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Blood Brothers: The Evolution of Brotherhood in Crime from *Deewaar* to *Satya*

Tianyi Yao

Introduction

On January 24th 1975, director Yash Chopra's acclaimed action thriller *Deewaar* premiered. Six months later, a state of emergency was declared by Indira Gandhi's government. While the movie quickly cemented its position in Bollywood history as "the film that established Amitabh Bachchan... inaugurating... the 'angry young man' phase of Hindi movies," the country itself was thrown into a storm of anger as well (Lal 238). Over a decade later, in 1989, another gangster film, *Parinda*, by Vidhu Vinod Chopra, revolutionized the genre once again. Winning multiple major film awards, the movie was released just one month before V. P. Singh's ascendancy to the position of prime minister. A wave of reforms and protests ensued as the new administration ordered an increase of job openings for the lower castes. After another nine years passed, Telegu film maverick Ram Gopal Varma finished *Satya* which "has largely determined the film form for the underworld theme in Bollywood" (Roy 101). Two months before the film's release, on May 11th 1998, India became the newest country to possess nuclear weapons. Yet only 17 days later, Pakistan snatched that title.

The three monumental movies were set in the same metropolis—Mumbai—featured the same class of people—gangsters—and all witnessed dramas in reality that punctuated their unique presences in the history of India and Indian cinema. These extraordinary doublings of historic moments are much more than coincidental, because the duality of fiction and reality is also mirrored in the duality of three pairs of distinct brothers in each film. Both *Deewaar* and *Parinda* present actual family relations whereas *Satya* creates a duo of metaphorical brothers. The conflicts and compromises between the closely connected male figures are central to the films' drama, while also reflecting hints of a grand historical narrative. This essay is an analysis illustrating how the identities of brothers have evolved

in the three selected genre films in the context of India's history, class distinction and morality.

Deewaar

Mother India has often been pointed to as the basis of *Deewaar's* story: "Like so many Bollywood films... [*Deewaar*] drew much from Mother India, but then few movies have not" (Bose 278). The duel between *Deewaar's* two protagonists, Vijay and Ravi, is very much catalyzed by the mother figure; almost every scene involving the brothers would eventually center on the mother one way or another. This trio rather than duo has indeed become the essence of the narrative, but a clear dichotomy of Vijay and Ravi can still be found in the film's visual distinction between anti-hero and hero. Most of *Deewaar* shows Ravi in light-colored or warm-colored clothes, and Vijay is often dressed in dark or cold colors. The ultimate form of this opposition in dressing is the contrast of uniforms: police and gangster. Similarly, after Vijay joins the mob, most of his scenes take place after sundown and Ravi's during daytime. Establishing this dichotomy would be less meaningful, however, if the divisions were not juxtaposed with images of unity. There are a few twilight sequences in which Vijay and Ravi share the same dress color, and one of them is the famous bridge scene where Ravi utters the classic line: "I have mom!" The brothers are both in dark blue in this confrontation, revealing the true nature behind their broken bond in the following dialogue:

Vijay: "...[W]ho's listening to me? A brother, or a policeman officer?"

Ravi: "As long as a brother will speak, a brother will listen. When a criminal will speak, a police officer will listen."

This exchange suggests that the characters see a clear distance between the idea of a brother and the idea of a policeman or criminal; the brothers can be linked by a bridge of history and family, yet the policeman and the criminal are incompatible. In the end of *Deewaar*, the policeman is obliged to denounce the criminal, but Ravi's position is far from a safe moral high ground. In order to fully grasp the subtlety of this scene, the dark blue clothes are key, because the only other time Ravi wears that outfit is during his visit to the poor family of the boy Ravi killed, who was only stealing a loaf of bread. In that particular scene, Ravi realizes the injustice of his shooting of a poor boy while doing nothing about Vijay, who had risen to the top of a smuggling ring. Ravi claims to have

learned a lesson from the dead boy's father and immediately decides to break away from Vijay, taking their mother with him. Afterwards, during the bridge scene, Ravi's demand that Vijay must turn himself in is a hypocritical statement, since the dual identities of Vijay as a criminal and a brother are not really distinguished in Ravi's point of view. Vijay in fact "honors the canons of ideal behavior in the kinship domain and, unlike hard-core villains, values family relationships; he is... an exemplary elder brother" (Thomas 176). Ravi's notion of a brother, however, is no longer dependent on Vijay's character and only builds upon another set of what Ravi called "principles and... ideals".

Of course, Ravi as a member of the law enforcement is exercising his responsibility to return the law-breakers to a state of order, and Vijay has undoubtedly committed crimes. However, Ravi has never responded to Vijay's indignation that the institutions that formerly oppressed their parents were still left unchecked. Therefore, to some extent Vijay suffers the same injustice as the poor man shot by Ravi: "What is refreshingly different in *Deewar*... is that [Vijay's] anger is directed at a generalized system of oppression, a web of power networks that unleashes an everyday situation of degradation for millions of people in India" (Virdi). Nevertheless, Ravi is by no means a villain in this reinterpreted scenario, since he is also a victim of the flawed justice system. The two brothers are subject to an intractable situation that cannot be mitigated in the social framework available to the state of 1970s India. Lenin commented on the nature of the state as "an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one class by another; it is the creation of 'order', which legalizes and perpetuates this oppression by moderating the conflict between classes." The film links Ravi's identity as a police officer to a moral dimension represented by the mother figure, so the administering of state justice is romanticized as the administering of moral justice, or even religious righteousness. This echoes the Marxist conclusion that

Since the State is the form in which the individuals of a ruling class assert their common interests, and in which the whole civil society of an epoch is epitomised, it follows that the State mediates in the formation of all common institutions and that the institutions receive a political form. Hence the illusion that law is based on the will, and indeed on the will divorced from its real basis — on free will. Similarly, justice is in its turn reduced to the actual laws (Marx).

Vijay's question about speaking to a brother or a police officer directly calls this linkage into question. Rather than appealing to Ravi for leniency due to their familial bond, Vijay is asking for a perspective that disregards state ideology, a perspective shared by two individuals who are connected by a shared experience as the urban poor and children of a union leader.

The final death of Vijay is celebrated by the institution when the film ends with a ceremony that places Ravi and his mother in the middle of a clearly respected crowd with the background of decorations that stand out as the three colors of the Indian flag. The murder of Vijay symbolizes a social cannibalism on a familial level as destabilizing factors are being eliminated not just by the state, but by the state's representatives in each family unit. A similar theme is also featured in Salman Rushdie's magnum opus *Midnight's Children* in which Shiva serves the agent of the state, destroying the brotherhood of the midnight's children. Like Shiva from the novel, Ravi and his mother are then swallowed in the wave of applause as rehabilitated members of society, newly joined in the ranks of patriots and contributors. *Deewaar's* power thus lies in its abstraction of this oppressive relationship between the state and the family, and its "appeal is to a sense of loss of... dreams of equality and redistribution, and the end of familial solidarity that freedom promised" (Mazumdar 211). The movie dramatizes the Indian reality in the 1970s when the Emergency was on the horizon at the time of its premiere. During that national crisis in 1975, a figurative killing of brothers took place on a national level, and just like in the movie, a mother set the carnage in motion and watched from the back.

Parinda

If *Deewaar's* brother dynamic eventually explodes in the form of an ideological antagonism, then *Parinda's* brothers are both caught in the fire of a purely underworld violence. *Parinda's* beginning has set itself apart from *Deewaar* since the protagonists Karan and Kishan are introduced as street children with no adult guardians. The absence of a parental generation has established Kishan, the older brother, as the family authority. Even though Karan later returns to Mumbai as an educated young man just like Ravi, his connection with the state apparatus is much weaker and is finally severed when his childhood friend Inspector Prakash is murdered very early in the film. The absence of any parental figure and the removal of the state representative allow

Parinda a deeply harrowing look at the inside workings of Mumbai's mob world. Instead of a direct fratricide as in *Deewaar*, *Parinda* manages to form an internal conflict between the brothers by adding another character into the duo of Kishan and Karan—the psychotic mob boss Anna. When a fight breaks out between Kishan and another gangster Abdul because of Karan's decision to turn to the police, Anna intervenes and commands: "Kishan's brother is like our own!" In this scene, both Kishan and Anna refer to Karan as "bhai," meaning brother in Hindi. This particular phrase establishes a different social environment for the gangsters: "The Bombay underworld today can be understood as a new community of men signified by the use of the term *Bhai* (brother) to refer to members of the gang" (Mazumdar 157). The underground community then overlaps with the family image, acknowledging in an egalitarian fashion that everyone is a brother. Using the word "bhai" foreshadows Karan's decision to descend into the underworld. Anna's henchmen have threatened Karan, and two other informants—Iqbal and Paro—with immediate violence, pressuring Karan to give up on legal justice. Unlike the white knight Ravi who chooses to stand by the badge, Karan decides to avenge Prakash by being part of Anna and Musa's organizations. Ironically, Karan's entrance into the gang world fulfilled the prophecy of his own demise in his warning to Kishan: "Blood will be spilt for blood, my blood for all your sins. For every family your bullets have destroyed... A bullet is waiting to destroy your family."

However, Karan's death is not a direct result of Kishan's sins, whatever they may be. Anna's murder of Karan and Paro is only based on the fact that Karan has killed Anna's henchmen Francis, Rama and Abdul. In other words, Kishan's past crimes never really factor into the horrible death of his brother. Therefore, the "my blood" and "your sins" in Karan's outburst do not carry in themselves actual referents. The differences between "my" and "your" are lost in the context of a community of brothers, or bhais. Karan pays the price not because of Kishan's wrongdoings but because he violates the community-family code of the gangland by betraying his own bhais. Similarly, Anna is killed because of his violation in killing his bhai Karan. If this explanation is to be accepted, the origin of this chain of familial violations should be traced. Seemingly everything is triggered by the shooting of inspector Prakash, which requires some suspension of disbelief since the hitmen are amateurish in killing Prakash in front of Karan. This killing is fundamentally an osmotic effect of the underworld infiltrating the surface world. Prakash certainly counts as a family member for Karan

since the latter marries Paro, the inspector's sister. Thus Karan faces the death of a brother-in-law and sees it as a violation of both the family code and the legal order. Once Karan realizes that the legal order cannot be restored, he resorts to abide by the family code, but like Anna says: "He doesn't understand business." Being a gang member demands a certain nullification of familial relations with the surface world, which explains why Anna is such a violent and merciless character, since he has perpetrated "his logic of gangland loyalties" and "undercut familial ties" by killing his own wife and child (Gopalan 171).

Karan's lack of understanding and disregard of the underworld rule that superimposes a blood brother with a gang brother has determined his tragic fate as a violator of family-gang codes. Nevertheless, there is another layer hidden deeper beneath this web of causality or karma. The true origin of Kishan and Karan's intermingling with Anna should be traced back to the first time the two brothers encounter a teenage Anna in the streets as children. When Anna provokes the two for being too cowardly to rob a passerby, Karan jumps and frantically urges Kishan to prove his worth, thus leading to Kishan's passing the point of no return. While the deviant persona of *Deewaar's* Vijay is essentially connected to his father's humiliation, Kishan's tainted career is set forth as a result of Karan's agitation. Yet in *Parinda's* case, the older brother has to bear the stigma since he is the one who has acted upon the inciting words. The instigator Karan, later in the film, literally reveals his true colors after he joins Anna's organization—all of Karan's clothes in the second half of the film are black, in stark contrast to the bright colors in the first half. Despite Kishan being the authority figure, the breadwinner, and the substitute father in the family, Karan's weaker status as the younger child is attenuated by his identity as the agitator, the stubborn voice, and the mother. Therefore, although Kishan's character ultimately becomes an analogue of Vijay, the Ravi and the mother in Karan are completely distorted and replaced by another more ruthless Vijay. Here the audience is presented with a re-imagination of *Deewaar*: in the world of *Parinda*, the Ravi in Karan has cowered after the bridge scene and his inner Vijay survives in the end while losing everything he loves. If *Parinda* is analyzed as this alternate version of *Deewaar*, then Vidhu Vinod Chopra may have presented a moral much more forcefully through extensive violence and intensified emotions: even Vijay from *Deewaar* should not be sympathized with, since he cannot uphold a family that walks on the border of two worlds. Kishan overpowers Karan in the dilemma of seeking righteousness, and the

latter, an embodiment of both Ravi and the mother, mimics Kishan but is still driven by the sole purpose of revenge.

In the earlier study of *Deewaar*, it is argued that Ravi as a police officer represents state oppression, but *Parinda* takes a step further and deconstructs its own Vijay–Kishan, challenging that he is a representative of oppression from the underworld. While the gangsters are destabilizing factors to the state authorities, their own community is built upon a form of capitalist monopoly, and with the aid of weapons and capital, this community is itself fascist in nature. Antonio Gramsci once asserted: “The originality of Fascism consists in having found the right form of organization for a social class which has always been incapable of having any cohesion or unitary ideology” (139). In an extensive study on Mumbai—*Maximum City*—by Suketu Mekhta, the chaotic ideological sphere of the Indian mafia can easily be found in the delirium of the mob leaders (245–247). With all the matching traits, the doubling of Karan and Kishan could be explained through a politicized view of gang experience: “fascism... is a return of the repressed, based on the ‘organized control of mimesis.’ Thus fascism, through the mimesis of mimesis, seeks to make the rebellion of suppressed nature against domination directly useful to domination” (Taussig 68). *Parinda* brings out the complex relationships between the brothers and a gang of ‘brothers’ and realistically portrays the ruthlessness of the underworld. Instead of creating a more obvious hero/anti-hero like Yash Chopra’s Vijay, Vinod Chopra rejects any heroic aura and implies an inevitability of a gang’s internal conflicts based on the transgression of family-community codes and the fascist nature of the organization.

Satya

Almost 10 years after *Parinda*, Ram Gopal Varma’s *Satya* sparked the Indian film industry with another powerful gangster tale. Imbued with even more cruelty and realism compared to *Parinda*, *Satya* “remains an uncompromisingly grim, stark analysis of the Bombay underworld, as Varma strips away the clichés of gangland loyalty and honor to focus on the violence that propels criminal life” (Crawford). The title character Satya enters Mumbai alone at the film’s start, and quickly gets incarcerated because of his Vijay-esque defiance against a local mob boss. As far as the narrative shows, Satya has little backstory, which is one step further in the direction of displacement. While *Parinda* leaves out the parents of the protagonists, *Satya* leaves out almost everything including childhood memories and family relationships.

For the majority of the film, one can claim that the story only revolves around Satya's conflicting gang life and love life, since no mother or brother is present for another kind of dynamic. Nevertheless, Satya's close association with another mobster, Bhiku, qualifies their bond as a metaphorical brotherhood. After Satya joined Bhiku's gang, his good relationships with other top members again broaden this circle of family formed entirely by gangsters. It may seem unrealistic how a blank-page like Satya becomes so many people's favorite, but it is exactly the blank-page that invites new and fresh impressions. The absence of Satya's past and the blurry histories of other characters allow the brotherhood to crystallize on-screen rather than to be established as a given premise.

Satya's understanding of brotherhood fairly resembles a mixture of Anna's love for his fellow gangsters and Vijay's love for his family. From the protagonist's point of view, "[t]he film plays out gang life as a space where brotherhood, community, death, and defiance coexists" (Mazumdar 173). Because Satya has no family, his love for his 'bhais' is indistinguishable from that for his family. Although as an outsider, he forms a family with the gang members in an ideal gangland morality: everyone in this group is a brother, and punishment must be delivered if there is a violation of this group. The entire movie is basically Satya being hell-bent on avenging his murdered 'brothers'. Except for his first killing of Jagga, a local bully, all the violence is just a back and forth exchange of mutual retaliations. He incites Bhiku to avenge the killed 'brothers' by murdering their rival Guru Narayan, follows with another plot to shoot Commissioner Shukla in order to avenge their friend Chander who was shot by the police, and finally goes on the last hunt for Bhau who has gunned down Bhiku. Throughout all these attempts of revenge, Satya is always the most determined one as a result of his hardcore belief in a fundamentalist vision of brotherhood. In contrast, the others around him more or less hesitate, let alone the antagonists Bhau and Mule's straightforward betrayal. In this movie, the ideologies of the heroes and the villains are reversed from those in *Parinda*. *Parinda's* hero/anti-hero Karan is the one who subverts the code of the gangland while Satya is the one who is absolutely dedicated to this code, and interestingly, he is also called out as someone who "doesn't understand the business". In both cases, the images of a perfect gangster family are heavily romanticized. In reality, the gangsters all hold an opposite view not very different from that of Bhau's: "There is no loyalty... There is no trust" (Mehta 225). Therefore Anna and

especially Satya are villains/heroes who can only exist in genre fictions, despite the realistic look presented by the films:

...[T]he gangsters, whose personal lives are characterized by an earthy simplicity, a vulnerability to cheap fantasies, the charms of illiteracy and folk wisdom, seem to be on the right side of a higher justice, whose time is yet to come. It is as if the gangster alone retains an original humanity, acting ruthlessly in his own interest but also instinctively loyal to his comrades and kind to strangers (Prasad).

Director Varma, however, ends the film by actually highlighting Satya's unbelievable naiveté through his desperate effort to reach his lover Vidya who belongs to the surface world. Satya only understands the difference between the underworld and the normal world in terms of legal categorizations. Due to his monolithic idea of family-gang (even his name says it—*Truth*), Satya fulfills his duty to his family by any means necessary, which is why he chooses to threaten Vidya's music director in the hopes of helping the girl he likes to be included in his family. Bhiku's wife is a fully adjusted woman in the gang family, and she is the only other young woman who Satya knows, so for him it is not impossible that Vidya would remain compliant to his family code. Unfortunately, everything ends horribly for them both in Satya's final run for the woman he loves. Vidya's eventual rejection of Satya's version of kinship shows how a 'perfect gangster' is fundamentally incompatible with the normal society.

After Satya falls in a pool of blood in Vidya's house, an ultimate statement of the protagonist's misguided conviction that gang life (blood) is congruous with normal life (Vidya's apartment), a short montage of reactions on the gang wars are shown before an ending title signed by the director himself:

This film is an attempt on my part to reach out to all those people who took to violence as a means for their living. At the end of it, if even one of them out there looks into himself before he takes out his gun the next time, and understands that the pain he inflicts on others is exactly the same as he would suffer himself, I would consider this effort worthwhile.

My tears for Satya are as much as they are for the people whom he killed.

Almost identical to Karan's warning of 'my blood for your sins', the director Varma apparently does not side with what Satya represents. The director knows how much violence is caused by the unending cycle of 'evening the debt'. As previously elaborated in Karan and Kishan's case, the gang world itself is a giant ground for mimetic metamorphoses. The characters involved are different, but their general behaviors are essentially identical. As long as the flawed state system is contributing to the survival of organized crime, the cycle is to be maintained forever, and the brothers within the gangs consume each other as always, but will the crime syndicates evolve? Their capitalist nature guarantees expansion. In *Satya*, the main villain Bhau is already venturing into politics at the time of his death. Bhau is a criminal who has evolved in order to gain legal authority, and his successful manipulation of democracy marks a new front in the war between the capitalist state and the capitalist underworld. Slightly touched upon in *Deewaar* and *Parinda*, the political sphere is much more significant to the criminals in *Satya*. Bhau is extremely cautious with the elections, delaying his plot to murder Bhiku in order to avoid unnecessary attention. The police force is terrorized effectively by the assassination of the hardline Commissioner Shukla, demonstrating how dysfunctional the official institutions are in the world of the film. The only force that obstructs Bhau, unexpectedly, turns out to be the gang itself. Before starting his political career, Bhau has violated Satya's 'brothers', which only invites capital punishment. Therefore, this narrative construction can be interpreted as a fundamentalist gangster moral keeping a more versatile ideology in check, i.e., "It is the inability of Satya to understand the world view of the gang community that eventually brought the gang's downfall" (Roy 111). The real world, unfortunately, leaves no possibility for the 'criminal chivalry' represented by Satya, and the brothers have long moved on, exerting their control over political parties and planting bombs in cars, which culminated in the 1993 Mumbai attacks.

Conclusion

The international metropolis of Mumbai has provided a perfect background for adventurous filmmakers, since "the great strength of Bombay Cinema... will always lie in its capacity to carry deconstructive or transgressive moments or 'regulated transgressions' in its interstices" (Mishra 33) From Yash Chopra to Vidhu Vinod Chopra and eventually to Ram Gopal Varma, three directors from three consecutive decades

have produced their own cinematic statements that delve deeply into the familial relationship of brothers. The narrative and visual dynamics among the male relatives have reflected more complex layers discussing society, morality and ideology. The massive and diverse market of Bollywood sets up the space for these movies to become popular, encouraging new dialogues in the real-world issues examined in each film.

1975's *Deewaar* serves as an incisive parable on India's class rule during the 1970s. The two brothers Vijay and Ravi eventually fail to bond as representatives of antagonistic classes, and their tragedy mirrors the internal conflicts between state and individuals during the Emergency. 1989's *Parinda* ventures more specifically into the gang world of Mumbai, showing how two brothers Kishan and Karan are condemned by the unspoken code of the underworld. The destruction of the brothers' lives can ultimately be attributed to the fascist nature of the criminal organizations and how they inevitably lead to a doubling of violent personality. 1998's *Satya* explores in a brand new dimension of the gangland with unprecedented realism, creating a character without a past, who has to build up his own family by interacting with the gang. *Satya*'s brothers suffer from an evolved order of beliefs that contradict his own merging of family and community. *Satya*'s fate demonstrates how a traditional faith in an ideal lawless environment might have curbed the extension of organized crime into the world of real politics.

The above mentioned topics are all very immediate to their own time period, namely mid-1970s, late-1980s and late-1990s. The present-day Mumbai has to deal with the historical or canonical problems displayed in each film, but its underworld has moved into a more disturbing direction: "The gangster-terrorist... is only the beginning of a trajectory that culminates with the emergence of a much more anonymous kind of perpetrator, one as yet unimaginable as a terrorist and one who presents a mask of innocence and ordinariness" (Rao 18). From the observations made based on the three selected films, it is apparent that the gangster world is changing much more quickly than the media is able to capture and recreate. This shortcoming of cinema demands a retrospect on the mob genre, since the filmmakers are in a battle more arduous than ever as they face the unimaginable personalities that become definitive features of our physical reality.

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