# POP CULTURE
# INDIA!

## Media, Arts, and Lifestyle

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production and increased importation of consumer goods, television became an important vehicle for product advertising. Channels such as MTV and particularly Channel V became popular with manufacturers targeting young, urban, cosmopolitan audiences. Even MTV, realizing that it was falling behind Channel V in advertising revenues, changed tack and began to "indigenize" its content. Advertising began to fuel the diffusion of new music, spurring a demand for cassettes and CDs. New Indian companies entered the market. Some already had interests in the print media, such as the Aaj Tak news channel, Times Music (from the Times of India group of newspapers), and Music Today (from the India Today group of magazines). Major international companies such as Sony, Time Warner, and BMG also set up shop in India to satisfy the new and growing demand for film and nonfilm music.

## Popular Music in India Today

By the turn of the millennium, with the rising popularity of satellite music channels, increasing access to international music, the emergence of a market for regional music as well as the home-grown Indipop, the arrival of CDs, and the introduction of organized music retailing, the Indian music industry had undergone a complete overhaul. Today India is one of the world's biggest consumers of music.

The music industry in India today is divided along the main genres listed in the following table.

There are five major music companies in India. Of these, T-series controls around 22 percent of the market, Saregama (formerly HMV) 15 percent, Tips 11 percent, and

| Film Music | Nonfilm Music |
| --- | --- |
| Hindi, 61 percent | Devotional music, 10 percent |
| Regional, 5 percent | International, 8 percent |
| | Pop music (Indian), 8 percent |
| | Other (*ghazals*, Indian classical), 8 percent |

(*Source:* FICCI Report 2003.)

Sony and Universal 7 percent each (FICCI 2003).

## Film Music

Although the HMV monopoly no longer prevails, Hindi film songs still constitute 61 percent of all music sold by the music companies, while regional films songs (mainly from Tamil and Telugu films) comprise 5 percent of total sales of music in India. Of the Hindi film music consumed, 45 percent of all sales are for songs from new films and about 21 percent for old film songs (FICCI 2003).

Each new film brings to the market a host of new songs. Thanks to sustained economic growth over the last fifteen years and more people with disposable incomes, the consumption of these new issues has increased. New indigenous music companies formed in the wake of the cassette revolution, such as T-series and Tips, entered into a frenzied competition with Sony and Saregama for the music rights to new films, leading to ever-increasing acquisition costs.

The acquisition of music constitutes the single largest expense for the music industry, far greater than the manufacture of cassettes or CDs. For decades, under the venerable umbrella of HMV, film producers

were paid only royalties from the sale of a film's music. But in the late 1970s newly formed companies began to offer producers advance payments to lure them away from HMV. Getting major producers to agree to the outright purchase of film music rights was the brainchild of the late Gulshan Kumar. Film producers were delighted with the arrangement, because it meant that they could recover a substantial chunk of their investment, sometimes even before the songs had been recorded.

As more companies adopted this tactic, an aggressive bidding war developed over music rights for films in production with each firm fighting to retain their share of the market. However, the music sales of a film are directly related to the success of the film, so that the greater a film's box office success, the greater the volume of sales for its music. During the boom years, when the film industry was delivering major box office hits, music companies prospered. But generally only one in four Hindi films manages to become a box office hit, and in 2002, the Hindi film industry (Bollywood) suffered its worst losses when 124 films out of a total of 134 crashed at the box office, leaving the music industry in dire financial straits.

To recoup their losses, music companies began to resort to remixes. With the music industry in a slump as a consequence of the slump in the film industry, the return to classic film hits seemed a safe bet for the music companies. But what began as an inexpensive rescue plan to bail out a floundering industry was transformed into a profitable and popular genre of its own. At least four of the top ten albums of the year 2003 were such remixes. They are, according to music critic S. Sahaya Ranjit, "time-tested, extremely hummable with no

dearth of people wanting them for nostalgic value" (Ranjit 2003: 74). According to the Copyright Act of 1957, any music company is free to make a new version of original soundtracks and re-release it in the market two years after its original release. Consequently, these remixes often include fairly recent hits.

Remixes also offer the opportunity to "sex up" an old hit. The lyrics of the old film songs always contained sexual innuendoes, but they were often concealed through a series of stratagems that disavowed any sexual content (Kasbekar 2001). The new remixes highlighted rather than disavowed these sexual innuendoes, leading to frequent confrontations between the government and groups concerned about morality on the one side, and the music (and film) industry and the liberal sectors of society on the other. One recent confrontation was over a music video of a remix of an old film song "kantaa laga . . ." The double entendre in the song ("kaanta laga" means "I have been pierced by a thorn") passed unnoticed when the original version came out in the 1970s. The remix video, however, is more explicit. It features a woman in blue jeans and a tattoo on her breast performing an erotic dance to accompany the song. The government immediately asked the television channels not to air the video, but because of the publicity, sales of the record and CD skyrocketed. Mobile phone companies vied with each other to offer the melody as a ring tone.

Another genre of music that has grown out of film music is the recompilation. By making new combinations of old and not-so-old Hindi film songs from the archives, the music industry has found a cost-efficient path to profits. The songs sung by

Lata Mangeshkar, the most important Hindi film "playback" singer, are constantly being recompiled. (Since Indian actors can't sing and professional singers can't act or are not beautiful enough to be stars, songs performed by professional singers are recorded and then played back during filming so that actors can mouth the lyrics. The recordings are marketed under the names of the professional singers and carry the name of the film.)

## Nonfilm Pop Music

The decentralized music production that characterized the cassette revolution led to both the revival of traditional, long-forgotten forms of music and the creation of new genres that syncretized traditional and contemporary (that is, Western) forms of music.

### Bhangra

One of the most dynamic of these fused genres is the contemporary disco *bhangra*, a lively, vigorous folk dance born of the agricultural traditions of the Punjab, a fertile region of the Indian subcontinent. The consolidation of the Punjabi immigrant communities in the United Kingdom and Canada spearheaded the emergence of the disco *bhangra*, an amalgam of Western beats and *bhangra* tunes sung increasingly in a mixture of English and Punjabi.

One of the leading performers of different styles of traditional Punjabi music (*heer* and *bhangra*) is the dignified and respected Gurdas Mann, and of disco *bhangra* is Daler Mehndi, whose tentlike robes and bejewelled turban form an eye-catching spectacle.

### Ghazals

One musical form that was revived and reinterpreted during the cassette revolution was the modern *ghazal*. Championed by the Muslim nobility in the nineteenth century in India, the *ghazal*, sung in Urdu or Hindustani, was a light classical mode that consisted of refined poetry and sophisticated musical improvisations expressing unrequited love, mystical devotion, philosophical rumination, ridicule of religious orthodoxy, and celebration of madness and divine intoxication (Russell 1992). When the Moghul empire declined in the eighteenth century, along with the fortunes of the Muslim nobility who patronized the fine arts, the *ghazal* found new appeal among the courtesan class that began to cater to the emerging North Indian Hindu bourgeoisie in *mehfils* (private concerts).

With the advent of the gramophone records in the early 1900s, recording companies seeking a pan-regional music to record and market hit upon the *ghazal* as a form that could be taken out of the private chambers of the courtesan and publicly marketed to the phonograph-owning upper classes. However, it was not until the arrival of cassette technology and the musical revolution that a mass medium was found for the dissemination of the *ghazal*. In the course of its transformation from a privately performed, light-classical form into a studio-made, publicly marketed form, the modern *ghazal* was born, adapted for a pan-regional North Indian— mainly Hindu—mass audience. Gone were the refined poetry and the sophisticated musical improvisations that were integral parts of the traditional *ghazal*. In their place, a simplified, precomposed musical rendition accompanied a more accessi-

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# Theater

In the preface to his book on political theater in India, Rustom Barucha decries the general tendency to view Indian theater as a single, unified entity. "It needs to be stressed," he writes, "that there is no such thing as *an* Indian theater. It may have existed centuries ago when it was synonymous with Sanskrit classical drama, but today we can speak only of the Bengali theater, or the Marathi theater, or the Tamil theater, and so on. There are as many theaters as there are languages in India" (Barucha 1983: xi).

With sixteen major languages and hundreds of dialects in India, there are indeed hundreds of theaters in India. Also, since most of the languages and dialects are not entirely understood outside their particular province or region, there has been little or no communication among the various theaters. Moreover, translations of regional plays into other regional languages have been few and remain so even today. And, as Barucha argues, apart from differences in language, the various regional theaters also reflect divergences of culture comprising the bewildering variety of customs, traditions, and folklore that are inextricably linked to particular regions. Consequently, the theaters in India are often specifically related to the cultural inheritance of particular communities. A play set in Bengal, for instance, may not be fully understood by an urban audience in Tamil Nadu, while the contemporary resonances of a Marathi play may elude an audience in Rajasthan. The various Indian theaters have thus developed as discrete regional and independent entities. "It should be remembered," observes Barucha, "that there are difficulties in understanding Indian theaters within India itself" (Barucha 1983: xii).

Despite the bewildering variety of dramatic activity, almost all contemporary theater in India has in some way been informed by certain crucial developments. The first two are the classical Sanskrit theater, which flourished between the first and eighth centuries AD, and the *Natyashastra*, a scholarly treatise attributed to Bharata (circa second century AD) on the aesthetics of the Sanskrit stage. Modern Indian theater is also influenced by the traditional popular and folk theaters of the regions, such as the *jatra, tamasha,* and *nautanki,* which flourished after the decline

of the classical theater. These folk and traditional theaters continue to thrive despite intense competition from film, television, and the modern stage. The legacies of the colonial British stage of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Parsi theater of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the Indian People's Theater Association during the World War II years have also informed the development of the modern Indian stage.

The arrival of the British colonials in the nineteenth century led to the creation of an exclusively British theater for the consumption of the colonial residents of Kolkata. The curiosity of the Indians was aroused both by the novelty of the plays (Shakespeare, for example) and the exotic theatrical conventions (proscenium stage, curtains, sets, props) of western stage productions. In the 1850s, universities were established in the cities of Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras, and the teaching of drama and literature brought both Shakespeare and Sanskrit literature into the reach of the growing number of Indian students (Gokhale 2003). The dramatic conventions of the British performances in colonial India soon seeped into vernacular Indian productions.

Borrowing elements from the British stage and from the prevailing local popular theaters (such as the *nautanki* and *tamasha*), the Parsi theater was born in the mid-nineteenth century—a splendid amalgam of Indo-European-Islamic influences designed to entertain the growing urban population. The Parsi theater's extravagant spectacles in some of the local languages later inspired the growth of local theaters in Hindi and other regional languages, such as the Marathi theaters in Bombay and Poona (now known as Pune)

and the Company Nataks in southern India. In the 1940s, the rise of the Communist Party gave birth to the Indian People's Theater Association (IPTA), created as the cultural wing of the Communist Party. IPTA helped bring into existence the modern, vibrant theater in Calcutta and other cities.

Today the most dynamic and vibrant theaters are those that animate the stages of the cosmopolitan cities of Mumbai and Kolkata. Both cities host a vast variety of theaters and performances from all parts of the country. Both professional and amateur groups perform in at least three different languages in each city: in Mumbai, the Marathi-language theater dominates the cultural scene, followed by theater in Hindi (the national language), Gujerati (the language of the neighboring state of Gujerat), and English. Less frequent but nevertheless enthusiastically received are plays performed in Tamil for the Tamil-speaking population of the city. In Kolkata, the Bengali theater holds the prime position, with theatrical activity in Hindi and English. Both the cities also benefit from the frequent visits of touring theater groups from other towns and cities of India.

## Sanskrit Theater

The origins of classical Sanskrit theater are still obscure. The surviving plays (and fragments of plays) are the main sources of information about this early theater, as well as Bharata's crucial treatise (circa second century AD) on the performing arts, the *Natyashastra*, which provides information on how these plays may have been performed. Normally performances were private or semiprivate and took place in theaters built within the precincts of palaces

Kathakali is dance-drama wherein the actors don intricate makeup, headgear, and ample skirts. This form of dance-drama is enacted in the courtyards of temples of Kerala, the southernmost state of India. No words are spoken, but the story is told by movements of hands and expression in the eyes. It is widely regarded as a connoisseur's dance. *Dussasana Vadham* (killing of Dussasana) is perhaps the most popular play in Kathakali repertoire. This story is from a Hindu epic, Mahabharata, wherein the Kauravas, led by their wily uncle Shakuni, challenge their cousins the Pandavas to a game of chess. The Pandavas lose all, including themselves and their wife, Draupadi. Duryodhana (the eldest of the Kauravas) asks Dussasana to drag Draupadi to the royal court by her hair and disrobe her. Lord Krishna comes to her rescue and protects her honor. A seething Draupadi curses the Kauravas, saving the worst for Dussasana. (Baldev/Corbis)

or the homes of the rich. The actors expressed emotions, or *bhava*, which created a variety of feelings or sentiments among the spectators. This "essence" of feeling experienced by the spectator was called *rasa*, and Bharata enumerates eight such *rasas* or feelings: erotic, humorous, heroic, compassionate, furious, apprehensive, marvelous, and horrific.

Sanskrit drama was performed without scenery and with a minimum of properties: the highly developed gesture language of dance made up for the absence of both. Every part of the body was used to help tell a story, and the well-trained audience recognized from conventional movements of hands, limbs, and features that the king was riding in his chariot, or that the heroine was caressing her pet fawn. The splendid attire of the actors was also regulated by convention, so that heroes, heroines, gods, demons, and villains were immediately recognizable (Basham 1994).

Dancing (*nrtya*) was closely connected with acting (*natya*); the words themselves are forms of the same root word, and both dancing and acting were aspects of a single art, *abhinaya*, the portrayal of emotions

that would produce eight corresponding sentiments (*rasa*) in the hearts of the spectators. The drama employed chiefly word and gesture, and the dance chiefly music and gesture. The poses and gestures were classified in detail: thirteen poses of the head, thirty-six of the eyes, nine of the neck, thirty-seven of the hand, and ten of the body are mentioned. With so many combinations available, the dancer could tell a whole story that was easily comprehensible to the observer who knew the conventions. The most distinctive feature of the dance was the hand gesture (*mudra*). By a beautiful and complicated code, the hand alone was capable of portraying not just a wide range of emotions, but also gods, animals, men, natural scenery, and actions (Basham 1994).

The performance generally began with an invocation to one or more of the gods, and a prologue in which the chief actor and stage manager (*sutradhar*) humorously discussed with the chief actress the occasion of the performance and the nature of the play to be performed. The main dialogue of the play was in prose, freely interspersed with verses. The verses were declaimed or intoned, but contrary to the practice in popular theater, they were not sung. The main play was generally preceded by a prelude (*praveshaka*) in which one or two characters set the scene and described what had gone before (Basham 1994).

The theatrical conventions allowed no tragedy. They also forbade the portrayal of violence, although these and other rules were sometimes ignored, as in the plays of Bhasa (second century AD). Tragic and pathetic scenes were common, but endings were almost invariably happy. But if the ancient Indian theater lovers rejected tragedy, they delighted in melodrama and

pathos. Sanskrit drama contained many melodramatic scenes: noble heroes led to execution for crimes they did not commit declaimed their innocence to their sorrowing wives and children, only to be saved from the stake at the last moment; wives were unjustly expelled from their homes by their husbands; long-lost children were reunited with their parents in the final act (Basham 1994). The plots of Sanskrit drama seem to be reincarnated in those of the popular Hindi films, which also have a propensity for romance, family relationships, and melodrama.

## Traditional Theaters

The terminal decline of the classical Sanskrit stage in the eighth century AD, which started with the political disintegration of the powerful Hindu and Buddhist states in northern India, was hastened by the conquest of the subcontinent by hordes of Muslim invaders who entered through the northwest.

The political fragmentation of northern India and the Deccan, and the rise of small, regional kingdoms resulted in interest concentrating more immediately upon local concerns and resources, and the whole of northern and central India became preoccupied with local rather than countrywide matters (Thapar 1966). These new states based on local cultures and histories crystallized local and regional loyalties. At the same time, the Sanskrit theater declined with the loss of an imperial patron. In the absence of a new and elite form of drama to replace it, it was the turn of the popular and "folk" theaters to gain ascendancy. Old legends, tales from the *Puranas* (religious literature of the first millennium), mytho-

logical lore, philosophy, and stories of Sanskrit plays were popularized by bands of players scattered around the land.

These forms of theater were flexible, varied, and heterogeneous. (Early performances were usually of a religious nature, although later more secular forms of theatrical entertainment began to develop.) Certain common features, however, linked the multifarious forms of popular entertainment and celebration. Performances of popular or folk theaters were part of the local, religious, and agricultural calendar. Unlike performances in the private and elite nature of the Sanskrit theater, the popular or folk performances took place in public spaces, either after harvest or between the planting seasons. Most performances took place at night, after the day's toil. Players usually belonged to a particular castes of performers (for example, the Kolhati and Dombaris in Maharashtra were caste of tumblers and jugglers), although later, toward the beginning of the nineteenth century, actors in *maanch* of Madhya Pradesh and *nautanki* of Uttar Pradesh came from the artisan classes and included goldsmiths, tailors, carpenters, gardeners, and coppersmiths. As in the Sanskrit theater, most performances, whether secular or religious, began with an invocation of the gods (usually Lord Ganesh), either on stage or off. The performances invariably combined song and dance. Most performances comprised merely musicians and the players, and there were no sets or props. The performances were loud and unsophisticated, lacking the rigid fastidiousness of the Sanskrit theater and its elaborate science of *abhinaya,* or the portrayal of emotions and *mudra,* or gestures (Gargi 1966).
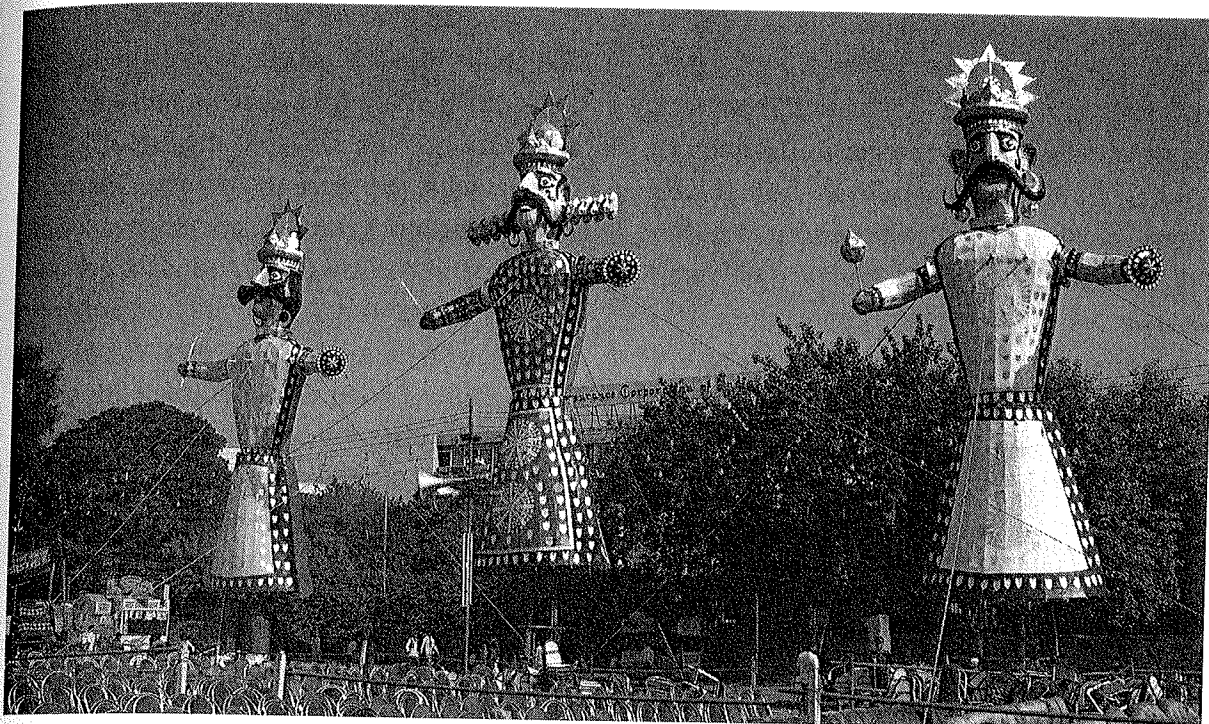
The surviving forms of popular theater can be loosely categorized as religious or secular although the boundary has never been clear. An irreverent and bawdy element has always been present in religious popular theater, such as the *Ram Lila,* introduced through the comic figures and the dancing; at the same time, secular theater, such as the *tamasha, nautanki,* and *jatra,* includes some serious moments of religious reverence and instruction.

### Ram Lila *and* Ras Lila

The *Ram Lila* is a cycle of plays based on the life of Ram as recounted in Tulsidas's *Ramacharitamanas.* It is said that during his lifetime, Tulsidas (who died in 1624) often listened to the chanting of Valmiki's *Ramayana* in Sanskrit, held during the Hindu festival of Navratri. Inspired by it, he wrote a long poem in Hindi about Ram's life. The Brahmin priests of the northern Hindu holy city of Varanasi (formerly Benares) were shocked to see the worship of Ram conducted in the tongue of the common man and boycotted Tulsidas. But this only helped to make his epic poem even more popular. Two years after Tulsidas's death, Megh Bhagat, a devoted follower and dealer in bows and arrows, enacted the *Ram Lila* on the basis of Tulsidas's *Ramacharitamanas* during a five-day festival of pilgrimage. The tradition of *Ram Lila* spread to other parts of the region, and slowly the five-day celebrations grew into a festival that can today last as long as an entire month, reaching its climax when Ram destroys the villain Ravana. The all-night performances of the *Ram Lila* are characterized by plenty of singing, dancing, bombastic rhetoric, sword fights, comic interludes, and pageants (Gargi 1966).

While the *Ram Lila* is a spectacular pageant spread over several nights in different acting locales with multiple sets, the *Ras*

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Effigies of (from left to right) Meghnath, Ravana, and Kumbh Karan are ready for the celebration of Dussehra, the triumph of good over evil, where the giant-sized effigies created are then burned. As legend has it, the Lord Rama killed Ravana after Ravana abducted Rama's consort, Sita. (Baldev/Corbis)

*Lila* retains its devotional focus and is characterized by poetry and song. It takes place in temple courtyards. Three inspired saints, Narayan Bhatt, Ghumand Dev, and Hitharivanshare, are said to have originated the genre (Gargi 1966). It has the fervent intensity of a religious congregation. It binds the audience in a bond of devotion and is an acceptable release for repressed emotions and tensions. Audiences join in the chants. Cymbals, chanting, drums, and slogans add to the fury of the maddened ecstasy. The form was used as an effective political weapon by the Hindu fundamentalists during the partition of India into Pakistan and India (Gargi 1966).

## Chavittu Natakam

The *Chavittu Natakam* is an unusual example of Christian religious theater. Chinna Thampi Annavi, a Tamil Christian missionary, founded it in the seventeenth century with the aim of spreading Christianity. For its style, the theater drew on an eclectic amalgam of martial arts (such as *Kalaripayattu*), temple arts (such as *Koothu* and *Kodiyattam*), and European opera and Shakespearean plays as performed in India. For its material, it drew on stories from the Bible, Renaissance Europe and the Holy Wars, and most frequently, the life of King Charlemagne. In this form of theater, the story of Charlemagne (known as *Karalman Charitham*) acquires the grand proportions normally the preserve of the Hindu epics, and requires at least fifteen nights for its performance. Elaborate costumes and songs are its key features. Traditionally fisherman enacted these performances, and until recently, the Roman

the singers made the melodies, or *ragas*, more folk than classical.

Munshiji, or "the accountant," is invariably the clown. He wears a coat buttoned backward with a patched, multicolored shirt and trousers and carries a split bamboo in his hand. He is a stereotypical character belonging to the nineteenth-century palaces of *nawabs* and landlords, always appearing at an unfortunate moment to remind people of their outstanding bills. No stranger to the seamy side of life, Munshiji moves among cuckolds, disguised lovers, mistresses, and gallant warriors, breaking the serious mood by his financial logic. In *nautanki* performances he appears as an all-knowing man whose incongruous remarks make people laugh. Whenever the play begins to drag, he is brought on to liven up the proceedings.

Because of its commercial nature and its secular character, *nautanki* has become increasingly lewd. After the Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act was passed in 1959, many prostitutes and *nautch* (dancing) girls, forced to leave their professions, opted to join *nautanki* troupes. When the Kanpur city corporation banned the *nautanki* performances within its municipal limits, the troupes began to perform on the outskirts of the city, and townsmen flocked to the performances. But it is the old-style *nautanki* troupes with their all-male casts that preserve the traditional vigor, singing style, and operatic charm of the form (Gargi 1966).

## The Colonial British Theater

Although the classical Sanskrit and the popular theaters have had a lasting impact on contemporary Indian theater, the colonial British theater activity had an even greater impact on it. Far from home and eager for some kind of familiar entertainment, the British had begun to build theaters for the expatriates in Calcutta soon after they arrived.

The Calcutta Theater was built in 1779, and with it began an unbroken period of expanding theatrical activity in the English community that lasted more than 100 years. The climate for theatrical activity was congenial. There was peace in this part of the country, the rule of law had been established and was enforced, and trade was booming. Money was there for the taking—at least for the officials of the British East India Company, whose numbers steadily grew but whose social life was rather limited. Except for Christmas and such infrequent social occasions as the governor-general's "at home" and ball, there was little by way of social festivities for the Englishman and his *memsahib*. Under these circumstances, the English theater in Calcutta, nourished by a steady inflow of histrionic talent from England, became a center of English social life (Raha 1978). A number of additional theaters were built in the early nineteenth century: Chandernager Theater (1808), Chowringhee Theater (1813), Dum Dum Theater (1815), and Sans Souci Theater (1839) (Raha 1978).

The plays—Shakespeare and a medley of comedies, farces, and serious plays that had proven popular in London and on the provincial stages of England—were performed exclusively in English. There were productions of *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *She Stoops to Conquer*, *School for Scandal*, and *Earl of Warwick*, alongside productions of less worthy plays—*Honeymoon*, *The Weather Cock*, *The Sixty-Third Letter*, and

Nariman Point culminates in the National Center for Performing Arts with the Parsi-sponsored Tata Theater (1981), designed by the American architect Philip Johnson, and the Jehangir Nicholson Museum of Modern Art. Bombay, 1997. (Lindsay Hebberd/Corbis)

many others, long since forgotten. There never seemed to be a shortage of acting or managerial talent, and an almost unbroken chain of gifted actors and actresses performed in Calcutta's English theaters. Tickets were highly priced (Raha 1978).

Initially, both the audience and the performers were exclusively white. The Calcutta Theater engaged only Englishmen, even as ushers and doorkeepers. The colonial theater's only contact with Indian theater was an English production in 1839 of Kalidasa's *Abhijnanashakuntala*, which had been translated by Sir William Jones in 1789, at the Sans Souci Theater (Bandyopadhyay 1986). In August 1848, however, a "Native Gentleman," one Baishnav Charan Auddy, was taken into the cast and assigned the role of Othello in a production

at Sans Souci. In the words of a letter in *The Calcutta Star*, the announced "debut of a real unpainted nigger *Othello*" had set "the whole world of Calcutta agog" (Raha 1978: 197).

The concept of going to see a play in a theater was initially novel to the elite Indian spectator. Traditionally, performances had taken place in the homes of wealthy landowners and aristocrats. However, the three cities of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras had become important trading centers, and a new class of moneylender-traders was beginning to form the nucleus of a commercial aristocracy whose tastes began to acquire an urban orientation. The founding of universities in Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras in 1857 produced a new corpus of Indian students who were famil-

iar with both western and Sanskrit literature.

Drama critic Shanta Gokhale points out that the land-owning aristocratic or caste-empowered members of the old feudal order gradually gave way to the cultural leadership of urban, university-educated young men from the upper castes who had been exposed to ideas from the West. Amateur drama groups were formed at universities and other places. Ideas were borrowed from the touring British theater companies, with their sets and painted scenery (Gokhale 2000). In 1842, Jagannath Shankar Seth built a theater in Bombay that was available for hire to the British and Indians alike. Soon more theaters were built in the three main cities. The elite class of English-educated Indians flocked to see plays of the kind watched by the British colonials in these new theaters.

The western plays were in English, a language understood only by the elite. What pleased the majority of the Indian urban theatergoers, however, was an amalgam of the European and Indian theatrical traditions—a theater that would offer Indian subject matter in Indian languages but also incorporate the exotic conventions of the proscenium stage, with its painted backdrops and ornate curtains separating the audience, seated in neat rows, from the stage. The first theater to offer just that kind of fare was the Parsi theater.

## The Parsi Theater

The growing urban population, with its corollary of a growing middle class and a growing working class in the nineteenth century India, saw two streams of theater: the popular, traditional forms such as tamasha in Mumbai and jatra in Kolk which found their way from the villages the cities, and the Parsi and European t aters for the middle classes. Until the vent of sound films in 1931, the Parsi t ater was the most widely available form theatrical entertainment for urban Indi audiences. An entrepreneurial communi the Parsis (or Zoroastrians, originally fro Persia) established many theatrical comp nies in Bombay, and their theater came be known as the Parsi theater. It was th first example of a fully commercial theat with a professional repertory.

Around 1850, amateur theater grou were beginning to emerge in Mumbai, and few enterprising Parsi business manager organized some of the theatrical clubs int professional touring companies. The Pars theater absorbed some of the convention of the colonial English theater, witnesse on the stages in Kolkata and Mumbai, an blended them with conventions of the in digenous popular and "folk" theaters. I style, the new theater was a happy marriag of the colonial English theater and the ro bustly musical popular Indian theater. The names of the theaters bear witness to the British influence: New Alfred Company Empress Victoria Theatrical Company, and Original Theatrical Company, although the plays that were performed were Indian. When the Parsi theater companies began to travel around the country in 1874, local entrepreneurs formed copycat companies offering similar fare and gave their companies similar British or Anglo-Indian names such as the Albert Natak Company in Chennai (Madras), the Ripon Indian Club (in Peshawar), the Oriental Opera and Dramatic Company (in Lahore) (Hansen 2001).

Initially, the plays were in Gujerati (the language spoken by Parsis), but with the

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huge commercial success of these ventures, the troupes soon began performing in Urdu and other regional languages, and later even in English. Traveling companies performed in Calcutta, Madras, Lahore, and even in London. Their productions featured a heterogeneous cast of players and catered to a heterogeneous crowd.

The plays produced by the Parsi theater largely comprised heroic legends from the Persian *Shahnamah* (for example, *Shirin Farhad*), Indo-Islamic fairy romances (for example, *Indar Sabha* and *Alam Ara*), stories from classical Sanskrit drama (most notably *Shakuntala*) and the Hindu epics, and adapted Shakespearean comedies and tragedies staged in the proscenium theaters first built by British and later by Indian entrepreneurs in Bombay. The Parsi theater had a stable of writers (known as *munshis*) on their payroll, and their output was on an industrial scale. Two scribes, Mohammed Mian "Raunaq" Banarasi and Hussein Mian "Zarifa," are said to have together authored more than fifty plays. Many plays by the Parsi theater writers were published and sold by the *seer* (an Indian measure) in the markets downtown (Narayana 1987).

The scripts were designed to cater to popular feelings with deliberate contrivances to provide for a variety of tastes. The makeshift arrangement of the auditorium without the modern facility of sound amplification imposed certain limitations. The lines had to be delivered in a loud manner. In the task of making themselves heard, the performers utilized rhymed sentences, which helped the dialogues to be heard in the last row.

Makeup on these stages was confined to indigenous material, and mica powder was often utilized as a tantalizer. But the absence of powerful modern electrical lights meant that the makeup, too, had to be loud, and that the gestures had to be highly stylized and loud to form one complete pattern with the painted curtains and cut scenes (Narayana 1987).

Sensationalism prevailed in most productions. *Vira Abhimanyu* of the New Alfred Company used to end with a bang, with the following stage directions: "Exit all, change scene. The father of Jayadratha is performing penance. The head of Jayadratha falls in his lap. The father gets up and his head breaks into a hundred pieces." *Buddhadeva* of Vyakula Bharata Company has this scene: "Scene change. Storm. Lightning and thunder. Stars dislodged from the sky. Huge demons seen. Some are spouting fire and some smoke. The sky is riddled with arrows in the background" (Narayana 1987: 41).

As their popularity grew, the productions began to devote themselves to more and more spectacular scenery, ornate curtains and drapes, and special effects in the lighting that highlighted the elaborate settings and enhanced the visual and emotional intensity. Songs and dances were plentiful, as were comic interludes.

The theater nevertheless adhered to the Indian convention of male actors playing female roles. Indeed, the New Alfred Theatrical Company banned female actors for nearly forty years. Women who did attempt to gain a foothold on stage faced physical danger. Kathryn Hansen, who has written extensively on the Parsi theater, points to the case of Latifa Begum, an accomplished courtesan and actress who was abducted after her first performance (Hansen 2001).

According to Hansen, the success of the Parsi theater companies could be attributed to several factors: new marketing techniques, such as newspaper advertise-

ments and printed handbills; exotic names that evoked the British monarchy (Empress Victoria Theatrical Company, New Alfred Company); the novelty of the proscenium stage with its elaborate painted scenery and special effects; the allure of operatic singing and declamatory acting techniques; and a sudden desire among the urban populace to see one another and to be seen at the theater. The polyglot, pan-regional and culturally heterogeneous Parsi theater was an appropriate expression of the burgeoning urbanization, industrialization, and capitalism (Hansen 2001).

Eventually the Parsi theater succumbed to competition from the "all-talking, all-dancing" films that began to emerge from the film factories set up in Mumbai. However, the influence of the Parsi theater on popular Hindi films was apparent. *Alam Ara*, the first Indian talkie, made in 1931, was a recreation of a Parsi theater production, as were *Shirin Farhad* (1931) and *Indar Sabha* (1931).

The influence of the Parsi theater on other urban theaters was immense. Through a process of selection and adaptation to contact with local forms, the Parsi theater influenced a number of regional styles of musical theaters, such the Marathi *sangeet natak* genre in Maharashtra, the company *natak* in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, the *nautanki* in northern India, and the Bengali theaters in Calcutta. It also exerted an important influence on new urban drama in the subcontinent. Through its productions and its traveling companies, it was the first cultural phenomenon to connect the four major cities with one another and with the hinterland, a feat not repeated until the recent developments in Indian television.

One of the theaters it was to influence greatly was the Marathi theater, which is today the most vibrant of modern Indian theaters.

## Marathi Theater

A central feature in the development of the Marathi stage has been the *sangeet natak*, a unique form of operatic theater. Before its emergence on the Marathi stage, *tamasha* and other folk performances entertained the rural masses while more sober forms of dramatic expression—such as *keertan* and *harikatha*—entertained the higher castes. Missing from upper-caste entertainment, however, were secular performances that drew on the emotions and music without being vulgar or bawdy as the lower caste entertainment was.

### Sangeet Natak

In 1843, the *rajah* of Sangli (in southern Maharashtra) asked Vishnudas Bhave, who worked in his palace, to put together some sort of secular performance that would both entertain and edify the female members of the royal household and other courtiers. Bhave set about his task with earnestness and vigor and presented *Sita Swayamwar*. The musical "play" was constructed around a well-known and well-loved episode from the Ramayana where Sita chooses Ram as her husband. The performance was declared a resounding success, and Bhave was entrusted with producing more such entertainment for the royal household. Unfortunately the *rajah* did not live long enough to enjoy the new productions, and a change in the royal arrangements forced Bhave to set out with his band of players and seek his fortunes

# 8

# Cinema

Cinema is the most important form of popular entertainment in India. With an annual production of 800–1,000 films, India is the world's largest producer of films, and this wealth of production informs all aspects of Indian cultural life.

The centrality of Indian cinema to Indian lives cannot be overemphasized. Songs from films account for around 66 percent of the music industry's revenues. Feature films, film songs, interviews with films stars, and other industry-based programs are an important feature of terrestrial and cable television. Films provide sartorial guidance in matters of dress, and clothing designers vie to design for feature films and for stars attending celebrity events. Women seek inspiration from films for their styles. For
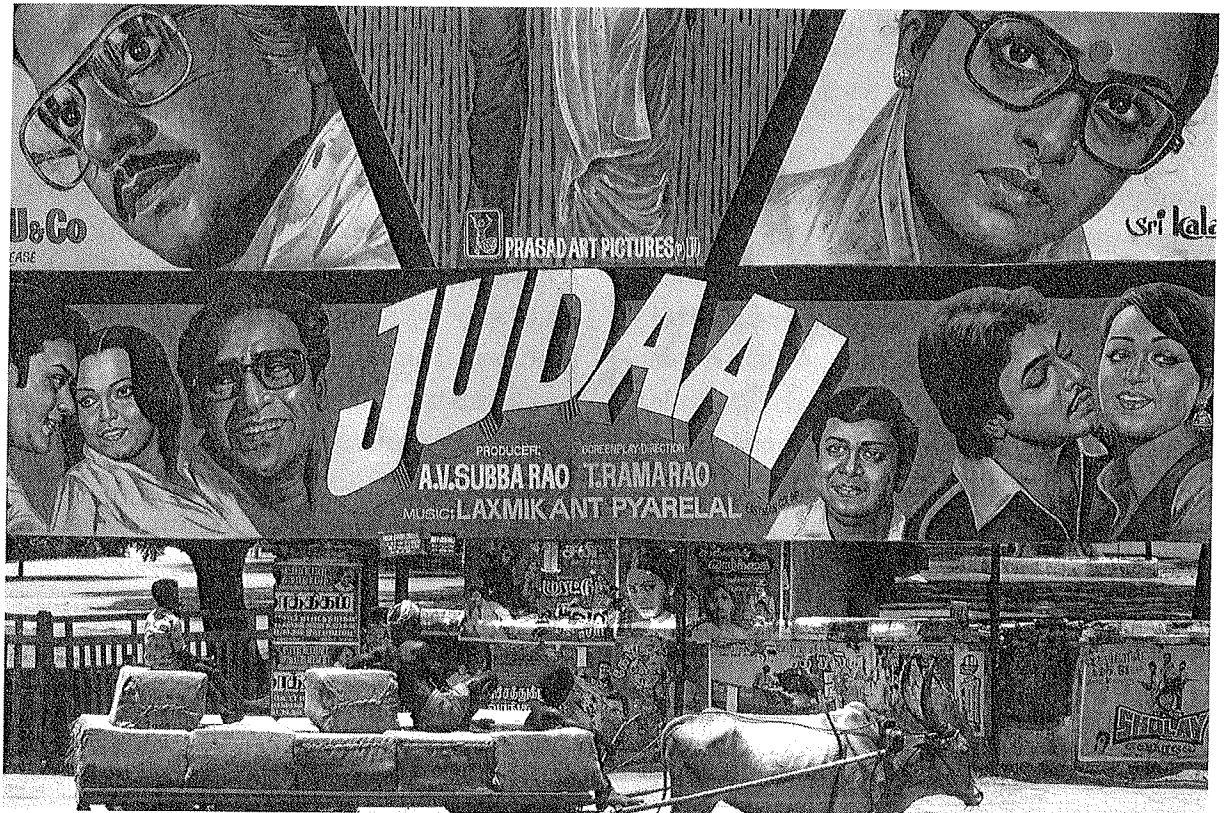


A giant billboard advertising a movie stands in the street, Chennai. (Hans Georg Roth/Corbis)

Bombay, now known as Mumbai, is referred to as Bollywood because it is the moviemaking capital of India. India is the worldwide leader, by far, in the quantity of movies produced, and watched, each year. Cinemas are generally packed to capacity, especially when the films are new releases of American classics, such as *Jurassic Park*, or Hindi classics that star famous Indian filmstars like Shashi Kapoor and Shabana Azmi. (Lindsay Hebberd/Corbis)

example, the all-time hit Hindi-language film *Hum Aapke Hain Koun!* (Sooraj Barjatya, 1994), described by many as no more than an extended wedding video, transformed the nation's wedding attire. Music played on national days is mostly patriotic songs from films, while devotional songs from films serve on religious festivals. Even folk singers and dancers have started adapting songs and dances from films in their performances, while cabaret shows at dance bars adopt film song-and-dance routines in their entirety.

The Indian film industry is fragmented into several regional film-producing centers scattered across the country. Films are made in all eighteen official languages, with even an occasional film in classical Sanskrit. However, the majority of films are produced in two main centers: Mumbai (formerly Bombay) and Chennai (formerly Madras). The Mumbai-based film industry produces between 150 and 200 films a year and is now routinely referred to in the media as "Bollywood." These films are in Hindi and follow a standard formula made up of familiar storylines elaborated by six to eight spectacular song and dance extravaganzas and comic subplots. The emotions are overstated; a grandiloquent, melodramatic narrative style is much preferred to quiet realism.

Bollywood films have the largest national following because Hindi, spoken in a

variety of dialects by around 400 million people of northern and central India—40 percent of the population—is the national language. Furthermore, because Hindi originates from Sanskrit, as is the case with the regional languages of western (and some parts of eastern) India, it is also understood (in varying degrees) by a majority of Indians living in those regions.

Chennai is home to films made in the southern Indian languages of Tamil and Telugu, spoken in Tamil Nadu (of which Chennai is the capital) and the neighboring state of Andhra Pradesh, respectively. However, with the building of new state-of-the-art studios such as Ramoji Studios, in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh is also becoming an important film-making center. Southern India has a vibrant film culture, and around 150–200 films are made annually in Tamil and Telugu each. But because familiarity with the south Indian languages is restricted to just four southern states (which account for 20 percent of the national population), the films do not have the same pan-Indian following enjoyed by the popular Hindi cinema.

Such is the all-pervasive cultural influence of Indian films on the Indian populace that even the mighty machine of Hollywood, which has laid low many national cinemas of the world, has been unable to make a dent in the Indian market. Hollywood films constitute between 5 and 10 percent of total film revenues in India (Kheterpal 2003), although recent strategies to dub some American blockbusters into Hindi have improved prospects for the major distributors.

The dissemination of Indian cinema beyond India's national borders also mounts a small but significant challenge to the global hegemony of Hollywood. Historically, Indian films have been popular in all of south Asia (Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka) and much of Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand). Indian cinema is also an important feature of cultural life in nations with large, long-established Indian populations, such as South Africa, Mauritius, and Fiji. Thanks to India's close political and commercial ties with the Soviet Union and the East European states during the Cold War, Indian films were regularly exported to the region. Not only have Indian films been regularly shown in Egypt and North Africa, but also in Israel, East Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa, where they have influenced the development of modern Hausa films and videos in Nigeria (Adamu 2004). The migrant Indian workers in the Gulf States constitute an important market for Indian films in the Middle East, and with an estimated 20 million persons of Indian origin living in the United States, Europe, Australia, and elsewhere, the Indian film industry has begun to recognize that the Indian diaspora is a valuable market for its products. In total, Indian films attract a global audience of 3.6 billion, as compared with 2.6 billion for Hollywood films (Perry 2002). In recent years, Indian films and films based on Indian subjects have caught the attention of some American and European distributors. The commercial success of films such as *East Is East* (1999), *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002), *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), *The Guru* (2002), and *Bride and Prejudice* (2004) has shown that there is an international interest in "ethnic" themes.

## Popular Hindi Cinema

In the blockbuster *Naseeb* (Manmohan Desai, 1981), the character played by Amitabh
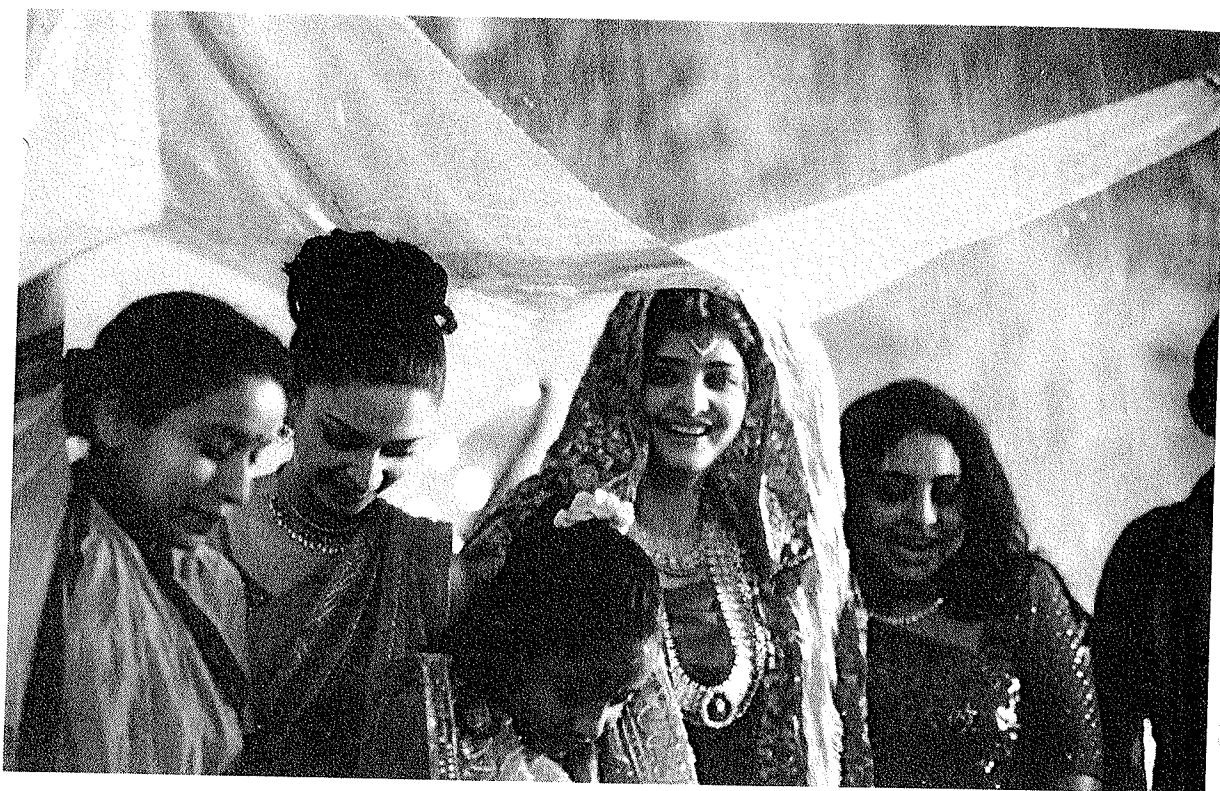
Scene still from *Monsoon Wedding*. (Mirabai Films/Delhi Dot Com/The Kobal Collection)

Bachchan, one of the biggest stars of the Hindi screen, says: "Hindi films are really very simple. Boy meets girl, boy rescues girl from a sexual assault in a magnificent fight scene, the two fall in love, sing many songs and live happily ever after. The audiences get their money's worth and go home happy." What Bachchan is referring to, of course, is the familiar story, a central feature of the formula that lies at the heart of the popular Hindi film. This hackneyed plot is emotionally enacted by stars and stretched, with the help of six to eight song-and-dance extravaganzas, spectacular fights, and comic subplots, into nearly two hours and forty-five minutes of unabashed cathartic release.

## Plot

The familiar plot, which can be varied with countless combinations and permutations, goes like this: A handsome but poor man meets a rich and beautiful woman. The two fall in love, but the young woman's father refuses to let them entertain any thoughts of marriage, having already chosen the totally unsuitable son of his friend or business partner as his future son-in-law. However, in the course of the film the father's abysmal judgment becomes apparent when his choice of husband for his daughter is uncloaked as either an evil man or an impostor intent on defrauding the credulous father, whereas the poor man turns out to be the embodiment of virtue. The father acknowledges the error of his ways and welcomes his daughter's choice into the family.

Obviously, family relationships and kinship obligation play an important role in such stories. A father who must be obeyed, a widowed mother, often blind or lame and sometimes both, who must be looked after—these elements create the tensions

necessary to endanger an early and smooth conclusion of the romance.

Sometimes family relationships form the dominant theme of a film, with the romance relegated to the subplot. These films dramatize the strains and pressures of modern life on the extended Hindu family when it is confronted by modernity in the form of an emancipated young bride. The "modern" newcomer disrupts the family's harmonious existence by refusing to honor the traditional family hierarchy and nearly causes a family breakup. The situation is saved in the nick of time when an exemplary member of the household awakens the young bride to the dangerous foolishness of her behavior. (Indian television advertisements often parody such "family breakup and reunion" stories. An advertisement for a cement company shows two brothers who have a falling out erect a wall dividing the ancestral property. However, after a melodramatic reconciliation they find that they are unable to break down the wall because of the excellent quality of the cement.)

A perennial favorite of the family drama is the "lost and found" theme first explored in G. Mukherji's *Kismet* in 1943 and which came into its own in the 1970s. Two brothers (or sisters, as in Ramesh Sippy's 1972 hit *Seeta Aur Geeta*) are separated at birth—by a natural disaster (floods, earthquakes), an accident (usually involving trains), or by the abduction of one child by a villain. Both grow up in the same city, unaware of their blood ties. One becomes a flashy gangster while the other is a hardworking policeman. When it eventually falls to the policeman to shoot the gangster in the line of duty, kinship is suddenly recognized—a birthmark, a pendant, a long-lost sepia photograph—and the brothers embrace, then set off to bring to justice the arch villain, usually the man the gangster used to work for.

These story lines are completely familiar to the spectators. As critic Ashis Nandy has pointed out: "The Bombay film story does not generally have an unexpected conclusion, it only has a predictable climax. It bases its appeal not on the linear development of a story line but on the special configuration which the film presents of many known elements or themes derived from other movies, or . . . from familiar traditional tales" (Nandy 181: 90).

The central conflict in the stories involves notions of good and evil, the Hindu concept of *dharma* (duty, righteous action), kinship ties, and social obligations (Thomas 1985). Popular Hindi films have incorporated many of the formal conventions of the popular theaters that flourished before the arrival of cinema in India. In the *Ram Lila*, popular theater in north India, for instance, episodes from the epics are performed at festival time to audiences who are completely familiar with the stories of the god Rama. The pleasure lies as much in the performance and the spectacle as in revisiting a familiar and well-loved episode. The interest thus lies in "*how* things will happen rather than *what* will happen next" (Thomas 1985: 130; emphasis in the original).

### Emotion

The familiar narrative serves to provide openings for the exploration of emotions as well as songs, dances, and spectacle. Critic Kaveree Bamzai writes: "If there is one thing Bollywood cannot be accused of, it is lack of passion. Even its worst movies have a seat-of-the-pants chutzpah and a spontaneity that probably springs from the

fact that dialogues mouthed by the actors were written just a minute ago. In Bollywood they don't act, they feel. They don't sing, they yodel. They don't dance, they whirl" (Bamzai 2004: 62).

The affective principle is of utmost importance in the cinematic experience. The emphasis on emotion finds its origins in the *Natyashastra* (ca. second century AD), a scholarly treatise on the classical Sanskrit stage attributed to Bharata, who documented an elaborate theory of *rasa* (the *essence* of emotions). Although the classical Sanskrit stage fell into decline in the eighth century AD, certain essential features were incorporated first into the popular theaters that survived it and later into the popular urban theaters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and thence into popular Indian films. The exploration of the entire range of emotions identified by Bharata within a single film has led the popular Hindi films to be labeled *masala* (mixed spices) movies. Violence and spectacle are blended with romance, comedy, and pathos. And it is not enough to simply convey these emotions—they must be powerfully overstated. Melodramatic overstatement is a "crucial stylization" of the Bombay film, for it strives to be "convincing as a spectacle by exaggeration," posits Nandy, citing the case of a disgruntled film critic who complained that whenever a clock strikes in Indian films, it always strikes twelve (Nandy 1981: 90).

### Songs and Dances

Even more important than the exaggerated emotion is the presence of songs. Each film has six to eight songs, although *Indrasabha* (J. J. Madan, 1932) is said to have contained seventy-one songs (Kabir 1991). Songs and dances in dramatic perform-

ances were an established convention in the classical Sanskrit theater; in the popular theaters such as *tamasha, nautanki,* and others; as well as in the urban popular theaters such as the Parsi theater that flourished in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Until recently, any Hindi film without any songs was immediately categorized as an "art film" and not for the consumption of the broad mass of film-going populations. The importance of music in popular films can be gauged by the fact that the music director (composer and arranger) has his or her name appear early in the roll of credits and alongside those of the producer and director on the massive, hand-painted billboards that advertise the films. (Stars are never identified by name on billboards and publicity materials—the affectation being that the public recognizes them just by looking at them.)

The success of the first talkie, a musical called *Alam Ara* (A. Irani, 1931) and a direct transfer from the Parsi stage, determined the future of the Hindi film as a musical. According to film historians Barnouw and Krishnaswamy: "The Indian sound film, unlike the sound film of any other land, had from its first moment seized exclusively on music drama forms. In doing so, the film had tapped a powerful current, one that went back some two thousand years" (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1980: 69).

During the silent era, film screenings were accompanied by live music played by a small group of musicians. Indian musical accompaniment was provided for Indian films and western musical accompaniment (usually piano) for imported films. Sometimes the musicians also provided sound effects such as the galloping of horses or the crash of thunder, and sometimes narra-

tors would translate the "title cards" and explain the intricacies of the plot.

The songs in the early talkies were taken from folk as well as classical traditions. The microphones used for sound recordings were still fairly primitive and had to be kept stationary in order to reduce noise disturbances. This severely restricted the movements of the actors (Skillman 1986). To muffle the whirring sound of the camera, it had to be buried under mattresses. Then a single microphone would be directed at the actor/singer while the small group of musicians sat outside the camera frame and provided accompaniment. The actor/singer was usually unable to move without upsetting the balance between voice and accompaniment and consequently the scene had to be shot in a single take with the singer rooted stiffly to one spot (Kabir 1991). Sometimes orchestras were hidden behind trees and bushes. Some were even suspended from trees to help the singer hear the notes clearly.

The increasing importance of songs forced producers to hire singers even if they were unable to act, since that failing was considered a lesser evil than actors unable to sing. However, R. C. Boral (1903–1981) soon solved the problems of microphones, singers, and musical accompaniments by prerecording the songs with professional singers and then having the actors to lip-synchronize on screen when the songs were played back during shooting (Skillman 1986). These singers came to be known as "playback" artists and became celebrities in their own right. The most famous playback singer is Lata Mangeshkar, who has over 25,000 songs to her credit in a career that has spanned over half a century. Playback liberated the actors to dance and whirl, and elaborate
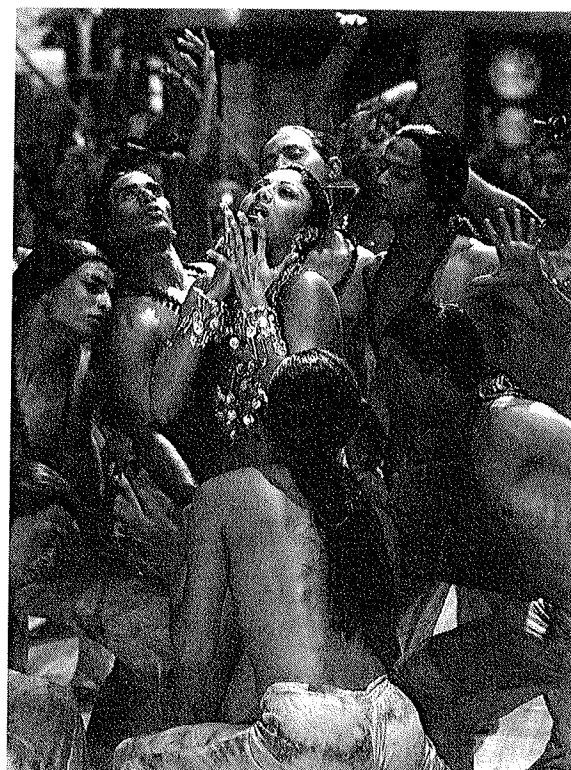


Popular Bollywood star Shilpa Shetty (center) dances with co-stars during the shooting of a song sequence for her new thriller *Khamosh*, or *Quiet*, in Bombay, 2004. (Sherwin Crasto/Reuters/Corbis)

song-and-dance routines (known as "item numbers") became an essential feature of popular Indian films. The sylvan settings, which began as a technical necessity, became a time-honored convention of the Hindi film song, and the elite press regularly satirized the alacrity with which actors "run around trees" during song and dance sequences.

Hindi film songs have an existence far beyond the screen. They are played over loudspeakers during religious festivals and national celebrations. Bands belt them out as wedding processions make their leisurely way across crowded streets; beggars singing on commuter trains have a repertoire of the latest hits. Even the per-

formers of "folk" songs that were once borrowed and adapted by music directors for the screen have started performing the screen versions of their own songs. Some radio stations are dedicated entirely to film songs, and a substantial proportion of MTV's broadcasts to India comprise Hindi film songs.

The song-and-dance sequences are devised as visual pageants with exotic dancing, lavish costumes, grand settings, and spectacular landscapes. Many are contrived as dream sequences, thus permitting dizzyingly frequent changes of costume and location. The song-and-dance sequences grant the actors permission to "express the inexpressible" and the viewers to indulge in the pleasures of looking. Most importantly, they provide the stars a chance to display their physical beauty and exhibit themselves as pure objects of desire to be visually devoured by fans.

### Genre

The formulaic unfolding of Hindi films defies generic classifications. Ever since the establishment of its major studios, Hollywood has catered to its global audiences by organizing the production and marketing of its films around "genres" (musicals, thrillers, comedies, and so forth), each genre with its own distinctive "system of orientations, expectations and conventions that circulate between industry, text and subject" (Neale 1980: 19). This system has enabled the industry to predict audience expectations, guide the audience's viewing, and cater to the preferences of varied audiences (Cooke 1985), and such an arrangement is commercially viable because studios calculate their profits by an averaging of total profits. In contrast, there is little genre differentiation in the current Hindi film industry. Most films belong to the "omnibus" genre characterized by a romantic plot, melodramatic renditions, song-and-dance extravaganzas, unrelated subplots, and narrative digressions.

The origins of the omnibus genre lie in the historical evolution of the Hindi film and in the manner in which films are made in India, where most producers are "independent" and where, unlike Hollywood, there are no longer any corporate studios left.

### History

**Beginnings** India's fascination with cinema dates back to the very early days of filmmaking. The Lumière brothers opened their cinematograph on 28 December 1895 in Paris. Six months later their emissary, Maurice Sestier, on his way to Australia, stopped off in Bombay to screen his collection of short films. The screening for British residents in India, some Europeans, and a few Anglicized Indians was held at Watson's Hotel on 7 July 1896. It was an unprecedented success. Further screenings were then hurriedly arranged for even bigger crowds at the larger Novelty Theatre.

Overnight an enthusiastic audience had been created, and by 1897 the regular screening of imported European and American films had begun. The first decade of the twentieth century was abuzz with film-related activities. British residents and Indians imported filming equipment to make their own films—short features that included comic gags, operas, sports events, and other documentaries chronicling local events (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1980). Indian entrepreneurs embarked on a theater-building spree. The greatest of them all was J. F. Madan (1856–1923), who

by the 1920s controlled about 100 out of the 300 theaters. Madan's agreements with overseas film companies led to a virtual monopoly of imported films in the country (FICCI 2003). He established an integrated film production-distribution-exhibition empire that would dominate the Indian subcontinent for the next three decades. Abdulally Esoofally (1884–1957) set up a network for the exhibition of films—not just in India, but also in the other British colonial territories of Singapore, Sumatra, Java, Burma, and Ceylon (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1980).

***The Silent Era***    The first Indian feature-length film was *Raja Harishchandra.* Made in 1912 by D. G. Phalke (1870–1944), it retold the famous story from Hindu mythology of King Harishchandra and his willingness to sacrifice everything in the pursuit of the truth. The film was 3,700 feet long; when screened with a hand-cranked projector, it lasted approximately fifty minutes. It is said that the inspiration for this first Indian film came from the film *Life of Christ* by the French director Alice Guy (Gaumont, 1906), which was screened as a Christmas feature in Bombay in 1910. Film historian B. V. Dharap points to an article written by Phalke in November 1917 where the filmmaker states:

> While the life of Christ was rolling before my physical eyes, I was mentally visualising the Gods, Shri Krishna, Shri Ramachandra, their Gokul and their Ayodhya. I was gripped by a strange spell. I bought another ticket and saw the film again. This time I felt my imagination taking shape on the screen. Could this really happen? Could we, the sons of India, ever be able to see Indian images on screen? (Dharap 1985: 35)

Phalke liquidated his assets and traveled to London to learn filmmaking. He bought some filmmaking equipment and returned to India to enlist the help of his wife in the making of *Raja Harishchandra.* Phalke, an art school graduate and photographer for the Archaeological Department of the colonial government of India, was also an amateur magician, and he incorporated the cinematic tricks and special effects of the celebrated Georges Méliès (1861–1938). The effort was met with unabashed enthusiasm. The Méliès tricks lent themselves spectacularly to the depiction of the miracles and divine interventions that abound in stories from Hindu mythology. Suddenly these mythological gods and kings, so familiar to ordinary Hindus, came alive on the cinema screens. Phalke's film was such a success that it is said that he carried away his nightly box office collections in huge mountains of coins piled high on a bullock cart (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1980).

Thereafter, all of Phalke's films were based on stories from Hindu mythology. Other filmmakers followed in his footsteps, and the "mythological" was the first-ever genre of Indian cinema. Gradually historical and social themes began to find a place in the array of films. A total of 1,331 silent films were made in India (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 1999). Most of these have perished, but the few that survive are stored at the Film Archives in Pune (formerly Poona). Although Indian audiences showed a clear preference for Indian themes, only 15 percent of the total number of films released in India in 1926–1927 were Indian films. The rest were foreign films, mostly imported from the United States (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1980). However, these percentages would change with the arrival of the "talkies."

***The Advent of Sound*** The arrival of the talkies proved a serious challenge for the film industry. With its linguistic diversity, India would need to make films in different regional languages and risk fragmenting the vast national market into smaller, less lucrative regional ones. The first talkie, *Alam Ara* (A. Irani, 1931) was made in Mumbai in Hindustani, a mixture of Hindi and Urdu. The film was a remake of a popular Parsi theater production with spectacle, songs, and dances. The film was a great success, and musical fantasy as a genre, already prevalent in the theater, seemed to show the way forward for film producers.

The advent of sound necessitated the construction of sound studios and the switch to indoor shooting. Scores of studios sprang up in the major cities. Lahore (now in Pakistan), Mumbai, Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), and later Chennai became major film centers. By the end of the 1930s, nearly one hundred studios, big and small, were involved in film production. Those that survived the struggle to remain solvent adopted the Hollywood model, controlling the production, distribution, and exhibition of films. This vertical integration allowed for investment in equipment and technologies, and for economies of scale. But studios also needed theaters for exhibition, and Madan, controling over a third of the existing 300 theaters, exercised a near monopoly. Since his theaters exclusively screened imported (mostly American) films, only bigger studios had the muscle needed to get their Indian films screened (FICCI 2003).

Three major studios emerged during the frenzied activities of the 1930s that would greatly influence the future of Indian cinema: New Theatres in Kolkata, Prabhat (in Kolhapur and later Pune), and Bombay Talkies in Mumbai.

***New Theatres*** In 1931, B. N. Sircar, an engineer by profession, had just completed the construction of a theater for a client when he decided to build one for himself in Kolkata. He equipped it with a first-class studio and provided the talented group of Bengalis he had gathered around him with everything they could possibly need to work creatively. This was the start of New Theatres. One of the directors to achieve fame and recognition soon after the establishment of the studio was Debaki Bose (1898–1971). His first success, *Chandidas* (1932), was based on the life of the eponymous sixteenth-century poet-saint. Bose's liberal use of devotional songs and music perfectly suited the requirements of the religious theme. His later films were also based on religious or mythological themes; the most famous were *Puran Bhagat* (1933) and *Seeta* (1934). The latter was the first Indian film screened at an international film festival.

However the greatest sensation to emerge from New Theatres was P. C. Barua (1903–1951), an Assamese prince whose production of *Devdas* (1935), based on a novel by the renowned Bengali litterateur Saratchandra Chatterjee, overwhelmed the nation. Made in two versions—Bengali and Hindi—it tells the tale of Devdas, the dissolute son of a rich, feudal landowner, who takes to drink when his childhood sweetheart is married off to another. So moving were the melancholic songs and the tragic dénouement that "virtually a generation wept over *Devdas*" (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1980: 80). The film has been remade several times in different languages. The most recent remake in 2002 was an ex-

travagant blockbuster in Hindi by Sanjay Leela Bhansali. It starred Shah Rukh Khan and Aishwarya Rai, the reigning king and queen of Bollywood. Barua directed both of the original versions but starred only in the Bengali one. Like his protagonist, he
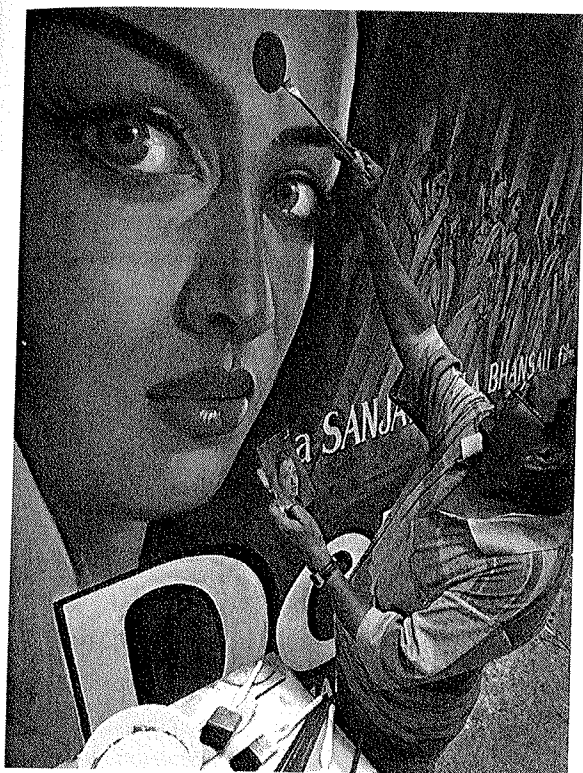
*Devdas*, by director Sanjay Bhansali, is the most expensive (US$12 million) Indian film ever made, with opulent sets, period costumes, and melodious music. Since its release the movie has broken records. Even after several weeks, the movie tickets were hard to get. The film's original costumes are part of a traveling exhibition, and will be auctioned in London. A whole range of *Devdas* brand products were launched in the market. The film is an adaptation of the novel written in 1901 by Saratchandra Chatterjee. The coveted role is played by the leading Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan with former Miss World Aishwarya Rai. This photograph shows a rare hand-painted billboard of *Devdas*, painted by the artist Vaidya in central Bombay, 12 July 2002. (Noshir Desai/Corbis)

died of drink (but not of melancholy) at the age of 48.

Most of the later films made by New Theatres were drawn from literary sources, and the audiences usually associated New Theatres with sophisticated, intellectual music dramas.

***Prabhat*** For New Theatres in Kolkata, competition was to come from Prabhat studios in Poona. Originally established in Kolhapur in Maharashtra State in 1929, the studio shifted to Poona in 1933. Like New Theatres, Prabhat began by making mythological and devotional films. The most influential personality to emerge from this studio was the actor-director V. Shantaram (1901–1990). His first film, made in Marathi (the regional language), was *Ayodhyache Raja* (1932), which once again explored the life of the same King Harishchandra that made Phalke famous. In 1936, Shantaram's associates S. Fatehlal (1897–1964) and V. G. Damle (1892–1945) made a devotional film, *Sant Tukaram*, on the life of the eponymous seventeenth-century poet-saint. The film won an award at the Venice Film Festival, the first international award for an Indian film. Many consider it the finest Indian film ever made. It is part of the library of films screened in villages by the Maharashtra State Government's mobile film unit.

Shantaram quickly moved away from the mythological genre and began to explore social issues. As was the practice of the day, he made two versions of his films—in Marathi and Hindi. His most famous films were *Kunku/Duniya Na Mane* (1937), which examined the issue of older men taking younger wives, and *Shejari/Padosi* (1941), which explored Hindu-Muslim relationships. Soon Prabhat became known for

its social themes. Not only were the films ideologically bold for the times, they were also innovative in their use of camera, music, and song, which was to influence later directors serving as apprentices at the studio.

***Bombay Talkies***  The third major studio in the 1930s was Bombay Talkies, set up by Himansu Rai (1892–1940). Rai had worked in Britain and Germany, but economic depression and the rise of fascism in Germany had forced him and his actress wife, Devika Rani (1907–1994), to return to India, accompanied by a few German technicians. They set up Bombay Talkies in Mumbai and proceeded to make three films a year. These were generally sophisticated, lightweight romances in Hindi directed by Rai with Devika Rani as his leading lady. The studio occasionally produced a film with a "social message," such as *Achhut Kanya* (1936), which explored a doomed romance between a high caste Brahmin man and a woman from an "untouchable" caste.

Rai ran his studio with a paternal authoritarianism. Only university graduates were eligible to join and all recruits—from leading actor to clapper boy—were accorded equal status. They all received a monthly salary and worked fixed hours. Bombay Talkies was renowned for its excellent sound system. It was famed for the excellent care it offered its workers (canteen, health care, and free education for the children) and its revolutionary, caste-free egalitarianism. According to film historians Barnouw and Krishnaswamy: "It was known that at Bombay Talkies all company members, of whatever caste, ate together at the company canteen. It was even said that top actors, on occasion helped clean floors . . .

All this was part of the legend of the role of Bombay Talkies" (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1980: 103). Many famous directors of the post-independent films received their early training at Bombay Talkies.

In addition to these three major studios, smaller studios included Minerva Movietone. It was founded in 1936 by actor-director Sohrab Modi (1897–1984), often compared to Sir Laurence Olivier. He specialized in historical films and "misogynistic psychodramas" (Rajadhyakasha and Willemen 1999: 150). Wadia Movietone was established in 1933. It produced Fairbanks-inspired stunt films featuring their star performer, "Fearless" Nadia (1910–1994), allegedly of Greek and Welsh origin. "Nadia of Wadia" delighted her audiences with dramatic rescues from moving trains, runaway cars, and wild horses.

***War and the Struggle for Independence***  The studio era was an exciting period in the development of Indian cinema. It laid the foundations for a powerful nationwide industry, trained a whole generation of actors, directors, and technicians, and created an enthusiastic but discerning audience all over the country. And now that films were written and produced entirely in Indian languages, Hollywood films ceased to dominate the screen.

The outbreak of World War II, in which India was an unwilling participant, drastically changed the film industry. Scarce film stock was rationed out by the colonial government to a few established studios, which had to reciprocate by dedicating at least one film in five to the subject of the war effort. Such films were rarely popular with the audiences, and many directors found ways to circumvent the order. Director V. Shantaram made an "anti-Japanese"

film, *Dr Kotnis Ki Amar Kahani* (1946) by setting it in China and recounting the tale of an Indian doctor who helped the communist forces fight the Japanese invaders. It was possibly the only war effort film to find favor with the Indian public.

The war years were also a period of intense political activity that continued until India gained independence from British colonial rule in 1947. There was strict censorship of political content in cinema, and films that ridiculed British soldiers, government officials, the police, and others were immediately banned. Not willing to risk their capital by having their films banned, yet wanting to capture the nationalist patriotic fervor of the time, some producers resolved their dilemma by reviving the historical and mythological genres. In *Sikander* (Sohrab Modi, 1941), a brave Indian king repels Alexander the Great's attempts to conquer the country, which provided several occasions for rousing speeches on the need for national freedom and Indian independence. In *Ram Rajya* (Vijay Bhatt, 1943), the epic battle between the god Rama and Ravana (a struggle between good and evil in the *Ramayana*) came to signify India's struggle against the evil colonizer. Even in *Kismet* (G. Mukherjee, 1943), a crime thriller, a rousing song warns Germans and Japanese soldiers to stay clear of India. However, the cinematic rendition of the song left few doubts about which foreign power the lyrics implied. The film was a huge success, thanks in no small measure to the song, and ran for nearly three and a half years in Calcutta.

Other producers responded to the censor's strictures by creating an Indian character who caricatured British mannerisms. Wearing a tailored suit and carrying a hat, he was either ridiculed as a buffoon who disdained Indians as "damn fools" or demonized as a villain. Needless to say, the nationalist hero in Indian attire usually got the better of him.

Still other directors began slipping in patriotic symbols. In *Anmol Ghadi* (Mehboob, 1945), a character opens a magazine with a picture of Subhash Chandra Bose, founder of the outlawed Indian National Army, on its cover. In courtroom dramas, pictures of Mahatma Gandhi adorned the walls instead of the British monarch. The censors lost no time in removing these images, but occasionally a few did manage to slip past the scissors. Barnouw and Krishnaswamy write:

> Film producers now took to the casual introduction of Congress symbols into films. On the wall, in the background, one would see the Gandhian motif, the spinning wheel, signifying defiance of the economic pattern of the empire. In a store there would be a calendar with Gandhi's portrait; in a home, a photograph of Nehru; on the sound track, the effect of a passing parade, with a few bars of a favorite Congress song. Often such symbols had no plot reference; but in theaters they elicited cheers. As war began, British censors ordered the scissoring of such shots. After 1942, when Gandhi was again imprisoned—along with a number of Congress leaders—no photograph of Gandhi was allowed on screen, no matter how incidentally. (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1980: 124)

**Beginning of the Formula**    The war years necessitated an expansion of defense-related industries and thus fueled a spurt in economic activity. Rapid industrialization required more workers and put extra money into circulation (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1980). More and more

young men left the countryside to find work in these new industries, thereby increasing the population of the cities and increasing the number of avid film spectators. The reduced marine traffic between Britain and India led to a scarcity in essential commodities and resulted in a flourishing black market. Much of the untaxed profits found their way into film production, marking the beginning of a long and covert relationship between money laundering and film finance, a relationship that has, over the decades, further strengthened.

With large amounts of cash from black marketeers eager to plow their money into films, new independent producers entered the business of making movies. Not wishing to be encumbered with the overheads of maintaining a studio and a permanent staff, they set up production companies and began to entice actors, musicians, singers, and cameramen away from the studios with very large sums of money. Producers had long known the marketing value of a "star." Placed in sylvan settings where romance blossomed, the stars sang soulful songs and engendered a fan following among the audiences. By promoting the beauty, talent, and charisma of stars, producers created a commodity that would lure audiences to the cinema in droves. A simple story, usually a romance that would exalt the star, was hurriedly concocted. In the process, the crucial role of the screenwriter was completely devalued. Unencumbered by the steep overheads of maintaining a studio with hundreds of employees on the payroll, the new independent producers made handsome profits.

Within a decade, the established studios ran into difficulties. Some folded quickly, and others, like Bombay Talkies, managed to survive by renting out their studios to the new, independent producers. The collapse of the studios was also accelerated by the demise or decline of the dominant central figures around whom many of these studios were built (for example, Shantaram at Prabhat and Rai at Bombay Talkies).

With extra money in circulation, the number of producers kept increasing. By the mid-1940s, thanks to mass migration from villages to the cities to take advantage of the increased prospects of work in the factories, mills, and docks, audience figures, too, had doubled. However, government controls over scarcity materials, such as those required for construction of theaters, resulted in no new theaters being built to accommodate the growth in the number of films and spectators (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1980). With an oversupply of films and a scarcity of theaters, distributors and exhibitors began to dictate terms to producers. They began to influence the kinds of films that were being made. Exhibitors had identified certain stars, and certain kinds of songs and dances as crowd pleasers and demanded that producers deliver these features if they wished to have their new films screened.

Romantic stories (with complicated family relationships to provide emotional tension), highlighting stars, songs, dances, and spectacle, became the order of the day, and remained so for several decades thereafter.

**Independence and After**   The film industry celebrated the independence of India with a spate of films about freedom fighters and nationalist martyrs. But nothing could dispel the gloom of the partition of the country into two nations—India and Pakistan—and the horrific violence that en-

sued between the Muslims and Sikhs on the one hand and the Hindus and Muslims on the other. Partition also had a very direct impact on the Hindi film industry. Lahore, a major city and film-producing center in the northwest of undivided India, became part of West Pakistan. As a result, hundreds of Hindu directors, producers, actors, musicians, lyricists, singers, and technicians made their way to Bombay film industry, enriching it with their immense talent.

In eastern India, Bengali cinema headquartered in Calcutta was badly hit when it lost half its Bengali audience to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Films had now to be exported to the new country and then re-imported subject to all kinds of levies and tariffs. As studios in Calcutta began to fold, an exodus of talent to Bombay took place.

Meanwhile in Bombay, the studio owners tried desperately to save their studios from the unstoppable rise of the "independent" producers. They sought government intervention and assistance, and proposed the creation of a film-financing institution involving commercial lending agencies, including banks. A corporate structure was proposed in an effort to protect the studios from unfair competition, and established public figures were drafted to lend credibility to their efforts. However, the government of a newly independent India had more pressing concerns and did not view the film industry as a priority investment area (FICCI 2003). It did, however, see the potential of the film industry as a revenue earner. Thus films became subjected to steep entertainment taxes, a feature of government policy that persists even today. State governments levy entertainment tax; levels vary but average 45 percent of the price of a ticket across the country.

***The Golden Age of Hindi Cinema***   The arrival in Bombay of talented filmmakers from the different studios of India gave new vigor and confidence to the bustling Hindi film industry and has led many film historians to label the 1950s as the "golden age" of Hindi cinema. It was an age of great actors such as Dilip Kumar, Raj Kapoor, Dev Anand; actresses such as Nargis, Meena Kumari, and Madhubala; composers Naushad Ali, Salil Chaudhary, and Ravi;



On 17 May 2003, Indian actor and director Dev Anand received the Lifetime Achievement Award for Indian Cinema at the fourth International Indian Film Academy Awards (IIFA) at the SunDome in Johannesburg. Legendary actor and Bollywood filmmaker Dev Anand received the 2003 Dadasaheb Phalke award, the prestigious accolade given by the Indian government for lifetime contributions to the cinema. The 80-year-old actor-producer-director is one of the few surviving legends of the pre-Partition era. Durban, South Africa. (STR/AFP/Getty Images)

and lyricists Sahir Ludhianvi, Majrooh Sultanpuri, and Shakeel Badayuni. Never again was the city to witness such a glittering assembly of talent in the Hindi film industry.

Four directors dominated the decade: Mehboob Khan, Raj Kapoor, Bimal Roy, and Guru Dutt. All four had served as apprentices in the major studios and had shown themselves to be open to the influences of Hollywood and the major film movements in Europe, which they duly incorporated into the now established formula film that was the signature of the Hindi film factories.

### Mehboob Khan (1904–1964)

The early films of Mehboob Khan portray an idiosyncratic blend of Islam and Marxism. Only in his later films did he embrace the extravagant flourishes of Cecil B. De Mille. His early films examine issues surrounding extreme poverty (of which he had firsthand experience as a young boy when his mother struggled to feed him and his siblings) and the plight of women under patriarchy. *Roti*, made in 1942, is a whimsical but stark denunciation of capitalism and human greed. Mehboob's most celebrated work is *Mother India* (1957), which has often been described as a left-wing *Gone with the Wind*. A remake of his earlier film *Aurat* (1940), it recounts the tale of an abandoned peasant woman as she struggles to keep her children alive in the wake of famine. The narrative unfolds against a backdrop of the nation's transition from primitive farming to modern mechanized agriculture, and while the denunciation of exploitation of peasants is robust, the production itself is extremely lavish. His other films, such as *Najma* (1942), *Andaz* (1949), and *Anmol Ghadi* (1945), explore the claustrophobic world of women and the tragedy of those who try to escape it. An ardent supporter of Nehru's socialist programs, Mehboob died within a day of Nehru's death.

### Raj Kapoor (1926–1988)

Four generations of the Kapoor family have found fame and fortune in the Hindi film industry. Raj Kapoor's father, Prithviraj Kapoor, was a well-established stage actor in Lahore, where he established Prithvi Theatres (1944–1960) and where he was the star actor and director. To keep the theater company solvent, he accepted roles in films as well. With his sons Raj, Shammi, and Shashi Kapoor, and his grandsons Randhir and Rishi Kapoor and great granddaughters Karishma and Kareena Kapoor, he spawned a great acting dynasty.

Raj Kapoor began work as a stagehand at his father's theaters. He later trained with Bombay Talkies, and by the age of twenty-two, he had established his own production company, R. K. Studios, and directed his first film, *Aag* (1948), in which he also played the leading role. Unusually handsome, with blue eyes, his screen persona was influenced by Hollywood actors such as Ronald Coleman, Clark Gable, and Charlie Chaplin. His early films tackle urban issues of unemployment and homelessness—serious themes that were examined not didactically but entertainingly, with lively songs and love scenes. *Awara* (1951) was an instant hit, not just in India, but also in the Soviet Union. It was said to be Chairman Mao Zedong's favorite film. With *Shri 420* (1955), Raj Kapoor established himself as the darling of the masses.

His later films—*Jis Desh Mein Ganga Behti Hai* (1960), *Sangam* (1964), *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* (1978), and *Ram Teri*

*Ganga Maili* (1985)—showed a greater preference for eroticism than socialism. In his lifetime, Kapoor acted in over seventy films and produced about seventy features.

**Bimal Roy (1902–1966)**  Scion of a rich landowning family, Bimal Roy began his directorial debut at New Theatres in Kolkata with the Bengali film *Udayer Pathey* (*Hamrahi* in the Hindi version, both 1944). He moved to Mumbai in 1950. After working briefly with Bombay Talkies, he set up his own company, Bimal Roy Productions, where he made thirteen films in eleven years (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 1995).

Roy was best known for his social themes, which depicted the injustices of the *zamindari* (landowning) system, as in his classic film *Do Bigha Zameen* (1953). Other memorable films were *Madhumati* (1958), about the exploitation of tribal communities; *Sujata* (1959), about the Hindu caste system; and *Bandini* (1964), about the freedom struggle. He also re-made P. C. Barua's *Devdas* in Hindi with the reigning star of the time, Dilip Kumar, in the title role. Roy was one of the few Indian cineastes to be able to combine his own political ideology with the Indian box office requirements of romance, songs, dances, and melodrama. His cinematic style reveals the influence of the Italian neorealist directors.

**Guru Dutt (1925–1964)**  No other popular director has attained the cult status that has been accorded to the actor-director Guru Dutt, who committed suicide at the age of 39. A trained dancer, he worked as actor, choreographer, and assistant director at Prabhat studios before setting up his own production company. He experi-

mented with a large variety of genres—romances, comedies, and adventure films. His most celebrated films were *Baazi* (1953), a gangster film noir; *Pyaasa* (1957), about a poet who decries the corruption of society; and *Kaagaz ke Phool* (1959), about the decline of a major studio. The latter flopped at the box office, a failure that Dutt took so much to heart that he refused to acknowledge his next film *Chaudhvin Ka Chand* (1960). It was a romance set in a traditional Muslim family and became a huge box office success. This was followed by yet another hit, *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam* (1962), a haunting unraveling of a feudal Bengali landowning family.

**The 1960s and the Arrival of Color**  Color processing equipment was not imported into the country until the 1960s. When Mehboob Khan's *Aan* (1952) was shot in 16mm Gevacolour and blown up in Technicolor, it was the first successful transition from black and white to color in India (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 1995). Color film encouraged lavish sets. Initially the prohibitive cost of color forced some directors to film only a few scenes (usually the ones that lent themselves to spectacle) in color. In K. Asif's spectacular romantic historical, *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960), recently re-colored and re-released by his son and greeted with warm tears of nostalgia by audiences, the famed "hall of mirrors" song-and-dance number is in color while much of the rest of the film is in black and white.

The 1960s was the decade of romance. The formulaic film had by now come into its own, particularly since color cinematography encouraged outdoor shooting in the magnificent landscapes of Kashmir and the Himalayas, bringing home to the urban audiences the splendors of the natural scenic

beauty of the Indian subcontinent. In *Jungalee* (S. Mukherjee, 1961) the Elvis-inspired, quiff-sporting protagonist undertakes a trip to Kashmir, where he meets a young woman. The two spend a substantial part of the film cavorting in the snow singing lively songs of love. When the scenic beauty of Kashmir was exhausted, producers moved to exotic locales in Switzerland, Hawaii, and elsewhere. Film titles such as *Love in Tokyo* (1966), *Singapore* (1960), or *Around the World in Eight Dollars* (1967) became commonplace. Despite the allure of seeing their favorite stars in color, the spectators remained a capricious bunch. The majority of films lost money, a small percentage broke even, and a smaller percentage made money. But it was the elusive possibility of hitting the jackpot that kept investors and producers eager to keep making films.

The love of romantic scenes shot in "exotic" foreign locations such as Switzerland and France has strengthened over the decades and spawned an entire tourist industry specialty: Indian tourists travel to sites where certain successful films have been shot with the fervor of religious pilgrims. To capitalize on this lucrative industry, many delegates from foreign tourist offices have travelled to India to encourage Indian producers to shoot films in their countries.

**The Angry Young Man**   The romance of the 1960s was to change dramatically with the arrival of a new team of screen-writers. Salim Khan and Javed Akhtar (known as Salim-Javed) replaced the romantic hero with the angry young man. In *Zanjeer* (Prakash Mehra, 1973), their first commercial success, the lean, mean, and angry hero who would rather fight than romance the leading lady was inspired by Clint Eastwood. The image of the introverted avenger popularized by Amitabh Bachchan was to dominate the screen for the next fifteen years. It also briefly brought back the screenwriter, devalued by the independent producers of the previous decades, as an important figure in the film-making process.

New technology allowed cinematographers greater scope for spectacular violence (blood spurts, neck breaks, and so forth) and created a new function—that of the fight composer, the person who choreographed these spectacular fight sequences. His job was to add choreographed bone-crunching fight sequences to the narrative. Gory spectacle in disused warehouses and colorful cabaret dances in the sleazy, smoke-filled bars frequented by the hero replaced the mellifluous love songs set in natural scenic beauty.

One way of increasing the visual pleasures of the film was to have multiple lead actors ("heroes") who, when not romancing their respective women in snow-covered mountains, flower-filled parks, or in the throbbing strobe lights of dance floors, were spectacularly fighting off multiple villains. Thus was born the "multi-starrer." One such multi-starrer was Ramesh Sippy's *Sholay* (1975), often described as a "curry western," and one of the highest grossing Hindi films of all time.

The 1970s also revived the "lost and found" stories about separated twin brothers, which permitting the reigning star to play double roles in the film and offered the spectators the visual treat of, as one film publicity poster famously announced, "twice the star for the price of one."

***Art Films and the Parallel Film Movement*** The decade of the 1970s also signalled the arrival of "art" films or "parallel" cinema, a movement that had, in fact, already begun with Satyajit Ray. Dispensing with the formula film world of stars, songs, and spectacle in favor of serious realistic themes, these small-budget films targeted the more discerning filmgoer.

Satyajit Ray (1921–1992), the celebrated director, brought to Indian cinema international recognition and status of the kind it had never before enjoyed. Born in Kolkata, Ray studied at Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore's Shanti Niketan. In 1947, he started a film society, which introduced him to the cinemas of post-war Europe and the Soviet Union. When Jean Renoir (1894–1979) came to film *The River* (1951), Ray was able to observe the French director at work. Inspired by what he saw, he bought the film rights to the Bengali novel *Pather Panchali* by Bhibhutibhushan Bannerji and wrote out a complete screenplay in Bengali. But finding a producer proved to be almost impossible. Dismayed that the film had no songs or dances, producers flatly turned it down. In desperation Ray sold his personal belongings and began to shoot a few scenes. When the money ran out, he turned to the state government of West Bengal, which, surprisingly, agreed to finance the venture. It was, many historians and economists agree, the best investment ever made by a government body in an artistic field.

Shot in natural surroundings on a very tight budget and with a musical score by Ravi Shankar, *Pather Panchali* (1955) is a simple, realistic, and exquisite document on the childhood of a boy named Apu. A great success in West Bengal, it was initially unknown outside the state. An official entry at the Cannes Film Festival that year, it was voted the "best human document." The film also set a new record for the longest running film at New York's Fifth Avenue Cinema. After his success with *Pather Panchali*, Ray completed the trilogy on Apu's life with *Aparajito* (1956) and *Apur Sansar* (1959).

The success of the trilogy marked the beginning of a career in filmmaking that spanned thirty-five years, during which Ray experimented with several genres— comedy, literary adaptations, adventure, musical fantasy. His only non-Bengali film was *Shatranj Ke Khilari* (*The Chess Players*, 1977), where he used the reigning stars of Bombay's film world. Although the greatest influences on Ray's filmmaking style were the Italian neo-realists from whom he also learned to make films on a shoestring budget, his view of the world was always unique and distinctive.

The legacy of Ray encouraged young filmmakers of the 1970s to experiment with new forms. The establishment of the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) in 1961 and the creation of the Film Archives in 1964 had already spawned a new generation of professionally trained directors and technicians. Many of these were absorbed into the film factories of Bombay and Madras. But some wished to experiment with alternative forms of cinematic expression, even though raising funds for such experimental endeavors proved nearly impossible. Although the state-funded Film Finance Corporation (FFC) set up in 1960 was amalgamated with the state-funded Indian Motion Pictures Export Corporation (IMPEC) to form the National Film Development Corpora-

tion (NFDC) in 1980, it provided only a few opportunities for newcomers to finance low-budget films.

Two new films financed by the FFC heralded the start of a wave of art films: Mrinal Sen's *Bhuvan Shome* and Mani Kaul's *Uski Roti*, both made in 1969. *Bhuvan Shome*, a comic satire on bureaucrats tells how a principled but heartless officer sacks his junior, only to be charmed by the latter's vivacious peasant wife during a chance encounter at a duck shoot. Kaul's experimental *Uski Roti* is based on a Mohan Rakesh short story about a young woman who walks several miles each day to deliver her bus driver husband his midday meal. One day her sister is sexually assaulted, and she is late. Her husband drives off in a huff, and uncertain of his intentions, she remains rooted there until nightfall.

Despite the excitement about the new trends in cinema, art films never found it easy to find distributors or exhibitors. Most remained confined to the film-club circuit and, in some cases, to their cans, never having been screened. While some like Mani Kaul and Kumar Shahani made largely incomprehensible experimental films, others such as Shyam Benegal made realistic films but shunned the dream-like fantasy and the song and dance routines of the popular Hindi cinema. Benegal's first film, *Ankur* (1974), and later *Nishant* (1975) treated the theme of peasant exploitation by the feudal landowning classes. Interestingly, Ramesh Sippy's curry western blockbuster *Sholay*, made the same year, also touched on a similar theme of rural exploitation, neatly pitting Bollywood's vision of the world against that of the artists.

Directors such as Basu Chatterjee (*Sara Akash*, 1969; *Piya Ka Ghar*, 1971) and Basu Bhattacharya (*Teesri Kasam*, 1966; *Anubhav*, 1971) mostly worked within the constraints of the conventions of the popular Hindi film but toned down the excesses of emotion and spectacle, replacing the implausible stories with more realistic ones. Theirs was not a world of separated twins reunited by chance encounters, but a middle class world of university lecturers, office clerks, and retired postmasters trying to come to terms with life. Songs were sometimes given realistic motivations, such as a radio broadcast or a record playing. Such films offered more refined entertainment for the urban middle classes.

The cinema of the 1970s could thus be divided into four categories:

1. The mainstream popular film with its familiar plots, overstated emotions, spectacular fights, and songs and dances, which dominated the screens.
2. The emotionally restrained and "sober" stories narrated in a more realistic fashion while retaining the songs (but dispensing with the grand choreography of dances), as exemplified by the films of Chatterjee and Bhattacharya.
3. The realistic films that completely dispensed with fantasy, songs, and dances, as seen in the works of Benegal and Sen.
4. The experimental art films where directors such as Kaul and Kumar Shahani (*Maya Darpan*, 1972) experimented with the formal devices of cinema itself.

Although the art film movement failed to take off, it had nevertheless created an opening for a new kind of cinema. The decade of the 1970s was an exciting time

for Indian cinema, with a variety of cinemas and diversity of genres not seen since the 1930s.

### The Gloomy Decade of the 1980s

The decade of the 1980s was a gloomy period for the film industry. The violent spectaculars and multi-starrers of the 1970s had run their course by the mid-1980s, and Indian filmgoers had had enough of testosterone-fueled actors. Besides, Amitabh Bachchan and others who embodied the genre were starting to gray and lose their appeal.

In 1983, when Amitabh Bachchan suffered a near-fatal accident during the shooting of *Coolie* (Manmohan Desai, 1983), millions of fans gathered weeping outside the hospital and prayed for his recovery. Yet within a few years, Bachchan's high-profile films began to flop at the box office—*Mard* (Manmohan Desai, 1985), *Sultanat* (Mukul Anand, 1986), *Agneepath* (1990), *Khuda Gawah* (1992). The worst was *Mrityudaata* (1997), which ruined Bachchan's production company, Amitabh Bachchan Corporation Limited (ABCL).

The high cost of crowding major stars into a single film led to correspondingly huge losses, and overruns in time schedules due to stars working in several films concurrently added to the huge cost overruns. Of the 132 films made in 1983, only seventeen were reported to have recovered their costs. In 1985, only one in eight films recovered its costs (Pendakur 1989).

In contrast, the success of tragic romances such as *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* (Mansoor Khan, 1988), about doomed love between children of feuding families, or romantic comedies like *Mr. India* (Shekhar Kapur, 1987), *Tridev* (Rajiv Rai, 1989), *Ram Lakhan* (Subhash Ghai, 1989), and *Maine Pyar Kiya* (Sooraj Barjatya, 1989)

heralded the return of romance and the dawn of a new era of directors and actors. In particular, it marked the emergence of stars Salman Khan, Aamir Khan, and Shah Rukh Khan, three stars who continue to dominate the screen today.

The financial outlook for the industry in the 1980s was further dampened by the video boom and with it, video piracy. Besides, by the 1980s television too had begun to make its presence felt.

### Competition from Television

The expansion of television in the 1980s was a major blow to the Hindi film industry. Although television made its first appearance in 1959 (largely as an experiment in educational development), daily telecasting did not begin until 1965. Initially, the broadcasts were just an hour long and geared toward educating farmers on agricultural matters. The shift in the fortunes of television was a consequence of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's personal vision. Mrs. Gandhi astutely recognized that the medium could be harnessed to showcase the government's achievements to the vast nation. The inauguration of the Ninth Asian Games held in Delhi provided the appropriate occasion to herald a new era of television entertainment in color. A *National Programme* broadcast from New Delhi was also introduced, providing the central government a platform from which to address the entire nation.

Thanks to the temporary lifting of restrictions on the importation of television sets, ownership multiplied six-fold, from 2.7 million in 1984 to 12.5 million in 1986 (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 1999). The first government-sponsored serial, *Hum Log*, that ran for nearly a year and a half (1984–1985) had a large part of the Indian

nation fascinated by the trials and triumphs of the family of Basesar, the alcoholic carpenter. This serial was promptly followed by a 57-part serialization (1987–1988) of the Hindu epic *Ramayana*, which proved to be an unprecedented hit in the history of television. This, in turn, was immediately followed by a 93-part serialization of another Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata* (1988–1990). Both mythological serials were made by well-established Hindi film directors Ramanand Sagar (*Ramayan*) and B. R. Chopra (*Mahabharat*).

In 1991, the arrival of satellite television from Hong Kong's STAR (soon after bought by Rupert Murdoch) resulted in a television revolution. Within a decade there was an explosion of choice, with over 100 regional and international channels available to the Indian viewers. The success of television had a negative impact on attendances in the cinema halls.

**Hindi Cinema in the 1990s**   Hindi cinema survived the spread of television by focusing on what the small screen could not offer—spectacle. The biggest hits of the 1990s were *Hum Aapke Hain Koun!* (Sooraj Barjatya, 1994) and *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* (Aditya Chopra, 1995), both celebrating engagement ceremonies and wedding preparations. In the former, an "extended wedding video," romance takes place in the sheltered atmosphere of a blissfully harmonious extended family. The first half of the film explores the delights of a wedding engagement, the actual wedding ceremony, and the joy of children. The only drama occurs halfway through the film, when the wife falls down the stairs of her mansion and dies. The family elders decide that the younger sister (Mad-

huri Dixit) must marry the widower so that the children may grow up in a loving atmosphere. Unfortunately, unbeknown to the family elders, the young woman loves the widower's younger brother who reciprocates her sentiments. But while the latter is willing to sacrifice his love for the sake of his brother and the greater good of the extended family, the young woman and her Pomeranian dog are not. However, all ends well when the dog (as a messenger of the god Krishna) exposes the romance to all concerned and the lovers are married. Such was the success of the film—and in particular its costumes—that copies of saris worn in the film were being sold in far off outposts of Indian populations such as Singapore and Fiji.

Chopra's *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* assiduously follows the formula of the classic Hindi romance. The only concession to changing times is that the lovers are members of the Indian diaspora, or "NRIs" (nonresident Indians). The first half is concerned with sight-seeing and romance in the snowy Swiss Alps while the second half focuses on preparations for a wedding—that of the young woman Simran (Kajol) to a man of her tyrannical father's choice. The unmitigated success of these two films with extended scenes of wedding celebrations engendered a flurry of copycat films replete with the finery of the wedding saris and other costumes.

The decade of the 1990s also saw the emergence of a new genre of romantic films set against a backdrop of political turmoil. These were pioneered by Mani Rathnam, who began his career in southern Indian films. *Nayakan* (1987) is a *Godfather*-like narrative on the Mumbai underworld, with a style that marries Cop-

pola and MTV. *Roja* is set in the political turmoil of Kashmir, where a newly wed woman searches for her husband, abducted by the Kashmiri militants. Made in Tamil, it was dubbed into Hindi for a wider release. The controversial *Bombay* (1995) was Rathnam's first foray into the world of Hindi cinema. It concerns a romance between a Hindu man and a Muslim woman set in Mumbai, a city that had just suffered bombings perpetrated by Muslims in 1993. Thereafter Rathnam made *Dil Se* (1998), where a journalist (Shah Rukh Khan) falls in love with a female terrorist (Manish Koirala). The film is better remembered for the song "*Chaiyya chaiyya . . .*" Rathnam's more recent film, *Yuva* (2004), is about modern-day angst and Indian youth.

A new genre of lowbrow comedy was born when director David Dhawan teamed up with actor Govinda in films like *Aankhen* (1993), *Raja Babu* (1994), *Coolie No. 1* (1995), *Biwi No. 1*, and so on. The success of the Dhawan-Govinda duo was based on Govinda's ability to dance and mouth the bawdy double entendre of the lyrics; some, such as "*Sarkailo khatiya . . .*" were called obscene. Govinda (who confessed to being inspired by Dada Kondke, a veteran artist of *tamasha*, the popular Marathi theatrical tradition whose bawdy humor found great success on the Marathi screen) won a seat in Parliament in 2004.

In the 1990s the major American distribution companies began to dub Hollywood blockbusters into Hindi. In 1994 *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1992) was dubbed and made INR 120 million (US$2.6 million), an impressive figure considering that the market for American films was still small. Other films have followed the trend— *Cliffhanger* (1992), *Aladdin* (1992), *Speed* (1993), *True Lies* (1994), and *Twister* (1996) (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 1999), although none of the later films were able to replicate the success of *Jurassic Park*.

Dubbing American films is not without its problems. In *Jurassic Park*, unable to find the Hindi language word for "dinosaur," the translators settled on "*badi chipakli*" (big lizard). Since Hindi films rarely have sexually explicit dialogue or abusive language, a sexually graphic description is briskly translated as "cheating in examinations" (D'Souza 2004).

**Contemporary Hindi Cinema**    *Lagaan* (Ashutosh Gowarikar, 2003) is a landmark film of contemporary Hindi cinema. Set in colonial India, it combines the excitement of a cricket match with the fight for freedom from colonial tyranny. Representatives of the British colonial government challenge the poor peasants of a village to a cricket match, promising that they will waive the onerous taxes they have just imposed if the villagers win the encounter. The film then explores the villagers' successful efforts to rise to the challenge. By combining the three central passions of Indians—the nation, cricket, and song-and-dance spectacles, the film made history at the box office. It was nominated for an Academy Award in 2003 for Best Foreign Film in the United States (but failed to win) and was sportingly reviewed by *Wisden*, the cricket journal in the United Kingdom.

The success of *Lagaan* provoked a spate of patriotic films set in colonial India or at the time of Partition. The colonial theme also offers opportunities for European actors, either as the oppressor or as a love interest. In the past, an Indian actor in a blond wig and riding boots was sufficient

to portray the British colonial. However, since the success of *Lagaan*, the European actor is the sine qua non of the new patriotic films such as Subhash Ghai's *Kisna* (2005) and Ketan Mehta's *1857—The Rising* (2005). The latter, which deals with the Indian Rebellion against the British in 1857, was partly financed by the U.K. Film Council. Patriotism is also the theme of Gowarikar's more recent *Swades* (2004), about an Indian-born NASA scientist who returns to India and dedicates his skills to the "upliftment of the motherland."

Building on the patriotic theme are the "war" movies. In the aftermath of the 1999 Kargil confrontation with Pakistan, J. P. Dutta's *LoC Kargil* (2004) put the conflict on celluloid. His earlier film *Border* (1997), also about a border conflict with Pakistan, was a surprise box office hit. Some of the patriotic/war films in 2004 have been Gaurang Doshi's *Deewar*, Anil Sharma's *Ab Tumhare Hawale Watan Saathiyon* (the title is from the lyrics of a 1964 war film, *Haqeeqat*, by Chetan Anand), and Farhan Akhtar's *Lakshya*.

In the same year as *Lagaan*, its lead actor, Aamir Khan, was also the star of Farhan Akhtar's *Dil Chahta Hai*, a multistarrer about urban youth and the new consumerist lifestyles. The success of *Dil Chahta Hai* was significant because it marked the emergence of a completely new phenomenon—that of "new" Bollywood. Hitherto, films were made by bearing in mind a heterogeneous spectatorship, one that spanned both the rural and urban constituencies. What *Dil Chahta Hai* did was to break free from the rural viewers by concentrating on the urban audiences. It was a film about love—for women, for cars, for consumer goods. And it actively promoted a lifestyle not available to the ru-

ral areas. The film indicated changing times and tastes.

Three important and concurrent developments contributed to the growth of the "new" Bollywood films. First, the economic liberalization of the 1990s had led to the rapid growth and enrichment of the urban middle classes. Although the economic policies undoubtedly improved the lives of rural Indians, it was the urban classes that benefited most from the government's policies. These growing numbers of middle-class Indians were interested not just in the standard Bollywood blockbusters but also in new kinds of entertaining films.

Second, in 1998, the government granted cinema the status of an industry, entitling it to institutional finance. Although the initial enthusiasm for bank loans was small, it now constitutes 33 percent of all film financing. Those companies that have taken up the offer of bank loans for film production have tended to be mainly small and middle-sized entertainment companies that have begun producing new kinds of films catering to the growing middle class eager for new varieties in entertainment. At the same time, certain state governments, such as the government of Maharashtra, decided to grant tax relief for the construction of new multiplex cinemas. These new cinemas have tended to be in the towns and cities providing entertainment companies with the opportunity to develop new idioms in cinema targeting niche audiences. Since the start of the new millennium, the number of screens has multiplied. The higher-cost ticket engenders a more exclusive social environment consisting of genteel audiences. The new theaters also offer a better viewing experience, bringing the middle classes back to the cinemas.

The sudden surge in new kinds of film is
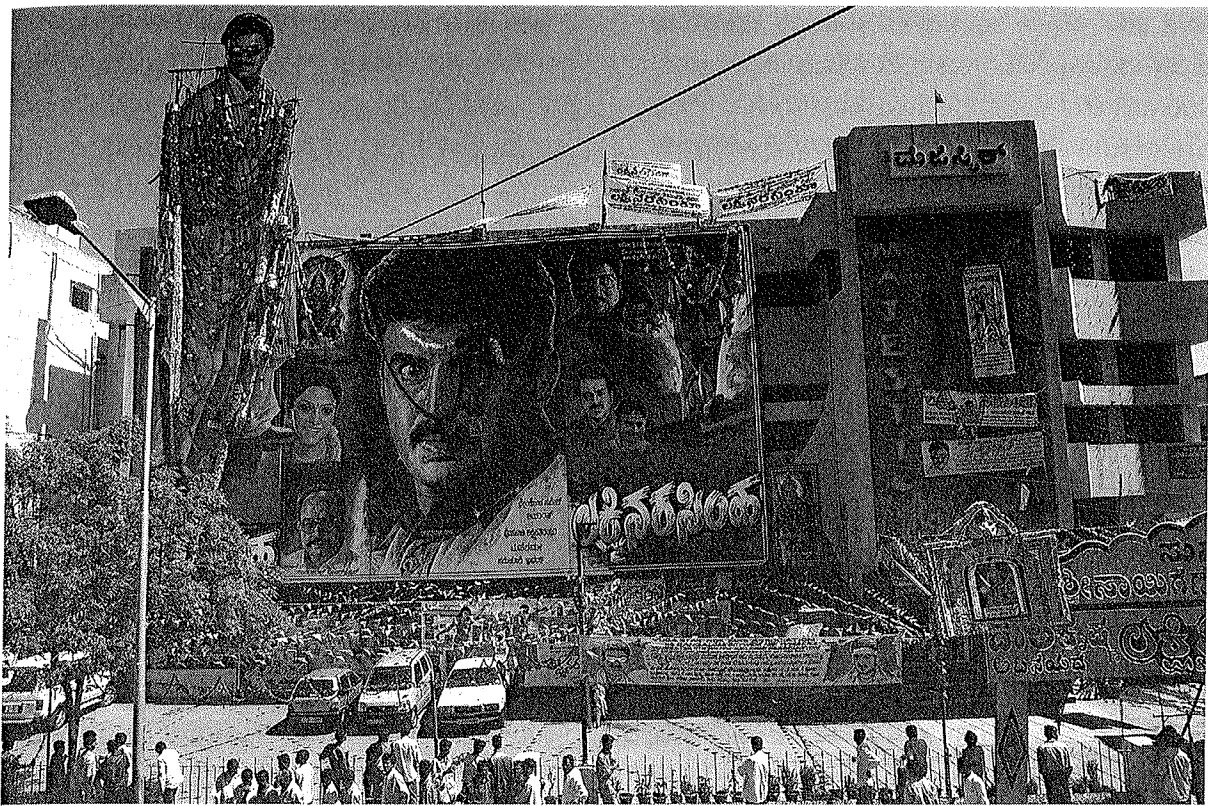
A heavily garlanded poster created in the Rajkamal Arts Studio hangs on the facade of the Majestic Theatre. Bangalore, Karnataka, 2004. (Joseph Khakshouri/Corbis)

the most telling feature of the new Bollywood. On the one hand films such as *Lagaan*, *Devdas* (Sanjay Leela Bhansali, 2002—the twelfth version to date of the classic), and *Munnabhai MBBS* (R. Hirani, 2003) continue to entertain both urban and rural India. On the other hand, new films— such as Madhur Bhandarkar's *Chandni Bar* (2001), a gritty film about a woman who survives by dancing in a bar; Anant Balani's *Jogger's Park* (2003), about a friendship between a retired judge and a feisty young single woman; Gustad Kaizad's *Boom* (2003), about the underworld and the modeling world; Nagesh Kukunoor's *Hyderabad Blues* (1998), about an Indian who returns from the United States to find himself a stranger in his own homeland; Dev Benegal's *Split Wide Open* (2001), about the lives of four

disparate people; Mahesh Dattani's *Morning Raga* (2003), about a tragedy that draws together three characters through the theme of music; and Vishal Bhardwaj's *Maqbool* (2003), an adaptation of Macbeth set in Mumbai's underworld—are all a result of new audiences willing to watch new kinds of films.

### Issues

***Film Finance***   One of the biggest issues confronting the Hindi film industry is the unorganized manner in which films are financed. Formal contracts are rare, and where they do exist they are considered neither important nor legally binding. Thanks to the archaic and slow-moving legal system, a dispute can take decades to come to court. Most of the transactions

that take place among producers, distributors, exhibitors, music companies, actors, and directors are informal, based on mutual understanding, and leave no paper trail. Figures reported are rarely true. Films that have done average business, for example, are often trumpeted as box office hits, and the seven trade magazines invariably offer differing versions of a film's commercial performance. Besides, there is no finished script before a film begins shooting, nor is there a detailed shooting schedule.

In most cases, the production of a film proceeds thus: A producer announces a project and, producers being highly superstitious creatures, chooses (with the help of astrologers) an auspicious moment to inaugurate the film shooting. A *mahurat* (religious ceremony) is performed during which the first frame (usually of the family deity or some lucky mascot) is shot. Actors, directors, chief guests, and even cameras associated with the project are garlanded and sweets distributed. The film, which is yet to be made, is then sold to distributors.

The distribution business is regional and fragmented. Six distribution territories cover the entire domestic market—Mumbai, Delhi/Uttar Pradesh, North India/East Punjab, Central India, the Eastern Circuit, and the South. The entire overseas market constitutes a single territory. Each regional territory has its own set of competitors, and very few business houses have a large-scale, cross-regional presence (Kheterpal 2003).

Distributors bid for the rights to a specific territory and pay an advance of 25–30 percent of the agreed price at the start of the project. Another 20–25 percent is paid as the production progresses. The outstanding balance is paid on delivery of the completed film (Kheterpal 2003). The producer mobilizes these funds to start the project. The secrecy and lack of transparency within the business obscure the actual transacted figures, and most figures are at best "guesstimates." The financial muscle of the distributors gives them considerable say in the casting and treatment of a film. As conservative businessmen, they prefer to repeat the same successful actors and the same tried and tested formulas in new ventures, often urging directors to include a particular feature (gypsy dance, cabaret number, comic actor, and the like) that has been a success in a previous film. With substantial sums at stake, the industry is averse to new ideas, new plots, new stars, or any feature that has not already proven its worth at the box office.

The producer also sells the music rights of his film to recording companies. Songs are recorded well before the film starts shooting (and in some cases well before a screenplay has even been written), and these are then slotted into the narrative—sometimes the plot is even altered to accommodate the songs. The cassette revolution of the 1990s initiated an unprecedented demand for film songs on cassettes, and songs from films have always dominated the music market. Even today they constitute approximately 66 percent of total music sales.

Over the years, as more and more music labels have entered the market, the bidding for the rights to a film's music has become frenzied. Some producers have been able to recover 40–60 percent of their costs through the sale of music rights (FICCI 2003). However, in 2002, the high cost of acquisition, exacerbated by the devastating effects of music piracy, the rise of FM radio stations, and the possibilities for digital

downloading of music, drastically reduced the profits of the music industry, which in turn has drastically lowered its bids to film producers.

### Consequences of an Unorganized Market

The consequences of the unorganized and fragmented nature of the industry have been far reaching. It has deeply entrenched the *formulaic film* with its predictable plots, spectacular and erotic song-and-dance numbers, and comic subplots. Only a well-established star actor or director can exert the muscle of his box office credentials to push for change in this matter, but few star actors or directors are willing to risk their careers to force change onto the film industry.

In the absence of any interest in original stories, the Hindi film producers are not at all averse to lifting stories from Hollywood films. These stories are then transposed into an Indian context and Indianized by subjecting them to the classic formula treatment. Frank Capra's 1934 classic *It Happened One Night* was copied, not once but twice, becoming *Chori Chori* by Anant Thakur in 1956 and *Dil Hai Ke Manta Nahin* by Mahesh Bhatt in 1991. Professor Abdalla Uba Adamu at the Center for Hausa Studies in Kano, Nigeria, in his research on Nigerian cinema compiled a list of the scores of Hollywood films that have been ripped off by Hindi film producers, which in turn have been ripped off by Hausa producers, the latter unaware in many cases of their Hollywood origins. The list shows that Martin Scorcese's *Cape Fear* (1991) became *Darr* (Yash Chopra, 1993); *Dead Poets' Society* (Peter Weir, 1989) became *Mohabbatein* (Yash Chopra, 2000); Khalid Mohammad's *Tehzeeb* (2004) is inspired by Ingmar Bergman's *Autumn Sonata* (1978), and so on. In no case was the original source ever acknowledged. Adamu quotes director Sanjay Gupta, who shrugs off the accusations of plagiarism: "I wouldn't mind admitting I borrow ideas from Hollywood films. But I don't call it plagiarism—I call it 'inspiration.' And there's nothing wrong with being inspired. Every piece of art, be it books, music or film, derives its inspiration from another. What is originality anyway? It's the art of concealing the source" (Adamu 2004: 36).

Because the hegemony of the formula film has resulted in the accretion of the "omnibus" genre, it has led to the eroding of generic variety. The *loss of generic variety* has its origins in the rise of the independent (freelance) producer and the "formula" film. Whereas the studios of the 1930s could average out their profits over several films, for the new breed of independent producers in the 1940s, every project was a "one-off" commercial gamble and a one-time opportunity for a quick sale to territorial distributors to recoup their investment (Pendakur 1990). The overriding concern with securing high returns on investment led to an increasing need to depend on tried and tested plot lines, established actors with proven box office successes, and spectacular song-and-dance routines.

Furthermore, Indians generally view films with their families, and it is not unusual to see twenty members of an extended family colonize a corner of the auditorium. Under the circumstances, the commercial advantages of the *omnibus genre*—where romance, spectacle, comedy, melodrama, violence, pathos, and heroism are all inscribed into a single film—are substantial. Unlike Hollywood, which fragments its audience and caters to their varied interests and expectations

through generic differentiation, the omnibus genre of the Hindi film divides the film into segments, and caters to the different constituencies of its heterogeneous audiences by dedicating each segment to a particular constituency—a sad episode full of pathos for women who like to weep; erotic dances for the male or female erotic gaze; choreographed violence with graphic blood spurting for the young adolescents and adults; slapstick comedy for the children; and so on. Instead of fragmenting its audiences and thereby its revenues by catering to varied expectations through generic differentiation, the individual, one-off producer amalgamates the varied pleasures of different genres into a single film (Kasbekar 2001). To control such a disparate agenda in a single film is extremely difficult and requires dexterous handling, and to the uninitiated, the producer's "something for everyone" intention gives an impression of a lack of focus.

The capriciousness of the filmgoing public also makes the business of film financing extremely volatile. It is estimated that 5 to 10 percent of Hindi films make money, and about 15 to 20 percent break even, while the rest lose money. According to the figures for the year 2000, only twenty-one films made profits out of a total of 230 films released that year. The industry lost INR 3 billion (US$66.6 million) on gross revenues of 39 billion (US$866.6 million) (FICCI 2003). The shortage of film theaters (estimated at 13,000 for the entire country) has also prevented the marketing and exhibition of nonformula or alternative films.

Another consequence of the unorganized market and the extreme conservatism of the film producers and directors is the *refusal to take any risks* by making films without stars. Currently the top three male stars (Aamir Khan, Shah Rukh Khan, and Salman Khan) have held their perch for more than fifteen years. Stars are a known commodity and function as brands. The anxiety surrounding casting new actors is that, unlike stars, they do not draw audiences to the theaters. Over the last two decades, most newcomers to the Hindi film have been promoted by their families, who are already in the film business—Abhishek Bachchan, son of superstar Amitabh Bachchan; Sanjay Dutt, son of star couple Sunil Dutt and Nargis; Saif Ali Khan, son of the Nawab of Pataudi, who captained the Indian cricket team, and Sharmila Tagore, star of the 1960s–1970s; Akshaye Khanna, son of 1970s star-turned-politician Vinod Khanna; Sunny Deol, son of 1970s superstar-turned–Member of Parliament Dharmendra; Karishma Kapoor and her sister Kareena Kapoor, great-granddaughters of Prithviraj Kapoor, granddaughters of Raj Kapoor, and daughters of Randhir Kapoor and his actress wife Babita, star of the 1970s. In addition, Aditya Chopra, star director of *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge*, is the son of Yash Chopra, stalwart director of Hindi films (*Deewar*, 1975; *Dil To Pagal Hai*, 1997). Farhan Akhtar is the son of lyricist and screenwriter Javed Akhtar, one half of the screenwriting duo Salim-Javed, and Salman Khan is the son of Salim Khan, the other half of the screenwriting duo.

Those who aspire to act in Hindi films but do not possess a star pedigree gain a foothold by being successful models, winners of international beauty contests—such as Aishwarya Rai (Miss World, 1994) and Sushmita Sen (Miss Universe, 1995)—or television stars. Shah Rukh Khan, one of the top three actors today, found his way to the screen via television and theater, while John Abraham is a well-known model.

Another consequence of the manner in which films are financed in Bollywood is that they *rarely take up contentious subjects*. The political system is, for instance, rarely overtly challenged. In 1976, Amrit Nahata made *Kissa Kursi Ka*, a political satire on the Internal Emergency declared by Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1975, during which she rounded up the opposition leaders and had them imprisoned. The film explores the rape of a nation through a symbolic rape of a woman. The film became a cause célèbre when henchmen of Mrs. Gandhi's son Sanjay destroyed the film negative. Nahata remade the film in 1977, but by then Mrs. Gandhi's Congress Party had lost the election and a new government was in power. Nahata himself later joined the Congress Party and disowned the film (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 1999).

In other matters of censorship and morality, profanity is completely unacceptable. The few mildly abusive terms in the film dialogue are confined to "bastard" and "bloody fool," usually uttered in English. Since cinema-going is a family activity, any obscenity would immediately restrict the viewing to a mature audience, thus decimating the film's commercial potential. Similarly, nudity and sex are avoided—at least overtly. Instead, actors and actresses get drenched in sudden, unseasonal downpours that reveal their body forms, and sing erotic songs accompanied by suggestive dance movements, providing the Indian alternative to the Hollywood bedroom scene.

Occasionally producers get into trouble for having crossed the lines of "decency." In 1993, an erotic song and dance sequence from *Khalnayak* containing lyrics, which began: *Choli ke peeche kya hai . . .?*

("What lies beneath my bodice?"), was condemned as "obscene" by a Delhi-based lawyer who claimed that the song had a corrupting influence on his young son (Bhardwaj 1993). He charged that the film was unfit for general viewing, even though the producer disingenuously protested that the answer to the question in the lyrics was: "Dil!" (My heart!).

In the 1950s, the leaders of independent India considered on-screen kisses an "un-Indian" activity even though they were quite uncontentious in Indian films made during the colonial government. Censors frowned upon such un-Indian behavior and lost no time in cutting them out of films. To avoid delays at the censors, particularly when producers had financed the films with money borrowed at very high (40–60 percent) interest rates, the song-and-dance number was deployed as a strategic substitute for erotic titillation. A decade ago censors began allowing on-screen kissing, but so successful had been the stratagems and subterfuges to circumvent the moral police of the previous decades that only a few producers and actors have taken up the opportunity. Some films, however, market themselves as "daring" adult material. These are normally low-budget ventures that hope to recruit their investment by the publicity they generate. Karan Razdan's *Girlfriend* (2004) is supposedly an exploration of lesbianism and managed to create a stir for portraying a sexual act between two women. Bal Thackeray, the chief of the quasi-fascist Shiv Sena party, whose henchmen attacked theaters where the film was being screened, condemned the notion of lesbianism as "not part of Indian culture." (Raval 1998: 80).

The most far-reaching consequence of the unorganized nature of film financing

has been the *entry of the Dubai-based Indian underworld*. The association between film finance and money laundering is almost as old as Hindi cinema itself. The burgeoning film industry had always offered an easy route for laundering gains from the flourishing black market in India during World War II. Thereafter the route remained open for all kinds of illegal gains from gold smuggling or untaxed profits of local businesses. The unorganized nature of film production and distribution was a convenient method for laundering large sums of money through the financing of films. The story of the gold smuggler Haji Mastan (who prefers to call himself a "businessman") was even the subject of a film in the 1970s.

The falling revenues in the 1980s and the resulting reluctance of distributors to concede to the high advances demanded by producers opened the gates for greater involvement of the underworld in film production. The 1980s also marked the meteoric rise of Dawood Ibrahim Kaskar, son of a humble policeman. Once a minor gang member, today he controls a large conglomerate with operations in Dubai, Pakistan, Nepal, and India of both legal and illegal businesses estimated at INR 70 billion (US$1.5 billion) (Chengappa and Raval 2003). The activities of his numerous syndicates are wide ranging and include gold smuggling, gambling, drug trafficking, video and music piracy, money laundering, gun running, and extortion. He also harbors a passion for Hindi films and cricket. Many film stars used to frequent his parties in Dubai and accompany him to cricket matches in Sharjah.

It is the lucrative overseas distribution territory that is of greatest interest to Dawood's criminal syndicates. Forced to flee from India to escape the Mumbai police and rival gangs after a shootout in 1985, Dawood was said to control his empire from Dubai, where he took refuge. His financial interests in Hindi films are allegedly controlled by "Chhota" ("Little") Shakeel, based in Pakistan. Despite several requests for his extradition to India, the UAE government had refused. The reasons were two-fold: firstly India has no extradition treaty with the UAE, and secondly, when in the past Dubai had requested the extradition of an Indian national on criminal charges, the Indian government had refused to comply.

Dawood's investment in films in the 1980s was a timely lifesaver to film producers and directors. Many struggling and aspiring film personalities begged him for help in keeping their careers alive, and with so many film personalities beholden to him, he and his acolytes began to wield great power within the industry. Journalists M. Rahman and Arun Katiyar have highlighted the curious phenomenon whereby Sudhakar Bokade, an airport cargo-handler, had suddenly turned into a film producer, as had Dinesh Patel, a garment shop owner (Rahman and Katiyar 1993). Even more curiously some directors and actors seemed never to be short of work despite a string of flops at the box office. For many in the volatile business of film production seeking the help of the criminal underworld seemed a safe way of guaranteeing their careers.

However, in 1991, the economic liberalization policies introduced by the Indian government included lifting restrictions on the importation of gold and making the Indian currency fully convertible. These policies made a severe dent in some of Dawood's smuggling and *hawala* (illegal
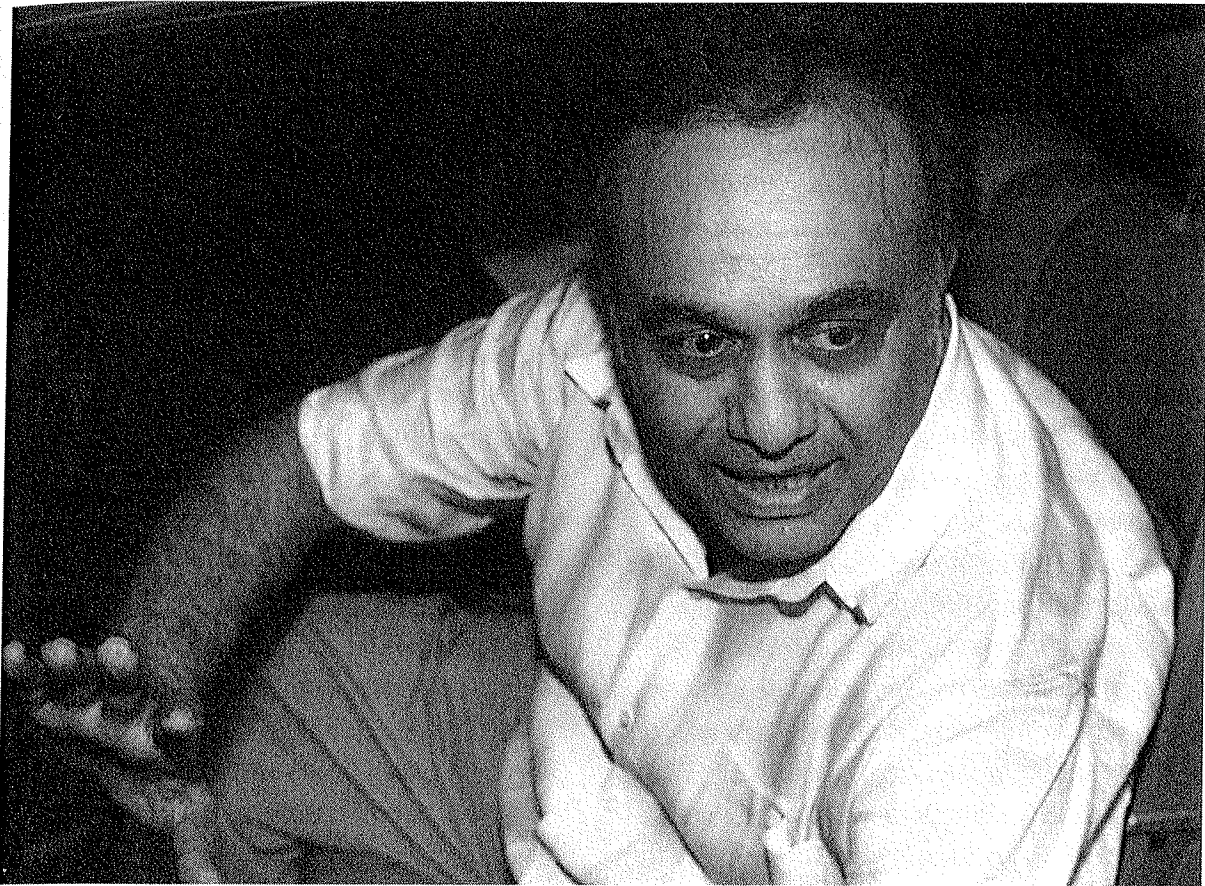
Bollywood film financier and diamond merchant Bharat Shah gestures as he sits in his car outside a Mumbai court. The court sentenced Shah to a year in jail for hiding information from police. Mumbai, 2003. (Roy Madhur/Reuters/Corbis)

money transfers that leave no paper trail) operations. His syndicates then expanded into extortion and protection rackets. Successful actors, producers, and distributors began to receive death threats if they did not pay up the large sums of protection money demanded. Director and composer Raakesh Roshan, father of current heart-throb Hrithik Roshan, suffered a near-fatal shooting (the bullet is said to have missed his heart by a few millimeters) after refusing to pay the money demanded by gangsters.

Since then a large number of similarly threatened film personalities have either paid up or requested police protection. In

1997, Gulshan Kumar, the audiocassette "king" of India, was gunned down in broad daylight. It was alleged that Abu Salem, once Dawood's henchman and now his rival, had executed the murder at the request of Nadeem Saifee, part of the film music-composing duo Nadeem-Shravan. Saifee was, it is alleged, annoyed that Gulshan Kumar had frozen him out of the recording business. Saifee has taken refuge in the UK, which has refused to extradite him to India.

The extent of the underworld's involvement in Mumbai's film world came to light in 1993 when Mumbai experienced a series of bombings that targeted several buildings of symbolic importance such as the Mum-

bai Stock Exchange and the Air India buildings. The bombings that killed 257 people, maimed 713 others, and destroyed property worth millions were claimed as retaliation for the destruction of the Muslim Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya in 1992. The explosives used were traced to Pakistan and the Mumbai-based family of gangster "Tiger" Memon. Dawood's associates in India as well as some Mumbai film personalities were also implicated.

During the police investigations into the bombings, an AK-56 assault rifle was recovered from the residence of Sanjay Dutt, a leading star of Bollywood and son of star parents the late Sunil Dutt (Member of Parliament) and Nargis. Dutt denied possessing the weapon while at the same time making arrangements to dispose of it. With extraordinary timing, Dutt's arrest came just a few days before the release of his film *Khal Nayak* (Subhash Ghai, 1993), where he played a gangster seeking to destabilize India through terrorist activities. Dutt was charged and imprisoned for two years. In 2001, Bharat Shah, an important financier of Hindi films for 30 years, was also accused of having links with the underworld. It was stated that at any point of time he had around INR 1.5 billion (US$33.5 million) invested in films (Desai 2003).

It was to wean the industry away from their dependence on "black" money and the criminal underworld that the Indian government granted film production the status of an "industry" in 1998, a move that entitles producers to seek institutional finance and tax rebates.

***Piracy***   The problem of piracy is the biggest single threat facing the Indian film industry. However, because of the informal and secretive nature of the film industry, there are no estimates regarding the extent of the menace. The video boom of the 1980s, so called because of a sudden increase in the number of households possessing VCRs, made a deep dent in the profits of the Hindi film industry. Cheap pirated versions of new releases hit the markets within days of a new release. In small towns, video parlors offered viewers daily showings of the latest films within days of their theatrical release in the big cities. As to the operations of these video parlors, Pendakur writes:

> An entrepreneur would acquire a 20-inch color television set and a VCR, place it in a hall that could hold 50 to 100 chairs, and show feature films in various languages from 9.00 AM until 2.00 the next morning. These video cafes, reminiscent of storefront theaters of the early 1900s, mushroomed in cities, towns, and villages all over India within a very short time. (Pendakur 1989: 71–72)

Traditionally, a video release is deferred until eight to twelve weeks after a film's release in the theaters, but countering the menace of piracy has brought forward the release date to four to six weeks after its cinema release. Over the years, the damage wreaked by piracy has increased due to improved VCRs and DVDs that offer better quality. Furthermore, the declining prices of both VCR and DVD players have increased the number of households that own the products (Kheterpal 2003). Like Hollywood, Indian distributors are now trying for a blanket weekend release in theaters across the country in order to maximize ticket sales before the video pirates cream off potential viewers.

While terrestrial and satellite television channels do not show pirated films, cable operators (those who deliver the "last mile" of satellite channels to private homes), often set up a separate channel that screens pirated versions of the latest films. This is offered as a goodwill gesture to their patrons to compensate for frequent breakdowns due to faulty cables and abrupt blackouts during disputes with the multi-system operators from whom they acquire their satellite programs.

Music piracy, which affects not just music companies but also the entire film industry because film songs constitute a substantial proportion of music sales, is estimated at around 40 percent of the market by the music industry (FICCI 2003). High government taxes on the sale of cassettes make authorized music cassettes more expensive than the pirated ones. Moreover, patrons of pirated cassettes make further savings when they buy compilation cassettes of all the best songs from the latest film releases. These pirated cassettes are compiled each week or each month, depending on consumer demand.

Controlling piracy is a difficult task. The police see it as a victimless crime and prefer to focus their meager resources on more serious crimes. Even when an arrest is made, the judicial process is extremely slow, and by the time the case reaches court it could be several years after the event. However, the government and police have pledged their support in fighting piracy, and taxes on cassettes have been reduced.

## Conclusion

The social and economic changes occurring in Indian society have created a more discerning middle class that desires greater variety than what the hegemonic film factories have been offering so far. The growth of new and better cinemas and new technologies is already beginning to manifest small but significant changes within the film industry.

Banks are now willing to offer loans to production companies as long as they guarantee transparency of process and provide detailed budgets, scripts, and production schedules. The proportion of organized funding—from banks, IPO funds, venture capital, and other "organized" sectors of the money markets—has increased from 4 percent in 2001 to 33 percent in 2003 (Singh 2004). But old habits die hard, and the bigger film producers continue to maintain their relationships with moneylenders, and a large proportion of sums earmarked for film production by the IDBI and other banks has not been taken up.

Although the volume of traditional, unorganized funding of films by debt financiers at high interest rates has decreased, it still constitutes the major source for the financing of films. The new sources of funding have been more popular with the new, small-, and mid-sized film companies catering to the niche market created by the growth of multiplex cinemas in the big cities than with the big banners of the commercial industry. In 2003, thirty-three firms attracted corporate funds of INR 1.76 billion (US$39 million). Many of these firms have links to television companies and are making films with middle-sized budgets.

Since the start of the millennium, the number of screens in Mumbai has increased. In 1980 there were 6,368 permanent and 4,024 touring cinemas in all of India (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 1995). Later figures place the total number of cinemas at 12,387. Of these, nearly two-thirds

are located in southern India, which accounts for just over 20 percent of India's total population. The need to address the lack of theaters available for the Hindi cinema moved the state government of Maharashtra to offer a three-year tax holiday for the construction of multiplex theaters in the state. The owners of 130 single-screen cinema halls in Mumbai promptly went on strike, but the government held firm.

By 2002, nearly twenty-five new multiplex screens were completed and another sixty awaited completion (Kheterpal 2003). The new multiplex screens offer more comfortable seats and an improved viewing experience, but at a higher cost. These higher-cost cinemas, coupled with the lifestyle boutiques and shopping malls, offer the urban middle classes a more congenial environment for consumerism. On the distribution side of the film industry, the new theaters have loosened the stranglehold of distributors and exhibitors over producers, allowing smaller budget films to gain a foothold.

The new multiplex screens have also allowed American distribution companies to achieve a bigger presence in the Indian market, and the increase of multiplex screens has been matched by an increase in dubbed versions of Hollywood films. Nevertheless, box office revenues from Hollywood films constitute less than 5 percent of all Indian films and 10 percent of the main stream Hindi film market (Kheterpal 2003).

As for the criminal underworld, until the terrorist attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001, Dawood remained untouchable in Dubai. But Dawood was subsequently found to have had links through *hawala* (illegal international money transfers) to drug trafficking as well as gun-

running activities in Afghanistan with Al-Qaeda and even Osama bin Laden. It was alleged that he has donated funds to the organization and helped its members to escape the country (Chengappa and Raval 2003). In 2003, Dawood was declared a "global terrorist" by the United States, and Dubai, wishing to improve its global image, asked the myriad gangs operating from that haven to leave the country.

Some from Dawood's gang have sought refuge in Pakistan and Europe, while the remaining have been extradited to India where they await trial. Abu Salem, Dawood's one-time henchman and the alleged killer of music baron Gulshan Kumar, who had sought refuge in Portugal, has also been extradited to India. Dawood is said to divide his time between Pakistan and Southeast Asia, the base of his erstwhile colleague and now rival "Chhota" Raja. Since 2004, the extortion rackets and demands for money from the film industry are said to have declined.

The lucrative market comprising the Indian diaspora has started to have an effect on the Hindi film industry and its film narratives. The global success of Indian directors, Indian subject matter, and even Indian-made films has boosted the confidence of filmmakers in Mumbai. M. Night Shyamalan, the Indian-born director whose Hollywood production *The Sixth Sense* in 1999 delivered sensational box office returns, followed his success by making *Unbreakable, Signs*, and *The Village*. Other directors of Indian origin to deliver global box office successes are Gurinder Chadha (*Bend It Like Beckham*) and Ugandan-born Mira Nair (*Monsoon Wedding*).

The Indian media categorizes such cross-cultural products as "crossover" films. Chadha specializes in stories about

growing up in the Indian diaspora, with *Bhaji on the Beach, Bend It Like Beckham,* and her most recent adaptation of Jane Austen in *Bride and Prejudice.* Nair also chooses Indian subjects, as in *Salaam Bombay,* about street urchins in Mumbai; *Mississippi Masala,* about racist attitudes among Indians overseas; and *Monsoon Wedding,* about an Indian wedding in Delhi. Her film adaptation of William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* was her first move away from an Indo-centric theme, although it must be remembered that Thackeray was born in Calcutta.

The exploration of Indian themes in British and American films and television and on the stage has provided international opportunities, not only for Indian film stars such as Aishwarya Rai, Naseeruddin Shah, and Om Puri but also for composers A. R. Rehman and Anu Malik (*Bride and Prejudice*), choreographer Farah Khan (*Bombay Dreams* and *Vanity Fair*), and designers such as Manish Malhotra (*Vanity Fair*).

The success of the Bollywood film *Lagaan* in India as well as the interest it raised in the United Kingdom and the United States, where it was nominated for an Academy Award in the Best Foreign Film category in 2001, has given the Indian film industry confidence to consider a global markets for their products. In 2004, *Shwaas,* a low-budget film in Marathi, was entered for an Academy Award nomination. Actress Aishwarya Rai and director Ashutosh Gowarikar have been members of the jury at the Cannes Film Festival. Indian producers looking for sales, co-productions, and financial backers have started scouring international film festivals and related events.

With so many changes in the offing, the future of Bollywood, unlike that of its for-

mula-packed emotion-charged films, is certainly not predictable.

## Films from the South

If Mumbai is the bustling center for the production of Hindi films, then the other major center of film activity is Chennai (formerly known as Madras), which has been the center for Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam films. Unfortunately, due to linguistic restrictions, these films do not enjoy a pan-Indian market. But this fact has in no way dampened the enthusiasm for film production. Although the smaller states of Karnataka and Kerala now have their own local film-producing centers, Chennai still remains the biggest center for most film production and post-production activity in southern India.

The importance of Chennai as a film-producing center stems from the political organization of the states. Under British colonial rule, the Madras Presidency comprised much of the southern region with the exception of the princely states of Hyderabad, Mysore, Travancore, and Cochin. During those years, its capital city, Madras, was the center of commercial activity. Major studios such as AVM, Gemini, and Vijaya were established there, producing films in the four southern languages as well as in Hindi. In 1956, nine years after Indian independence, the Indian states were reorganized along linguistic lines. The Madras Presidency along with the autonomous princely states became the four southern states: the predominantly Tamil-speaking state of Tamil Nadu with Madras as its state capital; the predominantly Telugu-speaking state of Andhra Pradesh with the city of Hyderabad as its capital; the pre-

woman by *Hello* magazine, beating Julia Roberts, Catherine Zeta-Jones, and Nicole Kidman for the title. After *Bride and Prejudice*, she found an opening in foreign ventures and has signed with the elite William Morris agency. She appeared with Meryl Streep in *Chaos* (Coline Sevreau, 2006).

**Rajkumar** (1929– ), a Kannada superstar who has acted in 200 films, entertained political aspirations before settling on producing films that promoted his sons. He was kidnapped by the bandit and elephant poacher Veerappan in 2000 and released for an alleged ransom of INR 400 million (US$1 million).

**Rajnikant** (1950– ), a bus conductor before becoming a Tamil superstar, is known and loved for his trademark trick of tossing a cigarette into the air and catching it with his teeth.

**N. T. Rama Rao (NTR)** (1923–1996) was a Telugu star who played in some 260 films and rose to be chief minister of Andhra Pradesh. He returned briefly to acting and directing after he lost his seat in the elections.

**M. G. Ramachandran (MGR)** (1917–1987) was the greatest star of the Tamil screen, with nearly 300 films to his credit. He went on to become the chief minister of Tamil Nadu, a post he held for nine years.

**A. R. Rehman** (1966– ) is India's foremost contemporary composer. He started with Tamil and Hindi films and broke through with Mani Rathnam's *Roja* (1992). Ram Gopal Verma's *Rangeela* and Rathnam's *Bombay* (both 1995) made him an all-India star; he composed the music for Andrew Lloyd Webber's stage musical *Bombay Dreams*.

**Sholay** (Ramesh Sippy, 1975): Veeru (Dharmendra) and Jai (Amitabh Bachchan) are two lovable crooks hired by Thakur, a retired police officer (Sanjeev Kumar) to avenge the annihilation of his family by the outlaw Gabbar Singh (Amjad Khan). This "curry western" about bounty hunters is a loving homage to "spaghetti westerns" and Clint Eastwood.

**S. S. Vasan** (1903–1969) was a producer and director of Tamil films; he made several attempts to conquer the Hindi film market. Owner of Gemini Studios, he is best known for the first ever super-spectacle, *Chandralekha* (1948), which he dubbed into Hindi, a first for a Tamil film.

**Ram Gopal Verma** (1961– ) was a civil engineer and later director of Telugu films who turned to mainstream Hindi films. His successes include *Rangeela* (1995) and *Satya* (2000). He has now revived the erstwhile horror and thriller genres with *Bhoot* (2001), *Murder* (2003), and *Company* (2005), the latter about the gangster Ibrahim Dawood's outfit, known as D-Company.

## Note

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