The ‘Paradox’ of Being Young in New Delhi

Urban Middle Class Youth Negotiations with Popular Indian Film

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ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to understand the ways in which popular film is integrated into the everyday lives of urban middle class youth in India. Approaching the study of film through an audience reception approach, I engaged in participant observation and interviews during a fieldwork period in New Delhi in order to better understand how a young audience might negotiate the fantasy of filmic images into the reality of their own lives. The two movies, *Salaam Namaste* and *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (KANK), provided the platform for discussing sensitive or taboo topics in the interviews as well as in the larger public sphere. In portraying alternative lifestyles such as a pre-marital sexual live-in relationship in *Salaam Namaste*, and an extra-marital relationship in KANK, these movies presented a possibility for discussing as well as negotiating changing practices and attitudes concerning courtship and marriage in India. The concept of negotiation plays a key role in this interpretation and analysis of the challenges, or 'paradox,' young people face while integrating a modern, global outlook with traditional, "Indian" morality. Imagination, I argue, thus provides the necessary tool for negotiating modern dilemmas incurred as a result of processes of globalization.

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FOREWORD

In the attempt to write a thesis which tackles the 'Popular' yet not so popular academic approach, namely the audience reception of mainstream Hindi film among an urban middle class youth in India, I am very grateful for the encouragement and advice I received from the sociologists Ravinder Kaur at IITD and Patricia Uberoi at the Institute of Economic Growth in New Delhi. I would like to think Banhi Jha at NIFT for allowing me to participate in her class on film and fashion, as well as her kindness in sharing her many thoughtful insights on the Bollywood film industry. I owe a special thanks to my thesis advisor, Helle Rydstrøm, for her very helpful and insightful comments and suggestions throughout the research and thesis writing process. I would also like to thank Mr. Ash Narain Roy and the Institute for Social Science, New Delhi for making the effort to accommodate my research interests in arranging a seminar as well as an interesting panel discussion on my research topic with the film critics Mr.Saibal Chatterjee and Mr. Utpal Bhorpujan and the film-maker Mr. Anwar Jamal. Additionally, I would like to thank Veena Ravikumar for her assistance, support and friendship during my fieldwork in Delhi. Most importantly, however, I would like to thank my roommates and all of the young people I met in Delhi who so graciously opened their lives and hearts to me during our discussions on film. I made many very good friends during my stay in Delhi. Also, a heartfelt thank you is due to my parents, Sue and John Williams, for providing me with their gracious support. Last but not least, I am eternally grateful to my loving husband, Jakob, who provided the economic, intellectual and emotional support needed for writing this thesis.

INTRODUCTION

The 'Paradox' of Being Young in Modern India

On September 27, 2006 I visited a college in New Delhi to meet with a group of students and talk about film. The following is an excerpt from my notes written about that day:

> The group discussion was very difficult to start at first. It was difficult to control, difficult to keep their attention and difficult to keep the conversation going. However, when the movie KANK [*Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*] was brought up, then all of a sudden a heated discussion arose. They started yelling at each other over whether or not the movie was a good movie or a bad movie. The group then rearranged their seating and divided themselves between those who thought it was a good movie (2) and those who thought it was a bad movie (4). I was quite taken aback by the strong response this movie provoked among these women. The majority of the young women thought that it was a bad movie because of the way that the family was disregarded. They said something like this would never happen in India. The way that Shah Rukh Khan (SRK) walked out on his family- not only his wife, but his son and his mother- this would never happen in India- and shouldn't happen. The other two, however, brought up Rani's situation and how the movie showed how love prevailed. Even though her husband was loving and caring, her heart lead her to SRK, and she took action and followed her heart. This was quite interesting to hear from these women, since later in the discussion in talking about their own lives, they didn't feel that love could prevail- one should follow the wishes of the parents.

The above selection from my field notes is just one example of the many conversations I had in Delhi about Indian mainstream movies. During my stay in India from August 2nd until November 1st, 2006 the movie *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (KANK)[1] was at the forefront of a larger debate about being 'Indian' in the face of globalization or Westernization- a debate which focused on marriage, family and sexuality as some of the key determinants for defining a sense of 'Indianness' in a global environment. Movies such as KANK, and others such as *Salaam Namaste,* have attempted to approach the debate from a different angle by introducing unconventional aspects of relationships and marriage such as live-in relationships, pre-marital sexuality and pregnancy, extramarital affairs and divorce. Even though these movies were not the most popular or successful, they raised a public debate about relationships in a heteronormative society. Popular films and other mass-mediated sources play an ever-increasing role in an environment of flux and

[1] Throughout the paper, the movie *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* will be referred to by its acronym, KANK.

transition spurred on by processes of globalization (see Appadurai 1996). Especially for young middle class Indians in the city, many of whom live alone away from their family and hometowns, while being in the midst of a transitional phase between childhood and adulthood, single and married, are the processes of globalization and the subsequent transition and flux a reality which requires constant negotiation of the 'old' with the 'new.' Being confronted with mass-mediated images and ideas about alternative or transforming courtship, sexual and marriage practices, young Indians must actively negotiate between being 'modern' and 'traditional' as a participant in a larger society of family, community and nation. As Priya[2], a female college student in Delhi related to me:

> Being Indian is like a person who respects tradition, and respects sentiments, emotions, and relationships. And blending traditionality and modernity. Modernity is like, for my generation it's a *paradox.* We can't leave our values, our beliefs, but we have to move ahead with the times so that we're not left behind. So that me being an Indian is, I have to be progressive, I have to make myself so much capable so that I give something back to society.

What I would like to show in the following is how popular culture, films in particular, play an integral role in the process of negotiating this "paradox" of being young in urban India during a time of transition and change most evident in issues regarding courtship and marriage.

Liberalization and Globalization of the media

With the onset of the liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991 and the subsequent hastening of the processes of globalization, India is undergoing an economic and social transformation which is changing everyday life for a large number of Indians (see Srinivas 2005a: 325). The economic reform policies initiated in the early 1990s opened the doors of Indian society to the flow of foreign goods, technologies, ideas and images at an increasing speed, scale and volume (see Appadurai 1996). Subsequently, the mediascape[3] in India has undergone a remarkable transformation (see Juluri 1996: 161; Uberoi 2006:x, Prasad 2000:145). Compared to pre-liberalisation when there existed only one state-owned television network, Doordarshan, the economic

[2] All of the names of my informants have been changed throughout the thesis in order to protect their identities. I did not include their ages due to a few outliers whose identity would be revealed if their ages were mentioned. All of my informants were aged between 16 and 26.

[3] "Mediascapes refer both to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information, which are now available to a growing number of private and public interests throughout the world, and to the images of the world created by these media."(Appadurai 1996:35)

reforms opened the air to transnational satellite networks, which allowed for a multitude of 24-hour channels and led to a rapid expansion in viewership, programming, channels and consumer preferences (Misra and Roychowdury 1997: 250, see also Butcher 1999: 165).

With increasing globalization processes, a global distribution of power is said to exist in which cultural products from a few dominant countries are 'transmitted' to other 'periphery' countries, such as India, which 'receive' these images (see Shohat 1997:188). In this way a dominant culture is understood as 'superimposing' itself onto a pre-existing culture, leading to a perception of the 'global' as a site of cultural erosion and the 'local' as a site of cultural 'authenticity' (see Ang 1996:152). However, if we look more closely at the process of globalization in the Indian context it would be misleading and overly simplistic to understand globalization as merely a process of cultural domination or homogenization (see Stam and Shohat 2000). Instead we need to approach globalization with a model which challenges the center-periphery distinctions and adopts a more "pluralist" understanding (Srinivas 2005a: 320). In the case of India a powerful reverse current is occurring in which the global mass culture has become indigenized to a large extent (see Juluri 2005, Mankekar 2004). In addition, cultural products originating in India not only dominate the local or national market, but are also exported to other countries figuring prominently in other national markets (see Vasudevan 2000: 130, Shohat 1997: 189).[4]

However, cultural controversies sparked by the cultural and social transformations occurring alongside globalization have erupted, re-instating a bipolarity positioning 'India' in opposition to an invasive 'West' (see Kapur 2000: 59, Brosius 1999: 100). The incorporation and reproduction of Western lifestyles is often perceived as a threat, especially due to a larger proportion of the younger generation and the middle class becoming increasingly more open to the ideas and opportunities brought in from the 'West' (Brosius 1999: 105). Television, movies and other forms of popular culture, often portraying 'Western' lifestyles' are believed to play an important role in shaping the beliefs, attitudes and behaviors of the younger generation. Thus, they might be providing a powerful resource for "counternodes of identity" which youth might possibly project against the wishes of their parents and other traditional authority figures (see Appadurai 1996: 44, Sen 2006: 3).

[4] The Indian film industry is the largest in the world producing 1100 films, exported to over 95 countries and watched by 3.4 billion viewers in 2005 compared to Hollywood's 593 films with 1.6 billion viewers in 2003 (Srinivas 2005a: 320).

Liberalization and Globalization of sexuality

In the public discourse positioning globalization or 'Westernization' as a threat to the Indian culture, the erotic realm has often been the platform on which a reification of 'Indianness' is established (Mankekar 2004:427). Media-centered debates[5] articulating anxieties and uncertainties around a cultural transformation have often focused on a risk of displaying images of sex and sexuality in the public sphere (see Kapur 2000: 53, Ghosh 1999:234). The Hindu right have opposed satellite television on the grounds that it promotes a promiscuous, Western culture which is a threat to traditional Indian values (Ghosh 1999: 234). The Indian mediascape has indeed witnessed a transformation with a proliferation of the representation of the erotic since the 1990s, thus giving rise to the perception that sexuality has also undergone a 'liberalisation' and 'globalisation' (John 1998: 362, Mankekar 2004: 403). A female college student in Delhi explained the situation:

> Earlier we didn't have television in India. Then we had television coming in, and then satellite TV and then we were opened. Another whole world opened up in our drawing rooms. We saw how movies were being made in different parts of the world. We saw how similar love scenes were being portrayed in foreign movies. That's when people's minds began opening up. Generally Indians are traditional about such things and do it behind closed doors, and they will not actually talk about it. But now it is very ok, people talk about it, people are fine with it and you watch it in the movies (Shanti).

Previously popular Indian cinema did not portray erotic scenes with kissing or love-making. An 'unwritten rule'[6] in the Hindi film industry upheld a ban on scenes of kissing (see also Vachani 1999: 227, Taylor 2002: 311), which according to Madhava M. Prasad (1998: 88) was related to a nationalist politics of culture. The felt need to maintain the 'Indianness' of Indian culture posited kissing as a sign of 'Westernness', and alien to Indian culture. This informal ban was most notably transgressed by the movie *Murder* released in April 2004, a re-make of the Hollywood movie *Unfaithful*. Since the release of *Murder,* many mainstream even 'family-oriented'[7] films, display 'bold' scenes

[5] Media-centered debates include e.g. the legal contest in 1994 over the screening of Bandit Queen in India, the protest against the Miss World beauty pageant in Bangalore in November 1996, and the release of the movie Fire. 6 The written rules prohibited 'excessively passionate love scenes', 'indelicate sexual situations', and 'scenes suggestive of immorality' (Prasad 1998, 88).

[6] The written rules prohibited 'excessively passionate love scenes', 'indelicate sexual situations', and 'scenes suggestive of immorality' (Prasad 1998, 88).

[7] 'Family-oriented' films refer to films which are targeted towards viewing where the whole family sits together watching the movie without feeling any discomfort relating to offensive or intimate issues.

and 'skin-show.'[8] In addition, popular films (including the two films *Salaam Namaste* and KANK) have begun to address new lifestyles and family mores such as premarital sex, unwed motherhood, alternative sexualities, live-in relationships, bachelorhood, 'singledom,'[9] infidelity and divorce (Uberoi 2006:28).

Research problem and outline of the thesis

This thesis is based on field research done in India where I sought to investigate the extent to which popular film plays a role in reflecting and/or affecting the social and cultural environment of change in the Indian context. What role do cultural products play in shaping ideas about sexuality, marriage and relationships in India? How does a young Indian audience negotiate images of sexuality, relationships and marriage depicted in popular Hindi movies into their own lives?

In the following discussion I will present and analyze the results of my research through a focus on approaching cultural resources such as popular film as an integral aspect of negotiating change and transition in contemporary India. To do this I will first introduce the research field including a discussion about the Hindi film industry, previous research on film and audience reception, and the targeted audience for this research: urban middle class youth. I will then discuss my fieldwork process in describing participant observation, interviews, some findings and my role as a researcher. Next I will turn to ways of understanding the relationship between popular culture products and their audience by considering culture as a site of domination and contestation, agency and negotiation. An integral part of the discussion involves the two films *Salaam Namaste* and KANK, which I will first describe. Subsequently I will give accounts of my informants' reception of these movies and consider the genre of melodrama as the framework for an interpretation and analysis of their perceptions- the analysis of *Salaam Namaste* will lead to a discussion of changing Indian courtship practices; whereas the analysis of KANK will lead to a discussion of possible changes in the Indian marital institution. In conclusion I will consider the formation of alternative epistemic worlds created by young people in India, such as my

[8] 'Bold' and 'skin-show' are every day terms to address the proliferation of sexuality in mainstream Indian films. 'Bold' refers to scenes which show explicit sexuality such as kissing or love-making, whereas 'skin-show' refers to the lack of clothing actresses wear, revealing parts of the body not normally displayed in Indian films. It should be noted that 'B'-movies and indigenous pornography have not upheld the informal ban on the kiss and 'excessively passionate love scenes'.

[9] 'Singledom' refers to a new lifestyle in which young men and women choose to remain single either by marrying late, or by not marrying at all. Most of my informants can be said to be in a state of 'singledom' in that they live alone in the city, away from their families, thus being 'single-in-the-city.'

informants, and the integral role imagination plays in negotiating the challenge or 'paradox' of being young in (global) India.

RESEARCH IN INDIA

Hindi film industry

In preparation for engaging in fieldwork in India, I researched scholarly works and media documents about film in India, as well as watched a large number of Hindi films in order to better familiarize myself with the subject of Indian popular cinema. I decided to focus on film in India since, as Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge (1995: 9) point out, "The culture of cinema in contemporary India affects almost every arena of public life"(see also Mishra 2002: 3). The Indian film industry comprises not only the popular Hindi film produced in Bombay, otherwise known as 'Bollywood' films, but also regional and 'parallel' or non-mainstream movies. However, I have chosen to focus on the mainstream Hindi film due to its immense popularity and widespread reception, considering popular Hindi films as cultural narratives which provide commentary on Indian society. The particular 'masala'[10] style of popular Hindi films usually includes a larger-than-life filmic spectacle of song and dance, strong emotions, comedy and action all in one film (see Rajadhyaksha 2000: 279, Kasbekar 2000:288). Effects of the aforementioned economic liberalization are noticeable in recent films which show an increasing portrayal of foreign locations; non-resident Indian (NRI) characters; lavish lifestyles displaying economic prosperity and an expensive taste in commodities; a style similar to MTV and television advertising; and even love stories where a young couple decide to marry against their parents' wishes (see Chaudhuri 2006:156, Inden 1999: 64, Srinivas a & b,).

Previous Academic (lack of) Attention

Recognizing the prominence and importance of the popular Hindi film in India, there is a noticeable dearth in academic writing in the past. According to Jyotika Virdi (2003: x), "A scandal in cinema studies of the last few decades has been the lack of attention paid to Indian popular cinema." This lack of attention is most likely due to being regarded by critics as "frivolous escape, or simply, degraded spectacle" (Dickey 1995: 131). Only recently has serious writing about mainstream Hindi films appeared (Gokulsing and Dissanayake 1998: 1). Since the 1980s numerous articles and books have been written on

[10] The term "masala" usually refers to a blend or mixture, as in a blend of spices.

the subject, mostly approaching film as a textual artifact emphasizing the reading of narrative and structure, assuming there to be a direct and perhaps predictable connection between the text and reader (Banaji 2005: 177, Juluri 2005: 166).

Audience Reception

However, as Steve Derné (2000: 109) argues, "cinematic effects do not flow directly from films themselves," for this reason it is important to consider the context as well as the experience and interpretations of the audience. Janice Radway, in her study of romance readers, has convincingly argued for an analytic shift away from the text analyzed in isolation towards placing the text within the complex event of reading and taking the reception of the audience into account (Ang 1996: 99). The aim should be to understand "the endlessly shifting, ever-evolving kaleidoscope of everyday life and the ways in which the media are integrated and implicated within it" (Radway in Ang 1996: 77). In this manner, the object of film study becomes a field of 'reception,' where the 'audience' is comprised of actual individuals who view the film, rather than as theoretical 'spectators' arising from the 'text' (Prasad 2000: 161, see also Ang 1996: 136). This kind of audience reception approach, which embraces qualitative empirical research and employs tools of ethnography such as in-depth interviews and participant observation, has been pioneered in India by researchers such as Patricia Uberoi, Steve Derné, Sara Dickey, Patricia Mankekar, and Vamsee Juluri. It is also the approach I have sought to shape my research after.

The young audience

My aim of doing research in India was to engage with a young, urban, middle class audience to understand how such an audience might negotiate with or incorporate images of sexuality and relationships from the films into their everyday lives. With this in mind I conducted fieldwork in India for a period of three months from August 2nd to November 1st, 2006. The urban middle class youth, sometimes referred to as "post-liberators" (Paramswaram 2006:27), is the first generation of Indians to grow up surrounded by the influx of foreign images, ideas, goods and technologies accompanying liberalisation and globalization. For this reason they are often said to be more influenced by this transformation, and become the focus of debates about 'tradition' and 'modernity.' Young people also grapple with change and flux in their personal lives, being in a life-phase of transition between childhood and adulthood, single and married. In addition many young people are

increasingly moving away from their family and hometowns in order to pursue educational or career opportunities in the city. At the same time, according to the media, youth in India are gaining more clout in becoming "the biggest and most influential consumer in the marketplace" (Mukherjee 2006: 41, see also Parikh 2006: 48).

The middle class audience

Within the last five to ten years, the main target audience and film-viewing experience has undergone a transition. Film producers are said now to target a young, urban middle class audience member who has the time and money to spend over 150 rupees on a ticket in a smaller movie complex, such as the PVR cinema complexes, compared to a lower middle class audience member who typically spends 10 rupees to watch a film in a large cinema hall (see Chaudhuri 2006: 156, Iyer 2006: 14, Sharma 2003). The middle class in India is commonly regarded as being a sizeable 30 percent of the population or 300 million people, but if one consults consumption patterns or income levels to define the middle class, the figure is substantially lower (Deshpande 2004: 134). However as Satish Deshpande (2004: 150) points out, the everyday term 'middle class,' while gaining weight in the face of globalization, is more of a symbolic than a factual description. According to Appadurai and Breckenridge (1995: 7) the idea of the middle class, both actual and potential, holds a significant place in the imagination of an Indian society, becoming "the social basis of public culture formations." Surprisingly, the 'middle class' segment in India has received relatively little scholarly attention (Deshpande 2004: 127), adding further weight to my choice of considering urban middle class youth as the focus in my research on the negotiation of popular culture formations in the face of globalisation and transition in India.

Fieldwork in India

Participant Observation

During the three months of my fieldwork in India, the bulk of which took place in Delhi, I engaged in participant observation, informal and semi-structured interviews, and the collection of documents, both academic and media. Because I lived with two young Indian women and spent most of my time out of my home with other young women, one could say I was constantly engaged in fieldwork. I wrote field notes throughout my stay in India documenting the personal observations and experiences I had as well as the events or conversations that took place throughout the day. In spending time with the young people I met, I engaged in different activities which

allowed for "participant observation", such as going to the cinema; TV and movie watching; going shopping; going to restaurants, cafes, bars and night clubs; visiting different parts of the city and college campuses; attending college events; and just 'hanging out.' All of these activities provided multiple opportunities to gather impressions and information about young men and women in Delhi, regarding how they relate to or incorporate popular Hindi films into their personal lives. They also provided the setting for numerous informal interviews and conversations about my research topic, which I would later record in my field notes.

Interviews

In addition to these informal interviews I completed 17 'taped' interviews with 40 people aged 16-24; 9 of which were private interviews; 8 of which were group interviews ranging in size from 2 to 6 people. All of my interviewees, in fact the majority of my informants, were from middle class or upper-middle class backgrounds, and most had moved to Delhi from various places around India- ranging from smaller towns to larger cities. In addition, most of my informants were college students, and all were unmarried. All in all, I interviewed 19 young men, 17 of whom were Hindus and 2 Muslims; and 21 young women, 13 of whom were Hindus, 7 Muslims and 1 Christian. The selection of participants was initiated through a 'snowball effect', creating a non-randomized or controlled group of informants. I did not attempt to create a sample of students who would represent all of India or even all of Delhi, although I did try to set up interviews with as many men and Muslims as possible, for it was much easier to come into contact with Hindu women. It was not my purpose, however, to come up with conclusive or generalizable data about youth reception of mainstream Hindi films. I was more interested in engaging in in-depth conversations with a few people who could give me a better understanding of the *ways* in which young people relate to issues such as sex, relationships and marriage within the context of discussing mainstream Hindi films.

Inquiry on Reception

In preparation for the interviews I had created an interview guide with a list of questions and issues to be addressed throughout the interview (see appendix a). I quickly discarded the guide as it introduced an element of formality into a discussion which was otherwise casual and relaxed. Instead I kept the main topics and issues in my head (see appendix b) making sure they were addressed in each interview, bringing them up myself if they were not brought up by the interviewee herself. While discussing popular film in India was the

premise for the interview, the bulk of the interviews were about personal issues and attitudes about relationships, sexuality, marriage, family and change in India.[11] While I had previously thought of focusing on the movie *Salaam Namaste* before I came to India, KANK became a focus of my research due to the prominence the movie had both in the media and in the discussions I had with young people about film. Discussing these two movies created a natural bridge or frame for a larger discussion about personal attitudes towards potentially taboo topics such as sexuality, relationships and marriage. I rarely asked directly about the specific sexual behavior my informants engaged in, but after judging the comfort level of the informant and our relationship I did ask on a few occasions.

Contextualization

In addition to participant observation, semi-structured interviews and informal conversations, I consulted documents such as newspaper and magazine articles. Like Derné and Jadwin (2000: 48)[12] I felt that these supplementary sources might reveal not only broad cultural judgments about cultural products, but also contextualize the statements of my informants in the larger social environment in which they are located. As Pinney (2001: 23) remarks on such an approach, "the ethnography of consumption ceases thus to be an 'event'- focused on particular individuals' reception of a specific film- but becomes rather an ongoing project 'living inside' the discourses which are perpetually maintained alongside filmic texts." By living and participating in the social and cultural environment in which my informants lived, I attempted to 'live inside' the discourses surrounding the films in focus.

Discoveries

I quickly discovered that there exists a multitude of attitudes, opinions, approaches and behaviors regarding the use of popular culture and film among the young people I met. Many of my informants stated that they did not like mainstream Hindi movies, attributing the Bollywood film industry to being meant for the 'masses'[13], and not sufficiently 'real' or substantial. However, at the same time, many of these same informants watched a large

[11] The style of the interviews resemble Joke Hermes' (2000: 561) approach as he writes: "the interviews were modeled on everyday lengthy conversation, as between friends… with my respondents describing themselves, their lives and their specific vantage points on life."
[12] Steve Derne and Lisa Jadwin (2000: 248) consulted fan magazines in order to "provide further support for the conclusions *they+ draw from interviews."
[13] The term 'masses' was used frequently to refer to a 'mass' audience which is comprised of a lower class rural audience who seek mindless entertainment as a form of escape from the harsh reality of their lives (see Srinivas 2005b)

number of these 'disliked' movies.[14] Additionally, many of my informants did not recognize the importance or impact of popular cinema in their personal lives, at the same time as they considered popular films as having widespread impact and importance in the lives of the 'masses,' or in the shaping of Indian society in general.

Role of researcher

My presence as a slightly older, married, American woman researcher no doubt influenced not only what was said, but also the manner in which it was said by my informants. Some of my informants would tell me about films in an informative rather than personal manner. They apparently did not expect a foreigner to be familiar with the Indian film industry. On the other hand my interest and familiarity with popular films was met with an overwhelmingly warm response. My presence as a Westerner and especially an American may also have had the effect that my informants were more open and willing to talk about and even accept certain attitudes towards relationships and sexuality since Americans are often believed to be more 'open' to such practices as pre-marital sexuality, live-in relationships, and even extra-marital affairs. In this way, one drawback of ethnographic research is that informants may say what they feel the researcher or the dominant discourse expects them to say, rather than what they actually think and feel. For example, often when informants discussed 'the masses' I understood this to be influenced by public discourse, and as a means to distance themselves from practices which are commonly degraded such as watching 'cheap Hindi flicks.'

Interpretation and Analysis

Although ideas and analyses were already beginning to take form in India, after leaving the field and returning home the intricate process of interpretation and analysis intensified. This included transcribing most of my interviews. By transforming the exact words of my informants into textual form, I was able to analyze and interpret the interviews as text, integrating them with other textual forms such as empirical material from my field notes including additional observations and/or conversations, magazine and newspaper clippings, and scholarly works.[15]

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[14] Steve Derne (2000:19) in his audience reception work on male filmgoers in India discovered this as well and writes: "Extensive filmgoing is combined with an extensive denigration of films by filmgoers themselves. Indians are at once attracted to and repelled by films and filmgoing. This contradictory attitude reflects ambivalence about modernity."

[15] Jackie Stacey (2003) in her audience reception work argues that the "role of the researcher … is to interpret the material that audiences produce within a critical framework which is appropriate to the material, and which is made explicit and can be contested." She argues for "the importance of textual analysis of the stories that audiences tell researchers about what the media means to them,

The aim of this study from the beginning was not to arrive at any conclusions or truths[16] about how young people in India respond to or perceive popular culture, so I did not try to eliminate the contradictions and inconsistencies which arose. I instead tried to make space for these ambiguities in my analysis. In doing so I attempted to better understand how my informants might, or even might not, negotiate issues such as sexuality, relationships and marriage in their everyday lives with images from popular films.

VIEWS ON CULTURE

Hypodermic Needle

The role of popular culture in shaping individuals and their societies has been analyzed from different perspectives, such as viewing culture as a site of domination or resistance, or in a less political approach as a site of negotiation. Understanding popular culture as a 'hypodermic needle,' or site of domination, was most famously advocated by T.W. Adorno and others from the Frankfurt School. This approach takes a negative or pessimistic approach to popular culture, deeming it banal in terms of its form and content, as well as detrimental in its effects. Cultural products such as film are produced by 'culture industries' (Adorno 2003) as a form for distraction from more pressing issues, and thereby work to keep the working classes and consumers of mass culture docile and subordinate (see Sen 2006: 109, McRobbie 2003:237, Brooker and Jermyn, 2003a: 5). The term 'popular' then refers to the widespread distribution of modern mass media products produced and marketed by these 'culture industries' for nationwide consumption, and play an instrumental role in the spread and imposition of hegemonic ideas (Uberoi 2006:35,4). The 'masses,' or consumers of cultural products, are passively led and controlled from above by the 'culture industries' working to maintain the presiding power relations.

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but in a framework which is demonstrably derived from the material itself. Thus a dialectical relationship emerges between the material studied and the theory which is used to analyse it."

[16] Ien Ang (1996:46) asserts the position that "It is not the search of (objective, scientific) Truth in which the researcher is engaged, but the construction of interpretations, of certain ways of understanding the world, always historically located, subjective and relative."

Sites of Resistance

Responding to the 'hypodermic needle' model viewing popular culture as a site of domination, Culture Studies scholars, such as Stuart Hall, David Morley and John Fiske, view popular culture as a possible site of resistance to the dominant economic and social order. According to Stuart Hall, the most viable way one can view popular culture is to position it "in a continuing tension (relationship, influence, antagonism) to the dominant culture"(Hall in Pinney 2001:3). This approach focuses on the popular tactics employed to cope with, evade and even resist dominant forces (see Fiske 2003: 116, Morley 1992, Ang 1996: 41, Vachani 1999: 202, Sen, 2006:114). Cultural products, then, may instigate a resistance to hegemony through a process of "excorporation" (Fiske 2003:114) where consumers subvert the original meaning of the object or cultural products and make their own culture out of the resources and commodities provided by the 'culture industries' (Fiske 2003: 114, McRobbie 2003: 238).[17] As Appadurai (1996:7) recognizes, "there is growing evidence that the consumption of the mass media throughout the world provokes resistance, irony, selectivity, and, in general, agency."

Sites of Negotiation

Instead of understanding the consumption of popular culture as a passive process by which one is subordinated by a dominant power, we should, from the Culture Studies perspective, understand the consumers of popular culture to be agents and actors, not merely objects and recipients (see Appadurai and Breckenridge 1995: 4). In this manner, according to Ien Ang (1996:4), a key historical feature of the postmodern is that cultural products pervade everyday life and that their meanings are not only constructed, but also subject to constant contestation. However, as Christopher Pinney (2001: 9) points out, although popular culture is involved in a larger cultural debate and contestation, it is "not a space characterized by the kind of massive cultural divide and miscomprehension that /…/ even Stuart Hall mobilizes." Instead, I suggest we understand popular culture products, such as film, as part of a process of negotiation which integrates the act of viewing into local everyday practices. As Susan Freitag (2002:365) explains, "acts of seeing and knowing, by which persons constitute their identities and construct meaning from their world, make them active participants in shaping their societies." The

[17] An example of this resistance or 'excorporation' can be found among my informants in their consideration of Hindi films as "cheap" where they reinterpret the "cheapness", the seemingly "low" or degraded quality of Hindi films, into something which is at once celebrated and adored, adding a sense of irony and humor

relationship between media texts, ideologies and viewers then, according to Christine Gledhill (1999), is best understood as a process of negotiation (see also Butcher 199:166, Gillespie 2003:321). In her thought-provoking work, *Pleasurable Negotiations* (1999:169), Gledhill views the process of negotiation as an ongoing process of "give-and-take" between competing frames of reference. Images in films engage an audience in a process of negotiation of competing understandings regarding "dilemmas concerning past and present" (Sen 2006:9), tradition and modernity (Mishra 2002: 4). The dynamic of negotiation is I suggest an especially salient approach to understanding the cultural complexity which Indian popular culture contextualizes, and with which a young audience in India must contend.

Unfortunately, most film critics and scholars, as well as many of my informants, abide by the dominant approach of viewing the Hindi film industry as a 'hypodermic needle,' as a 'low' form of culture provided for the 'masses' who wish to 'escape' from the harsh realities of life through fantasy (see Uberoi, 2006: 5, Nandy, 1995; Ohm 1999: 75; Shrinivas 2005b) However, I suggest we follow Sudhir Kakar's (1989:27) recommendation that we understand 'fantasy' to denote not the trivial and meaningless, but a "world of imagination which is fueled by desire, and which provides us with an alternative world where we can continue our longstanding quarrel with reality." The fantasy of the film-world contextualizes the reality of the transforming life-worlds of the audience by presenting various possibilities for negotiating and "quarreling" with modern day "dilemmas." As Lakshmi Srinivas (2005a: 321) notes, "Bollywood films are at the forefront of recognizing social change and are often ahead of sociologists and anthropologists in their anticipation of and commentary on significant issues in Indian society"(see also Uberoi 2006: 35). Movies reflect, as well as affect, change (Gokulsing and Dissanayake 1998:9) in their presentation of scenarios which present alternative social or cultural realities (see also Bjerregaard 2003:226), thereby engaging the audience in a process of negotiation. One of my informants explains this inter-relation in her discussion of the movie *Salaam Namaste*:

> Once the movie was released, it was written up in the newspapers, the issue of live-in relationships was being discussed every where. So it was a movie which reflected the change and which caused the change to a certain extent. Issues like live-in are being talked about now, this is the change from earlier times. This in itself is a drastic change. (Priya)

DISCUSSING FILM

Introducing the films

The films *Salaam Namaste* and *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (KANK) are just two examples of many in which films portray a scenario of social change, engaging the audience into a dialogic process of negotiation. The two films are quite similar in some ways: they were both recently released (September, 2005 and August, 2006 respectively); produced by large production companies; had a large marketing campaign and media build-up prior to their release; and most importantly, they both focused on potentially sensitive or taboo topics regarding sexuality, marriage and the family. In addition, both of these movies received an unexpected response from the Indian audience- namely rejection, or failure- but for very different reasons. Throughout the remainder of the thesis I will discuss these two films and their reception among my informants to explore the ways in which a young audience engages in a negotiation of social change. I will first introduce the movies, giving only a brief summary of the responses to these films, continuing to a more in-depth discussion of the reception of these films later.

Salaam Namaste

By the time I arrived in India, almost a year after the release of *Salaam Namaste*, the movie had mostly faded away from the consciousness of the young people I spoke with. The movie is about two Indians, Nikhil Arora (Saif Ali Khan) and Ambar Malhotra (Preity Zinta) who leave their families in India to pursue their educational and professional dreams in Melbourne, Australia, (and in the case of Ambar to avoid parental pressure to get married.) Ambar and Nikhil meet at a wedding and, after some misunderstandings are cleared up, they decide to move in together to try out their relationship, as they are both apprehensive about the idea of marriage. Things run pretty smoothly until Ambar discovers she is pregnant. Despite Nikhil's insistence on an abortion, she decides to keep the baby, which results in the break-up of their relationship. Over time Nikhil realizes that he loves Ambar and wants to marry her, leading to a happy and comic ending. Although the movie was one of the first mainstream or family-oriented movies to introduce the issues of live-in relationships, pre-marital sex and pregnancy, in addition to including the newly introduced 'bold' and 'skin-show' scenes, the movie did not provoke a strong reaction. According to my informants, the movie was said to have good songs, and a good theme (live-in relationships), but it was otherwise written off as "a good three hours of fun, a good time pass"(Priya). Many of my informants, having high expectations for a movie that was going

to be "different," expressed disappointment that it included the same familiar elements of song-and-dance, foreign locations, comedy and a usual, predictable happy ending. Taraksh, a male college student said:

> This is something new which hasn't been touched in Indian cinemas until now, so I was very much excited about [going to see] the film. I liked the first part of the film because it was something different, but in the end it turned out to be just another film. The second half was pathetic.

KANK (Sometimes You Never Say Good-bye)

Comparatively, KANK provoked a strong response of rejection among the majority of my informants. The movie portrays two married couples: Dev (Shah Rukh Khan) and Rhea (Preity Zinta) and Maya (Rani Mukherjee) and Rishi (Abhishek Bachchan). Dev and Maya first meet by coincidence, then start a relationship which eventually leads to love, providing a contrast to their incompatible marriages. They become involved in an extramarital affair, and when they decide to end the affair and tell their partners about it, their partners throw them out of their marriages causing Dev and Maya to lead separate, lonely lives for three years. At the end of the movie, Dev and Maya become reunited and live happily ever after. This was not the first time extra-marital affairs were shown in a mainstream film, but the first showing such an ending. A male informant told me: "Ending in having two couples separating, I don't know how far that has been accepted. This is the first movie which has that kind of ending. Extramarital affairs have been there, but the ending is always reconciliation between the husband and the wife" (Manvir). Contrary to the high expectations surrounding the release of the film, KANK was largely rejected by the Indian audience, mostly due to the portrayal of this alternative ending to an extra-marital affair.

Melodrama

Moral Universe

In order to interpret and analyze the reception of these two movies by my informants, an understanding the system of dramaturgy which most mainstream Hindi films adhere to, namely the film genre of melodrama, (See also Vasudevan 2000, Thomas 1995, Biswas 2000, Mishra 2002:36) is necessary. The filmic melodrama necessitates a clear divide between good and evil, placed in a morally legible universe privileging the moral over the

psychological (see Vasudevan 2000:131, Biswas 2000:123, Thomas 1995: 163, Gledhill 1999:176). In addition, as Rosie Thomas (1995:164) remarks:

> The Hindi film audience expects a drama that puts a universe of firmly understood- and difficult to question- rules into crisis and then resolves this crisis within the moral order. This means that transgressions must either be punished or more excitingly, made "acceptable"/…/ If the filmmaker steps outside the moral universe to construct the resolution, however, the film is said to have cheated, to be inept, to be unconvincing, and to be a failure.

Perhaps, then, the failure of KANK in the eyes of my informants was due to not adhering to the system of melodrama. Dev and Maya, the adulterers, are presented as "grey"[18] characters, neither black nor white, good or evil; nor are they punished (sufficiently) for their transgressions. Furthermore, Dev and Maya are allowed eventually to live a happy re-united life, privileging the psychological over the moral. The filmmaker thus "steps outside the moral universe," showing the break-up of marriages and families ending with bliss. A male informant related to me:

> I didn't accept that movie because in the climax a man is leaving his mother and the child for the other lady which is not acceptable in Indian society. The ending should have stayed where they separated and continued with their own lives without meeting in the end. These are the norms set by the Indian society (Akhil).

Verisimilitude

An additional aspect of melodrama which contributes to the acceptance or rejection of a film is whether the media text conveys a sense of truth or 'realness.' Peter Brooks, in his study of melodrama, explains this as a close connection between melodrama and realism (Biswas 2000: 126). An important criteria for judging the success of a melodrama considers how 'realistic' the film is, whether "the audience can imagine such matters as happening in real life and not something that is 'fantastic' or 'way out'"(Chitnis et. al 2006:134). This judgment of 'verisimilitude,' however, is not based on how closely the setting, lifestyle or events of the film resemble

[18] Karan Johar, the filmmaker of KANK, in an interview published in *India Express*, July 30, 2006, is reported as saying: "We live in the grey. There is no right and wrong in relationships. The film delves into the grey areas of all relationships. It also tries to look at the reasons why people get married and also looks at the psyche of those who look for love outside marriage."
http://www.indianexpress.com/story/9539.html *(accessed on December 23, 2006)*

something found in 'reality,' but rather on the behavior and development of the characters. As Rosie Thomas (1995:163) states:

> The criteria of verisimilitude/…/ refer primarily to a film's skill in manipulating the rules of the film's moral universe. Thus one is more likely to hear accusations of 'unbelievability' if the codes of, for example, ideal kinship behavior are ineptly transgressed/…/ than if a hero is a superman who single-handedly knocks out a dozen burly henchman and then bursts into song.

The viewers should be able to 'relate' to the characters of the film, making a connection between themselves and their own relationships with the characters and their relationships on the screen (see Dickey 1995:146). In the case of *Salaam Namaste* and KANK, both films failed to invoke a sense of 'verisimilitude.' The characters and their relationships portrayed did not resemble relationships which my informants could, or wanted to relate to, leading to a judgment of the film as 'unbelievable.'

Moral Universe saved

In the following section I will discuss first *Salaam Namaste* then KANK, using the melodramatic framework of the 'moral universe' and 'verisimilitude' in order to better understand the processes of negotiation my informants engaged in when viewing these films. In the case of *Salaam Namaste*, the rules of the marital 'moral universe' were tampered with by presenting live-in relationships as a possible alternative to marriage. However, in adhering to the code of melodrama, the 'moral universe,' was in the final moments of the film restored, upholding the sanctity of marriage as an institution which should be entered and *not* rejected. However, many of my informants could not "connect" to the film, saying the movie could have been made in a more "serious" way, suggesting that the element of 'verisimilitude' was missing. As Akarsh, a male college student relates:

> The movie [*Salaam Namaste*] was not made in a true way. It did not reflect the way that common live-ins are. You do have live-ins all over, but they showed it in a very Westernized way which was artificial and got lost in its meaning, in translation. It couldn't really connect to the crowd over here. /…/ It tried to explore an area which until now had not been explored, but made it look comic. It could have been much more serious.

By situating the movie in Australia, in a western context, and away from the family, the moral social and cultural codes which normally hinder young

people from engaging in pre-marital relationships, sex or live-in relationships were removed. In this way, the movie did not resemble the 'reality' of pre-marital relationships, even live-in relationships in India. In addition, as Rosie Thomas (1995:164) explains, viewers particularly appreciate "a filmmaker's proposing new ways of bending the comparatively inflexible system." Indeed, many of my informants were disappointed with the film for not presenting new ways of negotiating the desire or urge to become involved in pre-marital courtship practices within the moral ideological framework of the family in India.

Courtship

While *Salaam Namaste* attempted to portray something "new" for Indian cinema, but perhaps not unknown in India, the film failed in the eyes of my informants to seriously offer a possible scenario with which they could negotiate when addressing similar issues in their own lives. My informants expressed an acknowledgement that pre-marital relationships, even live- in relationships, do occur among urban middle class youth, but this is not reflected in the movies:

> I don't think that there are many movies which are based on the kind of relationships that exist in the society. That we can relate to. I'm in a relationship now, and the things we go through, that is not at all projected in a movie as far as I'm concerned (Javesh, male college student)

Some expressed a disappointment with the silence regarding these issues, and a desire to see more movies made addressing the issue like *Salaam Namaste.* Akarsh explains that pre-marital sex is "an issue that needs to be talked about in movies now. /.../ It is of most importance here. I don't know why the popular cinema still shies away from this whole area. Shouldn't be done."

Pre-marital Relationships in Delhi

Pre-marital heterosexual relationships and sexual behavior is perceived as being widespread among young Delhi-ites. Most of my informants guessed that perhaps six out of ten urban middle class youths were involved in a romantic relationship, and that among those involved in relationships, nine out of ten have had pre-marital sexual intercourse. These speculative figures may be exaggerated based on the widespread belief that 'everybody is doing it,' but they testify to the prevalence of these issues among urban youth. Many of my informants were either currently involved in relationships or have had a

relationship in the past. Only a few of my informants admitted to having had sexual intercourse. Many young heterosexual couples, though, are said to engage in intimate acts without endangering the woman's virginity and thereby marital prospects. As Javesh explains, young couples shy away from pre-marital heterosexual intercourse mostly due to "the mental block- for girls it's the idea, the guys are ok with it. The girls are still not that much forward that they should have it. There's a taboo; it's a bad thing before marriage."

The Unfamiliar Courtship Institution

Pre-marital relationships or courtship seems to be a source of anxiety for both young Indians, as well as for their parents. Whereas the 'institution' of marriage has a long history in India, backed by rites and society, according to Patricia Uberoi (2001:172), there is no formal tradition for courtship in the Indian society. Traditionally, or rather previously, a young woman was normally married either before or immediately after puberty (ibid.). Even though social changes occurring in the past century have required that women marry long after reaching maturity, women are still expected to enter marriage as virgins (ibid.: 173). Consequently,

> Post-pubertal girl's actions must be very carefully monitored, since any indiscretion on her part would seriously compromise her family's honour and impair her chances of an advantageous alliance. For this reason, romantic courtship is socially acceptable, if at all, only if it leads to marriage; it cannot decently be a period of open-ended experimentation in relations with the opposite sex, a in a true 'courtship culture.' (Uberoi 2006: 25)

In the case of the young women I met, all of them were between the ages of 19 and 26, unmarried, and most of them lived in Delhi alone, away from their families. They had come to the city in order to pursue higher education, or in some cases a job opportunity, and stayed either in rented flats, paying guest accommodation, or in hostels. Even though they were alone in the city, there was still a high degree of monitoring or surveillance by their landlord, neighbors or even from their distant families, which restrained their behavior and movements within the city. Most of the young women had curfews ranging between 7:30 to 11pm and some had to inform a school or parental authority about their whereabouts.

Accommodating change

My informants frequently observed that change was happening, with a greater acceptance and practice of pre-marital relationships, yet at the same time they recognized that changing oneself is also a difficult process.

> It's been so deep-rooted in our system, from the time, as you're born and brought up. Those values are instilled in you, so this is so deep-rooted, it's not easy for us to come out. (Priya)

This perception of a "deep-rootedness" of values which are "instilled" in a person is reminiscent of what Bourdieu refers to as the 'habitus.'[19] Often my informants referred to a "mind-set" which was very difficult to change, yet they recognized that this "mind-set" was changing- gradually, yet changing. Perhaps, as Appadurai (1996) suggests, while recognizing the relevance of Bourdieu's theory of the 'habitus,' we should place more emphasis on the process of "improvisation" which requires that the 'habitus' be "painstakingly reinforced in the face of the life-worlds that are constantly in flux" (ibid: 55). In this sense, the construction of the self or identity which takes into account factors such as the Indian family and society is under constant contestation, negotiation and exchange- a process which involves mass-mediated images such as popular films, among other sources (see also Brosius and Butcher 1999:11).

Parental Expectations

One of the most important factors which create anxiety and resistance to changing one's "mind-set," is the consideration of parental expectations. For all of my informants, their parents play a crucial role in affecting the choices and decisions regarding their personal lives, especially regarding relationships and possible marriage partners. As Priya explains:

> In my case the only reason I don't approve of live-in relationships is because of my parents. I know that they would never approve of it. I don't want to do anything which would hurt them, which would hurt their sensibilities.

Most of my informants explained the importance of parental approval of future marriage partners recognizing the "love-cum-arranged marriage"[20] as ideal, while admitting to the likelihood of an arranged marriage even though they might currently be involved in a long-term pre-marital relationship with somebody else. So while on the one hand there exists a change in courtship practices, with pre-marital relationships becoming more common and

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[19] Brosius and Butcher (1999:29) succinctly define Boudieu's habitus when they write: "an individual's repertoire of micro-skills including the learned (education, taste), internalized, or inherited (familial, status), dispositions (socialization), abilities (financial situation) and potentialities which are translated into practical knowledge (common sense)."

[20] Arranged-cum-love marriage refers to a love marriage which has the approval of the parents. See Uberoi 2001 for an interesting discussion on courtship and marriage practices.

prevalent among urban middle class youth, on the other hand there is a perceived gap in the acceptance of this change, leading to what my informants referred to as the "generation gap." The "generation gap" arose in almost all of my interviews and discussions with my informants, hinting at the prominence this "gap" may play in the negotiation of change in their everyday lives.

> I personally feel that change is happening, we have accepted the idea [live-in relationships], but if you talk about the generation elder to us, most of them would really not be acceptable to the idea. Things are changing, though it's taking time. You know in India the generation gap is so wide. (Javesh)

Movies: Bridging the generation gap?

Although the movie *Salaam Namaste* did not seem to provide any new tools for negotiating a pre-marital relationship or live-in relationship in India, it did provide an opportunity for public discussions about pre-marital sex and live-in relationships. Some of my informants had never heard of or thought about live-in relationships in India before the release of the movie, and most of my informants recognized the movie as an "eye-opener" for perhaps many people in India, including their parents. For this reason, the movie may have helped to bridge the generation gap:

> That is what Indian fathers and parents are all about. They have their own set of values and traditions that they follow. There is still that gap between the new generation and the old generation, so the movies try to bridge that gap. (Santoshi, a female college student)

However, even though their parents might become more aware about such issues by seeing them in a movie, their "mindset" might not be influenced or affected. One informant said, "Sure, they'll go and see the movie, but then afterwards they'll think, my daughter would never do that." Nevertheless, while the movie *Salaam Namaste* failed to make an impression on my informants by presenting a possible solution to the 'modern dilemma' of pre-marital relationships in their lives, the case may be different for their parents or grandparents perhaps helping to bridge the "generation gap." As Akarsh relates, "My grandmother was horrified about the movie [*Salaam Namaste*]. She was aghast at themes like that." In bringing awareness to issues such as pre-marital relationships and sexuality to an older generation, the movie was perhaps engaged in a young audience's negotiation between parental expectations and a possible desire to engage in a pre-marital relationship after all. By raising the sensitive topic of changing patterns of courtship to a cross-

generational audience the movie provoked a public discussion, perhaps bringing the gap between parental expectations and personal desires closer, even though it was perceived as failing to do so in the eyes of my informants.

Moral Universe Betrayed

Pandora's Box

Similar to *Salaam Namaste*, the movie KANK also failed in the eyes of most of my informants, yet succeeded in bringing to the fore a public discussion about a sensitive, taboo topic. Where *Salaam Namaste* attempted to approach the taboo topic of pre-marital relationships, but remove the potential provocation by using comedy, emitting the family, and restoring the marital 'moral universe' in its ending, KANK approached the taboo topic of extra-marital affairs without restoring the marital/familial 'moral universe.' Contrary to *Salaam Namaste*, KANK provoked a strong rejection from the audience. According to a women's magazine, it seems as if KANK "opened Pandora's Box and offended the sensibilities of a large section which upholds marriage as a sacrosanct institution not to be tampered with at any cost" (Vishwajeet 2006: 47). Karan Johar, the filmmaker, himself admits: "People loved it or hated it, but everyone is discussing it" (Bamzai 67:2006). Many of my informants were also provoked into discussion by the film:

> We had a huge discussion, you should have been there, you should have listened to the conversation that we had. /… /We were just discussing about the movie, KANK, the roles basically. It was a sensitive issue. It could've been dealt with better. The end was pathetic, it shouldn't have been there. (Santoshi)

Individual vs. Family

The biggest critique of the movie is its lack of 'verisimilitude', in that the characters and their relationships do not resemble an Indian 'reality'- extramarital affairs and the subsequent break-up of marriages is not something that would, or rather should, happen in India. Not only does the movie transgress the marital 'moral universe' by not re-uniting the married couples, it also emphasizes the psychological over the moral in privileging individual desire over familial duty. The dominant discourse about marriage in India, as well as among my informants, understands marriage not as being between two individuals, but as integrating two individuals into a larger familial group, which requires the subordination of individual desires (see Uberoi 2001: 183). A female informant expressed this very clearly:

> Yeah, family comes first. You know it's not the individualistic thing of living. You have to look at your mom, you have to look at your dad, you have to look at your children. You have to take your family along with you. Not just one single entity. You have to have your own circle or universe of people around you and you have to live according to them. In KANK these people had their own lives. I mean, instead of trying to mend your relationship you break out of that relationship and SRK leaves his mother, his wife, his son! (Aaliya)

Another informant underlines this view by referring to marriage as both particularly Indian and sacred:

> Marriage in itself is an institution in India. And once you're married you have to follow the thing till you die. I haven't seen the movie. It's not my kind of movie. I myself am a firm believer in the sanctity of marriage. (Priya)

Some of my informants, however, did appreciate the movie for highlighting individual desire and portraying a beautiful love story, but even then they explained their appreciation of the movie as a personal, rather than an 'Indian', perspective: "From the Indian point of view nobody will … but from a personal point of view, leaving Indianness behind…" (Nazeena).

Marriage under Transition

Even though the reactions to both KANK and *Salaam Namaste* would seem to suggest that the marital institution in India is something which is upheld at all costs, unchanging, and non-negotiable, there is an underlying awareness that change within the institution of marriage is occurring. As we can see from the discussions above regarding both KANK and *Salaam Namaste*, that films provoke the viewer to think about this change and reflect on the narrative, considering whether this change could be realistic or acceptable in the viewer's life, either now or in the future:

> The times are changing and maybe after 10 years, after 12 years, I may feel, 'yeah he [the director of KANK] was right to some extent', but not at this point of time (Priya).

For my informants, considering a change in the institution of marriage and a possible break-up of a marriage in their own future lives triggers a certain degree of anxiety, thus provoking a strong response to the movie KANK. As stated in a women's magazine: "According to The National Marriage Coalition, marriage is important because families are important. Families are

important because they are the building blocks of our society. When the family collapses, so does the society"(Vishwajeet 2006:47). There is a sense that the marital institution, including the Indian family and family values, are undergoing a change, with an increasing rate of divorce stated as evidence of this change. However, divorce is often attributed to being a Western phenomenon, and the result of the processes of globalization. Perhaps changes facing the Indian family place the distinctiveness of what is considered 'Indian,' namely the family and family values, at risk (see John 1998:383, Gangoli 2005:145, Brosius and Butcher 1999:14). When I asked a young informant what it means to be Indian, he replied: "We live a very distinguished life from others." Many other informants replied "family values." Others expressed the desire to live in India, stating the reason to be the prominence of the family and family values in India compared to the West. Most of my informants describe the family as the most important aspect of their lives, so perhaps when marriage and the "Indian" family were portrayed as crumbling in KANK, it provoked a strong, and heart-felt rejection.

Marriage under Pressure

However, in contrast to KANK where most of my informants adamantly defended the institution of marriage when threatened by extramarital affairs and divorce, they were not so quick to admit a desire to enter into this institution themselves. Therefore, there might be reason to believe the institution of marriage is currently under a lot of pressure. Without exception, when I asked the young people I met if they were looking forward to marriage, a loud and clear "NO!" resounded from their lips. The main reason stated was unwillingness or apprehension regarding the high-degree of compromise required in marriage. In fact "compromise" was the most common word used to describe marriage among the young people I spoke with, both men and women. The largest compromise, however, is expected of women. While most men hoped to marry a woman who was independent and wished to pursue a career, at the same time they expected her to sacrifice herself and take care of household duties such as housework and childcare. As one male college student related to me:

> An Indian wife- sacrificing, tolerable, obedient- these are the must haves of Indian wives. She should be adjustable. I won't tamper with her ambitions and her will to accomplish herself, /…/ but at the end of the day I like her to come back home and feed me also, and feed my children as well. Take care of the home. I'll expect that from her. (Akhil)

Ghoshali, a male college student, further explains what happens after marriage:

> Even if I get married I would expect my wife to be present and give me a cup of coffee when I come back from the office. Even if we say, 'we are so modern', but that mentality still remains in our society. It's like what we have seen from our childhood, we have seen our mom doing everything - cooking and doing everything. /…/ I think it is changing, women have come up in every sphere in India and have done better than guys in some spheres, but after all here, India, a girl has to get married /…/ I would say, before you get married everything is ok. You are independent, you can do everything and you can enjoy. These girls, even if after they get married, they cannot live the same lives. There are very few women who can live the same life they are living right now [in college]. /…/ So these girls, they don't want to get married.

Not only women, but men also have to undergo an element of compromise and sacrifice some of the freedoms they experience before marriage. Many of the young men I spoke with had high ambitions regarding their careers, and would not like to see these ambitions curbed by the demands a possible wife and children might make. When I asked Ghoshali if he would mind that his future wife worked he replied: "I wouldn't mind, because I know I wouldn't be able to give that much time to her. Rather than getting frustrated about life, if I could get engaged to my work…"

For some of the young men I spoke with the necessity of becoming economically stable and successful before marriage was a great source of stress. They understood that their futures were dependent on their careers and economic status, not only in supporting a wife and children, but also for deciding their future marriage partners - whether it meant finding a suitable partner for a likely arranged marriage, or in gaining the parents' approval for the woman they loved. When talking about *Salaam Namaste*, some of my informants considered a live-in relationship as a possible solution or a preference over the compromise marriage requires:

> I liked the movie [*Salaam Namaste*] pretty much. Live-in relationship and all, yeah it's pretty good. Rather than having a marriage, I think it's better. But you know, I think it won't be accepted in Indian society. /.../ Too much pressure from the family. I live in India! What else do you expect? Family pressure is always there, it has to be there in India. /…/ It's for my own good, but I don't mind, I'm comfortable with that (Madvir).

So while young Indians are not prepared to disregard the desires and expectations of their parents, they do attempt to imagine a future where parental authority is negotiated with personal desires:

> I am this Indian girl. I have a set of rules, for myself, which I follow always. No matter what I will not do something which is against my parents wish. But I will still have my own career, no compromise on that. I lived my life according to my parents' choice, then after that I decide on my own (Santoshi).

CONCLUSION

Imagining the future

Rohan-"Movies are a major reflection of that very society- a society in flux, a society in transition."
Sachit- "Movies reflects what India is, or what India in the short term wants to be."

(Comments made during an interview at a college in Delhi)

From the above discussion we have caught only a glimpse of the various ways in which young urban middle class youth in Delhi incorporate and negotiate images and representations of relationships and marriage into their everyday lives. With the liberalization of the Indian economy and the increasing pace and scale of globalization, change and transition is an unavoidable element not only in the Indian society, but globally. Increasingly globalization should be understood not as reinforcing a dichotomous relationship between center and periphery, East and West, but as a process which disintegrates the divide. What is now understood as 'Indianness' can no longer be clearly distinguished from 'Westernness', and vice- versa:

> Take somebody who is staying in Gurgaon, who goes to his office in a call center in Gurgaon who comes home to his wife who is also working in an office in Gurgaon, they are staying in a villa which is modeled after the town houses of the United States- they feel more closer to New York than Chandni Chowk. It's not just Western and Indian. (Rohan)

In an increasingly global society, new possibilities open up which challenge the traditional/modern or East/West divide forming alternative epistemic worlds (see Juluri 2005, Bjerregaard 2003) in which the everyday lives of individuals like my informants are located.

However, with the changes and transformations occurring alongside these processes of globalization, the necessity to evaluate for oneself whether one will accept or reject these changes requires that one contemplates and negotiates the old with the new. Urban middle class youth, while in a state of personal transition, sometimes far away from their families, are confronting the difficult task of being young in India- wishing to be progressive while keeping traditional values intact. Popular films in India, in addition to providing entertainment, fantasy and escape from the difficulties and worries of life, allow for the imagination to participate more actively in the processes of negotiation young people must contend with. The realm of the imagination is what allows the young viewer, the citizen, the son or daughter to imagine new possibilities and lifestyles. Gaining inspiration from Arjun Appadurai (1996:3), when he writes about, "the work of the imagination as a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity," I would also like to propose the centrality of the imagination for shaping the formation of identity and the creation of meaning in the 'practice of our everyday lives' (de Certeau, 2003). In discussing popular film with my informants, a larger universe of hopes, desires, frustrations and enjoyments was revealed due to the turning of our minds towards the imaginary realm of the larger-than-life Hindi movies. What is accepted, and more notably what was rejected, about these films, involves an active process of imagining oneself (and perhaps also one's nation), as one is now, and as one would like to become in the future. Appadurai (1996:31) states: "That the imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component to the new global order." My informants imagined their lives in the future, what it would be like to be married, and while they would not like to imagine their married lives resembling those presented in KANK, many of them were apprehensive about marriage and could imagine opting for a live-in relationship in order to evade the pressures and responsibilities of marriage, including those of gender roles and parental expectations.

At the beginning of this paper, one of my informants was quoted as referring to the "paradox" of being young in India- this "paradox" of negotiating the past with the present, the traditional with the modern, familial expectations with individual desires, is the challenge which young people face today. Imagination, therefore, provides a key tool with which young people, including my informants, can utilize to negotiate the flux and transition occurring around and within their personal life-worlds. While new roles, possibilities and opportunities are opened up with the processes of globalization, mass media, including popular film in India, plays an important

role in presenting these new possibilities in new lifestyles. The social practice of imagination thus engages the individual in the active task of integrating the new with the old, chartering new paths and creating new epistemic worlds.

APPENDIX A.

Interview guide

(September 6, 2006)

Name:
Age:
From:
How long have you been living in Delhi?
Where have you lived before Delhi?
How often do you watch movies?
Do you watch mostly Bollywood movies, Hollywood movies or other movies?
Do you mostly watch movies on TV, on DVD/VCD/Video, or in the cinema?
How often do you watch TV (how many days/week, hours/day)?
When you watch TV, what programs do you normally watch?
Do you watch movies on TV? If so, which- Bollywood, Hollywood, mixture, etc.?
How often do you go to the movies?
Do you watch more Bollywood or Hollywood movies at the cinema?
How often do you buy/rent DVDs'? Again, Bollywood or Hollywood?
Name some of your favorite Hindi/Bollywood movies.
What do you like about each movie?
Was it the plot, characters, music, setting, clothing that you liked the most?
Name some of your favorite actors/actresses.
Why do you like these actors/actresses?
Do you think Bollywood films or the film industry is changing?
If so, in which ways?
Can you relate to Bollywood movies?
If so, in which way?
If not, why not?
Do you relate to Bollywood movies or Hollywood movies more?
Do you think Bollywood movies in some manner represent reality?
If so, how? If not, why not?
Who do you think is the main target audience of the recent Bollywood movies released?
What role do you think Bollywood movies play in Indian society today?
Compared to in the past?
Do you think movies play a role in influencing the norms of society?
If so, in what way? Positively or negatively? If not, how not?

What do you think about the latest movies which show more skin, more kissing and more love scenes?
Do you get offended by these images?
Do your parents get offended by this?
Have you seen the movie *Salaam Namaste*? If so, did you like the movie?
If yes, what did you like about the movie; if no, what didn't you like about the movie?
How do you think Preity Zinta's character was portrayed in the movie?
Do you know someone who had a live-in relationship?
Do you know someone who became pregnant before marriage?
Do you think talking about premarital sex or sexuality in India is taboo?
How widespread do you think premarital sex is in India?
In the big cities such as Delhi? In the rural areas?
Do you think Bollywood movies show more love marriages or arranged marriages?
Do you think there are more love marriages or more arranged marriages taking place in India?
Do you think you will have a love marriage, or an arranged marriage?
How much do you think your choice is affected or supported by popular culture?
Do you look towards characters in movies, or actors and actresses who represent a lifestyle you would also like to lead yourself?

APPENDIX B.

Interview Questions and Topics generally addressed:

What is your name?
Where are you from?
How long have you lived in Delhi?
What you doing in Delhi?
What is your favorite movie? And why is it your favorite movie?
How often do you watch movies?
Do you prefer to watch Bollywood movies or Hollywood movies?
Do you feel that Bollywood movies have changed recently? In what ways?
What do you think about the increase in bold scenes and skin show?
What do you think brought about this change in Bollywood movies?
Is it the influence of Hollywood or cable television? Or do you feel it is influenced internally?
What do you think about the movie Kabhi Alvida naa Kehna?[1]
What do you think about the movie *Salaam Namaste*?[1]
What do you think about live-in relationships?
How prevalent do you feel is pre-marital sex?
What would be your guess about the percentage of young people engaging in pre-marital sex?
What do you think about pre-marital sex?
What do you think about marriage?
Are there any constraints you feel regarding your choice of marriage partner?
Are there any constraints regarding caste, class, education, religion, region, age, etc.?
Do you hope to have a love- or arranged-marriage?
Do you expect to have a love- or arranged-marriage?
What are your feelings about arranged marriages? About love marriages?
Do you hope to live in a nuclear family or joint family after marriage?
Would you like to work after marriage?(addressed to women)
Would you mind if your wife worked? (addressed to men)
Do you feel movies influence the way you view relationships? The way you view marriage?
In what ways do you feel movies have influenced you personally?
Can you name some movies that have influenced you personally?
How large a role do you feel movies play in Indian society?
Do you feel movies reflect what is already happening or affect what is happening in society?
What do you feel it means to be "Indian"?

How did you feel about being interviewed?
Are there any questions you feel I could have asked but missed?
What do you think were the most interesting questions?
Did you learn anything through the interview?

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