

## ARTS & BOOKS

### Bollywood, a rival for Hollywood?

By Priscilla QUEULVÉE

#### **Both “ollywoods” are huge film industries, but are they direct competitors ?**

Before the 1990s, the commercial Indian film-industry was hardly known abroad. Today films such as “Black” (2005) or “Kal Ho Naa Ho” (2003) have managed to reach a global audience. Over the years, Bollywood has transformed some of its standard themes to adapt to a more varied audience outside India.

While the strong Muslim aesthetic stamp on the Indian cinema has helped export Bollywood films in many Muslim countries, film directors have increasingly tried to cater to the tastes of exoticism starved Westerners and NRIs (Non-resident Indians). For instance they have started introducing themes NRIs feel strongly about such as Indian traditions and immigration. A recent Bollywood vogue has also been to film locations in Switzerland, Scotland, and various European capitals.

Bollywood has developed its exports all over the world. North America is a now leading market for Indian films, totalling 30 per cent of the industry’s revenues. Hollywood studios distribute most of the major Indian blockbusters. European movie houses show at least one Bollywood film per season. And some movies, like « Devdas » (2002) have attracted large audiences as far away as Japan.

If Bollywood exports are booming, so are foreign investments. Major studios like Twentieth Century Fox or Sony Pictures are interested in the Indian film industry, which brings around \$1.3 billion annually. Movie moguls like Baz Luhrmann (the producer of *Romeo + Juliet*) and Andrew Lloyd Weber, have repeatedly stated their keen interest in the Indian film industry. For Rachel Dwyer (University of London), an expert on Indian cinema and pop culture, this phenomenon is greatly helped by the low value of the rupee.

As far as productivity is concerned, Bollywood has clearly overtaken Hollywood (and all other countries, for that matters) with a whopping 700 films produced each year. However, only a fifth of all Indian movies eventually make a profit. So even though Bollywood is the most serious rival to Hollywood’s supremacy on world screens, it still has a long way to go.

Sources: \* “Bombay breakout,” *The Guardian* 12 December 2003.

\*\*\*“Growing up,” *The Economist* 10 August 2000.

\*\*\* “A new cultural lexicon,” *The Hindu* 1 September 2002.