

# Cinema as Family Romance

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ABSTRACT [150 words]

This essay analyzes the narratives and iconographies of India embedded in a trilogy of blockbuster Hindi films from the 1970s: Deewar (1975), Trishul (1978), and Shakti (1982). These films represent some of the decade's aspirations as well as its repressions that together constitute its public fantasies. Their narratives provide access to the political unconscious of modern India revealing the profound anxieties that pervaded the public culture of the decade. The essay explores the extent to which the traumas of the decade were displaced on the family and the crisis in political culture was recast in social terms as a Family Romance in popular Hindi film. It analyzes Deewar's tensions at narrating and containing an incendiary critique of the decade, and it exposes the "revisions" to this film's masterplot as they were rescripted in Trishul and Shakti. The essay concludes with proposing the social function of cinema as a Family Romance.

## Cinema as Family Romance<sup>1</sup>

Hindi films can be regarded as cotemporary folklore. And a folk hero, in any period, in any decade, is a personification of the moral values of that decade; he reflects the collective fantasies of the time.

—Javed Akhtar (recorded in Kabir 72)

### I. Introduction

This essay analyzes the narratives and iconographies of India embedded in a trilogy of blockbuster Hindi films from the 1970s: Deewar (1975; d. Yash Chopra), Trishul (1978, d. Yash Chopra), and Shakti (1982, d. Ramesh Sippy). All three were scripted by Salim Khan and Javed Akhtar; all three cast Amitabh Bachchan as a character named Vijay, and all three mobilize the family as a topos around which the nation's imaginary is structured and on which its pressing anxieties are projected. Deewar and Trishul were blockbusters; Shakti is regarded a film to rival Sippy's Sholay (1975), though it never quite achieved the latter film's outsize achievement at the box office where Sholay remains the #1 all-time top grosser adjusted for inflation (ibos.network.com). These films represent some of the decade's aspirations as well as its repressions that together I call its public fantasies. Through a reading of these blockbusters, this essay explores the extent to which the traumas of the decade were displaced on the family and the crisis in political culture was recast in *social* terms as a Family Romance in popular Hindi film.

For reasons that will become evident shortly, films such as Deewar invert the nation's central political conflicts in terms of the family and reframe it around its most

cherished social belief—namely, the sanctity of motherhood.<sup>2</sup> In this inversion, the oppositional culture of political life is represented as infecting private life as well, and both are revealed unstable—even combustible. Rather than resolving conflict, the mother is placed as the source and center of it both in political life (where she is symbol of the nation) and in private life (where she is represented, often in highly sentimental terms, as the center of the family).

The biological family and the symbolic nation-as-family become sites of mutual threat in 1970s Hindi cinema, each destabilizing the other in cinema's representation of the period. These narratives of popular cinema, I argue, provide access to the political unconscious of modern India in striking and contestatory ways revealing what the political theorist Michael Rogin in the context of Cold War US cinema identifies as the "register of anxiety" that pervaded the public culture of the decade (Rogin 238). The nation's political unconscious, like that of human subjects, speaks in symbols in order to evade the strenuous repression of the nation's conscious, and cinema's use of formal symbolism renders it the medium most capable of expressing and evading the apparatus of repression especially characteristic in the decade of the Emergency. The tools of psychoanalysis prove particularly useful in interpreting cinema's symbolic language and in uncovering the mechanics of repression and displacement so central to the public fantasies of the decade.<sup>3</sup>

In a series of wildly popular blockbusters such as Salim-Javed's Deewar-Trishul-Shakti triptych, popular Hindi cinema imagined the social geography of India, addressed its problems, idealized their solutions, and—to borrow a phrase from Laura Mulvey—generally became the primal scene of many of independent India's modern mythologies.<sup>4</sup>

Appearing a few months before the Emergency when the myth of the nation appeared to have devoured its young, Deewar's manifest content initially appears conciliatory if not downright celebratory of the state. It is, after all, a story of a boy who is unjustly rendered homeless, arrives penniless in the metropolis, and nevertheless makes a home and a fortune for himself. When it is discovered that his wealth is the result of smuggling operations, the state comes down hard, and the man is shot by his younger brother, a righteous cop. Both subject and state get their moments of triumph, though in the end, it is the collective, in the form of the state, that prevails over the individual who is punished.

However, rather than restoring the nation's myth of opportunity and justice, Deewar exposes its collapse and uncovers a form of violence so grotesque that it is displaced onto the family. Here, the latent narrative is one of a mother who desires her son, commissions his murder when her unspeakable desire is brought to light, and a state that rewards her for it. In short, the film rescripts the Oedipal drama from Jocasta's point of view with her desires and agency at the center. In this script the victim is criminalized and the criminal rendered the victim. However, the ironies of this displacement are cued throughout the film, and Deewar's family violence on the child is widely understood to symbolize the state's upon its citizens. Uncovering some of these acts of displacement in Deewar and their revisions in Trishul and Shakti exposes both the social work that the cinema did *in* India and the social work it did *for* the nation.

An important vein of scholarship has posited popular Hindi cinema as a site that produces and reinforces the ideology of the state, a point developed in an influential study by Madhava Prasad who argues for "cinema as an institution that is part of the

continuing struggles within India over the form of the state" (Prasad 9). A host of books with "nation" in their title or subtitle make similar claims that condense all possible "Indias" under the term nation.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to these works that regard the "nation" and "state" as largely interchangeable, this study insists on distinguishing between the two formations that it regards as fundamentally different and even divergent.

The state refers to those political and administrative components of modern polity that have the power and authority to govern. The nation, in contrast, is the set of imaginative constructions that, ideally, are congruent with the enterprise of the state and underwrite its governance, but more commonly contest and correct the practices of the state. The nation, in this formulation, is both more and less than the state in key ways: it is the repository of ideals and ambitions—not all homogenous—that precede the formation of the state; it can create the state, but it also contests it, diverges from it, or coalesces into it on some issues and diverges from it over others. "We have to labour and to work, and work hard, to give reality to our dreams," urged Nehru during Independence, clarifying the difference between the two concepts at stake (Nehru 2). The state marks a "reality" that is often compromised; the nation, its "dreams" that are also possibly its nightmares.

In this act of collective dreaming, popular cinema plays a role that is both a revision of reality and a reclamation of its originary impulses. It neither fully represents the state nor the nation as the aforementioned scholars posit: rather, popular cinema in my reading is a contact zone *between* the two, at times corroborating and at others contesting the formation of both in the construction of an ever shifting narrative of "India." Popular cinema provides a space for engagement, enchantment, and possibly

reenchantment if not with the nation itself then with the stories that undergird all acts of collective fantasy of which the nation is but one example. At best, it is a third space that fabricates and filters the experience of politics and modernity for its viewers.

The essay proceeds in three main parts. It analyzes the dominance of the trope of the family to represent anxieties of the period; explores Deewar's tensions at narrating and containing an incendiary critique of the decade; and develops the "revisions" to Deewar's masterplot as they were rescripted in Trishul and Shakti. The essay concludes with proposing the social function of cinema as a Family Romance.

## **II. Film, Family, and Family Romance**

The persistent use of the family as source and symbol of national tension is not new to Deewar. What is remarkable in Deewar is how the deadly national traumas of the 1970s are displaced almost wholesale upon the family which in turn is rendered patently evil in the film. The hitherto mythologized mother is a murderer; the crime she commits an infanticide; and the state a handmaiden in the cover-up. Rather than the family providing solace *from* the state, it provides solace *for* the state which escapes culpability for its crimes through the act of displacement.

Deewar's dystopian account of both family and nation had a rawness hitherto unseen in a commercially successful film. The story was too intense with its exposure of too many wrongs for its ending to be fully satisfying. And so the scriptwriters Javed Akhtar and Salim Khan rewrote the story, and kept rewriting it till they got it right.<sup>7</sup> This chapter analyzes Deewar, its first revision Trishul (1978, which easily outpaced Deewar in the box office for the decade and in retrospect)<sup>8</sup> and Shakti (1982), the second

effort to rewrite Deewar from a different directorial perspective. The rewrites are a structuralist's dream. The essential elements remain the same: nation allegorized in the family, conflict between parent and child, youth as a problem, the identity of criminality, and the diegetic use of death to accentuate—or to solve—problems.

What changes across the films, however, is the role each element plays in creating and solving problems. Thus, in Deewar the state creates a problem that the family solves; in Trishul, a parent creates the problem that the child solves; and in Shakti, a cardboard criminal outside the social order creates a problem for both the state and the family that the two together solve.<sup>9</sup> The migration of criminality across the three films from state to a caricatured smuggler external to the social order serves to contain problems and even to render them innocuous by the time they are staged in Shakti where the drama of national conflict has devolved into a family melodrama. In each new script, youth goes from indicating a problem (Deewar) to being the problem (Shakti). The death of the protagonist halts the future in Deewar; in Shakti, it enables it.

The three films together form a Salim-Javed trilogy that functions as what I had earlier called a Family Romance, and that term deserves some explanation. The Family Romance was fleetingly outlined by Freud in 1909 as a mechanism by which a subject, almost always male, authors fantasies about his origins that are more amenable to him than his real family is. Freud postulated that the child's ability to create an alternate "reality" through storytelling generally involved "getting free from the parents of whom he now has a low opinion and of replacing them by others who, as a rule, are of a higher social standing" (Freud 238-239). Read another way, the Family Romance is a liberation narrative that enables the child to master a world in which he is otherwise powerless.

The *gesture* of narrating—of telling a story—is a way of liberating the subject from his subjection. In Freud's account, the power of the family is typically inverted in the Family Romance, and its taboos—notably the Oedipal complex—are evaded by the act of fantasy and storytelling.

From this summary, it is clear that the Family Romance serves in understanding two main functions of narrative. It provides a frame for reflecting on the *structure* of stories and also for postulating their *function*, and here is where it has such resonance in domains beyond the couch. In enabling the subject to fabricate an alternative history to the one he lives, it enables him to manage and eventually to accept "reality," even as it liberates him from it. The Family Romance can thus be thought of as an epistemological project: its act of narration is also one of interpretation, one that explicates even as it narrates. What matters is not the actual story itself but the *act* of ordering and telling stories that the term Family Romance captures. It is thus both a form of exposure (of the subject's deepest desires and his "reality") as well as of subterfuge (in which one reality is covered by another more desirable one).

Applied beyond the individual to culture more widely, the concept of Family Romance allows one to probe the work that particularly popular narratives *do* in a specific cultural moment and to ask what traumas they mask, what "reality" they seek liberation from, and to explore the kinds of fantasies a culture develops in the process. Above all, the application of this concept from individual to society enables one to uncover the structure and function of narratives that were particularly popular and to ask what kinds of unconscious they convey and conceal.<sup>10</sup>

### III. Deewar, The Manifest Narrative

Released on January 24, 1975, Deewar's story has a singular preoccupation with provision that captures above all the shortages of the decade. Every character in the film, and every conflict, is driven by the singular desire to provide materially for others, or to withhold provision from others. Workers ask management for a share of the profits from their labor to provide for their families; parents sacrifice to provide for their offspring; children do the same for their progenitors and siblings; the state proves unable to provide basic amenities such as housing and food; and criminals step in at the breach.

Home for the Varma, though, is not where the hearth is: it is where Maa is. In the most famous scene from the film, all its major preoccupations come together: provision, property (moveable and real), criminality, law, justice, kinship, ideals, idealism, and home. Holding them together is the giant figure of Maa. The brothers, Vijay and Ravi, meet under the bridge where they had spent their childhood twenty years previously. Vijay warns Ravi of the underworld's price on Ravi's head and urges him to seek a transfer to a police-station in a different town. Ravi refuses to give up the case against the underworld. "My ideals won't let me," he replies.

*Vijay:* Your ideals! Bah! What have your ideals given you? A scrappy uniform?

A duty jeep? A rundown house? Look at me and look at you. We both came from this same footpath, and now look at what I have today. I have buildings, bank balances, cars. What do you have?

*Ravi:* Mere pas Maa hain. [I have Maa.]

Countering Vijay's catalog of possessions with the same economy even while putatively critiquing it, Ravi's "I have Maa" is an awkward locution in any language. But the

rhetoric of possession so permeates the film that it is the only way to claim kinship here. It is not that Maa lives with Ravi that matters; it is that he can claim to *have* her that makes him different from Vijay. At a time when very little could be owned, and much less provided, family relations, like ideals, succumb to the rhetoric of property and ownership. Thus, Ravi *has* Maa.<sup>11</sup>

But Maa is not just the mother. She is Hindustan, undivided and free. Not only does the poet Muhammad Iqbal's patriotic anthem, "sare jehan se achcha," play each time the brothers are under the bridge, Deewar's *mise en scène* inverts the anthem's jingoistic ethos ("Our Hindustan is the best in the world... ancient Greece, Egypt, and Rome have all vanished without a trace, but we continue to shine in the firmament") in a deeply ironic comment on the bridge and on Hindustan. Rather than Hindustan being better than all lands, it is barely as good as them; rather than bringing the brothers closer, the bridge further estranges them. The bridge, thus, stands witness to the betrayals and failures of state and nation that this film marks, and it is in its presence that some of the most egregious betrayals of the film occur. Thus, it is under the bridge when Maa accepts Vijay's offer to be the man of the house and work so they can together send the baby of the house (Ravi) to school; and it is the consequence of the pact under that bridge that propels Vijay to do the things that men do for their women. But the pact they make is hideously corrupt, far more so than anything the gangster Vijay will do as a grown up.

In accepting Maa's call to replace the father, to give her his childhood in order to be her man even though he is still a boy—her boy-- Vijay is fulfilling not the Oedipal wish, but the Jocasta wish: the desire of the mother for her son. For in accepting Vijay's offer to work so that "their" baby, Ravi, can go to school, Maa has catapulted Vijay from

being her son to being her provider. He is the husband she wants, not the husband she married. Her extramarital transgression is monstrous not because it is extramarital, but because it is intrafamilial. In taking her son as her mate, Maa's domination over him is complete. In many ways, she is not just Jocasta; in fact she is worse than Sophocles's doomed mother.

Jocasta's is the submission of desires for her son that comes from ignorance and avoidance; Maa's come from will and design. Having unwittingly "married" her son, Jocasta punishes herself with death when she discovers what she has done; Maa, in contrast, punishes her *son* with death to avoid discovery. Jocasta sought to evade her fate, knowing its horror; Maa sought to embrace her fate, knowing she could evade its punishment.

Maa's is a terrible demand, far worse than Jocasta's in all ways: whereas Sophocles' mother simply took her child's adulthood away from him, Maa claims her son's childhood. And for this obscene, unspeakable desire, *Vijay* (not Maa) must be punished. The mother cannot and will not accept what she has demanded under the bridge; she cannot and will not take responsibility for the violence for which she is responsible. Maa's disavowal is so complete that it takes two decades and the news that Anandbabu has died riding the rails to permit the stirrings of her repressed to come to the surface. And when it does it is terrible. Her punishment comes brutally, and it is visited upon the son – the object of her desire—rather than on herself, its instigator. Maa conspires with the baby, Ravi, to shoot Vijay. "I have done my duty. Now I am going to await my son," she declares, heading off to the temple after handing Ravi his gun. The twinning of her violence with the sanction of the state (the police force) and the piety of

religion (the temple) are almost unbearable. But Maa knows that the perfect crime takes no prisoners. Vijay must die and she must do it in such a way as to make it *her* sacrifice, not his. For this the state's participation is crucial. And the state, fully duped, hands Maa a medal for the murder of her son.

The dream that Vijay has offered Maa-- a home, respectability, security—cover a nightmarish secret that neither he nor she can speak. It is only when Vijay returns to the primal scene—the bridge—that the rift between them becomes clearest. "I have buildings, bank balances, cars. What do *you* have?" he asks Ravi. Without missing a beat, Ravi claims Maa as commodity and gloats: "Mera pas Maa hain." Their conversation about who "has" Maa thus devolves into a contest not just about the rightful heirs of the nation, but the rightful vision of the state: one which enables material plenitude ("buildings, bank balances, cars") or purely symbolic substance ("Maa").<sup>12</sup> In Vijay's depiction, Maa is the nation: a provider. In Ravi's, she is a menacing and vengeful figure akin to the state whose disciplinary power stands behind her.

This dialogue, possibly the most famous in modern Hindi cinema history, forces a latent content on Deewar and on its larger narrative of the migrant and home. For Ravi's insistent claim that he *has* Maa makes explicit a circuit between mother, home, and nation. To have Maa is to have all three. Yet, the possession of all three is largely symbolic: Deewar's manifest content is a symbolic solution to a problem that cannot be resolved. The dialogue between the brothers underscores the tenuousness of the mother-home-nation circuit. It is a symbolic one, unavailable in real, material terms, which is precisely why it must be overstated in such grandiose terms. Maa is neither able to feed nor shelter her children. Roti kapda aur makaan remain elusive in her domain.

### **Deewar, The Latent Narrative, or "India is Indira"**

Made in a particularly fraught moment in India's political and economic history, the migrant's journey in Deewar plays a key role in dismantling the earlier nationalist myth of nation-as-home. Corrupting the circuit of mother-home-nation, Deewar's Maa not only displaces her children from their natal home, she also insists that they sacrifice their lives for her own depravity. To confront this depravity head on in the film, to give it voice to speak its name, would not just disrupt but topple the vulnerable edifice of the nation ca. 1975. It would also be unacceptable in the terms of commercial cinema that Deewar enjoyed. So Deewar submerges its critique in a powerful latent narrative that connects the specifics of the domestic story with the national one. From the moment Anandbabu leaves Maa, the film portrays him roaming the ends of the nation in third-class rail compartments in which he eventually dies. His journey without destination not only disrupts the settlement narrative Maa promises her children; it also revises it. In fleeing Maa, Anandbabu flees not just the mother-nation-home circuit: he also publicizes its fraudulence. His alternative "home" is nowhere and everywhere. His is not an alternative to the state's vision so much as an indication of its impossibility and corruption. Anandbabu's aimless twenty-year train ride in the temples of industrial modernity testifies to the gulf between the soaring rhetoric and the hopeless reality of his situation. Vijay's tattoo ("mera bap chor hain") is not about the theft by the father, but the theft *of* the father who is exiled from the family along with his efforts to secure roti kapda aur makan.

Assessing Deewar two decades after its release, its scriptwriter, Javed Akhtar, offered his perspective on the zeitgeist that the film so starkly captured:

When we were writing Deewar, we were not aware of the sociological causes, implications, or symbolism. But the fact is that writers are also a part of society, and we were perhaps expressing the need prevalent at that time. The Emergency was imposed and the average Indian was losing faith in the various institutions--the police, courts, the government, the bureaucracy, and so on. When that happens, some kind of aggressive individuality develops.... In a society that lacked faith, it was natural that the gangster of Deewar should take birth. (as recorded in Gahlot 53)

Akhtar's remarks on the period bring a crucial point into focus. Not only did Indira Gandhi's Emergency evaporate the national ideals spawned during Independence, but she insisted on replacing earlier notions of Indian democracy with her own. Thus, "India is Indira; Indira is India" became her campaign slogan in 1971, and she scripted herself as both mother and nation in speech and image.

Mrs. Gandhi's own family psychodrama has unnerving resonances with Deewar's: like Maa, Indira Gandhi too prospered after she absented her husband, Feroze, from public life; like Maa, Indira Gandhi too anointed a younger son, Sanjay, her henchman; and like Maa, Indira Gandhi too commissioned the murder of the nation's young. In this case, the assassinations were accomplished quite literally through Sanjay's massive forced sterilization campaigns and more metaphorically by the Emergency and what Salman Rushdie named her "sperectomy: the draining-out of hope" (521).<sup>13</sup> Indira Gandhi's reign in the 1970s inaugurated the evaporation of Nehruvian national ideals and

their replacement with corruption and cynicism. In this, Mrs. Gandhi, like Maa, rewrote the father's legacy and obliterated the father's inheritance from the child. Mrs. Gandhi's genius, like Maa's, lay in displacing responsibility for her crimes upon her perceived enemies and fabricating herself as the only figure equipped to save the nation from itself—and her.

The preceding analysis gestures toward two kinds of outlaws and two kinds of gangsters. The manifest law that Akhtar's comments gesture to is that of the state, a law that both the executive and judiciary have broken as the reference to the Emergency highlights. This law must be upheld even if those to do so are the very ones who have corrupted it in the first place. Vijay's transgression against the state must be punished even though his actions regulate society in a way that the state no longer can or will. Meanwhile, the second law is the law of the family. Here the conflict is sharper but also greyer, for the unit of discipline is the family itself, and it is its unspoken laws against desire and incest that Vijay is accused of disrupting. The real outlaw in this context, however, is Maa, the figure who takes a childhood from a son, a family from its father, a future from a brother and returns a bullet in exchange.

Earlier I had compared Maa's infanticide with Mrs. Gandhi's and contrasted them with the Oedipal story. Jocasta, in the Greek version, is an unwitting spectator to the initial attempt at infanticide (which was initiated by her husband, Laius) as well as of the later union with Oedipus. Her suicide follows the death of Laius and the revelation of the curse upon him for the long-ago rape of the young boy Chrissipus. Deewar's version of this story uses the same actors but fundamentally changes the point of view. Like Laius, Anandbabu is absent for much of the action, though in marked contrast to the pederastic

Laius, Anandbabu's nobility is unquestioned. Whereas the Greek myth focuses on patricide, the Indian version emphasizes infanticide. The difference is key.

According to the folklorist, A.K. Ramanujan, there are scant instances of Oedipal narratives in India, and where they do exist as in Kannada versions, they seldom have tragic consequences. The Jocasta figure marries her son or accepts her fate, and the father figure is *never* overthrown (Ramanujan 379, 388). From this, Ramanujan concludes that "the modern, Western quest is individualism, achieved through an overthrow of the father, whereas the Indian hero's quest is to fulfill his father... A traditional culture needs to use and absorb the vitality of its young... An innovative culture needs to overthrow its parents" (Ramanujan 394).<sup>14</sup> Therefore, in the India captured in Ramanujan's folkloric research, stability prevails between the generations, and the father's power is always preserved in the proto-Oedipal oral folktales.

However, Deewar's Oedipal version reveals a very different India than Ramanujan's. It is a society that in Ramanujan's terms is paradoxically both highly modern (in which the father is overthrown) and deeply conservative (where the vital but renegade son must also be killed). At a time of political and social upheaval, youth in the film are a problem; educated and unemployed like Ravi or charismatic and capable like Vijay, they represent challenges to a generational hierarchy and are criminalized or eliminated in the film's conservative plot. At the same time, those elements from the hierarchy (such as the father) that might compromise with youth or share its power with them are exiled, as Anandbabu is. In this, Deewar presents a notably *authoritarian* – and eventually unstable—version of the Oedipal drama in which *neither* generation ultimately prevails. *Both* father and child are demolished, and power resides in absolutist fashion

with a ruthless central authority that is unwilling to cede or share it. Thus, Maa —and Mrs. Gandhi. The oppositional political order has fully penetrated the family, and both are revealed as ruinous.

In its depiction of maternal power, Deewar's mother is closer to Kunti than she is to Jocasta: namely, the figure from the Mahabharata who tried to kill Karna her firstborn in order to preserve her social status and then, when he was an adult, asked Karna to sacrifice his life again in order to preserve the mother's future security. It is an impossible sacrifice to ask for, and Karna refuses Kunti. The outcome is the apocalyptic battle in which the House of Pandu is destroyed. Much the same occurs in Deewar's cautionary fable where no happy ending is possible. The mother's infanticide destroys the family just as the state's infanticide deposes the political order and any belief in due process.

Unlike Ramanujan, who sees India's oral folklore providing a flexible and comforting set of narratives that preserve the social order, Deewar's filmlore exposes a political and social order on the brink of collapse, willing to undertake the most egregious violence to kinship loyalties. Furthermore, Deewar also exposes the violence covered (up) by the mother worship narratives so central to India's political culture and so overplayed in cinema at especially anxious moments of national definition such as the 1970s.

#### **IV. Deewar Retold, or Trishul and Shakti**

I'll Die for Mama was one of Deewar's English titles that captured both the central plot conflict (for mother, with mother) and the thinly veiled allegory of the nation it

signals. Vijay's "transgressions" in the film were described as inevitable by its scriptwriter: "In a society that lacked faith," Javed Akhtar averred, "it was natural that the gangster of Deewar should take birth" (Gahlot 53). When asked if a criminal hero like Vijay was "justifiable," Akhtar riposted: "In this kind of society, what do you expect?.. A hero at any given time is the personification of contemporary morality and contemporary ambitions" (Gahlot 53-54).

If Vijay was the outcome of his moment, he was also a marked departure from his cinematic predecessors. The criminal hero was hardly new in Hindi cinema: Raj Kapoor had developed him to popular acclaim in both Awara (1951) and Shree 420 (1955). But whereas Kapoor's heroes eventually repent their crimes (murder and fraud) and are integrated back in society following appropriate penitence, usually in jail, Deewar's hero had no such luck. Vijay, who has done all that his mother asked for (provided for her, prayed for her) is nonetheless killed, and his death meant to signal a sacrifice for Maa. Hence, I'll Die for Mama.

The state portrayed in Deewar displaces upon the family the problems it creates but cannot solve. It criminalizes those whose efforts at regulation expose the state's ineffectiveness, and then calls upon the social order (in the form of the family) to restrain the monsters it has spawned. In this, Deewar exposes the longstanding conflicts at the basis of Indian nationalism: the state espoused democracy but the social order (with its caste and class hierarchies) abjured it. Rather than state and society being partners in a shared enterprise, they became increasingly in conflict. Whereas Nehru's vision tried to develop the state's institutions to nudge society's, his daughter's used the state to divide

society. And no film better displays the bitter divisions as they came to a head in the 1970s than Deewar in which the menace of public life is reflected in the private.

Javed Akhtar may be correct to insist that Vijay emerged out of his moment, but Vijay's critical and commercial success notwithstanding, his was an uncomfortable emergence that had to be rescripted. If nothing else, the moment had changed with the fall of Mrs. Gandhi and the end of the Emergency in 1977, even if its legacies remained palpable. So, Salim-Javed killed Vijay in Deewar, but it was not enough to quell the popularity of a hero who captured the day with his fists and his smoldering eyes. He may not have gotten the best line of the film ("mere pas Maa hain"), but he became the best thing about the film. "A man who dies before his time lives to be a martyr," cautioned the malevolent mine owner in Deewar when his henchmen offer to kill Anandbabu during the labor strike. Anandbabu is allowed to live but become utterly irrelevant; Vijay, on the other hand, achieves his diegetic and extra-diegetic status by his death.

As if wishing to return the monster to his box, Akhtar and Salim Khan returned to Deewar and rewrote it twice, revising the basic conflict and looking for more amenable solutions to it. If Deewar was a raw exposition of conflict with the state, Trishul, which followed it in 1978, placed its conflict solely in society and the family. If Deewar was the story of the mother, Trishul was largely of the father. If Vijay is deemed a criminal in Deewar, he is a successful capitalist in Trishul. If Vijay's romantic life follows his doomed family life in Deewar, in Trishul, he gets conjugal happiness along with restoration into a loving biological family. And where Vijay must be sacrificed in Deewar, he thrives in Trishul. Above all, if the predominant conflict in Deewar is the

Kunti conflict in which Maa authorizes the murder of her firstborn, in Trishul, it is a more conventional Oedipal conflict in which the son avenges his mother by killing the father.

While the basic structure of the two films remains the same, the point of view and the outcome vary dramatically. And these variations say everything about the decade and about the social work of popular film. Above all, the variations index the different "India"s that popular cinema had to grapple with. In rewriting Deewar's masterplot, its writers were drawing attention to the very different citizen-protagonists in the nation. In this formulation, Deewar tells the story of the child who bears witness and cannot forget; Trishul the story of an adult who is willing to forgive if not forget. In Deewar, Vijay's actions sought to regulate all society; in Trishul, they regulate only the family. Deewar allegorizes the nation; Trishul largely ignores it. If politics and the state *are* the plot of Deewar, in Trishul both politics and the state are detachable from the plot, and the film is an almost total retreat into family life and its melodrama.

Trishul's revision was a triumphant one; it remains today an all-time grosser at the box office (#23 to Deewar's #50 in figures adjusted for inflation; IBOS). It softens many of Deewar's rawest referential illusions to the faltering state and replays all of Deewar's signal conflicts into happy endings. The preoccupation with roti kapda aur makan is now just a preoccupation with makan (housing); both the protagonists are builders, and in Trishul, both Vijay and his father compete for a contract to provide low-cost housing for the middle-classes which they both succeed in providing. The state's ineptitude is irrelevant in Trishul because Vijay is allowed to prevail and provide security when the state (in the form of the courts) fails to clear the father's legal title to land occupied by squatters. Vijay's law brings a widely-accepted order. And if Deewar's past is a haunted

one that provides Vijay neither rest nor respite, Trishul's past dies out (with the mother) and allows the future to occur and with it a happy ending signaled by the founding of a new corporation called ShantiRaj Enterprises, the name literally meaning the reign of peace. In short, Trishul represents a compromise solution to the problem of Deewar. The earlier film provided a powerful critique of the state and a stark depiction of its dystopian intrusions into private life. Trishul, on the other hand, erases the radical critique and gives the happy ending that was impossible in Deewar

In one account, Trishul reassured audiences that the problems of Deewar could be solved. The private could be separated from the political, and if one could be healed then maybe the other would follow. Above all, Trishul diffused the rage of the earlier film and integrated the protagonist not just into the social order, but also as the new head of the order represented by ShantiRaj Enterprises. Vijay is truly a victor in this film, unlike in Deewar, where his name was profoundly ironic. . (Javed Akhtar has noted a key detail about Trishul that bears mentioning in this context: "The first time we revised a script was for... Trishul" [as quoted in Kabir 56]. Moreover, it was a script that was written with Yash Chopra by their side, though Akhtar would not elaborate on what aspects of Trishul's script or its tone Chopra especially shaped.)

But most happy endings invite one to ask, willfully, what unhappiness awaits around the corner. And in their final take on the "problem" of Deewar, Salim-Javed scripted Shakti under Ramesh Sippy's direction. Deewar's legacy is scrutinized in a family setting that is everything that Deewar was not: contentedly middle class, professional, and stable. The public sphere doesn't just penetrate Shakti's stable family and ruin it as well: the family *is* the state in the form of a father, a police chief who

zealously pursues criminal elements to the letter of the law.<sup>15</sup> The main conflict occurs over whose law best provides justice: the father chooses to observe the state's laws even when his young son is kidnapped ("I refuse your call for a ransom," he tells the kidnapper). The boy, who overhears this remark insists that the laws of kinship have been betrayed, and he strays from his father. Explaining his childhood to a lover, Vijay offers: "My father married twice. My mother and his job. I'm my mother's son; my stepmother's son is the law. The law is my stepbrother [kanoon mera sautela bhai hai]."

Rather than the law as something that protects, Shakti reveals it as a weapon that creates a gulf between the weak and strong, men and women, father and son. Rejecting this law, Vijay offers justice to those whom the law does not reach: thus, the woman on the train being harassed by a gang of drunken men is protected by his presence (and his handy fists) when no cop is around. Unable to believe his son over the woman's harassers who then sue for injury, Vijay's father accuses him. Later, when a murder is pinned on Vijay based on circumstantial evidence, his father again believes the charge rather than the evidence. Though the film offers each conflict as a generational struggle, they both also serve as tutorials about law and justice.

At a time when both law and order are shown to have frayed, the policeman's zeal comes with some irony in that rather than burnishing the law, it reveals that even following the law to the letter cannot bring order. The father cannot tell the difference between charge and evidence; for him, an individual (especially his son) is guilty until proven innocent, and in this, his actions unwittingly end up underscoring the widespread view that Deewar had captured in the previous decade. Rather than the well-intentioned father redeeming the law by "believing" it, he ends up revealing that even those best

intentioned to uphold the law cannot conceal its utter irrelevance. In this, the law is in fact a stepchild *to* the family *and* to the nation.

Vijay's estrangement from his father in Shakti is a parable of the law's estrangement from the nation: Vijay chooses fathers in the film who protect him at the cost of biology; the state chooses laws that protect it at the cost of ideology. In both choices, the mother dies. She is literally shot in Shakti, just as the nation and its ideals metaphorically die in the conflict between her son (Vijay) and her stepson (kanoon, the law).

If Trishul undid most of Deewar's radical politics, Shakti renders those politics obsolete. Shakti's manifest content is profoundly conservative: youth is co-opted into family, family prevails over romance, the authority of both family and state prevail over the individual, and the father is allowed to prosper and to determine the direction of the following generations. Meanwhile, where Deewar's latent content destabilized its manifest order, in Shakti, the latent content is harder to discern within the terms of this single film. To do it, one needs Deewar and the mythologies embedded in its filmlore.

## **V. Conclusion**

Hindi cinema's Family Romances, as amplified in Deewar and its revisions, are neither typical liberation narratives nor exorcisms as psychoanalysis posited such narratives. The traumas they are intended to heal are paradoxically rendered more real on the screen largely because of their projections upon the familiar intimacy of the family unit. Rather than rendering the state abstract, and thus distant from the subject, these films render it closer to him in the form of the brother who will gun him and the mother

who will authorize the killing as in Deewar. Rather than liberating the subject from his nightmares, they bring them to life for him. In this form, the films are a peculiar sort of political tutorial: neither exultant nor exculpatory of the national myth, they serve to expose its fraudulence.

Deewar is notable for embedding its extensive critique of India in the 1970s within the terms of popular commercial cinema. If the situation of the decade "created" the protagonist of Deewar and ensured his currency at the time, the film's combustible counternarrative nevertheless required the formal apparatus of containment that its protagonist's death weakly provided. While Vijay's diegetic death illustrates the incompletely radical nature of popular cinema, it also stands as an indicator of popular cinema's opportunities. Because while Hindi film seldom provides sequels, it narrates the same story numerous times with each retelling exposing or addressing anxieties that the previous one missed or was unable to fully pursue. Thus, Deewar's radical critique kills a semi-criminal Vijay while Trishul's radical revision brings him back an unambiguous hero, and Shakti's radical burial renders him obsolete. Taken together, the three films serve not just as "contemporary folklore" as Javed Akhtar claimed in this chapter's headnote. They also serve as cautionary fables about the power of stories.

Deewar's volatile family drama with its dramatic critique of mother, state, and nation illuminated the corrosion in both biological and symbolic kinship units. Revising this story in Trishul generated the happy ending as well as a tutorial on the futility of such endings. In other words, utopia in Trishul proved as unsatisfying as dystopia in Deewar was. Stories, in this context, have the power both to satisfy and to unsettle. In

the tutorial that emerges from Salim-Javed's cinematic triptych, the pleasures of stories are contingent: they come with attendant cautions to qualify their satisfactions.

But stories also expose and reconfigure the world in which they circulate.

Deewar's critique refashioned in Trishul then again in Shakti serves an epistemological function that first critiques the master narrative (of nation and family) and then provides a series of commentaries on it in the form of revisions. If Trishul's ending of a peaceful ShantiRaj embeds a fantasy, it is a fantasy that powerfully underscores the unrelenting somberness in Deewar. In this cautionary account, Deewar both exposes the corruption that pervades 1970s India as well as the futility of confronting it, *even while providing the short-lived satisfaction of Vijay's Pyrrhic confrontations*. Trishul's ending is no more fully satisfying than Deewar's, even though both speak to the same desire for social justice.

In short, Salim-Javed's cinematic triptych in Deewar-Trishul-Shakti illuminates the many acts of storytelling central to all nation-building projects. The triptych provides a way to reconceive the dominant national narrative even while conforming to it. Moreover, it purveys the notion that the art of the story carries the craft of life. And for this, popular cinema is the nation's Family Romance, a space where the nightmares of the collective are addressed and where alternatives can be scripted even if they must eventually be dismissed. Reading the manifest and latent narratives embedded in Deewar and unraveled across the triptych exposes a set of pressing anxieties that found expression in the primal locus of the family and that required the countering impulse of the Family Romance for dissolution, if not resolution. In the Family Romance that emerges, Vijay becomes a symbol condensing all the forces threatening India — both the

state and the nation—in the mid-1970s. Deewar's family sanctuary is revealed, like the nation's, as threatened by invasion from without and seduction within (a preoccupation keenly observed by Michael Rogin in his work on US Cold War cinema [Rogin 267]). These threats are narratively "undone" across the films that comprise the triptych as the originary film's murderous plot is rewritten in more conciliatory terms.

Recovering these acts of making and undoing exposes not just the anxieties of the decade, but also the powerful role popular Hindi cinema played in producing and then containing the combustible energies of the moment. In countering the brutality of a decade on screen if not on the street, cinema served to remind the state of the nation that preceded it. Both were acts of public fantasy, enabled and underwritten by the Family Romance. Cinema in this context stands for a recovered memory: flawed, and faintly gesturing to a truth that cannot be spoken. The cinematic imagination of which the Salim-Javed triptych is a part enables a critique not just of the nation, but of the narrative fabrications that propel it. Suspended below the manifest narrative is a combustible latent critique, one that can only find voice in the displacement and hyperbole characteristic of the Family Romance. Popular cinema's genius lies in providing a space for these narratives that must not be recalled. At best, they have the sharpness and horror of all recovered memories, to which reality is neither as bad, nor as real.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to audiences at the following venues for generous comments: Lewis Gordon's Halloween Lectures on Monsters at Temple University, the Visual Studies Colloquium at Bryn Mawr College, the Madison South Asia Conference, the Center for the Humanities at Temple, Javed Akhtar, participants in the 1970s and its Legacies Workshop at Temple in April 2011, and Russell Berman's seminar at Columbia in the 1980s where Freud's ideas were subjected to the kind of reading that the finest literary critics bring to all texts. Special thanks to Daniel Ryan Morse for research assistance and to the staff of the National Film Archive of India in Pune for unfailing courtesies with research and materials.

<sup>2</sup> My thinking and phrasing here borrow heavily from Jane Tompkins' work on the popularity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in nineteenth-century America, a work that Tompkins argues "retells the culture's central myth (crucifixion) in terms of the nation's political conflict (slavery) and its most cherished social belief—the sanctity of motherhood" (Tompkins 134).

<sup>3</sup> For almost a century, psychoanalysis has provided an important interpretive framework for scholarship on India. Research inflected by its tools have come to define numerous disciplines including politics, folklore, religion, and sociology. Film is no exception with foundational scholarship using psychoanalysis' tools conducted by Kakar, Nandy, and S. Akhtar.

<sup>4</sup> Laura Mulvey's foundational work on early Hollywood melodrama inspired the phrase and insight on cinema's role as primal scene of India's modern mythologies (see Mulvey 121). Inspired by Mulvey's illuminating early work on Hollywood, I too see popular cinema as providing a body of narratives that expose a culture's public fantasies.

<sup>5</sup> "International Business Overview Standard," [ibos.network.com/topgrosserbyyear.asp?/year+1975](http://ibos.network.com/topgrosserbyyear.asp?/year+1975). March 15, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> See Chakravarty (1993) and Viridi (2003) as examples. Viridi, for example, has proposed that Hindi cinema *tout court* "projects the imagined nation on the terrain of the family... through contestations that throw into relief its social structures and realignments" (Viridi 2003:7).

<sup>7</sup> To a degree hitherto unprecedented in Hindi commercial cinema, Salim-Javed's scripts profoundly shaped the films that emerged from them. The writers were known to present bound scripts to the director who made virtually no changes to them. The director and producer had the choice over stars, music, movement, but little else. ("Prakash Mehra... likes to tell a story, not to disturb the frame... Yashji always zooms, for every shot... Movement means a lot to him," noted Bachchan of the directors of, respectively, Zanjeer and Deewar [as recorded in Dwyer, 98].) Recalling Deewar, director Yash Chopra observed: "That was one script and screenplay where you didn't have to delete anything after making, it was such—such a perfect script. We didn't do anything [to it]" (as quoted in Dwyer 100). Both Bachchan (see Somaaya 123) and Shashi Kapoor concur, the latter in a 2003 interview with the author.

<sup>8</sup> According to "International Business Overview Standard," Trishul ranks #23 among world-wide all-time grossers adjusted for inflation, while Deewar comes in at #50 (see [ibos.network.com/actualalltimes.asp](http://ibos.network.com/actualalltimes.asp). March 15, 2006). If returns just for the decade are reviewed, the gap is considerably narrowed, and the same source has Trishul at #9 and Deewar at #16 (see [ibos.network.com/topgrosserbyyear.asp?/year+197](http://ibos.network.com/topgrosserbyyear.asp?/year+197). March 15, 2006). In contrast to the latter, [BoxOfficeIndia.com](http://BoxOfficeIndia.com), another source, provides returns by decade according to which Deewar's earnings place it at #11 and Trishul's at #15 (see [www.boxofficeindia.com/showProd.php?itemCat+124&catName+MTk3MCOxOTc5](http://www.boxofficeindia.com/showProd.php?itemCat+124&catName+MTk3MCOxOTc5), November 17, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Other differences across the films: in Deewar, the father's ideals absent him from his family; in Trishul, his ambitions absent him from his son but keep him at the center of the family; and in Shakti, the father's ideals preserve him in the family and exile the son from it. Mothers are central in all three, but in Deewar they are vengeful and prevail till the end; in Trishul they are vengeful but die so their sons can achieve a happy end; and in Shakti, they seek compromises that eventually kill them, a fate in which their sons join them. Infanticide, or its threat, plays a role in all three: in Deewar, it disrupts the family altogether; in Trishul, where the threat is headed off, the family reconstitutes itself in a happy unit; and in Shakti, infanticide is a sacrifice that is tragic but necessary to assure the stability of a now-truncated family and the nation.

<sup>10</sup> Madhava Prasad, among others such as Virdi (2003) and Chakravarty (1993), provides a genealogy in which Hindi cinema through the 1960s is characterized by a focus on the family structure that he names "the feudal family romance" (Prasad 64).

Prasad's use of the family romance, however, has no resonance with Freud's definition: for Prasad, the term simply refers to a story in which the ideology of the family is central. In contrast, my usage of the term develops Freud's, and I use the upper case throughout to signal the technical (vs. colloquial) referent (see Prasad 30-31).

<sup>11</sup> The historian Vinay Lal regards Ravi's locution of ownership as the "voice of patriarchy" in which Ravi has become the "reincarnated husband." In contrast, my analysis reveals a patriarchy that is overtaken by the castrating figure of Maa who has ambushed its traditional authority. Ravi represents the intrusion of the state on to the family: he is neither the husband Maa married (Anandbabu), nor the husband she chose (Vijay). Unlike both males marked (literally and figuratively) by ideals by which they live, Ravi is a figure marked exclusively by ideology. All his actions require the instruction and sanction of others and the grandiloquence of rhetoric that issues from "Mere pas Maa hain." (See Lal 241).

<sup>12</sup> Thanks to Harleen Singh for this observation and the associations it spawned.

<sup>13</sup> Salman Rushdie was to memorialize the Emergency as the particular nightmare of midnight and to call the devouring mother, the Widow, who set up special torture factories to crush her children and prevent them from reproducing. "Test- and hysterectomized, the children of midnight were denied the possibility of reproducing themselves... but that was only a side-effect, because they were truly extraordinary doctors, and they drained us of more than that: hope, too, was excised, and I don't know how it was done" (Rushdie 523).

<sup>14</sup> Javed Akhtar further arguably claims that "in our country we don't have a strong tradition of bonding between father and son anyway" (as recorded in Kabir 1999: 24).

<sup>15</sup> In a somewhat ironic biographical detail, Salim Khan was the son of an Indore police officer, which might partly explain the depiction of these police-officer patriarchs in Salim-Javed films such as Shakti (and, above all, Sholay).

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