

SALAAM BOLLYWOOD

Representations and interpretations

*Edited by Vikrant Kishore, Amit Sarwal
and Parichay Patra*

WILEY-INTERSCIENCE
1111 WILEY ST
JOHN WILEY & SONS

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

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First South Asia edition 2016

First published 2016

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record has been requested for this book.

ISBN: 978-1-138-22013-3 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-62572-0 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo

by Apex CoVantage, LLC

Digitally Printed at Replika Press Pvt. Ltd.

For sale in India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka only.

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SALAAM BOLLYWOOD: INTRODUCTION

Vikrant Kishore, Amit Sarwal and Parichay Patra

Salaam Bollywood: Representations and interpretations is concerned primarily with film histories, or the multiple histories, of popular cinema cultures in India. It is an attempt to study Bollywood historically – its gradual progression through the history of the postcolonial nation state and its culmination in a globalised culture industry whose phenomenal growth is captivating. 'Bollywood' has always been a loosely applied journalistic term, a quasi-derogatory coinage that used to signify the inferior other of Hollywood for a considerable period of time. It came to prominence only with the disciplinary incarnation of cinema studies in India. From then on, Bollywood has continued its inclusive journey, gradually turning itself into a synecdoche for Indian cinema per se. M. Madhava Prasad (2003) has shown how Bollywood refuses to 'explicitly exclude the middle/art genres from its field'.¹ Even though the book has 'Bollywood' in its title, *Salaam Bollywood* concentrates more on the process of becoming, on the way in which the popular cinema industry in India evolved into its globalised media *avatar* known as Bollywood. By the term Bollywood cinema, scholars refer to these globalised cultures that have emerged following the economic liberalisation of the 1990s.² The larger significance of the culture industry transcending the traditional cinema exhibition network, the advent of the corporate-industrial-financial capital in the Indian cinematic scene, the proliferation of the ancillary sector of film production/exhibition and cinema's consumption by the enormous Indian diaspora worldwide are some of the essential traits of this globalised industry. For Ashish Rajadhyaksha (2007), Bollywood is a nostalgia industry where cinema is treated as memory, where the dissemination of culture and cinema effects have become more significant than cinema itself, the text being relegated to the margins. Issues related to the changing distribution and exhibition infrastructure, implications of the small budget multiplex films and the uses of cinema beyond the notion of box office success dominate debates

on Bollywood. All these traits have wider connotations for South Asia, and, considering the significance of Bollywood, critical studies devoted to the latter seem to be inadequate. Most of the anthologies published recently focus primarily on the travels of Bollywood and the rise of the Indian diasporic audience worldwide. *Salaam Bollywood* differs considerably from that trajectory. It tries to arrive at the global industry known as Bollywood considering it as a destination through the various phases of film production and development of film cultures. The book germinated in the context of the centennial celebration(s) of Indian cinema and it considers the history of Indian cinema in retrospect. It cherishes an intention to read the multiple histories critically, without being confined to the domain of a revisionist account of a bygone era of cinema.

Recently published anthologies on Bollywood focus more on specific aspects of the industry. Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti edited *Global Bollywood: Travels of Hindi Song and Dance* (2008) focuses primarily on song and dance sequences and the wider cultural dissemination of the latter in the context of globalisation. Edited by Rini Bhattacharya Mehta and Rajeshwari V. Pandharipande, *Bollywood and Globalization: Indian Popular Cinema, Nation and Diaspora* (2010) seems to be interested in discussing the post-Cold War, post-liberalisation Indian economy and its multifaceted implications in the cultural mainstream in general and popular cinema in particular. There are articles on gender issues, law, queerness and the emergent Hindutva forces, but the book revolves around the question of the nation state and the cultural imaginary after liberalisation. Edited by Rachel Dwyer and Jerry Pinto, *Beyond the Boundaries of Bollywood: The Many Forms of Hindi Cinema* (2011) has a special focus on the process in which Bollywood evolved historically. But it contains only a handful of articles devoted to some extremely specialised areas in the history of Bombay cinema. Edited by Anjali Gera Roy and Chua Beng Huat, *Travels of Bollywood Cinema: From Bombay to LA* (2012) is a relatively more comprehensive one as it includes a few articles on Bollywood's 'other' – the other industries in India. Even then, the book gives greater importance to the issues concerning globalisation and diaspora. Edited by Vikrant Kishore, Amit Sarwal and Parichay Patra, *Bollywood and Its Other(s): Towards New Configurations* (2014) expresses interest primarily in various others of the mainstream popular, and its quest for otherness is extended to the multifaceted forms of the other, exploring aesthetic, linguistic, sexual, regional and generic otherness. All these recent anthologies have oriented themselves towards some specific and specialised understanding(s) of Bollywood.

Salaam Bollywood, on the contrary, aims for a holistic view of the changing cinemas. It has an equal share of the historical trajectory of Bombay cinema, the emergence of a new cinema aesthetic after liberalisation, new

reading methods and Bombay industry's negotiation(s) with other cinema industries in India and abroad. Beginning with critical readings of various historical periods of Indian cinema, *Salaam Bollywood* tries to locate those traits and characteristics that had considerably influenced Hindi popular cinema through the ages. These traits are located beyond cinema, in the age of pre-cinema, in the domain of theatre and other pre-cinematic arts. The discussion on theatre ranges from pre-cinema era to the era of progressive nationalism and literary/cinematic/theatrical radicalism. Genre conventions and complexities has always been a relatively underexplored zone in the discussion of Indian cinema. So, the volume focuses on genres, marginal characters, creativity and creative practice aspects and the emergent trends in Indian cinema as well. The book makes an attempt to analyse the creativity in Bollywood, with special references to the influence of traditional theatre and folk forms in it, the mixing of genres, evolution of the various dance forms on-screen, collaborative processes in choreography and the reorientation of the old film form.

The book has been divided into four parts. Starting with the mainstream and alternative histories of Bombay cinema, it moves on to the alternative reading strategies, concentrating on choreography as a creative practice. Then, it moves to the discussion of the changing dynamics of the city of Mumbai and the cinema it houses, before concluding with the trans-regional and transnational associations of Bollywood. Various changes that are taking place or have already taken place find their way into the discussion and a number of tangential issues other than cinema have been emphasised. Changes in film form as well as in the forms of urbanism, the changing face of the city and its subterranean domains, changes in the responses to the issues of sexuality and gender feature strongly in these parts, along with Bollywood's interactions with and responses to the regional and other national cinemas. The emergent pan-Asianism and the transnational character of film studies help us to reconsider Bollywood's negotiations with Asian nations and Asia-Pacific regions, in terms of reappropriation of genres, reception of stars and the industry's considerable impact on India's cultural diplomacy.

What differentiates *Salaam Bollywood* from other anthologies is a comprehensive overview of the cinematic history that begins with the pre-cinema experience and ends with the notion of the transnational, an emergent area of research in film studies. Indian cinema studies has always been obsessed with the nation-state and the industry's complex negotiations with it, the transnational aspects of the popular being largely overshadowed by the national cinema camp. The global histories of Indian cinema³ have recently emerged as a site of inquiry, with wider investigation into the existence of these transnational associations back in the

colonial days.⁴ This book wishes to make significant contribution to this emerging network.

Part One – 'Histories: mainstream and alternative' – specifically looks into the mainstream and alternative histories; it has five chapters that engage with the various ages of film production. Kaushik Bhaumik's interest in pre-cinema helps him to trace the origin of Bombay cinema to the Parsi theatre repertoire, with special references to the Gujarati stage plays with *Puranic*/Hindu mythological narratives. Bhaumik establishes the connection between these *Puranic* themes and the emergent mercantile culture of the city of Bombay. His chapter explores the way in which these themes transcend the explicit symbolic logic of cinema and get circulated in the films that followed.

From the age of pre-cinema, the part moves straight to the post-independence formative years, the 1950s to be specific. Two chapters engage critically with two different aspects of post-independence cinema. Binayak Bhattacharya critically examines cinema's negotiation with nationalism, as evident in the cinemas of the 1950s. In literary criticism, the notion of pre- and post-independence progressive radicalism and nationalist politics in India has received its due importance.⁵ Bhattacharya looks at the umbrella genre known as *social*,⁶ an aesthetically ambiguous genre that accommodates various other genres. He argues that this mode of film practice, despite being ambivalent about any conscious political choice during its formative years, was gradually shaped by left-wing progressive cultural movement, especially by the leftist cultural organisations like the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA). Bhattacharya's chapter is followed by M. Madhava Prasad's reading of the formation of the *social* in the 1950s, and he takes up Hindi as well as Telugu films as his sites of inquiry, locating the fabricatory technique of genre mixing in them. He recognises symptoms of ideological reform and 'formal subsumption'⁷ in genre fabrications, instances of which include the socialising of the mythological genre in Telugu industry and the Bengali *social*'s transformations in its Hindi remake(s).

From the 1950s, it moves on to the 1970s, a decade of politico-social upheaval and schism in film form. Hariprasad looks at the most turbulent period in the history of Indian cinema, with references to the villains/outlaw characters that frequent the cinema of a time marked by extreme state repression, student uprisings, Maoist guerrilla movements and the National Emergency of 1975–77. He charts out the trajectory of these outlaws and shows how they, along with their cinema of popular justice, went out of memory.

Prateek's chapter deals with the self-referentiality in cinema, with instances where Bollywood looks back at its own past. It moves back and forth in times, looking simultaneously at a 1948 film and a 2007

blockbuster, exploring the connections therein. This chapter works as an introduction to the retro mode in contemporary Hindi popular cinemas.

Part Two – 'Bollywood dance: rereading history' – concentrates on the history, approach, design and choreography of the contemporary Bollywood song and dance sequences and uses it as a tool to read film history. Shruti Ghosh works on the pre-Bollywood (pre-1990s) cinema's deployment and changing perceptions of choreography; and Susan Kerrigan and Vikrant Kishore read Bollywood dance sequences with a detailed review of the related literature. Ghosh's chapter tries to find the new aesthetics that choreography articulates, with instances from it being recognised as an autonomous constitutive element in Indian popular cinema, locating the discursive shifts that have taken place. Kerrigan and Kishore's chapter engages with the issue of choreography with first-hand interviews with established film-makers and choreographers such as Kunal Kohli, Onir, Tanuja Chandra, Longinus Fernandes and Remo D'Souza. These interviews reveal the creative practices that Bollywood film-makers use during the collaborative production of the song and dance sequences, and how the role of a dance director is a unique and creative role that is quite specific to Bollywood films. In addition, they delve into the issue of the use of song and dance sequences as promotional material, something that adds significantly to the narrative of popular cinema.

Amrita Nijhawan's chapter closes the section on dance with its interdisciplinary approach. Nijhawan uses both dance and film studies analyses as she looks at the sense of rupture that item dance numbers create. She does not ignore the other provocative events involved, issues that made the overabundance and wide popularity of item numbers possible. Her quest ranges from Indian myths concerning dancing girls to the kind of femininity it evokes.

Part Three – 'Changes in the cityscape, changes in cinema' – engages with those changes in cityscape and forms and experiences of urbanism(s)/urban cultures that bring in subsequent changes in cinema. Hrishikesh Ingle critically examines the regionalist/small town films made in Mumbai and the return of that genre in the contemporary Bollywood that targets a multiplex audience. This regionalist turn in Bollywood helps to create a sense of representational realism.

The three chapters that follow Ingle's work on the regionalist cinema deal exclusively with the changing metropolis. Moinak Biswas concentrates on the idea of kinship, the genre conventions and the notion of violence in the urban underworld, as represented in contemporary Bombay cinema with references to an adaptation of *Macbeth*. Rajdeep Roy focuses on the transnational terrorism of the 1990s and the Hindu right-wing nexus in the city of Mumbai and its underbelly, with a detailed textual analysis of

Anurag Kashyap's *Black Friday* (2004) – a film based on the Bombay blasts of 1993. Shaheen Ahmed critically analyses another Anurag Kashyap film, namely *That Girl in Yellow Boots* (2011), as she finds the emergence of the *new woman* figure a matter of critical interest and goes on to explore the latter's association with the changing metro, branding her as the *flâneuse à la Benjamin*. The other film text that she picks up is Sujoy Ghosh's *Kahaani* (2012), even though it revolves around a metro far removed from Mumbai.

The concluding part – 'Other regions, other nations' – explores some of the trans-regional and transnational links of Hindi cinema. It begins with Nikhila's article on the complex negotiations between Hindi and regional cinemas of South India (Kannada cinema, in particular), with a special focus on the way Kannada cinema seeks to insert itself into the national. She considers the possibilities of remakes and its various corollaries, with a close textual reading of Hindi remakes of Kannada popular films that reveals the way in which the Hindi industry de-territorialises/re-territorialises them.

Other chapters in the part look primarily at the way in which Bollywood opens itself up to the trans-Asian cinemas/industries. Asian Transnationalisms, emerging trends in film studies and Indian cinema's negotiations with them are some of the major issues with which these chapters are concerned. They concentrate on various areas, appropriation-adaptation, reception, multinational production and theorisation. S. V. Srinivas writes on the Hong Kong martial arts cinema and Bollywood with references to Nikhil Advani's *Chandni Chowk to China* (2009), and his interest lies in the emergent pan-Asianism and the reappropriation of genres. Pan-Asianism, Asiaphilia or Asianisation are some of the critical terms that are being circulated in the context of the cinemas of such celebrated American or French auteurs like Quentin Tarantino and Luc Besson (see Hunt 2008). Srinivas, using Paul Willemen's concepts, recognises the question of economic value as a major issue in the discussion of pan-Asianism in Indian popular cinema. The problem, for him, lies in translating cultural value into economic value.

Sony Jalarajan Raj, Rohini Sreeekumar and Fikri Jermadi's chapter takes up the case of the reception of Bollywood stars in places like Malaysia. This chapter is a representative of the global Bollywood-Diaspora-reception model. Sanchari De and Amit Sarwal's chapter deals with the Bollywood films set and shot in Australia, *Salaam Namaste* (Siddharth Anand, 2005) being a case in point. The chapter tries to explain the newfound interest of Bollywood in Australia, with references to the collapse of the American dream of the diaspora following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. It is to be noted that all the three co-editors of this volume situate themselves

within the Australian academia, where a burgeoning interest in cinemas of South and Southeast Asia can be located.⁸

The volume ends with Parichay Patra's chapter on the emergence of transnational cinema studies, the problems of the national cinema school and the subsequent changes in Indian cinema studies. It is an introduction to the new world of cinema studies, tracking the reasons behind Indian Film Studies' self-imposed insularity, and it makes a strong argument in favour of the concluding part that engages with Indian cinema and its Asian connections.

As editors of the volume, we wish to thank Laleen Jayamanne for kindly consenting to write a foreword for our book. The idea of this volume took shape in a number of conferences in Australia. One of them was the 'Salaam Cinema: Past, Present and Future – Celebrating 100 Years of Indian Cinema' symposium, jointly convened by Hema Sharda and Amit Sarwal at the University of Western Australia, Perth, on 13 May 2013, the other being the 'Bollywood and Its Other(s)' conference at the School of Design, Communication and IT, University of Newcastle, New South Wales, on 21 February 2014 (co-convenors were Vikrant Kishore, Susan Kerrigan and Amit Sarwal). We thank Hema Sharda, Susan Kerrigan and all the participants and staff of the two universities for their kind help and cooperation in promoting Bollywood research in Australia. M. Madhava Prasad's 'Genre mixing as creative fabrication' was originally published in *BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Copyright 2011 © Screen South Asia Trust. All rights reserved, it is reproduced with the permission of the copyright holders and the publishers, Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd, New Delhi. We thank M. Madhava Prasad for allowing us to reprint his work and Ravi S. Vasudevan for helping us to acquire the reprint rights. Moinak Biswas, S. V. Srinivas and Amita Nijhawan have kindly revised their previously published works for us. We take this opportunity to thank them all.

Notes

- 1 The emergence of multiplex as an exhibition site and the resurfacing/resurgence of realism with the small budget independent cinema in Mumbai is significant, as it has created a niche audience of its own, despite remaining within the domain of Bollywood. It has pushed the boundaries further, with Bollywood remaining an umbrella term, an all-encompassing culture industry.
- 2 M. Madhava Prasad and Ashish Rajadhyaksha have published extensively on the globalised industrial cultures of Bollywood, among others (see Prasad 2003; Rajadhyaksha 2007).
- 3 For a detailed discussion, see Vasudevan (2010).
- 4 For the transnationalism of the 1920s cinema, see Sinha (2013). It traces the way in which American cinema and its Indian counterpart formed ideological and politico-cultural associations.

- 5 See Priyamvada Gopal (2005), who considers K. A. Abbas' films along with the literary texts of Saadat Hasan Manto, Ismat Chughtai et al.
- 6 For a detailed discussion of the term, see Prasad (1998: 46). Citing Rosie Thomas, Prasad has shown how the social became the dominant genre, forcing other genres to be appropriated and subordinated.
- 7 For a detailed discussion of these terms, see Prasad (1998).
- 8 In Australia, Indian diplomats are supporting cultural collaborations in the form of organising Bollywood festivals. Bollywood film festivals in Australia have made inroads into the suburban places as well and are not confined to the multicultural metros like Melbourne and Sydney. In 2014, Melbourne International Film Festival (MIFF) featured a special section on Indian documentary cinema, curated by Shweta Kishore and supported by Monash University, where documentary film-makers like Anand Patwardhan and Deepa Dhamraj were present as guests.

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Part I

HISTORIES

MAINSTREAM AND ALTERNATIVE