

BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS DE LIVRES

Bollywood Sounds: The Cosmopolitan Mediations of Hindi Film Song.

2015. Jayson Beaster-Jones. New York: Oxford University Press. 264 pp.

NILANJANA BHATTACHARJYA
Arizona State University

Jayson Beaster-Jones's *Bollywood Sounds* argues that Hindi film songs have been shaped by sources from different regions of South Asia as much, if not more, than distant, international sources. Furthermore, he contends that the producers of this music are cosmopolitan insofar as their music exceeds conventional borders even while retaining a sense of local rootedness (Beaster-Jones 2015: 11). In doing so, he eschews the tiresome binary that characterizes so many discussions of Indian popular music that attempt to categorize music into either "Indian" or "Western" influences. If we acknowledge that the boundaries of the Indian nation-state have been porous since its independence in 1947, and that there is a diversity of regional cultures within India's borders, this binary (and the scholarly studies that depend on it) loses its relevance, and Beaster-Jones's argument proves crucial.

Given that I have been teaching an undergraduate course that focuses on Hindi films and their music for the last ten years and relied on a syllabus that cobbles together articles and book chapters with my own notes and translations, I am aware of the difficulty of writing an accessible survey of the history of Hindi film music, but have long recognized the

need for it. *Bollywood Sounds* is the first book to address that need explicitly. It surveys a relatively long span of time (1943-2013), and the chapters in this book proceed chronologically, each covering 10 to 15 years. Given that this time period includes thousands of Bollywood songs, Beaster-Jones begins each chapter with an analysis of a representative song from the period covered, followed by a more general discussion of historical developments in the role of the music director (composer), recording and broadcasting technologies, playback singers, and a more focused discussion of one or two music directors and a significant song or two associated with them. Beaster-Jones writes:

One cannot examine the significance of songs in Hindi film songs solely in musical terms. Rather, even at the earliest stages of song production, musical meaning is produced by various agents in and through the confluence of visual, aural, narrative, and economic resources brought together to produce a film. That is to say, songs are written for moments in the narrative that communicate a complex of musical and extra-musical information. (35)

This confluence demands that a comprehensive analysis of a Hindi film song adopts, on one hand, a multivalent approach that examines simultaneous visual, aural, and literary texts as well as the song's role in the narrative; and on

the other hand, an examination of each song as a distinct entity, always potentially independent of the film. This book focuses more on musical elements in the aural text than on the visual and literary texts, causing some discussions to miss the depth and richness that draw so many audiences to these films and their music.

For example, the chapter on the 1960s ends with an analysis of S.D. Burman's song "Roop Tera Mastana" ("Your Intoxicating Beauty") in the 1969 film *Aradhana* (*Adoration*). As Beaster-Jones notes, it was one of the most sexually charged songs to appear at that time. After summarizing *Aradhana*'s plot, he establishes the song's context: a tense confrontation between two lovers who hurriedly married without the presence of their community because the husband is about to be deployed as an Air Force pilot. Beaster-Jones cites Philip Lutgendorf's key observation (2016) that the couple circles around a fire as if they were performing a Hindu marriage. He explains that Anand Bakshi's references to intoxication in the lyrics draw on a long history of Sufi influences in Urdu poetry and lyrics in Hindi songs that conflate divine love and romantic love.

Finally, he begins his musical analysis, which focuses on the song's tempo and meter, instrumentation, and clave rhythm evoking a jazz rhythm section, as well as solo instruments highlighted in the accompaniment, such as the accordion, saxophone, and violin. His focus on the instruments and the rhythms establishes the possibility that composer R. D. Burman, whose songs are associated with Latin, jazz, and rock and who

is also S. D. Burman's son, had more to do with the song than is commonly acknowledged. Still Beaster-Jones omits mentioning the singer Kishore Kumar's hushed, almost conspiratorial but alluring timbre that augments the audience's sense of imminent physical intimacy. Similarly, although Beaster-Jones mentions the saxophone, he doesn't draw attention to the memorable extended saxophone solo, which would have provided an opportunity to highlight the history and role of unnamed musicians like the late Manohari Singh, or explain how the saxophone has shaped the identity of so many significant songs by adding a timbre simultaneously evoking the *shehnai* (a South Asian double reed instrument) and the global sounds of jazz.

Beaster-Jones describes the darkness and role of the camera as it circles around and around the couple over the course of the song, drawing them ever closer to an inevitable conclusion in a breathtakingly virtuosic and claustrophobic single shot that builds tension over the entire song sequence. Although Beaster-Jones mentions that the sequence is one long shot, he doesn't describe its effect, which is crucial to understanding the song's power within the film as well as its enduring popularity.

Beaster-Jones integrates a more personal and vivid reading of certain songs and scenes alongside lucid accounts of historical and social context, and his authorial voice is refreshing. The book opens with a visceral account of his attendance at a commercial screening of the film *Bunty aur Babli* (*Bunty and Babli*) as part of his fieldwork in South

Mumbai in 2005. Explaining the common Bollywood practice of releasing the soundtrack and music video “teasers” before the film, he describes his physical experience hearing the songs at full volume with a powerful bass while watching the film amidst a cheering audience in the cinema hall. He then segues into a deft analysis of the film’s popular song, “Kajra Re” (“Your Kohl-lined Eyes”), a noteworthy song in terms of its visual narrative, as well as its music. Introducing the star Aishwarya Rai as a courtesan who dances and lip-syncs to Alisha Chinai’s voice, the song serves as a conventional “item number” that is performed in a *kotha* (salon). Audiences in the know, however, understand an extra layer of meaning when they recognize that she flirts and dances with her real-life future fiancé and father-in-law while she performs the song. Beaster-Jones highlights the decision to use the 1990s Indipop singer Alisha Chinai’s voice and identifies the lyrics as stemming from a women’s folk tradition in Uttar Pradesh, *kajali*, which is sung in the rainy season. He observes how the harmonium, *tabla*, *santur*, and electric bass accompany a solo female voice and a male voice that recites later *tabla bols* (rhythmic syllables). Later, he astutely notes that the sound of women’s ankle bells is added to the mix, along with a male chorus that repeats the hook of the chorus and provides sharp whistles. Similar close readings of musical events appear in Beaster-Jones’s analysis throughout the book; written at a level that will engage both neophytes and experienced scholars, they comprise some of the book’s most significant contributions.

“Kajra Re” is a wonderful song with which to open the book because ten years after the film’s release, the song is still well known. That said, I was surprised that Beaster-Jones didn’t address the more conventional reading of this song as a *mujra-qawwali* – a courtesan song and dance performance (a significant genre in Hindi film songs on its own), often accompanied by the stylistic markers of the Sufi devotional form, *qawwali*. In most *qawwalis*, we hear the *tabla*, harmonium, and a male chorus (the *qawwali party*) amplify and repeat the hook of the song until the song intensifies in speed and urgency, which happens in this instance. The lyrics’ obsessive references to the kohl-lined black eyes of her beloved, who has disturbed her peace (in Old Delhi, no less), evoke the many songs written from the perspective of the mortal woman Radha, who pines away for her dark, divine lover, the Hindu god Krishna. The superimposition of these lyrics onto a *qawwali* and its visual and aural performance as a courtesan’s *mujra*, add even more richness to this song and likely contribute to its phenomenal appeal to a wide audience.

My attention to these types of omissions perhaps relate to my own desire to see more scholarly analyses of film songs that transcend, and more accurately disrupt, the boundaries of any single discipline. So much Hindi film music scholarship from film studies pays little, if any, attention to background music, songs, and song sequences, but scholars such as Monika Mehta (2011), Sangita Gopal (2011), Lalitha Gopalan (2002), Corey Creekmur (2001), Neepa Majumdar (2009), Tejaswini Ganti (2012),

Daisy Rockwell (2003), and Aswin Punathambekar (2013) have changed the scholarly landscape over the last decade to strengthen ethnomusicological perspectives. The fact that Hindi film songs effect such a disruption and yield a near-maddening excess of possible readings delights me even as they render writing a book-length survey of them an unenviable task. *Bollywood Sounds*'s ability to integrate detailed, insightful analyses of individual songs with such thorough, lucid, and well-researched discussions of social and historical contexts results in its offering the most readable and accessible account of the history of Hindi film songs so far. 🍀

REFERENCES

- Creekmur, Corey K. 2001. Picturizing American Cinema: Hindi Film Songs and the Last Days of Genre. In *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music*, 375-406. Ed. Pamela Robertson Wojcik and Arthur Knight. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Ganti, Tejaswini. 2012. *Producing Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Gopal, Sangita. 2011. *Conjugations: Marriage and Form in New Bollywood Cinema*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gopalan, Lalitha. 2002. *Cinema of Interruptions: Action Genres in Contemporary Indian Cinema*. London: British Film Institute.
- Lutgendorf, Philip. 2016. Films | Indian Cinema | Aradhana. University of Iowa. <http://www.uiowa.edu/indiancinema/aradhana> (accessed February 5).
- Majumdar, Neepa. 2009. *Wanted Cultured Ladies Only! Female Stardom and Cinema in India, 1930s-1950s*. Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
- Mehta, Monika. 2011. *Censorship and Sexuality in Bombay Cinema*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Morcom, Anna. 2007. *Hindi Film Songs and the Cinema*. Aldershot, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Punathambekar, Aswin. 2013. *From Bombay to Bollywood: The Making of a Global Media Industry*. New York: New York University Press.
- Rockwell, Daisy. 2003. Visionary Choreographies: Guru Dutt's Experiments in Film Song Picturisation. *South Asian Popular Culture* 1 (2):109-24.
- Rap and Hip Hop Culture.** 2014. Fernando Orejuela. New York: Oxford University Press. 272pp., 17 Listening Guides.

JUSTIN ADAMS BURTON
Rider University

Totaling just over 250 pages, *Rap and Hip Hop Culture* offers a very broad overview of rap that serves the book's intended target audience: students with no special training in music. I lead with the book's length in order to set expectations about what Orejuela does and doesn't intend to do: there's a good chance your favourite song isn't ana-