Chapter 4

Bollywood Dreams Hand-in-Hand with the Canadian Movie Business

The Bollywood industry as a form of visual culture developed roots in India in the beginning of the twentieth century. Dadasahab Phalke was the first to have produced a film in India and from then on, the industry has been expanding by leaps and bounds and changing with changing times. There has been advent of new technologies with the result that it is one of the biggest film industries with an ever increasing market-size in the world. This chapter shall investigate the business dimension of this gargantuan industry in the context of Indo-Canada bilateral association. Films are both cultural and commercial commodities and several Indian films have been shot in Canada capturing the scenic panorama and cultural diversity. Several Canadian film companies have opened branches in India and have benefitted commercially owing to abnormally high film consumption levels in India. Hence, a further enlargement of the Bollywood industry in conjunction with specific Canadian film technologies and business deals can enhance links between the two countries and this chapter shall focus on how this area is perpetually broadening in terms of opportunities.

Incidentally, Bollywood is a nickname for the Indian film industry. The reason ascribed to its resounding success across the globe is its characteristic song and dance sequences that endeavours to encapsulate the traditional ethos of the country. Implicit in the Indian film paradigms are music and dance interwoven with themes pertaining to contemporary situations, nationalism, diaspora, history, myths, romantic entanglements and a host of other issues and thematic preoccupations. It is interesting to observe that
Indian film studies have been a part of field work in university courses. Dana Wilkie gives the example of De Tar, a Canadian student from Simon Fraser University who visited India and who “participated in the India film and culture field study…a 10-credit, three-month program…. The program was designed to provide De Tar and her colleagues with a deeper appreciation for Indian culture, history, religion, philosophy, gender roles, social castes, economy, and education” (49). Such educational tours have several implications. First, it provides an understanding of Indian movies, their themes and commercial aspects. Secondly, it facilitates a comparative analysis of business in Canada and India and allows the identification of opportunities in the sector. Thirdly, it forges links between students and faculty of both the countries. There is deeper engagement through educational partnerships that offer practical and theoretical opportunities for cultural appreciation.

Such educational fellowships provide hands-on-experience to both the international visitors and the host country since interaction is never one-sided. It is educational and cultural since such international experiences are recorded in the theses or works produced by the visitor.

It would be pertinent to mention that India has several film industries besides Bollywood—Tamil, Kannada, Gujarati, Marathi and so on, just to name a few but in this chapter the focus is on the Bollywood specifically because Hindi is a language that is understood by a large section of the Indian population and are showcased in different parts of the world.

Indian film music strikes a chord almost instantaneously in the hearts of the people and the NRI’s (Non Resident Indians). In fact, it is perceived to be a uniting factor among the Indian diaspora and the proximity felt is due to the superimposition of home and
abroad in these cultural commodities. It is also an industry with enormous business implications. Its profits are massive and the employment opportunities that it creates are remarkable. Shashi Tharoor mentions that Bollywood employs “2.5 million people” (111) and that the films are “watched over and over again by the Indian masses” (111). The repetitive value is because of the content that is in demand since they cater to feelings of nostalgia and belonging of the diaspora. For a few moments, films transport the viewers to their homeland and their contemporary situation. Since the visual medium is powerful and educational and as the images are hard for the mind to resist; Indo-Canadian parents consider it good and necessary for their children to watch them. The perception is that perhaps this would allow their children a chance to savour the feeling of Home. The watching of the movies again and again is cultural but then it becomes economic since there is a price to be paid for such images. They are cultural ‘commodities’.

In this connection, it would be pertinent to take into consideration the views of Andrea Jezovit who analyzes the popularity of Hindi movies in Canada and states that Roger Nair who owns a company in Toronto says that he “foresee(s) Toronto as the hub of Bollywood films” (20). One realizes that the choice of a country for shooting a film is conscious and a consequence of measured calculations. Many factors work towards materializing film production. Cultural factors definitely play a vital role but then comfort in terms of adherence to laws and regulations are equally crucial. When there are legal strictures and constraints it results in trepidation in terms of initiating business. Only a relaxed atmosphere can invite and foster both business and culture. Since, the atmosphere in Canada is conducive for filmcraft, several Indian movie producers and directors have been drawn towards the country. Besides, there is appetite for these products. The high
consumption levels serve as inspiration for creativity. Therefore capital and culture are interlinked.

Jezovit mentions that Bollywood is “worth more than $2 billion, it produces 1,000 films yearly—twice as many as Hollywood—for a worldwide audience of 3.6 billion people” (Jezovit 20). Several successful Indian movies like *Kal Ho Na Ho* starring Shah Rukh Khan, Saif Ali Khan and Preity Zinta; *Koi Mil Gaya* starring Hrithik Roshan and Preity Zinta have been shot in Canada. These are just a couple of examples.

Films are cultural artifacts reflecting images of a specific society and nation and the fact that two countries figure in several movies produced from a nation, endorse that there has been a convergence of two cultures. The bilateral aspect enlivens in films. It is relevant to ponder over when a director decides that a particular country is suitable to form the background or foreground of a film. There is the requirement of genuine appreciation for the country, for its laws and its culture. Only a free mind can be creatively sturdy. The fact that there are so many films being produced by Indian directors and producers in Canada and with Canadian aspects suggests that bonds already exist between the two countries. This bond is both cultural and economic and so this has potential diplomatic reasons for intensification. It also highlights the fact that there is a people-to-people link because of the existence of the Indian diaspora in Canada many of whom are into the business. Catering to this large and growing population through Indian films, enables them to identify their ‘lost homeland’ that also happen to sentimentally bind them with their country. This reality of culture and capital mixture is what makes Bollywood an endearing business area.
Business and economic relations affect and trigger new cultural streams and films create a space wherein there is articulation and amalgamation of multiple perspectives. India has a huge consumer market. Approximately India has a “300 million strong middle class” (Nilekani 140) and since their aspirations have also risen “For global retailers, that is the dream customer” (Nilekani 140). The presence of a huge middle class is what has elevated the market conditions in India. Companies across the world have been eyeing India as a potential market although the Indian government has not digested this idea of being seen as a selling place. The commercialization and branding of India, in a certain sense precludes and overshadows its other resources like skilled manpower; and India is not merely a purchasing source. It has potential in other departments of trade, commerce and culture. Nevertheless, the fact that India does possess a huge market is a verity.

In the context of films, it is not sufficient if several of them are being made. What they need is an audience which is obsessed with watching movies—in other words, in purchasing the product. That is what underlines the success of a business. The strength of India is its middle class which is gigantic and one that is becoming affluent on account of its ambitious people. Consequently, they are ready to purchase; and it is precisely this factor that is a direct precondition in business.

Deepa Mehta’s film *Bollywood/Hollywood* (2002) is set in Canada. The male protagonist, incidentally is in her own words “a dot-com millionaire who lives in Canada with his family…. He is Canadian but like most of us, he has ties elsewhere with a different culture and social mores…” (Wise 37). The film captures the pulse of the times with the protagonist assuming a profession that is popular in India for its income-generating capacity—the field of software. The theme is contemporary. Furthermore, one
of the ideas that the film touches upon is the economic dimension to the migration of people which is accompanied by a host of intercultural difficulties. The film therefore captures the prevalent conditions in India. While there are references through the subplots and the characters, subtle though they may be, to the economic exigencies that constitute the driving force behind transnationalism; associated with the production of such movies is the veritable truth that they have an audience that is prepared to consume such products. The popularity of such films can help in further exploration of the movie-making business. Diaspora themes are immensely popular. Like literature, there is scope for such plots in films. Canada’s locales represent that site that Indian directors and producers are interested in and this trend can be tapped by people from both the countries.

Deepa Mehta’s another movie called *Sam and Me* (1991) is also set in Canada and contains cross cultural themes. The choice of Canada as a backdrop to Indian stories is not purely because of the autonomy that exists for the production of movies but also because of the presence of the Indian diaspora. In an interview to Wyndham Wise, Mehta states clearly “Like most things in this world, it’s economics. I think distributors are waking up to the fact that here is a huge expatriate population of East Indians…. It’s a huge market…. There are now enough East Indians with expendable income in North America and elsewhere” (35). The emphasis on capital is telling. Deepa Mehta here refers to three things with reference to movie business in Canada—the diaspora, the scope of the market and the disposable income of the migrant population. The role of capital underscores movie production like any other business. Capturing this at the right moment helps business ties.
The fact that the Indian diaspora enjoys movies and craves to watch them can be capitalized upon through emphasis on deeper ties between Indian and Canadian companies. There have been several Canadian companies that have evinced interest in Indian films. Jezovit’s study of the Indian movie business led him to estimate that “India's population of 1.2 billion, many of whom are devoted filmgoers, would make a huge audience for Canadian films” (Jezovit 20). The Canadian company, Discreet Logic Inc. that specializes in film technology claims that its “11-person Mumbai office is turning heads” (24) and acknowledges that “India is one of the fastest growing markets” (24). These statements not only imply success but also indicate relief and satisfaction at having a chance to setup and continue business successfully. There is a suggestion of what might happen if there is expansion in the area. If a miniscule operation from Mumbai can create great profits, an increase in the business can create more capital.

Settling in another country is filled with apprehensions primarily because the settlers are unaware of what circumstances they might have to encounter in the new land. Though they would have done homework to understand the new country, they know that when they actually go there the situation could be different, could be unpredictable or maybe dangerous; but when they meet success there is a sense of achievement and desire for a long term relationship. We find exactly this and mutually in both Canadians and Indians. Again here too, the human capital dimension in India has received worldwide attention. Owing to high population the consumption of films is very high. Wavefront which is a subsidiary company “of Mountain View, Calif.-based Silicon Graphics Inc. (NYSE: $GI)” (24) in Toronto also accepts that it has had “explosive” (24) business growth in India. There have been efforts to explore this area. For instance, in the year 2004,
there were attempts to establish “an official co-production treaty between Canada and India” (Bracken 6). Sabbas Joseph—a director in Wizcraft International Entertainment Pvt Ltd (Mumbai) says “while 50-60 per cent of a Bollywood film is normally made outside India, North America has so far captured very little of that work (Simon n. pag). The indication is towards the lack of utilization of existing resources. This is also because the bilateral relation between the two countries is not very strong. There has not been much research on what and how the Bollywood can be explored despite superhit movies being made. Consequently there is less awareness and less consciousness of how collaborations in this area can be augmented. This indifference at times has been rather difficult to explain because there has been success in whatever little has been done but that has not provided fillip for further expansion.

Shashi Tharoor explores the Bollywood facet of India as one which is at once both cultural and economic. Therefore, it is doubly beneficial. Here, it is necessary to emphasise that Canada “became the first country in the world to adopt multiculturalism as a state policy. The policy accepts and encourages all ethnic groups to retain their culture” (Sangha and Sahoo 86). As cultural products, Indian films have always celebrated the existence and proliferation of several ethnicities, religions, festivals—aspects which are integral to the promotion of multiculturalism. The prevalence of a similar attitude in the Canadian society creates comfort levels for the creation of movies. As a tribute to multiculturalism, every May, Canada celebrates the “Asian Heritage Month” (Sangha and Sahoo 86). This can be seen as an example of cultural tolerance and respect. Probably, it is this policy that facilitates cultural association between Canada and Asia. These events are not insignificant as small things matter. When it comes to individuals, specifically
common citizens, this is a highly sensitive issue. In India, we call the common man ‘aam aadmi’ in Hindi language meaning someone who is preoccupied with dealing with his everyday struggles of life. For him/her, these little episodes of cultural sensitivity and mutual respect go a long way in restoring faith and reverence in a country’s government.

Shiamak Davar is a sought after popular Indian choreographer in the Bollywood industry. His expertise in mixing various dance styles has resulted in the opening up of dance institutions throughout India. Interestingly, he has opened up branches in Toronto, Vancouver and Calgary, bringing the Bollywood dancing style into Canada too. Cori Howard mentions:

Davar is determined to bring the Bollywood dance craze to mainstream Canadians…. The classes, set to fast-paced music and taught by a rotating crop of instructors recruited from Davar's prestigious dance institute in India, have already attracted around 500 regular participants…. In many ways, Davar's timing couldn't be better. There has of late been an insatiable appetite for all things Indian-fashion, film, jewellery, food and fitness trends like yoga. (n. pag).

The opening of Indian Bollywood dance institutes in Canada can be seen as a consequence of globalization where distinct cultural products of a country are made accessible in another country. It is also an acquaintance into the cultural interests of another region. Interestingly, Davar’s dance styles are not purely Indian. They are a mix of jazz, modern, belly dancing, hip-hop, the Punjabi Bhangra and a host of other dance forms that makes the art global in its aspects and appeal. The reformulations out of prevalent
dance styles and fusing them makes them a multicultural collage wherein every movement can be identified as emanating from a specific art stream. It is the cultural and global elements plus the commercial angle involved in the Bollywood industry that makes it an attractive terrain both in Canada and India. We thus find the spread of Bollywood trends in Canada.

In the year 1985, Farrukh Dhondy published an article titled “Indian Film and its World” that appeared in the *The Moving Image* (Daedlus) stating “In Britain, Canada, the United States, and whatever other Western Countries where Indians are to be found, the Indian film remains an alien peepshow, an inaccessible slice of culture. Neither will it catch on in time…” (139). It is interesting to compare what Dhondy observed in the latter half of the 20th century that prognosticated that the Indian film industry wouldn’t “catch on in time” (139), in the West including Canada as he refers to in the aforementioned statement. However, today it is apparent that Dhondy’s prediction hasn’t stood the test of time and Bollywood with all its global manifestations has successfully reached various countries and of course, in Canada too and has ‘caught on in time’ beyond doubt. The profitability involved is huge since the themes that Bollywood films deal with are popular with the Indian and diaspora masses.

Sujata Moorthy in her essay “Desperately Seeking an Identity: Diasporic Cinema and the articulation of transnational kinship” discusses two films *New View, New Eyes* by Gitanjali Saxena and *Desperately Seeking Helen* by Eisha Marjara. *New View, New Eyes* portrays Indian images, Mumbai’s urbanity and the rural areas of the country and depicts Canada from the perspective of an Indian. So there is a commingling of the personal with
the global. The advantage of knowing and travelling in two countries become a part of portrayal in movies.

A movie that was produced in the year 2011 was *Breakaway* which was also dubbed in Hindi and was called *Speedy Singhs*. The film was shot in Canada and reflected the Indo-Canadian community adapting into the country. Though a commercial flop, the film is interesting for its picturing India and Canada. One of the songs, *Ni Aaja Ve*, is particularly notable for its backdrop, conflating the Taj Mahal of India with the representation of the snowy winters of Canada right before the monument and the protagonists skating on the snow. There is the harsh winter of Canada and the world famous work of art of India blended together. The coming together of the two nations happens at a cultural, artistic and heritage levels. The hero is a Punjabi Indian whose girlfriend is a Canadian and their romantic relationship alludes to the interracial connections taking place in a society that is multicultural by nature. This is again a reference to the hybridization of cultures and people taking place in the Canadian society.

Several other movies have been shot in Canada like Neelam Sethi’s *Aaj Ke Haalat*; Eisha Marjara’s *Desperately Seeking Helen*, the protagonist happens to be an Indo-Canadian who travels to India to meet Helen, a Bollywood star and vamp. The protagonist’s mother was killed in the Air India bomb explosion that took place in the year 1985. This historical episode has always been a painful memory for Indo-Canadians and we find reference to this in Anita Rau Badami’s novel also *Can you Hear the Nighbird Call?* (that will be analysed in the next chapter). While the protagonist is going back to her roots, she is also remembering and reliving an excruciating historical incident. So film as a commodity becomes a site not only for culture portrayal but also for the precipitation of
fragments of history and memory. Reliving the Indian experience through films becomes indispensable for the diaspora. In Rohinton Mistry’s short story “Lend Me Your Light”, the protagonist writes a letter to his friend describing Toronto’s Gerrard Street which is like a ‘Little India’ in Canada where they could “see a Hindi movie at the Naaz Cinema” (189). So literature too is not bereft of the necessity that the Indian diaspora feels for Indian films in Canada.

In the context of the Indian diaspora, the Bollywood conceptualizes the desire for homeland for a community that has multiple affiliations. Furthermore, both Canada and India can create opportunities of investment through cinema—both cultural and commercial. Persistence on existing projects and ties would enable professionals of both countries to explore the area deeply. There have already been several strategic partnerships in this direction but considering the enormity of the Bollywood impact and the innumerable dimensions to it in terms of employment, investment, monetary profits and cultural representation, there is still plenty of scope for widening opportunities. This dimension has been captured by film business experts as mentioned in this chapter. Culturally, Indian films are acceptable and popular. Nevertheless, this area of business can be explored further.
Works Cited


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