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The essential Bollywood
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Introduction

While longstanding, scholarship on Indian cinema has seen a recent proliferation, one that suggests that scholars globally are taking film and media in India seriously. Two epistemic obstacles may have prevented scholarship from previously flourishing. The first is the hegemony of Western and Hollywood cinemas in media, film, and cultural studies. The second is the dismissal of popular film culture in Indian scholarship. With the rise of postcolonial and transnational scholarship, more global attention has focused on Bollywood and other Indian film cultures attempting to ‘provincialize’ Hollywood. Even scholarship in India which, at times, was dismissive of popular films as Technicolor fantasies catering to the masses, has undergone a revolution with the works of scholars such as Rosie Thomas, Ashis Nandy, Ravi Vasudevan, Ashish Rajadhyaksha, and Madhava Prasad in the last few decades. Now one of the largest film industries in the world with an audience that exceeds any other globally, Indian cinema and media have become significant areas of academic enquiry in India and abroad.

It is only since the mid-1980s that scholarly attention has been paid to these films as significant cultural texts. This reader collects key essays that introduce major paradigms of theorizing and analysing this significant cinema. ‘Bollywood’ – once a tongue-in-cheek term used by the English-language media in India – has become the dominant globally recognized term to refer to Bombay’s (Mumbai’s) prolific Hindi-Urdu language culture industry and cinema. Characterized by music and dance numbers, melodrama, lavish production and an emphasis on stars and spectacle, Bollywood films have met with box-office success and enthusiastic audiences both nationally within India and globally. This book provides a guide to the cultural, social and political significance of recent Hindi cinema, outlining the history and structure of the Bombay film industry, and its impact on global popular culture.

While various narratives exist for the origin and history of the term Bollywood, Madhava Prasad (2003), proposing an imperial history, argues that it should be traced back to the older term Tollywood used by an American producer referring to the Tollygunge area of Calcutta/Kolkata in the 1930s. Over time, the term
Bollywood has come to be used interchangeably with and replaced others such as Bombay/Mumbai cinema or popular Hindi cinema that marked films as regionally and linguistically specific. The use of the term Bollywood has increasingly been used to refer to the now globalized Mumbai’s Hindi film culture industry. Ashish Rajadhyaksha (see Reading 15) posits that Bollywood may refer to a mode of production, a way of producing culture within a national and global context that is inextricably linked to the Indian nation-state and the postcolonial economy of liberalization. Hence, the term itself is by no means ubiquitous or universal in its usage. Bollywood is now synonymous for most viewers outside of India, at least, with national Indian cinema. (While Indian filmmakers have produced films in over thirty languages, only the very largest audiences support major regional industries including Hindi, Tamil, Telegu, Bengali, and Malayalam.)

Recent arguments by stars, directors and scholars reveal the schisms in perspectives around the term. Its critics charge that it overshadows and erases the diversity of other regional cinemas within India, privileging one particular region and language over others; that it is a poor second cousin to Hollywood, marking commercial Indian film industry as a derivative and mimic of its Western counterpart; and that it refers to the increasing globalization and diasporization of the film industry and its attendant industries (e.g. fashion, music, advertising, performances and media) which are proving to be more profitable than the films themselves. Madhava Prasad (2003) asks us to consider why we use the term Bollywood and what it might mean to us:

Is it meant to suggest that the cinema is imitative and therefore deserves to be rechristened to highlight this derivativeness? Or is it in fact the opposite: an attempt to indicate a difference internal to the dominant idiom, a variation that is related to but distinct from the globally hegemonic Hollywood? Is it Indian cinema’s way of signifying its difference or is it (inter)national film journalism and scholarship’s way of reinscribing the difference that Indian cinema represents within an articulated model of global hegemony and resistance?

(Prasad 2003)

The name Bollywood, he suggests, begs a comparison. It implicitly demands that we set Hollywood the standard and place all other cinemas as derivative and secondary. Buried in the contention over the term is an epistemological question. Within much scholarship, Indian cinemas are immediately read within Eurocentric hermeneutics. Of course, it is not the name Bollywood alone that evokes these interpretative strategies and comparisons. Scholars writing on non-Western cinema, in general, have had to wrestle with Eurocentric frameworks that implicitly see Europe and North America, not simply as the sites of emergence of film, but as the sites from which all cinema development and progress must be measured and understood. Hence, non-Western cinemas have been evaluated in the shadow of European cinematic aesthetics, forms and epistemologies. Within these rubrics, popular Indian films, and especially Bollywood, are poor imitations of art, evincing a lack of social realism, and merely spectacles of music, fantastical settings,
melodrama, and glittery aesthetics. Though understood as always lagging and lacking, we may discover that Bollywood media and Indian cinemas may be and do something else entirely.

In the last few decades, scholars have reassessed these positions that dismiss popular culture and films and have advocated for new theoretical and methodological approaches to Indian cinemas. Some intellectual approaches to Indian cinema work with Western film studies but do not subsume Indian film studies into paradigms based on Hollywood production and forms. For example, Sumita Chakravarty (Reading 7) employs structuralist film theory to discuss how Hindi film interpollates a spectator into the nation through a communal mode of address. This reader features some of the most important scholarship in Indian film studies overturning previous paradigms and reframing central concerns. How do we work against readings of Hindi and other Indian cinemas that reproduce the West as the natural cradle and crucible of film as well as film and media studies? How do we work against several decades of discourses that have dismissed popular Hindi cinema as merely entertainment or time pass for the illiterate masses? How do we study this contemporary phenomenon that is Bollywood? How do we locate Bollywood within cinema and media studies? These questions resonate and repeat within the scholarship on Indian films, from early discussions which seek to contextually read Indian films as sites of pleasure and popularity to more recent contentions over the term Bollywood and its increasing transnationalism. We offer here an engagement with Bollywood that addresses and works around and through the issues that return repeatedly in studying Bollywood.

**Long before Bollywood there were Indian cinemas**

It would be easy to trace some seamless linear trajectory from *Raja Harishchandra* (1913) and *Alam Ara* (1931) to the Bollywood remake of *Sholay* (1975) as *Ram Gopal Verma Ki Aag* (2007). However, in creating such a seamless history, one must ask with what narrative would these films be linked; what use would we make of the films and other media that exist in archive; how would one narrate the fragments and gaps in that film archive; what would this historiography narrate that would neither support colonial nor national historiographies; how can we avoid a teleology of film and other media that evokes some culturalist explanation of cinema’s success in India using Bollywood as its exemplar; in other words, what does it mean to provide a history of film in India? Like historiographies of India, historiographies of Indian cinemas raise similar concerns and theoretical dilemmas. While providing some information to guide the reader about the emergence and development of film in India here, we seek to avoid creating such a historiography of film and strive to present a more critical understanding of the project of film historiography and its relationship to Bollywood.

General historiographical accounts of cinema in India often refer to the emergence of individual films, technological developments, directors/auteurs, studios and performers as evidence of Indian cinema’s and Bollywood’s history. This desire to use such materials and elements to create and justify a unified,
coherent, and traceable history suggests the need for a specifically national culture and cinema that is also inherently coherent. Most frequently, these histories would be written implicitly to mirror those of Western films going from silent to talkies, discussing auteurs and the studio mode of production, possibly ending in the current arena of global Hollywood. (While our discussion below encompasses several of these topics, it is not to trace a simple history, but to understand to examine a few key moments, developments, and disjunctures that are critical to the discussions within the reader’s essays.) Film histories struggling against such Eurocentrism, often endeavour to prove that their cinemas, like their nations, have a history that is traceable in some way. Other accounts of Indian film focus on the significant economic, political, social and legal processes and discourses that impact modes of production, distribution and reception, pointing out their imbrications with colonialism, nationalism and capitalism. In the discussion below, we provide a brief narration of some of the complex factors that are significant to the study and understanding of the emergence and rise of Bollywood as a culture industry.

Within colonial epistemologies, technologies, such as film, are always thought of as arriving late to India, and therefore, of having delayed histories. But within seven months of the Lumière Brothers introducing film to Paris in December 1895, it had arrived in Mumbai on its way to Australia in July 1896. (The exhibition in India was not unique and part of an almost simultaneous eruption globally including in Russia, South Africa, China, Europe and Australia.) As Barnouw and Krishnaswamy (1980) and others have described, exhibitions were immensely popular in Mumbai with repeated extensions of the shows. While early audiences tended to be predominantly British, it was not long before Indian viewers sought to exhibit, distribute and/or create their own films. Within that year, the first camera had been imported to India and documentary footage of a wrestling match in Mumbai was sent to London for processing by Bhatavdekar. Hence, Indian filmmaking began soon after the technology was introduced to the subcontinent in 1896. In these early years, many saw the moment as opportune and sought to capitalize on the possibilities offered by the entrance of this new medium. Many show people, moving from indoor theatres to outdoors in large tents and fields, began importing, making and touring with an ensemble of imported and domestic shorts making film more widely available. Within these early circuits of distribution and exhibition, these shows travelled far and wide not only in India, but also to other parts of South Asia, Southeast Asia and Africa. Of the several hundred silent films made during the early decades, very few actually survived. As Neepa Majumdar (2007) argues in her reading of three silent documentaries sponsored by the British colonial project, how we read the archived films can complicate rather than fortify the notion of Indian film.

Filmmakers in India did quickly deploy the medium for their own purposes – mimicking and absorbing other as well as producing their own visualities, auralities, and hapticities. It is clearly evident that Indian cinemas are rich in intertextuality as they make reference to and rework the styles, forms, aesthetics and/or semiotics of a wide variety of cultural forms including Parsi theatre, religious epics such as the Mahabharata, song and dance, oral performance and drama. Scholars
have argued strongly for analyses of cinema that look to Indian cultural forms and practices (such as the darsanic gaze for understanding spectatorship and rasa theories for understanding body, affect and aesthetics) that reflect grounded and historical understandings of the medium within the larger context of Indian cultural production.

Similarly, one might seek to reframe the charges of plagiarism that are lobbied against Bollywood’s borrowings from other cinemas (e.g. from Hollywood, Hong Kong, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, or Soviet cinemas) in its remakes of famous films such as *A Star is Born* as *Abhimaan* (Pride, 1973, dir. Hrishikesh Mukherjee) or the Korean film *Oldboy* as *Zinda* (Alive, 2006, dir. Sanjay Gupta). The use of early film for mytho-religious narratives is usually cited as evidence of the indigenization of the medium. *Pundalik* (Saint Pundalik, 1912, dir. P.R. Tipnis), was probably India’s first feature film that was religious and mythological in its content. Supposedly inspired by seeing *The Life of Christ*, Dhundiraj Govind Phalke (also known as Dadasaheb Phalke) is most credited with being a founder of Indian cinema and producing the first full feature length (over 3500 feet) mythological *Raja Harischandra* in 1913 for commercial release. The film starred all men as working within the growing film industry was not deemed respectable work for women. Catering to Indian audiences fluent with Hindu stories and mythologies, Phalke’s first and subsequent films were thought to have wooed and wowed audiences with its familiar narratives while simultaneously fostering new identificatory and gazing practices and formulating new genres. This kind of appropriation is not unique to Indian films (e.g. the spaghetti westerns of Sergei Leone). *Sholay* (Embers, 1975, dir. Ramesh Sippy), one of the most successful films in Indian film history, clearly borrows from sources as widespread as Sergei Leone, Akira Kurosawa, John Ford and Sam Peckinpah. This omnivorous and elastic appetite of Bollywood might be better understood as a strategy of accommodation, indigenization and hybridity as well as of a strong sense of cinephilia than simple copying. In the case of *Sholay*, the film produces a subgenre now known as the curry Western, a form that contributes to the multiple global remakings of the Western in general.

Lest one think that the only proper way to read Indian cinema is via copies of the West, Hindu epics, rasa theories, or narratives of tradition, we must emphasize that Indian cinema has been heavily invested in the production of modernity as well. As one can see in the example of the curry Western above, Indian cinema participates in a social and political economy that strongly emphasizes the location of the modern within Indian society. Hence, representations of and contestations over the modern girl, modern family, or the modern nation are not only common but also de rigueur. To cite another example, by the 1920s and 1930s, women had entered the silent film industry and had become part of the popular culture as starlets. The ‘modern girl’ was a particular onscreen and offscreen star persona that achieved major fandom through not only the films themselves but also attendant media and paraphernalia such as postcards, magazines, and pictures. These women, such as the famous Salochana, often had short hair, wore make-up and Western clothes, and were sexy, as well as racially and religiously ambiguous (Ramamurthy 2006: 200). Hence, the film and visual cultures became spaces
producing and linked to the desire for modernization within the context of a loose and expansive understanding of ‘India’. Ramamurthy argues that as the 1940s approached a different understanding and formation of ‘Indian’ became dominant and began to replace this earlier, perhaps more fluid moment. One may argue that these contestations over what constitutes Indian (in terms of religion, race, gender, region, etc.) have a longstanding history within film and public cultures.

Perhaps the greatest increase in demand for Indian films came with the arrival of sound. Silent films had the benefit of being portable in that they crossed linguistic borders fairly easily. The development of sound and talkies complicated the accessibility of the film. It also created the ability to localize film to its regional, cultural and vernacular audiences. Until the rise of the talkies and the subsequent rise in vernacular Indian language films, many of the films viewed during the silent period were primarily American in origin. Early Indian silent films were predominantly made in Mumbai and Kolkata, but also in places such as Nasik and Hyderabad, thus, perhaps creating the possibilities for regional cinemas to emerge in multiple locations. Thus, while we think of cinema as a national form, there is good reason to question this assumption and instead investigate how films become a national cinema.

Additionally, with the rise of sound and talkies, films made in various languages, often accompanied by extended musical soundtracks, became increasingly popular. Alam Ara (1931, dir. Ardeshir Irani), is usually credited with being India’s first sound film featuring seven songs. The significance of song as well as language has been critical to the popularity of much of Indian cinema and to the form of Hindi cinema itself. The development of Hindi cinema with its interruptions of song and dance sequences is cited as a critical feature distinguishing it from other cinemas (Gopalan 2002); it is often also cited as an impediment to serious cinema as well as the most significant marker of Bollywood and Indian cinema’s difference from other cinemas. Consequently, the film industry in Mumbai has been critically linked to the music industry as well. We return to the issues of music, genre, and relationship of media below.

The question of colonialism, nationalism, and the rise of cinema in India is not a simple one. Scholars such as Roy Armes have remarked that India is a unique case globally as it has the ‘only major film industry to emerge under colonialism’ (Armes 1987: 111). The significance of colonialism and the anticolonial nationalism to the development of film cannot be overstated. However, rather than frame colonial power as simply repressive, that is framing cinema censorship as repression, negation and erasure, reading through a framework in which colonial power is productive of and imbricated with Indian cinema, framing censorship as a productive tension between the colonial authorities and indigenous creative forces, is more fruitful (cf. Jaikumar 2006). Similarly, we would not want to propose that independence merely ushered in a golden age of cinema in which the medium, the nation-state and the masses were all aligned through the production and consumption of cinema which expressed and represented something inherently Indian. As our discussion of silent films of the 1930s indicates, it is possible to see the 1940s and the rise of the independence movement as actually producing a more narrow and rigid understanding of the category of India and Indian.
In general, the flourishing of film in India did not go unnoticed by colonial powers, which saw the potential of film to be an incendiary and dangerous medium for the independence movement or other insurgencies. The attempt to regulate and protect the technology and medium through legal codes produced multiple discourses and material consequences. Scholars of early film and legal history have commented that the colonial administration paternally saw the Indian viewer of films generally as illiterate and immature, therefore, in need of ‘protection’ around moral issues, namely race, religion, sexuality and politics. Hence, there were, at some time or another, limitations on the representations of the degradation of women or rape, torture of whites or blacks, white people drunk, uprisings, and the destruction of religious sites. This protection extended in several directions, attempting to prevent any anticolonial sentiments, offensive images of whites (especially women and interraciality) and offensive images of Indians. On one side, in order to preserve the superiority of the white colonial rulers, the authorities wanted to ensure that whites did not appear as buffoons or in degraded roles or that (successful) resistance to colonialism was not depicted. Anxieties about sexuality and race were more generally part of colonial anxiety about the peril of white women and interracial desire, in particular. As scholars have argued, these early censorship codes about race, gender and sexuality have had long-term repercussions on postcolonial cinema in India. As suggested above, the censorship extended beyond films made by Indian filmmakers. The prohibition against depictions of brown and black peoples that might offend Indian viewers and therefore further destabilize colonial powers was a critical part of the British censor code. Interestingly, it is British and American films that were the objects of anxiety and offensive images of Indians. On one side, in order to preserve the superiority of the white colonial rulers, the authorities wanted to ensure that whites did not appear as buffoons or in degraded roles or that (successful) resistance to colonialism was not depicted. Anxieties about sexuality and race were more generally part of colonial anxiety about the peril of white women and interracial desire, in particular. As scholars have argued, these early censorship codes about race, gender and sexuality have had long-term repercussions on postcolonial cinema in India. As suggested above, the censorship extended beyond films made by Indian filmmakers. The prohibition against depictions of brown and black peoples that might offend Indian viewers and therefore further destabilize colonial powers was a critical part of the British censor code. Interestingly, it is British and American films that were the objects of anxiety and the object of regulation, remark Bhownik (1995), Vasudev (1978) and Pendakur (2003). This indicates early on that Indian audiences were still consuming global productions, albeit marked along class and cultural capital lines (see Kaul 1998: 22–37; Jaikumar 2006: 41–64).

Studies have argued that the period of Indian cinema under British colonial rule, leading up to the talkies (post-1930s) and independence (post-1947) was one where we can witness the vexed relationship of the State to cinematic entertainment, the formation of the studio system, and the arrival of a Hindi-Urdu lingua franca which was to hold a hegemonic sway over the national cinema-going populace, representing Hindi cinema from Mumbai as ‘the’ cinema of India globally (Maitra 1995; Majumdar 1995; Kaul 1998; Jaikumar 2006). Citizenship and modernity through cinema’s colonial and postcolonial history is telling of a refracted and, at times, ad-hoc relationship between film producers, artistes, audiences and the State.

Only recently, in its hundred-year plus history, has Indian cinema been granted official industry status by the Indian government in 2001. Hitherto, the workings of the cinematic industry can best be characterized as a series of trades, sometimes partly organized through official agencies and at most times not. Under the colonial moment, cinema was an issue worth keeping an eye on not least because of the growth of nationalism as a movement in India and the increasing waning of colonial authority within the country, as well as overseas. However, its management was often at odds with policy recommendations or actual needs in
terms of harnessing a nascent industry. For instance, in 1927 the government of India (under the British Empire) set up the Cinematograph Committee to consider the perceived dangers of exhibiting too many Western films (i.e. American and British ones). Its recommendations went further than simply curtailing the number of imperial films for it claimed that the production of Indian films should be encouraged. To this effect, it went on to suggest measures that included the opening up of a new Department of Cinema; a new government film library to highlight the educational value of films; the building of a governmental film finance fund to aid producers with loans; and to launch a government plan to encourage the building of cinema halls (much needed at the time). The Committee also recommended the abolition of all import duty on raw film (a source of revenue for the State) in order to encourage the production of Indian films. The Committee was also in favour of a modified quota plan requiring Indian theatres, with some exceptions, to show a minimum percentage of Indian films. The colonial government ignored these recommendations of the Committee (Majumdar 1995: 298).

Censorship as a form of State control was also effective only up to a point under colonial authority. In an attempt to achieve a hegemonic balance between being in charge and appearing to be tolerant masters, the State was unable to foresee nor manage the pleasures that Indian audiences were gleaning from indigenously produced and directed films. Pre-independence films that were mythological and historical in scope and nature included villains and socio-political trials and tribulations which were read by audiences as a symptom of British foreign occupation (see The Peacock Screen, 1991); the films also included motifs and icons that were read as representative of the Congress Party and/or the independence movement (e.g. the use of the wheel in motion or the handloom from variations of the Indian national, political flag).

Even with independence in 1947, cinema was not fully fostered by the State. Cinema and its primary product, film, then, has been an ill-managed affair by the State until official industry status, where a momentum of change has begun (see below). Colonial and post-independence governments have held a relationship in terms of producing maximum taxes for themselves without procuring towards cinematic infrastructural support and development. Entertainment tax accrued from ticket sales and cinema exhibitions were implemented under colonial authority and gradually more than doubled by governments after independence. The imposition of high taxes on cinema exhibition was fuelled by a perception on the part of the State regarding cinema’s role as a producer of vice. Even in the successive five-year developmental plans after India’s independence in 1947, the State fostered a rudimentary affinity with cinema, barely managing to mention it seriously, if it all. Furthermore, the State’s attempts to discourage the dominance of film and film music were also ultimately unsuccessful. For a period of time that All India Radio (AIR) prohibited the broadcasting of film music, listeners sought out alternative channels such as Radio Ceylon that capitalized on these omissions.

Prasad (2000: 29–51) has noted how Indian film production has been operating as a capitalist vehicle without a State capitalist infrastructure supporting it, unlike in other industries. Film producers themselves were not without blame for the lack of professional and infrastructural development of Indian cinema. In
the run up to independence and after, discussions were held between Indian filmmakers and the State with a view of setting up official departments and agencies to oversee the running of cinema as a formally recognized industry with State intervention and controlled film production. The notion of control over almost every aspect of the production to distribution process made producers uncomfortable; not wanting to relinquish their autonomy in terms of filmmaking practices and, moreover, neither their freedom to accrue financial revenue for productions from various sources, including black money. As such a flexible and creative textual aesthetic form emerged (albeit one not wholly professionally organized), which allowed producers and directors to make Indian films by drawing from previous incarnations of popular cultural story-telling ranging from religious and mythic ideologies, the classical, folk and Parsi theatres that incorporated pre-modern and modern oral and visual cultures, to reworkings of Hollywood and other international cinematic referents and stories.

While a studio system emerged and existed from the 1920s to 1950s in India (although the full vertical integrated production, distribution and exhibition monopoly as in the classical Hollywood studio period was achieved by only a very few studios, see Reading 3 by Mishra and Reading 4 by Prasad), the post-independence period witnessed the rise of the independent producer who lured the actor away from the studio contract to emerge as an autonomous commodity in his or her own right as a star. This star phenomenon is incredibly significant and as Parama Roy (Reading 9) points out how intertextual Readings of the film text and star persona can account for extra-diegetic aspects of national popular culture and politics such as Hindutva and communalism. Roy focuses on Muslim actress Nargis, her performance as and in Mother India, and her relationship to highly visible Hindu figures ranging from her husband co-actor Sunil Dutt to former prime minister Indira Gandhi. As a star persona, Amitabh Bachchan’s popularity in India has been unmatched in the Indian film industry. Bachchan’s angry young man persona in cinema in the 1970s garnered him a national following. In 1982, while working on the film Coolie (1983, dir. Manmohan Desai), Bachchan sustained nearly fatal injuries; stories of fans praying for his health and offering to sacrifice or donate their own limbs in order to save him abounded in the media. Though Bachchan’s stardom suffered a great deal in the next decade, he was able to make a successful transition to television to revitalize his career and then return to films soon after; his son Abhishek also entered into acting and then married one of the premier stars of Bollywood, Aishwarya Rai. This establishing of family legacies has created dynasties within the film industry that continue the star system. This commercially driven star system, one where male actors continue to be paid more than their female counterparts, became cemented as a primary mode of operation through which Indian cinema, and Bollywood in particular, continues to conceive of films from inception through to post-production. The generic form within which these different yet related elements of the pre- and post-independence characteristics of popular Indian cinema congealed best was, perhaps, the Masala film.

Despite or perhaps because of these adverse circumstances in relationship to the State, cinema has flourished within India. This period after independence in
1947 until about 1961 has often nostalgically been referred to as the golden or classic age of Bombay cinema and the height of refining of the Masala film. During this period the films of stars such as Raj Kapoor and Nargis became household names with films such as Awaara (The Vagabond/Tramp, 1951, dir. Raj Kapoor) and Mother India (1957, dir. Mehboob Khan). The popularity of these films extended not only throughout various regions within India, but also through other parts of South Asia, the USSR, China, Africa, Fiji and Western Asia (or the Middle East). Hence while we speak of the globalization of the Indian film industry as a recent phenomenon, the internationalization of Indian films occurs much earlier through parts of the non-Western world. Additionally, Indian cinema received recognition from the West with the inclusion of Satyajit Ray’s films, especially the Apu trilogy and Pather Panchali (Song of the Little Road, 1955), within the category of world cinema, hence as a form of art cinema, in contrast to the more commercial and popular cinema associated with Bollywood and the Masala. As mentioned earlier, this distinction between serious art cinema and popular films for the masses deferred much scholarly discussion of Hindi cinema within cinema and media studies.

**Genre: a mixture of Masalas**

Different explanations exist for understanding the genres of Bollywood cinema. While some are dismissive, characterizing them as apolitical, cultural confusion or formulas, others mark them as specifically Indian referring to them as Masalas – as in a mixture of spices, or read through an understanding of the political economy of the postcolonial nation-state as All-Inclusives or even All-Action Films. All of these comment on the combination of elements that appear with the elastic and changing form. While many Western viewers, Bollywood suggests some static genre that characterizes all Indian film, genre classification is a tricky business. Working against the notion of some simplistic culturalist explanation that sees these all-encompassing forms as naturalized, scholars have painstakingly examined the genre from various angles (see amongst others, Someswar Bhowmik (1995) on genres in pre- and post-independence India, Madhava Prasad (2000) on the ideology of genres, and Lalitha Gopalan (2002) on action genres).

Earlier critiques dismissed popular films for their encompassing form – they were too unrealistic and far too escapist and melodramatic, not least in the song and dance omnibus form (see Reading 2 by Thomas and Reading 12 by Gopal and Sen). Often invested in social realist narratives, detractors of popular Hindi cinema have read the form as providing ‘mere entertainment’ or ‘timepass’, in contrast to the serious film of art, parallel or even middle cinema, foreclosing the possibility of social and political engagement within the Masala film form. The development of what has been called middle, art and parallel cinema is one that is relevant and overlapping with that of popular Hindi cinema. The boundaries between these categories would certainly have to be considered porous as the films of director Mani Ratnam, for example, might be seen as crossovers not only from Tamil cinema but also into both art and popular cinema.
Song and dance sequences within the Masala film have often been considered a key characteristic of the all-encompassing genre. While the inclusion of song and dance sequences is critical to defining the genre of Masala, it is also the element which viewers invested in social realism have difficulty accepting as it is seen as rather extraneous constructions of the ‘real’. Alternative understandings of the function of song and dance sequences (such as the spaces of fantasy and the imaginary disrupting the limitations of the narrative) have been offered by various scholars such as Gopal and Sen (see Reading 12). Moreover, that song and dance sequences enable and incorporate multiple forms of performance and viewing within the film, for example non-normative or transgressive sexualities within the context of courtesan dance scenes or same-sex desire or intimacy, has engendered conversations among scholars about the ways in which these previously ignored components of the film require much more serious attention.

The song and dance sequences have also been key to the production and consumption of the films themselves as well. Yash Chopra in the 1970s developed the trademark motif of setting these sequences in foreign locations, such as Switzerland. These settings, perhaps standing in for the place of Kashmir in the Indian imaginary or creating a tourist gaze of the foreign for Indian viewers’ consumption, also practically assisted directors in getting actors to make commitments to being physically present on location at their scheduled times. As film production itself is a fragmented and complicated process within the industry for many reasons, including the fact that actors often work on multiple films simultaneously, that films are made without scripts, and that actors sometimes do not appear according to shooting schedules, the opportunity to whisk away these prized commodities in foreign locations and therefore sequester them from other projects was a clever method of extracting labour as needed. The songs (which are usually sung not by the actors but rather by playback singers) are highly valuable commodities within their own right. The portability and mobility of song and dance sequences outside of the film itself into other forms of media (radio, video, television, digital media, live performance, etc.) is an important aspect of not only the success of the film, but also a critical aspect of the development of media and cultural technologies in South Asia that has quickly globalized.

Despite the variety of subgenres (including the historical, the family social, the gangster/underworld, and the courtesan), Bollywood is inevitably characterized primarily as a musical genre with a fixed form. Masala films are often the ones mistaken to represent all Bollywood films as formulaic or ‘the same’ in uninformed commentaries on Indian and popular Hindi cinema. This type of film was actually anticipated in the late 1960s by a type of B movie called Stunt Films which were rather like the American Zorro or Marvelman serials (Johnson 1987: 2) or like Hong Kong action films. Masala films are often packed with glamour and have been especially popular with the urban working class. They may be seen to represent the hopes and anxieties of the everyman and woman in a fast changing world. The angry young man series of films of the 1970s starring Amitabh Bachchan, such as Deewar (The Wall, 1975, dir. Yash Chopra) and Muqaddar Ka Sikandar (King of Destiny, 1978, dir. Prakash Mehra), are good examples of the Masala genre. Masala films draw on all aspects of Indian popular culture for their
formulae. In a loosely knit story one can see big city underworld crime, martial arts fights scenes with exaggerated hitting noises – ‘dishum, dishum’, car stunts, sexy cabaret, elaborate dance sequences with dozens of extras, comedy, romance and family melodrama. The appeal of these films is spectacle, melodrama and affect, and everything is designed to give maximum impact. The producers are challenged by the audience to continually think up something more spectacular, more imaginative, and sometimes even more bizarre, with which to assault the senses. At their worst Masala films are kitsch rubbish but at their best they are enthralling entertainment that has the audiences reeling with laughter and tears from one minute to the next.

During the 1990s, All-Action films suffered a blow themselves in terms of the decline in audience attendance and takings at the box office in India. As a case in point Salaakhen (Barrier, 1998, dir. Guddu Dhanoa) was produced at a cost of Rs 8 million but made a loss of Rs 3.5 million. Kabhi na Kabhi (Sooner or Later, 1998, dir. Priyadarshan) was made at Rs 5.5 million but made a staggering loss of Rs 4 million. For decades the Masala movie was thought to be a guaranteed success to recover production costs and boost profits. This is no longer the case as when romantic films like Hum Aapke Hain Koun? (Who Am I To You?) and Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (The Braveheart Will Take the Bride) were released in the mid-1990s, they inspired a feel-good factor which brought back urban middle-class cinema audiences in India and across the diaspora in large numbers; this was after the slump in attendance figures caused by competition from video and non-terrestrial media for middle-class viewers in particular. These films removed almost all the conflict and trauma from the narratives, instead focusing on the anxieties of achieving and fulfilling romantic couplings and the displays of ample consumption. Audiences began to slacken away from the tried and tested formulas of the Masala films. The period of the late 1990s, then, saw film teams associated with All-Action films as redirecting their energies and finances towards more rounded family entertainers, consisting of a more palatable blend of romance and consumption, and peppered with action only when required according to the script. The genre of the historical and anti-Pakistani films have continued to provide some space for action, along with the continued valorization of a certain brawny masculinity that is less central to the romance films. Male stars like Akshay Kumar, Sunil Shetty and Sunny Deol have also undergone a transformation in recent years from their young, hard men screen personas to believable heroes with more credible causes to defend (Dudrah 2006: 178–9).

The Masala film is perhaps the genre often banked on and hoped by filmmakers to make their fortunes at the box office due to its immediate recognition and perceived sale-ability with audiences. Even so, a number of other genres can be identified within Indian cinema, namely Mythologicals or Devotional films that recounted or reworked epic stories from the Ramayana or the Mahabharata as well as other religious traditions within the South Asian subcontinent. Historical Films were particularly pertinent in the pre-1947 independence period, where a focus on actual Indian historical figures was laden with messages about foreign British rule. Social Films or Topicals were often social-conscious evoking melodramas that engaged with the hopes, ideals and broken promises of
India as it emerged as a young independent nation, post-1947; many of these are considered to be part of parallel, art or middle cinema, as well as part of Bollywood. Muslim Socials are best considered as a subgenre of the social films; these were popular in the 1960s and inspired by stories from Urdu love poetry whose appeal crossed religious boundaries. Romantic films depict the universal boy-meets-girl love story and the numerous socio-cultural obstacles they face along the way. Non-resident Indian or NRI films are on the ascendency since the mid-1990s that represent the relationship of the overseas Indians to the homeland through the particular lens of Bollywood cinema. Horror or Supernatural Films consist of elements of Indian superstitions, folklores, and divine or semi-divine interventions against evil and demonic acts. Collectively, these several genres operate in a broad and connected sense. Rather than consign them as rigid generic definitions, these taxonomies are best considered as hybrid forms, sometimes borrowing from one another, sometimes quoting each other and frequently blending together. For example, it would not be odd for a *Masala* film to consist of elements from any or all of the genres above or vice versa (see Dudrah 2006: 175–80).

As official industry status is well underway post-1998, some filmmakers have become eager to identify and promote genres of commercial Hindi films through formats more familiar to international audiences of Hollywood genres. Heightened modes of publicity and easy viewer identification of films are increasingly becoming the norm in the contemporary moment as Bollywood cinema in particular ventures global; not only vying for traditional South Asian viewers but more so hoping for newer Western (i.e. non-diasporic South Asian) audiences too. This is now part and parcel of what Rajadhyaksha has termed the ‘Bollywoodization of the Indian cinema’ (see Reading 15). The various initiatives in process in the post-official industry climate also raise its fair share of socio-political possibilities and concerns.

**Official industry status**

May 1998 marked the inception of formal State acknowledgement and liberalization of Indian cinema as an industry. This was a long and drawn out process brokered by cinema industry stalwarts and State officials, led by then Information and Broadcasting Minister, Sushma Swaraj (Indian Express 1998). Three years later in 2001, Indian cinema was formally accorded industry status (MacGregor 2006). This has led to the possibilities for filmmakers to seek co-production possibilities from new sources of income both in and beyond India (see Dudrah 2006: 141–66). Until this time, the finance for the production of Bollywood films came from a number of sources, including production houses under the studio system present from the 1930s to the 1950s, independent producers and directors, business entrepreneurs attracted by the glamour of the entertainment industries, kith and kin networks from within the film industry, and even, as has been widely alleged, through money related to the criminal underworld (on the history of Bollywood’s lead up to official film industry status, see Ganti 2004: 43–52). The
formal liberalization of cinema since the late 1990s has allowed it to benefit from actual rewards in the form of lower production charges, tax benefits, and for filmmakers to accumulate production finance from banks and other corporate financial institutions, thereby according it an important and legitimate economic and symbolic status. Part of this move by the State can be understood within the context of wanting to consolidate India’s growth across all industry sectors as a potential global economic super power, heralded of late by many economists overseas as well as in the country itself. Within this framework, cinema then is to be supported and developed as a marker of Indian success in the international market place of goods, where Bollywood films compete with Hollywood ones at box offices around the world.

However, since the announcement of Bollywood as an official industry and its increasing liberalization, filmmakers have been split on whether financing from banks and other corporate institutions is a truly productive venture. Press reports from the national and international Indian media have indicated a discord at national conventions in India that have brought together filmmakers, corporate managers and trade and entertainment ministers to discuss the possible futures for financing in the cinema industry. Financial institutions consider filmmaking, and in particular popular Hindi filmmaking, as very risky business, given the number of high failure to low success ratios of films at the box office. Subsequently, funding from financial institutions comes with a number of conditions attached. Banks and financial institutions have asked the film industry to form a corporate culture akin to professional businesses and to prepare bankable scripts in order to get funding. The unorganized and high-risk nature of the film industry (where often no date is set for completion on most films before production commences and where fiscal losses are very high), has made corporate financiers nervous about releasing capital. Corporate financiers are more in favour of risk formula assessments in order to guard against potential losses to their investments and are seeking what they consider safe investment ventures, such as television channels and exhibition infrastructures like the growing number of multiplex cinemas across urban India which have predictable cash flows. Targeting NRI and/or urban audiences has become a consistent strategy by which producers seek to gain returns on the films either through the power of the dollar and pound or through the growing middle-class multiplex audience in India. Film merchandising and product endorsements (e.g. Pepsi and Coca Cola) along the lines of indirect advertising inherent in contemporary Hollywood cinema is also being encouraged as additional revenue for films, thereby allowing corporate financiers such as banks to be more comfortable about venturing into debt financing for filmmakers (Dudrah 2006: 149).

Such demands have met with mixed responses from the filmmakers themselves. On the one hand there is the view by some that the entertainment business is one of individuality and ad-hoc collaborative creativity. Filmmakers such as Shekhar Kapur and Yash Chopra have gone on record claiming that the corporatization of filmmaking will damage the creative culture of commercial filmmaking in India, and that to accord this cultural production as a higher risk than any other business is a false alarm. While on the other hand filmmakers such as Shyam
Benegal and Mani Ratnam favour funding by corporate institutions and banks. They believe that this will lead to new routes for funding in terms of co-production possibilities. It appears then that a debate is in motion among filmmakers, financiers and the state regarding whether to keep filmmaking as a flexible creative activity, or to manage that creativity alongside enterprise governance (Dudrah 2006: 150).

Furthermore, the Indian government, urged on by Indian film and media production companies, is seeking to formalize co-production treaties with other countries such as Britain, Italy and Canada. Indian producers are keen to market their films with crossover appeals among international audiences with an eye on maximizing their profits and this makes having co-production treaties with other countries all the more important. With co-production treaties companies can explore the advantage of hiring foreign talent and using their technology to make quality films at competitive costs and to market and distribute them globally. The move towards securing co-production treaties can be further understood in the context of the fast growing Indian media sectors, and amidst the expansion of South Asian consumer culture in recent years that has also caught the attention of global media companies and foreign investors to the South Asian subcontinent (Dudrah 2006: 150–1). Moreover, there have been Bollywood spin-offs in English made by Indian and diasporic filmmakers that are often partly financed by foreign capital and/or involve co-productions; these films (e.g. Kaizad Gustad’s Bombay Boys and Mira Nair’s Monsoon Wedding) may be considered part of Bollywood (Desai 2004).

Indian cinema has also ventured into diversifying its co-productions in the area of three-dimensional animation feature films. With the success of the animated film Hanuman (2005, dir. V.G. Samant and Milind Ukey), based on the stories of the Hindu Monkey God, which appealed to Indian and its diasporic audiences, a new market niche is being explored by leading Indian media production companies alongside traditional commercial films. Yashraj Films Ltd have teamed up with Walt Disney Studios on Roadside Romeo, a cartoon based Masala production starring a dog, due for release in the summer of 2008. Like its US animated feature counterparts, Roadside Romeo’s lead character voices will be provided by A-list Bollywood stars Saif Ali Khan and Kareena Kapoor and is being directed by junior actor turned director Jugal Hunsrja. In another example, Mumbai-based Graphiti Multimedia, led by Ram Mohan, is developing two animation films that are being produced by Turner, a Time Warner Company and by Anubhav Sinha, the director of the 2007 Bollywood film Cash (see Sapre 2007). In another related instance, reports have claimed that over a third of the digital and animation special effects in the Christmas 2007 fantasy blockbuster release, The Golden Compass (dir. Chris Weitz), co-produced by the USA and UK under the New Line Cinema banner, were realized by a team of 100-plus artists working at the Mumbai studios of special effects specialists, Rhythm & Hues (Parthasarathy 2008). Such skills, in use within the Indian media and entertainment industries, are evidently in demand globally. However, what remains to be seen is whether the possibilities listed above under the aegis of the post-industry status in Indian cinema, reap benefits that are equitable and sustainable for all those involved; or whether they increasingly
become part and parcel of a neo-liberal global media economy in which production and post-production skills and requirements are outsourced to countries like India for maximum profits alone, due to the cheaper rupee against the dollar.

Organization

In part, The Bollywood Reader examines the historical evolution of the scholarship on modern Hindi cinema in India, with an emphasis on understanding the interplay between cinema and colonialism, nationalism and globalization. More specifically, the readings attend to issues of capitalism, nationalism, Orientalism and modernity through their understandings of race, class, gender and sexuality, religion and politics as depicted in Indian popular films. In general, the readings focus on the film industry, cinema and Indian media in relation to current social and political issues, including the role of Bollywood in the public culture of India and its diasporas. In doing so, the readings seek to understand the relation between popular culture and the political economy and social imaginary of the nation-state. The readings also raise a variety of issues specific to the medium itself, including but not limited to the development of particular genres, narrative forms, and exegetic and diegetic elements including musical and dance numbers as well as questions of spectatorship, audience and institutional formations. In addition to including some of the existing key scholarship in the area, the reader has original and new contributions (by Sangita Gopal and Biswarup Sen, and Amit Rai) that have been written specifically for the publication. Where the symbol ‘[…]’ appears in the readings, this indicates where some text has been omitted.

The reader is divided into three main parts. Part 1 introduces canonical essays in theorizing the significance and meaning of Hindi cinema historically. These readings include early arguments forwarding the cinema as an object worthy of study and articulate different approaches to interpreting the significance of the films and understanding the development of the film industry. Part 2 looks at more recent (often postcolonial) scholarship that builds on the earlier theoretical paradigms forwarding more specific and nuanced frameworks focusing on significant absences in or reworkings of the earlier literature. Part 3 expands the discussion to concentrate on both the national and transnational aspects of Bollywood. It is here that we have chosen readings that explore the significance of specific and critical issues within cinema studies including an emphasis on gender, sexuality, religion, and the nation. It also interrogates how this cinema has created a global presence in a variety of locations including North America, the UK and West Africa.

References


