

AMITABH BACHCHAN: FROM 'ANGRY YOUNG MAN' TO 'FLIRTATIOUS OLD MAN'**Changing Representations of Masculinity in Bollywood**

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"Amitabh Bachchan-Top Hero numbers one through ten, yaar, demanding a lot of capitalisation of key descriptive words: Hero, Superstar; Urban Demi-God. So how to describe him? A cross between Clint Eastwood, Al Pacino, Elvis, but with more than a hint of John Travolta. Nah, that doesn't come close." Jessica Hines (2007, p. 7)

Amitabh Bachchan—considered one of the greatest stars of Indian cinema has been playing the leading roles in Hindi films since 1969. Popularly known as the 'Angry Young Man' of Indian cinema, Bachchan has dominated the Indian cinema for last four decades in various avatars, be it the 'Angry Young Man' of the 1970s, the demigod/superhero of the 1980s, the patriarch of the late 1990s and the ageing metrosexual of the 2000s.

The shift in the persona of Bachchan can be clearly seen in the 2007 film *Cheeni Kum*, which does not portray him as the 'Angry Young Man' as he has been popularly known as, or as the patriarch that he has been playing recently, instead it represents him as a 64 year old 'metrosexual' male who romances a woman 30 years younger than him. Bachchan is not out seeking vengeance or setting things right for society, nor he is playing god and passing his verdict on right and wrong. Here he is trying to flirt and appear his best to woo the woman (Tabu) he is besotted with. In one scene Tabu playfully challenges Amitabh's masculinity. Jha (2007) states, "The incandescent Tabu makes Amitabh Bachchan run across the London fields... 'Just to see if you've the energy to do anything else,' she tells him, her tongue firmly in cheek."

It has been more than thirty years since Bachchan captured the imagination of the Indian moviegoers, and he still wields the power to surprise them with his new makeovers be it the 'Sexy Sam' of 'Kabhie Alvida Na Kehna' (Never Say Goodbye, 2006) who literally chases anyone in a skirt, or the 60 year old photographer Vijay who falls in love with an 18 year old girl in 'Nishabd' (2007). The 21st Century has seen Amitabh Bachchan in a new mould; he has come out of the frame of the

superhero and is someone more realistic, his film repertoire has more shades than before and he is still the 'numero uno' for his die-hard fans. In this article, I will explore the changing images of masculinity in contemporary India through the films of Amitabh Bachchan, and how the socio-economic and political situation of the nation affects them. The article is divided into three parts—the "Angry Young Man", "The King and the God" and "The Patriarch and the Metrosexual". The 60s was a decade of metamorphosis in Indian history, with the war with China in 1962, Nehru's death in 1964, war with Pakistan in 1965, and finally the rise of Indira Gandhi as the Prime Minister of India in 1966. During this period, India was slipping into a state of discombobulation. Dasgupta (2006, p. 7) states:

There is a common perception among scholars and film script-writers that the political turmoil of the late 1960s came about as a result of a crisis in the ideals of Nehruvian state with its socialist

model failing to deliver essential goods and guarantee enough jobs. While this is indeed true, there is another side to the crisis. This period also witnessed stagnation in white-collar jobs. The middle class was as shaken as drought-stricken farmers and retrenched labourers of locked out factories. Indeed, the late 1960's ushered in a period of crisis for both the masses and the classes.

The Hindi Cinema in the late 60s and early 70s were dominated by the romantic genres particularly the films of Rajesh Khanna. The films portrayed suave, prosaic, courteous, and to some extent passive 'Heroes,' who were desirable romantically and ideologically. Khanna was the first superstar of the Indian cinema whose romantic and sensitive performance created mass hysteria, but it was short-lived. The early 70s saw turbulent times for India. The country was embroiled into the third war with Pakistan over creation of Bangladesh in 1971. Indira Gandhi's able tackling of war saw her rise as a statesman and a world leader, but the end of war did not bring any relief as such with an estimated 10 millions of Bangladeshi refugees in India led to the rise of mass unrest due to financial hardship, red-tapism, corruption and instability (Guha, 2007).

With the release of *Zanjeer* (The Chain), in 1973, the Indian Cinema changed forever. This film heralded the advent of the 'Angry Young Man'—a hero and a rebel with a cause, who would fight for his rights, who would single-handedly make sure he gets justice and who brings people to justice. He was not a romantic like Rajesh Khanna—the reigning superstar till 1973, or stars like Raj Kapoor, Dilip Kumar and Dev Anand who basked in the glory of Gandhian-Nehruvian nationalism, following the socialistic values and strengthening the cause of the new India's endeavour towards modernity and development. In Bachchan people found a 'voice' for their anger towards the anti-nationals, the corrupt system and the failing administration. For the audience he became their mascot for the struggle against the disillusionment they had with the shattered dreams of the Nehruvian promise one of them being "alleviation of poverty." Virdi (2004, p. 88) states:

An aspect of constructing masculinity is the hero's role as a primary agent shaping the nation's history. Like all heroes, the Hindi film hero upholds the law; or, on occasion, he is the heroic outlaw.

'The Angry Young Man' representation of Bachchan in films does this. He goes after the anti-nationals ruthlessly (*Zanjeer*-1973), fight for his rights (*Aadlat*, 1976), rebels against the system to fight its inefficiency and impotency against the rich, and the powerful (*Deewar*, 1975, *Trishul*, 1978). The Angry Young Man is not impotent, he is not a mute spectator, he observes, he sulks; he seethes in anger and retaliates with extreme violence to bring justice for what he believes in. Action films were made before *Zanjeer*, but they never inflamed the audience the way the portrayal of the 'Angry Young Man' did.

The Angry Young Man 1973-1983

The construction of Amitabh Bachchan's 'Angry Young Man' persona in Hindi Cinema has predominantly provided the symbol of the common mans' fight against the oppressors, be they the anti-na-

tionals, state, society, or his family. The Macho man representation of Bachchan was a contrast to the romantic image of Rajesh Khanna or the action films of Dharmendra. Dasgupta (2006, p. 13) contends:

It is Zanjeer that broke the audiences' expectations of a good-natured hero who always upholds the right values and does everything that society both prescribes and expects its members to follow. Zanjeer's Vijay does the right things all right, but these 'right things' are not the ones that are in vogue with the establishment. Rather, they are those that he finds out through his own understanding of the empirical situation at hand." In Zanjeer Amitabh played the role of a rebellious police inspector Vijay seeking revenge for the murder of his parents shot him to superstardom and earned him the screen image of an angry young man.

With the escalating financial and food supply problems in 1970s India, the rich and powerful were viewed by the masses as enemies, who's hoarding, bootlegging and black-marketing adding to their woes. This period saw the rise of various movements against the system and the class structure, especially the Naxalite movement which was inspired by the left movement and was an offshoot of many socio-economic issues like under-development, impact of declaring certain forest covers as National Park, eviction of families from forests and so on. Ray & Katzenstein (2005, p. 18) outlines the various movements that were happening during the 70s:

Naxalism was a major break with the politics of Nehruvian socialism, asserting instead an aggressive, pro-peasant Maoism. In 1972, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, the All-Assam Students Union, the Self-Employed Women's Association, various regional farmers association, the Chipko movement, and the Dalit Panthers were all formed. Civil liberties organizations, people's science movements, and a range of other organizations followed, and a revolution in Indian politics was underway.

The Lone Warrior

The 'Angry Young Man' persona was the creation of the writer duo Salim Khan and Javed Akhtar popularly known as Salim-Javed. After the success of Zanjeer and Deewar they went on to script more than 14 films starring Amitabh Bachchan as the 'Angry Young Man.' Javed Akhtar asserts that, "the focus of these films was the fight of the 'hero' against the corrupt establishment during this time (Kabir, 2005)."

Yash Chopra a prominent director made four films with Bachchan during the 70s namely Deewar (The Wall, 1975), Kabhi Kabhie (Sometimes-Sometimes 1976), Trishul (Trident, 1978) and Kala Patthar (Black stone, 1979). In Kabhie Kabhie he represented Bachchan as the brooding lover whereas he used the 'Angry Young Man' persona of Bachchan to its fullest. Bachchan's role in these films was akin to a street fighter who fights against the society and the establishment. In Deewar Bachchan portrayed an anti-hero; a mafia don opposite his police officer brother, played by Shashi Kapoor. Deewar was released in 1975 around the time when Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, declared a state of emergency and assumed dictatorial powers. The anti-establishment roles that Bachchan was portraying at this point of time fanned the support of the public and lent his image of 'Angry Young Man' an enormous status. Viridi (1993, p. 29) contends that:

It is films like Deewar that introduce in the 70s a new kind of masculinity of the hero, in the figure of Amitabh Bachchan. Not only is he heroic in his single-handed struggle against oppression, but he is guaranteed agency with a new style of machismo, where physical strength is important but so is his wit and intelligence.

The anti-hero of Deewar replaced the idealistic-utopian hero of the 50s & 60s. The wronged hero became more celebrated than the idealists, as he delivers justice himself, instead of waiting for the authorities to do it. The situation in India had changed; people were getting tired of corruption and red tapism and wanted to see immediate results, at least on screen. They wanted a hero who could be potent enough to retaliate, who would not fear death in his quest for his rights. They needed someone who could face the challenges, effect change and fulfill their masculine desires. Chopra (1999) argues:

Bachchan in Deewar and Trishul 'grows' from a street fighter into a forceful man while his screen brother Shashi Kapoor sings songs with the girls as the romantic. In this scenario of man-in-the-making, resorting to physical fights is projected as proof of male potency. Boys who shunned fighting are wimps, not fit to be 'manly' men.

The emergency era saw films like Kabhie Kabhie (1976), Hera Pheri (1976), Adalat (1976), Amar Akbar Anthony (1977), Immaan Dharam (1977), Khoon Pasina (1977) and Parvarish (1977). These were the films about fight against injustice of the establishment, family, and other elements of society. Most of the films glorified the macho image and the raw masculinity that Bachchan exuded. Though Bachchan's films gave the appearance of being anti-establishment to some extent, ultimately the state won in almost all the films. In Deewar, Ravi shoots Vijay for his anti-national activities. In Adalat, Bachchan sacrifices himself to protect the state represented by his son as the police officer. Dasgupta (2006, p. 26) closely observes the relationship of the state and the "Angry Young Man," she argues that:

When Mrs. Gandhi declared emergency in 1975, Amitabh supported the Congress and even campaigned for Mrs. Gandhi. Some might interpret this gesture to say that Amitabh held beliefs and ideologies that belied the hero he played onscreen, but I am inclined to infer that the polemic of the angry young man was in no way different from the ideology of the Congress. He merely wanted the state's powers to be intensified-he did not want its curtailment. Since Amitabh's film made a case for a greater self-reflection on the part of the state and the establishment, he was a rebel, but he was not anti-incumbent.

1977 was the year of people's victory against the dictatorial rule of Indira Gandhi in the garb of emergency. In the election held in 1977, the newly formed Janta Party, who received phenomenal support from the masses, routed Indira Gandhi's Congress party. Morarji Desai became the new Prime Minister of India. People were overcoming the fear and terrors generated by the emergency and were hopeful for the new government's rule, but the hope was short-lived. The political maneuverings of Indira Gandhi and the contradictions within the Janta Party saw the fall of the government within three years (Guha, 2007). Furthermore on the constant political wrangling of this decade Guha (2007, p. 84) states, "the 1970s saw the ascendance of a populist style in Indian politics, with disputes increasingly

sought to be resolved in the streets rather than in the legislature.”

Yash Chopra's *Kaala Patthar* was inspired by the true story of inundation disaster at Chasnalla mine, which killed 375 miners in 1975. The film showcased the raw grit and courage of the people working in these mines. The film revolves around poorly treated coalmine workers and a humiliated naval officer Vijay (Amitabh). It portrayed Amitabh as the brooding lone warrior against the capitalists who controls the coalmines. The upright coalmine engineer Ravi (Shashi Kapoor) and foe turned friend Mangal (Satrugan Sinha) helps Vijay in his cause to make the coalmine a safe and worker friendly place. The three of them come together to fight for justice against the mine owner Dhanraj (Prem Chopra) when water floods the mines endangering the lives of hundreds of workers. In *Kaala Patthar*, Vijays' fight is not just against the capitalists but also against the society and his family. He wanted to prove himself not guilty of the cowardice that he has been accused of while working as a naval captain for abandoning his ship. On the kind of masculinity that Vijay portrays in *Kaala Patthar*, I agree with Chopra's (1999) point that:

There is no doubt that for many years a muscular manliness that excluded and forswore feminine qualities from itself was the celebrated image. The ideal man was a sporting hero who was physically strong, courageously defended his honour and was always in the pink of health.

In *Kaala Patthar*, Bachchan is haunted by the nightmares of his cowardly act and being shunned by society and his family. He sees Mangal as a nuisance to the coal miners and rises against them as an act of repentance for his past. His failure as a naval officer makes him stronger and more courageous in the face of Mangal, the dangers of a coalmine, or the manipulative ways of the coalmine owner.

Brothers in Arms:

Sholay (Flames, 1975), *Khoon Pasina* (1977), *Suhaag* (1979), *Dostana* (1980) and *Ram Balram* (1980) depicted Amitabh as a brooding 'Angry Young Man' who fights for his honour and that of others, along with his friends. *Sholay*, hailed as one of the classics of Indian cinema, ran in a theatre for more than 10 years. The story follows two small time crooks Jai (Amitabh) and Veeru (Dharmendra) that are hired by an ex-cop Thakur Baldev Singh (Sanjeev Kumar) to fight a tyrannical dacoit Gabbar Singh (Amjad Khan) who has killed his entire family, and has terrorized the villagers. *Sholay* had various sub plots within it.

Two of the dominant sub plots were the love of Veeru and Jai for Basanti & Radha respectively, and their male bonding. Dharmendra as Veeru is the happy go lucky bumpkin who climbs a 100 meter high water storage tanker in a drunken stupor and threatens to commit suicide if the villagers don't marry him off to Basanti (Hema Malini), whereas Amitabh Bachchan as Jai represents the brooding warrior and the restrained lover who could not show his heart's desire to Radha (Jaya Bhaduri). The friendship between Jai & Veeru in *Sholay* has been hailed as the one of the finest on-screen male bondings and is highlighted by the song "Yeh Dosti" (This Friendship). Moreover the portrayal of male bonding in *Sholay* is not just limited to singing songs and finding lovers but is also found in the emotional support, protective attitude and sacrifice for their friendship. Travisano (2001) states "From his extroverted

avowal of friendship for his friend Veeru in "Yeh Dosti" to his sacrifice cum martyrdom for that same friend, Bachchan's masculine performance hovers between violent defense of righteousness and more tender defensiveness of what he holds emotionally dear."

Two main themes dominate the silver screen of the stories of male bonding starring Bachchan. The lost and found family theme is especially evident in the dramas of Manmohan Desai: *Amar Akbar Anthony* (1977), *Parvarish* (1977) and *Naseeb* (1981). The other dominant theme was of the friends fighting for a cause.

Khoon Pasina (Blood and Sweat, 1977) is another blockbuster, which followed the theme of lost and found family drama. *Khoon Pasina* is a tale of communal harmony, friendship and loyalty. Ram & Rahim represent the two communities of Hindus & Muslims in a village, which is an example of communal harmony. Their sons Aslam (Vinod Khanna) and Shiva (Amitabh) are also friends and are raised like brothers. They are both taught to uphold justice and fight against religion based communal forces. Zalim Singh (Kader Khan) a gangster/bandit is faced with stiff opposition from Ram and Rahim to carry out his unscrupulous activities and thus he has them murdered by stirring up religious hatred. Aslam & Shiva are separated in the chaos. Aslam is presumed dead and Aslam's mother brings up Shiva. Shiva becomes "Tiger" a vigilante who battles villains and the oppressors of the poor. Aslam becomes "Shera" a respected and feared figure living on the fringes of society, earning his living protecting merchants from thieves. He uses his wealth to help the poor but cannot get over the loss of his childhood friend. When Tiger is (falsely) accused of killing a poor farmer, Shera sets out to track him down and confront him, not knowing that the man he seeks to kill is none other than his long lost friend. The highlight of *Khoon Pasina* is the fight sequence between Amitabh and a real Tiger. Ironically in the film Amitabh is nicknamed Tiger. He oozes raw masculinity; vanquish his enemies and tame wild animals. This image of Amitabh as the macho tamer of the wild was repeated in films like *Shaan* (1980) where he fights off a crocodile and *Mr. Natwarlal* (1979) where he once again subdues a Tiger on a rampage. In later films, the animals and birds are not only tamed but become his friends/helpers as well. In *Coolie* (Porter, 1983) Amitabh has an Eagle named 'Allahrakha' (one protected by god) as his helper and in *Mard* (He-Man, 1983) he has a loyal Dog and a Horse who aids and rescues him in difficult circumstances.

Mother-Son Relationship:

In *Deewar* one of the most celebrated scenes is when the two brothers Vijay (Amitabh Bachchan) & Ravi (Shashi Kapoor) meet under a flyover to resolve the tension between them. Ravi insists that Vijay should leave the life of an anti-national and surrenders himself to the police, Vijay chuckles and retorts that the serving the police/government has hardly given anything to Ravi, whereas on the other hand he being an anti-establishment person has all the worldly pleasures at his side. Ravi replies tersely "Mere Paas Maa Hai!" (I have mother with me), this reply leaves Vijay with the cold and empty feeling that, without his mother at his side, he is nothing. The mother-son relationship that was developed in *Deewar* echoed the spirit of the 1957 film 'Mother India' by Mehboob Khan, but it was from *Deewar* onwards that the worship-love-hate relationship between mother and son was explored to the maximum, notably in, *Amar Akbar Anthony* (1977), *Khoon*

Pasina (1977) and Trishul (1978). In another scene in Deewar, Vijay goes out to buy a building for which he pays too much. The seller tells him that he is a bad businessman and does not know how to trade. Vijay replies mockingly that it's rather the other way round, as he would have paid much more because it is the same building for which his mother, as a labourer, carried bricks.

The mother figure has always been worshipped and prayed to in Indian culture through the form of the Mother Goddess. Mothers have been accorded the status of goddess at home and in society. In films, mothers were the ultimate women. They were tranquil, immaculate, and morally above reproach. The mother bore all the misfortunes and hardship to give her children protection and a good life. Bachchan, as the son who witnesses his mother go through all these adversities promises to end her sufferings when he is capable of doing so. In Deewar he starts working at an early age along with his mother (Nirupa Roy) to send his younger brother Ravi to school and fulfill their dreams. In Trishul he embarks on a journey to take revenge on his father who had deserted his mother.

Hindi cinema has cleverly utilized the issue of the wronged mother and the avenging son/s and is prominently figured in the "masala" (spiced, a mix of various genre of films) films. In "masala" films, various themes of drama, action, romance and revenge etc. are converged within one formulaic genre. Viridi (2004, p. 91) contends:

Traditional genre divisions associated with gender-women's "weepie," the maternal melodrama, and men's gangster/action films-collapse in Hindi films. Here, maternal melodrama and gangster action coalesce. These films project masculinity in a unique way. The moment that culminates in heroic success and proved an idealized masculinity is one in which the hero, as in most action films, achieves success by upholding the nation's law. But in Hindi cinema the hero is typically also motivated by a consuming desire to avenge the sins against his mother, which drives the narrative forward.

The success of Deewar and Amar Akbar Anthony prompted filmmakers to take note of a new kind of pairing; that of the mother and son, and thus the pairing of Amitabh Bachchan as the son, and Nirupa Roy as the mother, became a first of its kind in Indian cinema, which was repeated in more than 10 films from 1975's Deewar to 1999's Lal Baadshah.

The Entertainer and the Style Icon:

If the 'Angry Young Man' image gave Amitabh Bachchan's cult status and made him the star of the Indian Cinema, it was the films of Manmohan Desai that saw Bachchan's rise as the uncontested superstar. With the release of Amar Akbar Anthony the persona of Bachchan changed from brooding and violent hero to comical entertainer. The plot of the film was simple, separated family members are reunited, to bring love to the three brothers of the story, and to give the spectators a bundle of surprises in the context of an otherwise predictable cops and robbers, lost-found story (Haham, 2006). Now not only Bachchan can laugh at himself but can also shake a leg or two, even get beaten up by the police and concede his defeat. The role of Anthony Gonsalves that Bachchan essayed was much more relaxed, humbled and at ease. Dasgupta (2006, p.40) contends, "Unlike Vijay who wants a perfect world by eliminating the imperfect out of existence, Anthony bhai wants a perfect world by accommodating and absorbing the imperfect within its fold."

In Desai's "masala" films, instead of shying away from girls, Bachchan is busy wooing the girl of his dreams by singing, dancing and even getting beaten up for her. The courtship between Anthony and Jennie (Parveen Babi) sees Anthony performing the comical song 'My name is Anthony Gonsalves' in chaplin style. He acts like a buffoon and tries to impress her.

Bachchan excelled in song and dance sequences and created a new image of himself with the film Don (1978). His rustic dance movements in the song sequence "Khaikhe Paan Banaras-waala" gave him the stature of a dancing star. After this song and dance sequences became a mandatory and typical element in 'Amitabh style'. Song and dance sequence "John Jaani Janardan" (Naseeb, 1981), and "Mere Angne Me" (Lawaris, 1981) became very popular due to 'Amitabh style' factor.

The mega-entertainer Manmohan Desai had Bachchan in all his films after Amar Akbar Anthony. The director-actor combination of Amitabh and Desai achieved immense success. Desai's films Suhaag (1979), Naseeb (1981), Desh Premee (1982) and Coolie (1983) fortified the place of Bachchan as the undisputed king of India Cinema. Bachchan not only ruled the imagination of the people but also their style and demeanor. His hairstyle was what every youth sported, his mannerism was being adopted and imitated and his husky baritone voice emulated. Mohammad (2002) observes:

If he [Bachchan] had an odd walk, he converted it into a physical appearance befitting his screen character. If he took up dancing, he changed the criteria of judgment. If he became the silver screen superstar, he changed the concept of good looks. He made it a point to be judged by the criteria set by him."

The King and the God (1983-1992):

Coolie marked the shift of Bachchan's stature from a superstar to demigod. It was during the shooting of Coolie, in 1982, that Bachchan met with a near-fatal accident while filming an action sequence. His condition became worse and he battled with death, the whole nation came to a standstill. People were in a shock, and the moment they realised what happened, almost everywhere almost everyone was praying for their hero's survival. Hines (2007, p. 66) states, "Indira Gandhi Prime Minister at the time, came to see him and her son, his childhood friend Rajiv, cut short his American trip to visit the hospital. Thousands of fans underwent penances and made pact with their gods."

Hines (2007, p.67) colorfully observes that, when Bachchan recovered he was given a warm welcome reminiscent of the return of king Rama from 14 years exile. Hines (ibid.) further elaborates, "from then on he was no longer just a film star. He had been transformed by the intense interaction between him and his fans. As soon as he returned home from hospital after his accident, past all the banners, the fans began to come and collect on their debt. They would gather each day outside his house for darshan (viewing their god)." Coolie went on to become one of the biggest blockbusters and during the fighting scene where Amitabh Bachchan was injured, the moment is marked with a freeze frame, and a message is displayed in English, Hindi, and Urdu - "This is the shot in which Amitabh Bachchan was seriously injured."

Post 1983 was a turbulent time yet again for the Indian film industry as well as Indian Politics. The Indian film industry started suffering heavily because of the coming of Television and the VCR. The piracy of films became rampant, and the footfalls in the theatres started dwindling. In politics the most shocking event was the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984. Varshney (2007, p. 116) observes about the 1980's that the "two political developments of the decade stood out for their long run significance: the end of the Congress Hegemony in politics and the emergence of, what Amartya Sen has called, 'illusion of singular identity', which meant the obsessive identification of human beings with their religious selves."

During this time, Bachchan joined politics when Rajiv Gandhi, his friend and the leader of the Indian National Congress Party requested his assistance. This time Bachchan not only campaigned for the Congress but also contested the elections. For the first time Congress came to power with a thumping majority of more than three-fourth of the Lok Sabha (Lower house of the parliament of India) seats, Rajiv Gandhi took charge of the nation as the Prime Minister. Bachchan also won the election and became a Member of Parliament.

The phenomenal rise of Bachchan from films to politics also reflected in the films during this time; Bachchan was now the one who was taking control of his fate, not only was he challenging the system but also trying to overthrow it, he becomes the law himself.

In *Inquilaab* (Revolution, 1984) he shoots all the corrupt members of the legislative assembly as a way to get the nation rid of corrupt politicians. In *Mard* (He-Man, 1985) his punchline is "Mard ko dard nahi hota" (A man does not feel pain) as he fights his enemies. In *Andha Kanoon* (Blind Law, 1983) he gives up his faith on the law of the land and takes it upon himself to punish the guilty. Dasgupta (2006, p. 88) contends, "till now, the hero was fighting the system and its institutions, but in these films he directly fights the very basis and reason for those institutions—law." Bachchan now had metamorphosed into a demigod who wields a certain power, and can't be cowed down in front of challenging situations, rather it is him who takes control of the situation and delivers his own godlike verdict. The pinnacle of this image can be found in the films like *Akhri Rasta* (1986), *Shahenshah* (1988), *Agnipath* (1990) and *Khuda Gawah* (1992).

In Politics too Amitabh was going strong. The popularity of the Rajiv Gandhi Government was on a high until 1987 when Amitabh Bachchan and Rajiv Gandhi was implicated in kickbacks during the infamous Swedish Bofors Gun deal scandal. The image of Bachchan received tremendous beating in the eyes of the public. The press and the politicians gunned after him. Bachchan resigned as a Member of Parliament and went to the International Court of Justice to clear his name from the scandal, eventually winning the lawsuit and clearing his name, but the damage was done. His popularity had waned and the films that he worked on during this time hardly helped him to salvage his superstardom (Dasgupta, 2006).

Shahenshah (Emperor) was the ultimate celebration of the persona of masculine demigod; Bachchan plays the role of a superhero 'Shahenshah' who protects the oppressed and the downtrodden from the clutches of the smugglers and the criminals as police and politicians fail to protect them. In the final scene Bachchan

the Shahenshah hangs the villain Amrish Puri in the court of law in front of a judge, lawyers, policemen and public making a statement that the whole system was inefficient and corrupt and therefore finally it had to be someone as powerful like him, who is above the system to deliver justice. *Shahenshah* was the beginning of the downfall of the demigod. In the wake of the Bofors scandal people were apprehensive and unable to rally behind this imagery.

Though Bachchan had few successful films during the 1990s, he did not receive the same adulation as he did prior to 1987. He went into a self-imposed semi-retirement till 1997. His comeback film *Mrityudaata* (1997) fashioned on the lines of the superhero and demigod persona of the 80s failed miserably in an India, which was basking in the glory of the neo-liberal era under the Narasimha Rao Government of Congress in 1991. Basu (2007, p.146) states "the years saw India rise like a phoenix from its ashes. Social, economic and political, there were reforms on all fronts." The inroads made by the satellite channel challenged the traditional mode of storytelling in Bollywood. Moreover the middle class became more conscious of their choices and there was a major schism in terms of the rural and the urban class. Now the pan Indian audience no longer existed. Many were of the view that Bachchan was not able to reinvent his persona with the changing time that favoured young and romantic heroes such as Amir Khan and Salman Khan and the anti-hero Shahrukh Khan. Dasgupta (2006, p. 110) observes, "neither Bachchan as an individual, nor his writers and directors could identify the essence of the neo-liberal era. They could not quite understand and articulate the anomalies that afflicted the real world in this time of neo-liberalism." Surely, Bachchan's magic somewhat faded during the late 1990s, but this period also proved to be a time for realization for Bachchan to think about his image reinvention in accordance with the changing times.

Reinventing Amitabh Bachchan: The Patriarch and the Metrosexual (2000 onwards):

The 21st century saw the rise of a new Amitabh Bachchan, who understood the process of the changing times and the need of the audience in an era when Bollywood was dominated by the three Khans (Shahrukh, Salman, and Amir). He went in for a complete makeover and started his period of reinvention by playing the strict Patriarch in films like *Mohabbatein* (2000), *Ek Rishta* (2001), *Kabhie Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001) and *Armaan* (2003) to name a few. In most of these films he played important roles along with the younger breed of heroes. His representation in these films is of the father figure without whom the hero would be incomplete; he is the guiding light and the protector. Dasgupta (2006, p. 147) contends:

Amitabh still appears in the films of the new age but here he is more like an icon of the past beyond which art must progress. In an age of rapid globalization that is full of uncertainties and unexpected events, Amitabh Bachchan's image serves to provide a semblance of continuity and familiarity.

Suddenly when it looked like he would be typecast in the role of a Patriarch forever, Bachchan switched to much more meaningful roles suiting his age in films like *Aankhen* (2002) and *Kaante* (2002) where he plays negative role, and films like *Dev* (2004) and *Khakee* (2004) where he plays an upright cop.

In a span of ten years from 2000 till 2010 Bachchan experi-

mented with various shades of roles from an anti-hero, patriarch and a police officer to an aged lover. The highpoint was the role he played in *Kabhi Alvida Na Kehna* of 'Sexy Sam' an aged metrosexual male. Kazmi (2006) in his review of the film writes, "Amitabh and Abhishek once again create magic when they are together, even as the big daddy of Bollywood creates one of the most flamboyant playboys on the desi screen. Catch his throw-away lines and you'd realise Hugh Hefner's got competition." The suave, romantic and flirtatious (aged) metrosexual avatar of Bachchan was also seen in his recent release *Buddha... Hoga Tera Baap* (2011), literally translated into "Geriatric would be your Dad!" where he freely flirts with women half his age and had no qualm in telling his wife that he also has women admirers. The rise of the middle class, who were more upwardly mobile and urbanized by the 1990s, saw a shift of filmmaking towards appeasing them rather than the proletariat or the masses as in the 70s & 80s. The mushrooming multiplexes and malls in the urban centres added to the changing scenario where the urban middle class dominates. Indian Diaspora in countries like USA, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the Gulf saw a new kind of film style catering to their diasporic desires. Filmmakers like Yash Chopra and Karan Johar soon realised the potency of these viewers and focused their films more on the diaspora and the urban middle class. Amitabh's persona in *Kabhi Alvida Na Kehna*, Cheeni Kum, *Jhoom Barabar Jhoom* (2007), *Rann* and *Teen Patti* (2010) caters to these classes.

Conclusion:

Amitabh Bachchan changed the way people viewed cinema in India. He not only entertained the people but fanned their imagination to be someone as close to his on-screen persona. Amitabh as the warring proletariat became synonymous with the 'vox populi.' His 'Angry Young Man' image inspired many to rebel against the oppressive system and voice their opinions against it. His fight against the system made people believe that they can get rid of the corruption and the ineffectiveness of the government machinery. The youth in the 70s and 80s identified with, imitated, emulated and worshipped Amitabh cutting the caste and class barriers. Amitabh's masculine representation ranged from the proletariat macho man to the emotional bourgeoisie gentleman. Amitabh, for his fans was the epitome of the masculine object of veneration and desire, put on a pedestal as a demigod. The audience expected the same Bachchan in real life too, but when he faltered and was in the eye of the storm during the Bofors scandal, his image took a nosedive. Like the warrior of his films Bachchan rose to the challenge, fought to clear his name, and finally won. He proved to his audience that in real life also he was a survivor. Moving on to his second innings in films the demigod image did manage to capture the imagination of the audience but his age was not at his side. People were not able to take a 50-year-old Amitabh romancing and dancing with a 20-year-old girl. This time Amitabh transformed his image altogether and started playing the role suitable to his age and to the times. He began to play the patriarch of the Hindi Cinema. He achieved much success in his new form, but again Bachchan was not satisfied with just playing the patriarch. Gauging the changing environment of the society where people were becoming more open to experimental cinema and changing masculine images from violent and dominant to intellectual and sexual, Bachchan was quick to grab the opportunity and picked up films which were more in tune with the times and suits his age and personality. Today Bachchan is

doing variety of roles from godfather, to philandering patriarch to an aged romantic. In a film industry notorious for typecasting actors according to their age bracket, Bachchan's timely reinvention has not only changed the rules but paved way for the leading (Indian) actors to graduate with the times and not being stuck in a time warp that might render them out of the film industry.

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