

Chapter 20

Cartographies of Indian Cinema: A Transnational Journey

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ABSTRACT

The origin of cinema in India has transnational roots and can be traced back to as early as the 1920s. The multicultural connections were not only evident in terms of the cast and the crew but also in terms of the reach of the subject matter as portrayed on screen that had a global appeal. Application of modern technology and interactions between communities created a global space that transcended geopolitical boundaries. It is also interesting to note how actors and filmmakers from other nationalities became an integral part of these narratives. This culminated in an excellent combination of foreign technical knowledge and the creativity of the Indian film fraternity that produced an array of unforgettable masterpieces. This chapter attempts to chart the history and map the course of Indian cinema by applying a transnational lens and reexamining the cultural and social implications of these films. Moreover, it aims to situate the evolution of Indian cinema, keeping in view the intersection of gender, race, class, religion, and other categories.

INTRODUCTION

The unparalleled glory that India has attained in the production of films has become a *tour de force* in creating masterpieces locally, and those are celebrated abroad with enthusiastic appreciation by the audiences from Kenya to Kazakhstan and from Morocco to Malaysia (Thussu, 2008). Moving towards

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a globalized free economy, Indian films have opened the door to a global audience, much beyond the traditional South Asian diaspora. This global reception and increasing visibility of Indian films in various countries is the result of a complex network of national and transnational factors including improved technology, demand-driven circulation, the emergence and wider reach of media and communication sector as well as corporatization of the film industry. Globalization has changed the process of Indian filmmaking and market-oriented distribution, which are not contained within national boundaries or specific geopolitical territories, aiming for a global viewership through 'cross-over' films (Desai, 2004; Kaur & Sinha 2005) across porous borders. In light of the overwhelming popularity of Hollywood films in the global market, the turnover amassed from the export of Bollywood films, even though lesser compared to that of Hollywood, represents a new trend in the history of production, consumption and distribution (Miller, Govil, McMurria, Maxwell & Wang, 2001).

India's billion-dollar Hindi film industry is a centre of cosmopolitan culture and has experienced an exceptional reception and circulation in recent years. Thus (2006) stated that Indian film exports increased twenty-fold in the period 1989-1999 and has continued to grow steadily. The primary reason for this unprecedented growth is the incredible success in the domestic market spurred by ever-expanding international popularity which cuts across the intersections of region, language, class and gender. In addition to this, regional centres producing films in other Indian languages, like Tamil, Telegu, Assamese, Odia, Bangla and Malayalam have also generated a polyphonic and multivocal discourse that has been circulated beyond the territorial boundaries to reach the diasporic groups scattered all over the world.

Globalization has been a catalyst in bringing about myriad changes in the media industry in terms of production, distribution as well as the general perception and reception of the contents of cinema. According to Lie and Servaes (2000), the globalization process is moulding people's "perception of time and space" by enlarging the boundaries on the one hand and strengthening and defining the already existing ones, in terms of culture, identity and self. The debate surrounding the consequences of globalization has been varied and often pondered upon. While some scholars advocated the positive impact of globalization, a few have expressed their discontent regarding the presence of a dominant global culture which acts as a counteractive measure which resists the spread of indigenous and traditional culture as they are often not in a political position to oppose the homogenization that globalization demands (Thornton, 2000). Such an essentialist predisposition accelerates homogenization that downplays the "organization of diversity" in preference of replication of uniformity (Banerjee, 2002). Glocalization, in response to the overarching predominance of homogeneous identification, challenges the monolithic standardization of cultural elements. Everyday practices also display an amalgamation of global influences and consolidation of local expressions. There are many subtle significations by which the local elements have been transposed to the global stage by bringing them together in a *glocal* sense. This process of glocalization and conglomeration of cross-currents of transnationalism lead to the formation of a space wherein cultural production is intertwined with the representation of the local, which is increasingly becoming globalized due to its appeal and popularity and at the same time being more localised by integrating the differences and creating a coalition between contesting elements.

The global appeal of Indian cinema lies in its negotiation with multifarious layers of sensibilities embedded in the local terrain. Here, the popular Hindi films that the Bollywood industry produces and caters to the larger diasporic and international audience is loosely used as discourses to homogenize the linguistically diverse Indian films produced across various states. Even though Indian cinema is often considered to be an umbrella term for the films produced in different languages, the viewers with variegated perceptions react differently to the context and culture encoded in the films. The ever-changing

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