Unreal City: Cinematic Representation, Globalisation and the Ambiguities of Metropolitan Life

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The growth of Indian film production and of the significance of movies in Indian society since 1947 has been colossal and closely associated with the rapid expansion of Indian cities and of urbanism as a life style, which has taken place concurrently. Indian films have portrayed the process of urbanisation as struggling aspirations towards coming to terms with and formulating agendas for modernity, but also as reactions to and counter-programmes against this process.

Movies and cinemas have in themselves been central rallying points, symbols and institutions of modernisation and have provided battlefields of understanding for formulations and appropriations of the conditions of the new life as against what used to be. The production and reception of film has provided a crucial arena for negotiating and asserting control over the parameters of modern urban culture and politics. At the same time, the urban landscape has been inscribed with cinematic signs to such an extent that it is hard to form a mental image of an Indian city which does not incorporate a bombardment of both sight and sound from movie posters, film advertisements, tannoys and tapes of sound-track music.

In conditions of widespread poverty and illiteracy, movie spectacles have in India fulfilled a role supplementing that of literature and print culture in making modernity popular - creating images representing the challenges of change, the threat to old orientations, the emergence of new forms of dominance as well as of new fields for manoeuvre.

Debates over modernisation in India since 1947 have been closely linked to

debates over nation-building and nationalism, and films have contributed significantly to such debates, formulating visual agendas for a new coherent, modern and secular national life as well as criticising and undermining such agendas by giving visual representation and sound track voice to notions of cultural and communal autonomy.

Indian cinema has been an important icon of the modern, both nationally and globally. Images of urban modernity have been carried by movies from metropolises into smaller towns and the countryside, and in other parts of the world showings of Indian films have represented rallying points for notions of Indian-ness as well as institutions of cosmopolitanism and globalisation. Thus, in many African countries, the presence of Indian film is a distinguishing and spectacular feature of modern urban culture.

Modernity and Metropolis

In a variety of ways, more generally, the association of modernity and metropolis has been a commonplace in critical discourse. The big city has been a recurrent and flexibly faithful metaphor of modern life, and it has been assumed that particular characteristics of perception, psychology and consciousness are integral parts of metropolitan life – that urban dwellers represent either refinement, politesse and gentility at a higher level, or else – as members of "the urban crowd" as envisaged by Gustave le Bon and Simmel in Europe at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries - represent decadence and a nervousness of disposition which threaten to undercut the foundations of civilised social behaviour (Kaarsholm, 2001:125).

In the great 19th century novels of European critical realism, the metropolis unfolds itself as a spectacle of a life world in the making – to the shock, despair and exhilaration of those who enter it from the backwaters of the provinces. In Balzac's *La comédie humaine*, Paris is the stage which modernity requires unfolding itself – a universe of fascinations, rapidly and hypocritically changing surfaces, cynicism, betrayals and constant movement where everybody watches one another like in a theatre and through a lens. Until recently a provincial, Lucien - in *Lost Illusions* - finds his eyes "glued to the curtain" of the boulevard theatre and feels

> so much more vulnerable to the enchantments this kind of life offered
> with its alternations of lightning flashes and clouds because it was as
> dazzling as a firework display after the profound darkness of his own
> laborious, inglorious, monotonous existence (Balzac, 1971:293).

Similarly, in the novels of Charles Dickens, London represents a wholly new kind of life, which is like an "earthquake" and characterised by perpetual motion, rush, simultaneity, coincidences, fog and slipperiness – written about by Dickens in ways which by 20th century readers have been seen to anticipate Eisenstein and

motion picture techniques of representation. The urban world in Dickens's narration is one of

> such continual kinetic distraction of the eye as the *kinematograph's* "animated pictures" would bring... We do not have to wait for film's *avant-garde* 1920s for the spirit that gave birth to urban evocations like *Berlin, the Symphony of a Great City* (Rutmann 1927) or Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1928) (Marsh, 2001:76; Williams, 1975:189-201).

This metropolitan world is one of necessarily mixed feeling in which values are being continuously overturned, the highest beauty found in the most lowly surroundings, and the *flaneur* who moves restlessly through alleys and boulevards represents the only possibility for authentic experience - "in Baudelaire's mercurial and paradoxical sensibility, the counter-pastoral image of the modern world generates a remarkably pastoral vision of the modern artist who floats, untouched, freely about it" (Berman, 1983:139). The ambiguity of experience is so strong that

> to be fully modern is to be anti-modern: from Marx's and Dostoevsky's time to our own, it has been impossible to grasp and embrace the modern world's potentialities without loathing and fighting against some of its most palpable realities... the deepest modern seriousness must express itself through irony (Berman, 1983:13f).

In parallel terms, social theorists have used the panorama of life conditions in the city to demonstrate both what was horrible about the modern condition – its satanic mills and generalised prostitution – and also as a counterpoint of liberation and the opening of possibilities to what Karl Marx famously and brutally called "the idiocy of rural life". For Marx, the metropolis was the embodiment of those highest stages of western capitalism in which - like a mirror - other parts of the world might gain a vision of their own futures.

A not unrelated evolutionist perspective can be found in modernisation theory and development studies discourse of the post world war two period, where "tribesmen" would become "townsmen in the making" (Southall and Gutkind, 1957), and in the process overturn their dispositions, the structures of their dreams, and their capacities for mobility and for "empathy" – for envisaging the possibility of difference and change. "Transitional individuals" would undergo a "characterological transformation", become "participant persons" and experience a "massive growth in *imaginativeness*" (Lerner, 1964:411, italics in original) – spurred on by the "mobility multipliers" of "mass media of print, film and radio" (Lerner, 1968:391).

The modernity of big-city life has been seen to bring with it reflexivity, which is different from what went before. In *The Consequences of Modernity* Anthony Giddens (1990) represents the emergence of such reflexive modernity and "disembeddedness" as something both universal and unique, and as the outcome of a

particular avenue of historical development. It represents an "institutionalisation of doubt" whose beginnings can be attributed to a particular phase in the development of capitalism and the formation of nation states, but whose effects in the process of becoming globalised are not culturally specific — "Progress becomes emptied of content as the circularity of modernity takes hold" (Giddens, 1990:177).

This view, however, of the outcome of a particular historical trajectory becoming a universalised condition has for a long time through colonialism been tied to notions of progress which were far from emptied of content, and which identified "modernisation" with "westernisation". In this way, a dualism was established and consolidated between "modernity" and "tradition" which disregarded internal struggles, debates and contradictory dynamics in the life worlds of non-western colonies, and reduced them to homelands of custom into which European progress and modernity could only gradually be introduced. Thus - through systems of indirect rule - European colonial powers came to consolidate paradoxically gerontocratic and traditionalist forces, and undercut indigenous forms of and agendas for modernisation – the metropolis defining its periphery:

> ... a model of city and country, in economic and political relationships, has gone beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, and is seen but also challenged as a model of the world... in a new and universal sense, this was the penetration, transformation and subjugation of the 'country' by the 'city'... (Williams, 1975:334, 343).

As an alternative to such a colonialist unilinear and dualist view, a possibility – as Raymond Williams suggests in *The Country and the City* – would be a perspective which sees the contrasting of the urban with the countryside rather as a pattern of representation and understanding that has come around repeatedly like an "escalator" moving, and has occurred at widely different times and places to give expression to widely different meanings:

> ... what seemed a single escalator, a perpetual recession into history, turns out, on reflection, to be a more complicated movement: Old England settlement, the rural virtues – all these, in fact, mean different things at different times, and quite different values are being brought to question. We shall need precise analysis of each retrospect, as it comes. We shall see successive stages of the criticism which the retrospect supports: religious, humanist, political, cultural. Each of these stages is worth examination in itself (Williams, 1975:22).

In this more complex perspective, modernities and experiences of the breakdown of the old come to the fore in the plural – as historical conjunctures and life situations which are not the outcomes of a single evolutionary logic, but rather each of them battlefields of contestation between different forces of development and different cultural and political agendas.

Movies and the Urban Experience

The special capacity of film to represent the experience and life world of urban modernity has been pointed out often enough from Chaplin's sentimentalism and breathless pursuits through Eisenstein's montage and Vertov's moving camera to Fritz Lang's futuristic horrors and under-earth paranoia in *Metropolis* and *M*.

In his essay in the present volume on "Reading the City, Reading the Film", Peter Larsen discusses a corresponding set of assumptions put forward in early film theory of the comprehensibility of film and moving pictures being in return dependent on forms of perception peculiar to an audience with experience of big-city life. Like people making sense of a cubist painting, movie spectators must be able to "integrate single disjointed pictures into a coherent scene". But discussing the assumptions, Larsen gets on to an "escalator" moving much like Raymond Williams's – the "cognitive fundamentals of film comprehension" put forward by e. g. Kracauer and Benjamin do not hold water empirically – modern as well and old ways of seeing can be found in the both the metropolis and rural backwaters. What the theorists propose makes sense rather as "utopian visions about the connections between film language and urban modernity."

The experience of urban modernity as something peculiar depends on its being seen through a lens of alienation or difference – in this sense Chaplin's urban scenarios cannot be separated from the perspective of music hall and melodramatic vaudeville in which they are framed, and which belong to an earlier world. Similarly, Ashish Rajadhyaksha has argued that the theatricality and "neo-traditionalism" of early Indian silent films are rooted in the ways in which they understood and dialogued with the audiences to whom they were representing experiences of modernity and urbanism, and who were assumed to need such theatricality of address to understand (Rajadhyaksha, 1987).

Further, debates around representations of modernity in India have been particularly complex and intense because of the ways in which they have been bound up with issues of colonialism and nationalism – as Ravi Vasudevan writes,

> the power-laden circumstances in which modernity was introduced caused culturally defensive reactions against it; but... the 'inner' or 'traditional' stance which developed in response inevitably employed modern perceptual, technological and organizational developments to institute itself (Vasudevan, 2000:11).

As colonialism – in spite of oppression and segregation – identified itself as a programme for modernisation and progress, strategies to counter it relied on the elaboration of alternative notions and programmes of modernity that might not simply reject Europeanness as modernity *per se*, but situated Indian experiences and agendas against it. And which developed their own diagnoses of the malaises and possibilities of a modern life world whose ambiguities were intensified by its

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colonialist framing.[1]

Debates around the constitution and contradictions of modernity were re-directed and fuelled further by conditions of national independence and post-colonialism after 1947. In his contribution to this volume, Moinak Biswas discusses Nemai Ghosh's film *Chinnamul* from 1949-50 in which the experience of big-city modernity is shown from the perspective of a group of East Bengali peasant refugees who arrive in Calcutta after having been forcefully removed from their homes during the Partition of 1947. Dramatically and effectively, the film shows village life in almost stilted theatrical fashion and within sets that do not attempt to hide their artificiality, the world of the metropolis - as it erupts on the refugees when they arrive at Calcutta's Sealdah station - is shown as documentarist reportage.

In Ghosh's film, classically, modernity is shown in the form of the big city as seen through the eyes of new arrivals, but here also within a general setting of catastrophe and upheaval – with the nation as the modern coming into being through the foundational violence of the Partition.[2] This vision of modernisation as tragedy is expanded as the original cohesion – politically and culturally – of the refugee community eventually cracks up in Balzacian fashion, with individual members seeking their own selfish luck. In this way, *Chinnamul* and its refugee world of south Calcutta "colonies" foreshadows the suggestive later political-existentialist exposés of modern life by Ritwik Gathak, whose *Meghe Dhaka Tara* 1960 plays in the same urban landscape.[3]

The focus on big city life as incarnating the loneliness and alienation of capitalist modernity is continued in later Ghatak films and in *Subarnarheka* (1962) is given further depth by the looming of a potential nuclear war apocalypse. It also becomes a prominent in the production of Satyajit Ray – the most internationally famous representative of Bengali art cinema – whose critical realist *Mahanagar* (1964) and Calcutta trilogy of *Pratidwandi* (1970), *Seemabaddha* (1971) and *Jana Aranya* (1976) explores the liveliness of the big city, but also the depths of moral corruption to which human beings can be reduced and situates these in a context of contemporary politics.

Another Calcutta trilogy was produced almost simultaneously with that of Satyajit Ray by Mrinal Sen - consisting of the films Interview (1970), *Calcutta 71* (1971) and *Padatik* (1973). Here the urban vision is a much more directly political one and aims at interacting with the revolutionary left wing and social movements at the time of the Naxalites and the Emergency proclaimed by Indira Gandhi's government. Sen "deployed a wide variety of influences from Glauber Rocha's early work to Truffaut... and from Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* to Solanas and Getino," and at the same time "evoked the radical currents of Bengali theatre and

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[1] Such debates are the subject of discussion in Raychaudhuri (1988), Chatterjee (1993), and Chatterjee (Chatterjee, 1997b:193-210). Cf. also Sudipta Kaviraj's monograph on Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (Kaviraj, 1995).

[2] Though this disaster – as Biswas shows – was preceded by that of the 1943 famine to which the villagers' dialogue refer, and during which – like in 1946-47 – people were also forced off the land.

[3] In *Chinnamul*, Ghatak plays the role of the village goldsmith who becomes one of the individualist opportunists.

folk forms" in collage-like combination, providing a counterpoint to the moral approach of Ray – a contrast that became the focus for intense public debate (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, 1999:211).

Cultures High and Low

In later Bengali film production, the distinction between "high" cultural art cinema and popular cultural movies of entertainment has been upheld, though popular film has suffered in competition with the booming industry of Hindi film production with a base in Bombay, and art cinema has lost some of its critical edge and ambition. In Rituparno Ghosh's *Dahan* from 1997, the urban and moral focus of earlier art films is continued, but has become a much more narrow one of a middle-class south Calcutta, threatened by street crime and collapsing notions of respectability. In its mode of presentation, *Dahan* incorporates techniques from television drama and – by doing this – manages to balance its metropolitan street scenes with penetration into a sphere of privacy not usually put on show, but screened off – a breach of decorum almost equal to the intense kissing scenes of Ghosh's later movie *Bariwali* from 1999.[4]

A similar interest in urban middle-class life as the home ground of Indian modernity is cultivated in the work of the Tamil film maker Mani Ratnam whose *Bombay* from 1995 along with its scenes of violence and communalist mobilisation presents images of an urban world of globalised affluence and smoothness. This is a world which points beyond the strife and misery of the streets, and revolves around values of individualism and personalised love relationships, while at the same time showing these as not irreconcilable with other values of family loyalty and respect, thereby reconciling conflict and naturalising life styles of globalised modernity in their Indian setting. In an earlier Mani Ratnam film, *Roja* from 1994 which deals with marital love and obligation against a contemporary background of the Kashmir conflict, the nationalist character of Indian middle-class modernity is asserted even more strongly (for debates on *Roja* and Mani Ratnam, see (Niranjana, 1994; Prasad, 1998:230-237; Vasudevan, 1993).

Related gestures of reconciliation and naturalisation are exhibited in Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* from 2001, which shows an Indian modern everyday as the life styles of a metropolitan middle-class family with wealthy globalised extensions. In this film also individualist feelings of love versus the constraints of an arranged marriage are at the centre of contestations, but the ensuing conflict resolved by the benevolence and decency of the central characters involved. While the film with its marriage focus pays loving tribute to recurrent features in popular Bombay cinema, its side story of family incest dialogues with international cinema (including Thomas

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[4] For taboos on scenes of kissing, see chapter 4, "Guardians of the View: The Prohibition of the Private", in (Prasad, 1998:88-113).

Vinterberg's *Festen* of 1998), and – to a much greater extent than the films of Mani Ratnam – *Monsoon Wedding* is directed at an international audience and circuit of screening.

What above everything represents the notion of "cinema" as a specific cultural genre in India is Bombay-based Hindi cinema. It is interesting that in his contribution to this volume – reflecting on how in his West Bengal childhood strands of literary "high" culture would clash with those of popular culture as incarnated by film and movie songs – Sudipta Kaviraj does not think of Bengali films, but of Bombay and Hindi cinema. This, obviously, was what "cinema" meant as something unique and something peculiarly modern in its articulations which could match and live up to – as literary "high" culture had not been able to do in the same way – the moral and existential challenges of the metropolitan life that stood out as the incarnation of modernity – its ambiguities, despairs and excitements. And which was not just "representation", but in itself part and parcel of modernity as such.

Kaviraj points to an absence and an irony here – both in the sense of popular movies and film music giving expression to particular structures of feeling (as Raymond Williams would have had it) which "high" literature had not dealt with in serious terms, but only as satire, farce and travesty, the world of the westernised *babus*, and the invasion of the foreign – for Tagore, "the city cannot find a poetry of its own, because the city in its slovenliness does not deserve poetry." And at the same time popular cinema as a cultural form remains "low" and linked to the "depravity" which urban modernity was seen to represent and therefore bound up in a sphere which it was not felt to be proper for respectable critics and intellectuals to deal with.

Why is it, asks Ashish Rajadhyaksha in a comment on Sudipta Kaviraj's essay in this volume, that social scientists for long did so little to take cinema seriously, and that intellectuals would have such ambivalent feelings about it:

> My ... question [is one] that I, and many others in the 1970s and early 80s asked, as we struggled to establish a film theory in the Indian context. As we read the work of many social scientists including yourself who were, just about then, working out theories of cultural practice, and as I had an opportunity to meet them, I discovered that practically all of them were intense cinephiles, and music-philes, and especially Bengali intellectuals who were, literally, authorities on the cinema; that after six o'clock, the moment *adda* began,[5] they would intensely discuss and argue about the cinema as animatedly as about politics or anything else. So then I would ask them this question: how come the social sciences in India do not seemingly take the cinema seriously? Why can film not be discussed seriously by them before 6 o'clock, and in more serious forums?[6]

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[5] *Adda* is often presented as the central institution keeping Calcutta intellectual life together – intense informal conversation, discussion, criticism, joking and being together.

[6] From an e-mail to Sudipta Kaviraj (and the other contributors to this volume) of 29 October 2001.

The answer implied in Kaviraj's essay is that the world of popular cinema has related to a quite different set of feelings about the urban which formed a counterpoint to those given expression by the "high" cultural forms with which middle-class intellectuals had been used to most comfortably identifying themselves:

> The city was culturally dominated by the lower middle class, but its experience was obviously more diverse. Ironically, the poor in the city did not necessarily share this gloomy sense of the city and its place in history... Other classes in the city, even in a relatively stagnant and declining city like Calcutta did not necessarily share the historical melancholy of the educated lower middle class. The city for most people was a far more mixed and complex arena of experience. It certainly produced hopelessness and despair, but it was also a space in which anonymity gave a sense of freedom from restrictive village customs, and it was enjoyed by most characters in the films as a context in which genuine love could be experienced against the obstacles of deprivation, parental objection and vicious neighbours (Kaviraj in this volume).

The cultural studies approach to film represented by the Indian contributors to this volume therefore represented an innovation and a break-through vis-à-vis this ambiguity by taking popular cultural forms seriously and submitting them to analysis and theorising, while at the same time trying to understand the processes through which "high" and popular forms of culture become differentiated and institutionalised as separate idioms.

These endeavours were pursued in contributions to the *Journal of Arts & Ideas* – edited by Geeta Kapoor, Ashish Rajadhyaksha and others, in Rajadhyaksha's and Paul Willemen's *Encyclopaedia of Indian Film* whose first edition was published by the British Film Institute in 1994, by Ashish Nandy and younger scholars such as Ravi Vasudevan at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in New Delhi, at the Department of Film Studies, Jadavpur University in Calcutta where Moinak Biswas is based and the *Journal of the Moving Image* published, by M. S. S. Pandian and colleagues at the Madras Institute of Development Studies, at workshops organised by the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences in Calcutta and the Central Institute for English and Foreign Languages in Hyderabad, and more recently by scholars such as Tejaswini Niranjana, Ashish Rajadhyaksha and M. Madhava Prasad at the Centre for the Study of Culture and Society in Bangalore (Vasudevan, 1993:3). A major systematic contribution has been M. Madhava Prasad's *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction*, which came out in 1998 and on which much in the following section is based.

"Bollywood"

The popular Bombay-based or "Bollywood" Hindi film comprises as lot of varieties, some of which are not easily distinguishable from other genres within the sprawling world of Indian cinema in languages like Tamil, Telegu, Kannada, Malayalam, Bengali and so forth – whose most successful products – such as the Mani Ratnam films - are often also distributed in Hindi versions. But what has come to identified most commonly with Hindi or "Bollywood" film both in India and increasingly also internationally is a particular type of montage-like product, which in its tendency and development aims at being the "all-inclusive film".

In such movies the coherence between elements in the montage is flimsy and full of clashes, the action proceeds slowly with many interruptions and through a mixture of narrative sequences and more tableaux-like scenes, shifting between scenes of realism, dream sequences and flash-backs, and including elaborately choreographed dance incidents and powerful songs, aimed at becoming hits in their own right. The songs are an especially important ingredient, having been written especially for the film, recorded for the sound track by dubbing artists with a status as stars almost equal to the actors, and calculated to bring in – through sales of records and tapes etc. – perhaps up to 30% of the film's earnings. The importance of star actors in the films is tremendous, and inconsistencies between elements can sometimes be explained by a movie's being predominantly a vehicle for the promotion of its star personality, who may also well have (together with his or her commercial sponsors) invested in the production of it.

If the "all-inclusive" version of the package is a post-independence development, the characteristics of the genre can be followed back to the beginning of the 1930s and the introduction of "talkies" – in India this led to an escalation of film development in the different national languages, and aiming at establishing idioms of cinematic representation which were specifically Indian and contrasted with existing colonial, British and American iconographies in the field – e. g. by turning episodes from "national" epics such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* into film. It also led to the unfolding – already in the 1930s - of a range of genres such as "socials, mythologicals, devotionals, and stunt, costume and fantasy films" which all included song and dance as integral elements:

> The social has always been the broadest and, since the 1940s, the largest category and loosely refers to any film in a contemporary setting not otherwise classified. It traditionally embraces a wide spectrum, from heavy melodrama to light-hearted comedy, from films with social purpose to love stories, from tales of family and domestic conflict to urban crime thrillers ((Thomas, 1987:304) quoted in (Prasad, 1998:46))

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Critics have attempted to see the emergence of the fragmented, "all-inclusive" film as an expression of Sanskrit dramaturgical principles winning through, but according to Madhava Prasad, the main explanation is a more common sense and materialist one, relating to logics of film production and finance which meant that cinemas and chains of distribution gained hegemony over studios, and that the basic modern production unit in Indian cinema became the individual film. Thus, what in economic terms, Prasad describes as the "heterogeneous form of manufacture" operating in the Hindi film industry at the level of representation shows itself as a victorious rebellion of components against the whole:

> The different component elements have not been subsumed under the dominance of a cinema committed to narrative coherence. The heteronomous conditions under which the production sector operates are paralleled by a textual heteronomy whose primary symptom is the absence of an integral narrative structure (Prasad, 1998:45; Vasudevan, 1999:117).

To this is added the influence and inspiration from different dramatic and performance traditions – in Bombay cinema not least from Parsi theatre and from various forms of European and American melodrama dating back to the early 19th century. This placed forms of melodrama at the centre of what was filmic, and has made "feudal family romance" a prominent component in movies from the 1940s to the present – melodramatic forms that can be either aristocratic or democratic, depending on how the struggle between rank and "the power of the modern to destroy" is shown to be resolved (Prasad, 1998:55, 66-37), and representing, rather than an idealised conflict between tradition and modernity, one between two different ideologies of modernity, which has then again sometimes overlapped with one between "masala" and "realist" film-making (Prasad, 1998:31).

In the light of the above, Ashis Nandy has argued that the popularity of Hindi cinema relies on its giving expression to

> traces, however distorted, of affiliation to forms of community, cultural languages and concerns endangered by the homogenizing imperatives of modernisation ((Vasudevan, 2000:5) paraphrasing (Nandy, 1995)).

Nandy has also argued that it is the neo-traditionalism of Indian movies – and especially their melodramatic qualities and representations of "large, extended families" and of women as mother figures – which accounts for their popularity in particularly "developing countries", because to audiences in e. g. the Middle East, "India's family values are more familiar... than the dysfunctional families often featured in American films" (interview in (Fuller, 2000)).

Madhava Prasad, on the other hand, argues that popular film works in cahoots with modernisation and accommodates "desires for modernity":

> While often anchored in familiar narratives that reinforce traditional
> moral codes, the popular film text also offers itself as an object of the
> desire for modernity. The fragmentary text of an average popular film is a
> serial eruption of variously distributed affective intensities whose
> individual effects are not subsumed in the overarching narrative
> framework. As an effective medium of propagation of consumer culture,
> popular cinema has managed to combine a reassuring moral conservatism
> with fragments of utopian ideology and enactments of the pleasures of the
> commodity culture. The very familiarity of the narrative makes it a useful
> non-interfering grid within which to elaborate the new (Prasad, 1993:85).

As compared to Hollywood, the Unitarian principles of Aristotle get to suffer much more radically in "Bollywood" movies because of production techniques where the brilliance and appearance of the individual component comes to be decisive, and where such components are developed and produced separately and individually and only brought together through a process, which is often highly improvised, and where a master script has not been finally developed at the beginning of shooting.

While coordination is weak, and the relationship between a film's individual parts may be varied endlessly, the production of components is delegated out to highly specialised experts, whose sense of craft demand them to adhere to strict regulations of form. E. g. film songs are bound by rigid conventions of genre as to theme, stylistic devices and the use of metaphors, and film song writers – as is also discussed by Kaviraj – in their "real" lives would often be "high" cultural, particularly Urdu, poets and inspiration would come form *ghazals, qawwalis, thumris* as well as from Hindu wedding songs (Prasad, 1998:45). On the same patterns, there are inflexible criteria deciding what constitutes a good or bad script, a good or bad fighting scene, and so on. Which means that the "all-inclusive film" must have everything – the best action, the best songs, the biggest stars, the most exquisitely choreographed dancing scenes etc., but as a series of perfected components, rather than as a unified whole, and with production logics being underpinned by those of finance, aiming for each film to be an investment of quick and maximum returns.

Examples of "All-Inclusiveness"

As recent examples of "all-inclusive" movies, we may briefly compare a production which was a success story inside and outside India, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (directed by Karan Johar, 1998), and one which was a flop both in India and with diaspora audiences – Aziz Mirza's *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* from 2000 – both of them vehicles for the superstar and Pepsi Cola icon, Shah Rukh Khan.

Kuch Kuch Hota Hai broke new ground internationally, because it became an international success – not only with Hindi-speaking Indian diaspora audiences and with African and other Third-World audiences who have traditionally appreciated

Bollywood films even if the dialogue component was inaccessible, but also – in sub-titled versions – with audience groups who saw it as a new global trend, rather than something localised and exotic – a variety of "world cinema" to match "world music", or a more general dislocation and incoherence which is felt to be "post-modern" or "a show for the 21st century" (Goldbæk, 2002).

The reason for the success of *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* may be sought in the particular mix of components represented by the film which is generally accommodating to a wide range of viewers' desires and characterised by high production values, though a few individual components are strangely miserly, primitive and embarrassing. This goes e. g. for the scenario of the nationalist children's holiday camp in the countryside where Rahul - the Shah Rukh Khan character - sends his child in the last part of the film after the death of its mother, and where he meets again by accident his long-lost childhood tomcat girl friend played by Kajol, who is destined to become the child's new mother and help reconcile at last the tensions experienced by the modernising middle-class male protagonist in the face of the confusingly disharmonious aspects of contemporary womanhood he has been up against.

This is an absolutely central episode within the plot structure of the film, but is played out in sets that are strangely shoddy and reminiscent of amateur theatre – something which is not uncommon, but contrasts oddly with what has otherwise become a standard expectation for Bollywood films to include lavishly spectacular locations, most often with scenes from the Himalayas thrown in, and nymphs of various extractions going though choreographic motions in the fountains of Mysore's Brindavan Gardens. In *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai,* such extravagance is represented e. g. by the sequences played out in the Scottish highlands – representing a trend which has led to European competition for the custom of the Bombay film industry and, recently, to a campaign in Indian newspapers on behalf of the Austrian national tourism agency to that more Indian movies must have their action placed in the Alps, Tyrol and Kärnten.

More seriously – at least for some Indian audiences – such scenes seem to represent the opposite of dis-location, but sooner a placing of Indian middle-class experiences as belonging naturally with and constituting part of the modern global – an effort at "glocalisation" which is an important part of the function which the surrealist mix of components in *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* is meant to fulfil. Such appropriation of the global by the local is played out most importantly in the film in its incorporation of the youth, life style and consumption culture represented by American youth soaps such as *Glamour* and *The Bold and the Beautiful* as Indianised and transplanted on to the national body by satellite networks like Star-TV and M-TV.

In the film, this is symbolised by the protagonist's possibility to reconcile his love for the cosmopolitan beauty returning home (who becomes his first wife and the mother of his child) and that for Anjali - the locally rooted Kajol character – a

scenario in which hip-hop and gangsta rap are mutated into work-out exercises for well-nourished specimens of the Mumbai bourgeoisie, and naturally and effortless leads to scenes of an extravagant, traditional Hindu wedding as its natural conclusion and rounding-off. In this sense, the film very successfully represents a dream universe in which the local succeeds, is marked by progress and middle-class prosperity, and assumes its obvious place within a globalised modernity.

In *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* – whose point of departure for its "all-inclusiveness" like that of *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* is the "social" film – the local is to a higher degree represented by a national and political problematic and – possibly inspired by the success of Mani Ratnam's films – and related in self-contradictory and messy – but extremely interesting terms – to a discussion of terrorism and authoritarian state excesses.

The action of *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* comes to a halt almost before it has started, because it has to give equal prominence to elements from the genres in which its three stars – who are also the producers of the film – have excelled, and from there disintegrates into scraps of comedy, political thriller, action movie and melodrama, which mutually undermine and sabotage each other. Thus, the extremely effectively choreographed and tableau-like dancing sequences – which at regular intervals interrupt the unfolding of the different plots – stand out as the most dynamic elements in the movie to which the spectator looks forward.

Shah Rukh Khan – who plays a success journalist chasing a story about the involvement of top politicians with a gangster mafia – at the same time has the roles of a clown and a romantic lover, and charms and flirts his way into the favours of a female reporter colleague, employed by a competing television station. They eventually get to collaborate in the hunt for a highly Muslim-looking terrorist who has shot and killed a strong-man of one of the top politicians, but find out that he is being framed, and that his violent action is not terrorism, but the justified revenge of an outraged and honest family father for the gruesome rape committed against his daughter – as relived in the movie through a series of flash-backs.

All this is played out in a scenario of metropolitan modernity as represented by a highly idealised Bombay – advertising liberalisation and the consumption of a multiplicity of commodities – which here as in *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* are posited as belonging naturally and obviously in the urban Indian world, obliterating all aspects of reality contradicting this in the experience of audiences. What is particularly interesting in the film is its populist manner of demonising everything that has to do with the state and institutionalised politics – counter posing this with the healthy energy and solidarity within groups of individual citizens and their families.

At the conclusion of the movie, a force of such liberalised citizens go marching in demonstration through the city, braving the assaults and obstruction of a brutalised police force to liberate from prison the family patriarch-cum-liquidator-of-villainous-politicians just as he is about to be hanged – the prisoner already clad in his execution outfit covered with commercial advertisements, and the TV cameras

ready to shoot as he drops.

The confusion of the messages relayed by *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* is striking – not least the way it seems to be both critical of Hindu-Muslim communalist antagonism and of the state. The "people" - as represented in the film by middle-class families - are the essence of a "true" India, betrayed by politicians - but who these politicians are, and what is the exact direction of the film's populism remains unclear.

Another noticeable aspect is that the film – in spite of not having done well in terms of box office income – seems to have made a profit and been a financially viable venture. An explanation for this – other than the earnings from songs- is that *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* – much more unashamedly than *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* and in spite of its own cynical satire, in the execution scene – is saturated with "hidden", i.e. extremely visible advertisements for Swatch watches, Pepsi Cola, Hyundai cars, and other global brands directed in particular at consumers with adolescent life styles. Owners of such brands are extremely active and willing to invest large sums in India which – like China – represents a giant future market place, and one which is in the process of being dramatically changed from conditions of plan economy, regulation and cultural "autonomy" to liberalisation and globalised media culture. In this sense, there is something particularly decadent about *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* as movie, since in financial terms it seems to be able to afford to disregard its reception and the response and concerns of its audience completely – at least as far as these extend beyond commodity brand differentiation.

The Globalisation of Indian Cinema

If it is difficult to make head and tails of the message of a film like this in its Indian perspective and vis-à-vis Indian cinema-goers – what meanings can then be made of it among spectators abroad? What accounts for the tremendous capability to "travel" which Indian film – and "Bollywood" cinema in particular – has demonstrated, and which seems to have been increasing and involved an appeal to new and expanding audiences over recent years?

The globalisation of Indian cinema is not new – as Vashna Jagarnath's contribution to this volume shows, it has followed Indian diasporas into their settlements around the world, and has been a source for them to confirm, rejuvenate and debate their Indian identities. In this capacity it has also provided powerful inspiration for other forms of other cultural activity – in Jagarnath's Durban and South Africa, a shortage of films shown in Tamil led to the production of theatre shows among Tamil-speakers, who represent the majority of Indians – descendants of the indenture sugar-cane cutters who arrived in Natal in the late 19th century. According to Jagarnath's research, such drama performances would imitate the structure of the films shown in Durban's segregated Indian cinemas – their length,

their incoherence, the supremacy of components over unity. In this respect, they were similar to the Ugandan drama shows which came into existence in Kampala in the 1970s after Idi Amin's expulsion of the Ugandan "Asians" – which led to the closure of the city's cinemas which had been owned by Indians.

The globalisation impact of Indian films from early on went beyond the diaspora communities and on to the cultures and societies in which they were settled. Brian Larkin has described the process of this in Northern Nigeria and interpreted the meanings made of Indian cinema among West African Muslims in the special issue of the journal *Africa* on "Audiences" which Karin Barber edited some years ago (Larkin, 1997) – a story Larkin extends upon in his contribution to the present volume on cinemas and the urban space of Kano. My own enthusiasm for "Bollywood" film took off in a cinema in Zanzibar in 1989 – watching dance scenes, gods and goddesses, averted kisses, and heroes and heroines rolling joyfully singing down the slopes of Himalayan mountain sides in the company of an Afro-Arab audience of Swahili-speaking Muslims who understood as little of the Hindi dialogue as I, but were as effectively hypnotised, and eagerly whistling the songs and debating what had been going on after the show.

In recent years, the globalisation of Indian popular film has taken other forms in moving beyond the diaspora, as movies have become available and distributed also with English sub-titles, and are marketed internationally more ambitiously than before. In Vashna Jagarnath's post-apartheid Durban, for example, major Indian films like *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* or Santosh Sivan's historical "epic" *Ashoka* (2001) – also starring Shah Rukh Khan – are now shown, not in "Indian" cinemas, but in sub-titled versions in the major middle-class, mainstream – i.e. formerly white – halls (like the prestigious Ster-Kinekor one in the Musgrave Centre).

Karan Johar's mega-star "family values" follow-up to *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai – K3G* or *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001) – with not only Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol appearing again as characters called Rahul and Anjali, but also with Amitabh Bachchan as father figure (and his wife Jaya Bachchan as mother!) and doubled up with Hrithik Roshan as Rahul's younger brother and Kareen Kapoor as Anjali's sister Pooja – was launched through a major international campaign directed both at an expanding range of international cinemas (and managing to enter British and US box-office top-tens), but also at a booming VHS and DVD market for sub-titled versions. And "Bollywood" seems to have surpassed itself in Aamir Khan and Ashutosh Gowariker's historical cricket romance *Lagaan* (2001) that was Oscar-nominated and has made a major break-through into more general international circulation.

Thus "Bollywood" aesthetics are experiencing a popularity peak as globalised trend and fashion - illustrated also by the "Indian Summer" festival in London of 2002 which included a wide range of showings of not only Hindi films, but simultaneously a retrospective of Satyajit Ray films in copies restored for renewed circulation by the Merchant-Ivory company, as well as the launch of A. R. Rahman's

and Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *Bombay Dreams* paying tribute to
"Bollywood", and now moving on to be produced in New York, Canada, Japan
(Bedell, 2002; Spencer, 2002).

All this was supplemented during May 2002 by thematically laid-out show-
rooms at Selfridge's in Oxford Street celebrating the world of Indian cinema - some
of them by Nitin Desai, who did the sets for *Lagaan*, others "a faithful reproduction
of an entire floor of [film star and socialite] Dimple Kapadia's house in Mumbai
which was designed by Abu Jani and Sandeep Khosla. Both designers use a blending
a blending of traditional Indian designs and crafts with a thoroughly contemporary
environment". The idea was promotion of empathy – to make people feel that they
could be living there themselves:

> Customers will be able to experience the Bollywood lifestyle and meet
> the artistes [sic!], enjoy live performances of dance and music, film
> screening, exclusive fashion shows, specialist food in the food hall and
> cooking in the restaurants by India's leading chefs from the Taj group of
> hotels, as well as choose from an array of precious objects and designs for
> the home (Basu, 2002).

While the empire is thus seemingly striking back, and the West learning to be
most fashionably modern or post-modern by being "Bollywood" eastern, it will be
interesting to see what impact such new varieties of cultural globalisation will have
on the future development of Indian cinema.

On the one hand, the outreach of Indian movies to a more international
market coincides with liberalisation and new legislation in India, which will make
the entry of Hollywood and, other types of western films onto the Indian market
much easier than before. This will mean both intensified competition, and the
possible entry of transnational capital and production interests into the world of
Indian film, which may affect the layout of its genres and modes of expression.

On the other hand, there also remains a huge domestic Indian market for
films that remain "peculiarly" India and do not travel well or translate into
international successes – as demonstrated by some of the films discussed by Ravi
Vasudevan and Tejaswini Niranjana in their essays in this volume. Also in the
diaspora worlds of NRIs – non-resident Indians – the effects of globalisation and the
impact of new international media are not unambiguous and necessarily
homogenising: They carry with them not only new possibilities for confirming
belonging and feeling at home, but also for disagreement and new types of political
involvement and identity differentiation. What was called by the late Claude Aké the
enormous "explosion of monopoly" - and monotony - which the global spread of
capitalism sets off, is accompanied by re-defined differences, the production of new
localities, new forms of metropolitan life, and new challenges to make sense of
modernity which will require a variety of forms of cinematic representation to make
themselves understood.

Acknowledgements

The majority of essays in this volume originate in presentations made to a seminar and researcher training course held at Filmhuset in Copenhagen from 20 to 24 September 1999 on "Representations of Metropolitan Life in Contemporary Indian Film: Bombay, Calcutta, Madras" which brought together the "stars" of Indian film studies and criticism represented here with Danish colleagues, critics and PhD students.[7]

The meeting was accompanied by the showing of a series of films, including Nimai Ghosh's *Chinnamul*, Satyajit Ray's *Mahanagar* and *Jana Aranya*, Ritwik Ghatak's *Meghe Dhaka Tara* and *Subarnarheka*, Mira Nair's *Salaam Bombay*, Mani Ratnam's *Bombay* and Rituparno Ghosh's *Dahan* – an enterprise which had been extremely difficult to arrange, delayed the occasion by more than a year, and demonstrated how ridiculously difficult – for reasons of bureaucracy and preservation method – it is to actually get to SEE screenings of what can only be regarded as absolute high-lights in the modern cultural history of India.

The idea for the Copenhagen seminar arose at a Cultural Studies workshop organised in Mysore in November 1995 by the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta on the theme "Cultural Studies for India" at which Tejaswini Niranjana, Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Ravi Vasudevan gave presentations, and which took place while the debate in India around Mani Ratnam's *Roja* was at its highest. Other presenters at the workshop included Susie Tharu, Gyan Pandey, S. V. Srinivas, Partha Chatterjee, Tapati Guha-Thakurta and Vivek Dhareshwar, and the workshop became the first in a series of so far eight annual cultural studies workshops arranged by the CSSSC at different venues in India, and offering training to PhD students from India and the South.

The Indian cultural studies workshops have been planned in collaboration with the Graduate School of International Development Studies at Roskilde University, and Roskilde scholars have contributed lectures and discussion inputs. In this process, the Danes have certainly learnt no less than the Indians, and the purpose of the Copenhagen seminar on "Representations of Metropolitan Life in Contemporary Indian Film" was to bring some of the inspiration and excitement of the workshops in India to Denmark. Another intention was to stimulate a Danish interest in the rich, strange and wonderful world of Indian film which is already growing, as shown by the popularity of Indian movies at the "Films from the South" festivals which have been held in Copenhagen and other Danish cities in recent years.

The Copenhagen Indian film event in September 1999 was financed with contributions from the Danish Council for Research in the Humanities, "Det lange Udvalg", the Graduate School of International Development Studies at Roskilde

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[7] The essays by Jagarnath, Larkin and Ray-Mukherjee were commissioned after the seminar.

University, the Department of Film and Media Studies and the Department of Literature at the University of Copenhagen, the Danish PhD Network for Development Studies and International Relations, and – finally – the ENRECA programme under Danida, which had also funded the Mysore cultural studies workshop in 1995.

The venue for the event as well as indispensable practical and logistical support was provided by the Cinematheque and the Danish Film Museum at Filmhuset in Copenhagen. Successive Indian Ambassadors to Copenhagen – Mrs. Neelam Deo, and following her departure, Mr. Shashank – gave moral support, and helped in locating the whereabouts of copies of film.

Apart from the contributors to the present volume, I should like to thank the following individuals for having in different ways helped to bring the project to fruition – Dan Nissen, Katrine Høyberg, Amrit Gangar, Stig Hjarvard, David Hannan, Ritaban Ghatak, Amiya Bagchi, Mrinal Sen, and Peter Madsen - whose lecture to the September 1999 gathering has been published separately in a collection of essays on *The Urban Life World* (Madsen and Plunz, 2001).