"It was filmed in my home town": Diasporic audiences and foreign locations in Indian popular cinema

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Abstract
The defining feature of Hindi cinema for commentators in the West is the 'interruption' of the narrative, as Gopalan (2002) terms it, by the visualization of songs through dance. Headlines such as 'India's New Cinema has a Global Script' (Pfanner 2006) have, for the past decade, been proclaiming the birth of a globalized Bollywood, but the Bollywood that is 'globalizing' the UK and North America is the Bollywood culture industry of transcultural bhangra, dance fitness classes, and the celebrity world of Aishwarya Rai rather than Hindi cinema, notwithstanding the Oscar nomination of Lagaan (2001) for Best Foreign Language Film in 2002. For the groups of youngsters and young families who comprise the cinema audiences of the UK and North America avoid subtitled ('foreign language') movies, and outside of art film or Indian film festivals, Indian cinema is epitomized by its dance sequences.

Keywords
diasporic, audiences, foreign, locations, indian, town, popular, was, cinema, home, my, filmed

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'It was filmed in my home town': Diasporic Audiences and Foreign Locations in Indian Popular Cinema

Andrew Hassam

The defining feature of Hindi cinema for commentators in the West is the ‘interruption’ of the narrative, as Gopalan terms it, by the visualisation of songs through dance. Headlines such as ‘India’s New Cinema has a Global Script’ have, for the past decade, been proclaiming the birth of a globalised Bollywood, but the Bollywood that is ‘globalising’ the UK and North America is the Bollywood culture industry of transcultural bhangra, dance fitness classes and the celebrity world of Aishwarya Rai rather than Hindi cinema, notwithstanding the Oscar nomination of Lagaan (2001) for Best Foreign Language Film in 2002. The groups of youngsters and young families who comprise the cinema audiences of the UK and North America avoid subtitled (‘foreign language’) movies, and outside of art film or Indian film festivals, Indian cinema is epitomised by its dance sequences.

Non-Indian critics have understandably, if rarely convincingly, read these dance sequences in terms of the Hollywood musical. Newcomers to Indian popular cinema lack the cultural competence to recognise references to earlier non-Western texts and conventions, such as the character types of the Sanskrit epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, or the song sequences of earlier films, such as Shahrukh Khan’s homage to Rishi Kapoor in Om Shanti Om (2007), with their hidden intertextual meanings. More importantly, newcomers to Indian popular cinema fail to notice the importance of the playback singers and composers and the ways in which songs and song sequences circulate separately from the films: the sound track of Lagaan, for example, featuring the music of the revered A. R. Rahman, was released on CD two months before the opening of the film. In 2005, film music comprised 60–70 per cent of music sales in India, and the sale of the soundtrack rights can considerably offset a film’s production costs, with Aamir Khan selling the music and song rights of Lagaan to Sony for a reported Rs60 million. In this context, the Indian phrase ‘song picturisation’ to describe the visualisation of the songs aptly reflects the primacy of the music over the visual image, the song over the dance.

Despite key differences between Hindi popular cinema and the Hollywood musical in terms of their production, distribution and reception, Western audiences new to Hindi popular cinema come to it through a knowledge of the Hollywood musical, and there is some sense in using the musical as a starting point for an analysis of Indian song picturisations, providing Hindi film is not forced to fit an outdated Western film genre and emphasis is placed on difference rather than similarity. In an influential study of the Hollywood musical, Jane Feuer has probed the role of the on-screen audience of song and dance numbers. Feuer distinguishes between the audience in the film (what she terms the internal or theatrical audience) and the audience of the film (the spectator or film audience), and she employs this distinction to argue that the role of the internal audience is to compensate the film audience for the loss of a live performance. Thus, when Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers dance to a live audience on-screen, the film audience shares in the live performance through the reactions of the on-screen audience, with the camera typically positioned behind an applauding audience at the close of the dance. As Feuer puts it: ‘the internal audience serves a symbolic not a realistic purpose; they are the celluloid embodiment of the film audience’s subjectivity.’ Feuer notes that not all dances in a musical are performed in a theatre or on a dance floor, and where the dance sequence is set outdoors, as in many of Gene Kelly’s routines, the film audience is represented by an apparently impromptu gathering of non-elite bystanders, some of whom participate in the performance itself. Nonetheless, such scenes may incorporate a natural proscenium arch and once again, ‘We, the spectators, are encouraged to identify with a spontaneous audience which has actually participated in the performance.'
Other scholars writing on the musical have assumed a similar correspondence between audiences in films and audiences of films. Susan Hayward in her explanation of diegesis as the fictional reality of a film, uses the musical to explain the difference between diegetic and extra-diegetic audiences: ‘Musicals very commonly use diegetic audiences, dancing and singing around the main protagonist(s)—usually a couple—just to show off how brilliant they are in performing their song and dance.’ And on the basis of this distinction, Hayward defines the role of the on-screen audience in much the same terms as Feuer: ‘diegetic audiences also serve to draw us, the extra-diegetic audience, into the screen and thereby into the illusion that we too are part of the diegetic audience.’ Rachel Dwyer draws on this assumed identification between film audiences and internal audiences when she speaks of the song sequence in Hindi film, ‘refracting the exchange of looks between the performer and the audience through the presence of an on-screen audience, onto whom the feeling of voyeurism may be transferred’. Disappointingly, the only evidence offered for such readings is an implicit nod towards Freud’s psychoanalytic theories of identification and voyeurism.

For others, however, the Indian concept of darshan (‘seeing/looking’), integral to the practice of Hinduism and Sikhism, produces a very different cinematic affect in Indian audiences. Dwyer herself usefully defines darshan as, ‘a two-way look between the devotee and the deity that establishes religious authority’ and notes that, according to Ravi Vasudevan, the darshanic may (contra Freud), ‘deploy and subordinate modern methods of subject construction modelled on Hollywood narration’. Philip Lutgendorf makes the interactive nature of darshanic practice clearer: ‘In a crowded Hindu temple, one can observe worshipers positioning themselves so that their eyes have a clear line of contact with those of the god. Their explanations emphasize that they do not merely want to see the deity, but to be seen by him or her so that the deity’s powerful and unwavering gaze may enter into them.’ An interactive darshanic relationship between the on-screen performer and the film audience is held, therefore, to disrupt the voyeurism regarded as characteristic of Western audiences: ‘Unlike the “gaze” of Western film theory, darshan [darshan] is a two-way street; a visual interaction between players who, though not equal, are certainly both in the same theater of activity and capable of influencing each other, especially in the vital realm of emotion.’ Accordingly, the subjectivity of Indian audience members is relational and reciprocal rather than individual and autonomous, as in the West.

For M. Madhava Prasad, this difference in the construction of subjectivity is paralleled by a difference in the mode of address adopted by Indian cinema and Hollywood. Feuer, in her study of the Hollywood musical, distinguishes between a first-person and third-person form of address: whereas the narrative of the musical occurs in the third-person without a consciousness of the audience, the songs, with their live performances to on-screen audiences, adopt a direct or first-person form of address. Prasad employs a similar dichotomy to contrast the realist narrative of Hollywood with the self-consciousness of the ‘frontal spectacle’ that is characteristic of Indian cinema, ‘frontality’ as a cinematic mode of address precluding the voyeurism of Western audiences: ‘The frontal orientation of the screen image, especially in the song-and-dance sequences, makes the erotic spectacle less capable of functioning as a device of male-to-male identification.’ As a result, female eroticism (i.e., ‘skin show’) is mostly confined to the more self-conscious, less voyeuristic performance space of the dance sequences.

It would be misleading to suggest that critics agree on the nature of Indian cinema, but there does emerge something of a consensus concerning an opposition between darshan and voyeurism in terms of a consciousness of the audience in the song picturisations in Indian cinema and the concealment of the audience in Hollywood realism. Yet such an opposition collapses any difference in address between on-screen audiences in Indian song picturisations and Hollywood musicals; in other words, the presence of an audience results in both Indian and Hollywood song sequences.
adopting a first-person or *darshanic* form of address. The critic best placed to contrast the song sequences of the two cinemas, Rachel Dwyer, argues that the presence of an on-screen audience invites a transfer of voyeurism, while also accepting that *darshan* operates as ‘a two-way look’ between film star and audience, and her argument sidesteps any need to reconcile this contradiction between a one-way voyeurism and a two-way look by dismissing the Hollywood musical as dead and of no consequence.\(^{22}\) In sum, critical treatment of the songs in Indian and Hollywood movies tells us little, if anything, about the differences between them.

The most visually attractive difference is the vibrancy of colour and movement, particularly in the wedding festivities, of Indian cinema, though there are numerous less obvious differences, especially the masala of languages, dialects and linguistic registers found in any one film’s lyrics. In her comparison of Hindi cinema with Hollywood movies, Dwyer draws attention to the shifts in location, time and costume that occur in a single song sequence, breaking with the Hollywood convention of continuity of time and place.\(^{23}\) One of the most celebrated examples occurs in the Tamil film, *Jeans* (1998), and in the course of one song, ‘Poovukul’, Aishwarya Rai dances in front of the Great Wall of China, the Eiffel Tower, the Empire State Building, the Taj Mahal, the Pyramids, the Colosseum and the Leaning Tower of Pisa. To the degree that audiences make sense of such shifts in continuity as an expression of the dreams or fantasies of the protagonists, then similar shifts can occur within dream sequences in European or Hollywood realist movies, but ever since the first appearance of overseas locations in films like *Sangam* (1964) and *An Evening in Paris* (1967), song picturisations have come to include a foreign background as almost mandatory, at least in Hindi cinema. Indeed, according to Lakshmi Srinivas, viewing such sequences may contribute to the high level of repeat viewings of Indian films, with some viewers claiming that their sole reason for having repeatedly watched *Indian* (1996; Hindi title *Hindustani*) was a song picturisation filmed in Australia featuring kangaroos.\(^{24}\)

The reasons for the increase in foreign locations are manifold, and the inclusion of exotic locales reflects economic, technical and aesthetic shifts within the Indian film industry. Today, as Gopalan has noted, song picturisations are related especially to tourism and consumerism: ‘Not unlike the commercial imperative towards product placement in contemporary American cinema, song and dance sequences draw in a whole host of adjacent economies such as tourism and consumerism that are not so easily compartmentalized in Indian cinema.’\(^{25}\) In other words, while audiences in South Asia may pay money to see their favourite stars singing in exotic locales, and while they may especially enjoy images of a consumer lifestyle on display in the shopping malls of overseas cities, the film-maker’s choice of locale has become heavily influenced by the production incentives offered by governments aiming to promote tourism, inward investment and business migration from among the growing Indian middle-classes. The mountains of Kashmir as a romantic destination for the hero and heroine were replaced by the Swiss Alps in the 1980s, which were themselves supplemented by the mountains of New Zealand and Scotland in the 1990s; but the increase in overseas locations has also seen an increase in urban settings, with New York and London the pre-eminent choice due to a combination of their iconicity, blatant consumerism and financial incentives. Sydney, Toronto and, more recently, Cape Town, are the other major cities outside of Asia that regularly attract Indian film-makers, though Rome and Paris have remained popular due to their romantic connotations, and Dubai is steadily building up its profile in Indian films. But the newest development has been the growth among the global cities of Asia, such as Seoul, Singapore and, especially, Bangkok.

The main cities appearing in Indian cinema—New York, London, Sydney, Toronto, Cape Town, Dubai and Bangkok—all have significant South Asian populations. While critics have recognised that such cities constitute strong overseas markets for Indian cinema, no-one has attempted to examine what part diasporic family and business networks may play in the choice of overseas filming location, though given the size and spread of the Indian diaspora, the relationship is
possibly no more than a coincidence. There is, however, a necessary high correlation between these cities and those Indian films that explore the lives of Indians overseas, marked in its most recent phase by the release in 1995 of *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995). Like earlier Yash Chopra productions (*Faasle* 1985, *Chandni* 1989, *Darr* 1993), *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (*DDLJ*) sets the awakening of love between hero and heroine against the mountains of Switzerland, but the everyday life to which they return is that of London rather than Mumbai. Both hero and heroine have been brought up in Britain, one being born there and the other being taken there as a young child, and while not all non-resident Indian (NRI) heroes and heroines that have followed *DDLJ* have been born overseas, they have become increasingly comfortable with living their everyday lives outside India. Major Hindi productions, such as *Kal Ho Naa Ho* (2003), *Neal ’n Nikki* (2005), *Salaam Namaste* (2005), *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (2006), *Heyy Baby* (Sajid Khan, 2007), *Jhoom Barabar Jhoom* (2007), *Race* (2008) and *Crook* (2010) are set entirely overseas, whilst Tamil cinema (e.g., *Nala Damayanthi* 2003, *London* 2005, *Unnale Unnale* 2007, *Aridhu Aridhu* 2010), Telugu cinema (e.g., *Vamsi* 2000, *Mr. Errababu* 2005, *Chintakayala Ravi* 2008, *Orange* 2010) and, now, Punjabi cinema (*Virsa*, 2010) have contributed to this trend by setting substantial parts of their stories overseas.

A number of studies have attempted to describe and explain these changes, assessing the shifts in the representation of NRIs in Indian cinema from the perspective of either Indian or diasporic audiences. Recent Indian interest in its diaspora was marked by the Report of the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora presented to the Indian Prime Minister in 2002, behind which lay those wealthy NRIs and Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) whom the Indian government is trying to attract (back) to India, with recognition of NRIs and PIOs now being marked each January by Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, a special programme of events in partnership with the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs. In terms of popular culture, Sujata Moorti has looked not at the effect of India on the diaspora but at ‘the effect of the diaspora on the Indian imagination’, in particular, at how the diaspora has produced a globalised Indian identity within India, while at the same time helping to reassert traditional Indian values. There has also been good work on Indian audiences, such as Shakuntala Rao’s interviews with students in Patiala in Punjab that reveal how the lives of NRI yuppies as portrayed in Hindi cinema can alienate non-elite, rural Indian audiences; as one interviewee put it: ‘Only Punjabi films show what NRIs are really doing[,] like working in gas stations or working in a restaurant like in *Des Hoyaa Pardes*. Hindi films don’t show how Indians abroad are living.’ This is not strictly true, and the petrol station in *Des Hoyaa Pardes* (2004) is prefigured in *DDLJ*, while the New York taxi drivers in *Aa Ab Laut Chalen* (1999) and *Ta Ra Rum Pum* (2007) also come to mind; but the sentiment nevertheless attests to an alienation of rural audiences from films featuring wealthy NRIs. Conversely, as Srinivas has observed in terms of Kannada cinema, where Indian middle-class audiences have been wooed away from India’s regional cinemas towards Hindi movies, those cinemas have been forced to cater more exclusively for rural audiences, which is becoming their main market. Rao’s reference to Punjabi films is a rare acknowledgement of Indian cinemas in languages other than Hindi, and scant critical attention has been paid to Tamil or Telugu cinema outside of India, despite each producing annually the same number of films as Hindi cinema; as Aswin Punathambekar has noted:

> While Bollywood may affect to speak for and about Indianness, we need to keep in mind our lack of understanding of how different linguistic groups in diverse settings in the Indian diaspora (Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Bengali, and so on in Malaysia, Fiji, Norway, South Africa, etc.) engage with different regional cinemas and how the politics and pleasures in those cases intersect with Bollywood’s ‘national’ narratives.
In addition, studies of the reception of Indian films within the diaspora have concentrated on the
USA or the UK, with the notable exception of the study of South Asian audiences in Germany by
Christiane Brosius. The least convincing of these studies make no reference to actual audiences,
instead extrapolating from the films an ideal ‘diajloric spectator’ or ‘imagined space’ occupied by
a diasporic audience. Happily, there are a growing number of studies based on surveys and
interviews that, as in Rao and Brosius, draw attention to the complex, diverse and frequently
contradictory reactions of real people to these films. Drawing on her sociological study of cinema
viewing in Bangalore, Srinivas writes:

Through selective viewing, habituees do not consume a narrative with its own sequence and
coherence. Their practices enable them to cobble together fragments to reconstruct an
entertainment to suit their taste and needs. Cinema becomes a group construction, one which
is particular to a local setting, rather than a mass media product which is universal.
Consequently the ‘film’ that emerges is the result of audience interaction rather than a
construction of the film-maker’s which audiences passively consume. In this context,
cinema does not provide a homogenizing effect, rather, plural audiences construct
differentiated experiences.

We need, therefore, to be wary of extrapolating an ideal ‘diajloric spectator’ from the films as
texts, and as Shakuntala Banaji notes of her study of young people in London of Indian, Pakistani
and Bangladeshi background: ‘Rather than discovering a single, coherent “diajloric response” to
the act of Hindi film viewing, I found major differences between the film viewing contexts and
experiences of young British-Asian people from different communities in London.’

Despite the mantra of a globalised Bollywood, the study of the reception of Indian cinema outside
of India has to date been narrow in scope, ignoring global diversity in favour of the globalising
‘diajloric response’ to be found in the USA. Putting to one side the dominance of inward-looking
studies of either the USA or the UK, the focus on Hindi cinema has not only marginalised other
Indian cinemas, which most writers choose to ignore or are ignorant of, it has also been largely
preoccupied with the role of cinema in the maintenance, negotiation or creation of an Indian identity
among the diaspora. Jigna Desai, for example, argues that, unlike in the darshanic relationship
which depends on a recognition of difference between image and spectator, ‘the diasporic spectator
desires and aspires to be like and imitate the original upon which it gazes’. Such studies, therefore,
tell us little about how, say, a Tamil movie like Nala Damayanthi which features a Sri Lankan
Tamil Australian living in Melbourne may, as well as maintaining, negotiating or creating a
Tamilian identity (in all its political and cultural complexity), maintains, negotiates or creates
identification with an Australian host land within the Sri Lankan Tamil community in Melbourne.
These may be considered as opposite sides of the same coin, but if Bollywood is truly globalised,
then conclusions about British Asian identities drawn from, say, the reception in London of Ramji
Londonwaley (2005) need to be compared not with the film’s reception in Mumbai, which is
implicit in studies of the ‘diajloric’ spectator or audience, but with the reception in Melbourne of
Nala Damayanthi, the Tamil film of which Ramji Londonwaley was the Hindi remake.

Manu Madan has written of a screening of Rishi Kapoor’s Aa Ab Laut Chalen in Perth, Western
Australia, which attracted a much larger than usual Indian audience due to the appearance of Perth
in a song picturisation. Shots of Kings Park produced laughter, clapping and cheers, and Madan
suggests that the film helped its audience to articulate an Australian aspect of its diasporic identity:
‘Bollywood’s interest in Australia has made the diaspora take note of the specificities of their
location (city, landscape, culture) and become conscious of both the Australian nuances that inform
their identity and the diasporic aspect of their Indian identity.’ With the growth in the number of
Indian films featuring overseas locations, studies of the role of Hindi cinema in maintaining,
negotiating and creating an Indian identity among the diaspora need to be counter-balanced by
studies of the role of Indian cinema in maintaining, negotiating and creating an identification with the host land. To be sure, not many film-makers in India would be able to explore diasporic lives in the way they have been explored by diasporic film-makers like Mira Nair and Gurinder Chadha, notwithstanding attempts such as Puneet Sira’s 1...Proud to be an Indian (2004) or Jag Mundhra’s two films, Provoked: A True Story (2006) and Shoot on Sight (2007). Nonetheless, Madan’s account of the celebration of brief glimpses of Kings Park appearing in a song sequence in a movie set in the USA suggests an almost parochial desire by Indian communities overseas for their host land to be recognised by Indian cinema.

Raminder Kaur in her analysis of British Asian responses to Bollywood has sought to explore not only identification with India but the processes of self-identification involved in viewing representations of one’s own diasporic community on-screen; that is, ‘the idea that ingredients designed with the so-called NRI/“diasporan” in mind do not necessarily lead to a concerted series of identifications from British Asians’. Through interviewing second generation British (South) Asians about their experiences of watching DDLJ, Kaur identified a ‘disidentification’ that co-existed with an emotional engagement with Indian cinema, a momentary and contingent resistance to attempts by Indian film-makers and their corporate financiers to persuade them to maintain emotional and financial links with India; as one interviewee put it: ‘The hero and heroine—they might have been born in England but they’re like those in Goodness Gracious Me when the Indian students go on an outing to England.’ Of particular interest, in terms of the song picturisations, is Kaur’s finding that her interviewees were more critical of the realist (third-person) narrative sections of the film than of the fantasy (first-person) song sequences: ‘The disposition to have a willing suspension of disbelief is less so for the familiar, the mundane, particularly if it pertains to an area that the spectators recognise and is firmly implanted as part of the narrative, rather than couched as a backdrop for a song routine.’ In other words, while British Asian spectators may be prepared to immerse themselves in the romance of Shahrukh singing to Kajol on an open-top London tourist bus, they find it improbable that Amrish Puri should, after feeding the pigeons in Trafalgar Square, walk past Buckingham Palace on his way to work.

Here we might return to the orthodoxy that film audiences identify with the on-screen audiences of musical sequences. If, as Feuer puts it, ‘We, the spectators, are encouraged to identify with a spontaneous audience which has actually participated in the performance’, then Kaur’s findings suggest that diasporic Indian audiences would find unproblematic the representation of themselves as an on-screen audience. Whilst couples in Indian films might dance romantically alone in the mountains of Switzerland, Scotland or New Zealand, there is little chance of not drawing a crowd when dancing in the streets of New York or London, especially when news of the filming can be so rapidly circulated within diasporic communities via the internet and mobile phones. We need, of course, to be wary of the degree to which ‘impromptu’ audiences are spontaneous, and those discussed by Feuer are, as she admits, film extras, and the streets are studio sets. Indian cinema is more flexible, and film-makers regularly break the conventions of Hollywood realism by including in shot crowds who have gathered to watch the filming of fight scenes or dance sequences. One of the reasons given for filming overseas is to simplify the security arrangements required to prevent the film location being overrun by fans, and it would be impossible to shoot street scenes in India without crowds quickly gathering. For similar reasons, impromptu crowds may appear more frequently in smaller budget films, especially Tamil and Telugu movies, which lack the resources for the security and location fees required for street closures; indeed, lower budget films may dispense with professional dancers and co-opt bystanders into short routines, as in Preetse (2000), the songs of which were shot in Australia ‘for the first time in the history of Kannada cinema’ (Nagendrappa n.d.). Indian film-makers, therefore, seem to have made a virtue out of necessity by including casual bystanders in shot and, in so doing, mark the difference in cinematic culture between Indian cinema and Hollywood. Acknowledgement of the camera and film crew, obsessively hidden in Hollywood, disrupts the realist illusion and is consistent with the opposition
between an interactive *darshanic* or first-person relationship between performer and audience and a Hollywood voyeuristic or third-person mode. In sum, we could posit that the difference between the Hollywood musical and the Indian song picturisation is the possibility of including the casual bystander (in some cases, as in *Nala Damayanthi*, captured filming the filming), a difference that interestingly would situate in the Hollywood camp a major Hindi production like *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (2006), which excludes the casual bystander by a combination of camera angle and restricting public access to outdoor public locations.

As Gopalan reminds us, song picturisations are now entangled with the adjacent economies of tourism and consumerism, with heroes and heroines dancing alternately in front of, say, Piccadilly Circus or the Brooklyn Bridge and an outlet for McDonald’s or Starbucks (Emraan Hashmi, in fact, plays a UK tour guide in *Dil Diya Hai* 2006). To the degree that such sequences are to be read as romantic fantasies, enhanced by the fantasies of tourism and consumer marketing, then it may well be that diasporic audiences are disposed to suspend their disbelief and identify with the impromptu audiences that gather to watch the filming. Yet each of the various treatments of the supposedly symbolic process of audience identification assume a correlation in the composition of audiences of the film and in the film, and such discussions tells us nothing about cases where there are differences in culture, skin colour and location between film and on-screen audiences. At what level, for example, is there identification between Rao’s Punjabi interviewees, who were critical of the representation of American NRIs in *Swades*, and South Asian bystanders in Trafalgar Square in *Speed* (2007)? Or between a Sikh spectator in Toronto and the Afro-American internal New York audience in *Jaan-E-Mann* (2006)? Or between an Australian Tamil spectator and the White Australian on-screen audience in *Pokkiri* (2007)? Or, indeed, between an Italian-Australian spectator and the Italian bystanders in Venice in *Bachna ae Haseeno* (2008)? And with some films set in one country yet filmed in another, there are almost countless possible permutations.

It would be absurd to suggest that sufficient audience research could produce an algorithm for processing data, such as the cultural background of the spectator and their degree of familiarity with the song locations, which would reveal the level of identification with the on-screen audience. Nonetheless, it seems equally unlikely that the cultural background of the spectator and their degree of familiarity with the locations of the song do not play a part in how song picturisations set outside of India are received by individual spectators. This is not to dismiss the idea that commercial cinemas address what Srinivas terms a ‘habituated’ audience, ‘audiences who have developed a relationship with the films based on long acquaintance with them’. Cinema-going in India is generally a collective experience and, according to Srinivas, film-makers, ‘attentive to the expectations of habituees, construct the films as a dialogue with such viewers’. Yet it is also apparent that there are similar collective and habituated audiences for Indian films outside of India, audiences which can identify with their host land as well as their homeland, as Madan’s example of the laughing, clapping and cheering Indian audience in Perth demonstrates.

Possibly the willing suspension of disbelief, by which Kaur accounted for the less critical attitude of British Asians to the song sequences set in London, is related to a desire to see their city projected well overseas, especially in India. The shots of Kings Park in Perth that appear in the song in *Aa Ab Laut Chalen* project a romantic retreat of spring flowers and glimpses of the Swan River, the kind of image that makes Kings Park a popular location for local wedding photographers. Yet observations of cinema audiences undertaken by Srinivas suggest that fantasy song sequences nonetheless permit identification with the location as a real place that is knowable to a local audience. Audience members adopt a selective viewing style and have different levels of emotional engagement with what is happening on screen:

> Viewers may hum along with a tune or tap their fingers to the music even when it is background for a tense or tragic scene. Such aesthetic appreciation extends as viewers look
beyond the film to the reality which contributed to it, in what may be termed a documentary mode of viewing (Sobchack, 1999), as they remark on scenery ‘See it’s [Melkote, where the film was shot] so beautiful! We can go there on a picnic all of us!’\textsuperscript{45}

Such a viewing style is not inconsistent with Kaur’s findings, but it reveals identification with place as the result of a disruption of the ‘first-person’ fantasy by a documentary ‘third-person’ viewing mode. In other words, where spectators accept the idealisation of a known location in a fantasy song sequence, their parochialism results in both a belief in the fantasy projected and a negation of the exotic nature of its location. While there may indeed be a desire on the part of members of a diasporic audience to believe in the touristic projection of their host land in India, spectators may at the same time adopt a documentary mode of viewing.

With studies of diasporic audiences so preoccupied with Indianness and with identification with the homeland, the data for an analysis of any documentary identification with the host land does not exist. However, a certain parochialism, or loyalty to one’s city, comes into play when Indian films are discussed on internet forums. On the Internet Movie Database, a dispersed South Asian membership dominates discussions of major Hindi films. One contributor established a ‘Torontonian’ identity by pointing out that parts of *Kal Ho Naa Ho*, which was set in New York, were filmed in Toronto:

In the very beginning when Pritti Zinta is talking about New York there is a scene where they are showing an intersection with traffic moving. At the red light you can clearly see many TTC (Toronto Transit Commission) buses go by which are unmistakable by any torontonian. Just thought I’d point that out, found it to be rather interesting.\textsuperscript{46}

Another contributor, who admitted watching *Salaam Namaste* largely, ‘because it was filmed in my home town, Melbourne’,\textsuperscript{47} provoked others into defending the film’s depiction of life in Melbourne by commenting: ‘I had no idea that the story would be about a couple having a “live-in” relationship. This is considered as taboo in our culture. Our parents would kill us or disown us. Come on think about it all you Indians out there...have lived here all my life, and u know what, its ok to cohabitate here’\textsuperscript{49}—another contributor from Melbourne felt able to defend the film on the grounds of realism, of the film’s depiction of life in Melbourne: ‘i’m frm melbourne as well and i have a lot of friends (desi and non-desi) who have found themselves in similar situations, be it live in relationships, or unplanned pregnancies.’\textsuperscript{50} Being a member of the Indian diaspora does not prevent spectators outside of South India from identifying with an ‘exotic’ locale as documentary where the overseas locale is their home town.

While there is no data relating specifically to spectator identification with the on-screen audience in song picturisations, recognition of a familiar locale triggers a parochialism that we might anticipate would also be triggered by familiarity with the on-screen bystanders. In other words, a documentary mode of viewing song sequences does not lead to the kind of ‘disidentification’ with London noted by Kaur in the comments by British Asians sceptical of the verisimilitude of the narrative, or third-person, sections of the film; rather, the overlaying of the fantasy of the song sequences by familiarity increases identification with the locale. Internet forums not only distribute information about the exact location in which film crews are filming, they also record the experience of watching the filming and, on occasion, the possibility of appearing on screen. In November 2006, notices were sent out inviting locals to participate as hockey spectators in the filming of *Chak De! India* in Melbourne: ‘Crowds are desperately needed!! If you would like to meet Shah Rukh Khan, attend the state netball hockey centre in Melbourne on the 24th November, to be part of the crowd of this feature film. Wear your brightest colours—the more you stand out, the more likely you will
be featured. Inevitably, the reality of the occasion did not match the expectation of meeting Shahrukh, but even a glimpse of him made the waiting worthwhile:

I WAS THERE!!! Yeah i only got to see a little of him when he got out of the car, then nothing happened for the rest of the night (that i saw). He came out of this white sedan (a holden i think) out of a tunnel and waved to the crowd. I think he might have had a bit of a beard and his hair kinda long and shaggy. Yeah, alot of people wore traditional indian costume and they split us into either ‘Australian’ or ‘Indian’ depending on what we were wearing. Yeah and they filmed us “cheering” as they camera panned past us, so Yay! im in the movie!!!

When *Chak De! India* was released in Melbourne, many among the audiences were looking for glimpses of themselves among the crowd at the hockey match between India and Australia. Yet whilst, globally, such viewers comprise an insignificant proportion of a movie’s total overseas box office, their mode of viewing is much the same as those who, like the contributor who provoked the discussion of morality in *Salaam Namaste*, watch a film ‘because it was filmed in my home town’.

Familiar places and faces are important in the kind of documentary mode of viewing which seeks them out. It plays to a parochialism that looks for similarity rather than difference, particularly among audiences more used to seeing Mumbai or Delhi on screen than their home town. And while, for first generation migrants, Mumbai or Delhi might be familiar as known places, images of Perth or Toronto or Cape Town appearing in Indian cinema break with the generic norms that create expectations of the places and faces most likely to appear on screen. The kind of audience reactions that Kaur noted, that at once criticise the verisimilitude of the narrative sections while relishing the tourism fantasy of the song sequences, depend on a parochialism induced by a documentary mode of viewing. This parochialism may in part reflect a desire for the host land to gain a certain status from recognition by Indian cinema and cinema audiences in Mumbai and Delhi. But it may also in part reflect a parochialism shared with non-South Asian spectators who are part of a non-ethnically defined viewing community, one which includes anyone who watches Indian popular cinema and which is defined by Adrian Athique as, ‘the audience constructed by participation in the consumption of Indian movies, which are perceived as enacting diverse cultural dialogues across a wide and variegated social space’. The social space of the consumption of Indian cinema also includes non-South Asian film festival audiences, and films like *Salaam Namaste* or *Ka Ho Naa Ho* have the potential to promote cross-cultural communication and a greater awareness of South Asian cultural values within Melbourne or New York.

In conclusion, Jane Feuer’s argument that ‘the internal audience serves a symbolic not a realistic purpose; they are the celluloid embodiment of the film audience’s subjectivity’ is inadequate as an explanation of the role of internal audiences in Indian cinema. This is not only because the presence of casual bystanders taking photos of the stars and looking into the camera breaks the realist convention of concealing the presence of camera and film crew, a repudiation of Hollywood’s practice that makes possible, in Lutgendorf’s word, ‘a visual interaction between players who, though not equal, are certainly both in the same theater of activity and capable of influencing each other’. Feuer’s explanation is also inadequate because the increase in the number of overseas cities appearing in Indian cinema has resulted in more and more diasporic South Asian spectators seeing their home towns represented on screen in Indian movies, with the documentary mode of viewing familiar places and faces countering any purely symbolic identification with the casual bystanders.

Without data against which to test the interpretation of informal remarks posted on internet forums, how spectators view their home towns in Indian cinema remains largely speculation. However, it is clear that studies of the representation of the diaspora in Indian cinema have mostly accepted the
representation in those films and consequently focussed on the ways in which subjects negotiate the strength or precise configuration of their Indian identity. It is a commonplace among such studies that Indian films no longer set up an opposition between a Western lifestyle and a traditional Indian lifestyle, and that the films depict a modern Indian lifestyle; as Punathambekar, quoting Arvind Rajagopal, puts it: ‘NRIs are acutely conscious of their position as “an apotheosis of the Indian middle class, exemplifying what ‘Indians’ could achieve if they were not hampered by an underdeveloped society and an inefficient government”.’

The conferring of identity by the filmmakers on the locals who volunteered to play the hockey crowd in Chak De! India is, in this sense, retrogressive: ‘a lot of people wore traditional Indian costume and they split us into either “Australian” or “Indian” depending on what we were wearing.’ To be Indian, is to wear Indian costume (at least for women). Yet, even if scholars, like the film-makers, tell us that modern Indians who dress in a globalised Western style can still hold traditional values, they have lacked appreciation of the ways in which members of the diaspora can be Australian or British or American. What is missing from such studies is recognition of the ways in which Australians of Indian descent can barrack for the Australian hockey team in Chak De! India or cheer when a shot of Perth comes on screen in Aa Ab Laut Chalen. This is not to deny that others will not share such parochialism, or that parochialism is not part of a more complex ‘hyphenated’ identification, though it is also salutary to remember that not all among the Indian diaspora watch Indian films. We know little about how the representation of, say, Jaggu Yadav (Javed Jaffrey), the Australianised Indian in Salaam Namaste, is viewed among audiences in Australia in terms of ‘Australianness’; or how, in Thiruttu Payale (2006), a Tamil film also shot in Australia, an advertisement for Jayco camper trailers is received by a local Tamil audience in Dandenong, where the trailers are manufactured. What is missing from most accounts of the ‘globalisation’ of Indian popular cinema are the reactions of local audiences to the documentary depiction of familiar places and faces on screen.

References:


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1 Gopalan, Cinema of Interruptions.
2 Pfanner, ‘India’s New Cinema.’
3 Kao and Do Rozario, ‘Imagined Spaces.’
4 Mishra, Bollywood Cinema, p. 4.
7 Tyrrell and Dudrah, ‘Music in the Bollywood Film,’ p. 196.
10 Feuer, The Hollywood Musical, p. 27.