *Masoom,* the rebellious woman's forcible return to normalcy.

This definition of the woman as essentially a mother works well for the ideological purposes of *Masoom* but is only partly accurate, for there are ample signs in the film that the woman's return is propelled not by a sudden upsurge of maternal love for the lost boy, but *guilt at her own lack of such feeling*; her guilt, partly encouraged by the father, explodes at the moment the boy runs away from home ('why don't you just leave our lives?', she tells the boy when he returns, before admitting she was worried about him). Guilt instead of love is confirmed in the final scene as well; the father finds the three children sitting behind in the family car ('Ma says he can stay with us') and the mother in front, eager to return to normalcy ('can we go home now?'); absent is any ostensible sign of her love for the child, except for a redemptive photograph in the last frame of *Masoom* which shows a happy family, the girls with their father, the boy on the lap of his new mother, an imaginary redemption for the feuding parents.

In brief, although the ethical problem of *Masoom* is 'why punish an innocent child for the father's mistake?', a question valid in itself, its answer smuggles in an unnoticed supplement: in redeeming the child, the woman redeems herself as mother and forgets or implicitly forgives the father's 'mistake'; the film, by deploying the all-powerful ideologies of motherhood and innocence, brings the proto-feminist figure into line, gently forcing her to subsume her revolt under the preservation of family.

…

Sex work

Although Hindi cinema is famous for its depiction of the prostitute with the golden heart, even platonic intermixing with the sex worker is often punished; the sex worker's life is itself a series of punishments, an endless stream of suffering which invites the audience's sympathy[112].

In Chander Vohra's *Khilona* (1970), a courtesan (Mumtaz) leaves her profession to pose as the wife of a mad poet (Sanjeev Kumar) to heal him back to sanity. She is raped by her 'husband', actualizing the marriage, just when she decides to leave after facing the insults of the family members. The rape turns her, after some resistance, into a dutiful wife; by the next scene, she promises to 'look after him day and night'.

The woman's transformation itself seems to be a direct result of rape, for at one point she says: 'Don't worry about me, I have passed that stage in which there is danger or fear'; although it appears that she is referring to her courtesan life, this cannot be the case because she experiences fear and danger while being attacked by her 'husband'; the rape has turned her into a suffering-sacrificing woman who accepts her fate instead of rebelling against it.

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[112] The great exception to this rule is Shammi Kapoor's directorial venture *Manoranjan* (1974), which largely allows the woman (Zeenat Aman), a regular sex worker, to pursue her happiness without judging her, the M-subject par excellence. Interestingly, the novel *Umrao Jaan*, contrary to the film which depicted a courtesan pining for an impossible love, does the same: "The view of the courtesan presented in the film is very different from that presented in the Urdu novel. Instead of the exquisite Rekha portraying an innocent Umrao Jaan, who falls in love with one of her clients and whose story is told as a failed love story, in the novel Umrao admits she was rather plain and never fell in love although she had a number of significant affairs in addition to her regular clients. Rather than pining for an impossible love affair, she loves her work, her poetry and the pleasure, luxury and respect that this brought her. Aware of the pleasure of nostalgia, the last chapter in the book is the account of Umrao's reading of Ruswa's story of her life, where she sums it up herself in a clear, insightful manner. She was a prostitute, no beauty, but a woman of intelligence and skill: 'It was my profession to dance and sing and steal men's hearts. I was happy or unhappy depending on whether I was more or less successful than others in my profession. I was not as pretty as the others, but because of my talent for music and mastery of poetry, I was one of the best.'" Dwyer, *Filming the Gods*, 120.

Shakti Samanta's *Charitraheen* (1974) begins and ends in court, which seeks to decide whether a married man and a sex worker can be 'friends' or not; the verdict is an impassioned 'yes', on condition that the two do not engage in sex. The man (Sanjeev Kumar), a conventionally liberal hero, is utterly noble and devoted to his wife (Yogeeta Bali); his relationship with the sex worker (Sharmila Tagore) is purely humanitarian; even the wife is deemed wrong to suspect her husband, whose greatness she could never appreciate. The spectacle of the man's nobility, like most spectacles, conceals its opposite; the man has borrowed heavy sums from the sex worker; in fact, his factory is built with her money.

Though both sex worker and family man redeem themselves in court, how does the film itself view these two protagonists? *Charitraheen* has two major traumatic points: first, the woman is forced to become a sex worker because of a failed 'love marriage': the man she eloped with turned out to be a ruthless exploiter; she was soon driven into prostitution. Second, though the film is largely charitable to the friendship between the sex worker and the family man, it does not forgive a single transgression: the man's downfall – his falling prey to fraud, debt and marital woes - begins exactly after a scene in which the sex worker reveals she has named him as the father of her little girl, a responsibility the man assumes graciously.

This quasi-marriage between the respectable man and the sex worker, the high ethical point of the film, is unacceptable not only for society but also for the film; it is no coincidence that, though the little girl is adopted in the end, the sex worker must depart from the man's life even if she is only his 'friend'. The sex worker remains an object of shame for the society and for the film, which tries

to humanize the sex worker (a victim of circumstances), but secretly blames her for her fate (her elopement, which caused her downfall) and disposes of her in the end (couched as a sacrifice for her child).

…

In Basu Bhattacharya's *Teesri Kasam* (1966), a travelling *nautanki* dancer (Waheeda Rehman) falls in love with a village simpleton, a bullock-cart driver (Raj Kapoor). Yet she leaves him in the end, without admitting her love, to return to her profession. Why? The woman is caught between her existence as a dancer and a vision of marital bliss; she cannot make the leap from one to another, not because of an addiction to material comfort or the desire to remain independent, but for a strange reason: in her own words, she cannot violate her lover's fantasy of her as a pure woman, a goddess (*devi*), a vision she half-believes herself and one that will presumably shatter into pieces the day he knows of her disreputable past (sex work). Though she says she knows that both poles, of whore and virgin, do not represent her real self, she is still fascinated (*nasha*, or intoxicated) with the second pole (of the pure wife). Her final sacrifice is thus ambiguous, an ambiguity built into the concept of sacrifice: is it a sacrifice for the other's happiness or a means of entombing one's beautiful image in the eyes of this other, a narcissism par excellence where one's (false) self-image is more valuable than her desire?

These psychological subtleties in *Teesri Kasam* remain incomplete without comprehending the film's role in separating the couple. For it is quite clear that the moral law, the separation between a sex

worker and the respectable man, is decisively established in the end; further, the law is not opposed by the subject but authorized by her own sacrifice, an apparently free choice.

The man's reaction to the dancer's final decision is equally curious: contrary to her desire to remain pure in his eyes, he swears ('the third time', or *teesri kasam*) never to take another dancer on his cart again. His strange oath is perhaps an oblique vow of fidelity to the lost woman, but more probably, a case of 'once bitten twice shy', a decision to avoid the specter of a mysterious woman who seems to change her mind at every step; in ontological terms, the man finally affirms the film's desire to keep him away from the dancer.

A final mystery of *Teesri Kasam* is the secret of its title: what do the cart driver's three vows have in common? To recall, his first vow is to never carry illegal stuff on his cart; his second, never to carry bamboo (for, presumably, an overload of bamboo topples the cart); the third, never to carry a dancer on his cart. At first, we may think of the three as an arbitrary set, an exercise in willful absurdity, a gentle dig perhaps at the naïveté of our village hero, who sees in every disaster a lesson to be learnt. Yet there is a common attribute in all three transgressions: they all contain symptoms of excessive desire, or in other words, desire itself to the extent that it exceeds his 'needs'; the common lesson, he seems to be telling himself, is to stay away from temptation.

The film's objective to separate the villager and the dancer is borne by transgression analysis: in the second half, a villainous landlord is introduced, a man who wishes to make the dancer his mistress. The landlord's first rude intrusion interrupts the dancer's semi-romantic tryst with her lover; his second entry, this time a rape attempt, follows a stage song in which the dancer calls out to her

absent lover, a song which appears in the latter's dream, as if she were addressing him directly. If we recognize that in Hindi films, the villain, ironically, is often a device to establish the moral law, the landlord's role becomes clear; he prevents the blasphemous union of the couple through his continuous intrusions into the dancer's tent; indeed, one reason the dancer leaves her lover forever is that he faces a life threat from the powerful landlord[52].

…

Girish Karnad's erotic drama *Utsav* (1984) is as an ode to the sexual liberalism that existed in parts of ancient India, in which a courtesan could freely engage in sexual activities with men, married and unmarried, and, more importantly, teach them the art of sex. Perceptive viewers, however, have noted the conservative ending, in which the courtesan (Rekha) returns to her 'evil' suitor, while the man who was madly in love with her (Shekhar Suman) happily rejoins his wife (Anuradha Patel). This end is particularly stark given that it is Karnad's own contribution; the original Sanskrit play (Sudraka's *Mrcchakatika*, *The Little Clay Cart*) ends with the wife accepting the courtesan as the man's second lover.

In *Utsav*, we have an amiable camaraderie shared between the wife and the courtesan-lover, yet their common point of reference ultimately remains the man; Sumita Chakravarty notes: "The female bonding shown between the good, understanding wife and the courtesan plays out the ultimate male fantasy: the freedom of a man to move without guilt between a nurturing wife and glamorous mistress"[114]. The rule separating man and woman, which we shall examine in the infidelity

[114] Chakravarty, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema, 1947-1987*, 284.

genre of the 1980s, is active here as well: sexual freedom is the preserve of the married man and the unwed woman, but *not* the married woman; she is the secret condition of upholding the patriarchal order.

Chakravarty's analysis gives us a precise outline of the male gaze that frames this friendship between women over and above their antagonistic subject-positions, and yet the film's unfolding reveals that *both* the errant man and his courtesan-lover are punished in the end; the courtesan is 'murdered' by the evil suitor (Shashi Kapoor), a relative of and substitute for the king, the law; the man is wrongly framed and almost executed for the courtesan's death. A wandering sage brings the dead courtesan miraculously to life; she in turn intervenes in her lover's execution and saves *his* life. And yet, a general rule of Hindi cinema is that *scenes of resurrection or a return from near-death must be viewed with extreme suspicion; the resurrected person is frequently not the one who died in her place*. The classic example is of Anarkali (Madhubala) in *Mughal-e-Azam*; the Anarkali who returns after being sentenced to death is a pale shadow of the bold Anarkali who challenged the imperial law prior to the sentencing; in her own words, this Anarkali is already dead.

This insight is also validated in *Utsav:* before her death, the courtesan was the apple of her lover's eye, but is completely ignored when she returns; like her, the redeemed lover is no longer the same man who was taken to execution, for he has abruptly shifted loyalties to his wife. The reason is not difficult to grasp: the wife has proven herself to be a woman of virtue by begging the executioner for mercy; it is her devotion, not the courtesan's intervention, which melts the husband's heart.

A crucial turning point in *Utsav,* from a courageous defence of sexual freedom to a tame return to family values, lies buried in an earlier scene, amid the affectionate camaraderie between wife and mistress. Though much could be written about their lovely bond, the final scene of their bonding shows that it is thoroughly false; the wife is overjoyed by her husband's affair not because of her selflessness but for he now makes excellent love to her; further, she is dismissive of the enduring ability of the older courtesan to charm her husband for long.

The wife's perspective of the courtesan as a temporary distraction is upheld by the film and captures an important truth: the courtesan is useful to society, and to the film, as a vanishing mediator, a person who spices up the dulling sex life of ordinary couples, but she is hardly a threat to normal society, proved by the manner by which she is disposed of.

The courtesan's brief 'death' occurs as an accident, an intervention of Fate: the horse carriage which would take her to her lover is replaced at the wrong moment (or right moment, from the point of view of the film) by a bullock cart which carries her to the 'king's' lair, a switch in vehicles which directly leads to her short demise. But how are the vehicles replaced? By the 'accidental' intervention of a child, the man's son, who pricks a needle into the horse's stomach so that it runs away with the carriage; in the film's symbolic logic, if not in reality, the child acts as his jealous mother's agent.

The wife's suddenly cold behavior as she comes out to drop the courtesan to the bullock cart; her severe gaze as the cart leaves with her rival, are, I believe, sufficient to show that the double meaning of the women's camaraderie is a conscious placement by the film(maker), yet it can be most clearly

discerned only if the sequence is watched backwards, i.e. from punishment (suffering, death) to the causative transgression, an insight generally true for transgression analysis. In *Utsav's* interpretation of ancient India, the courtesan served as an exception that upheld the norm; she was a temporary diversion who enervated the sex life of commoners; *Utsav*, by its very form, supports this ideology; the film gets rid of its principal character as soon as her function is over, before she could pose as a real threat to her society.

…

Infidelity

The sub-genre of the infidelity film in the late 1970s and 1980s (*Arth, Masoom, Ijaazat, Pati, Patni aur woh*) is based on three factors, the third undermining the first two. In these films we see first, a sexual freedom unmatched in Hindi cinema; second, an occasional sympathy and even friendship between the rival women, a sign of gender solidarity, colored and contradicted by a third premise, the fact that *infidelity* remains almost exclusively the preserve of the male, and the friendship/understanding between the women is the condition of their loving devotion to either the man or the patriarchal order he represents. In many films, the male fantasy of possessing multiple women at the same time who would adjust or even live happily with each other, the obscene truth of their gender solidarity, is first taken to its limit and then disavowed.

In this brief eruption of *differential patriarchy*, there is a semblance of equality in formal rights but an inequality in implicit conditions of the exercise of the rights: both man and woman can have affairs,

but though the man's affair is extra-marital, the woman's affair is strictly non-marital (the man can have access to two women, the woman to only one); both man and woman enjoy sexual freedom but not the wife, who remains either docile or complaining. The wife's adherence to the marital rule is not an exception to the principle of sexual freedom but its very condition.

The man's guilt at the double relationship is a symbolic proof of his innocence, which, ironically in *Ijaazat*, enables him to continue with his transgression. Unlike the wife, the other woman is unmarriageable precisely because of her excessive energy, sexual or otherwise; in Gulzar's *Ijaazat* (1987), the man (Naseeruddin Shah) confesses that he didn't marry her because she was too 'impulsive'. In a flashback, she (Anuradha Patel) herself refuses to marry him, stating that she has seen enough relationships fail and decay for a long time before they die. This feminist dimension is, however, complemented by her unequal relation with the man, for instance in the revelation that he has slapped her in the past ('don't hit me in the cheek, it hurts a lot'); the man's attitude towards her is not of respect for an equal but of loving indignation at a spoilt child. In the next scene, she tries to kill herself, a punishment for her transgressions and her attempt at redemption as a selfless, sacrificing woman ('I didn't know I loved you so much').

Transgression analysis also pinpoints a specific cause of the wife's downfall in *Ijaazat*: her job as teacher, which the husband had vehemently criticized and asked her to leave before marriage. Just before the marriage breaks down, the wife (Rekha) leaves home to visit her former place of work; her act is juxtaposed with the man returning to his beloved.

The wives in the infidelity film are thus punished for being career women, for dominating in the household or for being materialistic (*Arth*, where the woman (Shabana Azmi) dreams of a lavishly furnished house and is subsequently punished by her husband's infidelity). In *Arth*, the specter of double infidelity - one who has betrayed once may betray again - constantly haunts the film, in the lover's (Parveen Babi) repeated suspicions that her man (Kulbhushan Kharbanda) will go back to his wife after having his fun with her, a suspicion that almost turns into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Her paranoia is punishment by madness for breaking up a marriage, as confirmed by the lover's mother ('she is paying the price for ruining your household').

In B R Chopra's *Pati, Patni aur Woh* (1978), the man's fantasy of possessing multiple women is confirmed when his extra-marital liaison with his office secretary (Ranjeeta Kaur) is punished by the wife (Vidya Sinha) only to be encouraged by the film in the next scene (he gets a new attractive secretary). The film even gives an ideological justification for why man, but not woman, is predisposed towards adultery: a woman can only love one man at a time, the man can 'share' his love with many, an ideology that is, as we have seen, implicitly promoted in this genre.

The man (Sanjeev Kumar) views his affair as a strictly financial transaction ('she needed money, which I had'), and this implicit logic of prostitution is confirmed by his lover in the final moments; she confesses that she fell for the middle-aged man for two reasons: pity, for he had invented a story about a dying wife to seduce her; and opportunity, the specter of a lavish lifestyle as his future wife ('I wanted to afford all the small pleasures of life'). By the end, she redeems herself by returning her boss's money, money, she rightly claims, was given as payment for her sexual services (even though it was couched as charity).

The other woman is, as a rule, disposable; she is the vanishing mediator who brings a temporary excitement to the man's staid and boring life; on the other hand, she is an exception to the patriarchal order and must be disposed, killed or eliminated from the film. The other woman is often a curious mix of the impetuous child and a mature feminist; the feminist moments are, however, rare and often punished by the film.

In *Ijaazat*, for example, two feminist moments are invoked and then punished by the transgression logic. In the first, the woman (Anuradha Patel) professes her disinterest in marriage and her experience of relationships in the past, all of which have led to bitterness; in the next scene the man (Naseeruddin Shah) has left her and married another woman (Rekha). In the second moment, this same woman, on a motorbike with her lover, playfully expresses her desire to be married to another man she finds attractive; two scenes later, she dies in a motorbike accident. It is not only the man who finds this quasi-feminist woman incorrigible; the film itself punishes her for her waywardness.

In the infidelity films, the wife must relent in the end if the husband asks for forgiveness; she must live with her husband's follies and its consequences as a necessary part of the patriarchal order (except in *Ijaazat*, where the woman has remarried). In *Pati, Patni aur Woh*, this supposition is made explicit: the secret support of the husband's continued infidelity is his wife's admission that the Indian wife has no other choice but to forgive.

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Dancing in public

The dancing woman is both a staple of Hindi films and the embodiment of a forbidden sexuality. The woman who dances on stage for the public gaze is often punished, the most notable example being *Abhinetri*, a film concerning a woman's insistence that she dance on stage after marriage; by the end, her revolt is subsumed under pregnancy. Another famous example is Vijay Anand's *Guide*, in which the woman's dancing career and rising stardom is a big reason for the couple's separation; in the end, the woman atones for her sins by an arduous trek to his temple where the couple do not reunite; yet, the M'-F relation between them is visually re-established, the suffering woman juxtaposed with the divinely inspired man.

Damini (1993) and *Pati Parmeshwar* (1989) form another unique category of Hindi films, which (chronologically) begin with the heroine dancing on stage. The dance performance, which is never repeated again in the film, is a symbolic reminder of the untamed sexuality (M-spirit) of the woman, which haunts her throughout the film. The film largely acts to control this transgressive spirit (via the abject female servility in *Pati Parmeshwar*, the repeated attacks on Damini before she finds the courage to rebel in the end).

One can generalize this point: while conventional wisdom would have us believe that a character's inner qualities (her courage or endurance) are revealed as a film progresses, on many occasions it is the *first scene* introducing that character, a scene which the viewer would have forgotten by the end, which reveals a singular attribute of hers. In *Masoom,* the wife (Shabana Azmi) is introduced as a career woman returning from office, a woman feared by her husband and kids; the film marks the great tussle between her feminization and her own resistance to this feminization.

In Subodh Mukherjee's *Abhinetri* (1970), two major transgressions are prominently displayed: the wife's excessive, almost suffocating, love for her husband (Shashi Kapoor), which prevents him from working properly, and the opposite: her resolute independence when she demands the freedom to become a dancer once again, a freedom she had relinquished at the point of marriage. The woman (Hema Malini) revolts against the husband's law, walks out of the marriage and begins to dance on stage until her mother-in-law, a force of law masquerading as love, intervenes.

The mother's strategy is indirect interpellation; she gently coaxes her son's wife to dance at home ('you dance so well… what is the need to dance outside?') and speaks of her own husband's death ('only she who has lost her husband knows the misfortune of losing him'); the film ends with jokes about a future child, a sign of closure of the dancer's revolt.

Two of Madhuri Dixit's iconic dance sequences – 'Choli ke Peeche Kya Hai' in *Khalnayak* and 'Mera Piya Ghar Aaya' in *Yaraana* – are crucial exceptions to this rule, for they are *not* followed by suffering or retribution. Yet in both films, Dixit dances to another song in public right after which her character faces punishment: in *Khalnayak*, 'Palki Mein Hoke' is followed by an attempted rape, and 'Loye Loye' in *Yaraana* introduces the villain whose violent lust for her destroys her life. Song-and-dance sequences on stage or in front of the public are thus often, but not always, punished.

…

In Vijay Sharma's *Jai Santoshi Maa*, the surprise blockbuster of 1975, a dance performance is punished by divine wrath. The film stars a young upstart goddess (Anita Guha), the daughter of Ganesha, who

overthrows the hierarchy of gods and goddesses by emerging as the supreme deity, to which even the highest gods of the Hindu pantheon, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, pay homage. Though *Jai Santoshi Ma* seems far removed from the 'angry young man' of the 1970s, the story - of a goddess who upstages the reigning hierarchy of Hindu deities - closely resembles Amitabh Bachchan's character, a man who upstages the systemic hierarchy of class differences.

Santoshi Ma is a largely benign goddess who implicitly demands sacrifice (the fast of 16 Fridays) from women; her status, as a divinity more powerful than even the established Lakshmi and Parvati, remains symbolic until the end, when her fury sends tremors around the world and Heaven. The goddesses, on the other hand, are jealous of Santoshi Ma and punish her arch devotee Satyavati (Kanan Kaushal) for forgetting them in her single-minded devotion to Santoshi.

Yet the hierarchy of gods is restored in a brief final scene, an exculpatory moment, in which the goddesses claim their jealousy of Santoshi Ma was simply a facade to purify Satyavati, in the form of tests of suffering, which is of course another way for the goddesses to redeem *their* innocence. The gods and goddesses bless Ganesha's daughter, Santoshi, and the film ends with the hope that she will be remembered for all time to come.

From the point of view of transgression analysis, Santoshi Ma's task is to feminize even the most feminine of women, in this case, the heroine Satyavati; any deviance from the F-norm (suffering and sacrificing) is promptly and brutally punished in the film.

Three traumatic points are to be noted: in the first, a virgin Satyavati shyly praises her lover on the behest of her friends, followed in the next scene by an attempted rape. In the second, a married Satyavati is the object of intense fascination of her husband who stays at home to make love to her. This idyllic scene of marital bliss is, as we have seen, a dangerous deviance in the Hindi film universe. Both husband and wife are punished by the joint family they inhabit; the husband is accused of being a 'nikamma' (unemployed and useless) and of not contributing to the family; the wife is later subjected to untold abuses, including stabs at her sexuality ('youth has gone into your head').

The third traumatic point occurs when the couple, happily reunited after a prolonged and intensely painful separation, choose to worship Santoshi Ma. Satyavati *dances* in the temple before the villagers, inviting Santoshi Ma's rage that erupts ostensibly to punish Satyavati's jealous sisters-in-law (who are themselves symbolic substitutes of the jealous goddesses), but with the real aim of punishing Satyavati herself. The villagers turn against her and she is saved only when she pleads with Santoshi Ma to intervene, her former confidence shattered by the turn of events.

Jai Santoshi Ma was the third highest grossing film of 1975, after *Sholay* and *Dharmatma*, and above *Deewaar*. Why was the film such a massive blockbuster? As is clear from the above reading, the film combines radicalism in heaven (Santoshi Ma's overturning of the hierarchy of gods) with extreme conservatism on earth (the suffering-punishment of Satyavati); further, it shows woman as the biggest enemy of woman, exculpating the male-dominated society. There may be a third reason as well: Santoshi Ma does not punish male sexual infidelity; Satyavati's husband, because of divine intrigue, spends several days consorting with another woman, yet his separation from the social

norm and his wife entails a punishment for Satyavati, not for him; nowhere does the husband suffer for his amorous liaison.

Finally, in Hrishikesh Mukherjee's *Bawarchi* (1972), dancing in public is punished twice, even though it is never criticized by characters within the film. In the film, a cook (Rajesh Khanna) arrives in a discordant family to heal their wounds with the message of love. The problem of *Bawarchi* is, as delineated early in the film, the absence of a single patriarchal authority; the joint family has split into several enclaves, which continuously squabble with each other.

The film solves this confusion by a novel trick, a series of *cascading* transgression-punishments, in which each act of delivering punishment in turn becomes a transgression. First, the orphan girl (Jaya Bhaduri) is taught to dance on stage to crush the pride of her cousin, who is obsessed with dancing in public. She defeats the cousin in the contest, but in the scene after next, is herself punished; she is beaten and abused mercilessly, ostensibly for inviting her lover home. In the same scene, the cook urges the ageing patriarch to reassert his authority over the daughters-in-law who are beating the orphan girl. The two women are suitably chastised by the patriarch; finally, to complete the circle, the cook asks the orphan to beg forgiveness from the aunts; even if she is blameless, he tells her, there is no shame in apologizing to elders. *Bawarchi* thus again marks the strange hypocrisy of the liberal humanist film: though the family ostensibly has no problem with their daughter dancing on stage, dance being a form of high culture, the film punishes both the girls who danced in public: one, by her loss and humiliation (which turns her into the model woman who wears a sari, works in the kitchen and dances *in* the house); the other, by a beating delivered at home.

CHAPTER 5: CASTE, CLASS & RELIGION

In this chapter, we continue our exploration of the different forms of transgressions beyond sex and gender in Hindi cinema. Apart from transgressions against the criminal law and the legal apparatus, which are explicitly criticized and implicitly punished in many films (e.g. *Deewar*), our focus now shifts to caste, class and religion. I shall focus in particular on the films of Hrishikesh Mukherjee as a master exemplar of the liberal humanist film, whose conservative underpinnings we seek to explore below.

The caste-class nexus

Caste is the great unspoken of Hindi cinema, yet in several Hindi films, caste and class references are subtly woven into each other. Class conflict, a frequent trope in Hindi cinema, generally appears to be a displaced metaphor of caste (hence the epithets of '*ganda khoon*' - impure blood - and '*gandi naali ka keeda*' - a gutter worm - for the poor). This does not mean that class is mere appearance, but that the two together constitute a powerful matrix - the caste-class nexus - which has played a prominent part in Hindi cinema from its early days even though it almost always presented itself in the form of class.

While class conflict, manifested in the rich girl-poor boy romance (or vice versa), is the substantial content of many a Hindi film[115], caste exists as its shadowy double as well as a repressed layer, which appears in the unnaturally harsh punishments often delivered to the poor and the low-born, the bastards and the orphans, as well as the films' frequent insistence that the orphan hero (or the heroine) must be of noble and legitimate birth, separated by circumstances from his respectable (i.e. 'upper caste') family.

The unspoken link between caste and class in Hindi cinema finds clear evidence in Hrishikesh Mukherjee's *Satyakam* (1969): when the hero (Dharmendra) learns about the heroine's (Sharmila Tagore) humble origins, that she is the daughter of a truck driver, he immediately connects it to caste, declaring that her 'low caste' should not present a problem for a principled suitor; the working-class person was thus automatically assumed to be of 'low caste'.

Another kind of class-caste transgression is the specter of a bourgeois or petit-bourgeois ('upper caste') man crossing boundaries to either associate with the working class or become a part of them. In Mukherjee's *Aashirwad* (1968), a village *zamindar* (Ashok Kumar) mixes freely with Dalits (Harijans in the film), drawing the ire of his wife (Veena), the real ruler of the village, who has the Dalit houses burnt down. Sick of his wife's inhumanity, the man leaves his beloved daughter behind; he pines away for his daughter (Sumita Sanyal) until his dying moments.

[115] "Caste politics is elided in popular Hindi films, and certainly nothing beyond platitudes against oonch-neech (high-low) is ever mentioned. Suppressing caste within the subtext of class is a sign of the extent to which caste and community distinctions are observed covertly". Virdi, *The Cinematic ImagiNation*, 209-210.

This touching tale of paternal love masks another layer, that of caste relations. The former landlord refuses to give up his attachment to his Dalit friends, he returns again and again to their shelter, and is brutally punished every time he makes their contact. His first moment of downfall comes immediately after he dances with Dalit girls in the village, his first major transgression; the second moment arrives when he returns to the Dalit cottages and rescues a girl from rape; the man inadvertently kills the transgressor and spends many years in jail; in the third moment, his failing health deteriorates after he is released from jail and returns to the Dalit houses; he expires among Dalit people as they take care of him.

Though the content of *Aashirwad*, in the form of its liberal protagonist, makes a strong case against casteism, its form tilts towards punishing the protagonist for the very same reason: persistent contact with the Dalit community as their equals. Apart from this solitary man who suffers throughout the film and yet refuses to stay away from the unconscious cause of his suffering, no other person interacts with the Dalits as equals; they are either mistreated or ignored.

In Hrishikesh Mukherjee's *Alaap* (1977), a classical singer (Amitabh Bachchan) leaves the house of his rich father (Om Prakash), a senior advocate, falls in love and marries a courtesan's daughter (Rekha); bereft of wealth, he begins work as a *tonga* driver. The cruel father is the explicit enemy of the film, and yet the film implicitly takes the side of the father: every meeting of the hero with the courtesan (Chhaya Devi) and her daughter is punished in the next scene, till the point that the film accepts this brazenly: the woman's brother urges her to leave him so that father and son can be reunited.

As the hero continues to work as a tonga driver and live with his wife in defiance of the paternal law, he falls sick with an incurable disease and almost becomes an untouchable, cut off from society. The double movement of *Alaap* is confirmed in the climax: a benevolent uncle (Sanjeev Kumar) berates the Father ('you're a father, not God') and in the same breath, crushes the son's revolt by reporting: 'Alok keeps on saying, please forgive me father, I have hurt you a lot...' In the final scene, Father himself comes to the son's bedside and strokes his grandson's cheek, as Alok looks at him with grateful tears.

However, this denouement does not explain much; if the rebel son asks for forgiveness in the end, and the recanting father accepts his bride and child, whose side is the film on? We must return to our original insight that in Hindi cinema, an obscure transformation must occur for the reconciliation between the warring sides to take place. The father's conscience strikes him at the precise moment when the courtesan, Alok's mother-in-law who he regards as his mother, dies. The scene is particularly telling: Alok has just begun to sing again in public; his 'mother', the courtesan, has died, and the song ends with a close-up of her photo, which cuts to the father awaking from a dream, as if he were watching the entire sequence in sleep.

This crucial sequence, which is quickly followed by the father being informed of his son's apology and the subsequent reconciliation, gives us the key to *Alaap*'s buried truth. The father's change of heart occurs for two reasons: the son is no longer a proletarian, a tonga-puller, but a part of the cultural petit-bourgeoisie (a vocation less objectionable than a working-class job); second and more importantly, the 'polluting' attachment that Alok shared with the courtesan, who he calls 'mother', is finally over.

In *Anupama* (1966), a rich man (Tarun Bose) marries late in life and obsesses over his wife (Surekha Pandit), speaking to her over phone for hours in office, private conversations avidly spied upon by the office staff. The man's obsession soon becomes a public spectacle, fuel for gossip, and it is no surprise, going by the crooked laws of Hindi cinema, that the man's wife dies shortly afterwards, in childbirth; her death is punishment both for her and her loving husband, an M-M relationship which is portrayed lovingly, but cannot exist for long in the film's moral universe.

The motherless child, Uma, is punished for 'causing' her mother's death; she grows up to become the exact opposite of her mother, a shy, demure woman who can hardly utter a word in public or private. This woman (Sharmila Tagore), fragile as glass and completely uninterested in pursuing ordinary pleasures, is regarded by the hero (Dharmendra) as Anupama (the one who has no parallel), and the film itself shares this view of the ideal woman as absolutely docile, as is clear from its title.

Yet there is a problem: a perfect woman, i.e. a perfectly docile woman, cannot marry her lover unless offered by her father in marriage; she must require the minimum courage to leap from one patriarchy to another, a courage which is itself proof of her devotion to the husband, the new law. The rebellion, if it occurs, must be tamed at its very foundation: Uma conveys her decision to leave by asking for her father's blessings, telling him that she wants to make someone happy the way her mother made him happy; her choice is already couched in the language of patriarchy, of selfless service to the man.

Why doesn't the film choose the easier path: the arranged love marriage, in which the father finally consents to the love match? In a way, the film does achieve this resolution: the father secretly follows Uma as she is reunited with her lover; more importantly, she does not meet him alone; Uma is accompanied by a wise father-figure (David), who hands Uma over to her lover, completing the match.

But why does the film prefer such a circuitous route in consummating the union? The reason lies in an obvious pattern in many of Hrishikesh Mukherjee's films, reflected in a wide variety of Hindi films, the class opposition between a rich, conservative father and a liberal middle-class hero, middle-class not always in terms of wealth but in terms of profession and values. This tension is explicitly detailed in *Anupama*, where the hero, an unemployed writer, vehemently protests the vacuity of the rich: 'we have everything except money, you have money but nothing else'.

The moral problems of being rich are precisely given in *Anupama*: hedonism, living for (selfish) pleasure; hubris, the conflation of money with reputation; the use of explicit force, which is applied to domesticate rebellious sons and daughters in conservative wealthy families. On the other hand, the middle-class family is apparently based on more sublime values: a reduced hedonism mediated by love, i.e. the principle of caring for others; pride in family and human values; the use of love to gently interpellate the erring or rebelling subject, a subtle rearrangement of desires.

The circuitous route that *Anupama*'s heroine takes to this middle-class idyll, the fact that her father does not officially give her away to her husband, is necessary to make a complete break from her

upper-class life. In *Anuradha,* another Hrishikesh Mukherjee film, we have witnessed the predicament of a middle-class wife who was not able to completely break away from her upper-class origins.

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Immanent joy

In *Mili* (1975), a young girl (Jaya Bhaduri) is struck with a fatal illness, and as her condition deteriorates, her lover (Amitabh Bachchan) decides to do whatever is possible to make her happy. The film ends with her marriage and their subsequent exit to Switzerland in search of a treatment. Like Anand, Mili is the principle of joy personified; she inspires happiness in the life of every person around her; like Anand, she speaks incessantly and perpetually plays pranks and jokes; when healthy, she is easily bored and seeks diversions. Finally, like Anand, she dies early, but the reason in her case is more clear.

To discern this reason, one must pinpoint the exact moment of Mili's fall: though the film makes the fact of her illness apparent right from the beginning, Mili collapses into a permanent bed rest *right after she spends an innocuous night with a stranger* (Bachchan); the two discuss love and gaze at the stars through a telescope. This also explains why Mili does not quite die in the end, since the sexual indiscretion has been legitimized in retrospect by marriage. *Mili* thus offers us a textbook example of transgression analysis, yet unlike her collapse, the fact of Mili's disease requires a deeper explanation.

Anand and Mili, both happy-go-lucky characters, suffer from the same basic disease which leads to their end; both privilege the principle of immanent joy over anything else; in Mili's case, such a principle leads her easily to spend a night at a stranger's place without a hint of shame. Characters like *Mili*, *Anand*, the cook in *Bawarchi*, the loving uncle (David) in a host of other films, are condemned to either die or disappear or play secondary roles. Mili uncannily resembles Anand in another respect: their *joie de vivre* 'reforms' the stubbornly unsocial lover or friend, the angry young man (Amitabh Bachchan in both cases), by infusing his life with happiness, turning him from an alienated soul into a proper husband, an integral part of normal society; in other films (*Zanjeer*, *Deewaar*), such a simple device proves too weak to contain his eruption into violence.

In Shakti Samanta's *Anuraag* (1972), a child (Satyajit) dies of cancer; his dying wish is to donate his eyes to a blind orphan girl, his 'sister' (Moushumi Chatterjee). In functional terms, the child's death is ennobled by his gesture; but why does he die? *Anuraag* offers us yet another unsolved mystery; the boy, Chandan, does nothing to merit his death. On the contrary, his short life is replete with several gestures of sacrifice; in one incident, he intentionally skips two answers in his test so his classmate can stand first and receive a scholarship.

Let me offer a weak possibility which could perhaps throw some light on the child's death. The most curious anomaly in *Anuraag* concerns the child's grandfather (Ashok Kumar), head of the family. The grandfather is a fun-loving spirit and the fatherless child takes after him; they constantly play jokes and games with each other. The child is, as he admits, the grandfather's soul; the old man is passionately attached to him. Yet the grandfather suffers from arbitrary pangs of guilt: 'I am always afraid', he confesses once, 'that I might have committed a sin unknowingly for which I would have

to do penance'. On being pressed, he expresses his fear that his whole life may have been a lie, 'People respect me, praise my generosity, that I stand by others in their joy and pain, but whatever I do, I do it out of selfishness, for gaining the blessings of others, so that Chandan can be always happy; I am so enamored (*moh*) of him that...'

When the cancer is discovered, the grandfather's response is to blame himself: 'This is God's punishment for the sins of my previous birth, but in God's court, there is no provision for appeal'. Though this explanation may appear to be religious nonsense, one could inquire into the cause of the man's guilt, a cause he vaguely hints at when he speaks of selfishness and passionate attachment to his grandchild. For he is perhaps dimly aware that the life of enjoyment he spends with the child is itself sinful, a life of love without law (father is dead and grandfather cannot occupy his place), which, in the absence of a restraining father-figure, is brought to a halt by the ultimate Father, God Himself. The child's death, in this weak reading, is indeed a punishment for the grandfather, for his lawless existence.

Another indication that this is the case is gleaned from discerning the moment when the child first collapses; the scene of collapse begins with a) splendid celebrations of his birthday and b) the grandfather's declaration in public that he will adopt the blind orphan girl, a gesture of love but also a possible violation of social law, which forbids the orphan-bastard (she is of unknown parentage) from being easily adopted by a respectable family. It is possible that the child's illness arrives to stall this formal adoption; once the child is dead and his eyes transplanted to the girl's, the adoption matter does not arise again.

Yet things are more ambiguous: the girl, as she opens her eyes to see the world for the first time, calls the dead boy's mother 'ma'; she is at least symbolically accepted in the family, though formal acceptance still eludes her. Is the child's death a case of another displaced punishment - does he pay the price for his orphan sister's incorporation into the respectable family? This line of investigation is attractive since the child repeatedly desires to sacrifice his eyes for the orphan girl; Fate cruelly makes his desire come true. Yet it remains a weak reading of the film, much weaker than the grandfather's explicit admission that the boy's death was retribution for *his* sins.

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The Materialistic Child

Though children's behavior, on account of their inherent innocence, may seem exempted from the moral law, the child with materialistic desires (money, toys, food) often meets a punishment in the next scene.

In Raj Khosla's *Mera Gaon Mera Desh* (1971), the child is spoilt by money; his mother complains that he has acquired the habit of extracting money from the hero ('you're spoiling him'). Though the hero defends the child ('it's a good habit to be used to money'), the film does not: in the very next scene the child watches helplessly as his father is killed by a dacoit (Vinod Khanna), and in a remarkable scene of brutality, the dacoit turns around and kills the child as well.

The murder of the child echoes a similar murder in *Sholay*: Thakur's 'spoilt' grandchild is shot dead by another dacoit, Gabbar Singh; the same child, it is earlier revealed, does not obey his grandfather's feudal authority but playfully fights with him. One could object that the punishment of death seems *prima facie* excessive for a the apparently minor transgression of a spoilt child; the above interpretation is thus a weak reading that can only be confirmed or undermined by excavating other violent deaths of children.

In Shekhar Kapur's *Mr. India* (1987), two key traumatic incidents follow from a little girl's desire. In the first, the orphan children have not eaten for many days; the woman (Sridevi), upon learning this, brings them all kinds of delicacies and encourages the little girl to start eating. The child is still reluctant; her guardian (Anil Kapoor) stares at her silently as she tentatively stretches her hand towards the delicacies and then distributes them to everyone. This scene is immediately followed by Mogambo's henchmen attacking the house and mercilessly beating the children.

The second scene features the same child walking towards a toy in the playground, her face lit with happiness. The toy contains a bomb; she picks it up and is blown to pieces. The extreme level of these punishments are delivered for such trivial acts not only in response to the children's materialistic wishes but also for the fact that they are orphans without a known father/family (de facto bastards), a category of people who are severely punished for their slightest infractions in Hindi cinema, until, that is, they are adopted by a father (recall that the orphan children in *Mr. India* address their guardian as brother, not father)[116].

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[116] One may easily poke a hole in this reading by pointing out that the man who becomes Mr. India, the superhero who embodies the nation, is himself an orphan, probably because he does not belong to any narrow family, caste or religion; only in this way, by denying his particular moorings, can he represent the country as a whole. This is of course all true,

In *Anuraag*, the child's fall into cancer and death can also be explained by his affluence and the continuous gifts and celebrations that mark his short life. The child, if we recall, collapses at the point of the most extreme enjoyment, at his birthday celebrations, a theory which finds an oblique confirmation in the grandfather's guilt at leading such a happy life.

Perhaps the happiness many Hindi films aimed to achieve was not a 'base' materialistic happiness but a noble or spiritual joy that could only be achieved in and through suffering. Ravi Vasudevan notes that although Mehboob Khan's *Andaz* was criticized for being a lavish depiction of upper-class lifestyle, the film also served as a denunciation of that same culture:

> "In three key speeches, one by the comic and the others by Rajen in the court and Neena in jail, this lifestyle is specified as a Western one, and one which produces at worst amorality and at its most innocent a confusion of social norms. In this regard, Mehboob's film, and the Bombay cinema, more generally, assumes a kind of self-orientalizing populism, in which to be truly Indian means to abjure the excesses of the materialistic life. In the 'cultural sociology' of the popular cinema, the influence of colonial or Western norms generates a pampered, alienated existence and vice versa. And it is presented as an experience which puts its subjects out of touch with wider self-perception and morality"[117].

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except that one must not forget the difference between the orphaned Arun (Anil Kapoor) and the children; unlike them, he is of definite parentage; further, Arun directly carries his late father's legacy forward by wearing the invisibility device his scientist-father had designed.

[117] Vasudevan, 'You cannot live in society and ignore it', 95.

The Orphan-Bastard

The orphan and the bastard are popular characters in Hindi cinema; both share the common attribute of existing beyond parental authority; the bastard exists beyond paternal authority *and* legitimacy (name of the father), the orphan's existence lies beyond parental authority. The bastard, of course, is often punished far more severely in Hindi films than the orphan.

The distinction between the two is blurred in the figure of the orphan without a recognizable family (brought up in an orphanage etc.); she, is, practically speaking, a bastard child, an identification made clear in many films like *Mr. India* where the orphans are humiliated for having 'impure' blood (*ganda khoon*) in their veins. Yet the orphan's humiliation in society or the suffering he endures in his unjust fate, the cause of his alienation from the world, becomes in many cases his secret strength, as Madhava Prasad notes in the case of *Zanjeer* (1973):

> "The orphan is a figure of marginality, deprived of the normal familial pleasures by the intrusion of evil. The orphan's actions are attributed to a force beyond his control, haunting his dreams and driving him to act in ways that conflict with the procedural protocols of the law. He lacks the personal stability that would enable him to function as a normal law-enforcing agent. He is a loner and a stranger to his colleagues, a narcissistic personality. His personal need for revenge is not recognized by the law that he serves. The law draws upon his strength to implement its will but refuses to loan him any part of its strength so that he may exact his revenge. This figure exists in a space between the law and illegality, a figure whose ability to fulfil his role as a citizen

is obstructed by the pathological history of the subject, which demands a cure that is extra-legal by definition"[118].

In Mahesh Bhatt's *Naajayaz* (1995), the punishment-as-suffering for the bastard son (Ajay Devgan) begins not from birth but from the moment he learns he is illegitimate; the son, a police officer, is caught between upholding the law and fidelity to his father, an underworld gangster. Every confrontation with his illegitimate father accentuates his punishment in the same or next scene; his mother relentlessly berates him for turning against his own father. In the end, the father, a confirmed murderer, kills himself to save his family.

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Muslims & Christians

It is commonly known that the depiction of individuals from other religions in Hindi cinema is laced with stereotypes: the promiscuous Christian woman, the stupid Sikh, the loyal, sacrificing Muslim friend. In the following films, we shall explore deeper into how Hindi treat such characters at a buried level, i.e. at the level of transgression and punishment.

In Manmohan Desai's *Coolie* (1983), a Muslim woman, the hero's mother (Waheeda Rehman), is kidnapped by a phallic Muslim man (M') and traumatized throughout the film until her son rescues her. Why does she suffer such a terrible fate? In order to comprehend this tragedy, we must break

[118] Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film*, 143.

this question down into two parts: first, why is she kidnapped? And second, why is she forced to undergo such intense suffering, through confinement and electric shocks? The answer to the first question lies in Islamic practices: the married woman is kidnapped by a man (Kadar Khan) who lusts[119] for her precisely because a) Islam, unlike Hinduism, gives her permission to marry again; and b) the man had turned to crime to accumulate the required bride-price, a uniquely Islamic custom, to legitimize his marriage with the woman he desires.

Though the villain is relying on a perverse interpretation of Islam (money itself can buy a woman), it may be argued that the original transgression of *Coolie*, the abduction and forced confinement of the mother, a transgression unthinkable in the Hindu families depicted in the Hindi films of that time, is possible because of certain Islamic customs. This weak reading, weak since Islamic customs are not the cause of transgression but only a condition of possibility, is not a criticism of Islam but the opposite, how certain customs peculiar to Islam are used by the film to set up a monstrous transgression, the kidnapping of a mother and the corresponding ruin of the family.

But why is the woman tortured throughout the film? Her torture cannot be fully tied with her being Muslim, instead there are two other explanations: first, a traumatic scene in which she cannot recognize her own son (Amitabh Bachchan), an involuntary transgression since she has lost all her memory, a scene akin to the mother abandoning her children in *Amar Akbar Anthony*; second, of (again, involuntarily) living *de jure* a life of sin with her malevolent captor, who takes resort to electric shocks in order to erase her memory.

[119] I use the word 'lust' not to imply purely sexual feelings compared to a relatively chaste love, but as an M'-emotion of seeking to possess or conquer the object of desire.

Coolie shows, in a rare moment, a Hindu man (Nilu Phule) dying to save the Muslim woman, but we must be careful to characterize this death as that of a Hindu; this man's identity, for which he fought and suffered grievous wounds, is his class identity as a coolie; the man's sacrifice is a camouflage for his punishment as the most rebellious member of the coolie community. This is made clear in the end, as the class struggle between the rich businessmen and the poor coolies at an election rally is displaced to a family revenge drama in which the son kills his mother's abductor.

Finally, a remarkable detail: in the penultimate scene of *Coolie*, the hero drapes a green religious blanket and dares the villain to shoot at him ('My chest has the name of God, let's see if this blanket saves me or turns into my coffin. Shoot!'); the blanket crucially does *not* shield him from the bullets; though he kills the villain, he barely manages to stay alive. In the original script, the hero was supposed to die in the end; the script was changed after Amitabh Bachchan's near-fatal accident when shooting for a fight scene. If we juxtapose the above scene with the original ending (the hero dies), we arrive at a surprising conclusion: the blanket of God had originally failed to protect the hero's life, an indirect rejection of Allah[120].

In *Saat Hindustani* (1969), directed by Khwaja Ahmed Abbas, a Muslim poet who joins five other Indians and a Goanese woman in the fight to liberate Goa, is badly wounded twice, while his comrades remain unscathed. One explanation is given in the film: the poet is a timid character; his battle injuries are perhaps his trial by fire. The other explanation, that he suffers because he is a Muslim, seems more likely; the Muslim who sacrifices for the nation to prove his loyalty is a well-

[120] Again, it could rightly be objected that one is assuming that the original scene was structured in the same manner. In my research, I could not find any evidence that the scene had been imagined differently, thus this interpretation remains open to change.

known trope in Hindi cinema. But this sublime trope hides an obscene demand: the Muslim, and no other community, must prove his loyalty to the nation, as if to compensate for his ontological transgression of being Muslim[121].

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In K.S. Sethumadhavan's *Julie*, the Christian girl is repeatedly subjected to molestation and humiliation for her short dresses; eventually her sexuality is punished through unwed pregnancy. In *Sagar*, a love story of a Christian woman and a Hindu man, we see a similar pattern. The woman's punishment begins only after a sexually explicit song *inside* the man's house ('Jaane Do Na'), followed by his attempt to convey his marriage plans to his cruel grandmother (the father-figure). However, the woman's excessive sexuality before this point - her sexual trysts with the man outside his house - go remarkably unpunished; in fact, the man receives an arbitrary punishment (through alternate plots, the introduction of a rival etc.) after these scenes.

In Raj Kapoor's *Bobby* (1973), the pattern is repeated: the painful ordeal of the Christian woman (Dimple Kapadia), which transforms her from a confident young woman into a hysterical figure, begins immediately after her father arrives at the house of her Hindu lover (Rishi Kapoor) to seal their match and is rebuffed; the deadlock is however resolved after the couple tries to commit suicide, melting their parents' hearts and proving their will to sacrifice for love.

[121] In *Daata* (1989), the loyal Muslim friend is killed while saving the Hindu hero (Mithun Chakraborty). Why? The answer lies in the preceding and the subsequent scene. Just before this man dies, he and the hero break the fast of Ramzan together, a symbol of intercommunal solidarity (transgression); just after his friend dies, the wounded hero reaches a temple and seeks blessings from the Hindu goddess (redemption). There is no further sign of Islam in the film, though its director, Sultan Ahmed, is Muslim.

In Hiren Nag's *Ankhiyon ke Jharokon Se* (1978), a tragic romance between a Hindu boy (Sachin) and a Christian girl (Ranjeeta Kaur), the excuse of the short dress, with its connotations of excessive sexuality,[122] to punish the Christian girl is disposed of, she is punished for being Christian (and desiring to marry a Hindu man) in spite of wearing clothes of 'decent' length. The girl contracts leukemia just after a romantic tryst (the title song) with the hero. Such an innocent song (with very few sexual connotations) would hardly be so brutally punished in any other film; in the case of *Ankhiyon ke Jharokon Se*, her punishment must be read in the backdrop of the scandalized reaction of the man's father when he learns that the girl his son wishes to marry is Christian. Though the father happily reconciles to their relationship a few scenes later (exculpating himself of any malevolent intention), the film assumes the father's unease and itself punishes the girl through an incurable disease.

In *Saat Hindustani*, a Christian girl (Shahnaz) accompanies six Indian men to fight against the Portuguese occupation of Goa. She is the only one out of the seven who dies. Why? The first obvious reason is the woman's remarkable courage throughout the film, her double transgression, as a freedom fighter and the lonely co-traveller with seven men through dense jungles in the quest to reach Goa. Though the content of *Saat Hindustani* ostensibly concerns the freedom of Goa, its form betrays the film's desire for India to conquer Goa via the figure of the Goanese woman.

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[122] This, I believe, is also the central problem of *Satyam Shivam Sundaram*: the disfigured woman (Zeenat Aman) is punished throughout the film not because of her scarred face, but because of the translucent saree that she wears throughout the film, a 'shamelessness' pointed out by a minor character at the very beginning. The director Raj Kapoor's infamous statement ("Let them come to see Zeenat's tits, they will go out forgetting her body and remember the film") must then be reversed; Zeenat Aman's body is the secret motor that drives the plot, which is camouflaged by the sublime meditations on the nature of truth and beauty.

Two crucial scenes make this desire visible: in the first, the woman is bathing in a jungle river, while the men ogle at her; in the next scene, they stealthily move towards her as she dries herself on a rock. The film at this point tries to disguise their intentions through an 'innocent' flute playing in the background, yet the woman comprehends their intentions of rape: "You are six, they were nine", she sighs, referring to the Portuguese who had raped her in the past. The ashamed men comfort her and give her gifts.

It seems possible that the film has included this scene to chastise the men's wicked intentions; yet in a pivotal scene, the six Indians lock the Goanese woman in her room as they install the Indian flag in Goa. Their avowed intention is to protect her from harm, but their actions belie the film's real intentions (which rewards their rebellion): the fact that they have arrived in Goa not to free the tiny state but to conquer it. The film's title ('Seven Indians') is thus a forced attempt at assimilating the brave Goanese woman into the rubric of India, an operation that, by the Indian patriarchal logic, can only occur with her feminization, an exercise of power she resists till her death.

…

Let us finally turn our attention to one of the great landmarks of religious tolerance and secularism in Hindi cinema. In Manmohan Desai's *Amar Akbar Anthony* (1978), three brothers are separated in childhood and adopted by three families of different faiths and are reunited with their Hindu parents years later. The central problem of *Amar Akbar Anthony* is that, contrary to popular perception, the three children are not separated by fate but *abandoned* by their own parents; the father (Pran) temporarily abandons the children for gold (when he leaves, one of his sons runs in vain after his

car; father returns to find them gone), the mother (Nirupa Roy) permanently abandons them in a failed bid to commit suicide.

Consequently, the mother's punishment is much harsher (she loses her family *and* her vision), compared to the father, who, using the gold, becomes a wealthy smuggler yet continues to pine for his children. In *Amar Akbar Anthony*, the principle of transgression and punishment is verified by the mother herself: when in desperation, she leaves her children to commit suicide, a branch from a nearby tree falls and immediately blinds her ("I tried to kill myself, therefore God punished me").

Amar Akbar Anthony is famous for its secularist message (a Hindu, a Muslim and a Christian are blood brothers), though it also supports the opposite reading: the Hindu parents of all three children are a metaphor of the essential Hindu unity underlying the diversity of Indian religions. Yet a puzzling pattern emerges in the film's form: though one of the heroes, Anthony (Amitabh Bachchan), is a Christian (he is the one who gets the maximum screen time and the most memorable moments), his adoptive father, a Christian priest (Nazir Hussain), is abruptly killed by the villain, Robert (Jeevan), at a church.

The murder of the priest is a profound mystery; it is neither merited by his previous actions, which are immaculately noble. It does serve, a functional reason though: near the priest's body, Anthony discovers a locket of Santoshi Ma and when he returns the locket to its owner, he learns that this man is his real father. Yet this transfer of son from one father to another could have occurred easily without the priest's death (like in the second son Akbar's case), so the mystery remains unsolved.

Notice that the priest's murder is symbolically presented as a sacrifice; as Robert's knife plunges into his heart, blood spatters on the figurine of Jesus, and the priest cries out: "Lord, forgive him". The priest, like Jesus, thus dies for the sins of others, though not for any arbitrary person but a fellow Christian, the central villain of the film. *Unlike Jesus who dies to redeem humanity, the priest dies to redeem Christianity.*

The death of the priest is analogous to the good Muslim-bad Muslim combination, in which the good Muslim, often the loyal friend, gives his life up to redeem his community, to show that Muslims are not all evil. The good member of the community is punished for the evil member's crimes, a punishment he turns into sacrifice; yet, what ties good Muslim and bad Muslim together is nothing but the community, which implies that the good member of the community is being punished *for being part of the community*[123]. In addition, since the priest is not just any ordinary Christian but the very emblem of the Christian community, it is Christianity that bears punishment for the sins of one of its disgraceful members.

This reading is strengthened by the fact that the priest's murder is quickly forgotten; even in the climax when Anthony and his brother Amar defeat Robert, Anthony does not mention his Christian father's murder even once; Robert is ultimately punished not for the priest's arbitrary murder but for his crimes against the Hindu family.

The unconscious anti-Christian bias is confirmed in another detail. Perhaps the most obscene scenes in *Amar Akbar Anthony* do not revolve around the villain, Robert, per se but around his daughter,

[123] Similarly, the bond between mother and child in *Do Bigha Zamin*¸ which enables one to be punished for the other's crime (displaced punishment), is nothing but the family.

Jenny (Parveen Babi), who after secretly meeting her lover is subjected to an unnecessarily brutal punishment (unnecessary since the other heroines, who commit similar transgressions, are not so ruthlessly punished): she is imprisoned by her bodyguard Zebisco and then, in a prolonged scene, made to run in the fields, chased by her father, her billowing skirt exposing almost the entirety of her legs. The objectification of Parveen Babi is of course not specific to *Amar Akbar Anthony*, yet unlike other films, her body is not an object of admiration (e.g. in her dance numbers) but an object of attack by the menacing patriarchal figure (her own father), as if announcing the arrival of the rape-and-revenge films of the 1980s.

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Other Transgressions: The Case of *Sholay*

In *Sholay* (1975), probably the most famous film in Hindi cinema, we encounter a great roadblock to transgression analysis: the shocking slaughter of Thakur's entire family, including a mere child, at the hands of the dacoit Gabbar Singh. This slaughter is so morally inexplicable that it may well have caused the public's stupefied silence when they came to watch *Sholay* for the first time, a silence which made the director Ramesh Sippy terribly anxious that the ambitious film, which had overshot its budget, was about to sink in the box office.

Sholay is set in a village, Ramgarh, whose benevolent feudal patriarchy (with Thakur as head) is threatened by dacoits who seek to avenge themselves on Thakur (Sanjeev Kumar). Thakur, a police officer in town, is mostly absent from the village, allowing the dacoits led by Gabbar Singh (Amjad

Khan) to massacre his family and install their own parallel regime on the village. In response, Thakur attempts to catch Gabbar again, who ties him up and cruelly severs his arms. The limbless Thakur resigns as police officer and hires two young criminals, Jai and Veeru, to defeat Gabbar and restore his own rule in the village. The reinstation of feudal patriarchy is the key theme of *Sholay*, as Ziauddin Sardar notes:

> "Whereas in *Ganga Jamuna*, and in so many other films of the sixties, including the magnificent films of Mahboob, notably *Mother India* and *Aan*, the enemy was feudalism and its representatives, in *Sholay*, feudalism is presented as a positive force for cultural development. The village with its landless peasants, ruled over by the feudal lord who, as the police inspector, now represents law and order, would be a happy place but for Gabbar and his band of cut-throats"[124].

But why was Thakur's family massacred? At first sight, there is no clear answer, as nothing before the massacre warrants the extreme punishment inflicted on the family, no subtle crimes against social law that the characters would have committed, no sexual or moral transgressions to consider, all because of a total lack of context: the family is introduced and eliminated in that one scene.

Our first clue lies in the scene preceding the massacre: Thakur is returning to his village after a long time, and speaks of his family, including his small grandson, as being angry with him over his absence ('I've never taken a bribe in my life, but when I go home, I must bribe my own family members').

[124] Sardar, 'Dilip Kumar Made Me Do It', in *The Secret Politics of Our Desires*, 48.

This scene establishes that Thakur's family is not conservative in its obsequious respect to the head of the family, but quite liberal in its outlook; even the child is allowed to be angry at his grandfather.

In the massacre scene, we find proof of this liberal ethos of Thakur's family. The young sons and their wives live their lives freely and equally, independently of their father; the women are not sequestered inside the house but perform their chores out in the open; the child is allowed his desire to receive Thakur at the railway station despite the elder daughter-in-law's protests ('you're spoiling him', she tells his father); the sharp-tongued elder daughter-in-law squabbles with her liberal-permissive husband; the younger son is practicing shooting birds in the open; the young sister is outside the house as well, drying clothes; the members, it is revealed, have all but forgotten to clean Thakur's room before his arrival, demonstrating his total irrelevance to their lives.

All the above characters are ruthlessly murdered, including the 'spoilt' child who is allowed to have his way, except for two survivors: the old servant (an F-figure) who is quietly helping the elder daughter-in-law, and the younger daughter-in-law (Jaya Bhaduri) who, unlike the other women, *is shown inside the house*; when she emerges, she wraps her saree around her head, and dutifully takes her *bhabhi*'s permission to visit the temple with the servant ('I would like to visit the temple, if there is any work... (you can tell me)'). The exceptions (who is killed and who is not) reveal the secret rule that governs the massacre: those who retain their subservience to feudal authority are saved, those who casually subvert or ignore that authority murdered.

This is, arguably, the key problem of *Sholay*: unlike a feudal regime, where the father-landlord is the center of all power, Thakur's long absence has not led to a crisis in his family but to its *flourishing* in

a liberal form. The ideals of liberal democracy are slowly spreading to Thakur's family, and presumably to the village as well. *It is not Gabbar who threatens to upstage the feudal order; the feudal order is on its last legs before Gabbar's arrival.* Gabbar may be a temporary threat to Thakur's authority but, in the long term, his violent intercession is the means by which Thakur's authority is re-established over his family (of one remaining widow, a silently suffering F-subject) and village.

As a hitherto absent feudal lord, Thakur's loss of his arms is a reminder of the impotence of the legal apparatus[125] as well as punishment for his (and the state's) failure to stop Gabbar from massacring his family and plundering the village; feudal authority is properly restored when Thakur uses his feet to defeat Gabbar in the end. The discovery that Gabbar and Thakur, though explicitly opposed, are on the same side as far as the moral law is concerned, corresponds to our thesis of the secret identity of father and villain in many Hindi films.

This reading also explains why Gabbar brutally kills the blind Imam's son (Sachin) and the curious denouement of *Sholay:* Veeru leaves the village with Basanti, *despite his earlier plan, shared with Jai, to stay in the village*. Both the Imam's son and Veeru leave the village premises for the city; one succeeds, the other does not. Why? Unlike Veeru, who leaves with Basanti for good, Iqbal's son leaves for the city in order to work and return, potentially bringing urban mores and ideals along with him which would disturb the already fragile feudal structure of the village. Further, Iqbal is

[125] "The Thakur's dismemberment has two conflicting but equally significant meanings: On the one hand, it represents the disabling of the apparatus of law and order, its debilitation in the confrontation with criminality. On the other hand, it also signifies a temporary breach of the coalition between the rural rich and the state: the Thakur remains but loses his hands, which he had himself described as the hangman's noose', i.e. the law. Both of these scenarios make possible and necessary the infusion of new energy from a source outside the coalition. The petty criminals, who provide this supplement of energy and serve as replacements for the lost limbs of the Thakur, are the infra-legal, but not irredeemably criminal, figures with whom the new proletarian and other disaffected audiences could identify". Prasad, *The Ideology of the Hindi Film*, 155.

Muslim, and his murder a double punishment – for him and his blind father[126], the representative of Islam in the village.

In this sense, it is essential that the urban lumpen, Jai and Veeru, be eliminated as soon as they finish the job; their continued presence would pose a similar danger to Thakur's freshly regained authority. Jai's fatal transgression is to fall in love with Thakur's widow, a dangerous threat to the family stability, and hence he was eliminated; the scene of his death is preceded by a scene in which the two friends plan to marry and stay in the village; in Jai's case, a double transgression (marrying a widow *and* living with her in the village) that would explode the feudal fabric.

But why does Jai die in this particular manner, in the act of uniting his best friend with *his* beloved? A possible answer could be gleaned from a singular sequence in the song 'Yeh Dosti': while singing '*tera saath na chodenge*' (we'll never leave each other's side), the two men spot a village belle on the road who observes them with interest. The two friends comically pull each other down as each attempts to approach her; frustrated, Jai tosses a coin (the same trick coin which determines Jai's sacrifice in the end) but instead of winning the wager, the coin lands on its edge. This brief interruption of lust (transgression) is followed by the duo nearly meeting with an accident

[126] The fact that Salim-Javed are the scriptwriters of *Sholay* may contradict this reading, but it must be remembered that a) these transgressions-punishments are not, as a rule, *consciously* inserted into the film as transgression and punishment, and b) in functional terms, the suffering-sacrificing Muslim is an explicitly positive depiction, akin to the suffering mother of the 1970s. In Hindi cinema, prolonged suffering and an unwarranted death lends the sufferer a sublime aura of innocence, and the suffering caused to innocents is held to be the worst crime possible. Like other filmmakers, Salim-Javed may have simply borrowed the regular trope of the suffering-sacrificing Muslim (e.g. *Saat Hindustani*, directed by another Muslim) to valorise him, yet our question concerns the hidden basis of this stereotype. This is the basic limitation of psychologizing the filmmaker to comprehend her film; the approach ignores the unconscious borrowing of archetypes from the wider body of Hindi cinema, patterns which have no recognizable authors but can be creatively interpreted, more or less, by the individual filmmaker.

(punishment); as their bike almost overturns, the two friends are separated only to be reunited again (redemption).

This short sequence, I believe, holds the key to Jai's death, a metaphor of the biggest threat to their friendship - heterosexual romance. Veeru, by courting Basanti, violates the implicit pact of eternal friendship *twice* ('we'll never leave each other's side'), first, *symbolically*, leaving Jai for Basanti (which explains Jai's comically obvious effort to get her guardian, *mausi-ji*, to refuse the match) and then, in reality, *when Veeru leaves Jai to die in the end*, to ensure Basanti's safety. In the end, Veeru and Basanti are reunited, but their reunion is not allowed to occur in the village, but in a departing train, leaving the feudal rule of Thakur in *Sholay* intact.

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Thesis 0: *In the larger context of Hindi cinema, the transgressions, even if brutally punished, form by themselves an archive of revolt, a reserve of memory for later filmmakers. For once a particular transgression has entered the space of Hindi cinema, it is no more a taboo (prohibition to utter a prohibition) but a minimally valid form of being. Some transgressive elements have a penchant to build themselves over time into new norms (a continuation of the Westernized heroine from Saira Banu in Purab aur Paschim to Zeenat Aman and Parveen Babi to the more emancipated heroines of today); others periodically erupt as sparks only to be repressed again and again (the problem of intermarriage between so-called upper castes and Dalits, in Achhut Kannya, Sujata and Satyakam).*

The same film can be read in two opposite ways: in functional terms, as introducing a certain dangerous idea to the public mind only to withdraw it before it gets too repulsive for one's mind; in terms of cause and effect, to depict a certain dangerous tendency in society *and* a fictive pathway to quell this tendency and restore social order. Though, seen by itself, a film may be conservative for its incessant punishment of social transgressions, the same film often introduces, however briefly, a new, flickering form of being, which in turn could be picked up by later films. A film could certainly be regarded as progressive if one focuses only on the ethical transgressions (e.g. *Sholay* raising the question of widow remarriage, coupled with Thakur's gracious assent), though this of course would be an incomplete reading of the film, a partly false redemption. And yet such a reading would have a limited truth depending on how far the film allows a certain transgression to accumulate before it is rudely interrupted, as we saw in the case of *Rajnigandha*.

CONCLUSION: THE NEW BOLLYWOOD

We end this study with seven theses on contemporary Hindi films, each seeking to explain a unique condition of possibility that would account for such a cinema.

Thesis 1: *Though the history of Hindi cinema is replete with revolutionary moments, the new Bollywood, for all its problems, marks a radical break from its entire lineage that starts from the early 20th century. For it marks not only the death of this or that transcendent ideal, but the death of transcendence per se (except for the recent resurgence of nationalism).*

An entire array of sacred structures, whose violation was necessary in order to reinstate them in a purified form (for instance, the corrupt, broken or overly authoritarian family transformed into a loving family, though with secret patriarchal underpinnings), has, over the span of a few years, been reduced to everyday immanence:

LOVE is transformed from a life-or-death situation to an everyday, often mundane, relation between two ordinary people, constantly on the verge of boredom or breakdown (the lead characters in *Shuddh Desi Romance* who are terrified of marriage, or Saif Ali Khan in *Happy Ending* who detests love because it would eventually lead to marriage). In Farhan Akhtar's *Dil Chahta Hai* (2001), which featured Aamir Khan as one of three inseparable friends, love is openly derided for a substantial

part of the movie, until Aamir himself falls in love. And yet, even when love triumphs, the final scene shows the friends mulling over their lives *at a remove* from their wives, who complain of the boredom of being left alone. *Dil Chahta Hai* marks the evolution of a major trend in Hindi cinema: the gradual replacement of sublime love, for which life itself could be sacrificed, with an everyday friendship based on mutual enjoyment. Friendship is arguably the dominant relationship in Hindi cinema today, to the extent that it even colonizes the form of love: lovers in Hindi films act more and more like friends in their collective pursuit of enjoyment.

FAMILY was, until the 1990s, a massively powerful institution, eliciting rebellion against its repressive structures in order to stage a final reunification (*Dil, Beta, Raja*), yet it gradually ceases to be a driving force after 2000. In parallel, the mother, who from the 1970s (Amitabh Bachchan's films) to the 1990s (*Karan Arjun*), acted as the indisputable moral center of the film all but disappears in the post-2000 films; from a sublime fount of legitimacy, she is reduced to a marginal character with little influence on her child's actions.

HONOR, honor of the family (*ghar ki izzat)* and honor of the woman (the beloved in whom the man's honor lies, for which he often clashes with the villain) – ceased to be a driving force in Bollywood plotlines. Till the 1990s, it had been a venerable tradition of several Hindi films to criticize the idea of family honor when determined by non-honorable standards like class position and money; on the other hand, the woman's honor was extolled in her chastity and fidelity to her lover/husband. The two opposed moves (one a critique, the other a eulogy) ensured together that the heroine redeemed, through her loyalty, sacrifice and suffering, the grand ideals of love, honor and the (purified, reunited) family, in short, the transcendent principles that defined Hindi cinema.

By the mid-2000s, however, this attitude had undergone a sea shift: it was tacitly accepted in many films (*Dil Chahta Hai, Lakshya*) that the woman, just like the man, has had a sexual/romantic past with other partners. Yet the notion of the woman's honor still existed in a minimal form, as evidenced by the remarkable fact that the woman's sexual history is rarely shown on screen (though it is common for male protagonists to have sex with multiple partners, including white women, until they find the loved one).

The woman's honor is also evoked in the anxiety in many 'progressive' Hindi films over sexual contact between an Indian woman and a foreigner (*Cocktail, Queen*); the taboo on sex between a *non-Indian man* and an *Indian woman* is a powerful unconscious motivation in constructing today's cinema, as indicated in the near-total absence of such a cross-cultural couple in our films.

EVIL, no longer embodied in a formidable villain who oppresses innocent citizens (*Ghayal*, *Ghatak*) or an imperious father-figure who creates barriers between the couple (*Gadar: Ek Prem Katha*), is now immanent in society, dispersed everywhere (a trend seen especially in the underworld films – *Satya, Company, Ab Tak Chhappan*). On the other hand, a 'feel-good' film often reduces evil to everyday *mischief*, in which the protagonists knowingly participate in acts of immorality (e.g. theft in *Oye Lucky Lucky Oye*, corruption and deceit in *Dabangg*); these traditionally evil actions are officially legitimized by the film's ironic-parodic tone.

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Thesis 2: *The form of the Hindi film has undergone a drastic transformation; the logic of transgression and punishment is increasingly being replaced by a new logic of desire and reward: the characters are rewarded when they act on their desire against social conventions or circumstances and punished when they deviate from their desire.*

The new Bollywood cinema has a complex form, yet two patterns can readily be seen: first, sexual transgressions (no longer kisses or intimate body contact, but sex itself) are still routinely punished; second, the pursuit of individual desire is often rewarded in subsequent scenes. In Imtiaz Ali's films, sex is a regular device that precedes separation, physical or emotional, between the couple: in *Tamasha* (2015), the first sex scene precedes the couple's four-year-long separation; the second time marks the beginning of the woman's realization that her lover is not the same man she had met years before.

In Imtiaz Ali's *Rockstar* (2011), a central ambiguity haunts the film: is the heroine's growing illness caused by separation from her lover or is it a result of their sexual encounters, a double crime since she is already married? The film makes a strong case for the former interpretation; the private world of the singer-musician (Ranbir Kapoor) and his muse (Nargis Fakhri) is blissful until its disruption by outside social forces (the media, the woman's marriage, her family); the woman regularly recovers from her illness, for a brief while, when her lover returns from his concerts to meet her. Yet the film is terribly ambiguous about this interpretation: in a pivotal scene, the bedridden woman recovers from her illness not when her lover kisses her but the opposite; she recovers, standing on her feet after months, to prevent him from kissing her.

A logic of cumulative transgression and punishment can equally well explain *Rockstar*'s form: the intermittent periods of sexual bliss between lovers are severely punished via the woman's growing illness. In the end, the heroine's younger sister explicitly accuses the lover of causing her death: *'You've killed her, Jordan... I hope you suffer all your life, you are her disease'*, a traumatic remark which illuminates this buried layer of *Rockstar*. For if the lover is simply the object of passionate attachment of the woman without whom she cannot live, he cannot be directly blamed for her death; it is his persistent return to her married life, their sexual transgressions and his inability to legitimize his presence in her life through marriage (she had once accused him of using her as a sex object) that accelerates the process of killing her.

In *Cocktail* (2012), a film written by Imtiaz Ali, the hero (Saif Ali Khan) leaves a brief live-in relationship with a sexually liberated woman (Deepika Padukone) and falls in love with her opposite, a pure Indian girl, a girl he knows he cannot bed without falling in love. *Cocktail* is an effective critique of the liberated woman's M-subjectivity, her incessant will to enjoy and live in the moment; by the end, she too has realized the emptiness of endless enjoyment without any foundation, either in Indian values (family, loyalty or restraint) or in love.

Yet the criticism is delivered from a conservative viewpoint, for *Cocktail* is also a conventional film in which female sexuality is allowed to grow before it is punished and the virtuous woman rewarded: the man, to his own dismay, falls in love with the other woman (Diana Penty) just after he is caught by his mother kissing his bikini-clad girlfriend on a beach (a sexual transgression).

In *Jab We Met* (2007), the happy-go-lucky woman (Kareena Kapoor), reminiscent of Anand and Mili[127], elopes from home only to be brutally punished by rejection when she finally reaches her lover; it is no coincidence that her second lover, the hero (Shahid Kapur), must first return her to the family before they can get married. Sex also poses unconscious problems for a host of other films; to take one example, the 'blind' hero's nightmarish ordeal in *Andhadhun*[128], where he finds himself trapped in a web of lies and deceit, begins precisely after he has sex with a woman who visits his home; punishment shares a singular resemblance with transgression since his pretence of blindness, which had helped him seduce the woman, lands him in serious trouble when he visits a patron's home.

The role of sexual transgression is particularly visible in the horror film. In Amar Kaushik's *Stree* (2018), men regularly disappear from a village under the influence of a sexually voracious witch. The first man disappears from a rendezvous with a sex worker; two other men vanish just after their friend, the hero, has a sexual encounter with a mysterious woman (a displaced punishment). The witch is defeated when the sexual act does *not* occur; the hero (Rajkummar Rao) claims that the witch, the ghost of a sex worker, never wanted sex in the first place but simply desired to be treated as human, redeeming her in retrospect.

[127] Anand, Mili and Geet of *Jab We Met* are exemplars of M-innocence, who pursue enjoyment without harming others or themselves. There are two other kinds of innocence: the familiar F-innocence in which a suffering-sacrificing subject (the heroines of Bimal Roy) acquires a sublime aura that melts the hearts of spectators. On the other hand, we have M'-innocence, the tremendous charisma a powerful authority-figure (e.g. *Dayavan, Sarkar*) exudes when he distributes gifts to the poor or intervenes in a situation to deliver justice. Each kind of subject has a unique aura that sticks to him or her, an intangible and distinctive atmosphere or quality that surrounds her, a halo of sorts which cannot be removed simply by rational arguments (by highlighting the M'-figure's scheming and exploitative actions, for instance).

[128] Sriram Raghavan's *Andhadhun* (2018) tells the story of a blind piano player who gets embroiled in a murder and his attempts to extricate himself.

Yet this redemption is deeply problematic: the final scene shows the once ferocious witch defanged of all her powers, staring wordlessly at a monument the village dedicates to her; monumentalization, in fiction as in reality, acts as a false redemption in *Stree*[130]. Though the film tries to redeem itself by having her powers stolen by another *woman*, a witch (Shraddha Kapoor), instead of being quelled by a male *tantrik*, one should not forget that this woman leaves the village alone in the end; the force of feminine sexuality has effectively been either tamed or banished.

Despite the prevalence of the transgression-punishment logic, Hindi cinema today seems to be moving towards the opposite logic: transgressions, when part of desire or goal of enjoyment, are not punished but rewarded, yet *deviations from the subject's desire are punished*. This new logic, which I shall demonstrate below, is a sign of the resolute establishment of the M-subject (seeking personal happiness and enjoyment) as the default mode of being for protagonists in Hindi cinema; from the suffering F-F couple in the 1940s and 1950s, to the phallic M'-F couple of the 1970s, the couple of the new millennium is firmly M-M.

The only complication is that though both man and woman seek personal freedom (which they define as the freedom to pursue happiness), they often have differential rights. For instance, we still have very few mainstream films in which the heroine is *shown* having sex with multiple people without repercussions; in *Dirty Picture* (2011), for instance, the salacious heroine (Vidya Balan) who sleeps her way to the top is brutally punished in the end.

[130] A similar monumentalization occurs at the end of *Achhut Kanya*: the villagers dedicate a monument for the valiant woman who sacrificed her life to prevent a train accident; repressed here is the transgression that caused her death (the fortuitous meeting with her lover after marriage).

In Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari's *Bareilly ki Barfi* (2017), a pseudonymous writer (Ayushmann Khurana) falls in love with a woman (Kriti Sanon) who, to his delight, is already in love with his literary persona. However, there is a problem: her parents disapprove of the writing profession, forcing him to conceal his identity from his beloved. The man sets up an elaborate scheme to dissociate the woman from his alter ego (the writer) and make her fall in love with his 'real' self, yet miserably fails again and again.

At one point, the writer is berated by a friend for being selfish in his reluctance to risk expressing his love. The film proceeds in the same manner: each time he fails to express his love to the woman and plots a roundabout scheme to attain her, he is punished, until the defeated man is forced by circumstances to read out a letter of love to his beloved at her wedding; the film instantly rewards him with a happy ending. *Bareilly ki Barfi* thus functions as a gentle criticism of the M-figure who wishes to preserve his shell of invulnerability, a safety shield against the world, which a declaration of love - always an unforeseeable risk - would inevitably puncture.

In Aanand L. Rai's *Tanu Weds Manu* (2011), a London-returned man (R Madhavan) falls in love with a woman (Kangana Ranaut) who unfortunately has a lover. The film punishes his efforts to forget his love: when he tries to leave town, the woman urges him to stay back so he can attend her wedding; when he does leave town, he is punished even more and, in a turn of events, finds himself in the unfortunate position of being a witness for the woman's court marriage.

The marriage fails to occur precisely when the man, for once, decides to act on his love: when the couple need a pen to sign the deed, he claims he doesn't have one, a lie. This small act of following

his desire is a major turning point: in the next few scenes, the woman has begun to fall in love with this man. The real breakthrough in their relationship occurs when the man tearfully confesses his love; his courage and fidelity to his desire are both rewarded. *Tanu Weds Manu* is, again, a critique of M-subjectivity, not only of the man but of the woman's as well - a woman who wants both men's affections but does not wish to fully reciprocate to either; the eruption of love marks her break from such egoism.

In Imtiaz Ali's *Tamasha* (2015), sexual transgression and punishment is a minor point in what is essentially a desire-reward narrative; the man (Ranbir Kapoor) is a born mimic and storyteller who abandons his dream and reconciles himself to an ordinary, well-paying career. He is punished for this betrayal by a bitter breakup and, true to the desire-reward logic, his fortunes turn around only when he decides to pursue his original dream of theatre, a choice instantly rewarded with success.

In Rohit Shetty's *Chennai Express* (2013), the man (Shahrukh Khan) is again prevented from pursuing pleasure (with friends in Goa) by his grandfather's final request to immerse his ashes in Rameswaram. On the train journey, he gets embroiled with a woman (Deepika Padukone) kidnapped by her father's henchmen. The man is trapped in a comic nightmare, pushed around by phallic men twice his size; amidst them, he constantly fears for his life. But when does his luck, i.e. the film, begin to favor him? Only when he overcomes his own cowardice and acts upon his desire: the man finds the courage to spirit the woman away from her father's home, immerses his grandfather's ashes and returns to her father, finally winning him over by defeating his rival - a transition from M to M'.

In Neeraj Pandey's *A Wednesday!* (2008), four terrorists are slated to be killed in a bomb blast, yet the police manage to rescue one of them. Why is this terrorist rescued? The answer may lie in a short conversation this man had with the police before the blast: he recounts how he had fearlessly survived a punishment in his childhood when he was strung up a tree. His wit and courage are briefly rewarded by the film, and he is shot dead by the police only when he starts to bluster and fumble about his religious ideals, revealing himself as a fraud.

In the Netflix web series *Sacred Games* (2018), an obscene ideology seems to be at work: the series posits an honest Sikh cop (Saif Ali Khan) against a ruthless RAW agent (Radhika Apte); the Sikh man is sensitive and considerate, the woman cold-blooded in her pursuit of criminals, using innocent lives as pawns in her quest. The cop informally works under her; as per the desire-reward logic, he is generously rewarded in his endeavors by the web series whenever he acts beyond the bureaucratic rules and restrictions of the police. The female agent is rewarded too and even her ruthlessness is redeemed in a scene in which she saves the man's life from a mob of henchmen and singlehandedly, with just a gun at her disposal, scares them off.

Yet this scene is a case of false redemption, for her brave act is immediately followed by two remarkable developments: the woman is shot dead by a terrorist and the man is captured and has this thumb cut off. Why? The woman's death and the man's injury both indicate the same underlying logic: the woman is killed for her transgression of rescuing the central character, a man, from trouble, feminizing him in the process; the rescued man is punished through a symbolic castration (severance of the thumb) for his cowardly act of fleeing as the lone woman protects him from the

mob of gangsters. The sexist aspect of *Sacred Games* thus occasionally erupts in its form, with practically no traces in its remarkably liberal content.

In Aditya Dhar's *Uri: The Surgical Strike* (2019), a singular detail: when do the brave soldiers fail in their mission and when do they succeed? We encounter the same logic of desire and reward: the soldiers suffer whenever they deviate from their duty (spending time with family) or are careless in their actions (ignoring a concealed bomb); they are rewarded with success when they are absolutely dedicated in their mission, as if no contingency could stop them once their desire is concomitant with their duty.

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Thesis 3: *Contemporary Bollywood's move against transcendence arose out of crucial transformations in form and content in the 1990s.*

Three iconic films of the 1990s encapsulated a turn away from transcendent ideals:

A) ***Hum Aapke Hain Koun* (1993):** With its incredible success, HAHK (man and woman fall in love during a family wedding) reinvented the family - from being the great upholder of honor (*izzat*) to an immanent zone of enjoyment (in Patricia Uberoi's words, 'a spectacle of unlimited consumption'[131]). Evil as condensed in specific personae was almost abolished; in its place *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* offered misfortunes (the accidental death of the daughter-in-law) and internal misunderstandings, which once clarified would lead to the utopian family reunion. *Hum Aapke*

[131] Uberoi, 'Imagining the Family: An Ethnography of Viewing Hum Aapke Hain Kofun . . .!', in *Freedom and Destiny: Gender, Family, and Popular Culture in India*, 164.

Hain Koun also presents a unique case of a film split between the classic mode of storytelling (via transgression and punishment) and the new mode (of the unpunished pursuit of desire, a cumulative transgression in retrospect); while the major part of the film allows the couple (Madhuri Dixit and Salman Khan) the opportunity of free love (sans sex, of course) without any punishment, the final section, after the sister-in-law's fall, proceeds by the brutal logic of punishment, sacrifice, and ultimate redemption.

The turning point of the film is the sister-in-law's fall from the stairs, which, we saw earlier, occurs just after she urges the man to place a necklace around her sister's neck, legitimating their union by substituting parental authority with her own. Her death is followed by the lovers completely subordinating their desire before the paternal law, suffering and sacrificing until a truly miraculous redemption.

B) ***Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1994):** Critics have often panned Aditya Chopra's *DDLJ* - a love story that begins in Europe but is rudely cut short by the woman's authoritarian father – as a blatant submission to patriarchal authority (the lovers instead of escaping, insist on taking the permission of the patriarch before marriage).

Yet the film is radically ambiguous for two reasons: first, the *boy's* father (Anupam Kher) is thoroughly egalitarian in his attitude; his only wish is for his son (Shahrukh Khan) to enjoy life as much as he can; by extension, the girl (Kajol) is entering a family which is the complete opposite of the one she is leaving (an authoritarian father, a submissive mother). Second, DDLJ's iconic final scene, in which the father (Amrish Puri) releases his daughter's hand and lets her

board the train along with her departing lover, is unique in its complete defiance of Hindu customs, for no traditional Hindu father would let his daughter leave with her lover without the sanction of society, i.e. marriage[132].

It is in this context that the father's final words should be read: '*Ja Simran, jee le apni zindagi*' (Go Simran, live your life) marks the voluntary demise of father's authority over his daughter's enjoyment; not only is the father *not* forced to relent or shamefacedly admit his mistake like in other films, he is instead allowed to ponder over the best match for his daughter and *freely* decide to pick her lover as his own choice; this is the secret meaning of the hero's insistence that he can convince the father to select him over his rival.

The final scene of *DDLJ* thus accomplishes a respectful destruction of traditional patriarchy without hurting its sentiments (indicated by the father's thumbs up to the departing hero), a move far more powerful than an unwilling or shamefaced acquiescence popularly depicted in Hindi cinema at that time.

The paternal law is indeed re-established, but the law in this case is the law of the *other* father (Anupam Kher), the law of enjoyment: the installation of European freedom (barring the prohibition on premarital sex) in Indian culture and the redefinition of Indian cultural codes from prohibitions and restrictions to avenues of enjoyment (a la *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* and, much later, *Monsoon Wedding*). This does not imply that equality between the sexes has been

[132] "The release of the girl, and the formation of the couple reorders the perceptual economy, making the father into a willing spectator of a scene both sanctioned by him, but now disappearing from his view and into the vast beyond". Vasudevan, *The Melodramatic Public*, 372.

accomplished; instead a new *differential patriarchy* is established where man and woman can pursue happiness together without the woman being the man's property or the *ghar ki izzat*. The difference here is simply that the man enjoys more privileges, his freedom much greater than the woman in the new patriarchy.

However, stubborn elements of the old system remain in DDLJ: the emphasis on the woman's *izzat* is not overcome, as confirmed in the hotel scene ('I know what *izzat* means to the Indian woman')[134], and it is an open question whether these elements should be viewed as trace (remnants of an old patriarchy, defeated but not quite extinguished) or symptom (the secret patriarchal basis of the couple's liberalism).

C) ***Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998):** Karan Johar's debut – a widower falling in love with his best friend from college - is again laced with respectful gestures towards tradition and 'Indian' femininity (the friend is transformed from a dark tomboy to a fair saree-clad woman). Yet it also attacks that tradition by equating love with friendship ("if she can't be my best friend, I can never love her") and forcing the hero to question himself if love can indeed occur twice. The question is remarkable since so far Hindi film tradition had dictated that if a man (or rarely, a woman) falls in love twice, either the person or the film itself must discredit one of the loves as a case of false love, an infatuation, harmless philandering or worse, an act of manipulation by the other. However, if it can occur more than once, love can no longer be taken for granted once achieved;

[134] "The crude insertion of a discourse of nationalism and prudish morality into the 'morning after' confusion in the Swiss hotel scene in DDLJ clearly jarred even viewers in my sample who delight in the film, causing them to think through and articulate critiques of the very ideas Aditya Chopra, the director, was most keen to champion and signalling that Hindi films may be at their least 'ideologically effective' when they are at their most didactic". Banaji, *Reading 'Bollywood'*, 119.

instead the sustenance of love would itself become a problematic in many films in the 2000s (*Chalte Chalte, Saathiya* etc.).

Yet the ideal of a single transcendent love was still not completely overcome in *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, a fact seen from the wife's (Rani Mukherjee) insistence that she failed to become the man's best friend, *and hence his true love*; she dies not only in order to fulfill the man's love (a functional explanation) but because she had intruded in their love in the first place and, *fully knowing this*, married the man instead of reconciling him with his true love ('That day I realized that maybe I had come between Rahul and Anjali, maybe I had come between two friends').

This is indicated by the total absence of any scenes of their early marriage (shown in montage); in the film's chronology, the wife's fatal illness follows the realization of her error. The idea of love as friendship (though given lip service in previous films like *Maine Pyar Kiya*) is a powerful *explicit* force in *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, though friendship blossoms into love only through a separation (a theme developed later in *Jaane Tu Ya Jaane Na*). Yet, at another level, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* is a conservative film: the second condition for the man to fall in love with his best friend is that she must transform into a feminine woman (F), in terms of appearance (the traditional Indian saree) and spirit (she must sacrifice her love, for her marriage is fixed).

Apropos her transformation, we can reconcile outer appearance and inner spirit for the dead woman (Rani Mukherjee) as well: chronologically speaking, her last proper scene before she falls fatally sick occurs at the railway station as she watches her lover's best friend (Kajol) departing

from their lives. The scene shows her in a western tight-fitting outfit, in stark contrast to the friend, who, though a tomboy, wears for once a white salwar kameez.

As the train starts to move, lover and friend stare fixedly at each other; the tearful friend (Kajol) impulsively throws her red *dupatta* from the train towards the lover, who catches it. Why? The red *dupatta* is a gesture of sacrifice, which the lover (Rani) does not reciprocate, neither at that time nor later. This is perhaps the real reason the lover (Rani) dies, for both her appearance and spirit are unbecoming, in the film's eyes, of that feminine ideal which the other woman (Kajol) achieves by the end of *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*.

…

Thesis 4: *The contemporary de-transcendentalizing phase of Bollywood, which marks the systematic decimation of all ideals hitherto held sacred, owes its existence to two primary techniques: irony and realism.*

While earlier Hindi films would stage an attack on an ideal (love or family unity) in order to prove its sublime and undying nature (love wins in the end and the family is happily reconciled), the contemporary techniques of irony and parody perform the opposite move: they tend to stage the accomplished ideal (a tearful love affair or a family reunion) as a *farce*, removing any kind of transcendent ground from beneath its feet.

Parody is especially effective in demolishing entire film genres or, at the very least, announcing the death of the genre it parodies. For instance, the gangster/underworld film, starting from *Satya*, enjoyed immense popularity in the early 2000s, yet saw an irreversible decline after the double success of Rajkumar Hirani's *Munnabhai* films that parodied the genre.

Realism works in the contemporary Bollywood film both as a formal and an ideological imperative: in its formal sense, a verisimilitude to location, mannerisms and concerns of ordinary people; as an ideology or ethics, a disavowal of idealism (political or romantic) and an acceptance of the flawed nature of humans. Realism as ideology encompasses as well as exceeds realism as form: the retro film, in all its garish excesses, is precisely the outcome of an ideology of realism, since it stages the film as farce and insists on flawed humanity (e.g. *Dabangg*: the cop-hero openly takes bribes).

The rise of the retro film in the late 2000s (remakes of 1970s and 1980s Hindi films, or of South Indian and other regional blockbusters) may show a continuity between contemporary Bollywood and its antecedents, yet the form of this continuity, homage or cross-referencing is the ironic-parodic paradigm discussed in the earlier thesis.

The retro film distinguishes itself from its antecedents by three distancing effects: a) *irony*, or the undercutting of the hero's machismo and other sublime ideals; b) *parody*, or exaggeration of the already overblown elements of yesteryear's films in order to reassure the viewer of the film's fantastic nature; and c) *nostalgia*, or the projection of old ideals and binaries of good and evil onto non-urban (the idyllic village) or non-contemporary locations (historical fictions). The popularity of the retro films after 2000, which parodies Hindi films from the late 1970s and 1980s, is doubly ironic,

since the films of that period were often parodying themselves in an overblown *masala* aesthetic[135]. E.g. *Shaan*, *Don*, *Amar Akbar Anthony*.

Yet despite its postmodern features, the retro film smuggles in the same M'-figure who, in the past few years, had been thoroughly delegitimized in Hindi cinema. Crucially, this phallic hero with a sense of humor, who is constantly joking and ridiculing his own masculinity, is split between appearance and action: his phallic actions are regularly rewarded in the film (e.g. *Dabangg*, *Singham*, *Simmba*), i.e. the self-parodying of the macho protagonist had little impact on his actions.

Let me demonstrate this point. In *Simmba* (2018), a police officer (Ranveer Singh) avenges the rape of his 'sister', who was murdered for attacking the villains. Apart from this defiant woman, who dies in the act of asserting her independence, all the other women, except the judge, are subordinated to the hero's authority, their actions either incited by him or subjected to his approval. As for the judge, she is given an imaginary deference, but has no real role to play in changing the course of the film; ultimately, the man must take his own revenge. Yet the official narrative of *Simmba* is of self-parody of the phallic masculine (M') and ironic homage to traditional Hindi cinema.

…

Thesis 5: *The 2010's mark a golden decade for (post-)feminism in Hindi cinema, from the eruption of uncompromisingly pro-women films (Kahaani, Queen, Revolver Rani, Piku, Anarkali of Arrah, Lipstick under*

[135] "The violence in Hindi films has long been presented as a fantasy, clearly separating it from the day-to-day world. The special effects were both wildly unbelievable (like heroes jumping incredible heights to the tops of buildings) and crude (accomplishing the jump upward by reversing a film of a hero jumping down)". Derné, *Globalization on the Ground*, 183.

My Burkha, Raazi, Angry Indian Goddesses, Parched) to the relative success of the MeToo movement in exposing the culture of gender harassment and inequality in the Hindi film industry.

The disappearance of the servile, suffering, sacrificing woman (F-figure) and the refusal of marriage (and even heterosexual love in cases like *Queen*) as the *telos* of a young woman's life marks a major feminist revolution in Hindi cinema. And yet the term 'feminism' itself is today either rejected (what is called postfeminism) by many women or used only in an individualized sense (part of what Catherine Rottenberg calls neoliberal feminism[136]).

P*ostfeminism* refers to the growing number of women who distance themselves from feminists and feminist movements by claiming that women have already acquired substantial freedom and equality vis-à-vis men and all that remains is a personal quest for 'empowerment' and 'choice' in their lives.

Neoliberal feminism shares many of postfeminism's traits except that in this case, women assert themselves as feminists, even though their feminism is defined in terms of individual empowerment (such as in Deepika Padukone's controversial 'My Choice' video[137]) as well as individual enemies (like

[136] "Confidence should therefore be understood as the dominant positive affective mode through which young aspirational women cultivate their neoliberal feminist subjectivity, enabling them to postpone the promise of a happy work-family balance until a later stage in life. As such, confidence is intricately tied to the mobilization of futurity as a technology of self and orients young women toward this temporal horizon. For young and high-potential women, the promise of future returns clearly helps to ensure that each individual concentrates on her own life plan, encouraging her to augment her individual generic capital by building up her own portfolio. To augment one's capital, one needs to be confident in one's self as having capital-enhancing potential, and this potential and promise are clearly future-directed.", Rottenberg, *The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism*, 119.

[137] Homi Adajania's short film, shot in 2015, is a veritable manifesto of postfeminism: "My body, my mind, my choice. To wear the clothes I like… My choice; to be a size 0 or a size 15… Let it be my choice to marry, or not to marry, to have sex before marriage, to have sex out of marriage, or to not have sex. My choice: to love temporarily or lust forever. My choice: to love a man, or a woman, or both. Remember; you are my choice, I'm not your privilege. My choice: to come home when I want. Don't be upset if I come home at 4 am… My choice: to have your baby or not, to pick you from 7 billion choices or not… I am the universe, infinite in every direction. This is my choice".

the rapists who are shot dead in *Mom* and *Angry Young Goddesses*), instead of group action and mass movements that aim to change a certain unjust structure.

In Vikas Bahl's *Queen* (2013), a woman is jilted by her fiancé just before her wedding; to overcome her sorrow, she goes alone on the planned honeymoon to Europe and experiences a self-realization: the only aim of life, she now believes, is to live each moment to the fullest, beyond the oppressive social rules that stifle one's freedom. *Queen*'s form perfectly matches this message; the woman's unhappiness lasts precisely until the time she gets drunk at a night club and is struck by an epiphany: "My condition is just like Gupta uncle. Gupta uncle had got cancer. He never smoked or drank, but still he got cancer. Wouldn't it have been better if he had done those things?"

What does her brief remark, a veritable manifesto of contemporary Hindi cinema, mean? It implies that suffering is arbitrary and not a necessary consequence of a previous transgression (smoking or drinking). If true, one is fundamentally free to pursue her life on her own terms, make her own laws and break them at will.

And yet there is a moral law in *Queen*: as long as the woman obeys traditional codes, she suffers; the moment she begins indulging in moderate hedonism (a flirtation with hedonism as opposed to authentic, dangerous hedonism that poses a real physical and psychological threat to the self, e.g.

Note that the emphasis on choice is based on the establishment of the contemporary M-woman's fundamental innocence (she can never be criticized for her choices, for she can always reply: 'my choice') and the denial of gender equality (a man who claims that it is his choice to have sex outside marriage without consulting his partner first, or refers to himself as "the universe, infinite in every direction", will be rightly called an egotist or a megalomaniac). And yet the choices themselves (sexual freedom, control over body and time) are often revolutionary, and restrictions on them frequently patriarchal in nature. One solution to this paradox is to assert a choice as long as it conforms to the norm of equality, in word and deed; in other words, a 'My Choice' should be complemented with a similar listing of 'Your Choice' in order to split open its narcissistic shell.

drugs, alcoholism, random sex with strangers), she is rewarded with happiness, confidence and friends. Her fiancé is the voice of a losing patriarchy; he arrives in Paris precisely after the woman shares a kiss with an Italian chef, a kiss completely desexualized by the naive expression on the woman's face and her desire to prove that Indians are the best at everything, including kissing.

In the end, the woman breaks off the engagement and thanks her former suitor (for inadvertently releasing her, through his rejection, from the shackles of traditional patriarchy), yet it is crucial to remember that she has returned from Europe with her precious virginity intact. The absence of sexual hedonism in *Queen*, indeed the woman's radical asexuality, points us towards a conservative message underwriting the film; *Queen* allows its protagonist to be liberated, on condition that the liberation is not sexual.

Finally, in *Queen*, we meet a character whom we have met earlier in *Anand* and *Mili*: the *angel of happiness*, a person who initiates the protagonist in her transformation from the suffering feminine (F) to the independent woman (M). In *Queen*, it is Vijayalaxmi, the woman's half-Indian friend; in *Jab We Met*, it is the heroine who initially brings the man out of his depression (their roles are reversed later in the film).

In Pan Nalin's *Angry Young Goddesses* (2015), female enjoyment is radicalized further: a motley collective of women from different walks of life come together for a lesbian wedding in Goa. When their British friend is raped and murdered, the enraged women track the rapists and shoot them down. The film is a powerful indictment of the everyday patriarchy as it exists today: regular sexual harassment, fairness creams, pressures of producing babies after marriage, the casual sexism of

audiences towards female stage-performers, the objectification of the woman's body in commercial cinema. Yet there are two singular features of the film: first, the class dimension, the fact that the original angry young goddess, the maid who works at the Goan house, is slapped and silenced by these upper-class women, who advise her against taking revenge for her murdered brother (by the climax, she has lost all her previous rage and is a marginal character entrusted with childcare).

Second, the British girl's death is immediately preceded by two remarkable scenes: first, the girl learns that the attractive man next door is interested in her, a knowledge which brings her intense happiness. In the next scene, the other women in the group begin to pull her leg over a completely unrelated issue (her British accent and her work in B-grade Bollywood films); their mockery of her work rises to such a level that she leaves in a huff for a walk; at this point, she is raped and murdered on the beach.

We thus observe what appears to be a double-layered punishment (the mockery of her own friends followed by her murder) and the transgression, in this case, can only be the neighbor's reciprocal interest in her, the real prospect of a future (heterosexual) relationship. Such an unconscious logic is alien to the film's explicit ideology of free love, except that it follows a pattern: men in *Angry Indian Goddesses* are routinely eliminated; one woman's boyfriend comes to check on her but she asks him to leave; another woman, after spending a time of freedom with her friends, decides to divorce her husband. A weak reading of *Angry Indian Goddesses*, weak since this pattern is utterly unique, is thus of a lesbian unconscious running through the film, punishing heterosexual relations and ultimately killing the British girl.

…

Thesis 7: *The films of the new millennium mark the near-complete exclusion of poverty and the poor from their domain; in the rare cases when the poor are shown, they are already proto-middle class in their thinking and ambition (Sui Dhaaga, Gully Boy).*

The dominant formula of several Hindi films from the 1950s (e.g. *Aan*[138]) to the 1990s (e.g. *Dil*) which involved inter-class relationships was to castigate and domesticate the westernized woman as a morbid expression of class struggle (the rich, proud woman represented the arrogance of her class); class struggle, in other words, was used as an excuse to silence the assertive heroine. However, more visible today is the opposite scenario: the growing trend to celebrate the resurgent power of women is coupled with the near-perfect elimination of the working class and rural India.

The clearest erasure of class contradiction is seen in Imtiaz Ali's *Highway* (2014), a film ostensibly about a young woman who discovers freedom through being kidnapped by a poor rustic stranger; the couple fall in love and wish to settle together, an obvious transgression. The film confirms our hypothesis: the man is killed just after the two set up a hut in the mountains. *Highway*, however, ends happily with the woman gaining personal and financial independence; she supervises a factory and lives alone in a bungalow in the hills, a lifestyle impossible to maintain in the humble hut. The possibility of inter-class relationships is thus raised and then summarily dissolved; the man, like Jack

[138] In Mehboob Khan's *Aan* (1951), the highest-grossing Indian film ever at that time, a poor Rajput villager (Dilip Kumar) falls for an arrogant princess (Nadira) who does not reciprocate to his overtures; the man later kidnaps her and forces her to adopt the life of a villager.

in *Titanic*, is ultimately a means for the rich woman to attain her personal independence from the claustrophobic bourgeois society.

The exclusion of the poor in Hindi cinema parallels the current neoliberal agenda of beautification of cities. Their inclusion can occur only if they pursue middle-class ambitions and raise themselves, out of pure grit and endurance, to the level of 'respectability', as in *Gully Boy*[139] and *Sui Dhaaga*[140]. One witnesses here the flip side of the logic of rewarding individual desire: the presupposition is that the desiring subject can *always* attain her object (fame, wealth, excellence) if she tries hard enough; ultimately the only obstacle on her path is her own lack of drive (low confidence, dearth of imagination to think of alternatives, lack of courage to take risks, insufficient endurance).

Although admirable in its extraordinary ambition and successful defiance of traditional moral codes, this logic of rewarding drive also places *the onus of failure completely on the subject*, with little criticism of the social structure that blocks her way; today's films, in other words, ultimately work by the Thatcherite ideology that "there's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families".

Thesis 7: *Films on terrorism often invoke innocence (the infinite value of civilian life) to deplore terrorism without examining its social causes, which often include the death of many forgotten 'innocents' whose punishment is secretly justified as retribution for an ontological transgression, their existence as members of a certain community.*

[139] Zoya Akhtar's *Gully Boy* (2019) films the struggle of an aspiring rapper (Ranveer Singh) of Dharavi, who channels his inner angst and rage against the wretched slum life to succeed in the music world.
[140] In Sharat Katariya's *Sui Dhaaga* (2018), a small-town tailor's grandson (Varun Dhawan) and his wife (Anushka Sharma) seek to escape from their dire poverty by participating in a prestigious fashion design contest.

Recent Hindi films on terrorism often depict the terrorist[141] as a figure split between bitter resentment against the 'normal', peace-loving, inevitably middle-class citizen and a secret insecurity about his or her violent goals. Film after film, from Mani Ratnam's acclaimed *Roja* (1992) and *Dil Se* (1998) to Neeraj Pandey's *A Wednesday* (2008) deploy the ideology of innocence (of the infinite value of civilian life, by definition innocent) to condemn the terrorist without examining the social causes of terrorism. The terrorist began his life in the late 1970s as the typical villain who poses a threat to the nation (*Shaan*, *Mr. India, Roja*). By the late 2000s, terrorism had become a full-fledged genre; the Islamic terrorist was opposed to the innocent Muslim, who was nonetheless punished by state agencies or regarded with suspicion by the general populace (*A Wednesday*, *Mulk*).

The paradox of such sympathetic liberal films is that they often advocate 'instant justice': any person remotely linked to 'terrorist' activities can be killed with impunity, without the film mourning his loss. At times the innocent Muslim would sacrifice his life to prevent a terror attack, a disguised atonement for his own community's 'sins' (*Aamir*), a sacrifice that shares a remarkable resemblance to the priest's death in *Amar Akbar Anthony*. A spate of recent Netflix web series in 2018-19 (*Sacred Games, Leila* and *Ghoul*) mark a fresh challenge to this ideology by linking the state to the production of terrorism, though a close analysis of the form of *Sacred Games* suggests that the ideology of instant justice and guilt by association continue to haunt them: Muslim youth with the faintest association with terrorist activities are shot in cold blood, while the death of other 'innocent' Muslims is grieved.

[141] Such a depiction of the 'terrorist' dates back to *Roja*: "For the first time, terrorism moved from being located in isolated terrorist impulses in a single villainous entity like Dr Dang in *Karma* (Subhash Ghai, 1986) or Mogambo in *Mr. India* (Shekhar Kapoor, 1987), to being presented onscreen in its complex overrun of the contemporary and to being defined as we see it now". Bharat, Shooting Terror, 45.

EPILOGUE: *BAAHUBALI*

Since the 2000s, Hindi cinema has achieved a remarkable progress in the portrayal of women, including a wave of uncompromisingly (post-)feminist films like *Queen*, *Angry Young Goddesses, Parched, Lipstick Under My Burkha* and *Raazi*. It is almost taboo today to present the woman as an F-figure (weak, dependent and suffering); women are either firmly ensconced in the M-category (independent and seeking personal happiness) or steadily moving towards that ideal.

Yet the earth-shattering success of the *Baahubali* films in 2015 and 2017 (the second instalment became the highest-grossing blockbuster of all time in Indian cinema) may undermine the cause of feminism in Hindi cinema. Though it may be argued that phallic heroes had never gone out of fashion (Salman Khan in *Dabangg, Kick, Sultan* and *Ek Tha Tiger* and Ajay Devgan in *Singham*), yet most of these films worked in the ironic-parodic mode of mocking their protagonists' excesses; on the other hand, *Baahubali* marks an unambiguous celebration of the phallic masculine (M').

In S.S. Rajamouli's *Baahubali*, an exiled king (Prabhas) regains the empire of Mahishmati that his wicked uncle (Rana Daggubati) had snatched from his father (Prabhas, again). *Baahubali* has been praised for its magnificent visuals, many of which are steeped in phallic symbolism[142]: scenes of men

[142] "Baahubali, which literally means "he who has strong arms", is representative of the spectacle of muscularity in contemporary Indian cinema. The film posters and promotional videos showcase brawny protagonists and antagonists with voluptuous heroines. The theme song of the film spells out the importance of masculine strength and its potential to change history, with Hindi lyrics such as "uski bhujayein, badlein kathayein (his arms alter stories)". The overblown

fighting enormous bulls and hunting wild boars apart, the younger Baahubali singlehandedly uproots an enormous Shiva *linga* (phallus) from the ground and bears it on his shoulders; he climbs a gigantic waterfall to reach Mahishmati; once he arrives at the capital, the young man saves a giant statue of the rival king, his uncle, from crashing to the ground.

Officially speaking, Baahubali marks the seizure of power by a democratically elected king, a king of the people, by the people and for the people; the two Baahubalis, father and son, represent the masses, while Bhallaladeva, the evil king, embodies a tyrannical state. *Baahubali*'s final scenes mark the overthrow of tyranny by a young king-in-exile who leads his people against the state- a king who, for a brief while, is also a revolutionary.

To enter into the hidden depths of *Baahubali*, let us first note a curious pattern: the fate of women in the twin *Baahubali* films. There are three major women in *Baahubali*, all of whom are incredibly powerful figures: Sivagami (Ramya Krishna), the Queen Mother of Mahishmati and the elder Baahubali's foster mother; Devasena (Anushka Shetty), Baahubali *père*'s wife and his son's mother; and Avantika (Tamannaah), the younger Baahubali's lover.

Yet each of these powerful women meet a terrible fate: Sivagami, the Queen Mother, dies while rescuing the infant prince from his uncle; Devasena, the prince's mother, spends years in captivity after her husband's death; Avantika, the prince's lover, all but disappears in the second instalment of the film. Though Avantika's absence is understandable given that the second film occurs largely

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machismo in Baahubali speaks not only to the epic setting but also to a larger trend in Indian cinema that celebrates the physical fitness of a new generation of male actors". Kanjilal, 'Muscular Mahabharatas: Masculinity and Transnational Hindu Identity'. International Journal for Indian Studies, 3(2), 18-39.

in flashback, yet even towards the end, when the film returns to the present, she is reduced to a marginal character, portrayed in spectacular images but without any substantive role.

Thus *by the end, the kingdom of Mahishmati is left without a single powerful feminine figure; the three women are either dead or have become symbolic ornaments to the new king's authority*. The idea that the younger Baahubali's power is premised on the annihilation of female authority is beautifully illustrated in the enigmatic opening scene of *Baahubali*: Queen Mother Sivagami sacrifices her own life to save the infant prince from being swept away by a turbulent river.

Let us trace this motif further by following the complex buried chronology of *Baahubali*. At the very beginning, Mahishmati's first ruler dies; before death, he picks his *younger* son as successor. Why? Not because his elder son is crippled (as the voiceover hastens to assure us) but apparently for his vices (a shot of him drinking). The younger son, who is never shown, dies immediately after succession, leaving his infant child (Baahubali *père*) to the care of his brother's wife, Sivagami, who assumes the position of a temporary regent.

The first mystery: why is the elder son removed from the throne *twice,* first by his brother and then by his wife? As is evident from the film, this man is not a drunkard and, apart from his deformity, he seems perfectly able to rule. His real problem is that he has little control over his formidable wife Sivagami, a tremendously assertive lady, a woman who rules Mahishmati with an iron fist (reflected in her famous statement: 'This is my word, and my word is law'). The elder brother's fear of his dominant wife is symbolized in his shriveled arm, a metaphor for a shrunken phallus.

Sivagami raises the two boys (one her own, the other her nephew), vowing to install the more deserving king on the throne; eventually, Baahubali, the foster son, is chosen as heir. Yet this neat plan is turned on its head with the arrival of Devasena, the princess of a vassal kingdom and the beloved of Baahubali. Devasena's entry begins a cascading chain of effects culminating in Baahubali's death: Baahubali is first demoted to commander-in-chief for choosing Devasena's love over Sivagami's orders; Sivagami's son, Bhallaladeva, becomes king amidst great opposition from the masses (who regard Baahubali as their real ruler).

A pregnant Devasena begins another conflict with the state, first by publicly exhorting her husband to seize the throne and then by cutting off the fingers of a molester who is close to the king; she and her husband are banished from the kingdom in return. Devasena has a formidable tongue, which does not spare even the king or the Queen Mother (her irreverent repartee: 'Don't you have any intelligence?'). Under her influence, Baahubali regularly defies the king's authority, posing a threat not only to the present king but to Mahishmati's sovereignty as well.

After Baahubali's death, Devasena is imprisoned for decades; in the eyes of the king Bhallaladeva, her crime is promiscuity; the king's son later mocks Devasena as a wanton woman who would sleep with any man she finds. This strange allegation finds no evidence in the film, for Devasena is utterly loyal to Baahubali; promiscuity, it seems, is a patriarchal metaphor for her rebellious spirit.

Devasena's real 'crime' becomes clear if we compare the young Devasena with her aged counterpart: the young Devasena was famous for her fiery tongue-lashing; the Devasena who returns after her punishment hardly speaks or acts; she must be continually rescued by men from danger, even though

she is granted symbolic moments (such as carrying the decapitated head of the king's son in her hands); her fabled will to avenge her husband's death is delivered as a message to her son not by her own tongue but by the slave Kattappa; though present on that occasion, she is a silent spectacle of suffering, a puppet of her own revenge.

Throughout his short life, the elder Baahubali is guided by these two formidable women: his foster mother, Sivagami, and his wife, Devasena. His tragic death also marks the end of female authority in the palace of Mahishmati; the Queen Mother's final sovereign action is to publicly proclaim Baahubali's infant son as the new king of Mahishmati.

Though *Baahubali* uses the clever ploy of having the same actor (Prabhas) play father and son, the two men are in fact starkly different. For unlike his father, who is heavily influenced by the powerful women around him and is prepared to sacrifice his life for their will (and not simply to protect them), the young prince, from the very beginning, either escapes the authority of women or tames them into submission. The future king climbs the giant waterfall despite his foster mother's warnings; he seduces a young rebel-warrior, Avantika, and overwhelms her rebellious spirit; he rescues his captive mother, and in the end, helps her burn the evil king in a pyre.

It is in the case of the third woman, the warrior Avantika, that the young prince's phallic tendencies, his penchant for domination and acquisition, are most clearly visible. Though his love story is bereft of violence, the tale follows the familiar pattern of domination by seduction: in the first step, the man paints colored patterns on the woman's body without her knowledge, etchings that are interpreted by others as signs of her inner femininity, a womanhood she has thus far refused to

accept. Once he has marked the woman's body, the man seduces her in a dream-like sequence; he first undresses her as she fights him in vain; she then gazes at her supple body, reflected in a waterfall, and is struck by the realization of being a woman hidden behind a warrior's exterior.

Post seduction, she once again attempts to escape the man's bewitching influence, drugging him so that she can fulfil her allotted goal of rescuing the captive queen Devasena, who unknown to them, is Baahubali's own mother. Yet her escape is thwarted by foreign marauders who capture her. Baahubali predictably arrives to rescue Avantika; his triumph is completed when he tears the bracelet off Avantika's wrist ('you're mine, and everything that is yours is mine, including your goals'); he, not Avantika, will rescue the queen Devasena from the palace.

It is at this point in the film, in the first instalment itself, that Avantika's role as an active agent of her destiny, the fierce rebel-warrior, meets its end; from now on, she is a minor accomplice to Baahubali's quest to avenge his parents and conquer Mahishmati.

…

A final mystery remains unsolved: why did Kattappa kill Baahubali? This question, which captured the popular imagination in the two years separating *Baahubali: The Beginning* (2015) and *Baahubali 2: The Conclusion* (2017), has two parts: why was the elder Baahubali killed in the first place, and why was the killer none other than his beloved 'uncle', the slave-warrior Kattappa?

First, let us examine the official narrative: Baahubali *père* was the victim of a conspiracy hatched by his evil cousin, the king Bhallaladeva, who manipulated the Queen Mother, Sivagami, into believing that Baahubali was attempting to seize the throne; Kattappa was then chosen as the assassin (against his will, of course), since he enjoyed Baahubali's absolute trust ('as long as you, Kattappa, are with me, no one can harm me', that is, none except Kattappa himself).

Yet the charge against Baahubali (that he was plotting to conquer Mahishmati) had a grain of truth: it is no coincidence that Baahubali was killed during his exile from the city, when news arrived of his great popularity among the masses, who regarded him as their king, a parallel authority. The existence of two kings, one among the people and the other in the citadel, had brought Mahishmati to a crisis of sovereignty; the only solution was to get rid of one of them.

But why did the film pick Baahubali, and not Bhallaladeva, for assassination? The central problem arguably lay with Baahubali himself, who, as we noted, was heavily influenced by the powerful women around him. He had even left the throne for a woman; such a man, whose relationship with his wife was premised not on subjugation (M') but equality, was a threat to the patriarchal sovereignty that Mahishmati embodied, a spirit that, ironically, Bhallaladeva represented more accurately than his noble cousin. The elder Baahubali (who, in patriarchal parlance, cannot even control his own wife) is not allowed, in the film's logic, to rule the empire; thus, legitimate succession is delayed to the next generation for a truly phallic man, one who knows the art of subordination of women, to emerge as the real claimant.

This clarification of the elder Baahubali's murder sheds light on a little-noticed fact: the manner in which king Bhallaladeva is executed at the hands of Devasena, a purely symbolic scene since the entire scenario has already been arranged by her son (the younger Baahubali), much like the Hindi film scene (e.g. *Bhoomi*) where the man pummels the rapist to pulp so the woman could avenge herself by firing the final shot.

Yet this scene is marked by a crucial oddity: Bhallaladeva's undying lust for the aged Devasena. Just before his death, the defeated king asks Devasena to jump into his funeral pyre ('come Devasena, let's die together'), a transgression silenced with his execution by fire. Bhallaladeva's lust for Devasena is, arguably, the key reason for his downfall; his fortunes fail him at the precise point when he captures Devasena again from the battlefield (unlike her earlier 'official' imprisonment), his final defeat a retribution for this sexual transgression. The adjective of 'promiscuous' to describe Devasena finds here another meaning: even in old age, she remains an object of lust for the king, a lust he projects on to the woman as promiscuity.

But why does Kattappa, and no one else, kill Baahubali? The slave-warrior Kattappa is a fascinating character; though utterly loyal to the crown, he is allowed considerable freedom to intermix with the elder Baahubali, who affectionately calls him 'mama' (maternal uncle). Kattappa is a self-confessed 'lower-caste' ('neech jaat'), an epithet that could refer to his status as slave, but, I think, should also be literally taken.

Kattappa's caste would explain a curious feature in *Baahubali*: scenes of friendly intimacy between Kattappa and the elder Baahubali are invariably accompanied by the creation of new problems for

Baahubali: their sojourn in a foreign kingdom in disguise, where the two men play-act as uncle and nephew, is followed by Bhallaladeva's plot to wedge a divide between the Queen Mother and her favorite son; Kattappa's mistake in interpreting the Queen-Mother's message is, by his own admission, the literal cause of the divide.

Devasena's request that the lower-caste Kattappa bless her child as grandfather is immediately followed by Baahubali's expulsion from the post of commander-in-chief; Baahubali's life in exile where he freely mixes with the common ('low-caste') people, eating food from their hands, is followed by the plot to kill him; and finally, Baahubali's end arrives when he decides to leave his pregnant wife and save Kattappa from enemies; he carries the wounded Kattappa on his back to safety, and refuses to listen to Kattappa's warnings ('Please leave me to die! Please!'), before being stabbed from behind.

Kattappa's act of killing Baahubali, is, of course, the ultimate proof of his allegiance to the throne of Mahishmati, yet Kattappa (or rather the proximity to the 'low-caste' Kattappa on equal terms) is also the elder Baahubali's nemesis in another sense; with his death, caste hierarchy, the prohibition on equal intermixing between castes, is once more established.

We end this thesis with an ambiguity: if the elder Baahubali's sin, among others, was his proximity to the slave-warrior Kattappa, why isn't the younger Baahubali, who travels everywhere with Kattappa, punished for the same crime? Why isn't the young king punished for mobilizing his people against the enemy, for leading the people against the state, if contact with the (lower-caste) people is a crime in the eyes of the film?

This mass mobilization seems to be an obvious counter to the above reading, yet *Baahubali*'s caste problem, as demonstrated above, is not a problem of 'purity-pollution' per se but of intermixing between castes *on equal terms*. In the case of the younger Baahubali, he is already a king declared at birth, correspondingly his people are never shown to mix with him as equals but act as his loyal soldiers, pledging their allegiance to him. Even Kattappa does not treat the young king as his equal but as the real sovereign, most famously demonstrated in his remarkable gesture of bending before the infant king and placing the child's foot over his bald head. Though the younger Baahubali attacks the fortress of Mahishmati in the name of its people and with their help, his status remains strictly demarcated, compared to his father who freely consorted with all kinds of people irrespective of status, i.e. caste.

Yet an ambiguity persists till the end of the film: the young king repeatedly refers to Kattappa as 'dada' (grandfather); is this merely a symbolic address or a shift in inter-caste relations, premised on a spirit of equality? A partial answer may lie in the final scene, in the almost complete visual elimination of Kattappa from Baahubali's coronation (his tiny figure, as commander-in-chief, is momentarily visible in a long shot beneath the king's dias), in contrast to prominent shots of the new king surrounded by his mother, Avantika and his ('upper caste') foster parents.

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