

Indian cinema as a cultural exception *

Monique Dagnaud & Kristian Feigelson

Ranking number first in the world for the film production, being part of the top group of the cinema enthusiast nations, endowed with a noria of T.V. channels and with a music industry full of dynamism, India has thus developed an entertainment industry of large size, movies playing the role of a launching pad.

It produces more than 1000 films a year (1090 having obtained the visa of the Central Board of Film Certification in 2006), **22% of them are Tegulu language films, 20% Hindi films and 15 % are Tamil films. The number of admissions, nearly 4 billions admissions in 2006, makes India as “the highest cinema attendance of any single market worldwide”¹. The Indian film industry has been performing exceedingly well in the past fours years, having grown by 17 % in the period 2004-2007². India welcomes some hundreds of foreign films copies on its screens, most of them American (in 2006, 74 foreign films appeared on the Indian screens). Their distribution is concentrated in the multiplexes of big cities. None of those foreign full-length films, however, does share the list of the most successful ones (4% of the market shares in the showrooms in 2006, rising as high as 8% in 2007), while the private audience’s priority is in local romances.³ **In 2005 and 2006, the ten films at the top of the box-office are hindi language films which appear dominant on the national market ; this points out the part played by Bollywood within the feature film industry. “Hindi films carry out universal messages” says Amitabh Bachchan⁴.****

That industry comprises a number of facets which make it distinct from other national films productions.⁵ Subtly anchored in the tradition and the representations of the Asian peninsula, it indefinitely re-activates the myths and the questions which are crossing the

¹ File for the Cannes’s festival in 2008.

² See The Indian Entertainment and Media Industry , Sustaining Growth, report 2008

³ *Casino Royal* and *Pirates des Caraïbes 2* were standing on top of the foreign films viewed by the Indian public. The ultra-modern multiplexes constitute today a new opportunity for that programming of foreign films, by attracting new categories of English speaking spectators, young and urbanized ones.

⁴ Interview 24 th of January, 2009

⁵ Monique Dagnaud, « Le cinéma à l’épreuve de trois modèles : Inde, Etats-Unis, France », in *Journal Commentaire* , Paris 2009 (à paraître)

Indian society, and some films are proudly serving the promotion of an Indian identity. Encouraged by industrial entrepreneurs who are planning to derive from it enormous sources of income, it stands as an axis of the nation's development, in the mode of the Hollywood film industry. **With an annual growth of revenues of 17 % (2004-2007) , it grows more rapidly than the industry (9 % in 2007, and declined to 4-5 % in 2008 with the financial crunch). Interestingly, recently the box office –overseas grows more rapidly (+ 19 % in the period 2004-2007) than the domestic one (+ 15 % in the period 2004-2007). And two others markets are developing : Home video (+ 30 % in this period) and ancillary revenues⁶ (+ 19 %).**

Opposite to most of European countries, it started without enjoying public financial support. **In France, as in many european countries, but at a larger scale, a bunch of rules and obligations of investments from the public and private broadcasting helps the film industry to develop and to flourish –a policy called as “the French cultural exception”.** And, to end with, as a counterpoint to France who distinguishes that activity as being one of the fine arts⁷, the Indian film branch is approached as a segment within a vast economic ensemble: the sector of popular entertainment. **On this respect, Indian feature film industry, dedicated to a huge market of more than 1,1 billion movie buff people, is closer to the American film industry : an economic activity alike other activities, a launching pad for profitable developments. Besides the size of the market, several aspects specify the Indian feature films industry, all of them configuring a cultural exception.**

An industry born from a cultural anchorage

The picture industries have rooted in cultural predispositions. As soon as 1896, one of the Lumière Brothers' cameramen, Marius Sestier, organized the showing of *A Train arriving in La Ciotat Station* at Watson hotel in Mumbai. In 1897, photographer Harishchandra S. Bhatvedekar imported the first camera and shot short scenes. A few years later, on May 3, 1913, D. Phalke already realized, thanks to various trick effects, the first mute full-length film, *Raja Harishandra*. The rush for the “dream machine” had been launched: a love story

⁶ Sales of television rights, internet download rights, mobile rights, remake rights, in-film placements, on-screen advertisements, brand placements, etc.

⁷ Monique Dagnaud, *Les artisans de l'imaginaire*, ed. Armand Colin, 2006

gets then being sketched out between that artistic activity and that country.⁸ The boom of the Indian movies starts very early in the 1920s, while that country was still under British trust – in the 1930s, the country was already producing more than 200 films a year (228 in 1935). The public's passion was the more intense since people had recognized in the movies “*a show which was coming out of its own culture*”: that is, Hinduism and Tantric religion. The population in the Asian subcontinent is used to a negotiation between ordinary life and a constellation crowded with gods, semi-gods and supra-natural divinities, carried by means of colourful stories which are delivering model behaviours for the day to day life. In that culture, the human epic can be deciphered first through divinities of which production, ornaments, gestures and gesticulations are loaded with sense. It does not come in the shape of written stories – thus, in Indian movies, the scenario is less important than the emotional dynamic which springs out of the succession of film shots. Those movies are also draws its inspiration from other kinds of shows and from popular arts such as the Parsi theatre and the Sanskrit dramatic art. The mythological stories of the *Mahabharata* and of the *Ramayana* have been subject to multiple adaptations on the screen and at the television. Spectators also live those images as an infra-religious experience in which the actors are assimilated to the gods which they embody. The image takes the turn of a cult-image according to the Hindu view that the divinity is an integral part of the representation. In fact the *Maya* notion of illusion and that of *Darsham* vision thus allows to understand the relaying role played by television with respect to the movies (in Hindi, public television has been qualified as *Darsham – far away from vision* – from its beginnings in 1960). Each image is subject to a specific cult (from temples to advertising posters, etc.), which materializes the true passion for film projection under all its forms. By crystallizing on predominant heroes, films are evoking an Indian regulated reality. Behind the screen less visible relationships are looming between sacred art and profane art, whilst today the movie house has a certain similarity to the temple and the showing to a ritual. India has been literally hypnotized by the invention of cinema since “*there is no country all around the world which as quickly and as entirely integrated a foreign invention*”.⁹ Since the

⁸ See Garga B D , *So many cinemas. The motion picture in India*, Mumbai, Eminence Design, 1996; see also Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willemen, *Encyclopedia of Indian cinema*, London, British Film Institute, 1994 and 2001; Chowdhry Prem, *Colonial India and the making of Empire cinema*, Manchester University Press, 2000.

⁹ See: Joel FARGES, « Cinema in India : rasa cinematographica », in *L'Inde contemporaine*, under the direction of Christophe Jaffrelot, Paris, Fayard, 2006.

1947 Independence, cinema has identified itself to Nation, as Mehbood Khan's cult-film bears testimony, *Mother India* (1957).

Local entrepreneurs have been stoking up the machine, taking advantage of the subtle game by the English who have induced the Indians to develop their industry in order to reinforce the circulation of the habits and customs on every corner of the British Empire, and to push aside the influence of the American cinema which is meant to result in “discarding the western civilization in the eyes of Indian masses”.¹⁰ A production has consequently taken off starting from the multitude of cultures and local languages which compose the Indian mosaic. Hindi appear to be the first language for shooting (close to one quarter of the films in 2006, as we mentioned), films are also to be seen in Tamil, Urdu, Bengali, etc. Though being segmented into regions, the markets are extending over demographic basins which are large enough to allow industrials to take their chance in the field of entertainment. Studios in Calcutta are producing films in Bengali, those in Bangalore (Karnataka) in Kannada, Madras (*Kollywood*) produces 300 films a year in Tamil while the studios in Hyderabad (*Kollywood*) are mainly producing in Telugu and those in Trivandrum (*Mollywood*) in Malayalam. Around the dominant pole of *Bollywood*, the Indian cinema has met the demands of a multicultural audience by developing subtle forms of autonomy *vis à vis* foreign countries.

In fact, one may enumerate three categories of films. Every year about one hundred of “underground” films are produced: such films are made by means of string bits and are circulating in clandestine spaces –**some of them are porn films**. Category B films constitute as many regional productions, shot in the language of a minority, and at a very modest cost (between 1 and 4 millions rupees): their audience does only very seldom extend across the frontiers of the state where they have been shot (for instance, the author's films by Girish Kasaravalli, produced in and for Karnakata). Or still, the films by Adoor Gopalakrishnan, almost ignored in his country as well as in Kerala but made in co-production with the CNC's *Fonds Sud* in France in which eyes “only our annual festival in Trivandrum, of international fame, remains a true window for the author's movies produced in India as well as for movies coming from elsewhere”¹¹.

¹⁰ See Emmanuel Grimaud, *Bollywood Film Studio*, Paris, Presses du CNRS, 2004.

¹¹ See Kristian Feigelson's interview with the film-maker in « Le cinéma comme rédemption du temps », Journal *Positif*, n°513, November 2003, pp 28-33.

Category A full-length films have the ambition of reaching the national market and possibly to be exported to emergent markets in Asia as well as in Africa: these popular productions may cost from 150 to 600 million rupees. *Bollywood* is mainly exported towards the Indian “diaspora” (following the example of the 150 copies of the detective film *Don* (2006) by Farhan Akhtar recently diffused in the USA), while films from South India are rather concerning the populations of Indian workers expatriated to the Gulf countries. **In 2008-2009, two Indian big-budget films, using the keys of blockbusters, were primarily targeted at the Indian audiences throughout the world : Ghajini, a action-thriller directed by A.R. Murugados, produced by Indian Film Co and “Chandni Chowk to China” a comedy directed by Nikhil Advani , with a comic actor Akshay Kumar and produced by Warner Bros –an exemple of an American major trying to capture an Indian audience.**

Because operating through a multitude of intermediaries, the opaque distribution system still reinforces the fragmentation which is characteristic of that market: in fact, that networks and sub-contractors economy works in an optimal way.

A capitalism which promotes national identity

The raise of the Indian industry has been mingled with national feeling and the social responsibility of a country in its way to independence¹². The attitude of Indian media entrepreneurs must be understood through a more general behaviour of the Indian industrialists. India has taken but a few public measures to the advantage of an industry of picture. The private production machine (producers, distributors and financial entities) is working in a masterly way, going as far as to saturate screens with domestic films and productions: in the movie houses foreign films hardly amount to 5% of the offer and of consumption, and on TV screens that cultural hegemony is also asserting itself.

However, an accurate investigation demonstrates that India, under cover of a pure market economy, is discreetly practising a protectionist policy in favour of national programmes. For instance, until 1992 the government has prohibited to dub foreign productions. And first and foremost, it has attempted to master the evolution of technologies for the purpose of containing influences from outside: proof to it, the constraints imposed on the *Star TV* satellite network (owned by Murdoch Group) in order to penetrate the Indian territory from Hong-Kong.

¹² Reed A.M, Perspectives on the Indian Corporate Economy, Palgrave, New York, 2001. See also : Damien Krichewsky, Le capitalisme indien à la recherche d'un nouveau compromis social, La vie des idées, 24 février 2009

To end with, the *National Film Development Corporation* helps financing author's works of a demanding construction, often of an author's vision with a social connotation. But due to their low amounts such funds are concerning only a tiny proportion of films. Indeed, in contrast with a big rather stereotyped production, a vivid trend does exist in the author's films category, from « *Dance of the wind* » (*Swara Mandal*) by Rajan Khosa to « *Taal* » by Subhash Ghai In 1999 and other works better known in the West - in 2002 such as « *Devdas* » by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, « *Lagaan* » by Ashutosh Gowariker, or those by film-makers of the diaspora, Gurinder Chadha « *Bend it like Beckham* » (*Joue la comme Beckam*- 2002) and « *Le mariage des moussons* » by Mira Nair, Lion d'or in Venice in 2001, or **“The namesake” in 2006 by Mira Nair also. These works often concern social issues of modern India, like poverty or women emancipation, which are often avoided by the main-stream hindi feature films.**

Indian cinema has always attracted capital from industry, but has been often used for the purpose of clearing money, and its links with mafia corrupted activities have been denounced. Today, thanks to a legislation in favour of liberalisation (various sectors of cultural industries, apart from film, have been progressively opened to foreign competition, such as publishing and radio in 2005), and thanks to the quick development of a middle class intended as a solvent public for these picture industries, this sector is quickly evolving. It becomes healthier, more professional (in 2005 more than one half of the films are coming from businesses rather than from individual producers), linked to investment banks and some of those businesses have been admitted to quotation (namely the multiplexes: *Adlabs*, *Shringar* Cinemas, *PVR* and *Inox*, *Fun Republic* from *Zee* group). Finally it taps more and more capital stemming from various sectors: hotel business, building industry, pharmaceutical industry and from pore expected industries such as telecoms, television, press and art market. Far from being the privilege of aesthetes or passionate persons, it benefits from the reputation of a high profitability sector. The turnover of cinema, 96 billions rupees in 2007, is expected to rise as high as 175 billions in 2012, **which means a 13 % annual growth rate; India's medium growth rate is 18% for the whole range of entertainment industries. From the outlook for the five-year period 2008-2012, cinema is ranking last among other cultural industries like television (+ 22 %), radio (+ 24 %), animation and gaming (+ 25 %) and publishing industries (+ 14 %). The illegal copying through digital distribution will affects virtually all segments of entertainment and media , with recorded music and**

filmed entertainment -which explains that outlook for these activities has been reduced

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Films producers are using a method which has guaranteed the success of Hollywood at its beginnings: contracting for several films with the most reputable directors and actors at the moment, which allows to ensure the security of the coming production. In 2006, for instance, *Adlabs* (a producer which has been bought up by *Telecoms Reliance* Group, a powerful group which is on the way to massively invest in cinema but is also diversifying in insurance companies, energy and finance), has booked the male stars Hrithik Roshan for three films (350 millions rupees), Akshay Kumar for equally three films (182 millions rupees), and the director Vipul Shah for 8 films (8 billions rupees). Nevertheless, beyond the financial dimension, one should not neglect the care for exalting indianity which moves part of the investors in that sector. The major scheme of that popular cinema and of the TV series is: a both true and standing off production of the values and life style of the Indian traditional society, at the same time associated to the turmoil of modernity. The favourite framework is described as follows: *"The matter is to paint the portrait of an extended Indian family, to introduce a tyrannical mother-in-law and a model daughter-in-law (or vice-versa), characters whose parents are opposing to love matches, a majority of traditional housewives wearing a sari, with the upper head fold as a mark of docility, and a minority of modern women, active and independent, a melodramatic tone, endless sudden new developments illustrating instants of happiness, but also of hardship in that group of individuals"*¹⁴. **Besides, of all the archetype in Hindi films , however, perhaps the most appealing is the love thief , an adaptation of the Indian mythology, going to ancient Sanskrit poetry (The Phantasies of Love-Thief, attributed to Bilhana, an eleven –century poet from Kashmir)¹⁵.**

Films endowed with a big budget (for instance that of Gurinder Chadha *"Bride and Prejudice"* – *Love at first sight in Bollywood*, in 2004), shot in English and intended for export, are touching the cord of an identity which, in some way or in another one, will come out rather often reinforced following its confrontation with other cultures. Thus is it conceived

¹³ The Indian Entertainment and Media Industry , Sustaining Growth, report 2008

¹⁴ Camille Deprez, « Mythes hindous, soap operas et telenovelas », Journal *Médiamorphoses* Hors série *Les séries télé*, Paris, Armand Colin, December 2006. See also her thesis, *Le cinéma populaire indien : bilan d'une décennie (1992-2002)*, Kristian Feigelson supervisor, defended in July 2006 at Paris III University..

¹⁵ Stephen Alter, *Fantasies of a Bollywood Love Thief, Inside The World of Indian Moviemaking*, HarperCollins Publishers, New Delhi, 2007.

as a deeply rooted life style, no doubt constraining the individual's excesses, but endowed with a subtle strength that allows it to negotiate with an "open" world, namely with the members of the Indian "diaspora" dispersed in Great Britain or in the United States. Tensions never turn to tragic rifts, and finally attain their finality when tradition and modernity are balancing each other. In that sense, the vision conveyed by those movie pictures on local habits is tenderly critical, far from embracing the violence and bitterness of some film productions in the Third World.

Being claimed as an economic activity, Indian cinema exhibits a will to win market shares in the world casino of the industries of image, and seeks to make its contents suit that design. Even if transfers between Bollywood and Hollywood studios are becoming more frequent, a signal of the present globalisation, Hollywood remains its main challenger and partner. *Warner Bros*, for instance, is very present in the distribution of the main American blockbusters in Bombay, and its new investments are concentrating on the emergence of those new urbanized middle classes ; **it even started to invest in Indian-style films, as we have seen**. Even if today the export capacity of the Indian cinema remains a limited one, it tends to increase. The latter is capturing around 10% of its incomes from across its frontiers, and its attraction area is confined to the places of the Indian "diaspora" (more than 20 millions individuals in South-East Asia, the Gulf countries, Great Britain and a few American cities)¹⁶. Film-makers are in reality making very few concessions in order to get closer to a hollywoodian construction (as testified by the length of the films, though today a few new action films are formatted in 90 minutes in order to meet international sales) and are rather declining the charms of indianity which flatters in front of the foreigner an "enchanted" or kitsch vision of that country. Participating in the world casino of the pictures supposes an adaptation of the creation, while the producers/authors either cannot afford it, or are reluctant to concede too much on the aesthetic or narrative prejudices and on the arguments. Those productions get profitable then (or not) on their domestic market and a series of popular films today begin to be made in foreign countries (Australia, United States, Switzerland...). The influence of Indian cinema, however, does not keep from expanding beyond its frontiers, since the producers are targeting the emergent countries where that thematic – tradition/modernity, community/individual - is deeply touching the publics. The film by Nikhil Advani, "**Chandni Chowk to China**", has been shooted in China for example. Taking

into account the financial means which its local investors are offering it, and the cultural ambition they confer to it, the economic activity of the picture industry is part of the priorities as an axis of the development of Indian economy across its frontiers: that ambition is clearly declared by the Indian business managers.

In order to strengthen the picture industry, in 2006, manufacturers in the district of Mumbai helped the filmmakers circles to create a private school located in Film City. The land was given by the town Council of Mumbai, and the project has been carried out by Subhash Ghai the internationally renowned film-maker. He is also a producer : Mukta Arts Limited – one of the leading production houses in India-owns- is a shareholders of the School. Subhash Ghai chairs now the Whistling Woods International, Institute for film, television and media arts. The dean, John J. Lee, is an american business man, formerly manager of multiple media companies ; he is also an author. The faculty team includes many professionals still involved in the film and cartoon industry. The School has been set up according to a an Anglo-American model, and is training intensively over two years (3800 hours) professionals for picture jobs as well as for acting, editing and post-production. 70 % of the courses are practical courses. 150 students are welcomed each year, most of them from India, but there are 10 % of students coming from abroad ; they are recruited after the secondary school . The fees are expensive, roughly 12, 00, 00 rps (about 25 000 euros) a year, an amount of money which implies a severe social selection. That school is an appropriate observatory of the changes in progress in the cultural industries sector. It is adapting its programmed learning offer to the globalised communication markets, where part of the members of its board of directors have been trained, either in the United Kingdom or in the United States, or Australia, and Canada. The school is working, moreover, through networks with Media Ventures - Los Angeles, UK Film Council, British Telecom...etc. Compared to traditional Film Institute in India –like in Pune or Calcutta-, The Whistling Woods International, is more dedicated to support the film industry than being an intellectual Center for revisiting cinema as a fine art.

¹⁶ See Jigna Desai, *Beyond Bollywood : the cultural politics of south Asian diasporic film*, London, Routledge, 2003.

A combination of productive channels

Apart from its being rooted in popular tradition, that cinema is characterized by the ambition to offer a thorough show. Typical Hindi films are known as “*masala*”, literally a combination of several spices, a mix of a plurality of artistic activities: music, songs, dances and recounts.¹⁷ In those recounts, India is endlessly replaying the tensions between its traditions and modernity: “*The narrative arc of the scenarios makes use of the upsetting of a moral universe and of the re-setting of order by the hero*”¹⁸, with a strictly controlled moral supervision of the films of the Indian popular cinema.

Cinematographic channel and musical channel are closely intermingled: music is viewed as a marker of the film, and they capture close to two thirds of the disk market – while international varieties constitute 6% of it. Music industry, being essential to Indian cinema, sometimes even participates in the pre-financing of films. In order to ensure the success of a film, the producers will invest quite 30% of the budgets in music, which is marketed ahead of the release of the film on the screens, in order to prompt the public to go to the movies. Films music, by means of a big marketing in the media, announces the next releases as if the sound universe, omnipresent in India, was announcing the reign of the picture. **And if the music does not become popular, eventually the film is not released. One must emphasize the part played by indian musicians in the film industry, whose talent is to add to indian sonorities multiple cultural music inspirations –a point that made the success of the music of Slumdog millionaire composed by Allah Rakha Rahman (who won two oscars for this).**

The industry of mobile phone has become a regular partner in the straight advertising announcement of the delivery of the new films at their subscribers.

¹⁷ See Manjunath Pendakur *Indian popular cinema: industry, ideology and consciousness*, Hampton Press, New Jersey 2003.

¹⁸ See Rosie Thomas, « Melodrama and the negotiation of morality in mainstream Hindi films », in *Consuming modernity: Public culture in a South Asian World*, direction Carol Breckenridge, University of Minnesota Press, 1995.

As a consequence the television network has become, since the beginning of the 1990s, an active and essential relay of Indian cinema. Being at the same time a window opening to a today globalized world, the small screen is offering the opportunity to its billion TV spectators to locally appropriate in a multicultural context the stars of the big screen¹⁹. The opening of India to foreign investors and the penetration by the big multinational audio-visual groups, thanks to the satellite and to the cable TV networks, have globally favoured the emergence of more and more powerful urban middle classes (deemed to be more than 240 millions persons), who have been capable to take advantage of that new economic development. Their purchasing power is subject to an overall attention on the part of the film industry, since that still minor category of the Indian population is devoting a growing amount of its incomes to entertainment and leisure, part of which is cinema, either declined in DVD or broadcast by television. Besides, the recent evolutions of Indian cinema are reflecting the centres of interest of those urban well off social strata in India, and of the “diasporas” disseminated all over the world. The scenarios today are evoking the social evolution of those categories, in which the day to day life is no longer confined to the family framework and where the individual, being socialised outside its extended family and escaping the castes system, may begin to live for his own account ((*Dil Chatha Hai, Le cœur le veut* in 2002 by Farhan Akhtar; *Kal Ho Naa Ho, New-York masala* in 2003 by Nikhil Advani, or still *Salaam Namaste, Bonjour* by Siddarth Anand in 2005, shot in Melbourne).

If the satellite has also penetrated into the most remote rural areas in the country, that new society of the picture is working according to more Americanized formulas, thus equally transmitting through cable the mythological series inspired by the great Indian epics of the *Ramayana* and of the *Mahbharata*. By ousting the movie houses in the rural environment, the popular success of those series on the TV contributes to widen the audience of the picture under all those forms. Television, formerly reserved to urban publics, has become a mass phenomenon which today the bollywoodian cultural industries have to take into account. Upstream in the writing of the scenarios as well as downstream in the distribution circuits. That culture of the visual testifies its re-appropriation by the public. That phenomenon touches as well the pictures as the conveying language. The Indian aptitude to appropriate what comes from outside and to shape it in conformity with one’s proper universe partly explains the success of unheard of cinematographic cultural forms. While challenging the worldwide communication, Indian cinema and in particular the bollywoodian one has been able to accompany an in-depth process of cultural hybridization, either the *hinglish* or the

¹⁹ See Camille Deprez, *La télévision indienne : un modèle d’appropriation culturelle*, Bruxelles, De Boeck, 2006. See also the data from our inquiry « Television in Indian rural environment : from global village to local village », by Camille Deprez and Kristian Feigelson, in Journal *Quaderni*, n°54/2004, pp 27-42.

zingsh, initiated by such private TV channels as *Star TV* or *Zee TV*. Those channels are calling for various cinema stars in a context of competition for audience which permanently appeals to novelty behind a background of indianity. Karan Johar, the maker of the film *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, in animating and producing a regular advertising broadcast “*Koffee with Karan*” on *StarWorld*. Still more than elsewhere, synergies have been networked between cinema and television: the latter abundantly broadcasts full-length films and confers to the stars, glorified by gigantic marketing operations (“people” broadcasts, cinematographic actuality magazines, TV games, advertising spots, all of which relayed by internet and the grand public press) a statute of worshipped figures: when gone into a coma following a shot, the actor Amitabh Bachchan provoked a kind of riots in 1982, around the hospital where he was cared. The same as the recent wedding of his son Abishek in April 2007 with the actress-miss World 1994 and egeria of *Devdas* and later of *L’Oréal*, Aishwarya Rai, a marriage then put to the rank of a national event by the TVs. What is at stake for the bollywoodian cultural industries is the more crucial since the majority of the population is living in a rural environment. Television in these conditions remains the essential source of leisure. Rural spectators (208 millions homes) are more numerous than those living in urban areas (207 millions homes) whilst TV reaches close to 52% of the whole of the Indian spectators (110 millions homes are enjoying TV sets). Cinema reaches 35% of the spectators in cities opposite to 80% for TV. Inequalities in access remain important between cities and countryside, even if the network of movie houses and that of the audio-visual are covering the major part of the Indian territory. In rural areas, TV reaches 42% of the inhabitants, largely bypassing cinema (22%). In the wealthy and literate regions to the North and also to the South (Punjab, Maharashtra, Kerala or Tamil Nadu), that culture of the audio-visual is by far more vivid than in the poor Eastern States (Bihar and Orissa). One evaluates to 41 millions the number of homes equipped with a TV set in urban areas against 38 in rural ones, a deficit which induces the open air diffusion of films addressing the local communities.

The steps of creation in a traditional indian film are different from western movies : the script is not that important, and can evolve a lot during the shooting –though this aspect is changing with the new generation of film-makers who emphasize the screenwriting -; music and dances are key-points and are part of the script ; the role played by stars, semi gods in the indian society, is even more central than in any other film industry in the world ; the themes and references to the indian history and mythology are frequent. But indian film-makers, if they still keep a very define style, if they work with their own pattern, are members of the fraternal (and narrow) society of the film directors of the world and are influenced by others filmographies – as well as they influence others. This openness means that Bollywood actually produces a large range of films genres, from blockbusters, art-house films, cartoons, to documentary films, etc which is the normal evolution of an artistic activity in a world of globalization.

A distorting mirror

Around those different paradoxes, cinema is reflecting a society undoubtedly more culturally open to the world, namely by means of its economy and of its migratory fluxes, however still inward-looking on a disparate identity, showing a quasi insular aspect. Even if that Indian identity is often claimed in a touchy manner, the needs of leisure at the scale of a continent-like country in a process of continuous growth remain until now locally targeted. In that unequal and multicultural society, leisure industry generates important disparities between urban and rural universe. “*Going to the movies*” becomes an uncommon practice, because it is rooted both in traditional, if not even religious forms of sacralisation of the image and in innovative forms around the life style of an “*Homo hierarchicus*” today more individualised²⁰. Some signs of the globalisation, besides, have become more visible in terms of consumerism, materialism or cult of the appearances. But indinity (around the concept of *swadeshi*) also allows accounting for a specific resistance of that society to the changes induced by those industries of the image²¹. Globalisation may have strongly influence the TV and the Cinema of the last decade, while shaping more complex relationships of Indian society to its pictures.

What may-be the most fascinating aspect of the indian feature-films industry, and especially the Hindi language films, is the way multiple segments of the society (manufactorers, artists, and the audience) cooperate as to produce a unified projection of a nation which, by the way, is divided (in language, religion and regional cultures) inside its bounderies and has spread out all over the world through a dispora. This talent is what we would define as the “indian cultural exception”.

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Abstract

²⁰ Close to 390 millions Indians are living under the poverty point with less than one dollar a day, 25% are suffering at chronic malnutrition and 50% are illiterate, among which 70% of females. See Sulil Khilnani, *L’idée de l’Inde*, Paris, Fayard, 2005.

²¹ See chapter V « Consommation, national-hindouisme et médias » in Jackie Assayag, *La mondialisation vue d’ailleurs : l’Inde désorientée*, Paris, Seuil, 2005, pp 223-269.

Indian cinema as a cultural

By Monique Dagnaud (CNRS/EHESS) and Kristian Feigelson (Paris III/EHESS)

Starting from the movie pictures, this article analyses the dynamics of the Indian cultural industries in a context of worldwide expansion and of strong claim for a cultural identity: how did cinema become step by step the spearhead of a more global industry of entertainment?

The matter is to investigate in turns the capacities of adaptation of the Indian cinema to a worldwide space by discerning what is at stake in that globalisation in the sector of the industries of the image, its impacts in terms of production as well as of distribution, the consequences of the privatisation of the Indian audio-visual on the cinema, the effects of the standardisation of the communication markets and its limits in India since the 1991 de-regulation and the opening of that country .

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