Contemporary World Cinema

Europe, The Middle East, East Asia and South Asia

Shohini Chaudhuri

2005

Edinburgh University Press
CHAPTER 7

South Asian Cinema

Among South Asia’s film industries, India’s is by far the most prolific, generating over 900 films annually. About a quarter of these are produced by the industry known as Bollywood or ‘Hindi cinema’, which is based in Mumbai (the city formerly named Bombay). Its films dominate the national market; and, of all the world’s film industries, it faces the tiniest competition from Hollywood. It has been exporting its films successfully around the world (especially to parts of Africa, the Middle East, and Asiatic regions of the former Soviet Union) for more than half a century. Its current foreign sales moreover extend beyond these traditional export markets to emigrant communities in the UK, the USA, Canada and Australia. Bollywood is tipped to become the West’s next Asian crossover phenomenon after Hong Kong cinema, although it has yet to convert mainstream Western audiences, who are allegedly put off by the melodramatic acting, song-and-dance sequences and non-linear plots. Within India and abroad, the traditional division between India’s popular cinema and its ‘art’ or ‘parallel’ cinema, modelled after India’s most prestigious film-director Satyajit Ray, often produced the uncritical assumption that Indian films are either ‘Ray or rubbish’. Recent Indian film criticism has started to pay serious attention to India’s popular cinema, assessing it on its own discursive terms. The spotlight on Bollywood, however, has often been at the expense of other South Asian cinemas, including India’s many other film industries, making films in over fourteen regional languages, and the cinemas of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, which this chapter briefly covers alongside a consideration of Bollywood’s popular idiom.

Despite their linguistic and religious diversity, South Asian territories have often been linked by a shared history and culture, including an ancient Hindu and Buddhist cultural heritage. After the arrival of Islam (starting in the seventh century), Muslim rulers held sway over most of the region until it passed into the hands of the British, who maintained their grip over their subjects with the connivance of native (Hindu, Muslim and Sikh) rulers. The 200-year British Raj ended in 1947 with the partition of India into two independent states – India, where Hindus constituted the majority, and Pakistan, which was formed from the Muslim-dominant
North-west provinces (West Pakistan) and the eastern part of the province of Bengal (East Pakistan), liberated in 1971 as Bangladesh. Sri Lanka (then called Ceylon), where Buddhist Sinhalese are the majority and Tamils (mostly Hindus) are the minority, became independent in 1948.

In terms of aesthetics, South Asia displays an extraordinary cultural mixing which presents a ‘striking discontinuity’ with events in the political realm, including the sectarian religious riots that accompanied partition. Yet this ‘syncrétism’ derives from its history – including the intertwining of Hindu and Muslim influences in the cultural milieu during the centuries of Muslim rule as well as European influences mostly during the British Raj and globalising forces since then. Orthodox Muslims disapproved of music and dance as a form of entertainment, yet Muslim rulers patronised musicians, singers and poets, whose ghazals (a form of Urdu or Persian poetry) were set to music. Moreover, the Sufis, who helped to convert the subcontinent’s poor and low-caste Hindus to Islam, spread their message through the medium of song and dance and other forms of folk culture.

This cultural syncrétism can be seen in the region’s parallel cinema, which has a tradition of embracing intercommunal tolerance. It is equally evident in Indian popular cinema’s oft-recurring (though not always acknowledged) romance with Islam: as Shohat and Stam remark, films such as Anarkali (1953) and Mughal-e-Azam (1960), which glorify Indo-Islamic culture, were produced in the aftermath of partition and ‘adored by the same Hindu audience that was attacking Muslims in the streets’. Many Muslim stars have remained ‘wildly popular even at the height of Hindu-Muslim tensions’ – including Dilip Kumar, Meena Kumari and Nargis during the 1950s and 1960s, and Shahrukh Khan and Aamir Khan in the 1990s. Moreover, despite its name, ‘Hindi’ cinema actually utilises Hindustani, a composite of Hindi and Urdu languages widely understood in the region by Hindu and Muslim audiences alike.

The underlying forms of Indian popular cinema – melodrama, spectacle, song and dance, and omnibus plots – have evolved from pre-cinematic roots in the Indian epics Mahabharata and Ramayana (which embody Hindu religious beliefs and the ‘sacredness’ of family institutions), classical and folk theatre (where drama takes the form of dance), and nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Parsi theatre (a European-influenced theatre which based its mass commercial appeal on a mix of ‘realism and fantasy, narrative and spectacle, music and dance, lively dialogues and ingenious stagecraft’ within a melodramatic framework). Indian popular cinema has combined these ‘local’ sources with inspiration from ‘international’ forms including Hollywood (especially the glamour of its star system and the musical) and, since the late 1980s, from MTV. Indian popular films are sometimes called masala assorted elements – song can be found together in to Indian popular cinema in several other world ‘something for everybody’ increasingly used in Hollywood/historical romance.

India’s regional-language film industries, although – with the exchange of regional-language films, the non-Indian idiom, which even India, has moreover seen the rise of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, industry based in the so-called ‘market dominance of India’s cinema’; films, the non-Indian from the Indian model, typically fuelled from 1980s films, but audiences in later, on satellite TV.

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The rest of this chapter region’s popular and peculiarities and differences, lapping histories give national and independent fundamentalism, which womanhood as metaphor for

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of the province Sri Lanka (then known as Ceylon and Tamil 1948). The intertwining of the centuries the British Raj roved of music, Western music, Persian poetry) art the subcon- message through the parallel cinema, 2. It is equally remarkable, films glorify Indian and 'adored by the streets'. 3 4, at the height of a Kumari and Aamir Khan actually utilises an understood pre-cinematic high embodiment (citations), classified nineteenth-century theatre and fantasy, and ingenious art cinema has national forms stem and the popular films are sometimes called masala films (masala means 'mix of spices') because of the assorted elements – song and dance, action, comedy and melodrama – that can be found together in a single film. This masala feature is not exclusive to Indian popular cinema. As already seen, it is present in varying degrees in several other world cinemas, including Hong Kong cinema, and the 'something for everybody' formula – a sure blockbuster principle – is increasingly used in Hollywood, including the three-hour action/melodrama/historical romance/disaster epic that is James Cameron's Titanic.

India’s regional-language cinemas often use this popular idiom, adding their particular flavours to it. There are many exchanges between the region's film industries in terms of stars, directors and other personnel, although – with the exception of South Indian cinema – the distribution of regional-language films is largely restricted to their own region. The Indian idiom, which evolved when Pakistan and Bangladesh were part of India, has moreover defined the model of popular cinema in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka (where there were early links with the film industry based in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu). However, the market dominance of Indian popular cinema has been a formidable challenge to South Asia’s other cinemas; and, in order to win audiences for local films, the non-Indian territories have tried to distinguish their cinemas from the Indian model as well as imitating it. Tensions have also been politically fuelled. From 1965 to 2003, Pakistan and India banned each other’s films, but audiences in Pakistan watched Indian films on pirated prints and, later, on satellite TV.

There are remarkable convergences, too, between South Asia's parallel cinemas. These films consciously display an aesthetic restraint absent from Indian popular cinema, using codes of realism derived from European cinema, particularly Italian neorealism (for example, location shooting in natural light) and the minimalist aesthetic of Robert Bresson.

The rest of this chapter will analyse the norms and practices of the region's popular and parallel cinemas further, emphasising regional similarities and differences, including the common themes to which their overlapping histories give rise – partition, communalism, the fragility of nationhood and independence, military confrontation, terrorism and religious fundamentalism, with films sometimes using the family or the role of womanhood as metaphors for problems afflicting the nation.

**Popular Indian Cinema**

Indian filmmaking has its beginnings in the pre-Independence era, starting as early as 1896. Major film studios were established in the 1920s; the
‘big three’ of these were New Theatres in Calcutta, Prabhat in Pune and Bombay Talkies, which created a solid infrastructure, including distribution networks and star manufacture, before the Second World War, by which time Indian films already dominated the national market. During the war, the film industry boomed – largely due to the entry of independent financiers wanting to launder money earned on the war’s black market. After the war, the studio system collapsed, giving rise to a system of highly-paid freelance artists (actors, music directors and playback singers). Black money has continued to pour into the industry. Other finances come from pre-sale to distributors and additionally, in the present era, from media conglomerates such as Polygram and the Amitabh Bachchan Corporation.

Hindi film gained its nationwide audiences in the immediate post-independence era. At the same time, the ‘All-India’ aesthetic – the name given to Hindi film by eminent film critic Chidananda Dasgupta – came to be extended to regional film industries, including the Tamil, Telugu, Bengali and Marathi film industries. In 1952, the new Indian government established the National Board of Censors, carrying over the tradition of censorship from the colonial government, which instituted it in 1918. India’s strict censorship bears the colonial era’s legacy, including its Victorian morality – nudity and ‘profanity’ are prohibited, and politically sensitive issues are off-limits.

Apart from this (and exhibition tax), the Indian government has not played an official role in the popular film industry, refusing to grant it ‘industry status’ until 2002, when it finally allowed producers access to bank loans and insurance. Indian films have captured the national market without government help, taking as much as 97 per cent of the domestic box office even before state protectionist policies in the 1960s and early 1970s led America’s Motion Picture Association to boycott the Indian market. While the lifting of trade barriers in the 1990s has allowed Hollywood to earn more from India than it ever did in the past, it has not yet dented Indian audiences’ overwhelming preference for local films. Filmmaking in India nevertheless remains a risky business with, on average, 90 per cent of Indian films flopping at the box office – of the remaining 10 per cent, 5 per cent do moderately well and another 5 per cent are blockbusters, keeping the industry afloat.

There have been many attempts to explain Indian popular cinema’s vast appeal not only across barriers of language, religion and caste in India but also to audiences in the Middle East and East Africa, where Indian popular cinema has crossed over from diasporic Indian audiences to mainstream audiences, who enjoy and identify with the films without knowing the language and without the account concentrates on elements of the cinema’s discussion of themes.

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guage and without the benefit of dubbing or subtitles. The following account concentrates on aesthetics and narrative style, as these are the core elements of the cinema’s national, regional and global appeal, leaving aside discussion of themes specific to contemporary Bollywood for Chapter 8.

Indian popular cinema’s pan-Indian appeal has been analysed in terms of its roots in the Mahabharata and Ramayana, which have ‘profoundly influenced the thought, imagination, outlook of the vast mass of Indian people’. Their influence can be seen in the films’ characters, narrative structure, ideologies and modes of address. Characters are frequently based on archetypes drawn from the epics; for example, the dutiful self-sacrificing mother or wife (like Sita in Ramayana) and the banished son (like the princes in both epics). Because they are recognisable archetypes, characters’ psychological motives are generally not fleshed out; in any case, the collective (family or community) is always more important than an individual. Narratives are based on moral principles found in the epics: family obligation, duty and honour (notions of family honour being closely tied to a daughter’s honour, i.e. chastity) and the omnipotence of ‘fate’. Chance and coincidence play an emphatic role, sometimes with divine intervention producing the dénouement of the plot.

As this implies, codes of believability are quite different from the standards of ‘realism’ in Hollywood or European films. Yet there remains, as Rosie Thomas states, ‘a firm sense of “acceptable realism and logic” derived from moral principles:

One is more likely to hear accusations of “unbelievability” if the codes of, for example, ideal kinship behaviour are inappropriately transgressed (i.e. a son kills his mother; or a father knowingly and callously causes his son to suffer), than if the hero is a superman who single-handedly knocks out a dozen burly henchmen and then bursts into song.

K. Moti Gokulsing and Wimal Dissanayake remark that ‘the central ideology underpinning the two epics is of preserving the existing social order and its privileged values’ and that Indian popular cinema often ‘legitimates its own existence through a reinscription of its values onto those of the two epics’. Some have argued that films like Raj Kapoor’s Awaara (1951) and the 1970s Angry Young Men films associated with superstar Amitabh Bachchan (Zanjeer [1973], Deewar [1975], Sholay [1975]), which critique social, political and economic injustices (the latter coinciding with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s State of Emergency [1975–7], when she assumed dictatorial powers), question the status quo only ultimately to affirm it. Yet, as with any conservative-traditionalist films, there are many ways in which global audiences can, and do, read them.

In contrast to classical Hollywood narratives, which follow a linear,
causal logic, the narratives of Indian popular cinema are episodic and digressive, often containing plots within plots and a flashback structure transporting viewers back and forth in time. This flashback structure is deployed in films as disparate as *Mother India* (1957), from Bollywood's 1950s 'golden era', and the contemporary Bollywood 'brat pack' film *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001). The length of these is suitably epic – three hours or more, with a built-in halfway intermission. This affects how scripts are planned and structured; any given film will have two climactic 'turning points': one in the middle and one at the end.

Most of the films' narrative features stem from the epics, which were transmitted orally in endless repeated performances. However, Sheila J. Nayar has argued that these features, often seen as indigenously 'Indian', are common to oral storytelling practice more generally, and that this is what constitutes the appeal of Bollywood cinema across national borders. In this respect, it is noteworthy that Indian films are popular in nations where there are 'significant numbers of non- or low-literate viewers' and that films that attempt to depart from oral storytelling characteristics do not succeed with non-elite, that is uneducated and rural, audiences. The appeal to oral cultures is not unique to Indian popular cinema – we have encountered it in Egyptian and other cinemas. It is even apparent in Hollywood films like *Titanic*, whose global success may be partly attributable to its use of oral storytelling flashback.

Indian popular films have a tendency to quote each other: 'an endless borrowing-cum-stealing of previous movies' tunes, lyrics, dialogue, iconic props, whole characters, and sometimes even entire plots’. Nayar explains this 'intertextuality' with the fact that Indian popular films, like oral stories, are collectively owned by the group, which does not recognise the concept of plagiarism or copyright, both of which arise with print cultures. The narrative predictability of many popular Indian films can be seen in this context: their priority is to maximise emotion and spectacle, emphasising 'how things will happen' rather than *what* will happen and 'familiarity and repeat viewings rather than “originality”'. Their audiences are known to 'clap, sing, recite familiar dialogue with the actors' and – appreciatively – ‘throw coins at the screen'. Repeat value is built into films through the stars and songs, which keep audiences coming to see films again and again.

Sound is an essential element of oral cultures, as already noted (in Chapter 3). In India, the arrival of sound enabled Indian cinema to create features that protected it from Hollywood and sealed its distinctive appeal for audiences in India and abroad – the song sequences, music (a hybrid of light classical Indian music including *ghazals* and Western orchestral and popular music) and film industries are in the basis of its song playback singers, back to the 1940s. The most famous are the provided singing voices. Songs are released and continue in throughout Westwood cinema, pop for market film to their audiences.

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In the 1980s meaning the massively on the state-run TV (including *M* MTV and foreign. In order to sustain niques, incorporate MTV, 'song pic sequences) of clip elite channels as:
popular music) and declamatory dialogue. In India, the popular music and film industries are intertwined. For core audiences, a film stands or falls on the basis of its songs. Actors rarely sing their own songs, so films deploy playback singers, with the actors lip-synching to lyrics – a practice dating back to the 1940s. Playback singers are stars in their own right – among the most famous are the sisters Lata Mangeshkar and Asha Bhosle, who have provided singing voices on Bollywood films from the 1950s to the present. Songs are released before the film; in the past on the radio, now on cassette and CD. Films can recover over half their budget by the presale of their music. In this respect, Indian popular cinema can be regarded as a model anticipating Western cinematic practice. For, in European and Hollywood cinema, popular music soundtracks are not only increasingly being used to market films, but have also come to define the appeal of many films to their audiences.

According to Nayar, sound is not the only element which is amplified in Bollywood cinema. Star performance, camerawork (which is flamboyant, unlike classical Hollywood’s ‘invisible style’) and mise en scène (where ‘the real’ is abandoned in favour of ‘the grand’) resemble ‘the mnemonic phrases of an oral epic’ – commanded into a form that will ‘render them permanently memorable’. Bollywood stars are typically big and brash – not just icons of beauty and desire (although they are these too, for example, 1994’s Miss World, Aishwarya Rai). Not for nothing is Amitabh Bachchan, whose superstar status remains unrivalled, also known as the ‘Big B’. Bollywood stars, who present themselves on screen as stars rather than characters in roles, must ‘stand out from the background; they cannot belong to it’. There are, of course, other historical reasons why Indian film stardom is such a big phenomenon. Star power has been a key element in financing films since the arrival of independent financiers who lured stars with huge salaries; and, because of the high box-office failure rate, many contemporary Bollywood films are ‘multi-starrers’, featuring as many as five or six top stars in order to try to hedge bets on success.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, colour television, TV soap operas (including the massively popular serialisation of the Ramayana and Mahabharata on the state-run network Doordarshan), video piracy and multi-channel TV (including MTV) lured audiences away from cinema. Exposure to MTV and foreign influences created new expectations in Indian audiences. In order to sustain their mass appeal, filmmakers began to use MTV techniques, incorporating them into their popular idiom. Since the advent of MTV, ‘song picturisations’ (the industry term for song-and-dance sequences) or clips from films edited to the music have been shown on satellite channels as a marketing strategy. The fact that the song-and-dance
sequences circulate as self-contained items on music television makes visible aesthetic affinities between the films and music video, which has stimulated new ways of filming dance sequences, including the use of MTV-like cutting and camera angles. For pop video also involves performers lip-synching to pre-recorded music. In the films, song-and-dance sequences are often set against exotic backdrops completely unrelated to the narrative, regularly flouting spatial and temporal continuities so that ‘heroines may change saris between shots and the scenery . . . skip continents between verses’. This is not dissimilar in practice to pop video, where the relation between visual images and musical lyrics is often shifting and arbitrary. Also, if MTV embodies ‘the look of sound’, that, too, makes it an ideal import for a cinema based on oral storytelling tradition.

The song-and-dance sequences are a key site for the outpouring of emotions, including emotions which otherwise cannot be publicly professed, such as fantasy, eroticism and other forms of ‘subversive’ behaviour (including gender subversion). Lovers’ fantasies in the form of dream sequences and stage shows are among the many means devised by filmmakers to express eroticism within restrictions imposed by censorship and public (or family) viewing contexts. Also popular is the ‘wet sari’ routine, where the heroine rhapsodises about an absent lover while dancing in a downpour of rain or wading into a lake, her soaked clothes clinging to her body and revealing its sensuous contours. Elsewhere in the narrative, we often witness the ‘withdrawal-of-the-camera technique’, which Lalita Gopalan terms ‘coitus interruptus’ – that is, when ‘steamy’ love scenes are replaced by ‘extra-diegetic shots of waterfalls, flowers, thunder, lightning and tropical storms’.

India’s Parallel Cinema

Parallel cinema, also called ‘New Indian Cinema’, defined itself against the norms of Indian popular cinema – initially, at least, it was songless, starless and low-budget. The name ‘parallel cinema’ arose because it diverged so radically from the mainstream and seemed ‘unlikely to intersect with it at any point’. However, the two streams do have links and common roots which can be traced back to the Indian People’s Theatre Movement (IPTA), a left-wing avant-garde collective of writers, dramatists, musicians and filmmakers founded in 1943 and based in Bombay. The IPTA influenced the political and aesthetic principles of some classic Bollywood actors, writers and directors including Bimal Roy and Raj Kapoor, as well as parallel cinema’s ethos as a whole. In 1952, the First International Film Festival took place in India, exposing filmmakers to European film aesthet-
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ics, especially Italian neorealism, which impacted on 1950s Bollywood and parallel cinema alike.

Bengali director Satyajit Ray is variously regarded as either the forerunner or the founder of parallel cinema. His 'Apu Trilogy' – Pather Panchali (1955), Aparajito (1956) and Apur Sansar (1959) – has greatly inspired subsequent directors. Ray himself was influenced by Italian neorealism and French poetic realism, especially that of Jean Renoir, as well as by Bengali literature, particularly Rabindranath Tagore (literary influences are a characteristic feature of Bengali cinema, where there are fewer films derived from the epics than in other Indian cinemas). The Apu Trilogy charts the growth of Apu, a poor Brahmin boy, who experiences the hardships of rural poverty, urban migration and the deaths of all his family members through illness. The most famous is Pather Panchali, which won the Best Human Document award at Cannes in 1956. Ray's subsequent films have covered a wide range of genres and issues, including The Chess Players (1977) (a satire of British colonialism, the Mughal aristocracy and upper classes), musical comedies, children's detective stories, documentaries, and films that probe gender relations in Indian society, with films focusing on lonely married women (Charulata [1964]) and young middle-class men (Days and Nights in the Forest [1970]). Although Ray's cinema transcends regional cinema defined in the narrowest sense - his undisputed international reputation is testimony to this - most of his films are regional in accomplishing a trenchant dissection of Bengali middle-class sensibilities. Kanchenjunga (1962) and his final film The Stranger (1991) exemplify this vein.

The financing of parallel cinema is shared between regional and central state governments and various co-operatives. The Indian government established the Film Finance Corporation in 1960 (which became the National Film Development Corporation [NFDC] in 1980) and a National Film Institute in 1961 expressly to support parallel rather than popular cinema. Another Bengali filmmaker and precursor of parallel cinema, Ritwik Ghatak, whose Cloud-Capped Star (1960) depicted the aftermath of partition, was appointed director of the National Film Institute. Many parallel-cinema directors emerged under his guidance at the Institute, which also nurtured technical, acting and directorial talent flowing into mainstream cinema. In 1973, the government also set up the Directorate of Film Festivals (DFF) to organise international and national film festivals in the country, and to hold the annual National Awards ceremony.

The NFDC spread its funds thinly, resulting in low production values. It was also notoriously bad at distributing films, which often end up staying on shelves for months or years before going to festivals. 

Bollywood's control over distribution networks poses a further disadvantage for parallel
filmmakers. The privately produced soap operas which began to appear on state-owned network TV in the mid-1980s and the arrival of multi-channel TV in the 1990s were, initially, another setback, luring away parallel cinema's largely urban middle-class audiences. However, some parallel films are now funded by multinational companies involved in satellite and cable TV, creating new distribution outlets.\(^\text{29}\) International co-productions form another new source of funding.

The parallel cinema of the 1970s and 1980s belongs to the Third Cinema model of radical collective filmmaking and includes the work of Bengali director Mrinal Sen, whose \textit{Bhuvan Shome} (1969) is a landmark of the movement. Parallel cinema has since fractured into what is known as 'Middle Cinema' – which combines parallel cinema themes and popular cinema devices in order to appeal to a broader audience – and a cinema of auteurs.\(^\text{30}\) The objective of presenting an 'authentic' version of Indian reality often takes parallel filmmakers to rural locations, telling regional stories using regional dialects. Some films employ regional songs and dances in place of popular cinema's fantasy song-and-dance routines; for example, Shaji Karun's \textit{Vanaprastham} (1999) makes striking use of Kerala's classical dance-drama Kathakali, while Buddhadeb Dasgupta's \textit{Uttara} (2000) features Bengali natyas, who sing and dance wearing masks.

Inspired by Marxist sympathies for India's exploited populations (including its Fourth World tribes) and the 1970s Women's Movement, parallel filmmakers have tended to focus on feudal, caste and gender oppressions, including Hindu customs which encourage widows to sacrifice their life and which forbid them to remarry. These themes can be traced from Ray's films to today's parallel filmmakers such as Gautum Ghosh, whose \textit{In the Forest \ldots Again} (2003), a sequel to Ray's \textit{Days and Nights in the Forest}, shows the forest baring its 'teeth' – the anger of tribals whose forest habitat the rich use as a tourist destination. An interest in women and minority populations has been reawakened by the fiftieth anniversary of India's independence, which prompted some filmmakers to explore the attempts of marginals to enter the mainstream or to contest India's independence settlement on behalf of its minorities. Films in this category include Shyam Benegal's Muslim women trilogy (discussed below) and Rituparno Ghosh's \textit{Chokher Bali} (2003).

The popularly acclaimed films of Shyam Benegal, who hails from Andhra Pradesh but works from Mumbai, have been seen as examples of Middle Cinema. Benegal made his debut feature \textit{Ankur} in 1974. His films typically critique the stereotypes of the 'honourable' wife, mother and daughter in Indian cinema and are concerned with gender, caste and class issues, exploring periods of national or social transition from the perspective of minority or underrepresented groups who have either crossed or gone on to successful careers (Shah and Om Puri). Female directors who broke new ground during the 1980s (1993) uses the format of the parallel drama – to examine issues in cinema.

For the trilogy for his \textit{Grandmother} (1994), S. D. N. collaborated with scriptwriter Puja and in \textit{Khalid Mohammed's \ldots transition} (Indian Mithun Chakraborty shows a woman doubting whose existence 'officially' becomes known.

The cinema of auteurs is also represented by these regionally focused films: Kerala's internationally known and Shaji Karun, while Buddhadeb Dasgupta, Gautum Ghosh, and the parallel film industry's resurgence in South Calcutta (hence the term 'parallel' sector) exists along with recent years from the two in the last two decades. Bangladesh film industry has made films in India and Bollywood).

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tive of minority or underprivileged classes. He has launched many actors who have either crossed into the mainstream (Smita Patil and Amrith Puri) or gone on to successful international careers (Shabana Azmi, Naseeruddin Shah and Om Puri). Benegal has also been a huge influence on several female directors who began making films addressing women's sexuality and desires during the 1980s, including his niece Kalpana Lajmi (whose Rudaali [1993] uses the format of popular cinema - glamour, song and dance, melodrama - to examine the stereotype of the suffering Indian woman) and Bengali director Aparna Sen (discussed below).

For the trilogy focusing on India's Muslim minority - Mamma/Grandmother (1994), Sardari Begum (1996) and Zubeidaa (2000) - Benegal collaborated with scriptwriter Khalid Mohammed, editor of the popular Indian film magazine Filmfare. The trilogy's last film Zubeidaa features Bollywood actress Karisma Kapoor, a popular soundtrack by A. R. Rahman, and dance sequences (most of them 'justified' within the diegesis according to dictates of narrative realism). It has been Benegal's most commercially successful film yet - a sign of his recognition of the importance of product packaging and branding in the new global market. Its tag line, 'Zubeidaa - the story of a princess', highlights the film's fairy-tale romance and glamour qualities. The film exemplifies Benegal's ability to narrate appealing stories about real-life social causes, for the story of aspiring Muslim actress Zubeidaa who marries a Hindu prince is based on Khalid Mohammed's mother and set against the backdrop of a nation in transition (Indian Muslims fleeing across the border to Pakistan and former princes being forced to yield their feudal lands to the state). It shows a woman doubly marginalised by her community and class, and whose existence 'official' history has effectively erased.

The cinema of auteurs has flourished in Bengal and Kerala, partly supported by these regions' Marxist governments and high literacy levels. Kerala's internationally acclaimed auteurs include Adoor Gopalakrishnan and Shaji Karun, while Bengal has the films of Aparna Sen, Buddhadeb Dasgupta, Gautam Ghosh and Rituparno Ghosh to testify to this regional film industry's resurgence. Bengal's film industry is based in Tollygunge, South Calcutta (hence known as 'Tollywood'), where a thriving 'commercial' sector exists alongside the auteur cinema, both sectors benefiting in recent years from increased private investment. There are crossovers between the two in the form of stars and crew, and also with the Bangladeshi film industry; for example, Tollywood actress Rituparna Sengupta has made films in Calcutta and Bangladesh (as well as in South India and Bollywood).

A former actress and daughter of renowned film critic Chidananda Das
Gupta, Aparna Sen made her directorial debut with *36 Chowringhee Lane* (1981). Her films typically focus on women and outsiders – here, an Anglo-Indian schoolteacher, and in *Paroma* (1984) a married woman who is abandoned by her lover. Sen won the Best Director prize at the 2003 National Films Awards for *Mr and Mrs Iyer* (2002), an English-language production like her debut. This film focuses on an encounter between a young Tamil Brahmin mother, Meenakshi Iyer (played by Sen’s daughter Konkona Sensharma), and a Muslim photographer, Raja Chowdhury (Rahul Bose), on a bus hijacked by rioting Hindus. Although, prior to this, Meenakshi had abhorred him as ‘unclean’, she declares that Raja is her husband in order to save his life from threatened assault by the rioters. Vision and visuality are the film’s key metaphors: Meenakshi learns to broaden her Hindu caste-bound perspective through the act of focusing through Raja’s camera lens.32

Sen laid the framework for Rituparno Ghosh’s films, including *Unsike April* (1994) (in which she stars), *Dahan* (1997), *Utsab* (2000) and *Chokher Bali* (also influenced in their style and subject matter by Ray). She has equally influenced a new generation of English-language (and non-Bengali) filmmakers including Dev Benegal, whose Mumbai-set *Split Wide Open* (1999) revolves around a confessional TV chat show and dissects a society reeling from the impact of globalisation and changing attitudes to sex, marriage and divorce. Rahul Bose, another actor, combines the influence of Dev Benegal and Sen in his directorial debut *Everybody Says I’m Fine!* (2001), whose telepathic hairdresser Xen analyses the rifts beneath the surface of Mumbai’s high society.

Buddhadeb Dasgupta made his debut feature *Doorata* in 1978. He has won several prizes at the National Awards, including Best Director for *Uttara* (2000). Stylistically, his films break with the realist model of other Bengali films discussed here, transposing contemporary social concerns into dreamlike imagery. Set in rural Bengal, *Uttara* has magic realist and gothic elements reminiscent of British Victorian fairy-painter Richard Dadd, including a community of dwarves – representative of all marginals – who hope that the ‘tall regime’ will soon be over. The film explores the homoerotic relationship between Uttara’s husband Balaram and his friend Nemi, who wrestle with each other on the hills, massaging each other’s glistening bodies and rolling together in the sand, oblivious to a mob of Hindu militants who burn a Christian priest to death, execute one of the dwarves, and (it is implied) rape and kill Uttara.
Cinema of South India and Sri Lanka

Although Bollywood films claim the largest share of the national market, popular films from India's southern states – Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka – are gaining influence and reaching large nationwide audiences through dubbing. The regional languages of these states are Telugu (Andhra Pradesh), Tamil (Tamil Nadu), Malayalam (Kerala) and Kannada (Karnataka). Since the 1970s, the output of the southern industries has far exceeded Bollywood. The majority of Indian films, especially from Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, follow the popular song-and-dance idiom. Tamil cinema achieved its first all-India hit with Chandralekha (1948), and since then it has frequently remade its films in Hindi for all-India audiences. It has also obtained overseas success among Tamil populations in Singapore, Malaysia and Sri Lanka. The hub of film production in the south is Tamil Nadu's capital Chennai (Madras), which is where the industries of South India and Sri Lanka originated. In the past, a hierarchy between the northern and southern industries existed. For example, minor or fading northern stars would travel south in the hope of resuscitating their careers, while moving in the other direction was the sole prerogative of those female stars whose dance training and fairer skin made them more eligible for exchange. Now the south is believed to excel the north in many respects and has gained a reputation for the quality of its technical infrastructure, including its colour labs, state-of-the-art digital technologies and sound-processing facilities (which have improved the dubbing of Tamil and other southern-language films into Hindi since the 1970s). The higher production values of Bollywood films since the 1990s are mostly due to using southern post-production labs. The careers of current stars also show a different pattern from the past; for example, the Karnataka-born Aishwarya Rai made her breakthrough into the film industry with Mani Ratnam's Tamil film Iruvar (1997) and, since becoming one of Bollywood's top actresses, has returned to the south for Kandukondain Kandukondain (2000), a Tamil adaptation of Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility. South India is renowned for its film stars going into state politics and political parties using cinema for political ends. Iruvar is based on the biggest of these star politicians, M. G. Ramachandran (known as MGR), and re-enacts excerpts from his films in its song-and-dance sequences.

Southern filmmakers like Mani Ratnam (whose work is discussed in Chapter 8), Ram Gopal Varma and Priyadarshan have altered the profile of India's 'national' cinema. So too have the south's technical specialists: cinematographers P. C. Sriman and Santosh Sivan, and music composer A. R. Rahman (who formed a highly successful team with Ratnam), have all
attained star status in their own right. The Keralan Santosh Sivan, who is responsible for the distinctive visuals of *Rudhah* and some of Ratnam’s 1990s films, has directed his own movies, notably *The Terrorist* (1999) and *Asoka* (2001). Inspired by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi’s assassination, *The Terrorist* is shot in a realist style comparable to contemporary European films (see Chapter 1), using hyperactive camerawork and unbalanced perspective to access the subjectivity of Sri Lankan suicide bomber Malli. It famously gained the admiration of American actor John Malkovich, who personally negotiated its US distribution.

Sri Lankan cinema has strong historical links with South Indian cinema: many of the first Sri Lankan films were made in South Indian studios with South Indian crews, and shared common roots in myth, melodrama and song and dance. There were, however, early attempts to ‘indigenise’ Sri Lankan cinema, led by Sirisena Wimalaweera in the 1950s as part of the post-independence Sinhalese nationalist movement. Due to subsequent divisions between the island’s two main ethnic groups and the dominance of the Sinhalese majority, post-1950s Sri Lankan cinema has largely been Sinhala cinema in its language and outlook. Alongside the popular cinema, which continued to produce melodramatic films with song and dance, there emerged an art cinema favouring ‘realistic’ themes and dialogue conventions similar to Sinhala stage drama. Its pioneer was Lester James Peries – Sri Lanka’s answer to Satyajit Ray – who received international acclaim for *Raktha* (1956) and has continued making films into his eighties. His wife Sumitra Peries became Sri Lanka’s first female director in the late 1970s.

In 1972, when the new constitution renamed the island Sri Lanka, the state nationalised the film industry and put it under the monopoly of the State Film Corporation – now called the National Film Corporation (NFC). Despite liberalisation of Sri Lanka’s economy and the release of Indian and other foreign films into the market in 1977, the NFC monopoly did not cease until 2000, and during the 1980s it typically held back the distribution of films unless they were classified as ‘art’ films. This, together with competition from television, increased production costs and the burning down of theatres during the 1980s communal riots, has contributed to the declining output of the Sri Lankan film industry since the 1990s. Yet the 1990s also witnessed the emergence of new filmmakers such as Prasanna Vithange, Asoke Handagama and Somaratne Dissanayake, whose films explore Sri Lanka’s sweeping economic, political and cultural changes since the 1980s, including violent conflict between Tamil separatists and the Sri Lankan government, through the theme of the family.

In Somaratne Dissanayake’s *Saroja* (1999), a Sinhala family shelters a Tamil girl, Saroja, and after his comrades kill her Sinhala family’s midst. Sinhalese villagers, but to ‘transcend ethnic ba Dharmasena Pathiraja h a Sinhalese perspective, to its Tamil counterpart form. In Prasanna Vitha protagonist is a divorced boyfrien, earning her botched home abortion day for psychiatric tr escorted away by her ex-mother with the image the family itself as an op

Cinema

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Tamil girl, Saroja, and her Tamil Tiger father, eventually adopting her after his comrades kill her father. The arrival of the Tamil family into the Sinhala family’s midst provokes a moral crisis and the outrage of other Sinhalese villagers, but the child’s innocence enables her adoptive family to ‘transcend ethnic barriers and to imagine a multicultural nation’. Dharmasena Pathiraja has argued that the film portrays the conflict from a Sinhalese perspective, vindicating the Sinhala family as morally superior to its Tamil counterpart and accepting Tamils only in their most ‘angelic’ form. In Prasanna Vithange’s Walls Within (1997), on the other hand, the protagonist is a divorced mother, who rekindles a relationship with an old boyfriend, earning her family’s and her neighbours’ opprobrium. After a botched home abortion plunges her into madness, her family sends her away for psychiatric treatment. However, the final shots of her being escorted away by her ex-boyfriend ambiguously suggest that her madness may be a ruse. By juxtaposing cultural expectations of the self-sacrificing mother with the image of a ‘self-fulfilling mother’, Walls Within exposes the family itself as an oppressive institution.

Cinema of Pakistan and Bangladesh

Pakistan and Bangladesh each produce about eighty films a year, although their output is rarely shown outside their borders. Pakistan’s main film industry is based in Lahore (therefore known as ‘Lollywood’) and makes films in Urdu and Punjabi. Lahore’s film industry suffered irrevocably from partition, as many of its talented personnel were Hindu and migrated to Bombay. Yet, with partition, an inflow of talent also arrived from Bombay. Among the newcomers was Noor Jehan (1926–2000), known as ‘Melody Queen’ – Pakistan’s most famous singer and actress. The films in which she acted had a success ratio of ‘well above 90%’. She moreover became Pakistan’s first female director with her film Chanway (1951), in which she also starred. She was still working as a playback singer in the 1990s.

Pakistan’s post-independence history has featured a succession of military dictatorships. However, there have been interim democratic periods, including five years under Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, who promoted the development of arts and culture in Pakistan and established the National Film Development Corporation (NAFDEC) after the Indian model. However, following his ousting, NAFDEC’s role has largely been ‘ceremonial rather than real’. In addition to lack of proper government support, strict censorship during periods of military rule has curbed freedom of cinematic expression. This has not only stifled the growth of an alternative, politicised cinema but has also given Pakistan’s filmmakers a competitive disadvantage.
against Indian films. The loss of East Pakistan, an important market for Urdu films, was also crippling. In the 1990s, however, some relief on Entertainment Tax and revenues from import duties enabled the production of several local successes including Choorian (1998) and Yeh Dil Aap Ka Hum (2002). The latter has been classified as Pakistan’s most expensive film and the first the country has released abroad.

Bangladesh’s capital Dhaka emerged as a film-producing centre after partition. At first supported by Pakistan’s central development board, Bangladeshi films have been called a ‘poor man’s copy of the Bollywood masala films’, although they tried to indigenise the popular idiom, for example with Bengali folk formats (Jatras) during the 1960s. Like Pakistan since the mid-1970s, Bangladesh has veered towards Islamic fundamentalism and suffered military dictatorships for a period. After independence, film production continued under the tight control of the Dhaka-based Film Development Corporation.

As in Pakistan, there has been a lack of resources and facilities for alternative filmmakers. Unlike India’s state-sponsored parallel filmmakers, Bangladesh’s alternative filmmakers belong to an underground movement known as ‘short films’ because many – although not all – of their films are shorts or documentaries. In order to have greater freedom of expression and avoid the commercial film industry’s producer–distributor nexus, they use low-cost 16mm film and show their films around the country on mobile projection units. However, low production values were never means in themselves – filmmakers were always ready to move to more high-tech formats when these became available.

Tanvir Mokammel is a leading ‘short’ filmmaker. Like many other films from Pakistan and Bangladesh, his feature-length Quiet Flows the River Chitra (1999) deals with the theme of partition, focusing on the Hindu minority who remained in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) in the immediate aftermath. It evokes the idyll handed down through generations in Bengali families: a vision of a bounteous Golden Bengal, watered by eternally flowing blue rivers’, with Hindus and Muslims living contentedly together on its banks. Through typically understated means, the film explores the cracks appearing in this idyll. The opening images of water-reflected sunsets, the colourful costumes and children’s games gradually yield to a menacing ambience. The river itself is highlighted as a place of danger, culminating in a gang rape of a Hindu girl on its banks, obliquely visualised as a sari unfurling across the screen.

A founding member of the Short Film Forum (established in 1986), Tareque Masud made a number of shorts and documentaries with his wife Catherine before their first feature The Clay Bird (2003), which their own
Dhaka-based production company Audiovision co-produced with the French company MK2. The Clay Bird became the first Bangladeshi film to compete at Cannes, where it won the International Critics’ Prize in 2002. Like many films by other younger filmmakers from the short-film movement, it deals with events leading up to the 1971 liberation war, a trauma comparable to partition. The Pakistani army’s repression led to genocide, and millions were forced to flee as refugees to India. An added motivation for this theme is that the values of the liberation war are exactly what the current political establishment—who use Islam for violent power politics—are set against.

In The Clay Bird, a boy nicknamed Anu is sent to a madrasa (Islamic seminary school) after his father, Kazi, an orthodox Muslim, discovers he has secretly been attending Hindu festivals with his uncle Milon, an activist for free elections (of which Kazi also disapproves). Through its child actors, the film combines the influences of Abbas Kiarostami (another MK2-sponsored filmmaker) and Ray, who—as a Bengali filmmaker, although from Hindu-dominant West Bengal—exerts a considerable force on Bangladesh’s alternative cinema. The fate of Anu’s sister Asma recalls that of Apu’s sister, Durga, in Ray’s Pather Panchali—she dies of a fever because Kazi, a homeopathist by trade, refuses her allopathic medicine, tenaciously clinging to his beliefs just as he later refuses to leave his house despite warnings of the Pakistani army’s crackdown. The echo of Ray in characters’ names and plots is significant, as Anu (like Milon) is a Hindu name—he reluctantly switches to his official Muslim name at school. Milon makes a virtue of syncretism, saying at one point, ‘the truth is that nothing is purely indigenous. Everything is mixed up.’ The film itself vividly juxtaposes Hindu and Muslim iconography: the madrasa’s architecture and uniforms contrast with colourful, noisy Hindu festivals, including the kite-flying competition, where rivals try to cut down each other’s kites—a millennium-old product of Hindu mythology—which has remained in Bangladesh and Pakistan.

The Film Censor Board of Bangladesh banned the film due to its ‘religiously sensitive material’. However, others have praised the film for its nuanced view of Islam, expressed in song interludes of Bengali folk music at open-air concerts attended by Anu and his mother—including a debate song in the Baul (itinerant minstrel) tradition which ‘contrasts more traditional forms of Islam with Sufi ideology’. At the madrasa, a moderate teacher takes issue with the head teacher’s dogmatic approach, recalling that it was not by the sword that the people of the subcontinent embraced Islam but through the Sufis and dervishes, who used peaceful means.
Notes

2. Gazdar, *Pakistan Cinema*, p. 14. The Hindu caste system created a highly unjust social hierarchy whereby priests (Brahmins) hereditarily enjoyed the highest status in society and Dalits (once called ‘Untouchables’) the lowest. Dalits were thus deprived of their basic dignity of life. Caste discrimination has been outlawed in India since Independence, yet still prevails.
4. Ibid., p. 315.
18. Ibid., p. 129.
28. Ibid., p. 21.
32. Ramnarayan, ‘Mr and Mrs Iyer’, p. 25.
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41. Iqbal, ‘Pakistani Cinema’.
42. Mokammel, ‘Alternative Cinema’, p. 29; Mokammel, ‘Last Two and a Half
44. Ibid., p. 30.
47. Mohaiemen, ‘Petition’.
CHAPTER 8

Indian Cinema

Bollywood films now have simultaneous international releases. Higher ticket prices in the UK, the USA, Canada and Australia ensure lucrative returns, generating up to 65 per cent of a film’s total income. In the UK, Bollywood releases routinely enter the weekly box-office top ten and score high screen averages. For example, in a UK box-office chart for a week in August 2003, the Bollywood hit *Koi Mil Gaya*, playing on just thirty-six screens, was listed as having the second best screen average after *Terminator 3*, which was in its second running week and showing in 477 theatres. Reception contexts are also rapidly changing within India, where middle classes who attend air-conditioned city multiplexes are prepared to pay ticket prices several times higher than poor rural audiences. Today’s Bollywood films are therefore constructed to appeal not only to the poor who traditionally formed their core audiences but also increasingly to the South Asian diaspora and India’s middle classes. However, this is only one of the ways in which Indian cinema has reinvented itself for global audiences since the 1990s. In addition to dominant Bollywood genres, this chapter looks at the work of popular Tamil director Mani Ratnam and arthouse films by Indian expatriates.

In India’s formerly closed, Soviet-style economy (introduced by India’s first post-independence Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru), foreign products came on the market years after they became available in the West. Government reforms introduced in 1991 dismantled strict quotas, deregulated local industries and permitted multinationals to enter India. The nation underwent accelerated globalisation, flooded by foreign brands and satellite-TV channels, bringing the West, with its glittering promises of glamorous, modern lifestyles, straight into middle-class homes. (In India, satellite-TV owners are mainly middle-class.) These rapid changes caused confusion and anxiety that traditional Indian values of belonging and support would be swept away – especially the institution of the joint (or extended) family whose interests had, for generations, been privileged over those of individuals. They gave rise to debates about who or what is ‘Indian’ and what is a foreign import.

Bollywood films have responded by reconciling global consumer life-styles with tradition from Bollywood钗 are Japanese / Th but my heart is Ind *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Ik* provide reassurance, portable and malleable – known as ‘non-remitting’ NRI audiences living consumerism giving heart in India yearning for India’s earlier films, where any Orientalist’s Enchanting story about women and work: “What constitutes women are traditional India’’. In the India by fire in order to unscathed. The H and resistance to t anxiety in Bollywood lesbian love story *F* Mehta. As will be version of the diaspora of ‘Indian’ness’, what were perceived as a

One theme estal precariousness and imbalances. In India, the
styles with traditional ‘Indian’ values – their mantra is similar to the song from Bollywood classic *Shri 420* (1955), where Raj Kapoor sings, ‘My shoes are Japanese / These pants are British / The cap on my head is Russian / But my heart is Indian’. Indeed, one recent Bollywood film is actually called *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani/The Heart Is Still Indian* (2000). Such films provide reassurance in a rapidly globalising world that ‘Indian values are portable and malleable’. In a pivotal move, films shift the diasporic Indian – known as ‘non-resident Indian’ (NRI) – to the centre of their narratives. NRI audiences living in the West can now see their pursuit of wealth and consumerism given a blessing in Bollywood narratives, and their nostalgic yearning for India acknowledged in the scripts. This is in stark contrast to earlier films, where NRIs never figured and the ‘West was as dangerous as any Orientalist’s East – seductive but spiritually fatal’.

The Hindu nationalist (Hindutva) groups, such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Shiv Sena who rose to power in the 1990s, promote narrow conceptions of Indianness comparable to other tribal nationalisms discussed elsewhere in this book (for example, Sinhala and Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka in Chapter 7 and rivalry between Croats, Serbs and Muslims in Yugoslavia in Chapter 1). The BJP believe that the Hindu nation is the one true Indian nation. They see the caste system as the ‘natural’ order, and they deny that Islam has made a significant impact on Indian culture. The Hindutva has many supporters in the South Asian diaspora as well as among India’s middle classes. When in power, their neoliberal economic policies were popular with wealthy NRIs in the UK and North America, for whom they introduced generous tax-breaks to invest in ‘the Motherland’.

Women and women’s desires are a particular focus of Hindutva debates on what constitutes Indianness. This is because, as we have seen elsewhere, women are traditional symbols of the nation – hence, the figure of ‘Mother India’. In the Indian epic *Ramayana*, the virtuous wife Sita undergoes trial by fire in order to prove her sexual purity, stepping through a bonfire unscathed. The Hindu woman’s purity has symbolised ‘Indian’ identity and resistance to the West. Not surprisingly, this is a site of ideological anxiety in Bollywood films as well as in the hysteria surrounding the lesbian love story *Fire* (1996), directed by Indo-Canadian filmmaker Deepa Mehta. As will be seen, contemporary Bollywood endorses a sanitised version of the diaspora, counting the figure of the NRI within definitions of ‘Indianness’, while the values associated with the diasporic film *Fire* were perceived as a foreign import.

One theme established at the outset of this book is that the nation is a precarious and imaginary ideal, which works to conceal and contain differences. In India, there has been a spate of nationalist films, such as *Gadar*...
(2001), L.O.C. Kargil (2003) and Lakshya (2004), appealing to a country racked by internal secessionist movements, with older tensions being re-ignited in Kashmir and the north-east together with a new flashpoint in the Punjab since the 1980s. In films like Lagaan (2001), another patriotic film, the contemporary era has witnessed a resurgence of All-India heroes, able to heal the nation’s rifts. Bollywood has traditionally played a culturally unifying role, constructing a pan-Indian ethos and appeal seemingly able to unite every element of life in a land otherwise divided by differences of language, religion, class and caste. However, while targeting global audiences, Bollywood’s dominant genres since the 1990s have retreated into narrow regional and/or ethnic preoccupations. In tandem with this, films from South India, especially Mani Ratnam’s ‘Terrorism Trilogy’ – Roja (1992), Bombay (1995) and Dil Se (1998) – have risen to the challenge of tackling national themes, gaining nationwide distribution and, in the case of Roja and Bombay, wild popularity. Like The Terrorist (1999) (discussed in Chapter 7), which was directed by his cinematographer Santosh Sivan, Ratnam’s films use the figure of terrorism to insert India into the global imaginary as well as drawing on regionalist and nationalist discourses. The rest of this chapter explores these topics more fully, engaging Lagaan, Dil Se and Fire in close analysis.

Bollywood Romance

The dominant Bollywood genre of the 1990s was romance mixed with comic subplots – a big departure from the action and revenge dramas which dominated in the 1970s and 1980s. Its common features are: the love triangle, with two men falling in love with the same woman, or two women falling in love with the same man; the notion that love is based on friendship (also found in earlier films); the ‘arranged love marriage’, that is, love choices which gain parental approval; NRI characters; foreign locations; and a style reminiscent of MTV and advertising, emphasising conspicuous consumption and product placement.

The arranged love marriage/‘love is friendship’ formula was minted by a young generation of directors known as the Bollywood Brat Pack. They include Sooraj Barjatya, Aditya Chopra, Karan Johar, Dharmesh Dharshan and Farhan Akhtar. The Bollywood film industry is full of acting and producing dynasties. Many Brat Pack directors are the sons of influential industry professionals. Sooraj Barjatya belongs to the family who own Rajshri Films, India’s largest distribution network, which also produces films. Karan Johar is the son of producer Yash Johar and childhood friend of Aditya Chopra, the son of veteran director Yash Chopra. In fact, it is Yash Chopra who is credited with the forte of romance and the focusing of Waqt (1965). How does the contemporary romance of professionals or college students adopt the received traditions, as Sooraj Barjatya’s Ht records, returned and promoting in the middle-class families a clientele with films co-deterrent to family au ‘clean’, ‘wholesome’ family myth in its narrated for the good of traditional wedding celebrations. Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham (2001) and Brat Pack films: ‘it’s all marriages, which are about traditional values’ court family elders beloved’. With each vious film, this has put the tradition of the joint wedding and rituals changing world.

These are post-feminism for their own desires for self-fulfillment of the Shrew-type na Kuch Kuch Hota Hai (1998) who is unconcerned with Kajol’s self-interest in maintaining jewellery or fashion). spectacular metamorphosis during their college days and meticulously groomed of the film, Anjali has to ‘Indian’ family values wife. In the end
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Yash Chopra who is credited with originating ‘the chiffon and roses’ brand of romance and the focus on super-rich lifestyles in his early films, including Waqt (1965). However, these featured older characters whereas contemporary romance focuses on youthful protagonists (usually young professionals or college-goers). In Dil to Pagal Hai (1997), Yash Chopra himself adopted the new formula, as has another veteran director Subhash Ghai, who made Pardes (1997).

Soooraj Barjatya’s Hum Aapke Hain Koun (1994) broke Indian box-office records, returning audiences to the theatres in droves after the slump in attendance during the 1980s, when the arrival of colour TV and VCRs kept middle-class families at home, while cinemas catered for a lower-class male clientele with films containing ‘higher doses of sex and violence’ (another deterrent to family audiences). HAHK was promoted and received as ‘clean’, ‘wholesome’ family entertainment. It enshrined the Hindu joint family myth in its narrative formula, where personal desires are subordinated for the good of the family, which unites around religious rituals and wedding celebrations. The tag line of a later blockbuster, Karan Johar’s Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham (a.k.a. K3G) (2001), sums up the ethos of these Brat Pack films: ‘it’s all about loving your parents’. In contrast to love marriages, which are about rebellion against elders, the lovers in these narratives ‘court family elders [for their blessings] with more ardour than the beloved’. With each big hit outdoing the box-office performance of previous films, this has proved to be a commercially astute formula, affirming the tradition of the joint family and North Indian (particularly Punjabi) weddings and rituals as ‘a bastion of stability and security in a rapidly changing world’.

These are post-feminist films which have absorbed the discourses of feminism for their own purposes. In them, women inevitably set aside their desires for self-fulfilment in favour of the family, often following a Taming of the Shrew-type narrative model. For example, in the mega-hit Kuch Kuch Hota Hai (1998), the star Kajol is basketball-playing tomboy Anjali, who is unconcerned with acting or looking ‘feminine’ (a role which embodies Kajol’s off-screen persona; she is often criticised for her lack of interest in maintaining her appearance by means of slimming, grooming, jewellery or fashion). However, in the course of the film we witness her spectacular metamorphosis, as her friend Rahul’s recollection of her during their college days is cross-cut with shots of Anjali bejewelled and meticulously groomed for her engagement party. In Anne Ciecko’s reading of the film, Anjali has tamed her rebellious youth and recognised her ‘duty’ to ‘Indian’ family values, thus proving her worthiness as Rahul’s prospective wife. In the ending, her fiancé Aman hands her over to Rahul, sealing
her transformation into a commodity exchanged between men and a self-sacrificing Sita-esque ideal of domestic goddess.\textsuperscript{14}

This custom of patriarchal exchange is embodied in the title of Aditya Chopra’s Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge/The Brave-hearted Will Take the Bride (DDLJ) (1995), the longest-running movie in Indian film history.\textsuperscript{15} DDLJ’s protagonists are second-generation British Asians Simran (Kajol) and Raj (Shahrukh Khan). When he discovers that the pair fell in love while on holiday in Europe, Simran’s traditionalist father sends her back to the Punjab for an arranged wedding. In a moving scene, Simran’s mother Lajjo, who sympathises with the lovers, speaks out against gender injustices. She relates how she was told that there are no differences between men and women, yet her own education was stopped so that her brothers’ could continue; since then, she has never ceased making sacrifices as daughter, sister and wife. The film articulates feminist dissent, yet ultimately contains it through its resolution in which Simran is handed over from father to husband. Even when Lajjo encourages Raj to elope with Simran, Raj decides instead to win the respect of her parents, only accepting the father’s authority to give away the bride. This is how Raj shows his Indian moral values, striking an iconic pose in his Harley Davidson jacket against a field of yellow flowers in the Punjab; despite outward signs, we find he is still ‘Indian’ at heart.

Male stars carry the box office in India, much as elsewhere. Top-ranking Bollywood stars include Shahrukh Khan, Aamir Khan, Hritik Roshan and Amitabh Bachchan (who has made many comebacks since his Angry Young Man days). Like the Hollywood Brat Pack directors, many of today’s young stars come from acting or producing dynasties. An exception to this is Shahrukh Khan, whose background is comparably humble. Previously a player of villains, Shahrukh retains a badmaash (wicked) or cocky element in his romantic roles. It was his first romantic role in DDLJ which made him a youth icon, both in India and abroad.

Through their use of stars, traditions and rituals, Bollywood films feed NRIs’ nostalgia for their ‘motherland’. They construct an imaginary or mythical India; for example, DDLJ presents an idyllic, virtually pre-industrial rural Punjab, airbrushed and shorn of violent conflict. At the same time, Bollywood makes prolific use of foreign locales, including Scotland, for song sequences in KKHH and the Lake District in Mujhe Dosti Karoge (2002). The craze for foreign locations is not new – Raj Kapoor’s Sangam (1964) was the first Bollywood film to use European locations – but whereas foreign locations served largely as backdrops for songs in earlier films, contemporary films integrate them into their NRI-targeted narratives. Many have a dual-nation setting, set partly in India and partly abroad, including Sydney (Dil Chahta) the New York-based tourist’s gaze from a giving NRI the pleasure of holiday des settings in contemporary social reality. Character bearing little relation or even abroad.

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partly abroad, including locations in London (DDLJ), New York (Pardes) and Sydney (Dil Chahta Hai [2001]). Some take place entirely abroad, like the New York-based Kal Ho Naa Ho (2003). These films solicit a global tourist’s gaze from an economically aspiring Indian middle class as well as giving NRIs the pleasure of seeing their favourite stars touring their own cities or holiday destinations. However, while showcasing tourist sights, settings in contemporary Bollywood films are otherwise disconnected from social reality. Characters live in opulent mansions and loft-style apartments bearing little relationship to the living conditions of most Indians in India or even abroad.

Whereas before, wealth and the West signified corruption, today’s films endorse global consumerism. Temples are among their recurrent settings, but so are shopping malls – temples of consumerism – providing reassurance to monetised NRI audiences that their pursuit of wealth and material comforts is in keeping with ‘Indian’ traditions. After all, Hindus worship a god of business success – Ganesh – and a goddess of wealth – Lakshmi.

The Films of Mani Ratnam

Ratnam is South India’s foremost director, who has also gained huge popularity in the all-India market. His films are renowned for their production values, stunning photography and well-choreographed song sequences. He is the director most closely associated with bringing MTV into Indian cinema (that is, by giving MTV a local inflection in song-and-dance sequences). He comes from a film-producing family – his father ‘Venus’ Gopalratnam was a producer, and his brother G. Venkatesan is a distributor and producer – although Ratnam himself worked as a management consultant before entering the film industry. Ratnam has made films in several Indian languages: his debut Pallavi Anupallavi (1983) in Kannada, Unarvo (1984) in Malayalam, Geetanjali (1989) in Telugu, Dil Se in Hindi, and the rest of his films in Tamil. The film that first brought him to national recognition was Nayakan (1987), financed by his brother’s production company Sujatha Films. A gangster film inspired by Francis Ford Coppola’s The Godfather (1972), Nayakan won National Awards for Cinematography and Art Direction for P. C. Sriram and Thotta Tharani respectively. Ratnam’s national profile soared again when Roja and Bombay were dubbed into Hindi and released with great success all over India.

Ratnam is often accused of expressing simplistic, nationalist and Hindu-biased sentiments. He is by no means a ‘radical’ filmmaker, yet his films are astonishing for what they achieve within Indian popular-cinema conventions and censorship restrictions. Importantly, Ratnam
has chosen to influence the mainstream not by operating alongside it – as India’s parallel cinema (discussed in Chapter 7) traditionally has – but inside it, although his films would not be possible without parallel cinema’s precedent.

The trilogy films all use real political conflicts as backgrounds to stories of passion and desire. This is something of a breakthrough for Indian popular cinema, especially when compared to the dominant contemporary trend of Bollywood romance which, despite its globe-trotting, sometimes depicts India as a timeless present filled with feudal family weddings and rituals. Roja and Bombay mark a bold departure for South Indian cinema, as they place their Tamil characters in North Indian situations and place the role of addressing national issues – namely the rise of separatist and independence movements within India’s borders in Roja (also in Dil Se), and communalism in Bombay, where the terrorism in question is religious fanaticism. The Trilogy films explore the linkages between nations and their terrorists rather than depicting them in opposition. Their stories of transgressive couples imagine empathy between the nation and its disaffected fragments. They also show a mirroring relationship between the state and terrorists, emphasising that state violence and oppression engenders terrorist violence.

Roja and Bombay have been massively influential, setting a trend for engaging with topical issues in some Bollywood films (for example, Khalid Mohammed’s Fiza [2000]). In Roja, a code-breaker, Rishi Kumar, is kidnapped by Kashmiri terrorists in reprisal for their leader’s capture by Indian security forces, and his distraught newlywed wife, Roja (another Sita-esque heroine), pleads with the state to secure his release. Rishi believes terrorists are mistaken in their aims of fighting for an independent Kashmir, as Kashmir is – according to him – part of India. Besides Rishi’s stirring patriotic actions, the film emphasises the bond that develops between him and his captor Liaqat. The film is beautifully photographed by Santosh Sivan, and also marks the debut of music composer A. R. Rahman, whose soundtrack was a major ingredient in the film’s success.

Marxist critic Madhava Prasad has argued that Ratnam’s films are a sign of ‘ideological reform’ in Indian cinema – not, however, for their content, but for their form. Roja opens with the capture of the terrorist leader and then cuts to Roja’s first meeting and marriage with Rishi in a Tamil village. Although Ratnam generally prefers linear narrative, here he deploys something like a flashback, although it is not subjectively motivated as flashbacks in Indian popular cinema usually are, and its significance remains an enigma until later in the narrative. Prasad argues that the opening fragment therefore actually menaces the subsequent pastoral idyll – a compressed feudal family romance out of its ‘timeless fragile ‘siege’ to the dominant filmic project’, thereby ‘activating elements’.

Bombay, which was released in December 1992, is the first Indian pop-culture film that engaged with an inflammatory issue in mainstream cinema. Bombay (since 1996 it has been retitled Bombay: No Cry) talks about ethnically Hindus of Maharashtra dialogue directly from the film’s representational reprimands the Shiites.

Despite this, the film was a critical and commercial success. It was criticised for its depiction of Indian society, although it did not attempt to glamourise it. The film’s depiction of Hindu-Muslim violence in the film’s setting is seen as an attempt to explain the violence that took place in the Punjab in 1984. The film’s soundtrack, composed by A. R. Rahman, became an instant hit and has remained popular to this day. The film’s success was due to its ability to address sensitive and controversial issues in a way that resonated with the audience.

After the success of Bombay, Mani Ratnam shifted away from the ‘Bombay’ series to explore other themes in his films. His subsequent films, such as Alaipayuthe [2002], have explored the fragility
feudal family romance – forcing this dominant cinema convention to break out of its ‘timeless frame’ and stage the present.\textsuperscript{19} Ratnam’s method lays ‘siege’ to the dominant form and harnesses its pleasures to ‘another narrative project’, thereby ‘staging . . . an ideological rehabilitation of its narrative elements’.\textsuperscript{20}

*Bombay*, which was produced by the Amitabh Bachchan Corporation, is the first Indian popular film to centre on a Hindu–Muslim marriage. The couple face problems not only before but also after they marry, having eloped to Bombay, where they are caught in communal riots which broke out in December 1992 and January 1993 after the destruction of the Babri Masjid (mosque) at Ayodhya by armed Hindus mobilised by the BJP. The film underwent a wrangle with the Censor Board, which demanded cuts from an inflammatory speech by Bal Thackeray, leader of the Shiv Sena, then in power in the regional government of Maharashtra, its capital is Bombay (since 1996 called Mumbai). In the speech, Thackeray allegedly talks about ethnically cleansing Bombay in order to preserve it for only Hindus of Maharashtrian origin.\textsuperscript{21} Although Ratnam apparently took his dialogue directly from Thackeray’s speeches, the Censor Board felt that the film’s representation of Thackeray was too ‘strong’ and feared violent reprisals from the Shiv Sena if the film was shown in that form.\textsuperscript{22}

Despite this, the film provoked protest from Hindus and Muslims, and Ratnam encountered death threats and an assassination attempt for making it. It was criticised for misrepresenting events, as it implies that Muslims started the riots, although this was not the case. The hero, Shekhar, tries to knock sense into the rioters, threatening to set himself alight unless they stop their bloodshed. He emphatically calls himself ‘Indian’ rather than Hindu or Muslim, highlighting a secular national identity that is being endangered by both state and terrorists. Despite its visible biases and ‘simplistic’ messages, one of the film’s strengths is that it does recognise the responsibility of political parties for inciting violence and enmity in communities who ‘have coexisted for decades’ – carrying echoes of former Yugoslavia (see Chapter 1).\textsuperscript{23}

After Indian audiences’ unfavourable response to *Dil Se* (see below), Ratnam shifted away from national-political concerns for *Aalipayuthey* (2000). While Bollywood romances typically end with marriage, many of Mani Ratnam’s films explore relationships and their complications after marriage. This is true of *Roja* and *Bombay* but especially of *Aalipayuthey* (which, however, was successfully remade as the Hollywood film *Saathiya* [2002]). In *Aalipayuthey*, Ratnam adopts a flashback structure (which, as noted above, he usually avoids). He uses non-linear storytelling here ‘to explore the fragility of a marriage whose murky hopes for the future rests
on a romantic past.

Ratnam returned to explicit political topics in *Kamathil Mathamittal* (2002), which won Shweta Prasad Keertana recognition for her portrayal of nine-year-old Amudha at the 2002 National Awards. This is Ratnam's first film without dance sequences, where present-day conflict in Sri Lanka disrupts a South Indian family idyll. Having discovered she is adopted, Amudha ventures into the island’s war zone in search of her biological mother, a trainer of Tamil Tiger suicide bombers. In a striking scene, Amudha finds herself in the midst of these ‘daughters of death’, girls of her own age, silently pointing rifles at her through the undergrowth – doubles of what she might have been.

**Indian Expatriate Filmmakers**

Indian expatriates such as Deepa Mehta and Mira Nair have gained a high profile making films with Indian casts and settings which appeal to international audiences outside the usual diasporic markets. A key feature of their work is the attempt to tackle aspects of Indian social reality left out of the hugely censored domestic cinema. This includes a bolder handling of sexuality, inevitably attracting controversy and leading Indian critics to dismiss their works as ‘carefully crafted attempts to steal the limelight’. In a competitive global market, ‘the ability to manipulate content, aesthetics and perhaps, controversy’ may be exactly what defines their approach – which, they themselves admit, is to provoke rather than merely entertain. Yet the fact that they are expatriates no doubt bears on their hostile reception in India, especially at a time when ‘suspicions about the influences of globalization can be stirred up against any and all foreigners’.

A former Bollywood director, Shekhar Kapur ventured into this category of transnational filmmaking with his film *Bandit Queen* (1995), which was co-produced by Britain’s Channel 4. He has since gone on to direct the UK production *Elizabeth* and other films abroad. *Bandit Queen*’s financiers are likely to have been attracted to the project by its conformity to Western ideas of ‘realism’ and its focus on the oppression of women. It is a biopic of a real bandit, a Dalit (‘Untouchable’) who survived numerous humiliations meted out to her gender and caste. She came to be championed for looting on behalf of the poor, who called her ‘Devi’, meaning ‘goddess’. After being jailed for eleven years, she entered politics and was assassinated in 2001. The film purports to be her ‘true story’, based on what she narrated to writer Mala Sen while she was in jail. As well as in the performance and shooting style, the film’s ‘realism’ stands out in the graphic depiction of sexual abuse and violence. But although its degree of explicitness is new, *Bandit Queen*’s rape-revenge narrative is similar to an Indian popular-
cinema formula from the 1980s. The real Phoolan Devi initially opposed the film, claiming that it was not the story she had given Sen. Because of this dispute, the Delhi High Court temporarily banned the film in India and withdrew it from the Oscars (it had been nominated as India’s Oscar entry). Further to these complications, the Censor Board would not release the film without cuts, which Shekhar Kapur refused to make. The film was finally released after Phoolan Devi made an out-of-court settlement with Channel 4 and the producers agreed to some cuts. Despite its favourable response in the West, which its financiers had carefully calculated, Bandit Queen came under attack from novelist Arundhati Roy, and others, who condemned its use of a feminist pretext for depicting explicit rape scenes.

Mira Nair, who hails from Orissa, is the best-known Indian director outside India. She trained abroad, including with US documentary filmmaker D. A. Pennebaker, and has lived in the USA and Africa. Nair believes that she had to leave India to make movies about India and that her US training allowed her to develop an independent style, which may have been restricted had she learnt filmmaking in India as an assistant to a male director. Funding is another reason why she works from abroad – her films are mostly funded by the USA and Europe (especially the UK’s Channel 4). Beginning with documentaries, then turning increasingly to fiction, her films express a feminist outlook and an interest in the disenfranchised (or ‘the subaltern’). Her Salaam Bombay! (1988), a co-production between Channel 4 and India’s NFDC, focuses on Bombay’s destitute street kids, drug-addicts and prostitutes. It is shot in cinéma-vérité style on location with non-professional actors, combining documentary with narrative. It was Oscar-nominated and won the Caméra d’Or at Cannes 1988. Nair’s later film, Kama Sutra (1996), named after the Indian erotic manual, is set in the sixteenth century and follows a female servant who rebels against feudal constraints. An erotic film with a feminist twist, it has sex scenes depicting erotic pleasure from a female point of view – a reaction against what Nair calls ‘perverse sexual portrayals of women’ in both US and Indian cinema, where ‘rape is an accepted sexual expression, but sensual or spiritual pleasure [in sex] is not’.

Kama Sutra’s release was limited, and it was not particularly well received. Monsoon Wedding (2001), by contrast, turned out to be Nair’s most popular film so far. It contains many ingredients common to contemporary Bollywood films: a Punjabi family wedding, ‘filmi’ music and dancing, super-rich lifestyles and an NRI character (Melbourne-return Rahul). However, it also utilises a digital home-video aesthetic and narrative structure reminiscent of the Dogme 95 film Festen (1998) (see Chapter 2), enabling it to cross over to international audiences attuned to this kind
of cinematic realism. Unlike contemporary Bollywood films, *Monsoon Wedding* reveals secrets behind the family façade – child abuse, pre-marital sex, financial problems, and technical hitches in the wedding preparations. Nair interweaves her interest in marginal characters into the story of a middle-class marriage by cross-cutting from them to wedding-manager Dubey and household servant Alice, whose marriage takes place on the sidelines of the big family event.

Deepti Mehta grew up in Amritsar, near India’s border with Pakistan, and studied philosophy at the University of New Delhi. Her father was a film-distributor and exhibitor, which gave her the chance to watch many Hindi films from early on. She herself learned filmmaking by working for a company producing documentaries for the Indian government. She emigrated to Canada in 1973, directing for television before making her debut feature film, *Sam & Me* (1991), which won the Caméra d’Or at Cannes. *Fire* (1996), the start of a trilogy, is her third feature and the first film she made in India. The second trilogy film *Earth* (1998) is adapted from Bapsi Sidwa’s novel *Cracking India*, which narrates the trauma of partition through the eyes of a polio-ridden Parsi child, Lenny, living in what is now Pakistan. The film, however, focuses more on the love triangle between Lenny’s Hindu Ayah, Shanta (Nandita Das), and two Muslim men, Masseur and Ice Candy Man (Aamir Khan), using partition as a dramatic backdrop for a tale of passion. Insofar as it uses stars and this kind of narrative structure, it resembles mainstream Indian cinema (although not in other respects). *Water*, the third trilogy film, has a story about widows taking refuge in a house in the holy city of Benares during the 1930s, in which one widow is forced into prostitution. Widowhood has traditionally been bound by Hindu customs, as mentioned in Chapter 7. Already provoked by the controversial *Fire* (see below), Hindu fundamentalists destroyed *Water*’s set even before shooting began, believing that the story sullied the image of widowhood, and spread rumours about the film’s ‘lurid and anti-Hindu content’. Mehta faced death threats, and her effigy was burned by protesters. The BJP, then in government, did nothing to stop the demonstrations – so Mehta halted the production, hoping to return to it upon a change of political climate.

Close Analysis

*Lagaan* (Ashutosh Gowariker, 2001)

The Bollywood film *Lagaan* takes place in a drought-stricken central Indian province in 1893, where Captain Russell (Paul Blackthorne), the commanding officer of a British colony, decides to participate in an ancient local tradition of cricket. The film explores themes of colonialism, identity, and social inequality. Aamir Khan’s performance as Ajay stands out, capturing the complexity of a man caught between his love for cricket and his duty to his community. The film’s realism is enhanced by its authentic setting and the use of local language, providing a compelling insight into the lives of Indians during that period.
commanding officer of the local British cantonment, challenges a group of Indian villagers to a game of cricket, promising to waive the entire province’s land tax (lagaan) for the next three years if they win; the forfeit if they lose, however, is triple lagaan. A village lad, Bhuvan (Aamir Khan), accepts the challenge, although the Indians have never played cricket before. The film contains a subplot involving a love triangle between Bhuvan, the village belle Gauri (Gracy Singh) and Russell’s sister Elizabeth (Rachel Shelley), who believes Russell has been unfair and teaches the Indians how to play. The film was an international breakthrough – the first Bollywood film to be Oscar-nominated since Mother India (1957) – signalling a shift towards mainstream Western acceptance. It was also popular in India, where cricket is a well-known national passion.

For Lagaan, Gowariker studied films by Guru Dutt, Bimal Roy and Mehboob Khan from Bollywood’s 1950s era, from which he draws his iconography of a poor rural community. Although Lagaan assembles a star-filled production team – including music director A. R. Rahman – Aamir Khan is the only star in the cast and the only one to have previously performed song-and-dance numbers. Aamir initially rejected the script as a risky departure from formula, but eventually agreed not only to act in the film but to produce it himself, setting up a production house for that purpose. This was his first venture as a producer, although he comes from a famous film-producing family.

Aamir’s roles in art-house films such as Earth have given him the reputation of being a ‘thinking actor’. He brings production practices from Earth into Lagaan, which was shot on a single schedule on location using direct sound, while Bollywood films are usually shot discontinuously depending on schedules of stars who are booked into several films simultaneously, with sound dubbed in studios after production. Direct sound considerably added to the cost and length of the shoot – every shot had to be good for both camera and dialogue delivery, therefore increasing the number of retakes. This, together with its large multinational cast, made Lagaan a very high-budget film by Bollywood standards. Much more time was spent on it than is the norm for Bollywood – the film was in post-production for a whole year, mainly for editing which, also unusually for Bollywood, closely follows continuity rules.

Just as unusually, Lagaan strives for period authenticity, although it does not recreate a historical India but rather a ‘mythical’ one, as suggested in its subtitle: Once Upon a Time in India. Despite its influences from Western realist codes – including linear narrative – it contains many traditional motifs and conventions. Although the outcome is inevitable – we know the Indians are going to win – the film aims to deliver a spectacular presentation
of a ‘larger-than-life’ situation, where it is not what happens but how it happens that is important.

Our first sight of Bhuvan is as he is protecting animals in the forest from the British hunters. An eye-line match with Russell aiming his gun makes it appear as if it is Bhuvan who is being hunted; he is simultaneously discovered by Russell’s men and indeed finds a gun pointing at him. This early scene underlines that the British have the power of the gun – odds are stacked against the Indians. Furthermore, the Indian team are presented as a motley bunch – consisting of a deaf mute, a crazy fortune-teller and a polio-stricken cripple and contrasting with the well-turned-out British team, who are experienced cricketers. The theme of underdogs who overcome a mightier foe is recognisably universal and common to other leading film export industries (Hong Kong as well as Hollywood). In Lagaan, however, it is significant that this is done not through conventional means of combat but through a cricket match, which becomes a metaphor for the anti-colonial struggle against the British, who invented cricket and spread it throughout their empire. Although the Indians initially think that cricket is just child’s play – like their own golli danda – they start to see its ‘complex rules and power’ and learn to beat the imperialists at their own game. In this way, the film also constructs an origin myth about the Indian passion for cricket, and references to historic Indian cricketers are scattered throughout.

Bhuvan overcomes the villagers’ initial reluctance to take on the British challenge and assembles his cricket team by harnessing their native or vocational talents. The film details each recruit’s specific qualities: for example, Bhura the chicken-keeper dives to catch the ball as he does his runaway hens, and Kachra, the ‘Untouchable’ with a withered arm, is a fantastic spin-bowler. The team is multicultural – including a Muslim (Ismail), a Sikh (Deva) and an ‘Untouchable’ (Kachra). Under Bhuvan’s paternalistic leadership, people set aside their religious and caste differences for their common goal of defeating the British. The film upholds India’s secular traditions by emphasising that they ‘go back in history’, at the same time using its All-India hero to perform the ideological work of smoothing out present divisions.

Due to an investment in period authenticity, Lagaan’s song-and-dance sequences are not in the usual MTV style and are filmed mostly in long takes. Each song fulfils a specific function. For example, in ‘Ghanan Ghanan’, the villagers’ joy at seeing rain-clouds, which promise to end their two-year drought, heightens their subsequent despair when no rain falls. ‘O Paalanhaare’ occurs with the villagers praying to the gods after the match’s second day concludes badly. Although Lagaan avoids the use of coincidences and acts of fate characteristic of Indian epics and popular cinema, it shows the the next day. Howe ascribe the Indian te

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In Fire, sisters-in-la in love in a joint mid (1942), a short story English and execut Hamilton. It was vis house venues, princ audiences, before it houses in forty-two:

Fire is the first In women as lesbian. It
cinema, it shows the 'workings of destiny' operating on the cricket pitch the next day. However, the film also cleverly allows Western audiences to ascribe the Indian team's successes to 'good fortune', while Indian audiences may 'thank divine intervention for the same fortuitous events'.

To configure the cross-racial love triangle, Lagaan uses the Hindu myth of Radha and Krishna. Radha and Krishna are the model of spiritual love: they were not married to each other yet they loved each other passionately, although legends also gave out that Krishna was a philanderer. In Song Three, 'Radha kaise na jale' ('Why is Radha Jealous?'), Bhuvan is shown in overhead shot as Krishna, playing his flute and encircled with maids, flirts with each one equally. The song positions Gauri as the Radha figure, jealous of Elizabeth. Yet, after Elizabeth's tearful farewell at the end of the film, we are told in voiceover that Elizabeth returned to England and never married, remaining Bhuvan's Radha all her life. Radha thus becomes a mutable, shifting identification, figuring the impossibilities of their love — both serving and destabilising the film's 'desire to form an Indian couple'.

In 'O Rey Chhori' ('Oh my Love'), Bhuvan tries to dispel Gauri's jealousy, yet the film reminds us of the triangular nature of their desire by cutting to Elizabeth in the cantonment. Earlier, Elizabeth confesses to Bhuvan that she loves him — in true Bollywood fashion, she does it in English (Bollywood characters often say 'I love you' in English, the language difference heightening the utterance's forbidden status). Her words fall on deaf ears, as Bhuvan does not understand English. What cannot be expressed in language has outlet in song. The sequence becomes a three-way fantasy, increasingly blurring the characters and their settings. Elizabeth appears in superimposition in the dusty plains with Bhuvan and Gauri, then rematerialises in Gauri's clothes; later, Gauri appears with her hair looking deceptively like Elizabeth's.

**Fire** (Deepa Mehta, 1996)

In *Fire*, sisters-in-law Radha (Shabana Azmi) and Sita (Nandita Das) fall in love in a joint middle-class family household. Adapted from 'The Quilt' (1942), a short story by Urdu writer Ismat Chughtai, the film was shot in English and executive-produced by Mehta's Canadian husband David Hamilton. It was viewed at international film festivals and Western art-house venues, principally by lesbian and gay and South Asian diasporic audiences, before its 1998 release in India, where it opened to packed houses in forty-two theatres.

*Fire* is the first Indian film to present explicitly a relationship between women as lesbian. It provoked violent reactions from the Shiv Sena, who
considered it 'alien to Indian culture' and vandalised theatres showing the film. The Indian Censor Board had passed it without cuts, but the Shiv Sena removed it from screens and returned it to the Censor Board, which passed it a second time. In the wake of *Fire*, explicitly gay characters also emerged on the Bollywood screen (for example in *Girlfriend* [2004], which, too, aroused Hindu fundamentalist ire), although prior to this Bollywood provided space for homoeroticism under conditions of cross-dressing and masquerade, as well as in male-buddy films and indeed under the banner of 'love is friendship'.

As Gayatri Gopinath observes, the issues of *Fire*’s diasporic origin and its lesbian content were conflated in its reception. On both counts, *Fire* was considered ‘un-Indian’ (ironically for Mehta, her Trilogy films are not considered ‘Canadian’ either, since they are shot in India, which disqualifies them for funding by the Canadian government). Resurfacing through anxieties about globalisation and the forces of Hindu fundamentalism, the myth of homosexuality as a foreign import brought to India by either Muslim invaders or European colonisers has been in currency since at least the late nineteenth century. In reaction to the Shiv Sena protests, Indian lesbian groups demonstrated on the streets proclaiming that ‘lesbianism is our Indian heritage’, evoking homoerotic traditions in Indian literature, paintings and erotic sculptures, partly suppressed during the colonial era. According to this argument, it is homophobia, not homosexuality, which is the ‘foreign import’. Ruth Vanita writes: ‘The rhetoric of modern Indian homophobia (with concepts ... like unnatural and sinful) draws directly on a Victorian version of Judeo-Christian discourse’. This can be seen in *Fire*, when Ashok reacts using biblical language to seeing his wife, Radha, and Sita together in bed: ‘What I saw is a sin in the eyes of God and man.’

Ashok, who has vowed celibacy, lies in bed next to Radha only to test his own strength; he believes that, by helping him attain his spiritual goals, Radha is doing her duty as his wife. His brother Jatin, succumbing to family pressures, has agreed to an arranged marriage with Sita, whom he expects to play the dutiful wife, while he continues to see his Chinese girlfriend Julie. Rendered immobile and speechless by a stroke, Radha’s and Sita’s mother-in-law Biji personifies the paralysing effects of traditions in the joint family household, making her demands known by ringing her bell. Mehta believes that Hindu fundamentalists reacted to *Fire* because it questions tradition. She sees her film as being about choices which women have traditionally been denied, not about lesbianism per se. In promoting this view, she risks presenting a one-dimensional view of Hindu tradition, and the reading that her characters make their choice solely because of their bad d another reading.

Whereas the men put Ashok with his swami (*space of the house their kitchen, meeting at first argues, Radha’s and Si female homosociality th arrangements*). Toget! Hindu ritual where mas husbands may enjoy a k saris on the roof, the Everyday female home massage, become suffusion with Radha’s dream field of yellow flowers. mother tells her: ‘What Towards the end of the Radha finally says she c within the interstices of

Gopinath suggests that Sena’s wrath was because Radha and Sita implicit to harness women’s sex
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In *Dil Se*, the final insta for All-India Radio, A with an Assamese militi blow up India’s presid inspired by real events:
because of their bad deal in their marriages. The film itself suggests another reading.

Whereas the men pursue their desires outside – Jatin with Julie, and Ashok with his swami (spiritual mentor) – the women make the interior space of the house their own, bonding over the preparation of food in the kitchen, meeting at first on the rooftop, then in the bedroom. As Gopinath argues, Radha’s and Sita’s relationship emerges from ‘those spaces of female homosociality that are sanctioned by normative sexual and gender arrangements’. Together they undertake karva chauth, a North Indian Hindu ritual where married women observe a day-long fast so that their husbands may enjoy a long life. We see them drying out orange-coloured saris on the roof, the colour orange signifying their growing passion. Everyday female homosocial activities, such as oiling hair and foot-massage, become suffused with eroticism. This gains meaning in connection with Radha’s dream of herself as a child sitting with her parents in a field of yellow flowers. This opens the film with a parable in which her mother tells her: ‘What you can’t see, you just have to see without looking.’

Towards the end of the film, we cut back to this scene in which the young Radha finally says she can ‘see’ the ocean; that is, Sapphic desire hidden within the interstices of the known and the visible.

Gopinath suggests that the real reason why Fire incurred the Shiv Sena’s wrath was because it depicts lesbian desire in the joint family home. Radha and Sita implicitly reject the Hindu nationalist project which aims to harness women’s sexuality, particularly their sexual conduct and reproductive capacity, to the propagation of the nation. Their names evoke sanctified notions of Hindu womanhood, as the film underlines in its re-enactments of Sita’s trial by fire from The Ramayana, which Biji watches on video. Radha is another Hindu mythological archetype (also seen in Lagaan), representing a steadfast ideal, for Radha remains devoted to Krishna despite his womanising. Not only do both women defy their namesakes, they leave the Hindu joint family home and reunite in an Islamic shrine. Radha’s sari catches fire as she attempts to escape her husband, but she steps through the fire and joins Sita unscathed.

Dil Se (Mani Ratnam, 1998)

In Dil Se, the final instalment in Ratnam’s ‘Terrorism Trilogy’, a reporter for All-India Radio, Amar Verma (Shahrukh Khan), becomes obsessed with an Assamese militant, Meghna (Manisha Koirala), who is plotting to blow up India’s president at Delhi’s Republic Day parade. The film is inspired by real events: Rajiv Gandhi’s assassination by a female suicide
bomber, the activities of the militant group ULFA (United Liberation
Front of Assam) who have been fighting for an independent state since
1979, and the fiftieth anniversary of India’s independence.

Indian audiences had great expectations for Dil Se, Ratnam’s first Hindi
film, after the success of Roja and Bombay. Dil Se, however, flopped at
the Indian box office. Yet, in the UK, it broke box-office records, becoming
the first Indian film to enter the Top Ten, and proving the ‘box-office muscle’
of UK South Asians.50 Audiences drawn to it mainly for the songs and their
favourite star Shahrukh Khan packed out the twenty cinemas showing Dil
Se several times a day. Dil Se also became a favourite with international
critics. For example, Jacob Levich writes in Film Comment that Dil Se is
Ratnam’s ‘darkest, finest, and least conventionally satisfying work’.51

All the Trilogy films, Sumita Chakravarty notes, ‘stage fantasmatic
encounters with the other’.52 Desire leads the hero to ‘the outside’, reversing
the more common scenario in Bollywood films where desire remains
inside the community. As Chakravarty argues, ‘it is the seductiveness of
the stranger (not love of the national mainstream) that propels these films’
narrative energies and photographic powers’.53 This goes some way to explain
the troubled reception of Dil Se, visually and musically ravishing like the
other Trilogy films, but where the love of the stranger is the most obses-
sive and ends in a bomb-embraced death.

In Dil Se, Ratnam dramatises the attraction between a character from
the heart of India and another from a peripheral state. Just after meeting
Meghna (but as yet unaware of her affiliation), Amar embarks on an assign-
ment to interview people in the north-east about what freedom means to
them after fifty years of Indian independence, receiving answers such as
‘What freedom? We have no freedom’. They believe they are oppressed by
India’s central government. Amar decides to pose the same questions to an
Assamese terrorist, who tells him, ‘Delhi thinks it is India,’ intimating that
India’s central government does not care about ‘small far-flung states’. In
interview, Ratnam emphasises that this scene is crucial to understanding
the film: ‘if you claim that this [the north-east] is as much India as say, UP
[Uttar Pradesh], it needs as much attention.’54

As Chakravarty states, the Trilogy films use terrorism as ‘a means of
interrogating national ideals gone awry, and of evoking the faces and voices
of the estranged who must be brought back to the mainstream’.55 However,
while Dil Se certainly shares this aim, it shows an awareness which the other
films lack – namely that the All-India hero’s claim to represent the nation
is tenuous at best. Its apocalyptic ending spectacularly refuses to offer the
ideological reassurance of Roja and Bombay, where the rift between the
nation and its fragments is healed through love and affection. In Dil Se,

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romance is interrupted and fails; but, rather than making this a bleak film, the emphasis on failed resolution highlights a problem that must be faced.

Interruption becomes the defining strategy throughout the film. Not only is the romance between Meghna and Amar interrupted, but also the marriage between Amar and Preeti (Preety Zinta), whom Amar agrees to marry after Meghna has repelled his advances several times. The wedding invitations, all printed and ready to go, pile up uselessly. However, it is through the song-and-dance sequences themselves that the interruptions are most powerfully registered – making use of the song-and-dance sequence form as an interruption. The first song, ‘Chaiya Chaiya’, occurs just after Amar and Meghna have met, with Meghna boarding a train before Amar has a chance to buy her a cup of tea. ‘This has got to be the shortest love story,’ he murmurs, and the rain-soaked railway station segues into a dance atop a moving train in Ooty (a hill-station in Tamil Nadu). This exhilarating sequence showcases Ratnam’s MTV style, with the female dancer’s sensual hip and belly thrusts accentuated by camera angles.

Although he used the Seychelles in Alaipayuthi, Ratnam generally avoids foreign locations, setting his films ‘within the geographical space endorsed by the nation-state’. Dil Se uses locations all over India – from the backwaters of Kerala, South India, where Amar and Preeti dance on rice-boats, to the snow-capped landscapes of Ladakh in India’s far northwest. The song-and-dance sequences configure the nation-state as a space of fantasy and dreaming, evoking the utmost borders of its ‘imagined cartography’, yet also – through their hybrid styles – open to the pleasures of global cultural exchange and fluidity.57

Notes

4. Ibid., p. 72.
5. Ibid., p. 11.
17. Ibid., p. 232.
20. Ibid., p. 224.
22. Ibid., p. 159.
23. Ibid., p. 158.
25. Joshi, ‘India’s Art House Cinema’.
28. Wayne, Political Film, p. 93.
31. Redding and Brownworth, Film Fatales, p. 160.
32. Ibid., p. 162.
34. Ciecko, ‘Superhit Hunk Heroes’, p. 130. See also Bhatkal, Spirit of Lagaan, p. 28.
38. Ibid., p. 3.
39. Ibid., p. 4.
42. Gopinath, ‘Local Sites/Global Contexts’, p. 150.
43. Ibid., p. 150.
44. Vanita, Queering India, p. 127.
45. Ibid., p. 3.
46. Ibid., p. 3.
49. Ibid., p. 158.
52. Chakravarty, ‘Fragmenting the Nation’, p. 231.
53. Ibid., p. 232.
56. Gopalan, Cinema of Interruptions, p. 129.
57. Ibid., p. 129.

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