



**India through re-Orientalist Lenses: Vicarious Indulgence  
and Vicarious Redemption**

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**Title:****India through re-Orientalist Lenses: Vicarious Indulgence and Vicarious Redemption****Abstract:**

Re-Orientalism, initially defined as the perpetration of Orientalism by ‘Orientals’ (Lau 2009), is a discourse which comes out of and is inescapably informed by postcolonial and diasporic legacies. The investigation of re-Orientalism has revealed new, even radical strategies of eastern identity construction which, while not escaping Orientalism, manage to Orientalize subversively and with considerable self-awareness. This essay highlights two strategies currently being utilized in the negotiation of contemporary Indian self-identity: vicarious indulgence in poverty literature and vicarious redemption in Bollywood heritage films. The first part of the article notes how the discourse of ‘Dark India’ via Indian writing in English (IWE) has become not only a re-Orientalist practice, but most relevantly a re-Orientalist strategy, designed to challenge and deconstruct the rhetoric of ‘India Shining,’ and to consciously pander to a western appetite for voyeuristic viewings of India as backward, poverty-stricken and crime-ridden. The second part of the essay argues that the reweaving of the independence struggle within post-2000 Bollywood heritage films (BHF) vicariously redeems British colonialists by representing white British characters facilitating Indian gallantry and heroism, thus constructing hybrid and more palatable depictions of Indian identities. In sum, the article finds re-Orientalist discourse today increasingly and strategically utilizing elements of self-reflexivity and demonstrating new tones and themes of satire, subversion, self-mockery, reconciliation and artistic indulgence.

**Keywords:**

re-Orientalism, Indian writing in English (IWE), Bollywood heritage films (BHF), vicarious indulgence, vicarious redemption

**Main text:****Introduction**

Edward Said’s 1978 Orientalism theory constituted a pioneering attempt to demonstrate how the East had long been textually represented by the West, and how ‘India’ (a vexed formulation, along with ‘East’ and ‘West’) had, therefore, been in part fabricated by the West. The West had categorized the East, imposing identifying characteristics, defining the East as the West’s alter ego and hence keeping these cultural constructs in sharp dichotomy. Productively engaging with Orientalism, re-Orientalism theory, initially defined as the perpetration of Orientalism by ‘Orientals’ (Lau 2009), recognizes that even though India’s cultural identities, rife with the binary opposites of Orientalism, are now fashioned by self-representation to a larger degree, they still draw on western referential points. Brought about by India’s current global positioning, a critical re-routing of Orientalist discourse is taking place. Re-Orientalism differs from Orientalism in its manner of and reasons for referencing the West: while challenging the

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3 metanarratives of Orientalism, re-Orientalism sets up alternative metanarratives of its  
4 own in order to articulate eastern identities, simultaneously deconstructing and  
5 reinforcing Orientalism. It is precisely this complexity of identitarian negotiation,  
6 within India as well as with the West, which this article focuses upon.

7 While remaining eastern in voice, the discourse of 're-Orientalism' is a discourse which  
8 is an 'orientally'-generated discourse coming out of postcolonial and diasporic legacies,  
9 of which it is acutely aware. Unlike Orientalism, re-Orientalism does not rely on the  
10 binaries of 'India' and the 'West'; it is based on a nuanced reading of both,  
11 accommodating the vital role of diasporic reception and production in countries such as  
12 post-liberalization India. As such, an investigation of re-Orientalism must be attentive  
13 not only to the present diversity of postcolonial audiences and readerships, but also to  
14 the different sites of cultural production. In this understanding, a 'western' audience or  
15 readership can also be regarded as a diasporic one, while IWE is being produced both in  
16 and outside India. This porous space of South Asian cultural formations, shaped by  
17 different discourses, practices and political contexts, was influentially defined by Avtar  
18 Brah in the late 1990s as "inhabited", not only by those who have migrated and their  
19 descendants, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous'  
20 (1996, 209). While, historically, the concept of re-Orientalism has been used almost  
21 exclusively in relation to diasporic cultural production, mapping these interconnections  
22 is central to addressing the complexity of negotiation between India and the West  
23 involved in cultural production today.

24 Aiming to develop current studies on re-Orientalism, this essay provides a conceptual  
25 grid which will contribute to the establishment of a working framework for  
26 understanding the present-day textual representations of the 'Orient' by 'Orientals.'  
27 With the purpose of broadening the scope and application of the study of re-  
28 Orientalism, this investigation identifies and proceeds to examine two processes of  
29 cultural self-construction, each corresponding to a discursive strategy in Indian cultural  
30 production: vicarious indulgence in poverty literature within IWE, and vicarious  
31 redemption in BHF.

32 The first section of this essay analyses how the discourse of 'Dark India' via IWE has  
33 become not only a re-Orientalist practice, but most relevantly a re-Orientalist strategy.  
34 This strategy, employed by mainstream literary social realism fiction in IWE, indulges  
35 in the unpalatable aspects of Indian poverty, depicting the underbelly of society with  
36 grim relish and rubbing the noses of readers in the grime and muck of India's material  
37 poverty and moral depravations. This literary trend seems designed to challenge and  
38 deconstruct the rhetoric of 'India Shining,' but stands accused of deliberately pandering  
39 to a known western craving for voyeuristic viewings of India as backward, poverty-  
40 stricken and crime-ridden. It does so, it might be argued, in a subversive manner, in a  
41 tone simultaneously mocking and self-mocking, serving up what the western palate  
42 appears to desire unto a surfeit which will deliberately and unwholesomely over-satiate.  
43 The second section analyses the ways India has been recently writing an alternative  
44 narrative for self-identification through historical revisionism, particularly through the  
45 redemption of the British colonialists in BHF. Bollywood, as the foremost cultural  
46 industry in India, logically emerges as a privileged site to articulate experiences and  
47 anxieties, and to negotiate transitions connected to globalization. In line with a  
48 nationalist historiography which regarded the leaders of the independence movement as  
49 saviours, this essay argues that the reconstructive historiography present in post-2000  
50 cinematic narratives which revisit British India and the struggle for independence  
51 attempts to create a more desirable and coherent narrative about Indian self-identity.  
52 The dramatizing and reweaving of the past includes a re-Orientalist strategy that  
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3 undergirds and facilitates the development of modern-day Indian identities: the  
4 redemption -- albeit vicarious -- of the British colonialists via British characters who  
5 facilitate the ambitions and aims of the Indian freedom-fighters protagonists.  
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### 8 **Vicarious Indulgence in Poverty**

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10 Ana Mendes argued that by deliberately utilizing an unreliable narrator, Aravind  
11 Adiga's The White Tiger (2008) 'strategically stages its own inauthentic Dark India'  
12 (2010, 288). Unlike Mendes's and several other studies, neither the realism nor the  
13 authenticity of the narrative details constitute the key consideration in this article;  
14 instead, it is concerned with the staging strategy employed, investigating what types of  
15 poverty are portrayed, how they are represented, and for what possible reasons. To this  
16 end, this section examines two novels that focus on urban Indian poverty: Kavery  
17 Nambisan's The Story That Must Not Be Told (SMNBT) (2010) and Adiga's Between  
18 the Assassinations (BA) (2009). As many have pointed out, depictions of poverty are  
19 not commonly rendered by those in poverty -- indeed, the literary treatment of poverty  
20 'is rarely authored by the poor themselves' (Korte 2010/11, 294) -- and, in the case of  
21 India, these representations are to a considerable extent produced by the middle-and  
22 upper-classes. What this section considers is not so much the issue of subalternism, as  
23 the issue of why these representations of Indian poverty prevail, and to what end they  
24 are being regularly made.  
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27 The popularity of poverty depictions in literature is hardly novel, reaching back at least  
28 to Victorian times 'where "slumming" was both vilified and celebrated' (Koven 2004,  
29 cited in Selinger and Outterson 2010, 2). These depictions were a staple of social  
30 realism fiction by writers like Charles Dickens, who regularly portrayed the squalor of  
31 living and working conditions of the poor and the destitute. Early IWE attempts at  
32 social realism brought about a professed need for texts to be representative of India  
33 (and, inescapably, of its poverty), to such a degree that the initial literary works by  
34 authors Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan were said to 'betray an anxiety to offer a packaged  
35 image of the nation' (Majumdar 2008, 11). As such, the depiction of literary India  
36 necessarily had to flatten out diversities, shades and contours, resulting in what Nivedita  
37 Majumdar argues are 'reductive constructions of India' and 'exotic ideological  
38 constructs' (2008, 12).  
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41 Robbie Goh makes the case that up to the 1990s or thereabouts, Indian Anglophone  
42 writing contained a romantic narrative strand which reflected hopeful, positive attitudes  
43 towards Indian society and 'confidence in its potential redemption' (2011, 327). Goh  
44 notes, however, that there has been a dark turn in this writing as a result of authors  
45 currently not being optimistic of India's ability to resolve its problems, and thus  
46 suggests that fiction about Dark India is the prevailing mode of literary engagement  
47 with the subcontinent's many difficulties and social ills. From this point of view, it is  
48 unsurprising that, as Goh identified, Indian social realism fiction in English regularly  
49 contains themes of violence, confusion, social injustice, corruption, dissatisfaction and  
50 frustration, especially with India's many and varied socio-economic and political woes.  
51 Even if contemporary Indian authors are engaging with India's problems, they are  
52 critiqued for having an eye on the demand of the western literary marketplace and the  
53 rewards it promises (and, indeed, can confer), and have long been roundly lambasted for  
54 selling out and for marketing the exotic. Influentially denounced by Graham Huggan  
55 (2001), the marketing of 'the margins,' is, however, quite specific: to have 'universalist'  
56 appeal, the writer arguably must provide exotic elements which contain an  
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3 'unthreatening, non-oppositional stance to mainstream readers' (Shanker 2009, 48). The  
4 fictional text must remain 'exotic yet familiar' (Morrison, cited in Squires 2009, 141)  
5 because '[f]oreign readers of Indian novels are searching for themselves in stories set in  
6 a world that is quaint, but not incomprehensible' (Joseph 2012). Featuring exotic  
7 elements is not sufficient: the exotica must be packaged in a form which is at once  
8 known but still charmingly different -- different enough, yet not so different as to  
9 disconcert or discourage western readership. Manu Joseph denounces British and North-  
10 American publishers as having had a corrupting influence on IWE, selecting as they do  
11 for their lists Indian novels that will turn a profit in their markets.

12 At present, the exotica which seem to be thriving in the cultural marketplace is the  
13 exotica of poverty. Although the 'rags to riches' theme had been a recurring plotline in  
14 classic Bollywood movies from the 1950s through to the 1980s, when 'India worked to  
15 lift itself from hunger and poverty' (The Infinity 2009), it is a relatively new-fangled  
16 trend in IWE. After a literary packaging of India post-independence which represented a  
17 resurgent patriotic India, then an exotic India, twenty-first century IWE has been turning  
18 increasingly to depicting Dark India, the underbelly and slums of India, the other face of  
19 'India Shining.' Novels like Adiga's *The White Tiger* and Vikas Swarup's *Q&A* (2005)  
20 have already been condemned and vilified for promoting 'poverty tourism' (or  
21 'poorism'), which has been identified as a form of discrimination (as the 'ism'  
22 suggests), an othering of the poor. The controversy over literary poverty tourism has  
23 indicted writers (and filmmakers) of pandering to and promoting 'slum poverty,' 'slum  
24 tourism,' 'poverty porn,' 'slum chic,' 'ghetto picturesque,' 'poverty tours' and  
25 'armchair tourism' (Duncan 2011; Korte 2011). This strategy of marketing literature is  
26 said to have glorified, celebrated and romanticised poverty, as well as resulted in  
27 'immoral voyeurism.'<sup>1</sup>

28 Commentators and writers alike, such as Salman Rushdie, have noted this shift in  
29 popular representations of India:  
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31 It used to be the case that western movies about India were about blonde women  
32 arriving there to find, almost at once, a maharajah to fall in love with ... or they  
33 were about dashing white men galloping about the colonies firing pistols and  
34 unsheathing sabres, to varying effect. Now that sort of exoticism has lost its  
35 appeal; people want, instead, enough grit and violence to convince themselves  
36 that what they are seeing is authentic; but it's still tourism. If the earlier films  
37 were raj tourism, maharajah-tourism, then we, today, have slum tourism instead.  
38 (Rushdie 2009)

39 Some critics have suggested darker, more shadowy motives for the popularity of this  
40 form of exotica rather than just literary tourism or cultural voyeurism. Deepika Bahri  
41 contends that a novel like Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* is 'yoked to its First  
42 World context, can be used (and apparently is used) to invoke a predictably smelly,  
43 chaotic mass of others who reinforce the superiority of the West' (2003, 122). Barbara  
44 Korte suggests that the depiction of poverty in the global south is attractive to readers of  
45 the global north precisely because 'they deal with a poverty that is not located in the  
46 North,' thus deflecting what is a common problem by setting it elsewhere (2010/11,  
47 295; Korte's italics). Moreover, for this social class of readers which has the means and  
48 leisure for indulging in poverty literature, the literature must be romanticized and  
49 presented in 'gold binding' (Pramar 1975). Besides this nurturing in western readership  
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<sup>1</sup> 'Immoral voyeurism' supposedly occurs when undetected glances invade privacy and take advantage of people's vulnerability, and observe people for condescending purposes and/or to further demeaning ends; members of a privileged group misrepresent the values and beliefs of an underprivileged group based on selective observations (Selinger and Outterson 2010).

of a sense of superiority and complacency, some have condemned the portrayal of Indian destitution not only as *derisive* and distorted, but most relevantly as overhyped, and accused artists and other cultural producers of utilizing poverty 'as tools of titillation to please the smug white world' (Bhaskaran 2010, cited in Duncan 2011, 314).

While broadly in agreement with the general thrust of these criticisms, this *essay* turns its attention to the subversive element of the performance of Dark India embedded in the texts of contemporary Indian authors. Most Indian writers are fully aware of their readership and the reach of their work, and those who are signed up and distributed by western publishers for western readership are *cognizant* that they are offering up versions of Indian poverty for consumption abroad. It is unlikely that such savvy and knowledgeable authors are unaware that *exotica* and *destitution* are commodities which thrive in *the* global literary marketplace. *As such, they* are re-Orientalizing in quite a novel and radical form: *these authors* are fully aware of the othering process involved in representing such depictions of impoverished communities which they are not members of. Nevertheless, while complicit in providing these highly demanded representations, they are creating them in such a way as to exhibit slightly different, paradoxical messages embedded within those desired literary commodities. Such skilful authors utilize form and style, as much as variety of content, to subvert subservience. The crudity and vulgarity of language in novels like *The White Tiger* (TWT) and Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* (2008) is deliberately provocative, jibing at and mocking a host of parties including, but not limited to, Indian elites, Indian capitalism and *western* neocolonialism.

*The White Tiger* begins with a letter from Balram, the protagonist (a self-declared thinking man and entrepreneur), to the then-Chinese president, Wen Jiabao:

Let us begin.

Before we do that, sir, the phrase in English that I learnt from my ex-employer the late Mr Ashok's ex-wife Pinky Madam is:

*What a fucking joke.* (TWT, 7; Adiga's italics)

Right from the outset, Balram destabilizes the status quo by beginning with solemnity, lulling the reader into a certain set of expectations, and at once overturning expectations by switching over into flippancy and swearing. Technically, it is an authority being addressed, a leader of a powerful country (which Balram implies he is an equal too by impudently daring to employ this personal confiding style in an informal letter), but on another level, the protagonist is also speaking to the middle- and upper-classes, who are the target audience and readership of literary social realism novels.

Balram proceeds to freely employ more vulgarity of language, 'I guess, Your Excellency, that I too should start off by kissing some god's arse' (TWT, 8) and even to insult his intended recipient in a blatantly racist manner: 'That's not to say I don't respect them, Mr Premier! Don't ever let that blasphemous idea into your yellow skull' (TWT, 9). This manner of address shows a calculated lack of respect, once again to authority and establishment, but also implicitly to the readership. It collapses, in a sense, the binary between East and West, because it sets up a new binary, of powerful versus disempowered. The continued use of titles 'Your Excellency' and 'Mr Premier' being juxtaposed to the vulgarities of language mock the very positions being ostentatiously saluted.

Balram goes on to then disparage his own country, by first portraying that which is sacred and revered in India, the Ganges River, making mention of its proudly associated mythology, spirituality, religion and history, and then immediately undercutting this

with a prosaic and deliberately disgusting portrayal of the filth and contamination in the river:

Why, I am talking of Mother Ganga, daughter of the Vedas, river of illumination, protector of us all, breaker of the chain of birth and rebirth. ... No! -- Mr Jiabao, I urge you not to dip in the Ganga, unless you want your mouth full of faeces, straw, soggy parts of human bodies, buffalo carrion, and seven different kinds of industrial acids. (TWT, 15)

By turning his mockery and cynicism upon his country's pride, Balram is signalling the depth of his disillusionment, and also implicitly that he is a dangerous character, who having no respect for his own, is equally likely to show no respect to that which is held sacrosanct by others. By deliberately representing the unpalatable in revolting terms, Balram/Adiga indicate the reader is not to be spared or shielded, and is thus forced into complicity and confrontation.

Similarly, Sinha's Animal's People begins with a smattering of unpleasant images and vulgarities:

Believe me, I know which one hasn't washed his balls, I can smell pissy gussets and shitty backsides whose faint stench don't carry to your nose, farts smell extra bad. In my mad times I'd shout at people in the street, 'Listen, however fucking miserable you are, and no one's as happy as they've a right to be, at least you stand on two feet!' ... I'm not clever like you. I can't make fancy rissoles of each word. ... If you want my story, you'll have to put up with how I tell it. (Sinha 2008, 2)

Sinha's protagonist, Animal, not only mocks the 'clever' people he is addressing by exposing, as he claims, his more intimate knowledge of their bad smells and lack of hygiene, he even holds them to ransom, forcing them to his low level if they hunger for his story. Animal, who swears as naturally as he draws breath, appears to take some perverse pleasure in dwelling on bodily matters, with the full knowledge and expectation that it will repel. He anticipates revulsion:

If you feel embarrassed throw down the book in which these words are printed. Carry on reading it's your lookout, there's worse to come, don't go crying later 'Animal's a horrible person, full of filth' think I don't know it already? ... If you're a man it doesn't matter, you're a dirty fucker anyway. (Sinha 2008, 79)

The narrator both challenges his readers as well as denigrates them, and the verbal abuse is a further challenge to continue consuming the story.

Reading through re-Orientalist lenses, it can be inferred that certain Indian writers are handling the perceived demands of the western literary marketplace by deliberately producing a surfeit of this popular fare. Making that fare uncompromisingly dark, authors seem to take pleasure in rubbing the noses of their readers in the most wretched and dire poverty depictions possible. They do not refrain from othering the poor, and do so knowingly, but push the othering process to extremes (for a readership even further removed), in order to press home its absurdity and tragedy. Poverty literature contains self-derision, but also disdain for the gallery it plays to. Authors of poverty fiction simultaneously pander while mocking themselves for pandering, acknowledging complicity, and although unable to escape complicity, some manage to comply subversively.

Korte suggests novels such as Sinha's and Adiga's may have a constructive intention in deliberately selecting these depictions of poverty, arguing that Animal's People and The White Tiger are 'novels emerging from a postcolonial context that destabilize preconceptions about poverty and the poor' (2010/11, 304). She makes the argument that the elitism of such writers who are socially privileged and able to address readers

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3 from a similar social background, particularly those outside of India, is a plus rather  
4 than a problem, because poverty should be the concern of all, rather than deemed as an  
5 exotic Third World problem safely removed from the affluent metropolis.

6 The following literary interpretations investigate how a new authority resulting from  
7 instigating a wider understanding of poverty is exercised. In Nambisan's The Story That  
8 Must Not Be Told, the sarcastic title comments on Indian middle- and upper-classes  
9 routinely turning a blind eye and deaf ear on the poorest classes, not wanting that face  
10 of India broadcasted. Simon, the elderly protagonist who unusually enough wishes to  
11 champion the cause of Sitara (the slums adjacent to his middle-class residence),  
12 attempts to listen and help, but he is depicted as fairly ineffective, somewhat lacking  
13 even in his comprehension of the scale and reach of the problem of poverty. However,  
14 utilizing such a protagonist may provide readers with a figure whose status and,  
15 therefore, whose bewilderment and ignorance can be readily identified with.  
16 Simon, his daughter and a journalist go on a 'tour'<sup>2</sup> of Sitara, taking in the pouring of  
17 molten brass to make belt buckles, the tannery, the child labourers, the fake hospitals  
18 and non-qualified teachers, the gigantic rubbish heap where children and women  
19 scavenge for refuse to recycle, and the ramshackle school run by a butcher-teacher.  
20 They learn that the residents of Sitara are squatters, illegally living on that land,  
21 providing cheap and plentiful labour to the city as the labourers are poorly paid and  
22 easily replaced. The basic relationship between the rich and poor is spelt out: 'This is  
23 how the world works. You can be rich only if you ensure someone else is poor'  
24 (SMNBT, 196). This identical sentiment is echoed in Adiga's novel: 'You keep us like  
25 this, you people from the cities, you rich fucks. It is in your interest to treat us like  
26 cattle!' (BA, 193). Both accounts concur that exploitation is not just rife, but  
27 systematically enforced.

28 Arundhati Roy said that '[t]his is the real horror of India. The orbits of the powerful and  
29 the powerless spinning further and further apart from each other, never intersecting,  
30 sharing nothing. Not a language. Not even a country' (2002, 36). Nambisan's and  
31 Adiga's novels, however, illustrate that far from sharing nothing, there is, in fact, a  
32 crucial relationship between the powerful and powerless, with the sustained victimizing  
33 and exploitation of the poor regarded an economic and social necessity. 'The world has  
34 a thousand Sitaras' (SMNBT, 144) because Sitaras are needed if the living standards of  
35 the middle-classes and above are to be cheaply maintained. At their most cynical, these  
36 novels suggest that the middle-classes can be sustained as such only if given the  
37 nurtured existence of Sitaras.

38 The attitudes of the middle-class come under unremitting criticism in Nambisan's novel  
39 for arrogance and hypocrisy:

40 You want the people here to accept kindness on your terms. You do it as a  
41 favour, an apology for being rich. Think, please. No thief, burglar or pirate has  
42 plundered like the rich. There is no law against amassing wealth, on spending on  
43 yourself and family and when you die, leaving it all to your imbecile children.  
44 ... Is it any wonder that the beggar who accepts your coin and touches it to his  
45 forehead has nothing but hatred for you? Or that the shudra woman who cleans  
46 your toilet mentally spits in your face every time she says 'Vanakkam Aiyya'  
47 and walks past the TV, fridge, sofa and food on your table to clean your  
48 bathroom? (SMNBT, 143)

49 Nambisan depicts Sitara as not only cramped and lacking basic amenities (such as  
50 water), but also disease-ridden, dangerous, life-threatening and foul-smelling. She

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57 <sup>2</sup> The idea of taking a tour of the slums might never be free of an element of slum tourism and voyeurism,  
58 and of the middle-classes' patronage.  
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3 writes of ramshackle huts, excrement on paths, putrid smells, pools of black water,  
4 mosquitoes, a mountain of garbage, slime underfoot, rotting wood and powdery rust  
5 eating away signboards; she highlights that living in such conditions heaps indignities  
6 on the poor, spelling out the degradation of poverty. The vileness of conditions in Sitara  
7 is dwelt on in careful detail by Nambisan so that the reader is allowed to escape none of  
8 it: 'At times the man had to wade waist-deep in sewage to dig out the muck. He carried  
9 the stink on his skin for days and even his own family shunned him' (SMNBT, 229).  
10 Nambisan's stories of Sitara's residents are uncompromisingly bleak for the most part.  
11 There is much violence against women; Senth, for example, a scholastically able child  
12 but pulled out of school to work at a sweatshop, is seduced on her way to work by an  
13 envious childhood friend of her father's, bent on revenge; Suno Tho, a Punjabi woman  
14 sold by her father into prostitution at seventeen to replace her mother, kills her father  
15 to save herself and her sisters; even violence against a friendly and sympathetic American  
16 girl in Sitara carrying out a survey, who is brutally gang raped and killed. The violence  
17 seems almost arbitrary, symptomatic of the living conditions, and much in line with the  
18 expectations of Sitara's citizens and culture.

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20 Nambisan's novel ends ambiguously, on the positive note of a love marriage between  
21 two endearing characters, but also on the destruction of Sitara and the scattering of its  
22 residents and their fragile lives and livelihoods. It is by no means a happy ending, or a  
23 conclusion with solutions, simply an ending that indicates the perpetuity of this system.  
24 Poverty is shown destroying itself from within, stripping dignity and decency away,  
25 while breeding violence, callousness, cruelty and tragedy. As previously mentioned, the  
26 title of Nambisan's novel satirizes the fact this is a story that must be told; in fact, the  
27 author seems determined to portray this side of Indian society and to refuse allowing  
28 such realities to be dismissed.

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30 Adiga pulls even fewer punches. Where Nambisan wrote vividly and in detail, his  
31 writing adds vulgarity and abrasiveness to the reading experience of [Between the](#)  
32 [Assassinations](#). Adiga's novel is a montage of even more uncompromising stories, set in  
33 the fictitious city of Kittur. Kittur is pitched as being any-Indian-city and given a wealth  
34 of detail, even history, tradition and detailed geography, to make it seem realistic.  
35 Stories outline sharp and hostile division between classes, religions and castes;  
36 moreover, they highlight rudeness, crudity and vulgarity, corruption, abuse of power  
37 and exploitation, danger, violence and cruelty, resistance, desperation and humiliation,  
38 disease, filth, destitution, bullying, crushed hopes, anger and indignities aplenty.  
39 BA features fourteen stories from all walks of life, not just from the very poor: its  
40 protagonists include street children and child labourers, casual labourers, a pavement  
41 trader, a cycle-puller, a teacher, a journalist, a factory owner, a woman cook, a conman  
42 trader and middle-class people, such has a deputy bank branch manager and the wife of  
43 a Gulf worker. Many of these are migrants and villagers coming in search of work in  
44 Kittur. While Nambisan's novel contrasts middle-class India which looks out for its  
45 own interests with those in dire poverty, Adiga's version of Dark India encompasses a  
46 wider range of social classes. This picture is not restricted to a portrayal of the poor,  
47 thereby commenting that India's socio-economic problems (such as corruption and  
48 exploitation) are not confined to those in poverty and not solely caused by destitution,  
49 but endemic of Indian society at a number of levels. In Adiga's novel, it would seem  
50 that everyone cheats, deceives and damages others; kindness does happen occasionally,  
51 but is arbitrary and unreliable, and relatively infrequent.

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53 One of Adiga's memorable protagonists is Chenayya, a cycle-cart puller who is one of  
54 many delivering heavy goods to customers' houses. He has to pay for the privilege of  
55 employment, and his salary is earned in tips from customers. His working conditions are  
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3 dire and his health is severely compromised. Chenayya seems to exist in a state of  
4 perpetual hostility, rage and bleakness; even ‘when he opened his eyes, the earth was  
5 one of thorns and shit and stray animals’ (BA, 186). He is full of anger against everyone  
6 he knows: his boss, the customers and also his fellow cycle-cart pullers, all of whom  
7 seem to accept the status quo. His anger stems from his understanding that everyone  
8 around him is complicit in his situation, a condition which makes him bestial. As such,  
9 he relishes the misery of others and the perpetration of depravity:

10 He got off his cart, walked around till he found a puddle of cowdung on the  
11 ground, and scooped a handful. He flung the shit at the lovers. There was a cry;  
12 he rushed up to them and dabbed the whore’s face with shit. He put his shit-  
13 smeared fingers into her mouth and kept them there, even though she bit them;  
14 the harder she bit the more he enjoyed it... (BA, 205)

15  
16 Adiga’s language and imagery are uncompromisingly crude and stark throughout the  
17 novel. A Chenayya’s mindset and behaviour are depicted as the consequence of a  
18 corrupting and degrading lifestyle and a rigid and unmerciful hierarchical system.  
19 In both Nambisan’s and Adiga’s novels idealistic characters are disillusioned, the well-  
20 intentioned are thwarted, the productive and those with potential are wasted or  
21 destroyed. In such narratives, re-Orientalism partly lies in the manner in which the  
22 reader is confronted with the seamy underbelly of India, the way poverty is served up so  
23 harshly, almost making the reader gag on the images conjured, and providing no  
24 happily-ever-after to escape to. Re-Orientalism subverts the tyranny of the literary  
25 marketplace demand by complying aggressively with the perceived desire of a western  
26 readership which seems to crave poverty tourism in India. Writing such as Nambisan’s  
27 and Adiga’s take their readers on an extensive tour of Dark India, serving up the  
28 maximum in filth and squalor, bombarding them to satiation and making them overly  
29 intimate with nauseating details, almost as a punishment for desiring such material as  
30 entertainment. However, for readers to agree to purchase and read such fare, the story  
31 has to be told in a palatable form, hence its packaging as exotica, framing poverty as a  
32 desirable commodity in the literary marketplace. While these stories are sickening, they  
33 effectively enthrall (or they enthrall because they are sickening). In sum, the peddling of  
34 the exotica of poverty in IWE has become a strategic assertion of agency, re-Orientalist  
35 but simultaneously subversive.  
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### 39 **Vicarious Redemption of the Past**

40  
41 An introductory note to this section is due on the multisidedness of present research  
42 contexts. Postcolonial practices of analysis and research, both inside and outside  
43 metropolitan centres, might be susceptible to complicity with the re-Orientalism that is  
44 supposedly being critiqued. In this respect, Minoli Salgado (2011) explored some of the  
45 implications of the critical study of re-Orientalism for postcolonial studies. Scrutinising  
46 the relationship between power and knowledge that Salgado argues is generated by the  
47 term, she contends that a study of re-Orientalism unwittingly enables ‘new  
48 cartographies’ of power and authority which form a re-orientation of discursive  
49 authority.  
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51  
52 When investigating re-Orientalism, the interplay between critical reception in the West  
53 and in India should be recognized, as well as the role of diasporic critics -- inside and  
54 outside the academy -- in making a novel or a film popular or ‘deserving’ of critical  
55 attention -- inside or outside India. Because one of the tenets of postcolonial theory is a  
56 desire to reduce Eurocentrism, the endeavour of western-based academics to understand  
57 the specificity and dynamics of re-Orientalism might be indicted of constituting a form  
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3 of cultural essentialism and of abusively projecting onto the East concepts and  
4 categories developed in western academia. Following the theory of Orientalism,  
5 scholars examining re-Orientalism would be relying on a Eurocentric understanding of  
6 the Orient. When one tries to understand 'India' through novels and films, the inquiry  
7 often implies essentializing – in fact, no representation can take place without a certain  
8 degree of essentialism, as a representation is neither 'true' nor 'real.' In this respect,  
9 Spivak famously wrote about 'India' as an 'artificial construct' as it 'is a bit like saying  
10 "Europe"' (1990, 39). Re-Orientalism is not just the preserve of cultural producers, such  
11 as literary writers and filmmakers, but also admittedly a practice of scholars. Being part  
12 of the academy already positions its practitioners to some extent, and objectivity is to be  
13 aspired to rather than attainable. In sum, in the authorial interpretations of contemporary  
14 literary texts by Indian writers and heritage Bollywood films, such as the ones offered in  
15 this essay, Orientalist and re-Orientalist practises can only be tempered, but not entirely  
16 avoided.

17  
18 Salgado's caveat mirrors the conundrum of both the practice and investigation of re-  
19 Orientalism: though these seek to evade western hegemony, they are unable to escape  
20 western awareness, influences and referential points. Re-Orientalism practice and  
21 investigation in fact include and reference the West, which is unavoidable given that the  
22 West is part of the East's history, if only as a result of colonization and diasporic flows.  
23 Furthermore, re-Orientalist strategies engage the West in increasingly self-aware, self-  
24 conscious and multilayered ways -- which include discoursing self-reflexively,  
25 reconciliatorily, redemptively, satirically, sardonically and subversively.

26  
27 This article is built on the premise that the mechanisms upon which the construction of  
28 present-day Indian identities lie are re-Orientalist. While India is self-identifying today  
29 as a nation by differentiation, it additionally constructs its identity through the  
30 negotiation of its hybridity -- by locating, identifying and articulating western strands  
31 which are interwoven into its past. In addition, India is attempting to recognize the  
32 impact of these strands and their roles in the recreation of eastern identities in a context  
33 where the spaces of cultural production and expression are decidedly global. To  
34 reconstruct such self-identities, narratives about the West and the colonial past need to  
35 be created anew,<sup>3</sup> and cinema is a privileged location for this narration in post-  
36 liberalization India.

37  
38 Within the interplay between revision and revival occurring in post-2000 cinematic  
39 representations of British India, the re-Orientalist strategy of vicariously redeeming the  
40 British colonialists is identifiable in the rewriting of colonial history which invariably  
41 involves crucial moments and key figures, such as Mangal Pandey, of the independence  
42 movement. These moments usually range from the First Indian War of Independence  
43 against the British East India Company, also known as the 'Indian Mutiny,' 'Sepoy  
44 Mutiny' or the Uprising of 1857, to the 1930s-40s independence movement.  
45 Bollywood's intersections with the global entertainment industries over the last decades  
46 feature the upsurge of the presence in heritage films of British characters that enable the  
47 goals of the male Indian protagonists, the latter being customarily glamorized warriors  
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54 <sup>3</sup> There is an established scholarship in the area of cultural and collective memory studies that has  
55 variously attempted to critique the rise of interest in the past, memory and nostalgia, as well as the current  
56 upsurge of reparations, apologies and other forms of redress. For example, Maurice Halbwachs (1992)  
57 and Jeffrey K. Olick (2007) are seminal studies in the area, but deserving a distinctive note here is the  
58 work of Michael Rothberg (2009) and Elizabeth Ho (2012) which focus particularly on the politics of  
59 memory in postcolonial texts.  
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3 (as is the illustrative case of a 'warrior-poet'), revolutionaries or freedom fighters.<sup>4</sup>  
4 These BHF, unquestionably part of a complex narrative of Bollywood's arrival on the  
5 global stage, rehearse some 'old preoccupations' identified by Amit Chaudhuri with  
6 reference to Hindi cinema in general:

7 to do with forgetting and remembering one's place in the world, and, connected  
8 to this, to do with the theme of doubles, of being joined, whether one knows it or  
9 not, to a different, often contradictory, version of one's self and life. (2008, 172)

10 An India emerging as a world power seems to come to terms with a harrowing colonial  
11 past through a process of vicarious redemption, which is inextricable from the attempt  
12 to formulate a modern Indian identity. As James Chapman contends, 'a historical  
13 feature film will often have as much to say about the present in which it was made as  
14 about the past in which it was set' (2005, 1). By having the white characters redeem a  
15 traumatic historical period of which they were the protagonists, and having them now  
16 assisting the hidden, alluring histories of Indian revolutionaries, BHF constructs the past  
17 in a way that grants meaning and hope to present experience.

18 At this point, stepping back in order to examine the critical label 'Bollywood heritage  
19 films' involves both problematizing the meanings associated with Bollywood as  
20 corporatized cultural industry and also adapting and translating the concept of 'heritage  
21 film' to the context of Hindi cinema. When introducing the label BHF, we are  
22 referencing heritage film, or, to be more accurate, British heritage film, which the critic  
23 Andrew Higson has influentially defined as 'a relatively small group of "British"  
24 costume dramas of the 1980s and early 1990s that detailed aspects of the English past  
25 and that shared various circumstantial, formal and thematic characteristics'; in  
26 particular, these characteristics orbited around an 'emphasis on the upper and middle  
27 classes in the early decades of the twentieth century' (2003, 11). Higson would later  
28 broaden his definition to include films that 'engage in one way or another with English  
29 heritage,' that is, films which 'offer some version of the English past, or some  
30 representation of the history of Englishness or the English cultural heritage' (2003, 25).  
31 Though some researchers have noted that heritage cinema is a transnational genre, i.e., a  
32 phenomenon not exclusively linked to a local, British film industry and a Thatcherite  
33 ethos, more attention has yet to be devoted to BHF and, chiefly, to its economic impact  
34 in an age of global capital. A great amount of work has been developed on the  
35 representation of the Raj in British film, which has been generally been characterized as  
36 nostalgic and as exemplifying a neocolonial othering process. In this respect, relevant  
37 studies include Chapman (2005), a self-described 'study of different ways in which the  
38 British historical film has been used the past as a means of "talking about" the present'  
39 (2005, 2), and Chapman and Cull (2009), which focuses on the way cinema has been 'a  
40 vehicle for disseminating images and ideologies of empire' (2009, 1).

41 A sustained and systematic analysis of BHF is yet to be made, but this is clearly an  
42 emerging area of studies. It is a well-established fact that Indian popular cinema plays a  
43 prominent role in the construction of Indian identity to both those within India and those  
44 in the Indian diaspora. Conversely, as the diaspora is central to the cultural imagery of  
45 Hindi films, diasporic representations of India shape Bollywood's encounters with the  
46 global. Considering the pivotal role of this film industry in articulating definitions of  
47 national identity for diasporic audiences, the marketing of the figure of the  
48 revolutionary freedom fighter, for example, might be seen as catering as much to the  
49 domestic market as aiming at broader markets which include NRIs.

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57 <sup>4</sup> An exception from earlier Hindi cinema is the 1952 film *Jhansi Ki Rani* (*The Tiger and the Flame*, dir.  
58 Sohrab Modi) whose plot revolves around the coming of age of a female leading figure in the 1857  
59 Uprising.

The economic impact of BHF in an age of global capital is worthy of a further, detailed investigation. There is a growing visibility of Indian films, which are increasingly enjoying a global reach, attracting crossover western viewers beyond South Asian diasporic audiences. Bollywood's corporatization, the result of India's integration into a globalized free-market economy in the 1990s, has had a decisive impact on this development. [The paradigm shift that Dinesh Raheja and Jitendra Kothari announced in 2004 is, nearly a decade past, in full sway:](#)

In the new millennium, Hindi cinema has generated a creative milieu conducive to taboo-trashing experimentation. No longer insular, the industry confidently talks today of 'crossover' films that will compete with western films. ... Today Hindi cinema is far more confident about the opening up of porous cultural borders. (2004, 133)

The BRIC countries have become increasingly relevant in the circulation of artistic products, generating new horizons in the global cultural landscape. Daya K. Thussu speaks of Bollywood as a 'global media contraflow' (2012, 121-123). At a macro level, the so-called 'imbalances of cultural trade,' where the Global North exerted cultural hegemony over the Global South through one-way vertical cultural flows, are now being redressed, Thussu argues, with the growing prominence of the BRIC countries such as India, by two-way vertical flows, compounded by the importance of horizontal South-South flows.

The films under scrutiny here are manifestations of how contraflows are changing our global cultural landscape, in the sense that post-2000 BHF mirror how postcolonial cultural production embraces and resists, borrows from and interacts with other transnational media flows. Complex mechanisms of cultural production, such as the current visibility of the heritage cultural industries, the marketing of the postcolonial (Huggan 2001) and the constitution of a postcolonial cultural marketplace are crucial issues for the cultural industries in India. To these mechanisms, we might add the translation of Bollywood films (distributed outside India by western companies) for the benefit of its crossover reception through the use of western cinematic codes, as in the absence of musical interludes and reduced viewing time. A case in point is Subhash Ghai's 2005 *Kisna: The Warrior Poet* which had two versions released simultaneously: a two-hour English version for the international market and a three-hour Hindi version for the domestic market, featuring songs and dances.

Well-received internationally, the 2001 heritage film *Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India* was beautifully photographed, carefully recreating the period atmosphere of both Indian and British quarters, and displaying lavish landscapes and exuberant colours. This led the cinema critic Roger Ebert to draw a comparison between *Lagaan* and *A Passage to India*: 'like David Lean, director Ashutosh Gowariker is not shy about lingering on ancient forts and palaces, vast plains and the birthday-cake architecture of the British Raj, so out of place and yet so serenely confident' (2003, 359). Referring to Paul Scott's *The Raj Quartet*, Rushdie observed:

Indians get walk-ons, but remain, for the most part, bit-players in their own history. Once this form has been set, it scarcely matters that individual fictional Brits get unsympathetic treatment from their author. The form insists that they are the ones whose stories matter, and that is so much less than the whole truth that it must be called a falsehood. (1991, 90; Rushdie's italics)

However, unlike Raj revival British films, and their nostalgic recreation of the British empire, BHF of the recent decades reverse the gaze: it is not the experience of the British in India with which they are concerned, but rather the experiences of Indians in British India. For instance, *Lagaan*, set in Victorian India, in 1893, centres on the

struggle of a village to cope with drought and with British occupation. Bhuvan, the peasants' leader, takes on a sporting challenge presented by the haughty commander of the local British cantonment: they are exempt from punitive land tax (the lagaan) if they beat the British in a game of cricket. Lagaan pioneered as the most popular BHF post-2000. It soon became Bollywood's first crossover hit of the millennium, as Rachel Dwyer remarked upon the film's British release:

On the one level, the film sticks to the Bollywood 'formula' -- a hero in a love triangle, a villain, songs and dances. But at the same time Lagaan breaks through the traditional boundaries of Hindi film. In India the film's historical background, lack of a star heroine, village background and folk-style music were all seen as problematic. Yet it proved one of the greatest critical and commercial successes of recent years. (cited in Chapman 2004, 352)

From an Orientalist representation of India as the exotic, exciting, seductive and mysterious other in Raj screen fictions, India in BHF is recast as a colonized nation suffering from acute poverty, a victim of political and economic oppression and exploitation where martyrdom and memory are valued. Films that fit this profile -- and which also meet the thematic and aesthetic criteria of heritage cinema, such as a stress on the idea of national identity -- include, besides Lagaan and Kisna, The Rising: Ballad of Mangal Pandey (dir. Ketan Mehta, 2005), Rang de Basanti (dir. Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, 2006) and Veer (dir. Anil Sharma, 2010).<sup>5</sup>

Ketan Mehta's 2005 The Rising centres on a pivotal event in Indian history: the First Indian War of Independence. In The Rising, native sepoys working for the East India Company refuse to use the cartridges of the new Enfield Rifle greased with pig and cow fat (which would consequently have defiled both Hindus and Muslims), starting a rebellion against British rule. Embedded is a story about the friendship between the sepoy, Mangal Pandey, popularly regarded as the first martyr of the Indian independence struggle, and William Gordon, his commanding officer. As its opening image, the film presents the following disclaimer:

This story is based on actual events. In certain cases, incidents, characters and timelines have been changed or fictionalized for dramatic purposes. Certain characters may be composites or entirely fictitious. Some names and locations have been changed. The scenes depicted may be a hybrid of fact and fiction which fairly represent the source materials for the film, believed to be true by the filmmakers.

Accordingly, the film's declared aim, as reproduced on screen, is to conflate 'history' and 'folklore' in order to show how a popular legend was born: 'Where history meets proud folklore, there legends are born.' Despite this introductory disclaimer clarifying that Mangal Pandey is not a strictly factual account but a hybrid of fact and fiction (a shared feature of historical narratives and figures), the film ends with a montage of historical drawings and newsreel footage documenting the Uprising, the freedom movement and the day of independence itself.

The fluid senses of belonging and the divided loyalties experienced by the two protagonists of The Rising are clearly recognizable: Pandey, who corresponds to the

<sup>5</sup> It falls outside the scope of this essay a comparative dimension through the analysis of earlier Indian historical films, such as Jhansi Ki Rani, Shatranj Ke Khilari (The Chess Players), (dir. Satyajit Ray 1977), Junoon (dir. Shyam Benegal, 1978), Kranti (dir. Manoj Kumar, 1981) and Sardar (dir. Ketan Mehta 1992). To pursue this dimension would certainly prove productive for establishing a dialogue through time concerning the experiences of Indians in British India. Jhansi Ki Rani would be particularly apt for a comparative reading with The Rising as both films are fictionalisations of the Uprising from an Indian perspective.

figure of the glamorized independence freedom fighter, and Gordon, a British character who, interestingly, does not function as tyrannical British ruler. Gordon acts not so much as a counterpoint to the Indian revolutionary, his close friend, but as facilitator of the latter's endeavours as he offers space for the vicarious redemption of an imposed British rule in India. In the same way as the stories of freedom fighters Bhagat Singh, in *Rang de Basanti*, and Mangay Pandey, in *The Rising*, are filtered through the perspective of British colonial officers, the story of the Indian warrior poet Kisna in Ghai's eponymous film is offered as a twenty-first-century flashback of Katherine Becket, the British daughter of a cruel British Deputy Commissioner in the British India of the turbulent 1940s. Along with his father, young Kisna Singh cared for the horses on the land stead belonging to Katherine's father. In the days just before independence, the British Deputy Commissioner's house is burnt down and he is killed, while his family manage to escape. Kisna protects Katherine from the nationalists-turned-attackers, which include members of his own family, and decides to escort her from their small village in the mountainous region of Pauri Garhwal, North India, to New Delhi, where the British High Commission will assist her to board a ship 'home' (a conflicted notion because she was born in India).

In conclusion, the roles adopted by British characters in the films under analysis here are the ones of co-adjutant, speaking to a symbiotic relationship, and include those of friend, lover and mortified jailer (as in *Rang de Basanti*), but also -- and most relevantly -- those of authoritative narrator, documenting and overarching directorial eye, catalyst for political awakening and fantasy audience. The discourse of re-Orientalism comprises a strategy for reconciliation of a traumatic past: the intention behind the scripting of whiteness and the redemption of colonialists in BHF is conceivably to make western characters expiate the guilt of and provide recognition for the atrocities committed in their imperial past. In Mehta's *The Rising*, this is quite apparent in the words of the British protagonist Gordon, uttered to himself in a moment of dejection: 'The Earth will be scorched, rivers of blood will flow, millions will die, and I, William Gordon... feel responsible for the inevitable.' In fact, the British lead characters in BHF do not function as stand-ins for the tyrannical British ruler, as in Raj screen fictions, and not so much as a counterpoint to the Indian warrior or revolutionary, but as facilitators of the latter's endeavours as s/he offers space for the vicarious redemption of British rule in India.

*Kisna* was marketed as an epic cross-cultural romance, between a British Commissioner's daughter and her family's Indian servant -- it was clear for filmmaker-producer Ghai that his film had 'universal appeal' and thus crossover potential. Reflecting re-Orientalism, Ghai talks about the genesis of his work in a way that echoes the plot of *Rang de Basanti*:

I went to England and there I chanced to meet an English boy whose father served in India. He knew so much about Indian culture, our spiritual supremacy, divine energies and our values through his father. This inspired me to take (up) this subject. ... decades have passed since the British left. Today, when we have more Indians in London than perhaps in any other city in the world, it's time we see our relationship with a fresh point of view. (cited in Kumar 2005)

This reading of the colonial past, starring glamorized Indian freedom fighters and advocates, and 'fair-minded' British individuals, is thus smoothly made to translate into the present of an emerging India as a world power.

## Conclusion

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3 With reference to IWE's recent incursions into poverty literature and topical BHF with  
4 its distinctive themes of redemption, and within the context of a highly complex global  
5 cultural landscape, this research constitutes the developing of the study of re-  
6 Orientalism. Re-Orientalism is an increasingly complicated discourse, and this article  
7 has case-studied two of its interrelated strands within the context of postcolonial  
8 subjectivities and representations of self. It has attempted to provide a critical look at  
9 Indian cultural production post-2000 through double lenses: western, coloured by an  
10 awareness of Orientalism and in permanent contact with re-Orientalized representations;  
11 and eastern, simultaneously re-Orientalizing and borrowing western perspectives and  
12 reference points. As we conclude this paper, it might be pertinent to revisit the issues of  
13 indulgence in poverty and vicarious redemption comparatively. In the first instance, the  
14 paper illustrated modern IWE accommodating and even pandering to the perceived  
15 demands of western audiences. By so doing, IWE is not only asserting its agency by its  
16 choice of how and what fare it serves up for a western palate, but also, by logical  
17 inference, constructing the Indian/eastern self by reference to the West. In the second  
18 instance, Indian and diasporic Indian identities, which are in no small part constructed  
19 by Bollywood, are further articulated in BHF by tracing the western strands which are  
20 intertwined into India's colonial past.

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22  
23 India is by no means the only country which views destitution as a form of  
24 entertainment and commodity. In the Philippines, for example, game shows popularize  
25 the recounting of the saddest personal stories, which is simultaneously seen as  
26 exploitation of and panacea for the poor, thus celebrating poverty (McGeown 2001). Is  
27 re-Orientalism playing to this same gallery and, while seizing agency, perpetrating an  
28 even more insidious form of Orientalism? U.P. Mukherjee would argue: 'Marginality is  
29 chic. The consumption of these works [literary works by postcolonial writers] helps to  
30 maintain a system of exploitation that was inaugurated by European colonialism and  
31 imperialism more than five hundred years ago' (2010, 8). However, as Mukherjee also  
32 notes, while marketing exotica, postcolonial writers can 'make exoticism bite back'  
33 (ibid). Dark India in IWE enables the First World to consume the exotic commodities of  
34 the Third World, enabling a western readership to relish the literary depictions of Dark  
35 India, without requiring the First World, western readership to have much knowledge of  
36 India, or even of the fact they are trading in exotica. The re-Orientalist novelists who are  
37 fully aware of the double standards of postcolonial attitudes flourishing in the literary  
38 marketplace both exploit it as well as mock their audience by producing and trading in  
39 ever more radical forms of poverty depictions.

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42 Another strand of re-Orientalism happening in parallel with the literary stagings of Dark  
43 India is India's writing of a substitute narrative for self-identification through vicarious  
44 redemption of its traumatic colonial past. The discourse of re-Orientalism encompasses  
45 a strategy for reconciliation of trauma and the recasting of heroism and victimization so  
46 as to facilitate highly selected and particularized directions of identity construction. As  
47 the East continues to self-identify by differentiation, revamped forms of Orientalism are  
48 being vigorously negotiated. In both cases, IWE and BHF, re-Orientalism discourse is  
49 seeking to resist western hegemony even if it cannot entirely elude western yardsticks.  
50 This opposition happens through i) subverting expectations, for example, by employing  
51 an unreliable narrator who mocks the reader, ii) revising identity constructions via, for  
52 instance, the vicarious redemption of British colonialists in BHF, and iii) complying (in  
53 appearance) with the pandering to western demand for selected cultural texts from  
54 India, such as poverty literature, submitting in a provocative, challenging manner. In all  
55 these cases there is implicit acknowledgement that these are resistance strategies only,  
56 not a total authorial/director escape from the sticky threads of re-Orientalism, and that,  
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3 in true Orientalist fashion, the West (the reference point of readerships/audiences)  
4 continues to hold position as centre.  
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