

Drifting West:

How the Presence of an Indian Diaspora Has Changed Bollywood

Rachel Turner

Senior Seminar in Dance

Fall 2012

Thesis director: Professor L. Garafola

© Rachel Turner

Americans are often transfixed by the grandeur and romance of Bollywood films, not realizing that many contemporary Bollywood movies are just as shallow as contemporary Hollywood films. Learning about Bollywood films after becoming involved in the Indian dance scene at Columbia was a shock to a Westerner like myself, as I was surprised by many aspects of the films that seemed very Western. In Bollywood classic *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (*The Brave-Hearted Gets the Bride*, 1995),¹ actress Kajol abandons her traditional sari, instead dancing in the rain in a short, white, and increasingly transparent outfit. In *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (*Never Say Goodbye*, 2006),² Hindi lyrics were replaced by English in the chorus of a dance number, and the lyrics alluded to partying all night. In the same film, the lead characters engaged in an adulterous affair. In the more recent *Ra.One* (2011),³ the voice of the male lead was sung not by a prominent voiceover singer, but by American musical sensation Akon. At first, these echoes of the West seemed to be oddities within the Bollywood films, but as I watched more and more films and began to consider them in a broader cultural context, I realized they were not exceptions but part of a trend.

The differences between more recent and older Bollywood films can be attributed to a Westernization of Bollywood. In the last few decades, there has been mass emigration from India to the West. This emigration has many causes and has resulted in a large Indian population in Europe and North America. The members of this Indian diaspora are often referred to as non-

¹ *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (*The Brave Hearted Will Take Away the Bride*). Produced by Yash Chopra. Directed by Aditya Chopra. 3 hr. 9 min. Yash Raj Films, 1995.

² *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (*Never Say Goodbye*). Produced by Hiroo Yash Johar and Karan Johar. Directed by Karan Johar, 3 hr. 35 min. Dharma Productions/Yash Raj Films, 2006.

³ *Ra.One*. Produced by Gauri Khan. Directed by Anubhav Sinha. 2 hr. 34 min. Eros International Ltd./Red Chillies Entertainment, 2011.

resident Indians (NRI's).⁴ Right now, the first generation of Indians born in the United States are young adults. While these NRI's are connected to India through family, they were raised primarily in the West. Their movie-going tastes were shaped by Hollywood, and this gives them a different perspective than their parents or even their young counterparts in India. Most second generation Indian-Americans speak Hindi, or another Indian language at home, but don't know enough of the language to watch a full Bollywood film without subtitles. These changes have caused filmmakers to target this diasporic audience in specific ways: dubbing their films, publicizing them on the internet, and, most importantly, creating content that is relevant to diasporic viewers.

In previous papers, I have examined the dance scenes of many Bollywood films noting a shift in both their character and their content. First, the big, glitzy, production numbers, called item numbers, have become more plentiful, while intimate duets with a close relation to the plot are being abandoned. Second, within these scenes, the choreography reveals Western influence, moving away from its roots in Kathak dance, one of India's classical dance forms.

NRI influence is evident in all aspects of recent Bollywood films, not just the dance scenes. The most obvious tactic to reach out to Western viewers is by setting films outside of India. New York and London are frequent location choices, unsurprisingly given the large Indian populations in both the United States and the United Kingdom. Placing these films in familiar Western environments makes them more accessible to an audience in the diaspora. Additionally, social settings in newer films reflect a more modern, Western aesthetic. Characters interact in clubs instead of temples and socialize at parties rather than weddings. The costuming of the characters, both in and out of dance scenes, also reflects Western influence. Characters wear

⁴ Jenny Sharpe, "Gender, Nation, and Globalization in Monsoon Wedding and Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge," *Meridians* 6.1 (2005): 58-81.

jeans and dresses instead of saris, formal attire for females that consists of a single piece of fabric wrapped and draped on the body, and salwars, a more casual form of Indian attire consisting of pants and a long tunic. This change by itself does not necessarily point to the West, as people in Indian cities commonly wear these clothes. The more important change in costuming comes in the dance scenes. In older films, the dancers almost exclusively wear saris or other Indian attire. In many new films, this traditional garment is abandoned for clubbing clothes, or modified Indian clothes that are shorter and more revealing than those worn in real life. The music in Bollywood films has also been influenced by a desire to attract the Western diasporic audience. This is manifested in multiple ways: incorporations of stylistic aspects of Western popular music, use of English lyrics, and direct sampling of Western songs.

We will look at these various facets—ranging from plot and location to music and dance—and see how they have changed in the face of a growing diasporic public. The Indian diaspora has coincided with the growth of technology, making the diasporic audience easily accessible to filmmakers. Through the use of YouTube, film producers have employed new publicity techniques, targeted at viewers in the diaspora.

It is significant to note that Westernization is not synonymous with globalization. *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) would be an example of a film influenced by globalization, because it sought to show Bollywood to non-Indian audiences abroad. In contrast, we are looking at films that are targeted to a Western, but still Indian, audience. Looking at all these facets will show us that the expanded presence of a large diasporic Indian population has caused changes in all aspects of Bollywood films, as directors seek to market their films to these new viewers in the diaspora.

Methodology

This paper uses evidence from a wide variety of both primary and secondary sources. My primary sources will consist of Bollywood films, reviews of these films published in both Indian and American newspapers, and interviews. Most of the Bollywood films viewed were released after the year 2000, though older classics have been used as comparisons or to show early efforts to reach out to audiences in the diaspora. I selected the films mostly based on the suggestions of friends of popular films, as analyzing an insignificant or infrequently viewed film would not add much meaning to this paper. Additionally research helped me locate films with Western themes or elements. I found newspaper articles about these films in a range of newspapers, both Indian and American, that helped to gauge responses to these movies both inside India and in the diaspora.

Finally, I interviewed, and conversed casually with, second-generation Indian-Americans about their experiences watching Bollywood films. In these communications I focused on differences between their reactions and the reactions of their native Indian parents to films, to get a sense of both generational differences, and differences between viewing films in India versus in the diaspora. I also spoke to Indians who had grown up in India, but went to college in America, to get a sense of differences in the marketing and viewing of films in India and elsewhere. The group I spoke with were all college students at Columbia University, and thus came from educated, higher-class families. In addition to providing specific insights on movie watching, I've used some of my casual conversations with this group for background on the diaspora and general facts about Bollywood.

My secondary sources consisted of various academic essays, either from books on the subject of Bollywood films or from journals in the disciplines of dance, film, and

ethnomusicology. Many articles analyzed specific Bollywood films, while others looked at general Bollywood trends. Often, articles addressed the issue of Westernization, but either didn't discuss why this was happening, or attributed it to a fascination with the West in India. Some articles did address the relationship between the diasporic audience and the films, but did not go so far as to attribute changes in the films to the presence of this audience. Finally, other articles made claims about the influence of a diasporic audience, but these were generally articles that analyzed one or two films and did not apply their claims to Bollywood as a whole. My claim goes beyond what past literature has done by claiming that the Westernizing changes in Bollywood films are due to the expanded presence of a large Indian diaspora, and by applying this claim to Bollywood in general.

Background

The Bollywood film industry is the most far-reaching film industry in the world outside of Hollywood. While the term Bollywood wasn't coined until the 1970s,⁵ Bollywood has been around since the mid 1890s, developing along similar lines as Western cinema. Bollywood is commonly credited with producing 1,500-2,000 films a year, making it the most productive film industry in the world (Hollywood generally produces fewer than 1,000 films).⁶ However, this statistic does not account for the fact that Bollywood films are often released in as many as twenty different languages to reach all areas of India, meaning that only around 200 films are actually produced in a year.⁷ So while Bollywood is not the most prolific film industry in the world, it has emerged as the dominant film industry within India.

⁵ Tejaswani Gatnti, *Bollywood*. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.

⁶ MPAA. < <http://www.mpa.org/policy/industry>>.

⁷ Ganti, 3.

One of most prominent features of a Bollywood film are the extravagant dance numbers. These scenes are more than just fun; they also serve a purpose within the films. These interspersed dance numbers can have one of two main functions: to act as a kind of chorus or to provide an entertaining interlude. The dance scenes act as a chorus either by serving a narrative function—introducing characters, highlighting plot details, and foreshadowing—or by revealing the internal desires of characters. The interlude scenes, called “item numbers,” often include the film’s catchiest songs and are the scenes that have changed the most in an effort to attract a diasporic audience.

An item number is an interlude, or *divertissement*, that usually has little to do with the plot, but highlights beautiful women, catchy songs, and trendy dance moves. Extremely popular item numbers add to the marketability of a film.⁸ Often they are released before the movie itself comes out, in order to generate hype and attract audiences. Item numbers often feature a female character, called an item girl, who is not a character in the film, but appears for a brief performance. Certain actresses, like Helen in the 1950s, and the more current Mallika, are known purely as item girls.⁹ Famous Bollywood actresses can also make cameo appearances as item girls.

Aside from the dance numbers, another hallmark of Bollywood films are the high moral standards they uphold. This morality stems in part from the cultural values associated with Hinduism, such as the deification of the mother, the importance of family, and of course, the importance of religion in everyday life. Additionally, socially conservative Indian society dictates certain moral standards, such as the taboo on public kissing. These standards are serious

⁸ Rini Mehta Bhattacharya and Rajeshwari Pandharipande, *Bollywood and Globalization: Indian Popular Cinema, Nation, and Diaspora*. (London: Anthem Press, 2010), 42.

⁹ Anandam P, Kavoori, *Global Bollywood*. (New York: New York University Press), 187.

business—in 2007, Bollywood actress Shilpa Shetty was detained briefly for violating obscenity laws after Richard Gere embraced her and kissed her cheek at a publicity event.¹⁰ While laws prohibiting on-screen kissing—a remnant of the colonial period—have been removed, there is still a stigma against on-screen kissing,¹¹ and as Shilpa Shetty experienced, off-screen public kissing as well.

Finally, a number of essential terms need to be defined. The first is a clarification of the term Bollywood: Bollywood is not the whole Indian film industry, but the Hindi-language film industry based in Mumbai. Tollywood, for example, is the name for the Telugu cinema industry based in Hyderabad. Above, we discussed item numbers, the big dance production numbers that have little relation to the plot. Finally, for the purposes of this paper the diasporic audience refers specifically to Indians in English-speaking countries. There are large migrant Indian communities in South Africa and the United Arab Emirates, for example, but for our purposes, we will just consider the English-speaking West, specifically the United States and the United Kingdom. I am focusing on these two populations, since I am most familiar with them and can add my personal experiences and insights to the analysis.

Location and Plot

More and more Bollywood films have been set in the West in recent years. These films are fundamentally different from their Indian counterparts, with the Western setting facilitating the incorporation of Western plot elements.

¹⁰ “No Kissing Please, We Are Indians,” BBC News. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7871304.stm.

¹¹ “Why don’t the characters ever KISS already?” Bollywhat?com. <http://www.bollywhat.com/faq.html#3>.

Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna (*Never Say Goodbye*, 2006),¹² often abbreviated as *KANK*, is set in New York and deals with the controversial topic of adultery. *KANK* focuses on two couples: Dev (Shahrukh Khan) and his wife Rhea (Preity Zinta), and Maya (Rani Mukherjee) and her husband Rishi (Abhishek Bachchan). Maya and Dev met after marrying their respective spouses and slowly fall in love. They try to be just friends, but struggle with their feelings for each other, especially since they are both dealing with failing marriages. Finally, unable to hold back their feelings, they sleep together in a night of passion. Dev and Maya both feel guilty and tell their respective spouses what has transpired. Both spouses demand divorce. Dev and Maya don't want to ruin the other's marriage, so they tell each other they are staying together with their respective spouses, and say goodbye. Years later, Rishi is remarrying and invites Maya to be his best man. Rhea is at the wedding and realizes that Rishi and Maya have separated. She tells Maya that she and Dev had divorced years before, and that Dev is about to leave the city for a new job, encouraging her to pursue him. Maya does so, catching Dev at the last minute, and they are finally able to be together.

In *KANK*, the Western setting is emphasized by constantly featuring New York locations in the film, particularly in the dance scenes. Iconic landmarks such as Time Square or the Statue of Liberty could certainly appeal to a native Indian audience fascinated with the West, but the appearance of less familiar landmarks such as Grand Central Station and Columbia University suggest the filmmakers' desire to engage a Western audience. In this Western setting, the controversial topics of adultery and divorce are addressed. The portrayal of adultery can be compared with that in the classic Bollywood film *Devdas* (2002).¹³ *Devdas* (Shahrukh Khan) and Paro (Aishwarya Rai) are childhood friends, but Paro is of lower caste than *Devdas*. When they

¹² *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (*Never Say Goodbye*).

¹³ *Devdas*. Produced by Bharat Shah. Directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali. 3 hrs. 3 min. SLB Films, 2002.

get older, the two fall in love, but Devdas' family rejects the idea of their son marrying someone of a lower caste. After being embarrassed by Devdas' mother at an event, Paro's mother arranges for Paro to marry an aristocrat. In intense depression, Devdas leaves home, resides in a brothel, and becomes an alcoholic, while Paro is unhappily married. In the closing scene, Devdas, now dying from alcoholism, comes to Paro's doorstep. Paro runs through the large house toward Devdas, in a dramatic battle with the slowly closing gates, but does not reach him, and Devdas dies on her doorstep.

Like Maya, Paro has adulterous desires, but she is not able to fulfill these desires, and is additionally punished by failing to see Devdas before he dies. The fact that there is retribution in the film for Paro's sinful desires makes the film less controversial. In contrast, Maya acts on her desires and is eventually rewarded by ending up with the object of her adulterous passion. Director Karan Johar attempts to dull the controversy by having Maya and Dev deeply regret their actions and choosing to walk away, but this is not enough for many audiences, particularly in India.

Despite the Western setting and the controversial topic, certain standards of morality are maintained. During the love scene where Dev and Maya commit adultery, they are in bed together, and it is very clear that they are naked and have sex, but we are still never shown a kiss. The irony of a sex scene with no kiss is huge. Writer Anil Saari's thoughts on Bollywood films can be applied to this situation: "The Indian wanted a new lifestyle that was totally different from the one he had inherited from his parents. And yet one not totally different."¹⁴ The "indecent" nature of this scene is toned down and made less shocking by upholding the taboo against on-screen kissing. This example emphasizes the difference between globalization and

¹⁴ Anil Saari, *Hindi Cinema*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Westernization. In *Slumdog Millionaire*, a film marketed toward a Western audience, including non-Indians, the protagonists kiss on camera. The kiss is much tamer than that of a typical Western film, but its presence is in sharp contrast to Bollywood films intended for Indian viewers. Moral standards that are based on Hindu values remain, since religion is not left behind when families move from India. *Slumdog* is a product of globalization, whereas *KANK* is a product of Westernization.

Reviews after *KANK*'s release in India poked holes in the plot and questioned the reasons for infidelity. Reviewers criticized the characters of Maya and Dev, and ask why two such obnoxious characters would fall in love.¹⁵ This reaction is legitimate, but credibility is seldom an issue, as most Bollywood films have huge holes in the plot that are often ignored by the Indian press. The same holes could be asked about *Devdas*: why did Paro still want Dev after he wouldn't stand up to his family for her, or after he became a drunk? The critics seem to be unduly harsh toward *KANK* because of its controversial topic.

*Love Aaj Kal (Love These Days, 2009)*¹⁶ is set partly in the West and partly in India, allowing for a comparison of how the West and India are portrayed in a single film. *Love Aaj Kal* features two parallel storylines—a past love story set in India and a present-day love story that travels between India and the West. This film quite literally tries to remind diasporic viewers that they have more in common than they think with older generations by showing the similarities between the love story of Veer Singh, an old shopkeeper, and Jai Singh, a young, modern man

¹⁵ “Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna – the Review.” <http://greatbong.net/2006/08/20/kabhi-alvida-na-kehna-the-review/>; “Review: Kabhi Alvida Na Kehna.” *Times of India*. http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2006-08-11/movie-reviews/27821468_1_rani-mukherjee-shah-rukh-khan-preity-zinta; “The NeverEnding Story.” Rediff. <http://www.rediff.com/movies/2006/aug/11kank.htm>; Subhash K. Jha, “Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna.” *Glamsham.com*. <http://www.glamsham.com/movies/reviews/kank.asp>.

¹⁶ *Love Aaj Kal (Love These Days)*. Produced by Saif Ali Khan and Dinesh Vijan. Directed by Imtiaz Ali. 2 hr. 10 min. Eros International, 2009.

who is skeptical of love. Jai, the skeptic, represents a viewer in the diaspora, whereas Veer represents the older, traditional generation.

Jai (Saif Ali Khan) and Meera (Deepika Padukone) are a couple living in London, but when Meera takes a job in India, they break up. Both start to date other people in their respective cities. Veer (Rishi Kapoor), a romantic, begins to tell Jai the story of his great love, Harleen, in order to convince Jai to get Meera back. Jai visits Meera in India, and Jai realizes the strength of their bond. However, before Jai leaves India, Meera's new boyfriend Vikram proposes to her. Despite a plea from Jai, Meera decides to marry Vikram and tells Jai their relationship is over. Jai leaves, depressed, lands his dream job in San Francisco, and moves there. After being married, Meera realizes her mistake and tries to contact Jai, but he tells her that he is moving for his dream job, so Meera does not tell him that she has left Vikram. Jai's dream job and life in San Francisco are not what he had hoped, so he returns to India and is told by Vikram that Meera left him after their wedding. Jai goes and finds Meera, and they are happily reunited.

As this transpires, the viewer is also told about the love story between Veer and Harleen. Veer fell in love with Harleen at first sight, and travels thousands of miles to see her. They finally have some interaction, but soon Harleen tells Veer that her parents have arranged a marriage for her and they must stop seeing one another. Veer goes to Harleen's family and tells them he wants to marry Harleen, but they ridicule him and beat him up. In a final attempt, Veer sneaks into Harleen's house and pleads with her mother, saying that Harleen will only be happy with him. Her mother relents, and Veer and Harleen sneak away to marry, and live happily ever after.

Initially, the two stories seem to share few similarities. However, the way they are intertwined reveals a common thread about never giving up on true love. The differences are also

significant. The primary Jai-Meera love story is targeted at a younger, diasporic audience, while the secondary story of Veer functions to placate traditional viewers in India. Jai and Meera are chiefly driven apart by career aspirations, a more modern, Western challenge to love.

Additionally, the cynicism about love expressed by Jai is an increasingly common refrain in other Western-oriented films like *Dil To Pagal Hai* (*The Heart is Crazy*, 1997).¹⁷ For the NRI audience grandiose depictions of love do not correlate with their experience. Arranged marriages are not common in the Western diaspora; thus stories about escaping from an arranged marriage do not strike the same chord. Instead, particularly for women, the conflict between raising a family and having a career is more relevant, and the Jai-Meera love story capitalizes on this conflict.

Dil To Pagal Hai (*The Heart is Crazy*; 2008)¹⁸ is worth mentioning because of the tension in the film between the Western, modern Nisha (Karisma Kapoor) and the more traditional Pooja (Madhuri Dixit), as they compete for the heart of Rahul (Shah Rukh Khan). Even though *Dil To Pagal Hai* takes place in India, as film critic Arundhathi Subramaniam points out, many scenes “seem to be set in quasi-New York style apartments and dance studios.”¹⁹ Nisha and Pooja are both dancers, but Nisha specializes in modern, hip-hop dance, whereas Pooja is highly trained in traditional Kathak. Nisha wears Western clothes, whereas Pooja wears salwars. In the end, Pooja ends up with Rahul, representing a triumph of tradition over Western modernity. This film, released in 1997, was one of the first to incorporate Western themes, but traditional influences still came out on top over Western ones.

¹⁷ *Dil To Pagal Hai* (*The Heart is Crazy*). Produced by Yash Chopra and Aditya Chopra. Directed by Yash Chopra. 3 hr. Yash Raj Films, 1997.

¹⁸ *Dil To Pagal Hai* (*The Heart is Crazy*).

¹⁹ Arundhathi Subrahmaniam, “Dance In Films,” in *New Directions in Indian Dance*, ed. Sunil Kothari, (Mumbai: National Centre for the Performing Arts/ Marg Publications, 2003), 132-145.

An even earlier film that touches on tensions between India and its Western diaspora is *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (The Brave-Hearted Will Take the Bride, 1995)*,²⁰ commonly called *DDLJ*. *DDLJ* is one of the first films where the NRI characters were not marginalized and stereotyped as being sinful and stupid.²¹ Raj (Shahrukh Khan) and Simran (Kajol) are both NRI's living in Britain. While Raj is initially portrayed as the stereotypically depraved NRI, who drinks and sleeps around, over the course of his courtship of Simran we learn that he does indeed maintain traditional values. In her article on Bollywood, Jenny Sharpe sums it up well: "The message of *DDLJ* is that, although the hero and heroine wear Western clothing and embrace youth culture, they have maintained their Indian values."²² *DDLJ* and *Dil To Pagal Hai* were important films in that they opened the door for films to have Western themes, and were marketed to a diasporic audience. With *DDLJ* in particular, Bollywood realized that the huge Western diaspora was a new, profitable market to target.²³

Kal Ho Naa Ho (There May or May Not Be a Tomorrow, 2003),²⁴ often abbreviated as *KHNH*, was another film that targeted a Western audience very successfully, becoming the highest grossing overseas film in 2003.²⁵ *KHNH* was also set in New York City, and was the first Bollywood film to address homosexuality. The film's love triangle features Naina (Preity Zinta) who is in love with Aman (Shahrukh Khan), and Rohit (Saif Ali Khan) who is in love with Naina. Aman helps Rohit seduce Naina, but when another character witnesses Aman teaching Rohit to woo Naina, she mistakes them for homosexuals. Throughout the rest of the

²⁰ *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (The Brave Hearted Will Take Away the Bride)*.

²¹ Sharpe, "Gender, Nation, and Globalization," 65.

²² Ibid, 65.

²³ Lord Meghnad Desai, "Bollywood Needs to Change Its Act," *The Hindu* (2007).

<http://www.hindu.com/mag/2007/11/25/stories/2007112550030100.htm>.

²⁴ *Kal Ho Naa Ho (There May or May Not Be A Tomorrow)*. Produced by Yash Johar and Karan Johar. Directed by Nikhil Advani. 3 hr. 4 min. Yash Raj Films, 2003.

²⁵ "Top Lifetime Grossers Worldwide." Boxofficeindia.com.

<http://www.boxofficeindia.com/showProd.php?itemCat=312&catName=TGlmZXRpbWU=>>.

film, scenes and comments refer back to Rohit's questionable sexuality after this incident. For example, the same character who witnessed the homosexual encounter later expresses relief that Rohit is marrying a girl. While this subtext is clear to most viewers, the topic of homosexuality is never explicitly addressed. At one point Rohit's father takes Rohit to a strip club to fix his "problem with girls," and when Rohit assures his father that there is no problem, his father exclaims "So you are a *real* (i.e., heterosexual) man!"²⁶ These statements are as close to directly addressing homosexuality as the film gets.

Another film, *Dostana (Friendship, 2008)*²⁷ also addresses the issue of homosexuality, this time more directly. Sameer (Abishek Bachchan) and Kunal (John Abraham) meet when they both want to sublet the same apartment. The owner won't sublet to them since they would be sharing the space with her young, beautiful niece, Neha (Priyanka Chopra). Sameer and Kunal tell the owner that they are a gay couple, and she allows them to sublet her place. Both men fall in love with Neha and their resulting attempts at seducing her while keeping up their ruse is comical. *Time Out UK* rated the film with 4 stars and said: "Beneath the frivolity is a non-preachy plea for tolerance and acceptance."²⁸ This statement goes a bit too far in describing the portrayal of homosexuality in this film. While Neha's acceptance of Sameer and Kunal as gay projects a positive message, at one point, Sameer's mother finds out he is "gay" and is extremely worried, and we are reminded of the stigma against homosexuality.

These two films represent just the beginning of a trend to include the topic of homosexuality, since they don't yet feature an actual gay character. Instead, they make the issue comedic. Additionally, the ruse or appearance of homosexuality is always in reference to the

²⁶ Ajay Gehlawat, *Reframing Bollywood*. (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010), 93.

²⁷ *Dostana (Friendship)*.

²⁸ Rajinder Dudrah, *Bollywood Travels*. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 44.

masculine pursuit of a woman. There is indication that homosexual characters, like NRI characters, will slowly be allowed into the spotlight as more than comedic relief. In the recent release *Student of the Year (2012)*,²⁹ there are not one, but two gay characters. One of these characters is played by famed Bollywood heartthrob Rishi Kapoor, and it is significant that a gay role is being taken on by such a mainstream actor. However, his character is still a supporting, not leading, role. There have been other films that addressed the topic of homosexuality, such as *My Brother Nikhil (2005)*.³⁰ This film was forced by censorship boards in India to feature a disclaimer stating that the film was fictional, despite the fact that it was not.³¹ Whereas divorce is common and generally accepted in the West, homosexuality is still a charged issue. There is greater acceptance than in India, as evidenced by the fact that the producers of *My Brother Nikhil* had to have such a disclaimer to release their film, whereas films like *Philadelphia* and *RENT* did not have the same issues with their release in the United States.

Dance and Music

In addition to location and plot of films, the influence of the West can be seen in Bollywood dance scenes. The location of the scenes, the costumes of the dancers, the music, and finally, the actual dance moves, have all changed as part of this trend. As mentioned before, the extravagant item numbers have become more present, since these numbers are often exploited as marketing tools to attract audiences in the diaspora.

²⁹ *Student of the Year*. Produced by Hiroo Yash Johar and Gauri Khan. Directed by Karan Johar. 2 hr. 26 min. Dharma Productions, 2012.

³⁰ *My Brother Nikhil*. Produced by Sanjay Suri, Vicky Tejwani, Onir, and Raj Kaushal. Directed by Onir. 2 hr. Four Front Films, 2005.

³¹ Robert Urban, "Review of *My Brother Nikhil*," AfterElton.
<http://www.afterelton.com/archive/elton/movies/2005/8/mybrother2.html>.

“Where’s the Party Tonight?” from *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* is very Western in many of its aspects. As the music begins, we first see Bollywood star John Abraham in a cameo role acting like an item boy to attract viewers. Next we zoom in, to a club scene, and see the dancers dressed in clubbing clothes with exposed navels and short skirts. The presence of a girl wearing a cowboy hat makes an even more obvious reference to the Western club setting. This scene features Rhea and Rishi dancing, while spliced-in clips juxtapose Dev and Maya checking into a hotel and sleeping together. Unlike pre-*DDLJ* films that would have expressed disdain for the NRI lifestyle of clubbing, Rhea and Rishi are actually portrayed as the more moral characters, despite their partying.

While most of the choreography appears like improvised club dancing, the clearly choreographed segments highlight thrusting and gyrating hip motions that are suggestive of grinding, or club dancing. In a girls section, classical movements appear unexpectedly, possibly as an homage to classical dance for the sake of older viewers. However, the moves end up looking awkward and out of place, especially as the dancers struggle to stand in *aramundi*, the base position of classical Indian dance which features bent knees and turned out legs, without flashing anyone in their short skirts. The effect of the whole scene is to evoke an American nightclub, and even the music alludes to the aesthetic. Many lyrics are in English, including the chorus and song title, directly targeting a diasporic audience that may not understand much Hindi. While there are still the familiar voiceover singers of Hindi films, the constant bass beat alludes to Western hip-hop and club music.

“Twist” from the *Love Aaj Kal* also features scantily clad dancers, and shows an even larger influence of Western dance styles. One thing we notice in the first twenty seconds are the crazy costumes—there is a clown, a cabaret girl, a wizard, and many girls in silly tutus and crazy

club-style outfits. A dancer hands Jai a flyer while doing hip-hop popping movements. The popper is one of many male dancers dressed in a hoodie, baseball cap, and sunglasses—a look reminiscent of the hip-hop scene in the West. As in “Where’s the Party Tonight?” there is a brief reference to traditional dance when a *dholi* drum player and traditionally dressed bhangra dancers appear. They do a few of their own steps before joining the other dancers. The dance scene shifts from the street to a club scene. Unlike in *KANK*, the dancers and characters, including Jai, drink alcohol, a big step away from the Hindi cinema’s usual religious and moral standards, but a familiar activity to an NRI population. While Jai and his female companion dance very closely, they never kiss, so that taboo is still upheld. At another moment, a breakdancer is featured, another reference to Western hip-hop culture. The group dance movements are also very heavily influenced by hip-hop. One of the steps in the refrain is a kick-ball-change that is very similar to a basic step in hip-hop and breakdance, although performed with a more upright, lifted posture and an added hip movement. Again, the music features English to attract NRI’s, as well as bass beats to go along with the hip-hop influence.

These two examples showed how specific elements were changing, and are part of a larger trend. One of the most popular classic item numbers of all time is “Chaiyya Chaiyya” from *Dil Se... (The Heart Says)*.³² This iconic number takes place on top of a traveling train, and features Malaika Khan as the item girl. In recent years, item numbers are being performed by the female lead instead of by an item girl—examples include “Sheila ki Jawani” (2010),³³ “Munni Badnaam” (2010),³⁴ and “Jalebi Bai” (2011).³⁵ These numbers introduce the female leads as

³² *Dil Se....* Produced by Bharat Shah, Mani Ratnam, Ram Gopal Varma, and Shekhar Kapur. Directed by Mani Ratnam. Eros International and Madras Talkies, 1998.

³³ “Sheila Ki Jawani – Tees Maar Khan (Full Song) HQ,” *YouTube*, 17 Nov. 2010.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hcKtDXUb6Cg>.

³⁴ “Munni Badnaam Hui (Full Song) Dabangg Feat. Salman Khan,” *Youtube*, 20 Apr. 2011.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jn5hsfbhWx4>.

empowered and strong, which we can deduce from the lyrics they sing. For example, the lyrics *My name is Sheila, Sheila ki Jawani, I'm too sexy for you...* in “Sheila Ki Jawani” presents the female lead as unattainable, instead of past songs in which the item girl, often referred to as a vamp character,³⁶ presents herself to men (*ab aa jaa re mere piya*, or *come to me now, lover in Devdas*) or at times laments her role in society as a temple dancer or vamp (*dekho yeh pagli diwani, duniyaa se hai yeh anjaani* or *look at this crazy girl, she knows nothing of the world* also from *Devdas*). Additionally, the high-energy singing and dancing of these numbers adds market value to the overall product.³⁷ Westernization has also loosened social standards, which may be part of the reason that leading ladies can perform these overtly sexual numbers and still be the protagonist who finds love. Even in *Dil to Pagal Hai* an older standard is maintained: the more traditional Pooja wins love over the more Western Nisha, but now the more openly sexual Westernized characters are also the ones who find love. Western media influences in India, such as the emergence of MTV India, have also encouraged the development of these more scandalous, Western-influenced dance styles.³⁸ Overall, the effect of Westernization has been increased sexuality in item numbers,³⁹ as well as an acceptance of the leading lady being able to perform in such a sexual way.

In at least one recent item number, “Subha Hone Na De” from the 2011 film *Desi Boyz*,⁴⁰ the main performers are two men rather than an item girl. Bollywood dance emerged from classical Indian dance and the traditions of *devadasis*, temple dancers, and *tawaiifs*, salon dancers. In these contexts, there was always an image of the male watching the female perform.

³⁵ “Double Dhamaal – Jalebi Bai HD,” *Youtube*, 09 June 2011. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bdRk_oHvwY.

³⁶ Kaur, et al. *Bollyworld*, 148.

³⁷ Anna Morcom, *Hindi Film Songs and the Cinema*. (Hampshire, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 181.

³⁸ Subrahmaniam. “Dance in Films,” 137.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 139.

⁴⁰ *Desi Boyz*. Produced by Krishika Thulla, Vijay Ahuja, and Jyoti Deshpandey. Directed by Rohit Dhawan. Eros International, 2011.

Even in most current item numbers, cinematic shots of males watching females perform are emphasized. Thus, it is a huge step away from tradition to show women watching men, instead of vice versa.

Bollywood music today reveals the influence of both Western pop and hip-hop music. Even when songs are in Hindi, they feel familiar, since the musical style is much closer to Western pop music than to Karnatic music from South India or Hindustani music from North India. Examples of this would be “Where’s the Party Tonight?” and “Twist,” which have rhythms that reference hip-hop and house music. Additionally, many songs today are only partly in Hindi. Many current hit songs resonate with the West because of their use of English words. While it possible to appreciate foreign music without stylistic similarities to one’s familiar music, it is extremely difficult to really appreciate a song without understanding the lyrics. These songs with English lyrics are made in order to attract a Western audience. “Where’s the Party Tonight” and “Twist” are examples of this trend as well. Finally, in some films Western songs are explicitly sampled in Bollywood songs. These songs take a Western song, and remix it with Hindi lyrics and new beats. The presence of familiar songs grab the attention of Western viewers, who recognize them from their own lives. Examples of this would be “Pretty Woman” from *Kal Ho Naa Ho*, and “Dildara” from *Ra.One*, which samples “Stand by Me.” These three tactics of integrating musical influences from the West are a result of filmmakers marketing their films to a diasporic audience.

Recently, the producers of *Ra.One* found a new way to attract a diasporic audience, specifically one from the United States, by featuring hip-hop artist Akon as a voice-over singer in the number “Chammak Challo.” This single was released, along with a “behind the scenes” video, months before the film in a move to generate publicity, which it certainly did. The

number's success was definitely aided by the fact that Akon has an extremely distinctive voice, even when singing in Hindi. Akon is extremely popular in the West, particularly in the United States, and his presence on this track intrigued many in the diasporic audience. This song may be the beginning of a new trend to attract a diasporic audience by having cameos by Western celebrities.

Technological developments have changed the publicity tactics of producers, making it much easier to target diasporic audiences. New media outlets on the internet, such as YouTube, have provided a simple way for Bollywood producers to reach a distant audience. As previously mentioned, item numbers are often heavily marketed on YouTube to drum up interest in future films. Additionally, Bollywood has a much larger presence on the web in the form of forums and fan sites, as well as official sites released by producers to meet the informational demand of viewers all over the world. Since finding previews and reviews of Bollywood in *The New York Times* is unlikely, viewers in the diaspora turn to the immense web of information on the internet, or as Bollywood academic Ananda Mitra calls it, the Bollyweb.⁴¹ In response, producers take advantage of this demand for information, and use it to market their films worldwide.

Conclusion

Bollywood was initially viewed in the West as a way for recent migrants to stay connected with their home, and movie showings near large Indian populations became social gatherings of a sort.⁴² However, public screenings became less popular as technology allowed for home viewing, so producers had to look for a new way to attract this diasporic audience, already

⁴¹ Aswin Punathambekar, *Global Bollywood*, 2008.

⁴² Aswin Punathambekar, "Bollywood in the Indian-American Diaspora: Mediating a Transitive Logic of Cultural Citizenship," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 8, no. 2 (2005): 151-173.

a source of profit. To do this, they targeted a younger generation growing up in the West. They targeted this audience by setting movies in familiar locations and by incorporating plot structures that resonated with Indians growing up in the West, and by partly abandoning grand love stories where the hero or heroine must escape from an arranged marriage. Soon it began to seem that this diasporic market might actually be more stable than the indigenous market,⁴³ perhaps because nostalgia blurred their judgment and prevented them from being too critical,⁴⁴ or because the experiences of Western culture made these viewers less critical about the expressions of overt sexuality.

Beginning with movies like *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* and *Dil To Pagal Hai*, directors stopped marginalizing NRI characters. *DDLJ* in particular was revolutionary in that it was the first movie to feature two NRI protagonists. This film reached out to the West with these characters, but also assured viewers in India that these characters still upheld Indian morals despite living in the diaspora. Movies like *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*, *Kal Ho Naa Ho*, and *Love Aaj Kal* went further in featuring Western characters, Western content, and Western locations—and these films were successful in this pursuit; *KANK* and *KHNNH* each held the title of the highest grossing Bollywood film overseas for a time. Finally, these films have taken us to a place today where dance scenes shot in clubs with more revealing clothing and alcohol are the norm. But at the same time, certain moral standards are maintained as to not entirely scare away the indigenous audiences; for example, kissing remains stigmatized (even in sex scenes in *KANK*), and the mother is still an important and respected character.

We touched on the importance of Akon being featured as a voiceover artist. This may be the beginning of a new trend to attract the diaspora, although it is unclear where that will lead.

⁴³ Desai, “Bollywood Needs to Change Its Act.”

⁴⁴ Gurbir Jolly, et al, *Once Upon A Time In Bollywood*. (Toronto: Tsar Books, 2007), 113-115.

Will more and more Western artists be featured in Hindi films? Will songs like “Chammak Challo” with Akon begin to attract a non-Indian population in the West, and is this a good thing? In the past year, “Danza Kaduro” by the Spanish artist Don Omar has reached prominence in the United States and globally. As American culture in particular becomes more intrigued by world music and films, will we see them targeted by Indian filmmakers as well? After all, as producers in Hollywood know all too well, the United States is a very profitable audience. And if this happens, does it mean that Bollywood and Hollywood will be in competition or will join forces? The biggest barrier right now to integration is language. Hindi films have been nominated for Academy Awards, but only in the foreign film category. There is no rule by the Academy that dictates that a foreign film cannot win Best Picture;⁴⁵ *The Artist*, a French silent film, won in 2012. It is highly unlikely that a Hindi film could win this award with the current language barrier, but we are left wondering if the successes of *Bend it Like Beckham* and *Slumdog Millionaire*, another Best Picture winner, might inspire Indian filmmakers to make the non-Indian Western market their newest target. Who knows, in a few years, we might see Shahrukh Khan plastered across the screens of mainstream theaters, seducing his co-star in primarily English dialogue.

⁴⁵ “Rule Sixteen: Special Rules for the Best Picture of the Year Award.” *The Academy*.
<http://www.oscars.org/awards/academyawards/rules/rule16.html>.

Bibliography

Biswas, Soutik. "No Kissing Please, We Are Indians." BBC News.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7871304.stm.

Chopra, Anupama. "Opening India's Closet; Even the Faux-Gay Plot Line of 'Dostana' is Cutting Edge in a Culture Where Homosexuality is Hidden." Los Angeles Times. 9 Nov 2008.

Chopra, Anupama. "Sex, Turmoil, Infidelity, Divorce: That's Bollywood?" New York Times. 30 July 2006.

Desai, Jigna. Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Dudrah, Rajinder. Bollywood Travels. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Dwyer, Rachel, and Divia Patel. Cinema India. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002.

Ganti, Tejaswini. Bollywood. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Ganti, Tejaswini. Producing Bollywood. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012.

Gehlawat, Ajay. Reframing Bollywood. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010.

Gera Roy, Anjali, et al. Travels of Bollywood Cinema. New Delhi: Oxford, 2012.

Hu, Brian. "Bollywood Dreaming: "Kal Ho Naa Ho" and the Diasporic Spectator." Post Script – Essays in Film and the Humanities 25, no. 3 (2006): 93-104.

Jha, Subhash K. "'Dostana' Has A Subtle Message On Homosexuality: Karan Johar (Interview)." The Hindustan Times. 16 Nov 2008.

Jolly, Gurbir, et al. Once Upon A Time In Bollywood. Toronto: Tsar Books, 2007.

Kamath, Sudhish. "On Marriage and Infidelity—Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna." The Hindu. 18 Aug 2006.

Kazmi, Nikhat. "Dostana." The Times of India. 15 Nov 2008.
Discusses how "Dostana" is able to be popular with such a homosexual theme.

Kaur, Raminder, et al. Bollywood. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005.

Manschot, Johan, and Marijke de Vos. Behind the Scenes of Hindi Cinema. KIT Publishers, 2005.

Mishra, Vijya. Bollywood Cinema. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Morcom, Anna. "An Understanding Between Bollywood and Hollywood? The Meaning of Hollywood-Style Music in Hindi Films." British Forum for Ethnomusicology 10, no. 1 (2001): 63-84.

Morcom, Anna. Hindi Film Songs and the Cinema. Hampshire, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007.

Punathambekar, Aswin. "Bollywood in the Indian-American Diaspora: Mediating a transitive logic of cultural citizenship." International Journal of Cultural Studies 8, no. 2 (2005): 151-173.

Punathambekar, Aswin, et al. Global Bollywood. New York: New York University Press, 2008.

Saari, Anil. Hindi Cinema. New York: Oxford, 2009.

Sharpe, Jenny. "Gender, Nation, and Globalization in Monsoon Wedding and Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge." Meridians 6, no. 1 (2005): 58-81.

Shresthova, Sangita. "Between Cinema and Performance: Globalizing Bollywood." Ph.D. diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2008.

Shresthova, Sangita. "Swaying to an Indian Beat... Dola Goes My Diasporic Heart: Exploring Hindi Film Dance." Congress on Research in Dance, 36, no. 2 (Winter, 2004): 91-101.

Subrahmanian, Arundhathi. "Dance In Films." New Directions in Indian Dance, ed. Sunil Kothari. Mumbai: National Centre for the Performing Arts/Marg Publications, 2003.

Urban, Robert. "Review of *My Brother Nikhil*." AfterElton.
<http://www.afterelton.com/archive/elton/movies/2005/8/mybrother2.html>.

MPAA. < <http://www.mpa.org/policy/industry>>.

"Rule Sixteen: Special Rules for the Best Picture of the Year Award." The Academy.
<http://www.oscars.org/awards/academyawards/rules/rule16.html>.

"Why don't the characters ever KISS already?" Bollywhat?.com.
<http://www.bollywhat.com/faq.html#3>.

Films and Interviews

Desi Boyz. Produced by Krishika Thulla, Vijay Ahuja, and Jyoti Deshpandey. Directed by Rohit Dhawan. Eros International, 2011.

Devdas. Produced by Bharat Shah. Directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali. 3 hrs. 3 min. SLB Films, 2002.

Dil Se... Produced by Bharat Shah, Mani Ratnam, Ram Gopal Varma, and Shekhar Kapur. Directed by Mani Ratnam. Eros International and Madras Talkies, 1998.

Dil To Pagal Hai (The Heart is Crazy). Produced by Yash Chopra and Aditya Chopra. Directed by Yash Chopra. 3 hr. Yash Raj Films, 1997.

Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (The Brave Hearted Will Take Away the Bride). Produced by Yash Chopra. Directed by Aditya Chopra. 3 hr. 9 min. Yash Raj Films, 1995.

Dostana (Friendship). Produced by Hiroo Yash Johar and Karan Johar. Directed by Tarun Mansukhani. 2 hr. 22 min. Dharma Productions/Yash Raj Films, 2008.

Jodhaa Akbar. Produced by Ronnie Screwvala and Ashutosh Gowariker. Directed by Ashutosh Gowariker. 3 hr. 33 min. UTV Motion Pictures/Ashutosh Gowariker Productions, 2008.

Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna (Never Say Goodbye). Produced by Hiroo Yash Johar and Karan Johar. Directed by Karan Johar, 3 hr. 35 min. Dharma Productions/Yash Raj Films, 2006.

Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham (Sometimes Happiness, Sometimes Sadness). Produced by Yash Johar. Directed by Karan Johar. 3 hr. 31 min. Yash Raj Films, 2001.

Kal Ho Naa Ho (There May or May Not Be A Tomorrow). Produced by Yash Johar and Karan Johar. Directed by Nikhil Advani. 3 hr. 4 min. Yash Raj Films, 2003.

Love Aaj Kal. Produced by Saif Ali Khan and Dinesh Vijan. Directed by Imtiaz Ali. 2 hr. 10 min. Eros International, 2009.

Monsoon Wedding. Produced by Caroline Baron and Mira Nair. Directed by Mira Nair. 1 hr. 54 min. USA Films, 2001.

My Brother Nikhil. Produced by Sanjay Suri, Vicky Tejwani, Onir, and Raj Kaushal. Directed by Onir. 2 hr. Four Front Films, 2005.

Ra.One. Produced by Gauri Khan. Directed by Anubhav Sinha. 2 hr. 34 min. Eros International Ltd./Red Chillies Entertainment, 2011.

Student of the Year. Produced by Hiroo Yash Johar and Gauri Khan. Directed by Karan Johar. 2 hr. 26 min. Dharma Productions, 2012.

Aditi Shankar, e-mail message to author, December 4, 2012.

Bhagat, Dhristie. Interview by Rachel Turner. New York, September 2012.

Ponnaganti, Nita. Interview by Rachel Turner. New York, September 2012.