

Routledge Film Guidebooks

The Routledge Film Guidebooks offer a clear introduction to and overview of the work of key filmmakers, movements or genres. Each guidebook contains an introduction, including a brief history; defining characteristics and major films; a chronology; key debates surrounding the filmmaker, movement or genre; and pivotal scenes, focusing on narrative structure, camera work and production quality.

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BOLLYWOOD

A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema

Second edition

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THE PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULAR HINDI CINEMA

In July 2008, amidst news reports about the efforts of some Hollywood majors to partner with Bombay production outfits, Karan Johar, an extremely successful Hindi film producer-director and popular television personality, offered some words of advice on his blog to Hollywood studios who were interested in producing Hindi films. Entitled "The East Side Story," and addressed to the "Disneys, and the Foxes, and the Sonys and of course, those Warner Bros.," Johar welcomed the possibility of collaboration, "With your vivid, soaring, global logos, your Oscar counts, and your bags of cash, We [sic], the Indian film industry, welcome you to India." However, Johar's welcome was qualified by a number of caveats. Describing his entry as a "humble and honest plea," Johar proceeded to explain the inner workings and psyche of filmmaking in India. Ordering the imagined Hollywood studio executive to "take a moment, put down that copy of *Variety*" and pay attention, Johar's first point was about the highly personalized nature of the film industry, characterized by the importance of long-term relationships and the primacy of verbal commitments:

In our film fraternity, relationships are stronger than contracts. They always have been. It's why I can drop the F word (fraternity, what were

you thinking?) so often and know in ever [sic] sense, that it's true. Our word is as permanent as ink, despite the bad apples that sometimes give us an amateurish reputation. We've been nurturing these equations for years, and we do it sans agents and managers and assistants.

(Johar 2008).

Although both Hollywood and "Bollywood" are large, commercially driven film industries, they are not organized similarly nor have they operated in the same way. For much of its history, the Hindi film industry has been highly decentralized, financed primarily by entrepreneurial capital, organized along social and kin networks, and governed mainly by oral rather than written contracts. Johar exemplifies this point on his blog as he posits kinship and social relations as reasons for the industry's success, which by implication is the reason for Hollywood's interest, "Those of us lucky to be raised within the industry have the word of our fathers, our siblings, and those friends that might as well be family. We're small, and we may bicker, but we've sat in each other's living rooms, and we've built this industry to what it is" (ibid.).

Johar's assertion about the significance of kinship and personal relationships is particularly germane to his career, which has been marked by the prevalence of family and friends in his training, filmmaking, and professional success.¹ Johar is a second-generation member of the Hindi film industry. His father, Yash, started a production company, Dharna Productions, in 1976, a few years after Karan was born. Johar's first two films, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Something Happens; 1998) and *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (Sometimes There's Joy, Sometime There's Sorrow; 2001), both tremendous commercial successes, were produced by his father. After his father's death in 2004, Johar took over the reins of the production company and has been producing his own films as well as those of his former assistants. Additionally, Johar attributes his experience of assisting his childhood friend, Aditya Chopra (also a second-generation member of the industry) on his directorial debut, *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (The Brave Heart Will Take the Bride; 1995) as the impetus for his own foray into direction. Johar is not a singular case, however,

as filmmaking has been primarily structured as a family business in India. All three sectors of the Hindi film industry – production, distribution, and exhibition – consist mainly of family firms, formally established as individual proprietorships, partnerships, or private limited companies. Within the production sector, many of these firms, referred to as “banners” in the industry, were started by actors or directors who then became producers, either to produce their own films or their sons’ acting debuts.

This chapter explains the fundamentals of the structure of the Hindi film industry, its systems of financing and distribution, the basics of the production process, the visual style of Hindi cinema, the practice of adapting Hollywood films, and the significance of music to Hindi cinema and the Bombay film industry. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the government’s granting of industry status and the entry of new production, distribution, and exhibition companies precipitated changes in a number of practices – financing, production, distribution, and exhibition – that began to be perceptible from 2005 onwards. Thus whenever relevant, the chapter also notes the changes in industry structures and practices.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOMBAY FILM INDUSTRY?

The most striking feature of the Bombay film industry is its entrepreneurial and fragmented nature. The industry is primarily comprised of independent producers, distributors, financiers, exhibitors, and audio companies. As previously mentioned, all three sectors of the film industry – production, distribution, and exhibition – are dominated by family firms, which is the dominant characteristic of business activity in India.³ During the silent era, producers negotiated directly with exhibitors, but the coming of sound witnessed the emergence of the distributor as a mediating agent between producers and exhibitors, leading to a particular feature of Indian filmmaking – the dominance of the independent distributor and distribution system. There are hundreds

of distributors throughout India and the world whose important economic role within the film industry will be discussed later.

The industry on the whole has been neither vertically nor horizontally integrated in the manner of the major Hollywood studios or multinational entertainment conglomerates.⁴ Entities referred to as “studios” in Bombay in the post-independence period such as R.K. Studios or Mehboob Studios were actually production companies set up by prominent stars or directors who turned to producing and procured real estate to create an autonomous production space.

While there have been instances of integration throughout the history of the Hindi film industry – stars who venture into production and distribution; audio companies that venture into production; producers who venture into distribution; distributors who venture into production or exhibition; exhibitors who venture into production – to date it has not resulted in a consolidation of the industry, nor has it precluded others from entering the business. Essentially, the “industry” has been a very diffuse and decentralized site where anyone with large sums of money and the right contacts can make a film.

However, this ability to make a film does not necessarily translate into being able to distribute one’s film and the number of films released theatrically is consistently smaller than the number of films produced. For example, in 2011, 206 Hindi films were certified for exhibition by the Central Board of Film Certification, while 149 were released theatrically.⁵ Securing distribution, therefore, consistently poses a challenge for new entrants into the industry. Power in the industry predominantly resides in the male stars and producer-directors with their own production companies, and in any given period a small number of male stars and banners garner a disproportionate share of industry attention and resources.

Even with the entry of the Indian corporate sector into filmmaking since 2003, film production has remained fragmented in Bombay. For example, while 97 production companies were involved in making the 99 films that were released in 1995, in 2005, 177 companies produced the 187 films that were released, and in 2009, 128 companies

produced 135 films, with the highest number of solo productions by a single company being five (Ganti 2012a). Not only is this a result of the general lack of barriers to entry in the industry, but also a desire on the part of the new corporate entrants to work with the traditional production companies or banners, rather than usurping their position. Therefore, filmmaking since the mid-2000s has been characterized by a high number of co-productions generally – between the traditional banners and the corporate producers; between new production companies and corporate producers; or even just among corporate producers.

Although both the Indian and international press use the metaphors of factories and assembly-line production to characterize the Hindi film industry – e.g., “Bombay’s dream factories churn out hundreds of films a year” – in reality the industry is extremely decentralized and flexible and a more apt comparison would be to a start-up company financed with venture capital. Films are often financed simply on the basis of a star cast, the germ of a story idea, and a director’s reputation. Each Hindi film is made by a team of people who operate as independent contractors or freelancers and work together on a particular project, rather than being permanent employees of a particular production company.⁶ The lack of a well-defined division of labor among the principal players means that most people play multiple roles, so the industry is filled with people who are both producers and directors, writers and directors, editors and directors, actors and producers, or even a combination of actor-director-producer.

Until the advent of corporatization, the industry contained very few non-value-added people such as executives, lawyers, agents, professional managers – i.e., the “suits,” who did not contribute to the actual film-making process. Also, for much of its history, the industry did not have intermediaries such as casting agents, talent scouts, or agencies like ICA and William Morris. However, since the mid-to-late 2000s, such intermediaries have been on the rise in the industry as a consequence of new approaches to casting and the increased significance of film stars for consumer brand advertising.

The Bombay film industry is primarily defined by and identified with its stars. Hindi film stars are men and women in leading roles who not only have tremendous drawing power at the box-office, but are global icons epitomizing a variety of attributes such as power, strength, sophistication, desirability, beauty, masculinity, and femininity. Ever since the decline of the studio system in the aftermath of World War II, the Hindi film industry is a star-oriented, star-driven, and many would complain, star-controlled industry. Producers frequently raise finance for their films on the strength of the star cast rather than the script. Scripts are usually written with specific male stars in mind and stars possess the power to promote or destroy projects. As a result of such power, stars frequently turn to production and sometimes direction, after having spent a number of years in the industry.

Like Hollywood, male stars wield a great deal more power in the Bombay industry than their female counterparts. Male stars are perceived as having greater box-office drawing power and thus are paid more and hired first. The prevailing attitude among distributors and producers is that “heroines” – the common term used for actresses in leading roles – do not “open” a film, that is, they do not pull in the crowds and generate the sold-out shows that guarantee a successful first weekend at the box-office. Therefore, it is difficult to market a film that is characterized as a “heroine-oriented” one within the industry, as top male stars tend not to act in projects where they play a supporting role. In late 2011 and early 2012, after two heroine-oriented pictures starring actress Vidya Balan – *The Dirty Picture* (2011) and *Kahaani* (Story; 2012) – did unexpectedly well, the press began to tout Balan as a “hero” in terms of her draw at the box-office and that the winds of change were blowing across Bollywood. The fact that Balan’s films got made to begin with is a testament to the fact that women-centric films do get made in the industry (and have been throughout its history). However, in order for dominant attitudes about the risks and marketability of women-centric/heroine-oriented films to change within the industry, such films will need to be consistently successful at the box-office.



Figure 2.1 Vidya Bahan in *The Dirty Picture*. Image courtesy of the Kobal Collection.

As in Hollywood, actors have much longer careers as leading men in the Hindi film industry than do women, who are sidelined into supporting roles soon after they turn 30. Actresses begin their careers when they are teenagers, while actors start in their twenties, so even if an actress has spent a decade in the industry, she is not necessarily advanced in actual years, but the press, industry, and audiences tend to dismiss her as “mature.” Filmmakers are constantly on the lookout for “fresh, new faces.” Men continue to act with women much younger than themselves, but the reverse is much less common. When it does occur, reviewers and the press frequently comment upon the inappropriate pairing between a younger man and older woman. Often, even when the two are of the same age, women are more apt to be criticized for having lost their youthful charm and looking older than the actor. There have been instances where actresses who have played the romantic lead opposite a particular actor end up playing the actor’s mother a year or two later!⁷

There is also an expectation among the press, industry, and audiences that once a woman marries, she will retire from acting as she will take

on other responsibilities such as raising a family. Even though there have been a number of married actresses within the Hindi film industry, some who continued to act in leading roles even after having children, the immediate conclusion that producers, journalists, and audience members jump to when hearing of an actress’s decision to marry is that she is in effect announcing her retirement. Such assumptions lead many women to delay marriage or in some cases even hide their marriages. Since the late 1990s, some actresses have turned to production and direction, which is a sign of their increasing power within the industry, but the fact that their identity as women is constantly commented upon by the media and the industry reveals the essentially patriarchal norms of the Bombay film industry.⁸

The Hindi film industry is a very cosmopolitan one, comprising people from every ethnic and linguistic region in India as well as beyond.⁹ In addition to the regional, ethnic, and linguistic diversity, the industry is marked by a high level of religious diversity. Every major religious group in India – Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Jain, Jew, and Zoroastrian – is represented. What is distinctive about the film industry as compared to the rest of Indian society is the high rate of inter-marriage across religious, ethnic, regional, linguistic, and caste lines, and frequently within the industry itself. The film industry becomes the primary social identity and community for most people, so that rather than being seen as belonging to a particular ethnic or religious group, an actor or director is identified more as a “film-wallah” or film person.

While the Hindi film industry is very diverse in terms of the linguistic, regional, religious, and caste origins and identities of its members, what is striking is the intensification of kinship networks since the late 1990s. These networks provide a source of personnel, a site for training, and a form of organization for the film industry. Though many of the producers, directors, and stars who began their careers between the late 1940s and the 1970s had no family connections in the industry, their children, grandchildren, nephews, and nieces have been taking up the family business with a passion. While there are other

means of trying to enter the industry – through professional training institutions such as the National School of Drama or the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), in the realm of acting (and increasingly directing), the dominant method has been through kin and social networks. Kinship and social networks continue to remain strong in the corporatized scenario and extend beyond the creative sectors of filmmaking. Many publicly listed production, distribution, and exhibition companies have their founders' children or other family members working in key executive positions. With most film people marrying other film people and with their children entering the industry, the Hindi film industry has been literally reproducing itself for several decades.

Systems of finance and distribution

Until the advent of industry status and corporatization, the finance capital for filmmaking in India was predominantly connected to the vast unofficial or "black" economy, which some scholars estimated was nearly half the size of the official economy (Kumar 2005). One of the results of the high rates of taxation in India was the creation of a parallel economy with high amounts of unregulated economic activity – mainly cash transactions – and large sums of unreported and thus untaxed income, commonly referred to as "black money." The Hindi film industry has been one of the main places to invest unreported income in India.

For decades, one of the main challenges faced by Hindi filmmakers was the high cost of capital to finance production. Since banks and other financial institutions shied away from funding filmmaking, capital had to be raised through an established network of financiers for filmmaking, who had made money in a variety of other fields such as construction, jewelry, diamond trading, real estate, manufacturing, as well as organized crime. These private financiers charged 36–48 percent interest annually, of which six months worth of interest had to be paid on receipt of the loan. With such sources of finance, the majority of financial transactions and business dealings in the film industry had been in cash with highly secretive accounting practices

and mostly oral contracts. This funding set-up resulted in a financially insecure and fragmented production scenario where films began production, but could take years to complete – while producers raised funds – or might be abandoned altogether for the lack of funds. The entry of the Indian corporate sector in the twenty-first century has infused previously unheard of amounts of capital into the Hindi film industry, making available consistent finance so that the risk of a film not being completed has decreased drastically.

Although the Hindi film industry's box-office success rates have not changed over the last many decades, corporatization has played a key role in the industry's own efforts to recast filmmaking into the mold of a modern, high-status profession. With the entry of the Indian corporate sector and its attendant culture of written contracts, institutional finance, and standardized accounting practices, filmmaking begins to appear and operate more in line with dominant understandings of professional organization and discipline. Since the advent of corporatization, the plethora of transnational accounting and consulting firms – A.T. Kearney, PricewaterhouseCoopers, KPMG – that have been preparing hyperbolic annual reports of the potential of the Hindi film industry have further consolidated its overall image as a successful, high-growth industry. Corporate production companies also attempt to represent filmmaking in India as akin to global norms. This is most apparent in the shifts that have occurred in the job titles, noticeable in the opening and closing credit sequences: art director has become production designer; dance director has become choreographer; cinematographer has become director of photography; and spot boys have become production boys or "valets."

The entry of new corporate production and distribution companies has also led to a tremendous increase in film budgets and star remuneration. While budgets for Hindi films at the turn of the millennium ranged approximately from 15 million rupees for low-budget ventures to 150–200 million rupees for the average big-budget film, by the late 2000s, budgets ranged from 20–50 million rupees for low-budget films to over one billion rupees for special-effects intensive, star-studded

action spectacles.¹⁰ By the late 2000s the average big-budget Hindi film cost between 200 and 500 million rupees. The increase in budgets is connected to the rise in salaries of cast and crew, which comprise the largest proportion of a film's budget, out of which the leading male actor's salary constitutes the single highest expense – a feature of Hindi film production for decades. Leading male stars currently earn 70–400 million rupees per film, while their female counterparts earn 10–40 million rupees (Nahata 2012a). Thus, the salaries of the male and female leads in the film could easily amount to 20–25 percent of a film's budget. In order to gain a perspective on how wealthy film stars are and how much money goes into filmmaking, one must bear in mind that the per capita income in India in 2010 was 60,300 rupees (World Bank 2011). Another factor in rising budgets is the much greater expenditure on publicity and marketing in the late 2000s than in previous decades of filmmaking.

Although most films fail at the box-office, when a film is successful, it can be so phenomenally successful – doubling, tripling, or even more than quadrupling one's investment – that the film industry is sustained by the new infusions of capital chasing the potential for colossal profit. In fact, much excitement was generated within the trade and general press about the industry's improved fortunes in 2006 and 2007 when trade analysts pronounced that the industry had actually registered net profits rather than losses.¹¹ Furthermore, since 2008, there has been a handful of films every year that have each netted more than one billion rupees at the Indian box-office alone, leading the industry to coin the phrase "100 crore club" to characterize the unparalleled success of these few male stars who thereby occupy the most elite strata within the industry's hierarchy (Nahata 2012b).¹²

Another way that the Hindi film industry has benefited from the transformed economic scenario has to do with the rapid rise of consumerism, increase in the numbers of a visibly consuming middle class, and the burgeoning audiovisual landscape. Since the early 2000s, the industry has been able to offset the costs of production or recoup revenues prior to a film's theatrical release through product-placement

in films, merchandising tie-ups with Indian retailers, and co-branding with consumer products. Co-branding enables what is referred to as "cross-promotions" where a consumer brand and a film are advertised simultaneously in one go – for example, the 2002 film *Kaante* [Thorns] tied up with Indian soft-drink brand Thums Up and advertisements depicting the film's characters drinking Thums Up were aired across a variety of Indian satellite channels during key viewing periods such as cricket matches (Tandon 2002). These new marketing and promotion practices are further highlighted for audiences, as a common feature of contemporary Hindi films since the mid-2000s are screens titled, "Our Brand Partners," "Our Marketing Partners," and "Our Media Alliances" appearing prior to the opening credits or sequence of the film at hand. The increase in marketing budgets for films, coupled with the explosion in satellite television channels and FM radio in India from the mid-2000s has resulted in more elaborate and sustained marketing and promotion campaigns for films, which can be understood as practices that seek to reduce the risk of a poor opening weekend at the box-office.

As mentioned earlier, since the arrival of sound, production and distribution were not integrated in the Hindi film industry, and Hindi films were distributed throughout India and the world by a decentralized network of independent distributors. For the purposes of Hindi film distribution, India is divided into five major territories: Bombay; Delhi/U.P. (Uttar Pradesh)/East Punjab; C.P. (Central Province)/C.I. (Central India)/Rajasthan; Eastern; and South. A sixth territory, known as the "overseas territory," was previously undifferentiated from the point of view of distributors in India, but is now subdivided into North America, United Kingdom, Gulf States, South Africa, etc. The five territories in India are divided into 14 sub-territories, which may be further divided.¹³ Until the advent of corporatization, there was only company – Rajshri Pictures – that distributed films throughout India; otherwise, distribution concerns were specific to a territory or a sub-territory. Currently, a number of companies – UTV, Reliance Big Entertainment, Eros International, Shree Ashwinayak Cinevision, as well as Indian subsidiaries of Hollywood companies like 20th Century Fox, Warner Brothers, Disney, and Sony

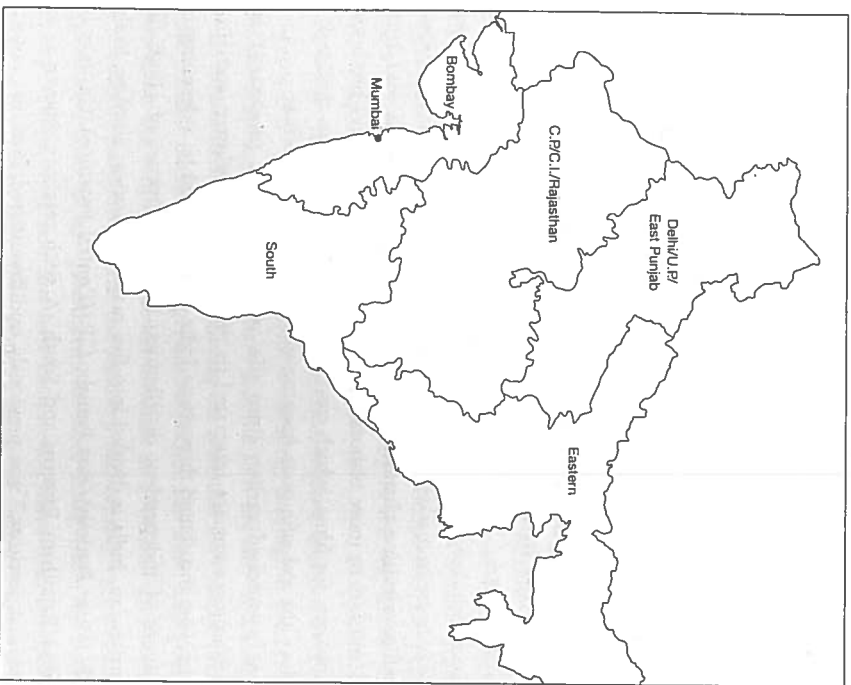


Figure 2.2. Map, Indian distribution territories. Image courtesy of the author.

Pictures – buy all-India or global distribution rights from producers. In the following paragraphs, I discuss what had been the industry norms for distribution prior to the entry of the corporate distributors in order to reveal the changes these companies have wrought.

Hindi film producers had financed their films primarily through the sale of theatrical distribution rights to their films. Producers started trying to sell the distribution rights of their film from the moment it

was “launched” or its particulars announced at a ritual known as the *mahurat*.¹⁴ The ritual role of *mahurats* in the production process will be described in the following section. Distributors traditionally bid for and bought the rights to distribute a film for 5–10 years in their particular territory, usually while the film was under production. Distributors raised money through the alternative capital markets mentioned above, as well as by subdividing their territories and selling off rights, and by receiving advances from exhibitors. The most common distribution arrangement in the film industry was the minimum guarantee or “MG” system where the distributor guaranteed the producer a specific sum, which was disbursed in installments from the onset of production. Distributors normally paid 30–40 percent of the contracted amount during the production phase and the remainder on delivery of prints. When a film was released, distributors paid for the print and publicity costs as well as theater rental. After distributors covered their costs – rights, prints, publicity, theater rental – and took their 20–25 percent commission, any remaining box-office collections were shared equally with the producer.

In such a system, the territorial distributors bore the majority of the risk since the producer was guaranteed a certain price for the rights. Producers with clout priced their films in order to make a profit, as there was such high uncertainty about the box-office success of any film. Even though the minimum guarantee system ostensibly accrued profits for producers once there was an overflow – the term used for the remainder of box-office revenues after distributors covered their costs and earned their commission – the chance of one’s film generating an overflow was (and continues to be) only 10–15 percent. The other factor in producers’ pricing decisions was that they could not trust distributors to share the overflow since distributors frequently used the revenues from successful films to cover their losses from unsuccessful films. Such a scenario was a consequence of the absence of a transparent system of data collection, especially when distributors were based far from Bombay (Ganti 2012a).

In addition to dividing India into territories and sub-territories, the distribution network also subdivides each territory by revenue-earning

potential into "A-, B-, and C-class centers." A-class centers are generally more populated – cities and large towns – with more cinemas and thus generate the largest revenues for the distributor. Another defining feature of an A-class center is the ability to fully collect revenues, for producers and distributors frequently comment that once their films are in B- or C-class centers, which include touring cinemas, they have no means of accurately tracking a film's earnings. In practice, such a division meant that films were first released in A-class centers to garner their full commercial potential after which they slowly made their way to B- and C-class centers.

Before the advent of video and its concomitant, piracy, Hindi films were not released in all of the major cities simultaneously. Films would first be released in Bombay and then open a few weeks later in other cities like Calcutta or Delhi. The simultaneous release of films in A-class centers as well as in the overseas territories – specifically cities with large South Asian populations such as New York, London, Toronto, Chicago, Houston, Dubai, etc. – began in the mid-1990s to thwart the problems of video and cable piracy in the higher revenue centers. Piracy was an even greater problem for distributors and exhibitors in smaller centers since there was a time lag between when a film was released in an A-class center and its screening in a B- or C-class center, by which time pirated VCDs were easily available and/or a pirated print of the film had been aired extensively on the local cable channel.

The lack of integration between production and distribution has meant that producers and territorial distributors often have competing interests. Every new technology of audio-visual dissemination from video to satellite television has offered new revenue sources for producers, while posing a challenge to traditional theatrical distribution, which has led to periodic conflicts between producers and distributors over the duration of distribution rights. Since the late 1990s, the rapid increase in the number of satellite television channels has benefited producers immensely, at the expense of distributors. In their bid to win audiences, satellite channels compete aggressively to buy the telecast rights for Hindi films and their willingness to pay substantial sums have

made satellite rights a significant source of revenue for producers. When a film does not do well at the box-office, satellite rights offer producers a chance of recovering some revenue.

When satellite channels began to build their film libraries in the late 1990s, the sale of telecast rights resulted in conflicts between distributors who had traditionally obtained the rights to exploit a film for at least five years, and producers who were selling the broadcast rights for films, months after their release. Distributors protested that producers were denying them their right to recover their investment when films were broadcast on television before distributors had a chance to exploit the film theatrically in their areas. With the legitimate film print being broadcast on satellite channels just months after its theatrical release, distributors and exhibitors whose business was based in B- and C-class centers complained of significant losses due to the drop in theater attendance in these areas for the particular films. Though producers and distributors came to an agreement in June 2000 that producers should wait one year before their new films were broadcast on television, the fierce bidding wars between satellite channels for broadcast rights made it difficult for many producers to honor the agreement. Producers and distributors came to a stand-off in April 2003 when producers decided to withhold all new releases as a protest against distributors' demands that they wait at least six months before releasing their films on television. The boycott lasted for about four weeks and no new Hindi films were released, throwing off exhibition and release schedules.

The advent of corporate production/distribution companies and the greater capital investment in exhibition infrastructure since the mid-2000s has had a significant impact on distribution patterns, benchmarks of success, and the producer-distributor relationship. The window for a film's theatrical business has shrunk considerably due to the increase in the number of multiplex screens as well as the refurbishing of single-screen cinemas in smaller towns to enable digital delivery, whereby the film is transmitted to the theater via satellite, significantly reducing print costs and the opportunity for piracy.¹⁵ While these

changes in exhibition have not increased the overall number of screens in India, they have done away with the temporal lag between the A, B and C-class centers so that mainstream Hindi films with big budgets and stars are released simultaneously across India and the world on a much wider scale than earlier decades. For example, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, because of the high costs associated with generating film prints (which had to be borne by the territorial distributor), a big-budget, much anticipated film would release with 200–500 prints in India, and perhaps another 100 in the overseas territory. Since the entry of corporate distributors with their much deeper reserves of capital and the expansion of digital delivery to nearly half of the single-screen theaters in India, mainstream Hindi films currently release across 1500–3500 screens in India, and 300–1000 screens abroad. In such a scenario, producers and distributors are able to recoup revenues much faster, and the trade can assess the commercial fate of a film – whether it is a hit or a flop – within the first two weeks of its theatrical run. Since the theatrical shelf-life of a film has reduced from several months or even years to just a few weeks, the traditional tension between producers and distributors over the duration of rights has eased. These tensions have been replaced by those over revenue-sharing with exhibitors: producers and/or distributors have periodically clashed with multiplex operators over the terms of revenue-sharing, which came to a head in 2009 when producers and distributors withheld the release of Hindi films throughout India and the world for two months (see Chapter 1).

The entry of the Indian organized industrial sector into film production, and the ability of established producers to raise money from the Indian stock market by transforming their production companies into public limited companies, have diminished the role of the traditional territorial distributor from a source of finance and power to being a middleman between producer and exhibitor (Ganti 2012a). Since 2005, some commercially powerful producers have forgone the distributor and dealt directly with the multiplex chains. In the instances they are only distributing and not producing a film, the new corporate

production/distribution companies are able to offer more lucrative distribution deals for producers because of their much higher threshold for financial risk than the traditional territorial distributor. In the post-corporate scenario, established and successful producers have been able to offset the risk of financial loss by pricing the distribution, satellite, and music rights for their films in such a manner as to earn a profit prior to the film's release. These "table profits" as they are referred to in the industry have reached significant proportions because the corporates who have entered distribution are willing to pay enormous sums for a film's rights; these corporate distributors often recover and profit from their investment by re-selling the rights they have acquired from the producer to the independent territorial distributor who is still necessary to implement the actual release of a film especially in regions far from Bombay or other major urban centers. Thus, akin to the production sector, the advent of corporatization has not resulted in a consolidation of the distribution sector of the film industry either; instead it has shifted the power from the independent territorial distributor to the corporate one (Ganti 2012a).

THE PRODUCTION PROCESS¹⁶

This section will briefly describe distinctive features of all three phases of making a film: pre-production, production, and post-production. The production of music is treated separately in the following section. The dominant misrepresentation circulated by the Indian media, audiences, as well as Hindi filmmakers, is that the Bombay film industry works in a lackadaisical and impromptu fashion. The most enduring stereotype perpetuated by industry members themselves is that scripts are rarely written and hardly followed. Members of the industry constantly bemoan the lack of professionalism, organization, and discipline within the Bombay industry. This has been a remarkably consistent narrative throughout the decades, from the 1930s to the present. These characterizations of the film industry offer a way for particular members



Figure 2.3 Steadycam operator, Filmistan, Bombay. Image courtesy of the author.

to assert their “difference” from a fictitious norm. Nearly everyone in the industry presents themselves as more organized, more professional, and more quality-conscious than the “typical” Hindi filmmaker (Ganti 2012b).

The actual process of making a Hindi film is marked by a high degree of flexibility and variation from one production company to the next. Due to the diffuse structure of the film industry, rather than one set process, there are multiple ways that a film can be initiated. Story ideas can be generated by a variety of people – writers, actors, directors, producers, assistants – but how an idea for a film manages to become a film reveals the sites of power within the industry. Producers and directors are not the only people with the power to give a film the go-ahead. Male stars frequently initiate projects or are the first ones consulted about a project. If aspiring writers, producers, or directors – individuals who have not yet made a mark for themselves in the industry – can persuade a male star about their story idea or script, the chances of it turning into a film are very high since casting a leading male star is usually the first step in putting together a Hindi film. A star’s willingness to participate signals to producers, financiers, or directors

the viability of a project. While producer/directors with standing and power in the industry initiate their own film projects, these projects are conceived with a particular star or set of stars in mind. Some producers regard themselves as star-makers and try to bypass stars, but often their introduction of new actors is balanced by the presence of established ones.

Though crucial to the process, screenwriters have much less power and status in the Bombay film industry as compared to other creative personnel such as actors, directors, composers, and choreographers. The most common complaint within the film industry is about the lack of talented writers and good writing, but screenwriters point out that the level of remuneration and respect for writers is not commensurate with the rhetoric and concern espoused in the industry about writing quality. Although everyone harps on about the importance of the script, writers maintain that the industry is not willing to invest time and money in developing quality scripts. Part of the Bombay screenwriters’ dilemma is that screenwriting is not generally regarded by members of the industry as a specialized craft that requires training or specific skills. Many directors write their own scripts, and assistants or technicians nursing a desire to become a director are usually working on their own scripts. Most Bombay screenwriters work on scripts commissioned by a producer, director, or a star, and do not have the time or influence to write an independent script and have it made into a film. In order for writers to get an independently written script produced as a film, they need to get a star on board or convince a producer that a particular star would be perfect in the film.

An important characteristic of the Hindi filmmaking process is its emphasis on face-to-face interaction. Films, deals, and commitments are made on the basis of interaction and discussion between key players, rather than intermediaries or written materials. For example, if producers want a particular star for their film, they will communicate directly with the star rather than go through his or her agent. In fact, in the Bombay film industry, agents do not exist in the same sense as they do in the Western entertainment industries. Hindi film stars have people known as “secretaries” who primarily keep track of and manage

a star's work schedule. While a few secretaries in the industry have reached some positions of power, using their connections with stars to become producers, most secretaries are marginal to the negotiations between a producer and a star. Secretaries can serve as gatekeepers when dealing with the public, the press, and people of lesser power, but a producer or a director would regard having to negotiate or consult with a star's secretary as an insult and a sign of disrespect. Producers meet with the star directly and the location of their meeting is an indication of relative status and power. If producers meet stars in their homes, it signals that the star is more powerful. When stars are summoned by producers to their offices or homes, it indicates that the producer has the upper hand. Due to these complex politics of status and respect, producers will frequently meet stars when they are shooting a film, as the set — but not the makeup room — is perceived as a neutral space. This emphasis on personal interaction results in a highly orally oriented work culture where verbal commitments become the equivalent of contracts. If a producer discusses a film project with a star, the assumption is that unless the star states otherwise, he or she is in the film. Therefore, producers approach stars one at a time, rather than several at once to avoid any confusion or misunderstanding.

Another example of the importance of personal interaction and oral working-style is that the key cast and crew in a film are usually told or "narrated" the script. It is very common to hear members of the industry state in television interviews that they decided to do a particular film after "hearing the script." Rather than reading a script, key members of the production team gather together to hear the writer or director relay the film's story. These sessions are known as "narrations" within the industry, and are undertaken throughout the pre-production process as a way of bringing cast and crew on board a particular film. Narrations can last anywhere from half an hour to several hours depending upon the completeness of the script. Narrating a film is in itself considered a skill and certain directors and writers are renowned in the industry for their narrating prowess. The significance of narrations has to do with the fact that the script is often incomplete prior to

casting. Even if a script is finished, writers usually read it aloud to small groups of cast and crew.

While the narration of a script is in Hindi or "Hinglish" — a mix of Hindi and English prevalent among urban elites — many contemporary screenwriters first write their scripts in English and then translate the dialogues themselves into Hindi or work with a dialogue writer who is more proficient in the language. The specifics of a screenplay such as location, time of day, scene descriptions, and camera movement are always in English. The presence of English as a language of production may surprise readers, but is testament to the cosmopolitan nature of the Bombay film industry where people come from every linguistic region of India, and are not necessarily native Hindi speakers. Due to the incredible linguistic diversity within India, English frequently serves as a lingua franca among urban, middle-class Indians living in major cities like Bombay because they have been educated in schools where English is the medium of instruction. As a consequence, although the language of the films may be Hindi, the language of production is multi-lingual, encompassing all of the major Indian languages, of which English has become one. This reliance on English by screenwriters is a recent phenomenon and also signals a shift in their background. In the earlier decades of Hindi cinema, screenwriters were often Hindi or Urdu poets, playwrights, or novelists who supported their literary endeavors by working in the film industry. Today, most screenwriters are not from such literary backgrounds, but come from a wide range of professional as well as film industry backgrounds. As mentioned above, writing is also the least specialized aspect of the division of labor during film production, so that a variety of people contribute to or try their hand at scriptwriting.

Once producers finalize the basic cast and crew such as the director, lead actors, music director, and writer, they usually announce the film to the industry and press by way of a *muhurat*. *Muhurat* refers to a specific date and time deemed auspicious by astrological calculations with which to start any new venture. These rituals take place, sometimes months in advance, before any actual shooting of the film begins and can range

from simple ceremonies in studios or other production sites to elaborate, ostentatious affairs in luxury hotels. One of the central features of a *mahurat* is the enactment of the filming process where the principal actors in the film perform a brief scene for the camera and the spectators present. The customary nature of the event is emphasized by the fact that the scene is written especially for the occasion and the shot footage is never incorporated into the final film. The goal is to impart the essence of the film since at this stage the film is usually a germ of an idea – a script has not even begun to be written. Other aspects of the event that highlight its ritualized nature is the frequent incorporation of features from Hindu ritual worship such as the breaking of a coconut before the "Roll Camera!" command or even the performance of an *arati* – the rotational display of an oil lamp or a camphor flame – to the film camera. This quasi-devotional relationship with the instruments of cultural production is commonplace in India; it can be witnessed between classical musicians and their instruments, dancers and their ankle bells, painters and brushes, actors and the stage, etc.

The *mahurat* primarily serves as a form of publicity for producers, especially in their efforts to raise finance for their project, of which selling the distribution rights is a very significant component. From the time of the *mahurat* producers start selling their film – or more accurately "the package" which at the bare minimum includes the director, the male star, and the music director who have been hired for the project – to distributors. Because of their past record as well as the marketability of the key personnel involved, some producers are able to declare "all territories sold" on the day of the *mahurat* itself. The *mahurat*, although reported in newspapers, film magazines, and television shows, is not a significant form of publicity for the viewing audience. While it can generate some expectations, the amount of time that usually elapses between the *mahurat* of a film and when it actually reaches the theaters is a couple of years, and in some cases many more. It is also a common feature of Hindi filmmaking that many films – and in certain cases, some highly publicized ones – never progress beyond the *mahurat* stage.¹⁷

The pre-production process is a very collaborative one. Whether writing the script or composing music, individuals rarely work alone, but in teams of two or more and the director is deeply involved with the film in every aspect. Much of the time is occupied by brainstorming or discussion sessions between the director and key members of the production team where the script and music are finalized. These sessions are referred to as "story sittings" or "music sittings" in industry parlance. The main details that are worked upon during this phase are the screenplay and dialogues in terms of the script, the melodies, and lyrics in terms of the music, and locations, sets, props, and costumes in terms of production details. The remainder of the casting is usually decided upon and finalized during this phase. Since Hindi filmmakers rarely work with story boards, decisions about lighting, blocking, and camera placement and movement are not made until the sets are constructed and shooting commences. While directors do not story board their films, they discuss the film in visual terms, mentioning on-screen action in relation to camera angles and movement. Directors frequently assert they have the film "running in their heads" and can mentally visualize every scene.

Until the mid-2000s, the principal photography for films was not completed in a continuous schedule, but occurred in discontinuous segments over a length of time. The reason for the fragmented shooting schedule was because producers did not have the requisite finance for their films at the outset, so rather than being shot from start to finish over several weeks or a couple of months, most Hindi films were shot in a series of "schedules" ranging from two days to two weeks over the span of months or even years, as producers tried to raise finance throughout the production process. Therefore, the elapsed time from the commencement of production (shooting) to theatrical release took several years. The easier availability of funds (at much more reasonable interest rates) as a result of institutional finance and the entry of corporate production companies has mitigated the financial uncertainties that plagued the production process. As a result, since the mid-2000s films are being made much faster; many projects having their theatrical

release within a year to 15 months after the onset of production rather than the 18 months to three years (or even longer) that it used to take in previous decades.

For decades, a distinctive feature of the production process was that Hindi films were not shot with synchronous sound. With the advent of lighter but noisier cameras in the 1960s, actors' speech was recorded separately on the sets only for reference and editing purposes, and all of the sound in a Hindi film from dialogues to music to sound effects was added in the post-production phase. Actors dubbed their own speech after a film had been shot and edited in special dubbing studios where they watched their performance and repeated the dialogues to match their lip movements on-screen. They re-enacted the film without the interaction of co-stars as dubbing was done individually rather than in groups. Instead of working from a script, actors used their aural and memory skills; they listened to the lines that they had uttered and repeated them verbatim. One of the assistant directors was usually responsible for overseeing the process and making sure that the pronunciation, grammar and syntax were correct. The amount of time that dubbing took depended on the actor's experience and the length of their role; an experienced lead actor was able to finish dubbing for a film in a few days.

One advantage of dubbing was that Hindi filmmakers could cast actors who did not speak Hindi and have a professional dubbing artist or a well-known Hindi-speaking actor dub for them; the reverse was true with Hindi film actors who acted in films made in other Indian languages. Of course, during the shooting, actors still had to be able to make the correct lip movements so that the dubbed speech appears synchronous. There have also been instances where directors and producers have literally "taken away" the voice of actors by having someone else dub in their place, but this was interpreted as an affront or insult. The practices of playback singing and dubbing meant that in popular Indian films, the speaking voice, singing voice, and actor's on-screen body could be three different entities.

Although synchronous sound has not been the norm, it is definitely valorized as a more modern and higher quality filmmaking practice.

When films have been shot in synch-sound, that fact is highlighted in trade and media discussions about the film. For example, Aamir Khan, one of the most successful and respected stars of the industry, attracted a fair amount of media attention when he decided that *Lagaan* (Land Tax; 2001), the first film that he produced, should be shot with synchronous sound.¹⁸ Subsequently, actors who have worked in films that utilize synch-sound proclaim their preference for this method as they feel that it is difficult to recreate the dramatic impact and spontaneity of their performance in exactly the same way while dubbing. Although filming in synch-sound poses many challenges to filmmakers primarily because of the scarcity of sound-proof shooting conditions, since the mid-2000s it has become a much more prevalent practice within the Hindi film industry. In fact, it has become the norm for the A-list filmmakers and production companies within the industry.

Generally, the working style of Hindi filmmakers counters the stereotypes held in the West of feature filmmaking invariably involving large, intrusive, disruptive, and troublesome film crews. When shooting on location, Hindi filmmakers tend to work with the surroundings rather than trying to shape the surroundings to their shooting needs. Hindi filmmakers are also remarkably efficient in working with limited resources.¹⁹ Although Hindi films exhibit high production values and are frequently elaborate visual spectacles, the production conditions have been surprisingly simple and use minimal technology. With the exception of certain elaborate action or song sequences, Hindi films are usually shot with a single camera unit. Filmmakers did not start working with video-assist technology, where a video camera records the scene simultaneously so that it can be viewed on a monitor, until 1998–99. Equipment such as cranes and dollies are manually operated. Clapboards are not electronic, but handwritten with chalk. Ordinary sheets of black paper and white Styrofoam boards serve as lighting equipment. Films started being edited digitally on computerized editing systems only in 1998–99. While the means of visual production are relatively simple, sound is another matter. Filmmakers use state-of-the-art

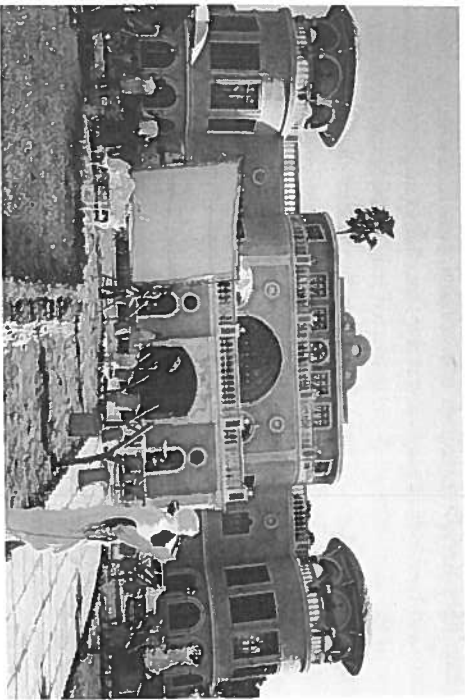


Figure 2.4 Mansion facade in Film City, Bombay. Image courtesy of the author.

sound recording and mixing technologies and most Hindi films are presented in Dolby Digital sound.

A minimal use of technology, however, is accompanied by a tremendous valorization of it so that the use of new technologies within the production process – even if not apparent to moviegoers – is showcased in filmmakers' discussions about their work (Ganti 2012b). The trade press faithfully reports every "first" use of a particular technology within the film industry. Since the mid-2000s with more money flowing into filmmaking, the use of special effects, digital technologies, 3-D, and complex post-production practices in Hindi filmmaking has increased immensely, reflected by the far greater number of animators, colorists, and other post-production personnel listed in a film's closing credits. While films from the late 1990s were defined by their lavish song and dance sequences and shooting these sequences became a way for filmmakers to demonstrate their exceptionalism within the industry (see later), by the late 2000s and early 2010s, the main mode to demonstrate exceptionalism was through special and visual effects primarily in action sequences. This was most



Figure 2.5 Ra.One poster. Image courtesy of the Kobal Collection.

perceptible in actor/producer Shah Rukh Khan's 2011 film, *Ra.One*, a sci-fi, action hero film laden with special effects and released in 3-D along with the more conventional 2-D version. *Ra.One* was in the news continuously for its budget – the most expensive Hindi film to date:

massive marketing campaign spanning over 10 months prior to the film's release, which included promotional tie-ups with 25 consumer brands; unprecedented release strategy – opening in approximately 5000 screens world-wide; and the fact that all of the special effects were created in-house by Khan's own production company, Red Chillies Entertainment.

VISUAL STYLE

Popular Indian cinema is very open and comfortable with the artifice that is at the heart of feature filmmaking. The visual style of popular Hindi films departs from continuity editing, naturalistic lighting, and realist mise-en-scène conventions typical of Hollywood. Hindi filmmakers are not overly concerned with realism even though a realist aesthetic is prized and valued as a higher form of filmmaking by the state, media, and many filmmakers. Unlike Hollywood films which go to a great deal of effort through their production design, editing, lighting, and camera practices to hide the fact that they are films, a Hindi film does not pretend that it is presenting an unmediated view of reality. Hindi filmmakers do not go to the same lengths as their Hollywood counterparts to hide the process of filmmaking. An example of how the two industries approach shooting on location should convey this difference. When an American film is shot in New York City on the street, spectators are shooed away or herded behind barricades completely out of the camera's field of vision because the goal is to show a "typical" street scene where people are walking along and not standing and watching a film being made. When a Hindi film is shot in a similar public situation, spectators, as long as they are not disturbing the production process, are frequently incorporated into the background. It is very common when watching a Hindi film to see curious bystanders on-screen watching the same action – a reminder that the scene was filmed in front of people. If the scene is shot in India, it is not uncommon to see a huge crowd in the background of the frame observing the sequence; sometimes

during a song sequence, the spectators on-screen form a large circle around the actors.

The editing, lighting, art direction, and cinematography in popular Hindi films highlight the constructed, artificial nature of filmmaking. Hollywood films primarily follow the system of continuity editing, which is a pattern of cutting that strives for continuous and clear narrative action. It relies upon matching screen direction, screen position, and temporal relations from shot to shot. Continuity editing focuses on maintaining the 180 degree axis of action, which dictates that the camera should stay on one side of the action to ensure consistent spatial relations between objects to the right and left of the frame (Bordwell and Thompson 1993).²⁰ The central philosophy underlying continuity editing is that films should be edited in a manner that makes them appear seamless and unedited. Viewers should not notice the editing as the process should not call attention to itself.

Popular Hindi films follow the rules of continuity editing unsystematically and often combine them with other visual modes. Editing practices are most notable in song and action sequences, but dialogue scenes are not immune from changes in screen direction and camera placement that break the rules of continuity editing. Maintaining the 180 degree axis of action is not a major concern. Song sequences frequently display an utter disregard for rules of time and space. Many songs just begin with the characters instantly transported to a picturesque European locale. Song sequences are edited in such a manner that characters appear in a quick succession of costume changes from one location to another. During the course of a five to seven-minute song, characters who are living in Bombay may be shown frolicking about in Swiss meadows, dancing in front of the Egyptian Pyramids, running along a Mauritian beach, and walking through an American mall.

Other features of popular Hindi cinema's visual style include the use of rapid camera movements such as zooms and pans for dramatic impact or to display heightened emotion. Sets are frequently grandiose and opulent and the emphasis of art direction has tended to be about larger-than-life spectacle. Hindi films are usually marked by bright

lighting and richly saturated colors, which also serve a functional purpose. Without such brightness and saturation, films would be barely visible in smaller towns with poor projection equipment and dingy screens or rural areas where films may be projected on a bare wall or a sheet. Thus, one aspect of the visual style of popular Hindi cinema is a consequence of accommodating the diversity of viewing conditions within India.

The roots of Hindi cinema's visual style lie in a variety of popular visual art forms and practices from the nineteenth century such as Company School paintings – art made for British clients and Indian aristocracy – woodcut printmaking, cheaply produced watercolors, and mass-produced lithographs and oleographs. Scholars have described the aesthetic common to these various forms as “frontal” because of the disregard for the laws of perspective and a stylistic emphasis on the surface (Vasudevan 1990). This aesthetic of frontality was transposed on to new technologies such as photography, which in turn influenced early cinema. When photography was first introduced in 1840, Indians did not follow the standard “rules” of balance or symmetry practiced by European photographers. Instead, they took photos which were characterized by the use of flat planes, the elimination of middle distances, the absence of perspective, and the lack of a point of entry into the photograph. Frequently items were stuck directly on to the photograph, creating a collage effect. Scholars have characterized the viewer's experience of such photographs as a “frontal encounter” where a viewer's confrontation with the subject of the photograph is immediate and not shaped by depth or laws of perspective (Rajadhyaksha 1986).

In early Indian cinema, this frontal aesthetic is noticeable in the flat, tableau-like presentation of certain scenes where the characters are arrayed facing the camera as if performing for a live audience, or in the case of mythological films, as if in the presence of devotees or worshippers. Scholars have argued that this particular frontal aesthetic made the experience of early cinema less alienating and jarring as it allowed viewers to experience the new technology in familiar terms (Rajadhyaksha 1986). In contemporary Hindi cinema, the frontal

aesthetic is still discernible in song sequences, but is combined with other visual modes such as rapid editing and fluid camera movement, resulting in a hybrid visual style.

REMAKES AND ADAPTATIONS

The Hindi film industry is frequently derided by the English language media in India for producing “cheap copies” of Hollywood films. Television shows as well as film magazines regularly “expose” the industry by detailing which Hindi films are copies of American films. Often the accusations are exaggerated so that a Hindi film is labeled as a “copy” when it has a similar type of scene. For example, Yash Chopra's *Darr* (Fear: 1993) is consistently described as a “copy” of *Cape Fear* despite the vast differences in plot, characterization, and theme, because it portrays a dramatic fight sequence on a stormswep boat.

Although the print and broadcast media see themselves as divulging secrets, Hindi filmmakers are quite open about their sources of inspiration. The origins of story ideas have never been that important, since the first feature films in India were mythologicals based on stories from Hindu myths which have been part of oral and performance traditions that predate cinema. Thus, the first narratives depicted on film were not suigeners. Within the Hindi film industry, it is common to encounter statements such as “Every film is based on the *Ramayana* or *Mahabharat* (the Hindu epics)” or “How many stories are there in the world?” Descriptions of contemporary films are usually articulated in terms of older films. Much of the discussion within the industry is about how most stories are not unique, but that the presentation and treatment of the story should be novel and “fresh.”

Many filmmakers believe that once something is in the public domain, it is fair game and think nothing wrong of being “inspired” by a particular film. The idea of the public domain is much more expansive in India than it is in the U.S. The Copyright Act in India – introduced in 1957 and amended in 1984, 1994, and 1999 – protects the original

expression of an idea but not the idea itself. Since many people can have the same idea, the concept of originality refers to how an idea is expressed. The underlying rationale is if ideas rather than their expression are protected, that would in effect restrict the freedom to think. Therefore, the idea behind an expression is considered to be in the public domain, and an individual can copy another's idea and not violate copyright as long as the idea is expressed in a different manner. Such an interpretation of copyright is in accordance with international copyright laws. Only when a writer copies an entire story or a substantial number of plots word for word from another work is copyright violated (Gopakumar and Uthi 2003). Hence, when Bombay filmmakers take or "copy" plot ideas from Hollywood films, they are not breaking any copyright laws since the finished product is substantially altered or "Indianized" according to industry parlance, to fit into the conventions of Hindi cinema. In the context of filmmaking, copyright laws in India are called upon primarily to protect the distribution and circulation of films and music from piracy. However, with Hollywood's increasing interest in and interaction with the Hindi film industry – including threats of litigation – some high profile filmmakers are buying the remake rights for Hollywood films. A great deal of media attention was paid to producer-director Karan Johar's decision to buy the rights to remake the 1998 Columbia Picture's film *Stepmom* in 2009. The Hindi film, which ended up with the English title *We Are Family*, was co-produced with Sony Pictures Entertainment and distributed by UTV; it had a disappointing run at the box-office in India and abroad when it released in 2010.²¹

Hollywood films as well as films in other Indian languages have been a source of plot ideas for decades, and the reverse also holds true, as Hindi films have been remade in other languages. Neither a universally condoned nor condemned practice within the industry, adaptations of Hollywood, Telugu, Tamil and older Hindi films are one of the strategies employed by Hindi filmmakers in their continuous quest for novelty and desire to reduce the chances of box-office failure.²² Hindi filmmakers regard box-office successes or "hits" in other Indian languages as

attractive remake material, because having already succeeded with one set of audiences, such films are perceived as having a higher probability of succeeding with Hindi film audiences as well. Such attitudes are reinforced by the fact that the biggest hits between 2008–2012 have been Hindi remakes of South Indian films (*Chajjini, Reddy, Bodyguard, Rowdy Rathore*) or even of earlier Hindi films (*Agnepath*). Hollywood films, however, are not selected on the basis of box-office outcome, but chosen for plots that seem novel and amenable to adaptation. Adapting Hollywood films is by no means a universal practice in the Hindi film industry. Many condemn the practice and view it as a symptom of the decline in the quality of writers in the industry and a sign of excessive commercialism which leads to short cuts in the creative process. That some of the biggest box-office successes of Hindi cinema have not been adaptations of Hollywood films is regarded as a vindication of the "originality" and hard work by those critical of the practice.

While remakes from other Indian languages resemble the original screenplay, adaptations of Hollywood films barely do as they have been transformed, or "Indianized." The three main elements of "Indianization" are adding "emotions," expanding the narrative, and inserting songs. Hindi filmmakers frequently describe Hollywood films as "dry" or "lacking in emotion," and claim that in order to Indianize a film, one has to "add emotions." For Hindi filmmakers, emotions are not about individuals but about their relationships with others. Rather than referring to internal states, filmmakers are referring to social life in their discussions about emotion. Therefore, "adding emotions" to a film involves adding family members and placing characters in a web of social relations of which kin are the most significant and common in Hindi films (Ganti 2002).

The inclusion of "emotions" also leads to greater narrative complexity since close family relationships provide moving stories of their own, according to writers. Hollywood films are frequently described as "single-track" and Hindi filmmakers express their amazement and envy at how films can be made on "one line" – a phrase denoting a story's simplicity as it can be relayed in a sentence. However, such films are

considered inadequate for audiences in India and adapting a Hollywood film involves enhancing the narrative in a variety of ways. Writers characterize a Hindi film as comprising four acts while a Hollywood film comprises three, and therefore sub-plots or the inclusion of parallel "tracks" – romantic, comedy, dramatic – are seen as necessary additions. The most obvious way that a Hindi adaptation is different from its Hollywood "original" is through the inclusion of songs and the next section discusses in greater detail the production of film music and its social, narrative, and economic significance.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FILM MUSIC

Popular film and popular music are inextricably linked in India, as music has played an integral role in Indian cinema since the onset of sound in 1931. The centrality of music has its roots in older performance traditions which influenced cinema. Classical Sanskrit drama, folk theater, and Parsi theater all tightly integrated music, song, and dance, with each element being essential to the entire performance. Perhaps the most defining and distinctive feature of popular cinema in India is the presence of music in the form of songs sung by characters in nearly every film. Until the early 1980s, these film songs were the only form of popular music in India that was produced, distributed, and consumed on a mass scale, and even today film music accounts for the majority – nearly 80 percent – of music sales in India.²³ Entering a music store in India, one is faced with a staggering selection of film music: categorized and packaged by films, music directors, singers, actors, actresses, directors, decades, and themes, as well as the more recent phenomenon of re-mixes.

Any visitor to India is struck by the ubiquity of film music in towns and cities. Film songs are part of wedding processions, election rallies, and religious festivals; they blare from cassette players in tea stalls and from speakers in taxis and auto-rickshaws. A good chunk of radio programming is film music from the hit parades counting down the latest songs

to programs of "classics" familiarizing new generations of listeners with songs from earlier eras. As well as having an aural presence, film music has a visual presence through television, which has been packed with film-based programming, predominantly oriented around film music since the onset of satellite television in 1992. Dozens of shows air the song sequences from Hindi films in a weekly top 10 countdown format. Advertisements for upcoming films feature slickly edited montages of song sequences. Game shows that test contestants' skills at recognizing and remembering film songs, and talent searches where singers are judged on their renditions of film songs are the more participatory instances of film music on television. Film songs have also generated national controversies, reaching the chambers of Parliament. In 1993, the hit song "Choli ke peeche kya hai?" [What is behind my blouse?] from *Khalnayak* [Villain] triggered such a storm of protests over its "vulgar" lyrics that Members of Parliament debated banning the song, which not surprisingly made the song and its associated film even more successful. During election campaigns political parties also produce and circulate audio-cassettes of their political slogans set to the melodies of popular film songs.

Music also has been central to categorizing cinema in India. The presence or absence of songs operates as a method of generic differentiation, and has been the main basis by which films are labeled: "art" films usually do not have songs; "middle cinema" – refers to an art film with songs; and "commercial" cinema to films which unquestionably have songs. Songs are perceived as the quintessential "commercial" element in a film. Filmmakers working outside the mainstream have treated songs as a way of reaching larger audiences, and this has often been characterized by the press as either accommodating or pandering to popular tastes. The omission of songs has frequently been interpreted as an oppositional stance – a way of making a statement against the dominant form of cinema as well as circumscribing one's audience. Song sequences are also iconic of "bad cinema" and seen as an impediment to "good cinema" according to state and intellectual discourses.

To those unfamiliar with popular Hindi cinema, song sequences seem to be ruptures in continuity and verisimilitude. However, rather



Figure 2.6 Shah Rukh Khan and Rani Mukherji in *Pehli*. Image courtesy of the Kobal Collection.

example, the entire process of falling in love – from initial attraction to the realization of being soul mates – can be established over the course of four or five songs, or about 30 minutes of screen time.

Songs are also used as the primary vehicles to represent fantasy, desire, and passion. A common scenario that has become a cliché is one with characters singing and dancing in the rain. Rain has always been invested with erotic and sensual significance in Indian mythology, classical music, and literature, as it is associated with fertility and rebirth. Indian classical music has many songs where the anticipation of the monsoon rains is likened to the anticipation of one's lover. Utilized in many films over the years, these often highly erotic sequences – with wet clothes clinging to bodies – are part of an elaborate system of allusions to, rather than explicit portrayals of, sexuality and physical intimacy as filmmakers navigate the perceived moral conservatism of their audiences, as well as the representational boundaries set by the Indian state through its censorship codes.

than being an extraneous feature, music and song in popular cinema define and propel plot development. Many films would lose their narrative coherence if the songs were removed. Chapter four provides a detailed case of how songs function in one of the most successful films of Hindi cinema, *Sholay* (Flames; 1975), to illustrate how songs work in a film that appears to be all about action, dialogues, drama, and revenge. Some scholars have described the popular film as operatic where the dramatic moments “are often those where all action stops and the song takes over, expressing every shade of emotional reversion and doing it far more effectively than the spoken word or the studied gesture” (Prakash 1983: 115). Hindi filmmakers spend a great deal of time and energy crafting the song sequences which have a wide variety of functions within a film’s narrative as well as provide the main element of cinematic spectacle.

Songs are produced in a very collaborative and informal manner. The first step is at the “story sitting” where the screenplay is worked out with the “song situations” – the points in the screenplay where songs will appear. These moments are created by the screenwriter in concert with the director who then narrates the “situation” to the music director and the lyricist. The skill of a writer and/or director is demonstrated by how well the song situations are integrated into the screenplay. While there are plenty of examples of Hindi films where the songs seem either very loosely connected to the narrative or simply pop out of nowhere, such a lack of integration is considered “sloppy,” “lazy,” or simply bad filmmaking.

One of the main functions of songs within a screenplay is to display emotion, and in the case of Hindi cinema this is overwhelmingly related to love. The general belief in the film industry is that love and romance are best expressed musically. In films where a love story is not the main focus of the plot, a “romantic track” is developed primarily through songs between the male and female leads. Even a love story focuses on the overcoming of obstacles to marriage rather than the process of falling in love, so songs provide a more efficient way to depict the romance developing between two characters than many scenes of dialogue. For

In addition to expressing intense emotion and *sigʃwɪyɪŋ ɪnɪvɪsɪdɪ* intimacy, songs are frequently used to facilitate the passage of time as well as evoke memories: children can become adults over the course of a song, or a song can take a character back to an earlier time. Songs can aid in characterization when they are used to introduce the leading actors in a film. Songs are also a mode of indirect address whereby characters can articulate thoughts and desires, which may be inappropriate to state directly. For example, a man can sing of his lover's betrayal in front of her and her husband at a social gathering without the husband suspecting anything. Once the song situations have been determined, the director then collaborates with the music director (as composers are referred to within the industry) and lyricist on the actual songs.

In the past, the prevalent practice was for the lyricist to write the words of the song, expressing the necessary sentiments and moods demanded by the screenplay. The music director would then set the words to music, finding a melody that accommodated the mood and meter of the song. Nowadays, the basic melody is often composed before the lyrics have been written and the lyricist has to find the words to convey the situation and fit them into the prescribed melodic structure created by the music director. After the melody and lyrics are finalized, a task accomplished in a series of meetings known as "music sittings" between the music director, director, producer, and their assistants, the music director then works with an arranger to determine the musical interludes between stanzas, the instrumentation, and other details before recording the music. However, even as songs are being recorded, a great deal of flexibility is maintained in the process. Changes are frequently made during song recordings, based on input from the director and others who are present. The whole process is also very oral: the music director does not write down any music, but composes it orally with his harmonium; after listening to the melody, the arranger translates the music from Indian notes and chords into sheet music with Western notation for the orchestra.

Once the songs are recorded, the director works in conjunction with the dance director (as choreographers are known) to conceptualize and

ɪnɪvɪsɪdɪ sequence. This process, which is referred to as "picturization," can take from three days to three weeks to shoot. The amount of time is determined by how many dancers are involved, how intricate and complicated the choreography and cinematography is, and how often sets, locations, and costumes are changed.

The most common way the Indian press describes the choreographed song sequences in Hindi films is with snide references to "running around the trees." This phrase is used incessantly to refer to the love songs in films where the leading couple bursts into song, mostly in picturesque locales such as gardens, meadows, and forests, far removed from the actual setting of the film, often with multiple costume changes, and sometimes with scores of dancers in the background. This penchant for sylvan, pastoral landscapes, so commented upon and ridiculed has very functional origins: in the early talkie era, before the techniques of playback singing and dubbing, when sound was recorded



Figure 2.7 Shah Rukh Khan and Preity Zinta in *Veer Zaara*. Image courtesy of the Kobal Collection.

directly on the set, the simplest way to hide musicians and microphones was to use bushes and trees as camouflage.

Songs are the main reason why popular Indian films are much longer than their Western counterparts. The average running time of a Hindi film is between 150–165 minutes, of which at least 40 minutes of screen time are occupied by song sequences. Every film contains an intermission that divides the film into two halves. The first half of a film establishes the characters and their context, and usually contains more songs than the second half. Most songs are composed of three to four stanzas with a refrain, in six- or eight-beat cycles, with musical interludes in between the stanzas. The instrumentation varies from the use of a few instruments to 100-piece orchestras. The length of a song ranges from three to 12 minutes, with the longer songs tending to be performances or other elaborate spectacles within the film.

As nearly all popular Indian films contain songs, the presence of music in and of itself is not the defining feature of a genre, but the genre of a film governs the use and style of music within it. Most Indian films defy Western descriptions of genres such as the “musical,” “comedy,” “drama,” “action,” and “love story,” since each film may contain all of these elements and more (see Chapter 4). The genre of a film depends upon which element is foregrounded as the driving force of the plot and other narrative and stylistic conventions. In the mid-1970s, when films emphasizing action and revenge were the dominant trend, the number of songs dwindled to just three or four per film, a sharp contrast to films from earlier decades which contained anywhere between seven to ten songs. In the 1990s with the success of romantic films, the average number of songs in a film increased to six or seven. One of the factors determining the number of songs in a film by the late 1990s was pressure from audio companies who wanted at least five songs, preferably six, for the purposes of audio-cassette production so that cassettes could be produced with three songs on each side. In some instances, songs which were on the audio-cassette never made it into the film.

Songs are absolutely essential to the marketing of a popular Hindi film. There have been very few examples of popular Hindi films

without songs. Not having songs communicates that a film is outside the mainstream of the Hindi film industry, possibly even an “art film,” and to most people in the industry this means death at the box-office. To anyone working within the dominant system of financing, distribution, and exhibition, songs are an indispensable element in films. There are plenty of rumors and stories within the industry about producers, distributors, and financiers pressuring filmmakers to add songs to films to increase their prospects at the box-office (Ganti 2012c).

Since the early 1990s, when new entrants into audio production challenged the music company HMV’s monopoly, film music has played an increasingly important economic function within the Hindi film industry.²⁴ The sale of music rights became an important source of finance for filmmaking as audio companies vying for the top production companies in the industry were willing to pay sums that amounted to as much as 25 percent of a film’s budget. Audio companies were willing to pay such prices since albums from successful Hindi films sold in the millions.²⁵ Companies such as Venus and Tips, flush with success in the marketing and sales of film music, also entered the realm of film production, where they understandably poured resources into the song sequences.

Songs are the most significant form of a film’s publicity. Songs are recorded before a film is shot and a few song sequences are shot early on in the production phase so that they can be used to sell a film to distributors. The release of a film’s music, at least two months prior to its opening, is a carefully orchestrated event by the producer and audio company. This action is preceded by an “audio release” function in Bombay organized by the producer and audio company to which the entire glitterati of the film industry is invited as well as distributors, exhibitors, music wholesalers, and journalists. Clips of the song sequences are screened, and a prominent member of the industry, invited as the chief guest for the evening, officially “releases” the audio – unwraps a package of cassettes and compact discs and hands them out – to the cast and key members of the crew, while photographers and television cameras capture every moment. Although this event is ostensibly for the

industry and the trade, it also promotes the film to the general public, given the heavy media coverage, especially when famous film stars are present. In an environment where market research is rarely done, music sales are also the only early indicator a producer has of audience interest in a film – 30–40 percent of the sales are made prior to a film's release (Chaya 1996: 42). Music sales also serve as the basis for the rankings of songs on television countdown shows, which function as another way to promote the film.

With the proliferation of film-song-based programs on television by the late 1990s, producers, distributors, and exhibitors saw songs as the main way of enticing audiences into theaters. Even before a film completed production, sometimes months in advance, its song sequences started airing on the numerous film-based programs on television, or appeared as commercials in between other programs. By the late 1990s producers spent inordinate amounts of money on the visualization of songs. Regardless of their theme and plot many films had an elaborate production number with lavish sets, spectacular costumes, hundreds of extras and dancers, and special effects, costing millions of rupees. These sequences, referred to as "item" numbers, added to a film's "repeat value." Members of the film industry asserted that for a film to strike gold at the box-office, it must possess a quality that makes people want to see a film not just once, but multiple times at the theater. The most successful films of Hindi cinema have been marked by the phenomenon of repeat audiences – people seeing a particular film 10, 20, 50, even a 100 times. Renowned contemporary painter M.F. Husain made news with reports that he had seen the 1994 box-office success *Hum Aapke Hain Koun!* – commonly referred to as "HAHK" by the press and by viewers – which had 14 songs, 85 times! Songs are probably the critical element in a film's repeat value. Soon after the release of *Khalnayak*, there were reports in the press about how often people were seeing the film, but only until the main item number of the film: "Choli ke peeche kya hai?" Part of the quest for repeat value is to shoot songs in "exotic" locations such as Europe, North America, and Australia. Switzerland, with its meadows, valleys, and mountains has been a long-time favorite of



Figure 2.8 "Item number" – Aishwarya Rai in *Dhoom?*. Image courtesy of the Kobal Collection.

Hindi filmmakers. Nevertheless, filmmakers are constantly in search of new locations that have not been shown on the Indian screen and in the recent past, song sequences have been shot in sites as varied as Alaska, Cuba, Egypt, Hungary, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Namibia, Scotland, and South Africa. Although some songs are set in foreign settings ostensibly because the characters are visiting that area, often foreign locations have a tenuous connection to the plot and function more as pure spectacle and novelty. Producer-director Yash Chopra went to Holland just to shoot two love songs amidst vast fields of tulips for his 1981 film, *Silsila* [Affair]. The producers of the 1998 film *Jeans* boasted how theirs was the first film to have a song that featured all "Seven Wonders of the World." The song where the two leads sing of their love for each other at the Great Wall in China, the Pyramids in Egypt, the Taj Mahal in India, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the Empire State Building in New York, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, and the Coliseum in Rome, became the main marketing point of the film. Thus, songs also operate as virtual tourism as filmmakers have shot sequences all over the world.



Figure 2.9 Rehearsing dance steps, Intrepid aircraft carrier, New York City. Image courtesy of the author.

Hindi filmmakers' penchant for shooting songs in foreign locations has led to new and unexpected value for these sequences in the eyes of foreign governments, resulting in financial incentives that, in turn, reinforce the commercial significance of songs. Since Hindi films circulate globally from Japan to Israel, from Peru to Britain, many governments view such sequences as a way to promote tourism; this is referred to as the "Bollywood effect," whereby dramatic increases in tourist arrivals from India are registered after several Hindi films have shot in a particular region. Thus, governments have been courting Hindi filmmakers to shoot in their countries (Olsberg/SPI 2007: 82). From Malaysia to Germany, South Africa to Scotland, and Florida to Finland, representatives of tourism promotion boards and film councils have been visiting India, trying to market their respective regions to Hindi filmmakers and offering incentives, such as all-expense paid scouting trips, monetary subsidies, tax breaks, technical and logistical assistance, and co-production arrangements. In fact, as filmmakers increasingly scout out new locations – Switzerland is now perceived as *passé* and

two Hindi filmmakers back to their country by offering free scouting trips since 2006, which include round-trip airfare between India and Switzerland, hotel stay for a week, and chauffeured transportation for location-hunting (Miller 2006).

Though shooting in foreign locales would appear expensive, Hindi filmmakers can be more efficient when filming abroad because they take along a minimal cast and crew, very little equipment, and maximize each shooting day. Filmmakers tend to go to Europe and North America in the summer in order to take advantage of the temperate climate and long days. By using natural rather than artificial light, and landmarks, cities, or natural landscapes rather than sets, filmmakers can cut the time it takes to shoot a song sequence in half. Another reason filmmakers like to go abroad is that they are more assured of having their actors' complete attention, unlike in Bombay where shooting is regularly disturbed by a continuous stream of visitors, journalists, and fans. Finally, producers can curb some star-related costs abroad that they would be unable to in India. For example, when shooting on location in India, producers frequently have to foot the bills of stars' retinues, which could include their family members, makeup artist, hair-dresser, driver, personal assistant, and/or friends. Producers do not follow this practice when shooting in foreign locations and are able to insist that stars travel alone or with a reduced entourage. While star status in India necessitates that they be housed in five-star luxury hotels, when abroad, the producer can afford to be more budget-conscious and stars have to make do with more modest accommodation. Thus, despite the significant amount of money involved in foreign shoots, for both aesthetic and economic reasons, Hindi filmmakers continue to find foreign location shooting an attractive option.

Since 2008, lip-synch song sequences have drastically reduced or nearly disappeared from prominent Hindi films, in particular those featuring top stars and produced by the leading production companies.²⁶ Music continues to have an important presence in Hindi cinema – the biggest box-office successes of the last decade have all featured lip-synch

songs – but the increasing use of non-lip-synch songs at the expense of lip-synch sequences and the change in attitudes regarding the narrative and commercial necessity of such sequences represent a sharp break from the norms and conventions of mainstream filmmaking practice (Ganti 2012c). While music continues to play an important economic role within the film industry as a way to market and promote films, lip-synch songs are not regarded as mandatory for commercial success since a number of films without such sequences have become box-office hits.²⁷

Hindi filmmakers credit the expansion of multiplexes for this development. With multiplexes' high ticket prices translating into a disproportionate share of theatrical revenues, Hindi filmmakers regard urban middle-class and upper class filmgoers – commonly referred to as the “classes” or the “gentry” – who frequent the multiplex as their main target audience, rather than the “masses” who were thought to constitute the bulk of the audience until the early 2000s (Ganti 2012a). In filmmakers' discourses, the taste of the classes is diametrically opposed to that of the masses; if the masses require lip-synch songs as an essential feature of an escapist cinema, the classes who prefer realism disapprove the practice of lip-synch songs.²⁸ Thus, greater variability in the use of music in contemporary Hindi cinema is related to a significant shift in the Hindi film industry's understanding of its audiences (Ganti 2012a).

3

NARRATIVE STYLE, IMPORTANT THEMES, AND KEY CONFLICTS

In 2008, a film about two orphaned brothers in Bombay – one struggling to make an honest living by working as a tea-server in a call center, the other living a more comfortable but dangerous life working for a gangster, which was set and shot completely in India, with an all-Indian cast, a mainly Indian crew, and with nearly one-third of its dialogue in Hindi – became a completely unanticipated global critical and commercial success. The film in question was British filmmaker Danny Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire*, which earned more than \$377 million globally and won a slew of awards, among them eight Academy Awards including Best Picture. While the film's own original distributors, Warner Bros., had not anticipated its success and planned on releasing it directly to DVD and eventually sold the theatrical distribution rights to Fox Searchlight, the film's global success took the Hindi film industry by surprise as well because of its utter reliance on the idioms of mainstream Hindi cinema. Although the film's visual style and mise-en-scène – one focused on depicting the gritty and grimy underbelly of Bombay's urban landscape, a representation that also garnered the film a great deal of criticism in India including the epithet of “poverty porn” – were very different, the theme, plot, narrative structure, and characterization were quintessentially