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Bollywood in the Indian-American diaspora

Mediating a transitive logic of cultural citizenship

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ABSTRACT This article brings together ethnographic detail and a thematic reading of *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (*K3G*) to examine the mediation of consensus regarding 'Indianness' in the diaspora. I argue that *K3G*'s emotional resonance with viewers in the diaspora is attributable in part to the departure that its narrative marks from Hindi cinema's earlier efforts to recognize and represent expatriate Indians. In positioning and drawing the diaspora into the fold of a 'great Indian family', *K3G* articulates everyday struggles over being Indian in the US to a larger project of cultural citizenship that has emerged in relation to India's tentative entry into a transnational economy and the centrality of the NRI (non-resident Indian) figure to India's navigation of this space. I argue that this process of mediation follows a transitive logic involving *K3G*'s representational strategies, first generation Indian immigrants' emotional investment in the idea of India and the Indian nation state's attempts to forge symbolic and material ties with the expatriate community.

KEYWORDS ● audience ● globalization ● Hindi cinema ● identity ● nation state

Within a rapidly expanding body of scholarship on transnational flows of people, capital and culture, questions of reterritorialization – of how migrants recraft a sense of community and cultural identity in new socio-geographic contexts – have been central. A prominent strand of work within this larger domain has emphasized the influence of transnational media flows in constituting subjectivities in diverse migrant settings (Gillespie, 1995; Lipsitz, 1994; Ray, 2000). In conversation with this scholarship, this article examines the influence of Hindi cinema in shaping the politics of identity, of being 'Indian' in the US.

Bringing together ethnographic detail and a thematic reading of *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (*K3G*, 2001),[1] I seek to demonstrate how Hindi film narratives, viewing practices, and patterns of socialization in the Indian American diaspora intersect to create a discursive realm of consensus regarding notions of 'Indianness'. I argue that *K3G*'s representational strategies intersect with and negotiate Indian immigrants' emotional investment in the idea of India along three major axes: class, family and citizenship. *K3G*'s immense success and emotional resonance with viewers in the diaspora, I argue, are attributable in part to an important departure that its narrative marks from earlier efforts by Hindi cinema (particularly films such as *DDLJ* and *Pardes*) to recognize and represent the expatriate Indian community. In exploring and cautiously legitimizing the cultural space of Indian life in the diaspora, *K3G* renders the diaspora's version of Indianness less transgressive and/or impure (as in a long line of movies from *Purab Aur Paschim* to *Pardes*) and more of an acceptable variant of Indianness. In positioning and drawing the diaspora into the fold of a 'great Indian family', *K3G* articulates everyday struggles over being Indian in the diaspora to a larger project of cultural citizenship that has emerged in relation to India's tentative entry into a transnational economy and the centrality of the NRI (non-resident Indian) figure to India's navigation of this space. The importance of this process of mediation by Hindi cinema becomes especially clear, I suggest, when seen in relation to the Indian state's recent attempts (for example, *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas* [Non-resident Indian Day])[2] to forge symbolic and material ties with the expatriate community.

Public culture goes transnational

Alluding to the bardic role played by Hindi cinema in Indian society, several journalists and scholars have commented on the centrality of Hindi cinema to life in the Indian diaspora worldwide. Hindi cinema does pervade settings as diverse as the UK, the US, Fiji, Guyana and several countries in the Middle East and Africa with long histories of contact with India. What is important to note of these flows is the shift, beginning in the mid-1990s, in the mutually constitutive relationship between commercial Hindi cinema and Indian immigrant communities (particularly in the UK and the US). These audiences can no longer be treated as merely markets catalyzing the 'globalization' of the Hindi film industry or as communities seemingly starved of cultural resources, but rather, as an integral part of the cultural imaginary of Hindi cinema (Desai, 2004; Mishra, 2002).

However, we need to recognize right away that Bombay-based Hindi cinema's output in its entirety does not reach and/or succeed in markets abroad. It is a specific kind of cinema that has, since the mid-1990s, 'brought the NRI decisively into the center of the picture as a more stable figure of Indian identity than anything that can be found indigenously' (Prasad, 2003) that is at issue here (for example, films such as *DDLJ*, *Pardes*, *Kaho Na Pyar Hai* and *K3G*). In a recent article, Rajadhyaksha locates shifts within Hindi cinema in relation to a larger conjuncture of economic, political and sociocultural transitions in India since the early 1990s. This cinema, he argues, 'refers to a reasonably specific narrative and a mode of presentation . . . couched in the post-information technology claims that Indian economy has been making in the past few years of global competitiveness' (2003: 28). It is this cinema, that 'exists for, and prominently caters to, a diasporic audience of Indians', that can be usefully termed 'Bollywood' (2003: 29).

Partly a response to exaggerated claims of the globalization of the Indian film industry and the use of the term 'Bollywood' (which inevitably reduces multiple cinematic traditions within India and the diverse range of themes addressed over the past decade to one all-encompassing stereotype of the 'masala musical') to stand in for Indian cinema, Rajadhyaksha urges us to understand 'Bollywoodization' as a transition that a segment of the film industry has gone through as it attempts to articulate a new sense of Indianness, 'a freer form of civilizational belonging explicitly delinked from the political rights of citizenship' (2003: 32), 'of cultural nationalism in a global arena' (2003: 25). Rajadhyaksha's analysis of Bollywoodization historicizes transitions in the relationship between Hindi cinema, the State, and audience communities and also raises the question of how cinema has 'come to occupy its crucial presence as a "cultural unifier" and a "keeper of the flame" ' (2003: 34) for countless individuals and families of Indian origin around the world who engage with the ecology of this new Bollywoodized Hindi cinema. It is this question that the following analysis tackles.

In what follows, I bring together excerpts from interviews conducted in the Boston and New Jersey areas of the US (see Appendix 1 for a profile of the interviewees) and a thematic reading of *K3G*[3] (the movie that was referenced the most during interviews) to understand how Bollywood cinema is drawn on, reworked and re-sited by first generation Indian immigrants increasingly cognizant of, and comfortable with, their position as cosmopolitan Indians who, in the words of Anupam Kher in *DDLJ*, 'move around with India in their hearts'.[4]

Viewing practices: continuity and cultural residence

Preeti and her husband Kuldip were one of several enterprising couples in the US, Canada and the UK who screened films for the expatriate Indian community during the late 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s. Screenings were usually held in university halls rented for a few hours during the weekend, with films screened off 16mm and, later, 35mm reels. These weekend screenings, with an intermission that lasted 30–45 minutes, were an occasion, apart from religious festivals, for people to wear traditional clothes, speak in Hindi or other regional languages and participate in a ritual that was reminiscent of 'home'.[5]

> We used to inform people by post. They used to come, buy tickets, get samosas and a cup of chai, coke for the kids and chitchat with their friends, exchange news, gossip, everyday things, you know, that one starts missing when one is away from home. I remember, even when there were snowstorms, people would come and say, we wait the whole week to watch a Hindi film, don't cancel it. (Preeti Arora)

Besides, as other families who moved to the US and the UK during the late 1960s and early 1970s recalled, there were no cultural institutions in place and little on offer in the mainstream media that resonated with their emotions, nostalgic longing and cultural values, let alone addressing the difficulties of life in a new cultural space. Importantly, these screenings were marked as an exclusively *Indian* space, away from mainstream society, where families could meet and participate in a ritual of sharing personal and collective memories of life in India.[6] As Mythili Rao recalled of her weekend trips in the UK before she moved to the US with her family:

> We used to go in the evening, start at 6 or 7pm and watch two movies in a row. We used to enjoy that a lot, we were surrounded by Indian people and it would be a nice experience to be among them.

This communal gathering around Hindi cinema reduced drastically with the arrival of the video cassette recorder (VCR) in the early 1980s. The rampant piracy that ensured availability of Hindi movies within a week or two of their release led to dwindling audiences for public screenings.[7] As Preeti recalled:

> Why should we leave home, they would say. We screened an Amitabh Bachchan movie one weekend and there were no crowds at all because the video cassette was already out. People would say, 'get a tape for $2 and watch it at home with your family and friends, why spend more in the theatre?'

In the US, an important factor was the change in migration patterns. Post-1965 migration to the US comprised mainly educated professionals and their families. Beginning in the early 1980s, following the Family

Reunification Act, people from a less educated, largely merchant-class background began migrating to the US. The spurt in the number of Indian grocery stores all over the country during this period can be attributed, in part, to this change. And it is these grocery stores that served as initial points of distribution for the video cassettes.[8] The grocery storeowners also served as intermediaries, as families sought their opinion on the latest films.[9] Furthermore, by this time, both in the UK and the US, there were weekly, hour-long TV shows comprising film songs, interviews with visiting actors/actresses, movie trailers, and so on. Not only were these shows widely watched, they determined rental choice as well.

The mid–late 1990s witnessed an expansion in Indian media, particularly the entry of satellite television channels such as B4U (Bollywood-for-You), ZEE-USA and Sony,[10] and a veritable explosion of websites concerning every imaginable aspect of the world of Hindi cinema (fanzines, discussion groups, review sites, and so on). Furthermore, with the addition of an India-specific radio station that plays Hindi film songs (among other programming) and the establishment of cinema theatres (in some cases, a multiplex) that screen Indian films in several cities in the US, engagement with the cultural ecology of Hindi films has become, simultaneously, highly diffuse and intense. My intention in tracking changes in viewing practices in terms of access and setting from the late 1960s to present times is two-fold. Let me illustrate with an excerpt:

> Vinod: You've grown up watching the movies and you *continue*, that's all. You like the songs, you listen to them here also. You enjoy particular kind of drama . . . you see crowded streets, keeps you in touch with the way of life in India.
>
> Mythili: It doesn't matter what the story is like, I like to see the dresses, the salwar designs, everyday life, even if it seems like a fantasy, you know.
>
> Vinod: And, you see, you want to keep that link with India even if you don't live there. Even though we've lived outside for many years, it's where you're from, isn't it?

It is clear enough that Hindi films, as a dominant storytelling institution in post-independence India, have come to possess tremendous cultural and emotional value for expatriate Indians who grew up watching these films. Vinod's comment indicates that the ability to *continue* a cherished ritual that is associated with being Indian is, in and of itself, reason enough to watch Hindi films. Second, while advances in communications have facilitated contact with India, over a period of time, work and other social engagements in the diaspora result in most first generation Indians gradually losing touch with day-to-day developments in India. Moreover, none of the families I interviewed visit India often (usually a three–four-week trip once in three–four years). Vinod's remark about 'seeing crowded streets' and Mythili's comment about 'seeing India change' and watching films to keep up with the 'latest salwar designs' point to 'an everyday, concretized instance of maintaining temporal continuities with the imagined homeland' (Ram, 1999: 156). Over the years, the act of viewing, Hindi films' ability to permeate various social rituals, and interactions within sociocultural networks that viewing practices created, have helped sustain expatriate Indians' desire to perform their Indianness and remain, at least culturally, residents of India.

It is easy to discern that such need for contact is but a starting point; in shaping *how* the 'home' is remembered, Hindi films reconfigure memory and nostalgia in important ways. It is to this question, of how Hindi film narratives and first generation immigrants' emotional investment in the idea of 'India' come together to frame narratives of being and becoming Indian-American, that I shall now turn.

Designer India for suburban homes

In newspapers, magazines and several websites, critics have penned scathing reviews of *K3G*. Paying close attention to the extravagant lifestyles that the film's protagonists lead, they have asked, 'is this really India?'. One critic declared:

> It is a chilling film. Chilling because here is India, Hinduism, and Jana Gana Mana made into glossy laughable commodities to be purchased for a high price. The film is designed to make NRIs thankful that the Old Country is as beautiful, as backward, and as resoundingly traditional as he wants it to be. (Ghose, 2001)

Ghose's critique, exaggerated as it may appear, points to two important sites of negotiation between the film and audiences in the diaspora. The first concerns *K3G*'s not-so-subtle efforts to naturalize a comfortable coexistence of tradition and modernity. In the space of the first few minutes, viewers are left with no doubt as to the transnational-yet-Indian-at-heart status of the Raichand family. In this respect, *K3G* can be situated alongside a series of films that 'reinvent tradition in easily recognizable terms to suit the exigencies of capitalist production' (Juluri, 1999: 236).

Related to this, a second crucial act of reconfiguration is *K3G*'s erasure of class through the insertion of lower-class space (Chandni Chowk) into a commodified sphere of ethnic authenticity. Changes in colours, background music, dialect and mannerisms, the use of 'ethnic' clothes and the presence of street performers all work to mark differences between the upper-class residence of the Raichand family and Chandni Chowk, the lower-class neighbourhood in which Kajol lives. However, for viewers in the diaspora, these encodings function not so much as systematic erasures of class differences, but as referents of 'tradition' whose consumption is critical to sustaining and performing ethnicity, particularly in community events. As one interviewee pointed out:

> When my friend's daughter graduated high school, she got a dress made in the same design as Madhuri's from some movie . . . so, yeah, I like to watch out for these designs too for my own daughter. When I go back to Delhi, I just have to tell the tailor that I want a design from such and such movie and he knows exactly what I want. The dress was a great hit in last year's Diwali function here. (Aparna)

In fact, the Chandni Chowk *mela* (fair) sequence in *K3G* can be read as a tactical response to diasporic viewing practices of the kind that Aparna describes. Consumption aside, there is another set of deliberations involved in this mode of viewing. Consider the following excerpt:

> Ajit: It is up to us to keep things Indian here and movies help.
> Aparna: See, we know that Hindi movies are this la-la-land, nothing realistic about them. I'm from Delhi, I went to college there, but why would I want to see the real Chandni Chowk in a movie? I like to see movies that are well made, that are in foreign locations . . .
> Ajit: Exactly, movies that show the real India are not what we want here . . . we don't want to see the *gandhgi* [filth] all the time . . .

That certain visual elements in *K3G* acquire a materiality that enables the performance of identity in the diaspora is not inherently problematic. What the comments above indicate, however, is the embeddedness of such practices within two larger discursive terrains. First, they signal the investment that first generation Indian immigrants have in imagining an India that is no longer associated solely with poverty and corruption, but rather an India that is entering an international economic order. As Rajagopal points out, NRIs are acutely conscious of their position as 'an apotheosis of the Indian middle class, exemplifying what "Indians" could achieve if they were not hampered by an underdeveloped society and an inefficient government' (2001: 241). The visual economy of films such as *K3G*, it can be argued, is an important source of cultural capital for those NRI families who belong in a particular class bracket, with the requisite education and job opportunities to live and work in countries such as the US.

Second, Ajit and Aparna's comments also point to middle- and upper middle-class Indian immigrants' position as racialized minorities in the US and the manufacturing and sustenance of a 'model minority' image over the years (Prashad, 2000). Ajit's desire for a diasporic India that has no *gandhgi*, that projects an image of success, competence and cultural stability, needs also to be seen as a refusal to acknowledge the presence of 'third world-ness', so to speak, within this picture perfect world of diasporic Indians.[11]

It is instructive to note that this 'naturalization of plenitude' (Uberoi, 2001: 333) did not go unquestioned by those informants from different class backgrounds, such as Balwinder Sodhi. Sodhi works at a hotel and supports both his immediate family in Boston and an extended family in India. Not only did he indicate a deep-rooted dissatisfaction with NRI-centric Hindi films, but he informed me that he had stopped watching new Hindi movies. Speaking wistfully of movies such as *Deewar* (1975) and *Zanjeer* (1973), movies in and of a very different social order in 1970s India, he dismissed my questions, saying I would never be able to understand what it meant to be in his position:

> Whatever they show in movies about people and life, it is always the good aspects, only moments in life that work out well, they hardly show or speak about the hardships and difficulties that one faces and goes through in life. One has to really struggle to experience a good life in America . . . and why do movies not bother to depict the struggles Indians like me go through? Just our everyday life . . . it is not like the families in the suburbs who only think of us when they go to a restaurant or take a cab in the city. (Balwinder)

Balwinder's comments assume even more importance when considered in light of the fact that none of the middle- and upper middle-class families I interviewed mentioned successful films that were not in any way 'family-centric'. It is not so much that families chose not to watch a diverse range of films, but rather, it is their choice of extravagant family melodramas to speak about their life experiences and notions of Indianness that points to how a 'designer India' becomes the first step in the complex of transactions between Bollywood and NRI audiences that work to negotiate belonging and circumscribe participation in diasporic 'India'.

Rehearsing, reworking and remaining 'Indian'

In a famous sequence in *DDLJ* (1995), the hero (Shahrukh Khan as Raj) and heroine (Kajol as Simran), having missed their train on a Eurorail trip, end up spending the night in a small town, with Simran swilling a bottle of cognac before falling asleep. When Simran wakes up on Raj's bed, panic-stricken and unable to recall what really happened, Raj holds her close and growls, 'you think I am beyond values, but I am a Hindustani, and I know what a Hindustani girl's *izzat* [honour] is worth. Trust me, nothing happened last night.' Mishra recounts this scene to argue that Hindi film consumption in the diaspora speaks to first generation Indians desperately trying to sustain a value system and inculcate the same in their children that sets them apart from mainstream society in countries like the US and UK. 'These differences', Mishra writes, 'are generally about tradition, continuity, family, and often, the importance given to arranged marriages' (2002: 236–7).

K3G is no different from other NRI-themed films such as *DDLJ* and *Pardes* in its heavy-handed depiction of a patriarchal family and the conflicts surrounding the institution of marriage. In *K3G*, several scenes in the Raichand family home clearly establish Amitabh's position as the uncontestable head of the household. Once the narrative moves to London, the role that married women are expected to play in an expatriate context is also rendered in no uncertain terms. In London, Kajol is clearly responsible for maintaining an 'Indian' home, including ensuring that the son is well schooled in Indian traditions. In addition to performing an elaborate puja at the crack of dawn, she is ready to serve breakfast for her husband and son. As she mills around, she begins singing a patriotic Hindi film song, chastising her son for not being sufficiently attached to India. The scene borders on the comical, but Kajol's riposte to her son's indifference to all things Indian is worth noting. Turning to her husband, she says: 'He's already half English, don't complain to me if he becomes completely English.'

In every family I interviewed, it was the mothers who watched Hindi films with their children, translating for them and explaining, as one woman said, 'all the Indian customs and traditions'. As Prashad writes, 'the woman is here responsible, in large measure, for preventing the acculturation of the children, a heavy burden in a society far more complex than this simple and sexist separation of domains is allowed to bear' (Prashad, 2000: 105).[12] The women's question becomes particularly pronounced in relation to raising daughters in the diaspora. English-language films and music, soaps and sitcoms on television and stereotypical assessments of modes of socialization (dating, for instance) and other sociocultural phenomena (divorce rates, single-parent households, and so on) are all marshalled as evidence of the debauched West and situated in sharp contrast to the traditional and morally superior values of 'Indianness' in countless Hindi movies and by several families interviewed during the course of this study. The families I interviewed were willing to negotiate some common ground with their daughters without necessarily 'reverting to petrified templates of dating and sexual norms in India' (Maira, 2002: 159). But their discomfort is revealed when they draw parallels with *K3G*, as the following excerpt illustrates:

Mythili: You see, the western community is very different from our culture. Like respect for parents and elders, how to behave, basic things . . . and when children go to school and make friends, you don't know the families that those children come from, what problems they may have. So your child will get influenced by all that.

Vinod: With Hindi movies, there is no question of influence. But they portray nice moral values . . . like *K3G*, we can get lessons for life from it.

Mythili: We have to make sure our children do not get too much into this

> culture. Things like that happen here, and there are parents who are very orthodox and will not accept children making their own choices. But we talk to our daughter and work out things.
>
> Vinod: But, you see, things have changed in India also. Like our niece in Bombay, she is very modern. So we have to change with times, but we should still hold on to some values. I think parents everywhere have such concerns and if they are not aware from the beginning, they pay the price in the end.

Vinod and Mythili's comments were partly a function of Neeti, their daughter, opting to live on her own, something first generation Indian families have had to deal with in the diaspora. It is revealing to note how *K3G* creates a space for viewers to rehearse and reflect on their hopes and anxieties, particularly through light-hearted moments in the film involving Poo (played by Kareena Kapoor), Kajol's younger sister raised in London. Scenes involving Poo echo informants' comments that vividly articulate the difficulties faced by parents wrestling with their desires to preserve an authentic 'Indian' self, fashioned on the basis of their own upbringing in India, and an acknowledgement of the influences of the starkly different cultural field that their children, particularly their daughters, encounter in schools and colleges in countries like the US (Maira, 2002). The 'synecdochic relationship between the purity/sanctity of women and the purity/sanctity of the nation' (Ram, 2002: 33) that films such as *DDLJ*, *Pardes* and *K3G* have set in circulation is not lost on first generation Indian immigrants.

This rehearsal and testing of values, ideals and norms becomes even more pronounced with questions concerning marriage and the imminent threat of interracial marriage. Speaking of *DDLJ*, Uberoi writes, Indianness is defined with 'reference to specificities of family life, the institutions of courtship and marriage in particular . . . whether at home or abroad, it is the *Indian family system* that is recognized as the social institution that quintessentially defines being Indian' (1999: 163–4; emphasis in original). Let me illustrate by juxtaposing a comment made by Preeti, when asked what she felt about her son growing up watching Hindi films, and a few lines that Amitabh Bachchan delivers in *K3G* on hearing about his character's son falling in love with Kajol, a girl from a lower-class neighbourhood:

> It was very good, he was imbibing his culture. During the week, at school, he was learning the culture of this place and while watching Hindi movies, singing Hindi film songs, he was learning about Indian culture. No one can tell that Sandeep is American, he can speak Hindi so well. It makes it easier as he thinks about marriage, you know. I know Indians married to others, but whatever people say, it will be easier if he marries someone Indian . . . they can share so much . . . they can understand each other's culture. It is important. (Preeti)

> Raichand. The name and respect has been given to us by our ancestors, to honour and respect them is our foremost duty. And I will never tolerate an ordinary girl becoming a hurdle. You didn't think even once about the background of the girl, her status, her upbringing. You didn't give thought to whether the girl will be able to understand our culture and our traditions (*sanskar aur sanskriti*).
>
> Will the girl ever understand our rituals, our rites? (*riti*, *riwaz*)
>
> Will the girl understand our ethics and principles?
>
> Will she adhere to the values of our family?
>
> How did you even dare to think that she could be a part of our family? (Amitabh Bachchan)

I would argue that this scene speaks to first generation Indian parents' fears that their son or daughter may marry a non-Indian who, in all likelihood, will not possess the cultural capital to participate in and ensure the continuance of the 'India' that they have so assiduously constructed over the decades.

K3G's erasure of class, as discussed in the previous section, serves a crucial purpose in terms of how viewers in the diaspora disassociate the dialogue from its context within the film and reinsert it into their own viewing positionality. While Amitabh's dialogue is directed at Kajol's lower-class status, for viewers in the diaspora already conditioned to recode class referents into commodities signifying tradition, such scenes serve as a liminal 'talking space' (Gillespie, 2002: 184) that permits reflection on their own reaction in the eventuality of their children entering into a relationship with a non-Indian and enables, as we saw in Mythili and Vinod's and Preeti's cases, a rehearsal of values that form the foundation of 'Indianness' – in this case, the institution of marriage. This rehearsal, it is important to note, is accompanied by a gradual reworking of ideas and values concerning cultural institutions such as marriage and, in the process, a questioning of India's status as the sole arbiter of 'Indianness' and, most crucially, a sense of confidence in their own version of 'Indianness'. As Preeti and Kuldip pointed out:

Kuldip: Our two married daughters are here and our son. All our close relatives are here and we have so many close family friends, some we met when we first came to this country.

Preeti: See, people like you, born and raised in India, come and ask us how we are Indian after all these years. But, you know, these days we have everything here. Temples, gurdwaras, other kinds of cultural places, dance and music school, language classes which our grandchildren attend . . . everything.

Kuldip: Let me tell you something, it is people in India who want to become western. My grandchildren may not speak Hindi fluently, but they can teach their cousins in India about Indian traditions. I think

> people like you should stop calling kids here ABCDs [*American-born Confused Desis*].

Kuldip and Preeti's comments echo an important narrative departure that sets *K3G* apart from earlier films such as *DDLJ* and *Pardes*. *DDLJ* and *Pardes* sought to bring the homeland into the diaspora, insisting on a return to India to resolve familial conflicts, where the diasporic Indians were asked to demonstrate their cultural competence to belong to the nation. Following an analysis of *DDLJ*, Mishra notes that Bollywood's representation of NRI life reflects a 'center-periphery understanding of the homeland-diaspora nexus in which the diaspora becomes a site of permissible (but controlled) transgressions while the homeland is the crucible of timeless dharmik virtues' (2002: 267). In *K3G*, it is the nation that seeks its citizens. The flow of cultural elements that lend authenticity is no longer a heavy-handed one-way flow from India to its expatriate Other. In exploring and legitimizing the cultural space of expatriate Indian families, *K3G* renders the diaspora less of a transgressive Other and more of an acceptable variant within the fold of a 'great Indian family'.

The nation seeks its citizens

> Indians who have chosen to settle in foreign lands should be loyal to their country of adoption. The biggest challenge facing every immigrant community is to integrate harmoniously into the political, economic and social life of the host society, while preserving and cherishing its civilizational heritage. Over the years, Indians have achieved this delicate balance virtually everywhere without a contradiction between their adopted citizenship and their original Indian identity. (Atal Behari Vajpayee, former prime minister, excerpt from inaugural speech at the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas ceremony, 2003)

K3G's negotiation of India's relationship with her diaspora is also, as discussed earlier, related to a growing sense within India of the 'relocat[ion] of what we might call the seismic center of Indian national identity somewhere in Anglo-America' (Prasad, 2003). Hrithik Roshan's character in *K3G* needs to be understood in relation to this. The quintessential transnational cosmopolitan, who can navigate multiple cultural spaces with consummate ease, Hrithik's character is, in fact, an embodiment of a 'super-Indian', whose Indianness transcends both that of the resident and non-resident Indian.

Hrithik arrives in London to the strains of a remixed version of 'Vande Mataram', a nationalist song possibly invoked to remind viewers in the diaspora of the irrevocable link that they have with their homeland. While billboards and storefronts of international labels and chain stores frame the first 5–10 seconds of his arrival, in subsequent frames, women wearing saffron, white and green dupattas (the colours of the Indian flag) walk by Hrithik, he is greeted by a group of Bharatanatyam dancers (the pre-eminent classical dance form that is highly popular in the diaspora) in the middle of a busy traffic intersection and sashays down a boardwalk flanked on both sides by a bevy of white English girls also sporting clothes coloured saffron, white and green.

We then see Hrithik in a cybercafe, looking up a directory listing for his brother's contact information. As the address is pulled up and the song in the background changes to 'Saare Jahan se Accha, Hindustan Hamara' (Better than any Place in the Universe, Our India), we see Kajol folding her hands in prayer in front of a framed picture of her parents-in-law. Not only is the family rendered inextricable from the nation, it is an explicit acknowledgement, both to viewers in India and the diaspora, of the diaspora's abiding desire to stay in touch with India. In a subsequent scene, we see Hrithik speaking with his parents (in India) on the phone. Sporting a tri-colour t-shirt, he assures his parents that he is happy to have found accommodation with an Indian family instead of staying in a hotel: 'They're very nice people papa. When I met them, I felt like I have known them for years, a laughing, happy, contented family, like we used to be.'

This dialogue can be read on three levels: as a reference to the rift within the Raichand family; as an allusion to commonly held views of NRI families struggling to define a sense of cultural identity; and as a comment that India, as a family, needs to understand and include her diaspora in order to be complete. While one can point to other instances that hint at an impending rapprochement between India and her diaspora, it is the singing of the Indian national anthem by Kajol and Shahrukh's son at a school function that is the pivotal event that legitimizes and mitigates the 'othered' status of the diaspora's version of Indianness.

Having learned about Krish Raichand's participation in a school function and Kajol's disappointment at her son not being able to sing the same songs she sang growing up in India, Hrithik decides to intervene. As Kajol, Shahrukh and the rest of the audience wait to hear Krish lead his classmates into 'Do Re Mi', he steps up to the microphone, says, 'This one is for you, mom' and sings the Indian national anthem. A close-up shot of a visibly moved Kajol and Shahrukh cuts to a long shot of the kids singing, followed by pans and cuts to different parts of a surprised, yet respectful audience. Kajol is reduced to tears as she runs down the aisle to embrace her son and the background music reverts to 'Vande Mataram', finally fading into 'Saare Jahan se Accha'.

This entire sequence functions both as a reassurance for the vast majority of first generation immigrants that they can live in the UK or the US and yet *belong* and claim cultural citizenship elsewhere and as a paradigmatic moment of India embracing her diaspora. It does not matter that Kajol's son sings the national anthem with a British accent, his mispronunciation towards the end is forgotten (the anthem is completed by Kajol), his being half English is not a concern anymore – every anxiety of negotiating a sense of Indianness is erased in the 52 seconds in which the national anthem is sung. The diaspora is no longer different and threatening.

Cultural nationalism: of Desi home(s) and deferred citizenship

> Perhaps geographical divisions between Indians in India and the Indian diaspora is blurring if not disappearing altogether. And with the announcement made by the Hon'ble Prime Minister at the yesterday's inaugural session, the dual citizenship will bring the diaspora closer to us not merely due to our cultural bonds but also by a legal system. Each entertainment and media icon of the Indian diaspora remains our unofficial ambassador abroad. We salute these leaders and assure them of our conducive policies to facilitate their endeavours. (Sushma Swaraj, Union Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, 10 January 2003)
>
> I kept their story line to Indian souls dreaming Indian dreams in a vibrant foreign land. (Subhash Ghai, filmmaker, referring to representations of expatriates in his movies *Pardes* and *Taal*, Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, 10 January 2003)

The foregoing discussion has made clear how Hindi cinema's historically close ties to modes of imagining the Indian nation, and the diaspora's emotional ties to India, can be used to read families' engagement with NRI/family-centric narratives such as *K3G*, particularly the articulation of cultural citizenship as belonging in the 'great Indian family'. Rajadhyaksha's argument that the exportation of Bollywood cinema also signifies an export of 'Indian nationalism itself, now commodified and globalized into a "feel good" version of "our culture" ' (2003: 37) needs to be extended much further to account for the complexities inherent in a three-way relationship between diasporic audiences, Bollywood and the Indian state. I would like to posit that a transitive logic is operative here, that the complex interactions between a) the diaspora and b) Bollywood, and between b) Bollywood and c) India, have set the stage for c) India to remap symbolic and material relationships with a) the diaspora. Such a reading would help us understand two key shifts in the manner in which Indianness is being imagined and acted upon.

The first relates to Partha Chatterjee's notion of the culturally unique interior space of the 'home', the 'separation of social space into *ghar* (home/inner) and *bahir* (outer/world)'. Chatterjee argues that the 'home/inner' came to signify a domain that successfully resisted 'western' influences, maintained the 'inner core of national culture', the very essence of 'national identity', and in many ways preceded anticolonial struggles in the 'outer/public' domain (Chatterjee, 1989: 239–40). It is clear that this process of defining the 'interior' is at work in the Indian diaspora as well; the difference, of course, being that 'Indian' homes in the diaspora are fashioned not only on the basis of a remembered past, but also in response to different racial and class economies in countries such as the US and UK (Maira, 2002; Prashad, 2000; Raj, 2003; Visweswaran, 1997). The question is, what happens when the Indianness fashioned in diasporic homes gains currency, enters transnational circuits and gradually begins to claim the legitimacy previously denied it (as Vinod's comment about ABCDs indicated) at the same time that Indians in India begin to imagine the possibility of living in countries such as the US and UK and come into contact with Indian communities there (the most visible of these flows being graduate students and those employed in the information technology sector). In fact, the immense popularity of not just NRI-centric films such as *K3G*, but also films like *Bend it like Beckham* and *Bollywood/Hollywood*[13] in urban India lends evidence to Mishra's argument that 'diaspora consciousness is now internal to spectatorial desire within India' (2002: 239). It is precisely this negotiation – between 'homes' in different sociogeographic locations that are nonetheless claiming Indianness – that Bollywood is simultaneously responding to and driving. It is critical, however, to keep in mind the class-specific nature of this negotiation. As Balwinder Sodhi's comments and *K3G*'s representational strategies indicate, the home of this 'great Indian family' is constructed by both exoticizing and dispensing with the class differences that Chandni Chowk in New Delhi or an apartment complex that houses working-class Indian immigrant families in Boston represent.[14]

The second realm of negotiation involves the Indian state and the diaspora. Sushma Swaraj's quote above points to more than just the fact that the importance of the legitimization of diasporic versions of Indianness by cinema is not lost on the Indian state.[15] In fact, large-scale transnational rituals such as the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas signal a qualitative shift in the state's relationship with the NRI; the Indian state, we now believe, is no longer content with wooing foreign currency into nationalized banks, no longer ambivalent about celebrating NRI successes and no longer hesitant about claiming the NRI as one of its own. What we are witnessing, therefore, is a state that seeks to capitalize on the work already done by its central mediating institution (Bollywoodized, as it may be) in reterritorializing the NRI community[16] and defining Indianness as a 'global *jugalbandi* (fusion) between Bharat *vasi(s)* (those living in India) and Bharat *vanshi(s)* (those who belong to the *civilization* of India)' (Joseph, 2003). Close attention to this three-way interaction also enables a re-examination of theoretical claims that the nation-state is 'no longer the key arbiter of social relations' (Appadurai, 1996: 4). While true to some extent, such a position leaves unexamined the manner in which media systems with historically close ties to the nation and the state (Hindi cinema, in this case) might play a crucial role in enabling the nation-state to play a central role in interactions that are transnational in nature.[17] Furthermore, the Indian state's differential response to its many diasporas also becomes evident and raises important questions about what citizenship in the conjuncture of post-1990s India entails.

Citizenship, as critics have pointed out, involves an element of obligation (both material and imagined) and, in the case of first generation immigrants, this obligation, as we saw, is worked out in relation to the family (and particularly through the family's metonymic relationship with the nation in Bombay cinema). What emerges in family-centric Bollywood cinema is an adherence to a social order that normalizes patriarchy and consistently erases class, regional and religious difference in favour of an upper-class, North Indian Hindu way of life. After Sodhi refused to talk about *K3G* and expressed his frustration with Bollywood cinema in general, I asked if he had heard about the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas and the Indian government's plan to offer dual citizenship, to which he responded, 'Do you think I will be able to attend? They don't want NRIs like me.' For people like Sodhi and those diasporic Indians who do not inhabit the transnational circuitry that films such as *K3G* and events such as the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas celebrate, citizenship in the 'great Indian family', it appears, is deferred.

However, it is also worth noting that this process of 'Bollywoodization' and, with it, negotiations of belonging that involve multiple actors in diverse settings worldwide is in its formative stages and necessarily incomplete. While Bollywood may affect to speak for and about Indianness, we need to keep in mind our lack of understanding of how different linguistic groups in diverse settings in the Indian diaspora (Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Bengali, and so on in Malaysia, Fiji, Norway, South Africa, etc.) engage with different regional cinemas and how the politics and pleasures in those cases intersect with Bollywood's 'national' narratives. Furthermore, the rapidly expanding space of Bollywood culture – 'new' media convergences that are tapping into and reconfiguring participatory culture in India (varied online life-worlds of fans, for instance); non-Indian audience communities in Nigeria, for example (Larkin, 2001); the performative 'reception' of Bollywood in cultural shows staged by second generation South Asian youth in different parts of the world – highlights not only the provisional nature of any effort to understand audience communities, but also the need to complement film theory with concerted ethnographic work in diverse settings.

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Notes

1 *K3G* is the story of an Indian family headed by a business tycoon Yashovardhan Raichand (Amitabh Bachchan) and his wife Nandini (Jaya Bachchan) who have two sons, Rahul (Shahrukh Khan, who is adopted) and Rohan (Hrithik Roshan). Rahul falls in love with Anjali (Kajol), a girl from Chandni Chowk, a lower-class neighbourhood in Delhi. Amitabh disowns Shahrukh, and Shahrukh leaves for London accompanied by Kajol and her younger sister Poo (played by Kareena Kapoor). On learning about these incidents, Hrithik sets out to London, promising to reunite the family.

2 Organized by the Ministry of External Affairs in collaboration with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas represented the Indian state's attempt to forge formal ties with expatriate Indians, particularly those located in the developed economies of the US and Western Europe. For more details regarding the success of the event, see: http://www.rediff.com/money/pravasi.htm

3 *K3G* had the biggest opening for a Bollywood film in North America, grossing slightly over $1m in the first week. *K3G* also had a successful opening in the UK. With $689,000 earned in the first week, it was placed at number three on the charts.

4 In relation to the process of interviewing and 'hanging out' with families, it became clear very quickly that asking questions specific to Hindi films would only yield standard and clichéd responses (such as, 'I watch them for the songs', 'I watch them to look at the latest fashion', 'I watch Hindi films because they are very different compared to Hollywood', and so on). Interviewees spoke about Hindi films in detail only in the process of narrating stories of their experience of living as Indians in the US: memories of childhood in India, their first journey to the US, subsequent trips back 'home', their status as NRIs in the eyes of their relatives in India, working and raising children in the US, making friends and becoming part of a larger Indian American community, a gradual distancing from the 'everyday' of India, and so on. Films such as *K3G* enabled the creation of 'talking spaces' (Gillespie, 2002: 184) for families to reflect on their experiences and, in doing so, helped them articulate their version of Indianness and how it intersected with different textual and extratextual elements of popular Hindi cinema. In all these stories that I heard, it is the family as an institution that emerged as the site wherein questions of cultural identity are posed,

rehearsed and gradually reworked. In a study on the reception of *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* in Hyderabad, India, Juluri also observes that audience engagement with Hindi cinema is 'primarily a relational one, articulated in and around the notion of the family' (1999: 244).

5 These weekend screenings gradually expanded to include, in cities with a significant concentration of South Asian immigrants, a radio show that broadcast Hindi film songs and various community-related announcements. Families who screened films also organized live shows, with heroes and heroines flying in from India to perform for the community.

6 The draw that these weekend screenings had also stemmed from the difficulties involved in maintaining connections with India. Not only was air travel limited and expensive, but the only means of contact for most families was a monthly phone call and letter writing.

7 While this did not happen until the early 1980s in the US, things changed faster in the UK. For instance, by the late 1970s, the BBC had begun telecasting Hindi movies as part of a six-week programme for Indian immigrants.

8 It is important to keep in mind that initially not all families had access to a VCR. Living on a working-class income, families such as the Raos in the UK and the Sodhis in the US watched Hindi films only when friends rented a VCR for a weekend or when the BBC had a telecast.

9 A survey of 18 stores in the Boston area revealed that, on average, each store owned close to 800 DVDs and 2500 video cassettes, including television serials, soaps, mythologicals and film song compilations of various kinds. It remains extremely difficult, if not impossible, to find reliable statistics estimating the size of the Hindi film market in the US or the distribution system of video cassettes and DVDs (largely distributed through family-owned grocery stores).

10 The ZEE Network website, for instance, claims that there are over 100,000 subscribers in the US today, increasing at a rate of 2300 per month. However, only two of the 11 families interviewed for this study subscribed to these channels. They continue to rent movies based on snippets provided during the weekend TV show, online reviews and recommendations from friends and grocery storeowners.

11

> Popular accounts of Indian immigration to the US have tended to conceal harsh realities, painting the Indian American community as well-educated, well-adjusted immigrants likely to be doctors, scientists, engineers and business professionals. With an overall intercensal growth rate of 105.87 percent between 1990 and 2000, Indian Americans today comprise 0.6 percent of the US population (1,678,765; Boston: 43,732), and include a high percentage of people with lower education, lower income, fewer professional positions, higher unemployment rates, higher rates of business

> failures and higher rates of poor families. The 1990 census revealed that 7.4 percent of Indian American families fall below the poverty line, marginally higher than white American families [7 percent]. (Maira, 2002: 10)

12 For a detailed analysis of the dynamics of gender roles in the Indian American diaspora, see Rayaprol (1998) and Maira (2002).

13 *Bend it like Beckham* earned $892,000 in India (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0286499/business) while *Bollywood/Hollywood* earned 13,331,302Rs (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0303785/business).

14 As Doreen Massey argues, 'some people are more in charge than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don't; some are more on the receiving end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it' (1994: 149).

15 The text of the keynote address by Sushma Swaraj is available at: (http://www.indiaday.org/pbd1/pbd-sushmaswaraj.asp). For more evidence on the centrality of cinema and its personalities at the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, see: (http://www.rediff.com/money/2003/jan/11sld1.htm).

16 The question of reterritorialization in terms of persons of Indian origin born and raised outside India needs significantly different approaches and theoretical lenses. For it is evident that the second generation, born and raised in diverse sociogeographic contexts, will not necessarily read 'nostalgia' and 'home' in Hindi films, but perforce repurpose film songs, dances and other elements to fashion their own sense of ethnic identity in response to the sociocultural imperatives they are faced with (be it in terms of defining a post-indenture identity in Fiji or as children of scientists raised in suburbs in the US).

17 As Aihwa Ong argues, 'nations and states are still largely bound to each other' and there is a need to 'consider how the hyphen between the two has become reconfigured by capital mobility and migration' (1999: 11). Also see Partha Chatterjee's (1998) critique of Appadurai's arguments.

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Appendix 1

Presented below are profiles of four families. This is part of a larger period of fieldwork that involved interviews with 11 families and 15 second-generation Indian-Americans

Family	*Migration path*	*Annual household income*	*Occupation*	*Education*	*Home status*	*Immigration status*
Balwinder and Sukhjit Sodhi	Punjab – Austria – US	$35–45K	B: Doorman at hotel S: Housewife	Middle school	Rent	Permanent residents
Vinod and Mythili Rao	Bombay – UK –US	>$40K	V: Retired doctor M: Works at high school	Degrees in medicine	Own	Permanent residents
Ajeet and Aparna Kaura	New Delhi – US	>$80K	A: Software analyst A: Housewife	A: Bachelor's in computer science A: Bachelor's in liberal arts	Own	Permanent residents
Kuldip and Preeti Arora	Punjab – US – Canada	>$60K	Entertainment and travel business	K: Graduate school, engineer P: Undergraduate degree	Own	Permanent residents

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