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Mumbai Macbeth: Gender and Identity in Bollywood Adaptations

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies

by

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Abstract

This project analyzes adaptation in the Hindi film industry and how the concepts of gender and identity have changed from the original text to the contemporary adaptation. The original texts include religious epics, Shakespeare's plays, Bengali novels which were written pre-independence, and Hollywood films. This venture uses adaptation theory as well as postmodernist and postcolonial theories to examine how women and men are represented in the adaptations as well as how contemporary audience expectations help to create the identity of the characters in the films. Ultimately, this project hopes to fulfil the gap in scholarship on adaptations in Bollywood.

Dedication

To my father, Mr. Sanjoy Maiti, for providing unconventional solutions to life problems. To my mother, Mrs. Mala Maity, for her unwavering confidence in me. To my husband, Dr. Amaradri Mukherjee, for his love and support and being my pillar of strength. And to Luchi, for being her furry adorable self.

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Introduction

The Lamentable Tragedy of Titus Andronicus is a violent historical play that has fourteen deaths, possibly the bloodiest play written by William Shakespeare. *Titus Andronicus* has been adapted as the Italian-American-British film *Titus*, directed by Julie Taymor released in 1999, starring Anthony Hopkins and Jessica Lange. The only other film adaptation of note is the 2017 Indian drama *The Hungry*, directed by Bornila Chatterjee. The film is set in northern India between two industrial families, the Joshis and the Ahujas, with Tathagat Ahuja (Titus) murdering Tulsi Joshi's (Tamora of the Goths) son, Ankur. The body count is a low six: Tathagat Ahuja and his children, Loveleen and Sunny (Lavinia and Titus' sons); Tulsi's sons, Ankur and Chirag; and Tulsi's lover, Arun Kumar (Aaron). Ankur's murder sets the story with Tulsi vowing for revenge.

The violence from the play is significantly diluted but still visually graphic, especially the mutilation of Loveleen and her murder/suicide, and the severed head of Chirag whose body, along with Arun's, are the main ingredients in the banquet served at Tulsi and Sunny's wedding feast. The film's violence and murder have been toned down for the Indian audience but this film, like many others, has an urban appeal only for a niche educated audience who may have some exposure to Shakespeare. The film is available to stream on Amazon Prime, providing another option to the traditional film viewing in multiplexes in India, and consequently, the film can reach a larger global audience through the streaming service. Moreover, in an interview with Aparita Bhandari, co-writers and co-producers of *The Hungry*, Tanaji Dasgupta and Kurban Kassam, observe how the film is based on real-world contemporary events such as two brothers who went to their farmhouse and shot each other as did their bodyguards, and the arrest of a woman who allegedly murdered her daughter. The combination of Shakespeare and

contemporary events make this film more relatable to the audience rather than a period film which might be historically accurate but not attractive to the audience.

The Hungry was featured at Toronto International Film Festival, the BFI London Film Festival, and the Mumbai Film Festival. *The Hungry* is in a long line of Shakespearean adaptations in the Indian film industry and a part of the globalization of Bollywood, as seen in film festivals across the world. *The Hungry*, like some of the films discussed in this project, is not typical of Bollywood, which normally features elaborate sets, exotic locations, synchronized dance sequences, melodrama, and over-the-top acting, an image that has been the view in the Western world for a long time. However, this perception has been slowly changing with the rise of more meaningful films and directors who want to break away from the mold.

The Hungry and countless other films in the Hindi film industry have been inspired by, influenced by, remade from, and adapted from various sources. From its inception, the Hindi and the Indian film industry has relied on existing cultural documents as source material for films. For example, recently, *Zulfiqar*, a Bengali movie, released in 2016, was an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Earlier, episodes from Hindu epics were adapted into films and now other literary texts and films are adapted to create new films. This project will focus on the gender identity of the different protagonists in various adaptations in the Hindi film industry after 1990, when satellite television was introduced to India, giving the country greater exposure to international, especially American, influences. The focus will be on the nature of adaptations: how adaptations are a mix of the original and the demands of the contemporary audience in terms of location, music, and casting; the reasons behind adaptations; and how the spirit or the idea and/or fidelity to the original enhances the original, making it universal and/or local. The audience for this work will understand the hybridized cultural identity

of adaptations, the reason behind these tensions, and the mechanics of adaptation in the Hindi film industry. It will fulfil the gap in scholarship on adaptations in the industry, especially as seen through the lens of gender expectations in contemporary Indian society.

Globalization makes a hybrid cultural identity inescapable where nothing seems to be completely homogeneous but is instead composed of multiple influences and ideas.

Globalization has resulted in markets of consuming lifestyle, aesthetics, entertainment, and economics, where everyone can consume everything in the global market, for the right price.

Extending the influence of globalization further, the Indian film industry, especially Bollywood is the perfect example of a mixture of genres, themes, and 'inspirations' like the ancient Hindu epics, William Shakespeare, novels in different languages, and Hollywood films. Bollywood is a part of the Indian film industry that is also composed of other regional film industries, some of which are Bengali, Assamese, Gujarati, Marathi, Bhojpuri, and the South Indian film industry composed of Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam and Tulu cinema. Bollywood is the most popular and is synonymous with the Indian film industry, especially to most Western readers.

This dissertation looks at adaptations in the Hindi film industry via how the gender roles and expectations have changed from the original source to the adapted film films, especially in a context which is removed from the original and how, often, audience expectations provide a strategy to create a particular kind of adaptation. In addition, I contend that the Hindi film industry has elements of both postcolonialism and postmodernism, and the colonizer has changed from Britain to global capitalism, as most manifested by the US. This gradual change reflects global change, the growing knowledge of international film, and the high expectations of films on the part of the Indian audience. The inevitability of global capitalism has resulted in a fusion of different cultural styles, components, and influences. Furthermore, there also seems to

be a reverse expansion with India exerting tremendous influence on the West, a trend largely seen in contemporary American popular culture.

From the Silent Era to the Cannes

Cinema came to India in 1896 when Marius Sestier presented at the Watson's Hotel in Mumbai, a few months after the premiere of the first cinématographe in Paris (Ganti 6). The first Indian film released in India in 1912 was *Shree Pundalik*, a silent Marathi film by Dadasaheb Torne and the first full-length motion picture in India was produced by Dadasaheb Phalke in 1913, *Raja Harishchandra*. The talkies came to Indian in the 1930s and 1940s with the release of *Alam Ara*, the first Indian talkie, in 1931. The 1940s and 1950s were the golden age of the Indian cinema where the main themes included depiction of the contemporary working class, social and economic issues, and nationalism.¹ As the period after India's independence in 1947 was a time of hope and dreams for building a new India, often political ideology and nationalism were interwoven in the films of this time.² Additionally, the 1950s and 1960s also saw the birth of parallel cinema, an alternative to the popular cinema. Parallel cinema focused on realism, contemporary socio-political movements, serious themes, and an audience that appreciated European movies. Parallel realistic cinema became high culture as these films rejected escapism and song-and-dance routines and some films of this genre received global attention, like Satyajit Ray's *The Apu Trilogy*.

Next, the late 1960s and early 1970s saw a proliferation of romance and action movies. It was natural for the audience to view films as an escape from the contemporary social reality because of an unstable political background: wars with China and Pakistan and a state of

¹ Landmark films included Guru Dutt's *Pyasa* (1957), *Kaagaz Ke Phool* (1959), Raj Kapoor's *Awaara* (1951) and *Shree 420* (1955).

² The important nationalist movies are Mehboob Khan's *Mother India* (1957) and K. Asif's *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960).

emergency declared by the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. The 1980s and 1990s saw the rise of family-oriented films with strong morals, generous doses of comedy and romance, a few fight sequences and sometimes, no villains. Finally, the new millennium saw the growth of parallel cinema and a type of postmodern cinema where a few films would reference earlier older films in terms of the latter's titles which could be parts of songs, featuring remixed songs of earlier films, references to earlier films like specific dialogue and characters, and also newer films that have a similar plot-line of the original but starred contemporary actors. Some adaptations fall under these categories, and they appealed to both intellectuals and the masses. This was also the time of the sudden popularity and visibility of the Indian film industry on the global arena, including appearances of major actors at the Oscars and the Cannes Film Festival with big budget films geared towards a diasporic audience.

Adaptations in the Indian Film Industry

Tejaswini Ganti in *Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema* defines Bollywood as a “tongue-in-cheek term [that] was created by the English-language press in India in the late 1970s [which] has now become the dominant global term to refer to the prolific and box-office oriented Hindi language film industry located in Bombay (renamed Mumbai in 1995)” (2). The distinctive features of popular Hindi cinema have also started to mean a particular type of film-making, “song and dance, melodrama, lavish production values, emphasis upon stars and spectacle” (Ganti 3). However, Bollywood is a contested term because it implies a poor cousin of Hollywood.

Although there is extensive scholarly work on film adaptations of different types of written texts and Shakespearean plays, not much work has been done on adaptations in the Hindi film industry. While a huge body of work each on adaptation theory and on the Hindi film

industry exists separately, there is no comprehensive work that looks at adaptations in the Hindi film industry³. Nevertheless, there has been a substantial rise in scholarship on the Hindi film industry, 2000 onwards, focusing on understanding the different aspects of Hindi and other regional film industries. The scholarly books are often guidebooks, collections of essays, and books that introduce the Hindi film industry⁴. These might include how the etymology of the term Bollywood came into existence, the history of the Hindi film industry, the phenomenon of playback singing, the importance of songs, the use of technology, the position of women in films, the theme of nationalism, the different kinds of regional cinema, how a diasporic audience uses Hindi films to create a community, and how and why Bollywood is different from Hollywood. There are also regular and special issues of journals on popular culture that include studies and essays on the Hindi film industry, such as *South Asian Popular Culture*, *South Asian Cultural Studies*, and *Studies in South Asian Film and Media*.

Likewise, there are numerous books on film adaptation, such as adaptation of the written text, including novels, short stories, plays, and film to film adaptations. Consequently, this project will fulfill this gap in literature that has nearly no research on adaptation in the Hindi film industry, despite a lot of scholarship on adaptation theories. It will show the hybrid cultural identity of the Hindi film industry through the relationship between the originals and the adaptations. It will also analyze how these adaptations enrich the original in new spatial and

³ Some of the texts on adaptation are: Syndy M. Conger and Janice R. Welsch's *Narrative Strategies*, James Naremore's *Film Adaptation*, Timothy Corrigan's *Film and Literature*, Rachel Carroll's *Adaptation in Contemporary Culture*, Brian McFarlane's *Novel to Film*, Linda Seger's *The Art of Adaptation*, Phebe Davidson's *Film and Literature*, Christine Geraghty's *Now a Major Motion Picture*, and, Mireira Aragay's *Books in Motion*.

⁴ These include: *Producing Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry* (2012) and *Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema* by Tejaswini Ganti, *Bollywood: A History* by Mihir Bose, *Bollywood Travels: Culture, diaspora and border crossings in popular Hindi cinema* (2012) by Dudrah Rajinder, *Global Bollywood* by Anandam P. Kavoori and Aswin Punathambekar, *Routledge Handbook of Indian Cinema* (2013), and *Indian Popular Cinema : A Narrative of Cultural Change* by Moti K Gokulsing, and Johan Manschot and Marijke De Vos's *Behind the Scenes of Indian Cinema*.

temporal contexts, often reflecting the changing identity and demands of the contemporary audience.

India has a long tradition of adaptations, especially those of Hindu epics, like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, as well as literary texts, like novels and plays. Before the 1990s, these film adaptations were faithful to the original in terms of characterizations, sets, dialogue, time, and space. However, post-1990, the adaptations of literary texts have been modified to suit contemporary audiences. There are also remakes of Hollywood films in the Indian film industry. Some major differences between these Hollywood-inspired films and the original Hollywood films include song-and-dance sequences; a complete reversal or modification of the original genres, often with a love story; and change in genre conventions. These adaptation choices have resulted in mixed success at the box-office. The Hindi film industry has also remade films from other national cinemas, mainly from South Korea, and a few from Hong Kong and the Philippines.

This project will bridge the gap of limited research in the field of adaptations in the Hindi film industry and analyze how the adapted works contribute and enrich the original work, and how successful adaptations are created. Although adaptation theory often compares the adaptations to original texts, especially in fidelity discourse on how faithful the adaptation is, nevertheless, this project will focus on how adaptations transform or go beyond the original in interesting ways. The adaptations are sometimes faithful to the main themes, overall ideas, storylines and characterizations, but they also show how contemporary audiences and society change the original, making the adaptations independent of the original story, space, and time period. The film adaptations are also analyzed in terms of commercial success that will evaluate whether the adaptation was accepted or not by the audience in terms of revenue.

As adaptations bring forth a dialogue with the original in terms of new contexts, spatial and time interventions, genres and sequences, and challenges, these also raise questions on what makes the original suitable for adaptation. Even if the audience does not know the details of the original text, the reworking will still be an adaptation. In this age of information, marketing strategies will often include advertising that the film is an adaptation and the opening or end credits will announce the title of the original text but only if it is an adaptation from a novel or a play. The film is credited to the original literary source to provide more legitimacy for the adaptation but never if it is reworking or a remaking of an American film. The films that I discuss in this project show the creation of a hybrid cultural identity that reflects the contemporary reality and also the different media of adaptations: film to film and epic/play/novel to film, across time and space.

Adaptations are important in the Hindi film industry for a number of reasons. They help to educate the audience on ancient history and literature, in an agreeable format, without lectures and textbooks; they reflect a change in social beliefs and value systems; they are entertaining, as often the time and space context are adapted to suit the realistic and modern audience expectations; and it adds on to the original text through the timelessness and universality of the original's core themes like good winning over evil or love overcoming all obstacles. This project presents the ways in which gender roles and expectations are modified using features of the original and also updating the adaptation to suit the contemporary audience.

Postmodernism, Postcolonialism, and Hybridity

This venture applies different features of postcolonial and postmodernist literary theories to examine the adaptations and how a hybrid cultural identity is formed in the Hindi film industry. Some of the critics whose theories I use, among others, are Edward Said, Homi Bhaba,

Fredric Jameson, Jean Baudrillard, and Linda Hutcheon. The features of postmodernism that I will use are: breakdown of grand narratives and focus on marginalized figures, intertextuality, and simulacrum and hyper reality.

Postmodernism believes in breaking down grand overarching meta narratives, and instead working on *petits récits* (little narratives), as Jean Francois-Lyotard argues, “The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation” (37). This puts the spotlight on the marginalized figures. Mike Featherstone draws another similarity that postmodern culture introduces a “movement away from agreed universal criteria of judgement of cultural taste towards a more realistic and pluralistic situation in which the excluded, the stranger, the other, the vulgar, which were previously excluded can now be allowed in” (106). These narratives often reflect the real world as the stories featuring protagonists who are criminals, members of the lower caste, prostitutes, homosexuals, and people with psychological disorders. Some of the adaptations feature these marginalized characters, which break down the trope of good winning over evil, making the audience more inclusive, and featuring more relatable characters that are not strictly black or white. The stories of these marginalized characters form local narratives and the diversity of human experience, both features of postmodernism. Adaptations in the Hindi film industry will often take original grand narrative work and break it down to a specific local context and include the stories of marginalized characters to show the breadth of humanity.

One of the major approaches will be Homi Bhaba’s concept of hybridity to analyze the cultural construction of the adaptations in the Hindi film industry: how it incorporates features of the originals while also maintaining its own independent identity. Another important approach will be Mikhail Bakhtin’s dialogism that and connects one text to other texts, genres, and art

works which are in conversation with each other. Also, his concept of polyphony will be used whereby the term recognizes and emphasizes the different voices, styles, and references in a work. Finally, this venture analyzes the adaptations and their relationship to the original through Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality which, like Bakhtin's dialogism, emphasizes that a text is created by the other texts. So, in the hybrid identity of a film adaptation, intertextuality occurs through the recognition of the original. Furthermore, intertextuality occurs not only at the level of referencing other films but, also because of the knowledge that the audience has of the film stars and their personal lives, adding in another level of reality and knowledge while watching a film. Simulacrum and hyperreality are also present in the Hindi films and industry whereby there is a breakdown between the real and the reel world.

In a similar vein, some of the postcolonial features, as proposed by Ganti, are "represented by religious ritual, elaborate weddings, large extended families, respect for parental authority, adherence to norms of female modesty, injunctions against premarital sex, and intense pride and love for India-is mobile and not tied to geography. One can be an 'Indian' in New York, London, or Sydney as in Bombay, Calcutta, or Delhi" (43). The late 1990s to early 2000s was also the period of movies which featured diasporic populations and the struggles of the immigrant with themes of a return to the homeland and cultural clashes, emphasizing a hybrid identity of the native country, India, and the country of residence, India or the USA or the UK⁵.

Postcolonialism also focuses on the narratives of the colonized who are now free to write in their own voice and reclaim their own histories. The people of former colonies, like that of postcolonial India, can create their own voice in popular culture by using foreign words, usually

⁵ Some examples include: *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995), *Pardes* (1997), and *Aa Ab Laut Chalen* (1999) . This continues in 2000s with *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998), *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001), *Kitne Door... Kitne Paas* (2002), *Out of Control* (2003), *Namastey London* (2007), *Jhoom Barabar Jhoom* (2007), and *Dostana* (2008).

English. The use of a hybridized language can be seen as a sign of global capitalism where exotic words are consumed, repackaged, and presented to a demanding audience. These words can be found in the film titles, the songs, and the dialogue of the characters, all of which reflect the changing Hindi language of the audience and contribute to the hybrid identity of the films. The words come from western languages like English, Spanish, and Indian languages like Urdu, Marathi, Malayalam, Bengali, Gujarati, Kashmiri, and Punjabi. The hybrid identity, the narratives of the decolonized, and the use of foreign words prove how adaptations are modified to suit contemporary audiences.

There is also the postcolonial impulse of trying to break free from the overarching influence of Shakespeare and other European writers. In an era of globalization and liberalization, there is also a realization and acknowledgement of the influence of the US on the society and the belief system of India, especially through Hollywood. This project focuses on the films produced after 1990 because that was the time when Indian audiences were largely exposed to Hollywood and American culture through satellite television. Additionally, it will focus on marketing strategies and how the diaspora audience sometimes affects choices in the casting, storylines, and locations of the adaptations, again proving the importance of the audience.

Gender and Identity in Adaptations

Some of the terms that this text uses are: the Hindi film industry, adaptations, and commercial success. The adaptations fall under the umbrella term of the Hindi film industry because the project will look at films that are both small-budget independent films and big-budget film. The term Bollywood will be used only when a particular adaptation has the popular features of Bollywood: melodrama, song and dance, lavish sets, improbable story-lines, and a

break with reality. The project includes films that are a mix of both high and low culture, be it exclusively Bollywood or a general Hindi film.

In using Dudley Andrew and Thomas Leitch's classification of adaptations, this venture will use the following terms to designate the different kinds of adaptations to be discussed here and how those adaptations create a hybrid identity. Andrew defines three modes of adaptation: borrowing, where the artist employs the "material, idea, or form of an earlier, generally successful text"; intersecting, where the uniqueness of the original text is left undisturbed; and transforming the fidelity of the original where the film adaptation reproduces "something essential about an original text" (Andrew 30, 31). The last classification is most applicable to the adaptations discussed in this project where transforming the fidelity can essentially be explained as preserving some aspects of the original text while also creating something new about the text.

Leitch, on the other hand, posits the following kinds of adaptations: curatorial adaptations that subordinate resources in the cinema to preserve the original texts as faithfully as possible; replication, which preserves everything of the original text, "structure, action, character, setting, dialogue, theme, tone"; homage in the form of readaptation that "pays tribute to an earlier film adaptation as definitive" such as *Dev.D* being adapted from both the novel and an earlier film, *Devdas*; heritage adaptation that is like a celebratory period drama; pictorial realization that shows things in cinema that can not only be presented in words; and a liberation adaptation that provides scenes and sections that were only hinted at in the original text (Leitch 96). Leitch's six approaches to adaptation will also be used as a framework to analyze the different kinds of adaptation in this project and how these adaptations form a hybrid cultural identity, especially in time and space that are removed from the original: compression that edits a long text to make it suitable for cinema; expansion that expands the original; correction that adjusts the original texts

to create a different story or characters; updating that sets a canonical text in modern times to show its universality such Hindi film adaptations of Shakespeare; and superimposition that superimposes coauthors on the literary material (Leitch 98-100).

This project argues that the gender roles in adaptations are changed from the original text primarily based on contemporary audience and social expectations. I build on Robert Stam's claim that film adaptation has a dialogic relationship with the original text making it one of the ways to read the written text rather than being the only true way of representing the text. Stam claims that "[a] filmic adaptation is automatically different and original due to the change of medium" (17). However, Stam's argument is valid only for the first three chapters that focus on a written and/or oral text whereas the last chapter focuses on remakes of Hollywood films. Furthermore, because of its "multitrack and multiformat nature," film is equipped to "magically multiply times and spaces" (Stam 21). Similarly, this analysis will chart the multiple differences between the adaptations and the original texts and the choices that are made to ensure commercial success and a favorable audience reception. Additionally, it will analyze how the differences and similarities between the original and the adaptation help to create a hybrid cultural identity of the different parts of the adaptations: story, characterization, and context. The adaptations are composed of parts of the original story and characterization within a new context as the adaptation is both a finished product and also in dialogue with the original. For instance, *Raavan* is an updated version of the Hindu epic, *Ramayana* but in an Indian context with an indigenous tribal leader who is chased by a police officer, creating ambiguous notions of good and evil. *Sangharsh* that is a cross-cultural remake of *The Silence of the Lambs* is updated with background songs and longer background histories of characters which are acceptable for an Indian audience.

Chapter 1, “Ruthless Ram and Sexual Sita: Alternate Readings of the Hindu Epics” argues that the contemporary adaptations of Indian religious texts are more successful because of the shared Indian culture and knowledge of Hindu texts and how this creates a hybrid identity of the characters that shows both traditional and contemporary features. It focuses on adaptations of the Indian Hindu epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. The adaptations of *Ramayana* in this chapter are *Main Hoon Na*, *Sita Sings the Blues*, and *Raavan* and the adaptation of the *Mahabharata* is *Raajneeti*. These two epics are engrained in the Indian society and the basic storyline and characters are familiar to a majority of the population across religions. As a result, the audience can easily draw parallels between the adaptations and the originals and expect the win of good over evil. The film adaptations also prove the importance of a shared culture with easily identifiable connections and the timelessness of the fight of good over evil that can easily be modified to suit a contemporary audience. The hybrid identity created here is composed of the ancient culture that is easily accessible through films and the contemporary reality, outside the film screen. These adaptations either add on to the original character or show another perspective, which was not given a prominent voice in the original.

In the chapter, *Main Hoon Na* (I Am There, 2004), a contemporary and typical Bollywood take on *Ramayana* sexualizes the Sita-like character and provides a radical transformation of another female character called Surpanakha. The gender roles are transformed from the original based on audience reality. Similarly, *Sita Sings the Blues* provides a longer and more nuanced narrative of Sita, Ram’s wife, whose story is always seen as subservient to that of Ram. This film actually blames Ram for his actions and shows how ruthless he actually was. The next film, *Raavan* not only portrays the villain, Raavan, as sympathetic but also gives more voice and agency to Sita, who is always powerless and held as a paragon of marital values and

morals, a change that reflects the society's demand to give a voice to the marginal and the oppressed. Ram, whom the Indian society sees as the perfect example of masculinity, devotion, respect, bravery, and heroism, is shown as ruthless in *Raavan*, blurring the boundaries of good and evil. Finally, *Rajneeti* was a commercial and literary success because of its story, characters, and connections to reality in terms of nepotism, alternative politics, and female agency, as well as showing that nothing is completely black nor white. Both postcolonialism and postmodernism work in conjunction with feminism to focus on narratives of subjugation and dominance are used in this chapter to examine the adaptations.

Chapter 2, "Shakespeare as the Big Other: Gender and Realism in *Maqbool*, *Omkara*, and *Haider*" builds on Slavoj Žižek's definition of the big Other from Lacan, which "exists only insofar as subjects act as if it exists... it is the substance of the individuals who recognize themselves in it,... yet the only thing that really exists are these individuals and their activity, so this substance is actual only insofar as individuals believe in it and act accordingly" (10). The chapter illustrates how Shakespeare functions as the big Other in the film adaptations of his plays, providing a hybrid identity of both the East and the West. One way of looking at the Indian film industry as postcolonial is if we see Shakespeare as the big Other, the representation of the colonial legacy. As Gauri Viswanathan argues in *Masks of Conquest*, Shakespeare and other writers were introduced in educating Indians so as to maintain cultural and ideological dominion over India. Consequently, Shakespeare can be seen as the big Other in colonial discourse whose all-pervading influence is inescapable as well as certain institutions in the film adaptations whose power cannot be escaped. Shakespeare has been adapted in numerous contexts in many countries, including adaptations in India. The hybrid identity of the trilogy of films in this

chapter is created from the play's characters and plots while updating with contemporary context, language, and social beliefs.

Vishal Bhardwaj, an award-winning director, is known in India for the interesting and off-beat subjects of his films. *Maqbool* (2003), an adaptation of *Macbeth*, is set in Mumbai, while the royalty of Shakespeare's Scotland is transformed into the Mumbai underworld mafia. Next, *Omkaara* (2006) is based on *Othello*, with the plot set in Uttar Pradesh, India, and includes questions of patriarchy and class struggles. The big Other in *Maqbool* is Abbaji, corresponding to Duncan and is Tiwari Bhaisaab in *Omkaara* corresponding to the Duke of Venice in *Othello*. Lastly, *Haider*, released in 2014, is based on *Hamlet*, where Scotland is the disputed Kashmir, and Haider (Hamlet) is the son trying to find his missing father. The big Other in *Haider* is the Indian government whose omnipresence affects all parts of Haider's life and his search for his missing father. An important feature used in these films includes narratives of the marginal figures like criminals, members of the lower-caste, and militants.

For all these films, the real big Other is also Shakespeare, and, by extension, the cultural legacy of the British colonization of India. Despite gaining independence from the British in 1947, the colonial legacy is still evident in bits and snatches in the treatment of the three original plays as well as portrayal of India in the adaptations.

Chapter 3, "Strong and Sexually Confident: Women Protagonists in Three Indian Literary Film Adaptations" claims that the artistic liberties that the directors and screenwriters take to adapt Indian texts that were written after India's independence for a postcolonial modern audience is a successful strategy, while also sharing the hybrid identity of both the original and the postcolonial audience. This chapter focuses on adaptations of texts written by Indian authors. Although most adaptations are true to the originals, some of them have been adapted to suit

contemporary audiences. All the films have been adapted from pre-independence to a contemporary post-independence setting. Whatever changes are made in these adaptations usually ensure commercial success. Subsequently, this chapter examines the hybrid identity of the characters, the connections to the real world, and how these adaptations improve the original texts. Because of their basis in reality, the characters in the adaptations often provide an identity that is composed of the original text and the adaptations.

The movies that are analyzed in this chapter are: *Saheb, Biwi Aur Gangster* (The Master, The Wife and The Gangster, 2011) influenced from Bimal Mitra's Bengali novel *Saheb Bibi Golam* (King, Queen, Knave); *Devdas* and *Dev.D* based on Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's novel, *Devdas*; and *Parineeta* based on Chattopadhyay's Bengali novel of the same name. Not only was *Devdas* reworked as a period drama in 1955 and 2002, but was also made into a modern day romance, titled *Dev.D*, which was released in 2009. *Dev.D* made a cultural statement as it was based on contemporary heterosexual relationships, substance abuse, and different gender expectations, especially in terms of sexuality. *Dev.D* and *Saheb, Biwi Aur Gangster* provide voice to the female characters who are oppressed by the patriarchy, use a mix of Hindi and English in the songs and dialogue, and negotiate power struggles between the main characters. *Dev.D* is also a postmodern film, as it references the 2002 *Devdas* version.

This chapter focuses on how these three films showcase the hybrid identity of the main characters, based on the reality of the audience and contemporary events. The women in all these three films are emotionally strong and sexually independent, making them unacceptable, in some instances, by the Indian patriarchal society. This is true for Madhavi of *Saheb, Biwi, Aur Gangster*, Lalita of *Parineeta*, and Paro and Chanda of *Dev. D*, all of whom negotiate power dynamics in their respective relationships and sexually transgress in some manner, be it pre-

marital sex, multiple relationships, or extra-marital relations. On the other hand, the men in the three films are shown as weaker than the women in terms of the power that the men wield, their strength of character, their hypocrisy, their insecurities, and their indecision at making important life choices. The reversal of power in these three films show that men do not have to be traditional courageous heroes but can be flawed and women do not have to be submissive and weak; they can be authoritative and can step up to their responsibilities and more when the situation arises.

Chapter 4, “Genre Breakdown and Creative Liberties in Hollywood’s Adaptations” postulates that the adaptation of Hollywood films in the Hindi film industry is successful largely through the breakdown of genre conventions for an Indian audience and notes what makes the originals suitable for adaptation in Bollywood. The chapter argues how Hollywood works as a cultural colonizer, whereby, apart from economic and social influences, it also exerts a tremendous cultural influence. It traces the history of liberalization and globalization in India, during the 1990s, and how successfully or unsuccessfully certain Hollywood films are adapted. It also focuses on how Hollywood films are Indianized in terms of the creative liberties that directors take to make it more palatable for Indian audiences and how the Hollywood films are glocalized whereby they are given a local Indian flavor to make them audience friendly. Some strategies of Indianization and glocalization include song-and-dance sequences, sanitizing the relationship between the lead pair, adding in family relationships, shooting in exotic locations, having ambiguous connections to reality, and having a happy ending as seen in the three films, *Sangharsh* which is adapted from *The Silence of the Lambs*, *Action Replay* which is adapted from *Back To the Future* and *Ta Ra Rum Pum* which is adapted from *Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby*. These strategies often provide mixed results for literary and commercial

success as seen in the three films. The chapter also looks into the recent trend of Hollywood co-productions as a solution to blatant plagiarism in the Indian film industry and traces the history of liberalization. The Hindi adaptations are a cultural hybrid of the Hollywood and the genre conventions of the Hindi film industry.

In the end, I intend for this project to function as a new and pertinent exploration of the hybrid identity of adaptations in the Hindi film industry. Hopefully this undertaking will add to the conversation of the industry and how adaptations, in this context, develop the relevance of the originals in different temporal and spatial contexts. This venture brings about a postcolonial and postmodernist approach to adaptations and reflects the reality of the industry and the Indian audience, especially in terms of how gender is portrayed on-screen. It shows how the postmodernist turn in Bollywood shows the increasing absorption of the Indian film industry into the global capitalist Culture Industry. The fact that there is a gap in scholarship on Hindi film adaptations will add interest in and relevance to this project's argument.

This project will enable further research of applying postmodern, postcolonial, and adaptation theories to original texts that are adapted across different temporal and spatial contexts. Hopefully the project will open up new ways of looking at the wide variety of films that are released every year to get a better understanding of how the films reflect certain aspects of a contemporary society and how it simultaneously fails to show a reality. In the past few years, films that show more realistic and relatable content, be it fewer or no songs, practical situations, sensible relationships, events that are inspired by true life, and actual locations in India that are often cities and small towns, have become more popular and successful. This does not mean that the market for larger-than-life films with popular actors has faded and escapism through cinema is frowned upon. It simply means that films that do not fit the typical Bollywood

modalities are gaining more acceptance, popularity, and acclaim by the audience, both in India and abroad. Consequently, there is a wide variety of films for all kinds of audience, making the Indian film industry, especially Bollywood, gain legitimacy across the globe.

Ruthless Ram and Sexual Sita: Alternate Readings of the Hindu Epics

India has a rich history of oral folktales and epics. India also has a strained relationship with interpreting different historical events, famous people, and even religious texts on screen. Hinduism is the dominant religion in India and any interpretation of Hindu epics or other texts which can raise objections is usually modified by the creators of the film so that the film is released to a large audience and can rake in profits from the box-office. Sometimes, the controversy can boost the sales of the movie, but that is not always the case. A recent example of a film running into controversy is Sanjay Leela Bhansali's 2013 *Goliyon Ki Rasleela Ram-Leela* (A Play of Bullets Ram-Leela), loosely adapted from *Romeo and Juliet* and based in Gujarat where the warring families have been fighting for five centuries. The title of the film was changed from *Ramleela* to *Ram-Leela* to *Goliyon Ki Rasleela Ram-Leela*, after a case was filed at the Delhi High Court. A petition was filed that since movie-goers associate the title with Lord Rama of the *Ramayana*, an important Hindu epic, the film will offend the religious sentiments of the audience, "as it [the film] contains sex, violence and vulgarity" and the title should be changed as it is misleading and has nothing to do with the epic (First Post Staff). The female protagonist *Goliyon Ki Rasleela Ram-Leela* is bold, independent, and a leader, while also initiating a relationship with the son of the other warring family who is indecisive, a womanizer, and concerned about his appearance. The film thus reflects the changing position of women in India who do not hesitate to take the lead when needed. This controversy shows how both *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* form an integral part of the Hindu psyche and that the epics' basic storylines and main characters are ingrained in the popular imagination. It also shows the struggles that different sections of the Indian film industry face with India's Central Board of Film Certification that regulates and classifies movies. These two epics form the basis of not

only religion but also social regulations of right and wrong. They also describe the expectations and duties of women, not only at the time of when the epics were created but also in the present. The sheer size of the two epics, nearly 24,000 verses in *Ramayana* and 100,000 verses in *Mahabharata*, have daunted scholars and film-makers alike. The former was written by the Hindu sage Valmiki around the 2nd or 3rd century BC, and the latter was written by Veda Vyasa between 400 and 200 BC. The two texts, originally written in Sanskrit, set out codes and guidelines for leading a moral life.

The *Ramayana* narrates the story of the protagonist, Ram, and his wife, Sita. Ram, who is the crown prince of Ayodhya and the son of Dasaratha, wins Sita's hand in marriage. Through the plotting of Kaikeyi, Ram's stepmother, he is banished to the forest for fourteen years. Although the banishment is not extended to Sita and Laxman, Ram's brother, they also accompany Ram out of their love and duty for Ram. The rest of the epic focuses on their adventures in the forest, including how Sita is kidnapped by Ravanaa, the evil king of Lanka, and how Ram, with the help of a monkey army, led by Hanuman, rescues Sita, destroys Lanka, kills Ravanaa, and returns to Ayodhya. Upon their return, Ram orders Sita to prove her chastity by an ordeal through fire. Sita passes the test and is united with Ram. Sukumari Bhattacharji in "A Revaluation of Valmiki's 'Rama'" observes that "In the Vedic age an Ordeal by Fire was common practice, it was called 'Satyakriya,' or the Act of Truth. The gods were invoked to stand witness to one's purity. Sita invoked the god of fire and then she called out to other gods" (41). Later in Ayodhya, Ram again banishes Sita to the forest as Ram's subjects raised doubts about the paternity of Sita's children. Laxman is entrusted with the task of abandoning Sita in the forest. She is sheltered by Valmiki, the poet of the epic and gives birth to twin boys who are later

united with Ram. However, when Ram asks for Sita to go through the fire once again, she agrees but states that if she is pure, she shall be swallowed by the earth, which is what happens.

On the other hand, the *Mahabharata* focuses on the relationships and war between two groups of cousins: the Kauravas, who are the sons of Dhritarashtra, and the Pandavas, who are the sons of Pandu. The story begins when Pandu, who is the younger of the two princes, is crowned king because Dhritarashtra is blind. As Pandu cannot father children due to a curse, he allows his wives, Kunti, and Madri, to have sex with various gods, which results in the birth of five sons, who are called the Pandavas. The Pandavas are exiled to the forest because of attempts on their lives by their cousin, Duryodhana, the eldest of Dhritarashtra's hundred sons. During their exile, the Pandava brothers jointly marry Draupadi. When they return to the kingdom, Duryodhana challenges Yudhishtir, the eldest of the Pandavas, to a game of dice. When Yudhishtira loses everything, including staking his wife, Draupadi, the brothers are exiled again to the forest for twelve years. When they return, the Kauravas still refuse to return the kingdom and the two groups of cousins fight on the field of Kurukshetra. All the Kauravas die but the Pandavas and their cousin, Krishna survive. Yudhishtir rules his kingdom; much like Ram rules his in *Ramayana*.

In this chapter, I will focus on how *Main Hoon Na* (I Am There, 2004), *Raavan* (2010), *Sita Sings the Blues* (2008), and *Rajneeti* (Politics 2010) have adapted the ideas and the stories of the originals, and used them to comment on the traditional roles of women, especially that of Sita and Draupadi, and how Ram, Ravanaa, and the Pandavas are portrayed as being both good and evil. I will show how these films are postmodern in foregrounding the narratives of the marginalized characters and the use of different kinds of narrative trajectories, especially in *Sita Sings the Blues*. The hybrid identities that are formed in the films and the main characters are

extensions of the contemporary audience who want to hold on to the past while also trying to adapt to the changing times. The identity is composed of the ancient culture that is easily accessible through films and the contemporary reality, outside the film screen. As these two Hindu epics are a part of the Indian psyche and the basic storyline and the characters are familiar with a majority of the population across religions, it is easy for the audience to draw parallels between the adaptations and the originals. I also contend that the contemporary adaptations of Indian religious texts are usually more financially and critically successful because of the shared Indian culture and knowledge of Hindu texts.

Two important features of postmodernism are the breakdown of grand narratives and the focus on marginal characters and their narratives. In the context of this chapter, this will translate into the stories of characters from a lower caste and lower social strata, as well as specific examples of how women are portrayed and their perspectives. The two postmodern adaptations of the Ramayana, *Main Hoon Na* and *Sita Sings the Blues*, foreground the narratives of the peripheral members of the society as well as present the view points of the Sita characters in the three films. I argue how these adaptations shed new light on the politics of gender in the two films which reflects a change in the attitude of the audience to be more accepting of Sita, as an ideal character but who was also a victim of the patriarchy. Also, the other two films, *Raavan* and *Rajneeti* (Politics), show how the concept of the hero and the villain has changed from the original *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, respectively.

Film and Other Adaptations of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*

Because of the length, the numerous characters, and the countless important events that serve as moralistic stories, both the texts have been abridged and adapted into various forms. Garrett Kam in *Ramayana in the Arts of Asia* observes that the *Ramayana* has been recreated in

different regions in India, apart from the original Sanskrit version, like the states of Assam, West Bengal, Kashmir, and Gujarat, and in the languages of south India, like Malayalam, Tamil, and Kannada (5). The epic also travelled to different countries, including Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Iran, Thailand, Myanmar, Java, Malaysia, Cambodia, Philippines, China, Japan, and Mongolia, each with its own modifications to suit the culture and society of the country (Kam 5-9). The epic has been transformed into different genres, like ceremonial dramas, puppet shows, shadow puppetry, plays, narrative songs, dances, to cultural artefacts like festivals, toys, temple sculpture, and paintings (Kam 10). On the other hand, there have also been rewritings of the epic or it has been retold from the perspective of Sita. For instance, Nabaneeta Dev Sen analyzes contemporary rural women's Ramayana songs in Bengali, Marathi, Maithili, and Telgu, which show Ram as a villain who "comes through as a harsh, uncaring and weak-willed husband, a far cry from the ideal man" (19). The existence of these rural songs is possible because these songs are outside the canon of patriarchal mainstream society where Sita is the idealized woman and Ram can do no harm. In India, mainstream songs are usually from films but folk songs have a niche audience, particularly in rural populations. These songs where Sita's story is sung have more viability as they are not considered threatening to mainstream society and because often women's actions are considered marginal, domesticated and subordinate. As the songs are in regional languages and restricted to localities, these songs rarely reach the mainstream society. Sen describes that, "In the women's retelling, Sita is no rebel; she is still the yielding, suffering wife, but she speaks of her sufferings, of injustice, of loneliness and sorrow" (19). Sen outlines the six major themes in these songs as, "Sita's birth, her wedding (with a touch of pre-marital romance), her abduction, pregnancy, abandonment, and childbearing" (19). Other retellings of the two epics include: Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* that recasts the *Mahabharata* in

the fight for India's independence and the Indian political atmosphere of the first three decades after Independence, Amit Chaudhuri's short story, "An Infatuation," based on the feelings that Shurpanakaha, Ravana's sister has for Ram; Mahasweta Devi's short story, "Draupadi," that reimagines Draupadi as a tribal woman; and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel, *The Palace of Illusions*, Saoli Mitra's play, *Five Lords, Yet None a Protector and Timeless Tales*, and Pratibha Ray's novel, *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*, all of which narrate the epic from Draupadi's perspective. The existence of these texts in various genres shows the versatility of the two epics as well as the importance of the female protagonists of the two epics, Sita and Draupadi, in the psyche of the Indian society. However, the fact that the majority of these adaptations focus on the voices of the two female protagonists show a gradual importance of the issues that women face, in society and the epics, their power negotiations under the patriarchy, and the motivations between their actions.

Apart from literary texts, the epics have also influenced the film industry. Anil Zankar traces the creation of film scripts to the oral traditions of the epics, where the emergence of professional storytellers was important in the context of writing longer literary works in verse form and memorizing them (270). Zankar observes, "Adding music to the verse made it more entertaining and dramatic" (270). These stories, which were the predecessors to film scripts, "are meant to illustrate a moral or a principle and this didacticism had to be married to entertainment" (Zankar 270). Zankar also traces the popular film tradition that Dadasaheb Phalke started. Phalke's *Raja Harishchandra* which released in 1913 (King Harishchandra) was the first silent full-length feature film made in India. This film was based on an episode in the *Mahabharata* and was thus the earliest adaptation in the Hindi film industry. Zankar observes that the narrative form of "popular film that was established in India through Phalke remains mythological in

essence. It followed its own logic of storytelling that emerged from the shared cultural beliefs of the creator and the views” (Zankar 272). From the beginning of using the two epics in the common social consciousness and in films, adaptations of these two epics rely on the shared knowledge between the creator of the film and the audience. For instance, some of the features in Hindi cinema have been modelled on the epics, especially the concept of the hero. Anupama Chopra in the book, *The King of Bollywood* notes that the conventional hero was modeled on Ram while the villain was pure evil.

Even when Hindi cinema moved into modern settings the actors continued to play archetypes rather than characters. The inspiration remained the great epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, which are peopled by larger-than-life men and women are concerned with the *dharmic* role of individuals within a society. Human struggles are a part of a larger cosmic circle. And so even contemporary B-grade Hindi films about criminals and their molls alluded to larger battles of good versus evil (113).

Simply put, many of the films that portray a struggle between good and evil often resemble the *Ramayana*, where the hero is Ram, the heroine is Sita and the villain is Ravanaa. Both the lead actor and actress are virtuous, morally upright, and good, who will rectify their mistakes and overcome hurdles. The villain will usually be a criminal whose motives may be personal revenge or professional greed. In some of the films post-2000, the villain is not a person but intangible like forces of society, economy, or faults that the protagonists have to overcome to achieve happiness. K Moti Gokulsing and Wimal Dissanayake in *Indian Popular Cinema: A Narrative of Cultural Change* describe the *Mahabharata* as embodying “the Hindu understanding of the concept of dharma. This is what sustains the world order. From the *Mahabharata* people learn the rules and the codes of ideal conduct laid down by everybody. It is an encyclopedia of Indian culture and has been described as the National Epic of India” (43). They also assert the adaptability of the *Ramayana*, which is constantly reconstructed as “stories from the *Ramayana*

are constantly told and retold and through them people learn the difference between right and wrong, develop a high sense of values and understand what constitutes ideal behavior. ...The destruction of evil by good, either by oneself or divine intervention, is a constant theme of Hinduism and of Indian popular cinema” (Gokulsing and Dissanayake 43). This idea of good overcoming evil is seen in film adaptations but because of contemporary social norms, the protagonists are shown as doing whatever it takes for good to prevail.

One of the earliest film adaptations of the *Ramayana* was *Lanka Dahan* (1917), a film on an episode from the epic. *Raja Harishchandra* (1913) was also taken from *Mahabharata*. An interesting feature of earlier Bollywood cinema is the liberal use of episodes from the sacred Hindu texts, mythologies, stories from folk theater and drama, and literary works.⁶ This harking back to the past can be seen as a postcolonial feature where the decolonized rewrite the history to include not only the oppression, but also the glories of days past. However, because of the complexity of the *Mahabharata*, it has not been adapted much, except the 1981 Shyam Bengal-directed *Kalyug* and the 2010 Prakash Jha-directed *Raajneeti* (Politics).⁷

The *Ramayana* is such a huge part of the Indian society that often the names of the protagonists are used as a short hand for the forces of good and evil. For instance, Subhash Ghai's *Ram Lakhan*, released in 1989, uses the names to show the significance of *Ramayana* and comment on how the epic is updated. The audience understands the storyline and expects good to

⁶ Some of these are: *Ayodhyecha Raja* (The King of Ayodhya), the first Marathi language film; the musical spectacular *Indrasabha* (The Court of Lord Indra) featuring more than seventy songs in 211 minutes; *Kunku* (1937), a Marathi film and based on the novel, *Na Patnari Goshta* by Narayan Hari Apte; *Maanbhanjan* (1925), the first adaptation of the works of famed Bengali poet Rabindrahath Tagore; *Puran Bhagat* (*Puran Bhakt*), a 1933 Hindi devotional biopic film based on a popular Punjabi devotional story; *Netaji Palkar*, a 1927 film based on the Maratha King Shivaji's Commander-in-Chief, Netaji Palkar; *Surekha Haran* (1921), *Sant Tukaram* (Saint Tukaram), a 1936 Marathi film, based on the life of Tukaram (1608–50), a prominent Varkari saint and spiritual poet of the Bhakti movement in India; and *Pundalik* (1912), India's first feature-length film based on a play by Ramrao Kirtikar.

⁷ Other versions of the *Mahabharata* are the TV series *Mahabharat* that aired from 1988 to 1990 on DD National, the 2013 animated film, and the five hour 1989 film directed by Peter Brook

win over evil. This not only shows the importance of a shared culture with easily identifiable connections but also the timelessness of these texts that can easily be modified to suit a contemporary audience. It features two brothers, Ram and Lakhan, who avenge the death of their father, Thakur Pratap Singh. Although there is no character named Ravanaa, Bhishamber, the main villain is referred to as Ravanaa. His son, Deboo, is also a villain, who tries to disrobe Radha, Lakhan's girlfriend, much like *Mahabharata's* Duryodhan disrobing Draupadi. Even before the audience saw the film, they would have realized that this film will be a parable of good and evil, simply because of the title. Ram argues with Lakhan on the importance of the *Ramayana*, but Lakhan retorts, "These days the *Ramayana* is just an ancient book. It's a drama or a TV serial. It's fun to watch but difficult to practice. The world has changed a lot since then" (*Ram Lakhan*). Ram notes that "But the age old traditions and ideals of the *Ramayana* has neither been challenged by a mortal" and will never be able to do (*Ram Lakhan*). The film ends with their mother immersing the ashes of their father and her prayer, "You [god] granted gifts of courage and power to Lord Rama and Laxman to slay demons. Please grant the same gifts to my Ram and Lakhan" (*Ram Lakhan*). This film was a huge box-office hit because of several reasons, like the constant references to the epic, the win of good over evil, and a happy ending where the two brothers are united with each other, their mother, and their girlfriends, suggesting a happy extended family.

Other notable examples of the epics being a part of the Indian collective consciousness and the Hindi film industry are *Drona* and *Hum Saath Saath Hain* (We Stand United). *Drona*, released in 2008, is a fantasy adventure superhero film, whose title references Dronacharya or Guru Drona, the teacher of the Pandavas and the Kauravas in the *Mahabharata*. The film focuses on the protagonist, Drona, who is a descendant of a line of warriors who are tasked with

protecting a source of cosmic energy. On the other hand, *Hum Saath Saath Hain*, released in 1999, and an example of the happy family drama where there are no external criminal masterminds and which imparted moral and family values, has a storyline similar to the *Ramayana*. These include the matriarch of the family, Mamata, convincing her husband, Ramkishan, to divide the family property dividing among his sons. Consequently, their eldest son, Vivek, who was her stepson, and Vivek's wife, go on a self-imposed exile to Rampur, the native village of Ramkishan. Like Bharat who takes over the throne of Ayodhya but makes it clear that Ram is the king after Ram, Laxman, and Sita are exiled, Prem, the son of Mamata and Ramkishan, also takes over as the managing director of their companies but insist that Vivek is the real leader.

The above examples show how the epics are such an important part of the collective consciousness of India as well as the audience of these particular films, most of which were financial successes. It is easy for the audience to recognize the adapted characters who are similar to the epics and also expect that those film characters will behave similarly to the original characters. However, in recent films, these expectations have changed or been subverted whereby the audience recognizes the originals but also accepts the changes in the film adaptations.

Gender and Postmodernism in the Adaptations

Postmodernism believes in breaking down grand overarching meta narratives, and instead working on petits récits (little narratives), as Jean Francois-Lyotard argues, "The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation" (37). This puts the spotlight on the marginalized figures and history of everyday life. There are elements of play, parody, and

narratives from the minorities. Similarly, the two films discussed here, *Main Hoon Na* and *Sita Sings the Blues*, focus on how the role of women has changed since the time of the original *Ramayana* with new rules and regulations, and how, especially in the latter, it is important to also hear this patriarchal epic from the perspective of the female protagonist, Sita. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan argues that “In Hinduism gender stereotypes are broken down in the attribution of power, whether negative—unruly, destructive, sexually unbridled— or positive—maternal, protective, asexual, to female divinity” (321). So, Sita is obviously maternal, protective, and divine, as opposed to the demonesses who are in Ravanaa’s Lanka, who are destructive, unruly, and sexually promiscuous.

The first film, *Main Hoon Na*, features a non-traditional student, army major Ram Prasad Sharma (Shah Rukh Khan), returning to college as an undercover agent. His mission is to guard his general’s daughter, Sanjana (Amrita Rao), from the threats of a radical militant, Major Raghavan (Suniel Shetty). *Main Hoon Na* references the *Ramayana* in the naming of the central male characters and the villain and alludes to other texts in its songs and dialogues. Ram is also on a quest to search for his brother, Lakhman ‘Lucky’ Sharma (Zayed Khan). Ram was his father’s illegitimate son and Lucky’s mother, Madhu (Kirron Kher), had left her husband when she got to know about his affair. Here, a reversal occurs where the wife abandons her husband instead of *Ramayana*’s Ram abandoning Sita because of rumors of her infidelity with Ravanaa.

An important female character is Lucky’s girlfriend Sanjana, also called Sanju, who is in charge of Ram’s protection. She is a tomboy who has a grungy appearance, but she transforms into a womanly lady under Chandni’s care. Chandni (Sushmita Sen) is the other Sita-like character and Ram’s girlfriend. After Sanju’s transformation, Lucky realizes that he is in love with her. Sanjana is traditionally the name of a girl, while Sanju is the name of a boy, perhaps the

shortened version of Sanjay, also a boy's name, but Sanju as a nickname is applicable to both Sanjana, in this film, and Sanjay, in general. Sanjana is not queer; she is heterosexual but called Sanju by everyone, except Chandni and Ram. However, the film makes the point that if Sanjana had not changed into a woman in terms of her clothes, hairstyle, and fashion accessories, Lucky would not have accepted her⁸. This is seen earlier in scenes of Lucky chasing after Mini, a college student who is seen in mini-skirts and usually applying make-up. Moreover, there is a song sequence where both Ram and Lucky romance Chandni and Sanjana, that confirms Lucky's feelings for Sanjana. However, after her makeover, Sanjana confronts Lucky and tells him that her transformation is fake. She informs Lucky that when she reverts to her old style of dressing like a tomboy, Lucky will chase after Mini. The Sanjana who is shown wearing traditional clothes and looking pretty, as per social standards, is only temporary. She contrasts Lucky with Percy, their common friend who has feelings for Sanjana despite her clothing and her non-traditional appearance. Lucky is understandably upset, but they both get together at the prom night dance sequence, signaling a happy ending for this couple.

Sanjana dresses up and behaves like a tomboy because of her strained relationship with her father, General Bakshi, who had wanted a son who, like him, would join the army. Consequently, he confesses to Ram that he could not love her as he would have loved a son. Bakshi realizes his mistake but Sanjana does not want to be with her father. She confesses to Ram that she wanted to be her father's son and she has succeeded so much that no one sees her as a girl anymore (*Main Hoon Na*). In the end, however, father and daughter are united.

⁸ This trope a boyish woman changing into a traditional female role has been criticized recently but still a part of Bollywood, the most famous being *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Something Happens, 1998). There are also other films where the tomboy character, who curses frequently, is noisy, is rowdy, is outgoing, and enjoys sports, does not transform into a socially accepted woman to get the love of the leading male character. In these films, the hero accepts her for who she is, without any expectations of her transformation. Although few, these films are more progressive and realistic than the ones like *Main Hoon Na* and *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* that glorifies the notion that to get a man, the woman has to appeal to him by being traditionally feminine.

Sanjana's transformation can be seen as similar to what Surpanakha, Ravanaa's sister, would have gone through in the *Ramayana*. Surapanakha is described as ugly, unnatural, and monstrous but she is infatuated with Ram. However, Ram mocks her and suggests that Lakhman should be with her, instead. Bhattacharji analyzes the scenes in the epic as, "[W]hen Surpanakha arrived on the scene, Rama cruelly mocked her and advised her to choose Lakshmana instead. Even as a joke, it was tasteless. Lakshmana was too courteous to reproach Rama about it" (Bhattacharji 35). The epic's Lakshman was also married, but he had left his wife, Urmila, behind to be with his brother. Lakshman follows in the steps of his elder brother without thinking of the trauma caused to his wife and Rama also demands that affection without thinking of his sister-in-law. Urmila, who was Sita's younger sister, wanted to follow her husband into the exile but Lakshman reasons that her welfare will be a concern for him and he will not be able to devote himself to the care of Rama and Sita. In this film adaptation, there is a sisterly bond shown between Chandni and Sanjana and a suggestion that both Ram and Lucky are united and will happily ever after with their respective partners, Chandni and Sanjana. Sanjana, therefore, is transformed from Shurpanakha to Urmila, under the care of Chandni/Sita.

Surpanakha, in the original, complained to Ravanaa about her disfigurement and suggested the kidnapping of Sita. On the other hand, Sanjana is much more deferential to Chandni, who is her college Chemistry teacher, and accepts her transformation under Chandni's care and Ram's insistence. Surpanakha does not transform into Urmila in the *Ramayana*, but Sanjana does. This transformation, though reinforcing expectations of female beauty and behavior is not regressive as Sanjana knows that the new feminine person is not her real identity. This realization makes Sanjana realistic and believable. She knows her limits, she is willing to test them, but she prefers to be her original self and win Lucky's affections. The change also acts

as a catalyst whereby Lucky confront his feelings for Sanjana and his social expectations; he grows up as an individual.

If Chandni is seen as Sita, as she is Ram's partner, then this modern-day Sita is very sexualized in *Main Hoon Na*. Sushmita Sen, who plays, Chandni, was the first Indian to win the Miss Universe crown in 1994. She has been a trailblazer in many ways: she adopted a girl when she was only 25 and single; she adopted a second girl when she was 35, and (despite being more than forty years old) Sen is unmarried and happy. Being a single unmarried mother is still looked upon unfavorably but Sen has always been vocal about her adoption and her independence. So, it is not surprising that her Chandni is an interesting take on Sita. Chandni is a college professor who teaches Chemistry and who is considered to be hot and sexy by the students and the teachers. There has been a long tradition of young male students falling in love with their teachers, from Raj Kapoor's *Mera Naam Joker* (My Name is Joker, 1970) to Nagesh Kukunoor's *Rockford* (1999), but here Ram is the same age as his teacher, Chandni. Whenever Ram sees Chandni, he hears violins playing and the audience sees a group of musicians playing instruments. Ram also bursts into different Hindi songs whenever he sees Chandni. This parodies the feature in Hindi films where it is completely natural for actors to sing songs as a part of the storyline. Chandni's brightly colored cloth folders are a part of her persona as a teacher and her chiffon sarees and sleeveless knotted blouses are her fashion statement. Her clothes also parody the fact that Bollywood actresses wear flimsy thin clothes, including chiffon sarees, in freezing temperatures, as seen in songs and to sexualize the actress. The hero, on the other hand, will usually be dressed in warm clothes. Chandni is shown as independent, outspoken, and extremely sexualized in the film.

Nevertheless, she acts as Ram's partner, and later, when she learns of his true identity as an army major who is on a mission, she starts seeing him as an equal, rather than her overgrown infatuated student. Afterwards, she also consoles him when Ram has a fallout with Lucky and their mother. Chandni fulfills the traditional roles expected of a Sita-like character but she is more independent, individualistic, and on an equal footing with Ram than the original Sita. She is also shown as more sexually and fashionably appealing than Sita. Unsurprisingly, Chandni's sarees, designed by Manish Malhotra, were later a huge fashion trend with the audience. The interesting thing about Chandni is that, despite her Sita-like qualities of being an equal partner to Ram, she is not named Sita. Even in the film *Raavaan*, the Sita-like figure is named Ragini. Malashri Lal in "Sita: Naming Purity and Protest" suggests that the name Sita "itself was sacred, an utterance which denoted a natural veneration, the context for which had to be suitably pious" (59). So, the name Sita would have been a problem for Chandni. Also, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, a character like Chandni with Sita's name would have run into a controversy, like the film *Goliyon Ki Rasleela Ram-Leela*.

If *Main Hoon Na* focuses on a sexualized Sita and a transformed Surpankha, then *Sita Sings the Blues*, an animation film released in 2008, focuses on Sita's perspective on the epic and Ram's treatment of her. Technically, although not a Hindi film as this American film was written, directed, animated, and produced by American artist Nina Paley in the US, this movie is important because of the narration from Sita's perspective. Ronnie Scheib argues that, "Punctuated with classic bluesy ballads mouthed by a highly stylized Betty Boop-ish 'Sita' and sung by '20s jazz icon Annette Hanshaw via vintage 78s, Paley's feature... constitutes an irrefutable argument for classic 2-D animation as a viable, vibrant low-budget arthouse medium for adults." The film follows four animation styles: one features the autobiographical story of

Paley, another one features the actual story line of the epic created in the style of Rajput painting, a third features the songs that Sita sings, and the last one a discussion of the epic by three shadow puppets with the events created in the style of Indian calendar art. The shadow puppets who discuss the epic are created like the shadow puppets of Indonesia, Java, and Malaysia. The trio is composed of two men and one woman, mimicking Ram, Lakhman, and Sita, and their discussion is light-hearted, irreverent, and not too knowledgeable. Paley has mentioned that she had asked her three friends, all natives of India, to discuss the *Ramayana* in a New York audio studio. Their unscripted hour-long discussion became the narration for *Sita Sings the Blues* (Paley). As for the present day storyline, Schieb identifies the style as Paley's popular "Nina's Adventures" and also asserts that, "the dual storyline exponentially increases the relevance of both plots and supplies a clever structuring device" (Schieb).

Like any postmodern film, *Sita Sings the Blues* also incorporates other sources than the *Ramayana*, "compositing maps, excerpted texts, reproductions of paintings and various other graphics" (Schieb). As for the songs that are an integral part of the film, Schieb describes them as "'20s ballads [that] are crooned by Sita, designed as a smooth, impossibly curvaceous assemblage of arcs and circle-shapes rendered in Flash animation" (Schieb). These songs, like those in Hindi films, comment on the actions of the main film,

Sita intones 'Mean to Me' while her beloved Rama cavalierly dropkicks her into a blazing funeral pyre to test her purity. Other tunes provide ironic counterpoint, as when a kidnapped Sita is liberated by scimitar-wielding monkey warriors and breaks into an upbeat "Who's That Knocking at My Door" while the decapitated heads and limbs of her captors pile up in time to the music (Schieb).

For Paley, this film is also autobiographical as she had created this film after being abandoned by her boyfriend, who left her to go to India for a job. She went after him, and later, he broke up by email, as shown in the film.

In an interview with Alex Dueben, Paley was asked what was it about the story and Sita that made her want to tell this story. Paley answered that she liked the “ambiguity of the characters, where it seemed at first that they’re either really good or really bad, but they actually have contradictions and they behave mysteriously in a way that seemed very very real” (Dueben). I will discuss this realistic portrayal of characters in the next section. Paley also comments that she likes the tension that arises from the fact that the story asserts the greatness and goodness of Rama, yet he banishes Sita, and (despite being “this perfect man”) behaves in imperfect ways (Dueben). This is evident in Ram mistreating Sita because he had overheard his subjects discussing her so-called infidelity with Ravanaa, Sita’s repeated tests of proving her innocence, and his abandoning a pregnant Sita in the forest. Ram can be seen as committing domestic abuse but his tales of valor and bravery are a part of Indian society. Meghnad Desai comments that “Rama does not even have the courage to tell Sita to her face that he is sending her to exile, knowing that she is pregnant with his progeny” (4). Paley also admits that the story describes human experience but the “age of it and the depth of it made me feel connected to all of humanity” (Dueben). This universality of the *Ramayana* is another reason for its popularity in so many countries and its numerous transformations and adaptations. Being a woman, Paley would have understood Sita’s story and sympathized with her, more intuitively, than she would have viewed Ram’s reasons for his actions. For Ram, it was more important to be an ideal monarch even if that meant mistreating Sita.

Paley also believes that the story of the *Ramayana*, Hanshaw’s songs, and her own story prove the universality of the epic (Dueben). This is true as seen in Paley’s own life of being abandoned by the man she loves and Henshaw’s songs that also focus on heterosexual relationships in which the man is less than perfect. The songs have a different animation style in

which Sita is hypersexualized as a Betty Boop character with exaggerated breasts, tiny waist, and luxurious hair. Ram is also sexualized as a character with a huge wide torso, bulging biceps, and tiny legs. In an interview with Malashri Lal, Paley argues that “the shapes [of the characters] emphasize gender. Sita’s hourglass shape is impossible to achieve.... Likewise, I gave Rama enormous biceps and an impossibly broad chest. The characters’ silhouettes unmistakably say ‘female’ and ‘male’” (126). She further notes that these “extreme poles of masculinity and femininity” are transferred on to Ram and Sita who are viewed as ideal characters (Paley and Lal 126).

These songs are sung in Hanshaw’s voice but are postmodern in the new context of its animation and the words, which makes the performance a pastiche of the original rather than a simple reproduction. These songs lend a Bollywood feel where the songs discuss the themes of the *Ramayana* but are dependent on the story. Paley observes that she heard Hanshaw’s songs after her breakup and she picked them because of “their historical weight” (Dueben). She also contends that the story of the epic expresses itself in human lives “and the songs are historical evidence of that” (Dueben). Moreover, Paley also suggests that “Hanshaw’s voice is the best emphasis of Sita’s strength: strength in vulnerability, honesty and yes, purity” (Paley and Lal 125). This film is significant and postmodern in its portrayal of the epic through Sita’s perspective, the autobiographical elements of the creator, as well as the playful point-of-view of such a serious and religious epic.

Sita, like Chandni of *Main Hoon Na*, is hypersexualized in *Sita Sings the Blues*, primarily through the songs where she looks like an Indian Betty Boop. Also, *Sita Sings the Blues* opens with a sexualized Lakhmi, goddess of wealth, who is massaging her husband, Vishnu’s, legs but ends with a reversal of Vishnu massaging her legs, indicating the restoration of equality between

the sexes. The other two animation styles conform to traditional portrayals of Sita, the Rajput paintings and the Indian calendar art, show Sita covered in sarees, modestly dressed, and demure, with only a few lines of dialogue. These animation segments focus on the original epic where Ram can do no wrong and where Sita is the perfect wife. It is only in the songs that Sita's voice and perspective are heard through Hanshaw's songs. Hanshaw's songs in the twentieth century provide a perfect voice for Sita's misfortunes from the original epic. Like Dev Sen's analysis of rural songs that are sung by women, which show Sita's condition, Hanshaw's songs and Paley's adaptations show what Sita went through. Perhaps Sita's narrative could not be accommodated in the main storyline of the paintings and calendar art, and had to be shown only through Hanshaw's songs.

To a certain extent, the discussion of the shadow puppets reflects the attempts of the audience to piece together the epic, from their respective cultural and regional backgrounds, while also analyzing the characters and seeing the epic from multiple perspectives. The *Ramayana*, as discussed by the shadow puppets, also questions Ram and Sita's actions and tries to provide answers and justifications for the characters. Their discussion can be seen as an example of Bakhtin's polyphony where the various voices of three shadow puppets, as well as the different animation sequences show the epic can be approached. For instance, one of the male puppets mentions that Ravana was learned, a wonderful king, and was also devoted to Shiva but he has been demonized. In the original, Ravana was also an excellent king of Lanka but he is identified only through his abduction of Sita, a married woman. The fact that he never lays a finger on her or forces himself on her is rarely discussed. He issues an ultimatum to her to make up her decision about living with him but is always respectful to her. He asks his demoness

subjects to convince her but he does not harm her. He possibly treats Sita with more respect than Ram does and this is rarely discussed.⁹

Through the song “Daddy Come Home,” Sita sends a message to Ram, via Hanuman, the monkey god, that she wants Ram to rescue her from Ravanaa. The puppets try to understand Sita’s motivation for not going with Hanuman and instead being Ravanaa’s hostage. The female shadow puppet suggests that Sita wants to glorify Ram by forcing Ram, her “man,” to rescue her: “He is virtuous and he will kill Raavan,” leading one of the male puppets to conclude that Sita was a “blood-thirsty woman” (*Sita Sings the Blues*). This discussion exemplifies the traditional gender roles of men as protectors who rescue women in distress. Even if Sita had wanted to leave with Hanuman, it would have been inappropriate as Hanuman is male and she is still married to Ram. In the end, everything is focused on the virtue and purity of Sita. Bhattacharji observes that, during the time frame of the epic, “women were denied institutionalized education and were reduced as objects of exchange. She is considered as the sole cause of miscegenation, the most evil of beings. Foreign invasions intensified fears of miscegenation” (Bhattacharji 44). As a result, it was of utmost importance for Sita to remain faithful to Ram, instead of being invaded by the foreigner, Ravanaa.

Another male puppet says that Sita has her own issue; she does not return with Hanuman which could have saved a lot of bloodshed and she prays for the well-being of Rama. The female shadow puppet justifies Sita’s actions based on her unconditional love for Ram despite his mistreatment of her. Sita’s idealized love for Ram is independent of reason and situations. Paley contends that “Sita’s ferocious love for Rama is an unstoppable force, a true source of power, if not empowerment” (Paley and Lal 125). Moreover, Mukti Lakhi Mangharam notices that “We

⁹The only exception is the TV series, *Raavan*, that was telecast for two years (2006-08) on Zee TV in India.

are told that throughout her kidnapping ordeal, despite being forcefully seduced, imprisoned, terrorized, and almost eaten by Ravanaa's *rakshasa* guards, she has bravely stood up to Ravanaa, concentrating on her love for Rama" (91). No matter how rich or powerful or important Ravanaa is, he can never measure up to Ram. In a contemporary context, if she had known how badly Ram would treat her, perhaps she would have reconsidered her decision to not stay with Ravanaa.

Respectful Raavan and Ruthless Ram: Grey Characters in the Adaptations

The concept of the hero has changed from the early Hindi films to contemporary times. Earlier, the male protagonist could do no wrong at all. Whatever he did was justified for the greater good. Often, the villain would be taken away by the law authorities and punished, rather than be killed by the hero. Also, the hero would only kill the criminal mastermind and no one else. However, the two adaptations, discussed in this section, complicate the binary of good and evil. Film criminals have various motivations like, creating an empire, megalomania, riches, and ambition. However, these two adaptations not only show how the villain is sometimes not entirely villainous but also show how the so-called heroes might have a darker side to them. These two postmodern adaptations not only complicate the binary of good and evil but also problematize the male gender portrayals. If the women are given more agency and sex appeal in the previous two adaptations, then the male protagonists and antagonists are given power and justification for everything that they do, be it murder, kidnap, lies, and manipulation. They are powerful and the women in these two adaptations negotiate the limited power that they have.

Even in *Sita Sings the Blues*, one of the male shadow puppets observes that Ravanaa is a villain who does not rape Sita; Ravanaa informs Sita, "If you do not come willingly, I will not touch you. I will not force you in my house, I will not force myself on you." (*Sita Sings the*

Blues). This proves that Ravanaa was a villain who abducted but who also respected Sita. Ram, though, in the original epic and in *Sita Sings the Blues*, is unconvinced of her chastity and loyalty towards Ram and orders her to go through fire to prove her purity. Ram also banishes a pregnant Sita when he hears one of his subjects say that unlike Ram, he cannot accept his wife who was with another man. This whole idea of Ram doubting his wife proves how imperfect he is as a hero, who completely misunderstands his faithful wife. One of the male puppets justifies the action that Ram had banished Sita to gain the respect of his subjects. Ram orders Laxman to do take Sita and abandon her in the forest. Megnad Desai observes that by the time the *Ramayana* was written

[P]atriarchy had registered its authority over women's bodies and over their reproductive rights. Rama considers Sita his property until he loses her to Ravanaa. Despite Sita's purity, Rama rejects her twice, doubting her fidelity, twice. ... Yet Sita is a silent heroine as she refuses to bear Rama any child till he secures his throne. She brings up her sons on her own as a single abandoned mother and finally returns to her mother's womb [the earth], thus establishing the autonomy of the female (9).

On the other hand, Mangharam contends that Sita uniting with the earth is a way “to find an alternative way to *moksha* outside the bounds of her conjugal relationship” (92). Mangharam contrasts her with Ram whose “undharmic behavior towards Sita means that his divine/human status remains ambiguous” (92). This shows that despite being the seventh avatar of Vishnu, one of the gods comprising the Hindu triumvirate, Ram is imperfect, as opposed to how “Hindu nationalists would portray him” (Mangharam 92). Mangharam emphasizes that Ram “serves as a negative foil to the divine goodness of Sita. *Moksha* is revealed as a sensual feminist journey, one that can only be achieved through sexual justice for women as well as men” (92). Both Desai and Mangharam agree that Ram, despite being divine, mistreats Sita. Ram's justification that Sita may be impure after being with Ravanaa is unjustified. Even in contemporary India, like any

other patriarchal society, the virginity of a woman is questioned before marriage but not of men. With education and awareness, this attitude is on the decline in urban regions but still present in rural areas. On the other hand, Ravanaa, despite being a villain, does not touch Sita. Shudha Mazumdar's *Ramayan* shows Ram's conflict,

He well knew her devotion and how dearly she loved him, but with a sinking heart he could not but become aware of the thoughts of his followers. Suspicion had entered their hearts... was this wife of their beloved Lord for whom they had waged so bitter a war, indeed worthy of their struggle? Had she truly kept unbroken faith with Shri Ram during her long imprisonment, or had Ravanaa succeeded in winning her affections? (433).

This shows Ram's conflict but he chooses his subjects instead of believing Sita's protests. Ram is heartbroken and distressed but he does not trust his wife, instead choosing to pacify his subjects.

Blurring this binary of good and evil is *Raavan*, released in 2010, which creates grey characters, characters which are more human because they are both black and white, *Raavan* not only portrays the villain, Beera (Abhishek Bachchan), the Ravanaa character, as sympathetic but also gives more voice and agency to Ragini (Aishwarya Rai Bachchan), the Sita character, who is always powerless and held as a paragon of marital values and morals, a change that reflects the society's demand to give a voice to the marginal and the oppressed. The film was simultaneously released in Tamil as *Raavanan*. An interesting feature of the crossover aspect of the Hindi and the Southern India film industries is when stories are adapted from one region and language to another, sometimes having the same actors. For instance, in the Hindi *Raavan*, the actor who plays the Ram character, Vikram, also plays the Ravanaa character in the Tamil *Raavanan*, showing the existence of good and evil in the same person across different films and acting contexts. The director, Mani Ratnam, predominantly makes Tamil films, and both the versions of this film give voice to Ragini and the indigenous population of the region, termed as tribals.

Ratnam's emphasis on Tamil films presenting the perspective of the female protagonist and the tribals can be seen as a consequence of what Kam notes, that in the south Indian traditions, "there are trends towards stronger female characters, increased importance of the monkeys, more sympathetic portrayal of the ogres, and frequent use of magic" (5).¹⁰ Possibly to avoid controversy, Ratnam did not name the characters as Ram, Sita, and Ravanaa.

The Hindi film sets up a binary between Beera, the bandit, and the police officers, led by Dev Pratap Sharma, the Ram-like character. As Beera is a tribal leader and a marginal figure, he runs a parallel government and is seen as a terrorist by the law. His two brothers and his followers are seen as sub-humans who do not deserve any kind of rights. The *Ramayana* has also been used for political purposes. Sheldon Pollock in "Ramayana and Political Imagination in India" traces the long history and relationship between the epic and the usage of Indian political symbols. He shows that the text offers two linked "imaginative instruments— whereby, on the one hand, a divine political order can be conceptualized, narrated, and historically grounded, and, on the other, a fully demonized Other can be categorized, counterposed, and condemned" (264). The strict demarcation between right and wrong is a consequence of this Othering, whereby everything that is bad, evil, and horrifying is projected onto the other, who is the enemy Ravanaa in the epic, and Beera in the film. Pollock's Othering is also seen in *Main Hoon Na's* Major Major Raghavan who sees Pakistan as evil and a country with which India can never achieve peace and harmony. Pollock argues that outsiders are made into others by being "represented as deviant— sexually, dietetically, politically deviant. Ravanaa is not only 'other' in his reckless

¹⁰ South India, comprising of the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Telangana, are viewed as a complete opposite to North India, comprising of the states of Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh and the Union Territories of Delhi and Chandigarh, in Indian popular culture. This opposition is seen in terms of society, status of women, culinary options, and also clothing.

polygyny—‘others’ always threaten to steal ‘our’ women but is presented without question as a tyrant, perhaps even as a kind of ‘Oriental despot’ constructed by a preform of Orientalism”

(283). Pollock’s assertion that Ravanaa is shown as a despot in the epic is true because he is the king of demons whereas Ram is not only an avatar of Vishnu but his subjects are human.

Ravanaa is the king of Ceylon, modern-day Sri Lanka and Ram is the king of Ayodhya, situated in modern-day Uttar Pradesh in north India. There is automatically a difference in culture as they are from two separate countries and regions. If Ram was from South India, then there would have still been some linguistic and cultural similarities, as well as similar appearances.

Consequently, Ravanaa and everything related to him are seen as Ram’s other. Pollock emphasizes this threat that Ravanaa poses through abducting Sita but Ram is also not the ideal husband.

As for the movie, *Raavan*, the audience did not have any problem connecting the central protagonists of the movie to the epic: Beera, the tribal leader is Ravanaa; Dev Pratap Sharma, the police superintendent is Ram; his wife and an accomplished classical dancer, Ragini, is Sita; Sanjeevani Kumar (Govinda), the forest guard, is Hanuman; and Inspector Hemant (Nikhil Dwivedi), who is Sharma’s partner and the Deputy Superintendent of Police, is Laxman. The movie justifies Beera’s actions as the audience uncovers his motivations and background through the perspective of Ragini, whom Beera abducts. Both Beera and Dev Pratap Sharma are the grey characters in this adaptation. The film starts with a straightforward binary that Beera is evil as he is terrorizing the indigenous population and his followers have also killed policemen and destroyed government property. Sharma is given the task to capture Beera, with the help of Hemant and Sanjeevani Kumar. Beera abducts Ragini and announces to his brothers, Mangal and

Hariya, that she will die in fourteen hours.¹¹ However, Ragini is allowed to live and see how Beera and his followers live in the forests. Through Ragini's perspective, the audience sees that Beera is justified in his actions. Ragini is freed and Dev interrogates Ragini, similar to the exchange between Ram and Sita, after Sita is freed from Ravana's clutches. Ragini returns to Beera but Dev follows her and apprehends and kills Beera.

Ragini is blindfolded when she is abducted by Beera and his brother, Mangal. She can only hear the sounds and asks, "Who's there?" Mangal answers, "My, queen, why are you losing your head?" She asks again, "Who's there?" He answers, "Demons and scoundrels" (*Ravaan*). Mangal is fooling around but his answer is similar to what the law-enforcement officers, the government, and the mainstream society will call the trouble makers. Beera is described in contradictory terms, whereby Dev describes him as "a hardened criminal, a man who terrorizes Laal Maati. And protects it too" (*Raavan*)¹² Dev further claims that Beera is both the law and lawmaker of Laal Maati but for the police department, he is simply a criminal, who was the cause of bloodshed. Ragini, before her abduction, asks Dev and Hemnat, whether Beera is Ravana or Robin Hood (*Raavan*). Dev answers that Beera is said to be in ten places simultaneously and has, "ten minds. Ten faces. He is the ten-headed Ravana" (*Raavan*). There are two storylines— one focuses on the plot after Ragini's abduction and the other informs the audience through flashbacks. In the present story, Ragini jumps from a high cliff into a water body but survives. After Beera rescues her, she calls him, "No man is worse than you. Uncouth beats. You monster. Fiend. No insults in the world are enough for you." (*Raavan*). While

¹¹ The number fourteen is a reference to the fourteen years that Ram spent in the forest with Sita and Laxman.

¹² Laal Maati translates into red earth, referring to the color of the red soil, found in the southern region of India and certain states, like Odisha (former Orissa) and Jharkhand among others. Jharkhand has historically seen Maoist insurgencies and so Laal Maati can be seen as a shorthand reference to Maoist and tribal uprisings, as portrayed in the film.

interviewing the tribals, Dev and Hemant receive contradictory descriptions of Beera: he is a calm and wise man, he is fearless, his heart is clear as water, he saved their land, he's a poet, women go crazy hearing him, he is dangerous, he's learned, he isn't educated but knows everything, he plays the dhol (drums) well, and if you see him, you see the death (*Raavan*). All of his varied characteristics not only show that he is a grey character but also makes him justified and appealing, despite his run-ins with the law. It also reinforces the idea of tunnel vision, whereby Dev always sees Beera as a criminal but Ragini changes her opinion and possibly, falls in love with him. The change in Beera and Dev's characters reflect the contemporary Indian society and humans, in general, where a person may be both good and bad but in different degrees. It also shows the radical shift from the epics whose stories are collectively known but whose religious lessons and codes of conduct are difficult to enforce, as Lakhan retorts in *Ram Lakhan*.

One of the reasons that Beera presents to Ragini for his enmity with the law is the rape of his stepsister, Jamuniya (Priyamani), who corresponds to Surpanakaha, of the original epic. In *Raavan*, Jamuniya's fiancé, Rajeshwar Tiwari, abandons her on the day of their wedding. Jamuniya courts Rajeshwar, which shows her assertive and independent side, a fact that Beera's brother, Mangal, also notes, "She was the only person in the whole family who did not fear Beera even a bit. [Even] Beera was afraid of her. She was extremely smart" (*Raavan*). However, seeing the police officers, Rajeshwar runs away. Dev, who was also present at the wedding, shoots Beera but he escapes. Later Hemant, who was also a part of the operation, pulls Jamuniya up from her seated position at the wedding by her nose, and takes her to the police station.¹³ And

¹³ Surpanakaha, in the original epic, married against her brother, Ravana's wishes, but later Ravana accepts his brother-in-law, Vidyut Jihva. However, when Vidyut Jihva attacks Ravana later, he kills him in self-defense. When Surpanakha advances towards Ram, and later Laxman, Laxman cuts off her nose and she returns to Lanka, where she instigates Raavana to abduct Sita. Beera originally does not favor Rajeshwar but later accepts him.

Hemant pulling Jamuniya by her nose-ring is reminiscent of Laxman cutting off Shurpanakha's nose. Jamuniya is gang raped at the station, the whole night, and later commits suicide, after mumbling that she is still pure. This puts her in a direct relationship with Ragini, whose loyalty is also questioned by Dev. It also connects her to the original Sita but Jamuniya is actually raped and Sita was not.

Later, Beera abducts Hemant, and returns him to the police: muddied, nearly naked and with a shaved head. Beera justifies his anger and the treatment of Hemant on the basis of the rape of Jamuniya, whose faults were that she was a tribal, she was Beera's step sister, and she does not reveal where Beera was hiding, if she knew at all. Ragini had assumed that Beera ill-treated Hemant because of his job as a law enforcer; she did not know about the rape. Arshia Sattar contrasts Sita and Surpanakhan where Sita is "good, pure, light, auspicious and subordinate, whereas Surpanakha is evil, impure, dark, inauspicious and insubordinate" (13). This contrast is evident in the characters of Ragini and Jamuniya. Ragini is fair complexioned, beautiful, of a higher social status as she is the wife of a police officer, educated, and talented as she is an accomplished Classical dancer. On the other hand, Jamuniya is dark complexioned, of a lower social status as she is a tribal, uneducated, and poor. However, both Jamuniya and Ragini are fiercely independent and both are abducted by men in different kinds of power; Ragini is abducted by a criminal tribal leader and Jamuniya is abducted by police officers. Like any postmodern text, *Raavan* shows how marginalized populations are treated by the mainstream society, including abuse of power and rape of women, who are lower on the social ladder.

Ragini, realizes that she is empathizing with Beera and his followers. She prays to a statue of Vishnu, submerged in a river, to give her anger. She also prays that she will not be softened by seeing the good side of her abductors. This is after she gets to know about

Jamuniya's rape. Ragini is torn between her love, devotion, and respect for Dev, and his actions against Beera and his followers. Beera describes Dev to Ragini as a great man who is large hearted and a man of high principles. He asks whether Dev loves her and she answers yes. But when Beera asks whether Ragini loves him, she does not answer. Beera confesses that he is jealous. It seems as if Ragini suffers from Stockholm syndrome as she slowly starts to fall in love with Beera. Unlike the original Sita, Ragini, is caught between Dev and Beera, her husband and her captor. Bhattacharji analyzes that "Sita had been with Rama in times of happiness and in time of trouble, had followed him from the palace to the forest. She had come to understand and know him, to place all her love and faith in him. She would find any rival of Rama absurd, however great his might and wealth" (Bhattacharji 35). Ragini starts off as trusting Dev completely but seeing Beera's actions and the motivations behind his actions, she almost grows up and realizes that the world, and especially Dev and Beera, is not simply black and white. Ragini is seen as a Sita-figure as per Mangharam's observation, "Often identified as a Sita figure, she was to be educated in Western-style conjugality while simultaneously being a *pativrata*, a woman who embraced devotion to her husband as the ultimate dharma. A domesticated, heterosexual, conjugal, and, by extension, religious femininity, then, has long been at the heart of nation building in South Asia" (Mangharam 81). This complication of Beera's character and his actions makes Ragini question herself, her beliefs, and her husband, Dev. Ragini, like any other intelligent and educated Indian woman, starts to question and this makes her uncomfortable as her Dev, like Ram, is not as idealized as she had thought him to be. Like a postmodern text, *Raavan* breaks down the grand narrative of the epic while complicating issues of identity. Like Ragini, the contemporary audience is also confused and cannot find an anchor for notions of right and wrong. The film accurately portrays how things are not what they seem

in an ever-changing world. Unlike Ravanaa, Beera does not plead or cajole with Ragini; he is tender towards her but is always aware that she is the wife of a police inspector. Ravanaa threatens Sita, flaunts his power and wealth to her but also pleads with her, “I am your slave, you are my goddess. ... Look, Fair One, I beg at your feet. Abandon anger and listen to my words. To none has the Ten-Headed One bent his heads, to your feet only does he bow now, O Sita” (Mazumdar 181). If Beera was shown beseeching Ragini, then that would have undermined his authority with his brothers and his fellow tribals, as Ragini is the enemy. It would have also gone against the portrayal of the traditional Indian man who does not show his emotions.

Dev, whose name translates to god in Hindi, corresponds to Ram; he is in charge of restoring law and order through his job as a police officer. He will do anything to capture Beera be it even shooting Beera’s other brother, Hariya, who had come to negotiate peace in exchange for Ragini’s return. For Dev, everything that he does is justified because he is trying to apprehend Beera, the criminal and terrorist. When Beera lets Ragini go, Dev embraces her and asks where Beera is. For him getting hi wife back after two weeks is less important than finding Beera. He shouts out, “Beera! Where are you?” Ragini asks him, “Did you come for me or him?” (*Raavan*). Dev responds with a warning that he will return to catch Beera.

When Dev and Ragini are returning on a train, Dev orders Ragini to take a polygraph test after she tells him that nothing happened between her and Beera. Ragini says that she wants to die after hearing his suggestion. Dev informs her that Beera had said that Ragini was impure. She gets off the train and meets Beera, asking him what he told Dev. Beera had said that he can kill and save lives for Ragini, who was like gold, which when burnt, is more refined. Beera had also said that although his hands may be dirty, he had carefully kept Dev’s precious possession, Ragini. This shows Beera’s purity, despite the government labeling him a criminal. Beera does

not lay a finger on her, does not rape her, and does not manipulate her. Ragini confides in Beera that Dev did not listen to her, and spoke rudely to her because he suspected her.

Later when Dev follows her, Ragini realizes that Dev had instigated his wife so that she would lead him to Beera. Beera had realized Dev's intelligence in questioning his wife's character and anticipating that Ragini will meet Beera. Ragini tries to save Beera by coming in front of him but she fails. For Dev, the capture of Beera is more significant than lying to and manipulating his wife. He is ready to do anything for the greater good, like Ram who abandoned Sita and asked her to go through the trial by fire. Dev, like Ram, is justified in his actions and manipulations because he is serving the greater good, in this case, capturing a dangerous criminal who is terrorizing a region. Dev shows how certain decisions need to be taken for the collective good, despite collateral damage. In that sense, he is a nationalist, a patriot, and a law-abiding citizen. He also exemplifies the numerous police officers in India who are ready to negotiate and bend the rules if it means putting away or getting rid of a criminal.

Ratnam, in an interview that was a part of the exclusive feature of the DVD, sees the two male protagonists as two sides of a coin: the right and the wrong side. Ratnam admits that if we, as audience, "shift our position and view from the character's point of view, then the way we look at it changes" (*Raavan*). This is applicable to both Dev and Beera, Dev can go to any lengths to restore law and order and Beera can show compassion and respect despite his criminal activities. The actors who played the characters accurately describe their on-screen personae. Vikram describes Dev as "dashing, purposeful, focused"; Aishwarya Rai Bachchan describes Ragini as a firebrand who is "so feisty," a fighter and "yet a normal complete woman," and Abhishek Bachchan describes Beera as "negative, raw, antisocial element. All heart and very correct from where he is coming" (*Raavan*). The back cover of the DVD features Ratnam's note,

Is Raavan the line that divides Good from Evil...?
 Does our understanding change when we look from the opponent's
 perspective...?
 The bond between the Hunter and the Hunted- between the Captor and the
 Captive seems to be a bond of do or die....
 ... Are Ten Heads better than one...?
 Is there a Ram inside Raavan?
 And a Raavan inside Ram? (*Raavan*).

Even the marketing of the film focuses on how a character changes based on a change in perspective. *Raavan* confuses the binaries and shows how the real world actually functions, without a moral compass.

Because of the complexity of the *Mahabharata*, it has only been adapted twice- *Kalyug* (1981) and *Rajneeti* (2006). *Rajneeti* was a commercial and literary success because of its story, characters, and connections to reality in terms of nepotism, alternative politics, and female agency. If only two characters in *Ravaan* complicate binaries, then almost all the male characters are grey in *Rajneeti*. This reflects on the original epic where though the characters are morally ambiguous, yet their actions justify their personal codes of living.

In an interview with Insiyah Vahanvaty, Prakash Jha, the director and writer of the film summarizes the main idea of the film, “The story [of the epic] is the same kind of familial battle, except it is set in this day and age. The film talks about every possible kind of politics -- personal, social, state and national. Also, today, the word 'politics' has become derogatory, the film tries to understand that” (Vahanvaty). Similarly, Pollock describes the politics in the *Mahabharata* where, “the shared identity of the antagonists is nearly total; not only are they not ‘othered,’ one group from the other, but instead they are ‘brothered’,” whereby the fundamental problem of the story becomes all the more insoluble and terrible” (283). The Pandavas and the Kauravas are cousin brothers and yet they are enemies, almost othering each other. For Jha,

politics is “development...being able to do good for the people and their uplift and development” (PTI). In reality, Jha also contested elections for a state political party from his home state, Bihar, but lost (PTI). His main aim for contesting the election was to have access to the resources and spend that in his area (PTI). Jha is known for making films with a strong political statement, and *Rajneeti* is no different. Jha uses his own background to discuss themes of politics, privilege, caste system, and corruption in his films.

Like the *Mahabharata*, *Rajneeti* is a story of a rivalry between the families of two brothers, Bhanu Pratap (who leads the Rashtrawadi political party) and Chandra (whose sons spilt from the Rashtrawadi party to form the Jana Shakti party). Because of its contemporary setting, the Pandavs are reduced to two brothers, Prithviraj (Arjun Rampal), corresponding to Bhima and Samar (Ranbir Kapoor), corresponding to Arjun. Prakash Jha, in an interview that was a part of the Behind the Scenes feature of the DVD, notes that Prithvi’s character was inspired by Bhim (*Rajneeti*). As polyandry and polygamy are illegal, Indu (Katrina Kaif) who is similar to Draupadi, falls in love with Samar but marries Prithviraj. And Sooraj (translated as and played by Ajay Devgn), who is based on Karna in the original epic, is adopted by the driver of the Pratap family. In the *Mahabharata*, Karna was the illegitimate son of Kunti. Before marrying Pandu, Kunti was given a boon and she invokes Surya to test the validity and effectiveness of the boon. She gives birth to Karna before her marriage. Fearing for her reputation, Kunti asks Surya to restore her virginity, which he does. Playing on the names in the film, Sooraj is a Dalit who refuses to assume the leadership or come to his biological family even after Bharti pleads with him and says that Samar and Prithvi will accept him as their elder brother. Nevertheless, Sooraj reasons that his parents are the adoptive ones who brought him up and his “soul is that of a Dalit” (*Rajneeti*). Bharati (Nikhila Tripathi) corresponds to Kunti. In the epic, Karna, is set afloat

and is raised by the charioteer of Dhritarashtra, and his wife. Similarly, Bharti become pregnant after a one-night stand with her mentor and the enemy of her father's political party, Bhaskar Sanyal, who leaves her after realizing his mistake. This trope of female characters getting pregnant after a one-night stand is common and usually serves as a cautionary tale to the audience to prevent pre-marital sex and as a means to control women's bodies. The trope of a night-stand resulting in pregnancy is also reinforced when Indu becomes pregnant after having sex with her husband, Prithvi. The next morning, a bomb blast kills both Prithvi and Sarah, Samar's American girlfriend, proving that only a one-night encounter resulted in Indu's pregnancy.

Samar, who is the male protagonist of the film, corresponds to Arjun of the *Mahabharata*. Arjun was the third son of Kunti but his biological father was Indra, the king of the gods in Hindu mythology. Arjun was also the most accomplished among his five brothers. The only person who could be considered his equal was the illegitimate Karna. However, Arjun also had his flaws. And when he was hesitant to raise arms against his cousins, the Kauravas, Lord Krishna convinced that doing so was a part of his moral duty, the same way that Brij Gopal convinces Samar to kill both Surya and Veerendra Pratap, corresponding to Duryodhana. Brij Gopal is Bharti's foster brother. Brij Gopal convinces Samar, "Don't get trapped in questions of justice and ethics. ... Don't lose sight of the goal for which you entered this battle. Remember in politics, victory is all that matters" (*Rajneeti*). Sooraj begs Samar to let him take Veerendra to a hospital and then Sooraj will meet Samar and Samar can do whatever he wants with Sooraj, including murder. However, Veerendra dies and Samar shoots Sooraj. Later, Samar confesses to his uncle, Veerendra's father, "I never wanted to do any of the things that I did. You, of all people, know this, uncle. Please forgive me" (*Rajneeti*). This was also in the original where

Yudhishtira asks for Dhritarashtra's forgiveness after the war that resulted in the deaths of the Kauravas. Jha notes that the film's "background was Indian democracy" (*Rajneeti*). Samar is shown apologizing as a way to convince the audience that he is not all that evil and that, whatever he did was in the name of protecting his family.

Jha also contends that the basic thought of the *Mahabharata* is that "you have to combat, you have to struggle, you have to fight violence with violence, you have to fight evil with evil" (*Rajneeti*). And this is what the male protagonists, Prithvi, Veerendra, and especially, Samar, follow. Samar starts off as a regular morally upright person who is getting his PhD in the US and who is visiting India for celebrating his uncle's birthday. Jha notes Samar is a "new Arjun" and Anjum Rajabali, who co-wrote the film's screenplay with Jha corroborates that the Arjun in Samar is "a reinterpretation, a pre and post Bhagvad Gita moment" (*Rajneeti*). Rajabali also observes that this Arjun/Samar is a good man who is forced into battle, like Michael Corleone of the *Godfather*, and that Samar's fascination with violence is evident in his the title of his dissertation, "The Sub-textual Emotional Violence of 19th Century Victorian Poetry." Possibly he was exposed to suggestions of violence when he was growing up, leading to his plans for murder and conspiracies as a solution when he encounters threats to his immediate family. There is a strained relationship between Veerendra, Samar, and Prithvi, from the beginning, possibly due to the question of ruling their political party. So it can be argued that power and politics is the main culprit and not the actions of the people involved. *Rajneeti* is truthful in its portrayal of Indian politics and the fact that situations can change the behavior of people.

Moreover, Samar rejects the beautiful Indu, who corresponds to Draupadi. Indu confesses her love for him but he rejects her despite describing her as "amazing, beautiful, so full of life, honest, just lovely" and knowing how she felt for him since childhood (*Rajneeti*). He also

reasons that they are very different and that he does not have feelings for her but does not inform her that he already has a girlfriend, Sara, in the US. This hiding of his girlfriend is almost cowardly of Samar. After Samar's father, Chandra Pratap, corresponding to Pandu who also dies in the epic, is murdered by Sooraj and Veerendra, Samar decides to stay back in India to help his brother Prithvi consolidate his new political party and protect his family.

Prithvi, who corresponds to Bhima, in the original epic, is a temperamental politician. He is happy to abdicate his position as chief minister for Samar. Prithvi takes sexual advantage of a party co-worker who wants a political seat. He also assaults a police officer who was doing his duty and Prithvi also murders the same female party worker and the officer. Nevertheless, Prithvi loves his family and can go to any lengths to protect them and to consolidate his political party. He does not want to marry Indu as she loved Samar but Samar insists that Prithvi will learn to love Indu who is a wonderful girl. Prithvi agrees to marry Indu so that her father will finance Prithvi's new political party. Later, seeing both Samar and Sarah together, Indu informs Samar that it is evident that Sara loves him but she does not know that Samar cannot love anyone; he only knows how to use people. Indu cannot recognize this Samar because of the "darkness" that she sees in his heart. She is thankful to her father rejected Samar's marriage proposal. Indu further notes that no matter how Prithvi is, he has a good heart. This exchange between Samar, Prithvi, and Indu shows that both the brothers are neither completely heroic nor pure evil.

Later, Sarah also says something similar that Samar has changed or perhaps he was always like that and she did not see his true self. Sarah grew up in Ireland and her brother and father were killed when she was six, which are reasons for her to leave Samar. Samar promises to leave politics after he hears that they are pregnant. Samar is caught between the crossfire of politics and family. After Sarah is killed in the bomb blast with Prithvi, Indu assumes the

leadership of the party.¹⁴ Samar leaves India to return to the US and decides to look after Sarah's mother. Before leaving, he tries to justify his behavior to Indu, "I always wanted to stay away from politics. I feared the demons that it brings out. But that is exactly what happened. I could not escape my circumstances and ended up losing everything. But I know that you're not like that. Your heart is pure. You'll be okay" (*Rajneeti*). Samar knew that his internal darkness would come out and he wanted to avoid that by being away from politics. He is similar to Veerendra, his cousin, and corresponding to Duryodhana, who also does everything in the name of protecting his family and politics. *Rajneeti* functions as postmodern text whereby it is difficult to understand who the hero is and who the villain is. The audience is confused as to which side to root for and which to disdain. The actions of the characters, both in the epic and the film adaptation, are justified as they are following their own code of conduct but that may be illegal or against the society.

In all the four adaptations, the audience gets to see and understand different perspectives, be it that of Sita in *Sita Sings the Blues* or Beera/Ravanaa in *Raavan*, or even being disoriented about good and evil as in *Rajneeti* or confronting ideals of feminine beauty in *Main Hoon Na*. *Sita Sings the Blues* and *Main Hoon Na* are postmodern in their narrative technique, play, and parody, while *Raavan* and *Rajneeti* are more realistic. No matter their diverse differences, the audience can easily understand their content based on the shared knowledge of the two epics and

¹⁴ In this respect, Indu can be seen as similar to Indira Gandhi, the only woman Prime Minister of India. Gandhi was the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, first Prime Minister of India. Nehru and Gandhi were central figures in the Indian national Congress, a party that still exists in India and is often viewed as being the epitome of family politics. Before the release of the film, Katrina Kaif, the actress who plays Indu, was asked if her character was inspired by Gandhi and she replied, "No, my role has nothing to do with Sonia Gandhi at all. When you see the film, you'll understand that it is, first and foremost, a family drama" (PTI). One reason for this denial is that Hindi films are strongly censored and often if a film has any connections to real world people or incidents or to politics, then there is a chance of it being banned. If *Rajneeti* showed a blatant reference to Gandhi, then it would have been banned or created a controversy.

the common culture. However, with change, the ideal qualities of the characters in the epics are used as a way to educate and uphold tradition, not so much as to emulate the characters. They are guides to live a morally upright life. The audience believes that these characters are perfect but also concede that the perspective of the epic characters might not be the only dominant perspective nor that these characters behave in a vacuum. The audience realizes that the characters in the film adaptations reflect the contemporary reality where the epic characters are more human, more believable, more realistic, and definitely more understandable. For the film-going audience, the personae in these postmodern film adaptations reflect both the traditional epics as well as a change in contemporary gender, whereby women are given more agency and sexual appeal and men are neither strictly good nor evil. This extends to the next chapter India's obsession with William Shakespeare has resulted in him being the big Other in three film adaptations.

Shakespeare as the Big Other: Gender and Realism in *Maqbool*, *Omkara*, and *Haider*

William Shakespeare's plays continue to be popular across the world and an important part of the literary canon, be it at the school or the college level. Mike LoMonico notes in the Folger Shakespeare Library's Education Department that Shakespeare's works appear in syllabi in European countries, like Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, and Serbia, but also in countries, like Algeria, Brazil, China, India, Iraq, Kuwait, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan (LoMonico). Indian students in middle and high school, where the medium of instruction is English, encounter his plays, including *Merchant of Venice*, *The Tempest*, *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, and *Hamlet*, among others. Often, two years in high school are devoted to close reading and understanding of a single play, including the context of the play and the playwright. Also, schools choose two other texts, in addition to Shakespeare, be it a novel, a collection of short stories, or a collection of poems. I have studied in a school that was affiliated with the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations where I studied a Shakespeare play for two years for each of the tenth grade and the twelfth grade examinations. As per the syllabi for the tenth grade in the years 2015 to 2017, schools can choose between *Merchant of Venice* or John Galsworthy's *Loyalties* (CISCE). The collection of poems is compulsory but the schools can choose among a collection of short stories, George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, or E.R. Braithwaite's *To Sir, With Love* (CISCE). As per the syllabi for the twelfth grade, or the US equivalent of high school, in the years 2015 to 2018, schools can choose between Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* or Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* (CISCE). The school can choose among the collection of poems, a collection of essays, a collection of short stories, or Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (CISCE). Most schools choose Shakespeare over the other play as his plays are seen as more important than the others. He is a bigger cultural influence in India, than

Galsworthy or Shaw. This disproportionate interest in Shakespeare is noted by Mark Brown. He reveals that a British Council survey of 18,000 people in fifteen countries revealed that 83 percent of Indians said they understood Shakespeare, far more than the 58% of Britons (Brown). Moreover, India also leads with an 89 percent in the question, “do you like Shakespeare?” (Brown). It is safe to say that Shakespeare had no idea how wide-reaching his influence would be across the globe, mainly because of the ideological shrewdness of the British government to posit him as the greatest playwright and show the superiority of English literature in the colonies.

Also, this liking and understanding of Shakespeare, at least in the Indian educational context, has its own set of causes and implications. The British introduced Shakespeare’s plays in the colonies as a way to maintain cultural hegemony, most notable in Thomas B Macaulay’s “Minute on Indian Education” that claimed the superiority of English literature to the literature of India and Arabia. In the “Minute,” Macaulay also proposed the formation of a class of interpreters who would liaison between the British government and the Indian population. This class of interpreters would also convey knowledge to the common people. At that time, English was already spoken by the Indian ruling class. Gauri Viswanathan argues in *Masks of Conquest* that Shakespeare and other writers were introduced in educating Indians to maintain cultural and ideological dominion over India. She proposes that English was introduced to “historical and political pressures: to tensions between the East India Company and the English Parliament”, the missionaries, and the Indian elite classes (10). This legacy of the English language is an important aspect of independent India as Harish Trivedi observes that English was and still is increasingly used in the public domain, both in the government and in media, and resulting in “the emergence of Indian writing in English as the best-known segment of Indian literature internationally, even though within India it remains a tiny and elite fraction of the total literary

production” (74-75). However, there is a gradual change in the literary atmosphere that is also giving equal importance to Indian authors writing in English and regional languages. This connection of the English language and literature with the elite society is still a part of the Indian psyche whereby if someone can speak in fluent, grammatically correct English, that person is automatically given a socially superior position. Often and unfortunately, using the language of the former colonizer ensures a wider audience across the globe. This trend is also seen in certain small-budget independent Hindi movies where the characters speak in English in the entire film, as opposed to other Bollywood films where the dialogue of the characters are interspersed with English words and phrases. These films have directors from India and are not under the category of diasporic or crossover films.¹⁵ These films with English speaking characters are realistic but have a niche audience in India, unlike some of the Shakespearean film adaptations which are usually aimed for a larger audience.

Shakespeare has been adapted in numerous contexts, like movies or TV shows, in many countries like Argentina, Thailand, China, Russia, South Africa, Tibet, Japan, Vietnam, Israel, Chile, Estonia, and Brazil, and English-speaking countries like the US, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand (Estill and Johnson). This global aspect of Shakespeare and his plays are examples of Slavoj Žižek’s decontextualization, “The way to test a great work of art is to ask how it survives decontextualization, transposition into a new context” (“Sing of the New Invasion”). Similarly, the film adaptations of Shakespeare in Bollywood are a perfect example of decontextualization where the plays fit in easily with large sets and song-and-dance sequences as well as in a realistic mafia world, a war-ravaged territory, or a society that accepts honor killings.

¹⁵ Some of the recent titles include *Finding Fanny* (2014), *Delhi Belly* (2011), *Parzania* (2007), *Being Cyrus* (2007), *Freaky Chakra* (2003), *Mango Soufflé* (2002), *Mitr, My Friend* (2002), and *Hyderabad Blues* (1998) and its sequel in 2004.

However, despite this universality of the themes of his plays, in India, Shakespeare is also seen as esoteric and an example of high literary culture because of the language of his plays and the belief that his plays are too far removed from the space, time, and culture of contemporary India.¹⁶ Moreover, his plays have been adapted into plays, folk theatre, and films. Some of the reasons behind adapting Shakespeare in Hindi films include educating a larger audience about the play and mixing the high culture of the plays taught in Eurocentric English medium schools and the low culture of Bollywood. These adaptations also add value to the conversation of a former colony speaking in the language of the colonizer by incorporating the main ideas, themes, and narrative units of the colonizer's text, while also discussing contemporary spatial and temporal contexts of the former colony. These reasons create a hybrid adaptation that not only has similar characters and storylines of the original but also incorporates the contemporary context, language, and social beliefs.

Although updating earlier texts to suit contemporary audiences is similar to the previous chapter on adaptations of Hindu epics in a contemporary context, the difference here is the language and the context of the original versus the film adaptation. Using English in a Hindi film adaptations would alienate the regular film-going audience and create a disconnect in the contemporary time and space, although sometimes characters do switch between Hindi and English in many main-stream Hindi films. Often characters speak in a mixture of two languages to provide authenticity, especially if the story is set in an urban center, and the English speaking characters are a short-hand reference for an education in an English-medium school. Although Shakespeare adaptations are neither in English nor in the language of the Renaissance plays, they

¹⁶ This has been captured in the Merchant Ivory Productions film, *Shakespeare Wallah* (1965). It is based on the real-life actor-manager Geoffrey Kendal family and his travelling theatre, Shakespeareana Company. This earned him the Indian nickname, Shakespearewallah.

nevertheless follow the basic plot and characterization of the originals.¹⁷ This chapter will focus on how gender and the morality of the main protagonists change in Vishal Bhardwaj's trilogy of adaptations: *Maqbool* (2003) based on *Macbeth*, *Omkara* (2006) based on *Othello*, and *Haider* (2014) based on *Hamlet* while also arguing how Shakespeare and various other institutions function as the big Other. Bhardwaj, an award-winning director, is known in India for the interesting and off-beat subjects of his films. For example, *Matru Ki Bijlee Ka Mandola* (Matru's Bijlee's Mandola, where each name corresponds to an individual) is a 2013 black comedy that discusses issues of capitalist expansion and land-grabbing in the backdrop of alcoholism and family; *Kaminey* (The Rascals) which discusses speech impediments of a pair of twin brothers who are also criminals and underdogs; and *7 Khoon Maaf* (*Seven Sins Forgiven*) is a 2011 film about how Susanna, the female protagonist, on her quest for love kills and buries six husbands. The last film also discusses issue of loyalty, infidelity, and domestic abuse, among others.

An important reason for the proliferation of Shakespearean adaptations post-2000 is the popularity of Indian cinema abroad, the growth of a niche multiplex audience who can connect the original and the adaptation, and a movement away from typical Bollywood films to realistic cinema. All these adaptations, including Bhardwaj's trilogy, reflect the changing status of women in the society, the prevalence of the caste system, and the politics of different institutions, like marriage, government, and the police. As far as language is concerned, *Maqbool* is in Hindi with words from Urdu as the majority of the characters are Muslim. On the other hand, *Omkara* is in

¹⁷ Some of the plays that have been adapted post-1990 are *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Comedy of Errors*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* among others. *Romeo and Juliet* is easily the most popular with seven adaptations, three of which released in 2012-13: *Ishaqzaade* (2012), *Goliyon Ki Rasleela Ram-Leela* (2013), and *Issaq* (2013). One of the reasons for the popularity of this play, in India, is because of its love story as love is the most important theme in Hindi films, where even diverse genres like horror and patriotism will feature a love story. The other reason for the popularity of the play is because of its warring families. India's diversity in languages, religions, and states are potential causes for conflict and provide a rich ground to base the story of the feuding families of Montagues and Capulets.

Hindi in the Khariboli dialect with a generous dose of swear words earning the film an Adult certificate, corresponding to a Restricted rating in the US. It also has a few sentences in English spoken by one of the characters who is taunted for his English education. *Haider*, set in Kashmir, is in Hindi, with certain dialogues in Urdu and Pashto. These examples of hybrid language are nothing new in the Hindi cinema but they do provide a convincing setting of the films.

Bhardwaj's trilogy is an example of a hybrid adaptation of the East and West which has elements of the English plays in its storyline as well as Indian cultural sensibilities. An analysis of these films shows how much the culture of the colonizer can be reworked to discuss and foreground issues such as gender and morality or to reflect changes in a medium that is capable of reaching a wide audience in a palatable format. Also, these films show the universality of the themes in Shakespeare's plays and show his relevance, four centuries after his death. He functions as the big Other, more specifically in Britain's former colonies, like India, where not only are his plays still a part of the syllabus in the Indian education system and theatre but also reworked into film adaptations, like Bhardwaj's trilogy. Shakespeare and certain elements of the trilogy function as the big Other, as defined by Žižek, the big Other operates on the symbolic order that controls every person. Žižek gives an example of the symbolic order, "When we speak (or listen, for that matter), we never merely interact with others; our speech activity is grounded on our accepting of and relying on a complex network of rules and other kinds of presuppositions" (*How to Read Lacan* 9). These suppositions include rules of grammar, prior information and background of the speakers, and socially accepted norms. These can be extended to society and its regulations and expectations, and institutions like the government, the legal apparatus like courts and the police, and even gender. Žižek's analysis of Lacan and the big Other provides a framework for analyzing culture as something that is permeated with ideas of

psychoanalysis and that also sees humans as ideological subjects. Consequently, Žižek's concepts of the big Other locates it in culture showing how Shakespeare as big Other can be transformed in a radically different context so that it can still be encountered and controlled. As Shakespeare's influence is inescapable, it is much more rational to accept and transform it in ways that reflect on him but are still changed to be seen as something as innovative.

Shakespeare is the big Other not only in the English-medium education in the schools but also in the icon of British imperialism. No matter how much India reads and studies his plays, and adapts him in different contexts, he will always be British in his reach over the world.

Shakespeare is read in abridged formats, analyzed in college curriculums, and adapted in plays and films but he will always be unattainable, like the big Other whom we can never encounter but only the stand-ins. This is best defined by Mark Fisher, "The big Other is the collective fiction, the symbolic structure, presupposed by any social field. The big Other can never be encountered in itself; instead, we only confront its stand-ins" (Fisher 44). Also, I will use the following description of the big Other to analyze the films and the cultural influence of

Shakespeare

In spite of all its grounding power, the big Other is fragile, insubstantial, properly virtual... It exists only insofar as subjects act as if it exists... it is the substance of the individuals who recognize themselves in it, the ground of their entire existence, the point of reference which provides the ultimate horizon of meaning to their lives, something for which these individuals are ready to give their lives, yet the only thing that really exists are these individuals and their activity, so this substance is actual only insofar as individuals believe in it and act accordingly.
(*How to Read Lacan* 10)

This can be applied to the readers and audience of the Bard's plays and the adaptations, the characters who become the big Other who have to be pleased and obeyed, and institutions and

society from which characters create and consolidate their identities, and different kinds of relationships for which characters can die or kill.

On the other hand, although, the films are hybrid adaptations and decontextualized, they do not fall under Homi Bhabha's definition of mimicry that is seen in the class of interpreters whom Thomas B Macaulay wanted in his 1835 "Minute on Indian Education," who will be both Indian and English. Nor do these films fall under the category of the mimic men of V.S. Naipul¹⁸. However, the film trilogy, itself a break from mainstream Bollywood films and transposing the plays in contemporary settings, is a counter-narrative to the Shakespearean canon and the over-the-top melodramatic Bollywood films with lavish sets and huge budgets. These adaptations fall under neoculturation as the result of transculturalism, defined by Fernando Ortiz as expressing "the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture.... In addition, it carries the idea of the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena, which could be called neoculturation" (102-103). In the context of this chapter, transculturation as a process will mean transforming something from one culture: a Shakespearean play written and performed during Renaissance England, to something else in another culture: a Hindi film adaptation released in post- 2000 globalized India. These adaptations are an example of the neoculturation as seen in a hybrid film that reflects the contemporary Indian audience. In simpler terms, transculturation of Renaissance England and post-2000 India results in neoculturation, Shakespearean adaptation in Hindi films. This process of neoculturation is significant as Shakespeare is seen as esoteric and an example of high literate culture because of the language of his plays and the belief that his plays are too far removed from the space, time, and culture of contemporary India. The film

¹⁸ Naipul, V. S. *Mimic Men*. New York: Vintage, 2001. Print.

adaptations bridge this gap of high literature and the low culture of Hindi cinema. Moreover, because Indians still see speaking in English as a symbol of high social status and education, there is still a colonial hangover and the English language and literature are still seen as superior by the common people. One reason for this can be that regional literature is not given much importance in school syllabi and the English literature by Indian authors is seen as archaic, imitative and inferior to European literature. Furthermore, the film adaptations of regional literature rarely get a national release, making them popular only in certain states. There have been film adaptations of regional literature and Indian writing in English but they have met with mixed success at the box-office. I will focus on their nuances in a later chapter. I will analyze each of the film adaptations in terms of how Shakespearean cultural legacy functions as the big Other, how there are certain characters or institutions that function as the big Other in the film adaptations, how each adaption is neocultural, how gender functions as the big Other in terms of characters breaking and conforming to gender roles, and how the object petit a is seen in the films through certain characters.

There has been a long history of the adaptations of Shakespeare's plays.¹⁹ Bhardwaj's trilogy tries to break away from the colonial hangover by making Shakespeare's plays more accessible to the general audience, but the details of the storylines can only be appreciated by someone who knows the details of the plays. Nevertheless, the films can also stand on their own as realistic portrayals of contemporary Indian society. All the three adaptations can be seen as what Thomas Leitch notes as updated adaptations, updating that sets a canonical text in modern times to show its universality (Leitch 98-100). The overall emotional drives of Shakespeare's

¹⁹ See Poonam Trivedi and Dennis Bartholomeusz, *India's Shakespeare: Translation, Interpretation, and Performance*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005. Also, see Poonam Trivedi and Minami Ryuta, *Re-playing Shakespeare in Asia*, New York, Routledge, 2010.

plays, like ambition, jealousy, love, guilt, and revenge, are applicable to the human condition, and these are seen in different ways in the film adaptations. These sentiments can be expressed in many ways but they are best shown in Shakespeare's plots. Furthermore, there are similarities between the society of Renaissance England and India: social and economic hierarchy, the class system, patriarchy, the fear and domination of the outsider, and the relationships in a family.

Maqbool, *Omkara*, and *Haider* also follow the nature of the works that Dudley Andrew compares, "The story [in this case, of the films,] can be the same if the narrative units [in this case, of the plays] (characters, events, motivations, consequences, context, viewpoint, imagery, and so on) are produced equally in two works" (34). The viewpoint and imagery are different in the trilogy from the play. However, the events, motivations, and results are similarly produced in the trilogy but updated to show the mafia, the caste-system, and a disputed state territory. Furthermore, in an interview with Arthur J Pais, Bhardwaj observes "*Macbeth*, in particular, can be adapted to fit any period or setting. The corporate world, politics, educational system or underworld" (Pais). Bhardwaj also notes that, "The film [*Maqbool*] is not meant for Shakespearean scholars. ... We had to identify with the play's spirit and essence and retain them in the film" (Pais). *Maqbool* is successful in capturing the spirit with the setting in the Mumbai mafia underworld. The Hindi film industry has been fascinated by the mafia and the corporatization of and legal regulations governing the industry made it possible for the producers to break away from the clutches of the underworld.²⁰ This is a recent phenomenon but there is still an uneasy relationship between the industry and the mafia.

²⁰ See Tejaswini Ganti's *Producing Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2012. Some of the films on the Mumbai underworld include: *Parinda* (1989), *Satya* (1998), *Vaastav* (1999), *Company* (2002), *Black Friday* (2007), *Once Upon a Time in Mumbai* (2010), *Shootout at Wadala* (2013), and *D Day* (2013).

Maqbool is set in Mumbai, while the royalty of Shakespeare's Scotland is transformed into the Mumbai underworld mafia. *Omkaara* is set in Uttar Pradesh, India, and includes questions of patriarchy and caste struggles. In *Haider* Denmark is the disputed Kashmir, and Haider (Hamlet) is the son trying to find his missing father. Consequently, Shakespeare can be seen as the big Other in these three hybrid adaptations whose all-pervading influence can be transformed but is inescapable. For India, Shakespeare is an institution, not just a person. For Bhardwaj's trilogy, the real big Other is also, by extension, the cultural legacy of the British colonization of India. Despite gaining independence from the British in 1947, the colonial legacy is still evident in the treatment of the three original plays as well as the portrayal of India in the adaptations, showing the hybridity of the country composed of the British and Indian elements. Some examples of this legacy include the education system with an emphasis on English language and literature as seen in the characters of Keshu in *Omkaara* and Haider who goes to Aligarh College in *Haider*. This is also seen in Bhaisaab of *Omkaara*'s fight for a seat in the parliament and the political structure of India that is based on the British government. The hierarchy of both the army and the police, as seen in *Haider* and *Maqbool* respectively, was formed during the British period but has undergone changes since then. These film adaptations show the versatility of Shakespeare, a playwright who was used for colonial expansion but who is now reused to create new contextual meanings of his original plays. These films have made Shakespeare a part of the Indian popular culture, while still preserving the traditions and regulations of the society and the physical space of the films' settings.

Macbeth is a play about Macbeth, who in his thirst for ambition, kills his king, Duncan of Scotland. He is urged to commit regicide by his wife, Lady Macbeth. Macbeth was fulfilling a prophecy that he had heard from three witches. After the murder, Duncan's followers suspect

Macbeth of murdering the king. Banquo, Macbeth's friend, was present with Macbeth at the time of the prophecy. Macbeth arranges to murder Banquo. After misunderstanding the second round of prophecies and being misled by the witches, Macduff, another thane kills Macbeth and his wife commits suicide. In *Maqbool*, Duncan becomes Jahangir Khan also known as Abbaji, Macbeth is Miyan Maqbool (Irrfan Khan), and the three witches become Inspectors Purohit and Pandit (Naseeruddin Shah and Om Puri), where Inspector Pandit predicts Maqbool's future through drawing horoscopes on surfaces like the moist window pane of a car or even with food. Lady Macbeth is Nimmi (Tabu), Abbaji's mistress and in love with Maqbool. Abbaji has a daughter, Sameera (Masumeh Makhija) who loves Guddu (Ajay Gehi), Kaka's son. Kaka (Piyush Mishra) corresponds to Banquo. Bhardwaj pinpoints the theme of *Macbeth* and *Maqbool* as guilt and its denial (Pais). The other important themes are ambition and greed. In *Maqbool*, Maqbool's ambition and his and Nimmi's guilt at killing Abbaji and its denial are the main themes in this adaptation. Denying their guilt leads them on a murdering spree to hide their crime, despite everyone suspecting and hinting that Maqbool has killed Abbaji for Nimmi. Both Maqbool and Nimmi die in the end. Maqbool takes her off life support and tries to escape with their child but on reaching the hospital finds Sameera and Guddu taking him away. The film ends with Maqbool's murder.

At the time of the release of *Maqbool* in 2003, Bhardwaj had only one film to his credit as a director, a children's film called *Makdee* (Spider), making *Maqbool* a critical success but not a commercial one. Before *Makdee*, Bhardwaj was primarily known as a music composer and writer. The cast of the movie comprised of actors who are associated with films for a niche audience and with theater. *Maqbool* was also a critical success because of its adaptation of *Macbeth*; the regular film-going audience assumed that a film based on Shakespeare will be

boring and esoteric. This film breaks away from the typical Bollywood films in its realistic portrayal of the mafia, the relationships between the crime lord and his followers, and the absence of elaborate sets, coordinated dances, and exotic locations. *Maqbool* and the other criminals are shown as normal people who fall in love, eat together, and are ambitious; there is a sense of community shown among the criminals and the police officers. There are no grand, elaborate sets that needed days of construction or a huge financial investment; instead the sets are realistic. *Maqbool* has only one song and dance sequence but it is set realistically during Sameera's marriage; all the other songs play as background score. The entire film is set in Mumbai, instead of foreign locations or spaces with no identifiable markers.

However, at the time of the release of *Omkara* in 2006, Bhardwaj had made a name for himself and could therefore afford to cast mainstream actors who were interested to work with him. Shakespeare's *Othello* shows the relationship between Othello, a Moorish general in the Venetian army, and his wife, Desdemona. Iago, an ensign in the same army as Othello, is jealous of Othello because he promotes another lieutenant, Cassio, instead of Iago. Consequently, Iago weaves an elaborate trap of lies, jealousy, and murder, to take revenge on Othello. He suggests to Othello that Cassio and Desdemona are having an affair through various strategies, resulting in her murder and Othello's suicide. When Emilia, Iago's wife confronts him with the truth that Desdemona was innocent, he kills her but he is alive till the end of the play. In *Omkara*, Omkara Shukla (Ajay Devgn) is a powerful political enforcer who works for the local corrupt politician, Tiwari Bhaisaab (corresponding to the Duke of Venice and played by Naseeruddin Shah), Desdemona becomes Dolly Mishra (Kareena Kapoor), Iago becomes Ishwar 'Langda' Tyagi (Langda means lame and is played by Saif Ali Khan), Cassio changing to Keshav 'Keshu Firangi' Upadhyaya (Vivek Oberoi), his love interest is Bianaca transformed into Billo

Chamanbahar (Bipasha Basu), and Indu is Iago's wife, Emilia (Konkona Sen Sharma). Firangi means foreigner and Keshu is called Firnagi because of his college education and he also speaks in English in the film, along with Hindi. The movie opens with the crashing of Dolly's wedding with Rajan 'Rajju' Tiwari (Deepak Dobriyal) and corresponding to Roderigo in the original play. Tyagi creates the suspicions in Omkara that Keshu and Dolly are having an affair by creating different situations and narrating 'truthful' stories. Tyagi conspires with Tiwari so as to cast suspicion on Omkara that Dolly is having a relationship with Keshu. Omkara believes Tyagi, suffocates Dolly to death, and realizing his mistake, commits suicide.

The last film in the trilogy, *Haider* (2014), ran into controversy as it was set in 1995 Kashmir, a place that has seen political instability, territorial conflict, and human rights violations since the time of India's independence. Both India and Pakistan continue to fight over the control of Kashmir, resulting in three wars in 1947, 1965, and 1999. *Haider* shows the violence of both the countries and how the common person is suffering.²¹ Understandably, it was a controversial film at the time of its release especially since Kashmir has been a disputed property between India and Pakistan and both the countries claim its ownership. Moreover, the original characters have contemporary jobs that fit in with the Kashmir situation: Hamlet's father is a surgeon who saves lives, irrespective of the nationality and occupation of his patients, Gertrude is an English teacher, Claudius is a corrupt lawyer and ambitious politician, Ophelia is a journalist, and Polonius is a policeman. Bhardwaj requests that Kashmiris should look within, and "Indians should also look within. What we have been doing in the State is not right all the time. Everybody has to look within. At least I have looked within" (Kumar). Bharwaj is

²¹ There have been other films that deal with the problems in Kashmir: *Lamhaa* (Moment, 2010), *Sikandar* (2009), *Shaurya* (Valor, 2008), *Yahaan* (Here, 2005), *Mission Kashmir* (2000), *Dil Se* (From the Heart, 1998), and *Roja* (1992).

appealing to the inherent goodness of the Indians and the Kashmiris and is calling for peace in Kashmir.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is set in Denmark. Hamlet, the crown prince learns that his Uncle, Claudius, has murdered his father and married his mother, Gertrude. He is informed of this by the ghost of his dead father. After a lot of hesitation and unplanned deaths of other characters, Hamlet is successful in avenging his father's death by murdering Claudius. The play ends with Hamlet's death and the deaths of Gertrude, his girlfriend, Ophelia, her father, Polonius, and her brother, Laertes. In *Haider*, Haider's father, Dr. Hilal Meer (Narendra Jha), is taken for interrogation after he treats the leader of a pro-separatist militant group, Ikhwan-ul-Mukbareen. Haider (Shahid Kapoor) returns from his university after twenty days to search for his father. His home is destroyed and his mother, Ghazala (Tabu), is living with her brother-in-law, Khurram Meer (Kay Kay Menon), an advocate at the High Court. Haider joins various search groups and petitions the police and the lawyers. Roohdaar (Irrfan Khan), a prisoner who was in the same cell with Hilal, who roughly corresponds to the spirit of Hamlet's father, informs Haider of the circumstances of Hilal's death, including the part that Khurram had informed the police that Hilal was treating the political leader. Haider is on a quest to kill his uncle but Khurram finds out about the plan and sends Haider's two friends to kill him. He escapes and takes shelter with a group of gravediggers, who were on Roohdaar's side. Ghazala comes to Haider to stop him from murdering Khurram but she becomes a suicide bomber instead of choosing between her son and her husband, Khurram. After the blast, Khurram is mortally injured and Haider walks away from him. The movie ends with Khurram begging Haider to kill him but he leaves, alive.

Sameer Yasir, a Kashmiri critic, claims that "*Haider* is a daring movie, and stands apart from Bollywood's fascination with the Valley's Dal Lake, flower-laden Shikaras and snow-

capped mountains.” A reason for this is that Bhardwaj and the Kashmiri writer Basharat Peer co-wrote the screenplay with certain scenes drawn from Peer’s 2010 book *Curfewed Night* (Yasir). Yasir also touches upon the controversy that the film ran into where right-wingers on social media called for a boycott of the movie, resulting in the Twitter trend, #BoycottHaider, with an opposing side that supported the movie on the trend, #HaiderTrueCinema (Yasir). This Twitter war shows the importance of the online media in the reception and review of a film in India. Like their counterparts across the globe, Indians use Twitter for different reasons, including conversing on films and with actors of the film industry.

Consequently, all the three film adaptations fall under an intertextual transcultural framework where there are similarities to the original Shakespearean play. The films form a hybrid identity of both the West in terms of the main story and the East in terms of updating the plot to suit modern sensibilities. The intertextual nature of the adaptations and the original play is best summed up by Robert Stam when he states that, “Film adaptations, then, are caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation, and transmutation, with no clear point of origin” (66). This is important to remember that even Shakespeare himself used different sources for his plays: Holinshed's *Chronicles (Macbeth)* for *Macbeth*, Giraldi Cinthio’s collection of tales titled *Hecatommithi* for *Othello*, and Thomas Kyd’s play called the *Ur-Hamlet* for *Hamlet*. Each newer version puts the adaptation into dialogue with the original, enriching it and expanding it.

Grey Characters

An important feature used in these films includes narratives of marginal figures like criminals, members of the lower-caste, and militants. Like the original protagonists, the heroes in the films are neither completely good nor evil, but a mix of both. In this portrayal of the lead

characters as both good and evil and in foregrounding the stories of marginal figures, the films assume a postmodern characteristic in foregrounding these lesser-known narratives. They break away from the general mold of big-budget Bollywood films where the protagonists are virtuous, heroic, fight against and win over evil, and will only kill the villain for the higher good. The titular heroes in this trilogy are neither completely evil nor completely moral but have characteristics of both, making them more believable and in the process, more realistic.

Bhardwaj's love for these grey characters is also seen in his other movies. His fascination with these anti-heroes connects to the protagonists in Shakespeare's other plays, too, where even the virtuous are guilty of racism and xenophobia, and the evil can be redeemed. He also had a love-hate relationship with Shakespeare, which he shares with many Indians. Acknowledging the genius of the Bard is often seen as obsequious to the colonizer because the Indian is conceding to the superiority of the British and Shakespeare, instead of taking pride on his own culture and literature. In an interview with Anuj Kumar, Bhardwaj, who studied in Indian schools, reflects that he was scared of Shakespeare in school and his inclination towards cricket made him wary of *Merchant of Venice*, a text that a lot of high school students have to read (Kumar). After viewing Gulzar's *Angoor*, an adaptation of the *Comedy of Errors*, Bhardwaj realized that Shakespeare was not as boring as he used to think and that Shakespeare also wrote many comic double roles (Kumar). Bhardwaj reminisces that many years later during a train journey he came across an abridged version of Shakespeare through a child and read *Macbeth* (Kumar). His personal experience shows how Shakespeare is a part of the syllabus of the English-medium schools and how he is usually comprehensible in abridged versions. The Bard is not only a big Other in his cultural influence but also in his educational significance, as is seen not only in high school syllabi but also in Bhardwaj's own experience. It is assumed that English-medium school

will have at least some component of Shakespeare in their syllabus be it in the form of a short story, selections, or an entire play.

Maqbool follows the original play in terms of its basic story line of an ambitious thane/general who acts on prophecies and kills his king on being urged by his wife/romantic partner and later suffers from guilt after becoming the king. This adaption is transcultural in the way it moves the play from Renaissance England to India and neocultural in the way it transforms Scotland to the Mumbai underworld and makes it realistic in terms of the characters and the actual workings of the Mumbai mafia and the corruption of the police. Inspectors Purohit and Pandit who stand in for the three witches are on Abbaji's payroll. They suspect Maqbool of killing Abbaji but are on his side. They may also be seen as opportunistic whereby they favor the one who is in power. In *Macbeth*, the three witches were independent and unconcerned about who was in power but for the inspectors, they need to be subservient to both the crime lord, Abbaji, and to their officers in charge. This paradox is common in the real-world whereby the police officers are loyal to different criminals because they benefit from bribes and are also loyal to the law enforcement. The inspectors have a dual loyalty to both the people who they are supposed to protect and the criminals whom they are supposed to apprehend.

Apart from Shakespeare functioning as an overall big Other in terms of his cultural influence, there are also other characters who function as the big Other in the film adaptations themselves even though they do not function in quite the same way, especially as they do not necessarily exist outside of the symbolic order and are also beholden to it. In *Maqbool*, the big Other is Abbaji whose approval Maqbool wants, whom he wants to be, and whom he cannot even think of harming. Maqbool's identity is connected to Abbaji who has raised him as his own son but who nevertheless is not deemed suitable to inherit the crime empire. As Abbaji does not

have a son, Guddu, who is engaged to Sameera, is in line to inherit. Like the original play, where Macbeth murders for the throne, Maqbool cannot wait to be the king of the crime world. His ambition and Nimmi's logic convinces him to murder Abbaji. Maqbool's desires of getting Nimmi and taking Abbaji's place in the crime underworld are reminiscent of Žižek's idea that the fulfillment of desire kills desire. As soon as he is with Nimmi after murdering Abbaji, their relationship breaks apart with Nimmi's pregnancy, questions of the unborn child's paternity, and the suspicions of Abbaji's followers. Apart from Abbaji's followers and Maqbool who see Abbaji as a big Other, even the inspectors who function as the witches from the original, see him as the big Other, whereby they are more loyal to him than to their assistant police commissioner, Devsare.

As it is impossible to have three witches in a realistic film, it also impossible to have a ghost of a dead person in contemporary India. A ghost automatically conjures up a horror film but ghosts have also been used in films targeted for children. Similarly, if three witches were used in *Maqbool*, the film would have become campy. If the ghost of Haider's father had appeared in the film, then the audience would not have the film seriously. Furthermore, his ghost would have diluted the seriousness of the issue of Kashmir in the film. In *Haider*, the major change in the list of characters is the addition of Roohdaar who informs Haider of Hilal's death, the role that Khurram played in his brother's murder, and the site of his father's burial. He corresponds to the ghost of Hamlet's father as he introduces himself as, "the soul [which is 'rooh' in Hindi] of the doctor [Hilal]" (*Haider*). Roohdar sings the song that Haider and his father sang to convince him of his story. He also functions as a conscience of the land as he supplies arms to the Kashmiris to fight the Indians but Khurram accuses him of being a double agent with spilt loyalties to India and Paksitan. It would have been strange to have a ghost or

spirit in an otherwise realistic film, like *Haider*. Not having ghosts or spirits in the *Maqbool* and *Haider* make them more believable.

Apart from Shakespeare, the big Other in *Omkara* is also Tiwari Bhaisaab, corresponding to the Duke of Venice in *Othello*. He is a father figure to Omkara, who seeks his approval. Tyagi and Keshu also respect him and follow all his orders. He is an important political figure in the region, ruthless, unapologetic, unscrupulous, and yet fair. When he is elected for parliament, Omkara is chosen to be the candidate for the elections. Bhaisaab sees him as a son. Furthermore, he intervenes at the beginning of the movie to help Dolly when Omkara crashes her wedding and kidnaps her. Dolly appears and confesses that she eloped and was not abducted, detailing how she fell in love with Omkara. Bhaisaab also endorses Omkara when he emphasizes that in all the years that he has known him, he has never heard of any affairs or relationships of Omkara with any girl at all, making him a 'good' and 'virtuous' person.

Shakespeare functions as the big Other in *Omkara* in the basic storyline and in the portrayal of the main characters: Omkara, Dolly, Tyagi, and Keshu. There are other marked differences from the original play, especially in the sub-plot of politics that involves Bhaisaab contesting elections and Omkara and Tyagi murdering Bhaisaab's rival. This neocultural film shows the extent of transforming the original play in terms of location, time, language, and society. As this film had mainstream actors, it has two item-numbers by Billo (Bianca) who plays the love interest of Keshu. Item numbers are songs in Indian films performed by scantily-clad actresses with background extras. The songs may or may not have a connection to the plot but are primarily used as way to display the bodies of the actress for appealing to the male gaze. Often these songs are released first as a promotional strategy for the film and many times, the songs become more popular than the film.

The big Other in *Haider* is the Indian government, whose omnipresence affects all parts of Haider's life and his search for his missing father. At every step of his journey, he encounters either the government or its stand-ins, be it the police, the lawyers, or the army. *Haider* can also not escape *Hamlet* especially because of the large number of similarities in both the stories: the search for his father's killer, the relationship between his mother and uncle, the various murders and shootings, and the decision to not kill his uncle in prayer. The main change is that Haider lives at the end. One reason behind the similarities can be that Bhardwaj was under pressure to produce a faithful adaptation, largely because of his status as an award-winning director and the fact that *Haider* is the last in his Shakespearean trilogy. Perhaps he felt that his audience will be more careful in watching and analyzing this movie more than the other two.

Like the other two adaptations, *Haider* is indecisive like *Hamlet*. Subsequently, a huge part of Haider's indecisiveness and anger is attributed to his Oedipus complex that was described by Ernest Jones in his book, *Hamlet and Oedipus*.²² Jones connects Hamlet's anger at Gertrude's remarriage to his Oedipal Complex. When asked about Haider exhibiting signs of this Complex, Bhardwaj replied, "If you want to look it that way then certain things start to appear. I have explored whatever can be within the parameters of our society" (Kumar). Bhardwaj could not show Haider having anything related to the Oedipal Complex as that would have brought a ban on the film. However, he does suggest something is on between Haider and his mother. One example of this is Ghazala's confession of her marital relationship to Haider after Hilal's disappearance. She claims that Haider was the reason for her to live in those long painful years, "Your father never really cared for me. Our marriage was dead. Which is why he gambled his life, our home, our honor, your future, risked it all" (*Haider*). As children are the responsibility

²²Jones, Ernest. *Hamlet and Oedipus*. New York: Norton, 1976. Print.

of their mothers as opposed to fathers who are in charge of the earning in Indian society, mothers are usually blamed for whatever happens to the children. Ghazala is no exception and she taunts Haider that “Either way, you will always blame me. I am used to it.” The doctor was busy saving lives but her life revolved around Haider; she waited for his return during the holidays. She observes that it is her fate to wait, first for her son, and now for her husband. Later, on the day of her marriage to Khurram, Ghazala reminds Haider, who is now acting mad, that he wanted to marry her when he was a child and he fought with his father even if he touched her. Haider does not want to share her with the world.

Like the original play, Haider pretends to be mad after he finds out his father’s burial site. He appears at a crossroads with a shaved head, a frayed rope as a microphone, and a torn jacket and asks the question, similar to Hamlet’s famous “to be or not to be,” do the Kashmiris exist or not? If they do, then where are they? If not, then where are they? Did we exist at all? Or not? He then recites the AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Acts) in English and demands freedom from both India and Pakistan. This Act “gives powers to the army and state and central police forces to shoot to kill, search houses and destroy any property that is ‘likely’ to be used by insurgents in areas declared as ‘disturbed’ [Kashmir, in this case] by the home ministry [of India]” (*Hindustan Times*). This conflict of Kashmir can be applied to other areas that have been under war and in conflict for a long time, expanding the context of the original *Hamlet*. Haider ends with a patriotic song, “Saare jahan se accha” that is translated as “the best country in the world is India.” His act of madness is diagnosed as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) giving him a valid explanation to commit murder. There are other scenes in the film that show other victims of PTSD. *Haider* is realistic in terms of its portrayal of the problems that the common Kashmiri face, caught in between India and Pakistan.

Furthermore, like the performance of *The Mousetrap* in the play, *Hamlet*, *Haider* also has a sequence of the story but it is performed in the form of the traditional folk theater of Kashmir, the Bhand performers. Pather is the storyline of the play and Bhand are the traditional folk entertainers of Kashmir. In the film, the storyline is a cautionary tale for a pair of nightingales to keep away from the falcon. This is an example of hybridity where the original play within a play is transformed to create an insight into the traditional theater. In an interview with Columbia University's James Shapiro, Bhardwaj informs, "Kashmir has a beautiful 200-year-old tradition called 'Bhand Pather', where they make stories by singing and dancing, although this folk art is almost dying today, because it's not supported by the State" and yet some people, despite their poverty, are earning their livelihood through it (Shapiro). It could have been narrated in some other way but perhaps Bhardwaj uses this form to educate his audience about the different kinds of folk theater that India has.

Gender and the Big Other

Apart from the different reasons provided by Bhardwaj to adapt the plays, other reasons include the social conditions at the time of the film's release and how the films reflect the contemporary audience. Being a patriarchal and a postcolonial country, India still struggles with an attachment to its history and traditions, while also adopting new habits and practices. This situation results in an East/West hybrid identity that manifests in strange and often liberating ways. These films open up a space for dialogue about this identity that is dominated by Indian values but is also influenced by Western ideas, without conforming to either. For instance, despite various legal advancements and social reforms, women are still under restrictions, imposed by either the self or the society. In the majority of mainstream Bollywood films, they are still shown as being nurturing and sacrificing mothers, virtuous daughters, upright girlfriends

who do not indulge in pre-marital sex, or home breakers who drink, have sex, and usually die at the end to restore harmony. Furthermore, they generally repress their sexual desires, they are usually heterosexual, and they are submissive to the males in the film. And yet the female characters corresponding to Lady Macbeth, Desdemona, Gertrude and Ophelia in the film adaptations perform roles governed by gender as well as break away from their traditional roles in Indian society. I will discuss this in reference to each of the adaptations later in the chapter and show how gender also functions as the big Other whereby it is the set of rules and regulations expected of women in society and how these characters try to break away. This shows how women negotiate patriarchy and the limited liberties that they have in a postcolonial India.

Žižek defines desiring some thing or someone in the context of the big Other as, “what I desire is predetermined by the big Other, the symbolic space within which I dwell. Even when my desires are transgressive, even when they violate social norms, this very transgression is conditioned by what it transgresses” (*How To Read Lacan* 42). This is seen best in *Maqbool* desiring Nimmi who is out of his reach, as she is his master’s partner. *Maqbool*’s desire for Nimmi is conditioned by the big Other, Abbaji. If Nimmi was not in a relationship with Abbaji, then perhaps, *Maqbool* would not have desired her. *Maqbool* desire her as she is unattainable. Also, both Nimmi and the city of Mumbai function as objects of desire for Abbaji. He refuses to settle in any other part of the world, Karachi or Dubai, despite another criminal college offering him three billion rupees and risk-free smuggling in the Middle East. Abbaji reasons that he cannot call any other place his home as for him, Mumabi, who is personified as a woman, is his sweetheart. Here, a place becomes so important to Abbaji that he forgoes a financial and professional opportunity. In the first foretelling, *Maqbool* is predicted to rule over Mumbai.

Nimmi is an object of desire, not only for Maqbool, but also for Abbaji, as she is his mistress. Abbaji also has another mistress, Mohini, or the traditional ‘gangster’s moll’ who plays an actress in the movie. Any film that is set in Mumbai often has some reference to the Hindi film industry, which can be characters connected to Bollywood or simply dialogue or indirect references to film actors and movie titles.

This connection to the overarching cultural influence of the Hindi film industry is also seen in *Haider*. A character change in *Haider* is that of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern who are transformed into two buffoonish owners of a video parlor that rents out VHS tapes; both are named Salman, after the Bollywood actor, Salman Khan, who was one of the top actors of the 1990s and is still active today. They copy Salman in his mannerisms and personal styles. This is not that far removed from reality where there are people who earn a living based on their ability to copy famous actors. Shaikh Ayaz describes them as body doubles who take on the work that actors refuse to do, “While they often operate as stand-ins for technical reasons, they are usually called upon for shots that make stars balk, shots that are too difficult, embarrassing or risky” (Ayaz). Ayaz describes how they are experts at mimicry and how they spend a lot of time perfecting their mannerisms. However, they often have an identity crisis as they are known by the names and mannerisms of the actors they copy (Ayaz). If they revert to their original identity, they will lose their source of income, making their inauthentic identity real. Their identity is a hybrid of their real and their simulated world, making them imitations of the real. An interesting point that Ayaz raises is that there is just one lookalike of an actress, making this business male-dominated.

Gender is also the big Other in both *Macbeth* and *Maqbool*. Nimmi in *Maqbool* is a much more marginal figure than Lady Macbeth. She negotiates power in her limited capacity as

a heterosexual woman in the patriarchy and an even smaller world of the Mumbai crime world. There are stark similarities and differences between her and Lady Macbeth, creating a hybrid identity that is both European in Nimmi's sense of agency and power struggles, and also Indian in her aspirations to be with her beloved, become a mother, and have a normal life with Maqbool. In the play, Lady Macbeth is a complex character who taunts Macbeth with questions about his masculinity and her own desire to be devoid of all motherly instincts. She is seen as the engineer of Duncan's murder and is more ambitious and determined than her husband. She does not waver from the path of murdering their benefactor and guest, Duncan, and shows control of her actions, especially when Macbeth is wavering from his intent to murder and when he brings the dagger to her. She also supports and defends Macbeth when he sees Banquo's ghost. However, with Macbeth doubting himself, she has a nervous breakdown.

In this film adaptation, Nimmi's portrayal is bold and unapologetic, contrasting her with other mainstream Hindi film heroines who are always subservient to their boyfriends and husbands, and who are almost without any sexual desire. They are also paragons of virtue, unlike Nimmi who conspires to kill her partner. Nimmi loves Maqbool and she can go to any lengths to be with him. This obsession, masquerading as love, is often reserved for the male characters, but rarely for female characters. She is Abbaji's mistress and knows that her position is not secure because Abbaji gets another mistress, Mohini; there is never any mention of his wife. Maqbool refutes the idea of murder, that that it is impossible with Abbaji alive and he knows that she cannot be attained as she belongs to Abbaji. This unattainability makes her desirable and the destination of a quest. This trope of getting someone who is out of reach to fall in love is also a common trope in the Hind film industry, whereby the main problem between lovers being

together can be different financial, social, or religious backgrounds. Maqbool knew that his relationship with Nimmi will never be fulfilled and yet he has an affair with her.

Also, Nimmi is not married to either Abbaji or Maqbool, making her an unwed mother who has had two unconventional relationships. Unlike Lady Macbeth, Nimmi is a mother-like figure for Abbaji's daughter, Sameera. Perhaps, if she had married, then her part in Abbaji's murder and her subsequent relationship with Maqbool might have been legitimized. She is marginalized, first as a woman in a male-dominated crime world, second as mistresses of two men, and last as an unwed mother. The position of women in India, from the time of Shakespeare to Nimmi, has undergone only some changes.

Like Lady Macbeth, who appeals to her husband's masculinity as a way of urging him to murder Duncan, Nimmi informs Maqbool that Guddu (corresponding to Fleance), son of Kaka (corresponding to Banquo), will inherit the empire of Abbaji as he will marry his daughter, Sameera (corresponding to Malcolm). Furthermore, Nimmi confesses that she cannot bear to see Maqbool as a dog wagging his tail around Guddu. Abbaji's followers and associates stand in for an extended family whose members know everything about everyone. When Nimmi and Maqbool murder Abbaji, this extended family breaks apart. Moreover, she taunts him by saying that Abbaji repulses her in bed; he is almost her father's age. It seems as if she initiates the relationship with Maqbool and can do anything for him, like Maqbool can do anything for Abbaji. She also appeals to him by discussing Abbaji's infidelity with Mohini and warning him to kill either her or Abbaji. Maqbool, seeing him as a father figure, reasons that he was brought up like a son in the household and cannot kill him.

Nimmi is not submissive but she does have some feminine traits, like being an excellent cook. The audience sees in the beginning when she serves dinner to Abbaji and his fellow

criminals, including Maqbool, Kaka, and the inspectors. Nimmi, as a character, would not be wholly possible in the Indian reality; she would be considered a villain who breaks Abbaji's house, although we do not have any proof of that and also kills her benefactor, Abbaji, in alliance with her lover, Maqbool. Nimmi also functions as the object of desire for the two main men: Abbaji and Maqbool. She dies at the end but the film ends on a note of hope: Sameera and Guddu will take care of her child. She stands in for Lacan's *objet petit a* in Žižekian terms "the chimerical object of fantasy, the object causing our desire and at the same time—this is its paradox—pose retroactively by this desire; in 'going through the fantasy' we experience how this fantasy-object... only materializes the void of our desire" (*Sublime* 69). She is a fantasy for Maqbool as she seems unattainable. He puts everything on line for her and for his own ambition but after getting her and receiving Abbaji's legacy of the mafia, Maqbool finds Žižek's void of his desires.

In *Omkara*, Dolly's character negotiates the oppressive small-town atmosphere of Uttar Pradesh, a state where the caste system is still functioning and where women are expected to conform to traditional gender roles of a daughter and wife. Dolly as Desdemona breaks away from this mold by running away on her day of marriage, having a relationship with a half-caste man, Omkara, and living with him in the same house, before marriage. Although live-in relationships and pre-marital sex are slowly being accepted in the India society, Dolly is a rebel in the society that she lives in.

Like Nimmi functioning as the object of desire in *Maqbool*, *Omkara*'s Dolly stands in for the *objet petit a*. She is beautiful, innocent, loving, and desired by the men in the movie in different ways. She is seen as her father's property who warns Omkara that as per the character of women, a girl (Dolly) who could not be her father's daughter cannot belong or be anyone's,

including her husband's. Dolly is the object of desire for the male characters in the film in various degrees and not always, sexually. Omkara is in love with her and abducts her on the day of her marriage. Her fiancé, Rajjan Tiwari wants to marry her and conspires with Tyagi (Iago) but it seems that despite his claims to lay his life for her, Tiwari wants to possess her and marry her as per the social arrangement. For Tyagi, Dolly is a pawn in his plan to destroy Omkara because Omkara chose Keshu as his successor, rather than Tyagi. And Keshu sees Dolly as someone who can talk to Omkara on Keshu's behalf. Keshu desires Dolly so that she can plead to Omkara on his behalf to forgive him and overlook his mistakes. Keshu sees Omkara as the father figure, the big Other whom he tries to please, and for whom he tries to be responsible. Nevertheless, Omkara's decision to appoint Keshu instead of Tyagi creates the problems, leading to the many deaths at the end of the movie. Omkara consoles himself that Tyagi, being like a brother, will understand. Moreover, Tyagi suggests that Keshu desires Dolly, romantically and sexually. In her traditional role, Dolly is supposed to meekly marry Tiwari but she allows herself to be abducted by Omkara. She negotiates her relationships so as to be with Omkara but his suspicions lead him to murder her.

Dolly, like Desdemona, falls in love with Othello, leaves her father, and has a relationship with someone who is beneath her in the social ladder. However, Bhardwaj uses this film to critique the caste system. Omkara is the illegitimate son of a higher caste Brahmin man and a lower caste woman, whereas Dolly is a Brahmin and it is unacceptable for her to marry someone like Omkara, paralleling the original play where Desdemona's marriage to Othello was undesirable because of his race. Despite Shakespeare functioning as big Other in the play's basic conflict between Iago's conspiracy, Othello's conflict, and Desdemona's loyalty, the film successfully adapts these themes in an Indian context. *Omkara* was a critical and a box-office hit.

Despite being realistic, it is one of the few Shakespeare films that had mainstream actors and was a perfect hybrid of independent cinema and Bollywood style of film-making.

Dolly is not as passive as Desdemona seems. She is the one who proposes to Omkara, despite her marriage arrangements with Tiwari. She puts a ring in Omkara's teacup and writes a letter to him, delivered by Keshu. She ends the letter saying that she is his and will remain his, "I love you Om. Yours forever, D" (*Omkara*). Although this might not seem that big of a step, in the milieu of the film, this is unexpected. Like Nimmi, in a way, Dolly initiates the relationship by revealing her feelings. It can be said that without her letter, Omkara would never have made the plan to abduct her. She transgresses her role as a submissive woman by revealing her feelings and initiating her abduction. Also, Dolly lives with Omkara's family before her formal marriage, again something that is not common. One reason can be that her father disowns her and so, she literally has nowhere to go.

Additionally, Dolly's beauty is exceptional, especially in a country obsessed with fairness. This white obsession can be seen as a remnant of colonialism where the British, with their fair skins, were often seen as superior masters by a section of the Indian population. There is a huge market for skin-lightening creams and the advertisements for those are demeaning to women, as often success, love, fame, and a better life can be achieved by simply applying the cream and becoming fair. The target audience for these fairness creams has now, unfortunately, widened to men with actors endorsing these fairness creams for men. Natasha Shevde in "All's Fair in Love and Cream" discusses the reach of fairness creams and the influence of Bollywood as it provides an "escape mechanism for millions of Indians, who lose themselves in the fantasy and drama of the movies, it is hardly surprising that the leading parts are played by fair-skinned Bollywood actors and actresses". This has resulted in celebrity endorsement with implications

“on the fetishization of fairness creams in general” (Shevde). This fascination with light skin is also a part of the Mumbai film industry, where numerous international actresses are acting, often as lead actresses, if not as background extras. As this group of actresses and extras are often outsiders in an Indian cultural landscape, they speak in either English, a mixture of English and Hindi, or they do not speak at all. These international actresses, barring Katrina Kaif and Jacqueline Fernandez, have acted in characters that are international, sometimes exotic, but always foreign. Only recently, have Kaif and Fernandez acted in film roles that are a part of the Indian society, as opposed to foreign roles. The counteraction to this equation of fairness with beauty is the Dark is Beautiful campaign, run by an actress, Nandita Das. The campaign focuses on beauty beyond all colors.

Omkara declares that Dolly is either a *noor*, an angel, or a *chudail*, a witch. She is an angel because she is so beautiful and has fallen in love with him, someone who is not at all handsome, the strong-silent-dark-type. Omkara’s skin complexion also becomes a joke with Indu, reflecting Emilia’s comparison of the two, “O, the more angel she,/ And you the blacker devil” (*Othello*, 5.2. 132-33). He calls Dolly a witch because he wonders whether there is some kind of enchantment or black magic behind her beauty comparable to the original play where Brabantio accuses Othello of bewitching his daughter, Desdemona, and marrying her,

Damned as thou [Othello] art, thou hast enchanted her,
 For I’ll refer me to all things of sense,
 If she in chains of magic were not bound,
 Whether a maid so tender, fair, and happy,
 So opposite to marriage that she shunned
 The wealthy curled darlings of our nation,
 Would ever have, t’ incur a general mock,
 Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom
 Of such a thing as thou -- to fear, not to delight. (*Othello*, 1.2.63-71)

Brabantino accuses Othello of practicing magic to lure away Desdemona and Othello jokes that Dolly is enchanted to fall in love with someone like him. Brabantino and Dolly's father cannot comprehend that Dolly and Desdemona would marry a dark-complexioned half-caste, like Omkara or a Moor, like Othello. Iago also calls Othello "an old black ram" (1.1.89). The marginal and the outsider are always feared by the dominant majority as seen in *Othello* and Dolly's status as people capable of magic. Dolly is also marginalized as woman whose decision to marry is in her father's hands and as a person who marries out of her caste.

However, she is completely and really in love with Omkara and makes an effort to please him, including learning the exact tune and pronunciation of Stevie Wonder's "I Just Called to Say I Love You" from Keshu. She repeatedly sings the chorus to get it right, "I just called to say I love you/ I just called to say how much I care/ I just called to say I love you/And I mean it from the bottom of my heart". She cannot pronounce "bottom" like the original but she tries. As songs in the English language are popular in India, this example is appropriate of a person in love singing in another elevated language to express the love. As Bollywood songs are looked upon as the entertainment of the masses, singing in English guarantees a more favorable response, even though it might simply be a popular love song.

This hybrid culture of the two languages is also seen when Ghazala (Gertrude) a teacher, is questions her students, "What is a home?" and answers, "It is brothers and sisters and fathers and mothers. It is unselfish acts and kindly sharing. And showing your loved ones you are always caring," with caring in chorus with her students. However, certain words are pronounced in two stressed syllables instead of one, like act-is for acts, love-ed for loved. Later, Arshiya (Ophelia) also says kick-ed for kicked, pluck-ed for plucked, and suck-ed for sucked, but Haider pronounces correctly. He is a student at Aligarh Muslim University and the subject of his

research is on the revolutionary poets of British India, providing a link to the colonization and the fight for independence.

Dolly does everything possible to get Omkara's love but she also accepts his slap and rationalizes it to Indu. Omkara gifts Dolly a *kamarbandh*, a piece of jewelry that is wrapped around the waist. He slaps her when she cannot find the *kamarbandh*. This *kamarbandh* corresponds to the missing handkerchief in the original play. Dolly forms a bond of sisterhood with Indu, who corresponds to Emilia. Indu misunderstands Dolly's tears at Omkara's slap as longing for her father. Indu helps her to ease into her in-laws' house and in her relationship with Omkara. Indu is the traditional wife and mother but she does not hesitate to kill her husband, Tyagi, when she realizes his evil plan. The other female character is Billo who is a professional dancer for hire at parties and who is also pragmatic when Keshu proposes marriage to her. She is independent and yet knows how to work the patriarchy to her own advantage. She corresponds to Bianca of the original play.

Later, when Omkara throws the *kamarbandh* at Dolly on the night of their marriage, she is delighted that it has been found. She is oblivious to his feelings and her own incriminated position. Omkara gives her two options: agree to her affair with Keshu and her life will be spared or she will be suffocated to death. Omkara suffocates her and Omkara kills himself when Indu comes in, sees the *kamarbandh*, and confesses to have stolen it. Indu slashes Tyagi's throat and the movie ends with Omkara's corpse on the floor while Dolly's dead body is swinging above him. This is in contrast to the original play where Iago murders Emilia. Indu's murder of her husband is justified in terms of the killing of evil, as personified by Tyagi but it also raises questions on the formal institution of justice in the country and how she resembles a goddess who has vanquished evil.

The two female characters in *Haider*, Arshiya and Ghazala, are given more agency than the original Ophelia and Gertrude. Arshiya is a journalist, who rescues Haider when he is caught by the Indian police at a checkpoint on his way home from Aligarh. She also comforts him when he sees his ravaged house, “There isn’t much of a home left in what remains *as your home*.” Meeting Haider is more important to her than seeing off her brother, Liyaqat (Laertes), at the airport for his job at a multinational corporation in Bangalore. Roohdaar asks her to give Haider a message and she helps Haider in his search for his father. Also, there are scenes that hint at pre-marital sex between her and Haider. Like Dolly, she is shown as innocent and pure and someone to be protected by her father, brother, and Haider. Later, Ghazala also consoles her when her father, Pervez dies. Pervez’s death results in her break with reality and she commits suicide; she could not reconcile the fact that her boyfriend shoots her father, although accidentally. On the other hand, Ghazala unknowingly betrays her husband. She confesses to Haider that she had voiced her fears to her brother-in-law Khurram about her husband Hilal bringing a militant leader to their house for treatment. Khurram uses this news to imprison Hilal. Ghazala calls herself a half widow, as her husband has disappeared but may or may not be alive.

The relationship between the daughter-in-law and her husband’s brother is often portrayed in interesting ways in the Indian culture. If the husband is considered to be powerful and strict, then it is suggested that the wife is on equal terms with her brother-in-law. Also, she acts as a mediator between the two brothers if her husband is unapproachable. Furthermore, there are often suggestions of a relationship between the wife and her brother-in-law and this is portrayed in *Haider* between Khurram and Ghazala. When she asks Khurram why doesn’t he like girls, implying his unmarried status, he replies, while looking directly at her “All the pretty ones are already married. Just like you” (*Haider*). Later he asks for her hand in marriage at his

brother's funeral. He asks permission to marry his sister-in-law as he cannot find the courage to see her as a widow and Haider as an orphan.

All the women in the three film adaptations, Nimmi (Lady Macbeth), Dolly and Indu (Desdemona and Emilia), and Ghazala and Arshiya (Gertrude and Ophelia) are strong, bold, and rebellious in their own limited roles as wives, mothers, and daughters. They are given more agency than their original counterparts and they reflect the Indian reality of women who are negotiating patriarchy in their constrained capacities. These films also show a hopeful side to Indian women who can take control of their lives and relationships.

On the other hand, although violence is not a daily occurrence, all three films, by virtue of being set in the Mumbai underworld, the regional politics of Uttar Pradesh, and the territorial war in Kashmir, have scenes of violence. As both *Omkara* and *Maqbool* have criminals and police as main characters, a lot of guns are used, be it in killing, threatening, showing power or some other reasons, like Nimmi extracting a confession of love from Maqbool under gun point. Guns are a phallic symbol and most characters feel emasculated without their guns, ready to take their guns out at a moment's notice. Guns and murdering also become a symbol of bonding. For example, Kaka (Banquo) declares that both he and Maqbool have been together for so long, and have taken numerous bullets together that the latter will never harm him. Usman, Abbaji's bodyguard of 25 years shows his back riddled with bullet marks as a sign of his loyalty to his master. In addition, guns are also featured prominently in *Omkara* where every male character has a gun. Apart from killing and threatening, guns are also used as playthings and to assert power. *Haider*, with its backdrop of war, prominently features guns, revolver, and pistols. Ghazala threatens Haider to go to Aligarh with a gun, Haider hides a gun which he later threatens Khurram with, Haider accidentally kills Pervez (Polonius), and also shoots the two Salmans.

Incidentally, Bhardwaj acknowledges that giving credit to the original source can be seen as a marketing tool: *Maqbool*'s credits announce that it is based on *Macbeth*, *Omkara* begins with, "A Vishal Bhardwaj Adaptation of Shakespeare's Othello," and the end credits of *Haider* announce that the film is an adaptation of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. This crediting of the original puts the adaptations in dialogue with the original, and the former colony writing back to the colonizer. Furthermore, because the theme is Shakespeare, the adaptations are deemed worthy of an international audience. Bhardwaj announces the source as he realizes that the film audience will not get the original source or may have read it and forgotten. He also discusses the short attention span of the audience that tends, according to him, not to move beyond "the synopsis and character introduction" (Kumar). This is similar to his earlier interview, a decade ago when he had made *Maqbool*, "All that I look for is a great human story. I do not believe in making films for elite audiences. I have always believed a well-made film can reach many people" (Pais). For Bhardwaj, this great human story is found in Shakespeare's plays. The universality of the adaptations in the Indian culture proves how much the Bard is a part of the Indian psyche, functioning as a big Other, whose influence is inescapable. Bhardwaj observes that many Indians miss the point that Shakespeare wrote for the masses and that "His greatness was that he never lost touch with human consciousness. If somebody is a king, he doesn't cease to be a human being" (Kumar). He also analyzes how the West has been living in the Bard's shadow when he saw the film adaptations to research on *Haider*, "Almost all of them use Shakespearean language. Even the one made in 2004, which is set in the contemporary corporate world uses the same kind of language. I think the West hasn't come out of the Shakespeare's shadow. I have no such hangovers" (Gupta). Bhardwaj's adaptations make the plays more comprehensible and can stand as separate films to audiences who do not know that these are

adaptations. However, all the three films were advertised as adaptations, primarily through their trailers and songs. Also, *Haider* has probably the most number of similarities with its original. Bhardwaj himself, like Indians now, have a hybrid identity of Indian values and education while also having access to the West, be it the films, technology, or research. This does not mean it has to be one or the other, but it is usually a mix of both.

The casting choices in any film is important but in an adaptation it is particularly more important as Sara Martin analyzes,

In practice, screen roles, whether original or adapted, operate like stage roles, for which physical appearance is not fixed except along rough lines of age and gender. Indeed, an habitual side-effect of adaptations is that a skilled actor can erase from the mind of the novel's readers [or the audience of the play] the original image suggested by the writer [or playwright] and replace it with his/her own in the film as, to all appearances, verbal descriptions pale before the impact a film image may have (52).

So even though it may be difficult to picture an Indian Macbeth, Othello, or Hamlet, it is possible with the casting choices that Bhardwaj decided on. Furthermore, because of the paucity of talented and experienced actors, Bhardwaj has repeated certain actors throughout his trilogy. For instance, the actors who play Lady Macbeth, Tabu and Macbeth, Irrfan Khan, are also in *Haider*, playing the roles of Gertrude and the ghost of Hamlet, respectively. Also, the actor who plays Duncan, Pankaj Kapur, is the real life father of Shahid Kapoor, the actor who plays *Haider*. Lastly, Iago played and played by Saif Ali Khan is the real-life husband of Kareena Kapoor who plays the role of Desdemona. *Omkara* was the only film in the trilogy that had mainstream actors and in an interview Puja Gupta, Bhardwaj describes his experience on working with mainstream popular actors, "I realized after working with them that it is difficult to convince mainstream actors as they come with pre-conceived images of themselves and see themselves as a third

person which is annoying.” (Gupta). Bhardwaj pinpoints the problem that mainstream actors, especially men, “don't let themselves loose. They don't trust anybody completely” (Gupta). He contrasts this with women actresses, “Female actors leave it to you and are not a problem” and that “If you ask a guy to take off his shirt, his face drops as he has not exercised and is more concerned about his cuts, curves and muscles than girls who are more relaxed on this count. Guys are also more complexed than the girls. Girls are lovely and painless. I wish I could make more female-oriented films” (Gupta). This break down between the real and reel life characters often add another layer of comprehension and simulation that show the artificiality of the films. The casting choices also help to make the story of the Bard’s plays more relatable to an Indian audience, who would feel out of place if European or American actors played the roles of Mumbai mafia, local politicians, or Kashmiris caught in war. Nevertheless, for Bhardwaj, the audience does not matter, “The audience hasn’t given me anything. I have been appreciated by the intellectuals, the critics and the connoisseurs of cinema. And it is because of them what I am. I don’t follow the popular taste. I want to hold out the hand. It’s up to them whether they want to hold it or not. I don’t make something that I won’t be able to own publicly” (Kumar). This makes his films author-oriented rather than audience-oriented but his choices to cast certain actors are in line with the relationships that he shares with Tabu, Irrfan Khan, Naseeruddin Shah and knowing which actor will pull in more revenue. Bhardwaj is associated with the contemporary trend of making independent critically-acclaimed films for the urban multiplex audience and the global diaspora audience²³.

²³ Bhardwaj has also adapted based on other kinds of literature: *7 Khoon Maaf* based on Ruskin Bond’s novella, *Susanna’s Seven Husbands* and *The Blue Umbrella* based on Bond’s children’s book of the same name. He also has an impressive list of movies based on original screenplay.

Shakespeare is the big Other in Indian school education whose plays become a part of the student population from a young age. He is also this inescapable force who is a huge component in the collective consciousness of the Indian population; almost everyone who has a school education has heard of William Shakespeare. Despite this phenomenon, where the colonized has adapted the colonizer to tell stories of their own, the Bard is still British and will always be an important element in the literature who fascinates but can never be wholly adopted by the colonized.

Also, certain characters in the film adaptations function as the big Other, who are in a position of power and from whom others derive their identity. Apart from the major changes in time and space, the female characters have been given more agency to reflect the contemporary India, and the titular characters are made more believable by being neither paragons of virtue nor absolutely evil. Their motivations are realistic: ambition, guilt, love, and revenge; further, the outcomes of their actions are acceptable in the milieu of the films. Also, the way these characters are transformed in the films is similar to the way certain other films are adapted to suit contemporary audience. The major change, as I will discuss in the next chapter, is the texts which were written by authors in a pre-independence time frame but whose adaptations are for a modern postcolonial audience.

Strong and Sexually Confident: Women Protagonists in Three Indian Literary Film Adaptations

India, as a nation, is very uncomfortable with sexual desires, sexual agency, sexual identity, and everything else connected with sexuality. It wants people to fit into strict gender roles and sexual binaries, despite Indian society having a long history of homosexuality. In an interview with Sneha Khaund, Ruth Vanita, author of *Queering India* and co-editor of *Same Sex Love in India*, observes that long history of discussing same-sex relationships, “in a range of registers, from a non-judgmental exegesis to an ascetic-oriented mild disapproval of all non-reproductive desire, to a joyful celebration. We have a marvelous trove of writing about same-sex relations, in Sanskrit, in Bengali, in Malayalam, in Urdu, in Rajasthani, in Hindi, and in many other languages” (Khaund).

Nevertheless, sexuality is still a taboo subject. Moreover, women’s sexuality is only assumed to be restricted to marriage and for the purposes of procreation. In other words, female sexuality is something that should be controlled by society and anything that does not fit in binaries or by mainstream patriarchal society, be it queer identities or female sexuality for pleasure and outside or before marriage is unacceptable. For instance, Surpanakha of the *Ramayana*, who I discussed in the first chapter, is demonized because she is confident in her sexuality and is unafraid to approach the married hero, Ram. To control her sexuality, Laxman, Ram’s brother, cuts off her nose as a lesson so that female sexuality is controlled. A recent incident that exemplifies female sexuality is Alankrita Shrivastava’s film, *Lipstick Under My Burkha*, that was denied a certification because it is a “‘lady-oriented’ film about women’s ‘fantasy above life’” whose “four female protagonists as real, earthy characters with their idiosyncratic dreams, fantasies and ambitions— something which has clearly threatened the

parochial mindset of the censor board” (Ghosh). This act of banning shows how women’s bodies and sexualities are regulated in the social and cultural sphere of the nation. Furthermore, Prachi Salve notes that there are 71.4 million single women in India in 2011, an increase of 39 per cent from 2001. This group includes “includes widows, divorcees and unmarried women, and those deserted by husbands” (Salve). These single women are seen as a problem in terms of their social status and desires as a single woman without the ties of family is perceived as dangerous, although this attitude is gradually changing.

The policing of women’s bodies is nothing new, but it has improved slightly in films post-2000, mainly because of globalization, higher levels of education, and urbanization. One indication of higher education has been the large number of literary film adaptations whereby certain films are adapted more than others. As a result, audiences know the basic storyline simply through viewing the films, rather than reading the actual novel. Another result of these literary adaptations is how the original text is often re-released with the book cover featuring either the poster of the film adaptation or scenes from the film, including novels and their film adaptations of *Parineeta* and *Devdas*.²⁴ Sometimes the newer versions are updated to show the use of technology and change in belief systems like in *Dev.D*, or newer casting choices like in *Parineeta*, or sequences that were not present in the original, like in *Saheb Biwi Gangster*. Whatever changes are made in these adaptations usually ensure commercial success. This

²⁴ These include, *Guide* based on R. K. Narayan’s *Guide*, *Black Friday* based on S. Hussain Zaidi’s *Black Friday: The True Story of the Bombay Bomb Blasts*, *The Blue Umbrella* adapted from Ruskin Bond’s novel of the same name, *Pinjar* based on Amrita Pritam’s novel of the same name, *Chokher Bali* adapted from Rabindranath Tagore’s Bengali novel of the same name, *Junoon* based on Ruskin Bond’s *A Flight of Pigeons* the book by same name, *Shatranj Ke Khiladi* based on Munshi Premchand’s short story of the same title, *Train to Pakistan* based on Khushwant Singh’s novel of the same title, *1947 Earth* based on Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice Candy Man*, *7 Khoon Maaf* based on Ruskin Bond’s “Susanna’s Seven Husband”, and adaptations of Chetan Bhagat’s novels: *Hello* from *One night @the Call Center*, *3 Idiots* from *5 Point Someone*, *Kai Po Che* from *The 3 mistakes of My Life*, and *2 States* from *2 States*.

chapter will look at three twenty-first century Hindi film adaptations of three twentieth-century Bengali novels, tracing the changes in the presentation of women as strong and independent and the portrayal of the male heroes as vulnerable and weak, rather than heroic and brave. The three novels are Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Parineeta* and *Devdas* and Bimal Mitra's *Saheb Bibi Golam* (King, Queen, Knave). The movies that will be analyzed in this chapter are: *Saheb, Biwi Aur Gangster* (The Master, The Wife and The Gangster, 2011) inspired by *Saheb Bibi Golam*; *Dev.D* based on *Devdas*; and *Parineeta* based on the novel of the same name.²⁵ Scholarship on Hindi films still talks about women in terms of passivity and a lack of sexual freedom, but I argue these adaptations show otherwise. Due to the hybrid identities of the characters, especially the women, these adaptations demonstrate a change in Hindi film that showcases women with more agency, especially in regard to their sexual freedom. Subsequently, this chapter will also examine the hybrid identity of the adapted characters which is composed of both the texts and the contemporary world and how these newer adaptations open up a dialogue on female sexuality and less-than-ideal male heroes through the portrayal of the main characters.

All the three adaptations have also been updated to appeal to an audience outside India because of the increasingly global nature of popular culture. The three adaptations have been produced keeping a global audience in mind but the original Bengali novels were written to appeal to a regional Bengali audience only. Even with English translations, the three novels still have a restricted attraction. In fact, both *Devdas* and *Parineeta* were published in English with newer covers after the respective films were released. As *Devdas* has been adapted many times, the translated text was released by Penguin in India with the book cover featuring the 2002

²⁵ *Saheb Biwi Aur Gangster Returns* and *Saheb Biwi Aur Gangster 3* are the sequels to *Saheb Biwi Aur Gangster*, released and releasing in 2011 and 2018. Both was directed by the same director and featured the same actors and characters who played the Saheb and Biwi but a new Gangster.

version, *Devdas*, directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali. Furthermore, even the translated *Parineeta* was released in 2005 with the cover featuring the film adaptation. *Saheb, Bibi, Golam* was not published after the film, possibly because the original novel was not as popular or as short as the other two. Moreover, although the three novels were set in Kolkata (formerly, Calcutta) and the rest of the state of West Bengal, *Dev.D* and *Saheb, Biwi, Aur Gangster* are set in north India to appeal to a wide section of the Indian audience as well as the Indian diaspora.

Moreover, all the three adaptations recreate the basic storylines but reconfigure them to suit contemporary audiences. Linda Seger argues that adaptation “is a transition, a conversion, from one medium to another. ... Yet adapting implies change. It implies a process that demands rethinking, reconceptualizing, and understanding how the nature of drama [and other forms of literature, like the novel] is intrinsically different from the nature of all other literature” (2). This is also true for the three novels that have been adapted into three different films which only resemble the original texts in the spirit. Two out of the three films, *Dev.D* and *Saheb, Biwi Aur Gangster*, can be seen as completely new products because of the massive changes as well as the numerous liberties taken by the directors. Both these adaptations have deviated significantly from the originals, especially in giving more choice and strength to the women while weakening the male protagonists.

Moreover, these two adaptations give women more sexual choice without effeminizing or demeaning the men, which would have been expected if the gender roles had been reversed. Despite having an adaptable storyline, interestingly, all the literary texts were in Bengali but have been translated into English. This may be because of Sanghamitra Mazumdar’s observation that, “The audience could easily relate to the issues he [Chattopadhyay] picked from contemporary society, the life-like characters he sketched and the inimitable style of his

narratives — the reason a large number of his works were found to be fit for successful screen and stage adaptations, in several Indian languages”. This shows how issues and characters in a story can transcend language and temporal barriers through film adaptations. Even if the setting changes, often adaptations that focus on the underlying important universal themes, can overcome temporal and geographical boundaries.

The three novel-to-film adaptations fall under Thomas Leitch’s two out of six categories of film adaptations, especially that of compression and expansion, whereby the former edits a long text to make it suitable for cinema and the latter expands the original (Leitch 98-100). Like any other novel to film adaptation, it is impossible to put in each and every incident and conversation for the limited time and attention span of the film audience. As a novel is read and a film is viewed and heard, it is inevitable that directors and writers of screenplays will have to edit out or add in parts that were present or absent in the original text. *Devdas*, *Parineeta* and *Saheb, Bibi, Golam* have all been compressed but also expanded to include newer plots and characters, which I will discuss.

Chattopadhyay’s novel, *Devdas*, published in 1917, has been adapted in films of many Indian languages. Nirupama Kotru notes that film has been adapted fifteen times in seven languages: “Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, [and] Assamese” (Kotru). *Devdas*, the novel, has been an important part of the Indian popular culture. P.K. Nair suggests that, “Some of the classic performance seen in Indian cinema that reminded one of the *Devdas* syndrome are: Dilip Kumar’s in S. U Sunny’s *The Fair* (1948) [Mela] and Amiya Chakraborty’s *The Indelible Mark* (1952) [Daag], Raj Kapoor as a TB [tuberculosis] victim in *The Longing* (1953) [Aah] and a bed-ridden Rajesh Khanna in Hrishikesh Mukherjee’s *Anand* (1973) [Bliss]” (85-86). All the movies listed have an undercurrent of tragedy—be it death,

unrequited love, or terminal illness. Sreejata Guha traces the prevalence of the image of Devdas in the popular Indian imagination, of a “haggard, world-weary, lovelorn soul driving himself to drink and hurtling on relentlessly on the path to self-destruction” (v). She describes the Devdas metaphor as “a time-honored, enduring tragic symbol of unfulfilled love” (v). Both these descriptions have become a part of the language whereby the term Devdas encompasses someone, usually male, whose love has not been reciprocated and who is in a sad and pitiable condition. Like, the name Romeo which suggests someone who is lovelorn but also capable of harassment, Devdas is another example of using fictional literary characters to denote reality.

It can be safely assumed that very few members of the audience of any *Devdas* adaptation have actually read the novel, but because of its numerous film adaptations, the story is familiar.²⁶ The original is in Bengali which restricts the national readership and the translated English version is only accessible to those who know English. Furthermore, the 2002 film, *Devdas*, directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, played a large role in acquainting an entire generation of filmgoers with the story. Bhansali, who is famous for making films as spectacles with lavish sets, bright colors, elaborate song and dance sequences, and providing a larger-than-life experience, through his films, created *Devdas* in a similar manner.²⁷ Unlike *Devdas*, both *Parineeta* and *Saheb Bibi Golam* have been adapted before but they are not as popular as *Devdas*. Despite the term ‘parineeta’ meaning a married woman and the phrase ‘saheb bibi

²⁶ Some of the more famous adaptations are: *Devdas* in Bengali (1935) and Hindi (1936) both directed by P. C. Barua, in Hindi directed by Bimal Roy (1955), in Bengali directed by Dilip Roy (1979), and in Hindi directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali (2002). There has also been adaptations of *Devdas* in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Randor Guy also observes, “The year 1953 witnessed the filming of the novel in Tamil and Telugu by the Kuchipudi dancer-choreographer-turned-filmmaker, Vedantham Raghavaiah (1919-1971) with the superstar, Akkineni Nageswara Rao as Devadas (Devadasu in Telugu) in both versions” (Guy). It can be safe to say that *Devdas* transcends both linguistic and geographical borders in its hold over popular imagination.

²⁷ This version of *Devdas*, set in 1930s, was also screened at 2002 Cannes Film Festival and was India's entry for Best Foreign Language Film at the Oscars in 2003, putting Bollywood firmly on the international map of filmmaking.

golam' referring to king, queen, and the knave in a deck of cards, they are not that big a part of the Hindi, Bengali or other Indian languages. Both *Parineeta* and *Saheb Bibi Golam* have been adapted in Hindi and Bengali.²⁸ It is not uncommon in India to adapt films from literary texts that are in different languages, be it Bengali to Hindi, Urdu to Hindi, or English to Hindi. Consequently, the three Hindi film adaptations in this chapter are from three Bengali novels. Even if the director, producer, or scriptwriter does not know the language of the original source text, English translations are freely available.²⁹

Set in the early 1900s, *Devdas* is the story of Devdas Mukherjee, son of a zamindar, and Parvati, the daughter of his next door neighbor. They grow up together in their village called Taalshonapur but because of their different economic and social classes, Devdas cannot marry Parvati, also known as Paro. Over the next few years, both Devdas and Paro realize that they are in love with each other. However, in a series of events, Devdas rejects Paro, which results in her family arranging her marriage to a widower, Bhuvan Choudhuri, an elderly zamindar, who had three children from an earlier marriage. Despite Devdas's proclamation of love, Paro refuses him. Devdas goes to Kolkata where he meets Chunilal, who introduces him to Chandramukhi, a prostitute with a heart of gold. Devdas starts drinking to drown his sorrows. He forms an interesting love-hate relationship with Chandramukhi who falls in love with him. When Devdas realizes that he is dying, he travels to meet Paro at her husband's house, as per when he had

²⁸ *Parineeta* has earlier been adapted in Hindi by Bimal Roy in 1953, in Bengali by Pashupati Chatterjee in 1942 and by Ajoy Kar in 1969 as well as under the title *Sankoch* (Hesitation) in 1976 in Hindi by Anil Ganguly. Similarly, *Saheb Bibi Golam* has been adapted in Bengali by Kartik Chatterjee in 1956 and by Abrar Alvi in 1962 as *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam*.

²⁹ Interestingly, there has been a Bengali movie, by the same name, *Saheb Bibi Golam*, directed by Pratim D. Gupta that only shares the title but has absolutely no similarity with the novel. In this 2016 film, the title acts as a phrase for the three characters who act out the roles of the king, the queen, and the knave.

promised Paro after her marriage. He cannot meet her when he arrives at night and by the next morning, he dies in front of her house, without meeting her.

Similarly, Chattopadhyay's Bengali novel, *Parineeta*, published in 1914, also focuses on the childhood love between Shekhar and Lalita. They fall in love, but cannot marry because of financial and social constraints. However, they still come together in the end and have a happy ending, unlike *Devdas*. Like Devdas and Paro, they are childhood sweethearts and there is a period of separation between the lovers. Lalita is an orphan who lives with her uncle, Gurucharan, his wife, and their five daughters. Shekhar is the son of their neighbor, Nabin Roy. They are in love but they do not express it in so many words. Things get complicated when Girin arrives who falls in love with Lalita. Through a strange twist in the story, Lalita and Shekhar get married. Despite this, Shekhar, like Devdas, does not accept Lalita. Through a gap in time and space, Shekhar assumes that she is married to Girin. After clearing the misunderstanding that Girin had married someone else, Shekhar and Lalita are united.

Saheb Bibi Golam, written by Bimal Mitra, is set in the last few years of the nineteenth century. It focuses on the decay of a feudal family as well as the changes that the city of Calcutta (present-day Kolkata) faces in that time period. The protagonist of the story is Pateshwari, also known as Chhoto Bou, translated as the youngest wife. She wants to be an ideal wife to her husband but she faces problems in terms of her husband's philandering ways, social expectations of the wife of a lord, her eventual alcoholism, and the ruin of the family due to bad financial decisions. The story is narrated from the point of view of Bhootnath, who comes to work in the house of Chhoto Bou and who despite growing fond of her, does not marry her.

Both the novels *Devdas* and *Parineeta* feature love triangles, a storytelling strategy that is also common in Indian cinema. In earlier films, after the couple who are in love with each other

united, the remaining man or woman would either die or be eliminated from the storyline. In recent films, the remaining person is either left alone or given a partner at the end, suggesting a happy ending. Love triangles are essentially tragic, as in the novel, *Devdas*, where the object of devotion for Paro and Chandramukhi dies. However in the novel, *Parineeta*, the love triangle is given a happy ending whereby both Lalita and Shekhar are united and so is Girin, who marries Annakali, although he was earlier in love with Lalita. It is important to keep this in mind as *Dev.D*, based on *Devdas*, has a completely different ending.

Adapting classical novels such as *Devdas* and *Saheb Bibi Golam* has, unsurprisingly, resulted in comparisons to the earlier films and newer versions and a whole burden of expectations and differences. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why Indian film directors do not create as many literary adaptations as Hollywood does but instead create remakes whereby a film in one language is remade into another, usually if the original one is commercially successful. All three film adaptations have made changes to cater to the contemporary audience, especially in terms of showing women as actively creating an identity, independent of men. Robert Stam describes these changes in a film adaptation as:

The source text forms a dense informational network, a series of verbal cues that the adapting film text can then take up, amplify, ignore, subvert, or transform. The film adaptation of a novel performs these transformations according to the protocols of a distinct medium, absorbing and altering the genres and intertexts available through the grids of ambient discourses and ideologies, and as mediated by a series of filters: studio style, ideological fashion, political constraints, auteurist predilections, charismatic stars, economic advantage or disadvantage, and evolving technology (68-69).

Stam's observation is evident in three aspects of the adaptation. *Parineeta*, directed by Pradeep Sarkar is set in 1962 in Kolkata and shows that Shekhar and Lalita, who are adults, instead of children, have sex on the night of their marriage, changing the childhood love story of the

original into something more adult and mature. It also provides a larger role and more visibility to the woman who was supposed to marry Shekhar. Secondly, *Dev.D*'s radical transformation from *Devdas* shows the studio style of UTV Spotboy, a division of UTV Motion Pictures that specialized in producing independent films on a shoe-string budget. It also featured the auteristist predilections of Anurag Kashyap who is known for his interesting films. Thirdly, *Saheb, Biwi Aur Gangster*, also showed the creative sensibilities of the director, Tigmanshu Dhulia, whose main goal was to achieve both commercial and artistic brilliance as noted in an interview "I want to portray something substantial through my films but make it entertaining too, so that the viewer enjoys himself" (Kumar and Chaturvedi 263). Dhulia's films usually balance the commercial aspect like songs and casting choices with some kind of a social message or highlighting a contemporary event.

Lalita of *Parineeta*

Women were usually portrayed in Hindi films as either the ideal heroine or the villain, a concept that Shoma A. Chatterji traces: "In the *Mahabharata*, women's sexual subordination to male authority was ensured in many ways. One such way was the artificial creation of the division of women into respectable and non-respectable or deviant women— those who were not attached to one man but who were free for all men" (Chatterji 181). So women in Indian cinema could either be the ideal girlfriend, mother, sister, or wife or she will be the vamp, the villain who crosses social and sexual boundaries and will usually die so as to maintain the status quo. This is seen in the last chapter where Nimmi (Lady Macbeth), Dolly (Desdemona), and Ghazala (Gertrude) die in the end as they transgress boundaries of different kinds. In these three adaptations, despite transgressing boundaries, all the four women, Lalita of *Parineeta*, Paro and Leni (also known as Chanda) of *Dev.D*, and Madhavi Devi of *Saheb Biwi Aur Gangster* who

corresponds to the original Choto Bou. Lalita transgresses social boundaries by having sex before marriage and also a secret marriage, Paro transgresses social expectations by initiating her relationship with Dev, Leni overcomes social stigma by getting an education and leading a normal life despite being a prostitute, and Madhavi Devi transgresses marital faithfulness by having two extra-marital affairs. Chatterji further observes that,

The strangest thing that strikes one is that nowhere does the sexuality of the woman find space for articulation, discussion, debate, exploration or analysis other than as an object of the male gaze, or the camera, or the director's perception. Why? Do these find representation, reflection and interpretation in contemporary Hindi cinema? 'Sex' is a dirty word in the context of Hindi cinema and especially with reference to women on-screen (183).

Yes, 'sex' is a dirty word in the context of Hindi cinema but these four women are portrayed to show that sex is a part of life and that it is normal, expected, and acceptable. The recent films that do explore and focus on female sexuality, like *Angry Indian Goddesses* (2015) and *Lipstick Under My Burkha* (2016), are heavily censored and the latter was released after a long delay. However, all the three film adaptations show, in some way or the other the sexual desires of women and what they want, while still being in the roles that society assigns them to: girlfriend, partner, wife, prostitute, and partner. The four female protagonists create what Leitch terms a liberation adaptation; an adaptation that provides scenes and sections that were only hinted at in the original text (Leitch 96). The updated film adaptations give more agency to the four women. Also, the scenes of sexual activity in the three films are the creative impulses of three male directors. The scenes try to show the desires of the women as much as is possible from a male perspective. The scenes and the characters try to show that 'sex' is not a dirty word and try to create a "space for articulation, discussion, debate, exploration or analysis" of female sexuality

(Chatterji 183). Furthermore, all the four women are not simply slotted into the categories of the goddess and the whore, a strategy that is still the norm.

To illustrate, *Parineeta*, directed by the first-time director debutant Pradeep Sarkar, is largely similar to the novel but is set in 1960s Kolkata, instead of the turn of the twentieth century village. Also, Lalita (Vidya Balan) is an adult instead of a teenager. The original novel showed child marriage, a phenomenon that was common during the Chattopadhyay's contemporary time. Child marriage although illegal in India, is still prevalent today because of different socio-economic situations. Showing the teenage Lalita getting married to a twenty-something Shekhar (Saif Ali Khan) would have created a controversy and would have been historically inaccurate. In the film, the socio-economic background that Lalita and her adoptive family come from, would not have resorted to child marriage. Her adoptive family is educated and consequently, knowledgeable on the perils of child marriage. Also, they are not in such severe financial problems that they will have to get the daughters married to someone older and financially settled to secure a future for the daughters.

Due to the temporal and spatial settings of the adaptation, an important expanded change in the film is the marriage ritual that Shekhar and Lalita enact which shows Lalita's choice in the act. She exercises her freedom to marry Shekhar, rather than be forced into an arranged marriage with someone else. In the novel, Annakali, Gurucharan's ten-year-old daughter, makes arrangements for the wedding of her dolls, including weaving marigold garlands and making arrangements for a feast. The date, in both the novel and the film, is considered to be so auspicious that just an exchange of garlands is equal to a real wedding without the ceremony and the rituals. In the novel, Lalita distractedly puts a garland on Shekhar and he also puts a garland around her neck. Similarly in the film, Lalita puts Shekhar's gold chain on his neck and then he

realizes what she has done. As they are both ‘married’, she and Shekhar have sex which is not considered to be a sin. Showing an underage Lalita having sex with an adult Shekhar, as per their ages in the novel, would have been rape.

Both the Lalitas see this marriage as a legal, social, and divine bond, unlike the two Shekhars. Swagato Ganguly contends that the, “women [in Chattopadhyay’s novels] most often have to bear the burden of the sacrifice. Thus Lalita puts her entire life on the stake, and gives up Girin who wants to marry her, because Shekhar had once enacted the Hindu rite of marriage with her even if he disowns her afterward” (ix). Both the Lalitas are aware of Girin/Girish’s feeling towards them but instead decide to be with Shekhar, who is worse than Girin/Girish in the way that he treats Lalita and takes her for granted. The Lalita of the film is also an emotionally strong woman who takes responsibility for herself and others, who searches for solutions to problems especially when she hears that her uncle’s house will be converted to a hotel unless money is paid, and who can take criticism as shown in the first scene of the film. By the end, she emerges stronger despite the problems as she shows her strength when, despite seeing Shekar’s marriage preparations to another person, she does not say anything about her marriage to Shekhar’s family. The change in the former helps to connect to the contemporary audience. Also, the person who Shekhar is supposed to marry in the novel is only mentioned in passing but given a short speaking role in the film, Gaytari Tantiya (Diya Mirza). Gayatri, who is contrasted with Lalita, is rich (her father is an industrialist), spoilt (she confesses that she has run through seven piano teachers as a child), pampered (she proudly proclaims that she cannot brew even a cup of tea but her father has promised to send six cooks with her when she gets married), and gets what she wants, including Shekhar (*Parineeta*). Her freedom and life choice are connected to her family’s wealth.

The film *Lalita* has a hybrid identity composed of the social roles expected of her as a woman while also being influenced by the modernism surrounding her. She takes care of Shekhar and the household chores but she exercises her right to freedom when she has sex with Shekhar and when she rejects Girish (Sanjay Dutt), despite knowing his feelings towards him. Lalita, in the novel, is a child who takes the responsibility of both her adoptive uncle's family in terms of household duties as well as taking care of Shekhar. The film *Lalita* also takes care of Shekhar by choosing his clothes, keeping his room tidy, and helping with the household chores of the families of her uncle, Shekhar, and that of their neighbor, Charu, whose uncle was Girin/Girish. For the two Lalitas, doing these chores is not a burden but an act of love; she is the domestic goddess who takes care of her adoptive and Shekhar's families. Additionally, to gain more agency and freedom, the film *Lalita* works in a clerical/secretarial capacity in the office of Shekhar's father but she is always looked down upon by him because of her low financial status and her position as an orphan who is sheltered by her uncle. Lalita's profession is another example of Leitch's expansion in an adaptation. Lalita's self-consciousness of her position in the society is described in the novel as her being old "enough to know just how lowly and insignificant she was. She was fully conscious of the fact that everybody was tender and caring with her only because she was an orphan" (*Parineeta* 55). The novel *Lalita* has no independence whatsoever because of her age, her status as an orphan, and her position as a young woman, whereas the film *Lalita* is older, somewhat financially independent, and has control over her body and whom she chooses as her partner.

Before the beginning of the film on the DVD, all four characters—Shekhar, Lalita, Girin, and Koel—are described. Lalita is described as "the heroine every young girl want to be, her faith is unshakeable; her determination rock-solid; her love immortal" (*Parineeta*). The screen

Lalita is better than the novel Lalita in terms of being independent as the latter “Lalita did not take a single step without Shekhar’s permission. No one had instructed her to do so nor was there any reason for this. Lalita was not independent, and the permission of her uncle and aunt would not suffice either” (Chattopadhyay, *Parineeta*, 13). This has some echoes in the film when Lalita decides to go out with Girish, Koel, and others and goes to inform Shekhar. A jealous Shekhar dismisses her and Lalita does not go. However, because of a misunderstanding, Shekhar assumes that Lalita had gone and scolds her, but she cries and responds, “You were livid...kept scolding me. Have I ever gone anywhere without asking you? You’re always yelling at me” (*Parineeta*). The screen Lalita has more independence because of the setting of the film and also because she is not a complete child, like in the novel. She is an adult who can take care of herself and is not as bound by familial obligations as the novel Lalita is.

Lalita’s emotional strength and Shekhar’s misunderstanding are shown in the opening scene of the film where he is getting ready to marry and visits Lalita at her uncle’s house. She meets her on the stairway and their exchange shows Lalita’s independence and Shekhar’s pride:

Lalita: Heard you are getting married today? Have you forgotten me completely? [You] don’t want to see me, meet me, even touch me? Maybe you do want to touch me? [She touches his face].

Shekhar: Aren’t you ashamed? You are married and you are saying these things.

Lalita: I am married and so I [can say these things]. I feel no shame, no fear, just...”

Shekhar: Stop it Lalita. I am not Girin. I know your real identity. A-a shameless betrayer pretending to be a faithful innocent wife.” (*Parineeta*).

This particular exchange between Shekhar and Lalita is also an expansion. In the film, Shekhar had seen Girin’s affection for Lalita and assumed that they were married after they leave Kolkata

to take care of Gurucharan, as in the novel. In both the texts, it is Girin/Girish who clears up the misunderstanding and helps Shekhar see the truth about Lalita. The dialogue also hints that Lalita is a prostitute as she is apparently married but is also trying to seduce Shekhar. Adding this to the film shows that Lalita is in control while also being faithful to her real husband, Shekhar, a person who does not trust her, who is ready to marry someone else, and who believes what he sees and hears without knowing the context or the background of what is happening.

Paro and Chanda of *Dev.D*

Like Shekhar, Devender Singh Dhillon (Abhay Deol) also known as Dev, the protagonist of *Dev.D*, also does not trust his childhood sweetheart, Paro. The film directed by Anurag Kashyap, made a cultural statement as it was based on present-day heterosexual relationships, substance abuse, patriarchy, and power equations in marital relationships. It references the 2002 Bhansali's *Devdas* version whereby one female character, Leni, is a modern adaptation of Chandramukhi of the original, and when Leni takes up prostitution as a profession, she adopts the name Chandramukhi or Chanda, in honor of the character. This intertextual reference makes it a postmodern film as referencing and alluding to different texts is a characteristic of postmodernism. There is also a shot where a picture of the 2002 *Devdas* is on the side of a secret bar, where the Dev of *Dev.D* goes to drink. Also, Dev's rented bedroom has paintings of Kali, Wonder Woman, and Madhubala, Yin and Yang, among others. Kali is the Hindu goddess of destruction, an embodiment of the female power and Madhubala was an actress who was active in Hindi cinema in the 1940s and 1950s. She has been considered to be one of the most beautiful actresses and her death at a young age has provided a tragic status to her, making her similar to *Devdas*, who also dies at a young age.

Anup Singh in “Devdas and the Intensity of Self” observes, “A film is always an unfurling, but an intangible relation between the self (the filmmaker) and the material the filmmaker handles. Making a film, at its core, is an obsessive reflection on the particular and mysterious in one’s life, a fanaticism, with elements of despair as well as wonder” (90). This is particularly true for *Dev.D* and its director, Anurag Kashyap, who said in an interview that he has been “an alcoholic and experimented with drugs. I’ve been a drifter and caught in severe depression thrice. I have made huge mistakes and botched up a big relationship in the past. I have walked the length and breadth of Paharganj doing things Dev does in the movie” (Akbar). Consequently, Kashyap’s own life has some similarities to both the novel and this particular adaptation. He is known for his interesting films and is also considered to be an outsider, not only for the topics of his films but also because he has no film family background in an industry that thrives on nepotism, family connections, and the formation of film camps, where certain actors, producers, and directors band together.³⁰

Kashyap, in an interview with *Variety* observed that, “The film [*Dev.D*] goes straight to issues dividing Indian society, with some critics giving it five stars and conservative commentators trashing it” (Holdsworth). The main theme of the film is its take on urban heterosexual relationships through the realistic portrayal of the three main characters. *Dev.D*, unlike the original *Devdas*, narrates the story from the three perspectives of Paro, Chanda, and Dev. It is divided into three sections where each main character’s background is portrayed along

³⁰ Some of the themes of his films are 1993 Mumbai terrorist blasts, coal mafia of India, film noir and the 1960s Hindi film industry, fake godmen, kidnapping, and student politics, among others. His films will often carry a message, a commentary, and his own ideology of power struggles, the urban life, and the different kinds of pressures that men and women are under. His films are usually critically acclaimed but have often faces controversies and low box-office earnings. Nevertheless, Sunny Sen observes that Kashyap, along with directors who make independent off-beat films, like “Vikram Malhotra, Ritesh Sidhwani, Farhan Akhtar... [and] Zoya Akhtar” has entered into a partnership with Amazon to develop new series for its Indian market which can be streamed (Sen).

with the connections to the other two protagonists. Each of the sections is chronological but the audience has to piece together all the three sections. They are titled as “Paro,” “Chanda,” and “Dev” and are shown in bright colors, almost like a nostalgic 1960s Hindi film where the credits and titles were splashed in colors. The blurb on the DVD proclaims that the film, “reflect[s] the sensibilities, conflicts, aggression, independence, free thought, exuberance and recklessness of the youth of today. A generation that is jammed between eastern roots and western sensibilities” (*Dev.D*). This hybridity of Indian tradition and western (American and English) freedom is reflected in the film in its attitude to women, their desires and sexuality, and the attitude of the patriarchal society as reflected in the character of Dev.

Similar to the original novel, the Dev in this film has to choose between Paro (who is the daughter of the manager of Dev’s father’s estates in Punjab) and Leni, also known as Chanda (who is a prostitute in Delhi and with whom Dev shares a relationship after Paro willingly marries someone else). There is class politics as Paro (Mahie Gill) is from a lower-middle class family whereas Dev’s family is rich but his father likes Paro and sees her as his future daughter-in-law, unlike the original. Dev accuses Paro of being unfaithful to him and leaves her. On the other hand, Leni (Kalki Koechlin) is a school girl who is embroiled in a sex scandal. Her father is an Indian who works in a foreign embassy but her mother is French and it is evident that they are also financially well-off. The actress who plays Leni, Kalki Koechlin, looks European with her light complexion and her real-life French parents. So Koechlin’s debut as a half-French schoolgirl, Leni, provides a plausible story as well as breaks down the border between the real and the reel. She willingly becomes a sex worker and completes her graduation. Dev is her client with whom she falls in love. The movie ends with the union of Dev and Leni, a happy ending for

the tragic *Devdas*, and an example of Leitch's correction to adjust the original to create a new ending.

Mahie Gill, who debuted as Paro in the film, is shown as someone who has an earthy sensuality and who is in control of her sexuality. Gill, who also plays the role of Chhoti Bahu in *Saheb Biwi Gangster*, has since gone on to portray characters that are bold and sexually confident. The theme of sexuality is tactfully handled in *Dev.D* where Paro is the more active person than Dev. One of the reasons why this movie struck a chord with its audience was its portrayal of the three characters. Paro and Dev are childhood sweethearts but Dev goes to London to study where they keep in contact through technology. Her screen name on Instant Messaging is Chammak Challo (translated as a woman who has a flashy appearance, especially through her jingling jewelry, and can also mean a sexually attractive village girl), and Dev's is The Dude (*Dev.D*). This film precedes sexting as Dev asks for her nude picture but she prints and scans one to him. Her picture only shows her bare shoulders and face, stopping just before her breasts. Later, they both cannot keep their hands off each other when Dev returns to India for his brother's wedding. She arranges to seduce Dev in the middle of a sugarcane field, complete with a mattress, but he calls her a "slut" after this incident. When she is undressing him, she mentions that he has a lot of hair, an interesting observation as usually men will comment on a woman's body (*Dev.D*). Dev cannot handle Paro's openness and is angry when he hears untruthful rumors that Paro has been sleeping around. Paro is his possession and he cannot handle Paro's so-called unfaithfulness. This scene of Paro trying to seduce Dev and have sex before marriage reflects the contemporary audience and what later, Chirodip Majumdar observes that per-marital sex in India is slowly becoming more common but is not widespread.

Later, Dev sleeps with Rasika, whose brother Paro marries. Dev breaks a bottle on the head of a man with whom Paro supposedly had sex. Paro's accusation at Dev shows the inherently sexist and hypocritical nature of India's attitude towards women's sexuality, "You broke the bottle on him after making out with Rasika? Bloody hypocrite. You can fuck around but if I do I am a slut" (*Dev.D*). The class politics of the film rises when Dev taunts Paro, "Go ruin someone else's house. Anyway, you're not worth it. A servant's [manager] daughter remains that [a manager's daughter]. Look at yourself... unkempt hair, lousy clothes, ugly as hell" (*Dev.D*). Her lower economic and social status becomes a reason for his refusal. Also, Paro hails from Chandigarh, a large city but her and Dev's homes are in a village, whereas Dev has a foreign education and flaunts his wealth. An education from abroad at the time of the film's release was considered to suggest wealth and prestige but not necessarily intelligence, an observation that Paro makes. She claims that despite Dev's education, she always ranked first in class while Dev barely managed to pass his classes (*Dev.D*).

Paro is shocked at Dev's chauvinistic attitude and decides to marry Rasika's brother, a widower with two children who is chosen by Paro's parents. Her father knew of her feelings but though that the match was impossible because of the difference in their economic statuses. Unlike the original novel, Dev's parents in the film actually saw Paro as their daughter-in-law and would have happily accepted her as a part of the family. On the night of Paro's wedding, Dev gets to know the truth that Paro was faithful to him, although she had also proclaimed her innocence earlier. Nevertheless, he does not stop her; instead, he gets completely drunk and passes out. Paro decides to be with someone who actually respects her rather than be in a potentially abusive and distrustful relationship with Dev, a choice that Lalita of *Parineeta* does

not make. Paro loved Dev but decides instead to be in a relationship that provides her with stability, rather than in a volatile relationship with Dev who is suspicious of her actions.

At the time of its release in 2009, *Dev. D* was considered ground-breaking because of its realistic and frank portrayal of sexual relationships and the contradictory attitude towards sexuality, ranging between desires to derision. Rochona Majumdar notes that in India, “the increasing preponderance of double income couples, greater work opportunities for middle class educated men and women, emergence of new modes of writing and filmmaking have fired the sexual imagination of the Indian middle classes in unprecedented ways” (Majumdar). This is seen in Dev’s request for Paro’s picture, Paro’s initiation of seducing Dev, Dev sleeping with Rasika to get back at Paro, and the rumor that Paro was unfaithful to Dev. Dev tries to seduce Paro on another occasion when she visits him after her marriage but fails. This openness of their sexuality and their desires are things that the educated Indian middle class, though uncomfortable with, can accept as normal. Majumdar also contends, “Kashyap's bold interpretation of one of India's best-known melodramatic romantic novels, *Devdas*, signaled the director's faith in the ability of a niche audience among India's ‘new’ middle classes to take such direct statements about sexuality and sexual pleasure in their stride” (Majumdar). Although, sexuality and sexual pleasure are not the focus of the film, they are, nevertheless, an important aspect of Dev’s relationships and Kashyap’s commentary on contemporary society.

Paro, in the film, is shown to love Dev but she marries someone else, largely because of Dev’s arrogance, chauvinism, and accusations about her. Nevertheless, she also takes care of Dev, later in the film. Dev spies on her and sees her laughing with her husband and two stepchildren. Yet, there is a shot of Paro’s bored face when she is having sex with her husband. Kashyap describes the character of Paro as someone with a “strong earthy sexuality” without

being obvious about it and without wearing sexually revealing clothes (*Dev.D*). The last that the audience sees Paro is when she leaves Dev's seedy room in Delhi, after she cleans his room, provides household cleaning supplies, washes his clothes, and bathes him. She, like *Parineeta's* Lalita, is the domestic goddess who takes care of her beloved, despite his faults and her independence. Paro refuses to have sex with Dev in this encounter as she informs him, "You don't love me. You can't love anyone, except yourself" (*Dev.D*). He pushes her out of the door when she taunts him about his masculinity and her satisfying conjugal sex life. Dev, like any other Indian man, cannot handle Paro's refusal and like an ex-lover, cannot see her content married life.

If Paro is the domestic goddess who sacrifices her happiness, then Chandramukhi the prostitute is the social outcast with a heart of gold. Both take care of Dev in different ways. If Paro cleans his room, then Chandramukhi, in this case Leni/Chanda, takes care of his emotional and intellectual needs by conversing with him and supporting him but also calling him out on his shortcomings. Admittedly, Nair contrasts the original Paro and Chandramuki as, "the two archetypes of women in Indian cinema- the woman of the house and the woman of the world: the first as the devoted, all suffering and self-sacrificing housewife, and the second one as the one destined to please society as whole, always there to help the hero in distress, very often at personal risk" (86). Both of these are seen in *Dev.D* where Paro is the woman of the house who sacrifices her love for Dev to lead a secure and respectful life with her husband and, Leni who is a prostitute but who helps out Dev, even leaving her profession.

This binary of women characters in Indian cinema is also applicable to women's sexuality as Chatterji demarcates, "the wife's participation in the sexual act is purely conjugal and passive, confined exclusively to the reproduction of progeny. The courtesan/prostitute/sex

worker is there purely to sell sex in its varied manifestations” (Chatterji 183). Accordingly, *Dev.D*'s Paro is the wife whose sexuality is confined within the marital bedroom and Leni's sexuality is for sale. Leni takes the name of Chanda, a shortened version of Chandramukhi. Leni sees videos of Bhansali's *Devdas*, specifically those featuring Chandramukhi, inspired by the actress who plays Chandramukhi, Madhuri Dixit.³¹ Leni also sees other songs and films starring Dixit, even before her career choice. Leni's story is titled Chanda in bright candy pink, making her seem extra feminine. As a school girl, she is aware of her sexuality as she tucks her skirt of the school uniform up and rolls down her socks.

Her life is changed when a Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) video of her giving a blowjob to an older man surfaces on the phones of her classmates and is later circulated. This references an actual scandal in 2004 when two high-school students engaged in a sexual act and the video was circulated showing how the postmodern condition of technology breaks down the boundary between art and reality (Venugopal). This is also noted by Nikhat Kazmi: “The turning point in Leni's life was the MMS scandal and Kashyap confesses he used the reference to the DPS [Delhi Public School] MMS scandal to show what happens to a person whose privacy is affected by cheap, hidden cameras” (Kazmi). In that same article, Kashyap explains, “The person who is at fault is not the person committing the sexual act, but the people who are watching, downloading and intruding on individual privacy” (Kazmi). When Leni asks her boyfriend why he is filming her, he replies, “For my personal use” and later proclaims, “Leni, you're the best” (*Dev.D*). This also shows the hypocrisy and dual standards of the Indian society where a woman's life is defined by one incident but her action is available for public consumption.

³¹ Madhuri Dixit is a popular Hindi film actress who was active in the 1980s till her marriage in 2002. She took a break and then returned to the films and is still acting. She is not only famous for her acting but also her dancing skills. Leni is inspired by her dancing to take up the name, Chanda.

Tragically, Leni's father also watches the video, and she is shattered to hear that. After her father's suicide, she is sent to live with her father's family in India where she is viewed as the reason for her father's death and the family threatens to control her.³² Leni is an outsider in her father's family in her mixed parentage and her crime. Leni is a postmodern character who not only adopts the name of a fictional character to suit her profession but also has two distinctive lives. She is a student earning her Bachelor's in Science during the day and is a prostitute by night. Moreover, as a modern-day prostitute, she dresses according to the whims and demands of her customers, be it an innocent schoolgirl, a nurse with a blonde wig, even brandishing whips for a customer who wants to be sexually dominated. She also performs phone sex in different languages.³³ The whole storyline of Leni is both an expansion and a correction. The original Chandramukhi of the novel does not seem to have a detailed past nor does the reader get too many details of her history.

Nair describes Chandramuki as "the prostitute with a golden heart" who has an edge over Paro as "she sacrificed her own happiness not for one but for many" (86). This is partly applicable to Chanda who has left her home and severed ties with her family when her mother refuses to take her in and plans to marry her off to a man. She tries to rebuild her life after the sex scandal through education and a job. Also, she falls in love with Dev, when he is brought to her room, drunk and passed-out. She tells him later that he did not love Paro, a truth that Dev echoes towards the end of the film when he decides to be with her. In the film and in the novel, when Dev leaves her, she also leaves prostitution. Nair also observes that "The indispensability of the co-existence of two women in a man's life- the woman of the house and the woman of the

³² This is not unheard of where anything bad that happens is automatically the woman's fault, especially if it is daughter-in-law or someone who is different.

³³ Kashyap appears in a scene as one of her customers, similar to the cameo appearances of directors in their films.

street- is something on which the Indian film had harped on a long time” (Nair 86). *Dev.D* breaks this binary down by showing that Paro is capable of seduction before marriage and Chanda, despite being a prostitute, can also lead a normal life and have a relationship with Dev.

Leni is shown as a victim of her circumstances when she is trapped in the sex scandal; however, she, also tries to control her life by getting an education and having a job. Apart from her work, she is portrayed as being as normal as possible, be it her love for dumplings, her clothes, her impulsive nature, or her love for reading. One reason why she could pursue a somewhat normal life was that the MMS clip was not shown on the TV nor was her photograph published anywhere and yet, “Half the country got off on that clip and they turned around and called me [Chanda] a slut” (*Dev.D*). Chanda’s profession also reflects the changing attitude to prostitutes in India when she observes to Dev that her NGO (Non-Government Organization which is similar to non-profit organizations) client calls her a CSW which stands for Commercial Sex Worker as calling her a randi (translated as whore) is out of fashion (*Dev.D*). Kashyap observes that Chanda “does those things that a girl experimenting at that age is doing in today’s time” (*Dev.D*). He also emphasizes that Chanda is a “liberated” girl who is “unashamed,” “does not cut a sorry figure,” and is “unapologetic about her sexuality, about who she is” (*Dev.D*). After her scandal, she wants the world to accept her as she is or else “get lost” (*Dev.D*). Furthermore, Chatterji argues that “sexual desire as women’s autonomous expression of sexuality, female desire, etc. purely as a source of pleasure on oneself derived directly from the sexual act without strings attached was excluded, rendered invisible, slandered, marginalized and denied” in Hindi cinema (183). Chanda, and other screen portrayals of prostitutes, is the exception where she actually likes her job of providing pleasure to her clients and is neither

slandered nor denied. This is also seen in the portrayal of Choti Bahu in *Saheb Biwi Gangster*, which I will analyze later.

On the other hand, Guha compares the original Chandramukhi and Paravati, who like other of Chattopadhyay's women, "are strong, proactive, and indomitable. ... It is Parvati and Chandramukhi's love for him [Devdas] that sustains the narrative; it is their love that makes things *happen*" (Guha xi). This is also seen in the film adaptation, where Paro's love for Dev forces him to reveal his true insecure chauvinistic self and her marriage to someone else propels the narrative forward. Chanda's conversations with Dev force him to acknowledge the hard and bitter truths about himself, including his untrue feelings for Paro and his true feelings for Chanda. Earlier he, had confessed that, "Chanda I love you, too [after Paro]" but he later realizes that he had not loved Paro at all (*Dev.D*). Both the women in *Dev.D*, Paro and Chanda, are emotionally strong, fiercely independent, do not hesitate to leave the love of their life for their own happiness, are educated, and relatable by the audience. Both Paro and Chanda's behavior, fashion sense, dialogue, and attitude towards life and relationships could be understood by the audience who would probably do the same things that these two women do. The film deals with subjects that are offensive to the Indian middle-class sensibility, like pre-marital sex, smoking, drinking, slang in and as everyday language, headstrong women, and weak incapable men, and this update to the original novel made it a successful contemporary adaptation, especially with giving more agency and a voice to Paro and Chanda.

Madhavi of *Saheb, Biwi Aur Gangster*

Like Paro and Chanda, Madhavi Devi (Mahie Gill) of *Saheb, Biwi Gangster* knows what she wants and is not afraid to go after it, be it power or a change of sexual partner. The entire film is a compression of the novel that spans a much longer period of time than the film.

Madhavi is the Rani (or queen) in the Biwi of the title, who lives with her Raja (or king/Saheb), Aditya Pratap Singh (Jimmy Sheirgill), in the fictional town of Devgadh. Aditya addresses her in the formal Choti Rani, translated as younger queen in terms of hierarchy. Like the original novel by Bimal Mitra, which showcases the fall of a rich land-owning family in Kolkata, caught in between changing times, the film also shows the remains of a royal family that has respect (rootba) but not enough money to maintain the luxurious and expected lifestyle. Like Shekhar and Dev, Aditya starts out as a strong and powerful person but in the end of the film, it is Madhavi who is in control. The film ends with Aditya injured and wheelchair-bound, while Madhavi is shown to control the crumbling empire.

Aditya's weakness is suggested in his interaction with his step mother, Badi Rani (translated as elder queen in terms of hierarchy), for money. She was a courtesan who is not respected as a queen. As she controls the finances of the family, Aditya believes that she wants him to visit her and beg for money (*Saheb, Biwi Aur Gangster*). Madhavi is Aditya's third wife: the first one had committed suicide, and the next one became mad. Badi Rani advises him, "Stop seeking pleasure outside and concentrate on the one inside the palace [Madhavi]" (*Saheb, Biwi Aur Gangster*). Like any blue-blooded Indian king, Aditya has a mistress outside his marriage. Aditya's interaction with his stepmother shows his so-called weakness at having to ask his mother, whom he hates, for money. It also shows the power and freedom of Badi Rani who is unafraid to scold her step son and who does not need a man to live her life.

Unlike her mother-in-law, Madhavi is dependent on Aditya to fulfill her financial needs. However, she, like Aditya, has an affair after marriage with someone called Lalit, a name shared by her new driver, who is the Gangster of the title. The driver has another name, Babloo

(Randeep Hooda), which is what everyone calls him.³⁴ In the original novel, Choti Bahu does not have an affair with Bhootnath, the equivalent of Babloo. Bhootnath feels sorry for her and sympathizes with her condition, where she tries everything to win her husband back, even going so far as to become an alcoholic. In the film, Madhavi is shown to drink but she is not an addict. Choti Bahu is caught in between worlds, where on one hand she is expected to be the shy, docile, obedient daughter-in-law of the family, while also being the attractive wife who will ensure that her husband does not visit prostitutes.

Madhavi knows of Aditya's relationship with her mistress, Mahua, and he knew of her affair with Lalit and later has an inkling of her affair with Babloo. Madhavi's sexuality, like the sexuality of any Indian woman, needs to be controlled and maintained within socially acceptable marital boundaries. It is suggested that Aditya did want to remain faithful to his wife but her affair pushed him over. He plans to go away for work and asks Madhavi if he should get something for her. She replies, "You could try bringing my nights back" (*Saheb, Biwi Aur Gangster*). He replies, "I had got the nights, Choti Rani, but you offered them to someone else [the earlier Lalit]" (*Saheb, Biwi Aur Gangster*). The reasons behind Madhavi's infidelity are not disclosed but it is not considered as something strange. It almost seems that her promiscuity is shown to suggest an equal footing with Aditya. If Aditya's masculinity is connected to the number of partners he has had, then even Madhavi's femininity and freedom is connected to her sexuality. Madhavi's relationships are examples of Leitch's correction, as they were not present nor hinted in the original novel.

³⁴ In India, people often have two names. One is the official given name which is used in government documents and various institutions, and a pet name that is known only to the family members and relatives. In this case, Lalit is the real official name while Babloo is the pet name.

Madhavi and Aditya's marital relationship is only restricted to the formalities and mannerisms of a marriage, without the sexual aspect. This is suggested in a scene where she has a stone on her bedside table. When Babloo asks her, she replies, "It is Saheb [Aditya]. He lies beside my bed. I am happy with that" (*Saheb, Biwi Aur Gangster*). Their relationship is not unlike many relationships in India where marriage is more of a convenience than a contract. Madhavi's relationship with Babloo is also based on sexual pleasure and the fact that she can dominate him. In one scene, she says that she loves Babloo but if he leaves her, then she will be alone and sick (*Saheb, Biwi Aur Gangster*). In an interview, Tigmanshu Dhulia justifies the changes introduced in the adaptation, especially in terms of Madhavi's sexuality, "since this was a modern tale, I did not want the character of *Begum* to be passive or muted. I wanted her to portray an aggressive and sexually demonstrative woman" (Kumar and Chaturvedi 264). Madhavi's sexuality is an important change from the original novel as well as the earlier film adaptations. Similar to Lalita, Paro, and Chanda, Madhavi is unapologetic about her sexuality. She owns up to her past mistake but is shrewd enough to realize that her power lies in being Aditya's wife and not in being Babloo's girlfriend. For instance, when she realizes that Babloo is harboring ambitions to be like Aditya, she confesses her affair to Babloo, thinking he is Aditya, who was standing outside her room outside her room. The room had curtains which obscured his identity.

If the Choti Bahu of the novel had a drinking problem and seemed depressed, then Madhavi seems to suffer from mood swings where her temperament can change in an instant. For instance, in one scene, she seems playful towards Babloo when she first meets him but on hearing that he shares the same name as her ex-lover, she screams at him and starts throwing things at him (*Saheb, Biwi Aur Gangster*). Like Kashyap who co-wrote the screenplay of *Dev. D*

with Vikramaditya Motwane, Sanjay Chauhan, the screenwriter of *Saheb, Biwi Aur Gangster* claims, “I wanted to retain the premise of the story, its setting, but introduce the moral vicissitudes of this era” (Jha). This is evident in not only Madhavi’s character but also in her relationship with Babloo, Babloo's ambitions to be like Aditya, and Aditya’s relationship with his stepmother. Also, Madhavi is a much stronger character than her husband, a welcome change that is similar to the relationships of Lalita and Shekhar, Dev and Paro, and Dev and Chanda. When the situation arises, all the women in the adaptations show themselves to be much more capable and in control of the situations than the men, a change that is not as pronounced in the original novels.

All the three novels, which were written before India’s independence in 1947, show women as passive, following social boundaries, suffering for the sake of family and relationships, and being subservient to the men, despite the men being weak, indecisive, and disrespectful towards the women. However, due to the changing attitude towards women and their sexuality, all the three film adaptations, released in the 2000s, show women as sexually independent, emotionally strong, intelligent, and breaking or bending social rules and regulations for either their own and their families’ happiness. The sexual freedom is seen as revolutionary because Indian society does not discuss the issues that are raised in these three films and does not see women as equal to or stronger than men. However, updating these three adaptations with the contemporary issues have made them more interesting, as Dhulia mentions in an interview, “An adaptation, if reproduced as the original, becomes very boring” (Kumar and Chaturvedi 263). And this holds true for all the three films.

Hannibal Lecter in Love: Genre Breakdown and Creative Liberties in Hollywood's Adaptations

Cinema is often intertextual, be it across language, cultures, countries, and time periods. Indian movies are intertextual as they draw inspiration from films of other countries, be it the US or Korea. The Indian film industry also remakes films previously successful in other languages. This recreation of films in different languages in India is not considered plagiarism and often the same director will be in charge of both the movies, like Mani Ratnam was for the versions of *Ravaan* in both Hindi and Tamil. Also cross-language intertextual remakes are not an uncommon phenomenon, be it in India or early Hollywood; for example, *Dracula* (1931) was simultaneously shot in English and Spanish and Spaghetti Westerns were typically made in both English and Italian. Tejaswini Ganti observes that “Bombay [Mumbai] filmmakers regard box-office successes or ‘hits’ in other Indian languages as attractive remake material because, having already succeeded with a set of audiences, such films are perceived as having a higher probability of succeeding with Hindi film audiences as well. However, Hollywood films are not selected only on the basis of box-office outcome but are chosen for plots that seem novel and amenable to adaptation” (Ganti 282). The problem arises when Bollywood blatantly copies films without any proper acknowledgement, despite the language barrier of translating films from English to Hindi. Hollywood is an industry which is full of new and creative ideas, but (as William Bibbiani lists in “21 Great American Remakes of Foreign Language Films”) Hollywood has also remade foreign films, like *Insomnia* (2002) that was remade from the Norwegian thriller of the same name, *Unfaithful* remade from *La Femme infidèle* (The Unfaithful Wife, 1969), and *Three Men and a Baby* (1987) remade from *Trois hommes et un couffin* (*Three Men and a Cradle*, 1985). Furthermore, the last two films have also been remade in Bollywood: the first as

Murder (2004) and the second as *Heyy Babyy* (2007). The intertextuality of films is also seen in MTV India's claims that certain Hollywood films were remade from Bollywood originals: *Leap Year* from *Jab We Met* (When We Met), *Delivery Man* from *Vicky Donor*, and *Win a Date with Tad Hamilton* from *Rangeela* (Colorful) among others (MTV).

This chapter focuses on how Hollywood works as a cultural colonizer in the context of Bollywood, whereby, apart from economic and social influences, it also exerts a tremendous cultural influence. I will argue that, through cross-cultural and cross-genre remakes and adaptations, the gender roles are transformed to appeal to the contemporary audience, both in India and the diaspora, mainly through glocalization and Indianization of the original Hollywood films, as seen through the creative and, sometimes bizarre, liberties that directors take to make it more palatable for Indian audiences. The gender roles of how men and women are expected to perform in society, how to behave in and what to expect in relationships, how to make choices that will affect their identity, and how to act and solve problems in work environments, can either be similar or different in the two countries, as depicted in the films. It will discuss legally authorized as a strategy to avoid plagiarism and unauthorized remakes that hint at deeper problems with the Indian film industry. Through comparing the originals and their adaptations, I will illustrate how these Hindi remakes are a cultural hybrid of Hollywood and the genre conventions of the Hindi film industry.

This chapter considers *Sangharsh*, a 1999 adaptation of *The Silence of the Lambs*, *Ta Ra Rum Pum*, a 2007 film loosely based on *Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby*, and *Action Replay*, a 2010 adaptation of *Back to the Future*. There has been some research on Hindi

film remakes, especially on *Kaante* (Thorns, 2002),³⁵ an adaptation of Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs*. The three film remakes that I have chosen have not received any scholarly attention and have undergone the most transformation, compared to other remakes and adaptations, in terms of genre and gender. The three films considered in this chapter, which have yet to receive any scholarly attention, demonstrate the culturally hybrid identity created when Hollywood films are Indianized to suit Indian sensibilities. Such adaptations include Bollywood tropes like: song-and-dance sequences, sanitized romantic relationships, increased familial relationships, exotic locales, ambiguous connections to reality, and always a happy ending. By layering Bollywood tropes over Hollywood box-office hits, the three adaptations in this chapter show how much gender roles have changed or remained the same in these cross-cultural and cross-genre remakes. These strategies often provide mixed results for literary and commercial success. Moreover, supporting Edward Said's claim that Orientalists represent East and the West as separate, this chapter will also show how the Hindi film industry has influenced Hollywood through a similar Bollywood trope of song-and-dance sequences, and how certain Indian actors and actresses are making a name for themselves in American films and television series, creating a reverse domination and influence, on a smaller scale, whereby Indian culture and the Hindi film industry are impacting the Hollywood and the U.S. The inclusion of the actors in Hollywood and various other entertainment segments proves the conscious choice of portraying diverse but not always exotic characters.

Liberalization and Hollywood Co-Productions

³⁵Neelam Sidhar Wright in *Bollywood and Postmodernism: Popular Indian Cinema in the 21st Century* has an extensive discussion on *Kaante*.

One of the major consequences of liberalization in India in the 1990s was the overarching influence of Hollywood on the Hindi film industry. Monica Mehta traces the history of globalization when she notes that “in the 1990s—the era of economic liberalization—the Bombay film industry began producing what the Indian state and audiences approvingly referred to as ‘family films’ which wove a happy marriage between Indian ‘traditions’ and the global market” (136). The creation of family films provides one of the strategies of Indianizing a foreign film to make it more acceptable to Indian audiences. As Bollywood was more exposed to the global entertainment arena, especially Hollywood, it started to be more influenced by Hollywood. There have been a handful of pre-1990 examples of Hollywood remakes in the Hindi film industry but there seems to be an explosion after 1990, especially after 2000.³⁶ This might be a consequence of not only liberalization and globalization, but an audience that demanded more interesting and individualistic stories that were not the traditional love-stories across class struggles and traditional villains or stories featuring plots that showed the problems that the protagonist faced against the larger forces of a corrupt government, an inevitable twist of fate and forces of destiny, or the larger socio-political forces in the country. Although these themes still continued, they have also been modified or completely overtaken by other themes, like non-traditional relationships across ages and identities or similar socio-economic backgrounds of the protagonists, larger socio-economic forces rather than a traditional villain, and twists of destiny but nothing too outrageous. Access to Hollywood films through liberalization and a change in audience expectations helped to create remakes of Hollywood.

³⁶ Other titles are: *Ghajini*, which is a remake of *Memento*, *Mere Yaar Ki Shaadi Hai*, which is adapted from *My Best Friend's Wedding*, *Black* was inspired from *The Miracle Worker*, *Krrish* is inspired from *Paycheck* *Players* is adapted from *The Italian Job*, *We Are Family* is a legal remake of *Step Mom*, *Kyonki Main Jhoot Nahi Bolta* is adapted from *Liar Liar*, *Kaante* is adapted from *Reservoir Dogs*, *Kuch Toh Hai* is adapted from *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, *Bichoo* is adapted from *Leon: The Professional*. More lists have been created by Divya Chauhan and Tatsam Muherjee.

Faced with a paucity of creative resources and comparatively lax laws on plagiarism and copyright, the industry of the 1990s looked to Hollywood for inspiration.³⁷

The diasporic Indian audience also plays a role in how films are made in Bollywood. Wright observes that the “pursuit of global recognition and Bollywood’s acknowledged popularity with the NRI diaspora are both primary catalysts for the cinema’s increased modernization and experimentation” (135). This diaspora audience seems to be in charge of the storylines of the Hindi remakes as the films make a considerable amount of money from overseas. They want Indian films to be similar to Hollywood films in terms of new storylines, locations, and also, a mix of Indian traditions and contemporary values. Consequently, the storylines focus on the diasporic audience by showing locations in the US and Europe. They contain elaborate portrayals of Indian traditions but also deal with issues such as the plight of immigrants, the realization or the breakdown of the American Dream, and intergenerational family and language issues. Ranjib Majumder confirms that, “Due to an ever-expanding diaspora, Indian films are increasing their market strength in international circuits. ...Our films getting a wider audience also mean that it’s becoming quite easy for the original filmmakers to identify movies that are ‘lifted’. The chances of getting sued for plagiarism are therefore quite high now” (Majumder). A diasporic audience is thus not only influencing storyline in Indian films but also because of the knowledge of Hollywood films can be more alter to Hollywood remakes in Bollywood.

³⁷ Interestingly, the influence of Hollywood is not only felt in India but also in other Asian countries, as seen from the number of remakes, as listed by Raymond Arcega, like *Unforgiven* in Japan, Japan’s *Ghost: I Want to Hold You in My Arms Again* from *Ghost*, Korea’s *Untold Scandal* and China’s *Dangerous Liaisons* from *Dangerous Liaisons*, among others (Arcega).

Hollywood remakes or Bollywood films that have been inspired by or ‘lifted’ from American films are often seen as plagiarized films because, unlike adaptations (which will often credit the original author), these remakes do not. There is a potential for plagiarism when Bollywood remakes and adaptations do not credit the original sources, especially if they are from Hollywood. There does not seem to be any plagiarism if the same director creates the same film in multiple languages. However, this potential for plagiarism has disappeared through recent Hollywood co-productions whereby Majumder notes, “a lot of Hollywood studios are active in India and thus have access to a lot more information and knowledge about the Indian film industry [which] makes it even more difficult to continue this practice [of plagiarism]” (Majumder).³⁸ Hollywood’s knowledge of plagiarism in India has resulted in creating official remakes in the Hindi film industry, in which Indian production houses acquire the rights of a particular movie and the film is coproduced with American/European production houses. So, remakes that are created without any official acknowledgement of its original source, in this case, Hollywood films, are considered to be plagiarized but Hollywood co-productions are not.

The relationship between the two film industries, Indian and Hollywood, can be described as one of two competitors with different sets of values, whereby Hollywood, because of its association with superiority of stories and techniques, is seen as a global leader and the Hindi film industry, because of its association with India, a developing country, is seen as inferior, strange, melodramatic, and exotic. The Hindi film industry has become an important competitor to Hollywood so much so that Hollywood is now collaborating with Indian

³⁸ Some of the official remakes include those of *Knight and Day*, *Metro Manila*, *Love Me If You Dare*, *The Intouchables*, *Priceless*, *Warrior*, *You Again*, and *Love Me If You Dare* (Majumder). Aseem Chhabra also lists plagiarism suits that Indian filmmakers have faced, like the producers of *Partner* (2005) who provided a thirty million dollar settlement to the creators of *Hitch* (2005) and UTV settling with the creators of the Filipino film, *Cavite* that was remade into *Aamir* (2008) (Chhabra).

production houses to direct Indian films. The relationship between Hollywood and the Hindi film industry has received some attention in scholarship. For instance, Azmat Rasul and Jennifer M. Proffitt analyze the different ways that Hollywood is becoming an important part of Bollywood like Sony, Warner Brothers, Disney, and 20th Century Fox coproducing “movies with the local production houses that know the culture and taste of the people rather than merely imposing U.S. cultural products” (Rasul and Proffitt 567). Rasul and Proffitt reason that profit is the main reason behind Hollywood’s “obsession to work with the Indian film industry” (567). India is not the only country that Hollywood is working with; it is also working with filmmakers from Japan, China, and Europe because of the economic potential of these huge markets (Rasul and Proffitt 569). Despite Hollywood’s reputation as a cultural colonizer across the globe, Rasul and Proffitt argue that “Hollywood has not been able to maintain its dominance over the Indian entertainment market despite its financial and technical prowess” (572). Regarding the global reach of Bollywood, Rasul and Proffitt contend that “The melodramatic nature of Bollywood movies interspersed with songs and dances has been successful in attracting foreign investors and millions of viewers in Europe, Africa, Middle East, South East Asia, and America” (Rasul and Proffitt 573). This global reach can become a problem if there is (and there often is) evidence of Hollywood films being plagiarized, resulting in potential lawsuits and losses.

Apart from India’s sheer population, its political structure has also played a part in being chosen by Hollywood. Hollywood chose India over China as a better market for investing as “Compared to communist China, India is a market economy that offers greater returns on investment due to its size. India is also a democracy, which in a globalized context [,] upholds supremacy of the market and egalitarian ethos in line with Western definitions of the terms” (Rasul and Proffitt 573). So Hollywood is interested in co-productions with India for profit, the

population size of India, and the political alignments of India and the USA. These Hollywood co-productions are also intertextual in nature due to similar storylines and cross-cultural references which the audience can recognize.

Intertextuality also plays a part whereby certain references are made to the original film that an audience, which has been educated about the earlier film, can notice and appreciate. Hollywood has inspired and played a major role in India's entertainment market, be it through unlawful remakes and present co-productions with Indian companies. As Carolyn Jess-Cooke notes, "Hollywood casts the dark shadow of Western values over world cinemas, Bollywood included, to the extent that domestic audiences are no longer satisfied with home-grown movies" (11). This is applicable not only to films but also to television serials, as American sitcoms and TV series are seen as more favorable than those broadcast on Indian channels.³⁹ American sitcoms and series get a wider audience than Indian ones because the contemporary Indian channels show programs that are often far removed from reality with themes like extra-marital affairs that are exaggerated, restrictive traditional gender roles where women are always weak and subservient and men are always courageous and can get away with anything, weird supernatural and religious rituals and traditions, extremely wealthy families, and illogical and improbable storylines. On the other hand, American series, although far removed spatially, provide certain ideas on relationships and some events that can still resonate with the urban Indian audience. The other Indian alternative is various web-series which show relatable contemporary content.

In fact, due to the access to technology and social media, it is not difficult to actually find out whether the film that the audience is watching is a remake or an original. The audience

³⁹ Netflix is available to stream in India as are major international satellite channels, whereby viewers in India can see the same episode of a TV series on the day that it is released worldwide, or soon after.

becomes important in creating a remake from a foreign film industry as the contemporary audience is now more aware of films that are produced around the world, and not just the US. Furthermore, it has now become an issue of embarrassment if a film is detected as a remake without proper acknowledgment of the original source, especially when social media plays a role, as Mazumder notes. This has led to official remakes whereby Bollywood films are remade from Hollywood or other non-Indian film industries only after getting proper permission and legal agreements. Nyay Bhushan confirms that “increasing corporatization and global consolidation of the [Indian film] industry” are creating opportunities for official remakes (Bhushan) which are a contemporary phenomenon.⁴⁰ These official remakes have a sense of validation and approval as they are made with the proper legal permissions and cannot be called out on plagiarism. As a result, there seems to be two kinds of Hollywood remakes- unauthorized plagiarized versions and unauthorized official co-productions. The three films in this chapter fall in the former category.

An important question that comes up is why do Indian filmmakers copy Hollywood or are ‘inspired’ by Hollywood films? Suhasini Joshi points out “Copying or a “remake” was a time-efficient solution to the problem of low box-office revenue generation in the Bollywood film industry. Short life span and constant pressure to release more movies with demanding deadlines ensured that the writers were left with neither the time nor the incentive to experiment with creativity” (Joshi). Joshi also notes the reasons behind the late response that Hollywood had to plagiarism: the complex storylines made it difficult for the Hollywood producers to recognize the resemblance, the revenues from these remakes were too small for Hollywood to spend its

⁴⁰ Bhushan lists that French producers have sold remake rights *The Intouchables*; French banner Les Films Pelléas sold rights for three titles: comedy *After You* (*Après vous*) remade as *Nautanki Saala* (2013), *Beautiful Lies* remade as *Shimla Mirchi*; and *Priceless* will be remade by Disney-UTV India” (Bhushan).

resources on litigation, the slow judiciary system in India, and the disorganized status of the Indian film industry before it was awarded the status of an industry in 2001 that was the wakeup call to Hollywood (Joshi). No matter whether a remake of a Hollywood film is official or not, I believe they can fall under what Shakuntala Rao terms as “glocalization,”

The central project of glocalization is to understand the reconfiguration of locality and local subjects, to account for new cultural forms emerging at the intersections of the global and local, and to counter the frequently expressed thesis of homogenization that is often associated with global flows of labor, culture, and capitals. ... The appeal of glocalization is in its conceptual elasticity and its ability to understand that locales (global, regional, national, provincial, local) overlap and mutually influence contexts and identities (5).

Rao’s main idea is how cross-cultural forms are created and influenced by places and the things associated with those places. This is applicable to adaptation of Shakespeare’s plays by Bhardwaj, which I discussed in an earlier chapter, and to the three Bollywood remakes that I will discuss in this chapter. Keeping the rudimentary plan and themes similar, the adaptations are still an example of glocalization whereby they are remade to appeal to an Indian audience while still keeping some similarities to the original Hollywood films. Both Rao and Wright also discuss the hybrid nature of these films. Rao claims that “Bollywood film images have begun to show a productive hybrid relation between the local and global, and have begun to help rework a national identity within newly formed cultural parameters” (Rao 16). This is applicable to the three remakes where the protagonist re of Indian origin but their lifestyles are global in terms of their clothing choices, use of both Hindi and English in regular conversations, and a different perspective on gender roles. Wright describes the hybridity that “regardless of how much Bollywood remakes may ‘steal’ from outside sources or stray from their own conventions, they cannot be experienced or labelled as foreign, Western or non-Indian productions. Their methods

of appropriation or resulting hybridity are still a product of (and tied to) Bollywood's unique film language" (Wright 174). This hybridity is not only in terms of styles and techniques but also in terms of genre, which will be the focus of this chapter. Philip Lutgendorf also emphasizes the essential nature of Bollywood, "Indeed, the 'hybridity' of Indian popular cinema is another of its proverbial features: its pastiche and parody of foreign forms and practices and its frequent borrowing of camera shots, plot ideas, and musical styles" (230). This chapter will focus on the three films in terms of changes in genre, glocalization, Indianization, and hybridity, as shown in the characters and the story lines. As the family and community ties are an important aspect of Indian society, all the three films show the significance of kinship ties, while also showing some changes in the role of women.

***Sangharsh*: Love Story between Clarice Starling and Hannibal Lecter**

Sangharsh, released in 1998, is based on *The Silence of the Lambs*, released in 1991. The Hollywood film is adapted from the 1988 novel of the same name by Thomas Harris. It is a horror-thriller film where the protagonist, FBI trainee Clarice Starling, is on a mission to apprehend a serial killer, nicknamed 'Buffalo Bill' who skins the corpses of his female victims, with the help of Hannibal Lecter, a former psychiatrist and incarcerated cannibalistic serial killer. The film ends with the successful arrest of Buffalo Bill, Starling's graduation from the FBI academy, and Lecter escaping the police authorities. *Sangharsh*, which translates as "struggle" or "dilemma," is a psychological crime thriller in which the female protagonist, Reet Oberoi (Preity Zinta) is a trainee in the Central Bureau of Investigation's (CBI) research wing. She is given the task of arresting Lajja Shankar Pandey (Ashutosh Rana) who abducts and murders children, with the help of Professor Aman Varma (Akshay Kumar), an extremely intelligent member of the mob who was unjustly imprisoned. The film ends with the death of Lajja Shankar, a kiss between

Reet and Aman after Shankar's death and before Aman succumbs to his injuries, and a medal of honor for Reet. The main differences between the two films are the nature of the crimes committed by Bill and Lajja Shankar, and also the relationship between Starling and Lecter as opposed to that between Reet and Aman.

Being set in two different countries but in the same decade, both *Sangharsh* and *Silence of the Lambs* have some similarities: Reet and Clarice are fighting the patriarchy, both women try to avoid their family backgrounds for different reasons, Lecter and Aman are extremely intelligent, the latest victims of Bill and Sharma are the children of politicians, and both Lecter and Varma escape the police by handcuffing a police officer and bloodying up their own faces. Both the films, especially *Sangharsh*, show how women are treated in law enforcement. The film and its director, Tanuja Chandra, were hailed as revolutionary because of her woman-centric films, an idea that is still a risky proposition at the box-office. *Sangharsh*, as a remake, is innovative but ambiguous. As Wright notes, "For Bollywood and its audience, the cross-cultural remake can be paradoxically taken and used to indicate or advocate change, innovation, and progression within the Indian film industry" (Wright 173-74). So, any Hollywood remake in India can be seen as ground-breaking if it copies the original and incorporates ideas from the original. As these ideas are missing in India, when the audience sees them on the Indian screen, the remakes, with Hollywood themes, are seen as new and progressive. *Sangharsh* was seen as radical because it was made by a female director featuring a female protagonist. Although inspired by *Silence of the Lambs*, *Sangharsh* was actually ground-breaking as it featured a female protagonist who was strong, independent, willing to take on the larger law enforcement agency, and also vulnerable due to her family history. The paucity of female-oriented films and women directors made both *Sangharsh* and Tanuja Chandra revolutionary, but not in the sense

that Wright sees Hollywood remakes as revolutionary. Wright's observation does not always hold true, especially for the other two adaptations, *Action Replay* and *Tara Rum Pum*.

Both Clarice Starling and Reet Oberoi are similar and this made *Sangharsh* a refreshing change from the contemporary films that featured a heterosexual couple with the usual twists and turns, be it unwilling families, or an external villain, or social forces, but always with a leading hero, and an actress who was there to provide support to the hero or be in the background as a pretty thing. Reet is different in that she is the protagonist and on at least an equal footing with Varma. Starling, an FBI trainee wants to work in Behavioral Science after graduation and has a double major in psychology and criminology. Reet is similarly accomplished; she has won medals on state-level competitions in swimming, horse riding, and shooting and had joined a year back in the CBI's Research Wing. Nevertheless, the educational and professional accomplishments of Starling do not matter when she is seen as an object by the different male characters. Dr. Frederick Chilton, the director of the sanatorium that houses Lecter, makes a pass at Starling, calling her an attractive detective. Chilton also claims that Jack Crawford, who headed FBI's Behavioral Science Unit and assigned Starling to interview Lecter, had sent a pretty young woman (Starling) to turn Lecter on as Lecter had not seen a woman for eight years. When Starling asks for help from Dr. Pilcher, an etymologist, he also asks her what she does when she's not detecting and offers a suggestion of cheeseburgers and beer. At the end of the day, Starling's beauty and her gender are seen as more important than her characteristics as an FBI agent and as a person. Her beauty and gender are seen as the only things that distinguish her.

On the other hand, Reet is seen as inexperienced and her credibility is torn apart by Aman, when she first interviews him, like Lecter who made Starling uncomfortable. Lecter deduces Starling's family background: "A well-scrubbed, hustling rube with a little taste. Good

nutrition has given you length of bone, but you're not one generation away from white trash, are you Officer Starling? That accent you're trying so desperately to shed- pure West Virginia. What was your father, dear? Was he a coal miner?" (*The Silence of the Lambs*). Reet is also taunted by Aman when she cannot answer his questions precisely on the present population of India, perhaps a nod to the original where Lecter refers to eating the liver of a census taker. Reet's vulnerability makes her more realistic and also someone who needs protection. However, later Reet's strength, courage, and ingenuity manifest in the different situations that she faces. Aman's prison cell is filled with notebooks and sketches on the wall. When he sees Reet, he asks, "What kind of problem has befallen the government that it had to send in a woman?" (*Sangharsh*). This dialogue taunts Reet's gender and how women are seen as traditionally weak and need protection. Reet also tries to remove the stain of notoriety on her family background: her father won the highest peacetime military decoration but her brother was a traitor resulting in her fear of darkness. Her father, who was an army colonel, committed suicide. Aman helps Reet to overcome her fears, and apprehend Shankar, while also falling in love with her. Aman helping Reet is similar to Lecter helping Starling in that both the female protagonists need a male character to support and help them, reinforcing the idea that no matter how accomplished and strong women are, they still need male support.

Apart from the inclusion of songs in *Sangharsh*, there is a love relationship between Aman and Reet. When Starling visits Lecter for a second time, he coyly suggests that, "People will say we're in love" (*The Silence of the Lambs*). Similarly, Verma observes after Reet's visit that, "People will think that you [Reet] have fallen in love with me [Verma]" (*Sangharsh*). Reet does fall in love with him, as does he with her, unlike the Hollywood original. Having a love story in an Indian film is completely accepted by the directors, producers, and the audience,

irrespective of the genre of the film, be it the main focus or as a minor narrative strategy. Despite this difference, there are also examples of kinship and the corruption and inefficiency of the law enforcement in both the US and India. Starling is shown having only professional relationships without any family member and only a roommate at the FBI. On the other hand, Reet is shown having a family with only a surviving worrying grandmother and a boyfriend who does everything that she asks him to do. These two exemplify the two divergent attitudes towards relationships: whereas the US focuses on individuality, India focuses on families. Also, Reet's whole quest for apprehending Lajja Sharma is to prove herself and remove the stain on her family whereby she functions as the classical hero out on a quest. This addition of family histories is an important aspect of Indianization, as Ganti outlines that for a financially successful adaptation, filmmakers incorporate certain strategies, like adding emotions, expanding the narrative, and including songs (290). Admittedly, *Sangharsh* adds much more narrative to Reet's story and her relationships with Verma which would have seemed out of place in an American thriller like *The Silence of the Lambs*. In fact, there is even a song that is shot at a masquerade party that provides an escape for Reet and Aman from the police after Verma escapes from the police in the first place.

Reet's past and family background become reasons for her being taunted by the police officers of Mumbai, who had wrongfully incarcerated Aman and who did not want Aman's help to catch Lajja Shankar. The officers' insistence on hierarchy is also evident when they confront Reet on her mission to cooperate with Aman to catch Shankar. They demand that they should have been informed but Reet was hesitant because of the general corruption of the law force. The Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP), who was in charge, calls her a "foreign chick" because she speaks both in English and Hindi and later notes that she is only allowed to conduct research

and not hunt the criminal (*Sangharsh*). He advises her to file the report and not get involved with any thieves, even though this collaboration would have potentially helped to catch Shankar. He also makes clear that Reet should not expect any help from him as it is a police station, not a center for women's uplift or social organization.

Later, Reet uses her English-speaking skills to help Aman, who is still in police custody. She flashes her identification card announcing, "Reet Oberoi, CID officer. I have explicit instructions from the Ministry of Home Affairs to come and meet Mr. Aman Verma. The Joint Secretary has personally asked me to take care of this case. So if you don't mind [I would like to meet him]" (*Sangharsh*). Reet, who has an education in the English-medium school system, successfully uses her knowledge to confound and confuse the officers, who have probably been educated in the regional-language school system or know only some aspects of the English language. Perhaps to make up for his limited knowledge of spoken English, his inefficiency at letting Verma escape, and not being able to catch Shankar, the ACP later accuses Reet of having tainted blood because her brother was a terrorist who was tortured all night. In anger, Reet kicks the ACP, fights the other officers, and runs away. For the lead female actress to fight was revolutionary at that time, when heroines were largely expected to look beautiful, be the damsel in distress, and act as a background support to the lead male actor. Shoma A Chatterji confirms that "the male characters in a film are constructed in a way so that they treat their female counterparts as objects of their gaze, desire, oppression, humiliation, glorification, and celebration" (183). Reet, a strong female character, can stand on her own without too much support from the male characters, shows that she is not only intelligent and street-smart but can

also defend herself, a rarity in contemporary Indian cinema.⁴¹ She is similar to Starling in the manner that both women are trying to create their identities in a patriarchal world of law-enforcement. *Sangharsh* was path-breaking in its portrayal of Reet, which was possible because its female director could present a more nuanced characterization of Reet, rather than making her an object of male desire, which was the contemporary norm.

This change and Lajja Shankar's crimes are the major changes in the film which is a part of the process of understanding the demands of the film-going audience, "Throughout the filmmaking process, Hindi filmmakers justify their narrative, dramatic, and aesthetic choices according to what they believe audiences will accept and reject. In the process of trying to produce a 'hit,' filmmakers theorize about what audiences' motivations for seeing a film and how they derive pleasure from it" (Ganti 284). For instance, cannibalism although a universal taboo would not have been acceptable in the Indian religious context but child abduction and murder made Lajja Shankar an iconic villain, even resulting in an award for the actor who played the role, Ashutosh Rana. Child abduction and murder are common in India but cannibalism is not. The horror of cannibalism is markedly more than the kidnap and murder of children. Shankar kills children to achieve immortality as he had gotten a dream where goddess Kali orders him and he follows her orders, including the murders. In *The Silence of the Lambs*, Buffalo Bill skins his victims but this practice of skinning humans would not have worked in the Indian context as skinning is associated with animals in India. Skinning humans would have been unacceptable and is associated with the lower castes of India who skin dead animals for leather and also dispose of the carcasses of animals. Buffalo Bill murdered, skinned, and dumped

⁴¹ This has changed now with films released post -2000, like *Shakti: The Power*, *Mardaani*, *Chak de India!*, *Revolver Rani*, and *NH 10*, which feature the female protagonists capable of physically fighting men for different reasons.

his victims in water bodies, where murder and dumping the bodies would have been admissible but not skinning as Shankar is shown to be a Hindu and Shankar's caste would not have allowed him to skin humans nor animals. Both the cannibalism and skinning motifs are horrifying to the American audience but the US audience is more likely to be willing to watch a film that contains things they are horrified, than an Indian audience. Also, Lajja Shankar has more screen time than Buffalo Bill does because the audience also needs proper exposure to the villain to form a bond of hatred and loathing. Although Buffalo Bill was a transsexual, Shankar only cross-dresses to become a mother-like figure to the children whom he abducts. These creative liberties and the complete change of the villain and his motivations are an example of what Ganti terms as Indianization, a "practice of constituting difference—between Indian and the West, and more important, between filmmakers and audience" (Ganti 283). Audiences would have rejected cannibalism and skinning women but accepted child sacrifices on solar eclipses to achieve immortality, perhaps because Hinduism is the major religion of India. Solar eclipses are a rare occurrence and Hinduism considers them auspicious because the sun disappears during the eclipse and there are certain myths associated with the eclipse (Goswami). Similarly, Hinduism has a history of human sacrifice so the plot line of *Sangharsh* is partly based on truth.

One of the things that adaptations have created is an altered concept of the traditional male hero. *Sangharsh* is no different. Lajja Shankar is pure evil and there are no redeeming qualities about him, neither a troubled past nor a disturbing family history. It is hard to find villains and criminals that are similar to Shankar's character in present-day films. Buffalo Bill was still shown as having a past that contributed to his murders. Aman, who wants to become a better person because of Reet's passion and ideals, is the male hero but he is not a real criminal. Risking his life, he had helped to catch Shankar the first time but the police put him in jail on

fake charges. He has a brusque demeanor but his kindness is manifested after interacting with Reet. At one point he even claims that he wants to change himself after meeting Reet; he wants to be the person that he was earlier, morally upright and fighting for the good.

Racing Cars and Family Values: *Talladega Nights* and *Ta Ra Rum Pum*

Ta Ra Rum Pum, released in 2007, is a family-oriented sports drama. It serves as a cautionary tale on buying things on credit and provides moral lessons through the protagonist's life and family ties. It is the story about Rajveer Singh (Saif Ali Khan), also known as RV, who is passionate about racing and lives in New York City. He is the fastest tire changer on his racing team and becomes a successful racecar driver for Speeding Saddles, after being discovered by its manager, Harry. He falls in love with Radhika Shekhar Rai Banerjee (Rani Mukherji), a music major student at Columbia University. They get married and have two children, a daughter called Princess and a son called Champ. However, Rajveer has financial problems due to his uncontrolled spending (on credit). On the other hand, Radhika, despite being the daughter of a rich businessman, is extremely careful with money, ordering the cheapest wine on a double date and knowing the exact price of the Tiffany's ring that Rajveer proposes with. Later, Rajveer has an accident on the racing track and has to undergo surgery and therapy. After this, he is traumatized and cannot win any title. He loses everything, his family moves to a broken-down apartment, and he starts driving a cab to earn money. Radhika becomes a music teacher who plays at restaurants and events. The movie ends with Rajveer returning to the track and winning the title on New York Speedway.

The movie is loosely based on *Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby* where Ricky Bobby, like Rajveer, works on the pit crew and through a series of events, manages to win titles for Dennit Racing. However, he also crashes and suffers from trauma. Meanwhile, his best friend

marries his wife and he takes his two sons to live with his mother. Ricky's father had let him when he was young but he still left tickets for him at every race. Later, Ricky cannot drive and delivers pizza. His father helps him overcome his fears and he wins the race.

Ta Ra Rum Pum is one of the few films in Indian cinema that is based on racing cars, despite Indian films having car chase sequences which often defy the laws of physics. There have also been some films that have focused on cars but none that has auto racing as its main focus⁴². The main reason is that motorsport is not that developed in India.⁴³ That might be a possible reason for *Ta Ra Rum Pum*'s box office success. Furthermore, the distribution company for the film, Yash Raj Films, is associated with making big-budget films that are usually family friendly or at least get a universal rating by the censor board, though there have been exceptions. Yash Raj Films also cater to the diasporic Indian audience with foreign locations and characters who wear designer clothes, live in lavish houses, and are socially privileged. Rao observes that "Films increasingly began to depict India's shifting relationship with the world economy through images of a hybrid relation between the national and global" and this is also evident in *Ta Ra Rum Pum* with Rajveer living in Manhattan, and later in a fictional Indian neighborhood called Cabbie Alley (Rao 3). The dreams of immigrants to lead a better life often fall short, as indicated when Harry observes to Rajveer that "when a dream is shattered in New York, a new cab driver is born" (*Ta Ra Rum Pum*). Harry's philosophizing could have struck a chord with the diaspora audience who may not be that financially well-off but is still in a foreign country for the money and the opportunities.

⁴² The only other films that have significant car races as a narrative strategy are *Baazigar* (Gambler released in 1993) and *Race* (released in 2008).

⁴³ The Federation of Motor Sports Clubs of India is the official governing body of motorsport in India and first ever Formula One Indian Grand Prix took place in 2011 in Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh.

Ta Ra Rum Pum functions as what Wright terms as “*secret or concealed imitation*” because “there is often no guarantee that that the majority of the pan-Indian audience is even aware of the original” (Wright 139-140). It is hard to connect the remake to *Talladega Nights* unless someone had seen the movie when it was released in India and also seen the remake. The genre of *Ta Ra Rum Pum* falls under multiple categories like family film, romance, and drama, whereas *Talladega Nights* is a comedy. *Ta Ra Rum Pum* was suitably Indianized “to conform with the conventions of Indian cinema (Ganti 282). *Talladega Nights* with its emphasis on crude humor and double entendres would not have been accepted in a family film. However, both the films have a strong family component, which makes *Talladega Nights* more amenable to a remake like *Ta Ra Rum Pum*.

Ta Ra Rum Pum also expands the narrative through what Ganti describes as sub-plots or “‘parallel’ tracks—romantic, comedic, dramatic—[that] are seen as necessary additions” (293). Ganti notes that including emotions “leads to a greater narrative complexity because close family relationships provide moving stories of their own” (293). This is evident in the romance between Rajveer and Radhika and the problems that face, both financial and the obstacles that Radhika’s father raises; the comic scenes between the lead pair, specially their attitude towards money; and the dramatic scenes between the couple, especially the hardships that they face, and the chance in Rajveer’s character. Also, the whole gamut of emotions that are shown in the film, especially via the rise and fall of Rajveer, makes for an entertaining film. The relationships that he shares with his wife, children, and dog, and Radhika’s troubled relationship with her father, also provide for more narrative innovations. Ganti emphasizes that “From a Hindi filmmaker’s point of view, identification is... dependent on whether the portrayal of joys and sorrows, and dilemmas faced by the characters are able to resonate with- rather than replicate- audiences’ own experiences”

(Ganti 285). This audience identification with the protagonists' struggles can be seen in Rajveer's dependence on the credit system, Radhika's father raising problems to Rajveer's suitability as Radhika's life partner because of their educational, family, and economic backgrounds, and Rajveer's desperate attempts to keep his family safe and secure. These changes and the portrayals of Rajveer and Radhika show how a Hollywood film is remade to appeal to the local audiences, an example of the Rao's glocalization and Ganti's Indianization to change a film for the local audiences: "Glocalization is a recognition that when ideas, objects, institutions, images, practices, and performances, are transplanted to other places, they both bear the marks of history as well as undergo a process of cultural translation" (Rao 5).

Similarly, Ricky Bobby also faces hardships when his car crashes and he loses everything, his wife leaves him, and he resorts to delivering pizzas. Ricky's openly gay French Formula One rival Jean Girard and Rajveer's rival, Rusty Finkelstein, are both seen as the other in different ways. If Rusty was shown as an exaggerated gay character, like Girard, then the audience would not have gotten angry at him, and the laughter would have mitigated Rajveer's tragic situation.⁴⁴ Also, the tragedy of Rajveer is magnified because of his family, consisting of his wife and their two children, who love him, care for him, and trust him, a portrayal that is similar to Ricky's family, consisting of his parents and his two sons. *Talladega Nights* focuses on families and the backgrounds of the characters, a trait that is extremely common in Indian cinema. Both Rusty's characterization and Rajveer's tragedy are examples of the glocalization of *Talladega Nights*; Rusty is portrayed as evil and straight and Rajveer faces hardships. The latter

⁴⁴ There have been openly homosexual characters in Indian cinema but often as a way to provide comic relief, although that has been changing with contemporary films portraying homosexual characters in a more serious, thought-provoking light.

change also shows a change in genre from comedy to family tragedy when *Talladega Nights* is transferred to a different countries and audience.

Like Aman, Rajveer's character is not the typical masculine hero. He is a part of the current generation of male protagonists who are not afraid to show their emotions, who apologize when they are wrong, who are shown as more human and consequently more relatable. Sudhavna Deshpande observes that the "new, liberalized hero is neither angry nor is he particularly anti-establishment. He is on the other hand, rich and conformist in his social attitudes. ... Additionally, the new hero, for the first time in Hindi cinema, is someone without a past and consequently a memory" (Deshpande 187). Rajveer starts off as poor but becomes rich; he dropped out of school after his parents and then he starts his racing career as a tire changer on the racing. He is easy-going but ambitious and his past is just a reference that is never described in detail. He is not a perfect person, and his faults are many. And yet, his life and his actions are so outrageous that they are unrealistic.

Rajveer's lack of a formal education is mocked by Radhika's rich and educated father, Shubho Shekhar Rai Banerjee, who asks her why he needs a degree if he is so successful, famous, and happy. Shubho believes that a person needs to have a more intellect than does Rajveer to be Radhika's life partner. On the other hand, Radhika is majoring in music at Columbia, with electives like French, history, Elizabethan poetry, world history, and mathematical logic. Shubho suggests his daughter to have an affair with Rajveer and forget about him. Shubho's predictions about Rajveer become true when later Rajveer loses everything because he cannot race. As he had bought everything on credit and installments, he loses his car and his house in Manhattan; the furniture and even the wedding ring that he had proposed Radhika with are sold by the bank. Through all this, Rajveer takes responsibility for his actions

and tries different things to earn money so that he can continue to keep his children in their old school. He and Radhika decide that they will not reveal the truth about their financial situation to the children; instead they tell them that they are on a reality show called *Don't Worry, Be Happy*, where each family is given a limited amount of money and so Rajveer's family pretend to be poor. Rajveer starts delivering pizzas, like Ricky Bobby, to earn money. However, he does not want to drive a cab as his pride does not allow him to beg for passengers. Apart from that he is ready to do anything like wash utensils at restaurants and change tires. After an incident, he goes to the owner of his racing car company for a loan. The owner insults him with charity. This proves to be the turning point in Rajveer who proclaims, "I got used to losing so lost courage. And then losing courage, I lied. I cheated those who helped me. And today, I came to beg. If you had not insulted me, I would not have realized how low I have fallen. My wife, my children, think me to be their hero. They think me to be the best husband, best father, [and] best racer. And for them I will become the best" (*Ta Ra Rum Pum*). Next, he forms his own racing team with his friend, and a crew comprised of the Indian cab-drivers from New York City, finally winning the race.

On the other hand, Radhika's character goes from that of a young carefree student to a matured mother of two. She had dropped out of college and her lack of a degree did not help in getting her a job when they lose everything. Her earnings go towards rent, electricity, food, and subway tokens. She plays the piano at restaurant lobbies, birthday parties, and funerals, and brings food from parties home to her children. Radhika's character is realistic as she is a sacrificing mother who wants to shield her children from life's unexpected problems but also has an emotional breakdown when she hears of her husband's lies to collect money for paying the school fees. For a film industry that primarily focuses on heterosexual love among the youth and

twenty-somethings, this film is interesting in its representation of a couple from their days of courtship to raising two children among complications. Radhika's thrifty and resourceful character helps her family out. Her pride forces her to tear up her father's check for fifty thousand dollars. She is secure that Rajveer will take care of her and their children. However, Rajveer admonishes her and says that he would have tolerated his father-in-law's insults if that would have helped their children.

These kinship and family ties make *Ta Ra Rum Pum* a film that is generically a sports film, with doses of family entertainment, comedy, tragedy, and melodrama, whereas *Talladega Nights* is more of a comic-sports film. Even Ricky Bobby's accident on the track, his recovery, and his return to the racing track are humorous and exaggerated. The former has multiple genres to appeal to various kinds of audience with different preferences whereas the latter's specific two genres make it appealing to only a section of an audience. This contrast suggests that an Indian film with a big budget has to appeal to a large audience to be a success at the box-office and that multiple genres make an Indian audience believe that it has maximized its investment in paying for and watching a film. It is simple economics for the producers and the audience of Indian films. Philip Lutgendorf observes that

Whereas Western viewers are sometimes distressed by what seems to them a *mélange* of genres (comedy, action adventure, romance, and so on) and too-abrupt transitions in mood (a tragic scene yielding to a comic one, and then to a romantic song set in a fantasied landscape), Indian audiences take such shifts in their stride and may even complain if a film does not deliver the anticipated range of emotions (though they also at times complain of pointlessness in film sequences if the moods evoked do not in some sense cohere into a satisfying whole (238).

Ta Ra Rum Pum can be seen as a *mélange* of genres where elements of romance, family drama, tragedy, and comedy are merged into a cohesive whole. The inclusion of so many genres is an example of both glocalization and Indianization of *Talladega Nights*. Other examples that help *Ta Ra Rum Pum* to be an effective remake of *Talladega Nights* are the title track of the film featuring a cartoon bear family and corresponding to Rajveer's family ends and a dramatic sequence begins whereby Radhika confronts Rajveer's lies and deception. This inclusion of a cartoon song sequence was accepted by the audience as this film was geared towards a family-friendly audience. Audience acceptance matters because of the financial nature of films where huge amounts of money are invested to appeal to both an Indian as well as a global Indian diasporic audience, and adding in a cartoon song makes the film family-friendly. This decision is similar to the numerous decisions that filmmakers take as their "claims about audience tastes and preferences are based on a mix of intuition, observation of box-office failures and successes, and first-hand viewing of films in theatres with audiences" (Ganti 284). Similarly, the songs in a film also straddle and connect different genres and strategies and are an example of both the Indianization and glocalization of the original. For example, songs also portray the passage of time, as seen in "Hey Shona" that shows the development of Rajveer and Radhika's relationship and Rajveer's wins on the racing track. Ganti observes that filmmakers operate with a distinctive sense of moral boundaries, usually pertaining to ideal kinship behavior, that cannot be transgressed when determining whether a Hollywood film is suitable for adaptation" (288). This is seen when Ricky Bobby's wife marries his best friend and his father leaves the family when he was just a child. Both the remarriage and the abandonment would not have fitted in a family-friendly film like *Ta Ra Rum Pum*. Moreover, Ganti's observation that filmmakers act as "cultural mediators" as they determine which Hollywood film can be adapted and how is seen in

what filmmakers pick, choose, edit, and modify (290). This is seen in choosing remarriage over a stable married family, not commenting on the rival's sexuality in the adaptation, expanding the significance of the family ties, and making the remake more suitable to a diasporic Indian audience. Apart from transforming gender roles, Bollywood remakes also transform and expand the genres of the Hollywood films.

Ta Ra Rum Pum can be seen as a family film, a genre that is politicized in Indian popular culture. The family film is an important genre that is used to be a vehicle of perpetuating gender roles and Indian family traditions, especially for a diaspora audience. The family film is the perfect balance of multiple genres—romance, drama, and comedy, and as a result, the quintessential Bollywood film. It will almost never have a villain, be acceptable to a young audience, have elements of relationship and family ties, not be violent or contain any sexual implications, while often having a romantic heterosexual couple at the center. Monika Mehta analyzes family films thusly:

In the era of globalization, family films have played a significant role in reimagining the nation, audiences, and markets. These films affirm India's moral foundations by representing its 'traditions' and announce India's triumphant entry into the global market by managing to persistently include a wide array of multinational brand names in its narratives. In these films, women become pivotal for the production of the patriarchal Indian family and men are charged with spreading seeds of liberalization within and beyond the borders of the Indian nation state" (Mehta 143).

This is noticed in the extravagant lifestyles of Rajveer and his family before his financial problems. They are a traditional family in terms of Radhika's family duties but she is also unconventional in going against her father's wishes. Radhika is the so-called modern woman but she has chosen to drop out of college to pursue her life with Rajveer. Radhika's life decisions

become a cautionary tale as she cannot get any decent well-paid employment opportunities as she does not have a formal degree, stressing the importance of education in the Indian social context. The family films have an important function to fulfil for a diasporic audience that looks into these films as a way to be connected to the native country, perpetuate traditions and gender roles, and also mirror some of the choices that this audience makes.

Mehta argues that “The gendered division of labor operative within the territorial boundaries of the nation state has been intensified in the diaspora, which assiduously seeks to (re)create Indian traditions” (Mehta 143). Radhika is an excellent mother who does not eat so that her share of the food can be used to feed her children, a classic trope of motherhood that was popular in the Indian cinema of the 1960s to the 1990s. The family dynamics mirror a somewhat realistic narrative of how the parents cope with a major financial issue and its repercussions on the children. The film ends on a happy note of Rajveer continuing his racing track career and Radhika graduating with a formal educational degree. *Ta Ra Rum Pum* falls under the genre of family films which “in turn contribute to fostering new relations between the Bombay film industry, the Indian state, and the Indian diasporic communities” (Mehta 143). This and other big-budget films are almost like an education manual on how the Indian native should behave abroad while still valuing Indian traditions and holding on to the Indian culture. For instance, Rajveer proposes to Radhika in the morning after living together for a while but there is no scene of them indulging in pre-marital sex. Radhika is also shown to be the dominant and strong partner as she takes all the important decisions, takes care of the children, and also reprimands Rajveer when the need arises. Rajveer is later supported by the community of cab drivers who are of Indian origin showing how important an Indian community is, especially in a foreign country.

Ta Ra Rum Pum focuses on some experiences of the Indian diaspora through the genre of the family film, while also borrowing from romance, drama, and sports. Steve Neale posits that genres consist of “specific systems of expectations and hypothesis that spectators bring with them to the cinema and that interact with the films themselves during the course of the viewing process. These systems provide spectators with a means of recognition and understanding. They help render films, and the elements within them, intelligible and therefore explicable” (161). Like any other Indian film, *Ta Ra Rum Pum* has multiple genres and this mixture of genres into one multi-genre film is something that the Indian audience knows and expects to see. So it is not uncommon for a horror or suspense thriller film to have songs, either as a part of the storyline or in the background. *Ta Ra Rum Pum* shows the rise, fall, and eventual rise of Rajveer, and his family, while also providing more strength and power to his wife, Radhika. As with any family film “which wove a happy marriage between Indian ‘traditions’ and the global market,” this film also shows how Indian traditions can still be an important part of the diaspora despite life-changing problem (Mehta 135). The characters perform their gender roles but Radhika is given more agency and authority while Rajveer is shown to be short-sighted and immature, character traits that were also seen in the male protagonists in the Hindi film adaptations of the Bengali novels in the last chapter. Despite drawing elements from *Talladega Nights*, *Ta Ra Rum Pum* reinvents the crudely comic sports film into a sanitized family film to appeal to a large audience, both in India and abroad.

A Trip to the Past to Change the Present: *Back to the Future* and *Action Replay*

Focusing on audience expectations and the expansion of different genres in a film, Indian directors and producers often play safe with genres, focusing on romance, drama, and comedy, with established gender roles rather than venturing into science fiction, horror, or films with

diverse and broad gender characteristics. This creative choice may be a result that in India, science fiction and superhero films face mixed reactions at the box office. Earlier, mythological films have been successful but fantasy films have not.⁴⁵ One reason for this can be the importance of religion and spirituality, although this is changing. There are more authors in India now who are writing science fiction novels and graphic novels but the films that deal with science fiction do not, usually, fare well. Another reason can be the risky nature of the production as science fiction films require investment in terms of technology and special effects and the producers might not get their return. However, special effects and fancy technology are a viable option in a film that does not focus exclusively on science fiction.⁴⁶

Action Replay, released in 2010, was a financial flop at the box-office but is still one of the few Bollywood films that fared better than other forgettable Bollywood science fiction and fantasy films. The film focuses on Bunty (Aditya Roy Kapoor), who travels back in time, before his parents, Kishen (Akshay Kumar) and Mala (Aishwarya Rai Bachchan), got married. Bunty does not want to get married because his parents are always fighting and arguing and on the night of their thirty-fifth marriage anniversary are contemplating a divorce. He goes back to fix his parents' relationship and he is successful. The film ends with him returning to the present, Kishen and Mala being happy, and Bunty proposing to his girlfriend, Tanya (Sudeepa Singh), whose grandfather built the time machine. The story is a remake of *Back to the Future*, released in 1985, where the teenager Marty McFly accidentally travels back in time and becomes his

⁴⁵ *Mr. India* (1987) and the *Krish* superhero series, consisting of two films, and a prequel, were successful but a futuristic robot focused *Ra-One* (2011) was not. *Love Story 2050* (2008) was a box-office disaster but the recent short film, *Carbon: The Story of Tomorrow* (2017) was moderately successful. Science fiction films have been more popular and have been produced more in number in film industries of south India, than in Bollywood.

⁴⁶ For example, the two part epic fantasy *Bahubali, The Beginning* and *The Conclusion*, was the highest grossing film in the years in which the two parts were released as well as the highest grossing franchise in India. It was simultaneously shot in Tamil and Telugu and later dubbed in different Indian languages. It had spectacular animation but it was not science fiction

mother's love interest. Through a series of events, McFly manages to make his parents fall in love with each other, and the film ends on happy note but a suggestion for a sequel. However, the director of the film, Vipul Shah, insisted that it was inspired by H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (Indo-Asian News Service). Furthermore, the film starts with the claim, "Based on Shobhana Desai's Gujarati play *Action Replay*" (*Action Replay*). Possibly, Shah claimed to be inspired from a Gujarati play, rather than *Back to the Future* because of fears of plagiarism and an expensive lawsuit.⁴⁷ Although this may be true, both the Hollywood film and the Bollywood adaptation share the same story-line of a son travelling back in time to help his parents fall in love with each other and consequently, changing the present.

Action Replay, like many other Indian films, is not just science fiction but also is a romantic comedy, which is common in an Indian film. There are many love stories in this film, each with a different dynamic at play, and with varying levels of gender expectations. There is the main story of Kishen and Mala, whose marriage is that of convenience, and has varying levels of power at play. Their son, Bunty seems to have a good relationship with his girlfriend, Tanya who, unconventionally, proposes to him, but he is afraid of commitment. Then there is Kundan (Rannvijay Singh) who loved Mala and whose teasing of Kishen led to their argument. And lastly, there is Mala's friend, Mona (Neha Dhupia), who falls in love with Bunty when he travels back in time, and later, marries Kundan after Bunty changes the past.

The gender expectations are reversed in *Action Replay*, with Mala and her widowed mother assuming more dominant roles than Kishen and his widower father. Kishen's role is slightly based on Marty McFly's father, George, in terms of being meek, kind, unassuming, and

⁴⁷ Interestingly, Shah filed and won a lawsuit against the makers of a Bengali film that was remade from one of Shah's own films.

a slight push-over. Like Biff Tannen bullying George in *Back to the Future*, Kishen is also bullied by Kundaan, who was in love with Mala. There is a literal disrobing of Kishen on his marriage anniversary that makes Mala and the other guests laugh at Kishen's plight. On the other hand, Lorraine, Marty's mother is overweight and depressed. Similarly, Mala confesses angrily to Kishen that she is unhappy in their marriage and her extravagant shopping habits at malls are a way for her to be happy and avoid the reality of their relationship. Kishen has a restaurant business where he spends all his time to avoid being with Mala. Mala falls under the expected role of a woman who uses retail therapy to escape her problems, and Kishen's association with the restaurant is somewhat interesting as he is the manager as well as the cook, as shown through his past. India has seen the emergence of male chefs and Kishen falls into this category. These similarities and differences make a remake uniquely Indian. A R. Thomas acknowledges, "No successful Bombay filmmaker simply copies Western films. Of course, most borrow openly both story ideas and sometimes complete sequences from Hollywood, Hong Kong, and other foreign cinemas, but borrowings must always be integrated with Indian filmmaking conventions if the film is to work with the Indian audience" (Thomas 161-62). The filmmaker has to be always aware of what the audience wants, expects, and appreciate but sometimes, even that experience might not be enough to save a film as both *Sangharsh* and *Action Replay* did not fare well at the box-office, unlike *Ta Ra Rum Pum*.

The gender expectations in both the films throw up interesting parallels. *Action Replay*'s flashback is set in 1970s India and *Back to the Future* is set in 1950s America but both have similar gender expectations despite being set in different time periods and countries. In *Back to the Future*, Marty's mother, Lorraine has very strict ideas on how a girl is expected to behave:

Lorraine: I don't like her [Jennifer, Marty's girlfriend], Marty. Any girl who calls a boy is just asking for trouble.

Linda [Marty's sister]: Oh Mom, there's nothing wrong with calling a boy.

Lorraine: I think it's terrible. Girls chasing boys. When I was your age I never chased a boy, or called a boy, or sat in a parked car with a boy.

Linda: Then how am I supposed to ever meet anybody?

Lorraine: Well, it will just happen. Like the way I met your father.

Linda: That was so stupid, Grandpa hit him with the car (*Back to the Future*).

The present Lorraine does not approve of girls who chase after boys, as boys are supposed to pursue and court girls, not the other way round. However, in the flashback, the audience gets to see how Lorraine essentially throws herself at Marty, who was hit by the car, instead of his father, George. So, the Lorraine in the present would have disapproved of her actions in the past. When Marty realizes that his mother is falling in love with him, he does everything possible to get his parents together, an idea that is modified in *Action Replay*. Also, reversing gender expectations, Tanya, Bunty's girlfriend proposes to him, more than once, and he refuses because of his parents' unhappy marriage. Tanya exemplifies the contemporary girlfriend who is not afraid to make the first move of proposing to her boyfriend, an action that is conventionally attributed to the man. He accepts her in the end after repairing his parents' marriage and realizing that there are happy marriages, too.

Like cannibalism, a relationship between a mother and her son or a father and his daughter is a taboo. As the Indian audience could not have accepted a relationship between Bunty and his mother, Mala, even though it would have been unintentional, Bunty tries to get his parents together by overcoming other problems like Kishen's unattractiveness and shyness and taming Mala's aggression and outspokenness. Shamita Das Gupta's observation that the bad woman in Indian film "has been depicted as westernized, individualistic and sexually aggressive, ready to lead men to their ruin" (176) is slightly applicable to Mala, who is westernized as seen

in her clothes, individualistic in her independence, and verbally and gesturally aggressive. She does not ruin Kishen but is definitely instrumental in making him a stronger and assertive person. So she has some traits but is not the bad woman as she is the main female protagonist of the film.

Both Mala and Kishen seem to have reversed gender expectations as Mala is masculine in her manner of speech and actions while Kishen is feminine in his meekness and submissiveness. Their problems are shown to be the results of social expectations on their parents, Mala's widowed mother, Bholi Devi, and Kishen's widower father, Rai Bahadur Dhyanchand. Kishen confesses to Bunty,

After my mother passed away, my father did not marry so that I will not get a stepmother. And I took on all the household responsibilities. Kishen became Kitchen Kumar. Since then, for my father, I am his son and his life partner [as I took care of his life and the house]. I take care of my father in the house and the customers in the restaurant. This was my life. And now you tell me, Bunty, after all these responsibilities, how could I be in sync with the world? (*Action Replay*).

This shows how Kishen takes on the so-called female responsibilities to take care of his father and the business and results in Kishen becoming meek, unsmart, and to a certain extent, silly. Kishen's feminine qualities make him a figure of sympathy, with his buck teeth and long hair, and this confession spurs Bunty to work harder to unite his parents. When Bunty confronts Mala about her habit of making fun of Kishen, celebrating his weaknesses, and accusing her of being stone hearted, she tells him,

The person [Mala] who does not have a father and whose mother goes to work, has to be strong in front of the world or the world will not let us live in peace. After my father passed away, my mother tolerated a lot of things. When she [Mala's mother, Bholi Devi] went to shop for groceries, the shopkeeper would purposefully try to touch her [Bholi Devi's] hands. When she visited the doctor, he would repeatedly get her to breathe [so that he could touch her chest with his stethoscope]. My mother was beautiful but alone. One day, a drunk entered our house with a marriage garland. She started shouting in fear. After that, she

decided, “Mala, if you want to live, kick the world and live [as the world is a predator]. The world is for strong people. If you are weak, you will have to tolerate [the dilemmas]” (*Action Replayy*).

Seeing her mother harassed on regular basis forces Mala to adopt a strong tough attitude so that she cannot be hurt as her weaknesses will make her vulnerable. Mala’s character is seen as masculine because she is outspoken, aggressive, and emotionally strong, reversing the typical gender roles in the film. She is neither a tomboy nor a lesbian and she can be feminine as seen in her choice of clothing, her gesture to please Kishen, and later her acceptance of Kishen’s proposal.

Despite these reversed gender roles in Mala and Kishen, the film still has Indian sensibilities. Shiela Nayar argues that “finished adaptations from foreign works are less remakes than extracted skeletons: plot repositories molded and shaped for a more sufficient and efficient cultural retelling. Even given the filmmakers’ borrowing, stealing and blatant plagiarism, these finished products are *indisputably* Indian” (Nayar 74-75). *Action Replayy* does have the bare skeleton of *Back to the Future* of a son who goes back in time to save/modify his parents’ relationship but it also has the components to make it an Indian film—emotional melodrama, bright flashy sets, and song sequences, while also portraying the importance of family. It is also appropriately glocalised and Indianized with a cultural retelling of the love story of Mala and Kishen undergoing a transformation and fall in love with each other, and not Mala and Bunty, to show the sanctity of Indian culture and preserved the gender status quo. Towards the end of the film, both Kishen and Mala have settled in their conventional gender roles, Kishen is aggressive with strong opinions and Mala is submissive, kind, and loving. Kishen and Mala are very much in love with each other because of Bunty’s intervention in their history. From Das Gupta’s

definition of a so-called bad girl, Mala transforms to a woman who meets the criteria described by Geetanjali Gangoli: “To be acceptable, women are allowed to look ‘Westernized,’ but demonstrate that they have not lost ‘Hindu’ values of chastity and modesty” (Gangoli 59). Mala changes but she is a perfect life-partner to Kishen and everyone lives happily ever after, an ending that is acceptable by the audience.

In addition to being culturally and generically appropriate, there are some similarities between *Back to the Future* and *Action Replay* that show how gender roles and genres are transformed based on audience expectations, especially that both the fathers, George McFly and Kishen, are weak figures who need the intervention of their sons to be with the mothers, Lorraine and Mala. Both George and Kishen are mild-mannered individuals who are bullied by the people around them, be it an employer or a wife. Both the films also have the bullies, who dominate the fathers, Biff who is George’s classmate in high school and who tries to sexually assault Lorraine, and Kundan who is Mala’s friend, wants to marry Mala, and disrobes Kishen. Lastly, Dr. Emmett ‘Doc’ Brown who invents the time machine in *Back to the Future* has a dog called Einstein, and when Bunty first meets Tanya’s grandfather, Anthony Gonzalves, he asks her, “You didn’t tell me that your grandfather is Albert Einstein?” (*Action Replay*). These similarities can suggest the appeals that *Back to the Future* has for an audience, as Ganti argues: “Hollywood films that are perceived as having the potential to be adapted for an Indian context are described as having elements of ‘universal appeal,’ those that are not labelled as ‘regional.’ (287). A quest for a son ensuring that his parents fall in love and be happy is an appealing universal motif, especially in the Indian context that is so focused on family and community. Modifying the similarities and the gender roles are examples of glocalizing and Indianizing *Back to the Future*.

Furthermore, these similarities and the major modifications of *Back to the Future* place *Action Replaay* within important currents in contemporary Bollywood cinema. As Wright observes, “Bollywood mainstream cinema is in a state of flux where a *bricolage* of multiple genres, styles, and conventions continue to cancel out or invalidate each other. The remake is the prime example of the current identity collapse of Bollywood cinema; however, it also paradoxically signals the beginnings of a new form of cinema” (Wright 187). *Action Replaay* participates in numerous genres (including romance, drama, comedy, and family), with two distinct styles, one focusing on the contemporary 2000s time and the other on the 1970s, with bright colors, retro settings, and flashy clothes. This fondness for nostalgia is common in Hindi films but slightly uncommon in having both styles in the same film, unless flashbacks are shown. Usually a film has only one kind of time setting, past, present, or future. However, the multiple genres, like the other two remakes, are a part of the Indianization of Hollywood films.

All the three cross-cultural remakes, *Sangharsh*, *Ta Ra Rum Pum*, and *Action Replaay*, are examples of how Hollywood films like *The Silence of the Lambs*, *Talladega Nights*, and *Back to the Future* are Indianized and glocalized for a global Indian audience through the use of Bollywood tropes and mixing of different genres. These creative choices are often at the discretion of the director, the producer, and the writers of the screenplays. Due to a shortage of time and the investment of huge amounts of money, writers often resorted to plagiarizing from Hollywood films which they thought would appeal to the Indian audience. The main difference between the adaptations and the remakes is that former, especially those of Shakespearean plays and Indian novels, credit their source but unofficial remakes do not. With globalization, Hollywood is aware of plagiarism in the Indian film industry and has started working to co-produce films in India and other markets so as to maximize profits while also forging

connections with the local talent, productions houses, and the audience. This trend of Hollywood co-productions will continue with the finding of new markets for popular culture and where the contemporary audience, like in India and its diaspora, will dictate the creative and genre choices of the new films.

Conclusion

This project has analyzed adaptations in the Hindi film industry, specifically adaptations from the Hindu epics, Shakespeare's plays, and Bengali novels written before India's independence, as well as remakes of Hollywood films. Apart from a noteworthy amount of scholarly attention focused on Vishal Bhardwaj's Shakespearean trilogy and Neelam Sidhar Wright's *Bollywood and Postmodernism: Popular Indian Cinema in the 21st Century*, there has not been any significant work done on adaptations, especially on the ways gender roles have changed in terms of women getting more freedom and becoming more than just accessories to the male protagonist and men becoming more realistically human rather than being heroic and always brave.

Given the vast size of the Hindi film industry, it is impossible to analyze all the adaptations that have been released and are still being released, be it official remakes of Hollywood, remakes of films that have been released earlier, or literary adaptations of novels by authors like Charles Dickens, Fyodor Dostoevsky, O. Henry, and Jane Austen. There have also been adaptations of films written by Indian authors like R. K. Narayan, Amrita Pritam, Ruskin Bond, Munshi Premchand, and Chetan Bhagat, which needs more analysis and attention. Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* has also been adapted in different forms in the film industry, contributing to the popularity of that play in India.

There has also been some research on how gender has been portrayed in India and despite how things are being changed—be it storylines to accommodate feminine perspectives, plots with women as protagonists, and/or showing women who can be more relatable by the audience especially in the life choices, relationships and clothing—there still much work needed to make the Indian film industry more friendly towards women, overturning ideas of toxic masculinity

and normalizing healthy relationships rather than portraying masculine stalking as normal and feminine rejection as unacceptable.

Moreover, only the last chapter looks at how Bollywood has transformed genres of Hollywood films to make them acceptable to Indian audiences. The other three chapters look at how epics, plays, and novels are transformed on to screen but the focus of the dissertation has been more on gender and audience expectations. There are many films that have been similarly adapted from other novels and short stories and these cross-cultural remakes are similar to how Shakespearean plays have been adapted across the globe, keeping the contemporary space and time in mind. There have also been remakes of Indian films that have released in the 1970s, 1980s, and even as recent as 1990s which showcase more of how audiences dictate the choices as these films are updated but there does not seem to be too much of gender concerns. Perhaps there can be more research on the direction that these films take in preserving the original plot but also focusing on how audiences have reacted to the directors' creative choices. More focused research on the audience would take the adaptations into new directions as well as provide authentic answers on what the audience really wants to see in an adaptation in the Indian film industry.

Possibly, with the recent popularity of Bollywood as well as critical reception of films of the Hindi film industry, India will play a bigger role in influencing the global cultural industry and the Hindi cinema will be seen as deserving more serious research rather than a dismissal of being only melodramatic and featuring songs and dance sequences without a cohesive logical plotline.

From India to Hollywood- A Full Circle

One result of Bollywood's growing popularity and influence is that quite a few of the Indian actors have made the crossover to Hollywood. And this does not include the diasporic crossover films of the Merchant Ivory productions, Gurinder Chadha, Deepa Mehta, and Mira Nair. Instead this journey is about the other actors who have played a part in mainstream Hollywood films and television series. The most prominent examples are Priyanka Chopra, who has not only starred in numerous Indian films but has also worked in the American TV series, *Quantico*; Deepika Padukone in *XXX: Return Of Xander Cage*; Aishwarya Rai Bachchan in *The Pink Panther 2* and *The Last Legion*; Irrfan Khan, who acted in *The Life of Pi*, *Jurassic World*, *Inferno*, and *The Amazing Spider-Man*. One might also mention older actors who have acted in earlier Hollywood films, including Ben Kingsley who changed his name from Krishna Bhanji and is known for his role in *Gandhi* among numerous other films. There are also other actors who have Indian roots but are American; Uttara Choudhury lists actors who have played major roles that are not typically exotic, Oriental ones, such as Dev Patel (*Slumdog Millionaire*, *The Last Airbender*, and *Lion*), Mindy Kaling (*The Mindy Project*), Sarita Choudhury (*Homeland*), Kal Penn (*How I Met Your Mother*), Senthil Ramamurthy (*Heroes*), and Indira Varma (*Game of Thrones*) among others. It is not just actors and production houses who are becoming a part of Hollywood. Ankur Pathak reports that Amazon Video has collaborated with Vishal Bhardwaj, director of the Shakespearean trilogy among others, and Vidhu Vinod Chopra, while Netflix has signed Anurag Kashyap, director of *Dev.D* among others. These examples show that as a result of globalization, a reverse domination is happening in Hollywood with people of Indian origin becoming a part of mainstream popular culture, and the US accepting actors of color in a bid to become more diverse. These examples also show that Hollywood is steadily losing ground as the

dominating culture industry. Consequently, there is a gradual convergence of national film industries, like India, into one giant global cultural industry, be it through co-productions or hiring actors of color.

So, perhaps, Hollywood is becoming more diverse with the #oscarsowhite hashtag on Twitter and Frances McDormand's mention of inclusion rider at the end of her speech for the Oscar for the Best Actress. And perhaps, Hollywood will see more actors of color acting roles that do not focus on their races, ethnicities, or countries of origin but on the character itself. Possibly, the Indian film industry, while making official remakes from Hollywood will also appreciate the progressive gender roles and focus on audience expectations, rather than blindly copy an American film. And Hollywood will continue to have co-productions with international production houses and be strict on illegal Indian remakes. And most importantly, perhaps Indian filmmakers will only make official legal remakes and adaptations, rather than unauthorized remakes, in fear of long litigation and shame at stealing original ideas and a lack of creativity. But most importantly, the official Hollywood remakes will be better produced and more readily accepted by the contemporary audience because of the relativity of the directors and appropriate glocalization and Indianization, rather than a frame-to-frame copy without any cultural considerations.

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