

# Chapter 1

## The Cinematic Study of Hindi Film Songs

### Introduction

Since the very beginning of sound film in India in 1931, virtually all Indian commercial films have had a musical format, nowadays including about six or seven songs per film. In 1934, the first gramophone records of film songs were produced and played on the radio (Joshi 1988: 150),<sup>1</sup> thus launching film song as a mass-mediated, popular music in India. For over five decades, these film songs, also known as ‘film music’, almost exclusively constituted what was popular music in South Asia, and despite the expansion in the music world that has taken place from the 1980s following the advent of cassettes in India (Manuel 1993), they are still the dominant form of popular music in this part of the world. Film songs have achieved massive sales – from around 1 million cassettes for an unsuccessful film or album to around 12 million for the biggest blockbusters – before a crash in the music industry in 2000. Post the crash, however, they still continue to number in the millions for a hit film. These figures do not include the sales of pirated cassettes, which were estimated in 2001 to be 40 per cent of the official market (*Screen* 13<sup>th</sup> April 2001), a decrease from their 1986 level of 95 per cent of the official market (Dubashi 1986).<sup>2</sup> As well as being a formidable presence in South Asia, film songs have extended far beyond their home territory to become a global phenomenon, being popular in many parts of Africa,<sup>3</sup> the former Soviet Union, South East Asia, the Middle East, and to some extent the Far East – and more recently, the Western world.

The enduring presence of songs in Hindi films has received much attention and been given various interpretations. By far the most common explanation for the presence of songs in Hindi films, offered by scholars, members of the Indian film industry and ‘ordinary’ people alike, focuses on songs as the main difference between Hindi and Hollywood films, and relates this to a clichéd characterization of Indians. It is said that ‘Indians love music’, that songs and music mark the most important aspects of Indian life – life cycle rituals such as birth and marriage, and also festivals and worship – and hence Hindi films are full of songs.<sup>4</sup> Whilst most

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<sup>1</sup> Record collectors Narayan Multani and Suresh Chandravankar cite 1932 (interview, 6 March 2000).

<sup>2</sup> See Manuel 1993: 78-88 for a discussion of cassette piracy.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Larkin’s account of Hindi films and film songs in Hausa culture in Kano, Nigeria (1997).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Kabir 1991.

Indians undoubtedly love music, and music is a part of traditional (and also modern) life in India, the same can be said of Europe and America. Yet, only a minority of European and American films feature songs in the way Hindi films do, i.e., in a musical format where the songs are actually ‘sung’ (or rather lip-synced)<sup>5</sup> by the characters, as opposed to being played in the background score. Furthermore, this view also does not adequately explain why songs must be ‘sung’ diegetically by the characters in Hindi films rather than played in the background score, which is the norm for Hollywood films since the 1960s (Kalinak 1992: 186-7). Either technique can cater for an audience’s love of songs by including them in the cinematic experience.

As well as being the focus of what makes a Hindi film different from a Hollywood film, songs have also become the focus of what makes a film ‘commercial’, appealing to the largely uneducated ‘masses’, as opposed to ‘art’, which appeals to the urban elite and intelligentsia. This essentially class-based division of films into ‘commercial’ and ‘art’ was initiated in India by Satyajit Ray in the 1940s in his essays on cinema, and adopted by other writers such as Kobita Sarkar throughout the 1950s (Vasudevan 2000: 100-105). The Hindi commercial film is often described as a *masālā* film, literally ‘spice’, containing a concoction of elements that may satisfy the crudest of spectators, such as songs, dances, fights, stars, comedy, goodies and baddies and so on. The commercial film is also described as ‘unrealistic’, with the story being ‘interrupted’ by the songs and the other elements (Prasad 1998). The breaking into song by characters is seen as unrealistic and illogical, especially since the characters sing in voices other than their own and the song sequences tend to shift to extra-narrative locations. Commercial films are also melodramatic, with exaggerated emotions and characters that represent types rather than realistic psychological portrayals (Vasudevan 1995: 310). Music is not commonly cited as a culprit of Hindi film melodrama, but, as is argued below and in chapters 3 and 4, it is an important part of the melodramatic expression characteristic of Hindi films. This ‘unrealistic’, melodramatic style of the Hindi cinema, with its array of titillating elements, is seen as a failure to make proper cinema. As Ray writes, ‘In India, it would seem that the fundamental concept of a coherent dramatic pattern existing in time was generally misunderstood’ (1948, quoted in Vasudevan 2000: 100).<sup>6</sup> In this way, the ‘commercial’ Hindi film is contrasted negatively with Hollywood films and Indian ‘art’ cinema, both of which adopt a linear narrative and psychologically realistic characterization. Indian cinema tends to be seen as ‘a *not-yet-cinema*, a bastard institution in which the mere ghost of a technology is employed for purposes inimical to its historic essence’ (Prasad 1998: 2).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Since around 1940, songs in Hindi films began to be sung by ‘playback’ singers rather than the actors themselves, and this soon became the norm. See pp. 55–57 below.

<sup>6</sup> See also Rajadhyaksha 2000: 269.

<sup>7</sup> Western opera contains many elements that Hindi films are criticized for, in particular an emphasis on emotional expression over realism or plausibility, convoluted plots, and the use of music, much of it extraneous to the main story. That this ‘high’ cultural art-form has not been widely criticized for these features reflects how strongly the belief is held that cinema is a realist medium.

The format of Hindi films has also been seen in terms of audience inadequacy. Vasudevan writes how Sarkar's articles 'were coloured by the image of a critic dealing with an infantile culture which needed to grow up', unsophisticated audiences that required crude films with 'gross moral oppositions and simplified conflicts' (2000: 101-102). Das Gupta sees songs as necessary given the nature of the audience, because songs counter the 'built-in naturalism of the cinema', and bring them more in line with the 'pre-industrial, mythical style of discourse' prevalent in India (1991: 59). Whilst less pejorative, this view is essentialist, and the idea that the cinema is an inherently naturalistic apparatus is highly debatable,<sup>8</sup> with Hindi films being a case in point.

The presence of songs is vital for a film to have commercial potential, and this is certainly related to audiences' evident enjoyment of the Hindi cinema as a kind of 'cinema of attractions' (Vasudevan 1995: 307).<sup>9</sup> However, to see these songs as evidence of Hindi cinema's not managing to be 'good' cinema because of the failure on the part of Indian filmmakers or the immaturity or the mythical mindset of the audience is pejorative and essentialist. Recent studies of melodrama (Brooks 1984; Ang 1991), Hindi film melodrama (Thomas 1985 & 1995; Vasudevan 1993, 1995 & 2000), and Indian film (Dwyer 2001) have led to a greater acceptance of Hindi cinema on its own terms and opened an arena for a more critical and less colonial or ethnocentric discussion of the role of songs in Hindi films. This has also been contributed to by a blurring of the 'art' versus 'commercial' distinction, as films on 'serious' topics have been made with a musical format by directors with an 'art' film background in order to reach a wider audience. *Aastha* (1997), *Mrityudand* (1997), *Satya* (1998), *Earth* (2000) and *Zubeida* (2000) are all examples of this.

The format of Hindi films can be historically traced to dramatic forms that predated the cinema. The Hindi cinema inherited its musical format from the urban theatrical traditions of the nineteenth century, such as the Parsi theatre, Marathi theatre and Bengali *Jatra*. Some of the earliest Hindi films were filmed stage plays, and many of the personnel of the early film industry came from these theatre traditions. These traditions in turn inherited their format from a variety of folk drama traditions:

When a new Indian theatre began to develop in the nineteenth century, these folk-drama forms exerted an immediate influence: a vast tradition of song and dance was available to the new theatres. When the sound film appeared, this same reservoir pressed strongly on it (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1980: 72).

The coming of sound made it possible for Hindi cinema to tap into this tradition of music and song as a part of dramatic expression that reaches back as far as around two thousand years to Sanskrit theatre (ibid.: 69). Although silent films could not incorporate songs and music into the cinematic narrative, music and songs were added to the screening of silent films in theatres through a live band, often including singers (Hughes 1996; Naushad Ali interview, 15 November 1998). It could be argued that with this background, it would be surprising if Hindi films did not contain songs.

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<sup>8</sup> See Prasad 1998: 1-6.

<sup>9</sup> The commercial role of the songs themselves is explored in chapter 5 below.

The presence of songs in the Hindi film narrative can also be seen in terms of the orality of most Indian drama.<sup>10</sup> As Vasudevan writes, 'In contrast to a literary disposition whose reading practices interiorize the reader/viewer's relationship to the text, such orality is said to sustain an externalized, declamatory and musical form in the Indian popular cinema' (Vasudevan 2000: 9).<sup>11</sup> In such an oral culture, 'music has an expressive equivalence to speech' (ibid.: 9), and 'the artificial "break" which is felt in the West when an actor bursts into song is thus less apparent to the Indian viewer' (Beeman 1981: 83). This point makes clear the extent to which the description of a Hindi film as opposed to an 'art' or Western film as 'unrealist' is the expression of a particular cultural viewpoint rather than a reflection of what is real or natural.<sup>12</sup> The cultural depth of the combination of drama and song in Indian culture and the lack of artificiality in moving between speech and song made the musical format a natural choice for the Hindi sound film, and one that is likely to persist. However, although the history of Indian drama and its folkloristic study shows why Hindi films should contain songs, it does not tell us in detail about the role of songs in films. This question, introduced below, forms a focus of the book as a whole.

As Arnold explains in her 1991 thesis, the musical style of Hindi film songs and most of the film industry personnel were also initially taken from the urban theatre traditions. Many composers came to the film industry from the theatre, and used existing theatre songs, or songs of a similar style, containing a mixture of classical, light-classical and local folk traditions for the films. However, by the mid-1930s, film songs were beginning to experiment with Western instruments, harmony and orchestration. Western classical music was available on recordings, played on the radio, and also familiar to many people living in Calcutta and Bombay because of the Parsi and Christian communities living there. Since the mid-1930s, film songs have been characterized by musical hybridity and a thirst for the new and the modern. Unlike most traditional genres, there were no restrictions on experimentation and the use of foreign genres in film music. Rather, a modern style was appropriate to the new Western and technological medium of films. By the mid-1940s film songs had begun to display an exotic and eclectic array of styles, with songs being written in a jazz style, as waltzes, or in the style of other Western and also Latin American popular genres. This reflection of global musical fashions has continued in film songs up through the present day.<sup>13</sup> This new and modern song style soon became a national craze, as 'audiences responded with ecstasy to the eclectic styles and the large ensembles full of Western instruments' (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1980: 157).

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<sup>10</sup> Sanskrit drama, which died out about 1000 years ago, was not an oral tradition.

<sup>11</sup> Vasudevan notes that this statement needs to be qualified; see Vasudevan 2000, footnote 30: 30. It should also be noted that an exteriorized and declamatory style, often using music, is characteristic of melodrama.

<sup>12</sup> A 'realist' style was espoused by many left-wing and Marxist film-makers from the 1930s to 1950s. A film like *Mother India* (1957) can be seen as a product of this, although it hardly conforms to Hollywood standards of realism, mixing a form of socialist realism with a musical format.

<sup>13</sup> Chapters 3 and 4 below discuss the musical style of film songs in detail.

However, conservative elements of society representing ‘high’ culture were not (and are still not) enamoured of film songs.<sup>14</sup> Some, following Adorno’s criticism of popular music, see them as exemplifying the worst aspects of mass production (Manuel 1993: 37-59). The ‘hybrid’ style of film songs also offended and continues to offend Indian cultural purists. In 1952, an attack on Hindi film songs was made from a governmental level, typically representing the socialist-inspired Nehruvian development ideology of 1950s and 1960s India, which sought to raise the standards of the masses and stick conservatively to pure, Indian traditions. B. K. Keskar made a now famous attempt to cleanse India’s airwaves of film songs by making restrictions on the broadcasting of film songs on All India Radio (AIR) when he was made minister of Information and Broadcasting in 1952. However, in a mass consensus demonstrating the desire of millions of Indian to hear film songs, listeners tuned into Radio Ceylon, which broadcast mainly Hindi film songs, eventually forcing Keskar to reinstate film songs on AIR in 1957.<sup>15</sup> Hindi film songs, like Hindi films, remain to this day a somewhat controversial genre, with millions of fans and at the same time, some harsh critics amongst the Indian intelligentsia, Indian classical musicians, and Western lovers of classical or folk music. However, even such critics of film songs are in fact often found to like certain film songs, which they somehow consider to be a cut above the rest. The older critics tend to favour old film music, citing its *rāg*-basis, whereas younger critics from Westernized, elite backgrounds often cite the music of A. R. Rahman, which has introduced a sound that is more ethnic, but also more global and therefore compatible with Western pop music. Shankar Ehsaan and Loy are also popular with such groups, similarly providing globally hip rather than Indian kitsch music. A. R. Rahman is the only composer who has gained significant recognition in the West, writing the music for Andrew Lloyd-Webber’s musical *Bombay Dreams* that opened in London in 2001.

Despite their relatively small number of critics, film songs have become a ubiquitous part of modern India. They have become the music of public space in India, being heard from open windows in peoples’ homes, on buses, and in bazaars. They are sung and danced to by millions of people in a range of formal and informal contexts, and have been appropriated in many folk genres (Manuel 1993; Marcus 1992/3 & 1994/5; Booth 1990 & 1991/2; Larkin 1997).<sup>16</sup> Whilst the latest songs are hard enough to miss, it is virtually impossible to escape one of the runaway hit film songs, such as *Pardesī pardesī*, ‘You who are leaving’, from *Raja Hindustani* (1996), *Colī ke pīce*, ‘Behind the blouse’, from *Khalnayak* (1993), *Ek do tīn*, ‘One two three’, from *Tezaab* (1988), or *Āwārā hūñ*, ‘I’m a vagabond’, from *Awara* (1951). Unlike Western rock or pop music, film song as a whole has fans in all sectors of Indian society, although certain styles and composers have more of a following in

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<sup>14</sup> This high-cultural and conservative criticism of Hindi film songs has become less during the 21<sup>st</sup> century in particular as film songs become increasingly fashionable amongst the middle and even upper classes, and are beginning to be used to culturally represent the nation.

<sup>15</sup> See Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1980: 157-158. Radio Ceylon and its most famous film song show, *Binaca Geet Mala*, are also discussed in chapter 5 below; see pp. 187–189.

<sup>16</sup> See chapter 6.

particular groups. There is something of a youth culture developing around some film music, beginning with R. D. Burman's songs in the 1970s, and composers like A. R. Rahman largely attract audiences from big urban centres.



**Figure 1.1** *Ek do tān* performed by Madhuri Dixit © Kamat Foto Flash

## Previous scholarship on Hindi film songs

Despite the extent of the suffusion of film songs through Indian society and non-Indian societies, and their deep roots in Indian culture, film songs are only beginning to be taken seriously at a scholarly level. Most ethnomusicologists have been lovers of folk and ‘high’ art traditions rather than hybrid, popular ones.<sup>17</sup> Music scholarship in India has also been concerned with the classical traditions, and film music – as a genre of music that violates its central aesthetic of purity of tradition – has mostly been considered as beneath contempt. Such attitudes have changed considerably, but there has been little research on film songs to date. In particular, the cinematic perspective of Hindi film songs has been ignored, with musicological studies largely viewing them as separate entities from their parent films.

The most comprehensive study of film songs to date is Alison Arnold’s unpublished doctoral thesis *Hindi Filmi Git: On the History of Indian Popular Music* (1991), which studies film songs in a broad cultural context. It describes from a historical perspective how social, cultural, political and technological factors and changes in the Indian film industry affected the way in which Hindi film songs developed from their sources of light-classical and theatre music, and emerged in the 1940s into what has become a distinctive *filmi* style. There are some published studies of Arnold’s work (1988, 1992/3, 2001), but the most thorough analysis of this genre is her unpublished thesis, which therefore remains the main source material for the study of the musical style of film songs and its historical development. However, this thesis does not address the narrative context of film songs, and also deals only in summary with film music post 1955.

Peter Manuel also discusses film song style in several of his publications, such as the chapter on Hindi film music in *Popular Musics of the Non-Western World* (1988). His relatively brief analysis of Hindi film song style reaches mostly the same conclusions as Arnold in terms of what typical film song style consists of. Manuel’s main focus has been on a media study of film song and Indian popular music, and a discussion of the political issues surrounding such a mass music as Hindi film song. In *Cassette Culture* (1993), he investigates the effect of the advent of cassette technology in India on the world of Indian popular music. His style of analysis is Marxist or neo-Marxist, and draws extensively on the work of Theodor Adorno of the Frankfurt School. He argues that the changes in the Indian popular music world which came about when gramophone technology gave way to cassettes demonstrate the relationship between base and superstructure, the mode of production and the cultural product. The ‘old’ media such as television, cinema, radio and gramophone records, he argues, have ‘one-way, monopolistic, homogenizing tendencies’, requiring massive infrastructure and investment and are usually centrally controlled. The ‘new’ media, such as audio and video cassettes, on the other hand, are inherently ‘democratic-participant’, because material can be easily and cheaply recorded, duplicated and distributed. They therefore allow small grass-roots communities to record and distribute music, something that was virtually

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<sup>17</sup> See Nettl 1983: 315-322. Arnold also makes similar comments in the introduction to her thesis on Hindi film songs (1991).

impossible in the case of the 'old' media (Manuel 1993: 2-4). The move to cassette technology, a 'democratic-participant' means of production, thus caused a revolution in the Indian popular music world. For the first time, Indian popular music expanded beyond the realms of film music to include many other popular recorded genres such as popular *bhajan*, *ghazal* and *rasiyā*, to name a few.<sup>18</sup>

Before the advent of cassette technology, when India was still in the grips of the old, 'homogenizing' and 'monopolistic' style media, all that was on offer to the public in the way of popular music was film music, which Manuel sees as being highly standardized in its style, particularly when compared to the variety of musics to be found in India. In Manuel's opinion, people were forced to accept this music since there was no alternative: it was not music produced by the people for the people, but music produced by a tiny minority of the population for the masses, 'mass music' rather than 'people's music'. Manuel continues with the classical Adornian logic that people therefore became passive consumers of music rather than actively making music themselves: 'Individuals and communities were thus alienated from their own creative talent...' (1993: 7). Manuel cites the way that the voice of Lata Mangeshkar has dominated much of Hindi film music as particular proof of stylistic homogenization. He concludes that the homogenous style of film music 'can hardly be attributed to popular demand, but rather to the creation of film music as a common-denominator mass-music style, produced in corporate, urban studios and superimposed on a heterogeneous audience' (ibid.: 53).

Arnold and Manuel are the scholars who have discussed Hindi film songs and Indian popular music most extensively. However, there are many smaller studies of film songs that also include important material. Terry Skillman's historical survey covers much of the same material as Arnold (1986). Darius Cooper discusses the use of song in the work of a particular director, Guru Dutt (1988). William Beeman examines the use of song in Hindi films in comparison with music in Western films (1981). Barnow and Krishnaswamy classic study of the Hindi film (1980), whilst not focusing specifically on film music, contains many references to film songs. Satyajit Ray, typically a critic of commercial Hindi cinema, surprisingly writes an enthusiastic appraisal of the fusion skills of Hindi film music directors (1976). Gayatri Chatterjee, in her study of the classic Hindi film *Awara* (1951), discusses the use of music in this particular film, describing the director Raj Kapoor's combining of song and narrative (1992). Nasreen Kabir has also written articles on film music, an unpublished overview of film song (1991), and a discussion of film songs and their importance to Hindi films (1995, in French). Her recently published book of interviews with lyricist Javed Akhtar (1999) also contains much useful material

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<sup>18</sup> Though beyond the scope of this book, this argument certainly needs to be updated in the light of the advent of CDs and DVDs and the professionalization of marketing strategies in the new, highly competitive and now highly capitalized music industry that has formed after the cassette revolution. Although not as capital-intensive as the 'old' media, CDs and DVDs are not nearly as accessible as cassettes. In addition, the production standards of the industry are now so high that it would be impossible for any but the very richest Indians to launch a music company to compete in this market. The Indian music industry and the commercial life of film songs are described in chapter 5.

on film songs and lyrics from the point of view of one of the industry's current top lyricists. Gregory Booth has also made a study of the combination of musical, narrative, cinematic and religious codes and also extra-narrative gossip in the meaning of Hindi film songs, focusing on textual analyses of several film Hindu devotional songs or *bhajans* (2000).

There are also various papers that examine the wider life of Hindi film songs, as they are appropriated by various folk genres. Booth discusses the use of film songs in the music of Indian brass bands (1990 & 1991/2). Scott Marcus discusses film music in the context of its appearance in and influence of *Birahā* (1992/3 & 1994/5). Qureshi (1986, 1992/3) and Hansen (1992), in their studies of *Qawwālī* and *Nauṭāṅkī* respectively, also discuss the effect of film music on the style and repertoire of these traditional genres. Manuel also discusses the impact of film music on folk music and the re-use and recycling of tunes within and between many genres of South Asian music, from classical, to folk to popular (1993: 55-59 and 131-152). What promises to be an important collection of essays studying aspects of Hindi film song as a global, mass-culture phenomenon, and one of the first books devoted to Hindi film songs, is due to be published in 2008 *Global Bollywood: The Transnational Travels of Hindi Song and Dance*, edited by Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti.<sup>19</sup>

Several dissertations on film music have been completed in Hindi in India, though unfortunately none of them have been published as yet. The first was completed by Professor Pradeep Kumar Dixit in 1978 at Benares Hindu University (BHU). Dixit describes the use of the sources of Indian classical music, Indian folk music and Western music in Hindi film song style. Unfortunately, this thesis was not available for study, so it is not possible to comment in any detail. Soma Dasgupta's thesis (1998) studies the role of film music in inspiring people to learn music in India.<sup>20</sup> Mala Sinha's thesis (1991) is a biography of Naushad and an in-depth study of his music. It is particularly useful because it describes in detail the way Naushad has used aspects of various Indian folk and classical styles, instruments and western style orchestration to create mood and effects relevant for the drama and setting of the songs. Unfortunately, this thesis was only available for brief viewing.

Whilst a corpus of work on film music is beginning to build up, albeit with the extensive studies such as Arnold's or those completed in Hindi in India remaining unpublished, and only one book-length study apart from this one due shortly for publication, there are certain areas that are neglected. No studies have examined in detail the process of production of a Hindi film song, that is how a song is put together and what part the film itself plays in this process. Also, few studies have combined a musicological study of film songs with an analysis of their cinematic, narrative and visual contexts. Some studies, such as those of Cooper and Beeman, examine the use of song in Hindi films, examining where songs come in the film

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<sup>19</sup> A version of chapter 5 of this book, 'Tapping the mass market: The commercial life of Hindi film songs', appears in this forthcoming publication (from University of Minnesota Press).

<sup>20</sup> There have been other theses on film music completed at BHU under the supervision of Professor Dixit, such as on the role of classical music in film music and the work of particular music directors, such as Shankar-Jaikishen, but they were unavailable for study.

narrative and the lyrics of songs, but do not examine the role that the music itself plays. Manuel (1993: 40-55) similarly discusses film culture, but does not combine this anywhere with musical analysis of songs. He only refers to film culture in general, rather than any details of film narratives or song picturizations. Other studies examine the music of songs in detail, but not their narrative or cinematic contexts. They effectively look at film music as an autonomous tradition of mass-mediated popular music, and side-step the issue of the role of the cinematic context, film narrative, visuals and so on in the musical style of film songs and their historical development. This is largely the case with Arnold's *Hindi Filmi Git*. Arnold herself acknowledges that a cinematic study of film song would be useful: 'My approach is ... limited in the analysis of film song in relation to screen action: I occasionally refer to the picturisation of prerecorded, playback songs by film actors and actresses but a cinematic perspective on film dramatization of songs falls outside the range of this present work' (1991: 10). However, although the cinematic context of film songs is not the focus of Arnold's study, there is still useful information to be found on this topic in her thesis. Chatterjee (1992), Mala Sinha (1991) and Booth (2000) are also among the rare cases of studies that have discussed songs in their cinematic, narrative and visual contexts. Chatterjee and Sinha discuss the interaction of music and narrative in the music of *Awara* (1951) and Naushad respectively, and Booth discusses the combination of music, narrative, religion and extra-narrative gossip in the meaning of several Hindi film *bhajans*.

As with the production and the music of Hindi film songs, the cinematic context of the reception of film songs has also received little attention. There are studies that look at the way film tunes find their way into the repertoire of traditional musics and influence aspects of their musical or performance styles, but the primary reception of film songs and its relation to films has received little attention. Manuel is one writer who has discussed film culture as a whole and its influence on people's worldview, behaviour and so on, and its association with film music. He states that 'to some extent, Indian film music assumed a life and significance of its own that was independent of cinema', but also adds that 'for many, if not most consumers, the significance of film songs remains allied to their cinematic context' (1993: 42). This is intriguing, but there is a lot more to be discussed on the nature of the interaction between songs and films in their audience reception. How far are film songs consumed as a part of the Hindi film or with their visual picturizations, and how far are they consumed in the musical dimension only? Do songs make films popular or do films make songs popular, and how does this happen? Can record/cassette sales of music tell us anything about the primary consumption of film songs relative to the film?

In short, the relationship of film songs and the cinema in terms of production, musical style and reception is still an area that has been little explored. The neglect of details of musical style by non-musicologists writing about the use of song in Hindi films is consistent with a long history of visual bias in Western scholarship on texts such as narrative film where both a visual and a musical level are present. As Kalinak writes with reference to Hollywood film music, classical film theory assumed 'visual ascendancy and aural subordination' in its discussion of music's role in film: 'Sound was divided according to its function in relation to the image:

either parallel or in counterpoint to the visual image. Such nomenclature assumes that meaning is contained in the visual image and that sound can only reinforce or alter what is already there' (Kalinak 1992: 24).<sup>21</sup> This 'visual ascendancy' seems to have spread into more recent postmodern studies of MTV and pop video, which have almost completely ignored the music, with unfortunate consequences. In 'Fatal Distractions: MTV Meets Postmodern Theory,' Goodwin describes how MTV and pop videos were seized upon by many postmodern scholars as being postmodern texts *par excellence*. However, 'reading the postmodern accounts which celebrate the fragmentary visual discourses of MTV, one might never notice that its soundtrack is organized around regimes of repetition and tonality that are highly ordered and predictable' (Goodwin 1993: 47).

This lack of attention to the musical level of a text by film or video scholars is nothing new or surprising. However, the neglect of the Hindi film narrative by ethnomusicologists writing about film song style is puzzling. There are two reasons that may lie behind this. The first relates to the question of what the appropriate context for the study of film music is. The central tenet of ethnomusicology is to study music in its context, and writers such as Arnold and Manuel have indeed studied film music in its social, cultural, historical, technological and religious contexts, as well as the contexts of the film industry and film culture in general. However, film music also exists as a part of a Hindi film. Film songs exist both in the flesh-and-blood world of Indian culture and society, and in the fictional world of the parent Hindi film narrative, as a part of the protagonists' experiences, the film drama and so on. To put it in film magazine jargon, you could say that film songs exist in the 'reel world' of the film as well as the real world of Indian society. The real world context of film songs has been studied in considerable detail by, in particular, Arnold and Manuel, but that of the 'reel world' has received little attention. Because film songs are consumed apart from Hindi films and the visual medium to a certain extent, have a very high profile in Indian society and culture, and are clearly interacting with the 'real world' context in fascinating ways, it has possibly led to the 'reel world' being overlooked as a major context of film music in its own right.

The second possible reason why the musicological and cinematic aspects of film songs have not been studied simultaneously is the commonly held view that the cinematic context of film songs is in fact more or less insignificant to them, that they are effectively a tradition of popular music independent of the cinema. It is generally held to be the case that film songs interact with the contexts of Indian culture and society, as any tradition of Indian music does, but in terms of their music, they do not interact with the film narrative, even though they are found in Hindi films. Many academics and non-academics hold the view expressed by Manuel that most film songs are 'more-or-less gratuitous insertions into the plot, to be enjoyed for their own sake' (1993: 41). Manuel states that 'the closest American equivalent to Indian musical films' is MTV, implying that Hindi film songs are like pop videos, items in themselves, not relating to a larger narrative or thematic material (*ibid.*: 48). This view that songs are unrelated to film narratives has also been put forward and

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<sup>21</sup> Kalinak traces this visual bias through 19<sup>th</sup> century scientific discourse and as far back as Greek theories of acoustics (1992: 20-24).

theorized in detail by Prasad in his discussion of the Hindi film narrative (1998). Prasad refers to Marx's two modes of manufacture, the heterogeneous mode and the serial mode. With the heterogeneous form of manufacture, the whole is assembled from pre-fabricated parts. The example Marx gives of this is the watch. With the serial or organic form of manufacture, however, 'the base material of the product is present from the beginning to the end of the process,' but is shaped and refined by various stages of the process. The example of this given by Marx is the needle. Thus, Prasad sees Hollywood films as exemplifying the needle-type, organic manufacture process, due to the centrality of the story. The story in a Hollywood film 'is the point of departure of the production process and its transformation into a narrative film is the final goal of that process' (1998: 43). With the Bombay film, however, the story does not have this central position, it is rather just one component of the film, the others being the songs, dances, fights, comic track, dialogues and stars. 'It could be said that the story [in a Hindi film] occupies a place on par with that of the rest of the components, rather than the pre-eminent position it enjoys in the Hollywood mode' (ibid.: 43).

The various components of a Hindi film are independent from each other, and are discrete attractions in themselves within the film as a whole. Variations in these components 'are not demanded by the narrative', since unlike Hollywood films, there is no over-arching story or narrative plan in Hindi films (Prasad 1998: 44). Instead, they vary according to their own traditions, each having a logic of its own (ibid.: 44-45). For example, the lyrics of Hindi film songs are drawn largely from the Urdu poetic tradition, which has its own repertoire of images and themes. Songs, fights, dances and character types similarly have their own traditions, which would make a written script largely redundant, since 'the kind of narrative contexts that the given dialogue, lyrics, dances and stock characters make possible *do not require a prepared script*, simply because the variations in them are caused by innovations internal to the traditions of dialogue-writing, Urdu lyric-writing and dance history rather than the external pressure of the particularities of a narrative' (ibid.: 45).

Ravi Vasudevan, in his work on Hindi films, similarly describes the Hindi film narrative as modular and the various features as independent. Songs, dances, lyrics, dialogues and fights are all to some extent items in themselves within the film text, and have their own particular appeal: 'The relationship between narrative, performance sequence and action spectacle is loosely structured in the fashion of a cinema of attractions' (Vasudevan 1995: 307). Elsewhere, he describes songs, dances and comic sequences as 'para-narrative units' (1989: 31). In a similar vein, Rachel Dwyer describes the song sequences of Hindi films as coming to the narrative 'almost as prepackaged items' (2000: 142-143).

This view that songs are items superfluous to the Hindi film – or put in more neutral terms, that they are para-narrative units, emanating from their own traditions and not directly affected by the film narrative – implies that the cinematic context of film songs has little relevance to the form and style of film songs or to the development of the genre as a whole. This is probably why a thorough cinematic study of Hindi film songs, where songs are analysed in terms of their music, the film narrative and their visual picturization has not been completed, and why the Hindi

film has rarely been seen as anything more significant to Hindi film songs than an associated or 'allied' (Manuel 1993: 42) phenomenon.

### **The 'reel' world of Hindi film songs**

Are film songs really produced independently from films, irrelevant to their plots, and only associated or 'allied' to films and film culture in their consumption? Or is there in fact a deeper dynamic at work between film songs and films at all these levels that would be worth studying? Although it has not been the focus of their work, the aspects of the cinematic, narrative or visual context that Chatterjee (1992), Sinha (1991) and Arnold (1991) have discussed strongly suggest that the cinema and the Hindi film narrative is significant to film songs, and that film songs are not a tradition of music independent from the cinema. Booth (2000), in his analysis of film songs in their narrative and visual contexts, provides further evidence for the integration of songs with their films and visuals. In this article, rather than discussing film songs as a popular song tradition separate from films, he discusses them as 'music scenes', and demonstrates how cinematic, narrative, lyrical, musical and wider cultural codes combine to create textual meaning in religious or devotional film songs.

Aspects of Chatterjee's, Sinha's and Arnold's work, and Booth's article, all challenge the assumptions and theories that lead to Hindi film songs being seen as somehow separate entities from Hindi films, there for their own sake and extraneous to the narrative. Their work implicitly suggests or explicitly states that there is a complex relationship between film songs and films at all levels, which is central to the understanding of the nature of Hindi film songs and Hindi films and the nature of their consumption. This book studies this relationship between Hindi film songs and Hindi films. It looks at film songs in their cinematic, narrative and visual contexts –in their fictional, 'reel' world context rather than their real world one. It examines the connection of film songs with films in their production, musical style, commercial life and reception. It addresses the central question: To what extent are film songs an integral part of films, and to what extent are they an independent musical tradition that is merely associated with or 'allied' to films and film culture? Although the focus of this book is the relationship of film songs and the cinema at various levels, its findings will also be relevant to the issues of homogenization, passive listening and alienation that have haunted popular music studies since Adorno's writings on popular music from the 1930s. Through its study of the musical style and also the reception of film songs, it challenges and hopefully opens for wider debate Manuel's widely read statements about Hindi film music and Hindi films.

The cinematic study of Hindi film songs is a virtually new field, and there is little material to work from. It is therefore necessary to look to other fields of study that can provide relevant information and theoretical perspectives. If film songs are to be studied in the context of the Hindi film, then more information on the nature of the Hindi film text is necessary. The idea that film songs belong to a separate tradition from films, are gratuitous to films, and not influenced by the particular film, characters, stories and so on has already been discussed. Further work on the Hindi film narrative that is potentially significant to a cinematic study of film songs is found

in Vasudevan (2000). He characterizes Hindi films as consisting of a combination of Hollywood 'realist' continuity codes that force the narrative forward in a linear fashion, static visual codes such as the tableau, the iconic forms of address, and pre-modern Indian cultural codes of looking. These different cinematic codes convey meaning in different ways, and create different effects. Vasudevan notes that song sequences tend to contain more stasis, more iconic framing and tableaux. If the music of songs relates to narrative, then these different narrative styles may help us to understand musical style in songs better.

Thomas (1985, 1995), Vasudevan (1989 and 1995; 2000), Prasad (1998), Dissanayake (1993) and Dwyer (2000) have all discussed the Hindi film text as being melodramatic or in the 'melodramatic mode' (Brooks 1984 and 1991), 'displaying the characteristic ensemble of manichaeism, bipolarity, the privileging of the moral over the psychological, and the deployment of coincidence' (Vasudevan 1995: 307). In melodrama, the story may be set in the everyday world, but the characters' moral dilemmas and emotions are the real players (Brooks 1991; Elsaesser 1991; Gerould 1991). This focus of melodrama causes it to present more what Ang terms an 'emotional realism' than an 'empiricist' or 'classical' realism (1985, quoted in Dwyer 2000: 107 with reference to Hindi films). Plots present us with a bipolar or manichaeistic universe, extraordinary patterns of coincidence, mistaken identity and unlikely twists and turns in order to highlight emotions and moral issues in a stark and powerful way. This is very much the case with Hindi films.

Music is central to the idea of melodrama. The term melodrama literally refers to a drama accompanied by music, melo- coming from the Greek *melos* for music.<sup>22</sup> Of course, not everything that is classified as being in the melodramatic mode actually contains music, such as novels and plays. However, as both Brooks and Elsaesser note, music is still crucial to the understanding of the melodramatic mode. With the focus of melodrama being moral struggle and emotional realism, the type of communication that music represents is essential, as Brooks writes:

The emotional drama needs the desemanticized language of music, its evocation of the 'ineffable', its tones and registers. Style, thematic structuring, modulations of tone and rhythm and voice - musical patterning in a metaphorical sense - are called upon to invest plot with some of the inexorability and necessity that in pre-modern literature derived from the substratum of myth (1991: 60).

The overload of emotional and moral import in melodrama means that normal speech is inadequate as a means of expression. There is 'The feeling that there is always more to tell than can be said', and hence a heavy reliance on non-verbal forms of communication (Elsaesser 1991: 76). Seeing Hindi films as melodramatic and more concerned with emotional realism and moral struggle than psychological realism helps one to make sense of the role of songs. Songs are clearly unrealistic in the sense of the classical realism that Hollywood usually employs, but they are a means of giving explicit voice to real emotions that characters' words and expressions only

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<sup>22</sup> It was first used in this sense by Rousseau 'to describe a play in which he sought a new emotional expressivity through the mixture of spoken soliloquy, pantomime, and orchestral accompaniment' (Brooks 1991: 59).

hint at. Songs also play a role in the typically hyperbolic emotional expression of melodrama. Music and song enables emotions to be expressed in a bigger, larger-than-life way. Producer and director Anil Sharma described the use of songs in Hindi films as being in order to create a special or intense flavour or feeling,<sup>23</sup> to give ‘emotions in a better way’ (interview, 15 April 1999).

Whilst information on the nature of the Hindi film text is essential to any study of film songs as a part of that text, it does not directly help in the analysis of music in combination with visuals, narrative or drama. For this, we can look to work on traditional Indian theatrical forms such as *Nauṭāṅkī* (Hansen 1993) and Marathi theatre (Ranade 1986). Such work is of particular relevance to Hindi films and film songs, because these theatrical traditions are some of the most direct precursors of Hindi films. However, the most detailed material to be found regarding Indian drama and music is that in the *Saṅgītśāstras* and in more recent work regarding Indian classical music and its use in Sanskrit drama. Although Sanskrit drama is certainly not a direct influence on Hindi films and film songs, at least one writer, Mukund Lath, has found many parallels in his article ‘Bharata Muni and Hindi Films’ (1975). This helps us to connect films and film music with a larger tradition of Indian music and drama. There is also extensive discussion in the *Saṅgītśāstras* and more recent works on Indian classical music and musical meaning. Although these works only discuss classical music and *rāgs*, they provide essential indigenous theoretical material on music and meaning. Film songs may use many features of Western music, but they also use many Indian musical elements too, especially in the older songs of the 1930s to 1960s, where *rāgs* were frequently used. Although actual *rāgs* are used infrequently nowadays, much ‘Indian’ melody – often from folk music, or melody that is *rāg*-like in its structure and movement – is used in contemporary film music.

Indigenous material on music and drama is essential to this cinematic study of film songs, and yet film songs are also a hybrid art-form that is connected with the cinema. For this reason, it is relevant to look to writing on film theory, studies of American musicals and studies of multimedia for more detailed information on the way that music and song can interact with film narratives and drama. In his work on American film musicals (1987), Altman raises many issues that are relevant to a study of Hindi film songs, such as how narrative moves into song sequence, how dialogue moves into song, what visual and dramatic effects are associated with song sequences, and what effects are associated with the narrative portions of the film. He also discusses in detail the various relationships of music with the diegesis, ‘the *narratively implied spatiotemporal world of the actions and characters*’ (Gorbmann 1987: 21), and greatly refines the two categories which have previously been used by film theory: diegetic music, also known as source music, is that which has a source in the diegesis, and non-diegetic music, also known as background music, does not. He also examines the kinds of effects or meanings the various relationships of music or song and diegesis can lead to.

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<sup>23</sup> He used the term *rasa*, literally ‘juice’, an ancient term for aesthetic quality in Indian arts, but in a colloquial rather than technical sense.

Film theory and studies of multimedia also discuss the nature of interaction of music with narrative and raise important issues of meaning. Contemporary film theory sees meaning as emerging from the *interaction* of all the media rather than as something that is contained in the visuals or lyrics (as according to traditional film theory). With this model, it is not the case that music reinforces or alters meaning already present, but that music itself, along with visuals, dialogue and so on, is an active parameter in the creation or emergence of narrative and meaning:

Narrative is not constructed by visual means alone. ... music works as part of the process that transmits narrative information to the spectator, ... it functions as a narrative agent. Mood, emotion, characterization, point of view, even the action itself are constructed in film in a complex visual and aural interaction in which music is an important component. ... Thus when *tremolo* strings are heard, the music is not *reinforcing* the suspense of the scene; it is a part of the process that creates it (Kalinak 1992: 30-31).

This active role of music in constructing narrative and meaning is demonstrated by Gorbmann through applying the linguistic tool of commutation to film studies, 'taking any small segment of film and applying different types of music to it' (1987: 16). This shows that any kind of music *can* be used to accompany a given portion of film, but a different meaning will emerge from the combination of the segment of film with each new piece of music.

The implication of such work as Gorbmann's and Kalinak's is that if a given text is to be studied meaningfully, all its media should be studied. The dangers of leaving any level out of an analysis have already been referred to with the case of postmodern scholarship on MTV and pop video, which ignored the musical dimension and focused only on the visuals (Goodwin 1993). In *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, Cook (1998) reviews various theories concerning music and its possible interaction with other media – including film theory, musical synaesthesia and the concept of 'music alone' – to present a general method of studying combinations of music with other media, such as pop videos, television commercials and also narrative films. In his 'music-to-other-media approach', he emphasises the fundamental importance of including all media in analysis. He argues that it is not the case that meaning lies in the visual medium and the music can be ignored, or that meaning lies somehow in the music alone and the visuals can be ignored, since 'if the music gives meaning to the images, then equally the images give meaning to the music' (1998: 8). Cook is referring here to television commercials, but the point is equally relevant to film and film music, or to Hindi film and Hindi film song. The method of this book follows the thinking of contemporary film theory and the specific 'music-to-other-media' approach of Cook's for the analysis of Hindi film songs, and studies them as a form of musical multimedia.

As Booth's work has shown, a multimedia approach to film songs can have important implications for a consideration of meaning in songs and song sequences. However, a multimedia approach is not just important for the discussion of textual meaning and the possible reception of picturized film songs. It is also essential in establishing, at the level of musical style, whether songs are an autonomous tradition from films or whether they are integrated with films, and if so, to what extent. As Gorbmann's commutation method shows, *any* set of visuals and music will interact

in terms of meaning if they are viewed together. However, this does not necessarily mean that the visual level and the musical level are intended to go together or are in any way integrated traditions. Once songs are analysed in the context of the narratives and visuals of their parent films, the narrative style of Indian cinema in general, and their production process examined, it will be possible to ascertain how far Hindi films, visuals and narrative are involved in the actual musical logic of film songs.

The multimedia model of analysis is crucial to the study of the relationship of Hindi film song and Hindi film in terms of musical style as well as to a discussion of meaning in picturized film songs and the reception of film songs. However, the multimedia theory of seeing meaning as emerging from the combination of all aspects and media of a text rather than being fixed in any one still does not get to the bottom of the issue of meaning in musical texts. Kalinak, quoted above, writes regarding film backing music that ‘when *tremolo* strings are heard, the music is not *reinforcing* the suspense of the scene; it is a part of the process that creates it’ (1992: 31). This is certainly true, but why should tremolo strings be used as a part of creating suspense in the first place? Why not a trumpet fanfare or a lyrical melody played by massed violins?<sup>24</sup>

This question brings us to the heart of the much-debated issue of how music is able to refer outside itself. Some see meaning as inherent to the musical structure and style, whilst others see it as arbitrary and learned through convention (Shepherd and Wicke 1997: chapter 1). Tremolo strings for suspense is one of the many conventions or clichés of Hollywood backing score music used to manipulate and shape meaning within narrative films. It could be argued that tremolo strings have an inherent quality that can evoke suspense, due to the way they mimic trembling and thus connote fear. However, it could also be argued that their evocation of suspense is arbitrary, that it is merely a convention that has grown up as a part of late nineteenth century Romantic music, Hollywood’s main musical source, which has been further consolidated from repeated use in the context of scenes of suspense in films. Such an explanation is consistent with contemporary film theory and with Cook’s argument that meaning is created or emerges within a certain context, and that not only does music not exist without a context, but that it cannot mean anything on its own. As Cook writes with reference to TV commercials: ‘meaning is constructed or negotiated within the context of the commercial. ... Instead of talking about meaning as something that the music *has*, we should be talking about it as something that the music *does* (and has done to it) within a given context’ (1998: 8-9).

The study of Hindi film songs as multimedia and as meaningful or integrated to the narrative and visuals leads us into this debate of musical meaning from a particularly interesting angle: Hindi film songs and backing scores use much Western music and even use Hollywood conventions, but in the alien context of a Hindi film and Indian society. What could the often symphonic-style score of *Mother India*, set in a rural Indian village, have meant to audiences in 1957? Why was a more

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<sup>24</sup> Anahid Kassabian, in her study of Hollywood film music, also points out that people know what “‘low ominous sounds” or tubas mean’, but that this ‘does not answer the question of how tubas have become humorous’ (2001: 24).

Indian idiom not used? This book returns to the issue of musical meaning through an investigation of the use of Western music in Hindi films, drawing on Indian as well as Western discussions of musical meaning-making.

As dangerous as assuming that a given cultural product can be interpreted from just one medium is the assumption that it can be interpreted from a textual analysis or an analysis of its production alone. As Frith writes regarding the analysis of pop song lyrics: ‘much of the argument that starts from lyrical content analysis assumes that the “content” (or meaning) of songs as revealed by the analyst is the same as the content (or meaning) for other listeners’ (1998: 164). A number of studies highlight the importance of the audience rather than the text or producer in the ‘meaning’ of a given cultural product. Cook demonstrates how tonal unity in Western classical music, seen by theorists as one of its most important aspects, hardly features in a group of music students’ reaction to some musical works by altering pieces so they do not end in the tonic key (1988: 52-56). Janice Radway’s study of a particular group of women’s reading of popular romances similarly presents a radically different view of what a text can be said to ‘mean’ according to its content and structure, and what it may mean to those who receive it. The way the women read romances can be seen to be ‘oppositional because it allows the women to refuse momentarily their self-abnegating social role’, but ‘the romance’s narrative structure embodies a simple recapitulation and recommendation of patriarchy and its constituent social practices and ideologies’ (1991: 210). The ability of audiences to give texts meanings they were never intended to have is particularly strong in the case of songs, which rely on the semantically inexact media of music and poetry for their expression. Frith demonstrates this in his discussion of ‘protest songs’. Whilst Bruce Springsteen’s ‘Born in the USA’ was originally performed with bitter irony, ‘It is about growing up working class, being shipped off to fight in Vietnam and coming back to nothing’, the Republican Party later attempted to use it in the campaign for the 1984 presidential election (1998: 165-166).

These studies all demonstrate the power of audiences to invest a text with meaning and to use it in new and creative ways. They illustrate the necessity of considering, or at least being aware of, the reception of a cultural product in any given study, the social practices through which a given text is consumed, received or appropriated by audiences, and any secondary socio-cultural phenomena that may occur as people interact with the text. While a detailed, historically contextualized ethnography of film song consumption and reception is beyond the scope of this book, some of the broader ‘horizons of expectation’<sup>25</sup> and related socio-cultural phenomena of film song reception are examined in chapter 6 in order to re-evaluate the Adornian profile of film song audiences.<sup>26</sup> As the audience-based studies of Cook, Radway and Frith

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<sup>25</sup> This term was used by the German theorist Jauss in 1970 in *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation*, his study of reception of literature, looking both at historical patterns of literary genre, form and meanings, and present readings and interpretations. See Holub 1984: 58-63 for a discussion of Jauss’s use of this term.

<sup>26</sup> See also Jayson Beaster-Jones forthcoming PhD thesis, University of Chicago, dealing with consumption and marketing of film songs in various music stores in Bombay and Bhopal.

all suggest, audiences may gain a lot more from film songs than Manuel has given them credit for in his Adornian analysis (1993) which, from the observation that a small number of people produce film music for a mass audience, concludes that the audiences become passive receivers, alienated from their musicality.

## Fieldwork

With very little existing scholarship on Hindi film songs, this book draws extensively on fieldwork. This consisted of several trips to India made specifically for this project between 1998 and 2000, but also grew from many other trips made to India and Nepal from 1990, during which I was initially exposed to Hindi film songs and gradually grew to love and be fascinated by them.

I first came into contact with Hindi films and film songs in a six-and-a-half month trip to India made in 1990 after finishing school, when I was for the most part working as a volunteer English teacher at the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts in Dharamsala in the foothills of the Himalayas. At this stage, I had engaged little with Indian culture, living in a very much Tibetan cultural enclave, and found Hindi films utterly bewildering and the music rather abrasive. It was difficult to understand my Tibetan students' and friends' enjoyment of them.<sup>27</sup> However, over the following decade, I have seen myself turn into a fan and also a scholar of this cinema and music that I initially had such an aversion to. This came about through a greater familiarity with and understanding of Indian culture, as I started to study Hindi language and literature from 1993 and later Urdu, made more trips to India, and started to listen to this music and watch the films. My initial motivation for watching Hindi films and listening to film songs was partly the improvement of my Hindi, but I was drawn to them also out of a curiosity to understand what people saw in these, to me, extraordinary and not very appealing films and songs. People began to lend and recommend me film music they liked, and I was introduced to songs such as those from *Mere Mehboob* (1966) and *Baiju Bawra* (1952) by Naushad, or those from *Maine Pyar Kiya* (1989, the first Hindi film I actually went to a cinema to see), which still remain amongst my favourites. As well as being shown a way into film music in this manner by fans, what was also significant in growing to like film music was being able to listen to it on decent recordings and in at least relatively comfortable circumstances (as opposed to on extremely bad quality recordings played either on long bus journeys or in crowded bazaars, where my experience of film music became coloured by stress, exhaustion, heat and/or nausea).

In this way, Hindi film songs grew on me, and I became increasingly fascinated by this genre. I found myself wondering in a similar way to Arnold<sup>28</sup> (and many others) why a music that is found and loved the length and breadth of a continent should have received such a cursory treatment in Western and Indian scholarship. I

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<sup>27</sup> There seemed to be a distinct gender divide amongst the Tibetan refugee community in Dharamsala over movies, with typically the girls liking the Hindi movies, and the boys tending to prefer either Western movies or martial arts movies.

<sup>28</sup> These matters were significant in inspiring Arnold's PhD in film songs, which has sadly not been published. See Arnold 1991: 1.

also marvelled at film song's ability to create controversy – it must have *something* interesting and worth writing about if people love it and hate it with such vigour. Another aspect of film song that gained my sneaking admiration was a brazen iconoclasm, an ability to borrow and adapt music from many traditions, ancient and modern, 'high' and 'low', to break the rules, and to make such a roaring success of it! Having been a student of mostly classical Indian music at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), and having grown up with a lot of classical Western music, whilst being and remaining deeply fond of these traditions, the rebellious, non-classical nature of film song appealed to me greatly as something new, different and fun. It was also something that it was easy to hold and express an opinion about, whether positive or negative, informed or uninformed, because film music does not yet have an authoritative tradition that interprets it in certain ways and holds it sacred or above criticism. In fact, no aspect of film music or Hindi films is above criticism by anyone, whether it is particular songs, films, singers, composers or the style as a whole.<sup>29</sup> How long this situation will last remains to be seen, as aspects of films and film songs become old if not ancient, and opinions begin to solidify as film culture matures and scholarship about films and film songs builds up. Even now, for example, there is a sense of the greater quality of old film songs and films, or that some film music is for the 'masses' and some more for the 'classes'.<sup>30</sup>

These are amongst the reasons that led me, whilst I was studying *Dhrupad* in the ancient Indian city of Benares with a view to going on to do research in classical music, to make the decision to undertake a project in Hindi film songs instead. I saw Hindi film song as a musical tradition that has as much right to be taken seriously as any other, and aimed to attempt to understand it on its own terms and see it through the eyes of its own people and culture, indeed, to approach it in an ethnomusicological way.

My fieldwork was ethnographically based; I aimed to study film music through observing, fitting in with and joining in with its own people and culture. There were several ways that I went about trying to narrow the gap between myself and the people I was meeting, and to enter into film culture. The first was through language. I already could speak Hindi and had begun learning Urdu, since this was the language of most film songs rather than the largely Sanskritized Hindi I had learned at SOAS and in Benares. Although many of the people I met in Bombay spoke English, and some even preferred to speak English to Hindi, especially to me, my knowing Hindi and the fact that I was learning Urdu showed I was taking India, a substantial proportion of its people and the linguistic heritage of Hindi film songs seriously, and it helped in turn in getting people to take me seriously and to give me their time. It was also crucial in enabling me to observe effectively, and to understand important

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<sup>29</sup> Contrary to the opinion held by mass music critics in the vein of Adorno and Manuel, rather than being turned into passive receptors of this music, I have found people and the media to be particularly vociferous in their reaction to film music, and not to hold back from dismissing any aspect of films or film songs as useless or stupid. This and other aspects of audience reactions to film music are discussed in chapter 6.

<sup>30</sup> This can be compared with the role of the past and the ancientness of music and pedigree in valuing styles and performers in classical Indian music. See Neuman 1990.

conversations people had with each other rather than with me. It was also essential for carrying out interviews with certain key industry figures such as Naushad and Rajkumar Barjatya. I also felt that an adherence to an Indian dress code went possibly just as far as knowing Hindi in earning people's respect and being seen as an insider, since women are judged harshly by the type of clothes they wear, and Western clothes, unfortunately, tend to put someone in the less 'respectable' and more 'available' bracket, especially if they are Western to start with.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the Indian film industry is famous for preying on women.

Another key factor in becoming a part of film culture and being taken seriously by people was to know about the industry, and an important part of the first year of my PhD was spent in getting to know 'the players', their important films and songs etc., and becoming acquainted with the kind of discourse that exists about films, songs and the industry on television (I had Zee TV at home in the UK), and in fan magazines such as *Filmfare* (in English) or *Filmī Duniyā* (in Hindi).

However, this project involved more than entering into ordinary people's world(s) of films and film songs. Because I wanted to focus on the production of film songs and their economics as well as their reception, access to a highly privileged sector of the population was necessary – that of members of the film and music industries. I never managed to persuade any members of the industry to meet me just for the sake of my important, scholarly task. Even belonging to London University and speaking the best Hindi I could muster were no help. These people were famous and/or very rich, were far more important than me, and were also very busy. An introduction was essential. I was lucky enough to be given access to the industry through one of my PhD supervisors, Dr Rachel Dwyer, who put me in touch with the highly esteemed director Yash Chopra, with whom she has been working for some years. Yashji arranged interviews with several people, and introduced me to Sanjeev Kohli, the chief executive officer of Yash Raj Films and Metavision,<sup>32</sup> a former employee of HMV, and the son of the late music director Madan Mohan. Sanjeev Kohli arranged many interviews for me and also shared his encyclopaedic knowledge of film songs and the industry. Once I had been introduced to a few people, they were able to introduce me to others.

The interviews were mostly formal; I came at an arranged time to meet the person (and then often had to wait a long time after the pre-arranged time to actually talk to them). I found the interviews particularly challenging. Most of the people I met had given many interviews to journalists, and set out to give me a standard story, their background, their struggle, their breakthroughs, their hit films, exciting new projects, and so on. However, with some persistent questioning, virtually all came to understand the sorts of things I wanted to know, such as how they coordinated with other members of the film team to produce a song, what kind of a role the film and the song situation played in the music, and how and why they expressed certain moods and dramatic scenes with particular musical techniques. After the interviews,

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<sup>31</sup> See Dwyer's examination of dress codes in Indian culture (2000b).

<sup>32</sup> Yash Raj Films is Yash Chopra's production company, and Metavision is a television company that produced amongst other things, the film song singing competition show *Meri Awaz Suno*.

most people invited me to recording sessions, for songs or background music, as they realized that I wanted to observe closely how things happened.

Observing these recordings led to meeting more people, more interviews, and in turn more recordings. However, one recording session led me to a more remarkable experience, which enabled me to not just observe film and film song making and conduct formal interviews, but to actually join in, albeit at a low level. I had been to several recording sessions for songs from *Hum Tum Pe Marte Hain* (1999) when, to my shock, it was announced (without asking me) that I would be playing a role in the film. In the film, the heroine's sister-in-law (a semi-'baddy') manages a substantial business empire, big enough to have a business partner from the West, my father in the film, played by Bob Christo.<sup>33</sup> Although this was a minor part, just a few scenes with one or two dialogues, it did give me the opportunity to see a lot more than just recording sessions and formal interviews, and to be a part of a film team. I got to know the direction team well, and many of the assistant directors became my friends. I spent a lot of time with them, listened to on-duty conversations, such as discussing a scene and amending dialogues prior to shooting it, and joined in off-duty discussions about films, film-making, music and so on. I witnessed much of the editing of the film and the songs, the dubbing of dialogues, lots of shooting, and obviously took part in some myself, and had the chance to meet the most aloof members of the film team – the stars.<sup>34</sup> I saw parts of the film created from shooting to the rushes to rough edits to trials to the final version. The only things I had been unable to witness with this film (and any other) were the sittings between music director and director, and the making of the background music, which happened before I had met the team and after I had left the country respectively. I was later able to witness one preliminary music sitting that the direction team of *Hum Tum Pe Marte Hain* had with a music director for a possible future film.

Taking part in this film certainly changed my relationship with industry people. Whilst it was intriguing, but not a big deal for industry people outside the film I was taking part in, it put me to a significant extent on the inside of the team of the film I did take part in, and enabled me to make friends with many of those involved. It also helped me understand the 'industry people' and their work much better, as I begun to comprehend the magnitude of organization, money, hard work, imagination, patience and determination that goes into making a film and picturized film songs. Shooting is intensive and exhausting, especially in locations and studios in India without air-conditioning. Although recording studios are air-conditioned, directors and music directors seem to work virtually round the clock most days. I saw clearly that at the level of production, there is sincere effort and a belief that something great can be created, even if the result is a 'flop' that audiences ultimately laugh at.

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<sup>33</sup> Bob Christo has played foreigner roles in around 200 Hindi films, his function mostly being, as he said, to test the strength of the hero, in other words, to fight the hero and lose (personal communication 1999).

<sup>34</sup> Meeting stars was not very relevant to the project, but it was fascinating to see their off-screen personas, and personally exciting, to meet and talk to some of my favourites, like Dimple Kapadia and Govinda.

Whilst carrying out fieldwork in the Bombay film industry had its problems – waiting around, almost endlessly sometimes, for important people to meet me, and trying to make sense of the often conflicting things they told me spring immediately to mind – in other senses it was relatively unproblematic. I can say quite confidently that people did carry on with work as normal while I was present, and I had little real impact on what I was observing. Unlike in many ethnographic fieldwork situations, having a foreigner present was not a big deal. Industry people live global lives and the nature of the style of films and film music itself are inherently hybrid and eclectic. Furthermore, I was not a person of any influence or power in this context. Music directors, singers, directors and producers, not to mention actors and actresses, are used to working amongst, and performing to, crowds of people who are more interested in them than they are in the crowds. If the director, producer or some other important film personality enters a recording studio or set, people's behaviour does change, but people were far too busy to be affected by someone as unimportant as myself. Observing recordings and shootings has actually been one of the few situations in India where I felt able to sink into the background and just watch. I did ask questions, but waited for natural pauses, such as waiting for a singer or a musician to turn up, so as not to be intrusive.

Even in the case of *Hum Tum Pe Marte Hain*, where I had an active role in the film and was also extensively present, observing far more details of film and song making, such as editing, dialogue writing and discussions, I did not feel my presence changed anything fundamentally. I was only invited to editing or to listen to discussions, or more importantly to the one music sitting I was able to witness, when the team knew me well and were comfortable having me around. Although opinions of mine will have been assimilated into the film and song-making process, this was not in a more privileged way than those of anyone else the director or music director or other members of the film team may have met and talked to. What could have fundamentally changed my position as a fieldworker and the field itself would have been being shot to fame through *Hum Tum Pe Marte Hain*. However, my minor role was hardly the ideal star vehicle, and the film itself was sadly unsuccessful, and the only people I recall spotting me were my tailor and his wife and a local coconut seller who knew me already!

## Outline

This book aims to present a comprehensive study of Hindi film songs and the cinema by exploring the relationship of film songs and films at the levels of production, musical style, commercial life and audience reception. Chapter 2, drawing almost exclusively on fieldwork, approaches the production process of film songs, locating it within that of the parent Hindi film. The role of the producer, director, choreographer, stars and film story as well as that of the music director (composer) and lyricist in the making of the film songs is examined. It is established how far the songs are composed according to musical tradition and the individual taste and creativity of the music director, and how far they are composed according to matters directly relating to the film. This will establish to what extent film songs are independent songs, and to what extent they are a part of the film at the level of production.

Chapters 3 and 4 turn to the music of Hindi film songs. Whilst lyrics are referred to, the focus is on film songs as a musical expression. These chapters draw on previous scholarship on Hindi film songs, material on Western film music, pop videos, American film musicals, Indian theatrical traditions and music, and studies on the Hindi film narrative, as well as material from fieldwork and the analysis of picturized film songs. Chapter 3 reviews previous studies of film song style and then proceeds to investigate film song style through a comparison of film and non-film *qawwālīs*. This comparison reveals what the film has added or changed in traditional *qawwālī* and hence isolates what film song style is. This method is also used to isolate the cinematic aspect of the historical development of film song. Film song style is discussed with relation to the cinematic and narrative style of Hindi films. With comparison to other popular music genres, themselves influenced by film song, it is possible to isolate the unique components of film song style. The chapter concludes with a discussion on how far film songs can be seen as an independent style, as in Prasad's model discussed above, and how far they are to be identified with the Hindi cinema.

Chapter 4 extends the study of film music to the backing scores of Hindi films, and addresses the issue of musical meaning in the music of Hindi films. It focuses on the phenomenon of the use of Western music in film songs and background scores. First, it is established to what extent the use of Western music in Indian and Hollywood films overlaps. Then it is discussed how an overlap may occur if music is a culture-specific semiological system. The debate about whether meaning in music is arbitrary and culturally learned, or whether it is inherent in the musical structures or indeed in physiological processes of the human body, will be revisited with the findings of this specific case of Hindi film songs. Trends in the use of Western music in Hindi films are discussed in the light of the narrative context of this music, and it is argued that the narrative role of film songs plays a part in the borrowing of Western music in Hindi film songs and background scores.

In chapter 5, the commercial life of film songs is examined. The history of film songs as a commercial product is discussed through a focus on four eras of film song history, the early years of sound film; the early 1930s to the mid-1980s: the gramophone era; the 1980s-2000: The cassette revolution and the spread of commercial television; and 2000 and beyond: From boom to bust. The commodification, marketing and profitability of film songs in each of these eras are discussed, and the commercial relationship of films and film songs explored.

Chapter 6 overviews the reception of film songs and its relationship to the cinema, focusing chiefly on the contemporary situation. First, the popularity as opposed to the commercial sales of film songs is discussed through an examination of countdown charts that are calculated according to audience requests as well as sales. The contact of audiences with film songs is then discussed, so as to ascertain how far audiences are exposed to film songs in the context of the parent film or the Hindi cinema in general. The question of what audiences then 'do' with film songs is also addressed. Chapter 6 concludes with a discussion of the different levels of film song reception, and a return to the Adornian profile of film songs as passively consumed and causing musical alienation as argued by Manuel (1993).