The struggle to belong

Dealing with diversity in 21st century urban settings

Amsterdam, 7-9 July 2011

Reading the "Muslim Space" in Bombay (Mumbai) through cinema

Aravind Unni

Paper presented at the international RC21 conference 2011

Session: RT 14.2 Religion, Media and Urban Space.

University of California, Berkeley

Unit 701, International House, Berkeley CA-94720

aravindunni@berkeley.edu

aravindunni85@gmail.com

Reading the "Muslim Space" in Bombay (Mumbai) through Cinema

Bombay, now a provincial Mumbai has become a paradigm of many contestations, disconnections and excommunications; with globalization and isolation going hand in hand. It is in this complex context that I study, the emergence of the (in)-visible 'Muslim space' in Bombay; a global and a simultaneously provincial city. The 'Muslim space', I argue is a result or a response to the fundamentalization of politics that culminated or commenced with the Bombay riots of 1992- 93. To help delineate the invisible 'Muslim space' in Mumbai, I have employed Bollywood cinema as my lens on the assumption that it is just not the physical reality that makes the city, but it is also the stories, everyday discourses, art, symbols and the imagery that form an inherent part of the physical built form. Also working on the major assumption that cinema is a mirror reflection of the society that we live in. Bollywood cinema, I posit is a tool that has not been used extensively to understand deeper nuances of urbanism and especially in the case of (in)-visible, marginalized spaces like the 'Muslim space' in Bombay, which sometimes might not be perceived in the real world.

Cinema as a tool to read the cityscape

In the past 60 years Mumbai has undergone immense social and cultural changes and this evolution has been explored in many realms of artistic representations of the city. The writings of Salman Rushdie and the cinematic city of *Shree 420* were the tools of exploration for Rashmi Varma in reading the transformation of the cosmopolitan Bombay to the provincial Mumbai.[1] Whereas, Popular Bombay cinema was posited as a reservoir by Ranjini Mazumdar in "*Bombay cinema: an Archive to the city"*, to read the cinematic landscape of the city in junction with various changing cinema types and genres. While for Gyan Prakash in "*Mumbai Fables"*, the comparison of idyllic cartoons of Mario Miranda to that of the riotous and uncanny urban dystopic paintings by Sudhir Patwardhan narrate a story of emerging communalism and decay in the landscape of the city. The example of an urban cartoon character called Doga man; a vigilante style comic hero of Mumbai has been studied by Gyan Prakash as a direct response to the drastically transforming characteristics of the city. It is these transformations that constitute

---

[1] Rashmi Varma, *Provincializing the Global City From Bombay to Mumbai*

the narrative and stage for the Doga man in Mumbai. And now after its phenomenal success, the cartoon is going to be made into a film starring ShahRukh khan; the leading superstar of Hindi cinema.[2] This process of cross influencing and transmitting of images has resulted in the merging of the art and cinema; the cinema and society; and the real and the reel.

It is now difficult to distinguish between cinema and life in Mumbai; they no longer imitate each other but appear to have merged. Political philosophies, social values, group behavior, speech and dress in society are reflected in the cinema and are also copied form cinema, like a true mirror, and it reflects back in the society. It is thus possible to view the cinema as a legitimate metaphor for Mumbai and society in general; which helps to understand society better.[3] The cinematic city of Bombay to me was already 'known' before my first trip to the real Bombay and all my explorations in the city were established on the cinematic city I had experienced many times in the cinema hall.[4] But it was only after my innumerable visits to the actual city I realized that the usual cinematic city had enclosed and hidden many details that I never knew of Bombay and only one of the many being the 'Muslim Space'. This study then is not just about visible built pattern of the city of Bombay, but also about the absences and the hidden (un)representations of Bombay that I seek to explore with and within cinema.

There are many Precedents that have inspired me to utilize cinema as a lens to read the city. Nezar Al Sayyad's "*Cinematic Urbanism",* pursues an answer to this question and narrates a journey connecting the past one hundred years of western modern and postmodern theory of urbanism and cinema. The discourse and comparison of the history of urbanism combined with cinema reveals new histories of modernity and post-modernity that might be employed to read

---

[2] Subhash K. Jha, *In conversation with Anurag Kashyap,* www.bollywood hungama.com
[3] Akbar S. Ahmed, *Bombay Films: The cinema as a metaphor for Indian society and politics,* Modern Asian Studies, Vol. 26, No. 2, May, 1992
[4] Inspired from Nezar AlSayyad's *Cinematic Urbanism*

the present day real cities more comprehensively. Hence arguing that cities cannot be viewed separately from the imagined cities of cinema and ignore the dissolution of the real and the reel.

The methodology

I compare and contrast films spanning six decades from the 1950's to the present with real physical spaces, which enables me to map the transformation of both the depiction of Muslims in the cinema and also get leads about the built fabric of Muslim dominated parts of Bombay. The sequential transformation and sidelining of Muslims in the reel life suggests the sequential process of marginalization and creation of the 'Muslim space' in Bombay. The research aims to explore and find the many constituents or 'elements' that make the 'Muslim space', and unpack the elements on various cinematic themes, while comparing and differentiating it with the 'Other' city of Bombay (Mumbai). There must (and are) be other elements that depict the transformation and formation of 'Muslim Space' in Bombay, but I argue, since some of them are not fully matured in the cinematic form. I will hence employ only a few selected ones that have consolidated as an element of the 'Muslim space' in Bombay (Mumbai).

For the period till 1996, I refer to the present day city of Mumbai with the name it was known by since the colonial times, i.e. Bombay. From 1996 onwards I refer to it as Mumbai. The change in name, as Rashmi Varma suggests, points to and is a symbol of the provincialization of a modern city. 'Muslim Space' is a term that I am assigning to a space that I argue is a space of marginalization and underdevelopment that is inhabited predominantly by Muslims. Even though, it is very simplistic to call it a 'Muslim Space' because of its inhabitants, but since the reasons, the constituents and the being-ness of this marginalized space is very different from the other spaces of isolation and seclusion, this temporary term is necessary to demarcate that difference.

The structure of the paper

The paper is divided into three sections. In section one; the research traces the existence of the 'Muslim space' in the history of Bombay (Mumbai). This section provides the basic historical background for the research with which to corroborate and substantiate the argument of the 'Muslim space'. The second section explores the cinematic Bombay through a selection of biggest hits of Bollywood cinema. This visual mapping of the built space will allow for the deciphering of the (visual) elements employed to depict the city and its (de)evolution. Thus, this section of the chapter helps in recognizing the 'vocabulary' of the cinematic city of Bombay and which in turn can be employed to read the landscape of a cinematic 'Muslim Space'. Parallelly this section also addresses the cinematic depiction of Muslims and the transformation in the portrayal with respect to the socio-political circumstances and the genre of films. This comparison will help to establish the relationship between the cinema, cinema types and their representation of Muslims in India. This chapter hence helps to narrow down on the type of films to select and to facilitate a comprehensive reading of the 'Muslim Space' in Bombay (Mumbai). In section three, a chronological selection of selected films that portray Muslims in Bombay neighborhoods will allow a reading into the 'Muslim Space' and its constituents. . My attempt here has been to show how the various elements like '(dis)connections', the 'Other' city, the 'railways', the 'red-light' district, 'proximity to mills' etc, are selected to map the transformation and evolution of 'Muslim Space' have varied from film to film, chronologically. Hence, pointing to the rising being-ness of the 'Muslim Space' in Bombay after the *Hindutva* doctrine emerged as viable contender in the socio-politico-scenario of the 1980s. This chapter also defines the 'Muslim Space' in the contemporary Mumbai comprised of as marginalized and decaying

Muslim neighborhoods using inferences from the analysis of elements used to map the transformation of its built form.

The history of the "Muslim space"

Bombay grew out of the seven, sparsely populated, disconnected islands to the "*Urbs prima in Indis*"[5], the transformation of the island of Bombay to the city of imperial Bombay was rapid. Trade and business[6] formed the foundations of the strategically located town and invigorated the city in the early 1800s[7], at first this port city traded cotton and opium to China and then, as industrial city, textile mills were established here in the 1860. The late nineteenth century industrialization resulted in a major wave of migration of mill workers from the rural areas to the city. The structural 'modern' change, accompanied as it was, by rural deprivation and insecure capitalism reinforced the caste and class systems prevalent in pre-British India, which was visibly inscribed in urban space. The city and especially the native quarter developed as a collage, stitched according to religion, regional, caste affiliations or sometimes class groupings, or in some cases subsets of many variables. The unabated migration and the increasing overcrowding in the native quarters also resulted in the insecure British State to segment and cut open the native city through its various institutions and policies like the Bombay Improvement Trust (BIT), plague control policies and the Police act of 1902[8]. The physical restructuring of the city resulted in the appropriation of the Western shores for the wealthy, the North for the middle class, while punching through the congested central parts to build arterial roads connecting the upper and middle class areas to the business districts in the Fort, and also to

---

[5] Term borrowed from Teresa Albuquerque's *Urbs Prima in India: an Epoch in the History of Bombay*
[6] Arjun Appadurai, *Spectral Housing and Urban Cleansing:Notes on Millennial Mumbai,* p 631
[7] Gillian Tindall, *City of gold: the biography of Bombay,* p 17-25
[8] Prashant Kidambi, *The making of an Indian metropolis : colonial governance and public culture in Bombay, 1890-1920,* p 38-40

have control over the possible insurrections in the native quarters.[9] This resulted in the more marginalization and hostility of the many native communities, also the Muslims, who were sandwiched between the rich western and eastern industrial 'developments'.

After a relative peaceful and the uneasy calm for the city of Bombay in the early decades of independence, the early 1980s saw the decline of the textile mills concentrated in central Bombay where thousands earned their livelihood.[10] After the retrenchment of workers from the mills, it was the informal and insecure working conditions, usually for lower wages that offered the workers a livelihood. For some Muslims in Byculla and Nagapada localities adjoining the mill districts, other avenues opened up after the migration links to the countries of the Persian Gulf were revived. Thus, a huge working population faced a constant struggle for a secure livelihood, while the other persevered the economic downturn. And increase in competition by unabated migration, only fueled the differences.[11] The rise of *Shiv Sena* (a right wing Hindu party) filled up the vacuum left by the waning Congress Party in the national front and the losing hold of the Communist Party in the mill lands of central Bombay. The political party, until then pretty much directionless, gained mileage from the *Hindutva* wave that was sweeping the country in the 1980s.[12] The use of distorted historical narratives about a Marathi historical hero, *Shivaji,* in combination with a reworked discourse of regionalism, (redeployed as xenophobic populism in Bombay) worked magic for the Sena. The party became the sole representative of the Marathis in Bombay.[13]

---

[9] Gyan Prakash, *Mumbai fables,* p 81
[10] Sujata Patel and Jim Masselos, ed., *Bombay and Mumbai : the city in transition*, p 17
[11] Thomas Blom Hansen, *Wages of violence : naming and identity in postcolonial Bombay*, p 78
[12] Jim Masselos, *The city in action: Bombay struggles for power,* p 364
[13] Thomas Blom Hansen, *Wages of violence: naming and identity in postcolonial Bombay,* p 47, 71

The country's most western and cosmopolitan city was under anarchy for a couple of months in December 1992 and January 1993. Bombay never remained the same after the riots. Planned and orchestrated attacks on its Muslim inhabitants by the Sena in connivance with the State left the city dismembered on religious lines. Later in 1995, riding the wave on a polarized electorate, the Sena became part of the elected state, renaming the cosmopolitan Bombay into a provincial Mumbai. The cityscape of Mumbai is now fractured on the lines of class, caste, region and for the Muslims; their religion. The lack of civic amenities, dilapidated housing and worsening physical environment along with the fear of riots and danger to their life has forced Muslims to live in selected areas like Dongri, Pydhonie, Nagpada, Byculla, Mazgoan etc. The lack of socio-economic and spatial mobility over the years has turned such areas (with Muslim population) into marginalized neighborhoods with very little State presence, resulting in the rise of criminal activities[14].

I argue the neighborhoods that now comprise of the Muslim (space) dominated sections of the city have always been witness to a spate of violence in the history of Bombay. The forms of violence have ranged from riots between intra-religious sects; between inter-religious sects; between the inhabitants and the State and also in the guise of various developmental mechanisms adopted by the State. These spates of violent acts have always rearranged the populations innumerable times in different permutations and combinations. The neighborhood hostilities; this over the years has played out in various forms and means. These contestations, which have been both violent and nonviolent, are the nature of this city, and suggest that the neighborhood identities are transitory in quality and transform with time. But it was only after the last riots of 1992-93 that there was a considerable and perceptible mass migration of Muslims within the city

---

[14] Abdul Shaban, *Mumbai : political economy of crime and space,* p 175-177

to certain pockets with a substantial minority population for security, thereby scripting the existence of a marginalized 'Muslim space' in Bombay; where Muslims in the city live together in fear of communal violence. The violent history of the space and the faulty policies that the state institutions inherited from the British appear to have left an impact thereby maintaining a common mistrust that marginalizes the people of a specific area. Hence forming neighborhoods that were easily painted as Muslim dominated, outside of which no Muslim gets to rent space. The flash point came in the 1980s where the Muslim dominated neighborhoods just south of the Mill districts, where thousands of workers were dispossessed of their livelihood were swayed by right wing Hindu party. The Sena which invoked the plebian and violent spectacle of the 19th century festivals, found their 'Others' in the relatively prosperous Muslim community in south central Bombay and vented their frustration and strategically used the mill workers grievances for communal polarization which later in 1995 reaped electoral benefits.

By charting the historical transformation of Bombay's socio-political atmosphere and the ensuing changes in the landscape, the attempt was to map the existence or the non-existence of the 'Muslim space' in the historical built form and discourse of Bombay. As the analysis suggests, the 'Muslim space' has reinforced itself in the past few decades of fundamentalist politics of *Hindutva* or if it existed before, it might have had different characteristics. The 'Muslim space' then I argue exists and might be only a temporal set of characteristics and identities, which might with time and intervention by the State, erase or strengthen this particular shape that it exists in now.

Reading the city through cinema

The research aims to explore the landscape of Bombay through cinema from the 1950s to the present and to identify elements or themes that are employed by the cinema to paint an (realistic or otherwise) image of the city. The selected movies are the biggest hits or trend-setters of Hindi cinema that have Bombay (Mumbai) as the backdrop for the narrative.[15] Thus, this section of the chapter will help in recognizing the vocabulary of the cinematic city of Bombay (Mumbai).

In the 'city of hope' of 1950s as represented in *Shri 420*, built form is typically associated with "modernity" (defined as Western) and used to define the city. The symbolic presence of trains, flyovers and wide roads signifies the new 'modernity' of Bombay in the 1950s.[16] The 'rich city' as an element had still not crystallized and was still accessible to the poor. While in the city of *Deewar* in 1970s, these elements of modernity transform dramatically. The cityscape changes from a landscape of optimism to the landscape of confrontation; or better put, the landscape itself is related to the cause of confrontation.[17] The divide between the rich and poor is also more visible. Unlike *Shri 420*, where the poor were far more optimistic about the city, the poor in *Deewar* are struggling to survive. Homelessness changes to the more hostile life on the "footpath". The tropes of 'modernity' of the 1950s like that of the trains and rail lines transform into sites of action and confrontation. The workers, unions and the docks emerge as new players and spaces respectively in the 1970s that define the industrial Bombay.

In films like *Vaastav*, the presence of *chawls* conveys the decay and congestion in the neighborhoods of the mill district in the 1980s, where the disgruntled citizenry resorts to

---

[15]M.K. Raghavendra, *50 Indian film classics;* Tejaswini Ganti, *Bollywood : a guidebook to popular Hindi cinema*
[16] Philip Lutgendor, Philip'sfil-ums notes on Indian popular cinema, http://www.uiowa.edu/~incinema
[17] Ranjani Mazumdar , *Bombay cinema : an archive of the city,* p 2

informal means to survive. In *Parinda* of late 80s, the decayed neighborhoods degenerate to a "city of death".[18] The rundown factories and abandoned docks all turn into spaces of staged violence and have been sucked up by the underworld for illegal activities; signaling the rise of the underworld and the demise of an 'industrial city' in Bombay. Amidst the informality and illegality, the city of Bombay and its skyline had crystallized in the imagination of the cinema, but with the advent of gangster movies like *Satya* in 1990s, the image of the glamorous and touristy Mumbai had been broken and the cinematic Bombay ceased to exist, and there emerges instead, a claustrophobic, dark Mumbai in crisis.[19] This was taken to a new scale altogether when in *Company* the city loses its decayed existence entirely and dissolved in character, with its connections to the global underworld circuit.[20] Continuing from the post 2000s, Mumbai ceases to exist as a whole city, the broken fragments and with far greater divides between the rich and the poor, the Hindu and the Muslim hostility, the high rises and the slums and various other disjointed elements tear the city fabric into many pieces. Consequently, the films like *Mumbai Meri Jaan*, and *A Wednesday* show Mumbai as a city almost on the verge of a breakdown. A post-modern city where the built elements of the erstwhile Bombay, namely the rails and the footpaths of *Shri 420*, the docks and the godowns of *Deewar,* the *chawls* and the mills of *Vaastav*, the rundown factories and abandoned docks of *Parinda*, the claustrophobia of *Satya*, the global connections of *Company*, the absent State in *A Wednesday*, all have collapsed beyond repair.

Parallelly, if we map the transformation of the artistic representation of the largest minority in India, it has always been contested and a controversial terrain. Bollywood cinema,

---

[18]*Ibid,* p 151, 163

[19] Deepa Deosthalee, *The truth lies in the picture,* Indian Express 1998

[20]Ranjani Mazumdar, *Bombay cinema : an archive of the city,* p 174

often spectacular in form and formulaic in content meant[21] for commercial success, has never been able to portray the Muslims in India realistically. The chronological comparison reveals how Muslims' depiction in *Bollywood* cinema has changed and with its diminishing screen presence from Muslim the 'comedian' in imagined secular India of 1970's to that of Muslim the 'smuggler' of 1980's, then to that of Muslim the 'jihadists' of the 1990's and to now a collective acceptance of common Muslims in India as 'victims' of bias and neglect.[22] This comparison will help to establish the relationship between the cinema, cinema types and representation of Muslims in India, so as to employ cinema as a tool to study the marginalization of Muslims and in turn, study its physical manifestation in the built form of the city. Thus, I argue that just the Hindi mainstream cinema is not sufficient, to be employed to read the actual conditions of Muslims in India and thereby the 'Muslim space' in Bombay. The major reason behind these incomplete or false representations, if very simplistically put are its formulaic nature of mainstream Hindi cinema based on market trends, the wide array of audience, the majoritarian Hindu populace of the country and the uncertain markets. These absences were only addressed in a few selected genres forms which emerged as a radical response to the formulaic mainstream. The 'New Wave' cinema in the 1970s or as the 'Middle Path' cinema in the 1990s evolved, and now the low-cost 'Multiplex' Cinemas in the post 2000s are perfect examples.

Mapping the "Muslim Space" in Bombay (Mumbai)

The Selection of the films to read the 'Muslim Space' is based on the analysis of the representation of Muslims in Hindi cinema in the previous section. As mentioned, the Hindi mainstream cinema has more than often depicted a contrived imagery of the Muslims in India.

---

[21] Lalitha Gopalan, *Cinema of interruptions : action genres in contemporary Indian cinema,* Introduction
[22] Syed Ali Mujtaba, *Bollywood and the Indian Muslims,*
http://www.indianmuslims.info/articles/syed_ali_mujtaba/articles/bollywood_and_the_indian_muslims.html

So to escape a skewed reading of the Muslim Space, the filmography has been restricted to "New Wave cinema" of the 1970s, from which *Dastak* (1970), *Salmi Langde Pe Mat Ro* (1989) and late New Wave cinema *Naseem (*1995) are selected.[23] *Dastak's* story is set in Bombay of the 1970s, in a neighborhood close to the red-light area, where a newly-wed couple Hamid and Salma unwittingly rent a flat. The previous occupant of their home, to their misery, was a (in)famous *ganewaali* (a courtesan). And thus begin their daily turmoil and fight for survival in the hostile and harsh city.[24] *Salim Langde pe Mat ro* navigates the real murky side of Bombay and presents a picture of despair and anguish for the Muslims who are ostracized in the Bombay, and those who in turn opt for violence to earn a livelihood. And not an untrue image of bravado and glamourous death as prevalent in the action flicks of late 1980s. *Naseem* charts the narrative of a young school going girl Naseem, in the months leading up to the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992. It is a very intimate story involving a young girl and her grandfather in the terrible times of communal frenzy. *Naseem* deals with nostalgia to contrast it with the realistic simmering communal violence during the lead up to Bombay riots of 1992-93.

From the popular 1990s, a "Middle Path" film *Bombay* (1995) is the pick. *Bombay* narrates a story about a couple from different religious faiths, who fall in love and elope from the conservative village to the cosmopolitan Bombay. And yet ironically they find themselves in a Bombay that is provincial, divided along communal lines. The film incorporates the conventional formulas for commercial cinema, but combines it with a gripping realistic storyline set in a volatile socio-political scape. Thus, it is classified into a genre of Middle path cinema.[25] Whereas *Aamir* is a proponent of the refreshing new "Multiplex cinema" is the choice in the

---

[23] Ira Bhaskar and Richard Allen, *Islamicate cultures of Bombay cinema,* p 97
[24]*Review of film Dastak*, http://passionforcinema.com/dastak-1970/
[25] Lalitha Gopalan, *Bombay,* p 14

2000s.[26] *Aamir* is a 2008 Hindi film that revolves around a young Muslim man, Dr. Aamir Ali, who has returned to Mumbai from the United Kingdom and finds himself at the mercy of Islamic extremists who want to use him as a pawn to carry out a bombing in the city. In case of *Aamir*, a common Indian Muslim is represented as the victim of stigmatization and bias, who suffers in between the Islamic extremists and the partial society. These films are selected because of their realistic narrative involving the Muslims in Bombay and, break away from the distorted and stereotypical representation of Muslims in mainstream cinema.

Defining the "Muslim space"

The 'Muslim Space' as derived and delineated in the analysis of the selected movies, corresponds to the transforming nature of neighborhoods in the wake of socio-political and other external forces. The Muslim dominated neighborhood in *Dastak* was a heterogeneous mix of populations with Muslims having a prominent presence. The religious identity and markers were not considered important in defining the neighborhood identity and it was proximity to the rail lines that was the landmark. The thriving connections with the 'Other' city ensured life in the mainstream and a responsible State also helped in negating the marginalization associated with the red-light district. But the Muslim neighborhoods in *Salim LPMR* changed to homogenous isolated community without any formal connections with the 'Other' city. The new connections that were developing were only of illegality supported by anti-social elements. The absence of the State being filled by the gang lords and smugglers, added to the criminalization and marginalization of the neighborhood. Mosques had emerged in the form of identity markers and rail lines suggested isolation. The presence of red-light district in the locality suggested the

---

[26] Sharma, Aparna, *India's Experience with the Multiplex*, Seminar 25

immobility and seclusion of Muslims in Bombay. By 1992-93 riots, in *Bombay* and *Naseem,* presents a community mixed in character, but having enmity and mistrust towards each other. And in case of *Bombay*, the animosity was very visible in the volatile 'borders' of rioting communities. Moreover, the religious institutions were now prominent landmarks in the neighborhood and also a source of violence. The audibility of the trains and the mills in case of *Bombay* suggests its marginality, and a predominant Hindu presence also suggested the proximity and possible fringe to the Muslim neighborhoods. *Aamir* in the 2000s depicts a glamorous global Mumbai which it contrasts with the homogenous, secluded and criminalized Muslim underbelly of Mumbai. The disconnection of the people and the neighborhoods is very obvious from the decaying built form and abysmal living conditions. The illegalities and anti-social elements, and now sentiments against the 'Other' Mumbai is apparent. The rail lines and the trains have become an intrinsic part of the *Aamir's* landscape. The towering minarets of the innumerable mosques in its streets suggest the emergence of religious identity of the neighborhoods.

I argue that the neighborhoods in *Dastak* and its transformed type in *Salim LPMR* might be considered the 'core' of the 'Muslim Space' in the 1970s and 1980s respectively, but localities depicted in *Bombay* are the best examples of 'borders' of 'Muslim Space'. While in the case of *Naseem*, the well-off Muslim family living away from the conventional elements of the 'Muslim Space' likes railways, mills, red-light area etc forms the relatively posh 'margins' of the 'Muslim Space'. Continuing to the last of the selected films, *Aamir* which I argue becomes the 'core' and the most heightened version of the 'Muslim Space.' The neighborhood represented in this film has all the elements in their most complete form of being-ness; disconnections with the 'Other' city; the trains as a striking visual presence; the illegal, anti-national and global

connections; dissolution of the brothels within the neighborhood etc. The elements present in the cinematic Bombay from *Dastak* transformed and metamorphosed into the Muslim space in *Aamir's* Mumbai. This assumption of neighborhoods with varying degrees of built form elements will help to form a much more comprehensive, nuanced and more whole configuration of the Muslim space in Bombay.

Conclusion

The films that I have analyzed point to a drastic transformation of the neighborhoods under study and consequently, the being-ness of 'Muslim Space' in Bombay (Mumbai). The transformations mapped include the change in the composition of the neighborhood from a heterogeneous mix of Hindus and Muslims to a largely homogenous grouping of Muslim residents alone; the rising prominence of religious institutions; the cultural (dis)connections with the 'Other', more global Mumbai; the existence of transnational connections with the Persian Gulf; the evolution of illegal associations and the ensuing criminalization/religious profiling of the residents of this neighborhood by the ineffective State; the physical marginalization of the Muslim neighborhoods depicted via the ominous heightening presence of the railway tracks; ubiquitous proximity to the defunct mills and the red-light districts. While a walk through the Nagpada and other Muslim neighborhoods in Mumbai today, as I often undertook during the course of my research last summer, does reveal some of these elements of the built form in plain view, but is more perceptible in the films I have analyzed as the camera's eye produces a much heightened awareness of these same elements, compressed as they are in space and time. The persistent presence of these elements in the representation of Muslim neighborhoods in cinema, that I have termed here the 'Muslim Space', suggest a change in the real socio-politico-economic space as points to the existence of a real 'Muslim Space', albeit in a diluted form.

This cinematic representation of Muslim space becomes all the more well defined and contrasting when compared to the cinematic representation of elements of the cityscape elsewhere in Mumbai. The developing disconnections and distancing of the Muslim community can be attributed to their increasing marginalization in Indian socio-political life. But the manifestation of the 'Other' city in the conventional mainstream cinema (*Shree 420, Parinda, Satya* etc) is always in the form of an oasis of leisure and fun. The cinematic landscape of the 'Other' city is always replete with modern high-rises and promenades alongside the sea where all the romantic sequences are shot with the backdrop of the Mumbai skyline. However, this same 'Other' glitzy Bombay (Mumbai) in the perspective of the inhabitants of the 'Muslim Space' emerges to be hostile and troubling; for them the 'Other' city is an object of both awe and angst. Again, the Mumbai local trains, which in conventional Hindi films become the site of action and love, like in *Deewar, Satya* etc, transform into the symbol of marginalization and isolation in the context of Muslim protagonists. While there are transmutations in the import of the elements or themes used to depict the larger city of Mumbai in cinema, there are other themes like that of the red-light districts that always (and only) feature in the selected films centered around the 'Muslim Space'. The brothel, as a site, is usually not entertained in mainstream cinema, meeting with the censors cut. All the selected films except for *Naseem* contained the red-light district in the same neighborhood. Such contrasts in the depiction of the Muslim neighborhoods from other neighborhoods in Mumbai, underscore the distinctiveness of the existence of a cinematic 'Muslim Space' and its constituents.

In section three I posit a layered spatial form of the 'core', 'margins' and 'border' of 'Muslim Space.' The 'Muslim Space' then becomes a space not bound in the imagined marked limits that form a marginalized community, but at times a porous and at others marked

boundaries with the city surrounding it and beyond. The neighborhood in *Aamir* forms the core, and those in *Nassem* and *Bombay,* forms the 'margins' and the 'boundaries' respectively. The locality in *Salim LPMR* can be said to be the predecessor of the 'Muslim Space,' in which the becoming and forming of cinematic 'Muslim Space' via the elements is visible, differing markedly from *Dastak*, where there is clear absence of the elements of 'Muslim Space' in present cinematic form. The volatile and violent communities in the film *Bombay* in the 1990s suggest the presence of clear demarcations of neighborhoods, while in the case of *Naseem*, the rich Muslim family with some mobility living in a Hindu dominated locality, may be seen to depict the margins of the 'Muslim Space'. The elements present in the cinematic Bombay from *Dastak* transformed and metamorphosed into the Muslim space in *Aamir*, with *Bombay* being its volatile boundary and *Naseem* being its porous edge. The 'Muslim Space' in Bombay/ Mumbai, thus I argue, started off as a Muslim dominated neighborhood in the old part of Bombay, which through the past four decades has changed in its character and constituents due to socio-political circumstances prevalent in its times. The once mixed locality developed into a distinct neighborhood with homogenous religious characteristics and elements that made it 'Muslim Space'.

A clearer definition of the 'Muslim Space' can be derived from its comparison to the case of the Hyperghetto in the American context, which has similarities to the 'Muslim Space' on many fronts. The ghetto is essentially defined as a socio-spatial result (and device) of the marginalization of a subordinate group endowed with negative associations, by the hegemonic group.[27] As Wacquant notes, massive migrations from the American South to the Northern-Eastern and Mid-Western Metropolises forced African-Americans to congregate in a 'Black

---

[27] Loïc Wacquant, "from slavery to mass incarceration: Rethinking the 'race question' in the US" *New Left Review,*

Belt' which quickly became overcrowded, underserved and blighted by crime, disease, and dilapidation, while the 'job ceiling' restricted them to the most hazardous, menial, and underpaid occupations with no opportunity for social equality.[28] Even though ostracized from the mainstream, the African-Americans played a key role in the manufacturing economy of the city, thus making them and their 'space' an indispensible and autonomous entity for the cities. But in the 1970s, the structural shift to a suburban service economy meant that large segments of the workforce contained in the 'Black Belts' of the Northern metropolises were simply no longer needed. The resulting hyperghettoization as noted by Loïc Wacquant points out how the flight of relatively rich from the ghetto makes it more homogenized in terms of class, thus leaving the poorest of the poor in the ghettos and breaking the ghetto socially and economically. In the present, Wacquant points out "it has devolved into a one-dimensional machinery for brutal relegation, a human warehouse for the segments of urban society deemed disreputable, derelict, and dangerous,"[29] with easily quantifiable impacts by way of indicators like rising unemployment, deteriorating housing, and the falling literacy levels.

A similar history can be narrated in the case of Muslims in Bombay, the communal hostilities only increased after the de-industrialization and the retrenchment of workers, which lead to the earlier riots in the 1980s, in and around Bombay. This economic downturn and hostilities lead to gradual homogenization of the Muslim space, as depicted in the becoming of the 'Muslim Space' in *Salim LPMR*. The resulting disconnections with the rest of the city system lead to new connections of illegality and migrations to Persian Gulf, thus giving the marginalized space a relative autonomy. The rich Muslims, differing from the hyperghetto moved towards the

---

[28] St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*
[29] *Rethinking race and imprisonment in twenty-first-century America*, Boston Review
http://bostonreview.net/BR27.2/wacquant.html

outskirts of the marginalized space, as the space crunch and high value real estate of Mumbai holds them to their roots, thus, producing a ring of posh Muslim neighborhoods in the outskirts of Muslim space, with the interiors occupied by the most undesired elements. This case is clearly manifested cinematically in the case of *Naseem*, where the family resides in the margins of the 'Muslim Space'. But with the riots of 1992-93 and later with the drastic urban expansion of Mumbai, there has now been a flight of well-off Muslims out of the 'Muslim Space', thus transforming the 'margins' into volatile 'boundaries' like in that of *Bombay*. The other aspect that separates the 'Muslim Space' from a hyperghetto is the presence of an alternative economic structure, the emigrational links to the Persian gulf and the presence of a rich Muslim community still holding a substantial amount of the wholesale market trade in Mumbai.

The 'Muslim Space', thus is a unique spatial-temporal phenomenon and manifestation as a result of religious conflict that has emerged in the post-*Hindutva* era in the socio-political life of India. The Muslim Space, I have argued is a result of only a temporal set of characteristics and identities, which might with time and intervention by the State, erase or strengthen the particular shape that it exists in now. My attempt through the use of cinema was to read the marginalization and seclusion in cinematic Mumbai is just a step towards understanding and recognizing the real 'Muslim Space', thereby opening new avenues of further research of how the reel might be also reinforcing the real in Mumbai and vice versa.

Bibliography

Urban Design Research Institute. *Mumbai reader.* Mumbai: Urban Design Research Institute, 2006; 2007.

Adarsh, Taran. *Aamir movie review.* June 5, 2008. http://www.bollywoodhungama.com/movies/review/13807/index.html.

AlSayyad, Nezar. *Cinematic Urbanism: a history of the modern from reel to real* . New York ; London : Routledge, 2006.

Alternate Movies. August 23, 2005. http://parallelcinema.blogspot.com/2005/08/salim-langde-pe-mat-rodont-cry-for.html.

Appadurai, Arjun. "Spectral Housing and Urban Cleansing:Notes on Millennial Mumbai." *Public Culture 12.3*, (2000): 627-651.

Ausaja, S. M. M. *Bollywood in posters.* Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India : Om Books International, 2009.

Basheer, K.P.M. "No exodus of emigrants from the Gulf: study." *The Hindu* , Mar 6, 2009.

BBC movies . http://www.bbc.co.uk/films/2006/03/30/iqbal_2006_review.shtml.

BBC website. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-11854177.

Beg, Saima. "The Bollywood Muslim." *The View Point* . http://www.viewpointonline.net/the-bollywood-muslim.html.

Benegal, Shyam. "Neither state nor faith : the transcendental significance of the cinema." In *The crisis of secularism in India*, by Anuradha D Needham and Rajeswari S edited Rajan. Durham : Duke University Press, 2007.

Berardinelli, James. *Bombay, a film review* . 1996 . http://www.reelviews.net/movies/b/bombay.html.

Bharucha, Rustom. "Utopia in Bollywood: 'Hum Aapke Hain Koun...!'." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1995: 801-804.

Bhaskar, Ira. *Islamicate cultures of Bombay cinema.* New Delhi, India: Tulika Books, 2009.

Bhaskar, Ira, and Richard, Allen. *Islamicate cultures of Bombay cinema* . New Delhi, India : Tulika Books, 2009.

Chandavarkar, Rajnarayan. *The origins of industrial capitalism in India : business strategies and the working classes in Bombay, 1900-1940.* Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Clarke, David B [ed.]. *The cinematic city.* London ; New York: Routledge, 1997.

"Dastak, an in-depth study." *Digital south Asia library, Annual of Urdu Studies, v. 5*, 1985: p. 86-90.

David, M. D. *Bombay, the city of dreams : a history of the first city in India.* Bombay : Himalaya Pub. House, 1995.

Deosthalee, Deepa. "The truth lies in the picture." *Indian Express*, 05 08, 1998.

Dossal, Mariam. *Theatre of conflict, city of hope : Mumbai, 1660 to present times* . New Delhi ; New York : Oxford University Press , 2010.

Dwivedi, Sharada, and Rahul Mehrotra. *Bombay : the cities within.* Bombay : Eminence Designs Pvt. Ltd., 2001.

Dwyer, Rachel. *Cinema India : the visual culture of Hindi film* . New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2002.

Edited by Padgaonkar, Dileep. *When Bombay burned : [reportage and comments on the riots and blasts from the Times of India]* . New Delhi : UBSPD Publishers' Distributors, 1993.

Engineer, Asgharali. *Bhiwandi-Bombay riots : analysis and documentation : analysis and compilation.* Bombay : Institute of Islamic Studies, 1984.

—. *Communal riots after independence : a comprehensive account.* Delhi : Shipra, 2004.

—. *Communalism in secular India : a minority perspective.* Gurgaon: Hope India Publication, 2007.

Fernandes, Praveen Lance. *Review of Salim Langde pe Mat Ro.* May 29, 2007. http://www.bollywoodhungama.com.

Ganti, Tejaswini. *Bollywood : a guidebook to popular Hindi cinema.* London ; New York : Routledge, 2004.

Gokulsing, K. Moti, and Wimal Dissanayake. *Indian popular cinema : a narrative of cultural change.* Stoke-on-Trent ; Sterling, USA : Trentham, 2004.

Gopalan, Lalitha. *Bombay* . London : BFI, 2005.

—. *Cinema of interruptions : action genres in contemporary Indian cinema* . London : British Film Institute, 2002.

Hansen, Thomas Blom. *Wages of violence : naming and identity in postcolonial Bombay.* Princeton, N.J. : Chichester : Princeton University Press, 2001.

Hasan, Mushirul. *Nationalism and communal politics in India, 1885-1930.* New Delhi : Manohar Publications, 1991.

Islam, Maidul. "Imagining the Indian Muslims: Looking through the lens of Bollywood cinema ." *Indian Journal of Human Development* , 2007: 403-422.

Joshi, Poonam. *BBC-Movies, Iqbal film Review.* http://www.bbc.co.uk/films/2006/03/30/iqbal_2006_review.shtml.

Justice now : Bombay riots, 1992-1993 : The Srikrishna Commission report. New Delhi: Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust, 2007.

Kalpana, Sharma. "Can Mumbai become Shanghai." *The Hindu* .

Kamdar, Mira. "Bombay/Mumbai: The Postmodern City." *World Policy Journal* , 1997: 75-88.

Kidambi, Prashant. *The making of an Indian metropolis : colonial governance and public culture in Bombay, 1890-1920* . Aldershot, England ; Burlington, VT : Ashgate, 2007.

Kothari, Miloon, and Nasreen Contractor. *Planned segretation : riots, evictions and dispossession in Jogeshwari East.* Mumbai : Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action, 1996.

Lutgendorf, Philip. *philip'sfil-ums: notes on Indian popular cinema.* 2007. http://www.uiowa.edu/~incinema/.

Masselos, Jim. *The city in action : Bombay struggles for power.* New Delhi ; New York : Oxford University Press, 2007.

Mazumdar, Ranjani. *Bombay cinema : an archive of the city / Ranjani Mazumdar.* Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Mehta, Suketu. *Maximum city : Bombay lost and found.* New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 2004.

Mercidi. *Shree 420: Raj Kapoor's masterpiece.* December 19, 2007. http://letstalkaboutbollywood.over-blog.org/article-14777347.html.

Mishra, Vijay. *Bollywood cinema : temples of desire.* New York : Routledge, 2002.

Mohamed, Khalid. "Review: Aamir." *Hindustan Times.*

Mujtaba, Syed A. "Bollywood and the Indian Muslims." *Indian Muslim News and Information.* 2006. http://www.indianmuslims.info/articles/syed_ali_mujtaba/articles/bollywood_and_the_indian_muslims.html.

"Mumbai Noir." *Subvert Samsara:.* March 13, 2007. http://spiderfeed.blogspot.com/2007/03/mumbai-noir.html.

Naseem, movie description . http://www.nfdcindia.com/view_film.php?film_id=83&show=all.

Patel, Divia, Laurie Benson, and Carol Cains. *Cinema India : the art of Bollywood* . Melbourne Vic: National Gallery of Victoria, 2007.

Patel, Sujata, and Alice Thorner. *Bombay : mosaic of modern culture* . Bombay ; New York : Oxford University Press, 1995.

Patel, Sujata, and Jim Masselos. *Bombay and Mumbai : the city in transition.* New Delhi ; New York : Oxford University Press, 2003.

Prakash, Gyan. *Mumbai fables* . Princeton : Princeton University Press, 2010.

Puniyani, Ram. *Communal politics : facts versus myths* . New Delhi ; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 2003.

Raghavendra, M. K. *50 Indian film classics* . Noida, India : Collins,, 2009.

Raja Sen. *Aamir movie review,.* June 05, 2008. http://www.rediff.com/movies/2008/jun/05aamir.htm.

Rao, Vyjayanthi. "Risk and the City: Bombay, Mumbai and Other Theoretical Departures." *International Affairs Working Paper 2005-08*, 2005.

Review of film Dastak . October 26, 2006. http://passionforcinema.com/dastak-1970/.

Sarvepalli, Gopal Edited. *Anatomy of a confrontation : the Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhumi issue.* New Delhi, India ; New York, N.Y., USA : Penguin Books, 1991.

Shaban, Abdul. *Mumbai : political economy of crime and space.* New Delhi : Orient BlackSwan, 2010.

—. "Crime and Place ." *Times of India*, 2010.

Shah, Svati. P. "Producing the Spectacle of Kamathipura, The Politics of Red Light Visibility in Mumbai." *Cultural Dynamics* , 2006 : 269-292.

Sharma, Aparna. "India's Experience with the Multiplex." *Seminar 25*, 2003: 42–46.

Somaaya, Bhawana. *Cinema : images & issues.* New Delhi : Rupa & Co., 2004.

Tambe, Ashwini. *Codes of misconduct : regulating prostitution in late colonial Bombay.* Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press , 2009.

The Hindu. *The ironies of Kamathipura.* June 03, 2001. http://www.hinduonnet.com/2001/06/03/stories/1303128f.htm.

Tindall, Gillian. *City of gold : the biography of Bombay.* London : Temple Smith, 1982.

Varma, Rashmi. "Provincializing the Global City: From Bombay to Mumbai." *Social Text*, 2004 : 65-89.

Varshney, Ashutosh. *Ethnic conflict and civic life : Hindus and Muslims in India.* Karachi, Pakistan : Oxford University Press, 2003.

Virdi, Jyotika. "The cinematic imagiNation [sic] : Indian popular films as social history ." Introduction. New Brunswick, N.J. : Rutgers University Press, 2003.

Filmography

A Wednesday! Dir. Neeraj Pandey. Perf. Anupam Kher and Naseeruddin Shah. Music. Sanjoy Chowdhary. 2008.

Aamir . Dir. Raj Kumar Gupta. Perf. Rajeev Khandelwal. Music. Amit Trivedi. 2008.

Bombay. Dir. Mani Ratnam. Perf. Arvind Swamy and Manisha Koirala. Music. A.R. Rahman. 1995.

Company. Dir. Ram Gopal Varma. Perf. Vivek Oberoi, Ajay Devgan and Manisha Koirala. Music. Sandeep Chowta. 2002.

Dastak. Dir. Rajinder Singh Bedi. Perf. Sanjeev Kumar and Rehana Sultan. Music. Madan Mohan. 1970.

Deewaar . Dir. Yash Chopra. Perf. Amitabh Bachchan and Shashi Kapoor. Music. R.D. Burman. 1975.

Mumbai Meri Jaan. Dir. Nishikant Kamat. Perf. R Madhavan, et al. 2008.

Naseem. Dir. Saeed Akhtar Mirza. Perf. Kaifi Azmi, et al. Music. Vanraj Bhatia. 1995.

Parinda. Dir. Vidhu Vinod Chopra. Perf. Shroff, et al. Music. R.D. Burman. 1989.

Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro. Dir. Saeed Akhtar Mirza. Perf. Pavan Malhotra, Makrand Deshpande and Ashutosh Gowariker. Music. Sharang Dev. 1989.

Satya . Dir. Ram Gopal Varma. Perf. J.D Chakravarthy, Urmila Matondkar and Manoj Bajpai. Music. Sandeep Chowta. 1998.

Shree 420. Dir. Raj Kapoor. Perf. Raj Kapoor and Nargis. Music. Shankar-Jaikishan. 1955.

Vaastav. Dir. Mahesh Manjrekar. Perf. Sanjay Dutt. Music. Sandeep Chowta. 1999.