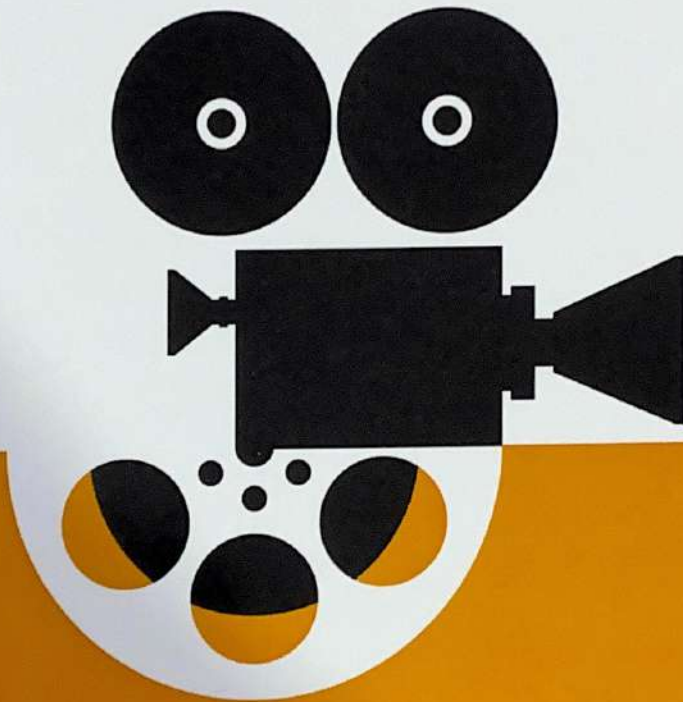


THE PARADIGM SHIFT IN INDIAN CINEMA

CONCEPTS AND APPLICATIONS

A Film Enthusiast's Guide to Cinema



EDITORS

DR. NEHA JINGALA | DR. PRAVEEN GAUTAM | DR. DEVENDER BHARDWAJ

Galgotia Publishing Company

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About the Book

Indian Cinema brings a lot of excitement and joy to movie buffs in India. All the more, it has made strong and lasting impressions on the global audience as well. From Raja Harishchandra- the first Indian feature film made in 1913 by late Dada Saheb Phalke to the new releases on OTT platforms, Indian Cinema has evolved and undergone seminal changes over the years. The Silver screen has witnessed variation in the characters, genres, storylines, cinematography and many other important elements of motion pictures.

A must for any cinephile, this book is packed with significant developments and approaches related to film making which have changed remarkably in the last 108 years. The book equips reader with necessary knowledge about films and largely explain topics such as Noir Thriller, South Indian Male Characters, Women Representation, Copyright Infringement, Screenwriting, Audience Analysis, History of Indian Cinema, Film Promotion and Marketing, Telangana Dialect in Tollywood, Adaptation of Literature, Indian New Wave, Economic Liberalism, Post- Structural Manifestations, Digital Media. An invaluable book for any film enthusiast that provides a comprehensive introduction to concepts & applications which leads to better appreciation of the Indian flicks.

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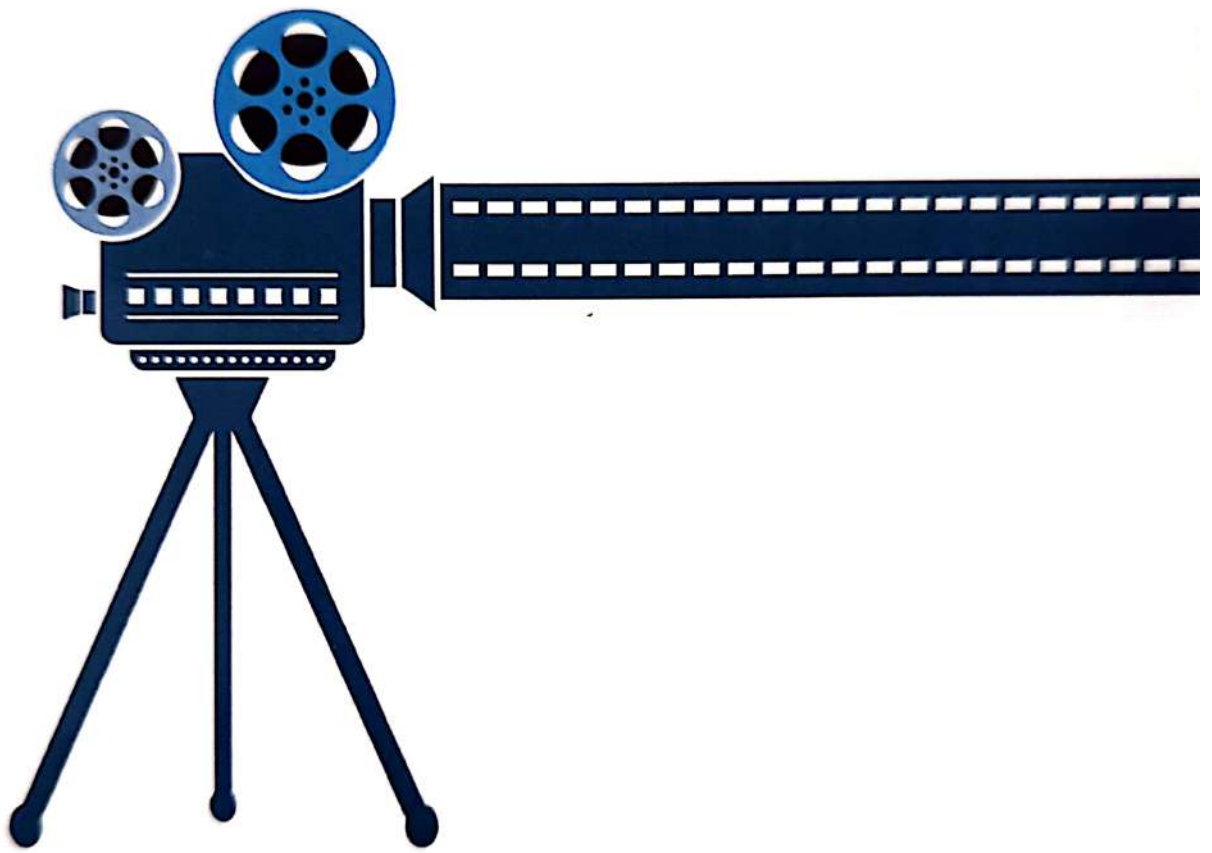


An Introduction to Abstract Algebra

Anuradha Gupta • Neha Bhatia



SULTAN CHAND & SONS



AUTHOR TO AUTEUR
Theories and Film Adaptations

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Reimagining *Othello* on Screen: Bhardwaj's Auteurship in *Omkaara*

AAKRITI KOHLI

INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare continues to have a looming presence in Hindi cinema. Beginning with the silent film *Dil Farosh* (dir. Udwadia) in 1927, he has been variously and widely appropriated, adapted and absorbed. The adaptation of his plays on the stage and on the screen continue to be hotly debated and contested, with many purists deploring the adaptation of the Bard as an unfaithful and inauthentic exercise and a disservice (Trivedi 2007). As is widely known, many of Shakespeare's works were themselves adapted from other literary or historical sources, and that has not diminished his reputation. This paper will read Vishal Bhardwaj's *Omkaara* (2006) as a reimagining of the bard's *Othello* on screen. There has always been a lament and a derision towards the adaptation of literature into cinema, almost seeing it as a distortion and perversion. This points to the position of literature in general, regarded as high culture and by extension superior, vis-à-vis cinema which was considered low culture and lacking any taste and sophistication. This paper departs from this position, and is aligned with emerging work in the field of adaptation studies (Hutcheon 2004, 2006; Cartmell and Whealan 1999, 2007 and Leithch 2008) that focusses on studying these adaptations as independent cultural products.

Shakespeare has been translated and adapted across contexts, cultures, languages, genres and media and this has also sustained the focus on studying how his works get adapted. Adaptation studies have come a long way from the usual denigration of cinematic adaptation of literary texts, to a more nuanced probing frame on the nature of questions raised by the adaptations themselves. It will not be a stretch

to suggest that for many with non-literary backgrounds and interests, cinematic adaptations of the Bard are perhaps their first brush with him. Even for Bhardwaj, a chance encounter while researching for another film made him come across Shakespeare's work, and hence was not something he had prior knowledge of. Interestingly, many cultures have also laid claim on him and his identity, with a Turkish historian calling him Sheikh Pir, and some others in Libya claiming that his real name was Sheikh Zubair.¹ Hence it merits a discussion without devaluing the cultural significance of adaptations in popular culture.

Omkaara is part of a trilogy of films made by Vishal Bhardwaj based on three tragedies by William Shakespeare. It would be fruitful to read *Omkaara* as a film text which explores the discursive differences that it produces in its representation of power struggles and violence, both physical and psychological, rather than how faithful it remains to the literary text. Vishal Bhardwaj's trilogy of *Maqbool* (2004), *Omkaara* (2006) and *Haider* (2014) are closely referenced to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, *Othello* and *Hamlet* respectively, and his interpretations resonate with the Indian audience, including many of those for whom this is their first encounter with Shakespeare. In fact, Bhardwaj accidentally stumbled upon William Shakespeare, and credits his godson for introducing him to his plays. Upon reading his tragedies, Bhardwaj was convinced that they could be adapted and localised to the gangster genre by going beyond violence, blood and gang wars.²

WAYS OF SEEING AN ADAPTATION

Hutcheon (*A Theory of Adaptation* xiv) calls an adaptation a, "deliberate, announced, and extended revisitation of prior works", which suggests that a cinematic adaptation of a literary text is not an imitation or a replica but a retelling with revisions. Her approach unequivocally rejects placing the original literary text on a pedestal to compare, assess and evaluate adaptations, and instead stands for a poststructuralist position towards texts, resisting any hierarchy. This also reveals that the process of adaptation is a complex terrain, and the ways of seeing and receiving give different pleasures. In this sense, the original text and the adaptation are in conversation, dialoguing on the possibilities and limits and negotiating meaning-making, something that has also

and interweaves it with others, and then there are 'point of departure' approaches, where a new story gets invented.

Every adaptation needs to be understood in the specific context of that relocation. The travels and the spatial and temporal dynamics of that relocation. The form it is adapted to, who is adapting the text, why they choose to retell that story, how they go about revising, the audience within which the adaptation is situated, and the local context and culture within which the work of adaptation is also perhaps a new lease of life to the story, in many ways never wanting it to end. Chatterji (2018) in a discussion on Shakespeare's impact on Indian cinema has rightly remarked that his plays lend themselves very well to adaptation into films irrespective of culture, ethnicity, time, space and language. This is also because of the universal themes he deals with and the detailed exploration and study of the human condition in his works.

The question then confronting us is that how do we encounter, receive, appreciate and discuss a literary adaptation to cinema? As Hutcheon (2006) has pointed out, studying an adaptation is not about placing aesthetic emphasis on the literature, to measure or assess the value of the cinematic work as it is not just an imitation or a transcription, but a cultural product, part of a creative exercise, where the reception of that adaptation by the audience involves the pleasure of a back and forth between the two texts. This prior knowledge of the audience is also true in the case of genre expectations. This then places an emphasis on the 'active audience' approach that the meaning then is not inherent in the text itself, and the process of meaning-making begins the moment the audience interacts with the text. Shakespeare was often a source of plots in cinema without any explicit or in-depth knowledge of his plays. Adaptation, then, is not just a bad imitation, or a second-class derivation. The shift from stage to screen is a shift from imagination to reality-like. In a carefully worded essay, clearly making a case for not viewing adaptations as derivative, unfaithful, debased works, Hutcheon (2004) argues for understanding the differences, and the pleasures of adaptation while at the same time teasing out the ways in which it also brings anxiety among theorists.

Even though the field of adaptation studies still continues to grapple

with value judgements that seek to assess how faithful the adaptation is to the source text, this essay, in visiting *Othello's* adaptation into *Omkara*, will not follow a dyadic literary to cinema text approach, but a more diachronic mode of inquiry, raising some text-based but also thematic questions that emerge from the film.

CONTEXTUAL REIMAGINING OF *OTHELLO* AS *OMKARA*

This essay will attempt to read *Omkara* without being overtly haunted by the ghost of *Othello*, so as to not fall into the trap of a comparative analysis and emphasising on its literary origin and instead recalibrate by exploring the historical, generic, spatial, performative and publicised location of the film. In other words, how it gets produced and the ways in which it is received to understand the "specific problems in the production and reception of adaptations and relations between adaptation and other intertextual modes" (Leitch 76), which is how *Omkara* plays with *Othello*.

From a generic tragedy play to a dramatic film situated in Indian popular culture, the text travels into the Hindi heartland in a postcolonial reimagining of *Othello*. However it is neither an authentic adaptation, nor a shameless copying, or shadowed by the bard or fighting with his ghosts. As with contemporary developments in adaptation studies, *Omkara* as a film encourages us to move beyond the usual frame of reading adaptations as faithful or bad imitations, as it re-reads the original text, reimagines the characters, and shows us how universal Shakespeare can be to our contemporary concerns in India. The film then becomes an unencumbered signifier without a referent, circulating in the cinematic realm, open to meanings which the audience might want to ascribe to it. Inspiration from Shakespeare in this case has been very subtly and beautifully transformed in the local context of Hindi cinema.

It is true that many literary adaptations, in their anxiety to perform well commercially, shy away from fully associating with their literary inspirations, something which Bhardwaj also does. The film won three National Film Awards, with the director also winning the Special Jury Award in the ceremony. Among many other accolades, the film also bagged nine Filmfare Awards. In an interview, he has stated that *Omkara*

is his own version, staking claim over what he considers rightly his own. For him, it is not a transcription but an interpretation of the source text. The director insists that it is his version of *Othello*, and should be seen as such, going on to remark, "Let the purists frown".³ This statement was perhaps in anticipation of and in response to many readings and reviews of the film that sought to evaluate whether it captured the essence of the original source text or not. Interestingly, the film does not make any overt attempts to project that it seeks to remain faithful to the original text. The film in its promotional material has been officially positioned as Vishal Bhardwaj's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello*, drawing on the symbolic capital of Shakespeare, and firmly locating the film. In terms of genre, *Othello* can be identified with family drama and comedy, something that translated and adapts very well in Hindi cinema. The familial pressures and fight of romantic love against societal dictates and all odds is a familiar narrative. The makers have also made sure to celebrate the film's association with the bard but at the same time, have distanced the film to position it on its own, as he has mentioned in his interviews where he insists that the film can be enjoyed even without any prior knowledge of *Othello*. In fact, in an online interview, Naseeruddin Shah, who plays Bhaisaab (Duke of Venice) in the film, has gone to suggest that the film is probably better than the original text.

In many ways, it even departs, as *Omkara* is placed in another cultural and historical context, bringing local issues to the fore, and addressing new emerging questions. The film does in some ways recreate certain passages from *Othello*, going to the extent of teasing the medium-specific limitation, by using cinema's resources, and making it more evocative.

It will be fruitful to begin our discussion with the drive behind the adaptation of *Othello* and the contexts within which it has been produced and received. Bhardwaj's intention behind adapting Shakespeare is pertinent to discuss here. His drive to probe and reveal the compulsions of politics, the state and the resultant violence via the narrative frame of a Shakespearean tragedy is a recurring theme in his trilogy of films. This translation of his concerns into the visual realm in this collaborative process of making an adaptation with the elements

of direction, acting, screenplay and music composition have made his films assume their own canonical status in auteur Hindi cinema. This in turn makes them as much a work of adaptation, as much as they are independent works of art on their own.

In his own admission, Bhardwaj sees the film as a revision and localisation, keeping in mind the format and form that works in Bollywood. While maintaining feeble links with Shakespeare, it endeavours to remain commercially viable and successful, as evidenced by the interviews and candid admission by the actors as well as the line-up of big Bollywood stars in author-backed roles. In order to appeal to the widest possible audience, it makes room for comic elements, item songs, gang violence, dramatic sequences and romantic love scenes. It will not be wrong to suggest that it is an appropriation of the Bollywood formula and format of cinema as much as it is an appropriation of Shakespeare. While he departs from Shakespeare (as I will discuss in subsequent sections), he also departs from Bollywood family-film generic conventions, with rampant use of profane language, as well as the depiction of love-making scenes between its characters, as well as pre-marital sexual relations between the protagonist and his love interest.

Lastly, the universe of adaptations is not limited to the cinematic screen itself, as the whole culture industry of advertising, marketing, news media and publicity work together to create an enduring appeal of *Omkara* in popular culture. T-shirts, mugs, memes and GIFs, among others inspired by the film belong to the large canvas of popular culture forms, and have assumed significance of their own and are hence not just limited to the written or performative mode of adaptation. T-shirts and mugs, among other merchandise, featuring the main characters, played by Ajay Devgan, Saif Ali Khan and Vivek Oberoi, including their images and famous dialogues from the film continue to sell online.⁴ Many fan pages on the Internet are devoted to "iconic" dialogues from the film, most notably by the character Langda Tyagi, played by Saif Ali Khan.⁵ There are webpages dedicated to appreciating the poetry, the double entendre lyrics of the songs in the film.⁶ *MenXP*, a leading men's magazine recently did a retrospective article on the film, dubbing it as a 'cult' classic, praising the 'originality' of the film, its memorable characters and music, among other things.⁷

REMEDICATION OF CULTURE AND IDENTITIES

What happens when *Othello* crosses national and cultural borders? *Omkara* can be seen in many ways remediating culture and identities which inform its meaning. The story unfolds in a rural space where the traditional and modern are foregrounded in the transposing of *Othello* as *Omkara* is a spatial transformation marked by the liminality of the rural space where the dialogues in *Khari bol* tensions between the colonial and global, the rustic interiors of Uttar Pradesh, replete with profanity, richly textures the configurations of the original text into semi-rural Meerut where political warfare in the hinterlands of Uttar Pradesh, replete with profanity, richly textures the configurations of the original text into (Kauravi dialect) and Hindi in the film. This film is also political in the sense that Bhardwaj changes the visual structure, language and character a larger comment on rural gangster violence in the hinterlands of Uttar Pradesh. The film through its cinematic sensorium, producing sensory arcs, invites the audience into a cinematic sensorium, producing sensory affective experience, with its dialogues, costumes, songs and story line.

The film straddles competing realms with ease — it is constructed to be commercially successful but at the same time, is characteristic of Bhardwaj's auteurship; it retains the literary text's core essence but is infused with significant changes, using colonial Shakespeare to speak to the postcolonial third-generation audience, remaining local and yet maintaining and imagining global ties. In a testament to Bhardwaj remaining true to his own revision and imagination of *Othello*, the excessive use of cuss words in the film invited the ire of film distributors, critics and audiences, with many families opting not to watch the film, and even walking out, and as a consequence the film not doing very well at the box office.⁸ To his critics, the filmmaker suggested that they walk out of the film as the language and the conversation in the film was central to his story and the characters.⁹

Based in rustic Uttar Pradesh, the film reveals the operation and circulation of power and violence at the intersections of gender, class and caste and moves through the tensions of the self and the other as well as the public and the private. Shakespeare is captured, incorporated and used deftly, to look at UP politics, the violence by state and non-state actors and familial pressures and relations.

Desdemona (played by Kareena Kapoor) as Omi is going to kidnap her soon. Dolly's lawyer father Raghunath Mishra/Brabantio (played by Kamal Tiwari) is enraged and approaches Bhaisaab in the jail to free his daughter from Omi's clutches, whom he sees as a good for nothing hoodlum. This is re-worked from the original where after Desdemona elopes with Othello, Iago goes on to inform her father of this development. Iago compares Othello to 'black ram' and Desdemona with 'white ewe', something that also is spoken by Tyagi's (Iago) wife Indu/Emilia (played by Konkona Sen Sharma). Bhaisaab summons Omi to bring Dolly for an audience with her father to confirm if she went of her own accord. This interaction mirrors the original text, where Desdemona, like Dolly confesses that she loves Omkara and has eloped of her own volition. The father seized by the loss of family honour and shame, tells Omkara that a woman who can deceive her own father can never be faithful to another man, something which Brabantio also tells Othello in as many words. The possibility and reference to 'honour killing' does not come up in the film, as Bhaisaab intervenes to arbitrate and give a final verdict on the matter. Here we see Dolly torn between her love for her father and lover, and subsequently the war of whom Dolly 'belongs' to, later forms the central question and driver of the film, where Tyagi continuously exploits this seed of vulnerability in Omkara's head, and leads to his suspicion of Dolly's love and loyalty for him. He is shown to be visibly burning with jealousy, but the cool and calm breeze of Dolly's love dissuades him time and again from doubting her. It would not be a stretch to state that Dolly's character and her loyalty is the pivotal point of the whole film, instigating everyone's actions. In a contrast with Othello's life, Omkara has a whole family, along with Indu, who unlike Emilia is not a servant but a warm and loving sister to Dolly.

After he kidnaps her, he is met with jibes by Indu that they are as opposite as charcoal and milk, and an elderly woman speculates if Dolly has put kilos of pancake. This also plants the idea of inferiority and not being good enough in Omi's mind, for he refers to his dark self time and again when questioning why someone as fair and beautiful as Dolly would want to be with him. In the context of the film, Omi

is also reminded of his lesser caste status, something that he brings up on his own as well in his conversation with Dolly. He is already operating from a position of 'lack' that has been thrust upon him by social conventions.

It is not surprising that in the absence of men, the women in the house talk about the men only, cooking for them, and wondering about the ways in which they can make a place in their hearts. In a scene where Dolly is preparing a sweet dessert for Omi taught to her by her grandmother, she reminisces that she was told that a sure shot way to a man's heart is through his stomach; Indu though playfully retorts that she's heard instead that the way to a man's heart is below his stomach. Dolly makes all efforts to please him, learning an English song from Kesu (in return for bringing him back in Omi's good graces after a drunken brawl).

Kesu, unlike Cassio, studied with Dolly in college, and has friendly relations with her. This is something that Tyagi exploits, for he is bitter after being passed over for being the next *bahubali*. His anger at Kesu being appointed to take Omi's place is also fueled by Rajju/Roderigo. Rajju in turn is driven by his own rejection and burning love and desire for Dolly. Again, the woman, and her possession seems to drive everyone except Iago, who simply exploits everyone's obsession and insecurities with respect to Dolly. Everyone is a pawn in his masterplan of exploiting very basic human emotions. Tyagi is a man who is acutely aware of his surroundings, of people's emotions and their vulnerabilities. He is able to plant seeds, run interference, and turn the course of events by orchestrating skillfully. In a significant departure from the original text, Iago who is motivated by his own suspicion that Othello slept with his wife Emilia, in the film, Tyagi's wicked evil nature is more innate than that of Iago's. He is driven to Machiavellian manoeuvres because of his thirst for power and recognition, and what he thinks is his due. The tipping point for him is when Kesu is propped as Omi's successor, and in a deeply evocative cinematic visual, Tyagi re-enacts Kesu's coronation by smearing his face with his own blood, a symbolic reference to the bloodletting that is soon to follow.

During the film, in a loving and tender moment, in contrast to the handkerchief in the original text, Omkara hands over his family

family honour. During a playful sequence of chasing him, the kamarbandh falls and is later stolen by Indu, which is in turn stolen by her husband, Tyagi. Knowing fully well that it belongs to Omkara (played by Bipasha Basu). When Omkara finds it out, he interrogates Dolly, who is unable to locate the waistband or explain how and where she lost it. The waistband, which can be compared to the chastity belt given by soldiers going to war to their wives, is given to Dolly as a family heirloom, and is later coveted by Indu with greed and lust and later worn by Billo as a seductive lustful piece of jewellery in the film. For Dolly, it can be seen as a burden of family honour, for Indu it was an expression of her sexual agency, and finally travelling to Billo, in a contrast to what Dolly stands for, it's a promise by Kesu. During the love scene between Indu and Tyagi, at one point he wears the waistband on his head, like a floral head-gear, much like a to-be groom ready to take over his bride-like strongman status. Cabaret (2015) has in fact proceeded further to argue that this queers the relationship between Omi and Tyagi, where the waistband is worn by him as a way to seduce Omi. This reading is also reflective of the homoerotic tension that has been often interpreted between Othello and Iago. The history of the waistband, traced back to Omi's mother who was a showgirl who seduced his father, is poetic, and tells the burden of sexuality, lust, seduction and charm imbued in the jewellery, it is an object which is meant to tease and arouse.

Since Dolly cannot find the waistband, he is now convinced of her affair with Kesu. As a punishment, Omi puts Kesu in his place and entrusts him with the task of sending out his wedding invitations, which can be seen as a move to side line and stake his claim of ownership on Dolly. After the wedding, unable to contain himself after seeing a fabricated evidence of Dolly's and Kesu's love affair, Omi smothers her to death on their wedding night, only later to be told by Indu that it was she who stole the waistband and Tyagi's involvement, and how this whole conspiracy was hatched to make Omi doubt Dolly's character and innocence. Indu comes out to be a strong corrective to this unfair and unfortunate scenario. Unlike Emilia, she is opinionated and finds

enough screen space to make her presence felt. She scolds Omi when he is in the wrong, she consoles Dolly, and towards the end of the film delivers a retribution of sorts, restoring equilibrium. The uprising of Indu towards the end, the one who unravels the conspiracy, and passionately kills her husband Tyagi, is a significant departure, and has been read by many as a reversal of gender roles by Bhardwaj. Indu becomes an important character for both men in the film. For Omi, she reveals the conspiracy to him, making him realise the mistake he has committed, the guilt of which ultimately drives him to take his own life and be joined in death with Dolly. For Tyagi, she brings retributive justice, killing him without remorse to restore balance in the world. However, another perspective would suggest that the women in the film still continue to circulate within the trope of a subjugated subject position, who after much suffering will rise up for the final blow. Barring Indu's characters, Bhardwaj's film does not offer a drastically different vision for the women in society. Billo's character, read as a contrast to Dolly's chaste innocent one, is testimony to commercial compulsions of Bollywood as well as the need to use the courtesan as a radical contrast to the female leads in the film. In a postcolonial semantic analysis of Billo's assertion in the film, Charry and Shahani (2014) argue for Billo's presence as the third-generation young voice of emerging India, and also serving as an East and West contrast (between Dolly and her), and the very opposing presence of Shakespeare and Bhardwaj in the film itself. In an answer to the question of portraying Bipasha Basu as the village show girl, replete with item songs in a Shakespearean inspired film, Bhardwaj stated that, "I wanted to reach the masses. I've to serve them the right appetisers to get them to appreciate the meal."¹⁰

Bhardwaj perhaps offers more agency to the women in his films, not as mere spectators, but capable of agentic actions. Dolly (Desdemona) is perseverant, exuberant and prominent in her screen space, effecting action and change. Desdemona was circumscribed by constraints on her agency, first by her father in her freedom to be with Othello, and later by Othello himself for supposedly transgressing the borders he had laid for her, imprisoning in his house.

In that sense, Shakespeare gets assimilated and reconfigured by the transgressive potential of the female characters. Bhardwaj draws

hierarchy from a strongman to a local leader in the political party does lend legitimacy and social capital to Omi, something which he has been struggling with, as he is feared by all but maybe not respected.

This postcolonial Shakespearean phenomenon and his adaptation into Hindi cinema fueled by globalisation have been described by Burt (2003) as, "the indigenization and subversive appropriation of Shakespeare in postcolonial and developing nations" (266). While temporally, it is postcolonial, the pressing concern of the film is more of a response to a contemporary and global India navigating the complex changes brought upon by changing political, economic and cultural developments in a country where even democratic systems are populated by the corrupt and the criminal. The very elevation of college educated English-speaking Kesu over the foul-mouthed Tyagi as the next successor, and Dolly's efforts to learn an English song to serenade Omi describe the urgent desire of this generation to move up the globalising ladder.

In a larger comment on the struggles and pitfalls of moving up the social ladder, Bhardwaj scripts these two as the easy targets in the film. They quickly become the 'other' for Omi and others in the film, creating another state of alterity. Kesu stands for everything Omi lacks, his demeanour, his looks, his education, the way he dresses, all that charges his modernity and makes him desirable and fuels Omi's jealousy.

In this way, Bhardwaj has been able to make Shakespeare speak to the local rhythms of India by incorporating him in the realities of complex caste and gender relations and political machinations and aspirations of the country. In his interpretation, Omi gets consumed by jealousy, ego and doubt, which sets off a chain of events that destroys him and the lives around him but there are quite a few displacements from the original text especially with the inclusion of the usual elements of a potboiler — action, crime, romance, comedy and item songs.

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CELEBRATING THE CITY

KOLKATA IN INDIAN LITERATURE



Edited by

Sayantana Dasgupta

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I. Invitations from Kolkata in Odia Personal Narratives

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“Land of Wonders” Kolkata as Setting in Odia Literature

Animesh Mohapatra

The emergence of Kolkata as the second city of the British empire and the capital of colonial India not only exerted tremendous political and economic impact on the country, it also led to far-reaching cultural consequences. In the eastern part of India, in particular, the rapidly growing metropolis transformed aspects of social and economic life in significant ways. Given the geographical proximity of Odisha with Bengal, the similarities Bangla and Odia shared as spoken languages, and the cultural transactions they had historically engaged in, Kolkata began exercising a special fascination for Odias. Over a period of time, a sizeable community of migrant Odias found a new home in Kolkata which, as in the case of exiles everywhere, was not always a welcoming and hospitable place. The story of the survival of these migrants from an agrarian world was also a riveting one of the exploration of new ways of belonging to a modern metropolis. In view of the precarity of their existence in the imperial capital, it is not surprising that literary representations of their experiences took a fairly long time to find expression. Therefore, while we find early references to Odia presence in Kolkata in European travel narratives, it is only in the last decades of the nineteenth century that we come across Kolkata being depicted in Odia literary texts. The first part of the essay, therefore, focuses on colonial accounts that explore evolving connections between Odisha and Kolkata. In the second part, various ways of imagining Kolkata in Odia literature are examined.

discussed above, Kolkata also emerges as a site where danger and pleasure dramatically intermingled. Finally, it is portrayed as a theatre of spectacular violence. So, Kolkata in these narratives is imagined as a place that is fast-paced, liberal and non-hierarchical, a hunting ground for conmen, and also a place of violent strife.

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**MEDIA BEYOND
BORDERS:
A SOUTH ASIAN
PERSPECTIVE**

**EDITED BY
V. RATNAMALA
SAYAN DEY**

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OTT Consumption of Transnational Television Reruns and Fan Practices in India: A Case Study

Aakriti Kohli, Assistant Professor, Department of Journalism, Delhi College of Arts and Commerce, University of Delhi, Netaji Nagar, Delhi

Introduction

Consumption of popular television shows available as reruns on OTT platforms opens an exciting field of cultural enquiry into how these media texts are received, re-articulated and re-situated by audiences themselves. The global cultural economy in its transnational mode of operation is primarily influenced by and flows via the nodes of American cultural production. This paper takes the case study of reruns of a popular television sitcom, *Friends* which ran on NBC from 1994 to 2004, completing 10 seasons and 238 episodes, available for streaming on Netflix now. This paper makes use of online surveys and participant observation of online fan groups, and draws on theoretical works of Hill (2007) and Morley (1986) on television and pleasure, Jenkins (1992) and de Certeau (1984) on fan practices, Hall (1997) and Appadurai (1990) on global media culture, and Spigel (1995) and Kompare (2005) on television reruns to build a prism via which pleasures of transnational cultural modernity and consumption of television reruns on OTT and fan practices in India can be put in perspective. The central concerns of this paper include why and what do audiences seek in watching reruns of popular television shows? Is it because television programming which relies on tested television shows ensures high volume of audiences to be delivered to OTT platforms or do audiences themselves seek particular kinds of pleasure in watching reruns of their favorite shows? In essence, why do we watch what we watch? This requires an attempt to unravel the inherent logic of transnational television reruns of episodic narratives, the themes that make them timeless and the interrelated questions of cultural production and reception. This paper also delves into the phenomenon of fan practices around the show i.e. the second order of production (consumption) by way of which the audience receives, makes use of and interacts with the text. Subsequently this paper probes the level of active consumption by way of which fans may engage

with a text, including recontextualization (where fans may add to the text's narrative and offer explanations), cross-overs (cross-referencing other television programmes and characters) and personalization (fans inserting themselves in the narrative). Towards the end this paper argues that a show such as *Friends* is a familiar space most audiences continue to return to, find relevant, seek comfort in, and identify with their life, not just as banal television but as a meaningful repository of love, relationships and friendship.

Previous research on television watching practices in the field of cultural studies has explored the element of pleasure in consuming television, discussing the problematic overt emphasis on pleasure (Hill, 2007) or the guilty-ridden pleasure of watching television itself (Morley, 1986). The act of watching television or televisual content may be conscious or unconscious, where audiences may or may not reflect on the television text as a purveyor of ideology. Subsequently audience engagement and mode of viewing a genre such as news and current affairs will be distinctly different from other genres such as situation comedies. Battles and Hilton-Morrow (2002), for instance, argue that situation comedies rarely deal with political issues and largely depend on interpersonal relationships and individuated acts to pull the narrative forward. In that sense audience expectation from situation comedies will tend to be different from other television genres. Popular psychology reports from a study conducted in 2012 suggest that watching reruns of our favorite television shows may boost our will power and may have restorative powers (McGonigal, 2012). As per the report, the participants in the study who were asked to write about their favorite shows performed better at structured tasks than those who were asked to list items in their room. The researchers concluded that watching reruns had a "measurable restorative effect from a familiar fictional world." [1] Being a consumer of popular television shows has led me to think further on why and what do audiences seek in watching reruns of popular television shows available on OTT platforms. Is it because of television programming which relies on tested television shows to ensure high volume of audiences to be delivered to advertisers or do audiences themselves seek particular kinds of pleasure in watching reruns of their favorite shows? Why do we watch what we watch?

Transnational television content has been available in India from 1991 onwards via satellite, cable, direct-to-home and the Internet more recently. [2] Before the convenience of watching television shows online,

the repertoire of English-language shows produced in the US and the available in India on cable was limited. Some of the longest running and most popular English-language drama and sit-com shows in India include *Barwatch*, *Seinfeld*, *Bold and Beautiful*, *Sex and the City*, *Will & Grace*, *Therese & Greg*, *Small Wonder* among others. In 2019 for instance, Netflix bought the rights for *Seinfeld*'s 180 episodes for over \$500 million (Horton, 2019). India has never been a prominent exporter of transnational television content to international networks, barring Bollywood films. On the other hand, it has received much television content from the West. Chopra and Gajjala (2012) point out that transnational global media culture has inevitably brought to bear the concepts of concomitant cultural imperialism and homogenization of global culture in developing countries. However, some recent work on global media culture has been insightful in providing conceptual and theoretical maps of the complex spatial and temporal dynamics of media production, circulation and reception among audiences. Especially with reference to OTT, the production, circulation and proliferation of television media texts via global economy is an exciting field of cultural enquiry to understand how these media texts are received, re-articulated and re-situated by audiences themselves.

Reading the working of transnational media production practices into what Hall (1997, pp. 27) calls "global mass culture", one can understand the unbound nature of media content circulating globally today when he says that it is:

...dominated by the modern means of cultural production, dominated by the image which crosses and re-crosses linguistic frontiers much more rapidly and more easily, and which speaks across languages in a much more immediate way... by all the ways in which the visual and graphic arts have entered directly into the reconstitution of popular life, of entertainment and of leisure... by television and by film, and by the image, imagery, and styles of mass advertising. Its epitomy is in all those forms of mass communication of which one might think of satellite television as the prime example... its whole purpose is precisely that it cannot be limited any longer by national boundaries.

Arjun Appadurai (1990, pp. 299) on global cultural economy and transnational 'mediascapes' observes that they are,

...image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality, and what they offer to those who experience and transform them is a series of

elements (such as characters, plots and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places.

The global cultural economy then in its transnational mode of operation is primarily influenced by and flows via the nodes of American cultural production. Kompare (2005) in his work tracing the historical emergence of reruns and repeat television in America remarks that a cultural and industrial history of reruns in the US points towards this phenomenon as a legitimate business practice in running of the television industry. He also goes on to argue that the format of repeat television in the US was to also construct a sense of national history and national past, something which is also discussed by Spigel (1995) in her work on popular memory and its negotiation with official historical past where televised heritage comes to stand in for heritage itself fostering particular notions of gender, class, race and ethnicity albeit in a teleological fashion.

Kompare further argues that television reruns should be seen as commoditized objects circulating in capitalist economies of cultural production thereby referring to the monetization of syndicated content, advertising revenues and a pre-tested and adapted audience for those programs. While this does explain the business logic of scheduling reruns of old television content as well as their availability now on OTT, however it does not adequately explain the continued patronage, engagement and consumption of reruns by the audiences themselves. More specifically it does not sufficiently throw light on how transnational television content and its reruns find resonance with viewers in a country like India, long after the show has stopped running or the continued fan engagement and concomitant fan practices around certain shows. This requires an attempt to unravel the inherent logic of transnational television reruns of episodic narratives, the themes that make them timeless and the interrelated questions of cultural production and reception.

My query with respect to reruns of popular television shows is specifically to do with the American sitcom *Friends* which ran on NBC from 1994 to 2004, completing 10 seasons and 238 episodes. The show follows the everyday professional and love lives of six friends in their 20s living in Manhattan, New York. Each character is sketched with particular quirks such as the "control freak" chef, the "dumb but good-looking" actor, the "waitress obsessed with her looks", the "nerdy paleontologist", the "witty corporate cog" and the "free-spirited masseuse and singer". These

MEDIA BEHAVIOUR AND PRACTICE
characters are essentially performing as young people carrying out modern day professions in one of the most expensive cities in the world.

From New York to New Delhi

It has been more than 20 years since the show aired on television but according to the Broadcast Audience Research Council in India between January and June 2016, the show aired on Viacom 18's Comedy Central (English entertainment channel), had 2.08 million impressions (Sathe 2012)[3]. Every few years there are rumors of the cast reuniting for another season or the release of the trailer of the film based on the show.[4]

The sitcom works on syndication, and generates \$1 billion in syndication revenue for the Warner Bros every year and the cast of the show makes 2% of the syndication revenue each year as syndication royalties.[5] In 2002, NBC negotiated to renew the show for its last season, and are reported to have paid each member of the cast \$1 million per episode for the last season.[6] In 2002 the show was doing 24.7 million viewers per week, with a 12 rating with adults between the ages of 18 and 49 making these numbers. The sitcom made use of many revenue channels, including the first-run ad revenues, broadcasting syndication and DVD sales. While no current DVD sales revenue figures have been released, a report indicates that in 2003 2.1 million copies of *Friends* DVDs were sold for \$75 million.[7]

The show's rights were acquired by Romedy Now (an English-language television channel that broadcasts romantic comedies (American television shows and Hollywood films)) in 2014 and ran for a few months after which the rights were also acquired by Comedy Central, which continues to broadcast the show in India. The show has previously run on Star World and Zee Café (English-language television channels that broadcast syndicated popular American television shows), sometimes simultaneously, with both channels showing different seasons. The content head for Romedy Now defends their decision to acquire the old sitcom on the premise that it fits well within their "love and laughter" motto, additionally the programme scheduling is done in such a way that individual episodes can be watched every night of the week from Monday to Thursday and "binge-watched" on Saturday in a marathon session.[8] The show also finds its audience not just on television but also on free online streaming websites and subscription-only portals such as Netflix, an online Video-on-Demand or OTT streaming website which bought the rights for streaming *Friends* for \$500,000 per episode in 2015.[9] The show was briefly discontinued on Netflix after its

rights were bought by Warner Media, however it has been back on the Netflix platform since 2020. While Netflix does not divulge the number of subscribers streaming a show or their viewing patterns but a Netflix spokesperson has been quoted as saying that *Friends* draws as much online buzz as other contemporary shows about young adults.[10] As per a report, approximately 32 million minutes of *Friends* has been streamed on Netflix as on December 2019 (Vyotko, 2019).

The show, with its emphasis on the individual in a society, the hopes and ambitions, the individual struggles and challenges, is aspirational when it comes to living on your own, pursuing your dreams, dating woes etc. The characters do not engage with their immediate political environment, where current events only come in passing as a reference to a joke. Socio-economic issues are the individual's alone who must triumph over them to be a part of the society. The show is a capitalist dream – a new vacation, a new car, a new job, a new piece of jewelry, new-found love, all of these are the lampposts of high points in the character's lives. All the characters in the show are heterosexual (barring comic references to one of the character's father who is gay and performs in drag) and white.

The emerging question is that how can a show that aired in 1994 and ran till 2004 still continues to find relevance among audiences in India? A similar thought is articulated by Sternbergh (2016, p. 4) who observes:

The world of *Friends* is notable, to modern eyes, for what it encompasses about being young and single and carefree in the city but also for what it doesn't encompass: social media, smartphones, student debt, the sexual politics of Tinder, moving back in with your parents as a matter of course, and a national mood that vacillates between anxiety and defeatism.

The Cultural Economy of Repetition on OTT

Where does then *Friends* fit into the current lives of the youth and more specifically where does it fit in the current lives of Indian youth who are watching it for the first time and/or watching the reruns on OTT? Taking off from this question I began having preliminary discussions with my students about the show, their personal memory of watching it for the first time and their practices associated with the show. For many of my undergraduate media students in the ages of 18 and 21, their popular memory and memorialization around the show leads them to believe that it was perhaps their first brush with all things modern and progressive or all things American specifically. Even for my generation, those who were born in the mid-1980s, the show for us was a commencement of young

adult life and independent decision-making, albeit with a dose of everyday humor. Subsequent discussions with my students regarding their television viewing habits led me to search for a community of audiences who still watched the show and continued to engage with it. Since I was looking for new and old audiences, I searched for online groups dedicated to the show. I found a group specifically for Indian fans of the show on a popular social networking website (Facebook) with over 87,000 members. It was a closed group and I had to send in a formal request for joining in. The description of the group reads as "Great TV Show which gets more funnier (sic) each time you see when not in great mood. Do watch any episode it really makes your day and you become friends to the characters in the even though you don't know them personally." For the purpose of this research, I adopted the methodology of an online qualitative and quantitative survey along with online participant observation of the group community to study individual fan behavior and inter-personal fan practices.

Before carrying out the survey I wrote a time-bound post in the group in May 2020 asking interested members to write to me about their experience of watching the show and if they would be interested in taking part in the study. I received 87 messages from members who were interested in talking about the show and demonstrated interest in taking part in the study. After an exchange of messages about the show, their memories of it and their continued engagement with it, I emailed the survey to them. Out of the total 87, 83 members completed the survey. My respondents were both male and female, between the ages of 17 and 38, living in metropolitan cities of India. Most of the respondents remember watching their first episode of the show when they were anywhere between 12 to 14 years of age on Netflix (OTT) (42%), television (40%) and on DVD (2%). On television, the respondents recalled watching the show on Star World and Comedy Central in equal numbers, followed by Zee Café. 94% of the respondents admitted to still watching the show on a regular basis, with 55% watching it on television. During the initial interview exchange, some respondents admitted that they come across the show while surfing channels and do not specifically seek out the show during its scheduled hours. About 59% of the respondents said that they specially streamed the show on Netflix.

The show came to an end in 2004 and Netflix and Comedy Central has been running different seasons and episodes multiple times during the year, this is also evident from 88% of the respondents who claim that they have watched some episodes more than 5 times. Each episode is roughly

22 minutes, with 8 minutes of commercial break. While television (cable networks/DTH) continues to dominate as the medium of preference for watching all kinds of televisual content, 57% of the respondents used Video-On-Demand and online streaming services such as Netflix, Hotstar and Amazon Prime (Netflix, Amazon Prime and Hotstar are paywalled online streaming platforms which offer watching of television shows and films on their platform for a fee. Hotstar is an Indian platform whereas Netflix and Amazon Prime are international services). Revealingly 90% of the respondents admitted to watching television shows online (which may also include illegal and pirated streaming websites). 73% of the respondents admitted to streaming *Friends* episodes online, suggesting that it's not just programming of reruns on television but also voluntary seeking out of old episodes online for viewing.

In some of the detailed descriptions on why they like the show, the respondents explain the characters, humour, relatable situations, and context of the show, which has an undying appeal for them. Some responses also described the uniqueness of each character and the building of a relationship with the characters after all these years. Some respondents also admitted to knowing the characters like their own friends and predicting how the characters will respond in a given situation. The show continues to be an important reference point even now for many of them. Many pointed out to the nonchalance with which the characters dealt with important life decisions and issues such as marriage, divorce, job loss, childlessness and dating failures. As one young female respondent said: "The show tells you to take life easy...*Friends* is easy on the head, not too complex and always funny." Some of the respondents (9 females and 5 males) also shared that watching reruns of episodes they have seen before is reassuring, and the concerns and issues of the characters continue to find relevance in their life as well. Even though the show speaks of the American way of living, some of the cultural practices and issues finding prominence in the show such as finding a dream job, throwing a get-together, retail-therapy to address mood swings, dating troubles, falling in and out of love, resonate with them at a personal level, and consequent identification with the characters bringing them back to the show.

An overarching observation by women respondents was about how the show has had an impact on the way they dressed, and specially their hairstyle. A running joke in the show is one of the character's overweight days when she was young and the constant fat-shaming that she went

through when she was young. This is referred to time and again to remind the character (and perhaps the audience as well?) to not get over-weight in order to fit in and dwell on vanity if you want to be the most popular girl in your social circle. At least 27 women respondents variously mentioned "appearances", "looks", "hairstyle", and "clothing style" in their detailed replies to what attracts them to the show.

In the survey I also asked the respondents to construct the image of Manhattan that they form in their mind while watching the show. Image of recurring adjectives included "free" and "freedom" along with "love", "open about sexuality", "modern" and "young". While it will not be wrong to suggest that the Manhattan of the show is hardly representative of Manhattan in real life, it will be useful to discuss the lack of any racial and ethnic diversity on the show. There are no Hispanic or Black characters even peripherally present in the show or sexual diversity in terms of characters other than those of the heterosexual kind. There is also a discernible air of anti-intellectualism embedded within the show, where one of the characters who holds a doctorate and is a paleontologist is made fun of, stopped from discussing his work or publications, is branded as boring and is derided as "Not an actual Doctor".^[11] None of the other characters ever speak about education, politics or issues plaguing the country or any other subject matter which could be considered "heavy". Any references to the economy are limited to their own personal jobs and the amount of money they make. The show in that sense is largely conformist to idealized notions of good house, good job, and money to spend, with person to love and maintaining the status quo. It is not surprising that the one-page brief for the show was that the show will be about six friends who hang out at the coffee house.^[12]

Re-living the show: Online Fan Practices

The field of cultural studies and research on media texts as artefacts of culture has certainly helped transcend the previous assumptions around meaning-making and the ways of seeing and knowing. Much of the research in the field of cultural studies has firmly argued that the meaning of a text is not embedded in the text itself but the meaning is generated when the audience encounters the text and engages with it. While the first level of production of a cultural text may be guided by the dominant mode and logic of culture industry production, it is in fact the second order of production (consumption) by way of which the audience receives, makes use of and interacts with the text (Certeau, 1984). Michel de Certeau calls this active

consumption of texts as "poaching" (pp. 74). Henry Jenkins (1992) calls this active consumption "textual poaching" and fans as "active cultural producers" and notes the various ways in which fans may engage with a text, including recontextualization (where fans may add to the text's narrative and offer explanations), cross-overs (cross-referencing other television programmes and characters) and personalization (fans inserting themselves in the narrative).

During the course of my survey, it emerged that for the audiences, post-viewing engagement with the show continues to be high with 92% of the respondents agreeing to having read news articles about the show as well as participating in online quizzes themed and centered around the show (76%). Subsequently I carried out online passive participant observation in the group over a period of three months, from May 2020 to July 2020 and kept a track of posts to the group by the members and their interactions with each other over those posts.^[13] The group exists as a space of socialization and creative expression, of demonstrating aesthetic and creative labour and continuing the show's narrative by participative community media production. Some of the images circulated in the group are sourced from elsewhere on the Web and some are especially created by the members (more often than not the members mention if the fan art is an original piece of work) The members of the group primarily engaged with each other via the production, circulation and distribution of memes in the group. The members in the group interacted fairly regularly with at least 4 or 5 posts to the group every day. The group's fan practices can be described as sharing of digital texts revolving in and around the show and the content can be categorized in to memes (including still photographs, screenshots and GIFs), quizzes, videos and personal statuses.

Digital memes are the hallmark of our online experience and interaction on the Internet and are a distinctive feature of contemporary popular culture. Memes have existed much before digital communication, when Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene*, published in 1976 defined "meme" as a unit of culture, be it a certain kind of behavior or style or even an idea that could spread within a given culture. Dawkins, in conceptualizing the meme, referred to it as a change in culture brought on by mutation on the basis of his theory of selection. The meme as we know now took its current shape and form after it was appropriated by users on the Internet when they drew cultural references from films, cartoons, music videos, video games, photographs etc. to depict an emotion, a phrase or

phrases on the internet with the characters of the show. This kind of cross-referencing also included juxtaposing a screenshot and a dialogue from the show with another show and dialogue in a kind of cross-textual referencing. In one of the recent posts in July 2020 a lot of cross-textual references between another popular show *Game of Thrones* led to many such memes. Some memes also include (vi) members posting a screenshot from the show and suggesting alternate endings in the episode or an entirely new story and (vii) superimposing the names of the show's characters on stock images taken from the Internet or other popular culture references.

Members also share short video clippings of specific scenes that they like, captioned with their own take on the scene, inviting comments from other users and tagging their friends to take part in the conversation. Such posts lead to fascinating discussions on the member's own version of why a character behaved the way they did or disagreeing with other members on motives, statements and behavior of the characters. Another very popular way of engaging with the show on the group is sharing online quizzes themed around the show with other members of the group. There are perhaps hundreds of online quizzes about the show available on the Web and on any given day at least one quiz is shared by a member. Among the various kinds of quizzes, members share quizzes about specific characters such as "Do you know him or her?", "Are you more like him or her?", "Which profession from the characters should you have had?" and "How much do you really know the show?" among others. Such posts lead to members posting their scores, sharing trivia about the show with others and posting explanations about the quiz. Members also post personal statuses from in and around the show, such as a long-standing joke from the show, or an unresolved conflict from the show, which they'd like other members to weigh in on. Some personal statuses also take the form of questions where members ask the group who they identify with the most or discuss a contemporary issue and wonder how the characters of the show respond to it. More recently, there have been cross-reference questions such as how a character from this show would have responded to a situation from another show if given a chance. Such posts attract passionate discussions, many disagreements and hypothetical arguments.

The pleasures of watching: Some Notes

The television and OTT culture industry may find reruns profitable, but for the audiences of the show, it remains iconic not just on television but also in their video-on-demand and online streaming choices where

they consciously seek out the show. The show certainly obfuscates class conflict, racial inequality and alienation of labour. It squarely puts the onus of survival on the individual, where Monica, a budding chef needs to find her own footing while wading through endless catering jobs and compromises with multinational food corporations. While the show also obliquely refers to struggle, it only does that in passing, where Ross, an emerging scholar and academician negotiates the complex world of tenure and academia. Joey, a struggling actor, has to pull himself together to get regular acting jobs in order to keep his medical insurance (there is no mention of an actor's union or a recognized body that works for their welfare). Or someone like Rachel, who learns that she cannot always be her daddy's spoilt rich kid, but she'll have to be her own spoilt rich kid. Chandler on the other hand is the smart corporate whiz who saves enough for a rainy day, and still has unresolved issues with his father's sexuality and occupation as a drag performer. Phoebe on the other hand is the only character who is allowed to criticize mass production, standardization and commodification only because she is – as one of the characters in the show describes her – 'flaky'. She is unpredictable, weird and eccentric, someone who believes in ghosts, spirits and auras, and hence by extension most of her beliefs are untenable and to be brushed off. My respondents to the survey as well as those interviewed described watching the show as a leisurely activity and discussed the pleasures derived from the show at length. Barring a few – who did mention that the show brings forward the challenges of living in a city like Manhattan – none of the respondents chose to reflect on the socio-political issues underlining the show. For majority of them, the show was just that, situation comedy among six friends.

The undying appeal of the show is exactly this, footloose and fancy free, every man (or woman) for himself (or herself). Though one can rely on friends to bail us out and provide comfort, the state has no role to play, its presence is only a mild irritant, at best. The show is the representation of the best that 'American life' has to offer: freedom, autonomy and choice. The pleasures of watching the show are also inextricably linked with its long-standing popular culture presence on the Web. For the members of the fan group, the show and its characters are seamlessly integrated with their everyday digital practices of sharing jokes, memes and posts on social media, on the group and off it. The show is non-confrontational and equally liked by advertisers. In that sense the fact that the show makes no external reference to social issues, economy or polity, it continues to exist in

suspended animation in a timeless space, much like a heterotopia, and perhaps that's the reason it continues to find relevance even 13 years after the last episode was aired. As one of the respondent's put it, "It is a clean show and touches a chord every time, every human emotion and every conflict a person may go through is in the show".

Before writing this paper, I assumed that the show's audiences would lament the unavailability of other situational comedies and similar content produced in India or even similar content from the West. However, it does emerge that there is no dearth of content, with different shows finding their presence and following among the audiences' viewing habits. This particular show however continues to be that familiar space most Indian audiences continue to return to, find relevant, seek comfort in, and identify with their life, not just as banal television but as a meaningful repository of love, relationships and friendship.

Endnotes:

[1] A detailed discussion of the study is available here. <http://www.buffalo.edu/news/releases/2012/09/13646.html>

[2] For a more in-depth discussion on the Indian television experience post the 1990s within the framework of globalization, refer to Narayan, Sunetra Sen. *Globalization and Television: A Study of the Indian Experience, 1990-2010*. New Delhi. Oxford University Press. 2013. The book examines in detail the liberalization of the television space, opening up of the economy, rise in purchasing power, developments in telecommunication and the concomitant changes in audiences, channels, available content, revenue models etc.

[3] BARC defines impressions as television viewership in thousands of a target audience who viewed a show, averaged across minutes, for more see, <http://www.barcindia.co.in/glossary-terms.aspx>

[4] For instance, this report from 2016 on a reunion <http://www.cnn.com/2016/01/14/friends-cast-to-be-reunited.html>

[5] Report on the earnings and loyalty figures of the cast, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/entertainment/2015/02/27/youll-never-believe-how-much-money-the-friends-cast-still-earns-today/27593556/>, viewed on 1st May, 2017

[6] Report on the loyalty and syndication rights deal, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/12/business/friends-deal-will-pay-each-of-its-6-stars-22-million.html>, viewed on 1st May, 2017

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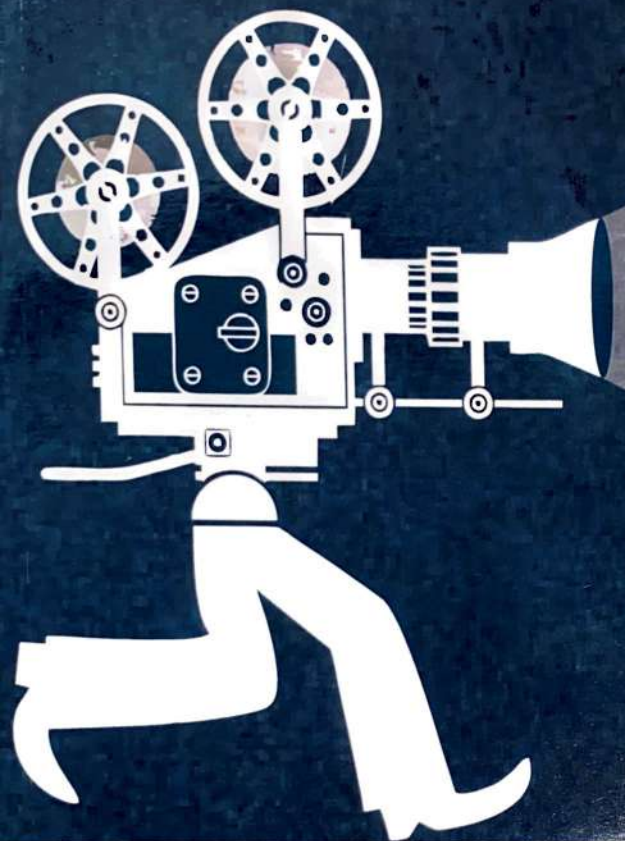
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AN INTRODUCTION



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●●● Worldview Film and Media Studies

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The Hollywood Story: The Studios and the Auteurs of Classical Hollywood Cinema



Smita Banerjee

This chapter focuses on an important segment of world cinemas, one that is perhaps most widely watched and known, Hollywood cinema (Bordwell terms it 'an excessively obvious cinema'¹). Exhibited and seen in most countries, Hollywood has been at the forefront of the institution of cinema from the early days of film production and distribution, and incorporates within its structure a very efficient corporate culture that uses film to capitalise on both creative and commercial enterprise. Located in North America, Hollywood interestingly has acquired the status of an international film industry and is very rarely referred to as only designating American cinema, or rather only as National cinema. Classical Hollywood Cinema (hereafter CHC) is generally used as a temporal marker to designate a particular period in Hollywood film industry history. It roughly encapsulates the time of the big studios of the 1930s and culminates in the 1960s. CHC can be studied in three broad categories: one as a specific kind of cinema in terms of its mode of production and a history of technology; second as a cinema with specific narratorial and stylistic codes that demarcate the popular genres that define CHC² and lastly, as a socio-cultural exemplification of ideology that permeates this cinema.³ Is there another node that can be applied to an understanding of this cinema that moves away from the above categories? A different narrative can be plotted if one foregrounds the biographies of certain well-known directors such as Alfred Hitchcock, Orson Welles, Max Ophüls, Douglas Sirk and others who worked within the system as contracted directors but have been credited with a distinct visual style and designated as auteurs especially within the CHC.⁴ At a simplistic level, it seems a contradiction to apply this art-house term to a structure and institution of filmmaking which is an industrial and commercial enterprise that works with set and often very rigid parameters.⁵ Is it possible to uncover a signature visual style, the most important criteria used to define an auteur, within a system that used a stratified and well-structured production method?⁶ However, before we turn to the auteurist intervention, it is also important to understand that CHC as an institution is not only defined by its mode of production and narrative style but crucially needs to be understood as a system that controlled exhibition and distribution as well. The following section explains the structural components of CHC in terms of its exhibition and distribution practices as well as various