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‘Bollywood’ adolescents: young viewers discuss class, representation and Hindi films.

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Ideological change: from an ethics of poverty to an aesthetics of wealth

Historically the issue of class has been seen to be of overt significance in structuring narratives and representations of young people in the Romantic genre in Hindi cinema, and in the last few decades representations of class have altered almost beyond recognition. In the 1970s, young heroes or heroines tended to be poor, from single parent families or impoverished areas.¹ Malhotra and Alagh argue that depictions of class in these films are tied to an ethics-driven post-colonial vision: ‘wealth was linked directly to the corrupt, exploitative and dissolute world of old money or the landowning classes who aligned themselves with the colonial masters’ (2004: 25). The 1990s saw a superficially comical shift. Released in 1994, after the dramatic liberalisation of the Indian economy (Fernandes, 2000a and 2000b), *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* (HAHK: *Who am I to you?* dir, Sooraj Barjatya) is set in an elite India of fast cars and brand-names, while its heroines possess the traits of docile, traditional Indian daughters-in-law. It depicts as commonplace the everyday reality of a miniscule elite (Saldanha 2002: 341). Subsequent family melodramas placed commercial culture centre-stage, with teenage heroes driving convertibles, wearing branded clothing and jetting off in private helicopters to million-dollar apartments². A viewer in Rao’s ethnography (2007: 64) comments: ‘If someone makes a film where the hero is not rich then they call it an *alternative* film. Why is a film about a poor man alternative in India? Majority of Indians are poor!’ Saliiently, noting the films’ resonance with political propaganda of neoliberal and far-right religious-political elites, textual accounts of this era of Hindi cinema deplore commercial films as depoliticising, capitalist fantasies (Bharucha 1995; Juluri, 1999).

Locating the audience

Concern with the ‘effects’ of Hindi films is not new: in fact it is the primary theme of much writing on the subject (Mathur 2002, Chatterji 2003, Shukla 2005). Fareed Kazmi's Gramscian conclusions sum up a number of anxieties about the ‘dangers’ of Hindi films:

¹ In a series of films –*Roti Kapda aur Makaan* (*Bread, Clothing and a House*, 1974, dir. Manoj Kumar), *Trishul* (*Trishul: Three Pronged Weapon*, 1978, dir. Yash Chopra) and *Deewar* (*The Wall*, 1975, dir. Yash Chopra) directors showcased the emptiness of economic achievement if unaccompanied by loyalty, integrity, maternal love or national pride.

² E.g. (*Yaadein* (*Memories*), dir. Subhash Ghai, 2001; *Kabhi Kushi Kabhi Gham* (*Sometimes Happiness, Sometimes Sorrow*), dir. Karan Johar, 2003)

Conventional films do not simply reflect the social world, but actually construct a coherent version of social reality within which ideological tensions can be contained and resolved ... [i]n other words, through highly complex and devious means, it privileges 'preferred' meanings over 'excluded' meanings, thereby reinforcing the 'given' of the system, and absorbing or referencing out all potentially oppositional connotations. (Kazmi 1999: 215-216)

There are numerous reasons why theorisations of Hindi films as closed and coherent systems remain prevalent. In particular, unease about xenophobic nationalism in India (Mankekar 2000, Bhatt 2001) and the erasure of working-class characters (Bharucha 1998, Kazmi 1999) from blockbusters, appear to emphasise the need for an understanding of links between social behaviours and spectatorship. This is all the more the case as, in the opinion of numerous textual critics (Barnouw and Krishnaswami 1980: 281, Valicha 1988: 48-60), audiences uncritically watch films that seem at best to ignore and at worst to encourage authoritarian, non-egalitarian beliefs and circumstances.

While each of these accounts of Hindi films appear to describe aspects of the *texts* accurately, the nature of commentators' assumptions about *audiences* raises problematic questions. Are all the romance, music, costumes, dialogues and settings of contemporary Hindi films equally ideologically 'suspect'? Of course, some theorists (Nandy 1998: 3-14, Thomas 1985: 126-28) have summarized their assumptions about Hindi film audiences in relation to the *pleasures* of spectacle and emotional excess, an avowed 'need' for tradition in a threateningly modern world. But are these pleasures politically dubious by virtue of their connection to an Indianised neoliberal ideology which mixes elite economic globalisation with superficial pop-cultural modernity and oppressive social traditions as Vishwanath (2002) suggests? Surely, while pertinently connecting films to sociocultural contexts, this framework too homogenizes audiences dangerously? To find out, for instance, how and *why* particular viewers interpret and use Hindi films, it proves necessary to allow them opportunities to 'talk back'³, to explain what, and in which conditions, they interpret and act on discourses of social class, gender, youth and sexuality in films. Hodge and Tripp argue that 'ideological effects cannot simply be read off from ideological forms analysed in isolation from the cognitive and social processes that constitute them' (1986: 99). The expansion of media ethnography and Cultural

³ A term used by bell hooks to describe her experience of challenging an adult authority figure. <http://writingcollaboration.wordpress.com/1-introduction/1a-bell-hooks/>

Studies in recent years as tools for recording and understanding audience responses have ensured that the question of how different audiences ‘read’ film narratives is addressed (Derné 2000, Mankekar 2000, Dudrah 2002, Banaji 2006, Rao 2007). Derné’s examination of the ways in which ‘mainstream’ male viewers interpret Hindi film messages leads him to analyse their responses in the light of studies which have tended to support the belief that many viewers read ‘against the grain’ of texts (Walters 1995: 77, in Derné 2000). In this respect, Derné acknowledges that there are aspects of his interviewees’ responses which support Stuart Hall’s notion of oppositional readings of cinema messages; however, he also cautions that whether filmgoers will be sceptical of or adopt cultural messages present in films cannot be taken for granted or known *a priori* (*ibid*: 11). Arguably then, different individuals and different groups of viewers could position themselves very differently in relation to film discourses. However, this interpretive binary of resistance/acceptance of ‘film messages’ continues to sit uneasily alongside the myriad and contradictory things individual viewers testify to feeling and doing in relation to films. Therefore, with a view to theorising meaning-making which does not fit within that arguably reductive framework, this chapter explores the ways in which young urban Indian audiences reflect on representations of class and family life. It argues that while they are both aware and critical of the blatant absence of representations of working and lower middle class characters in most Hindi films they use existing representations in both pleasurable and critical ways to engage with actual and potential contexts and experiences.

Methods

Out of over 100 young people interviewed in-depth about Hindi films, wider media use and their beliefs, behaviours and attitudes since 2000, this chapter draws particularly on a series of semi-structured pair interviews conducted between December 2007 and September 2009 in Bombay and Delhi. Interviews lasted between one and four hours and were analysed thematically in the light of forms of discourse analysis stemming from social psychology (Potter and Wetherell 1988, Hollway 1989) and in a tradition of audience research that foregrounds individual viewers as parts of a knowing, experienced interpretive community (Barker and Brooks 1998). Thus, although aspects of viewer identity such as class, gender and religion are seen as being significant in inflecting experiences of life and film,

interviewees' accounts are presented as part of a snapshot⁴ of Hindi film viewing and use rather than as representative of entire communities' viewing positions. Responses were first coded in relation to topics of central significance in textual studies: nation, class, sexuality, sex, gender, religion and education, with further attention paid to aspiration, media and consumption, and moral perspectives about happiness and life. As with all truncated accounts of data generated through interviews, summaries of factual information about interviewees emphasise aspects of their experiences that seemed significant in relation to topics discussed but is not meant to frame all their comments with some extra-textual explanatory power.

Following Miller and Glassner (1997: 101), the language of interviewing cannot be seen as a straightforward reflection of an unproblematic reality. The interview questions and the categorisation in this account, as noted in the conclusion, have resulted in the 'fracturing of stories', the telling of parts and not others. Further, despite efforts to reduce the power differential between myself and interviewees by giving them access to details about my life, spending extended periods of time with them viewing films before the interviews, it must nevertheless be noted that interview questions and interventions were sometimes interpreted as inviting very particular responses in light of my position as an adult and an educator. Given tensions over issues relating to sexuality, independence, leisure, relationships and consumption between many young people and their parents in India, permission to discuss these matters was obtained from the parents of the under-15 year olds, and those interviews were conducted in home settings but with parents in another room. Older young people were interviewed in settings where they did not have to worry about upsetting or offending parents whom they respected but did not necessarily agree with. Trust and confidentiality were maintained throughout (names and details have been altered to maintain anonymity). I was also sensitive to the ways in which some of the issues were felt to be embarrassing in the interview situation: discussing class in any setting can be emotionally fraught. Saliently, following insights suggested by Jay Ruby (1991) in relation to documentaries but equally applicable to other kinds of qualitative fieldwork, I informed each of the young people (excepting one, who had by the time migrated to another city) how I was interpreting and using what they had told me. In one case I accepted corrections to a transcript; in another I agreed that I would include my interpretation alongside an interviewee's critique of that interpretation.

⁴ Used here to mean a moment in cultural time and space that has absorbed and thus reflects key meanings, values and discourses from its surrounding sites of culture

Meaning, class and contemporary Hindi films: six viewer accounts

Jacob (18), a Catholic and Munni (17), a Hindu are boyfriend and girlfriend. Both are middleclass. Their fathers are restaurant managers; their mothers housewives. They have been educated at a Government-aided school. There are, of course, vast differences between economic power and social positions even within the middleclasses of an urban metropolis (Fernandes, 2000a; Srinivas, 2002) which entail differential experiences of jobs and life choices. Amongst other affective engagements, anxieties about the ways in which marriages are frequently tied to financial gain for middleclass Indian families emerge as central to their film commentaries:

Munni (glancing at J): I like to laugh. I get upset watching serious films. Always something is going wrong. Usually the girls' or the boys' parents are not accepting something because there is *not enough money* or the religion is wrong...But some pictures are nice... Did you see *What's Your Raashi?* (*What's Your Star Sign?* 2009, dir. Ashutosh Gowarikar).

Jacob: [sotto voce]: Bekaar (Rubbish) picture...

Interviewer: Yes?

Munni: Hmm, everything in that picture is on romance and family and money. You marry someone for money to save your family [...]

Jacob: But if you notice carefully, the boy always has an expensive car and stylish jeans and shoes... He marries a very rich NRI (Non Resident Indian)⁵ girl and his grandfather who is a multimillionaire gives him lakhs like it means nothing to them.

Interviewer: But it was a happy ending – You don't approve?

Jacob: It doesn't matter if we approve or not. People will always go to the pictures because where else is there to go? ... I was disgusted by the emptiness of the story, the lack in ideas other than the initial concept [a man dates women from twelve different star signs after being told he has to choose a wife in six days or lose his inheritance]. The characters have no sense to do anything except escape from their families, or have a wedding and make money. [Pause]. He could have chosen (to marry) the

⁵ NRIs live and work in Europe of the USA and have featured increasingly in post 1980s blockbusters.

Doctor girl who wants to make a difference in India's villages, but it is clear that though he likes her and she likes him, her proposal that he gives up his expensive job in the US to follow her is unacceptable. It's not just unacceptable to the character of the boy, don't mistake me [...] it is unacceptable to the audience of mamas and papas – even to most of the boys and girls in the audience. The whole Himalayas would come falling on his head if a man gives up career to follow his wife, or if we choose a life of social work over a life of successful business...And the girl he does marry – she was independent at the beginning, she had chosen to marry a man who is half African. He is caught cheating on her.

Munni: It was just to watch. Eye-candy. I enjoyed it, but it didn't teach me. In our situation (shyly) we have to think how would we live without too much of money, just on our two jobs if our parents do not accept.

Interviewer: But there are films that do 'teach you'?

Jacob: I don't watch Hindi films to learn.

This excerpt reveals tensions felt around family and personal choice as well as the ways in which this inflects readings of and feelings towards specific film narratives. Munni's wish to learn from Hindi films ('it didn't teach me') which might support her immediate circumstances – she is dating a young man from a different religion – is offset by her emphasis on forgetting the seriousness of her situation, laughing, being entertained. She names a recent light romance, *What's your Raashi?* as fun to watch. She suggests with irony that the ethics of the film are dubious: 'you marry someone for money to save your family', clearly acknowledging that this is *not* what she hopes to do.

Jacob too uses the film subtexts to voice discomfort with his own life circumstances and with wider social practices he has observed. The film's inability to endorse non-mainstream (feminist, culturally challenging or non-monetary) life-courses for a young Indian middle-class man and his dissatisfaction with the stereotyped imaginaries offered – 'the boy always has an expensive car and stylish jeans and shoes'; 'she was independent at the beginning, she had chosen to marry a man who is half African. He is caught cheating on her' – segue with discussions of his parents' worldview and beliefs not quoted (including the fact that he was studying Commerce at their behest, rather than Arts and Literature, his 'passion'). All of this suggests how broader non-fiction rhetorics about modern India's economic success since the 1990s (epitomised by the politically motivated 'India Shining' campaign of the Hindu Right

BJP in 2004⁶) permeate contemporary film representation; and how personal life experiences inflect interpretations for viewers.

Other young people from lower-middleclass families evince distaste for films celebrating wealth and consumption and are priced out of cinema-halls by the tickets. Kadam (13) and Zulaiya (18) are brother and sister. Their mother is a housewife raised in a village. Their father works as an employee for a company. Zulaiya mentions that they are in need of money. Kadam has a hearing impairment. By urging him to excel at sport, his family feel they are protecting him from jibes about disability that are common. Sport features in these young people's accounts as an inspiring life-course:

Kadam: I love cricket. I've watched *Lagaan* over twenty times – on vcd – theatres are too much expensive these days...and I like to use the subtitle function to support, you know, if I make mistakes. She's watched *Chak de India* every time it comes on.

Zulaiya: We watch any movie about sport, even English pictures. We are sport mad in our family. I played cricket too and also hockey...

Interviewer: What do you like about films that have sport in them? Why don't you just watch sport on TV?

[...]

Kadam: I like to see all the inside stuff like how did they train to become successful, what was their mental picture, mental strength. It takes so much of courage to pursue your dream if your parents and friends are calling you to study all the time –

Zulaiya: *Lagaan*, *Chak de, India* – it doesn't matter if you are poor or rich. You can be the best. You can beat the opposition. It shows team-work. You can respect your religion and God will support you to win the game, win the prize. Nowadays in the dirty pictures that are coming all about [lowers voice] “sex” and corruption they are forgetting traditions and forgetting religion to get what they want or they are showing gangs and terrorism, which is against our religion [...]K3G was also nice, very good songs, lovely costumes. But they have to make troubles for themselves, because they have so much money, so many cars, in fact helicopters, boats, whatever their heart wishes. That is why the stories are all on families fighting. In fact I know some of the people in this neighbourhood are like this...

⁶ <http://www.indiatogether.org/2004/mar/edu-heads.htm>;
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/3756387.stm

The films they choose to comment on extensively construct a sporting team in the image of a united Indian nation with critical forays aimed at regional, caste, class and religious discrimination. For these Muslim teenagers who have grown up in a newly neoliberal India in the wake of two documented anti-Muslim pogroms (Bombay in 1992-1993 and Gujarat in 2002), religious teachings, paternal expectations and financial scarcity placing conflicting demands on their identities, sport-centred Hindi films could be seen to provide a promise of equality and civic agency. The idea of a benign collective endeavour as opposed to one which overtly centres on a nationalist project which is frequently anti-Muslim (Vasudevan 2001; Chatterji 2003), fortified by hard physical labour (training), self-discipline and competitive drive, which results in ultimate success and in which gender, class, caste and religion are irrelevant but nationalism is rewarded can be seen in both their accounts to prove irresistibly enjoyable. When I discussed my interpretation with Zulaiya, she was at first disconcerted that I should think her religion – in its sociological incarnation, rather than as a faith-based identity – had so much to do with her enjoyment. Her discomfort provoked me to place her filmic preferences in the context of enthusiastic statements about the pleasures of film songs and costumes and more normative and gossipy ones about the idle, dissatisfied rich in her locality, lessening the importance of religion as an interpretive category. However, it is possible to understand her self-positioning in relation to film discourses as both ‘structural’ – linked to her social position in a post 9/11 India – ‘they are showing gangs and terrorism, which is against our religion’ – and initiated by more personal tastes or circumstances. Saliently in this regard, Kadam’s description of the interface between sports films and his life treats the films as reflections of a psychological ‘reality’ to which simply watching sport on television does not provide access. This overt acknowledgment of Kadam’s use of the films as mentoring devices and pedagogic tools is in marked contrast to Jacob’s more sophisticated or more cynical view – ‘I don’t watch Hindi films to learn’.

Kaveri (11) and Nimmi (12), cousins, speak of class and consumption interlinked with gender and community. Kaveri’s parents work as shop-assistants in a small family-run business. They are interested in spirituality and ‘social improvement’ and have taught their daughter not to think about material goods. Nimmi’s parents have aspirations, servants and investments, which are paying high dividends.

Interviewer: You were telling me about that film *Fashion* [dir. Madhur Bhandarkar, 2008]. I'm surprised you were allowed to watch that.

[...]

Kaveri: [smiling] I think my mamma took us to that picture because she wanted us to think about how you can spoil your life running after material things, running after more. But [shyly] Nimmi was very excited to see all the costumes.

Nimmi [Confident]: Why was everything so beautiful and shown again and again by the camera if we weren't supposed to like it? It was like an advert. [Pause]. I would have a balance in my life, not like those models who take cigarettes all the time and drink Pepsi for breakfast. But I want to look good [whispers, English], *sexy*. Some costumes are so beautiful – girls should be able to choose how they dress.

Kaveri: Yes, I agree with her that on one side the films make bad and dirty things very beautiful to watch and then on the other side we are told don't do this, this is not good. So it is hard to know which one to believe. But that is why we have to follow our own upbringing. I know what is right, what is wrong. Designer clothes and high grades in class and lots of money do not make someone a good human being. We should make our philosophy like *Three Idiots* (Rajkumar Hirani, 2009). Do something because it is a good thing to do...That way even if you become lame or encounter difficulty or lost your family you still know which path to follow. [Laughing] But most people in our family agree with Nimmi, not with me and my parents.

Interconnected discourses drawn from strands of Gandhian, humanist, feminist and post-feminist thought surface during this exchange. Kaveri's moral imperative is to reject commercial youth culture as well as film representations of feminine perfection and economic achievement. She interprets the outing to see *Fashion*, a film about the glamorous, sleazy life of supermodels, as an attempt at moral education, which, ironically, has failed to work on her cousin. Nimmi, whose parents would be disturbed at the notion of her wanting to appear 'sexy' and yet who gratify her every request when it comes to clothing and make-up, acknowledges the visual pleasures of clothing and beautiful women on screen; she uses Hindi film displays of fashion as a way of inspiring new outfits for herself. In line with her family's beliefs, Kaveri points out that brands are exclusive in terms of class, and inscribed with problematic versions of femininity. Nimmi too chooses to reinterpret 'fashion' through a feminist discourse of autonomy, however this supports her choice to clothe herself trendily but also in ways that might seem risqué or even completely unacceptable for a chaste young

girl to conservative members of her family and community ('girls should be able to choose how they dress'). She also raises a perennial question for media literacy about the double-edged openness of interpretation in the depiction of situations and events which are, apparently, being represented disapprovingly: 'Why was everything so beautiful and shown again and again by the camera *if we weren't supposed to like it?*' Kaveri sidesteps her cousin's critique of constraints arising from ideological conditioning and contemporary community discourses.

Saliently, critiquing *Fashion*, Nimmi and Kaveri comment on camera's tendency to linger on shots of what is deemed desirable but to overlay this with overt moralistic dialogues. Referring to such sequences, Leela Fernandes has argued that 'tensions stemming from the possibility that globalising forces may overwhelm the Indian nation are displaced onto the terrain of a gendered politics' (2000b: 625) resulting in a 'politics of purity'. Although this critique might not be specifically applicable to the discursive world of *Fashion*, whose director has a history of challenging gender violence and patriarchy as much as he might decry aspects of global industries, there is clearly truth in the notion that the management of problematic aspects of globalised culture in contemporary India tend to be played out disproportionately, given the underrepresentation of workingclass characters, in middleclass women's lives on screen.

What's at stake in discussions of class, youth and film interpretation in India?

Actual discussions with young people are instructive for textual, audience and producer-centred accounts of film. A clearly defined range of discourses on sexuality, gender, family, nation and class are in evidence in this chapter, which both replicate and challenge the assumption that coherent changes in textual representations reflect and affect the consciousness of young audiences in some straightforward manner. Notably, here as in my more extended study (2006), critique and enjoyment may be present in the same accounts, as is the case for viewers like Munni, Kaveri and Zulaiya, while contradictions between beliefs expressed about on-screen behaviours or beliefs, and viewers' off-screen value systems are a consistent feature of film-related talk. The lower-middleclass young people interviewed for this study evince both enjoyment of the wealthy lifestyles represented through material goods, clothing and holiday destinations in mainstream Hindi films *and* irritation at snobbery,

exclusiveness, hypocrisy or didactic morality. However, it is also obvious that critique is far more likely in cases where the young people or children already hold worldviews at odds with particular screen representations as is the case with Jacob, Kaveri and Zulaiya, who, albeit for very different reasons, are frustrated by many mainstream depictions of gender, sex and class life-styles.

Additionally, as suggested in discussions with young audiences referenced here and elsewhere (Banaji 2006, 2008), themes like wealth, globalisation and social class are not generally introduced by directors and experienced or used by audiences in isolation from themes such as gender, family, nationalism and sexuality. Several interviewees reference their use of films as potential pedagogic resources or their disappointed expectations when films turn out to offer no new vision. And these 'visions' when offered are far from uncomplicated in political terms. The films Kadam feels he learns from are *Lagaan* and *Chak De India*, both about the building of teams and team-spirit, in a profoundly divided society. Both films revert to a now less commonly utilised Hindi film narrative of Indian underdogs against 'outsiders': in the first instance the outsiders are the British colonisers, as *Lagaan* is set in the past; in the second they are other national sporting sides, each epitomised in a series of easily recognisable and xenophobic stereotypes. The film Kaveri chooses as epitomising her philosophy and that of her parents is *Three Idiots*, where a working-class college student inspires his two friends to challenge the crushingly conformist educational system and upset class expectations by pursuing their dreams rather than their parents' wishes. Although the last sequence of *Three Idiots* reaffirms financial success and able-bodiedness, other young viewers too maintained that this film was a critique of the 'wealth culture' and 'exam-culture' which dominates in middle-class, urban India and in contemporary 'Bollywood'; several commented ironically that their parents were not willing to 'act on this message'. A disproportionate tendency on the part of textual commentators on Hindi cinema to read film meanings – and ideological messages – primarily in light of final sequences, or in light of a single, linear viewing, can thus be confirmed as problematic. In fact, audience research in this chapter has emphasised that it is important to approach Hindi films as internally fractured, with contradictory discourses expressed visually and verbally or by songs and narrative moments or different narrative sequences within a single 3-hour narrative. Films, like other cultural texts, refer both to *other texts* and to *social worlds beyond themselves*.

I have argued here that both distinctive experiences and shared social formations upon which children and young viewers call in their interpretation of film narratives are acutely relevant to the uses to which they put aspects of film discourse. As Janet Staiger has suggested (2000-44-54), spectatorial identities may be shaped by intersecting, and contingent aspects of history and experience. Evidence in this chapter and my other studies suggests that the availability of films as providers of alternative, pedagogic and/or pleasurable imaginaries is one of their most widespread uses. Problematically, however, like much research, this chapter presents only a partial snapshot of a far more complicated whole. Space constrains even discussions of class and alternative interpretations of viewers' assertions, rendering far too determinist a picture, and giving little space to discussions of exclusions and absences, to what was *not said*, and perhaps to the reasons why some issues do not figure in discussions with these particular young people. Indeed, if one draws on the perspectives of working-class young people and children in both urban and rural areas as I have done elsewhere (Banaji 2006, Banaji 2010a and 2010b) then an interesting pattern emerges, with debates over social injustice and political violence occupying proportionately greater percentages of interview space compared to those relating to choice, sexuality and romance. While these are merely heuristic observations emerging from qualitative research, they suggest avenues for future research. A significant minority of the films watched and screened in the past two decades, particularly in the gangster genre, deal either centrally or tangentially with working-class lives; here stereotypes abound and are challenged by working-class young people (Banaji 2006 and 2010b). The consistent stereotyping and/or erasure of the everyday lives of the poor, the working class, regional and minority religious groups from most big-budget films speaks both of middleclass arrogance and of fear on the part of producers; this issue was foregrounded in mediated debates around Danny Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire* (Banaji 2010b). Textually, this lack of interest in the visual and emotional depiction of the milieu in which a majority of Indian audiences live also signals a distinct break from the overall integrationist postcolonial vision of numerous Hindi films in the post-independence decades and a sense in which capital – in its broadest sense – rather than labour (and 'the people') is now constructed as India's strength in the global arena by those who produce much of this fictional representation. However, as is evidenced by my interviewees' responses, the popularity of the films categorically does not stem merely from an endorsement of this new upper-middleclass vision amongst all sections of the audience.

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