

Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute sponsored Multidisciplinary International Seminar
Bollywood's Soft Power

13-15 December 2009
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology
Kharagpur West Bengal India 721 302

The Seminar is part of a two-year long collaborative project on *Bollywood's Role in Promoting India Canada Relations* and is generously funded by the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute.

Soft power, a term coined by the Harvard political scientist Joseph Nye in his book, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*(1990), which he developed a decade and a half later in *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*(2004) has entered the vocabulary of international relations over the years. By soft power Nye means "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than through coercion" and believes that soft power enables a nation "to achieve desired outcomes in international affairs through attraction rather than coercion." It was Nye who made the connection between Bollywood and soft power when he asserted that "Indian films with a sprawling audience across Asia, Middle East and Africa, are the cutting edge of the country's soft power" at the Davos Meet in January 2006. Two years later, author, peacekeeper and politician Shashi Tharoor seconded him by citing the international popularity of Bollywood films as an example of India's rising soft power. But when the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh recently told a group of IAS probationers that "cultural relations, India's film industry, Bollywood...I find wherever I go in the Middle East, in Africa, people talk about Indian films," and underlined the need to put soft power to use as an important instrument of foreign policy, Bollywood's soft power received official recognition.

India's film industry is already the world's largest in terms of the number of films produced and second largest after Hollywood in terms of its global reach. From Afghanistan to Canada and Zimbabwe, Bollywood has invaded spaces that diplomacy has failed to. One of the first things that Afghans did after NATO forces drove out the Taliban was to bring out their hidden collections of Hindi music. A generation came of age in China humming the title song of Raj Kapoor's *Awara*(1951) while in Russia Raj Kapoor and Nargis's names still have an instant recall. If *Sholay*(1976) made Amitabh Bachchan a cult figure from Egypt to Ghana, Thailand still lives in the Rajesh Khanna years. Although his being frisked by the security personnel at the Newark airport last summer proved that the Bollywood idol is not a household name in the US, more people in the world have heard of Shah Rukh Khan than Tom Cruise. What accounts for the inexplicable pull of the three hour

long song and dance sentimental melodramatic romance? What makes Bollywood open doors when everything else fails? What impact has Bollywood had on the film industry, consciousness and lives of people in difference parts of the globe? What role does it play in promoting relations between India and other nations, particularly India and Canada?

Although mainstream Bollywood films have been popular with the South Asian Diaspora in Canada for decades, Bollywood was inserted into the Canadian imaginary indirectly through the critical acclaim received by Indo-Canadian filmmaker Deepa Mehta's 'crossover' films such as *Earth* 1947(1998), *Fire*(1996) and *Water*(2005). Since Mehta's *Bollywood/Hollywood*(2002) made its world premiere as the opening night film for the Toronto International Film Festival's Perspective Canada programme in 2003, Bollywood has made deep inroads into Canada. Toronto mayor David Miller personally invited Abhishek Bachchan and the star cast of *Guru*(2007) for the world premiere of *Guru* India's first mainstream international premiere in Canada in 2007 in order to bring "Indian Cinema to a larger appreciative audience and, at the same time, to further develop economic, creative and personal ties between our[the] two countries". As the first Indian film to be distributed by a Canadian Distributor, Roger Nair Productions, *Guru* was a landmark in making Canada an official territory for Bollywood films. Bollywood's mainstreaming continued with films like *Kabhi Alvida Na Kehna*(2006) and *Singh is Kinng*(2008) being screened in multiplexes within the CBD. Bollywood Dancing, which has been part of South Asian youth culture in Canada for nearly a decade, crossed over with the release of *Slumdog Millionnaire*(2008). In 2008, Bollywood movie distributor and producer Eros Entertainment tied up with Wal-Mart Canada to market its collection of Indian movies and Wal-Mart Canada hosted a fashion show to celebrate the launch of Bollywood Signature, a new line of authentic South Asian women's clothing, carried exclusively at Wal-Mart Canada stores. Indo-Canadian actors, such as Lisa Ray and Harbhajan Mann, have become extremely popular in Hindi and Punjabi films and a number of films such as *Kai Ho Na Ho*(2003), *Dus*(2005), *Neal and Nikki*(2005) have been shot in Canadian locations. Bollywood stars touring Canadian cities are mobbed by their adoring fans. The University of Windsor in Ontario, Canada awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Law to Bollywood actor Akshay Kumar recently and the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television(ACCT) nominated Preity Zinta for the Genie Awards in 2009. Two Bollywood films *Dil Bole Hadippa*(2009) and *What's Your Rashee*(2009) had their world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival in September 2009.

The Department of Humanities and Social Sciences Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur is organizing a three day Seminar sponsored by the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute from the 13th - 15th December 2009 to deliberate on Bollywood's popularity within and outside India focusing on its role in international relations, particularly between India and Canada. Invited speakers from India, Canada, the UK and the US including film and television professionals, critics and journalists will get together with academics in literary, cultural, film, media studies and sociology to address the following themes from multidisciplinary perspectives.

- Brand Bollywood
- Hard Power vs Soft Power
- Bollywood as an example of Soft Power
- Bollywood in Asia, Australia, Africa, Europe, North and South America, Canada
- Function and Power of Cinema at Home and Abroad
- Exhibition Spaces and Spectatorship
- Gender and Sexuality
- Song and Dance
- Fashion
- Tourism
- Star Power
- Diasporic Locations
- Bollywood's Shakespeare Connection
- Bollywood as a tool of international relations between India and the South Asian diaspora in places such as Canada

The Seminar will open with a Panel Discussion Bollywood, Tollywood, Kollywood: What's in a Name? on Sunday, the 13th of December 2009, featuring well known film and television professionals from Mumbai and Kolkata.

Seminar Convener

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Paper presentation in the Seminar is by invitation only. However, interested persons can register for the programme as delegates by contacting the Seminar Convener.

LOCATION

Situated 116 Km away from Kolkata, IIT Kharagpur boasts of being the oldest and the largest IIT. Its green, tranquil campus provides a refreshing contrast to the polluted city life. Kharagpur is an important junction in the South-Eastern Railways, and is connected to all major cities in India. Local and express trains connect it to Howrah Station. The IIT is about 5Km from Kharagpur railway station, and is accessible by rickshaws, autos, and taxis

from the station. The beach town of Digha on the Bay of Bengal is 120 Km from Kharagpur and the temple town of Bisnupur is about 100 kms away.

Abstract

Schedule