Economic & Political WEEKLY

Utopia in Bollywood: 'Hum Aapke Hain Koun...!'
Author(s): Rustom Bharucha
Source: *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 30, No. 15 (Apr. 15, 1995), pp. 801-804
Published by: Economic and Political Weekly
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/4402626
Accessed: 14/01/2015 09:57

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Economic and Political Weekly is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Economic and Political Weekly*.

http://www.jstor.org

This content downloaded from 140.233.70.45 on Wed, 14 Jan 2015 09:57:20 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

Utopia in Bollywood

'Hum Aapke Hain Koun...!'

Rustom Bharucha

It is sad that we should be celebrating the century of cinema in India with a superhit so vacuous as 'Hum Aapke Hain Koun...!', a film devoid of any illusion worthy of the condition of the millions of people who are at once the primary patrons and victims of its vision. This is a film that is obviously in tune with the 'liberalisation' of our times, while being thoroughly grounded in the signs of a homogenised, upper class, upper caste Hindu constituency.

AT a time when the master narratives of Hindi cinema are facing an inner collapse, or repeating themselves *ad nauseam*, a new superhit seems to have broken all box-offices records in the history of Bollywood. Defying all norms of 'success', it has attracted audiences throughout the country, cutting across differences in class, caste, community, gender, age, religion, and political affiliation. What more could one ask for in these divisive times? The perfect unifier, the entertainment for every Indian: 'Hum Aapke Hain Koun...!'

What is the secret of Sooraj Barjatya's phenomenal success? Does his film introduce a long-awaited superstar? Is it politically provocative in playing with the immediacies of the realpolitik – 'terrorists' in Kashmir and bomb blasts in Bombay? Does it feature a bandit queen? Has it advertised a new titillating dance number on the lines of 'choli ke peeche kya hai'? Does it explore some new-wave cinematography? The answer to all these questions is an incredulous 'no'. 'Hum Aapke Hai Koun' (HAHK) must be one of the most banal superhits in the history of Indian cinema. Its audacity lies in the fact that it totally dispenses with a plot and all the 'masala' associated with sex and violence. It is an emphatically clean film, a family entertainment par excellence, celebrating one supremely human event – 'shaadi', with all the conventions, rituals, and merriment surrounding it. With the exception of one break in the narrative, resulting from a death in the family, which ironically contributes to the insistently celebratory drive of the film – we shall examine its implications later in the essay – HAHK could be described accurately (and not just with the hype of advertising) as a non-stop roller-coaster of laughter, food, songs and games, functioning within the perfunctory framework of romance.

I say 'perfunctory' because romance is almost the pretext for sustaining the dominance of fun in the film.[1] So fervent is Barjatya's commitment to providing 'pure' entertainment that his narrative annihilates whatever one has come to internalise and appreciate as 'variety' in entertainment. In the context of Hindi film blockbusters, this would include melodrama, rousing climaxes, shifts in perspective, histrionic revelations, showdowns, suspense, subplots, and a range of songs – not just 'happy' party numbers which dominate Ram-Laxman's monochromatic, predictably rhythmic score. What makes Barjatya's intervention in popular cinema significant is the ruthlessness with which he reduces the levels in the narrative, providing us with almost no breathing space, no time to switch off, no diversion of interest. Claustrophobic in effect, the projection of happiness in the film is 'jabardasti', forced on us, whether we like it or not, a manifestation of aggressive hospitality rather than generosity of spirit.

It is the purpose of this essay to question the construction of happiness in Barjatya's film, which almost assumes a utopic dimension. Keeping in mind that "a realised utopia can be another name for terror" [Nandy 1987:1], I am alerted to the specific difficulties in analysing 'utopia' within the framework of what would seem like a totally innocuous, harmless entertainment. 'Why take it so seriously?' is a question that almost any analysis of HAHK would seem to be up against from the very start. It is almost as if the film is immune to being read against the grain of the expectations, stock reactions, publicity and hype surrounding it. Indeed, I am only too aware that my emphasis on certain details in the film can easily be dismissed on grounds of overstatement or nit-picking. Nonetheless, at the risk of appearing elitist in countering cultural populism, or more specifically, a populism that does not question its own premises, I would claim that while entertainment can be enjoyed as entertainment, this does not mean that its apparent 'autonomy' and aura of 'innocence' are entirely free from the exigencies of history and captial that it appears to transcend. If this were so, entertainment could be reduced to an essentialised, a historical set of categories, conventions and formulae that could be perpetuated through skill alone. But this is not the case, since the world of entertainment had different significances at different points in time. There are different kinds of entertainment, different 'treatments' of the same rhetoric, different ways of envisioning utopia. These differneces, I would argue, are not arbitrary, but intricately dependent on a range of strategies, guesses, and gambles, by which directors like Sooraj Barjatya appear to 'give people what they want' while vetting the agenda for their desires and dreams.

In one of the most illuminating reflections on 'Entertainment and Utopia', Richard Dyer has problematised this paradoxical terrain by which the world of entertainment responds to 'needs' that are 'real', while "defining and delimiting what constitutes the legitimate needs of people in society" [Dyer 1993:272-83]. So on the one hand the avatars of entertainment can posit 'utopian solutions' ('abundance', 'energy', 'intensity', 'transparency', and 'community') in response to the very real tensions of everyday life ('scarcity', 'exhaustion', 'dreariness', 'manipulation' and 'regimentation'), but in the process, these manufacturers of a 'better life' can exclude many vital needs for the transformation of society, for example, the need to respect women outside patriarchal norms, or the need for oppressed communities to develop alliances across differences without the 'enlightened' patronage of the ruling class. The only 'needs' addressed in the world of entertainment are those which capitalism acknowledges and promises to meet, so that in the final analysis, "entertainment provides alternatives to capitalism which will be provided by capitalism."

Dyer attempts to counter this 'one-dimensional situation' by emphasising the "contradictory nature of entertainment forms", which are to be found in the disjunction between narrative and musical numbers, representational and non-representational signs (colour, texture, movement, rhythm). To my mind, what Dyer assumes as 'contradictory', which he never defines, is more often than not a form of elaboration or substitution by which a dominant set of signs in a particular representation gets reiterated in seemingly different ways. The 'contradictions', if any, are cosmeticised. What appears to be a subversion is actually a means of reaffirming the underlying norms of a narrative. If Hollywood musicals (which are the focus of Dyer's investigation) or commercial Hindu

This content downloaded from 140.233.70.45 on Wed, 14 Jan 2015 09:57:20 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

films could contradict the premises of their production through oppositional signs, which could radically interrogate the content of the overall construction, then we could begin to speak of their representations of 'utopia' in a more liberatory context. Unfortunately, what exists in the form of 'utopia' is far less reflexive, and indeed, as I hope to elaborate in my discussion of HAHK, almost frighteningly hermetic in construction.

Fetishised Representation

In its categorical rejection of a conventional story-line, HAHK would seem to exemplify what has been described in film studies as 'fetishised representation', which permits only an 'attenuated narrative' to repeat ceaseless 'scenarios of desire' [Ellis 1992:160-61]. Abolishing the distance between the spectator and the image, the 'fetishised representation' focuses, indeed, lingers and luxuriates, on the materiality of objects, which are substitutes for desire, more often than not concentrated in the bodies and faces of the performers themselves. At their most extreme, such representations exploit the erotics of performance, 'explicitly posed for the viewer (sometimes involving the performer looking directly at the audience)'.

This is precisely what happens in the opening shots of HAHK as the credits unfold to reveal the charismatic faces of Salman Khan and Madhuri Dixit, gigantic close-ups in alternate frames which almost fill an entire half of the screen. The stars appear to be singing to each other even as they look out directly at us in the audience, almost inviting us to enter the seduction of their world ('chehra mera pad lo kabhi', as Madhuri Dixit invites us to read her face). The very repetition of the words, 'bechain hai meri nazar/hai pyar ka kaisa asar'.../hum aapke hain koun', lulls us into accepting the inanity of *non sequiturs*, lines that go nowhere and centre coyly around themselves. This circuitous rhetoric is amplified in the repetition of the shots, slow, langorous, and oddly momentous, which provide a visual clue as to what lies in store for us in the film, as the story is sidelined for an endless elaboration of desire.

The 'repetitive' motif of HAHK is perpetuated in the idiom of romance that it posits and postpones. In this regard, the very title 'Hum Aapke Hain Koun' could be regarded as a tease. While appearing to be a question, it is implicitly rhetorical, neutralised of inflection and gender. No wonder then that it is merely echoed by the young lovers when they voice the line, never answered. When it makes its final appearance in the closing shot of the film, it is in the form of a bold caption followed by an exclamation mark. We are expected to be regaled by it, not to question the inanity of its inscription, as it brings the film to a decisive end, almost flaunting its success like a signature.[2] One technical innovation that has contributed viscerally to the projection of Barjatya's success is the unprecedented use in cinema halls of sparkling lights rotating around the screen during the hit songs and the 'happy end'. These lights, reminiscent of the decorative borders surrounding film hoardings, further intensify the two-dimensional frame of Barjatya's spectacle, enhacing the materiality of its images, which almost hit us in the face with the calculated immediacy of their impact.

Among the objects fetishised in the film, it is food that is most alluringly foregrounded, textualised, and texturalised with a power that I have not witnessed in any form of advertising. Indeed, Barjatya's film is gastronomically lavish and loaded with signs. On the one hand, there is the 'shaadi ka khana', topped with generous supplies of mithai, kulfi, cold drinks and paan. But it is the everday 'ghar ka khana' that is almost overwhelming in its omnipresence, ranging from kachori, samosa, halwa, namkeen, achar, to a seemingly limitless supply of vegetables and fruits, primarily shining red apples, which are only too visible on the dining tables and in the interiors of kitchens, the primary sites of numerous scenes. Most conspicuous of all details are the rounds of chai which are served throughout the film at the oddest moments, constituting a leitmotif in the narrative.

A lot of humour in the film is specifically food-centred, involving the amateur culinary skills of the bride's father (Anupam Kher); the substitution of salt for sugar in the making of halwa; the concealment of papad under a sheet as part of wedding humour. Even Tuffy the dog (surely the major attraction of the film) drinks an entire Thums Up with a straw. At a more playful level, chocolates play a vital role in the romancing of the younger couple, Prem (Salman Khan) and Nisha (Madhuri Dixit), who are the younger siblings of the married couple, Rajesh (Mohnish Behl) and Pooja (Renuka Shahane). Counterpointing the formalities of marriage, the younger couple tease and flirt with each other throughout the film, finally coming together over a home-made meal, the nutrition contributing to the ritualisation of their romance.

In short, food becomes the most literal, yet reasonant sign in Barjatya's world of wealth and health, family and tradition. It is there to be consumed, its surfaces seemingly touched up with vivid colours as in the icons of food advertisements. At times, the brand names of particular articles are barely concealed, so that we can dwell on a Cadbury 5-Star bar or a bottle of Pepsi. In the process, Barjatya naturalises the iconicity of food items, which (in reality) could scarcely be afforded by the millions of people watching his film. And yet one is given the illusion that these commodities are eminently available, such is their abundance.

Wealth and Family

Wealth is a 'given' in a pre-ordained condition which exists without a hint of struggle, despite fleeting references to the humble beginnings of the boys' surrogate father, Kakaji (Alok Nath) and Anupam Kher's relatively modest profession as a professor. These references are totally marginalised in favour of a portraiture of a rich and happy family. Here all the relatives are nice, the brothers and sisters love each other, with Prem going to the extent of having a sign 'I love my family' painted on his jeep. There are no illegitimate or dishonoured or discarded siblings from another generation hovering in the shadows. All is legitimate, 'seedha-saadha'. And therefore the only option available is to aspire to the seeming bliss of this supremely happy family, or should we say, an extended hindu family whose members are frequently identified not by name but by the generic categories of mamaji, kakaji, bhatija, jethani, devar, sali, jijaji. Direct blood-ties are far less important than cultural bonds and affinities, so that a kakaji or chachi can become a surrogate father and mother respectively. In this affirmatively harmonious world, there is no possibility of a vicarious protest through the presence of a malcontent or a party-pooper or some self-righteous soul questioning the origins of this wealth. There is no dissent whatsoever because there is no need for it. 'Don't worry, be happy' would almost be a radical slogan in this world where happiness is the essentialised condition of life.

Other signs of wealth in the film are displayed through the extravagant supply of expensive toys that emerge miraculously once the birth of Pooja's child is imminent. Barjatya packs his frames with an almost obscene variety of cartoons, cutouts, plastic animals, train sets, and balloons, around which the adults celebrate their 'second childhood'. More signs of familial wealth are casually evident in homely games of billiards, swimming pools, and at least two displays of fireworks, the kind that rich families vie with each other in, in order to prove their social status. And finally, there are exchanges of 'real' money as part of the gifts and jests in the wedding, including the mandatory offering of money to the hijras, who demand their due from the child's father (on his return from abroad, where he has successfully finalised a deal on a car factory with foreign collaboration).

Economically, this is a film that is obviously in tune with the liberalisation of our times, while being thoroughly grounded in the signs of a homogenised, upper-class, upper-caste hindu constituency. For all the

This content downloaded from 140.233.70.45 on Wed, 14 Jan 2015 09:57:20 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

display of wealth, there is no overt flashiness in a nouveau-riche or blatantly 'westernised' mode. The cultural codes remain indigenous: no booze, no non-veg, no cigarettes (only Madhuri Dixit mimes smoking a cigarette with a pencil, revealing her much-valorised and deceptive aura of 'liberation').

If the Hindu inscriptions of wealth in the film are naturalised within the framework of the wedding, they are more self-consciously inserted in the preceding scene where Rajesh and Pooja meet in the environs of a hindu dharamshala adjoining the Ram Tengri temple. (This site, incidentally, is one of the very few locations that is specifically named in the entire film, which oscillates between two households whose geographical specificities are left completely nebulous. 'North Indian' would be the most approximate definition of the cultural geography in the film.) In the tradition of utopic representations, which posit a 'temporal and spatial elsewhere', the Ram Tengri temple is represented in a totally synthetic space, with no trace of the surrounding landscape, neighbourhood, or community. Whatever exists is within the framework of the temple, which becomes the mediating sign by which Pooja reveals her grace and devotion to Rajesh through her painting of the temple itself.[3] Hindu icons, emblems, and colours are visible in almost every frame of this hermetic space, which is charged with sanctity. Even the 'diyas' that float in the waters around the temple merge simultaneously for one split-second to form a swastika. Such are the subliminal signs of hindu religiosity which become increasingly emphatic as the film proceeds, not least when Pooja is presented with a copy of the *Ramayana*, over which her brother-in-law solemnly takes an oath swearing allegiance to his *bhabhi*.

Politics of Inclusion

All of these signs can be defended on grounds of verisimilitude. The contexts of a temple and a 'shaadi', after all, have to be hindu. But what needs to be emphasised is not just the predominance and incremental power of the hindu signs, but more subtly, the way in which they have been conflated with the construction of an 'Indian' identity. Almost mandatorily, the 'other community' is inscribed in this construction through the most blatant use of comic tokenism in the form of a fat muslim doctor who, of course, has to recite 'shairi' almost as soon as he makes his entrance. At one level, the flair in the performance is highly enjoyable, but one should not forget that it is grounded in the stereotypes of representing minorities, where the muslim becomes a nice person especially when he reaffirms the fundamental goodness of his hindu brethren. His cultural difference is merely superficial, an object of humour, but fundamentally, he is part of a larger beneficent structure in which he is accommodated hospitably.[4]

A more problematic construction of the 'other' is concealed in the characterisation of Lalloo, the genial servant, who is almost a member of the family. Indeed, so close is the camaraderie between Lalloo and Prem that their class signs are almost entirely eradicated. The servant and his young master dance and play cricket together, apart from plotting all kinds of romantic intrigues against Nisha. At no point in the film are we presented with any signs of Lalloo's background in the village, his sick bhouji, for instance, remains an absence. Nor do we witness any representative of the 'working class' or the 'destitute', who have almost always been inscribed in the master narratives of Hindi cinema, even if their modes of representation have been contrived, melodramatic and exploitative. In this regard, we are compelled to recall the evocations of the 'common man' and the 'toiling masses' in the masterworks of Mehboob, Raj Kapoor and Manmohan Desai. In contrast, Sooraj Barjatya solves the problem of subaltern representation by simply excluding the poor from the canvas of his film.

All who exist and are worth addressing are subsumed in the world of 'rich Indians', the kind whom Manmohan Singh would love to believe as representative of the Indian population at large. Lalloo is merely an extension of the 'rich', upwardly mobile, learning-to-speak-English, compering cricket matches. At one point, he even recites a few lines extolling the virtues of Pandit Nehru. The parody of his representation is not entirely innocent, as can be glimpsed from the seemingly gratuitous, yet telling, frontal shot of Lalloo holding a book entitled USSR upside down. The joke is as much on a defunct and redundant socialist system as on Lalloo himself, who is merely a satellite of the capitalist ideology that is assumed as an unquestioned norm of progress and benevolence in the film.

And yet, there is a seeming twist in the representation of Lalloo when the crass and execrable Bindu (who is the only quasi-villainous figure in the family) refers to him categorically as a 'naukar'. This is in response to the telegram that has arrived from Lalloo's home announcing his bhouji's illness, and the subsequent generosity of Pooja in giving him some money. Bindu interprets the telegram as a 'bahana', a hoax which pains Lalloo greatly.[5] The moment is undeniably affecting because it is the first sign of a 'human emotion' that interrupts the heady momentum of joy in the film. But significantly, it shifts the attention away from Lalloo to Pooja, who inspires him to receive the blessings of good. In her 'vishvas' that all will be well, she embodies an aura of humanity that epitomises the essential goodness of god-fearing capitalists.

The second interruption in the film following Lalloo's telegram is more jolting insofar as it results in a break in the narrative – Pooja inexplicably falls down the stairs, and shortly after, dies in hospital. For me, this death (which lasts barely three minutes, following two-and-a-half hours of almost unmitigated fun) comes as a great source of 'tragic relief' because it has the potential to dismantle the construction of happiness in the film. But barely ten minutes after Pooja falls, another round of tea emerges, initiating a new cycle of reassurance. Following the tea and doctorsahib's recommendation that the pining Rajesh should marry again (it is only natural), the old Hindi film formulae surface with younger brother Prem sacrificing his love for Nisha, who imagines that she is marrying Prem only to confront - horror of horrors, while 'mehndi' is being put on her hands – that the invitation card mentions another bridegroom. Through some process of divine intervention in which Tuffy the dog plays a vital role, the film draws to an inevitable denouement as the true lovers come together, precipitating yet another 'shaadi', with everybody whirling in circles, hand in hand, bringing the round of merriment full circle. Death, therefore, merely reinforces the utopia of another wedding in the total closure of a 'happy end'.

'Consumption as Spectacle'

It is a daunting fact to realise that millions of people in India are watching this 'end' with a profound suspension of disbelief, or so it would seem from the rapt attention and ardour with which the film is being seen. In the absence of audience surveys, one may not be able to gauge definitively what exactly is being absorbed and retained, but if the box-office remains the ultimate criterion of assessing not just the popularity but the power of commercial cinema, then the world represented in HAHK would appear to be eminently desirable. The ingredients of its success need to be taken seriously and not just dismissed as some kind of freak or manipulated phenomenon. Rather, we should try to understand its mass appeal through what Han Magnus Enzensberger has identified as "the elemental power of deep social needs" [Dyer 1993: 277]. Though we may not necessarily agree that these 'needs' have "physiological roots which can no longer be suppressed", Enzensberger is deeply intuitive, I believe, in locating these 'needs' within the context of "consumption as spectacle", which contains "the promise that want will disappear", even when "there can be no question of a real fulfilment of this promise". While acknowledging the deception, brutality and obscenity of the media, Enzensberger nonetheless qualifies that, "consumption as spectacle is, in parody form, the anticipation of a utopian situation".

This content downloaded from 140.233.70.45 on Wed, 14 Jan 2015 09:57:20 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

What makes the utopian representation of HAHK disturbing is the intensity with which the spectacle is offered to be consumed, without the mediation of a sustained parody. If the protagonists of the film could have been allowed by their director to parody their desires, there would have been greater possibilities of questioning the premises of the film. But what appears to be 'parody' invariably borders on 'burlesque' – most significantly, the dramatisation of the hit song 'didi tera devar deewana', where a woman cross-dresses as a man, Salman Khan's double, a surrogate brother-in-law, while wooing a 'pregnant' Madhuri Dixit. It is significant that while appearing to subvert the norms of heterosexual romantic love, the song ultimately vindicates patriarchal control in determining gender and desire, with Salman Khan chasing away his surrogate, while appearing in the final moments of the song dressed in a skimpy, silken slip as a 'pregnant male'. Now this can be dismissed as a trivial sign, but what it illuminates through its triviality is the reaffirmation of codes and cultural norms that only appear to be parodied.

Tellingly, there is no such playful treatment in exposing the economy that supports the representation of wealth and happiness in the film. The representation of capital is extravagant and loaded with fun, but at no point in the film is its 'illusion' called into question. The economic foundations of Barjatya's utopia in Bollywood remain intact. If the film has surpassed all box-office records in the history of Indian cinema, it is substantially related to the narrative in which contemporary capitalism has been inscribed without any significant inflection or contradiction whatsoever. The presiding deity of the film (to whom even Lord Krishna and Sri Rama would seem to be agents rather than rivals) is wealth. In this context, the deepest 'social need' that is at once targeted and fetishised in the film is what money can buy – this includes a 'happy' family, romance, food, and an endless round of fun and games.

It would seem to me that the surrender to Barjatya's utopia cannot be separated from the infiltration of capital in our cultural space, which provides the overwhelming majority of millions of people with very little scope for negotiation, thereby ensuring their total exclusion from the benefits of capitalism while subjecting them with renewed intensities to its consumerist lure. Though Barjatya does not narrativise the global dimensions of this scenario (beyond the nebulous foreign connections in an unnamed country which enable Rajesh and Prem to build their factory), he succeeds in domesticating (and thereby, rhapsodising) the 'good life' provided by unquestioned resources of money.

But this is not all. Apart from tuning very ingeniously into the infantalisation of desire that seems to be pervading our society through a craze for novelties and commodities, Sooraj Barjatya is also drawing on very real needs for 'security' and 'community', which are being eroded systematically by the state. In this regard, the most problematic component in his projection of utopia is an effervescent construction of 'the community' as providing a model as it were for a well-ordered, wholesome, civilised Indian life. It would be an exaggeration, perhaps, to claim that HAHK is about the Hindu Right, but it is definitely a film that would not have been possible without a deep internalisation of the Hindu Right in popular and mass culture. What can be seen against the grain of the film, through the seeming idiocy of its narrative, is the ease with which the market has been embraced within a matrix of upper-class, 'traditional', hindu cultural values, with an appropriate dose of religiosity to keep 'the family' happy, and very discreetly – without making an issue of it – to keep the others out. Of course, if they wish to enter this matrix, they will always be welcomed with a cup of tea and absorbed.

'Claustrophobic', 'homogenised', 'monocultural', 'totalising' are some of the signs of a new narrative that seems to be emerging through the negation of earlier film narratives, which for all their moralistic hypocrisies and affiliations to earlier modes of capital, were more expansive, variegated, histrionic, and diverse in their modes of representation. All HAHK can do is to invoke the master narratives of Mughal-E-Azam, Sholay and Bobby through a game, where the inner circle of 'the family' sits around and passes a cushion to bursts of old Hindi film songs. Nostalgia is fetishised through quotations, but the lessons of the past are not re-invented. Instead, they are submitted to the horseplay of self-exhibition and then glibly passed over for the cultivated superficialities of the present.

It is, indeed, a sad sign of our times that we should be celebrating the century of cinema in India with a superhit so vacuous as 'Hum Aapke Hain Koun...!' – a film devoid of any illusion worthy of the massive suffering and poverty of millions of people, who are at once the primary patrons and victims of its vision. The 'innocuous', however, is what appears to be the idiom most deeply related to the 'banality of evil' in our times.

Notes

[I would like to thank Gagan Makar for his critical contributions to the research of this essay.]

1 In this respect, HAHK is significantly different from Sooraj Barjatya's earlier superhit 'Maine Pyar Kiya', where romance is foregrounded and built into the structure of the film, concentrating on two young lovers divided through class and patriarchal strictures, who eventually come together with a pigeon serving as a go-between. In HAHK, romance is an elaborate motif supporting a much more emphatic celebration of capital and community, but the 'love story' is subsumed (as discussed in my essay) within a larger propagation of 'utopia'.

2 At the risk of stressing the insignificant, it should be pointed out that the word 'Koun' in the title is flashed and then erased, so that the final title in the last image of the film reads: 'Hum Aapke Hain...!' This would seem to be even more of a declaration than the title of the film.

3 Renuka Shahane could be the first television personality to be featured prominently in a Hindi film superhit. By casting her as Pooja, Barjatya is obviously playing on the persona for which she is best known throughout India, as the anchorwoman, the second-in-command on Siddharth Kak's grossly overrated 'Surabhi'. In the role of Pooja, Shahane merely extends her second-in-command status as the charming wife of Rajesh, combining a modern, level-headed cheerful outlook on life (punctuated with semi-automatic grins) along with a dutiful subservience as the 'bahu' in a Hindu household. In a different register, Pooja's bantering tone in her playful exchanges with Prem, is startlingly similar to the rehearsed repartee that Renuka Shahane has adopted in her exchanges with Siddharth Kak. In the combination of 'tradition' and 'modernity', seeming 'informality' and 'professionalism', not to mention the consumerism that 'Surabhi' propagates through its cultural quiz, there are some very tantalising, yet telling signs of the growing nexus between 'television' and 'film' cultures in India. This will definitely be a subject worth analysing at a later stage.

4 Hypothetically, for the sake of argument, it would be almost impossible to imagine HAHK contextualised in a predominantly muslim social background. Nor is it entirely plausible that the lovers could be 'divided' in the classic Indian formula through warring families or distinct communities. This is not to assume that these options would be free of their own politics, but the point is that HAHK obliterates the possibility of such options through the strong, hindu majoritarian thrust of its narrative.

5 In a later scene, following Pooja's death, Lalloo is indirectly pitted against Bindu, when she brazenly suggests that Rajesh should marry her niece, Sweety, on condition that Pooja's child can be brought up by an ayah. As the men in the family echo Lalloo's deep sense of shock, Bindu flies into a rage which is terminated only when her seemingly mild husband, 'Mamaji', slaps her for her flagrant insensitivity to a mother's love ('ma ki mamta'). In the process, Bindu's aberrant behaviour reinforces the essentially civilised codes of family life upheld in the film. And significantly, when Bindu makes her final appearance as a reformed, pregnant wife, her vamp-like behaviour is obliterated through an apparent change of consciousness. So, ultimately, even Bindu is part of Sooraj Barjatya's 'happy end'.

References

Dyer, Richard (1993): 'Entertainment and Utopia' in Simon During (ed), *The Cultural Studies Reader*, Routledge, London.

Ellis, John (1992): *The Sexual Subject*, Routledge, London and New York.

Nandy, Ashis (1987): *Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

This content downloaded from 140.233.70.45 on Wed, 14 Jan 2015 09:57:20 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions