



Hum Aapke Hain Koun...!: An Example of the Coding of Emotions in Contemporary Hindi Mainstream Film

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Abstract: Taking *Hum Aapke Hain Koun...!* as an example, this article asks whether models that were developed for the analysis of narrative forms and their intended emotional effects in Hollywood cinema can be regarded as universal, and to what extent they may be reasonably applied to commercial Hindi films. The often voiced reproach that Hindi cinema lacks realism, usually accompanied by a critique of the excessive use of emotional cues, arises in part from the fact that scholars tend to view the narrative forms of Western mainstream cinema as the norm from which Hindi cinema deviates. By contrast, this article argues that we need to search for a proper understanding of a cinema whose films follow different rules. In so doing, this article also contributes to the debate on how cognitive models of film reception may be expanded to include culturalist elements of explanation.

Keywords: cognitive psychology, emotions, narration, post-liberalization Hindi cinema, Rasa theory

Hindi films may be unreal in a rational sense
but they are certainly not untrue.
—Sudhir Kakar

Few Bollywood films have provided critics with such copious material for different and controversial interpretations and analyses as Sooraj Barjatya's *Hum Aapke Hain Koun...!* Not least due to its success outside India, the film has come to be regarded as a milestone of the post-liberalization cinema. Although often derided as a film without a plot ("three-and-a-half hours in search of a plot"¹ as one critic described it; in Britain the phrase "fourteen

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songs and two weddings” was coined to describe it, alluding to *Four Weddings and a Funeral*²), *Hum Aapke Hain Koun . . . !* set the tone for a new era of popular cinema in India. In the 1980s, audiences consisted mostly of young and relatively poor men. This changed during the mid-1990s when cinemas began attracting entire families and in particular the prosperous “new middle classes” that were developing as a result of the liberalization process initiated in 1991 by the then finance minister Manmohan Singh (Datta 2003; Dwyer 2000). However, the past two decades were marked not only by changing audiences and by a strategic reorientation in producing but also and especially by a new aesthetics. In particular, this period may be described as one during which the romantic family film flourished and in this respect, *Hum Aapke Hain Koun . . . !* is paradigmatic (Uberoi 2006). Unlike the films of the 1980s that were often peppered with scenes of excessive violence, these films contain fewer or no violent sexual excesses. At the same time, it is necessary to mention that the box office hits of the 1990s did not always remain untouched by Hindu nationalist readings of Indian culture and history (Malhotra and Alagh 2004). Although the films in question do not explicitly promote fundamentalist thought, it seems that the subjects of family values and Hindu religion receive increased attention, as do conflicts between the Western and Indian values—subjects designed to promote the Indian nation’s sense of belonging.³ *Hum Aapke Hain Koun . . . !* especially sparked a great deal of controversy as Hindu rituals play a significant role in the film’s dramatic narrative. Moreover, the film is filled with references to Ramayana (Raghavendra 2006: 45). Conversely, and this is what makes the film particularly interesting, it also allows readings that go beyond such reactionary interpretations. Thus the filmmaker and scholar Shohini Gosh (2000), who characterizes the film as a “family carnevalesque,” plausibly shows that many viewers find the film attractive because of its positive erotic vibrancy, which at first sight may surprise those familiar with the film. Moreover, according to Gosh, because the film has given rise to so many different responses, it serves as a good example for a popular culture approach that is premised on the viewer’s active interaction with a polyseme text. Gayatri Gopinath (2000) also draws attention to the film’s potential for resistant readings, in this case for a transnational queer perspective that finds pleasure in the cross-dressing song-and-dance sequences.

This article focuses on the coding of emotions, with a particular focus on the era of liberalization. I maintain that this film, as a very influential example of the post-liberalization family film, lends itself especially well to an analysis of such coding strategies. My approach is informed by the question of whether models that were developed for the analysis of narrative forms and their intended emotional effects in Hollywood cinema can be regarded as universal (as some of their proponents claim), and to what extent they may be reason-

ably applied to commercial Hindi films. My first working hypothesis is that the often voiced reproach that Hindi cinema lacks realism, usually accompanied by a critique of the excessive use of emotional cues, arises in part from the fact that critics and scholars tend to view the narrative forms of Western mainstream cinema as the norm from which Hindi cinema deviates, rather than searching for a proper understanding of a cinema whose films follow different rules. Perhaps symptomatically, the excessive emotionality, about which some critics of Hindi cinema are up in arms, has so far rarely been discussed in its own right. Although this article cannot remedy this deficit, it formulates some provisional ideas and observations on the emotionality of popular Hindi cinema with a view to a further, deeper examination of these questions.

The article also contributes to the debate on how cognitive models of film reception may be expanded to include culturalist factors. This is a pressing question in film studies not least because, as a result of globalization, more and more cinematic traditions have come to the attention of scholars that had previously received only little systematic consideration. The post-colonial world is, in the words of Okwui Enwezor, a “world of proximities, a world of nearness rather than an elsewhere” (2002: 44). Film studies have more and more come to acknowledge this fact, and Hindi cinema is one of the subjects that gave rise to this understanding. The growing academic preoccupation with commercial Hindi cinema may, for the sake of simplification, be summarized in two different positions. First, there are those authors who analyze Bollywood films from a historical or aesthetic perspective in the tradition of national cinematography, that is, as an expression of the national culture of their country of origin. These may be contrasted with those authors who approach commercial Hindi cinema with questions of film studies without focusing on national cinematography, instead raising questions of aesthetics, of narratology, or of authorship, to name but a few. This second group may be further differentiated insofar as it comprises two distinct theoretical positions. On the one hand, we find a difference-based approach in the tradition of post-colonial and post-structuralist theories, according to which Bollywood cinema is best understood in terms of its otherness, its difference from Hollywood. On the other hand, there are those conceptions that are interested in the common traits of different narrative cinemas and attempt to identify these similarities. Thus cognitive film theory proposes to describe the offerings of fictional worlds based on universal features of the human brain and the supposed universality of mental processes while basically assuming that there are no significant cultural differences between various narrative traditions. In *Understanding Indian Movies* (2008), Patrick Colm Hogan has shown in a paradigmatic fashion and using Bollywood cinema as an example that this latter position does not exclude a culturalist perspective.

A Comparative Cultural Approach

Film scholars have developed highly differentiated theoretical models for describing narration based on Hollywood cinema. Furthermore, recent film theory has generally reflected the emotional experience of films in terms of narration. It has become habitual to apply models developed for the analysis of Hollywood films to other cinematic traditions, be it only for heuristic purposes. I draw on Ed Tan's (1996) cognitive psychological model, which constitutes the most coherent theoretical design, for the analysis of emotions in narrative Hollywood cinema. The comparison of Bollywood and Hollywood films aims at describing their differences; and it is also designed as a critique of Tan's model. I argue that we can only adequately understand the function of emotions in Bollywood cinema if the close connection between emotion and narration proposed by Tan is loosened in favor of a different conception of the relationship among cinematic aesthetics, emotion, and affect.

The perspective informing this discussion is that of a non-Indian, Western film scholar. It is not unusual for film scholars to study films not belonging to their own culture and made in languages they do not speak. Here, I particularly have in mind those works by Western scholars dealing with African, Japanese, and other Asian cinematic traditions. In recent years, however, a certain skepticism has developed as to whether an adequate reception is possible under such conditions—a skepticism that is not altogether unjustified. This seemingly applies all the more to Hindi film, insofar as popular Indian films have only rarely been screened in Western cinemas. Conversely Dorothee Wenner (2002) has reminded us that it is a Western stereotype to relegate the entire subcontinent to the realm of the other; that is, to understand India as something that defies understanding.

In Godard's *Pierrot le fou* (1965) the American director Sam Fuller, who plays himself, laconically states, "Cinema is emotion." Tan comes to the same conclusion in *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film*, which closes with the following words: "In this sense, and more than anything else, the traditional feature film is a genuine emotion machine" (1996: 251). The cognitive-psychological research on emotions, in which Tan's study must be included, has questioned the dominant psychoanalytical approaches in the theoretical debate on affect in cinema, thus significantly contributing to a more differentiated discussion of the subject. Conversely, the newly developed interest in emotionality has itself triggered approaches aiming to leave behind cognitivist conceptions or trying to enhance this perspective with culturalist ones.

According to Tan, the key to understanding emotions—those that are represented in fiction as well as those triggered in the viewers—lies in the film's narration. Cinematic concepts of narration, according to Tan, are especially important because narration has a privileged function when it comes to creating emotions. In Tan's succinct formula, narrating means creating emo-

tions. In his book, he is primarily concerned with the classic Hollywood films that he holds to be the feature film par excellence.

One could say, with slight exaggeration, that Bollywood cinema is identical with its American counterpart only in one respect: both narrative traditions favor a happy end. In all other respects, we find significant differences. What follows are the main systematic features of classical Hollywood narration:

- The main characters are the source of causality. They act more or less intentionally and goal-oriented, and their psychological structure is clear, though usually quite schematically defined.
- Whenever possible, the narrative adheres to the chronological order of the events.
- At any given time, the audience only sees and hears what is functionally relevant for advancing the narrative.
- As a rule, the viewers know whether they are witnessing an event from an objective or from a subjective perspective.
- The film does not draw attention to itself as an artifact. The filmic parameters and technical means such as staging, camera handling, and editing are largely subordinate to the film's narrative progress and to the presentation of the events' causality.
- Stylistic freedom is restricted by the conventions inherent in a particular genre.

The main features of the 1990s Bollywood cinema are roughly as follows:

- The conception of the subject is rather non-psychological; the uniqueness of individual experience is not given to the same extent as in classical Hollywood cinema.
 - The priority of chronology is suspended in the song-and-dance sequences; the plot often evolves by means of flashbacks. There is a different treatment of time (see, for example, Raghavendra 2006).
 - In song-and-dance sequences, there is no clear and consistent distinction between the objective and the subjective perspective. Raghavendra reminds us of similar aesthetic procedures operative in Sanskrit dramas. He quotes Richard Lannoy: "the dramatized structure of a Sanskrit play is cyclical, based on the themes of separation and reunion . . . ; various devices are used such as the dream, the trance, the premonition, the flashback, to disrupt the linearity of time and make the action recoil upon itself" (quoted in Raghavendra 2006: 35).
 - Commercial Indian film has not developed the conventions associated with particular genres to the extent that classical Hollywood has. On the viewers' side, however, there exist highly specific expectations waiting to be gratified by the film's stars.
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- Bollywood films are characterized by storylines that are more or less stereotypical, often remain fragmentary or episodal and contain several detailed subplots (Grimaud 2003; Rhagavendra 2006; Thomas 1985).
- Dialogues are often declamatory and sometimes assume the character of an insert.
- Hindi films almost invariably contain song-and-dance sequences, an element that is found in only one genre of American cinema—the musical.

Narration, according to Tan, who basically follows David Bordwell's definition, is a process by which fictional events are presented in an ordered manner and as part of a temporal structure with the purpose of creating a certain effect on the part of the viewer. This also includes technical aspects, including acting and camera work, that are designed to present the fictional events in such a way as to create the intended effect. As far as his understanding of emotion is concerned, Tan refers to the work of Nico Frijda who defines emotions as follows:

“(1) An emotion is usually caused by a person consciously or unconsciously evaluating an event as relevant to a concern (a goal) that is important. . . .

(2) The core of an emotion is readiness to act and the prompting of plans; an emotion gives priority for one or a few kinds of action to which it gives a sense of urgency—so it can interrupt, or compete with, alternative mental processes or actions. . . .

(3) An emotion is usually experienced as a distinctive type of mental state, sometimes accompanied or followed by bodily changes, expressions, actions.” (Oatley and Jenkins 1996: 96)

This definition includes Frijda's “Law of Change,” according to which emotions do not stem from positive or negative conditions but must be traced to changes of stimulus.

In order to apply this conception of emotion to the study of fictional film, Tan suggests that two different types of emotion are to be found in film. First, there are the characters' emotions; that is, the characters' experiences—here, the audience is present as an invisible witness in the fictional world of the film. Second, there is the so-called artifact emotion that is not connected to a particular person but stems from the viewers' liking of and admiration for the film. Tan further elaborates on this by maintaining that what we as viewers experience in terms of emotion is to be termed witness emotion. Because it is clear that we cannot partake in the action directly but only view it from the outside, cinematically created emotions are mostly witness emotions. When

the viewer shares the character's emotion, it constitutes an empathetic emotion; sympathy, compassion, and admiration are the most common examples of such a reaction. This also implies that the significance of a particular situation for the character is crucial for the viewer's emotion. The knowledge here is unequally distributed between the character and the viewer—we know something that the character is oblivious of but the character's situation is nevertheless decisive for our empathetic emotion. This is not the case where non-empathetic emotions are concerned; for example, we may enjoy a particular scenery or a character's physical appearance even though they are not relevant for the character's fate and his or her emotions.

Narration and Emotion

What then is the relationship between narration and emotion in commercial Hindi cinema? Two aspects are of crucial importance: the characters' subjectivity and the song-and-dance elements.

Huma aapke hain koun . . . ! relates the story of two orphan brothers, Prem and Rajesh, who were raised by their uncle and are now old enough to get married. A suitable wife, Pooja, is found for the older brother. They get married, a baby is born, but suddenly Pooja dies in a tragic accident, having been the only person to know of the tender love her sister Nisha and Prem felt for each other. Pooja is survived by her half-orphan for whom a new mother must now be found. The grandparents decide that the child's aunt, Nisha, is the only possible stepmother. After many dramatic developments Nisha and Prem finally find each other and get married.

The last third of the film sends its characters on a full-blown emotional rollercoaster. A group of men discusses the possibility of a marriage between Nisha and Rajesh. At this point, the audience is aware of the plan; only Prem, who would consequently have to relinquish his bride to his brother, is oblivious. As soon as Prem is told of the plans, the camera zooms onto his face, the conversations and sounds melt into the background and, at the same time, a dramatically crafted musical motive begins; a subjectivation is happening that is tied to Prem; the aural point of view and the music combine to express his feelings. His eyes wander away from the group and to a photograph that is made visible by a dramatic zoom in the following shot—a picture that was taken before Pooja's death and depicting both sisters together with both brothers and the baby. A shot/reverse-shot follows that alternates between the photograph and Prem's face, while the camera, accompanied by dramatic music, comes closer and closer to his face. The unselfish Prem endorses the proposed match. (Depending on one's point of view, of course, his behavior could also be interpreted as that of a coward or of someone with a high regard for tradition.) The marriage between Nisha and Rajesh, however, can only take place if Nisha gives her consent. In one of the following scenes, her parents

discuss the wedding while Nisha is secretly listening. Due to a fatal misunderstanding, she believes that the conversation is about her wedding with Prem. Overjoyed, she runs to her room, sits down at her dressing table and puts on the necklace given to her by Pooja before her death as a token of her knowledge of Nisha's love for Prem and her approval of the match. Only later, when the engagement ceremonies are already underway, does Nisha accidentally learn who the real groom is. Again, the viewer's empathy arises from the fact that he knows something the character does not. If one agrees with Edward Branigan that narration is a process of adjusting different degrees of knowledge, then the viewer emotion is, in this case, a direct effect of narration.

Let us take another look at the first scene with Prem: Here, completely in accordance with Frijda's theory, an outside stimulus results in an abrupt change of Prem's emotional state. This is emphasized by the camera movement, a zoom onto his face, and by the sound design, which switches into the subjective mode. Suddenly, the voices are dropped from the soundtrack, thus creating the impression that Prem now finds himself in a different state of perception. Similarly, Nisha's joy as well as her disappointment are primarily indicated by the use of music. Simultaneously, there is a short flashback. When Nisha tries on the necklace in front of the mirror, she is reminded of the moment she received it from her sister. Thus in emotionally dense moments, the characters' emotion is always emphasized by stylistic interventions; a change in the size of the frame and elements of the soundtrack underline the characters' emotional experience and serve to showcase it. One could, with reference to another point of comparison taken from the repertoire of Western popular culture, speak of a comic-like procedure. The scene in question is a typical example of the coding of emotions in Bollywood cinema: music and camera as catalysts of the characters' emotion. From Tan's perspective one might conclude that artifact emotions are functionally subordinated to character emotions.

Character and Subjectivity

The psychologist and philosopher of culture Ashis Nandy has used the term "antipsychology" to describe a feature of Indian cinema (Nandy 1995, 2003). According to Nandy, popular Indian cinema organizes itself on stereotypes and on essentialist depictions of its characters. No real people populate the screens, but "larger-than-life characters, patterned more like archetypes" (Nandy 2003: 81). Furthermore, commercial Indian cinema makes instrumental use of cultural traditions and worldviews, and depicts them in a very theatrical and spectacular fashion. In doing so, it aims at articulating its audience's specific problems in a generalized and effective way. This kind of generalization of the problem is accompanied by an externalization of its psychological components. Thus this cinema is anti-psychological in the sense that it pre-

sents psychological conflicts as conflicts between social types or as the result of a singular constellation of external events. Nandy's perspective is informed by a gesture of cultural criticism that would merit a more detailed discussion. One could ask, for example, if the anti-psychologism of Indian films is consistent with certain cultural and religious ideas and if Nandy's criticism of the films' anti-psychological character ultimately relies on a bourgeois Western idea of subjectivity. This would also imply a discussion of modernity and modernization in the Indian context. Nevertheless, Nandy's analysis is conducive to a more precise understanding of these films. What is more, Nandy's observation is corroborated by the fact that commercial Hindi film has retained more mythical elements in terms of its character conception than, for example, Hollywood or the modern novel. In Hindi film, the narrative develops in comparably "strong, extreme and frontal confrontations" whereas, according to Marc Vernet, Hollywood narrative film and the the modern novel rely more on closeness, where oppositions are "toned down, partial and fragile" (2006: 17).

Proceeding from the observation of "anti-psychology," one could explain the exaggerated coding of emotion in Hindi film in terms of a compensation hypothesis. Because the characters lack psychological depth and "roundedness," emotional enhancers are needed to support and enhance witness emotion. Furthermore, one could also describe this form of coding emotions as an efficient means of generalization, as a simple and effective way of conveying supra-individual emotions.

Conversely, these stylistic devices for conveying character emotion can have a distancing effect, as they may produce artifact emotions that in turn serve to put the emotional excess into perspective. This technique of exaggeration produces a constant oscillation between empathy and artifact. In other words, what is at stake in the scenes in question is not the *plausibility* but the *intensity* of emotional expression; the logic of these scenes is one of intense emotional display. This becomes especially manifest in the song-and-dance sequences. Song and dance feature prominently in Indian performing arts; through music, traditional rituals and celebrations are integrated into films. In addition, song-and-dance sequences frequently assume the character of fantasies, day dreams, and desires, though they are often not attributed to just one character and thus by no means reveal the inner life of one particular individual. Thus a couple may imagine its future love life in a song. Fantasy acts are usually of a special emotional density and center on the emotion of love. These scenes also have an important social function. In a social context in which intimacy is largely restricted to the private sphere, they form an ideal vehicle for the experience of intimacy in the public sphere. Their

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content is often starkly erotic and sometimes even pornographic, though the fantastic frame serves to dissociate these displays from the reality of the main narrative and thus has a somewhat mitigating effect.

On the subject of the culturality of emotions Frijda observes: “Within a given culture, different display rules again exist for what is appropriate in public, in intimate relationships, or with priest or psychotherapist. In fine, as Ekman and Freisen conclude, culture defines not what emotional expressions to make, but when to make them, and how strongly” (1986: 62). In the song-and-dance sequences, there becomes manifest what Frijda describes as a culturally legitimated realm of emotions: Certain emotions can be expressed more adequately in an imaginary framework. The song-and-dance sequences in Indian cinema in some cases create privileged sites for private emotions. Sudhir Kakar, a psychoanalyst, introduces another aspect; he assumes that psychological processes are determined by different cultural settings to a larger degree than Frijda would have it. Kakar relates the song-and-dance sequences to the fact that “in India the child’s world of magic is not as far removed from adult consciousness as it may be in some other cultures” and that “the Indian ego is flexible enough to regress temporarily to childhood modes without feeling threatened or engulfed” (1990: 28).⁴ For Kakar, Hindi film and especially the song-and-dance sequences provide a “regressive haven” for such fantasies—cinema as a topography of longing. Kakar’s thesis is compelling not least because it takes on the old colonialist stereotype of the childlike “primitive” psyche, while simultaneously giving it a positive twist by insisting on the greater flexibility of the Indian psyche, which Europeans by comparison lack. In any case, it is out of the question that the emotional experience of song-and-dance sequences thus conceived cannot be adequately described by a model that links emotion to a narrative consisting of coherent characters acting in a causally complete world. What we need, then, is an approach that accounts for different layers and registers of emotional experience in film.

The cognitive-psychological approach allows us to describe to a certain degree the emotional strategies of commercial Indian cinema. But its limitations are noticeable. A narrowly defined concept of narration can neither do justice to the films nor to the kind of experience they provide. Also, cultural components enter into one’s understanding and experience of film to a greater extent than cognition theory would have it. This is especially obvious when it comes to the question whether cinematic emotions—those depicted in the film as well as those produced in the audience—can be equated with everyday emotions. As shown above, Bollywood films are concerned not so much with “authentic” emotions than with a specific aesthetic quality in the depiction and production of emotions. The concept of “witness emotion” does not do justice to this kind of surplus.

The “subversion” of emotional realism in Bollywood cinema should be considered in the context of local and regional traditions in art and entertainment.

This point can also be made in terms of the concept of the artifact. According to Bordwell, the classical Hollywood film does not attract the audience’s attention to its nature as an artifact. The filmic parameters and technical devices (staging, camera handling, and editing) are largely subordinate to the film’s narrative progress and to the presentation of the events’ causality; together, they create the realism that is typical of Hollywood (see, for example, Bordwell, et al. 1985: 6–8). On the contrary, Bollywood film likes to highlight artifact effects. Popular Indian cinema sometimes appears as a street-corner folk theater unwittingly trying to do a Bertolt Brecht or Jean-Luc Godard. Indian cinema, then, does not lack realism. Rather, these films show that realism implies its own subversion (Nandy 2003: 80). This does not mean to say that Bollywood presents us with a Brechtian alternative to Hollywood when it comes to representing emotions. Rather, the “subversion” of emotional realism in Bollywood cinema should be considered in the context of local and regional traditions in art and entertainment.

Local Traditions

Cinema first appeared in India at the beginning of the twentieth century, initially in the form of Western films. However, there quickly developed a specifically Indian form of cinematic entertainment. Mythological beliefs, classical and folkloristic dance and theatre traditions, elements of Parsi theater and also of Hollywood cinema combined to form an autonomous, popular film aesthetic. Authors vary in their relative emphasis of Western traditions of representation and narration and Indian beliefs. A special point of controversy is the question of whether the so-called *Rasa* theory of classical Indian philosophy of art can serve to explain certain features of popular cinema.⁵

The origins of the *Rasa* theory are to be found in Bharata’s *Natyasastra* (“textbook for the performing arts”). The *Natyasastra*, which dates from around 200 BC, is a treatise on poetic, musical, and dramatic performance practices. The *Rasa* theory can be described, in somewhat simplified terms, as an aesthetic doctrine of the emotional dispositions a work of art can create in its audience. “*Rasa*” literally means “juice” and refers to what is tasted and enjoyed, a kind of generalized emotion. *Natyasastra* knows of eight emotions to which the *Shanta* (the inner peace) was later added, thus producing the theory of “*navarasa*,” or the “*nine rasas*.” The original eight *Rasas* are: the romantic, the comic, the sorrowful, the violent, the heroic, the fear inspiring, the revolting, the marvelous, and the peaceful. For each *Rasa*, there is a corresponding concrete emotion (*bhava*): love, gaiety, sorrow, anger, determination, fear, revulsion, wonder, peace.

In classical Indian aesthetics, the *Rasas* are of central importance: They are fictionalized emotions that can be experienced through poetry and art. The

Rasa theory's most important contribution to art criticism is its emphasis on the signifying context as a stylistic determinant. According to the Rasa theory, poetry elevates our experiences, including those that are profane or based on facts, to a higher level, a kind of emotional insight. Where Western thought since Aristotle has linked aesthetic experience to learning and a gain in knowledge, Rasa theory focuses on the evocation of emotions, on the joy that lies in observing a work of art, and thus on the hedonist principle as an integral part of aesthetic contemplation.⁶ According to the Indian art historian Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, aesthetic experience has a strong element of play: "The spectator's appreciation of beauty depends on the effort of his own imagination, just as in the case of children playing with clay elephants" ([1924] 1985: 33).⁷ Taking a cue from Rasa theory and Coomaraswamy may help to think about the aesthetic surplus of Bollywood films without constantly having to point to its purported lack of realism. What a Hollywood-educated audience may perceive as the excess of Bollywood films is more than just a surplus that the process of narration fails to properly integrate into its well-ordered system of discourse. Rather, that supposed excess could be the very reason why audiences choose to engage with the film's playful unfolding of emotional experiences in the first place.

But let us return to the initial framework of cognitive psychology. In a first step, that framework was found wanting for not sufficiently taking into account the culturally specific aspects of film viewing. In fact, one could argue that cognitive psychology—the psychology of information processing—does not construe the construction of meaning as a problem of particular relevance, which is exactly how it differs from psychoanalysis, a hermeneutics of deep structures of cultural and biographical meaning.⁸ Cognitive psychology's meaning-blindness can be compensated for by turning to the work of Jerome Bruner, one of the pioneers of cognitive psychology who proposes "to tackle the problem of meaning anew through a psychology of the narrative" (Hediger 2002: 54). According to Bruner, the narrative is "a privileged form of cultural meaning" (54). A culture, Bruner claims following Clifford Geertz, "consists of a set of norms . . . as well as of an array of tools of interpretation that allow us to comprehend deviations from these norms and stories fulfill this function." Stories, according to Bruner, create cultural meaning by explicating deviations from the rule (1990: 47). Following Bruner, Hediger maintains that cinema does not merely explain the world to its audience and make "deviations from cultural norms intelligible in virtue of its constitution as a medium of narration", but rather enables "its addressees to engage in their own game with cultural norms" (2002: 55).

According to Shohini Gosh (2000), in *Hum Aapke Hain Koun . . . !* this game takes shape in the erotic tensions that mark, in varying degrees, all relationships between men and women throughout the film. Patricia Uberoi (2006)

observes that from a sociological and anthropological perspective, the song-and-dance sequences are particularly instructive. Particularly through the bawdy songs ritually sung by women during weddings the film represents *jija-ali* (sister's husband and younger sister) relations as well as *dewar-bhabi* (husband's younger brother/elder brother's wife), and *samdhi-damdhan* (opposite sex parents-in-law) constellations in a humorous take on key facets of north Indian types of kinship. These "joking relationships" can plausibly be read as playful surrogates of the sexual relationship between husband and wife (Uberoi 2006: 145). The erotic tensions are embedded in a web of misunderstandings, missed chances and a chronology where things always happen either too soon or too late. The result is an emotional rollercoaster, a narrative that is without doubt culturally specific but provides an emotional experience of a kind that in a Western context is often associated with the melodrama.

Thus a point made by German film scholar Hermann Kappelhoff, whose argument, echoing Coomaraswamy's view, comes full circle: "As far as the viewer is concerned [what matters is] the feeling of his own sensitivity: a surprise encounter with his own affectivity" (2005: 48). In the past, Western audiences have turned to the novel and, later on, to Hollywood in order to be surprised by one's own sensitivity and affectivity. Nowadays, it is in Bollywood films, perhaps more than other genres and formats, that Western viewers find the opportunity for such an encounter. Although it is quite possible that a Western audience will never enjoy Hindi films as much as an audience familiar with their underlying cultural codes, it is precisely the excessive emotionality provided by Bollywood films on screen and to viewers that audiences find so enticing.

Taking *Hum Apke Hain Koun . . . !* as my example, I subscribe to the idea of a universality of filmic experience, but it is important to add the following differentiation: Bollywood films are not melodramas in the Western sense of the word. However, with different cultural premises, in the light of different aesthetic traditions, and by mobilizing distinct artistic procedures they, much like Western melodramas, provide their audience with the opportunity of playfully experiencing their own emotionality: An enjoyment of their own emotions similar to, and reminiscent of, that of children playing with clay elephants.

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Notes

¹ “*Hum aapke hain koun . . . !* (1994),” http://www.filmigeek.com/2006/10/hum_aapke_hain_.html (accessed 9 March 2009).

² “*Hum aapke hain koun: A Super-Duper Hit*,” <http://hindi-movie-masala.blogspot.com/2007/10/hum-aapke-hain-kaun-super-duper-hit.html> (accessed 9 March 2009).

³ According to the historian Partha Chatterjee, it was under the colonial logic of segregation that the private sphere of the family became the privileged locus of Indian identity for Indian nationalists. Bearing in mind this background, it becomes easier to understand why in the 1990s Bollywood films the family is such an important place where tensions between modernizing and anti-modernizing forces are played out (see Vitali 2000).

⁴ For further reading on the psychoanalysis of childhood in India see Kakar (1978).

⁵ Dwyer (2002) questions the relevance of Rasa theory for popular cinema. For a productive engagement with this theory, see Cooper (2000), Pandit (2007), and Hogan (2008).

⁶ As an aesthetic theory of drama, Rasa theory contains indications that fictional characters are to be of a static construction (unlike the characters of the bourgeois novel, for example, and of course of Hollywood cinema), that is, should not evolve or change (see Cooper 2000).

⁷ The idea that an aesthetic theory, i.e., a theory of artistic beauty and of aesthetic experience must be developed from the concept of play, is part of a German tradition and can be found in Schiller ([1795] 1981) and in Gadamer (1960). In view of the manifold connections between German culture, namely German philosophy and a (presumed) Indian heritage, a further exploration of these subliminal relationships would seem promising.

⁸ For the following account of the relationship between cognitive psychology and psychoanalysis as film theoretical models, see Hediger (2002).

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