

Shifting Spaces: Public Religious Space and National Space in Hindi Film¹

“‘Human beings’ do not stand before, or amidst social space; they do not relate to the space of society as they might to a picture, a show, or a mirror. They know that they *have* a space and that they *are* in this space. They do not merely enjoy a vision, a contemplation, a spectacle – for they act and situate themselves in space as active participants.”

- Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*²

This paper began with an observation concerning two of my favorite Hindi films: Manmohan Desai’s 1977 superhit *Amar Akbar Anthony* and Mani Ratnam’s 1995 *Bombay*. At the simplest narrative level, these two films share a common theme: they depict the troubles and, ultimately, the triumphs of a single family whose members belong to different religious communities. In *Amar Akbar Anthony* the three eponymous heroes are separated from their Hindu parents as children and raised in different faiths. Amar (Vinod Khanna) is raised by a Hindu policeman and grows up to become a policeman himself; Akbar (Rishi Kapoor) is adopted by a wise old Muslim man (a standard figure in Hindi films of the time) and becomes a famous singer of *qawwali* (Sufi devotional songs); and Anthony (played by Bollywood’s biggest star of all-time, Amitabh Bachchan) has been brought up by a Catholic priest and become something of a rogue, though a good-hearted one who tithes half of the profits from his seedy bar to the Church in honor of Mary. The intricate plot centers around the reuniting of the brothers with each other and with their parents, both of which occur before the curtain falls.

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Bombay's formula is somewhat different. In this film, a Hindu man named Shekhar, (Arvind Swamy) and a Muslim woman named Shaila Bano (Manisha Koirala) fall in love, and, against the wishes of their families, elope to the big city of Bombay, where Shekhar works for a newspaper. They have twin sons, each of whom is given two names, one Hindu and one Muslim. Before long, however, communal riots erupt on the streets of Bombay after the destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya by Hindu nationalists. Shekhar's and Shaila Bano's parents, whose concern for their children had overcome their resistance to the interfaith marriage and led them to Bombay, are killed in the violence, and the twins are temporarily separated from their parents. The riots are not quelled until members of both communities begin heroically protecting members of the rival community, insisting to their co-religionists that the people being attacked are like members of their own family. As in *Amar Akbar Anthony*, the family of protagonists is reunited and presumably lives happily ever after.

Despite the narrative similarities of the films, and despite the fact that the religious identities of their protagonists are among the central themes of both films, I observed that there is a stark distinction in the ways in which the two films depict public religious space. In *Amar Akbar Anthony*, the viewer is taken by the camera-eye into two public spaces explicitly marked as religious, a Catholic church and a shrine to the syncretistic guru-saint Sai Baba. Both of these spaces are extensively represented onscreen, occupying about 28 minutes of screen time, or about 15% of the total film. The Sai Baba shrine appears in just one scene, but this scene consists of nearly 60 shots, from at least eight different camera angles (see Appendix 1, figs. 1 & 2). The interior of the Catholic church appears in four different scenes, consisting of approximately 92 total shots from at least 20 distinct camera angles (see figs. 3 & 4).

² Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), p. 294.

The wide variety of camera angles employed, and the fact that many of the shots of both spaces are zoom, tracking, or pan shots (which provide sweeping views of the spaces) give the viewer the ability to easily construct a cognitive map of the spatial relations of the different elements within the space depicted. So it becomes very clear, for example, where the church's altar is in relation to the confessional, the pulpit, the pews, the entrance, and so on. Several shots are also presented from the point of view of characters within the space (including, perhaps, the divine images); the viewer thus gains a sense of being able to actually inhabit the spaces depicted, and they become familiar, welcoming, and inclusive of the viewer – indeed, the camera lingers almost lovingly in these spaces, exploring them in great detail.

In *Bombay*, on the other hand, public religious spaces – specifically temples and mosques – are frequently discussed by characters, but are all but invisible on the screen. The contestation over a particular religious space (the Babri Masjid/Ram Janmabhumi) provides the narrative impetus for the entire second half of the film, and the violence that would ensue from this contestation is foreshadowed in the first half of the film in a confrontation between Shekhar's father and Shaila Bano's father; the former attempts to buy bricks inscribed with the name of Ram from the latter in order to send to Ayodhya to be used in the eventual construction of the temple.³ The hero's and heroine's families also frame their objections to their marriage in terms of religious space. Shekhar's father asks:

"Has there been a day when we have not visited the temple? Tell me. I have been a trustee of the temple for 20 years. The management dare not make a decision without consulting me. That's the kind of respect I command. It's our house the deity is brought to first during any festival. But how and why will the deity be brought here anymore?"

³ This is clearly an allusion to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's "brick campaign" of 1989, during which they urged Hindus from all over the world to send such bricks to Ayodhya to demonstrate their support for the temple movement. See Manjari Katju, *Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Indian Politics* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman), pp. 55-57.

Similarly, Shaila Bano's father tells her that she was "born when I returned from a pilgrimage to Holy Mecca" – implying that her birth was a direct result of this pilgrimage – and that she "has ruined everything" by falling in love with a Hindu. Both fathers indicate that their own relationships to religious spaces will be negatively affected by their children's actions. Religious space thus plays a pivotal role in *Bombay*'s narrative and discursive planes, but not in the visual. In contrast to *Amar Akbar Anthony*, *Bombay*'s camera-eye barely touches upon the interior of any such space, and only slightly more upon the exterior of such spaces. The destruction of the Babri mosque is depicted by three hazy, nearly identical exterior shots of the domes of a mosque, over which newspapers reporting the destruction of the Babri mosque are superimposed, and one interior shot. Additionally, the viewer is provided with a solitary reverse zoom/pan from the exterior of a Ganesh temple (see fig. 5), a brief pan of Muslims worshipping either in or directly outside (their exact location is unclear) a mosque, and a very quick flash (less than a second in duration) of a Muslim leader preaching inside a mosque. Public religious spaces in *Bombay* thus occupy just seven shots and less than two minutes of screen time (just 1.5 % of the total film, as opposed to *Amar Akbar Anthony*'s 15%); by contrast, the courthouse in which Shekhar and Shaila Bano are married, which also occupies about two minutes of screen time, is presented in fourteen shots from twelve different angles. Even when religious spaces are shown in the film, the camera moves quickly over (and often away from) them, giving the viewer little opportunity to grasp any of the details of the spaces shown. While such spaces are depicted in *Amar Akbar Anthony* in great detail and in such a way as to make the viewer feel as though they are inhabiting the spaces depicted, in *Bombay* they are depicted in such a way as to exclude the viewer. Instead of the public religious spaces of *Amar Akbar Anthony*, *Bombay* depicts domestic space as the space within which religion – and particularly Islam – is or should be practiced; both

Shaila Bano and her father are both depicted individually performing prayers in the home (see fig. 6).

What accounts for the differences I've just noted? Of course, nothing requires the films to depict public religious space in similar ways, or to depict it at all; certainly we could chalk up the contrasts I've pointed out to stylistic differences on the part of the films' writers, directors, cinematographers, editors, etc. Yet the near absence of depictions of religious space in a film like *Bombay*, which is so deeply concerned with religious space on the narrative and discursive levels, raises a red flag in my mind and suggests that this absence is in fact significant. In this paper, I will argue that *Amar Akbar Anthony* and *Bombay*'s depictions of religious space are part of a larger argument about how an Indian national space should be constituted, and that as such they are artifacts of a trend in post-independence Hindi film in which the depiction of public religious space – or the lack thereof – is used in the production and negotiation of Indian national space. The path of this argument will consist of three parts. I will begin by defining my terms: what it is that I mean by the term “space,” and by the subcategories of “religious space” and “national space?” I will then sketch out a narrative tracing shifts in the depictions of religious and national space in post-Independence Hindi films, describing the ways in which some key films use such depictions as part of an argument for a particular vision of how the Indian national space should be constituted. Finally, I will argue for the possibility of a “cinematic space” within which religious space and national space overlap, and which therefore makes the reorganization of the relationship between the latter two spaces possible.

Space is certainly not the only lens through which one may read these films,⁴ but I believe it is an important one. I have chosen space as the rubric for this discussion for two reasons. First, I believe the spatial aspect of human experience has been largely neglected as a category for the analysis of both cinema and nationalism in India.⁵ Second, and more immediately important, the last two decades have seen the meteoric rise of a Hindu nationalist movement whose agenda is often articulated in specifically spatial terms: the very land of India, they claim, is a Hindu goddess, and therefore that land belongs to – and should be governed by – Hindus. Only Hindus, they argue, can be considered true Indians. As the ideological identification of “Indianness” with “Hinduness” has grown, there has been a corresponding increase in contestation over the relationship between religious spaces and the Indian nation. The most notable of these contestations has thus far been the events in Ayodhya, but smaller scale incidents, such as the Sangh Parivar’s protests against filmmaker Deepa Mehta’s attempts to represent the city of Varanasi in her film *Water*, indicate that Ayodhya is not an exceptional event in this respect. For this reason, I believe that a better understanding of such events and the movements that precipitate them requires a better understanding of the production, negotiation, and representation of space – particularly of religious space – within the space of the Indian nation-state.

Space

My understanding of the term “space” is primarily informed by Henri Lefebvre’s seminal work, *The Production of Space*. In this complex book, Lefebvre argues that the spatial element of

⁴ Indeed, nor are the categories of space that I have chosen to highlight in any way exhaustive of the possibilities for spatial analysis of these films; the relationships between urban and rural, public and private, and “Indian” and “Western” spaces also suggest themselves as fruitful areas of inquiry.

⁵ Ron Inden’s work on the role of the garden in Hindi film (see “Transnational Class, Erotic Arcadia, and Commercial Utopia in Hindi Films,” in *Image Journeys: Audio-Visual Media and Cultural Change in India*, Christiane Broesius and Melissa Butcher, eds. [New Delhi: SagePublications, 1999], pp.41-66) is an exception in

human existence is as important as its social and historical elements. Indeed, he argues that these three elements are inextricably bound together: every human action, he reminds us, occurs within a social context, a temporal context, *and a spatial context*. The spatiality of human existence has been largely ignored by modern thinkers, he argues, because the capitalist mode of production demands that the process of the production of space, like the processes that underlie the production of goods, be obscured in the final product. The results of this obfuscation are an unquestioning and uncritical acceptance of space as always already existent, transparent, and homogeneous, as emptiness simply waiting to be filled. Space, like air, is the medium within which all human activity occurs, and, also like air, it is all but invisible and undetectable in its omnipresence.

Against such theorizations of space, Lefebvre argues that *spaces are produced by the enactment of social relations*. A “space” thus differs from a geographical “place” for Lefebvre in that spaces are effectively created by the flows and movements of relational networks – such as capital, power, and information – in, across, and through a given physical area. Spaces, according to Lefebvre, both concretize and reproduce the social relations that produce them. Consequently, as the social relations that produce a space change over time, the space itself will change into a “new” space. Similarly, changing the relational organization of a space may effect change in how the social relations within that space can or will be enacted.

As an example, consider the “natural habitat” of the academic: the classroom. The traditional classroom is designed to facilitate a particular social relationship, that of the “instructor” and the “instructed.” The physical organization of the traditional classroom – rows of seats facing the “front” of the room, toward a blackboard and/or podium or lectern which face

cinema studies, and Manu Goswami’s *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) is a welcome attempt to fill the void in studies of nationalism.

the opposite direction – is also a relational organization, intended to promote a unidirectional flow of information across the physical area of the room. This flow marks the person who stands in the front of the room as the provider of information, and therefore as more powerful and of a higher status than those receiving the information. It is this social relationship that has historically produced a space marked as a “classroom,” rather than as a “playground,” a “bedroom,” etc. The classroom itself not only concretizes the instructional relationship by rendering it capable of being experienced bodily; it also reproduces that relationship by encouraging its inhabitants to continue to enact the relationship, largely by discouraging the cultivation of other forms of social relationships (as anyone who has tried to lead a discussion class in a lecture hall with fixed seating will have experienced). To change this social relationship from a unidirectional flow of information into a multidirectional information exchange network – that is, into an effective discussion class – usually requires the physical reorganization of the space so as to promote a “peer-to-peer” relationship in which all nodes of the information exchange network – that is, all the participants in the discussion – are perceived as qualitatively equal in the relationship. Even after this relational reorganization, the space will likely still be considered a “classroom” because it is still being produced by – and aiding in the reproduction of – the enactment of the social relations of instruction, but it need not be. The physical area of a “classroom” might serve equally well as an “office,” as a “café,” or as a “lounge;” it is the social relations that are enacted within that physical area that determine what sort of space is produced therein.

There is one further characteristic of space in general that requires mention before I move on to describing particular types of space, and that is the possibility and frequent occurrence of nested, overlapping, and interwoven spaces. Spaces are not self-contained or mutually exclusive;

if we think again of spaces as networks of social relations, “different” spaces may share common nodes, or even encompass entirely other networks that nevertheless retain distinct identities.

Lefebvre writes:

[Social spaces] may be intercalated, combined, superimposed – they may sometimes even collide. Consequently the local (or ‘punctual,’ In the sense of ‘determined by a particular “point”’) does not disappear, for it is never absorbed by the regional, national, or even worldwide level... All these spaces, meanwhile, are traversed by myriad currents. The hypercomplexity of social space... [embraces] individual entities and peculiarities, relatively fixed points, movements, and flows and waves – some interpenetrating, others in conflict, and so on.⁶

Thus different spaces may exist within, around, or intersecting each other. To return to my previous example, a classroom remains such despite being contained within a large building; this building in turn is but one node in a larger social and spatial network known as a university, which in turn acts as a node in any number of larger social and spatial networks, from the local economic space of the city in which it exists to the global space of the knowledge production industry. All of these spaces are porous to various degrees, permitting people and objects to move between and exist simultaneously within multiple spaces. This interpenetrability will be important when we consider the relationship between the different categories of space that I am about to describe.

Religious Space

Given the understanding of space that I have outlined above, how then should we understand the concept of “religious” space? “Religious,” of course, is a notoriously slippery signifier, but for the purposes of this paper I am basing my conception of “religious space” on

⁶ Lefebvre, p. 88.

Jonathan Z. Smith's discussion of "sacred space" in his book *To Take Place*.⁷ In his attempt to theorize ritual practice, Smith has argued that ritual is "a mode of paying attention" and that "place directs attention:"⁸

When one enters a temple, one enters marked-off space... in which, at least in principle, nothing is accidental; everything, at least potentially, demands attention. The temple serves as a focusing lens, establishing the possibility of significance by directing attention, by requiring the perception of difference. Within the temple, the ordinary (which to any outside eye or ear remains wholly ordinary) becomes significant, becomes "sacred," simply by being there. A ritual object or action becomes sacred by having attention focused on it in a highly marked way. From such a point of view, there is nothing that is inherently sacred or profane. These are not substantive categories, but rather situational ones. Sacrality is, above all, a category of emplacement.⁹

A sacred (or religious) space, then, according to Smith, is a place in which its occupants practice a sacral (or religious) mode of paying attention (whatever that mode may be for a given "religion"). Just as the classroom is physically organized to facilitate the embodiment, enactment, and reproduction of a set of relationships marked as "instructional," so the religious space is organized to facilitate the embodiment, enactment, and reproduction of a set of relationships marked as "religious" – between, for example, deities, worshippers, priests, and ritual objects.

The relational nature of religious space comes to the foreground in what might arguably be described as the most widespread devotional practice of the Indian subcontinent: *darshan*. *Dasrshan*, which means "seeing," is associated primarily (but not exclusively) with Hinduism, is an act in which a devotee and a deity or saint (mediated by an iconic or aniconic image) gaze at each other -- the worshipper "takes" the *darshan* "given" by that which is worshipped in an act of

⁷ Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). I have chosen to use "religious space" rather than "sacred space" as a term of analysis for this paper because, despite the problematical nature of the term "religious," I think it does a better job of conveying the concept of space as generated by practice.

⁸ J.Z. Smith, p. 103.

⁹ J.Z. Smith, p. 104.

reciprocal seeing.¹⁰ This action of reciprocal seeing establishes a relationship between deity and devotee, and this relationship both produces and is produced by a religious space that is designed to maximize the ability of devotees and deities to see each other.

Amar Akbar Anthony provides an excellent example of the act of *darshan* during the scene in the Sai Baba shrine mentioned earlier. The title characters' mother, Bharati, who was struck blind on the night that the boys were separated, is on the run from the gangsters who are the film's main antagonists. She finds her way to the Sai Baba shrine by following the voice of Akbar, who is singing a devotional song to Sai Baba. Once she comes into the sightline of the statue of the guru-saint, two small candle-like flames appear in the eyes of the image and float through the air toward her, superimposing themselves over her eyes and then fading out. (see fig. 7). The film then cuts to a shot – presumably from Bharati's point of view – that begins very blurry, then resolves itself into a crystal clear image of the statue of Sai Baba staring back into the camera.¹¹ This scene indicates one way that *darshan* may be conceived of, as a relationship established by the transfer of energy between the eyes of the deity and the eyes of the devotee, a relationship that requires the joint action of two agents gazing at each other.

Religious space need not be a public space like a temple or shrine; private spaces such as a family's home may serve to produce, enact, and reproduce religious relationships as well, as in *Bombay*'s depiction of Shaila Bano and her father at prayer, or in the small domestic shrines that many Hindus maintain; even the dashboards of rickshaws festooned with religious images can

¹⁰ On *darshan*, see: Lawrence Babb, "Glancing: Visual Interactions in Hinduism" *Journal of Anthropological Research* 37 (4) 1981, pp. 387-401; and Diana Eck, *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*, 2nd edition. (Chambersburg, PA: Anima, 1985).

¹¹ This scene appears to have been influenced by the 1969 Panjabi film *Naanak NamJahaz Hai*, in which a similar miracle occurs. Gokulsing and Dissanayake, p. 59.

serve to produce the *darshan*ic relationship for Hindus.¹² Nevertheless, the continuing existence of a major pilgrimage economy in India¹³ – an economy that encompasses every major religious group – is a testament to the sense held by many people that participation in the relationships that produce and are reproduced by public religious spaces is, for whatever reason, somehow more powerful, beneficial, or effective than participation in those produced by their domestic counterparts. In fact, photographs or prints of these spaces themselves are sometimes used in household shrines in ways very similar to the ways in which images of the deities are used; the spaces themselves seem to have the ability to give *darshan*.¹⁴

But the practice of *darshan* is of course just one example of the sort of relationship that can characterize religious space, and other sorts of relationships (such as the economic relationships embodied in tithing) often combine to make up a larger set of relationships that collectively mark a space as religious. This becomes most apparent upon considering that the category of religious space may be expanded beyond the idea of simply “a temple” or “a church” to encompass whole cities (e.g. Jerusalem or Varanasi) and even entire geographical regions (e.g. “the Holy Land,” or Vrndavan, the childhood playground of Krishna) that are tied together by multiple networks of symbolic, economic, and political relationships. Religious space may thus overlap, intersect, or exist within other spaces. This is particularly evident in the work of religious nationalists – like the proponents of the Hindu nationalist ideology known as Hindutva – who identify the network of Hindu religious spaces that dot the Indian landscape as producing

¹² For a discussion of how mass production of images has affected the practice of *darshan*, see H. Daniel Smith, “Impact of ‘God Posters’ on Hindus and their Devotional Traditions” and Stephen R. Inglis, “Suitable for Framing: The Work of a Modern Master” in *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia*, ed. by Lawrence A. Babb and Susan S. Wadley (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995) pp. 24-50 and 51-75; and Christopher Pinney, *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

¹³ Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1994), chapter 4.

not just a larger Hindu religious space, but also a space that may be considered “national.” And it is to defining national space that we now turn our attention.

National Space

My concept of “national space” takes as its starting point Benedict Anderson’s definition of the nation as “an imagined political community” that is “both inherently limited and sovereign.”¹⁵ A nation is limited in that no nation includes all humanity; nations are always framed and defined by borders, whether cultural and genetic (as in the older sense of a nation as a “people”) or political (as in the more recent sense of a nation-state). Anderson argues that the rise of print-capitalism allowed people who were otherwise unaware of each other’s existence to imagine themselves as being tied to a common community that existed within these borders – that reading the same things allowed them to, as he puts it, “‘think’ the nation.”¹⁶ Yet as useful as Anderson’s analysis of the imagining of the nation has been in understanding the creation and contestation of the idea of the nation, I suggest that a fuller picture of the nation emerges when we consider it in the context of the theory of space advanced above. For as Anderson hints at, but fails to state explicitly, the nation is not *only* imagined – it is also *enacted* within and across multiple sets of social relations that simultaneously produce and are reproduced within a spatial context.¹⁷ An early citizen’s act of reading a newspaper (to use Anderson’s example) was more

¹⁴ H. Daniel Smith, pp. 33-35, 45-46.

¹⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, revised edition (London and New York: Verso, 1991), p. 6.

¹⁶ Anderson, p. 22.

¹⁷ This is not to say that Anderson ignored the spatiality of the nation; he points out, for example, that the modern conception of the nation-state is irrevocably tied to a notion of territoriality that links political sovereignty to a “legally demarcated territory,” (p. 19) as opposed to earlier (European) political ideas in which sovereignty was vested in – and moved with – the body of a divinely ordained ruler. He also discusses at length the ways in which the secular “pilgrimages” (administrative journeys between metropole and assorted provinces) of “creole functionaries” in Europe’s New World colonies worked to tie together in networks of intellectual and economic exchange not only the “margins” and the “center,” but different sets of “margins” with each other as well. See Anderson, chapter 4.

than a mental act of imagining oneself as just one of many readers linked by the act of reading spread out across a vast area. The newspaper itself was a physical manifestation of relational networks of capital, information, and power, and the act of reading was an embodiment of that citizen's interactions with the other nodes of those networks (with, for example, the corporations responsible for reporting, editing, printing, distributing, and selling the newspaper and with those, such as politicians, whose actions were being reported upon). These networks together served to produce a space that we have come to call "national," a space that is not only mental but physical, and embodied in the day-to-day actions of those who participate in these networks, including those who are agents of the state.

It might in fact be argued that the state and its agents (such as Anderson's creole functionaries) are the primary producers and shapers of national space. Given the vested interest of the state in preserving a general stasis in the ebb and flow of social relations across the various networks of such relations that criss-cross national space – the apparatus of the state, after all, thrives on and derives its legitimacy from continuity – this should come as no surprise. Of course, agents not directly tied to the state exist as nodes on these social networks, but the state typically does its utmost, through a variety of practices, to regulate and control these agents and the networks of which they are part. As Lefebvre argued, the sovereignty claimed by states implies "a space established and constituted by violence."¹⁸ This violence need not (or not only) be physical violence in the military mode; Lefebvre claims that there is also a kind of violence inherent in the very project of statehood, that is, in the principle of unification that serves as the rationale for the existence of the state. This principle "subordinates and totalizes the various aspects of social practice – legislation, culture, knowledge, education – within a determinate space... Each state claims to produce a space wherein something is accomplished – a space,

even, where something is brought to perfection: namely, a unified and hence homogeneous society.”¹⁹ The state, then, is for Lefebvre a space produced by “the ruling class’s hegemony over its people and over the nationhood that it has arrogated” and within which that hegemony is enacted and reproduced.²⁰

Accordingly, the state claims a majority of the responsibility for organizing the space(s) over which it claims sovereignty -- and thus for shaping the social relations that produce and are reproduced by these spaces. Consider, by way of illustration, three types of practices that are immediately apparent with which the nation-state known as India attempts to produce the “unified space” of which Lefebvre wrote.

1. **demarcational practices:** the state claims for itself the responsibility of maintaining the integrity of (and, when the opportunity arises, expanding) the national space’s borders through force; it also claims the privilege of deciding who and what may enter and leave the national space, by way of customs regulations and the issuing and approval of passports and visas, and of collecting fees, tariffs, and taxes on the goods and people that enter into its space.
2. **constructive practices:** The state engages in numerous projects that involve the physical construction of spaces that are marked as “national” public spaces, such as courthouses and other administrative buildings, as well as monuments, memorials, national parks, and public utilities such as hydroelectric dams; the state also claims responsibility for the construction and maintenance of the infrastructure – roads, railways, airports – that are necessary to connect different places within the national space, as well as to connect the national space with extra-national spaces.

¹⁸ Lefebvre, p. 280.

¹⁹ Lefebvre, p. 281.

3. **representational practices:** The state claims the right to regulate the production and distribution of what Lefebvre calls “representations of space”²¹ such as maps, textbooks, television and radio broadcasts, and (most importantly for this paper) films. This regulation consists of the taxation, licensing, and sometimes the production itself of such representations, primarily through the Central Government’s Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

National space, then, as I have presented it, comprises numerous smaller spaces – some (like government buildings) explicitly marked as “national,” some (like movie theaters) not – which act as nodes in a vast network of social relations. It is the flows of information, capital, and power – and especially of the human beings that embody these flows – between these nodes and across these networks that ties together what might otherwise be considered discrete places into a “single” space. The apparatus of the state and its agents seek to encompass, organize, and control the space(s) over which it claims sovereignty, even up to the point of regulating how those spaces are to be represented in what is (ostensibly) harmless entertainment.

As just mentioned, the Indian state regularly intervenes in the filmic representation of spaces via the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB), and in the case of films, via its subdivision, the Board of Film Certification (BFC). The BFC (originally called the Board of Film Censors) was created by the Cinematograph Act of 1952,²² but the roots of film censorship in India go back to colonial times. The Cinematograph Act of 1918 established censor boards in major Indian cities, under the direct control of the British Board of Film Censors, which were

²⁰ Lefebvre, p. 281.

²¹ Lefebvre, pp. 40-6.

²² The Act and all other quoted legal documents are available at the MIB website: “Acts & Rules Main Page,” <http://mib.nic.in/informationb/media/actsrules/cinemaACT1952.htm>

responsible for preventing the compromise of British interests in India.²³ Given the many ways in which the newly independent Indian state depended upon models established by the colonial government,²⁴ it is unsurprising that the Cinematograph Act passed by the new nation largely adopted both the colonial legislation's bureaucratic mechanisms and its premises (namely, that if left to their own devices, producers would create films that could in some fashion be detrimental to the state). The BFC was charged with certifying that films are not "against the interests of the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality," do not involve "defamation or contempt of court," and are not "likely to incite the commission of any offence."²⁵ Films were to be reviewed by the board and granted one of four certificates, or refused a certificate altogether. The BFC was given the power to direct filmmakers to make "excisions or modifications" in order to gain certification,²⁶ and the power to cite and/or bring charges against those exhibitors who showed uncertified films (the exhibitors were also required to be licensed by the government²⁷). Furthermore, the Central Government, MIB, and BFC were protected from legal proceedings being initiated against them "in respect of anything which is in good faith done or intended to be done by this Act."²⁸

Over the years, these powers have been modified and spelled out more explicitly by subsequent legislation. For example, the Gazette of India: Extraordinary requires that a film's government-issued Certificate (see fig. 8) must be displayed on screen for at least 10 seconds prior to the start of the film.²⁹ In 1991, the MIB issued Notification S.O. 836-(E) (in supersession of a 1978 Notification) spelling out the goals of censorship and a set of guidelines that should

²³ Prem Chowdhry, *Colonial India and the Making of Empire Cinema: Image, Ideology, and Identity* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 19.

²⁴ See Goswami.

²⁵ Cinematograph Act of 1952, 5B(1).

²⁶ Cinematograph Act of 1952, 5B(2e).

²⁷ Cinematograph Act of 1952, 10-11..

²⁸ Cinematograph Act of 1952, 7F.

guide the BFC in “sanctioning films for public exhibition.” This Notification (quoted at length in Appendix 2) provides an excellent overview of both the rationale for the Indian state intervention in the practice of filmic representation and the breadth of its claims in this sphere. Through these guidelines, the state claims the responsibility for protecting its citizens from actions ranging from the offense of their “human sensibilities,” to the glorification of alcohol consumption, to the advancement of “anti-scientific” attitudes; and from the denigration of religious ideals to the depiction or instigation of rape, animal, and child abuse. As guidelines (xiv) – (xix) indicate, the state also aims to protect its own interests by prohibiting the calling into question of its own sovereignty, the defamation of its agents in the courts, and the misuse of its symbols; and under the Cinematograph Act, it has the power to order the excision of any images determined to do so before granting the film certification.

Every film shown in India, then, is in some sense “about” the Indian nation-state, in that each film bears the traces of approval and/or modification by the state apparatus which claims sovereignty even over the space of the cinema screen. The cinema screen is perceived by the state – and, as we shall see, by many filmmakers – as an important part of the Indian national space, one node in the vast network of social relations that produce and are reproduced by the national space. How that national space should be constituted, and how, if at all, it should overlap and interact with public religious spaces, has been the subject of a number of Hindi films since 1947. It is to a selection of these films that we now turn our attention.

Religious space and national space in Hindi film: a historical narrative

Vijay Mishra, in a chapter on the relationship and reaction of the Hindi film industry to the 1992 events in Ayodhya, identifies “a shift in the spatial reorganization of the cinematic

²⁹ Part II-Sec. 3 (i); 34.3

mise-en-scene” between the 1950s and the 1970s.³⁰ According to Mishra, Hindi films made soon after Independence rarely depicted temples: “[i]n *Awara* [Raj Kapoor’s 1951 classic] the spatial organization was primarily house/street/courtroom/beach. In [Mehboob Khan’s 1957] *Mother India* it was home/land. The spatial category that didn’t exist (in any extended form) in these films is the temple.”³¹ He goes on to identify the 1975 Yash Chopra hit *Deewaar* as a “crucial text”³² in a shift towards the inclusion of the temple space in the cinematic mise-en-scene.

While I think Mishra drastically overstates his case – temples and other religious spaces were not completely invisible in Hindi film before *Deewaar* (for example, *Chhalia*, Manmohan Desai’s 1960 directorial debut, features a couple of key scenes in a temple and places its climax within the context of a *Ramlila* festival) – I agree with Mishra that there is a marked break between *Deewaar* and earlier films that is apparent in *Deewaar*’s use of religious space to launch a critique of the state.

This break is particularly evident when comparing *Deewaar* with the aforementioned *Mother India*, from whose plot the former film clearly drew a good deal of inspiration.³³ The enormously popular and influential *Mother India* is the story of a village woman named Radha (Nargis) and her two sons, Birju (Sunil Dutt) and Ramu (Rajendra Kumar). When her husband, who had lost both of his arms in an accident, runs away to spare her the burden of taking care of him, Radha is left alone to raise their sons and to deal with a disastrous flood and the family’s spiraling debts. While Ramu remains a “good” son, the impulsive and reckless Birju becomes an outlaw, kills Sukhilal, and is eventually killed himself – shot by his own mother in order to save Sukhilal’s daughter.

³⁰ Vijay Mishra, *Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002). p. 222.

³¹ Mishra, 222

³² Mishra, 222.

It is interesting that *Mother India*, despite being a romantic and nostalgic portrayal of the Indian village aimed at the urban audiences who were the primary patrons of the cinema, displays little interest in the religiosity that is a standard stereotype in literary and cinematic portrayals of village India. In fact, practice or discourse explicitly marked as religious is almost entirely absent from the film. The only scene in which religious discourse is deployed is one in which Radha, after her village, home, and family are devastated by a terrible flood, goes to the house of Sukhilal the local moneylender, who has been pressuring her to marry him since her husband's disappearance. She agrees to marry him in order to save herself and her children, and Sukhilal tells her that he will drape her in gold so that she will look like Lakshmi, the goddess of material prosperity. At the mention of Lakshmi's name, Radha, sensing the irony of the moneylender's comparison of the poor and desperate woman that she has become to the goddess of wealth, looks across the room at Sukhilal's small household shrine, in which a silver statue of Lakshmi stands. She then launches into an intense and hostile monologue admonishing the goddess for standing by doing nothing, unable to give strength (*shakti*) while a mother is helpless to save her children. The camera cuts back and forth three times during this monologue between an extreme close-up of Radha's face and the divine image, as it typically would during a dialogue; this standard shot-reaction-shot montage creates a relationship between two different shots, so that the statue of Lakshmi is in a sense shown to be "replying" to Radha by remaining mute. As she nears the end of her speech, Radha rushes forward to pick up the image, presumably to harm it in some way, but collapses in despair as Sukhilal pries it from her hands (see fig. 9).

³³ Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willemen, *Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema, New Revised Edition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999) p. 350.

At that moment, finding her marriage necklace clutched in her fist, Radha's affect changes to one of shock, then of hope. "He will return (*voh aayenge*)," she says, "he is alive (*voh zinda hain*)," and she is certain (*zaroor*) that the goddess will return her husband and children. Her strength regained, she fights off Sukhilal's advances and returns to her children. What is interesting about this scene is that Radha's renewed faith actually serves as a *repudiation* of religiosity rather than a reinforcement of it, for in the end Radha's husband never returns; her faith, the film implies, was misguided and misplaced in traditional religion.

This rather hostile attitude toward religion is also evident in the film's choice not to represent onscreen what is generally considered one of the most important spaces of any Indian village: the temple, mosque, or shrine. While Sukhilal's domestic shrine plays a fairly significant role in the film, public religious space is almost – if not entirely – nonexistent: there is just one extraordinarily brief shot (lasting less than a second) of a building that seems to be a temple submerged in the flood waters that overtake the village (see fig. 10). Instead of religious space, as Mishra noted, the film focuses our attention on domestic space (scenes of cooking and child care) and village agricultural space (scenes of farmers working in the fields). It is in these two spaces, and particularly the latter, that the film locates the "true" India (a point made almost absurdly explicit by a shot in which the farmers have carved a huge map of the country in their fields – see fig. 11). These spaces are framed at the beginning and end of the film with depictions of the emblematic space of Nehruvian developmental socialism: the dam (see fig. 12). The economic policy of Nehru's post-Independence government was marked a series of Five-Year Plans designed to modernize and industrialize India along the Soviet model, and this program is clearly endorsed by *Mother India*. As Rachel Dwyer writes, "Nehruvian modernity is promoted

as the solution to the village's problems, symbolized by the opening and closing images of the inauguration of the dam designed to prevent the villagers suffering from floods and water shortages.”³⁴ Similarly, Sumita Chakravarty notes that “[t]he era of technology” ushered in by India's independence is “symbolized by the shots of tractors, machines, and dams no doubt very familiar to viewers from... state-produced newsreels... promises relief and a new era in village life.”³⁵ *Mother India* thus managed to cast both rural, agricultural space and industrial space as representative of national space. Arm-in-arm with industrialization, however, Nehruvian modernity ardently espoused secularism. In order to rid themselves of the problems they face, the film argues, villagers – and, by extension, all India – must leave behind the superstition symbolized by Sukhilal's image of Lakshmi and the submerged temple and embrace the science and progress embodied by the image of the dam, the concrete (in both senses of the word) space into which *Mother India* managed to collapse larger abstract notions about the national space.

Like *Mother India*, the plot of *Deewaar* concerns the conflict between two brothers and the plight of their mother who is caught in the middle: younger brother Ravi (Shashi Kapoor) is a policeman, while his elder sibling Vijay (Bachchan again), though good at heart, has become mixed-up with crime-lords and smugglers. Unlike the temple in *Mother India*, however, *Deewaar's* temple space plays a significant role in the unfolding of the film's narrative. The conflict between the two brothers is foreshadowed by the difference in their attitudes as children toward the temple their mother visits daily. Ravi dutifully visits the temple with his mother, but Vijay, upset by the circumstances that have led his family to destitution in the big city (Ravi and Vijay's father, having been branded a thief, has abandoned his family in shame, much like

³⁴ Rachel Dwyer and Divia Patel, *Cinema India: The Visual Culture of Hindi Film* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press) p. 64.

³⁵ Sumita S. Chakravarty, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema, 1947-1987* (Austin: University of Texas Press) p. 153.

Radha's husband in *Mother India*), declares that he wants nothing from God (*Bhagwan se kuch nahin chahie*) and will not enter the temple. It is not until many years later, when their mother has fallen ill, that Vijay goes to the temple (see fig. 13) and, in a lengthy monologue similar to Radha's in *Mother India*, beseeches Shiva to save her life (unlike Radha's speech, however, Vijay's prayer is answered). Later, after he has been shot by Ravi, Vijay again returns to the temple in order to die there in his mother's arms.

Before comparing *Deewaar*'s and *Mother India*'s depictions of national space and public religious space, it should be noted that by the time the later film was made, a seismic shift had occurred in regard to public enthusiasm for Nehruvian developmentalism, as corruption and highly restrictive economic protectionism that prevented foreign investments made it impossible for the Central Government to deliver on its promises of liberation from hardship through modern technology. M. Madhava Prasad identifies the late 60s and early 70s as the "moment of disaggregation," signaled by the decline and splintering of the Congress Party, in which the political consensus that had emerged in the wake of national independence began to collapse.³⁶ Following independence, "nationalist goals as envisioned and articulated by political leaders were widely shared by all influential sectors of the population and the general public more than in any subsequent period of the nation's history,"³⁷ and this was generally reflected in Hindi films like *Mother India*. But as time went on and the situation of average Indians failed to improve significantly, a sense of disillusion with the heady ideals of the 50s began to set in, and this too was reflected in the cinema, via the rise of the "angry young man" genre that was embodied in the star persona of Amitabh Bachchan. *Deewaar* is one early example of the

³⁶ M. Madhava Prasad, *Ideology of Hindi Film: A Historical Construction* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998) 118-120.

³⁷ Chakravarty, p. 117.

genre,³⁸ but it was another 1975 Bachchan-starrer, *Sholay* (directed by Ramesh Sippy), that became the standard by which all others were judged. According to Lalitha Gopalan,

Sholay was emblematic of a number of films feeding off what political theorists refer to as a crisis of legitimacy of the Indian state. Film critics, media activists, and film scholars agree that the unrest in civil society marked by communal riots, police brutality, violent secessionist movements, and assaults against women and minorities seeped into film narratives. Stacked with gangsters, avenging women, brutal police, and corrupt politicians, these films resolve their narratives through vigilante actions that repeatedly undercut the authority of the state.³⁹

The “angry young man” films thus foregrounded the theme of vigilante revenge in place of the romance that had driven most earlier hits, such as those starring the likeable, Chaplinesque Raj Kapoor, and made the vengeful and violent antihero the primary protagonist. While such characters had existed in earlier films, they were generally depicted as obstacles to the national project. While *Mother India*’s Birju is depicted initially as a sympathetic figure, full of righteous indignation at the abuse heaped upon his family, his turn against the law and attacks on an innocent girl and his own brother at the end of the film render him an unsympathetic character whose death provides a certain amount of narrative pleasure. *Deewaar*’s Vijay, on the other hand, remains up to and during his death a sympathetic character with whom the audience is intended to identify. In films like *Deewaar* and *Sholay*, a character’s angry dissatisfaction with his lot in life – and, implicitly, with the state’s failure to improve that lot through its programs of modernization and industrialization – thus became an acceptable (or even the preferred) vehicle of cinematic narrative in the 1970s and 1980s, and this dissatisfaction seems to have been at least occasionally mirrored in the depictions of space.

As we have seen, *Deewaar*’s plot is nearly identical to that of *Mother India*, as is its narrative structure (both are told as flashbacks in the mind of the mother as she is summoned to a

³⁸ The film generally credited with launching both the genre and Amitabh’s career is Prakash Mehra’s 1973 *Zanjeer*.

³⁹ Lalitha Gopalan, *Cinema of Interruptions*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002) pp. 9-10.

public accolade by her surviving son). Yet by deploying these elements in a different spatial context (the city instead of the village; the temple instead of the field), *Deewaar* manages to call into question the straightforward Nehruvian message of the earlier film. Modern technological industry and its embodiment in the city are the problem in *Deewaar*, rather than the solution. Vijay works at a dockyard and his mother at a construction site, and in these spaces numerous shots of heavy industry – cranes, forklifts, etc. – are contrasted with the tired and broken bodies of the human workers who exist in its shadow. The space of modernity that had been constructed as national space in *Mother India* is marked as decidedly negative in *Deewaar* – as a space produced by and reproducing the social relations of grueling poverty and unending labor, relations caused by the very industrialization that had been touted by the Nehruvian developmentalists as the solution to those problems. *Deewaar* in turn proposed a counter-space – the temple – that would not fail in providing for the needs of its participants.

We can, then, read *Deewaar*'s reversal of *Mother India*'s privileging of modern industrial space over religious space as a dissatisfaction with and rejection of the Nehruvian message of developmentalism and secularism of the earlier film. As Rajadhyaksha and Willemen point out, however, *Deewaar*'s message is not unambiguously subversive.⁴⁰ The film can also be read as an endorsement of the authoritarianism of Indira Gandhi's government, which reached its height in the declaration of a state of Emergency the same year that *Deewaar* was released. As Rajadhyaksha and Willemen write, "although the audience's sympathies are directed toward the working-class rebel, the mother-nation reluctantly sanctions the legalized persecution of her well-meaning but misguided son, an action with obvious parallels in the political situation of the time."⁴¹ *Deewaar* thus calls into question the effectiveness of the state in providing for its

⁴⁰ Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, p. 423.

⁴¹ Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, p. 423.

citizens, and therefore its legitimacy; but in the end it may wind up reconfirming that legitimacy.⁴²

A less ambiguous reworking of some of *Mother India*'s themes can be found in Raj Kapoor's 1978 *Satyam Shivam Sundaram*. This film's plot revolves around a young village woman named Rupa (Zeenat Aman), whose face was burned in an accident as a girl. She and her father (her mother died giving birth to her) have both given up hope that she will ever be married when a young city-bred engineer, Rajiv (Shashi Kapoor), arrives in the village to work on a dam being built by the government. One morning, while Rupa is cleaning the village temple, Rajiv hears her singing and becomes enchanted. He asks a villager who it was that he heard singing and is told it is a girl named Rupa. Rajiv tracks her down to declare his love for her, and she manages to conceal her disfigurement from him until their wedding night. He is convinced that the scarred woman to whom he has been married can not possibly be the Rupa he fell in love with, and in order to be able to receive any of Rajiv's affections, Rupa must embark upon an elaborate scheme of self-impersonation – again concealing her scars, she meets Rajiv in the forest, where he “cheats” on his wife with her. When it becomes apparent that the scarred Rupa is pregnant despite Rajiv's belief that he has never touched her, he accuses her of infidelity. Angered by his hypocrisy, Rupa leaves him, and as she walks away heavy rains begin to fall. The rains cause the collapse of the dam, and the villagers are forced to flee. Rajiv and Rupa are nearly killed when the bridge they are crossing is swept away, but they find refuge on the spire of the submerged temple (see fig. 14). Apparently his near-death experience causes Rajiv to suddenly appreciate Rupa's inner beauty, and as they embrace, the rains cease and the flood quickly dissipates. The film's final shot is a zoom from the couple kissing on the steps of the

⁴² Prasad, p. 141.

temple to the images of Krishna and Radha enshrined within, implying the responsibility of the divine couple in bringing together the hero and heroine. (see figure 15)

While *Satyam Shivam Sundaram*'s plot clearly owes far less to Mother India than *Deewaar*'s did, its treatment of the roles of religious space and of the space of the dam in the episode of the flood seems to be a self-conscious inversion of *Mother India*'s treatment of these spaces. In the older film, as we have seen, the dam is a symbol of state-oriented progress, modernization, and science, and its ability to prevent the kind of disastrous event that religious devotion had been previously powerless to stop (as indicated by the both the submerged temple and by Radha's tirade against Lakshmi) served to affirm the Nehruvian developmentalist agenda. In *Satyam Shivam Sundaram*, on the other hand, it is science and modern technology that not only are unable to prevent the flood, but that are in fact responsible for it; and it is a religious space – the temple – that has the ability to save villagers' lives. In this reading, *Satyam Shivam Sundaram*'s repudiation of “the modern” (as embodied in the dam and the character of the engineer who despises anything that is ugly) in favor of “tradition” (as embodied in the temple and the character of Rupa, who is pure at heart despite an unpleasant appearance) is a far less ambiguous critique of state policy than that advanced in *Deewaar*.

It was in this context – of the increasing practice of films contrasting national space with religious space in order to critique the former – that *Amar Akbar Anthony* was released. While *Deewaar* and *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* used religious space to display the failure of national space, *Amar Akbar Anthony* takes the opposite position and casts religious space as the space *within which* national space is constituted through the harmonious integration of diverse religious traditions.

In order to explain this assertion, it is first necessary to recognize that throughout *Amar Akbar Anthony* the three brothers are clearly intended to be read as an analog of the Indian nation. Intending to come back for them after he has shaken off the criminals who are chasing him, their father leaves the children in a park, under a statue of Gandhi (often referred to by Indians as the father of their nation). Their separation occurs on August 15th, the anniversary of the partition of British India into the sovereign states of India and Pakistan. The first time the "orphaned" children are all back together again is when their birth mother, Bharati (whose name means "Indian") is hit by a car; as the three heroes are the only ones with the proper blood type, the blood is siphoned simultaneously from all three of them into Bharati's body during the opening credits, symbolically depicting the sacrifice made by patriots of all three faiths for the good of the country. Eventually the parents and children are reunited, our heroes marry beautiful women of their respective faiths, and the (re)creation and (presumably) the continuation through reproduction of the family (*khandan*) – the fulcrum around which the vast majority of Hindi films revolve – is accomplished, while each brother (it is implied) maintains his distinct religious identity. The picture painted is an ideal one of religious integration, in which members of three religious communities live harmoniously as the sons of our old friend Mother India.

However, this narrative closure can be accomplished only through two key events that occur within the religious spaces described in my introduction. These events – literally *dei ex machina* -- are miracles that prove to be essential to resolving the narrative of familial reconstitution. The first is the restoration of Bharati's sight (discussed above) which allows her to recognize Akbar as her son; the second is Anthony's prayer/threat to Jesus, which results in his finding a pendant image of the Hindu goddess Santoshi Maa that leads eventually to his discovering his real father. Such miracles are not uncommon in Hindi films, but what is unusual

is that both of these provide an instance in which religious traditions seem to act together – is it Jesus or Santoshi Maa, or both, that allows Anthony to find the pendant? And in the earlier miracle, Bharati (a Hindu) says that it is the intervention of Sai Baba (whose teachings and ritual practice combined both Hindu and Muslim elements⁴³), and the devotion of the Muslim Akbar (who sings a song of devotion to Sai Baba throughout the scene) that combine to restore her vision. The religious spaces that are depicted in such loving detail thus provide the setting – indeed the only possible setting – for the (re)constitution of the family’s domestic space, which has throughout the film served as an analog of the national space.

Bombay, produced in the aftermath of the events in Ayodhya and the subcontinent-wide violence that ensued,⁴⁴ no longer found the propositions of *Amar Akbar Anthony* palatable. Unlike *Amar Akbar Anthony*, *Bombay* argues that the way to achieve national unity is not through the tolerance and integration of diverse religious identities, but rather through their abandonment or, at the very least, through their privatization. Allegiance to religious identity, the film implies, has in the past and will in the future lead only to communal bloodshed. Shekhar (a Hindu by birth, though apparently not in practice, as he is never shown participating in any sort of religious action) makes this point explicitly. After pointing out to his Hindu and Muslim friends the destruction wrought by their hatred, he screams that he and his children are neither Hindu nor Muslim: "We are neither! We are only Indian!" ("*Ham koi nahin hain! Ham sirph Indian hain!*") To be Indian, the film argues, one must (at least in the public sphere) relinquish one's religious identity. The film’s depiction (or lack thereof) of public religious space, as

⁴³ Charles S.J. White, "The Sai Baba Movement: Approaches to the Study of Indian Saints" *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Aug., 1972) pp. 863-878.

⁴⁴ According to U.P.I., "More than 1,100 people were killed in Indian sectarian violence and nearly 250 Hindu temples set afire in Pakistan and Bangladesh." "Jailed leader says his party does not seek setting up of Hindu state," 12/27/92.

described earlier in this paper, is a key element of this argument. The conspicuous absence of public religious spaces like shrines, churches, and mosques in a film deeply concerned with religious identity – and it is apparent that the state, in the form of the BFC, had a large role in this absence⁴⁵ – results in religious practice and sentiments manifesting themselves within the film either in domestic space (as noted earlier) or inappropriately in the “wrong” public spaces (riots on the streets of the city). The film clearly argues that the former manifestation (a peaceful individual relationship to the divine, practiced within one's home) is far more preferable than the latter (religious gathering = mob = violence and the destruction of the home). The film might thus be read as arguing, if not for the complete abolition of religious identity within the Indian national space, than at least for a privatization of such identities.

In addition to attempting to disentangle national space from public religious space *Bombay* also argues for the cinematic reclamation of a space explicitly marked as national, and which had played such an important role in many earlier films: the courthouse.⁴⁶ The courthouse in *Bombay* plays the same role as the church and shrine in *Amar Akbar Anthony* – it is the site within which the nation is allegorically constituted, in this case through the marriage of Hindu and Muslim rather than the establishment of their common ancestry. This constitutive role is advanced visually as well as via the narrative. I mentioned earlier that the courthouse in which Shekhar and Shaila Bano are married occupies about the same amount of screen time as the public religious spaces, yet is depicted in twice as many shots. While *Bombay*'s camera-eye moves out and away from public religious spaces, excluding the viewer from those spaces, it lingers within the courthouse, paying close attention to the details and practices (such as the

⁴⁵ see Ravi Vasudevan, “*Bombay* and Its Public,” in *Pleasure and the Nation*, Rachel Dwyer and Christopher Pinney, eds. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 186-212.

⁴⁶ See Dwyer and Patel, pp. 76.

image of Gandhi under which newly married couples are garlanded and the administrative practices of questioning, licensing, and registering the new couples [see fig.16]) which mark it as a node on the networks of social relations which produce the national space, and giving the viewer the opportunity to establish an identification with and imaginatively inhabit the space. *Bombay* thus reserves for national administrative space techniques similar to those which *Amar Akbar Anthony* used in the depiction of public religious space, visually arguing for the privileging of administrative space over religious space as constitutive of national space. That the state itself had a large role in advancing such an agenda is indicated by the BFC's excising of a large number of scenes, including documentary footage depicting the destruction of the Babri Masjid.⁴⁷ The BFC seems to have thought that its directive to preserve the "public order" required such actions in order not only to avoid again fanning the communal flames that had been stoked by the events in Ayodhya and their bloody aftermath,⁴⁸ but also to avoid reinvigorating anti-government sentiment initiated by the government's own failure to intervene in Ayodhya and in the riots that followed.⁴⁹

Ratnam's call for a post-Ayodhya rejection of public religious space seems to have had little effect, however. In 1997, amidst celebrations of the 50th anniversary of India's independence from Britain, J.P. Dutta released the jingoistic war film *Border*. The film, based on the 1971 border skirmish of Longewalla in which a tiny garrison of Indian troops held off a much larger Pakistani force, explicitly identifies Indian national space with (Hindu) religious

⁴⁷ Vasudevan, pp. 195-6.

⁴⁸ The BFC seems to have been remarkably unsuccessful in this endeavor, to the point where, after protests by Muslims over the depiction of their community in the film, police in several areas, including Bombay, temporarily banned the showing of the film, with the result that Ratnam found himself with some presumably unanticipated allies: the rabidly Hindu nationalist Shiv Sena party (Madhu Nainan, "Firebrand Hindu leader warns of trouble after police ban film," Agence France Presse, 4/8/95). Later in the year, Mani Ratnam's home in Madras was attacked by homemade bombs ("Controversial Indian movie director injured in bomb blast," Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 7/10/1995) of unknown provenance.

⁴⁹ Vasudevan, pp. 195-6.

space. The very title of the film identifies its concern with political spatiality, and early on the nation's geographical aspects are identified as a key determinant of national space. Kuldeep (Sunny Deol), one of the film's two main heroes, is the commander of the 23rd Punjab Regiment (many of the soldiers are Sikhs) being sent to Longewalla. When his wife tries to convince him not to leave their son, they sit overlooking the Himalayas (see fig. 17) while he tells her that his sworn allegiance to the land itself outweighs his family ties:

Don't forget the oath I took when I joined the army. I also took an oath when I was born in India. I swore by this soil in which I have grown from childhood to a man. I swore by those Himalayan peaks which have been protecting my motherland for over 5000 years. I swore allegiance to 50 *crore* of my countrymen who were born of this soil just as I was. I can sacrifice my son for them anytime.

Kuldeep thus marks the national space as a geographic area demarcated by the Himalayas, and defines the nation as a finite space that requires protection from the encroachment of other spaces.

Similarly, as that which separates the Indian national space from the Pakistani and serves to protect its integrity, the border post that the Punjab Regiment is charged with protecting epitomizes national space; but the post adds a religious element to the nation which was not immediately apparent in Kuldeep's speech. The camp is centered around a small temple to the "Mother Goddess" (*Devi Ma*), at which the soldiers perform *puja* daily in order to protect the post. In case there was any doubt about to which manifestation of the Goddess the temple is dedicated, its introduction onscreen is framed by soldiers greeting the arriving Punjab Regiment with shouts of "*Bharat Mataji ki jai!*" ("Victory to Mother India!"). Though the temple's time onscreen is brief, it plays a pivotal role: Bhairav Singh (Sunil Shetty), who had commanded the Border Security Forces at the post before the arrival of the Army regiment, decides to undertake a suicide mission against a Pakistani tank that has taken a serious toll on his

comrades. Grabbing an anti-tank mine, he charges toward the tank, only to be felled by a hail of bullets. He collapses to his knees, and cries out another of the names of the Goddess, *Shakti Ma* (“Mother Strength or Power”). There is a quick cut to a bird’s-eye view of the camp’s temple, the only building left standing after the Pakistani bombardment, and then a cut back to Bhairav Singh, who hauls himself to his feet and blows the tank (and himself) to bits. The editing clearly implies that it is the Goddess herself who has taken action to protect the border post, and, by extension the nation.

Border, then, identifies the nation with the border post, and the border post with the religious space upon which it is centered and the goddess who is worshiped there. In doing so, it recalls the ideological move made most famously and most influentially by Bengali novelist Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay’s song *Vande Mataram* (“Glory to the Motherland”), from his 1882 novel *Anandamath*. The novel concerns the struggle of a band of warrior renunciants against “a puppet Muslim nawab indirectly controlled by the British in Bengal”⁵⁰ in 1770. The renunciants, who call themselves the Children of Mother India, live in an old temple which features enshrined maps of India in front of which *Vande Mataram* is chanted. The song, which describes a bounteous and beneficent mother goddess transformed into the terrible Durga in order to drive her enemies away, was adopted not only by anti-colonial nationalists but also by Hindutva ideologues who see it as a call to arms against the “foreign” power of Muslims living in India.⁵¹ While the song does not appear in *Border*, the film’s equation of national space with a religious space dedicated to a Mother Goddess who is both protective and wrathful is clearly alluding to the song that many Hindutva sympathizers feel is the “true” national anthem of India

⁵⁰ Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001) p. 177.

⁵¹ Sarkar, p. 177.

and to the militant Hindutva theology with which it has become associated.⁵² Despite director JP Dutta's protest in a 1997 web chat that *Border* was an attempt to bring India and Pakistan closer together, it is clear from the responses of some of his questioners ("thanks for taking a shot at pakistan! finally someone had the courage to do so" [sic]⁵³) that the film evoked communal feelings similar to those that inspired the Ramjanmabhumi movement and the resulting riots, and against which *Bombay* was ostensibly reacting. It is also clear from the scenes we have just discussed that the temple space is central to this evocation in *Border*.

Other post-Ayodhya films have attempted to rehabilitate public religious space in less Hindutva-esque terms. Khalid Mohamed's 2000 *Fiza* deals with a theme that is also central to *Bombay* – a family's separation during the Bombay riots – but flips the earlier film's national space/religious space dichotomy on its head. The film's title character (played by Karisma Kapoor) is a young woman from a Muslim family, whose younger brother Aman (Hrithik Roshan) disappeared during the '92-'93 riots. Her mother (Jaya Bachchan, the wife of Amitabh) visits the police station weekly for news of him, but is perpetually disappointed. Fiza, fed up with waiting, is determined to find her brother, and tracks him to the Rajasthan desert (the border again), where he has joined a group of Muslim militants fighting against the Indian military. Unlike *Bombay*, in which it is the administrative space of the courthouse that provides the setting for the constitution of the family-as-nation, *Fiza*'s police station – depicted in very little detail – is useless in accomplishing this objective. It is only after mother and daughter visit the shrine of Haji Ali – which, by contrast, is depicted in nearly as great detail as the religious spaces of *Amar Akbar Anthony* – that any progress can be made in the attempt to reconstitute the family. The shrine is depicted by roughly fifty different shots, including handheld shots of devotional

⁵² See Sarkar 268- 290.

⁵³ <http://www.rediff.com/chat/jpd1.htm>

practices around the tomb of the saint, a series of sweeping crane shots that provide a wealth of visual information about the exterior of the space, and a number of super-long shots that establish the relationship of the island shrine to the mainland of the city (see figs. 18 & 19). During the scene, A.R. Rahman's song "Piya Haji Ali" sings the praises of the shrine and points out in its lyrics that the shrine is visited by members of the three largest Indian religious communities – Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. *Fiza* thus turns back to the techniques of *Amar Akbar Anthony* in order to advance a slightly more subtle variation on the earlier film's argument: that religious spaces are an essential part of the networks of social relations that produce a unified national space, rather than – as *Bombay* argued – something that undermines it.

Conclusion

The narrative that I have just sketched out is a story of the processes of change and negotiation amongst and between filmmakers and the state in regard to the role that religious space should play in the creation and maintenance of a national space, from the outright exclusion of religious space from national space in *Mother India* to their outright identification in *Border*. But one thing that all these films seem to have in common is the view that cinema can affect the ways that people enact the social relations that produce and are reproduced by religious space and national space – indeed, this premise is inherent in the censorship legislation to which all films shown in India are subject. But if cinema does have such effects – and though apparently accepted as a given by both the state and filmmakers, this is far from proven – how does it initiate them?

I suggest that might gain a new perspective on the problem by exploring the existence of what we might call a "cinematic space." While the phrase "cinematic space" might immediately

call to mind the representations of space that appear on the screen – namely, the photographically captured reflections of light off of actual physical objects and places that combine with a film’s other elements to provide a setting for the film’s narrative – I would like to “zoom out,” as it were, and suggest a broader definition of cinematic space. Cinematic space, more broadly defined, is not only the “represented space” of the screen, but also a “lived space” (to use Lefebvre’s term) produced by the vast economic, discursive, and above all *social* networks of the production, distribution, exhibition, consumption, and criticism (both the kind of academic discourse represented by this paper and “fan-based” discourse found in magazines like *Filmfare*) of films. These networks produce and are reproduced in a space marked by engagement – in whatever fashion – with those represented spaces that appear on screen, but the networks and the space they produce are enacted in “the real world” beyond the limits of the screen, and thus overlap with and intersect a great many other spaces produced by other such networks – including religious spaces and the Indian national space.⁵⁴ Cinematic space, I argue, is one of the major areas in which the national space and religious space overlap. That is to say, participants in the networks that produce the cinematic space are also participants in social networks that produce these overlapping spaces – moviegoers also vote and run for office, and they visit mosques and temples and go on pilgrimages. By changing the relational position of nodes in one network – by reorganizing cinematic space – it would seem that filmmakers, and ultimately the state responsible for allowing films to be shown, are attempting to change the relational position of those nodes in the other space-producing networks within which they participate. By changing

⁵⁴ For Hindi films, these networks often extend beyond the borders of the Indian national space (Bollywood movies have been popular for years in the Middle East and Africa, and are becoming increasingly so in the UK and USA, not only amongst the Indian diaspora but with “locals” as well -- a friend recently returned from two years in the Peace Corps in the West African nation of Guinea tells me that one of the most popular films in that country is the 1984 Hindi film *Disco Dancer*, which is almost always shown without any sort of subtitles despite the near total absence of Hindi speakers living there. However, despite such occurrences, the primary market for Hindi films remains the nation in which they are produced.

within cinematic space the depiction of characters' relationships to public religious space and national space, those responsible for the films appear to hope that, by virtue of the viewers' identification with those characters,⁵⁵ the sorts of relationships depicted will be carried out of the flows of cinematic space into the network of social relations that produces the national space, and be enacted and reproduce themselves in that space, thereby changing the substance of the national space itself.

⁵⁵ See Christian Metz, "Identification, Mirror" in *Film Theory and Criticism* (5th edition), Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, eds. Pp. 800-808.

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Appendix 1: Film Stills



Fig. 1: Medium-long shot, Sai Baba shrine interior; Akbar (Rishi Kapoor) sings a devotional hymn to a Sai Baba *murti* (image) in *Amar Akbar Anthony*.



Fig. 2: Long crane shot, Sai Baba shrine exterior; Akbar continues his song.



Fig. 3: Long shot, Catholic church interior; Easter mass, *Amar Akbar Anthony*.



Fig. 4: Medium-long shot, interior of Catholic church; Anthony (Amitabh Bachchan)'s monologue to Jesus, *Amar Akbar Anthony*.



Fig. 5: Beginning of a reverse zoom/pan shot, exterior of Ganesh mandir;
one of *Bombay*'s few depictions of public religious space.



Fig. 6: Shaila Bano's father at prayer in his home, *Bombay*.



Fig. 7: Bharati's sight is returned by Sai Baba, *Amar Akbar Anthony*.



Fig. 8: BFC certificate, *Hum Aapke Hain Koun...!* (1994).



Fig. 9: Radha snatches up Sukhilal's domestic shrine, *Mother India*.



Fig. 10: submerged temple, *Mother India*.



Fig. 11: Agricultural space as national space, *Mother India*.



Fig. 12: Construction of the dam, opening credits, *Mother India*.



Fig. 13: Vijay (Bachchan) enters the temple to plead for his mother's life in *Deewaar*.



Fig. 14: Rajiv and Rupa are saved by the spire of the submerged temple, *Satyam Shivam Sundaram*.



Fig. 15: Rajiv and Rupa embrace on the steps of the temple, while Krishna and Radha look on, *Satyam Shivam Sundaram*.

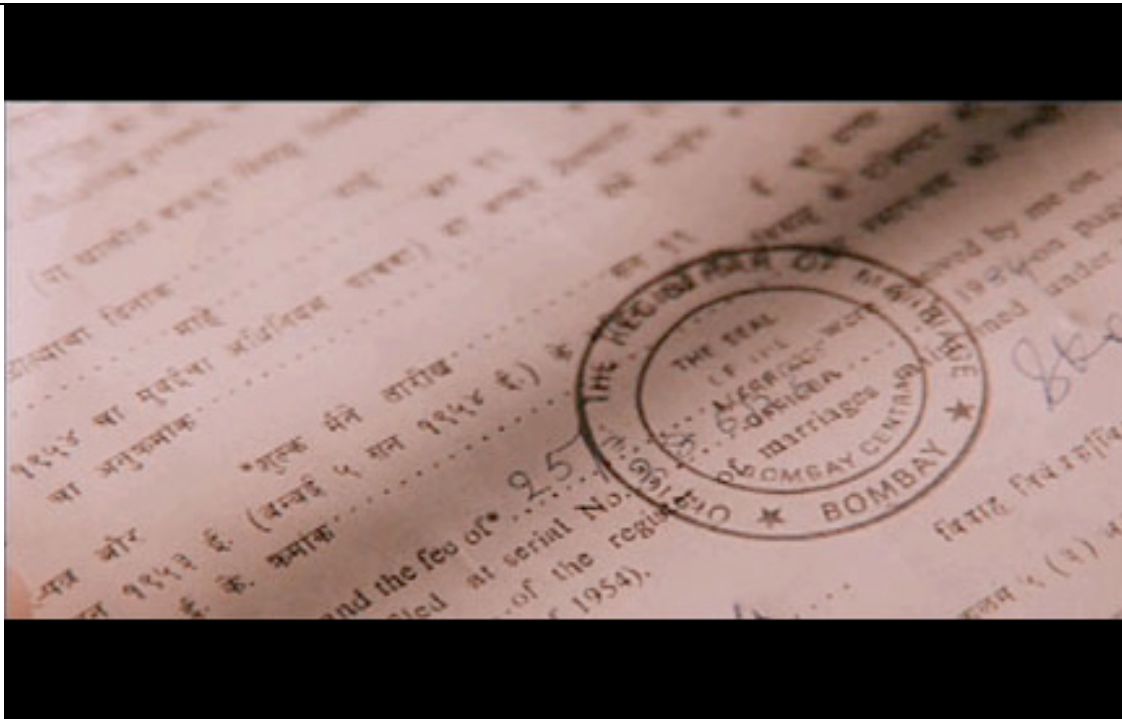


Fig. 16: the state sanctions the marriage of Shekhar and Shaila Bano, *Bombay*.



Fig. 17: Kuldeep Singh (Sunny Deol) explains his national duty, *Border*.



Fig. 18: long shot of Haji Ali shrine from mainland, *Fiza*.

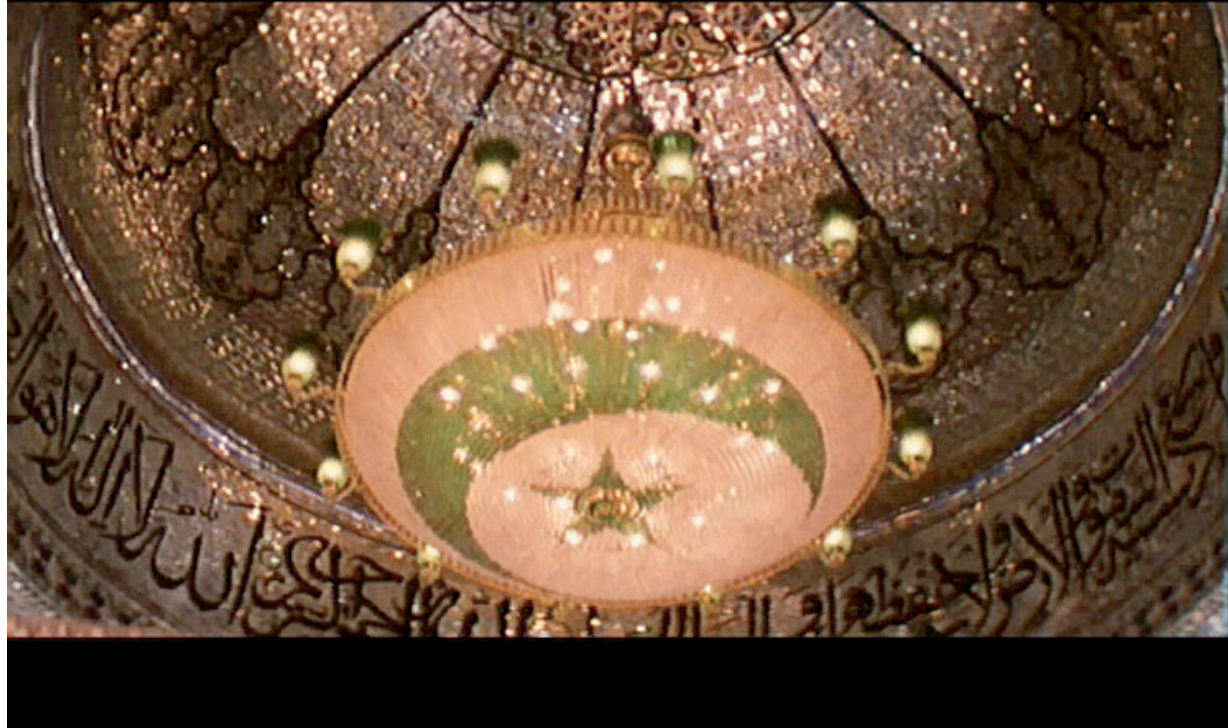


Fig. 19: interior of Haji Ali shrine, *Fiza*.

Appendix 2: MIB Notification S.O. 836-(E) (Dec. 6, 1991)

1. The objectives of film certification will be ensure that -
 - (a) the medium of film remains responsible and sensitive to the values and standards of society;
 - (b) artistic expression and creative freedom are not unduly curbed;
 - (c) certification is responsive to social change;
 - (d) the medium of film provides clean and healthy entertainment; and
 - (e) as far as possible, the film is of aesthetic value and cinematically of a good standard.
2. In pursuance of the above objectives, the Board of Film Certification shall ensure that
 - (i) anti-social activities such as violence are not glorified or justified.
 - (ii) the modus operandi of criminals, other visuals or words likely to incite the commission of any offence are not depicted;
 - (iii) Scenes –
 - (a) showing involvement of children in violence as victims or as perpetrators or as forced witness to violence, or showing children as being subjected to any form of child abuse;
 - (b) Showing abuse or ridicule of physically and mentally handicapped persons; and
 - (c) showing cruelty to, or abuse of, animals, are not presented needlessly;
 - (iv) pointless or avoidable scenes of violence, cruelty and horror, scenes of violence primarily intended to provide entertainment and such scenes as may have the effect of desensitising or dehumanising people are not shown;
 - (v) scenes which have the effect of justifying or glorifying drinking are not shown;
 - (vi) Scenes tending to encourage, justify or glamorise drug addiction are not shown;
 - (vi-a) Scenes tending to encourage, justify or glamorise consumption of tobacco or smoking are not shown;
 - (vii) human sensibilities are not offended by vulgarity, obscenity or depravity;
 - (viii) such dual meaning words as obviously cater to baser instincts are not allowed
 - (ix) scenes degrading or denigrating women in any manner are not presented;
 - (x) scenes involving sexual violence against women like attempt to rape, rape or any form of molestation, or scenes of similar nature are avoided, and if any such incident is germane to the theme, they shall be reduced to the minimum and no details are shown;
 - (xi) scenes showing sexual perversions shall be avoided and if such matters are germane to the theme, they shall be reduced to the minimum and no details are shown;
 - (xii) visuals or words contemptuous of racial, religious or other groups are not presented;
 - (xiii) visuals or words which promote communal, obscurantism, anti-scientific and anti-national attitudes are not presented;

- (xiv) the sovereignty and integrity of India is not called in question;
- (xv) the security of the State is not jeopardised or endangered;
- (xvi) friendly relations with foreign States are not strained;
- (xvii) public order is not endangered;
- (xviii) visuals or words involving defamation of an individual or a body of individuals, or contempt of court are not presented; EXPLANATION: Scenes that tend to create scorn, disgrace or disregard of rules or undermine the dignity of court will come under the term “contempt of Court” and
- (xix) National symbols and emblems are not shown except in accordance with the provisions of the Emblems and Names (Prevention of Improper Use) Act, 1950...