

A Need for Redress: Costume in Some Recent Hindi Film Remakes

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Abstract

This article analyzes some Hindi film remakes using the overlooked component of film costume. Costuming in *Devdas*, *Don*, and *Om Shanti Om* can be read as a strategic effort to situate each film along with its predecessors in a new vision of the industry's past and present. Since the early 1990s, India has been transformed by economic policies that have nurtured the growth of capitalism. Consumerism is celebrated in film at the same time, as filmmaking itself is undergoing structural change. Costume plays a critical role in these processes, operating in remakes to appropriate elements of each film's forerunners in ways that illustrate the new film's superiority. The case studies presented here illustrate how this is done: costumes are readily translatable into the commoditized clothing that is part of the new consumerism: they signal high production values; they are complicit in the construction of contemporary stardom; and they embody "professionalism" via the employment of well-connected fashion designers. At the same time, by illustrating the limits of masquerade or by reconfiguring the dilemmas of modernity as a myth, costume assists in the projection of themes that are more conservative than those of each film's forerunners.

Keywords

Remakes, costume, designers, consumerism, masquerade, pastiche, Hindi film, Bollywood

Introduction

Quotidian complaints about the Hindi film industry's predilection for plundering other films—whether from its own vaults or someone else's—make it hard to press the case for the serious analysis of film remakes. But as theorists of the remake point out, the reworking of themes and narratives is well-established practice in filmmaking, whether one is talking about self-professed remakes or not (Verevis, 2005). Until relatively recently, remakes were shortchanged even in more conventional areas of film studies, although recent works by, for example, Durham (1998), Forrest and Koos (2002), and most recently, Verevis (2005) go a long way toward making up for this neglect. Unfortunately, these studies only consider remakes in the European and American industries, and the extension of theory to Hindi film remains to be done.

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This article extends the literature on an underappreciated form via the examination of an undertheorized film component, costume. My contention is that costume plays a pivotal role in the re-imagining and re-staging involved in three recent Hindi films, two “acknowledged” remakes, to use Greenberg’s (1991, p. 170) terminology, and one partially acknowledged one. It can scarcely be said that costume in any of these films has been ignored, for the spectacular and fashionable attributes of the clothes in all three films have invariably drawn comments from critics and reviewers. Each film employed high profile costume and fashion designers, and all inspired commercial clothing lines in retail centers as part of the new synergy between film, apparel, and advertising industries. There is little doubt that the role of film costume in facilitating the convergence of such commercial interests is both striking and important. Emphasizing these extratextual influences and engagements, by no means, exhausts the usefulness of costume analysis, however, costume also provides an alternative means through which to explore a film’s meaning. Quite obviously, it elaborates the film’s narrative, as almost all costume designers I have ever interviewed insist. Costume scholars have argued, however, that costume is most interesting for the ways in which it forms its own semi-autonomous narrative, one that is not always acknowledged in industry discourse (Berry, 2000; Bruzzi, 1997; Dwyer, 2000; Gaines & Herzog, 1990; Street, 2001). In the remakes I consider, costume lies at the heart of the reconfigurations they represent, producing meanings within the movie frame that differ significantly from those of their predecessors. At the same time, because each film was made in explicit or implicit conversation with these predecessors, I shall argue that costume strategies are reflexive efforts to situate both earlier and later versions within a new vision of the industry’s history and prospects. These efforts are of critical importance to an industry in the contemporary global mediascape (Appadurai, 1990).

I start with Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s *Devdas* (Bhansali, 2002), released in 2002, and Farhan Akhtar’s *Don* (Akhtar, 2006) released in 2006. *Devdas* is the most recent in a long line of film adaptations of an original literary work—a 1917 novella—and adopts a rich and opulent *mise en scène* that puts it in direct stylistic contrast to its predecessors. *Don* is a remake that brings the action of the 1978 original into the present, employing fashionable clothes as well as exotic settings to demonstrate how criminal masterminds, the fabulously wealthy, and the thriller genre itself, can be made to appear after a 30 year hiatus. Unlike films that remake others somewhat cryptically—by altering the film title, for example—both *Devdas* and *Don* embraced their status as remakes of famous movies. They were, thus, burdened from the outset with establishing their legitimacy, particularly since their forerunners (just one film in *Don*’s case, a string of them in *Devdas*’s) were well-regarded, practically iconic in their own right. Staging a remake in these circumstances reflects a considerable degree of self-confidence, inviting the audience to expect a freshness of approach uniquely associated with the directors involved (Sanjay Leela Bhansali and Farhan Akhtar).

Finally, I introduce Farah Khan’s *Om Shanti Om* (Khan, 2007). This film uses costumes (as well as props and sets) to produce a stylized version of the 1970s that is in diegetic conversation with the present within the confines of the film itself. This film’s antecedents have been a considerable topic of controversy, with claims of plagiarism dogging it from the moment of its release. However, my use of *Om Shanti Om* focuses on its remaking of the visual style of 1970s films, and of 1980s’ *Karz* (Ghai, 1980) in particular, a film that is openly referenced in the film itself. *Don* and *Devdas* implicitly contain reflections upon remaking as an act and process, as most remakes are wont to do. *Om Shanti Om*, however, is

explicit about it and its intertextual referentiality lies at the heart of its appeal. *Om Shanti Om* invites audience complicity in its witting engagement with nostalgia, and by doing so, encapsulates some of the arguments I propose for the other films as well.

Thinking about Remakes

That remakes rely heavily upon intertextual strategies to link them both to the original source material and to previous films, is broadly recognized. Given that almost all films participate in intertextual strategies suggests, however, that those films that are given explicit recognition as remakes are a specific institutional form in which intertextuality plays a part. Indeed, Verevis (2005) argues for a multidimensional understanding of remakes in which the industrial imperatives that fuel the production of remakes, as well as the extratextual discourses that help in their definition and assessment, are recognized alongside the remake's textual components. Although my arguments about costume will conform in large part to analyses that stress textual references above all, it is in fact the industrial and extratextual contexts that are perhaps most influential in providing the space in which costume can work its effects.

Since the early 1990s, India has undergone a profound economic transformation as the result of the introduction of neo-liberal policies aimed at creating a more congenial environment for the growth of capitalism (Ganti, 2004; Mazumdar, 2007; Viridi, 2003). Film has become an important vehicle through which to portray and promote the new consumerism just as filmmaking itself has felt the effects of an altered economic landscape. Calls to reform the industry go back beyond the early 1990s (Prasad, 1998), but only very recently has the infrastructural means to transform film financing, film production, and film marketing been in place. Set against such a background, the decision to manifestly remake certain films is not coincidental. *Devdas*, for example, has been remade numerous times in both acknowledged and unacknowledged forms (Creekmur, 2007). Bhansali's version, however, entered the marketplace accompanied by a full-blown promotional campaign in which its place in the *Devdas* pedigree was firmly established even before the film was screened. The same can be said of *Don*, with respect to its cinematic genealogy, and also *Om Shanti Om*, although its debts were a little more complicated and, indeed, controversial. All three films were released, furthermore, into a paratextual (Verevis, 2005, p. 130) environment where magazine stories, television interviews, and film websites could be deployed to generate discourse about a film and its place in film history, to audiences whose appreciation of and knowledge about films has been extended and deepened by repeat viewings enabled by television, video, and now cheap and abundant DVDs. Conversations about costume, as well as their material recreations as fashion "collections" in stores, were also part of this public cultural phenomenon. The inclusion of fond, nostalgic retrospectives in industrial discourse was as clear an indication as any that these were not attempts to erase the past but instead to celebrate, and thus manage it. Remakes are, in essence, an element in Bollywood's reflexive reconstitution of itself, of which the films I discuss are emblematic.

There is a balancing act going on, though, that weighs proper obeisance to what can now be enshrined as "classics" against affirmations about what a new and improved industry can do. In this context, I find compelling the arguments of Forrest and Koos (2002) and Leitch (2002) that remakes

at least covertly recreate or replace the stylistic elements of their predecessors, in ways that illustrate the superiority of the remake (Forrest & Koos, 2002; Leitch, 2002). At a time when the Hindi film industry is eager to establish a set of new, global credentials, acknowledged remakes serve this purpose through allowing the display of novel technical and imaginative accomplishments. As viewers become familiar with, for example, new “technologies of illusion,” a remake justifies its existence on its ability to align an established narrative with adjustments in audience expectations (Forrest & Koos, 2002). Costume bears a particular burden for the persuasiveness of the remake through convincing the audience of the film’s supposed faithfulness to off-screen sartorial conventions or historical projections (Higson, 2003; Sprengler, 2009; Street, 2001). It is, therefore, one of the primary means by which the illusions of cinematic realism, particularly in historical films, are perpetrated. When the remake situates itself in the past, costume’s persuasive abilities emerge from a paradoxical condition of costume production. Unlike props (which may be recycled from antiques), or settings (which may include actual buildings that are insinuated into the film), actual clothes from the past, or costumes from other films, are never re-used, at least, not for leading actors.¹ Instead, new costumes are always made. Authenticity becomes a concern precisely because of this practice, to which the designer may respond by investing in historical and visual research, or at least claiming to have done so. At the same time, being freed from the constraint of having to use “real” historical clothes means that the costumes can be subtly adapted to conform to the stylistic conventions of the time of shooting, an important consideration because the commercial viability of the remake depends upon appealing to an audience with entirely different sartorial and self-presentational standards (Higson, 2003; Street, 2001). Thus, it is the ability of costumes to speak simultaneously of the past and present that allows the remake to present its own costumes as more convincing of the time in which the film is set than previous versions. This adjustment of costume in any and all historical pictures amounts in essence to pastiche, and infuriates some historical costume purists. It is, nevertheless, crucial to the visual effectiveness of historical films.

Another task of costume in a remake is to signal high production values in the mounting of spectacle. The recruitment of fashion designers as dress designers in Hindi films has signaled both openness to a more “sophisticated” sartorial aesthetic, and the desire for a professional production practice that links together the booming media, advertising, and fashion industries. In the days of the original films from which these remakes derive, audiences realized their desire for film clothing by having their tailors make adaptations of it. While this trend continues, and flea markets abound with cheap readymade versions, increasingly the bigger production houses embrace tie-ups with apparel manufacturers that put copies of film costumes directly into more organized retail settings (Wilkinson-Weber, 2010). Many fashion designers that work in films see their work in both film and fashion as reshaping consumer tastes. For too long, they say, film costume has embodied the lowest production values in spectacle through either the uninformed uses of excess, or a failure to understand non-Indian fashion norms. Getting costume “right” is one among several ways in which the much vaunted “corporatization” of the industry, restricted as it is to the thin air of its uppermost levels, can be made visible.

Before proceeding further, it is important to note how the casting of superstar Shah Rukh Khan in each film to be discussed, illustrates the significance of remakes not just in the reconfiguration of the industry, but also in the construction of stardom. Khan has been identified on numerous occasions as the heir to the mantle of Amitabh Bachchan, whether this is in terms of their shared popular appeal,

their somewhat unconventional appearance, or the unorthodox path both took to superstar status. Replacing Bachchan in *Don* can be seen, therefore, as a sardonic move, particularly given the theme of impersonation that propels the film. Assuming the role of Devdas, however, suggests an effort to exceed Bachchan in versatility, inviting comparisons with the actor most associated with Devdas, Dilip Kumar, widely described in the industry as a “thespian” or “serious” actor. The subject of replacement is again raised in *Om Shanti Om* via its elision of Khan and Rishi Kapoor in its opening scenes. The film’s more insistent theme is, however, the protean ability of Khan to be interchangeable with Bollywood’s multitude of stars, and thus, to be in some sense a “star of stars.” It is very much Khan’s movie, so much so that as a humble extra, Khan seems less immersed in the extra’s character than the “extra” is immersed in Khan’s. The discourses on Khan’s persona that these three films represent, are by no means exhausted by costume, but they find critical expression in them, a point to which I return in the analyses that follow.

The Adornment of Devdas

The story of Devdas has been remade many times in several languages. Based ultimately on a 1917 Bengali novella by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, the story’s familiarity to audiences comes mainly by virtue of its various cinematic renderings, of which P.C. Barua’s 1936 version (Barua, 1936), Bimal Roy’s 1955 remake (Roy, 1955) and the recent 2002 film by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, are the best known (Creekmur, 2007). Each film relates the tragic fate of Devdas, a young, somewhat weak man who cannot have what he wants—his childhood love, Paro—and does not desire what he is offered—the love of the courtesan Chandramukhi. Having descended into acute alcoholism, he makes one last journey to die outside Paro’s marital home. In Roy’s hands, Devdas was an opportunity to reflect on one of his preferred themes: what it is for Indians to be modern. Devdas is, after all, an educated man who appears to move more easily in urban Calcutta society than he does in his natal village; at the same time, he seems incapable of transgressing the restrictive social rules that separate him from Paro. Bhansali’s version, as Creekmur (2007) argues, does something different, situating Devdas’s story for the first time within a definitively past, but somewhat historically indeterminate period during the colonial era that renders it a remembered rather than a re-enacted story. In this version, instead of grappling with the wrenching dilemmas of colonial, modernizing India, Devdas and Paro are victims of the timeless tribulations of family vendettas, parental snobbery, and their own and others’ impulsiveness.

On the 2002 film’s official website, Bhansali asserts his film is not a remake, but a “personal interpretation” of the original novella (the film itself includes a dedication to Chattopadhyay, Barua, and Roy before the credits). Nevertheless, it is inevitable that comparisons have been made between his and Roy’s versions, first, because they are the most obvious and only widely available ones to compare, and second because of the oppositional contrast they present between restraint and excess. Critical disapproval of Bhansali’s film almost always hones in on the lavishness of its *mise en scène*. One critic, for example, dismissed the film as a “thoroughly hollow spectacle of pure consumption” (Deshpande, 2002), while another sniped at the “corridors of *havelis* and *kothas* that look and sound like Cottage Emporium-meets-Salvador Dali sets” (Mahadevan-Dasgupta, 2002). In a more measured critique, even Creekmur (2007, p. 186) refers to Devdas’s “hyperbolic version(s) of past fashion.”

Bhansali clearly anticipated objections to the film's opulence, for he argues on the film's website that the splendor of the character's apparel and surroundings is at once a syntactic expression of physical and moral beauty, as well as a symbolic statement about the grandeur of the commitment of faith that the otherwise simple story contains:

... in spite of losing in life, they [the characters] never lose faith in God. Therefore Devdas, which was a simple story had a soul which was so big. I felt that to do justice to this, it had to be made with grandeur and opulence. We have lavishly mounted the film, without offending the spirit of Devdas. We have given the characters a lot of space to compliment (sic) their largeness. Their surroundings are as beautiful as them. If Chandramukhi, the golden-hearted prostitute came down the steps, the steps had to be worth it. (Bhansali, n.d.)

The characters indeed appear to inhabit a fantasy world that aside from brief references to "the British" seems quite isolated. The film's settings are hybrid, combining neo-classical, Gothic, and Indo-Saracenic elements in a form of pastiche that Dyer (2006) distinguishes as "pasticcio." It is no wonder that the past of Devdas seems indeterminate. The main characters are dressed as though constantly onstage, with Chandramukhi's dance performances scarcely less stunning than the humdrum goings-on in Paro or Devdas's houses. There is no quotidian adjustment in costume, no time at which the display eases into a less declarative form. As Bhaskar Sarkar (2008, p. 46) notes, *Devdas* less resembles its sparser predecessors of the same name than it does the *tawaif* (courtesan) film (e.g., *Pakeezah* [Amrohi, 1972], *Mughal-e-Azam* [Asif, 1960]) with which it shares its splendid costumes, accomplished dancing, and filmmaking on an epic scale.

Creekmur's comment about Bhansali's attention to an almost "museum-like" collection of props and costumes is a striking echo of Higson's (2003, p. 39) description of the "pictorialist museum aesthetic" that produces "spectacles of pastness" in English heritage films like *Chariots of Fire* (Hudson, 1981), *A Room With a View* (Ivory, 1985) and *Elizabeth* (Kapoor, 1998) (Higson, 2003, p. 40).² This is, paradoxically, the source of *Devdas*'s novelty, an attribute that producer Bharat Shah is moved to emphasize in the "making of" featurette on the DVD release when he says that Sanjay Leela Bhansali "gave to this film a new look, an up to date (*aaj ka modern*) look." The film is not, of course, literally updated, which would entail contemporary fashion and settings, but the quality of the costumes, props, and sets do suggest the anticipation of a discriminating audience that appreciates the evident craft and professionalism involved in making such a meticulously mounted piece of work. Such considerations were obviously important to the commercial ventures that the film spawned, including a recreation of one of the film's sets, complete with a selection of the costumes designed by Neeta Lulla for some of its principals in the Piramyd department store in Pune (Menon, 2002). A "traveling Devdas exhibition" also took some of the film's costumes to retail centers such as Crossroads in Mumbai, where shoppers would have "the opportunity of walking into the store, getting a first-hand look at the clothes worn by the stars and actually meet[ing] the designer who fashioned the clothes" (Menon, 2002). The stardom of actresses Aishwarya Rai and Madhuri Dixit were indispensable components of these paratextual ventures, and promotional photographs of both women in the most lavish costumes of the film quickly began circulating as epitomes of female beauty. One poster of Madhuri was tacked on the door of the trainee beauty salon at the hostel where I stayed in 2002 (see Image 1).

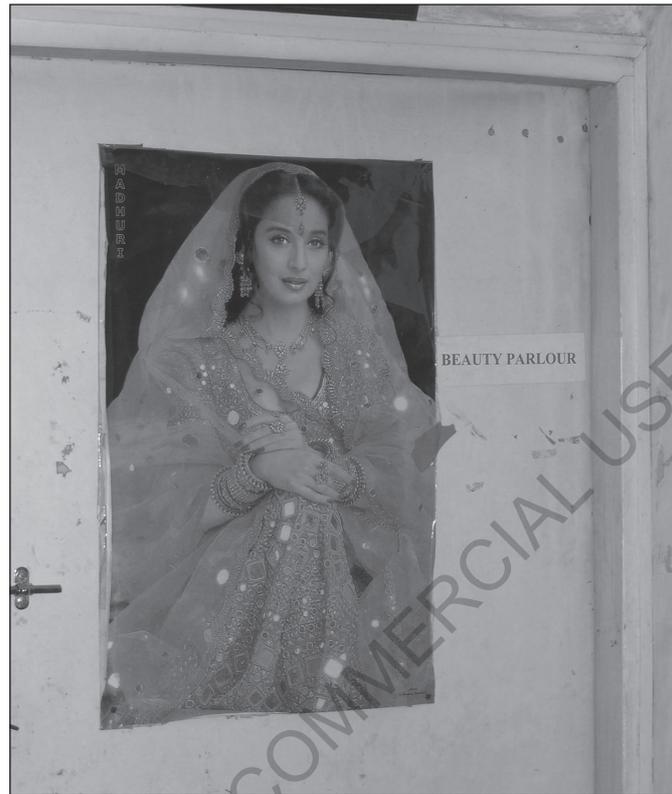


Image 1. A poster attached to the door of a beauty parlor in a women's hostel in suburban Bombay. The use of the image emphasizes the use of Madhuri Dixit as Chandramukhi in *Devdas* as a model of female beauty.

Source: Author's own.

The remarkable cost of the costumes was a common topic of discussion in feature stories and promotional material immediately preceding and following the film's release, but it would be a mistake to think that this was simply a way to talk about the production house's ample spending capacity. Rather, the staggering quotes of costumes valued in lakhs (hundreds of thousands) of rupees were indexically linked to the practical ability to manage such amounts in effective, professional ways. Money did not simply buy jewelry-encrusted *ghaghara-colis* (skirt-bodice ensembles); it also bought the enormous scale of operations that lay behind *Devdas's* execution. For the *Devdas* dressmen (costumers) that I interviewed while the film was being completed, this meant managing a much larger number of costume components than usual: "In one big schedule, 30–40 boxes came of belts, caskets, girdles. There were three trunks of jewelry. Aishwarya's jewelry took an entire trunk. It was a huge trunk." I was also told that because the lead actress's costumes had embroidery on chiffon, "if there's movement, sometimes it comes loose, so we took it back in the night and returned it in the morning at 10. By 11, it had to be back. Like this, the daily schedule went for 16 days."

The costume designers, Neeta Lulla, Abu-Sandeep (Abu Jani and Sandeep Khosla) and Reza Shariffi, were acutely aware of setting a high bar in the standards of costume production, one remarking that: “They’ve [the costumes] become more detailed, more realistic. Initially, an outfit would be called ‘*filmi*’ [i.e., overstated, loud] but like now you pay more attention on detailing of costume, on characterizing... now the fabrics used are not wrong....” For the money spent to show on screen was, from this point of view, precisely the point.

It is no surprise then that costume works in different ways in the 1955 and 2002 versions. In Roy’s film, their different social statuses notwithstanding, Paro and Chandramukhi are cast into opposed positions, in which the actions of one are matched by the actions of the other. For example, the scene in which Paro is decked in jewels for her wedding is followed immediately by a scene in which Chandramukhi puts on her finery to prepare for her dance performance. Soon afterwards, Chandramukhi gives up her jewelry, her possessions and her dance dresses along with her lifestyle. The fake bridal ornaments she later buys underscore her dashed hopes of happiness with Devdas. Meanwhile, Paro refuses to wear the authentic customary ornaments of a married woman that are hers by right (see Image 2).

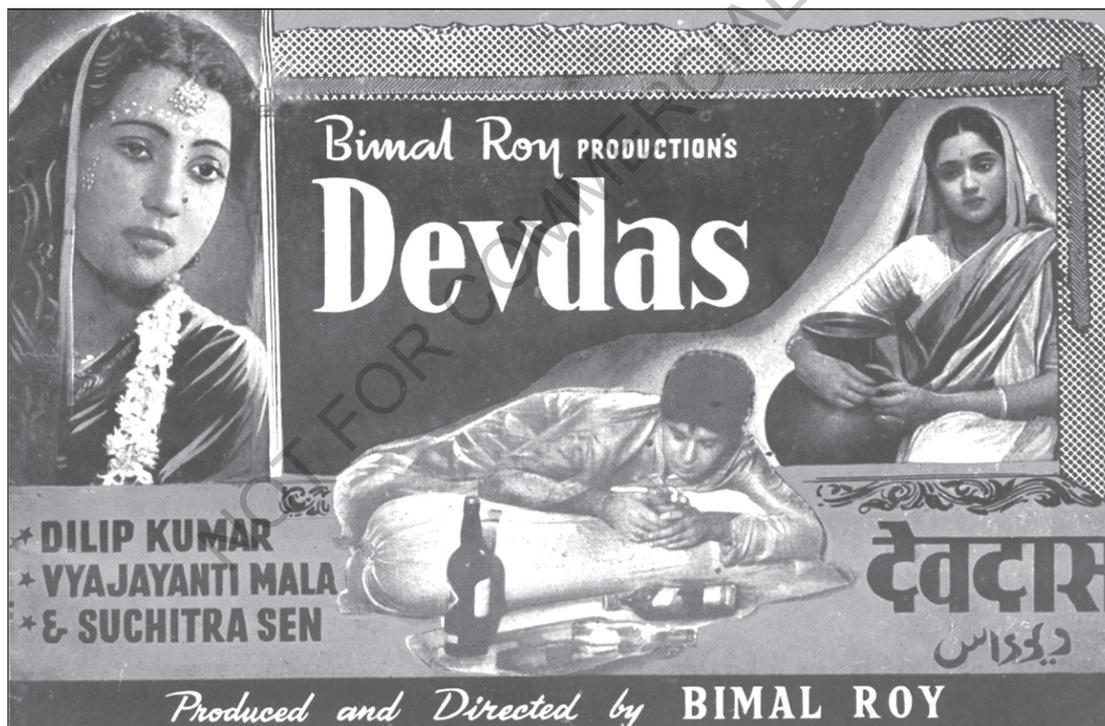


Image 2. A poster for Bimal Roy’s 1955 version of *Devdas*, shows Paro (played by Suchitra Sen, on left) and Chandramukhi (Vyjayantimala on right) as partial mirrors of each other. Notably, Chandramukhi is shown not as a courtesan, but as she appears after she renounces her old life for Devdas.

Source: National Film Archive of India.

Image courtesy: Bimal Roy Memorial.

Fifty years later, Bhansali takes an entirely different approach to his heroines' relationship. The accomplished camerawork and lighting impart detail and texture to the magnificent sets, costumes, and jewelry that are essential to the pleasures they elicit. At the same time, the very materiality of Paro's and Chandramukhi's respective domains that superior technique conveys hints at an existential burden upon both women that inhabiting such worlds entails. Their rich costumes and ornaments are quite literally weighing them down. True, Paro switches the colorful but free flowing garments of girlhood for the more formal and concealing costumes of a wife. She gives a handful of jewels to her new step-daughter shortly after her marriage in deference to her desire to distance herself from the marital pleasures and privilege they symbolize, but overall, married as she is to an extremely wealthy man, she is just as, if not more, resplendent than she was before. As for Chandramukhi, she effects a change that is somewhat the reverse of Paro's. She begins with wearing the *kathak* and *mujra* (dancing) costumes and lavish jewelry associated with her profession. As the film progresses, she wears the simpler saris and loosely tied hair that accentuate her girlishness as she spends more time with Devdas. Again, though, these are only moderate adjustments and she is splendidly dressed for her dance performances until practically the end of the film.

The sheer richness and splendor of their costumes accentuate Chandramukhi and Paro's similarity. The changes in sexual status that were more marked in Roy's film are relatively unmarked here in comparison, and in fact in a dance scene that the two do together, they are deliberately made indistinguishable. In Roy's film, the two women converge via their voluntary refusal to wear the decorations of wives and courtesans respectively, aspiring instead to (in Paro's case) an ascetic position at odds with marriage, and (for Chandramukhi) a marital position at odds with prostitution. In Bhansali's, they are united by the ultimately empty enjoyments of material excess, for it is made quite clear that the customary embellishments of both wives and courtesans cannot readily be abandoned. For all that Bhansali's is supposedly a "modern" production, it is curious that the small measure of choice in their sartorial actions that were extended to Paro and Chandramukhi in the earlier film are removed in the second, a difference that surface attention to the pleasures of costume is apt to obscure. Bhansali hereby introduces a note of unease at the very heart of the tremendous wealth that surrounds both women.

Devdas's own costume trajectory is equally revealing. After several years away in London, he comes dressed from head to toe in the most up to date fashions of 1930s England. He wears a soft hat with a black band, a cravat, a dark overcoat and a light brown suit and waistcoat. As the story proceeds, his Western uniform is gradually discarded. First to go is the greatcoat, then the suit is reduced to a waistcoat, trousers, shirt and cravat, then the softer structures of cricket trousers and pullovers, then shirt and trousers, with cravat untied. After his furious but impotent departure from home, Devdas shifts inexorably into Indian styles, first a ravishing *chikan kurta* (embroidered shirt), *pajama* (loose trousers) and shawl for the first time he encounters Chandramukhi (signifying presumably a new identity and opportunity, one that he chooses not to accept), and then simpler, plainer and more disheveled *kurtas* and *dhotis* (a wrapped garment around the lower half of the body) until the film's end. This shift marks his transformation from a man of substance into a man with nothing, but it traces also his contrary transition from an inchoate, foreign lacuna to a keenly felt film archetype that Bhansali, in his remarks on the film's website, regards as a kind of Indian "everyman." Dress, in this case, makes this transformation very apparent in ways it does not in the Roy's film, where Devdas's clothing shows him suspended between two worlds throughout. Instead, Chunilal, Devdas's temptor and helper along the road to his doom is the only consistently Western dressed character, and his appearance on the train in suit and overcoat to administer Devdas's final, and fatal, drink of liquor is an especially strong statement about the corruption of modernity. By the time we get to Bhansali's version, Chunilal is dressed in the self-same "fusion"

outfit of jacket, shirt, scarf and *dhoti* or *pajama* that Kumar's *Devdas* wore previously. In sum, these alterations in the costume narrative, along with other adjustments in both *mise en scène*, and the telling of the story, indicate that the theme of modernity versus tradition has been entirely left behind.

Bhansali, in his remake, is situating *Devdas* within not just the imagined historical era of his pastiche, but in the present day of economic liberalization and new interactions with global culture. It is plausibly understood as an effort to carve out a position in the global marketplace using models established by—if not Merchant-Ivory, from which most Hindi filmmakers are estranged—then Miramax to marry the costume drama with mainstream commercial success (Higson, 2003; Sarkar, 2008, p. 46). *Devdas* aims to belong among those films whose costumes and sets assert “authorship, craft, and artistic value” and “get invited to film festivals and win awards” (Higson, 2003, p. 1), or in an approving critic's words, “[t]he film brings a ‘commercial’ grandiosity to the tale without sacrificing the original's tragic timbres” (Jha, 2002). In these efforts, we see one answer to Creekmur's (2007) question about why it was decided that such a determinedly Indian film property could be the vehicle for gaining a foothold in international film. Having been transfigured into a myth, the film could be more readily fitted by non-Indian audiences into a generalized “Romeo and Juliet” slot, while the high production values converge neatly with frankly orientalist fantasies of Indian opulence and decadence (see Breckenridge, 1989). As to whether this was likely to work, Bhaskar Sarkar (2008) answers in the negative. *Devdas*'s claims to global significance can be attributed to its visually rich, intensified melodrama that is akin other recent films (like James Cameron's *Titanic* [1997]) where cinematic technology and gorgeous *mise en scène* are crucial to the “accentuation of the emotions through excessive stylization” (Bhaskar, 2008, p. 47). And yet it cannot dispense with the conventions that make Indian filmmaking distinctly “Indian” and which are quite unlike the conventions that inhere in the Western films with which it seeks comparison. As a result, the likelihood of it (and comparable epic Bollywood undertakings) achieving the desired level of international recognition is uncertain at best.

Redressing *Don*

There is not much that is obvious in aligning *Devdas* with *Don*, Farhan Akhtar's remake of Chandra Barot's 1978 film (Barot, 1978) of the same name. *Don* is an action thriller whose sense of the exotic comes less from an immersion in the mythic so much as in the real landscapes of Malaysia. It also contains a cynicism that would seem alien in *Devdas*. However, its costumes and settings belong just as much to the domain of the spectacular, and like *Devdas*, there are fundamental deviations from the way the story is told and presented in the original film.

The first *Don* starred Amitabh Bachchan in his heyday, playing a double role of the ruthless gangster Don and the humble street actor Vijay who is cajoled into impersonating Don after the criminal's unexpected death. The film had always enjoyed a reputation as a particularly fashionable film, with its celebrated sets and songs, actresses Zeenat Aman and Helen in pant suits and daring evening gowns, and lead and character actors in wide-lapeled three piece suits and flared trousers. Rachel Dwyer goes so far as to point to the possible influence of blaxploitation on its now iconic sense of cool (Dwyer, 2005). The new film's official website extends this homage in quotes from the film's principals that cite the original:

Don was the most modern film of our time. I still remember the bowtie, dotted shirt and the dialogues. I obviously can't question the greatness of old *Don* but what I have tried achieving is making this *Don* a little more relevant in today's world.

[S]ays Shah Rukh Khan, for example. Indeed, references to the “old” *Don* punctuate almost every page, with the accompanying caveat that the new film is more suited for today’s “youth” (“*Don: The official site*,” n.d.).

Unlike *Devdas*, where the historical context has merged with the myth, Farhan Akhtar’s remake situates *Don* not in the past but in the very tangible, material present. Like the first *Don*, however, the film is blatantly, joyously invested in displaying the lifestyles of the rich and notorious, using the story as a means to exhibit clothing designed by well-known fashion and film designer Aki Narula on the bodies of Shah Rukh Khan as Don, Priyanka Chopra as Roma, Kareena Kapoor as the hapless Sonia/Kamini and Isha Koppikar in the somewhat thankless role of Don’s moll. Expanding its horizons beyond the more straitened circumstances of luxury in the late 1970s, Akhtar’s *Don* rules his domains from Malaysia, and the film is replete with scenes set amidst Kuala Lumpur’s stunning architecture, as well as multiple mansions, offices, golf courses, and poolsides. At the same time, the old *Don* is never far from mind, as either certain set pieces (like Sonia/Kamini’s failed seduction of Don to the song “*Yeh mera dil pyaar ka deewana*”) are re-picturized, or costumes “quote” the first film, for instance in the re-use of a shamrock motif on Shah Rukh Khan’s shirt that was used on Amitabh Bachchan’s waistcoat in the first film (See Images 3 and 4).

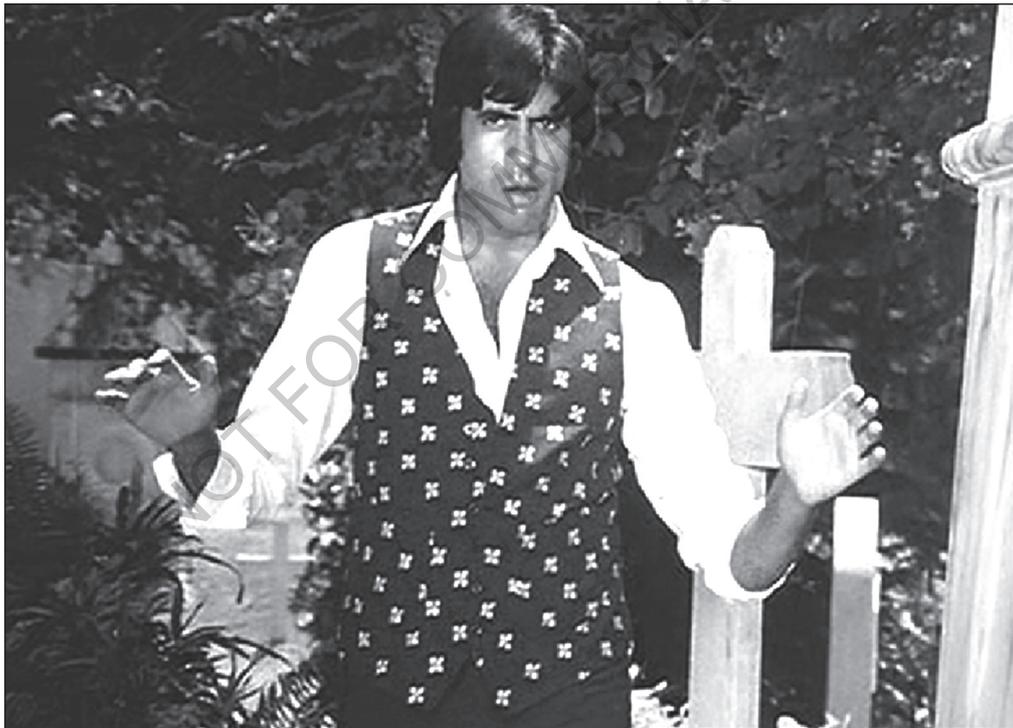


Image 3. Amitabh Bachchan plays Don in the 1978 film. The four-leafed shamrock design on his waistcoat is repeated in a shirt worn by Shah Rukh Khan as Don in the 2006 film (Figure 4). In earlier scenes, both wear distinctive neckware associated with the character: Bachchan wears a large, floppy, spotted bow tie, while Shah Rukh Khan wears a tie in the same fabric as his shirt inside his collar.

Source: Author’s own.

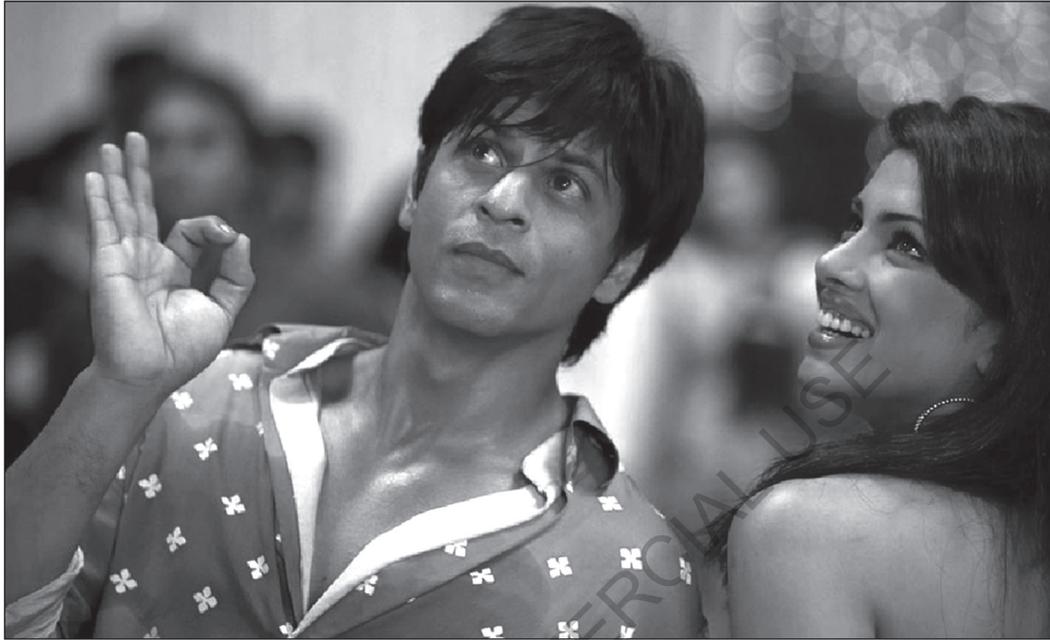


Image 4. Shah Rukh Khan as Don in the 2006 film, wearing a shirt with the same shamrock motif as appeared on the waistcoat of Amitabh Bachchan as Don in the 1978 version.

Photo courtesies: Excel Entertainment.

Photographer: Abheet Gidwani.

Overall, too, the original *Don*'s theme of edgy style is repeated in the latest *Don* via a new set of fashion signifiers. Thus, Shah Rukh Khan appears multiple times wearing a tie inside his shirt (a fashion statement he continues to make outside of film), in shades and leathers, and in softly-textured shirts. The secondary character of Jasjit Ahuja, conceived originally as an acrobat and played by the middle-aged Pran, is now played by the much younger Arjun Rampal, and given the relaxed but up-to-date wardrobe of a middle class computer consultant. The female characters are rarely, if ever, seen in Indian clothing, but then again, neither were Zeenat Aman or Helen in the original. However, it is striking that Kareena Kapoor's shiny dance dress in her seduction scene with Don is actually less revealing than the bikini top and skirt, with its cut-outs and foot to hip slits, worn by her counterpart, famed screen vamp Helen, in the earlier film. I take this to mean that while, in general, costume conventions now allow heroines to show more flesh than in the past, it is more important that what they appear in is deemed "wearable" by a fashion conscious audience. Indeed, the value of the song as a marketing moment was drolly confirmed by *Business Week* in an article that noted its use as a way for Garnier Naturals to "ingeniously promote[s] its hair colour" (Subramanian & Bose, 2007).

The central conceit of both films is that a simple man from the streets of Bombay comes to impersonate a powerful, dangerous criminal. Whereas the first film crafts these elements into what one reviewer termed in complimentary tones a "high decibel" drama, Akhtar's version opts "to play it straight" by turning the cast into "'realist' characters" (Kazmi, 2006). In Barot's *Don*, the attributes of "coolness"

and “heart” that Rosie Thomas (1995, p. 173) argues are conjoined within Bachchan’s character in his earlier film *Deewaar* (Chopra, 1975) are here divided between two characters. On one hand is Don, the gangster, urbane and detached, and on the other, Vijay the showman, a man of “heart,” devoted to two children he has sheltered since the disappearance of their father (Thomas, 1995). In Akhtar’s *Don*, the division seems to be between (as Don) the cold, borderline psychotic characters created by Shah Rukh Khan in *Baazigar* (Abbas-Mustan, 1993), *Darr* (Chopra, 1993) and *Asoka* (Sivan, 2001), and (as Vijay) the boyish, comic personas he effects in the first half of countless of his movies (albeit somewhat declassified this time). In the first film, the two characters never meet. In the second, they do, momentarily and critically, in the depersonalized space of a hospital intensive care unit that is radically removed from the parallel orbits in which they move in their “real” lives. In both films, Don and Vijay (as bifurcations of one actor) inhabit a bifurcated social world—the slum and the penthouse; the street and the highrise; and in the second film, Bombay versus the world (or more specifically, in this case, Kuala Lumpur).

Vijay is shown in both films to be nervous about what the impersonation demands, but the process by which Vijay learns to become Don is dispensed with very quickly, assisted by the device of memory loss that will conceal Vijay’s ignorance of Don’s ways until he can learn them. To make Vijay into Don means, in essence, to trade in his lower class, “street” outfit of *kurtas*, *dhoti*, and *pajama* (traditional Indian shirts, wrapped lower garment, and loose pants) for the immaculately tailored suits and casual wear of Don. True, Vijay’s street performer background explains to some degree the skill of his impersonation (and the plot requires things to move along briskly at this point), but there is not a single slip, a hair out of place, a suit not matched. Alongside demeanor, costume is the constant that guarantees to Don’s gang that he must be who they think he is. For the 2006 version, the apparel brand Louis Philippe was able to earn a promotional mention in the film as well as use the opportunity to offer a “Don line of clothing” in its stores, an overflowing of the film’s boundaries that crested in Shah Rukh Khan himself appearing at the line’s launch (Subramanian & Bose, 2007; *The Hindu Business Line*, 2006).

The heart of the film is, of course, the overlaying of the Don character with Vijay. As the earlier film progresses, the two components of the Bachchan persona are reunited as the dispassionate, murderous Don is humanized and socialized by his inhabitation by Vijay. But the 2006 version marks its difference from its predecessor with a dark and ironic twist on the actual facts about Don’s identity. With more than a passing nod to, one assumes, Bryan Singer’s *The Usual Suspects*³ (Singer, 1995), Farhan Akhtar forces viewers to re-evaluate their entire interpretation of the film on learning in the last five minutes that Don was Don all along, and that Vijay never got the chance to do the characterization even for a moment. There are multiple implications to this revelation, among them a realist concession to the objection that a bumpkin like Vijay could never have dressed up and impersonated Don with so little difficulty. The “ingenuity,” that Sumita Chakravarty (1993, p. 212) argues, marked the hero’s daring impersonations in earlier films, is effectively cast aside. Perhaps, the new *Don* suggests, Vijay was not up to the task of taking on another man’s life, particularly one whose cosmopolitan tastes were so massively beyond Vijay’s experiences. There is a derisory hint that if no-one else ever questioned Don when “we” (the audience) thought he was Vijay, then this was due to Don’s own performance of himself. To Don, sartorial distinction comes “naturally,” perhaps as naturally as it might hope to come to those “20-somethings” shopping the “Don collection” at the Louis Philippe store in suburban Mumbai (*The Hindu Business Line*, 2006). Having escaped the bonds of Bombay to immerse himself in more striking landscapes of wealth and privilege, the new *Don* proposes that Don himself has escaped the possibility of emulation.

In the 1978 *Don*, we believe that Vijay can become Don, although the transformation is incomplete. As the film progresses, and as Vijay's masquerade unravels, he resumes his *paan* (a betel leaf chew) habit and lapses into street talk. At the same time, his immaculate dress begins to erode as first he loses his jacket, then his tie comes undone, and finally his waistcoat and shirt come loose—all symptomatic of the waning grip of Don at his worst on the now “uplifted” Vijay. At this point in the film, Bachchan plays the two parts like a duet, switching from one to the other within the space of one scene.

In the 2006 version, we are shown that no fusion of Don and Vijay need be effected because Vijay has already been disposed of, and Shah Rukh Khan, when he plays Don, is only Don. To use Chakravarty's (1993, p. 212) terms, the “fixed and self-evident” identity of the post-1960s villain, his “patently false and obvious” attempts to masquerade as the hero, have been inverted. The hero's virtuous (and virtuous) management of multiplicity is replaced by a deception that is both seamless and cynical. In effect, those moral attributes of the film antihero that Bachchan inaugurated and personified are dismissed, while Shah Rukh Khan's *Don* retains all the traditional hallmarks of screen villainy (high fashion, bad habits, excessive sexual appetite) but pays no price for them. Instead, just as the vamp with her cosmopolitan tastes and revealing clothes was absorbed into the screen heroine (Mazumdar, 2007; Wilkinson-Weber, 2005), so too the sharply dressed villain has now become the hero.

Playing with Pastiche: *Om Shanti Om*

I include *Om Shanti Om* in this article because it to some extent mediates between the two uses of costume already described with *Devdas* and *Don*. Like *Devdas*, it represents a vantage point on the past to which costumes are critical. Like *Don*, its ultimate frame of reference is the 1970s, but whereas the latest *Don* unfolds entirely within the present, *Om Shanti Om* splits into two halves, the one historical (although not epic in the conventional sense), and the other contemporary. The comparison it draws between practice in the films from which it borrows stylistically (most obviously Subhash Ghai's *Karz*) and filmmaking today are spelled out in the two sections of its exposition. *Don* and *Devdas*, on the other hand, rely solely upon the memories of the audience to effect that same contrast.

Om Shanti Om is a self-consciously *filmi* story of murder, revenge, and reincarnation. Om Prakash, a junior artist (film extra) of 1970s Bollywood, is slain while trying to save his beloved, film heroine Shanti Priya, from her murderous husband, Mukesh Mehra. Om is almost immediately reincarnated in newborn Om Kapoor, who grows up to be a Bollywood star. As Om Prakash's memories of the earlier crime awaken in Om Kapoor, he conspires to bring Mukesh to account for the double murder with the help of both Om Prakash's family and a young woman named Sandy who is herself startlingly like Shanti Priya.

Om Shanti Om is a deliberate reflection upon the altered conventions that structure present and past Bollywood, accentuated by the device of showing the “making of” films in both halves that allows director Farah Khan to compare the technologies as well as the personalities of 30 years ago to today (Shiekh, 2008, pp. 80–83; Sprengler, 2009). *Om Shanti Om*'s first half is a deliberate, lavish pastiche. In the film's opening scene, Om Prakash appears as an extra during the filming of the “*Om Shanti Om*” song from the 1980 film *Karz*. Like *Om Shanti Om*, *Karz*, with Rishi Kapoor as the hero, Monty, tells the story of a reincarnated murder victim avenging himself on his killers. The difference is that the two incarnations are played by different actors. In a matter of moments, *Om Shanti Om*'s multiple frames of reference come into focus: the film *Karz*, the film *Om Shanti Om*, and the shooting of the film *Karz* in the 1970s. After a few minutes, Om imaginatively projects himself into the song performance by suddenly appearing on

stage wearing Monty's shiny silver jumpsuit. The scene closes out with Shah Rukh Khan enacting, and in essence, appropriating this famous sequence, making it central not just to Om Prakash's dreams, but anticipating the second half in which Om Kapoor really is a star comparable to *Karz's* Monty.

Karz is, by no means, the only source of *Om Shanti Om's* story, but it is a key source of its style, through which both eras are imaginatively united in experiments with fashion. *Karz's* fashion—which exists alongside and is reinforced by a musical soundtrack that includes elements of funk and disco—includes sleeveless sundresses, ski pants and tunics for the young female cast, and polo necks, tracksuits and bomber jackets for star Rishi Kapoor (and Raj Kiran in a brief appearance as the murder victim). Kapoor is even seen at one point in a version of John Travolta's iconic white suit from *Saturday Night Fever* (Badham, 1977) (see Image 5).⁴ *Om Shanti Om* echoes this self-conscious stylishness through costume designs by Manish Malhotra, Karan Johar, and Sanjeev Mulchandani. Junior artist Om Prakash is fitted out with kipper ties, checked jackets, wide-lapeled shirts and bellbottoms, while the film's heroine (and heroine of the film within a film, "Dreamy Girl") Shanti Priya is dressed in glamorous yet demure tunics and churidars (traditional pants that hug the lower leg), headbands, and evening gowns.



Image 5. Rishi Kapoor as Monty in a costume that recalls John Travolta's iconic white suit in *Saturday Night Fever*. *Om Shanti Om* draws on *Karz* thematically. It also repeats these forms of intertextuality and makes overt its embrace of high style.

Source: Author's own.

According to Mushtaq Shiekh's book about the making of the film, the designers' intention was not to aim at a naturalistic rendering of 1970s clothes, but instead to call to mind other films and other actors. Om Prakash's imaginative leaps—into the place of Rishi Kapoor, or the Tamil industry star Rajnikanth in a parodic re-enactment of a “South industry action scene”—are underwritten by costume changes that highlight the element of masquerade in *Om Shanti Om*'s pastiche. Similarly, Arjun Rampal's (as Mukesh) use of leather jackets remind audiences of screen “heavies” Vinod Khanna or Danny Denzongpa, while the elaborate CGI sequence in which Deepika Padukone (as Shanti Priya) appears to act with various male stars of yesteryear allows the viewer to imagine, in her place, the many heroines for which she is a signifier. Memories are evoked, thus, not just of *Karz*, but potentially of other films, and other stars of that era, whose stardom is visually fixed first by their faces, and next by their dress (Shiekh, 2008).

Given that, exact replication of 1970s film costumes was not the filmmakers' goal (Shiekh, 2008) and Farah Khan's instructions to “create something new with the help of references” speaks directly of the need for differentiation from the films of the past. To put it bluntly, the nostalgia that permeates *Om Shanti Om* is tinged with a sense that 1970s and 1980s Bollywood was, from the fashion standpoint, ridiculous. Designer after designer whose career began in the 1990s has told me in the course of my research that one of their chief goals has been to transcend the “tasteless,” “excessive,” and “garish” film costumes that failed to conform to the fashion standards that they now seek not only to uphold, but to define. In the course of the pseudo-archaeological research that went into *Om Shanti Om*'s 1970s pastiche, it is quite striking that no time was spent seeking contributions from costume designers of the era, who are still very much alive. Dutifully copying old film costumes would have run the risk of either attributing a level of quality to the clothes that designers are concerned to rebut, or (ironically enough) producing an apparent parody that would puncture the nostalgic mood of the film. Instead, the designers (and Khan herself) presented their work as a kind of homage (Dyer, 2006), a product of their personal memories and longing for the names, styles, and culture of 1970s films. It was this, rather than the recreation of either the techniques of construction of 1970s costumes, or the tastes that animated them, that prompted their efforts at “authenticity.” And as with *Devdas* and *Don*, there were arguably other commercial concerns in play. Obviously, hoping to tap into a complementary nostalgia amongst consumers, marketing for the film involved offering an “*Om Shanti Om*” collection spanning the entire period of the film at the department store chain Shopper's Stop (Bhushan, 2007).

Scholarly opinion of popular Hindi films of the 1970s alludes time and again to the unique political contexts against which films of the era derive meaning (Mazumdar, 2007; Mishra, 2001; Rajadhyaksha, 1996). *Om Shanti Om*, however, through its self-contained, reflexive staging and its derivative, allusive costumes, presents the 1970s as an outcome of its films, not a cause of them. It distances and commodifies the 1970s, placing the era within the “wider nostalgia economy where...objects and conventions circulate...” (Sprengher, 2009, p. 135). This “walling off” of the past becomes obvious, as the film shifts into the present in its second half, and costume design veers affirmatively into the display of contemporary fashion. Shah Rukh Khan as Om is, in essence, a version of Shah Rukh Khan himself, outfitted in a succession of brand label jeans, t-shirts, and sports and leisure wear. Excess expressed in rapid changes in commoditized clothing is apparent in songs, spectacularly in the erotically charged “*Dard e Disco*” song. Here, Shah Rukh Khan is treated visually and sartorially as the male equivalent of the “item girl” (Shiekh, 2008, p. 135) and his costume (designer jeans and not much

else) changes over five times in the course of the song. The female, backup dancers, in highly revealing, body-hugging lycra, also mark a distinct departure from the kitschy “tribal dancers” of the opening “*Om Shanti Om*” number from *Karz*. As for the other characters, Mukesh Mehra has swapped his safari jackets, polo necks and slacks for structured suits, while Shanti Priya’s naïve and youthful double—Sandhya—embodies the latest version of the “college girl” in a look that mixes Indian and Western elements.

As hard as it is to advance an argument about film realism as the supernatural elements of the story build toward the conclusion, nevertheless there is a discernible, “realist” message in *Om Shanti Om*. Consider that the turning point in *Karz* was the rebirth of Ravi Verma in a new form, that of Monty. In *Om Shanti Om*, Om is simply transposed into Om Kapoor, a new version of Shah Rukh Khan, distinct in personality and profession because of his enhanced birth, but alike in virtue and strength of purpose. Om Kapoor need not project himself imaginatively into the starring roles and costumes that go with them in Hindi film, as Om Prakash had to. True, the waking dreams of Om Kapoor as he remembers his karmic history represent a level of fantasy in the film, but the poignant longings of his earlier self are no longer necessary when Om Kapoor can wear as many costumes, enjoy as many different film roles, and be the star that Om Prakash would have liked to have been. The costume changes at this point do not signal imaginative states, but real states of contemporary Bollywood costume excess that are particularly associated with stars. The hero is given no opportunity to restage an entrée into film stardom, only to reap the benefits of his improved birth that allow him the chance to gain revenge, or as Shiekh (2008, p. 28) puts it so succinctly, “How can a boy from slums become a big star? Only through reincarnation!” This rather dark concession to “reality” at the heart of *Om Shanti Om*’s fantasy represents a reining-in of assertions about social mobility via masquerade that can be compared to the most recent treatment of *Don* (discussed earlier in this article).

Reality also enters into the film’s second half in ways that overstep the bounds of the film itself.⁵ An extended sequence at an awards show features several Hindi movie stars playing (and lampooning) themselves, and in a new “*Om Shanti Om*” song, a parade of even more movie stars enters the scene to dance with Shah Rukh Khan/Om Kapoor. Finally, at the very end, in the extension of the film into the final credits—a hallmark of Farah Khan films—cast and crew are identified as they appear to arrive at the *Om Shanti Om* premiere. All the actors are deemed to be showing up “out of character.” However, the very first arrival, Shah Rukh Khan himself leaping athletically out of a sports car dressed in black pants, printed t-shirt and jacket, is practically indistinguishable from the role he plays—a recognition that the “*Om Shanti Om*” sequence has already prepared us for. Only as the arrivals continue, does the diegetic grip of the film begin to loosen. Arjun Rampal appears next in a suit, but it is not a meticulously cut and fitted suit of the kind that villains wear, but a hipper, more playful version of the form. When we get to Kirron Kher, who plays Om’s mother in both halves, she has swapped her synthetic floral sari for a far more glamorous version. These openings in the film’s diegetic world are important precisely because of the contrast they present to the first half, from which the “real” 1970s is systematically excluded. In the present, fashion, costume, and everything else are deemed a function of, or a reflex of the creativity and industry that lie outside the film. But the 1970s, by contrast, is depicted as entirely sealed within the film’s diegesis, accessible only via the imaginative practices of present day filmmakers. Through these techniques of appropriation, *Om Shanti Om* can attribute value to the film industry’s past, while immunizing itself from its limitations.

Conclusion

Leitch (2002, p. 55) argues that every remake is presented as “less problematic” than the earlier versions from which it borrows. All three of the films I have discussed here are remakes that not only strive to exceed their predecessors, but in the act of so doing, seek both to acknowledge and to split from the history they inherit. Positioning themselves as remakes, these films invite audiences to stir up their recollections of past films in ways the remake helps direct (Verevis, 2005). Pastiche is used explicitly in *Devdas* and *Om Shanti Om*, and more subtly in *Don* to render the past of the films they remake as the object of nostalgia, bringing that past under control by aestheticizing it. Scholars have already noted the critical role of nostalgia in the reaction of diasporic Indian audiences toward Hindi film (Appadurai, 1990; Mankekar, 2005), but now this stance has rooted itself in Bombay itself, as set dressers disinter antiques from the bric-a-brac shops of Mumbai’s Chor Bazaar, and dress designers scrutinize old films for ideas.

For *Devdas* the imperative is to establish the high quality Hindi epic to compete with other historical costume dramas on a global stage; for *Om Shanti Om*, it is the insertion of irony into the Bollywood archetype (the “*filmi*”); for *Don*, it is the realist reinvention of the action/thriller film with an unconventional hero. These are films that draw heavily upon the “distinction” of their directors to stake out new territory, a distinction that includes, as simple fact, a commitment to high production values. Costumes are among the most noticeable indicators of both high production values and an alignment with fashion. By employing high profile fashion and dress designers, each film distinguished itself from forerunners whose costumes were created by designers without commercial credentials, or (as in *Devdas*) were made by the head dressman at the behest of the art director. Recruiting fashion designers is not only in keeping with contemporary costume mores, but opens up the production to an entirely different dimension of imaginative construction not anticipated in the earlier versions. Removing costume design from “amateur” designers and dressmen, and placing it in the hands of designers with stronger affective and business ties to fashion is often described as one of the keys to creating a “professional” industry (Wilkinson-Weber, 2006).

However, all three films, examined through the appearances that costumes produce, reveal that there is a price to be paid in making a “new” start in Bollywood. Each obliquely installs more conservative themes in the place of its predecessors, themes that costume elaborates by either pointing out the limits of masquerade (that Vijay cannot play Don, or that Om Prakash cannot be a star), or by converting *Devdas*’s struggles with modernity into timeless myth under layers of visually arresting attire. It is perhaps possible, in these cases at least, to arrive at a position that incorporates elements of both Jameson’s (1992) pessimistic view of pastiche as a conservative form, as well as the positive evaluations of Cook (2004) and Sprengler (2009), who contend that filming the past always suggests a constructive way of engaging with it. *Om Shanti Om*, *Devdas*, and *Don* may well represent a step back in engaging with the history they refer to, but at the same time they invite a new way of looking at the past of popular Hindi films that “reminds us...of what we have lost even while confirming that it is lost” (Sprengler, 2009, p. 178).

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Notes

1. Uniforms, multiples of one kind of costume for extras, and certain kinds of “ethnic” dress for minor actors are the exception to this rule, and are rented from *dresswalas* (costume supply shops). The costume collections of the *dresswalas* are themselves so diverse that they automatically lend themselves to pastiche.
2. The director of Elizabeth is erstwhile Hindi film director, Shekhar Kapoor. Critical assessments of his recent films allude often to this history, particularly in reference to costume, although no professionals from the Bombay industry have traveled with him into his film career outside “Bollywood” (aside from composer A. R. Rahman).
3. Don is, in this version, very much like the elusive Keiser Soze in *The Usual Suspects*. The famous concluding line about him, “And like that ... he’s gone,” echoes the repeated claim about Don that “catching Don isn’t just difficult, it’s impossible.”
4. Just as arresting is the attire of Kamini (Simi Garewal), the woman who betrays and murders the husband who will be reborn as Monty. Kamini conforms entirely to well-established dress codes of the time for a particular kind of treacherous women, which means that she spends the duration of the film in somewhat masculinized Western clothes and a styled haircut. There is no equivalent of Kamini in *Om Shanti Om*, and so the analysis of her costume is not a central part of my argument here.
5. There are a few such moments in the first half—for example, a joke in which the real Govinda is introduced as a young struggler—but the second half instances are far more elaborated.

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