

Excerpt

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The Cinema of Enchantment

Le lo le lo sapnon ka saudagar aya

Le lo ye sapne le lo

Tumse qismat khel chukii tum qismat se khelo

Ab tum qismat se khelo

Here, take them away, the dream merchant is here

Come take them away, take away these dreams

Your luck is playing tricks with you

Now you play tricks with your luck

(Shailendra, *Sapnon Ka Saudagar* 1968)

SAPNON KE SAUDAGAR: THE DREAM MERCHANTS

Viewing fantasy ‘as another name for the world of imagination which is fuelled by desire and which provides us with an alternative world where we can continue our longstanding quarrel with reality’, noted Indian psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar defined Hindi cinema as ‘a collective fantasy—a group daydream, containing unconscious material and the hidden wishes of a vast number of people’ (Kakar 1980: 12). Hindi film scriptwriter and lyricist Javed Akhtar, adopting a similar psychoanalytic line both, described cinema in general and Hindi cinema in particular as ‘a kind of dream’, which enables those who are able to decode it, the collective thinking and fantasies of others (Akh-tar 2007). Raj Kapoor, who enjoys an emblematic status in main-stream Hindi cinema as actor and filmmaker, preferred the Hindi term *sapna* [dream] to define it and described himself as ‘*sapnon ka saudagar*’ or the dream merchant.

Making a film is like selling a dream. The man in the audience sees the hero beating up twenty people and he jumps with joy. He identifies with the hero and finds an outlet for his own pent up frustrations. I sell dreams too... [but] I sell visions of love sometimes ... (Raj Kapoor quoted in Nanda 2002)

This sentiment was echoed by Boney Kapoor, the producer of *Mr. India*, one of the most successful

films of the 1980s: ‘We are dream merchants and we have got to sell dreams, which are lapped up by all’ (Kapoor 2010). Read without the Freudian or Lacanian baggage underpinning Kakar and Akhtar’s description of Hindi cinema, the terms *khwab* or *sapna* that strongly resonate with Musharraf Ali Farooqi’s description of the dastan as ‘the world of dreams’ (Farooqi 2000: 124) can yield demotic meanings which can disengage the ‘unreal’ in Hindi cinema from Western psychoanalytic categories and situate it within the dastanic world of enchantment. The main argument of this chapter is that Hindi cinema’s lack of realism need not be considered its drawback because it indeed deploys pre-modern aesthetic categories and experiences made popular by the Perso-Arabic and Indo-Islamic narrative traditions of the dastan that were based on tilism or enchantment.

REALISM, ILLUSIONISM AND THEORIES OF CINEMA

Cinema emerged in the West in a socio-cultural environment shaped by the aesthetic preoccupations of the novel and painting, which were focused on art’s capacity for realist representation. Cinematic realism has its origins in the naturalist movement in painting in the nineteenth century that accompanied the growth of scientific positivism in the West and the invention of the camera. The painter

and the novelist viewed himself as competing with the scientist in recording reality with photographic precision and accuracy. Verisimilitude or correspondence with material reality became the prime value that arts were enjoined to cultivate. In contrast to painting and fiction, which emulated the verisimilitude of the photographic image, cinema's relationship with the photographic image allowed it a mechanical reproduction of reality unseen in any previous art form and, thus, uniquely qualified cinema to record physical reality. Realism, one of the most contested words in the history of cinema, raises important questions about the nature of cinematographic images, the relation of these images to reality and the role cinema plays in understanding the world. Debates on cinematic realism focus on two approaches to realism, the first being its capacity for verisimilitude through the creation of plausible plots, characters and situations and the other through the mechanical reproduction of reality by the technological apparatus.

Adopting a cognitive approach to explain the nature of film representation, analytical philosopher Gregory Currie, in *Image and Mind*, critiques notions of illusionism underpinning recent semiotic and psychoanalytical film theory and argues that film is not an illusionist but a realist medium. He engages with three doctrines centred on realism that have shaped thinking and theorising about cinema, namely transparency,⁽¹⁾ likeness and illusionism and proposes the concept of perceptual realism. Perceptual realism means that 'film is, or can be, realistic in its recreation of the experience of the real world' or that 'the experience of watching a film approximates the normal experience of perceiving the real world' (Currie 1995: 326). Contending that 'illusionism' or the belief that 'film is realistic in its capacity to engender in the viewer an illusion of the reality and presentness of fictional characters and events portrayed' (Currie 1995: 326), Currie offers a useful distinction between those who believe that 'film engenders an illusion that something is real, when in fact it is not' and those who do not (1995: 237). Currie's view of films as essentially, uniquely and particularly realist has been critiqued over the

years by those who view that illusion is central to the cinematic experience.⁽²⁾

Noel Carroll's definition of illusion as 'something that deceives or is liable to deceive' the viewer by which he means that 'the illusion provokes the viewer to have false beliefs about the object perceived' (Carroll 1996: 367) has been meticulously deconstructed by Richard Allen. Allen underlines the need to modify Carroll's definition of illusion as deception and differentiate 'the kinds of deception involved in visual representations that are putatively illusions' (Allen 1993: 33). Allen emphasises the need to distinguish the two respects in which illusions are deceptive—one is by deceiving the senses, and two, by leading us to make false inferences—by asserting that, 'We can experience a sensory illusion without being deceived into believing that what we see is real' (Allen 1993: 34), or in other words, that a 'sensory deception' need not be an 'epistemic deception' (1993: 34). Allen argues that cinema is experienced as a form of illusion that he calls a 'projective illusion', which is not unique to cinema but is uniquely promoted by the cinematic medium. Although a sensory form of illusion, a projective illusion 'does not encourage us to believe in the reality of what we see' (Allen 1993: 22). As opposed to a 'reproductive illusion', which is derived from 'the reproductive properties of the photographic image' (Allen 1993: 25), and its 'transparency' (1993: 23), which allows the spectator to see both the object and how it is represented in the photograph, and remain medium aware, in a projective illusion, the spectator perceives the events of the film as 'a fully realized, though fictional, world' with all the 'perceptual presentness or immediacy of our own' (Allen 1993: 40). He points out that the reality experienced is a virtual one and entails a loss of medium awareness. Allen's notion of projective illusion places the photographic, perceptual and ontological realism of cinema in perspective by interrogating the idea of the spectator as a dupe of an illusion. He shows that the 'film spectator is not duped by the cinematic apparatus or the forms of narration in the cinema; the spectator is fully aware that what is seen is only a film' (Allen 1993: 21).

Allen compares projective illusion to other forms of pictorial and dramatic illusion, and one of the ways he distinguishes them is by identifying the absence of reproductive illusion in representational painting. Unlike a painting, which ‘can only mislead us about its own status’, but not about reality, he argues, a photograph can mislead us about the status of reality and ‘contribute to the production of an illusion by presenting the phenomenon in a way that disguises its real status’ (Allen 1993: 28–29). Allen posits that the minimum condition for a picture or drama to be experienced as a projective illusion is that it should be representational and must provide representational cues that facilitate the viewer’s capacity to experience them as a projective illusion. He argues that projective illusion is perfected by cinema. Allen’s emphasis on context dependency in projective illusion, the spectator’s contribution in its production and the representational cues provided by each medium for its realisation have a bearing on the difference between cinema’s projective illusion with those of traditional art forms. Comparing cinema with painting and theatre, Allen holds that painting, in certain respects, is superior to cinema in its evocation of projective illusion, but the capacity of live theatre to engender projective illusion is con-strained by the fact that the drama is embodied before us in the auditorium. He considers the projective illusion of cinema to be stronger than that in pictorial and dramatic forms. He shows that projective illusion is a sensory illusion in the sense that ‘we entertain in thought or imagine that we see the represented object’ (Allen 2001) or the event portrayed, and agrees with Currie that our relationship to visual fiction may be no different from our relationship to literary fiction (Allen 2001). However, he differs from Currie in maintaining that cinema allows us to both see a representation and also imagine that we see what the representation represents.

Realism and Hindi Cinema

Unlike Hollywood cinema whose naturalised relationship with the reproductive illusion of the photograph determines the production of cinematic illusion, Hindi cinema’s generic debts to pre-

cinematic visual and performing arts such as calendar art and Parsi theatre offer fertile grounds for the comparison of its projective illusion with that of Hollywood cinema. The ontological realism of the photographic image that enabled classic Hollywood cinema to create verisimilitude through reproductive illusion is undercut by these legacies. As op-posed to realism that defines the ontology and rhetoric of the classic Hollywood film, Hindi cinema’s ontological and rhetorical origins lie in an aesthetic tradition determined by enchantment. As opposed to Bazin’s idea of cinema as answering the yearning for realistic representation, Hindi cinema answers its viewers’ yearning for enchanted worlds.

Realism has always been a contentious issue in the analysis of Hindi cinema, causing a deep chasm between critics and defendants of its embarrassing ‘anti-realism’.⁽³⁾ Kakar asserted that ‘when dogmatic relationalists dismiss Hindi films as unrealistic and complain that their plots strain credibility and their characters stretch the limits of the believable, this condescending judgement is usually based on a very restricted view of reality’ (Kakar 1980). Speaking about the psychological manoeuvres employed by Hindi cinema to convey different meanings to different segments of society, Ashis Nandy cited the steadfast refusal of such cinema to be conventionally realistic and argued that ‘in Indian popular cinema, the sub-version of realism is in “realism” itself’ (Nandy 2003: 79). Similarly, Shyam Benegal pointed that ‘the representation of the real world is not always supposed to entertain Indian audiences’ and that ‘they want to be transported completely into another world’ (Benegal 2005/2011: 3). Thomas points out that ‘tolerance of overt fantasy has always been high in Hindi cinema, with little need to anchor the material in what Western conventions might recognize as a discourse of “realism”, and slippage between registers does not have to be marked or rationalized’ (Thomas 2000: 158). Through its reworking the codes of realism through the narrative convention of tilism, Hindi cinema eschews the Platonic mimetic tradition running from Greek theatre to Victorian fiction and classical Hollywood cinema and unshackles cinema from its moorings in photographic

verisimilitude and anchors it in dāstānic enchantment. In sharp contrast to cinema, as Farooqi demonstrates, ‘verisimilitude was not the center around which the fantastic world of the dāstān revolved. Should he value his life, verisimilitude was well advised to look not only right and left, but also fore and aft, when crossing the highway of narrative’ (Farooqi 2000: 141). Unlike realist cinema, which is predicated on photographic verisimilitude and is required to produce a faithful reproduction of the original, Hindi cinema produces a self-referential world. Akhtar’s de-scription of the world of Hindi cinema as one that has no correspondence to any real world emphasises its focus on the creation of an enchanted universe. Without suggesting that real geographical spaces do not exist in mainstream Hindi cinema, it is possible to assert that Hindi cinema produces a form of spatiality that draws on the materiality of geographical spaces but reinscribes them to create an autotelic universe. These constructionist codes of representation disrupt the conventions of cinematic realism deeply entrenched in Platonic mimesis and their valorisation of photographic representation.

Hindi Cinema: A Cinema of Attractions or Enchantments?

While scholars have engaged at length with Hindi cinema’s anti-mimetic orientation, their use of borrowed vocabularies from the discipline of film studies does disservice to a cinema whose conventions have been derived from indigenous ontological and aesthetic terminologies. Ravi Vasudevan’s celebrated description of Indian cinema as ‘a narratively-integrated cinema of spectacle’ in which ‘the relationship between narrative, performance sequence and action spectacle is loosely structured in the fashion of a cinema of attractions’ is adopted in apologetic defences of its anti-realism (Vasudevan 1996: 307). Dwyer and Patel’s unproblematic acceptance of Vasudevan’s definition leads them to flesh out the evidence of spectacles in ‘sets and costumes, action sequences, presentation of the stars, grandiloquent dialogues, song and dance sequences, comedy interludes and special effects’ (Dwyer and Patel 2002: 30). In the polarised division

between the two modes of film practice identified by Andre Gaudreault and Tom Gunning, namely the ‘system of monstrative at-tractions’ and ‘the system of narrative integration’, the non-continuity of its attractions leads to Hindi cinema being classified as the cinema of spectacle (Gunning 2006: 14). Although the term ‘cinema of attractions’ is not an inaccurate description of the pleasures of Hindi cinema, Gunning’s coinage of the term in the mid-1980s to refer to early European cinema in relation to Eisenstein’s own use of the term alludes to a specifically European lineage of vaudeville, circus and fairs that can be traced from Eisenstein to Spielberg.⁽⁴⁾ Gunning’s cinema of attractions looks both ‘backwards to a popular tradition and forward to an avantgarde subversion’ (Gunning 2006: 16). The key to the difference between the pleasures of Hindi cinema and early European cinema lies in the specific difference between attraction and enchantment. Unlike ‘the cinema of attractions’, which is invested in the technology of the medium, indigenous narrative practices of the das-tan explain the ‘dream-like’ quality of Hindi cinema.

While the Oxford English Dictionary defines attraction as some-thing that draws people by appealing to their desires, tastes, etc., it refers to ‘peak moments’ of a show and goes beyond a simple process of appealing to the tastes of the public ‘by implicating a direct, somewhat aggressive, address of the spectator’ in Eisenstein’s definition (Strauven 2006: 18). In Gaudreault’s term ‘cinematographie-attraction’, which he borrowed from Coissac, ‘attraction’ falls under the denomination of ‘cinematography’. Attractions, as Strauven’s essay on early trick films shows, are produced through technologies, specifically the cinematic apparatus, which deploys tricks for the animation of the non-human or the dislocation of the human (Strauven 2006: 106–107). However, according to Eisenstein, an attraction was supposed to produce ‘emotional shocks’ in the tradition of French Grand Guignol Theatre—notorious for its use of horror and special effects (Strauven 2006: 18). Although the attractions that characterise early cinema also included other elements like chases, rescues, and even magic

elements, in addition to bodily violence, they attempted to shock rather than to appeal to the miracle-seeking sensibility of the audience.

Enchantment is defined as ‘captivation: a feeling of great liking for something wonderful and unusual’ (Princeton Encyclopaedia) or an ‘enraptured condition’ (Oxford English Dictionary). Enchantments, as the product of ‘a sorcerer by infusing inanimate things with the spirit of planetary and cosmic forces’ (Farooqi 2009: x), have an occult basis. The effects of enchantment differ from Gunning’s ‘aesthetic of astonishment’ despite his references to the influence of magic theatre because though ‘first projections produced shock and astonishment, an excitement pushed to the point of terror’ (Gunning 2006), this tradition used the latest technology to produce apparent miracles. The miraculous and the magical that constituted the attractions of the mythological genre designed to appeal to the religious sensibility of a devout mass audience or to astonish the listeners of the dastan cannot be framed within the spectacles of the cinema of attractions. Defining Hindi cinema as a cinema of attractions has teleological implications and its elucidation through the codes of photographic or cinematic realism fails to account for a ‘domain populated with magic that is a world within the world’ (Farooqi 2009). Bilal Tanweer, in his review of *Hoshrubā: The Magic and the Tilism*, believes that it offers some-thing ‘entirely missing from our contemporary condition of disenchantment from the world’, ‘a world enchanted with itself, perpetuating its meaning through an unmitigated belief in imaginative storytelling to bewilder, dazzle, and entertain us’ (Tanweer 2010). (5)

Warning against regarding monstration and attraction as synonymous, Wanda Strauven shows that ‘in the mode of attraction, the spectator is attracted towards the filmic (or the apparitional)’ whereas in the case of monstration, ‘the filmic (or the apparitional) is monstrated to the spectator’ and concludes that ‘attraction involves, more manifestly than monstration, the spectator; it is a force upon the latter’ (Strauven 2006: 17). Gunning offers by way of explanation that ‘rather than naming a specific

period as “the cinema of attractions”’, he had ‘used the term to refer to an approach to spectatorship’ that ‘dominated the early cinema from the novelty period until the dominance of longer narrative films’ (Gunning 2006: 36). He makes it clear that rather than seeing ‘attractions as a counter narrative’, he had proposed them as a different configuration of spectatorial involvement and address that can, in fact, interact in complex and varied ways with other forms of involvement (Gunning 2006: 37). Strauven notes the difference between Gunning’s use of the ‘cinema of attraction’ (Gunning 1986) and ‘cinema of attractions’ (Gunning 1990) and suggests that while the first invites us to consider the cinema itself as an attraction, the second focuses on cinema as a series of attractions (Strauven 2006: 17).

While for Gunning, attraction is a category of cinema itself and its attractions might include magical elements, it doesn’t include specifically the element of tilism or enchantment, which defines Indian cinema. The juxtaposition of Pritchett’s translation of *Tilism-e Hoshrubā* as ‘Enchantment of the Senses’ and Farooqi’s as ‘Magic that Will Blow Your Senses Away’ against Gunning’s notion of the ‘cinema of attraction’ might lead one to a different understanding of Hindi cinema in which the series of attractions, which contribute to the viewing pleasure are themselves embedded in a cinema that is itself an illusion. As Oldfield points out, *Tilism-e Hoshrubā* offers the listener or reader ‘a chance to lose oneself in an alternate reality built of un-tamed language that has been freed from any obligations to adhere to moral, logical, or didactic constraints’ (Oldfield 2009: 383).

ENCHANTMENT THAT BLOWS AWAY THE SENSES

In her Introduction to Farooqi’s translation, Oldfield argues that ‘an important feature that distinguishes *Tilism-e Hoshrubā* as a fantasy from other epics that contain magical elements (like the Arthurian legends, for example) is that the action takes place almost completely within the magical realm’ (Oldfield 2009). The presence of fairies in the *Dastan-e-Amir Hamza* and other dastans makes them

a specific category of tales in which fairies definitely play a key role, and which were probably directly translated in the stories that old hands in the Hindi film industry identified as ‘pari stories’ (Thomas 2014). While pointing out that the hero of the dastan inhabited a marvelous realm, Pritchett shows how the marvelous element increased in the Persian qissa over a period of time and culminated in the Urdu dastan, some of which like the *Tilism-e-Hoshrubā* are nothing but magic (Pritchett 1985: 6). Oldfield agrees that ‘unlike much fantasy literature, the epic does not offer a world that mirrors our own, providing morals and lessons like the grimly serious Tolkien trilogy’ (Oldfield 2009).

The presence of the marvelous disqualifies Hindi cinema from being regarded in the same light as classical realist cinema. The marvelous, both as event and as explanation, has been central to discussions of Hindi cinema’s realism. The marvelous events of the dastan have been divided by John Stevens into three categories: ‘mysterious’ events [that] are ‘unmotivated, unexplained and inexplicable’; ‘magical’ events [that] are controlled by man; and ‘miraculous’ events [that] are controlled by God (Stevens 1973: 90–91). In a sense, the dastan world fits this typology, for it rests on the strong opposition between the (black) magic controlled by men, which must always be evil in the eyes of good Muslims, and the miraculous events ultimately controlled, however obscurely or indirectly, by God. Magicians work through spells and charms to create their enchantments. But the dastan hero is also aided by the arcane powers of pīrs, faqirs, and other holy personages and divine beings (Pritchett 1985: 5). Through examining how Queen Bilal deflects the magical objects with which Queen Suhel attacks her in the Dastan-e Amir Hamzah [DAH], Farooqi explains that ‘within the enchanted world itself there are two layers of magic: one in which all things exist, and the other produced by the reality to which they subscribe. While all are dependent on the first layer for their existence, the second could be suspended by one or more of the characters by resorting to a “sub-reality”’ (Farooqi 2000: 141). He uses the word ‘sub-reality’ here because ‘the whole of reality cannot be

accessed from within the confines of the enchantment’ (Farooqi 2000: 142). However, the centrality of the marvelous in the indigenous narrative and performing arts such as the dastan or qissa exceeds the situational and social to the representational that is shared by the dastango or qissakhwan and his audience because ‘the fantasies/realities of all participants, the reader included, become one, and this linkage sustains the enchantment’ (Farooqi 2000: 144). Farooqi’s insistence that ‘for the dāstān to be successful, the enchantment woven by the narrator’s fantasy needs the second layer of the reader’s own fantasy to sustain it’ (2000: 142) foregrounds the mutual production of an illusory world by the teller and his listeners through shared codes of representation and perception that points to the nature of the world as a tilism or an illusion.

According to Farooqi, ‘belief in the narrator is a core principle for the one who must enter the world of enchantment. And continuous belief in the narrator is imperative if one intends to explore this world further. The narrator wishes the reader to remain suspended in his (the narrator’s) reality’ (Farooqi 2000: 142). Unlike cinematic illusion that is tethered to the reproduction of an unstaged or staged reality even though the illusion might produce a virtual reality, the das-tango creates purely imaginary worlds that have no referentiality. He also calls attention to ‘things that do not have a material existence, either in this world or in the enchanted world of the dāstān: things which exist in the spatial realm of fancy for the characters of the dāstān, as well as for the characters in the real world. In such cases the identity of these objects is universal both within and without the enchantment’ (Farooqi 2000: 143). But the dastango’s freedom from reproductive illusion frees both his and his listeners’ imagination to enter fully realised worlds of experience. Unlike cinema, the projective illusion depends to a large extent on the listener or spectator’s ability to imagine in their minds the objects or events narrated by the dastango. In Farooqi’s opinion, ‘If the reader does not believe in the conjuration raised by the narrator’s fantasy, he may nurse his sanity, but can no longer de-rive any

pleasure from the dastan. To enjoy the dastan, he must again plunge himself into the world of the narrator (2000: 143). Without being able to see a representation as in cinema, the listener must be able to imagine that he sees what the representation represents. In addition to its projective illusion that allows listeners to enter fully realised worlds, the dastan offers another level of illusion, that is, the tilism.

Tilism: Magic, Science or Ontology?

The term tilism is of Greek origin and meant an emblem possessing magical or protective powers but is now loosely understood as magic or a maze. Pritchett shows that though tilism transliterates as talisman or something to ward off enchantments along with other dangers, its dominant meaning in classical Urdu literature comes from the dastan, conveying an ‘enchanted world—amazing, even stupefying, events and sights; mystery; inaccessibility; a general incomprehensibility that reduces one to helplessness; the inability to get out by any normal means’ (Pritchett, Ghalib Project).

Tilism is often confused with magic, which has pejorative associations with pagan rituals of gods and goddesses in Christian thought. Farooqi draws on Islamic texts, such as the fourteenth century *Muqaddimah-e Tarikh-e Ibn-e Khaldun*, (Khaldun and Rahmani 2001) to interrogate the opposition between magic and science in Christianity and suggests that magic was closely related with physical and oc-cult sciences and used science to produce magic. He argues that in the oral Urdu narrative traditions of South Asia, the special combination of occult sciences used to create a magical world, or tilism, is called *himia*. Defining *himia* as ‘the science of conquering planetary forces and enslaving jinns’ (2009: 433), Farooqi asserts that it was based on the combination of at least four occult sciences: *simia*, *kimia*, *limia*, and *rimia*.⁽⁶⁾ This understanding of tilism appears to have been shared by Kamlapati Tripathi, the grandson of Devakinandan Khatri, whose novel *Chandrakanta* (1888) displays a strong influence of the tilism literature in Urdu. Tripathi’s objecting to the television version of *Chandrakanta*

(1994) on the grounds that it reduces tilism, which is based on technical and scientific principles, to *jadoo* or magic, problematises the translation of tilism as magic and the reading of the das-tan as magic realism.

Suhail Ahmad Khan argues that a simplistic understanding of tilism can undermine its symbolic significance for the dastango and his audience and stresses on its metaphysical dimensions: ‘Ancient genres of literature regarded the world as a tilism and saw its out-ward aspect as an illusion or a phantasmagoria created by the elements. Similarly, man’s inner being was seen as an enchanting tilism, but one in which lay hidden many an awesome ordeal’ (Khan 2000: 96). Krishna Majithia (1978) observes a resemblance between tilism and maya based on its definition in the Rig Veda and calls attention to its relationship with *maya-vidya* (7) mentioned in the Hindu epics. Mahmood Farooqui agrees:

A loose translation of tilism is *maya*. We are living in a mayavi world today. The moment we encounter multiple realms in *Dastangoi*, we open up a mayavi jaal, which can be applied to this world. It’s a kind of questioning, an illusion. Are we living through it? It’s as if someone is playing with us, like Shakespeare makes us feel the stars are sporting with us, so the idea that we’re in a world of magic reveals all kinds of shifts in meanings. (Farooqui, quoted in Mita Kapur 2012)

Reading Pritchett’s description of tilism as a fake ‘simulacrum of a world’, Farooqi’s notion of *himia* as a special combination of occult sciences to create a magical world or tilism, and Khan’s concept of the world as a tilism with Majithia’s comparison of tilism with maya makes it possible to conceptualise tilism as a metaphor for the method and effects of popular Hindi cinema, which creates an enchanted world that produces certain sensory effects on the viewer and gratifications that are based on a different perception and understanding of the world.

The conception of the cinematic text as a tilism liberated from mimetic realism can facilitate the theorisation of the magical effect or enchantment

that it produces in the minds of viewers. Pritchett sees tilism as ‘inherently a sort of fake, a simulacrum of a world: the things you find in it are almost never what they seem’ and ‘when it’s broken it bursts like a bubble, and almost everything in it vanish-es’—which might well apply to the simulacrum that is cinema (Pritchett, Ghalib Project: Ghazal 173, verse 11). Similarly, Farooqi’s translation of tilism as ‘a domain populated with magic that is a world within the world’ (Farooqi 2009) reverberates with Akhtar’s description of Hindi cinema as a dream that constitutes itself according to its own rules.

Pritchett’s definition of tilism as magical worlds within which ‘nothing is what it seems: time or space expand or contract at the narrator’s pleasure’ situates the unrealist Hindi cinema within a world that can be created and destroyed by sorcery and trickery (Pritchett 1991: 15). But when read in conjunction with Raj Kapoor’s imagining of Hindi commercial cinema as a ‘sapna’ and himself as a ‘*sapnon ka saudagar*’ or dream merchant that titles of books on Hindi cinema of-ten pick on, it epitomises the method of a cinema that consistently invites attention to its anti-mimetic status. Marie Gillespie’s warning that, ‘in order to understand the conventions of realism\antirealism in Hindi cinema, one would need to consider much wider issues including concepts and conventions of realism in Indian culture generally’ has a bearing on the symbolic import of tilism for Hindi film audiences, much like it did for the medieval dastan audiences (Gillespie 1989: 235). If cinematic realism is based on the production of an experience of illusion through technology that facilitates the removal of media awareness, the *dastango* is required to produce an illusion that leads one to truth rather than deception.

A distinction needs to be made between the idea of illusion as a fake and that created by the science of planetary forces or a combination of occult sciences. In understanding the ‘illusion’ produced by Hindi cinema, *simia* or ‘the science of creating illusions and transfer-ring spirits between bodies’, which ‘manipulates the imagination and presents non-existent and imaginary things to the human eye’ is ex-tremely crucial (Farooqi 2009: 433). The world

of Hindi cinema that has been denigrated for its lack of resemblance to any experienced world interpreted in light of the logic of tilism underlines not the gullible audience’s willingness to be duped by an illusion that is untrue but its sensitivity to representational cues provided by the *dastango* that enable them to experience its projective illusion. Contrary to being misled into believing that the world they see on the screen is real, the audience’s familiarity with the ontological illusionism of the dastan enables them to experience a fully realised world of experience. Unlike the Hollywood audience whose expectations of cinema have been shaped by its ontological realism, the Hindi film audience contributes to the production of projective illusion by expecting cinema to produce enchanted worlds. The failure of realist cinema to engage the average Indian spectator must be attributed to its refusal to recognise this expectation through its attempt to educate the spectator in the grammar of cinema. On the other hand, the commercial Hindi filmmaker, the merchant of dreams, reveals a cognizance of their need to experience enchanted worlds. Javed Akh-tar’s description needs to be quoted in full to understand this world:

There is one more state in this country and that is Hindi cinema....Hindi cinema’s culture is quite different from Indian culture, but it is not alien to us.... As a matter of fact, Hindi cinema is our closest neighbor. It has its own world, its own traditions, its own symbols, its own expressions, its own language and those who are familiar with it understand it. (Akhtar quoted in Kabir 1999: 35)

It is the world created by the *dastango* in which everything is larger than life and impossible things happen. Giants more than ten feet tall walk the earth, brave young men vanquish an entire army, twins separated at birth are united through uncanny coincidences, human beings are rescued through divine interventions and ghosts return to exact revenge. All those aspects that seem implausible from a rational scientific perspective make perfect sense in the world of Hindi cine-ma whose rules, although entirely different from those of the real world, follow

their own inexorable logic. At no stage is the spectator duped into believing that what s/he is observing is the real world but s/he does believe that in the fictional fantastic world of the film, this can indeed happen.

In the B-grade films of the 1950s, called jadoo or fantasy films, produced by Basant Pictures owned by Homi Wadia, the dastanic space is unambiguously translated, featuring ‘magical worlds in which the impossible happens’ (Thomas 2014: 151). ‘Fantasies permit you to stretch your imagination, to think out tricks which will thrill the audience, it’s a bit like magic this fantasy film making’, Wadia stated in an interview (Wadia 1991: 40). Rosie Thomas asserts that ‘India’s fantasy films’ were ‘spun around magical and wondrous happenings in a quasi-Arabian Islamicate setting, most drawing loosely on oral and literary traditions of the Arabian Nights’ (Thomas, *Tasveer Ghar*). Arguing that ‘magical worlds and superhuman feats have a long history within India’s mythological traditions, both its Hindu religious epics and its Islamicate legends’, Thomas examines stills from the film *Aladdin and the Magic Lamp* (1952) featuring the genie flying on a magic carpet to show that ‘both are dreamscapes in which apparently magical flying promises to transport consumers out of the mundane world into an enchanted domain’ (Thomas, *Tasveer Ghar*). She explains the popularity of tales from the Arabian Nights with the coming of the talkies in India to the audience’s familiarity with these stories and to their offering ‘surprising twists and turns’ in storylines (ibid.). Although the fantasy films made way for the films of social realism at the end of the 1930s, there was a revival of the fantasy genre in the 1950s with K. Amarnath’s *Alif Laila* (1953).

Anustup Basu points out that although ‘the stunt spectacular was gradually relegated to poverty row segments of the industry’ with ‘the nationalist feudal-bourgeois recoding of culture and the emergence of the social from the early thirties’, ‘the caped/masked crusader’ of this category of films ‘appeared within the parameters of the top line feudal family romance’ from time to time as late as the 1980s (Basu 2011: 559). He argues that ‘in recent

years, the popular Hindi cinema industry has been experimenting with the superhero and science-fantasy genres [*Koi Mil Gaya* 2003; *Krrish* 2006; *Ra.One* 2011], albeit with mixed box office results (Basu 2011: 559). However, Marie Gillespie is of the view that ‘for those who enjoy Hindi films fantasy is a chief source of pleasure’, and that ‘the songs and dances as well as their settings often provide discrete dream-like sequences “and a moment of escape from reality” for the spectator’, confirming their dastan-like ambience (Gillespie 1989: 234).

UTOPIAN VISIONS: THE WORLD OF DREAMS WHICH SHUTS OUT ALL TROUBLES

Hindi filmmakers’ commitment to the production of a dream world which their audiences can retreat into would suggest that the space of Hindi cinema should be read as a Utopia, a site ‘with no real places’, one that presents ‘society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down’ (Foucault 1986: 22). Richard Dyer, in ‘Entertainment and Utopia’, examined musicals as entertainment and maintained that two of the taken-for-granted descriptions of entertainment, ““escape” and “wish fulfillment”, point to its central thrust, namely, utopianism’ (Dyer 2002: 20). Agreeing with Enzensberger’s notion of media as answering deep social needs, Dyer holds that ‘entertainment is responding to needs that are real, at the same time is also defining and delimiting what constitute the legitimate needs of people in this society’ (Dyer 2002: 26). Therefore, while it addresses real needs, entertainment also denies ‘the legitimacy of other needs’, especially of class, patriarchal and sexual struggles’ and that ‘the ideals of entertainment imply wants that capitalism itself promises to meet’ (Dyer 2002: 27), thus creating a ‘one-dimensional’ situation. Dyer contends that this one-dimensionality is countered by ‘the deeply contradictory nature of entertainment forms’ and the contradictions that are to be found in the disjunctions between ‘the narrative and musical numbers’, between ‘the representational and non-representational’ signs (Dyer 2002: 27). If utopianism is intrinsic to musicals and all forms of entertainment, how does the ‘image of “something

better” to escape into’ (Dyer 2002: 20) offered by Hindi films classified as musicals differ from other forms of entertainment? Dyer underlines the need to ‘examine the specificity of entertainment’s utopia’ and suggests that the categories of utopian sensibility ‘are related to specific inadequacies in society’ (2002: 25–26). He concludes that entertainment works because it responds to real needs created by society (Dyer 2002: 26).

Rustam Bharucha questions the construction of happiness in one of Bollywood’s biggest hits *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* (1994), which, in his view, ‘almost assumes a utopic dimension’ (Bharucha 1995: 801). He offers a compelling reading of the film as exemplifying a ‘fetishized representation’ that focuses on ‘the materiality of objects, which are substitutes for desire (1995: 802) and concludes with the disquieting admission that ‘the surrender to Barjatya’s utopia cannot be separated from the infiltration of capital in our cultural space’ (Bharucha 1995: 804). Although the utopian sensibilities of Hindi films from the 1950s to the 1990s are reversed through dystopic images of deprivation, squalor, disease and oppression and the presence of evil in the shape of the ubiquitous villain, their lavish studio settings, sanitised cities, slums and villages produce visions of abundance and goodness. Are these images of abundance to be viewed as utopian solutions to social tensions caused by scarcity, as Dyer suggests? The appeal of mainstream Bollywood films would appear to lie in their answering deep social needs for the elimination of poverty and injustice, for the individual as well as society, and equal distribution of wealth in the face of actual poverty and inequity. Contesting this simplistic explanation, Kakar holds that the reason for the ubiquity of film fantasy ‘lies in the realm of cultural psychology rather than in the domain of socio-economic conditions in India’ (Kakar 1980: 13).

Utopias mean no places, but also good places as opposed to bad places or dystopias. Manmohan Desai, the maker of several 1970s blockbusters and progenitor of the ‘Hindi masala film’, stated, ‘I want to take them into a dream world where there is no poverty, where there are no beggars, where fate is

kind and God is busy looking after his flock’ (Desai quoted in Manuel 1993: 45). Contrary to his statement, Desai’s ‘dream world’ is replete with images of poverty and includes not only beggars but also thieves and pickpockets. Although Desai directly experimented with the dastan only in the highly successful *Dharamveer* (1977), one can demonstrate that Hindi masala films broadly function within the escapist space of the dastan. Desai made a number of superhit films in the 1970s that foregrounded issues of deprivation, social inequality, even violence, in the vendetta tales featuring Amitabh Bachchan. These films featuring separated lovers or twins or orphaned protagonists certainly do not represent a perfect world but one riddled with injustice, crime and violence. But the dream world is represented as a polarised opposition in true dastan style in which social tensions caused by scarcity and issues of class, patriarchy and gender are submerged in an epic battle between forces of good and evil, concluding in the reformation or decimation of evil. In her reading of *Shree 420*, Viridi examines ‘the contradictions between the commitment to the nation and the Herculean challenge posed by meeting the needs for food, shelter, clothing and education’ (Viridi 2003: 97) and concludes that these tensions remain unresolved till the closing shot of the film featuring the song ‘*Mera joota hai Japani*’ [My shoes are Japanese]. Despite the presence of squalor, deprivation and oppression, the films essay a universe ‘where fate is kind and God is busy looking after his flock’. In this universe, after suffering tribulations and hardships through the workings of fate, separated lovers and siblings are permitted to reunite with each other and with their children, blind mothers regain their vision at saint’s shrines, protagonists destroy evil and recover their rightful places in the family and community and are rewarded with true love in proper dastan fashion.

Like the dastan and fairytale, Hindi cinema has a distinct utopian function with its potential to make the underdog feel good and its happily-ever-after ending. Suffering and evil in Hindi films are explained by the ameliorating ontological understanding of kismet or karma and the generic

expectation of the happy ending. Although the happy ending is by no means always assured either in the dastan or in Hindi cinema, its utopian gesture is articulated through its libera-tory function, that is, through its reflection of a process of struggle against all forms of oppression. As Rachel Dwyer puts it, ‘the melo-dramatic mode prefers an ending with the world restored in the correct way rather than a couple living “happy ever after”’ (Dwyer 2013: 402). Dwyer contests the widely held perception of Hindi films having happy endings by stating that it is only the romantic genre whose ending requires the formation of the couple in the embrace of the (ex-tended) family and re-examines the idea of happiness in Hindi films with respect to this dimension of utopia. She argues that the ‘Indian film offers viewers three main types of happiness: emotional, moral and judgmental. This can mean the audience feels happy, is satisfied that the law is observed and the good rewarded and pleased that religion and traditions are upheld’ (Dwyer 2013).

Interrogating the idea of utopia as comic or ending happily, Richard Gerber maintains that ‘there are no happy endings in the greater Utopias, but there cannot be any despair either, because the ideal remains inviolate (Gerber 1955: 130). While speaking of the utopias produced by entertainment, Dyer makes the important point that utopias ‘work at the level of sensibility’, by which he means ‘an affective code that is characteristic of, and largely specific to, a given mode of cultural production’ (Dyer 2002: 20) that combines representational and non-representational signs. Although all Hindi films might not feature perfect worlds and end happily, their utopian dimension functions at the affective level through their gratification of audience’s de-sires at the emotional and moral level. It is in their suggestion of the possibility of a perfect world, of families living in complete harmony, of finding true love and of good eventually winning over evil that the utopian function of the romance dastan is fulfilled. Gillespie’s young respondent describes it as another world that transports her to a euphoric state.

When I watch an Indian film, after that I’m in heaven but I don’t relate to the real world like

I did ... they’re in rose gardens and the music just springs up from nowhere ... that’s why people like watching them to get away from their lives. What do drugs do? They take you to another world but they are a safer way out of your problems. (Quoted in Gillespie 1989: 233)

Unlike Gillespie’s young West London interviewee who ‘wouldn’t mind sitting around in rose gardens or deserts being loved and things like that’ (1989: 234), the Hindi film audience is conscious that the rose garden is no more than a conventional dastan setting for romance. But this knowledge does not prevent them from surrendering to the escapist pleasures of the fantastic worlds created by Hindi films. Kakar points out that ‘in India the child’s world of magic is not as far removed from adult consciousness as it may be in some other cultures’ and that the Indian ego is flexible enough to regress temporarily to childhood modes without feeling threatened or engulfed’ (Kakar 1980: 14). He concludes that the Hindi film, like the adult daydream, emphasises the central features of fantasy—‘the fulfilment of wishes, the humbling of competitors and the destruction of enemies’ (Kakar 1980: 15). He adds that ‘to limit and reduce the real to that which can be demonstrated as factual is to exclude the domain of the psychically real, all that is felt to be the actuality of one’s inner life’ (Kakar 1980).

CONCLUSION

The self-acknowledged escapism of the Hindi film defended by its producers for its mitigation of the subcontinent’s numbing poverty and derided by purveyors of realist cinema for its lack of social realism must be framed within the conventional pleasures of dastans rather than in those of fantasies. Innocent of Aristotelian injunctions on aesthetic pleasure and Platonic mimeticism, the literacy of the average audience of Hindi film in the conventions of indigenous narrative and performing arts allows them to suspend their disbelief and give in to the enchantment produced by Hindi cinema, which they are well aware represents a world produced by

enchantment in the first place. Without denying the interaction between Sanskritic and Perso-Arabic performing arts visible in modern Hindi, Urdu and Parsi theatres, the magic of tilism, this book argues that the predominant trope in the dastan, produces a distinctive form of enchantment that is Hindi cinema. Viewing Hindi cinema as an enchantment produced

through a combination of occult forces compels a fresh look at its much disparaged escapism. Although the enchantment of the world of the dastan might have been overtly translated only in Arabian Nights fantasies, oriental, costume and stunt films, its traces are visible even in mythologicals and historicals and inflects the realism of the socials.

NOTES

1. By transparency, Currie means that film, 'because of its use of the photographic method, reproduces rather than merely represents the real world' (Currie 1995: 326).
2. According to cognitive illusionist theory, film 'engenders a false belief in us such that we are literally seeing the fictional events of a film unfold before us'. Perceptual illusionist theory makes a distinction 'between how film appears to us and how it really is, independently of our beliefs about it' (Kania 2008: 237–238).
3. James Chapman contends that Hindi cinema 'is a cinema of spectacle, a cinema of excess, a cinema of stylization', which 'does not conform to any regime of verisimilitude', 'is highly melodramatic' and 'privileges performance over characterization and style over narrative' (Chapman 2003: 345).
4. 'The drive towards display, rather than creation of a fictional world; a tendency towards punctual temporality, rather than extended development; a lack of interest in character "psychology" or the development of motivation; and a direct, often marked address, to the spectator at the expense of the creation of a diegetic coherence, are attributes that define attractions, along with its power of "attraction"' (Gunning 2006: 36).
5. Geeta Kapur has brilliantly demonstrated the deployment of modern technology to produce devotion in the devotional genre through her examination of the gaze in early films like *Sant Tukaram* (1936) (Geeta Kapur 1987).
6. 'Simia is the science of creating illusions and transferring spirits between bodies. It manipulates the imagination and presents non-existent and imaginary things to the human eye. Kimia is the science of the transmutation of physical properties of elements, of bringing them to the highest pinnacle of their essence. Limia is the science of runes— letters or words that cause super-natural effects through interaction with the function of heavenly bodies. Rimia is the science of configuring and exploiting the inherent physical forces of the Earth to create extraordinary marvels' (Farooqi 2009: 433).
7. There are references to maya-vidya or producing illusions as an art associated with rakshasas in the Hindu epics.

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