

‘Om, Naam Toh Suna Hee Hoga’: Stardom, Doubling, Intertextuality and Excess in ‘Om Shanti Om’

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How to Cite this Paper

Deshmukh, I. (2022). ‘Om, naam toh suna hee hoga’: Stardom, doubling, intertextuality and excess in ‘Om Shanti Om’. *Confluence: Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies*, Volume VI, 56-71.

Abstract

This paper explores the concepts of stardom and doubling/double roles through the ideas of intertextuality and excess by analysing Farah Khan’s 2007 film *Om Shanti Om*. This paper also looks at the phenomenon of double roles by placing it in the context of star theory and Bollywood. Furthermore, through a textual analysis of the film and drawing on ideas posited by Richard Dyer, Susan Hayward and Christine Gledhill, the paper aims to answer the question – how the logic of multiplication or doubling constructs or plays into Shah Rukh Khan’s star persona? The research finds that while double roles aid actors such as Shah Rukh Khan to explore more versatile roles, another character is added in the narrative to later authenticate the actor’s star image, one he deviated from with the first character.

Keywords: Intertextuality, Excess, Doubling, Stardom, Bollywood, Shah Rukh Khan

Introduction

Doubling or the logic of multiplication has been common in Hindi cinema for decades. Closely associated with other ideas such as excess, spectacle, and intertextuality, dual roles were

employed in films for more than simply fulfilling narrative requirements. Doubling in Hindi cinema presented the perfect commercial value – having a star figure embody two different characters in one film at the same cost. Thus began a relatively long history of double role films, tracing back to *Nishan* (1949). These films usually had familiar narrative tropes such as ‘twins separated at birth and across multiple generations’. (Majumdar, 2003). Popular examples include Tapi Chanakya’s *Ram Aur Shyam* (1967), Ramesh Sippy’s *Seeta Aur Geeta* (1972), and David Dhawan’s *Judwaa* (1997). Additionally, some of the most common narrative themes followed were themes such as characters being reincarnated to fulfil an objective of their deceased predecessor or two doppelgangers (one protagonist and the other, an antagonist). The most famous example of the latter is Mahesh Bhatt’s *Duplicate* (1998) as well as both versions of *Don*, one starring Amitabh Bachchan (1978) and the other, Shah Rukh Khan (2006).

Om Shanti Om, therefore, becomes an important film to study in the history of double role films in Hindi cinema, as it also falls under the same genre. The film deliberately uses familiar narrative tropes of doubling such as reincarnation and doppelgangers. It also becomes a reflection of the evolution of post-war Hindi cinema to that of the films born in post-liberalised India. *Om Shanti Om* traces this history and the birth of Bollywood through references to an older film from the same category of doubling– *Karz* (1980). Additionally, it is also done through the body of Shah Rukh Khan, who becomes the face of the Hindi films post-1990s. Stardom and doubling, therefore, become two critical ideas in the film to understand Bollywood. Star figures and the star system have been central to Hindi cinema for decades; the two concepts of excess and intertextuality also lie at the system’s focal point, without which stardom and doubling cannot be understood. Excess has been at the focus of stardom in Hindi cinema since the 1940s by providing multiple ways, spaces and approaches through which audiences could be exposed to the star body, and actors could present themselves within and outside the filmic space. Majumdar (2003) also notes that the star system allowed actors to appear in multiple film releases. This tendency of multiplication led to the concept of double (or multiple) roles becoming common in the industry. Along with doubling and excess, intertextuality also becomes relevant to the study. *Om Shanti Om* contains and addresses all of the concerned areas of study and provides the space for understanding star figures and double roles in Hindi cinema within the framework of excess and intertextuality. In this paper, the film will be analysed, keeping the aforementioned framework central to examining how Shah Rukh Khan’s stardom is used and authenticated through the double roles in the film.

Star Theory, Excess And Intertextuality

A star is someone who brings into alignment the body and technology and becomes a channel that allows the flow of the creative energies of a specific historical moment.

(Chakravarty, 2013).

With the changing media landscape, the star system has become dynamic and subject to further study over the past two decades. The following section of the paper highlights theories posited by Richard Dyer, Susan Hayward, Christine Gledhill and more that have been crucial to understanding the phenomenon of stardom. Furthermore, this section also brings in the ideas of intertextuality and excess, and in tying them with the star theories, aims to provide a theoretical framework for analysing Shah Rukh Khan's stardom through his double roles in *Om Shanti Om*.

Stardom or the star figure is a complex network of interrelated meanings. There are multiple perspectives through which the concept of stardom can be understood. In his book *Stars*, Richard Dyer categorised stardom into production and consumption, wherein he suggested that star figures represent economic value. In referring to these individuals as texts produced by media and products, stars became vital capital value in the film industry. They are seen as a guarantee, an investment for a film's success. These figures are also used to 'stabilize audience response' (Dyer, 1998, p.11). They are also seen as assurances for drawing in audiences and being promised a certain production quality. Stars exist in the film industry as both capital and labour. As capital, these figures become 'valuable assets to the production company', that is, they are investments that provide a degree of protection against loss, to mitigate risk. Their salaries make up a significant percentage of a film's budget and are also used as marketing tools, with their images being advertised considerably in order to influence the entertainment industry in favour of the film being promoted (Dyer, 1998; McDonald, 2000). Additionally, Dyer, McDonald and several other authors noted that the star's tangible features – notably the body, the face, the personality, and their real or created identities – are useful marketing tools that are being used as product differentiation between production houses. Presently, the star figures have their own brand images that they market for their own economic and creative benefits. Production houses, filmmakers and the industry also depend on these images as a point for brand identification from audience as well. The star system or these star figures become one of the focal points of the film industry (globally, nationally or even hyper locally).

Furthermore, Susan Hayward notes that in addition to the capital value, stars also represent a specific iconography that supports the former. Iconography is the form of gestures, actions, or even being associated with particular genres of films, types of characters and more. Iconography here becomes an important point to note for the concept of intertextuality. Advocated by Julia Kristeva, intertextuality in a film refers to filmmakers building narratives around pre-existing subject matters from texts and resources available to them; they are also based on and reconstructed around current sociocultural settings, economic systems, pieces of literature, prior fables and traditions, and so on. However, one of the most critical aspects of this functioning is the audience's comprehension of the allusions.

Hayward's definition of a star being understood through the representation of certain iconography can also be linked with Dyer's explanation of using the tangible features of a star as a point for production and consumption. Hayward (2000) noted in her first definition of stars that these figures not only worked through certain archetypal codes (referring to their dispositions, characters they were typecast into, or the way they looked) but also represented cultural codes that helped them in being differentiated according to the regions they belonged to and consequently, the film industry. These cultural codes included particular gestures, attitudes, postures and so on. Stars being typecast as certain characters in the films they make and the archetypes they thus create and fit into make space for stars from later generations to fill similar roles and borrow cultural codes from them.

According to Richard Dyer (1998) and Christine Gledhill (1991), stardom is not reducible to simply actors as we see them but rather the complex personas comprising various texts. The star figure is embodied by a human being. While the audience is privy to these personalities through their differentiating physicalities such as their voice, looks, skills, and so on, this version of the text is made available to viewers by the industry, films, publicity, marketing, or through unofficial texts such as rumours and scandals. Therefore, stars are not simply creations of the film industry; they too partake in constructing their personas. Dyer also notes that 'stars are extensive' and are intertextual in the sense that their images 'are picked up and used by others', whose stories outlive them. As a result, a star can be seen as a collection of meanings that present the star phenomenon as fundamentally unstable and contradictory in nature.

In reference to the idea of 'borrowing', Christian Metz suggested that films become texts that have consciously or unconsciously borrowed from other pre-existing texts (available in any form). Intertextuality in Indian cinema has always been featured through allusions, adaptations, references and more. Character names, emotions in conversations, and other visual signals like images and figurines can be alluded to in films (CVS Edu, n.d.).

Bollywood and Stardom

Since its inception, Bollywood as a phenomenon has been subject to much interpretation. However, among such views, the perspective that Bollywood is an appellation given to a type of Indian film inspired by local and global situations appears to be the most historically and logically coherent (Prasad, n.d.). Bollywood films emerged in the 1990s when the Indian economy became liberalised and found its foundations in the films and the industry of pre-liberalised India. These films were centred around NRI figures with a combination of tradition and modernity as the crucial themes (Prasad, n.d.).

Ashish Rajadhyaksha (2003) notes that Bollywood is not the Indian film industry but a part of the whole. It works parallel to Hindi cinema, and for a small space, it is a complex network of activities relating to the film industry. As Rajadhyaksha points out, Bollywood addressed the

NRI and was not concerned about the problems of Indians; it became techno-cultural nationalism and NRI nostalgia for India. The author mentions that with Bollywood came technology to keep up with the Western film industries, technologies that allowed for the multiplication of star bodies to continue. (Rajadhyaksha, 2003).

While there was a rapid increase in the presence of star figures across the industry, as the system's dynamics shifted, it led to a surge in the dominance of actors being known for much-specialised roles. The star system in Bollywood continues to take forward the commercial and aesthetic value of having star bodies in the films. A central phenomenon to this new stardom in Hindi cinema was the idea of excess wherein the body of the star was permitted 'multiple avenues of exposure' within the production and the general discourse of films (Majumdar, 2003, pp. 89-90)). Consequently, it led to a new tendency of seeing stars in multiple roles which also led to the creation of a logic of multiplication – double role films or doubling, as mentioned above. This has been a relatively widespread phenomenon in Hindi cinema over the past few decades. Doubling also offered an opportunity for a 'meta-performance', as suggested by James Naremore (1988, p. 72), wherein the actor 'signals they act persons who are acting'. This idea of meta-performance can also, therefore, be linked to Shah Rukh Khan's performance in *Om Shanti Om*, wherein as Om Makhija in song picturisations, he breaks character almost to signal his presence as the star and then switches back to the person he is embodying through the act of acting. Through his double roles in the film, the audience becomes aware 'of the mechanism of cinema itself' (Chakravarty, 2013), the link between technology, the star and his stardom, and the seamless way through which the film moves spatially and temporally. This logic of multiplication of star body or doubling also builds on the idea of excess. Excess in Hindi cinema has majorly been showcased through the notion of wealth and dream sequences in the form of song picturisation, both at times tied in with exaggerated acting. Following liberalisation, contemporary Hindi cinema observes narratives surrounding diasporic Indians residing abroad engaging in consumerist opportunities and travel, romance also being another central storyline. Wealth or abundance remains a rather large part of the commercial productions, notably in films like *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001), *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995), and more.

With the use of technology, there has been a sort of longevity given to the stars of this era, unlike the ones from the pre-liberalised Hindi cinema, where stars enjoyed only a decade or so of stardom. In referring to this longevity, there has been an increasing shift of male and female actors towards the anti-ageing process. While female stars from the yesteryears are nowhere to be seen after a few years (examples including Helen, Neetu Kapoor, etc.), the arrival of technology in Bollywood has let contemporary faces such as Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan, Saif Ali Khan, Akshay Kumar, Deepika Padukone and more, enjoy more than two decades on-screen, not allowing them to age in the process. Some of these male actors are seen in multiple film releases, touched-up images (completely toned bodies, wrinkle-free faces, dyed hair, etc.), romancing actresses at least a decade younger than them. Furthermore, with the

expanding digital media landscape, Bollywood has transcended, in some form, to OTT platforms taking with it some of its stars, furthering the idea of longevity.

Bollywood and Intertextuality

Essentially, the industry today produces content in which the “past continues into the present” (Kapoor, 2020) through intertextuality and constant referencing enabled by star bodies. The Indian ‘star system’ functioned on a fair degree of dominance of the star over the film production and on their practice of working on various projects simultaneously, which continues even in contemporary Hindi cinema (Majumdar, 2003). Stardom has been a central and dominant part of Hindi cinema, and the appeal of Hindi films rested on the local and cultural interpretations and readings of the star bodies (Viswamohan & Wilkinson, 2020). Stars from the earlier decades in Hindi cinema allowed their films to construct their star identities. Presently, in addition to the aforementioned details, stars aid in providing capital value to the cinema and stabilizing viewer response.

Intertextuality, however, has remained a common theme throughout the changes seen in the industry. Current stars constantly make references to older ones, and remakes allow viewers to consider, reflect and be nostalgic with certain narrative tropes common to star figures. While Bollywood emerges parallel to Hindi cinema with new tendencies of its own, its star system remains rather static. Much like Dilip Kumar and Amitabh Bachchan after him, Bollywood has seen (albeit more in number) multiple male stars enjoy stardom for long years such as the three Khans and Akshay Kumar. On the other hand, every decade a new set of female stars emerges, slowly replacing some of the older ones. Stardom in Bollywood does not reinvent itself into a new phenomenon but draws on the system from earlier Hindi cinema and modernises itself through technology.

***Om Shanti Om* Analysis**

Synopsis

Om Shanti Om (2007), directed by Farah Khan, is a romantic drama film that follows the story of Om, a junior artist in the 1970s, who falls in love with female star Shanti Priya. He is murdered while attempting to save the actress from a fire and is reincarnated thirty years in the present as Om Kapoor, an upcoming star in Bollywood. Om Kapoor begins regaining memories from his life as Om Makhija after he meets Bela (Om Makhija’s mother), Mukesh and another series of events that trigger the resurfacing of his memories. Om and Mukesh decide to collaborate on a film called *Om Shanti Om*, where he employs a Shantipriya look-a-like in the hopes of forcing a confession from Mukesh. However, things go astray, and Om’s life is put in jeopardy once more. *Om Shanti Om* presents a narrative that is packed with entertainment, a story and the subsequent

stylisation pertaining to some of the most popular genres in Bollywood such as romance, drama and action which quickly made it an audience favourite. It saw the highest number of prints, about 2,000, which was a significantly large number for any Hindi film at the time of its release (Raghavendra, 2007) and accumulated millions in profit after its release worldwide. In comparison to its ₹30 crore budget, the film made over ₹300 million in India only (BOI, n.d.). Shah Rukh Khan's role and performance were so anticipated that the film's premiere at Berlinale in 2008 had three sold-out screenings (PTI, 2008). However, one of the recurring themes in audience reactions across all media channels remained Shah Rukh Khan (SRK). People across the globe have consistently watched the film owing to the amount of exposure it provides them to the actor, doing in abundance on screen for what he has become known for – an affective performer. In general, the film provided the 'entertainment value' that has been closely associated with Bollywood for years – a dramatic storyline with a happily ever after, elaborate and highly stylised song sequences, and two hours of screen time for some of the popular stars in the industry.

Intertextuality and Excess in '*Om Shanti Om*'

The aesthetics of excess, tied in with intertextuality, become essential to understanding the stardom represented in *Om Shanti Om*, which can be noted through the mise en scène and narrative aspects. Excess is also closely associated with the idea of melodrama. In reference to Gledhill's (1991) argument about melodrama, most sequences in the film are charged with overpowering background music and exaggerated actions from the actors seen through swift zoom-ins and mid-shots as they interact with one another and the mise en scène. An example is a sequence with Om Makhija and his mother in the flashback as they argue over changing his name. This tendency of overdramatising scenes through non-diegetic sound and exaggerated acting has been relatively common in Hindi films from the 1960s to 1980s; a tendency also used to accompany dialogue to highlight characters' issues relevant to their dispositions and society. In the case mentioned above, the matter being discussed is the change in the last name, status and caste symbol within the Hindu society, also relevant to stardom.

Intertextuality in *Om Shanti Om* is characterised by gestures, familiar narrative tropes, costumes and set designs as references to popular films. In doing so, it also creates a sense of nostalgia and recognition, also characteristic of Bollywood films from the late 1990s (Shastri, 2011). The film borrows heavily from another film called *Karz* (1980) and opens in a film city-like space known as RC studios. The artificially-made elaborate structures of the city become a vital mise en scène element to the film as it acts as a central space for climaxes in both sections to take place, for memory and recall, and becomes a temporal link between the past and the present (Mitra, 2020). The mise en scène is packed with the romanticism of 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, Bollywood and Hollywood films, especially those about producing movies. (Khalid, 2007).

Om Shanti Om constantly refers to a common tendency of Hindi cinema's star system to have 'powerful' names to gain superstardom. The constant references made by Pappu for Om to change his name to one of more significance (such as 'Kapoor', 'Khanna') highlights an important aspect of stardom in Hindi cinema at the time. A part of it has been associated with names of actors such as Raj Kapoor, Dilip Kumar, Rishi Kapoor, Rajesh Khanna and more, which has seeped into contemporary Hindi cinema as the film presents through its narrative and allusions such as the ones mentioned above. Perhaps this explanation can also be extended to Om's love interest in the film – Shanti Priya. It is possible to link the female character to Hema Malini, who enjoyed star status in the 1970s Hindi film industry. This association is made for two reasons: Shanti Priya is called the 'Dreamy Girl' while Hema Malini also starred in a film titled *Dream Girl* (1977); and another because both women sport double names. (Shastri, 2011).

Another character, Rajesh Kapoor, has been included to spoof Rajesh Khanna, and the former brings the latter's eccentric style of hair flicking, which we also see being imitated by Om and Pappu. In producing a character off of a real actor, whose gestures are replicated by the main protagonist, who is also a star at the time of making the film, produces a text within a text within a text. Through this character, we can first understand the star as capital value or commodity. It is clear from most of his scenes in the film that he is a respected star. From his character and the reactions of the others around him, he holds a specific commodifiable value that, in Dyer's understanding, is used to maintain and garner favourable audience responses – a guarantee for any film to perform well commercially. Although a minor character in the film, Rajesh Kapoor's star persona also comprises the hair-flicking gesture and distinct way of carrying himself, similar to Rajesh Khanna, representing cultural code and an important star figure of the 1970s.

Shanti Priya too can be seen as a commodity in the industry. In the premier sequence, she fulfils the same conditions that Rajesh Kapoor does, if not more. Shanti also represents the 'Dreamy Girl' iconography, which showcases her authentic star persona. However, in the later scenes, we can also observe the industry's restrictions imposed on her star persona. In the sequence before Om saves her from the fire, we see Shanti refusing to work; consequently, the entire filming comes to a halt. It can be inferred that female stars are simply vehicles for films. It is as though a film gains additional value, commercial and aesthetic, with them. This scene in the film added to the melodrama aspect and is also an intertextual reference to a similar incident that had taken place with stars Nargis and Sunil Dutt.

Shanti's stardom can be understood through the perspective of stars being constructs. As Gledhill also mentions, the female stars who have 'excessive' habits need to be punished or are made to disappear. Shanti Priya becomes a representative example of this in the sequence where she confronts Mukesh of their marriage predicament and confesses about her pregnancy. Similar to Om eavesdropping, we watch as Shanti pleads to Mukesh to embrace their truth as he argues about the money that could go waste if they do. The lines 'no one will invest money in a married

actress's film' or her 'career would be ruined' if they publicly announce their marriage present the state of female stardom in Hindi cinema. At the risk of a public confession, Mukesh murders Shanti later. Her death in the narrative is mysterious to others, with only Mukesh and Om knowing about the murder.

The idea of the unavailability of a female star due to marriage, pregnancy or even other 'excessive' habits strips them of their star identity. Om's mother also refers to a similar logic in his conversation about the last name change. She mentions in passing how she could've been a star had she not been carrying Om at the time of her audition. At the risk of a public confession, Mukesh murders Shanti later. Her death in the narrative is mysterious to others, with only Mukesh and Om knowing about the murder.

Om Shanti Om borrows from films before it, and showing the filming of a project with the same name in its narrative shows its capacity to be self-reflexive and intertextual. The film's intertextuality works so that the audience also becomes an active participant in the meaning-finding process as they become aware of the intertextuality the film undertakes. Additionally, it builds its narrative and mise en scène in a way that mirrors the tendencies and traditions of Hindi cinema in the territory of Mumbai, old and new. The film's narrative 'deftly moves in and out of diegetic bounds to establish intertextual relationships' (Shastri, 2011).

Through the tragic love story of Om and Shanti and the carefully crafted mise en scène, *Om Shanti Om* presents a transformation of Hindi cinema to Bollywood. The sets, characters, narratives and other cultural codes relevant to Hindi cinema from the 1970s and 1980s have to burn down to let Bollywood and its extravagance take place; for Shah Rukh Khan to claim his superstardom. Bollywood rises from the ashes of Hindi cinema.

Shah Rukh Khan – Star Image

Shah Rukh Khan attained super or mega-stardom in Bollywood over fifty films and fifteen years in this industry. His rise to stardom corresponded with the beginning of Bollywood and India opening up to a 'neoliberal capitalism and Internet age' (Gopinath, 2017). His presentation of himself in the public eye and through his film roles, as a sophisticated, urban and modernised male with this newly liberalised economy quickly made him one of the most prominent faces of contemporary Hindi cinema or Bollywood (Gopinath 2017; Chopra 2007; Chakravarty 2013). Even the characters he played – which majorly spanned middle-class Hindu men presenting affective masculinity – quickly won him credibility within Indian households.

Following more than two decades of being in the spotlight, SRK's stardom remains one to be studied in terms of his double roles. His name is often the first one associated with Bollywood and indicates a link to the 'contemporary sensibility defined as a global culture' (Chakravarty,

2013). It is important to note that SRK's performances are not limited to simply films. His persona covers and stretches across various media such as advertisements, television, live performances and more.

Ashish Rajadhyaksha (2003), in his article on Bollywood, mentions how the new era in Hindi cinema after liberalisation came with advancements in technology. Additionally, Chakravarty (2013) and Chopra (2007) also suggest that Shah Rukh Khan becomes the face of this new era, representative of the technologically advanced films made in Bollywood, as contemporary Hindi cinema. This technology enabled the star to appear with himself in one frame and maximise his star persona as he 'romances with his favourite stars from the seventies in one scene' (Chakravarty, 2013). The technology being harnessed here also adds to the excess and spectacle Farah Khan creates through the sets, costumes and sound.

The film begins thirty years in the past and ends thirty years following that, suggesting that if the problems posed in the narrative are not resolved, the film is not over. Given SRK's global stardom and extensive filmography of romance films, the viewers expect the star to have the conventional 'happily ever after'. The reason for the aforementioned is not simply his devoted fan following and 'his cinematic representation of a compassionate heteronormative relationship' (Gopinath, 2017), but also his ability to feel and express the emotions of his characters profoundly and to make his audience reciprocate those as well. Therefore, in a way, he must, literally and metaphorically, 'win' at the end by getting a happy ending with his love interest, resolving the narrative crisis, or both. As similarly suggested by Gopinath, 'He and his characters are sensuous and emotional, objects of desire and regard, who, nevertheless, are triumphant subjects at the end.'

Doubling in '*Om Shanti Om*'

In this regard, SRK's first character in the film – Om Makhija – can be analysed. Om Makhija, a junior artist struggling to make it big in the industry, falls in love with Shanti Priya, a female star at the time. Both meet a tragic end in the film's first half when they die in a fire. Comparing some of the previous roles held by SRK, Om Makhija is a rather pitiful character. His actions are exaggerated; his poor command of the English language and his struggling role in the industry positions Shah Rukh Khan as undesirable.

In referring to Hayward and Dyer's understandings, Shah Rukh Khan's star body is easily commodifiable in a way that it provides a guarantee for the film to succeed commercially. However, Om Makhija neither provides capital value for the film nor garners a favourable audience response given the character's life trajectory. He is portrayed as 'less than' in terms of agency, economics and social status compared to other characters such as Shanti Priya, Mukesh, and so on. Although, the character does provide SRK to showcase his versatility as an actor. Om

Makhija is everything that Raj (*Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge*), Rahul (*Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*), and so on, or even the Shah Rukh Khan represented in media is not. However, Om Makhija provides an avenue for SRK to embody characters that show his versatility as an actor, allowing him to break out of the roles he is usually typecast into – the urban, middle-class Hindu man who resolves all crises at the end (both action and romance).

Albeit, SRK retains his real star persona through songs. Through the multiple set and costume changes, the songs in *Om Shanti Om* do not provide a temporal jump, unlike other Bollywood films but temporarily break us away from the film's narrative to reinstate SRK's star figure. The idea of meta-performance can also, therefore, be linked to Shah Rukh Khan's performance in *Om Shanti Om*, wherein as Om Makhija in song picturisations, he breaks character almost to signal his presence as the star and then back to the person he is embodying through the act of acting. Primarily seen in the track 'Main Agar Kahoon', the audience sees less of Om Makhija and more of the Shah Rukh Khan known to grace the screens. In referring to stars being representative of specific cultures and creating their iconographies, SRK has come to be known as a 'romance king'. The film momentarily breaks from the narrative to show SRK wooing Shanti Priya with his iconic actions – smiling at the camera in a side angle and his signature open-armed wide stance. The affective/emotive star figure he is known for is restored through this. As Om Makhija, Shah Rukh Khan borrows gestures from his previous characters that framed his star identity to reinstate that same identity through the character. Here, Hayward's star theory on intertextuality and iconography comes into play as SRK borrows gestures from previous characters he played, one that he is known globally for, to pacify the viewers of his real identity and a promise of resolution of the crisis. However, since Om Makhija is embodied by Shah Rukh Khan, the unfavourable circumstances of the character are unsuitable for the actor as the film cannot let him 'lose' or not just lose his love interest but simultaneously die after not having resolved the problem; let the 'evil' win over the 'good'. Consequently, the audience is led to the next section of the film, where SRK's double role as Om Kapoor is introduced.

Om Kapoor, son of Rajesh Kapoor, is born when Om Makhija dies. The opening sequence with SRK's second character in the film begins with mid-shots and close-ups of a film star's luxurious lifestyle, accompanied by a voiceover of Om Makhija narrating the star life he had dreamt of having. As can be seen from this, the foreshadowing from the previous sections is coming true. Here, the ideas of excess and intertextuality are presented in *mise en scène* elements and theory, respectively.

In the mid-long shot, we see the room in which Om Kapoor resides is large; each corner arranged with decorative, modern art pieces and picture frames as he is dressed in an expensive robe, with multiple butlers at his service. Additionally, the ominous non-diegetic background score build-up adds to the life of excess that Om Kapoor lives in, owing to his star identity. There is a hint of

melodrama when the music comes to a crescendo with a shot of the burnt scar of the ‘Om’ tattoo on his wrist, providing physical evidence of reincarnation.

In referring to Gledhill and Dyer’s understanding of the star as a construct, Om Kapoor becomes a central, intertextual figure. This understanding becomes relevant, especially in the case of Shah Rukh Khan and the characters he embodies in *Om Shanti Om*. Through Om Kapoor, SRK is not only displaying the life of an upcoming star but also of himself via his distinct way of greeting his fans through his infamous balcony; the lifestyle lived by him and the way his star persona is a ‘networked’ body with the use of technology that enables him to be in multiple spaces at the same time. Om Kapoor is produced as an individual reaping the benefits of a neoliberal capitalist economy. Not only is he a close representation of SRK’s real life, but he is also reflective of the star system prevalent in Bollywood today. This can be noted in the scene where a producer hastily narrates the scene to Om Kapoor, who is listening to him and simultaneously carrying on a conversation through a Bluetooth device. As Chakravarty notes, SRK’s persona is ‘hypermediated and networked’. (Chakravarty, 2013). Additionally, the same scene also shows how the crew of the film Om Kapoor is working in cannot move forward with the filming without him or his input and approval. He seems to be the driver of the film, the most vital narrative and economic component of the entire project. The character also represents Shah Rukh Khan – the reel persona embodying the real persona. In doing so and in reference to Dyer’s (1998) and Hayward’s (2000) theories, *Om Shanti Om* highlights the significance of a star’s commercial value by also using the same concept through SRK. Furthermore, in embodying Om Kapoor, SRK partakes in the construction of the former’s (reel) stardom based on the latter’s real star identity, which he helps create along with the industry, media, fans and more. Om Kapoor can thus be viewed as a text within a text within another text.

The ‘Deewangi Deewangi’ song also becomes essential to this discussion. The song takes place as an after-party and celebration of Om Kapoor winning an award. It has an extraordinary number of appearances of other stars of Bollywood, especially ones Shah Rukh Khan has worked with. This song can be seen as epitomising SRK’s star figure; through the facade of Om Kapoor, the audience can enjoy performances from other star actors, all of whom dance to gestures borrowed from their movies with SRK. He does not perform here as Om Kapoor but as himself. This brings in intertextual references and further positions Shah Rukh Khan as the global star of Bollywood. The award show that precedes the song is also an essential sequence in terms of intertextuality and excess. The dramatic, exaggerated performance of all the stars, including SRK, adds to the excess.

Furthermore, the scenes where the nominations are announced are references to films done by the actors (Akshay Kumar, Abhishek Bachchan, etc.) and SRK. However, both the scenes from different movies involving Om Kapoor are identical as he narrates the same dialogue to two different actresses. The dialogue here coupled with his signature arms-wide-open pose invites the

audience to view him as SRK, not Om Kapoor. These scenes provide the junction for reality and illusion to overlap (Shastri, 2011), creating multiple layers of intertextual texts that reinforce Shah Rukh Khan's stardom by giving his 'real' persona the space to do so, not the 'reel' as Om Kapoor.

In presenting Om Kapoor's lifestyle before the character himself, the film in a way is attempting to restore Shah Rukh Khan's star image, almost pacifying the viewers that the issues from the previous section will be resolved now that much of the control in the film had been reinstated to SRK's character. Om Kapoor's star identity in the film is also a mirror image of SRK's stardom. The song sequence, 'Dard E Disco', which the character suggests as a dream sequence for a wheelchair-bound character he plays for his job, becomes an interesting piece to analyse. The sequence leading up to the song presents a film-within-a-film, referring to the constant use of intertextuality. The song itself also becomes an example of excess given the use of dancers of varying nationalities dressed in skimpy clothing and exaggerated accessories, while SRK dances mostly shirtless in frontal shots. SRK/Om Kapoor remains the central figure of spectacle throughout the song.

Drawing on the ideas of theorists mentioned above, the association between the actor and technology in Bollywood becomes apparent in the second half of the film. As mentioned earlier, the Om Kapoor's scene with the producer of a film he seems to be working on, the Superman sequence that required him to 'fly' with the help of gadgets and the constant reliance on technology (phones, projection and surveillance equipment, etc.) in the execution of the plan to take revenge on Mukesh – all of these instances aid in showing SRK – through Om Kapoor – as the face and networked body of Bollywood's new technological stage. *Om Shanti Om* not only provides Shah Rukh Khan two major avenues to express this affective masculinity that has become a significant part of his brand image but also allows him to extend, borrow and reference his star identity interchangeably – as SRK from outside of a film and as both the Oms, his characters in the film.

Conclusion

Om Shanti Om illustrates Shah Rukh Khan's stardom in two ways: the first of his versatility as a performer through the 'desiring and vulnerable body' of Om Makhija, and the second related to his star identity outside the film screens, in other media spaces as a 'desired body' through Om Kapoor (Chakravarty, 2013). Both characters are brought together in a space characterised through themes of love, self-identification and sacrifice and highlight the actor's ability of an affective performance, as he has come to be known. This is also helpful in further establishing his credibility as an actor.

Shah Rukh Khan had done a few double role films before *Om Shanti Om*, and more so following it as well. However, in each of these films, there is an observable pattern to the way his star identity is presented to the audience. In *Don* (2006), as an example, while he plays a negative character in the film, the power of the plot rests solely in his character, as though it is him that controls the narrative, so much so that even the viewers are not aware of an unexpected development in the narrative. Even by playing such a role, the film does so to leave and authenticate his star identity in a position of command. Therefore, reiterating the point that SRK's characters in some form must be triumphant in the end, doing so otherwise will not only dampen audience expectations but also deem the actor's stardom as lesser than the global image he holds.

Shah Rukh Khan (and other similar stars) have never quite broken out of his star image, within and outside the space of the film. He experiments with his performance as Om Makhija in the first half of the film, completely deviating from the dominant, romantic, and all-knowing characters he plays to Makhija's naive and submissive personality. However, to validate his star figure and his presence, he comes back and ends the film as Om Kapoor, a character that not only lives and breathes as SRK in the reel life, but one that embodies and represents the actor's real life. Therefore, in order to deviate from their usual star personas, actors such as Shah Rukh Khan pick narratives that allow multiple avenues of exposure to their body so they can, later in the same film, authenticate the stardom they previously diverged from. In doing so, the subsequent (audience) consumption remains in accordance with the stardom as produced by the various media texts.

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