# NATION, LIBERALISATION AND FILM SONGS: TECHNOLOGY AND HYBRIDISATION IN CONTEMPORARY HINDI FILM MUSIC

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**Abstract:** This paper seeks to study some exemplary ways in which sophisticated audio processing and packaging technologies have been incorporated into the aesthetic of Hindi film songs in the post-90s period, especially with regard to how such uses of technology correspond to post-liberalisation narratives of national identity in India. I attempt to show how technology is used to articulate newer senses of locationality, mapping hybrid national subjects vis-à-vis markers of the 'rural' and the 'urban', the 'regional' and the 'cosmopolitan', the 'local' and the 'global'. On one hand, film songs from this period consciously negotiate with the 'global' (or metropolitan) market and mediascape, yet on the other, address a national audience with wide disparities in terms of economic and cultural access. In the face of these constitutive tensions, a newer studio aesthetics arises through reworking older modes of hybridity and eclecticism in the film song tradition, framed by the larger problematic of how Hindi films have addressed and narrated issues of national identity and subjectivity.

## Introduction: The problematic

This paper seeks to study some exemplary ways in which sophisticated audio processing and packaging technologies have been incorporated into the aesthetic of Hindi film songs in the post-90s period, especially with regard to how such uses of technology correspond to post-liberalisation narratives of national identity in India. Film songs in the period often attempt to retain an affirmative and coherent narrative of the nation across the wide gulfs of access and privilege within their audience. From this follows the central problematic that I seek to address: on one hand, film songs increasingly participate in a 'global' (and metropolitan) market and mediascape, while on the other, they often attempt to integrate privileged and subaltern groups into coherent narratives and/or seek to construct hybrid and representative national subjects. Through this constitutive tension, a newer studio aesthetic arises by reworking older traditions of hybridity and eclecticism in the film song. I attempt to show how technology is used to articulate newer senses of spatiality, mapping hybrid national subjects vis-à-vis constructs of the 'rural' and the 'urban', the 'regional' and the 'cosmopolitan', the 'local' and the 'global'.

In the subsequent sections of this paper, I shall make an attempt to explore and delineate two different tendencies of hybridisation that can be discerned in the use of technology, following the theoretical lead of Ella Shohat in designating different modalities of hybridity (Shohat, 1992). For convenience of nomenclature I shall designate these as the hybridity of quotation and the hybridity of synthesis. I define the hybridity of quotation and stylistic separation as that which tends to index or bracket musical styles, as opposed to the hybridity of stylistic synthesis and continuity which tends to deconstruct stylistic boundaries, subsuming 'original' or 'source' styles in the new one. I contend that both tendencies can simultaneously interact within the encompassing structure of a single piece of film music, and contextually correspond to variable semiotic strategies in the narration of the nation and national subjects. Technology is itself not a neutral medium, but bears cultural markers of

privilege and metropolitan location – especially if its use is evident in the sonic product and not just in the process of recording or mastering. Both tendencies, while being traceable to older trends in film music, are negotiated anew in more contemporary uses of technology.

**Hindi film songs in history: Between centralisation and decentralisation**
Some discussion on the longer tradition of Hindi film songs from the post-independence period might prove helpful here. A ubiquitous component of Hindi films, film songs nevertheless became an important and distinct cultural and commercial product from their earliest days. This can be attributed to their extra-diegetic nature: that is, they tend to be isolable from their narrative contexts, and thus lend themselves to consumption and negotiation in diverse socio-cultural contexts and situations (Jha 2003, Marcus 1992). On the other hand, film song composition has largely been a centralised and studio-bred art without a corresponding amateur sector (Manuel 1993). One may understand these contrary tendencies of centralisation and decentralisation as analogous to the way Hindi films and their songs have appealed and catered to diverse cross-regional audiences and yet seek to construct overarching national narratives (Manuel 1993, Arnold 1988). Just as films have mediated post-colonial nation-building – often seeking to construct a coherent idea of national subjectivity vis-à-vis the tension-ridden dynamics of gender relations, or sectarian/religious and class/caste differences – film songs too can be located in terms of their strategies to narrativise and aestheticise the nation (and its subjects) in the face of these fissures.

      This narration of nation in films and their songs can be seen as becoming all the more urgent in the period of economic and media liberalisation, broadly periodisable from the late 80s/early90s through the 2000s[1]. This is the time of the rise of Hindu right and various controversies and contests in the public sphere regarding issues of culture, gender-sexuality and religion (Kapur 1999). On one hand, one could note new narratives of nation, charting the shift from an older Nehruvian, service-based middle class to a new middle class identity premised on consumerism and the aspiration to be part of 'global' metropolitan lifestyles (Mazzarella 2004). This is evidenced, for example, in a crop of films set among non-resident Indians in western metropolitan centres[2], or the so-called 'multiplex' films dealing with metropolitan contexts within India[3]. This seems to indicate a certain homogenisation into the metropolitan media culture of the post-Cold War neoliberal period. However, we do not just see an articulation of citizenship and nationality in terms of globalisation or liberalisation, but also the simultaneous re-appropriation and re-assertion of folk cultures and regional identities, articulated through different modes of hybridity that diversely appropriate and utilise markers of rurality and 'tradition'. This could be seen as continuing the long-standing attempt of Hindi films to encompass a variety of locations and fashion hybrid identities. Film songs, while updating themselves vis-à-vis globally disseminated genres like hip-hop and techno and using the latest studio technologies to process audio, have yet turned to folk or semi-classical genres and styles to fashion hybrid musical styles, the popularity of remixed *Bhangra* beats being just one example.

**The uses of hybridity: Pre- and post-liberalisation periods**
At this point, there is perhaps a need to discuss what exactly is implied in my usage of the concept of hybridity. While Bhabha offers us a general concept of hybridity based on a reading of imitation and mimicry in colonial discourse (Bhabha 1985/94), Ella Shohat argues that hybridity "must be examined in a non-universalising, differential manner" (Shohat 1992). She distinguishes between different modalities of hybridity: "forced assimilation, internalised self-dejection, political cooptation, social

conformism, cultural mimicry and creative transcendence"(ibid.) While I do use this concept of different modalities, in our context, these different forms of hybridisation cannot be fixed in terms of political valences (like "forced assimilation" vs. "creative transcendence") in themselves. This is not only because the same aesthetic tendency may situationally correspond to different narrative strategies, but also because the semiotics of music cannot always be pinned down to visual/lyrical context or plot situations. Thus, the relation between modalities of hybridity and the politics of narration remains slippery and contextual.

But how might one sketch a history of hybridity in Hindi film music, especially as regards the role that technology has played in fashioning such a hybridity? Peter Manuel provides a useful chronological map with a dualistic schema – locating 1975 as a marker of change from the oligopoly of a few corporate producers, music directors and singers centrally located in the studio system of Bombay, to a more loose system with diverse regionally located producers enabled by the advent of cheap cassette technology. He sees the first period as creating a homogenised national style that marginalised folk styles, linked to a disruption and decay of community, and the second period as more heterogeneous and democratically oriented, linked to the revival and/or propagation of regional identities and community affiliations, allowing plural agents to claim their stakes (Manuel 1993). But he largely ignores the syncreticism of the older film music – which borrowed liberally from regional, folk and light classical styles – and there is no real analysis of how this hybrid aesthetic attempted to garner a pan-regional appeal much before the advent of cassettes. In this respect, Arnold's and Booth's accounts are more fruitful.

Arnold seeks to show how film composers creatively united diverse intra- and inter-national styles into one that had pan-national appeal, and thus resisted both western hegemony and the rigidity of traditionalists through an "integrated, eclectic music… at first drawing upon native forms of music, dance and drama… (but) with a new outlet for musical experimentation and syncretism" (Arnold 1988). In a related vein, Booth similarly examines how dramatic and musical conventions of pre-film genres are renegotiated in film music (Booth 2000). However, in validating the underlying logic that makes film songs work, both Arnold and Booth do not pay much attention to the tensions of this mainstream aesthetic of hybridity, and how these constitute a certain politics of forging a national style. Manuel, conversely, takes greater account of this politics, but doesn't provide any analysis of how this happens at the level of song structure and aesthetics, which are studied by Arnold and Booth. Thus, perhaps a combination of the above approaches is called for.

Moreover, all of these accounts end with the earlier period of liberalisation (mid- '90s), but the following decade or so has been an eventful period in terms of newer trends. Perhaps the most noticeable development is what film theorist Ashish Rajadhyaksha terms the 'Bollywoodisation' of Hindi films. By this he means not only the newer imputation of the term "Bollywood" (after the American term, of course) to a decades-old film industry, but also the growth of an international market in which the Hindi film with all its accessories becomes a cultural commodity in its own right (Rajadhyaksha 2003). Within this packaging of Hindi films geared for the international market, Hindi film songs too begin to compete in a more globalised mediascape with diverse genres of popular songs – no longer just as 'music scenes' within films but as independent commodities that are packaged on MTV or similar media channels alongside music videos from the latest pop singles or remixes. Thus, the film song that has been already extra-diegetic (Jha 2003) becomes even more isolable in the way that it is packaged to compete with other forms in global media: note the increasingly ubiquitous 'item numbers', pre-released songs and so on. The advent of sites like Youtube and Musicindiaonline, as well as mp3-sharing software

and the pirated mp3 industry, further enable the independent consumption of songs (that would earlier take place through radio and TV shows, cassettes, etc). Songs thus have to function doubly within their film context and as 'autonomous strips of narrative' (Dhareshwar and Niranjana 1996). This would explain, for example, the entirely new (and perhaps Hollywood-inspired) trend of having different versions of the same song on the film soundtrack and on the album (good examples would be the song 'Lakad jalke' from *Omkara*, 'Lukka Chhupi' from *Rang de Basanti*, among others). Of course, this makes the question of the multiple valences of film songs even more complex and fraught.

The other significant trend is the incorporation of sophisticated studio technologies to record, process and manipulate sound, as seen in the work of a younger generation of composers, first evident in the early 90s in the work of A.R. Rahman and continuing through the work of composers like Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy, Vishal Bhardwaj, and Ismail Darbar, to name a few. If the pre-1975 film music scene was studio-centred (as Manuel argues), now the studio aesthetician's power only increases, to the extent of reducing the role of artists and performers who used to be integrally embedded in the production process (Leading film composer A.R. Rahman acknowledges this in a 2007 interview where he speaks of how singers' voices can be massaged to correct faults or accentuate certain qualities in the recording in their absence)[4]. Moreover, prior recordings of instruments and singers can also be sampled, processed, looped and layered to manipulate and (com)modify existing genres and styles far beyond the scope of older technologies (remixes being a whole sub-industry based on this). However, as we shall see, the ways that technology gets used are hardly simple, and there seem to be a variety of ways in which it can be utilised in relation to existing (already-hybrid) styles. On one hand, techniques of digital signal processing can be used to index and set apart instruments and styles from the rest of the texture and structure of the song, 'quoting' it so to say – for example, the sound of the *tumbi* (a single-stringed instrument) that indexes the Punjabi folk style of *Bhangra* is texturally separated out in the title song of the film *Rang De Basanti* (2005), and the sound of harmonium and women's voices is similarly quoted to index a folksy feel in the introduction to the song 'Kachchi kaliyan mat todo' ('Don't pluck the fresh buds') from *Lagaa Chunari Mein Daag* (2007). Conversely, electronics or synthesised and/or processed sounds may be merged aesthetically with other, older styles. An excellent example would be the introduction to the song 'Namak Ishq Ka' from the film *Omkara* (2006) where synthesised sounds blend seamlessly with the vocal melisma of the singer and serve to fill in the gaps between the phrases. These specific uses of technology correspond to different narrative strategies in different film songs, complicated further by the fact that these songs have a life both within and outside of films. At this juncture, thus, it becomes all the more important to examine the politics of this newer hybrid aesthetic – the role these aesthetic strategies of Hindi film songs play in their continuing attempt to narrate a coherent nation, a feasible narrative of national development, or a viable national subject, with attendant inclusions and exclusions. The subsequent part of the paper tries to do so by analyzing the songs from some prominent films of recent years that mediate the question of the nation within globalisation quite consciously.

**Analysis of selected film songs from the 2000s**
The 2000s, with the continuing spate of liberalisation and capital influx on one hand and farmer suicides and rural distress on the other, punctuated by the grisly anti-Muslim pogroms in Gujarat in 2002 and the subsequent fall of the pro-Hindutva BJP in the 2004 elections, have been a time of both crisis and celebration, with new forms of assertive national identity and discourses of a national resurgence having to contend with major fissures and discontents in the economy and polity. In this

context, films like *Lagaan* (2001), *Kal Ho Na Ho* (2003), *Swades* (2004) and *Rang de Basanti* (2006) are among the many that (more or less) consciously mediate the question of the nation and its subjects in this day and age. All of these films have music that audibly draw upon sophisticated studio technology, and that became successful in the inter/national market in its own right. Some of these films foreground and celebrate global Indian subjects who remain 'Indian' while being technically in the diaspora in cities like New York (*Kal Ho Na Ho* being an example), while ones like *Swades* try to bridge the gaps between metropolitan subjects and unprivileged India, and yet other films like *Lagaan* foreground a non-metropolitan rural/semi-urban context as the site for an authentic consolidation of the nation. Tendencies to both quotation and synthesis are apparent in the music of these films, but in ways that may differ even for different songs in the same film. This provides interesting points of comparison.

The music of *Lagaan* ('Land Tax', 2001) for example, tries to consciously evoke the folk and the rural and bypasses the older, pre-liberalisation *filmy* style – avoiding its eclectic use of orchestral string and brass sections, and rather using percussion such as the *dholak* and stringed instruments like the *ektara* common to north Indian folk music. However, there is no attempt to faithfully stick to any particular regional style. In a television interview[5], the director (Ashutosh Gowariker) speaks of what he was expecting from the music director (A.R. Rahman) and why he hired him: "the reason why I wanted Rahman was because, you know, *Lagaan* is a blend of folk music, traditional, classical music (Indian), *and* western classical" [italics indicate spoken emphasis]. One, of course, notes the vague demarcation of 'folk', 'traditional' and 'classical (Indian)'; they are all grouped as opposed to 'western classical'. This grouping is very clear in the use of music in the film's narrative: a story of how villagers somewhere in pre-independence India take on their British administrators led by a spunky young farmer named Bhuvan. Several scenes in the cantonment of the British are accompanied by waltzes and other ballroom music; the background score in others is lushly orchestrated for symphonic orchestra. Music very clearly becomes a cultural marker of difference through the quotation of a putatively 'western classical' music (that more concretely evokes Hollywood-style period film scoring). For the 'Indian' scenes we have a more syncretic, less easily locatable style that is broadly north Indian but does not try to be faithful to any particular genre within it. For example, the song 'O Mitwa' ('O Friend') opens with an *ektara* solo that quite clearly quotes the music of wandering *fakirs* and *sants*, whose words of wisdom are explicitly evoked in the beginning of the song. But unlike the music for the cantonment scenes, this does not remain a separated, static musical snapshot but becomes the basic riff upon which the beat of the song, played on a global assortment of percussion from *dholaks* to marimbas, is built. The orchestration weaves the *bansuri* and the *sarangi*[6] together with cellos and double basses, no longer set apart as 'western' but subsumed into the structure, as when they provide the sonic thrust underneath the vocals for the words 'Mitwa, o Mitwa' ('Friend, o my friend"), the melodic and rhythmic core of the song. The song fulfils the narrative function of bringing together the villagers – across caste, age, religion and gender – to a common resolve to challenge their administrators under the leadership of Bhuvan. As such, it is a potent moment in the national allegory in *Lagaan*, and the musical hybridity is thus significant in the way it creates a continuous syncretic style markedly different from the static stylistic quotation used for the British scenes. This supports the symbolic demarcation of an India that seems vaguely decentered and syncretic, and yet retains hegemonic north Indian elements. The use of technology remains unobustrive in *Lagaan*, and serves to texturally balance and bring together the diverse instruments – for example, simultaneous overlaying of the *bansuri* and *shehnai* in an instrumental

interlude[7] in *Mitwa* – to create an inseparably hybrid texture, lending itself to the larger project of synthesis and harmonisation evident in the song.

If the optimistic national allegory of cross-sectarian unity in *Lagaan* comes a year before the horrific communal violence in Gujarat, the celebration of the global metropolitan Indian in *Kal Ho Na Ho* ('Tomorrow may not be…", 2003) comes a year before the debacle of the ruling BJP's 'India Shining' campaign in the face of massive rural discontent. But *Kal Ho Na Ho*, set among diasporic Indians in Manhattan, is able to utilise that metropolitan location of access to bridge cultural elements from the hinterland – *bhangra*, classical *tabla* rhythms, *dandiya*[8] – with globally-disseminated urban genres like rap and hip-hop. The film skillfully builds an optimistic narrative in which the protagonist (a young woman of Indian origin, Catharine Naina Kapoor) transcends familial trauma, heartbreak and even a death to find a happy ending in love. In the process, the film tackles several social, religious and generational fissures and pokes clever fun at social conservatism to construct a young Indian subject who both is (multi)culturally open and mindful of his/her roots. (For example, on one hand the system of arranged marriages and familial matchmaking is made fun of; on the other, the lead male character Aman, played by the actor Shah Rukh Khan, upbraids the diasporic family of the Kapoors for having forgotten their cultural identity and losing themselves to a bland American conformity, and renovates their failing corner-shop business into an Indian restaurant prominently decked up with the national tricolor.) The song sequence 'Mahi Ve' ('O Beloved') marks the culmination of the events of the first half of the film in the engagement party of Naina with her boyfriend. It vividly depicts this desirable syncretic balance between different communities, between the 'traditional' and the 'modern', and the elderly and the young, through the time-tested trope of a spectacular dance sequence in which everyone is made to participate. Aman sets off the song with the invocatory cry, 'Chak de phatte!' (a quintessentially Punjabi phrase signifying, in this context, 'Let's get going!' or 'Let's bring the house down!'), which is immediately answered by the DJ at the party (a Indian American called Frankie) who spins out a catchy riff, comprising a short sample of synthesised sound. This is looped beneath a pop beat and a women's chorus that sings a short harmonised sequence to the words "That's the way, Mahi ve!" Soon enough, the *dholaks* and *tablas* enter the multilayered texture, and the electronic sounds of the DJ get looped underneath the lead vocals. Thus, while the opening sequence juxtaposes two separate stylistic quotations – the 'Chak de phatte' cry (invoking the common construct of Punjabi masculinity as raucous and staunchly provincial) and the urbane synthesised grooves of the diasporic DJ – a syncretic textural synthesis becomes evident further into the song. With the looping of the DJ's grooves underneath Punjabi (*Bhangra*) and Gujarati (*Dandiya*) beats, a mediation rather than an opposition is evident, going with the general trend in the movie to optimistically unite constructs of the 'regional' and the indigenous with those of the 'metropolitan' and the foreign. Of course, a certain position within global capitalism is the condition of production of this holistic hybridity, a hybridity available only to certain class of privileged subjects located squarely in the metropole with access to both ends, though this critique takes nothing away from the skill and verve with which the song effects the hybridisation.

*Swades* ('One's own country', 2004) is released the next year, the year that the ruling BJP's 'Indian Shining' electoral campaign collapsed due to a massive rejection by small-town and rural voters. Perhaps not entirely coincidentally, the film takes into account the urban-rural economic divide and tries to effect a material union of the regional and metropolitan, rather than the symbolic and tokenistic union we get in *Kal Ho Na Ho*. It tells the story of a young non-resident Indian in the US who gives up his lucrative career as a scientist there to go back to a village in India and improve its lot, by initiating and leading the villagers through projects to bring irrigation, electricity

etc. to the locality. In the process, he is humanised through that interaction just as much as they gain from his leadership and knowledge. As such, it is on one level a national allegory of an equal, mutual reconciliation between the cosmopolis and the periphery, and on another level a film on social responsibility where the liberal-minded elite come to forward lead the rural poor. These two ways of bridging intra-national divides come into tension in the cinematic and musical narrative, as shown in a comparison between two key song sequences, 'Yuhi chala chal rahi ('Just keep going, traveler') and 'Yeh jo des hai tera' ('This country of yours').

      The song 'Yuhi chala chal' offers a very rich sonic text mediating between techno-pop, filmy and folk styles. It occurs during a road trip that the central protagonist Mohan (the scientist, played again by Shah Rukh Khan) takes through rural India, driving his van. He gives a ride to a wandering *fakir*-like figure, and at some point in the trip he turns on the music system, looking for approval at the *fakir*, who doesn't object and later even lets down his hair and starts singing his own lines into the song, encouraging Mohan to join in too. The song thus starts off by making its extra-diegetic element explicit, entering the narrative through audio technology that is made entirely visible (unlike the conventional invisibility of technology where songs with all their instrumental accompaniment simply arise from narrative spaces, with no explanation of their sonic packaging deemed necessary). In the rest of the song, the use of technology is sometimes foregrounded and sometimes invisibilised. The intro to the song, for example, layers a peppy 90s dance beat with a short, fragmented *sargam*[9] where the singer's voice is lightly vocoded[10], clearly suggesting the electronic remixing and subsumption of an established classical technique. With the further layering of a falsetto male voice with a guitar solo and bass guitar riffs, an urbane hybridity is established between the electronic and the acoustic. The ease with technology is evident in how a short bridge of electronic sounds is used to seamlessly introduce the vocals, sung in Hindi in a recognisable playback style, which fixes the song's filmy provenance after the more ambivalent pop/techno/world-music intro. But the greater shift occurs when the *fakir* – his part sung by popular Sufi and folk singer Kailash Kher – joins into the song with a vocal line composed to sound improvised and spontaneous, somewhat analogous to the contextual elaborations of Sufi Qawwali singers in the course of a performance. More obviously, the singer's somewhat nasal timbre and accent suggests a regional and folksy feel[11] compared to the standard, nationally hegemonic filmy vocal style exemplified in the playback singing of Udit Narayan, who sings Mohan's part. In terms of both the music and the narrative, there is a binary encounter here – between the folk/vernacular and the urban/cosmopolitan. But while the technological hybridisation is made explicit for the latter, the former is presented as authentic and direct from the mouth of a roving *fakir* – its technological mediation made covert. These two musical elements – one already-hybrid and the other supposedly more authentic and unmediated – are further hybridised in an instrumental interlude from 4:01 to 4:23, where we see Mohan and the fakir dancing together to an *ektara* solo over the heavy pop beat. Thus, two levels of hybridisation can be discerned within the encompassing aesthetic of the song – one, the urbane hybridity mediating between techno, pop, and filmy styles, and the other the structural mediation between this already-hybrid, cosmopolitan style and a putatively pure folk style. In the trope of the encounter between Mohan and the *fakir*, the regional/folk is thus constructed in contrast to the cosmopolitan/hybrid, and while the overall structure establishes a further level of hybridisation between the two, it still quotes the folk as something that is in itself static, unmixed and evocative of an uncomplicated, authentic vernacular.

      Though problematic, this encounter in 'Yuhi chala chal, rahi' is at least on an equal footing between the two ends, seeking a mutual reconciliation. The narrative is skewed differently in the song 'Yeh Jo Des Hai Tera' ('This country of yours'). The

song occurs at a crucial juncture when Mohan makes the decision to return from the US, nostalgically remembering scenes from rural India and from his village of origin. The accompanying visual sequence contrasts his busy professional life in the US with these short static flashbacks of India. The song quotes a looped sample of a north Indian woodwind instrument, the *shehnai*, over a short clip of crowd noise, a synthesiser pad[12] and a soft pop beat; the vocals enter later and bridge a filmy style with a loosely western pop style. The introduction starts with the synth pad and the soft beat and we see Mohan working in his office at NASA. His concentration is interrupted by sudden recollections of scenes of rural life (houses, street, temple), at which point the looped clip of crowd noise enters. As he gets further carried away, the *shehnai* clip enters, its note-pattern synchronised with a quick succession of visual clips from India (spices, cross-country train, mountains, landscape). As the looped pattern gets established through repetition, the vocals enter with the line 'Yeh jo des hai tera, swades hai tera' ('This country of yours, it is your very own'). Given the striking textural difference of the *shehnai* and the crowd noise from the rest of the layered beat, and given how they are synchronised with the short clips of motley scenes (spices, village streets, landscape), one could safely assert that they function as markers of a loose, encompassing 'Indian-ness'. The textural quotation in the music is thus used to index and collapse a plural array of images into the encompassing marker of 'swades' (one's own country) and freeze that teeming multiplicity into the static, repetitive, haunting backdrop for the protagonist's thoughts and decision-making process (ventriloquised by the off-screen singer, Mohan never lips the lines). This interpretation gathers further ground when we consider the images of waiting later on in the visual sequence – a succession of shots of village elders, old women, children back in India all looking out of the screen expectantly, interspersed with shots of Mohan introspecting to the lines, 'it is you who will decide the path, it is you who has to say which direction that country will go if it is to move'. Thus, not only is that multiplicity frozen into a backdrop, it is also without any agency of its own, waiting for the metropolitan protagonist to make his decision. While he does emotionally need India, he is clearly the agent who should go back and help develop that backward land. Just as the frozen *shehnai* clip is the backdrop for the urbane, hybrid vocals, a static rural India becomes (through the semiotic interlocking of the musical and the visual) the backdrop for his metropolitan hybridity and agency. The musical-visual interlocking makes the sequence into a very powerful symbolic statement of patriotism and moral responsibility to the nation – but in the process, the national allegory of the film privileges the elite hybrid subject even more than the trope of encounter and mutuality in 'Yuhi chala chal, rahi' did.

Lastly, I want to briefly touch upon the role of new technologies of dissemination in the marketing and consumption of songs, which may thus acquire new or different meanings when presented outside the narrative context of the film. While a detailed examination of this phenomenon would need another paper, an interesting exemplary case is provided in the song 'Lukka chhupi' ('Hide and Seek') from the film *Rang de Basanti* (2006). The film is another national allegory: it charts how a group of urban middle class youth in the period of liberalisation rise above pessimism, self-immersion and a general apathy toward politics to a more responsible and active role within the nation. Their transformation hinges upon a tragic narrative juncture when a respected and exceptional member of the group, a pilot in the Indian Air Force, crashes his plane because of a technical failure, which, they discover, is due to the second-rate airplane parts purchased in fraudulent defence deals engineered by corrupt politicians and businessmen. The rest of the film is about their attempts to uncover and avenge this anti-national plot of corruption. The pilot's death and funeral is framed through the song 'Lukka chhupi', an imagined dialogue between his mother and her son (with metaphoric resonance with cultural tropes of the nation-mother and

the sacrificing son) that plays in the background during his State funeral. The nationalist narrative in the film builds on this relation of sacrifice to the mother nation (which respects and yet transcends the filial affection for the biological mother). The song, accordingly, stresses the tragic yet inevitable separation between the biological mother and the son through the melodic distinctiveness of their vocal lines, which in film version of the song complement each other yet remain structurally separate. In the film, the song fades after a point; however, the CD release has the full version where the singers (Lata Mangeshkar and A.R. Rahman) join together in the last third of the song in a mellifluous *sargam* foregrounding their virtuosity and classical refinement. A video on the making of the song is also released on television and made available on Youtube[13], where we see the singers rehearse the *sargam*, and the composer A.R. Rahman explains the structural logic of the song: "It had two sections but it didn't go any further, it was just going circling [sic]. After that I thought both of them should join and sing like a duet, which in the end we sing in the *sargam*." The absence of any reference to the lyrical content suggests that this structural/aesthetic logic is not tenable in the narrative context (which is why the film version has to fade out before the *sargam*). The song, to fulfil its full aesthetic logic, has to work beyond the nationalist narrative of separation-and-sacrifice, and is directed to a more select consumer who would care enough for the music to buy the CD or view the video on the making, not to the undifferentiated mass audience to whom the film tries to sell its patriotic appeal. The limitation of mainstream national narratives, and the way film songs can both work within them and can come into tension with them, could not have been made clearer.

## Conclusion

A study like this may need to be broadened through many more comparisons and examples before general conclusions can be drawn. However, it does demonstrate that while technology may seem to merely add to the power of the metropolitan studio aesthetician, thus strengthening the centralising and hegemonic function of Hindi film music, it also lends itself to differential tendencies of hybridisation that have contextual negotiations with narratives of the nation and national subjects. Perhaps it is the tension between these tendencies of quotation, subsumption and continuity that could make for the most fruitful encounter that Hindi film music has with its subaltern others – destabilising coherent and centralising tendencies in narratives of the nation in favour of more tentative, open-ended ones.

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**NOTES**

[1] This periodisation is a complex affair – as scholars like Mazzarella (2004) note, the economy began to be liberalised from it protectionist phase in stages from 1975 onward; yet the '91 budget can be located as bringing in some of the most far-reaching changes.

[2] E.g. *Pardes, Kal Ho Na Ho*, *Kabhi Alvida na Kehna*, *Dil Chahta Hai*

[3] Films directed at big city Multiplex audiences and dealing with lifestyles familiar to such audiences, as opposed to films released in single screen theatres throughout the smaller cities of country.

[4] http://smaramra.blogspot.com/2006/08/r-rahman-interview.html, accessed May 12, 2008

[5] This interview is available on www.youtube.com;
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vuBdrX0sfzs; accessed May 13, 2008.

[6] Respectively, the Indian transverse flute, and a fiddle-like instrument with many resonating strings

[7] from 2:01 to 2:28, 'O Mitwa', *Lagaan* (2001)

[8] Bhangra – a much-exported genre of Punjabi folk music; Tabla – the paired hand-played drums used in North Indian Classical music; Dandiya – a popular dance form from Western India.

[9] A North Indian classical technique of vocal improvisation using note names.

[10] A way of processing voices through digital analysis and re-synthesis which lends a characteristic mechanical texture to the voice; a well-known example is the processed voice in the pop star Cher's 'Believe'.

[11] Kher is from a lower middle class background in eastern UP, not far from Bihar. A rediff.com article says, "Initially, Kher got a lot of flak for his singing style. He admits he used to be nervous about it. "My voice was considered raw and not the conventional 'hero kind of voice,' because of which I got turned away from a lot of places," he says." In the same article, we learn, "A R Rahman calls him the 'fragrance of rural Indian soil'" (http://www.rediff.com/movies/2005/may/09kher.htm, accessed on May 15 2008).

[12] Common synthesised sound banks used to provide chordal accompaniment to pop songs

[13] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FxRpmgqtcaM, accessed May 14, 2008.

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**Songs available on www.youtube.com:**

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http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXn-o10GVmE

Mahi ve, *Kal ho na ho*
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhLm_IZpnP0

Yuhi chala chal rahi, *Swades*
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sxb5w7udUbY

Yeh jo des hai tera, *Swades*
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UC-RFFIMXlA

Lukka chhupi, *Rang de Basanti* (film version)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWGrZKFc8lM

(all accessed on May 12 and October 3, 2008).