Unit 19
Films

Contents

Learning Objectives

This Unit will help you to:

• Understand the patterns of consumption and representation of Bollywood and diaspora; and

• Know the representation of diasporic filmmakers and their communities.

19.1   Introduction

Meera joota hai Japani

Yé Patloon Inglistani

Sar pé lal topi Rusi —

Phir bhi dil hai Hindustani.
(*Shree 420*)

The chorus from this song in Raj Kapoor's legendary film is a fitting starting point, especially when considering how it has subsequently cropped up in many movies and novels by diasporic writers of South Asian origin. For instance, in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* fictional Hindi movie superstar Gibreel Farishta, a blend of Amitabh Bachchan and M. T. Rama Rao, sings the song when tumbling down to earth after his AI flight 420 is blown up in the middle of the English Channel and in Mira Nair's film *Mississippi Masala* the song is played on a tape recorder when a Ugandan Asian family is violently ejected from their home and forced to migrate via England to the US. Indeed Raj Kumar Saxena, the main character in *Shree 420*, is a masquerader par excellence, a man who can absorb difference - racial and cultural, dress, makeup and behaviour. He can inhabit an identity that valorises fragmentation and seek wholeness and incorporate several transnational identities in himself (see Chakravarty, 1993:203). In this respect it could be argued that the song is an anthem for migrancy, dislocation and re-rooting on our routes. In the song, the chaplinesque clown wears a motley of international attire, yet despite these markers his 'heart remains Indian for all that'. Is he the prototype of the diasporic migrant? Within processes of identity negotiations film, film music and cinematic representation have always played a significant role. Bollywood[2] cinema in this realm occupies an in-between place, on the one hand providing a link with the home country for the diasporic migrant, on the other presenting the diaspora back to the homeland. Indeed, Sumita S. Chakravarty argues that Indian commercial cinema has come to symbolise an order of psychic investment for immigrants of Indian origin all over the world, evoking the desire for origins, often problematic scenario of originary desire, a desire for origins, often problematic scenario of originary desire, a

accompanied by discomfort, guilt and pain, that is central to the attempt at identity formations on the part of displaced peoples. Bombay cinema and film songs become thus the common ground of social intercourse in the Indian diaspora. (Chakravarty, 1993:3) She further argues that for Indians living in the diaspora Hindi movies become the metonymic substitution for 'India' and this substitution is an attempt at closure, a means of constructing rigid mental boundaries between the past and the present, the culture at home and the new adopted culture, home and exile, nationality and naturalisation. More often than not, this imaginary 'India' is frozen in time, a past to which it is impossible to return, but 'which comes to represent the self valorized in another place, at another time.' (Chakravarty, 1993:4) In this respect, the Bombay film becomes the displaced site of national exploration. Yet to read the Bombay film and its relationship to the diaspora as mere nostalgia would not expose the full picture. Increasingly, Indian popular cinema has impacted on markets outside India. Until recently these used to be markets with large Indian immigrant communities, but ever since the late 1990s Indian cinema's reach has widened even further.

This unit will look at how Bollywood cinema represents the diaspora and will also look at the consumption of Bombay cinema in the diaspora. Furthermore, it will look at a cinema located beyond Bollywood, the South Asian diasporic films, which at first were markedly different from Bollywood cinema, but have increasingly been influenced by Bollywood. Although Indian popular cinema has had a global following for decades, the diaspora has not emerged as a central theme until the mid- to late 1990s. Therefore this unit will focus on the post-1990s period with a special emphasis on the genre of the Romantic Film. Of course, Hindi cinema has tackled other issues in those years besides family and romance, but 'the assertion and endorsement of Indian "family values" in an uncertain globalising world has become a conspicuous and insistent theme in popular culture in the 1990s.' (Uberoi, 1998:311) This seems to be reaffirmed in films such as *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (hereafter *K3G*) and *Kal Ho Naa Ho*. Interestingly Indian diasporic filmmakers have also addressed this issue in their films and it seems grounds for commonality can be located here. Indian diasporic filmmakers have tackled issues of home, belonging and alienation in their cinematic productions, but have often adhered to realism and eschewed Bollywood's blending of different genres, but negotiations of 'family values' too have increasingly dominated. When considering India and its diaspora on film, several questions emerge. Firstly what function does Bollywood cinema have in negotiating the migrant's relationship with home and the new host nation? Secondly, how do diasporic filmmakers represent their own communities on screen? How do they position themselves to renegotiate the shifting ground beneath their feet? Thus this unit seeks to explore how film is a useful medium in mapping an emerging cultural landscape of hybridities, confluences and influences. This unit can only give an indicative account of the debates that have dominated the fast proliferating analysis of Indian popular cinema in relation to the South Asian diaspora in a variety of fields, such as postcolonial studies, social anthropology, film studies and cultural studies, but what will hopefully emerge here is how South Asian diasporic cinema and, more problematically, Bollywood do not only occupy a position between locality, nationality and internationality (Kaur and Sinha, 2005:16-23), but also occupy a position at the interstice of culture.

19.2   Bollywood and Diaspora — Consumption and Representations

In *Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire*, Vijay Mishra asserts that any study of Indian popular cinema must nowadays address the role it plays in the lives of the peoples of the Indian diaspora (see Mishra, 2002:235). He distinguishes between two instances of diaspora formation. Firstly, the movement of indentured labourers to the colonies, secondly, the post-1960s phenomenon of economic migration to the metropolitan centres of Great Britain, Canada, the United States and Australia. The migrants of this second phase have been usually referred to as NRIs and, according to Mishra, have 'radically reconfigured Indian readings of the diaspora and redefined [...] cultural forms that see this diaspora as one of their important recipients.' (Ibid: 236) It is this diaspora of late capitalism which has been increasingly targeted by the film industry as a lucrative market for their products and which has also become the subject of its films. In these films 'the space of the West' becomes 'the desired space of wealth and luxury that gets endorsed, in a displaced form, by Indian cinema itself.' (Ibid) Mishra argues that a diasporic imaginary grows out of a sense of being marginalised, of being rejected outright by nation-states, because of their difference (see Mishra (Ibid:237). Thus Bollywood for the diaspora fulfils the function of bringing the homeland to the diaspora while also 'creating a culture of imaginary solidarity across the heterogeneous linguistic and national groups that make up the South Asian diaspora' (Ibid). Mishra sees Indian popular cinema as a crucial determinant in globalising and deterritorialising the link between the imagination and social life (Ibid). Where such a reading of Bollywood becomes problematic is in its levelling of South Asia into a homogenised monoculture in which an orientalised version of India becomes a stand-in (see Desai, 2004:6). In this respect, Bombay cinema informs a narrow ethnicity that finds its imaginative realism through a particular kind of cinema that 'brings the global into the local, presenting people in Main Street Vancouver, as well as Southall, London, with shared "structures of feeling" that in turn produce a transnational sense of communal solidarity.' (Mishra, 2002:238) Thus, according to Mishra, the consumption of Bombay cinema actively constructs an Indian diaspora of shared cultural idioms, the Indian diasporas as imagined communities, in which Bollywood cinema functions as a self-contained, cultural specific phenomenon (Ibid).

Vijay Mishra raises here quintessential questions about home, belonging and rootedness, and the function of Bollywood in these identity negotiations. Marie Gillespie's study is also revealing in this regard as she investigates what it means to be 'British' and 'Indian' as well as ethnographic questions about the perception of Britain and India in relation to the viewing habits of Hindi films among young British Asians. She maintains that for young people in Southall, London, Indian films are influencing their perceptions of the subcontinent, especially for those who have no direct experience of India. Furthermore, for those who have been to India these movies are an important counterpoint to their lived experience (Gillespie, 1995:81). The binaries of tradition / modernity, village-rural / city-urban, poverty / wealth, community / individualism, morality / vice are important markers within a social, political and moral discourse within these films that have a particular influence on young diasporic South Asians' perception of these films (Ibid:82). Gillespie points towards striking gender differences in the perceptions of Indian cinema, where young girls looked towards the social and moral values inherent in the films through a retelling of the narratives, while boys seemed to be much more concerned with issues of representation

of India and Indian communities and on that basis often rejected these portrayals in the movies (Ibid). Gillespie associates this partly with the experience of racism in Britain which 'undoubtedly influenced the range of meanings projected on to Hindi films, as they underpin responses to constructions of Indian society in all media' (Ibid).

Hindi films are a heterogeneous blend of a number of genre, often structured around composite narrative themes. Rosie Thomas identifies three basic narrative themes — 'Dostana', where the bond of male friendship overcomes the desire for a woman; 'lost and found', where parents and children are separated and reunited, usually involving a plot of mistaken identities; and 'revenge' where villains are justly thrashed by wronged heroes (see Thomas, 1985:125). Crucially, viewers are drawn into these movies and become emotionally involved. This involvement forms an integral part of the viewing pleasure as '[a]ffective engagement is ensured not only by cinematic techniques which encourage identification, but also through the songs which heighten the emotional impact of the film' (Gillespie, 1995:84-85). Music is a powerful element of Hindi films and like an interior monologue can express repressed desires, emotions and aspirations and thus are often picturised as fantasies and dreams, moments of escape from reality. Music can also function as an emotional memory trigger that allows for escape from the harsh realities of everyday life in a society that is often hostile towards its immigrant communities. Thus, music provides a form of escape and respite for a younger generation of South Asians who stand somewhere between East, West - the pressures of traditional values at home and the pressures the West puts on them. Furthermore, Gillespie also shows how Hindi films are a powerful tool used by the older generation of diasporic Indians to educate their children and grandchildren 'in the values and beliefs that are seen to be rooted in Indian culture and traditions (Ibid). Gillespie argues that films allow both the young and their elders to form opinions on 'salient themes, especially issues of kinship, duty, courtship and marriage'. She further concludes that Hindi films seem to be used 'to legitimate a particular world-view, but also to open up its contradictions. So, while young people use Indian films to deconstruct "traditional culture", many parents use them to foster cultural and religious traditions' (Ibid: 87).

Box 19.1: Bollywood as a tool

Bollywood serves as a tool within the diaspora to reformulate and translate cultural traditions in the South Asian diaspora, but also as a tool with which to deconstruct these. This is mirrored in the patterns of consumption of Hindi films. Rachel Dwyer notes that while during the 1960s and 70s Hindi films were screened in the UK in cinemas during off-peak times and Sunday mornings, these were discontinued in the 1980s as the VCR took over, a market that in turn was superseded by the advent of cable and satellite television channels that cater for the Asian diasporic community, such as Zee TV and B4U.[4] Multiplex cinemas revived Hindi movie shows in the 1990s as the practice of video holdback (films being released on VCR up to six months after their cinema release) made these showings commercially viable again.

Yash Chopra was one of the first to recognise the potential of the diaspora market as a major source of revenue, quickly setting up offices in London and New York in 1997 and 1998. For Yash Chopra, film audiences in Bombay, London and New York and the South Asian diaspora of the UK, US and Canada became his film's imaginary realm (Dwyer, 2002:160). Increasingly there is also a non-South Asian audience interested in the films of the Yash Chopra brand. It is therefore not surprising that ever since the late 1990s

Hindi films have regularly featured in the list of top 20 grossing movies in the UK and the US, Mani Ratnam's 1998 movie *Dil Se* being the first. From a marketing point of view, the overseas market is very lucrative for Indian film producers, considering that revenue from ticket prices can be almost ten times higher than in India. There is in this new market a new generation of cinema-goers that has emerged from the Asian diaspora, a generation educated in English, that grew up in a western cultural environment in education and in its patterns of media consumption (Ibid:161). Few of these are Hindi speakers – the British Asian community is largely Punjabi, Gujarati or Bangladeshi. Thus there are very few mother-tongue Hindi speakers in this diaspora (Ibid). According to Rachel Dwyer, This younger generation acquires its knowledge of Hindi largely from watching Hindi movies. Hindi cinema's supplementary material, like soundtrack albums, fanzines like *Filmfare* and *Stardust* as well as television specials on the latest releases are readily available through shops and satellite television as well as the growing number of websites and discussion forums on the internet, allowing for a much wider and faster consumption of Bollywood. As an industry Bollywood has become truly globalised, albeit in a specifically diasporic sense.

The heightened awareness of Bollywood cinema and of the South Asian diaspora suggests that Bollywood's aesthetic is invested with some kind of cultural capital that goes beyond the commercial. Thus to discuss Hindi cinema as merely escapist entertainment would also be too simplistic. Rajinder Dudrah argues convincingly that what we mean by escapist entertainment needs to be thought through in more complex terms. He suggests that Bollywood cinema needs to be studied as 'part and parcel of cultural and social processes and elaborated on, though not exclusively, through an engagement with actual social subjects.' (Dudrah, 2006:29) In this respect, Dudrah argues, there is a need to think imaginatively about cinema as a global industry, films as popular cultural texts, and the relationships that are possible between cinema and its audiences. A closer look at patterns of consumption and production of Bollywood allow us to open such a debate. Importantly, for the diaspora Bollywood cinema has had this cultural capital all along. However a definition of that cultural capital is problematic especially when it produces readings of Bollywood solely in terms of latent nostalgia for its diaspora or as the eroticised commodification of a minority culture. The question is how can this be avoided? The Bollywood craze in the UK in 2001/2002 may be an illustrative example. While the department store Selfridges in London transformed its basement into a Bollywood set, the Victoria and Albert Museum curated 'Cinema India: The Art of Bollywood', under the banner *Imagine Asia* the British film institute toured with a selection of films through the regions, and the big-budget musical *Bombay Dreams* produced by Andrew Lloyd Webber with music by A. R. Rahman opened in London. *Bombay Dreams* in particular drew from the musical and visual language of Bollywood and accentuated spectacle while packaging it within the conventions of the musical theatre genre. It initially brought in mainly a South Asian audience and then by word of mouth the audience became increasingly mixed. The question of audience and representation is of importance here. The lure of A. R. Rahman's score is undisputed, but what image of India is the show, scripted by Meera Syal, presenting? Is it a Bollywood pastiche or exuberant exotica? To be a convincing pastiche the show relied too much on Bollywood conventions to actually work. The question is how we read these shows and events. Despite the recent celebrations of Bollywood cinema within Western mainstream culture, it is important to note that this celebration coincided with a backlash against South Asian diasporic communities in the wake of

the September 11 attacks. This further complicates the relationship between a 'majority' culture and its minorities. It brings up questions about where we place films by diasporic filmmakers which, unlike Bombay cinema, are not necessarily 'commercial' films. Furthermore where is the place of Bombay cinema within this discourse? Considering Bollywood's output, which has always exceeded Hollywood's and considering Bollywood's audience reach, can we really speak of a niche cinema? The increased critical attention this cinema is receiving suggests that the balance is slowly but surely being redressed and that Indian popular cinema is increasingly read as not only a national cinema, but also as a global cinema. But can it really challenge the dominance of Hollywood? Kaur and Sinha go as far as to suggest that the integration of the Bombay film into film studies allows for a wider engagement with the nature of globalisation and how it operates in popular culture.

The application of methodologies applied to the reading of Hollywood films to the Bombay film too is problematic, considering that on this basis the Bombay film has been too often dismissed by scholars, because it is so difficult to categorise (see Thomas, 1985:116-117). Thus, there is an argument to be made for the production of new methodologies to read Bollywood cinema on its own terms. Arguably, within processes of globalisation, Bollywood could be seen to work as a centrifugal force against the cultural homogenisation exercised by Hollywood. Thus 'the circulation of India's commercial cinema through the globe has led to the proliferation and fragmentation of its fantasy space, as its narrative and spectacle beget diverse fantasies for diasporic communities and others.' (Kaur & Sinha, 2005:15) For film studies in particular, attaching value to the popular remains a bone of contention. Indeed, the heightened interest and engagement with Indian popular cinema and mass entertainment seems to redress the balance in the debates about Third World filmmaking and can make an important contribution insofar as it forces us to engage with a different mode of filmmaking that is not avant-garde or structured according to the tenets of received Western modes of filmmaking. In a discussion of Bollywood we have to engage with populist modes of cultural production that reach people of disparate backgrounds and experiences uniting them in front of the silver screen.

These debates are linked to questions about the relationship between global, national, popular and mass culture (see Chakravarty, 1993:10) Thus the idea of nation and the relationship between diaspora and the nation becomes a site of constant contestation that needs to be navigated. Perhaps the negotiation of identity for the diaspora through the medium of film can be best understood, to bring together Chakravarty and Virdi's terms from their studies of Indian popular cinema, as the tension between 'ImpersoNation' and 'Cinematic ImagiNation', which is also reflected in the song from *Shree 420*. In both these metaphors we can locate 'notions of changeability and metamorphosis, tension and contradiction, recognition and alienation, surface and depth: dualities that have long plagued the Indian psyche and constitute the self-questionings of Indian nationhood.' (Ibid:4) Indian popular cinema is caught up in the cross-currents of these debates and negotiations and through its contributions made the drama of impersonation its distinctive signature (Ibid). According to Chakravarty it serves more than just reinforcing 'the truisim that films impersonate life; characters impersonate real men and women; the film-viewing experience impersonates dreams.' (Ibid) Thus impersonation 'subsumes a process of externalization, the play of/on surfaces, the disavowal of fixed notions of identity.' (Ibid) Within the global, then, Bollywood is still posited within India. India still is its imaginary

realm, but it needs to acknowledge through its global distribution that as a cinema it has become the conveyor of what it means to be Indian to an array of audiences. Thus the Bombay film has become a means by which diasporic communities negotiate Indianness and its transformation (see Kaur & Sinha, 2005:16). Kaur and Sinha propose an analytical framework that posits itself outside prevalent discussions of Bollywood cinema in terms of its difference, largely based on its unique formulae or in terms of nationalist ideologies. Yet Kaur and Sinha stress the interdynamic relationships between the local and the global, the national and the international and the national and intra-national, arguing that Bollywood cinema through multiple sites of productive economies has the power to link broader networks of transnational societies and diasporic communities, demonstrating how Bollywood cinema's consumption by its diasporas across the globe inflects the imaginings of nationhood (Ibid:23). Thus what has become evident especially during the 1990s and after is that the construction of a 'national fantasy' has become unstable. Sudhanva Deshpande illustrates that in her discussion of the family romances of the 1990s. Bollywood's relationship with its diaspora challenges us as 'readers' and viewers 'to think imaginatively about cinema as a global industry, films as popular cultural texts, and the relationships that are possible between cinema and its audiences.' (Dudrah, 2006:29) In this respect, while India remains Bollywood's target market, increasingly, one needs to consider that Bollywood equally and simultaneously appeals to a wider audience, especially in South Asia and its diasporas (Ibid:31).

Reflection and Action 19.1

Explain the patterns of consumption and representation of Bollywood vis-à-vis its diaspora.

During the 1990s, the Bollywood 'masala' formula has undergone a number of changes, which often makes it difficult to categorise Hindi movies into the five generic strands that Edward Johnson identified: Muslim social film, Devotional films or mythologicals, Masala Films, historical films, social films (see Dudrah, 2006:33). As Dudrah convincingly argues in his reading of Subhash Ghai's 1997 film *Pardes*, these thematic differentiations are increasingly challenged through the emergence of the diaspora as a lucrative market during the 1990s. Thus filmmakers are actively rethinking and retuning the established conventions and genres, creating a new masala formula (Ibid:65-96). Mishra pertinently points out that in recent years in particular, Bombay cinema has actively sought to picturise its own version of the diaspora and to tell the diaspora what it desires. Thus, as much as the diaspora might construct its view of the homeland through Bombay cinema, Bombay cinema attempts to 'display the diaspora better than it displays itself.' (Mishra, 2002:245). While this might not be an entirely new phenomenon - Mishra points to Manoj Kumar's *Purab Aur Pachhim* (1970) as a filmic example that uses the East/West binary to dramatise the tradition/modernity dichotomy - the diaspora has become more and more an integral part of Bollywood cinema (*Salaam/Namaste*, being a more recent example). . Mishra sees the reasons for that in a massive process of deterritorialisation between 1970 and the early 1990s (Ibid). This further accelerated with market liberalisation in India. The possibility of travel brought the homeland and the diaspora closer together. For Mishra, film forms an active part in the culture of travel which also brings star concerts and film production units abroad, especially to the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, Australia, The Gulf states and Switzerland. For example, Farhath Hussain has presented Bollywood entertainment shows ever since 1986, Sensation 2005 being the latest one where actors and actresses like Shahrukh Khan, Rani Mukerji, Preity Zinta and Saif Ali Khan perform hit songs from their

movies. The overseas locations, especially Switzerland, also have become a staple part of Hindi movies. These concerts, according to Mishra, mediate between diasporic culture and Indian culture, as well as between diasporic culture and Western culture (Ibid). Mishra identifies in these concerts a cross-current of cultural representation, where Bollywood movie stars represent Western popular culture back to a diaspora audience 'in response to the diaspora's own unease about claiming Western culture as its own.' (Ibid) How convincing this is as an argument is debatable, especially in the light of more recent developments where cultural "cross-overs" have occurred more regularly and more easily in film, theatre, and music and many of these have been facilitated by the South Asian community.

The success of 1994 movie *Hum aapke hain kaun...!* (hereafter *HAHK*) made the family-orientated film a viable commercial option once again, paving the way for the success of *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (hereafter *DDLJ*). *DDLJ* has been regarded as the film that has brought the diaspora back to the *desh*. Dwyer sees *DDLJ* directly borrowing the visual vocabulary of the romantic dramas of Yash Chopra. The film features a gripping story, visual beauty, great locations and unforgettable songs and bears all the hallmarks of a Yash Chopra romance. However, the film differs in the more conservative deployment of the family in the young lovers' romance (Dwyer, 2005:76). Aditya Chopra explores his own thematic vision in the way in which the lovers do not directly challenge society's prohibitions and taboos as their passion unfolds, but instead seek to persuade the harsh, if well-meaning, patriarchy (Ibid:141). Another notable difference is the portrayal of foreign locations not as mere spectacle. Though the Swiss Alps are presented as an idyllic place where romance flourishes, London is presented as a cold and anonymous city, home to the dislocated transnational Indian middle-class nuclear family. The Punjab is presented in this respect as the idyllic yearned-for homeland where traditional values remain intact, 'a place for family and love' (Ibid). London is presented as an inappropriate location for romance, the Swiss Alps allow romance to flourish, but full passion is unleashed in the Punjab (Dwyer, 2005:76). The film's driving force is the hero Raj's (Shahrukh Khan) love for his heroine Simran (Kajol), which transforms him from spoilt brat into a responsible adult. His rite of passage highlights the structuring of family friendships and emotions (Ibid:78). Dwyer convincingly argues that the film tackles family friendships and emotions and reinforces the belief that Indianness is not so much a question of citizenship as of sharing family values. Thus the film's emotional richness lies at the centre of the narrative, rather than the story of return from the foreign land back to the *desh* (Ibid). This emotional richness is largely enshrined in the on-screen chemistry of Kajol and Shahrukh.

A closer look at Aditya Chopra's 1995 smash hit with its Western-look-Eastern-message might illustrate what Mishra means when he argues that *DDLJ* together with *HAHK* redefined Bollywood cinema in the 1990s. *DDLJ* links the institutions of family and courtship and marriage to the articulation of an Indian identity within the context of the diaspora (Uberoi, 1998:331) Mishra terms it a seminal text about diasporic representation and consumption of Indian popular culture, as the film's success with the diaspora community is directly linked to the manner in which the film reprojects the diasporic subject. However, it is, according to Mishra, a reprojection of a diaspora manufactured in the dream factory of Bombay in terms of its own conventions and 'at odds with the struggle for self-legitimacy and justice that underpins diasporic lives generally.' (Mishra, 2002:250). What happens in the film according to Mishra is the reworking of a number of diasporic fantasies, which are reconfigured by the homeland 'as the "real" of diasporic lives'

and in the process become "truths" to which the diaspora aspires. These fantasies are sublimated in what Patricia Uberoi in her discussion of *HAHK* terms the 'arranged love marriage'. The film does not challenge traditional Indian family structures. For Baldev Singh, Mishra argues, in England, difference needs to be maintained as otherwise one's own identity would be lost. Is this merely a casting of the patriarchal family father as the villain or obstacle that both lovers Simran and Raj need to overcome, or is this as Mishra pertinently asks a display 'of ethnic absolutism? No engagement with the nation state? No gesture towards hybridity? And home? Where is it? What one has left behind rather than where one is at? But are they also indications of a new sense of diasporic self-assuredness after years of excessive pandering to the West on matters of the popular? Or, finally, is this Aditya Chopra's own reading of Indian culture onto the diaspora to emphasize the culture's eternal verities to the home audience?' (Ibid: 252) These are hard hitting questions that we as audience need to negotiate and be aware of. For the daughter Simran in particular, the homeland is set up as a possible threat to her emotional independence, and the European tour seems a form of escape from familial pressures. Thus the film sets up Raj's and Simran's European pastoral in the Swiss Alps as backdrop in contrast to the pastoral place of origin in the Punjab for Simran's father. Along with *HAHK*, *DDLJ* set a trend and there have been similar reworkings of the plot, *Pardes* being one example. Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* too uses the model of a narrative of return. According to Mishra, Bollywood cinema through these films elaborates a fantasy text of the homeland and the diaspora that strikes a cord with the implied diasporic spectator, now living in a threatening foreign nation state. In this respect Mishra identifies two trends. A heavy dependence on overseas locations largely unfamiliar to the home audience but familiar in the diaspora. Secondly, a Punjab ethos displacing the old Northern Indian ethos of Bombay cinema, because of the large Punjabi community living in the Indian diaspora.

Since this unit is concerned with the diaspora itself this discussion leaves out the way in which the diaspora and the presumed narratives about them can function as an ideal for the Indian spectator as well. This also needs to be considered in a discussion of the representation of the diaspora in Bollywood cinema. The question is in how far are these representations accurate; do we need to look for authenticity? On the one hand we need to read these representations on Bollywood's own terms, but on the other we also need to consider the cinema that lies beyond Bollywood, films produced by diasporic filmmakers from the South Asian community abroad. Thus what Bombay cinema presents on screen is its own reading, some would say misreading (see Mishra and Kaur) of the diaspora. According to Mishra, this is partly due to the centre-periphery understanding of the homeland-diaspora nexus in which the diaspora becomes a site of permissible transgressions while the homeland is the crucible of timeless dharmik virtues (Ibid:267). Bombay cinema has also created its diaspora stereotype. Mishra concedes that Bombay cinema comes to the subject of the diaspora with its own ideology. Thus, apart from a narrative diegesis that locates films such as *DDLJ* and *Pardes* in the idea of global migration he sees the texts not as a distinct representation of the diaspora experience. This is tackled more incisively by diasporic filmmakers from the South Asian community abroad, exploring social tensions within the diaspora community and in relation to an alien host culture. Bollywood cinema engages in a double construction. On the one hand it constructs an image of the affluent NRI abroad and on the other it constructs an imaginary homeland for the diaspora itself (Ibid:269). Kaur further develops this points. She sees in the fetishisation of the figure of the NRI the creation of a new hegemony, albeit

from a particular perspective, where capital and distributive networks determine what it means to be a 'proper Indian' (Kaur and Sinha, 2005: 314). She also argues against too simplistic a reading of Bollywood cinema where box-office successes and TV ratings are too often uncritically translated into a discourse about NRI nostalgia. A closer examination of diasporic film-making underpins this argument. Part of the issue seems to be location, as many second or third generation South Asians do not necessarily 'see India as their centre of psycho-political imaginaries' (Ibid:316). In this respect, Kaur argues, Bollywood is essentially taking up an ultra-conservative Euro-centric argument that migrants from elsewhere 'do not quite fit' in the west and presents them without context in an environment 'where the specificities of diasporic histories and the cultural politics of that are elided' (Ibid). What emerges from Kaur's study and interviews during fieldwork is that the aspiration of Bollywood filmmakers to "represent" the diaspora has lead to a striking disidentification from South Asians living in the diaspora, showing that these films are 'negotiated on a shifting terrain of love and disdain' (Ibid:322). Part of the problem is a lack of differentiation. The NRIs presented in the films are affluent upper-middle class north Indian families. Thus these films overlook 'the diversity of class and ethnic positions of the diasporic Indians.' (Ibid:323) Kaur sees this blanket generalisation implicit in the term Non Resident Indian – someone whose main orientation is Indian, even if he or she was not born there, to which some of the participants in Kaur's fieldwork took exception. Within these debates about Indianness and debates about Indianness as a measure of authenticity lies a much more politicised debate about home and the positioning of India as the authentic homeland that stands in opposition to the inauthentic 'home' in the west. This is often accompanied by a representation of the homeland 'with intoxicating imagery of peasants dancing in lush fields' (Ibid:323). Within these parameters, we need to ask the question where and how to position the films of the South Asian diasporic filmmaker, screen-play writer and director, such as *My Beautiful Laundrette, The Buddha of Suburbia, My Son the Fanatic, Bhaji on the Beach, Mississippi Masala, East is East, Bend It Like Beckham, Anita and Me, Bollywood Hollywood, Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, to name but a few. The next section will look at some of these films in more detail.

19.3   Diasporic Filmmakers and their Communities

British cultural critic Stuart Hall has pertinently observed with regards to an emerging new cinema of the Caribbean that identity needs to be understood as a 'production', never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation (See Hall, 1994:392). Thus, cultural identity is always in flux, to be negotiated and renegotiated, to be produced from different positions of enunciation. The question it raises is if it is possible, considering the inevitable fragmentation and experience of dispersal inherent in diaspora, to impose any form of coherence and if such a coherence must not ultimately be imaginary (Ibid:394). Salman Rushdie remarks in his essay 'Imaginary Homelands' that the emigrant's physical alienation from 'India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind.' (Rushdie, 1992:10) The diasporic migrant needs to negotiate his relationship with a new alien culture and carve out a space and place for himself. Thus negotiating identity becomes a two-fold process, in Hall's terms 'a matter of "becoming" as well as "being".' (Hall, 1994:394) While cultural identities of the Indian diaspora are formed and

shaped by the history of colonialism, Empire and its aftermath, they are nevertheless subject to an infinite number of rearrangements. Thus 'identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.' (Ibid) Cultural identities, as Hall sees it, are thus the points of identification within the discourses of history and culture and these are characterised by difference and rupture. Thus the diaspora experience is defined by heterogeneity and diversity, 'by a conception of "identity" which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*'. (Ibid:402) Hall proposes a conceptualisation of diaspora as a form of cultural identity that moves away from a fixation with a return to the roots and origins to a diasporic cultural identity that is born through difference. This construction of identity through difference and by hybridity has become increasingly important in cinematic representations of the South Asian community by South Asian diaspora filmmakers in Britain, Canada and the US, who will be the main focus in this section.

According to Jigna Desai, South Asian diasporic identificatory processes are centrally configured and contested through the cinematic apparatus. South Asian diasporic cinema is a developing cinema that negotiates the dominant discourses, politics and economies of multiple locations (Desai, 2004:35). In this respect, South Asian diasporic cinema is posited somewhere between Bollywood, Hollywood, Britain's, Canada's and the US's national cinemas and 'art-house' cinema. This again becomes a difficult territory to navigate. As Desai convincingly contends, part of the phenomenon of the art-house and its reception in the west is to view 'foreign' films, especially from developing countries, as ethnographic documents of "other" cultures in which diasporic filmmakers serve as native informants, e.g. Merchant Ivory's 1983 docu-drama *The Courtesans of Bombay*, Mira Nair's debut film *Salaam Bombay!*. The films of Satyajit Ray's were read in a similar way in the West. These directors are perceived as significant enough to occupy a place among the pantheon of European art house film directors such as Jean Luc Goddard or Federico Fellini, while Bollywood films were never included. The animosity this can cause is illustrated by Nargis's following remarks:

NARGIS: Why do you think films like *Pather Panchali* become popular abroad?... Because people there want to see India in an abject condition. That is the image that they have of our country and a film that confirms that image seems to them authentic.

INTERVIEWER: But why should a renowned director like Ray do such a thing?

NARGIS: To win awards. His films are not commercially successful. They only win awards. ...What I want is that if Mr Ray projects Indian poverty abroad, he should also show 'Modern India'.

INTERVIEWER: What is 'Modern India'?
NARGIS: Dams...
(Rushdie, 1992, p. 108-109)

Desai points to South Asian diasporic cinema's position as outsider, actively engaging in a contesting relationship with national cinemas. It reveals South Asian diasporic cinema, especially within the British context, as actively engaged in debates about 'Englishness' and challenging Eurocentric views (see Shohat and Stam, 1994). Within the British context, many of the films and scripts had their origin in workshops and groups formed in the 1980s in London as a response to growing racial tensions and exclusionist definitions of 'Englishness' by a right-wing conservative elite. While Black British cinema

works inside parameters of mainstream filmmaking — in this respect it seems more accurate to talk about independent film-making – the topics these films tackled were deemed 'radical', both within their own community as well as the British public. The response to Hanif Kureishi's films illustrates this well. For instance, Norman Stone condemned *My Beautiful Laundrette* in the London *Sunday Times* as a film that represents 'sick scenes from English life' (Nasta, 2002:184), while the British Asian community were outraged by the iconoclastic portrayal of their community. Indeed, it illustrates the in-between space a second generation Asian like Kureishi has to negotiate. For him, then, it becomes more of a problem of how to negotiate his Britishness. Hanif Kureishi's films were some of the first films to reach a wider audience, partly because of the funding they received - these workshops had been funded with public money, thus these films gained access to a much wider network of distribution and had some commercial success as well (see Desai, 2004:46). Another reason for the films' success is the great economy with which Kureishi tells his stories: 'one objective of film writing is to make it as quick and light as possible' (Kureishi, 2002:vii). Kureishi handles complicated issues of race, gender, individuality, home and tradition with a lightness of touch yet still presenting their complexity. Kureishi comments that because of his screenplays' subject matter 'it didn't occur to any of us involved in *My Son the Fanatic*, for instance, that it would be either lucrative or of much interest to the general public' (Ibid).

Kureishi's 1985 movie *My Beautiful Laundrette* is the story of Omar, a restless young Asian man who takes care of his alcoholic father in South London during the mid-1980s. His uncle, a keen supporter of the entrepreneurial zeal of the then prime minister Margaret Thatcher, offers Omar a business opportunity to revamp and manage a dilapidated laundrette, an opportunity at which Omar jumps, enlisting the help of his old school-friend Johnny, who has since fallen in with a gang of neo-Nazis. Both men form an alliance that turns the laundrette into a successful business as both men also become intimate with each other. The film explodes a variety of racial, sexual and class stereotypes. What is revealing about this film is its negotiation of a British and Asian identity from both sides. It reveals that 'belonging' must not necessarily be an exclusionary zone but that you can be both British *and* Asian. Thus the film engages in a process of learning to live outside already defined and known parameters of home (Nasta, 2002:192). In this respect, Kureishi in his attempt to present the local histories of individuals from the South Asian community opens up new spaces and creates new parameters for the representation of the heterogeneity of the diaspora within Britain, while at the same time engaging with and often exploding essentialising dichotomies of home and abroad, native or immigrant by presenting differently conceived possibilities situated within the contested terrain of 'Englishness' itself. Thus any conceptualisation of home can 'no longer be a *single* place, but represents a series of *locations*, an imaginative ground fertile for new improvisations.' (Nasta, Ibid:211) These films, then, carve out a new discursive space for the articulation of the diversity of British Asian lives.

Filmmakers and screenplay writers such as Gurinder Chadha, Hanif Kureishi and Meera Syal topicalise identity, home, belonging, race and ethnicity in relation to questions of justice, self-empowerment, representation and equal opportunities. These three in particular have 'explored the uncomfortable terrain of a *hybridity* which is "Englishness" for a new generation of Asians born and raised in Britain' (Nasta, 2002:173). Thus what has to be negotiated is what it means to be British Asian, Canadian

Indian, etc. Furthermore, these films, many of them scripted by authors who have also written highly acclaimed and successful novels on similar themes, point to the fact that living in a society with contradictory attitudes to class, race, gender and sexuality that define the hybrid spaces of the black and Asian diasporas in Britain remains a difficult territory to navigate. As a recent movie like *Bend it like Bekcham* shows, the issues are in many ways unresolved (Ibid:190). In this respect, diasporic self-representation becomes an important marker in identity negotiations in relation to a consideration of home and the homeland. In an interview with *Filmfare* in September 2000, Shabana Azmi observed: 'The term 'British needn't mean white Anglo-Saxon. [...] Asians [also] are now so much part of the British fabric.' (see Mishra, 2002:241) In how far the South Asian diaspora has become part of the fabric is explored in the alternative identity constructions by diasporic South Asian filmmakers. Films like *My Beautiful Laundrette, My Son the Fanatic, Bhaji on the Beach, Anita and Me* or *Bend it Like Beckham* do not only reveal the problems of identity negotiations for second generation Asians but also reveal a more profound identity crisis that Britain faced in the mid-1980s and is still facing. The black cinema that developed after the race riots of the early 1980s sought to be challenging, transgressive, imaginative and illuminating as well as pleasurable to watch as a direct challenge to the stereotypical image of minority ethnic communities that were constructed as 'problem-ridden, undesirable and most of all invisible.' (Alexander, 2000:109) Thus the emergence of the British Asian and Black communities as a subject for British cinema worked as a direct challenge to received ideas of cultural identity and demonstrated that cultural identity could not only be deconstructed and reconstructed as well as rewritten. Thus a film like *My Beautiful Laundrette* 'mapped out a possibility of Britishness that could contain and engage with diversities of race, gender, sexuality and class in a meaningful and often poetic way.' (Ibid:110) Kureishi's screenplay shows a version of British culture that is both familiar as well as alien and negotiates that territory from an insider/outsider point of view (Ibid).

Gurinder Chadha's interest in filmmaking grew out of seeing *My Beautiful Laundrette* and her first film *Bhaji on the Beach*, scripted by Meera Syal, was very much in the same vein. The film depicts three generations of Indian women on a day trip to the seaside resort of Blackpool in the North West of England and engages with similar topics as Kureishi's films however from the point of view of its female protagonists. It was one of the most successful South Asian diasporic films and while initially it did not recover its costs at the box office, it did so through video sales. *Bhaji on the Beach* set the trend for the 'more commercial [South Asian diasporic film] that becomes the primary focus of Asian filmmaking discourses in the last half of the 1990s' (Desai, 2004:64). There seems to be a shift in these films from drama towards comedy; the 1999 film *East is East* also confirms that trend. With *Bend it Like Beckham*, the runaway success of 2002, Chadha attempted to communicate similar issues and sensibilities about the Asian community in Southall, while using a more populist approach. Because these films were 'conventional' in their style of film-making and because of the rise of discourses of multiculturalism in the UK, Canada and the US, which many of these filmmakers took on board, it allowed 'them to gain wider access to production and distribution' (Desai, 2004:45). In this respect, Black British filmmaking moved away from being a minor independent strand of film-making: 'it becomes progressively demarginalised, and in the process its oppositional perspectives reveal that transitional structures of cultural value and national identity are themselves becoming increasingly fractured' (Mercer, 1994:74). As this cinema pushes into the mainstream and it becomes

institutionalised can it be seen as a part of a new national public sphere? Films like *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Sammy and Rosie get Laid* have exploded dominant conceptualisations by presenting a plurality of identities on screen and through representation rejected essentialist notions of 'Englishness'. In that respect these films also stand as a direct challenge to the construction of an English nationalism with its resurgent Raj nostalgia of the early 1980s (see for instance films like *Gandhi* or *A Passage to India* and the TV mini series *The Jewel in the Crown*). The first wave of South Asian diasporic films in Britain, Canada and the United States were the first films in English representing the South Asian diasporic community that also had a level of commercial success. How do we need to understand the complex locations of diasporic cinema and it occupying an in-between space? On the one hand it is a minority cultural production within a national framework, on the other it is also a cultural production that belongs to a transnational framework. Topically, there are many meeting points in terms of content between the films – an emphasis on race, racism, multiculturalism, conceptualisations of home, gender and sexual politics (Desai, 2004:48). Importantly, in these early films, the protagonists tend to imagine and 'seek home in mobilized "routes" in the diaspora rather than national and cultural "roots" in the homeland; thus they refuse to evoke "natural" and "organic" roots in the homeland through nostalgia and memory.' (Ibid) In this respect these films disavow any essentialising discourse of 'home' and 'abroad', but recognise diaspora identities as 'hybrid', not being 'either' 'or', but 'as well as'.

During the mid-1990s, largely due to the liberalisation of the Indian economy, some filmmakers from the South Asian diaspora like Mira Nair and Deepa Mehta re-directed their lens back to the homeland. Nair directed *Kama Sutra* (1996), an erotic historical romance centred around the life of courtesans and queens, ultimately giving an eroticised and some argued stereotypically orientalised account of sixteenth century India, and *Monsoon Wedding* (2002). Canadian filmmaker Deepa Mehta returned to India to make a film trilogy (*Fire, Earth, Water*) concerned with the position of women in South Asia. *Fire*, although controversial in India, sparking a number of protests by ultra-nationalists who objected to the depiction of two women falling in love, was a critical and commercial success. The second film in the trilogy, *Earth*, based on Bapsi Sidhwa's 1988 novel *Ice-Candy Man*, brought together Bollywood talent and Mehta's Canadian team - the music was composed by A. R. Rahman and starred Aamir Khan and Nandita Das. After a wave of protests by the same nationalists who objected to *Fire*, Mehta had to abandon her plans to make *Water*. Subsequently, Mehta returned to Canada to make *Bollywood. Hollywood*, discussed below. It took almost five years to put the production of *Water* back together and it was finally shot in Sri Lanka under an assumed name and strict code of secrecy and released in 2005. Desai pertinently points to the difficult position of Nair's and Mehta's films that focus on South Asia, as their films occupy precariously balanced positions in regard to Bollywood and other Indian cinemas, demonstrating how South Asian diasporic films can be involved in complicated struggles over representation.

In recent years, South Asian diasporic film increasingly renegotiated its relationship with Bollywood cinema, as Bollywood sought to position itself as a global cinema (see Desai, 2004:40). Bollywood's global push has also affected the production and circulation of South Asian diasporic cinema, not only thematically, but also in terms of audience reach. As British Asians pushed Bollywood successfully into the mainstream, British Asian diasporic filmmakers also took these sensibilities on board, in order to increase their

audience. However, diasporic film makers have often referenced Bollywood before, e.g. *Bhaji on the Beach* uses a Bollywood-style musical dream sequence, in *East is East* the family goes to a cinema hall to watch a Bollywood movie, both *Mississippi Masala* and *Fire* use Bollywood music as their background soundtrack (Ibid:42) But South Asian diaspora filmmakers have also looked to Bollywood's romantic film genre. Weddings as a common cultural denominator play an increasingly large role in fusion projects, as it travels very well between East and West, and between the diaspora and the homeland (Ibid:212-216). *Monsoon Wedding* is one example, *Bend it Like Beckham* another, while Deepa Mehta plays with this ingredient in *Bollywood Hollywood* and Gurinder Chada's adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* titled *Bride and Prejudice* in the UK makes this point even more obvious. Jigna Desai explores this further, arguing that Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* relies on a complex interplay between nostalgia, pleasure, and feminine politics in its depiction of a large bourgeois family wedding, recognising that weddings function in many ways for different audiences, as they are evoked as markers of the idealised relationship between diaspora and the homeland but also as the object of the transnational and cross-cultural gaze. (Desai, 2004:217) *Monsoon Wedding* exposes the disturbing issues brewing underneath the silence that is imposed on the self-proclaimed happy family reminiscent of Bollywood films, while developing a narrative of nostalgia and fantasy regarding familial relations and cultural practices amidst global processes of late capitalism, transnationality and modernity. (Ibid:219).

The main focus in *Monsoon Wedding* does not lie on the ceremony itself, but cultural practices. For example, the female sangeet is very much presented as a feminist space of expression and agency. The arranged marriage functions in the film as an ambiguous sign, considering the emphasis the director puts on India's modernity and serves to build up the tension between the modern and tradition and is marked as giving stability within a world in flux through globalisation and modernisation. The arranged marriage becomes acceptable as the bride Aditi allows herself to fall in love with her future husband, hence the match evolves into an 'arranged love-marriage' through the agency of the protagonist herself. She clearly chooses him over her lover Vikram as she identifies Hemant as the better of two options. She confesses her trespasses to him and by doing so allows her sexual agency to be channelled into acceptable forms.

Reflection and Action 19.2

Discuss the representation of Diasporic filmmakers and their communities with suitable illustartions.

Deepa Mehta's film *Bollywood Hollywood* also challenges conventions about marriage within parameters of tradition and modernity, but in the space of the diaspora. The film is about an affluent NRI, Rahul, in Toronto who hires an escort to pose as his fiancée for his sister's wedding as he tries to evade the pressures of his pushy mother and grandmother to finally get married. Deepa Mehta makes interesting use of the wedding-film genre as she mixes Bollywood's recent reliance on them as common cultural denominator with that of the Hollywood romantic comedy which needs it for its Happy End. It is the successful conflation of the two that produces an engaging fusion without ever losing sight of the fact that the entire film would not be possible without Bollywood. Rahul explains the NRI as being in a 'Bollywood/Hollywood state of mind' – living in the West, but with the Indian cultural values as they are emphasised by Bollywood cinema as a lifeline. Mehta explains that she took the very schematic Hollywood plot and imposed

Bollywood on it: 'To me they're very similar. Both have commercial plot lines. Boy meets girl, they get separated, they come back together.' (Mehta, 2002, p. 44). Underneath this simple plot lies an exploration of identity where the boundaries are completely blurred. For instance, Rahul's chauffeur spends his evenings working as drag queen Rockini, Rahul's geeky brother Govind, a teenager with a serious lack of confidence, always has his camera with him and lives in the cinematic world of Bollywood, commenting constantly on family matters by comparing them to Bollywood plotlines, the mother lives up to the whole back-catalogue of the stereotypical Bollywood mother, crying and fainting on demand, and the grandmother's resoluteness is matched by her advice and commentary usually given in the form of Shakespeare quotes. Rahul has to take the role as head of the family after his father's death and struggles with the pressures to fulfil his duty to his family. So he hires Sue, a girl partial to multiple identities. She is the stereotypical 'benevolent prostitute', which Western audiences would know from films like *Pretty Woman* and South Asian audiences would recognise from the courtesan movies like *Mughal-E-Azam*, *Pakeezah* or *Devdas*. While Rahul's sister Twinky is in a hurry to marry because she is pregnant, Sue, who is revealed to be Sunita, daughter of a Sikh from the Punjab, entered her line of work as an escort as a last resort to escape the pressures from her father who wanted her to marry the wrestler Killer Khalsa. She proves her 'cultural' worth at Twinky's Sangeet, as she keeps up appearances. However, as her secrets are revealed, it is Rahul who has to make up his mind, to accept Sue on her own terms, prostitute or not. Her rebellion against cultural norms imposed onto her by her father is something Rahul has to accept, which he does after his grandmother talks some sense into him. In that respect, the film echoes Shakespearean comedy, which is perhaps alluded to by Mehta having the grandmother quoting from his plays all the time. This connection might be revealing, as weddings/marriage function in Shakespeare as a way of channelling female sexuality. As the film negotiates issues such as sacrifice, marriage and filial duty, identities are increasingly blurred, exposing the patriarchal pressure to marry that weighs heavily on Rahul, his sister and Sunita.

This echoes in Bollywood films like *DDLJ* or *K3G*, where patriarchal resistance, objecting either to the proposed groom or bride respectively, is the obstacle that needs to be overcome. So while the romantic melodrama of the late 1990s casts the patriarch as the villain, in *Bollywood Hollywood*, cultural conventions of the South Asian diaspora that Rahul sums up as 'living in a time warp', exemplified by Rahul's mother or Sunita's father, are portrayed as the obstacle that needs to be overcome. The film is a nuanced overlaying of Bollywood and Hollywood conventions, easily recognisable as a romantic comedy, yet the tongue-in-cheek references to Bollywood cinema, its use of stock narrative devices and characters, the spoofing of heavy handed metaphor-laden dialogue ('remember, you hold the baseball bat of destiny') are direct references to Indian popular cinema immediately recognisable to South Asian cinemagoers. What Mehta does successfully and where a film like *The Guru* failed is that her own knowledge of the genre allows her to weave Bollywood into her film, not as exotic imitation that ends up perpetuating clichéd stereotypes, but as a way of exploring the migrant condition, highlighting the importance of Bollywood cinema for the diaspora and, in the process, by showing what effect it has on her set of characters, to use it to comedic effect. She deploys Hindi cinema strategically in her film, having sequences from films like *Rangeela* and *Mast* play on televisions in the background that serve as points of reference or she uses little taglines before a scene starts that directly reference Bollywood. The Western cinemagoer is not excluded from her ironic jokes, as she questions the

appeal of Indian cinema for a Western cinemagoer. Rahul comments to Sunita: 'everyone is a sucker for exotica, trust me.' Mehta not only displays an understanding for both genres that allows her to lovingly send up Indian popular cinema and its place in the Indian diaspora without forgetting that her own film would not be possible without Bollywood as well as Hollywood. What Deepa Mehta's irreverential look at Bollywood makes abundantly clear is that there is a playful and parodic relationship with the genre in the diaspora. In this respect it is too simplistic to read Hindi films as merely a vehicle for nostalgia and provider of an emotional and material link to the homeland (see Kaur and Sinha, 2005, p. 313).

19.4   Conclusion

Within processes of identity negotiations film, film music and cinematic representation have always played a significant role. Bollywood[5] cinema in this realm occupies an in-between place, on the one hand providing a link with the home country for the diasporic migrant, on the other presenting the diaspora back to the homeland. Although Indian popular cinema has had a global following for decades, the diaspora has not emerged as a central theme until the mid- to late 1990s. It appears that Indians living in the diaspora Hindi movies become the metonymic substitution for 'India' and this substitution is an attempt at closure, a means of constructing rigid mental boundaries between the past and the present, the culture at home and the new adopted culture, home and exile, nationality and naturalisation. More often than not, this imaginary 'India' is frozen in time, a past to which it is impossible to return, but 'which comes to represent the self valorized in another place, at another time.' In this regard, one could perceive that the Bombay film becomes the displaced site of national exploration. Yet to read the Bombay film and its relationship to the diaspora as mere nostalgia would not expose the full picture. Increasingly, Indian popular cinema has impacted on markets outside India. Until recently these used to be markets with large Indian immigrant communities, but ever since the late 1990s Indian cinema's reach has widened even further. Besides, as we consider Indian film and its diaspora, several questions requires to be tackled, such as the role and function of Bollywood cinema and representation of diasporic filmmakers on screen.

19.5   Further Reading

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