Love in the Time of Globalization:
Indian and American National Identity in Romance Cinema

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The movie *Slumdog Millionaire* brought Indian cinema to America. Ironically, for a country that houses over one million Indian immigrants, Americans did not notice Indian cinema – which originated in Bombay (Mumbai) and hence inherited the nickname Bollywood because it is a play on "Hollywood," turning the "H" turned into a "B" – until 2008, when an Irishman named Danny Boyle released his independent film about impoverished Indian street children. *Slumdog* won eight Academy Awards, including best picture and best director; consequently, after the Oscars ceremony the movie became a worldwide box office phenomenon, drawing $141.3 million from the United States alone, and Americans clamored for more. The Pussycat Dolls, an American female pop group, covered 'Jai Ho,' the movie's Oscar-winning credit song, in English. Steven Spielberg supposedly signed a deal to set up a studio in India, despite never having visited the country. Even the 2009 national pair figure skating champions, Meryl Davis and Charlie White, skated to victory with a program of songs from two Bollywood movies. Indian cinema is literally dancing its way into American culture.

As Bollywood becomes more a more visible force within American culture, it becomes ever more important for Americans to understand how Bollywood movies work. This means more than simply recognizing the Bollywood format (a set number of songs exist within each movie, usually around five) and calling it different. It also means understanding what overarching messages those movies convey about Indian culture.

Film is one of the most powerful artistic reflections of social change. In his book *Screening Out the Past*, the cultural historian Lary May argues that movies were a vital part of America's shift from a producer to a consumer economy, capturing "democratic

individualism" on screen. According to May, critics as early as the 1920s noticed audience reactions to movies with heightened emotional responses: movies have always created a sense of enhanced reality that simultaneously reflected social ideals and reinforce them.[1] As *New York Times* film critic A.O. Scott describes it, "the unofficial demotic history of cinema is built out of these impressions [personal memories] and out of the patterns that turn movies into a warped, unignorable mirror of the world they inhabit."[2] In the United States, for example, distinct film styles represent various eras in the twentieth century. In the 1930s, musical spectaculars reflected Depression-era escapist desires: moviegoers wanted to forget their economic woes, so they watched screen spectaculars like *42nd Street* and *Gold Diggers of 1933* that reflected their dreams of prosperity. In the early 1960s, adolescent extravaganzas such as *Beach Blanket Bingo* and the *Gidget* series reflected (and consolidated) the social and economic arrival of a new class of American – teenagers – and in the late 1960s those movies incorporated the same generation's startling new moves toward sexual liberation. Each era's movies come with their own set of social commentaries.[3]

My thesis analyzes twentieth-century Hollywood and Bollywood films to explain their distinct understandings of national identity, to mark changes over time, and to identify possible areas of convergence as the two cinemas begin their second century. With *Slumdog Millionaire*, Americans opened themselves up to India, but with that new global connection (as with any new cross-cultural connection) comes the responsibility to understand foreign cultures critically, not superficially. Ethnic stereotyping has thrived

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[1] Lary May, *Screening Out the Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).
[2] A.O. Scott,"Screen Memories," *New York Times*, 15 Nov 2009. http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/15/magazine/15FOB-wwln t.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=screen%20memories&st=cse.
[3] Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1997).

throughout American history, as citizens willfully misunderstood the voluntary and forced immigrants around them. When people from India first came to the United States in significant numbers, around the turn of the twentieth century, they were often targeted for their dark skin and exotic turbans: "Rag-head" became a popular derogatory nickname on the west coast. *Slumdog Millionaire* was arguably the first mainstream opportunity for large numbers of Americans to learn about Indian culture. Just as *Slumdog* used film as a medium to create interest in India, this paper will use film as a medium to help explain particular aspects of romantic culture in India.

Hollywood films are not the only ones to elicit critical commentary. Bollywood also portrays turbulent cultural changes in modern Indian history. Nationhood, economic crisis, and globalization: Bollywood has consistently echoed and commented on these shifts throughout the twentieth century. Although Bollywood films are easily dismissed as fantastical musicals with no basis in reality, their formulas are just as culturally revealing (albeit not as realistic) as their Hollywood counterparts. Moreover, in both Hollywood and Bollywood, each decade's cinematic social commentaries inevitably overlap with the next, creating patterns of thought as values shift, progress, and regress (although not necessarily in that order). As each industry's films spanned decades – and soon to be a century – their products start to reflect overarching changes or consistencies within national identity.

Interestingly, the nationalistic benefits of Indian cinema went unnoticed or unappreciated by Mohandes K. Gandhi himself. Speaking in New Delhi on May 27, 1947, the Mahatma cited the old saying about idle minds and devil's workshops, criticizing people who "waste their time in cinema and theaters." He added, "If I had my

way, I would see to it that all the cinemas and theatres in India were converted into spinning halls and factories for handicrafts of all kinds."[4] Despite Gandhi's great popularity and influence, on this particular point a majority of Indians disagreed with their leader. Indian filmmakers had been producing movies since the very first years of the medium's invention. By the time of the nationalist movement, it was already one of India's most durable and profitable domestic industries. Films made prior to Independence are outside the scope of this thesis, for two main reasons. First, India as a nation did not exist until 1947, therefore the analysis could get frustratingly hazy. Also, the post-Independence years spurred the first great Indian 'auteurs,' filmmakers whose subject matter departed from the more traditional religious stories.

This thesis focuses on a revealing sub-genre that was popular in both countries: film series featuring recurring romantic couples – that is, on-screen pairs who made more than one movie together. Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers probably come first to mind in the American case, as an iconic duo who made ten films together over more than a decade. Love and romance arguably go to the heart of any culture, although film scholars have often been more preoccupied with critical analysis of comedy, epic, or social change films. Nevertheless, particularly in the Bollywood formula, romance is an element of nearly every film plot. Moreover, cultural historians have now shown that love is not a universal or transhistorical emotion, even if most societies promote that idea. According to David Shumway, literary critic and film scholar, love is very much a social (or "socially constructed") phenomenon, and it is ever changing. Shumway's *Modern Love: Romance, Intimacy and the Marriage Crisis* probes the idea that mass media, such as

[4] Mohandas K. Gandhi, "Speech at Prayer Meeting," Speech, New Delhi, India: 27 May 1947. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi Online*, www.gandhiserve.com.

literature, music and film, have shaped and informed societal definitions of love since at least Shakespeare's time.[5] A mere glimpse at changes in terms of arranged marriage practices in India over the last fifty years confirms that the ways in which people find love and/or deal with love are anything but static. Perhaps the only truism here is that a society's customs and rituals around love reflect its core values in all places and times.

The consistency and longevity of romantic film couples also makes them ripe for comparative analysis. At least in the United States, romances (and romantic comedies in particular) are often dismissed as *drivel* – mere popular entertainment. But to the degree that such popularity bespeaks audience approval, audiences reveal what kinds of values, customs, and attitudes they like by voting at the box office. Recurring couples take audience approval to a higher level. Cultural historian Jeanine Basinger examines the inner mechanisms of the classic Hollywood studio in her book *The Star Machine*. Movie studios brought actors and actresses together solely to find box office "gold." If a pair of stars, like Fred and Ginger, proved successful at the box office, the studios would bring them back together for another movie, and then another, until the formula wore thin or their contracts expired. Romantic on-screen pairs usually repeated similar formulas within each movie because those formulas appealed to audiences, making such films ideal historical documents that repetitively confirm audience values and opinions.[6]

Likewise, the broader history of each industry reveals how modern-day Hollywood and Bollywood have differed, and therefore how American and Indian society differ – at least in the parts of their cultures represented in film. Only a thorough examination of both industries' histories can reveal the development of modern day

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[5] David R. Shumway, *Modern Love: Romance, Intimacy and the Marriage Crisis*, (New York: New York University Press, 2003).
[6] Jeanine Basinger, *The Star Machine* (New York: Vintage, 2009).

fundamental differences in Hollywood and Bollywood, and therefore modern day fundamental differences between American and Indian society. In Hollywood romances, the progression from the 1930s onward resulted in a philosophy of modernity infused with tradition; in Bollywood, the progression from the late 1940s onward resulted in a philosophy of tradition infused with modernity.

Scholars differ (to say the least) over the definition and nature of "modernity" and its relationship to "tradition," and not surprisingly neither Hollywood or Bollywood has been concerned (despite the centrality of film in representing and enacting to clarify these ideals) to clarify them. For example, the "modern woman" in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s had different characteristics and responsibilities from the modern woman of the 1950s.[7] They are at once concrete and fragile definitions, reflections more of contemporary ideals rather than fixed ideas. However, despite their indefinite forms, the importance of modernity and tradition still manifest into recognizable patterns within each culture's films. In Bollywood, tradition is often assigned to some mythical past India. These films often fudge the line of what counts as 'Indian' in and of itself, but they consistently represent an idyllic past that no longer exists. For Hollywood, the definition is a more tenuous debate over gender equality, as modern society and traditional values battle for dominance: the two often cannot coexist. These changing concepts of tradition and modernity themselves contribute to an understanding of each film industry's founding culture. By the end of the millennium, each industry's romances reached a philosophical compromise between whatever they defined as modernity and tradition that betrays a fundamental difference in national attitudes.

[7] In a later section this study will examine the contradictions inherent within a single Bollywood director's (Raj Kapoor) definition of the modern independent Indian.

To best study national identity through these romances, this inquiry is divided into four basic time periods. The first time period is that of national identity and growth: for America that stretches from the 1930s to the 1940s, mostly solidified by the 1950s; for India this period stretches from the end of the 1940s to the early 1960s. Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers cater to Depression-Era audiences, and then give way to Katherine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy, who gratify a more conservative post –war audience. In India Raj Kapoor and Nargis struggle to define national identity in the late 1940s and early 1950s; the struggle continues with Guru Dutt and Waheeda Rehman, who inherit their predecessor's patriotic worries. The paper then moves on to societal breakdown in the 1970s. In America Woody Allen and Diane Keaton chronicle the breakdown of gender relations in the midst of emerging feminism. In India, Amitabh Bachchan and Jaya Bhaduri reflect turbulent national politics. The 1970s is followed by a traditional renaissance in the 1990s. Americans embraced Meg Ryan and Tom Hanks' oblique romanticism, while Indians celebrated their traditional roots with Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol.

These time periods are not strictly chronological; rather they are nodes of change. The epochs were chosen more or less because they each represented major shifts in national identity. The 1960s and the 1980s were excluded for two reasons. First, while important, these decades' romantic couples are not necessary to determining an overarching pattern. Secondly, due to the nature of this study it would be impractical to study every single decades' romantic couples: focusing instead on three major shifts, the analysis remains the same. It matters less why America and India parallel each other's

national moods during these decades, but more what each industry's reaction to the same circumstances reflects about their country.

Bollywood Basics

Bollywood films differ so drastically from Hollywood products that a brief primer of the basic facts and forms of this major genre of Indian cinema are in order. Bollywood is the largest of India's many film industries producing Hindi-language films that reach the largest possible audience (versus more regional industries that use less widespread languages like Tamil or Urdu). A good basic explanation of Bollywood format appears in the *Dilwale Dulhania le Jayenge* companion book, written by film critic Anupama Chopra. Bollywood films are structured around a system of incorporated songs. Probably, a form of indigenous theater in India provided the template for what has now become incorporated into film structure – so much taken for granted that I will not dwell on the songs themselves in my analysis. Compared to Hollywood's output, Bollywood films tend more toward spectacle and escapism than realism. A Bollywood film is a community event that lasts several hours, complete with an intermission and elaborate theater refreshments. Therefore, each film provides a broad catharsis that fits melodrama, adventure, romance, and mystery into a single sitting. The Bollywood film caters to the widest audience possible, so almost every movie combines multiple genres. To the average American moviegoer, Bollywood movies at first seem like badly acted soap operas, but such a response would miss the point of the Bollywood experience. It is

obviously a different style, perhaps more histrionic, but no less reflective of society's desires than a Hollywood film.[8]

Finally, Bollywood films draw heavily on religious figures, with characters often reflecting famous historical archetypes. Another Bollywood guide book, *Behind the Scenes of Hindi Cinema*, written by Johan Manschot and Marijke de Vos, outlines various religious 'types' often found in Bollywood films. The romantic formulas usually fall under the headings of 'Rama and Sita' or 'Krishna and Radha.' Rama was a respected, ideal prince whose loving wife, Sita, was abducted by a jealous lover. She is not violated, but Rama asks her to prove her loyalty in front of his suspicious subjects: she proves her undying devotion and purity by asking Mother Earth to swallow her whole to prove her chastity (which Mother Earth gladly does). Rama and Sita often manifest themselves cinematically through the idealized, dutiful hero and the unswaying, loyal heroine. Krishna was one of God's avatars living on earth, a highly sexual being who is often associated with his naughty flirtations with gopis, or cow-herding girls. Radha Krishna's favorite gopi, his true love. Unfortunately, Krishna cannot keep his hands off of the other gopis, so Radha constantly oscillates between jealousy and loyalty. Their relationship usually manifests itself through the Bollywood flirtation, where the hero teases the heroine to the point of harassment, until, despite her obvious hatred for him, she falls in love with him through his detested flirtations. These two pairings consistently reappear through Bollywood history, oftentimes coexisting in the same film. Such

[8] Anupama Chopra, *Dilwale Dulhania le Jayenge* (London: British Film Institute, 2002), 9-10.

archetypes are important to keep in mind in any Bollywood analysis, and especially this particular analysis, because they reinforce the sense of tradition prevalent in each movie.[9]

With these basics understood, Bollywood films can be studied in conjunction with the Hollywood films, to allow cross-cultural analysis. However, the earliest films in the romantic couples genre were made in the United States, so the analysis begins with Hollywood.

Who Leads? Fred and Ginger Experiment with Equality

In the movie *Top Hat* (1935), an unexpected downpour interrupts Dale Tremont's morning horseback ride.[10] She runs for shelter into a nearby pagoda. (Yes, really.) Jerry Travers, who has been carefully following her throughout the park, approaches the pagoda with a large umbrella. "May I rescue you?" he asks, his face expressing well-rehearsed concern. "No thank you," she replies haughtily. "I prefer being in distress." The courtship of Dale (Ginger Rogers) and Jerry (Fred Astaire) does not amount to a classic love tale. She does not swoon at the sight of him: she dances by his side, matching him step for step. Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers movies comforted Depression-era audiences, assuring them that equality between the sexes was not dangerous, but rather rewarding. Among the most popular box office attractions of the 1930s, they made nine films in five years and were largely responsible for the solvency of their studio, RKO. In the compendium, *Leading Couples: The Most Unforgettable Screen Romances of the Studio Era*, film scholar Frank Miller notes that "even seven decades after their reign as

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[9] Johan Manschot and Marijke de Vos, *Behind the Scenes of Hindi Cinema: A visual journey through the heart of Bollywood* (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2005), 76-82.
[10] *Top Hat*, dir. Mark Sandrich, RKO: 1935.

stars, the names 'Fred and Ginger' are still the ultimate compliment to any dance team."[11] They offered a model for the new decade – a solution for modern concerns about disappearing gender divisions. With each movie, they projected images of working class solidarity and companionate equality that still preserved American views of sexuality.

When the Great Depression deepened in the early 1930s, the United States reached a cultural crossroads. The new century had brought startling lifestyle changes as the agrarian economy rapidly gave way to a highly industrialized economy that fundamentally altered the social order. Many feared that basic values of society – communal ties, moral strength, and economic restraint – were falling to pieces on the factory floors. Beyond the scope of change, it proceeded at an alarming rate. In *Culture as History*, a book of seminal essays, the cultural historian Warren Susman analyzed the 1920s as a time of struggle between profoundly different worlds: the austere, production-based past and the abundant, consumerist future.

Rapid changes in technology and communications made progress attractive and minimized the consequences. The nation "frankly hungered for all kinds of knowledge and yet found itself unable to cope easily with the vast quantities and differing kinds of knowledge with which it was presented."[12] A wave of disenchantment after World War One spurred many to embrace change with increased abandon. Lack of inhibitions marked the Twenties: Americans moved faster, thought faster, enjoyed faster,and sinned faster. Everything and everyone sped on in a dizzying rush of adrenaline and progress until suddenly it all came to a screeching halt on Wall Street in late October 1929.

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[11] Frank Miller, *Leading Couples: The Most Unforgettable Screen Romances of the Studio Era* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2008), 13.
[12] Warren Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2003), 106.

Questions that had remained implicit in the 1920s exploded in the 1930s. After years of technological change and moral upheaval, what kind of culture would emerge? Susman writes:

> Initially a question that plagued intellectuals, more and more the whole idea of culture and most especially an American culture began to take hold in middle-class America. What did these obvious changes that had occurred in the material base mean for life? More and more concern grew over "ways of life," life-style...[13]

These questions seemed even more prescient once the nation faced deep economic woes. The "independent woman" threatened long-standing traditional gender roles. Before her most famous partner came along, Ginger Rogers exemplified the modern woman on screen – sassy, outspoken and opportunistic. In Margaret T. McFadden's article "Shall We Dance: Gender and Class Conflict in Astaire-Rogers Dance Musicals," the American Studies professor details how men struggled to accept how hard times changed women's economic roles. During the 1930s, massive male unemployment forced many women to seek paid employment. Ironically, many women lost their jobs in the 1930s to make way for unemployed men, just as more women were trying to join the workforce to support their financially strapped households. However, even as women were being dismissed from their jobs, Americans perceived that traditional distinctions between "breadwinner" and "homemaker" were disintegrating. Understandably, the Depression era saw "a crisis of masculinity for many men," as people struggled to understand their new roles in society.[14] Americans needed some way to reconcile new economic realities with older conceptions of gender. Astaire and Rogers helped to meet that need. They justified the

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[13] Ibid 188.

[14] Margaret T. McFadden, "Shall We Dance: Gender and Class Conflict in Astaire-Rogers Dance Musicals," *Women's Studies*, 37 (2008): 684.

seemingly permanent change in economic gender roles by maintaining basic distinctions between femininity and masculinity.

In tune with the times, Astaire and Rogers always portrayed working people. Their first starring vehicle together, *The Gay Divorcee* (1934), initially looks like an upper-class romance set in a rich holiday retreat, but it hints at darker economic times.[15] Mimi Glossop (Rogers) does not hold a job, as far as the audience knows, while Guy Holden (Astaire) is a highly successful professional dancer. Superficially, they appear to lead lives of luxury. However, during a dinner outing Holden misplaces his wallet. Under the pressure of their waiter's suspicious gaze, he performs an impromptu tap dance to avoid washing dishes in the kitchen. Although Holden can afford various luxuries, he proves that has earned his wealth through diligence and hard work. In movies following *The Gay Divorcee*, the working class undertones become more explicit. Astaire and Rogers are usually professional entertainers; in *Swing Time* (1936), for example, Astaire is a vaudeville-type dancer with a mean gambling streak, while Rogers is a ballroom dance instructor.[16] They may wear luxurious clothes and stay in fancy hotels, but they always work for their spoils.

With their working class credibility, Astaire and Rogers make culture and romance look accessible. In *Roberta* (1935), she plays a temperamental Polish countess Scharwenka, whose real name is Liz.[17] Scharwenka no sooner encounters the Indiana bandleader Huck Haines (Astaire) than the audience realizes that she is putting on a front. When they are alone, he asks her, "Did you marry the title or just lift it?" She shrugs shamelessly. "Be a pal, will you Huck?" she entreats him. "It's just a stage name; you

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[15] *The Gay Divorcee*, dir. Mark Sandrich, RKO: 1934.
[16] *Swing Time*, dir. George Stevens, RKO: 1936.
[17] *Roberta*, dir. William A. Seiter, RKO: 1935.

have to have a title to croon over here!" Similarly, in *Shall We Dance?* (1937) Fred Astaire is the culprit.[18] He is the "Great Petrov," ballet dancer extraordinaire, but, just like Rogers's Scharwenka, his title is deceptive. As the camera glides past rows of dainty ballerinas, a choreographer tells the company owner (Edward Everett Horton), "He [Petrov] is in his private room, practicing his grand leap." Behind the door, Petrov, who is actually Peter P. Peters from Philadelphia, is secretly tap dancing to American jazz.

Huck (Astaire) calls Liz's (Rogers) bluff in *Roberta*. Photo courtesy of rounddancing.net.

These masquerades serve two purposes. First, they assure audiences that Yankee culture reigns supreme. In McFadden's analysis, gender issues were inextricably linked to economic woes. After the opulence of the 1920s, Americans not only had to accept women's presence in the workplace to survive; they also had to accept that their entire national culture had been affected by such economic woes. In the face of massive

[18] *Shall We Dance?*, dir. Mark Sandrich, RKO: 1937.

unemployment, many people felt uncomfortable supporting the luxurious European trends of the 1920s. During the Depression, ideologically speaking, "the wealthy had to be forced to renounce their old ways and embrace the new American way, which is NOT highbrow and European-oriented, but down-to-earth, modern and American."[19] At the same time, the masquerades assure audiences that, despite their economic troubles, they too can be cultured. Astaire and Rogers acquire refinement – and if they can do it, so can their audience. In the recent survey, *Dancing in the Dark: A Cultural History of the Great Depression*, literary and film scholar Morris Dickstein finds a particularly American definition of class in the 1935 musical *Top Hat*:

> It's a one-joke scene, but the "Thackeray Club" brings out the puckish, rebellious, "American side of his [Astaire's] personality. For Astaire class is motion, energy, pleasure, not static hierarchy. Unlike the upper-class swells in, say, Phillip Barry's plays, Astaire is always the entertainer dressing up, relishing his role as a man of the world, never simply the rich man to the manner born…there is an indistinctive democrat at work (and play) behind Astaire's joy in dressing up.[20]

This is how they comforted the Depression generation: while wealthy superiority was on the way out, classiness was still within reach.

Not only are Astaire and Rogers working professionals, but they also encounter the biggest obstacle of the 1930s: unemployment. In *Swing Time* (1936) Astaire's character, Lucky, misses his own wedding when his friends swindle him out of all his money in a game of dice. To appease his future father in law, he promises to make a fortune in New York City so he can support his bride-to-be. Dressed in his wedding tails but penniless, Lucky hops a freight train. He arrives in New York looking like a wealthy socialite without money, shelter or employment. According to McFadden, this tableau

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[19] McFadden, 694.
[20] Morris Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark: A Cultural History of the Great Depression* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009), 382.

offers audiences "the opportunity to identify against Astaire in his highbrow incarnation and enjoy the sight of a wealthy man experiencing hard luck."[21] True to his nickname, Lucky has a partner who can reverse his fortunes.

Neither Astaire nor Rogers braves economic hardship alone. Reconciling the role of women in the workplace, they succeed only when they work together. Usually Astaire creates the conflict. In *Follow the Fleet* (1936), sailor Bake Baker (Astaire, awkward and unbelievable in Navy togs) meets his former dance partner Sherry Martin (Rogers) at a cheap nightclub, where she is the headliner.[22] They sit down to talk at an isolated table. Sherry wonders why Bake left her and joined the Navy:

> Sherry: Well, all I said was I didn't want to marry you.
>
> Bake: Yeah, I know. It all seemed very important at the time. It doesn't make any difference now.
>
> Sherry: [Tenderly] Doesn't it?
>
> Bake: No. As you said, marriage would have ruined your career.
>
> Sherry: Well I found out I was wrong.
>
> Bake: Well maybe you're right. If you'd have married me you wouldn't be working in a chop suey joint like this [his voice goes higher at the end, sarcastic]…
>
> Bake: Gosh Sherry, how did you ever end up in a place like this?
>
> Sherry: Well, it seems I didn't mean much after we split up. For some reason or another they're not interested in a girl dancing alone [pause] unless she's got a fan.

At first, this conversation looks like an affirmation of male superiority. Sherry admits that after his departure, she cannot manage on her own; her stock has plummeted and the career woman is subdued. However, when Bake tries to remedy the situation, he only

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[21] McFadden, 689.
[22] *Follow the Fleet*, dir. Mark Sandrich, RKO: 1936.

makes matters worse. First, he tells the club's manager that Sherry deserves better working conditions, which immediately gets her fired. Suddenly unemployed, she gives Bake a withering glare. "I'll take care of everything," he assures her. "That's exactly what's worrying me," she retorts. Bake tells her he will arrange an audition with Jim Nolan, a musical show director, implying that she deserves better. Unfortunately, Bake only causes more problems when he goes to Nolan's office. Overhearing good reviews about the current woman auditioning, Bake vows to sabotage her performance and slips baking soda into the woman's drinking water, effectively destroying her voice. Not surprisingly, the woman performing is none other than Sherry! Bake once again proves that he is incapable of providing for her. Only later in the movie, when they reunite on stage for a fundraiser, do they attract Nolan's attention. Bake needs Sherry – just as Sherry cannot move beyond cheap dives without him, he cannot "take care" of anything without her support. United, they assure audiences that women can and must work alongside men – only together can Astaire and Rogers conquer hard economic times.

Ultimately, everything in an Astaire and Rogers film centers on the dance. Rhythm and movement physicalize their dynamic of equality and dependence; each fiercely competitive, they must meet on equal terms in order to complete each other. Edward Gallafent, film historian and author of *Astaire and Rogers*, argues that each dance is a microcosm of their overarching love story. Gallafent's book centers around the idea that the dance numbers, and indeed the series in general, are self-aware of their own narrative arcs. "Seduction of each other always depends on their dancing together," he writes, "and involves a degree of abandonment of their sense of themselves as professionals and of their dance as just a professional skill, a withdrawal from a social

context."[23] Astaire and Rogers dances always have a narrative – they mirror the action of the film, projecting the couples' flirtations in nonverbal form.

Astaire and Rogers gracefully transition between mirrored movements and ballroom hold in *Top Hat*. Photo courtesy of rounddancing.net.

Their dances are cinematically unique because they approach each other as equals on the dance floor. According to Martin Rubin's biography, *Showstoppers: Busby Berkeley and the Tradition of Spectacle*, Astaire and Rogers inherited a Broadway tradition of intimate, often narrative-driven dancing. This style was first made popular by Vernon and Irene Castle, ballroom dancers who performed complex couple dances and brought fads like the Foxtrot into mainstream culture (Astaire and Rogers paid tribute to their predecessors in their second to last film, *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle*). Astaire himself started off as a vaudeville and Broadway dancer, successfully partnered with his sister, Adele. However, their performing style, highlighting the contributions

[23] Edward Gallafent, *Astaire and Rogers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 23.

each made to the overall dance, differed markedly from revue choreography, which emphasized spectacle. Epitomized by Florenz Ziegfeld and his Ziegfeld Follies, the Broadway extravaganza showcased specialty performers backed by Rubenesque chorus girls in elaborately racy costumes. In the Follies, the overall effect was more important than the individual dancer. While women did sometimes headline Ziegfeld's shows, they rarely danced with partners: there was no sense of comparison, only a highlighted performer and a chorus-line. When stage performers ascended to the screen, they carried both styles with them, but not simultaneously. "The tradition of mass spectacle, with Busby Berkeley as its leading component, dominated dance numbers in the movie musicals of the early 1930s," writes Rubin. "In the mid-1930s, it began to be overtaken by the tradition of intimacy and individual grace epitomized (and imported directly from the stage) by Fred Astaire."[24] For the first time on film, Astaire and Rogers showed audiences two dancers coming together on equal terms. Having graduated from the Berkeley-style spectacle, co-starring in several of his backstage musicals, Ginger Rogers she joined Astaire and ascended from lowly chorus girl to individual dancer.

The plots of their films told audiences that men and women must work together as equals in order to survive economic hardship; their dances made that equality look appealing, if never easy. In the finale of *Roberta* (1935), they move seamlessly to "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," in choreography that tests equality even as it reiterates gender roles.[25] Her tight black evening gown accentuates a slender, feminine body, just as his sleek white tie and tails accentuate masculine vertical lines. As the musicians transition into the song, the duo walks hand in hand onto the floor. Slowly they begin,

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[24] Martin Rubin, *Showstoppers: Busby Berkeley and the Tradition of Spectacle* (New York: Columbia University ~~Press~~, 1993), 76.
[25] *Roberta*, dir. William A. Seiter, RKO: 1935.

performing identical moves side by side. Their hands part, but their movements remain in sync – equality in motion. Ever so gently, Astaire takes her hand and twirls Rogers underneath his arm, flowing into a classical ballroom hold. He does not dominate her; rather, they effortlessly ease into traditional masculine and feminine roles. From that ballroom hold Astaire leads Rogers through dramatic twirls and graceful backbends before pulling her into a show-stopping dip. Reverting to side-by-side movements, they glide off screen.

This kind of dance is typical for Astaire and Rogers. McFadden explains, "In the context of the collapse of the sexual division of labor and the prevailing anxiety about whether women would come to dominate in families with no male provider, these dances stage and seem to resolve a key anxiety of both men and women."[26] Rogers never once loses her femininity, nor does she threaten Astaire's masculinity. They have the best of both worlds; the man and the woman are fairly matched. Neither appears to dominate, yet they still project traditional romance.

By the finale of any Astaire and Rogers , marriage is inevitable. The problem "for the characters played by Astaire and Rogers is not to understand that they are in love," writes Gallafent, "but to realize that this has happened some little time before they find the words to declare it – to make peace between their, or society's words, and the dance."[27] Often they dance around the idea of the proposal itself. After "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," Rogers collapses in a chair – literally swept off her feet:

> Liz: [decisive] I guess I'll have to give in to you.
> Huck: To me? [bewildered] But I didn't say anything.
> Liz: But I thought you were about to want to marry me!

[26] McFadden, 698.
[27] Gallafent, 31.

Huck: Well, I was!

Liz: [matter-of-fact] Well, I accept!

Huck: [shakes her hand] Well, thanks very much!

Liz: [laughing] Well, you're quite welcome my fine-feathered friend!

She has to remind him that they should get married. He, like the audience, has probably taken for granted that they will. It does not matter who asks when you are meant for each other. Similarly, in *Follow the Fleet*, Bake tells Sherry he will only accept Nolan's offer if she asks him to marry her. "Well," she says, arms folded, businesslike, "Will you?" He pulls her arm under his and pats her hand condescendingly. "You'll have to ask father," he quips. Bake turns the proposal into a farce. Neither he nor Sherry cares which person proposes. As McFadden explains, love and romance "are represented as more important than money, and the male inability to provide is rendered unimportant, because these are relationships based on sexual attraction, friendship, and romance, not economics."[28] Since they already love each other, who cares who proposes? Companionate marriage is a natural choice.

Astaire and Rogers spend only two films as established married couples. *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle*, as a biopic, necessarily differs from their fictional personae.[29] The second, *The Barkleys of Broadway* (1949), reunited the stars after a decade, casting them as an aging Broadway couple on the verge of a split.[30] Either way, Astaire and Rogers exemplified companionate marriage, but their films offered little guidance after the words, "I do." Their body of work played off the challenges to companionate marriage in the uncertain Thirties. In *Homeward Bound: American*

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[28] McFadden, 691.

[29] *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle*, dir. H.C. Potter, RKO: 1939.

[30] *The Barkleys of Broadway*, dir. Charles Walters, MGM: 1949.

Families in the Cold War Era, the cultural and women's historian Elaine Tyler May argues that Hollywood did not provide a "new model" for the modern couple. May believes that Cold War pressures deliberately heightened the gender tensions that Astaire and Rogers films had worked to overcome, in order to undermine the solutions that these films offered. Depression-era solutions were not permanent; they were based upon immediate necessity. Men and women "were simply urged to be flexible and somehow find a way to avoid competition and jealousy in marriage – a message that was relevant not only to stars but to couples of modest means trying to survive the depression and the tensions inherent in the two-earner household."[31] Equality may have been an innovative solution to the nations' economic woes, but it could not last – as Katherine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy would prove in the 1940s.

Katherine Hepburn, Spencer Tracy and the Fall of the Modern Woman

During the 1940s, as the country mobilized for World War Two, Hollywood became increasingly conservative. Whereas the 1930s had been a decade of populism and experimentation, the 1940s was a decade of conformity. A combination of increased economic prosperity, wartime support for soldiers and a new Cold War mentality pressured Americans to cling to pre-existing sexual divisions. The Hepburn and Tracy movies reflected that return to tradition, unintentionally reiterating societal fears. While Katherine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy movies often claimed to argue in favor of female equality, in reality they undermined the modern feminism of the 1930s and celebrated traditional gender roles.

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[31] Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: BasicBooks, 1988), 44.

With increased wartime production, Americans finally moved out of the economic slump that had gripped the nation for almost a decade. Thriftiness continued throughout the war years, but people felt a change coming, and by war's end they were rewarded with unrivaled economic prosperity. Even in the early 1940s, Americans sensed that Depression-era solutions would no longer be necessary, solutions that had extended, as described earlier, into masculine and feminine spheres. During the 1930s more women had to enter the workforce to provide for their families. With the advent of war, the numbers jumped even higher as women were encouraged to take men's jobs. This increase in female independence heightened the 1930s' crisis of masculinity. Men felt threatened by the notion of female breadwinners. Thankfully for them, with increasing prosperity, women would no longer *have* to work; they could return to their rightful place, the home.

Additionally, wartime propaganda meant to idealize the 'American Way' of life – a society without class or gender conflicts – simultaneously encouraged conformity to the suburban ideal. Cultural historian Warren Susman argues that the idea of the 'American Way' crystallized in the 1930s, as people sought to define and reaffirm the essence of American culture. Studies like the Gallup Poll created empirical evidence for uplifting common beliefs and values. However, as Americans came closer to defining national identity, that identity became a tool for conformity. "The reliance on basic cultural patterns," wrote Susman, "stressed by further development of public opinion, studies of myth, symbol, folklore, the new techniques of the mass media, even the games of the

period could and did have results far more conservative than radical."[32] This is especially true for the war and postwar years, when the American Way became more than cultural identity: it became the reason America fought overseas.

Hollywood boosted its audiences' wartime morale by idealizing the pinnacle of American freedom: consumer culture linked with individual prosperity. Depression-era Americans may have lacked economic security, but they already had a system that encouraged materialistic consumption. The 'American Way' – symbolized by the suburban family home with a white picket fence - was just a natural extension of unfulfilled dreams from the decade before. Americans, particularly soldiers, again needed assurance. Whereas before men needed assurance to combat economic woes, now they needed assurance to combat foreign threats to democracy. As the type of fear changed, the Hollywood response changed as well:

> For the remainder of the war, she [the film heroine] would provide the vision of what men were fighting for: home and hearth...the popular culture reflected widespread admiration for the many thousands of female war workers, but affirmed the primacy of domesticity for women.[33]

Even while encouraging women to work for the war effort, women were more pressured to conform to traditional gender roles than during the Depression.

Moreover, women were discouraged from entering the work place after the war ended. While independent women had gained limited respect during the war, they quickly lost all credibility once their husbands came home. Returning soldiers needed employment, and women who held jobs appeared to be deliberately thwarting the soldiers' economic needs. Hollywood once again altered its message. "After the war, as

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[32] Susman 164. For what is generally cited as the first prominent usage and definition of the phrase "the American Dream," see James Truslow Adams, *The American Epic* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1931), 401-417.
[33] May, 62.

subservient homemakers moved into center stage, emancipated heroines gave way to predatory female villains," writes May. "Even Wonder Woman lost some of her feminist characteristics and became more dependent on men."[34] A modern, independent woman could no longer function in a 1940s Hollywood movie. She either married and moved to the suburbs, or became the film noir femme fatale.

Katherine Hepburn and Spencer Tracey contributed to the new mindset by making the working woman look distinctly unfeminine. As actors, they came from very different backgrounds. During the 1930s, Katherine Hepburn often played dizzy upper-class socialites, as in the role of empty-headed Susan Vance in Howard Hawkes' 1938 screwball comedy, *Bringing Up Baby*.[35] Spencer Tracy had a more rugged persona, appearing in thrillers such as *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and action dramas such as *They Gave Him a Gun*.[36] However, when they teamed up for *Woman of the Year* (1942), they begat a distinct romantic comedy tradition that would define their careers for decades to come.

Their first movie, *Woman of the Year*, was made in 1942, draws from 1930s female professional roles. Katherine Hepburn is Tess Harding, a brilliant newspaper reporter.[37] She is witty, speaks several languages and works on a first name basis with myriads of international diplomats: she is more than a woman, she is a super woman. Fellow reporter Sam Craig, played by Spencer Tracy, falls instantly in love with her. He finds her success attractive and her wit alluring. They quickly fall in love and agree to get

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[34] May, 67.
[35] *Bringing Up Baby*, dir. Howard Hawkes, RKO: 1938.
[36] *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, dir. Victor Fleming, MGM: 1941.
They Gave Him a Gun, dir. W.S. Van Dyke, MGM: 1937.
[37] *Woman of the Year*, dir. George Stevens, MGM: 1942.

married. Up to this point, there is little hint of the conservatism to come: Craig may act like an old-fashioned romantic, but he never asks her to stop working.

Harding's professional status is not necessarily a romantic disadvantage. As mentioned earlier, during the war women entered the work force in unprecedented numbers. William Chafe, cultural historian and author of *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970*, believes that wartime created one of the first major outlet for women professionals in the twentieth century. During the five year war period "over 6 million women took jobs, increasing the size of the female labor force by over 50 percent."[38] After the war, women lost their jobs to returning veterans, but quickly regained a sizeable portion of the job market. However, if popular sentiment accepted female workers, it dictated specific reasons for employment. Post-World War Two attitudes could not accept permanent changes to the social order:

> The events of the war years suggested that most Americans could accept a significant shift in women's economic activity as long as the shift was viewed as "temporary" and did not entail a conscious commitment to approve the goals of a sexual revolution. On the other hand, when the issue was one of preserving a division of labor between the sexes, they demonstrated their adherence to traditional values.[39]

Consequently, Tess Harding proves troublesome not because she works, but because of her attitudes towards work and home.

The trouble begins after they marry. Harding thinks she can maintain her independent lifestyle, only this time with a male companion by her side. They do not buy a house together but move into *her* apartment, where she continues to host parties with *her* friends and runs their living space like *her* office. Harding has no consideration for their bond as a married couple. The breaking point occurs when, without Craig's

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[38] William H. Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 135.
[39] Chafe, 189.

knowledge, she adopts a Greek child. Harding lacks any maternal instinct: she only adopts the boy out of a sense of duty to her Greek refugee committee, and she makes no effort to become attached to him. When she ignores his needs to attend an awards ceremony where she will be crowned Woman of the Year, Craig severely accuses her of hypocrisy. "You know, it's really too bad that I'm not covering this dinner of yours tonight because I've got an angle that would really be sensational," he says, bitingly. "The outstanding Woman of the Year isn't a woman at all." Harding cannot deny his accusation. Being feminine means being a caregiver, someone who nurtures her marriage and her children with the utmost care.

Tess (Hepburn) treats her home like an office in *Woman of the Year*. Photo courtesy of imdb.com.

Chafe argues that women could only gain approval for their professional lives if they somehow contributed to the home. What "remained most significant was the *impression* that women went to work out of necessity," only taking positions to fulfill economic need

at home.[40] However, Tess Harding works for the joy of working, not for her husband or future family. Without contributing to her union her professional standing becomes worthless: she is a professional success precisely because she is incapable of being a woman.

Now Harding must to bow to male superiority. Craig leaves her, and she realizes that she must make sacrifices to avoid living the spinster's fate. Eager to become a good wife and atone for her sins of modernity, Harding sneaks into Craig's suburban bachelor pad to win him over with the housewife's secret weapon: cooking. However, being Tess Harding, she has absolutely no idea how to cook and spends several painful minutes silently mangling simple breakfast dishes. When Craig catches her in the act she begs him for forgiveness. "Sam, you don't understand!" she pleads. "I'm going to give up my job…I'm going to be your wife!" Craig's response hints at what would initially look like equality. "Why do you have to go to extremes, Tess?" he sighs. "I don't want to be married to Tess Harding any more than I want you to be just Mrs. Sam Craig. Why can't you be Tess Harding-Craig?" He elevates her, assuring her that she does not have to be an ideal housewife or give up her job. However, he does draw the line. He does not want to be married to "Tess Harding," meaning he does not want to marry the same woman he met. She must alter herself and conform at least partially to the role of wife and mother. The name Harding-Craig is fitting; even though she keeps part of herself she must become a part of him. Even if they both remain professionals, Craig is master of his domain.

This is veers sharply from the Astaire and Rogers formula. During the 1930s more women were entering the work place, but not nearly to the extent of the 1940s. Yet

[40] Chafe, 192.

the 1930s mentality encouraged women to work alongside men, whereas the 1940s mentality encouraged women to work for only men and family. Instead of a continued effort to solve gender issues (which had obviously not disappeared in the 1940s), Americans decided it was no longer necessary to maintain the façade of cooperation. With military and economic prosperity, Americans rejected Astaire and Rogers' "temporary" solution in favor of more comforting and familiar sexual divisions.

Woman of the Year is not an isolated case. Hepburn and Tracy movies all revert to the same formula: Tracy either meets or is already married to Hepburn, she gets ideas that promote feminine independence to an unreasonable extent, he tells her she is not a woman, she repents, and then he tells her that he does not mind equality, but there must be some recognition that men and women are different. What feminist scholars have termed the "equality-versus-difference" debate is at issue here, and Hepburn and Tracy movies show how a woman's difference often translates as her inferiority. Historian and gender theorist Joan W. Scott, author of the seminal article "Deconstructing Equality-versus-Difference: Or, the Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism," argues that anti-feminists have used *sex* differences between men and women to counter and silence arguments for *gender* equality. Biology is destiny, this logic goes, and a woman's biological role cannot but inform her social identity as homemaker and mother. According to Scott, "a binary opposition has been created to offer a choice to feminists, of either endorsing 'equality or its presumed antithesis 'difference.'"[41] This binary is not only invalid but present women with a Catch-22: if men and women are equal, feminists

[41] Joan W. Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-versus-Difference: Or, the Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism," *Feminist Studies*, 14, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 38.

cannot advocate gains based on women's special needs; and if men and women are different, then there is a natural and irrefutable inequality between them.

The Tracy persona almost seems contractually guaranteed soliloquy along these exact lines at each film's end. While celebrating gender differences, he subtly reaffirms male superiority. This is especially important because Katherine Hepburn's persona as an actress was that of an independent woman: she controlled her career, she wore slacks, and she was the ultimate feminist. Yet despite her reputation as the upright career woman, she always submits to Tracy's arguments in their movies. *Adam's Rib*, made in 1949 (seven years after *Woman of the Year*), repeats the "the modern woman is not a woman at all" argument, only this time they are already married.[42] Amanda and Adam Bonner (Hepburn and Tracy) are both lawyers. Amanda volunteers to defend a woman who attempted to kill her cheating husband because, she argues, "a boy sows a wild oat or two, the whole world winks – a girl does the same [pause] scandal." She takes the case to make sure women receive equal treatment in the courtroom. Adam, who ends up defending the husband, thinks Amanda is bending the law, turning the case into a three ringed circus of overblown feminist tract. When she ends up winning the trial, he turns on her. First he gives a big speech about her methods:

> I want to tell you that this close I see something in you I've never seen before, and I don't like it...contempt for the law, that's what you've got. It's a disease a spreading disease. You think the law is something you can get over or get under or get around or just plain flaunt....

But then his speech takes an entirely different turn:

> I'm old-fashioned. I like two sexes! All of a sudden I don't like being married to what is known as a "new woman." I want a wife, not a competitor. Competitor! If you wanna be a big he-woman go ahead and be it, but not with me."

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[42] *Adam's Rib*, dir. George Cukor, MGM: 1949.

Once again, Tracy accuses Hepburn of not being a woman - and a he-woman at that. She has gone too far, forgetting that she is his wife, not his equal in the court room. Then Adam plays a trick on her: he pulls a fake gun on her, the same way her client pulled a gun her husband, and she realizes that her gut reaction reflects his stance in the trial.

Amanda (Hepburn) and Adam (Tracy) debate gender equality in the courtroom in *Adam's Rib*. Judy Holliday (center) portrays the wronged wife on trial for attempted murder. Photo courtesy of blogdecine.com.

Infuriated, she yells, "You couldn't bear to be bested by a woman!" but the audience already knows she has lost. After an unsuccessful (and wholly unconvincing) attempt at a divorce settlement, they make their way back into each other's arms, and Amanda takes one final stab at gender equality. Adam shows her that he used fake tears to garner sympathy, so she retorts:

> Amanda: But what does that show? What have you proved…It shows that what I said was true. There's no difference between the sexes. Men, women, the same.

Adam: They are, huh?

Amanda: Well, maybe there is a difference, but it's a little difference!

Adam: Well, you know as the French say…

Amanda: What do the French say?

Adam: Vive la difference!

Amanda: Which means?

Adam: Which means hooray for that little difference!

Even Amanda admits that there is some difference between the sexes, leaving Adam open for his final victory. "Vive la difference!" does not merely celebrate their complementary sexuality, but it confirms a fundamental inequality between men and women. In her article "Miss Hepburn is Humanized: The Star Persona of Katherine Hepburn," feminist historian Janet Thumim reiterates Joan Scott's belief that Adam's Rib destroys the equality argument even after Hepburn has officially won the battle in court. The film's strategy is "namely that of discrediting feminist arguments about the inequitable balance of power in social relations by means of a reduction ad absurdum achieved by insisting that these arguments be applied to the unarguable facts of gender difference."[43] In other words, the biological differences confirm social inequalities.

A final example confirms the established pattern. In *Pat and Mike* (1952) Hepburn plays Pat Pemberton, an aspiring female athlete and Tracy plays Mike Conovan, her working class New York coach.[44] She starts playing professional sports partly to avoid marrying a man who condescends to her. Conovan does not condescend to her, constantly claiming "this man and woman thing, that's gotta be a 50-50 thing, five-oh,

[43] Janet Thumim. "Miss Hepburn is Humanized: The Star Persona of Katherine Hepburn," *Feminist Review*, 24 (Autumn 1986): 80.
[44] *Pat and Mike*, dir. George Cukor, MGM: 1952.

five-oh." He advocates equality until she defends him against a gang of gamblers. She wounds his masculine pride, so he calls her a big Mrs. Frankenstein. "I like everything to be five-oh, five-oh," he repeats, but adds, "I like a 'he' to be a 'he' and a 'she' to be a 'she.' After that she feigns weakness, pretending she needs him to defend her even though he has already proven himself comically inept. Even in farce, Hepburn submits to Tracy's mastery.[45]

Although *Woman of the Year* and *Pat and Mike* were made ten years apart, their similarities reflect anxieties that followed the end of World War Two into the Cold War. Continuing fears of new social changes after World War II only increased Americans' commitment to the suburban home and the gender roles which it entailed:

> McCarthyism was fueled, in large measure, by suspicion of the new secularism, materialism, bureaucratic collectivism, and consumerism that epitomized not only the achievement but the potential "decadence" of New Deal liberalism. The cosmopolitan urban culture represented a decline in the self-reliant and entrepreneurial spirit, posing a threat to the national security that was perceived as akin to the danger of communism itself...the domestic ideology emerged as a buffer against those disturbing ideologies.[46]

Masked by the face of communism, these concerns pushed Americans deeper and deeper into the suburban ideology. The Hepburn and Tracy movies reflected the growing trends towards conservative gender roles, trends that would not change until the turbulent sexual revolution of the 1960s.

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[45] Interestingly, Hepburn and Tracy were chosen to portray a liberal couple in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, which was a movie made in 1967. The movie was revolutionary because the plot supported marriage between a white woman and a black man. Hepburn and Tracy played the parents of the white woman, (portrayed by Hepburn's real-life niece Katherine Houghton), but their interactions harkened back to their 1940s movies. Hepburn supported their daughter unconditionally, and chided Tracy when he did not easily support his daughter's proposed union. However, at the end of the movie Tracy makes a speech that basically admonishes his wife for easily supporting the marriage. Ironically, he says she is too feminine, letting her emotions get the better of her. Her inferiority as a woman stops her from understanding that he is not against the marriage, but that he knows they need all the strength they can muster to survive the trials of being a mixed-race couple. Even though he, for once, does not chide Hepburn for her lack of femininity, he still puts her in her place.

[46] May, 10.

The Great Depression forced America to define itself as a nation, but World War Two pushed Americans backwards. However, in the 1940s the very idea of nationhood would forever alter Indian identity. On August 15, 1947, India became an independent nation. Politicians struggled to answer the question of what kind of nation India would become. Like Astaire and Rogers, Raj Kapoor and Nargis sought reconciliation between modernity and tradition within their new national identity. However, unlike Astaire and Rogers, they did not reach a concrete compromise. Instead of a solution to societal issues, they presented their audiences with an ideal society that arguably defines Indian cinema to this day.

Raj Kapoor and Nargis: Defining a Nation

Part of the conflict between tradition and modernity began before 1947, with India's methods for gaining independence. While the Indian National Congress, a modern, representative body, was highly influential in terms of negotiations with the British, they were not nearly as popular as the Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi captured universal Indian support by drawing upon pre-colonial Indian customs, such as cloth spinning and farming. His focus on "traditional" Indian values, coupled with a rejection of foreign imports and Western ideas, was a powerful anti-imperial message. Gandhi did not see any explicit advantages to Western lifestyles and values. In a letter to his friend J.W. Patel, he wrote, "your advice to copy the rapid locomotion in America, make me giddy to even read it…[numerous American friends] have all assured me that there is

beneath the untold wealth of America, degradation, superstition and vice incarnate."[47] In his traditional clothing (dhoti), using classic Hindu philosophy to justify civil disobedience, Gandhi was the picture of Indian, not Western, strength.

Ironically, Gandhi, who was most often viewed as a modern-day Indian wise man, promoted modern ideas of equality. Himself a member of the Indian National Congress, Gandhi pushed for many reforms, including new laws against untouchability and increased religious tolerance (especially between Hindus and Muslims), as well as increased women's rights. It is important to keep in mind the contradictions inherent in Gandhi's position: he advocated for traditional values and lifestyles, but supported the Congress and their subsequent decisions concerning governmental organization in a newly democratic nation.

The Indian National Congress channeled the success of Gandhi's civil disobedience into a starkly modern constitution. According to Ramachandra Guha, author of *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (2007), the constitution "sought to promote national unity and to facilitate progressive social change."[48] Alongside rules governing a parliamentary style legislature, Congress passed the Hindu Code Bill in installments, which "had a dual purpose: first, to elevate the rights and status of Hindu women: second, to do away with the disparities and divisions of caste."[49] While the constitution executed many Gandhian ideals, it also maintained many aspects of British government. This combination of Gandhian respect for traditional

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[47] Mohandas K. Gandhi, "Letter to J.W. Petavel," 23 June 1927, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi Online*, www.gandhiserve.com.

[48] Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (New York, Harper Collins: 2007), 121.

[49] *Ibid*, 235.

minority groups, coupled with a very Western political philosophy, created ongoing tensions that would manifest themselves in Indian cinema.

Right as India gained independence, Raj Kapoor, the son of then Bollywood superstar Prithviraj Kapoor, started to make his mark as a popular Indian filmmaker. His partnership with Nargis, a pale beauty, began with their very first film together, *Aag* (1948). The two of them began a long lasting partnership that questioned the success of their independent and modern nation.

In most of their films, the love story exemplifies the problems of the modern woman. In *Aag*, the newly liberated woman proves too superficial.[50] Kewal (Raj Kapoor) breaks away from his Anglophile parents to start a radically independent theater company. There, he meets a beautiful actress whom he calls Nimmi (Nargis), after a childhood love. Nimmi has run away from her Punabji home life, and Kewal accepts her without question because this is a new theater, where women are respected and not judged by their background. However, foreshadowing sets in as Nimmi clearly demonstrates her sexual attraction to Kewal. Wearing western-style turtlenecks with her traditional skirts, she confidently demonstrates her physical desires. Kewal thinks he has found true love. Unfortunately, after an accident where he burns half of his face off, he learns that Nimmi cannot deal with his disfigurement; faced with Kewal's ugliness, se leaves him for his best friend. Nimmi may be a modern woman – the type of woman able to dictate the actions of her own life thanks to reforms made in the Indian constitution – but with her modernity comes the loss of traditional loyalty. She cannot see beyond his physical features.

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[50] *Aag*, dir. Raj Kapoor, Raj Kapoor Films: 1948.

In their other films the woman may not be superficial, but her modernity leads her to interact inappropriately with men. *Andaz* (1949) makes a powerful Gandhian argument against western influence, specifically in terms of the modern woman.[51] Neena (Nargis) is a fully westernized woman. She wears slacks, fraternizes with an international crowd, and asserts her independence daily. She befriends a young man named Dilip (Dilip Kumar) who becomes enchanted with her exuberance and free spirit. Her father, however, warns her against getting too close to him:

> Badriprasad (father): I didn't like your meeting Dilip so uninhibitedly...and I know how much embarrassed I was...meeting a stranger like this can surely give a wrong impression to him and the society at large.
>
> Neena (breezily): Your daughter will never take amy step which would cause your embarrassment.

After her father's death, Neena tells Dilip that she is already engaged to Rajan (Raj Kapoor), an old friend who is studying in Britain. Rajan returns to India so he can provide for her; they get married and have a daughter. Meanwhile, Dilip cannot reconcile Neena's actions towards him and her self-professed love for Rajan. After a dramatic accident he injures his brain and goes crazy, attacking her in the name of love, and she shoots him in self-defense. At the trial Rajan himself testifies against her, saying, "On one hand, she called me God and offered me flowers of love; on the other hand, she made the innocent Dilip crazy about her by parties, clubs, ballrooms, clubs and every Western style." After being sentenced, she tells Rajan to protect their daughter from the evil influence of Western society: "the foreign soil and atmosphere can never be suitable for our children."

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[51] *Andaz*, dir. Mehboob Khan, Mehboob Productions: 1949.

Neena and Raj (Nargis and Kapoor) share their wedding plans with Dilip (Dilip Kumar) in *Andaz*. Photo courtesy of chandrakantha.com.

Andaz could not be more obvious in its anti-imperial message. It is a warning against the modern woman. Even with new reforms, the traditional woman is the only woman who can truly sustain a marriage. With too many liberties, she is apt to unintentionally seduce innocent men, confusing them with her false intentions. To a certain extent, Nargis's roles in these movies parallel Katherine Hepburn's roles in her films with Spencer Tracy. Both women are doomed by their own assertiveness: they are damned by their lack of femininity. However, there is a vital difference between the two roles. Hepburn always works against society: she submits to Tracy because she has been asserting herself despite pre-existing traditional solutions. Nargis, on the other hand, is a victim of society. In *Andaz* she tells Rajan to take their daughter away from modern

society because it destroys traditional values. Taken away from modern society, Neena would be harmless. She represents societal critique instead of individual condemnation.

Nargis is not simply an anti-imperial symbol; she is also a member of a deeply patriarchal society. Female deviations from that system are strongly discouraged, whether the West influences them or not. A good explanation of Indian traditionalist fervor comes from an Indian film critic named Chidananda Das Gupta, writing about Hindi cinema in 1969:

> It is the Hindi film which holds forth: "Look at the twentieth century, full of night clubs and drinking, smoking, bikini-clad women sinfully enjoying themselves in fast cars and mixed parties: how right you are in condemning them- in the end everyone must go back to the traditional patterns of devotion to God, to parents, to village life, or be damned forever. This answer does not try to explain; it merely echoes the natural fear which traditional people have of anything new, anything they do not understand. The films thus give reassurance to the "family audience" which is the mainstay of the film industry. They pander to the Puritanism developed in the dark pre-British period of superstition and isolationism aided and abetted by Christian missionary teaching of the British period.[52]

Das Gupta obviously had very strong opinions about Indian traditionalism, but he made a good point. Twentieth century western influences are an easy target; they offer simple solutions for darker fears that extend beyond British colonialism. Often any challenge to the traditional system becomes Western because it is so obviously alien and unwelcome.

As social criticism, these films often championed traditional values in contrast to modern ideals. However, the way that these movies defined tradition was oftentimes ambiguous, reflecting Gupta's idea of a more fundamental, less clearly anti-imperial fear of modernity. In *Aag*, Nargis is obviously a bad influence. She is replaced by a girl Kewal's parents choose for him, who turns out to be Kewal's childhood sweetheart. On

[52] Chidananda Das Gupta, "Indian Cinema Today," *Film Quarterly*, 22 no. 4 (1969): 29.

the surface, this looks like a simple reaffirmation of traditional ideals: only the parents' arranged marriage brings Kewal true happiness. However, those parents are Anglophiles, old lawyers for the British crown. Kewal's westernized "traditional" parents scramble the seemingly simple anti-western message. In *Andaz* the message is more obviously anti-western. When Neena dances with Dilip after her marriage, Rajan's friend complains:

> To hell with society!...I cannot see this living hell. A girl is dancing with her arms around another man's waist. What the hell is wrong with you people? How can such a society be yours? Those who behaved in such a way have packed their bags and left.

Perhaps the best way to reconcile these movies' conflicting messages is to look at their 1951 film, *Awaara*.[53] *Awaara* both criticizes western influence, but also acknowledges India's internal societal problems. Justice Raghunath (played by Kapoor's real-life father, Prithviraj Kapoor) is a young, ambitious lawmaker. Unfortunately, his reputation for unrelenting justice brings him nothing but trouble: criminals that he himself convicted abduct his innocent wife. Although they do not touch her, they taint her pregnancy with suspicion, so her husband he cannot accept their baby as his own. He throws them out into the street, and in a state of poverty, their son Raj (Raj Kapoor) grows up unable to avoid criminal influences. In the slums, he falls into petty crime, unable to live an honest life.

[53] *Awaara*, dir. Raj Kapoor, All India Film Corporation: 1951.

The tramp and the socialite in *Awaara*.

On the one hand, Raj's poverty is his father's fault, and his father is clearly a western figure. He lives in a palatial marble palace that screams Western elegance. Raj's love interest Rita (Nargis) defends him in court by arguing, "The one who is guilty is his father, who drove an innocent woman from his house, and denied his own son." However, there is another layer of criticism in the movie. Raj himself blames society at large:

> You may punish me as you please. But sin, crime, hatred and violence, this vicious circle that holds your society in a vice-grip, do you think it can be broken by hanging me?...I did not inherit crime from my parents; from that gutter of filth that flows from my shanty I picked up crime…

Awaara recognizes that the debates surrounding tradition versus modernity are tied up with the success of India as a nation. It connects modern behavior with the problems that Indian faces as a modern society. Men like the judge, who have brought their Western education into Indian society, are steering the country in the wrong

direction. There is a growing disillusionment in *Awaara* that reflects a wider disillusionment within some areas, specifically urban areas of Indian society. The film calls for social reform, but *Aag* and *Andaz* hearken back to a time free from political entanglements. All of Kapoor and Nargis's films, even *Awaara*, look back to another India, an India that unhindered by western ideas and social structures. Clearly India, despite having freed itself from colonial bondage, was still wrapped up in the debate over modernity and tradition.

Real economic problems faced India in its infancy. Raj's slum in *Awaara* mirrored the huge refugee problem Indian cities faced after partition. After India became India and Pakistan, huge numbers of Indians found themselves caught on the wrong side of the border, and were forced to immigrate back to India from the now Muslim Pakistan. By 1950 India's cities had developed huge squatter communities, many of which became permanent slums. And slums were only one facet of India's problems as a young democracy. As Indians became more aware of the problems their country facedand the empty promises of the new government, their disillusionment manifested itself onscreen.

Guru Dutt and Waheeda Rehman: Basking in Disillusionment

Raj Kapoor made *Awaara* in 1951; Its sense of disillusionment grew and festered in Guru Dutt's masterpiece, *Pyaasa*, released six years later.[54] India, contrary to its citizens' desires, had not become a unified, peaceful nation. The country came into being during a partition crisis, and, a decade later, partition continued to create tensions as India and Pakistan fought over their borders and the idyllic land of Kashmir. Domestically, the

[54] *Pyaasa*, dir. Guru Dutt, Guru Dutt Films: 1957.

country became increasingly divided as minority groups struggled to maintain linguistic and governmental autonomy.

When nationalists were creating anti-western, historical-based nationalism in the pre-Independence years, they stirred up more than nationalistic sentiment: they also encouraged regional pride. Some regional areas had already moved in a more traditional direction. Writing about Partha Chatterjee's book, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (about political movements in Bengal), book critic David Arnold explains, "While the outer, or material world of public and political life was dominated by the colonized West, the [nineteenth century] Bengali middle class drew strength from an inner domain, a cultural and spiritual world that could not be annexed to Western hegemony."[55] Independence only strengthened Bengal's bid for autonomy, and encouraged other communities to apply national sentiment inwards, to their own communities. In such a large nation, ethnic groups felt compelled to protect themselves from the overwhelming power of nationalist trends that threatened to sacrifice their ideals for a unified culture.

These cultural conflicts were anything but peaceful. Prime Minister Jawharlal Nehru did not think India should focus on regional disputes in the first few years of its independence. "For some years now our foremost efforts have been directed to the consolidation of India," he said in 1952. "Personally, I would look upon anything that did not help this process of consolidation as undesirable."[56] However, the regional movements were unmoved by the Prime Minister's rhetoric, and became ever more

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[55] David Arnold, "*Review* The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories by Partha Chatterjee," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, 58 no. 1 (1995): 183.
[56] Guha, 195.

vigilant in their actions. When a Telugu- speaker from Andhra died from a six week fast fighting for Telugu recognition, hundreds of people rioted in the streets. According to Ramachandra Guha, "government offices were attacked, and trains were stopped…the damage to state property ran into million of rupees." Some protesters were killed by police gunfire.[57] In 1956, Bombay shook as residents fought over the capital's official language. The SRC (States Reorganization Council) asked the local, linguistically based residents (the Maharashtrians) to "give up their claim to Bombay in the spirit of compromise."[58] Again, mobs rioted in the streets, looting shops and attacking policemen – dozens were reported dead.

All the violence could not but have affected the country's mood, and consequently the country's cinema. Nationalists saw their country disintegrating into sectional squabbles. Instead of building a unified nation, Indians were fighting to protect their own interests. Coupled with unresolved poverty and foreign tensions with Pakistan, Kashmir, China and the United States (to name a few), many Indians could not avoid the disappointment of lost hopes and dreams. While there were exciting new technologies and government programs improving aspects of Indian rural and urban life, they did not come with the political tranquility Gandhi had predicted.

1950s film director and actor Guru Dutt channeled his disenchantment into dark, brooding critiques of Indian society. He was not always successful: unlike Raj Kapoor, who churned out continuous hits (not to mention a whole dynasty of acting descendents), Dutt moved in between successes and painful flops. Oftentimes his dark view of Indian society did not satisfy audiences looking for more cheerful perspectives. However, his

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[57] *Ibid*, 197.
[58] *Ibid*, 203.

hits, like *Pyaasa* (1951), reflect the same societal issues as is flops, like *Kaagaza ke Phool* (1959).[59] Moreover, he maintained some remnants of Raj Kapoor's brand of anti-western nationalism. In *Kaagaz Ke Phool*, an introspective look at the Indian film industry, Dutt plays Suresh Sinha, a filmmaker unable to gain any respect from his wife's anglicized parents.[60] They think filmmaking is low class, and try to legally separate him from their daughter. "I have implicit trust in the justice of the British," his father-in-law declares. Suresh's in-laws basically destroy his marriage because they cannot rise above their aristocratic, western snobbery, but this conflict is only a side note in the movie's overarching tragedy.

Dutt spends more time decrying the loss of traditional values in Indian society. In his world, Gandhi's (and in a larger sense, Hinduism's) universal tolerance has been replaced by greed and blinding self-interest. *Pyaasa*, the first of Dutt's social commentaries, is "the tale of an artist crushed by the soulless materialism of post-Independence India," says movie magazine *Filmcomment* writer Jacob Levich. [61] Dutt plays Vijay, a poet unable to find work. He cannot provoke sympathy or even charity. His brothers laugh at his work and sell his poetry for waste paper. When he offers assistance to a taxi driver the driver laments, "What has the world come to? The educated working as coolies!" but still hands Vijay a counterfeit coin. Even his college sweetheart, Meena, left him because she did not believe he could take care of her, marrying a wealthy publisher instead:

> Meena: besides love, a sensible woman needs security and the comfort of a home. And few money is also required.

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[59] Today, many film scholars have deemed *Kaagaza ke Phool* a classic Indian film, lauding its artistic techniques and Dutt's usual understated melancholy.
[60] *Kaagaz ke Phool*, dir. Guru Dutt, Ajanta Pictures: 1959.
[61] Jacob Levich, "Guru Dutt: Bollywood Master," *Filmcomment*, 45 no. 5 (2009): 62.

> Vijay: You married Mr. Ghosh, selling love for wealth.
>
> Meena: Don't accuse me wrongly! I loved you, but you were poor and unemployed. In life, besides love and poetry, there's hunger. How could you bear my burden when you couldn't feed yourself?
>
> Vijay: You gave me no chance. When a man has responsibilities, he shoulders them. Don't deceive yourself. You sought wealth and high society...

Meena has no compassion, but worse, she has no trust. She could not trust Vijay to take care of her, so she sacrifices their love for her own self-interest. Selfish asides pepper the entire movie. At a college reunion an anonymous woman tells her friend, "[my husband] wanted me to take him to hospital, but I put it off: how could I miss such a party?" At a strip dive Vijay watches men drag a dancer away from her screaming baby, yelling, "tend to us first, then see to your child!"

The prostitute Gulabo (Rehman) feeds a destitute Vijay (Dutt) in *Pyaasa*.

The only person who treats Vijay with compassion is a poor prostitute, Gulabo (Rehman). She finds his poetry when she purchases scrap paper and immediately appreciates his concern for society's unwanted members. It is no accident that a prostitute, the most marginalized member of society, understands and appreciates his philosophy and his tortured soul. Only she, despite her meager earnings, wants to take care of him.

The same greed applies to one of Guru Dutt's last movies, *Sahib Bibi aur Ghulam* (1962).[62] Although the movie is based on a classic Bengali novel about Bengal's aristocracy at the end of the 19th century, it mirrors Dutt's contemporary concerns about lost traditions. Dutt plays Bhuvan, a poor country boy who moves to the city looking for work. He innocently falls for a poor working girl, Jaba (Rehman), but also becomes tied up with his employer's wife's affairs. Choti Bahu (the wife) desperately seeks love from an alcoholic and immoral husband. Just like Vijay's companions in *Pyaasa*, the Bengali aristocracy has no sense of moral responsibility: they are "a class of brutish, drunken wastrels who police tenants with goon squads and squander their fortunes on wedding ceremonies for their cats." [63] They care for none but themselves, wasting their families' collective fortunes on selfish pursuits.

For Dutt, the world is more than just a selfish place; it is an irredeemable hellincapable of redemption. In *Pyaasa*, Vijay tries to commit suicide: he fails, but in the aftermath everyone thinks he is dead and he becomes a renowned posthumous poet. When he tries to prove he is Vijay neither his brothers nor his publisher (Meena's

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[62] *Sahib Bibi aur Ghulam*, dir. Abrar Alvi, Guru Dutt Films: 1962.
[63] Levich, 64.

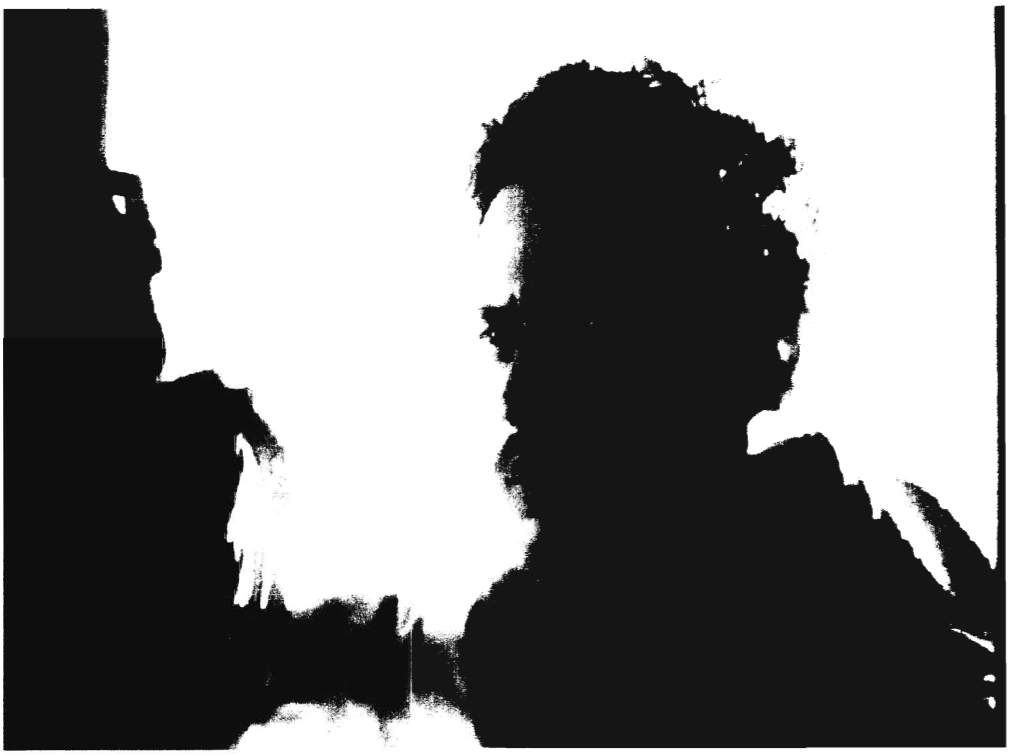
husband) will publicly recognize him: they do not want to lose the profits from his book. Disgusted, Vijay forces his way into a public memorial service where the publisher hypocritically lectures his audience about the way they treated him:

> It is said he committed suicide. But in fact you killed him. If Vijay were alive he would see the world which starved him is ready to shower wealth on him. The world which starved him is ready to shower wealth on him.

This statement is completely true, except for the fact that Mr. Ghosh did most of the starving himself. When Vijay is finally recognized, he realizes that nothing, not even his newfound fame, will alter the way people treat him. He leaves the service, and tells Meena that he cannot live in society any longer:

> I have no complaint against a society them [or] any human beings. But against a society that denies the right to be human. That makes a brother a stranger, a friend an enemy. I complain against a world that worships no humans but worships idols. That destroys humans and tramples them. Where it is a crime to share the sorrows of the poor...In such a world I shall never be at peace.

As Vijay leaves the auditorium he spots Gulabo, faithfully waiting for him. She asks him where he is going. "Where I won't need to go further," he responds. "Will you come?" She agrees, and they walk into the sunset. Some critics believe that the ending is optimistic: together, their love can combat all obstacles. However, in this writer's opinion, such optimism is unfounded. Vijay and Gulabo are literally unable to survive in society. All they can do is abandon it, but nothing exists outside of society. Unlike Raj Kapoor, who can protect his daughter from evil influences or redeem himself in jail, Dutt sees no such easy solution. Vijay and Gulabo must leave this world all together in order to escape its injustices.



Vijay (Dutt) sees the hopeless corruption of modern society at the end of *Pyaasa*.

A similar fate awaits their relationship in *Kaagaz ke Phool*. While the movie is superficially about the film industry, it mirrors Dutt's approach to modern Indian society just like *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam*. Once again, Waheeda Rehman plays an innocent village girl, Shanti. Shanti attaches herself to Suresh, the great film director, giving him pure, unadulterated love and devotion (just like a wife is supposed to give, even though he is already married). However, despite their discretion and complete respect for their relationship's boundaries (they never touch or even suggest romantic activity) they are berated by society. His own daughter, Pammi, asks Shanti to leave her father: "Slanderous articles are written about the two of you in the papers," she reasons. "My friends at school taunt me!" The gossip slowly destroys his relationship with Shanti and then his career. He turns to alcohol, slighted by his family and the studios. The studios send Shanti to find him and rescue him from his own addictions. However, when she

finds him drunk, in a hovel, she cannot save him. Despite the goodness in her heart, despite her traditional loyalty and devotion, it is too late. She shakes her head and walks away.

Like Kapoor, Dutt looks back towards a mythical India, an undated time when traditional values reigned supreme. Rehman's characters always represent the ideal traditional woman, the lone voice of sympathy and good sense. Yet unlike Kapoor, Dutt cannot find a way back to the ideal Indian society. In Kapoor's films, once the characters recognize western influences they can extricate those influences from their lives. There is no redemption in a Guru Dutt film. Society is a cruel, unforgiving force. People do not help others, and those few people who have not been corrupted by modern society are still unable to survive. In *Kaagaz ke Phool*, Suresh dies impoverished and alone. In *Sahib Bibi aur Ghulam* Choti Bahu falls into her husband's evil ways, and ends up dying for her efforts as her home burns to ashes. Bhovan and Jaba only escape because there is no more village, and hence no more society, to corrupt them. Only with society's complete destruction can Dutt and Rehman successfully consummate their love.

The 1970s

In the 1960s, both industries started to distance themselves from by-then predictable social messages. In India, the change came from economic prosperity and expansion. India proved its own lasting power. Recognizing stable nationhood, people started to distance themselves from overtly critical on-screen social commentaries. In America, the change came from the burgeoning sexual revolution. Hair grew longer, skirts grew shorter and sex became an openly discussed topic. New cultural laxity

brought a little frivolity into the stale 1950s household. However, in both cases, the excitement wore itself out, and disillusion took its toll on cinematic romance.

By the 1960s, Hollywood had already been churning out romantic comedies for over forty years.[64] Romantic comedy was, up to that point, a highly stable cinematic genre. In fact, the romantic comedy has survived as a genre because it has constantly adjusted its formulas to changing social mores. According to *New York Times* film critic Manohla Dargis:

> Over the years this sturdy if supple genre has survived extraordinary cultural and social changes, most notably the suffragist movement in the early part of the last century and women's rights toward the latter. Liberated women, along with the pill, quickie divorces, swinging couples, blended families and various wars both abroad and at home might have dinged the genre, but it has endured and adapted...[65]

Retrospectively, this is an easily justifiable argument. Meg Ryan and Julia Roberts are household names, bastions of romance from the 1980s and 1990s. But from the 1970s perspective, audiences did not know the future of the romantic comedy. Starting in the 1960s, conventional formulas began to feel stilted, unrealistic. Doris Day and Rock Hudson made a small set of working girl comedies, but their "good, clean fun" quickly became outdated as the "sixties" picked up steam. The "sixties" as an era, and as a movement, demanded more than a re-examination of the cinematic relationship formula; it demanded a dissection, a burial of the old relationship. By the 1970s public ideas of modern romance had changed, and Woody Allen parodied those changes on screen.

"Things fall apart; the center cannot hold," wrote William Butler Yeats in his famous post-World War One poem "The Second Coming." He could easily have been

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[64] Romantic comedy was a vital genre even in the silent era, , on which see William K. Everson, *Love in the Film: Screen Romance from the Silent Days to the Present* (Secaucus, N.J.: Citadel Press, 1971).
[65] Manohla Dargis, "Girl Meets Ape and Complications Ensue," *New York Times*, 24 July 2009, http://movies.nytimes.com/2009/07/24/movies/24ugly.html?scp=1&sq=girl%20meets%20ape&st=cse.

writing about the 1960s, when even a renowned feminist actress like Katherine Hepburn could play a traditional wife on film.[66] Psychologically, America had been breaking down for a long time. According to Elaine Tyler May, as early as the 1950s Americans started turning to psychoanalysis to address their anxieties, anxieties often centered around Cold War fears and marital dissatisfaction. People eagerly submitted themselves to psychoanalysis, anything to explain the discomfort that underlined the seemingly flawless post-war period. However, if anxieties stayed in the doctor's office during the 1950s and early 1960s, by the end of the 1960s, they moved out in the open. Relationship-wise, Betty Friedan's groundbreaking feminist text, *The Feminine Mystique*, publicly explained the housewife's fundamental dissatisfaction with her life. However, this was only a step in the right direction. The feminist movement really blossomed in the counterculture.

The 1960s counterculture demonstrated how even within a cultural revolution, women were still being sidelined. A strong example comes from Todd Gitlin's account of inner party politics in the 1960s organization, Students for a Democratic Society in *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*. Early on in the movement, women had made prominent strides. College educated women were prominent organizers and speakers. Their organization rejected older forms of society that sidelined women, or so they claimed:

> Thus background, education, ideology, and experience all primed the New Left for equality. Yet their experience in the national movement was confusing, grating....there was a disgruntlement that ran deeper than statistics. SDS women felt obscurely uneasy. Men sought them out, recruited them, took them seriously, honored their intelligence – then subtly demoted them to girlfriends, wives, note-takers, coffeemakers.[67]

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[66] This refers to *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, discussed in a footnote on page 34.
[67] Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books:,1987), 367.

If SDS was supposed to signify a new world order, women found themselves disillusioned with empty promises. Other movements had seen similar issues. Feminist historian Sara Evan chronicles similar complaints in the civil rights movement in her book, *Personal Politics: the Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement & the New Left*. Seeking equality, African American women often found themselves stuck in either secretarial or housewife type roles. So women spoke out. It is no surprise that the women's liberation movement erupted in the late 1960s. The counterculture emphasized a re-examination of all societal relationships; it was only a matter before their critical gaze reflected back upon the counterculture itself.

Additionally, the feminists' male counterparts soon discovered that they were not entirely comfortable with their wives and girlfriends' independent thoughts. Men saw their utopian ideals crumbling. How could a new world order succeed if its founding visionaries were unknowingly as backwards as their parents? As Gitlin reminds his readers, by the late 1960s the movement's founders had overestimated their own importance, and they started taking women as trophies. When the women's movement began capitalizing on female subordination, most of their male counterparts "were guilt-ridden sexists anyway, and realistic enough to know that the Revolution wasn't close enough to wash away their sins."[68] In a sense, the women's liberation movement marked the end of the 1960s. This is not to say that feminists were solely responsible for the end of "the sixties," but their indictment of the movement itself marked the beginning of the movement's decline. The center could not and did not hold; the 1960s fragmented, and slowly faded into a nostalgic past.

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[68] *Ibid*, 373.

Woody Allen and Diane Keaton – Disassembling Romance

The aftermath of the 1960s lived on in society and in film, as a disillusionment with modern relationships that clearly translates into Woody Allen and Diane Keaton's movies. *Annie Hall* was made in 1977, yet it resonates with the same sexual tensions that Gitlin witnessed in Students for a Democratic Society.[69] For Woody Allen, 1960s enlightenment transferred into 1970s New York intellectuality. His characters always thrive on intellectual crowds. Allen cannot abide the culturally ignorant, but he also cannot abide the hypocrisy inherent within intellectual circles. This particularly resonates with the previous decade's chief social organizers – Gitlin strongly believes that the counterculture began as an intellectual crusade. Oftentimes his relationships with women give the impression that the 1960s never ended.

Post-counterculture disillusionment was only aided by the decades' national misfortunes. For the first time since the Great Depression, America suffered a major economic Depression. In 1973 OPEC (Organization of Arab Petroluem Exporting Countries) placed an embargo on oil based on America's support of Israel, resulting in the 1973 oil crisis. In 1974 the Watergate scandal gripped the nation: Americans began to lose faith in their politicians as Nixon destroyed his own hard earned credibility. The Civil Rights Movement had entered a more radically violent stage, marked by militant groups such as the Black Panthers. During all of these events, feminists struggled for awareness and respect. In such an atmosphere, Woody Allen understandably felt more than a little pessimistic romantic, if not all, relationships.

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[69] *Annie Hall*, dir. Woody Allen, United Artists: 1977.

For Woody Allen and Diane Keaton, successful relationships are ultimately no longer possible because men cannot deal with newly equal gender relationships. *Annie Hall* (1977) is the ultimate example of imposed expectations. Annie (Keaton) is a Manhattan newcomer. Alvy (Allen) immediately becomes attracted to her freshness and naiveté. Cementing her older views on romance, Annie sings "It Had to be You," a Frank Sinatra classic, in a small, intimate nightclub. No one notices her while she is singing, so by the end of the evening she leans on Alvy for support, searching for the romantic reassurance she sings about in her song. He naturally assumes the role of a caring supporter: "You are extremely sexy," he tells her lovingly. "You are!" But Alvy, as an enlightened byproduct of the 1960s, is not satisfied with Annie's dependence. She is not independent enough or intellectual enough for his tastes.

Alvy (Allen) shapes his modern woman (Keaton) in *Annie Hall*. Photo courtesy of cinematical.com.

However, when Alvy encourages Annie to educate herself, he walks into his own worst nightmare. Annie starts seeing a psychiatrist and taking adult education classes, all based upon Alvy's suggestions. Yet, the more she delves into her psyche, the more she

realizes that Alvy is trying to shape her personality to fit his needs. To her psyciatrist Annie complains, "since our discussions here, I feel I have a right to my own feelings." On the flip side, Alvy tells his analyst, "I'm paying for her analysis and she's making progress, and I'm getting screwed." They gradually become frustrated with each other; ironically, the more they reach the same level of "heightened" psychological awareness, the more they start to detest the other person's flaws.

As in the gender dynamics of SDS and the civil rights movement, "progress" only leads to increasing dissatisfaction. The woman is not satisfied with her seemingly enlightened male partner, and the man cannot understand his female partner's dissatisfaction. This is a complete rejection of the Hepburn and Tracy solution. Katherine Hepburn saw inequality between the sexes because she did not understand her feminine side. Twenty years later, the very idea of a basic feminine nature looks like social propaganda, a strategy for keeping women in the home. Fundamentally, modern society cannot not handle gender equality because Americans cannot comprehend equality. Beneath its superficial accomplishments, modern gender equality is incompatible with love.

In *Manhattan* (19790, Allen and Keaton meet on equal terms, and are once again incompatible despite their obvious compatibility.[70] In this case, Isaac (Allen) and Mary (Keaton) start off in separate relationships. Isaac is dating Tracy, a 17 year old that is much more mature than Isaac himself. Mary is sleeping with Isaac's friend Yale, a married man. Neither of them is particularly satisfied with their relationship. Although Isaac (Ike) seems to enjoy Tracy's company, he feels uncomfortable with her obvious youth; for him, her age reads as ignorance. Mary, on the other hand, fits his requirements

[70] *Manhattan*, dir. Woody Allen, United Artists: 1979.

for a modern, alluring woman. Mary is a self-professed divorcee: "I was tired of submerging my identity to a very brilliant, dominating man." Mary meets Ike on the same intellectual playing field. Tracy is a safe partner, as loyal as a Labrador. Mary presents a challenge, an allurement.

Ike (Allen) is attracted to Mary's feminist liberation in *Manhattan*. Photo courtesy of Alt Film Guide, altfg.com.

Observing obvious sexual tension, they slowly follow their instincts: Ike leaves Tracy and Mary leaves Yale. But, even though they share chemistry, they cannot survive as a couple. Despite her enlightenment and despite her therapy, Mary cannot resist Yale. Also, despite knowing about Mary's affair with Yale, Ike is completely taken aback when she returns to the affair. He cannot reconcile his expectations, which Tracy fulfilled, with Mary's complicated psyche. As the movies point out, the modern man or woman is usually destroyed by his/her heightened awareness.

It is no surprise that psychology plays a large role in Allen's films. Obviously, part of the nervousness comes from Allen's comic iamge: he built his career with the persona of a nebbish, neurotic Jew. However, Allen is not the only emotionally troubled character in his films, and that fact reflects more about American society than mere Jewish stereotypes. By the 1970s, America was facing a "marriage crisis." According to David Shumway, author of *Modern Love: Romance, Intimacy, and the Marriage Crisis*, the divorce rate had hit 50 percent. Americans turned to a time honored tradition, psychotherapy, in order to solve their problems. However, as Alvy's sessions with his analyst reveal, the psychotherapy does not solve his problems, but rather heightens them:

> Perhaps the explanation for this cynicism, which is an aspect of this group of films as a whole, is that although relationships are analyzed and patterns revealed, there is little hope offered for better relationships. Clearly, if only women are portrayed as making progress, heterosexual relations are not likely to improve. But there is another limitation that seems built into the genre rather than an aspect of modern love itself: these films cannot show the way out of the patterns they depict.[71]

Woody Allen certainly comments on the romantic comedy as a genre in and of itself. However, this very destruction of the romantic comedy is a powerful reflection of the relationship crisis in America. If the 1960s brought awareness, the 1970s turned that awareness into a 'hyper awareness,' a new intimacy that turned every sentence, every movement into something more than it was. Unable to see the romance above the psychology, Keaton and Allen ultimately never succeed. Even in farce, Allen and Keaton demonstrate the dangers of the modern world. In *Love and Death* (19750, they work within the framework of a classic

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[71] *David Shumway Modern Love: Romance, Intimacy and the Marriage Crisis* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 170.

Russian novel.[72] Yet even amidst the tights and corsets, Allen and Keaton break character to have intellectual arguments. Not surprisingly, they only succeed romantically when they fall back into the Russian formula. Otherwise they would just argue for hours.

Once again, Americans rejected the previous generation's standards for romance. There is no continuity between Woody Allen's awareness of gender inequality and Astaire and Rogers' attempt to change that inequality. Nor is there a link between Katherine Hepburn's tamed feminist and Diane Keaton's boisterous liberation. Americans decided that a new era needed a new definition, or in this case an anti-definition of cinematic romance. Like Guru Dutt, Woody Allen believed society could not return to older structures. Unlike Dutt, Allen has no ideal image of America society, only tangled gender relations. While Allen and Keaton thrived on disfunctionality, India entered a new era also determined to dissemble older social conventions. However, as will be made evident, even if the ideal traditional relationship is not possible at the moment, it still exists.

Bachchan and Badhuri: The Angry Young Man and the Barely Noticeable Woman

During the 1970s, India as a nation faced more than its usual share of national woes. In the 1950s, Indians became disenchanted with broken pre-Independence promises. However, by the 1960s, industry was looking up, the Congress National Party had maintained a consistent majority in Parliament, and even Bollywood had replaced its dark societal commentaries with sunny, vacation fantasies. Guru Dutt may have highlighted ongoing conflicts, but most filmmakers chose more uplifting subject matter.

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[72] *Love and Death*, dir. Woody Allen, United Artists: 1975.

Social critique was replaced by Western-style teenage fantasies. But like so many movements, eventually the 1960s' bouncing Bollywood baubles wore out their welcome. According to the authors of *Indian Cinema: the Bollywood Saga*, an in depth chronology of Bollywood film,

> After the colorful escapist excesses of the 60s, it became imperative for films to address and reflect the harsh changes that were taking place in Indian society. In film after film (Deewar, Hera Pheri, Trishul), Amitabh played a street-smart man fighting a Darwinian battle for survival. The violence seemed a hugely cathartic experience.[73]

Mahatma Gandhi's ideals of love and nonviolence fell out of favor as a new Gandhi, Indira Gandhi, took the reins. Her tenure as Prime Minister saw a severe shift in Bollywood subject matter.

Indira Gandhi paid little homage to her country's legacy of nonviolent cooperation. The daughter of India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, she respected her predecessors but proceeded with her own plans to consolidate and demonstrate India's (and her own) power. Gandhi won her country's love and support through India's decisive victory over Pakistan in the 1971 war. Over several years the nation had quietly modernized its organization and weaponry, becoming a formidable opponent to the Pakistan. The war itself lasted less than two weeks, and, according to Ramachandra Guha, became a point of national pride. More than anyone, Indira Gandhi was credited with the victory, especially for maintaining a calm but firm stance against Pakistan and against Americans threats of intervention.[74] Gandhi was a bastion of strength, and her aggressiveness replaced her father's noninterference. Guha quotes newspaperman K.R. Malkani as saying, "the old image of peace is being replaced by the

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[73] Dinesh Raheja and Jitendra Kothari, *Indian Cinema: The Bollywood Saga* (New Delhi:, Roli Books, 2004), 93.
[74] Guha, 461.

new one of power. The old image only elicited patronizing smiles: the new image commands attention, and respect."[75] However, as Gandhi would soon discover, the aggression she promoted in herself would soon be turned against her.

Gandhi's domestic programs were not nearly as successful as her foreign-policy decisions. Crop production was lower than expected, industry moved too slowly, and poverty rates were unchanged, if not worse. Writing in 1975, Richard L. Park, author of "Crisis in India, 1975," expresses little surprise at India's domestic problems:

> Who can one blame if things go wrong? Since "things go wrong" almost always in India, trouble lay ahead...The problem was not so much that the human condition for the majority was miserable – India had become accustomed to that; rather, much had been expected by the concentration of authority and power in Mrs. Gandhi's hands.[76]

For someone with such tight control over the nation's economy, Gandhi was not moving fast enough. In fact, partially due to her inability to improve the economy, Gandhi fell under critical fire for her immense amount of power.

As *The Bollywood Saga* points out, Bollywood responses to Gandhi's reign set a new precedent for cinematic violence. This was a new, powerful India, and past heroic figures were no longer satisfying. In the 1970s, who would find Guru Dutt's heroes, mournfully reciting poetry and denouncing the world, convincing? A new type of hero was needed, and Amitabh Bachchan, a hitherto unknown actor, encapsulated his country's righteous indignation, becoming one of the most popular Bollywood actors of all time. His anti-hero, the "angry young man," became the prototype of the film hero for more than a decade. According to Vijay Mishra, Bollywood expert and author of *Bollywood: Temples of Desire*, Bachchan's success was only made possible by a

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[75] *Ibid*, 462

[76] Richard L. Park, "Political Crisis in India, 1975," *Asian Survey*, 15 no. 11 (1975): 1000.

fundamental societal shift away from the nation's founding principles of nonviolence. "There is something deep seated here, as if the entire politics of nonviolence did not, finally, lead to the kind of moral uplift Gandhi had in mind when he raised nonviolence to the highest principle of action," writes Mishra. "Amitabh Bachchan's anger is possible only in an India no longer comfortable with the Gandhian ideology of nonviolence."[77] Bachchan fought injustice because he could rely on nobody else, and nothing, not even love, took higher priority than his responsibility to eradicate evil in Indian society.

During the 1970s, India was rife with corruption. According to Park, "corruption in public and private life was so endemic and widespread that "black money" was taken for granted, including the financing of the Congress Party."[78] Gandhi was no exception to the rule. Fond of dismissing ministers and officials who disputed her opinions, Gandhi acquired several enemies who accused her of corruption. On June 12, 1975, the Allahabad High Court found Gandhi guilty of corrupt election practices, and asked her to resign. Instead of resigning, like the court asked her to, she asked for an appeal and continued working. When opponent Jayaprakash Karayan asked the Indian public to join a nonviolent campaign to force her resignation, Gandhi sent out the troops, arrested hundreds of dissidents and used this "threat" to call a state of emergency. The emergency lasted from 1975 to 1977. Gandhi silenced all dissenters (both within the government and the press) and held a tight grip on the Congress, maintaining almost absolute power until the elections of 1977, when she was robustly dethroned from the Prime Minister's office.

Not surprisingly, Bachchan's movies always harbor a deep mistrust for government and authority. This can be easily traced back to India's rampant problems

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[77] Vijay Mishra, *Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 137.
[78] Park, 1000.

with corruption. In his first major film, *Zanjeer* (1973), Bachchan plays Vijay Khanna, a law-abiding policeman.[79] Vijay repeatedly tries to stop a local crime boss, Teja, from importing illegal liquor as well as committing other gang-related crime including murder. When Teja decides Vijay has come too close he bribes local officers, who frame Vijay with laundered money. After six months in jail, Vijay decides to attack Teja on his own not as a police officer, but as a private citizen. The police are useless, easily swayed by dirty money. *Zanjeer* eerily foreshadows the Emergency of 1975, when the police blindly complied with Parliament's (meaning Gandhi's) arrest orders.

Bachchan's second film with Jaya Bhaduri, *Sholay* (1975), also displays a deep mistrust for governmental authority.[80] He plays Jai, a petty thief, who with his best friend Veeru (Dharmendra), moves in and out of jail with relative ease.[81] Jai and Veeru may be petty thieves, but they understand the difference between right and wrong. They prove their worth early on in the film, when bandits attack a train carrying them to jail. The police officer, Thakur Baldev Singh (Sanjeev Kumar), releases them from their handcuffs so they can fight the bandits after they promise not to abandon him. Thakur is impressed by their heroism. "They are criminals, no doubt, but they are terribly brave," he declares. Later on, when bandits terrorize Thakur's town, he summons the criminals to his house and asks them to destroy the bandits' power. Like *Zanjeer*'s police, the local authorities are inadequate and paralyzed by fear. Jai and Veeru, who seemingly reside on the wrong side of the law, are the only people willing to stand up to Gabbar, the chief bandit.

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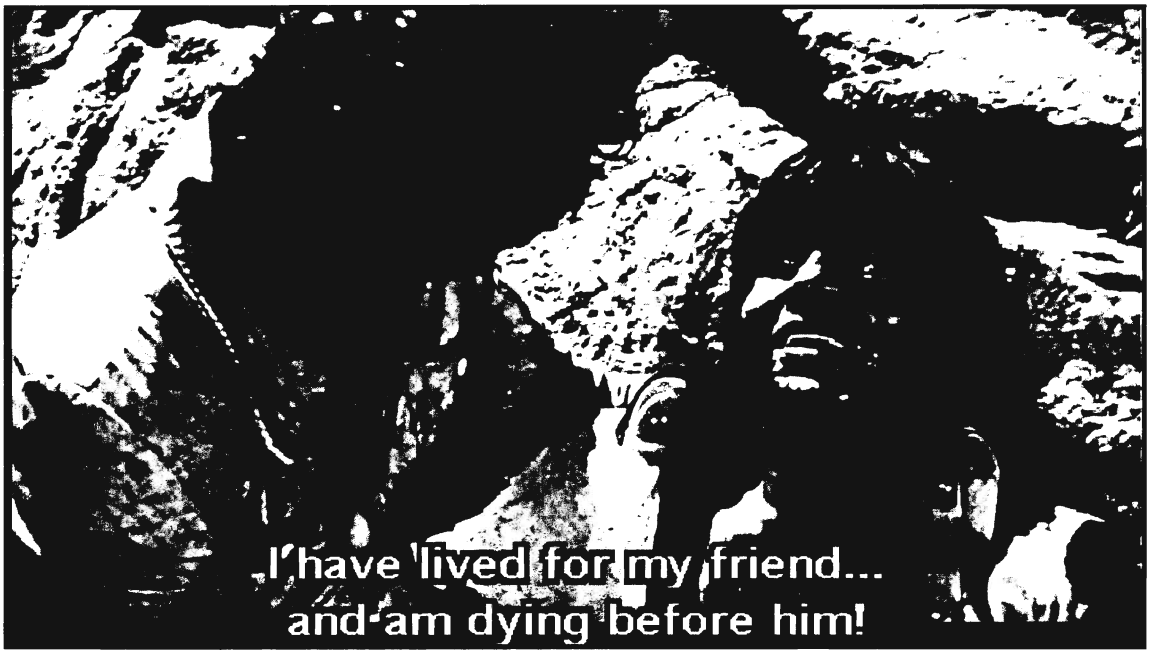
[79] *Zanjeer*, dir. Prakash Mehra, Prakash Mehra Productions: 1973.
[80] Until 1995, Sholay was the longest running Bollywood movie of all time, the theatrical release playing for ten years. Only the release of *Dilwale Dulhania le Jayenge*, which was ~~still play~~ing in theaters twelve years after its initial release, broke the record.
[81] *Sholay*, dir. Ramesh Sippy, United producers: 1975.

Brotherhood takes precedence in *Sholay* in the forms of petty thieves Jai (Bachchan) and Veeru (Dharmendra).

Sholay is a remake of the *Magnificent Seven*, an American western.[82] The movie has a very western feel: out on the frontier, men cannot always rely on law enforcement to solve society's problem, so they must take matters into their own hands. Yet *Sholay* twists the American western into a distinctly Indian form. In fact, both movies emphasize the importance of brotherhood and patriotism over the needs of the individual. This cannot be understood without the context of the Pakistan War. India harbored millions of refugees from East Pakistan, and that same sort of protectionist instinct, combined with strong post-war national sentiment, clearly manifests itself in Bachchan's movies. In *Zanjeer*, Vijay sacrifices his position and his life for the safety of his community. In *Sholay*, he not only helps defeat the enemy, but he dies so that his friend may live. Jai sends Veeru away from a deathly shootout, where he is fatally wounded. Cradled in Veeru's arms, Jai gasps, "My game is up, Veeru! But I have no regrets, Veeru!

[82] Of course, the *Magnificent Seven* is a remake of Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*, which has a heavily Western influence.

I have lived for my friend…and I have died for him!" Brotherhood is both literary and symbolic: Jai sacrifices his life for his friend and his village, which represents India in a larger sense. To fight injustice, Indians must sacrifice themselves in the face of ever increasing danger.



The ultimate sacrifice in *Sholay*.

Because the fight against injustice is more important than anything else, love is almost always pushed to the sidelines. Still, it is important to note that Bachchan's character always wants a traditional marriage. In *Zanjeer*, Vijay falls for Mala (Bhaduri), a jovial knife sharpener who witnesses a gang-related massacre. He and Mala clearly desire each other, and while she lives in his house for protection, they both unconsciously perform the duties of a husband and wife. In *Sholay*, Jai falls for Radha (Bhaduri), an introverted widow, whose husband (Thakur's son) was brutally murdered by the bandits. Jai slowly reforms his behavior in order to deserve Radha's hand, and even asks Thakur

to obtain her father's permission to marry.

Radha (Bhaduri) stands by as her true love dies in *Sholay*.

Unfortunately, injustice usually gets in the way. *Zanjeer* firmly puts love on a lower priority than the battle against corruption. When Vijay returns from jail, Mala reprimands him for his bitterness, telling him he has "so much hatred for some people…that there's no place for love in your heart." Vijay quickly realizes that he might lose her, so he promises to forget his anger. However, that promise does not last long. One day, as Mala chatters on about curtains, Vijay explodes:

> Outside our beautiful curtains, if people are dying, let them! Let smugglers' trucks crush innocent kids. Why should I care? I promise you, Mala. If I hear them scream…I'll hide my face in your hair, I'll look into your lovely eyes..and not remember that an aged father is searching for his son's killers! Sure, Mala. We'll make a beautiful home. We'll forget that this world, in which we've made a home…is such an ugly place! There's so much of tyranny. So much of injustice! We'll forget it all! All right?

Mala has no idea what hit her. Her innocent desire for well-designed drapery is eclipsed by Vijay's rage at the injustice of the world. After much careful thought, she realizes that

he cannot move on unless he defeats Teja. Her future dreams look petty in the face of much more important battles:

> There was a time when I held you back. But today I request you. Go! Go and take revenge on them, who have made you like this…

This whole exchange typifies the role women played in all of Bachchan's movies. They are decoration. They represent marriage, something Bachchan aspires to have, but cannot confront until he has fought other battles. In a broader sense, Bachchan's romance, or lack thereof, enforces the idea that country is more important than personal happiness. At the end of *Zanjeer* Vijay and Mala walk away from the battle scene, bruised by united. The war is over, and romance can resume. However, it does not always end that way. As Jai lies dying in *Sholay*, he looks over at Radha and laments their "unfinished story." Their future together is destroyed. Tellingly, in retrospect Jai does not even think about Radha when he sends Veeru away from the shootout. His "brother" and the village are much more important.

Like Allen and Keaton's films, Bachchan and Bhaduri's movies critique the modern idea of romance in their respective cultures. Each couple combats 1960s escapism with hard-hitting reality. Yet Bachchan and Bhaduri more closely mirror Dutt and Rehman than their contemporary American counterparts. Indian society is currently filled with vice, but once upon a time it was a bastion of traditional love and happiness. Sometimes people can overcome modern society and sometimes they cannot, but the ideal remains unchanged.

Amitabh Bachchan and Jaya Bhaduri did not make many movies together, partly because they married each other in real life, and marriage destroys a woman's Bollywood

career. However, their partnership in these two movies is crucial because these films established Bachchan's star, which would shine fiercely for decades to come.

The 1990s

If 1960s opulence wore out its welcome, 1970s skepticism was no different. In America, the opulent, hair sprayed 1980s quickly replaced the previous decade's earthy, darker tones. In India, the change took a little longer, at least on screen; Amitabh Bachchan was a box office smash throughout the 1980s. However, in the 1990s both industries (and subsequently both cultures) experienced a cinematic renaissance. Nora Ephron, a feminist journalist turned script writer and director, cemented a foolproof formula for romantic bliss encapsulated in the wispy form of Meg Ryan. Aditya Chopra, son of movie mogul Yash Chopra (founder of Yash Raj films) asked India to "fall in love again" with Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol and created a long lasting box office sensation. Both Americans and Indians wanted romance again.

Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan: Bringing the Spark Back

During the 1990s, America experienced a great economic boom. Jobs increased, markets expanded; the world slowly bowed down to the power of Coca-Cola. As will be discussed later, even India opened up its doors to the Western market. In fact, the nineties' economic security recalled an earlier moment in American history: post-World War Two prosperity. And, like the post-war era, Americans needed a reassurance of their prosperity and security. Not surprisingly, similar forces of conservatism played against the "modern woman." Katherine Hepburn's legacy lived on in the 1990s, as

conservatives waged a subtle war against the feminist movement. However, the difference between the 1950s and the 1990s lies in the obvious acknowledgement of female inequality and the existence of a feminist movement.

A certain anxious legacy from the 1970s lingered for the next couple of decades. When the women's movement broke through the 1960s counterculture, Americans saw their romantic assumptions crumbling around them. Woody Allen and Diane Keaton acted out the price urbanites paid for their heightened social awareness: an inability to work within old romantic frameworks. Uncertainties and anxieties naturally accompanied feminist energies. After all, Annie Hall and Alvy Singer did not stay together in the end: they predicted an end to the traditional romance, a complete rejection of older formulas. Thanks to these anxieties the sexual revolution, like the countercultural revolution, began to lose its energy almost immediately.

Even in a time of heightened prosperity, the 1990s continued to experience an undermining sense of anxiety about new gender relations. In their 1998 book *Terms of Endearment: Hollywood Romantic Comedies of the 1980s and 90s*, cultural historians Peter Williams Evans and Celestino Deleyto describe the resurgence of the romantic comedy in the 1980s and 1990s as a response to societal pressures. According to Evans and Deleyto, in the 1950s directors like Billy Wilder made comedies that appealed to male needs for moral security during the Cold War era (as can be seen with many of the Tracy/Hepburn films). In the 1990s, a similar fear gripped Americans about their lack of control in an increasingly socially aware climate. "America continues to be trapped between the conflicting drives both of an ever-increasing explicitness of subject treatment and of a roaring permissiveness," the book explains. "At one extreme the shrill sobriety

of the moral majority, at another the radical feminist anti-pornography crusaders."[83] Conservatives fought back against anxieties in what 1990s feminist writer Susan Falludi calls, *the backlash*. However, anti-feminists could not deny the power of feminist arguments proving economic and legal inequalities. Therefore, instead of putting women in their place, Katherine Hepburn style, 1990s media veered towards a more understated attack on women's psychological happiness.

Women paid for their sexual liberation with mental anguish. According to Falludi, whose 1991 book *Backlash* examines feminist losses of the 1980s and 1990s, women were told that what they gained in the workplace they sacrificed in the home. Feminism threatened motherly instincts and destroyed families:

> The prevailing wisdom of the past decade has supported one, and only one answer to this riddle: it must be all that equality that's causing all that pain. Women are unhappy precisely because they are free...they have gained control of their fertility, only to destroy it. They have pursued their own professional dreams – and lost out on the greatest female adventure.[84]

The backlash, fed by politicians, religious figures and the media (films, movies, books, magazines, etc.) was insidious because it was not a political battle – rather, it was a psychological attack that provoked women to reassess their own feminist inclinations. Taken as a whole, the backlash tried to push women "back into their 'acceptable' roles – whether as Daddy's girl or fluttery romantic, active nester or passive love object."[85]

Seen in this light, the Meg Ryan and Tom Hanks romantic comedy looks like an insidious weapon used to pull women away from corporate success and

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[83] Peter Williams Evans and Celestino Deleyto, *Terms of Endearment: Hollywood Romantic Comedies of the 1980s and 90s* (Edinburgh,Scotland: Edinburgh University Press,1998), 194.
[84] Susan Falludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Againt American Women* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc.,1991), x.
[85] *Ibid*, xxii.

put them back into deserted kitchens. However, their films soften, rather than attack feminist positions. These films discreetly discredit feminist arguments by sending a more positive message of fulfillment: a renaissance of romance, a return to a romantic tradition that had seemingly been lost forever. Movies like *Joe vs. the Volcano*, *Sleepless in Seattle* and *You've Got Mail* are all friendly reassurances that in a chaotic world of social relations, romance can and does still exist. In her romantic comedies Meg Ryan is "the creature of changing attitudes towards romantic relationships, yet someone also through whom modern lovers are made to yearn for the securities of the past, the back-to-the-future star brought up on experiment and change who brings back the promised future of monogamous marriages and fidelities."[86] Ryan and Hanks, in essence, resurrect the attitude of the Astaire and Rogers films of the 1930s. They embrace equality but maintain gender divisions, downplaying gender awareness by clouding the relationship in the magic and the nostalgia of romance.

Ryan and Hank's films firmly reject the realistic attitudes of the 1970s. In order to make romance seem viable, the films acknowledge that they are idealizations, something to aspire to rather than something that reflects grounded reality. In *Joe Versus the Volcano* (1990), the plot revolves around Joe's medical diagnosis: his doctor tells him he has a terminal "brain cloud," something that will end his life but has no visible symptoms.[87] Everything is utterly preposterous: his assignment to jump into a volcano, his journey with his employer's daughter Patricia (Meg Ryan), a magical typhoon that bathes the screen in neon green light,

[86] Evans, 199.
[87] *Joe Versus the Volcano*, dir. John Patrick Shanley, Warner Brothers: 1990.

and the end, when both Joe and Patricia jump into a volcano only to be pushed out by erupting lava completely unharmed.

Joe (Hanks) and Patricia (Ryan) on a fantastical island in *Joe Versus the Volcano*. Photo courtesy of Glenn Heath Jr., matchcuts.files.wordpress.com.

The movie is a purposeful fantasy, incorporating literal "Once Upon a Time" and "Happily Ever After" screen titles into the movie. *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993) lacks the same cartoonish quality, but it does unrealistically create a love story between two people who do not meet until the last few minutes of the film.[88] "We are asked to believe that Ephron's couples are destined to be together," writes David Shumway, despite the fact that they live at opposite ends of the country. Ephron's films are "truly fairy tale romances."[89] These films counter Woody Allen's heightened realism with heightened cinematic awareness: they recognize the lack of reality in film and embrace it, effectively neutralizing Allen's hard edge.

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[88] *Sleepless in Seattle*, dir. Nora Ephron, TriStar Pictures: 1993.
[89] Shumway, 221.

Moreover, their films directly draw from a cinematic tradition. *Sleepless in Seattle* constantly references *An Affair to Remember*, a romantic drama starring Cary Grant and Deborah Kerr. Four different women watch it, and it inspires the movie's Valentine's Day meeting on the Empire State Building. "That's your problem," Becky (Rosie O'Donnell) tells Annie (Ryan) one day as they watch the film. "You don't want to be in love, you want to be in love in a movie." These films acknowledge their preposterous premises, allowing the hardcore cynics to ease back into traditional roles. It is all right for people to want the fairy tale; Americans can find sanctuary in films that embrace the mystery of love.

For Ryan and Hanks, the romance lies in the mystery of love itself, not in gender power struggles. They provide security against uncertainty, asking their audiences to believe the power of love overcomes all modern societal obstacles. In *Sleepless in Seattle*, Annie begins the film engaged to Walter (Bill Pullman), an uninteresting but dependable sort of person. She tells her mother about how they met (they each ordered the other's sandwich, but with different bread), and her mother attributes it to the mysterious power of love:

> Mother: Destiny takes a hand!
>
> Annie: Mom, destiny is something we've invented because we can't stand the fact that everything that happens is accidental.
>
> Mother: Then how do you explain that you both ordered the exact same sandwich, except for the bread? How many people in this world like lettuce and tomato, without something else like tuna?
>
> Annie: Well, it wasn't a sign, it was a coincidence.

The movie gradually proves Annie completely wrong. Her mother tells her own love story, which has a magical element, and Sam Baldwin (Tom Hanks) acknowledges the

inexplicable attraction he had towards his deceased wife. "I knew it the first time I touched her," he reminisces. "I was just taking her hand, to help her out of a car, and I knew it; it was like magic." These stories emphasize the possibility of romance in ordinary life: they are anecdotes, purposefully boosting Ephron's argument that true love exists for everyone. The arguments work on characters within the movie as well as out. Annie slowly realizes that maybe the problem is not that romance does not exist, but that it does not exist with Walter. By the end of the movie she sees signs herself, leaving Walter at a restaurant after seeing a heart appear on the side of the Empire State Building. "Walter," she says, knowing full well she cannot live without knowing if she could ever love Sam, "I have to go!"

Sam (Hanks) and Annie (Ryan) finally meet at the top of the Empire State Building in *Sleepless in Seattle*. Photo courtesy of images.themoviedb.org.

Sam, too, learns to re-embrace love's mystery. He experienced true love once, but does not think he will ever be able to recapture that magic. Yet his own experiences tell him otherwise: he sees Annie on the street, and without saying anything other than

"Hello," he noticeably looks different, distracted. When they meet on the Empire State Building he simply says "it's you," and she replies, "it's me," as if they both realize they are meant to be together. Far from being a dangerous stranger, Annie is his soul mate; he takes her hand to lead her out the door, and the camera captures the same feeling he remembers with his wife. Romance conquers both Annie and Sam's cynicism.

The story is reminiscent of the screwball comedy, but in a gentler form. Astaire and Rogers, for example, always begin their films as adversaries. As the narratives develop, they slowly work their way towards each other, negating their enmity through dance. In *Sleepless in Seattle*, Ryan and Hanks may not hate each other, but they are both suspicious of falling for a complete stranger. They have to negotiate their own skepticism until full-fledged belief brings them together. In *You've Got Mail* (1998) Ryan and Hanks do actually start off as adversaries, and follow the same pattern of conquering mistrust. Their movies always culminate in their acceptance of destiny.

Comforting the anti-feminists, occupation is never an important issue in a Ryan and Hanks film. *In Joe Versus the Volcano*, the plot's sheer lunacy separates the two protagonists from any sort of realistic economic status. Trapped in the middle of the ocean, they lose everything but Joe's steamer trunks. With no one but each other there is no forum for social competition. In *You've Got Mail* the situation is more complicated because Joe Fox (Hanks) and Kathleen Kelly (Ryan) directly compete against each other in the bookstore industry. Fox in fact bankrupts Kelly, forcing her to close her store, but it is not a gender battle in the same manner of a Hepburn and Tracy movie. Kelly hardly suffers an economic blow when her shop closes, and she immediately receives offers for book deals afterwards. In *Sleepless in Seattle*, the two are both professionals in

completely different fields: since they do not even meet until the last five minutes, they do not compete on any economic level. As a competent professional, Meg Ryan is non-threatening to male professionals but still assertive enough to satisfy feminist professional ideals.

These films also address another societal anxiety: the information revolution. In the last decade of the twentieth century, Americans were introduced to the magical powers of the World Wide Web. According to James Gleick, a *New York Times* technology reporter during the dot-com boom, by 1992 a few hundred Internet nodes had rapidly grown into 1 million. For the first time in American history, the President of the United States had an e-mail address. In his book *What Just Happened? A Chronicle of the Information Frontier*, Gleick compiles a collection of his articles from the mid-1990s that reflect the excitement and danger of the new "information superhighway." He compares the information revolution to the technological revolution of the 1890s, "when the new technologies of electricity and the telephone began to penetrate everyday life, people were amazed, confused, awestruck, and then – almost as rapidly – cured of their surprise."[90] Yet even if the technologies quickly became commonplace, the social ramifications of such technologies took much longer to develop. Recalling Astaire and Roger's films, they reflect a society that is still reeling from a technologically induced new social order.

Therefore it comes as no surprise that Americans saw similar signs of communal disintegration in the Internet. "Some scholars fear that it [the internet] fosters impersonal communication," wrote Gleick in 1993. "But social theorists have been predicting a

[90] James Gleick, *What Just Happened? A Chronicle of the Information Frontier* (New York: Random House, 2002), 4.

decline in community and a rise in alienation ever since they began to pay attention to the industrial revolution, and it is far from clear that they have been right."[91] Gleick, on the other hand, was hopeful about the internet's ability to create new virtual communities – the Ryan and Hanks films share that hopefulness, easing Americans out of their anxiety with the same romantic ideals that dissipated anti-feminist anxieties.

Romance overcomes America's new "impersonal" technologies. *You've Got Mail*, a loose remake of the 1940 romantic comedy *The Shop Around the Corner* (starring James Stewart and Margaret Sullivan), provides the best example.[92] The original film centers around two romantic pen pals who unwittingly hate each other in real life. *You've Got Mail* takes their correspondence online, allowing Ryan and Hanks to develop an intimate connection through email. Email intensifies the communication gap, because Internet chat rooms are far less intimate than old-fashioned written correspondences. The Internet feels insecure; it is a dangerous vacuum of unknown entities. Contrariwise, far from being an endless frontier, the Internet can be a forum for true love. In 1993 Gleick wrote hopefully about a medium that fostered marriage between two online bridge players. *You've Got Mail* asserts the same argument, that two strangers in a chat room can achieve intimacy without ever speaking to each other.

Ryan's romantic comedies with Hanks are so comforting exactly because she so neatly sidesteps any societal trauma. Interestingly, the cinematic tradition these movies draw from most is that of the 1930s romantic comedy. Like Astaire and Rogers, Ryan and Hanks manage to be equal but separate partners, neither threatening the other's gender. However, the twist here lies in the idea of modernity versus tradition. For the

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[91] Gleick, 59.
[92] *You've Got Mail*, dir. Nora Ephron, Warner Brothers: 1998.

earlier pair, equality was something exciting and modern. Ryan and Hanks turned the Astaire and Rogers model into an established tradition. They celebrated gender equality in its modern form by associating it with an older form that was once radical, but now feels old-fashioned.

Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol - the Dynamic Diasporic Duo

Over in India, the 1980s were not a particularly impressive decade politically or cinematically. Indira Gandhi regained popularity after her fall from grace during the "state of emergency," and her familiar policies shaped the decade, even after she was assassinated and her son, Rajiv Gandhi, took her place. Rajiv Gandhi laid the technological groundwork for India's own information revolution in the 1990s, but his work remained a quiet force until India opened its markets. Otherwise, much governmental policy remained the same. Paralleling the country's dormant economic state, Bollywood recycled its well-known "angry young man" storyline for over a decade. However, both the nation's policies and Bollywood's storylines gradually went out of fashion.

From the earliest moments of Indian independence, the Indian government had maintained a strictly pro-national economic system that discouraged foreign investment. In the 1980s, India slowly started to accept more pro-business and investment plans. However, according to Guha, "they stopped short of being pro-market policies that would remove impediments to entry and exit by Indian or foreign firms, thus encouraging competition and expanding consumer choices."[93] Unfortunately, by 1991 India's

[93] Guha, 684.

insulated system had cost them $70 billion in World Bank loans. The country needed to change its policies, so the government opened its doors to the global market.

India welcomed foreign investors with open arms. Consequently, Western culture quickly infiltrated everyday life. Anupama Chopra, author of the authoritative film companion book, *Dilwale Dulhania le Jayenge*, summarizes the feeling succinctly:

> Suddenly the landscape was awash with foreign labels. Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Levi's – what was once the prerogative of only those who could afford to travel abroad was now available at the local store. Suddenly a plethora of channels offered dizzying alternatives to the staid, monotonous government-run programming…the West, with its promise of a glittering, flashy, modern lifestyle, entered the inner sanctums of middle class Indian homes."[94]

Finally, Indians were connecting with the world around them, but with that heightened awareness came a new form of anxiety. Indians did not know how they could reconcile new western lifestyles with inherent Indian identities. They worried that western capitalism would destroy traditional ideals. Indians living outside of their homeland asked themselves the same questions.

According to Vijay Mishra, by 2002 the Indian diaspora accounted for 11 million Indian immigrants across the globe. Over 3 million resided in Britain and the United States alone.[95] Indian migrants traveled to the western world in large waves around the turn of the twentieth century, but most modern day diasporic communities, at least in America, stem from liberal post-1960s immigration laws. These communities embraced western promises of economic prosperity, and, like their stationary counterparts, they struggled (and continue to struggle) to define themselves as Indians living in a westernized setting.

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[94] Anupama Chopra, *Dilwale Dulhania le Jayenge* (London: British Film Institute, 2002), 54.
[95] Mishra, 235.

In her scholarly article about diasporic mindsets, "South Asian Diasporas," Sandhya Shukla believes that post-colonial nationalism only gained strength in international communities. "The constructed memory of the trauma of colonialism has been a central part of nationalist communities," writes Shukla, and that patriotic feeling has transferred overseas.[96] An overwhelming protectionist sentiment permeates Non-Resident Indian (NRI) communities. Just as Indians created a national identity in order to protect themselves against British cultural influences, NRIs fight to protect their lifestyles from the western melting pot. Shukla calls this type of movement "willed oppositionality and external minoritization."[97] It is a way to maintain Indian identity without actually moving back to India.

When India opened it markets in 1991, the diaspora and the motherland reunited, merging their anxieties and desires. Both NRIs and resident Indians needed to reassure themselves that they would not lose their "Indianness" even if they lived in a globalized world. Moreover, because India now encouraged foreign investment, film producers saw vast potential in these overseas markets. Bollywood responded to these movements by framing India through a nostalgic filter. Amitabh Bachchan's rebellious plotlines no longer satisfied audiences who yearned for reassurance and reconnection with pure values. India became a hazy paradise, a traditional renaissance. Movies reassured NRIs that they had not lost their essential Indian identities.

Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol were a romantic team in the early 1990s. However, Khan never played the romantic lead – he preferred playing villains and psychopaths, men determined to terrorize the women they loved. Kajol chose roles belonging to

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[96] Sandhya Shukla "Locations for South Asian Diasporas," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 30 (2001): 561.
[97] *Ibid*, 562.

headstrong, assertive women. According to the *Dilwale Dulhania le Jayenge* fan book, Khan only accepted the role of Raj because "he would never achieve superstar status unless he was every woman's dream man and every mother's dream son." Kajol, too, objected to the movie, because she could not reconcile her active personality with the role of the "traditional, obedient daughter." However, despite their reluctance, when they altered their onscreen personas, Kajol and Khan became Bollywood legends. *Dilwale Dulhania le Jayenge* (1995), meaning 'The Lion-Hearted Takes the Bride,' is, to this date, the longest running Bollywood movie in history, still playing in select theaters in India over ten years after its initial release.[98] The movie made over five million dollars worldwide, the most successful Bollywood movie ever up until that point. *Dilwale Dulhania le Jayenge* (DDLJ) opened up overseas markets, reminding Indian directors that over 20 million expatriates were eager to reconnect with Bollywood. Khan and Kajol hit upon a foolproof formula.

Star-crossed NRI lovers in *Dilwale Dulhania le Jayenge*. Courtesy of University of California, Irvine, Film and Video Center. www.hnet.uic.edu.

[98] *Dilwale Dulhania le Jayenge*, dir. Aditya Chopra, Yash Raj Productions: 1995.

Khan and Kajol always portray NRIs or highly westernized individuals who manage to maintain Indian ideals in spite of their western lifestyles. In *DDLJ* Raj and Simran both hail from London. Simran is a docile elder daughter who likes dancing to rock n roll music on the sly, but never disobeys her father. Raj is, superficially, an immoral playboy. When they are thrown together on a pan-European train ride personalities clash and of course, hijinx ensue. One night Simran has a little too much to drink (she was only trying to stay warm!) and wakes up in Raj's shirt, confused and forgetful. Raj insinuates that they made love, at which point she starts crying hysterically. Unnerved by her response, Raj tells her it is just a joke. At the height of her hysteria he grasps her neck with his hands, trembling, and says:

> I know what you think of me. You think I'm a wastrel. I'm not scum, Simran. I'm Hindustani. And I know what honour means for the Hindustani woman. Not even in my dreams can I imagine doing that to you. Trust me Simran.

They both cry, and at that moment they begin to fall in love. Only after Raj has affirmed his true "Indianness" can they be together.

They are the ideal NRI couple, an image that continues throughout subsequent films. In *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998), Rahul (Khan) and Anjali (Kajol) are completely westernized; they wear brand names such as GAP, Polo, and DKNY, drink brand name soda (Pepsi, because Khan is a Pepsi spokesman), and play basketball.[99] However, underneath their American garb, they are true Indians. Rahul always goes to temple, Anjali transforms into a sari wearing beauty, and even Anjali's romantic rival, Tina (Rani Mukherjee), hides deep Hindu spiritualism underneath her miniskirts. In *Kabhi Kushi Kabhi Gham* (2001), Khan and Kajol consciously assume the names, if not the

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[99] *Kuch Kuch Hotai Hai*, dir. Karan Johar, Dharma Productions: 1998.

personalities of Raj and Rahul again, reinforcing thematic continuities from their earlier films.[100] Despite being kicked out of Rahul's family home for marrying against his father's wishes, Rahul and Anjali create an ideal Indian home in London. They perform all of the traditional Hindu rituals, and Anjali even teaches her son to sing the Indian national anthem. Whatever their situation, Khan and Kajol demonstrate exemplary devotion to their homeland. Accompanying their devotion to homeland is a deep devotion to family that takes precedence over anything else.

Western brands and styles invade *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai.*

This is the crux of Khan and Kajol's formula: no matter how the two come together, their union is not a happy one until they obtain familial consent. *DDLJ* is the pioneering example. Simran is an unwilling participant in an arranged marriage, and her family ships off to India as soon as she reaches marriageable age. Raj follows her to India with only love in his heart, but, in a sudden twist, he does not rescue her from her family. In fact, he positively refuses to elope with her, despite various pleas from Simran's complicit mother and his sympathetic father:

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[100] *Khabi Kushie Khabie Gham*, dir. Karan Johar, Dharma Productions: 2001.

> No Simran, I'm not eloping. I haven't come here to steal you. I might have been born in England but I am Hindustani. I've come here to take you as my bride. I'll take you only when your Babuji [father] gives me your hand [he silences her protests] What I'm up to is daunting. But I have complete faith in our love…

Raj does not challenge the family system. Rather, he incorporates himself into it, performing the duties of an ideal son throughout the wedding preparations. In doing so, he eventually wins over Simran's parents. Simran's father, Chuadry Baldev Singh (Amrit Puri), realizes that Raj really is an ideal match because despite his ardent love for Simran, he does not challenge her father's decisions by eloping, even when all hope seems lost. "Go, Simran, go," Singh tells his daughter. "No one can love you more than him." Ironically, Raj's willingness to sacrifice Simran's love without her family's approval proves his ultimate worthiness.

Similar marital woes follow Khan and Kajol in all of their films. In *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, Anjali, having despaired of Rahul's affections, agrees to marry the amiable Aman Mehra (Salman Khan) even though she does not love him. Rahul, at this point a widower, unwittingly sends his daughter to Anjali's summer camp. They reunite and quickly fall in love, yet Anjali refuses to break her engagement. As a traditional Indian woman, she feels obligated to marry Aman, heartbroken but determined to fulfill her duty. Luckily, Aman recognizes her despair and calls off the wedding, allowing Anjali to marry Rahul. Anjali maintains her honor but still gets the man she desires.

In a more drastic move, in *Kabhi Kushi Kabhi Gham* Anjali and Rahul actually elope despite Rahul's father's disapproval. They flee to London, but parental absence hovers over their house like a dark cloud. "We've set up a house, but have you ever wondered what kind of home is this that doesn't have a mother's warmth or a father's

blessings?" Anjali asks Rahul. "I know they are as incomplete without us as we are without them." That emptiness follows them until Rahul's brother facilitates a reunion, at which point their lonely father apologizes for his mistakes and finally gives them his blessings. Even with a small family of their own, Anjali and Rahul's marriage is not happy until they receive their parents' blessings. Even the movie's slogan reminds its audience, "It's all about loving your parents."

In all of their films, the traditional Indian family always takes precedence over the individual. Only through traditional devotion do the lovers gain acceptance for their modern union. Khan and Kajol somehow achieve the ideal balance that decades of Bollywood couples struggled to define. As Anupama Chopra explains about *DDLJ*:

> The film fed NRI nostalgia for traditions and rituals like Karva Chauth. It also reassured them that the West had not and could not change India irrevocably. It could not rob them of their roots....DDLJ told them that you could, as an India Today article stated, 'straddle both worlds, have your cake – and your green card – and eat it too.'"

From within India, the duo celebrated the homeland's strong historic traditions, assuring natives that they would not lose their core values despite the presence of new Western products. From without India, Khan and Kajol reassured audiences that living within western societies would not destroy traditional lifestyles. Both inside India and out, they promoted ideas of cooperation, asserting that western culture could coexist alongside Indian traditions, as long as people understood which values took precedence.

Conclusion

Looking back, both Hollywood and Bollywood have crystallized a superficially similar, but deeply differentiated, compromise between modernity and tradition. In the

Hollywood romance, couples channel tradition (Hollywood golden age romance) through modernity (gender equality). In the Bollywood romance, couples achieve modernity (a love marriage) through tradition (familial approval). Whereas a Hollywood couple embraces modernity by referencing tradition, a Bollywood couple cannot embrace modernity without bowing to tradition.

As a reflection of India, the Bollywood romantic formula represents an unchanging dedication to nationhood. Since India's independence, cinematic romance has struggled to recapture a mythical past, an India untouched by external forces. Even if the exact definition of 'Indianness' changes between historic periods (for example, like the indistinct attitude towards colonial Indian families in the Kapoor/Nargis films versus the complete India versus Britain attitude of Khan/Kajol films), all of the films analyzed in this thesis express a yearning for a coherent, unpolluted India. Guru Dutt and Waheeda Rehman, Raj Kapoor and Nargis all communicate that modern Indian society has hurt, sometimes even destroyed traditional values, but those values are still the ultimate ideal. Even Amitabh Bachchan (who tends to ignore his love interests unless he absolutely cannot) always wants the traditional marriage; societal woes may hinder the outcome, but the desire remains. This desire only feels more obvious in the 1990s because Khan and Kajol achieve the happy ending.

This dedication to traditional Indian roles exemplifies a strong understanding of national identity. There is no doubt that India's national identity is largely informed by its colonial past. After all, Indian nationalism, which drove the independence movement, developed as a direct response to colonial rule. As Partha Chatterjee explains through his studies of Bengali nationalism, colonial pressure incited regional powers to embrace pre-

colonial, or "traditional" identities. Looking towards independence, regional movements united against a common enemy. Moreover, those traditional movements continued to hold local and national sway even after Independence was achieved. The nationalists' emphasis on a united culture and history has clearly left a long and powerful legacy. This study has argued that the nationalism Indians created as a foil to British imperialism has shaped and informed national Indian identity to this day. Ramachandra Guha reminds readers that critics have predicted India's downfall as a nation since its very inception, yet India still exists today as a solid, democratic nation. "There are also forces that have kept India together," Guha says, "that have helped transcend or contain the cleavages of class and culture, that – so far at least – have nullified the many predictions that India would not stay united and not stay democratic."[101] Various diasporic communities around the world still exhibit the same fierce cultural protectionism that nationalists promoted in the 1940s. Continuing dedication to a national Indian ideal – even if such an ideal society never existed in the area that is now modern day India – is a testament to the ongoing power of historical pride and national identity.

The American formula, on the other hand, reflects a dedication not to nation, but to change. Hollywood romance does not follow a singular pattern. Astaire and Rogers embrace risqué gender equality only for Tracy and Hepburn to reject it. Allen and Keaton want gender equality but cannot handle it, and Ryan and Hanks accept gender equality by asserting that it is an American tradition. The only coherency to be found within this progression lies in the romance genre's continual reassessment of gender equality in over the half-century when the nation at large was engaged by similar issues.. Unlike Bollywood's reflection on Indian national identity, which feels decidedly coherent and

[101] Guha 11.

steadfast, Hollywood's reflection on American national identity feels remarkably transient.

Put another way, the Hollywood cycle reflects an American tendency to reject history. Romantic on screen couples consistently reject the previous decades' philosophies, choosing whatever system works for their particular generation. Even Ryan and Hanks, who intentionally reference older Hollywood movies, alter those movies' meaning. In terms of equality, the 1930s was a highly experimental and transient period for gender relations, yet Ryan and Hanks sell it as tradition. The Indian tradition reflects a commitment to history; the American tradition reflects a commitment to renewal – not necessarily progress, but constant evaluation and change.

America's continuous reevaluation has roots in the turn of the twentieth century. Returning to Warren Susman, he argued that specific changes in the United States forever disrupted American lifestyles while simultaneously crystallizing dubious notions of "tradition." The industrial revolution, combined with technological and communications revolutions destroyed America's production based economy, which in turn distinctly altered social relations. World changing events repeatedly begged the question of what it meant to be American; World War One mobilized and united the nation, the Armistice brought on violent disillusionment, the Roaring Twenties rested on an illusory prosperity and then came the Stock Market crash of 1929. Ironically, the Depression gave Americans more time to reflect on and experiment with new lifestyles. Several scholars who influenced this study have characterized the 1930s as a time of increased experimentation, populism, and liberality. However, many also observe an undercurrent of dissatisfaction, a yearning for the true American Way of Life.

Before citizens could solidify a new national identity, critics laid a groundwork of mistrust that undermined that definition's permanence. Although many Americans still voiced a need for the values that had shaped pre-industrial times, in reality there was no returning to agrarian life – nor could they justify such a backwards yearning. Unlike India, America could not blame outside forces for its internal changes. Indians could look beyond British rule to a mythical time that easily corresponded with nationalist desires; America could not look beyond itself.

Additionally, these patterns reflect upon more fundamental cultural attributes of Indian and American society. The Hollywood romances emphasize the individuals within each relationship; the Bollywood romances emphasize the couple as a unit within the greater whole of society. Astaire and Rogers navigate gender equality with each other, not society. Each of their films is a negotiation, a series of steps that brings each partner into the other's understanding. Kapoor and Nargis, on the other hand, fail to come together not because something is inherently wrong with either person, but because society influences their actions. Their love is inherently pure; socially influenced behaviors, rather than lovers themselves, account for incomplete love stories. American romances demonstrate a strong tradition of American individualism – after all, the very word "individualism" was created to describe United States society. Indian romances stress loyalty and community over any sense of the individual – society is an organic whole, something larger than the individuals comprised within it.

Obviously, neither culture is better than the other: each country's values and attitudes come with their own advantages and disadvantages. However, considering how each country's film industry manages to project their national attitudes through

superficially trivial movie romances, it is important to consider how Americans and Indians attach their attitudes onto the other society's films. This is especially important for America, considering how Bollywood is coming closer and closer into the public consciousness. Americans, judging from their own movies, might easily assume that Bollywood films are just glittery versions of their own ideas. However, such an interpretation entirely misses the inherent patriotism of a Bollywood film, the dedication to "nation" over "self" and to India over anything else.

Slumdog Millionaire certainly illustrated American misinterpretations of a movie that was not even a Bollywood product. Danny Boyle told *New York Times* reporter Sumini Sengupta that he did not consider *Slumdog* a Bollywood movie. "No, no, no, it's not a Bollywood film," he remonstrated. "It's a good story. It's a narrative." However, other newspaper reviews disagreed with him. *China Daily* reporter Alvaro Vargas Llosa said Boyle managed to "tell a Bollywood story without falling into any of Bollywood's conventions." *USA Today* reporter Jake Coyle said *Slumdog Millionaire* represented "Hollywood meets Bollywood," because the film was run by a British crew, with a combination Bollywood and local actors.

However, these reviews gloss over the social distinctions between *Slumdog Millionaire* and a Bollywood film, which are subtler than more obvious differences, like language or built in songs. *Slumdog Millionaire* may contain several aspects of a Bollywood film, such as an underdog hero and a somewhat melodramatic plotline, but it lacks the tone of a Bollywood movie. *Millionaire* is about a hero who overcomes his individual past. There is no consistent interplay with society, no sense of sacrifice or duty towards the country, only towards the self – these may seem like overly trivial

distinctions, but cultural understanding is crucial for any reading of the past. In *Culture as History*, Warren Susman wrote, "the historian searches not only for truth but for meaning." In a globalized world, the historian carries that meaning across continents, where she facilitates new avenues of discussion and cultural comparison.

If Bollywood movies are invading America, Americans should understand what they are and what they mean as national texts. There is nothing wrong with interpreting *Slumdog Millionaire* as a Western narrative, because it is a Western narrative. However, if Americans assume it represents Bollywood and therefore Indian culture, they run the risk of cultural ignorance. This paper attempts to create distinctions between the two traditions, not to create cultural divisions, but to foster intercultural understanding. By understanding what Bollywood movies mean, Americans can better understand what national attitudes Indian audiences, and subsequently Indian American communities, bring to the United States.

Film Chronology

United States Films

42nd Street. Directed by Lloyd Bacon. Warner Brothers: 1933.

Gold Diggers of 1933. Directed by Mervyn LeRoy. Warner Brothers: 1933.

The Gay Divorcee. Directed by Mark Sandrich. RKO: 1934.

Roberta. Directed by William A. Seiter. RKO: 1935.

Top Hat. Directed by Mark Sandrich. RKO: 1935.

Follow the Fleet. Directed by Mark Sandrich. RKO: 1936.

Swing Time. Directed by George Stevens. RKO: 1936.

Shall We Dance?. Directed by Mark Sandrich. RKO: 1937.

They Gave Him a Gun. Directed by W.S. Van Dyke. MGM: 1937.

Bringing Up Baby. Directed by Howard Hawkes. RKO: 1938.

The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle. Directed by H.C. Potter. RKO: 1939.

The Philadelphia Story. Directed by George Cukor. MGM: 1940.

The Shop Around the Corner. Directed by Ernst Lubitsch. MGM: 1940.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Directed by Victor Fleming. MGM: 1941.

Woman of the Year. Directed by George Stevens. MGM: 1942.

Adam's Rib. Directed by George Cukor. MGM: 1949.

The Barkleys of Broadway. Directed by Charles Walters. MGM: 1949.

Pat and Mike. Directed by George Cukor. MGM: 1952.

Beach Blanket Bingo. Directed by William Asher. Alta Vista Productions: 1965.

Gidget. Directed by Paul Wendkos. Columbia Pictures: 1959.

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner. Directed by Stanley Kramer. Columbia Pictures: 1967.

Love and Death. Directed by Woody Allen. United Artists: 1975.

Annie Hall. Directed by Woody Allen. United Artists: 1977.

Manhattan. Directed by Woody Allen, United Artists: 1979.

Joe Versus the Volcano. Directed by John Patrick Shanley. Warner Brothers: 1990.

Sleepless in Seattle. Directed by Nora Ephron. TriStar Pictures: 1993.

You've Got Mail. Directed by Nora Ephron. Warner Brothers: 1998.

Slumdog Millionaire. Directed by Danny Boyle. Celedor Films: 2008.

Indian Films

Aag. Directed by Raj Kapoor. Raj Kapoor Films: 1948.

Andaz. Directed by Mehboob Khan. Mehboob Productions: 1949.

Awaara. Directed by Raj Kapoor. All India Film Corporation: 1951.

Pyaasa. Directed by Guru Dutt. Guru Dutt Films: 1957.

Kaagaz ke Phool. Directed by Guru Dutt. Ajanta Pictures: 1959.

Sahib Bibi aur Ghulam. Directed by Abrar Alvi. Guru Dutt Films: 1962.

Zanjeer. Directed by Prakash Mehra. Prakash Mehra Productions: 1973.

Sholay. Directed by Ramesh Sippy. United Producers: 1975.

Dilwale Dulhania le Jayenge. Directed by Aditya Chopra. Yash Raj Productions: 1995.

Kuch Kuch Hotai Hai. Directed by Karan Johar. Dharma Productions: 1998.

Khabi Kushie Khabie Gham. Directed by Karan Johar. Dharma Productions: 2001.

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