

Dil Se / *From the Heart*

(1998, Mani Ratnam, India)

Component 2: Global Filmmaking Perspectives (AL)

Core Study Areas Key Elements of Film Form Meaning & Response The Contexts of Film

Rationale for study

Dil Se demonstrates the key characteristics of a mainstream Bollywood film: a two-part structure, big stars, spectacular song and dance sequences, themes of Indian identity and the struggle between love and duty. However, it goes against the usual Bollywood narrative in its mixing of a romantic obsessive love story with a serious and thought provoking political thriller.

STARTING POINTS - Useful Sequences and timings/links

Satrange Re – a song and dance sequence inspired by Amar’s glimpse of a bathing Meghna. As an erotic fantasy set in the exotic Ladakh region of the Himalayas it ‘picturises’ the sexual desire played out in Amar’s head 0:5:01- 1:04:38

The dramatic ending of the film Meghna’s suicide mission ‘Take me with you’ 2:33:17-2:41:10

CORE STUDY AREAS 1 - STARTING POINTS - Key Elements of Film Form (Micro Features)

Cinematography

- Sumptuous colour cinematography by Santosh Sivan covers the different regions of the Indian sub-continent evoking the contrasting geographic and ethnic features.
- After the interval the story moves to New Delhi with consequent tighter framing.
- In *Dil Se* the songs (apart from *E Ajnabi*) are fantasies bookended by realities. The cinematography signals the change between these two modes. During the dance sequences frequent use of camera zoom, moving camera, change of camera angles echo the rhythmic pattern of the song. At the ending of the film the cinematography is much more tied to the conventions of realism.

Mise-en-Scène

- Lavish mise-en-scène in terms of the costumes as well as the scenery. During the song and dance sequences both change constantly which is one of the features of the Bollywood film. In *Satrange Re* Meghna starts off in black, then white, orange, yellow, green, red, blue, white, purple then white again. Amar wears black until the end of the sequence when his costume changes to white.
- The fiery ending is foreshadowed in some of the song sequences. *Chaiyya Chaiyya* cuts to a fire at the end; *Dil Se Re* is full of flames, in *Satrange Re* the single tree is ablaze.
- Final sequence in the streets of New Delhi, city contrasting with the more exotic locations of the rest of the film. Ordered ranks of soldiers.

Editing

- The film’s big hit *Chaiyya Chaiyya* cuts abruptly from a deserted railway station in a remote corner of north East India on a cold rainy night to the roof of a train

speeding through sunlit dramatic scenery. Amar, no longer shivering under a blanket, dances with an unnamed woman.

- The songs and music make a diegetic rupture, a break in the continuity of the plot/story world underlined by the editing. The transitions from the 'real' world to the 'imagined' world can be abrupt. In *Satrangi Re* Amar sees a bathing Meghna through a doorway and the doorway shuts with a blackout wipe but during the song itself whiteouts are used towards the ending.
- Cuts used during the songs emphasise the transitions and visual fragmentations as costumes and locations change.

Sound

- A.R.Rahman the composer of the soundtrack uses an ethnic mixture in the music, including folk rhythms, Indo-Persian *ghazal*.
- The songs are 'picturisations' disassociated from the screenplay and undercut the continuity of the film providing a 'second narrative' that is able to express sexual passion and emotion through music and movement. They allow the characters to express feelings in surreal sequences that appear in some cases to be played out inside their heads. They contribute to the overall sense of dislocation, forming diegetic ruptures into harsh realities. The one exception is *E Ajnabi* heard on radio, which unlike the other songs, is diegetic.
- Motifs from the songs appear throughout, there are no songs in the last 40 minutes but repeated motifs from earlier parts of the film. Natural sounds such as birdsong in the final moments.

CORE STUDY AREAS 2 - STARTING POINTS – Meaning & Response

Representations

- The treatment of terrorism in *Dil Se* forms a contrast with the way it is portrayed in Hollywood films. In *Dil Se* the 'terrorists' are revolutionaries, positioned as 'freedom fighters'. The spectator is invited to judge their actions as having their basis in a just cause. In *Dil Se* Amar represents the dominant group, not just a man but also a Hindu who falls in love with a woman from a repressed minority.
- Meghna is a complex portrayal of a woman whose actions are motivated by rape and murder. She is a mysterious and lonely figure, contrasting with the open and vivacious Preeti.
- Amar a journalist for All India Radio with the

remit of reporting on what Indian independence has achieved for its citizens. What it is to be Indian is usually set against opposition from outside, here India itself is the oppressor, the emphasis being on what he hasn't done.

Aesthetics (i.e. the 'look and feel' of the film including visual Style, influences, Auteur, Motifs)

- Choreography by Farah Khan uses influences of Indian classical dance from different parts of the Indian sub continent.
- Melodrama as a genre is about emotion, spectacle 'melodramatic excess', which presents us with an unreal world, experienced only through the medium of film as entertainment cinema with a clear line drawn between reality and fantasy. *Dil Se* crosses that line. Mani Ratnam has said '*If I'm dealing with a serious issue I must do it in a language that is understood by the people around me*'.
- Bollywood films, like other 'national' cinemas, represent Indians as a group. Mani Ratnam is a Tamil and *Dil Se* is the third film in his 'terrorism trilogy' a series of controversial mainstream films about contemporary issues. The others are *Roja* 1992 (about Kashmiri secession) and *Bombay* 1994 (about the Hindu / Muslim Riots that took place in Bombay in 1993). Both *Roja* and *Bombay* were small budget, Tamil language films. *Bombay* dealt with particularly controversial themes. *Dil Se* is a mainstream Hindi film with big stars.

CORE STUDY AREAS 3 - STARTING POINTS – Contexts

Social

- The world is in a phase of globalisation, but terrorism is about localisation, group identities based on religious, ethnic or regional separatism. The idea of a country having a National Cinemas is based on identifiable characteristics. Bollywood films, like other "national" cinemas, represent Indians as a group. *Dil Se* stresses not just diversity but suppression.

Historical

- India gained independence from British rule in 1947. The country was partitioned with resulting bloodshed. Within India various separatist movements have arisen such as in the Eastern Himalayas threat to unity of the nation. Violence of insurgents

and counter violence of Indian army.

Political

- *Dil Se* is set during the 50th anniversary of Indian and Pakistani independence. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by a female terrorist in 1991. The events of the film are more familiar to an Indian audience.

Technological

- Songs not sung by the actors but by professional 'playback' singers who record the material to which the non-singing actors lip synchronise on screen. The songs undermine any conceptions of realism. Whether the person singing is near to, or far away from camera, the sound is the same volume.

Institutional

- As a love story tied to a political film it challenged the romantic narrative of many Bollywood films. It was not a success at Indian box office and was criticised for its ending. It won a following outside India. Pre-sales of music soundtrack before its UK release is estimated at 100,000 copies. In its first week of release in the UK in 1998 it grossed over £224,636 becoming the first Hindi movie to appear in the top 10 of the British Box Office Chart.