CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION

Post-liberalization India’s consumer market has produced a thick visuality of a ‘semiotic society’ (Scott Lash cited in Smith, 2001, p.225) that seeks to spectacularise images of consumption on star-studded billboards and various audio visual publicity medium. It is within this dense semiotic universe that the star emerges as an icon within an inter-textual universe wherein SRK’s image across multiple media texts that includes films, advertisements, newspapers, magazines, etc. It can be also argued from Derridean concept of intertextuality and its horizontal dimension. The horizontal component refers to the position that a sign occupies in a field of texts and it implies that one meaning of a text is bound up with others, even if these others are totally contrary and outwardly independent (Rojek, 2007, p. 52). The media-texts deploying star-text, opens up a whole inter textual field where the meaning of the Star-presence is bound up with other meanings. It is just not the star but the inter-textual field that is laid open to evoke meanings like material fulfilment, success, mobility, affluence, pleasure consumption, happiness, good life and so on. All of these are not only conveyed through identification mobilized through sheer star presence but also through its parallels with star biography.

‘With respect to the horizontal dimension the development of globalization and the rise of multicultural society has exposed native cultures to new social and cultural influences. Cultural … has occurred between native and migrant cultures. Western forms of diet, music, literature, dress, television, cultural values and much else have been revised in the process. World music, novels … the prose poetry … movies are cultural expressions. But so is the rise of multi-cultural communities. The development of multi-ethnic …, multicultural fashion style…’ (ibid. p. 58) Globalization and cultural mixing allow the star and his appeal to operate upon a large inter-textual territory - drawing up meanings and associations with wider implications. Shah Rukh’s implication within this transnational global culture is an exemplar of glocalization, an affirmation of alternative non-Western modernity, a hybrid subjecthood.

The endless circulation of meanings on account of a textual proliferation has replaced the earlier public sphere with the media sphere - a mediated public private space. Contemporary media do systematically provide connections between many different areas of life otherwise not connected. Media contributes to “textualization” of the social world (Cauldry, 2000. p. 78-79). Shah Rukh like other celebrities get constituted and constituted within the textual universe of this media sphere. The endless circulation of his image across various media owing to his extra cinematic engagements renders him to an ‘emblematic text’. The flow of images across different forms of media and the connection between different aspects of culture not otherwise connected, allow for the star’s ubiquity - from cinematic screen to endorsements on billboards newspaper, television, sports coverage (for his ownership of a cricket team of the IPL league) campaigns for public interest, presence in state supported programmes as popular face as cultural (popular) ambassador in foreign events and so on. Textualization is the premise in the
construction of the star image - spanning across the mediated sphere and allow for shared understanding and reception of the star as a text. The star’s engagement within the public sphere is therefore not a discrete phenomenon from his professional engagements as a celebrity. The star therefore needs to be seen within a particular inter-textual environment whereby the star himself acquires the status of a text - his physiognomy, his mannerisms, his acting, biography, his cumulative image from the past. The star, thereby takes place within a particular set of inter-textual association. These inter-textual associations are in main made up of certain social political, economic and ideological relation to reading composed by apparatuses like global media, press, fanzine, T.V., film advertisements - within and between which socially dominant form of reading are constructed. The reading of the star text, i.e. star-image of Shah Rukh spill over to many practices reinforced further by his multiple extra cinematic engagements - in fashion, consumption entrepreneurship, diasporic popularity, global shows tours and public performances, cultural representation of state etc. Shah Rukh as a cultural text is located under the ideological influence of a social, economic and political apparatus of the nation intersecting with the discourse of globalization, and his presence in multiple media produce him as a multitextual phenomenon. The density of meaning thereby produced through his presence and his engagement can be condensed in order to be studied in its full social, cultural and historical context. The cultural positioning of Shah Rukh as a star spills beyond cinematic screen what. What is conveyed to us through his both cinematic and extra cinematic engagements ‘are conditioned by processed representations produced by advertising, photography, television, film, radio, newspapers, magazines and music’ (Rajek, 2007, p. 28). Our relationship to social and cultural reality is mediated - our everyday cultural reality is dematerialized, depersonalized. We have come to inhabit a media-sphere of images, sound-bites and sequences of mass communications which shape our understanding of surrounding cultural, political and economic reality (ibid. p. 29). It is within this media sphere that star identity of Shah Rukh and his representation are constructed and reproduced. The ubiquity of the star within this dense textual environment and his wide engagement within this mediated, intertextual field is largely enabled through media convergence and synergy (see Bose, 2006) and global television that has also enabled largely the emergence of a global postmodern culture. Barker argues ‘In addition to the circulation of specific genres like soap opera and news, the global multiplication of communication technologies has created an increasingly complex semiotic environment in which television produces and circulates an explosive display of competing signs and meanings. This creates allow of images that fuses news, views, drama and reportage so that the juxtaposition of variety of images and meanings form an electronic bricolage. Thus, the globalization of television is at the heart of the image production and circulation which forms that collage of stretched together image which is core to postmodern cultural style.’ (Barker, 2002, p. 140). The televised representations of stars like Shah Rukh allows audience to see him in various images juxtaposed between films, chat shows, reality shows advertisements, interviews, film promotions and news reporting. It creates a montage of images spanning across the vast intertextual domain and allows audience to ‘create a striptext’
of their own, adopting the ‘appropriate’ reading attitudes and compete news as required’ (ibid). Televised representation as central to postmodern cultural style allow for blurring of the boundaries of various programmes. As a consequence of this juxtaposition, Shah Rukh gets reproduced as a (media) bricolage wherein his images are coalesced, juxtaposed, de-contextualized and de-centred through repeated reproductions and re-articulations across a wide variety of media texts.

The idea of stars as texts beyond films does not undermine the relevance of the same. ‘Inevitably the films have a distinct and privileged place in a Star’s image. It is after all film stars that we are considering - their celebrity is defined by the fact of their appearing in films. However the star is also a phenomenon of cinema (which as a business could make money from stars in additional ways to having them make films e.g. in advertising the fun industry, personal appearances) and of general social meanings, and there are instances of stars whose films may actually be less important than other aspects of their career. This lead us to the conclusion that. ‘While in general films are the most important of the texts, one should bear these points in mind when, as here, the focus is the stars total image rather than, as in..., the role of that image in films’ (Dyer,1979. p. 70). Understanding of the star’s iconization is to weave a tapestry of mediatexts that are both cinematic and extra-cinematic and how they compound to contribute meaningfully towards the construction of ‘particular Star image’. The coming together of multiple images from various media texts is not neatly patterned but is complex. Shah Rukh’s cinematic images negotiate with his images in ads, newspaper, television, as an entrepreneur performance tours, etc to construct his image as a whole. As Dyer says : ‘It is misleading to think of the texts combining cumulatively into a sum total that constitutes the image, or alternatively simply as being moments in a star’s image’s career that appear one after the other - although those emphases are important. The image is a complex totality and it does have a chronological dimension... that totality in its temporality is the concept of a structured polysemy. By polysemy is meant the multiple but finite meanings and effects that a star image signifies.’ (Dyer, ibid. p. 72) The elements of signification constituting the Star’s image react among themselves - either reinforcing, or negotiates or mask the contradiction or apposition.

Shah Rukh’s image as a structured polysemy draws from his filmic persona and biographically from his early struggle, his middle class origin, his secular Muslim credentials, and legitimizes a certain way of being a perfect star in post-global India. These images sutured while drawing from various media texts do not ‘imply stasis’ as images are dynamic, changing and evolving. While some defining ones remain key to his image, others add on as cumulative accretions.

Unlike earlier stars who solely enjoyed the cinematic space, contemporary film stars mediated and circulated via plural channels, of the media are constituted within a dense media ecology. Technological reproductions of star images render them easily accessible. Shah Rukh’s image has been infinitely reproduced through electronic and print media. As a cultural text, like most celebrities and popular icons his image is readily available in nearly every form of media beyond films, like newspaper magazines, film, television and video. This has consequences for
how culture is experienced and perceived. Benjamin as cited by Rojek argues (ibid, 2007, p. 107) that the ‘main consequence of replication is the decline of what he calls aura (see notes, 3). Representation renders star image accessible in various medium and its sheer ubiquity threatens to rob its ‘starry-aura’ (Dyer, 1979). Turning the star image to near ubiquity is the handiwork of market capitalism that constantly bombards our sense, fuels our desire that are promised to be fulfilled through buying more commodities and identifying with brands. This culture of consumption is assimilative and cannot be eluded. To reach a wider clientele it deploys well-known faces. As Barker argues: ‘Capitalism is not a rectified object that is simply being manipulated by a conspiracy of rich and powerful but is a set of all embracing practices in which we are all implicated.’ (Barker, 2002, p. 173).

The role of Hindi and English print media in co-modifying stars is undoubtedly significant. Mishra argues with respect to building Bachchan as a parallel text ‘English fanzines are a classic vehicle for the crossover of industry publicity and policy and the filmic text which is the alternate posit of the star. Industry publicity, control, and policy represent the social institution that produces and determines, in major part, the social consumption and circulation of film as commodity’ (Mishra, 2002. . 130). In the case of Shah Rukh, and his construction as a star, does draw from various reporting by film magazines, ads, websites, fanzines etc. These publicity channels provide a continuous array of information: his relations to other male stars, female co-actresses, director-producers, personal life, extra cinematic commercial ventures, his diasporic and international image, his public statements on civil and political issues, his relation with the state etc. The star consciously cultivated a screen biography that seamlessly coalesces with his personal life and convictions. Several authors like Anupama Chopra, (2007) Biswajit Ghosh (2004), Deepa Gehlawat and Mushtaq Sheikh (2009) have authored the star’s illustrious ascendancy and his exemplary rise in their biographical accounts of Shah Rukh Khan.

Print media’s accounts of his series of success with his non-conventional anti-hero role in his early films from Baazigar (1993) to Kuch Kuch Hota Hai (1998); his non-filmic background with no nepotic links supporting him, his reinvented excess portrayed in his buoyant and blithe performance his resplendent overseas success consolidating his image or a ‘diasporic hero’ since DDLJ, his professionalism, media-friendliness, amicable public relations, middle class educated back ground and early struggle, his unique psychotic roles in early films flamboyant romantic roles in later films added to the construction of his image and his ‘textualization’.

In popular culture, the object of veneration is the performer and a star performer (citing Madonna’s instance) is only available intertextually. None of the texts as per Fiske is an adequate text for Madonna (ibid p125). Following Fiske’s study of popular culture and intertextual circulation of star performer like Madonna, it can be argued that Shah Rukh needs to be subjected to an intertextual reading that spills beyond films. Because of their incompleteness, all popular texts have leaky boundaries, they flow into each other, and they flow into everyday life (ibid). Reading the star within the intertextual circulation as the star’s presence in primary, secondary and tertiary texts cross boundaries, calls for one to see him across all media text.
The texts of popular culture are full of gaps, contradictions and inadequacies. This openness enables popular texts to invite producerly reading and allow it to speak differently in different contexts, in different moments of reading. The force of popular reading is always struggling against the social and textual forces that attempt to limit it. Popular text is a site of struggle between forces of closure and openness between readerly and producerly, between homogeneity of the preferred meaning and heterogeneity of its readings (Fiske 1989 p126). Considering Shah Rukh as a popular text it may be argued that notwithstanding his hegemonic construction, neither narrative discourse of film or ideological closure of ads, he remains open to resistant meanings, popular appropriate in everyday life. Popular meanings allow re-construction of the star in their everyday living as a popular producerly text. The star as a cultural text is not confined to a single level of inscription, but works as an ‘interleaving of levels’, as a ‘multilayered semantic entity’ for which there can be no privileged reading. As an ontologically mixed entity there is no authority or formality of its reading. The star is open ended and dynamic in nature. To study the social life of star text one needs to be engaged in constant reading (Storey1996). The constant process of construction and reconstruction of star text – it is subject to a growing range of competing moments of inscription and re-inscription within a particular socio-economic political and historical context. The interleaving levels of meanings that intersect with the star text involve aspects and dynamics of the political and cultural economy of film production, global flows, audience reception, and spatio-temporal contingencies. As an open ended text it is open and dynamic – amenable to revisions, reinscriptions, repackaging of his image, body etc. Textually produced within filmic narratives, symbolically imagined by audience and consumed visually as a sign, and even the sheer malleability of his body/image that keeps on revising to produce a new look his dynamic interpersonal relations within the industry and in public domain including the state (as reported in daily newspapers, film magazines, etc.) shows that there is a constant production and accretion of the star image within a global context. He is constantly produced, circulated reconstructed within flows of a globalizing economy. As a popular cultural text he is constantly being re-cast notwithstanding the constancy of his stabilization via his iconicity within the feel good myth of a globalizing nation.

The persona or identity associated with the star evolves cumulatively or is constructed over a period of time. This identity is usually extensive in that it covers all aspects of their character and is both a multi media and intertextual creation, in that the various forms of media and promotional activities that surround the star, inform and constantly build upon each other. This process begins with actors or actresses forming their own star identity or symbolic biography through the films they appear in and the characters they play, and through documentation of their public and private lives in the media. This is enhanced by the photographers or artists who produce the images that are seen on the plethora of promotional material accompanying a film release. At the same time audience watching films see these images and develop their own perceptions of the star. They too are able to affect the way a star is represented by the choice they make, which are manifested through their attendance in the box office as well as other
media. Like watching his public shows, interviews, reading his biography, following him on community internet sites. The identity of the star is not captive to films alone but is constructed by the star, the media and the people (see Dwyer et al). The visual medium that is variety of media texts in myriad forms defines and constructs star’s identity. This can be seen in the formation of not only Bachchan (as studied by Dwyer and Patel 2002 and Mishra 2002) but also in the case of Shah Rukh.

Shah Rukh’s early roles as a psychotic, obsessive negatively cast hero was subsequently shelved as he began to be recurrently cast in urban/affluent/diasporic/new middle class/secular/cosmopolitan image an image that the globalizing nation aspired as well. Strange enough this filmic image concurrent with his biography, his ascendancy from a modest , urban educated liberal Delhi based Muslim family and his marriage to a Hindi woman produced certain character traits/film persona that were transferred in subsequent roles from one film to the next. The star’s vibrancy his energetic performance, his sporty cool trendy look, his excess, represented the face of India’s burgeoning upwardly mobile new middle class and caught the imagination of the hybrid diasporic sensibilities as well.

Film magazines provided a barrage of information on Shah Rukh his relation to renowned film directors/producers, his popularity, his early struggle, his bonhomie with powerful political clan, his stable marital life with his wife and children, his secular beliefs, his business like extra filmic ventures and acumen to manage the same confirmed his iconicity as an achiever of new global India embracing new opportunities. Promotional material, magazines, news paper reports on his various professional engagements. While documentary films, “Living with the Super Star” (director: Anupama Chopra, 2009) and his biographies have explored his real life trajectory, his public private life – an exemplar of success, his domestic arrangements within his palatial house Mannat, his taste/preferences both private and professional, his business ventures, his relationship within the industry, his dreams, ventures, ambition, candid admissions – all rendering him chosen to people as a celebrated idol who rose from ordinariness to a stature of successful stardom and charisma. This image construction is cumulative and evolves via accretions (see Dwyer et al and Mishra on Bachchan).

Considering the wide reach of cinema and its permeation almost into every area of modern Indian urban culture across every aspect of media, satellite and cable television, to the video industry, the popular music business and the magazine publishing a dense network of mutually interdependent media domains (see Dwyer in Kavoori et al p 240 2009) become crucial to construction of Shah Rukh’s image. The star’s advertising campaigns in favour of a consumerist metropolitan/urban lifestyle along with its semeiotics and economics are commensurate with the various magazine and documentary/biographical reporting on star’s own style of leisure living. As a result, Shah Rukh’s image as per Dyer’s view ‘...matter beyond films as they come to act as the focus for dominant discourses of their time’ (ibid p 242) as signifiers of temporalities, as embodiment of ideological discourse both in films and in his engagements beyond films and the reporting that circulate about him through print and audio-visual media. These include stories circulating about Shah Rukh across various film magazines.
about his latest films, his success, his high rates, professional animosities business ventures, often rumours and gossips, his display of consumption material assets. Gleaning across several magazines that include Star Dust, Film Fare, Cineblitz, Anandalok etc. and his biographies, (Sheikh, 2009, Ghosh 2004, Chopra, 2007) the researcher observes that the major modes of narratives about Shah Rukh includes intimate tales of his struggle, his personal/emotional beliefs, his rise from ordinaries on strength of hard work, faith and abilities and gossips about his professional rivalry with Bachchan, other contemporary male stars etc. The role of such extra-filmic narratives on star life is also of importance towards construction of star image, his iconicity, his commodity status, marketability etc. This has the effect of providing intimacy, which stars shuns in real life as they live often remote and sheltered lives, cocooned by security and air-conditioning. The magazines allow the readers to feel that they are participating in this world, a feeling which is reinforced by highly personal forms of address, creating solidarity and connections. The effect is one of intimacy and distance, the stars are personalities like you and me, but they are different in kind, in that they have an excess or surplus of everything. The ‘creation of intimacy’ with the stars through such reporting about their off-screen lives, various public appearances, public address or comments make them figures who are near and yet remote and so can function as unthreatening figures. The melodramatic mode of the narrative is central to this, depicting the star as emotionally charged, quasi family figures (Dwyer,2012 cited p 252-253 in Kavoori et al 2008). Besides magazines, biographies producing a simulated experience of closeness with the glamourised, celebrated, successful image of SRK, what draws him closer to public experience are his own narratives, interviews on his success story and rise from sheer mediocrity of middle class background, his verbose candour in shows, his hosting of television programmes, his presence in public grounds like IPL, his political secular views and so.

Another important domain where star’s image, latest information about his engagements circulate is cyber sphere, an anthropogenetic domain, producing digitized information (constituting the virtual or cyberspace accessed via Internet)(This allow the star for geographical dispersal). Engagement of Shah Rukh actively also involving his enabled agency to actively interact as do many star celebrities in Tweeter, Facebook, blogs (in community/interactive sites) creates new forms of sociability and dialogue between star and his distant others (fans/public etc.) Such interaction if though might be Contra Habermas, it can be seen as a quasi public space enabled via electronic communication. The star via his interaction activates his right to access to resources to participate in cultural productive – within a popular realm and its cultural citizenship (see Hermes). Such presence attack earlier assumption of starry aura maintained through limited contact with public sphere. The presence of star registered in new cultural space albeit virtual space redefines relationship with public domain differently.

The study of popular culture argues Fiske is the study of circulation of cultural meaning of cultural texts. But treating the text as privileged objects artificially freezes the circulation at a convenient point and tends to overemphasize the role of text within it. The popular text is an
agent, a resource, not an object. So a star text like Madonna, observes Fiske, circulates as a text or a series of texts. Far from being an adequate text in herself, Madonna as the star is a provoker of meanings whose cultural effects can only be studied in her multiple and often contradictory circulation. Popular culture circulates intertextually, among primary texts (the original commodity) i.e. Madonna the star self, the secondary text that refers to them directly (ads, press stories, criticism etc.) and tertiary texts that are in constant process in everyday life (conversations window shopping way we dwell in apartments, adopting, Madonna Movements in a high school dance). All texts of Madonna – primary, secondary and tertiary- are inadequate and incomplete. Madonna is the only intertextual circulation of her meanings and pleasures, she is neither a text nor a person but a sense of meanings in process. Even though she can be studied only in her texts and the relations between them for those are the moments when meanings in process become visible, the texts themselves are not signifying objects, but agents, instances and resources of popular culture (Fiske 1989 p 124-125).

Fiske’s understanding to study star-texts with an intertextual universe, in circulation in diverse form provides a useful method to study Shah Rukh, as a star text. Shah Rukh as a text is therefore can be read in multiple texts: primary, secondary (films ads magazine gossips interviews etc.) and tertiary (how he permeates sub-cultures of fans reflected in our daily routine etc.). The idea of a dynamic circulation of text within the realm of popular culture tacitly acknowledges the near ubiquity of the star in multiple texts and the plural meanings it generates. Though this study is de-limited to certain texts like films, advertisements, news reports and academic writings, it does acknowledge the relevance of reading the primary text, fan culture and their discursive practices, star interviews, gossip reports about the star etc. This researcher despite an earnest effort failed to gain an access to the star, the primary text and concedes to this limitation. However it may be stated that this study is essentially a study of cinematic texts and the star’s extra-filmic engagements understood through a review of extant academic literature and theoretical positions, concepts and discourse. As future plan of research, I would like to extend the later research to include a study of fan behaviour and fan culture and an interview of the star to complement the present study and address its limitations.

The purpose of this study was to uphold Shah Rukh as an illustration of a particular heroic prototype or nation’s subjectivity and its emblematic significance in representing the discourse of globalizing nation. The semantic significance and his representativeness are further enhanced through a strange and uncanny resemblance of his oeuvre or filmographic trajectory with the nation’s encounter with the global. The biography of the star is a classic model of ascendancy that runs parallel to or corresponds to the rise of the new middle class of the globalizing nation. The researcher does not deny the relevance of studying other major contemporary stars of the Hindi film industry, but would like to re-iterate that Shah Rukh’s larger presence in the inter textural media sphere and the public domain, which undeniably is a spillage from the cinematic persona and image of the star within films, makes him an important popular icon who lives, proves, plays and performs the myths and promises of a globalizing nation.
In a country, where civil society exists in confined enclaves of the urban intelligentsia, where development is skewed and a significant number of the people are left beyond the pale of literacy, the relevance of such stars or popular icons is undeniable. It is through the heroic roles, through his body and its performance that the transformative change or process is translated or rendered amenable through a more understandable and popular idiom. The star allegorizes the urban, modern, secular, liberal, face of India and acts as a rallying point in the domain of popular culture as an agent of change articulating a trans-national address of a Global -India. The study of such popular icons as illustrations of the larger context of the nation, as an embodiment of the nation’s discourse serve to prove that the realm of the popular as an important register of the nation’s discourse.