Working Paper Series

Naql, Iqtida, Muarada, and Javab g'oi, Sariqa, and Mahumda Sariqa in the Hindi *Masala* Film[1]

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Abstract: In view of the intensified debate on the practice of plagiarism in Bollywood cinema with the tightening of copyright regulations, the practice of copying, if any, in Hindi cinema requires serious investigation. Against the popular perception of the commercial Hindi film as a "bad" copy of the Hollywood film and frequent allegations of plagiarism (Wax 2009), this essay focuses on Perso-Arabic poetic and aesthetic traditions animating Hindi commercial cinema, particularly on the category of *naql* (transmission, imitation, mimicry) to propose an aesthetics of the copy. The essay demonstrates that the concept of naql, the dominant trope of Perso-Arabic compositions transmitted over the centuries through a class of hereditary performers known as naqals or naqlis, can throw new light on "the culture of copy" that pervades the Hindi film industry.

Introduction

Commercial Hindi cinema, if not completely elided, was largely dismissed in Euro-American cinematic discourse as unoriginal, derivative, and cannibalistic (Graham 1952; Monthly Film Bulletin 1963),[2] a perception that appears to have been shared by film scholars (Chatterjee 2003; Rampal 2007; Minhas 2008),[3] English language media (Singh 1976; Batra 1976; Shamim 1976)[4] and the English speaking elite in India until quite recently. Rosie Thomas, M.

Madhava Prasad, and Tejsawani Ganti have convincingly exonerated Hindi cinema against plagiarism allegations by throwing light on the complex production, consumption, and aesthetic practices through which cinematic plots are Indianised (Thomas 1985; Prasad 1998; Ganti 2013). While these scholars have effectively demonstrated the production of a unique visual and narrative grammar through Hindi cinema's amalgamation of indigenous storytelling and production practices with Hollywood plots and formulae, they have framed the issues of copying and imitation within modern Western debates on imitation and plagiarism. In view of the intensified debate on plagiarism in Bollywood cinema with the tightening of copyright regulations, the practice of copying, if any, in Hindi cinema requires serious investigation. Against the popular perception of the commercial Hindi film as a "bad" copy of the Hollywood film and frequent allegations of plagiarism (Wax 2009), this essay focuses on Perso-Arabic poetic and aesthetic traditions animating Hindi commercial cinema, particularly on the category of *naql* (transmission, imitation, mimicry) to propose an aesthetics of the copy. The essay demonstrates that the concept of naql, the dominant trope of Perso-Arabic compositions transmitted over the centuries through a class of hereditary performers known as naqals or naqlis,[5] can throw new light on the culture of copy that pervades the Hindi film industry.

Naql, Naqal, Mimicry

One of the binaries in the Islamic aqli naqli discourse, which means transmitted or revealed, the term naql is loosely translated as imitation, copying from a model but also as mimicry and parody. The term naqqāl in Persian derives from the Arabic naql and retains the sense of carrying the meaning or image of something (Wolf 2014, p. 35). Naql was also considered the fourth type of saraqa (plagiarism) by Shams-i Qais-i Razi, in his *Al-Mu'jam fi Ma'air-i Ash'ar-il 'Ajam* (1981, p. 1220/1221). Hindi filmmakers' alleged practice of copying reverberates with the multiple meanings of the term naql, including 'carrying, transporting' and 'transmission, report, account, copy' (Wehr 1976), 'transference' (Gleave 2012), and 'imitation, copying from a model' (Gacek 2001, p. 78).[6] Naql and Naqqāl offer the perfect site for the contestation over the meaning of imitation or mimesis in Perso-Arabic, Indo-Islamic, and Western aesthetic theories and its manifestation in specific visual, narrative, and performative practices.

In tracing the Hindi film to Hindu epic traditions, theorists of Indian cinema unwittingly fall back on metaphors such as *bahurupiya* (Sanskrit *bahu* many *rupa* form)[7] and *baazigar* (one who performs the *baazi*) drawn from performing arts (Chakravarty 1993) to conceptualise cinema while turning a blind eye to the overlapping boundaries of Indic performing arts through which the Persian naqli or naqal leaks into the Hindu *bhand* (jester).[8] Neelam Man Singh Chaudhary (2004) translates naqals as imitators by following the Persian roots of naql. Richard Wolf considers the Naqqāl along with the baazigar as a 'prominent category of entertainer stretching from North India to Iran' who 'used to recite, tunefully, texts such as the epic Shāh Nameh and Sā'di's Bustan in urban teahouses of Khorasan and other regions of Khorasan before the revolution of 1979' (2014, p. x).[9] Farina Mir (2006) traces the transmission of the Persian *qisse* to the Indian subcontinent, and emphasises the Persian absorption of Punjabi local traditions through which they evolved into a new genre of the qissa that eventually found their way into the Moghul court and the Deccan. A similar transformation of the naqal from the Persian storyteller to the naqal as a mimic took place in India through the literal translation of the term as impersonator or actor and the storyteller's assumption of multiple roles in order to produce laughter. Hindi cinema's inherent syncretism reaffirms the mixed lineage of hereditary performers.[10]

The similarity between the Persian naqli and his Indian mutants is rooted in their disregard for originality in favour of imitation. Like the Persian naqli who narrated well-known tales from the *Shahnameh* (Yamamoto 2003), the Indian naqals enact incidents from familiar epics or folktales. In their indifference to the originality of plot and delight in detail, digression, and improvisation, they follow traditional Perso-Arabic storytelling practices in which originality and suspense was sacrificed to the pleasure of recognition and comparison. Instead of valorising originality, the audience in a traditional performance was expected to compare various renditions of the same text for identifying fidelity to the original as well as individual creativity.

In Praise of the Culture of Copy

The fact that commercial Indian films continue to reverberate with or borrow plots and themes from Hollywood and World Cinema even a century after the inception of the film industry calls for a serious engagement with the binary of plagiarism and original creativity, a

major criterion often deployed by media specialists to assess the quality of Indian cinema. Any number of examples, including the biggest box office successes or "hits" as they are called in the Hindi film industry's parlance, in nearly a century of filmmaking, illustrate the degree to which the culture of copy dominates Indian cinema spawning several websites dedicated to tracing 'the original versions of every Bollywood film.'[11] This confirmation of the world's largest film industry that boasts of a global spectatorship as being doomed to derivativeness does not explain the mystique of Bollywood films to a significant proportion of the global population, which, it would appear, prefers the copy to the original (Larkin 1997).[12]

With more Euro-American film critics and academics (Thomas 1985; Dwyer 2000; Allen 2006) cultivating a taste for the Bombay *masala* film, the disavowed culture of copy has begun to attract international media attention and academic recognition. Although the serious attention that these scholars have begun to give Hindi film classics is a significant symbolic gesture that multiplies their cultural capital in the Euro-American media landscape, compliments to Hindi cinema's 'skillful borrowing' or 'creative transformation' fail to elucidate the Perso-Arabic traditions structuring the poetics of the copy in Hindi films (Allen 2008b). The perceptions also fail to account for the shades of transmission, transfer, mimicry, and play that are suggested by the Perso-Arabic concept of imitation. The naturalisation of borrowing, crude or creative, in Hindi cinema requires a detailed analysis. How does one differentiate between different forms of influence? When does borrowing stop being creative adaptation and degenerate into shameless copying? How can a nation of more than a billion people and a film industry with the biggest talent pool be bereft of aesthetic originality? How does copying become a means of creative reconstruction in the Hindi film? These questions demand an unpacking of Hindi cinema's narrative and aesthetic difference, predicated on Perso-Arabic imitation theories, from American, European, and other world cinemas, rather than a globalising theory of plagiarism, influence, or adaptation.

As opposed to the established and perhaps normative practice of copying in the Hindi film industry, the discomfiture of the English language film critic, which appears to be shared by the Anglicised cultural elite in urban India, is based on the Western perception of plagiarism as a lazy, dishonest practice that violates the originality premise of creative production. Instead of replicating the investigative pleasures of identifying instances of

plagiarism that film critics and the English speaking elite in India have indulged in, a comparative perspective on the privileging of originality and uniqueness in diverse cultural and aesthetic traditions would prove to be educative in elucidating the pleasures of the copy.[13]

Copy as Unoriginal, Copy as Reinterpretation

The idea of art, conceived as a poor imitation of a transcendental reality, underpinned the privileging of uniqueness and originality in Western Romantic aesthetics despite the widely accepted practice of borrowing in the past. Whether the copy is denigrated as unoriginal or valorised as creative, the myth of origins and the cult of authenticity underlying the systematic redemption of the copy in the West derives its authority from an aesthetic tradition deeply entrenched in a Platonic suspicion of mimesis and art. The notion of art as a copy of a copy and, therefore, unreal and secondary is contingent upon the myth of origins and ideal forms. Terms such as adaptation, influence, plagiarism, and authenticity have been defined with reference to an esthetic propped on modern notions of individual property and ownership in which every act of imitation is framed against the history of a negative view of art as mimesis. Although postmodernism interrogates modernist distrust of adaptation as unoriginal and the latter's premium on uniqueness, it does not escape the paradigmatic burden of mimesis.

In contrast to the negative representation of mimesis in Western arts and aesthetics, imitation and repetition is considered a legitimate aesthetic category in 'Arabic and Persian poetics and poetry', in which may be found 'many degrees and kinds of originality and imitation' (Losensky 1998, p. 106). Asserting that 'the very word "imitation" comes to indicate mimicry or a slavish unimaginative copying' (1998, p. 228), Paul E Losensky, in *The Allusive Field of Drunkenness: Three Safavid Mughal Responses to a Lyric by Baba Fighani*, explains that Arabic and Persian have several words for imitation out of which taqlid comes closest to 'the connotations of the modern English word "imitation" as mimicry or copying' (p. 230). He clarifies that the Persian retains the modern Arabic sense of iqtida, which means to adopt a certain pattern or model of behaviour and adds that *muarada* means 'to face another', which carries 'a sense of rivalry and antagonism' (p. 111). In a similar vein, Julie Meisami, in *Structure and Meaning in Medieval Arabic and Persian Lyric Poetry: Orient*

Pearls, alludes to a range of terms including 'taqlid (imitation in its most general sense)', 'ihtidhā' (*copying)', 'iqtida (active, voluntary following and positive emulation)', and 'muarada (practice by imitation)', to distinguish between different forms of imitation (2003). Confessing that he was forced to use the term imitation in his essay for want of a better alternative, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi states that 'it is not so much that "Imitation" misses the point as that if it is the Aristotelian mimesis, it is a different thing altogether, and more importantly, it issues from entirely different philosophical premises' (2008, p. 2).

In a storytelling tradition where it is less important to tell new stories than to tell old stories in an original fashion, the legitimacy accorded to repetition with a difference questions the negative connotations of imitation in the Platonic theory of mimesis. Against the Platonic understanding of art as a copy of a copy, the notion of art as naql (transferring or transporting) presents a novel way of analysing the aesthetic of the copy animating the Hindi film.[14]

Where it is Plagiarism, Where it is Not

Stewart Home has defined 'plagiarism as the negative point of a culture that finds its ideological justification in the unique' (1995, p. 49). Home articulates the modernist privileging of uniqueness to commodification and its search for a new, original language to the capitalist project. The imbrication of plagiarism with copyright laws, in which it is interpreted as the theft of intellectual property, underlines its historicity and cultural specificity. In a culture that places a premium on uniqueness and originality, the pejorative meanings of the term emerge from the concept of property and individual ownership and attract punitive action. Plagiarism, defined as 'the act of appropriating the literary composition of another author, or excerpts, ideas, or passages therefrom, and passing the material off as one's own creation', in *Legal Dictionary*, 'is not a legal term; however, it is often used in lawsuits. Courts recognize acts of plagiarism as violations of Copyright law, specifically as the theft of another person's Intellectual Property.'[15] The charges of plagiarism can be substantiated in legalistic language only through reference to the protection of intellectual property and copyrights of "original" material.

Losensky, calling attention to 'the dynamic, dialectical relationship between originality and imitation' in the Arabic and Persian tradition, asserts that 'the line between

the two is elusive and shifting, and they are frequently indistinguishable' (1998, p. 228). Faruqi agrees 'that plagiarism, as understood in Western poetics, has never been much of an issue in Persian poetry' (2008, p. 2). 'The earliest and perhaps the most authoritative pronouncement about saraqa (plagiarism) in Persian literary theory', according to Faruqi, 'is by Shams-i Qais-i Razi in his Al-Mu'jam fi Ma'air-i Ash'ar-il 'Ajam (1220/1221)' (in 2008, p. 4). In an entire chapter devoted to plagiarism, Razi lists four types of plagiarism in poetry: i) *intihal* (falsely attributing to oneself the words of another); ii) *salkh* (to skin or flay an animal, to take off someone's clothes); iii) *ilmam* (approaching or becoming close to something); and iv) naql (transferring or transporting). In a similar vein, Holmberg quotes Abu Hilal al-Askari (after 395/1005) who stated: 'I've heard that anyone who adopts a concept word is a [full-scale] plagiarist; anyone who takes part of one is [designated] an inserter; and anyone who takes one and adorns it with words that are better than the original is more praiseworthy than his predecessor' (in Holmberg 2006, p. 198). According to Holmberg, plagiarism includes three degrees of plagiarism: i) plagiarism (*sariqa*), which is not necessarily an act to be condemned because it includes both good theft (sariqa hasana) and laudable theft (*sariqa mahmuda*); ii) *tadmin* (incorporation) direct quotation with a citation from the original author; and iii) muarada (literary opposition, confrontation), the technical term for imitation or emulation of a literary text (2006, p. 198). Such understandings of copying and imitation reveal a more heterogenous approach to storytelling and narrative than that found in Western legal-literary models of originality. Being attentive to the diverse historical variagies of storytelling and "originality" enables a more nuanced appreciation of the cultural politics of copying in Bollywood films.

The denial mode, into which Bollywood producers strategically retreat in order to evade increasingly stringent copyright regulations, cannot erase a longstanding practice in Bollywood.[16] Although plagiarism might be a habit that the Indian film industry, allegedly working with tight shooting schedules and shortage of good plots, has allegedly indulged for decades, porous copyrights laws in South Asia prevented plagiarism charges from being leveled against Bollywood producers until recently (Shedde 2003).[17] As opposed to the established practice of sariqa in the Hindi film industry, the discomfiture of the English language critics, shared by the Anglicised cultural elite, is based on the perception of plagiarism as a lazy, dishonest practice that violates the originality premise of creative

production. The denunciation of plagiarism in Hindi cinema by elite Anglicised spectators is predicated on the valorisation of uniqueness and originality in Euro-American media circles despite the widespread practice of the commercial Hollywood cinema, which is, equally, based on copy. Following the informed opinion of Anglicised Indian film critics and intellectuals based on their familiarity with the original that they use to place themselves above the average Hindi film audience, this view of plagiarism has percolated to a wider audience. The Anglicised Indian elite's apologia conceals both a secret "Bollywood" fetish and a hope that the gradual disindenturement of Hindi cinema through the invention of original storylines and plots would release it from its early imitative stage.

Lifting (*sarq*) or Creative Transformation (naql)

While explaining the complex distinction between repetition and originality in medieval Arab discussions on saraka, Losensky points out that most mazmun or themes, images and metaphors belong to all poets (1998, p. 228). Faruqi explains that in Persian literary theory, 'the *ma'ni* (meaning) and *mazmun* (theme) can be two different things' but the same mazmun could be used in different ways, or made new 'by addition, alteration, or shift of emphasis' to produce multiple meanings (2008, p. 2). Faruqi brilliantly demonstrates how the mazmun could be made new in the *sabk-i-hindi* tradition of *taza go'i* (uttering the new) and *javab go'i* (replying) to produce a different meaning (p. 1). Razi's opinion and judgements of various forms of saraqa are seminal to the understanding of the different forms of borrowings in Hindi cinema:

> And if the second poet [who lifts the *mazmun* of the first] does not provide an
> addition or a supplement to the *mazmun* of the first one in such a way as to enhance
> its elegance, and does not clothe it in the dress of a language more expressive and
> sweeter, then he is a thief of *mazmuns*. (1981, p. 476)

The cultural politics of "copying" is complicated by the practices of some of the most revered figures in the Hindi film industry who have allegedly pillaged the entire world's poetic and sonic heritage to make them available to a local audience. While the most unimaginative borrowings in Hindi films might include "lifting" of car chases, action sequences, or "love scenes" from the world's diverse pool of films (Banerjee 2003),[18] even the best of Bollywood sometimes displays an intriguing influence of mazmun (themes, motifs, and plots) from

Hollywood or other World Cinema classics. Unlike the stereotyped Bollywood movie mogul who supervises the concoction of the strange potpourri called Bollywood by ordering that ingredients from "phoren" (foreign) films be added in the right proportion to ensure his film's box office success (Banerjee 2003), highly respected figures in the film industry couldn't possibly have chosen the easy option of borrowing from foreign sources and compounded it by intihal (falsely attributing to oneself the words of another) or not acknowledging their influences. Yet the plagiarism charge connects them to the confirmed plagiarists of Hindi cinema.

Since an overwhelming number of Hindi films reflect strong Western and non-Western cinematic influences, the difference between a well made and poorly made film is often reduced to that between creative borrowing and plagiarism. In Hindi cinematic jargon, this is often translated as creative inspiration or iqtida (active, voluntary following, and positive emulation) by certain filmmakers that degenerates into frame by frame copying or *sarq* (theft) in others. A large proportion of copying in Hindi cinema belongs to a blatant form of intihal plagiarism. In sharp contrast to these are conscious adaptations by "thinking" filmmakers that betray a modernist "anxiety of influence" in indigenising alien filmic contents. A final form of copying is a postmodern repetition of canonical texts with a parodic intention. All copies, good or bad, involve some form of homage (iqtida) and parody (naql) in varying degrees. While a number of Hindi filmmakers pilfered in total innocence or ignorance of copyrights laws until recently, the acknowledgement [tadmin] of the influences of world cinematic classics by the educated minority belongs to the category of 'inspired-by' in Richard Allen's typology (2006) whose productions may be interpreted both as acts of homage (iqtida), tribute and muarada, naql or '(re-)interpretation and then(re-creation)' (Hutcheon 2006, p. 8). The idea of adaptation as an 'act of alteration performed upon specific cultural works of the past and [which] dovetails with a general process of cultural recreation' can be applied to some Bollywood classics (Fischlin & Fortier 2000, p. 4).

Creative Adaptation (Naql)

The Indianisation of alien plots, themes, and motifs is definitely an important element in the 'copycat' culture of Hindi cinema (Ganti 2013). This creative adaptation often emerges from the variety of didacticism that the educated classes worldwide chose to appropriate from

the classics of world literature in order to educate the masses. Some of the best adaptations of "phoren" films in popular Hindi cinema illustrate the successful translation of alien concepts into familiar categories to ensure a seamless "glide" from the rational, individualistic, sexualised West to the communalistic, miracle-seeking, spiritualised East.

The plagiarism charge was ironically first leveled at Sampooran Singh Kalra alias Gulzar, defined as the first Indian art cinema director, whose "off-beat" experiments in the 1970s were denied the status of original creativity due to their being viewed as Indian "takeoffs" on world cinematic classics (Singh 2011). Gulzar's alleged remakes of *The Sound of Music* (1965) in *Parichay* (1972) or *The Comedy of Errors in Angoor* (1982) were received by cinemagoers unexposed to English cinema as "off-beat" even without the English language media redirecting them to their original sources.[19] The unambiguous delight of the elite English language film critic lay in exposing the serious filmmaker as a vulgar plagiarist who pillaged the world's classics to repackage them for the consumption of unsuspecting masses. The masses, however, innocent of the canonical texts of world cinema, hailed his works as cinematic masterpieces.

The most mediatised case of plagiarism in the 1970s, Gulzar's alleged adaptation of *The Sound of Music*, may well serve to illustrate how the same mazmun could be made new in the sabk-i-hindi tradition of taza go'i to produce a different meaning. In order 'to adjust, to alter, to make suitable' (Hutcheon 2006, p. 7) Hollywood's best known musical to an Indian setting, Gulzar substituted several key features and motifs with Indian equivalents to meet the "probability" criteria and "moral" concerns of Hindi audience. While the *zamindari* (landowner) backdrop offered an easy fit with the feudal aristocratic milieu in *The Sound of Music* and the children could easily be transposed to a non-European setting, the romantic theme of the male protagonist's relationship with his children's governess was modified by the film's shifting its love interest to the second generation through an emotional bonding between the quiet, soft-spoken tutor and his young ward. While retaining the central theme of the original – of music and love as being a more effective means of guiding young children than discipline – Gulzar effectively "Indianised" the cinematic setting by displacing the strict stepmother with a disciplinarian grandfather and the loving female governess with a sensitive male tutor. Balancing love and discipline and altering the plot to evade remarriage, a controversial social issue in India, transforms Gulzar's *Parichay* from an unqualified tribute

(iqtida) to a contested homage (muarada) or even a reply (javab go'i). Even though *The Sound of Music* effect is visible in almost all frames, Gulzar's film cast three of the then reigning male actors – the "villainous" Pran, the comedian Asrani, and the swashbuckling Jeetendra – in atypical roles, while capitalising on the female lead Jaya Bhaduri's gamine charm. This casting was welcomed by Indian cinegoers – both those who had watched the original and those who had not – as "clean, healthy entertainment," and its songs including the *do re me* adaptation *sare ke sare* proved to be extremely popular. While the Hollywood musical lent itself more easily to Indianisation than Hitchcock's thrillers, *Parichay* demonstrated a deft transposition (*naql*) to a different setting through familiar Indian figures and setting – including the authoritarian patriarch, the rebellious musician son, the loyal family retainer, the loving grandmother – while weaving in specifically Indian concerns like the caste structure, the decline of aristocratic patronage for the arts, the angst of unemployed urban youth, the "village" community and so on. Gulzar, who took the original and 'adorned it with' the words or lyrics 'better than the original' could well be viewed as 'more praiseworthy than his predecessor' (Askari in Holmberg 2006, p. 198). If Gulzar's film must be viewed as a copy, it should not be condemned because it was viewed by his admirers as a laudable theft (sariqa mahmuda) or even as an Indian muarada or javab go'i to Hollywood.[20]

Unlike Gulzar, whose recent consecration by the film industry as the most original and talented lyricist displays amnesia to the 1970s film criticism, another celebrated Urdu poet lyricist, Sahir Ludhianvi, appears to be culpable of the same charge posthumously. As some of his best lyrics, hummed by generations of Hindi film viewers in films like *Hum Dono* 1961) and *Kabhi Kabhie* (1976), exhibited undisclosed "phoren" influences and "plagiarism" does not appear to be an isolated strategy. A comparison of his song 'main pal do pal' with those of a Billy Joel's 'I am the entertainer' shows Ludhianvi to be an unabashed plagiarist who lifted the song almost verbatim in Yash Chopra's 1970s romance *Kabhi Kabhie*:

> Main pal do pal ka shair hoon [I am a poet]
>
> Pal do pal meri kahani hai [So is my tale]
>
> Pal do pal meri hasti hai [My fame is transitory]
>
> Pal do pal meri nishani hai
>
> Kal aur ayenge [Tomorrow there will be others]

> Mujhse behter kehne wale [who can tell a better tale than me]
>
> Tumse behter sunne wale [those who are a better audience than you]

Compare these lyrics to Billy Joel's 'The Entertainer':

> I am the entertainer,
>
> And I know just where I stand:
>
> Another serenade,
>
> And another long-haired band.
>
> Today I am your champion.
>
> I may have won your hearts.
>
> But I know the game,
>
> You will forget my name,
>
> And I won't be here
>
> In another year,
>
> If I don't stay on the charts.

Strictly speaking, Linda Hutcheon's distinction between adaptations that announce their relationship to sources and plagiarism that never acknowledges appropriations (2006, p. 3, 7, 9) does not qualify the experiments of Gulzar and Sahir, two of the finest poets in Urdu, as adaptation. However, the meaning of naql elevates Gulzar's and Sahir's compositions from plagiarisms to tributes (*iqtida*), contested homage (muarada) or even going forward (*istiqbal*).

Skillful Borrowings

Against the well-intentioned attempts of "middle cinema"[21] filmmakers such as Gulzar, Bimal Roy, Hrishikesh Mukherjee, and others, to make "non-literate" masses cine-literate by translating classical fictional plots and themes (mazmun), may be placed the "skilful borrowings" of Hollywood motifs and sequences by a commercial film auteur like Prakash Mehra or Ramesh Sippy to introduce an element of novelty and guarantee the commercial success of their films.

Whether its influence is reflected in the choice of the genre as in Ramesh Sippy's *Sholay* (1975), or in the theme as in *Zanjeer* (1973), or in the induction of specific scenes to enhance the films' appeal, Hollywood's shadow looms large over some of the best known

Indian classics. If Gulzar's *Parichay* may be viewed as a *istiqbal* (going forward, welcoming) (Losensky 1998) of the Hollywood musical, *Sholay* constitutes a radical reinvention of the "spaghetti western" through his curious blending of seemingly disparate elements. *Sholay* has received the attention it truly deserves in film studies, including in a full length book on its making, and its cult status is reinforced by generations of viewers recalling scenes, repeating dialogues, singing songs and dancing to tunes from the film and its characters such as the notorious dacoit Gabbar Singh invading the Indian popular and mythical imaginary. Even the dance numbers in the film by two of the best female dancers in Hindi cinema have become benchmarks for aspiring and established actors and dancers. In bringing out its richness for the uninitiated viewer, studies of *Shola*y fail to point the irony of the fact that the classic of Indian cinema was viewed as a copy of the Hollywood Western when it was released.[22]

Sholay, now universally accepted as a masterpiece, best illustrates this process of skilfull transfer or naql of alien genres, plots and themes.[23] The Indian spaghetti western broke with the familiar melodramatic romance plot of Hindi cinema but transposed the cowboy story to the familiar "bandit" setting dispensing and retaining the staples of Hindi cinema such as comedy, love interest, family values, and song and dance to create a novel mix.[24] Ramesh Sippy assimilated the Western within the conventions of the vendetta plot in the established *daku* (bandit) film genre with the exception that it is the *thakur* or the landlord police officer who hires two ex-crooks to settle scores with his dacoit bête noir. To the English speaking elite (Singh 1976; Batra 1976; Shamim 1976), the two Hindi film stars – the "macho" hero Dharmendra and the "angry young man" Amitabh Bachchan – might have appeared like ludicrous imitations of "real" American cowboys. But the curiosity of the non-English speaking masses was sufficiently tickled by their favourite male actors donning cowboy jeans and hats, their "dream-girl" Hema Malini playing a chatterbox *tangewaali* (horsecart puller), their "guddi" (little girl) Jaya Bhaduri donning a mature widow's garb. The marginalisation of the love interest to male bonding struck a chord in the Indian male audience through the film's romanticisation of the cult of *yaari-dosti* (male bonding) to make *Sholay* an "all time hit".

In the same way as Gulzar or Sippy indigenised Hollywood to produce a transformation in the original, Vishal Bhardwaj's adaptation of Shakespearean plays in his

film *Omkara* (2006) demonstrates his skillful borrowing from the Bard that stands out among the hundreds (at least) of Shakespearean adaptations, in English, and in a range of other languages. The transposition (naql) of Shakespeare's *Othello* to the patriarchal milieu of the Hindi heartland, where a possessive husband driven by the universal emotion of jealousy and egged on by the wily villain strangles his wife, is remarkable for its illuminating transposition of the Shakespearean theme (majmun) into the intrigue, the rivalries, and the contestation that characterises rural North Indian economy. Bhardwaj's temporal and spatial displacement of the Shakepearean play, while retaining its quintessential spirit, was lauded as a creative adaptation through the Hindi film director's replication of Shakespeare's own strategy for familiarising alien plots and settings to sixteenth century England. Though Bhardwaj's setting is as remote from the Western as it can be, his particularisation of the universal theme of love, possessiveness, jealousy, betrayal, and rivalry in a highly localised North Indian setting demonstrated that copying, if done skillfully, could be elevated to the status of an art.

Two films inspired by Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972) and separated by several decades may illustrate Hindi cinema's parodic imitation of Hollywood.[25] *Dharmatma*, a 1975 Hindi film, produced and directed by Feroz Khan is believed to be the first attempt in India to "localise" *The Godfather*.[26] A tongue in cheek post on *Bollycat* describes Khan's *Dharmatma* as: 'the actor's reimagining of *The Godfather* … [which] corrects for[sic] Francis Ford Coppola's oversight in not including any motorcycle stunts in the original. The similarities to *Dharmatma*'s source material are easy to see, as long as you can imaging[sic] a version of *The Godfather* in which Michael Corleone spends the middle third of the movie in Afghanistan chasing around[sic] gypsy girls and fighting with Danny Denzongpa' (Todd 2008). Khan's effective transposition of the New York underworld to Mumbai and the Italian village to his native Afghanistan in *Dharmatma*, a frame by frame transposition of *The Godfather*, becomes a disturbing inquiry into the relations between the savage transparency of the rustic, marauding culture of Pathans with the corruption of the modern Indian city in retrospect. Khan's technicolor translation of *The Godfather* with its male machismo, female voluptuousness, colorful costumes, beautiful mountains, and complex filial relations in the 1970s – that strongly reverberated with Coppola's Sicily and Italian patriarchal family structures – was better received by the Indian audience than Ram Gopal Varma's darker,

sophisticated translations, *Sarkar* (2005) and *Sarkar Raj* (2008). Khan's reiteration of motifs, symbols, and tropes of the American gangster film revealed an excess, a slippage that undercut the authority of the Euro-American genre to capture the savagery of the *jangli* (wild) warlords, whose predatory instincts were produced by the Afghan borderland's strategic position in old conquest and trade routes.

Different Perceptions of the Copy in East and West

In view of such effective borrowings from diverse world cinemas, copying appears to resemble Homi Bhabha's (2004) colonial mimicry that legitimises imitation as cultural translation or parodic reiteration. However, against the modernist originality fetish, Allen's modernist typology of influences and the postmodern reactions of Home and Hutcheon, the imitation of world cinematic texts in Hindi cinema may be framed within the disregard of originality and uniqueness in favour of a pleasure of expansion, deviation, and improvisation through which individual creativity was accommodated in line with Perso-Arabic performing and narrative traditions. In this context, Vijay Mishra's notion of the epic *The Mahabharata* as constituting the grand syntagmatique of Hindi cinema and the views of other South Asian film scholars on all Hindi films being variations of the epic tales of *The Mahabharata* and *The Ramayana* are particularly relevant (Mishra 2002).

Unlike the West, Perso-Arabic performing or visual arts where imitation is designed to produce an illusion of reality, naql or mimicry calls attention to its difference from the original and its status as artifice. Instead of a faithful reproduction of the original that makes the imitation lifelike, the naqli imitates without dissolving the distance between himself and the characters he impersonates. The pleasure of a naqal performance arises not from the production of a faithful replica but an improvisation on or parodic imitation of the original through exaggerated play that produces admiration or laughter. Framing the allegations of plagiarism and copying against this performing tradition in which original creativity is sacrificed to naql, casts a different light on even the worst copies of Hollywood in Hindi cinema.

The emulative or parodic imitation of European genres must therefore be viewed against these mimetic practices in which repetition with a difference becomes a form of cultural assertion and complex negotiation. It is in Hindi cinema's repetition of colonial signs

with a difference that colonial authority is disrupted and its excess and slippage transports cinematic imitation from the comfort zone of localisation to difference. This reiterative capacity through which the ambivalent desire for the colonial sign is visible, even in faithful replications of Hollywood classics, shows how the reframing of Hollywood formulae simultaneously invokes and disrupts their authority.

Conclusion

In a culture revealing an easy incorporation of the folk into the popular and vice versa and a tradition of unacknowledged borrowing, Hindi cinema's borrowings are not considered as particularly culpable offences. Rather than originality, creativity may be measured through the difference in the way existing elements are mixed into a new whole. Like the traditional naqal, who would narrate well known tales in a distinctive fashion through adding, removing, or altering details and by mixing old motifs in new combinations, Hindi cinematic texts copy "originals" by remixing them in order to produce new version of films and make them locally appealing. If the art of storytelling is the art of repeating old stories, Hindi cinema has certainly perfected that art. Unlike faithful adaptations, usually of the "inspired-by" genre, that betray a strong anxiety of influence, the run of the mill Hindi films pilfer the world's heritage without compunction in an unproblematic incorporation of diverse motifs, images, stories, and characters that is difficult to trace to a single, definitive text.

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Hum Dono 1962, film, dir. Amarjeet, Navketan Films

Kabhi Kabhie 1976, film, dir. Y Chopra, Rajkamal Kalamandir Studios

Koshish 1972, film, dir. Gulzar, Sippy Films

Mackenna's Gold 1969, film, dir. J. Lee Thompson, Columbia Pictures

Moulin Rouge! 2001, film, dir. Baz Luhrmann, 20th Century Fox

My Cousin Vinny 1992, film, dir. Jonathan Lynn, 20th Century Fox

Omkara 2006, film, dir. V Bhardwaj, Shemaroo Entertainment

Parichay 1972, film, dir. Gulzar, Tirupathi pictures

Sarkar 2005, film, dir. R G Varma, K Sera Sera Sahara One

Sarkar Raj 2008, film, dir. R G Varma, Showman Pictures, Balaji Motion Pictures

Sholay 1975, film, dir. R Sippy, United Producers, Sippy Films

The Sound of Music 1965, film, dir. Robert Wise, 20th Century Fox

Zanjeer 1973, film, dir. P Mehra, Asha Studios

Notes

[1] An earlier version of this paper titled "Naql and the Aesthetic of the Copy" was published in J Tse-Hei Lee & S Kolluri (eds), *Hong Kong and Bollywood: Globalization of Asian Cinemas*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, pp. 217-34.

[2] Early Western film criticism such as Virginia Graham while referring to *Aan* (1952, p. 9) and the *Monthly Film Bulletin* (1963) to *Ganga Jumna* (1961) inaugurated this view of Hindi cinema.

[3] Chatterjee (2003) maintains that 'a large variety of Hindi films ape Hollywood in a manner singularly devoid of any kind of inspiration' (p. 437) and that 'innumerable Hollywood-inspired Hindi movies hit screens across the country in the 2000s', although none of them was 'a carbon copy' (p. 438). Rampal agreed that 'another cause for concern, from the standpoint of creativity and ethics, is Bollywood's tendency in recent years to copy themes from popular Hollywood films' (2007, p. 38).

[4] 'For years, Indian producers have paid Hollywood the ultimate compliment: knocking off American films scene-for-scene and turning them into Bollywood blockbusters' (Wax 2009). A scriptwriter Suparn Verma shared his experience in an interview with Subhash Jha, 'It's happened so many times – I go to producers with original ideas and am told to Indianise this or that Hollywood film. I have to cleverly make my way around such mindsets and persuade producers to accept radical changes in the Hollywood format' (in Jha 2003).

[5] In Sanskrit, *Bhand* means a jester, and the caste are called Naqal (actor). According to William Crooke, 'The Bhand is sometimes employed in the courts of Rajas and native gentlemen of rank, where he amuses the company at entertainments with buffoonery and burlesque of European and

native manners, much of which is of a very coarse nature. The Bhand is separate from and of a lower professional rank than the Bahurupiya' (in Russell 1916, p. 349).

[6] While Adam Gacek translates the Arabic term naql as imitation, copying from a model (2001, p. 78), Gleave (2012), prefers 'transference' (naql, intiqál) of meaning (see for example: https://rekhta.org/urdudictionary?keyword=naql).

[7] John and Ulrike Emigh (2003) define bahurupiya as 'a wandering mimic and comic' (p. 149). Bazigar is a performer who performs Bazi (Persian play) or an 'entertaining performance based on physical acts' (Schreffler 2011, p. 218).

[8] According to H. A. Rose, the naqal (mimic) is the Arabic translation of the Hindi bhand (1911). This is supported by Robert Vane Russell, who traces the etymology of the word to the Sanskrit term bhand (jester), stating that 'the caste are also known as Naqqal or actor' (1916, pp. 156-157).

[9] While Wolf points out that 'Bhands, Naqqāl and Taifas all potentially refer to the same groups of mimics, buffoons, singers, dancers, storytellers and actors', the 'naqalchi (mimic)' is 'sometimes called the bahrupiya' in Punjab (2014, p. x).

[10] Neelam Man Singh Chaudhary explains that 'the Naqqal is normally presented by two men who through a series of jokes, improvisation and horseplay, make sharp and satirical comments on society and politics' (2004, p. 216).

[11] See for example, *Bollycat*: https://inspiredposters.wordpress.com/tag/bollycat/

[12] Copying of Hindi film tropes in other Asian film industries, such as Indonesian or in Africa such as the Nigerian film industry known as Nollywood, and more recently in Hollywood productions such as *Moulin Rouge!* (2001) has further complicated the understanding of imitation. It must be kept in mind that Hindi films have sought inspiration not only from Hollywood but also other Asian and World cinema.

[13] While acknowledging naql's intersections with anukaran, the Sanskrit term for imitation, and of Perso-Arabic imitation theories with Sanskritic, this essay focuses on Arabic and Persian and Urdu sources while engaging with the concepts of imitation and plagiarism.

[14] Man Singh Chaudhary's description of Naqals as 'master adapters, changing their script, movement, songs, and innuendos as they go along' (2004, p. 216) and her emphasis on the

spontaneity and improvisation of *naqal* performance suggests an aesthetic in which adaptation is not relegated to secondariness and inferiority.

[15] In Islamic law, 'Although the term sarika is used no "theft" in the legal sense of the word is implied, as Islamic law does not recognise intellectual property. A modern booklet on intellectual theft stresses the moral turpitude involved, but does not invoke any Sharīa norms or punishments (Abd al-Mannān, al-Sariāt al-ilmiyya). The victim of plagiarism could only have recourse to public opinion or approach a man of power (istidā) to redress the situation' (Gleave 2012).

[16] See the following article from *The Hindu* magazine:
http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/mag/2003/08/03/stories/2003080300090400.htm

[17] One of the earliest case dragged to court was that of B R Films by Twentieth Century Fox over copyright infringement of its film *My Cousin Vinny* (1992).

[18] Banerjee speaks of two schools of plagiarists in the Indian film industry, those who borrow and others who 'move about brazenly with Hollywood VCDs tucked under their arm and often go to actors saying that the introductory scene is ready and switch on the VCD player' (2003). Kalpana Lajmi, renowned director, says, 'Sometimes the regurgitation is so literal that it's difficult to digest' (in Banerjee 2003).

[19] Some of Gulzar's acclaimed films like *Parichay* and *Koshish* (1972) were alleged to be "remakes" of the Hollywood musical *The Sound of Music* and the Japanese film, *Happiness Us Alone* (1961) respectively. He categorically denied borrowing from *The Sound of Music* in *Parichay* in a recent interview but acknowledged the influence of *Happiness Us Alone* on *Koshish* (Singh 2011).

[20] Gulzar's insistence that he made his *Koshish* 'as an anti-thesis to that Japanese film' illustrates the notion of javab go'i.

[21] Middle cinema was a term used in the 1980s 'to imply some kind of compromise between the mainstream that came out of the film industry and those that seemed like independent films of personal expression' (Benegal in van der Heide 2006, p. 46).

[22] While Bikram Singh, Assistant Editor of *Filmfare*, called *Sholay* the biggest blockbuster of 1976 and it is now considered a classic – 'a good imitation Western though lacking in any profundity' (1976) – Bindu Batra, film critic of *India Today*, described it as 'a curry Western, so slickly executed that one

forgives it for its plagiarism and lack of worthwhile content' (1976). M Shamim, film critic of *Times of India*, considered it 'the most blatant remake of half-a-dozen Western films spiked with song and dance, an Indian sense of humour and the convincing debut of a sensation called Amjad Khan' (1976).

[23] Wimal Dissanayake, for instance, viewed *Sholay* as a film 'heavily indebted to American Westerns' but that assimilated 'the imported elements into the fabric of Indian melodrama' (1993, p. 199). Kaushik Bhaumik traces the influence of *Mackenna's Gold* (1969) on *Sholay* (n.d.).

[24] Ato Quayson, in an interview with the author, opined that while borrowing the idea of the frontier from the Western, the film also transformed the rugged, masculine character of the Western (2009).

[25] Another version of *The Godfather* is *Dayavan* (1988).

[26] Kaushik Bhaumik, however, views it as an Indianisation of *Mackenna's Gold*.