HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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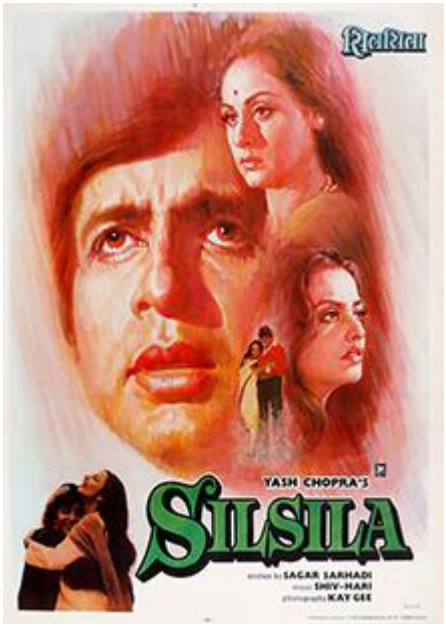
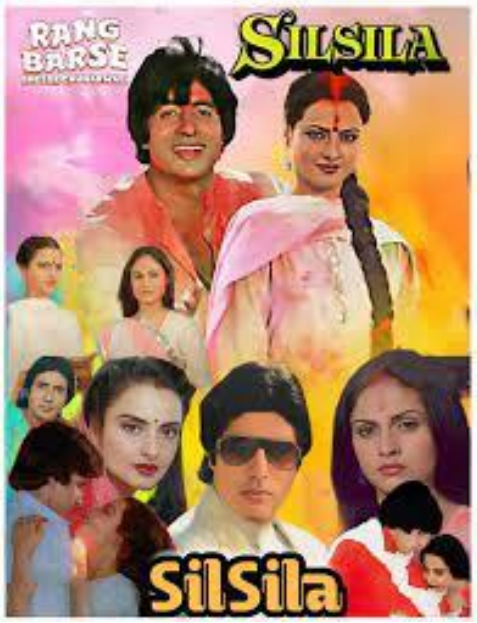
THE AFFAIR */ SILSILA* (1981)

Yash Chopra

Hindi language

Film link:
https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B095JTCM7H/ref=atv_sr_fle_c_sr4e8ffb_1_1_1?sr=1-1&pageTypeIdSource=ASIN&pageTypeId=B095J487QM





OVERVIEW

Auteur Yash Chopra (1932-2012) was one of the most iconic and influential Indian film-makers who worked in the Bollywood film industry based in Mumbai. Chopra initially worked with his elder brother, B.R. Chopra, making hits such as *Dhool Ka Phool* (*Flowers of the Dust*, 1959) and *Waqt* (*Time,* 1965). In 1973, he launched his own production company, Yash Raj Films, which went on to become one of Bollywood's most powerful production houses, with over 80 films to date. Chopra is considered a "King-maker" of Bollywood cinema, having introduced and nurtured the two biggest stars of the industry, Amitabh Bacchhan and Shah Rukh Khan. His most impactful films include romances such as *Kabhi Kabhie* (*Sometimes,* 1976), *Silsila* (*The Affair,* 1981), *Chandni* (*Moonlight,* 1989) and *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (*The Brave-Hearted Wins the Bride*, 1995) and action-packed thrillers such as *Deewaar* (*Wall*, 1975) and *Darr* (*Fear*, 1993). Chopra's work is also memorable for featuring visually stunning imagery shot in diverse and exotic locales, such as Switzerland and Kashmir. He is the only filmmaker to have won the Indian National Film Award for best popular film five times— four times as director and once as producer. He also received a number of Filmfare Awards (given by *Filmfare* magazine), including 12 nominations and 4 wins for best director and 15 nominations and 4 wins for best film. The government of India honoured him with the Dadasaheb Phalke Award for lifetime achievement in cinema in 2001, and in 2005 he received one of India's highest civilian honours, the Padma Bhushan.

Film *Silsila* (lit. *Continuance* but usually translated as *The Affair*) is a musical romantic drama directed, produced, and co-written by Yash Chopra under the Yash Raj Films banner. The film stars Amitabh Bachchan, his wife Jaya Bachchan, his rumoured girlfriend and best leading lady Rekha, and Sanjeev Kumar playing the two main couples. The music was composed by Shiv–Hari, with lyrics by Harivansh Rai Bachchan (Amitabh Bachchan's father), Javed Akhtar and 16th century devotional poetess Mirabai, among others. The soundtrack includes several notable tracks, including "*Yeh kahan aa gaye hum"*, *"Dekha ek khwab to yeh silsile hue*" and "*Rang barse bhige bhunar wali"*; the last, sung

by Amitabh Bachchan and penned by Harivansh Rai Bachchan, became widely associated with the Holi festival and remains one of the most played Holi songs in popular culture.

The film drew significant attention during production due to its casting, which mirrored real-life speculation surrounding the lead actors. Despite the “scandal”, *Silsila* underperformed at the box office and received mixed-to-negative reviews, with criticism directed at its storyline and performances. Sunil Sethi of *India Today* criticized the film for its conventional storyline and unconvincing characterizations, describing it as "pure polyester yarn" and inferior to the real-life gossip it sought to dramatize. He concluded that the film looked visually appealing but was “a distortion of half-lies, which is worse.” Despite its critical and commercial failure, the film received three nominations at the 29th Filmfare Awards: Best Actor (Amitabh Bachchan), Best Actress (Jaya Bachchan), and Best Music Director (Shiv–Hari).

Background Chopra had initially considered Parveen Babi and Smita Patil for the roles eventually played by Rekha and Jaya Bachchan, respectively, but they were replaced on the recommendation of Amitabh Bachchan, who had agreed to star in the film in 1980. Rekha reportedly designed her own costumes and jewellery for the film.

Chopra argues, “There are no fights, no smugglers, no gimmicks at all”, setting *Silsila* apart from the usual fare that Bachchan was dishing out at the time. Film scholar Rachel Dwyer has noted that Bachchan’s portrayal of a romantic lead in *Silsila* was at odds with his established image as the “angry young man” from earlier films such as *Deewaar* (1975) and *Zanjeer* (dir. Prakash Mehra, 1973) making his role less convincing to audiences at the time. Despite its poor performance, Chopra later named *Silsila* as one of his personal favourites in a 2011 interview.

Silsila remains a watershed moment in Chopra’s career, not only as it was the very last film till date of the star pair, but also because Chopra had a major and very public falling out with Bachchan and they wouldn’t work together again for two decades until the time Bachchan, having suffered many flops in the 1990’s and almost losing his career, begged Chopra for a good pick-up role (*Mohabbatein,* 2000, written and directed by Aditya Chopra for the Yash Raj Films banner).

Intersection of Reel and Real Life Few films in Indian cinema have blurred the lines between reel and reality quite like Yash Chopra’s *Silsila*. The film was not only a cinematic love triangle—it was a mirror reflecting one of Bollywood’s most rumoured off-screen relationships. With Amitabh married to Jaya in real life (in 1973) and linked romantically to Rekha, the film’s casting was as controversial as it was bold. Jaya Bachchan even insisted on remaining on the sets at all times when Amitabh and Rekha had any scenes together! Rumours only intensified after a BBC interview (2010), when Chopra openly referred to Rekha as Amitabh’s “girlfriend” and Jaya as his wife—both on and off screen. Chopra candidly admitted that making *Silsila* felt like walking a tightrope. “I was always on tenterhooks and scared because it was real life coming into reel life,” he said. The filmmaker acknowledged that anything could have happened during the shoot, adding, “They are working together… Jaya is his wife and Rekha is his girlfriend—the same story is going on in real life.” However, the BBC Asian Network denied any complaints from the actor’s side.

The story of *Silsila*—both on-screen and behind the scenes—has since become part of Bollywood lore. Though *Silsila* did not achieve box-office success upon release, largely due to its unconventional and uncomfortable theme, it gained immense recognition over time as a classic. Decades later, *Silsila* is revered as one of Yash Chopra’s finest works, remembered for its bold exploration of human emotions, unforgettable music, and sheer artistic beauty. It paved the way for future filmmakers to explore complicated relationship dynamics in Indian cinema. It enjoys cult status today, celebrated for its soulful music, emotional complexity, and the unforgettable pairing of Rekha and Amitabh—for the very last time.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Amit Malhotra	A Delhi-based playwright (Amitabh Bachchan)
Shekhar Malhotra	Amit’s brother and Shobha’s fiancé (Shashi Kapoor)
Shobha Malhotra	Shekhar's fiancée and Amit’s wife (Jaya Bachchan)
Chandni	Amit’s lover (Rekha)
Vidyarthi	Amit’s drama producer (Deven Verma in guest appearance)
Dr. V. K. Dr. Anand	Chandni’s husband (Sanjeev Kumar)
Kulbhushan	Police officer and Shobha’s cousin (Kulbhushan Kharbanda)

SYNOPSIS

Shekhar, an Air Force pilot, and Shobha are lovers who are about to be married. Shekhar invites his younger brother Amit to visit and meet his fiancée. Amit meets Chandni and falls in love. Amit courts Chandni with roses, recordings in his sexy baritone voice and an invitation to his award-winning play performance, after which romance follows. Amit tells his brother he intends to marry her, but when Shekhar is killed in the (1971 India-Pakistan) war, leaving Shobha pregnant, Amit agrees to marry Shobha to save everyone's honour. Soon after, they get in a car accident after which Shobha has a miscarriage. Her physician, Dr. Anand (Sanjeev Kumar), turns out to be Chandni's husband. Chandni and Amit meet and he explains why he had to leave her; soon their affair recommences. Shobha meanwhile begins to fall in love with Amit. One night, when Amit and Chandni are having an adulterous date, she knocks a boy down while driving. However, the police officer in charge turns out to be Shobha's cousin, and, recognising Amit, reproaches him. Meanwhile Amit and Chandni decide to embark on a new life together. Chandni leaves while Dr. Anand is out of town and Amit tells Shobha he is leaving her. Shobha declares her resolve to win him back. Amit and Chandni go to his friend's parents' golden wedding celebration. The ceremony reminds them of the sanctity of marriage. Suddenly the phone rings: Shobha tells Amit that Dr. Anand has been in a plane crash. Amit and Chandni rush to the site. Shobha reveals she is pregnant, but Amit reassures her and jumps into the flames to save Dr. Anand. Amit saves Dr. Anand, who leaves on a stretcher, accompanied by Chandni. Shobha and Amit are reunited.

SCENES



Opening scene A beautiful mountain valley with a rapidly flowing spring leading to the river, sets the scene for a group of beautiful women singing and dancing "*Sar se sarke chunariya*" ("My veil slides off my head"), celebrating a baby shower. Shobha and Shekhar, singing the main bits of the song, hug and romance in the glade. Shekhar tells her that he will also fulfil her wishes one day (of becoming a wife and mother).

Shobha and Shekhar's life At a program at the Air Force base, Shobha leads a group of children in singing the national anthem. She announces the charity work that Air Force Wives Welfare Association is doing. Shekhar also comes (in full uniform) and praises her. Shobha complains that he is away too much and he replies that he would do anything for her, even give up drinking. Later, Shekhar lets Shobha hear few lines of poetry on a recoding done by Amit. He tells her that it's his brother.



Amit meets Chandni Amit dances and sings in a *baarat* procession, bringing his Sikh friend, Gurdip, as the groom to a wedding. A very pretty Chandni dances for the guests. Amit and Chandni sing a duet and dance, "*Ladki hai ya shola*" ("Is it a girl! Is it a flame?") Elsewhere, Shekhar shows off some cool moves flying on his little plane for Shobha. She says it frightened her but he brushes it off.



Amit courts Chandni Amit goes to meet Gurdip and his new wife, begging her to introduce him to the beautiful girl, Chandni. The wife gives him Chandni's contact and he sends Chandni a bunch of roses for her birthday the day after. He also sends a recording of his (baritone, very sexy) voice, saying that he will send her flowers every month.

Amit meets Shobha Shekhar writes to Amit to visit him in Kashmir. Shekhar has to go to on a work flight and asks Shobha to receive Amit at the airport. They meet at the airport and get along well on their drive back. The brothers are good friends; being only a year and half apart in age they have done everything together from drinking for the first time to bathing naked. They have a rule- the brother who is in trouble always gets bailed out by the other one. Shobha brings him home and Amit charms her mother quickly. Amit jokes he was just entertaining Shobha for Shekhar's sake, now, but soon his brother will be out of the picture.

The three of them have a blast Shekhar returns and they visit a dance club. Amit complaining to Shobha that Shekhar drinks too much and makes her dance with him, quipping about the (more than 1 foot) difference in their height. Shekhar, completely drunk, tells Shobha that Amit is an alcoholic. Both the men get stupid drunk and Shekhar thinks he's driving after forgetting to put the jeep in gear. Finally, Shobha, sitting between the two drunk men, points it out and they're on the way, singing a bawdy song from their younger years. Somehow they drop Shobha off to her home in one piece. Back at Shekhar's house, he gets sentimental about when he beat Amit up 15 years ago. They drunkenly argue and cry and reminisce about an old sweetheart mired in humdrum domesticity. Amit cries and tells Shekhar never to leave him for anyone and Shekhar consoles him.



Amit and Chandni's romance Chandni continues to get enamoured with Amit's poetry recordings and roses. In a valley of flowers (and other exotic, romantic locations) they sing the superhit title song "*Dekha ek khwab toh yeh silsile hue*" ("I saw a vision that began this story").

Transitions Shekhar and Amit bathe in the gym shower (a rare shirtless sequence for both of them) and laugh about their childhood when their sweetheart caught them bathing naked. Amit says he must return soon. Elsewhere, Shobha's mother tells her that she's reassured about the two brothers and their bond; they will take good care of her. Chandni's parents also discuss her marriage plans and her father says that "a daughter belongs to another household, so she has to leave one day", while Chandni exercises in the lawn.



Amit excels in a play Vidyarthi and Amit discuss the proposal for an upcoming play on the way to a famous actress's house. He charms her immediately and flirts with her. She asks him to return the next day, when they do a reading with some actors. During the show, Chandni watches, engrossed, from the first row, while Amit throws a famous monologue "You start at zero and finish at zero….you can't live as you want...all are hollow...there's still time..heed his call, shout, I can't live a false life..."We are free"!! He gets a standing ovation. After the show they walk together, almost, but not quite proposing.

Amit and Chandni's romance deepens The next day, Amit receives a bouquet from Chandni, intercepted by Vidyarthi, with a letter and a promise to meet. They have multiple dates (mostly walking around in tree-lined streets at all times of day and night, hugging etc.), singing another romantic song. Their chemistry is breathtaking. They do everything together and get very close.



Shekhar reassures Shobha There is a war and all the Air Force pilots are called to duty, including Shekhar, who manages to return alive. Shobha tells Shekhar that it really frightens her when he has to go to war. He reassures her with loving words.

Happy plans Chandni's father calls and tells her that he has arranged her marriage. She is shocked but tells him that she loves someone, and he agrees to cancel the match. Amit calls Shekhar and tells him that he has decided whom to marry and that they would have a double wedding. Shekhar flies off to war.

Shekhar dies Amit while speaking on the phone to Chandni about the planned wedding, sees news on the TV that Shekhar has been killed while gunning down enemy planes. Amit shouts and throws a paperweight to break the TV screen. Shobha runs to her mother, howling. Amit tearfully tells Chandni that the last war killed their father, but he didn't cry then; he bore the death of their mother soon afterwards because Shekhar was there for him. But he is totally devastated and orphaned today. Chandni reassures him that she is with him. On his flight to Shimla, Amit remembers Shekhar's words that he won't leave him.

Amit steps up to marry Shobha Shobha again comes to receive Amit at the airport. Shekhar gets full Air Force honours and is awarded a medal of valour, which Amit receives. Later, he speaks to Shobha's mother, who is heartbroken. She tells Amit that Shobha is pregnant with Shekhar's child. Amit speaks to Shobha, "we can't even console each other". Shobha says she doesn't know how she will continue living, "for whom?" Amit tells her that she's young and beautiful and can marry again. Shobha replies that she is



inseparable from Shekhar even in death; who would marry her? Would he?

Amit breaks up with Chandni Amit writes all this in a letter to Chandni, breaking up with her, telling her to forget him. Reading the letter, Chandni says that she has lost all faith in love now. She sings a sad song, “The blue sky has fallen asleep” by herself as Amit and Shobha get married elsewhere. All of them are equally miserable.

Shobha has a miscarriage and meets Dr. Anand Some time passes. Amit, while driving with Shobha, has an accident. Shobha somehow survives but suffers a miscarriage. Her operating surgeon is Dr. V. K. Anand. Amit comes to meet Shobha in her hospital room. She breaks down crying and he consoles her, reassuring her that he will always be by her side.

Chandni is married to Dr. Anand Chandni, looking more glamorous than ever, is now married to Dr. V. K. Anand. Dr. Anand returns late from the hospital and complains that they don’t argue with each other like regular couples. He tells her about Amit and Shobha’s accident.



Chandni comes to meet Amit and meets Shobha as well Chandni is stunned and goes to meet Amit at the hospital with a bunch of red roses, while a sad version of the title song plays in the background. Suddenly, Dr. Anand comes in and praises Chandni for bringing a “get-well-soon” bouquet. Amit refuses to say what he remembers about the accident. Dr. Anand plucks one rose from the bouquet and takes Chandni to meet Shobha. Shobha praises Dr. Anand’s charming bedside manner. Shobha says it’s a great coincidence that they have met and they should keep in touch. Dr. Anand advises Amit to treat Shobha carefully and avoid exertion.



Amit tries to meet Chandni Amit and Shobha return home. He takes very good care of her. Shobha tells Amit that she is growing fond of him. They talk about destiny and debt. He takes her to a saree shop, where Chandni is also shopping. He approaches Chandni and surreptitiously tells her that he wants to meet. Shobha interrupts them and Chandni awkwardly leaves, saying that she will be at a hotel at 5pm. Amit drops Shobha off very early to her doctor appointment with Dr. Anand and goes to the hotel to meet Chandni. But before they can speak, the actress from his play suddenly sees him and chats him up. Chandni’s friend also suddenly appears and engages her. Amit and Chandni don’t get a chance to speak.

Amit continues to chase Chandni Dr. Anand and Shobha chat and laugh. Amit tries to call Chandni’s house phone, but is thwarted when Dr. Anand picks it up. Shobha reads Amit’s poetry out loud and praises his deep emotions. He brushes her off, clearly uncomfortable. Amit calls and gets Dr. Anand again and invites him to lunch, mistakenly thinking that Chandni will also come. They meet for lunch. Dr. Anand innocently lets slip that Chandni will be at a flower show as a judge. Sure enough, Amit finds her there and tells her to meet him later.

Amit and Chandni reunite When they meet, Chandni flatly tells him that he cannot blame her after sending that break-up letter. She tearfully blames Amit for not having done well by her and chastises him for shattering her heart. He apologises but says he has no excuses; then he tells her the truth about Shobha and his duty. He tells her that he still loves her. Chandni rues their bad fate, “I hate you!” and cries and hugs him.

Shobha confesses her feelings to Amit Back home, Shobha gives Amit a head massage and tells him that Amit is too morose, unlike Shekhar. She tells him clearly that Shekhar is a sweet memory for her past while Amit is her *zindagi* (life), for nurturing her. As a woman, her husband is her *parameshwar (*‘god and ruler’). Amit is surprised and asks if she is happy.



Amit is caught cheating by Vidyarthi Amit meets again with Chandni at a restaurant, who tries to half-heartedly convince him to give up the affair instead of breaking two homes. A drunk Vidyarthi suddenly comes and accosts them and tells Amit why he didn’t invite him to the wedding. Chandni walks off and drives away in a huff, causing an accident with a cab driver. Amit beats up the driver injuring his hand and Chandni stops him. At home, Shobha asks how he got injured and Amit lies to her. Vidyarthi arrives and is surprised to see Shobha as Amit’s wife instead of Chandni. Vidyarthi talks in riddles and warns Amit to be careful. They

sit down for dinner. Amit keeps glaring at Vidyarthi so he doesn't let the affair slip.

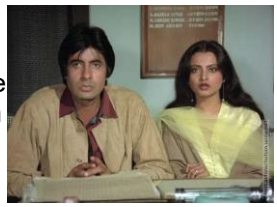
Amit and Chandni caught on live TV together Amit invites Chandni to the award ceremony where he will get a national award for his play. After some hesitation, she agrees to come. Shobha says that she will go, too, but Amit tells her to stay home. She jokingly requests him to tell her if he likes any girl there. Amit gives a speech saying how grateful he was for the award and the support of his audience. Chandni, dressed elegantly in hot pink sequinned saree, watches from the front row. Amit recites a few lines from his next play. Shobha watches the televised program where the camera focuses on Chandni, shocking her.



Amit and Chandni's affair continues Afterwards, Amit and Chandni romance in his car parked by a lake. Chandni shows him a ticket that she had bought years ago, of his very first play. Amit tells her that the time he spent without her was meaningless and the few moments they spend together now are eternal.

Chandni has a divided life Chandni returns home and bumps into her husband, whom she was supposed to pick up from the airport but had forgotten. Dr. Anand says that she has changed and tells her that he has been keeping an eye on her. Chandni keeps asking for details; then Dr. Anand tells her about her TV appearance. Dr. Anand and Chandni get intimate.

Amit and Chandni get intimate Amit remembers kissing Chandni and writes the famous lines, "*Main aur meri tanhai*" ("I and my loneliness often speak to each other"), segueing into one of Bollywood's top songs of all time "*Yeh kahan aa gayein hum*" ("Where have we come to"), visualised on Amit and Chandni on various dates in pretty locations with flowers, with much kissing and hugging and sleeping together.



Chandni causes an accident There is a city-wide blackout. Shobha waits for Amit with a lit candle. Chandni, driving a car with Amit, hits a child on the road. The child is not injured but a crowd gathers and creates a ruckus. The police soon arrive and ask if Amit and Chandni they are married, then ask them to come to the police station. They lie about being married. Coincidentally, the police officer, Kulbhushan, calls Dr. Anand to come and consult on the kid's injury. Amit begs the police officer to let the case go, but he refuses. Amit and Kulbhushan get into an argument; both of them call each other names. Dr. Anand arrives but Amit had already paid off the injured child's parents and left the police station. Kulbhushan tells Dr. Anand that "Amit Malhotra's wife" caused the accident.

Amit's affair gets caught by Kulbhushan Upon returning home, Amit runs into Shobha's mother, who proposes to have a dinner with her cousin, who, how surprising, turns out to be the same police officer, Kulbhushan. Amit denies having met him earlier. Kulbhushan says that he will protect his sister and warns Amit to stay in line or else. Amit continues to call him names. They continue arguing. Kulbhushan concedes for the moment, but then follows up with a conversation with Dr. Anand at his home, where he sees that Chandni is Dr. Anand's wife. Chandni rushes Dr. Anand out, leaving Kulbhushan puzzled.

Amit, Shobha, Dr. Anand and Chandni go on a double date Shobha chats normally with Dr. Anand but it's a little awkward when Shobha recalls seeing Chandni on the TV program. Dr. Anand is embarrassed for speaking too honestly. Dr. Anand invites them over for Holi celebrations. Then Amit and Chandni dance, leaving Dr. Anand and Shobha at the table. Shobha is clearly jealous. Dr. Anand says that Shobha must be hiding a secret and mentions the car accident, but takes it back when he realizes the faux pas. Shobha makes up an excuse for Amit and Dr. Anand tells her that she is a very good wife and Amit is blessed. Amit, dancing with Chandni, asks her if he can apply *gulal* (coloured powder) on her during Holi, and she says he has already earned that right.

It's Holi!!! At the Holi celebrations, Shobha and Chandni chat and Chandni tells her about her lost love; Dr. Anand and Amit have a similar conversation. Amit, continuously drinking *bhang* (intoxicating drink made from cannabis leaf paste), very noticeably favours Chandni during his performance of "*Rang barse bheege chunarwali*" ("*Colours shower down, drenching the belle in the veil..scattering jasmine flowers on the wedding bed, the lover lies down while the husband is tormented*" etc. It's a very cheeky song!! I love it!!) It's possibly the most famous Holi song of all time, which Bachchan sang himself. They even kiss in public!! Dr. Anand and Shobha catch on Amit's public display of affection with Chandni and look dejected, of course.





Insecurities Back home, soaking in the bathtub reddened with the *gulal*, Amit says he just got too drunk and went out of bounds. Elsewhere, Dr. Anand tells Chandni that he's now sure of how her past is affecting her, but he won't ask for details as he considers his wife a whole person, not a slave. He has a secret past as well, the memories of which were dredged up that day. Later, he tells her that the past should stay as a sweet memory, otherwise it destroys everyone.



Complexities Kulbhushan tells Shobha that he wants to take care of the situation, but she dissuades him, forcefully telling him not to interfere. Elsewhere, Amit complains to Vidyarthi who advises him to stay away from Chandni, as she's now married. Dr. Anand and Shobha meet for her doctor appointment and they allude tangentially to a fairy tale to rework their fate, "the queen should fight for her rights". In that story, Dr. Anand is the king who's responsible for the whole kingdom. Dr. Anand is clearly more depressed than Shobha.



Shobha and Chandni's (famous) showdown Shobha meets with Chandni and asks her to let Amit go. Chandni refuses. Shobha says Chandni will never be able to tear Amit away, and Chandni says her love will never lose.



Amit and Chandni decide to leave their spouses Chandni tells Amit that she can't live a divided life. Amit tells her not to feel guilty and she must decide if she can leave Dr. Anand right away. He has decided to leave Shobha. Chandni says that she can't live without him.

Amit leaves Amit packs up and tells Shobha that their relationship has lost its spark, become a burden and her suspicions are correct; he's leaving her for Chandni. He had forgotten his past after marrying her, but time chose to make them reunite again. He couldn't run from fate. He has no regrets except that he inadvertently hurt her. Shobha, almost crying, replies that this relationship is her life's support and love. She continues to praise him and tells him how she fell in love with him. The she runs away, sobbing. Amit leaves regardless, without saying goodbye.



Shobha's pain and resilience Shobha's mother questions her why she let Amit go so easily. He married her out of pity, but now he has to return of his own free will, Shobha replies. Amit and Chandni meet; both look unhappy. Shobha sings a Meera *bhajan* (devotional song composed by Meera, a 16th-century female Hindu mystic poet and devotee of Krishna) full of angst as Amit and Chandni drive away to snowy Shimla.

Amit and Chandni are socially ostracized Gurdip tells Amit that he should stick to his responsibility; he once became a god in everyone's eyes by marrying Shobha but cannot become a human now, otherwise he will be ostracized. He refuses to invite Amit and Chandni together for a family celebration, so Amit says they will go separately. Chandni asks Amit if he's rethinking his decision. At the celebration, the friend's mother asks about Chandni's husband and when she's getting pregnant. Amit sits stonily though the rituals and remembers his wedding when he has to do an *arati* ritual alone (it's usually done together by married couples).

Dr. Anand's plane crashes and Amit rescues him Shobha calls Amit and says that Dr. Anand's plane has crashed. Amit and Chandni rush back, driving at breakneck speed, then ride a helicopter to the crash site. Shobha and Kulbhushan also arrive at the crash site. There are big fires and booming explosions, completely beyond control. Amit wants to rush into the flames, but Shobha stops him, saying that she's pregnant with his child. If anything happens to him, there'll be no other Amit to stand

by her and hold her hand. He reassures her, saying it's his repentance, and runs into the inferno regardless. He recklessly runs into the burning plane and is electrocuted and catches on fire, but sees Dr. Anand inside and runs to him. Dr. Anand is still alive. Amit somehow drags him out. The rest of the plane explodes. Chandni and Dr. Anand reunite.

Amit and Shobha reunite Amit frantically looks for Shobha, who has been brought home in a serious condition. Amit tells her that he has returned after cutting all ties to his past. She replies that she always believed in him. The only truth now is that they are husband and wife. After recovery, he sings a romantic song with Shobha, the same song that Shekhar was singing at the beginning. The film ends with the missive, "Love is Faith and Faith is Forever".

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Amit

Amit, the hero of our film, is a deeply flawed and complex personality. With his brother, Chandni and applauding fans, he is witty and charming; but his more serious nature is seen in the choices he makes, such as marrying Shobha and rekindling his affair with Chandni.

Charming On the film's release, critics decried Bachchan's turn away from his "angry young man" persona to "romantic hero"- in fact, many blame the film's failure on Bachchan's failure to portray a romantic hero well. That said, he is witty and charming especially in the first part of the film, before Shekhar's death; for instance, at the dance club, he jokes with Shobha about the great difference in their heights, a running joke in Hindi filmgoer circles.

Dutiful For some reason, Amit considers his duty to marry Shobha to protect her honour and the honour of his own family, despite the fact that neither of them have extended families or relatives etc. who would make their lives miserable otherwise; the infamous "what will people say". Shobha only has a widowed mother and Shekhar and Amit are orphans, true to Chopra's style. Neither of them has involved social lives in their communities, either. So Shobha being an unwed mother wouldn't have mattered too much in the larger scheme of things. In any case, the pregnancy is ultimately lost, with neither of them being too emotionally distraught over it.

Philanderer After running into Chandni most unexpectedly, Amit doesn't hesitate at all to rekindle their relationship. He chases her again with the same passion that he had in their prior time together. But where he is emotionally available and vulnerable with Chandni, he (naturally) grows cold and distant from his wife Shobha, but takes great care initially to maintain appearances. Thus, it doesn't come as a surprise to the viewer when Amit decides to leave Shobha- what does come as a shock, in fact, is that he managed to get her pregnant during the same time frame as he was also intimate with Chandni. It's quite clear that his loyalties were divided, even though he pretends that is not the case. And of course it speaks volumes to his inflated ego that he knows both women will accept him back, no matter how much he transgresses (and this is a pervasive symptom in Indian men as well).

Repentant Just as Amit's sense of being a dutiful brother by marrying his pregnant to-be sister-in-law isn't psychologically or socially sound, so his repentance also feels somewhat hollow and falls flat. It also happens fairly quickly and seems to stem more out of sudden guilt (for cuckolding Dr. Anand) than anything else. In any case, once he does confess his repentance to Shobha at the climactic scene, at least he doesn't look back!

Chandni

Rekha was at the peak of her career in 1981, when *Silsila* was released. She brings the whole weight of her extensive experience to play Chandni and her on-screen chemistry with Bachchan is electrifying! She is an innocent and submissive young woman, who ends up being abandoned not once but twice.

Innocent From the beginning, Chandni is portrayed as a naive and innocent young woman. She does take some time to be swayed by Amit's lavish courtship, with voice recordings and roses etc., but once she falls in love, there is no looking back. Perhaps her pampered family life and the lack of wide social exposure kept her innocent and trusting nature intact.

Submissive Throughout the film, Chandni is extremely submissive to Amit's demands, even if they are unreasonable. For instance, after their reunion, she tearfully blames Amit for not having done well by her and chastises him. He apologises but says he has no excuses; then he tells her the truth about

Shobha and his duty and that he still loves her. Chandni rues their bad fate, “I hate you!” and cries and hugs him. She has a general air of helplessness and lack of agency in what happens to her, which adds to her submissive character.

Abandoned Chandni is abandoned not once but twice by Amit, even after he breaks her heart the first time with a very inconsiderate letter. Reading the letter, Chandni says that she has lost all faith in love now. She sings a sad song, “The blue sky has fallen asleep” as Amit and Shobha get married elsewhere. And at the climax, after Amit rescues Dr. Anand and rushes away looking for Shobha, we are not shown any parting conversation between them and it’s unclear if Chandni was ready, even then, to give up the affair.

Incomplete As a character, Chandni lacks the well-rounded development of Chopra’s prior heroines. For instance, we are shown little about her life and interests beyond her relationship with Amit. It does seem that she is a “cultured” lady, as she shows some interest in theatre and is a judge at a flower show, but that is all. She has no education or career that we hear about, though she is likely to have a college degree at the least. Chandni is perpetually stuck in a typical Indian middle-class rut where marriage, hopefully to a good man, would be the pinnacle of her life.

THEMES

Siblings*: Brotherhood* Though this film is squarely about romance, Shekhar’s small but unforgettable role as Amit's older brother again underscores Chopra’s fascination with the bond of brotherhood, especially as explored in its various facets by Sashi Kapoor and Amitabh Bachchan. Here again, they are foils to each other- Shekhar, the untamed extrovert who always has a joke and a loud laugh, versus the more introverted and poetic Amit, who is surprisingly witty and charming when he wants to be. Despite their personality clash, Shekhar and Amit are very close to each other emotionally and even have a private code of conduct, where they must do everything together, including bathing in the communal showers where they joke about not picking up the soap from the floor! Moreover, Shekhar here is like a father figure to Amit. As Amit tells Chandni after his death, Shekhar always sheltered him after their parents passed; with his loss, Amit has been truly orphaned.

Illustrative moment One of the funniest sequences in this (otherwise tension-ridden) film occurs when Shekhar, Amit and Shobha visit a dance club. Amit complains to Shobha that Shekhar drinks too much. Shekhar, completely drunk, tells Shobha that Amit is an alcoholic. Both the men get stupid drunk and Shekhar thinks he’s driving after forgetting to put the jeep in gear. Finally, Shobha, sitting between the two drunk men, points it out and they’re on the way, hilariously singing a bawdy song from their younger years, “*Neeche paan ka dukan/ Upar gori ka makaan*” (“Downstairs, a *paan**-shop/ Upstairs, my fair beloved’s home”). Back at Shekhar’s house, he gets sentimental about when he beat Amit up 15 years ago. They drunkenly argue and cry and reminisce about an old sweetheart who is now mired in humdrum domesticity. Amit cries and tells Shekhar never to leave him for anyone and Shekhar consoles him.

**Paan* is a betel-leaf wrap filled with various items like areca nut, slaked lime and spices, and chewed for its stimulant and narcotic effects. Paan-shops, which also sell cigarettes and other tobacco products, are a hub for the local youth and middle-aged men to lounge about, gossip and often, “eve-tease” and harass women who pass by.

Love*: Romance* The film starts off on an expected route- boy meets girl and they decide to get married, times two. Shekhar and Shobha are a picture-perfect couple, romancing in the beautiful valleys and gardens of Kashmir, making sweet promises (and love, off-screen) to each other. They are just about to tie the knot, with the blessings of Shobha’s widowed mother. Elsewhere, Shekhar's younger brother Amit meets the stunning belle Chandni at his friend's wedding and it’s love at first sight. Amit courts Chandni with regular bouquets of red roses, recordings in his sexy baritone voice and an invitation to his award-winning play performance, after which romance follows. Unbeknownst to Chandni however, her parents have arranged her marriage with someone else. But once Chandni confesses to her father about her relationship with Amit, he readily agrees to withdraw the arranged match and gives them her blessings.

But fate has something else in store for them. Eventually, they end up with different partners in marriage, and fairly quickly at that: Amit with Shobha and Chandni with Dr. Anand, who were already married by the time of Shobha’s miscarriage (so less than 7 or 8 months, at most). Insofar as Bollywood has carefully nurtured the idea that love and marriage go hand-in-hand- and this is especially pertinent in a society where arranged marriages remain the norm for a large majority-

Silsila almost forces “socially sanctioned” love between these married couples. Shobha, apparently attracted to Amit’s sometimes witty and sometimes morose personality, truly begins to fall in love with him in that very short span of time and declares that she would never willingly give him up. Chandni and Dr. Anand’s relationship is somewhat more distant and he looks a great deal older than her (there is a 16-year age gap between Rekha and Sanjeev Kumar). Dr. Anand is jovial, a deep thinker and liberal in his mindset towards women but Chandni is always awkward with him. Dr. Anand hints at some great romantic tragedy in his own past but *Silsila* leaves no scope for exploring that. Given these factors, the resolution Chopra offers feels rushed and emotionally unsatisfactory, not to mention extremely conservative.

Illustrative moment Chandni continues to get enamoured with Amit’s regular gifts of poetry recordings and blood-red roses. In a valley of flowers (and other exotic, romantic locations) they sing the superhit title song “*Dekha ek khwab toh yeh silsile hue*” (“I saw a vision that began this story”). They have multiple dates (mostly walking around in tree-lined streets at all times of day and night, hugging etc.). Their chemistry is breathtaking. They do everything together, from jogging to tennis and swimming and get very close.

Love*: Forbidden love* When Amit and Chandni meet again after Shobha's miscarriage, Amit woos Chandni again with words drawn from his play and the affair recommences. It did help that their separation couldn't have been more than a few months. They seem more mature for their separation, somehow. While many a Bollywood film has dealt with extramarital love, this was the first one to show the consummation of adultery. This is done very subtly in a single (and easily missed) superimposed image of Amit and Chandni in bed, with other images of their romancing. But this phase isn't all sunshine and roses; they have to be clandestine and spend time in their parked car or a hotel, which is hardly the most comfortable of accommodations. Suddenly, the very same things they were doing before their marriages takes on a sleazy turn. Added on is the guilt of deception that destroys the relationship from within. Divorce, the logical solution to their problem, is not mentioned even once.

Illustrative moment One of the best remembered songs from this film, not to mention 1970’s Bollywood, is the iconic romantic Holi song *Rang barse,* sung by Amitabh Bachchan himself in his characteristic baritone drawl. The song features both the couples during the celebration of the “festival of colours”, Holi, a setting that is famous both for wholesome “boy-meets-girl” match ups as well as unsavoury harassment of women by random and not-so-random and/or drunk men. Before the celebration, Amit asks Chandni if he could apply *gulal* (coloured powder) on her, and she consents. This becomes a rare moment of unfettered laughter after the beginning of their extramarital affair. During the celebration, Amit, continuously drinking *bhang* (intoxicating drink made from cannabis leaf paste), very noticeably favours Chandni during his performance of “*Rang barse bheege chunarwali*”, a cheeky son about sneakily cuckolding the husband (“*Colours shower down, drenching the belle in the veil..scattering jasmine flowers on the wedding bed, the girl’s lover lies down while the husband is tormented*” etc.). Amit and Chandni even kiss in public!! Dr. Anand and Shobha catch on Amit’s public display of affection with Chandni and look dejected, of course.

Marriage While some justification for it is given by the couple having been lovers before Amit sacrificed their relationship, the film explores the question: can adultery be romantic? The film portrays the decline of the extramarital relationship which collapses when the couple face social stigma and the guilt of deceiving their wedded partners. The innocent lovers become a sleazy couple, notably in the eyes of the state, embodied in the police officer Kulbhushan who also turns out to be Amit's brother-in-law; in front of Amit's friends (Vidyarthi, Gurdip); and in front of older people who should be respected (Gurdip's parents). The sadness and silent suffering of Shobha and Dr. Anand, who discuss the affair as a parable of the princess and the king also make the lovers look sleazy.

Illustrative moment After Amit tells Chandni that they cannot continue with their divided lives, and Chandni, ever the submissive lover, agrees with his decision. For no clear or obvious reason, they leave Delhi and drive to Shimla, where they had originally met at Amit’s friend, Gurdip’s wedding. But contrary to Amit’s expectations (and totally in line with the conservative Indian mindset), Gurdip tells Amit that he should stick to his responsibility; he once became a god in everyone's eyes by marrying Shobha but cannot become a human now, otherwise he will be ostracized. He refuses to invite Amit and Chandni together as a couple for his parents’ golden jubilee celebrations, so Amit says they will go separately. Chandni asks Amit if he’s rethinking his decision. At the celebration, they are physically separated and seated in different areas. Gurdip's mother asks about Chandni’s husband and when she’s getting pregnant. Amit sits stonily though the rituals and remembers his wedding when he has to do a ritual alone (it’s usually done together by married couples). This watershed moment finally brings

home the enormity of crushing social stigma they have to continue facing, if they choose to remain an adulterous couple.

Marriage: *Polygamy* If anything, the film highlights the pitfalls of non-consensual polygamy (rather than adultery). Clearly, Amit had no qualms in sleeping with both the women in his life in the same time frame, and both of them accept/ celebrate it! It's unclear if Chandni and Shobha were aware of this, but their conversation seems to indicate their implicit acceptance of the sexual side of things. Chandni and Dr. Anand are also shown getting intimate in one scene, but in the context of the Indian marriage (and pertinent laws, which until now has not criminalized marital rape), it would have been very difficult for Chandni to refuse her husband's sexual demands even if she wanted to. The last Chopra hero placed in this predicament was Sunil in *Daag,* who, notably, did not even touch his lawfully wedded wife, Chandni, in all the years they were married. Perhaps the only interesting idea to emerge from this befuddlement is that unlike Chopra's previous heroines who were enshrined as strong mother figures and as such were severed from their sexuality as lovers/ wives, Shobha here is a proper romantic heroine. She can fall in love more than once and get pregnant with multiple lovers- though of course, this "transgression" too, remains enveloped in the blanket of social acceptability that is marriage.

Illustrative moment Particularly reproachful and symbolic is Shobha's role as the archetypal Hindu wife, invoking absolute devotion to her husband via Meera's song of her devotion to Krishna. Perhaps this creates grounds for the forgiveness for Amit's philandering by linking it to Krishna's dalliance with the *gopi*s (milkmaid-devotees). We later come to realise that she is pregnant in this scene, but she does not reveal this until she fears Amit will risk his life and she will lose her second lover.

Marriage*: "Love is Faith and Faith is forever": Chopra's conservative approach* Notwithstanding Chopra's progressive attitude towards unwed and single mothers and abandoned wives, his films have always fostered a healthy respect for the institution of marriage; for instance, *Deewaar*'s Sumitra continues to religiously wear the signifier for marriage (*sindoor*) long after her husband had abandoned her and their two sons. In *Silsila* too, we see an early conservative example when Chandni's parents discuss her marriage plans and her father says, "a daughter belongs to another household, so she has to leave one day", a popular and oft-cited adage about daughters in India. To make one's commitment to the bourgeois nuclear family, one must come to love one's spouse in whatever way one can and one needs to let go of the past, to live in the present. In fact, that iconic (dream?) scene where Chandni and Shobha call their dibs to Amit, remains firmly etched in Bollywood audience's memory: Shobha meets with Chandni and asks her to let go of Amit. Chandni refuses. Shobha says Chandni will never be able to tear Amit away, and Chandni says her love will never lose. Critics have widely disparaged this sudden reversal; for instance, Javed Akhtar argued: "*Silsila* didn't flop because Amitabh played a romantic role. It failed because it had a weak script. After picking a bold theme on extramarital relationships, Yash Chopra develops cold feet, and the film becomes apologetic... probably because he wasn't convinced of the moral stand he himself had taken."

Illustrative moment The climax of the film revolves around this idea; Amit and Chandni realise that their loyalties lie with their wedded partners: Chandni because Dr. Anand's life is at risk; Amit because he finds his wife is pregnant. After Dr. Anand is safely rescued, Amit frantically looks for Shobha and tells her that he has returned after cutting all ties to his past. She replies that she always believed in him. The only truth now is that they are husband and wife. After recovery, he sings a romantic song with Shobha, the same song that Shekhar was singing at the beginning. The film ends with the missive, "Love is Faith and Faith is Forever". Once again, Chopra uses an unusual incident that precipitates a complete reversal, but it remains psychologically unconvincing.

Caring: S*acrifice* Amit, although under no real pressure, marries Shobha to preserve the "honour" of the family, and Shobha, in fact, suggests it initially, laced with a half-hearted claim of being inseparable from Shekhar even in death. Thus Amit sacrifices his deeply intense relationship with Chandni for what could only be called a "pregnancy trap". This act immediately distances Shobha from prior Chopra heroines like Shanti from *Trishul,* who unhesitatingly cuts ties with her ex-fiancé after she becomes pregnant with his child. Unfortunately, an accident causes Shobha to have a miscarriage- this, again, being the first instance of Chopra favouring the sacrifice of an unborn life to drive the plot forward. In any case, that miscarriage doesn't seem to have affected Shobha emotionally to any great degree; even though Dr. Anand advises Amit to take great care of his wife, we don't see any scenes of her mental distress over it, which seems peculiar and psychologically inconsistent with her character (and [women's] experience of miscarriage in general). Moving further

down the timeline, and after Amit leaves Shobha, she finds herself pregnant again and this time holds her tongue, putting her faith in the age-old adage, “if you love something, set it free”, up until Amit is about to risk his life. At that crucial moment, again, she tells Amit that she is now pregnant with his child, precipitating their final reunion.

Illustrative moment In the climactic scene at the airplane crash, there are frighteningly large fires and booming explosions, completely beyond control. Amit, having just arrived by helicopter, wants to rush into the flames to save Dr. Anand. But Shobha stops him, saying that she’s pregnant with his child. If anything happens to him, there’ll be no other Amit to stand by her and hold her hand. He reassures her, saying it’s his repentance, and runs into the inferno regardless. While it is understandable that Shobha wouldn’t want the person she loved to die, there is an obvious disconnect between priorities, revealing weakness of her mental fortitude- a man’s life versus the prospect of being a single mother- another selfish decision that she makes. It’s also unclear why Amit thinks that saving Dr. Anand at the very real risk of his own demise is “repentance”, when he was only too happy to cuckold him mere hours ago. Amit and Chandni do not meet or converse afterwards.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1) In light of the plot, why do you think Chopra named the film “Continuance”.

2) What is the role of duty and sacrifice in the film? Discuss with examples.

3) Discuss Dr. Anand as a character foil to Amit, with specific character traits. From today’s standpoint, whom would you prefer if you’re in Chandni’s shoes?

4) What is the most emotionally challenging aspect of the film to you?

5) Did you find the ending of the film psychologically convincing or not? Discuss.