"OM SHANTI OM" AS A HOMAGE TO BOLLYWOOD: THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE BEAUTIFULLY FLAWED TRIBUTE

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Abstract

Farah Khan's Om Shanti Om (2007) stands as one of the most self-referential and exuberant films in modern Hindi cinema - a glamorous homage to Bollywood's past, present, and cinematic ethos. This paper critically examines how Om Shanti Om functions as both a celebration and a satire of Bollywood. Drawing from intertextual analysis, film theory, and popular culture studies, the paper explores how the film embraces nostalgia, melodrama, and spectacle while simultaneously parodying the industry's excesses, superficiality, and moral contradictions. The study identifies the "good" aspects - its affectionate tribute to cinematic history, meta-humour, and revival of masala cinema - the "bad" - its overindulgence in stereotypes and gender objectification - and the "ugly" - its self-congratulatory tone and lack of deeper critique. The analysis situates Om Shanti Om within the discourse of postmodern Bollywood, where parody and pastiche blend to redefine popular cinema.

**Keywords:*Om Shanti Om, Bollywood homage, postmodern cinema, parody, nostalgia, Farah Khan, meta-cinema, Indian film studies.*

Introduction

Bollywood has often turned its gaze inward, creating films that reflect on its own mythology, glamour, and contradictions. Few films have done this as flamboyantly as Om Shanti Om (2007), directed by Farah Khan and starring Shah Rukh Khan, Deepika Padukone, and Arjun Rampal. Blending reincarnation melodrama with film-within-a-film narrative, Om Shanti Om celebrates the dreamlike excess of Hindi cinema while simultaneously mocking its clichés.

The film's first half unfolds in the 1970s—a golden era of melodramatic cinema, elaborate song sequences, and superstar culture—while the second half transitions into the hyper-commercialized, globalized Bollywood of the 2000s. Through this dual structure, Farah Khan crafts a love letter to Indian cinema while also exposing its vanity, gender biases, and moral superficiality.
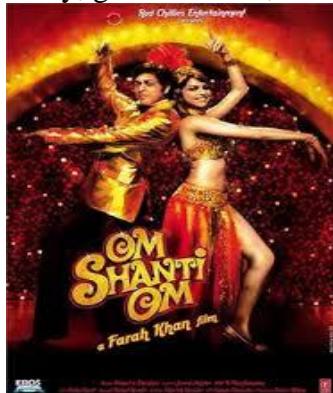
This article investigates Om Shanti Om as a cinematic homage - an affectionate parody that oscillates between admiration and critique. By dissecting its intertextual references, narrative devices, and representational politics, the study aims to answer a central question: How does Farah Khan's film succeed and fail in paying tribute to Bollywood's cinematic legacy?

Review of Literature
Bollywood and Self-Reflexivity
Scholars have long examined Bollywood's tendency toward self-referentiality—films about filmmaking, stardom, and spectacle (Dwyer, 2006; Vasudevan, 2011). Works such as KaagazKePhool (1959), Guddi (1971), and Luck by Chance (2009) interrogate the illusion of stardom and the industry's exploitative nature. Om Shanti Om belongs to this lineage but takes a more celebratory tone, combining parody with nostalgia.

Postmodernism and Bollywood
Bollywood's entry into the post-liberalization era brought hybrid aesthetics—mixing genres, ironic self-awareness, and nostalgia (Mehta, 2012). Postmodern Hindi films use pastiche (borrowing from various eras) and intertextuality (referencing iconic films) to engage audiences familiar with Bollywood's own history (Thomas, 2015).

Farah Khan's Auteur Signature
Farah Khan, known for her choreographic precision and visual spectacle, brings a distinct meta-cinematic sensibility. Scholars like Nayar (2016) and Ghosh (2019) note her ability to merge camp, parody, and glamour, making Om Shanti Om a joyous yet ironic ode to Bollywood mythology.

Despite numerous journalistic reviews, academic engagement with Om Shanti Om remains limited. This paper addresses that gap by offering a balanced critique—recognizing both the film's innovative intertextual play and its problematic indulgences.

Methodology
This qualitative study uses textual and cultural analysis to interpret Om Shanti Om as a postmodern homage. Primary data include close viewing of the film and identification of intertextual references (songs, dialogues, costumes, cameos). Secondary data sources include academic articles, reviews, and interviews with Farah Khan and Shah Rukh Khan.

The analysis is guided by:
1. Intertextuality and Pastiche Theory (Jameson, 1991).
2. Cultural Memory and Nostalgia Frameworks (Boym, 2001).
3. Representation and Gender Critique (Mulvey, 1975; Gokulsing& Dissanayake, 2004).

The study categorizes findings into three evaluative layers: the good, the bad, and the ugly representing what worked as homage, what faltered in execution, and what exposed Bollywood's internal contradictions.

Discussion and Analysis
1. The Good: Bollywood's Self-Love Done Right
a. Intertextual Richness and Tribute to Cinematic History
The first half of Om Shanti Om is an exquisite homage to 1970s Bollywood marked by references to Karz (1980), Amar Akbar Anthony (1977), Sholay (1975), and Madhumati (1958). The production

design, costumes, and dialogue evoke a bygone cinematic innocence. Scenes such as the film-set sequences and song "DhoomTaana" re-create the aesthetic and spirit of vintage filmmaking.

Farah Khan's encyclopedic love for Hindi cinema manifests in the **"DeewangiDeewangi"** song sequencea parade of 31 real-life film stars that collapses the boundary between reel and real Bollywood. This moment becomes both nostalgic and celebratory—a meta-cinematic carnival of stardom (Vasudevan, 2011).

Postmodern Storytelling

By blending reincarnation melodrama with satire, Om Shanti Om revives the spirit of 1970s masala filmsmixing action, romance, comedy, and tragedyyet frames them with self-aware irony. The film's playful engagement with cinematic conventions invites viewers to laugh with Bollywood, not at it.

The reincarnation trope, borrowed from Karz, functions symbolically: it signifies Bollywood's cyclical naturewhere stars, trends, and genres are constantly reborn.

Shah Rukh Khan as Metaphor

Shah Rukh Khan's double role as junior artist Om Makhija and superstar Om Kapoor encapsulates Bollywood's aspirational mythology. His transformation from "outsider" to "insider" parallels both Bollywood's dream factory ethos and Khan's own career trajectory.

The Bad: Glamour without Depth

Superficial Critique

While Om Shanti Om acknowledges Bollywood's dark side—exploitation, class hierarchy, and gender inequalityit rarely interrogates them deeply. The death of Shantipriya (Deepika Padukone) is framed as melodrama rather than a critique of systemic misogyny. Her ghostly return functions more as a narrative device than a feminist assertion (Menon, 2012).

Farah Khan's affection for Bollywood often softens the film's critical edge. Unlike Luck by Chance (2009), which offers a layered examination of fame and exploitation, Om Shanti Om remains content with surface-level satire.
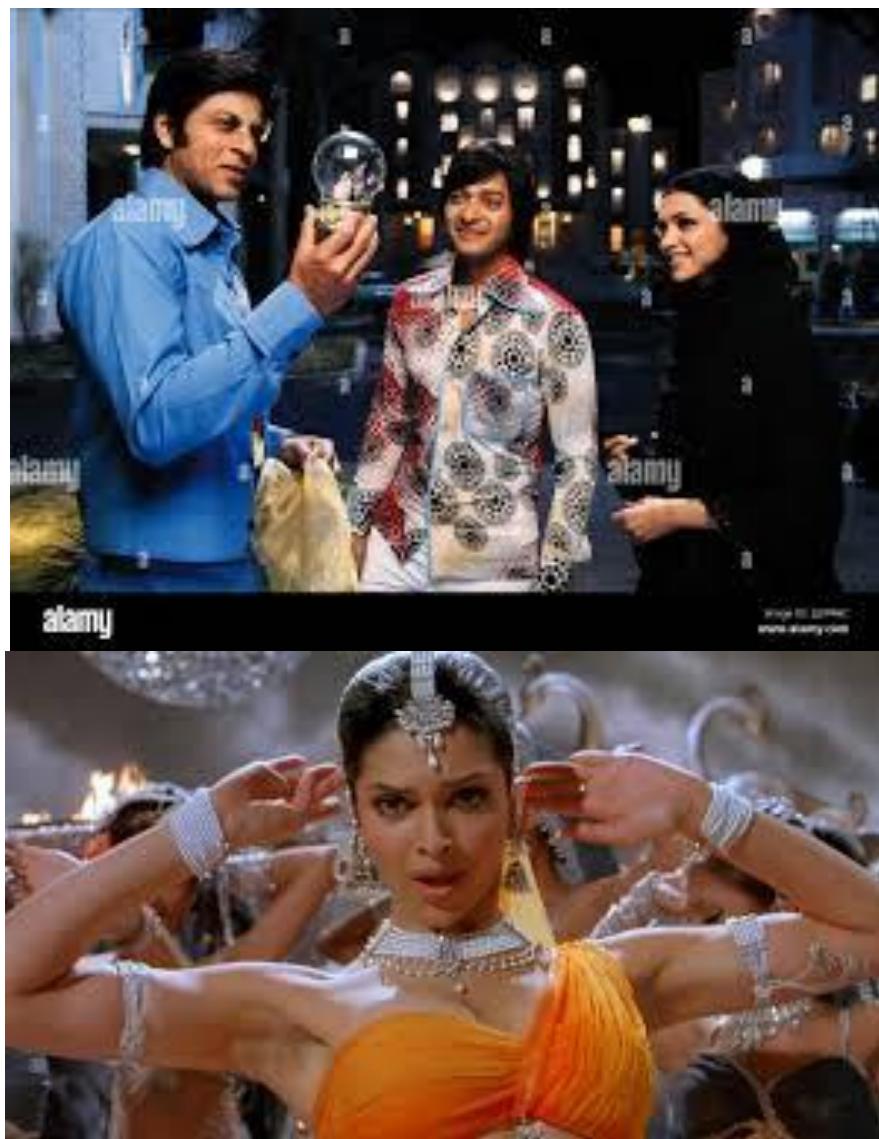
Overindulgence in Self-Referencing

While the film's intertextuality delights cinephiles, it risks alienating general audiences unfamiliar with Bollywood history. Its dense self-referential humor sometimes becomes self-congratulatory, turning homage into indulgence.

Gender and Representation Issues

Despite its progressive self-awareness, Om Shanti Om perpetuates the male gaze through the objectification of female bodies. The reincarnation of Shantipriya as Sandy lacks agency—she serves as an extension of the hero's redemption arc rather than an independent subject.

The Ugly: Bollywood's Narcissism in Full Display

The film's second half, set in the 2000s, mirrors Bollywood's obsession with celebrity culture, box-office power, and vanity-driven filmmaking. The parody becomes indistinguishable from the reality it mocks.

The character of Om Kapoor, a self-absorbed superstar, blurs satire and endorsement—Bollywood laughs at its own excess while celebrating it simultaneously. This **"double irony"** (Jameson, 1991) captures postmodern Bollywood's paradox: the inability to separate critique from complicity.

Moreover, the exaggerated production values—grand sets, designer costumes, stylized song sequencesreflect the same consumerist aesthetics the film ostensibly critique. As Sen (2015) argues, Om Shanti Om becomes "a mirror hall of Bollywood's vanity—mocking itself while basking in its reflection."

Findings

Aspect	What Worked	What Didn't
Homage to Bollywood history	Rich intertextuality, authentic 1970s recreation	Overcrowding of references without narrative restraint
Narrative tone	Balanced humour and emotion in first half	Second half slips into overindulgence and melodrama
Gender representation	Tribute to vintage heroines	Objectification and lack of agency

		for female characters
Satire	Sharp industry in-jokes and parody	Limited critique of systemic issues
Meta-cinema	Brilliant self-awareness and nostalgia	Borders on self-congratulation
Music and choreography	Exceptional, era-evoking compositions	Sometimes overshadow storytelling

Conclusion

Om Shanti Om succeeds as a joyous, affectionate homage to the Bollywood dreamscape—celebrating its grandeur, melodrama, and myth-making power. It immortalizes the spirit of Hindi cinema's self-belief, its ability to laugh at itself, and its eternal love for spectacle.

However, the film also exposes the contradictions of postmodern Bollywood: its obsession with glamour, its superficial engagement with critique, and its continued gender bias. Farah Khan's film thus stands as both tribute and testament—affirming that Bollywood's beauty lies as much in its flaws as in its fantasies.

In the end, Om Shanti Om tells us that to love Bollywood is to embrace it wholly—the good, the bad, and the gloriously excessive.

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