CHAPTER 2

Discovering the world of Bollywood: Genesis and Functioning.

Bollywood is no longer ghetto territory, but a world to be fancied—not a Hollywood rip-off but an equal; and a means of running around the cultural hegemony of Hollywood. -Deepa Gahlot

Studying Culture: The dynamics of popular Indian Cinema.

The term Bollywood came into being in the early 80’s possibly and very late 70’s in English language magazines covering popular Hindi cinema. Bollywood derives its origin from Bombay and Hollywood, Bombay being the major centre of production of Hindi films. When the term was first used and was thus retained till date, it was found rather amusing, as Prasad says: “What a strange name! But stranger still is the wide acceptance that has gained over the last few years, in a country where the dominant prevailing view is that Indian popular cinema is an entirely indigenous product.”

Bollywood thus is the informal name given to popular Mumbai film industry in India. Although some purists like Prasad deplore the name, it seems likely to persist with its own entry in the Oxford English Dictionary. Today it is not only the English language media which is probably the term’s original habitat but also the Indian language press, so also film scholars employ this term to talk about Indian popular cinema (Prasad, 2003).

The term Bollywood has crept into the vocabulary of the Anglophone culture slowly and steadily, almost without anybody noticing it. Just like certain processes of which we become aware only when they are almost over, we are right now witness to the naturalization of 'Bollywood' as the designation of what was previously known as Hindi cinema. Structural bilingualism has significance at a different level where the English speaking masses prevail in giving a name, an identity to Hindi popular cinema. When we lament this change, we tend to participate in the same fantasy of unchanging essence that sustains the new realities symptomatized by Bollywood. As a variant of international melodrama from the early capitalist era, Indian popular cinema did not undergo formal transformations comparable to those that signaled the advent of realism, as an aesthetic of immanence cut off from the pre-modern sources of symbolic meaning. Thus it would be a mistake to regard the thematic elements of Indian popular cinema as reflecting the social realities of their times. Most of the thematic elements are variants of the ones popularized by stage melodrama in 19th century Europe. One needs to attend to the changes at the formal level in order to
grasp their relationship to the reality they inhabit. At this level Hindi films do get into their periodic shifts and modifications relating to their forms.

Bollywood then is interesting to investigate, as the symptom of such a formal transformation, in understanding not only as a dimension of textuality, but also in a larger sense as the set of relations between the elements internal to the text as well as those which constitute it's habitat; it's audiences, it's economic structure, it's ideological matrix etc. Approached from this point of view, Bollywood does provide us pivotal insights into the changing modalities of Indian national identity in a globalizing world. With these aspects in view Bollywood also signals the advent of a certain kind of reflexivity, becoming a cinema for itself as it were, recognizing its own unique status in the world, the contrastive pleasures and values it represents vis-a-vis Hollywood. This reflexivity is as much a form of self-awareness as it is a know-how that enables the Hindi film to reproduce itself for a market that demands it's perpetuation as a source of cultural identity.

*They 're always such fun... Indian movies are culturally rich. I know they're often criticized for being just song-and-dance, but I know that's not all there is to them. I've seen some significant movies on deeper themes. And I know that Bollywood films have a very large audience, not just in India but around the world. I think it's the simplicity with which they tell their stories that makes Indian movies special.*

*George Lucas, American filmmaker.*

In some recent releases one gets a distinct feeling that the intelligences involved in their production has brought about the Bollywood theory of songs in films, rather than spontaneously making films with songs which might have been the situation in earlier times. The desire for Bollywood is thus a desire for the reproduction of the difference that it represents on a world platform, which the industry itself, in its current reflexive moment, is responding to. It is this reflexivity and the demand that can be said to constitute the very substance that the new NRI film is all about. There are other dynamics at work, which are invested in transforming the Indian cinema scene, of getting to shed the old formats and establishing new logics of cultural production. And though, Bollywood despite this ongoing trend does not commit itself to any restrictive meaning, people have unanimously accepted the moniker which reveals the scope of Bollywood and the fantasy that it embodies.

Nevertheless it was this thought, which was employed to sum up popular perception of what Hindi films represent, melodramatic, loud
glamorous kitsch and frivolous. As a consequence many in the Hindi film industry found it patronizing, because it suggested that Hindi films were sort of, a second-hand Hollywood. It was also perceived that most Hindi cinema was a copy of or 'inspired' by Hollywood flicks. Despite all this it has found wide acceptance probably because of its habitat in the English language media and also because this is why it makes it different- its energy, colour, heightened emotions and its use of music, dance and its peculiar narrative style. Something, which all of us expect it to be. Every Indian across the globe has in a way succumbed to its emotions. "Long before my initiation into the rituals of the big screen Hollywood style, I lost my 'blockbuster' virginity to Bollywood in a British auditorium at an impressionably young age, since then viewing Hindi movies became a cultural extravaganza which revolved around twin lynchpins in an Indian wheel of existence."

"On an average 750-800 films are produced and distributed every year," compared with about 250 produced by Hollywood annually (Plate, 2002) that is more than two per day, and shown to nearly 15 million people everyday in 13,000 cinemas all over India, some that are little more than traveling tents pitched in rural fields. Many of these films are 'the stuff dreams are made of' with their purveyor sans pareil of the song and dance extravaganza in which music blends with melodrama, and truth and justice triumph before the closing credits. Mahmood Jamal's charming documentary on Indian popular cinema, and the official report, Mass Media in India 1992, compiled by India's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, "both tell us that on an average day, India releases more than two and a half feature films, and sees some 15 million people throng the country's 13,002 cinema halls."

Writing in 1968, Chidananda Das Gupta criticized the commercial film industry of irrationality, of fantasy wrapped up in a package of spectacular song-and-dance performance. He is one among many writers who have long lamented the apparent decline in Indian cinema. "If India's course today is still being guided by Tagore--Nehru dream of an East-West synthesis, the all India film actively prevents the filtering down of that dream from the advanced middle class to the wider base of the population. It is thus a conformist, reactionary film, out to prevent social revolution rather than to encourage it."

Noting the sharp divide apparent between Indian cinema and its more popular cousin, Das Gupta predicted the eventual demise of "quality" film. "For Indian audiences Hindi popular film remains the first choice, enjoyed by audiences throughout Asia, the Middle East and Africa, the "Hindi language film sometimes referred to as the All India film, takes the lion's share of the market, many regional films are also released simultaneously, (e.g. Telugu,
Tamil, Malayalam, Bengali) because Hindi is widely understood throughout the sub-continent (particularly the northern region) and also because the genre usually draws elements from a broad spectrum of cultural sources." According to Ashis Nandy, Bollywood film has been shaped by the need to appeal to an incredibly diverse audience: "An average Bombay film has to be, to the extent possible everything to everyone. It has to cut across the myriad ethnicities and lifestyles of India and even of the world that impinges on India. The popular film is low brow, modernizing India in all its complexity, sophistry, naivété and vulgarity." 

The Hindi film is thus the holistic antidote to the anxieties of a modernizing society pulled up by the forces of language, religious fundamentalism and ethnicity. One is tempted to see the apparent style as an encapsulation of contradictions, rooted in native sensibility yet greedy to all of us everywhere. A morality fable sold to us as entertainment through its characters with an overemphasis on enduring sentiments and moral piety, it is a force to reckon with. In his satirical novel Show Business Shashi Tharoor lampoons the Indian film industry for its superficiality. He says that Bollywood film viewer "dream with their eyes open." But fantasy is something that all of us have passports to, with free entries. Yet Dom Moraes laments that "the bulk of people are deeply influenced by the films they have (seen)... they believe in these dreams more uncritically than any other audience in the world. To forget the squalid reality of his own life, a poor man will visit the cinema every day."

The Bombay cinema industry is the prolific dream machine industry. Bombay is "that super-epic motion picture of a city, a microcosm of India, is the teeming film capital of the country." Bollywood is increasingly being viewed as a reflection of India's diverse and vibrant culture. Says writer Lavina Melwani: "From the 'wah-wahs!' (applause) of the front-benchers, our beloved, but much maligned, Hindi cinema has gone on to being feted around the world and included in the Oscar talk." The increasing presence of Indian cinema in film festivals across the world, including the prestigious Cannes festival, has also led to educational institutions dissecting Bollywood and pondering on the effects of this "powerful medium" on human beings. "Indian audiences are used to treating the indigenous film—whether in Hindi or in any regional language, the popular film's form remains the same—as an acquired taste peculiar to Indian culture, a 'vice' to be admitted to sheepishly, something to be slightly ashamed of, like paan (betel nut) stains on the teeth and coconut oil in the hair.
Inspite of a comfortably receptive overseas market, the Hindi film industry was smugly content with the vast audiences it had at its command within the Subcontinent.¹ So unlike Hollywood, Indian filmmakers did not feel the need to expand internationally beyond a few known and fairly lucrative territories that went under the omnibus label of "Overseas". "A clear example of ghar ki murgi daal barabar—a piquant Hindi saying which means that people often ignore what is right under their noses. In this case, a unique product and an eminently exportable commodity."¹⁵ Despite little or no coverage from mainstream Western media, limited-release Hindi films can be found shooting up the US Top 20 and UK Top 10 box office charts. In fact, it is being said that Bollywood movies are now grossing more money in Britain than British films. For outside of its massive Asian fan base, Bollywood has always been barely acknowledged. However, as its popularity continues to skyrocket, this is now finally starting to change. Bollywood is certainly getting respect, an entry in the Oxford dictionary being one such indicator. Today, Bollywood is of great interest to sociologists and anthropologists, says Lavina.

At Stanford, it is possible to take a course - 'Bollywood and Beyond: South Asian Histories and Cultures through Popular Film'. As the syllabus states, Indian cinema has been an important site for the articulation of ideas about nation, class, caste, gender and sexuality, community, and the diaspora. Bollywood seems to be turning into fodder for academic researchers. Historically Bollywood movies have had limited audiences in countries outside India, but in the last two decades as a consequence of globalization, revolutions in ICT and significant increase in the size of the Indian diaspora, filmmakers in Bollywood have been making films keeping the diasporic audiences in mind. With the increasing migration of people across the globe and the parallel revolutions in information and communication technology, attracting niche audiences in the diaspora has become economically and technologically viable for media organizations in the homeland, such as India, China, Mexico, and Arab countries. Various media outlets have to some extent reversed the flow of information that was traditionally from the West to the East. And in this counter flow of media products, movies constitute a significant component, especially from India and China. To tap this growing global market, Indian filmmakers, from the Bollywood film industry are reaching out to the diaspora from the sub-continent (Desai, 2003, 2004; Dudrah, 2002a, 2002b; Gillespie & Cheesman, 2002; Kaur, 2002; Rajadhyaksha, 2003). This reversal of mass media flow has its own political-economic and cultural implications from the perspective of globalization theories. The success of Indian movies at the global level since the late 1990s has attracted much scholarly attention (Desai, 2004; Ganti, 2004, Kaur, 2002; Rajadhyaksha, 2003).
For Indian immigrants living across the globe, movies from India are an essential part of their popular culture. In a feature story on Bollywood in the February 2005 issue *National Geographic*, Suketu Mehta quotes, a CEO of a film production house saying, "For the diaspora the only connection with India is Hindi films. Hindi film is India for them." As Ziauddin Sardar argues, that Hindi films through their constant reiteration of narratives established the diaspora's social and intellectual priorities. "For us, Indian cinema was just that: Indian in a true multicultural sense. There were no divisions here between 'Muslims', 'Hindus', 'Sikhs', or 'Pakistanis' and 'Indians'- all of us identified with the characters and found meaning in the narratives. The films testified to the fact that all were culturally and socially one. We saw them as a universal symbol of our subcontinental identity; a lifeline for the cultural survival of the Asian community. They brought a little bit of 'home', of what my parents had left behind in Pakistan, to us here in Britain and thus provided a sense of belonging not offered by British society. But more than that, they also conveyed the problems of the society we had left behind." Scholars have argued that Indian popular movies are one of the most significant and visible components of Indian popular culture both at home and in the diaspora (Basham, 1975; Desai, 2004; Pendakur, 2003; Prasad, 1998). Indian movies epitomize what Hannerz (1997) and Lash & Urry (1994) have described as the cultural “flow” of images across the globe, a characterizing feature of globalization, albeit in a direction counter to the normative west to east media flows.

It can be argued that people of Indian origin in the diaspora, living in different countries, share similarity of experiences while watching Indian movies, which thus contributes to the construction of a global “public culture” (Appadurai and Breckenridge, 1989; Desai, 2004) and an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991). Here, it must be noted that the diaspora shares this similarity of experience also with the Indians in the homeland, as these movies are primarily made for home audiences. "This interest abroad has perhaps coincided with the emergence of a strong Asian subculture in the West, which, as usual, has exported our own Indianness back to us, apparent in the way Hindi cinema has caught on with the hip, urban teen set who earlier used to think that the Hindi masala movie was infra dig, only meant for lumpens and bored housewives. Like the dominance of Black culture some years ago, it is the turn of Indian/South Asian culture now—Indian food, yoga, ayurveda, spirituality, are all in vogue. "There’s bhangra rap in the discos, salwar kameez and saris being accepted as haute couture, henna tattoos as fashion; Madonna singing shlokas and Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan composing..."
for major Hollywood films. Now, Indian films are shown regularly on television all over the world to a multiplying flock of multi-cultural audiences, and not just on ethnic channels."\(^{18}\)

"As Bollywood goes to Hollywood, some American movies are heading more toward the Bollywood style," said Kiran Ramchandran, an India-born screenwriter and director who is based in Los Angeles. "People are borrowing from each other."\(^{19}\)

Bollywood movies constitute an element of public culture for the Indian diaspora and to some extent by the diaspora from the Indian sub-continent (Dudrah, 2002b).

Madhava Prasad (1998) in his seminal work, *Ideology of Hindi Cinema* had taken a national culture approach to Hindi movies. In order to understand the construction of identity in Bollywood movies, its ideological underpinnings need to be examined. Movies have to be studied with respect to the relationship between cinema and cultures in which they are produced and consumed, the text and the context, and the ideology that permeate conditions of production and consumption. In an entire issue of *Screen*, vol. 4, 1978, devoted to the cinematic representation and negotiation of ideology, politics, and economics, MacCabe (1978) stated that the analysis should identify the ideological practices embedded in the text. He argued that *cinema* represents reality as seen through the prism of ideology. Some scholars argued that films are the product of specific economic system and the product of the ideology of the economic system that produces and sells it (Comolli and Narboni, 2004).

Bollywood is similarly an eclectic mix of globalization as represented by the flows and global network capitalism, and traditional culture. Prasad through his analysis of Indian movies showed that this mix of ideologies was represented in the characterization of the lead actors and the narrative structure of Hindi movies. Hindi movies, as stated by Prasad (1998), were woven around the idea of feudal family romance, patriarchy, realism and melodrama. He reported that there was evidence that Hindi movies had bought in the socialist ideology and underplayed consumerism and idealized scarcity and experimented with social justice. It is not a co-incidence that the 1990s also witnessed the rise of Bollywood movies at an unprecedented scale among the Indian diaspora (Gokulsing, 2004; Kabir, 2001; Pendakur, 2003). From an active audiences (spectators) perspective, the consumer can take part in this negotiation thus socially construct his/her own identity in response to the narrative and images (Srinivas, 2002).
That Bollywood is making movies keeping the diaspora in view is evident. Mehta (2005) quotes Aditya Chopra, an Indian filmmaker, saying that "they have to make films keeping both the diasporic and home audiences in view." These popular Indian movies also have to cater to the audiences at home, the majority of who are far removed from the discourse of globalization. Filmmakers have churned out traditional values and symbols of refusal, simultaneously producing a counter discourse of globalization in the form and content while exploiting the market as a result of global network capitalism. Lowe (2001) writes that globalization is a re-invention and adaptation of neocapitalism.

Bollywood has become an international brand name, evoking the gaudy, gyrating world of Indian entertainment industry. But what are its main draws? Cheap escapism, masala (spice) for the masses, exported as exotic kitsch to others, a canvas in which profound psychic and political conflicts of a new post-colonial notion are screened; or it's highly stylized renditions of universal predicaments. For long there seemed to be no logical answer to this. A precociously magisterial Satyajit Ray, in his 1948 diagnostic manifesto asked, "What is wrong with Indian films?" He listed his complaints against commercial Hindi cinema as, starting a production without adequate planning, sometimes even shooting without a script; a penchant for convolutions of plot and counter-plot rather than the strong, simple unidirectional narrative; the practice of sandwiching musicals numbers in the most unlyrical situations; the habit of shooting indoors in a country which is all landscape—all these stand in the way of evolution of a distinctive style. It is a sign of the rise to prominence of the popular Hindi film that Ray now seems (one hopes only temporarily) out of fashion. His understated, intimate, socially realistic dramas are the antithesis of the lavish, flamboyant and visually spectacular style of the Bombay/Mumbai film industry. Ray’s place in Indian cinema history, indeed, is comparable to Akira Kurosawa’s in Japan: the filmmaker who first brought their national cinema to critical prominence in the West was criticised in their homeland for their supposed pandering to 'western' traits, in Ray’s case the liberal, humanistic outlook associated with the European art film movement of the post-war period.

There are distinct Indian and western perspectives on Indian cinema. For Indian scholars, the history of their cinema has tended to be written in terms of its representation of what Rajadhyaksha has termed ‘the biography of the nation-state’. Their focus tends to be on the period following Independence in 1947, with the 1950s being the key historical period when a national film culture was forged through the rise of the Hindi social melodrama, most famously exemplified by Mehboob Khan’s Mother India (1957). It was Ray’s
collaborator Chidananda Das Gupta who coined the term ‘All-India Film’ to describe the mainstream Hindi film industry that achieved both economic and cultural hegemony across the Indian subcontinent. When attention is given to the pre-Independence period, it tends to be to claim filmmakers (such as the early pioneer Dadasaheb Phalke) as proto-nationalists.

“The motion picture, with its fantastic synthesis of Hollywood, Indian folk performance traditions, music, mythology, and linguistic variety, has become a major cultural tradition, no less important than the murals of Ajanta, Padmanabhapuram, or the sculptural friezes of Sanchi, Konark or Mahabalipuram”

Ram Rahman, artist and curator.22

Call it Bombay cinema, Indian Popular cinema or Bollywood, it is a gargantuan organism, proliferating, seducing and marking its territory worldwide. In the galaxy of global cinema Hindi films outshine everything but Hollywood in scope and extravagance. In India, Bollywood dominates television, politics, and public life. Hindi film stars are the biggest in the world, and hold sway over the imaginations of millions of devotees, spawning hundreds of ‘filmi’ gossip magazines. For Western audiences the attraction of Hindi cinema is not necessarily the sparkling stars, so much as the lavish combination of so many different elements often lacking in Western cinema these days, executed with energy, vitality, joy, and infinite inventiveness. The films flaunt an extravagant heart and soul, which reflects the passion of both filmmakers, and of Indian culture itself. This unique and addictive art form has much to offer western audiences bored with one-dimensional storytelling. The cream of Hindi cinema offers all in one: exquisite art direction, extraordinary sets and costumes, gorgeous film stars who can sing and dance as well as emote bucketful of tears and also tell stories that elevate soap opera to mythological dimensions. The influence of the Bollywood aesthetic has global reach - from French photographers Pierre et Gilles to the fashion for sequined tops, hennaed hands and bindi bright foreheads, it has certainly managed to paint the image of the happy Indian woman, beautiful in her costumes and graceful in disgrace.

The Historical Beginnings of Indian Cinema

The moving image is the medium of mass culture and the most important and universal art form of the twentieth century. More than any other art form, it has the power to entertain, to educate, to reflect and to shape our sense of who we are and our understanding of the world in which we live. The
After the Lumieres first exhibited their cinematographie in Paris, India became the target of their first site of cultural conquest with their first screening on July 7th, 1896. An agent who had brought equipment and films from France first showed his moving pictures in Bombay. This day marked the beginning of a glorious journey in the social and cultural history of India. The day’s program started with the film, Entry of Cinematographe, introducing the new medium, followed by other films such as Arrival of a Train, The Sea Bath, A Demolition, Workers Leaving the Factory, and Ladies and Soldiers on Wheels. Purchasing their first cameras, Indian photographers started filming shorts, which were shown in tents, playgrounds, and public halls in Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras. “Among them was Harishchandra S. Bhatvadekar, known as Save Dada, who shot India’s first motion picture in 1896- a wrestling match- with a Lumiere movie camera.” Others soon followed suit and the moneyed were soon wowed by this discovery, hiring local importers to screen shorts from foreign countries for their personal functions and ceremonies. In Calcutta, Hiralal Sen photographed scenes from some of the plays at the Classic Theatre. Such films were shown as added attractions after the stage performances or taken to distant venue where the stage performers could not reach.

The possibility of reaching a large audience through recorded images, which could be projected several times through mechanical gadgets, caught the fancy of people in the performing arts and the stage and entertainment business. The first decade of the 20th century saw live and recorded performances being clubbed together in the same programme. In 1900, an enterprising Muslim electrical engineer, F.B. Thanawala shot local scenes and called it Splendid New Views of Bombay. The first indigenously produced feature was R.G Torney’s Pundalik, based on the legend of a famous Maharastrian saint and released on May 18, 1912, at the Coronation Cinematograph in Bombay. While most people credit D.G. Phalke as the founding father of Indian cinema, film historian Firoz Rangoonwala contends:

It is obvious that Pundalik being based on a story, specially enacted for the camera by actors made up for their roles and taking up half of the bill of fare was a feature film in every sense and has, therefore, to be acknowledged as India’s first picture, preceding D.G. Phalke’s Harishchandra exactly by a year. It also means that Indians saw their own first feature film earlier than the Americans, who, according to the noted film historian Arthur Knight, saw the France-made Queen Elizabeth as their feature film only on July 12, 1912. The only limitation of Pundalik was that it was shot by an English cameraman and
was clubbed together with a foreign story film, whereas Phalke's effort was completely indigenous.24

Therefore (3700 feet long) Dadasaheb Phalke's, film called Raja Harishchandra was released in 1923. Based on a story from the Mahabharata, it was a stirring film concerned with honour, sacrifice and deeds of courage. From then onwards several 'mythologicals' stormed the screens. Phalke's efforts were dogged by financial difficulties and lack of adequate technical support for his ventures. Nevertheless, the grand old man of Indian cinema as he is fondly called managed to produce a hundred feature films, of which unfortunately only a few survive. What remains of the footage is striking for its experimentation, technical skill, and fine camera work. For instance, as Chakravarty writes, "in Phalke's Lanka Dahan (The Burning Of Lanka, 1917), which is a significant episode from the Ramayana, the god-monkey Hanuman devastates the golden city with his ignited tail."25 Producer- director J.B.H. Wadia calls the film a minor masterpiece of it's time, saying that the "spectacle of Hanuman's figure becoming progressively diminutive as he flew higher and higher in the clouds and the burning of the city of Lanka in tabletop photography were simply awe-inspiring."26

Significant is the turn of Indian cinema to the genre of the mythological as a form of inscription and putting itself onto the map of world cinema through it. A genre, which was ‘feminized’ as Chakravarty puts, appealing mostly to women. A technological wizard, who saw himself as folk figure nevertheless negotiated for Indian cinema, an alternative feminized space carved out of the dominant semantic Western technology as colonial imposition and extended the mechanical power of the cinema to duplicate itself (Chakravarty, 1998). His mythologies were a bold declonizing gesture that returned meaning to the feminine realm. In a spirit of “raiding” that has become a venerable tradition in the Bombay film industry, this ‘father figure’, ascribed his tenacity and his business success to his wife. Other producers followed Phalke’s example and by 1918, “the semblance of an industry came into being.”27 What make Phalke’s films interesting are the ideas of disguise, masquerade, concealment and tricks associated with the cinema of this period. In one of Phalke’s articles in ‘Navyug’, he introduces his comments on film acting through the metaphor of the curtain/screen. Infact what he said decades ago reflects what cinema till date holds for the masses.

Phalke devises the following exchange between his wife’s persona and his own:

*Wife*: This curtain has created duality everywhere. There is a curtain for women. There are double-dealings in thoughts and conduct in case of men, in politics, patriotism, at home and outside. In short this curtain has helped to
show one appearance from the inside and the other from the outside and also to conceal mysterious things, to cover up secrets, and to prevent them from being disclosed, and to conceal filthy things from people's vision. Human nature is also becoming more and more skilled in concealing vile. I am fed up with all this. The more curtains you have the greater the absence of straight dealings and innocence...

Phalke: Let nobody blame this art of motion pictures which has firmly established itself by entertaining learned men continuously for twenty-four years.

Wife: But don't you require a screen even for your motion pictures?

Phalke: No, this is your misconception. What you call a screen or curtain in cinema is the substratum, which holds my visual illusion. Should a water surface be considered a curtain because it is reflected? We see our own reflection in the mirror-can we, therefore, call it a curtain or a screen...although the dramatic art on the screen is still young; it has conquered the world by its charming and child-like purity of gestures.28

Phalke kept up the phenomenal success of Raja Harishchandra with a series of mythological films that followed - Mohini Bhasmasur (1914), significant for introducing the first woman to act before the cameras - Kamalabai Gokhale. The significant titles that followed include - Satyawan Savitri (1914), Satyavadi Raja Harischandra (1917), Lanka Dahan (1917), Shri Krishna Janma (1918) and Kalia Mardan (1919). In fact Phalke was also the first, to picturise the 'bath scene'. The bathtub sequence where Harishchandra comes to call his wife Taramati, who is in the tub, with her fully drenched attendants is indeed the first bathtub scene in Indian cinema. All the females in their wet sarees and blouses clinging to their bodies are in fact all males in female garbs.

The Elphinstone Bioscope Company of Calcutta issued its own version of the Harishchandra story, nearly double the length of Phalke's, in 1917, and "later that year offered Prahlad Charitra (the deeds of Prahlad), based on the Bhagavata Purana story of a legendary devotee of Vishnu."29 Jamshedjee Madan who founded the society also built the first cinema house in India and would later own Madan Theatres, "the gigantic empire with a big production output and a chain of theatres."

The first film made in south India was 1919's Keetchaka Vadham (the slaying of Keetchaka), directed by R Nataraja Mudaliar, likewise adapted from the Mahabharata. Such films, which themselves celebrated swadeshi or indigenous manufacture embodied a nationalist message through traditional tales presented via a fascinating new technology; they helped to draw new
constituencies into the cinema, and into a project of Indian modernity. Another film made in Madras - Valli Thiru-Manam (1921) by Whittaker drew critical acclaim and box office success. Hollywood returned, Ananthanarayanan Narayanan founded General Pictures Corporation in 1929 and established filmmaking as an industry in South India and became the single largest producer of silent films. Kolhapur in Western Maharashtra was another centre of active film production in the twenties.

In 1919 Baburao K. Mistry - popularly known as Baburao Painter formed the Maharashtra Film Co. with the blessings of the Maharaja of Kolhapur and released the first significant historical - Sairandhari (1920) with Balasheb Pawar, Kamala Devi and Zunzarrao Pawar in stellar roles. Because of his special interest in sets, costumes, design and painting, he chose episodes from Maratha history for interpreting in the new medium and specialised in the historical genre. The exploits of Shivaji and his contemporaries and their patriotic encounters with their opponents formed the recurring themes of his 'historicals' which invariably had a contemporary relevance to the people of a nation, who were fighting for liberation from a colonial oppressor.

The attack against the false values, associated with the Western way of life and their blind imitation by some Indians, was humorously brought out by Dhiren Ganguly in his brilliant satirical comedy - Belet Pherot/England Returned (1921) - presumably the first 'social satire' on Indians obsessed with Western values. And with that another genre of Indian cinema known as 'the contemporary social' slowly emerged. Baburao Painter followed it up with another significant film in 1925 - Savkari Pash (The Indian Shylock) - an attempt at realistic treatment of the Indian peasant exploited by the greedy moneylender. In Bengal, a region rich in culture and intellectual activity, the first Bengali feature film in 1917, was remake of Phalke's Raja Harishchandra. Titled Satyawadi Raja Harishchandra, it was directed by Rustomjee Dotiwala. Less prolific than the Bombay based film industry, around 122 feature films were made in Calcutta in the Silent Era. The first feature film in Tamil, also the first in entire South India, Keechakavatham was made during 1916-17, directed by Nataraja Mudaliar.

Other films of the period centered on the legendary biographies of poet saints of the medieval bhakti tradition, such as Bilwamangal and Kabir Kamal (both 1919). Such hagiographic films were sometimes called “devotionals, to distinguish them from “mythologicals, which featured divine and semi-divine heroes. However, many accounts merge both under the umbrella label “mythological." Mythological/devotional films accounted for all but one of the twenty-five feature films made by Indian producers prior to 1920, but cinematic content changed rapidly in the next decade. The 1920’s were a
period of consolidation for Indian cinema. "Production rose from a mere 8 per year to 18 in 1920, 40 in 1921, 80 in 1925, and 172 by the end of the decade." 33 Dhiren Ganguli's *Bilat Ferat* (England Returned, 1921), offered a contemporary comedy of manners, and Madan Theatre's *Barer Bazar* (Marriage Market, 1922) dramatized a social problem. "There were historical dramas like *Simghadh* (The Fortress of Simghadh, 1923), on the life of the Maratha king Shivaji, and thrillers like *Kala Naag* (Black Cobra, 1924), based on a sensational murder case in Bombay." 34 The variety of nascent genres suggested by these titles reflects the pressure of competition within a growing industry (by 1930, India was producing close to 200 films per year), which caused filmmakers to seek new sources of appealing narrative. Mythologicals continued to be produced (and re-produced: e.g., the *Mahabharata* tale of *Savitri* had been filmed at least eight times by 1937) 35, but they comprised a shrinking percentage of output.

According to B. V. Dharap, "they accounted for roughly seventy per cent of films made prior to 1923, but only fifteen per cent of those made between 1923 and 1930." 36 They experienced a brief resurgence with the coming of sound in 1931, accounting for some forty per cent of films during the next three years, but then their output fell again, to an average of between five and ten per cent of annual production. 37 These statistics cover the whole of India and thus include regions of the south where mythological films continued to be made in sizeable numbers (e.g., the Telugu language cinema of Andhra Pradesh). 38 In the dominant Hindi language cinema, according to Nasreen Munni Kabir, the mythological had virtually disappeared by the 1950s. 39

As mentioned earlier, Phalke's company alone produced some hundred similar films. What little remains of the Indian silent era up to 1930 barely fills up six video cassettes in the National Film Archives of India library, but it is remarkable for the way traditional 'theatrical' framing (Static characters, faced front on by the camera), is animated by a considerable investment in location shooting, both in natural surroundings and indoors. This is evident not only in *Raja Harishchandra* but also in the historical-cum-stunt films such as *Diler Jigar / Gallant Hearts* (S.S Agarwal; 1931) and *Gulaminu Patan / The Fall of Slavery* (SS Agarwal; 1931), and in the international co-productions directed by Himanshu Rai and the German producer Franz Osten. Among these, *Light of Asia* (1925) which was a film about the Buddha, and *Shiraz* (1928), about the origins of the Taj Mahal, referred to as "Romances from India" by their producers, constructed the magical notion of India, as the mysterious land inhabited by either godmen or princes complete with its depiction of spectacular processions of elephants and camels, juxtaposed with a glittering naturalism.
The First World War saw the phenomenal rise and expansion of Hollywood, with 85% of films shown in India being undoubtedly American. But with the advent of sound the Indian film industry exploited the opportunity to the fullest and in 1931; the first Indian Talkie *Alam Ara* was released dubbed simultaneously into Hindi and its close cousin, Urdu. The most widely understood language that was used in the north of the country, known as Hindi if written in the Devanagari script and known as Urdu when written in the Perso-Arabic script. The strongest direct influence upon cinema was the Urdu Parsee theatre of the Thirties, a hybrid colonial form that drew its subject matter from the Indian classics and many of its stage techniques from 19th century British melodrama. Many early film professionals were drawn from the Urdu Parsee companies, and many of the screen plays were from its mythological repertoire. And till a long time the bulk of Hindi film coming out of Bombay's studios have had the *filmi hindustani* as the vocal medium. This was a colloquial blend of Hindi and Urdu, the two closely related sister languages which were associated with the Hindus and Muslim communities respectively. It so happened that although Bombay was not the north, it had a large Hindi speaking population as well mostly migrant as well as local Muslims who used Hindi-Urdu as their language and who came into the growing film industry. *Alam Ara* never described as an artistic triumph and not preserved by the archives, it had nevertheless a tremendous impact. The Majestic Theatre was besieged. Tickets disappeared into the black market.

"Police aid had to be summoned to control the crowds......Fouranna tickets were quoted at R.4 and Rs.5."40 That same year, 22 other Hindi films appeared, and all seem to have made money. Also, in 1931, three films in Bengali, one in Tamil, one in Telugu, appeared in their respective language areas.1932 saw eight films in Marathi, two in Gujarati. In 1933 alone, 75 Hindi feature films were made,41 production in other languages also grew. So regional language film also flourished alongside Hindi films and as India has different regional identities these catered to such demands. People quite naturally preferred to see films in their own mother tongue therefore many films produced at this time were also tailor made to suit these requirements to be alter oriented to the larger Hindi speaking market. In those days, the films made, had up to 40 songs. The tradition persists, thankfully minus the numbers. In any case by 1933, trepidation over the coming of sound had given way to unbounded optimism. That year, the compiler of *Who's Who in Indian Filmland*, in a jubilant preface gave expression to the mood:

*What with scanty resources, step motherly Government aid, with keen competition from privileged foreign films, with few technically qualified men, with no interested capitalists, with less interested fans, with actors and actresses scarcely able to spell their names (for it was thought a disgrace by*
society people to be associated with the screen), with no market excepting India, with censuring censors, with discouragement to the right, cheap sneers to the left, despair in the front, and criticism from behind, the Indian Film Industry, thank God, has marched on and on to the filed of victory, battling against a thousand other misfortunes. Has she not made a giant stride?

The films of the 1930's and the 40's addressed the social differences of caste, class and the relations between the sexes. Constantly innovating themselves in this field, film directors adopted a modernist outlook in the then converging Indian society. V.Shantaram, renowned Marathi director was familiar with the world trends in filmmaking, deploying expressionist effects intelligently in films such as Amrit Manthan (Prabhat Talkies: 1935). Devadas (1935) marked itself as the most popular film of this period with director Pramatresh Barua creating a startling edited climax of a saga of love frustrated by social distinction and masculine ineffectuality. Released simultaneously in Bengali, Hindi and Tamil, Devdas created the oddly ambivalent hero for this period (and again through a Hindi remake by Bimal Roy in 1955) and more recently a lavish and dazzling cinematic extravaganza (Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s version) (2001) was screened at the prestigious Cannes Film Festival in 2002. Predicated on indecision, frustration and a focus on failure and longing rather than on achievement, so common with our everyday lives Devdas with its star power of Shah Rukh Khan was a show stealer with the masses sans the international award.

By the 1940's the social film further delimited its focus by excluding particularly fraught issues, especially of caste divisions. A representative example, prefiguring the kind of entertainment that has become the kind of hallmark of the Bombay film, was Kismet / Fate (Gyan Mukherjee: Bombay Talkies,1943), which broke all box office records and ran for more then 2 years. Family and class became the key issues in the representation of society, and the story’s location an indeterminate urbane one. Although this became the model for popular cinema in India, especially after the decline of regional industries in Maharashtra and Bengal by the end of 1940’s, different strains are observable in the Tamil films of the same period. In the 1930’s the Tamil cinema gained national recognition with the costume extravaganza, Chandralekha, directed by S.S. Vasan for Gemini Studios, called by it’s director a ‘pageant for our peasants”(a large section of the audience were obviously literate). Its story, of the conflict for the inheritance of an empire, is laden with over blown set pieces and crowds of extras. Even more significant than this investment in the spectacular was its Tamil-ness, the recognition of a national existence different to that portrayed in the Bombay output.
By the start of the 1950's, Calcutta became the vanguard of the art cinema, with the emergence of the film society movement at the end of the 1940's and Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali/Song of the Road*, produced with the West Bengal state government support in 1955. Post-independence, despite a relative sympathetic government enquiry in 1951, the industry became the object of considerable moral scrutiny and criticism, and was subject to severe taxation. A covert consensus emerged between the proponents of art cinema and the state, all focusing on the imperative to create a "better" cinema. The Film and Television Institute of India was established at Pune in 1959 to develop technical skills for an industry seen to be lacking in this field. However, active support for parallel cinema, as it came to be known, only really took off at the end of the 1960's under the aegis of the government's Film Finance Corporation, set up in 1961 to support new filmmakers.

Ironically, this pressure and vocal criticism occurred at a time when arguably some of the most interesting work in popular cinema was being produced. Radical cultural organizations, loosely associated with the Indian Communist Party, had organized themselves as the All India Progressive Writer's Association and the Indian People's Theater Association (IPTA). The latter had produced *Dharti Ke Lal/Sons of the Soil* (K.A. Abbas; 1943), and its impact on the industry can be seen in the works of radical writers such as Abbas, lyricists such as Sahir Ludhianvi, and directors such as Bimal Roy and Zia Sarhady. Moreover, directors such as Raj Kapoor, Guru Dutt and Mehboob Khan, while not directly involved with IPTA created films that reflected a passionate concern for questions regarding social justice. Largely studio based, the films of this era nevertheless incorporated vivid stylistic experimentation, influenced by international currents in filmmaking. Such effects are evident in *Awara* (*The Vagabond*, Raj Kapoor, 1951, script by KA Abbas), *Awaaz/The Call* (Zia Sharhady; 1956) and *Pyaasa/ Craving* (Guru Dutt; 1957). Therefore the fifties saw the rise of great directors like Mehboob, Bimal Roy, Guru Dutt and Raj Kapoor who changed the fate of Indian cinema. These directors entered the film industry during the 1930s and '40s, which were traumatic years for the Indian people. The fight for independence, famines, changing social mores, and global fight against fascism all contributed to the ethos in which the directors grew up.

The First International Film Festival, held in Bombay in 1951, showed Italian works for the first time in India. The influence of Neo-realism can be seen in films such as *Do Bigha Zameen/Two Measures of Land* (Bimal Roy,
1953), a portrait of a father and a son eking out a living in Calcutta that strongly echoes the narrative of Vittorio de Sica’s *Bicycle Thief* (1948). Mehboob Khan’s *Andaz/Style* (1949), an upper class love triangle founded on a tragic misunderstanding, draws on codes of psychological representation—hallucinations and dreams that feature strongly in the 1940’s Hollywood flicks. Mehboob’s tendency to make a visual spectacle of his material, and his involvement with populist themes and issues made him one of the most successful directors of popular cinema around this time.

India’s emergent art cinema, led by Bengali directors Ray, Mrinal Sen, and Ritwik Ghatak reacted against such trends and its ongoing spectacle. Satyajit Ray’s world famous debut, *Pather Panchali* (1955), is based on the many themes that engaged contemporary popular film-makers of the time, such as loss of social status, economic injustice, uprootment, but sets them in a naturalistic, realistic frame which put a special emphasis of what our rural environs look like, locating it as a place of nostalgia, to which the urban and individualist sensibility of it’s protagonist Apu, looked with longing. In Ray’s later work on the urban middle class existence, *Mahanagar /Big City* (1963), Charulata (1964), *Seemabadha/Company Limited* (1971), *Pratidwandi / The Protagonist* (1970) and *Jana Aranya /The Middleman* (1975), his rational, humanist vision is at the same time with his original place of belonging and at home in the city, and repulsed by it; overarching estrangement is relayed through images of futile job interviews, cynical corporate schemes and murky deals in respectable cafes.

Wedded to the traditions of the nineteenth century intelligentsia, he finds society wanting, vilifies it for its ignorance and corruption, and oversees the malignant terrain below with a lofty disdain. Ray’s women, such as the mother, Sarbojaya of *Pather Panchali*, the tomboy Aparna Sen of *Samapti/The End* (1961), Madhavi Mukherjee in *Charulata* and *Mahanagar*, and Kaberi Bose in *Aranyer Din Ratri*, are splendidly drawn portraits in the realist tradition. In contrast to Ray, his contemporaries Mrinal Sen and Ritwik Ghatak set out to expose the dark underside of India’s lower middle-class and the unemployed. Sen, after a phase of uneven, didactic political cinema at the height of the Maoist-inspired Naxalite movement of the early 1970’s—marked by the trilogy *Interview* (1971), *Calcutta* (1972) and *Padatik/The Guerilla Fighter* (1973)—made two films, *Akaler Sandhane /In Search of the Famine* (1980) and *Khandar /Ruins* (1983), about film-making itself, exploring it’s inherent distance and disengagement, and the problems entailed in trying to record ‘reality’. In the histories of world cinema produced in the West, Indian cinema made in 1956, the year in which, Satyajit Ray’s, *Pather Panchali* burst on the international film scene [David Cook, 1990 and Eric Rhode, 1978].
Some narratives may attempt a brief recap of the evolutionary thrust of the decades preceding this (Cook, 1990), but in general the evolutionary thrust of film historiography does not allow for a consideration of early Indian cinema as one of the national cinemas of the silent era. Moreover, having begun in 1956, these narratives do not attempt to tell the whole story, however briefly, concentrating instead on those realist/ artistic products which correspond to a certain conception of true cinema.

Most film scholars have already encountered the spontaneous philosophy behind this approach, in the form of the developmentalist ideology, which regards non-realist cinema as not-yet-cinema, as well as the emblematism that has dominated theoretical reflections on the field. The prevalence of this ideology has meant that serious writing on Indian cinema was for a long time restricted to a consideration of the works of masters such as Ray, Ghatak, and others. "The prestige of Indian cinema at home and abroad, was enhanced by such writings, especially by the influential western admirers of Ray, but these writers did not feel the need to situate this cinema in the Indian historical context, a tendency that was encouraged by the perception that the context served, if at all, only as a backdrop of mediocrity against which the auteurs shone even brighter."

Perhaps the most outstanding of this generation, fulfilling the potential of these radical cultural initiatives of the IPTA, was the great Ritwik Ghatak. Disruption, the problems of locating oneself in a new environment, and the indignities and oppression of the common folk are the recurrent themes of this poet of the Partition, who lamented the division of Bengal in 1947. Disharmony and discontinuity could be said to be the hallmark of Nagarik/Citizen (1952) and Meghe Dhaka Tara/The Cloud-Capped Star (1960), where studio sets of street corners mingle uneasily with live-action shots of Calcutta. There is something deliberately jarring about the rhythms of editing, the use of sound, and the compositions, as if the director refuses to allow us to settle into a comfortable, familiar frame of viewing. In Aajantrik/Man and Machine (1958) and Subarnarekha (1952, released in 1965), he juxtaposes the displaced urban figure with tribal peoples; placing the human figure at the edge of the frame, dwarfed by the majestic nature.

During the 1960’s, popular cinema had shifted its social concern towards real entertainment to more romantic genres, showcasing such stars as Shammi Kapoor—a kind of an Indian Elvis—and later Rajesh Khanna the soft, sensitive romantic hero. The period is also notable for a more assertive Indian nationalism which played on the patriotic emotions following the Indo-Pakistan wars of 1962 and 1965. The Indian army officer came to
a rallying point for the national imagination in films such as \textit{Sangam} / \textit{Meeting of the Hearts} (Raj Kapoor, 1964) and \textit{Aradhana} / \textit{Adoration} (Shakti Samanta; 1969).

However, the political and economic upheaval of the following decade saw a return to social questions across the country, in both art and popular cinemas. The accepted turning point in the popular film was the angry young man and this perhaps was the beginning of violent images that became the major component of later films to come. \textit{Zanjeer} / \textit{The Chain} (Prakash Mehra; 1973), which fed the anxieties and frustrations generated by the quickening but lopsided pace of industrialization and urbanization, established Amitabh Bachchan as the biggest star of the decade. The considerable political turmoil of the next few years, including the railway strike of 1974 and the Nav Nirman movement led by J.P. Narayan in Bihar and Gujarat, ultimately led to the declaration of Indira Gandhi’s Emergency in 1975. It was as if the state and the people had split apart. As the cities grew, so did the audiences. The popular cinema generated an ambiguous figure to express this alienation. At the level of images, there was this greater investment in the emotional stresses of everyday life and, unlike the 1950’s in the location of the shooting.

In \textit{Zanjeer}, the casual killing of a witness on Bombay’s commuter trains conjures up the perils of life in the metropolis. This is echoed in the images of the dockyard, taxi stands, rail tracks and the construction site in \textit{Deewar} / \textit{The Wall} (Yash Chopra; 1975) also starring superstar Amitabh Bachchan. It is possible to identify a number of factors in the 1970’s, which led to a change of direction and focus in popular Hindi cinema. Its popular genre remained firmly within the romantic/melodramatic tradition, with the usual recipe of eight or nine songs (love, devotional, folk and so on) and the same formulaic patterns that proved successful right though the next four decades or so. But, with the ’70’s marked a shift from the romantic song and dance drama to the violent, action packed thriller (Arnold, 1991). Consequently, the seventies saw the emergence of cynicism on a large scale with the political scenario attributing its own value to it.

There was an abundance of consumer goods but the majority of Indians could not afford it. “The thought arose that nobody was going to give you what you did not grab.” Kothari describes the mood as less of “discontent and more of dismay and growing disorientation.” She asserts “the decade and more since emergency has brought home to us the increasing irrelevance of mere regimes...for some it is basically a crisis of economic performance, for others, a crisis of leadership, for still others, a crisis of character.” The recurrent narrative of these films, of protagonists uprooted from small towns,
rural families to the toxic culture of the city, is shared by the street children researched by professional sociologists in Mira Nair's "Salaam Bombay" (1988). The Bombay films in their very excesses, their grand gestures, and the priority given to emotion and excitement may more truly reflect the dominant rhythms of urban existence in India. At the level of plot and character, however, Bollywood films simultaneously simplify and collapse our sense of India reducing the enormous variety of identity—social, regional, ethnic and religious—that make up Indian society. Where these identities appear, they do as caricatures and objects of fun.

To counter this, art cinema of the 1980's diversified from its Bengali moorings of the earlier period under the aegis of the Film Finance Corporation. Works by Shyam Benegal, Gautam Ghose, Saeed Mirza, B.V. Karnath, Girish Kasaravalli, Mrinal Sen, M.S. Sathyu, Ray, and Kundan Shah, among the others, actively addressed questions of social injustice: problems of landlord exploitation, bonded labour, untouchability, urban power, corruption and criminal extortion, the oppression of women, and political manipulation. Ghatak, in particular had addressed many of these issues earlier, but had never been there such an outpouring of the social conscience, nor such a flowing of new images—of regional landscapes, cultures, and social structures.

Many of the films may be seen as didactic and uncomplicated, undercutting the attention to form that had marked the earlier period—but not all. Benegal's first two films indicate an unusual concern with the psychology of domination and subordination. Ankur/The seedling (1974), starring Shabana Azmi, is particularly striking not only for this but also for the open, fluid way it captures the countryside. Among Kannada directors, working in South India, Kasaravalli in Ghattashradha (1981) affected an intimate vision of the oppression of widows through the view of a child. And special mention must be made of Kundan Shah's Jaane Bhi Do Yaaron/Leave it alone friends (1981), a wonderful exercise in farce and slapstick that is also a brilliant portrait of Bombay as the fast moving and apathetic city.

In the 1990's, video, national and satellite/cable television have resulted in the development of a prolonged crisis in India's cinema industry, where commercial and art films are equally at the risk of failing at the box office. The problems of the latter are mainly due to a persistent failure to find distribution outlets. Now, more and more filmmakers of both streams have begun to understand the expanse of television as a medium. The state film finance unit (now named the National Film Development Corporation) has a major stake in the expansion of the national network. There have been two
responses to this crisis. The first, at the economic level, has been to try and curb film piracy, and to systemize the relationship of film to video. The second is an investment in new technology, and in new forms of story telling.

The Telugu and Tamil industries, and directors such as Ram Gopal Verma and Mani Ratnam, are at the forefront of such techniques constantly learning from Hollywood studios and not necessarily imitating them. Varma's *Shiva* (1990) and *Raat/Night* (1991) showcase the use of steadicam - in the latter, to the exclusion of any serious narrative. The technical virtuosity of Mani Ratnam's works as well as their elegant story telling and restrained performances have attracted a following among film buffs across the country, who identify with his style and implicitly, with the image of a dynamic, modern identity. In 1993, Ratnam made *Roja*, a love story about a young Tamil woman and her husband, a cryptographer who decodes messages for army. The couple is brought to Kashmir the centre of sustained separatist extremism. Embroiling a Tamil couple in national issue that might have seemed remote to an earlier generation, the film identified a new pan Indian field of interest. Dubbed into Hindi, it was national success, giving a rise to the dubbing of a number of southern films.

A prolific production house: The diasporic magnitude of Bombay Cinema.

The Bombay film industry produces around 900 films a year—more popular entertainment than any other film centre in the world. Unlike Hollywood, it did not start with the global ambition of capturing foreign markets. Hollywood spends and markets its films vociferously but Bollywood never really had the resources to handle international publicity, yet its films traveled across countries on little more than word of mouth. The rise of television and the music videos enabled Bollywood to successfully defend its own patch from global marauders and has been a success story with the wide Indian diaspora especially in North America, which is a leading export market for Indian films, which now accounts for 30% of the industry's revenues.

Beyond the diaspora, it has also found fans among directors like Baz Luhrmann and Andrew Lloyd Weber, who have plundered signature elements to revitalize their own work. In an era where other national film industries are crumbling, having had to painfully adjust to the Hollywood juggernaut, the Indian film industry has emerged as perhaps the most aggressive riposte to Hollywood. Hollywood's share in markets all over the world is up at 60 to 90 per cent but it has failed to make a dent on the enormous Indian market where it averages a mere 5 per cent. Internationally as well, Bollywood has reigned over countries such as Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand,
Egypt, Algeria, Morocco and many other Afro-Asian countries. In fact one is almost identified with the stars of the industry while traveling abroad.

Bollywood has conquered the hearts and minds of people whose governments have been hostile to India. When the Pakistan government recently banned the telecast of Bombay films to Pakistani homes, cable operators there went on strike forcing their government to withdraw the ban. Even at the height of the Kargil War, Bollywood films were still being smuggled into the country. At the time of the Lahore bus Yatra, the then Prime minister of India, Atal Bihari Vajpayee was reported to have been received by a group of young Pakistanis with the following chant: ‘Madhuri de do, Kashmir le lo’. (Take Kashmir, but give us Madhuri). In Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban regime, one of the first acts of celebration was the sight of people queuing up outside cinema halls to see Hindi films. In those Islamic countries where are secluded and have strict codes of dressing and where Hollywood is an unwelcome sight, Bollywood even with their routine song and dance routine have been embraced warmly.

Hindi popular cinema have become the staple emotional diet of people across the world and in societies where they are getting ‘westernised’ and ‘modernized’ without being comfortable about it. Films of this kind are popular because they don’t just play on those anxieties but rather try to resolve these conflicts and present a space where a harmonious balance is possible and even desirable—provided certain eternal core values are kept in mind, values that allow to maintain a healthy and creative relationship with tradition while adopting modernity in liberal doses. “The success of Bollywood lies in it’s offering what appears like a viable alternative to a narcissistic variety of individualism that often seems to come with westernization.”

People in non-western cultures feel threatened by this kind of individualism because it undermined traditional institutions, especially the institution of the family.

The point is not to read all Hindi films as antagonistic but working to open up the ways in which female images and their roles have been projected over the years. Indian popular cinema is all one, an energetic mix of many genres that alternate within a single film, “an intricate cocktail of moods and subplots in to which the characters with their song and dance routines are woven as an indispensable expressive element.” At one level, Bollywood is crass, melodramatic excess, but at another level, it is exemplary entertainment cinema, which also makes it quite clear to the spectators that it’s not reality,” says Mishra. “There is a kind of distancing effect - associated with Brechtian theatre, but going back to Sanskrit drama theory - that is also
part of the system. I think it is quite some cinema, and probably much underrated."49

Surprisingly, according to Vijay Mishra, author of *Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire*, "Bollywood entrenches not so much hybridity as cultural absolutism - although in the realm of visual representation, the opposite is the case, as skimpy outfits and bulging bodies are the norm."50 Mishra points out that the film; Karan Johar's *Kal Ho Naa Ho* uses a marriage ceremony as a climax point (as do many popular Hindi films). "I was struck by the fact that the dance sequences related to the wedding took up a full half-hour,"51 says Mishra, a professor of English and comparative literature at Murdoch University in Perth. "There's a voiceover intoning the Sanskrit wedding mantras, and this is both cinematic spectacle - connecting the wedding to Vedic ritual - and a statement about tradition within modernity."52 Hindi/Indian cinema demands and gets total suspension of disbelief. It works at the level of the ballad, fable, fairy tale and simple morality yarn, where virtue is always rewarded and wickedness punished. "To the West this blend of the simple and the outlandish is attractive, while others find resonance's of their own lost innocence in the illusory world of the Indian film. This is the only world where there are no doubts or confusion or nasty surprises."53

Call it anything, anywhere; Bombay cinema retains its own distinctive flavour, a heady mix of the real and of the make believe world, demanding its own exegeses with the passage of time. And its thematic notions about women, corruption, and its portrayals of violence make up an intrinsic element in the narratives; provoking us to constantly excogitate its existence. Its cathartic effect has all of us involved, irrespective of gender, religion, age or caste.
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