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## Chapter One

# BOLLYWOOD BASICS

Indian films are unquestionably the most-seen-movies in the world. And we're not just talking about the billion-strong audiences in India itself, where 12 million people are said to go to the cinema every day, but of large audiences well beyond the Indian subcontinent and the Diaspora, in such unlikely places as Russia, China, the Middle East, the Far East, Egypt, Turkey and Africa. People from very different cultural and social worlds have a great love for Indian popular cinema, and many have been Hindi film fans for over fifty years.

Indian cinema is world-famous for the staggering amount of films it produces: the number is constantly on the increase, and recent sources estimate that a total output of some 800 films a year are made in different cities including Madras, Bangalore, Calcutta and Hyderabad. Of this astonishing number, those films made in Bombay, in a seamless blend of Hindi and Urdu,

language

have the widest distribution within India and internationally. The two sister languages are spoken in six northern states and understood by over 500 million people on the Indian subcontinent alone - reason enough for Hindi and Urdu to be chosen above the fourteen official Indian languages to become the languages of Indian popular cinema when sound came to the Indian silver screen in 1931.

The Hindi film continues to captivate audiences from Lahore to Lagos. But how does it keep so many millions in its grip? How has it overcome regional differences within India, where linguistic barriers and regional customs differ so much, to become the dominant form of entertainment? One great advantage that Hindi cinema has always enjoyed over the commercial cinemas of other regions is its ability to create a composite world. Divisions of religion and caste, or differences in regional cultures and languages, have always been glossed over in Indian popular cinema. From the 1930s, when sound first featured in Indian movies, the Bombay film was rightfully labelled the 'All India' talkie.

The typical Hindi film has always been a product of cultural pickings aimed to appeal to a pan-Indian audience, and the latest source of inspiration is global culture that a Hindi film hero is equally acceptant whether dancing the *bhangra* at a wedding, a contest to win the heroine's heart, or Jackson's dancing style with Sydney Harb drop. But when it comes to making big decisions of whom the hero or heroine will marry, it reverts to tradition, demonstrating the res status quo that the audience demands. Its insistence on tradition enables cinema aud

it means to be Indian, outlining the values by which an Indian must live. That said, one of the most influential screenwriters in India, Javed Akhtar, who co-wrote many blockbusters in the 1970s, believes that over the years Hindi cinema has developed a stylized form that operates outside the restrictions of reality:

*screen writer, lyricist, poet*

**Javed Akhtar:** India is a country where there are many cultures, many languages, many sub-cultures, many states. Each have their own identity, their own culture, their own language. Bengalis speak Bengali, they have a different culture, a different ethos. In Gujarat, they have a different culture, a different ethos. In the same way, we have one more culture and one more ethos, and one more state – that of Hindi cinema. Hindi cinema has its own traditions, its own culture and language. It is familiar and recognizable to the rest of India and the rest of India identifies with it. Shall we say that Hindi cinema is our nearest neighbour? And we know our neighbours well and we understand them. In Hindi cinema, a son can tell his mother, '*Ma, mujhe samajhne ki koshish karo*' ('Mother, try to understand me'). Now, in India, no son would ever say such a thing to his mother, that's for sure. We have our own screen fathers, fathers who wear dressing gowns and hold a pipe; a father who decides his daughter can never marry the man she loves. Hindi film audiences understand that culture, they are familiar with it, so they keep seeing the films. Sometimes the audience is critical, sometimes amused, sometimes irritated, but I suppose you can't change your neighbours [*laughs*].

New Indian Cinema

Unlike Hindi cinema, India's New Cinema, which originated in 1969 with Mrinal Sen's *Bhuvan Shome*, was aimed at the educated middle classes. Directors including Shyam Benegal, G. Aravindan, Adoor Gopalakrishan, Girish Kasaravalli, Gautam Ghosh, Buddhadeb Das Gupta and Ketan Mehta made films that were based on a great variety of storytelling traditions and chose subjects that reflected social realities. Unlike most Hindi films, which tend to present a homogenous, and often fantasized, image of India, the New Cinema films made it a point to stress differences in regional cultures, languages and customs. These films were made in regional languages, and the fact that many New Cinema productions were financed by the government, through the National Film Development Corporation, meant that appealing to the box-office wasn't the main objective.

Many New Cinema directors rejected the use of song and dance in their narratives, and their films dealt with themes such as caste, oppressive landlords, political corruption and the exploitation of workers and women - a far cry from Indian popular cinema's preoccupation with romance. Another important contrast between the popular and the art cinema was evident in the approach to acting styles. Director Shyam Benegal, for example, introduced many talented actors to the screen, including Shabana Azmi, Smita Patil, Naseeruddin Shah and Om Puri. In contrast to the glamorous and theatrical styles largely prevalent in Hindi popular cinema, the New Cinema actors, as with Western equivalents such as Robert De Niro or Dustin Hoffman, brought realism and naturalism to their performances.

The Indian director most famous in the West is undoubtedly Satyajit Ray. From his first film, the unforgettable *Pather Panchali* (1955), Ray has been regarded as working in a category

of his own, as is his contemporary, the brilliant Ritwik Ghatak. Ghatak's films, including *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (1960) and *Subarnarekha* (1965), have brought Bengali cinema international acclaim. Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak have clearly influenced many New Cinema directors in the way they later developed their school of filmmaking. But often the success of these films has been limited to regional cities, film festivals, Indian and European television, whereas the idea behind Indian commercial cinema has always been to rely on formulaic entertainment to reach the greatest number. Celebrated screenwriter, director and actor Girish Karnad has been an essential contributor to the New Cinema movement in both north and south India, and has written and acted in Shyam Benegal's best films:

**Girish Karnad:** You have two cinema traditions in India - one is the popular film and the other, the art film, which flowers out in Satyajit Ray, and continues in Mrinal Sen, Shyam Benegal and my kind of film. Ghatak was Ray's contemporary and was a great filmmaker. You can't say he was influenced by Ray, but he was a product of the same thing. But Ghatak never got the recognition that he deserved. The kind of films that we attempted to make were the art films. They remained pure, they didn't have songs, and in those days, if you sold your film in London or Berlin, it covered your costs.

In the 1970s, there was also the parallel cinema, with directors like Hrishikesh Mukherjee and Basu Chatterji and Gulzar and later, Sai Paranjpye. Their films had songs and dances and sentiment and

Two film traditions

## BOLLYWOOD

appealed to the middle class. By the 1980s, all the art cinema directors were making serials for television. The middle classes wouldn't step out of the house. The cities had become so overcrowded and lawless that the middle classes, even if they had a car and driver, would prefer to see something on television rather than go out. The art cinema was finished by the 1980s because there was no audience.

In the early 1990s, from one state-run television channel, Doordarshan, an incredible growth of cable, satellite and television channels had mushroomed in Asia. Many of these belonged to Rupert Murdoch, and were beamed in from Hong Kong. At first, Indian film producers feared that the popularity of Hindi films would decrease because of the new multi-channel competition, but they soon realized that television gave their films an even greater reach, not only in India but throughout Asia. Half-hour programmes showing film songs, star interviews and the movies themselves have become the mainstay of television programming. Hindi cinema has never been as it has today; it is at the heart of big cities, influencing music, fashion and ment. In fact, the appeal and success of become a worldwide phenomenon, and regularly enter the box-office charts as never before.

In India, however, there seems to be a greater divide between city and rural audiences, as the changing values and modern heroes depicted on the screen do not reflect the social reality that exists across the country. Director Karan Johar, whose first film *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* became one of the biggest hits of the

city vs rural audience

1990s, explains how an Indian audience reacts differently to a film's plot, and its morals, depending on where they live:

Karan Johar: In India, we break up our business into 'A', 'B' and 'C' class centres. 'A' class are the cities, 'B' are slightly smaller towns and 'C' centres are villages and rural areas. In a village, a woman is a wife, a woman is a mother, a woman is a sister, but a woman as a friend? No way. That's their belief, and that's how they've been raised; they haven't been educated, so they don't understand a concept like that. So the business that my film, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, did in 'C' class centres was much less than everywhere else. We are restricted as Indian filmmakers. If I try to do something completely unusual, I know it won't be understood. We have to cater for the Indian yuppie in New York and the man in rural Bihar. I always say the most difficult thing to do is to make a universally commercial Indian film.

Any Bollywood film juggles several genres and themes at the same time. Audiences are used to the sometimes extreme shifts in tone and mood. A violent action scene can quite seamlessly be followed by a dialogue in which a mother tells her son never to be dishonest, and this exchange can then be followed by a comic scene led by one of the film's secondary characters. It is precisely this mix of genres that makes the Bollywood film unique. The multi-genre film was known in the 1970s and 80s as the 'masala' film – the term comes from the idea that, like a curry cooked with different spices, or *masala*, the Hindi film offers a variety of flavours.



However, the mixing and matching hasn't always been the norm. Early Indian cinema in the 1930s was founded on specific genres, such as the mythological or the devotional film. The form and substance of the mythological theme is the fight between good and evil, and the importance of sacrifice in the name of truth. The retelling of stories known through an oral tradition was an important element in the success of the mythological film; the *Ram Leela* (a celebration and re-enactment of the exploits and adventures of Ram) and the *Ras Leela* (episodes from Krishna's life) are said to be of particular influence in Indian cinema. Such reconfirmation has always been an element of Indian culture - for instance, the endless ways in which the plots and themes of India's epics, particularly the *Mahabharat* and the *Ramayana*, are recycled for a variety of different narrative purposes. As Arundhati Roy says in her novel, *The God of Small Things*, 'The Great Stories are the ones you have heard and want to hear again. The ones you can enter anywhere and inhabit comfortably.' Roy was speaking of the Kathakali dance form, but the argument holds good for cinema too.

In the 1930s, when sound came to the *Alam Ara* (1931, *The Light of the World*),

dancing film became hugely popular. This is the Urdu Parsee Theatre, a narrative form that

fully dramatized Victorian plays and Persian love legends. The courtly love stories of the Urdu Parsee Theatre are probably the reason behind Indian cinema's dependence on romantic and the way they link love, obstacles and tragedy. Another genre of this period was the historical film, based on real characters or legendary heroes. The importance of the historical film lay in its patriotic undertones. The grandeur

pre-Raj India, the splendid costumes, the etiquette of the nobility and high drama were a direct invitation for national self-esteem and the will to be independent. Of course, India did not need to be independent to produce films: thousands of miles of celluloid had run through the projector gate before the British finally packed their bags in 1947. Despite having first blossomed under a political power so alien to its own conventions, Indian cinema's thematic and aesthetic development seems to have remained largely free of direct concern with colonial rule. Individual film directors were deeply concerned by the independence movement led by the Congress Party, and demonstrated their allegiance to the concept of a free India in films such as *Sikandar* (1941) and *Shaheed* (1948). In the 1940s and 1950s, a small number of patriotic films and a handful of songs with a clear message of Indian nationalism were produced – the most famous is '*Door Hato O Duniyavalo, Hindustan hamara hai*' ('Go away, you invaders! India is ours') in the 1943 film *Kismet* – but by and large, the patriotic film isn't a genre that is hugely popular today. Hindi films have never been overtly political, unlike African or Algerian cinema, the classics of which are clear indictments of French colonial rule.

The creation of the major studios in Madras, Calcutta, Lahore, Bombay and Pune in the 1930s was a crucial move in the development of a proficient Indian film industry. Studio owners including Himanshu Rai and Devika Rani, V. Shantaram, V. Damle and S. Fatehlal set the tone of film production, playing an essential role in promoting national integration. People of all castes, religions, regions, sects and social classes worked together in the various studios. Film production has always prided itself in the way it has been inclusive and continues to be

Castes in film development

a shining example of communal (i.e. inter-religious) harmony and tolerance. Hindus and Muslims work together, and promoting national integration and communal harmony has always been a favourite theme of the Bombay film.

The studios, including Bombay Talkies, the New Theatres in Calcutta, Prabhat Film Company and Gemini and Vauhini in Madras, were also responsible for broadening the choice of screen subjects, with music as a primary ingredient. Like the great Hollywood studios, they experimented with different stories and themes while each developing their own brand of filmmaking. The key films of this period show the origins of themes and subjects that have recurred over subsequent decades of filmmaking. For example, the New Theatre's films, particularly the 1935 classic *Devdas* by actor/director P.C. Barua, made in both Hindi and Bengali versions, gave Hindi cinema its most recurrent theme: the love triangle. *Devdas* is an adaptation of Sarat Chandra Chatterji's Bengali novel of the same name. This film also gave Hindi cinema its most enduring male character: the tragic romantic hero. Devdas is a high-caste Brahmin who cannot marry the love of his life, Parvati, his neighbour's daughter, because she is of a lower caste. He later befriends Chandramukhi, a prostitute who gives up her profession and turns to spirituality. In a downward spiral of self-destruction, the Hamlet-like Devdas becomes an alcoholic and ultimately dies at the gate of Parvati's marital home.

The story of Devdas touched millions of Indians in the 1930s, who felt that his anguish would become their own if they dared marry against parental authority. The most popular versions of the love triangle are modelled on the character of Devdas, a man unable to fight the system and caught between two women, one

socially acceptable but unattainable, and the other a prostitute with a heart of gold. This theme returns regularly every decade, either in a direct remake, e.g. Bimal Roy's 1955 *Devdas* (director Sanjay Leela Bhansali is currently making a new version to be released in 2002), or as an important theme, as in Guru Dutt's *Pyaasa* (1957) or Prakash Mehra's *Muqaddar Ka Sikandar* (1978).

V. Shantaram was a co-founder (along with V. Damle, S. Fatehlal and Dhaiber) of the Prabhat Film Company, based in Kohlapur and later Pune. He made many stunt and action films early in his career, favoured socially progressive subjects and dealt with themes considered taboo. The resulting movies became known as the 'social film'. Shantaram's best work included a period drama about the vengeance of women (*Amar Jyoti*, 1936 - the first Indian film to be shown at an International Film Festival, in Venice), the cruel injustices against women brought about by the arranged marriage system (*Duniya Na Mane*, 1937), to the rehabilitation of a prostitute (*Aadmi*, 1937), and the promotion of Hindu-Muslim friendship (*Padosi*, 1941). In 1942, V. Shantaram left Prabhat to start his own production company and studio, Rajkamal Kalamandir, in Bombay. There, he continued to make internationally acclaimed films based on social concerns, including *Dr Kotnis Ki Amar Kahani* (1946) and *Do Aankhen Barah Haath* (1957).

Bombay Talkies also made social films, the most celebrated example of which is Franz Osten's *Achut Kanya* (1936) starring Devika Rani and Ashok Kumar. It was one of the first films to deal with the evils of untouchability. Bombay Talkies made many popular movies, including Gyan Mukerji's aforementioned *Kismet*, a film that introduced another favourite theme in Hindi cinema - the 'lost and found'. Though the lost and found theme

*Achut Kanya*

can be traced back to mythology in the story of *Shakuntala*, *Kismet* made it popular in cinema.

The lost and found usually involves family members who are separated by a combination of fate and villainy, only to be reunited at the end of the film. In later productions, the lost and found theme has tended to revolve around two brothers being separated in their childhood who grow up on opposite sides of the law. The brothers usually know each other as friends and speak of their friendship as being akin to brotherhood. They have yet to discover their true blood ties, and the audience enjoys the irony of the situation.

An interesting twist on this popular theme occurs in Manmohan Desai's *Amar Akbar Anthony* (1977), in which the director depicts three brothers separated as young children and brought up by members of the three main Indian religions: Hinduism, Islam and Christianity (hence the names Amar, Akbar and Anthony). The film was a massive success and Desai himself made several other films combining the importance of communal harmony with the theme of loss and recovery. In his *Naseeb* (1981), the Amitabh Bachchan hero is called 'John, Jaani, Janardhan' and is proud to be seen as Christian, Muslim and Hindu. As long as the separated family members are played by well-known stars, the audience never seems to tire of the repetition of themes. One of the current generation of film directors, Dharmesh Darshan, who made the hugely successful *Raja Hindustani* (1996), talks about the kinds of Hindi film plots that have appealed to him:

**Dharmesh Darshan:** I saw a lot of old Indian cinema before I became a director, studied a lot of the themes.

Indian cinema's lost and found theme, the triangle romance, the anti-establishment films of the 1970s. What appealed to me most? No, not the lost and found, I was not very enthusiastic about that [*laughs*]. I liked the love triangle films. They have dramatic and emotional conflict. What really appealed to me more, is the question of how a human being fights the system and fights his circumstances and emerges a winner, whether man or woman. We had this classic in the 1950s called *Mother India*, which is about a woman fighting the system, and *Mughal-e-Azam*, in the early 1960s, which was essentially a triangular romance, but this time between the father, the son and a courtesan. Then *Sangam* in 1964, a love triangle between three mature adults. I like any subject that offers conflict and shows how a man resolves this conflict; human beings facing dilemmas. Indian cinema has an abundance of people rising like the phoenix from the ashes.

Financiers who made money during the war years found film-making an easy way of gaining quick returns, and this new method of financing movies ultimately brought about the end of the studio era. The studio owners could not afford to pay high fees for their stars and staff, and so freelancing made a return – a system whereby all film practitioners were employed on a contract-by-contract basis. The studio system was over by the late 1940s, and widespread freelancing, established by the 1950s, set the pattern for film production thereafter.

The 1950s was a glorious time for Hindi cinema. Filmmakers created authored and individual works while sticking strictly

within the set conventions of the films. The example of Mahatma Gandhi and Prime Minister Nehru's vision of the newly independent nation was also highly influential throughout the decade, and many excellent Urdu poets and writers worked with filmmakers in the hope of creating a cinema that would be socially meaningful. It is no surprise that the 1950s is regarded today as the finest period in Hindi cinema, and the era has profoundly influenced generations of Indian filmmakers in a way that no other decade has done since.

The best directors of the time, including Mehboob Khan, Bimal Roy, Raj Kapoor and Guru Dutt, brought new depth to established themes. They drew on the wide spectrum of Hindi cinema stories, but brought to them a personal vision. The films of the late 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s were lyrical and powerful, and dealt with themes including the exploitation of the poor by rich landlords (*Do Bigha Zameen*, 1953), the importance of sacrifice and honour (*Mother India*), survival in the big city (*Boori Polish*, 1954), untouchability (*Sujata*, 1959), the changing role of the woman (*Mr and Mrs '55*, 1955), urban vs rural morality (*Shree 420*, 1955), nature versus nurture (*Awaara*, 1951), dilemmas faced by modern Indians (*Andaaz*, 1949), materialism versus spiritualism (*Pyaasa*, 1957) and the importance of destiny (*Chaudhvin Ka Chand*, 1960). These films show a complex and sophisticated mix of characters, plots, ideas and morals.

Unlike the typical Bombay film, which relies on the idea of the multi-genre – the 'total spectacle' – the important filmmakers of this period not only made commercially successful work but also mastered the language of cinema. They understood how performance, photography, editing and, above all, music could be used to create a new aesthetic. It was around this time

that Hindi films started to receive regular worldwide distribution, and films such as *Awaara* made Raj Kapoor and his co-star Nargis major celebrities in places as far afield as Russia and China. Mehboob's *Aan* (1952, aka *Mangala, Daughter of India*) and *Mother India* (perhaps the best-known Indian film of all) also won large audiences beyond the Indian subcontinent.

The average Hindi film does not pretend to offer a unique storyline. The gamut of human emotions is universal, even if the codes of behaviour relate specifically to Indian culture. And while a new twist to a familiar Bollywood storyline helps a film to succeed, if the audience is looking for originality, they know it is principally to be found in the score. The song and dance sequences are the most important moments - even more so today. Film music is of such primary importance in today's Bollywood that it more or less determines the box-office fate of most movies. Leading choreographer Farah Khan believes that, 'What is saving Indian cinema from being engulfed by Hollywood is our song and dance routines, because they just can't imitate that.'

Songs from the movies are part of Indian culture and life. Bombay psychotherapist Udayan Patel has an interesting view on the way romance in real life, for example, is associated with the expression of love in a Hindi film song:

**Udayan Patel:** The impact on the audience is actually quite deep because the images of the film, the characters, the plot, the music, the dance, the way of dressing, all have an impact - not only on the mind, but also on the construction of fantasies. So the meaning of 'Who am I?' in relation to life also comes from films. A man



told me that he was in love with a girl he met in the city of Bhopal. He went rowing with this girl on Bhopal lake. He rowed to the middle of the lake, stopped there and burst into a song and then proposed to her. When he told me this I was laughing, but he was deadly serious. He said that was the best way to propose.

Following the most creative and innovative decade in Hindi cinema, formula took centre stage in the 1960s. The multi-genre film - in which romance is followed by comedy, then family drama, then action - became the order of the day. An important move away from the social film can in part be attributed to the fact that colour film labs had opened in Bombay and Madras. Up to the 1960s, the big films made in colour, including *Aan* and *Mother India*, were processed at Technicolor in London, at great expense. Colour photography tended to be reserved for the costume drama and the historical film. When colour processing became available in India, it could be used to bring alive light-hearted romantic movies that had songs and dances shot in a variety of lush locations. The formula film moved away from the socially relevant themes of the glorious black-and-white period, and depended instead on family dramas and love stories. The settings and the costumes became more important than the themes. Actor, comedian and television star Jaaved Jaaferi explains how formula and clichés applied not only to the way in which the plots were developed but also to dialogue:

**Jaaved Jaaferi:** There are certain elements in Hindi cinema terminology that are called 'compulsory blind'. The term originates from a card game. You have to have

a certain amount in the booty to start off the game. In the 1960s film, we also had cliché dialogues, like the young heroine telling the hero '*Main tumhari bachche ki maa banevali hun*' ['I'm about to give birth to your child'], and the heroine's scandalized mother would say, '*Le jaa is paap ki gatri ko yahan se*' ['Take away this bundle of sin'], and the father would add, '*Aaj se ye ghar ke darwaze tumhare leeye bandh ho chuke hain*' ['From today, the doors of this house have been closed to you'].

Another typical scene in the sixties film had the hero and heroine set out with friends on a picnic, singing 'la la la la la'. There's a fork in the road and the friends cycle off one way, and the hero and heroine another. Suddenly it starts raining and they get wet. Out of nowhere, they find a little *guhāa* [cave]. The next shot shows a clothes line hanging in the middle of the cave, and the heroine's sari is drying. There's a fire burning, lightning flashes and finally they jump into each other's arms and we see entwining feet – and then cut to the next scene. They are dry and the hero is saying '*Humse bahut bari bhul hui hai*' ['We have made a dreadful mistake']. The hero, who is a *pardesi babu* [a man who has appeared from a foreign land, or perhaps only from the city to the village], has come into the girl's life. He then goes away to study for eight years. Of course, no one has ever heard of telephones, so there's not a single call from him for years. Nothing. The pregnant heroine gives birth to her so-called bastard child, who isn't really illegitimate because the hero and heroine have accepted each other as man and wife in front of a statue

of God in some remote temple. The hero finally returns and all ends happily.

The key productions in the 1970s represented two extremes: violent action movies built around the character of a disillusioned hero who turns to crime, and light-hearted and highly entertaining films known as 'multi-starrers' (because the films were sold on the large number of big stars in the cast). Looking back, films such as Prakash Mehra's *Zanjeer* (1973), Ramesh Sippy's *Sholay* (1975), Yash Chopra's *Deewaar* (1975) and Manmohan Desai's *Amar Akbar Anthony* overshadow most other productions. As during the 1950s, more serious themes emerged, reflecting a troubled era in Indian political history. Screenwriting team Salim Khan and Javed Akhtar (known as Salim-Javed) created a new kind of anti-hero whom the press dubbed 'the angry young man'. This brooding and rebellious character, personified by Amitabh Bachchan, echoed the frustrations of struggling workers in big cities. At the heart of these social dramas is the bond between the hero and his mother; her trials and tribulations drive him to take revenge on a cruel and unjust society.

One of the most versatile actresses in Indian cinema, Shabana Azmi, who has worked in the New Cinema movement, in mainstream cinema and in many international productions, considers the wider context of the mother-son relationship to understand why it has such power in Hindi films:

**Shabana Azmi:** This comes from the entire social structure in which the birth of a male child is the only way a mother can get any respect in society. She is not

respected if she gives birth to a daughter. This is a very hard-hitting situation in India. Even in this new millennium, there are cases where female foetuses have been aborted because the desire for a male child is so strong. Hindi cinema tends to take its basic material from Indian mythology, which plays a very dominant part in our lives today in terms of what our heroes do and what our duties are. But in real life I find, particularly within urban India and even amongst many rural women, there is a change and recognition of the fact that the girl child is also very important. There is also an attempt to bring up sons in such a way that they learn to respect their wives. We see very little reflection of this in Hindi cinema.

What happens in daily life does not seem to interest Indian audiences, who don't usually look to the cinema for realism. They want family entertainment, full of basic values; something that doesn't offend cultural or religious sentiments. Indeed, after the defiant films of the 1970s, Bombay productions settled back into formula mode: a love story, an action hero, a vamp, a villain and a happy ending. Very few permutations in storylines and themes can be traced through the mainstream cinema of the 1980s, but exceptions include the films of Mahesh Bhatt (*Arth*, 1983) and Shekhar Kapur (*Masoom*, 1983). These directors introduced new twists and the themes of the illegitimate child and adultery to the family drama.

The 1980s weren't a particularly strong time for film music either. The movie that brought back music and young romance was Mansoor Khan's 1988 film *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* – a love

story along the lines of a modern Romeo and Juliet, showing two young lovers blighted by their feuding families. Lead actor Aamir Khan shot to fame as the teen idol of the late eighties. *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* was followed by Sooraj Barjatya's *Maine Pyar Kiya* in 1989, another romantic movie with great music and family values, which brought another cinematic idol to the fore - Salman Khan. A third actor with the same surname - Shahrukh Khan - became the biggest new star of the 1990s. Shahrukh Khan began his career in the theatre and television before he got his big break playing a psychopath in *Baazigar* (1993). He has acted in all of the big hits of the 1990s, including Aditya Chopra's excellent romance, *Dilwale Dulhania LeJayenge* (1995), and Karan Johar's delightful *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998). Shahrukh Khan believes Bollywood shares its dependence on love stories and simple plot lines with Hollywood:

**Shahrukh Khan:** The Hindi film is like *Titanic*, everything is told to you. This is going to happen, the ship will hit an iceberg and just in case you don't know it, let me show you at the beginning of the film how it happened. Everything is explained, you don't have to think too hard, just enjoy the moments. Films are very basic and 'talk' like you would to a child. You follow the story, you enjoy it, it's full of emotion and whenever you get a little bogged down, a song will come. A Hindi film is a complete variety entertainment show and you don't have to worry about whether you'll understand the film or not. I've seen *The Matrix* three times and every time I've come out of the cinema, I thought I understood a different story. In Hindi films, everything is nice, crystal

clear, simple, straightforward. They are not pretentious. Sometimes I feel it's very difficult to make simple things and I think that's the uniqueness of Indian cinema. It has so much in it, there are songs, dances, emotions and fights and yet the format is very simple. I think that's the winning feature of good Hindi films.

Comparatively recently, the Hindi film industry has become known universally as 'Bollywood' – some people claim a journalist from the popular Indian film magazine Cineblitz first coined the term in the 1980s. The Bollywood name has divided critics, filmmakers and stars, many of whom refuse to use it. They believe it sets up Hindi cinema against Hollywood movies in an overtly simplified and patronizing way, and blithely implies that conventions that work for Tom Cruise will work equally well for Aamir Khan, or that Kajol could change places with Julia Roberts. But despite such valid protests, the term has become common currency in both India and elsewhere. Most people find it a useful way of identifying Bombay productions, perhaps seeing Bollywood movies as a product of large-scale entertainment much in the same way as Hollywood films are regarded. For many people unfamiliar with India, understanding the term 'Hindi cinema' is perhaps too much to ask. Does it refer to a language, for instance, or a religion?

The Bollywood label has helped audiences unfamiliar with Indian cinema to get to grips with this massive industry, but unfortunately, it also facilitates the lumping together of Hindi films into one big blob of bad entertainment. Consequently, gems of storytelling and genuine classics struggle to establish their individuality. However much the 'Bollywood' label has divided opinion, it is here to stay.


Bollywood

Term: Bollywood helps

One might also assume that audiences will simply accept any Hindi film equally. This is quite untrue – producers are well aware that out of the huge number of Indian films made each year, only eight will be box-office hits. Indian audiences are highly discerning. They may like the formula film but they expect a lot from it, including fabulous music, romantic dreams and a code of right and wrong that speaks to the grandmother and the grandson at the same time.

Recent productions have a technical polish that previous colour Hindi films may have lacked. Unlike former generations of filmmakers, who catered to an audience whose main source of entertainment was going to the movies, filmmakers today are aware they are competing with fifty television and satellite channels, not to mention countless titles easily available on video and DVD. Young directors know they have to produce crowd-pleasing, glossy films to entice the audience to the cinema, and to stay at the top, they have to know the Bollywood recipe off by heart:

**Karan Johar:** If you have to name five basic ingredients that your Bollywood film must have, I'd say: glamour, emotion, great interval point, a hard-hitting climax and every kind of entertainment you can put into the film. I think these are the key elements. You have to have the right emotions, a completely glamorous look, great songs, and your interval point has to be fantastic. And everything has to round up very well in your climax. That's what I look for when I start writing. That's what you need for a commercial Hindi film. It should have all these elements. Only then will you make it successful – that's if you are aiming at the market in its entirety.



Hindi cinema's most successful filmmakers have mastered the Bollywood mixture of music, love, family values, comedy, fantasy and a staggeringly adventurous choice of film locations (which increasingly have no relation whatsoever to the narrative). Audiences know that films are not real life, but rather allegories for a perfect world, where troubles and difficulties are all sorted out. It's more than just offering happy endings – the stories are full of hope, showing that good inevitably triumphs: the poor man defeats the exploiter; the rich heroine is ultimately able to marry below her class and continue to enjoy an opulent lifestyle; the faithless husband always returns home to his wife and children; people live modern, westernized lives and still respect traditional Indian values; the hero always vanquishes the villain and the dark side of life is banished forever. The most famous of all Indian film stars, Amitabh Bachchan, sums it all up: 'Hindi films provide poetic justice in just three hours – a feat that none of us can achieve in a lifetime, or in several lifetimes.'