



# **100 BOLLYWOOD FILMS**

**BFI SCREEN GUIDES**

**Rachel Dwyer**



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To the menagerie:  
SEMPER FIDELIS

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## Introduction

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The films in this volume have been chosen for different reasons. The only common ground is that they should be recognisable as a 'Bollywood' or a Hindi film. I suggest the following parameters: the films are produced in India, their language is Hindi (or Urdu) and they had a theatrical release across the usual distribution circuits of (north) India.

Although this is not a selection of the '100 best' films, some of the movies here are widely held to be 'better' than others, in terms of structure, style, acting and other features that would be recognisable to those who know other cinemas. Perhaps one could suggest that the films of Bimal Roy, Guru Dutt, Mani Ratnam and some outstanding films (such as *Sholay* [1975], *Deewaar* [1975], *Pakeezah* [1971]) could be assessed under the umbrella term 'world cinema', where despite their noticeable differences from other cinemas, they can be appraised on some of the same critical and aesthetic terms.

Yet to those unfamiliar with Hindi cinema, some of the films in this volume do not look like 'good' movies, yet most of them would be regarded as such by their audiences. There is no defined aesthetics of Hindi cinema, but these films share noticeable features, such as the use of melodrama and heightened emotion, especially around the family, an engaging narrative, stars, a certain *mise en scène*, usually one of glamour, grandiloquent dialogues and the all-important songs. These are therefore the topics upon which I have focused in my discussion, as indicators of why these films are significant.

The pleasures of cinema, as of other art forms, are complex, and it is never easy to analyse people's responses to films. Box-office success should be noted as it suggests that the audiences found these films to be

'good', although we do not usually know for what reasons. Statistics for Bollywood films are notoriously unreliable as figures are said to be 'adjusted', in the face of rampant piracy, but I have taken into account films that were clearly major hits.

Another criterion for selection is the film's importance in the history of Hindi cinema. For example, *Bobby* (1973), a film that would deserve inclusion by any of my criteria, also brought in the 'love as friendship' theme which flourished in the 1990s; *Lagaan* (2001) for its 'Oscar' success; *Hum aapke hain koun...!* (1994) for its marketing; *Dilwale dulhania le jayenge* (1995) for Hindi film and the diaspora (and for its 500-week run in India); *Dil chahta hai* (2001) for changing style within the Hindi movie format, and so on.

I have omitted silent films, although they are foundational to Indian cinema history, on several grounds. Few silents were made in Bombay and to call them 'Hindi' films is wildly inaccurate. Were I to choose any examples, Phalke's work would have been the obvious choice, but we do not have complete versions of his films. Other films might have been *Shiraz* (1928) or *Light of Asia* (1926) but these are English films, as a very basic grasp of lip-reading shows. All India's remaining silent films are available in the Film and Television Archives of India in Pune and can be watched over a few days. They may be of historical interest but I am not sure how many would count as good cinema.

The important talkie cinema of pre-independent India is under-represented here, as it is only gradually becoming available beyond the Archives. While many films are lost, including *Alam ara* (1931), India's first talkie, some studios' outputs are fairly well preserved, notably those of Calcutta's New Theatres, Bombay Talkies and Pune's Prabhat Studios. Prabhat Studios have issued many of their films with subtitles on VHS and VCD. However, some of the work of New Theatres and Prabhat is excluded on the grounds of language (Bengali and Marathi respectively), and only their Hindi films (mostly made in parallel to the Bengali or Marathi versions) may be considered. The hugely influential Bombay Talkies which spawned Filmistan has only two films here, while Prabhat has only one, as some of

their best features were in Marathi only (*Sant Tukaram* [1936], *Ramshastrī* [1944], *Sant Dnyaneshwar*); New Theatres made some of the key early films (*Vidyapati* [1937], *Chandidas* [1927], *Devdas*) and nurtured major talent such as K. L. Saigal, Prithviraj Kapoor and Bimal Roy, but I have included the work of these figures only once they had moved to Bombay.

It is hard not to allow the 1950s to dominate, as this was the era in which so many classic films were made and the great directors Mehboob Khan, Bimal Roy, Raj Kapoor and Guru Dutt were at their peak. The 1970s was also an extraordinarily fertile period when, alongside the great Salim–Javed films for Amitabh Bachchan, there was also the middle-class cinema of film-makers such as Hrishikesh Mukherjee, while the ‘parallel cinema’ also had a productive decade.

I have tried to include key figures – directors, stars, music directors, writers – throughout the selection, but I have also tried not to let any one of them dominate. If the list were of ‘good’ films or my favourites, there would have been more films by Raj Kapoor, Guru Dutt, Bimal Roy and Yash Chopra. Some key figures feature surprisingly infrequently, in particular those who have become important since the 1990s, while there is a disproportionate number of Salim–Javed films. The latter are foundational to the modern Hindi cinema, were huge hits, widely held to be ‘good’ films and set a standard which has rarely been equalled. Amitabh Bachchan starred in most of their films and, as he also acted in many of the middle-class films of Hrishikesh Mukherjee, he has by far the greatest number of entries in the volume. Yet I had to leave some of his films out and still regret missing some, such as *Coolie* (1983) and *Naseeb* (1981).

The ‘parallel’ or ‘middle’ cinema does not belong in this book, as it was produced, distributed and exhibited on different circuits from the others, and has hardly any connection with the mainstream cinema. Were I to pick films just for being ‘good’, this group would be more highly represented. Even Shyam Benegal, one of the most important film-makers and intellectuals in the Indian film industry, has only one film in this selection despite having made many ‘good’ films. Although Benegal’s films are privately produced and many had theatrical releases,

they are viewed as a separate form of cinema, a type of realist cinema that is close to that government-sponsored cinema of the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC). I have included only one NFDC-funded film, *Jaane bhi do yaaro* (1983) as it has reached wide audiences and is always cited as a landmark.

Satyajit Ray is internationally recognised as India's greatest film-maker and is certainly one of my favourite directors. He made only one Hindi film (apart from his film for television, *Sadgati* [1981]), which was *Shatranj ke khiladi* (1977). This is a great film but I have not included it here, as Ray's films belong to an entirely different tradition of film-making in terms of production and distribution. (I was amazed to find that many of the younger generation of Hindi film-makers who know their Hollywood movies have not seen a single film by Ray.)

I am not a connoisseur of Hindi B-movies, but they are not a part of the history of mainstream cinema. They have their own separate circuits of production, distribution and exhibition. In recent years, the horror movies of the Ramsay brothers have generated their own cult following, for films such as *Bandh darwaza* (1990), *Do gaz zamin ke neeche* (1972) and *Purana mandir* (1984). No one would call them 'good cinema', however.

I had thought of leaving out films that are not generally accessible, but I have included a couple (for example, *Phool* [1944] and *Khazanchi* [1941]), as these may soon join the others in becoming available on VCD and DVD. Most of the films in this book are available at least on VCD, with many on DVD (the latter have English subtitles and are more expensive). One of the great pleasures of writing this book was rewatching the films on DVD, as I had previously seen many of them only on low-quality VHS where the image was spoilt by advertising, the sound was poor and I saw them when my knowledge of Hindi was very limited.

## 'Bollywood'

There has been controversy over the name 'Bollywood' for some time now. Several voices in the industry have expressed a dislike for the term, as it implies that Hindi cinema is a derivation of Hollywood and thus an



insulting term. The etymology of the word is clearly from 'Hollywood', the word that all round the world signifies 'cinema'. Hollywood is the centre of the largest film industry in the world in terms of distribution, budgets and global impact, and has created much of the world's cinema style. Indian cinema is not entirely indigenous (its supposed connections with Sanskrit drama and folk traditions are highly exaggerated) but it is a hybrid form that has been influenced heavily by other cinemas, in particular that of Hollywood, as well as by photography, painting, theatre, narrative forms and popular music, none of which can be described as 'purely' Indian. However, this hybridity does not mean that it is entirely derivative or imitative, but that it has evolved its own sense of style and form.

There is some dispute as to the origins of the term 'Bollywood'. It seems that the first use of 'Tollywood', to mean the cinema made in the Calcutta suburb of Tollygunge, dates back to 1932. (Madhava Prasad, 'This Thing Called Bollywood', <[www.india-seminar.com/2003/525/525%20madhava%20prasad.htm](http://www.india-seminar.com/2003/525/525%20madhava%20prasad.htm)>, viewed 8 March 2005.) Prasad suggests that it is unlikely that Bombay cinema would have become known as Bollywood without this detour via Tollywood. Perhaps it is after the word Bollywood was coined that we find terms like 'Nollywood' used to mean 'Nigerian cinema' and 'Lollywood' employed to describe 'cinema made in Lahore; Pakistani cinema'.

We can quibble with the 'B' in 'Bollywood'. This cinema is not made only in Bombay (or, since 1995, Mumbai). Much of it has been produced in other cities (for example, Prabhat Studios in Pune made bilingual films in Marathi and Hindi), so this restriction would exclude films such as *Aadmi* (1939), *Padosi* (1941) and *Duniya na mane*, and most of K. L. Saigal's films, as he made them in Calcutta with New Theatres (including the 1935 *Devdas*), along with several by Prithviraj Kapoor and P. C. Barua; it would also exclude the Hindi films made in the Madras studios (such as *Ram aur Shyam*), and those made in the Lahore studios before independence, such as *Khazanchi*.

If we discard the term 'Bollywood', then what do we call this cinema? Hindi cinema? This opens up another can of worms. Many films

are classed as Urdu films (right up to and including *Junglee* [1961]). Should it be called the Hindi-Urdu cinema? Would anyone recognise that term? If English continues to make inroads into Indian cinema, will it become English cinema, even if it follows the style of the former? If the actors say 'I love you' in English, is it still Hindi-Urdu cinema? What about the fact that all the publicity and advertising is in English, along with many of the film magazines? How would we then exclude forms of Hindi cinema that are produced and distributed in a different circuit from the cinema examined here? Do we call it 'commercial' cinema? Would I call it 'art' cinema and 'commercial' cinema? But does that not mean that one is creative and worthy of being called 'art', whereas the other is interested in money at the expense of art?

So the appellation 'Bollywood' is problematic, but so are the other terms. While some in the industry and outside think it is insulting, why does it prevail? 'Bollywood' is a recognised term in the UK and US where this book is to be distributed (though it may well be called Hindi in the Indian edition). Indeed this may be part of the problem with the term 'Bollywood', as it is promoted by the NRIs (non-resident Indians) whose culture is deeply problematic for many Indians. It has also been taken up by westerners (with an entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary*), which also causes cultural hand-wringing as to whether this is another form of neo-colonialism.

'Bollywood' is not a term I use myself. I don't like its clichéd humour, and to me it means *masala* film, a film that has some sense of kitsch. Many of the films I have selected in this volume are by no means 'Bollywood' film in my understanding of the term.

However, I do not think the term is an insult. Hindi cinema is a unique form, with its own structures of production and distribution, its own audiences and its own narratives and style. It is a form of cinema that has always had an international audience but is becoming truly global, and it is one that is undergoing enormous changes. It is a cinema that I prefer to most others, and one which I find intellectually engaging as well as pleasurable. However, it is better that in 'Bollywood' it has a

brand name that is internationally recognized rather than continuing to struggle for recognition but missing the mark. I shall continue to call it Hindi cinema, even though that term itself is inaccurate. The term 'Bollywood' was not widely used when I began to study this cinema and I find habits hard to change. Whatever we call it, I hope this collection will add to other works in trying to define what makes this cinema.

I make no claim that the selection is entirely objective. I have included a few films I do not like because I think they have to be included by the criteria outlined above. Several other films fulfil these criteria but have not been included, because I have preferred others. There are new films appearing that mark a different kind of cinema, but time will only tell whether they are exceptions or are defining a trend.

Every reader will have another list of his or her own 100 films, and some will object to mine. I too shall probably wish to revise my selection in future. However, I have chosen this list carefully in conjunction with friends and colleagues. I hope it provokes debate and encourages people to see the films.

## Note

The spelling of names varies greatly from film to film, so the same person will appear in several different versions in the book: for example, Nasir Hussain may appear as Nasir Husain. Also, many films have been released with the same name.

The length of films varies as they have often been re-edited and shortened after release, or the overseas version may have been re-edited for DVD release.

Most films have four writers: for the story, the screenplay, the dialogue (usually dialogues in Indian English) and lyrics. Film credits may simply say 'written by' or just give the writer of the dialogue; it is generally assumed that, if no other contributors are mentioned, the story and screenplay are by the director.

## ***Aankhen***

India, 1993 – 177 mins

David Dhawan

---

*Aankhen* deserves its place in this collection both in its own right as one of the most successful Hindi films of all time and as an example of one of the most popular comedy teams of the 1990s, the pairing of the star Govinda and the director David Dhawan. Few successful films sustain comedy throughout, generally relying on comic episodes enacted either by the star, or comedians (such as Johnnie Walker or Johnny Lever).

Govinda, mostly in Dhawan's films, created his own style, often wacky, slapstick and somewhat downmarket, if not outright crude, in hits such as *Raja Babu* (1994), *Coolie No. 1* (1995) and *Hero No. 1* (1997).

Dhawan made hit films with other stars throughout the 1990s, notably Anil Kapoor (*Andaaz* [1944], *Loafer* [1996]) and Salman Khan (*Judwaa* [1997], *Biwi No. 1* [1999]), which make him one of the decade's most successful directors, while Govinda has become a major star (and also an MP).

In his earlier films, Govinda came to be regarded as vulgar, not least for his own (bad) taste in dance, gesture and garish clothing. Shobhaa Dé called him 'an obscenity' on account of his hip-thrusting and suggestive dancing. However, he is popularly known as the 'Virar ka chokra', the lad from the Bombay (downmarket) suburb Virar, and has always had a loyal audience among the 'masses' rather than the 'classes' (as the cinema audience is popularly divided). It took some time for Govinda to be appreciated as a comic star and a dancer but now he is seen as a one-man show, one of the few stars capable of holding together an otherwise mediocre film, and is praised by many as a great star. He was undoubtedly the greatest dancer in Hindi films in the 1990s, one of only a few who possess natural rhythm and style.

*Aankhen* spotlights these elements of Govinda's work, from his vulgar yet impeccably timed dancing in hugely catchy songs, such as 'O lal duppatewali', to his mad fast-talking dialogues and excellent comic

timing. Hindi films often use doubling (identical twins, lookalikes and so on), but *Aankhen* takes this device to its extremes. Govinda (Munnu) and Chunky Pandey (Bunnu) star as two good-for-nothing sons of a rich businessman, Hasmukh. They get caught up in a plot to replace the Chief Minister with his double, a villain transformed by plastic surgery; meanwhile Munnu's double, Gaurishankar (Govinda again), appears from a village to confuse Munnu's family and everyone in the town, while the real Munnu is mistaken for his double by the entire village. Hasmukh's long-lost identical twin appears and helps the others to catch the criminals. A monkey is another member of the Munnu–Bunnu comedy team, enjoying a more interesting and developed role than the female stars (Raageshwari, Ritu Shivpuri).

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**Dir.:** David Dhawan; **Story/Scr./Dial.:** Anees Bazmee; **DOP:** Siba Mishra; **Music:** Bappi Lahiri; **Lyrics:** Indivar; **Selected Cast:** Govinda, Chunky Pandey, Raj Babbar, Shilpa Shirodkar, Raageshwari, Gulshan Grover; **Prod. Co.:** Chiragdeep International; Colour.

## ***Abhimaan***

India, 1973 – 125 mins

Hrishikesh Mukherjee

In some ways an Indian version of *A Star is Born* (1954), *Abhimaan* is the story of the famous singer Subir (Amitabh Bachchan), who is publicly acclaimed but has a fragile ego and is lonely apart from his one friend, Chandru (Asrani), and his girlfriend (or not – it is never quite clear) Chitra (Bindu). He receives late-night phone calls from his female fans. He drinks and works but his life is empty. When he visits his Mausi ('Aunt', played by Durga Khote), who has brought him up, he falls in love with a village girl Uma (Jaya Bhaduri), who has been taught to sing by her father (A. K. Hangal). She is a classically trained singer who even teases Subir about his popular style. He invites her to sing a duet at their wedding reception, where one of his friends (David) notices that she is the better singer. Uma begins her career as a recording artist by singing with him but soon producers want her to give solo performances at a higher fee than her husband, and fans mob her rather than him. This tension over work leads to tension at home, and he abuses her and drinks heavily even though she offers to stop singing. She returns to her father, while he picks up his relationship with Chitra. Only when she loses their unborn baby does he ask for forgiveness. However, her depression is so severe that she can no longer respond to him let alone sing. Subir sings their famous duet 'Tere mere milan ki yeh raina', and finally persuades her to sing it with him on stage.

A film about singers needs a special score, which this film certainly has. Composed by the elderly S. D. Burman, it contains some hugely popular songs, with lyrics by Majrooh Sultanpuri. Among the hits, favourites include the song Kishore sings for Amitabh, and songs like 'Meet na mila re man ka', which although sung in a happy mode, suggests he conceals an inner loneliness. Two of the duets are particularly outstanding: their first, 'Teri bindiya re', in which Mohammed Rafi sings for Amitabh, and their 'theme song', 'Tere mere'.

However, the story is also sustained throughout the film, with memorable dialogues by the Hindi writer Rajinder Singh Bedi, which, along with the songs, help maintain a steady pace in the realistic portrayal of the pain and suffering the couple go through despite their great love for each other.

This is one of several films by Hrishikesh Mukherjee that pairs Amitabh Bachchan and Jaya Bhaduri, who acted together in other major hit films including *Zanjeer* (1973), *Sholay* (1975), *Silsila* (1981) and *Kabhi khushi kabhie gham* (2001). They married in real life a few months before the release of this film. They were one of the most popular screen couples, and although he is undoubtedly the greatest star in Indian film history, she was initially the bigger attraction, and it was often said that she had to stand down because she would have outshone him, though, of course, that is entirely speculative. However, for this film, it was Bhaduri who won the National Award, in the category of Best Actress (shared with Dimple Kapadia for *Bobby*). None the less it was also a great performance from Amitabh, who brought his pain and anger to the role as he did to all his roles, whether in middle-class cinema or in the Angry Young Man fighting films. There was strong support from veterans such as Durga Khote, who made her name in the early Prabhat films, and A. K. Hangal, whose latest appearance was in *Lagaan*, having acted in films over many decades.

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**Dir./Story:** Hrishikesh Mukherjee; **Scr.:** Nabendu Ghosh; **Dial.:** Rajinder Singh Bedi; **DOP:** Jaywant Pathare; **Music:** S. D. Burman; **Lyrics:** Majrooh Sultanpuri; **Selected Cast:** Amitabh Bachchan, Jaya Bhaduri, Durga Khote, A. K. Hangal, David; **Prod. Co.:** Amiya; Colour.

## *Achhut kanya*

India, 1936 – 142 mins

Franz Osten

Bombay Talkies (1934–54), founded by the western-educated and trained couple, Himanshu Rai and Devika Rani, nurtured major talents, including Gyan Mukherjee, Manto, Ashok Kumar, Dev Anand, Kamal Amrohi and Dilip Kumar. It was noted for its social films, including *Kangan* (1939) and *Kismet* (1943). Rai and Rani had both worked with film units in Germany before the Second World War and their studio employed several German personnel, including Franz Osten (who directed this film) and Joseph Wirsching (who was later the cameraman on *Pakeezah* [1971]).

Devika Rani was a major star when this film was released, but Ashok Kumar was just beginning his career (this was his second film). Although Devika Rani dazzled as ever (looking nothing like a rural girl), Ashok Kumar's appearance as the shy, awkward boy who falls in love with this fearless girl is memorable. It was felt that he looked too urban and sophisticated for the role (although it was clearly acceptable for Devika Rani to wear lipstick and have plucked eyebrows), so he wore *kurtas* that sparked a new trend among the young.

Kasturi (Devika Rani), the Dalit (so-called 'Untouchable') daughter ('Achhut kanya') of a railway signalman, falls in love with the Brahmin Mohan (Ashok Kumar), the grocer's son. After protests and violence from the villagers, they agree to marry others but ultimately Kasturi sacrifices her life under a train. The train features regularly in Indian cinema as a symbol of modernity and of the entrance of the new into the seemingly unchanging village world.

It is very unusual for Hindi cinema to take up the issue of caste. It is mentioned in passing in *Devdas*, where Paro and Devdas play different types of Brahmin, and again in Bimal Roy's *Sujata*. Although Gandhi had brought up the issue of the Harijans, as he called the Dalits, cinema did not follow his lead, preferring to gloss over caste and untouchability, as



indeed it has often avoided other major issues, such as widow remarriage and underage marriage, looking rather at broader social problems such as westernisation, arranged marriage, abandoned children and so on.

The film's music was composed by one of the few female music directors in the history of Hindi cinema, Saraswati Devi. Khursheed Manchersher Minocher-Homji took this pseudonym because of protests from the Parsi community and specifically from Parsis within Bombay Talkies. The hit song was 'Main ban ki chidiya banke ban ban bolun re'.

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**Dir.:** Franz Osten; **Story/Scr.:** Niranjan Pal; **Dial.:** J. S. Casshyap; **DOP:** Josef Wirsching;  
**Music:** Saraswati Devi; **Lyrics:** J. S. Casshyap; **Selected Cast:** Devika Rani, Ashok Kumar, P. F. Pithawala, Kamta Prasad; **Prod. Co.:** Bombay Talkies; Black and white.

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Ashok Kumar and Devika Rani in *Achhut kanya*

## ***Amar, Akbar, Anthony***

India, 1977 – 186 mins

Manmohan Desai

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This is one of the great *masala* films, a riotous blend of comedy, action and romance. Three boys are separated from their parents on Independence Day, when their father leaves them at the foot of a statue of Mahatma Gandhi; each one is subsequently brought up by different parents, one a Hindu (Amar – Vinod Khanna), one a Muslim (Akbar – Rishi Kapoor) and one a Christian (Anthony – Amitabh Bachchan). The family is separated although the mother (Nirupa Roy) knows Akbar and Anthony but, as she was blinded in an accident, does not realise they are her sons.

The fact that the boys' real parents are Hindus and the Hindu son is a policeman reinforces the underlying Hinduness of all Indians, although there is much lip-service to the religiosity of the Catholic priest and the sincere prayers of Akbar to Shirdi Sai Baba, whose devotees include Hindus and Muslims, which result in his blind mother's miraculous cure as two rays of light emanate from the eyes of the image. Thus begins the plot's denouement, but a great deal more must be untangled before the family can be reunited.

Romantic love remains divided by community (Amar falls for a Hindu girl, Lakshmi – Shabana Azmi; Akbar for Salma – Neetu Singh; and Anthony for Jenny – Parveen Babi), and while the Hindu's romance is sincere and reforming, the Muslim attracts the doctor by singing (camp) *qawwalis* ('Purdah re purdah') and bringing eunuchs to shame her father into permitting the romance ('Tayyab Ali, pyar ka dushman'). Amitabh Bachchan, in one of his greatest comic performances, takes on the role of the *tapori* or streetwise man, perfected in his stylised dialogue and his denim flares. His drunken scenes are much celebrated, but the wonderful moment during the Easter party at the Catholic gymkhana when he jumps out of an egg to sing 'My name is Anthony Gonsalves' is unforgettable.

The audience knows the whole story, while the characters only find out their origins later in the film: the credits roll as the three brothers are linked up to a machine unknown to medical science that transfuses blood from them directly to their mother, each unaware of the 'blood relationship'. The film's knowingness provides further fun: during the fight that restores order at the end of the film with Vinod Khanna, one of the great 1970s' heroes dressed as a 'one-man band', and the great Angry Young Man, Amitabh in a priest's costume, while Rishi Kapoor, the romantic hero of the 1970s, plays the accordion that is incorporated into the background score as 'fight' music. It also provides a song opportunity, with 'Anhonee ko honee'. A madcap, hilarious film, showing how much fun Hindi film comedy can be.

Manmohan Desai made some other wonderfully crazy films like *Naseeb* (1981) and *Coolie* (1983), which have some great moments, but *Amar, Akbar, Anthony* is one of my favourite films of all time.

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**Dir.:** Manmohan Desai; **Story:** Mrs J. M. Desai; **Scr.:** Prayag Raj; **Dial.:** Kadar Khan; **DOP:** Peter Pereira; **Music:** Laxmikant-Pyarelal; **Lyrics:** Anand Bakshi; **Selected Cast:** Vinod Khanna, Rishi Kapoor, Amitabh Bachchan, Neetu Singh, Shabana Azmi, Parveen Babi, Nirupa Roy; **Prod. Co.:** MKD Films; Colour.