CINEMA AND THE VILLAGER: ANALYZING RURAL INDIA’S CHANGING ACCESS TO HINDI FILM

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ABSTRACT

Much of Hindi film scholarship focuses on the industry’s globalization and its diversifying audience demographics in recent years. As a result of this outward focus, Indian villagers have been greatly ignored in Hindi film research, despite making up 70% of the country’s population. This thesis argues that by using the lens of comparative historical sociology, we can understand the overlapping and connected changes in technological, social and institutional contexts in post-independence India, and how these changes have affected the extent to which rural Indians have accessed Hindi cinema, both pragmatically and emotionally. Important historical processes to consider include the diffusion of ICTs, lingering effects of the caste system, and the globalization of the Hindi film industry. Re-conceptualizing the historical contexts as networks helps focus the analysis on issues of access, where connections exist, and how different actors are included – or excluded. Furthermore, this thesis supplements a macro historical lens with content analysis, which illustrates how broader changes manifest in cultural texts. In particular, examining ten Hindi films from 1953 to 2009, this thesis examines the changing narrative of on-screen portrayal of rural India. This multilayered long durée perspective not only helps map historical shifts occurring simultaneously in multiple ‘networks,’ but also shows how more explosive changes in the short durée – such as recent ICT diffusion and Bollywood’s globalization – relate to the broader multiple-network system. As a result, we find a complex cyclical relationship between Hindi film and the broader technological, social, and institutional contexts from which these cultural texts emerge.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Networks create links across individuals and communities. These groups construct and maintain various networks through interactions, exchanges, and the sharing of values over time. The strengths and structures of networks can also be shaped by economic, political, social, and technological influences. In this regard, David Singh Grewal (2008, p.20) has provided an apt definition of a network as “an interconnected group of people linked to one another in a way that makes them capable of beneficial cooperation, which can take various forms, including the exchange of goods and ideas.” Such a definition illustrates the role of networks in directing not only material but also intangible flows.

In the context of cinema, networks are involved in production and distribution processes, as well as in the ways in which consumers can access films. Today, films are increasingly shot in any number of countries, processed in another location, and distributed globally. Throsby (2010, p. 25) has explained that the globalization of film has led to production structures that no longer resemble value chains but rather “value networks, where multiple inputs, feedback loops, and a pervasive ‘value-creating ecology’ replace a simple stage-wise process.” These multiple inputs have steered cinema to become a powerful entertainment so that in 2011, the global film industry’s ticket sales reached US$32.6 billion (McClintock, 2012). Without networks to coordinate international production and distribution, the economic impact of film would not have been nearly as great.

Even after distribution occurs, audiences require various network links to gain access to platforms for viewing and otherwise experiencing films. For example, networks link theaters,
individuals, and ticket offices. Technological networks also exist, providing the necessary infrastructure for audiences to view films in a given space. Social networks among individuals and groups propel people to view films. Such examples of networks do not function in isolation; rather, they are part of an intricately constructed larger structure of interaction. Individuals who can access these structures of interaction benefit by being more closely connected socially, technologically, and economically. The resulting infrastructures, often transnational today, help films to spread as entertainment products and vehicles of cultural values.

With its overseas audiences and global production structure, the Hindi film industry depends heavily on networks spanning transnational contexts to succeed. However, in its formative years, the national context was the most important. In the late 1940s, when India was still grappling with independence, the federal government took a central role in pushing an agenda that decided “policies of censorship, taxation and [the] institutional formation” of Hindi film (Vasudevan, 2000, p.6). The film medium had a wide appeal – albeit a problematic one given India’s ethnic diversity at the time – and helped to promote national identity and unity (Morcom, 2007). It fostered certain Indian cultural values, which are still a part of Hindi film today, both in popular Hindi movies known collectively as “Bollywood” and Hindi art cinema.

This paper will look both at Bollywood and other Hindi cinema, referring to the two collectively as Hindi film. Athique (2011) points out that Bollywood as an entertainment industry has set itself apart from the other Indian film industries for its outward-looking plots, while still drawing upon established musical and cultural motifs. Here, one must be aware of the existing thematic infrastructure of Bollywood films. Athique (p.4) explains that “the Bollywood archetype is defined by the high-budget saccharine upper middle-class melodrama which
represents a tongue-in-cheek blockbuster repackaging of the masala movie of old within an affluent, nostalgic, and highly exclusive view of Indian culture and society.” Hindi-language films that do not fall under the umbrella of Bollywood often tackle more serious plots and themes, and usually do not include song-and-dance numbers (Athique).

Today Hindi film constitutes a global entertainment institution, contributing heavily towards revenues gathered by India’s film industry each year; in 2011, the country’s film revenues totaled US$1.85 billion (McClintock, 2012). Indian viewers have certainly contributed to the growth of Hindi film in the last sixty years, but more recently, overseas audiences have come to play an increasingly central role in the industry’s continued prosperity. Members of the Indian diaspora, often referred to as Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), have created networks with social and economic links, allowing them access to Hindi film in theaters and in other forms. NRI-Hindi film linkages help strengthen other networks that have emerged out of NRI-India relations, such as regular financial investments that the overall successful group sends back to their homeland – approximately US$26 billion in 2006 alone (Menon, 2007).

Given the global presence of Hindi film, academic studies focusing on this field have proliferated in recent years. Yet most of these studies focus on two aspects of production and viewership. One major part of the field looks at the rise of international co-productions and the use of overseas filming locations. Such studies highlight the rise of a New International Division of Cultural Labor, or NIDCL, and how the Hindi film industry has adopted NIDCL practices as it globalizes (Miller et al., 2005). Govil (2006, p.87) has illustrated the impact of the NIDCL, explaining that Bollywood illustrates a new industrial “interconnectivity” because it straddles national and global contexts and processes of production. Such trends in global media
consumption have galvanized a new era of investment in Hindi film, as foreign companies see economic merit in being involved in its production and distribution. Included among these companies are Viacom, Sony, Fox Searchlight, and Disney, to name a few (Overdorf, 2007). As overseas revenues have increased and Hindi film studios have learned that there are viable international audiences to capture, scholars have reworked earlier theories of value chains and flows of capital (Throsby).

Many other Hindi film scholars focus on changing viewership demographics. The global migration phenomenon of NRIs complements Bollywood’s expansion beyond India’s borders: the Hindi film industry used NRI populations as a stepping stone to capture a wider market share (Moorti, 2003). NRIs, while only comprising a small part of Bollywood’s global audience today, have nonetheless greatly affected the way the film industry has expanded overseas. Scholars such as Moorti (2003), Desai (2004), Rajadhyaksha (2008), and Ganti (2008) have studied the cultural and economic experience of the NRI with Hindi film, as well as spillover effects on non-Indian audiences. Such culturally unaffiliated audiences are finding Hindi films, particularly Bollywood, increasingly easy to understand. Moorti and Gopal (2008) have explained this phenomenon by looking at the social influence of the Indian diaspora and how recent Bollywood films have positioned themselves to mirror a heavily Westernized, hybridized identity.

Thus, although the current body of literature on Hindi film is rich, it largely excludes a significant portion of Indians. As of 2011, over 800 million Indians – 68.9% of the country’s population – lived in villages (Office of the Registrar General, 2011). Although they are poor, Indian villagers still participate in the consumption of Hindi films, albeit in different ways than their urban counterparts. However, academic studies tend to focus on urban and upper class
Indian audiences, as well as globalized audiences that are not necessarily Indian. Rural groups and the fragmented networks of access they have built over time are largely ignored by scholars.

The gap in research raises the following questions: how, if at all, has the changing technological, social, and institutional environment in post-independence India shaped rural access to Hindi films? Secondly, how has this change been reflected in the on-screen portrayal of these groups?

This paper argues that a combination of the technological, social, and institutional processes taking place in the past sixty years have affected the extent to which rural Indians have been able to access Hindi film. Rural development and the inclusion of technology in development projects have helped villagers access the network infrastructure needed to connect to cinema. Yet even as infrastructure has expanded, entrenched social prejudices against lower classes and castes – of which villagers make up a great proportion – have limited film producers’ acknowledgement of them as an audience. As the review of the existing literature shows, Hindi film as an institution has globalized, allowing it to woo richer and more diverse viewers around the world. Rather than occur in parallel contexts, these technological, social, and institutional processes have converged, functioning as related parts of a larger multi-level network that has shaped rural Indian access to Hindi films since India’s independence. The result is a complex relationship between Indian villagers and Hindi film that can best be described by considering how networks in different contexts overlap and change over time.

This thesis employs the lens of comparative historical sociology as a way to understand how multiple factors work together to influence a complex outcome. In particular, it adopts a qualitative perspective to assess the fragmented networks of access that rural Indians use to
access Hindi films. To this end, the paper first presents a multi-layered theoretical framework, drawing upon existing work on the literature of comparative historical sociology and showing why it is an effective methodology in this case. In Chapter 2, I will define the different angles of analysis – technological, social, and institutional – and show how the three angles fit together.

Building on this conceptual framework, Chapter 3 will analyze pertinent portions of Indian history from each of those three contexts and see how distinct processes converged to shape the rural-Hindi film network. Included will be an account of the advent of information and communication technologies (ICTs) into rural development and their impact on reshaping networks of rural access. From there I will examine social factors and their influence on how rural groups have historically been cast as subaltern and marginalized, making them outliers in aristocratic networks (Barabasi, 2003) of film consumption. Finally, I will show how those networks were affected by institutional influences such as the tendency of cinematic industries – Bollywood in particular – to favor upper-class areas over rural regions, given the high sunk costs in film production and distribution.

Chapter Four will provide a complementary perspective to the comparative sociological approach. Using partial content analysis, I will look at specific scenes of ten Hindi films to see how changing technological, social, and institutional factors have manifested in on-screen representation of rural Indians. The films analyzed will be Do Bigha Zamin (1953), Naya Daur (1957), Bandini (1963), Teesri Kasam (1966), Ankur (1974), Umrao Jaan (1981), Mirch Masala (1987), Virasat (1997), Swades (2004), and Billu (2009). All ten films have rural/urban themes and reflect varying portrayals of villagers. During the early 20th century, silent film and then film with sound had only limited circulation in India, confined mostly to upper class Indians and the
British colonial presence. Although the early decades of Indian cinema illustrate rich cultural beginnings, my research is on post-independence India and thus the starting point for Hindi film’s history will be in the 1950s.4

In a concluding chapter, the thesis will reflect on how a combination of approaches creates a more holistic understanding of the complex processes involved in shaping rural access to Hindi films. On the one hand, a comparative sociological approach highlights broad historical shifts and how such shifts connect across contexts. On the other hand, a film content analysis draws attention to concrete cultural details that do not show up in a purely macro perspective. This chapter will also present several possibilities for the roles that research on rural India and film may play in the future. While villagers may continue to be an audience demographic that is not very socially or financially influential in the years to come, studying networks that involve them can still yield important insights about how cultural flows spread and individuals are connected to one another.
Chapter 2: Methodology

Introduction

This research seeks to uncover how the changing technological, social, and institutional environment in post-independence India has affected rural access to Hindi films. It does so by examining how historical shifts in these three contexts have overlapped and intertwined to shape both the infrastructure that allows rural audiences to access films as well as the social and institutional prerequisites to take full advantage of them. To complement the macro analysis, the paper also examines a collection of Hindi films with rural plots and characters to study any general shifts in the on-screen portrayals of these groups. To achieve this, I use partial content analysis. The combination of these two perspectives will yield the most holistic understanding of how networks of access have changed, and help identify which processes have been most influential.

The chapter first provides a review of the literature related to rural access to films in India. Based on the remaining questions in the field, it then describes the advantages of a comparative historical approach in addressing them, first reviewing the features of this approach and then defining the cases to be studied. In addition, the chapter presents out a multi-layered framework of networks to help visualize a comparative historical approach that looks at technological, social, and institutional contexts. By imagining those three contexts as dynamic networks whose topologies can change over time, we can characterize historical changes as factors that lead to new network structures. Visualizing historical changes as adjustments in strengths and types of network links allows us to see potential connections – in other words, access to Hindi films.\(^b\)
Literature Review

As noted in the previous chapter, rural Indians’ access to Hindi films has been largely ignored in academic scholarship of Hindi cinema more broadly. Most of the work on this topic has focused on the globalization of production and the globalization of Hindi cinema’s audiences, especially due to Bollywood films. This focus has economic and cultural motives: Hindi cinema has international financial strength and it appeals to those beyond Hindi speakers. As a result, the last several decades have seen a rise in research on the Indian diaspora, overseas film consumption, the Westernization of Bollywood, and other related topics.

Despite the overwhelming attention on global aspects of Hindi film, there has been some research on rural Indian audiences and their relationship to film. What does this body of literature on rural film access and experience show? Until very recently, most of the scholarship that addressed rural audiences made a very one-dimensional argument about the role that information & communication technologies (ICTs) played in bringing media to previously isolated areas of India. Even today, most of the relevant research has looked at the modernizing effects of film and television collectively, particularly as a result of development endeavors (Fernandes, 2000; Cecchini & Scott, 2009). Only a few authors have gone beyond development contexts and looked at the resulting experience of the rural viewer, either via ethnography (Johnson, 2001; S. Rao, 2007) or content analysis (Ranganathan, 2010).

Johnson (2001) looked at how the introduction of television into rural India, as part of a larger ICT push, has shaped villagers’ views and belief systems. His data comes from fieldwork conducted in several villages in Western Maharashtra. Johnson argued that the culture that
emerges from the introduction of television results from “the myriad decisions made by intelligent individuals within the constraints of their social context” (p.148). In this way, he broke free from many of the imperialist-toned research characteristic of earlier decades and pushes a more nuanced argument that reiterates how “village society is highly differentiated...[and] resembles any larger society with all the complexities of power struggles” (Johnson, p.163). Johnson’s work has identified the need for a more multidimensional look at how rural areas deal with technological change. Yet at the same time, his argument focused ultimately only on one particular technology – television – and its social and political impact.

S. Rao (2007) brought the globalization of Hindi cinema – Bollywood in particular – back to rural India, and went one step further than Johnson in trying to capture the Indian villager’s experience of film. In particular, Rao analyzed the impact of the “Bollywoodization” of Indian cinema and argues that this shift towards a globalized entertainment institution has led to a growing elitism within the Hindi film industry (Rajadhyaksha, 2003). As a result, Indian villagers feel increasingly distanced from Hindi film plots and characters. Conducting ethnographic interviews, Rao (2007, p.65) has revealed how most villagers watch Bollywood films and instead of feeling satisfied, the movie experience “becomes a fantasy of alienation.” According to Rao (2007), recent Bollywood plots and characters have flaunted a Western cosmopolitanism, which has led to “an increasing distance from the everyday reality of lower middle class and rural audiences” (p.65).

Rao’s article (2007) provides a good counterpoint to the dominant body of work that focuses solely on Hindi film’s globalization in the last decade. In addition to highlighting an often overlooked audience, Rao presents a multifaceted argument. While doing her fieldwork,
she acknowledged the impact of broader social factors, such as India’s ingrained caste system and ongoing religious strife. Despite these strengths, Rao’s work is predominantly ethnographic in nature and lacks an overarching macro approach that considers the influence of slowly emerging shifts in society. Instead of looking at the underlying processes that created the possibility for such a viewing experience, Rao (2007) emphasizes the subjective experience of the rural viewer.

In contrast to this ethnographic approach, some scholars have used content analysis to understand rural experiences and their connections to Hindi film. Ranganathan (2010) has been particularly persuasive in showing how recent Hindi films, most of which embrace a globalizing Indian identity, create challenging adjustments for rural viewers who still follow more traditional lifestyles. In her article, which focuses on the 2004 Hindi film Swades, Ranganathan grappled with how different “we” and “they” identities – collectively making up a complex and not completely consistent Indian identity – emerge in film. Villagers in Swades are shown to be at once stubbornly traditional as well as capable of change, all the while representing a “highly problematic and essentialized notion of Indianness” (Ranganathan, p.46). The small body of work that Rangnathan’s article belongs to shows how film content has the power to shape and perpetuate established ideas of Indian rural identity, even more so in this current era of globalization.

**An Alternate Framework: Comparisons and Networks**

While informative, the current literature described here does not comprehensively explore the issue of rural access to Hindi film. What broad infrastructures and social
prerequisites have emerged over time to shape how rural Indians view films? How do macro changes influence varying aspects of rural access, and how do those processes of change influence each other? To answer these lingering questions, this thesis will draw upon comparative historical sociology. A macro approach, comparative historical sociology identifies a variety of broad historical changes and emphasizes the collective influence of multiple factors over time. Mahoney and Rueschemeyer (2003, p.6) have identified the approach as having “a concern with causal analysis, an emphasis on processes over time, and the use of systematic and contextualized comparison.” These three main features of comparative historical sociology merit further explanation.

Causal analysis places an emphasis on “the explanation and the identification of causal configurations that produce major outcomes of interest” (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003, p.11). This type of analysis can be characterized in various ways, such as cumulative causation or causal chain arguments. The former refers to slow-moving causal processes that require “change in a variable [that] is continuous but extremely gradual” while the latter suggests that “the ultimate outcomes of interest reflect a sequence of key developments [in other words, multiple variables] over extended periods of time” (Thelen, 2003, p.181, 187). Although the reasoning behind causal analysis can vary depending on the factors and temporal structure involved, it is useful in conducting analyses that involve broad shifts that take time to occur.

The role of time, and temporal structures, such as path dependency and the longue durée, is also central to comparative historical sociology. As described by Mahoney and Rueschemeyer:

….comparative historical researchers explicitly analyze historical sequences and take seriously the unfolding of processes over time...the events that engage
comparative historical researchers...are not static occurrences taking place at a single, fixed point; rather, they are processes that unfold over time and in time. As a result, comparative historical analysts incorporate considerations of the temporal structure of events in their explanations. They may, for example, argue that the influence of an event is very much shaped by the duration of the event...Indeed, precisely because events are temporal processes, they may intersect with one another, and the relative timing of that intersection can be of decisive importance” (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003, p.12).

Fernand Braudel (1969) also emphasized the role of time in his characterization of the longue durée as a mix of incremental patterns and larger changes that collectively account for shifts in technological, economic, and social contexts over time. More useful comparisons, he argues, involve stepping back and analyzing a larger period of time.

By providing a “systematic and contextualized comparison,” comparative historical sociology also keeps the research from drifting off into a general historical reflection (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003, p.6). Hence, one can analyze a variety of different variables, or cases, depending on the goals of the research and the parameters of the subject matter. Although the common strategy is to compare different geographical units, periods of time or even different contexts within a single geographical unit can serve as cases for analysis (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). Choosing technological, social, and institutional processes, which unfold over time as case materials, provides a deeper understanding of a given territory.

Such an approach requires that each of these variables is defined. “Technological” refers both to media platforms and how information spreads with the help of ICT structures. We can define ICTs as “the set of activities that facilitate the capture, storage, processing, transmission, and display of information by electronic means” (S.S. Rao, 2004, p.261). Those activities are coordinated either by government or private sector organizations. In this paper, “social” will be
defined as collective attitudes, beliefs, and norms that emerge in interactions within a certain
cultural or geographical context (Grewal, 2008). It includes dominant groups’ perspectives as
well as those that are excluded or marginalized (Spivak, 1988). In contrast, the term
“institutional” refers to specific infrastructural and industrial embodiments of social norms. In
this context, we can view institutions as “embodying collectively defined cultural understanding
of the way the world works,” (Thelen, 2003, p.216) through a series of “humanly devised
constraints that shape human interaction” (North, 1990, p.3).

Although comparative historical sociology is useful when considering macro processes
that have developed over time, it must be properly structured. Because it studies the longue
durée, comparative historical sociology must process and filter relevant ideas from more general
history. Without a proper framework, it will be difficult to simultaneously analyze technological,
social, and institutional processes and thus our analysis will likely yield limited results. To avoid
such pitfalls, we can characterize these processes as dynamic networks that change their
topology over time.

Understanding technological, social, and institutional processes as networks allows for a
multi-layered framework of analysis. This is an emerging approach in comparative historical
sociology that has gained traction in the last several years. Gould (2003, p.243) has explained
that “if individuals or their traits could be reframed...as the products rather than the agents of
interlocking relations, then it is reasonable to treat all sorts of phenomena as if they are networks,
regardless of what intuition or mainstream social science might say to the contrary.” Treating
processes as networks involves understanding the basic traits of networks and how changes in
those processes can be embodied as changes in network structures.
When applying a network approach to comparative historical sociology, the emphasis turns to changes in network links, network structures, and how different actors are included – or excluded. Barabási (2003), for example, has shown how small-world networks arise out of clustered network links, resulting in aristocratic network structures that favor those who are more centrally connected. As a result, isolated individuals or groups become outliers and experience restricted access to resources and interactions from the larger hubs (Barabási, 2003; Watts & Strogatz, 1998). In addition, Granovetter (1973) has described the role that different types of ties – strong versus weak – play in determining how structures are shaped from technological, social, and institutional processes. Strong ties create clustered worlds with dense connections; weak ties help traverse contexts and expand network reach (Granovetter, 1973). Considering technological, social, and institutional processes as networks allows us to identify how structures that emerge from interactions and rules can impact the parameters for membership, and from there, positions of power (Grewal, 2008, p.22).

Given that each of the technological, social, and institutional processes can be conceived as networks, we can and should think about how these three networks interrelate and overlap over time. Padgett and Powell (2012) have provided such a framework to do so. According to them, the various aspects of society – e.g., political, economic, religious, etc. – constitute multiple, and overlapping, network layers. Because these layers influence each other, they must be analyzed simultaneously. As they have noted:

“...social science disciplines usually segregate their intellectual activities by analyzing only one domain at a time, as if the other domains and disciplines did not exist. At best, external domains are conceptually black-boxed as reified ‘environments’ without examining their internal structures. In contrast, the whole point of a multiple-network perspective is to superimpose multiple domains, with
their respective production and exchange networks, and to examine feedback dynamics.” (Padgett & Powell, 2012, p.5, emphasis added)

Figure 1: A multiple-network perspective highlights overlaps and connections between normally separated contexts and/or processes (Padgett & Powell, 2012, p.6)

By “superimposing multiple domains,” we can transcend the established barriers in social science research and examine how important changes in one network can affect another network’s structure. The inclusion of Padgett and Powell’s diagram in this chapter is not to suggest a specific way in which the technological, social, and institutional cases in this research connect. Rather, the diagram helps make the point that, in addition to systematic comparisons as proposed by Mahoney and Rueschemeyer (2003), comparative historical analysis can illustrate the ways in which networks depend on and are influenced by each other. Historical changes in
one context, when thought of as changes in network topologies, often have repercussions in other contexts – in this case, other networks.

Notwithstanding the benefits of this approach, there are, as Ranganathan (2010) has shown in the context of rural film access, advantages to balancing a broad lens with micro details. Hence, in addition to conducting a comparative historical sociology analysis based on the framework laid out above, this research will employ a partial content analysis. Krippendorff (2012, p.24) has defined content analysis as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use.” Depending on its goals, content analysis can be heavily quantitative or remain mostly qualitative in how it defines variables and presents the findings.

What Krippendorff hints at in this definition is the comparative potential of the findings from a content analysis. Although content analysis is much more focused on minute details than comparative historical sociology, it still emphasizes systematic comparisons, albeit using texts as the different cases. Berelson (1952; cited in Krippendorff, p.50) has shown that in addition to textual comparison, content analysis helps “describe trends in communication content” and “reflect attitudes, interests, and values (cultural patterns) of population groups.” Extrapolating such trends found in the texts analyzed helps highlight deeper cultural motives of those involved in producing the text.

Van Leeuwen & Jewitt (2001) have explained that applying the parameters of content analysis to visual analysis of film requires defining the body of films to be analyzed, stating the different features – dialogue, scenery, characters, etc. – to be studied, and presenting a hypothesis about the predicted findings. Because film content analysis hopes to understand
cultural decisions as they manifest in film, the hypothesis often refers to “the ways in which the media represent people, events, [and] situations, and… allows description of fields of visual representation by describing the constituents of one or more defined areas of representation” (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001, p.14). Furthermore, because of its comparative nature, content analysis allows film research to observe “historical changes in modes of representation,” including differences in gender, class, or ethnicity (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001, p.14).

Thus, applying content analysis to film highlights specifics from a given film, such as scenes, dialogue, or other pertinent information, that normally stay hidden with a macro perspective such as comparative historical sociology. As such, a partial content analysis complements the conclusions from the comparative historical analysis, while drawing on those conclusions to make an educated hypothesis about what will be found. Although assuming that a film’s content always reflects a nation’s value system is too far-fetched, the types of film plots and themes that are popular in a country can reveal certain cultural expectations of an audience. Likewise, seeing how groups are represented in – or excluded from – film draws attention to embedded values of the producers of such content (Krippendorff, 2012).

Supplementing a comparative historical sociological approach with content analysis provides a glimpse of how broader changes are manifested in cultural texts. In particular, it uses historical evidence to justify why certain groups might be represented in different ways. Texts like films are usually considered neat and finished products, an assumption that ignores the production processes that embed valuations and representations in the film plot and themes – and also ignores certain audiences. Examining cultural products such as films after having
systematically gone through the deeper shifts in technological, social, and institutional cases helps make the resulting extrapolations that much stronger.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has laid out the theoretical groundwork needed to tackle the questions of rural India’s access to Hindi films and how technological, social, and institutional changes have affected this access. The existing body of literature on this topic is small and has tended to be ethnographic or content-based in nature, focusing on individual experiences rather than looking at macro shifts over time. As an alternative, I have proposed the approach of comparative historical sociology and shown how its emphasis on temporal structures and cumulative causation helps balance different influences simultaneously.

In addition, it helps to consider different cases of comparative historical sociology as overlapping networks to overcome a common tendency in social science to focus on one context at a time. Padgett and Powell’s diagram (2012) provides a useful visual and conceptual framework of how different contexts can be transformed into networks and then compared. Employing networks in this type of analysis highlights how technological, social, and institutional processes are not static but constantly in flux, affected by deeper societal norms and shifts. Everything becomes relational. Drawing upon findings of content analysis adds a different perspective to questions of film access, filling in details that sociology might otherwise ignore. Film analysis, informed by an awareness of underlying historical processes, shows what norms and beliefs are embedded into the final cultural texts.
The next chapter will examine in more detail the specific technological, social, and institutional changes that have affected how rural India has gained varying levels of access to Hindi films in the past sixty years. Analyses of changing ICT infrastructures, attitudes towards rural marginalization, and Hindi film’s production and investment structures will shed more light on the changing networks to which rural Indians have been connected. Throughout the analyses of these three overlapping processes of change, I will refer to concepts and definitions described in this chapter. In particular, Padgett and Powell’s multi-domain network diagram will help visualize cross-context changes in rural access. Chapter 4 will provide a partial content analysis of ten Hindi films after first presenting a hypothesis about expected rural representation based on the findings from the preceding comparative historical analysis. These two chapters present a holistic look at how rural access to Hindi films has changed and been shaped by larger historical shifts.
Chapter 3: Analyzing Networks of Access in Post-Independence India

Introduction

Building on the methodology laid out in Chapter 2, this chapter addresses the issue of rural Indian access to Hindi film in the past sixty years. The previous chapter described comparative historical sociology and its use for answering questions that span contexts and time periods. It highlighted the three main features of a comparative approach and the advantages of re-conceptualizing the cases to be analyzed as networks – a strategy that emphasizes changes in inclusion and exclusion. This chapter will apply that macro lens to post-independence India so as to show how technological, social, and institutional changes have collectively shaped rural access to Hindi film.

Before we convert contexts to networks, we must clarify the dynamics of the historical contexts themselves. To this end, this chapter first presents three distinct historical narratives. The section on technological contexts highlights the entry of ICTs into rural India, especially via development projects, as well as the phenomenon of technological leapfrogging. These technological developments have provided the necessary infrastructure for rural pockets to gain access to film.

The section on social contexts describes the caste system, which dominated cultural interactions for the last few centuries and instilled an attitude that justified rural marginalization. Interestingly enough, the historical process of rural marginalization was accompanied by a feeling of reverence towards the pure simplicity – and religious orthodoxy – of Indian villages. This oxymoronic perspective towards villages translated into arguably inconsistent representations of villages in early Hindi film, a point that Chapter 4 will discuss in more detail.
Only recently, in part due to technological advances, have collective attitudes become more inclusive of villagers.

The third section on institutional contexts briefly describes Hindi film as it evolved from a vehicle for enhancing national identity to a global entertainment institution, as well as how the industry’s high fixed costs and practice of audience targeting have led to the disregard of poorer Indian villagers. Each narrative concludes by showing how broad changes in the given context can be re-conceptualized as changes in network structure.

Having characterized these historical narratives as networks, I then compare changes in the three networks’ sizes and structures of links, and I describe how rural populations are situated within them. This comparison depicts a complex network of access to film – a multifaceted network that is shaped simultaneously by technological, social, and institutional influences. Drawing on Padgett & Powell’s multiple-network framework (2012), as described in the previous chapter, I identify several examples of how changes in one network affect other networks’ topologies. As described in Chapter 2, the conclusions drawn from this chapter will inform the hypothesis that frames the film content analysis in the following one.

**Technological Contexts**

The technological narrative of rural India in the past sixty years has been characterized by a combination of government and organization-driven ICT development, first by providing permanent infrastructure and more recently by promoting mobile technologies. Many of these development projects have aimed to help villagers modernize. Some projects have focused solely on technological capacity building, while others have looked to cinema to expose rural villages
to cultural knowledge. Most of the older initiatives primarily targeted men, further sidelining rural women, although female empowerment has recently become a more central goal of both domestic and international development (World Bank India, 2013). No matter what their objective, these approaches were externally driven, and rural audiences had little input.

Since independence, India’s strong central government has led rural technological development endeavors while occasionally cooperating with international organizations. In the 1950s, India’s leaders made the development of their technological infrastructure one of their highest priorities – in primarily urban areas but also rural regions (Bose & Jalal, 1998). However, in the following decades, a private sector with growing economic and political clout began to challenge this state-interventionist approach to ICT development (Bose & Jalal, 1998). For example, until the 1980s, decision makers believed that the best way to reduce poverty and promote modernization was by integrating technology into rural life (Johnson, 2001). They believed, furthermore, that the government – with input from international development agencies such as the World Bank and United Nations Development Programme – was the best organization to lead this push (Johnson, 2001). This view has come to be known as “information and communication technology for development” or “ICT4D” (Toyama, 2011, p.75).

Although scholars began to oppose this approach as early as the 1970s, ICT4D dominated the international development community throughout the second half of the 20th century, and it continues to shape development agendas today (Toyama, 2011). In the 1950s and 1960s, Indian government officials focused on urban development and the transition to a self-sufficient model of governance after the nearly century-long British rule of the country. During its early growth, India’s domestic development sector saw ICT4D as the ideal Western model towards which to
work. In part, India wanted Western nations to view it as a legitimate developing country that could modernize; in other ways, India felt that a technologically driven approach would be the most accountable (Y. Singh, 1973). At this time, gender was not an important criterion to consider: many ICT-focused projects glossed over intra-village gender dynamics in order to achieve quantitatively tangible results as quickly as possible (World Bank India, 2013). Government-led projects involving film often involved large public screenings in village centers, which exposed illiterate Indians to a cultural text that they could follow and understand (Vasudevan, 2000).

In the last decade, ICT development has started to emphasize capacity building, seeing technology as an amplifier rather than a solution in and of itself. As Toyama (2011, p.80-81) shows:

“Technology-as-amplifier leads to the conclusion that successful development programs that rely on technology cannot be scaled simply by scaling the technology. Rather, direct investments in building human capacity must be made. Yet, those are exactly the expensive instruments that development organizations hope to avoid through technology….the amplification theory results in the recommendation that technology projects should seek to amplify the impact of existing institutions that are already contributing successfully to development goals.” (Toyama, 2011, p.80-81, italics added)

Development leaders have realized that they must consider the ICT infrastructure that rural groups currently possess to better shape future initiatives involving technology. For example, only 33 percent of rural households have a television in their home, in contrast to over 75 percent of urban households (Office of the Registrar General, 2011). However, over half of rural households own a mobile phone (Office of the Registrar General, 2011). Keeping these habits in mind, development organizations both domestically and internationally are increasingly using
mobile technology to drive new projects (Frolich et al., 2009). These same projects are designed to bridge gender gaps and boost both male and female participation (World Bank India, 2013). As global perceptions of top-down versus participatory development strategies have themselves changed, so have the ways in which rural Indians have encountered film.

Given the flexibility of mobile technology, technological leapfrogging has influenced how rural groups view film. Gaining traction in the 1980s, the idea of leapfrogging development suggests that “information technologies, especially telecommunications, can help developing countries accelerate their pace of development or telescope the stages of growth…in both technological and economic ways” (J.P. Singh, 1999, p.4-5). For example, instead of waiting for more permanent ICT infrastructure necessary to establish complete theaters, rural mobile cinemas are now appearing in certain states. Ganesh Kumar, the Forest, Sports and Cinema Minister in Kerala, said that such mobile theaters will help in “fostering a healthy film culture in the society,” helping those who traditionally could not access the necessary ICT infrastructure to experience films (Express News Service, 2011). Mobile ICT development has become even more popular given the accelerating rate of technological change as more of rural India gains access to mobile devices. Despite such advancements, however, one-sixth of the country (200 million Indians) still does not have access to a television, phone, or computer (Shrinivasan, 2011).

Given these broad shifts, we can start visualizing a network that represents the dynamic technological context of rural India. Throughout most of the 20th century, the network was highly aristocratic and skewed towards richer and more developed regions in India. Strong ties were concentrated within cities, and enduring weak ties connected different cities because they
possessed the necessary infrastructure and governance. Very few weak ties (Granovetter, 1973) – if any at all – extended to rural areas (S. Rao, 2007). Most changes in the technological network affecting access to films in rural areas occurred systematically: top-down authorities created links, which spread outwards from hubs such as cities and development organizations. These top-down links also often perpetuated existing power structures within villages, leaving women more isolated and less empowered.

Today with technological leapfrogging, the network is growing more erratically, no longer needing permanent infrastructure to expand. Although most of the changing network topology can still be attributed to formal ICT deployment out to rural populations, leapfrogging with mobile technologies has created new weak ties that function as bridges (Granovetter, 1973) and connect rural communities without having to create an entire formalized hub to link the two.

Within rural communities, villages now have stronger technological ties among themselves. New technical capabilities have also affected how rural audiences interact with film; mobile rural cinema provides a flexible way that villagers can view it. A mix of weak ties and strong ties has shaped the dynamic technological network that represents part of the story of rural access to films in post-independence India.

Social Contexts

In contrast to top-down influences in the technological network, emergent cultural attitudes embodied in religious values have shaped the social contexts in which rural Indians view film. One of the biggest influences has been the caste system, which, having evolved over centuries, has shaped how different social classes in India exercise their rights (J. Rao, 2010).
The caste system has shaped India’s long durée (Braudel, 1969) and has systematically marginalized lower class – and often rural – Indians (Stevenson, 1954). It has become embedded in the beliefs and structures of Indian society over many generations (Stevenson, 1954). Until quite recently, the strict social statuses stemming from castes marginalized villagers as outliers, limiting their access to and representation within Hindi film.

Castes are divisions of society based on the individual’s “natal group” (Stevenson, 1954, p.47). They guide religious and secular behaviors such as familial structure, job prospects, and marriageability (Stevenson, 1954). Brahmins are at the top of Indian society while ‘dalits,’ formerly known as ‘untouchables,’ are excluded from the entire system, and all but completely ignored by formal society. Not all villagers are dalits, but dalits are so systemically excluded from society that they often are relegated to more rural areas in the country (Gang, Sen, & Yun, 2012). Caste principles have integrated with India’s heavily patriarchal social structure, forcing rural women to comply with demands not only from higher castes but also from males in their same caste (Gang, Sen, & Yun, 2012).

The caste system in India has developed slowly over time and functioned for centuries as a fundamental part of Indian culture as well as its national identity. Although based on Hindu tenets from the Bhagavad Gita, the caste system transcended religion barriers and became part of India’s socio-political structures long before British rule, helping to differentiate labor according to varied social backgrounds. Later, British colonists expanded existing caste divisions “to promote order in Indian society,” a decision that exacerbated discrimination towards lower castes (Pye, 2002, p.177). Those in higher castes were traditionally favored in political and social
matters, assuring them and their descendants more respect and power, while lower castes experienced a vicious cycle of discrimination and hardship (Pye, 2002).

Although castes no longer dictate laws at the state and federal level, they are still embedded in India’s culture through interactions and informal traditions. On the one hand, global cultural influences have weakened castes’ rigidity by championing more equal human rights (Nelson, 2009). In part, these social movements have targeted ongoing prejudices against women, trying to lift established caste dictates that limit female social capital (Narayan, 1999). Yet castes still influence interactions as “informal social constraints” (North, 1990, p.45), and they grant different groups diverse social rights, right down to the dalits who, until recently, have been “essentially shunned from society” (Thekaekara, 2005). Grassroots and government-aided movements have tried to eliminate caste-based discrimination, but it still occurs today.

Because caste parameters endure as informal constraints, they still shape how non-rural India views villagers. Many rural Indians find themselves in the lower if not lowest castes, and struggle to earn the same social rights given to those in higher castes. Lower caste individuals are often scorned and must complete demeaning tasks to earn a living (Thekaekara, 2005). Since the 1970s, politicians such as Indira Gandhi have tried to dispose of castes’ social rules, but most have not succeeded (Bose & Jalal, 1998, p.212). The cultural embeddedness of the caste system is too strong. Thus, in addition to being geographically marginalized, many rural Indians find themselves socially marginalized.

The social process of marginalization has excluded most rural populations from mainstream India, thereby greatly limiting their voices. Spivak (1988, p.28) explained that histories generally reflect the elite minority’s experiences, excluding those of the “subaltern
subject.” Disempowered, subaltern groups cannot share their own narratives or participate in creating other narratives that circulate through society (Spivak, 1988). Lack of resources and limited social capital (Narayan, 1999) relative to other populations has compartmentalized villagers as subaltern subjects who struggle for recognition. This process is cyclical: since villagers cannot earn a widely legitimated voice, they cannot act as their own agents for social change. And since they lack social capital, they cannot accumulate enough support to make their voices heard. In this cyclical process, rural women suffer much more than their male counterparts.

In this context, higher classes and their rules of marginalization have influenced how villagers access Hindi film, both technologically and emotionally. Limited means for ICT development have often prioritized urban areas over rural ones. At the same time, culturally-embedded prejudices against lower castes have also strengthened support for ICT development in urban areas ahead of smaller villages (J. Rao, 2010). Even when rural audiences gain access to film, as they increasingly do with technological advancements, they still find themselves as “the Other” when relating to the film’s plot and characters (Spivak, 1988, p.24; S. Rao, 2007).

Today’s globalizing themes in Bollywood movies help reaffirm that emotional otherness (Rajadhyaksha, 2008).

Simplistic stereotypes of villagers within many Hindi films, a side-effect of social exclusion, strengthens the emotional distance that many villagers – especially women – feel when viewing films. Both positive and negative stereotypes appear; films present villagers as symbols of traditional purity as well as of dumb simple-mindedness (Ranganathan, 2010). Yet either way, rural characters often reflect flat archetypes that are based on the film studios’ elite
assumptions. Such archetypes limit the extent to which villagers can empathize with and access mainstream Hindi film (S. Rao, 2007).

When these social patterns are viewed as a network, they appear as an asymmetrical collection of “small world” hubs (Watts & Strogatz, 1988; Buchanan, 2002) around cities and isolated clusters in outlier villages. Ties between rural individuals within a given village are strong and based in tradition, trust, and familial interactions (Johnson, 2001). Within these rural small worlds, ingrained cultural tenets – in other words, principles governing strong ties – perpetuate positive structures such as communality and negative structures such as gender roles that constrain female empowerment.

Yet, as people who historically do not have far-reaching social networks outside their communities, villagers are often outliers, cut off from interactions and flows of information (Narayan, 1999). Just as outlier groups struggle to access cultural products, the products themselves often cannot travel on network paths to the outliers. As such, cultural texts like films circulate unequally through networks, following asymmetrical aristocratic paths (Barabasi, 2003) that exclude outliers. Over time, outliers tend to remain isolated because they lack the resources to build weak, bridging ties across communities (Narayan, 1999; Granovetter, 1973); similarly, subaltern subjects remain excluded (Spivak, 1988).

The social network of rural-film access has recently been expanded but at different rates in urban versus rural areas. Thus it is slowly welcoming more rural participation as it diverges from older frameworks shaped by the caste system. As the previous section showed, technological advances have helped rural isolated clusters connect with other hubs in richer urban areas. In this section, I have shown how marginalization has only recently started to ebb,
erasing social barriers so villagers can rely more on accessible technology and communication infrastructures to build connections and experience Hindi film. The older social frameworks shaped by the caste system, which heavily excluded rural outliers, are beginning to change, although they seem likely to endure as cultural constraints and to perpetuate uneven network growth in the future.

**Institutional Contexts**

The institutional context of Hindi film spans national borders, connecting hubs of cities and often prioritizing global audiences over rural ones. To understand how villagers have accessed the institution of Hindi film, we must look first at how the institution itself has evolved over time. In contrast to the caste system that took centuries to become rooted in Indian society, Hindi film has experienced much more accelerated structural change. It has boomed in the past two decades. Changing funding structures, increasing international co-productions, diversifying audience groups – all of these factors have combined in a causal chain, reflecting “a sequence of key developments” over a span of years (Thelen, 2003, p.187). Yet at the same time, there are nuances within Hindi film: acknowledging Bollywood’s global role in relation to more obscure Hindi art cinema illustrates how rural audiences have been alienated, by multiplex theaters as much as by cosmopolitan themes.

A brief look at the history of Hindi film provides a picture of its changing identity and funding structure over the past sixty years. Serving as vehicles for enhancing national identity, Hindi films in the 1950s consciously presented idyllic conceptions of Indianness for its new citizens (Vasudevan, 2000). In the decades that followed, film production rates jumped, and
although art cinema received some government funding, much of popular Hindi cinema drew the bulk of its funding from smuggling, tax evasion, and other black market transactions (Govil, 2006). In the 1990s, the government began to deregulate other sectors and open them up for foreign investment, a strategy that was soon applied to Hindi cinema (Hambrock & Hauptmann, 1999). Money started to flow in from European and American studios that were looking to invest in co-productions with Indian directors, a trend that could dramatically revolutionize the filming process and its reach (Govil, 2006). In 1998, the government went one step further and granted the Indian film institution the status of ‘industry’ (Govil, 2006). The conceptual motivation behind this legislation was to urge filmmakers to “look outward and recruit international capital via foreign media investment” (Govil, 2006, p.88).

This legislation affected all forms of Hindi film; yet here I should differentiate between Hindi ‘art cinema’ and ‘Bollywood.’ Because art cinema addresses more serious and controversial issues that limit its mainstream popularity, it has relied more heavily on government funding. In the mid-20th century, many art films and popular Hindi films included song-and-dance numbers, but in recent years the former has shied away from such formats (Vasudevan, 2000). On the other hand, Tejaswini Ganti’s (2008) research has highlighted the global branding of Bollywood. Branding popular Hindi cinema as ‘Bollywood’ is related to corporate processes and privatization, which has made this particular film industry dominate Indian cinema. Bollywood reflects dominant social attitudes, choosing a safe middle road that ensures its mainstream popularity instead of challenging gender or class norms (Rajadhyaksha, 2008). Because it blends Indian and Western elements, Bollywood appeals to NRIs (Non-Resident Indians) and even non-Indians.
Rising overseas box-office revenues and a growing global appeal have expanded Bollywood’s international distribution and foreign investment. As a result, the institutional context of Hindi film is now global – and glaringly urban. From an economic standpoint, all studios want to minimize their sunk costs and maximize profits from ticket sales (Vogel, 2011). According to Vogel (2011), products of the entertainment industry such as films must harvest large revenues because their production processes initially entail extremely high fixed costs. To cover these costs and capture returns, Hindi film studios have built their theaters in Indian cities, where audiences have the most purchasing power. Additionally, given the recent expansion of Hindi films abroad, overseas audiences are a guaranteed source of revenue. As a result, rural theaters within India – and rural audiences – are on the sidelines.

The pattern of distribution of theaters across different regions in India attests to the disparity between urban versus rural movie-goers. Before 2000, there were no indoor shopping malls or multiplexes in the country (Pendakur, 2011). By 2010 there were 223, which collectively boasted 785 of the 12,000 cinema screens all over India (Pendakur, 2011). In contrast to the boom of urban multiplexes, most rural Indian villages have only one local theater, where the most popular films are shown. Moreover, even if the ICT capabilities existed to build more theaters, most villagers would not have enough disposable income to regularly watch movies. As Pendukar (2011) has explained, “private capital [to maintain theaters] flows into areas where audiences have purchasing power to buy expensive tickets at the shiny multiplexes.” Thus, the institutional presence of Hindi film – or lack thereof in rural India – is cyclically reinforced.
From a cultural standpoint, changing audience demographics have made cosmopolitan plots and characters within Bollywood more popular, giving rise to a higher demand for transnational themes as well as changing industrial priorities in favor of a globalized brand. This brand woos urban viewers possessing more global cultural knowledge, but it is not easily translatable for rural audiences. Director Shyam Benegal has pointed out that:

“...the village audience is completely cut off from the kinds of films made in Mumbai [the central hub of Bollywood]: ‘That’s because people are simply not making films for this audience. Many [Hindi] films are aspirational. And though the young in rural India have their aspirations tied to urban India, they don’t understand these city-oriented films’” (Sinha, 2010).

With respect to today’s mainstream Hindi films, villagers are simply not a key cultural demographic.

When the institutional context of rural-film access is conceived as a network, we can see why Hindi film has expanded globally and, consequently, why villagers have experienced only limited access. As noted above, the layout of the Hindi film industry takes the form of an aristocratic network, which is subject to preferential attachment (Barabási & Albert, 1999). As Vasquez (2003, p.67) describes, preferential attachments occurs when “new vertices...are attached preferentially to high-degree vertices,” which reflects “a power-law degree distribution.” In simpler terms, network nodes with existing links will continue to attract more links, eventually resulting in concentrated clusters, or hubs. Institutional hubs have emerged in large Indian cities and in areas of high audience density abroad – diaspora pockets in the US and UK, to name a few (Rajadhyaksha, 2008). As a result, diasporic populations themselves have constructed bridges that span different contexts and helped the institutional network to expand geographically.
The Bollywood network exhibits preferential attachment by attracting foreign studio investment and acting talent, thereby ensuring its central position in the network. Bollywood directors’ common decision to reflect the social status quo of gender and class norms also helps the network maintain its stability. Rural viewers are distanced as a result. Villagers can access Hindi film by interacting with established institutional hubs, but they often cannot extend the network to their villages. With little purchasing power and cultural awareness, the rural individual can draw upon very few resources to actively shape the institutional network. Instead, they must rely on existing ICT infrastructure that outsiders have constructed. Even if rural populations successfully access established hubs, they may be unable to draw upon the cultural linkages necessary to emotionally connect with a given film’s themes, plots, or characters. As the phenomenon of preferential attachment (Barabási & Albert, 1999) suggests, the Hindi film industry possesses far more power and influence than villagers have to determine the structure of its network. Thus, if the industry does not actively build linkages to rural India, it will be very difficult for rural audiences to better connect to the institutional network of Hindi film.

**Comparing Network Changes**

At this point, we need to understand not only the historical trajectories that technological, social, and institutional contexts of rural-Hindi film access have followed, but also how together they form a comprehensive network. As is, the overarching network of rural-film access remains fragmented as three parallel networks. In keeping with Mahoney and Rueschemeyer’s approach to comparative historical sociology, we systematically need to compare important traits across the different cases – or networks. By looking at patterns of growth and links across the three
networks, we can construct a comprehensive picture of the network providing rural communities access to film.

Rates of growth, the concentration of links, and overall size are all important structural network attributes that deserve attention. Although all three of the networks under investigation have expanded in the last sixty years, the technological and institutional networks have experienced far more change than the social network. Technological capabilities have gone through exponential growth, resulting in more punctuated network growth through ICT development. Relying on those same advances in technological deployment as well as the growing global demand for Hindi film, the institutional network has experienced a similar top-down expansion. On the other hand, the social network has grown slower due to emerging collective views that take time to diffuse and affect people’s actions (Grewal, 2008, p.50). And while the technological network might have the most concentrated hubs of activity, given the recent boom in India’s IT capabilities and labor pool (Growth, 2010), the institutional network is the largest, spanning national borders via cultural flows.

The size and rate of growth of the networks is important, but perhaps it is even more revealing to understand how new network linkages are determined. Different underlying influences of each network determine how links in that network are created – and from there, how weak ties and hubs are positioned (Granovetter, 1973; Buchanan, 2002). As described in Chapter 2: technological networks refer mostly to ICT infrastructure, social networks refer to collective beliefs and the behavior that ensues, and institutional networks refer to infrastructural and industrial embodiments of social norms. Because each network serves a different purpose, what determines network clusters also varies. Existing capacities to build ICT infrastructure
predominantly shape technological hubs. In contrast, constructing new hubs in the social network is much harder because it requires changing attitudes (J. Rao, 2010). Creating institutional hubs demands both cultural and technical resources. Hindi film would not command the global presence it has today had it not had cinematic appeal and varied viewing platforms. Drawing attention to the evolutionary basis of each network illustrates why each has a different structure.

By looking at how the different networks evolved and relied on context-specific links, we can compare how rural groups are positioned in each. The story of the technological context suggests that rural populations will be better connected via ICT infrastructure in the future. After all, technology is advancing at an accelerating pace, and each day more remote areas connect to hubs, often in more mobile and sustainable ways (Frolich et al., 2009).

The social network’s narrative is more doubtful: villagers may remain excluded because of enduring informal social constraints (North, 1990) stemming from the caste system (J. Rao, 2010). These constraints have loosened in part due to global flows of more modern beliefs, but they still influence behaviors and how non-rural India views villagers (J. Rao, 2010).

Changes in the institutional network over time present both economic and cultural barriers to a complete rural experience of Hindi film. It does not appear that Bollywood will revert to a national-focused cinema; its audience pool is only further globalizing (Rajadhyaksha, 2008). At the same time, rural viewers with limited purchasing power do not represent an ideal audience demographic, and those who do gain enough economic stability often choose to move out of villages into more urban areas (Mitra & Murayama, 2008).
Taken collectively, these threads present a complex picture of rural-film access based on historical shifts that have occurred over the past sixty years. It is not a singular narrative but rather informed and shaped by a multitude of variables across different contexts.

**Internetwork Repercussions**

Although I have already hinted at internetwork repercussions in each of the historical narratives, several relationships merit more discussion. This section reviews three main overlaps in technological, social, and institutional developments that have significantly affected how villagers access Hindi film. Padgett and Powell’s (2012) diagram provides a helpful framework for conceptualizing multiple domains. By using a comparative approach that cuts across networks, we can avoid the black-boxing of networks as “reified ‘environments’ without examining their internal structures” as well as overlooking their external impacts on the surrounding environment (Padgett & Powell, 2012, p.5).

One important internetwork trend arises across technological and social contexts: ICT development has begun to emphasize local capacity building, which in turn has helped cultivate new attitudes with respect to how villagers can be included in broader Indian society. As Scott and Storper (2003, p.4) have explained, newer development projects around the world value local participation and “processes that occur on the ground, in specific regions.” Specifically in India, many development projects today bring local communities together with development facilitators and emphasize the inclusion of women in such activities (World Bank India, 2013). Recent rural ICT projects have not only generated the necessary infrastructures, but they have also provided locals with training in the expertise needed to use that technology (Scott & Storper,
2003). Within villages, these participation-driven projects are slowly bridging long-standing gender gaps.

As a result, non-rural groups increasingly interact with villagers, seeing them not as downtrodden objects but more and more as individuals with capacities (Retallack, 2010). In this way, social attitudes are also slowly changing, especially with regards to women’s roles and potential. In network terms, as new technological hubs crop up in various areas and connect new rural actors together, those new actors are able to more easily challenge dominant stereotypes that have historically cast villagers as objects of pity. Rural populations are no longer resigned to exist only as outliers. These internetwork relationships illustrate how shifts in one context can afford structural network changes in another.

Another outcome worth noting is more straightforward: as film production involves more technologically complex processes, the industrial structure of Hindi films has increased in scale, leading to weak ties that connect different studios across the world. All of these changes have strengthened Hindi film’s global brand (Rajadhyaksha, 2008). This relationship has both helped and harmed rural viewers. On the one hand, the infrastructure that supports theaters can now connect completely new audiences to Hindi film. This infrastructure serves as an innovative tool that builds links among rural viewers and can expand both technological and institutional networks. Yet at the same time, the Hindi film industry now prioritizes the wooing of global audiences with more purchasing power (Thussu, 2006), all the while relying on rapidly changing technological platforms for sharing film content. Here, the Indian film industry has determined how both technological and institutional networks will expand. Rather than facilitating a more
equally expanding and distributed network, technological changes have only reaffirmed the aristocratic structure of the institutional network of Hindi film.

A third important trend relates to the interconnection between social and institutional contexts: as marginalization has slowly decreased in societal interactions, some directors have started to see rural India as a lucrative setting for successful big-budget films. Although many film from the 1950s and 1960s were filmed in rural areas (Vasudevan, 2000), today’s Hindi cinema often gravitates towards more cosmopolitan locations, which appeal to a wider audience (Thussu, 2006). Even so, recent blockbusters like _Lagaan_ (2001), _Swades_ (2004), and _Billu_ (2009), all of which take place at least in part in Indian villages, prove that Bollywood can ‘do’ rural – and profitably.

Nevertheless, looking at the linkages between social and institutional contexts, we can speculate about how new rural-urban film links may develop in the future. Hindi films are increasingly embracing global themes and characters (Rajadhyaksha), a trend that, as film director Benegal pointed out, partially bars poorer rural viewers from connecting emotionally to the film (Sinha, 2010). Yet as caste tenets loosen (J. Rao, 2010) and more studios shoot on location (Elmer & Gasher, 2005), new rural-urban links can grow, leading to more cultural texts that focus on villages circulating in the broader Hindi film network. Future rural-themed blockbusters might build newer – albeit smaller – hubs that include rural areas, at least thematically. The presence of texts focused on villages in the production network of Hindi film illustrates a new type of network expansion and repercussion.
The overlaps among these three networks illustrate how they depend on each other to grow: strength comes from concentration, weakness from isolation. Padgett & Powell (2012, p.26) expand on this distinction:

“...the stability of multiple-network systems is associated with redundancy, a dense spaghetti of overlaid and intertwined production networks with feedback cycles at their cores. Sometimes redundancy means the simple replication of networks of production rules...[or] replication of multifunctional rules or people that bridge between networks. Either way, redundancy is associated with reproductive stability because even if one of these networks is destroyed, there are other similar networks around....conversely, lack of redundancy is associated with reproductive fragility” (Padgett & Powell, 2012, p.26, emphasis added).

In Padgett & Powell’s words, the cinematic networks that villagers participate in continue to suffer from “lack of redundancy” – socially, financially, and technologically. To overcome this fragility in the future, rural audiences must first gain access to the necessary resources to strengthen not just one but all contexts in the multiple-network system.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has described how changes in technological, social, and institutional contexts in post-independence India have collectively shaped how rural audiences access Hindi film. It described the broad shifts in these three contexts over the past sixty years, re-conceptualizing each context as a network. The chapter also compared these three networks in terms of their sizes, structures, and the nature of their links. Using comparative historical sociology, we have seen how villages have historically existed as isolated small world outliers in larger networks. They have relied on external changes in ICT infrastructure, social marginalization, and film production structures to access cinematic hubs – changes that mainly
perpetuated ingrained gender and social inequalities with some recent reform. To further illustrate how interwoven networks are – and the resulting complex network of rural-film access – this chapter identified several impacts of the interrelationships among technological, social, and institutional networks. Only by using comparative historical sociology and its acknowledgment of causal analysis, temporal structures, and systematic comparison could this scope of historical research take place.

Globalization, itself an amalgamation of networks, continues to include more groups with technological and commercial links, suggesting that Indian villagers may eventually be better positioned to access cultural products like films. Yet we must temper the once-dominant discourse about globalization, one where technology’s flag unfurls magnanimously and connects everyone to everything, by acknowledging social and institutional barriers that still limit how rural Indians can experience Hindi film. The next chapter uses a partial content analysis to present some possible on-screen effects of rural-film access. Using a hypothesis that draws from this chapter’s conclusions, Chapter 4 suggests how rural representations in Hindi film have changed over time and then looks at ten films from 1953 to 2009 to see to what extent the hypothesis is correct. In this way, Chapter 3 and 4 work in tandem to illustrate important macro and micro characteristics of rural-film access in India.
Chapter 4: Film Analysis

Introduction and Hypothesis

Drawing on the conclusions of the previous chapter, this chapter conducts a content analysis of ten Hindi films, based on two hypotheses about how on-screen representations of rural groups have shifted as the country’s contexts have changed. As Chapter 3 showed, changes in India’s technological, social, and institutional contexts have shaped how each network’s structure has expanded. Furthermore, villagers in these networks have been repositioned over time, resulting in a complex multiple-network system where rural access to film is affected simultaneously by a variety of factors. With its historical sociological analysis, the previous chapter provides key material upon which to base this paper’s hypotheses about cinematic portrayals of Indian villagers in Hindi film.

Given those findings, I present the following hypotheses about on-screen representation of villagers in Hindi cinema:

Premise 1: Over the past half century, the evolution of Hindi films has shifted from rural themes to more global ones. This shift has been reflected both in Hindi film’s plots and its more diversified audiences.

Hypothesis 1: Based on this observation, we can expect to see a limited broadening of on-screen representation of villagers from the 1950s to the present, but rural Indians in mainstream Hindi cinema should still appear to be more simplistic and provincial than their urban counterparts. In more recent films, this rural vs. urban comparison should shift towards a rural vs. globalized comparison of identities.

Premise 2: Hindi art films cover more serious and controversial topics than their Bollywood counterparts, which primarily serve as entertainment.

Hypothesis 2: Based on the differences in art cinema and Bollywood, we should expect to see more realistic and nuanced representations of villagers in the art films. In other words, the Bollywood films analyzed in this chapter should cast
consistently more of a black-and-white distinction between rural and urban characters.


In sum, I present an account of the changing portrayals of villagers in Hindi film since India’s independence. This analysis is not comprehensive, given the thousands of Hindi films produced during this period. Rather, this chapter relies on landmark productions as stepping stones from which to extrapolate a broader narrative. After analyzing each film, I conclude with a brief summary of trends and consistent patterns. When taken with Chapter 3’s historical sociological analysis, the film analysis provides important micro cultural elements that a macro analysis overlooks. Chapter 5 will analyze these findings in tandem and provide a comprehensive picture of how Indian villagers have accessed Hindi films over the past sixty years.
**1950s: The Village as the Nation**

Vasudevan (2000) explained that the first decade of Hindi films in the post-independence period focused on creating a unified ‘Indian’ identity; film plots of this time presented examples of – and challenges to – the ideal Indian. Because most of India was still living in rural areas and the government had only recently adopted policies to boost urbanization, these films sought to reflect the country’s strong agricultural roots (Morcom, 2007). In the newly independent country, nationalistic messages of hope and confidence targeting rural India became central parts of cultural texts of the time (Vasudevan, 2000).

To test Hypothesis 1, I look at how villagers are represented in two films from this time period, *Do Bigha Zamin* (1953) and *Naya Daur* (1957), to see if the expected rural vs. urban dichotomy appears. Relying on Krippendorf’s strategy (2012) of content analysis, I conduct this analysis from a comparative perspective that highlights broad changes in representation over time. What the content analysis shows, in fact, is that early rural representations in Hindi film prized villagers’ simplicity and tradition and cast urban characters and elements as threats to India’s national identity.

*Do Bigha Zamin*, or “Two Acres of Land,” was directed by Bimal Roy and released in 1953. The main cast was made up of Balraj Sahni, Nirupa Roy, and Rattan Kumar. The film tells the story of Shambu (played by Sahni), a poor Bengali farmer who must pay the local landlord to dissuade him from repossessing the land for use as a mill construction site. Shambu cannot make the necessary money from his farm so he is forced to leave his wife Parvati (Roy) and travel to the city with his young son Kanhaiya (Kumar) to find a well-paying job. Shambu is overwhelmed by the fast-paced city and fears that its people and morally questionable activities...
will corrupt him. In the end, Shambu fails to make enough money, and he and his family are forced to abandon their land.

From the start, the film portrays villagers as simple, hardworking people who are deeply tied to their agricultural roots. *Do Bigha Zamin* opens with a song-and-dance number performed by the villagers to celebrate an imminent rainstorm that will bring needed water to their crops. The lyrics, “The green spring has come with the beat of the drums / Let us sing a song of renewed hope,” reflect the villagers’ connection to and continued dependence on natural cycles of weather. Shambu and the other villagers do not have grand ambitions, nor are they interested in large modern cities. Rather, they are perfectly content in their small communities, going through agricultural routines that have defined their lives for generations.

Hence, Shambu is depicted in stark contrast to urban populations, a strategy in on-screen rural representation that has remained popular in Hindi film for the better part of the last sixty years. While on the train to the city, Shambu overhears two men – dressed in cleaner, fancier clothes that represent their urban roots – discuss their duty to help villages modernize. One man says, “We must leave our city houses and settle in villages. The villages should become model villages. To model them is our duty.” Here we can observe political and technological discourses of the time: the India of the 1950s needed to assert itself as a newly independent country, and the government knew that its villages needed to modernize along with its cities (Sugata & Bose, 1998). But, as Shambu’s experiences in the city show, villagers simply do not belong there. Shambu’s fears of immoral temptations and his son Kanhaiya’s forays into illicit activities such as pickpocketing reinforce the idea that they are unwelcome. Staying in the villages equates to remaining pure.
The last scene in *Do Bigha Zamin*, where Shambu and his family are forced to abandon their home.

The end of *Do Bigha Zamin* is anything but optimistic, signaling that although rural India is not yet ready for the inevitable march towards modernization, villagers have little choice in the matter. Shambu and his family return to their land for one last look before starting to search for a new home. Kanhaiya, the young son, tragically says, “Mother, see where the smoke is rising, there was our house” as he points to where the mill is now being constructed (Figure 2). Knowing they have little social influence, Shambu and his family do not challenge the court ruling that allowed the landlord to reclaim the land as his own. Rather, they accept their somber fate and move aside for the modern machinery.

Released in 1957, four years after *Do Bigha Zamin*, *Naya Daur*, or “New Era,” tells the story of a horse-cart driver, Shankar (played by Dilip Kumar), who must compete against modern buses that threaten his transportation business in a village. Directed by B.R. Chopra, the
film takes place in a remote village ruled by a benevolent landlord who also owns the local factory where most of the villagers work. Unfortunately the landlord’s son, Master Kundan, (played by Jeevan) comes from the city to take over, aiming to mechanize the factory and replace the *tongawallahs* (horse cart drivers) with modern buses. The film culminates in a race between Shankar in his cart and Kundan in his bus. Shankar’s eventual victory temporarily halts modernization, and shows the enduring strength of the simple, traditional villagers.

In comparison to *Do Bigha Zamin*, *Naya Daur* makes a more explicit argument about preserving the goodness of the village while also embracing the inevitable move towards modernization, which was a dominant theme of India in the 1950s (Sugata & Bose, 1998). The film starts with a quote by Mahatma Gandhi:

“We are all leaves of a majestic tree whose trunk cannot be shaken off its roots which are deep down in the bowels of the earth. In this there is no room for machinery that would displace human labor and concentrate power in a few hands. Labor has its unique place in a cultured human family…Dead machinery must not be pitted against the millions of living machines represented by the villagers scattered in the seven hundred thousand villages of India. Machine to be well used has to help and ease human effort…”

This quote drives the themes of the film, which pits village and city against each other with the village ultimately coming out on top. From the start, the harsh dichotomy of rural versus urban is shown through the characterization of the villagers, especially Shankar, in comparison to Master Kundan. As Figure 2 shows, Kundan is fancily dressed and acts remote, while the villagers are warm-hearted people, sometimes almost entertainingly so.

Mechanization, represented by Kundan, is cast as the unyielding antagonist, threatening the purity of the village, which Shankar personifies. At one point, Kundan makes a grand speech about efficient machinery coming to the cities of India and carrying the country into the next era
of industrial production. He seems unaware of how machinery in the village’s factory will affect the villagers and their jobs. Shankar speaks up for the rest of the workers – perhaps symbolically for the rest of rural India – and challenges, “Whatever is happening in the country, that is fine. But this village is in that country too – think about it too! We are saying that if the country progresses, help us progress too!” This scene, like others throughout the film, seems almost to scold figures like Kundan for too hastily embracing the glamorous speed of modern industry. Yet that technocratic perspective is not entirely ignored; the villagers only ask to be included in that linear march towards progress. Instead, Naya Daur’s viewers are coaxed to see villagers as having potential for progress not in spite of but because of their simple and passionate work ethic.

Figure 3: The village seer (right) greets Master Kundan as he arrives in the village factory. Note the difference in appearance between sophisticated Kundan with his Europeanized outfit and the village seer, who wears plain handwoven clothes.
These two films show how in the 1950s, Hindi cinema presented the village as the untouched traditional part of Indian society, a representation that cultural texts pushed to preserve. At the same time, on-screen rural characters were portrayed as resisting urbanization – Shambu through his fear of the city, and Shankar the cart-driver through his insistence that machines were not always the solution. One unexpected finding of this analysis was the way in which rural versus urban characters were valued, a discovery that suggests that Hypothesis 1 is incorrect, at least for Hindi films at this time. Surprisingly, 1950s films revered the village and seemed to warn against the dangers of the city, which in later years arguably was deemed the ‘better’ of the two. However, I suggest that the representation of rural populations as idyllic, albeit simplified, characters became a cinematic style that persisted into later decades, thereby stratifying the portrayal of villagers. To see if this is true, we must proceed to the next set of films.

1960s: Gender and the Village, Part 1

As India continued to grow as an independent nation in the 1960s, it was still predominantly rural, so rural films focused on characters dealing with various aspects of encroaching urbanization (Morcom, 2007). During this period, more Indians were starting to move to the cities for better job opportunities (Sugata & Bose, 1998) – not unlike Shambu’s character in Do Bigha Zamin. Looking back at the previous chapter, we should expect to see villagers who are still quite isolated, due both to technology and to social prejudices related to caste. What we can see from the content analysis of Bandini (1963) and Teesri Kasam (1966) is
that formerly technological threats to villagers were transformed into social threats that centered on how rural gender was represented.

*Bandini*, translated as “Imprisoned,” was directed by Bimal Roy and was the 10th highest grossing Hindi film of 1963 (IMDb.com). It won the 1963 National Film Award for Best Feature Film in Hindi as well as several Filmfare Awards in 1964 (Box Office of India). In the film, Kalyani (played by Nutan), a woman imprisoned for murder, is courted by the jail doctor, Devendra (played by Dharmendra). The audience learns through a series of flashbacks that Kalyani had earlier been involved with a man from her village named Bikash (Ashok Kumar) who later abandoned her. Through many coincidences, Kalyani ends up murdering Bikash’s wife out of pure hatred and eventually must choose between Bikash and Devendra.

Although it may be surprising that a film in the 1960s had a female protagonist, by taking a closer look at Kalyani’s behavior, we see how Roy managed this, and also how rural women were portrayed as subservient and dependent on men. From the start of the film, Kalyani is admired despite being in prison: she volunteers to nurse another prisoner with a contagious disease, she humbly bears teasing from other women in the jail, and she politely resists when the young jail doctor Devendra flirts with her. In one of the flashbacks to her village, Kalyani is waiting on her father and Bikash, serving them tea and desserts. At one point, Kalyani pipes up, “Do women have nothing else to do but feed hungry men?” Yet even this one challenge is quickly extinguished by the two men, who cajole her back into subservience.

Perhaps Kalyani’s unwavering humility as a rural woman is best illustrated in scenes where she simply does not participate. After they get caught spending the night together, Bikash and Kalyani realize they must get married. It is Bikash, not Kalyani, who talks to Kalyani’s
father about the proper next steps (Figure 4, below). Soon after, Kalyani’s father yells at her for her immoral deeds: “You want me to stay put? You’re bringing me to disgrace! Either you leave this house, or I’ll leave!” Again, Kalyani chooses the non-confrontational option, sneaking out at night for her father’s sake, her own well-being coming second. In the end, Kalyani is an acceptable protagonist because she remains the embodiment of patience, virtue, and subservience – all of which were traits that Indian society at the time deemed ideal for rural women (Kapadia, 1995).

Figure 4: In a scene where Kalyani’s fate is being decided, Kalyani herself stands demurely in the background as Bikash and her father converse.

1966’s Teesri Kasam (“Third Oath”) also touches on village versus urban morality and its connection to gender, although it takes a much more black-and-white approach. Directed by Bhattacharya, it stars Raj Kapoor as Hiraman, a simple-minded bullock cart driver who is asked
to carry Hirabai, an urban Navtakni (exotic) dancer (Waheeda Rehman), to a fair forty miles away. During the trip, they bond: Hiraman wrongly sees Hirabai as a pure angel, and Hirabai views Hiraman as innocent and good-hearted. Yet once Hiraman finds out from his friends about Hirabai’s questionable past as a prostitute, he struggles to accept it. Eventually Hirabai tells him to leave her so she can continue her work and he can ‘escape’ her immoral reputation.

Director Bhattacharya makes no secret of the fact that Hiraman represents simple, rural innocence while Hirabai is the embodiment of urban worldliness, touching on the rural-urban binary that has already appeared in other films analyzed thus far. When Hiraman first starts driving his cart to the fair, he is not sure who or what is riding in the back. Scared, he pulls his cart to the side of the path and prays to a local idol, saying, “Protect us, I don’t know what kind of passenger it is. I can smell some perfume from time to time from the cart. My back also itches. I hope it is not a she-demon! I’ll make an offering of a rupee and a quarter. Save me!”

Interestingly, when Hiraman and Hirabai converse later, Hiraman himself mocks villagers for not knowing anything. Meanwhile Hirabai finds her driver amusing yet sweetly naïve of the world.

*Teesri Kasam* also relies on an established trope of Hindi films to reveal relationships between characters during the song-and-dance numbers via lyrics (Morcom, 2007) that also hint at the world of differences between Hiraman and Hirabai. Many Hindi films have relied on their songs for commercial success and for having emotional resonance with their audiences (Morcom, 2007). Furthermore, in the early decades of the Hindi film industry, having popular songs was a way to get more funding before the film production itself was complete (Morcom, 2007). A song performed by Hirabai’s Navtanki dance troupe serves this dual function for *Teesri Kasam*, drawing audience attention to the affection between the two main characters while also
hinting that they are not meant for one another – another nod to the rural versus urban comparison (see Figure 5, below).

Figure 5: This moment represents much of the Hiraman-Hirabai relationship. He is too innocently shy to face her while she looks at him with a combination of wistfulness and amusement.

By looking at Bandini (1963) and Teesri Kasam (1966), we find that Hindi films with rural plots in this time period presented villagers as more traditional and simplistic, although they began to also highlight gender differences through characterization. Rural women were cast as morally pure, but once they went to the city, their moral character became tarnished. The machines that had threatened the villages of the 1950s were replaced by intangible moral threats, for which female characters were more to blame and male characters were often victimized. Looking back to Chapter 3’s discussion of the social network, perhaps such characterizations
emerged from dominant social values of the time that aimed to quell any possible threats to morality as the country continued to modernize.

1970s-1980s: Gender and the Village, Part 2

When examining Hindi films from the 1970s and 1980s, it is important to consider the technological, social, and institutional contexts of the time. Most of the funding for Hindi films still came from black market transactions (Govil, 2006). Simultaneously, access to cinematic technology was expanding and more Hindi film studios began adopting location shooting (Vasudevan, 2000). Because of the increase in technological capability and funding, more art films appeared during this time, most of which started to diverge from established strategies of popular Hindi cinema, such as including song-and-dance numbers (Morcom, 2007). Art films’ strategies reflect, in part, a challenge to older social constraints based on caste. Thus, Hypothesis 1 and 2, as presented at the beginning of the chapter, are relevant here. In fact, of the three films that were analyzed from this period – Ankur (1974), Umrao Jaan (1981), and Mirch Masala (1987) – two are art films that focused on both newer social conflicts and established gender stereotypes.

Ankur, or “The Seedling,” was directed by Shyam Benegal and released in 1974. Benegal, one of the leading art cinema directors of the time, was part of a group of film producers in the 1970s that pushed for more critical, serious Hindi films (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004). Benegal and other ‘New Wave’ directors hoped to counter a growing trend towards violence in popular Hindi film by emphasizing Indian neorealism (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004). Ankur tells the story of a poor village woman named Laxmi with a deaf-
mute husband, Kishtaya, who serve together as caretakers for a house where the landlord’s college son, Surya, comes to live. As time goes on, Surya and Laxmi begin a physical romance that culminates in a child – the seedling. Commentary on caste is rampant through the film.

Surya represents a new type of urbanized Indian, not like Master Kundan from Naya Daur who is simply bent on modern efficiency, but rather one who wants to abandon the social constraints of rural India. Soon after returning from college, Surya confronts his father, Patel, and says, “I don’t like farming. I’d rather do my B.A.” Patel is shocked that his son would so easily abandon the familial farmland. When he comes to the house where Laxmi is working, Surya comments scornfully that the house looks “like a garbage heap.” Despite this spoiled attitude, however, Surya also exhibits a more lax social outlook. After Laxmi hesitates to make him tea – she is a ‘dalit’ after all – Surya simply responds, “I don’t believe in caste. Get the tea.”

Prejudices towards lower castes and ‘dalits,’ a concept discussed in Chapter 3, show up frequently in Ankur, drawing attention to the rural-urban binary and double standards between men and women. Rumors about Surya and Laxmi’s relationship start swirling through the village and, at one point, a storeowner and the police chief are discussing it. The storeowner shakes his head and says, “Surya is just a kid. She should not forget caste rules.” The policeman agrees. All blame is placed on Laxmi as the lower caste woman. And as the film progresses, even Surya accepts this double standard, abandoning Laxmi when she explains that she is pregnant.

Meanwhile, the viewer is painfully aware of how socially unjust these double standards are.
Perhaps the most poignant scene in the film is the last one, where Laxmi finally releases her anger about Surya abandoning her and her child – a rare moment of lower caste victory. Laxmi is kneeling by her husband, who has just been beaten by Surya, and she hurls dirt as other villagers watch. Benegal frames this moment deliberately (see Figure 6, above), showing the view to the front yard from Surya’s potential perspective. Yet there is no resolution from this climax: the film ends shortly after, without Surya making amends or Laxmi gaining the self-respect she deserves. This may be Benegal’s way of showing the enduring conflict related to caste in 1970s India, even as its urban residents try to leave it behind.

The historical Bollywood film *Umrao Jaan* (1981) was directed by Muzaffar Ali and starred Rekha as the title character, as well as Farooq Shaikh, and Naseeruddin Shah. Set in
1840s colonial India, *Umrao Jaan* tells the story of a young village girl who is kidnapped and trained as a courtesan dancer in Lucknow. Umrao is unlucky in love, first falling for Nawab Sultan (Shaikh) before trying to run away with a bandit who is killed. At the end of the film, Umrao returns to her village – and her family – only to have them cast her off in disgust.

Although *Umrao Jaan* focuses primarily on the colonial court and the restricted life of a courtesan, the beginning and end of the film show the restricted life of a rural woman. As the opening credits play, a young Umrao is being dressed for her child marriage ceremony. Even as a young teen, Umrao’s life is already planned out for her as she swiftly moves from the care of her family to the care of her husband-to-be. When she is kidnapped and sold to courtesans, Amirin acts not unlike *Bandini*’s Kalyani, passively accepting her fate without question. She seems to forget her rural roots as she lives the life of a courtesan. But even those luxuries cannot erase the memory of her village home, as is shown in the last scene’s song.

Similar to other popular Hindi films, *Umrao Jaan* uses its songs to convey emotional states and transformations of its characters, in this case revealing Umrao’s sadness at returning to her village as an outsider. The film’s final song, “Yeh kya jagah hai doston?” (What kind of place is this, friends?), captures Umrao’s emotional struggle. Even though she is physically home, she will never be truly welcomed by her family. Spivak’s discussion of the “subaltern subject” (1988) emerges here: Umrao was already marginalized as a villager, but when she returned to her village as an urbanized woman, she was again excluded from the community. Similar to *Ankur*, *Umrao Jaan* ends abruptly, as Umrao returns to the now-abandoned court, unsure of how to proceed in her life that was, until that point, so utterly dictated for her.
In contrast, the 1987 film by Ketan Mehta, *Mirch Masala* (“Spices”), presents a very strong female villager, Sonbai (played by Smita Patil), who is actively trying to carve out her own life despite social obstacles represented by most of the men around her. Mehta’s film garnered critical acclaim both domestically and abroad; it was nominated in the 15th Moscow International Film Festival (IMDb.com). Part of the ‘New Wave’ (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004), *Mirch Masala* tells of life in a small isolated village where women are controlled by the men, and the men themselves must toe the line of the sexist arrogant tax collector, or ‘Subedar.’ The Subedar (played by Naseeruddin Shah) casually sleeps with several village women and gains interest in Sonbai, precisely for her rebellious streak. The Subedar-Sonbai tension escalates until Sonbai barricades herself in the village’s ‘mirch masala’ factory; the film ends with a standoff between the two, in which Sonbai ultimately comes out on top.

The Subedar’s tyrannical hold on the village parallels how the village men control the women, setting up intra-village gender conflict as well as gender-based struggles between the women and the Subedar. Mehta drives home this inequality further by casting the men as bigoted, except for the schoolmaster. While most of the men, including the chief, insist that only boys can attend classes, the schoolmaster urges mothers to send their daughters, saying, “Along with the passage of time, lower caste customs change.” In stark contrast, the other men routinely exclude women from participating in political matters. This behavior appears during a pivotal scene when the men discuss whether to hand Sonbai over to the Subedar for his own pleasure. Neither Sonbai nor any other women participate; ironically, the only woman shown in the scene is the chief’s wife who is locked inside the house and can only peer through the window grate.
As a result of this directorial decision, *Mirch Masala* mocks village men while presenting their female counterparts as much stronger and more genuine – an interesting divergence from this author’s expectations about rural portrayals stratifying over time. However, this portrayal aligns with Hypothesis 2, which posited that art films such as Mehta’s ‘New Wave’ production would be more serious and tackle relevant social issues (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004).

Benegal’s *Ankur* ends with the female protagonist, Laxmi, expressing her anger at a higher caste man. Mehta’s *Mirch Masala* goes one step further, explicitly depicting his female lead as strong and powerful. In the last scene when the Subedar and his troops break into the barricaded masala factory, Sonbai is in a dire situation. Yet in a sudden twist, the other factory women come to her aid and throw dried masala powder onto the Subedar’s face. He thrashes in pain, and the film ends as Sonbai stands above him in a very dominant position, holding a sickle (See Figure 7, below). The audience is left wondering whether she will attack him or simply leave him to suffer.

In the 1970s and 1980s, we find that gender continued to be an important aspect of rural representation in Hindi films, although the ‘New Wave’ included several art films that seriously challenged dominant portrayals of rural women (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004). Simultaneously, as a generation of Indians who had been born into an independent nation came of age, there were new conflicts between generations that reflected differing opinions on social issues such as caste. *Umrao Jaan* should be considered separately from the other two films in this section because it was an historical piece. Yet its depiction of once-rural Umrao and how she ends up being marginalized from her own village highlights how societal values have long
shaped the futures of rural individuals. The films of this time reflected an India that was struggling to come to terms with growing disparities between its rural and urban populations.

![Figure 7: Mirch Masala's Sonbai finds herself in a rare position of power over the evil Subedar as he struggles to get the masala out of his eyes.](image)

**1990s - present: Rural India vs. The Global Indian**

In the last two decades, as Bollywood has globalized, its films have had a broader appeal, reflecting the growing cosmopolitanism of the global Indian (Rajadhyaksha, 2008). Chapter 3 points out how the institutional network of Hindi film has expanded to connect cities around the world. These scattered pockets of audiences represent a diversifying demand for characters and plots that both overseas and domestic Indians can enjoy (Thussu, 2006). When looking at three films from this time period, we might expect to see a shift towards rural versus global
comparison, as Hypothesis 1 would suggest. In fact, the analysis of the three films *Virasat* (1997), *Swades* (2004), and *Billu* (2009) does show a new rural-global dichotomy. We also see a pattern in Bollywood films in which the global Indian character initially resists returning to a rural lifestyle but over time comes to appreciate it.

*Virasat*, or “Inheritance,” was released in 1997 and won several Filmfare Awards for its cast and soundtrack (IMDb.com). Priyadarshan directed the film, which starred Anil Kapoor, Amrish Puri, Tabu, and Pooja Batra. *Virasat* tells the story of a London-educated man, Shakti (played by Kapoor), who returns to his small Indian village home with a Westernized girlfriend, Anita (Batra). Shakti is first reluctant to live among the villagers and his father, who owns the land. Nevertheless, when his father dies, Shakti takes up his place and tries his best to govern. Forced to choose between his familial duty and a life abroad with Anita, Shakti eventually embraces his rural future, which near the end of the film abruptly spirals out of control due to intra-village conflict.

Similar to *Ankur*, *Virasat* brings up intergenerational conflict, although the Shakti of the 1990s reflects a more global Indian than 1970s’ Surya, who simply wants to go to college in the city. Shakti’s father is proud that “the son of an uneducated farmer has gone to London for studies,” but assumes that Shakti will still want to take over control of the tribal land. Not sure how else to break the news, Shakti confesses that he wants to open a chain of restaurants, to which the father angrily replies, “So you want to leave the village and settle down in the city!” Even with an argument that emphasizes family loyalty – “You’re educated, try to understand [the villagers’] shortcomings. Don’t forget your duty towards your village and your land” – Shakti’s father is initially unable to get his globalized son to focus inward on his rural roots.
In contrast to the earlier Hindi films, *Virasat* and other films of this time greatly emphasize the struggle faced by the global Indian who has returned to his rural home. Shakti subtly resists any traditional influence on his actions, dressing in jeans and shirts, growing his hair long, and almost flaunting his girlfriend Anita, who herself shocks the conservative villagers with her revealing clothes and spirited behavior. Conflict between Shakti’s father and uncle, the two brothers who own most of the nearby land, also reveals the villagers’ tendency for crude violence, which Shakti loathes. At one point, even Shakti’s father points out the villagers’ primitive ways, yelling, “If you stay amidst these animals, you’ll also become one like them.”

Ultimately, Shakti does embrace his village roots, taking his father’s place after his untimely death and trying to resolve the feud between the two brothers. His acceptance of familial duty involves not only casting off all remnants of his old life, including Anita, but also taking a villager wife and dressing the part (See Figure 8, below). His transformation is noticeable to others too. In a dramatic conversation between his old flame, Anita, and his new wife from the village, Gehna (played by Tabu), the audience witnesses the extent of Shakti’s change. Gehna, the quintessential subservient rural woman, worries that Anita is mad at her. But Anita only expresses surprise at her ex-boyfriend’s change, quietly stating: “I didn’t know that there’s a villager hidden inside Shakti. Don’t worry. The Shakti whom I loved is not this man. The man who lives here is your husband.” This statement reflects the journey that the once-global Shakti has made, ultimately returning to his rural homeland to fulfill his duties.
*Swades*, “We the People,” (2004) builds on the social issues bubbling up under the surface in *Virasat*, but it also brings in more contemporary issues such as ICTs in villages, seen through the eyes of a Non-Resident Indian (NRI) protagonist. These global issues ensured *Swades*’ enormous success in box offices overseas, even though it did not fare very well domestically. Mohan Bhargava, played by Bollywood legend Shahrukh Khan, is a NASA engineer who lives in the US and who has returned to the tiny village of Charanpur to retrieve his childhood nanny, Kaveriamma (played by Kishori Balal). What Mohan predicts will be a short trip turns into a longer journey, both physically and emotionally, as his ideas about his homeland are challenged by the village schoolteacher Gita (Gayatri Joshi). In the same way that *Virasat* shows how Shakti is transformed into local landlord, *Swades* shows how an NRI transforms from an outsider to a local in rural India.

Following a character arc similar to that of Shakti in *Virasat*, *Swades*’ Mohan goes through a transformation during the film, changing from an NRI to a local who enthusiastically
helps the village build its own water-powered electric generator. When he first arrives in Charanpur, he dresses in his polo shirts and jeans. He also carries bottled water around with him, believing the local water to be unsafe. But Mohan’s stay affects him. About a third of the way through the film, Mohan’s NASA colleague, another Westernized NRI, teases Mohan for including a local saying in his farewell over the phone: “Well, well…the village lingo’s getting a hold on you. Jai Ramji ki! Bye.”

Perhaps the most significant scene attesting to Mohan’s ongoing struggle to acclimate to life in rural India occurs during a dinner conversation with Kaveriamma and Gita. Mohan scolds Gita, saying “This thinking [that the government will solve everything] is imbedded in our culture & tradition and it hampers the nation….you Indians can’t take any criticism.” As Figure 9 (below) shows, this comment earns him glares from both women, and the NASA engineer scrambles to correct himself. Yet that conversation is a pivotal wake up call for Mohan; from then on, he works tirelessly as a social and technological champion for Charanpur, trying to improve the village as best he can.

Swades not only portrays Mohan’s reentry into Indian life, but it also makes reference to the Internet and related ICT infrastructure, touching upon elements of the technological network discussed in Chapter 3. When Mohan first arrives at Charanpur, the postmaster informs him that “there is no ISD here, but you can get connected through Mizwa village.” These villagers are aware of modern technologies – a far cry from Do Bigha Zamin’s villagers – yet they simultaneously appear content in their simple ways of life, a juxtaposition that Ranganathan (2010) has argued stratifies them as rural archetypes. Furthermore, Mohan and his NASA colleagues initially seem oblivious of the ICT limitations of rural India. For example, another
engineer asks if he should email over some files for Mohan to review, and Mohan mutters, “You do that. But the internet connection here is weak.”

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As a film, *Swades* takes an unusual path, sticking to mainstream Bollywood motifs with song-and-dance numbers while including more serious discussions of social issues – particularly that of castes (Ranganathan, 2010). In one scene, Mohan questions the *Panchayat* (village council) about their decision to exclude lower caste children from joining Charanpur’s school:

**Panchayat Elder:** “So…what is your background? I mean…what caste are you?”

**Mohan:** “I’m a Brahmin!”

**Panchayat Elder:** “Then learn to behave like one.”

**Mohan:** “So what am I expected to do?”

**Panchayat Elder:** “We’ve heard that you eat food cooked by Mela Ram. Are you aware what his caste is?”

**Mohan:** “But what difference does that make? What age are you folks living in?”

The village council humors him, but its members are still reluctant to change their attitudes. In part, Mohan gets away with lecturing them because he is not from Charanpur; he lives in
America and is allowed to have daring and newfangled ideas about social standing. But does Mohan have any long-term impact on Charanpur’s social system? We can only guess, as the Bollywood film wraps up neatly before those questions are addressed.

*Billu* (2009), directed by Priyadarshan, addresses less serious issues than *Swades*, but its portrayal of villagers reveals important information about the state of rural representation in Bollywood today. *Billu* tells the story of the title character (Irfan Khan), a poor barber in a small village called Budbuda who struggles to earn respect from others in town and to pay his bills on time. When a famous Bollywood actor, Sahir Khan (played by Shahrukh Khan) comes to shoot a film in Budbuda, Billu intimates that he and Sahir are great friends – a tale that quickly spins out of control as his neighbors clamor for a chance to meet Sahir. How Billu and Sahir know each other remains a secret until the final scene, which takes place at a school fair, where Sahir relates a story about how, when he had a chance to leave the village and follow his dreams, his loyal friend Billu gave him the money to do so.

Director Priyadarshan heavily emphasizes the rural-global dichotomy in *Billu*, characterizing both sides almost comically to show the clash of cultures in Budbuda. On the one hand, Billu’s fellow villagers appear simple-minded and caught up in trifles such as paying as little as possible for haircuts, and constantly gambling. The film also follows a trend from the art cinema of the 1970s and 1980s, which depicted female villagers as being more grounded than their male counterparts, who somehow seem to exist mainly for mockery.
In contrast, for most of the film Sahir Khan and his entourage flaunt their wealth and status as Bollywood figures that have traveled the world. When Sahir’s agents scope out Budbuda as a possible shooting location for an upcoming film, the audience notices how they stick out in the quaint surroundings of Budbuda’s market (Figure 10, above). The song-and-dance number that accompanies Sahir’s arrival to Budbuda – in a helicopter flanked on the ground by a dozen SUVs, no less – features suave bodyguards dressed in slick suits, wearing sunglasses and earpieces. Sahir himself remains kind but distant, seemingly accustomed to the fame and crowds that follows a Bollywood star. However, in the final moment of the film, Sahir Khan reveals his relationship to Billu the barber, and in doing so, reminisces on his rural roots, tearing up as he recalls what is at the core of his Indianness.

Representing the last two decades of Bollywood films that focus on rural India, these three films clearly demonstrate how the earlier rural-urban binary has been replaced by a rural-global dichotomy. Issues of caste still show up, as in the case of Swades. But overall,
transnational issues have replaced national ones, as represented by the conflicts that the global Indian characters – Shakti, Mohan, and Sahir – experience. Importantly, despite contextual differences, all three global Indian characters share the same kind of emotional journey where they return to the simplicity of the village.

**Conclusion**

Examining ten films produced in the years 1953-2009, this chapter presents a narrative of how rural populations have been represented within Hindi films, one that reflects changing Indian concerns and priorities. Drawing from screenshots, plot summaries, and dialogues and employing a partial content analysis (Krippendorf, 2012), I examined each film in chronological order, teasing out important stylistic and thematic elements. Scenes from these films reveal the essence of rural characters in Hindi cinema and how directors have interpreted their identities during different time periods. By tracking broader themes and characterizations (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001), I provide a picture of how social values of India have manifested in Bollywood and art films.

With respect to the hypotheses posed earlier, this chapter highlights both a few anticipated findings about on-screen rural representation as well as some surprises. Rural portrayal in the 1950s was idyllic, blending simplistic characterization with underlying nationalistic messages about the essence of Indian identity. Accordingly, villages were prized over cities, a bias that started to fade by the 1970s as more of India began to urbanize. By this time, rural stereotypes in Hindi films had begun to solidify: villagers remained unfalteringly pure, and rural women were particularly traditional. Yet art films that were part of the Indian
New Wave of the 1970s and 1980s presented rural characters in more realistic ways, shying away from the laughable archetypes that had begun to dominate.

From the 1990s onward, Hindi film increasingly focused on the rural-global dichotomy, a shift that has only served to draw more attention to the differences between villagers and more cosmopolitan groups. Earlier analysis of the institutional network of Hindi cinema provides good reason – financially, politically, and culturally – for the rising popularity of Bollywood. Conducting a partial content analysis on recent films like Swades and Billu, I show a continually problematic representation of Indian villages, one that is simultaneously being pulled in multiple directions. Today’s village characters are more aware of modern influences; yet in some ways they still resemble the same simplistic archetypes from nearly 50 years ago.

The types of rural representations gleaned from these cultural texts create a narrative about villager portrayal in Hindi cinema. However the real value of this film analysis comes when we review the results in tandem with the conclusions from the historical sociological analysis in the previous chapter. Chapter 5 will weigh both micro and macro factors highlighted in this research paper to present a multifaceted and comprehensive picture of the changes that villagers have experienced in their access of Hindi films since independence.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

Introduction

Despite making up nearly 70 percent of India’s population today (Office of the Registrar General, 2011), villagers have been greatly overlooked in research that examines Hindi film, in part because they wield limited financial and political clout. Instead, most scholars studying Hindi cinema have chosen to focus on the globalization of the Hindi film industry (Thussu, 2006; Rajadhyaksha, 2008) and the growing role of diasporic populations in cultivating Bollywood’s appeal overseas (Moorti, 2003; Ganti, 2008; Govil, 2006). The recent limited research targeting rural contexts has been either ethnographic (S. Rao, 2007; Ranganathan, 2010) or sociological work that targets a specific type of media and its social influences on villages (Johnson, 2001).

In an effort to highlight unexplored areas, this research has examined how broad historical changes in post-independence India have affected the ways that rural groups access and consume Hindi films. First, the paper characterized technological, social, and institutional contexts as networks, which highlighted key changes in structure, connections, and participation. By examining shifts in those three networks, I demonstrated how underlying processes can shape the production and circulation of cultural texts – and how a traditionally excluded subset of India has been positioned to participate as audiences. A partial content analysis of ten Hindi films with rural themes and plots accompanied this broad historical study. The content analysis aimed to piece together a narrative of rural characterization in cinema. In this way, the research explored both macro and micro factors.

This chapter first summarizes the main findings from the comparative historical analysis and the partial content analysis. Building on that discussion, I present the multilayered picture of
rural-film access that results from synthesizing micro and macro levels of analysis. I then discuss two important thematic and methodological lessons from this research. Finally, I consider the direction of future research on the relationship between rural India and Hindi film.

**Combining the Macro and Micro**

By bringing together the findings from Chapter 3 and 4, we can better understand how continuous network reconfigurations since independence have affected and been affected by cultural representations made in Hindi films. On their own, the historical sociological examination and the partial content analysis of ten Hindi films each illustrate important forces that have shaped how Indian villagers have connected with cinema. When discussed in tandem, however, more nuanced interconnections emerge, and we can see an intricate landscape representing the rural-film relationship and characterized by feedback loops.

The comparative historical sociological analysis of technological, social, and institutional contexts in post-independence India highlighted slow changes over time that affected the extent to which villagers were included as potential film viewers. By converting contexts to networks, this paper examined how contextual structures changed over time and, as a result, how rural India was positioned in relation to broader societal changes. The technological network’s pace of change has accelerated due to recent ICT initiatives implemented by development and governmental actors. Over time, villagers have become more technologically connected to the rest of India, boosting their chances of accessing Hindi films. The social network, shaped by attitudes towards impoverished rural India entrenched in centuries-old religious values, has also experienced change, albeit at a slower pace. Earlier prejudices against lower-caste villagers have
loosened through global and domestic influences, but they still constrain levels of rural inclusion. The institutional network, represented by the Hindi film industry, has grown exponentially in the past two decades, rising from its early origins as a national cultural institution to become a global entertainment behemoth. Throughout this expansion, rural audiences have lagged further and further behind in infrastructural as well as emotional ways.

In addition to examining each network’s evolution over the past sixty years, Chapter 3 compared traits of all three networks and also highlighted several important internetwork relationships. Analyzing factors such as growth, the aristocratic positioning of various players, and the strength of ties in different regions of a network, I was able to create a more holistic picture of the rural-Hindi film network, which has undergone continuous change since independence. By looking several repercussions across technological, social, and institutional contexts, I was able to show that forces from one network have affected the structures or sizes of other networks. Padgett & Powell’s multiple-network system (2012) made it possible to visualize the multifaceted narrative of rural access that emerges from a variety of ongoing processes.

The partial content analysis looked at selected scenes and dialogues from ten Hindi films to test if the findings from Chapter 3 – fluctuating inclusion of rural groups – translated into on-screen portrayals of villagers. These films ranged from 1953-2009 and involved rural plots, characters, and themes. They also included a mix of Bollywood and art films, since each genre has portrayed rural life differently in this time. The chapter laid out a narrative of how rural representation in Hindi film has changed by assessing factors such as specific gendered portrayals of rural men and women, how rural characters interacted with their urban counterparts, and in more recent films, how films presented rural-global relationships.
Reflecting on these findings, we can observe a relationship driven by feedback loops between historical processes of restructuring within and across networks, and the portrayal of rural groups in Hindi films over the past sixty years. We do not find a linear process where a simple combination of technological, social, and institutional factors directly shapes cultural products – or vice versa. Instead, the micro and macro factors of rural-film access have affected and been affected by one another. For example, consider the recent globalization of Bollywood and the burst of films in the past decade that include characters who reflect the global Indian. Perhaps initially the industry began incorporating global plots and characters into its products after noticing the migration patterns of NRIs (Non-Resident Indians) in the 1990s. But beyond that initial adjustment, the process became inherently interdependent: more Bollywood films with global themes increase the genre’s popularity with overseas audiences, and as overseas box office revenue grows, more films cater to those more diversified demands. As Throsby (2010, p.25) explains, even the production process has shifted from being linear to resembling “value networks…[with] multiple inputs, feedback loops, and a pervasive ‘value-creating ecology.’”

We can find another example that reflects this value-creating ecology (Throsby, 2010) typified by feedback loops if we look at the films from the first decade after India’s independence. During this time, the government played an active role in promoting certain unifying themes and national values (Sugata & Bose, 1998). The country’s burgeoning political leadership in the 1950s understood that cultural texts such as films could effectively promote certain types of national unity for a country trying to imagine its future (Vasudevan, 2000). Indeed, early rural films like Do Bigha Zamin and Naya Daur weave together idyllic representations of villagers with deeper cultural messages about the ideal India of the future.
When these films were released, Indian viewers simultaneously sympathized with and respected characters such as Shambu and Shankar for their pure rural values and behaviors. Yet in time, these early rural characterizations, although initially revered, became stratified, locking in rural characters to simplistic archetypes that still linger on in today’s films. Here, we see a decision that was initially motivated by an institution that influenced films of the time, which in turn shaped subsequent social attitudes and cultural products in later decades.

When considering both macro changes in network structure and more micro shifts in on-screen representation of rural groups, the myriad feedback loops involved make it virtually impossible to trace back to the original influence. However, this does not suggest we cannot gain any meaningful information from the multiple-network system of influences. Instead, acknowledging this interdependence allows us to break free of myopic perspectives that search only for linearity and direct cause-effect relationships. We can investigate and analyze more multidirectional interactions and exchanges, and, as a result, expand the list of actors and forces that play a role in shaping the rural-Hindi film network.

**Thematic and Methodological Lessons**

In addition to presenting the fluid and cyclical relationship between rural populations and Hindi cinema, this research brings up several thematic and methodological lessons. Three significant lessons are (1) the ways in which cultural texts can shape and perpetuate identity amid broader contexts, (2) the benefits of analyzing historical change using a networked sociological perspective, and (3) the value of the long durée perspective to map how contextual plate tectonics of different networks function as part of a broader multi-domain system. This
section will briefly review each lesson, framing important concepts based on specific findings from the previous two chapters.

Because they circulate ideas and stereotypes, cultural texts, such as films, can have a strong influence on the perceived identity of various groups. Since they carry cultural messages that viewers easily absorb into their existing sets of beliefs, films play a large role in shaping how individuals view groups that are less visible in a given society. Because marginalized groups have only limited social capital (Narayan, 1999), they frequently fall prey to external influences such as film, which shape their perceived identity. Indian villagers make up one such marginalized group.

The sociological analysis and the content analysis both reveal the deep influence that films can have on group identity. The aristocratic structure of the social network effectively excluded lower-caste villagers from the dominant social spheres in Indian society until quite recently. Additionally, the hierarchical production structures of the Hindi film industry – represented through the concentrated hubs in the institutional network – have made it difficult for villagers to gain the expertise and capital needed to participate. We notice this lack of rural participation in most of the Hindi films analyzed in Chapter 4, although the art films *Ankur* and *Mirch Masala* strive towards symbolic participation in their more complex portrayal of villagers. In this way, we uncover a thematic lesson embedded in this research: the power of cinema to reflect and perpetuate established identities has also played a role in shaping how rural India sees and is seen in Hindi film.

In addition to this thematic finding, this research also sheds light on the values of using comparative historical sociology, specifically with networks as the unit of analysis – a still-
developing methodology that could be applied to many areas of scholarship. Although Chapter 2
details the merits of combining historical sociology and a networked perspective, this
interdisciplinary approach merits further discussion here. Mahoney & Rueschemeyer’s three-step
methodology (2003, p.6) of “causal analysis, an emphasis on processes over time, and the use of
systematic and contextualized comparison” allowed for a fuller examination of contextual
changes that have occurred in India between independence and present day. That kind of
historical approach spanning multiple contexts – and decades, for that matter – set this research
apart from earlier work looking at rural India’s relationship to Hindi film.

Furthermore, by choosing networks as the units of analysis, this research brought
concepts from network theory into conversation with historical sociology. This methodological
combination was best suited to frame the relational and dynamic evolution of rural access to
Hindi film. Especially in scenarios where the level of access by the to-be-studied group is in
question, this interdisciplinary strategy keeps the focus on the strength of links, network growth,
and network structures. This framework helped bound the field of research to avoid an unfiltered
historical account of post-independence India. Finally, it provided a systematic way to compare
how each networked context depended on and influenced the others.

Perhaps most significant, the use of the long durée perspective (Braudel, 1969)
highlighted different rates of network growth among the three studied contexts in the past 65
years, illustrating how more explosive ‘short durée’ network expansion relates to slower and
more emergent structural change. As Chapter 3 showed, the social network, governed by
centuries-old caste influences, has grown at a far slower pace than the technological and
institutional networks. In the past two decades, enormous strides in ICT advancement and in the
global presence of Bollywood have allowed these two networks to experience significant expansion – which have affected rural-Hindi film access in multiple ways.

One might initially guess that such explosive short durée changes could overpower informal social constraints (North, 1990) and, in this way, more comprehensively dictate how rural actors are included in networks of film access. Yet what we find is that the social network’s embeddedness in and influence on the other two networks is strong enough to continue to impose long-standing cultural views on how rural groups are positioned. Such a finding reaffirms the idea of the multiple domain system illustrated by Powell & Padgett (2012), particularly how feedback loops of varying strengths function within and across networks. More generally, this discovery shows how intricate the relationships among contexts are, which in turn has resulted in an intricately structured rural-film access network. This research’s use of a macro historical lens spanning the long durée helped to uncover this multi-network relationship – a complex landscape of contextual plate tectonics that are shifting at different rates and clashing with one another in a variety of ways.

**Rural India and Hindi Film: Looking Forward**

Given the approach, data, and conclusions of this research, what can we expect the future of scholarship on rural India and Hindi film to look like? As I explained in the introductory chapter, there is little chance that villagers will suddenly gain great amounts of disposable income to view films in the near future. For the most part, these poorer groups will continue to lag far behind middle and upper class audiences – in India and around the world. In the same way, it is unlikely that the Hindi film industry will suddenly begin catering solely to rural
audiences. The industry has its own motives of sunk costs and box office revenues to consider. Embedded infrastructural limits such as ICT development and social barriers such as how rural communities perceive the cultural role of cinema also block Hindi film from completely diffusing into these areas. Therefore, the financial impact of rural moviegoers, an issue that has driven much of the NRI-focused film scholarship in the past decade, will not likely be a motivating factor for continued rural-film research anytime soon.

Rather, as globalization of Hindi film marches inexorably forward, we must pause to acknowledge and analyze those who remain on the outskirts of social and cultural influence – how they got there and what’s keeping them there. Rural groups in India will probably remain marginalized, much as they are now, on the fringes of society and the Hindi film industry. As such, future scholarship on rural India and Hindi film depends on academics recognizing that subaltern groups (Spivak, 1988) still merit attention, even if such work ranks low on political and economic agendas. This research takes a first step in that direction, moving beyond established ethnographic work and putting forth a possible strategy that combines broad historical analysis with a content-driven examination of cultural texts.

In order to keep expanding the existing body of literature, it will be necessary to employ similar interdisciplinary approaches that weigh the different factors that influence how rural populations access Hindi film, both historically and in the years to come. Continuing endeavors to increase ICT diffusion, development initiatives that boost technical expertise as well as local participation, and changing societal attitudes are just some of the forces that may affect the multiple-network system of how villagers interact with Hindi film in the future. The contexts are anything but static. Future work will yield important insights about how cultural flows spread
through pre-existing networks – networks that change even as they shape the ways that cultural texts circulate – and affect how individuals connect with one another.
ENDNOTES

Chapter 1:
a See Vasudevan, 2000; Morcom, 2007 for more on colonial Indian cinema.
b As stated in the introduction, this thesis does not look at concrete links between specific rural individuals and/or groups, due to practical limitations. Rather, it uses historical secondary sources and networks to conceptualize broader changes in rural Indian access to Hindi films in the past sixty years.

c Chapter 2:
Swades (2004, dir. Ashutosh Gowarikar) is one of the ten films that will be more closely analyzed using content analysis in Chapter 4.
d See also Meyer & Rowan, 1991; Scott, 1995.

e Chapter 3:
The Indian Ministry for Rural Development was founded in 1982, and has worked closely with the Department of Electronics and Information Technology for many years to facilitate development projects that bring technology into more of rural India (Ministry for Rural Development website: http://rural.nic.in/).
f A few network theory definitions help explain this statement. Granovetter (1973, p.1364) explains that a “bridge” plays a critical role in a network because it is “the line in a network that provides the only path between two points.” At this point, we must remember that strong ties connect nodes within a cluster while weak ties connect nodes across different clusters. Because nodes in a given cluster are often connected to more than one other node, Granovetter explains that “all bridges are weak ties.”
g The permeability of the caste system, a facet of Hinduism, into other aspects of Indian society is due in part to the historically strong presence of Hindu rulers and the outcomes of many civil conflicts between mainly Muslim and Hindu populations throughout modern South Asia’s development (Sugata & Bose, 1998).
h Caste-based discrimination and even hate crimes occasionally still appear in news media. One example can be found in a BBC News article from December 2011: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-15997648
i Narayan (1999, p.6) defines social capital as “the norms and social relations embedded in the social structures of society that enable people to coordinate action and to achieve desired goals.” Without social capital, individuals struggle to gain access to resources – material and human – to participate in society. Also see Burt, 1997.
j Legislation that allowed foreign direct investment (FDI) into India passed in 1991 and dramatically changed how much the Indian government opened its borders for international trade (Hooda, 2011). Prior to the 1990s, India had been a mostly closed economy, focusing on developing its domestic industrial sectors with an emphasis only on import-substitution industrialization (ISI) (See Patnaik, 1998; Hambrock & Hauptmann, 1999 for more information).
k The term “Bollywood” first emerged in the 1970s, when Western scholars started studying Hindi cinema (Rajadhyaksha). Before this time, films that followed Bollywood themes and plots were simply called popular Hindi cinema. The term comes from the colonial name given to the “Tollygunge” film industry in Calcutta in the 1930s, as “Tollywood” mimics the label given to the Los Angeles-based American film industry (Rajadhyaksha, 24).
l See also Barabási & Albert, 1999.
m I am not suggesting that these are the only places for overlap across the three networks, only that the three presented provide a good snapshot of the types of impacts that internetwork overlaps have had on rural-film access.

Chapter 4:
o These films were chosen through a combination of background research (Google searches, BoxOfficeIndia.com resources, etc.) and consulting my uncle, Vijay Vaidyanathan, a knowledgeable source on both Bollywood and Hindi art cinema. When providing these suggestions, Mr. Vaidyanathan was also in contact with several acquaintances connected to the Hindi film industry.
p Unfortunately there are not concrete verifiable statistics on the production budget and box office revenues at the time for Do Bigha Zamin, or many Hindi films before the 1990s. A lack of systematic financial records and a mix of
legal and black market funding has made finding verifiable production and revenue numbers all but impossible (Govil, 2006).

\( ^q \) Swades’ total box office revenues from the US, UK, and India were over $US 4.47 million. (IMDb.com)

**Chapter 5:**

\( ^f \) For a more detailed discussion of such films and the ‘global Indian’ archetype, please see Chapter 4’s analysis of *Virasat* (1997), *Swades* (2004), and *Billu* (2009).
LIST OF WORKS CITED


