

***The known unknown: The 'Bollywoodized' Imaginary of India among Twice Migrant communities in the Netherlands***

*Introduction:*

***Media feed the homesickness of first generation migrants who use movies and television series to educate their children about their country of origin. (Gillespie 1995:78-95)***

Bollywood brings a plethora of elements with it; Song and dance sequences, scenic backdrops, celebrated rituals, dialogues that echo in your ears year after another, and the most cherished stories that connect. Bollywood has enjoyed the status of being the largest film industry in the world in terms of production for a long time, producing more than 1500 films per year (McCarthy, 2014). A major part of these productions is the Popular Hindi Cinema, commonly known as Bollywood. Bollywood has influenced many a trends in fashion, rituals, and also travel. The act of popularizing locations by Hindi films has been prevalent for decades, as can be seen in the exemplar cases of *An Evening in Paris* (1967) or *Love in Tokyo* (1966) to point to a few, which introduced the audiences to a different world. Given the lack of internet infrastructure back in those years, the awareness and curiosity among the Indian audiences about the locations picturized, can be potentially attributed to the films themselves. In addition to the awareness, the yesteryear trends are finding a place in the contemporary tourism industry. It also holds true in case of a reverse gaze, where popular Hindi cinema set on Indian ground generates the kind of aforementioned awareness and curiosity amongst the diasporic Indians, moulding an idealized imaginary of India, its culture, places, people and language. The magnanimity of the Bollywood film industry also translates into the films being exported globally for the global audiences. Therefore, this research intends to lay focus on Diasporic tourism, inspired by Bollywood films.

Traveling under the inspiration of Bollywood films has been prevalent, although not much academic focus has been laid on it. Films like *3 Idiots* (2009) or *Haidar* (2015) for instance, have been instrumental in uplifting and symbolizing the remotest locales of Ladakh and Kashmir respectively in the northern parts of India and generating tourism flows in that direction. A pertinent case in view is the surge of domestic tourism to Ladakh post the release of *3 Idiots*; The tourism went up by 194.38% by the end of 2011 (Angmo & Dolma, 2015), and is telling of the fact that films tend to play a significant role in influencing the decision making of potential tourists about travel destinations. One could further also reflect on this phenomenon of Bollywood tourism influential in driving domestic tourists abroad, by drawing on the exemplar film- *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995); the movie that introduced the Indian mass audiences to Europe. It was regarded as one of the most influential films that ushered the influx of Indian film audiences/tourists to Switzerland. An indelible association is drawn between the Swiss Alps and the movie, courtesy- the glorifying representation of the Swiss landscape in the film, especially the song sequences. Very naturally, the Swiss government recognized the impact this film had in ushering the Indian audiences to Switzerland thereby leading to a boom in Swiss tourism economy and honored the late director of the film Yash Chopra with a statue in Interlaken (Chandrasekhar, 2016). Such examples from the past, still find relevance in the present scenario. In 2013, over 4.6 million overnight stays in Switzerland were recorded by tourists from India (Rajan, 2014). How much of this is film driven audience, is hard to tell, but the impact of this single film still echoes in these Swiss mountains. Many scholars argue on similar lines that movies do persuade audiences to turn tourists and visit the places shown in the movies (Riley & Van Doren, 1992; Beeton, 2005; Kim, 2012 etc.) One can

cognate these instances into Beeton's (2005) definition of Film Tourism, which is the act of traveling to places under the influence of films. However, these tourism flows are only subsequent to certain imaginaries that people develop about a place. The step prior to actually being motivated enough to travel to a place includes knowing about it, then thinking about it, and associating oneself with the place. This stage, where people associate themselves with a place before conducting tourism that is inspired by a film they are watching, is the stage this research intends to focus on.

These cases are only reflective of an increasingly popular trend that has given an impetus to a tourist's imagination, and therefore movement and border crossing in directions that cinema leads them in. The sheer number of dedicated domestic and international Bollywood themed tours can be seen harboring the offerings of the tourism market.<sup>1</sup> This trend of shooting on scenic locations, and cashing on the aspiration that follows, however, is not only peculiar to some shining examples, but is slowly becoming a norm realizing the potential of the Indian middle class audiences turning into tourists. In the past decade, the Indian middle class has risen into the global tourist streams given the marked increase in their disposable personal income and a growing need to garner more international cultural experiences. A fairly recent report confirms that the fastest growing consumption sector in India, is travel and tourism which adds to the relevance of the study of this increasingly popular trend (Kershner & Huq, 2011).

According to anthropologist (Appadurai, 1990) in a world of transnational migration and movement of people and goods, it is the well-known stories from movies and TV shows that still provide something to hang on to for the world citizens far from 'home', which is especially true for Indian diasporic communities living the entire world. These films provide building blocks for the construction of a cohesive diasporic identity. The trends in consumption of cinema are telling of how vulnerable the diasporic audiences are to the notions of home, identity and belonging. Drawing on these notions of Home and Belonging, Bandyopadhyay R. (2008) argues that for the first generation audiences who have had no bodily connection to India before, Bollywood movies enable them to romanticize their homeland thereby creating a desire for visiting their roots. The Indian film industry has traversed its journey from being called the dream factory to the nostalgia factory, by touching upon themes that cater to needs of the homesick diasporic communities. (Verstappen & Rutten, 2007) Bollywood films, given their popularity are exported worldwide, and have a widespread reach, as it reaches the largest diaspora in the world, the Indian diaspora (United Nations, 2016). So the question then arises, whether this cinematic awareness of India fuels homesickness amongst the Indian diaspora, and to what extent do the Bollywood films connect with and motivate these physically detached audiences to move in the direction of home, albeit for the temporary act of tourism.

The concept of Indian diaspora is however not a straightforward one; It is a result of decades of transnational migrations of Indians who have been displaced from their homeland under varying circumstances and phases. Therefore, understanding who the diaspora is and what is their idea of home, becomes crucial in developing an argument on the diasporic consumption of these films and their role in the conception of a Bollywoodized imagery of India. The ideas of home and belonging amongst the Non-resident Indian (NRI) community has been often spoken about in the light of Bollywood, as it gives the detached diasporic audiences something to hang on to (Puthambekar, 2015; Bandyopadhyay, 2012). However, it is observed that many of these studies are done towards the first or second generation Non-resident Indian Americans, who still have the scope to maintain physical contact with India. The lacunae is however felt in a deeper understanding of the formations of Indian diaspora under the pre and post-

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<sup>1</sup> [www.bollywoodtours.in](http://www.bollywoodtours.in), [www.filmyholidays.com](http://www.filmyholidays.com), [www.bollywoodtourism.com](http://www.bollywoodtourism.com), to name a few, offer a plethora of Bollywood themed tours, including slum tours and studio tours.

colonial conditions. Barring a couple of studies (Verstappen & Rutten, 2009), there is a lack of attention felt on the initial internal dialogue and feeling, which is the process before conducting any particular visitation. These softer notions, which spark both interest and affinity in the 'place' due to their identification with home and their belongingness is rather elusive in Film Tourism research, and especially so in a non-western context of India, given the large diasporic audience it boasts of. It is indeed of great value, to lay importance on these feelings, not only to understand the diasporic perception of India through Bollywood, but also their motivations to travel to India. These findings can further enhance the policy orientation towards Diasporic tourists. The wealthy diasporic audiences were spending in the foreign value currency to watch cinema, and therefore the films were relatively earning much more abroad than in the domestic markets (Dwyer, 2002). When the film industry in Bollywood realized the potential audiences in the diasporic communities abroad, it became keen on wooing them and the imagery, and look and feel of the films changed. A new approach was developed which (Gopal & Moorti, 2008) have called the "transnational optic". Having said that, Bollywood films aired abroad, ascertains a certain cultural presence for Indians. The films emphasized why being rooted to your own cultural tradition was important to safeguard their identity in a foreign land. The filmmakers therefore took the diasporic audiences very seriously, right from adjusting the cinematographic elements to having a more relatable story line adapted to match the diasporic storyline. However, this is just one sided production perspective.

To understand the influence of Bollywood on the diaspora and the spatial affiliations they develop towards India, it is first crucial to understand who this diaspora comprises of also how and in what situations these movements were undertaken. Emigration from India has been widely varied in terms of *historical contexts, causes, and consequences of migration*. Landy et al. (2004: 204-4) have categorized the Indian emigration from the historical to the contemporary period into six broad phases ranging from merchants who went to East Africa or Southeast Asia before the 16<sup>th</sup> century, to the Migration of contract workers to the Gulf countries, and to the movement of the indentured laborers to colonial empires like the Caribbean, Fiji, Mauritius, to the recent migration of knowledge workers to developed countries (USA) (Safran, Sahoo, & Lal, 2009) Of these movements, the one of peculiar interest to me given the colonial emigration that began to the Dutch colonies in the Caribbean: The movement of indentured labor to Suriname. 34,000 Indian workers were exported as indentured labor to work in the plantations in the Dutch colony of Suriname. This was one of the major wave of emigration of Indian laborers from the British India to Dutch colonies of the Caribbean. Most of these emigrants were lower-caste peasants from the Bhojpuri-speaking region of what is now Bihar in Uttar Pradesh- who were illiterate, but they carried with them the memories of their rich traditions, customs, and rituals which they continued to preserve and cherish even during the difficult periods of indentured life in plantations (MEA, 2001:76)

The Surinamese Hindustanis in the Netherlands who are called "Twice Migrants"; were originally descendents of the indentured labour who migrated from the erstwhile Bihar in the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, to the former Dutch colony of Suriname in the late nineteenth century. Bihar was alternatively called Hindustan, which is why this group of people was called the *Hindustani's*. After their contracts expired, only one third of the Hindustani's returned to British India. In and around 1975, when Suriname gained independence, many Surinamese migrated to the Netherlands for varying socio-political reasons; to have better job opportunities, and to retain their Dutch passport were some of the primary reasons. This specific case of diaspora, twice migrants, are the people who arrived in the Netherlands, via an intermediate country (Suriname) in addition to the country their roots trace back to (India).

The Netherlands enjoys a wide diversity in ethnic and cultural groups, and almost 12% of the entire population is 2<sup>nd</sup> Generation non-western (Weiner, n.d). However, since the Indian Diaspora is so widely spread, it is a mere practical consideration to lay emphasis on one aspect of the diaspora, the Hindustani twice migrants. In social scientific literature, there is a big lacunae in the domain of twice migrants. Twice migrants with an Indian descent, and other intermediary countries, and their eventual movement to the Netherlands is worth laying focus. This case is further made interesting by the lack of physical contact the Hindustani's now have with India, and yet develop ideas about India through movies. I could further justify why The Netherlands makes for an interesting case study in the light of Twice Migrants and Bollywood tourism, is the erstwhile colonial affiliations India shared with the Netherlands. The Twice migrants chosen in this case, are PIO's (People of Indian Origin) currently residing in the Netherlands.

### **Research question:**

The primary motive of this research is to understand what imaginaries of India are articulated and contested by the twice migrant communities in the Netherlands. This research taps into the questions such as- *To what extent do the People of Indian Origin (PIO's)/ "Twice Migrants" in The Netherlands are inspired by films to travel into the destinations popularized by the Bollywood films?* I also draw on a sub-question: *How does this diasporic community identify with their roots in this process?*

The above questions motivate the direction of this paper, and result in an overarching research question:

*How do the 'Twice Migrants' without any bodily connection to India in the Netherlands identify with and are inspired to travel to India under the influence of Bollywood cinema?*

### **Themes identified**

To date based on the data collected, the following themes have been identified:

1. Bollywood as a mode to learn Hindi
2. Negotiating between Indian roots and westernness
3. "India is much more than Bollywood"
4. "I feel more of an Indian than Dutch or Surinamese": The broken bridge

### **Research Methodology**

An enquiry into the personal notions of home, belonging, identity and the relevance of Bollywood cinema in the lives of the physically detached twice migrated individuals requires a thorough understanding of what goes on in their minds. A methodology that therefore fits the nature of this study best is the face-to-face semi-structured interview which involves conversation, discussion as well as questioning (Newton, 2010). Interviews will ensure collection of a rich subjective data that will give a deeper insight into the respondent's associations and imaginations that on-site observations may lack. Empirical data will be collected, employing one of the well-known approaches for assessing insights into issues; the semi-structured or in-depth interview method. The interview will lead to construction of knowledge in the domain through the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). 24 in-depth interviews will be conducted where the respondents are asked questions which deal with their ideas of self, home, and in a progressive manner assess the role of Bollywood in idealizing those notions in the minds of these twice migrants. The interviews will be supported with a

framework of pre-set questions to keep the researcher aware and avoid possible digressions in the interview. Another advantage of opting for a semi-structured interview is the scope that it gives for dealing with themes and topics of discussion that emerge during the conversation without diverting from the research focus. A case-study design is adopted to understand the peculiar case of Indian diaspora, i.e. the twice migrants. It makes it particularly interesting to study this group since they bear no physical contact with India, yet from what literature indicates, have steady idealized imaginaries of the place. This would imply that these imaginaries are perpetuated in their minds via stories, films or other parallel media.

### **Sampling**

Potential respondents will be identified through cultural forums on Facebook and other social-cultural situations. I will visit movie halls playing Popular Hindi Cinema and also assess the audience around and approach them. Snowballing will also be helpful in identifying other suitable participants and be screened for eligibility based on two selection criteria. These respondents will be chosen purposively based on a selection criteria that they are of Indian descent, Surinamese history, and are currently living in the Netherlands. It is not imperative that they are born in The Netherlands. Another criteria applied on the chosen sample is that they should be regular audiences of Bollywood films, and have intentions of going to India at some point or would have visited India before. The term regular here needs definition; the respondents should out of their own interest watch Bollywood movies. The social setting and the frequency of it is not taken into account, as them being choosy is also reflective of their choices. The age group is no bar, however so far the average age of the respondents has been 35, it can be safely assumed to be an appropriate and mature age to develop certain feelings about home, belonging and the connection thereof, that ages any lower would presumably fail to develop. I intend to lay emphasis on all socio-economic groups (A Taxi driver, to a Dutch-Indian beauty pageant winner, and small-large business owners to Dutch government employees are some of the respondents I have spoken to as of now) to not let any factors of class and occupation have any bearing on the results of this study. The field area set for the purpose of this study is going to be The Netherlands. In sum, twice migrated individuals with an Indian origin, with affection for Bollywood cinema, currently residing in the Netherlands will be selected by a non-probability purposive sampling technique for this study.

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