

# Indian Horror: The Western monstrosity and the fears of the nation in the Ramsay Brothers' *Bandh Darwaza*

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**Abstract.** This paper investigates Indian horror films as a site of socio-economical tensions in India at the end of the 1980s through the employment of the postcolonial reading of the 1990 Ramsay brothers' horror film *Bandh Darwaza*. This paper argues that specific references to the European gothic tradition and employment of imagery and interpretation of a western monstrosity (Dracula) in the film are not merely the exploitation of the exotic discourse, but an unconscious articulation of fears and anxieties summoned by the specific socio-economic conditions of India. The political turmoil and the economic changes at the end of the 1980s created a specific platform for fears and anxieties that were articulated through the deformed monsters of the western gothic tradition.

## Introduction

Anthony Henriques, a reader of the Indian cinema magazine *Filmfare* complained in the 'Readers' letters' section of the 1988 edition about the 'laughable' attempts of the Indian film industry to produce horror movies, concluding that 'the Ramsay Brothers and the others who produce horror movies would be better advised to tap the rich vein of Indian ghost stories instead of relying on second-hand imitations of third grade foreign horror movies' (Henriques 1988). I take this remark as a starting point of departure to analyze a horror film by the Ramsay brothers—*Bandh Darwaza* (*The Closed Door*), made in 1990. The clear references in the film to western horror elements, the Dracula character and pronounced hybrid aesthetics raise the question as to why this particular monstrosity was chosen to be reinvented in the Indian cultural context.

Horror as a genre in India was born with the Ramsay family production in the late 1970s and retained a stable position throughout the 1980s. Cheaply-made Ramsay horror films circulated at the margins of mainstream Bollywood; however, the films drew large audiences to the cinema halls in smaller urban centres and towns. The 1980s (when horror films by the Ramsay brothers were the most popular) was a certain liminal phase in Indian cinema—a transit period between the 1970s 'angry young man' type of films, which exploited social fractures, inequality and the

tensions of the criminal and political underworlds, and the family dramas of the 1990s, which shifted their attention from urban violence to the reformation (or rather re-establishment) of the family institution (Uberoi 2006). The 1980s was a period where India's political, social, economical and cultural landscapes were marked with uncertainty and disruptions.

Many film scholars confirm that in many cases horror films not only explore fears and tensions of a person(s), but usually expand these feelings further into the terrains of collective fears and the anxieties of a nation. As summarized by Valerie Wee, 'horror films articulate the specific fears of a nation/ community and reveal the socio-cultural, political, and ideological failures and instabilities that shape a nation/ culture's historical zeitgeist' (Wee 2014, 8). Similarly, Indian horror films of the 1980s functioned in the terrains of political turbulences and instability, marked by the Indian army's attack on the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the assassination of Indira Gandhi, the subsequent communal violence and the growth of extreme Hindu nationalism (Vitali 2011, 80–1).

In this interpretative context, this article proposes to treat *Bandh Darwaza* as a filmic site of reflection on the political and socio-cultural transformations at the start of the 1990s. This analysis also proposes a further crucial interpretative dimension—the liberalization of India's economy. Major economic changes came to India in 1991, when India shifted its economic organization to the capitalist patterns, thus opening itself to the investments of foreign capital and multinational corporations—and export and import. In this context *Bandh Darwaza*, which was created just one year before the economic liberalization, will be treated as a mediator of certain anxieties and fears attached to the forthcoming changes that this liberalization could supposedly bring about. Connecting economic liberalization and the inevitable western intervention into the sacred domain of 'Indianness', protected by the Indian nationalism, *Bandh Darwaza* transforms the phobia of this new form of neo-colonialism into the deformed monsters of the western classical horror tradition, and Dracula in particular.

Even though the Ramsay brothers are marginalized in the intellectual and academic debates on Indian cinema with their films being treated as *kitsch* and cheap cinema production, reading these films critically and relating them to the broader context of socio-cultural and political displacements can 'open the doors' (referring to the title of the film in question) to deeper layers of the country's national identity and psyche. Therefore, this article explores one of the possible interpretations of the film *Bandh Dawraza* in establishing a relation between the cultural connotations of vampire mythology, conventional gothic fiction and films, and the socio-cultural climate of India.

### The foreign monstrosity in *Bandh Darwaza*

The film *Bandh Darwaza* narrates a story of a childless thakur and his wife. The thakur's sister is a follower of a dark cult and a servant of a terrible creature Newla. She lures the thakur's wife to a mysterious place called Kali Pahadi, where she meets Newla. The monster promises that the thakur's wife will have a child. However Newla warns that if the child is born a girl, she will become the property of Kali Pahadi and will have to be brought here. When the daughter Kaumiya is born, the thakur's wife dies at the hands of her evil sister-in-law, who tries to kidnap the child and bring it to Newla. The thakur interferes and supposedly kills the monster. But Newla is not destroyed—instead he dissolves into a bodiless lethargic sleep. The thakur's daughter grows up and upon the hypnotic influence of her real father Newla comes to Kali Pahadi to restore the monster once again to its former form.

The narrative composition of *Bandh Darwaza* is somewhat similar to many of the films by the Ramsay brothers with a monstrosity threatening some particular figure of feudal authority and his family. The spatial and aesthetical configurations of the film are also quite conventional to the craft of the Ramsay brothers: secluded, abandoned caves where the dark cult thrives, a fierce *pujari* and a gang of skull-garlands wearing martial servants. However, what makes the film *Bandh Dawaza* a particularly interesting case for study is the clear references in the film to the *Dracula* story and the ideological tropes associated with popular vampire mythology. While aesthetically all films by the Ramsay brothers are an eclectic mix of various Western horror narratives and motifs, carefully blended with the interpretation of the vernacular mythological narratives, the distinct feature of *Bandh Darwaza* is its relation to a *particular* monstrosity—*Dracula*.

Here we cannot deny the possibility of the exotic discourse of the 'Other', as an important market strategy, employed by the Ramsay brothers in order to accumulate the spectators' interest. It is known that the British 'Hammer Horror' production, (which is best known for its *Dracula*, *Frankenstein* and the *Mummy* film franchises), was widely circulated on the outskirts of Indian popular cinema and was watched by the Ramsay brothers and apparently had an influence on some of their narrative and aesthetical decisions (Majumdar 2012).

Various remakes of the *Dracula* narrative can be found not only in Western cinematic cultures, but also in Asian horror circles as well. However, as it is very clear from a study of the Japanese *Dracula Trilogy* (released by the 'Toho Studio' in the 1970s) by Schlegel, the reception of these films in the West is usually dotted with a particular irony and sometimes disappointment (Schlegel 2009). The negative reception is usually based on the treatment of these films as a parody of the original *Dracula*, mainly because the films had little 'authentically Eastern moments', related

to any particular Oriental expectations by Western audiences. The problem with the reception of this type of film is that in most cases they are evaluated only by the observing of *what* is being shown while not trying to analyze *why* precisely these sets of images are chosen and what is their connection to the social and cultural aspects of the culture(s) from which they are derived—as in many cases they can provide us with clues about how to interpret the reinvention of western narratives in Asian horror films (Schlegel 2009, 272–3).

This similar disapproving approach is quite often applied to the films by the Ramsay brothers, as was clearly indicated in the introduction of this article with the citation from the *Filmfare* reader. In this respect, the visible elements of western gothic and horror fiction and the pronounced allusions to vampire themes in *Bandh Darwaza* require us to critically read the film from both the perspective of conventional Gothic and the *Dracula* mythology as well as to pay attention to the unique cultural landscape of India.

Dracula is one of the most popular characters of gothic fiction, which in the course of more than a hundred years has become integrated into the popular imagination and appears in many film adaptations, cartoons and commercials (Bolton 2010, 55). The character of Dracula is embedded with deep cultural codes and if appropriately read from a certain historical perspective, becomes a ‘modern myth still relevant to our lives’ (Hutchings 2003, 9). It also has to be noted that Dracula is always related to different ideological dispositions, as noted by Cavallaro: ‘Literary and filmic images of the vampire summoned by the Gothic vision indicate that this monster is a context-bound fantasy, which alters through time as the creature is required to incarnate different ideological messages’ (Cavallaro 2002, 181). In this way Dracula’s imagery in the Ramsay brothers’ film *Bandh Darwaza* has to be analyzed not only in relation to the socio-political context of India, but also to the inner concepts of the British gothic and vampire themes.

Proceeding now to the analysis of the film, first we should take a closer look at the Newla character in *Bandh Darwaza*. The first and foremost important feature of Newla is that it is being constructed as an alien monstrosity, not related to the mythological or folk sphere of India. Contrary to the other monstrous characters created by the Ramsay brothers (who, despite the obvious influence from western horror, are quite abstract and not entirely tied to the recognizable western monstrosities), Newla in *Bandh Darwaza* is created and modelled according to the ‘Hammer Horror’ tradition of Dracula. Visually, the Ramsay brothers borrowed clearly recognizable sets of images of the British Count: a long black suit with a cloak, fangs, the lethargic sleep at daytime in a coffin and activity at night, the ability to transform into a bat, the supernatural strength, just to name but a few.

India's rich mythology and folk beliefs have a number of supernatural creatures, which do not, however, fall exactly into the concept of a western vampire. Even though some of the vampire-related elements are to be traced in Indian demonology (e.g. creatures like *pishachas* and *rakhsas*, or *wetala*), most of them are more related to the cannibalistic rather than purely blood drinking practices (Bhattacharyya 2000, 120). In this respect, the idea of reanimated corpse is quite problematic in the Indian cultural context, where the Hindu ritualistic practices define specific funerary rites—cremation (Tombs 2003, 248–9).<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the similarities between Newla, Dracula and Christian traditions are evident—the sleeping place of Newla is a coffin: an object, which for many Indian spectators is adequately associated with the non-Hindu funerary practices, and first of all, Christian.<sup>2</sup>

So we can consider Newla belonging to an alien culture but residing on Indian soil. It is also clear that the Ramsay brothers were not seeking to make an adaptation neither of Stoker's novel, nor a remake of any of the Dracula films (as there are very few if any references to the original story in the film), and just borrowed some of the representational elements from *Dracula*-related stories and films, which signify that the character of Dracula was chosen not because of the uniqueness of the literary story, but because of some aspects related to vampire topic that conventional Indian mythology could not offer. As emphasized by Carroll, contrary to the mythical stories, where you can also encounter a monstrosity and where it is considered to be an inseparable part of the world's fabric, in the horror stories 'the humans regard the monsters they meet as abnormal, as disturbances of the natural order' (Carroll 1990, 16).

In Indian culture, all sorts of monstrosities are acquainted from the early childhood through TV programs, comic books, adapted stories and calendar art (the best example could be demon Rawan, one of the central characters of *Ramayana*). In this respect *Bandh Darwaza* is different from the conventional Indian mythology and Hindu cosmogony precisely because of the otherness of Newla's monstrosity, which would be treated by Indian spectators as an anomaly. The strategy of the employment of a western monstrosity in the Indian horror films could be related to the fact that westernized characters in films like *Bandh Darwaza* could offer Indian spectators a particular scopophilic intervention into the private sphere, which in Indian cinema

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<sup>1</sup> Even one of the stylistically and aesthetically closest to conventional gothic genre Indian films—*Mahal* (The Palace, 1949) converts traditional gothic elements of ghosts and spirits through reincarnation—the concept acceptable and understandable for the Indian spectators (Mishra 2002; Dwyer 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Christian references to demonology in the film *Bandh Darwaza* can be found not only in the vampire imagery of Newla: additionally there is a grimoire book of Black magic (the pink Necromicon!), which is used by Kaumiya to lure Kumar to the cemetery in order to have sex with him. The ritual is performed using candles and the photograph—articles employed in many popular usages of western magic.

was closely monitored by censorship. Asha Kasbekar (2002) has convincingly explored the double function of Indian popular cinema: the affirmation of morality through immoral scenes—this way Indian popular cinema would employ erotic or sexually provoking female characters to create certain voyeuristic pleasures (most often this would be done through explicitly sexual cabaret dances etc.). However, at the end of film, punishing these characters for their supposedly immoral behaviour and thus affirming the moral values of the spectators. This formula is obviously used in the films by the Ramsay brothers as well. The Ramsays, however, crossed the firm boundaries of Bollywood aesthetics and narratives in a way even more daring: quite often accumulating a large amount of sexuality and fantasy, their films were able to offer eager Indian spectators particular pleasure forms rare in Bollywood films. The brothers have masterfully combined conventional Indian cinema strategies (romantic love, stories, fight and stunt scenes, comical interludes) with the new concepts: the transformed and eclectic gothic and horror aesthetics with the addition of stylized sex scenes, famous bathroom episodes and explicit dialogues.

All these means of unauthorized pleasure would become a special way to transgress the private sphere, which earlier would not have been that easily accessed by the Indian spectator. This transgression is effectively achieved through the monster, which in many cases would initiate, manipulate or even take part in these actions. Taking note that the monstrosity is always eliminated and destroyed at the end of the Ramsay brothers' films, the aforementioned double ideological connection between the camera, as a voyeuristic intervention as well as the establishment of moral notions, is more than obvious.

The transgression of the private sphere, however, can be expanded into a broader analysis. As explained by Madhava Prasad, the transgression of the private poses a threat not only to the family or the institution of marriage, but to the nation itself, because 'expansion of the sphere of sexuality threatened to break open the national borders and destroy its identity' (Prasad 1998, 91). Therefore, if we consider the mission of the horror film not only to exploit the individual fears and anxieties and their connection with the broader fears of the nation, the western monstrosity in Ramsay's *Bandh Darwaza* can be treated as a reflection of a broader national anxiety, and, to be more precise, the postcolonial fear to re-live the colonial experience again. To support this mode of analysis, I will turn now to a certain postcolonial interpretation of the Stoker's *Dracula* in the western critical tradition.

### ***Bandh Darwaza* and the fears of the nation**

One of the interpretations found in the critical readings of the novel *Dracula* is that the novel serves to reveal a certain anxiety of 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain to experience

reverse colonialism. This interpretation was developed by Stephen D. Arata in his article *The Occidental Tourist*, where he interprets Stoker's *Dracula* in the context of declining British imperial power. In this interpretation, Dracula is seen as a reflection of imperialist ideology as he uses some of the imperial strategies such as the systemic accumulation and classification of knowledge about the country, which he plans to invade and transform into his vampire empire. Britain, having vast experience in colonial practices, instinctively reflects its own fear of becoming a victim of the same strategy; therefore, this imaginary intervener is positioned in Eastern Europe—another pole of the exotic discourse other than the already explored 'East'. Arata notes that in reading the novel from this perspective, 'Stoker thus transforms the materials of the vampire myth, making them bear the weight of the culture's fears over its declining status. The appearance of vampires becomes the sign of profound trouble' (Arata 2000, 166).

The model proposed by Arata could be implemented in the interpretation of the film *Bandh Darwaza* as well. The film clearly establishes relations between the discourse of a foreign monstrosity, blood drinking practices and sexuality—that which lets us bind the parallels between Arata's interpretation and the postcolonial reading of the film. Moreover, that the connotations between imperialism, vampire and the image of Dracula are also to be found in the later Indian horror films.<sup>3</sup> Taking into account the sensitive socio-political and economical situation of India at the end of the 1980s and the start of the 1990s, when the film *Bandh Darwaza* was released, the aesthetical and narrative complex of the film could be interpreted as the postcolonial fear of a new colonial expansion, in the postcolonial studies defined by the term neo-colonialism and related to the economical exploitation of the Third World Countries. Economical liberalization in India opened the flow of transnational capital and encouraged international companies to establish their offices, encouraging the vast export of goods. However, the liberalization has also triggered imports, as a result bringing to India not only foreign goods, but cable TV as well—this way increasing not only the circulation of the 'western values', but also erotic films and programs. Therefore, this national anxiety about the increased impact of westernization may be figuratively seen in a hybrid and foreign nature of Newla in *Bandh Darwaza*. The film *Bandh Darwaza* constructs a foreign monstrosity, which is only supposedly destroyed at the start of the film. The lethargic sleep of the monster (that is, a belief that something

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<sup>3</sup> For example, in a low budget film by Harinam Singh *Shaitani Dracula*, Dracula commands his followers to drink blood, proclaiming 'create hundreds and thousands of draculas for our empire. For in the whole world there will be only draculas' (*hamaare saamraajya ke liye laakhon, hazaaron aur karorom dracula banao. Puri duniya mei dracula hi dracula ho*). In this context the used word empire (*saamraajya*) positions 'Dracula' not as individual, but rather as a specific condition of colonisation.

is destroyed but actually is not and still waiting for its hour to rise again), in this interpretational framework could be treated as a fear of neocolonialism—the fear that colonial past is not destroyed completely, but can rise again.

This interpretation can also be supported employing Freud's concept of *the uncanny*. At the very beginning of his essay, Freud emphasizes that the uncanny 'belongs to all that is terrible—to all that arouses dread and creeping horror' (Freud 1919, 1). Freud emphasized the certain ambivalent duality of the German terms *heimlich* (homely, hidden, closed) and *unheimlich* (released to the outside), where both of them are related to negative or uneasy experiences. Therefore, it may be possible to use Freud's references to the double logic of the uncanny in trying to explain the duality used in the film *Bandh Darwaza*: if the gigantic statue (where Newla's vital energy is conceived), hidden in the dark dungeons under 'the closed door', could be considered as belonging to the *heimlich*, then Newla could be interpreted as the twin reflection, *the unheimlich*, or the repressed fear. Freud has connected the ambivalent categories of *heimlich* and *unheimlich* meanings thus concluding that the uncanny is 'in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old—established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression' (Freud 1919, 13). Freud also emphasizes the importance of anxiety about something that is repressed and its ability to come back again (*ibid.*).

Therefore reading the film *Bandh Darwaza* from the perspective of the postcolonial discourse, it is evident that Newla is a very ambiguous creature. First of all, as we have noted earlier, it is constructed as an alien monstrosity. At the same time Newla is also a fixed and established monstrosity—there is no mentioning of a transit moment (as, for example, in original Stoker's novel and film adaptations Dracula is always migrating) and from the very first shots in the film Newla is referred to as a creature residing in Kali Pahadi. As Freud has noted, repression is always an incomplete process and the past has an ability to slip back into the present, so it is not surprising then that following this concept of the uncanny, the lethargic sleep of Newla may refer to the anxiety of the nation about the possible return of the monster—what precisely happens in the film. So if we substitute the figure of Newla with the figure of western colonialism, in the psychoanalytical sense it could be considered to be known and destroyed, but still retaining the dreadful ability of returning—even if in another form. In this way *Bandh Darwaza* reflects on the idea of colonial horror coming back and being repeated.

The interpretation of a neo-colonial monstrosity is also possible if we take a closer look at the polarization between a monstrosity (*shaitan*) and humanity (*insaan*) in the film and the relation between the monstrous and the religious objects. In popular culture and traditional lore related to the vampires there is a firmly established



antagonistic relation between the undead and the cross. The Ramsay brothers, however, extended this religious discourse much further. One of the final scenes in *Bandh Darwaza* is when Newla tries to hide in his coffin, but he fails to do so because there are certain religious objects hidden in his abode: the *Om* sign, the cross and verbalized *suras* of the Quran (Hindu, Christian and Islamic attributes respectively). Valentina Vitali treats religious iconography in the Ramsay films as not so much related to the narrative importance, as more to the commercial need to exploit the exotic taste of the spectators and the creation of a dramatic effect (Vitali 2011, 79); however, this aforementioned scene in *Bandh Darwaza* could also be read as relating to a particular nationalist rhetoric. Partha Chatterjee has effectively argued about the ideological division between the material and the spiritual in many of the nationalistic narratives, emphasizing the hierarchical superiority of spirituality (East) over the materiality (West) (Chatterjee 1993, 6). From the film we can derive an idea that Newla is disturbed not by a certain religion, but by spirituality as such, as was emphasized in the film by selecting a combination and unity of the religious (or spiritual) elements.

If the gothic genre tried to question the rational ideas of the Enlightenment and the polarization between ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’, this ‘otherness’ would quite often comply with the Saidian Oriental ‘otherness’. Therefore, according to Procter and Smith, ‘postcolonial Gothic might be said to cite and write back to familiar Gothic texts (including imperial ones) in order to unsettle or in some way disturb their grand narratives of colonial mastery/ degeneration, relocating the horror from the locus of the colonised to the violence and abuses perpetrated by empire’ (Procter, Smith 2007, 96). In this way, the film *Bandh Darwaza*, as an example of postcolonial gothic, works as a contra-strategy to imperial narratives, reforming and applying otherness and monstrosity to the imperial identity. In this way the idea of reverse colonialism (where Dracula is the dark side of Britain, its eastern ‘Other’), in the postcolonial horror narrative is reversed yet again—the western monstrosity becomes the ‘Other’ for India, or, rather, the embodied fear that this ‘Other’ may return once again.

This fear of neo-colonial exploitation and threat to identity is emphasized through one more thematic aspect—sexuality, which is reinterpreted yet again in the film *Bandh Darwaza* relating it to the sensitive context of the nation.

### ***Bandh Darwaza* and the sexual nature of a woman**

In his interpretation of reverse colonialism, Stephen Arata refers to the conceptual links between sexuality and the blood drinking practices, where a bite of the vampire is equal to sexual intercourse. The expansionist strategy of a vampire is dreaded precisely because through the bite there is a possibility of reproduction, related to

certain aspects of race and hybridity. Being bitten by Dracula, Victorian women become a distinct 'race', belonging neither to the world of the dead, nor of the living—transformed into aggressive sexual predators.

The link between blood, sexual intercourse and reduplication of the species is known to many cultures. India is not the exception: here blood in some mythological narratives is tied to reproduction.<sup>4</sup> However *Bandh Darwaza* develops this idea further and more explicitly, including a scene of actual sexual intercourse between the monster and a woman. The strong sexual instinct of Newla is especially pronounced in the film and his sexual nature is presented from the very first scenes, where Newla is introduced as an 'impure entity' (*ek napaak jism*), and having sexual encounters with the village women (*jo gaav ki ladkiyon ki izzat se khel raha hai*). The references to impurity are used both directly and figuratively: it may refer to the illegitimate sexual intercourse generally as well as to the supposed incestuous relations between Newla and his daughter Kaumiya. If we follow the interpretation of the vampire's bite (that is sexual intercourse) as the contamination of the race, this paradigm could be also found in the film *Bandh Darwaza*.

The major effect of an encounter with the vampire is the inner transformation of the woman, transforming her into a sexually aggressive predator. This way the importance of sexuality is closely related to the major fear of losing one's own identity and becoming someone else—an alien—a threat posed both to the personal as well as the national identity. Woman's sexuality in Indian cinema was always closely monitored and controlled by a strict means of censorship, so actual sexual intercourse or explicit shots of the naked body were mostly eliminated or carefully masked. However there were many practices in Indian cinema, which allowed filmmakers to include sexual references and not to have them removed by the censorship. Other than a well-documented and analyzed technique of the 'wet sari' (Dwyer, Patel 2002, 91), the most often used strategy in Indian cinema was the polarization of female characters into two characteristic categories in cinematographic terminology: the *Madonna* and the *Vamp*. The *Vamp* was often constructed as being alien to the Indian cultural landscape, a stranger—often an Anglo-Indian or of uncertain descent. She was always portrayed as vulgar, persistent, sexually aggressive etc. As a contrast, the idealized woman, or the *Madonna*, was always portrayed as traditional, spiritual and sacrificial (Gokulsing, Dissanayake 2004, 79).

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<sup>4</sup> For example in *Devimahatmya* there is the famous myth of the goddess Kali and her struggle against the demon Raktabija. According to the myth, every drop of blood spilled from the wounded Raktabija would reproduce another demon, so Kali was able to defeat the demon only by drinking every drop of his spilled blood. This relation between blood and reproduction is encoded in the demon's name as well, where in Sanskrit *rakta* means blood, and *bija*—seed (a word which encapsulates sexual connotation as 'semen' too).

And even though the image of the Vamp character has suffered some changes in the course of time, the devaluation of her negative image is apparent only from the end of the 1990s, when, inevitably, Indian cinema was looking for strategies of constructing a modern, yet traditional image of a woman (Gangoli 2005, 157), many of the films prior this period retained this character division. The ideological separation in women characters is still visibly articulated in the film *Bandh Darwaza* through the main female characters—Sapna and Kaumiya (Newla's daughter). Kaumiya is presented as sexually active, a 'hunting' woman who starts demonstrating her active sexuality even before the actual contact with Newla (perhaps as an indicator of her monstrous blood), while Sapna shows almost no hints of sexuality (except for one song/ dance scene in the rain, but it should be treated as a romantic dream sequence) and is rather associated with bravery, heroism and romance. So if we treat Newla as a foreign monstrosity, related to him (or spread through him) aggressive sexuality is also considered as being alien to traditional Indian culture—it is imported and infiltrated but not indigenous.

Other unconventional sexual practices (such as masochism) are articulated through another female character in the film—Newla's mysterious female servant. It is obvious that this character has no visible narrative impact for the film and functions only as a voyeuristic cinematic insert and as ideological confirmation of the idea that pronounced sexuality is of a foreign nature. The identity of Newla's servant is never revealed; however, she obviously transmits the Western exotics through extravagant clothes, a connection with black magic and forbidden sexual practices. Comparing these two to Newla-related female characters (Kaumiya and the female servant), it becomes evident that explicit sexuality is either foreign (in the case of Newla's servant) or infiltrated and artificially contaminated, indoctrinated through hypnosis or other unconscious practices (in the case of Kaumiya).

In this context it is important to investigate the case of Manu, Sapna's sister-in-law. When Newla corners Manu in a closed barn, they have a struggle, which ends with eye-contact. The close up of Manu face indicates a shift from terror to the unexpected and uncontrolled desire for the monster. Contaminated by Newla's bite, Manu desperately wishes to unite with the monster, constantly repeating to her friends and relatives that she needs to go to Kali Pahadi. As the spectators are constantly reminded throughout the film, Newla is not a human being, but a demon. This hypnotic desire for the alien, a nonhuman and fearful creature could be interpreted as a fantasy of sexual experimentation with otherness. But as the overall ideological discourse of the film confirms, this sexual attraction for otherness is treated not as an active and individual desire, but rather as a result of contamination.

It is important to note that Kaumiya, too, reflects her inevitable submission for the monster. The song in the film *I was a sparkle (Main ek chingari thi)* shows

Kaumiya imprisoned in the dark catacombs and labyrinthine passages of Kali Pahadi (a reference to the conventional gothic setting). She is lamenting that once she was a sparkle, but now everything is veiled with darkness—beyond the closed door. In the course of the song Kaumiya is constantly being exploited and humiliated by episodic appearances of Newla; however, she cannot escape his hypnotic powers and at the end of the song she is portrayed as a bride, laying affectively to Newla through the cover of a glass coffin.<sup>5</sup> So the film condemns neither Kaumiya, nor Manu, and rather presents their condition as an inevitable outcome of contamination.

It is therefore important to emphasize that both Kaumiya and Manu die at the end of the film: this is a reference that contaminated blood neither cannot stay for long (in the case of Manu) nor has an antidote (in the case of Kaumiya). The only woman in the film acting on her own free will is the mysterious stranger—Newla's female servant. But this representation does not collide with the overall ideological position of the film—being a foreigner; she is an alien to the cultural environment of India and therefore is able to demonstrate her sexuality and choice freely.

### Conclusion

In the analysis of the film *Bandh Darwaza* I argued that the film, which was created just before the economic liberalization in 1991, appears as the embodiment of anxiety and fears related to the forthcoming changes this liberalization supposedly could bring about. Choosing the vampire theme, the film re-writes the conventional western gothic narrative and uses it as a means to reflect the anxieties of the nation. *Bandh Darwaza* reflexively posits the dangers of westernization, which might be created by the socio-economic changes in India, and intuitively prescribes them the form of a western monster.

The film also elaborates on the dangerous position of the woman. As a bearer of cultural and traditional values, she is more vulnerable to submissively succumb to the destructive and degrading influence of the West. The film articulates the unconscious sexual desire for the 'Other', while at the same time indicates the dangers of it, emphasizing the threat of racial mixing and suggesting better protection of women,

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<sup>5</sup> This episode may be related to the traditional Hindu epic mythology. One of the main episodes in *Ramayana* is Sita's abduction by the demon Ravana and the imprisonment in his island kingdom Lanka—a place where there is no possible way of escaping. Even though Ravana attempts to seduce Sita, she remains virgin and pure—the rakshas does not succeed in using her sexually (this is later confirmed by *agnipareeksha*—the fire trial). In *Bandh Darwaza*, the sexual contact is dramatized to the maximum. Even if there is no direct depiction of the sexual act between Newla and Kaumiya, there are, however, indirect references to it (it is evident in few scenes where Newla is shown fondling Kaumiya's body). The narrative of purity here is transformed into desire (even if forcible) for the exotic 'Other'.

as they are presented in the films as more vulnerable in terms of their sexuality. Contaminated by the foreign forces, a woman can become an aggressive sexual predator and bringer of the dangerous and contaminated reduplication, thus posing a threat to the exquisite Indian identity.

The dominant aspect of *Bandh Darwaza* still remains the exclusive focus on the idea of a unified community. The film implements the motif of a battle against the western and strange monstrosity, which, however, is not an individual battle but the combined force of the community. In the last minutes of the film *Bandh Darwaza* we can see the whole village united in the triumphant victory over the 'Other'. The community is shown gathered near the body of the defeated monster, strategically positioning the low-angle camera shots; this way directing the viewer's gaze from below and creating the impression of the superiority of mankind over the deformed monstrosity. The common denominator of the religious discourse shown in the film is the synthesis of religious practices. In *Bandh Darwaza* the Ramsay brothers, for the first time, combined the three main religious practices (Hindu, Muslim and Christian) in the communal fight against a monstrosity as a signifier of unified India, overcoming the threat posed for the nation.

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