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Sandesh

"The Message"

From Editors' Desk

Dear Readers,

The theme of our current issue and this year's banquet is 'In the Wonderland of Indian Cinema'. Indian cinema is commonly viewed as a 'dream factory', producing easily consumable products with formulaic content. In this issue, we instead focus on the *pluralism* of this art form. With strong roots in traditional 'Kathas' or stories performed by travelling minstrels and a willingness to experiment with western techniques, Indian cinema is many 'cinemas' at once. Its diverse strands reflect ancient myths and modern aspirations, fulfilled dreams and broken compacts, prose and poetry. We invite you to experience this wonderfully human enterprise.

Sandesh

An IndUS of Fox Valley

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Indian Cinema—Much more than 'Bollywood' *

By Anil Zankar

Hollywood films account for about 60 per cent or more of the theatrical playing time in most countries of the world, but probably less than 10 per cent in India. There are good reasons for this. Indian cinema is deep-rooted and has built an enduring relationship with its audiences.

The Matrix of Hindi Cinema

India has several regional cinemas of her own, yet she has created this National Cinema in Hindi. It is an expression of popular culture that seeks a unitary nature of the society and the nationhood in popular terms. This is not due to any intrinsic patriotic quality in the film-makers, but due to the need to communicate to a pan-Indian audience, that is heterogeneous in terms of castes, language groups and levels of education. The content, therefore, is quite often expressed in a manner that seems to aim at the lowest common denominator. It is thought to be a sound commercial practice and has led to a certain standardization of form. And it is within this system that films succeed and fail at the box office.

Content of the form[ula] of the traditional Indian film

Hindi Cinema may appear to tell simplistic stories with stock characters and situations, and is based on a number of conventions.

Traditional Indian films are dramatic narratives with the happy ending. A hero and a heroine and their love relationship are a must for the story. Mostly the stories are hero-centric and driven forward by his and/ or the villain's actions. An obvious villain is usually present. Natural calamities, misfortunes, oppressive social norms also play the role of obstacles. The hero has a certain goal in the story like revenge or achieving material success or an elevated position in society. At the end of his journey, defeat of the villain and union with the heroine and the family reunion are certain. Hero, heroine as well as the villain are endowed with larger than life qualities. They are more typical, than individual. The stories are usually episodic with time and space, quite often loosely defined. Coincidence, acts of fate do play sometimes even a crucial part in the narrative.

Some of the themes repeat themselves as very dramatic situations in these films e.g. love at first sight, acts of tyranny, separation of family members, people undergoing great suffering in the form of *Vanavas,*[exile] declaration and acts of vengeance, acts of *Prayaschitta* [penance], celebration of joy and festivities through dance, confrontations of conscience, etc. An individual Hindi film is expected to be full of all kinds of sentiments and happenings. In comparison to films from other countries they tend to be very long, usually between two-and-a-quarter to three hours. This narrative structure broadly applies to all kinds of films – as strictly speaking there are no rigorously defined genres of Indian films in the manner of Hollywood like musicals, westerns, film noir.

* Bollywood seems to be used by a lot of people as a generic term, but the readers are fore warned, that many in India find it to pejorative

This cinematic form thus defined in India, has two exclusive aspects. Firstly, it has its roots in the old literary as well as the performance arts' tradition of the country, essentially belonging to the pre-industrial epoch of the society. Secondly, the concept of reality operative in these films is mostly mythical.

Origin and growth

Indian mainstream cinema owes its mythical nature to its pioneer D.G. Phalke. He was influenced by a film called *Life of Christ* in 1910 and single-handedly proceeded to set up the Indian film industry against all odds by making *Raja Harishchandra* in 1913. Phalke's pictures were an instant hit with the Indian audiences as he was mostly telling them the stories that they were familiar with, as his stories came from the Indian mythology and were superbly executed with trick effects. This form came to stay and prosper in the subsequent years.

However, the others also entered the fray and began to make films that began to move away from mythology. Gradually the trade infrastructure came to being and Indian film industry adopted the studio structure, where the product would be conceived, shot and finished all under one roof. The big Indian cities like Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai became initially the centers of production and remain so till date with a few more centers added to them with the passage of time. Indian Cinematograph Act with the Censor Board and other regulations came into being during the British period.

In 1931, *Alam Ara* was a film that heralded the age of sound cinema in India. Coming of sound had a salutary effect on the industry. It strengthened the studio system. Indian cinema became more definitive due to the use of language and music and suddenly it opened the gates of musical culture, which has been millennia-old. It also helped Regional Indian language films to come into their own.

This system continued merrily till 1947(the year of Independence). After Independence, the studio system began to weaken, but film-making continued with fervor. Setting up of the bodies like Federation of Film Societies of India, The National Film School [FTII] and National Film Archive in the first 15 years after the Independence were the most notable things as they had major long term effects. International Film Festivals were being held. But, in terms of the film form the real landmark film and a truly pioneering effort towards modern cinema came in the form of *Pather Panchali* the unique film of Satyajit Ray in 1955. This film won the award at Cannes with the citation calling it the best human document.

Satyajit Ray –The First Modern film-maker of India

Realism as understood in the West, was unknown to Indian cinema. Indian film-makers before Ray has dealt with realistic themes, but not in realistic form. After a great beginning, Ray continued to excel throughout his prolific career [1955-1992]. He was the first Indian filmmaker to totally go beyond the traditional form of Indian film narrative and connect to the world audiences with a modern form and a mature depiction of intricacies of Indian social life, that was historically accurate, psycho-socially observed and rendered in a dignified, under-stated style that invited the audiences to feel. He adopted the works of writers new and old, interpreted them with his unique perspective that was informed by rationality and progressive social thoughts and went on to become the greatest chronicler of Indian life.

Pioneers of Indian Cinema

Today's Indian Cinema stands on the shoulders of these giants who not only gave birth to it but also nurtured it with their tireless and persistent efforts. As every other new film has some technical finesse, it is because of the efforts of those who laid the roots, with their sweat and tears.

* N. G. Chitre and Dadasaheb Torne made the first narrative feature film *Pundalik* 1912. The movie was a recording of a play by the same name.
* Dadasaheb Phalke made the first full length feature film (3700 feet) *Raja Harishchandra* in 1913.
* J. F. Madan made the first Bengali feature film *Nal Damyanti* in 1917.
* Begum Fatima Sultana was the first woman director. She directed *Bulbule Paristan* in 1926.
* Aredeshir Irani made the first Talkie feature film *Alam Ara* in 1931 and the first color feature film *Kisan Kanya* in 1937.
* Guru Dutt made *Kagaz ke Phool* in 1959, which was the first movie made in cinemascope.
* V. Shantaram (1901-1990) is a renowned actor, director, and producer. He produced and directed the first Marathi film *Ayodhyecha Raja* in 1932. He had an illustrious career as a filmmaker for six decades.
* Mehboob Khan (1907-1964) was a pioneer producer-director of Hindi cinema. His *Mother India* (1957) was nominated for Academy Awards .
* Bimal Roy (1907-1964) was the most acclaimed director of Hindi films. He won eleven Filmfare Awards, a National Film Award and an award at Cannes Film Festival.
* Satyajit Ray (1921-1992) with his movie *Pather Panchali* (1959) started the era of *Parallel Cinema*. He was a recipient of Life-time Achievement Academy Award.

The mixed fare as of today

The path opened up by Ray, widened with the passage of time and other filmmakers followed in the track. Mrinal Sen, Ritwik Ghatak, Shyam Benegal,

Adoor Gopalkrishnan, Girish Kasaravalli and quite a few other film-makers have contributed to the innovative modern film making in India over the years. The films made with limited resources have flowered in many languages and in many ways can be seen to be seeking to depict the Indian reality in diverse forms. Economic oppression, gender issues, political corruption, outdated religious and cultural practices, issues of globalization happen to be some of the dominant themes. Also the present day film-makers have the confidence of being innovative with the form. Taken together all these films would open a up a spectrum of India that is full of energy, issues and development.

On the other hand, the traditional Indian films in Hindi as well as other languages, continue with some major changes now. The changes are not so much in essence as in the format of presentation. The appearance of the contemporary mainstream big-budget films shows a lot of influence of the modern TV ad culture as well as forms like MTV. In Southern film industries like in Tamil and Telugu, personality cult of the big stars continues and films starring Rajanikant and a few other super-heroes costing between 10 and 20 million USD continue to be made. These films have a market abroad too, as these films are exhibited in more than 60 countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. But, heartening development has been the possibility of making a low budget feature film for rank newcomer with a good script is very good nowadays and that is bringing in the fresh blood and innovation and the path to improvement of the stereo-typed mainstream film lies in such effort gaining strength.

So, on the whole it is an interesting period ahead for the Indian film industry. □

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What remains in the middle now? India's turn to neoliberalism & Hindi cinema

By Jyotsna Kapur

Although it was in 1960 that the Indian government, under Nehru's leadership, set up the Film Finance Corporation to promote alternatives to the mainstream *masala* Hindi film it was not until the end of that decade that the cinema we know as middle/art/parallel cinema came into its own. This is the cinema we associate with Basu Bhattacharya, Gulzar, Saeed Mirza, Hrishikesh Mukherjee, and Kundan Shah and their portrayals of urban middle class domesticity. Contrary to the star studded, melodramatic, spectacles of the commercial Hindi film these films were meant to offer a realistic, serious cinema; a cinema that Madhava Prasad has quite correctly called a "middle class cinema," in that it reflected and aimed at producing a middle class national subject, i.e., someone whose identity was solidly entrenched in the middle class as opposed to caste or region.[1] Of course, these films rarely veered from the largely Hindu upper caste milieu they passed off as *the* middle-class. Yet, they were remarkably preoccupied with concerns that can be best understood as secular, such as individual freedom, privacy, romantic love, material comfort, and the relationship of citizens with the state.

Films like Basu Chatterjee's *Rajnigandha* (1974) and *Sara Akash* (1969), Basu Bhattacharya' *Anubhav* (1971), or Gulzar's *Parichay* (1972)- whatever their differences and nuances- presented subjects conflicted by the constraints of middle class life. These films debated, questioned, and gently mocked the existential dilemmas of being middle class; of living by the norms of frugality, public decorum, delayed gratification, and industrious living against the desires of freedom and autonomy generally centered on the heterosexual romantic relationship.

It was a very middle class cinema in form as well. Quietly restrained, it eschewed the highly melodramatic, widescreen, color spectacles of the Bombay *masala* film. In these films, love was spelt with a lower-case against the undying passion of the *masala* film. They started where the *masala* film generally ended, i.e., *after* the wedding, dwelling on marital discord (e.g., *Sara Akash*, *Anubhav*, *Kora Kagaz, Aandhi*)[2]. They discarded the communitarian and homoerotic tropes of *dosti*, so central to the *masala* film, in favor of an exclusive preoccupation with the inner world of the middle class family. The urban landscape of Bombay, against which much of this cinema was located, appeared as a mere background to the internal crisis of this class; a crisis which was nevertheless portrayed gently as resolvable. A standard establishing shot of marine drive or a middle-class high-rise would locate the film in the city but the subjects rarely encountered, with the notable exception of *Gharonda* (Bhimsen, 1977) the city as an intrinsic part of their lives. *Gharonda* had revealed with affectionate empathy the struggles of a young couple, played memorably by Amol Palekar and Zarina Wahab, to find an affordable apartment in Bombay. There was a core middle class belief at the heart of these domestic comedies: problems within individuals in the family could be resolved within the family via an understanding and awareness of the causes of the problem. Consequently, these problems too were

presented as small and manageable in the larger scheme of things. But the dramatic encounter with fate or destiny continued to rage in both the *masala* film and the religious epics.

Most of all, this cinema abhorred the action/violence that had become standard fare with the Amitabh Bachchan kind of cinema geared towards the urban male proletariat in the 70s. In fact, Hrishikesh Mukherjee made a clear statement of this difference with his *Guddi* (1971). In the film, Jaya Bahaduri played a young, guileless, love -struck fan of Dharmendra (who plays himself as a movie star) who is cured of her infatuation with the artifice of commercial cinema and learns to love her real fiancé. In a fundamental sense, the fragmented structure of the masala film - with its songs, dances, comedic, action routines mixed up with tropes of mother, *dosti*, etc, and its chatty performing-audiences - and the linear cohesive narrative of the middle cinema mimicked a bourgeois subject, one whose life is lived according to plan and an ethic of production that is geared towards the future. [3]

There was a certain confidence this cinema reflected in the middle class subject—in the ability of this class to understand and act upon its troubles. Yet, this subject was also decidedly masculine. Looking back now, it seems, as if this cinema was attempting to calm the simmering tensions of gender and sexuality which were to explode middle class homes with the women's movement in the late seventies-early eighties. When Rinki Bhattacharya revealed the abusive marriage she had shared with Basu Bhattacharya and walked out of the marriage in the early 1980s, it confirmed the violence that lurked behind middle class doors; a violence that this cinema had failed to confront because of its middle-class aesthetic of timidity, coyness around questions of sexuality, and, its reliance on realism above all else as the correct form. The realist aesthetic, when fetishized as the *only* correct form, forecloses the possibilities of looking below and behind surfaces, to explore psychological truths, and to imagine alternatives.

Middle cinema took greater risks when it moved out of the domestic sphere to address the relationship between the state and citizen. In particular, this gained a certain momentum after the Emergency with landmark films such as *Aakrosh* (Govind Nihalani, 1980), *Anantram* (Adoor Gopalakrishnan, 1987), *Ardh Satya* (Govind Nihalani, 1983), *Bhavni Bhavai* (Ketan Mehta, 1980), and *Chakra* (Ravindra Dharmaraj, 1980). These films did not shy from expressions of rage and disenchantment with the Indian state. At their best, they revealed the astonishment, vulnerability, and basic integrity of the middle-class subject who comes upon the awful and complete knowledge of the criminalized state and echoed the experiences of a generation getting radicalized in the Emergency period. Yet, the Other India—the tribals, the dalits, the working class, women, the marginalized—remained, in these films, shadows hopelessly condemned to silent victimhood. Perhaps, this accounts for the popularity of these films with the middle class and their failure beyond this critical audience. The trend had had its most recent antecedents in Shyam Benegal's three films, *Ankur* (1974), *Nishant* (1975) and *Manthan* (1976). Finally, there was the more experimental trend, best associated with Mani Kaul's *Uski Roti* (1971) and Kumar Shahni's *Maya Darpan* (1972). If there was a film form in which the bourgeois subject started to come apart it was in the works of these latter filmmakers, which revealed states of utter futility, boredom, and meaninglessness. What is worth remembering is that these films were all subsidized by the state, i.e., by tax money and so represented a moment when art was considered a public good and therefore, granted a certain degree of autonomy. Yet, the cinema was constrained by the rules of censorship that it shared with commercial cinema as well as its own inability to step out of its middle-class lens.

By the 1990s, it appeared that this middle class cinema had run its course. For one, its former antagonist, i.e., the *masala* film had been, like hip hop or blue jeans, appropriated from its urban male proletarian roots into the upper echelons of the transnational bourgeoisie and emerged as the brand ambassador for *India Inc*. weddings, light-hearted comedies on triangular relationships, and coming-of-age-stories now formed the faint-hearted core of Bollywood spectacle, whose look had become now glossier than ever before. In contrast to the secularized national bourgeois subjects of the 70s middle cinema, the bourgeois subject of Bollywood is tied into celebration of ritual befitting a pre-modern peasant. But the scale and style of celebration—the designer homes, weddings, and playrooms against which these spectacles are staged — fit the buying aspirations of the "world class consumer," the mold into which the middle class is increasingly invited to cast itself. The Nehruvian middle class, with its simple-living and high -thinking petty bourgeois ethic, has indeed disappeared, and along with it has its image in Hindi cinema.

But its disappearance has not gone uncommented. There is, I think, a searing image of the disintegration of the middle class subject that has started to appear on the screen. Usually young urban male, these protagonists are delusional, murderous or suicidal, and given to blatantly using others or being used by them. *Dev D.* (Anurag Kashyap, 2009), *Kartik Calling Kartik* (Vijay Lalwani, 2010), *Love, Sex, and Dhoka* (Dibaka Bannerjee, 2010) are some current examples. There is also a great preoccupation with conmen and cheating, swindling, etc. as a way of life. Take for instance, the *Munnabhai* series which figure Gandhi, the petty bourgeois par excellence, as an inspiring *bhai* or small time goon; *Khosla ka Ghosla* (Dibakar Bannerjee, 2006) which shows the smarts of a middle class family as they wrest their life time savings family plot from crooks by out-crooking them; and *Lucky Oye Lucky* (Dibakar

Bannerjee, 2007) on the exploits of a young man who escapes his lower middle class routine life to become a much loved thief. The hussler or the entrepreneur who is willing to take risks is rapidly replacing the slow, future-directed hard-working middle class subject who had a certain faith in the continuity of his, and to a lesser extent her, class position.

As inequities have widened in neoliberal India and life has become increasingly insecure, especially for the middle class, the realist aesthetic of middle cinema is proving to be incapable of representing the surreal clash of extremes that have now become common place. Simultaneously, the very coherence of the bourgeois notion of individualism has been shaken to the core in face of the fact that even the right to life cannot be taken for granted in the current political situation. In such a thorough-going crisis, the awakened political subjects of the 70s and 80s middle cinema, such as the memorable characters etched by Govind Nihlani who find the sickening truth about a violent and corrupted state and are shocked by it, appear tragically innocent. For the present generation of filmmakers and audiences, such faith appears downright naïve. On the one hand, this signals a cruel and cut-throat individualism that is susceptible to calls for unity under fascist projects of annihilation of the self and others. Projects of communal violence that have been on the increase since the 80s, were born in the vacuum left by the evacuation of the secularized middle class of the Nehruvian state. Since then, there has also been a steady revival of tradition based in caste and patriarchy. Its most horrific symptom, the "honor killings" that have surfaced in recent years are life and death struggles that cannot be treated by the middling aesthetics of middle cinema. Consequently, the dark comedy, the withering self-analysis, the blurring of sex and violence, and the flouting of middle-class identity that has now taken over the image of this class is not necessarily a bad thing. The cynicism with which it holds the democratic project of the bourgeois state may well be the beginning of a thorough-going critique of bourgeois culture as well; i.e., its belief in the home as a sanctuary from conflict. Recent cinematic forays into this space have not only revealed the tensions that rage within this enclave but the fragile nature of the public/ private divide itself.

What is to be noted, though, is that such self-investigation is occurring in a space enclosed for middle-class consumption. These films are screened in multiplexes ensconced within malls where money, armed guards, and surveillance cameras ensure a temporary respite from the crushing antagonisms of neoliberal India. □

[1] Madhava Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction,* New Delhi, 1998.

[2] *Sara Akash* by Basu Chatterjee (1969) narrated the troubles of a newly married couple in starting their relationship. While the young man had felt compelled into an early arranged marriage the woman, also more educated than the others in the family, is equally alienated from the relationship. Chatterjee traced the nuances of this new relationship, the insecurities of the male and his power, as well as the desire and necessity of privacy against the norms of the extended family. In *Anubhav* (1971) Basu Bhattacharya explored the threat of dissolution of an older marriage. In *Kora Kagaz* (Anil Ganguly, 1974) a marriage between a wealthier woman and middle class professor threatens to come apart because of the woman's interfering parents. Gulzar's *Aandhi* (1975), supposedly modeled after Indira Gandhi, explored the contours of a relationship come apart because of the political ambitions of the woman.

[3] See Lalitha Gopalan (*Cinema of interruptions: Action genres in contemporary Indian cinema*. London: BFI. 2002), Manjunath Pendakur (*Indian popular cinema: Industry, ideology and consciousness*. New Jersey: Hampton Press. 2003), and Madhava Prasad (*The ideology of the Hindi film: A historical construction*. NewDelhi: Oxford university Press, 1998) respectively on the interruptions, *masala* routines, and heterogenous mode of production of popular Hindi cinema.

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Do you know that ...

- *"De de khudake naam par"* was the first song recorded for the movie *Alam Ara* in 1931.
- *Indra Sabha* produced by Madan Theatres in 1932 is the only film till today with a record number of 71 songs.
- Madan's other films *Chatrabakavali* and *Bilwamangal* produced in 1932 had 41 and 37 songs.
- Meenakshi Cinetone's *Pavalakkod*i, produced in 1934, had 50 songs while Angle Film's Tamil hit *Sri Krishna Leela* in 1934 had 62 songs.
- The Bengali film *Chandidas* produced by New Theatres was the first movie with "Background" music by R. C. Boral.
- Playback singing was introduced in 1935 in the movie *Bhagya Chakra* produced by New Theatres.
- Wadia Movietone's *Naujawan* produced in 1937 was the first movie without any songs.
- Lata Mangeshkar was featured in the *Guinness Book of World Records* from 1974 to 1991 for having made the most recordings in the world.

Stand up and be counted! Women Directors of Indian Cinema

By Neepa Majumdar

There is something to be said about first impressions. They tell us about trends that are worth noticing. But first impressions also invite us to question and examine them further. Thus it is worth noting that when one thinks of Indian film directors who are women, the names that first come to mind tend to be women of the Indian diaspora, such as Mira Nair, Gurinder Chadha, and Deepa Mehta, whose work is located primarily outside India and between cultures. If one were to expand the circle to include women directors located in India, it continues to be noteworthy that the first names that come to mind, for example, Aparna Sen, Jahnu Barua, and Sai Paranjpye, are predominantly associated with regional cinemas or alternatives to the mainstream Bombay or South Indian cinemas. Thus our first impressions tell us that there is no place for women behind the camera or as directors in the mainstream cinemas of India, though they have quite literally sold movies to the masses through their visible presence in front of the camera.

While this impression of the absence of women directors in mainstream Indian cinema is generally correct, there are a few exceptions that are worth noting. Most recently, of course, Farah Khan, has moved from choreography to direction, with her second film, *Om Shanti Om*, becoming the most successful Indian film in terms of box office returns, and has been received equally well by critics. The film broke ground with its sure-footed spoof of Bombay cinema. But since 1954, the first year of the annual *Filmfare* Awards (the Indian equivalent of the Oscars), only one woman has received the Best Director award, Sai Paranjpye for *Sparsh* in 1985, though a few others such as Mira Nair and Farah Khan have been nominated. In this sense, there are certain structural similarities between Hollywood and the Bombay cinema in their marginalization of women directors and the fact that each industry in its long history has honored only one woman with the award. Things don't look much better when one considers the more prestigious National Film Awards given out annually by the Indian government. Since 1968, the first year of these awards, only two women have received it, Aparna Sen for two films, *36 Chowringhee Lane* in 1982 and *Mr. and Mrs. Iyer* in 2003, and the Assamese director, Jahnu Barua for *Hkhagoroloi Bohu Door* in 1995.

If one puts aside film direction for a moment, one finds that even in the early years of Indian cinema, some women did have surprisingly influential positions. The actress Nargis's mother, Jaddanbai, for example, was a film producer with her own production company and is credited as the director of the two films, *Madam Fashion* (1935) and *Moti ka Haar* (1937), which like so many films of that period, no longer survive. She also composed the music for several films, including *Talash-e-Haq* (1935). But the first female Indian Music Director to be credited as such was Saraswati Devi. Her real name was Khursheed Manchersher Minocher-Homji and her first film music composition was for the 1935 film, *Jawani ki Hawa* for the studio Bombay Talkies. Her involvement in the cinema along with that of her sister, whose screen name was Chandraprabha, caused a major uproar and demonstrations in the Parsi community. But Bombay Talkies and Saraswati Devi did not back down and she remained a major force as a music director until 1949. Perhaps her most well known composition is "Main Ban ki Chidiya" sung by Ashok Kumar and Devika Rani in the film *Achhut Kanya* (1936).

Another area in which many women directors are active, but are virtually unknown to a mainstream audience, is in documentary and activist filmmaking, where women directors such as Paromita Vohra and Deepa Dhanraj, to name only a few, have made a name for themselves in documentary and experimental film circles. Unfortunately, their films are not widely available, but in the numerous burgeoning documentary film festivals and circuits in South Asia, women documentary directors are now a force to be reckoned with. For example, among the winners at this year's Himal South Asian Documentary film festival in Kathmandu, was a film by Shabnam Virani called *Unlikely Bonds in Quest for Kabir's 'Country'*, which is now traveling as part of the Traveling Films South Asia package of the best documentaries of 2009 from South Asia. When one considers that documentary filmmaking is so much less expensive and also more within the control of a single individual, it is no surprise that we find so many highly acclaimed women directors in this area, where institutional barriers are easier to overcome.

Even the most prominent Indian women directors we know today, such as Mira Nair and Gurinder Chadha, started out as documentary filmmakers. Chadha's first film, *I'm British But….* (1989), was a documentary about Bhangra music in the UK that, along with Pratibha Parmar's *Bhangra Jig* (1990) and *Warrior Marks* (1993), was part of a new wave of South-Asian-British documentaries in the 1990s. Chadha went on to make the simply delightful *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993), a feature film about a multigenerational group of British-Indian women going out for a day trip to Blackpool, in the course of which the tensions among the characters bring to the fore a number of complex issues of gender, race, nostalgia for the homeland, and the role of Hindi movies in the diaspora. In a way, her better-known (but perhaps less inventive) *Bride and Prejudice* tries to make similar gestures of homage as *Bhaji* to the Bombay cinema that Chadha grew up with.

Mira Nair, who also began as a documentary filmmaker with her student film, *Jama Masjid Street Journal*,

has continued to make documentaries over the years, and her documentary style has also had an impact on her feature films. The scenes in India in *The Namesake* (2006) and the street scenes in *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), for example, capture some of the same liveliness and unpredictability of the Indian street as in her very first film. Nair garnered international attention and further offers of filmmaking projects after *Salaam Bombay!* (1988) won numerous awards, including the audience award at the Cannes film festival and an Academy Award nomination for best foreign language film. Her most popular film since then has been *Monsoon Wedding*, which won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival and numerous other accolades.

Given the somewhat marginal position of women in the commercial Bombay film industry or "Bollywood" (a terrible name that seems to be here to stay), it is no surprise that many of the women directors discussed here have directly or indirectly engaged with issues of gender equality in their films. Even commercial films such as *Om Shanti Om*, *Bride and Prejudice* and *Monsoon Wedding* deal with such issues, but these three films are also noteworthy for the way in which they have surreptitiously closed the gap between commercial Hindi cinema and the various art, documentary, and regional cinemas of India. This is because all three films offer, in addition to a good story, a way of thinking about the cinema itself and its role in the broader culture of India. *Om Shanti Om* does this more obviously through its numerous references to other films and filmmakers. *Bride and Prejudice* and *Monsoon Wedding* can both be understood as homage to, and critiques of, the spate of wedding movies that came out of Bollywood in the 1990s, including *Dilwale Dulhaniya le Jayenge* (1995). *Bride*'s homage to these films is through its deployment of spectacle and song choreographed in recognizably similar ways and through its presentation of a similar narrative of transnational romance. *Monsoon* on the other hand, offers a critique by making a wedding film of a different sort, one that, in addition to the spectacle of wealth and song, includes glimpses of a darker side including class differences and family incest. These three women, Farah Khan, Gurinder Chadha, and Mira Nair, present us with the current face of a transnational class of smart and creative women directors, whose films' appeal is no longer bound by national borders. But their success today has also, in part, been possible because other women before them walked the same path under considerably more difficult conditions. □

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The Curious Life of Vijay: When life imitates movies

By Mahesh Subramony

Vijay was distraught. "Everything . . . every single thing that I once saw on screen . . . is now happening to me!" I helped him settle down with two sips of something strong and requested him to begin at the beginning. "My life", he began, "does not just parallel Bollywood, it is actually *identical* to it". Like many of my generation, Hindi movies shaped every aspect of Vijay's life. Let us begin with the mundane. He wore his hair long, lost the top two buttons of his shirt, carefully cultivated a 2-day old beard, and at the slightest provocation spouted lines from "Sholey" (The Flames), "Diwaar" (The Wall), or "Trishul" (The Trident). Thus, the line at the college cafeteria always "began where he stood", he had no use for grades (or riches) because he had something more important – "his mother", and his dream was to build a business empire with no capital investments solely on the basis of his confidence and yes, "the blessings of his mother".

Now, we all had our role models. I must confess my own irrational attraction for the works of a certain movie star known for such stunts as lighting a smoking device utilizing the forehead of his opponent to provide friction for the match . . . but, Vijay belonged to a different species of movie worshippers. Movies were his raison d'être. Supreme bliss, for him, was a seat at the local cinema hall. His sense of self was contingent upon catching the newest release on the first day of screening, and existential angst resulted from the decisional conflict presented by two new releases on the same day. It was therefore ironic that one fine September morning, Vijay woke up to realize that he was a character from one of his favorite movies.

Things were exhilarating at first. He discovered that he could ride a motorcycle at *mach* speed without holding the handgrips, perform triple back flips, and play several musical instruments including the harmonica, grand piano, drums, and the guitar – with his teeth. Once he used the overhead electric cables to power his electric guitar while playing a love song atop an electric train to woo a young beauty – Simone. Sparks flew. Love bloomed. In various dream sequences, they travelled across the vast expanses, they travelled across the vast expanses of the Saharan desert swaying to Arabian beats, accentuated the beauty of the Swiss Alps with their bright and vibrant colors, and splashed in the pristine rainwater pools of the city in wet clothes and one pink, polka-dotted umbrella.

Then, events took a turn for the worse. Class differences were discovered.

Simone, though deceptively Gucci clad, was the daughter of a low level clerk serving a benevolent autocrat – Vijay's father – obsessed with building strategic business partnerships through matrimonial alliances. Parental disapprobation resulted, separation ensued, and soulful songs were sung. In the following days, Vijay in his attempt to differentiate his identity from that of his father built up a business enterprise fueled by love for Simone and the secret blessings of his mother while thwarting several attempts on Simone's honor by evil minded classmates, intoxicated policemen, and rapacious landowners, by successfully displaying his martial arts skills. Those were challenging times.

I stopped Vijay during this portion of the narrative to supply refills and enquired whether his state of mind resulted from the trials and tribulations discussed thus far. He nodded "no" vigorously, and brightening a little, explained that those obstacles did not kill their love, but made it stronger. "Simone and I, through our sheer determination, convinced everyone that our love was greater than their hate", he said. Through divine providence invoked by Vijay at a local place of worship, and the father-son camaraderie resulting from battling a common enemy - an untrustworthy business associate who also happened to be Simone's potential abductor - things began to work themselves out. A marriage followed. A honeymoon in New Zeeland ensued. And yes, songs of love's supremacy were sung.

"We walked into the sunset with hands entwined", Vijay said, wiping away his tears. I hid mine, though not convincingly. Everyone loves people in love. "It has been wonderful", he continued, "and I want it to stop".

"But why?. . ., I am confused. . . Love prevails . . . All's well that ends well . . . Right?" I sputtered. Vijay did not appear sane in the best of times, and his words suggested that a padded cell would add the appropriate décor for his personage. "That is exactly what I mean", he gestured with both his hands, "This is where the movies end – the character attains his prize and walks into the distance, but have you ever wondered about what happens next?"

I reached into the file-drawer of my memory for an answer to his question. The "Mainstream Bollywood" folder ended exactly at the spot where Vijay left off. The "Art Movie" folder inevitably ended with ennui but did not include any of the Bollywood content. Vijay was right. There were no answers.

"Navigating the peaks and troughs of my recent life, I hung onto the reliable boat of Bollywood script writing. I knew that if I ventured too far, a latent script or an 'invisible hand' would be invoked to bring the story back to familiar territories . . . but now I have nothing to guide me. If my life is a movie, what happens after 'the end'?" I was stumped. For years, Vijay had been guided by the characters he watched on screen for the requisite two and a half hours and went back home, replaying their stories in his thoughts, dreams, and actions. But where did the characters go once Vijay had left the confines of the movie theatre? Now he had to find out . . . by living their lives.

I asked him to take two aspirins and get some sleep, and then pondered the problem. It was clear that Vijay was living the life of a Bollywood hero – everything he had told me fit the bill. But, something was not quite right. It took me a while to figure out what it was. When I did, I shook him awake.

He rubbed his eyes tiredly as he woke up. "Do you . . . remember seeing this in any of your movies?" I questioned. "This? You mean our conversation?" I nodded and continued, "Have you watched a Bollywood movie where the key character has the problem that you do, and asks a friend for help?" He answered "No . . . but where are you going with this?" I pressed his shoulders powerfully and declared my discovery. "If *this* is happening and we both know it hasn't happened previously in any movie, it means that . . .". Understanding dawned on his face, and he cautiously completed my sentence, "that my actions are no longer dictated by a script, and

Sometimes the Indian Cinema is mistakenly identified with the Bombay Film Industry, popularly known as 'Bollywood'. However the regional cinema is equally rich. Here is a break-up of Indian Feature Films produced in different languages in 2009.

Hindi	235
Telugu	218
Tamil	190
Kannada	177
Marathi	99
Malayalam	94
Bengali	84
Bhojpuri	64
Gujarati	62
Oriya	17
Punjabi	15
English	9
Assamese	5
Rajasthani	5
Konkani	4
Santali	2
Haryanvi	1
Kodava	1
Maithili	1
Nagluri	1
Nepali	1
Rajbanshi	1
Sambalpuri	1
Mishing	1
TOTAL	**1288**

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that I am free to shape my own life the way I feel!". "Correct, Vijay!" I said, "You are no longer just an actor in a movie written and directed by others. This is your movie. You own every part of it. The end as they declared in 'Kala Patthar' (The Black Stone) is actually your 'new beginning'". □

Mahesh Subramony is an IndUS alumni and ex-Fox Valley resident who now lives in Sycamore, IL with his wife, Ritu, and their daughter, Vani. He teaches management at Northern Illinois University. Comments on this article can be sent directly to him at mahesh.v.subramony@gmail.com.

Indian Cinema - As the world sees it

Indian Movies and "Quadros"

Asmara, the capital city of Eritrea is a home to many cinemas that play foreign movies. As a teenage boy during the late 1980s, I watched movies in many of those theatres. Back then Indian movies played in many of the cinemas. Cinema Hamasien, cinema Odion, and cinema Dante were some that played Indian movies regularly. With a $1 Birr entrance fee and a downtown location my favorite was Cinema Dante.

Before I learned English as a second language, they definitely were my favorite, and of course, some movies more than others. Qurbani is one; Disco Dancer is another. However, I did not understand a word of what was said in the movies. With story plots that are very easy to follow, impressive dance moves, and several action scenes, they definitely were enjoyable to me. The same could have been said about the crowd in the movie theatres from back then. Loud applauses from the crowd in the theatre at several key scenes of a movie were very common. Occasionally, you would spot young boys trying to imitate some of the dance moves while walking on the streets of Asmara. The most widely spoken language in Asmara is Tigrinya and thus few of the movie goers actually understood the words spoken in the movies.

The fun did not stop inside movie theaters. "Quadros" as we called them back then were the currency of many youth games. Win enough games and you have plenty of quadro collection. They were frames cut from film reels, and what is in the film frame could be clearly seen during normal day light. The film frame had to have a picture of a recognizable movie star for it to be accepted as a currency of a game. If you have a film frame with picture of Amitabh Bachchan, Mithun Chakraborty, Dharmendra Deol, or Amjad Khan in it, then you would be welcome to play and may be win some more frames. If you don't have one, then you could buy and it may cost few cents per frame. As I look back, Indian movies did have a part of my growing up. □

Mussie Teclezion is a faculty in the Department of Business Administration, University of Wisconsin Green Bay. He is a native of Eritrea, a country in the North East of Africa.

Bollywood 101

Even today, I can distinctly remember the warm, rich, spicy flavor on my tongue from the first time I tasted Indian chicken curry. I was in elementary school when my 6th grade teacher took a whole group of us to eat at a local Indian restaurant in Pasadena, CA in order for us to be exposed to a new culture. I remember the food…oh the food, it was absolutely delicious, like no other I had ever tasted before! I remember the restaurant decorated in extravagant fabrics, colorful handmade rugs, bright red and orange beads hanging everywhere, and a number of shiny metal sculptures of things I had only seen in history books.

Ever since then, Indian culture has always fascinated me. That is why when I met Sumi Pendakur, Director of the Asian Pacific American Student Services at the University of Southern California, I asked her to help me put on a *Bollywood 101* program for my residents (I am a Resident Assistant "RA" in a freshmen dorm here at USC with about 50 residents on my floor). Personally, I enjoy Bollywood films primarily because of the beautiful bright colors, the gorgeous natural scenery, and the "spice" behind the extravagant love affairs (or what my good friend Neelam Savla, junior majoring in Psychology likes to call it, the "masala" of the movie).

Needless to say, my Bollywood 101 program was a huge success among the residents. Although she has only been somewhat exposed to Indian cinema, Stephanie Margaret, USC alumnus, actually attended the program and commented on her experience: "I think these films are enlightening and give you a glimpse into the traditions, practices and ideals of a different culture. At the same time though, although the setting is different they're universally appealing; there is something for everyone in each film."

Bollywood films are intriguing to all sorts of people because they remind us of the American musicals we grew up with and sing along to when they come on the television. Rebecca Buddingh, sophomore majoring in Journalism, who also attended the program notes, "I personally enjoy Bollywood films because they feature dancing and choreography in ways I have never seen before. Visually, these moves are mesmerizing." For those of you have yet to experience Indian cinema, prepare to be indulged in a unique storyline, with a foreign twist and the pinch of rich, zesty masala! □

Laura Escobar-Vallecillo is a junior at University of Southern California majoring in Communication.

The First Feature (talkie) Regional Films

Jamai Shashthi* (1931)** The first **Bengali** feature film. ***Billwamangal was the first silent film in Bengali produced in 1919.

***Kalidass* (1931)** The first **Tamil** feature film with songs in Telugu.

***Heer Ranjah* (1932)** The first **Punjabi** feature film. It was censored by the Punjab Board.

***Ayodhecha Raja* (1932)** The first **Marathi** feature film by V. Shantaram. It was made simultaneously in Hindi "*Aydha ka Raja*".

***Karma* (Fate) (1933)** The first **English** feature film, an Anglo-Indian co-production. Hindi version was premiered in Bombay on January 27, 1934.

***Seetha Kalyanam* (1934)** The first **Telugu** feature film.

***Purandardas* (1937)** The first **Kannada** feature film made simultaneously in Tamil.

***Balan* (1938)** The first **Malayalam** feature film.

***Ekta* (1942)** The first **Sindhi** feature film directed by J. B. H. Wadia.

News ...

The Movie *Kavi*

Appleton Public Library screened *Kavi*, an award-winning documentary on life of a teenage brick maker in India on June 24th, 2010. The film was nominated for Academy awards in category of short documentary films. Sandhya Sridhar led the discussion following the show.

Celebration of *Independence Days of India and the United States*

IndUS of Fox Valley in collaboration with India Association of North East Wisconsin, Hindu Temple of North Wisconsin and Sikh Temple of Fox Valley celebrated *Independence Days of India and the United States* by staging two Classical Dance Ballets on Saturday, August 28, 2010 at Einstein Middle School in Appleton, Wisconsin.

Gita Govinda in Odissi style by Utkala Dance Center, Naperville Illinois .
Luv-Kush in Bharatnatyam style by

Kalaanjali School of Dance and Music, Madison, Wisconsin.

Proceeds were donated in charity to

Harbor House Domestic Abuse Programs in Appleton, Wisconsin

Octoberfest

This year our booth at Ocoberfest in downtown Appleton on September 25, 2010 was a tremendous success. We sold delectable dishes from India: dosas,

samosas and tandoori chicken. This year henna tattoos were also a popular money-maker. More than fifty

volunteers from IndUS of Fox Valley and India Association of North East Wisconsin helped in making it so much fun. It was good to have our presence at this annual event that was attended by more than a hundred thousand people. The money raised will be donated to a local charity involving children.

Upcoming events

Arts Day for Leadership Fox Cities

IndUS will participate in Arts Day for Leadership Fox Cities organized by Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce on December 14, 2010.

Let's Share

After a brief summer hiatus we will soon resume *Let's Share,* a monthly discussion forum on topics of special interests. Look out for an announcement.

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Visit our website at

www.indusfoxvalley.org

Contact us at
indusfoxvalley@yahoo.com

IndUS-2010

The IndUS-2010 celebration will be on Saturday, November 20th from 5:00 pm to 9:30 pm at Radisson Paper Valley Hotel. The theme for this year's annual banquet is "In The Wonderland of Indian Cinema". Under the leadership of Kamal Varma and Gaurav Bansal different teams are working hard to put this event together. In one evening you will take a journey in a magical and fantasy world of Indian Cinema which would show the direct and indirect influences of social changes and also take you away from the real life difficulties and sadness to an escape land of the imagination. You will take a visual tour of the history of Indian cinema of different languages and come close to the most popular heroes and heroines of India where the most number of movies produced in the world. Some of your favorite characters will come alive and greet you personally. IndUS Exhibition committee is busy trying to make it a spectacular show for you that evening. Your taste buds will have a feast by experiencing the authentic mouthwatering Indian dishes which Dr. Peter D'Souza, with the help of Chief Chef of Radisson, will prepare for that evening. To bring the evening to a climax, a cultural pro-gram will take you in the fantasy word of colorful exotic fashion, dances, music and story lines of the Bollywood where you can participate in interactive elements of the evening. You could dress up in a costume of your favorite stars of the cinema world. Please come and join us for all that fun. In the past these annual banquets have been a sold out event; however, the tickets are still available.

For more information about the event visit **www.indusfoxvalley.org.** One can also download the registration form from the web site.

Registration Form

Your Name & Address

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Telephone _____

E-mail _____

Tickets Needed

IndUS member	x $30	$
Non-Member	x $35	$
Full-Time Student	x $25	$
Table for Ten	x $350	$
Tickets Sub-Total		$

IndUS Membership

Individual Member	$ 10
Family Member	$ 20
Life Membership	$ 200
Benefactor ($100-$ 499)	$
Patron ($500 +)	$
Donation (If any)	$

Grand Total (Tickets, Membership Dues, & Donation) $

Complete the form and mail with your check payable to IndUS of Fox Valley to

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IndUS of Fox Valley

Presents

IndUS - 2010

In the Wonderland of Indian Cinema

Saturday, November 20, 2010
5:00 to 9:30 p.m.

Radisson Paper Valley Hotel
Appleton

Exhibition
Social Hour
Authentic Indian Cuisine
Cultural Program