

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON *PURAB AUR PASCHIM* (1970) AND *BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM* (2002): THE CHANGING PATTERNS OF BOLLYWOOD DIASPORIC MOVIES IN COMING AGES**

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**ABSTRACT**

Movies can be considered as the product of culture and also the producer of culture. They are based on the lifestyle and surrounding of people living in the society. It is a very strong form of the visual medium through which audience communicates, relates and evokes a response. Bollywood has become more global thus pushing the envelope and raising some interesting issues. It is gradually enlarging the audience boundary capturing the interest of a cross-border audience that made it global. Movies bring an identity into being nourished by a particular cinematic address. With the changing pattern of migration there is also change in demand and consumption of the entertainment industry in the present context. This article will be drawing comparative study between two movies Purab and Paschim (1970) and Bend it Like Beckham (2002). Majorly the views and imaginations of the Indian Diaspora filmmakers are to feed the NRI audience a desire of what I call a Disney fantasy. They give audience the feeling that all is well that ends well. This article will discuss the shift of west as negative to depicting west as alluring through the lenses of Bollywood. It would also highlight the problems faced by the second generation Indian Diaspora.

**Keywords:** Audience, Bollywood, Diaspora, Movies, Identity.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

There is increasing growth in the entertainment industry resulting in thriving economic growth and soaring income of the Indians from the past few years in the Indian economy. Naturally when there is a growth in the income of an individual he will lead to spend his money more extensively in different kind of leisure activities apart from bare necessities. A report of Goldman Sach, October 2003, India would soon rise as one of the large force in the world economy in the upcoming 50 years. As per NASSCOM-MCKINSEY, growth in the IT sector would create job creation, thus frittering more in leisure. Mall culture and Multiplexes have

created a significant position in the societal life of a middle class. The middle class of the society represent majority of the Indian population and one can notice the change in the economy observing their expenses and investments. When it comes to entertainment they spend huge amount of money on gadgets, televisions, sound systems, etc.

Films can be considered as the product of culture and also the producer of culture. They are based on the lifestyle and surrounding of people living in the society. It is a very strong form of the visual medium through which the viewer communicates, relates and evokes a response. Films can motivate thought and draw attention in comparison to printed media. It was only during 1998 that filmmaking was given the status of an industry in India (Ganti, 2012). According to Jasbir Jain films are considered to be the youngest component in comparison to literature and culture, though it's multiform is deeply rooted in the other two "Cinema more than other media like television, mobile phones or the internet, constitutes a medium for the enacting, teaching and dissemination of this nationalist discourse heralding the combined virtues of consumerism and devotion and of cosmopolitanism and roots" (Therwath, 2010)

Diaspora, as we see, can connect and bridge itself through a medium that leads them into a world of fantasy with their homeland. It is not only about entertainment rather it is an emotional bondage between the Diaspora with its homeland. Bollywood is a medium that fades the line of alienation and individuality.

"Bollywood represents an ideal India in the collective imagination, not the real, problematised nation but the shared cultural fantasy of an idealised India that is constantly striven for" (Dudrah, 2006). Most people gain their deepest impressions through their senses-what they see, hears, and feels upon entering a new culture. Perhaps more so than any other sense, people remember and attempt to make sense of what they see when entering another culture for the first time (Verluyten, 2007, 2008).

The model of India as formulated in the below films is imaginary in nature but for the NRI's it is an authentic brochure that they relate to. These NRI's experience a prismatic expedition of Indian relatives, wedding, food, holiday destinations, etc. The course of though in these films are exaggerated to a great extent. The research also observes that all these films are not only melodramatic but are also based substantially on a North Indian backdrop.

Bollywood films, Vijay Mishra says, "comes 'pre-textualized', it comes with its own ideology, its own apparatuses of production." (p.268) Bollywood representation of the Diaspora does not have much to do with the actual diasporic experience. In its presentation of the Diaspora, what Bollywood does is replicate its "own form" (p. 269). There were many films which represented the lifestyle of Indian Diaspora abroad, especially in the West. Such films deal exclusively with

different migrant experiences. Contradictory to the movies that were made in the past which made the Indians cringe to return back to their homeland, the present ones begin and end their story in the foreign country itself. This step was of utmost importance for the Indian economy. In addition the producers and directors preserved in these films high taste for consumerism and of course had little connection with the reality of life of the most Indian migrants (Rao, S., 2007). Movies like Bollywood Hollywood (2002), Cocktail (2012), Salaam Namaste (2005), etc completely circulate from starting to end in the hostland.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

This article is descriptive in nature therefore for this study I have used secondary sources, viz. research papers, books, journals, and different websites.

## **3. SIGNIFICANCE**

The movies that I have selected for my research are completely based on the Diaspora and the emotions that they emote through the lenses. Movies that were made few years after post independence of India and the Diaspora movies made in the 20<sup>th</sup> century vary to a great degree in their cinematic representation of Indian Diaspora.

### **Purab aur Paschim (1960)**

The movie centres on the character Bharat who is an idealistic, dutiful, forgiving and nationalistic man. The movie highlights more about pros of spirituality and the cons of a materialistic world. The other Indian western characters ponder upon why they would return to India a place filled with poverty. The protagonist of the movies changes the ideology of everyone (from the West) who comes in contact with him. He inculcates a sense of Indian mysticism, values and ethics among other NRI's. It is a commonplace in Bollywood that the West represents all that is decadent while India stand for the pure, pristine, the good, and so on. The West is considered as evil and deviated culture that highlights alcohol, womaniser, demeaning traditional norms, etc. Whereas Indianess highlights love, respect and culture. Bharat sings songs like "Zero hi diya mere bharat ne, mere bharat ne" and "Hai preet jahan ki reet sada main geet wahan ke gata hoon, bharat ka rehne wala ho bharat ki baat sunata hoon"



*A scene where Bharat talks about India and Preeti is completely blank and finds its old fashioned and boring. She relates Bharat choice to that of her father who she thinks has choices very similar to him.*

*Source:*[https://www.google.co.in/search?q=purab+aur+paschim&hl=en&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewjb74vg1OPXAhVGKY8KHYuMA1EQ\\_AUIDCgD&biw=1366&bih=637#imgrc=-oUD4dE7hzmuzM](https://www.google.co.in/search?q=purab+aur+paschim&hl=en&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewjb74vg1OPXAhVGKY8KHYuMA1EQ_AUIDCgD&biw=1366&bih=637#imgrc=-oUD4dE7hzmuzM)

Bharat as a hero is extremely Indianized in a manner but wears pants shirt and blazer when he is in London for his studies. The research understands that the reflection of patriotism is showcased too much in the movie which doesn't look real nor feel connected. Movies are supposed to be the mirror image of the society and the activities that are taking place within it. Portraying the heroine's mother as a negative character because she consumes alcohol is cliché. Preeti is an embodiment of transgression an illegitimate crossing of boundaries and borders. Her body symbolises the vulnerability of racial identity and of racial purity (Nast, 1998: Sethi, 2002) reinforced by its encounter with and location in the heart of the hedonistic West of the 1960's (Mohammad 2007). There are other means of showcasing a negative character despite for the fact that they are being forcibly negative because they are westernized and don't feel attached with the homeland. These kinds of character are very common in the contemporary diasporic movies. Consumption of alcohol, pubbing, having multiple affairs, detached homeland feeling, etc are not alien to the NRI's. Probably this movie was made at a time where the NRI's were shown with great audacity as traditional to meet the satisfaction of the Indian audience. These genres of movies are reflection of generations that are trying to keep their culture alive. The movie also

highlights that even though post freedom or after the freedom struggle India might be free of British rule but not free of British thoughts. In the previous films (ones that were directed post-independence) the foreign land always referred to London. There was existence of no other location beyond Indian borders in the mind map of the directors and producers. It talks about Indians who do not feel proud to hail from their own country and degrade their nation by stating inferior remarks.

In order to revive Preeti's Indianness Bharat takes the sole responsibility of removing her from the physical space in the corrupted environment of West and relocated her into the territorial boundaries of the homeland. Diaspora in content highlight certain values that occupy a central place and are mentioned frequently like *sharm*, *lihaz*, *izzat* [shame, modesty, honour], three virtues presented as the preserve of women (Karudapuram 2001).

It is the same with her brother and other characters in the movie who change their nature with the change in space. This film is a precursor of later day attempts like "Des Pardes", "Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayege", "Swades", "London Dreams", etc.

### **Bend It Like Beckham (2002)**

Bend It Like Beckham was very different from movies which were made in that particular time. Gurinder Chadha, 2003, stated that the title of the film is a lot alike to the rigid Indian norms. She goes on to explain that like David Beckham kicks the ball with certain curves and bends so does Jazz the protagonist from the movie bends the so called norms and tradition to fulfil her passion for playing soccer. She does not let her cultural background come in her way of her dreams (Chacko 2010, p 81). It is the story of a Sikh Punjabi family who live in Southall England<sup>1</sup>. Jess the protagonist of the movie idolizes David Beckham the British soccer player. Her passion of the game is obstructed by patriarchal stereotyping prevailing at her home and racism in the field of practice.

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<sup>1</sup> This particular location is a large vibrant community of the South Asian Diaspora.



*Jess playing football with her male friends which are seen as a taboo by her mother who doesn't consider her a proper Indian woman.*

*Source: <http://www.frenchtoastsunday.com/2016/08/bend-like-beckham-hidden-gem-british-cinema.html>*

As per Jess's mother she is crashing through the doors of tradition to reach her passion for playing football, she points out instances like running around in shorts in the football field "showing her bare legs to 70000 people". This act of Jess was pulling down the sanctities of their home and their cultural identity. In the movie the second generation<sup>2</sup> finds the Indian identity is thrust upon them by their parents as oppressive as it is a one reason that does not fit in with her aspiration to play soccer. Her mother concerns about Jess not being able to make "round *chapatti*"<sup>3</sup> and "*aloo gobi*"<sup>4</sup> does not make her a "proper woman"<sup>5</sup>. Food on the other hand is not only a distinguished signifier of Indianess but also of womanhood. In this movie it is a part of their cultural identity and distinguishes them from the others including their British neighbours.

Jess's father Mr. Bhamra ancestors moved out of India to East Africa as labourers during the colonial period. He was brought up in Nairobi where he was the best fast bowler in the cricket team at his school. He even seemed to have won the East African Cup. It was only after shifting to England his pursuit for cricket was thwarted by racial prejudice. According to Chacko, such multiple mass movements of people have led to increasing diversity within nation-states,

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<sup>2</sup> The second generation this movie includes of Jess, her elder sister Pinky and her gay friend Tony.

<sup>3</sup> It is a flat unleavened bread made of wheat flour

<sup>4</sup> It is an Indian dish made of *aloo* (potato) and *gobi*(cauliflower). It is a popular accompaniment to chapatti

<sup>5</sup> Jess mother refers to the stereotypical Indian women who are coy and prompt in household work.

given rise to multicultural societies, and made cross-cultural interactions inevitable. It was very common for Sikhs in England to be discriminated and marginalised by the Whites which as a result deeply etched the polarity of “*self*” and “*other*” in among the consciousness among the Sikhs as represented by Mr. Bhamra in *Bend it like Beckham*. His experience of Indian consciousness is largely shaped from his experiences as an immigrant in Britain.

We see that Jess confesses to Joe about her parents that, “*They want to protect me. This is taking me away from everything they know*”. Here in context to an immigrant protecting means to preserve the cultural anatomy of their home. The parents do not want their children to get diluted in the hostland culture thus they are trying to safeguard them. The culture of hostland is dominant for the migrant therefore an attempt is made by the parents to protect the domestic space which in a way recalls the nationalistic discourse in the colonial India. Jess finds Indian culture particularly restrictive because she grew up in a society with different expectations and constructions of gender roles. Women in the Diaspora endure greater price as a racialized immigrant identity from time immemorial. In the process of protecting the women in the hostland the male curb their independence. Gupta refers to this as “*ideology of protection*” wherein patriarchal oppression prevails and delays unifying efforts to fight oppression (Gupta 1988, p 27).

Joe the Irish coach of Jess football team can be related to the British who in this movie is in a mission to civilize the irrational and orthodox Indian similar to the memories of the colonizers who did the same in India ages ago. In the movie he took it upon himself to liberate the oppressed and long suffering Indian women.

Gurinder Chadha’s film very commonly reflect topics like the survival of the Indian immigrants in London, cultural dilemmas faced by them and the adjustments made by them in order to survive culturally. For the Indians back in their homeland her movies turn out to be an entertaining way to look at their peers in a nation which is not their own by someone who is essentially like them. Jess expected discomfort with Indian things is acceptable and looks funny in the movie in contrast to many other diasporic characters played in Hindi movies that spent all their lives outside India yet manage to break into *Bhajans* at the drop of a hat.

Earlier cinema like *Purab aur Pashchim* and *Maine Pyar Kiye* portrayed negative implications of Indians in a westernized culture as materialistic but the content and portrayal of such characters have also changed in the recent movies. “Such characterizations of overseas Indians were an extrapolation of the conflicts between tradition and modernity, often implicitly (or even explicitly) played out in Indian cinema as a contest between Indian and Western values” (Athique 2012, 5). Presently the transformations from a negative NRI character to a more

understanding NRI's in movies have made the homeland start accepting and accommodating them with respect and honour.

Movies are shot in locations like US, UK, Canada, Singapore, Mauritius and Australia so that the Diasporas are able to relate to the spaces. The characters played in such movies are highly cosmopolitan in some scenes and suddenly turn traditional as per some scenes. For e.g. Poo in *Kabhie Khushi Kabhi Gham (2001)* is an ultra modern girl who wears skimpy dresses sings English songs becomes traditional after interacting with Rohan. The NRI's were shown as grand, successful people living in posh areas, shopping in malls and wearing branded stuffs. They are also portrayed in saris and *lehengas* adorning bangles and *bindis* in some songs and festive sequence in the same movie.

## **CONCLUSION**

India is in a phase of transition from tradition and modernity, similarly, Bollywood too is transitioning as well. Bollywood has become more global thus pushing the envelope and raising some interesting issues. It is gradually enlarging the audience boundary capturing the interest of a cross-border audience that made it global. Films from India always reflected the Indian society in the 70's, 80's and 90's but now they also speak of the dilemma faced by Preeti and Jazz the second generation Diasporas. We notice that one common factor of the Diaspora movie is that they showcase life of people both at homelands and hostland.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

This paper is dedicated to my parents and supervisor Asst. Prof. Ajaya Kumar Sahoo for their guidance and unconditional support.

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