

## CONTEMPORARY BOLLYWOOD'S TRYST WITH BOURGEOIS ROMANCES OF HINDI CINEMA

**Kanika K Arya**

Satish Pradhan Dnyanasadhana College  
Thane

**Dr Manish Verma**

Director, Amity School of Communication  
Amity University, Gurgaon

### ABSTRACT

Hindi cinema is a grand syntagm with sentimental romances as an inevitable element; post 2000 the romantic portrayals in Bollywood underwent metamorphosis but kept connections with its past alive; thus, feudal family romances, social romances, domestic drama romances, action romances and bourgeois romances all contributed towards the romantic Hindi cinema post 2000. This commentary charts the trends of Hindi cinema post 2000 and critiques how contemporary Bollywood romances need to be interpreted through a consciousness towards the above said trends and a cognitive culturalist approach model.

**Keywords:** Hindi Cinema, Bollywood, Bourgeois Romance

### INTRODUCTION

Hindi cinema is like a wedding *thali* (feast), it is infused with multiple plots, a melodrama type which is different from Hollywood melodrama genres (Vasudevan,1989), a period which surpasses logic and follows the time-trajectory of mythological epic texts of the country (Hogan, 2008), characters and their life stories are not tied to narrative of the film but bring intertextuality from the previous characters played by the star or the persona of the stellar in real life (Dwyer,2014; Gopinath,2017) and the unavoidable song and dance sequences which are the junctures/ 'para-diegesis' which fill in the story with a lot of details absent from the main plot using narrative tools like flashback, flash-forward and dreams and fantasy (Dwyer 2014; Hogan 2008).

*Ye Jawani hai Deewani* (Mukherji, 2013) is a rom com from the decade of 2010-2020 of Hindi cinema; but has a lot of elements which belong to romance films (main plot is love between the heterosexual bourgeois couple) of 1990s, of which the best example is *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (Chopra,1995) : a film which set the standard for romantic Hindi cinema of the 90s decade (Dwyer, 1998; Rajadhakshya, 2003; Mehta, 2010). Though the film has faint impressions of bourgeois romance films of

1990s (Bollywoodisation) but it also authenticates with the trend of romances post 2000 in Bollywood. The image of male protagonist undergoes a change compared to the stereotypical selfless, *bechara* (brooding) image projected till 1990s (Mishra, 2002; Mubarki, 2018); for the millennial protagonist personal goals are important than family goals, he believes in travel and adventure as inescapable for individual development and his *Awara* tattoo brings in a postmodernist meaning to the cinematic motif (Wright,2015); the female protagonist breaks many patriarchal trends - for e.g.- Aditi's character (Kalki Koechlin), she is flamboyant, her friends occupy most of her life space, we never see her immediate kin except during her wedding when we get to see the elaborate family and she is dressed like a tomboy initially; we witness her in traditional Indian clothes only during her wedding ceremony (Kamble, 2015). She is a contrast to the typical image of Hindi film female lead: submissive, selfless, bearer of tradition, dependent on men to take her life decisions (Bose, 2014; Kamble, 2015; Kaur & Sharma, 2017).

Globalization and liberalization impressions are present in the film, though it was not a niche (*hatke*) subject but still a topic which the multiplex audience enjoyed watching and

marketing was done as best suited the trends post 2000- brand integration and extensive social media campaigns (Exchange4media, 2013; Bose, 2014; Dwyer, 2014). Hindi cinema post 2000 experimented with narrative, plots and characters, film-making techniques, and marketing strategy - Wright (2015) mentions two categories in which she places post 2000 Bollywood films- the New Bollywood (*hatke* films) and Contemporary Bollywood. Due to the emergence of multiplex audiences and production houses ready to take risks there are a range of subjects that erupted. Where on one side was the aesthetically exquisite cinema of Bhansali; *hatke* films (Dwyer, 2014) of directors like Kashyap, Bhardwaj, Dhulia and Sircar and many like them mesmerized the audiences with stories which were from interiors of India, language used was with a touch of regional, locations and film ambience was much like documentary and characters were nowhere close to the perfect and fantastical protagonist that Hindi cinema created till the 1990s decade (Paunksnis, 2017). But the trend of big budget, foreign location based, diaspora centered, bourgeois romance and cinema which projected the life of super rich Indian's sans the subaltern space and based more on their personal life struggles also sustained (Kamble, 2015) - a kind of cinema whose aesthetics were created by Yash Chopra (Dwyer, 1998) :*Ye Jawani Hai Diwani* being an example but not untouched by the experimentation of post 2000 decade.

### Post 2000 Hindi Cinema Trends

#### Hindi Cinema as Public Culture

Hindi cinema is not restricted to cinema halls but is an important part of the audience's life; 'Bollywood permeates India's public culture more significantly than viewership of films themselves'. Post 'Hollywoodization', Independent cinema emerged strongly, production houses corporatized themselves, films and their marketing entered digital arena; films became a guide to lifestyle trends; the star text overpowered the characters they played in films and song junctures continued strongly in Hindi films (Dwyer, 2014). The trend of big budget films whose subject were either the diasporic Indians or upper class/ upper middle-class Indians for whom the day-to-day livelihood struggles don't exist, but the film focuses on their personal life struggles more like bourgeois romances of Yash Chopra

(Dwyer, 2010) ; films like these continued to be made in 2000s.

#### Hindi cinema and Postmodernism

*Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* (Bhansali, 1999) started the 'visually excessive style of film making'; Aishwarya Rai represented the perfect feminine visual based on Raja Ravi Verma created female image (Mishra, 2002; Dwyer, 2010). Hrithik Roshan introduced the 'hyper masculine physique' (Mubarki, 2018) and superhuman dancing abilities. *Gaja Gamini* (Husain, 2015) emerged as first commercially released *Avant Garde* cinema which brought an 'explicit postmodern aesthetic' to Hindi Cinema. Farhan Akhter's *Dil Chahta Hai* (2001) challenged the old attitudes and promoted a modern India (Wright, 2015).

*Lagaan* (Gowariker, 2001) became the third film from Hindi cinema to be nominated for Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. Films like *Koi Mil Gaya* (Roshan, 2003), *Main Hoon Na* (Khan, 2004) and *Hum Tum* (Kohli, 2004) adapted plot ideas and technology thought from Hollywood. *Black* (Bhansali, 2005) lacked the song and dance sequences and was commercially successful indicating diversifying tastes of the Indian public.

Film franchises made huge profits with films like *Krrish* (Roshan, 2006) and *Dhoom 2* (Gadhvi, 2006); a trend of remakes of old Hindi films started with *Don* (Akhtar, 2006) and *Umrao Jaan* (Dutta, 2006); *Om Shanti Om* (Khan, 2017) was the highest grossing film of the year and a 'postmodernist' remake of 1980 film *Karz* (Ghai, 1980); international rap star Snoop Dog wore a turban and produced theme song for Bollywood film *Singh is King* (Bazmee, 2008). Post 2000 Wright (2015) suggests:

Bollywood made films with elements of recycle, repeat, to excessively express and visualize, to commercialize and self commodify, to appropriate other cultural works and to differentiate binaries or blur distinctions...this cinema has in restructuring acquired striking postmodern qualities.

#### Hindi Cinema and Branding

Kriplani (2007) makes an important point, the films based on weddings continued to be

made; crossover films also picked up the trend - *Monsoon Wedding* (Nair, 2001), *Bend it Like Beckham* (Chadha, 2002) and *Bride and Prejudice* (Chadha, 2004) have marriage as important plot point . The extended wedding drama films *Kabhie Khushi Kabhie Gham* (Johar, 2001), *Kal Ho Na Ho* (Advani, 2003), and *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* (1999) and the films in 1990s decade- 'the domestic dramas' (Malhotra and Alag, 2004) created a trend of big fat Indian weddings which emulated the visual style, costumes and elaborate ceremonies of these film weddings and promoted foreign locales as the perfect spot for honeymoon. He also mentions the image that Hrithik Roshan projected: the muscular metrosexual man with his speed machine set the trend for the image of male protagonist : some films being *Kabhie Khushi Kabhie Gham* and *Kaho Na Pyaar Hai* (Roshan, 2000). Films also advertised brands through their inclusion in the narrative , example being *Koi Mil Gaya* (Roshan, 2003) ; tourism to foreign locales surged with films like *Kaho Na Pyar Hai* making New Zealand as a desirable location and Scotland tourism surged with Indians after *Kuch Kuch Hota hai* (Johar, 1998).

#### Crossover Films

Crossover films, the films where east meets west; films with Indian actors speaking in English ; plots were to do with stories of Indian families settled in country or abroad; their struggles of love and identity; portrayal of endeavor between tradition and globalization influences but the style of film making (camera techniques, *mise en scene* and editing and portrayal of characters by actors ) was like any Hollywood movie rather than Bollywood style make. Examples include *Bend it Like Beckham* (2002), *Hollywood Bollywood* (Mehta, 2002), *The Mistress of Spices* (Berges, 2005) and *Being Cyrus* (Adajania, 2006) (Wright, 2015; Kidwai, 2016).

#### Women Character Portrayal

Women characters portrayed in post 2000 Bollywood have been vastly critiqued upon : Central female characters - post 1990s started wearing western outfits frequently, were shown financially independent but dependent on father or husband/boyfriend to take important life decisions and once aware of her conventional responsibilities would only be seen in Indian traditional attires (Derne, 2000); post 2000 female character portrayal

underwent change -Kaur and Sharma (2017) mention films like *Mardaani* (Sarkar, 2014) and *Gunday* (Zafar, 2014) where female characters underwent a psychological change and the narrative supported her journey being completely in her hands, male characters would act like sidekicks; a withdrawal from 'larger agenda of patriarchal ideology and traditional values'.

Bose (2014) mentions the stardom of Vidya Balan and cites reasons for it being favourable industrial and technological changes; radical transformation in exhibition of films and sectorial practices; trans-media marketing and promotions; production houses hiring new filmmakers who were ready to experiment with subjects due to presence of multiplex niche audiences. But Sharma (2017), and Khan and Taylor (2018) mention films like *Queen* (Bahl, 2013) which though hailed as films with a female perspective but the world she exists in and the conditioning she has is patriarchal; projecting this ideology in transnational space; also locating a trend of 'Central Female Characters adherence to prescriptive gender norms ' so they suggest radical changes in female character portrayal.

#### Male Protagonist Image Post 2000

Some films from the decade of 2000-2010 which portray the trend of Hindi Cinema in this decade are - *Kaho Na Pyar Hai* (2000) brought overnight stardom to Hrithik Roshan and created a new image for the male protagonist in contrast to the image of three Khans who ruled Bollywood in 1990s decade- burly neo-liberal Hindutva expectation laden body in 2000s compared to the metrosexual man of 1990s (Kavi, 2000; Mubarki, 2018) . *Dil Chahta Hai* (2001) became the defining film of the decade : the way it was shot, clothes characters wore, the way they spoke and even the wall paint everything was different; protagonist were shown fighting personal battles: identity, love, career (Dwyer, 2014; Wright, 2015).

#### Hatke and Contemporary Bollywood

Multiplexes emerged; Hindi films left the days of underworld funding and corporatized itself; studios like UTV Motion Pictures emerged. Middle road cinema resurfaced with films like *Ab Tak Chhappan* (Amin, 2004), *Khosla Ka Ghosla* (Banerjee, 2006), *Rocket Singh: Salesman of the Year* (Amin, 2009). Amitabh Bachchan

started doing character roles, Amir Khan produced and acted in experimental films like *Rang De Basanti* (Mehra, 2006), *Taare Zameen Par* (Khan and Gupte, 2007), *Jaane Tu Ya Jaane Na* (Tyrewala, 2008), *3 Idiots* (Hirani, 2009). *Hera Pheri* (2000) helped Akshay Kumar, an action star in the 90s, find his sublime comic side. Saif Ali Khan was suddenly the most exciting star-actor around, making adventurous choices, showing range with characters played in films : *Hum Tum* (Kohli, 2004), *Omkara* (Bhardwaj, 2006), *Being Cyrus* (Adajania, 2006). Shah Rukh did some of his most loved films – *Kal Ho Na Ho* (Advani, 2003), *Swades* (Gowariker, 2004) and *Chak De! India* (Amin, 2007). Lage Raho Munnabhai (2006) – which established Raju Hirani as a major director – ‘joined the ranks of the hallowed sequels that actually improved on a fantastic first part’.

Sriram Raghavan’s **Johnny Gaddaar (2007)** brought the iconography, narrative and ideology of *noir* genre to Bollywood; Vishal Bhardwaj, Anurag Kashyap, Dibakar Banerjee, Raghavan – ‘stylists with eyes for characters and milieus from the fringe – came into their own in the 2000s’ (Ghosh, 2019).

#### Post 2010 Hindi Cinema

2010 onwards the experimentation with subject and technical aspect of a films continued : *Aligarh* (Mehta, 2015) is a film that exists in Indian social milieu and exposes its ‘hypocrisy and homophobia’. *Madras Cafe* (Sircar, 2013) is a spy thriller with a subtle political commentary sans melodramatic violence. *Newton* (Masurkar, 2017) a film about the righteous protagonist who is rigid and impractical but critiques the political system of our country. *Raman Raghav 2.0* is a typical Kashyap *noir* film about a serial killer, *Piku* (Sarkar, 2015) a story which traverses a father daughter relation through mundane every day and realizes the beauty of unremarkable, *Highway* (Ali, 2014) a self-evolutionary journey through social hypocrisy and Stockholm syndrome, *Lootera* (Motwane, 2013) –O Henry’s ‘Last Leaf (1907)’ through an Indian socio-political lens and a love story in between.

*Delhi Belly* (Deo, 2011): The representative ‘adult comedy of errors from Bollywood...the satire is exaggerated on purpose and the film takes pleasure in treating its characters like objects’. *Rockstar* (Ali, 2011), *Shanghai*

(Bannerjee, 2011), *Soni* (Ayr, 2019), *Badlapur* (Raghavan, 2015), *Ankhon Dekhi* (Kapoor, 2013) are few more experimental films. *Lunchbox* (Batra, 2013), *October* (Sircar, 2018), *Kapoor and Sons* (Batra, 2016) , *Haider* (Bhardwaj, 2014), and *Masaan* (Ghaywan, 2015) are some films which show love in peculiar circumstances (Kumar, 2020). Film making has become ‘radically novel’, high end technology use, blending of parallel and commercial cinema, divagation from song sequences formula, genre multifariousness, and use of Hinglish.

These new films don’t match the ‘existing models and established theories’; this new cinema is challenge to established definition of Hindi cinema. New Bollywood is ‘aesthetically distinct and innovative’ and contemporary Bollywood ‘accentuates the post millennial era’ . These contemporary films ‘exhibit strong postmodern aesthetic style...it has been used as a means of internally commenting on and critiquing industry in its cultural form’; the subjects of these films are in the unstable environment of neo-liberalism, a state of crisis, anxiety and unquenched desires; another term used for these films is ‘neurotic realism’ (Wright, 2015; Paunksnis, 2017).

#### **Analysis through Cognitive Culturalist (Schneider, 2009) Approach : *Ye Jawani Hai Diwani***

Cognitive theory says mental representations are structured and processed; narrative cinema uses mental processes for events presented in films; thus, reading a film should use mental representations. Film spectatorship is a motivated and informed action; the process of creating a story out of perceptual cues offered by dramaturgy of cinema is a precondition for narrative understanding. Cognitivists argue w.r.t. films, thinking and feeling are intimately related ; our emotional response to films depends on our understanding of textual information (Bordwell, 1989).

To understand Hindi films, acquaintance with *Rasa* theory (The theory of Indian Aesthetics) is important. The presentation of actors and audience reaction to a film are understood through *rasa* essentials. Story, character , themes of love and grief, intricate backgrounds, exquisite makeup and the elaborate song and dance sequences all are related to the *rasa* theory. *Natyashastra* (Detailed treatise and handbook on dramatic

art explaining all aspects of classical Sanskrit theatre; written by Bharatmuni between 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE) places audience experience while encountering a performance art supreme most; the performance of the actors should be able to evoke the *navrasas* (nine types of sentiments).

S. No	Rasa	Emotion Conveyed
1	<i>Sringara</i>	Love/Romance
2	<i>Hasya</i>	Laughter
3	<i>Karuna</i>	Grief
4	<i>Raudra</i>	Anger
5	<i>Vira</i>	Vigour
6	<i>Bibhata</i>	Disgust
7	<i>Bhayanak</i>	Fear
8	<i>Adbhuta</i>	Surprise

The eight *rasas* and the corresponding emotions conveyed

The most commonly used *rasas* in Hindi cinema are *shringara* and *karuna*, thus Hindi films from early times have focused more on melodrama and romance. (Schneider, 2009; Roy, 2017).

Cognitive models of film reception infused with culturalist elements of explanation help understand films intricately. The Cognitive Psychological approach helps in understanding the 'emotional strategies of Indian cinema'. Post 2000 Hindi cinema has a changed audience, 'strategic reorientation in production' and development of a new aesthetic.

More than anything traditional feature film is a genuine emotion machine...the key to understanding emotions those represented in fiction as well as triggered in viewers lies in film's narration. (Tan qtd.in Schneider, 2009)

#### Main features of Bollywood cinema (Schneider, 2009)

1.Song and dance sequences are para-diegetic and anti-chronological
2.Concept of subject non psychological
3.Song and dance sequences : non clarity in objective and subjective perspectives much like Sanskrit dramas
4.Hindi cinema has no clear genres, but audience has a high expectation waiting to be

gratified by film's stars
5.Story stereotypical, fragmentary, episodic
6.Dialogues rhetorical and sometimes act as disruption
7.Hindi cinema invariably contains song and dance sequences

#### Main features of Bollywood Cinema post 2000

New Bollywood (Hatke)	Contemporary Bollywood
Low budget	Big budget
Experimental filmmaking	Amalgamation of experimental and standard Hindi cinema film making
Neurotic realism	Hindi cinema melodramatic characteristics and postmodern features too
Altered distribution and exhibition	Aggressive and big budget marketing
Transnational audience and urban middle class audience	Pan Indian as well as global diaspora audience
Digression from song sequences	Song sequences inevitable
Genre diversity	No demarcation of genres



*Ye Jawani Hai Deewani* (Source: livemint.com)

*Ye Jawani Hai Deewani* reminds one of bourgeois romances of Yash Chopra; Naina (Padukone) takes audiences through a flashback; a powerful tool of Hindi cinema to break the chronology of time (Hogan, 2008). A memorable trip to Manali with Kabir (Ranbir Kapoor), Aditi (Kalki Koechlin) and Avi (Aditya Roy Kapoor) is what she reminisces as she receives Aditi's wedding card.

The trip is a self-introspective journey for Naina; she finds her life mundane, and this holiday brings fun, adventure and cheer to her life: a theme which dwells on neoliberal Indian's consumerist power and likeness for individuality (Kamble,2015). Kriplani's (2007) analysis about branding in films post 2000 can be observed here as the trip is managed by 'Make My Trip'. Ranbir's character is a Fox TV travel journalist and while capturing different cities in the film; Fox TV crew can be seen with him; while Fox TV was also part of marketing strategy for the film (Exchange4media, 2013).

Aditi is not afraid of being an average person; she fits no threshold of a perfect girl stereotypical image. Avi is a typical aimless youth who enjoys being drunk always and Kabir believes in adventure, self-love, and goals above relationships, and they all are happy with who they are. Naina is a dutiful daughter, academically good but annoyed with the burden of perfection. The film projects in the beginning about it being about upper middle class youth of globalized India, who are unapologetic about exploring a lot of western ideals like being self-centered, live in relationships and friends above family; it is about their internal struggles reminiscent of the genre Yash Chopra created but the aim, ideals and perspective of protagonists here is much different from Chopra's protagonists; here being self-centered, individualist and consumerist is celebrated (Dwyer, 2010; Wright, 2015). Manali's snowcapped mountains, beautiful natural landscape and its small corners are captured aesthetically. The dream song and dance sequence *subhanallah* express Naina's transformation and her love for Kabir. *Balam Pichkari* brings in the folk element into the world of globalized postmodernist youth; *sambhoga sringara* is expressed through both the private and public love songs like *dilliwali girlfriend*, *batmeez dil* and *kabira* (Sarrazin, 2008).

Kabir: the protagonist is a travel photographer and earning very well. He is introduced through a tattoo on his wrist and a camera in his hand: the tattoo says 'Awara'; this word brings in the element of intertextuality and postmodernist streak as well: Raj Kapoor's - the tramp and the trickster, the star lineage of Ranbir Kapoor and his flamboyant, playboy image as is projected in media and the elements of the *vipralamba* induced sentimental

hero (Mishra, 2009; Dwyer,2014) all come together to create the image of Kabir.

Kabir's love for his goals, Naina's belief in a simple life with family, Aditi's growth, and acceptance of life challenges and Avi's failure as a businessman show contrasting images of globalized neo-liberal youth who are accepted and identified by the multiplex niche audience (Bose, 2014; Dwyer, 2014). The middle of the film explores the romantic relationship between Naina and Kabir and uses elements of melodrama, sentimentality, song and dance sequences, the elaborate wedding ceremonies, intricate costumes, and aesthetically beautiful location of Udaipur to evoke feelings of *Sringara*. It is typical characteristics of the 'grand syntagm' that is Hindi cinema (Mishra, 2002) that are used in the middle to explore the *sambhoga* and *ayogyia sringara* (Sarrazin, 2008). *Bano re bano chali sasuraal* is a folk touch to Aditi's *Haldi* ceremony (one of pre wedding wedding functions) and as certain researchers mention a hold of old patriarchy over the neo-liberal globalized youth (Sharma, 2014); *re kabira* is a song which dwells on Aditi's *bidai* (folk song sung at time of girl leaving for groom's house) and at the same time is a cry to the neo-liberal, post modernist, globalized youth to come back to the nationalist, Hindu and elite world of upper class Hindus created in the 1990s decade in Bollywood which shows modernity as a facade and at heart believes in the *dharmic* world of Hindutva (Derne, 2000; Malhotra and Alag, 2004).

The conclusion can be understood by what Prasad (1998) calls the feudal family romance and the heterosexual couple accepted within the world of patriarchy where the man is the upholder of modernity and can experiment with his lifestyle and life goals while as the women is the bearer of tradition, selfless and ambition-less with no personal goals. The man retains his flamboyance but within the patriarchal structure and the women never challenges and is happy within this world. *Batmeez dil* is the character song for Kabir but at the same time acts as the *nazar milana* (erotic romance) song for the heterosexual couple. Throughout the middle and end Naina is dressed in intricate Indian attire which makes her look sensual and attracts Kabir's attention: *angika* (costume), *natya* (Dance) and her *abhinaya* (acting) are in sync with the *sringara rasa* she has to evoke (Dwyer, 2010). Kabir's

closeup of facial expressions through middle and end, when he gazes at Naina in the song *batmeez dil* or when he casually flirts with her or when he is filled with *bibhastha rasa* (disgust) when Naina is with someone else; or *vipralamba* (sorrow) evoked expressions when he realizes he must choose between his goals and his love can be understood through *rasa* parameters.

## CONCLUSION

*Ye Jawani hai Deewani* is contemporary Bollywood; it has roots in the domestic drama genre of 1990s; iconography is much like these films; but the narrative begins with the dreams and expectations of neo-liberal youth, love for consumerism, and the characters are carved with strong individualistic sense; their portrayal is sans melodrama and their ideals are less traditional and more western but as the film reaches its conclusion, this postmodernist neoliberal youth finds solace in the virtuous world of traditional India; the female completely immersed in this traditional world but the man a combination of both traditional streak and neoliberal ambitions.

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