6 *Sholay*, the Western's passage to India

Sholay as archetypal Indian Western

The film-in-focus of this chapter is the Bollywood Western directed by Ramesh Sippy, *Sholay* (usually translated into English either as 'Embers' or 'Flames') released in 1975. Since its release, the film has evolved into a cultural phenomenon in India, seemingly forever etched in the memory of Indians, being constantly evoked and revived (a recent revival was the 3-D rerelease in 2014). Its stars, characters, songs, and dialogue have all become a part of the folklore of Mumbai (formerly Bombay) and thence, of the whole nation; its popularity has crossed over from the film industry to the recording, music, and publishing media. It was the top-grossing film in the Indian film industry from the time of its release until 1994 when its number one position (maintained for nineteen years) was taken over by *Hum Aapke Hain Koun…!*, a modern Bollywood musical that is best seen as an antithesis to *Sholay* in terms of genre, mood, and style. Equally a Bollywood production, *Sholay* is a Western that has been analysed for its depiction of evil and its dialectic with social order (see Dissanayake 1993, 196–203) and as a study of violence and its dialectic with non-violence (see Hogan 2008, 86–99). These two parallel themes—evil and violence—are the most closely related to the Western genre. They will be addressed in more detail as we move into the film's Western terms of reference. There is a considerable literature on *Sholay* where most if not all the writers acknowledge that it is a Western, describing it as a 'curry Western', or an 'Indianised Western', but otherwise do not really go into any great depth to examine the film as a Western. The Western factor is perhaps the main reason for *Sholay*'s popularity, though this has not been fully examined. When it was remade by Ram Gopal Varma as a modern gangster film, *Aag*, in 2007, it proved to be a disaster; but it inspired a successful Bangladeshi Western remake *Dost-Dushman*/*The Friend-Enemy* (1977) (for an analysis of this film, see Raju 2014). Most analyses of the film try to avoid typing the film as a mere Western and locate it within the historical context of its production and 'its relationship with larger social issues' (see Kazmi 1999, 97). Kazmi's discussion of the film is one of the more astute of the contextual-analysis kind that has dominated the discourse on *Sholay* (Kazmi 1999, 95–115). This chapter then will deal with *Sholay*'s Western characteristics and identifications, placing the film in the purview of this volume's focus on Asian Westerns and their transformative capabilities. It will also seek to define

the film's Western credentials from a review of the key current literature, bringing out the arguments and discourses that mark out the Western themes and concepts.

In the company of all the films already discussed in this volume, *Sholay* is the grand-daddy of Asian Westerns, already forty years old. This testifies to the endurance of its generic elements and it would be fair to say that the film has maintained the popularity of the Western as an international form over forty years. In that time, it should be remembered that the Western has declined in popularity in America and in Europe and it is due to films like *Sholay* (and subsequently the Westerns produced by other Asian cinemas such as those discussed in our previous chapters) that the myth of the Western has continued to reverberate in international cinemas. More than that, *Sholay* is the finest early model of an Asian Western, maintaining through the years the notion that the Western is virtually a 'native' genre in Asian cinemas. We have seen in the last chapter that a native genre of Chinese Westerns actually exists in the mainland Chinese cinema in which an affinity with the American Western is inescapable. Similarly, the Indian cinema contains a genre strand of Westerns that integrate Indian cultural elements together with the characteristics of the American Western and the European Western. *Sholay* represents the archetypal form. There is hence a need to examine *Sholay* as a Western in order for us to continue to determine the Western's reliability as an international medium and as an Asian genre. This is not to confine the film within its genre borders but rather to see the genre as one that has become far wider than its apparent limitations confer on it—a genre, that in the example of *Sholay* is Bollywood, Pan-Indian, Asian, transnational, global.

I will go on to examine how the film's Western effects and impressions are Asianised (or Indianised). More specifically, the film's interplay of the binary of good and evil or the 'good/bad' opposition is explored for how they fit into or contravene 'the generality of the binary structure', as Will Wright has put it in his book *Six Guns and Society* (Wright 1975, 24). For Wright, the simple binary structure is universally maintained by Westerns (by which he means essentially American Westerns) and it provides depth and the 'real, conceptual meaning of myth', 'while the possibility for rather complicated symbolic action is created' (Wright 1975, 24). It is worth our while in this chapter to see how the conceptual meanings of myth are transformed by the Indian Western, as represented by *Sholay*. The Indian Western is of course not examined at all in Wright's structural scheme and it is up to us to connote its relationship, or otherwise, with Wright's scheme. His dependence on the binary structure provides only a simplistic basis for our investigation of *Sholay*'s interplay of good and evil and how it transforms the binary to accommodate the depths of meaning intrinsic in the myth that also informs the Indian Western.

The good, the bad, the ugly, and the evil

Wright acknowledges that it is possible for three or more characters to appear in a Western but asserts that such a structure would present 'a far less obvious and general' meaning of each image or object in the structure, since, 'when three or

more characters are structurally opposed, their symbolic reference becomes more restricted and obscure because of the fine distinctions required; thus, their interpretation becomes more difficult' (Wright 1975, 23). We have seen just precisely this structure being deployed in the Korean Manchurian Western *The Good, The Bad, The Weird*, and in the Chinese Western *Let the Bullets Fly* (see chapters 3 and 4). In both films, a good/bad/ugly structure was identified, following the Spaghetti Western formula of Leone's *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly*. The Asian Westerns transmute the Ugly character into the Weird, and we have seen this as a step in the Asian Westerns' 'weirding process' of transforming the Western as it becomes indigenised. In *Sholay*, the structure is even more intricate which therefore compels finer distinctions in interpretation, particularly in identifying the respective roles. Rather than a ternary structure, the film presents four characters who are intertwined in their roles of good, bad, and ugly. The question for us is what the fourth role is and who fills it?

Wright asserts that 'when three or more characters do appear, they appear as contrasting pairs, not as coequal representatives of alternative positions' (Wright 1975, 23). Thus, Wright maintains that the characters fall naturally into pairs of oppositions which work out as binary oppositions of good and bad. He continues:

> Each two characters are identified on one axis and contrasted on another; this structure permits interaction between social types and resolutions of conflicts between social principles but prohibits the more realistic and tragic situation of all three characters being equally good, equally domestic, and equally opposed.
> (Wright 1975, 24)

In relation to *Sholay*, Dissanayake has given us a view of the 'hero of the film' who 'gets split into three, in an interesting twist' (Dissanayake 1993, 198). The hero is a triangular unit consisting of the Thakur Baldev Singh (played by Sanjeev Kumar) who is supplemented by two criminals Veeru (played by Dharmendra) and Jai (played by Amitabh Bachchan). The two men are his 'hired hands', as Koushik Banerjea has put it (Banerjea 2005, 179). We later learn that both the Thakur's hands have been chopped off by the bandit Gabbar Singh (played by Amjad Khan), who is therefore the Bad, the object of the Thakur's revenge. To follow the classic good/bad opposition represented by one north-south axis, the Thakur is the Good, standing on the northern end of the axis, supplemented or completed by Veeru and Jai (his two hands). They are opposed on the southern end of the axis by Gabbar Singh, the Bad. We denote this in the following diagram:

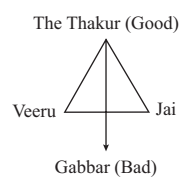

Figure 6.1 Diagram of the Thakur and his two hands opposed to Gabbar Singh, his nemesis.

This structure, indeed, necessitates a more complicated interpretation than the simple binary structure would allow. It also complicates the ternary structure somewhat. Instead of contrasting pairs, we have an apparently Good triangle consisting of a hero unit 'split into three' in opposition against a single Bad man. Veeru and Jai are the two extensions of the Thakur's character but they are not ordinary Good heroes. They may in fact be classified as good badmen since they are in reality outlaws who could be villains in other circumstances. Depending on the degree of goodness or badness, they can either be quite nasty or quite nice and lovable. One of the influences on the film is George Roy Hill's *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), which presents quite nice and lovable good badmen (the eponymous duo played by Paul Newman and Robert Redford). Another influence is Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969), in which the titular 'Bunch' may be described as quite nasty good badmen. Veeru and Jai are identified as badmen or criminals who are yet honest, courageous, and brave. 'For all their vices, they have some virtues too', the Thakur says. The Thakur appears to recognise implicitly the difference between their type of badmen and common outlaws or bandits who are just evil. Gabbar Singh, for example, is just evil. Veeru and Jai are given a backstory together which tells the audience that they are essentially good badmen. A flashback told by the Thakur shows how they saved the Thakur's life when the train transporting them to jail is attacked by bandits. 'They are criminals but they are brave; they are dangerous because they know how to fight back; they are bad, but human', says the Thakur. Gabbar Singh, on the other hand, 'simply enjoys being evil' (Varia 2012, 35). We are not given any social clues about how and why Gabbar becomes what he is. He has 'no social history, no personal biography beyond the stylistic markers of stylistic excess'; he is merely shown as 'the embodiment of an absolute alterity, a howling depiction of unmediated evil' whose sole motivation in life appears to be 'vengeance and sadism' (Banerjea 2005, 179).

It is in this light of the portrayal of evil and its ambiguous opposition with social order that Dissanayake asserts that 'no moral framework exists' in *Sholay*: 'the film throws into bold relief the power of evil and the inability of society, which produced it in the first place, to contain it within an accepted scheme of moral adjudication and retribution' (Dissanayake 1993, 201). Dissanayake sees the film as opening up 'a new discursive space within the dialectic between evil and social order' (Dissanayake 1993, 200). This statement is crucial for our purposes of examining the film's allegiance to the Western form and its values system. As a Western, we have attested to *Sholay*'s compliance with the mythical structure of the good/bad opposition which is nevertheless complicated by its introduction of more than just two characters who fulfill the binary opposition. At the same time, it also appears to slightly modify the Spaghetti Western good/bad/ugly ternary model although it is possible to fit it into the roles played by the four characters. Thus the Thakur is the Good, Gabbar Singh is the Bad, and Veeru and Jai are the Ugly. The Ugly in this model is hence split into two, as contrasted with Dissanayake's premise of the hero 'split into three' (in the diagram above). We see this represented in the next diagram below, with the Ugly occupying the middle ground of the axis, split into two:

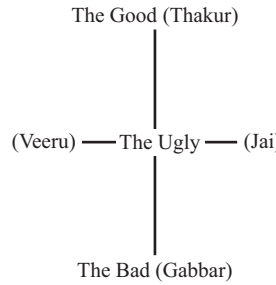

Figure 6.2 Diagram of the Ugly split into two.

The split of personalities is perhaps inherent in trying to fit four roles into a ternary structure. This is what makes *Sholay* interesting and we identify it as one of its methods of transforming the Western into its Indianised setting. The split provides us a way of assessing the film's transformative process, beginning with the characterisations of the main protagonists. That roles are split can possibly point us towards another model, which is that of overlapping roles. Thus, it is possible to see the Thakur as not just the Good but as a composite of the Good and the Bad (this point will be made clearer below), and Gabbar is not merely Bad but is also Ugly and can be a composite of Bad and Ugly (another point that I will return to), while Veeru and Jai, who are identified at first by the Thakur as Bad, can be seen as Bad/Ugly, Good/Ugly, and finally Good/Bad characters. There are thus several variations of overlapping roles in relation to each character (assuming that Veeru and Jai are one unit) and as each character relates to the others, as demonstrated in the table below:

Such overlapping is an effect of not strictly observing the binary structure of the classic Western and I would argue, primarily an effect of the Bollywood narrative style. Bollywood aesthetics and style being what they are, the film is long drawn out (it runs just over three hours) and encompasses various moods and discourses as well as what Lalitha Gopalan calls a '*constellation of interruptions*' (see Gopalan 2002, 3; italics hers). This is consonant with the idea of a discursive space that Dissanayake refers to, which can be contentious and even subversive in that themes are drawn out and given greater play. Dissanayake says that the film provides 'a new discursive space' which suggests the film's propensity towards transforming the structure of the Western by demonstrating an ambiguity towards the dialectic between evil and social order in the first instance. This ambiguity is

The Thakur	Veeru and Jai	Gabbar
(Good)	(Bad)	(Ugly)
(Good (Bad))	(Bad (Ugly))	(Bad (Ugly))
(Good (Bad))	(Good (Bad))	(Bad)

Figure 6.3 Diagram of overlapping roles.

much deeper than the Western binary of good and evil, which then supports the overlapping of roles.

The interruption process

For our purposes, it is vital to understand Bollywood aesthetics as an interruptive space. Interruptions take the form of song and dance numbers, in particular, but also comic turns and other digressions (Gopalan includes such items as the practice of intermissions strategically timed in the narrative; and censorship regulations incorporated by filmmakers themselves during the process of filming as a way of preempting cuts, as for example, dealing with sexual matters). These interruptions do not necessarily detract from the plot, as for example, the song and dance numbers. Gopalan concedes that they bear 'an integral link to the plot' although they also delay the development of the plot and distract us 'from the other scenes of the narrative through spatial and temporal disjunctions' (Gopalan 2002, 19). Ganti has demonstrated that each song in *Sholay* 'is tightly integrated into the narrative and serves more than one purpose and precedes further action' (see Ganti 2013, 144, and 144–148 for her analysis of all the songs). Ranjit Kumar, meanwhile, argues that in Bollywood films, 'each song might have a different narrative and structural function and may or may not be an actual "interruption" to the narrative if it is indeed an "integral link to the plot"' (Kumar 2011, 36). Kumar offers an alternative concept of 'pleasure-pauses' which to me seems to have the same effect of interruption in practice. Besides, interruptions suggest more than just a pause, and pauses may not just be pleasurable.

In a typical Bollywood film, we get to the conclusion after many interruptions of action, song and dance, comedy (both slapstick and sitcom), melodrama, and tragedy—a whole constellation of moods and genres, which has the effect of spreading out the discursive space of a film. In *Sholay*, a rather somber dialectic of evil and social order, to follow Dissanayake's formulation, is interrupted by the intrusion of a joyful number, as for example, the Holi festival number, which segues into an action sequence as the bandits attack the village. Similarly, the 'Mehbooba Mehbooba' number ends in an explosion which marks the incursion of Veeru and Jai into the bandits' lair. Song and dance numbers may interrupt the action but the two numbers cited actually are interrupted by violence, hence interruptions can be mutually operative if one has a bias either towards action or the musical. In any case, they are also integral to the narrative in other ways, providing the space for the two heroic protagonists to mix and assimilate themselves with the community, in the instance of the Holi number (and the action that proceeds from the number justifies their use of violence to defend the community in which they are half-way being integrated), while in the more erotic 'Mehbooba Mehbooba' number, they appear to intrude into Gabbar's private space, violating his erotic gaze on Helen, the dancer, the violence seemingly a part of the eroticism. These interruptions illustrate the wide berth that is the narrative discursive space given by the film's typical Bollywood style to tackling the dialectic of evil and social order. This wide berth of a discursive space is an important part of the

film's transformative process of the Western, which we might call an 'interruption process', after Gopalan. The interruptions undergird the universal sense of the discursive space. If we call *Sholay* a community Western, it is a really a very broad community. The village of Ramgarh can be taken as a microcosm of the nation which is therefore all-encompassing. In the context of the Bollywood narrative, we see a range of moods and manners and the interruption process is carefully calibrated to take into account the inclusive nature of the community and its discursive space. Such a space naturally incorporates the splitting and overlapping structure of the characters which we will examine in closer detail.

Basically, the discursive space is problematised by the presentation of the figure of the Thakur as the heroic embodiment of good. As I have suggested above, the Thakur can easily be a composite figure of Good and Bad. The fact that he is complemented by two criminals in his personality intermingles badness with his goodness—a case, in fact, of corruption of his blood, so to speak. Alternatively, he has the capacity of the Bad, as when he executes his desire for revenge on Gabbar at the end of the film but does not accomplish it because he is stopped at a crucial moment by the arrival of the police (clearly an interruption on the line of censorship). Normally the Thakur would be the villain in other films, as for example in Shekhar Kapur's dacoit Western, *Bandit Queen* (1994). The *thakur* is a title given to a caste of rich landowners who are usually depicted as the primary enemy of social bandits in the Indian countryside. Kapur's film is perhaps the best known of the dacoit Westerns in the Indian cinema. It is not the first film to portray the 'Bandit Queen' Phoolan Devi, a real figure of dacoit legend who was elected into the Indian Parliament in 1996 and then assassinated in 2001 (a previous film based on Phoolan Devi's life was Ashok Roy's 1985 *Kahani Phoolan Ki*). *Sholay* is the precursor of the 'Bandit Queen' films whose narrative, however, offers an explicit 'affirmation of the feudal order', according to Prasad (Prasad 1998, 154). Part of the film's complexity and its fascination for contemporary critics is its supposed reflection of a time in Indian history when the state was in crisis. The film was released in the year when a State of Emergency was declared by Indira Gandhi's government in June 1975. Hence, the conceit of the Thakur as a hero mirrors the desire of the governing class for a strong state. The Thakur is the 'central narrative device … who embodies the unity of the interests of the state and the feudal order' (Prasad 1998, 154). Prasad considers that his dismemberment contains two 'conflicting but equally significant meanings':

> On the one hand, it represents the disabling of the apparatus of law and order, its debilitation in the confrontation with criminality. On the other hand, it also signifies a temporary breach of the coalition between the rural rich and the state: the Thakur remains but loses his hands, which he had himself described as "the hangman's noose", i.e. the law.
>
> (Prasad 1998, 155)

The preoccupation with law and order and the self-description of the Thakur's hands as 'the hangman's noose' are illustrative of generic Western themes. As an

ex-police officer, the Thakur typifies the lawman of Western convention, a Ward Bond type perhaps if not exactly Gary Cooper or John Wayne. He retires to his village of Ramgarh after arresting Gabbar, the notorious bandit. Gabbar escapes and massacres his family before he is able to return to the village. Only Radha, the daughter-in-law is spared (she was not present during the massacre). The massacre is presented in a flashback that is directly copied from the similar massacre scene in Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968). On his return, the Thakur is confronted with the deaths of his family members and he rushes to take his revenge on Gabbar but is captured. Gabbar chops off the Thakur's hands. We may see the loss of the Thakur's hands as the first sign of the interruption process at work in the narrative both as a kind of symbolic interruption as the narrative proceeds and actual interruption (the fact that the Thakur has lost both hands is hidden from us until such time when an interruption—a flashback—is necessitated in the narrative).

The loss of hands interrupts the Thakur's quest for vengeance and his (as well as the state's) imposition of law and order over the community of Ramgarh. This makes it necessary for the Thakur to hire two petty criminals who 'serve as replacements for the lost limbs of the Thakur' and function as the 'infra-legal, but not irredeemably criminal, figures with whom the new proletarian and other disaffected audiences could identify' (Prasad 1998, 155). This suggests that the audience who patronise *Sholay* (and made it such a commercial hit) is overwhelmingly the disaffected working class, and that they would not have bought into the Thakur's characterisation as hero in other circumstances. The massacre scene, no doubt, increases the audience's empathy with the Thakur and his desire for revenge. In becoming the instruments assisting the Thakur's quest of vengeance, the two figures of Veeru and Jai also play the role of appeasing the audience's disinclination towards sympathising with the Thakur. Thus the 'split into three' with the Thakur acting as the center of the heroic personality is fundamental to this idea of appeasement. Fareed Kazmi made the point that the film 'neutralises' the crooks and the dacoits and thus it manages to do 'what all ruling classes desperately want to achieve' (Kazmi 1999, 105). On first impression, this is perhaps peculiar to the Indian condition but it is not beyond the conventions of the Western, which after all is replete with tales of how outlaws and bandits are liquidated or neutralized, the basis of the genre's underlying violence (a point that I will return to). There are heroes who are outlaws or are outlaws who later become incorporated into the community as upright citizens (the literary character 'Deadwood Dick' in American Western literature is the prototype).

Kazmi suggests that the procedure of co-opting the two outlaws Veeru and Jai as heroes is ingenious. Their change is brought about 'not through preaching or sermonising, but through a series of cleverly-crafted incidents so that the audience itself wants it so': 'they are never shown as leading a humdrum, bourgeois existence, but as still rebelling, still carrying on the fight' (Kazmi 1999, 107). This is central to an understanding of the heroes as themselves being an inherent part of the interruption process of the film's transformation of their roles. The Western is an attempt to reintegrate outlaws and misfits into the community.

One can see this as the grand theme of the Western in classics like *Shane* and *The Searchers* to Post-Westerns like *The Misfits* and *Brokeback Mountain*. In *Sholay*, Veeru and Jai are seen essentially hanging around in the village when they are not in action, courting the two women who are respectively their love interests, Basanti (for Veeru) and Radha (for Jai). Their engagements with the bandits are sporadic, almost always retaliatory and seldom proactive (the only occasion when they penetrate into the bandits' lair is the 'Mehbooba Mehbooba' number, which results in an injury for Jai). The film works as a protracted drama in which the two outlaw characters become slowly enamored of the domestic life but coming to that realisation on their own terms. At times, the film even has the introspective feel of Terrence Malick's *Days of Heaven*, which was actually released in 1978, three years after *Sholay*.

There are many quiet scenes that are action-free, perhaps even boring and mundane, essentially describing the heroes' desire to settle down, become farmers, and have children. This desire for domesticity is denoted in an exchange between Veeru and Jai who remain conscious of the paradox of their presence in the village. 'We are outlaws, we can't use the plough', says Veeru. 'Our vices taught us to use guns, our virtues will teach us how to farm', counters Jai. The interruption process, as it revolves around Veeru and Jai, therefore constitutes a kind of cultural valence that has contributed to the film's critical cachet over the years. As Anupama Chopra has written, one of the factors that has made the film live on in the minds of its fans and admirers is the 'gritty directorial conviction that allows an unhurried tale to be developed, full of texture and rhythm' (Chopra 2000, 7). The texture and the rhythm is another way of saying that the interruption process is a form of narrative mode. As such it is possible to consider the whole Bollywood style as an interruption process on the Western form. Gopalan states that popular Indian films constitute 'an interruption in film theory' (Gopalan 2002, 9), and this is a useful axiom to bear in mind as we consider the Bollywood style on the Western structure and its theories of binary oppositions.

The interruption process as an integral component of the Bollywood aesthetics and style compel a new understanding of the Western form. Indeed, if we see the film as a departure from the American Western and its classical structure, we

Figure 6.4 A vision of domestication in the Indian Western, *Sholay*.

can attribute this to the interruption process of the Bollywood narrative style. The interruptive principle is based on the narrative structure of the film which is composed not of simple binarisms but on the interactions of characters in a rather intricate web of relationships. On one level, the interruption process clearly slows down the action by introducing other generic elements of culture (such as song and dance numbers) or subplots. On another level, there is a lot more time devoted to the discursive space in which we see the social-political dynamics of the heroic action changing and evolving. The bandits could not be subdued in one or even two action sequences, and therefore a lengthier narrative would only be conducive to convince the audience that they can only be subdued after much interruptive goings on.

The allegorical Western

The narrative style of Bollywood cinema has been attributed to Indian tradition, notably the ancient epic narrative poems, the *Ramayana* (the Romance of Rama) and the *Mahabharata* (the Great Epic of the Bharata Dynasty). Gokulsing and Dissanayake assert that the art of narrative in Indian popular cinema owes much to these two epics, 'particularly to their structure' which is 'a circular pattern in which narratives are embedded in other narratives', resulting in a cinematic narrative style that is 'rarely linear' (Gokulsing and Dissanayake 2004, 94). However, there are parallels closer to our own age and to the cinematic medium. The models for the long drawn-out narrative of *Sholay* are in fact Leone's masterpieces *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly* and *Once Upon a Time in the West*, which originally ran to over three hours or just under three hours. Leone's films can be interpreted along the line of interruptions, which I will attempt to do in chapter 11. Another model is Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*, also running more than three hours in its original version which affords the audience the all-encompassing space to be deeply acquainted with the characters, the village community and all its political dynamics. David Lean's lengthy epics are another influence, particularly *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), which may be described as a British Arabic Western featuring camels as well as horses.

The long epic narrative of heroic action provides us a clearer definition of each character and their social-ideological inclinations. The Thakur is transformed into the hero 'split into three' which poses a strange dialectic in which we see Veeru and Jai as the two hired hands wavering in their commitment to the Thakur and finally making up their minds, influenced not just by the Thakur's plight which moves them but by the community (as for example, the blind imam's support of the heroes to stay on in the village rather than to be surrendered to the bandits). Then there is also Radha (played by Jaya Bhaduri) who plays a key role in the men's determination to stay on. It is Radha who shames the two men on the first night when they decide to steal the Thakur's money from his safe. Radha interrupts Veeru and Jai as they try to open the Thakur's safe and gives them the key to do so. The name of Radha is instrumental to her role. In Hindu mythology, Radha (who is the mistress of Krishna) symbolises the human soul and it is therefore no

accident that it is she who fundamentally humanises the two men in one stroke, bringing to mind the Thakur's words, 'they are bad, but they are human'. Before Radha, we see their badness, after Radha, we see their humanity.

Although the alliance between the Thakur and the two heroes finally 'reinforces the upper caste and class's natural right to govern', according to Gopalan (Gopalan 2002, 74), the film shows heroic action in a way that is ultimately motivated by the urge of the duo to integrate into the community's space. Here the community is primarily a broad church which is meant to accommodate 'several points of view', as Gopalan sees it (Gopalan 2002, 74), but ultimately only to reaffirm the social order of the Thakur. This ideological contradiction is one of the themes that has sustained interest in *Sholay* and its lingering impact on cultural and film studies. Hence we might say that the discursive space afforded by the film has spilled over into yet another sphere, that of the allegorical. The ideological question surrounding *Sholay* attests to the genre's capacity to allegorise the real world, and this is no doubt an important constituent of the film's discursive space. The Western has been shown to be very political in its content by numerous writers and scholars, particularly Richard Slotkin in his book *Gunfighter Nation* (1992) (and more will be discussed on Slotkin's book later). Indian Westerns are no less political in their content as I have attempted to show.

Gopalan observes that *Sholay* belongs to a category of dacoit Westerns which paradoxically 'spurred the growth of the dacoit as star-villain' while at the same time 'revives the landlord's point of view'; Gopalan suggests a connection between the dacoit Westerns and 'Ford's early Westerns which sympathised with white settlers who ostensibly had to defend themselves against savage Indians' (Gopalan 2002, 74). The influence of Ford's films may be felt because they are essentially very political in nature. Gopalan, thus, brings up the indebtedness in terms of the opposition between savages and settlers which is the ideological point of view that addresses the dacoit Westerns, and *Sholay* in particular (I will return to this point of indebtedness to the American form). Another political tradition is that of the revolutionary Spaghetti Western, or the Zapata Western. We may see the film as a subconscious Zapata Western. Fareed Kazmi makes the following point:

> Coming at a time when the police officer-landlord nexus in India was considered the main curse in villages and when dacoits were looked upon as heroic people who dared to stand up and fight this powerful combine, the film, by inverting the actual picture, was quite clearly straining the limits of credibility. (Kazmi 1999, 100)

Though Veeru and Jai are clearly conceived as heroes, we have seen that they are meant to appease the audience's identification with the underdog (who in this case would be Gabbar) and stymie any natural sympathies for revolution. In other words, Veeru and Jai serve to draw the audience away from Gabbar. Over the years, it has been proven that the audience has clearly identified with Gabbar, the villain. His character has become possibly the most popular in the film next only to Amitabh Bachchan's character, Jai. Gabbar has become a cultural icon in

the popular imagination. His 'face, voice, and persona have been used by many multinational companies to boost their sales', as the Foreword of a recent graphic novel devoted to the character (entitled *Gabbar*, published in 2014) informs us. Anupama Chopra tells us that Amjad Khan 'became a legend' in that he was 'Hindi cinema's first advertising icon' (Chopra 2000, 2). Dissanayake writes that 'viewers were enamoured of his dialogues and his delivery' which he interprets as a new development in cinema reception at the time which privileges spectacle over narrative, 'in a way that was not seen in earlier Indian melodramas' (Dissanayake 1993, 199).

I have defined Gabbar as one that could be identified as Ugly as well as Bad. Therefore I take Amjad Khan's performance to be an interpretation after the Mexican bandit character Tuco (the Ugly), portrayed by Eli Wallach in Leone's *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly*. Wallach's memorable performance easily wins over the audience and his character effectively dominates the entire film. Amjad Khan's performance nearly dominates *Sholay*. As such, the idolisation of the character is probably a subconscious form of sympathy for the social bandit that Gabbar is, and that his villainy contains a subtext of revolutionary resistance. Gabbar clearly belongs to the category of bandits which Hobsbawm defines as those in whom 'terror actually forms part of their public image' and 'their appeal is not that of the agents of justice, but of men who prove that even the poor and weak can be terrible' (Hobsbawm 1969, 50). Probably because of this evil quality, Gabbar's character is said to be modeled after the pathological bandit Indio, played by Gian Maria Volonte, from Leone's *For a Few Dollars More*. Still, Gabbar should really be the people's hero but has been construed as a villain based on ideological imperatives. Nevertheless his popularity as an icon demonstrates the social bandit as a '*recursive* cultural figure' in the popular media culture of India, as Bishnupriya Ghosh has put it (Ghosh 2013, 23; italics hers). Ghosh states that 'the practice of social banditry persists as a fairly stable phenomenon' in India despite social changes and 'new technologies of mediatization' (Ghosh 2013, 29).

Gabbar's cultural status in the popular imagination imposes on *Sholay* a metatext of revolution, or perhaps, more sensitively, caste war. The film is ultimately not

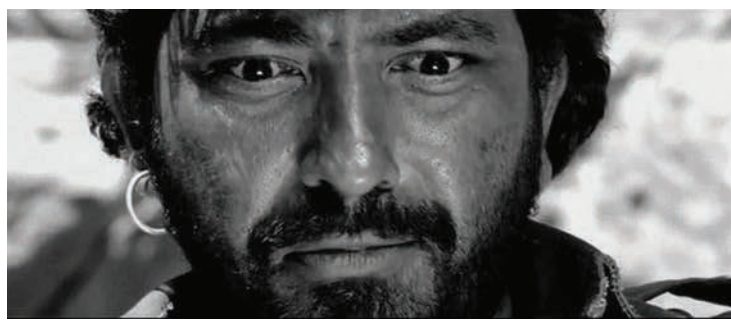

Figure 6.5 Gabbar Singh (played by Amjad Khan), evil villain or people's hero?

a revolutionary Western because of the interruption process of Bollywood narrative and its unfolding of a discursive space that accommodates 'several points of view'. This deflects implicit texts away from their heroic ends. Instead, it is the Thakur who functions as the hero; but it is possible to see his character too as another symbolic interruption in the genre if we put the film in relation to other dacoit Westerns. Hogan asserts that Shehkar Kapur's *Bandit Queen* is 'a response to *Sholay*' (Hogan 2008, 134). The film foments the rasa of anger in the audience against the social order and the injustices that it incurs on women as represented by the heroine Phoolan Devi. There, the Thakurs who are the object of Phoolan's hatred instill the rasa of anger in the audience while *Sholay* cultivates the anger rasa through the figure of Gabbar (the film also instils other rasas, such as those of love and pathos, with the effect of dissipating the rasa of anger as the central rasa). Gopalan has cited and discussed other dacoit Westerns in the Indian cinema such as J. P. Dutta's *Ghulami*/*Slavery* (1985) and *Batwara*/*Partition* (1989) that 'challenge *Sholay*'s (pro-Thakur) premise by inverting the conditions structuring the "*daku*" or dacoit genres found in Hindi cinema, an inversion that rehabilitates an engagement with revisionist Westerns' (Gopalan 2002, 75).

Another noteworthy example of this inversion through a 'revisionist Western' model is Rakesh Roshan's *Karan Arjun* (1995), starring Salman Khan and Shahrukh Khan as two brothers, Karan and Arjun, who are killed by the evil Thakur (played by Amrish Puri) and then are reincarnated when their mother calls on the Goddess Kali to give her back her sons. They grow up in the city, each in their separate families, but have divinely-inspired visions that guide them towards each other. Eventually they return to the village to acknowledge their mother and to exact revenge on the Thakur with the help of the villagers. The film can be described as a Post-Western response to *Sholay*, blending the Western vengeance plot with the 'mythological' which is a faith-based Indian genre dealing with saints, gods, and avatars. As such, it is typically Bollywood in style, offering an anti-Thakur variation of *Sholay* (though its reincarnation theme is possibly borrowed from the non-Western *Karz* [1980], directed by Subhash Ghai).

The heroic duo Karan and Arjun obviously recall Veeru and Jai; they have their respective love interests—a Basanti type for Karan (portrayed by the beefcake Salman Khan), while Arjun (played by Shahrukh Khan) is in love with the Thakur's soon-to-be daughter-in-law (about to be married against her will to the Thakur's son). The film also contains a humorous take on the 'Mehbooba Mehbooba' number, entitled 'Gup Chup Gup Chup', in which a group of erotic dancers help the heroic duo to penetrate the Thakur's camp (the Thakur and his men are in the process of smuggling weapons) and incur damage on his gang of thugs and myrmidons. But not before they are entranced by the dancers into a drunken ensemble dance (in *Sholay*, Gabbar was at least careful not to be tempted to join in with Helen's dancing). Although not portrayed as dacoits, the two brothers symbolise the kind of dacoit resistance against the Thakur that a film like *Bandit Queen*, released in the same year as *Karan Arjun*, expresses with no ideological inhibitions. Presumably it is only through the Western genre that conditions of the dacoits can be presented more sympathetically, as belonging to a world

'of popular criminality', to quote Prasad (Prasad 1998, 152). Although *Sholay* presents a pro-Thakur perspective, it still resonates as a dacoit Western with a metatext, as I have suggested, of revolution. Hence, the Western genre in India is an allegorical text par excellence, associated as it is with the dacoit narrative of social banditry and thus inherently radical and political.

The violence of *Sholay*

Social banditry is a perennial theme in the Indian cinema in any case, present in classics such as Mehboob Khan's *Mother India* (1957) and Nitin Bose's *Gunga Jumna* (1961). Both of these films feature bandit-heroes who resort to banditry as a result of failures in the social order to accommodate their desires as common citizens, 'forced into crime by a feudal system which the law is unable to smash' (Prasad 1998, 152). The Western no doubt accommodates a fantasy romance of destroying the feudal system. 'Where the law does not fulfil its role as destroyer of feudal oppression, an alternative system of justice arises' (Prasad 1998, 152). The American antecedence of the Western form appears to make the notion of destruction even more viable, given the pretext of violence that Warshow sees as a structuring device of the form. It is worth repeating Warshow's statement that the Western 'offers a serious orientation to the problem of violence' (Warshow 1998, 46). We have already seen how the Western's penchant towards violence is a generic predisposition almost determining the Asian Western's own descriptions of violence in the Chinese Westerns discussed in the last chapter. The preoccupation with violence in the genre finds another expression in *Sholay* where it goes beyond the dacoit problem and fosters a new expressive methodology in the Indian cinema as well as raising a question mark over the entire social order. Dissanayake writes:

> In this film, the violence seems to invest the brutal, the vicious, and the hideous with an aesthetic value. Violence becomes the lynchpin of the signification system of the outsiders and the inarticulate. The sanguine faith in the existing social order is seriously questioned. Through evil they are reaching out to a new social order.
>
> (Dissanayake 1993, 203)

Finally, we will explore the question of violence as the most direct sign of *Sholay*'s indebtedness to the American Western. I link violence with a specific context of 'Americanization' that the genre is thought to propagate. In his analysis of *Sholay*, from his book *Understanding Indian Movies*, Hogan writes:

> The opening clearly establishes that the film is modeled on American Westerns. This itself suggests thematic concerns—an advocacy of the values associated with the Old West and an advocacy of greater Americanization in Indian politics and culture.
>
> (Hogan 2008, 90)

Hogan's point about 'Americanization' is an important one and it needs to be chewed over. That the film advocates 'Americanization' is understandable in the context of the Western. But the film is not just modeled on American Westerns, of course. It copies scenes from Italian Westerns, as we have seen in the example of the massacre of the Thakur's family; and the theme of buying mercenaries to defend a village is copied from Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*. There are influences from Hong Kong kung fu movies (the Thakur's feet kung fu, deployed in his final fight with Gabbar, for instance). In addition, *Sholay* has also borrowed from another Indian Western, *Khote Sikkay*/*Counterfeit Coins* (1973), directed by Narendra Bedi and starring Feroz Khan as a Lone Ranger-type avenger (Feroz Khan's character becomes the avenger after his father is killed by a bandit who has also chopped off the father's hands; the bandit is clearly an inspiration for Gabbar while the Feroz Khan character is an inspiration for the Thakur; furthermore, one of the film's heroes, five in all, falls in love with a widow). However, there is no doubt that the American Western is a major influence on *Sholay* and the advocacy of 'Americanization' is a natural (conceptual) part of the paraphernalia of the genre.

Hogan, however, does not analyse *Sholay* as a Western. His brief is to explain how Indian films are Indian, and he does not really say what he means by 'Americanization'. He simply takes it for granted, or as a natural consequence of the film being a Western. For our purposes, we will link it to the problem of violence that the Western connotes, as we learn from Warshow, although we can certainly take it to mean a cultural soft power kind of influence intrinsically exerted by the Western form. Americanization can be a generic sort of liberalisation in social and cultural attitudes. On a more materialistic level, the American cultural influence shows up in the denim jackets and jeans that characters wear, as well as the fact that they are experts in using guns, and that they ride motorcycles and toss coins (a detail probably lifted from Howard Hawks' 1932 gangster movie *Scarface*, another iconic American genre). However, I think the single most important item of Americanization that Hogan is making a case for is that of violence. Hogan argues that the film is a model for justifiable violence in the context of India's continuing veneration of Gandhi's principle of non-violence (ahimsa) and implies that 'Americanization' is a more or less positive trait that has intruded into the dilemma that violence poses for Indians. 'The film directly addresses the conflict between compassionate ahimsā and "defensive" violence. It explicitly and unequivocally supports violence' (Hogan 2008, 89–90). This echoes Warshow's contention of violence as emancipatory, though Warshow also states that in the Western, 'the moment of violence must come in its own time and according to its special laws, or else it is valueless' (Warshow 1998, 47). In *Sholay*, violence comes in its own time and according to Indian traditions. Violence is of course very much a part of the Indian epics, particularly the *Mahabharata*, and Hogan specifies, in expert detail, certain Indian principles that come into play on the question of violence.

Yet, Hogan sees the characters of Veeru and Jai as clearly 'Americanized' in their manliness because they 'do not feel constrained in the practice of violence or the use of modern weapons' (Hogan 2008, 90–91). Hogan has raised the pertinent issue of the 'practice of violence' and the use of 'modern weapons' as an

American precept. This is done in the context of the Western, but I am not so convinced that there is an 'Americanization process' of violence in the film. However, the Western is not without political significance and there is something to be said for the Western as an 'Americanization process' in itself—the Western often being considered an allegorical tool of how the United States conducts its interventionist foreign policy, which I will touch on shortly. Of greater interest to us then is the question of violence as a correlation of the Western's political significance. After all, violence is also justified in *Sholay* through Hindu and Muslim ethics, as Hogan points out. Hindu dharma and the Muslim notion of jihad are both deployed 'in the service of "defensive" violence' (Hogan 2008, 90). In bringing up violence and the use of weapons in connection with the Western, Hogan, perhaps inadvertently, reminds us of the kind of allegorical analysis undertaken by Richard Slotkin in *Gunfighter Nation*, where the author discusses the concept of American Westerns, and, more specifically, a subgenre of 'Mexico Westerns' as a tool for 'thought-experiments' of counterinsurgency in Third World nations during the Cold War (Slotkin 1992, 410; see the whole chapter 13, 'Imagining Third World Revolutions: The "Zapata Problem" and the Counterinsurgency Scenario, 1952–1954', pp. 405–440).

Slotkin examines Robert Aldrich's *Vera Cruz* (1954) as a model of a 'Mexico Western' in which the 'thought-experiment' is played out, allowing for a scenario in which Americans can intervene in Third World countries. Slotkin makes the point that the film's lead characters, played by Gary Cooper and Burt Lancaster, are a pair of cynical mercenaries who eventually sell their services to the Mexican revolutionaries and fight for their cause. Cooper and Lancaster are gunfighters and they therefore sell 'gunfighter expertise' which can be differentiated from the Mexican revolutionaries who fight on 'mere will and courage' which 'are not enough without fast guns and sharpshooters to fire them' (Slotkin 1992, 438). The difference 'between gunfighter expertise and civilian incompetence becomes a metonymy of the different racial endowments of White Americans and brown-skinned "natives"', Slotkin writes (Slotkin 1992, 439). *Sholay* of course does not feature actual American characters who sell their gunfighter expertise but Veeru and Jai are seen, following Hogan, as *Americanized* characters who possess gunfighter expertise. This notion of Americanism is thought to be pervasive by Hogan such that the violence of the film is basically guided by it. Additionally, the film's 'embrace of Americanization' seeps through into the social attitudes of the community such as a more liberal attitude towards widows as expressed in the relationship between Jai and Radha (Hogan 2008, 92). This is also conversant with the Mexico Western's development of the hero's moral attitude which is usually connected with a female character. In *Vera Cruz*, the Gary Cooper character falls in love with a Mexican woman in the revolutionary camp who then aids his 'moral development' and which convinces him finally to fight unconditionally for the revolutionaries (Slotkin 1992, 436).

The trope of Americanization as an interventionist philosophy is implicit in the Western. The genre becomes a model of infusing Americanized values. It is possible then to see Veeru and Jai as 'Americans' who are brought in by the Thakur

Figure 6.6 Veeru (played by Dharmendra, right) and Jai (played by Amitabh Bachchan, left), gunfighter-experts.

as professional gunfighters or mercenaries to intervene in the dacoit revolution in the vicinity of Ramgarh. They pacify the bandits (revolutionaries) and finally capture Gabbar, at the cost of Veeru's life. Peace and social order is restored to the community according to more liberal values of Americanism. This scenario fits exactly into the Mexico Western 'thought-experiment' scenario as Slotkin has dissected it. It also fits into the 'professional plot' structure defined by Will Wright, and which Noël Carroll has highlighted in his essay 'The Professional Western: South of the Border' (see Carroll 1998). Carroll connects the notion of professionalism with the Mexico Westerns—but before dealing with the professional plot, it is first necessary to return to Wright's definition. Wright's structural study of the Western has seminal application to any study of the Western in both a constructive and deconstructive way. *Sholay* follows two of Wright's plot models: the vengeance plot and the professional plot. The latter concerns us more; but in both plot structures, Wright makes a tautological point of 'a conceptual distance between the hero and the society' (Wright 1975, 59). In the vengeance plot, Wright makes the contrast that 'unlike the classical hero who *joins* the society because of his strength and their weakness, the vengeance hero *leaves* the society because of his strength and their weakness' (Wright 1975, 59, emphases his). This is not the case in *Sholay*, if by the vengeance hero we mean the Thakur (and the Thakur embodies both strength and weakness in his character). Veeru and Jai are professional heroes who are not entrusted with executing vengeance on Gabbar; they are only hired to capture him. We now turn to the professional plot which, on the whole, structures the film. Carroll's essay is basically a rejoinder to Wright's theory. He asserts that some of the films cited by Wright under the professional plot structure such as *The Professionals* (1966) and *The Wild Bunch*, depart from Wright's claim that the professional groups generally do not mix with society. 'Although these men are generally fighting for some social cause, as a group they separate themselves from society and have virtually no contact with it', according to Wright (Wright 1975, 86). Carroll shows that in the Mexico Westerns (Carroll also analyses two other Westerns, *Vera Cruz* and *The Magnificent Seven*), far from being detached from the society of Mexico in which they are involved, the

'professional heroes become emotionally and/or existentially involved with these resistance movements and they are willing to stake their very lives on their outcome' (Carroll 1998, 49).

We have already seen of course how Veeru and Jai, as professionals hired to defend Ramgarh, are themselves keen to integrate themselves with the community and become normal citizens of society (to farm, marry, and have children). Whether they are trying to infuse Americanized values into the community is an open question, since this is also another theme of the professional Western that concerns us here. They become more integrated with society in the course of the film. The film sets up a discursive space which becomes a forum for the professional heroes to debate their tendencies towards domesticity. There are other issues that are ancillary to their professionalism such as the managerial or technocratic ethos that Carroll has brought up in relation to Wright's theory. Wright states that the 'social values of justice, order and peaceful domesticity have been replaced by a clear commitment to strength, skill, enjoyment of the battle, and masculine companionship' (Wright 1975, 86). Clearly, we can say that the professionals of *Sholay* do not replace their desire for peaceful domesticity with a clear commitment to their skills or enjoyment of the battle or indeed, of masculine companionship. The homosocial bonding of Veeru and Jai, as remarkably portrayed in the 'Yeh Dosti' number, has been much commented upon (see Gopinath 2000, Waugh 2001, Jha 2003, Holtzman 2010, Anjaria 2012). These are all ancillary to the paramountcy of social order and domesticity, and the film provides a discourse on the integration or assimilation of professionalism and the aspirations of more liberal social values. Gabbar is not outside of this discourse either. He too is a professional (a professional killer and bandit) and he craves the community's submission—but this is essentially a distortion tactic on the filmmakers' part to depict him as evil. By rights, as a social bandit, he is a part of the community. Social bandits 'remain within peasant society', as Hobsbawm tells us, 'and are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped and supported' (Hobsbawm 1969, 14).

As a community Western, *Sholay* offers a rather self-contradictory theme of peace and integration which seems to countervail the violence. In a sense, it seems to want to overcome the nagging need for violence, and it is possible to see it as a film that seeks to rise above the action genre. The Western is essentially used as an instrument to refine action as a prime ingredient of entertainment in the Indian cinema, but the film uses the Western in other ways. The word 'Western' may stand in for a kind of intense social genre which explores the community and the dialectic of social order and evil. Violence is a necessary outcome, but it is a transformed violence that arises out of the Indian setting. *Sholay* is said to have set new standards on violence in the Indian cinema, and if this is an American value it is probably more to do with the quest for more 'professionalism' of aesthetic standards in the Indian film industry (and hence, the professional Western is a good model for this objective). One can't overstate the idea of Americanization in an industry as complex as Bollywood is, and one can speak as much of an

Indianisation of the Western as of an Americanisation of Indian cinema. '*Sholay* is never purely contained by its transformative character or composite form', writes Banerjea (Banerjea 2005, 180). Americanisation is no doubt a sign of the Indian cinema's openness to global influences, and a film like *Sholay* highlights the 'increasingly globalised, transnational narratives of the male outlaw, social dysfunction and violence', as Banerjea tells us (Banerjea 2005, 165). Violence may also be overstated. According to Banerjea,

> The ability of *Sholay* to anthologise the highlights of known genre narratives not only loosens their conventions but heightens its pleasures. It complicates the cohesive rituals of a highly physical form like the western precisely because it is inspired by abstractions of the anti-Western.
>
> (Banerjea 2005, 182)

Banerjea's point is well taken with regard to violence. Violence is a ritual that has been loosened up and complicated, although it is also heightened. For lack of space, it is beyond our scope to fully dissect how this is done but we can point to the 'interruption process' that I have brought up above as a possible method of the process. Violence also tends to overwhelm other themes—for example, the theme of sacrifice, which has been neglected in the discussions of the film, and which is part of the classic Western plot, as in *Shane*. Sacrifice, then, can be another aspect of Americanisation that comes with the Western. This can operate as a theme to strengthen the sense of community, or relationships in a triangular scheme where homosocial bonding either complements heterosexual desire or takes precedence over it. Basanti's feminine heroism in the remarkable 'Haa Jab Tak Hai Jaan' number where she dances to save Veeru's life is followed by Jai's masculine intervention. Jai's final sacrifice—where he tosses a coin and wins the bet, compelling Veeru to take Basanti and go, leaving him behind at the bridge—is taken from Henry Hathaway's *Garden of Evil* (1954), starring Gary Cooper, Susan Hayward, and Richard Widmark. The final scene in which Widmark stays behind after losing the bet in a draw of cards and Cooper escorts Hayward to safety is testament to the Western's predilection for male bonding and the theme that 'a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do'. At the end, Cooper utters the line, 'Somebody always stays. All over the world, somebody gets it done'. The line is a homosocial paean to the sacrifice of the Widmark character, but it also sounds like a good dictum of the professional Western.

Jai's sacrifice exemplifies the dictum as it is applied in the Indian Western. The code of the Indian Western demands his sacrifice since his love for the widow Radha is destined to be tragic. Jai then exemplifies the Indian hero who gets it done in an Indian professional Western but rather than submitting this piece of action to an anti-Western analysis (or to the transformative process of the Asian Western), I wish to conclude this chapter by asserting that it reaffirms the transnational appeal of the professional Western. If 'Americanization' is a factor of the Indian Western, it only reminds us of the historical association between the Western and India. As an Indian Western, *Sholay* is the end result of the Westward expansion of America. Henry Nash Smith

has shown in *Virgin Land* that the Westward expansion of the United States, which began in the early nineteenth century, was driven by the economic urge of trade with Asia, and finding a 'passage to India' (see Smith 1950, 20). Walt Whitman's poem 'Passage to India' was a homily to this Westward expansion.

> Passage to India!
> Lo, soul! seest thou not God's purpose from the first?
> The earth to be spann'd, connected by net-work,
> The people to become brothers and sisters,
> The races, neighbors, to marry and be given in marriage,
> The oceans to be cross'd, the distant brought near,
> The lands to be welded together.

Smith writes that

> the idea of a passage to India, with its associated images of fabulous wealth, of ivory and apes and peacocks, led a vigorous existence on the level of imagination entirely apart from its practicability. So rich and compelling was the notion that it remained for decades one of the ruling conceptions of American thought about the West.
>
> (Smith 1950, 23)

That the Western should end up in India is therefore not as strange as it seems. Some might say that there is a teleological progression of history in all of this, but it may be simply proof that the Western contains a historical and social connection with Asian societies. This is the premise of Richard Francaviglia's book *Go East, Young Man* in which the author presents the Orient as 'a vital element in American westward expansion' (Francaviglia 2011, 290). One can see *Sholay* as the end point of this westward expansion. But as *the* classic of Indian Westerns, it marked a new beginning of the development of the Western as a genre in the Indian cinema. Its impact is still with us today and I believe it leaves a legacy of the Western's passage to India, not just one of an Americanisation of Indian cinema but also of the Indianisation of the Western.