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Missing in the Original:
Twin Dragons Remade
in India

Indian film industries, like their counterpart in Hong Kong, frequently remake films produced by other industries. All films sourced from abroad are ‘unofficial’ remakes in that no royalties are ever paid and no acknowledgement made of the fact that the film at hand is based on another. It is a part of the film reviewer’s job to track the sources and educate the readers/viewers on the extent and brazenness of the borrowing.¹ I discuss below the instance of a remake and its source circulating in the celluloid versions in the same context to show how the original is made over into an *incomplete* or inadequate object, whose gaps various agents are required to fill.

I do not intend to make a case for ‘reception studies’ or radical readings of films by particular (subaltern) audience groups. The larger point of this examination is to identify a set of questions that have to do with the material effects of *industrial* contexts of circulation and take them to the examination of films themselves. In disciplinary terms, the task at hand is to make the fact of celluloid films’ susceptibility to mutation, as they travel down the distribution and exhibition ladders, a problem for film studies. As of now the film studies conception of the filmic text is for the most part insensitive to the routine nature of object’s physical transformation in the course of circulation. In this essay I will look at the Hong Kong film *Twin Dragons* (Tsui Hark, Ringo Lam, 1992) and its Telugu remake to make my point. Telugu film industry, one of the four south Indian industries, is second only to Hindi in size. Andhra Pradesh, the state which houses the industry, is the single largest market for cinema in India. It is also the state where Hong Kong films have had a significant presence.

There are two stages to my investigation into what happens to the original. I begin with the circulation of *Twin Dragons* in the theatrical circuit in Andhra Pradesh. I then move on to this film’s Telugu remake, *Hello Brother* (E.V.V. Satyanarayana, 1994) and discuss how and why *Twin Dragons* became the occasion for addressing a set of issues that affected the Telugu film industry. In the latter part of the essay I will argue that the original and remake foreground key questions of stardom and how it works in specific contexts. I will also show that the original presents itself as a candidate for remake by reworking the conventions of melodrama. This exercise carried out by the Hong Kong film opens up new possibilities for the Telugu film industry, resulting in the rapid makeover of the dominant local genre.

The industrial context: Adding ‘nativity’ to the import

Although the manner in which *Twin Dragons* circulated in India might be surprising to those who are unfamiliar with the workings of the local distribution and exhibition sectors, nothing about this film’s career here is a digression from the familiar pattern. As is common practice in

India and elsewhere with Hong Kong productions, the film's title was changed and the censor certificate was issued in May 1993 for the film with the title *Twin Brothers*.² This title change is likely to have been made by the film's distributor Indo Overseas Films, Chennai, the largest importer-distributor of Hong Kong films in the 1980s and 1990s. Theatrical release is likely to have occurred within weeks of the certification. In the early 1990s Jackie Chan was already popular in many parts of India, especially Andhra Pradesh. A distributor who has dealt in Hong Kong films recalls that the film was initially released in Class A (air-conditioned) theatres in larger cities and towns on the strength of Jackie Chan's presence. It then moved down the rungs of the distribution and exhibition ladder to smaller cities/towns and less comfortable cinema halls in larger cities.³ This latter segment of the film market I have elsewhere called the *B circuit* and I will have more to say about it presently.⁴ The Indian film print, which was obviously being prepared for a career in the B circuit, changed the credits and named Jackie Chan as the director.

If there is an element of surprise in the Indian career of *Twin Dragons*, it certainly does not lie in the remarkable ability of local distributors and exhibitors to change titles and directors. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, this was in fact the default mode of promoting Hong Kong films among local audiences (I present some examples below). What was surprising however was that the Telugu film industry's production sector, would choose to remake a *Hong Kong* film. So what qualified *Twin Dragons* as source material? I return to this question after a brief discussion of what happens to Hong Kong films in the course of their circulation in India. This detour is useful because it brings into focus the logic underwriting the film industry's approach to 'foreign' films.

The change of title and credits is a small but critical sign that films mutate in circulation. *Twin Dragons* (or rather, *Twin Brothers*) circulated in a context in which it was not unusual for films that have passed through the censor certification process to be spliced with explicitly pornographic sequences.⁵ The extent of the mutation of Hong Kong films in the Indian B circuit cannot be accounted for by David Bordwell's point that, "...Hong Kong companies gave foreign distributors carte blanche to recut their films."⁶ Not the least because this is the fate of a number of European, Asian and Hollywood films, not to mention low budget Indian films, which enter this segment. While there is no evidence that *Twin Brothers* underwent this degree of transformation, it is useful to note the extreme instance in order to take on board the disconcerting possibility that the filmic object may not be such a stable one after all.

There is an underlying logic to the seeming chaos of the B circuit. R.K. Bhagawan, a distributor and also producer of Telugu dubbed versions of Hong Kong and Indian films, offers a vital clue. Describing the process by which he selects Hong Kong films for dubbing into Telugu, he states that he often picks up older films whose rights are re-issued (after five years, when they revert to the producer). He chooses 'flop films with quality'.⁷ He explains that these are films which failed in their earlier release because of complex plots or unfamiliar story lines which local viewers could not follow because they *could not understand English*, the only language in which Hong Kong films were dubbed for the Indian release till the late 1990s. Bhagawan himself

sees the problem as one of intelligibility and finding local equivalents to elements (including titles of films) that are not immediately comprehensible. Interestingly however, straightforward translation has never been the intention of the B circuit distributor. This is partly because, as Bhagawan indicates, the import poses a number of problems.

One area in which this becomes evident is stardom. In the 1990s Hong Kong films circulated in Andhra Pradesh alongside Telugu films whose publicity revolved almost exclusively around stars, especially male stars. This mode of film promotion continues into the present. When Hong Kong films had stars who were recognized locally, their presence was naturally foregrounded. *Twin Brothers*' credits are an instance of how far a major star's presence in a film could be pushed. But only a handful of Hong Kong stars were recognized locally. The low economic worth of the market and the erratic nature of supply made it impossible to build publicity campaigns around lesser-known stars. Distributors thus passed off unfamiliar Hong Kong actors as relatives (sons, daughters, brothers) or teachers of Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan. This made sense because the Telugu film industry in the 1990s witnessed the entry of a number of second and third generation film stars. So '*Banda* [fat] Samo Hung' was introduced in the publicity of a film distributed by Sree Suchitra Films, Vijayawada, as Jackie Chan's 'Guru.' A film titled *Dangerous Mission* (Eric Tsang, other details and Hong Kong or US titles unknown) claimed to feature 'Dangerous devil action from the brother of Jackie Chan'.

Distributors also 'introduced' elements which were absent in the film in question. Sree Suchitra Films issued publicity stills for Chan's *Operation Condor/Armour of God II* (Jackie Chan, 1987) with Hollywood actress Kim Basinger. She of course did not act in the film but that banal factual detail did not prevent the distributor from adding glamour to a film, which was presumably lacking in it. Distributors were therefore supplying flashy titles, actors with star value, heroines and even comprehensible story lines. These elements were evidently missing in the original thus making it fall short of comprehensibility and reducing its economic worth.

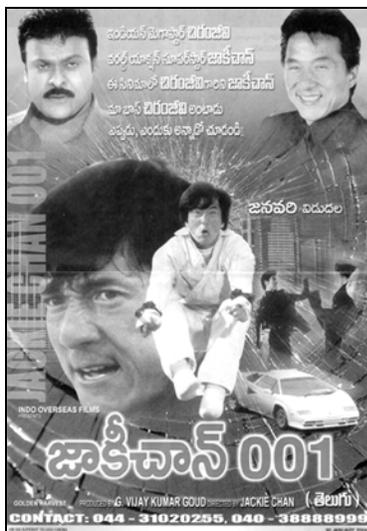
It is useful at this point to introduce the category *nativity*, and ask if this is in fact the missing element that the local industry has to supply. Nativity (the English word itself is used) is the film industry term for 'nativeness.' The term has rich connotations in Telugu (and Tamil). It is the on-screen representation of *Teluguness*, especially the customs, practices and also geographical locations that epitomize linguistic and cultural specificity. With reference to Telugu cinema, the origins of the concept can be traced to the demand made on films by journalists and intellectuals that they contain Teluguness. Kodavatiganti Kutumbarao, scriptwriter, film critic and public intellectual, argued as early as 1940 that Telugu films should have *Telugutanam* or Teluguness.⁸ He bemoaned the lack of nativity in Telugu films every once in a while.⁹ For some time now, nativity has been something of a hold-all category for the attempt by the Telugu film industry to create a diegetic space that is at once distinct from and related to the (Indian) 'national' one. Nativity is a crucial site for the often difficult negotiation between linguistic identity or the particularity of the local and the larger Indian nation-state.

Nativity is also closely associated with a certain variety of realism in Telugu and Tamil cinema in the seventies and eighties. It is in this sense that Sundar Kaali uses the term in his

essay.¹⁰ Nativity is often produced by the deployment of stock signifiers: paddy fields, women in traditional attire, etc. Kodavatiganti, among others, has made arguments about nativity being an important *source* of realistic presentation.

The reason why I invoke the concept here, although it has not generally been used in the discussion of distribution/publicity of imported films, is to situate the work of the B circuit distributors against the backdrop of what is clearly an important concern of the production sector. Further, nativity would help pinpoint the kind of localization that is attempted at by the film industry: how borrowed materials are localized and how they are deployed to address a set of issues/crises in the local setting. My suggestion is that the domestication of Hong Kong films is best understood in terms of prevalent concerns of Telugu cinema rather than, say, cultural essentialist terms.

Dubbing of Hong Kong films into Telugu opened up immense possibilities for introducing nativity to promote imported films. An interesting example came to light in January 2004 when newspapers and film magazines carried out an advertisement for the Telugu version of a Jackie Chan starrer titled *Jackie Chan 001 (Project A, Jackie Chan, 1983)*. The English version of the film was in circulation since the 1980s. According to the film's advertisements, Jackie Chan could apparently be heard saying, 'My boss [is] Chiranjeevi.' This was an obvious reference to Telugu film industry's biggest star whose photograph also appears on the top left hand corner of this advertisement (as well as the jacket of the VCD version). Chiranjeevi is often referred to by his fans as Boss or *Big Boss* (after one of his films directed by Vijaya Bapineedu, 1995). The process by which Jackie Chan, the more popular and bigger among the two in stature in the rest of the world, becomes a Chiranjeevi fan is one that involves taking considerable liberties with the original. It is also one that indicates that Jackie Chan not only speaks in 'my' language but also speaks like me and to me. But then, he has been practicing for some time now!



Jackie Chan 001 a.k.a Project A. Notice the prominence of Chiranjeevi's image in the film's publicity.
(Source: Superhit 30th January, 2004)

Arriving at Twin Dragons via the rowdy-hero of Telugu cinema

North American and European action film buffs swear that *Twin Dragons* is a copy of the Van Damme starrer, *Double Impact* (Sheldon Lettich, 1991). English language reviews, which appeared in the wake of the US release of *Twin Dragons* in 1999, conclude that the Chan vehicle fails as action film and comedy.¹¹ This failed copy was remade twice in India. The Telugu remake *Hello Brother* (1994) was in turn faithfully remade into Hindi as *Judwaa* (David Dhawan, 1997) and also dubbed into Tamil as *Hello Brothers* (1994). The Indian career of *Twin Dragons* throws open a new line of investigation about what is being worked out in the film and why it is of interest here. *Double Impact*, like *Twin Brothers*, was issued a censor certificate in 1993 and in the light of Van Damme's popularity in India, is likely to have been released almost immediately. It is therefore possible that all three films, *Twin Dragons*, its alleged source and copy circulated in Andhra almost simultaneously.¹²

To restate the obvious, remakes insert themselves into local histories. The central question before me is what the processes of localization might tell us about the original and the remake and their contexts of production and circulation. I have already suggested that the addition of nativity is something the student of cinema has to be on the lookout for. This addition is necessitated by the fact there is an acute awareness on the part of the industry that the imported film has migrated into a new paradigm marked by industrial and spectatorial relations that are quite distinct from those at the point of origin. Juxtaposing the remake and the original will help identify the continuity and differences between these paradigms. Given my limited familiarity with Hong Kong's film culture and industry, I will focus mainly on Telugu cinema and Andhra Pradesh, making only tentative (and possibly inaccurate) observations on Hong Kong.

Interesting work has been done on the circulation of the Hong Kong action film in different parts of the world and some of this work also deals with the ways in which it spawned hybrid local products. Notable in this respect is David Desser on the early American reception of Hong Kong film.¹³ Meaghan Morris's writings on what she calls the "generic uptake of Hong Kong action cinema in Western contexts" is quite fascinating.¹⁴ Unlike the contexts that Morris discusses,¹⁵ the circulation of Hong Kong action film in India has not resulted in the emergence of anything like a new genre. Transformations at the distribution level are a pointer to the ways in which remakes might approach their source. A more sustained engagement with Telugu *films* of the period is necessary to understand where and how the original was destined to sink roots.

In order to appreciate what *Twin Dragons* becomes in Telugu, it is necessary to understand the paradigmatic genre, which the Hong Kong film is made over into. That genre is known as the mass film (*mass chitram*, *mass cinema* in Telugu). *Twin Dragons'* encounter with the mass film lays bare the manner in which the original is deployed to address problems in the paradigmatic genre. And in the process we witness all over again the ways in which a remake supplies that something which was missing in the original. Except this time the original in question was the

mass film. The imbrication of the Hong Kong film with the mass film, might have a tale to tell about *both*.

Twin Dragons is the story of twins (played by Jackie Chan) separated in their infancy who grow up in very different circumstances and meet by chance. They fall in love with the each other's female companions, are forced by circumstances to switch roles, and finally realize that they are indeed twin brothers. The film's story outline is curiously familiar for those accustomed to watching Telugu films (or for that matter Indian films in general). However, even a quick examination of the film would reveal that *Twin Dragons'* use of the star in a double role as well as the story of twins-separated-at-birth, which are the chief reasons for its apparent familiarity, finds equivalents in film industries across the world—not merely Telugu, Tamil or Hindi. Reduced to its bare story elements, the film deploys standard formulaic elements of melodrama and comedy alike. One can therefore safely assume that the parallels at this level between the Hong Kong and Indian films are not very significant. But there are other reasons for *Twin Dragons'* suitability as remake material. The possibilities this film opened up for Telugu cinema become clear when the industry's problems around this time are recalled. Much of these had to do with the crises of the mass film.

Mass film is a journalistic as well as an industrial term that refers to big budget productions featuring major stars in the lower class/caste roles. It often deals with the mobilization of the populace, via the star-protagonist, against the enemies of state and society. There are close parallels between the mass film and similar genres in other southern states which were assembled in the wake of the success of Amitabh Bachchan's 1970s films in Hindi on the one hand and the latter day work of first generation southern stars such as M.G. Ramachandran and N.T. Rama Rao (NTR).¹⁶

The mass film in Telugu is closely linked to the rise to prominence of a new generation of stars namely Chiranjeevi, Balakrishna, Venkatesh and Nagarjuna in the 1980s and Mohan Babu in the early 1990s. Not only was the mass film the focus of the film industry's investment in the eighties and the early nineties but it was also the site for working out resolutions to pressing social and political questions.

The growth of the mass film coincides with the rising popularity of Hong Kong film in India in the 1980s. There are discernable 'influences' of Hong Kong action film on the mass film, including the increased premium on fighting skills as a source of stardom, which were often displayed in action sequences that were sourced from popular Hong Kong films. The remaking of *Twin Dragons* is therefore something of a culmination of a much longer one-way transaction between Hong Kong and Telugu cinemas.

In *Hello Brother* Nagarjuna plays the roles of the twins who are social opposites. Deva (Boomer of *Twin Dragons*), around whom much of the film's action revolves, is the lost twin who loses his working class foster parents too in his childhood. He grows up as an orphan and is also the sole guardian of his little sister, who till the film's climax he assumes to be his blood relative. He becomes a ruffian and a petty crook who is continuously being chased by two inefficient policemen. Nagarjuna as Deva is the famous 'rowdy' of the mass film. The urban

criminal, or rowdy (the word is a part of the Telugu lexicon), has been an ubiquitous figure in popular Telugu cinema since the seventies and has parallels with criminal lower class characters played by major stars in other Indian cinemas. The screen rowdy has been critical for the negotiation between the state, subalternity and citizenship in contemporary cinema. All major male stars from the seventies played the rowdy, often repeatedly. So the rowdy is neither confined to the mass film nor Telugu cinema but I will stay within the narrow field for obvious reasons.¹⁷

Rowdy-heroes of the mass film represent the poor in obvious ways—speaking for and fighting oppressors for them, but also speaking as one of them.¹⁸ In the mass film there is a tendency towards the criminalization of the lower class figures, which in turn becomes an additional marker of his subalternity.¹⁹

These developments made possible a new approach to the old problem of representing citizenship, which Partha Chatterjee argues is seen in the distinction between ‘citizens’ and the ‘population’:

Most of the inhabitants of India are only tenuously, and even then only ambiguously and contextually, rights bearing citizens in the sense imagined by the constitution. They are not, therefore, proper members of civil society and are not regarded as such by institutions of the state. However, it is not as though they are outside the reach of the state or even excluded from the domain of politics. As populations within the territorial jurisdiction of the state, they have to be both looked after and controlled by various governmental agencies. These activities bring these populations into a certain *political* relationship with the state.²⁰

Popular cinema in India has had much to say about the gap between the citizen and the population. In an essay that in fact examines the rowdy (not the screen representation but the product of the colonial and post-colonial regimes of legality) Vivek Dhareshwar and R. Srivatsan trace the surfacing of the rowdy figure in public life, and also journalistic and scholarly discourse, back to a fundamental contradiction in the citizen-subject.²¹ They argue that there is a “split, a doubling, between the legal-political-moral subject (of the liberal discourse) and the empirical subject of political technologies.”²² This formulation allows us to understand the gap between the citizen in theory or principle—the bearer of ‘naturally’ endowed rights—and the denial or inaccessibility of rights to the majority in practice. Madhava Prasad opens up the issue for students of cinema by pointing out, “Although Citizen-Subject remains an incompletely realized utopic figure in all instances, it is also the case that this non-realization takes specific forms in different nation-state formations.”²³ The problem therefore is not merely the gap between the citizen-in-theory and the population at large—for there are no instances where such a gap does not exist—but the ways in which subject positions approximating to (or not to) the citizen figure are produced in cinema.

In popular Telugu cinema till the 1970s we notice that there is an exteriorization of the citizen-subject gap, almost on the lines that Chatterjee speaks of it as two distinct entities which

have a physical existence: into the educated, upper caste, upper or middle class citizen figure and his other, who is a member of the abject subject population.²⁴ In the mass film the split between citizen and its other remains in force. The major new development is the rowdy, who now becomes endowed with the authority to represent the masses, *in spite of the absence of traditional markers of the citizen figure* (education, upper class and caste origins). This absence is compensated by the rowdy's *authenticity* within the framework of the fiction. He is one of the masses and criminality and orphanhood further enhance his subalternity. Notice for example the Deva character in *Hello Brother*. Although the film for the most part is a comedy, the childhood of Deva and the loss of his foster parents are presented in a moving manner, as if to make a convincing case for his status as rowdy in the rest of the film.

Deva is thus a regular fixture of the mass film. As with most rowdy-heroes of the nineties he speaks a lower class (Coastal Andhra Telugu) dialect that is liberally sprinkled with mispronounced English words. *Hello Brother's* departure from the general tendencies in the 1990s mass film lies in the manner in which the relationship between the double roles of the star are accounted for. The history of the double in cinema in itself is of little interest to the present discussion. I am only interested in the development of stardom in the nineties, which has much to do with the star's double existence but not necessarily to do with double or multiple roles. There is an interesting *retrograde* return to the pre-mass film theme of the missing siblings. By the late eighties itself the mass film began to do away with explanation of the resemblance in terms of blood relationships. For example in *Donga Mogudu*, Chiranjeevi plays rowdy Nagaraju and industrialist Ravi Teja who change places, exactly in the *Twin Dragons* manner to solve each other's problems. *Donga Mogudu's* deployment of the star to play characters who are not related can actually be traced back to pre-mass film era and *Iddaru Mitrulu* (Two Friends, Adurthi Subba Rao, 1961) in which Akkineni Nageswara Rao, the father of *Hello Brother's* male lead, plays the characters of a suicidal poor man and a rich man who change roles. No explanation is offered for the resemblance between the characters in either of these films. It is therefore possible to suggest that by the eighties the older explanation for the casting a star in multiple roles was no longer necessary.²⁵

Unlike a number of lower class heroes of mass films (who may or may not be criminalized) Deva is not engaged in solving problems of the populace or in the mobilization of the masses against a variety of oppressors (as seen for example in *Mutha Mestri*, Gangsman, A. Kodandarami Reddy, 1993). This difference however is perfectly in consonance with the mass film's logic of distributing representational responsibilities of the star-protagonist between a confrontation with upper class oppressors and an obscene capacity for enjoyment. In contrast to the prudish heroes of the earlier eras, mass heroes are hard drinking 'vamp' chasers. Eventually however, they will prove to be faithful lovers and monogamous husbands (though not always the latter). But not before they have amply demonstrated their limitless capability for enjoyment. Deva, for example, cannot restrain himself from slapping the bottom of any woman who bends forward. This habit lands him his rich girlfriend but on one occasion he gets drunk and slaps the bottom of his future mother-in-law.

Citizenship, point out Dhareshwar and Srivatsan, is premised on the *absence* or transcendence of particularity: “if one of the major conditions of democratization is a certain disincorporation of the subject’s positivity—my particularity has no bearing on my participation in the public sphere—not everyone can participate equally in the logic of disincorporation.”²⁶ It has been argued that in the Indian context the citizen figure is *invisibly marked* as upper caste, middle class, Hindu and male.²⁷ Therefore, those who are not invisibly marked thus but are instead marked by their particularity—by virtue of their lower caste status, for instance—will find that their aspirations to citizenship are doomed to remain unfulfilled. Dhareshwar and Srivatsan suggest in passing that stardom in the Indian context has much to do with what they call the logic of disincorporation. I will extend their suggestion by pointing out that the rowdy-hero of the mass film (and other contemporaneous popular genres across industries in India) draws attention to the cinema as one crucial site where disincorporation is not only at work but also results in the production of a new type of citizen figure.

Demonstrably in the mass film, the subaltern subject’s *positivity* is disincorporated by overloading it with the excessive particularity of the star. How this is worked out is quite remarkable.

What distinguishes the mass film from garden-variety populism that is often found in popular cinema across the world is the genre’s relentless *insistence that the spectator be aware that she is in the presence of a major star*. A number of techniques are used to ensure this and the most remarkable of them is certainly the inevitable reference to the star’s real name, honorific titles and earlier films *in the course of the film*. This technique, which I call the ‘biographical reference’, requires close attention. In *Hello Brother*, which is quite restrained by mass film standards in its use of the biographical reference, the character Deva is referred to as *Yuva Samrat* (young emperor), an honorific title by which he is known among fan circles.²⁸

The deployment of the biographical reference is best appreciated when we look at the career of Chiranjeevi.²⁹ It is not as if Nagarjuna’s vehicles don’t contain such references but they are tame in comparison, suggesting that the technique’s deployment is in direct proportion to the stature of the star. Nevertheless, in *Hello Brother* too the spectator is reminded of something that she is in any case unlikely to forget: that Deva is the star Nagarjuna.³⁰

There need be no doubt that the ‘biography’ in the biographical reference is as elaborately constructed a fiction as the film itself. Richard Dyer, in his discussion of stardom in Hollywood films, argues that the star image is “authenticated as something more—truer, more real—than an image” by referring it back to his/her existence in the ‘real world.’³¹ He adds: “[T]he authentication afforded by the ambivalent star-as-image: star-as-real-person nexus resembles nothing so much as a hall of mirrors”.³² The gap between the real and fictional is not the issue here but the need for the production of the ‘real’ star and his/her biography, etc. The inevitable references to the star’s extra-diegetic existence also recalls Laura Mulvey’s statement: “... the cinema has distinguished itself in the production of ego ideals as expressed in particular in the star system, the stars’ centering both screen presence and screen story as they act out a complex

process of likeness and difference (the glamorous impersonates the ordinary).”³³ Does the deployment of the biographical reference have anything to add to the understanding of stardom in cinema?

Two *registers* of plausibility or verisimilitude (in Steve Neale’s sense of the term) are simultaneously in use in the mass film.³⁴ The first ensures that the rowdy is marked with a number of indicators of subalternity (criminality, orphanhood, speech in non-standard dialects, dark complexion, etc). This register coexists and needs another, which by underscoring the actor’s stardom actually seems to cancel out the carefully assembled image of the authentic subaltern. However, the contradiction is significant: the authenticity of the rowdy is presented as a direct consequence of the fact of a major star playing the role.

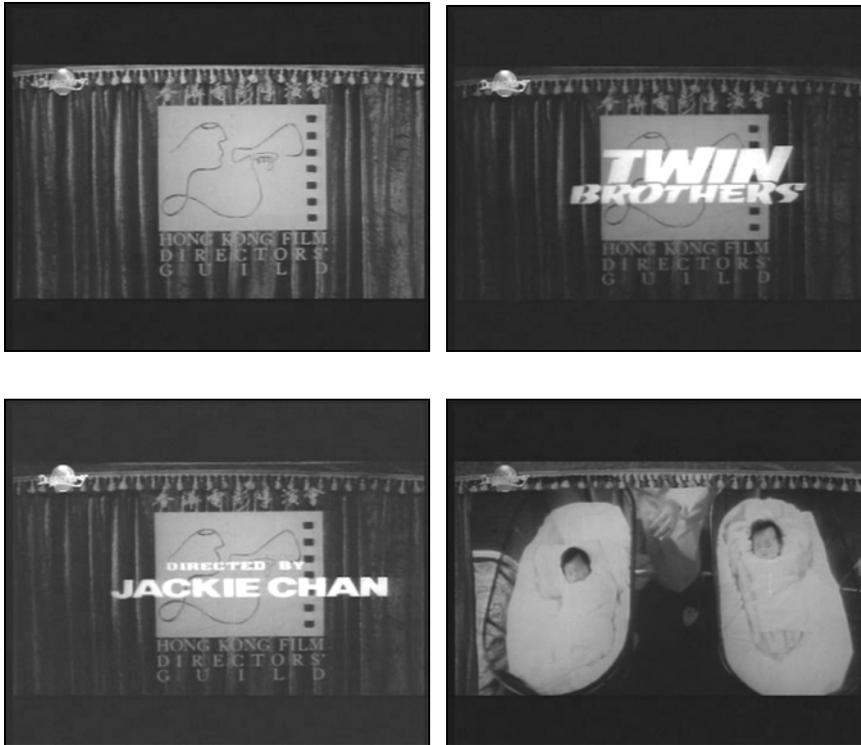
As suggested above, the not so infrequent reminder of the actor’s star status is necessary in order for the rowdy figure to be disincorporated. Not for the emergence of the unmarked or invisibly marked citizen-subject (the secular Hindu, upper caste male middle class subject, who alone can occupy the position of citizenship because of the lack of particularity) but as one with an excessive positivity that allows him to represent the subaltern. The two registers of verisimilitude work in tandem to ensure that the star can *represent* the masses (speak for and represent them) because he is *not* one of them.

Casting of stars in double roles heightens the interplay between likeness and difference. It also actively contributes to the mass film’s political agenda. Unlike Deva, the role of Ravi Teja as wealthy expatriate or Non-Resident Indian (NRI) has a considerably shorter history. However, the splitting of the star into characters representing social, cultural and temperamental opposites is a regular feature of films that cast stars in double roles. The splitting of the star in this manner is not an Indian invention. It is only to be expected that the oppositional positions represented by the duo are named in terms that have a contemporary relevance (the rowdy and NRI in *Hello Brother*; the mechanic and expatriate classical musician in *Twin Dragons*). The equitable distribution of disability—the rich twin is weak, passive, feminine and the poor one strong, aggressive and masculine—witnessed in *Hello Brother* too is not specific to Telugu cinema. However, the mass film foregrounds the simultaneous co-existence of two subject positions, which are the consequence of splitting the citizen-subject into the citizen and subject positions, but also how the two are glued together by the star.

Thus far the story of *Hello Brother* could have been told as if *Twin Dragons* was never (re)made. The mass film was after all going about its mandate of exploring disincorporation even before *Hello Brother* came into the picture. However, *Hello Brother* does not merely borrow its story and characterization of the twins from the Hong Kong film but also the *framing* of the narrative, and its positioning vis-à-vis inherited cinematic conventions. This new frame turned out to be a critical asset for the post *Hello Brother* mass film and for this reason adequate attention needs to be paid to the use of cinematic conventions in both films. They successfully use melodramatic conventions that were already outdated in their respective industries. Moreover, these are films *about* conventions, which are explicitly named as outdated and for that very reason recalled nostalgically.

Melodrama and its parody

The opening of *Twin Dragons* leaves little doubt that the film's approach to the separated-twins motif is both nostalgic and ironic. The film begins with the credits unfolding on a curtain.



The first minute of *Twin Dragons* in India. The curtain is drawn after crediting Jackie Chan as director and the lace remains framing the infants as the story begins.

At the end of the credits which roll out in colour, the curtain opens to reveal a *black and white world*: we see the twins in their infancy. Having established the pastness of the scene, the camera zooms in past the frills of the curtain and the story begins. The film's opening shot also seems to suggest that we are witnessing a stage performance. The theatrical framing is accompanied by an exaggerated display of emotions and the entire episode of the twins being separated, in spite of the violence of the events, is presented in a comic vein: even the sorrow of the parents is laughable. The film continues more or less in this manner using a number of techniques to parody the conventions of melodrama.

Major Hong Kong film directors (including the film's own directors) are cast in a variety of roles, which according to the Kim Newman (cited above) accounts for all but the female leads of the film! The exaggeration notwithstanding, the casting suggests that the film is an elaborate joke. Indeed a collective joke played by the current generation upon an earlier one. Jackie Chan himself invites the spectator to join the game when the John Ma character, the classical musician and more naïve of the twins and also the one who takes himself more seriously, winks at the camera.³⁵ He does so at a moment when he is presumably up to something serious and sentimental: teaching his future girlfriend Barbara (Maggie Cheung) how to play the piano.

All this ensures the creation of a sense of *temporal distance* to the conventions, which the film parodies since they are seen as belonging to another time. The parodied conventions in *Twin Dragons* indeed belong to another time as far as Hong Kong cinema is concerned. The ‘original’ that *Twin Dragons* is parodying is missing from contemporary Hong Kong cinema—it only exists as a memory. There is in fact a larger pattern to the parody of *Twin Dragons* in Hong Kong comedies, especially those featuring Stephen Chow, suggesting that the conventions parodied by Hong Kong comedies exist for the most in their parodied versions and not independently.³⁶

Hello Brother, on the other hand, is far more invested in melodrama and its conventions (from the theme of the missing siblings to the happy reunion and the comedy of errors in between), which continued to be in vogue in contemporary Telugu popular cinema.³⁷ The film therefore has some interesting difficulties in going along with the original. The opening sequence, unlike that of *Twin Dragons* is presented in a melodramatic (rather than comic) vein and there is also a frequent return to the melodrama conventions, without parodying them, at critical moments in the film. To give an example, the mother of the twins (Sangeeta) becomes comatose due to the shock of losing one of the twins. The wheelchair-bound mother reappears in the end of the film to be revived by the touch of her missing son, Deva. Further, *Hello Brother* foregrounds what would soon become a characteristic response to both melodrama conventions and the cinematic past in general: the object of parody is re-deployed to take the story forward or bring it to a close. I will return to this below after a brief discussion of what is parodied and how.

Hello Brother posits a spectator-in-the-know by making frequent references to earlier films and their stars. It is debatable whether the Telugu filmmaker and scriptwriter knew their Hong Kong cinema well enough to spot the industry stalwarts in cameo roles (or were even aware of their presence in the film). It is likely therefore that the filmmaker did not know that *Twin Dragons* too produces a similar spectator through its casting. The coincidence is indeed striking. Regardless of the actual degree of awareness of individual members of the audience, these films’ *spectator* is presumed to know what is being referred to. This entity is crucial for both the films to work as comedies. Early in *Hello Brother*, for example, Deva’s sister gathers neighbourhood children to teach them catch phrases from the films of her favourite star Chiranjeevi. Moreover titles of earlier Telugu films punctuate the dialogue at regular intervals.³⁸

Although the scale is indeed impressive, the examples cited above would constitute the routine variety of intertextuality, which all mass films have employed since the 1980s. *Hello Brother* goes far beyond this. The famous screen villain of the sixties Rajanala plays himself in the film. The ‘senior villain’, as he is referred to by himself and others, is the mentor for the film’s main villain Mitra (Napoleon, Tamil actor who is not well known among Telugu audiences and therefore a ‘junior’ villain). As a child, Mitra like typical 1970s film *heroes* vows to avenge his father’s death in the hands of Chakravarthy (the father of the twins, Sharat Babu, who plays a police officer).

The character of Deva’s sister (Arunasri?) is particularly interesting with reference to the film’s intertextuality. Between them she and Deva turn ‘sister sentiment’ (industry name for

sister-love) upside down. They are everything brother and sister are not like in films.³⁹ She threatens to elope because he is unable to find her a husband but unlike screen heroes he is more worried about his own marriage. Nevertheless it is sister sentiment that comes to the forefront when the villain later kidnaps Deva's pregnant sister, an event which triggers off a series of developments that culminate in the reunion of Deva with his parents.

Sister-sentiment alerts us to the complex relationship between *Hello Brother* and its object of parody. Melodrama, the term I used to refer to it, is at once adequate and inadequate to describe this object. Insofar as the heightened emotional affects are its common denominator, melodrama does not require further elaboration. Steve Neale points out in his discussion of writing on the subject in the American context from 1920s to 1950s that it was not a genre in the same sense as the western or the ghost film. It was actually possible to have all kinds of melodramas based on their chief distinguishing features: 'cape-and-sword melodrama', 'nautical melodrama', 'equestrian melodrama', and so on.⁴⁰ What was common to all these melodramas was the critical importance of emotion, the only feature that was shared across the board. The melodrama that *Hello Brother* refers to is of course the Telugu variant, which like its other Indian counterparts has had a specific historical mandate.

An important contribution of film studies in India to the discussion of melodrama is the shift away from positing realism and melodrama as opposing tendencies.⁴¹ Ashish Rajadhaksha proposes:

1. That realism was one of the key sites of a major cultural hegemony in cinema, as various approaches to it defined state policy on film after independence....
2. That the primary political battle was assimilated at a secondary level by most of India's commercial cinemas, [which] in equating realism with certain objectified values and symbols (e.g., of 'rationality,' 'science,' or 'historicity') also wrought what in retrospect would be the far more significant change in Indian film: the shift from the reformist social (including in this the indigenous mythological and the more borrowed historical), into an idiom of melodrama.
3. That this melodrama not only provided the most propitious space for handling the realist initiative, but in doing so it also crucially revitalized the star system....⁴²

Most Indian films can be described as hyphenated melodramas: comic-melodrama, action-melodrama, romantic-melodrama, and certainly realistic-melodrama too. The overwhelming presence of melodrama is so obvious that it is only worthy of a passing reference. How does this knowledge further the understanding of the work of melodrama in specific instances? For the sake of simplicity let me make a schematic representation of what I suggest is happening in both *Twin Dragons* and *Hello Brother*. Drawing on Rajadhyaksha's essay, I will move beyond the notion of melodrama as genre and also extend this understanding to *Twin Dragons*. I do so by noting the overwhelming presence of the melodramatic idiom in Hong Kong and without suggesting that it is a consequence of a resolution of its relationship with realism (as was the case in India).

This notion of melodrama I will call M. Melodrama, M is the template on which the comedy, C is mounted. What we see in *Twin Dragons* at any given moment is MC, in unison, except that the melodramatic idiom is under erasure, or bracketed by the parody. So what we effectively witness is (M)C. *Hello Brother* attempts to achieve a similar effect by relegating M to the opening sequence and therefore creating a real time temporal distance between the comic and the melodramatic parts within the film. The convention returns in an undiluted/un-parodied form towards the end of the film resulting in an M-C-M structure.

The arrival of the comic interregnum, taking up most of the film's running time, is heralded by a string of references to popular cinema in the early part of the film.⁴³ The return to 'pure' melodrama is announced by the death of one of the two inefficient policemen Chitti (Mallikarjuna Rao). In a deeply moving scene, his long time colleague Mattaiah (Kota Srinivasa Rao) asks the corpse to get up and have lunch. As far as the story is concerned, this entire sequence is unnecessary. There is no need to kill the policeman (his colleague does not avenge his death after all—he merely disappears from the film). However, the importance of the sequence is hardly in question. The very next sequence of the film is that of Deva's pregnant sister being carried to the hospital by Kasi. There can be little doubt that we have been returned to M.

The segment C in this film (unlike its counterpart in *Twin Dragons*) is thus a particular kind of comedy, one which is crucially dependent on the *parody of the conventions that will not be abandoned by the film*. This approach to convention would soon become widespread. Arguably, its spread has much to do with the success of *Hello Brother*. By extension, it is an imprint left behind by *Twin Dragons* on Telugu cinema. By the late 1990s we notice that Telugu popular cinema began to adopt an M-X-M pattern (where X is either comedy or romance). The new form was so well developed by the end of the decade that the first and second halves of the film presented themselves as two distinct entities, belonging to completely different *genres*. The best example of this is the Chiranjeevi starrer *Bavagaru Bagunnara* (Greetings! Brother-in-Law, Jayanth C. Paranjji, 1998) where the narrative follows a C-M and C-M pattern in both halves of the film (separated by the interval) with the M segments much reduced in length but not narrative importance.

There is an intriguing difference between *Twin Dragons* and *Hello Brother*. Considerable effort is made in the latter to account for the twins' ability to respond to each other's stimuli. *Twin Dragons* gives this new twist to the story of twins on film and it is the source of much comedy in both films.⁴⁴ *Hello Brother* seems to find everything about *Twin Dragons* perfectly normal, except this one detail. *Hello Brother* therefore offers an incredible *scientific* explanation and even gives a name for the phenomenon ("reflections"). In the first part of the film (the M sequence), the doctor explains to the father that the twins were conjoined at birth and were separated surgically. Further, the father is told, conjoined twins often experience reflections (at this point the doctor pinches one of the infants to demonstrate and both of them cry). *Twin Dragons* does not offer an explanation for the twins' behaviour. That a ludicrous 'scientific'

explanation was inserted indicates that for *Hello Brother*, this detail alone is outside its frame of verisimilitude. The rest of the story is easily accounted for in mass film's own terms.

Hello Brother arrived at a time when the mass film was on the verge of a major crisis. This film opens the possibility of abandonment of the mass film's overt political themes (the mobilization of the masses against oppressors of various descriptions) in the aid of another kind of agenda, which too is political but in a different way. In *Hello Brother*, while the star performs role of the rowdy, he does so without carrying out the rowdy's well defined political functions such as organizing workers/slum dwellers, or fighting oppressors on their behalf etc. Instead the film's populism is worked out at the level of Deva's affair with Mangatayaru (Ramya Krishna), who is a fusion of both variants of mass film's heroine. She has the upper class origins of the shrew (whom the lower class hero goes on tame in films like *Gharana Mogudu*) as well as the sexual assertiveness of the lower class heroine of the mass film (for example Vijayashanthi characters in *Lorry Driver*, B. Gopal, 1990, *Rowdy Inspector*, B. Gopal, 1992 and *Gangleader*).

These deviations are possibly a pointer to the much larger change that was occurring: the increasing awareness, evident in individual films, of the inadequacy of the mass film's stock themes and devices. The M-C-M structure of *Hello Brother* is a key indicator and one which also demonstrates that the industry was not yet prepared to abandon the genre's formal and thematic concerns. The industry had not yet found a new way to make the big stars work, so the formula continued to be used, but with disastrous consequences.

Twin Dragons is thus deeply implicated in contemporary Telugu cinema and its survival struggles. Although this is among the few instances of a Hong Kong film being remade in India, it opens up the possibility of a comparative project that addresses critical issues related to film culture's place in the complex socio-political settings of both places.

[Acknowledgements: Based on a paper presented at the symposium on Mobile Asian Screen Genres organized by School of Film, TV and Multimedia, Korean National University of Arts and *TransAsian Screens*, Seoul, November 8th 2003. This version of the essay is also a part of a chapter in a manuscript under preparation titled, "Frontiers of Cinema: Hong Kong Action Film in India."]

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¹ Tejaswini Ganti's description of how the Bombay film industry remakes Hollywood films is useful to understand the general picture even in other film industries in India. Ganti states: "Bombay filmmakers regard box-office successes of 'hits' in other Indian languages as attractive remake material because, having already succeeded with a set of audiences, such films are perceived as having a higher probability of succeeding with Hindi film audiences as well. Hollywood films, however, are not selected only on the basis of box-office outcome but are chosen for plots that seem novel and amenable to adaptation. Although remakes from other

Indian languages resemble the original screenplay, adaptations of Hollywood films barely do because they have been transformed—or ‘Indianized,’ in industry parlance—to conform with the conventions of Hindi cinema.” Tejaswini Ganti, ‘And Yet My Heart Is Still Indian: The Bombay Film Industry and the (H)Indianization of Hollywood,’ in L. Abu-Lughod, F. Ginsburg and B. Larkin eds, *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 282.

² The VCD version of the film, released by Diskovery Video and Laser Company, Mumbai in December 2001, has *Twin Dragons* on its jacket and *Twin Brothers* on the discs.

³ Observations on Jackie Chan’s films are based on an interview with Ramesh Reddy of Sree Suchitra Films, Vijayawada, by the author on 15th March 2001.

⁴ For a detailed account of the distribution and exhibition of Hong Kong films in India see S.V. Srinivas, ‘Hong Kong Action Film in the Indian B Circuit,’ *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (April 2003), pp. 40-62.

⁵ Kunal Sen’s visual essay provides an insightful account into how an art house film is transformed into a pornographic film in the course of its circulation in India. See Kunal Sen, ‘The Worth of a Movie Ticket.’ *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* Vol. 4, No. 1 (April 2003), pp. 109-116. What is of interest for our purposes is the film industrial context in which such transformations are routine.

⁶ David Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment* (Cambridge, MA. and London: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 90.

⁷ R.K. Bhagawan, interviewed by the author, Chennai, 27th February 2002. For more details on the work of distributors discussed here see Srinivas, ‘Hong Kong Action Film in the Indian B Circuit.’

⁸ Kutumbarao Kodavatiganti, ‘[Telugu, 1940] Sanghika Chitraladwara Prabodham,’ in Krishnabai and Challasani Prasad eds, *Cinema Vyasalu: Kodavatiganti Kutumbarao Vyasa Prapancham 4*, (Visakhapatnam: Viplava Rachayitala Sangham, 2000), p. 23.

⁹ See for example, Kutumbarao Kodavatiganti, ‘Telugu Films: An Industry in Exile.’ *The Andhra Pradesh Chamber of Commerce Journal* Vol. 9, No. 5-6 (March-April 1964), pp. 3-7.

¹⁰ Sundar Kaali, ‘Narrating Seduction: Vicissitudes of the Sexed Subject in Tamil Nativity Film’ in Ravi S. Vasudevan ed., *Making Meaning in Indian Cinema* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 168-190.

¹¹ See for example Kim Newman, ‘*Twin Dragons / Shuanglong Hui*’ in *Sight and Sound* (June 1999), <<http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/reviews/details.php?id=137>> and Kerry Douglas Dye, ‘Review: Jackie Chan’s *Twin Dragons*,’ 12th April 1999, <http://www.leisuresuit.net/Webzine/articles/twin_dragons.shtml>

¹² I do not discuss *Double Impact* in this paper because I am unable to demonstrate that the film has left adequate traces on *Twin Dragons*, regardless of whether or not it was in fact the

immediate source of one or more plot devices (including that of the twins separated in infancy/childhood).

¹³ David Desser, 'The Kung Fu Craze: Hong Kong Cinema's First American Reception.' In Poshek Fu and David Desser eds, *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts, Identity*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 19-43.

¹⁴ Meaghan Morris, 'Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema: Hong Kong and the Making of a Global Popular Culture.' *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*. Vol. 5, No. 2 (August 2004), p. 181.

¹⁵ See Morris, 'Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema,' and Meaghan Morris, 'Learning from Bruce Lee: Pedagogy and Political Correctness in Martial Arts Cinema,' in Mathew Tinkcom and Amy Villarejo eds, *Keyframes: Popular Cinema and Cultural Studies*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 171-186.

¹⁶ See also M. Madhava Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 158, for the parallels between Bachchan and 1970s south Indian stars. He coins the phrase 'aesthetic of mobilization' to describe the close relationship between the films of these stars and political mobilization of the masses around charismatic but authoritarian figures in the 1970s (pp. 138-159).

¹⁷ Among the notable mass films featuring the rowdy are *Donga Mogudu* (Fake [or Thief] Husband A. Kodandarami Reddy, 1987), *Jebudonga* (Pickpocket, A. Kodandarami Reddy, 1987), *State Rowdy* (B. Gopal, 1989), *Gangleader* (Vijaya Bapineedu 1991) and *Rowdy Alludu* (Rowdy Son-in-Law, K. Raghavendra Rao, 1991).

¹⁸ The distinction I am trying to make here is between reformist figures till the 1970s, who spoke and fought for the poor but were marked by their privileged class, caste and educational backgrounds. For example Chowdarayya, the upper caste, educated Gandhian, played by Suri Babu in the important early Telugu film, *Malapilla* ('Untouchable' Girl, Gudavalli Ramabrahmam, 1938). He plays a key role in reforming both the lower castes and the Brahmins of the village and belongs to neither community.

¹⁹ This can be traced to the films of Amitabh Bachchan such as *Deewar* (Yash Chopra, 1975). A number of Bachchan films were remade in Telugu with N.T. Rama Rao. For example, Bachchan starrer *Don* (Chandra Barot, 1978) which features the star in a double role, was remade as *Yugandhar* (K.S.R. Das, 1979). Prasad notes criminality and orphanhood frequently mark Bachchan as a subaltern figure. See Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film*, pp. 138-159.

²⁰ Partha Chatterjee, 'Democracy and the Violence of the State: A Political Negotiation of Death,' *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*. Vol. 2, No.1 (April 2001), p. 8.

²¹ Vivek Dhareshwar and R.Srivatsan, 'Rowdy Sheeters': An Essay on Subalternity and Politics,' in Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty eds, *Subaltern Studies IX* (Delhi: Oxford University Press. 1996), pp. 201-231.

²² Dhareshwar and Srivatsan, 'Rowdy Sheeters', p. 219.

²³ Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film*, p. 54.

²⁴ To take a pre-mass film example, in *Adavi Ramudu* (Forest Ramudu, K. Raghavendra Rao, 1977) Ramu (N.T. Rama Rao) mobilizes the poor and exploited tribal population but by all indications he is a citizen figure of the *Malapilla* vintage, an outsider to the community he organizes.

²⁵ This is not to say that multiple characters played by the star were no longer related. Chiranjeevi's *Mugguru Monagallu* (Three Heroes, K. Raghavendra Rao, 1994) and Balakrishna's *Matho Pettukoku* (Don't Mess With Us, A. Kodandarami Reddy, 1995) feature the stars playing their own brothers.

²⁶ Dhareshwar and Srivatsan, 1996, p. 223.

²⁷ Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana, 'Problems for a Contemporary Theory of Gender,' in Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty eds, *Subaltern Studies IX* (Delhi: Oxford University Press), pp. 232-260.

²⁸ *Yuva Samrat* is an obvious reference to the honorific title of Nagarjuna's father, Akkineni Nageswara Rao, who was known as the *Nata Samrat* (emperor of acting/actors)

²⁹ For example, Chiranjeevi's *Big Boss* (Vijaya Bapineedu, 1995) has a song, shot partly in the midst of a gathering of his fans, which features Chiranjeevi playing himself. Indeed, this film features the comedian Ali as a Chiranjeevi fan who 'mistakes' the protagonist for the star.

³⁰ It is useful to note that biographical references are not unusual even in Hong Kong films, especially those featuring Jackie Chan and Stephen Chow, who have played characters called Jackie and Chow, etc. The producer-director Wong Jing has on a number of occasions included references to his name and fame in his films. I am aware that the listing of similarities of this order does not lead to an *argument* about how stardom works in these two industries and would therefore like to let the matter rest at drawing attention to the technique.

³¹ Richard Dyer, 'A *Star is Born* and the Construction of Authenticity,' in Christine Gledhill ed, *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, (New York and London: Routledge.1991), p. 135.

³² Dyer, 'A *Star is Born*,' p. 136. See also Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: British Film Institute, 1979 rpt 1994) and Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (London and New York: Macmillan and St. Martin's Press, 1986), for a detailed discussion of the construction of stars' 'real life' personas.

³³ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' in Patricia Erens ed, *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1975 rpt. 1990), p. 32.

³⁴ According to Neale, "'Verisimilitude' means 'probable', 'plausible' or 'likely'. In addition, it entails notions of propriety, of what is appropriate and *therefore* probable (or probable and therefore appropriate)... Regimes of verisimilitude vary from genre to genre." Steve Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 32.

³⁵ Major stars frequently gesture towards the camera in popular Indian films but Chan's gesture is surprising considering that even Hong Kong comedies do not usually deploy this technique.

³⁶ In Chow's films there are innumerable instances of classic melodramatic sequences, whose emotional charge is also simultaneously disavowed and parodied. *King of Beggars* (Gordon Chan, 1992) is particularly illustrative of the co-existence of the melodrama and its parody in his films. Here the loss of the father's wealth and prestige creates a strong bond between the father-son pair (played by Ng Man Tat and Chow), whose common suffering includes being forced to eat dog food. An interesting displacement of the theme of the missing son is also to be found in *Lawyer, Lawyer* (Joe Ma, 1997) where it is not the protagonist Chan Mon-Gut (Chow) but his assistant Ho Foon (Eric Kot), who is at the centre of the melodrama. Ho Foon's evil half brother and the legitimate son of his father victimize him by implicating him in a false case. The reunion of father and son is made possible by the fact of a birthmark on the son's butt.

³⁷ *Mugguru Monagallu* and *Matho Pettukoku* deploy them without any attempt at parody.

³⁸ The film titles referred to include *Kartavyam* (Duty, A. Mohan Gandhi, 1991) *Aasayam* (Ambition, A. Mohan Gandhi, 1993), *Rowdy Alludu* and *Gangleader*. This film's title, *Hello Brother* is used thrice as a greeting during the course of the film.

³⁹ Madhava Prasad points out that sister-love is an important element in the films of the first generation south Indian male stars. He says, "The sister in these films is a *cause* that the hero takes up and through which he elevates himself from a state of immanence in the diegesis, rising above it as a transcendental signifier. Sister-love is an ingenious solution for the problem of narrative authority that the popular cinema faces." M. Madhava Prasad, 'Cine-Politics: On the Political Significance of Cinema in South India', *Journal of the Moving Image*. No.1 (Autumn 1999), p. 45.

⁴⁰ Steve Neale *Genre and Hollywood*, p. 199.

⁴¹ Steve Neale too points out that melodrama is not the opposite of realism. See Neale *Genre and Hollywood*, p. 186.

⁴² Ashish Rajadhyaksha, 'The Epic Melodrama,' *Journal of Arts and Ideas* No.s 25-26 (December 1993), p 56-57. The other significant contribution to the centrality of melodrama in Indian cinema is Madhava Prasad's discussion of 'feudal family romance' in Hindi cinema of the 1950 (See Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film*, pp, 52-87). Prasad however retains the distinction between realism and melodrama in his book. 'Asian melodrama' has received some critical attention (see for example the contributions to Wimal Dissanayake, *Melodrama and Asian Cinema*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) but a number of critical issues remain under-examined, including those which Rajadhyaksha mentions almost in passing.

⁴³ Fifteen minutes into the film, there is something of an announcement of the film's comic intentions (in spite of or as distinct from the very somber opening sequence). A fight between a groups of thugs and Deva, supposedly triggered off by a rude comment passed on the sister by one of them, ends with the arrival of the police. Deva asks them why they have arrived after the very first fight when should come after the "climax fight." Deva's friend Kasi (Brahmanandam), adds to the hilarity by hitting the inspector so that he too can be arrested with his friend. Upon

being arrested he repeats the lines of the legendary screen villain Rao Gopal Rao in the film *Mutyala Muggu* (Rangoli of Pearls, Bapu, 1975).

⁴⁴ Twins and their supposed ability to respond to each other's stimuli are hilariously represented in *Royal Tramp* (Wong Jing, 1992) where the royal eunuch (Ng Man Tat) loses his/her sanity and does everything that Wilson Bond (Stephen Chow) does as if they were conjoined twins. Later in the film Bond is guarded by two female bodyguards who are in fact twins and therefore respond to each other's pain and pleasure, fall in love with the same person (Bond) and also speak in unison. Clearly Hong Kong cinema in the nineties was hardly invested in anything that had to do with twins and their psychic abilities.

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