



*Producing*

*Bollywood*

INSIDE THE  
CONTEMPORARY HINDI  
FILM INDUSTRY

TEJASWINI GANTI

# **Producing BOLLYWOOD**





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INSIDE THE CONTEMPORARY  
HINDI FILM INDUSTRY

Tejaswini Ganti

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***For my hero,***

Vipul,

***and our two stars,***

Saahir and Siddharth



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## INTRODUCTION

### **How the Hindi Film Industry Became “Bollywood”**

“Yeah, I think this question is a little too late now, because it will change I think, by the time your book comes out.”

I was interviewing Shah Rukh Khan—one of the most successful stars of the prolific and box-office-oriented Hindi-language film industry based in Bombay—for my dissertation research in 1996.<sup>1</sup> We were at Mehboob Studios, located in Bombay’s western suburb of Bandra,<sup>2</sup> where Khan was shooting for the film *Duplicate*; my first question concerned the condescension and distaste expressed toward popular Hindi cinema by Indian elites and the English-language media. Khan continued, “I believe this attitude will change, and I can say that with a lot of conviction, because I would also blame myself for being in that category say four or five years ago. I would also think it was not fashionable to like Hindi films.” Little did I realize at the time how prescient his statements would be. Although my book took much longer than Khan ever would have anticipated, he was absolutely right in his predictions about the transformation of attitudes toward popular Hindi cinema—from contempt to celebration—with Khan himself being an important figure in these changes.<sup>3</sup> Hailed by his biographer as “the face of a glittering new India” and “a modern-day god” (Chopra 2007: 11), Khan’s celebrity has extended globally across a variety of domains: from the financial—being the first Indian actor to ring the opening bell of the NASDAQ stock exchange in February 2010—to the scholarly—being the subject



of an international conference, “Shah Rukh Khan and Global Bollywood,” held at the University of Vienna in October 2010.

That Khan represents a “glittering new India” is indicative of the other transformation that has taken place over the course of my research: the change in global representations and perceptions of India—from a “Third World” country to the “next great economic superpower” (Elliott 2006).<sup>4</sup> The Hindi film industry, now better known as “Bollywood,” has been an important accoutrement of India’s resignification in the global arena, one that is deployed both by the Indian state and the corporate sector in efforts to brand the country as an economic powerhouse in arenas such as the annual World Economic Forum held at Davos, Switzerland. Bollywood is a presence at Davos mainly through its music and its stars; in 2009, Amitabh Bachchan, one of the biggest stars of Indian cinema, was awarded the World Economic Forum’s Crystal Award for “outstanding excellence in the field of culture” (Upala 2009). Bachchan reflected about the honor on his blog, “I took pride in the fact that an honor such as the Crystal Award was bestowed on me, an Indian from the world of escapist commercial cinema, a cinema which 50–60 years ago was not such a bright profession to be in. Children from good homes were not encouraged to go anywhere near it: an activity that was considered *infra dig*.<sup>5</sup> But look how this very escapist cinema had progressed through the years, where today in an International forum of some eminence, I was able to stand and represent my fraternity and my country in a most humbling recognition” (in Lavin 2009).

This book is an examination of the very narrative of progress, respectability, and arrival to which Bachchan alludes in his remarks. It is the story of how the Hindi film industry became “Bollywood”: a globally recognized and circulating brand of filmmaking from India, which is often posited by the international media as the only serious contender to Hollywood in terms of global popularity and influence. As an anthropologist, my central focus is on the social world of Hindi filmmakers, their filmmaking practices, and their ideologies of production.<sup>6</sup> I examine the ensuing changes in the field of Hindi film production (Bourdieu 1993), especially those related to the cultural and social status of films and filmmakers—as well as the political economy of filmmaking—and locate them in Hindi filmmakers’ own efforts to accrue symbolic capital, social respectability, and professional distinction. These efforts have been enabled by the neoliberal restructuring of the Indian state and economy—intensified from 1991, after the IMF mandated structural adjustment policies—resulting in a dramatically altered media landscape, marked

first by the entry of satellite television and then by the emergence of the multiplex theater.<sup>7</sup> I argue that the Hindi film industry's metamorphosis into Bollywood would not have been possible without the rise of neoliberal economic ideals in India. By tracing the transformations of the Hindi film industry for over a decade—one marked by tremendous social and economic change in India—this book provides ethnographic insight into the impact of neoliberalism on cultural production in a postcolonial setting.

When I first began my research about the social world and production practices of the Hindi film industry more than a decade ago, the dominant discourse about mainstream Hindi cinema—generated by Indian political, intellectual, social, and media elites—derided it as an intellectually vacuous, aesthetically deficient, and culturally inauthentic form.<sup>8</sup> Although the images, sounds, and styles of Hindi cinema had been a ubiquitous part of the urban landscape in India for decades (with the exception of the four southern states, which have popular filmmaking traditions in their own respective languages), popular Hindi films were frequently criticized or dismissed as an “escape for the masses”—as in Bachchan's remarks about “escapist commercial cinema”—in the mainstream press, government documents, and well-appointed elite drawing rooms. For example, when I was introduced as someone studying the film industry for my PhD during a dinner party in Bandra hosted by my upstairs neighbor about ten days before my interview with Khan, one of the host's friends launched into a diatribe about the absurdity of Hindi cinema, exclaiming, “What is there to study? All they do is run around trees! I mean how is it possible that such bad films get made? I don't understand how people can stand to watch them, and what does it say about the mentality of the common Indian that he likes such nonsense!” Even those who were more sympathetic to my research, like journalists and others working within the media world of Bombay, expressed their scorn for the film world by asserting that I should only meet the handful of people (according to them) in the industry with the requisite intelligence and education to understand my project, and therefore able to help me.

Now as I write this introduction in 2010, these disdainful attitudes toward my research belong to another era. One of the most notable changes since the onset of the millennium, which Khan had predicted, is the way Hindi cinema, along with the film industry more broadly, has acquired greater cultural legitimacy from the perspective of the state, the English-language media, and English-educated/speaking elites in India. Hindi cinema and Bombay filmmakers are circulating through, and

being celebrated in, a variety of sites redolent with cultural and symbolic capital—from prestigious international film festivals like Cannes and Toronto, to elite academic institutions such as Harvard and Cambridge.<sup>9</sup> This enhanced status of Hindi cinema arises from an interconnected set of processes: the increasing academic interest and study of popular Hindi cinema by scholars located or trained in the Anglo-American academy; the avid consumption of these films by the South Asian diaspora; the increasing recognition and celebration of Hindi films in Western cultural spaces; and the emergence of new global markets for Hindi cinema. Underlying these processes is a less explored dimension, however: Hindi filmmakers' own drive for distinction and greater social acceptance, which is the focus of this book.

The rising cultural legitimacy of popular Hindi cinema is a result of what I argue is an ongoing process of the “gentrification” of Hindi cinema and the Hindi film industry. Gentrification, which in its most basic definition means to renovate or convert an area to conform to middle-class taste (*OED* 2006), is an apt metaphor to describe the changes occurring in the Hindi film industry, which has been concerned with respectability and middle-class acceptance since the 1930s. Conventional accounts of popular Hindi cinema had described it as a cultural form concerned with mass appeal and representing the sensibilities of the slum (Nandy 1998). Despite the close identification on the part of scholars and journalists between Hindi cinema and the working poor, or “masses,” of Indian society,<sup>10</sup> what I had observed during a decade of fieldwork, from 1996 to 2006, was that members of the Hindi film industry consistently distanced themselves from such audiences, having identified with and sought acceptance, approval, and respect from more elite segments of Indian society. I characterize this desire for respectability and elite approval as the Hindi film industry's drive to gentrify itself, its audiences, and its film culture. Just as urban gentrification is marked by a vocabulary of progress, renovation, and beautification, which is predicated upon exacerbating social difference through the displacement of poor and working-class residents from urban centers, the gentrification of Hindi cinema is articulated through a discourse of quality, improvement, and innovation that is often based upon the displacement of the poor and working class from the spaces of production and consumption.

The results of this gentrification are evident in three main ways. First, since the mid-1990s, in the films themselves—both in their narrative content and *mise-en-scène*—there has been a growing concern with wealthy protagonists and the near-complete erasure of the working class, urban

poor, and rural dwellers once prominent as protagonists/heroes in Hindi films. When films do focus on non-elites, they still represent an elitist perspective in that the protagonists are frequently rendered as gangsters or as part of some sort of criminal milieu, rather than being the unmarked everyman protagonist of earlier eras of Hindi cinema.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, more and more films are being shot in North America, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Europe rather than in India; thus India itself is increasingly erased from the films.<sup>12</sup> Second, a prominent discourse of respectability, connected to the class and educational background of filmmakers, as well as a newly emergent discourse of corporatization and professional management, serve as further modes of gatekeeping. Additionally, the film industry has become progressively more insular and exclusionary, so that it is very difficult for people without any family or social connections to get a break. Finally, regarding the sites of circulation and exhibition, a new geography of distribution has emerged, one that prizes metropolitan and overseas markets and marginalizes equally populous but provincial markets. Furthermore, the multiplex phenomenon is increasingly transforming cinema-going into an elite pastime within India. My discussion and explanation of these processes are based upon over a decade of ethnographic research, as well as filmmakers' statements and reflections about films and filmmaking over that period, rather than upon in-depth formal or textual analyses of particular films.

The third noticeable transformation of the Hindi film industry, since the late 1990s, has been the efforts by filmmakers and business leaders to rationalize the production, distribution, and exhibition process, most commonly referred to as the "corporatization" of the industry. Historically, filmmaking in India has been very fragmented and decentralized, with hundreds of independent financiers, producers, distributors, and exhibitors, who have never been vertically or horizontally integrated in the manner of the major Hollywood studios or multinational entertainment conglomerates. Although a studio system with contracted actors, writers, and directors existed in the 1920s and 1930s in India, a handful of studios did not monopolize the film business as they had in Hollywood. The majority of Indian studios also did not control distribution and exhibition like their Hollywood counterparts. The lack of integration between production, distribution, and exhibition accounted for the high mortality rate of studios; a series of commercial failures, or even one major disaster, frequently led to bankruptcy. Additionally, film historians attribute the influx of wartime profits during the Second World War as the single most important factor in the rapid decline of studios, with the rise of the

independent producer as the characteristic feature of Indian filmmaking (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1980; Binford 1989).<sup>13</sup> What is referred to as the “studio era,” was actually a short chapter in the history of Indian cinema (Shoesmith 1987).<sup>14</sup> Entities referred to as “studios” in Bombay in the post-Independence period, such as R.K. Studios or Mehboob Studios, were actually production companies set up by prominent stars or directors who turned to producing and procured real estate to create an autonomous production space.<sup>15</sup>

Dramatic changes in the structure of the Hindi film industry have been under way since 2000, when the Indian state recognized filmmaking as a legitimate industrial activity. The entry of the Indian corporate sector into filmmaking—either through the creation of media subsidiaries (Reliance Industries’ Big Entertainment), or the transformation of independent production companies into public limited companies (Mukta Arts)—is leading to a greater level of integration between production, distribution, and exhibition than had existed prior to this period. Rationalization is related to the issues of cultural legitimacy and respectability, since much of the discourse around these changes, generated by the general media and the film industry, is articulated through a vocabulary of professionalism and modernization.

I argue that these processes of gentrification and rationalization attempt to resolve the dilemmas posed by the central features of the production culture (Caldwell 2008) of the Hindi film industry: the immense disdain that filmmakers express for both the industry and their audiences, as well as the tremendous uncertainty that characterizes the filmmaking process. This book examines in detail these features of the Hindi film industry’s production culture, focusing on filmmakers’ quests for social respectability and professional distinction, as well as on their continuous manufacture of knowledge and axioms that try to make sense of the unpredictability of filmmaking. By focusing on the social world of Hindi filmmakers, and their processes of production, I demonstrate how commercially oriented cultural production is a site of social practice and a domain of meaning-making. Through a study of the Hindi film industry’s production culture, we gain insights into how the mass media are implicated in the production of social difference, the imagining of the nation, the objectification of culture, and the constitution of modernity in contemporary India.

One of the more unexpected findings of my fieldwork was the frequent criticism voiced by Hindi filmmakers concerning the industry's work culture, production practices, and quality of filmmaking, as well as the disdain with which they viewed audiences. Throughout my fieldwork, I encountered filmmakers criticizing every aspect of the industry—from the working style to the sorts of films being made. For example, producer Firoz Nadiadwala, a third-generation member of the film industry, described Hindi filmmaking as being full of compromises and formulae, and the industry filled with people who were either incompetent or who lacked a proper filmmaking vision. Throughout our interview he periodically punctuated his statements by pronouncing that I would have nothing to write about. At one point, he asserted, "It's such a sorry state of affairs. I don't even think you're going to get anything worthwhile writing this book. *Koi kuch nahi kar raha hai. Kuch nahi kar raha hai.* [No one is doing anything. They're doing nothing.] All they're interested in is, '*Bhai artist ko sign karo, aur itne mein itne bhej do, aur picture mein paisa kamao.*' [Just hire an actor and sell this picture for this much and make money off the whole deal.] There's no quality consciousness, there's no forward thinking, save and except maybe for just three or four people, that's it" (Nadiadwala, interview, October 2000). Criticism of this nature comprises a popular genre of discourse within the film industry and serves as a form of "boundary-work," a concept articulated by Thomas Gieryn (1983) to discuss the ideological efforts by a profession or an occupation to delineate who is and is not a legitimate member. The Hindi film industry for much of its history has been characterized by porous boundaries and very few barriers to entry. Essentially, the "industry" has been a very diffuse site where anyone with large sums of money and the right contacts has been able to make a film. The capacity for complete novices to enter film production has been a characteristic feature of filmmaking in India for decades—one that has been heavily criticized by the state and filmmakers alike (Karanth 1980; Patil 1951). This book examines the boundary-work indulged in by Hindi filmmakers in their efforts to recast filmmaking into the mold of a modern high-status profession.

Not only did I encounter complaints and criticism about films, filmmaking, and the workings of the industry, I discovered an inordinate amount of paternalism and condescension expressed toward audiences, specifically the "masses"—the most common label for poor and working-class audiences—who until the early 2000s were understood to comprise

the bulk of the film-viewing audience. For years, in media, state, and scholarly discourses, the masses were posited as the root cause of Hindi cinema's narrative, thematic, and aesthetic deficiencies, and I discovered that the majority of filmmakers I met professed similar views.<sup>16</sup> One of my informants, a screenwriter who was one of the few members of the industry who did not share these views, was often critical of his colleagues' representations of audiences. He related to me the advice he was given when he first began his career — the portions set off in em-dashes are his asides to me:

I hear people, very, very senior and respected people who have been practitioners for 25 years tell me, "Boss, I will tell you a *guru mantra* (the gospel). You want to write for the Indian audience, you must remember one primary over-riding fact." I say, "What is that?" "That is that the average I.Q. of the Indian audience is not more than that of a 10-year-old. *Yeh, unki*, they are not intelligent. Their I.Q. — I.Q. is one word which they bandy about a lot — is that of a very, very simple child. They are like — somebody has even said this to me — our audience is like monkeys." This is the kind of respect which they have for the audience. (interview 1996)

He went on to recount how filmmakers cited the high rates of illiteracy in India, which indexed a lack of formal education, as the root cause for the stunted intellectual development of the majority of audiences in India.

Such perceptions are rooted in the political discourse produced by the postcolonial Indian state, which has designated the vast majority of the population as "backward" and in need of "upliftment" or "improvement." Thomas Hansen points out that after Independence the national leadership produced a more openly paternalist discourse where the "ignorance and superstition" of the masses were the main obstacles to national development (1999: 47). Therefore the responsibility of reforming social habits, of "civilizing" the Indian masses, and inculcating the values of an Indian modernity became the task of state institutions, the political elite, and the social world of the middle class they represented (Hansen 1999).

The changes in filmmaking and film-viewing that I characterize as gentrification address the roots of these sentiments of disdain in both the production and consumption arenas. According to industry and media discourses, a more educated and socially elite class of people working in filmmaking has led the industry to become more respectable, producing a better caliber of films. These better films are being watched by a superior class of audiences, more commonly referred to as the "classes"

or the “gentry” in industry parlance, who are more amenable to experimentation and variety in cinema; therefore, according to industry discourses, elite producers and audiences engender better cinema. The process of rationalization also redresses the problem of disdain because with the entry of the Indian corporate sector and its attendant culture of written contracts, institutional finance, and standardized accounting practices, filmmaking begins to appear and operate more in line with dominant understandings of professional organization and discipline.

#### UNCERTAINTY

To state that large-scale commercial filmmaking is wracked with uncertainty may appear as an assertion of the obvious; however, how that uncertainty is experienced and managed varies across different film industries. While the “electronically mediated home” is the most economically important site of film consumption for Hollywood (Caldwell 2008: 9), in India the movie theater is the most significant site of film consumption. Domestic theatrical box-office income provides the lion’s share of revenues—about 73 percent—in India (KPMG 2009); this is in contrast to Hollywood, where it is less than 15 percent (Caldwell 2008: 9). This reliance on the domestic box-office, however, is represented by the Indian financial sector as a problem that filmmaking in India must overcome in order to reduce the risks for investors (KPMG 2009). Reports by a variety of global consulting firms (Arthur Andersen 2000; KPMG 2009; Pricewaterhouse Coopers 2006a) keep touting the economic potential of alternate and ancillary “revenue streams” such as home video, cable and satellite rights, and mobile telephony.

Although the driving force within the Bombay industry is box-office success, it is a difficult goal, achieved by few and pursued by many; the reported probability of a Hindi film achieving success at the box-office ranges from 10 to 15 percent every year—a figure calculated, for reasons that I explain in chapter five, from the point of view of the distributor and not the producer. One explanation filmmakers offer for this low success rate is that the majority of their audiences possess limited discretionary income and cannot afford to see each and every film in the cinema hall; another, more common, explanation is that such a low success rate is due to the poor quality of filmmaking. Additionally, until the advent of multiplexes, the economics of exhibition worked against films that explicitly catered to niche audiences, since single-screen theaters in India have very large capacities, ranging anywhere from 800 to 2,000 seats.



The process of gentrification, especially the growth of multiplexes, helps to reduce the perception of uncertainty associated with filmmaking by reducing the reliance on mass audiences and single-screen cinemas. Film exhibition practices in India are akin to theatrical or concert performance practices in the United States, with advance reservations, assigned seating, and differential rates of admission connected to seat location, so that most cinemas have two to four classes of ticket prices in ascending order: lower stalls, upper stalls, dress circle, and balcony. The discursive division of the viewing audience is integrally connected to the spatial hierarchies present inside the cinema hall; the “masses” are those who sit in the cheaper seats located in the stalls, while the “classes” occupy the more expensive balcony seats.

Multiplex theaters, the majority of which started being built from 2002 onward, have critically altered the film-viewing experience by charging very high rates of admission.<sup>17</sup> With their high ticket prices, social exclusivity, and material comforts, multiplexes have significantly transformed the economics of filmmaking. Despite constituting a small percentage of theaters in India, multiplexes account for a disproportionate share of reported box-office revenues. The importance of multiplexes within the Hindi film industry was highlighted further in 2009 when a dispute over revenue sharing between Hindi film producers, distributors and multiplex exhibitors resulted in a sixty-day moratorium on Hindi film releases. Although the conflict was with six national multiplex chains, the United Producer Distributors Forum—a coalition of the most powerful producers and distributors in the industry— withheld the release of their films throughout India and the world from April 4 until June 6, 2009, when the disputing parties finally reached a resolution.<sup>18</sup>

Just as multiplexes have been represented within industry discourses as rescuing filmmaking from the poor and unpredictable mass audience, so too have international audiences, specifically within the South Asian diaspora, been touted as a route to rescue the industry from the overall vagaries of the domestic box-office. Since 1998, the international, or “overseas,” territory has become one of the most profitable markets for Bombay filmmakers, with certain Hindi films enjoying greater commercial success in Great Britain and the United States than in India. For over a decade Hindi films have been appearing regularly in the United Kingdom’s weekly listing of the top-10 highest grossing films and in *Variety*’s weekly listing of the 60 highest grossing films in the United States. The success of Hindi cinema outside of India highlights the significance of

the South Asian diaspora as a market for the Bombay film industry, and certain filmmakers have explicitly articulated their desire to cater to diasporic audiences. Diasporic audiences especially in North America and the United Kingdom are perceived as more predictable than domestic audiences and, despite their smaller numbers, are attractive for filmmakers because of the disproportionate revenues generated by the sales of tickets in dollars and pounds.

While gentrification is a manifestation of the film industry's quest to manage unpredictability in the arena of film consumption, the process of rationalization is its counterpart, addressing uncertainty in the production process. For decades, one of the main challenges faced by Hindi filmmakers was the high cost of capital to finance production. Since banks and other financial institutions shied away from funding filmmaking, due to the high-risk nature of the enterprise, capital had to be raised through an established network of financiers, who made money in a variety of other fields, such as construction, jewelry, diamond trading, real estate, or manufacturing. These private financiers charged from 36 to 48 percent interest annually, of which six months' worth had to be paid on receipt of the loan. This funding setup resulted in a financially insecure and fragmented production scenario, in which films began production, but could take years to complete—while producers raised funds—or were sometimes abandoned altogether for lack of funding. There also was significant uncertainty within the production process concerning whether a film, once completed, actually got distributed.

The entry of the Indian corporate sector in the twenty-first century has infused previously unheard of amounts of capital into the Hindi film industry, making available consistent finance, so that the risk of a film not being completed has decreased drastically. Many of the new companies have integrated production and distribution, which reduces the uncertainties around the latter. Measures such as film insurance, co-productions, product placement, and marketing partnerships with high-profile consumer brands have also mitigated some of the financial uncertainties of filmmaking. Despite all of these new methods to rationalize the production process, the overall success-failure ratio of Hindi films at the box-office had not improved by the end of 2010. In fact, based on my analysis of the annual box-office overviews listed in the trade publication *Film Information*, the percentage of hits actually decreased over the fifteen-year period from 1995 to 2010. (See Table 6.) While the film industry has not necessarily improved the hit-flop ratio, it has been successful

in terms of attracting new forms of finance capital; this is due to efforts by its members to refashion the industry and filmmaking to target socially elite viewers domestically, and diasporic audiences internationally.

Given the highly unpredictable nature of filmmaking in India—from the uncertainty of audience response to the insecurity of finance for much of its history—the Hindi film industry has developed a variety of practices to manage the risks and uncertainty of filmmaking. Scholars have argued that “audience fictions,” generated by producers to manage the inherent unpredictability of audience response, are an integral part of the media production process.<sup>19</sup> I contend that the uncertainty endemic in filmmaking also leads large media industries like the Hindi film industry to generate “production fictions,” which are truisms, axioms, and structures of belief about what is necessary for commercial success. This book examines how both production fictions and audience fictions play an integral role in managing the uncertainty of Hindi filmmaking.

#### FROM HINDI CINEMA TO “BOLLYWOOD”

In May 2007, I was contacted by the assistant managing editor of Southwest Airlines’ in-flight magazine, *Spirit*, who asked if I would be interested in being their “expert” and write a brief “Beginner’s Guide to Bollywood” for their November issue. “Bollywood”—derived by combining Bombay with Hollywood—was originally a tongue-in-cheek term coined by the English-language press in India to refer to the Hindi film industry.<sup>20</sup> Although dating back to the late 1970s, “Bollywood” gained currency primarily in the late 1990s, with the increased circulation, presence, and recognition of Hindi films in North America, the United Kingdom, and Western Europe, and officially entered the English lexicon in 2001, when the *Oxford English Dictionary* included the term. During my first stint of fieldwork in 1996, the term Bollywood was not a part of the everyday parlance of Hindi filmmakers, having been used mainly by journalists writing for general or trade publications. By the time I carried out my last phase of fieldwork in 2006, however, I felt it was imperative to ask my informants their thoughts about the term, as many prominent stars and directors had publicly expressed their displeasure with it.<sup>21</sup> I encountered a wide spectrum of reactions to the term: acceptance; resignation; indifference; ambivalence; and antipathy.

That Bollywood has become the dominant global term to refer to the Hindi film industry, mainstream Hindi cinema, and even erroneously to all of the diverse filmmaking traditions in India, becomes apparent from

the two institutions acknowledged as pioneers in the organization and dissemination of information in our contemporary world: Amazon.com and Google. “Bollywood” as a search term on either site yields four times more results than “Indian cinema” and ten to twenty times more results than “Hindi cinema.”<sup>22</sup> The fact that the editorial team of a publication for a regionally focused budget American airline such as Southwest thought an article about “Bollywood” would be interesting and relevant for its passengers, signaled to me that the term had entered the American mainstream.<sup>23</sup>

Bollywood is a contested and controversial term nonetheless, both within the Indian film-studies community and the Hindi film industry. Film scholars are justifiably upset by the indiscriminate use of the term by the media—and even by other scholars—to refer to all filmmaking both past and present within India.<sup>24</sup> An exasperating feature of the global use of the term is the way that Bollywood has become synonymous with any film either produced in India or by diasporic Indians and set in India; Mira Nair’s *Monsoon Wedding*, Gurinder Chadha’s *Bride and Prejudice*, and Deepa Mehta’s *Earth* have all been referred to in this vein. Global media usage of the term “Bollywood” usually demonstrates a complete ignorance that feature films are produced in over twenty languages in India every year and that vibrant and prolific film industries exist in the cities of Hyderabad, Chennai, Bangalore, Trivandrum, and Calcutta.

This ignorance is demonstrated most perceptibly through pronouncements about the sheer size of Bollywood—“largest film industry in the world”—based on the aggregate number of films produced annually in India. While the total number of feature films produced in India is quite high (1,288 in 2009), Hindi films comprise a much smaller proportion—about 20 percent—of that total. The annual film production statistics reflect the total number of films certified for exhibition by the Central Board of Film Certification, which is different from the total number of films actually released theatrically.<sup>25</sup> For example, in 2009, whereas a total of 235 Hindi films were certified, 132 films were released theatrically; out of which even a smaller number could be regarded as “Bollywood” films in terms of their star cast, directors, and narrative/aesthetic style. Neither is Bollywood synonymous with Indian cinema, Hindi cinema, nor with the Indian film industry. In fact, there is no such entity as the “Indian film industry” in terms of nationally integrated structures of financing, production, distribution, and exhibition, even if there is some overlap and circulation of personnel between the six main film industries in India. The “Indian film industry” is a rhetorical trope mostly used in state, media,

and corporate discourses to signal the sheer scale of filmmaking in India and demonstrate India's exceptionalism in the global media landscape.

Within the Hindi film industry, while some are indifferent or resigned to the use of the term Bollywood, others are upset by the term because they feel it is essentializing and condescending; represents a kitschy, tacky cinema; or implies that Hindi cinema is a cheap derivative of Hollywood. A comparison to Hollywood is inevitable with a term like Bollywood, which is why many members of the industry profess not to like it. Yet even prior to the coinage of the neologism, comparisons between Hollywood and the Bombay film industry by the Indian press have a long history, dating back to the late 1920s. Neepa Majumdar, in her work on stardom in Indian cinema from the early sound era to the immediate post-Independence era, discusses how the Indian film press created Hollywood epithets for Indian stars, such as "the Indian Douglas Fairbanks" for Master Vithal or "the Indian Mary Pickford" for Ermine (2009: 54–55). Majumdar points out that such comparisons were also criticized by some explicitly nationalist film magazines and resented by the stars themselves; for example, the star who was referred to as the "Indian Douglas Fairbanks" wrote in a popular film journal that he hated the epithet and that "such names go against our national pride" (in Majumdar 2009: 55).

The Hindi film industry has always defined itself in relation to Hollywood and not any other national cinema. During my fieldwork I observed Hindi filmmakers frequently discussing Hollywood—either by praising it, criticizing it, or comparing themselves to it. Hollywood is a constant symbolic, metaphoric, and narrative presence in the Bombay industry,<sup>26</sup> and since 2006, with its tentative entry into Hindi film production, a material presence as well; therefore, I find Hindi filmmakers' criticisms of the term Bollywood as demeaning or condescending somewhat disingenuous. Furthermore, as evident from Firoz Nadiadwala's comments earlier in the chapter, Hindi filmmakers express a great deal of disdain themselves for their own industry.

I contend that Bollywood does not inherently imply a cheap imitation of Hollywood; if Hollywood is an icon of global popular culture and box-office muscle, "Bollywood" signifies that the Hindi film industry is at the same level—or capable of being at the same level—of global dominance. This is why "ollywood" has become a very generative and productive morpheme to refer to other centers of media production—such as "Nollywood" for the Nigerian film industry—that index their aspirations for global popularity. The wide use of the term Bollywood by Indian

media professionals represents an assertion of sovereignty and cultural autonomy in the global media landscape. Global circulation is not the determining factor, however, in the Hindi film industry's transformation into Bollywood, as Hindi films have had a global market for decades. Since the 1950s, Hindi cinema, along with its stars and music, has been popular in sites as diverse as Nigeria, Greece, Egypt, Indonesia, and the former Soviet Union, but these histories of consumption and circulation precede the coinage and concept of Bollywood. Though some have argued that "Bollywood" is an empty signifier (Prasad 2003), ahistorical and essentializing (Vasudevan 2008), or a culture industry that is distinct from the cinema (Rajadhyaksha 2003), I use the term to index a particular moment in the Hindi film industry's history, a transformation in its filmmaking practices, and a shift in how it imagines its audiences.

The historicity of the term "Bollywood," its indication of a particular style of filmmaking, and its implication in the global circulation of Hindi films, have been addressed by scholars of Indian cinema (Prasad 2003; Rajadhyaksha 2003; Vasudevan 2008). Central to their critical engagements with Bollywood is the figure of the NRI or non-resident Indian, the appellation most commonly used by the Indian state and media to refer to members of the Indian diaspora settled in North America, the United Kingdom, Europe, and Australia.<sup>27</sup> While the growing economic significance of diasporic audiences has been an important feature of the Hindi film industry's makeover into Bollywood, the conscious pursuit of socially elite audiences domestically is also a critical factor in the industry's transformation. Finally, a dimension that has been completely overlooked by an insightful discussion, centering mainly on narrative form, film history, and political theory, is that of filmmakers' own subjectivities and attempts to accrue symbolic capital and cultural legitimacy. I argue that the "Bollywoodization" of Hindi cinema—to use Rajadhyaksha's coinage (2003)—which has been attributed overwhelmingly to diasporic audiences and overseas markets, is also closely tied to Hindi filmmakers' desires to legitimate their filmmaking and their aspirations to be accepted among social and cultural elites.

#### DEVELOPMENT, NEOLIBERALISM, AND THE POSTCOLONIAL CONDITION

Amitabh Bachchan's statements about how cinema was not regarded as a promising profession in India and that "children from good homes were not encouraged to go anywhere near it" articulates the peculiar sense

of social marginality that members of the Hindi film industry have felt over the years. Despite the fact that Bachchan's own social class, family background, and level of education mark him as someone from a "good home"—a phrase that along with its other more common variant, "good family," indexes an amalgam of caste and class status, educational level, occupational identity, and gendered norms of behavioral comportment and propriety—in his remarks we encounter the disdain that filmmakers perceive is directed toward them by those from good homes and good families.<sup>28</sup> In spite of their fame and fortune, I found that Hindi filmmakers were extremely concerned with appearing "respectable," and I examine how this idea is understood, expressed, and enacted within the industry. Beverly Skeggs, in her ethnography about white working-class women in England, points out that "respectability is usually the concern of those who are not seen to have it . . . It is rarely recognized as an issue by those who are positioned with it, who are normalized by it, and who do not have to prove it" (1997: 1). Members of the Hindi film industry have been trying to prove their respectability for decades, and in this book I describe how these efforts are not just about the social backgrounds of filmmakers, but also closely connected to the social class of audiences.

The phenomenon of mainstream Hindi cinema and its makers accruing respectability shares some commonalities with other performance traditions in India that underwent similar social transformations in the colonial era. Scholars have traced the history of how dance forms, such as *Bharatanatyam*, and musical genres of the North (Hindustani) and of the South (Carnatic), earned the exalted status of the "classical" and came to denote a national cultural heritage. These performance traditions acquired prestige and respectability through the efforts of upper-caste, middle-class reformers who criticized the traditional exponents, such as *devadasis* (temple dancers) or *tawa'ifs* (courtesans), for being disreputable and unworthy of these art forms, and encouraged middle-class men and women to learn and perform these traditions (Bakhle 2005; Meduri 1988; Weidman 2006).

The case of filmmaking, however, is also different from classical music and dance in a few important ways: the social class of audiences, nationalist agendas, and cultural politics. The disrepute associated with classical music and dance in the nineteenth century only had to do with the performers and not its patrons, who were traditionally from the aristocracy and nobility. In the case of cinema, though it began as an elite activity in India, it became quickly popular across various social strata by the 1920s, and by the 1940s, film was regarded as a form of mass entertainment.

While music and dance were reformed under the guise of a national tradition at various points of the Indian nationalist movement, film was never accorded any such importance either by leaders of the nationalist struggle or the newly independent Indian nation-state.

Sumita Chakravarty discusses how filmmaking was perceived by the national leadership as having escaped the effects of colonialism, which they felt had marginalized performers and producers of other artistic traditions. She describes the dominant attitudes toward cinema in the aftermath of Independence: “As a decolonizing nation, India now felt threatened from within, victimized by the very forces of modernization it had rushed to embrace. What space would traditional culture (pre-British, premodern) occupy in the new milieu? How could the tide of film mania be stemmed? How could the ‘excesses’ of the film industry be curbed? Who were the real guardians of the “public interest”? These were some of the questions that were repeatedly raised in official circles, by citizens’ groups, by artists, and critics” (1993: 58). Not only was film regarded as a threat to other performance traditions, filmmaking was also not accorded any economic importance by the Nehruvian developmentalist state. Respectability for Hindi filmmakers and cultural legitimacy for commercial filmmaking only became possible when the developmentalist state was reconfigured into a neoliberal one, privileging doctrines of free markets, free trade, and consumerism. Under this new regime, the mass media’s significance is gauged by its economic rather than its pedagogical potential, a shift characterized by Ravi Vasudevan as the “displacement of nation as art form by nation as brand” (2008).

Scholars have noted the transformations in the national politico-economic imaginary after the economic liberalization policies instituted by the Indian state in 1991.<sup>29</sup> As Leela Fernandes notes, “while earlier state socialist ideologies tended to depict workers or rural villagers as the archetypical objects of development, such ideologies now compete with mainstream national political discourses that increasingly portray urban middle-class consumers as the representative citizens of liberalizing India” (2006: xv). What I am characterizing as the gentrification of Hindi cinema is part of a broader socio-historical conjuncture where urban middle classes are celebrated in state and media discourses as the main agents, as well as markers of modernity and development in India. Just as the urban middle-class consumer represents the idealized citizen in a neoliberal and globalizing India, the urban middle-class film-viewer represents the ideal audience member for an industry concerned with issues of prestige, respect, and global circulation.



While the impact of neoliberalism has been examined in India primarily with respect to those who have become more insecure or dispossessed by these policies, in this book, I examine a story that goes against the grain, one that may even appear counterintuitive. The growing scholarship about the changes wrought in India by the adoption of neoliberal economic policies frequently asserts, in passing, that elites have benefited, before moving on to a discussion of the social and economic consequences of liberalization on non-elites.<sup>30</sup> In contrast, this book examines the ways that certain sectors of the Hindi film industry have benefited from neoliberal economic policies, which was neither expected nor anticipated by scholars or filmmakers in the mid-1990s. In fact, Hindi filmmakers and scholars have continually predicted the decline of the film industry due to the entrance of technologies such as video, cable, and satellite television, or because of changes in state policy about media imports and foreign investment in media.<sup>31</sup>

This story of “success”—which I qualify with the quotation marks since the idea of success is dependent on particular structural positions within the industry—is of a different nature than that experienced by the Bombay advertising world as examined by William Mazzarella (2003), where the entrance of multinational consumer-goods companies led to new opportunities for Indian advertisers and marketing professionals to position themselves as vital cultural experts and mediators for these global firms. The Hindi film industry has benefited directly from certain changes in state policy, the expansion of the televisual landscape, and the growth of diasporic markets. Globalization—shorthand referring to transnational flows of capital, images, and people (Appadurai 1996)—and neoliberalism—another shorthand to signify the establishment and dismantling of governmental structures to enable those flows (Harvey 2005)—have strengthened the Hindi film industry and made it a more dominant media institution within and outside India. Such a trajectory differs from the standard narratives offered about the impact of globalization and neoliberalism on media industries outside of the United States, which usually equate these processes with the ascendancy of media corporations based or identified with the United States, to the disadvantage of national media institutions.<sup>32</sup>

Another presumed logic that the example of the Hindi film industry disrupts has to do with the nature of capitalism, more specifically “late capitalism” and the regime of flexible accumulation (Harvey 1990). Flexibility, fragmentation, decentralization, and their associated occupational and employment insecurities that are cited as characteristics of a global,

late capitalist order, have actually been the defining features of the Hindi film industry since the end of the Second World War. Although Indian and international journalists have relied on the Fordist metaphors of the factory and the assembly line to represent the Hindi film industry, the structure and workings of the industry are the exact opposite: each Hindi film is made by a team of independent contractors or freelancers.<sup>33</sup> The rise of neoliberal policies in India has coincided with—and is contributing to—a greater consolidation and integration of the Hindi film industry, rather than its fragmentation, flexibility, and decentralization. At the same time, the relationship between the film industry and the state has been crucially reconfigured. For decades, the Indian state, operating within a Nehruvian developmentalist paradigm, did not support the Hindi film industry and its forms of filmmaking, which are oriented toward popular entertainment. Instead, state policies treated and taxed commercial filmmaking as something akin to a vice. Since the late 1990s, the Indian state has been lauding the Hindi film industry and appears to be ideologically and materially invested in the project of commercial filmmaking more than ever before.

A discussion of neoliberalism in the Indian context cannot be complete without a discussion of developmentalism. Akhil Gupta argues that development discourse, which locates a particular set of nation-states as temporally “behind” the West, is not just about the economic position of a nation-state relative to others, but more significantly has “created the ‘underdeveloped’ as a subject and ‘underdevelopment’ as a form of identity in the postcolonial world” (1998: 11). The postcolonial nature of the Indian state and society allows us to examine the logics of developmentalism and neoliberalism within the same frame. Although the current Indian state replaced a Nehruvian-style development agenda with a neoliberal one—preliminarily in 1985 and more aggressively since 1991—it has not abandoned its obsession with “catching up” with the West. While the methods may have changed, a teleological ideology of modernization still undergirds state economic and social policy. The discussions of filmmaking in India are rife with the allochronism (Fabian 2002)—the false sense of a contemporary society being part of an earlier era—associated with developmentalist logics, whereby the changes besetting the industry, which I have characterized as gentrification, are frequently hailed by commentators in teleological language: “coming of age”; “growing up”; or “maturing.” Filmmaking in India is often described globally in a developmentalist idiom as well. For example, American film critics frequently describe contemporary Hindi cinema as akin to older Hollywood films so

that a teleological narrative is produced whereby classical Hollywood is Indian cinema's present, while contemporary Hollywood is its future.<sup>34</sup>

During my fieldwork, I observed Hindi filmmakers constantly coming to terms with and contesting the connotations of "backwardness" and inferiority implicit in the label "developing." Rajjat Barjatya, one of the producers of the most successful films in Indian cinema, the 1994 blockbuster *Hum Aapke Hain Koun!*, when discussing the decision to make the film with the latest sound technologies, articulated the introduction of optical and digital sound technologies in India in a very obvious developmentalist narrative: "Revolution is taking place at a very, very fast rate in India: optical stereo in the U.S. was prevalent for almost fifteen years and since the last two years, they have been going ahead with digital, but in India, we introduced optical stereo just one and half years back and already people are switching over to digital. What I'm saying is that maybe we've taken a long time to catch up with the West, but we're almost there. We have caught up with them in a very, very short span of time" (Barjatya, interview, April 1996). In addition to illustrating how the technological properties of cinema become a sign of modernity, Barjatya's statements about "catching up with the West" demonstrate the experience of modernity that Akhil Gupta has termed the "postcolonial condition" (1998). Gupta argues that to be a national subject in a "developing" country like India is to "occupy an overdetermined subject position interpellated by discourses of the nation *and* by the discourses of development to which that nation is subjected" (1998: 41). Although Gupta's research focused on poor farmers in north India, in Barjatya's description of the technological "revolution" taking place in India and his use of the United States as the benchmark of modernity, we see how even urban elites are interpellated by the discourses of nation and development. In this book, I detail how developmentalist logics operate within the field of Hindi film production—with respect to both filmmakers' own subjectivities and representations of the industry and in their representations of audiences and their subjectivities.

#### PRODUCERS, AUDIENCES, AND THE SOCIAL LIFE OF TECHNOLOGY

As mentioned earlier, mainstream Hindi cinema had been the object of derision and trenchant criticism for many years, and much of the early writings on Hindi cinema reflected this derision in their dismissive attitude toward mainstream filmmaking.<sup>35</sup> Seminal work on popular Hindi

cinema by scholars such as Sumita Chakravarty (1993), Ashish Rajadhyaksha (1986), Rosie Thomas (1985), and Ravi Vasudevan (1989) addressed issues of film history, state policy, genre, aesthetic formations, narrative style, and national identity, establishing the foundation for what has become a highly dynamic field of study. This book joins a growing body of scholarship on Indian cinema that draws upon earlier questions and concerns about history, the nation, genre, representation, and narrative form,<sup>36</sup> but has expanded the focus to include issues of circulation, consumption, exhibition, music, fan cultures, stardom, visual culture, political economy, and globalization.<sup>37</sup>

With a focus on the production culture and social world of the Hindi film industry, this book is also a part of the growing anthropological literature about media forms and practices that seeks to demystify the mass media as it goes beyond the media-text to identify the diverse cultural, social, and historical contexts of media production, circulation, and consumption.<sup>38</sup> An anthropological approach to studying the mass media distinguishes itself from other approaches by its focus on people and their social relations, as opposed to a focus only on media texts or technology (Ginsburg 1994). Anthropologists are centrally concerned with the “making of meaning and the social relations within which this occurs” (Myers 2002: 7). Based on my interest in practice, experience, meaning-making, and social life, I have examined filmmaking and filmmakers in much greater detail than specific films. This focus does not preclude a discussion of specific films; rather than regarding films as texts, however, I regard them as social and discursive objects that come to possess their meaning through practice and social life (Myers 2002), which leads me to concentrate on how filmmakers interpret, discuss, and assign social as well as cultural significance to particular films.

Much of the impetus to study media anthropologically emerged initially from an interest in examining audiences and their consumption of mass media, such as film or television, which expanded and complicated our understandings of the circulation and reception of media forms.<sup>39</sup> An anthropological focus on media production developed somewhat later, although a very robust tradition of studying production cultures in the United States has existed in sociology, communication studies, and media studies for some time.<sup>40</sup> An ethnographic approach to media production is important for deepening our understanding of production and of producers, in this specific case, of Hindi filmmakers who have been either mostly ignored in the scholarship on Indian cinema or have been regarded as isomorphic with the films they produce. In this book, I view

Hindi filmmakers as agents grounded in specific social, historical, and interpretive locations, with their activity of film production as a “social process engaged in the mediation of culture” (Ginsburg 1995: 70). I focus on what Barry Dornfeld, in his work on American public television producers, describes as “the abundance of acts of evaluation and interpretation that cultural producers engage in as a necessary and formative dimension of their productive work and as a self-defining activity in other dimensions of their lives” (1998: 16). This book explores how filmmakers’ subjectivities, social relations, and world-views are constituted and mediated by their experiences of filmmaking.

In a site like the Hindi film industry, where negotiations are highly personalized and oral, ethnography grounds the study of media in a specific time and space and offers insights into the processes, possibilities, and constraints of filmmaking that are not apparent from an analysis of the film text. A focus on the process of production allows us to look beyond the instances of “success”—those films that do get completed and distributed in some manner—since many films do not progress beyond a conceptualization stage, and some are abandoned halfway. Such “failures” (Ganti 2002) also add to our knowledge, offering productive insights and possibilities for theorizing about cinema and other media forms. Additionally, in a context of financial secrecy and the willful absence of record keeping, which marked the Hindi film industry for much of its history, ethnography offers insights into the production process that exhortations to simply “follow the money”—to trace the broad contours of capital investment and ownership—could not achieve.<sup>41</sup>

An ethnographic approach to media production is also important, both for understanding how media are produced in different cultural settings, and for countering the ethnocentrism of much of the scholarship on culture industries and mass culture, which are mainly based on the study of North American and Western European media institutions and corporate capitalism. Although the Hindi film industry—like Hollywood—is a commercially driven, blockbuster-oriented industry, its structures of financing and distribution, sites of power, organization of labor, and overall work culture are quite distinct. In contrast to Hollywood, the Hindi film industry is highly decentralized, has been financed primarily by entrepreneurial capital, organized along social and kin networks, and until the early 2000s was governed by oral rather than written contracts.

While this book’s focus is on Hindi filmmakers, readers will notice a great emphasis upon “the audience,” specifically upon how filmmakers imagine, represent, and discuss film audiences. Not only has scholarship

on media production amply demonstrated that audiences are always prefigured in the production process,<sup>42</sup> a strand of mass communications research has focused on “audience-making,” which refers to how media industries actually produce their audiences through a variety of institutional mechanisms (measurement, segmentation, and regulation), so as to reconstitute actual viewers into collectivities that carry economic or social value within a particular media system (Ettema and Whitney 1994). I examine the Hindi film industry’s audience-making practices, which are based on the measurement of theatrical commercial outcome interpreted according to the geographic and spatial logics of film distribution and exhibition.

The figure of the audience is central to understanding the nature of Hindi film production. The very label “commercial cinema,” which is used to describe the dominant form of filmmaking, has the market, that is, the audience implicated within it. At every level, the scholarly or popular discussion about Hindi cinema is a discussion about the audience explicitly or implicitly; these are broadly of three types: textually based scholarship that chooses to ignore the figure of the audience because it is too problematic, or masks it into the esoteric language of the psychoanalytically imagined “spectator”; ideological analyses, which ostensibly are about films as texts but implicitly construct a figure of the audience, since ideology needs a recipient; or work that justifies the study of commercial cinema by the term “popular,” drawing strength from the fact that many people watch these films.

The history of Hindi cinema is frequently represented as a narrative of change mediated through the figure of the audience. Many accounts uncritically espouse the view that Hindi cinema underwent drastic changes aesthetically, thematically, and stylistically because of the changed class composition of audiences.<sup>43</sup> The common narrative found in most general histories of Indian cinema articulates a decline in cinematic standards and quality after the Second World War, usually attributed to the post-war changes in film financing and audience composition. I discuss the narratives of “improvement” regarding cinematic standards and quality that were a dominant feature of the discourse surrounding filmmaking during my fieldwork. These narratives are essentially of gentrification, where cinematic quality and standards are connected to middle-class audiences.

The attitudes toward audiences that I detail in this book offer a different perspective from some anthropological theorizing about media consumption. For example, Dornfeld (1998) argues that a dichotomy be-

tween production and reception—or producers and audiences—is untenable, since both partake in processes of production and reception, understood in terms of the generation of interpretations and the engagement in acts of evaluation. Such assertions about the artifice of this divide are based on theorizing from contexts in which producers and audiences are part of the same social and interpretive world (Dornfeld 1998). However, whenever media producers have produced content for large-scale audiences characteristic of American commercial television or Hollywood, there is a strong tendency to deride, stereotype, essentialize, or “paedocratize,” because of the fundamental inability to directly observe and know one’s audience.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, in cases like the Hindi film industry, the Hindi television industry (Matzner 2010), the Tamil film industry (Dickey 1993), or the Egyptian television industry (Abu-Lughod 2005), where a vast social distance exists between producers and the majority of their audiences, and where producers do not imagine their audiences to be like them at all, then the production/reception divide is an important dichotomy that reveals how social difference is produced, managed, and experienced. This book analyzes how commercial cinema production is based on an articulation of difference, specifically a relationship of “othering,” between producers and audiences.

Examining Hindi filmmakers’ discussions of their audiences reveals a parallel discourse about the social and aesthetic impact of different media technologies, such as video, satellite television, and the multiplex theater upon cinema in India. Anthropologists have pointed to the importance of examining the distinctive material and sensory properties of media technologies as a necessary component of the ethnography of media (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002). Ethnographic studies have illustrated how media and communication technologies (and their use) shape and are shaped by the practices of daily life, patterns of social relations, and specific experiences of modernity.<sup>45</sup> Although an in-depth analysis of the physical and sensory properties of video, satellite television, or multiplex theaters is beyond the scope of this book, I discuss these media technologies in terms of the meaning and value invested in them by Hindi filmmakers. I demonstrate how video, satellite television, and multiplexes are differentially implicated in filmmakers’ discussions of their own subjectivities and filmmaking practices. In filmmakers’ discourses, video is the villain that precipitated the decline in standards and quality, while the multiplex is the hero that has initiated a new era of opportunity and possibility for filmmaking; satellite television occupies a more ambivalent position between the two. The judgmental character-

izations of these technologies derive from the metonymic relationship established by filmmakers between the social class of audiences and the specific viewing practices engendered by these technologies. For example, the advent of video is viewed negatively, not only because of issues of piracy and loss of revenue, but also because it represents for filmmakers the retreat of middle-class audiences from the space of the cinema, while the multiplex represents their return. Therefore, a discussion of how new technologies of dissemination and practices of exhibition have reconfigured the relationship between Hindi filmmakers and their audiences demonstrates how media technologies can “impose new social relations” (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002: 19).

An anthropological emphasis on media technologies also provides a necessary counter to universalist narratives of technological determinism (Larkin 2008; Miller and Horst 2006; Pinney 1997; Pinney and Peterson 2003). The case examined in this book is the multiplex movie theater. While the multiplex in the United States is synonymous with mainstream blockbuster cinema, aggressively oriented toward broad audiences and mass appeal, in India the multiplex signifies exactly the opposite. In India, the multiplex is credited with fomenting and supporting an alternative cinematic practice more akin to art-house cinemas in the United States; accordingly, the multiplex is associated with niche audiences and social exclusivity. The discourse about “multiplex cinema” detailed in this book illustrates the significance of exhibition practices and distribution arrangements to the narrative and aesthetic content of cinema. The narratives of change in filmmaking practice attributed by both filmmakers and the Indian press to technologies such as video, satellite television, and multiplexes demonstrate how cinema must also be analyzed and understood through the technologies of its dissemination.

#### THE HINDI FILM INDUSTRY AS A RESEARCH SITE

What sort of site is the Hindi film industry for ethnographic research? At one level it seems abstract, diffuse, and unmanageably large in scale, but my focus on those groups with the creative or financial power to make decisions that shape the films—producers, directors, actors and actresses, writers, distributors, exhibitors—and those who shape the discourse about films, filmmaking, and filmmakers—journalists—provided the boundaries for my fieldwork. This fieldwork, carried out in Bombay for twelve months in 1996, with shorter follow-up visits in 2000, 2005, and 2006, was a combination of participant-observation and direct inter-



views. As a testament to the increasingly globalized nature of the Hindi film industry, the Bombay portion of my fieldwork was supplemented by additional fieldwork in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania in 2001, and intermittently in New York between 2005 and 2009.

The bulk of my time in 1996 was spent observing the production process at various sites in the capacity as a guest, and later as a directorial assistant for two different films (*Dil to Pagal Hai* [The Heart Is Crazy] and *Ghulam* [Slave]), which allowed me to observe the pre-production process as well. In addition to observing how films were produced, I also observed both how “stars” were “produced” by watching elaborate photo sessions orchestrated for the glossy English-language film magazines, and the interactions between film journalists and actors. By attending a number of events (or rituals) of the film industry, such as premieres, *ma-hurats* (ceremonies which announce the start of a new production), music releases, and award ceremonies like the *Filmfare* Awards, I was able to observe how the industry reinforced, and occasionally celebrated, its discrete identity.

I also carried out formal, taped interviews in English and Hindi with more than a 100 members of the film industry and the film press, from both the trade and gossip magazines. The interviews served as opportunities to clarify and delve further into issues that I had observed at the production sites, and as occasions to gather information about topics that were unobtainable through observation. The interviews also provided the space for industry members to add to and critique the discourse generated by the print media about Hindi cinema and the film industry. My third research strategy involved collecting contemporary written discourse (in Hindi and English) about films and the industry produced by the trade press, mainstream print media, and government institutions, such as the National Film Archive and the National Film Development Corporation, in order to map out the larger discursive terrain about cinema in India.

The expansion of the Internet and electronic communication has enabled me to stay in touch with some of my informants through email and social networking sites such as Facebook. The proliferation of websites having to do with “Bollywood”—Internet news magazines focusing on South Asia, and Hindi producers’ own websites—are now another source of discourse about Hindi films and the film industry. Finally, I have kept abreast of the issues and discussions featured in the trade press by subscribing to *Film Information*, a weekly trade magazine published in Bombay since the early 1970s. *Film Information* is one of the oldest of four

trade magazines published in English in Bombay that focuses on the business side of the industry: assessing commercial outcome; detailing business deals; providing news of films under production; announcing the release dates of films; and reviewing films with an eye to their commercial prospects.

### Focus

Even with a focus on those members with financial or creative decision-making power, the Hindi film industry can still appear as a formidable site for ethnographic research, given the sheer scale of filmmaking in Bombay. If one concentrates on those filmmakers who have the most prestige and command the most financial and symbolic capital within the film industry, however—the “A-list” producers, directors, and actors—then the size of the industry shrinks considerably. Despite hyperbolic media representations about the sheer magnitude of the filmmaking enterprise in Bombay, based on annual production statistics, the proportion of films made by individuals from the A-list has never been more than a third of the total number of films produced and distributed between 1995 and 2006.

Although the A-list comprises a small percentage of the overall Hindi film industry, films from these makers are the ones that tend to generate box-office profits for distributors, which serves as the benchmark for commercial success since distributors have been the main investors in—and bearers of financial risk for—films during most of the industry’s history. While a standard criticism within the industry is the oft lamented success-to-failure—or hit-to-flop—ratio, which over the course of my fieldwork peaked as high as 24 percent hits in 1997, and dropped to as low as 7 percent in 2009, the percentage of hits within the A-list is often twice or thrice that of the overall industry—47 percent of the films made by these filmmakers were commercially successful in 1997, compared to 17 percent in 2009.<sup>46</sup> My informants were primarily either from this elite stratum of the film industry or those who were aspiring for that status. My fieldwork was centered on the actors, producers, directors, and writers who possessed various degrees of celebrity within and outside the industry—the very same individuals who were also the focus of journalistic attention.

It is important to convey the absences and limitations of my fieldwork. Certain occupational roles in the film industry are more amenable to the “deep hanging out” that marks the ethnographic enterprise, which played a role in how my research took shape. On a film set, actors, directors, assistant directors, and producers have the most down time, while

everyone around them is busy going about their specific duties and tasks. I was the least obtrusive on a set, where I was often the only—or one of a few—women, if I situated myself with the producer, director, or actors, who were often sitting and chatting while waiting for the lighting to be set up. Given that I was in my mid-twenties when I began my fieldwork, I developed a rapport most readily with assistant directors, actors, and young directors, who were around my same age and welcomed me easily into their social world.

Other than my observations of the activities on a film set or film shoot, I did not carry out any research with the vast array of workers—carpenters, camera attendants, light-men, make-up artists, hair-dressers, and sundry others—who in American film parlance are referred to as “below-the-line” and are the vital life-blood of the labor that goes into the production of a film. When taking these categories of film workers into account, the Hindi film industry once again becomes quite vast in size and scale, as there are thousands of such workers in Bombay. My research also did not focus on those members of the industry who are referred to as “technicians” by Hindi filmmakers—cinematographers, editors, choreographers, composers, musicians, sound engineers, art directors<sup>47</sup>—although I had many opportunities to observe these various individuals at work on sets, in editing suites, recording studios, and dubbing studios. There are a multitude of projects to be done about the Hindi film industry from an ethnographic perspective, and recently anthropologists have begun to pay attention to more specific features of Hindi film production, such as costume design (Wilkinson-Weber 2005, 2006) and film music (Booth 2008), adding valuable perspectives on below-the-line workers.

#### Access

One evening in April 1996, on my way to Filmalaya Studios, where I was going to observe a film shoot, I noticed an unusual sight on the side of S.V. Road in Andheri (a northwestern suburb of Bombay) while sitting in an auto-rickshaw waiting for the red light to turn to green: a white man and a white woman dressed in shorts, T-shirts, sneakers, and carrying large backpacks. Given that this part of suburban Bombay was not a common destination for European or American tourists, the pair stood out among the busy throngs of people going about their evening routines. When I got to the studio, much to my surprise, the backpacker couple was seated comfortably in chairs observing the slightly frenetic proceedings prior to the shoot. The film’s producer and executive producer were dart-

ing about nervously, for they had invited a number of journalists to witness the shoot that evening; a song that had been billed as “historic” for it featured cameos by a number of yesteryear stars, including the hit star pair of the 1960s, Asha Parekh and Shammi Kapoor, who were sharing the screen after a gap of nearly 30 years. One major point of tension between the two producers was that there were not enough chairs on the set for the actors, distributors, and financiers who would be present.

Meanwhile, the two backpackers, who were occupying valuable real estate in the form of the chairs, were not questioned as to their identity and business on the set. Everyone assumed that they were someone’s guests. When the woman backpacker, who was taking photographs, asked me who Asha Parekh was, I finally asked the couple politely who they were. Imagine my surprise when they informed me that they were tourists from Sweden who had come to Bombay on a holiday and did not want to leave Bombay without seeing “Bollywood”! They were no one’s guests; neither did they know anyone associated with the film, nor did they know anything about the film. They were basically able to wander on to this set because of the color of their skin. I was incredulous and thought how the reverse could never happen—I would never be able to casually stroll on to a sound stage or studio lot in Los Angeles.

Many months later, in November, when I was observing a different film shoot taking place in a classroom of a local community college in Andheri, two young Indian men who had traveled from Delhi to try to get a glimpse of the glamour of the Bombay film world had wandered onto this set, hoping to meet their favorite star, Aamir Khan. Since I appeared to be involved with the production—sitting next to the director and conversing with other members of the crew—these two men approached me and asked if it would be possible to watch the shoot. By this point in my research I had come to the conclusion that film sets in Bombay were quasi-public spaces, since they were frequently peopled by a myriad of visitors and onlookers, and I told them that if they sat quietly and stayed out of the camera’s field, it should be no problem. Unlike the situation with the Swedish tourists, members of this crew did question the two men and commanded them to leave the set.

I relay these anecdotes not only to represent the permeable boundaries of a film set—which enables tourists, curious observers, fans, and anthropologists to wander in—but also to communicate how access to the Hindi film industry is shaped by racial and class privilege. Although being an upper middle-class diasporic South Asian female academic from New York definitely paved my access to the film industry, these social

categories were frequently trumped by the privilege of white skin. For example, one afternoon in May 1996, I was waiting to meet a producer in his office. It had taken me several tries to get an appointment. Although the time for my appointment came and went, I waited, aware of the alternative temporality that characterized film business. I looked up from my magazine to see two white European or American individuals being ushered upstairs to the producer's office. When I inquired with the receptionist about why those two had been sent upstairs, reminding her that I had been waiting for a couple of hours, she replied in a matter-of-fact way, "Well, you know those journalists came all the way from Chicago to meet Shiv-ji." Thus, within the hierarchy of who is able to gain access to the Bombay film world, being South Asian and from New York defers to being white and from Chicago (or probably anywhere, actually).

Despite being displaced by white journalists, I was on the whole pretty successful in gaining access to the A-list of the film industry. My access to this elite social world was determined by a number of factors: my own social, class, and national location; my occupational trajectory; and my gender. The ease and rapidity with which I was able to gain access to the elite of the Hindi film industry was a result of contacts emerging from my own social networks as a diasporic South Asian living in New York City. I could not have cultivated these particular networks if I had remained in India. Though my own family in India would be identified as solidly middle class, with every member of my parents' generation having attended college and mostly pursuing careers in engineering or medicine, being from the southern state of Andhra Pradesh and residing mainly in the cities of Calcutta and Hyderabad, the chances of me encountering individuals with close contacts to the Bombay film world, who would facilitate this sort of ethnographic research, would have been very remote.

My fieldwork was primarily enabled by two main sets of contacts—one set located in the film industry itself and the other located in the larger social world of filmmakers. My preliminary contacts within the film world were two daughters of a Hindi film screenwriter, both of whom I had met when I was living in Philadelphia as a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania. The younger of the two was a feature writer for the prominent English-language news magazine *India Today*, who mainly wrote about Hindi films and the film industry. She had a master of journalism degree from Northwestern University, after which she moved to Philadelphia to live with her sister and worked at *Harper's Bazaar* in New York. The older sister was then an aspiring director (she's had sev-