

*Bollywood and Postmodernism: Popular Indian Cinema in the 21st Century.* By Neelam Sidhar Wright. (Edinburgh: University Press, 2015. 229 pp. ISBN: 978-0-7486-9634-5).

Indian cinema has never been able to fit completely in the West, mainly due to its particular style, with songs, and dances and the unusual length of its feature films, often making them unbearable for the average Western cinemagoer. These conditions have not done anything but reinforce Indian culture's marginalisation and disregard, which in turn nurtures India's otherness and subalternity. The situation is even more noticeable in the academic field, in the opinion of the author, independent academic researcher and filmmaker Neelam Sidhar Wright.

The main topic discussed in *Bollywood and Postmodernism* seems evident at first glance. The author presents an analysis of the Mumbai-based Hindi language film industry from a postmodernist perspective, including concepts such as identity, frame-breaking, blurring of binaries, cross-cultural mixture, intertextuality, self-reflexive narratives, and a visually spectacular and nostalgic style—all these features that began to appear in Bollywood cinema after the industry's economic liberalisation at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But as soon as we read the first pages of this work, a second intention is made clear, which is to raise an awareness over the artistic value of Bollywood films, especially within the international academic field, by bringing Bollywood closer to Western cultural standards—i.e. postmodernism.

This main idea is developed throughout eight different chapters. In the introduction, the author briefly discusses bits of history and preliminary questions about Bollywood and postmodernist theories. Chapters 2 and 3 address the traditional reception of Indian cinema in the West through the analysis of academic literature and pedagogic practices regarding Indian Film Studies, demonstrating “a widespread devaluation and marginalisation of Bollywood.” After that, the rest of the book constitutes a response to this disregarding Western approach to Bollywood by demonstrating its postmodern features.

Chapter 4 addresses the changes that Bollywood underwent after its commercial liberalisation. Chapter 5 analyses typical postmodern elements in three Indian feature films: *Om Shanti Om*, *Koi... Mil Gaya*, and *Abhay*. Chapters 6 and 7 are for me the most interesting ones from an academic point of view. In them, the author analyses the Bollywood remakes, considering they are not simply imitation or a result of a lack of original ideas, but constitute a unique form of expression that Bollywood has developed from pastiche and parody, and “a platform for innovation and creative translation.” Throughout these chapters, as well as in the rest of the book, the word ‘mimicry’ is repeated plenty of times, which raises an interesting debate on remakes from a postcolonial perspective. Chapter 6 also includes a very interesting note on what the author calls “Celebrity and Genetic Intertextuality,” i.e. the use of ‘cameo’ appearances as an intertextual device. Chapter 7 constitutes a more detailed analysis of the particular postmodernist characteristics of the Bollywood remake.

The subjects discussed throughout the book open the debate about the place that Bollywood films have in global culture, as well as their particular position in Western and, of course, Indian cultures. Bollywood's relation to Western cinema is another interesting debate introduced by this work. In further investigations, such analyses might be carried out from the point of view of the cultural polysystems theory, developed by Itamar Even-Zohar. A postcolonial perspective is welcomed as well, to consider Hollywood's position as a referent in world cinemas including Bollywood. Wright's analysis of remakes in Bollywood, expounded in Chapter 7, would indeed be a good starting point—without disregard, of course, for the rest of the monograph.

As much as Hollywood's influence over Bollywood seems evident, as it is highlighted by its very name, Mumbai films have indeed developed a characteristic style of their own. In most of its analysis, however, *Bollywood and Postmodernism* does not embrace the inherent particularities of Mumbai's film industry, which in fact show evident differences as compared to the US cinema, and actually constitute Bollywood's virtue, not its curse. Postmodernism is



a strictly Western wave of thought, which can indeed be applied to every culture, but will always maintain the dominant view of the Western canon. India has its own culture, and it would be more interesting to keep and acknowledge its difference and to develop academic studies on its own, and not forcing it into the global movement that is postmodernism. Wright's analysis on extracting postmodern features from Indian films is nevertheless interesting on its own, since it Bollywood in a previously unexplored way. But I think that trying to make of these postmodern features the main aspect from which Bollywood should be analysed is possibly reducing the movement's actual potential.

Now, having said that, the truth is that the global academy is almost entirely Western, and even in postcolonial topics like this, the point of view of the analysis is still attached to a Western and often orientalist thought. And it is also true that for variations of literary and artistic expressions to be considered important

or even worth of attention, postmodernism is indeed a good entrance door into the academy. Wright's position in this sense seems now logical, insomuch as Bollywood, albeit quantitatively the biggest film industry in the world, still finds it difficult to demonstrate its cultural and artistic value, let alone the rest of 'invisible' regional Indian cinema industries, such as Telugu cinema (Tollywood) or Tamil cinema (Kollywood), among others, all of them blurred out from the Western interest in the East under Bollywood's shadow.

In conclusion, I think that Wright's intention with this work was successfully achieved, and *Bollywood and Postmodernism* will hopefully be an important contribution to the prestige of Indian film production and will fuel future analyses on its artistic and literary value.

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