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Bollywood Is Bangladeshi!

Hindi Film and the Formation of a Middle-Class Audience

Based on ethnographic research, in this article I suggest that with the consumption of Indian film and film-mediated culture and modernity, India's cultural hegemony and class inequalities in Bangladesh are reinforced. Following Bourdieu's (1984) concept of "distinction," I explain how middle-class values and status are attached to Hindi popular cinema in Bangladesh; as a result, Hindi film and film-mediated culture and modernity are considered to be tasteful, polished, well executed, and technically savvy compared to Bangladeshi commercial films, which are seen as poor people's entertainment. The hegemony of Bollywood films in Bangladesh works through the consumption of the production and representational values that are attached to film's story, music, dance, fashion, and style, as well as the people involved in it. While consuming Bollywood film and film-promoted culture and modernity, the middle class reinforces Indian cultural hegemony, alienating them from Bangladeshi commercial films that they define as low-grade, crass, and lacking in production values.

Keywords: audience—class formation—Bollywood—cultural hegemony—cultural taste—film circulation—Islamicate

Cultural hegemony shapes consumer tastes. At the same time, consumers' tastes classify their place in society and reinforce class differentiations and inequalities. In this sense, cultural hegemony and cultural consumption are interrelated. Middle-class viewers in Bangladesh think that Bollywood[1] films have superior aesthetic, cultural, and symbolic values. By consuming certain types of films with what they perceive as superior cultural, economic, and symbolic values, middle-class audiences in Bangladesh raise their own cultural and symbolic values within and across the class. This phenomenon substantiates Pierre Bourdieu's argument that "taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier" (1984, 6). While middle-class audiences in Bangladesh create their own sense of class through consuming Bollywood films, at the same time they create a sense of disdain toward Bangladeshi commercial films that they view as devoid of high production values and inferior to Indian films. The whole of South Asia's film industries might be arranged along similar lines, which warrants further investigation. By production values most of the audience mean creativity, skills, techniques, professionalism, and aesthetic and stylistic judgment, impeccably applied in every aspect of filmmaking such as light, sound, sets, storytelling, acting, directing, and editing.

In this article I argue that with the consumption of Indian film and film-mediated culture and modernity, India's cultural hegemony and class differentiations in Bangladesh are reinforced. While Bollywood's hegemony across South Asia is obvious, its influence within India may be discerned in its transformation into a state-endorsed "soft-power," its generation of half of the total national film revenue, its monopolization of urban multiplexes (Athique and Hill 2009), its alliances with multinational media production houses, and its creation of national meta-narratives (Devasundaram 2016).

In line with Bourdieu's (1984) concept of "distinction," I explain how middle-class audiences in Bangladesh attach values and status ideals to Hindi popular cinema.[2] Many audiences consider that Hindi film and film-mediated culture and modernity are tasteful, polished, well-executed, and technically savvy compared to Bangladeshi commercial movies, which they think are poor people's entertainment. Middle-class audiences distinguish themselves from the *nimnabitta* or "lower-class" audiences in terms of their cultural capital, such as education and the knowledge to decipher or decode meanings in films, among other factors. As Bourdieu reminded us, consumption is an act of deciphering and decoding. To

decipher and decode one needs to acquire the cultural capital that enables him or her to master deciphering and decoding those meanings (1984, 2).

Indian films were banned in Bangladeshi theaters after Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan in 1971. This ban, however, was unable to prevent the Bangladeshi audience from watching Indian films after the arrival of videocassette technology in the late 1970s and 1980s. In the early 1990s, the ban became almost completely irrelevant after the arrival of cable television. With the later arrival of the video compact disc, followed by the DVD and the internet, the circulation and consumption of Indian films has become so ubiquitous in Bangladesh that it seems a quite inescapable phenomenon for the Bangladeshi audience.

This article is based on my doctoral fieldwork carried out in 2013–14. To select film audiences, I used a preferential sampling method. To understand reception patterns and variations, participants were selected in terms of their age, class, and gender. To capture their diverse media experiences, I chose the age group of eighteen to forty years old, both males and females. I carried out ten in-depth interviews with viewers, with five male and five female participants from educated (in both Bengali and English mediums) middle-class families in Dhaka. At the same time, to uncover opinions about controversial issues such as cultural policy and the impact of foreign films on Bangladeshi culture and industry, I carried out four formal and one informal focus group discussions with both the male and female groups. As it was an ethnographic project, the views of film audiences were also explored by participant observation through sharing in their daily lives, activities, and interactions as much as possible. Participant observation, conversational interviews in naturalistic settings, observation, and detailed field note documentation assisted me in building rapport with the urban participants to observe their interaction and experience with films.

Though both male and female viewers participated in this research, female participants were found to be more influenced by Bollywood film and mediated fashion products than their male counterparts. As a result, more quotes from the female participants have been used in the narrative.

Bourdieu's notion of distinction and cultural taste

Instead of taking consumers' tastes or preferences as inherent, universal, and individualistic choices of the human intellect, Bourdieu argued that tastes are socially conditioned, function as the markers of social hierarchy, and reinforce class differences. As Bourdieu theorized, "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed" (1984, 6). Bourdieu argued that consumer choices "correspond to educational levels and social classes" (1984, 16). As he asserted, "all cultural practices (museum visits, concert-going, reading, etc.), and preferences in literature, painting or music, are closely linked to educational level (measured by qualifications or length of schooling) and secondarily to social origin" (1984, 1). Bourdieu used

the concept of "social fields," by which he meant the "locus of struggles" (Bourdieu 1975, 19) that represents a network of positions that are created through the accumulation of economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital. Though all types of capital seem to be different from one other, they are closely linked and can be transformed into one another. Bourdieu claimed that cultural capital is one of the salient factors of status and position in society. Cultural capital, for Bourdieu, is achieved in embodied (or incorporated), institutional, and objectified form. While embodied and institutionalized forms of cultural capital are achieved through family and institutional schooling, objectified forms of cultural capital exist in objects such as films, books, paintings, monuments, and instruments (Bourdieu 1986), and this is obtained by possessing such objects.

Bourdieu reasoned that, "social class is not defined solely by a position in the relations of production, but by the class habitus which is 'normally' (i.e., with a high statistical probability) associated with that position" (1984, 373). Bourdieu also argued that the accumulation of cultural capital and social origin define someone's habitus or "transposable disposition" (1984, 1–23). By habitus Bourdieu meant both structured structure and restructuring structure (1984, 170); while the individual's transposable disposition is predicated on and defined by his or her past and present situations/structures and accumulated cultural capital, the individual tends at the same time to increase his or her position in social fields through achieving distinction, which affects his or her present and future practices as well as structure.

Putting the film audience into perspective

Stephen Hughes has argued, "from about the mid-1970s, 'spectatorship' began to emerge as a central problem for film studies and was predominantly theorized within a general framework of semiotics" (2011, 299). Spectatorship was used as a theoretical concept to consider how film viewers are constituted, positioned, and fixed by the textual aspects of films. In earlier studies, audiences had been assumed to constitute a homogenous category and were positioned within the media texts. Laura Mulvey's (1975) screen study, for example, set a trend in screen theory "which has overall placed emphasis on the power of film texts in constituting spectators through a series of subject positions of identification" (Hughes 2011, 300).

The celebration of "spectatorship" during the 1970s was, however, stalled by the rise of British cultural studies as a significant model of media studies during the 1980s. Stuart Hall (1980) posited his encoding-decoding model negating the previous notion of inherent meaning within texts. He argued that meaning is not inherent in messages but rather is produced in relation to wider linguistic and cultural contexts. Hall's model was supplemented by David Morley (1980), who claimed that the individual viewer's class, gender, and ethnic and national identities as well as social relations determine their media access and facilitate their encounter with media texts. Hughes noted that cultural studies provided momentum to audience research from the 1980s onward, but it did not "explicitly spell out how to study audience. When faced with the problem of figuring out how

people engage with media, those in cultural studies increasingly turned to anthropological methods, in what amounted to a selective reinvention of ethnography" (2011, 302). The use of ethnographic methods in various studies was seen as an ethnographic turn in cultural studies.

The theoretical and methodological changes in the 1980s provided a discursive framework within which anthropologists started thinking seriously about the problem of audience research. With the boom in audience research in the 1980s (Ang 1985; Morley 1980; Radway 1984), anthropologists started an interdisciplinary exchange around the problems of media audience. Sara Dickey's (1993) ethnographic work on film and the urban poor in South India was one such initiative. Her research method and narrative style were anthropological, but much of her analysis of audience was drawn from film and cultural studies approaches of the 1980s, which empowered the audience instead of the texts.

Dickey interpreted her audience in terms of the usage and gratification approach[3] (McQuail 1997; Rosengren, Wenner, and Palmgreen 1985; Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch 1973), which takes the view that the audience is watching film as a pastime and as a means of emotional release. She employed a functionalist approach in interpreting the film viewing of the South Indian urban poor, who "escape into utopian fantasy as a means of fulfilling deep psychological needs, which are not otherwise addressed in their difficult living conditions" (Hughes 2011, 308).

In addition to Dickey, Brian Larkin's work in Nigeria broadened the perspective in audience research. Instead of keeping film viewership within the media and film texts, Larkin took viewership as a quotidian social and cultural practice that needs to be understood within the wider socio-cultural and political contexts, as these define viewers' interest, indifference, or avoidance in producing, circulating, or consuming cultural artifacts such as films.

Larkin studied Nigeria's urban media and observed the circulation and viewership of Indian films[4] in the Hausa community. He argued that Indian films create a "parallel modernity" that "coexist[s] in space and time [with] multiple economic, religious and cultural flows that are often subsumed within the term 'modernity'" (1997, 407). Instead of limiting himself to Western cultural hegemony and local resistance, Larkin situated film viewership within the wider media environment in which the Hausa youth audience consumed mediated cultural content, including Hausa or Yoruba videos; Indian, Hong Kong, or American films; or videos of *tafsīr* (exegesis) by local preachers. Using Arjun Appadurai's (1996) "deterritorialized imagined community" and "social reality of imagination," Larkin asserted that media create "interconnections between different peoples who can now consider alternative lives based not on experiences in their locality but on a range of experiences brought to them through international mass media" (1997, 410).

To explain the causes behind the popularity of Indian film in Hausa society, circulators, distributors, or video sellers alleged that there is a similarity between Indian and Hausa culture and perceptions. Larkin argued that despite linguistic, cultural, and religious differences, the main messages of Hindi films are well received by the Hausa community. As he stated, "The iconography of Indian 'tradition,' such as

marriage celebrations, food, village life and so on, even when different from Hausa culture, provides a similar cultural background that is frequently in opposition to the spread of 'westernization'" (1997, 413). Larkin's study of Indian films in Nigerian society is important, as I have also found many of his findings relevant to the context of Bangladesh. The viewership of Hindi films both in Nigeria and Bangladesh makes a trade off between modernity and religion. With more exposure to mediated modernity, people do not abandon their religious norms, values, and practices. Instead they strike a balance between cultural and religious practices.

Despite having similarities among the audiences in Nigeria and Bangladesh in the formation of parallel modernity based on the consumption of Hindi cinema, there are major differences in the meaning-making process across audiences from different classes. Because of geographical and socio-cultural and political differences, audiences in Bangladesh negotiate and contest the hegemony of Hindi films, which are not common in Nigerian contexts. Despite watching Hindi films on small screens at home, Bangladeshi audiences do not want to allow Indian films to be shown in Bangladeshi cinema halls. This oxymoronic love of Indian films in private and hate for them in public has to do with nationalism and other historical connections and contentions, which are absent in the context of Nigeria.

Referring to the dearth of research carried out on the circulation and consumption of Bollywood films in South Asia in general and Bangladesh in particular, Zakir Hossain Raju's (2008) paper is mainly based on the analysis of secondary sources with a handful of interviews. Instead of seeing class differences and gender variations in consuming Bollywood films, Raju has emphasized the formation of a homogenized and globalized audience around the viewership of Bollywood films in Bangladesh. He uses Appadurai's deterritorialized imagined community in understanding the Bangladeshi audience's allegiance toward Hindi films. This deterritorialized imagined community, however, undermines Bollywood's hegemony across South Asia and its impact on Bangladeshi society, culture, and film industry.

Like Larkin, other anthropologists have studied film viewership within the larger framework of film production, circulation, and exhibition (Ganti 2012; Himpele 2008; Hoek 2014; Hughes 2006) rather than limiting film viewership to texts and viewers only. Instead of taking viewership as a given (Ang 1991; Ganti 2012), I understand it as constitutive and contingent, an everyday form of social and cultural practice (Hughes 2011) in which viewers celebrate, negotiate, and contest certain types of film, film culture, and modernity. By "constitutive and contingent" I mean that viewership of films is subject to change as individual (or group) ideologies change. An avid viewer of film, for example, can turn into a non-viewer overnight because of a change in their religious perception[5]; similarly, new social associations may spark a change in a person's cultural tastes whereby, for example, they may begin preferring Hollywood films to Hindi or Bengali films. I do not limit film viewership to the relation between the viewer and the film only; nor do I take film viewership to be a personal choice only. Instead, I place viewership within the larger framework of social class and cultural hegemony that frames an individual's choice and cultural tastes. To me, film viewership is associated with

cultural taste and consumption, which create class differentiation and reinforce cultural hegemony.

Instead of keeping viewership limited to the film texts and viewers, I have seen it as a diurnal social and cultural practice in which viewers celebrate, negotiate, and contest certain types of film and film-mediated culture and modernity. To map out film consumption beyond narration and interpretation, I have used interview quotes that I think vivify participants' accounts and bring immediacy to their point of view. I maintain that representation of ethnographic texts should be based on excerpts of exchanges with participants along with the researcher's own interpretation of those excerpts (Corden and Sainsbury 2006).

<h2>Defining class through cultural tastes</h2>

The middle class cannot totally be understood through material indicators. This means that Marx's (Williams 1977) definition of class in terms of relations to the means of production does not really capture what is important about the middle class in Bangladesh. Instead, Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital is quite instrumental to interpreting the formation of the middle class in Bangladesh. Referring to Bourdieu, Mark Liechty stated that the middle class's "social behavior is driven by the secret desires to emulate the social elite" (1994, 237). Their practices are "either pathetic attempts to imitate a 'real' or 'true' cultural 'knowledge' that resides forever above them or equally pathetic attempts to glorify vulgarity" (1994, 237). The middle class feels that Hindi films are superior to Bangladeshi films and by consuming them they can satisfy their cultural desires and enhance their social status. At the same time, they view commercial Bangladeshi films as "rickshaw-pullers' films," crass, "obscene," and unrepresentative of the middle class. Middle-class Bangladeshi audiences easily accept Hindi films, even though they transgress norms that would not be tolerated in Bangladeshi films. As film scholar Lotte Hoek told me, "While in a Bangladeshi film, an actress cannot even show her navel, Katrina Kaif, a Bollywood actress, may be shown wearing almost nothing, yet still be judged as tasteful, not 'obscene,' and therefore not *apasaṅskṛti* or degraded culture" (personal communication, January 1, 2014). This means that there is a huge incongruity in the way films are judged and valued by many people. Hindi film in Bangladesh is embedded in middle-class discourses, and it is considered to be appropriate for family viewing, unlike Bangladeshi commercial films. In the following section, I discuss how the middle class's morality and values are associated with their viewership of films.

<h2>Middle-class morality and film viewership</h2>

People in Bangladesh who claim to be in the category of middle class use behavioral attributes and moral codes such as *bhadra* ("gentle") against the assumed binary opposition of *abhadra/mofo*[6] (uncivil/rustic), or *śīl* (decent) against *aśīl* (indecent/vulgar) to define their class identity or cultural artifacts. Those people claim themselves to be *bhadra* or cultured in a particular way. I take *bhadra*

as a cultural category that defines the boundary of *madhyabitta* or middle class. My use of *bhadra* or *bhadralok* ("gentlefolk," "well-mannered" person) is different from the concept of *bhadralok* as applied in Kolkata during colonial times.

Joya Chatterji (1994) extensively discussed the emergence of Kolkata-centric *bhadralok* during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She argued that Kolkata-centric *bhadralok* were predominantly Hindu middle class, which was a result of the reformation of land by the British in the late eighteenth century. Chatterji argued that there were variations among the *bhadralok* based on the size and quality of their land. She argued that besides landed wealth, some *bhadralok* turned their status even higher within the *bhadralok* class through acquiring cultural capital and Western culture. This elite educated group among the *bhadralok* class was known as *bābu* (Chatterji 1994, 3–5).

While Kolkata's colonial *bhadralok* was a defining category in terms of their relations to the means of production, my understanding of *bhadralok* in the postcolonial and neoliberal contexts is on the basis of mode of consumption rather than mode of production. In the realm of consumption, *bhadralok* are characterized by certain behavioral and moral attributes that define the boundaries of Dhaka's *bhadralok* or middle class. Middle-class audiences' cultural preferences and consumption practices are closely linked with their educational level and socio-economic background shaping their "transposable dispositions" (Bourdieu 1984, 1).

Moral codes and boundaries are taught to middle-class children at an early age so that they can learn to reproduce those behaviors. Children in most middle-class families, for example, are taught not to watch romantic, intimate, or "sexualized" scenes of a film or music scene in front of their parents or respected senior members. Parents also change TV channels in front of their children when any romantic or "sexualized" scenes appear on TV or by any other means of exhibition.

Recalling their past experience, some participants stated that during the VCR era in the 1980s and early 1990s, their parents would watch Hollywood films at midnight when the children were asleep. Considering types of content, they would restrict their children from watching certain Hollywood films. They reported that even for some Hindi films, parents would fast-forward or skip intimate or romantic scenes on the VCR or cable TV channels when their children were viewing with them. One male participant reported getting angry with his parents for hampering his watching in the middle of a film, but later in his adolescence he realized the reasons for skipping scenes.

Moral codes and behaviors are also associated with certain social spaces in which watching films are thought to be a transgression of the *bhadra* boundary. Parents teach their children not to visit ordinary cinema halls to watch Bangladeshi commercial films, as these halls are seen as *abhadra* or "uncivil" space. Both male and female participants said that their social upbringing and family schooling discouraged them from visiting ordinary cinema halls. Some male viewers, however, said that as adolescents, they sometimes skipped school or college to watch Bangladeshi commercial films in such halls. Some female participants said that they had never visited a cinema hall in their lives. They said even if they tried, they were forbidden by their family members or parents who believed that middle-class *bhadra*

or "gentle" families do not visit ordinary cinema halls. These restrictions are based on the assumption that Bangladeshi cinema halls are filled with "lower-class" people there to watch "vulgar" and "obscene" films, and visiting such places might put their status in the family and in society in jeopardy.

Within the framework of moral and behavioral boundaries, most middle-class children watch films at home, or sometimes in multiplexes (for Hollywood films or Bangladeshi alternative films) instead of visiting ordinary cinema halls. Ordinary or single-screen cinema halls and multiplexes are different spaces in terms of physicality and ideology. While the ordinary cinema hall is a century-old phenomenon, multiplexes in Bangladesh are quite a recent phenomenon, due to economic liberalization in the 1990s. Prior to the 1990s there were only a few ordinary open marketplaces in Dhaka, such as Gausia, Mouchak, Gulistan, and New Market. People of all classes frequented these markets. From the 1990s, multistoried shopping malls have emerged in various parts of Dhaka as exclusive urban middle-class spaces. The gated Bashundhara City, which opened in 2004, is claimed to be one of the biggest shopping malls in the world. It houses around 2,500 retail stores over various floors. On Level 8, there is a food court with one hundred shops and a multiplex that facilitates complementary entertainment for the cinema-going audience ("About Bashundhara City" 2013). Hundreds of middle-class youth hang out there to spend their leisure time with friends and family. This urban spectacle[7] is hierarchical and works as symbolic and ideological space. Like films, these spaces also demarcate the tastes and boundary of the middle class and reinforce class differentiations. During my fieldwork, I was driven to Bashundhara City in a vehicle known as a CNG (compressed natural gas) auto rickshaw. The driver suddenly asked me whether things were pricey inside the mall. I could not figure out which particular product's price he was referring to, so in reply I asked him why he himself did not pay a visit to the mall to see for himself. He responded, "This is for rich people [*bhadra*], not for the drivers. I am wearing a *luṅgi* [a wrap-around male garment often associated with lower classes when worn in public], so how can I go inside?"

In the following section, I discuss the way middle-class audiences in Dhaka form their cultural tastes through their consumption of Hindi films and by following their favorite actors and actresses.

VIEWER INTEREST IN HINDI FILMS AND STARS

Most viewers commented on the production and representational values of Bollywood films that they find attractive. One female participant, for example, said that Bollywood films are pure entertainment. She also said that children are very fond of Hindi films and music. Besides cartoon channels, parents nowadays feed and mollify their children by showing Hindi comedy films or songs. She said that sometimes Bollywood makes Hollywood-style action films, but she did not like these. Instead she wanted Bollywood to maintain its own style, with its films full of color and *dhūm dhaṛakkā* (deafening noise), including dance, songs, and fights as well as love affairs. *Dhoom 3* (2013) had not yet been released when I spoke with

her, but she said she did not want to see it because she did not appreciate the West-ern look of the actor (Amir Khan). Instead she would see Salman Khan's *Jai Ho* (released January 24, 2014), which she thought would be *dhūm dhām māramāri* (thunderous and random fighting), a typical Indian film. She said that Bollywood films are glamorous and colorful; their stories, songs, and dances are well made. "After seeing a Bollywood film, you will feel that you have had a good time or your time was worth it," she added.

She reported that as entertainment, Bollywood is like *jhāl-muṛi* (a locally pop-ular dish of puffed rice mixed with mustard oil, green chili, and onion) in Bangla-desh.[8] In drawing a metaphor with *jhāl-muṛi*, she referred to the way the dish is prepared with a mix of various spices; similarly, Hindi film contains a mixture of ingredients, such as action, romance, dance, and melodrama, to make it a com-plete form of entertainment. In addition to Bollywood films, film music is a great source of attraction for most of the audience. As one female participant said:

> When Bollywood dance starts, I cannot control myself, let alone my children. The other day, I went to a party at one of my colleagues' houses and we had fun there playing Hindi songs in full volume. Hindi songs are so rhythmic that when I hear the music, although I cannot dance, I just feel like jumping with it.

Some participants cherished their childhood memories of engaging in *antyakṣari* competitions on Hindi songs with their family members.[9] They said that to beat their opponents, they had to have memorized many Hindi songs. Though the dialogue of Hindi films and the language of the songs are different from Bengali, most of the participants mentioned that they more or less understand Hindi. Some participants even claimed to be more comfortable in Hindi than Bengali. This is how I think class distinction is created through consuming high-valued products, in this case Bollywood film. Because of their own cultural capital such as education and better social standing, the middle-class audience differentiate themselves from the lower-class audience through interpreting and consuming culturally high-valued products. As one female participant said, "Sometimes I even find Bangla difficult to understand, but not Hindi." She was referring to Kolkata's Bengali, which she found a bit difficult. Interestingly, she mentioned that sometimes she finds Bangladeshi Bangla dialects in film also difficult to understand. She stated the following:

> I don't understand Farooki's [a prominent alternative filmmaker in Bangladesh] language at all as to what he wants to say and what he wants to mean. Those are a mélange of dialects and modern Bangla that seem to me quite confusing. Kol-kata's Bengali accent is also different, which I find problematic, but there is no problem in understanding Hindi at all; sometimes, I can even understand Tamil due to watching Tamil films time and again.

Regarding their favorite actors and actresses, most of the participants referred to Bollywood stars, namely actors Aamir Khan, Shahrukh Khan, and Salman Khan and actresses Katrina Kaif, Deepika Padukone, and Sonakshi Sinha. In reference to Bollywood stars, one female participant said:

In Bollywood, the films are now all actor-based. A Salman Khan's film means an action film, Shahrukh Khan means a big-budget film and Aamir Khan means a good film; good means full of quality. So when Aamir Khan makes an action film, there is no less interest in that as well, and when he makes six-pack abs that also becomes a matter of attraction.

By "six-pack abs" she meant body muscle, particularly on the abdomen, built by the actor to give him a look of masculinity and power in the film. She also said, "I am a diehard fan of Shahrukh Khan because of his looks and the roles he plays. Because of his acting quality, Shahrukh Khan has been most of the girls' dream character." Similarly, another female participant said, "In all of his films, Aamir Khan has an attractive and distinct personality. His work, his speaking, acting, and dancing all are perfect. His acting seems quite natural, which touches me a lot."

As for female Bollywood stars, one male participant said, "Katrina Kaif is my favorite actress because her complexion is beautiful and her figure is slim." Similarly another female participant said she loves Katrina Kaif because she looks quite strong in her dance and in any role. As she said:

In the film *Jab Tak Hai Jaan* (2012) I found her [Katrina's] dance with Shahrukh Khan very attractive and appealing. Her dancing supersedes her acting in that film. In *Dhoom 3* as well, though it was an actor-dependent film, her dancing seemed to be quite gripping, along with her look and style.

Referring to Deepika Padukone as her favorite actress, another female participant said:

Deepika is a seasoned one who can act in any role; she can perform as a rural character or an urban, stylish, modern, and independent character. Sonakshi is my overall favorite because her expressions and dancing are quite interesting.

Some participants said that they hardly ever miss their favorite star's films. They mentioned that they repeatedly watched Hindi films with performances by their favorite stars. One female participant said that she had seen the Hindi film *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) a number of times:

I have watched that film 15 to 20 times. I watched it when it was released. We went to Kolkata and watched that film in the cinema hall. I also watched *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998) in Kolkata and *Om Shanti Om* (2007) in Mumbai. Among recent films I found *Chennai Express* (2013) very interesting and a favorite. I will watch it time and again.

Besides watching their favorite films, viewers keep track of their favorite actors, get their updates, and follow everyday developments by reading their interviews in print or on electronic media. One female participant said that Bollywood film stars are thought to be more than normal human beings. She said that people who do not follow Bollywood stars still know about them, their lifestyle or everyday life, and their relations with others; quarrels, marital status, clothing, dating, and scandals interest all Bollywood fans. She said that she follows in particular what Bollywood actors are doing for the betterment of society. For example, Salman Khan's charity

organization "Being Human" helps society to do good work; similarly, Shahrukh Khan visited Yale University and gave the students an inspirational speech, and he has made speeches about how to achieve success in life and stay determined. She said that these attributes of a celebrity attract a middle-class audience.

She also said that the definition of film star in Bollywood is different from that of Dhallywood, as Dhaka's film industry is known. She mentioned that in Bollywood, there are certain parameters to become a star—they need to have a hit film, have brand endorsements, give concert performances, and have performed social work; their number of likes and shares on their Facebook and Twitter pages also count, as does their media coverage in magazines and newspaper articles. She said that in Bangladesh, on the other hand, "star means some media coverage and a number of hit films, and that's all." She mentioned, in that respect, that viewers do not count their other aspects. The reason is that there is no such awareness in Bangladesh, where the film budget is very low and there are fewer people who are interested in the film industry. She said that recently, filmmaker and actor Anata Jalil, the only person investing significantly in Bangladeshi film, went to different quality locations outside the country and cast good singers in his films. However, because of Anata Jalil's lower-quality acting, his film is not appreciated by the middle-class audience, who instead ridicule his performance in the film. She also said, "Had Anata Jalil stayed behind, provided his idea and money, and cast people who can act better, then the quality of his film could have been improved."

Most of the participants mentioned that they receive up-to-date news of their favorite actors in Bollywood through various means such as social networks via their mobile phones, internet, TV, radio, and newspapers. For Shahrukh Khan's latest updates and organizational activities, for example, they receive news by liking his social network fan clubs, Facebook pages, or via TV channels, which update Bollywood news every hour.

One female participant said that she follows Shahrukh Khan's wife Gauri Khan through her social network pages such as Facebook. She said that Gauri Khan updates her page saying that today she bought toys for her children, or on another day she dropped her children off at school and Shahrukh himself picked them up. She also uploads photos of different occasions. During last year's Ramadan Eid, for example, photos were uploaded that showed which clothing she wore as she joined Shahrukh Khan to greet his fans who had gathered in front of *Mannat*, their family home. Photos are also available on Gauri Khan's page showing Shahrukh Khan cutting his birthday cake.

While most middle-class audiences watch Hindi films and music, some watch India's Bengali films, which are produced in Kolkata. In the following section, I discuss how the cultural tastes of some middle-class audiences are framed around Indian Bengali films, besides Hindi films.

Viewer interest in Bollywood fashion and beauty

The idea of being modern is about self-styling (Ferguson 2006) or self-fashioning (Liechty 1994). According to James Ferguson, modernity in the neoliberal world

order is not a historical progression, as it was used in the theory of modernization. It is also not "a set of wonderfully diverse and creative cultural practices, but . . . a global status and a political economic-condition: the condition of being 'first class'. Some people and places have it; others don't" (Ferguson 2006, 187). Middle-class individuals style themselves in particular ways that they consider to be fashionable and modern. As they do with films, the middle class compares locally made styles and fashion trends with ones of foreign origin. Because of their socio-cultural differences, the Bangladeshi middle-class audience does not directly follow Hollywood films. Instead they follow Bollywood, which is more similar to their society and culture, to elevate their social standing. The boundary of self-styling is defined by local cultural norms and values. As one female participant said, "As a girl, going outside wearing mini-skirts and half pants is simply not possible here."

Another female participant said that she was not interested in Bollywood film star Sonakshi Sinha's acting style or expressions, but she liked how she dresses. During the interview, the participant showed me a *sārī* on her own Facebook page that was worn by Sonakshi in a film and said that she intended to buy that *sārī* and wear it for *Pahela Baishakh* (Bengali New Year, the first day of the Bengali calendar). She had seen it in the film *R . . . Rajkumar* (2013) and, after searching, found it on Facebook.

She mentioned that nowadays she easily finds her desired clothing on Facebook. She added that on her Facebook timeline, many ads and links related to Indian and Pakistani fashion and clothing pop up. If she finds anything interesting she just likes it and browses it. She mentioned that Bangladeshi business people own most of the pages, and they simply upload Indian catalogues on the web to conduct their business. Business people also send messages via Facebook profiles. She mentioned that they mainly target women with requests like, "Apu [a referent to a female to show closeness and respect], please check my page." They also take out ads on Facebook, and if someone likes their pages they receive automatic updates on any new clothing releases.

Regarding the products they buy online, female participants mostly buy various things. As one participant mentioned:

> Q. What types of Bollywood products do you buy?
> A. I have bought some *sāṛī* and a few gorgeous party *kāmij* [clothing for women]. Bollywood-promoted clothing items are all gorgeous, which is why I do not wear them at the office but wear them to parties.
> Q. So, you buy products promoted and worn by Bollywood film stars. But don't you find any alternatives in Bangladesh?
> A. The boutique items that are sold in Bangladesh are not good quality. They are also too pricey. Indian *sāṛī*, for example, I can have one for BDT 6,500 [USD 83], but at a Bangladeshi clothing house such as Dressy Dale, the same would cost me between BDT 20,000 [USD 257] and BDT 22,000 [USD 283], which I cannot afford. I have a job and I cannot afford it. I have seen it in Dressy Dale, and also Aarong [a renowned retail chain in Bangladesh], but their price is quite high. A simple thing is sold in Bangladeshi shops at quite a high price. The reason we buy Indian and Pakistani

clothes is that they are affordable within our limited budget. I love Bangladeshi clothing, I like clothing from Dressy Dale, but to go there takes BDT 15,000 [USD 193] to BDT 20,000 [USD 257]—is that affordable to me?

Asked about the quality of the clothing, she complained that once a renowned Bangladeshi boutique shop deceived her. She said that she bought a simple *sāloẏār kāmij* (female clothing) for BDT 4,500 (USD 58) or BDT 5,000 (USD 64) but it became discolored within a few days. She continued:

> I even sent the item to that shop for dry cleaning but it came back discolored. The dry clean cost me BDT 180 [USD 2.31] for one set of clothing, but when took it home I found its color faded. Pakistani clothes do not become discolored. And some Indian clothing's fringe and lace is sensitive and sometimes loses its color, but the sellers caution the buyers, saying, "*Apa*, there might be a possibility of it getting discolored, so you must dry clean it." I have not found any Indian clothing that lost its color after a dry clean. Sometimes, I found that if I inadvertently dipped a new *sāloẏār kāmij* in water for a long time at home, then it loses its color, but otherwise not. In Indian clothing there are tags that read, "must dry clean." That is why it is not their fault. But I was ripped off buying Bangladeshi clothes. The quality is bad, it is pricey, and I do not find the design interesting, so why buy it unnecessarily?

She mentioned that besides Indian clothing she buys Pakistani clothing as well. She said, "Pakistani clothing has flooded the market. You can find it anywhere. They are called lawn clothes." She also said that she preferred to wear Pakistani clothing at the office, but for attending a party she preferred Indian clothing and *sāṛī*. "Over the past 5 years I have not bought Bangladeshi clothing and *sāṛī* at all. Having been ripped off, I do not buy them anymore," she added.

The growing demand for Indian and Pakistani clothing is quite a recent phenomenon that could be pinned to the advent of cable television and the internet in the 1990s and 2000s. During the VHS era, Indian clothing was not available, but some participants mentioned that they were drawn to mimicking Hindi film stars' clothing, hairstyles, or makeup. One female participant, aged around forty, recalled Hindi actress Juhi Chawla's *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* (*From Doom to Doom*, 1988) and some of her other films released in the late 1980s and early 1990s. She found Juhi's clothing in that film very attractive. She even designed her own outfit after seeing the film star, gave it to her mother, and asked her to make her one in the same way. Like Juhi Chawla, she wore many short *kurtā*s (blouses) in the 1980s and 1990s.

Another female participant said that she was not influenced by the clothing Bollywood actresses wear, but she was influenced by their makeup. She said the following:

> If I see their makeup is natural then I find it interesting. I then think of trying makeup like that when I attend a party. I feel that my makeup should be natural as well. I try to differentiate between the "made-up look" and the "soothing natural look." I try to follow that. I also follow their hairstyle and braid so that I can style my hair like them and make a match with the *sāṛī*, *leheṅgā*, or *ghāghrā*.

Along with current trends promoted by Indian film stars, older styles of past actresses are also followed by some women to make them look different from others. One participant said she likes Suchitra Sen's hairstyle, blouses, and the decoration of her eyes, particularly the application of eyeliner. Suchitra acted a long time ago but she remains an attractive figure for the audience. The participant feels the old styles are back in vogue. In addition, she mentioned that she wears a *sāṛī* sometimes and checks whether Suchitra Sen's hair-braiding style goes with that *sāṛī* or not.

Both male and female participants believe that due to Bollywood films, the perception of beauty in Bangladesh has changed a lot. They said that many "lower-class" audiences still feel that film actresses should be a bit fleshy and chubby, but that perception is being changed nowadays. Referring to their mothers and aunts, some participants said that previously any slim girl would have been thought to be *rogā* or sick and unhealthy. A plump or chubby girl was thought to be healthy and happy. With the predominance of slim actresses in Bollywood, young girls nowadays follow diets to keep slim, which up until now has not been a part of Bengali culture at all.

India's film-mediated culture and modernity has changed tastes related to self-fashioning and the sense of beauty of many middle-class audiences in Bangladesh. As a result, Dhaka's markets are inundated with Indian fashion products, influenced by the hegemony of Bollywood. In the following section a scenario at Dhaka's Eid market is described.

Bollywood fashion at Dhaka's Eid market

Indian fashion and clothing brands named after Hindi films, actors, or even Indian TV soap opera stars inundate most shopping malls in Dhaka. Observing various markets and shopping malls such as Bashundhara City, Karnafuli Garden City Market, and others in Dhanmondi, New Market, Mouchak, and Malibagh, I found women's clothing branded with popular Hindi film names such as *Aashiqui 2* (2013), *Chennai Express* (2013), *Raanjhanaa* (2013), and *Murder 3* (2013), and actresses' names such as Deepika, Vidya Balan, Rani Mukerji, Kajol, Bipasha, Aishwarya, Katrina Kaif, Karina Kapoor, Sunny Leone, and Sonam Kapoor appear on the clothing. Besides Hindi film, Hindi soap opera stars such as Gopi and Punkhuri are also popular in fashion at Eid. Interestingly, many Bangladeshi-made articles were also branded with names of popular Indian films and actors that create appeal for buyers. Some even named their shops after Indian film stars, like Aishwarya Sari House, which displayed its name using a colorful larger-than-life-size poster of Aishwarya Rai.

Apart from a few local branded boutique shops, most clothing shops frequented by middle-class customers are replete with Indian and Pakistani clothing, namely *sāloῗār kāmij*, a traditional outfit in South Asia, and *sāṛī*s. Sellers from different shops reported that they import clothing from Bombay, Surat, and Delhi to sell to Dhaka's posh markets. Sellers also reported that among middle-class women, the demand for Indian garments is greater than for Bangladeshi garments. Indian

garments are thought to be better in terms of quality and design. Colorful embroidery, various types of studs, and the use of colors give Indian clothing a gorgeous, razzmatazz look in the eyes of customers.

Some sellers said that they import garments designed in Bangladesh but made in India, while other shops import ready-made clothing directly from various parts of India. Interestingly, the phenomenon of designing and making clothing locally is similar to the process of CD or DVD copying. Garments are made and named after Indian films and stars to increase sales in the market. Those who imported clothing from India displayed catalogues of various fashion brand names, such as Vipul, Vivek, Riva, Mohini, Om-Tex, Avon, Jinaam, Siya, Vinay, Raanjhanaa, Ekta, Rama, Bela, Vishal, Ram, Passion, Pari, Hasejaa, Madhik, Ganga, Roop Mohini, Kasheesh, Kashika, Pankhuri, and Pakeeza. Customers, mostly female, look through the catalogues and purchase what they like. Importers mentioned that the product lines they import include *sāṛī*, *sāloẏār kāmij*, *leheṅgā colī*, *ghāṅgrā colī*, *cūṛīdār kāmij*, and *cūṛīdār kurtā* made of cotton, georgette, silk, and chiffon, among others.

North Indian "Islamicate"[10] culture has been influential across the Indian subcontinent through Bollywood films. From this perspective, North Indian fashion such as *sāloẏār kāmij* is seen as "modern and progressive," as opposed to "regional" or "local" clothing, which has been treated as "traditional" (Bahl 2005). The representation of North Indian "Islamicate" fashion in Bollywood film has made this style of clothing more appealing across South Asia. In Bollywood film, costumes are signaled with "high production values; they are complicit in the construction of contemporary stardom; and they embody 'professionalism' via the employment of well-connected fashion designers" (Wilkinson-Weber 2010b, 125). Bollywood stars' personalized costumes become desired signs to the consumers/viewers who construct their identity through wearing those signs. As Jean Baudrillard (2001) reminded us, commodities in the contemporary world are not defined by their function (use value) or price (exchange value) but rather by their significance or distinction from other commodities. According to Baudrillard, a sign has no value in and of itself, but when it is juxtaposed with other signs, difference or distinction emerges. The hierarchy of signs creates class differences in the mode of consumption.

Discussion and conclusion

In the pre-1930s silent era, American and European films were dominant in the Indian market. Despite the fact that the production of Indian films also began in the silent era, they could not gain ground before the introduction of sound in the 1930s. With sound, films carried more meanings and became more interactive for audiences. With the arrival of sound technology, filmmaking in united India expanded. As Tejaswini Ganti reported, "Within a decade of the advent of sound, the ratio of foreign films being screened in India dropped to less than 10 percent, and the film industries in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Lahore, and Pune grew at a rapid rate without import barriers or state supports" (2012, 11). However, most of the studios were located in Bombay and Kolkata, and filmmakers from other

linguistic territories would visit Kolkata and Mumbai to make their films. While sound gave more meaning to the films, it also split the viewership of films according to linguistic territory. As India is linguistically divided, so films were supposed to be made in different territories in their respective languages. This equation was applicable to every language except Hindi-Urdu. As the Hindi-Urdu-speaking population was greater than for any of India's other languages, more Hindi-Urdu films were made right from the beginning of filmmaking in India. But how did Hindi film gain its crossover appeal across India, eventually leading to its hegemony over India's other languages and cultures? I suggest that besides its vast natural market, the "Islamicate" process is evident in Hindi-Urdu film to make it hegemonic to non-Hindi-speaking and Muslim-dominant territories such as East Bengal (later on East Pakistan and eventually Bangladesh).

Historically, the Bangladeshi film audience has had access to Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, and Hollywood films, but the degree and quality of access to the products of these linguistic culture-industries has changed over various periods of Bangladesh's history. Access has been affected primarily by shifting political relationships, whereby this part of greater Bengal was part of the British Empire and subsequently part of independent Pakistan, before becoming independent Bangladesh. These political relationships have interacted with the linguistic differences between Hindi, Bengali, and Urdu and the political imperatives that have privileged one or the other of these languages in specific political contexts. Despite import bans on films from India at different historical moments, a large number of Bangladeshi viewers across age, sex, and class lines have viewed legally and illegally circulated or broadcast films, especially from India, which account for more than 90 percent of South Asia's total film output.

Instead of making Bangladeshi films appealing to the Bangladeshi middle-class audience, the hegemony of Bollywood film has ghettoized them. With the change in the target audience and the production and exhibition of Bollywood films in the 1990s, the Bangladeshi middle-class audience responded to this change, as did the Indian middle-class audience, and was alienated from Bangladeshi commercial films. The absence of middle-class audiences in Bangladeshi cinema halls, however, was quickly filled by the working-class audiences who migrated from rural areas following economic liberalization and the expansion of the ready-made garment, housing, and transport industries from the 1990s onward. Bangladeshi commercial filmmakers then targeted the so-called "captive lower-class audience" with action-packed, "vulgar," or "obscene" films.

The rise of cable TV in India and the advent of other technologies such as CDs, DVDs, and the internet increased the flow of Indian films and film-mediated culture into Bangladesh. In addition, changes in the Bollywood filmmakers' target audience since the mid-1990s also changed the tastes of the middle-class audiences in Bangladesh. Tejaswini Ganti (2012) extensively analyzed the changes in the Bollywood industry since the 1990s. She showed that until the 2000s, the focus of the filmmakers was the masses, but the trend changed with a series of gentrification processes by which Hindi films became popular with urban middle-class audiences. She said, "The filmmakers' audience imaginaries parallels shifts in other

spheres of cultural production in India, brought about by the neoliberal structuring of the state, media, and society, in which citizens have been reconfigured as consumers" (2012, 358).

With the corporatization of the film industry and the introduction of multiplexes, filmmakers' focus shifted to the middle-class audiences who have more discretionary income than the "lower-class" masses. Ganti discussed how Bollywood filmmakers started thinking about the cultural values of the family, especially when all the family members watched a film together: the film had to be "'wholesome' or 'vegetarian', which denotes their sanitized language and lack of highly suggestive song sequences, bawdy humor, or graphic violence" (Ganti 2012, 295). Ganti argued that the major structural changes in the production and exhibition of Bollywood films attracted the middle-class audience. I suggest that just as the Indian middle class responded to changing production values in Bollywood films in the early 1990s, the Bangladeshi middle class also responded to these values, which they found more appealing than those of Bangladeshi films or Kolkata's Bengali films.

The middle class consumes Hindi film-constructed signs and luxury, such as costumes, which bring significant pleasure to film watching (Dwyer 2000; Wilkinson-Weber 2010a). Within the chaotic commodity market, Hindi films provide references to middle-class audiences to select their products, such as costumes. Bollywood films work as the "window-shopping" through which the audience becomes connected with the world of aestheticized commodities (Mazumdar 2007). Following Bourdieu's concept of "distinction," I have analyzed how the cultural tastes of middle-class Bangladeshis have changed with contact with Bollywood films.

I have argued that audiences' cultural capital, such as education and social background, influence the framing of their cultural tastes. Middle-class audiences subscribe to and consume cultural products based on accumulated cultural capital, such as sophistication and virtuosity within the product. By sophistication viewers meant good quality, taste, and refinement of the product. Through consuming sophisticated products, they can increase their social status and superiority in society. To the middle-class audience in Bangladesh, Bollywood films have been the "phantasmagoria of modernity" (Mazumdar 2007, 95).

In their judgment of taste, whereas Hindi films are treated as entertaining and appealing, Bangladeshi commercial films are defined as crass, "obscene," lacking in cultural capital, and not worthy of watching. While Hindi films and stars are celebrated, Bangladeshi ones are degraded and defamed. The same is the case for film-mediated fashion and modernity, which positions Bollywood film- and star-promoted clothing as more modern and appealing than Bangladeshi clothing.

AUTHOR

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Notes

1. The word "Bollywood" is a portmanteau of "Bombay" and "Hollywood." It has been used as a sobriquet for the Hindi film industry since the 1990s, which prior to that had been widely referred to as simply "Hindi film."

2. The creation of distinction is not only a middle-class phenomenon; it can form in every class from the lower to the elite. It works simultaneously within and across class. As my research was limited to middle-class audiences, I discussed the cultural practices of the middle class along with their habitus and cultural capital.

3. Denis McQuail (2005), for example, listed a host of gratifying needs that direct viewership. Some of the needs he mentioned are entertainment; information; escaping or being diverted from problems; relaxing; getting cultural or aesthetic enjoyment; filling time; emotional release; sexual arousal; identifying with others and gaining a sense of belonging; finding a basis of conversation and social interaction; having a substitute for real-life companionship; enabling one to connect with friends, family, and society; finding models of behavior; and identifying with valued others.

4. By the term "Indian films" I mean all kinds of films that are owned by Indian producers. The concept of "Indian films" reflects a general Indian national identity and boundary and does not refer to the country's diverse linguistic and regional film industries, e.g., Hindi, Tamil, Marathi.

5. For my research, though I did not follow any viewer for a longer period of time, in my interviews I nonetheless found that some viewers reported that previously—which might be one month, or a year, or even a few days back—they used to see Hindi films and other foreign films regularly, but because of changes in their religious views and practices, their consumption of films has also changed. They now hardly see any films, because watching films is forbidden or *haram* in Islam.

6. *Mofo* indicates backward, uneducated, and gauche (see Hoek 2014, 27).

7. Guy Debord (1994) looked into the transformation of society from mode of production to mode of consumption. In the mode of consumption, infrastructure such as a shopping mall becomes a spectacle of visual consumption. George Ritzer (2005) also showed how the urban spectacle, such as the shopping mall, rationalizes market economies and expedites consumer culture.

8. The *jhāl-muṛi* metaphor is similar to the *masālā* metaphor, which says that like the spice mix known as *masālā*, a Bollywood film is made up of various genres, such as comedy, action, romance, drama, and melodrama.

9. This is a competition based on Bollywood film song lyrics in which a competitor must think up a line from a Bollywood song that begins with the last syllable of the line sung by the previous competitor; if they fail to do so, they are eliminated.

10. "Islamicate" does not directly refer to "the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims" (Kesavan 1994, 246). Mukul Kesavan argued that the "Islamicate" social and cultural lifestyle of the Nawab and the ruling elite in North Indian cities such as Awadh and Lucknow became hegemonic among the colonial middle class. Filmmakers in the colonial period and even in the post-colonial period used the hegemonic language of the "Islamicate" empire and cultural practices of the *tuwāif* or courtesan to attract audiences. Mukul Kesavan also explains the way Hindi film became influenced by the "Islamicate" language and culture of the ruling elite in North India (1994, 246–251).

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