Editorial

We bring to our readers this time a special issue on Indian Cinema. There could not have been a better theme for me to commence my editorial stint as Indian and India-based cinema seem to be the flavour of the season.

India was introduced to ‘moving pictures’ soon after their screening by the Lumierre brothers in Paris. By the end of the nineteenth century, Indian filmmakers had started making documentaries and later exploring the commercial potential of cinema. A journey that began with ‘Raja Harishchandra’ and ‘Alam Ara’ has today led to the largest film industry of the world, diverse in its treatment and coverage of subjects. The Indian film industry has contributed several masterpieces; a number of filmmakers have left their indelible imprints on world cinema; and several film personalities are fairly well known across the world. Oscars for A.R. Rahman, Gulzar, and Resul Pookutty testify to the creative and technical talent in the country, as ‘Jai Ho’ resonates through the globe.

It is impossible to do justice to different facets of the Indian film industry in a small publication. We have articles on some filmmakers and some artistes, to present to you a sample, and there has been no attempt to be exhaustive. In India we have a very rich tradition of regional cinema; they have all been doing well and making excellent films. The issue includes articles on cinema in a few states. Due to constraints of space, we have not been able to cover all the languages and offer our apologies.

We have tried to bring to you a collage that hopefully would interest some of you in further exploring Indian cinema through more comprehensive publications, and equally importantly, in watching more Indian films.

I thank all of those who have contributed articles and provided material for this issue.

Hope you enjoy reading the issue.

March 2009

Virend Kundra
The Indian Film Industry
AN OUTLOOK

It is notable that today we speak not of the “film business”, but of the “film industry”. In a broader sense, the Indian Media & Entertainment industry is going places. The sector remains resolute and continues to grow at 17 per cent CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate), despite the larger economic slowdown. So what is this growth engine of the Indian economy about? Why are more and more corporates jumping onto the film financing bandwagon?

Firstly, the content business in India is likely to generate over $50 million in the next two years. This growth is expected to come from the overseas market. The Indian film industry is projected to grow by 15 per cent over the next five years, reaching to Rs. 176 billion in 2012 from the present Rs. 96 billion in 2007, nearly double its present size. In addition to this, India is also fast emerging as an outsourcing base for special effects, gaming, and animation content development.

Next, the box office figures are healthy and promising. The box office incomes of the film industry will shift marginally from the traditional revenues to the new emerging revenues like home video market and digital cinema. Though the share of the domestic box office is projected to reduce to 70 per cent in 2012, primarily in favour of overseas and ancillary revenues, the domestic box office segment itself will grow at 11 per cent cumulatively over the next five years to reach an estimated Rs. 125 billion in 2012 from the present size of Rs. 72 billion. Increases in the average ticket prices will be the primary contributor to this growth, estimated to increase from an all-India average of Rs. 22 in 2007 to Rs. 35 in 2012. The number of admissions is projected to rise marginally from the current high base of 3.25 billion tickets sold in 2007 to an estimated 3.5 billion in 2012. The overseas collections are estimated to grow cumulatively at 19 per cent over the next 5 years to reach Rs. 20 billion in 2012 from a current size of Rs. 8.5 billion in 2007. On a per film average basis, the share from overseas collections is expected to increase to 16 per cent per film in 2012 from 12 per cent in 2007. There are several growth drivers for this segment from increased marketing and selling efforts internationally, growing popularity of Indian films overseas and beyond the Indian Diaspora, several films with themes/locations/stories based on the Indian Diaspora, increased number of prints and a significantly more organised distribution plan.

The home video market is expected to significantly shift in the next five years given the developments in 2007. Though an overall growth of 15 per cent is projected over the next five years, in line with the previous years, the current rental-market domination is projected to significantly reduce to 25 per cent in 2012 from 80 per cent in 2007 in favor of the sell-through market. The penetration of home video subscribers is estimated to increase from 10 per cent of the pay-TV homes in 2007 to 25 per cent in 2012. This translates into an addition of 41 million subscribers over the next five year period. 75 per cent of these subscribers are estimated to be from the sell-through segment.

Though the home video subscribers are expected to increase in the next five years, the sell-through prices are expected to decline over the forecast period from a current average of Rs. 90 in 2007 to Rs. 50 in 2012. The average rental price of Rs. 50 is expected to decline only marginally. The home video market is thus projected to double its size to Rs. 15 billion in 2012 from the current Rs. 7.5 billion in 2007, translating into a cumulative growth of 15 per cent over the five-year forecast period.

The ancillary revenues comprising of revenues from sale of television rights, internet download rights, mobile rights, re-make rights, in-film placements, on-screen advertisements, brand placements etc. will on an overall basis grow by 16 per cent over the next five years to reach an estimated Rs. 18 billion in 2012 from Rs. 8.5 billion in 2007.

(Source: The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce)
Danny Boyle’s hugely entertaining Slumdog Millionaire is the flavour of the season and not without reason. The superbly crafted, pulsating rags-to-riches drama has put Mumbai on the mainstream moviemaking map of the world, besides providing global exposure to Bollywood-style storytelling, replete with drama, dance, song and narrative happenstance.

The unique Danny Boyle touch may have raised a straightforward narrative that employs several Mumbai masala movie plot devices – a poor slum boy who triumphs over all odds to hit the jackpot on a television quiz show, separated lovebirds who are reunited on a busy Mumbai railway platform, a feel-good fantasy that hinges on the role of destiny in human lives – to a new level of suppleness, but the fact remains that, in more ways than one, Slumdog Millionaire is the ultimate ‘Indian’ crossover film.
The question of the hour is: are our own homegrown filmmakers fully equipped to grab the opportunity that Slumdog Millionaire has created? Can Brand Bollywood travel beyond the expatriate Indian community in various parts of the world? For genuine global impact, our cinema has for many years banked primarily on the efforts of a handful of Indian-origin filmmakers who are active on the global scene – the likes of Shekhar Kapur, Mira Nair, Deepa Mehta and Gurinder Chadha. The scenario is beginning to change for the better and directors like Kapur and Nair have of late inched decidedly closer to the Hollywood mainstream. Mira Nair’s Amelia, a biopic about the legendary aviatrix Amelia Earhart who, in 1937, disappeared over the Pacific in a bid to fly around the world, and Kapur’s big-budget fantasy epic Larklight will hit the screens soon. Though helmed by Indians, these productions cannot be regarded as Indian films.

So what will India’s global film be like? Will it be from Bollywood or will it be from the Indian Diaspora Directors? One major Mumbai-based Director who has been working towards carving a global niche for this kind of cinema is Vidhu Vinod Chopra. The Bollywood Producer-Director, the man behind the successful Munnabhai films, is all set to shoot his first Hollywood film, Broken Horses, starring Mickey Rourke, the veteran actor who was nominated for an Oscar this year for his performance in Darren Aronofsky’s The Wrestler. Seasoned Assamese Director Jahnu Barua, too, is planning a period film to be shot entirely in the UK with a mixed Indian and British cast. Titled Homing Pigeons, the film will be targeted at a global audience.

On the other hand, the work of Diaspora Directors reflect the diversity of the Indian cultural and social landscape to an extent that mainstream Bollywood movies never quite do. Deepa Mehta, whose Water reached India seven years after its shoot was violently disrupted in Varanasi, says: “India gives me the stories; Canada gives me the freedom to tell those stories.” Though Water was a Hindi-language film, it was Canada’s official nominee for the best foreign-language film Oscar last year. Incidentally, Slumdog Millionaire, too, uses Hindi extensively on its soundtrack.

The world is today a smaller place and Indian émigrés are doing well for themselves across the globe. As more and more filmmakers of Indian descent make their presence felt on the international stage with cinematic essays endowed with global appeal, Bollywood will gear itself up to provide the Indian equivalent of Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon.

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The author is an independent film critic.

Deepa Mehta’s Naamkaran (top left) and Monsoon Wedding (top right).
Gurinder Chadha’s Bend It Like Beckham (left above & right).
It is only natural, therefore, that the Ray consciousness comes up with discoveries with the passing of every year. It began in a humble way with the setting up of the Ray Society in Kolkata which found eager patrons in America. This has now grown into a full-fledged programme to give his films a new lease of life with enhanced audio and visual qualities. This does not mean that anyone is trying to tamper with the originals. That would be sacrilege, somewhat like adding new colours or lines to an Amrita Shergill. All the same, there is a compelling need to ensure that the original nuances which give Ray's work a character of its own - from the frugal music in the background to the outstanding compositions of every shot. Some well-meaning scholars from America turned up at the last Kolkata Film Festival with about half a dozen Rays of different genres whose prints were in a dilapidated state but which had been restored to their original form. They may even have gained something from the possibilities of new technology without letting the technology get the better of the actual document.

This is something that no other Indian film-maker can claim – that the works are being restored and preserved because they constitute inevitable study material. If one is talking about an original screenplay that sets aside the conventional wisdom of turning to established fiction, there can hardly be a better example than Kanchenjangha. He had done two heavy films in the later 50s – Devi and Jalsaghar and had fulfilled a long-cherished dream to complete the final part of the Apu trilogy after the box-office disaster of Aparajito when he felt that he needed to plunge into an experiment. That was the time he made Kanchenjangha on an S

Students graduating from film schools have tended to lean towards film-makers who belong to experimental groups rather than towards the classical masters who represent the best cinema in their respective countries. It was many years ago that Penelope Houston had stated in a brilliantly succinct statement how the world looked at Indian cinema; she said that as long as someone did not come along to change, Ray's Bengal would be cinema's India. Talk to the young exponents of direction, camera, editing and sound, passing out of film schools and they would probably beg to disagree with one of America's leading film scholars.

Yet what Houston said more than four decades ago can hardly be disputed even by the post-Ray generation. Satyajit Ray remains an icon who is not just revered as a master but, almost 20 years after his death, remains a reference point for anyone who wishes to extend his appreciation of the medium regardless of the language or culture to which he or she belongs. Ray goes beyond words into a visual magic that transcends the limitations of language or the geographical borders within which his work generally moved.

Satyajit Ray
THE TIMELESS TEXTBOOK

SWAPAN MULICK

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original screenplay using running time to record actual time when members of a family from Kolkata stroll down the misty pathways in the mountains sorting out their inner conflicts. It bombed at the box-office then because many saw it as a film ahead of its time. Today, it remains the best possible specimen of a screenplay in which all the voices blend into a splendid orchestra, each as indispensable as the other and the little pieces in the jigsaw puzzle fitting into a magnificent ensemble.

If this was one of the films restored, it was because this uncharacteristic adventure had so many complexities including the deliberate attempt to place the human experience in a natural environment. Turn to *Sonar Kella* (The Golden Fortress) and one would again run into another text-book piece that the restorers hope will reach film schools all over the world. First, there is no children’s film by Ray which deserves to be seen as naïve amusement. This and the *Goopy Bagha* series make
statements that penetrate adult minds. They are technically so exciting as to demand repeated viewings. And they move out into open spaces that pose a powerful challenge to the cameraman, in this case Ray himself. Whether it is the magical use of Subrata Mitra’s camera in *Pather Panchali* or the delightful manipulation of external sounds or even his uncanny ability to turn rank “outsiders” into able performers, he controlled every department of film-making and emphasised that if the director had to be the vital cog in the wheel, it was imperative that he didn’t slip up on finer details and had the whole movie in his head before a single scene is shot.

There are two other points that young rebels with the camera, with fire in their belly and anger in their hearts tend to overlook. First, it is no sin to be simple. Today’s enthusiasm for non-narrative techniques often leave one puzzled as to why it ignores the discipline of film-making that is the cornerstone of Ray’s work (he deleted remarkably little footage on the editing table). He imbibed the story-telling techniques of Hollywood in the Thirties and reaffirmed that one could put all one’s cinematic, aesthetic and even personal ideas into the broad framework that the masses understood. Without being the marketing guru that today’s so-called creative personalities set out to be, he saw most
of his films being picked up long after their initial runs. He did not have to worry about markets and festivals – they came to his doorstep.

Secondly, his work grew from their humble roots to a universal humanism that ensured their place in history. Whether it was a historical like *Shatranj Ke Khilari*, a crime thriller like *Joi Baba Felunath* (The Elephant God), an examination of life in a big city (*Mahanagar, Jana Aranya*), a sense of compassion prevailed though he never allowed it to lapse into misplaced romanticism. Nor did he allow the phenomenal variety in his works to suggest that he lacked a philosophy of life. Ray never believed in a committed way of life or thinking. He wrote the series of detective stories with as much passion as he recreated periods from Tagore stories (*Charulata, Ghare Baire*) with a contemporary outlook. Long before the Tagore pundits frowned upon any “new interpretations”, Ray turned the final statement of *Charulata* on its head and played around with characters in Tagore’s *Ghare Baire* and Premchand’s *Shatranj Ke Khilari* without setting the Hooghly on fire.

Today all that is irrelevant. What matters is that Ray offers everything to anyone who wants to learn cinema. He had regretted at one stage having failed to take up science fiction that he so loved and an epic drama that offered another kind of challenge. Perhaps it is just as well that blockbusters never consumed his time that he devoted more fruitfully to projects that confirmed his breadth of vision and an all-embracing spirit of inquiry. Each of these became a social event when they reached the theatres, a picture of an India that has survived its cultural diversity. And, of course, they will remain text-books for film buffs and sources of intellectual nourishment long after the curriculum in film schools has to be changed with the times.

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Hindi Film Posters
VISUAL CHRONICLES OF CULTURE
S.M.M. AUSAJA

The fact that Hindi cinema has always had a form of art, besides the various creative talents involved in filmmaking, has remained largely hidden over the years. It’s a form of brush-stroke art that appeared in its publicity material like posters, block-prints, song-synopsis booklets, slides, lobby cards, and even LP record covers.

Hindi films arrived in 1931 with Ardeshir Irani’s Alam Ara. Since the Thirties there have been several transitions in the art of poster designs. Films of thirties were largely theatrical in presentation, therefore, the emphasis on elaborate costumes can be seen on the characters depicted in the posters of the Thirties. Also, since films

There were artists, poster designers who specialized in publicity art and they were often very popular within the producers’ community, though somewhat anonymous to the rest of the world. There is a difference between a poster-designer and a hoarding painter. The poster-designer is the creative brain behind the visuals one saw on the film’s advertising media, while a hoarding painter usually enlarges any one poster design to the hoarding size.

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The Forties and Fifties, with the rise of superstar Ashok Kumar and his natural acting style, gave us films that highlighted social issues. The family dramas, romantic musicals, socio-political sagas, and action/stunt films emerged and overshadowed the costume-dramas. So more profile-driven posters arrived on the walls.

*Aurat* (1940), *Nartaki* (1940), *Bahen* (1941), *Aadmi* (1941), *Roti* (1942), *Kismat* (1943), *Anmol Ghadi* (1946), *Dard* (1947), *Jugnu* (1947), *Aag* (1948), *Andaz* (1949) and *Mahal* (1949) are some of the most successful films of those years. The posters were simpler and the faces were given prominence over costumes. With superstars like Ashok Kumar, Dilip Kumar, Raj Kapoor and Dev Anand in the limelight, their faces were given more weight than the other players in the film for purely commercial reasons. In the Fifties the same trend continued.

*Babul* (1950), *Bawre Nain* (1950), *Jogan* (1950), *Awara* (1951), *Baazi* (1951), *Do Aur Daag* (1952), *Aab* (1955), *Do Bigha Zameen* (1955), *Mother India* (1957), *Pyasa* (1957), *Anari* (1959) and *Kaagaz ke Phool* (1959) made waves as socially relevant films. *Baazi* and *Kaagaz ke Phool* were attempts to elevate Hindi films to the level of technical finesse seen in Hollywood. The posters indicated what was in store for the viewer. For example, in *Bahen*, a film about a brother’s obsessive possessiveness about his sister, the sister was shown dwarfed under the large shadow of her tall brother!

*Kismat* being a noir film with a near negative protagonist, Ashok Kumar held millions captive under his revolver as the film smashed records across the country to emerge as the biggest success story till we had *Sholay*!

In *Devdas*, Dilip Kumar and his alcohol bottle on the posters took the viewer to the hero’s self-defeating journey of love and betrayal.

The Sixties was an era of romantic musicals embedded even in epics like *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960). The film’s dialogues played as big a role in its success as Naushad’s immortal compositions. The posters were distinctively ostentatious as we saw in most historicals, but the film was essentially a romantic one.

*Junglee* (1961), *Saab Bibi aur Ghusali* (1962), *Dosti* (1964), *Ram Aur Shyam* (1967) and *Aradhana* (1969) were all musical success stories despite their varied plots. The posters began to highlight music; in fact the reprint posters had the hit songs prominently written on top to indicate to the viewer that the film possessed hit music.

The Seventies began the era of the Angry Young Man as Amitabh had been branded as symbols of perversion, very few families ventured to theatres. To combat this social resistance, the Thirties producers focused on mythology, history, fantasy, religion, and folk-tale inspired films. It worked to expand their audience. The film posters of those early years were full of flamboyant costumes and the biggest success stories belonged to these genres. Notably *Indrasabha* (1932), *Alibaba aur 40 Chor* (1932), *Aayodhya ka Raja* (1932), *Chandikida* (1934), *Ramayan* (1934), *Anarkali* (1935), *Haratiwar* (1935), *Seeta Haran* (1936), *VidyaPati* (1937), *Alladin and the Wonderful Lamp* (1938), *Gopal Krishna* (1938) and *Sohrab Modi’s immortal historical* *Sukur* (1939) had visually appealing posters, full of elaborate costumes.
Bachchan rose like a meteor and emerged as the biggest-ever star the industry ever saw. The Seventies, Eighties and Nineties belonged to him in terms of popularity, making him a ‘Star of the Millennium’ (in a global opinion poll commissioned by the BBC). Romance and music took a back seat as the posters began to display a variety of action images: from guns, machine-guns and knives to poses of stars – mainly Amitabh – in combat positions. Such was the extent of Amitabh’s influence that even the established romantic stars were forced to pick up the gun – like Dev Anand (Johreny Mera Naam, Des Pardes, Lootmaar), Rajendra Kumar (Gora Aur Kala), Dharmendra (Yaadon ki Baarat, Hiksumat), Dilip Kumar (Shakti, Vidhaata, and Duniya). Amitabh’s anger simmered on posters from Zanjeer and Deewaar to Sholay, Don, Muqaddar ka Sikandar, Kaala Patthar, Laawaris, Kaalia, Coolie, Aakhree Raasta, Agneepath, Hum, Khuda Gawah and Lal Badsah.

In the Thirties, Forties and Fifties, there were lithographic posters. The lithographic press gave way to the offset press and the posters of the Seventies and Eighties were mostly offset prints. The Nineties popularized the digital press. Consequently, by the end of Eighties, the era of hand-painted posters ended, replaced by the digitally composed images appearing on the posters. With the end of the hand-painted posters, came the realization to treat the originals as pieces of art, thereby making the hand-painted poster of any film from the Thirties to the Eighties objects of art. The craze for collecting such posters began in the Nineties and has gained momentum in the new millennium. Today, these posters are being auctioned at art houses, galleries and premium auction houses globally.

Lastly, we need to applaud the designers and painters who have given us such delightful images across decades. The foremost designer who ruled for three decades was D.D. Neroy. And there were many talented names and entities like Tilak, Dhwakar Karkare, Mulgaonkar, D.R. Bhosle, Pamart, Pandit Ram Kumar Sharma, S.M. Pandit, Faiz, and many more. These were exceptionally gifted artistes who depicted a visual journey of Indian culture on posters across decades. They are unsung, and we need to celebrate them if we celebrate the art of posters in India.

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The author is a noted film-historian and cinema memorabilia collector.
The limelight on composer A.R. Rahman should draw attention to Tamil cinema that nursed him and honed his skills. Barely a year after the Lumiere brothers screened their moving pictures in Paris, cinema was introduced in Madras (now Chennai) in 1897. The first silent film in South India, Keechakavatham (The Slaying of Keechaka) was made in 1916 by Nataraja Mudaliyar in Madras, marking the birth of Tamil cinema. It was in the Fifties that the hold of cinema on the Tamil people increased as it penetrated deep into rural areas, riding piggyback on rural electrification schemes of post-independent India. Touring talkies, another unique feature of Indian cinema, took films into remote rural areas. Today, with 2548 cinema houses, films enjoy a high exposure rate in Tamil Nadu.

Like other cinemas of India, early Tamil films were all mythological, with a series of excuses for songs. This was a legacy from the company drama. Within a few years of the arrival of talkies film music grew into an independent aural entertainment and increased the hold of cinema on people. The gramophone industry, coupled with the availability of inexpensive machines, popularized film songs.

A prominent feature of Tamil cinema is its interaction with politics. How did it begin? When sound came to Tamil cinema, in 1931 with Kalidas, the artistes from company drama moved into the studios. They were already highly politicized, having formed an active part of the freedom struggle. They brought with them their ideology and a penchant for political activism. For instance, the film Kalidas, though a mythological, had a song praising Gandhi. Soon, cinema became an instrument of political propaganda and many film artistes began taking direct part in politics. Some went as delegates to National Congress sessions and many appeared on political platforms. One of the stars of the Thirties, K.B. Sundarambal, campaigned for the Congress. She was the first film artiste in India to enter the legislature, in 1958, as a Congress nominee in Chennai. This interaction, between film artistes and cinema, continues to the present day. Two stars, Vijayakanth and Sarathkumar, each floated a political party recently.

After Independence film artistes gravitated towards the Dravidian movement, whose leaders offered them recognition and patronage. Many of the leading lights of the party, like C.N. Annadurai and M. Karunanidhi, were themselves playwrights and often acted in plays. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam that grew out of the Dravidian movement, facilitated the advent of the phenomenon of the star politician in India. M.G. Ramachandran, the best known star-politician and later Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu had, in fact, acted in patriotic plays and was a khadi-wearing Congress sympathizer in his younger days. The interaction between Tamil cinema and politics has attracted academic scholars from all over the world. A good reference work is Tamil Cinema: The Cultural Politics of India’s Other Film Industry (Routledge London 2008) edited by S. Velayutham of Sydney University.

One of the distinctive characteristics of cinema in India is its subservience to the spoken word. In Tamil cinema, this was a legacy of the stage and it was accentuated when dialogue writers from the DMK became active in films. Long monologues with alliterative sentences became popular, as in the film Parasakthi (The Goddess), 1952. These monologues are remarkably like formal speeches. Even the camera angles were such that...
the characters appeared to be addressing the vast multitude in the cinema house. The importance given to the spoken words tended to eliminate camera mobility and rendered performance immobile. In fact, dialogues of a few of these films were published in book form and as gramophone discs. Thus, cinema, as handled in these films, was almost like an extension of literature, instead of belonging to its own realm.

For three decades Tamil cinema was in the shadow of two stars, M.G. Ramachandran and Sivaji Ganesan, rivals both in films and in politics. They had both built up a huge following with thousands of fan clubs functioning as surrogate party units. MGR specialized in swashbuckling roles. His Nadodimannan (Vagabond king), 1958, was characteristic of this genre. Sivaji Ganesan on the other hand featured in melodramas such as Pasumanniippu (Forgiveness of Sins), 1961. The films that came during this period were formulaic, the characters stereotyped and acting stylized. A critic observed: “Bedevilled as Tamil films are by the Big Two, the story of every year is the story of what films they made and who outscored the other at the box office. Aesthetics do not enter into the discussion at any point for aesthetics here is subordinate to economics.”

As the influence of the two stars began to wane in the Seventies, there were signs of change with a new generation of filmmakers making their mark. Bharathi Raja, through his 16 Vayathinile (At the age of 16), 1977, focused on rural Tamil Nadu. Balu Mahendra’s Azhiyatha kolangal (Enduring Patterns), 1979, a story centring around three school boys, clearly reflected the influence of European cinema. He later went on to make Veedu (Home), 1988, the story of a middle class family struggling to build a house. Mahendra adapted a literary work to make Udhiripookal (Scattered Flowers), 1979. A few young filmmakers who trained under these directors individuated and made movies, extending the frontiers of Tamil cinema. Balu was one such who has made films like Sethu, 1999. And there was Cheran whose film Autograph, 2005, endeared itself to the Tamil public.

Today the Tamil film industry has matured, along with Kannada, Malayalam and Telugu film industries into a vibrant industry which provides employment and entertainment to a vast section of the population. Tamil cinema has enjoyed a reputation for being both the pioneer and the launchpad for new technologies, new actors, successful story formulae etc for the entire southern film industry. The presence of world class film labs and infrastructure at Chennai has also contributed to the leadership role that Tamil film industry plays in the south. Now with A.R. Rahman, a talent nurtured in the Chennai Hollywood making it big in the real Hollywood, Tamil films will really get a global exposure.

*The author is a noted writer and cinema historian.*
Kannada Cinema

A WHIFF OF SANDALWOOD

JYOTSH

Colloquially referred to as Sandalwood, the cinema of Karnataka encompasses movies made in Karnataka. The emergence of talking pictures in regional languages of South India in 1931 saw the release of the first talkie in Kannada in 1934 Sati Sulochana, followed by Bhakta Dhrusa. Both Sati Sulochana and Bhakta Dhrusa were major successes.

The most popular actor in Kannada films was the late Dr. Rajkumar. An accomplished singer and a performer with versatile acting capabilities, his era was thronged with superb comedian actors, music composers, directors, lyricists, script writers and cinematographers who collectively brought what is now regarded as the golden era of Kannada cinema. Dr. Rajkumar, originally known as ‘Mutturaju’, had to his credit over 200 films. His debut film with Gubbi Virnna’s Bedara Kanappa in 1954 established him as a mythological hero overcoming the severest test of conscience to prove his devotion to his ideals. The movie proved to be a blockbuster and signalled the arrival of a new star. It also launched comedian Narasimharaju and director G.V. Iyer.

Bedara Kanappa, 1954

Sadly, even after the success of Bedara Kanappa, the Kannada film industry remained stagnant. Lack of financiers, technicians and studios proved to be a hindrance to film making. Rajkumar’s public adulation and identification was peerless. His early retirement stunned his fans who treated him as a demi-god. Predictably, the septuagenarian was forced out of his self-imposed exile by his fans and Shabdavedi, his comeback movie, saw the thespian performing once again. He received the prestigious Dada Saheb Phalke Award in 1995 for his outstanding contribution to Kannada film industry. Rajkumar was one of the few actors in world cinema who had an illustrious classical singing and stage acting career throughout simultaneously.

The 1970s and 80s is heralded as the Golden Age of Kannada cinema. It was also the period that witnessed the birth of alternate cinema or parallel cinema. Shankar Nag, in the late 70s, made his own mark with the internationally-acclaimed Malgudi Days along with some commercial hits. Sandesh Nagraj made his presence felt with his off-beat films. Sunil Kumar Desai wowed the audience with his...
versatility whereas Dinesh Babu redefined the art of story-telling. T.S. Nagabharana’s involvement in Jaanapada and historical melodramas, Kodlu Ramakrishna for his subjects based on common man and narrative stories, Phani Ramachandra with his comic flicks, Rajendra Singh Babu, all brought Kannada cinema its much deserving recognition.


The current star of the Kannada film industry is Shivarajkumar, who started his career with a hatrick of superhits. Actresses like Bhavya, Mahalaxmi, Sudhharani, Thara, Vanitha Vasu, Anjana, Shruti too made their presence felt over time with sterling performances.

The recent years have been good times for the Kannada film industry. The year 2005 witnessed stupendous box office success for the Kannada film industry. Starting with Shivakumar starrer Jogi, which grossed Rs. 70 crore at the box office, films like Annu Tiangi (grossed Rs 50 crores), Gouramma, Anuradha, Deadly Soma, Nenapirali performed well at the box office. An estimated four of every five releases had succeeded at the box office. The profits soared and the industry flourished like never before.

Mungaru Male released in 2006, shattered all records of the Kannada film industry grossing Rs. 75 crores. In 2008, the Kannada film industry saw many firsts. A number of films were released outside the state and even abroad. Gaaja, Buddheswara and Netrugraha became huge hits. The success of the film industry is obvious by the fact that the average budget for Kannada films is now between Rs. 5-10 crores as against Rs. 1-2 crore just three years ago. The fragrance of Sandalwood continues to spread far and wide.

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The author is a noted writer and documentary film maker.

Ghata Shraddha, 1977
Marathi Cinema

SCALING NEW HEIGHTS

MAYAH BALSE

There is a fable in the Indian epics, in which a clever squirrel waits for an army of ants to laboriously bring grains of sugar to a hole in the bark of a tree. The clever squirrel then barges his way in to eat the hoard of grain and occupies the niche too. This is what has happened to Marathi cinema over the years, vis-a-vis Hindi cinema. The powerful and muscular Hindi giant has nudged Marathi films from supremacy in their own territory. The birthplace of Marathi films has become the stronghold of Bollywood’s Hindi film industry.

Ironically, it was a Marathi “maanoos” who was responsible for laying the foundation of cinema itself in India. It was Dadasaheb Phalke, a Maharashtrian, who envisioned making the first ever indigenous Indian film – a silent movie called Raja Harishchandra, a story about a high-principled king who was willing to sacrifice his kingdom and his family to gain the grace of the gods. The gods were so impressed they gave him back what he had lost.

Raja Harishchandra was the first home-grown Indian production and the corner-stone of the film industry. Dadasaheb Phalke is remembered today as the father of Indian cinema and a prestigious award named after him, is bestowed on those luminaries from the film world who have distinguished themselves in the field of cinema.

The mantle for making films, thereafter, fell on Prabhat Film Company, owned exclusively by Maharashtrians, which took the movement forward with classics having moral values and emotional resonance, the notable ones being Sant Tukaram, the first film in India to bag the best film award in 1927 at the Venice Film Festival. Prabhat Films produced the first Marathi talkie, Ayodhyecha Raja in 1932, fast on the heels of the first Hindi talkie Alam Ara which was made a year earlier, by Imperial Film Company and directed by Ardeshir Irani.

It was over two decades later in 1954 when the National Awards were launched for the first time, that P.K. Atre’s Marathi film Shyam chi Ayee won the President’s Gold Medal. It was a cinematic rendering of Sane Guruji’s emotional novel.

Marathi cinema bloomed after that, with the advent of names like V. Shantaram, Sudhir Phadke, Raja Paranjpe Master Vinayak and others. Directors like Ashok Mane churned out films focusing on the widely
popular Marathi folk art form, the tamashas. Also in vogue were traditional family dramas of Raj Dutt and Datta Dharamadhikari, which told stories of emotional conflict, in a realistic environment. Rustic and urban audiences enjoyed both genres of films.

Later in the 70s, comedy with double entendres and earthy jokes catered to another kind of audience who loved this genre even when it bordered on the vulgar. Dada Khondke handled this format to perfection and had his audiences in splits. But some squeamish people frowned on these films as they felt they would corrupt the young. Apparently the young did not mind it one bit, though the family elders were extra-protective of their progeny who were banned from seeing such films.

In the 80s, Ashok Saraf, Sachin Pilgaonkar, Laxmikant Berde and Mahesh Kothare ruled the roost. Their comedies sparkled on the silver screen. This was a different kind of entertainment, minus the double entendres of Dada Khondke and proved exceedingly popular as grandparents could watch these films even in the company of their grandchildren. It was soon after this that Marathi theatre raced ahead of Marathi cinema, with bold themes and great acting. While Marathi plays earned accolades and appreciation, Marathi cinema struggled for recognition. While Marathi plays earned accolades and appreciation, Marathi cinema struggled for recognition on the fringes.

There was a reason for this. Marathi films were up against the juggernaut of Hindi films, which were nurtured in the same environment. But Hindi films had larger budgets, bigger stars, more audience, greater reach. Marathi films with their niche audiences and therefore, low budgets faced tough times. The other regional language films in their respective states, like Bengali and South India, apparently had more clout and prospered. Further, successful Marathi film stars and technicians trotted over to the greener pastures of Hindi cinema, in this case, just another studio in Mumbai.

It was only after a series of conferences, airing of grievances, and serious brainstorming that things began to look better. State subsidies for Marathi films were hiked upward, the government stipulated that multiplexes must have substantial number of Marathi film screenings to qualify for subsidies, etc. Following these incentives things have become better. For example, Ankush Chaudhary’s Sade Made Teen, released in November 2007 made with a budget of Rs. One crore is reputed to have earned more than Rs. 3 crore. Today big corporates like Zee Talkies and ABCL are interested in investing in Marathi films and promoting this genre of regional film. Today, Marathi films have successfully become a Rs. 100 crore plus industry.

Marathi films have often represented India honorably abroad. Valu, directed by Umesh Kulkarni was the first Marathi movie to be screened at the International Film Festival of Rotterdam. It was the only Indian film to be given four screenings at the festival and also received the Hubert Bals Fund. Chitra Palekar’s Maati Maay, starring Nandita Das, won the Prix du Jury Graine Cinephage Award at the 30th Creteil’s International Women’s Film Festival in Paris, France.

Marathi films have come a long way from their fl eeting days of Dadasaheb Phalke’s silent era. With corporate houses and cricket icons entering the field and awards galore, it surely means a new era of success for Marathi cinema. The army of ants it seems, have made a comeback into the squirrel’s den, but reconciled to sharing small tit-bits with the Hindi monolith.

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The author is a noted writer for films and TV serials.
Raj Kapoor was undoubtedly the most complex man Indian cinema has produced—a man who fell in love with his leading ladies, one of whom not only inspired his studio but financed some of his early films. The eldest son of Prithviraj, Raj had such blue eyes and white skin that often, while walking home from school, he would be mistaken for a white boy and taken away to a restaurant and fed by whites, while his darker brother, Shammi, would sit outside the restaurant watching his older brother gulp down the food. Early in life he suffered the sort of tragedy that might well have scared him. Raj was about six when his four-year-old brother, Bindi, ate rat poison and died, while his father and Durga Khote. This was followed by a Debaki Bose film, After the Earthquake. Prithviraj was none too pleased when Raj, having failed his matriculation, and struggling with Latin, told his father that he would rather learn from the university of life, which meant going into films to produce, direct, and act.

Raj got a break in films with Kidar Sharma in 1947. It was Prithviraj who had persuaded his friend, Kidar, to take on his son. Sharma was filming Vish Kanya. But as Sharma recalls, before giving the clap for the shot, Raj would always comb his hair and pose in front of the camera and only then give the clap. That day, Sharma wanted to take a close-up as the sun was going down and had told Raj not to comb his hair for, if the sunset was missed, it would mean having to make a forty to fifty mile return journey to the same location the next day. But Raj just carried on, and this time for good measure, caught the hero’s beard in the clapperboard and it came off. Sharma lost his temper and slapped Raj Kapoor in front of the whole unit.

Afterwards, Sharma felt wretched over his loss of temper and spent a sleepless night worrying about it. Raj was, after all, his friend’s son and he was working for free. The next morning Sharma called Raj into his office. It is said that the marks of the slap could still be seen on Raj’s skin, although this may be retrospective imagination. What is undeniable, however, is that Sharma gave him a cheque for Rs. 5000 and signed him up as the hero of his next venture, Neel Kamal, which also introduced Madhubala to Hindi cinema.

When Raj Kapoor came calling on Nargis at her flat, quite unannounced (he had come over his loss of temper and spent a sleepless night worrying about it. Raj was, after all, his friend’s son and he was working for free. The next morning Sharma called Raj into his office. It is said that the marks of the slap could still be seen on Raj’s skin, although this may be retrospective imagination. What is undeniable, however, is that Sharma gave him a cheque for Rs. 5000 and signed him up as the hero of his next venture, Neel Kamal, which also introduced Madhubala to Hindi cinema.

When Raj Kapoor came calling on Nargis at her flat, quite unannounced (he had come to see Jaddanbai), he could be dismissed quite contemptuously by Nargis. “A fat blue-eyed pinkie has visited me,” she told her friend, Lettitia. Kapoor was, on the other hand, awestruck. He later recollected, “She had been faking pakodas when I rang the bell. And when she opened the door she accidently brushed her hand with basean (a yellowish paste) on it to cover her hair.” Raj Kapoor was so overwhelmed that he rushed back to the studio and asked for Nargis to be written into the script. He would never forget the scene. More than a quarter century later in 1973, with Nargis long out of Raj Kapoor’s life and a new sensation, Dimple Kapadia, being introduced in the teen hit Bobby, there was a scene in which Raj, played by Raj Kapoor’s son Rishi Kapoor, goes to Bobby’s house and she answers the door casually, her hair disheveled.

Raj Kapoor would later say, “Nargis was my inspiration, meri sopheri [my energy]. Women have always meant a lot in my life, but Nargis meant more than anybody else. I used to always tell her Krishna is my wife and she is the mother of my children. I want you to be the mother of my films.”

Raj Kapoor had admired many a Hollywood director. However, one man who towered over all for Kapoor, and who was his mentor for Awaara, and all his other films, was Charlie Chaplin. Dev Anand described how he and Kapoor went to see Chaplin in Montreux. As Oona played on
the piano, they talked for three hours, with Raj sitting on the ground in Chaplin’s backyard, almost literally at his feet. They had come by bus and, as they boarded the bus to leave, Anand says, “Raj kept looking back at the receding figure of Chaplin, which got smaller and smaller. Raj raised his hand and shouted, ‘Hey, little fellow, bye, bye. We love you.”

Kapoor, who had seen all the Chaplin movies would later say, “What inspired me in his work was the little man and when I began my career then I saw the little man all around in our country—the downtrodden, the man beaten for no fault of his own. What drew me to Chaplin’s films was Chaplin himself; the hobo, the bum, the common man. I was not drawn to him so much because of his get-up but because of the simplicity of the little man and his human emotions. How he enjoyed life, even though he was so poor. There was so much of Chaplin that affected me, the thought process behind all of his beliefs. I think his hobo was one of the greatest characters ever conceived.”

The very title Awara (Vagabond), tramp—had strong echoes of Chaplin, as did the character Raju, which Kapoor played in a very Indian version, with his trousers rolled up, wearing torn shoes, and a trilby, which he doffed at everyone who passed by. Raj moved his lips as Mukesh sang ‘Awara Hoon…’. And the whole nation sang with him.

It was the Marxist writer, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, who had written the Awara story. When Abbas proposed the idea to Raj Kapoor, Hollywood was in the middle of its McCarthy witch-hunt against communism. Awara was not only a hit in India but a movie that travelled the world—Turkey, Iran, the Arabic world, and Eastern Europe—creating box office records. Millions across the globe joined Indians in singing Mukesh’s song of the Awara. The Soviet Union is said to have made a massive distribution of Awara, dubbed into a number of its languages.

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Even Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s Cancer Ward had a reference to it, with the character Zoya described as being much taken by the urge of the popular song she began singing from a recent Indian film. A-va-rai-ya-ya! A-va-rai-ya-a-a!”

By the time Raj Kapoor was being feted in Moscow, he was on his way to making the film which Satyajit Ray considered his best, Shri 420. The title itself was a Raj Kapoor joke: This film also displayed his nationalism in songs like ‘Mera joota hai Japani.’ Kapoor had always used his family in his movies. In Awara, the judge was played by Prithviraj, the young Raj by his brother, Shashi, and the little boy shown in the tide sequence, was Rishi, his own boy. In Shri 420, his children played an even more significant part. While Raj Kapoor was becoming the first Bollywood superstar and reaching out to millions around the world, there was another Indian who would make an even greater impact on the world of cinema, what many would call the real cinema, as opposed to the tinsel town of Bollywood. That was Satyajit Ray, now these great men of Indian cinema fell out badly. As it happened, the quarrel took place outside India, when both were being feted for their movies. Benegal takes up the story.

The Bombay film industry always thought that Ray was not doing right by India. Raj Kapoor and he had a big spat once. Raj Kapoor’s film, Jangal Raho, was directed by Shambu Mitra, a famous Bengali theatre director who had the same stature as Ray in cinema. Shambu made the film and it won Raj Kapoor an award in the 1964 Karolvy Vary film festival, the same year that Aparajito won the Golden Lion in Venice. They met up at some meeting where both were being felicitated. So Ray said it was a great recognition for Bengali cinema. Raj Kapoor said, ‘Why Bengali, are you not an Indian? Why do you say you are a Bengali film-maker?’ Ray said, ‘I am a Bengali film-maker.’

Raj Kapoor said, ‘Why can’t you say you are an Indian film-maker? For god’s sake.’

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Fatima was born on 1 June 1929 in Calcutta. She was the daughter of Uttamchand Mohanchand who belonged to a wealthy Rawalpindi family, and the famous and talented thumri singer Jaddanbai, who came from Chilbilla, a small village in Uttar Pradesh. Mohan Babu was studying to be a doctor and was supposed to go to London when he became entranced by Jaddanbai. It is said he heard her singing, perhaps in Calcutta or Lucknow, and fell instantly in love. In order to marry her, he became a Muslim and took the name Abdul

Mohan was given two names when she was born. Her Muslim mother called her Fatima Abdul Rashid, while her Hindu father named her Tejeshwari Uttamchand Mohanchand. But the world knew her as Nargis. Fatima was born on 1 June 1929 in Calcutta. She was the daughter of Uttamchand Mohanchand who belonged to a wealthy Rawalpindi family, and the famous and talented thumri singer Jaddanbai, who came from Chilbilla, a small village in Uttar Pradesh. Mohan Babu was studying to be a doctor and was supposed to go to London when he became entranced by Jaddanbai. It is said he heard her singing, perhaps in Calcutta or Lucknow, and fell instantly in love. In order to marry her, he became a Muslim and took the name Abdul

Nargis
THE LEGENDARY LADY OF INDIAN CINEMA

Nargis in Mehboob’s Mother India – a classic that became a watershed in the history of Indian Cinema (facing page)
to be a producer, scriptwriter, music composer, actor and singer. In no time an entourage of relatives and aspiring film stars mushroomed around her and she became a huge film personality in Bombay during the 30s and 40s. Despite Jaddanbai’s wealth and fame, Fatima was brought up in the Islamic faith, growing up in a close-knit family atmosphere along with her two older brothers, Akhtar and Anwar Hussain. Young Fatima was known to all as Baby, though the name on the door to the family’s home read Fatima Abdul Rashid. In contrast to Dad’s troubled and difficult childhood, Mom was brought up in great comfort, surrounded by domestic help and chauffeur-driven cars. She was very close to her father who was a softhearted and happy-go-lucky man. On the other hand, her mother, Jaddanbai, was a strong-willed lady, a pivotal figure in the household. Though much of Mom’s strength was inherited from her mother, she was also in awe of her. After all, it was Jaddanbai who supported the family through her film career, whereas Mohan Babu, alas, wasn’t good at business, despite having tried his hand at many things. Yet he was happy to be behind the scenes and remained a pillar of support for his wife who had enormous skill and creative talent. Her achievements were many at a time when having a professional life was rare for a woman. Chateau Marine, the building on Marine Drive in which she had a spacious ground floor flat, was the hub of many cultural activities and she actively promoted film-makers and musicians.

Sometimes we feel distressed to think Mom didn’t really have much of a childhood. She may have lived in some luxury, but when she was only five she had to start working, albeit in her...
mother’s movies. From that early age, and renamed “Baby Rani” for the screen, she continued working for the next 25 years. Mom did manage to continue her education till she was 14, attending school at Queen Mary’s in Nanachowk, South Bombay, where, because her name was Fatima, she was affectionately called “Fatty.” A popular student, she excelled in drama and sports. Like her father, she once had dreams of becoming a doctor and shared with him a thirst for knowledge. She was a voracious reader, and absorbed herself in books and it was through reading that she learnt much about the world. But was the loss of childhood reflected in how she excelled in drama and sports.

Like her father, she once had dreams of becoming a doctor, a dream that completely changed Mom’s life both professionally as well as personally. On the professional front, the making of the film marked the end of her long association with the RK Films’ banner, on the personal front, she met the man she would soon marry. In Mother India, Mom plays Radha, the wife of Shyamu, a farmer, while Dad was cast as her rebellious son Birju. This was a role he got by chance, as initially he was to play the role of Radha’s eldest son, Ramu (eventually played by Rajendra Kumar). But as luck would have it, at the last minute, the role of Birju fell into Dad’s lap. Given the disparity in their status in the world of films – she was an established star and he, a newcomer – they did not strike up a friendship, though Mom was always known to interact with the whole unit effortlessly. She never had airs and was never stuck up. Dad always described Mom’s presence as regal, “You couldn’t say anything frivolous around her and whenever she entered the set everyone fell silent. It was her charisma. Yet with all this, she was unusually simple and unassuming.”

Extracted from Mr and Mrs Dutt: Memories of her parents, by Namrata Dutt Kumar & Priya Dutt, Roli Book, New Delhi, 2007.
On February 15, 1969, a gangly 27-year-old, uncommonly tall for an Indian, certainly for an Indian actor, arrived in Bombay determined to make it in movies and that very day he got his chance. That film flopped, but success could not be denied to him; it came four years later with a movie that was seen as a landmark new film, and soon the star was to revolutionize Bollywood. That young man was Amitabh Bachchan. It is tempting and quite feasible to write the history of Bollywood since 1973, when Bachchan had his first hit with *Zanjeer*, to an extent reflected the political style Mrs Gandhi so successfully adopted in 1969. This was of a person who was part of the system but yet against it. The film would set the pattern for many of Bachchan’s movies that followed, and gave the films of the 1970s the convenient shorthand title of the decade of the angry young man. Bachchan was the brooding loner, with very little time for song and dance, and no hesitation in taking the law into his own hands to ensure justice, which the system had failed to provide, was meted out to deserving criminals.

Bachchan’s skill, says film-maker Govind Nihalani, was that his acting summed up the mood of the nation as, in an earlier generation, Raj Kapoor’s movies had done.

Any kind of image attributed to an actor, like the Angry Young Man, concerns not only that actor, but also the environment that prevails in that period of history in which people are functioning. However, reflecting the times he was born in, he was very nearly given the name of *Inquilab* (revolution), having been born on October 11, 1942, just as India was in the midst of the Quit India movement. Amitabh’s father, Harivanshrai Bachchan, wanted to call his son *Inquilab*, but accepted poetess Sumitra Nandan Pant’s suggestion of *Amitabh*, which comes from *Amit* and *Abha*. The Bachchans were also well connected to the rising Bollywood establishment. His family was very friendly with the Kapoors. Harivanshrai would go to Prithviraj’s stage performances and then, at the backstage soirees, recite his poems which Prithviraj liked. But when in 1969, Amitabh came to Bombay looking for work he did not make his way to R.K. Studios, preferring to try and make it without “pull,” as the Indians put it.

Amitabh was brought up strictly, which may explain why he was shy and had problems with simple tasks like entering a restaurant on his own. This shyness was to plague him in his early days as a struggling film actor. Once, he had to meet actor Manoj Kumar for an assignment, and Kumar asked him to come to the Filmistan Studios where he was shooting at the time. Every day for a week, Bachchan went all the way to the studio, only to falter at the gates, unable to walk in, undone by shyness. Surprisingly, despite his superstar status, and after years in cinema and many live programmes, he still admits to being extremely shy and an introvert, a trait that is often mistaken for arrogance.

The family was not exactly rich. Bachchan senior earned Rs 500 a month and they neither had a fridge nor a ceiling fan and, in the intense northern Indian summer heat, his mother would flood the floor with water to cool the room and place ice slabs before the rickety table-fan to cope with the afternoon heat. The Bachchans recall that there was never too much money for entertainment, but the parents
clearly directed the children to what they felt was wholesome entertainment. Calcutta did provide him more opportunities for amateur dramatics. It was his brother, Ajitabh, who encouraged Bachchan’s film ambitions and took pictures of him outside Calcutta’s Victoria Memorial, sending them to the Filmfare-Madhuri talent contest. But nothing happened, and it seemed Amitabh’s life would be a continual series of failures; after all, the man who has probably one of the best voices in Bollywood failed tests as an announcer for All India Radio, both in English and Hindi. The problem always was he was a “Lumbu,” just too tall for an Indian actor to have any front line actress wanting to play opposite him. Off the screen he was still the well brought-up young public schoolboy. He recited his father’s verses all the time, a practice Madhu attributes to the quality of Bachchan’s voice. When, in Shatranj Ke Khiladi, Satyajit Ray wanted someone for the voice-over narration, he turned to Bachchan, and his baritone voice became a character in that film.

Bachchan deliberately decided to play the doctor who looks after the dying cancer patient, Anand, played by Khanna in the film called Anand. Bachchan’s motivation was if he played off the super star he would get some attention. Mehmood, whose brother Anwar Ali had become a great friend—it was through him that Bachchan became a paying guest at the sprawling Mehmood home and got to know Mehmood, acting in Bombay to Goa advised him, “Design your performance round Rajesh Khanna. Imagine him dying... it’s an enormous thing... the nation will cry their hearts out for him.” That, says Bachchan, is just what happened. “The very fact that I’d been teamed with Rajesh Khanna, the greatest idol, gave me a semblance of importance and respectability.”

The last scene showed Bachchan, the brooding, sensitive, doctor watching as Khanna, who had borne his suffering with a smile and shown great spirit in adversity, dies. Bachchan’s performance won him his first Filmfare Award for Best Supporting Actor but, while critics finally took notice, and were even complimentary, none of them thought he would be anything other than a strong character actor, at best a 1970s version of Balraj Sahni. But, at least this was a change from the relentless bad notices Bikram Singh, film critic of The Times of India, gave him who, as Bachchan says “always harped on my gaunt face and gawkiness.” This was Bachchan’s first real success, where he had shown undoubted acting ability.

The making of the film was beset with problems. Pran, who played the Pathan, a villain who befriends the policeman as he sees justice, was in many senses the central selling-point of the film, being the established star. But, on the first day of the shooting, he threatened to walk out when he discovered he had to sing a song. The song and the words had not been given to him in advance and, having been cast as the eternal villain of Bollywood for almost three decades, it was well-known in the industry that Pran Sahib, as he was called, did not do songs and dances, and all that running round trees. Mehra had to rush to Pran’s house to plead with him, saying without him the film would not work as Amitabh as a hero was not a bankable box office proposition.

But it was Deewar that marked his most successful period. Bachchan may have established the brand of angry young man with Zanjeer but it really took off in Deewar.
Hema Malini
THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DREAM GIRL

There are no doubts that in the history of Hindi cinema Hema Malini has had the longest reign as a number one star. No heroine before or after her has enjoyed her position or power and it’s to her credit that she has never missed her superstardom. On the contrary, despite several limitations and hurdles she has pushed herself to the optimum level to explore varied mediums like television, direction and at the moment Parliament.

The media projects her as a traditional woman but her choices in life prove that she is more liberal than most of the slogan-shouting feminists we know about. Her unconventional marriage could not have occurred without her conviction to walk the path untrodden. And the fact that she has been able to sustain this deviant relationship tells a lot about her courage and endurance.

There is a side to Hema’s personality that is very gregarious and affectionate which she takes great care to not reveal to outsiders. I have seen glimpses of her effervescence at my shootins. Her closest companion those days was her aunt (her mother’s youngest sister) popularly addressed as Shanta Aunty by Hema’s colleagues. I called her Captain Aunty because she always wore the sun cap on the sets when they were together... She was the only one I think with whom Hema had her defences completely down.

What is intriguing about Hema is that her reserves build up just as suddenly. Strangers were always uncomfortable about being in her presence and she did not make any effort to put them at ease. She once confessed to me that she tried not to be so restrained but when in public, her body language altered by reflex action. I remember her expression when she said so. At that moment she had looked and felt completely helpless.

With her classic Indian features and fairly traditional grooming, one associates her with a certain conservative quality. It is only when you interact with her that you discover that she is not only progressive but also has a good sense of humour. There is a natural grace to her that makes her travel through fragile, complex experiences with restraint and poise. Her life is about someone who has transformed every obstacle into an opportunity.

Hema cannot recall a defining moment, but she gradually transformed every obstacle into an opportunity. She was just woken from sleep, she could perform them with her eyes closed. By then, slightly defiant, Hema insisted that these dances that even if she could perform them with her eyes closed. By then, slightly defiant, Hema insisted that she would dance only behind closed doors. ‘Once inside my room, I would loudly sing the song and thump my feet on the floor, faking the impression that I was dancing, when in fact I was only doing the footwork without the accompanying hand movements.

Hema was so well versed in these dances that even if she was just woken from sleep, she could perform them with her eyes closed.

She studied at the Madras Higher Secondary School along with her older siblings but had little interaction with her classmates. If she was not at school, then she was engrossed in her homework. Moreover, when she finished her lessons, she had to go for her dance class. Sometimes she missed having friends but because she was extremely shy, she did not know how to cultivate them. ‘When I saw other children playing in the neighbourhood I wondered what they laughed about. I could not fathom their joys and I am sure they found me equally baffling. There were times when I wanted to be like them and play mischief, something that provoked my mother.’

Today as a Member of Parliament who frequently visits the capital, Hema often finds herself searching for that little girl she left behind in the familiar lanes of their old abode. It’s been over four decades now but Hema can still recall her sense of wonderment and isolation. ‘I was so withdrawn, almost living in my fantasy as a child. Our house had a beautiful painting sketched by Amma – of baby Krishna playing in Vrindavan. We still have that painting in our home in Chennai. This painting for some strange reason always gave me great solace.

I wondered what they laughed at... What is intriguing about Hema is that her reserves build up just as suddenly. Strangers were always uncomfortable about being in her presence and she did not make any effort to put them at ease. She once confessed to me that she tried not to be so restrained but when in public, her body language altered by reflex action. I remember her expression when she said so. At that moment she had looked and felt completely helpless.

Hema cannot recall a defining moment, but she gradually transformed every obstacle into an opportunity. She was just woken from sleep, she could perform them with her eyes closed. By then, slightly defiant, Hema insisted that she would dance only behind closed doors. ‘Once inside my room, I would loudly sing the song and thump my feet on the floor, faking the impression that I was dancing, when in fact I was only doing the footwork without the accompanying hand movements.

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Every time I was confused or frightened, I imagined myself being Krishna’s playmate in Vrindavan... It was a restless phase. There was no reason to, but I felt anxious... Time has abated all those fears. Today, when I’m more reassured, I want to hold the little girl’s hand and protect her. I want to tell her, ‘Don’t be afraid... you had to endure all you did, because I had to emerge from you…’
As luck would have it, all the top banners signed up Hema for their films. She did Madan Mohla’s *Sharafat* and Vijay Anand’s *Johnny Mera Naam*, both big hits. About *Johnny Mera Naam*, she says, it was the right film at the right time with the right cast. Dev Anand and she starred in eight films together after *Johnny Mera Naam* released in 1970. *Tere Mere Sapne* in 1971, *Shareef Badmash*, *Chupa Rustam* and *Joshila* in 1973, *Amir Garib* in 1974, *Jaunmohri* in 1976, *Sachche Ka Bolo Bala* in 1989 and decades later *Censor* in 2001, but somehow none could match the magic of *Johnny Mera Naam*. *Johnny Mera Naam’s* memorable song, ‘O mere raja…’ was shot in a sky trolley at Baigir situated 100 kms south-east of Patna. The actors had to travel by the ropeway, the only mode of transport to reach the location, the Buddhist temple situated on the other side of the mountain. On the way, director Vijay Anand spontaneously decided to shoot a few lines on the ropeway too. For a compact frame, he made Hema sit on Dev Anand’s lap. The distance to the destination was only a few minutes, but a prankster on location, switched off the current. The trolley came to a halt and the pair was stranded in mid-air. Hema, who has an inherent fear of heights, was petrified. To distract her, Dev Anand entertained his leading lady with jokes. Soon the culprit was caught, and the trolley restarted. Says Hema, ‘Even today, when I see the film, the fear of that scene returns… It’s funny how memories associated with movies come rushing when you see an old clipping or a photograph.’

She was the reigning queen of Hindi cinema and almost all the leading heroes of that time, Dharmendra, Jeetendra, Sanjeev Kumar to name a few, held a torch for the dazzling beauty. Sometimes there were innocent episodes on the sets when the co-star could not contain his attraction and openly flirted with her. Sometimes confessions were subtler, expressed via scribbled notes and eye contact. At times there were messages sent through Hema’s personal staff, make-up man and hairdresser and on a couple of occasions there were serious proposals carried over by family members or colleagues.

Hema believes that there is no dearth of stimulation in an artiste’s life but the euphoria comes with a penalty. The excitement brings along with it innumerable and unforeseen pressures. And nobody can help you ride out this turbulence. Still, the enchantment is worth it. Opportunity knocks on your door once and your fortune is in recognizing those chances.

Extracted from *Hema Malini* by Bhawana Somaaya, Lotus Roli, New Delhi, 2007.
If it’s true that every age gets the hero it deserves, then Shah Rukh Khan is the hero of the globalized Information Age, with an image that cuts across international boundaries to reach the Indian diaspora and fans all over the world. The term ‘superstar’ was coined in Bollywood, for Rajesh Khanna. Amitabh Bachchan inherited the title, earning labels such as Big B, Angry Young Man and Supremo and then Shah Rukh Khan took over the crown, entering the Bollywood hall of fame, with sobriquets of his own, such as King Khan, Badshah (Emperor) Khan and King of Bollywood.

Most of Shah Rukh Khan’s films are moneyspinners even before they are made, their success a foregone conclusion because he is the star playing the leading role, inviting almost maniacal adulation from fans. With about sixteen years in cinema to his credit, he is already a legend. An icon as king-sized as Shah Rukh Khan would not be able to walk down the street in any country where there is a Bollywood-crazy population, without being mobbed.

Beginning his acting career away from films, he is the only theatre and television star who went on to become a movie superstar. He entered the film industry when the sons of earlier stars were ruling Bollywood, making it next to impossible for an outsider to get a toe into the Bollywood door. Today, he is the favourite of the industry’s top banners and many producers say that they cannot imagine making a film without him. It was a different story when he started his career in films as an ordinary-looking, not-too-tall, mop-haired young man – nobody could have predicted that he would be one of India’s biggest and highest paid superstars. Or maybe, it was written in the stars...

Shah Rukh Khan was born on 2 November 1965 at the Talwar Nursing Home in New Delhi. He was born with the umbilical cord entangled around his neck. The nurse attending to his mother then remarked that this was a sign indicating that the child was blessed by Lord Hanuman (the Hindu god worshipped in the form of a monkey) and would be very lucky – prophetic words as it turned out, of course. Home for the child Shah Rukh was at Rajinder Nagar, a colony in New Delhi, where he and his elder sister Shahnaz were brought up by their father Meer Taj Mohammad, a lawyer and businessman, and mother Latif Fatima, a magistrate and social worker. Shah Rukh has described his father in interviews as a 6.2 feet tall, good-looking man, with grey eyes and brown hair. Very well-read and well educated, with Master of Arts and law degrees, he was fluent in six languages. He was also, in his time, the youngest freedom fighter against the British colonialists.

The young Shah Rukh was sent to study at St. Columba’s High School, New Delhi, an institution run by Irish priests who believed in discipline and a high standard of education, which was exactly what Shah Rukh’s parents wanted for their children. An incident that Shah Rukh has related in several television and print interviews illustrates his solid middle-class upbringing. When he was four years old, he threw a rock at a boy in his colony, who began to bleed profusely. Later that night, the boy’s drunken father came to Shah Rukh’s home with a knife, threatening to kill the four-year-old, but Shah Rukh’s father did not turn a hair. Instead he sent Shah Rukh out to talk to the raging man, and the child apologized to him, managing to calm him down.

As a child, Shah Rukh was bright, naughty and fond of sports. He was weak in Hindi, either scoring very low marks or failing in the subject. Instead of scolding him, his mother told him that if he got full marks in Hindi, she would take him to see a Hindi film in a cinema hall, something he had never experienced. The bait was attractive enough for him to work hard at his Hindi and get full marks. His reward, his first visit to the cinema, must have triggered off the acting impulse in the child, because Shah Rukh Khan considers this experience a turning point in his life.

In school, he was more interested in sports, such as cricket, hockey, football and athletics, than in studies and hoped to become a sportsman capable of representing his country in international competition, but the boy was not to be thwarted. He entered the film industry when the sons of earlier stars were ruling Bollywood, making it next to impossible for an outsider to get a toe into the Bollywood door. Today, he is the favourite of the industry’s top banners and many producers say that they cannot imagine making a film without him. It was a different story when he started his career in films as an ordinary-looking, not-too-tall, mop-haired young man – nobody could have predicted that he would be one of India’s biggest and highest paid superstars. Or maybe, it was written in the stars...

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without bothering about whether his image as a married man would affect his nascent career as a film actor. Shah Rukh’s own mother died in 1991, very shortly before he got married. He has often said that his one regret in life is that his parents were not alive to see his wedding or success. In November 1997, a son, Aryan, was born and three years later, in May 2000, daughter Suhana was born, completing the family. The star is as caring a father as he is a husband, and all the free time he has is spent with his family. In a relatively short career span, Shah Rukh has won every award possible (except the National Award), and was awarded a Padma Shri in 2005, by the Government of India, at the same time winning the MTV Youth Idol award, and more recently, the MTV Style Icon Award. The actor who was considered not-too-handsome when he came into the industry, is now considered sexy and good-looking. His face has acquired more character, his personality more charisma as he has grown older, entering the dreaded forties, and yet there is an ageless boyish quality about him.

About Shah Rukh Khan’s youthful look, Yash Chopra adds in an avuncular manner, “He doesn’t do anything right, he smokes too much, he hardly sleeps, he eats anything, mostly chicken, still he doesn’t seem to age.”

Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (The Braveheart Will Take the Bride) was a blockbuster, not just in India (where it swept up the major film awards) but also in the overseas circuit. Nostalgic-for-home NRIs were enchanted by the film – the portrayal of Indian customs, rituals and idyllic rural life, the values of respect for elders and fidelity in love as followed by Indians, were irresistible – and since then, all Shah Rukh Khan films have done wonderfully well overseas, where he has a huge fan base. The phenomenon has been captured in an interesting documentary, The Outer World of Shah Rukh Khan, by British-Indian filmmaker, journalist and writer Nasreen Munni Kabir, who followed Shah Rukh and his star entourage on his Temptations World Tour in 2004.

Shah Rukh would be walking down the street or into a hotel lobby like a normal tourist, when suddenly an Indian would spot him, do a double take, and in no time at all a group of fans would be tailing him. This fan worship prompted a Guardian writer to comment that he makes “Beatlemania look like a librarian’s convention.” And a security guard in Shah Rukh’s entourage on this tour adds: “Even Brad Pitt would not get this kind of public adulation.”

Karan Johar is sure that very soon Shah Rukh will begin directing films too. “He is buzzing with ideas all the time.” As Shah Rukh Khan enters a new phase of his career, is everyone ready for surprises...?
The eminent producer-director firmly believed that films were not merely about jugglery with money. A film, he believed, addressed itself to the society and it was the duty of the film makers to make healthy and wholesome films with a good story and social message. The script, to him, was the yardstick for a successful film. Substance was the hallmark. Under no circumstances, did he compromise with the story. This was largely because he himself had started his career as a writer. Each movie broke some new ground whether it was adultery in Gumraah, the politics of rape in Insaf Ka Tarazu, the position of women in the context of Muslim Personal Law in Nikaah, rehabilitation of prostitutes in Sadhana, widow remarriage in Ek hi Raasta or the hand of fate in Waqt. Each film addressed some issue, its failouts and solutions.

Chopra reached the pinnacle of his professional life with the Dilip Kumar-Vyjayantimala starrer Naya Daur (1957). The film exhibited the Nehruvian look to a newly independent country and the responsibility of its people towards nation-building. Appreciating his directorial skills in the film, Pandit Nehru wrote a letter to him: “Last evening I saw your picture Naya Daur. Prince Philip of England who is in India wanted to see a good picture on a village in India. Somebody suggested the name of your picture. I was very tired and did not like to sit for three hours but I thought I could be with Prince Philip for a few minutes and could come back after the picture got going. But the picture was so compelling that I sat through the whole film and enjoyed it thoroughly. The photography was excellent and the direction superb. The atmosphere of the village was really very nice.”

At a time when interspersing 10 to 12 songs with the script was mandatory, he made the songless Kanoon in 1960. This did not mean that Chopra was averse to songs and music. In fact, his films carried a number of the finest songs in Hindi films with poets like Sahir
Ludhiani and Yogesh coming out with some of their best poetic creations. Songs like Saathi Haath Badhana (Naya Daur), Chalo ek baar phir se (Gumraah), Aurat ne janam diya mardon ko (Sadhana) and Dil ke armaan aasooyon me beh gaye (Nikaah) are timeless. One can see young girls and boys asking for the music CDs of the films in the market even today.

An association with his younger brother, Yash Chopra, yielded several socially viable and financial top grossers like Dhoool Ka Phool (1959), Waqt (1965) and the first colour multi-starrer production, Aadmi Aur Insaan (1969) and Ittefaq (1969). The 70s saw BRs personal and professional life facing rough weather. After almost two decades, Yash Chopra branched out and went on to make films independently. This left BR shattered. He was quoted saying, “I was on sleeping pills for six months because it destroyed my dreams of a joint family.” Dastaan (1972) and Karm (1977) failed at the box office. However with rare determination, he embarked on his next directorial venture, the evergreen comedy film starring Sanjeev Kumar-Vidya Sinha, Pati Patni aur Woh. This superhit brought the smile back on his face.

Chopra did not restrict his yearning only to the stories, he chose to venture into restricted grounds. He played a major box office gamble when he gave Zeenat Aman, who was typecast as a glamdoll till then, the role of a lifetime in Insaaf Ka Tarazu where she played a rape victim who guns down the offender. This film also saw the rise of Raj Babbar and Deepak Parashar in tinsel town. The film became a jubilee hit winning a number of awards. B.R. Chopra’s honesty of intention was palpable in everything he did with total commitment to the script.

The late Eighties saw the arrival of one of the most popular TV serials, Mahabharat, by him which spearheaded a string of religious serials on the small screen. He opted for Dr. Rahi Masoom Raza to pen the dialogues for the serial. Many wondered whether it was a good idea. But, Dr. Raza’s dialogues turned out to be the highlight of the serial. Mahabharat became the first Indian TV serial to enter the Guinness Book of Records for creating a world record for having been seen by the highest number of viewers. The serial won many more awards and became a hallmark in the history of the small screen. The nanogenarian and recipient of the 1998 Dada Saheb Phalke award had not lost his Midas touch. Few know that the superhit family drama Baghbhan that he produced was his brainchild.

Baldev Raj Chopra remained true to his art and life till the end. He passed away at the age of 94 in November 2008 after a prolonged illness leaving behind B.R. Films as one of the most successful production companies to have stood the test of time equally known for its TV serials as well as for motion pictures.

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The author is a noted TV programme maker and former Assistant to the late B.R. Chopra.
Shyam Benegal
PROGENITOR NEW WAVE CINEMA

Shyam Benegal is considered the father of parallel, or Indian new wave cinema in India. Indeed, the history of this politically conscious film movement with realist premises more or less coincides with Benegal’s career span close to 30 years commencing in 1974.

Benegal’s films offer an ‘alternative’ history of India as well as an example of film-making practice from the margins. This is a history that challenges assumptions about national progress and provokes considerations of the consequences of this development. Now 55 years after Independence, while a younger generation celebrates consumer culture, Benegal still draws attention to realities of Indian life that are airbrushed out of the rosy images conjured up by Bollywood for the benefit of a global market. And Benegal has been doing this right from his first film. Ankur (1974) made use of the background of peasant revolt in Southeast India, while his latest project about the controversial leader Subhas Chandra Bose looks at the nationalist movement and the problems of leadership in the freedom fight.

Constantly drawing upon voices from the margins, Benegal has discovered some of the best acting talents in Indian films, a veritable gallery of dramatic actors whose names have become synonymous with parallel cinema – Shabana Azmi, Smita Patil, Naseeruddin Shah, Anant Nag, Om Puri and others. These performers appear and reappear as in a repertory company, exhibiting unique strengths and talents from film to film and in the works of other parallel cinema directors. One of his strongest points is his ability to gather people and keep them in a repertory of films, while maintaining a democratic spirit in the unit. Benegal’s production schedules usually last between four and six weeks, during which time he prefers to take his entire unit on location to interact with local people and improvise with the script.

When he first moved to Bombay in 1963, Benegal turned down the offer to assist his cousin Guru Dutt in his productions. He was convinced that those were not the films he wanted to make: ‘People make films according to individual sensibilities. The existing formal style was not suitable – I had no wish to work on design-made films. But eventually all work is part of the same river.’

His style of film-making places him in the parallel cinema genre, although Benegal himself is impatient with arbitrary categorizing of cinema. Although he began with independent producers, Benegal has also had his work produced by cooperatives and state ministries. He has been described as a maker of development films in the Nehruvian vision, but the surprising variety of his work belies this statement. His increasing restlessness with narrative styles has taken his oeuvre beyond realistic linear drama, and his familiarity with literature has often led to delightful experiments in narrative style and craftsmanship such as Kondurlu Amugram (1977) and Suraj Ka Satavan Ghoda (1992).

In choosing to tell stories of the oppressed, Benegal represents the ‘subaltern subject’ in cinema, a figure of importance in the revival of revisionist history and cultural studies – and in whom is embodied the idea of looking at history from below. In October 1988, during the Guardian lecture at the National Film Theatre in London, Benegal said:

“These themes of economic disparity, caste system – after a while I saw them no longer in a linear way, but in a much more complex manner. I asked myself, I just slogging – surely there is a deeper reality. These themes have metamorphosed into something else, not only do I look at the ‘other’, but somewhere I start looking at myself and my own relationship to my environment.”

Benegal is also both famed and remarkable as a male director who places women at the centre of so many of his films. He has unceasingly raised questions about gender exploitation in a patriarchal society. His work radically challenges middle-class morality and pre-conceived notions of womanhood as ideal wife and mother, sometimes drawing censorious responses as he did with Ankur and Bhumika (1977). Mainstream industry wallahs condemned his subjects as un-Indian, whereas feminists alleged that his female characters were portrayed too much as victims. Yet the very credibility of his characters – so often doubly marginalized by caste and gender – invests them with deep dignity. In the Guardian lecture at London’s
Shyam Benegal has had a prolific career, having made about 900 films. Over 28 years, there have been 20 features and several television series, including the epic *Discovery of India*. The features are perhaps surprising in their variety, from the politically inflected early films to brilliant narrative experiments. Benegal’s later work has not always matched the cinematic vision of the earlier works that led the *International Film Guide* to cite him as one of the five best directors in the year 1979. In the 1970s, Benegal was being feted internationally for his work, but by the mid-1980s he was accused of being too pragmatic, making films with careless speed.

Where does Benegal stand in relation to his predecessors? In the 1950s and 1960s, the four big directors in Bombay films were Mehboob, Raj Kapoor, Bimal Roy and Guru Dutt. Benegal’s oeuvre comes closest in some respects to the concerns of Bimal Roy, with their mutual interests in class and gender themes and the linking of film and literature. More frequently, Benegal has been considered a successor to Satyajit Ray. Ray’s *Pather Panchali* (1955) was one of the formative influences on Benegal’s ideas about cinema. And there is much to link the two afterwards. This tradition itself can also be considered a development of the aesthetic principles of the Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA) formed in 1943 by progressive writers, playwrights and film people.

He is probably the only film-maker in India who has consistently made films with stories outside the region in which he lives. While building on the tradition of those earlier filmmakers, he has also extended their concerns more deeply and widely throughout the great variety of regional and national subcultures, dialects and traditions.

Benegal’s popularity in the West is second only to Ray’s. Beginning with the stirring impact of *Ankur* in the Berlin Film Festival and its European distribution, Benegal’s films travelled widely to international festivals and markets. The eloquent director became one of the best cultural ambassadors of India worldwide.

Looming over Benegal’s shoulder throughout his career has been the unavoidable presence of the powerful Indian commercial film industry, against which his practice could be said to have defined itself. As *Ankur* went into production in 1973, the hugely successful teen romance *Bobby*, directed by Raj Kapoor, appeared on screens across the country. At the same time, Prakash Mehra’s *Zanjeer* (Chains) marked the introduction of Amitabh Bachchan as the angry young man. Nasir Hussain’s *Yaadon Ki Baraat* (1973), a vendetta/lost-and-found story, was hugely successful in 1974 when *Ankur* was released. Both teen romance and the vendetta films provide stark contrasts to Benegal’s work. There were other contrasts, too. The family values represented by Yash Chopra’s *Kabhi Kabhi* (1976), with its romance, weddings, song and dance, seem a world away from Benegal’s searing analysis of the tragic consequences of superstition and sexual repression in *Kondana/ Aniruddham* (1977).

Benegal himself is openly critical about films being reduced to mere entertainment and their complete lack of context. There is still a place for other stories and other ways of telling them. Benegal remains the leading exemplar of the countermovement that survived into the 1990s and beyond, with his portrayals of real people and concerns, as opposed to the escapist fantasy world offered in Bollywood films. Although new cinema has been pronounced dead by some, Benegal continues to make films reflecting his own sensibility. Benegal himself considers this decline in parallel cinema and comments:

“Every movement has a certain peaking state, then it plateaus and starts to erode. Because these are really vanguard motions, directional movements, after which the job is done in many ways. If it is worth it, then it gets absorbed into the mainstream. See for instance today’s film-makers like Rathnam, Priyadarshan and Varma – their films offer accessible entertainment and connect to life. They would not have been possible without the influence of our kind of realism.”

*Extracted from Shyam Benegal by Sangaya Dutta, Lotus-Roli, New Delhi 2002.*
Gulzar

THE VERSATILE MAN AND HIS WORLD

Gulzar’s significance as a filmmaker stems from the singularity of his vision. In a movie industry that is propelled largely by the desire for making a box office killing, he dares to make films for the love of making them. He tells stories because he has tangible insights to share with his audience. He writes lyrics because he is a poet forever keen to give free rein to his imagination. Gulzar is also one of the Mumbai film industry’s last surviving links with the golden era of Hindi cinema. He carries within his artistic persona the seeds that were sown by mentor Bimal Roy.

A voracious reader, he would devour any literary material that he could lay his hands on. For, if anything, he wanted to be a writer. The Partition of India in 1947 unleashed forces that turned the family’s rented accommodation in old Delhi’s Sabzi Mandi area into a veritable refugee camp. During those cataclysmic years, Gulzar lived in this house with his stepmother, having relocated from a small, idyllic west Punjab village where he had spent his early childhood. The patriarch of the Sikh family, Gulzar’s businessman father, Sardar Makhan Singh Kalra, who had the foresight to migrate from the village of Dina in Jhelum district before the Partition ripped Punjab apart, had to ensure that all his near and dear ones got a fair chance to begin life afresh.

Sardar Makhan Singh’s own immediate family was large enough by itself. He had nine children – three from his first wife, one (Gulzar) from his second wife (who passed away when her son was only an infant) and five from his third and current marriage. The influx of duress-driven relatives only added to the strain.

In mid-1949, another quirk of fate impacted Gulzar’s life. The budding poet, having just completed his matriculation from Delhi United Christian School, was pulled out of St Stephen’s College in the middle of his first term there and sent off by his father to the bustling western Indian metropolis so that he could find a long-term toehold there for himself.

Gulzar’s elder brother, still a bachelor, had a single room accommodation in Parel, besides a permanent room in the downtown West End Hotel. Gulzar moved into the room in Krishna Nivas, Parel, central Bombay. He had already begun to contribute poems to Urdu magazines like Beesi Sadi and Shama.

Jasmer Singh, like any concerned elder brother, probably had the interests of his younger sibling at heart, but his outlook on life was completely at variance with Gulzar’s. The asprising poet was told in no uncertain terms that a formal education and a degree in Chartered Accountancy was to be his principal pursuit in Bombay.

There were times when Jasmer Singh could not contain his rage. What particularly rankled the young poet was that these angry admonishments would often be delivered in the presence of other family members and even outsiders. Words like nikamma (good for nothing) and anpadh (illiterate) were constantly hurled at him both by his father and his brother.

When his patience ran out on one particularly bitter occasion, Gulzar snapped back at his
Gulzar’s reply was a prompt and unequivocal no. His intrinsic aversion to a career in films was still intact.

So the Bandini stalemata continued. A desperate Debu sent word to Shailendra himself, seeking his intervention. Shailendra knew Gulzar because of their common association with the Bombay Youth Choir. When the established lyricist heard that Gulzar’s reluctance sprang from the official songwriters, he indignantly confronted the latter: “What do you think you are? Do you think everybody who works in fi lms is a fool?” The words stung Gulzar to the quick. He relented and agreed to write the song.

The bewitchingly lilting Mora gora ang lat le/Mahe shiyam rang dai de was born after five days of concerted effort. When the song was ready, Gulzar recited it to S.D. Burman. The latter was hugely pleased with the young poet’s effort. Having secured the music composer’s approval, Gulzar told him that he would now show the song to Bimal Roy.

Sachinda asked Gulzar: “Tumhe jaanta aata hai (Can you sing)?” “No,” Gulzar replied, “I cannot.” So Sachinda forbade Gulzar to take the song to Bimal Roy. “I will sing it to him myself,” was his diktat. It was during these sittings that Gulzar fi rst met S.D. Burman’s son, Pancham – Rahul Dev Burman to the world – who was to become a lifelong friend and professional associate. As luck would have it, Burman patched up with Shailendra after Mora gora ang lat le was recorded and Gulzar was in grave danger of being left out in the cold. But Roy had a highly acute sense of fairplay. He was convinced that it would be unethical to cut Gulzar out of the scene completely after he had bailed out the Bandini unit at such short notice.

In the mid-80s when Amitabh Bachchan’s larger-than-life presence had faded out of the Hindi screen in a huff, Bollywood was left gasping for a new icon, a fresh formula to replace the ‘Angry Young Man saga’ he had sustained for more than a decade. The me-too incarnations epitomised by the likes of Mithun Chakraborty and Anil Kapoor could not really recreate the magic at the box office.

The situation called for a drastic reorientation. That’s when a steady progression of newcomers – actors, directors and technicians – most of them in their twenties, saw their opportunity and began taking over every aspect of filmmaking in Bollywood. The enterprising new breed represented more than just a generational change. They represented a paradigm shift in Bollywood. They cleverly and successfully rewrote the conventional script of the Hindi cinema to give it a new dimension. The ‘new cinema’ of the new order simultaneously pleased the critics and the majority audiences without outraging conventional cinematic values. In this new order, stars weren’t seen as box office gods. Instead, well-written scripts and imaginative presentation formed the bedrock of success.

The first to break the mould was a US-educated computer wizard, Mansoor Khan. Though he hailed from a “filmy” family, Mansoor completely broke away from his father’s established set-up and formed his own team of talented youngsters. The result was the film, Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak (QSQT), inspired by Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, which took the box-office by storm in 1988, breaking the stranglehold of the action-vendetta syndrome which had held sway in the Amitabh Bachchan era.

The success of QSQT emboldened more young filmmakers to go against the tide. The new order worked on the belief that audiences no longer entered cinema halls just to drool over their idols. They were looking for exciting diversions. Mansoor was followed by Sooraj Barjatya. Like Mansoor, he chose to go against the tide of action-based films to make a teenage love story, Maine Pyar Kiya in 1989. With an unknown heroine, Bhagyshree, and a reluctant hero, Salman Khan, the director in his early 20s turned an innocuous love story into a blockbuster. He followed it up with Hum Aapke Hai Koun, which went on to rewrite box office history, surpassing even the unprecedented collections of the 70s blockbuster Sholay.

A year later, Aditya Chopra, came up with another simple, youthful film without sex and violence, to rewrite box office records! Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayege made intercontinental romance a fad and its success prompted even Aditya’s father veteran filmmaker Yash Chopra to change tracks in his new film Dil To Pagal Hai, which introduced jazz ballet and Shiamak Davar to Hindi cinema. Even Subhash Ghai, a die-hard adherent to the conventional form and formula, was shaken into making a Pardes and Taal.

From the same Yash Chopra School, emerged another wonder kid, Karan Johar in 1998. His Kuch Kuch Hota Hai brought to life a fantasy world inhabited by beautiful people who slugged Pepsi.

**Director’s Cut**

**THE ONES THAT BROKE THE MOULD…**

**RAUF AHMED**
from cans, dressed like hip MTV veejays and married their campus sweethearts without their parents talking caste or class. Johar not only made films but also introduced other talented youngsters like Nikhil Advani and Tarun Mansukhani. Today, Johar is among the most influential filmmakers in Bollywood.

The Bollywood of the late nineties also saw re-emergence of two exceptionally talented men: Ram Gopal Varma and Vidhu Vinod Chopra. Ram Gopal Varma redefined the concept of the Bollywood heroine with his Rangeela, and then redefined the concept of film making in Bollywood with his “factory approach” to creative work. On the other hand, Vidhu Vinod Chopra, was a film studies graduate whose talent was never in doubt. His An Encounter with Faces was the first ever Indian film to be nominated for an Oscar in the short non-fiction film category. Though not always so lucky at the box office, Chopra’s films have stood out for their individuality and cinematic values, like the Amitabh Bachchan starer, Ekla Chalee (which was India’s official entry to the Oscars in 2006) and the two Munnabhai adventures which he produced. Only a filmmaker of his predilections would have backed the last two films directed by one of his gifted assistants, Rajkumar Hirani. He blooded another of his assistants, Pradeep Sarkar, as a full-fledged director with the sensitive Parinevita.

The Bollywood of the millennium has given us stars like Farhan Akhtar. His debut film Dil Chahta Hai (2002) set Akhtar apart as the most innovative of the emerging young directors. He surprised everyone by switching to acting in Rock On! and even singing in it. He came up with another impressive performance in Zoya Akhtar’s Luck By Chance.

Today, in the afterglow of Slumdog Millionaire, there is a lot of attention on directorial talent in Bollywood. As the world’s largest film industry matures into international production values, the onus will be on the brood of directors to take Indian films to global heights.

The author has served as Editor of several film magazines.
The 1940s witnessed amalgamation of folk music with Hindi film music. Master Ghulam Haider introduced folk music and gave a break to Shamshad Begum in Khajana (1942), Noorjahan in Khandan (1942), and Lata Mangeshkar in Mazboor (1948). Pandit Amar Nath composed memorable music for film Dasi. Khemchand Prakash's music in Bhoot sees the entire nation and its song Amaan wala became the hallmark of Lata Mangeshkar's singing. He also introduced Kishore Kumar in Zidd with a song Marne Koo Duwan Koonu Maanu. The other hit song of this film, ‘Chanda Ja Re Ja Re’ was sung by Lata. Naushad Ali made his debut in Prem Nagar in 1940, but it was his use of folk music in Ratan (1944) that created waves. Its songs, especially ‘Ankhiya Milake’ sung by Zohrabai Ambalewali, was a great hit and could be heard in every household. Naushad gave memorable music in Anmol Ghadi, Shahjahan (1946), Mela (1948) and Dillagi (1949). But his best was yet to come. Baiju Bawra (1952) bagged him the first Filmfare Award. Naushad will always be remembered for his music in Shabab (1955) and Mughal-e-Azam (1960).

Naushad introduced Mohammad Rafi, Suraiya, Shyam Kumar and Uma Devi (Tuntun) to film music. He worked with K.L. Saigal in only one movie - ‘Shabnam’ – but its songs Jahan Hi Toot Gaya, Ghama Diiy Mustaqal and Roobi Roobi Dil Mein have made an ever-lasting impression.

The late 1940s witnessed the emergence of S.D. Burman and Shankar-Jaikishan. With them came a new batch of lyricists. Majrooh Sultanpuri, Sahir Ludhianvi, Rajinder Krishna, Hasrat Jaipuri and Shailendra belonged to this crop of lyricists.

The credit of introducing Western music goes to C. Ramachandra.

Shankar Jaikishan made their debut with Raj Kapoor’s Barsaat and thus began a long journey with the RK banner that threw up hit after hit up to Mera Naam Joker. The duo composed lovable music for Dilip Kumar’s Daag (Ae Mere Dil Kahin Aur Chal) sung by Talat Mahmood in 1952.

Ghazal was a less popular genre in film music till Madan Mohan came on the scene. His compositions in Adalat (1958) “Unko yeh shikayat hai ki, Teri Duniya Mein Dil Lagta Nahi” sung by Lata and in Deeb kahira roya (1957) “Humse aya na gaya” sung by Talat Mehmood became memorable ghazals. He composed classics like “Mai ree kaise kahoo, Hum hai mata-e-koocha o bazaar ki tarah and Baiyan na dharo” all sung by Lata Mangeshkar.

Khayyam staged a comeback with Yash Chopra’s Kabhi Kabhi and received his crowning glory with Umrao Jaan and Razia Sultan in 1980s.

In the 1950s, Roshan composed hits for Kidar Sharma’s Banware Nain. In this film he used folk music in the song Sun Beti Balam Sach Bol Re Ina Kya Hoga. His composition Mujhe Sach Sach Bata Do (Mukesh and Geeta), “Teri Duniya Mein Dil Lagta Nahi” (Mukesh) were written by Kedar Sharma himself and still flash in the memories of music lovers.

If Shankar Jaikishan were loyal to Raj Kapoor, S.D. Burman and later R.D. Burman remained with Dev Anand till the end. Sachin Dev Burman gave memorable music for Bimal Roy’s Deedar, Saajna and Bandanwani. He also made compositions for Guru Dutt’s Pyasa and Kagaz ke Pooch.

Salil Chowdhary’s music was a blend of the east and west.

The fourth generation of music directors comprise Bappi Lahiri, Rajesh Roshan and A.R. Rahman. Rahman offered a new kind of a music. A song from the film, “Dil He Chhota Saa” became an instant hit. Rangeeda was his first Hindi film and its score too became a hit. After Dil Se’s number Chal Chhota Saa, Rahman has never looked back. After Lagaan, Taal, Range De Basanti and now with Slumdog Millionaire, Rahman has proved that he is the best.

The 21st century music composers – Ismail Darbar and Shantanu Moitra – have brought the melody back. Monty Sharma, in Saare Jahan Se Acha (2008) and Vishal-Shekhar in Om Shanti Om have given hopes to music lovers that melody will remain the queen of film music.

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The author served with Doordarshan and is a noted writer on cinema winning National Award for Best Author twice.
Then came the mythologicals, historicals, family dramas and the biographicals, each with its own type of lyric and music. There were cheer-boosters and pain-relievers in lyrics crooned by Saigal, Ashok Kumar, Devika Rani, Kanan Devi and faith-cures in the ‘abhängs’ of V. Phadnis of Sant Tukaram, of Prabhat Films. Similar gems were penned by Arzoo Lucknow and Kidal Sharma from the New Theatres banner.

Every-lasting ‘mubkadar’ by Shakeel Badayuni and Majrooh Sultanpuri throbbed in all youthful hearts. “Hum aaj kahin dil ke baithne (Today I lost my heart somewhere)” and “Tu kabe agar jane ban bhar (If you say, I will croon songs all my life)” from Mehboob’s Andaz have gathered an evergreen appeal. The movie mughal himself in his naive way used a couplet for his banner logo: “Wohi bota bai jo mano zare huda bota hai”, linking hammer and sickle with total reliance on God for whatever happens. Sahir Ludhianvi’s leftist was stronger and more bitter (‘talkibhayan’). So too his social comment: “Rehne ko ghar nabin bai, sara jabaam hamara (Cannot get a house to stay, the whole world is ours).”

O
f course, some of the most memorable verses were written for the song and poem. Indians have a weakness for the song and poem. This is a mindset; sourced from India’s deep heritage of literature and culture. We take the lyric home… to our heart, mind, soul, our relationships, our drawing rooms, kitchens and Indian Idol stages.

The process of identification works strong and fast with the lyric, especially in Hindi-Urdu. It may not even be understood deep down in the southern parts of India, or vast swathes of Central Asia or China. But it is repeated and hummed long after cinema, radio or TV have stopped broadcasting. I have heard a Japanese lady singing Raj Kapoor’s “Aauna boot” in accented tones. And in the bylanes and by-lanes of Delhi, where Hindi-Urdu is the lingua franca, the words are interchanged to suit the singers’ own urges, fancies and situations.

Our lyric writers from the first talkie onwards have grasped this aspect of the lyric and have played upon it. As to be expected from a society infused with religion like India, the first recorded film song was: “Dey dey khuda ko naam pe pyare (Give in God’s name if you have the power, my friend). Lyricist: Joseph David, Alam Ara”. But it was the romantic lyric in the tales of legendary lovers, which become the most popular. Films like ‘Shirin Farhad, Laila Majnu, Heer Ranjha, turned from stage-plays into films, became super-hits in 1931-32 due to their profuse content of songs. The craze peaked with 70 songs in Indra Sabha.

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The author is a film historian and author of several books on Indian films.
INTERVIEW

Nandita Das

Your father is an artist and your mother a writer. How much did their artistic nuances influence your personality?

When you grow up with a certain artistic sensibility it becomes part of you as it is deeply internalized. As a child our forms of entertainment were going to classical music concerts, dance performances, exhibitions... in fact never films! I am sure all those exposures have become part of our sub-conscious sensibilities. I am sure they helped me in making Firaaq as filmmaking requires working with different art forms. Also my parents gave us (my brother and I) a lot of freedom to ask questions and make our own decisions. That freedom and space we got definitely has a big impact on the choices we are making in our life.

What are the parameters you keep in mind while accepting a role?

My decision of doing selective films, in languages other than Hindi, or to live in Delhi and not in Bombay, was an explicit choice. Of course you gain some and lose some. But what I have gained, in terms of expanding my experiences, being connected with the real world, not feeling insecure as I am not in any race and having the freedom to live life on my own terms has been well worth it. I have instinctively anchored towards projects that I could relate to, that resonated with my interests, concerns and dilemma. There have been some films that didn't turn out the way I had imagined them to. But I am happy that I at least made those choices for honest reasons. What I look for is a good script, a director who can translate that into an interesting cinematic experience and a role that's challenging and relatable. Often, all these things don't come together as there are many factors involved in film making. All said and done, it is a gamble. But, the only thing I can confidently say is that the criteria for choosing a film has not been based on any other reason other than the ones mentioned above.

You seem to gravitate towards regional directors, is it because of greater realism in that cinema?

I have never classified films as art or commercial, Hindi or regional. I do films that resonate with my sensibilities, in which ever genre it
maybe. When I look back at the 30 odd films I have done, many of which are regional films, that they needed to make less compromises with the form and content they chose. Of course they are always struggling with budgets and marketing issues and so the vision doesn’t translate into a reality.

Could you describe your experience of working with Adoor Gopalakrishnan?

I have shot more films in Kerala than in Bombay and I feel very much at home in that milieu. Adoor Gopalakrishnan’s involvement in his work is 200% and to see that level of dedication and perfectionism is a real pleasure. His style of working is rather unique where not many people in the cast and crew know much about the film! When I did ‘Four Women’ I seem to have been the lucky one amongst the actors − who at least knew what the story and my role were!

How did your own transition to directing come about?

For me, in many ways acting to directing was a natural progression. But directing is far more consuming and obviously very different from acting, as it challenges every aspect of one’s personality.

Going from acting to directing is like jumping straight from $5^{th}$ grade to doing a PhD! There are hundreds of factors that need to be dealt with and I doubt I have even multi-taught in this way. Directing is far more


The journey of making *Firaaq* has pushed my boundaries and by this I don’t mean only creatively. As an actor one doesn’t realize how much more goes into a film than just the shoot. Also having gone through this experience I feel, a film is not the sum total of its parts. Directing entails making choices and decisions at every step and taking responsibility for all its aspects. There are 100 odd people who work on the shoot and as a director, you become like a parent! Also the post production has many technicalities and learning all of that on the job, was both challenging and exciting. Being an actor myself definitely helped my interactions with the actors in the way one could communicate to them. On the sets as an actor, it was always exciting to watch the rest of the crew work towards shaping up a scene. Often I would get involved in different aspects of the shoot or simply observe. Slowly the desire to tell stories, the way I wanted to, started growing stronger. So I thought maybe making a film and going through all its phases would be more satisfying.

What was the most challenging part of directing *Firaaq*?

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consuming, as it challenges every aspect of one’s personality. *Firaaq* is not an easy film as there are 5 different stories, so with a tight schedule and budget, every 5-6 days you are with a new set of actors, in a new location, and need a different headspace to deal with a new story. But I am really glad that the film got made against all odds and from the responses received so far from around the world, I can only say I am overwhelmed.

**As an actress, which films of yours do you look back on with fondness?**

There are many. Out of the 30 I have done, I would say I look back on 20 odd films with fondness, and it brings a smile to my face for different reasons. Sometimes the journey was good and sometimes the film was important in what it wanted to say, even though it may not have turned out the way one had imagined. For me, the journey is as important as the end so I can’t really separate the two. To name a few, there was Deepa (Mehta)’s *Fire* which had an intimate cast and crew; Mrinalda’s film because he’s such a special person, with thousands of stories that I so loved listening; Mani Ratnam, for his relentless energising shooting style; Santosh Sivan for being so spontaneously creative and having such a fantastic team to work with; Adoor Gopalakrishnan, for his uncompromising puritanical approach to cinema; Shyam Benegal for his intellect and warmth. And also first-time directors like Chitra Palekar and Kavitha Lankesh, for their passion and commitment (and now I know how difficult it is to make your first film!). And Suman Ghosh’s film for the opportunity to get to know and work with Soumitrada (Chatterjee). You see how different projects have been important to me for different reasons!

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Ms. Nandita Das is a well known actress. *Firaaq*, is her debut film as a Director.
There was a time when movie halls reserved Sunday mornings for children and animation films. At the end of the show, the sparkle in the eyes of the kids said it all. Those days are gone and animation movies today are watched and enjoyed by all. India, with its surfeit of computer wizards, could have played a dominant role in animation movies but commercial success – perhaps, we love our flesh-and-blood heroes and heroines more than painted, wooden characters – has eluded producers of such movies. One such movie is Anil Kaul’s Bhaggmati. It is a curious mix of live-action and 2-D animation and narrates the story of Bhaggmati, a banjaran or gypsy with whom the Sultan of Deccan falls in love. In its non-animation parts, that is one hour and five minutes of its two hours and forty minutes length, it features Tabu, contemporary Indian cinema’s finest dramatic actress.

What makes Bhaggmati unique is that 110 people, slogged for three years to create 7,50,000 hand-drawn frames inspired, at least in part, by old Indian miniature paintings. The quality of animation done by artists of Zee Television is of international standards.

Indian audiences, wary of novelty, did not go in droves to see the film. It may have done better with non-resident Indian audiences abroad. The story of feature-length animation films made by Indians for a theatre release began with Ram Mohan’s Ramayana based on the ancient Hindu epic. It was produced by Yugo Sako, a Japanese, who had first visited India in 1985, seen the archaeological excavation site near Ayodhya and subsequently read Valmiki’s Ramayana in Japanese and ten different versions of it, all in his mother-tongue.

Ram Mohan, a former staffer of Films Division of India and trained in animation techniques by Claire H. Weeks of Walt Disney Studies, USA, produced an elegant 2-D version of Ramayana, released in 1990, thanks to his Japanese producer’s support. Need one add Ram Mohan’s Ramayana did pretty good business, thanks largely due to the Japanese connection.

The story of Indian animation films is quite old. Mandar Mallik, a Bengali of some means, went to Germany in the 1930s and came back with a 35 mm cine camera which also allowed single-frame exposures. What he did until he met in the early 1960s, a very promising young artist, Ganesh Pyne in Calcutta (now Kolkata), is not known.

He got his young protégé to do some films, including one about a naughty black cat. Pyne’s efforts in animation cinema, financed by Mallik, were reportedly quite competent and touched by droll humour. Ganesh Pyne gave up animation films quite early in his career and went on to be a celebrated painter.

The reverse is true of Ishu Patel who graduated from the Maharaja Sayaji Rao University, Baroda with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) degree. He then went to the National Institute of Design (NID), Ahmedabad, to study animation. In 1970, he joined the National Film Board of Canada and his journey as a distinguished animator began. Over time, he mastered 2-D and 3-D film animation and acquired an international reputation. His bold, experimental approach won him laurels at various reputed film festivals. Afterlife (1979), for example, had plasticine figure on glass.
lit from below and then animated. Other productions of Patel include *The Bead Game* (1978), *Paradise/Paradise* (1986), and *Divine Fate* (1994).

Ishu Patel's concerns are moral, ethical and philosophical. His work touches upon Buddhist philosophy and Indian mythology. Concepts like free will, freedom and equality figure in his films as do ecological issues. He is appreciated for his subtle use of colour and pithy musical scores contributed by Indian, Japanese and American musicians. Patel lives abroad though he has taught in India at his alma mater, NID.

Animation film making in India, as elsewhere, has moved from film (celluloid) to video and allied digital technology thus increasing its technical range immensely and reducing considerably the backbreaking labour required earlier in frame-by-frame cine animation. The earlier method entailed the drawing, colouring of each separate frame and then its photography on a single frame of film. One had to be a millionaire producer like Walt Disney to run a huge studio with hundreds of artists and technicians to create feature-length narratives.

Hyderabad-based Pavel studios has made a 90-minute animation film entitled, *Little Pandavas* through its animation division. It was produced by Nitin Sidam-Setty and Rudra Matsa and directed by B.G.N. Pawan Chandra, Rudra Matsa and Charan Reddy Desai. The style used to illustrate the frames was inspired by Japanese Manga comics.

Sahara India Pariwar released *Hanuman* in 2005. The story about the monkey-God from the Ramayana was directed by V.G. Samant, Silver Toon and Milind Ukey who had also written the script. Actor Mukesh Khanna lent his voice for the narration. Singeetham Srinivasa Rao made *Ghatotkach* in 2008, which features two kinds of animation styles.

3-D animation has not caught on in India as yet. In America, 3-D animation films like *Shrek* and *Toy Story* have become huge hits and competed with live-action films. In 2-D animation, *Lion King* and *Sleeping Beauty* are but two examples of super hits in recent years. Animation cinema, in the country, is still shackled to myth and legend, which lend themselves to flowing lines to make the 2-D animator's work sparkle. Tales rooted in the past, if treated conventionally in terms of script ideas, do not rattle up a controversy. Indian mainstream animation films – though streets ahead of its live-action counterpart in aesthetics – is actually equally conventional in thought. In fact, an ever-increasing market may bring about a welcome change.