The article discusses a few seminal issues concerning Indian cinema, in terms both of aesthetics and contents. In particular it tries to focus how such seminal points as gender and the crucial contact with western cultures is dealt with in Indian cinema. As far as the first point is concerned, the leading love-story in filmic melodrama, one grounded essentially on stridharmic and dharmic values, instructs the representation of the two loving characters according to traditional iconographies and standard conformity to myth. This normative bias can be seen again at work in the continuous clash between deshi values and the disturbing influence of western culture.

A valuable starting point in assessing a “tentatively homogeneous Indianness” concerns the communicative, and normative as well, aspects of Indian cinema. Consequently, we should be able to analyse Indian films in terms both of reception and of specific cultural heritage. Of course, we have to avoid the grotesque pitfall constituted by crude orientalism, that is, we ought to reconcile the performative strategies which are peculiar to Indian cinema with the puranic and sanskritised too huge corpus of texts narrating myths, rituals, love and devotion. It is well known that the first Indian film Raja Harishchandra (the 1912 version) by Phalke was defined by the author himself as a pauranik kathanak. Although the very plot of the film, taken by the Markandeya Purana,¹

¹ Owing to the promise made to the sage Vishwamitra the king donated his Kingdom to the sage and sold his wife and his son as slaves. In Benares he worked in a crematorium. Their son died and to have him burned the former king’s wife had to sell her nuptial necklace. Harishchandra recognised his wife and was going to exact the tax for cremation from her, but the gods took pity on them, resuscitated the son and offered them heavenly abode.
seems to fit tightly the orientalist view, one emphasising an unmediated transmission from a traditional text to its filmic version, the visual characterisation of the story eludes the repetitive framework which is implied in a would-be orientalist view and also transcends the “symbolic restraint” that influenced the concrete manifestation of emotions and sentiments on the stage.² On the screen it is possible to embrace, to seek and find physical nearness with someone else. To understand better what I mean, one should keep in mind the film Fire (1996, film director Deepa Mehta), that invites the audience to compare the stylised version of the agniparisha in the lila play, such as represented in the film, with the parallel scene of the almost “kerosened wife”. The former instructs rehearsing sequences of normative conduct, whereas the latter introduces oppositive movements of potentially unchecked passion — I mean the quasi-rapist embrace of the discarded husband, a gesture of pathetic violence, and by contrast the undomestic wish for freedom which is vindicated by the deserting wife.

The corrosive bid for emotional freedom staged by the heterodox, but not necessarily lesbian, love-story in Fire stretches to its utmost acceptability the conflict between individualised love and dharmic constraint, usually represented by the convention of the arranged marriage. The unchecked pathos arising out of the wild clash between the stifling traditional heritage embodied and still nurtured by the extended family circle and the crazy opportunity represented by spontaneous, that is unarranged, love at first sight constitutes the narrational backbone of most Bollywood films.

We should be able to detect in such compulsive strategies of story-making the return to an archetypical model of structured fabulation — the role of chance, such as described by Bakhtin³. A man and a woman meet casually, and their meeting is the only reason of their sudden, and otherwise inexplicable, falling in love. However, Bollywood films do not stop at the very threshold of conjugal life, as the Greek prototype usually did. If

2. See what Kamlabai Gokhale, a most famous theatrical actress born in 1900, said in 1980: “Theatre acting is done within norms of restraint. It is symbolic, particularly in love scenes. On the stage you can keep your distance, decide your limit and say that I would go no further than holding hands […] But, in a love scene in a film, you have to embrace — really embrace — the other fellow in front of the camera, otherwise, it would make no sense”. Quoted by Brigitte Schulze, “The First Cinematic Pauranik Kathanak”, in Narrative Strategies: Essays on South Asian Literature and Film, eds. Vasudha Dalmia and Theo Damsteegt (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 60.

the starting diegetic sequence in such films deals with the bliss of romantic love, the subsequent sequences are from hell, given the revengeful slashing back of tradition. A happy couple of migrants may return to the patriarchal violence of a backward village somewhere in Bihar or in Rajasthan, or a fond husband may reveal himself in his true colours. Of course a different brand of Hindutva-like films skips the starting sequence of untutored passion, so as to focus the developing plot on the enforced stridharmic compulsion to passive obedience and accepted suffering. The punishing view which is obviously implied in such films as Ghar Ki Laksmi (1990, film director Shilpa Shirodkar), Vivah (2006, film director Sooraj R. Barjatya) or Karwa Chouth (1980, film director Ram Lal Hans) percolates to us from the pauranik kathanak started by Phalke with Raja Harishchandra, that is true love may only be attained or achieved through pristine loss and separation. Bollywood films shift the diegetic emphasis from myth to everyday domestic life, even if myth is the counter-instructing thematic device in Fire, if we consider the repeated visual quotations from the Ramayana. Of course, we should not forget that in Fire the fasting festival of Karwa Chouth is explained and introduced by an imagined version of its mythical origin.

If Bollywood comedy usually evades myth, it does not accept as a rule the Western ways of (family) life. Hindustani girls “do not do that” is the constant refrain of Hindu girls facing free sex or something similar, a heritage statement echoed back by the apparently wild boy, one who refuses an unauthorised marriage. Hindustani Romeos only take their brides from the hands of their fathers (see Dilwale Dulhanya Le Jayenge, 1995, film director Aditya Chopra, for instance). This game of found and possibly lost comes down from tearful Devdas, a bitter tale in which the male protagonist is destroyed by his inability to overcome the socio-dharmic refusal to free choice in love. We can detect a beeline progress from Devdas (particularly in the 2002 filmic version, film director Sanjeev Leela Bhanisali) and Dilwale, since the happy ending of the latter does not elide, or elude, the do not scheme. As a matter of fact we should relate the cinematic taboo forbidding kisses, or other bodily tokens of passionate love, to the code intimating unrealistic or distancing representation of physical contacts. These “norms of constraint”, to quote the actress Kamlabai Gokhale, must be perceived behind the extensive use of dance in Bollywood comedies. We should understand them as a modernising form of nautch — an exercise of highly-stylised seduction that anticipates the consummation of love. Given this perspective filmi dance stands for something else — it instructs erotic passion as an imagined scene, a mock kamasutra which suggests instead of cataloguing.
This downgrading from normative description to metaphorical hints marks the distance that separates Devdas from Dilwale, the former imposing a mythical identity on the two doomed lovers, which are ichnographically rendered as updated versions of Krishna and Radha, whereas the latter film migrates the infringing couple, or would-be infringing, to a hyphenated location, in-between West and East. As a matter of fact, the maverick hero and the romantic heroine of Dilwale move constantly within a bleak geography of estranged lands: England, a country of exile and failed belonging, as intimated by the father of the girl in the opening scene of the film; the Swiss interlude, more a sequence of cinematic quotations or an exotic background for picaresque romance, than a real passage to a redeeming idyll; the native Punjab, a deceiving haven of happy extended families but actually a concealed hell of violence and wild behaviour. I would define them all “no-lands”, that is sites of alienation and loss, notwithstanding any possible happy ending in the story-board.

In Devdas the mutinous discourse of passion is safely transferred to the faraway banks of the Yamuna, so as to make a puranik kathanak of a too-human story of love and death. Dilwale adopts a strategy of movement through space which mimics at the same time the humble act of migration and a version, however reduced, of the Grand Tour. Instead of resorting to myth Dilwale refers to the return of the native in terms both of deshi regression to “arranged” ways of life and of imagined tourist galore. Its map includes sites which miss whatever ontological concreteness or eulogic possibilities of soothing representation, a catachrestic sequence of sthala purana which do not authorise continuity or shared remembrance. Consequently such ruptures in representation and ritualised iconography (that is, the Krishna-Devdas descent of authorised meaning) defer Bollywood comedy and domestic tragedy to the negation of self-fulfilment, as far as evolutive life stories are concerned. As a matter of fact, Indian cinema in the age of Nehru had equated social and economical development to feminine sacrifice and extreme acceptance of time-honoured duties, so that in Mother India (1957, film director Mehboob Khan) the collective ethos of the joint village obliges de facto a mother to kill her misbehaving son, one who breaks the don’t do that regulate the life of the community.

Once again, taboos concerning marriage and free choice constitute the divide that distinguishes good from evil, the dharmic boy from the Indian black sheep, the badmash. This divide also reflects and confirms the ideological background on which the post-independence claim to virtuous nationhood thrives: not casually the Punjabi boy in the film Namastey London (2007, film director Vipul Amrutlal Shah) instructs high words of postcolonial revenge
(plus a vindication restoring deshi marriage) when in London. The path that leads from stridharmic epos to “Funjabi” comedy of conjugal manners and choices may perhaps seem too crooked; we however should rule out discontinuity of purpose and of national(istic) view in the diachronic range of Indian filmography concerning human feelings and relationships. The maintaining of type seems to be the shared thread that runs through and across its mixed comedies of laugh and tears, one that takes charge of its ambiguous oscillations between the rebellions pleas to freedom out of the stifling family circle and the crushing weight of unmodified tradition.

BOLLYWOOD GALORE AND THE EXPATRIATE TEXT. DISARRANGED MARRIAGES AND THE IMPOSSIBLE RETURN OF THE NATIVE

Both in filmi and fictional texts, the clash between cultures and generations in the migrant partially fulfilled re-location constitutes a specific sub-genre, whose discursive constructs and strategies percolate into easily recognisable features deploying a rather homogeneous corpus of imagined life-histories, that is fictionalised diegetic constructs that coincide in parts with actual life-stories (or narrated true biographies) but diverge from them by being ideologised representations of what might have happened in real experience. I would say imagined, given their loaded emphasis falling on such in-between sites of controversial belonging as the implied disavowal of hybridisation, the constant threat of miscegenation, the troubled, and muddied focus on assimilation and clumsy modes of survival. As a matter of fact, the films and the novels or the short stories I am involved with highlight the debate on the distancing viewpoint assumed by the expatriate writers or film directors, most of them women, migrants of the first or second generation, with the addition of a select handful of Western authors in the cinematic field. Of course, expatriates are intellectual migrants, people whose position entails a mixed heritage often on the verge of ambiguity, not to mince words. He or she partakes as it were of the “exile of the mind” considered by Meenakashi Mukherjee as the split cultural frame in which the postcolonial bourgeoisie live. They use English as their cultivated and in-group language, thus relegating Hindi and regional languages to the subaltern role of an inferior lingua franca, actually a sort of Brown Sahib Hindustani. This attitude inverts the as-

4. The four sections of the present article are different essays which have been collected for publication. Repetitions, mainly in plots, may consequently be found
summation that indigenous languages reflect the cultural heritage of the speaker, so as to imbue the private and intimate sphere of life with political and symbolical relevance. Vice versa, the use of English in the network of family relationships concerning bilingual backgrounds separates domesticity from external everyday life. It introduces paradoxically the notion of *dasatya* (that is, one of compulsory maintenance of subaltern positions) within a movement supposedly of reform and modernisation.

Such compulsion postulates a stance of distancing perspective on the part of the expatriate author, who revives, as it were, the nineteenth-century debate between Indian reformers and Indian nationalists, both of them focusing differently on juxtaposed interpretations of unmitigated indigenous manners and customs in the domestic sphere of life. Whereas the former represented traditional practices and hierarchies within the family group as a backward impediment to the rational modernisation of everyday life, the latter viewed patriarchal domesticity as the extreme stronghold of pure *deshi* identities. This binary agenda either of change or resistance deployed two different strategies for the discursive appropriation of the intimate relationships ruling more or less domineeringly the family circle. In particular, nationalists would equate the private sphere to the outward dimension of political authority and control, so as to allow a forceful metaphor of collective self-identification. Consequently, the Indian nation was seen as an extended version of the conservative family structure, whose network of gendered responsibilities and separated dharmic duties was supposed to motivate the seminal distinction between a substantially unassimilated native self and a *videshi* other. Such concern against hybridising cultural intrusion relocated the process of colonising mimicry away from the breakthrough influence of imposed assimilation. It rather suggested unmitigated claims to *swadeshi* patterns of original behaviour and evoked simultaneously an untamed excess of values that brought forth stern modes of uncompromising self-isolation and refusal.

The expatriate agenda dealing with fictional and filmic narratives lends itself to analogous tropes of deferred acceptance of *videshi* domesticity. The indigenous languages (either Hindi or Urdu or Bengali) spoken in such texts within the family circle of the migrants circumscribe a select area of behaviour closed to reform and external influence. Let us consider two recent ethnic comedies on the screen, *East is East* (1999, film director)

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Damien O’Donnell) and *Ae Fond Kiss...* (2003, film director Ken Loach). In both films the two migrant shopkeepers speak a strongly accented English, a sort of parodic Pakistani English, whereas their assimilated sons are fully proficient in idiomatic British or Scottish English. Urdu stands low as the language of the domestic emotional blackmail operated by the family circle: it should be understood as the breaking agency that interrupts the progress towards cultural assimilation and redemptive full Western citizenship. As such, it defuses hybridisation by imposing a de facto conservative conformity to pre-migrant type and subaltern circumscribed identity.

This stubborn sticking to unassimilated ethnic ways of life might suggest a rather unsavoury equation between a retrogressive migrant and a potential terrorist, according to a time-honoured trope that views the foreigner in-between our Western world as the one who brings raw chaos and untutored behaviour. Its original type dates back to Othello, the passionate Moor in the text that might stand as a high warning against miscegenation, or to cunning Shylock, whose spite against Christians introduces the figure of the implied terrorist moving in-between the laws of the West and the rancorous hate of the Other. Both of them are metaphorical conquerors, would-be Trojan horses within the walls of an unguarded city. As failed agencies of unambiguous assimilation they enforce a liminal stance on the status of the migrant, one who falls back constantly to compulsory type or slyly tries to masquerade as the tamed follower of an alien law. Such a not-too-innocent ancestry impresses a cathacrestic turn to the identity of the old-timers of simply nostalgic deshi migrants featured by expatriate literature and filmic ethnic comedy. As far as fiction is concerned, we should perhaps individuate the archetype in Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* (1989) and *Wife* (1975). In the first novel the underground voyage of the heroine into the hellish world of clandestine migration, up to successfully mimetic Western identity, requires a stage of disavowing through the mimic rehearsal of native rites that stage the unspeakable ceremonies of the Hindus. A mock *anugamana sati* burning deflates Jasmine’s symbolic widowhood, whereas the murderous enacting of the epic and victorious fight of the Devi against a demon foe shifts the raw image of migrant resistance embodied by Othello to a myth of power and feminist reshaping of subaltern migrant identity. Consequently, the expatriate Bharati Mukherjee hybridises in function and meaning the ceremony of *sati* burning and the myth of the triumphant Devi. In the first instance by making an implied or virtual *sati* of Jasmine the author recuperates to the intermediate space of miscegenation the semantic root of the world, *sati* meaning “to be present”.
As a consequence, she switches to the issue of relocation the paradigm of presence-absence made evident in the crucial juxtaposition sati-anugama-na. As a matter of fact, Jasmine migrates to follow dutifully her husband, or the virtual shadow of his legitimising presence, given his murder by Sikh terrorism. She behaves actually as if her marriage had not been broken by death: by making a perennial wife of herself Jasmine adopts the claim to be a sati, but one who is missing the body of her husband. Thus her cleansing assumption of the anugamana ritual, reduced to mere symbolic function however, blurs away whatever distancing distinction between presence and absence, belonging and separation, wife and surviving widow. Such cannibalisation of meanings otherwise unchangeable is further emphasised by her translation of deshi tropes into terms of Westernised gender, concerning the iconic heritage of the Devi seen in her terrific fight against the asuras. Apparently we need a Kali to defeat a villain-like Half-Face, a true backdrop from the pages of Dick Tracy. Here, the clash between cultures and the fight for hegemony is aptly expressed in a way that endorses both folk images of regionalised Hindu myth, depending on everyday popular belief, and gothic Western comic art. Thus the picaresque progress that assimilates Jasmine into the middle class of North America is astutely rendered in the traditional mood of a sthala purana, that is a local chronicle whose authorising reference to myth characterises a specific place into a deshi site open to narration.

However, in the expatriate text myth yields too easily to post-orientalist picturesque description: it smacks more of the rhetorical trick rather than expressing continuity in the process that relocates identities. As a rite of passage, from East to West, folk-myth does not coincide necessarily with the obdurate maintaining of autochthonous ways of life on the part of the migrant. As a matter of fact, it does not coincide at all with the fixity of the nostalgic keeping to original type on which the migrant text thrives. We should draw a sharp distinction between the imagined constructs contrived

6. In Jasmine Bharati Mukherjee re-reads the paradigm absence-presence in terms of inner metamorphosis of identity and cultural rebirth, thus impressing a positive turn to the sense of disjunction in selfhood, such as motivated by transnational migration. See the declaration of multiple identity, a crucial step beyond merely ambivalent hybridization (p. 176): “But Jyoti was now a sati-goddess, she had burned herself in a trash-can-funeral pyre behind a boarded-up motel in Florida. Jasmine lived for the future, for Vijh & Wife. Jase went to movies and lived for today.” One should compare her threefold assumption of names to the three statues (or maps, according to different English versions of the novel) of the Goddess in Anandamath by Bankimchandra Chatterjee. Of course the Jyoti-figure burns her own polluted clothes, not her real body.
by expatriate literature, such as the use of discursive myth to introduce relocation, and the parodic sticking of the backward migrant to old-fashioned ways of life. In the former instance myth acts as an agency of disruption that marks the breaking point in the chain of resistance against timeless type. It rather signifies a metaphor of rebirth, a change within the self. Consequently, we should not mistake the cinematic identity assumed by the expatriate for the self-contained unchangeability of the first generation migrant.

In the latter case obedience to unmodifying deshi customs and manners stands up as a clog in the procedures of cultural assimilation. It evokes patterns of spontaneous resistance against the Western world by transferring the hybridised persona of the migrant (the cannibal serving at table, in postcolonial jargon) from the subcontinental colonised native to the contemporary Paki, namely the South Asian living in-between East and/or West. We should be able to detect this resistant mode of self-contained life of the migrant keeping to his/her undeflected oikumene in the very first stages of Jasmine’s metamorphosing descent into Westernisation. She has to cope with undiluted Indian domesticity, one grounded in the stifling and excessive seclusiveness of nostalgic culture. Accordingly, Jasmine is trapped into spending dreary Sundays devoted to Bollywood films, regional food, gossip and extensive matchmaking. To make things worse, she is reduced down to the subaltern status of an auntie, the poor relation or humble widow whose role is to be the drudge within the house.

Strategies of fictional representation are quite different in *Wife*, a novel that replaces the tyranny of the traditional stridharmic code with a subtler script of imposed feminine behaviour in the migrant’s life, so as to enforce the hegemonic control of the patriarch, along lines of inculcated fear concerning the external world that allow only restrained movements to the wife. Such induced timidity of behaviour surfaces again as the central motif in the recent *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali (2003), an astutely-constructed novel that impresses the final touch to the representation of the quasi-grotesque time warp in which the unemancipated migrant woman seems to live. Differently from what happens in *Wife*, Monica Ali’s text includes erotic female transgression (the secluded wife has an affair with a glamorous young Bengali migrant) and finally the splitting up of the family group, when she and the two children refuse to follow the husband and father, a sad failure in life, back to Bangladesh. Such an inchoative promise of slow independent integration is not conceded to Dimple in Bharati Mukherjee’s novel *Wife*. Her husband builds up an invisible wall between the woman and the surrounding American society, impressing a catachrestic turn to the fear and the feelings of anxiety a migrant may have in his/her estranging first contacts.
with alien people and ways of life. As a result the biased warning against the supposed unbridled violence that rages in American society constitutes the key to interpret the TV news or the fictional serials that Dimple watches as her only allowed link with outdoor reality. This sort of segregating purdah, with a TV screen instead of a traditional curtain through which to peep at the world, re-patterns her imagined vision into subliminal intimations of wild freedom that cause the apparently mad murder of her husband. Such dramatic action of extreme resistance transcends any Western conceit of gendered revenge. It rather renders a metamorphosed feminine identity in the unsubmitted persona of the Devi fighting against the demonic asuras. Whereas the swadeshi archive elaborating on the corporate images of nationhood emphasises feminine self-sacrifice as a unifying symbol for national identity and collective duty, so as to claim through the rallying figure of the Devi both a patriotic call for care and protection in Anandamath (1882) by Bankimchandra Chatterjee and a loaded representation of domestic responsibility in the post-independence film Mother India, Wife makes a subversive agency of myth: we are led to understand the killing of the husband as a ritual to regain strength.

Here again, as in Jasmine, myth is the key to inner freedom and unbound possibility of self-transformation, not the lesbian bliss opening provocingly to Radha and Sita (they have to desecrate myth before quitting their absentee husbands) in the film Fire, but the liberating assumption of a metamorphosed identity. Fire implies a complete reversal of sexual attitudes, so as to define a mimetic (that is, liberating) stance of domestic refusal through Westernised ideology. By making use of myth as a background motif in her representation of changing identities Bharati Mukherjee defuses her claim to assimilation. Her two female characters are mimetic rather than mimic, since they embody the untamed nature of the Devi in her role as a cosmic fighter. They evade the fetters constituted by the enforced identification of a woman with gendered locations of dharmic identity. She is narrowed down to a pativrata and should be assimilated to a Kali turned fair, a Gauri. As such, she is but docile cow, an obedient wife to be dealt unproblematically with: “[She is] an article of gift [...] she is given away even as a cow or any other chattel” (p. 51). But a naked Jasmine, her bleeding tongue protruding becomes the terrifying appearance of Durga in her killing mode. She is actually an avatar, not just a mere and passive shadow, a namesake.

Difference in identity concerns here the distinction between the untaimed persona of the Goddess and a domestic (or domesticated) Laksmi, the latter being de facto confined to the patriarchal household. In other words, Jasmine evades the dichotomy Laksmi-Alaksmi, o auspicious-inauspicious,
by migrating her identity as a *stri* from East to West, via Durga. In *Wife* the writer adopts a totally different strategy of representation, since she seems to focalise her breach of feminime roles so as to suggest a straight refusal of duties, thus impressing a short *adharmic* turn upon Dimple's behaviour of revolt. To me these two strategies are complementary, since both of them refuse the nationalist discourse on the sacred value to be attributed to domesticity. Such twist of the tale is heavy with consequences in the thematic evolution of migrant literature. The controversial appeal to a sort of *hindu-tva* astutely applied to domesticity established the genetic trope of conflict on which both filmic and fictional narratives of the subgenre dealing with intercultural issues seem to thrive. Indeed, Jasmine's career as an assimilated migrant foreshortens quite triumphantly as it were in a condensed span of experience the clash between first and second generation migrants, a contrast which is absolutely paramount to the comprehension of the canon ruling ethnic comedies. As a rule the thwarting authority exerted in matrimonial matters by the extended family of the migrant inscribes within the text the crucial motif of *izzat*, a value, which dichotomises the sense of belonging. *Izzat* (literally honour, but more extensively a set of notions implying the good name of the family group and its self-esteem) becomes for instance in *Ae Fond Kiss*... a forbidding sign of communal identification and consequently of discriminating attitudes, insofar as it distinguishes between a suitable Pakistani bride, directly imported from the *deshi*, and a noxious *gori*, that is the Irish fiancée. The latter is viewed as a potentially destructive woman, seeing her suggested disavowal of duties and her Western conception of the possible transience of love. She would make an unreliable bride, following the standards fixed by *izzat*.

Such disturbing hints of cultural intolerance, verging more or less consciously on mild forms of racism and radical antagonist behaviour, are counteracted in the film by the rebellious reaction of the son against his arranged, or rather imposed, marriage. Here the domineering authority of the *pati* is shared, rather than endorsed, by the elder daughter, who acts as the guardian of family *izzat*. Honour becomes women we are suggested, but honour only belongs to *deshi* women: it is a communal value. This lack of liberty and free decision within the pale of the extended family finds its perfect iconic representation in the attached flat built by the father to accommodate the legitimate outgrowth of the patriarchal household. Such excessive extension of bound domestic belonging should be viewed in terms of equating functions with the prisonhouse in which the wife Dimple lives, but it is also strongly reminiscent of the fortress-like ancestral mansions depicted in the novel *Inside the Haveli* (1957) by Rama Mehta. The mandatory
flat in *Ae Fond Kiss*... constitutes a male *zanana*, if we can grant authority to such notion. Harsh’s intimations of rebellious resistance to imposed marriage surface also in *East is East*, or even in *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002, film director Gurinder Chadha), in the latter perhaps as the device that introduces the more unacceptable and unsavoury question of homosexuality. In particular, *East is East* seems to yield to a vision of miscegenating Britain, in which English working-class women surrender their tamed *gori* identities to domineering *Paki* husbands. Such comedies mix freely the cultural twists made possibly by hybridisation with the more seclusive and self-isolating attitudes nurtured by the die-hard Eastern migrant, even if the crumbling down of the patriarchal extended family seems to be the inevitable consequence of the culturally miscegenating society in which the second generation lives. Whereas in *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) by Hanif Kureishi, both the novel and its TV film version (1993, director Roger Michell), the encapsulated miscegenating migrant tries to find integration within British high middle society, in spite of racism and belated imposition of ethnic stereotype, the film *Ae Fond Kiss*... lays heavy stress on how both the family circle of the migrant and the Catholic setting in which the Western young woman lives act jointly against their love-story. Both the tyrannical father and the intolerant parish priest react as stifling agents of de-hybridised behaviour. As guardians of pure and unmixed tradition they shift the discursive strategy of backwardness from the periphery of the Western world (that is, from the former colonies and their “half-formed” assimilation of redeeming culture) to the very core of the postmodern supposed melting-pot. As such, they defuse what Bhabha has postulated apropos of the hegemony that in our split contemporary society falls on marginality and interrupted conditions of belonging. In *Ae Fond Kiss*... the formidable alliance between crucial Eastern and Western agencies of repression stifes any freedom of choice in private lives, thus inducing the victimised characters to acts of open and radical rebellion.

Similar constructs implying refusal and dramatic suggestions of non-return make the strong unpalatable kernel of the highly controversial film *Fire* and previously of the novel *Wife*. *Fire* makes uncompromising havoc of the patriarchal rule of the *pati*, since it posits provokingly lesbian sisterhood as the only way of escape from the hell represented by the extended family and stridharmic duties. By making runaway lovers of the two unhappy brides Radha and Sita the film comments rather sourly on the Hindu archive of myths and narrations. We should not forget that Radha is also the name of the *deshi* heroine in the film *Mother India*, a founding stone in the laying of post-independence feminine identity, her sublimated persona being the
very embodiment of the Indian homeland. However, enough is not enough, given that *Fire* makes devastating fun both of the *Ramayana* as the text that constitutes the hierarchies of gender for the Hindus and of the *agnipariksha*, which is equated to the practice of burning wives, with the help of the cooking apparatus, so as to divorce them. Spectators are invited to interpret the film as a parodic or inverted *Ramlila*, one replacing onanism for religious devotion and *kerosened* wives for imagined womanhood.

This film deviates the hegemonic gaze of the expatriate author from the turmoil of hybridising migration to the very core of the deshi extended family, seen in its native location. Its story-line turns disturbingly inside out the code of *stridharma*, making of the bridal *antahpura* a noxious site wasted by male indifference and quasi-rapist attitudes. It results from the provocation of an extreme lesbian manifesto which extols *adharmaic* behaviour and the refutation of Manu. Its deconstructing strategy should be correlated to the novelette *Indira* (1893, revised edition) by Bankimchandra Chatterjee, a text that relocates a polluted wife into the lost dignity of marriage by means of a malicious joint female action plotting a strategy of confusing seduction. A totally feminised *antahpura*, a mischievous site loaded with hints of proto-lesbian sisterhood, should be recognised as the pivotal centre around which the rescue of the separated wife turns: she adopts *sringara* as the only way to social respectability, after being coached by another woman into a clever arouser of male desire, *Indira* changes a sadly desecrated wife into an irresistible *mohini*, thus blurring whatever *rekha* there might be between bride and lover, duty and untrammeled passion.

Such *viparita* inversion of roles excludes however any reading based on Westernised interpretations harping on about issues of gender, since the transfer in identity operated by *Indira*, from *patni* to Mohini, is still encompassed within the sphere of Hindu marriage. Given that a Hindu husband is a god to her wife, any infringement concerning her intimate conjugal behaviour may be neutralised, as happens in *Indira*, by equating the overflowing woman to a *devadasi*, that is to a female which is endowed with authorised extrovert sexuality\(^7\). Inversely, *Fire* disclaims duty away from being a component of feminine passion. It subtracts the everyday gestures of conjugality away from shared intimate emotions and prescribed rites, thus deregulating as coercive the male plea to unity. In *Fire* the respectful

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\(^7\) In *Devdas* (2002, film director Sanjay Leela Bhanshali) the courtesan Chandramukhi says that now people call her “Devdasi”, an obvious pun on her subaltern liaison with Devdas, a god to her.
and loving act of pressing the feet of the husband is ironically distorted, when Radha and Sita yield to it in a tender lesbian mood under the benevolent gaze of the excluded pati. Of course Fire rehearses the traditional triangle between wife, husband and co-brother (co-sister, here), this being a dramatising device introduced by early Indian fiction to narrate potential illicit love within the too tight texture of the extended family. This canon includes such different texts as Rajmohan’s Wife (1864) by Bankimchandra Chatterjee, an innovative novel that constitutes new perspectives concerning traditional domestic life, and the mawkish The Vine of Desire (2002) by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, a sentimental novel that explores the expatriate dilemma for a corporate identity in the light of the pristine narrative of female transgression.

However, overt sexual transgression does not feature usually as an escape hatch out of matrimonial bondage, notwithstanding lesbian galore in Fire, or the yielding to Kama of the lonely wife in Brick Lane. Bridal elopement or clandestine affair seem to be still out of bonds, not only in Devdas or in the other nineteenth-century texts, but even in updated love-stories such as in the film Dilwale. Dimple’s frightened refusal to be seduced defines a good case in point, illustrating as it does how the forbidding power of the tabooing rekha has moved across the sea together with the female migrant. In Wife the dreary figure of the pati still haunts the married life of the Indian migrant woman, more as a metaphorical nightmare, or an ideologised presence, than a real tyrant in his full flesh. If Jasmine celebrates the American melting-pot as an effective agency abrogating cultural difference and making a homogenous entity of unhomologised identities, Wife seems to maintain that Hindu, or Indian, married women are de facto denied the possibility of overflowing through migration into an alien culture. Readers who would feel strong nostalgia for the more glamorous supermarket of globalising intercrossing sentimental encounters, such as depicted in Ae Fond Kiss..., should turn to such post-migration inclusive stories by Bharati Mukherjee as “Orbiting”, one gloating on the unarranged, and totally post-modern, thanksgiving eulogic meeting between an Afghan and an Italian.

Vice versa, to the unhappy heroine Dimple of Wife migration appears as a barred prisonhouse, a darkening and terminal extension of a metaphorical purdah. We should understand her frightened, and apparently self-imposed, seclusion in forbidding terms of pre-arranged confinement, that is the mimic removal to America of her previous household in Calcutta, with the bonus of a few fringe benefits: essentially, updated gadgets in the kitchen and in the bathroom. As a matter of fact she lives in a more comfortable cage, one similar in role and function to the room with the
barred window depicted by Kipling in “Beyond the Pale”. Instead of opening new vistas, here migration does not erase the Laxman Rekha that keeps Hindu married women on the safe side of dharmic behaviour. The suggested notion of a punishing Laxman Rekha should or might be perceived as the hidden trying motif that controls the narrative dynamics of the film Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge, translated as Brave Heart Will Take the Bride, either in the climactic scene when the heroine proudly states that Indian women do not do that before marriage, thus impressing a sudden serious turn to the potentially dangerous interlude of her Swiss escapade, or finally in the authorisation to her runaway marriage granted out of the blue of the pati figure in the story. His apparent yielding to mollified feeling reinstates patriarchal authority by twisting the consequences of disruption into a legitimising frame of consent, a trick to justify ideologically the cathartic happy ending, that one Dilwale shares with many other films.

After graduating, a young Indian migrant living in England with her family is doomed to the usual arranged marriage with a deshi Punjabi boy from their native village. Of course, she falls in love with a sort of maverick character who has equally migrated from India. Notwithstanding the moderate modernist message conveyed by the final yielding of the stern and stiff pati father of the girl to a true marriage of love, the film focuses rather ambiguously on a type of disruptive male hero, originally an isolated irregular, who fights bravely alone against the evils of society. Such character has been common in Indian films since the seventies, but ethnic comedy makes an empty and almost ridiculous trickster of him, apparently to circumvent by his extrovert presence the lesser importance women roles have assumed on the screen in the last three decades. This momentous shift from the self-sacrificing heroine of Mother India that embodies the homeland and its eternal values to the anarchist individualism of the maverick has been explained as the aftermath of the notorious 1975 Emergency, a critical period in the contemporary history of India that has jeopardised the fund of trust between ruler and nation . Whereas Mother India justifies failure in family life as the product of social injustice and pre-independence, Dilwale stresses the basic inability of tradition to cope with reform and change, so as to imply the necessity of granting more freedom to individual choices.

8. A period lasting from June 1975 to March 1977 in which the government assumed extraordinary powers, these including press censorship, hamming “extremist” organisations and diminishing the powers of the Judiciary. Parliamentary elections held in March 1977 saw the defeat of Indira Gandhi and the end of the Emergency Rule.
and wishes, against the behaviour of strict obedience that the domineering ethics of the family or the castal group impose on their members. *Dilwale* also features the impossible return of the native to the homeland, thus breaking the uninterrupted link of the first generation migrant with the *deshi*.

The film stops rather abruptly on the verge of the desperate elopement and tragedy, when the rival families of the “arranged” future husband and of the intruding and un-guaranteed unofficial suitor stage a terrific fight. Family tragedy becomes instead the ruling motif of the film *Shakti* (2002, film director Krishna Wamsi), in which the rather mawkish happiness of a couple of Indian migrants, and of their young son, settled in Canada is suddenly shattered down when the husband decides to visit his family back in Rajasthan, after watching on TV news the reportage of a cruel local feud in which his clan is involved. The voyage back to origins turns to be a nightmarish trap, since the father of the husband behaves like a cruel tyrant who wants to make his grandson the heir of his dominion. A despotic patriarch, he thrives on violence and corruption, competing with a rival group for the control of the district. When the husband is butchered down in the savage feud, the patriarch thwarts with ruthless determination his daughter-in-law’s desperate attempts at escaping back to Canada. Mother and son are finally rescued by a self-sacrificing maverick hero, whose presence introduces an extensive cameo devoted to wild bouts of fighting extravaganza, a well-needed structural device counter-balancing the too painful tension of the story-line.

However, the film deploys overt strategies of anti-patriarchal discourse, such as indicated by its subtitle, “The Power”, and by the unrelenting energy shown by the heroine, whose strenuous resistance against coercive male authority might be reminiscent of the feminine pluck shown by Radha in *Mother India*. Both films translate into terms of namesake seminal issues relevant to gender, and by extension to the awareness of national symbols converging on the soteriological role of the Devi. Of course, we should refer again to *Anandamath* by Bankimchandra Chatterjee and to his imagined construct of Mother India as the founding symbol for such shared values of nationhood. The privileged link between the Devi and her sons (a common definition for her devotees) constitutes the ideological background that motivates in *Mother India* the strong feeling between Radha and Birju and also impresses implied strength, or power, to the stubborn resistance operated by Nandini in *Shakti*. It should be observed, however, that the motif of the privileged and intimate feeling between mother and son stands also in the latter film as the disrupting agency that shatters conjugal bliss.

The hysterical reaction of the husband when he knows of the murderous attack against his family group yields too easily and quickly to terrific
moods of inchoative and authoritarian violence against his wife and son. He becomes for a while the intolerant pati of the ethnic semi-tragical comedy, even if his temporary excess of patriarchal authority is soon downgraded to implied patterns of virtual emasculation, a symbolical loss of virility that he sadly shares with the maimed husband in *Mother India*. As a matter of fact, his death represents his inability to protect his family or, more to the point, to sever the morbid ties that make his return to Canada and to rational life impossible. He falls a victim to an inverted overflowing, that is he moves back from West to East, a deregulative process that recalls archetypal tropes of entrapping seduction, viewed as the deployed cause of degeneration in the imagined sites of intercultural passage and blocked approach to reformed identity, provided we exchange the sedate figure of the too loved Indian mother for the ravishing image of Cleopatra.

In *Shakti* the Indian mother of the husband is the agency that jeopardises the process of modernisation in which her migrated son seems to be deeply involved at the very beginning of the film. Her disturbing emotional power over him upholds as a matter of fact both the compensatory maintaining of tradition and the obliged self-surrender of the migrant self to the hegemony of the ingrained authority represented by the family. The apparently subdued leadership obliquely achieved by the older mother figure in *Shakti* fulfils an exercise of domestic power far more effective than the heavy load of coarse violence and corruption embedded in the haunting figure of the pati. Undiluted patriarchal rule is no match for the seductive energy shown by the mother figure. Of course we should root such discourse in the nationalist representation of conjugality and of widowhood, a redeeming anticolonial strategy that exalted spiritually a widow as a world renouncer, one who could pour her emotional and sacralising surplus onto her children. Such *swadeshi* ideology emphasised “the nature of the woman’s commitment to the conjugal order that bound the system together. Moral initiative therefore passes on to the woman, uniquely privileging her activism. If the household was the embryonic nation, then the woman was the true patriotic subject”. The issue surfaces again at the onset of the Nehruvian and quasi-socialist age, given how in *Mother India* the exaltation of the mother figure emphasises gendered issues (*adhinata*) of maternal self-sacrifice and devotion as the joint agencies that inscribe stridharmic values into the select archives of nationhood. As a matter of fact, *Mother India* does not need the hegemony of the adult male figure, whose role has been

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taken over by the son. This shift in the network of family relationships puts to the forelight the role of the collective imagined persona I would term the *patiless patni*, not exactly a widow, but more specifically an archetypal mother taking exclusive care and protection of her sons.

These duties associated with total motherhood erase from the nationalist text the blame of inauspiciousness that fell heaviy on Hindu widows; we should consider, for instance, the *madi* in South Indian tradition, such as represented in *Phaniyamma* (film version 1982, film director Prema Karanth, out of which the novel *The Young Widow* by M.K. Indira, 1990). In *Mother India*, the virtual loss of the husband emphasises an *anugamana* state of widowhood, that is an in-between position that erases the actual conjugal presence from the married couple. However, this condition of presence-within-an-absence does not coincide at all with the cleansing process of cultural sanitation that forcefully takes place in *Jasmine* through the relocating agency of migration:

It seemed like a miracle, that [...] the water could be hot, the tiles and porcelain should be clean, without smells, without bugs. It was a place that permitted a kind of purity [...]. I determined to clean my body as it had never been cleaned, with the small wrapped bar of soap, and to purify my soul with all the prayers I could remember from my father’s and my husband’s cremations. This would be a fitting place to die. I had left my earthly body and would soon be joining their souls [...]. It was the murkiness of the mirror and a sudden sense of mission that stopped me. What if my mission was not yet over? I didn’t feel the passionate embrace of Lord Yama that could turn a kerosene flame into a lover’s caress. I could not let my personal dishonour disrupt my mission. There would be plenty of time to die; I had not yet burned my husband’s suit. I had not stood under the palm trees of the college campus. I extended my tongue, and sliced it. Hot blood dripped immediately in the sink. I had planned it all so perfectly. To lay out the suit, to fill it with twigs and papers. To light it, then to lie upon it in the white cotton sari I had brought from home [...]. I wanted that moment when he saw me above him as he had last seen me, naked, but now with my mouth open, pouring blood, my red tongue out. (pp. 117–118)

*Jasmine*’s picaresque progress across American society stands in high contrast to the claustrophobic and taboo-ridden *oikumene* represented by the small village in *Mother India*. If the family group constitutes the true kernel of indigenous identity, its protective and normative pale extends to the whole village (as a side effect every girl in it is considered to be a sister
to the village boys; therefore marriage between them is absolutely forbidden) and finally includes all the nation, via the spiritually hegemonic role taken over by the mother figure.

The film *Shakti* makes a reduced version of this idealising rendering of the Indian woman. Notwithstanding her courage the widowed mother Nandini fulfils a subaltern role of stubborn resistance against the tyranny of the patriarch. Migration seems to have deprived the Westernised woman of her deep spiritual power. She does not embody or endorse any more national consciousness, also given the catachrestic return to backward feudal type we have to assume in the depiction of traditional rural life. Even the time-honoured persona of the male black sheep is downgraded from the issue of individual social protest, possibly reaching to embryonic forms of class struggle (in *Mother India* Birju’s revolt against the Lal and the time-honoured conventions of village life constitutes a pattern of pre-Naxalite insurgency) to organised crime. Thus the rebellious *dakoi* turns into a *goonda*, and the redeeming conceit of nationhood is disproved as internecine war between relatives in neighbouring village.

The *swadeshi* discourse of collective responsibility within the community is downloaded to mafia-like declarations of protective patronage: the village forfeits emancipation. Such an awful loss in shared identity and heritage of collective symbols and myths lays bare the background of raw power concealing behind the nationalist strategy that invested family structure and its relationships with strong political significance. *Shakti* underlines how the breaking point in this imagined frame isolates the authority of the patriarch from its feminine counterpart and from the tremendous load of myths and values related to her purifying presence. The very title of the film should be understood in sheer terms of nostalgic and weakened quotation, one reminiscent of a lost age of national hopes and numinous symbols of fruitful sacrifice. Although the term *shakti* seems to intimate an all-pervading power of feminine reactive strength, the traditional eulogy is de facto confined to lines of narration which emphasise a personal act of subaltern resistance, rather than tracing a common path to nationhood through the agency of myth. The numinous term *shakti* folds back from the high-minded commitments of nationalist discourse to hybridised notions of feminine identity. It spells defeat, given the collapse in the expatriate imagination of the link between gendered relationships within the household community and the coterminous conception of nationhood as the extended family kept together by untainted domestic values. The nationalised woman partakes of a double nature, if we recognise, as we should, in the *shakti* figure the “naked and fearsome” presence that “initiates a process of arousal and then
transforms itself into nature”\textsuperscript{10}. We can trace out such pattern quite easily in \textit{Mother India} and also find its residual strength at work in \textit{Shakti}. To me the breaking point occurs in \textit{Jasmine}, or even in the previous \textit{Wife}, two novels that impose a truncated view of Hindu femininity, through the agency of migration. Of course, we have with \textit{Jasmine} the figuration of a traditional naked and arousing \textit{shakti}, but we might sorely miss the nurturing side of her sacralised identity. Instead of providing the family with food (and the nation with a well-needed legacy of collective belonging) in \textit{Jasmine} the migrating \textit{shakti} kills revengefully her would-be seducer or, in \textit{Wife}, her too obtuse husband. Her truncated attitude discards nurturing and eludes any reference to public and national symbols. This dramatic change in role and imagined function requires self-nurturing instead of self-sacrifice: it is \textit{Jasmine} again and finally the \textit{gori} fiancée in \textit{Ae Fond Kiss}. Both of them, a migrant \textit{deshi} widow and a Catholic divorcee, move well beyond their own cultural and gendered \textit{rekhas}, away from their circumscribing villages, either real or metaphorical, and from communal impositions.

\textbf{ACTS OF MIMICRY AND THE FAILED HERO}

A young man living in a village near Calcutta loses his job as a clerk in a jute mill and reaches the big city in search of financial help from his former college mates. However, a further and half-concealed reason drives him there: he wants to meet again his village fiancée, an independent girl who jilted him for a supposedly rich urban husband, but one who reveals himself to be a drunkard absentee and a cheat. As a matter of fact the film, whose essential plot has been inspired by a short story by the American writer O. Henry (“The Gift of the Magi”, 1906), turns around the double lending of a raincoat — hence its title, \textit{Raincoat} (2004, film director Rituparno Ghosh) —, and a long conversation between the two former lovers. They tell each other a huge mouthful of lies, to conceal that both of them are broke and steeped in existential failure. The woman lives in a seedy old mansion, maybe a faded heritage of the Raj, whose rent has been unpaid for a long time and whose cumbersome furniture makes the place percolate into a bleak lumber room or godown.

The main agency at work in the narrative texture of the film reminds me of a bedtrick\textsuperscript{11}, given that the two main characters mimic a social status

\textsuperscript{10.} T. Sarkar, \textit{Hindu Wife}, 267.

\textsuperscript{11.} Perhaps I should rather speak of a raincoat-trick, seeing how the contents of
they are not entitled to. As I have written elsewhere, the very act of bedtricking implies, or rather requires as such, a metamorphosis or relocation of being deeper than a mere replacement of identities. It suggests that someone has grown to a new and more prestigious location of identity, so as to conceal the deferring interlude represented by difference. However, such agency of concealed relocation is grounded upon an act of mimicry, one that intends, as V.S. Naipaul has taught us, to fill the blank core of nothingness out of which the postcolonial frame of being has been shaped. To me the bedtrick deploys compensating features of personification, whose scope is the embodiment of an imagined self. Of course, this procedure of relocation does not evade the loaded notion of authority, given how such refusal of deferring (according to the meaning of putting off) needs to be accomplished through a hegemonic deferring (according to the meaning of yielding to someone).

In a nutshell, an unsatisfied or failed self submits himself, or herself, to a more glamorous imagined persona: they mimic the very authority that has divested them of their true and original beings, or, in postcolonial terms, have marginalised them within the modernising and urbanite archives of the new nationhood. The fictional archetype concerning such procedure of substitution is obviously found in the short stories of *Miguel Street*, 1959, by V.S. Naipaul. In his groundbreaking book the writer lays bare how a failed colonial self may authorise himself in mystifying terms of mimicry. He imagines his own identity by deferring, that is by yielding, to a purpose of pretended self-fulfilment. For instance, the eponymous character in the short story “Bogart” moulds for himself an imagined mimic self after his charismatic American namesake, Humphrey Bogart. He moves and speaks “just like an actor [...] hardly opening his lips, and his accent was getting slightly American”. Similarly the two main characters in the film *Raincoat* assume a fictionalised identity, the man donning the cloth of an emerging

its pockets are the agencies that regulate both revelation (the woman finds there a copy of the letter asking for financial help his friend sent around to his former school batch) and the self-effacing yielding to mimicry and falsehood: the woman plays for the last time the assumed role of the high lady sitting in purdah, by giving him her dowry jewels, on the pretence that all the cash available in the house is with her husband. The point is that on being previously left alone on the premises for a while, her village friend meets the landlord and discovers the sad truth about her. So he pays the rent for her out of the purview money his friends have given him.

and well-to-do TV producer selling slots around, whereas the woman plays the glamorous role of the high-born lady in the forlorn castle.

In other words, they discard for a while their real selves, in order to cover up their failures in life. They imitate someone else and by doing so they defer (that is, they put off) a possible issue of mutual acknowledgement. As a matter of fact, their behaviour of lying mimicry reflects the widening gap in contemporary India between the new urbanite classes, thriving on computer engineering, advertising, TV serials and the rustic, or rural, heritage of the traditional village. They are just backward individuals who have been dropped behind in the forward race. We may find similar instances of regression from pristine authority or status at the turn of the twentieth century in the bitter contrast between tradition and the encroaching Western presence, especially such as deployed in the filmic renditions of several Bengali fictional classics, these including Choker Bali and Devdas. The former deals with such momentous issues as the plight of widows, the crumbling authority of the mother figure, the so-called bara ma, within the old-fashioned joint family and finally the confused, and confusing, hegemonic presence of English culture.

In the Bengali classic love story Devdas, the progressive decadence of the landed gentry (the so-called zamindars) is featured externally, through the ruinous inability deployed by the hero, who cannot step over the stifling rules of tradition when his family refuses flatly to accept as a perspective bride the woman he loves. This happens because of the culture of shame, given how the girl, who is barely sixteen in the original fiction, is a neighbour, she being taboo as far as marriage purposes are concerned; to make matters worse she also belongs to a poor and inferior group of Brahmins. In Raincoat the two characters do not conform fully to the self-destroying acceptance of the rules imposed by a forbidding society. In particular, the woman tries almost cynically to move upward out of the stifling village, by means of a supposedly glamorous marriage. Although she will be tricked out of her hopes, the half-mutinous behaviour she adopts in discarding an inept moffusil lover makes havoc once for all of the sentimentalising and mawkish paraphernalia of all-devouring passion, such as featured in Bollywood films. However, she still runs against the tide of social respectability, whereas the man loses himself after a weak dream of romantic love and sticks to the easy

pathos of muted withdrawal and failed romance. He does so because he has missed his chances of life, these concerning both passion and social improvement; by contrast his former village girl would have taken advantage of her marriage, the only acceptable choice traditionally left to the common Indian woman striving to achieve social success (so as to join the creamy layers of Indian hierarchies). Given the contemporary modernising setting of the film, the would-be astute woman plays as a matter of fact the crucial role of the doomed courtesan, one which cannot attain true love because of her mercenary condition, even in spite of her possible sincere feelings.

Thus *Raincoat* might perhaps border the *kothi* drama, such as for instance featured in the film *Salma* (1985, film director Ramanand Sagar), if we consider how money constitutes a seminal agency throughout the story. However the scenery is radically shifted to domestic tragedy, one which thrives on the contrast between the new urbanite milieu and the increasing backwardness of the people who are left behind. By moving across such worn-out issues as the taboos of aristocratic casteism or family honour, *Raincoat* instructs stern metaphors of purview. This term (the purview of reservation, in current officialese) designates literally the reservation benefits, these including jobs and education, that should reach the really backward classes with the object of improving their station in life.

Although couched in terms of benevolence, the financial help his former batch metes out to the failed hero goes beyond the simple private sphere. It should rather be inscribed as a more impersonal gesture, one that mimics diegetically the politics of nationhood, its partition of the identities in non-backwards and backwards (OBC, that is the Other Backwards) and the measures of controlled redemption. Apparently a story of dedicated and faded love, *Raincoat* deals as a matter of fact with more momentous issues of social belonging and final exclusion. The emotional side of the film communicates however the plot to the audience in terms of dialogic resemblance with the tearful pathos that imparts *Devdas* its dramatic power. The male character seems to me fully steeped in the aura of too a passive attitude, one that has been haunting Bengali men, at least since the fiction of Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, the author of the well-known *Devdas*, but also the more complex *Srikanta*\(^{14}\). Men at a loss when the final decision concerning the woman they love comes to the fore, I would say.

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\(^{14}\) It was published in four parts between 1917 and 1933. *Srikanta* is a passive spec- tator and an idealising lover, who finally gets free of any respectable social convention by yielding to an inferior form of love.
By refusing whatever reactive action the failed male in *Raincoat* actually updates the destructive behaviour that his too emotional ancestor, Devdas, inflicts on himself, when he cannot marry his Paro/Parvati. Devdas drinks himself to death, whereas the backward dreamer in *Raincoat* renounces the purview his friends have given him; he does that as to grant the woman he loves some financial respite. Thus the mimic dialogue in the film mimics in its turn the agencies of social welfare now at work in India: if the two marginalised lovers have not been able to keep up the pace with the surrounding changes in the social sphere, their only hope lies in the purview depending on the labelled location meted out to them by the national archive. By being backwards they are de facto entitled to some endowment, so as to try a fresh start in life.

I think it would be possible to individuate here a discursive strategy that loads such intimations of individual failure within the sheer terms of a lay myth concerning power. The two characters in the film *Raincoat* yield their future perspectives to an act of benevolent external purview, which changes their intentions to a submitted politics of reservation. They do not transcend type but are offered, or offer each other, such help that puts off any possibility of upward movement in their lives. By being reduced to the status of confirmed backwards they are obliged to act as the mimic men they are; she poses as the mock high lady through an imposed parody of *purdah*, whereas the man endorses his emotional passivity by a gift of money than would suggest regressive stubbornness of behaviour rather than sublime generosity of soul.

The attitude of joint mimicry adopted by the two characters extends to the involuntary mutual act of purviewing that concludes the main narrative sequence in the film. To maintain to the last their assumed identities they behave with respect to each other as unconcerned donors; the man in particular mirrors back the benevolent attitude his friends have shown him. Of course his too generous donation may be viewed as a sheer act of love, a romantic sacrifice to the memory of the past. We should be able to detect a double pattern of authority behind his act, whose terms mimic acts of institutionalised purview (one which authorises the backwardness of the woman as her filed away identity in the archive of the Hindu nationhood) and at the same time start a process of compensating strategies which culminate into a stridharmic return to feminine type. She embodies the woman who gives away her dowry jewels, the very symbols of her auspicious bridal identity. By yielding to this supreme gesture of feminine sacrifice she accomplishes the *vratas* a faithful wife must dedicate to her husband: her behaviour restores necessity as a dharmonic duty through the implied evocative quotation of myth.
However, both lovers negate their separate failures in life, but pretend social success. They are given to imitation because of their assumed identities, but their acts of mimicry transcend whatever individual significance. As a matter of fact they even move beyond the intimations of correct behaviour suggested by the implied reference to Hindu myth. Their generosity mimics the institutional agencies that provide support for the backwards. Their benevolent attitude, one which is shared by the helping friends, reflects the “mandalisation” of the contemporary Indian society, a national strategy of reservation and purview for the so-called backwards. However, a further identity trick lurks behind the pun of mimicry. The filmic text introduces passages of intratextual identification within the cultural borders of the narrative. The Indian audience are invited to perceive the male protagonist as an embodiment of the god Krishna. As a matter of fact, the journey to Calcutta of the protagonist leaving his native village is perceived visually by the audience through the agency of a running train, whereas a bodiless voice sings the love-born sadness of Radha, pining for her divine lover, Krishna, who has left her alone.

Two diegetic moments juxtapose here, since the running train illustrates the kinetically spatial dimension that moves forward the story-board from the native and rustic village to urbanite Calcutta. In the meantime the Indian, or rather Hindu audience, are emotionally induced to adopt a further and potential deepness of meaning, one that focuses the narrative to come in terms of failed love and final separation. The external and bodiless voice conceptualises the image, gives it an added value which transcends the mere internal organisation of the narrated events and achieves a concealed meaning that we should recognise as a myth of foundation. Krishna and Radha, if we consider their burning but forbidden passion, constitute an imagined figuration of the two heroes of Raincoat, but one quite different from the agency of mimicry which defers their autodiegetic discourses to a distanced urbanite milieu.

The return to a pristine type advocated functionally by myth goes beyond the mere issue of archetypal fixity, since it involves the audience as the reactive agency that re-inscribes the characters, and the sections of their life stories which are being narrated under our eyes, into sequences beyond the sheer random order of chance. If myth takes care of casualty, it re-tells at the same time a story already known, whose main features are familiar to their audience. Of course repetition engenders ritual. Such is the case for instance of the Hindu mythologicals: the films that narrate the stories of the gods are perceived by a devoted audience as they were a darshan, a manifestation of the divinity. Consequently, the visual act becomes an act of prayer and devotion, no more an image that evokes a
story, but the story itself. Such process implies a transformation, given that the addressee becomes someone different, he identifies himself with the god he is watching and at the same time worshipping.

Consequently the Hindu spectator-cum-devotee becomes de facto the author of the text he is watching: by addressing the visual image of the god as the god himself, he changes his own identity. The usual Sanskrit and Hindi term for a visual performance grounded on the sacred texts and the myths concerning the gods is *lila*. However, a *lila* may also refer to the more or less playful activity of creation practised by a god. *Lila* is also the true image, one we are not usually able to perceive, whereas the world of unsubstantial appearance is the delusive field of our daily experience. The visual text speaks of a world which is beyond the frame constituted by mere appearance (*maya*). In other words, the representation becomes true when it leaves the reality we live in: the *yatra* (pilgrimage, roughly) here is heavenward, rather than on earth. The seminal shift we have to deal with concerns the passage from intratextuality to hypertextuality, from an image deploying reference to an image which should be understood as true reality. The statutory aim of the image, one that constitutes an introductory normative sequence within the film, does not defer to the development in the lives of the characters which are involved, but refers atemporally to the prescriptive autonomy of the iconic representation. As a consequence, it transcends a mere descriptive function, beyond any free turn or twist in the emotional biography of the characters. The transition from a biosphere to a semic sphere loads dramatically the taxonomic frame into which the leading characters are inscribed. The audience are introduced to pre-determined existential failures rather than being thrilled by the up-and-downs of a freely evolving story of passionate love. In other words, the auto-referential status of the prescriptive image requires, or rather entails, its presence as a frame giving the story its diegetic codes and its norms of interpretation.

*Romeo and Juliet* would be perceived by us in a quite different way if Shakespeare would have started his play by comparing the hero and the heroine to an encoding image of transgressive love, one subject to measures of punition. The erasure of an evolving biography of passion would deflect the role of chance within the story to a deterministic agency of cause, since the deconstructive image would lead us to imagine the story-line in terms of unavoidable loss. The latest filmic version of *Devdas* (2002, film director Sanjay Leela Bhansali) constitutes a valuable case in point. A slight hint both in the original fiction and in the 1955 film (director Bimal Roy) is turned into a semiosphere, that is it transfers the love story of Devdas and Paro into a pattern of obliged synchrony between the two
characters and their iconic counterparts. By being referred to a former and higher identity, the couple of lovers becomes part of an uninterrupted sequence of meaning and communicative construction of a text already endowed with its own notions of here and there.

Following on the original version, the 1955 film introduces a small group of Bauli itinerant singers that bless Paro and her feeling of love by evoking the sacred names of Radha and Krishna. Such hint makes an implied namesake of Paro, so as to instruct her love-story with Devdas according to numinous patterns of separation and painful distance. The 2002 filmic version elaborates astutely on this inchoative reference, so as to transfer the two lovers Paro and Devdas from the biosphere to the semi-sphere, from life to Hindu myth. The seminal meeting of love between Paro and Devdas takes place at night in a wood and along a stream. Paro is on her way to fetch water when a thorn pierces her bare foot. The ensuing rescue by Devdas yields to a multiplying frame of signifying quotations, which may include an eighteenth-century Bundi painting (that represents a maid in a princely garden with a lady whose foot has been pierced by a thorn: the maid is assisting the princess, who is standing on one leg, while the leg with the offended foot is kept in a horizontal position, one reminiscent of the dance-like movement of Paro in the love-scene of the film Devdas) and a miniature of the same period from Central India, featuring a hero removing a thorn from the foot of a heroine.

The two characters in Devdas are thus relocated in space and time; or rather they are de facto subtracted to whatever reference to realistic representations of life. They are instead included authoritatively into the strategic archives of a hindutva-like frame applied to aesthetics. Such conforming return to type through heroic characterisation leads to a further step in their reduced metamorphosis. The silent scene of imagined seduction between the hero Devdas and the heroine Paro (one also obliquely reminiscent of the Khajurao so-called erotic sculptures, in which a woman stung in her foot by a scorpion is enflamed in the flesh by the power of adirasa) is given new significance by an external voice, whose song equates the stream in the filmic text to the river Yamuna (“passion rages on the Yamuna river”), the background of the games of love once played by Radha and Krishna.

In the meanwhile, throughout a sequence of alternate scenes, Paro’s mother is dancing the dance of Radha in front of Devdas’ household, on the false belief that she is celebrating the promise of marriage of her daughter with Devdas. The iterated reference to Krishna and Radha constitutes myth as an agency of dynamic synchrony, that is as an image of truth which communicates the filmic text in terms of norm, given the coherence
of the represented incidental events with a generative frame. Consequently, the Yamuna River is the real here and now behind the nameless stream in the film: simultaneously the two lovers must be identified as personae within a pre-constituted story. They are heroes that enact a story of which they are not the autonomous protagonists. The truncated intimation of future bliss that lurks behind the sophisticated imagery of passion and desire does not entail chance, or a supposed malevolence on the part of a ruling god. As a matter of fact, it suggests a dharmic organisation of the text, a stoppage of whatever evolution in the life of the characters, who are not allowed to step beyond the frame of myth.

LONDONI HUSBANDS AND THE FORGOTTEN WIVES

_Sylheti term for Bangladeshis who live in London, a play on words, dhoni, meaning rich._

_Salaam Brick Lane (Tarquin Hall, 2005)_

Migration splits families, but also emphasises the so-called double standard between men and women. Male migrants may leave behind them their _deshi_ wives and re-marry in the new land, possibly with _gori_ women. As such they constitute a category of their own, a specific and recognisable group within the larger mass of Eastern migrants, most of them originating from Pakistan or Bangladesh. They are usually known by the extended appellation of _Londoni_, an ethnic adjective turned to noun that apparently assumes the mixed point of view of those who has been left behind, usually to a pining and stunted existence. In fact, the name _Londoni_ reflects both the prestige that the former colonised still may attach to the once ruling metropolitan centre, the sun around which the colonial system of lesser planets revolved, and simultaneously the bitter awareness of extraneous, and often culturally polluting, ways of life.

Consequently, a _Londoni_ identity percolates more or less openly into the ambiguous status of the foreigner, one who is superior and inferior at the same time, one who might be despised, although he has substantially the responsibility of our well-being. The glamorous side of such controversial aspect of migrancy suggests a presumptive condition of relative affluence. However, to a privileged social station at home corresponds a low or marginal rank abroad. For instance, to consider a typical issue in contemporary migration, Edo Nigerian prostitutes coming to Italy enjoy a dominant role in their native
Benin State, both in terms of economic power and social influence, where they are known as Italos, although their unsavoury profession abroad. As a matter of fact, the general term that indicates in Nigerian Pidgin English a migrant, especially to England, seems to be “have been”, a further indication of a relatively upgrading passage into a sphere of wider possibilities.

Of course, a Londoni, however successful he might be, is still a Paki in the derogative lexicon of British racist discourse. Nowadays the term Paki indicates a South Asian (or better, a subcontinental) migrant at large. In any case, one should not minimise the original emphasis of the Muslim background which is definitely implied by Paki. Thus, my analytical claim would refer as a matter of fact to contemporary migrants from Pakistan or Bangladesh, since it seems likely to me that such terms inscribing alien presence to imagined ethnicity should be necessarily referred to actual and concrete stages in migration. A similar re-grouping of South Asian identities took place in Australia, when at the turn of the nineteenth century North Indian and Afghani drivers were brought there to take care of the camels to be employed through the great Australian desert. Since then subcontinental Eastern migrants have been traditionally claimed in everyday language as Afghani. I should add, as a confirming side reference, that in my part of Italy (Turin, Piedmont) the migrants from South Italy were and still are collectively labelled as Napuli, that is people coming from Naples, whatever their regional provenance might be.

Then Muslim Londonis highlight the focus of my discursive representation concerning migrancy in postcolonial expatriate literature and films. A suitable starting point takes us back to the film East is East (1999): when at odds with his English wife the Pakistani migrant threatens to call to England his native “first” wife. We have no further information concerning her, except that perhaps she was left in Pakistan roughly in 1947, when the Partition took place. She is a creature doomed to silence, a ghost-like presence that is sometimes instrumentally evoked as a mere deterring threat. She is but the useless extension of a forgetful husband, a patiless spouse left to cope as best as she can with her sad solitude. To catch a first glimpse of such darkened lives we have to read a sensible story collected in the volume Phoenix Fled, published originally in 1953 by the expatriate writer Attia Hosain. The plot of “Time is unredeemable” is quite simple; a newly-married man migrates to England, leaving his young spouse in a barren home. Many years pass by and she pines away her solitude, nourishing the melancholic and frustrated hope of his continually delayed return. One day, to celebrate a presumptive return, the woman buys a coat, perhaps to compete with the elegant gori rivals her secluded imagination can dimly think of.
At last her husband, who has presumably his “real” family in England, comes back for the too-postponed visit. With humble and pathetically faded coquetterie the wife tries after many years the never-worn coat in front of the mirror, only to realise that now it has become too tight to fit her aged body. Many years later the husband comes back, but just exchanges a few cursory and embarrassed words with her, before retiring to sleep in a bedroom of his own. Nothing happens in this short story, whose climatic epiphany rehearses the concise techniques of representation specific to the Urdu ghazal. The woman looking at herself in the revealing mirror reminds me of a similar and traumatic way of dealing with such acts of viewing. In a ghazal by Ghalib a couplet reads “There is you and your adorning the curls of your tresses? / Here am I and my apprehension of the distant future!”

These two verses imply a consciousness of time seen as an agency of destruction, so as to lay bare the cruel sense of separation and loneliness that is implied in the otherwise trite motif of the passing time and the decay of feminine beauty. Moreover, the pathetic attempt made by the solitary wife in the Attia Hosain’s story intimates to me the punishing effect that the very cosmetic act of embellishment has for the loved woman in a further ghazal by Ghalib, in which the futile image of the woman “[...] adorning the beauty / Behind the veil, [...] looking into the mirror” constitutes a de-constructing act of gazing, one which defuses the very act of feminine beautification. To understand my point, one should realise that mirrors were made by polishing iron plates that would usually rust. This repeated operation would scar them and leave scratches and lines. We should compare the scratched surface of the polished mirror with the beautifying coat that emphasises instead the ageing of the woman: both of them being epiphanic agencies of waste and useless effort against the devouring emptiness of time.

This sad story adjourns in prose the painful sense of failed yearning that traditionally haunts Urdu ghazals. However, its romantic feeling does not mitigate at all the bleakness of the emotional, and we suppose cultural as well, divide that separates de facto the Londoni husband and his half-forgotten wife. The very act of migrating tears their lives apart, though we should punctiliously observe that there is no progressive drifting away between them. They seem to be extraneous to each other: a sad consequence of their presumably arranged marriage, whose effects of initial

16. Ibid., 277.
estrangement have been radicalised and perpetuated by the separation consequent to the migratory act. However, no alternative choice seems to be available to the abandoned wife, one who cannot evade, in the stifling perspective assigned to her by the astute writer, the timid and dreary role of the unrequited woman. By adhering hopelessly with stubborn genetic submission to unreformed modes of conjugal behaviour the woman perpetuates the pale of traditional gendered values. Her truncated passionate life goes sedately against the absolute freedom conceded to her husband by migration: by focusing her story-line on the caged woman Attia Hosain deploys a double pattern of movement within the diegetic scheme, one that construes an elliptic (since we have just the basic information) forward movement in time so far as the husband is concerned, whereas the more detailed narrated span in the life of the wife does not include any significant events, excepting the finally revealing coat. Here absence signifies, but we can only construe passive conformity to submissive type. This seminal erasure in the script motivates as it were the authorial refusal to be involved in a direct representation of how a male migrant might live, and marry, in an alien country. No clash is suggested here between desi and videshi, between what is suitable according to tradition and the real conditions of life. This missing contrast turns the story from domestic tragedy to domesticated elegy and unproblematic acceptance. It rather matters the exquisite texture of the narration, one imparting a meaning of desperate emptiness and fatal dispossession. Indeed there is no loss or possibility of reaction: desperation arises out of sheer flatness of tone and too concise quietness of word. We are not allowed to fathom the deepness of the feeling and of the emotions involved in the situation. However such paucity should not be misunderstood for cold bareness, but should evoke in our critical response a sort of Muslim feminine decency, a genetic cultural shyness that conceals rather painfully the naked soul and the scorched heart.

Anyway, it suffices a slight turn of the authorial screw to embitter, or worse deteriorate, this elegiac perspective. In the recent novel Maps of Lost Lovers (2004), by Nadeem Aslam, a fateful allegiance to the codes of feminine izzat imposes a sort of metaphorical veil that occludes whatever possibility of feminine self-expression and mundane vel (that is, any infringement to this stern and forbidden code of behaviour). Migrant woman live in a frightened and restricted oikumene of their own, in which they are easily divorced by drunken and violent husbands, conjugal intimate relationships are reluctantly accepted for procreation and everything that does not belong to their Muslim watan is unholy and desecrating. English is not spoken or easily understood by these people, who negate constantly
the Western background in which they live. *Maps for Lost Lovers* loads with no way of escape the bitter and excluding sense of estrangement and refusal well expressed by the *Paki* persona in the opening sequence of the film *Dilwale*. England is the place for bread, not the place of birth and unbroken tradition.

Such perennial disavowal of relocation and mixed belonging should be potentially equated to further intimations towards terrorism (given that in *Maps for Lost Lovers* murder is the usual response against any breach touching Muslim rules of behaviour). By resorting to issues of systematic and repressive intolerance the migrant group in the novel refuses the lay cultural heritage represented in Indian Islam by Urdu poetry. Whereas Attia Hosain adopts the stylistic conventions and the emotional background of Urdu *ghazal* to express the loneliness of a deserted wife, whose solitary life is spent on the wrong side of Londoni migrancy, in *Maps for Lost Lovers* the continuity of tradition constitutes an agency of splitting contrast within the community and the family itself. In this novel, romance is stifled before budding extensively into stylistic pathos and emotion. We surely miss the twilight of unspent passion that haunts the pages of Attia Hosain, even if we are obliged to recognise the quasi morbidity of its atmosphere of defeat and crumbling balance in family life. On the contrary, *Maps for Lost Lovers* moves flatly beyond the nostalgic elegy of what has been lost in terms of emotions and refined discourse. The writer may re-imagine the English village in which his migrant characters live so as to load its Northern landscape with the accumulated aesthetic sensibility born out of his sophisticated native heritage, but these beautified shores, these havens harbouring clandestine naked lovers, are finally a site for murder and the concealment of corpses. Even the passion of the illicit “lost” lovers lives, ironically as it were by proxy, in the feast of butterflies, not a metaphor of self-destroying love as it is usually the case with Urdu *ghazal*, but as a distancing representation of a blind and impersonal erotic drive, a cold image substantially devoid of human pathos.

This interrupted link between past and present isolates in *Maps for Lost Lovers* the writer from the doomed destiny of his migrant characters. Not casually, in *Brick Lane* Monica Ali relocates on similar lines the stunted lives her Bangladeshi exiles live within the ethnic cage constituted by self-containing communities. Such bitter vocation to marginality just reflects failure to achieve integration within British society. Abortive intimations of growth, represented as usual by female unrest, are only possible in comparison with the sad life led in the native country by Nazneen’s sister, to whom independence just means enforced prostitution. The bit-
ter catalogue concerning humiliated womanhood reaches its apex in the sadistic treatment meted out in Map for Lost Lovers either to Muslim possessed girls (that is, in falling in love with Hindu boys) or divorced young women. Here passion is brutally made to coincide with miscegenation and too ignorant superstition instructs punishing remedies. Punishment against the transgressive couple of lovers, a second generation Pakistani, and a gori, constitutes the dramatic kernel of the film Ae Fond Kiss... Sheer passionate romance, with a taste of somehow clumsy eros, opposes in Ae Fond Kiss... the uncompromising refusal of miscegenating practices. However, the film cannot propose a feasible middle way between untutored erotic passion and the imposition of an arranged marriage. We should apparently discard the dreary discourse of izzat made by the elder sister as mere backward ranting. However, we cannot escape unwelcome feelings of uneasiness when we consider how the chronicles of real life endorse her disagreeable words of admonition. The gori woman will leave him when he is old and ill, she says, and these intimations of a bleak and forlorn future suggest the sad vision of a deserted and ailing old husband. In any case, it might be just a kiss, with no future to follow.

The juxtaposition between marriage as an arranged contract for life, within the pale and the rules of the joint family, in which authority is still held by the elders, and the individualistic, often temporary, play of passion marks the distance between East and West. It erases whatever possibility of meeting half-way and constitutes the life of the migrant as a self-contained space, almost extraneous to the external world. Paradoxically this refusal of Western ways of life seems to reproduce the British colonial reaction to India. The Anglo-Indian chose as a rule to be as alien as possible to the native resident world around him; he considered himself an exile, a prey to nostalgic and bitter regret. This practice of distancing is seen again in the stern behaviour of the deshi migrant against the modernity of the West; perhaps it is an unwelcome consequence of the previous colonial aloofness and of its inability to come to terms with the fear of cultural miscegenation. Thus self-isolating difference is the private side of hegemony, a withdrawal from hybridity as a vital network of relationships. In my own view hybridity connects together the private and the institutional spheres of life, thus allowing a sort of interrupted sequence of control along the frayed lines of colonial power. Although endangering resistance in the long run, it authorises dissimilarity within a wider frame of regulating measures. This fragile balance is disrupted in the passage from colonial order to migrancy, given how Western authority deploys hegemony without repressive military power, one previously imposing
some conformity. The family life of the Eastern migrant becomes an agency for a circumscribed power of resistance, according to the sharp distinction between life inside and outside the family circle, following the Hindu nationalist view at the end of the nineteenth century, one which emphasised the role of the woman within the house in eulogic terms of custody and unpolluted maintaining of the Hindu heritage.

This transition from the deshi to the confusing world of migrancy (mainly seen through the experience of the expatriate elite) endorses the message of the two films *Vivah* (2006) and *Namastey London* (2007). The former makes a good case in point for the eulogy of the traditional Hindu courtship and marriage. A young couple fall in love through an arranged meeting and see each other under the benevolent eyes (excepting the step-mother of the young woman) of the two families. Whereas most Bollywood romances deal with the dangers of blinding romantic love (for instance, in *Ab...Bas!*, 2004, film director Rajesh Singh, the husband reveals himself to be a sadistic and homicidal tyrant) or with the measures of repression against a too independent wife (in such cases the family circle obliges a rebellious patni to conform to type), *Vivah* focuses on the shy bliss of deshi love. His final message, when the future bride is badly burnt almost to death, runs against the implied subversive declaration of the gori woman in *Ae Fond Kiss...* (love is not necessarily for ever) or suggests a manifesto counteracting the usual family burning of the wives (the so-called kerosened wives).

We must consider these grounds, if we have to understand the subtle play between the deshi lover and the wild oats sown by the expatriate woman, the London brat, and her Muslim friend in the film *Namastey London*. The film reduces to nothingness the too cautious hints of male maverick behaviour and female insurgency against *stridharm* that spice the refused return to a Punjabi arcadia, a location which evokes the refusal of a coarse possessive presumptive husband. Vice versa, in *Namastey London* a rustic Punjabi man is tricked by the expatriate woman into a mock marriage which allows the astute plotter a safe coming back to London and to her mundane British fiancé. The reaction in the film shifts the issue of the double marriage of Eastern migrancy from a London husband to a Punjabi husband, one who the scheming woman would relegate to the background of refused India. However, *Namastey London* does not rewrite back a film like *East is East* with a vengeance: the ridiculed Punjabi husband is able to persuade his mutinous, and too clever, bride back to India, to the bliss of a rustic idyll. His spontaneous, almost naïve, wilful obstinacy against the too easy behaviour of the woman counterbalances
the crumbling authority of the traditional family circle, which is no more able to impose its unchangeable values. The Punjabi boy plays the solitary and redeeming hero in the waste land inhabited by the *gora* people, who are still seen as the unsavoury heirs to colonial contempt towards the native world. It is not casual that the match of rugby that opposes a British team to a team of NRI (non-resident Indians) would echo back the momentous match of cricket in the film *Lagaan* (2001, film director Ashutosh Gowariker): both situations are instrumental in starting a reversal of hegemony, one that moves from subaltern hybridity to autonomous and victorious resistance.

**MARRYING OFF / MARRYING OUT: THE EXPATRIATE DIASPORA FROM TRADITION**

It is well known that the arranged (or mis-) marriage constitutes a specific subgenre in the fictional discourse of the diaspora writers. Not a mainstream issue however, rather a side-effect of Bollywood dramatic romance, I would say. The most famous film *Dilwale* might be the model such fiction is grounded upon at large, even if a larger model lurks possibly behind the dramatic juxtaposition of duty and passion, family bonds and freedom of choice. Of course, I would claim the Bengali story of *Devdas* by Sarat Chandra as the noble ancestor of the contemporary plea for romantic love against the matrimonial alliance ruled by tradition. With a momentous turning-point, though, given how the failed romance in the 2002 film *Devdas* turns too easily to acceptance on the part of the male lover in *Dilwale*, who takes his bride only from the very hands of her father, as any suitable Hindustani boy is supposed to do. A recent novel from the UK diaspora changes quite radically the rules of the game, since a perspective “handsome, kind and considerate” good husband, but a tasteless one, is discarded in favour of a highly unreliable and incorrigible womaniser. The novel I refer to is *Chapatti or Chips?* (2002) by Nisha Minhas which shamelessly features a scandalous version of the rather worn-out dilemma: “Should she marry the man her parents choose? Or does she have a mind of her own?”, as the caption on the cover astutely suggests. Generously sprinkled with free sex and glamorous naked males, *Chapatti or Chips?* makes havoc of the *Devdas-Dilwale* narrative pattern, given how it erases out the caveat “Hindustani girls not do that”, a stern warning on the threshold of unchecked yielding to premarital passion, also an updated version of the stridharmic norms.
In a nutshell, one has to defer true passion until marriage (love comes after living together and not the other way round), provided that the spark will ignite the married couple; if not, a dreary life may percolate into passive resistance and even into the ritual-like murder of a husband — such as the one staged in the novel Wife by Bharati Mukherjee. As a matter of fact, the frightened timidity of a migrant Indian woman in front of an alien (and too often hostile) culture stands a long way from the easy freedom of life displayed rather exuberantly by the shameless heroine Naina in Chapatti or Chips?. It is open to debate if the sexy overtones that give the story a strong spicy flavour have been influenced by such TV sagas as Sex and the City, although it seems possible to me that a more deshi lineage might be traced back to Shobha Dé’s Strange Obsession, a pioneering novel in which scenes of sexual and possessive dominance are couched into patterns of pathological behaviour, so as to be made them titillating and palatable to the readers.

If we recognise Shobha Dé as the starting point for whatever displays of sexual overtones in the Indian novel, we should equally individuate in Bharathi Mhukerjee’s novel and short stories the seminal path that in the fictions of the diaspora has led to inchoative representations of split perspectives in the life of a migrant woman. To follow further such intimations of difficult relocation in slow progress, and setting aside the mawkish novel Arranged Marriage by Chitra Divakaruni, we must defuse Brick Lane by Monica Ali as the ultimate narrative outcome of the secluded migrant woman still keeping on the safe side of the rekha of transgression, beyond which stretches the wild expanse of Western life.

To make a last point it would be possible to detect in Brick Lane a foretaste of the sexual galore to come, when the female protagonist, a Muslim young woman, considers with keen interest the virile body of the fundamentalist leader in implied disparaging equation with her not too glamorous husband. The figure of the conventional Indian husband is finally relegated to a blurred and flimsy background in Chapatti or Chips?, in which the assets of the presumptive husband as a lover are cynically evaluated by the scapegoat Dave:

Dave looked him up and down, not bad. Couldn’t pick his own woman though, could he? Oh no, Mummy and Daddy had to help him. That’s not a man, that’s a cretin. Nice shoes though. Obviously got a bit of money. But money won’t satisfy Naina in the bed department. You don’t get many orgasms to a pound these days. Dave glanced to Ashok’s crotch, Naina would have been disappointed. (p. 445)
The suitable boy gets definitely the backstage in a passage which is parodically reminiscent of the traditional act of inquisitive gazing Indian brides in pectore are subjected to when introduced to the bridegroom's family.

A fresh infringement against the narrative codes of the split approach to arranged marriage takes place in the sudden elopement of Naina with Dave, a step which Devdas and the male hero in Dilwale refuse to consent to, albeit the forceful pressure exercised by their feminine counterparts, either the beloved in the former case or even her mother in the latter instance. When the twisting plot requires a choice (as happens in the ending events of Chapatti or Chips?) the conformed fictional standard opts as a rule for the sedate suitor against the naughty lover. If such is the solution in the film Monsoon Wedding (2001, film director Mira Nair), in which the “arranged” bride comes to reason after having sown her wild oats, in Chapatti or Chips?, the homely (to misquote rather maliciously the lexicon of the Sunday matrimonials) perspective husband is discarded, or jilted, in a whiff as a bore and an inadequate sexual performer.

It should be quite obvious by now that the novel Chapatti or Chips? turns inside out the staple narrative scheme embodied by the film Dilwale. It is a sort of thematic part run wildly amok in a frenzy of sexual intoxication. This procedures stretches to its utmost boundaries the Swiss sequence in Dilwale, when the two will-be lovers are stranded alone in the midst of the country. Although an exotic nowhere, such location does not allow the possibility of breaking off the moral laws; the very scene of nocturne drunkenness (the heroine quaffs down a drop too much, in order to fight the Swiss winter) just evokes a tipsy exuberance in dance and movement.

There is no comparison with the mundane promiscuity that haunts the pages of Chapatti or Chips?, one which absorbs the differentiating persona of the Indian expatriate into a conforming and disobedient jumble of Gucci or Versace deluxe items of too fashionable dresses and soiled bed sheets. This novel shows no shortage of Indian expatriate girls on the spree carousing, in a second-generation assimilated way of life that has definitely chosen chips instead of a rustic chapatti. As a matter of fact, one could turn chips native by calling them aloo tikka, or something like that. What I actually mean is that an arranged marriage is waiting for the wild expatriate girl at the end of her passage towards the bliss of freedom and modernity. Such might be the case with the Indo-American novels on the subject, such as For Matrimonial Purposes (2003) by Kavita Daswani, whose catchword sounds like this, in perfect Bollywood style: happiness and marriage are separate experiences.
This return of the expatriate she-rebel (or he-rebel, if we consider the film *Ae Fond Kiss...*) to type is too brusquely truncated in the ending sequences of *Chapatti or Chips*, in which the matrimonial event jumps to uncompromising mutiny:

...and they both jumped into the car, and skidded off before realization dawned on the disillusioned crowd, realization that a thousand years of tradition had been broken by one of their Indian girls in the name of true love. Their strict system had fallen to a force of nature that nothing can truly bind. (p. 447, emphasis in the text)

Indeed, the seeming, albeit too loud, seriousness of such a loaded manifesto is given the lie by the successive authorial remarks that illustrate the would-be sad feelings racking the mind of the jilted quasi-husband:

And Ashok, the one that this would be hit the hardest of all, just watched as his beautiful bride vanished with a white stranger before his very eyes. But in a way, he had never really had her in the first place. Let’s face it, he didn’t even know his bride’s favourite chocolate bar, or music, or film, or favourite colour, he knew one thing and one thing only — she was beautiful and she was gone. (p. 447)

A reader should not allow himself to be led astray by the tongue-in-cheek ring of the passage, considering how it negates de facto the Indian notion that the less you are familiar with your chosen bride or bridegroom, the more your alliance is liable to be a happy one, horoscopes consenting to that. Maybe a tempest in a cup of tea, but the emphasis laid here on “true love” goes beyond feminism and invokes the refusal of the philogenetic alliance such as claimed by Indian tradition. It would certainly be inappropriate to identify the above statement, assessing “true love” as “a force of nature”, in terms of post-Darwinian eugenetics, one that shifts however the values from the group to the individual. We could speak more sedately of a mutinous attitude, whose roots are to be sought in a cultural, and generational as well, gap between East and West.

The incumbent and somewhat menacing presence of the traditional joint family and its hierarchies that still lay heavy on the fugitive migrant *Jasmine*,

17. We should compare the ending matrimonial twist in *Chapatti or Chips* with the conforming return to deshi marriage in the film *Namastey London*. 
the relocating heroine depicted by Bharati Mukherjee, one moving her first steps in the USA within the circle of the Indian network of family and hierarchy, are summarily disposed of in the last chapter of *Chapatti or Chips?*, just before the marriage they did not celebrate, “[Naina, Kate, Leena] had refused the offer of sleeping on the floor listening to farting aunties and wailing children” (p. 435). Such disavowal of a deshi surrounding and hegemonic background in the life of a second-generation migrant is on the foreground in a further Indo-British novel, *Un*arranged *Marriage* (2001) by Bali Rai.

Here we have a male character moving on the dangerous and cutting edge of mutinous behaviour:

Harry and Ranjit were waiting for me. Waiting to take me to Derby, to a wedding — my wedding. A wedding that I hadn’t asked for, that I didn’t want, to a girl who I didn’t know. They must have sat there waiting for me, laughing to themselves about how I had finally succumbed to their way of thinking, their way of life. A good Punjabi man at last, after years of being a tearaway, a rebel, a junkie and a philander. At least, that was what they had called me at various times. (p. 9)

Set in a conservative, and rather backward as well, Punjabi family of migrant Sikh Jat stock, the novel moves on grounds akin to the films *Dilwale* (particularly in the interlude that shifts the scenery from Asian England to rustic Punjab) and *Ae Fond Kiss...* Its thematic background includes different interlocked interstitial slices of contemporary British mongrel society, focusing however on the claustrophobic heritage, imbued with casteism and Eastern racism, that still haunts the communities of subcontinental migrants. As a matter of fact, the supposed and self-styled purity of the Jat tradition, and its ways of life, which are considered to be superior to the corruption of the West and its unclean and tainted women, conceals instead blind authority in the family circle, crass ignorance and retrogressive isolation.

However, the British mixed way of life that constitutes the only feasible alternative open to the migrant moves dangerously on the bitter hedge of hard-won respectability and lower middle-class survival. In *Un*arranged *Marriage* the refusal of stifling tradition implies and requires a radical passage towards individual ripeness, well beyond the sexual extravagance flaunted with mimic impudence in *Chapatti or Chips?*. At the same time *Un*arranged *Marriage* deconstructs as it were the notion itself of hybridity in contemporary migration: its message of disavowal imposes a nasty turn in the heuristic myth of the return to deshi type, such as expressed in the films *Dilwale* or *Swades: We, the People* (2004, film director Ashutosh Gowariker).
In particular the latter film celebrates the return of the expatriate scientist to a Punjabi village ridden with casteism, poverty and backwardness (there is no electric light) in terms not of modernising redemption for the community, but above all as the cultural and spiritual regeneration of a Westernised Hindu. Both the novel and the film seem to indicate that no intermediate choice would be possible between the two un congenial extremes represented by the Eastern and Western ways of life. As a matter of fact the film Swades relocates the periphery of the postmodern discursive strategies at the very, and half-forgotten, margin of the new and shining India. Such a nostalgic cultural mapping clashes with the Punjabi interlude that in (Un)arranged Marriage makes fun of the healing powers attributed to the so-called return of the native.

Instead of promoting ethnical purity, the novel emphasises high hybridity. The ultimate borderline concerning the unchecked mix of Asian, different types of gorah and kaleh people are defined through the girl Sarah:

Maxine was Sarah’s half sister. Her father was black, whereas Sarah’s was white. She had a kid brother too, Mickey, who was half-Spanish. I suppose it was quite a mix, her family, but it didn’t bother me. Our school was full of mixed-race kids and brothers and sisters who shared only a mum or dad in common. Or they were part of two families who had been thrown together. I thought it was brilliant, all that kind of stuff. (p. 47)

Izzat is the only flimsy screen that the Punjabi community can deploy through the agency of the joint family against such miscegenating confusion. Of course, this act of resistance cannot support any issues of mutuality on the dangerous edge of chosen difference on the part of the unchangeable migrant. Such radical exploration of estrangement generates however more interstitial mobility rather than productive chaos. As a matter of fact in (Un)arranged Marriage oppressive monologic culture still obliges the mutinous son to live in a condition of surreptitious concealment. Indeed, we might compare his way of life to the submerged existence of the clandestine migrant, one who does not exist officially.

The coercive authority of the ethnic family refuses negotiation, and by doing so it replaces the authority of Western nationhood as the source of relentless power. This vision of projected control and continual marginality also articulates the impossibility of substituting communicative love (not the sexual galore exploding in Chapatti or Chips?) for the fugitive migrant losing his own cultural norms. As a consequence, Western individualism seems to dominate interpersonal relationships, whereas the
Authoritarian hegemony of the homogenous migrant group relocates from the former colonial periphery to the contemporary metropolitan centre the disorder of communality.

Such rebounding of conflicts and clashes from East to West and vice versa emphasises the existential side of chaos in the experience of the migrant, so as to generate at the same time a purview of hybridisation in the coercive norms that rule the national archives. Communality between the migrant groups maintains alterity as the value that discriminates identities. Violence stands high as a paralysis of memory, a chaos that destroys multiplicity and finally endorses hybridisation not as a third space in-between difference, but as a transferred agency of control engendering subaltern marginality.

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