Recycle Industry: The Visual Economy of Remakes in Contemporary Bombay Film Culture

by Ramna Walia

"Audiences now want new stories. The problem is Bollywood has no tradition of producing original screenplays"
—Chander Lall, lawyer

"The brain is a recycling bin, not a creative bin. What goes in comes out in different ways"
—Mahesh Bhatt, filmmaker and producer

Thus spoke filmmaker and producer Mahesh Bhatt when Mr. Chander Lall, the legal representative of two of Hollywood's major studios issued “warning letters” to film producers in Bombay who were poised to “indianize” a series of Hollywood films. While Lall referred to Bollywood’s widespread practice of making uncredited remakes of Hollywood films as “tradition,” Bhatt defiantly saw these remakes as a symptom of a larger mechanism of recycling material. In fact, the influence of other cinemas on Bombay films was reflected narratively and in other aspects of filmmaking such as fashion, poster art etc. Thus, at the center of this debate was the issue of Bombay cinema's identity as a bastardized clone of Hollywood and the counter argument that noted the distinctiveness of Bombay film culture by highlighting the “difference” in the manner of production.

In view of these unacknowledged networks of exchange, the term “remake” was often used within popular discourse as an underhanded accusation of plagiarism against Bombay films. Moreover, because most of Bombay cinema’s remakes of Hollywood films were un-credited, they never secured the legitimacy attained in Hollywood and world cinemas wherein this process was seen as a reinterpretation of an earlier work or an updated modus operandi. For the most part, Bombay films were at best seen as a cinema of hybrid genres characterised by the centrality of a love story, high use of melodrama, stock characters, the insertion of song-and-dance routines and a happy ending. It is within the context of this larger narrative of what a
“Bollywood film” is, and what a remake entails, that the entire history of Bombay films got subsumed in an account of cut-and-paste credentials.

Globalization and the multifarious networks activated by an economy of global exchange have redirected the dispersed signage assigned to the past into a fresh network of production, distribution and circulation. Cinema’s refusal to be posited as a fixed entity in the wake of the digital boom and the virtual transformation of the film object from a fixed entity to a dispersed one has given way to a collection of fragmented traces of the past—in digital art, retro-fashion, hand-painted posters, guest appearances by veteran film stars in self-referencing roles, song parodies, YouTube videos, fan pages, retail stores of vintage film products. In this paper, I mobilise these debates to study Bombay cinema’s new and dominant method of remaking its old blockbuster films. In the last decade, film remakes have become a popular genre of filmmaking within India’s dominant film producing industry in Bombay. Remakes of old blockbuster hits like Devdas (2002; 2009), Don (2006; 2012), J.P Dutta’s Umrao Jaan (2007), Ram Gopal Varma ki Aag (2007), Agneepath (2012) and Zanjeer (2013), amongst many others, have led to a resurgence of old classics. Many popular films like Satte Pe Satta (1982), Sahib Biwi aur Ghulam (1962), Qurbani (1980) and Amar Akbar Anthony (1977) have further been announced².

In this paper I map the journey of a film industry that has long been marginalized as a cottage industry of cut-and-paste credentials and as a derivative genre of filmmaking: the remake. The Bombay film remake marks a crucial intervention in defining the changing contours of the term “remake” within the history of Bombay cinema and how it reflects on the journey of the Bombay film industry, from the marginalized quarters of a cottage industry to its global profile as a song-and-dance industry. This paper situates the resurgence of popular blockbuster films by studying three recent remakes — Farhan Akhtar's Don (2006, 2012), Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Devdas (2002) and Anurag Kashyap's Dev D (2009)— and studies them as testimonials to the enduring power of blockbuster films and their performative charge within Bombay film culture discourse. While the revival of Akhtar’s Don uses the parochial structure of the Bombay film industry and the centrality of the star, Bhansali’s operatic scale of filmmaking recasts Devdas, Indian cinema's most
enduring tragic hero and Dev D, Kashyap’s remake of Devdas uses the dystopic urbanscape of modern day Delhi. What is critical in these case studies is the contrary impulse of the two remakes of Devdas: the former exalts the tradition and partakes in it through Bhansali’s interpretation as an auteur and the latter encapsulates and challenges any monolithic narration of Bombay film history. The three films thus offer to map the complexities of the shifting socio-cultural ethos of Bombay films through the reconfiguration of an archival memory of old films into new patterns of representation. By choosing to remake films that have a great cultural currency and that continue to circulate within popular culture, these remakes have a character of cross-fertilisation that doesn’t simply reproduce its classics; they also establish an archive of cinematic legacy and rescue Bombay film history from the monolithic narrative of plagiarism. Moreover, this resurgence not only draws on the after-life of the old classics within popular culture but also reflects on the changing modes of production, circulation and exhibition of films in the contemporary Bombay film industry.

Cottage Industry of “masala” filmmaking: Bollywoodization of Bombay films

Most recently, commercial Bombay films have acquired an international profile as representatives of “Indian” cinema within global circuits of circulation as “Bollywood.” Until the advent of neo-liberal policies in the early 1990s and a more global outreach of Indian cinema, commercial Bombay cinema was consigned a marginal cultural legitimacy within popular film discourse, both in India and abroad. In the post-Independence period there was a voice of growing suspicion on the “values” represented by cinema itself, which was vociferously articulated by Mahatma Gandhi. Others, like former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru saw cinema as a powerful medium in service of nation building for newly independent India. With the arrival of color film in mid-twentieth century, Bombay cinema expanded its horizons by staging a desire for leisure, locations, consumption and global tourism. This phenomenon was best captured in the foreign travel films of the 1960s like An Evening in Paris (Shakti Samanth, 1967), Love in Tokyo (Pramod Chakravorty, 1966) and Sangam (Raj Kapoor, 1964). By the 1970s, commercial cinema had made inroads into dominant markets and honed its use of multiple genres and song-and-dance sequences, establishing itself as a mass entertainment form. Within film scholarship, however, these films rarely warranted any serious attention. In a rare
defense of this mass cultural form, the National Film Development Corporation’s (NFDC) Indian Cinema Yearbook 82/83 lauded commercial Bombay cinema’s phenomenal sweep over the nation. In an article titled ‘Moviemania’, Monojit Lahiri referred to the “great escape” provided by mainstream cinema as a “mental holiday without trespass” (Lahiri, 1982: 12).

The rise of the Indian New Wave in the early 1980s was identified with a new breed of Film Institute trained filmmakers who made films on “serious” issues. It was also during this period that the rise of television and video made the future of commercial cinema an unstable proposition. Writing about the future of Indian cinema, the Indian Film Directorate Association published Indian Cinema: The Next Decade in which filmmaker journalist Khwaja Ahmad Abbas contrasted “serious” cinema with the crowd-pleasing “mirch masala-khatta-meetha miscellanies” (1984: 8). Working within these restricted categories of art and commercial, serious and frivolous cinema, commercial films during this period began to be seen as a kind of “assembly line production tailored to the tastes of mass audiences” (Masood 1986: 23). By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the explosion of cable and satellite television, the invasion of VHS, and ever-expanding pirate markets issued a serious threat to Bombay films. Due to the ease of access, cross-cultural exchanges became more frequent. For the most part, these films were adapted to the tastes of the audience and openly flouted copyright laws. In the coming years, commercial Bombay films were not only seen as frivolous but also as a bastardised form that borrowed and stole plots, music and scenes from Hollywood films. Thus, the term ‘remake’ emerged in this context as a lowly commercial enterprise.

In an article titled “Is Bollywood a Hollywood Clone?...”, journalist Bootie Cosgrove-Mather stated the perfect “recipe” of a “Bollywood” film: “Take a Hollywood plot, sprinkle in cheesy song-and-dance numbers and pour in a gallon of melodrama. Shake well, and you’ve got a Bollywood movie” (Cosgrove-Mather 2003). What is underlined by such compartmentalized allegations is the marginalised status of a certain brand of cinema, reduced to being defined purely through its parent “mirror image”: Hollywood. Rosie Thomas’s engagement with popular Indian cinema is one of the earliest critiques of this widespread assumption inherent in a certain kind of film journalism and scholarship that has dubbed Bombay cinema a “not yet cinema”,

a mere collage of “song-and-dance sequences”, rich in “masala”, a vulgar imitation of Hollywood trash (Thomas 1985). She argues that certain theoretical frameworks present in Euro-American film studies may fail to grasp the complexity of Indian cinematic forms, constantly inventing it as the lowly “other” of Hollywood cinema. For a long time, commercial Bombay films remained at the periphery of any serious academic engagement within film studies. Indian films that recorded their presence within international discourses on cinema (particularly the film festival circuits) were the ones that emerged from the less commercially viable but socially relevant and “realistic” films made by critically acclaimed filmmakers such as Shyam Benegal, Girish Karnad, Mani Kaul, etc. However it was the “masala” filmmaking that helped Bombay films expand its markets.

As Indian cinema’s diasporic market expanded considerably in the 1990s, especially in the United States of America, the United Kingdom and South Africa, the Non-Resident Indian (NRI) emerged as a protagonist in cinema. The term “Bollywood” gained more currency and seemed to encapsulate and celebrate what was once considered disreputable—song-and-dance sequences, melodrama, “over-the-top” plot lines, garish sets and costumes. In his important intervention on this recovery of a discarded cinema, Indian film scholar Ashish Rajadhyaksha locates popular Bombay cinema as a global cultural industry that capitalises on a nostalgic desire for traditional roots. He refers to this as the ‘Bollywoodization’ of Indian cinema (Rajadhyaksha 2008). Rajadhyaksha contends that at a time when Hollywood was expanding its overseas market, the term “Bollywood” became the newly coined term that helped Bombay films to establish and expand its market. While this new-found confidence was reflected in the revival of big production houses like Yash Raj Films, the circulation of these films as representative of Indian cinema now operated on a larger scale.

Navigating this new cultural currency in the global economy, the conventions and rhetorical features of popular Indian cinema were foregrounded; thus making them reflexive commodities that according to film scholar Madhav Prasad maintains “a formal continuity with the past” while displaying an anxious desire to “surpass these models” (Prasad 2009: 41). The blockbuster film is primarily defined by the high production values and stupendous box office returns. Their target is the “mass
public, with few artistic-expressive expectations. The narrative construction is usually simple, not highly innovative or revolutionary in content. The second important characteristic of the blockbuster, besides its size, is the promise of spectacularity” (King qtd. in Stringer, 2003). These are the films that were once dismissed for their lack of aesthetic values. Remakes of these films thus become a tool through which Bombay film culture is mapped. In reclaiming the past and recasting it through contemporary modes of production, distribution and circulation, remakes marked the industry’s active participation in excavating its history from abrasive accounts of “formulaic” filmmaking and unabashed plagiarism. Thus the remake as a material object becomes a sign of its own mediation with the past and the present. Central to this narration is the transitory status of Bombay film culture and the politics of remembering the past as a cultural relic.

While there has been a radical shift both in the aesthetics of representation and the nature of exhibition, the digital explosion has unleashed a peculiar revival of the past. The digital explosion has led to scattered screen cultures that have shaped new patterns of consumption. The past now doesn't simply travel within institutional space of the archives or domestic mediums of television and radio; the Internet has unleashed a new cinema archive. In his book *Film Remakes*, Constantine Verevis mobilises theories of genre and intertextuality to situate the remake as the “post-modern circulation and re-circulation of images and texts” (Verevis 2009: 8). Verevis’s account draws on industry, text and critical receptions and explores issues related to copyright, authorship, canon formation and film re-viewing. Similarly, in *Film Remakes as Ritual and Disguise: From Carmen to Ripley* (2006) Anat Zanger suggests that the repetitive techniques of the remake operate as the “hidden streams” of an imaginary archive of cinema that illuminates the “preferences and politics involved in filmmaking practices” (Zanger 2006: 9). While these writings constitute an important body of work about the Hollywood remake, in Bombay Cinema the remake is linked directly to the persistence of cinematic idioms in popular memory. Contemporary audiences have expectations based on the memory of particular scenes, dialogues, stars, music, and fashion. The film text itself becomes secondary to the circulation of the aura of the past; the memory of popular reminiscence of its stars, fashion, dialogues and songs that continue to circulate within popular culture. Therefore, I look at the remake as a cultural artefact that
draws on the heritage status of films from the past to become an active part of contemporary film culture that develops along the nodes of debates on globalisation, digital technology, stardom and popular memory.

The remake mobilizes these sites within Bombay films to trace an alternative narration of the history of Bombay film culture. This ostensible investment in nostalgia associated with cultural pasts influences the various decisions regarding the remake: the set, location, set design, publicity as well as the formulaic expectations of the audience. What are the choices that guide the selection of what constitutes “memory”? What version of our past do we reserve for our nostalgic meanderings? It is crucial to note how memory and nostalgia are constructed and mobilised to build a homogenous history of cinema and film culture in a selective fashion—not how one remembers but how “the remembered film” is mobilized to construct a narrative of cultural history of Bombay cinema. In the next three sections I focus on the selective mutation of the script in three remakes—Farhan Akhtar's Don (2006; 2011), Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Devdas (2002), and Anurag Kashyap's Dev D (2009)—that mobilize popular memories of the original film (songs, music, dialogue etc.) and its after-life within the narrative and visual iconography of the remake. Central to this mutation is the way in which the figure of the star becomes a means through which the shifting coordinates of Bombay film culture can be traced.

Rebranding the star: The International Profile of Farhan Akhtar's Don

Kamini (Helen) seduces Don (Amitabh Bachchan), the eponymous gangster in Chandra Barot’s 1978 crime thriller with the blockbuster song, ‘Yeh mera dil...’. Influenced by the iconography of the femme fatale in Hollywood films, Helen with her blue eyes and blond hair mobilized the image with films such as Howrah Bridge (Shakti Samanta, 1958), Gumnaan (Raja Nawathe, 1965), and Sholay (Ramesh Sippy, 1975), which came to define her star persona within popular Bombay films. Her cabaret numbers became the highlight of the films she acted in. It is not surprising then, that three decades later when film director Farhan Akhtar announced his new directorial venture Don (2006)—a remake of Barot’s successful film—critics were quick to point out that recasting for Helen could prove a bigger “cardinal sin than substituting the leading man himself” (Sen 2005). It wasn't a surprise then that Akhtar cast leading Bombay film actor, Kareena Kapoor to play the role of Kamini,
played by Helen in the original. Kapoor’s star appeal was thus mobilized in the choreography of the song (see fig. 1). Akhtar, while playing with the story line, used similar setting as the original and re-employed the popular reminiscence of the original song in his remake.

The announcement of Farhan Akhtar’s Don, a remake of Chandra Barot’s 1978 crime thriller by the same name triggered a frenzy of debates within popular media. One such tabloid said, “These [Sholay and Don] are films that can’t be remade, that musn’t. Write in subtle asides into your films, name your characters Vijay, Roma and Jasjit, and chuckle to yourself. Don’t look at the icon and try to top it” (Sen 2005).

However, looking at old Bombay films as icons had become the new norm and the desire to equate it was a challenge for filmmakers like Akhtar. The first theatrical trailer of Don (2006) assumes audience knowledge of the original Don by opening with an aerial shot of Kuala Lumpur’s cityscape and playing the original film’s theme music as the actor Shah Rukh Khan is revealed as the new Don. Following this introduction, a series of shots from the film emphasising action through fights, car chases, gadgets and thrill fill the screen. Finally, an array of stars is introduced with the same names given to characters in the original film. Using the leading stars of

Fig. 1: Helen in Don (1978) and Kareena Kapoor in Don: The chase Begins (2006)
the Hindi film industry, Akhtar creates a multi-star cast ensemble with Priyanka Chopra, Arjun Rampal, Kareena Kapoor and Om Puri. In this regard, Akhtar invites his audience to refer to the memory of each ‘character’ from the original by using contemporary leading stars. *Don* draws on the star’s centrality to stage its entertainment value and markets its star cast as an “advertisable” element. In addition, the remake draws on audience memories of the original film’s dialogue, songs, and characters by retaining and reworking them.

Infused with the vision of kinetic perception linked to the “song-and-dance routine” along with knowledge of widely circulating Hollywood genres, popular Bombay films have for a long time mixed generic conventions to deliver a mass entertainment form. While exploring this ever-evolving entertainment cinema and its domination in the world of film production, distribution and consumption, Rosie Thomas sees popular Indian cinema’s distinctiveness in its formal continuities with traditional theatrical traditions as well as in what the filmmakers saw as “blending the (right) *masalas*”—a collage of formulas with a mix of drama, comedy, song and dance (Thomas 1985: 124, 120). It is in reference to this distinctiveness that Thomas asserts the need for an understanding and analysis of the films and their successes. The dedicated film broadcast time slots and channels on television granted the popular blockbuster films an after-life within the domestic screen culture. Fan clubs, video libraries, and regular telecasts further assured audience familiarity with dialogue, stars, and the songs of the films. The remake confronts this familiar terrain of knowledge by foregrounding questions related to culture, consumption, and entertainment. It is not surprising that most of the remakes’ originals were released in the 1970s—an era of multi-starrers that epitomised the “masala” blockbuster and saw the rise of superstar Amitabh Bachchan.10

The 1970s saw a shift in the impetus of Bombay cinema from what Madhav Prasad (1998) calls the “feudal family romance” of the 1960s to a pronounced social dislocation. The Nehruvian dream of social equality and economic stability for the newly independent nation had waned in the face of political turmoil and gave rise to cinematic narratives of loss that featured figures like the orphan, the illegitimate son, the widowed mother and the urban dweller. The war with the neighbouring state of Pakistan, the rise of the Left in politics, spiralling price rise and the displacement of
the urban poor (as a result of government policies), and the declaration of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s election code violation during the 1971 central Elections further instigated the tense economic and social situation of the early 1970s. Following a surge of protests against the government, state emergency was declared on June 26, 1975, civil rights were suspended, and reports of gross violence against citizens were reported. It was in this tense socio-political environment that the figure of the ‘angry young man’ as “an agent of national reconciliation” (Prasad 1998: 141) emerged and connected with the Hindi film audience. It was in Prakash Mehra’s Zanjeer (1973) that this persona first took shape. Amitabh Bachchan was a talented actor who made his debut with Saat Hindustani (K.A. Abbas, 1969). Initially unsuccessful as an actor in terms of box-office success, a few important roles followed including Hrishikesh Mukherjee’s Anand (1971) and Guddi (1971). However it was Prakash Mehra’s Zanjeer that raised Bachchan to stardom. In the film, Prakash Mehra played an upright and brooding police officer who is haunted by the personal childhood trauma of his parents’ murder. His reinvention of the Bombay film hero through his performance of anger and vengeance acquired a “quasi-revolutionary fervour” (Mishra 2002: 134) that proved cathartic during this period of political turmoil. The depiction of anger in films like Deewar (Yash Chopra, 1975), Trishul (Yash Chopra, 1978) and Muqadar ka Sikander (Prakash Mehra, 1978) recast the overwhelming focus on domestic life. However, it was with films like Amar Akbar Anthony and Sholay, that Bachchan consolidated his position. These multi-star cast films went on to become major hits riding high on Bachchan’s stardom. When Farhan Akhtar announced the remake of Don, there was a flurry of speculation on online portals and newspapers; everyone was curious about the cast of the film. Besides the sundry of popular characters, who would be the right “inheritor” for Amitabh Bachchan’s legacy? Thirty years after Barot created the suave underworld gangster, Akhtar resurrected the legacy of Don.

Barot’s Don narrates the story of a police hunt for the elusive gangster Don (Amitabh Bachchan) and his partners. In the course of the film, Don dies and is replaced by his double, a paan-chewing street performer named Vijay (Amitabh Bachchan). Vijay comes from a working class background and agrees to be part of the plan to help the two uprooted children of a petty criminal, Jasjit (Pran). His identity as a police informer, however, is jeopardised with the death of his mentor, Inspector D’Silva.
(Iftekhar). The second half of the film traces Vijay’s struggle to establish his innocence. The double visual economy of the star (Bachchan as Don and Vijay) within the film was used primarily in the metaphorical bifurcation of the bipolar moral universe of the film.\textsuperscript{11} Through the character of Vijay, the moral compass of the film shifts to his struggle in the world of deceit, revenge and double crossing. The film has subplots of revenge, conspiracy and hidden identities, and lacked what its writer Javed Akhtar calls the “Hindi picture requirements” of family sentiments and traditional melodrama.\textsuperscript{12}

With no budget left for publicity, \textit{Don} (fig. 2) was released with one hundred and twenty prints on May 12, 1978 and was declared a flop.\textsuperscript{13} Within a week, though, word-of-mouth publicity and a last minute addition to the film in the form of the song ‘\textit{Khaike paan Banaras wala...}’ became a rage and the film collection picked up. The film ran for fifty weeks in all centers and for seventy-five weeks in Hyderabad.\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Don} became an accidental success that rode high on its style, dialogues, songs and, most of all, on Bachchan’s stardom. In the original film’s dramatic and action-centric poster, Amitabh Bachchan occupies the central position against a labyrinthine backdrop painted yellow and orange. The poster splits halfway in four ensnaring circles marked by a bullet clipboard. Bachchan is captured in the image in action. On the extreme right corner and mid-right angle of the poster are Roma (Zeenat Aman) and Jasjit (Pran) respectively holding guns. The central theme of the poster underlines the packaging of thrill as the main selling point of the film\textsuperscript{15}. 


The film was remade in a number of regional cinemas including – K.S.R Doss’s *Yugandhar* (1979), a Tamil remake titled *Billa* (R. Krishnamurthy, 1980) and Sasikumar’s Malayalam film, *Sobhraj* (1986). *Billa* marked the beginning of Rajnikanth’s career, a superstar who is revered as a deity in most regions of south India.\(^{16}\) *Don* was a film that seemed to “reserve” its iconic lead role for superstars. In a film industry where family empires rule, the remake usually works through a logic of inheritance. It was this very logic that made writer-lyricist Javed Akhtar’s son Farhan Akhtar decide to take on the task of adapting a film originally scripted by his father. In an interview, Farhan Akhtar said the film was a tribute, “not just to that film, but to that time, to the films Pa and Salim uncle (*Salim Khan*, who co-wrote *Don* with Javed Akhtar) and Mr. Bachchan made” (Akhtar 2005). The strong parochial association within the family thus became a determining factor in the casting of the film.

On April 24, 2006, the popular movie website Rediff.com released the first look of Farhan Akhtar’s *Don* (2006). Set against high-rise buildings, at the centre of the poster was the half-illuminated front profile of India’s leading superstar Shah Rukh Khan. Bathed in an electric mix of green and black, the new ‘Don’ appeared with the tagline “The chase begins again” (fig. 3). Shah Rukh Khan became the star that
inherited the brand that Bachchan created. Even before the release of the film, new hierarchies developed beyond the customary circuits of box office returns; thus shaping star power. Reports of rivalry between Amitabh Bachchan and Shah Rukh Khan further intensified the latter’s image as the heir apparent to the superstardom of Bachchan. Thus Shah Rukh Khan’s popularity became another way that transference of the famous anti-hero’s title was transferred from Hindi cinema’s *Shehenshah*, Amitabh Bachchan to its *Baadshah*, Shah Rukh Khan.  

A struggling actor who came to Bombay with the dream to rule the film industry, Shah Rukh Khan found a place for himself in the industry after a successful foray in the world of theatre and television. In director duo Abbas Mustan’s *Baazigar* (1993), Yash Chopra’s *Darr* (1993), and Rahul Rawail’s *Anjaam* (1994), Khan became popular in the early 1990s through his portrayal of the “psychotic hero”. In these films, he portrayed a sort of clinical detachment from the social world. He played the stalker and a killer with obsessive and psychotic tendencies. With Khan, the face of the Hindi film hero changed (Mazumdar 2000, Ganti 2004: 124), and this new anti-hero of Bombay cinema could now “die in the film and lose the girl” (Chopra 2007: 128). It took less than half a decade for this new hero to reign the film industry, But his position as a superstar got consolidated with films like *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (Aditya Chopra, 1995), *Dil to Pagal Hai* (Yash Chopra, 1997) and *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Karan Johar, 1998). These films mobilised a global appeal and the
The original film had created a flurry of fashion trends upon its release. Aware of this overwhelming identification of the film with “style”, Akhtar’s Don was promoted through various collaborations such as the release of the “Don line of clothing” by fashion men’s fashion brand, Louis Philippe. Other stars like Kareena Kapoor, playing Kamini, also collaborated with the hair endorsement brand, Garnier that used the song picturised on the actor as part of its promotion. The film channels the stars and the long-term contracts with a number of fashion products to promote the film, the primary aim for which was to reinvent the stylish villain of the 70s into an aspirational lifestyle embodied and endorsed by Akhtar’s Don. Moreover, the tie-ups with various brands also draw attention to the array of popular stars lined up by Akhtar. The consumer endorsements promoted by these stars directly corresponds to Akhtar’s re-packaging of Don’s antics and the consumerist streak espoused by the film – in its characterization of Don as well as it’s hyper-stylistic mise-en-scène.

Within minutes into Akhtar’s Don, Khan bathes in a chic white bathtub while watching the Tom and Jerry cartoon series. The phone rings and he is informed that his former employee, Ramesh (Diwakar Pundir), has broken away from the “business” and married his girlfriend, Kamini (Kareena Kapoor). In the next scene, Don brutally murders Ramesh. In the contemporary re-invention of Don, Shah Rukh Khan re-styled the character in tandem with the screen legacy associated with the 1990s psychotic hero fused along with the promise of luxury and style associated with the quintessential NRI figure of the yuppie. It is through this play of star persona(s) and
through the film’s ability to harness the power of technology that Akhtar gave an “international profile” to his film.

In his contemporary version, Akhtar places Don in Malaysia and sets the narrative against the backdrop of mafia wars. Don is a drug smuggler and an international arms supplier. In Barot’s Don, the opening credits roll over a tinted red screen and a montage of fights and chases from the film. Placed against a hue of green and white, the opening credits of Akhtar’s Don set the pace of the narration against a hyper-stylised panorama of the cityscape; the roads, trains, elevators, highways and columns of high-rise buildings (fig. 4). This change from the composite field of action in the original to a play with global urbanism in the remake sets the stage for a comparative story-telling through its visual design.

For instance, unlike his predecessor who occupied the space of the private in the form of obscure hotel rooms, barren landscapes (opening sequence of counterfeit deal) and his secured den, the new Don is mobile and occupies both public and private space. He inhabits nightclubs, polo grounds and five star hotels with equal ease. While the original’s opening sequence stages the counterfeit deal in an isolated rugged landscape, Akhtar introduces his protagonist in a coffee house aided by a remixed version of the title song ‘Main hoon Don...’ as the background score. Such contrasting and yet self-conscious visual and aural details evoke the phantom presence of the original in the fast-paced, technological and modern Don. The choice of the city of Kuala Lumpur not only helps to eroticise the appeal of the film,
but also locates the narrative within a world that emblematises a global urbanity, a touristic journey of through the modern architecture (high-rise buildings), cafes, nightclubs and shopping malls. In her essay, “The City as Dreamworld and Catastrophe” (2000) Susan Buck-Morss responds to the entry of new visual regimes in everyday life by highlighting the polarities embedded in the city and engaging with an on-going debate regarding the urban space as a “consumer playground”. Akhtar creates a hyper-stylized and sanitized global urbanity in Don. It is this combination of architectural extravaganza, urbanity and speed that makes the new Don instrumental in articulating a globalized consumerist experience—an experience that gets anchored in the construction of the suave villain, Don, and gets promoted through its star Shah Rukh Khan.

Akhtar expands on Barot’s influences for the original by referencing figures from James Bond to the contemporary action series Mission Impossible (1996-11) and Bourne franchise (2002-12). What changes in the new Don is a paradoxical marriage between a desi James bond, accessorized with designer clothes, cars, gadgets and girls and the impulse to remake the dominant traditions of the popular film. Gadgets in the film function as symbolic representations of this technological modernity. An extension of the visual ensemble of Don and the power he exudes with his gadgets comprising primarily of sundry explosives render him a quasi-super hero. Akhtar’s vision of the futuristic aspect of the film was foregrounded in his use of hyperstylisation. In the car chase sequence where Don is hunted by DCP D’Silva (Boman Irani), for instance, Akhtar uses split screens to convey the tempo and field of action. This device is associated with an exhibitionist address in the action blockbuster genre of films that employ what film scholar Jeffrey Sconce calls the “explosive apathy” which uses an accelerated velocity to draw attention to representation rather than narrative. Driven by such kinetic energy of action, technology and verticality of the cityscape, Don reinvents Barot’s thriller by creating a hyper-stylised format.

In the original Don, action was used primarily to reveal suspects (senior intelligence officer Malik is revealed as the head of Don’s gang), foiled kidnapping (of Jasjit’s children) and the final exposé of the gang. The central force behind these revelations was Vijay’s helpless quest to establish his real identity as the police and his fellow
mobsters were hunting him down. It was in Vijay that the moral compass of the film got fixed; in Akhtar’s version, the affable Vijay is marginalised. This was highlighted in the promotional posters and trailers of the film. Akhtar deviated from the original at two crucial moments of his film. Right before the narrative breaks for intermission, D’Silva is revealed as the mastermind behind the plan to kill Don and take over his “business”. However, it is the climax of the film that overturns the entire premise of the plot and its moral centre. The audience is suddenly told that Vijay never got to participate in the swap with Don at all. Don was playing Vijay in order to buy his freedom and mobility. Here, Akhtar exploits the knowledge of the original to shockingly foreground the “non-role” of the street smart performer, Vijay.

Responding to this absence and twist in the film, Clare Wilkinson-Weber suggests that Vijay is not a desirable icon of consumption the way Don is. The publicity posters and trailers of the film were centered on the protagonist, Don. Dressed in black from head to toe with slick gadgets, he appeared as a brand. Weber further notes how “having escaped the bonds of Bombay to immerse itself himself in more striking landscapes of wealth and privilege, the new Don proposes that Don himself has escaped the possibility of emulation” (Wilkinson-Weber 2010: 137). The spaces of the mansion and that of a working class house cannot coincide even in the performative vocabulary of a narrative imperative.

Preventing the unfolding of Vijay’s tale of lost identity in the new version, Farhan Akhtar distanced himself from the ‘twist’ of the swap that lay at the core of the original script of Don. A week before Don hit theatres across India, Akhtar asserted that Don becomes “an entirely new film”. By the time it ends “you realise...that your point of reference for Don, the character, is not going to be applicable to this Don, because this is a different character. He may say the same lines, but he is not the same Don...because they are two different movies that happen to begin with a common premise.” So, while privileging the character of Don over Vijay, Farhan Akhtar’s Don re-works the binaries embedded within the values associated with good and evil, Akhtar invests heavily in Don’s hyperbolic declaration in the original—“Don ko pakarna mushkil hi nahin namumkin hai” (“It’s not merely difficult to catch Don, it’s impossible”). Akhtar cleverly takes this statement literally in the new version. Thus while drawing on the syntax of the original, Akhtar reinvented the narrative in the
remake. Further, he mobilised popular memory associated with the original dialogue track to build a narrative of defiance and innovation. This selective engagement with the basic premise of the original complicated the new Don’s relationship to the original.

Within months of the release and success of its adaptation of Barot’s Don, Akhtar announced its sequel titled, Don 2: The Chase Continues (2011). In the sequel he transports the story of Don (now primarily resting on the character of the new Don of 2006 rather than the original script) to the ganglands of the European mafia; thus displacing the simplistic relationship between the original film and the remake. While Don (2006) reinvented the mise-en-scène of the original, its point of reference was the original script by Salim-Javed. Farhan Akhtar, in an interview to Hindustan Times declared that Don 2 “was like starting with a clean slate. I had the opportunity to do whatever I wanted to with those characters.” The sequel posits the possibility of converting the remake into a film franchise: the Don series.

While there are very few sequels in Bombay cinema, most recently, they have done very well at the box-office with films like Dhoom (2004; 2006) Golmaal (2006; 2008; 2012), Dabangg (2010, 2013), Krish (2006; 2013), Wanted (2008) and Race (2008; 2012). As a result, the franchise is now regarded as a way of reducing the risk involved in big budget productions (Ghosh 2011). Santosh Desai, an advertising professional, points out that “in the age of information overload, familiar signposts are reassuring and sequels offer the comfort of the predictable. You have an idea (of) what you are going to see” (Ghosh 2011). But what happens when the proverbial is defamiliarized? By conflating the categories of the remake and the sequel, Akhtar expanded the grammatical ontology of both. Rick Altman related the sequel to “repeatable titles” (like the Godfather Series (1972-1993) and StarTrek (1975-2013)) as well as to “proprietary characters” (e.g. James Bond, Rambo, Indiana Jones) which balance novelty and familiarity in repetition (Altman 1999). What the new Don series destabilizes is the chronological order of narration as well as the memory of the original.

Moreover, the series reinvents Shah Rukh Khan as an action hero; and by extension, the persona of Don portrayed in the series is liberated from the original
Recycle Industry: Remakes in Contemporary Bombay Film Culture

Ramna Walia

film. Drawing on the hierarchical ties of stardom and re-working the formula of the “masala” blockbuster, Akhtar’s Don film series showcases the ambiguous relationship between the legacy of the original and its remake. Before the release of Don 2, Akhtar announced the launch of Don: The Origin, a comic novel that was publicised as a prequel to his film at the Comic Con Express in Mumbai (fig. 5). With this move, Akhtar consciously marketed his reinvention of the original Don into a super-hero figure that drew on the iconography of the fantasy genre, Shah Rukh Khan's stardom and the inheritance of title from the original Don and superstar, Amitabh Bachchan on the one hand; and the global icon of Bombay cinema's blockbuster format on the other. Thus, Akhtar uses the figure of the star to channel the narrative through various locations, genres and formats and resurrects the Don brand within the contemporary context.

As I have argued, Farhan Akhtar's Don series raises important questions regarding the mutability of the film object as it explodes the simple narrative of cinematic history while employing the stardom of Shah Rukh Khan in branding this franchise. Here the term “superstar” plays a critical role in defining the market value of the star. This value entails box-office returns, awards, world tours as well as the status of the stars within ancillary industries such as advertisement and fashion. Akhtar's Don deliberately mobilizes the hyper-stylized set design and action sequences to justify the rebranding of the film through Shah Rukh Khan. While in Don, Shah Rukh Khan bequeathed the role of superstar of the 1970s- Amitabh Bachchan, in Bhansali’s

Fig. 5: Cover of Don: The Origin (Comic Novel)
magnum opus Devdas, he partakes in commemorating a milestone tragic hero of Bombay cinema of the 1950s- Dilip Kumar. The lavish scale of the film’s production becomes a means through which Bhansali makes an interjection in the long tradition of remakes of Devdas in the history of Bombay cinema. The multi-star cast, elaborate film sets, and extravagant costumes reconstruct the social realism of Bimal Roy's Devdas into a quintessential Bollywood saga of mytho-historical scale. While Akhtar plays on the notion of “legacy” and re-imagines Barot's stylish thriller in urbanesque and unchartered exotic locales, Bhansali relies on his intervention as a visual auteur of Bombay films by reconfiguring the long traveling narrative codes of the Devdas story. Again, the figure of the star influences the ways in which the legacy of the original film is repackaged in the remake. Thus the superstar triumvirate who has been associated with defining films of Bombay cinema—Dilip Kumar, Amitabh Bachchan and Shah Rukh Khan—get revalorised in the remake while drawing attention to the memory of the film through the figure of the star. Bhansali mobilises the same by casting Khan as the quintessential tragic film hero and dramatizing the melodramatic tale on an epic scale.

Reconstructing Narrative Codes of Bombay films: The Visual Economy in Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s Devdas
A dazzling carriage stops at the red carpet as film stars Shah Rukh Khan and Aishwarya Rai step out to celebrate the premiere of Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s extravagant saga of love, Devdas (2002), at the 55th Festival de Cannes. The first Indian film outside the art cinema circuit to be invited in the festival’s out-of-competition category, Bhansali’s Devdas embodied the distinctive features of popular Hindi cinema; melodrama, lavish production values, and an emphasis upon stars and spectacle (Ganti 2004: 3). Heralded at the festival as the epitome of “Bollywood’s song-and-dance extravaganza”24, the elaborate canvas of the film reinvented Indian cinema’s proverbial tragic hero; and as the most enduring character on Indian screen, the cinematic profile of Devdas spans thirteen films in eight decades. The first was produced in 1928 by the Eastern Film Syndicate as a silent film (Naresh Chandra Mitra: 1928). The last and most recent version was Anurag Kashyap’s reinterpretation of the Devdas myth in his Dev D (2009).
Devdas has its genesis in Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay’s 1917 novella by the same name and is the story of a doomed love affair between a rich landlord’s son, Devdas Mukherjee, and his childhood sweetheart and neighbour, Parvati, who belongs to a different caste and class. A city educated Devdas returns to his village, Taj Sonapur, but is unable to break out of societal barriers of caste and class. Under pressure from his father, Devdas hastily concludes his romance with Parvati (also referred to as Paro). A jilted Parvati gives into parental pressure and marries a rich landlord/zamindar (Bhuvan). Tormented by Parvati’s marriage, Devdas moves to the city of Calcutta and becomes an alcoholic. It is in this section of the novella that Sarat Chandra introduces Chandramukhi, the golden hearted courtesan who falls in love with Devdas. Devdas takes a train journey across the nation, only to land at Parvati’s doorstep to breathe his last.

Devdas (1955) metaphorically depicted a newly independent India at the crossroads of tradition and modernity. The choice between rural and urban became central to the dislocation of old feudal values. The city came to represent the modern and all that was rural came to signify the traditional. In the novel, the city is dark, decadent and tragic while the village becomes a space that suppresses individualism. These modern contradictions further find expression in Devdas’s melodramatic tenor, which reveals the ambivalences resulting in this collapse of the old world order and struggle to usher in the new. The film adaptations of Devdas, like Chattopadhyay’s novel, explored these conflicts and contradictions in Devdas and made him into a “national hero” (Vasudevan 1989). The novel was a moderate success during its time and it was cinema that “elevated the fictional narrative from melodrama to myth” (Chopra 2007:198).

Bombay cinema’s successful foray into the adaptation of Chattopadhyay’s novella began in 1935 when director P.C. Barua made Devdas with K.L. Saigal as the lead figure. In her study of Devdas’s travels within Bombay cinema, Madhuja Mukherjee shows how Barua’s Devdas marked a point of departure from the novella. For Mukherjee, it was the narrative style of Barua’s film that sets the stage for the construction of a cinematic idiom that grows through other Devdases (Mukherjee 2009). Citing K.A. Abbas’s comment in FilmIndia, Mukherjee argued that Parvati as a
pujarin (a devotee) gets incorporated in the visual vocabulary of the Devdas films. Abbas contends:

    Out of the very lens of the camera walked away the slender figure of a woman, going further and further, her back turned to the audience, a puja thali (vessel) in her hand. A beautiful figure—and mysterious. The audience kept guessing; who is she and why? And where is she going?26

Barua thus gave visual language and iconography to the characters from Chattopadhyay’s novella which became the reference point for the many adaptations that followed.27 But it was probably in Bimal Roy’s Devdas (1955) that the story found its most popular form. Roy’s Devdas emerged in a period of intense socio-political turbulence.

Forty-seven years after an entire “generation wept over Devdas” filmmaker Sanjay Leela Bhansali cast Hindi cinema’s superstar Shah Rukh Khan to in his 2002 remake Devdas remake. At a news conference held during the Cannes festival, Shah Rukh Khan said that remaking Devdas was like “trying to remake The Sound of Music. As far as an Indian audience and Indian cinema is concerned, you are treading on real thin ice” (Mckay 2002). Made with a huge budget of over five million USD, Bhansali’s Devdas became the most expensive film in the history of the Bombay film industry. By modernising the visual and emotional tenor of the story from the social-romanticism of Bimal Roy’s Devdas to an almost an epic historical form, Bhansali mobilized star discourses by casting Shah Rukh Khan, Chandramukhi (Madhuri Dixit) and Paro (Aishwarya Rai) to create an operatic spectacle that featured monumental set designs, costumes and jewellery.

In this regard, Shah Rukh Khan became a vehicle for both Don and Devdas and the perfect endorsement for a reinvention of the cultic space associated with the popular blockbuster film. By marrying the reified blockbuster film and the aura of the star, Bhansali and Akhtar invested primarily in Khan’s stardom. He in turn displayed his “protean ability...to be interchangeable with Bollywood’s multitude of stars, and thus, to be in some sense the ‘star of stars’” (Chopra 2007: 129). In casting Khan as “Don” and “Devdas”, Akhtar and Bhansali successfully portrayed him as the ultimate heir of Bombay Cinema.
Unlike the figure of the Vaishnav mendicants in Roy’s film, in Bhansali’s version the two women, played by Madhuri Dixit and Aishwarya Rai, are adept at verbalising their love during the Durga Puja celebrations (see glossary) by performing a well-choreographed dance to ‘Dola Re..’ (fig. 6). The women perform in Parvati’s mansion and declare their love for Devdas. Through this performance in the domestic space of a kothi, Chandramukhi—the “other” woman—verbalises her love in a space that is traditionally denied to her. But soon the courtesan is confronted by Paro’s son-in-law, Kalibabu and her family. Chandramukhi questions the value of Kalibabu and reminds him of the feudal link between the courtesans and Zamindars. Despite opening a space of defiance for Chandramukhi, Bhansali reverts back to melodrama and both women return to their delegated social spaces as the narrative carries on. Both women, like in the novel and in the earlier films, continue to occupy what Nandy referred to as the “conjugal presence that is mostly passive and ornamental” (Nandy 1995: 70).

Reacting strongly to such gross deviations and dissolution of the cultural nuances of Bengali culture, noted film director Rituparno Ghosh criticized the dance sequence as a preposterous insertion into the story “only to make Madhuri and Aishwarya dance.” (Ghosh 2002). The commercial imperatives of these historical deviations can be seen in producer Bharat Shah’s triumphant declaration: “Public wo song dekhne baar baar jayegi” (“People will go and see the film over and over again just to...
Opening on a high note, Bhansali’s *Devdas* introduces an aspirational dreamscape that turns narration into a visual spectacle. The crisis of contradictions embodied in *Devdas* and the distinctions of class, caste, social standing, country and the city break through the overwhelming grandeur of the mise-en-scène. Ashis Nandy places the tragedy of Devdas as a representation of the “anguish of the first generation of a rural elite entering the pre-war colonial city. His (Devdas’s) self-destruction bears the imprint of both his ambivalent defiance of the village to which he tries to return before his death in one last, doomed effort to reconnect to a lost past and escape anonymous death in a soulless city- and his rejection of the urbane charms of a seductive new lifestyle” (Nandy 1995: 52-53). These sites of Devdas’s dislocation in Bhansali’s film are overwhelmed by the grand sets, which obliterate all distinctions between class (which was the central conflict in the novel and Roy’s film) and socially marked spaces of the streets, *kothas*, and *kothis*. The massive sets of Devdas and Paro’s feudal family homes stand adjacent to one another in Bhansali’s version (fig. 7); a spatial imagination criticized by Rituparno Ghosh since it causes the country/city narrative to get lost. By privileging the visual, Bhansali’s *Devdas* creates two different orders of the story; in mobilising the visual opulence of space, the director collapses the social markers of interior/exterior, city and country and the spaces of legitimacy and illegitimacy. What we see on screen is a seamless unfolding of visual opulence and ‘monumental sets;’ thus all the spaces together, destroy the traditional cultural codes of narration. Corey Creekmur suggests that with Bhansali’s *Devdas*, the contradictions of modernity are “artificially overstated”; thus exoticising the cinematic currency of the Devdas phenomenon.31.
In this narration, Bhansali exteriorises the melodrama of the original and transports it to the ocular terrain of the film. Towards the end, Devdas returns to meet Paro one last time before his imminent death and through circular tracking, the camera captures the mansion and we see Paro rush out to get a glimpse of Devdas. The official website of Devdas describes the set design of Paro's post marital abode, Zamindar Bhuwan's haveli as follows:

(...) huge with long corridors. So huge that when she wants to meet a dying Devdas at the end, she has to run and run. One sees her becoming smaller and smaller and finally get hidden within the length the mansion. She never makes it to see Devdas and thus came out the pathos. The house also had painted walls with stand-still figures. Thus telling the story of Paro who without Devdas was like the paintings. Viewed as having life, yet quite lifeless. 32

Bhansali inserts himself into the Devdas meta-text and myth while signposting his version wherein spectacle lends itself to a revised narration of the classic Devdas story. It is not the change in the story as much as the impetus laid on the costumes and the sets of the film that allowed for a re-imagining of the tale through sheer opulence. The film became an ode to the grandiosity of the tale and its symbolic power. The panoramic vision of Bhansali's Devdas used the trope of excess and contrasts starkly with Roy's depiction of Devdas, which operates within the conventions of social realism and draws attention to Bhansali's intervention and reinvention of Devdas. While his departures remained within the boundaries set forth by the original myth and archetype, Bhansali’s Devdas invested both in the original
narrative and the legacy of the tragic figure. By contrast, Anurag Kashyap's *Dev D* (2009) defies the star system, narrative patterns, and visual templates established by his predecessors; thus embodying a strand of dissent against the celebratory regime of the Bollywood blockbuster.

**Excavating the urban nether land: Dev D as the counter remake**

How do we read Anurag Kashyap’s *Dev D*, a “story of outcasts”, a film which sets out to counter the legacy of Hindi cinema’s tragic hero, Devdas?  

Anurag Kashyap first became known through his writing (*Satya*, Varma:1998) and later forayed into filmmaking. A spate of critically acclaimed films like *Black Friday* (2004), *Gulaal* (2009) and *No Smoking* (2007) followed. But despite being established as a “master of modern cinema”, Kashyap continued to be a peripheral player in the domain of mainstream Bombay cinema. None of his films had easy releases. After a difficult negotiation with the censor board, *Paanch* (2003), his directorial debut film cleared, but became mired in disputes between the producer and distributors and was never released.  

His next film, *Black Friday* (2005), an investigative docu-drama about the 1993 Mumbai terrorist blasts did not get a censor clearance until 2007; and, with the commercial failure of *No Smoking* (2007), Kashyap’s survival in the industry became difficult. Despite these challenges, Kashyap gained critical appreciation for his unconventional subjects and experimental techniques of filmmaking (Mazumdar: 2010). His films traveled through numerous film festival circuits to establish him as an ace filmmaker. Given this profile, it was surprising that Kashyap chose Devdas as the theme of his film.

In *Dev D*, the coming-of-age story of Davinder Singh Dillon (Abhay Deol), Dev returns from London to visit his village after Parminder aka Paro (Mahie Gill), his childhood sweetheart, emails nude pictures to him. Unable to adequately respond to Paro’s sexual assertiveness, Dev spurns her and moves to the city of Delhi where he becomes swamped by the urban rhythms of the city, and indulges in alcohol and drugs. In Kashyap’s remake, he urbanizes the figure and relocates him to contemporary India.

Divided into three chapters, each narrating the story of Paro, Chanda and Dev, *Dev D* gave individual characters agency and rescued the dominant love triangle
narrative by decreasing the role of parental authority in the film. Kashyap’s Paro is a rustic woman of strong, earthy sexuality who, in a daring portrayal of her unabashed sexuality, is shown carrying a folded mattress on her bicycle to the fields so she can have sex with Dev. The journey of Lenny, a half-Indian, half-French sex worker who turns to commercial sex after a scandalous MMS (Multi-media Service) video upturns her life, is tracked spatially by a handheld camera as she moves from her elite central Delhi abode to the lonely landscape of Canada, and back to Paharganj. The set design of her boudoir evokes decadence, deviance and a strange sense of freedom. It is here that Lenny is recast as Chandamukhi as societal restrictions are surrendered in order to narrate “the story about the times we live in” (Kashyap 2009), and Kashyap uses flashbacks to narrate each character’s back stories. The subversion of popular idioms thus became the conduit to weave tales of modern India.

In an interview with Shradha Sukumaram of Midday, Kashyap defined the film as a “contemporary updated version of today and how Devdas is applicable to the youth of today, how youth looks at relationships, love, and the real things in an age of communication”. Dev D drew on news stories of MMS leaks such as a case involving the circulation of images of a schoolgirl who was recorded having sex. Similarly, in Dev D, Chandramukhi becomes a sex worker after she is humiliated by an Internet leak. Other incidents like the death of seven people because of a rich boy’s drunken driving are also referenced in the narrative—Dev runs over pedestrians in a state of intoxication. Thus Kashyap’s film focussed on its urban markets and its success in multiplexes across major film centres in India made the film a metropolitan hit.

The first theatrical trailer of Dev D provided insightful pointers to the method that Kashyap employed to stamp his mark on the Devdas myth. The trailer introduced Dev through a scene where he has a verbal argument with his lover (who is she?) in a local bus. The running text commentary says: “All that Dev ever wanted was love.” As the scene returns to interrupt the text, the woman jolts the audience out of its complacent knowledge of the idiom of Devdas and by extension the limits of popular Hindi cinema. She says all he “ever wants is to fuck”. The running commentary returns to state: “the fuck up is that he has everything but love”. A celebratory aural
track explodes and Kashyap formally introduces his cocaine snorting ‘hero’, Paro and Chanda. The trailer ends teasingly with the caveat: “This season try not falling in love”. Integrating newspaper headlines with the visual sprawl of urban dystopia, Dev D subverted the templates of sex, sexuality, agency and desire, placing the narrative in the midst of a transforming youth culture (fig. 8).

Fig. 8: Abhay Deol as the modern Devdas

Kashyap’s characterization of Dev defies his predecessors’ representation of the conventional lover. In fact, in Kashyap’s words Dev “does not know who he is and therefore his definition of love is very concocted, very confused”.38 Kashyap’s first step to counter the Devdas myth was to cast Abhay Deol—the poster boy of independent cinema—instead of a megastar. Deol belongs to a family of film stars whose unconventional roles in films like Sanjay M. Khanduri’s Ek Chalis Ki Last Local (2007), Navdeep Singh’s Manoroma Six Feet Under (2007) and Dibakar Banerjee’s Oye Lucky Lucky Oye! (2008).39 In an article in Screen India, titled ‘Abhay Deol is a Braveheart’, the actor was praised for playing Devdas as an “adjective and not as a romantic hero” and emphasized his performance of the archetypal Devdas’s flaws.40 Thus, in Dev D Kashyap created not just a “counter” remake, he also supported an alternative system of stardom by casting the offbeat cinema’s new star to play the lead in Devdas.
Defying Roy’s social-realism and Bhansali’s opulent set-designs, Kashyap composes the *mise-en-scène* of the film in a manner that infuses the characters with the kinetic rhythms of the city. As Dev moves from Punjab to Delhi, the pace of the film suddenly picks up. We are introduced to a neon-infused Delhi at night; Paharganj in *Dev D* is a heady underworld of alcohol, drugs and cheap hotels. Kashyap captured Paharganj’s gritty dark alleys with a wide-angle lens and a special SI-2K camera, which allowed him to shoot up to 11 frames per second (fig. 9). The technique enabled the camera to adventurously introduce spectators to subconscious imagery and a kinetic urbanescape. Shots taken with a fish eye lens and the trippy movement of the frame accentuated a densely textured urban form seen through Dev’s drunken eyes. For instance, the song ‘Pardesi...’ (‘inhabitant from another land’) moved Dev from the dislocated space of the streets to the subterranean world of abstract forms and night joints. The song track is fused with the films’ stylized production design to create a *mise-en-scène* replete with graffiti, multi-colored lighting and a decadent ambience. Through such foregrounding of subterranean currents, Kashyap stages the changing nature of contemporary youth culture.

![Fig. 9: The seedy lanes of Paharganj inhabited by Dev](image)

Anurag Kashyap argued that *Devdas* was not just a novel, “it is an adjective…that is almost synonymous with love”⁴¹. And yet, he countered the very trope of this love (an intrinsic “ingredient” of the great Indian “masala” cinema) in order to redefine not just *Devdas*, the cinematic text, but a whole body of film practices built around this figure. Kashyap refers to Bhansali’s *Devdas* through sequences at Lenny’s boudoir showing a televised Madhuri performing the Mujra. He also places a poster of Bhansali’s film, showing Shah Rukh Khan lighting a cigarette outside a neon lit underground bar in Paharganj. In this regard, by calling attention to Bhansali’s remake, Kashyap
inserted the blockbuster film’s idioms to distinguish his own art, and consciously constructed *Dev D* as a counter remake. *Dev D* was never just a remake of the novel; it was a film that relied on knowledge of Bhansali’s *Devdas*.

For example, during Paro’s tragic wedding scene, Patna ke Presley, an Elvis Presley-styled band, sang ‘emotional atyachar’ while Paro danced and Dev drowned in vodka. This song became a highlight of the film during its promotion and acted as a potent vehicle through which Kashyap mocked the conventional tropes of tragic love. Thus, through *Dev D* Kashyap subverted one of the most enduring tragic stories in the history of Bombay cinema and in the process questioned and reconfigured the characters and themes that have defined the formulaic style of filmmaking associated with Bombay cinema. By shifting the focus of his narrative from the traditional dichotomy between the city and the country to the various currents within the contemporary city Kashyap—unlike Akhtar who relocates Don in a global cityscape and Bhansali who mythifies the mise-en-scène into an epic scale—explores the psycho-spatial subterranean underbelly of Delhi’s disreputable alleys; which becomes the means through which the cinema industry’s old parochial structures (i.e., narrative expectations, character sketches and stardom) are challenged.

**Conclusion**

In this paper I have traced the nodes along which Bombay cinema recycles its own archive and draws attention to the impulse of recovering, adapting and narrating its cultural history. In their interactions with popular culture, the film remakes of Bombay’s old blockbuster films foreground the complexity of narrating the history of a film culture that embodies its own defined codes. The figure of the star thus becomes a potent way through which films get branded. While all three films—Farhan Akhtar’s *Don* (2006, 2011), Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s *Devdas* (2002), and Anurag Kashyap’s *Dev D* (2009)—consciously intervene in the re-imagining of Bombay film history, their distinct set of methods and representations defy narration of Bombay cinema’s past. Further, as the networks of travel are accelerated within global economy, Bombay cinema also explores its past through different means. This foregrounds the contradictions and density of materials that have defined
Bombay cinema in the last one hundred years. I have also explored how remaking popular films function as the method through which Bombay film history is narrated. This history—for a long time relegated to the margins of any serious engagement and only recovered in global mediascape as Bollywood routine—has seldom been acknowledged for its rich and distinct film culture. I have shown how this process of engaging with the touchstones of Bombay films has legitimized the “lowly” genre of the remake. The narrative, star profile, and mise-en-scène become the sites of this new narration. Whether it is Don (1978, 2006), Sholay (1975, 2007), Karz (1980, 2008), or Agneepath (1990, 2012), it is the quintessential “masala” blockbuster that has activated the popular remake as a major film practice in contemporary Bombay film industry. Through the discourse on stardom I have argued that the adaptation of old texts as brands remains the central driving premise of the popular remake. The fact that career-defining films that have long afterlives within popular culture are chosen to be remade—as opposed to critically-acclaimed cinema—highlights an alternative system of recording film history; not through formal frameworks of genre theories or art movements but the emotive charge of old films. The Bombay film remake thus assumes an ambiguous position toward its slippage between the forces of conformism and insurrection and entails a more complicated network of cinematic tourism that renders any homogenous reading of the Bombay film culture opaque.

While Bombay films gained a greater currency in the last two decades as “Bollywood,” film remakes use the tropes of this distinctive cinema by revisiting the narrative codes of the original while subverting and in some cases propagating the mythical after-life of the original. Moreover, this recovery of a cinema whose dominant profile itself is a derivative misnomer, Bombay film remakes engage with the past through cinematic idioms to create a contemporary oeuvre that is annotated, mutated and resurrected. By emphasizing the different centers in the narrative and casting, popular Bombay remakes then exercises a conscious act of self-fashioning. Thus, the creative recycling bin of Bombay film history becomes fodder for filmmakers to establish themselves vis-à-vis the touchstones that have defined Bombay film culture over the last century.
Notes:

1 Chander Lall represents Hollywood-based production houses Sony Pictures and Warner Bros. in India. The statement issued by him was in response to the legal battle between Mumbai based Production house, BR Films and another Hollywood studio, Twentieth Century Fox. Lall on behalf of Fox studios issued a notice against B.R.Film’s *Banda Yeh Bindaas Hai* (Ravi Chopra, 2011) accusing the film of breach of Intellectual Property Rights of *My Cousin Vinny* (Jonathan Lynn, 1992). The legal battle became a fertile ground for discussion on cases relating to plagiarism that has haunted popular Hindi cinema for decades.

2 Recently, new remakes of old Bombay films have been announced. This includes popular films such as Satte pe Satta (Sippy 1982), Amar Akbar Anthony (Desai, 1978) and Qurbani (Khan 1980). Several uncredited reports on casting for numerous unconfirmed projects is also part of media speculation and finds wide range of coverage.


5 Madhava Prasad responds to Rajadhyaksha’s article and situates the beginnings and recent “naturalization of Bollywood” in its relation to the “structural bilingualism of the Indian nation state”, a metalanguage that articulates nationalist ideology in the period of globalization. (Prasad 2003)

6 A term used by André Bazin (1955).

7 Rosie Thomas argues that popular Indian cinema refutes the Western theoretical framework, both in terms of its industrial practices (like in case of genre for instance; as it accommodates the ‘socials, the ‘devotional’ and the ‘multistarrer’) as well as in its consumption (clapping, booing etc.). The spectator thus assumes a critical position in defining the aesthetics of production of popular Hindi cinema and its (distinct) aesthetics of reception, embodied in the popular ‘masala’ quotient.


9 As one of the biggest stars of the Bombay film industry Shah Rukh Khan is often referred to as “Baadshah Khan” or “King Khan”.

10 The Bachchan phenomenon has been an intrinsic part of the study of stardom in popular Bombay cinema. It was in the 1970s that Hindi cinema got its first superstar in actor Rajesh Khanna. Khanna, however, was soon dethroned by Amitabh Bachchan’s screen persona of the ‘angry young man’. After 1985, Bachchan saw a downfall in his career with a spate of flops and an unsuccessful foray into politics and film production, but he managed to resurrect his stardom with the television show *Kaun Banega Crorepati* (2000). Many scholars have argued that Bachchan is the most powerful and perhaps the “last iconic hero” of Bombay cinema (Mazumdar 2001:238). Also see Mishra (2002).

11 The idea of doubling was a common trope in Bombay cinema. Films like *Do Kaliyan* (R.Krishnan,1968), *Ram aur Shyam* (Tapi Chanakya, 1967), *Seeta aur Geeta* (Ramesh Sippy, 1972), *Chalbaaz* (Pankaj Parashar, 1989), *Anhonee* (KA Abbas, 1952) etc, use doubling as a trope. Besides bifurcating the moral universe within the narrative, or show bonds of kinship, the film also doubles the body of the star. See Neepa Majumdar “Doubling, Stardom, and Melodrama in Indian Cinema:
The ‘Impossible’ Role of Nargis” Postscript, 22.3 (Summer 2003): 89-103


14 Ibid.


16 The iconic song “Khaike Paan Banaras Wala” acts as a visual and aural default in all these films.

17 These are the titles that are used in popular media discourses related to the stars. The princely titles are borrowed from the famous titles of their films, Shehenshah (Tinnu Anand, 1988) and Baadshah (Abbas-Mustan, 1999). Operating within the restricted flow of financial resources (privately financed) and investing heavily in the bonds of kinship, Bombay film industry has long defined its functioning within a system that can loosely be termed as family Empires. From studios like R.K. film studio to production houses like Yash Raj, to star’s sons and daughters, familial ties are an intricate part of the functioning of the Bombay film industry. Firmly working within such a hierarchical structure of operation, the defining fence of insider and outsider domains are clearly marked.

18 This interview has been quoted in Anupama Chopra’s King of Bollywood: Shah Rukh Khan and the Seductive World of Indian Cinema, 2007: 161.

19 From selling biscuits to cars, soaps to cellular phone services, cola drink to men’s fairness cream, Shah Rukh Khan emblematised the consumerist streak and purchasing power of the new middle class and held a promise of accessibility, comfort and modernisation.

20 In “Explosive Apathy”, Jeffrey Sconce argues that explosive apathy within the action blockbuster genre involves a formal use of logical strategy that recalibrates the spectator’s attention at the key plot point and breaks the pace of the impact of action to its aesthetics. (Perkins and Verevis: 2014, p. 30)


23 Film sequels by definition constitute a “chronological extension of a …precursor narrative that was originally presented as closed and complete in itself” (Budra and Schellenberg 1998: 7, 8) (my emphasis).


25 Though a literary success, Sarat Chandra’s novella, enjoyed a great part of its enduring success due to its popular adaptation in cinema. Film scholar, Corey K. Creekmur suggests that much like Indian epics such as Mahabharata and
Ramayana, “No Indian ever sees Devdas for the first time” (Creekmur, 173). She goes on to suggest that in the process of transmission in popular culture, ‘Devdas has been made the vehicle of a continuous process of collective “remembering, repeating and working through”’ (175). Creekmur rightly points to the mythic presence of Devdas for film-going public of India. This sustained engagement with this tragic figure has not only been adapted multiple times, the story has also inspired a number of films including Guru Dutt’s Pyaasa (1957), Raj Kapoor’s Aah (1953) and Prakash Mehra’s Muqaddar ka Sikander (1978).

26 K.A. Abbas’s statement to the film magazine, FilmIndia in 1940 cited by Madhuja Mukherjee in her 2009 essay ‘Travels with Devdas: Notes on Image-Essay’.

27 Writing for Sixth the annual publication of the International Film Festival of India, Rita Ray points out that the phenomenal success of Barua’s 1935 Devdas was as much due to his higher artistic values in “lighting and natural dialogue” as the fact that it fitted into “the social mores of a slightly puritanical and frustrated pre-war society” (Ray 1977).

28 Ghosh observed, “You just can't make a thakurian (upper-class Bengali woman) dance in Durga puja.” He continued, “In no historical account of Bengali culture can such liberties be corroborated. Sanjay could’ve done it in a dream sequence. All he wanted was to make Madhuri and Aishwarya dance.” Subhash K.Jha, “Devdas a hit, but literary debate rages”, The Times of India, August 6, 2002; http://www.cscsarchive.org:8081/MediaArchive/art.nsf/%28docid%29/D7DB6F40F1F9D5AE6E5256C1500223BB6

29 “The making of Devdas” is a special DVD extra feature of Bhansali’s Devdas. The DVD is released by Eros International Pvt. Lmt

30 The promotional videos of the film made extensive use of the song. The official website of Bhansali’s Devdas also credits choreographer Saroj Khan for her magic touch (that) surfaces yet again with her choreography in "Devdas -. This includes the much awaited "Dola re dola" song in which she orchestrates the nimble movements of Madhuri Dixit and Aishwarya who blaze the screen together for the first time.


32 The official website of Devdas describes the set-design of each of the spaces inhabited by the three main characters in Bhansali’s film. The details are available at http://devdas.indiatimes.com/sets.htm

33 Filmmaker Anurag Kashyap wrote many blog pages for web page, Passion for Cinema. In a blog post titled, “Genesis 2: Happy Accidents” December 30, 2008 Kashyap describes the genesis of Dev D and his encounter with the endearing tragic hero, Devdas.

34 On August 29, 2009, ScreenIndia posted an article titled ‘The old in the New’ describing film directors like Vishal Bhardwaj, Dibakar Banerjee and Anurag Kashyap as the frontrunners of a new wave of films that have recently redefined the contours of popular Hindi cinema.


37 The growth of the multiplexes in the late 1990s is intricately related to the rising
consuming power of the metropolis. The extension of multiple screen theatres into a gamut of leisure activities like games, shopping and food accommodates the mainstream and fringe cinema. (For more, see Aparna Sharma’s “India’s Experience with the Multiplex”, May 2003, seminar 525 and Ranjani Mazumdar’s “Friction, Collision and the Grotesque: The Dystopic Fragments Of Bombay Cinema”, in Ed. Gyan Prakash, *Noir Urbanism: Dystopic Images of the Modern City*).

38 Anurag Kashyap on *Dev D* in DVD extra of the film, “The Making of Dev”.


**Filmography:**

*Devdas*, Dir. Sanjay Leela Bhansali, 2002

*Devdas*, Dir. Bimal Roy, 1955

*Devdas*, Dir. PC Barua, 1936

*Dev D*, Dir. Anurag Kashyap, 2009

*Don*, Dir. Chandra Barot, 1978

*Don*, Dir. Farhan Akhtar, 2006, 2011

**Glossary:**

1. Rupees/lakhs/Crores: References to Indian Currency. Currently, $1=Rs 63.

2. Thakur/Zamindar: Landlord/Aristocrat.

3. Durga Puja: Durga Puja is an annual festival that is primarily celebrated in Bengal and celebrates the Hindu goddess.

4. Masala: A culinary term that refers to Indian condiments that enhance the ‘flavor’ of the dish (Thomas: 1986).


6. Lok Sabha or the House of the people: the lower house of the Parliament of India.

**Bibliography:**


Buck-Morss, Susan ‘The City as Dreamworld and Catastrophe’ in October Vol. 73, Summer 1995, pp. 3-26


Creekmur, Corey K.. 'The Devdas Phenomenon' http://www.uiowa.edu/~incinema/DEVDAS.html


K.Jha, Subhash. ‘Devdas a hit, but literary debate rages’, *The Times of India*, August 6, 2002; http://www.cscsarchive.org:8081/MediaArchive/art.nsf/%28docid%29/D7DB6F40F1F9D5AEE5256C1500223BB6


Kashyap, Anurag, qtd. in ‘Contemporary Devdas Is Here’, *Screen*. January 1, 2009.


Lahiri Manojit 'Moviemania', *Indian Cinema 82/83*, The Directorate of Film Festivals, pp. 8-15, 1983. India.


Thomas, Rosie. 'Indian Cinema: Pleasures and Popularity' Screen Vol. 26, No.4, May-August: 1985, pp. 116-131


Yugandhar, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ptvl_NM4IHQ&feature=related