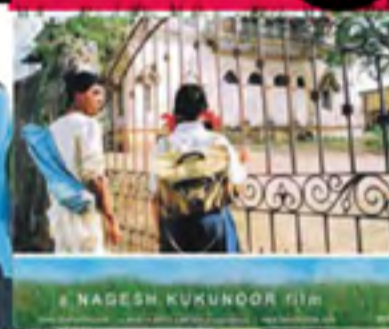




# Contemporary Indian Indies



A fresh perspective on the new Indian Cinema | Rehaan Diaz

# CONTEMPORARY INDIAN INDIES

Rehaan Diaz


amazon publishing  


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*hello*  
cinéastes!

A photograph of a man with long dark hair, wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt and dark pants, sitting on a metal staircase. The staircase is made of silver metal steps and railings. The background is a brick wall with a red brick lower section and a grey brick upper section. A white pipe runs along the wall to the left. A white light fixture is visible on the wall above the man. The entire image is framed by a white border.

Currently based out of Struggle Street, I am a screenwriter with a background in advertising and in pursuit of a benevolent, clairvoyant producer to team up and make some indie movie magic off my 3 registered scripts .

In the meantime, this book came to life in between screenplay sessions, house parties, sports articles, film festivals, and a break-up of the loveliest kind. Hope you like the effort!



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# *Introduction*

The general perception and tendency in film circles abroad is to associate cinema from India to Bollywood. When in fact, Bollywood or the Hindi film industry is just a part of the Indian film industry where other film industries based in Southern states, producing vernacular language cinema are equally proficient in producing spectacular films. While the commercial Hindi films are reaching far and wide and netting more money than ever, there is another sub-set of films that is independent of the traditional Hindi cinema narrative.

The indies which are a subject of focus here are produced working in the prevailing system, and have a distinct shift in narrative strategies and cinematic sensibilities. They are part of an emerging trend, made by a generation of new filmmakers, but these have been small blips on the radar. There is a lack of scholarly material written about the films that are a part of this book and therefore I had to make use of internet sources and articles from leading critics of Hindi cinema from around the world. This underwritten aspect is also a reason that I chose the subject so as to create awareness around these indies.





# INDIE FILM

'An independent film is any motion picture financed and produced completely autonomous of all studios, regardless of size' (Merritt, 2000 cited in King, 2005, p9). While Merritt's is a utopian definition, the definitive realm of indies is not as smooth and defined. Independent cinema can be characterised according to the aesthetic strategies that mark out a film from the mainstream. How do we define 'independence' in cinematic terms? Should it be by looking at the industry, at audiences, or at the text of the films? How does this affect how we view these films? A starting point is the model used in books about the American Indie movement (by Geoff King, Jim Hillier and Yannis Tzioumakis).

From the book's perspective, it is important to start by establishing what is meant by independent cinema in an Indian context and with those basic outlines analyse films that can be termed as indies through a variety of approaches: industry, audience, finance, cinematic techniques and cultural impact. The attempt is to examine these indies from these various co-ordinates and coalesce an argument as to how much, if indeed are these films a part of a wave that can be categorised under Indian indies.

In India, in the late 70s-early 80s there has been cinema that has been tagged under the 'parallel cinema movement', in some of which, the money would be funded by the government. Though socially relevant and critically acclaimed, it was never commercial and after that movement ran its course, it has become increasingly difficult to make a film by keeping away from the system. The Hindi film industry has a lot of families involved for several generations in various fields of film-making and is infamous for being nepotistic. However, the new millennium and its circumstances have brought in greater opportunities, especially the recognition as an industry by the Government of India in 2000, which brought corporate financing into films.

Production and financing gain importance in a classification process of indies and in Chapter 1, this book therein looks into the circumstances that afforded for these indies to be produced. Chapter 2 concentrates on the exhibition and the audience aspect. The multiplex revolution has helped a lot in making conditions favourable for smaller movies with low budgets to be made and screened in specific markets for a discerning audience. When defining the term indies, form and degrees can vary. How exactly a film is marked as sufficiently different from Bollywood mainstream to qualify as independent is subject to numerous variations explored in detail in Chapter 3 - Style. A primary and common concept is restructuring of the songs, followed by the increased emphasis on off-beat stories, screenplay, and editing techniques. I will be giving case studies of films that have categorically tried to have that genuine variation in spirit and production and elaborate how they used cinematic tools of budgeting, screenplay, editing, storyline and songs to achieve that. Each case study will focus on particular aspects that are distinctive in nature, use and expression. Chapter 4 debates on whether these films form a trend or are they a passing fad. The sub-topics will include a comparison with other film movements like the American indie movement and French New Wave, the ambiguous, even polysemic nature of some of the indies and what makes these films important. The conclusion will tie up the chapters and evaluate the stand of the indies in the present scenario.



New York based film critic Aseem Chhabra has argued in his *Mumbai Mirror* column that despite the success of *Dev.D* and *Khosla Ka Ghosla*, post-Bollywood indie cinema is too young to be defined as a genre. Here he has used the term post-Bollywood, but then Bollywood is also a term that was a moniker made out by the combination of Bombay and Hollywood and secondly and importantly, Bollywood has not stopped making films. Therefore a term other than post-Bollywood is needed to represent the independent films that are a focus of this project.

The term 'New Wave' or 'New Age' sounds apt, but the movements in past have been already called that, least of all the French New Wave. Moreover, there have been many cinematic movements across the world in several countries since the French New Wave which have borrowed the term, viz. Romanian New Wave, Japanese New Wave, Hong Kong New Wave and Cinema Novo (Brazilian New Wave). Chhabra argues that 'New Age carries with itself a baggage of being used with a number of other associations. The term has a completely different connotation in the West, representing a spiritual movement with elements of music, astrology, and whole array of Eastern religious philosophies' (Chhabra, 2010).

New Wave

# NEW WAVE

'New Wave' is a term coined by Françoise Giroud while writing for *L'Express* in 1958, which originally referred to a new, youthful spirit then making itself felt in French films. It gained currency and became a versatile catch phrase applied to not only film, but any cultural phenomenon that was seen to be new or rebellious or hip (Monaco, 2004, p 9). This is evidenced in the usage of New Wave in 1970s music scenario.

Regarding a film scenario, New Wave as a term is used in a correct context if like the French New Wave, there is a succession of films from a new generation of directors from a particular country for a sustained period of time, which break away from traditional mode and offer a fresh perspective. The films that are the focus of discourse here have been fewer and therefore limit their claim to be tagged as a movement as yet. That they have been popping-up intermittently and with more frequency is however ostensibly noticeable. So by excluding the term New Wave and New Age, and instead using contemporary, there are some definite advantages as it escapes the connotations that are associated with them. The term contemporary is more apt as it can be defined as the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and provides the anchorage of time and perspective.

As is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, there are some constraints for the independent tag of these indies as the films are made within the same structure as other Hindi films. Not being completely independent can be pin-pointed as an attribute of these films because the circumstances do not afford them to be so. The term 'Indie' then has more to do with the style that is independent of the 'song and dance narrative' with stories rooted towards realism, than the escapism seen and portrayed in Hindi films.

As an infant genre, newer terms are used to mention them and another term for these films that has been found being mentioned by film critics and journalists is 'Hindies', which is quite self explanatory in itself. It is being mentioned as part of articles that cover the London Indian Film Festival in *The Guardian* (Verma, 2011) and by Indian critics like Anupama Chopra who categorised Independent Hindi films as Hindies (Chopra, 2010). Hindies are indies in Hindi language. These are also dubbed in English for worldwide release; however, the language in these films has registered the presence of more than a smattering of English, rather closer to Hinglish – the newer emerging language in urban India. Calling them Hindi films would not exactly be correct, as the language is more polyglot than ever before.

Hence, a blanket term is yet to be coined; however for the sake of nomenclature for this book, I have stuck with 'Contemporary Indian Indies'. The films included would be works produced between 2001-2010, which have steered away from the traditional Hindi film narrative and have strived to offer newer narratives and storylines.



# Production and Financing

A number of scholars argue that the Hindi film industry is abnormal in a number of ways. For example, Tejaswini Ganti notes that it is known for its peculiarities when

compared to the film industries around the world. It is highly decentralised, financed primarily by entrepreneurial capital, organised along social and kin networks and governed mainly by oral rather than written contracts. There are 'banners'<sup>1</sup> instead of studios that make films. In fact, studios within the Indian context are merely shooting spaces and not production and distribution concerns (Ganti, 2004, p 54).

The industry is a very diffuse and chaotic place where anyone with large sums of money and the right contacts can make a film. The financiers could be wealthy businessmen with varied businesses from construction to jewellery to textiles with an interest to manifold their investment. The banners have long been controlled by families who have been involved in the process of film-making since the time of independence. The industry derives its dynastic and nepotistic roots from there. This chapter will look at the production and financing aspect of the industry, its corporatisation, and how it has changed in the last decade, which in turn has a bearing on the production of Contemporary Indian Indies. Subsequently, the movie-making mechanism of the industry has become more professional and an off-shoot of the whole process is the emergence of the production of indies. The chapter will explore the effect of corporatisation in an industry that is not readily open to changes.





# LUCK BY CHANCE

The unreceptive nature of the industry towards outsiders has been a long-standing trend. For an outsider, to use an industry term- to get a break i.e. a chance to work in any department of filmmaking is extremely difficult and subject to luck. A genuine outsider to get a chance needs what is euphemistically called 'a jack' to lift him/her into the elite circle that is involved in the process of film-making or depend on serendipity to be discovered and given a chance. These idiosyncratic aspects have found a nuanced representation in *Luck By Chance* (2009). Particularly notable are the scenes between the producer, his wife and his lead-actor (Excel Movies, 2009).

*Luck By Chance* is not an indie film but a multiplex film (the difference is explained in Chapter 2) that has a meta-film narrative<sup>2</sup> and extensively touches upon the vagaries of the process of film-making, financing, production, distribution and casting.

<sup>1</sup>Banners are individual production companies, which are started by actors or directors who subsequently become producers.

<sup>2</sup>Meta-film is a style of film-making which presents the film as a story about film production. In *Luck By Chance* another film *Dil Ki Aag* is being made. The film deals with struggles of young actors to get established in the film industry.

There is an established network of financiers for filmmaking and the financial stream for producing films has always had connection to the black economy of India. This black money is the untaxed, unreported and therefore unregulated money that cannot be shown on bank accounts or written on cheques or remitted through wire transfers. This money finds an opportunity of outlet in film production. Increasingly, there have been financial links of the industry to the underworld since the late 1980s (Treverton, 2004, p 54) when the country had a closed economy. More details can be found in the extensive non-fiction book *Maximum City* by Suketu Mehta and *Organised Crime* by Prafullah Padhy.

However, post-liberalisation, the underworld postured accordingly to expand their sphere of influence to organised crime and film financing instead of extortion from the producers. The underworld investing money in film-financing as a part of their organised crime racket formed an important plot in *Company* (2002), a film that is part of the analysis in Chapter 3, an indie which portrays social realism by raising existing social issues. The government's granting of the industry status<sup>3</sup> in October 2003, has led to changes in the fundamentals of financing, distribution and exhibition in the film industry and that led to the corporatisation of the Hindi film industry. This policy of the Government of India had significantly contributed in creating a different work culture in the industry marked by the entry of corporate firms and added emphasis on professionalism. The goal of the government was to curb black money and thereby increase revenue from taxes on these films' domestic and international collections.

'Among a series of financial and regulatory concessions that accompanied this major shift in state policy were the reduction in import duties on cinematographic film and equipment, exemption on export profits and other tax incentives to exhibitors' (Punathambekar, 2009). The granting of industry status therefore entitled films to bank finance.

<sup>3</sup>Sources here vary. Tejaswini Ganti cites the year of accordance of industry status to be 1998. At a national conference on "Challenges Before Indian Cinema" held in Mumbai (10 May, 1998), then Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Sushma Swaraj announced that the government decided to accord "industry" status to the business of filmmaking in India. But it took until October 2000 for the bill to be framed and made into an act in the parliament. The film industry was brought under the purview of FICCI (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry). An annual convention FICCI - FRAMES is held annually ever since to encourage corporatisation.





Increasingly, banks like IDBI, ICICI, Bank of India, Punjab National Bank began financing films. These banks are a cleaner way of raising money for a film and their names are rolled as financiers in the opening credit rolls of the films. Earlier only National Film Development Council (NFDC) would be the legal body who used to finance films. But now, leading corporate houses of India like the Tata Group, Sahara Group, Aditya Birla Group, Future Group, Mahindra Group and the Reliance Group have ventured into film production. Each have launched their Media & Entertainment (M&E) wing under the aegis of their umbrella brand and several others are following suit.

For the newer, emerging batch of film-makers like Dibakar Banerjee, Nagesh Kukunoor, Sriram Raghavan and Navdeep Singh, who do not have contacts in the industry but want to get a film made, there is a choice between the institutional funding and corporate finance as against funding from private entrepreneurs operating since before corporatisation. Mostly, they chose the former option. Simultaneously, they work with a newer, younger bunch of independent producers who work in collaboration with the corporate houses. With more formal sources of finance being available, movies have begun to be completed within an assured time frame, thereby reducing the costs and the indirect burden on the producers. Apart from a producer, there is a line producer and an executive producer to manage the film production.

The increase in film financing from organised sources has been led by Media & Entertainment (M&E) companies that have raised funds through Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) over the last few years and new entrants comprising High Net-Worth Individuals (HNIs) & companies, who were traditionally not engaged in the M&E business. This has resulted in the players reducing their funding from the traditionally unorganized sector. This trend represents the first definitive (and meaningful due to the quantum of films involved) shift in the growth of organized film financing for the Hindi film industry, a trend which is likely to sustain and grow over the coming years.

# CINEMA

During the mid 2000s, it was witnessed that several Indian companies engaged in diverse business segments across the Media & Entertainment (M&E) space raised money through IPOs and private equity placements. The first company to tap public money through an IPO was the C&S (cable and satellite) TV broadcaster, Zee Telefilms Limited, in 1992-93 (Indian Film Trade, 2007).

Apart from the money raised by IPOs from the share market, off-shore foreign investment has also begun. Because of the economic liberalisation, the restriction on foreign investment has been lifted. The amount of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)<sup>4</sup> allowed varies from sector to sector but the film industry has been permitted 100% FDI. Foreign investment and venture capitalistic funding from overseas players has poured in more money into the sector, which is seen as an area of strategic interest by the investors. Foreign studio majors have started investing in distribution networks for Hollywood films have now expanded to studio infrastructure, office spaces, post-production services, animation, and special effects studios in India because of this.

For example, Joint MD of Percept, an M&E company, Shailendra Singh, says “The opening of the film industry to foreign investment coupled with the granting of industry status to this segment has had a favourable impact, leading to many global production units entering the country, including Walt Disney, Warner Group, Viacom and Sony Pictures Entertainment. Production houses are being forced to embrace corporatisation, because of systematic and continuous growth” (Datta, 2008).

Singh’s statement points to the sudden exigency in refiguring of film financing model across the new and old industry players. In addition to the adoption of structured methods of film finance, corporatisation has ushered in more transparency and accountability, which is an indication of the trend amongst film-makers of adopting international practices and approaches. The verbal and handshake agreements have been discarded now in the favour of well-defined, structured, formal contractual agreements which when broken are subject to legal recourse. Legally binding contracts for all the professionals involved in the making of a film is becoming common-place.

<sup>4</sup> Up to 100 % of the paid-up capital in an Indian company involved in film financing, production, distribution, exhibition, marketing and associated activities relating to the film industry.

The transformation of the Hindi film industry is also being further propelled by various tax benefits that the industry receives. The industry has been granted tax benefits especially to the multiplex theatres (more details can be found in Athique and Hill, 2010). It forms one of the most important reasons for the mushrooming of multiplexes in urban centres in India. Corporate models were based on American studios, to support a film all the way from screenplay development through film distribution and in some cases even exhibition as a complete vertical integrated package.

In the initial years of the last decade, 'corporatisation' became the buzz word. Corporatisation was seen as a win-win situation for the corporate as well as the Hindi film industry. The films would help the corporate companies increase their visibility among their respective target audiences, while the corporates would bring finance and organisation, thus structuring the otherwise disorganised and chaotic industry. Despite the rush of these series of changes in every step of film-making; financing, production and distribution, the situation for independent and different films with challenging narrative remained unchanged.

Flushed with funds but rushing for profits, the corporates started to play safe and invested in stars, instead of scripts in an industry that is based on star-system. The competition between these upcoming corporate production houses led to a case of too much money chasing handful of talent, resulting in exorbitantly high remunerations for the leading actors who could guarantee a box office opening. The imbalance in the supply-demand equation drove up the prices for the few bankable stars and multiple film deals were signed between them and the corporate film houses (Hrithik Roshan had a 3 film deal<sup>5</sup> for 35 crore with Adlabs<sup>6</sup>).

This was primarily because the creative talent was seen to be the actors and not the content despite adoption of an international mode of film production. In all this, the investment in experimental films was forgotten. The initial years were lukewarm and did not really do much for the independent films.



<sup>5</sup>Under the deal, the actor had full liberty to choose the script and director he wanted. The deal was scrapped afterwards as not a single project could take-off as the actor did not approve of any script.

<sup>6</sup>Adlabs was bought by Reliance Big Entertainment in 2005.

The initial corporate forays (of some firms like Sony Pictures Entertainment and Reliance Big Entertainment) suffered due to the inexperience in the film making process as they were entering an unexplored market. The company stock prices, branding and being in news apparently became prominent issues. Instead of establishing a respected functional production house by expanding the repertoire of films and genres, the fear of box-office failure began to dictate decision of which films would go to the production floor.

The corporates also brought executives from other non-film related backgrounds (often FMCG<sup>7</sup> and retail) and they were given the power to green flag movie projects despite being novices in the field. They got into the mentality of 'marketing a detergent'; a point which Minnie Vaid, an executive at Mahindra and Mahindra owned Mumbai Mantra echoes by pointing, "I was told marketing a film is like marketing a detergent. But how can it be so? Each film, each Friday, comes with its unique sensibility and needs and has to be marketed as such. They think skills are transferable but some skills clearly are not!"

Vaid's bafflement at the statement shows the rookie naïvety of the corporates. The marketing was wrong and the high actor salaries raised the film budgets, thereby leading the films into incurring losses. Vishal Bhardwaj, another off-beat director who adapted William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* to a Mumbai crimelord setting in *Maqbool* (2003) reiterates the point of the sudden financial muscle of newly formed corporate houses saying, "The corporates had little production experience. They had a mandate to spend a certain amount of money and before the recession, anyone could make just about any film they wanted" (Dhawan<sup>8</sup>, 2009).



These films were sold to exhibitors at high rates by selling the star cast as their main selling points. Corporates also looked at non-theatrical revenues with the sale of film merchandise, satellite rights, audio rights and overseas distribution rights. The films continued to lose money because of the economic fundamentals of the process being unfavourable to making profits. These high budget films that were bankrolled tanked at the box-office too as the average success rate of films in a year was extremely low.

Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, director of cult hit *Rang De Basanti* (2006) has also blamed these neophyte corporate executives for huge actor salaries (Bollywood Trade Editorial, 2011).



*The net worth of their companies are pretty high, hence corporate companies don't mind paying 3/5/10 times the cost because the moment you make announcement through your full page advertisements, people see your name and would buy your company shares. Your share price rises from ₹100 to ₹400. If your company net worth is 1000 crores, it will become 4000 crores.*

*A star never comes to your door and asks for huge amount of fees at gun point. The corporate producers go and say, 'Instead of 10 crores for a movie we will pay you 35 crores for 3 movies'. I don't mind saying it started with Reliance Big Pictures. As the pool of talent in our industry is limited, these corporates are trying to corner talents on their side by paying huge prices.*

*-Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra*

Mehra's accusation is towards the 35 crore deal, which never materialised. But it did however trigger similar offers and deals within the industry which led to losses. Quite akin to stock market where an out-of-control bull-rally is followed by a correction period, the film industry corporate houses too have started to adjust the bloated and overvalued stocks of film production. The worldwide economic recession that hit in 2008 also was a prime factor in the corporate houses correcting their stance. Of late though, there has been a great deal of inventiveness and experimentation in the industry in terms of story, style and sensibility like *Johnny Gaddaar*, *Aamir* and *Do Dooni Chaar*. The corporates to an extent are responsible for this.

<sup>7</sup>Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) are the retail goods that one must have in order to live, or at least live well. The items are referred as fast moving because they are the quickest items to leave the shelves at a supermarket, over a short period of days, weeks, or months.

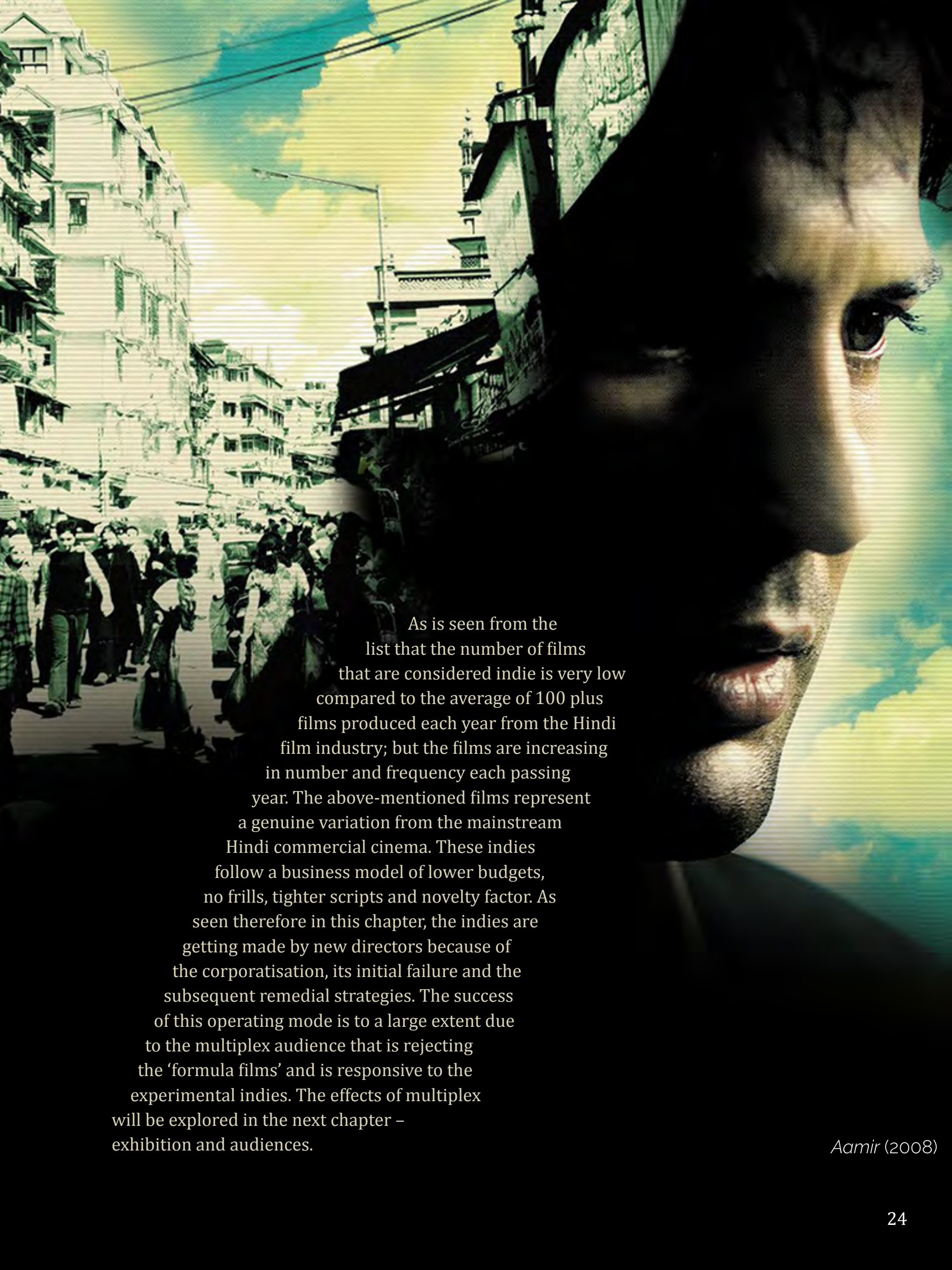
<sup>8</sup>Sabrina Dhawan is a screenwriter who works in India and the United States. She is also the Area Head of Screenwriting at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts in the Goldberg Department of Dramatic Writing. She wrote the screenplay for the 2002 film *Monsoon Wedding*.

The synthesis of corporates and films is still an ongoing process. Still, films are being made without the corporate backing too. These films are produced by independent producers who are willingly backing them or films, which look for distributors after completion of the shooting. Moreover, these films are made by a generation of film makers who are cinephiles, well-read and informed, and who because of the internet, satellite television and DVD stores have access<sup>9</sup> to world cinema. The school of thought is different, so are their inspirations and sensibilities. The rise of the urban audience, multiplex theatres, the evolution of the censor board, and changing cultural values have also contributed to this range of films and stories that are written. Because of these factors a number of contemporary indies from India are being made. Following on the next page is a list that most emphatically represent the Contemporary Indian Indies.



<sup>9</sup> Access means physical access to DVD stores and satellite television

- 
- 2001 *Chandni Bar, Pyaar Tune Kya Kiya*
  - 2002 *Company*
  - 2003 *Maqbool, 3 Deewarein, Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi, Haasil*
  - 2004 *Yuva , Ek Hasina Thi, Ab Tak Chappan, Black Friday*
  - 2005 *Page 3, Iqbal, D*
  - 2006 *Khosla ka Ghosla, Being Cyrus*
  - 2007 *The Blue Umbrella, Johnny Gaddaar, Manorama Six Feet Under*
  - 2008 *Oye Lucky! Lucky Oye!, Aamir*
  - 2009 *Dev.D, Little Zizou, Gulaal*
  - 2010 *Love, Sex Aur Dhokha, Dhobi Ghat, Peepli [Live], Do Dooni Chaar, Udaan, That Girl in Yellow Boots*



As is seen from the list that the number of films that are considered indie is very low compared to the average of 100 plus films produced each year from the Hindi film industry; but the films are increasing in number and frequency each passing year. The above-mentioned films represent a genuine variation from the mainstream Hindi commercial cinema. These indies follow a business model of lower budgets, no frills, tighter scripts and novelty factor. As seen therefore in this chapter, the indies are getting made by new directors because of the corporatisation, its initial failure and the subsequent remedial strategies. The success of this operating mode is to a large extent due to the multiplex audience that is rejecting the 'formula films' and is responsive to the experimental indies. The effects of multiplex will be explored in the next chapter – exhibition and audiences.

*Aamir (2008)*



## *Exhibition and Audiences*

It is interesting to look at the exhibition, audiences and release strategies aspect with respect to the contemporary indies. The exhibition of films and its economics have changed due to the multiplex phenomenon. In parallel, the audiences have also changed, become segmented and expect better quality feature films. It is the audience that makes the film what it becomes by the way it receives the films. Audiences as arbiters of meaning is a contentious issue and is advocated in genre studies by Tzvetan Todorov (Todorov, 1976). This is even truer in case of indie films; for a discerning cineaste audience is the key for the word-of-mouth publicity that an indie film is dependent upon.

This segmented cinephile audience is largely both, a product of, and a part of urban centres. The present state of indies can owe a lot to two factors that emerged closely - firstly the recognition of film-making as an industry in 2000 and secondly, the beginning of the emergence of the first multiplexes in urban centres of India in 1997 and the subsequent multiplex revolution. The exhibition in multiplexes and its audiences are intimately related. This chapter will explore the economic outlook of it. The proliferation of multiplexes, the increase in number of screens, the ticket pricing, the duration of indies and the release strategies being the essential points of discussion.



**BOX OFFICE**



The purchasing power of the Indian middle class has gone up and the year-on-year growth in both - multiplex sector and film revenues is fuelled by the co-evolution and proliferation of the retail boom.

The Average Revenue Per Viewer (ARPV) from screening in multiplexes is greater than single screens and that has shifted the economics of cinema exhibition in India. Multiplexes are fast dotting up the metros and are slowly realising the potential of even the smaller cities. The rapidly expanding infrastructure has created more screens and with it, the strategies of screening films have also changed. These changes have been pre-emptive or in response to the tastes and sensibilities of the viewing populace. The chapter will also look into the release strategies as on an average 100 films are releasing in the Hindi film industry and it is easy for indies to get lost in the marketing and promotional blitzkrieg of bigger films.

‘The first wave of multiplex construction swept through the major metros in the late 1990s, accompanied by a boom in mall construction; the mall and the multiplex became the twin arcades of post-modernity’ (Rai, 2009, p 142). By post-modernity, Rai here means the post-liberalisation period in India, when there is an emphasis to replicate and homogenise the look of urban structures- in this case, the retail and leisure infrastructure. The PVR Group built the first multiplex in India in New Delhi in 1997 by converting Anupam theatre to a 4-screen multiplex theatre, two with a capacity of over 300 seats and the other two with 150 seats (Anon, 2011).

India’s experience with cinematic exhibition in multiplexes was made possible by the retail boom unleashed by the process of economic liberalisation. The state in its bid to structure film exhibition, encouraged companies and entrepreneurs by the waiver of the entertainment tax on the multiplexes. These multiplexes were developed on the ‘shopping mall’ model of the multiplex sporting all the features of an up-market turf as prevalent in the West. Indians began to watch films in a framework that fits global consumerism standards. Five major companies - PVR Cinemas, Adlabs Films Ltd., Shrinagar Cinemas Ltd., Inox Leisure and Fun Cinemas operate two-thirds of India’s multiplexes. All of these companies are engaged in massive expansion programmes (Athique and Hill, 2010, p 50-56).

This spurt in growth has done three things. Firstly, it has increased the revenue for all films; secondly, it has segmented the audience; and thirdly it has given an opportunity for newer genres to screen in theatres.

Before proceeding further, it is important to differentiate between a multiplex film and a contemporary Indian indie film. For the book's purpose, a contemporary Indian indie will most certainly be a multiplex film, but a multiplex film might not be a Contemporary Indian Indie (mentioned in Chapter 1 earlier). 'A multiplex film has a certain operational possibility within the economics of cinema and is directed towards the high-value, aspirational urban audience' (Athique and Hill, 2010, p 203-207). Some of the examples cited by Athique and Hill are *Pyaar Ke Side Effects* (2006), *Namaste London* (2007) and *Honeymoon Travels Pvt. Ltd.* (2007).

However, these multiplex films are too diverse and it is the operating terms of these films, rather than any set of cinematic features that distinguishes them from mainstream cinema. Their targeting of a particular segment of the urban audience though does create a common mode of address and an overlap with the indies.



Nagesh Kukunoor's *Hyderabad Blues* (1998) is an example of being a contemporary indie as well as a multiplex film. It is also a pre-cursor to the contemporary indies. Kukunoor shot it in US\$ 40,000 within 24 days, but had a hard time finding theatres that would run his film. It eventually went on to become a hit in all the metro cities especially Hyderabad, where the film is based and shot in. *Hyderabad Blues* displayed that a small offbeat film could work. It is a pioneering work in multiplex cinema – a cinema which does particularly well in urban centres. It worked without big stars, on a shoestring budget, without the song and dance narrative typical of mainstream Indian cinema and funded by the writer-director's personal savings. It was a model for a contemporary Indian indie. Kukunoor later on directed many small budget films following the same model he debuted with. With corporatisation later on, he was able to attract finance for his projects (*Iqbal* in 2005 was made for Subhash Ghai's Mukta Arts, an independent producer). Kukunoor, who faced a tough time scouting for cinema halls to screen his debut Hinglish film *Hyderabad Blues* agrees, "Multiplexes provide an ideal link between experimental film-makers and audiences who want to watch different films in a different ambience"(Wallia, 2003).

Multiplexes thus have made it possible for film-makers to experiment with different genres, languages and budgets. Newer subjects and contents are being explored by a breed of filmmakers who are exploiting the chance of exhibition. Aparna Sharma states how the multiplex has segmented the urban movie-going audience.

“The multiplex intervention, as of the moment, can be termed as appropriating varying audience segments to stabilize and secure its own position, establish its distinction and engage the audiences in a varying film viewing exercise. It has emerged as comprising a mix of seemingly contradictory strains wherein central and peripheral tendencies co-exist. Taking cues from each other, multiplexes all over the country are making for variables that don’t just originate in, or correspond with, the existing common needs of their audiences, but have also identified and accommodated overlapping tastes and preferences by readying access to fare, which may have previously been considered as lacking numerical encouragement vital for profitability” (Sharma, 2003).



The audience thus now has found a place to access different films. Previously, pre-2000 and even in the 1980s when there was a parallel cinema movement<sup>10</sup> in India, the art films and much of the parallel cinema usually had to face reluctance from distributors and exhibitors alike. These were films like *Albert Pinto Ko Gussa Kyon Ata Hai* (1980), *Ardh Satya* (1983) and *Saransh* (1984) with social realism and hard-hitting subjects which are recognised as important films of parallel cinema movement. The audience back then did not have interface with the films itself due to less screenings in commercial theatres. They had only got support from National Film Development Corporation (NFDC), film festivals and state run network television at that time. NFDC still supports the independent filmmakers as exemplified by it producing *That Girl in Yellow Boots* (2010) directed by Anurag Kashyap.

The exhibition of contemporary indies now are finding occupancy primarily because of the audience. The audiences have grown to accept these films; fed as they are to satellite television and international exposure to films, across the genres and from all over the world. At least a section of cinéaste audience expects a wider variety of films. The indies have treaded an innovative path and gained currency by confronting pressing social and political issues. This will be seen in Chapter 3 case studies- such as *Company* (2002) deals with organised crime, the underworld and the police machinery, *Black Friday* (2004) is the true story of the 1993 Bombay serial bomb blasts and *Love, Sex aur Dhokha* (2010) raises a number of issues- chiefly honour killings, voyeurism and the concerns of the youth.

Although made from within the industry set-up, they are distinctive and occupy the space between the mainstream and art film, reaching audiences without the essential melodrama typical of commercial films, which gains them critical acclaim. The audience of these films are those for whom quality and critically appreciated films are a draw to watch them. The films have gained critical acclaim at home and abroad alongside box-office endorsement in many cases like *Company*, *Oye Lucky! Lucky Oye!* (2008) and *Dev.D* (2009).



<sup>10</sup> Parallel Cinema as an alternative to the mainstream commercial cinema is a specific movement in Indian cinema, known for its serious content, realism and naturalism, with a keen eye on the socio-political climate of the times.

In the backdrop of a film industry fraught with uncertainty of financial performance of films, the small budget and independent films gradually have received considerable approval and encouragement as there are not huge losses if they do not make money at the box-office. This slice of the cinema is expanding and the multiplex constitutes a crucial exhibition space, given that they target specific rather than mass audiences. Getting a film made is an onerous task but despite the difficulties, the directors like Sriram Raghavan, Navdeep Singh and Vishal Bhardwaj have continued making them both independently and in collaboration with firmly positioned industry corporate productions.

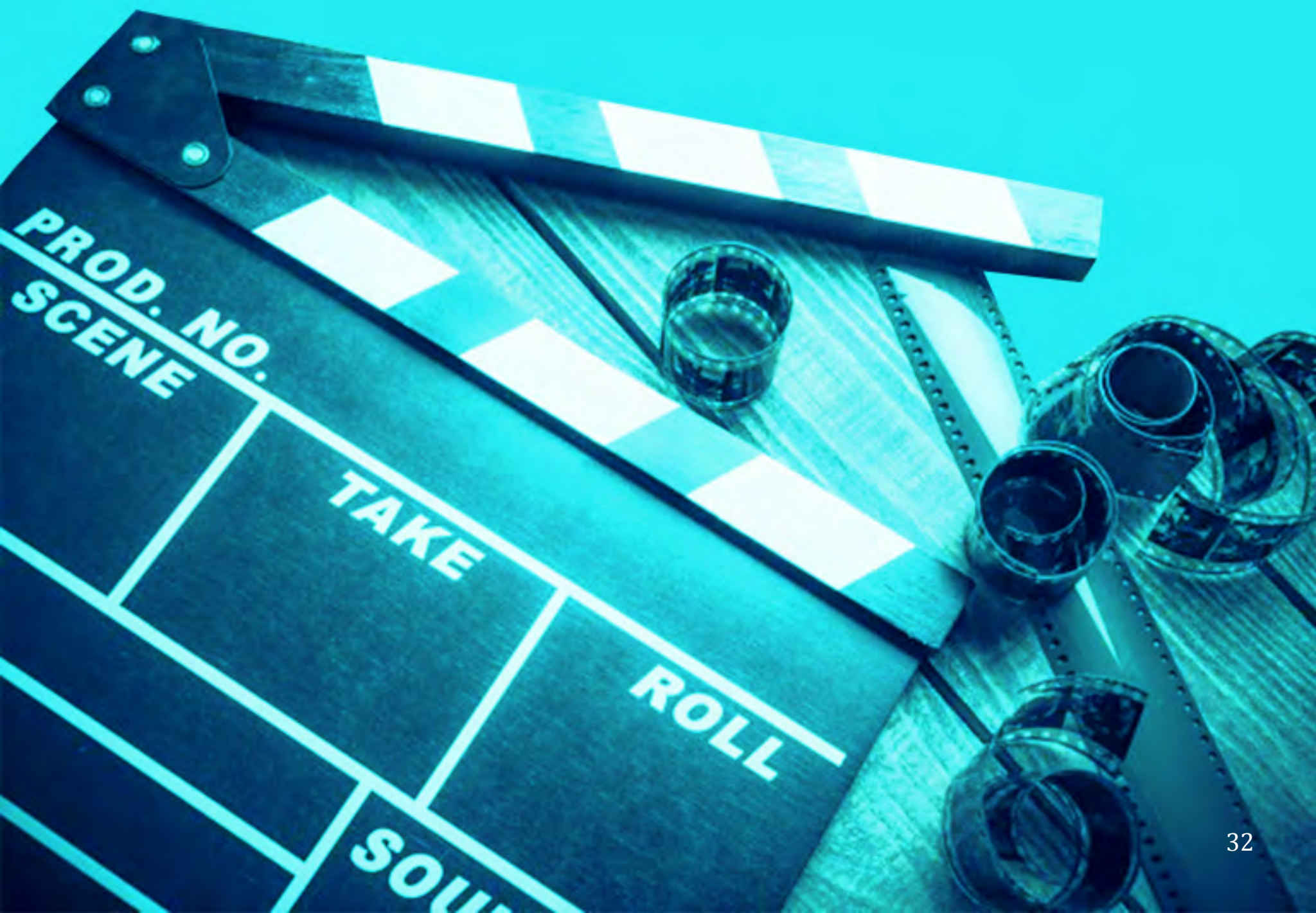
Accruing with the audience trends is the revenue aspect that is supporting the indie films. The penetration of these indies into the multiplex can be located in simple mathematics – the proliferation of screens. New multiplexes are being constructed and the screen numbers are increasing throughout the country. A single screen in multiplex seats a smaller audience than a single screen cinema and it is easier to fill a hall for an indie with 150-200 people. Multiplexes operate with flexibility and by manoeuvring the screens, the timings and audience. They have not followed the conventional 12-3-6-9 and the 10-1-4-7-10 time schedule prevalent in most single screen cinemas.

This created the opportunity to schedule and programme films on different screens (Sharma, 2003). The ability to manipulate schedules enables films of varying lengths to be accommodated. These non-mainstream indies are of varying durations and usually shorter than an average commercial film. Recent commercial films like *Krrish* (2006) is 185, *Om Shanti Om* (2007) is 162, *Ghajini* (2008) is 183 and *Jodha Akbar* (2008) is 215 minutes in running time.

The indies hence could easily be integrated in the multiplex's film menu. A list of running time of some indies below show that they are rarely close to 3 hours and on an average are closer to 2 hours. In the same time that 2 commercial films are screened on a screen in a multiplex, 3 screenings of an indie of lesser duration can be screened. It is this flexibility that is an advantage for any multiplex management.



<b>Film</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Film</b>	<b>Duration</b>
<i>Chandni Bar</i>	150 min	<i>Ek Hasina Thi</i>	120 min
<i>Manorama Six Feet Under</i>	135 min	<i>Dev.D</i>	144 min
<i>Company</i>	155 min	<i>Ab Tak Chappan</i>	129 min
<i>Being Cyrus</i>	90 min	<i>Love, Sex Aur Dhokha</i>	110 min
<i>3 Deewarein</i>	120 min	<i>Black Friday</i>	143 min
<i>The Blue Umbrella</i>	90 min	<i>Dhobi Ghat</i>	100 min
<i>Maqbool</i>	132 min	<i>Page 3</i>	139 min
<i>Johnny Gaddaar</i>	131 min	<i>Peepli [Live]</i>	95 min
<i>Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi</i>	120 min	<i>Khosla ka Ghosla</i>	135 min
<i>Oye Lucky! Lucky Oye!</i>	118 min	<i>Do Dooni Chaar</i>	97 min
<i>Yuva</i>	161 min	<i>Iqbal</i>	132 min
<i>Aamir</i>	96 min	<i>That Girl in Yellow Boots</i>	103 min





Apart from that, there is the ticket pricing strategy. For differing audiences, the multiplexes base their ticket pricing strategy accordingly. The shows cost lesser in the morning and in the afternoon. The multiplex exhibiting fares for mainstream films and indies vary too. Indies are priced at a lower rate than a commercial film with stars. When located in the smaller urban centres, multiplexes have fewer screens and the price of a ticket is lower than metropolitan cities. According to the audience's sensibility, judged based on location, local language and general cosmopolitan nature and preferences of the city population, the number of screenings for an indie is allotted.

A city's multiplex is successful because of the footfalls it generates. Viewership and profitability are related, so are the real estate prices. Ebitda, short for earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortization (loan repaying); are city specific. The key, clearly, is to keep the ticket price points proportionate to real estate prices and purchasing power in a city.

In several states in south India, the government keeps a cap on price points. In Chennai, for instance, tickets can't be sold for more than Rs. 110. Whereas in Mumbai or Delhi, even getting a morning show for the same, even on a weekday is very difficult. Across many multiplexes in smaller cities and towns, the price is around 100, while in the metros, prices vary from 150 to 750. Again, this depends on the day and the film being watched. Generally, weekends, movies from big production houses, with bigger stars slim down the wallet quicker. Watching an indie on a weekday has better odds of better movie at a lower price. Compared to ticket prices abroad though, India has cheaper ticket rates overall - be it an indie or a commercial film. On an average a high end multiplex will cost around US \$ 4-8 dollars.



The same people who watch indies may watch commercial cinema too, but multiplexes provides a platform where they can entertain this overlap of preferences and this creates a niche audience. 'The multiplex has capitalised on an inclusive tendency to motivate and assemble diverse audiences. On the other hand, it has remained an urban, largely middle and upper middle class leisure pursuit, with its highly priced tickets excluding the masses crowded in the lower regions of the income graph' (Sharma, 2003).

If the indies are watched by a niche audience that is itself a part of the niche urban multiplex goers' population, then the numbers are not impressive. Anurag Kashyap, says that he has an audience of 100,000 but also that there is a growing awareness that independent films must be supported (TOI Crest). This support can start only by having more screenings in multiplexes.

Spatially too, the multiplexes are mostly spotted in affluent neighbourhoods, within easy reach and concentration of young audiences. Gradually, the spurt of multiplexes have begun to spread beyond the urban metros to smaller urban cities even as the film exhibition companies look towards the urban tier-II and III cities like Bhopal, Jaipur, Amritsar, Nagpur, Ranchi, Lucknow, Vizag and Kochi for expansions by aiming a pan-urban presence, which will only help the indies to a wider audience. However, tagged with these positive developments are some challenges too. The big budget films with star casts are now banking on the blockbuster syndrome<sup>11</sup> for which the focus is on maximum possible revenues in the opening weekend, thereby helping distributors recover a majority of the anticipated revenues from the film during the first week itself. The multiplexes are the main revenue generator for both mainstream and indies as they gather more box-office collections than single screen theatres despite lower admissions because of their higher priced tickets.



<sup>11</sup> The approach for making a film blockbuster by cornering maximum number of screens in multiplexes for the screening of a particular film.

Multiplexes, with multiple screens, can exhibit multiple shows of a single movie simultaneously. For instance, 31 shows of the multi-starrer *Race* (2008) were shown on a single-day by a multiplex operator in Mumbai (Anon, 2008). Because of a new release practically every week, the shelf life of an average commercial film has dramatically reduced from a few months earlier to merely a 1-2 week duration. The reducing shelf life of movies makes the multiplex the ideal format for distributors. The sale of satellite and cable (S&C) rights within a month of release is a trend that is a direct result of this.

With high ticket rates in multiplexes, the Average Revenue Per Viewer (ARPV) has gone up and that has changed the nature of the movie-going audience. With prices higher than a single screen, the average person cannot see all movies releasing in a week or a month. The viewer has already seen the film promos, read the newspaper reviews, done the internet research, discussed the film with peers on networking sites, weighed the options before determining whether the film is according to his/her taste and worth the ticket price.





Thus for an indie, a positive critical reaction is essential for word-of-mouth publicity and gradual increase in occupancy in theatres. A failure to do otherwise can result in it being ignored for commercial films. A smaller indie film might get squeezed out of screening space in case of this 'carpet-bombing' by the bigger films. If it releases close to a big film, it can get phased out. This has significantly reduced the time window within which producers and distributors can monetise the movie and recover their costs. The release strategy of the indies hence is very important. Even the well-made indies will net low recovery if sandwiched between big films despite fetching positive reviews.

Major films release during the Valentine's Day, Independence Day, Republic Day, Diwali, Id, Christmas and other festival weekends. Apart from these, there is the period of April-May where summer vacations lead to more occupancy in theatres, which is when the big-ticket films are released. The indies thus have to follow a release strategy to get released in a 'window of least competition and resistance', which is to release the films during the non-clashing weeks and preferably weeks with relatively lesser activity in the theatres. As it is, the indies can only secure screenings at multiplexes in some urban territories where the audiences are present and money comes from.



Another way of gaining attention is a film-festival schedule enroute to release, with the rider that the film should be accepted to be screened at those festivals. This mode has been gaining favour among the releases since 2008. The indies gain word-of-mouth publicity and viral buzz by taking the film festival route to theatrical release. The films travel the film festival circuits and earn the prestigious laurel leaves to their credit by being screened at esteemed festivals. Positive reviews from the Indian and international critic circles help them fetch distributors and a wider release in India. The news of the film's merits or lack of travels faster owing to social networking and there is awareness around the film raising the curiosity. The better the film does at the film festivals, the more it is backed by the producers. Films now have posters designed with the specific mentions of the being official selections at international film festivals. *That Girl in Yellow Boots*, *Udaan*, *Peepli [Live]*, *Dhobi Ghat* (all in 2010) are recent examples of indies taking the film festival route to before their release in India. *Udaan* premiered and competed at the Cannes Film festival in the Un Certain Regard category in 2010 and got screened at Giffoni Film Festival for children's films in Italy. *That Girl in Yellow Boots* screened at Venice Film Festival and at the Toronto International Film Festival. *Dhobi Ghat* premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and later screened at London Film Festival in 2010 (imdb.com).



It has been discussed in Chapter 1 how the influx of corporate money in the industry has created favourable conditions for production of indies. Capital has also been poured- in for creation of exhibition infrastructure. Exhibition strategies and the audiences themselves have been the dominant shifts in the last decade. These developments have obviously helped the exhibition and promotion of indies. The multiplexes in the last decade has emerged as the dominant mode of film exhibition and preferred over single screen by the audiences because of the plush ambience and variety; while the format simply makes economic sense for the distributors and exhibitors alike. Corporate houses aiming for vertical integration are opening their own multiplex chains. Reliance Big Pictures owns its chain of multiplexes- Adlabs, while multiplex chains like PVR are getting into film production. The screenings at multiplexes will only increase and that is a positive departure for the indies as they will get a release platform. What the indies offer is an alternative to the commercial cinema, some of which like *Company*, *Black Friday*, *Johnny Gaddaar* and *Love, Sex aur Dhokha* are analysed in the next Chapter – Style.

## CHAPTER 3

# STYLE

The cinematic features which differentiate the indies are the restructuring of the soundtrack, the emphasis on realism in storylines, apart from a penchant for experimentation with cinematic tools. The case studies in this chapter will look into the inspired, yet original storyline and editing in *Company* (2002), non-linear narrative, adapted screenplay and its significance in recent history of India in *Black Friday* (2004), intertextuality and self-reflexive homage to noir films in *Johnny Gaddaar* (2007) and the found footage format and social critique in *Love, Sex aur Dhokha* (2010). Before proceeding to the case study of films, the chapter will elaborate on the two aspects – soundtracks and screenplay writers.


One of the reasons that Hindi films are not taken seriously is mildly related with the escapist nature of the storylines and the ‘dancing around the trees’<sup>12</sup> songs that have now come to be associated with them. The films are often called musicals because of these song and dance numbers. ‘The classical musical may be defined by its inclusion of a significant proportion of musical numbers that are impossible-i.e. persistently contradictory in relation to the realistic discourse of the narrative. The most obvious and manifold examples of these impossibilities are the ostensibly spontaneous yet often hugely elaborate, flawlessly conceived and executed song-and-dance routines that typify the Hollywood musical’ (Rubin, 1993 cited in Langford 2005, p 90).

Going by this definition, a huge percentage of the films from the Hindi film industry do the same. There is a clear defiance of spatial and temporal continuity in the way songs are presented in the film. The lip-synced songs, choreographed dancing and music serve as perfect expression of state of minds of characters which robs the narration of realism and supports indulgent escapism.



<sup>12</sup> Colloquial Indian term used for song sequences shot with dancers and in locations in foreign countries





Songs have always been part of the narrative structure of films from India. All prevailing film industries, Hindi and several vernacular languages use songs as a part of their narrative. Over the years, the songs and their structuring have changed in the Hindi film industry. The gradual degeneration of revenues from the audio industry has also affected the impact an audio release of a film album used to have. Films nonetheless have found ways to make money through other revenue streams. The songs however remain integral parts of films. There are fewer songs (four–six) in contemporary releases from the Hindi film industry than earlier, when they would average around eight-ten songs every film. Accordingly, the Hindi film music has also evolved considerably. Songs in Hindi films try to consciously capture the largest possible market and media-space. They have a different sound, attitude and even language. ‘This new generation of music has managed to crossover and woo audiences the world over’ (Bichu, 2010).



*Kal Ho Naa Ho (2003)*

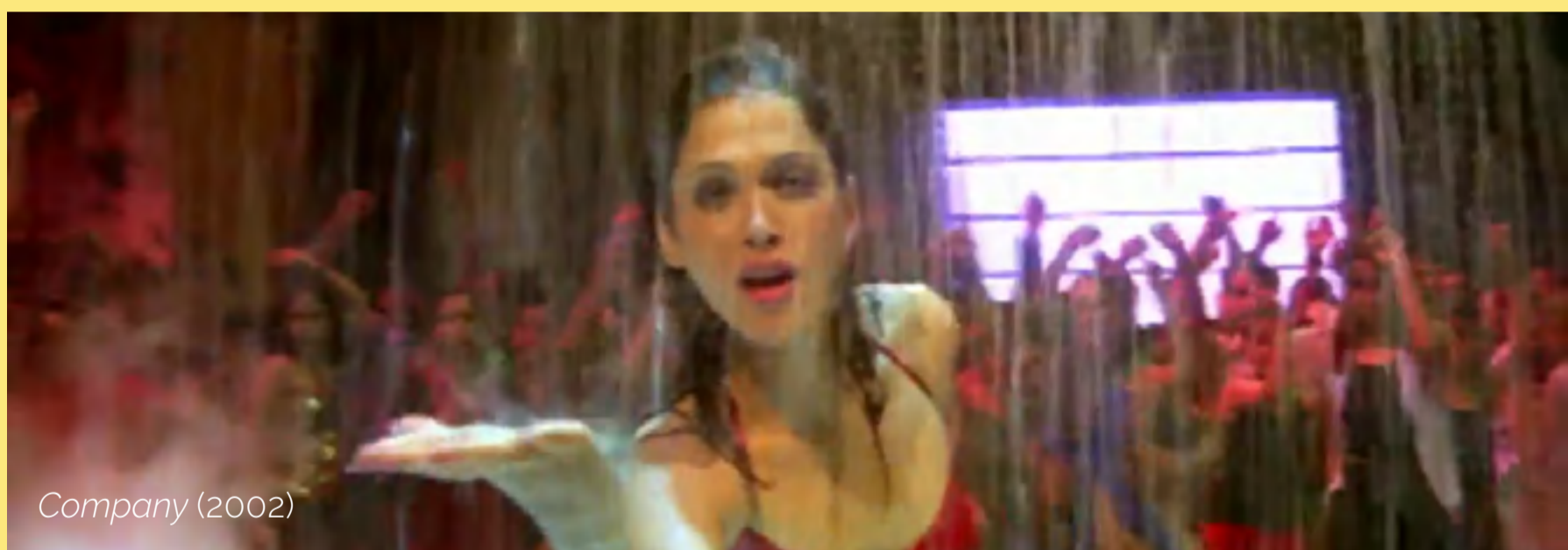
Songs are conspicuously present even in modern Hindi films. The indies however stand apart because of their rejection of the concept of lip-syncing songs. The discarding of this technique assists in attaining a more realistic feel in a film. Songs are still there in indies, but they are present as soundtracks, supplementing the narrative force and are situational rather than popping-up gratuitously. Indies use the songs as background scores and mostly the songs are not featured in their entirety of running length in the film. The soundtracks aided by the lyrics are used to give texture and depth to the film, as exemplified in *Dev.D* (2009), a contemporary adaptation of Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's classic Bengali novel *Devdas* had as many as eighteen songs with a total play length of 61:29 minutes in a film with a duration of 144 minutes. But the songs are never featured fully and mixed judiciously as they slide-in and fade-out to create the right atmospherics for the scene. Probably 'songs' is not the right word. They are snapshots-of genres, emotions and situations. It is less of an album, more of a kaleidoscope that never stops whirring (Bhattacharya, 2009). The album was critically acclaimed but eighteen songs is a rarity.

On the other end of the spectrum is *Dhobi Ghat's* (2010) soundtrack, which has Oscar winning composer Gustavo Santaolalla as the music director. It has two songs and the theme music that is composed by Santaolalla, all running in the background score of the film. *Johnny Gaddaar* (2007) had soundtracks inspired by the 1970s Indian film noir<sup>13</sup> and remains in the backdrop while *Ek Hasina Thi* (2004), another crime caper had also hardly used songs with the exception of the title theme track. *Company* (2002) used an item number at the very beginning to establish the mood as the opening credits ran on the screen; as it makes for a prudent decision not to break into song and dance montages in a serious film. Plenty of new film-makers are staying away from the long charted and travelled route of the traditional narrative in which choreographed songs were and still are seen.

<sup>13</sup> Indian noir films in 1970s were inspired by the original Hollywood film noir films.



There is a tendency in Indian theatres for the lights to come up 4-5 minutes before the film is about to end, which gives the audience the wind that the film is very close to its end. While this is done for people who want to rush back to parking and avoid a traffic stampede; in case of a film that hinges on the surprise element in the final few reels, this can have a detrimental effect. Some of the films in an attempt to circumvent this inevitability, now buffer the end with a song, which apart from not giving away the end of the film, also gives an opportunity to put in a song that may be used for promotional measures in trailers leading up to the release of the film. *Love Sex aur Dhokha* (2010) and *Khosla ka Ghosla* (2006) both have songs at the end of running time and is a clever way of overcoming the constitutive tensions that come for the indie films' directors where producers and distributors prod them to include a song that can be used later as a marketing tool.



The soundtrack itself can be an extremely handy tool in the hands of a film-maker even in a dark film. Ram Gopal Varma used one lip-syncing song '*Khallas*' in a night club environment in his close to truth fictional exposé of the Mumbai underworld in *Company* and Anurag Kashyap used India's popular contemporary fusion band Indian Ocean's music; especially the track '*Bande*' to bring the melancholic tones in *Black Friday*. This kind of shift means that the soundtrack is used when the tunes are really suitable for a film and not picked and inserted from the composer's inventory of tunes. The independent film-makers are now exercising creative liberty and using the soundtracks in the way it best suits the film, which is closer to the practice followed in Hollywood.

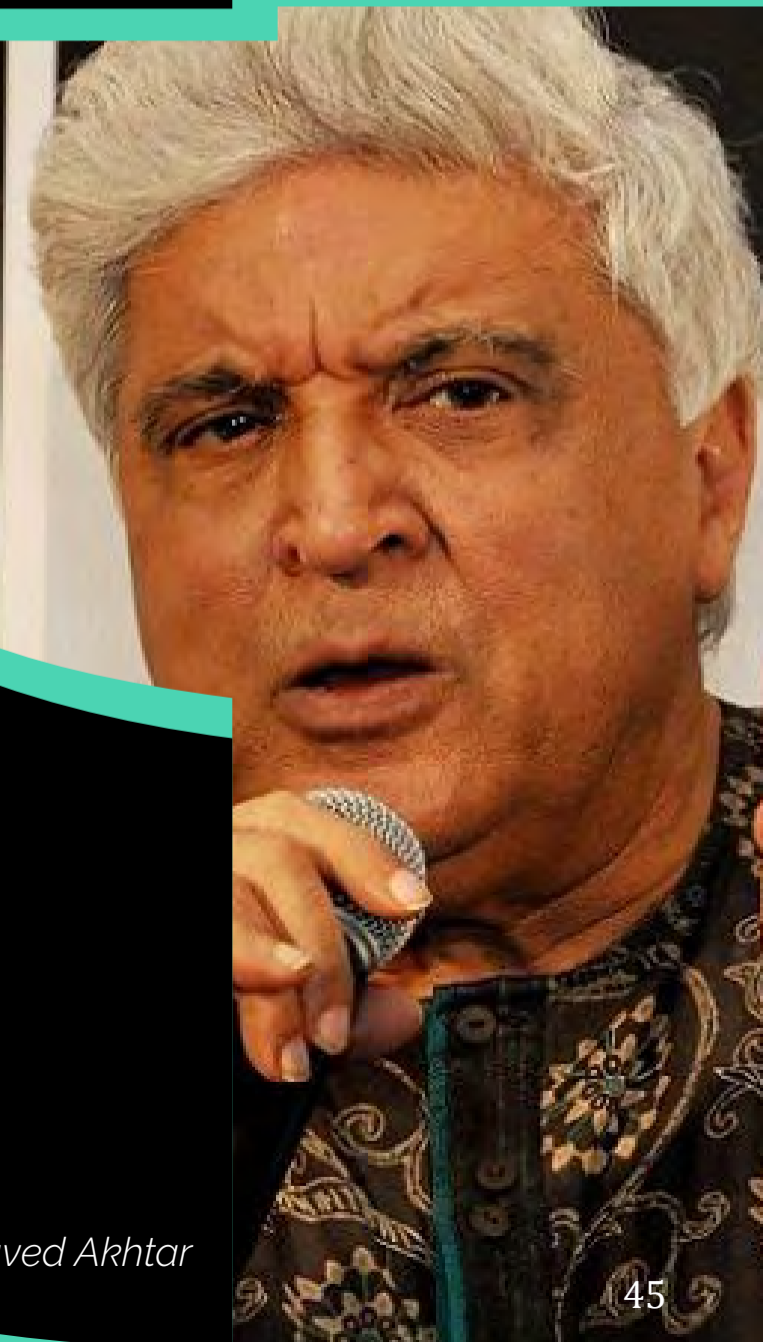
The soundtracks are one aspect and stories another. The indies have stories which present a dimension of culture that is contemporary. Dissanayake comments that until about two decades ago (1980s), Indian popular cinema was dismissed out of hand by film scholars, film critics and intellectuals in general as unworthy of serious academic attention. 'It was often characterised as being meretricious, escapist, mindless drivel and totally irrelevant to the understanding of Indian society and culture' (Dissanayake, 2003, p 202). In order to understand the nature and significance of Indian popular cinema, we need to examine its genealogy. In this regard, certain formative influences present themselves as being significant and far reaching in their power of inflection: the ancient epics that form the basis of Hindu religious belief, the vibrant, European influenced Parsi theatre of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the classical cinema of Hollywood and lastly MTV music videos. It is only by paying close attention to the structure of narrative in Indian popular cinema that we can begin to understand its uniqueness as a cinematic discourse (ibid, p 205)



Commenting on the structure of stories in Hindi films, leading screen-writer and lyricist Javed Akhtar, who co-wrote India's classic *Sholay* (1975) with Salim Khan, opines

*We are, I feel, very..Victorian about the structure of the story. I'm not talking of the content of the morality, but the structure. If you take an average film from say America or Europe, in its structure, it is nearer to a short story. I mean there are films that are best sellers, novels, like Gone With The Wind, Ben Hur, Spartacus, or Godfather (sic), leave aside those films, an average film will be nearer to a short story. But an average Indian film, again one is not talking of its intellectual level or aesthetics, strictly talking about the structure, an average mainstream commercial film is nearer to a novel. Now if we take traditional stories, even in the West, they're nearer to a novel. The short story is developed later. We have our own saga-like quality in our stories.*

*On the other hand, parallel cinema or off-beat cinema is again nearer to a short story and it is one of the reasons that perhaps it doesn't work with the Indian masses. Indian masses somehow want a story that will engulf generations and eras, a larger period of time, and incidents, big influences on a larger spectrum. This is one major difference between the structures of a European or American film's screenplay. You see a short story will have a beginning and an end, but these sagas have to have a beginning, a middle, and the end.*

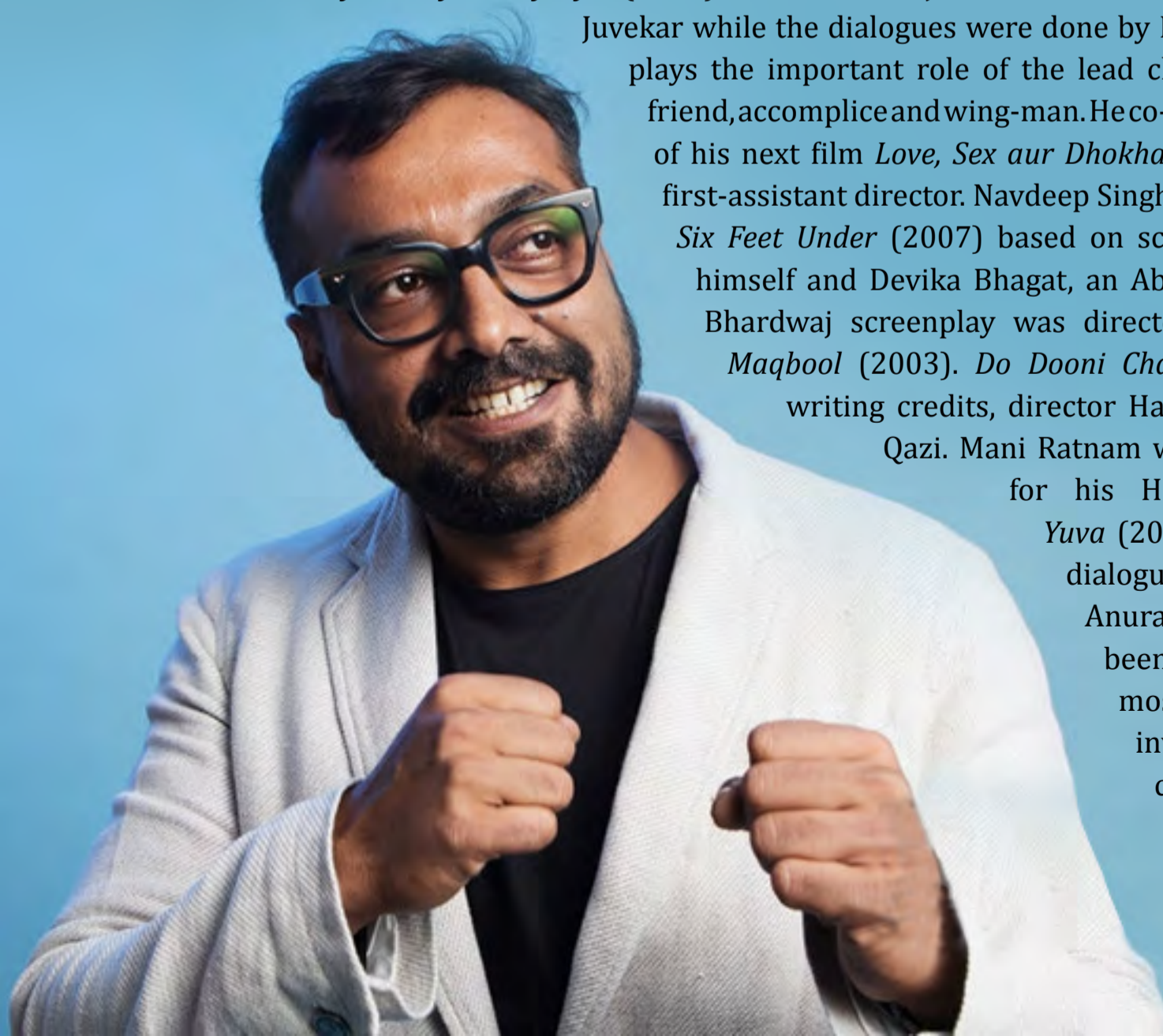


*Javed Akhtar*

There has long been the concept of intervals in the Hindi films, which brings the baggage of writing the film in two parts. Bring the whole narrative to a high point at the half and then resume forward in the second with it. This fact can be detrimental to the scripting aspect as every story might not have and for that matter, require a break or a tantalising twist in the middle. All films start with that requirement except in exceptional cases as in *Dhobi Ghat*, which at 100 minutes ran without the break. While a lot of indies still have intermissions, it comes in around the one hour mark. The indies have slashed their duration by taking out the songs and so are shorter. A film closer to 2 hours can manage more screenings in a day than a longer film closer to the duration of 3 hours, a point that was mentioned earlier in Chapter 2. Moreover, what these films have done is to liberate the process of screenwriting by choosing newer, fresher, riskier subjects to write. They are now thinking as a short story instead, alike the ones followed by Hollywood that Javed Akhtar mentions earlier.

The indies pre-dominantly are based on an off-beat concept and fundamentally rely on the novelty of the script to stand out of the clutter. The script and script-writers of indies are given importance in the process of film-making and a number of the new crop of directors write their films themselves. Mani Ratnam's *Yuva* (2004), Nagesh Kukunoor's *3 Deewarein* (2003), *Iqbal* (2005) and Anurag Kashyap's *Black Friday* (2005) are examples. Directors on other occasions when they are both writing and directing a film, prefer to co-write with contemporaries, first-assistant directors or their writers. A lot of the contemporary indies are films that are co-scripted by the director with a writer.

In case of *Oye Lucky! Lucky Oye!* (2008), Dibakar Banerjee co-wrote the screenplay with Urmi Juvekar while the dialogues were done by Manu Rishi who also plays the important role of the lead character's childhood friend, accomplice and wing-man. He co-wrote the screenplay of his next film *Love, Sex aur Dhokha* with Kanu Behl his first-assistant director. Navdeep Singh directed *Manorama Six Feet Under* (2007) based on screenplay written by himself and Devika Bhagat, an Abbas Tyrewala-Vishal Bhardwaj screenplay was directed by the latter as *Maqbool* (2003). *Do Dooni Chaar* (2010) has two writing credits, director Habib Faisal and Rahil Qazi. Mani Ratnam wrote the screenplay for his Hindi-Tamil bilingual *Yuva* (2004), while the Hindi dialogues were done by Anurag Kashyap, who has been the film personality most consistently involved in these contemporary indies.

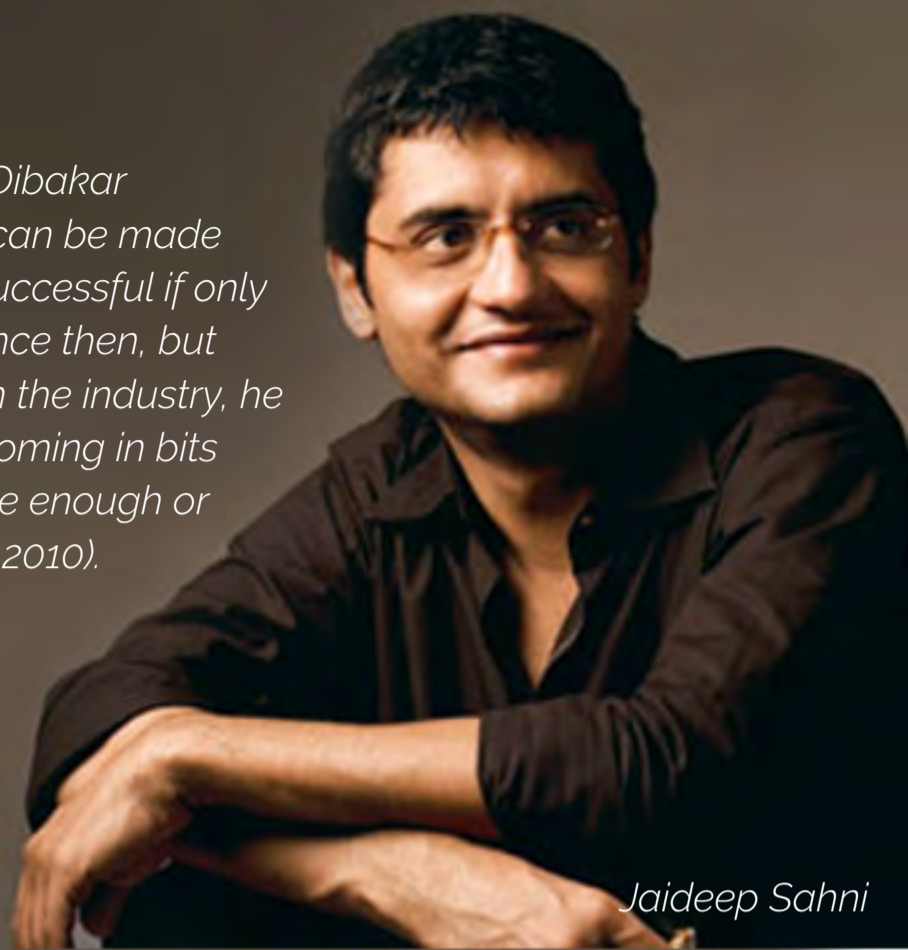


Ram Gopal Varma, reputed for not making 'run of the mill' films if not indie films started doing so right from his debut with *Kshana Kshanam* (1991) in his local language Telugu. Ever since he has gone on to direct and produce films which had a distinct shift from the films that were made by his contemporaries. Varma named his film production house as 'Factory' and all films from it had their distinct stamp of being an author-based script. Varma is a key figure to be mentioned as he made off-beat films like *Raat* (1992), *Rangeela* (1995), *Satya* (1998) and *Kaun?* (1999), even before all the favourable trends fell into place for other filmmakers. A number of directors who have made indies have worked with him – Shimit Amin, Madhur Bhandarkar, Chandan Arora, Anurag Kashyap, Vishram Sawant, Sriram Raghavan to name a few.

Varma invited advertising film writers to pen scripts for him as he felt that the existing bunch of writers were too caught up in the 'Hindi film mentality' as they took fewer risks, resulting in lack of freshness in the scripts that they wrote (NDTV, 2010). Varma's cult classic *Satya* was written by Anurag Kashyap and Saurabh Shukla. Kashyap at that time was writing for television with director Mahesh Bhatt. *Satya* is widely considered the first part of the Indian gangster trilogy which includes *Company* and *D* (2005). *D* was directed by Vishram Sawant and produced by Varma. Varma's *Company* is written by Jaideep Sahni an ex-ad writer who mentions in his interview with the editor of Indian Express that Varma at that time was looking for 'non-filmi'<sup>14</sup> writers. *Company* was his second attempt following *Jungle* (2000) (NDTV, 2010).

The investment in the writing talent throughout the industry is not healthy and probably therefore the directors choose to collaborate with a writer and co-write the screenplay together. In case of *Dev. D* (2009), the lead actor Abhay Deol is officially credited with the concept of the film. The indies have also brought to attention women technicians and writers like Nina Arora who co-wrote screenplay for *Page 3* (2005), Anusha Rizvi and Kiran Rao who have written and directed their debut films *Peepli [Live]* (2010) and *Dhobi Ghat* (2010) respectively. In Rizvi's case, the director's tag was shared with her husband Mahmood Farooqui. Anurag Kashyap's *That Girl in Yellow Boots* (2010) is penned by him and the film's leading lady Kalki Koechlin. Pooja Ladha Surti was the screenwriter/editor for *Ek Hasina Thi*, co-written with director Sriram Raghavan, who shared the writing credits for his next production *Johnny Gaddaar* with Vinay Choudary, while being again edited by Surti.

*Jaideep Sahni wrote Khosla ka Ghosla directed by Dibakar Banerjee with an intention to prove that good films can be made without the big stars and big money and become successful if only the story is well told. Sahni has written more films since then, but when asked if the script is gaining the importance in the industry, he answers with a pragmatic caution that "change is coming in bits and spurts, but the change is not deep enough, wide enough or good enough, to be really called a change " (NDTV, 2010).*



*Jaideep Sahni*

That *Khosla ka Ghosla* was stuck for financial reasons for close to a year and a half underlines the point that Sahni mentioned, despite being a decent script that later on won the National Film Award. Most indie directors work with a bound script. While that may not sound revolutionary in terms of the world standards, however that is a healthy change from the existing trends in the Hindi film industry where scripts are changed at the whims of the people controlling the reigns, which can be the producer, actor or the director. There is now a script supervisor especially in indie productions who actively works to ensure that the filming doesn't veer off from the written script.



*Khosla Ka Ghosla (2006)*





*Dhobi Ghat (2010)*

Making films with different sensibilities needs the scripting and stories to be different in the first place. The stories that these indies adopt storylines that are closer to the Indian cities and milieu. Often the themes involve the lower middle class under-dog. They are being contemporary by choosing to portray more realistic scenarios and shunning the improbable escapism of traditional Hindi films. This is seen in the background in which the stories are set. Just to sample on that, newer locations being used include rural Rajasthan in *Manorama Six Feet Under*, a Hyderabad prison in *3 Deewarein*, a remote Andhra Pradesh town in *Iqbal*, the middle-class Delhi localities in *Khosla Ka Ghosla*, *Do Dooni Chaar* and *Oye Lucky! Lucky Oye!* (2008), a fictional rural hinterland from the back and beyond in *Peepli [Live]*, the idyllic hilly town of Panchgani in *Being Cyrus* (2006) and the decayed urban Kolkata in *Yuva*. *Johnny Gaddaar* uses Goa, Bangalore and Pune as locations while *Black Friday* is shot in eastern UP, Jaipur and the border city Tonk in Rajasthan, West Bengal and small ports towns like Alibaug and Shekhadi around Mumbai. Even when films are set in Mumbai, it is not the glitz rather the gritty underbelly which is the setting as shown in *Company*, seedy dance bars in *Chandni Bar* (2001) and shady crowded lanes of old town area in *Aamir* (2008) and in *Dhobi Ghat*.



Shots of crowded Mohammed Ali Road in Mumbai in *Dhobi Ghat*



# COMPANY®

A LAW & ORDER ENTERPRISE

कंपनी  
کمپنی

*Company* (2002) is an exposé on the operations of the Mumbai underworld closely resembling the real-life mafia gang run by Dawood Ibrahim in the 1990s commonly called the D-Company, from where the title of the film originates. While *Company* is a fictionalised account, it is based on intensive research around the organised crime in India and covers the modus operandi of the D-Company which grew from extorting money to becoming back handed investors in several businesses; be it construction, stock market, film financing and smuggling. It starts by how D-Company was established and later on segued into every business from which money could be made. This is the time when black money from the organised crime was hand in glove with the production of films, which is a plot point in *Company* as mentioned earlier in Chapter 1. Noticeably, there is never the trade of drugs and the whole enterprise was into legal businesses and spreading its reach to lucrative industries minting money.

The inspiration from real-life incidents is evident in the film. The fall-out between the two lead gangsters; the mentor Mallik and protégé Chandu closely resembles the fall-out between Dawood Ibrahim and his protégé Chota Rajan, who are then at loggerheads as in the film. Mallik's aide Yadav is interviewed via telephone from Hong Kong by a female journalist of Indian news channel Aaj Tak<sup>15</sup> after their assassination attempt on Chandu in Nairobi, Kenya. The theme and raucous tone of this interview is an identical depiction of a real-life interview that Dawood Ibrahim's aide Chota Shakeel gave to Indian journalist Sheela Bhatt, after an assassination attempt on Chota Rajan in Bangkok in 2000 (Anon, 2000). Another example is the character of Vilas Pandit, the closest aide and consigliere of Mallik who is believed to be a depiction of real-life D-Company aide, counsellor and Dawood Ibrahim's confidant Sharad Shetty.



<sup>15</sup> Aaj Tak (Until Today) was the pioneer and the quickest rising news channel in an exploding channels market in early 2000s. Presently, though still a major news channel, its programming has become banal as it has followed the nation-wide trend of sensationalism in news, an issue critiqued in *Love Sex aur Dhokha*.

Ram Gopal Varma had earlier made a cult film on Mumbai underworld *Satya* (1998), which was a gritty take on the rivalry of small local gangs and criminal-politician nexus. *Company* goes a step further and shows how D-Company consolidated these splinter groups opportunistically by the lure of money, ominous threats or sagacious compromises. The director did not repeat a single actor from *Satya* to avoid comparison and to maintain novelty.

Even regularly cast actress by Varma, Urmila Matondkar's appearance in the opening credits song sequence was added very late on the editing table, an add-on to lead the audience into the milieu of the film. The authenticity of the characters is underlined by the Bombay Hindi<sup>16</sup> they speak as also the halting but strong hold on Hindi of the South Indian<sup>17</sup> Police Commissioner V. Srinivasan (based on D. Sivanandhan<sup>18</sup>, presently the Police Commissioner of Mumbai and a consultant for the film). Varma, like in *Satya* has presented an objective view of the police who are tied by the limitations of the laws of the nation to curb the crime. For example, the gangsters seeking hide-outs in countries with whom India does not have an extradition treaty (Abu Salem, a gangster on Interpol's wanted list was arrested in Lisbon, Portugal, but it took 2 years to get him back to India for trials).



<sup>16</sup> Bombay Hindi or Bumbaiya is not a dialect or language but a pidgin, a mixture of Hindi, Marathi and English with a strong tendency to simplify the grammar of regular Hindi. <sup>17</sup> South Indians generally, but not necessarily are not fluent in Hindi (this is not mocking, but a closer portrayal of reality. South Indian characters are few in commercial Hindi films and when present are reduced to cultural and regional stereotypes) <sup>18</sup> D. Sivanandhan was Joint Commissioner (Crime) for Mumbai in the mid-nineties and instrumental in successfully tackling the growing gang wars in the city.

*Company* starts by ominously stating the operating philosophy of the underworld (voice-overed by Mallik) as it highlights the economics and the framework followed by the organised crime mafia.

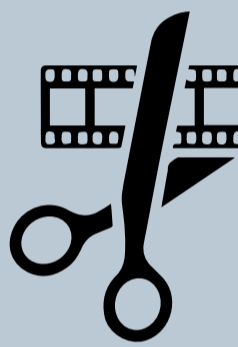
“Despite anybody telling anything else, in this world everything is done for profit, so is this business. We don’t pay taxes; neither do we keep accounts. For this work is done by inducing fear. Anybody can join us anytime, but can never resign. Whoever breaks our law, is broken-down by us. Friendship, respect or honesty, the only real reason behind all these is the same thing - profit.”

The professional ruthlessness by which the D-Company is run is further underlined when Mallik’s voiceover continues “And profit will happen; this way, that way or any which way.” After the prologue, the story is narrated by an external narrator (Makarand Deshpande), with brief voiceovers in between by either Mallik or Chandu. The film uses more than one voiceover to join the narrative together. Crucially, it uses the news correspondent’s voice to report over the scene, which has become the news bulletin. *Company* uses narration and editing techniques in interesting ways.





Shot of Chandu taking gun out of the cabinet under Gods images as he takes blessings while saying to his mother "Danger is everywhere. A man can die while crossing a street too"



Editing offers four basic areas of choice and control to establish relations between two shots-graphical, rhythmic, spatial and temporal. (Bordwell and Thompson, 2004). All four editing techniques are found to be used in *Company* to get the effects. Illustrated here are a couple of examples of graphical editing that brings forth contrast to the scenes.

The voice-over says "It isnt as if the police was fast asleep when all this was happening" over the shot of the sleeping Police Commissioner. The contrast is brought by the interplay of narration with the image on the screen.





Rhythm editing describes an assembling of shots and/or sequences according to a rhythmic pattern of some kind, usually dictated by music. Rhythm is one of the essential features of a film, for it decisively contributes to its mood and overall impression on the spectator. Editor Chandan Arora achieves this through the combination of mise-en-scene, cinematography, sound and editing.

The tension and exigency of the moment caused by split between Mallik and Chandu is shown by the sound of increasing number of telephones ringing cut against the rapid shots of several buildings in Mumbai. Each shot is changed to the next quicker than the last shot while corresponding to the increasing decibel levels caused by the rise in number of telephone calls. It was previously established in the film, how important the telephone had become to the functioning of the gang. The images and sound in editing both play a part here to establish a rhythmic pattern between atleast 24 successive shots.

Spatial editing is seen in the story arc where the assassination of a senior politician is planned in Hong Kong and executed in Mumbai as the chain of cause and effect goes back and forth between the two cities. As the plan is being thought of, the next shots jump to the actual execution and the dilemma in going through the contract. There is marginal flash-forwarding in a couple of instances; however it is mainly the spatial editing using crosscutting. i.e. alternating shots of two or more lines of action occurring in different places, thereby associating the characters from both lines of action.



- 1 Planning of hit in Hong Kong
- 3 Mallik asks to carry on with contract
- 5 Chandu calling off the contract
- 7 David informs the situation to Mallik
- 9 Mallik asks to go through the hit

- 2 Minister in Mumbai
- 4 Minister's convoy on highway
- 6 Truck contracted to run over minister
- 8 Minister's car on highway
- 10 Car is run over by the truck





Temporal editing by flash-forwarding a chain of events is at display in another scene where a businessman is shot dead for refusing to pay ransom.

- 1 Businessman is shot dead
- 3 Businessman refuses to pay
- 5 Shooter takes out his gun
- 7 Shooter's face revealed
- 9 Shooters flee on their bike

- 2 The ransom call is placed
- 4 Businessman is tracked down
- 6 Shooter about to shoot
- 8 Businessman shot from behind

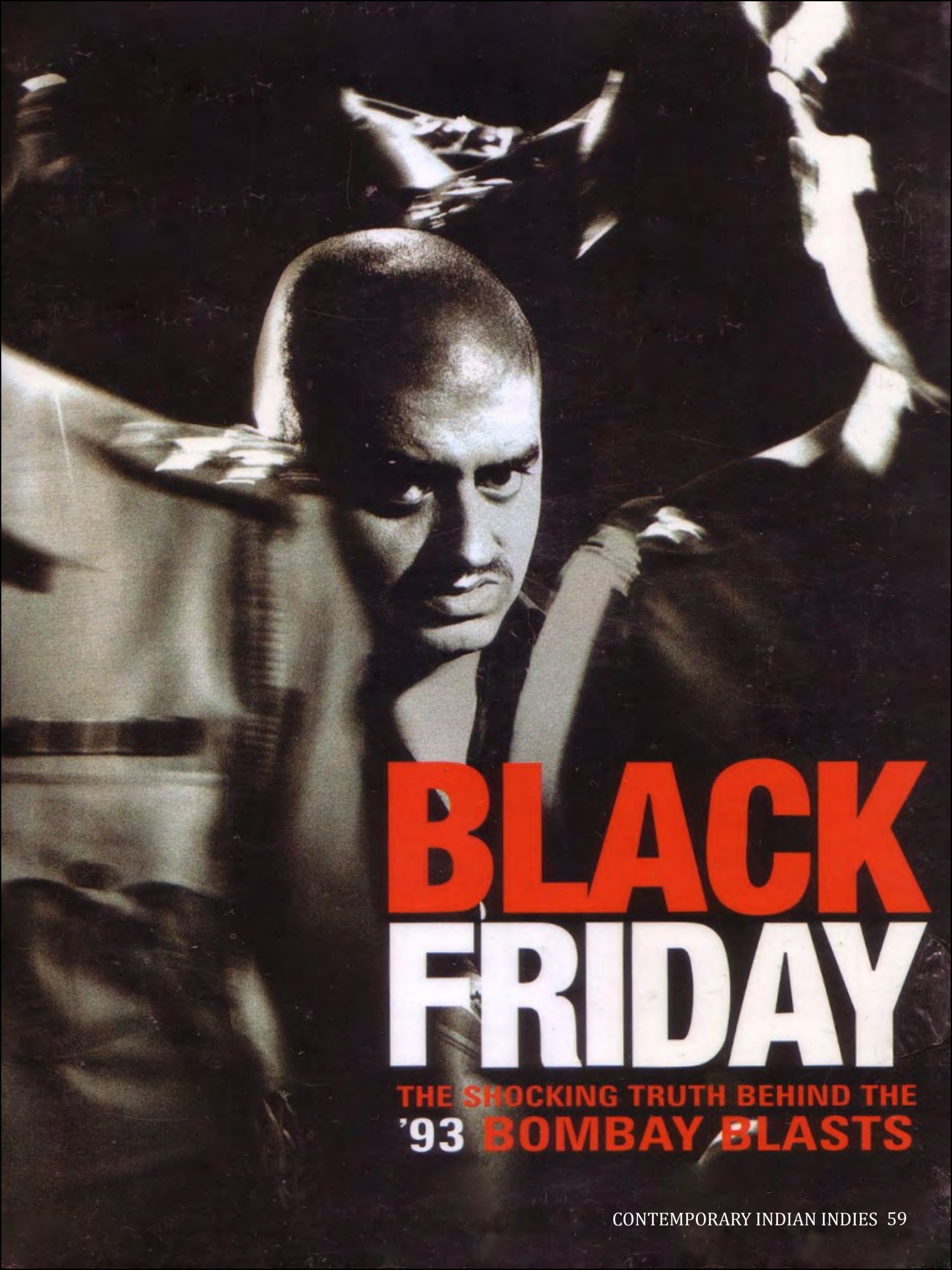


Company also diligently used television news. The effects of the gangster war and underworld activities are reported on news channels and police statements and sound-bytes are covered on channels. This is a tool of how serious the issue is and how the media is playing an important part in coverage of the same.



- 1 Company makes it to *India Today's* cover
- 2 TV news in homes
- 3 TV news in a hair salon

- 4 Chandu's wife watches the news
- 5 Aaj Tak news correspondent
- 6 Yadav's telephone interview from Hong Kong



# **BLACK** **FRIDAY**

**THE SHOCKING TRUTH BEHIND THE**  
**'93 BOMBAY BLASTS**

Friday. March 13, 1993 was the day that shook and shocked Bombay<sup>19</sup>, because until then Bombay (now Mumbai) never thought it was susceptible to terrorism. *Black Friday* shows the chaos and after-effects of that fateful day, what led to the serial bombings and who were the people behind one of first acts of terrorism in India. The screenplay is adapted from the book by S. Hussain Zaidi by the same name, who was the crime investigative reporter with *MID-Day* newspaper in Bombay and covered the Bombay serial bomb blasts and the police investigation thereafter. Remaining true to the book, the film traces the purpose of the blasts. The immaculate planning by Tiger Memon, the funding and logistic support of ISI, the RDX smuggled into Bombay, the role of Dawood Ibrahim, the corrupt police and customs officials involved are covered elaborately. It shows the state of mind of the people involved, their rigorous training and poisoning of impressionable minds as they are made to listen to incendiary audio cassettes.

Black Friday was banned because it takes the name of people who were involved in the chain of events, presents the truth as it is without kowtowing to any individual, religious groups, political organisation or nation. It was banned by the High Court, but eventually cleared by the Supreme Court of India following which it was released in February 2007. India doesn't have a history of making films on real-life incidents or biographies (*Gandhi*, 1982 was made by Richard Attenborough). Ironically in a democracy, the political parties intervene in the release of a film involving political or public figures and getting a film based on historical events made and released is a Kafkaesque process.

The narration is interspersed with news footages and archives from the 1990s that gives out a balanced perspective. The span of incidents that occurred during Decemeber 1992-May 1993 are sequenced unconventionally as it goes forth, then back, and then further back then forth again (Detailed narrative sequence on next page). The episodic nature can be traced to two reasons – firstly, that the book was written in chapters and secondly that the film was initially meant to be a six part television series (Rehaan, 2011).

<sup>19</sup>Mumbai will be referred to as Bombay while discussing Black Friday as the events are prior to the year 1995, when Bombay was renamed.

# Locations

- Ayodhya
- Delhi
- Rajasthan
- U.P
- West Bengal

- Bombay
- Dubai
- Pakistan
- Alibaug
- Thane

## CHAPTER 4 Yeda Yakub and RDX

### CHAPTER 3 On the run

### PROLOGUE

### CHAPTER 2 Arrests and interrogation

### CHAPTER 5 The conspiracy - III Yakub Memon and Dawood Ibrahim

### CHAPTER 5 The conspiracy - I Planning

### CHAPTER 5 The conspiracy - II Training

### CHAPTER 1 The first arrest

### CHAPTER 5 The conspiracy - IV What is past is prologue

## December 92 93 January

Early January-ISI asks Dawood Ibrahim to land the RDX consignment in exchange of solving his gang war with Aslam Bhatti and Dawood Jaat

7-14

Riots by Muslims as a backlash to the falling of the mosque

6

Demolition of Babri mosque in Ayodhya by Hindu fundamentalists

6-13

Riots initiated by Hindu groups with political support

14-16

Tiger Memon flies to Dubai with his family

28

Tiger Memon and Dawood Phanse meet Dawood Ibrahim in Dubai

29

Dawood Phanse bribes Police and Custom officials for allowing the landing of RDX

## February

4 RDX landing in Shekhadi, (costal town in Maharashtra)

5-8

Recon at all bomb blasts sites

9

A hood tells the police about the planned blasts, but the information is ignored  
Tiger Memon sends his family to Dubai from Bombay

11

Bombs assembled and fitted in cars, jeeps & scooters  
Tiger Memon flees to Dubai in an early morning flight before the blasts on 12



First evidence-Bomb squad gets the abandoned Maruti van at Siemens factory in Worli and its registration papers

## March

4 The group of 19 men return to Bombay via Dubai

9

A hood tells the police about the planned blasts, but the information is ignored  
Tiger Memon sends his family to Dubai from Bombay

11 Bombs assembled and fitted in cars, jeeps & scooters  
Tiger Memon flees to Dubai in an early morning flight before the blasts on 12

## April

10 Police picks up Yakub Khan's brother Majid Khan  
Yakub Khan tips the police about RDX during investigations soon thereafter

20

The bomb planters go underground, absconding by moving between Rajasthan, U.P and West Bengal. All are arrested between March -May

20

Pakistan denies sheltering Tiger Memon

14

The first arrest Asgar (Yusuf) Mughadam's confession; reveals the names and modus operandi

28

Badshah Khan confesses to training in Pakistan

30

Dawood Phanse's arrest and confession  
Confirmation of involvement of corrupt Police and Customs officials

Dawood Ibrahim's role in RDX landing becomes clear  
RDX's country of origin is traced to Pakistan

## May

4 Bombay Police files a chargesheet with 189 people accused in it  
Ujwal Nikam is the public prosecutor

5

Tiger Memon's brother Yakub is arrested in New Delhi

Yakub Memon points to Tiger's and ISI's involvement in an interview with TV Today

Tiger Memon and Dawood Ibrahim are still absconding in Dubai

## Nov Aug 94

## Bombay Serial Bomb Blasts 12

1.30 pm  
Bombay Stock Exchange

1.36 pm  
Narsi-Natha Street

2.30 pm  
Century Bazaar

2.41 pm  
Shiv Sena Bhavan Dadar

2.45 pm  
Worli Passport Office

2.48 pm  
Centaur Hotel Juhu

3.05 pm  
Zaveri Bazaar

3.16 pm  
Plaza Cinema

3.50 pm  
Sea Rock Hotel Bandra

3.55 pm  
Centaur Hotel Santacruz Airport

# MB BLASTS ROCK BOMBAY

Apart from the style of narration that is noticeable for its uniqueness, there exists a reason for its use. Had the actual linear timeline been followed, the whole series of events would have been seen as a cause and effect episode. If the events had been shown in chronological order, the falling of the Babri Mosque would be termed as the instigating factor. While the event was iconic and seminal in modern history of India, the subsequent events were also equally diabolical if not more. This is emphasised in the narration over news footage played out on Doordarshan<sup>20</sup> "Revenge begets revenge begets revenge". The film is a factual documented account with the objective of presenting the truth as it happened. Tellingly, it opens and ends with Mahatma Gandhi's quote "An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind".

- 1 Archives of news footage
- 2 News on TV being cheered by Hindus
- 3-4 Archival footage of destruction of Babri mosque in Ayodhya on Dec 6, 1992
- 5-6 Pakistan's diplomat denies sheltering the Memon family in an interview

<sup>20</sup>The State's official television broadcasting channel.



Hail Lord Ram! Hail Lord Ram!



...crumbles under the blows of thousands of Kar Sevaks.



It is very sad for all of us. A matter of great shame...



It is reported that the Memon family has sought shelter in Pakistan.



I can assure you the Memon family has not sought asylum in Pakistan.

The film was shot in 2003 and a lot had changed since 1992-93 as modern cars, mobiles and satellite television came in to the landscape. All the brands and hoardings were different from just a decade ago. The film uses a lot of tele photo lens<sup>21</sup> for shooting from long-range distances and shots from rooftops to counter this. And that has given the film its distinctive style.





The Russian film maker Andrei Tarkovsky once said “Filmmaking is a sad art, because it takes a huge amount of money to transform your imagination to image.”

Films cost money to make, and since most indie flicks have little to work with, it's no wonder they cut corners wherever possible. Obviously, the biggest benefit of guerilla-style movie-making is the cost savings. However, any film can be a guerrilla film since the term doesn't apply to any particular genre, budget or style of directing. The main characteristic of guerrilla films is that they're shot in public places without going through the proper permission channels. In other words, be as inconspicuous as possible.

The term guerrilla is usually associated with rampant disregard for authority. Unlike the warfare of the same name, guerrilla filmmaking is actually controlled, although it is subtly rebellious out of sheer necessity. Cast, crew and equipment are usually minimally to avoid getting busted by security and authorities. In fact, you might walk right by a guerrilla film in progress without even realizing, if it's being done stealthily enough. *Black Friday* with its long lens shots and 'shoot and scoot' method pulled it off successfully. By being sleightful, the film appeared bigger. It looked a like a big production on screen because the entire city was its set.





The film is a starting point for an audience willing and eager to know the truth and understand the gravity of the series of incidents. Danny Boyle admits to watching *Black Friday* among other Bombay based films like *Salaam Bombay!* (1988) and *Satya* as a preparation before shooting *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) in Mumbai (Jivani, 2009). The extensive seven minute chase sequence<sup>22</sup> was the inspiration for Boyle's opening sequence in *Slumdog Millionaire* (YouTube, 2010). Boyle later helped Kashyap when he shot the drug scenes in *Dev.D* (2009) by passing the 'tripping' technique he used for *Trainspotting* (1996) to show the high experienced during certain drug's influence.



*Black Friday* showcases the seminal time-period of 1992-93, which has gone on to create fault lines in India. Prior to this, there have been separatist movement in Punjab, insurgency in north-eastern Assam and Maoist movements in several pockets of India, but none had religion as an instigating catalyst. The falling of Babri Mosque and the subsequent riots and the bomb-blasts led to the focus of fundamentalist Islamic agencies (*Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Al-Qaida*) towards India, which has not stopped since. Despite the controversy and obvious arousal in curiosity because of Bombay High Court's stay order, *Black Friday* largely remains unseen by the masses even after its commercial release. It is about the modern history of India, which no film before or since has managed to tell with such courage and accuracy.

<sup>21</sup> Lens of long focal length that affects a scene perspective by enlarging distant planes and making them seem close to foreground planes. In 35 mm filming, a lens of 75mm length or more. <sup>22</sup> A bomb blast accused, Imtiaz Gawate runs for his life, stops, hides, runs again, stumbles and is finally too exhausted to do anything before stopping right in front of a waiting policeman.

# JOHNNY GADDAAR





Edited By  
**POOJA  
LADHA SURTI**

*Johnny Gaddaar* pays reverential homage to the film noir<sup>23</sup> genre of film making. The pre-credit sequence introduces the noir-aesthetic<sup>24</sup> that characterises the film as the grey tones combined with the rain and darkness create the stifling suspense that is interrupted only by the red colour of the blood spilled, as the action cuts to the title sequence montage that cements the film's genre and sensibilities. The film's opening credits montage establishes its key intertextual sources of inspiration as well as tribute- Jyoti Swaroop's *Parwana* (1971) starring Amitabh Bachchan, Vijay Anand's *Johny Mera Naam* (1970) and James Hadley Chase's novel *The Whiff of Money*. The montage is made of selectively included snippets of scenes that come later on as the film progresses. The credits have been done in the style (colour, font and music) of a 1970s crime thriller from India. Sriram Raghavan has admitted to toying with the idea of shooting the entire film in black-and-white, keeping in with the noir atmospherics of the film.

<sup>23</sup> Film noir 'dark film' is a term applied by French critics to describe a type of American film, usually in the detective or thriller genres. *Johnny Gaddaar* tributes both the original Hollywood noir films and the Indian film noir that was inspired by it in late 1960s and early 1970s.

<sup>24</sup> Crime dramas with low-key lighting and a sombre mood that emphasise on cynicism, greed and sexual motivations.





Vikram (alias Johnny) gets ideas of how to implement his double-cross from *Johny Mera Naam* and *Parwana*. *Parwana* supplies him with an alibi and *Johny Mera Naam* gave him the alias. The allusions and inspirations in *Johnny Gaddaar* are accompanied by irony as both the films are rather innocent and relatively naïve vintage crime thrillers that Vikram watches on TV. *Johny Mera Naam* is playing in the

hotel lobby when he's checking in while he is making his detour to Pune enroute to Goa. Inspired by the film, he books-in under the name Johnny G. The irony is that the character whose name (alias) he adopts is in fact, a law abiding police officer in the original film. Furthermore, both are love stories with redemption and explanation to amoral acts in the end. Whereas in *Johnny Gaddaar*, the moral delineation is not smoothed by the redemptive feature. Crime here is a personal choice not a social one forced by circumstances. Vikram's motive is to flee with Mini (wife of one of his four partners<sup>25</sup> at the club) after a carefully orchestrated, well thought-out plan by which he can steal the money and no one ends up dying. The eventual turn of events is unexpected as the body count keeps on rising.



<sup>25</sup> Seshadri, Vikram, Shiva, Shardul and Prakash are the five partners in the gambling club. The partners also deal with other underhand operations, one of which forms the storyline in the film.





By committing the murder on a train, he is able to alight at a designated station (Pune) and return to his place of business (Goa) without arousing suspicion - a sequence which echoes the chain of events in *Parwana*. The murder on train to claim money is a reminder of Hollywood noir classic *Double Indemnity* (1944) in which insurance money will be doubled while here Vikram would pocket five times his return (5 million to 25 million rupees). The film has a rich presence of intertextuality in its music, dialogues and it is self-reflexive in portraying that. There are certain other popular culture references, for instance, in a bus sequence Mini (Rimi Sen) is caught reading R. K. Narayan's *Guide* which was adapted to a famous film in the 1960s and Vikram is reading James Hadley Chase's *The Whiff of Money* in the train (before killing for money). Chase, one of the best known thriller writers of all time, himself had various pseudonyms, including James L. Docherty, Raymond Marshall, R. Raymond, and Ambrose Grant. The director is a self confessed and obsessed fan of the best selling writer and including him in the film subtly is his way of paying tribute to a maestro.



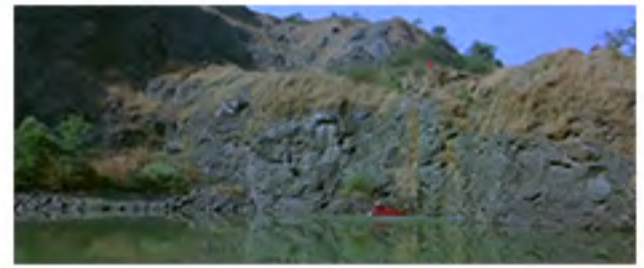


Notable attempt at making a nostalgic resonance of 1970s is done via the casting of yesteryear actor Dharmendra as Seshadri (Vikram's mentor) as the lead partner of the club and the revelation of his own trade of smuggling watches as he reminisces his dead wife. Added to that, Seshadri listens to an old Hindi song cover sung by his wife (from Bimal Roy's *Bandini*<sup>26</sup>, 1963) from an audio-cassette in a boom-box. There are also a couple of lines from old Hindi songs from *Jugnu* (1973), *Yakeen* (1969), *Aadmi aur Insaan* (1969)<sup>27</sup> (Dharmendra acted in *Bandini*, *Jugnu*, *Yakeen* and *Aadmi aur Insaan*). Besides, these song snippets bring in the self referential angle to the film, a feature that is identified as a film noir aesthetic. Again as a feature of indies, these songs are not lip-synced, but are being played in the background in a discotheque. There is a soundtrack mix referring to the nursery rhyme 'Johnny Johnny Yes Papa', nailing the liar and cheat part of the rhyme.

<sup>26</sup> The song from *Bandini* is 'Mora Gora Ang' sung by singing legend Lata Mangeshkar

<sup>27</sup> The songs from *Jugnu* and *Yakeen* are 'Rama Rama Ghazab' and 'Bachke Kahan Jaoge' respectively



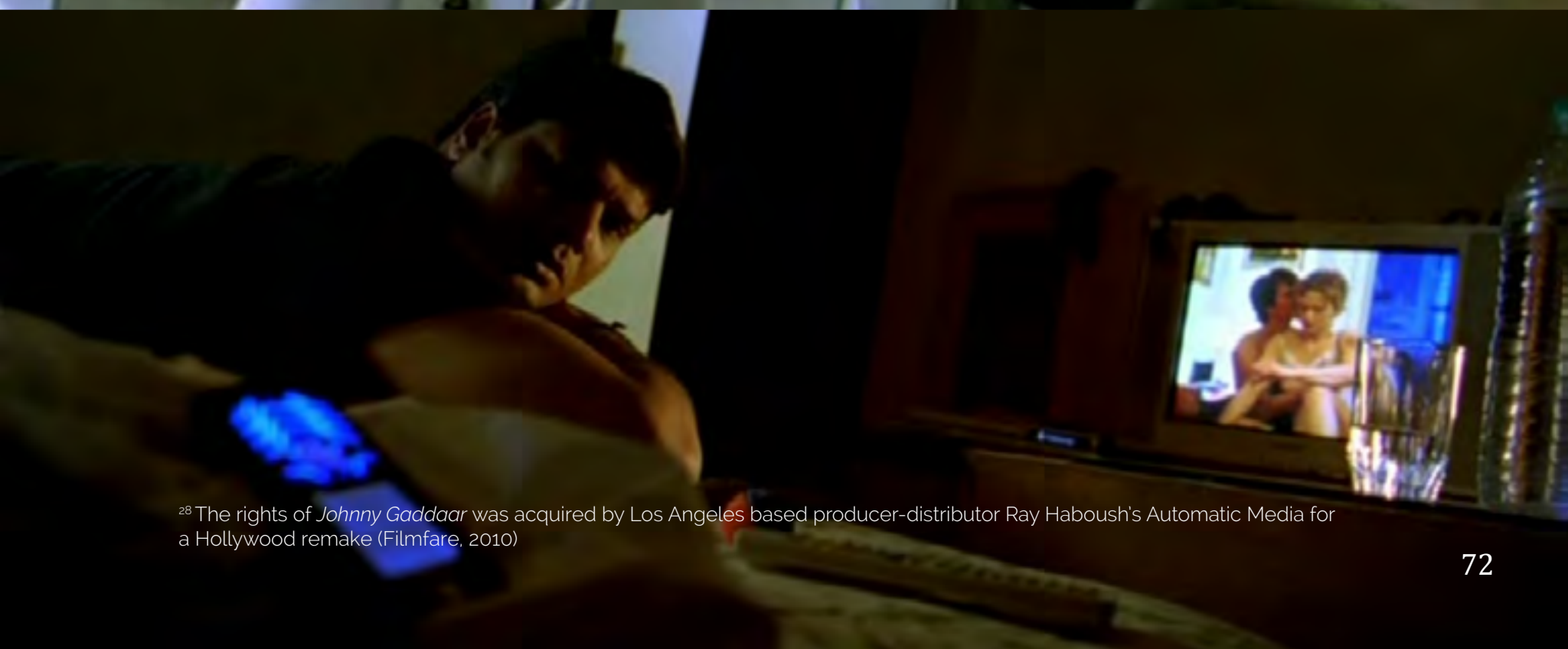


There is a constant presence of the colour red in the film. The colour of blood is associated with passion and desire, and in umpteen scenes in the film, it signifies urgency, danger and imminent threat around the corner. It is simply and subliminally used to great effect.



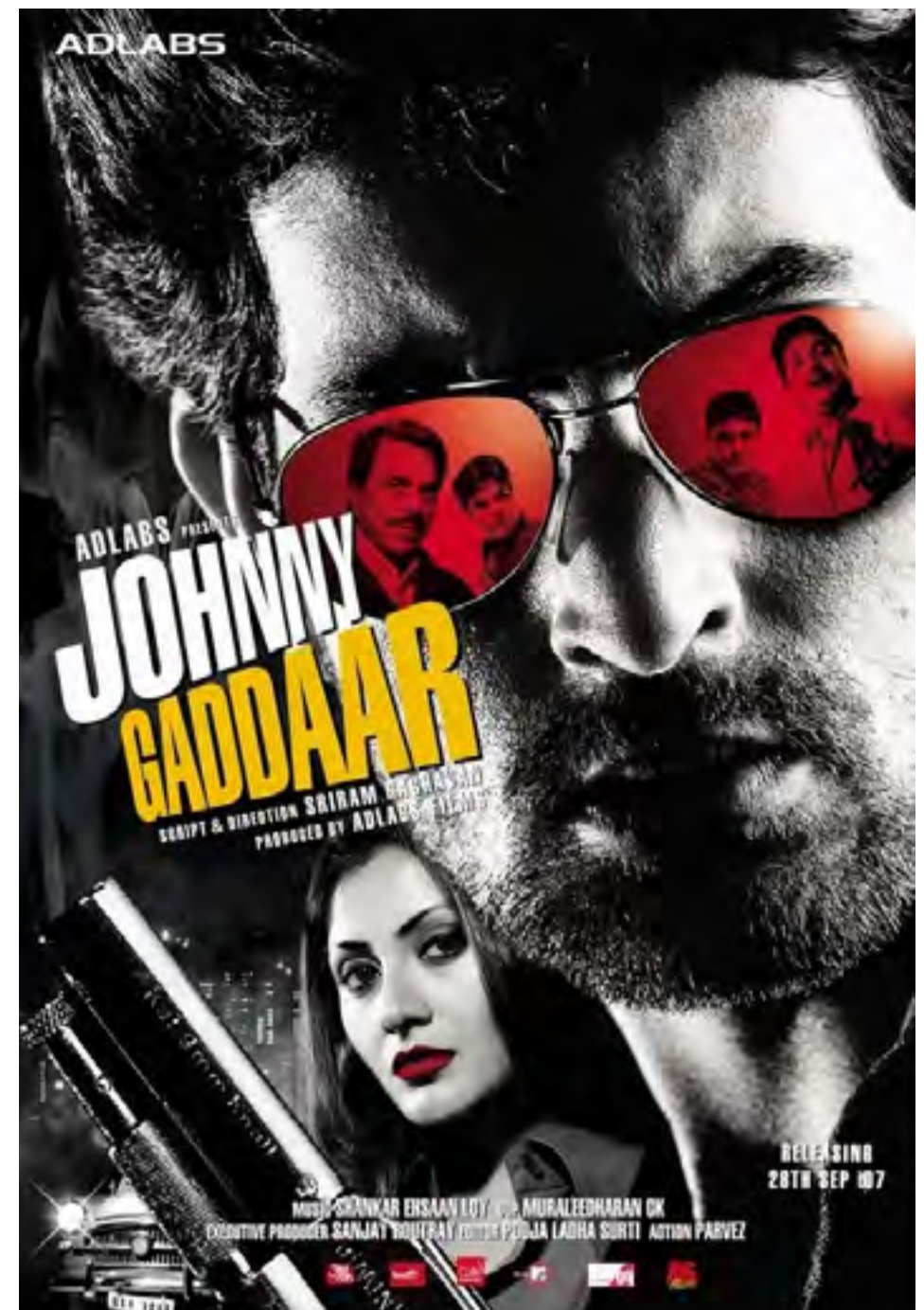
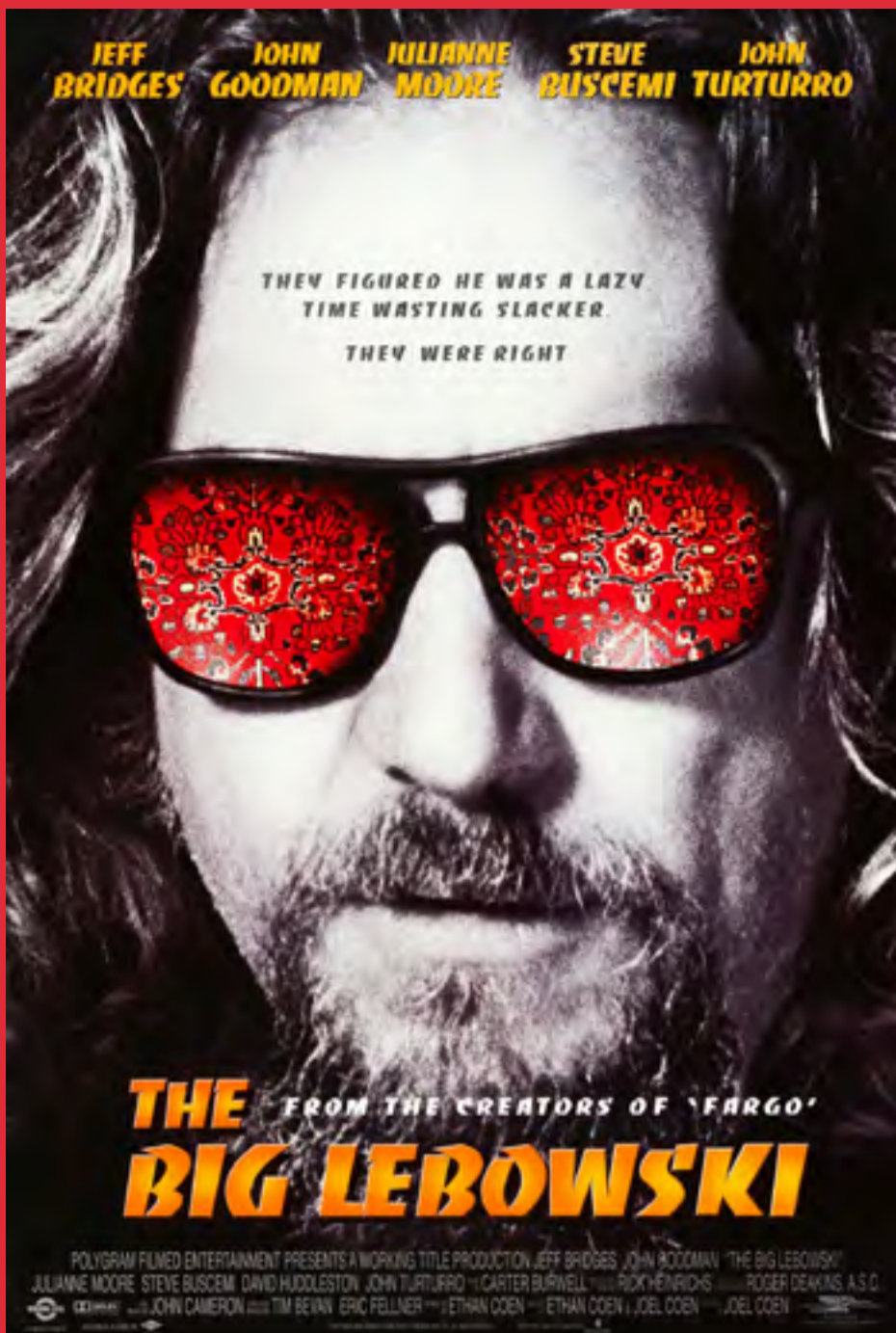
There are three instances where presence of Hollywood films is observed. In the same aforementioned cassette, Seshadri's wife asks him to take her to see *Dr. No* (1962) in Regal theatre in Bombay. While counting the 25 million rupees, Seshadri mentions that a similar scene was there in the film *Scarface* (1983) which is a remake and tribute to Howard Hawks' original crime-thriller *Scarface* (1932). Shiva (another club partner) is watching Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) when he gets a call from Shardul (Mini's husband).

The suspense in the film is not who has committed the murder. The audience knows who is the culprit. The suspense is what is the next scene going to be, and this makes it decidedly different from commercial Hindi films. There is the theme of urban discontent and the power of money to change motives and morality (*The Whiff of Money* alludes to this). The use of vernacular languages in Marathi, Tamil and Kannada brings the polyglot nature and layer of multi-culturalism. *Johnny Gaddaar*<sup>28</sup> is an original script with knowing nods to masters of the genre with a global touch and Indian texture to it.



<sup>28</sup> The rights of *Johnny Gaddaar* was acquired by Los Angeles based producer-distributor Ray Haboush's Automatic Media for a Hollywood remake (Filmfare, 2010)





There also flies an accusation of one of the posters being copied by *The Big Lebowski* (1998). But the insinuation doesn't stick on *Johnny Gaddaar*. There's some form of homage in the filmography of every filmmaker, past or present and it certainly will in the ones yet to debut. The determining factor between homage and plagiarism is intention: either a filmmaker transparently presents a reference as a reference, or blatantly passes off someone's (previous) work as their own.

The remixing and reinterpretation of ideas makes the medium richer. To argue otherwise is to deny a cinematic tradition of resonant, fruitful, and revealing intertextuality. The films, novels, songs, and art in general that filmmakers are fans of, play a significant role in the journey as creatives. Being able to reverentially weave those influences into one's work, and thereby doffing your hat, requires talent, which Sriram Raghavan has displayed in ample measure in this film. The influences are varied and layered in with heft in the cinematic fabric of *Johnny Gaddaar*.



*Love Sex aur Dhokha* has made an impact with its hard-hitting comment on society, its narrative technique and for being the first digital film from India. It's also the first film in India to have sex in its title. The film shows the unflattering side of a developing nation by placing a voyeuristic camera in three separate situations and capturing human behaviour at its most basic. Using three interlinked stories, the director has touched upon various issues that continue to exist in the Indian social fabric; such as honour killings of runaway couples, the remorseless nature of 24-hour news channels and the casting couch in the entertainment industry. Each of the three stories in *Love Sex aur Dhokha* (henceforth referred to as *LSD*) was presented in the found-footage format by simulating handycams, store cameras and hidden cameras.



Breaking the wall – characters speaking directly into the camera

In the first story segment- *Superhit Pyar!*, a young couple elopes and marries. But there is no happily-ever-after ending for them. In the second story, *Paap Ki Dukaan!*, a supermarket salesgirl succumbs to the affections of a sly co-worker who betrays her. And the third story, *Badnaam Shohrat* involves a disillusioned item-girl who gets her revenge on a pop-star who had exploited her.





Shooting of diploma film being disrupted - Mehndi Laga Ke Rakhna

The boy's diploma film, *Mehndi Laga Ke Rakhna* is an exact rip-off of the longest running film in Indian film history *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995). And by that, *LSD* implies how Indian films are usually a copy of some film or other and that there are no new stories. When he is not shooting his diploma film, he is shooting his own video diary for his adopted mentor- Aditya Chopra<sup>29</sup>. By worshipping the director, *LSD* shows that how plenty of youngsters live in a bubble especially inspired by the candy floss cinema that is passed off in Hindi film industry as romance. That is a biting satire on the directing philosophy of several leading directors. The film shuttles between being a spoof and satire. How the film has tried to depict realism can be summed up in one scene. The scene above best represents *LSD's* intention.

<sup>29</sup>Aditya Chopra is an Indian film director, producer, screenwriter, and distributor. He is one of the, if not the most influential movie mogul of the Indian film industry.



Camera is tripped off and the indicators allude to the shift to realism

Evidentially, it is a conscious caricature on the romances of Hindi cinema. As the shooting is interrupted by the goons, the tripod falls off and we see the camera settings appearing on the screen. Those camera specifications of battery life, clip timing, aspect-ratios are signifiers that what we see right now is 'what happens in real life'. The diploma film is being shot with a tripod and steady camera, while the next scenes are chaotic and jerky and shown as if filmed by awkwardly held camera. In effect, the director is saying that while all is rosy and pink in films, the reality is entirely and harshly different. So, it is a *vérité* style which gives the impression of grounding the events in something that feels more real. More real than if the camera were fixed or moved more smoothly on dolly tracks. It has an expressive impact, underlining the edgy and the unstable nature of realistic life events that it is trying to portray realistically.

While the film shows the brutal, barbaric murder of the young couple by the girl's own family, it is also critical of the delusions of the youth who get swayed by romantic fantasies shown in films. It is a hate crime and resulting from a misplaced sense of ego and a societal ill. No amount of candyfloss can paper over the chilling realities of caste and religious perplexities of India. These complications that prevent the youth's open expression of freedom, peg the nation back. And in some instances can have grave, violent consequences.



The camera indicators are still on as the couple is hacked to death.

The film's second story segment - *Paap Ki Dukaan!* is how a salesgirl is conned by the smooth talking MBA (Master of Business Administration). It touches upon the struggles of the youth to earn enough to show off. Being an MBA is another obsession that is going on in India. Everybody wants to be a manager and the myth and hype built around a management degree makes it a much-chased qualification. The guy first tries to lure the fairer girl and only when he is exposed in front of her does he turn his attention to the other girl on night shift. There is an obsession for the lighter skin in India. The amount of fairness creams that are sold in India clearly points to the fascination to look fair-skinned. There is a dialogue in the film where the boy is prodded by other store -person to go for the taller girl with dark complexion by saying "fair or dark, all girls look alike when naked".

# पाप की दुकान!





In the storyline, the camera remains static. There are six cameras which are swapped and shuffled to show us the storyline between July–September. By mostly using the zoom-in feature the intrusive nature is shown. People’s behavior changes when in knowledge that they are under surveillance. This awareness or lack of awareness according to the situation is central to the entire film.

When the boy finally manages to get footage of him having sex with the store-keeping girl, he sells the clip to a local news channel and it becomes an overnight scandal. MMSes were sent like wildfire and the news spread rapidly. All that just for the sake of television ratings and what was at stake was a girl’s honour. Such things are easily overlooked in the pursuit of eye grabbing news and the largely commercial aspects of news channels.

1-3 Zoom being used – the girl is unaware that she is being watched

4 The girl is now aware of the store camera, which she asks the boy to turn off when before they are having sex. The boy cheats her into believing that he has turned it off.



This second story is the sex part of love, sex and dhoka (deceit). The contentious footage was pixelated and shot in night vision. *LSD* pushes some buttons and pokes some uncomfortable questions. What makes lewd MMS' a rage? That it has got immediacy and lust. And that's what one of the biggest point that *LSD* makes. That we are all voyeurs. And that is exactly why Paris Hilton's *1 Night in Paris*<sup>30</sup> video went double platinum, in spite of being shot in green night vision and its hazy shooting. News channels will willingly spend for an exclusive sexually charged clip.



The pixelated sex-tape and its uploaded version on the internet

Footage was bought from the storeowner by the news channels both for the store scandal and the shoot-out. Even in the times when 3-D films are beginning to be a norm, furtively and salaciously placed cameras try to get a footage that has the potential to be the national rage, has potential to burn airwaves. The only rider is that it has to have sex involved in it.

This is something that has been further elaborated with great detail in the third story as the channel editor hounds the cameraman for scandalous footage of sting operations. He is told to keep his camera on, on a 24x7 mode. One would imagine that in a vast nation, stories are easy to find. But stories have become rare and bad news sells better than good news. And scandalous news sells even better. In India, the 24-hour news channels have become so desperate that rather than innovative content and presentation, there is looped trivial news especially around the 4 Cs-Crime, Cricket, Cinema and Standup Comedy. All these are better and easier ways to feed the airtime and so they do not bother unless it is something really sensational in a very tabloid journalism fashion.

<sup>30</sup>*1 Night in Paris* is a 2004 pornographic video promoted by Kevin Blatt depicting Paris Hilton having sexual intercourse in 2001 with Rick Salomon. Not originally intended for release, it was filmed primarily with a single, stationary, tripod-mounted camera using night vision. The video was released by Salomon shortly before Hilton's TV series *The Simple Life* debuted, causing a media sensation.

The third story segment *Badnaam Shohrat* has the least spoof and with most satirical elements. Thousands of girls want to become singers and actresses. And in their quest, they get their portfolios clicked and come to metropolitan cities with dreams in their eyes and hope for instant stardom. That there is a casting couch is an open secret and *LSD* shows it through a sting operation. The naïvety of the youth fed on misinformation makes them vulnerable to exploitation. Another noticeable trend is titillating sexually charged music videos sell despite their mediocrity.

*LSD* is a comment on the voyeuristic streak that the society has developed with lewd MMS, news hungry 24-hour news channels and their outrageous sting operations. Cheap handycams and cheaper mobile cameras with their shaky handling and scratchy sound are evolving the way people are broadcasting themselves courtesy YouTube. We are surrounded by the digital eye and we have to learn to live with the advantages and threats that it brings along.

The milieu in this third story is sneaky, with a prying camera somewhere close in vicinity to record the details of the ongoing proceedings; be it the spy camera wired-in on the sting operation girl or the professional camera of the news cameramen. Apart from the casting couch exposé, it also points to the unprofessionalism of the news channels. While they vie for viewerships, they are looking to churn news with the minimum possible effort to get a decent story.



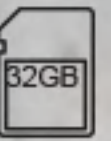


- 1-2 The channel executive urges the cameraman to keep his camera on 24x7
- 3 The item girl and the cameraman discussing the sting (both aware of the camera)
- 4 The pop star being filmed via the concealed camera in item girl's dress
- 5 The pop star being filmed via the concealed camera in item girl's purse

In *LSD*, a video camcorder, a store security camera, and concealed cameras candidly expose lives in three loosely-linked tales. *LSD* is a mildly didactic film, which pushes and nudges the viewer to think about the issues that have been raised mildly, subtly and sometime overtly. There is a conscious attempt to make the viewer see these aspects that have become so prevalent that it is taken for granted. And it is doing so by using a grammar of cinema that has been adapted cleverly for telling a story in the digital age. *LSD* does this and exposes the myths and idiosyncrasies that a majority of the people in the Indian society turn a blind eye to.



[REC]

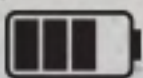


Dibaker Banerjee explains his intent behind writing *LSD* “The digital eye surrounds us, on TV, on the net, on the CCTV camera that snoops into every step we take, the spy cam sex scandal we enjoy on prime time TV, the home movies we make, the guilty kiss we share with someone, holding out the mobile camera at an arm’s length, and the MMSes that fly around the nation. The digitised, fuzzy faces, the strobing, jerky movements, the furtive glances, the nervous camera, the clumsy, choppy edit, the scratchy sound, the repetitive slow motion, rewind and forward — to me all this is the new grammar of cinema. A language that is evolving as we speak. I’m not interested in delivering the last word in the digital or film war - I would shoot on paper if there were a technology to do so. The only thing I’m interested in is the medium bringing its own, inseparable aesthetic to the content.”

Effectively, what Banerjee is reiterating the phrase that Marshall McLuhan coined - The medium is the message. The Canadian philosopher and intellectual McLuhan posited that the form of a medium embeds itself in any message it would transmit or convey, creating a symbiotic relationship by which the medium influences how the message is perceived.



ISO 3200



5300K<sup>84</sup>

# CHAPTER 4

## Wave <sup>or</sup> TREND

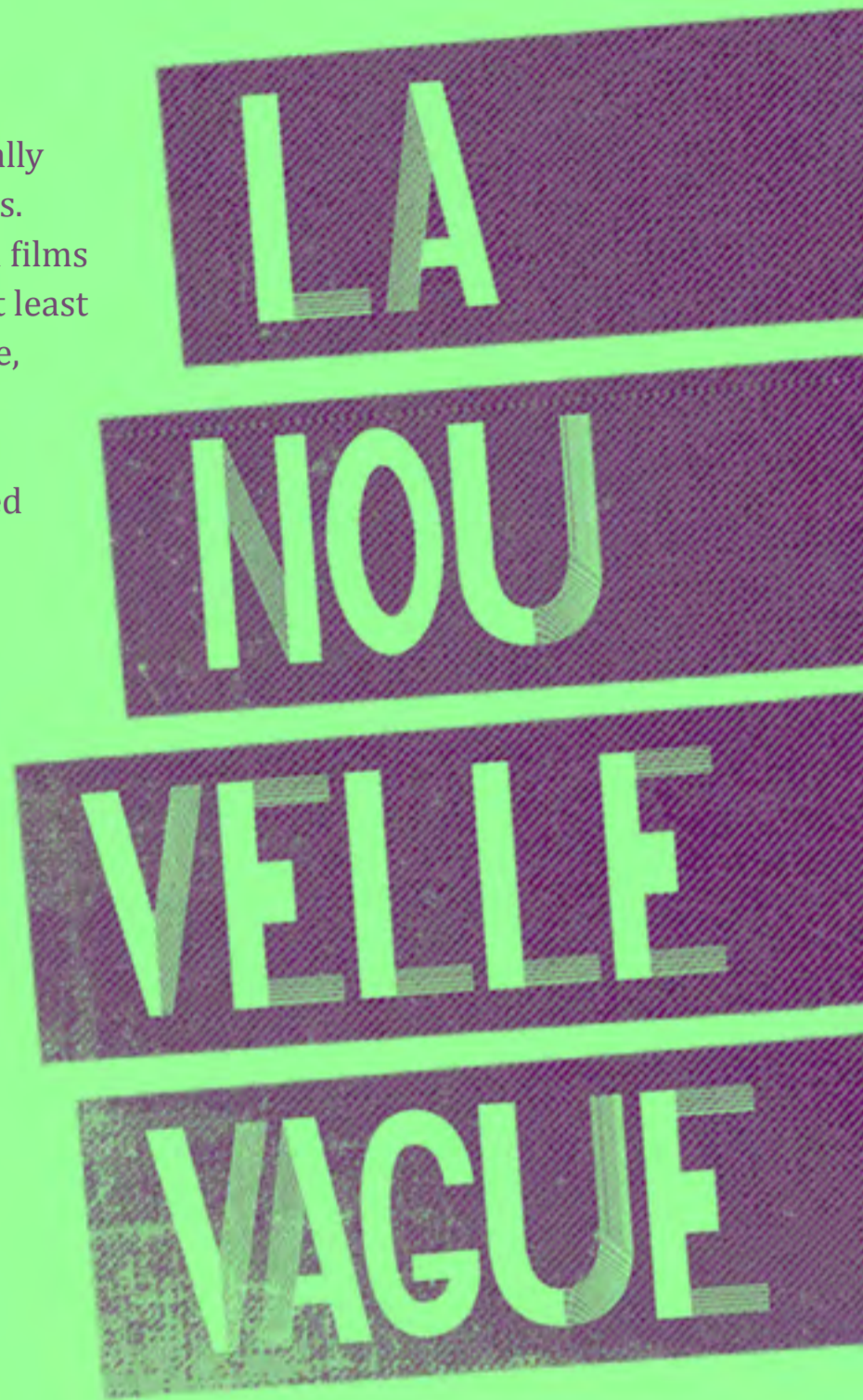
The previous chapters dealt with the financing, production, distribution, exhibition and audiences in relation to the contemporary Indian indies. The last chapter covered their distinctive style. It is noticeable that the presence of the indies is being felt around the film festival circuits and in the multiplexes in India. This chapter will focus on whether these films are a passing fad, do they form a trend or whether they can be classified as a new film movement in India. A comparison with other film movements like the American indie movement and French New wave will serve as an indicator of how pronounced is this trend that is being witnessed. Every film movement or neo-wave is spearheaded by a group of directors who side-track the conventional and make films with a new viewpoint, which is an angle that will be explored. As mentioned in the introduction, the ambiguous, even polysemic nature of some of these films, present some constraints for the independent tag, which will be looked into by considering the example of *Dhobi Ghat*. Finally, the chapter will assess as to how these films are important before proceeding to the concluding part of the book.

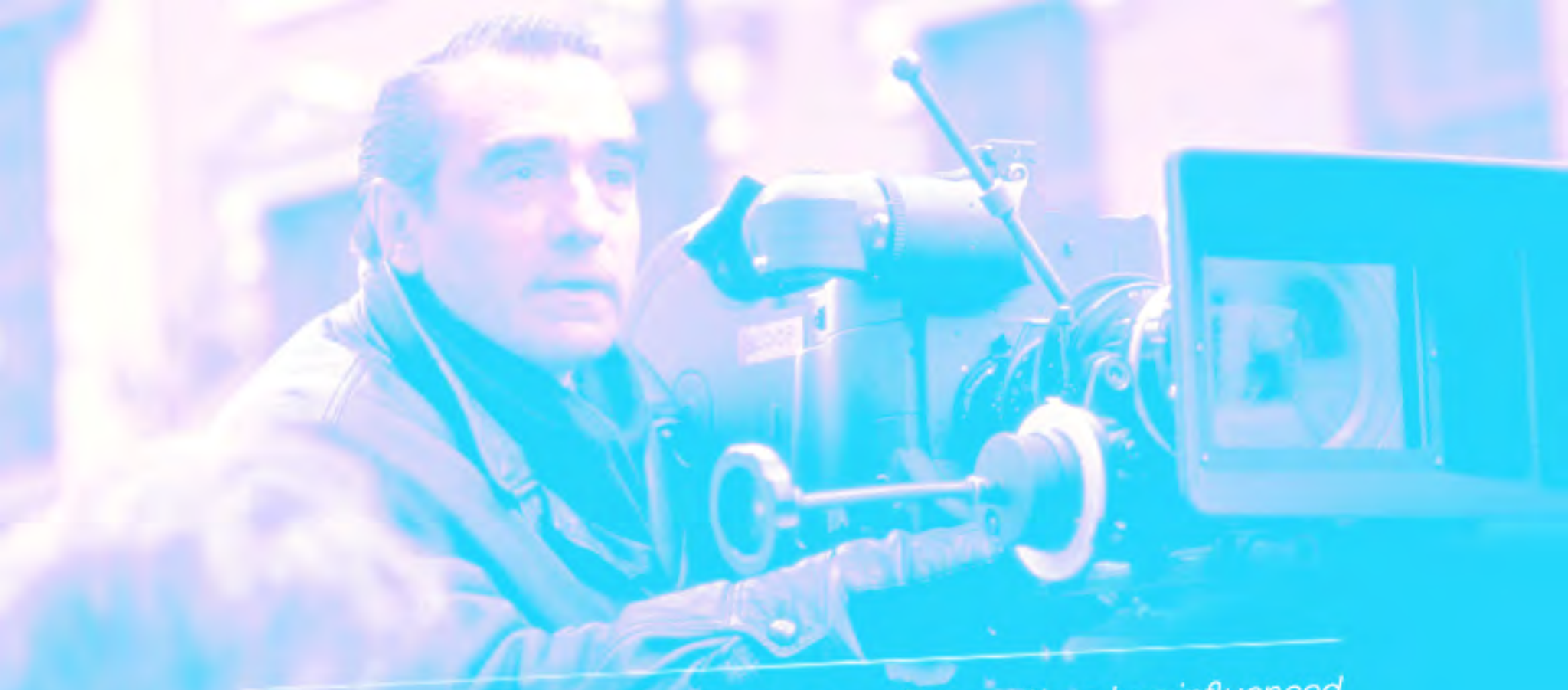
The French New Wave (La Nouvelle Vague) is usually viewed from one or more overlapping perspectives. Greene and Hayward claim that as highly personal films made on extremely low budgets, they changed – at least for a time the ways in which French films are made, produced and perceived (Greene, 2007, p1). It forced forward a new way of production practices and a democratisation of the camera which allowed marginalised voices and people into film-making during the 1970s (Hayward, 2005, p 235). The Nouvelle Vague aesthetic is founded on a series of choices made from the script through to the final print. In principle, therefore it assumes the following agenda which will be looked into as comparative features for the indies in this section:

The auteur theory<sup>31</sup>, the director not following a pre-established shooting script, shooting in natural locations and avoiding studio sets, a small cast and crew, use of direct sound over post synchronisation, avoiding additional lighting and using a faster film stock, use of non- professional, newer actors, collaboration among peers, the blurring of boundary between the fiction and documentary and a genuine sense of innovation.

All these choices provide for a greater sense of flexibility in the direction and endeavour to streamline as much as possible the heavy constraints typical of the commercial, industrialised cinema model. They are aimed at erasing the borders between professional and amateur cinema, and those between fiction, and documentary, or investigative films (Marie, 1997, p 71). While comparing the indies to the established aesthetic poles of the French New Wave, some aspects like the use of faster film stocks have become redundant due to technological advancement in cameras. But importantly, the depreciation in prices of digital cameras has made the medium more democratic and accessible. While all these characteristics cannot be completely shadowed by the contemporary Indian indies, considering the four decade time difference, the spirit of French New Wave is ostensible. The French New Wave has inspired several subsequent generations of film makers like Francis Ford Coppola, John Cassavetes, Martin Scorsese, Arthur Penn, Robert Altman, Steven Soderbergh and Quentin Tarantino who themselves are part of the American indie movement.

<sup>31</sup> Auteur Theory is deceptively simple and there is the counter argument to it that film-making is a collaborative medium. For the purposes of comparison, the chapter will stick to the school of thought of the director being the author with a differentiating, almost instantly recognisable style.



A man in a dark jacket is operating a professional motion picture camera. The camera is mounted on a tripod and has a large lens. A monitor on the right side of the camera shows a live feed of the scene. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a film set.

*Martin Scorsese puts it aptly that "The French New Wave has influenced all filmmakers who have worked since, whether they saw the films or not. It submerged cinema like a tidal wave." (Hitchman, 2008)*

The Auteur Theory as a concept originated from the French New Wave; something the indies fall short of despite having several directors who have made indie films on the single count that their overall body of work is not substantial enough yet. Anurag Kashyap, Vishal Bhardwaj and Dibakar Banerjee however are three directors whose films warrant them to be placed on a higher pedestal than other relative new directors like Navdeep Singh, Habib Faisal and Raj Kumar Gupta. There was loose complicity and collaboration among French New Wave directors, and with their writers because of their multi-skilled nature and penchant for experimentation. The collaboration between writers, screenwriters and the directors has already been referred to in Chapter 3. Other associations include Vishal Bhardwaj producing Anurag Kashyap's *No Smoking* (2007). Raj Kumar Gupta who made *Aamir*, has been worked as an assistant director with Kashyap. Jaideep Sahni and Dibakar Banerjee are friends from their days in advertising. Sahni has worked with Kashyap, Shimit Amin (*Ab Tak Chappan*) and Ram Gopal Varma. Kashyap had co-wrote *Satya* for Varma. Alike the French New Wave, a number of these indies were done on shoestring budgets, using friends as the cast and crew as even with the corporatisation, raising money is not always easy. Agnès Varda had pooled a co-operative model to fund *La Pointe-Courte* (1955). Similarly Onir's *I Am* (2010) is made by crowd sourced money. Budget was raised via the web donations and through the social networking site Facebook (Child, 2011). Most of the indies do not have leading commercial actors and so they focus on good casting of relatively unknown actors by the casting directors. While French New Wave used non-professional actors, indies use actors from the few reputed film institutes (National School of Drama - Delhi, Film and Television Institute of India- Pune, Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute - Kolkata) in India and the theatre arena. This reduces the cost of the production of the film by taking out of the account the massive fee of the lead actors. Just to give a couple of examples, Vivek Oberoi (Chandu in *Company*) and Neil Nitin Mukesh (Vikram in *Johnny Gaddaar*) were debutants.



The French New Wave directors like Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Rivette, Éric Rohmer and François Truffaut were critics at Cahiers du Cinéma to start up at first. The globally tuned indie directors treat the films by Godard and Truffaut as film education and inspiration. French New Wave films had a mildly autobiographic and personal nature and merged reality and fiction. They strived to achieve realism in cinema and consequently cinema got more realistic. Validating his position, Godard had commented “photography is the truth and cinema is the truth twenty-four times per second ”(Temple and Williams, 2000, p 84).

There is an autobiographical touch in the indie films, be it the Delhi milieu in Banerjee’s films, rural lingo in Bhardwaj’s or Mumbai in Kiran Rao’s *Dhobi Ghat*. The realism is brought forth by shooting in real locations instead of expansive sets and scripting the story closer to reality. Finesse and nuance is preferred over melodrama. Other notable styles includes characters breaking the fourth wall (or character aside), when they speak directly to the camera, to the audience, as in *Peirrot le Fou* (1962) and ambiguously in *Les Quatre Cents Coups* (1959) and is seen in many movies later on, like Woodie Allen’s *Annie Hall* (1977). There are characters in *LSD* that speak directly into the camera and do a variation of the same. The French New Wave was concentrated more on the new morality, myth of youth culture, desires, lust, heteroclitic leads and their existential dilemmas. The indies concentrate on the new urban culture, the youth and its aspirations, their dilemmas in a competitive and paradoxical society.



*Breathless (1960)*

The French New Wave is a more coherent film movement than Italian Neorealism movement or New German Cinema. It has had trans-continental bearings. Although there is no particular locus for it, the acculturation of aforementioned mild trends make it a decisive movement in cinematic history. Similarly, the coming together of favourable circumstances is what makes the indies possible now, and they too don't have a definite starting point or a harbinger film or personality. The indie directors are coming from outside the traditional film backgrounds, like advertising that is breaking the monotony. In a way, it is cyclical to have a new breed of directors coming up every 20 years, but the change now is that they are moving away from the traditional code of narration. Then again, the collective weight of these indies is not substantial as compared to the commercial mainstream films; be it in the number of releases, the financial muscle or the audience base.

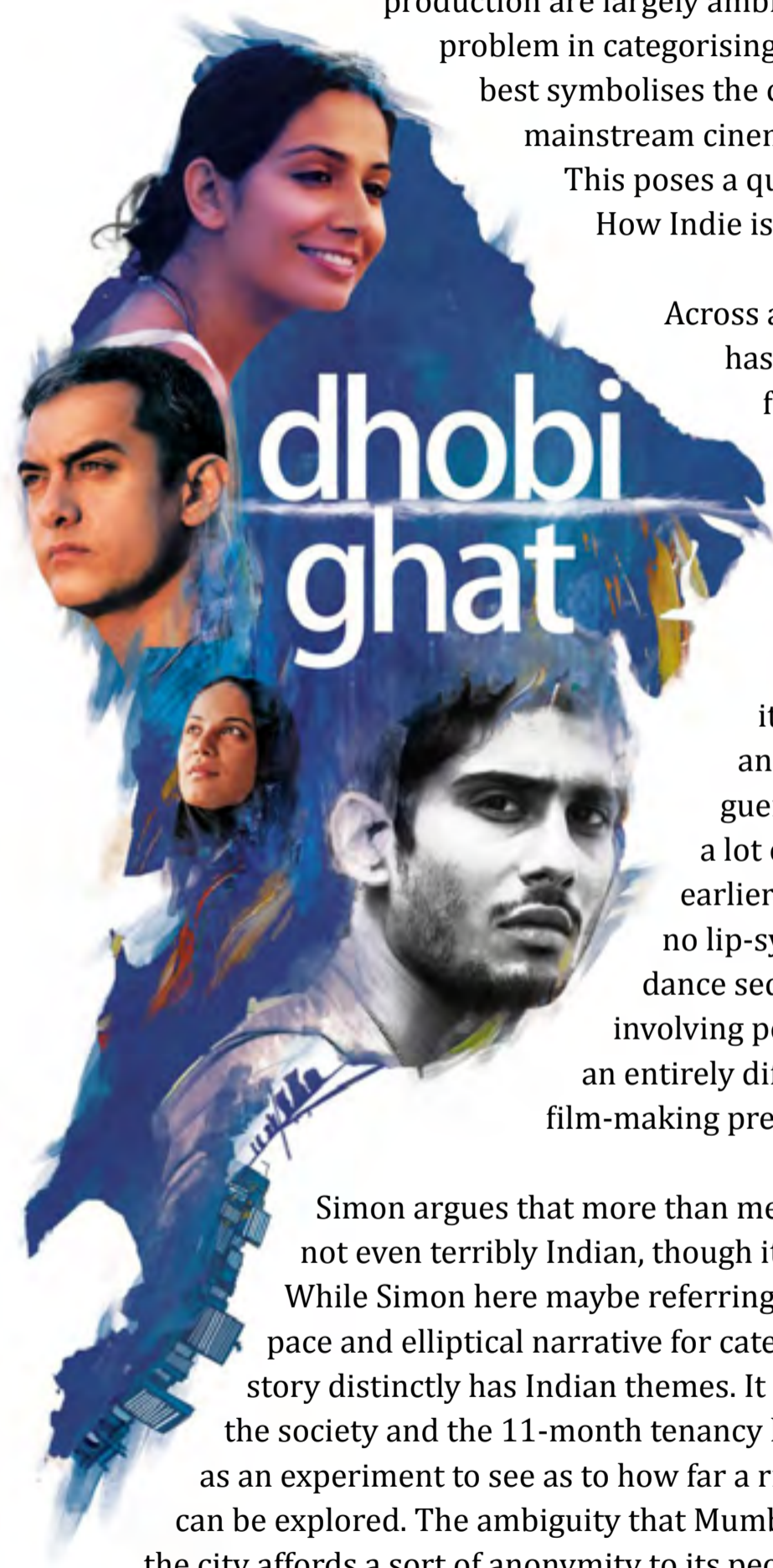
While there is an evident congruency with the French New Wave, there is commonality with the American indie movement as well. American indie movement gave rise to independent studios that have in-turn become part of the bigger Hollywood studios by the effect of consolidation by the major studios. The contemporary Indian indies too are now part of a financial structure in which the corporate production houses become a part at some level of film-making. The indies in India are now under a category between commercial mainstream and art-house, as happened in America.

This brings forth the ambiguous nature of the indies, which is seen in *Dhobi Ghat*. One of the most high-profile films that is tagged as an indie from India recently has been *Dhobi Ghat*. The factors, technicians and parties involved in its production are largely ambiguous, which relates to the problem in categorising films as independent. It actually best symbolises the closing-in of the chasm between mainstream cinema and art-house filmmaking.

This poses a question which is analysed further - How Indie is *Dhobi Ghat*?

Across all review platforms, the film has been termed different than the film offerings from the industry. Critics even liken it to have a European sensibility. It is called 'independent' and 'art-house'. *Time-Out London* called it Renoir-type realism, Mike Goodridge for *Screen Daily* terms it both independent and art-house and *The Film Street Journal* notes its guerrilla-style cinematography. It has a lot of characteristics that were used earlier to classify films as indies, like no lip-syncing songs, no choreographed dance sequences in the narrative, a story involving people of the lower middle-class and an entirely different sensibility and approach to film-making prevalent in the Hindi film industry.

Simon argues that more than merely not 'Bollywood', *Dhobi Ghat* is not even terribly Indian, though it is utterly Mumbai (Simon, 2011). While Simon here maybe referring to the film-making, the glacial pace and elliptical narrative for categorising as 'not even Indian', the story distinctly has Indian themes. It nuances upon the class divides of the society and the 11-month tenancy law in Mumbai. It can also be seen as an experiment to see as to how far a rich girl-rich man-poor boy story can be explored. The ambiguity that Mumbai as a setting offers is explored as the city affords a sort of anonymity to its people and nurses their dreams in its crowded environs.



It is set during the Mumbai rainy season. As the south-west monsoon takes over the island, sheets of water lashes over the crowded metropolis, cleansing and drenching it and enveloping it with romantic mysticism associated with rain. Rain means different things to different people from different strata and stages in life. For a young newlywed girl, new to Mumbai it is the thrill of shooting it and sending video letters to her brother back in her hometown. An artist who has holed himself in an apartment, uses it to soften his drink and trying to find inspiration for his next art collection. As for the laundry guy, as the rainwater patters his home, he has to adjust his make-shift roof to stop the dripping water. By simple observations like the cup in which a domestic help is served tea, ironically by a domestic help, the film artfully explores the pertinent issue of class.

Munna is wearing 'The Doors' t-shirt as Shai asks him if he likes 'The Doors'. Munna nods without having a clue of who Jim Morrison is. He might have most likely to have picked the t-shirt from a street market just because he liked the design.



The maid brings tea in a mug and a glass. Clearly the tea in glass is meant for Munna. The inferior cup for a person of lower strata of society. Shai seeing this opts for the glass and lets him have the cup. Munna is oblivious to even this, as he is just happy to be offered tea.



Clockwise from top - a perfume seller, flower vendor, hide maker, knife sharpener, betel nut cutter, fish vendor, key maker, cart puller, ear cleaner and cobbler; All in black-and-white. It pictures the vanishing culture and professions in Mumbai that have been pushed to the periphery. In the glamour streets and posh galleries, the work and toil of the migrants from all parts of India is smudged away. Without the people who do the minion jobs, life can't possibly be as frenetic as the people of Mumbai want it to be.

Kiran Rao said “It’s my love letter, my homage to the city I love the most,” (Bronfman, 2010). Her husband Aamir Khan, who both produced and starred in the film, echoed her sentiments, calling Mumbai the fifth character in the film. Hence story and production style-wise it is a very Mumbai, very Indian and an indie film but with international influences. *Dhobi Ghat* took a film festival route strategy, which is a topic discussed earlier in the strategies of release that the indies are opting for in the recent past. It was an official selection at Toronto International Film Festival and London International Film Festival. In his official description, Cameron Bailey, co-director of Toronto International Film Festival calls *Dhobi Ghat* to be a major step forward for Indian filmmaking. He further adds,

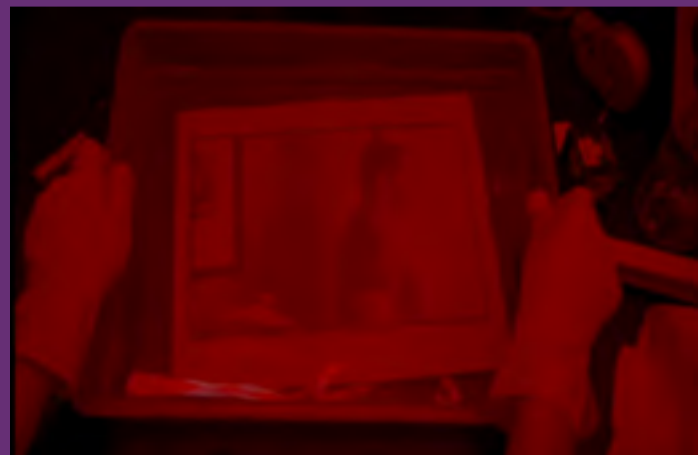
*Informed by Wong Kar-Wai and Tsai Ming-Liang, but directing with her own intimate sensibility, Rao draws her three characters together against the backdrop of a city that gives and takes in equal measure. It took years for American independent cinema to develop its own narrative voices in contrast to Hollywood storytelling. In India, the emergence of a contemporary indie style is happening right now (Bailey, 2010).*

Cameron here mentions contemporary indie style and he also mentioned on his Twitter account that there is a need to find a better term than ‘new age’; a term that New York critic and freelance journalist Aseem Chhabra quite rightly expressed reservations about in his column in a Mumbai tabloid article (Chhabra,2010).





*Dhobi Ghat* has one leg each in the mainstream category and the indie category. What adds the layer of ambiguity to it is that it has Aamir Khan in its cast and is produced under his banner Aamir Khan Productions and distributed by UTV. The biggest advantage it had was that it saw a mainstream release with an active PR campaign and a star producer in Khan to market it 'as the best film to be made under his banner yet'. It has had the same release as commercial Hindi films, because Khan had the resources to back his ambition and so an art house independent film shot in a budget close to \$2.3 million, written and directed by a debutant got a wide commercial release. It has international involvement with Oscar and BAFTA winner Gustavo Santaolalla creating two soundtracks and another by Japanese composer Ryuichi Sakamoto. There was no music release and songs are only included in the film. Kiran Rao points to Hong Kong second new wave director Wong Kar-Wai, Taiwanese second new wave director Tsai Ming-Liang and Belgium's Dardenne brothers as her influences (Bhandari, 2010). The mild cross-over of character arcs and long drawn shots which featured in works of Wong Kar-Wai are visible in her directorial venture as she captures the city of Mumbai in the monsoons. And quite akin to the Dardenne Brothers's films, Rao also seems to sympathise with the underdogs and the have-nots of the society and how the city finds its way into their lives.



Shai clicking and developing photographs.

It uses multiple formats in the film itself like amateur photography, painting and videography to showcase different people. She talks about that being present to bring more visual textures in the featurette of the film on [imdb.com](http://imdb.com) (Screenplay, Inc. 2010).




Arun painting on canvas and watching his muse on video-tapes on the television.

It was shot in super 16 mm, to help it manoeuvre into spaces and crevices of the city easily. It is not clear quite how indie *Dhobi Ghat* is. It has come from within the system and is quite unlike any Hindi film but the spirit and the vision with which it is made is unmistakably indie. Therefore as it is seen above, with all the similarities with the French New Wave there is a counter argument for the claim of being an indie. There is a set exclusion criteria, but there is not classified selection criteria either that makes cataloging of indies easier. The indies are however an important slice of contemporary Indian cinema and the following section discusses why they are important.

The indies have elements of art cinema in their social commentary, inspirations from various world cinema and auteurs, and despite being produced from within the existing Hindi film industry system do not shy away from critiquing the effects of same. Vaibhav Vats observes that the subversion of popular idioms is a conduit to say stories of modern India. It is a way of changing the system by being in the system. 'The contemporary indies have defied the older notions in Hindi cinema and are rejecting the ghettoisation of 'arthouse' cinema in order to effect change from within the mainstream. It has an easy translatability that allows filmmakers a mainstream platform while leaving room for avant-garde expression' (Vats, 2009).

It is a rebellion from inside the industrial boundaries. This creative expression through subversion is achieved by questioning the morals of the society, its practices, its underbelly and all the less 'glamorous' aspects like crime, sex, urban-rural divide, caste issues, poverty and the desultory younger generation which are skated-over if not expunged from the commercial cinema. The society's hitches are weaved into the stories and given an agency to expose the hypocrisy by using spoofs and satire, dark humour and drama.

In *Dev.D*, the protagonist Dev (Abhay Deol) encourages sexual liberalism in Paro (Mahie Gill) but is threatened by his insecurity as she exercises her feminism. It also incorporated contemporary events; that of a millionaire running over pavement dwellers by his car and the infamous Delhi Public School MMS sex-scandal<sup>32</sup> into the narrative without looking contrived. In the end, Dev doesn't die of liquor addiction as in the original novel or the various other cinematic adaptations, but instead realises his misdemeanours and in a twist to the tale starts his life afresh with Leni. This is shown in his poignant confession to Leni (Kalki Koechlin) saying "You were right. I am a slut".



*Abhay Deol*

<sup>32</sup> An MMS of two students of Delhi Public School in New Delhi was circulated nationwide in 2004. The MMS clip had the girl performing oral sex on the boy who forwarded it after filming the act.



A common feature in these films are themes involving the less flattering and mildly dystopian nature of portrayal of life-events. What is recognised here is that a nation is not a uniform entity, there is deep chasm between the cities and towns and villages. *Peepli [Live]* (2010) is a satirical comedy juxtaposing the headline chasing urban media frenzy in a remote sleepy, bucolic village. As the nation itself; the metros are also not a singular entity. Developing India is not all super highways, mall and multiplexes. There is unemployment, immigration, crime and a daily struggle for millions. The SUVs whizz over the flyovers, but there is life beneath that. There are diverse worlds within the same city.

This is apparent in Dibakar Banerjee's *Oye Lucky! Lucky Oye!* (2008), a film almost entirely set in the capital that steers clear of Delhi's hitherto dominant visual representation in cinema. Banerjee focuses on the claustrophobia that the protagonist (Lavinder Singh Lucky) feels in the West Delhi ghetto in his growing years. The only way he sees out of it is by getting rich and hence he steals without apology or remorse. He wants to do away with the regressive culture that he is in by embracing the consumer culture. Lucky is anti-thesis of a typical Punjabi lead in a commercial film and the Punjabi characters are made loud and flashy only to form a critique of society. By making them baroque, it becomes a nuanced study. *Do Dooni Chaar* (2010) too is set in Delhi, but stays away from showing the landmarks of the Red Fort, India Gate or Chandni Chowk and focuses on the middle class family of a high school teacher. Similarly, the familiar and trite shots of Marine Drive and Bandra Bandstand that populate films that are set in Mumbai are absent from *Dhobi Ghat*, *Aamir* (2008) and *Ab Tak Chhappan* (2004).

This chapter thus has looked into the three aspects. The argument in favour of the indie movement with salient comparisons to French New Wave, the ambivalent indie footing of *Dhobi Ghat* as a case study and importantly the social significance of films. Whether these indies can be slotted in a term and a bonafide movement is discussed in the conclusion that follows this chapter.

ab tak  
chhappan  
{ 56 and counting }

# CONCLUSION

The overarching question that has been addressed in this book is how to define 'independence' in cinematic terms. It focuses by looking at the industry, its financial and production aspects which have gone through changes because of corporatisation. There have been arguments and counter-points regarding the audience aspect of the indies. The creation of niche audiences and how this affects the way these films are viewed. The emergence of leisure and multiplex industry was also a point that was covered as an aspect that is deeply influencing the economics of the indies. Furthermore, the text of the films was looked upon as case studies.

Indies have a dynamic quality rather than fixed ones which makes them off-beat in nature irrespective of their country of origin. The 'style' Chapter delved into salient aspects of the film techniques of contemporary Indian indies followed by case studies of four films *Company*, *Black Friday*, *Johnny Gaddaar* and *Love, Sex aur Dhokha*. Instead of three-hour long musicals featuring extravagant song-and-dance numbers, colour-saturated shots and stock characters and plots, the indies reveal unvarnished narratives and allow realism and realistic tones. However, it would be wrong to slot the indies into darker or sombre genres. The indies over the decade have offered dramas, dark humoured satires, comedies, thrillers, crime-capers and romances (see filmography) which, over the years have cultivated a discerning, appreciative audience. Popular films screened at multiplexes, no longer satisfy these cinephiles, for their interest in cinema goes much beyond Hindi films. For these new viewers, movie viewing is critiquing and discussing the nuances of each film. The pertinent question is as Rao asks 'can these films extend themselves beyond the realm of counterculture reformist cinema that spurs Indian audiences to flock in droves to experience cinema entertainment other than the entertainer film' (Rao, 2011).



The book has covered films of the last decade as the indie film trend is relatively new and from its present shape, there only emerge feelers rather than any concrete predictions. There has been a rapid spread of the multiplex from their concentration in urban cities to smaller urban centres. This has emerged as a dominant trend leading to branded chain of multiplexes which are getting into various stages of film production or being taken over as part of a vertical integration drive by corporate houses. The year-on-year growth in the sector has raised more revenue as taxes for the government. The active encouragement from the various states via tax-cuts is propelling the multiplex penetration into other urban and semi-urban, non-affluent territories. This has changed film marketing and ticketing strategies. While indies still struggle against commercial blockbusters, the boom is for everybody and hence indies have also benefited from the same.

There is a certain lack of volition in indies as a trend and a handful of films do not make a movement. Indies are made by an urban fringe of directors and they are important in that, there is an efforted authenticity and realism that they bring to the screen. They are breaking away from old strictures and upending clichés of the Hindi film narrative. The presence and recognition of these indies on film festival circuit is an important step in them being clubbed in a 'World Cinema from India' category that is a distinctively different offering than Bollywood. The indies with increase in their numbers and frequency can be an alternative genre from India. This signals an emergence of a section of cinema from India which can be termed as independent, because of their spirit.

# WORLD CINEMA

## *FROM INDIA!*

# CONTEMPORARY

Anurag Kashyap in his interview to Indian film critic Anupama Chopra at Cannes said that 'Bollywood is still seen as comic relief' and not taken seriously (NDTV, 2011). The indies are but an alternative to the Hindi films by the film intelligentsia. Form of realism subversively disapproves of the Bollywood narrative and thus denounces the glossy popularity of consumerism of mainstream cinema. The indies are paradoxically located both inside and outside of Hindi film mainstream enabled by the multiplex phenomenon. Vishal Bhardwaj, Sriram Raghavan, Dibakar Banerjee, Nagesh Kukunoor and Anurag Kashyap are at the forefront of a new wave of filmmakers whose films have a mix of realism, dissent towards Hindi film narrative strategies and critique of the societal plagues, as well as acknowledged nods to their inspirations which makes them stand out from the commercial films and the multiplex films.

After looking at various perspectives in relation to the contemporary Indian indies, it is not suitable, if a little pre-mature to term it as a movement; but they are part of an emerging genre of filmmaking from India which offer a counter culture and a counter narrative to the typical Hindi film industry films. I conclude by positing that contemporary Indian indies is a up-and-coming genre that has varied and global inspirations, rooted in post-liberalisation India and made with a distinctive desire to offer newer stories and narratives.

# MULTIPL

# INDIAN



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Genre: Drama /Crime | Runtime: 120 min

**Aadmi aur Insaan** (1969) | Directed by: Yash Chopra  
Genre: Drama | Runtime: 150 min

**Aamir** (2008) | Directed by: Raj Kumar Gupta  
Genre: Drama/Thriller | Runtime: 96 min

**Ab Tak Chappan** (2004) | Directed by: Shimit Amin  
Genre: Crime | Runtime: 129 min

**Albert Pinto Ko Gussa Kyon Ata Hai** (1980)  
Directed by: Saeed Akhtar Mirza  
Genre: Comedy/Romance/Drama | Runtime: 110 min

**Annie Hall** (1977) | Directed by: Woodie Allen  
Genre: Comedy/Romance | Runtime: 93 min

**Ardh Satya** (1983) | Directed by: Govind Nihalani  
Genre: Drama/Drama | Runtime: 130 min

**Bandini** (1963) | Directed by: Bimal Roy  
Genre: Drama/Musical/Romance | Runtime: 157 min

**Being Cyrus** (2006) | Directed by: Homi Adajania  
Genre: Comedy/Drama/Thriller | Runtime: 90 min

**Black Friday** (2004) | Directed by: Anurag Kashyap  
Genre: Crime/Drama/History | Runtime: 143 min

**Chandni Bar** (2001) | Directed by: Madhur Bhandarkar  
Genre: Drama | Runtime: 150 min

**Company** (2002) | Directed by: Ram Gopal Varma  
Genre: Drama /Crime | Runtime: 155 min

**D** (2005) | Directed by: Vishram Sawant  
Genre: Crime/Drama | Runtime: 130 min

**Dev.D** (2009) | Directed by: Anurag Kashyap  
Genre: Romance/Drama | Runtime: 144 min

**Dhobi Ghat** (2010) | Directed by: Kiran Rao  
Genre: Drama | Runtime: 100 min

**Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge** (1995)  
Directed by: Aditya Chopra  
Genre: Musical/Romance/Drama | Runtime: 189 min

**Do Dooni Chaar** (2010) | Directed by: Habib Faisal  
Genre: Comedy/Drama | Runtime: 97 min

**Double Indemnity** (1944) | Directed by: Billy Wilder  
Genre: Crime/Film-noir/Thriller | Runtime: 107 min

**Dr. No** (1962) | Directed by: Terence Young  
Genre: Action/Adventure/Thriller | Runtime: 110 min

**Ek Hasina Thi** (2004) | Directed by: Shriram Raghavan  
Genre: Drama/Thriller | Runtime: 120 min

**Gandhi** (1982) | Directed by: Richard Attenborough  
Genre: Biography/Drama/History | Runtime: 192 min

**Ghajini** (2008) | Directed by: A.R. Murugadoss  
Genre: Drama/Romance | Runtime: 183 min

**Gulaal** (2009) | Directed by: Anurag Kashyap  
Genre: Drama/Crime/Politics | Runtime: 140 min



**Haasil** (2003) | Directed by: Tigmanshu Dhulia  
Genre: Drama/Crime | Runtime: 120 min

**Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi** (2003)  
Directed by: Sudhir Mishra  
Genre: Drama | Runtime: 120 min

**Honeymoon Travels Pvt Ltd** (2007)  
Directed by: Reema Kagti  
Genre: Comedy/Romance | Runtime: 119 min

**Hyderabad Blues** (1998) | Directed by: Nagesh Kukunoor  
Genre: Comedy/Romance | Runtime: 170 min

**I Am** (2010) | Directed by: Onir  
Genre: Drama/Romance | Runtime: 95 min

**Iqbal** (2005) | Directed by: Nagesh Kukunoor  
Genre: Drama/Sport | Runtime: 132 min

**Jodha Akbar** (2008) | Directed by: Ashutosh Gowariker  
Genre: Drama | Runtime: 215 min

**Johnny Gaddaar** (2007) | Directed by: Shriram Raghavan  
Genre: Thriller/Drama | Runtime: 90 min

**Johny Mera Naam** (1970) | Directed by: Vijay Anand  
Genre: Musical/Drama/Action | Runtime: 159 min

**Jugnu** (1973) | Directed by: Pramod Chakravorty  
Genre: Drama/Musical/Action | Runtime: 149 min

**Jungle** (2000) | Directed by: Ram Gopal Varma  
Genre: Drama | Runtime: 146 min

**Juno** (2007) | Directed by: Jason Reitman  
Genre: Comedy/Drama/Romance | Runtime: 96 min

**Khosla ka Ghosla** (2006) | Directed by: Dibakar Banerjee  
Genre: Comedy/Drama | Runtime: 135 min

**Kaun?** (1999) | Directed by: Ram Gopal Varma  
Genre: Drama/Thriller | Runtime: 120 min

**Krrish** (2006) | Directed by: Rakesh Roshan  
Genre: Drama/Sci-fi | Runtime: 185 min

**Kshana Kshanam** (1991) | Directed by: Ram Gopal Varma  
Genre: Drama/Crime | Runtime: 148 min

**La Pointe Courte** (1955) | Directed by: Agnès Varda  
Genre: Drama | Runtime: 86 min

**The 400 Blows** (1959) | Directed by: François Truffaut  
Genre: Drama | Runtime: 99 min

**Little Zizou** (2009) | Directed by: Sooni Taraporewala  
Genre: Drama/Comedy | Runtime: 90 min

**Love, Sex Aur Dhokha** (2010)  
Directed by: Dibakar Banerjee  
Genre: Drama/Comedy/Crime | Runtime: 110 min

**Manorama Six Feet Under** (2007)  
Directed by: Navdeep Singh  
Genre: Crime/Drama/Mystery | Runtime: 135 min

**Maqbool** (2003) | Directed by: Vishal Bhardwaj  
Genre: Drama/Crime | Runtime: 132 min

**Monsoon Wedding** (2003) | Directed by: Mira Nair  
Genre: Drama/Comedy/Romance | Runtime: 114 min

**Namaste London** (2007) | Directed by: Vipul Shah  
Genre: Romance | Runtime: 128 min

**Om Shanti Om** (2007) | Directed by: Farah Khan  
Genre: Drama/Comedy | Runtime: 162 min



**Oye Lucky! Lucky Oye!** (2008)  
Directed by: Dibakar Banerjee  
Genre: Comedy/Drama/Crime | Runtime: 118 min

**Page 3** (2005) | Directed by: Madhur Bhandarkar  
Genre: Drama | Runtime: 139 min

**Parwana** (1996) | Directed by: Jyoti Swaroop  
Genre: Romance/Thriller | Runtime: 131 min

**Peepli [Live]** (2010)  
Directed by: Anusha Rizvi, Mahmood Farooqui  
Genre: Comedy/Drama | Runtime: 95 min

**Pierrot le fou** (1962) | Directed by: Jean-Luc Godard  
Genre: Drama/Crime/Comedy | Runtime: 106 min

**Pyaar Ke Side Effects** (2006)  
Directed by: Saket Chaudhary  
Genre: Comedy/Romance | Runtime: 132 min

**Pyaar Tune Kya Kiya...** (2001)  
Directed by: Rajat Mukherjee  
Genre: Romance/Thriller | Runtime: 123min

**Raat** (1992) | Directed by: Ram Gopal Varma  
Genre: Crime/Horror/Thriller | Runtime: 128 min

**Race** (2008) | Directed by: Abbas-Mustan Burmawalla  
Genre: Drama/Action | Runtime: 170 min

**Rangeela** (1995) | Directed by: Ram Gopal Varma  
Genre: Comedy/Musical/Drama | Runtime: 142 min

**Salaam Bombay!** (1988) | Directed by: Mira Nair  
Genre: Drama/Crime | Runtime: 113 min

**Saransh** (1984) | Directed by: Mahesh Bhatt  
Genre: Drama | Runtime: 137 min

**Satya** (1998) | Directed by: Ram Gopal Varma  
Genre: Crime/Drama | Runtime: 170 min

**Scarface** (1932)  
Directed by: Howard Hawks/Richard Rosson  
Genre: Crime/Film-noir/Thriller | Runtime: 93 min

**Scarface** (1983) | Directed by: Brian De Palma  
Genre: Crime/Drama/Thriller | Runtime: 170 min

**Sholay** (1975) | Directed by: Ramesh Sippy  
Genre: Action/Drama | Runtime: 164 min

**Slumdog Millionaire** (2008)  
Directed by: Danny Boyle/Loveleen Tandan  
Genre: Drama/Crime/Romance | Runtime: 120 min

**That Girl in Yellow Boots** (2010)  
Directed by: Anurag Kashyap  
Genre: Drama | Runtime: 103 min

**The Blue Umbrella** (2007) | Directed by: Vishal Bhardwaj  
Genre: Comedy/Drama | Runtime: 90 min

**The Big Lebowski** (1998) | Directed by: Ethan Coen, Joel Coen  
Genre: Comedy/Crime | Runtime: 117 min

**Trainspotting** (1996) | Directed by: Danny Boyle  
Genre: Drama/Crime | Runtime: 94 min

**Udaan** (2010) | Directed by: Vikramaditya Motwane  
Genre: Drama | Runtime: 134 min

**Yakeen** (1969) | Directed by: Brij  
Genre: Crime/Action/Romance | Runtime: 147 min

**Yuva** (2004) | Directed by: Mani Ratnam  
Genre: Drama | Runtime: 161 min



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

*To my parents.*

*And my friends. You know who you are. Thanks for being there.*

# CONTEMPORARY INDIAN INDIES

Rehaan Diaz

amazon publishing  


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