Aristotle Did Not Make It to India: Narrative Modes in Hindi Cinema

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The way Bollywood 'tells its stories' is usually considered as being quite different from Western modes of narration. Storytelling in Hindi cinema (a more accurate term than the popular 'Bollywood') is often associated with three-hour films, many musical numbers only loosely connected to the rest of the film, conventional love stories and happy endings. This view is a common cliché of Bollywood, especially outside of India. This cliché also regards storytelling in Bollywood as a distinctively Indian peculiarity. The purpose of this chapter is not only to outline a view of storytelling in Hindi cinema, but also to answer the question of how much of this specific narrative mode can be seen as specifically Indian.

Mode of narration/ways of reception

In Indian fiction film two modes of narration can be found: one is commercial filmmaking, mostly in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu and other Indian languages; the other is called Middle or New Indian Cinema. These two modes differ significantly in the way film production is organised, stories are told and the way the audience is addressed. Both modes are characterised by a set of conventions and can be identified quite easily. Hindi cinema (and commercial cinema in other Indian languages) mostly targets a domestic and diasporian audience, whereas Middle cinema finds its audiences at international film festivals outside of India.

Those two modes of narration have their own history and are constantly shaped by economic, sociological and political developments in India. In the films of the

so-called Golden Age from 1947 until the early 1960s, elements of both modes can be found. The only films that differ completely in style and narration are those made by Satyajit Ray, who directed his first film *Pather Panchali* in 1955. But the division into those two modes can be observed since 1969, when the first films financed by the official Film Finance Corporation (FFC) were released. *Buhuvan Shome* (Mirnal Sen) and *Uski Roti* (Mani Kaul) are regarded as the beginning of the Indian 'new wave', the 'New Indian Cinema' (see Prasad 1998: 122–3).

In the years since 1998, when the Indian government finally granted Bollywood cinema official industry status, a shift in the mode of production of Hindi films can be observed – often termed 'corporisation' – that is heavily influencing their way of storytelling (see Dudrah 2006: 148). But before examining this recent shift, I want to sketch out how 'classical Bollywood cinema' – as I would like to term Hindi cinema from 1947 to the mid-1990s – tells its stories.

Heterogeneous manufactory

In a nod to Karl Marx, M. Madhava Prasad calls the mode of production of Hindi cinema a 'heterogeneous manufactory' (as opposed to the serial manufactory of Hollywood). This mode is defined as follows:

> The whole is assembled from parts produced separately by specialists, rather than being centralized around the processing of a given material, as in serial or organic manufacture. This is of significance to the status of the 'story' in the Hindi film. (1998: 32)

The most significant trait of Hindi cinema is not the way it tells its stories, but the status of the story itself in the film. Whereas in classical Hollywood cinema everything is submitted to the narrative (at least in the account of its most prominent scholar, David Bordwell; see Bordwell 1985: 53), in Hindi cinema the story is only one of many elements of the film.

Prasad continues to define the status of the screenplay and therefore the story in Hindi cinema:

> The written script, which enabled 'disjunctive shooting schedules' and other measures aimed at economy and efficiency and necessitating the division of the task of writing into several stages is one factor of extreme importance to the Hollywood production process, whereas everyone who writes on Bombay cinema notes that this is conspicuous by its absence there. (1998: 44)

The elements of a Hindi film therefore are not integrated as tightly as in classical Hollywood cinema, because they are developed more or less separately and are not organised and coordinated by the screenplay.

How Indian are Hindi films?

Some of these elements therefore may be considered as isolated from or – with regard to the development of the plot – as 'interrupting' the flow of narrative information. Lalitha Gopalan calls Indian popular cinema a 'cinema of interruption' and she mostly refers to the musical numbers and the intermission in every Hindi film (2002: 16). The intermission is a significant dramaturgical device for almost every Hindi film and is one of the characteristics of Indian cinema culture. People are used to leaving the projection room to eat, drink and talk and then return to a more plot-driven second half. In classical Bollywood cinema the first half is lavishly used for exposition and music, and later in the second half the plot has to come to its closure. So as a rule there are more musical numbers in the first half than in the second (see Tieber 2007: 61).

But musical numbers do not necessarily stop or interrupt the plot the way the interval does; 'They provide commentary on the story, and regularly contribute plot developments', Gregory Booth writes (2000: 126). Even if musical numbers are considered an interruption of the plot, they cannot be regarded as an Indian particularity *per se*. In structural as well as in narratological terms, these musical numbers are equivalent to those in Hollywood film musicals and are therefore not necessarily indigenous.

Another approach to emphasise the specific 'Indianness' of these films comes from Vijay Mishra (1985) who argues that the narrative structure of the *Mahabharata* is the model for the narrative structure of Hindi films; the epic should therefore be further examined in these terms. The problem with this approach is that the *Mahabharata* consists of not one single story, but of a whole collection of stories, an epic told in episodes. I would suggest that the way these episodes tell their stories is not significantly different from Western narratives. The plotlines themselves do not differ very much from Western ones. The influence of Western melodramatic theatre and literature of the nineteenth century should be added to the counter arguments (see Vasudevan 1995); this influence can be considered as strong as that of the great epics, at least in narratological terms.

Unity of action versus 'convolutions of plot'

But Mishra's argument mostly hints at the specific way in which Hindi cinema combines plotlines. Hindi films are often seen as a chaos of multiple plots without any unity of action. One of Bollywood's most famous opponents, Satyajit Ray, once called it a 'penchant for convolutions of plot and counter-plot rather than simple unidirectional narrative' (1994: 23).

The three classical unities that Aristotle demanded from every tragedy are rarely found in films, wherever they are made. The unity of time and place is a demand which Bollywood often ignores; the unity of action is also challenged. Screenwriting

manuals are full of advice to keep the plot simple, not to use too many plotlines and to end every one of them satisfactorily. But such manuals as well as screenwriting courses arrived in India only recently. In most Bollywood films a unity of action cannot be found. This can be partially explained by the above-mentioned dramaturgy of the interval. In this way of storytelling, a completely new plotline in the second half of the film is not unusual at all. The beginning of such a second plotline usually takes place at the end of the first half, to ensure that the audience will want to come back to the cinema after the interval. Whereas in Hollywood cinema plotlines are usually told in parallel and are interwoven in the end, in Bollywood it is a common practice to tell one story after the other and connect them only loosely. But to call the narrative form of Hindi films 'a convolution of plots' is massively exaggerating. The storytelling can be described far more accurately as a mode of Hindi films in terms of interruption and continuity, as Gopalan does. Even if the elements that Gopalan defines as interrupting can in fact be considered as contributing to the plot much more than is noticed in general, these elements are only 'attractions' or spectacular, highly emotional situations – be it a music number or a comic interlude. They cannot be regarded as plotlines in their own right. In fact there are seldom more than two plotlines in a Hindi film, so there is not much difference to a Hollywood film. The difference lies in the chronology of plotlines, not in their quantity.

My objective here is to take a closer look at some specifics of storytelling in Hindi cinema, to analyse these aspects of classical Bollywood cinema and finally to ask if, how and why they were changed by developments that have taken place in the last ten years. These aspects are:

- the relation of story and plot; the effectiveness of storytelling
- Indian heroes or the question of protagonists with or without a goal
- intertextuality as a storytelling device and the question of religion
- the influence of nineteenth-century Western melodrama

The effectiveness of storytelling

One of the main distinctions in narratology is the one between story and plot (or *syuzhet* and *fabula*, if one prefers the Russian formalist version, made popular by David Bordwell). Story is defined as 'the set of all the events in a narrative, both the ones explicitly presented and those the viewer infers' (Bordwell & Thompson 2003: 70). On the other hand plot 'is used to describe everything visibly and audibly present in the film before us' (2003: 71). That means that much of the story is not shown. The temporal gaps between two parts of the plot are usually called ellipses. Every relationship between story and plot is possible – at least in theory.

A narrative mode can also be regarded as a distinct relationship between story and plot. In classical Hollywood cinema this relationship is a very efficient one, where as little plot as possible is used to tell a big story. Screenwriting manuals constantly

advise screenwriters to avoid scenes that are not essential for the development of the plot. This is just another way to describe the very economic ratio between story and plot.

In classical Bollywood cinema, less story information is left out. Much more plot is used to tell the story. This is not only a question of length: there is a tradition in Hindi cinema of telling the whole backstory of the protagonists, mostly their childhood and youth. This backstory is not necessarily told at the beginning of a film; it may be shown as a flashback somewhere in the middle of the film. In a Hollywood film this scene would last only a couple of minutes; in classical Bollywood cinema such backstories usually last for half an hour or even longer. These parts became such a convention that Sudhanva Deshpande noticed that the 'new hero' of Hindi cinema 'is someone without a past and consequently without memory' (2005: 187).

Classical Bollywood cinema tells a story from the very beginning until the very end. Not necessarily in that order, but almost nothing is left out. This is one of the reasons why sequels are very rare. Bollywood started to make economically successful sequels only in the last five to ten years. These films were made possible by a shift in the narrative mode of classical Bollywood cinema and therefore can be considered a defining element of post-classical Bollywood, as I would like to call it. Storytelling in classical Bollywood cinema can therefore be described as baroque (see Thomas 1985: 117) or endlessly meandering. Screenwriter and lyricist Javed Akthar addresses exactly that matter with the following definition: 'The difference between Bollywood and a Western film is that between a novel and a short story' (cited in Thomas 1985: 123).

Heroes, anti-heroes, goals and desires

According to David Bordwell and most screenwriting manuals, the goal-oriented hero is one of the trademarks of Hollywood cinema. A Hollywood plot is driven by the actions of a (usually male) hero to achieve his goal. The relation of this type of character to a genuine bourgeois and American ideology is obvious (see Bordwell, Staiger & Thompson 1997). Looking at classical Bollywood cinema, the issue of the goal-oriented protagonist raises a lot of questions. First of all: can such an active agent be found in most of the films?

One of the most popular characters in Hindi cinema is Devdas. Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's novel (1917) has been adapted many times; the film directed by Bimal Roy in 1955 is probably the best-known version. Devdas is in love with Paru, but he is not allowed to marry her because of caste differences. For most of the film Devdas is shown as an unhappy lover who tries to forget his sorrow with the help of alcohol. He is a rather passive agent of his fortune; the only thing he achieves in the end is his return to his home village, where he dies. The character was so popular that 'being a Devdas' became a popular phrase for being a passive alcoholic without much will to live. Of course there are a number of Hollywood films that deal with alcoholism

– from the 1950s on, when the power of the Production Code waned and the discussion of issues like that became possible without risking box office failure. But there is no similar passive character in Hollywood cinema with comparable popularity.

In classical Bollywood cinema, Devdas is not the exception, but the rule. Guru Dutt is passive and suffering in most of his films, Raj Kapoor is the object of a social experiment in *Awara* (Raj Kapoor, 1951), and a tramp who became the (more or less passive) victim of a gang of con artists in *Shree 420* (Kapoor, 1955). The case of *Mother India* (Mehboob Khan, 1957) is more complex because in its second half, Birju, in his raid for his mother's wedding ornaments, may be seen as a goal-oriented hero. Radha herself, the character that gives the film its title, has no goal whatsoever.

All these characters are mostly passive and do not have any recognisable goal, at least not one that would structure the plot. All occurrences just happen to them, they do not strive towards any defined goal. Even after this short overview of some of classical Bollywood's best known films, it can be stated that the goal-oriented hero we know from Hollywood was rather hard to find in Indian cinema until the early 1960s – at least not in most parts of a film. As Ravi Vasudevan writes 'the capable, goal-centred hero of American mainstream cinema … is often stated in the Hindi film – with local inflections – but at a later point in the narrative' (1989: 31).

In terms of class, the goal-oriented hero in Hollywood cinema and in Western cinema in general is fuelled by the ideology of the bourgeois subject, who is master of their own fate. The character therefore is mostly embedded in a bourgeois environment. In classical Bollywood cinema, bourgeois characters are almost completely absent from the screen. The above-mentioned characters are either aristocrats like Devdas, or tramps, outcasts of society (but not 'untouchables', *dalits*, who are absent from popular Indian cinema) like the Raj Kapoor character, or peasants like the ones in *Mother India*. Mehboob Khan's *Andaz* (1949) is one of the few films from the Golden Age that deal with bourgeois characters – but in this film the characters stay passive as in an Anton Chekhov play.

The first characters in Hindi cinema that had a clearly defined goal to be achieved by any means were those played by Amitabh Bachchan in the 1970s. Bachchan's 'angry young man' persona successfully mixed elements of gangster film, social critique and personal charisma. Most of the characters Bachchan played were proletarians: coolies, mine workers and so on. Although public morals forbade that the Bachchan character wins at the end, he was the perfect active agent of the plot. His actions propelled the narration forward – he was the driving force. The action-packed type of film that Bachchan made famous in India went on until the 1980s, when it slowly lost its audience. The action genre, if one wants to call it that, petered out.

In the 1990s the Indian middle class became an internationally registered phenomenon. The middle class grew to a size that made it interesting for foreign economic investors as well as for the Indian film industry (see Dwyer 2000: 58–95). The initial films of the renaissance of the so-called 'feudal family romance' (Prasad 1998: 64) either presented protagonists who were completely passive, like the ones in *Hum*

Aapke Hain Koun (Sooraj R. Barjatya, 1994) or showed heroes that needed the whole first half of the film to find their goal, such as Raj in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (Aditya Chopra, 1995). But from this moment onward, the Indian middle class began to dominate Hindi cinema in every way. The characters on the screen were middle class, or more precisely, a fantasy of a middle class that was shared by most of its real members. The protagonists of these films as well as the films themselves were modelled more and more on Hollywood formulas and with an international audience in mind. This means that they reached their goal and achieved it with a happy ending. (Before the 1990s happy endings in Hindi films were not as endemic as in Hollywood.)

Before analysing this shift into a post-classical Bollywood, I want to reflect on the changing type of protagonist in Hindi cinema. As much as the goal-oriented protagonist of most classical Hollywood films represents the dominant ideology of the bourgeois subject who is the master of his own fate, the Indian equivalent can only represent an Indian ideology. In the decades after independence, individualism was not very popular in a state that was officially called secular, but where religion played an important part in many ways. Secularism means something different in the Indian context: it is not the absence of religion, but a proposed 'peace treaty' between religions.

So it will not come as a surprise that in this ideological environment there was no room and no need for a goal-oriented protagonist to propagate individual initiative and self-responsibility. This is made quite clear by scenes in which religion directly influences the plot. In Hindi cinema religion is not a special character trait as it is in Hollywood, but something that actually works, with little or great wonders, from making blind people see as in *Amar Akbhar Anthony* (Manmohan Desai, 1977) to bringing back the strength of the protagonist by simple religious signs as in *Mother India* (see Chatterjee 2002: 56). In a setting where turning points can be induced by religion (which would be regarded as mere coincidences in Western cinema and therefore as bad filmmaking) there just is not a need for an active agent.

It is interesting to observe that the arrival of the active agent in Hindi cinema happens in the shape of a proletarian hero, instead of a bourgeois protagonist. This can be explained by India's social development of the 1970s. The industrialisation plans of Jawaharlal Nehru produced a growing working class (see Guha 2007), whereas the Indian middle class achieved an economically relevant size only in the 1990s. Classical Hindi cinema always tried to find the biggest possible audience for its films. Therefore it had an integrating function in Indian society. The Bachchan films of the 1970s were clearly aimed at a male urban proletarian audience, but they also reached other classes. People who believed in Indian independence were frustrated when the government got itself involved in corruption scandals and their former hopes faded away. In this situation – especially during the Emergency of 1975–77, when political activities like strikes or rallies were forbidden – an active protagonist on the screen could fulfil at least a few hopes and dreams for this kind of audience.

The final shift of the hero in Hindi cinema came with the rise of the new middle class. The possibility to combine West and East, represented usually by the character of a Non-Resident Indian (NRI), is the dominant ideological subtext of the 'feudal family romance' films since the mid-1990s. In these films individualistic ideology and personal success are no longer regarded as contradicting traditional 'Indian' values, such as arranged marriage or Hindi rituals. In short, the sociological and political developments in India since independence have heavily influenced Hindi cinema, its characters and its ways of storytelling.

Intertextuality

One of the main characteristics of Hindi cinema is the heavy use of intertextuality in its storytelling. Intertextuality of course is a narrative device found in films around the world, but the specific way it is used, as well as the amount and visibility of this use, can be regarded as an Indian particularity.

Intertextuality in Indian cinema is mostly connected with the use of the two big epics for storytelling purposes. The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, with their legions of characters and stories, are used in different ways and for different purposes. Here I focus on the verbal references to the epics: the naming of characters, dialogue references and visual signs, both pictures and statues. I do not refer to undisguised representation of gods or other characters from the epics, or to adaptations of stories taken from one of the big epics (for this topic see Dwyer 2006).

The names of characters in Hindi cinema bear great significance; in most cases they directly refer to a character from the *Mahabharata* or the *Ramayana*. The name itself can inform the audience about the type of character they are confronted with for the next three hours. An Arjun will seldom be a villain; a Sita will always be a good loving wife, and so on. Hindi cinema is able to reveal a lot more about its characters with these mythological and religious names than Hollywood is.

Another way of addressing the epics is even more direct. Their characters and/or scenes are explicitly referred to in dialogue. For example let's take *Deewaar* (Yash Chopra, 1975): when Ravi, the good brother who is now a police officer, is about to pursue his gangster brother, knowing that in the end he will have to kill him, his girlfriend reminds him of what God told Arjun. In the *Mahabharata* Arjun has doubts about going to war against a part of his own family, but God tells him to go and fight for justice and *dharma*. In the plot the short dialogue of this scene not only has the task of destroying Ravi's doubts and present him as a believing Hindu, while showing his brother as an unbeliever – it also tells the audience how to comprehend the whole situation and so bestows it with a greater significance. This direct commentary is a common device in Hindi cinema. The audience is told how to read a scene, how to interpret the situation with the help of the two big epics.

The connection to the epics can also be pointed out by pictures or statues. For instance in the famous scene from *Mother India*, where Radha walks to the house of

the money-lender, the statue of Lakhsmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth, is treated in the scene as if she were a real person. Parts of the scene are edited in classic shot/reverse-shot tradition, as if Lakshmi is indeed talking to Radha.

Targeting a Western audience, as Hindi films of the early twenty-first century aim to do, renders this specific type of intertextuality useless. Most people of the Western hemisphere cannot be expected to be familiar with the Indian epics. Nevertheless the use of intertextuality as a narrative device can also be found in a 'secularised' way. This starts with the above-mentioned *Deewaar*, where pictures of Ghandi and Nehru comment on the events that are happening in front of them. 'Secular' intertextuality in Hindi films can also be found in other ways. In *Life in a Metro* (Anurag Basu, 2007), a character makes his first appearance in front of a poster of *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005) and later on has homosexual intercourse (again with the poster in the background). In this case the intertextual reference to a popular Hollywood film is used to foreshadow the character's real self.

But in the Indian context, intertextuality is not a tricky sophisticated game, just a way to tell a story, to comment on the characters and events, and most of all an attempt to provide the whole film with a deeper meaning. Gregory Booth sums up the intertextual functions of the epics in Hindi cinema, stating that the epic content 'usually forms a secondary or allusory subtext rather than primary text' (1995: 173). In another essay Booth writes that the connection to the epics is not necessarily understood in religious terms: 'such reference does not automatically consign … to a category that most Indians would identify as religious' (2000: 129). Reference to the epics therefore can be regarded as a storytelling device.

Melodrama

It is a commonplace that Hindi cinema tells its stories in a very melodramatic way, that is, heavily influenced by Western melodrama from the nineteenth century. The criteria of this melodramatic mode of storytelling can be summed up as follows: 'The system of dramaturgy is a melodramatic one, displaying the characteristic ensemble of manichaeism, bipolarity, the privileging of the moral over the psychological, and the deployment of coincidence' (Vasudevan 1995: 307). That way Hindi cinema could also be described as the last remaining outpost of Western melodramatic narration, which is hard to find anywhere else (except in 'dead' art forms like the opera).

The melodramatic side of Hindi cinema was always under critical attack by advocates of a more realistic and socially conscious cinema. In India this discussion commenced most prominently between Nargis, the star of *Mother India* and Satyajit Ray, India's best-known film director. As Rosie Thomas (1985) demonstrates, the arguments in this debate were created in India and then transported to Europe and the USA, where they still constitute the core of anti-Bollywood clichés.

As much as Hindi cinema is loved specifically for its melodramatic aspects, films that want to reach a Western audience and middle to higher class audiences in

India turn towards a more realistic way of filmmaking – a development that can be observed since the late 1990s. But before we have a look at these shifts, I want to sum up the characteristics of classical Bollywood cinema.

According to Rosie Thomas, Hindi cinema is a genre 'in which narrative is comparably loose and fragmented, realism irrelevant, psychological characterization disregarded, elaborate dialogue prized, music essential, and both the emotional involvement of the audience and the pleasure of sheer spectacle privileged throughout the three-hour duration of the entertainment' (1995: 162). Most scholars agree on these specifics that distinguish classical Bollywood from its American counterpart. Their discussions focus on the reasons for these differences and on the assessment of them as either being escapist, shallow fare or an alternative form of commercial cinema that should be taken seriously.

Before presenting economic and organisational issues as the main reason for these differences, I have to state that the view of classical Hollywood cinema that Bollywood is constantly compared to can verge on superficial. In this comparison, an idealised vision of Hollywood filmmaking is often implied that never really existed. One of the 'collateral' results of research in the field of Indian cinema is the possibility of looking at Hollywood cinema in a new de-familiarised way. With a Bollywood-trained view you can detect many elements of classical Hollywood cinema that were missed for quite a while, for example, overstating the tight structures and norms and conventions that classical Hollywood cinema is supposed to adhere to.

I have already argued that the political and ideological circumstances in India made it difficult and rather useless for a goal-driven protagonist to become an essential factor in Hindi cinema. This also has formative consequences for the narrative structure of Hindi cinema. The most important reasons for the specific form of narration in Hindi films are the position of narration itself in the production process and the expectations of the audience.

Filmmaking, especially commercial filmmaking, is always a collaborative process. In Hollywood this process is controlled and organised by the screenplay. It does not matter if the screenplay is written by just one or by many screenwriters. Filmmakers discuss a screenplay before the shooting of a film begins. They not only argue about certain plot twists or lines of dialogue; they also discuss the whole film, and they want their version to be written down in the screenplay in order to ensure that the film is made the way they want it. The screenplay is more or less the blueprint of the film.

In classical Bollywood cinema the production process differs significantly from the practice in Hollywood. In most cases a written screenplay does not even exist. The story of the film is told in many so-called 'narrations' (see Tieber 2007: 45) to the director, composer and the stars. The composer does not necessarily know the accurate plot when he writes the music scenes. The lyricist may not know the exact situation in which his song is heard. A music number may be inserted into the film after general shooting just to have enough songs for the CD, the music rights having

been sold in advance to finance the film. The integration of the different elements during the production process of a film is clearly visible in the finished product. This is not necessarily an indication of bad filmmaking: in Indian film culture the narrative is just another part of the film. Its less important status – as compared to Hollywood films – is one of the preconditions for multiple viewings of a film, which is a common habit in India.

The influence of this specific organisation of production on the narrative structure of films becomes even more visible when this mode changes. After the 1998 government recognition of the film business as an 'official industry', production firms could become corporations allowed to borrow money from banks. This decision signified a shift of official politics towards the film industry. This development occurred due to the economic success and international recognition of popular Indian films. The government also wanted to eliminate the influence of black market money on the Indian film industry. One result of this 'corporisation' of the Indian film industry, as it soon would be called (see Tieber 2009: 7–11), is the greater importance of the written script. Banks do expect detailed information about projects that they are asked to finance; the whole process of financing a film has become less dependent on oral communication and more and more on written details.

Screenwriting was never a big issue in the Indian film industry, although it has produced popular screenwriters such as K. A. Abbas or Javed Akthar. This is about to change: screenwriting schools and contests are popping up like mushrooms from Indian soil. Screenwriting 'gurus' such as Syd Field are being hired by production companies like UTV to transform Indian screenplays to Hollywood standards (see Sen 2007). In addition to this change in the mode of production, Hindi films have begun to target new audiences: the New Middle Class, NRIs and Western audiences in general. The results of this shift in production and the change of target audiences can be noticed in the content of recent Hindi films, where representatives of anything but middle class members are vanishing, as well as in their narrative form.

Post-classical Bollywood

The three most obvious changes from classical to post-classical Bollywood can be described as follows:

- the films get shorter: ninety-minute films are no longer an exception
- there are more and more films without musical numbers
- the use of the English language is increasing; more and more films are being produced completely in English

A good example which combines all three aspects is *Being Cyrus* (Homi Adajania, 2005, 90 minutes). Examples of shorter films are *Kabul Express* (Kabir Khan, 2006, 104 minutes), *Eklavya* (Vidhu Vinod Chopra, 2007, 105 minutes) and *Life in a Metro*

(132 minutes) – to mention just a few. There are no musical numbers in *Kabul Express, Black* (Sanjay Leela Bhansali, 2005), *Sarkar* (Ram Gopal Varma, 2005), *Khosla Ka Ghosla* (Dibakar Banerjee, 2006), *Bheja Fry* (Sagar Ballary, 2007) and *Sarkar Raj* (Ram Gopal Varma, 2008). The increase of English dialogue can be noticed in most Hindi films; there also are more films that have got an English title. Classical Bollywood films of course are still being produced, but the above-mentioned changes start to build a series of films that may be called post-classical.

The main differences between classical and post-classical Bollywood have their origin in the shifting of the mode of production and the accompanying change of the target audience. Whereas classical Bollywood cinema integrated cinematic and narrative means and forms from early Hindi cinema, from classical Hollywood as well as from Indian traditions in order to integrate their audience (see Vasudevan 1995), post-classical Bollywood is heavily influenced by contemporary Hollywood films and targets almost exclusively a middle class and/or Western audience. Indian film producers expect this audience to relate better to a more realistic way of storytelling. So the first result of this shift is a more integrated way of filmmaking, where most of the content considered indigenous to Hindi cinema is almost erased now. Musical numbers are more tightly integrated in the films, they no longer must be sung by the characters (as for example in *Rang de Basanti* [Rakesh Omprakash Mehra, 2006], a film with an abridged version especially produced for a Western audience). The songs mostly illustrate montage sequences; there is no longer any difference between comparable sequences in Hollywood films. Another important factor influencing the development of Indian cinema is the financial investment of American film studios in the Indian film industry. They do not produce Hollywood films there, but Hindi films with a Western approach. The screenplay becomes more important, and the integration of cinematic elements is almost complete.

But is there anything specifically Indian left in post-classical Bollywood films? Yes indeed, there is: even in films quite obviously made in this new context, like *Life in a Metro*, attributes of classical Bollywood cinema can hardly be ignored. *Life in a Metro* is what David Bordwell calls a 'network narrative' (see 2008: 189–252), a form of narration used in Hollywood since the days of *Grand Hotel* (Edmund Goulding, 1932), but which has really become popular since the 1990s, especially after Robert Altman's *Short Cuts* (1993). A network narrative consists of many different plotlines; the characters and their stories are loosely connected by time and/or space or through more or less coincidental circumstances. *Life in a Metro* is structured by the songs of a pop band, pictured in the rainy streets of Mumbai. These musical numbers can be called meta-diegetic, because the musicians can be seen performing, but the characters in the film are not able to see the musicians. Their songs comment on the narrative. This way the musical numbers structure the narrative rather than interrupt it. The musical commentary by a band that is visible to the audience has a long tradition in Hindi cinema. Mostly *qawwali* parties, as these specific musical ensembles are called, take this part. The best-known example is *Awaara*, where a

qawwali party is seen in rainy streets commenting on the abandoning of Leela, a Sita-like character, and therefore explicitly connecting the narrative to the *Ramayana*. Another characteristic of classical Bollywood cinema is intervals, even in short films. This tradition has its origins in the habits of the audience and the economic needs of the cinema owners, but not in dramaturgical conventions. It is rather interesting to notice that even when these conventions are being changed, the interval still resists any 'Westernisation'.

The narrative form of Hindi cinema is heavily influenced by the way film production is organised in India. Recent shifts in this organisation have led to changes in the narrative structure of the films. But even films made for a Western audience do not completely abandon narrative devices that are considered specifically Indian. Hindi cinema always was and still remains a hybrid form of cinema and storytelling; this is its main characteristic.

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