

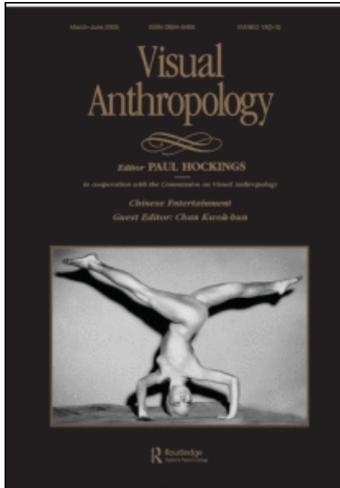
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### Bollywood, *Rasa* and Indian Cinema: Misconceptions, Meanings and *Millionaire*

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## REVIEW ESSAYS

# Bollywood, *Rasa* and Indian Cinema: Misconceptions, Meanings and *Millionaire*

*Slumdog Millionaire*. Produced by Fox Searchlight Pictures; directed by Danny Boyle and Loveleen Tandan; story by Vikas Swarup; screenplay by Simon Beaufoy; music by A.R. Rahman; lyrics by Gulzar; starring Dev Patel, Freida Pinto, Anil Kapoor, Irrfan Khan, Saurabh Shukla, and Rajendranath Zutshi. DVD, color; 2008 [2009], 120 mins.; English and Hindi with English, French, or Spanish subtitles.

### BOLLYWOOD: HOLLYWOOD'S LITTLE BROTHER

Indian cinema, popularly referred to as Bollywood, has a piqued history in the global film community. Its products are rarely seen as transcendental works of art, nor are they seen as sophisticated, often being political pieces of escapist fun. Rather, Bollywood exists on a lower tier, little brother to the big brother of Hollywood and the anglophonic film world in general. Acclaim for Indian cinema is often proffered only after some Westernizing touch has been applied. And certainly, respect for its little brother is rarely given by Hollywood.

The term “Bollywood” began as a humorous idiom referring to the Hindi-language film industry located in what was then Bombay, nowadays Mumbai. However, the term was quickly adopted in reference to all cinema produced in India. The term “Bollywood” is now so ingrained into the *lingua franca* of cinema culture that it is now wrongly considered to be a simple genre of film that encompasses all of Indian cinema. This is akin to consociating all American cinema with that produced in Hollywood, overlooking the variances and alternatives that characterize American film history with such movements as Blaxploitation and Independent film. Indian cinema is a widely varied, accomplished and profitable facet of the international film business, with huge audiences, although it is often marginalized by its misclassification as a genre.

In order to understand the inaccuracy of the categorization of all Indian cinema into one genre, Bollywood, it is necessary to understand how the term was popularized. Madhava Prasad, in his article “This Thing Called Bollywood” [2003], admits that the exact origin of the phrase is murky; however, he posits that the American engineer-cinematographer Wilford E. Deming may have played a significant part in the phrase’s acceptance. In recounting a telegram he received,

Deming noted the phrase “Tollywood,” a portmanteau that came from the location of a studio in the Bengali suburb of Tollygunge. Interestingly enough, the other alternative was the term “Hollygunge”; however, the crew decided on “Tollywood” as it seemed more suitable since several more studios were projected to exist there. As Prasad notes, “it was Hollywood itself . . . with the confidence that comes from global supremacy, renamed a concentration of production facilities to make it look like its own baby” [Prasad 2003]. After the production houses in and around Tollygunge became less prominent than those located in Bombay, the term “Bollywood,” yet another portmanteau offering a “little brother” connection to the “big brother” of Hollywood, became synonymous with Indian cinema.

Claiming that “Bollywood” films—that is, those produced from Bombay/Mumbai,—represent the whole of Indian cinema is similar to claiming that films produced by Warner Brothers represent the whole of American cinema. Bollywood is merely one area of film production in India. It refers to a specific genre of films produced since the 1990s that are characterized by glossy production values, elaborate *mise-en-scène*, spectacle, song and dance and stories that center on the lives and domestic rituals of Indian families who, it seems, can travel easily across the globe with their “Indian” values intact. The adoption of the term as a signifier of the cinematic cultural whole is one more step toward the establishment of an increased anglophonic presence in contemporary Indian society. According to Prasad, it has been a trend to dismiss India’s intrinsic cultures and replace them with cultural elements from English-speaking societies. Madhava Prasad is surprised by the declining role played by one of India’s major languages, Urdu, and the increasing role played by the English language.

The undisputed role of Urdu as the metalanguage of Hindi cinema’s ideological work has now been challenged by English . . . Love, rather *pyar*, *mohabbat* or *ishq* is today the reigning signifier for the privileged affect. English phrases and proverbs are liberally used to construct a web of discourse . . . the charms of Urdu . . . has [*sic*] now been reduced to its accumulated stocks of nostalgic sentiment. [Prasad 2003]

This bilingual nature of Bollywood films is very reflective of those who are in front of the camera as well as those behind it. The industry in Bombay has become filled with “a group of sons of industry magnates . . . as well as new generations of stars, most of whom are educated in elite schools, if not abroad” [*ibid.*]. This education has given those who hold the most sway over the production of films a chance for their films to assimilate more easily into the Western film markets.

This assimilation is evident in the attempt by countries in the West to integrate some of the conventions of Bombay and Indian cinema, upbeat Hindi song-and-dance numbers, for instance, into films such as *Moulin Rouge*<sup>1</sup> [Luhmann 2001] and *Slumdog Millionaire*<sup>2</sup> [Boyle 2008].

#### THE FAILURE OF *SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE* AS AN INDIAN FILM

*Slumdog Millionaire* (hereinafter *SM*) may serve as the best example of the anglicization of Bollywood, as it is based on a novel set in Mumbai, written by

an Indian diplomat, adapted by a British screenwriter, helmed by a British director and starring a British actor; yet it was considered by many to be a quintessential Bollywood/Indian film and to be representative of Mumbai and India as a whole. However, as the Warner Brothers-backed film impressed critics, audiences and awards juries with its rags-to-riches tale of hope and its endurance, the lesser-credited child stars of the film returned to squalor and poverty in Mumbai (at least for awhile). This seemingly colonialist attitude in filmmaking has potentially dire consequences for the Mumbai film community, and for Indian cinema as a whole.

After its release, those in the entertainment industry and media erroneously referred to *SM* as an Indian film, or more often as a Bollywood film. As the source material for the film was an Indian novel, this confusion seems natural. However, examination of *SM* and its traits sets it apart from both films produced in Mumbai and in India as a whole.

The trait of identifying a particular failure of the Indian state/society/culture is a large part of Indian cinema.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, while the effects of these failures are present in *SM*, the causes of the failures are never truly identified and instead are presented as a matter of course for the lower classes in India. *SM* revels in these problems and by the film's end not only are no solutions proffered but the audience is made to forget the horrors shown in the film by an elaborate song and dance number, unconnected to the film's story and simply there to associate it with the stereotypical generic corpus of Bollywood films.

Throughout the course of the story, the audience is shown: a child falling into a pit of human waste, a man being tortured by two police officers, hundreds of children living in squalor, mostly orphaned and forced to lose limbs to get money by begging, and a child witnessing his mother's brutal murder during an anti-Muslim riot. Now, many Indian films may offer extreme visuals in order to engender sympathy, to showcase a problem or make an attempt to promote some aspect of social change, even if only by shining a spotlight on societal injustices in the country, thus either explicitly or implicitly displaying the failures of the Indian state. This does not seem to be the case with *SM*, which is directed by and starring non-Indian people, and so one can expect disconnectedness to the tragedies depicted on-screen and the real-life events on which they are based. Because those in charge of making the film do not have to live with the afflictions shown, they do not seem to feel the natural desire to make one's home a better place, as their home is on another continent.

Another failure of *SM* as a medium to promote social change is the lack of lasting indignation that it engenders—or more appropriately fails to engender—in its audience. In his review of the film for *The Village Voice*, Scott Foundas asserts that “just when you figure he has pulled out all the stops, Boyle proves to have one more trick left up his sleeve: a joyous musical number that sends everybody out of the theater feeling like a winner” [2008]. The saccharine ending that follows two hours of injustice and shattered innocence leaves the audience happy and free to exit from the theater without the burden of either righteous indignation or simple human compassion, thus negating any hope that change can occur. One of the themes of the film, destiny, proves this: by the end the viewer ceases to care about the plight of the orphans or the citizens of the slums, as one day, if it is written,

they will experience the same storybook ending as the protagonists. So they simply join in the joyous number at the end of the film and allow themselves to forget about the tragedies demonstrated on the screen minutes before. The typical Euro-American film focuses solely on an individual protagonist, and thus after his or her needs or desires are sated the film is effectively over.

One of the main reasons for this anglicization of Indian cinema is a matter of accessibility for Euro-American film markets. The accessibility of a true Bollywood film could never match the accessibility of an American and British interpretation of what they believe a Bollywood film to be. Instant connectivity is created by the similarity between the anglicized interpretation and preconceived notions about Indian cinema on the part of the viewer. Simply put, audiences outside India are much more likely to see a film referred to as a Bollywood film, but containing a wholly Western ideology and aesthetic, than a film containing an aesthetic that they are unfamiliar with, despite the bilingual nature of the film.

It is this basic aesthetic difference between Indian cinema as a whole and Western cinema that drives Indian cinema as an alternative to what is seen as the average filmic experience in America. This difference lies in the performance of the actors and the emotions experienced by the audience in the two modes of cinema; in short, the difference is *rasa*.

#### RASA, THE FLAVOR OF PERFORMANCE

The theory of *rasa* is derived from a famous ancient text in Sanskrit known as the *Natyasastra*. It is believed to be a collection from several different authors put together between 200 BCE and 200 CE. Bharata Muni, an Indian performance theorist and philosopher, is often credited with the formulation of the *rasa* theory, and is held in high regard as the father of Indian performance art. The theory postulated in the *Natyasastra* is that a performance piece depends on the emotions felt by the audience as a result of the actor's presentation. As quoted in the article "Rasaesthetics" by Richard Schechner, the *Natyasastra* states:

Rasa is the cumulative result of *vibhava* [stimulus], *anubhava* [involuntary reaction], and *vyabhicari bhava* [voluntary reaction]. For example, just as when various condiments and sauces and herbs and other materials are mixed, a taste is experienced . . . so also with the different *bhavas* [emotions] the *sthayi bhava* [permanent emotions experienced "inside"] becomes a *rasa* . . .

Because it is enjoyably tasted, it is called *rasa* . . . sensitive spectators, after enjoying the various emotions expressed by the actors through words, gestures, and feelings feel pleasure. This feeling by the spectators is here explained as the *rasa* of *natya*. [Schechner 2001: 29]

Quite simply put, the premise of *rasa* is the emotion that an audience undergoes in the enjoyment of a performance. The actors and, more importantly, the performance that they give dictate these emotions. For example, if the character in a given performance is feeling a particular emotion, or *rasa*, then the audience is most likely to feel that particular *rasa* as well. As Patrick Colm Hogan writes in his essay, "Rasa Theory and Dharma Theory: From *The Home and the World*

to *Bandit Queen*," "If the character is feeling love, most often the spectator feels something akin to love. He/she is not feeling anger, say, or disgust . . . One implication of this claim is that the *rasa* is an empathetic version of the correlated *bhava*" [Hogan 2003: 39]. Under the theory of *rasa*, audiences who enjoy a particularly well developed performance are enjoying it vicariously through the actor's exhibitions. According to the *Natyasastra* there are eight fundamental *rasas*:

*Sringara*, or love/desire  
*Hasya*, or humor/laughter  
*Karuna*, or pity/grief  
*Raudra*, or anger  
*Vira*, or energy/vigor  
*Bhayanaka*, or fear/shame  
*Bibhasta*, or disgust  
*Abdhuta*, or surprise/wonder

Each *rasa* represents a particular emotion that is conveyed by the performer and thus felt by the audience. Although the comparison is not entirely accurate, one could compare each *rasa* to a genre of film. While the comparison of a *rasa* to a mere genre of film does some disservice to the concept of *rasa* and the deep emotions that it connotes, it is a fair comparison as certain genres seek to enlist certain emotions from an audience (horror films seek to elicit fear, fantasies seek to elicit wonder and awe, etc.). While not every *rasa* has a corresponding genre many parallels can be seen, if only on the surface level; for example:

*Sringara*: Romance  
*Hasya*: Comedy  
*Karuna*: Melodrama  
*Raudra* and *Vira*: Action  
*Bhayanaka* and *Bibhasta*: Horror  
*Abdhuta*: Fantasy

Now, while each *rasa* does not belong exclusively to a genre, all *rasas* can be seen as the building-block of genres. Before a film is made the writer, director, actors, etc. determine the emotion that is to be elicited. This is *rasic* in nature, even if the final performance is not dictated by the theory of *rasa*. However, despite this surface similitude, there is a crucial difference between genre and *rasa*. Genres attempt to convey an emotion to the audience through characters, situations or *mise-en-scène*. *Rasa* theory mandates that performers become the living embodiment of the *rasa* they are depicting. Character development, story progression and realism are put aside in order for the performer to convey completely the grief, anger, fear or whichever *rasa* they desire for their performance.

As an addendum to these, the 10th-century Indian philosopher Abhinavagupta added a ninth *rasa*, that of *shanta*, or bliss. This final *rasa* was not precisely a new one, as it occurs when the eight *rasas* join together, leaving the audience with a sense of supreme fulfillment. Richard Schechner argued that "a perfect performance, should one occur, would not transmit or express *shanta* . . . but allow *shanta* to be experienced simultaneously and absolutely by performers and partakers" [Schechner 2001: 32]. Thus *shanta*, the nebulous ninth *rasa*, is the rarest

of performance feats. Every aspect of the performance must work in strict synchronicity and the performer must display to perfection every *rasa*. *Rasic* performers portray the emotions more than the actual characters they are playing, and thus the audience feels these emotions as well.

This is in contradiction to Konstantin Stanislavsky's methodology,<sup>4</sup> which is popular in modern performances. This method of acting, developed in the 20th century by the Russian actor, insists that an actor must inhabit the spirit of the character totally. Stanislavsky argued that it was only by "becoming" the character that an actor could give a worthy performance. By transposing one's interpretations of a character to his performance it was possible that the depiction of emotion could ultimately change from its original conception. Becoming a living, breathing embodiment of a character was much more important than simply conveying emotion, according to Stanislavsky, for emotion would come through a character who has been made real by an actor. The total character is ultimately more important than the bigger picture of the story and the emotions therein, as these are to be brought out by the actor as they are in character.

This is the primary difference between Indian cinema and Euro-American cinema. On average, modern Euro-American cinema features performances influenced by Konstantin Stanislavsky; therefore they rely on the development of a character through the actor's inhabiting the character and allowing story and emotion to flow from the inside out. Indian cinema relies on *rasa*; the performance is merely a conduit with which to transfer the *rasa* from the film to the audience. This is not to say that performers in Indian cinema are inferior in talent to their Stanislavsky-influenced Euro-American counterparts. Rather, it simply illuminates the difference between the two, and thereby helps explain the difference between the cinematic cultures as a whole.

A further look at *SM* and a comparison with Indian-made films highlights the difference between the two performance theories. The British actor Dev Patel in his performance as Jamal Malik, the protagonist, adheres to the Stanislavsky methodology and attempts to inhabit the spirit of the character rather than become an embodiment of the *rasa* as dictated by the story. When compared to true Indian films, Patel's performance stands out as anti-*rasic*. Patel never conveys the emotion called for by the story and the events therein; rather he plays the part in a slack-jawed, dull-eyed stupor that belies the scope of emotion that would burst out of the actor and rush over the screen in a true Indian film, yet it fits the character inhabitation model called for by Stanislavsky. Even during scenes of Patel's police torture and interrogation, he plays the role as a confused and out-of-place twenty-something. This however is in harsh contrast to the performances in *rasa*-centered Indian cinema, such as those of Shahrukh Khan and Amitabh Bachchan.

In these performances *rasic* actors often portray characters much older or younger than themselves, and it is the nature of their performances that allows the actors to escape the criticism that many-Stanislavsky-inspired actors endure. For example, in *Coolie*<sup>5</sup> [Desai and Raj 1983] Amitabh Bachchan plays a young railroad porter or coolie in his twenties. Bachchan however was nearing his fortieth birthday as he played this young, put-upon worker, and Indian audiences who are accustomed to performances built more on conveyance of emotion than

on realistic character depictions did not take umbrage with Bachchan's actual age in relation to the character's age. It is this concentration on emotion over verity that is missing in *SM*. Dev Patel certainly looks the part of a young Indian man; however he misses the transmission of emotion that should thrive in such a tale of despair, hope and perceived triumph that *SM* is.

As the film was produced, directed and distributed by Euro-American entities, it is no surprise that a European actor would be desired above an Indian actor. It is however this desire for mutuality that prohibits *SM* from being a truly Indian film. An Indian actor would be adroit at understanding and performing in the *rasic* mode, and in doing so project the nuance of Indian culture beyond what is on the page. Now this is not to impugn Dev Patel, nor his acting ability; instead it is an explanation of differences between two acting methodologies and their potential applications in cinema across cultures. One performance theory is not superior to the other, nor is Amitabh Bachchan a better or worse actor than Dev Patel. Their approaches to performance however are markedly different, and thus should be judged not only on their own merits but also on the merits of the performance culture which they claim to inhabit. If the roles were altered, and Amitabh Bachchan played in a Euro-American film using his *rasic* guidelines, it would seem clunky and out of place. This is the crucial problem with Dev Patel's performance and the failure of *SM* a whole: it steps into *rasic* territory (*i.e.*, Indian cinema) without the slightest attempt at an understanding or achieving of a *rasic* performance, and then accepts the pronouncement that the film is in the spirit of Indian cinema, which is to say *rasa*.

Obviously *rasa* is the pure expression of emotion; therefore the display and transference of emotion is the most important aspect of a *rasic* performance. Thus it stands to reason that some genres are more prevalent than others. In Indian cinema the romantic and the melodramatic prove to be the most popular genres. As Patrick Colm Hogan asserts, "probably the two most common primary rasas in Indian cinema are the romantic and the sorrowful or 'pathetic'" [Hogan 2003: 40]. Because the most accessible emotions a human can experience are love and sorrow, it is evident that the most common *rasas* displayed in cinema are *Sringara* and *Karuna* (love and grief, respectively); thus most popular Indian films center on romance or melodrama.

As stated earlier, Indian cinema is replete with films spanning many disparate genres and thereby constituting many *rasas* of the cultural whole. While there are many films, and of many different genres, few films exhibit only one *rasic* element. For example, a film may be a love story at its core and display the *rasa* of *Sringara* very strongly; however, it could easily encompass the *rasas* of *Abdhuta* or *Hasya* (wonder and humor, respectively) as a means of bolstering the primary *rasa*. While however there are many divergent genres in Indian cinema, it is the love story and the melodrama that remain the most popular. Hogan further argues that it is a sense of social compassion that leads filmmakers to make films that focus on human suffering. "Didactic" filmmakers, as Hogan refers to them, make films to espouse the social progressions they feel a culture should strive toward:

Didactic works in India are no less inclined to the use of *rasa* aesthetics than are the works of simple entertainment. Indeed, didactic works rely overtly on the empathetic character

of *rasa*. The creation, sustaining, and enhancement of empathetic feeling is almost invariably central to the works that set out to cultivate a commitment to social ethics on the part of a reader or viewer. [Hogan 2003: 41]

It makes sense that the pathetic or sorrowful *rasa* is a prevailing one, in order to engender empathetic feelings; one must show true emotion with which to empathize. Indian films often feature characters painted with broad strokes, but who embody deep emotions. This is the strength of the *rasic* performance; it shows emotion over characters, making it easier for those who desire to foster empathetic feelings in partakers of a *rasic* performance to do so.

For example, the film *Rang De Basanti*<sup>6</sup> [Mehra 2006] begins as a carefree and fun picture; it features modern music and fast-paced dance scenes. The film centers on the attempts of an English woman, Sue McKinley, to produce a documentary on the lives of Indian freedom fighters who fought against the British and were executed in the early 20th century. She meets resistance from her employers and decides to self-finance the film and travels to India to find her cast. There she meets a group of young Indian men and women and asks them to portray the freedom fighters for her film. Initially they are unenthused about the project as well as the subject matter, but reluctantly continue their work on the film. Eventually Sue begins to fall in love with one of her cast, a Hindu man named DJ;<sup>7</sup> however, DJ's brother, Ajay, a pilot for the Indian Air Force, dies in a plane crash. Speculation abounds that the cause of this crash is the corruption of the Indian Defense Minister, who sold the defense contract to a company who made cheap and inadequate aircraft. Feeling slighted by their government, the group takes to the streets and protests the grievances committed by the Indian government. The group slowly begins to realize that they share a kinship with the freedom fighters they were to portray; they take up arms and fight the perceived injustice, becoming revolutionaries themselves.

Clearly, the first half of the film strongly ties with the *rasas* of *Vira* (energy and vigor), *Hasya* (humor and laughter), *Sringara* (love), and even *Abdhuta* (wonder and amazement). However, in a very deep and palpable departure in tone, the second half of the film concentrates on the *rasas* of *Karuna* (pity and grief), *Bibhasta* (disgust), *Bhayanaka* (fear and shame), and *Raudra* (anger). And most importantly, as the portrayals of the characters change from fun-loving young adults to hard minded revolutionaries for a cause, the audience senses this change by the emotions being portrayed, or in some cases the emotions that are no longer being portrayed. More important than connection with the story, however, is the connection of the audience to the theme of the film. As if to remind them one final time of the film's message, a title card is shown that states the number of lives lost due to faulty machinery in the Indian Air Force, and implicitly urges the audience to similarly protest the actions of a corrupt government. This clearly fits in with Hogan's idea of a "Didactic Work," a piece of art that through the engendering of empathy causes the audience to change their perception or increase their knowledge of certain events. No matter the intentions of a filmmaker to create a film that has an impact on social progress, it relies though on the exhibition of the proper *rasas* to arouse enough empathy to cause the audience to further their social progressiveness. The need for a

thematic film to be enjoyable too, as in *Rang De Basanti*, is universal in cinema; a difficult theme is much easier to—for lack of a better word—digest if it contains overall entertaining content.

Perhaps this is why many scholars believe food to be analogous to the Indian cinema experience, and this is in large part due to the nature of *rasa*. *Rasa* in its purest form is to be created by the performer and then shared with the audience, tasted, and then judged. The judging process is not complex: if the *rasa* was enjoyed by the audience then it is a good show with a strong use of *rasa*; if the show is not well-received, then it is believed to be a poor performance and, more importantly, a poor demonstration of *rasa*. As Richard Schechner explains, “*Rasa* is flavor, taste, the sensation one gets when food is perceived, brought within reach, touched, taken into the mouth, chewed, mixed, savored, and swallowed” [Schechner 2001: 29].

The comparison between *rasa* and food does not end at the experience; it extends to the format of the films themselves. Indian films generally are expansive, multi-layered events with a three-hour-plus running time. To the *rasic* spectator they are like feasts, each *rasa* displayed acts as another course of the feast, until they all blend into a perfect crescendo of emotional enjoyment. If each course of *rasa* builds perfectly, dessert arrives in the form of *shanta* (bliss) and the performance transcends into a pure display of emotion. Feasts are highly regarded in Indian culture, as they create a gathering of family and community. And the *rasa* theory is similar, in that, if performed well, everyone at the performance enjoys the feast. Feasts in India, as elsewhere, are long drawn-out events that are more about lengthened enjoyment rather than the immediate gratification of gaining sustenance to fuel your body.

Much like the Westernized idea of tantric sex, the ultimate enjoyment in Indian cinema comes from the prolonging of the pleasure rather than the immediate gratification of climax. Indian films often cross the three-hour mark and feature stories that weave in and out of several narratives. For a viewer new to the experience it can be somewhat daunting, as the Euro-American idea of cinematic storytelling has a very specified story structure featuring a beginning, middle and a resolution. Often one can predict when structural happenings including an exciting event and the climax will occur if one knows the running-time of an American film. In an Indian film there is a formulaic pattern; it is not based on story structure or plot development but rather on the prolonged display of *rasa* for the audience to taste and feel. The films drag along plot lines, extending the story, but more importantly extending the opportunity to showcase the *rasas* embodied by the performances. Aptly explained by Richard Schechner, “*Rasic* performance has as its goal not separating winners from losers, but extending pleasure. . . . *Rasic* performance values immediacy over distance, savoring over judgment. Its paradigmatic activity is a sharing between performers and partakers” [Schechner 2001: 31].

When one compares Indian films with Euro-American ones, many differences come to mind. However, every major difference between the two forms is based on the difference in performance aesthetic. If one takes away *rasa* theory from Indian films one would take away the very essence of what makes Indian films unique and more simply what makes them work. The exhibition of *rasa* is the

quintessential aspect of India's performing arts and it is essential to understanding the filmic dialect of Indian cinema. I believe Patrick Colin Hogan states it best: "... one misses a great deal of what is going on in South Asian films—and underappreciates them—if one ignores the non-European theories of aesthetics and ethics that pervade those films... they are a significant and consequential presence" [Hogan 2003: 37]. This ignorance of Indian films and the performance aesthetic theories behind them leads to the mislabeling of all films made in India as "Bollywood." However, it also leads to the acceptance of films produced outside the Indian filmmaking community and disregarding the Indian performance aesthetics as Indian films, ignoring India's rich performance history. The potential anglicization of such a rich cultural heritage in performances is both distressing and lamentable. Nonetheless, the horizon is not entirely bleak. Given the staggering output of films produced in India, it is hopeful that the *rasa* aesthetic can remain intact within these films, and spread to new viewers of Indian cinema. It would be encouraging to see films borrowing from the *rasa* theory of Indian film rather than the base conventions of song and dance numbers. *Rasa* theory is a deep and beautiful way of experiencing a film. When used as a comparison model between other forms of performance aesthetics, from Aristotle's *Poetics* to Stanislavsky's method, it could bolster the artistic core of the cinematic performance across the globe.

## NOTES

1. Baz Luhrmann [2001]. *Moulin Rouge* features a song, "Hindi Sad Diamonds," which is a re-working of the Hindi song "Chhama Chhama." The cast sings the verses in Hindi and an elaborate song and dance number ensues. One could easily argue that *Moulin Rouge* follows the basic conventions of Bollywood throughout the duration of the picture. Elaborate *mise-en-scène*, glossy production values, spectacle and characters bursting into song at a moment's notice are present throughout the film.
2. Danny Boyle [2008]. The dance number at the end of *SM* aligns with the preconceived notions of an Indian film; however, the rest of the film strays far from conventional Indian cinema.
3. While identification is an important facet of Indian cinema, justice is not always served. For example, in some films the power is reversed and the oppressed become the power-holders; however, it is made clear that this is fantasy and does not occur in life.
4. Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863–1938) introduced a realism-based acting system that was able to traverse cultural borders and become the most widely used and accepted acting system in the modern Western world, despite its eastern origins.
5. Desai and Raj [1983]. During the filming of *Coolie*, Amitabh Bachchan was injured. Thousands of fans flocked to the hospital to pray for him, and the footage of this was included in the film. His character was to die, but due to the passionate response he lived. Bachchan's support from devoted fans can largely be attributed to the *rasic* nature of his performance.
6. Rakeysh O. Mehra [2006]. *Rang De Basanti* translates to "Paint it Yellow." Yellow represents sacrifice in Indian cultures; "Main Rang De Basanti" translates as "Paint Me Yellow" and is usually uttered when someone is prepared to make a great sacrifice. Yellow is a very predominant theme in the film. *Rang De Basanti* is one of the few Indian films to reach widespread acceptance across the globe.

7. In true *rasic* fashion, DJ was played by Aamir Khan, who was in his forties when asked to play the 25-year-old DJ.

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