

# Mythology, Masculinity and Indian Cinema: Representation of ‘Angry Young Man’ in Popular Hindi Films of 1970s

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*In the 1970s popular Hindi cinema witnessed an emergence of action oriented films with a distinctive “angry young man” protagonist. Tracing the antecedents of Indian masculine subjectivity in colonial discourse, this essay seeks to constitute a framework that identifies vestiges of mythological narratives alongside the politico-historical factors, to explain the formation of the belligerent male in the post-independence popular Hindi films. Reconciling the problematic of overdetermined “Indianness”—conceived as spiritual, calm, and other-worldly, together with its opposite: aggression, anger and this-worldly, that is also constitutive of Indian masculinity—the essay argues, benevolence or militancy cohere in the masculine self and, are activated according to specific political conditions in history. The angry man figure inscribed in the 1970s popular Hindi cinema is explicable in relation to the 1960s political crises in India that exposed a delegitimized Indian state. This essay focuses on the mythic tale of Parashurâma in the epic Purânas, which is instructive in understanding the rage and rebellion of the figure of the angry man—and his violent yet eventually sacrosanct masculinity—whose dharma (sacred duty) is to reinstate the flawed ideal even if that meant confronting the enemy within or going against one’s own family.*

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Films, through its specific representational forms and practices, are involved in the production and re-production of masculinity as a cultural category. The cinematic apparatuses and its complex relationship with the socio-political developments produce distinct cultural texts which not only bear ideological underpinnings but also show deep psychological enunciations. Even if one isolates and considers the portrayal of men within the hetero-normative category in mainstream Indian popular cinema, its intersection with class, caste and ideological underpinning makes it a problematic and unsettled category. “Hindi cinema’s narrative are unfailingly centered on a hero and heroine, who together constitute its fundamental templates in which masculinity is the flip side of femininity” (Virdi 2003, p. 87). The unfixed nature of masculinity of the Hindi film hero is evident with the changes in the construction of masculinity in response to the nation’s history and the hero’s role as a primary agent shaping that history. Masculinity as a social/cultural category undergoes continual transformation, making it impossible to construct it as a universal, generic, absolutist category.

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In the 1970s Hindi cinema witnessed an emergence of action oriented films with a typical 'angry young man' as the protagonist. An impressive number of studies (Prasad, 2001; Kazmi, 2002; Banerjea, 2005; Srivastava, 2006) underline the volatile political situation during the 1960s and 1970s as one of the reasons for the emergence of such a distinct genre of film. The political events taking place progressively after independence made the citizens of the newly independent nation-state disillusioned and the rhetoric of an ideal Indian nation-state seemed concocted. The formation of 'angry young man's' masculinity needs to be understood within this context. As Prasad has discussed, with the gradual obsolescence of feudal family romance, 'ordinary' heroes entrance was natural into mainstream commercial films. Dockworker, mineworker, gang-leader, porter, police officer, small time crook: these were some of the roles Amitabh played in his career, roles that were predominantly lower class, positioned at the periphery of the respectable society yet a figure of resistance. However, the construction of masculinity has been influenced not only by a shift to proletarian themes but also at the level of a transformative construction of an industrial masculinity, with the corresponding political, aesthetic and institutional values. It is also interesting to note that the mass popularity of the Kung Fu films in India, with the release of *Enter the Dragon* (1973) also proved to be instrumental in shaping the aggressive masculinity of the hero. As Koushik Banerjea points out "In this decade of increasingly authoritarian rule led by Indira Gandhi, the celluloid iconography of Bruce Lee's lean and mean stance against the villainous Han found ample residue in the angry Amitabh Bachchan characters throwing off the shackles of their subaltern status to fight the henchmen of rogue goonda (criminal) capitalists" (p. 16). These studies do provide an insight into the political and ideological workings behind the emergence and popularity of the 'angry young man' genre. However, Indian understanding of the self has strong underpinning of spiritualism and sainthood, and hence, in this essay, while, taking into account the prevalent argument regarding the constructivism through socio-political discourse, I seek to understand in what way, mythological accounts also invest in the construction of such belligerent, violent male protagonist.

In the first section of this essay, I would attempt to offer a sketchy outline of the issues relating to the cinematic representation of Indian masculinity and in the following section I would delineate the notion of spiritual masculinity and the ways it negotiates with the historical and political conditions. In the subsequent section, refereeing to certain mythological accounts, I shall discuss about a certain ambivalence of the masculine self to move on to the specific myth of Parashurama to understand the construction of a violent, irate, outlawed, dissatisfied 'angry young man' in popular Hindi films. In the process, I shall attempt to unpack the logic of representation, in line with the mythological accounts to suggest how his ambivalent masculine subjectivity is formed negotiating with the ideological and the mythological underpinnings.

## **Mythology and Ideology**

### **The politics of representation in Indian cinema**

Popular films play the role of a normative referent in the ideological construction of masculinity. Ostensibly, the representation of masculinity changes over time with historical, political conditions and through a complex mutually complementary discourse. The analogousness of nation and women gets manifested in post independence popular Hindi cinema with its tendency to metonymic contiguity between family and the nation being congealed with a similar emotive affection that is central to the 'Indian joint family'. The notion of masculinity changes as the hero struggles with different categories of enemies. "These enemies took the form of

unprincipled profiteers in the 1950s, foreign aggressors in the 1960s, “smugglers” in the 1970s, separatist “terrorist” and politicians in the 1980s, and authoritarian patriarchs in the 1990s.” (Virdi, 2003, p. 87) Consequently, scholars have attempted to explore this intricate and shifting nature of the construction of masculine self, and also tried to extract the constitutive elements of this formation of masculine subjectivity. In the films immediately after independence, such as, *Râm Aur Shyam* (1967) or *Naya Daur* (1957), invested with the responsibility of nation building, the hero is constructed with an idealized longing for a nationalist spirit, savior of his mother/nation. While the later films like, *Deewar* (1975), *Muqaddar Ka Sikandar* (1978), *Coolie* (1983), *Charas* (1976), assume the nation as a natural political entity with its own problems, which the hero tries to overcome.

However, in this essay, without undermining the ideological explanations behind the emergence of the ‘angry young man’, I wish to draw a parallel to the *purânic* mythological tales because myth and ideology, as belief systems and modes of argumentative discourse, are structurally different but functionally similar. It is important to note that ‘myth’, as Roland Barthes used it in *Mythologies* (1957), functions almost as a synonym of ‘ideology’. While, ideology refers to a hegemonic power, which legitimates itself by endorsing beliefs and values suitable to it; naturalizing and universalizing such beliefs so as to make them obvious and seemingly predestined; demeaning ideas which might contest it; eliminating opposing forms of thought, conceivably by some tacit but organized logic; and making social reality ambiguous in ways convenient to itself. Such ‘mystification’, as Terry Eagleton explains, “frequently takes the form of masking or suppressing social conflicts, from which arises the conception of ideology as an imaginary resolution of real contradictions” (1991, p. 6).

The aspect of a socially constructed reality which is passed off as ‘natural’ is important in both mythology and ideology. The opinions and values of a historically and socially specific class are held up as ‘universal truths’. Efforts to confront this naturalization and universalization of a socially constructed reality are disregarded for lacking common sense, and therefore excluded from serious consideration. The genuine power relations in society (between classes, between coloniser and colonised, between men and women etc.) are obscured, reference to all tensions and difficulties blocked out, glossed over, their political threat defused (Barthes, 1957, pp.74-77). Hence, it can be useful to read certain mythological traces into the ideological explanation behind the representation of such belligerent, violent male protagonist in the popular Hindi films of 1970s.

### **Spiritual masculinity and the discursive masculine subject**

“India has always been a separate world, hard for any outsider, Eastern or Western, to penetrate. Such a culture becomes a projective test; it invites one not only to project on to it one’s deepest fantasies, but also to reveal, through such self projection, the interpreter rather than the interpreted.” (Nandy, 1988, pp. 79-80). This over determined nature of ‘Indianness’ not only makes it problematic to homogenize the process of subjectivation but also reveals the duality and incongruity of subjective identity. Hence, while most discussions regarding India is tempted to construct around ‘spirituality’— Indians as other-worldly, self-righteous, calm and merciful, one has to understand that on the flipside of it remains overtly this-worldly motives, terrible self-interest and an increased identification with the aggressors, that revived the ideology of the martial races and a number of nineteenth century social and political movements that constituted Ksatriyahood! “as a new, nearly exclusive indicator of authentic Indianness” (Nandy, 1988, p. 7).

So is this violent, irate, outlawed, disgruntled masculinity in Hindi cinema an entirely new formation that is emerging out of the distinct political historical conditions? The polymorphic conception of spiritual masculinity embodies in itself both the militant and benevolent aspects of masculine self. I would suggest that the ambivalence lies in its interpretation and deployment in response to political, social conditions, while the primary constituents remain fairly coherent.

The arguments against the colonial aggression and in favour of emerging nationalism in early nineteenth and twentieth century India incorporated an array of texts that invested in the construction of the colonial Indian masculinity and which undoubtedly shaped the understanding of postcolonial Indian masculine self as well. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, dynamically articulated the concept of *sannyasi* (literally means ‘saint’) or *santan* (literally means ‘son’ but it carries the connotation of ‘sons of motherland’), militant, rebellious, violent at the same time ascetic, celibate thus ‘spiritually pure’. The construction of the *sannyasi* or *santan* was devised to transform itself as a politically proactive, assertive, spiritual masculine figure ready to take up the all important ‘task’— “The task of a *Santana* is a difficult one. Anyone who is not a renouncer in the absolute sense is not fit to carry out this work” (Chattopadhyay, 1953, p. 697). Indubitably, this ‘task’ in the colonial context was to drive out from the Motherland those who did not have faith in the *sanatana dharma* <sup>2</sup> and to liberate the Hindu nation-state.

Swami Vivekananda, through his writings and speeches delineated the formation of the spiritual masculinity as a discursive formation emerging out of opposition from ‘other’ religions and ‘other’ masculinities. His construction of the spiritual masculinity, akin to Bankim, was ostensibly linked with liberating the Motherland and the limitations posed by the colonial social customs. Drawing from various ancient Hindu scriptures, including the Vedas, Gita and Upanishads, Vivekananda’s notion of spiritual masculinity blended together the strength of the *Kshatriya* with the potency of knowledge of the *Brahman*— “Vivekananda, however, chose to fuse militant virility with the ‘pure’ Brahminical principle of asceticism in order to render masculinity invincible.” (Chowdhury, 1998, p. 127)

“The Hindu (a prominent Indian religion) believes that he is a spirit. Him the sword cannot pierce—him the fire cannot burn—him the water cannot melt—him the air cannot dry.” (Vivekananda, 1989, p. 9) Such a construction of the invincible masculine Indian, especially when the colonial consciousness constructs the stereotypes of effeminate, emasculated colonized identity emerges from the specific historical conditions that play with the ambivalent notion of spiritual masculine subjectivity with its double bind of violent, militant masculinity and the ascetic, sagacious masculinity. Gandhi, in early twentieth century, interestingly enough, neither attempted to reiterate the notion of *Ksatriyahood* as the ideal Indian masculine self, nor did he ascertain a spirituality which was a means to achieve and retain superior physical prowess. Rather, borrowing from the tradition of saintliness and the mythological narratives of power derived from bi-unity, Gandhi constructed Indian masculinity by ratifying that “...manliness and womanliness are equal, but the ability to transcend the man-woman dichotomy is superior to both, being an indicator of godly and saintly qualities.” (Nandy, 1988, p. 53) The construction of such a spiritual masculinity is irrefutably connected with his major concern for *Satyagraha*<sup>3</sup> or militant nonviolence. Since the doctrine of nonviolence can only be practiced properly by a masculine subject which has transcended the man-woman dichotomy. The masculine self becomes a fusion of maternal prerogative and masculine courage of acknowledging his feminine side. Thus in the specificity of the late colonial condition, the militancy was laid in the negation of the culture of violence, which was irrefutably necessary for the colonial rule.

The discursive formation of the masculine subject within the understanding of the colonial self, I want to suggest, reveals the polymorphous nature of spiritual masculinity, which embodies both militant and benign aspects. Since it draws upon such mythological materials which can be ambivalent in nature, the manifestation or invocation of either militant or benign aspects depends on the desired response to the historical, political situation and the interpretation of such notion of masculine self within that historically specific discourse.

### **Myth and masculinity: Ambivalent Indian masculine self**

Myth, as noted by a number of eminent scholars (Freud, 1953; Jung, 1968; Lévi-Strauss, 1955; Rank, 1914; Arlow, 1961; Propp, 1968) provides an ideal fulfillment of a repressed desire. The external surface of the myth hides its true meaning and thereby prevents fulfillment, but it also contains the subliminal meaning and thereby may provide contentment. Depth psychology intimately engages with myth to explore the notions of self and sexuality and suggests a frame of reference to analyze the original motives and behavioral processes. The fundamental ideas of masculinity and femininity in the Indian context can evidently be traced to the Indian mythic narratives, and unlike the West, Indian myth is closely related to everyday life and emphatically forms the canon of Hindu religious texts. Corresponding to models of infant care and to the structure and values of family relationships, popular and well known myths are isomorphic with the central psychological constellations of the culture and are constantly renewed and validated by the nature of subjective experience. (Obeyesekere, 1981)

The discursive formation of the masculine self is unquestionably tied with the Indian mythological narratives since repeatedly Indian myth or *Puranic* allusions are made to establish such discourse and to prescribe and justify the way 'lives are lived'. When it comes to psychoanalytic discussions on the formation of masculine subjectivity, there is an intriguing disparity between Western and Indian psyche. In a letter to Freud, Girindrashekar Bose (1929) evidently pointed out that "The desire to be a female is more easily unearthed in Indian male patients than in European..." Even relatively modern psychoanalysts, like Kakar has reiterated that this fantasy of embodying the sexual attributes of both the parents seems to be reasonably more common since,

"The hegemonic narrative of Hindu culture as far as male development is concerned, is neither that of Freud's Oedipus nor of Christianity's Adam. One of the more dominant narratives of this culture is that of Devi, the great goddess, especially her manifold expressions as mother in the inner world of the Hindu son." (Kakar, 1996, p. 112)

This general tendency of the Indian male psyche to embody sexual attributes of both the sexes, or more specifically, nurturing in the unconscious the 'primitive idea of being a woman', I will argue, points to a specific understanding of the ambivalence that marked the discourse on spiritual masculinity. Vivekananda's notion of spiritual masculinity which combined the courage and heroism of the *Ksatriya* and the asceticism of a saint obliquely drew upon the Indian myth of Devi. This immensely popular myth has a number of versions and been narrated in folktales, proverbs, ritual worships and sacred Hindu hymns.

What is striking is that this *Shakti* or ultimate cosmic power, the "great fiery splendor" is 'feminine'. As J. Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff (1996, p. 39) have rightly pointed

out that *Devi Mahatmya* does not recognize that *Shakti* is feminine and that its possessors or vehicle is masculine— for *Devi* herself possess *Shakti*. The dramatic and extremely violent narrative concludes with the *Devi* forcefully piercing the demon, *Mahisasura* with her spear but the potent all conquering ‘masculine virility’ is evident throughout the myth. I would like to point to this ambivalent nature of the sexuality and notions of gender, embodied by the goddess or *Devi*. This very ambivalence is exploited by Bankim Chandra, Vivekananda and other radical nationalist leaders during the colonial time to construct the notion of a spiritual masculinity that makes an effort to tap into the idea of *Shakti* and not surprisingly as corollary to it the notion of spiritual masculinity is constructed upon this ambivalence.

Gandhi on the other hand is more direct is his proclamation of this bi-unity, the transcendence of being solely man or woman and acknowledging the androgynous identity. Like the myth of *Ardhanariswar*, an incarnation of Lord Shiva as half man and half woman embodying the union of femininity and masculinity, creation and destruction, *prakriti* (primordial nature) and *purusha* (primal manliness). However, again I would suggest that his construction of spiritual masculinity— of dualism, bi-unity for a more powerful self as deployed by Gandhi in the colonial context seemed more potent than the masculinity of the colonizers. Again the subtle trope of ambivalence constituted upon the acceptance of androgyny destabilized the structure of the colonial authority which is deeply connected with the Western concept of manhood.

### **Confronting the ‘Enemy Within’: Spiritual crisis and the ‘Angry Young Man’**

The construction of aggressive, proletariat & often criminalized masculinity in the such popular films like, *Deewar*(1975), *Sholay* (1975), *Hera Pheri* (1976), *Don* (1978), *Trishul* (1978), *Muqaddar Ka Sikandar* (1978), *The Great Gambler* (1979) can not be understood in isolation from the postcolonial anxieties of post independent India. The film industry of India, considered to be a mediator of Indian culture was substantially connected with the discourse of nationalism and the nation-state, hence Indian cinema is perceived as the vehicle of socio-political discourse and ideology. However, in colonial period the Indian film industry was still in its nascent stage. As Priya Jaikumar (2003) remarks identifying colonial Indian cinema as a survivalist cinema: “Since inception, India’s film market was exploited by the United States until Indian films were able to create a domestic audience “without quota or subsidy,” consolidated with the arrival of sound technology and political independence.” (p. 83)

The overwhelming influence of Hollywood films, strategic censorship by the colonial government and a tumultuous nationalist movement limited the scope of legitimate mediation and dissemination of ideology and cultural politics through colonial Indian cinema. Though an impressive number of mythological, historical and social films were produced during this time but the scope of this paper does not allow me to delve deep into the specific traces of mythological enunciations in the representation of the colonial masculine self in Indian cinema. Rather, this article would grapple with the questions of how the notion of spirituality, one of the major constituents of the populist idea of ‘Indianness’ and its ambivalent manifestation is consciously or instinctively used to construct the ‘angry young man’ masculinity, especially in the popular Hindi films of 1970s. And in what way, that particular imagination of the masculine self is composed within the specificity of mythological insinuations that play a crucial role in response to particular political and ideological conditions.

In maternal melodrama the mother’s dedication to her son is overwhelming, as portrayed in such exceptionally successful films, *Mother India* (1957) and *Aradhana* (1969). On the other hand, films that underscore the quintessence of masculinity are commonly told from the son’s point of view, narrativizing, among other things, the hero compensating his mother for

suffering at the hands of the father. This is prominently featured in Raj Kapoor's *Awaara* (1951), *Lawaaris* (1981), Yash Chopra's *Deewar* (1975) and *Trishul* (1978). These films were extremely successful with both men and women. Almost all these films' narrative, at least implicitly, responded to the troubled and intensified restructuring of the Indian family during the second half of the twentieth century. These films, considered as a whole, express a metanarrative: shifting family politics within India's feudal-patriarchal culture giving way to capitalist patriarchy.

The transition of the construction of masculinity towards a violent, irate, outlawed, dissatisfied 'angry young man' has its roots in the period of intense political upheaval beginning in the mid-sixties. This crisis has been explained by Madhava Prasad (2000, p. 120) as "a deep disaggregation of the socio-political structure resulting in the delegitimation of the consensual ideology of the state." This period has been marked by, Indira Gandhi becoming the Prime Minister after Lal Bahadur Shastri's death in 1966 until 1975, when, amidst political unrest she declared a state of emergency which continued for eighteen months. The emergency was notorious for tyrannical suspension of civil liberties, restriction on the freedom of press and indiscriminate detention of opposition leaders. It was also infamous for Sanjay Gandhi's policy of mass sterilization and eviction of urban slums which left deep scars in the mind of the marginal disposed. Particularly, mass sterilization of male or vasectomy was identified as a threat to masculinity, which was being imposed vigorously by the state over the subaltern population. With the disintegration of the socio-political order, the middle class became open to the appeal of a new identity based on "disidentification with the 'socialist' programme in the national project". (Prasad, 2000). The ideological construction of 'angry young man's' masculinity needs to be discussed within this framework. Indian cinema or more specifically Hindi cinema is conceived as shared fantasy emanating out of the desire of the people of India linked with each other culturally and psychologically. The unfulfilled wishes, dreams and discontented desires are fulfilled like a daydream or fairytale<sup>4</sup>. (Kakar, 1996, pp. 24-27) Hence Hindi popular cinema in itself becomes myth, a social myth, as Jacob Arlow (1961) explains,

"The myth is a particular kind of communal experience. It is a special form of 'shared fantasy', and it serves to bring the individual into relationship with members of his cultural group on the basis of certain common needs. Accordingly, the myth can be studied from the point of view of its function in psychic integration" (p. 375).

Thus, in the 1970s this 'shared fantasy' involved a way out from the deep political discontent and intense disenchantment with the postcolonial independent nation-state, candidly apparent in the then prevalent proclamation in Hindi, "*Ye Azadi Jhuta Hai!*" (This freedom is a lie!). Unlike the colonial time, I would suggest that the enemy does not come from outside like the *asura* (demon) rather the government and its governance proves demonic in its austerity, failure, violence and domination. The citizens of independent India neither find the mythic nation that the nationalist leaders made them foresee, nor do they find a veritable representative state leadership for consensual governance. Instead, what they vulnerably witness is a volatile political situation, disintegration of the image of the nation from an ideal to a natural political entity revealing many inadequacy and debility.

Not surprisingly, this postcolonial crisis has analogy with a number of Indian mythological narratives, but unlike the colonial discourse of nationalism, spiritualism and masculinity, such mythic enunciations did not receive recognition and reiteration, since the exclusionary trajectory of the national modernity found such traces incompatible. The dissatisfaction of the citizens

with the policies and governance of the state authority was originating from the gradual alienation of the marginalized, inept ruling class and the exclusionary nature of the state apparatus. Unemployment, inflation and increasing class conflicts and segregating urbanization evoked a shared fantasy of escaping such dreadful socio-political condition by defeating the enemy within. The struggle against such ‘enemy within’ has a double bind. While resistance against the colonial rulers or the religious ‘other’<sup>25</sup> had no scope of transgression, since both the ‘enemy’ are alien to India and the ‘Indianness’ thus easier to confront and deracinate.

On the contrary, confronting the ‘enemy within’— going against the legal apparatus, administrative machinery, judiciary and disciplinary institutions— in other words waging a war against the different institutions of the nation-state itself involve a sense of culpability. Revolting or retaliating against a keen, a brother, even the mother requires severe reparation, even perhaps the ultimate self-punishment. But to discipline this waywardness, to restrain the debauchedness, one has to commit the supposed “sin” of going against ones own people.

The responsibilities, privileges and limitations of every role are stipulated by an undeniable law, the *sanatan* or “eternal” *dharma*, and apply equally to the most powerful as to the weakest of subjects. A common belief reiterated in various Indian mythological tales is that the authority of social institutions rests in the *dharma* they encompass rather than in practical contractual agreements and duties. Besides, it is usually assumed that social conflict, subjugation and disorder do not originate from the organization of social relations, but begin in the *adharmā* (Sanskrit antonym of *Dharma*) of those in positions of power. Since the paternalistic nation-state can not stray in the path of *adharmā* thus it is up to the sacrificial individual who would punish those villains out of his personal vengeance (but that would indirectly serve the nation) that often has roots in his improper childhood. Hence, the extra-legal citizen subject has to die a sacrificial death so that the law-abiding ideal citizen subject may remain true to his self.

This narrative trope like a myth is reiterated in a number of popular films with very little variations. Thus, in *Muqaddar Ka Sikandar* (1978) following a similar narrative trajectory, Bachchan’s character called Sikandar does the act of switching sides, positioning himself on the side of the “illegal” but morally upright margin, with an inevitable sacrificial end. In *Deewar* (1975), the male protagonist Vijay, again played by Amitabh Bachchan takes up this “sin” of going against the law and the state only to be killed in the end by his brother, Ravi, played by Shashi Kapoor, who, as a sub-inspector, remains an rightful part of the nation-state and the government. In *Sholay* (1975) Jai and Veeru played by Bachchan and Dharmendra respectively, represent the sacrificial individual who would punish the villains out of his personal vengeance and thus obliquely serving the nation. Similarly, in both *Don* (1978) and *Trishul* (1978), the male protagonist positions himself on the side of the “illegal” but at the same time morally upright location, which gave the figure its power and mass appeal.

Here, I would like to remind the metonymic contiguity between ‘family’ and the ‘nation’ being congealed with a similar emotive affection that is central to the ‘Indian joint family’ is a common rhetoric even in postcolonial discourse. Thus acting beyond the marked contour of individual agency delineated by the legal, judicial, administrative and other institutions of the nation state is akin to acting against the family, or the brother, or against the ‘mother’. The notion of spiritual masculinity so far never confronted such a crisis in regard to its response to socio-political condition. Apparently it seems that the very basic idea of spirituality will perish if one resorts to retaliate and strike against the family, the brother or more importantly the mother. But for the attainment of the ‘ideal’ repudiation of the flawed and inappropriate ideal may become necessary. The mythological parallel may remind us the popular narrative of *Parashurama* narrated in the great epics and the *Puranas*—



Seeing the charming king Gandharva; Renuka, the wife of sage Jamadagni and mother of Parashurama, sensed fleeting erotic desires for the king. Coming to know this Jamadagni became infuriated and ordered his four sons to immediately kill their mother. Matricide being the grievous sin, they refused to abide by their father's order. Being even more enraged, Jamdagni cursed his four sons to become imbecile. But the youngest of the sons, Parashurama, abiding by his father's order instantly decapitated his mother. Being very content with his son's obedience, Jamadagni sought to bless him with boons. Being asked what blessings he wants for himself, Parashurama asserted that the first thing that he wishes is his mother must be resurrected immediately and she should not be able to recollect what happened to her. Moreover, he should not be sinned for matricide; his imbecile brothers should gain back their normalcy and he should be able to lead a long, invincible life.

The interesting aspect of this mythic narrative is that after the matricide the first thing that the son, Parashurama wanted was that his mother should be resurrected and she should not have any memory of this incident. Thus by exercising the *Ksatriya dharma* (duty), he exterminated the flawed, deviated 'ideal', which his brothers could not exercise being limited with onerous Brahminic values. On the other hand, by asking for resurrecting his executed mother and more importantly by praying to make her mother forget that incident he displays his *Brahmana guna* (virtue). A perfect blend of *Brahmana guna and Ksatriya dharma* which manifests in response to imminent crisis – thus the sin of going against the institutions of the nation-state akin to revolting against ones own family, is mitigated as the intention is to reinstate the 'ideal' by retaliating against the 'flawed ideal'.

Hence the notion of spirituality in this construction of postcolonial masculinity emerging not out of a crisis from an alien regime but the newly discovered flaw and incoherence in the delusion of ideal. However, the discursive construction of masculinity is again formed on an ambivalence of the notion of spirituality, an ambivalence which easily accommodates violent, irate, outlawed actions at the same time, legitimizes it with the accepted self-punishment by being violently wounded, beaten and very often being dead. A popular cinematic trope in Hindi cinema of 1970s— the almost inevitable murder or death of the ladylove inscribe this attempted project of recuperating a deviated, spoiled 'ideal', while the suffering mother, embodies the tormented, anguished ideal which attempts to remain pure till the end. It is this untainted ideal that the male hero wants to unite with, an analogy with the unattainable reunion with the mother.<sup>6</sup>

Thus the construction of the 'angry young man', I wish to suggest, is evoked in the specificity of the post-independent crisis of the 'ideal national-state', and to rectify this 'flawed ideal' the violent, irate and dissatisfied masculinity is formed which firstly, becomes a construction of the shared fantasy of the population and secondly it plays with an ambivalence of good and bad, sacred and profane, spiritual and non-spiritual— all these a corollary to an ambivalence of Brahminic and Ksatriyahood. Here again, the mythic character of Parashurama<sup>7</sup> emblematically embodies the constituents of such a violent yet eventually sacrosanct masculinity, whose very formation, whose very history, legitimizes the violence, brutality. Often his foreseeable death underscores two issues. First, that such digression to rectify the ideal is necessary but will be sternly castigated and second to unite with the ideal one has to undertake rigorous penance perhaps a new birth.

These mythological narratives found a comfortable location in the cultural memory and made possible the wide acceptance and popularity of the ‘angry young man’ character in 1970s and 1980s. Hindi popular cinema like a social myth or perhaps akin to fairy tales, expresses the shared fantasy, which becomes the site for the overdetermined formation of masculinity with its ambivalence, its doubling and its temporality.

## Conclusion

In this paper I have not tried to conduct a close textual readings of films to discuss about the representation of the ‘angry young man’ in the popular Hindi films of 1970s, rather my intention was to put forward few conjectures that may serve as an alternative interpretative framework to comprehend a social phenomena and its mediation in popular culture. The formation of the aggressive and often criminalized masculinity on screen, with its overdetermined masculine subjectivity underscores an ambivalence which has traces of Indian mythological narratives nurtured in the shared fantasy and the cultural memory of the cinemagoers. Popular cultural representations, whether through Hindi cinema or in any other form share a complex relationship with the ideological formation of the masculine self; but to understand the discursive formation of even such a clearly ideological and historically specific construction of the ‘angry young man’ it might be constructive to employ a psychoanalytical perspective interwoven with mythological traces. This trajectory is perhaps more accommodating to the apparent contradictions between the spiritual, ascetic notions of masculine subjectivity and the aggressive, violent masculine self. One of the objectives of this article was to suggest that it would be unwise to isolate the mythic and the fantastic from the political, ideological and historical, since they constitute and alter each other in the discursive formation of the subject. The altering notions of masculinity in Indian cinema, with the shifting nature of spiritual, political and ideological underpinnings become apparent in post-liberalization period of India as well, when the representation of the masculinity on screen altered considerably in the face of rising consumerism and globalization.

## Notes

1. *Ksatriya*, is second highest in status of the four *varnas*, traditionally the military or ruling class of the traditional Vedic-Hindu social system as outlined by the Vedas and the Laws of Manu. *Ksatriya* means holder of *ksatra* (authority). According to Manu, due to the eventual differences in occupations, people ended up in different *jātis* and caste. Those who studied the Vedas became known as *Brahmins*, those who practiced trade became *Vaishya*, those who labored became *Sudra*, and those who took up martial arts became *Kshatriyas*.
2. *Sanatana Dharma* denotes ‘eternal natural law’ created by divine sources. This is eternal and ever present and carries substantial spiritual and religious implications. However in the discourse of nationalism the interpretation of *Sanatana Dharma* received political undertones. While the notion of *Sanatana Dharma* has the potentiality to go beyond limited religious and ritualistic articulations but during the colonial and postcolonial period the term has been specifically exploited to refer to exclusively Hindu identity and practices. Hence it is not surprising that the non-believers in *Sanatana Dharma* did not only include British colonizers but also Muslims.
3. The term *satyagraha* was Gandhi’s invention based on the conjunction of two words: *satya*, meaning ‘truth’, and ‘*agraha*’ meaning firmness.
4. For classical Freudian myth, dreams and fairytales are alike. It is the contemporary Freudians who maintain that myth, dreams and fairytales are different from each other. And the difference occurs mainly on the aspects of wish fulfillment or denial and serving the superego, ego or the id. For a detailed discussion on myth see, Bruno Bettelheim, *The Use of Enchantment* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977)
5. As I have already mentioned the ‘religious other’ in colonial and postcolonial time is primarily Muslim; besides it also involves any religion other than Hinduism. Even though radical Hindu nationalist groups

like *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS)[ National Volunteers' Organisation] emerged during the colonial period but it became perhaps more proactive in post-independence era, especially endorsing *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP). Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Dayanand Saraswati, Keshav Baliram Hedgewar and other radical Hindu nationalists with their exclusionary often militant interpretations of *Hindutva* reinstated 'Hinduness' as intrinsic to the nation. For a detailed discussion see, Dayanand Saraswati, *The Light of Truth in Sources of Indian Tradition*-Volume II-Modern India and Pakistan, ed. Stephen Hay (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1988); Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Hindutva* (New Delhi: Hindi Sahitya Sadan, 2003 edition) and Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999)

6. Amitabh Bachchan became a kind of personification of this scheme, with a certain amount of integration of star value within the narrative that was hitherto unattainable. While several stars were successful in forming a star-image, only Bachchan, who enjoyed unprecedented success, eventually evolved into a national figure. The turning point came with the scripts written by Salim-Javed, screenwriter duo. *Filmfare*, a popular Indian film magazine, in a special issue on cinema of 1970s commented, "They called him the One Man Industry and for sixteen years he churned out hits with assembly line regularity. *Zanjeer*, *Deewar*, *Don*, *Amar Akbar Anthony*, *Muqaddar Ka Sikandar*, *Trishul*, *Kasme Vaade*, *Kaala Patthar*, *Laawaris*, *Kaalaa*, *Naseeb*, *Namak Halal*, *Andha Kanoon*, *Coolie*, *Mard*, *Geraftaar*...Never before had a star seen this kind of success, and for so long."
7. The mythological narrative of Parashurama's birth also underlines this ambivalence. Parashurama's grandmother Satyabati received a boon from her father-in-law, the great sage Vrigo. Satyabati being childless, asked for two potions from Vrigo; one for herself and another for her mother. The potion meant for Satyabati had Brahmanic qualities and the other one meant for her mother had *Kshtriya* attributes, since she belonged to a *Kshtriya* dynasty. But due to her mother's instigation, Satyabati unknowingly consumed the potion with *Kshtriya teja* and her mother had the potion with Brahminic attributes. So Satyabati's son, in spite of being born in a Brahmin family will bear *Kshtriya* attributes and her mother's progeny will bear Brahminic attributes in spite of being born in a *Kshtriya* lineage. After knowing this Satyabati, pleaded to Vrigo for not letting her son yield *Kshtriya* attributes. But since the potions were irrevocable, Vrigo informed Satyabati that her son will not bear *Kshtriya* traits but her grandson will display *Kshtriyahood*. Shortly, Satyabati gave birth to Jamadagni, who later married Renuka and had five sons, the youngest of them Parashurama, inherited the distinct *Kshtriya* traits in spite of being a Brahmin.

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