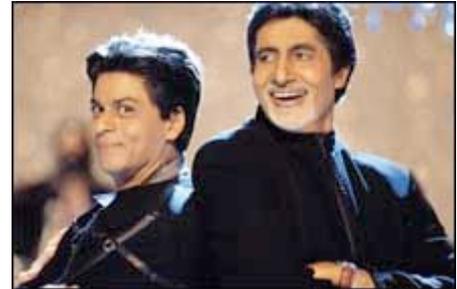


## ARTS & BOOKS

### Gods made in Bollywood

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Shah Rukh Khan & Amitabh Bachchan

**Indian gods and goddesses are plentiful, and new ones keep appearing all the time as Bollywood, the great divinity making machine, churns them out.**

The Bombay cinema industry, aka Bollywood, constantly produces stars some of whom are literally idolized by their Indian fans. Amitabh Bachchan, aged 64, is the best example of this typical national devotion. This Indian superstar, now also film producer, achieved fame by playing the “angry young man” in several films in the seventies like *Zanjeer* in 1973. He moved the entire nation when he was severely injured while shooting *Coolie* in 1983. While he was in a coma, reports on his health would be read every day in the news bulletin.

He eventually recovered, but the devotion did not abate. More than twenty years later, when he was in hospital for a stomach infection in November 2005, two men walked hundreds of miles to bring him gangajal urns (i.e. water from the Ganges renowned for its miraculous healing powers). Everyone in the country prayed for his recovery.

Some people went as far as declaring him a living god: the Amitabh Bachchan Fan’s Association (ABFA) erected a marble temple in Kolkota where they worship his statue. Moreover, his wedding with Jaya Bedhuri, the lionised heroine of *Guddi* (1971) has but heightened this idea of a blessed and divine pantheon.

Who could possibly be his heir? The best candidate seems to be Shah Rukh Khan, also nicknamed “King Khan”. He has acted in nearly 60 films and often claims that Bachchan is his role model. Shah Rukh Khan actually stars in *Veer-Zaara* which was Amitabh Bachchan’s latest film to be released in the West.

In India, where a majority of people live below the poverty line, the movies do not have the same role as their European counterparts. Bollywood productions with their lavish songs and choreographies are the ultimate escapist mirage.

Having said this, Amitabh Bachchan, although having reached a god-like status is still very accessible to his fans to whom he readily gives out his personal e-mail address and phone number in Bombay.

Tom Cruise and such Western idols seem eerily untouchable and unreal when compared to this Indian living god who is so completely down to earth.

Sources: “Amitabh Bachchan has a cold,” *The New York Times* 12 February 2006.  
“The Great King Kane” *Newsweek* 16 January 2006.  
<http://movies.indiainfo.com/features/amit-temple.html>