

## Hindi Cinema at International Film Festivals | Text Transcript | CIRCLE

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This is a text transcript for the recorded webinar “Hindi Cinema at International Film Festivals” presented by the Canada India Research Centre for Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at the University of Guelph. The guest speaker was Dr. Aysha Iqbal Viswamohan. The event was recorded on March 25, 2021 and was moderated by Bharat Punjabi.

Transcript:

### Bharat Punjabi

A warm welcome to everyone from the University of Guelph. My name is Bharat Punjabi. I'm a faculty at the University of Toronto and it's my great pleasure to anchor - moderate this event today on behalf of CIRCLE. You know our Center on India Canada Research at the University of Guelph. So, before I begin and introduce our speaker for the day, I just wanted to give you all some idea about you know how, why and from where we are doing this event.

On behalf of CIRCLE, you know the Canada India Research Centre for Learning Engagement, I wanted to share some information on CIRCLE's profile and research and it's an interdisciplinary nucleus at the University of Guelph in Canada for cutting-edge research on the Indian community and the Indian diaspora, and to showcase, advocate, catalog, and further on equitable respectful and sustained dialogue of knowledge between Canadian and Indian scholars on complex and emerging topics related to sustainability but also social and economic well-being.

So, CIRCLE here at the University of Guelph takes a great pleasure in, I know, welcoming all of you to this webinar. Our main speaker for the day and it's my great pleasure to introduce to all of you, Dr. Aysha Viswamohan from IIT Madras. Dr. Aysha Viswamohan is a full professor at IIT Madras' Humanities and Social Sciences Department. She's been there for almost 16 years. She's worked in the area of film studies, popular culture, and drama and has published several books in peer-reviewed publications.

Her comments on aspects of cinema appeared several times in BBC culture at UK. She's also had a long association with Canada and Canadian institutions primarily through the Shastri Indo-Canadian institute's Canadian faculty enrichment programs and she's also been a visiting faculty at Simon Fraser University. Now, Dr. Viswamohan is also in collaboration with the University of Guelph, she has recently organized an international virtual conference on women in films, media, and beyond and this event was sponsored by the Shastri's Institute's golden jubilee lecture series and conference grant. So, it's my great pleasure to welcome Dr. Viswamohan to speak today on the topic of Hindi cinema in international festivals.

So, what we are going to do when Dr. Viswamohan speaks is we're going to mute everyone and if you have any questions, you know we can ask them at the end of Dr. Viswamohan's presentation, and you can also choose to send your questions via the chat function which is what you'll see in the zoom app which we are using for today. So, on that note let me hand it over to Dr. Viswamohan and she'll speak for about half an hour.

**Dr. Viswamohan:**

Thank you, Dr. Bharat. So, acknowledgements are due to Dr. Sharada Srinivasan of CIRCLE from the University of Guelph. Miss Shirley, who I have been associated with quite some time, we also did a conference a fortnight back and the administration of the University of Guelph for this kind invitation.

Friends, students, colleagues, for joining, I really appreciate your time. And administration of the IIT Madras; professor Ravindra Getty, the dean ICSR of IIT Madras, administration, as well as professor Gethu for their unstinting support for this research through the exploratory research grant. So, thank you very much and the topic as Dr. Bharat Punjabi has already introduced it is on Hindi cinema at international film festivals. So, I begin with your permission?

**Bharat Punjabi:**

Yes.

**Dr. Viswamohan:**

So, yeah thank you. So, it is not just by sheer output but also by the way it is generating interest in various cultural spheres, including fashion, team weddings, dance, etc., that popular Hindi cinema or Bollywood is becoming increasingly globally visible. Indeed, Hindi cinema is positioned as a cultural marker, necessitates more attention than ever before today. Popular Hindi cinema has an immense reach across the borders and is well received at various levels both commercially and scholarly. So, it has a commercial presence as well as it has an academic presence also and also the growing clout and presence of the non-resident Indians has also contributed to the visibility of popular Hindi cinema, stars, and the various tropes of popular Hindi cinema such as dance, music, and fashion.

The basic premise of my work is to explore Bollywood's intersection with international film festivals. Festivals are events that play an important role within film culture; they not only add value to the aesthetic image of a film that is screened at a festival, but also help in lending it greater commercial viability. Popular Hindi cinemas encounter with international film festivals goes back in time.

One of the most popular or well-known examples is Raj Kapoor's *Awara*. It is a 1951 film, it was also directed by Raj Kapoor and produced by his artisans. The movie was entered in the 1953 Cannes film festival where it was nominated for the prestigious Palme d'Or award, that is the

grand prize of the festival, and in 2003 the Time magazine included it in a list of 10 Indian films to treasure.

Awara was followed by the presence of films such as Do Bigha Zamin which was directed by Vimal Roy in 1954, Mother India, directed by Mehboob Khan in 1957, Do Ab Bn 1959, and The golden age of Hindi cinema put the industry on the world map. So, that was then and then let's talk about now, what's happening?

So, with India's integration into a globalized free market economy, Indian films are now strengthening their global reach attracting new viewers beyond their traditional south Asian and Diaspora territory. Hindi cinema has decidedly come into its own as a soft power and films are regularly screened at Cannes, Berlin, Sundance, Toronto, Venice, Asia Pacific International South Asian Film Festival, Hong Kong, International Film Festival at Helsinki, Rotterdam International Film Festival, Locarno International Film Festival, and many more.

Also, several of these festivals have a special event on screening Bollywood films and these screenings are attended by cinema enthusiasts from across the world. In recent times the list has been increasing and it's going on. If there are offbeat fairs, such as Monsoon Wedding directed by Mira Nair, we also have Anurag Kashyap's, *Zenith Gangs of Wasseypur* in 2012, Vitesh Bhatras, *The Lunchbox* in 2013. Anand Gandhi's *Ship of Theseus* in 2013. *Masaan* by Neeraj Ghaywan in 2015. Hansel Mehtas, *Aligarh* – but these may be offbeat films but at the same time there are also big budget ventures such as Ashutosh Gowariker's and Aamir Khan's production, *Lagaan*, that was in 2001 and it was also India's Oscar entry for the best foreign film.

Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Magnum Opus*, *Devdas* in 2002, Vikramaditya Motwane's *Udaan* in 2010, Rajkumar Hirani and Vinod Chopra's production *PK* in 2013, and Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Ram-leela*. Vasan Bala's *Mard Ko Dare Nahi Hota* premiered at the tail end of the midnight madness section of the 43rd Toronto International Film Festival and it also bagged the prestigious Grolsch Viewer's Choice Award.

So, festivals have thus become a perfect venue for Bollywood filmmakers to showcase their products. It is no longer the so-called arty stuff that is gaining attention or garnering you know accolades, but it is also the so-called commercial films starring big time actors such as Shah Rukh Khan or Amir Khan or Ranveer Singh or Ranveer Kapoor.

So, these films are also gaining acceptance as well as a fairly good reception at the festivals. So, my interest in this research was that in spite of an increasing scholarship in the domain of Bollywood, there is a distinct lack of longitudinal research on popular Hindi cinema and international film festival; the symbiosis of these two constructs. Film critics and scholars point at this lag as a reason for creating misleading profiles for some films and help launch others and this is an area by itself that what kind of film should be sent and what kind of films should not be sent so, this research that I'm grappling with is an ongoing research and it's an attempt to address this gap.

My project aims to make festival research in Indian context, particularly Bollywood, more accessible to connect its various aspects and to encourage interdisciplinary exchange between researchers as well as experts. The research will be a significant addition to the existing corpus of research on the global south and especially the cultural aspect of it and I am going to talk a little bit more about that.

As we all know Hindi cinema is a part of global academic discourse and engenders cultural significance, therefore, there is tremendous scope for further research in this field. A significant follow-up of this research could be an investigation into film festivals organized in India, so from international we can also talk about - research can also be conducted into film festivals organized in India and I will be happy to respond to questions if any on this area itself.

Also, another area of inquiry could be the presence of regional cinema from India at international festivals I know that one question that is coming my way would be that I'm talking basically about Bollywood and popular Hindi cinema which is stupid because the field itself is so vast. So, the presence of regional cinema from India at international festivals needs to be addressed as well, okay and these could be further follow-ups of this kind of research. So, this research could possibly provide an entry point to understand India's success or at this point we can say reasonable success at international awards.

Although India produces or it is one of the largest producers of cinema in the world on par with Hollywood or perhaps it has exceeded Hollywood, although there are entries made but so far bagging prestigious awards has, you know, it has not yet reached that level although we are getting there. Further research is also possible in the area of cinema and soft diplomacy and I am very sure that many of you are interested in this area.

This can be achieved by negotiating cinema's impact on forging cultural relations with other countries. So, Bollywood and Bollywood's power as a soft power; Bollywood's existence as a soft power. Political scientists such as Joseph Nye have commented on Bollywood's power as a cultural institution that greatly enhances India's influence abroad.

Soft power as theorized by Joseph Nye is the ability of a nation to indirectly attain the outcome it desires through the use of soft resources - indirect means like co-option rather than coercion. Over the past two decades mainstream Hindi cinema has received substantial academic attention. Popular stars are invited to attend prestigious events such as Khan's Bafta and the Golden Globe awards and international universities include mainstream Hindi films as part of their syllabi.

Such attitudinal shifts lead us to conclude that Bollywood films call for an investigation of how people and societies inform culture and provide scope for policy research; so, this is also one area that can be looked into through festivals. My tentative research questions for this research are - and it's an ongoing study, I may not have all the answers, but I am asking perhaps the right questions.

So, how can festivals make popular Hindi films more visible at global level, the success at festivals translate into more sustained research and intellectual discussion and academic discussion on Bollywood. Second question is, is there a possibility for creating more participation and encouraging greater discussion among festival enthusiasts?

And my third question is what impact can sending Bollywood films to film festivals have on marketing distribution and exhibition of films in the international market and this is a huge, huge area not really possible to have... you know, it would require years of research into this area about marketing distribution and exhibition in the international market, but this is research worth doing.

So, naturally the challenge here would be to gain access to high profile festival organizers and film makers from - also the filmmakers from the Hindi film industry, due to various logistical reasons it is difficult to facilitate their participation in an academic conference and engage them in a research project. Also, Hindi filmmakers largely involved in the practice of producing mainstream and commercial entertainers are not particularly invested in making their presence felt at international film festivals although this is changing of late.

So, I anticipate that these and similarly related problems are you know a few challenges, but still the very fact that the entire research process is problematic, therefore, I consider that it is also more rewarding. So, no point in doing easy research for which we can have easy answers. So, it is definitely a challenging research and something that would require a lot of sustained effort and sustained interactions with global academics, as well as people who are involved in the practice as well as theory of film festivals who are organizers and who also do a lot of study in this area and this field is growing.

Some of you who are interested in this area would know that there is immense potential, and a lot of people are working in this area; there are major books and major publications in this area, so it is a very exciting area that is waiting to be explored more vigorously with greater vigor.

So, this was a bit about my, you know, some entry point observations and the challenges that I consider some of my research questions; perhaps they may change over a period of time because I have just started this research so it will take a long time to go deeper into it but nevertheless, so from this point I would like to share my presentation with you and show you some of the films that have won accolades and made wave at various film festivals because we are hosted by a Canadian university I thought it more appropriate to discuss more on the representation at TIFF, that is Toronto International Film Festival. So, I would like to share my presentation with you at this point. Is it visible?

**Bharat Punjabi:**

Yes, it is.

## Dr. Viswamohan:

Yeah, thank you. So, this is the title, this is the complete title, Hindi Films at International Film Festivals: The Spatialities of Reception and Commerce. So, this is what I want to - and this is, you know, I couldn't resist because it is such a beautiful image, we have a very young and good looking Awara with Raj Kapoor as Awara, and then we have Dev Anand as Guide, followed by The Lunchbox and the very recent Manto, very different kinds of films so this is what I have been I want to draw your attention towards, that these are extremely diverse kinds of films.

So, Awara and Guide were big budget movies for their time, starring the superstars of their time. I mean Dev Anand and Raj Kapoor it didn't get better than or bigger than that. But, at the same time we also have medium budget movies such as The Lunchbox and Manto that have also gained entry into film festivals and have received a very good appreciation and reception.

So, coming down to my – because my research is focused more on contemporary cinema, of course when we talk about contemporary and when we talk about the so-called indie cinema - the independent cinema - we should go back in time a little bit and start with Nagesh Kukunoor's Hyderabad's Blues. It is the film that I think is at the centre of all these changes that we see in Hindi cinema today.

So, Nagesh Kukunoor, some of you attended the conference that we recently organized with the University of Guelph and Elahe Hiptoola who was the producer of Hyderabad Blues, she did talk at length about how Hyderabad Blues was made; it was an independently produced movie, they had a lot of difficulties but then that movie was a game changer. And then, subsequently we have this surge of wonderful cinema that is gaining so much of recognition all over the world particularly in festivals.

So, here we have the brilliant movie that is Gangs of Wasseypur and directed by Anurag Kashyap. The theme - because if you would go through my abstract, you would find that I am talking about how film makers are emboldened today, and they are trying out new themes which were not right let's say a couple of decades ago.

Okay and if you watch today's cinema you will feel that it has entered - of course the big budget movies do exist, you know the extravaganzas with beautiful spectacles and all that, that would be there because that's what we are all about, we are Bollywood so it would be there, so it's not going anywhere, but at the same time there is a space for this kind of cinema also which is extremely heartening.

So, what is the genre here, it is rural gangster and the movie performed very well at Cannes, Sydney Film Festival, London Film Festival, Sundance Film Festival, Glasgow Festival and one thing that I would like to draw your attention to is that the DVDs and publicity materials of these films showcased they actually made visible that these films have been showcased at all these major festivals, so it is a win-win situation for the festival organizers also and for the Indian filmmakers also because this is the way... it's quite a symbiotic relationship and it helps both parties.

So, here you can see it's a Hindi newspaper, Amar Ujala, which gave so much of prominence to the reception of Gangs of Wasseypur at Cannes. We may not believe that who is going to look at festivals and perhaps, we have to change the mindset because festivals are taken seriously, they have a lot of prestige, they have a lot of respect and therefore, when a movie is screened at something this prestigious then the resonance is felt throughout.

So, Amar Ujala gave a lot of visibility to this, this is a 2012 news event Cannes Gangs of Wasseypur. And then Vishal's Makdee and Vishal has gone on record in some of his interviews that because the movie performed so well at various film festivals, and therefore it got a lot of attention back home. Screening films at film festivals may not always help but it does help. It gets you at least some kind of recognition and attention so that enables a filmmaker - a serious filmmaker like Vishal – to go on and move on to their next film and as we all know Makdee was followed by the brilliant Maqbool and Makdee had absolutely no star cast, except the presence of Shabana Azami as the Makdee and that is the spider.

The theme was superstitions and basically it was a children's movie, but it performed well and as you can see here that the producer and the filmmakers displayed it quite prominently, awarded second-best film by Adult Jury at Chicago International Children's Film Festivals in 2002. So, festivals do matter.

And here is Shonali Bose's Amu, 2005, it also dealt with a very serious theme and you can see how prominently they have displayed it, it was screened at Toronto Film Festival. The film is set against the backdrop of the 1985 massacre. And Shonali Bose also recognizes the impact of the support of international film festivals and getting funding for, garnering funding for her subsequent projects.

And this is the excellent Aligarh by Hansal Mehta. It also dealt with a very controversial theme, at least a couple of years ago it was controversial; homosexuality. It is also a biopic and then the poster and the publicity material displayed with pride that it is the official selection at Busan, at BFI London, British Films Institute London, and also our own Mami.

And then here is The Lunchbox which was extremely well received at Cannes, and perhaps many of you are familiar with this movie and the wonders it performed at Cannes and the theme is it's an old-fashioned romance but with a twist. And as you can see here Cannes Film Festival, Telluride Festival, Toronto, Sundance, and the makers are quite proud of it evidently.

And here we have Dhanak. Dhanak is a very heart-warming movie by Nagesh Kukunoor and this too gained a lot of attention at various film festivals. It's about the journey of two children and it's a very offbeat movie. It is set in the desert of Rajasthan and two children - so, the movie takes you on a journey along with these two children - and the journey is they want to meet Shah Rukh Khan who is supposedly shooting in some remote part of the estate that is Rajasthan.

The boy is a disabled child - visually challenged – and the children have somehow heard that Shah Rukh Khan supports eye donation and they believe that if they meet him then something

good will come out, and you can also see that the boy is a fan of Salman Khan and he's wearing the same bracelet that has become like trademark of Salman Khan in various films of Salman. So, this film was the winner at Berlin Film Festival and also won the TIFF Kids award, and also it was a showcase at Montreal Film Festival also.

**Bharat Punjabi:**

You have three minutes left.

**Dr. Viswamohan:**

Absolutely, wind up three minutes.

**Bharat Punjabi:**

Okay.

**Dr. Viswamohan:**

Thank you, thank you. So, here we have Mard Ko Dard Nahin Hota, Vasan Bala, it is a genre-bending and very quirky film in the style of the Coen brothers – those of you who are followers of Hollywood cinemas - Coen, and also Tarantino and it also inverts several of these ideas about traditional ideas on gender, so this is a very remarkable movie which gained a lot of attention at the festivals.

Here is the winning team from Mard Ko Dard Nahi Hota and Business Standard, a very respectable newspaper from India did a feature on it, the Mard Ko Dard Nahi Hota wins top award at Toronto Film Festival. And here is Trapped, Vikramaditya Motwane's film which won the best picture at the Swiss Neuchâtel International Film Festival.

So, it won the best picture award there and the theme is city as an urban nightmare, starring the very extremely talented Rajkumar Ram. And The Sky is Pink, again by Shonali Bose, is one of the latest, recent entrance into the world of film festivals which the theme is life and hope and happiness in the face of a terminal disease. And here the entire cast, Farhan Akhtar and Priyanka Chopra, along with the director Shonali Bose at the TIFF festival.

And I couldn't resist displaying this picture I like it very much and this is Aishwarya's first appearance at Cannes and we all know she has become a brand ambassador for L'oreal, so it works that way also, so big stars and their presence, so this is Devdas at Cannes. So, thank you very much and I welcome questions from all of you.



Bharat Punjabi:

Thank you, thank you very much professor Viswamohan for this very fantastic insight into the world of Hindi cinema, Bollywood at film festivals. I'm opening up the floor to questions. The way we can do this is you can actually raise your hand and I'll actually come to you, unmute you, and you can ask your questions live online or you could put your questions into the chat box. So, either way you can actually convey your questions.

Vellikkeel Raghavan:

Hello?

Bharat Punjabi:

Yes? Please keep it brief so that everyone has a chance, thank you.

Vellikkeel Raghavan:

Okay. Thank you, Dr. Aysha Viswamohan. This is my new -

Dr. Viswamohan:

Vellikkeel, I saw your question, it is about my research questions, I will send it to you.

Vellikkeel Raghavan:

I just got two questions okay, that's okay.

Dr. Viswamohan:

I will mail it to you, you are my old friend.

Vellikkeel Raghavan:

So, we engaged previously also regarding international film festivals, you were the spokesperson in our university also regarding new Hollywood and previous Hollywood also, old Hollywood also. So, my question is that you know the very concept of international film festivals will be counterintuitive to the mainstream cinemas; if it is in India this would be Bollywood and if it is in the West, it would be Hollywood.

So, - and another thing is that these two concepts merge together in the concept of stardom, because both of them need stardom. Hollywood needs stardom and other international film festivals need stardom from Hollywood. So, there is a given from both mainstream filmmakers in this platform. Okay, that is one question and one more thing is that can we categorize Hindi

film as a model category because – yeah, I hope that. And one more thing that I just wanted to bring into notice is that Hindi films have been offered challenges very formidable challenges by regional filmmakers, especially in the international forum -

Dr. Viswamohan:

Vellikkeel, can I just respond because otherwise you know, you can ask me questions later.

Vellikkeel Raghavan:

Okay okay, no problem, Aysa.

Dr. Viswamohan:

Okay, so one is the domination of Hollywood there and from Bollywood here and I mean Bollywood from our side and Hollywood from the West, right? Okay, but how do we explain then, let me talk about the west then, French films, German cinema, Iranian cinema, Chinese cinema, Korean cinema, okay they have been making their presence felt. It is all about marketing, exhibition, and distribution.

I will give you one example, there is a wonderful film called Hero, it's a Chinese movie. It stars some of the biggest stars from the Chinese film industry okay. It had Jet Li, it has a Tony Lang, and Maggie Chang and a host of wonderful –Zhang Yimou – so, these are quite well-known people or stars even globally because Chinese cinema has become truly global and transnational. And this movie, however, in 2002 it came on the heels of Crouching Tiger and Hidden Dragon. Okay and there were big studios involved in the promotion and distribution of Crouching Tiger and Hidden Dragon, and it won the Oscar if you remember that year – it's the gladiatorial year – as the best foreign entry.

So, you see how one movie opened the doors for another movie, and then Hero was distributed and marketed in a big way by Quentin Tarantino because Crouching Tiger opened the market; so, it requires some, you know, a great deal of effort by people from all over the world. Otherwise, of course, there will be Hollywood domination; they have the biggest stars, biggest studios, and they are also extremely visible.

Okay, from our part of the coming to here – our part of the world – I would have a little disagreement with you because Bollywood is there - because again, big studios, big stars, most recognizable stars, okay that is there and it will be there okay. At the same time, you have Satyajit Ray, you have Adoor Gopalakrishnan, you have Ritwik Ghatak, and Marathi cinema and Malayalam cinema, they are making waves okay so it requires perhaps, you know – so this is a discussion we will continue Vellikkeel. Let me now –

Vellikkeel Raghavan:

One minute, can we have a discourse actually? Just one minute I need, especially Marathi cinema. Am I available to you? Hello?

Dr. Viswamohan:

Yup.

Vellikkeel Raghavan:

Especially Marathi cinema, Bengali cinema, Malayalam cinema, Tamil cinema, and nowadays Bhuter too are very formidable, counter narrative to the Bollywood scheme of things. Of course, all these traditions have got their commercial versions of filmmaking also but along with that these four or five regional filmmakers they do counter the Bollywood types; Marathi was there at least up to 90s. Now we have Tamil cinema, Malayalam cinema they are also -

Bharat Punjabi:

Could you keep your question brief? Ask your question quickly just so that you know we can -

Vellikkeel Raghavan:

Recently from 2017 almost, Buter cinema also has made an intro into the –

Dr. Viswamohan:

Dr. Bharat has given us a warning so let me take because there are lots of questions I can see here and I need to respond to them Vellikkeel. I will always get back to you at a more personal level okay. So, let me also – yeah, I agree that regional cinema is making waves, but it is not a recent phenomenon it has always been there. Satyajit Ray put Indian cinema on the map in a very big way, okay be it at Cannes or be it at Venice, he is the person who really brought the spotlight on us and of course we have Raj Kapoor, Awara, Shantaram also, okay so we have to accept, we have to recognize enough.

Then we talk about the so-called Parallel Cinema in the seventies. We all know the contribution of Adoor Gopalakrishnan and Ranal Singh also and the people who followed them. Okay, so it was a wonderful period but then every cinema like every cultural entity it goes through a period of phases and there are cycles. So, things sometimes – this aspect sometimes – regional films are more invisible as it happened because there was a time when Satyajit Ray was the face of Indian cinema.

Okay and then I will quickly respond to your question on Hindi film as a monolithic category; no, it is not, and I absolutely admit that there are lots of things happening in Hindi cinema,

although as I mentioned earlier that the Bollywood extravaganza would always remain and it shouldn't go away anywhere because that is one of the most important feature of our so-called soft power.

**Bharat Punjabi:**

Dr. Viswamohan, we have to quickly move to other people's questions and I have two questions coming down through the chat which have been there for some time Dr. Viswamohan, and one is do you think that Hindi films have been able to effectively move away purely from pure entertainment towards social reality? And the other question from Sagar Krishna is how are the various facets of reception of Indian cinema changed post-liberalization in the 1990s, as compared to the pre-liberalization era? You know, if you can respond to these two questions from our attendees, thank you.

**Dr. Viswamohan:**

Absolutely! Yeah, so Professor Jamila Begum, thank you so much for coming, it's an honour to have you here. That Hindi films have been able to garner social reality and have moved away from pure entertainment there is one definite segment of Hindi cinema that is looking at social reality. It could be something as arty as and I don't want to categorize, but of course, we have to categorize because we want to recognize that Hindi cinema is not a monolithic category. So, we have something like The Lunchbox and Olan with no star cast, we have Manto; these are the biopics.

So, these films do represent social reality. They function in a particular social, cultural context. Even an out-and-out commercial fair with big stars like Gully Boy, also received extremely good reception at the New York Film Festival, at Toronto also. Although, it had the presence of Ranveer Singh and Alia Bhatt, and produced by Farhan and Zoya Akhtar.

Nevertheless, it does portray a certain kind of social reality in terms of representation, the stars and the portrayal of the stars. So, they were not stars, they are not Ranveer and Alia; they become Murad and Safeena on screen so yes, there is a social reality there. Pure entertainment will always be there and why not? Hollywood too has all these categories to it, it should be there. It is only art house European cinema which has remained true to very avant-gardeish, very experimental and they can afford to do it, but in huge industries where people have to survive and many people depend for their employment also, such as in Hollywood; Hollywood generates employment, it generates revenue, so, you have to have big budget extravagance.

So, there is always economic concerns also. So, yes, thank you, professor Prabhajot, and I have to respond to now Sagar Krishna. How has the various facets of reception of Indian cinema change post-liberalization? You know, Sagar, it really hasn't change so much as in because after the liberalization what happened was there was an ease of showcasing perhaps, you know, a lot of barriers were removed and therefore, you know filmmakers were able to showcase their work at the international film festivals which is not to say that there were great challenges

earlier, perhaps there were, but you know after liberalization people became more aware of Indian cinema, particularly Hindi cinema.

I'm talking about Hindi cinema because I am researching on Hindi cinema, as I already mentioned that there is a possibility of great research in the area of regional cinema also, okay but however my focus for today's presentation was on Hindi so, therefore, I am talking about that. This is not to take away anything from regional cinema. And there is also - one reason Sagar – is the very strong presence and the visibility of the non-resident Indians in various countries internationally; they are making their presence felt internationally, at a global scale and therefore, perhaps, many people are getting interested in cinema.

So, therefore, perhaps more number of movies that are sent for film festivals and perhaps, more doors are opening for them and there is more sustained interest in showcasing these films as compared to earlier times. But do not forget that our stars like Dev Anand and Raj Kapoor were well known and there are documented evidences of their great popularity abroad. Except that now – I have to use a cliched term, that global village – so that could be more aware of this phenomenon. Yes Bharat, should I respond to Saf now?

**Bharat Punjabi:**

Yes, Saf has this question on whether you plan to include documentaries in your research because you know they're becoming more important.

**Dr. Viswamohan:**

Yes, absolutely and we have excellent documentaries I'm aware of that but you see the entire point is that even the popular Hindi cinema and you don't have enough time and enough bandwidth to research on that, it is so vast, okay the scope is so huge. So, as a researcher we want to expand as well as narrow down the focus of our research; so, documentaries should be included, why not? Immediately, I do not have such plans.

**Bharat Punjabi:**

So, he's asking you whether acceptance at foreign film festivals enhances the previously underappreciated films acceptance back home and if this says theoretically anything about a post-colonial residue or a cultural inferiority among Indian masses? He is asking you this with reference to what you just said about the movie Makdee.

**Dr. Viswamohan:**

Yeah, you see there is no, I'm not referring to the cultural inferiority at all because see whether a film is a blockbuster abroad or not it wouldn't matter to our audience. Our audience understands a certain language of cinema, so, we have a certain grammar of cinema and it doesn't really impact our people to watch only those films that have done extremely well at

international festivals and festival circuit, etc. Okay, having said that, it always – especially to a small budget film like Makdee – it adds value. Okay, so it is not the question of cultural inferiority, but if a movie is well received at an international festival, a newcomer - because Vishal Bhagwat was a newcomer at that time, now of course he's a superstar director – so, a newcomer director can attract more eyeballs and it leads to also other good things also. As I said it's a win-win situation.

**Bharat Punjabi:**

So, this question is really about whether movies should continue to or will continue to reflect some of the difficulties or some of the kind of weaknesses within Indian democracy and society; you know, we're talking about whether directors are still open to making movies of you know economic, political, social significance as they pertain to the current period and this question is coming from Vikas Atalu, I think this is a student of you and Dr. Velika.

**Dr. Viswamohan:**

Yes, so Vikas has attended a couple of courses which we offer online and it is supported by the Ministry of Education. So, I think yeah, so Vikas has been very supportive of our online efforts and he has been there. Vikas, I would like to skip this question. Can I move on to the next question please?

**Bharat Punjabi:**

Yes, the next question is about OTT and has OTT and I don't know what OTT stands for because–

**Dr. Viswamohan:**

Over the top.

**Bharat Punjabi:**

...change the film's reception of OTT. So, I'm not very clear about the question maybe –

**Dr. Viswamohan:**

I am, I understand.

**Bharat Punjabi:**

If you can reframe it for us, what is this?

Dr. Viswamohan:

It's okay for me, I can answer this. So, OTT platforms such as Amazon Prime and Netflix and Hotstar. Okay and we also have something like HBO – so they make their own films, not necessarily the kind of films that a big studio would make. But Netflix and Amazon Prime, etc. they are making and producing their own films and yes, they have actually changed the way films are made and films are received because a number of novel themes can be now incorporated in cinema.

So, we have examples of several films where filmmakers can – because sometimes an idea cannot be commercially viable – but Netflix and OTT platforms such as what he's mentioned is that they give a platform for filmmakers to showcase their work so therefore, they perhaps, there is an audience for that and they can, yeah so, I think this is what I would like to say about it. Yeah, so yes, it has impacted in a big way.

Bharat Punjabi:

How do you ... the next question is from Jhinuk and she's addressing the question to you where she's asking whether language is becoming a factor for recognition at the international festivals. An instance can be Bertolucci is the last emperor which could also be done either in Italian or in Chinese. How do you think that hinders the distinctive potential of the cinematic language?

Dr. Viswamohan:

Okay [rereads question in the chat] language becomes a factor for recognition at the international festivals which could have been done either in Italian or in Chinese. Okay. How do you think it hinders the distinctive potential of the cinematic language? Okay. you mean the language or the cinematic language? I'm not very clear Bharat, so let Jhinuk –

Bharat Punjabi:

Jhinuk, if you want to ask your question directly to Aysha.

Jhinuk:

Yes, am I audible?

Dr. Viswamohan:

Cinematic language or are you talking about languages as in dialects and several languages that we speak? What are you talking about?

Jhinuk:

Yes ma'am, am I audible firstly?

Bharat Punjabi and Dr. Viswamohan:

You are.

Jhinuk:

Okay okay, what I meant is the language is primarily English in which The Last Emperor was made but does it hinder for an Italian director to, you know, explore the language of the cinema and not just sticking to a language that the majority of the people speaks, so I'm dividing the language of the cinema versus the language of the majority people speaking in USA or most part of the world.

Dr. Viswamohan:

I want to respond so let's give a break from Bertolucci and let's move on to more contemporary filmmakers. So, Ang Lee who has made Crouching Tiger and Hidden Dragon in Chinese, he is also the director of Sense and Sensibility. You can't get more English than Jane Austen okay and Sense and Sensibility is a quintessential English novel set in the 18th century, so, the question of a filmmaker making a cross-cultural interactions that are happening and a filmmaker from one part of the world making cinema in another language is no longer relevant.

Ang Lee has also made Life of Pi with Irrfan Khan. Okay and we have John Woo, who was making action films, martial arts cinema with all the great Chinese stars and he also made Face/Off which is a Hollywood extravaganza with John Travolta and Nicolas Cage. It doesn't get bigger than that. Our own Shekhar Kapur has made film with someone as big as Cate Blanchett. So, [indiscernible] language it just requires - see, the world of cinema - we cannot contain it in such kinds of questions anymore because things are changing.

There are a lot of developments that are happening and it all boils down to the way filmmakers make themselves visible in various settings. Festivals are a good way to do that. So, let's gear the conversation back to the festivals; and then, how they market, exhibit, produce and distribute them. And, after that things happen to filmmakers who have actually taken such kind of initiatives; so, it is all about initiatives. My presentation was how film festivals give people a platform to exhibit their products and then go on to becoming so global and so transnational in their subsequent year.

Jhinuk:

Thank you so much ma'am.



Bharat Punjabi:

So, if there are more questions you know we can address them. It's almost 12 o'clock but you know if there are a couple more questions you can please feel free to speak into the mic, or you know send them through the chat. Yes, Sagar Krishna do you have another follow-up question?

Dr. Viswamohan:

Yes Sagar, you can ask me.

Sagar Krishna:

Hi ma'am, am I audible?

Bharat Punjabi:

Yes, you are.

Sagar Krishna:

Yes ma'am, this is an offshoot of the question related to the OTT, so earlier when the films were exhibited at the film festival after that they were released in theater, but nowadays you get exhibited at the festival and you're related on the OTT for like Aji off the top of my head is a good example which didn't get a proper theatrical release after it was in the festival circuit. So, do you think this new distinction between theatrical release and OTT release, does it change anything or at the end of the day it doesn't matter?

Dr. Viswamohan:

And you will find that very soon everyone would be pining to go back to the theatres. Today I was watching an interview with Anupama Chopra on Film Companion and she had a couple of youngsters as well as the magnificent, wonderful Jackie Shroff okay and they were all having a kind of discussion. And Jackie Shroff says – is a very interesting, he's a very very – his interviews are an absolute joy to watch because he is always unprepared; it's not like he rehearses or intellectualizes too much, he just speaks from the heart – and he says "koi cheez rumal par dekho", "rumal" is handkerchief and "koi cheez chaddar par dekho", "chaddar" is a bedsheet okay so, it is like OTT, etc. You can even watch it on your cell phone but then it almost becomes, it takes away from the pleasure of viewing films. We all want to go back to the theatres and we will be making films.

It is important - for the industry to sustain - it is important that all kinds of cinemas exist, so we no longer talk about cinema as Vellikkeel was pointing out as a monolithic entity, but we have to talk about cinemas and there should be more dialogue between various kinds of cinemas, and it is happening if Jackie Shroff is acting in our house movie across cultures, I am sure that

he doesn't speak south Indian languages but he is now acting in so many south Indian movies, so these kinds of dialogues and changes and conversations are extremely important and therefore you know as viewers you won't get - the best thing for us as viewers because see let's keep aside this academics and you know these publication and worrying about conference presentations and all but we are all basically into it because we love cinema, we want to watch films.

You need to watch regional cinema back-to-back with a major Hollywood film, back-to-back with an art house French film, you know, films from various parts of our country. And you watch them on your cell phone, you watch them on your OTT platforms, but you also want to go back to cinema once in a while.

**Bharat Punjabi:**

I have a question and I'll, then I'll pass it on to you.

**Vellikkeel Raghavan:**

We have to watch films, we have to enjoy films, we have to theorize films also, so that's very interesting anyway so please.

**Bharat Punjabi:**

I had a question Aysha. In the nearly two decades – hello, can you hear me? in the nearly two decades I've spent in Toronto I've seen the Toronto International Film Festival really increase in profile and become very important, so, you know when I often teach my students – I teach a course on cities – and we look at culture as playing a very important role so could you throw some light on how TIFF became so influential on the global stage over the last two decades? Is it just marketing or was there something else going on?

**Dr. Viswamohan:**

Well, one could be the very strong presence of the Indian community in Canada, yeah and if Indians are there then you have to have films because films as we all know – see, cinema has always been one of our major source of entertainment and escapism and also one passion that is cinema other is cricket and of course this is a very cliched expression but it is what it is. So, wherever we are we will encourage and promote our cinema and at the same time we also want to encourage and promote the middle level cinema and people keep forgetting that we always had various cycles of parallel cinema. We had Satyajit Ray, we had V Shantaram, okay so it was not like something that is happening only now.

V Shantaram never depended on major stars but he was a brilliant filmmaker. He made something called Dr. Kotnis Ki Amar Kahani and it went all over the world. Raj Kapoor didn't just make Awara he also made Boot Polish; very few people would remember who were the stars in

Boot Polish so this is the way it has always been, but now it is gaining more recognition because – [Brief indiscernible interruption by Vellikkeel]

Dr. Viswamohan:

What happened?

Bharat Punjabi:

I think there's some interruption, that's okay. Is there other questions? We have space for one more question, if there isn't I would just like to thank everyone, but I just want to ask if anyone has a question.

Vellikkeel Raghavan:

There is a question from Jamila Begum.

Dr. Viswamohan:

I did respond to that, social reality.

Bharat Punjabi:

You did respond to that, yes.

Dr. Viswamohan:

I did, I did. How can I ignore my Jamila Begum?

Bharat Punjabi:

Yeah so, on that note I would like to thank all of you for making this webinar such a huge success. I also wanted to thank Shirley for helping us with the technology part in the background, surely works with CIRCLE and before we end, I just wanted to also announce that CIRCLEs events for this semester are coming to an end. The next event will be on May 5th at 9:00 am and it will center around the book called India: Continuity and Change in the 21st Century.

So, on that note on behalf of CIRCLE I wanted to thank all of you and especially Dr. Aysha for taking the time to come and present at this webinar. I learned a great deal on the importance of culture myself and all these very interesting, wonderful questions on cinema so, it was a very great opportunity to fill my own knowledge in on what is happening with cinema. So, on that note let me thank all of you and thanks again for joining us. Thank you, bye-bye.

Dr. Viswamohan:

Thank you very much! Thank you, thank you. Bye.

[End of transcript]