

Self-reflexivity and the Representation of The Indian Diasporic Community in Deepa Mehta's *Bollywood/Hollywood*

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Abstract: This paper discusses Deepa Mehta's lighthearted romantic comedy *Bollywood/Hollywood* as a representation of the Indian diasporic community settled in Canada. What makes this film especially interesting is that it focuses on how, for overseas Indians, Bollywood offers the possibility of accessing the home culture in a globalised world. Bollywood as an industry is synonymous with the genre of family melodrama, and when Mehta uses this term it represents, not just the Bombay Film Industry, but also the cultural iconicity of the genre, which in turn represents the film sensibility of the entire 'mass' of Indians located within the country and in the diaspora. At one level, the film is a lighthearted comic portrayal of the Indo-Canadian community in Toronto and its strong connection with "our magnificent Indian culture" (B/H) through the Hindi movies churned out by Bollywood. At a closer look at a number of scenes, light is cast on the way Deepa Mehta emphasizes the cultural divides through interesting

narrative and visual constructions. The actual argument of the film emerges in a dialectical reading and recognition of the oppositional forces operating within and without the narrative world. What is particularly striking about this film is its self-reflexivity. It announces itself as a Bollywood melodrama and celebrates this identity. Bollywood is thus positioned as both a subject and an object of contemplation—a world of Cinema that is a part of our memory and a vehicle of history. The critique of the formula also comes from within the formulaic narrative itself. Deepa Mehta constantly uses the genre and also plays around with it in interesting ways.

Keywords: *Bollywood, Diaspora, Melodrama, Self-reflexivity*

INTRODUCTION

Deepa Mehta's *Bollywood/Hollywood* [1] was the opening film in the Canadian Perspective Section at the Toronto International Film Festival 2002. An Indian who migrated to Canada, Deepa Mehta is best known for her earlier films *Fire* (1996) and *Earth* (1998) which established her as a serious filmmaker. *Bollywood/Hollywood* happened while she was facing problems with the filming of *Water* (released in 2005); her effigy was burnt and she received death threats from religious fundamentalists.[2] She felt she could never make another film after the traumatic experience of *Water*. "It was so painful, so terrible and

dark and so utterly unnecessary” she later said in an interview... I was questioning my craft.”[3] At that time she heard a story about an Indian businessman who had gone to the casino at Niagra and sat next to a woman who turned out to be an Indian. He could not believe that an Indian woman could be alone and in such a place. “That story was like a bolt of lightning. It started me thinking about my role as an Indian woman in Canada and how I felt about that... about the question of Indianess and shifting meanings of culture, religion, gender, and morality in the diasporic community and I decided to make a light romantic comedy on the same.” [4]

It is the story of Rahul (Rahul Khanna), a rich young Indian businessman who lives in Canada with his grandmother, mother, sister, and younger brother. In the opening sequence of the film, his father dies, telling him that “sacrifice is the brightest torch of Indian family values which he has to preserve at all costs.” (B/H) Besides other things, the film is about this pressure; the baggage of culture that he has to live up to. He falls in love with Kimberley (Jessica Pare), a white Canadian girl, and takes her over to be approved by his mother and grandmother. Kimberley is rejected, because she is white and because she is a Christian. Both the mother and grandmother want Rahul to choose an Indian girl, and that too within a short span of time before his sister gets married (since it is customary in Indian families for the elder sibling to marry first). Rahul hires a professional escort, Sue (Lisa Ray), who he thinks is Spanish, but can pass off as an Indian because of her looks and especially because she loves Bollywood films which “kind of makes her an honorary Indian” (B/H).

What makes this film especially interesting is that it focuses on how, for overseas Indians, Bollywood offers the possibility of accessing the home culture in a globalised world.[5] Bollywood as an industry is synonymous with the genre of family melodrama, and when Mehta uses this term it represents not just the Bombay Film Industry but also the cultural iconicity of the genre, which in turn represents the film sensibility of the entire ‘mass’ of Indians (who are familiar with Hindi) located within the country and in the Diaspora. At one level, the film is a lighthearted comic portrayal of the Indo-Canadian community in Toronto and its strong connection with “our magnificent Indian culture” (B/H) through the Hindi movies churned out by Bollywood. Ashish Nandy points out that “on an average day, India releases more than two-and-a-half feature films, produced by the world’s largest film industry, and sees some 15 million people through the country’s 13,002 cinema halls. As if this were not enough, these films are an important cultural presence from Russia to North Africa and from the Caribbean to Fiji”. [6] What Frantz Fanon has to say about language seems equally applicable to Bollywood:

“To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization.” [7]

Hollywood also has its share of melodrama, and in the title, Bollywood and Hollywood are joined as well as separated by a slash. The subtitle of the film says “Different Tree same Wood.” Over the years Deepa Mehta had heard people comment that Bollywood films are often remakes of Hollywood blockbusters. She thought, “Maybe we should do it the other way round. Take something from Hollywood, a Cinderella story, or say *Pretty Woman* (1990) and impose on it popular Bollywood conventions like the melodrama, the music, the singing, and see if a hybrid is possible..... It is not a film

about East and West values as such.... I would call it... a fusion film. Its composer is from Bollywood and its choreographer is from Toronto who works in Hollywood”. [8] Despite this claim, in the diegetic world of the film, Bollywood supersedes Hollywood. In the title too, Bollywood precedes Hollywood, and the visuals and songs are stereotypes pulled out of Bombay cinema. The film B/H has been variously described by critics, and the filmmaker herself, as being either ‘a Canadian film’, or ‘a typical Bollywood film in English’, or ‘a hybrid’, or ‘a study of Indian culture from western sensibility’, or ‘an inauguration of Indo-Canadian New Wave’, my contention is that all these categories, though indicative, are individually reductive. The actual argument of the film emerges in a dialectical reading and recognition of the oppositional forces operating within and without the narrative world.

What is particularly striking about the film is its self-reflexivity. It announces itself as a Bollywood melodrama and celebrates this identity: “We always loved Bollywood (says Deepa Mehta), but until now it was not politically correct to say so.” Sue (Lisa Ray), the female lead in the film, echoes this sentiment... “I love Bollywood... all the sing-song and melodrama”. To which Rahul replies, “That sort of makes you an honorary Indian” (B/H). Throughout the film, characters, especially from the older generation, are accused of behaving like Bollywood characters. Rahul’s younger brother, Govind, likens his mother (Moushumi) to Reema Lagu in *Hum Sath Saath Hain* (1999), and his grandmother to Zora Sehgal in *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* (1999). Sue accuses her Punjabi father from Bhatinda (played by Kulbhushan Kharbanda) of “foaming from the mouth like Amrish Puri” and before shouting back at her, he first wants to know “Amrish Puri in which film? *Pardes* (1997) or *Taal* (1999)? [9]The reflexivity is also emphasized by the presence of T.V. sets in practically every frame of the film. Whether it shows Rahul’s family home, or his independent apartment, or the bar where he dances with Sue, or the banquet hall where the Sangeet ceremony[10] takes place, Bollywood is a constant presence in the film and on the ambient T.V. screen. There are very interesting intertextual references, for example when the grandmother Dina Pathak is talking the T.V. screen behind her is showing her earlier film *Khubsoorat* (1980) where she plays the character of a strong matriarch. Bollywood clichés have permeated the lives and the vocabularies of these characters. When Rahul refuses to marry after he loses his girlfriend, his mother calls herself unlucky and wonders, “What she has done to deserve Devdas for a son” and this statement is followed by a written explanation imposed on the visual “Devdas –very tragic Bollywood hero.”[11] These written captions disrupt the narrative and perform several important functions: (1) serve as an alienating device (2) bring in a certain irony and humour (3) comment on the narrative (e.g. *Mummy goes shopping*) (4) translate the meaning of the songs which are mainly in Hindi and (5) explain certain Indian terms to an international audience. Although it is not clear whose point of view the captions represent, at times it seems to be the younger brother Govind’s, who is also a kind of filmmaker within the film. He is always shown with handy-cam recording events, interviewing his family members, asking them to comment on certain situations, thereby adding to the visual and narrative texture of the film. At the end of one particular scene Govind, while recording the events, exclaims “this is way better than any Bollywood film” (B/H) making Bollywood both a subject and an object of contemplation – a world of Cinema which is a part of our memory and a vehicle of history. The critique of the formula also comes from within the formulaic narrative itself. Deepa Mehta constantly uses the genre and also plays around with it as she does with the audience’s expectations. Rashmi Doraiswamy recognizes the fact that

“interesting developments are happening in the commercial world [of Asian cinema]. Many filmmakers who are working with commercially established genres are subverting them innovatively. There is a new self-consciousness and playfulness in this effort unlike earlier auteurs of the commercial cinema who more often than not, worked in studio systems and were only later canonized as original filmmakers.”[12]

That Deepa Metha is a very conscious filmmaker is evident from the very first visual. The opening shot seems straight out of a horror film. The darkness of night is accentuated by rain, thunder, and lightning. A careful contrast is created by the dimly lit palatial house in the background and a dark figure awkwardly (but deliberately) foregrounded in the right-hand corner of the frame. Within this uncanny scenario is heard a male voice – an asynchronous sound. “Remember Rahul – sacrifice is the brightest torch of Indian family values... Like the Olympic torch” (B/H). The visual leaves several questions in our minds. We do not know who is talking – we do not know why the fountain in the front lawn has not been switched off this stormy night – we do not know why the dark figure is there. The next shot focuses on the steel frame of some medical equipment, then narrows down to an old man lying on a bed with his teenage son kneeling by his side, Besides the usual shot-reverse-shot sequence between the two, we have a very interesting long angle shot. The spectator is positioned by the old man’s side and can look directly at a T.V. set (also switched on) situated at the other extreme corner of the room. The whole room is not revealed to us, the space behind us is blocked out and we see only these two characters and a T.V. set framing a death-bed sequence. The voice we had heard in the opening shot belongs to the father who is explaining to his son that, “after he is gone his son will now be the team captain of the family and will hold the baseball bat of destiny in his hand”. The father is talking about preserving Indian family values but the reference to the Olympics and baseball are images located in an international or transnational context. We know these characters look like Indians, but their vocabulary is not entirely Indian. Rahul has an Indian name but not an Indian accent. The usual monologue about “Khandaan ki Parampara”[13] has to be translated into new images for this new avatar of Bollywood cinema – the Non-Resident Indian. The ideological contradictions – a staple of family melodrama – are now between first and second-generation N.R.I.s. The film focuses on a particular moment in the history of the migrant community where the first generation migrant Indians are now old, the new generation born or -- nurtured in an ‘alien’ land has grown up and the parents feel a lot of pressure to preserve ‘authentic’ Indian culture (whatever that means) which seems to be on the verge of extinction.

The focus is now on issues such as linguistic and cultural transpositions, displacement from one’s homeland, alienation, and loss. No wonder the first sentence that Sue speaks contains the words ‘existential angst’. The nostalgia for the ‘imaginary homelands’(to use Salman Rushdie’s famous phrase) becomes a strong force in their lives and they are constantly living with the anxiety of what will happen to the next generation. So the conflict between generations becomes very complicated and the definition of Indianess itself becomes problematised. With the emergence of the Indian diaspora, the debate centres on who is a true original Indian and on whether there was a coherent definition of ‘Indianness’ or ‘Indian culture’ to start with. Culture is a process; culture is a construct and the confused pressurised second-generation dislocated Indian is trying to define his or her identity vis a vis the older generation. Rahul understands the problem very well when he tells Sue “we are in a time warp trying to preserve whatever we can of our whole country.....” (B/H). Although the father dies, he remains a very strong presence in

the diegetic world, preserved in photographs on the bedroom wall, on the bedroom side table and on Rahul's office table; in fact, the dead father keeps coming out of the photographs to be heard and also keeps appearing as a ghost, pushing himself into the cinematic frame.

To come back to Rahul, his being the eldest male heir of the Seth "khandaan" [14] obliges him to be extremely careful when choosing his wife. His dying father had instructed Rahul "to hit at whatever ball comes his way with total concentration and not to get distracted by the cheerleaders in their short skirts (B/H)." But we have only to see the next shot (captioned simply "10 years later") with a song and dance performance by the pop star Kimberley (the Britney Spears of Canada) to realise that Rahul is concentrating *primarily* on the cheerleaders in their short skirt or at least one particular cheerleader. This disruption in our expectations hits us with the realization that this is not a simple narrative. The father's advice is dismissed by the son as well as the filmmaker because this song bursts upon the screen with the flourish of colourful visuals and choreographed dance movements as the titles of the film play out. The words of the song are equally indicative -- "Tell your mama now's the time to let go.... Everything you need to know... This girl's gonna teach ya". Within this song, we get aerial shots of the city of Toronto which establish the setting. Kimberly steps into Rahul's limousine, kisses him and quotes Dr Deepak Chopra "The past is history, the future is mystery the present is a gift". For Kimberly, India is equal to spirituality. Rahul wants to marry Kimberly and this sets him in conflict with the matriarchal figures of authority-Dina Pathak the grandmother with the cane who has read English literature and can quote Shakespeare with eloquence and ease, and -Moushumi Chatterjee as the weepy melodramatic mother who has the talent of "fainting on demand" but when questioned about it blames it on "low blood pressure". Although all the characters speak in the same language (English), the difference in their manner of speaking, accent, and vocabulary is very pronounced. As Frantz Fanon rightly says, "Every dialect is a way of thinking"[15] Rahul's dead father was quite at ease with the linguistic images of the West unlike Sue's father (Kulkushan Kharbanda) who talks (amidst sound flashbacks) of the prosperous fields of Punjab, the "Makki ki roti, Sarson ka saag," Gulli danda" and the "Payal ki jhankar".[16] Twinkie and Govind have been born in Canada as is evident from their western accent and their vocabulary ("nerd" "Geek"). Rahul is the character at crossroads – he is dealing in cyber optics but is a "poet at heart"- so he tells Sue that he finds poetry "as satisfying... as... surfing the net" at which, Sue bursts out laughing. Sue is the contemporary woman at ease with Spanish and English and Hindi; equally at ease in tight-fitting western outfits as in sarees and salwar kameez; she can quote from Pablo Neruda and can also enjoy "the sing-song and melodrama of Bollywood". She knows Spanish dance as well as the Bollywood *matka jhatkas*. [17] The driver Rocky speaks English comfortably but in a very self-conscious and performative manner-"Every day is a discovery"... "don't judge a book by its cover" etc.

Let us take a closer look at a number of scenes to see how Deepa Mehta emphasizes the cultural divides through interesting narrative and visual constructions. Rahul gets Kimberly to meet his 'Ma' and 'Grandmaji' and she enters the frame wearing a dupatta (veil) on her head, which must have obviously been suggested by Rahul. Her first view of the two women seated in the living room is from the top floor lobby and we get a point of view shot. Kimberly exclaims that she seems to be the altar of a Cathedral and Twinkie completes the statement – "Like a goat to slaughter?" The camera pushes Kimberly and Twinkie into a small triangular space whereas the two women down below are in the vast opulent space

of the living room. The spatial distance and dimension draw attention to the difference between the characters, their religion, and their languages. Kimberly's discomfort during the interview is reflected in Twinkle body language. The spectator has the privileged central position and can look at the mother, grandmother, and daughter alternately. The difference between the two cultures is emphasized by the fact that the grandmother deliberately decides to speak in Punjabi asking her daughter-in-law to translate because "Response under pressure is the best judge of character" The questions asked of Kimberly are very personal and rude, deliberately meant to unnerve her. Kimberly fails the test and stomps out of the room while Govind, the younger son, exclaims: "This is way better than any Bollywood movie". He had been recording the interview with his handy-cam and now a counter-movement starts where he, in turn, interviews his mother, grandmother, and sister in his accented diction " So mom what do you think of Bhai Ki pasand" ?[18] When Moushumi looks at the camera she stops crying for a split second to set her hair and resumes her crying. Grandmaji[19] is back to her Shakespeare quoting "This is the winter of our discontent". This is a very stylistic sequence where awkward and dynamic handy-cam shots create a different visual rhythm and achieve a reflexivity that is so important to the construction of meaning in the film.

In the next scene, Rahul is alone in his apartment listening to the news and we hear about Kimberly's death on T.V. and see the visual recording of her tragic tumble down the Hollywood Hill chanting "Om" and sitting in the lotus posture. Rahul picks up the T.V. set and instead of seeing the T.V. set being smashed we only hear the sound of glass splintering. This sound is carried over to the next visual in which Rahul is heard singing a sad song in Hindi.[20] Although B/H has songs at predictable junctures, most of them are not as long as Bollywood songs as the total duration of the film is only one hour and forty minutes, which is much less than an average Bollywood film. This may be because Deepa Mehta was making a film for an international audience and was not only following conventions but also playing around them. Within the causal, linear narrative, she has incorporated certain experimental devices. Sometimes the camera focuses just on Rahul's hand with its accusing finger pointed at his mother, 'this is blackmail ma,' and the finger is pointed at all the sobbing, blackmailing mothers of the world; but like all mothers, this one also succeeds in her efforts. Rahul agrees to 'see' more women – the caption announces "mummy goes shopping" and in the next frame we see a very battered and subdued Rahul sitting between the two maternal forces in his life 'shopping' for his life partner. This is an unusual shot. We are given a glimpse of a portion of the living room but the person who is speaking is blocked out from our vision. Perhaps what we hear is more important than who is saying it. What we hear is a female voice proclaiming, "I don't like arty-farty movies, what is the use of focusing on incest, poverty, and all that stuff; what I like are movies that reflect our magnificent Indian culture and Indian values."

"I love songs – because songs represent internal dialogue".

The voice belongs to a prospective daughter-in-law. Although the question asked is not spelt out, it is implied in the answers – the 'right' person will have to answer the all-important and essential question – "What kind of movies do you like?"

The framing of this scene is very important. An elaborate and very careful mise-en-scène, a frontal address, an eclectic collection of art pieces, a tableau setting, – with all three characters (The mother, Rahul, and grandmother) are in a position of power, and this spatial arrangement supports their superiority and complicity.

The mother and grandmother are in a position to question and choose, – because they are consenting to a patriarchal order. This is an example of how visual hierarchies of power may develop around the image of a character. The girl comments on the irony of the situation and directs a question to Rahul “If you are as uncomfortable as I am, why are you going through this” and Rahul’s monosyllabic answer is “*pressure*”. The girl ridicules this by the idiomatic expression of “go fly a kite”. The grandmother wants to know why she is asking Rahul to fly a kite when it is not “Basant”[21], – and then the girl wants to know what basant is and then the mother explains it is “kite-flying festival”, – and Rahul ends this sequence by getting up and saying “Is it just me or is everyone going nuts”.

This and the previous interview scene with Kimberley are very important comments on the cultural and linguistic divide between, not just the Indian and Canadian community, but also the first and second-generation Indians.

There is another interview which I would like to draw attention to. This time the girl in question is Sue (Lisa Ray)– the girl whom Rahul meets at a bar, assumes to be Spanish, agrees to pay a large sum of money if she will pose as his fiancée till Twinkie’s marriage is over. Rahul hits upon this plan and shows interest in Sue only after she confesses that she loves Bollywood, – “All the singsong and the melodrama”. “How much do you know of Bollywood”, Rahul asks (echoing the earlier formal interview where the women are ‘shopping’ for the daughter-in-law; here Rahul will actually ‘buy’ her) and she replies “enough”. When Rahul asks her if she is East Indian the reply is “I can be what you want me to be.” This is a very loaded statement and is related to the larger issue of gender as performance. Almost all the characters in Rahul’s family look her up and down, and the camera traces the movement of their eyes. After the deal has been finalized and Sue decides to masquerade as his fiancée, she first has to be dressed up in Indian formals. We are taken on a tour to the Indian market of Toronto with its big Indian stores and boutiques (such as ‘Pooja Boutique’) and restaurants (‘Moti Mahal’). When Sue emerges dressed up in a sari, Rocky exclaims “Sir J. Lo meets K. Ko, – Karishma Kapoor Sir” (J. Lo of course does not have to be explained). Before entering his home “(Om sweet Om) where Twinkie’s “sangeet”[22] is taking place Rahul pauses at the entrance, gives a nod of approval, then takes her inside. The mother catches sight of them amidst the crowd, pauses, and in slow motion comes towards them amidst an internal diegetic sound which we are meant to hear but not understand because she will repeat the words which are “Just like other heavenly couples – Ram and Sita, Charles and Di, and of course my Twinkie and Bobby”. The mother’s movement towards Rahul and Sue is also accompanied by the melody from the well-known Raymond’s advertisement about ‘the perfect man’. Interestingly Sue appears as Sita[23] to the mother, but to the young Govind she appears to be “Oh so hot” that he has to cool himself with an ice cube. Although Sue later refuses to sing the bhajan (devotional song) in the prayer room, at the sangeet she delivers the obligatory sing-song and dance, impressing the entire

gathering including Akshay Khanna (a Bollywood hero, also the real brother of Rahul Khanna) who has flown down from Bombay because “Rahul is like a brother to him”.

This is the scene in which Rahul is shocked into the realization that Sue is actually short for Sunita; she is Indian and can speak Hindi. As an explanation, we see Sue in a flashback sequence seated in the living room of her own house where every wall is covered with images of Guru Nanak, the Sikh Guru, and the Golden Temple. Like Rahul, Sue is also being pressurized by her father to go in for an arranged match. Hence she is to be interviewed by a prospective groom, chosen by her father and with whom he wants to enter into a business partnership. Sue’s head is covered, her eyes are bowed, the man enters and the camera focuses on his black shoes, tracing his walk up to the sofa where he sits down. Ravi Vasudevan, in his essay “Addressing the spectator of a ‘third world’ national cinema: the Bombay ‘social’ film of the 1940s and 1950s” has an analysis of Bimal Roy’s *Devdas* (1955) where he refers to Devdas’s entry into Parvati’s (his childhood companion and lover) house and how “Parvati’s point of view is used to underline the desirability and the authority exercised by Devdas’s image, – first his feet are shown in the doorway, – the future husband as deity, object of the worshipful gaze, is established by the narration’s deployment of Parvati’s point of view”. [24] Sue’s gaze also rests on this man’s feet, initially evoking a normative response towards husband as deity; but what follows is her iconoclastic denunciation of this wrestler called Killer Khalsa whose “hidden muscle is as small as the size of his brain” (B/H). Her laughter from this scene is carried over by a sound bridge to the next sequence where Rahul and Sue are shown laughing together as they discuss this episode.

The two narratives – the formulaic and the subversive – are both presented in the film. Sue decides when to conform and when not to conform. She defies neat labels – is she a prostitute or is she not? Rahul wonders if he is “reading too much into it”. She was supposed to lie about her being a vegetarian but when grandma ji asks her about her choice she admits that she does have chicken and fish. Grandma, therefore, feels she needs to learn “the art of lying.” The same thing happens with the mother – when asked about her parents-- rather than spin a melodramatic yarn about being brought up in a Spanish Harlem, etc. as had been agreed – she starts crying and escapes the lie. She is a student of anthropology (not of Home Science as Killer Khalsa presumes) and is intelligent enough to say and believe that “only fools don’t question tradition”. She helps Govind face up to discrimination at school and when thanked by Rahul can sharply reply “You are paying me for it”. One of the best moments of the film is when Twinkie comes and announces that she and her lover, Bobby, have eloped and got married (without any consideration of ‘Khandan ki izzat’ [25]). Since Sue is no longer needed for the sake of role-playing — to help Rahul fulfil his family obligations—, he thereafter has to woo her for her own sake.

The grandmother advises Rahul to follow his heart because “If you love someone you have to trust them completely”; however it is obvious she gives this advice only because she approves of Sue. In Kimberley’s case, she did not care whether Rahul loved her or not. She was prejudiced to the extent of calling her “a white whore”. Rahul’s father’s ghost appears to him saying, “You’re a hole-in-one Rahul now is the time to think of your own happiness” (B/H). Kimberly’s ghost appears and tells him to follow his heart because “Dr Deepak Chopra has called the heart the cosmic computer” (B/H).

Rahul goes to Sue's house, steps on the hood of her father's red car, calls out to Sue and in a scene reminiscent of Romeo and Juliet's famous balcony scene woos Sue with Neruda's poetry with a red flower in his hand. "The language of love is a language -- in any language (B/H)."

The film ends with a staged curtain-call sequence wherein Rocky sings "*Mera naam Chin-Chin-Choo*" [26] against thick drapes of red velvet curtains and the entire cast and crew of *Bollywood/Hollywood* appear on the screen dancing in gay abandon -- with Rahul's father and Kimberly also present above the stage, floating in the air, showering red rose petals on everyone down below. The last shot is a beautiful aerial view of Toronto covered with a pink romantic haze and the audience is invited "Please to bless happy couple" (B/H).

A lesser-known film of hers, *Bollywood/Hollywood* is an important intervention in the representation of the Indian diasporic community and is particularly interesting as it celebrates the melodrama and the song and dance of the popular Bollywood genre. It seems to be Deepa Mehta's ode to popular Hindi Cinema which she grew up watching and feels nostalgic about, simultaneously being aware of the fault lines. She realized how Bollywood was not just "out there" but had been internalized in deeper forms by the Indian community. Using certain formulaic conventions of Bombay cinema, she has also turned them around as a form of questioning, giving more agency to the heroine. This journey through "Holly-Bolly—Bolly-Holly, Different Tree same wood" is so enjoyable and so relevant in the context of the diasporic community. However, the film will only impact us if we stand within and without the world of the film, understand the complex intertextual references and see the unfolding of a metanarrative about, and on Bollywood, constantly evoking a genre and also exploring its boundaries.

References

- [1] Bollywood stands for Bombay Cinema. in the text of the paper, the film title is abbreviated as B/H.
- [2] Since the story of *Water* was set in the holy city of Varanasi, and dealt with the controversial story about a young widow who falls in love. Earlier, in the case of *Fire* too she was surrounded by controversy as it dealt with a lesbian relationship between sisters- in- law in the context of a Hindu middle class household.
- [3] Interview with Deepa Mehta https://www.northernstars.ca/mehta_deepa_interview/ accessed on YouTube on 15 June, 2021. This interview was originally published in issue No. 39 of Take One magazine in September 2002.
- [4] Ibid.
- [5] See Prasad, Madhav. *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction*. India, OUP, 2000.
- [6] *Peacock Screen* (London, BBC Channel 4, 1996), director Mahmood Jamal, script Firdous Ali; *Mass Media in India: 1992*. New Delhi, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1993:157.1982. <http://cscs.res.in/dataarchive/textfiles/textfile.2007-09-10.8776797854/file> accessed 16 June, 2021.
- [7] Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Mask*. London: Pluto Press, 1986: 17-18.
- [8] <https://www.rediff.com/movies/2002/sep/11tor2.htm> Deepa Mehta's interview accessed on 2 June, 2021.

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- [9] Names of some popular Bollywood films.
- [10] The customary song and dance ceremony that accompanies marriage celebration in India.
- [11] *Devdas* is a tragic love story written by the famous Bengali novelist, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay. It was made into a film several times. The first Hindi language version was released in 1936 and was directed by P.C. Barua. The films popularized the character of Devdas as a tragic hero who dies an alcoholic as he is unable to come to terms with unfulfilled love. The story represents the feudal social customs of rural Bengal in the early twentieth century.
- [12] Doraiswamy, Rashmi. "Whither Asian Cinema". *Media Asia*. 1998; Vol. 25, No.3:257.
- [13] Translated as "Family tradition and repute"—a phrase carrying a heavy patriarchal, cultural baggage in the Indian context (Translations are by the author, unless specified).
- [14] *Kandan* translates as 'family' but again carries heavy cultural overtones.
- [15] Fanon: 1986.
- [16] Phrases from Sue's father's vocabulary, reminiscent of his growing up in rural Punjab. The phrases refer to the staple food, games and familiar sounds in a stereotypical Punjabi village.
- [17] The proverbial term used to describe the twists and turns of Bollywood dance sequences especially those of the heroine.
- [18] Translated as "my brother's choice".
- [19] "Ji" is a mark of respect for the elders.
- [20] The film is mainly in English, with most of the songs in Hindi and some dialogues in Punjabi.
- [21] The spring season when it is customary to fly kites during the harvest festival.
- [22] The customary song and dance accompanying Indian wedding celebrations.
- [23] The ideal wife of Lord Ram according to Hindu mythology.
- [24] Vasudevan, Ravi S. "Addressing the spectator of a 'third world' national cinema: the Bombay 'social' film of the 1940s and 1950s". *Screen* . 1995; Vol 36, No.4 (Winter): 315.
- [25] Translated as "the reputation of the family"— see note 13.
- [26] A peppy Bollywood number from the Hindi film *Howrah Bridge* (1950).