

- » Understanding what Bollywood is
- » Examining where Bollywood came from
- » Getting down with Bollywood music and dance
- » Seeing Bollywood worldwide

## Chapter 1

# Introducing Bollywood

As Bollywood stars begin to make waves outside India and bring the rich tradition of Indian filmmaking to other parts of the world, it has become impossible to not hear about Bollywood or see its influence worldwide. Though Bollywood is often characterized as an industry filled with musicals, corny dialogue, and over-the-top action scenes, it's so much more.

From its humble beginnings depicting the everyday struggles of Indian citizens after Partition to newer films that comment on polarizing subject matter, Bollywood has undergone a journey through time. Bollywood's true charm is the people that made it famous and continue to drive it forward today. From legendary directors, to homegrown actors, to modern-day media darlings, Bollywood has provided the world with a never-ending case of lovable characters. This chapter serves as your jumping off point into the world of Bollywood. Dive right in.

## Addressing What Bollywood Is

*Bollywood* itself is a gigantic film industry that churns out hundreds of movies every year. The term “Bollywood” typically refers to movies made in Bombay (now Mumbai) studios, in the Hindi language. Figure 1-1 is a wall mural of a Bollywood film at one of their studios, evoking a similar feeling fans feel seeing movie posters as they drive past movie studios in Hollywood.



**FIGURE 1-1:**  
Bollywood  
wall painting  
outside a  
film studio in  
Mumbai.

imageBROKER /Alamy Stock Photo



CULTURAL  
WISDOM



REMEMBER

Other film industries within India create movies in other languages (which we discuss more in Chapters 17), and although they're often remade or dubbed into Hindi films for Bollywood, their individual industries carry distinct and different names. Bollywood movies can be from a number of different genres, but they all carry a familiar formula and have several characteristics shared between the films.

A few of those notable characteristics, which we discuss in Chapter 7, include

- » **Musical aspect:** Nearly every Bollywood movie has at least one song and dance number where the main actors will cut away into a dream sequence and mesmerize the audience with a song. Some actors and actresses gain notoriety for their ability to dance, whereas the *playback singers* for the songs (the singers whose singing is pre-recorded and featured in Bollywood films) also grow famous for their vocal contributions. Though musicals are a bit less numerous in film industries around the world, the art of mixing storytelling with musical interludes is a defining aspect of Bollywood as an industry.
- » **Romance:** Regardless of the overarching theme of the movie, the gravity of its subject matter, or even the film's genre, Bollywood filmmakers nearly always find a way to include a romantic story arc within the plot of the film. As audiences continue to consume the romantic journeys with elated expectation, the filmmakers have no reason to stop. If you love a good love story, chances are you're going to love most Bollywood movies.

- » **Runtime:** A more dubious characteristic of Bollywood films is their runtime. Whereas many Western movies release their audiences after 1½ or 2 hours, Bollywood movies take great pride in enrapturing their audiences for several hours, sometimes as long as 4! Noting the lengthy time commitment that comes with any Bollywood movie, most Bollywood films also come with an intermission in the middle of the movie. Traditionally, when movies premier in theaters in India, the intermission of the movie allows moviegoers to stretch their legs, go to the bathroom, and buy snacks.
- » **Fashion:** Costume design is rarely an oversight in Bollywood films, often becoming the highlight of a movie. Whether the movie is a period piece that requires ornate, period dress, or a modern story set in the Western world, Bollywood movies don't hold back in decorating their characters in some of the trendiest and eye-catching of fashion. Moviegoers pay close attention to the dress of their favorite actors and actresses, and most Bollywood artists end up as international fashion icons as a result.

## Identifying the Families of Bollywood

Bollywood movies share more than just similar characteristics between different films. A few legendary family have dominated Bollywood for nearly its entire history. Some of these families stick purely to acting, whereas others include directors, producers, and singers, occupying every part of the industry. Here are some of the most famous families you'll come across in your journey through Bollywood (we delve deeper into them in Chapter 2):

- » **Kapoors:** Spanning three generations, no family has had more influence on every aspect of Bollywood than the Kapoors. From some of the most iconic actors and actresses to a history of storied directors and producers, the Kapoors dominate the Bollywood scene. The Kapoor family is Indian royalty and truly a force to be reckoned with in the Bollywood industry.
- » **Bachchans:** Made particularly famous by the man who originally held the surname, Amitabh Bachchan, the Bachchan family continues to grow as it enters its third generation. Both Amitabh and his son, Abhishek, married revered actresses in their day, extending their influence across the industry and cementing their family as Bollywood royalty.
- » **Johars:** Known less for acting and more for the movies they have produced and directed over the years, the Johar family is often credited with some of the consensus best Bollywood films of all time. Family patriarch Yash Johar led the way and established the family name within the industry, and his son Karan Johar proudly carries the torch now.

- » **Bhatts:** A multitalented family, the Bhatts have contributed daring directors and incredible actors to the Bollywood industry. Today, this family is one of the most respected within the industry for its continuing contributions to the art of storytelling within Bollywood.
- » **Mukherjees:** A family that appeared in what seemed like every movie of the 1990s and early 2000s, the Mukherjees have carved their own name within the ranks of Bollywood. With esteemed actresses like Kajol and Rani Mukerji hailing from the renowned family, no doubt the Mukherjees are revered across Bollywood.

## Looking at Bollywood's Evolution

Over the years, Bollywood has changed dramatically. Although each movie stays in line with the general characteristics we mention in the section, “Addressing What Bollywood Is,” earlier in this chapter, each era of Bollywood had its own distinct feel, subject matters, and stylization. Comparing a movie from the 1960s to today would showcase the varying ways that Bollywood has progressed, while also exhibiting the characteristics that unite all Bollywood films together under one genre. Each era also brought with it a new parade of stars, bringing their singular talents to the screen in ways no one before them ever had. Here is a quick rundown of the different eras in Bollywood.

### Focusing on the 1940s to the 1960s

The early years of Bollywood were a representation of the tumult that India was undergoing at the time. Freshly independent, India struggled to gain its footing in the early years after gaining its freedom from Great Britain and reeling from a bloody split with Pakistan. Many of the early films characterized the struggles of everyday people in India, connecting with the everyday man and woman.

This era of Bollywood film from the 1940s to the 1960s is often referred to as the Golden Era, because some of the most important and influential Indian movies were made during this time. At this time Bollywood was a direct reflection of its viewers and dealt with difficult socioeconomic conditions and class stratification in India in many of its films. However, as India began to lift itself out of the shambles that Partition had caused, the film industry also took a turn for the positive.



The latter part of this era saw the introduction of romantic-themed movies that changed Bollywood cinema forever. In particular, a more whimsical, joyous cinema characterized movies in the 1960s. Iconic actors and actresses during this time period gave weight to the characters they played on screen and helped give

birth to what would become the largest movie industry in the world. To see how they did it, flip to Chapter 3.

## Eyeing the 1970s and 1980s

By the late 1960s, Bollywood moviegoers were craving a bit of variety in their viewing experience. Enter the complicated and endlessly entertaining genre of action and crime movies. Using the rising underworld in India as a plot device, filmmakers re-invigorated audiences with complex plots, epic villains, and a whole new batch of actors.

One of these actors, Amitabh Bachchan, went on to define this era of Bollywood. Using his angry young man trope, Bachchan took over the Bollywood industry in the '70s and '80s and revolutionized the types of movies that Bollywood fans wanted to see. With intricate plots spanning generations, locales, and themes, he won the heart of a nation and helped to bring Bollywood to new heights. Chapter 4 discusses Bachchan and his rise to fame.



The complexity of movies also increased, as filmmakers grew more and more emboldened to challenge audiences and explore bleaker themes. The emergence of highway bandits, or *dacoits*, spurred a separate genre during this time as well. Still a reflection of India in real life, Bollywood showcased this side of the quickly growing country while staying true to its roots. That's right, even underworld dons fancy a good love story.

## Considering the 1990s and 2000s

One actor took over the film industry in India during the 1990s and never let go. Shah Rukh Khan's arrival into Bollywood was akin to a hurricane coming ashore, as he broke all records and established himself nearly overnight as the King of Bollywood. Appearing first as an anti-hero before evolving into a lovable romantic, Khan's screen presence and endearing personality defined a generation of Bollywood movies.

Of course, Khan wasn't the only talented actor in Bollywood during this time. The emergence of talented filmmakers and actors alike brought a period of great success to Bollywood during this era. Changing societal norms and the entrance of India onto the world stage catapulted Bollywood cinema into a new era where it explored more taboo subjects and experimented more and more with liberal displays of affection in film. That's right, Bollywood actors finally kissed on screen during this era — though not all global fans were happy about it, which you can read more about in Chapter 13.

With the Bollywood industry fully established and flourishing, the studios increased their budgets and often shot movies or portions of movies overseas. Indian audiences were enamored with the many locations shown on screen, and Bollywood's romanticized depictions of places around the world spurred a new generation of Indians to travel and share their culture around the globe. We explore some of the most iconic movies during this time in Chapter 5.

## Arriving at the present day

Bollywood today continues to be a powerhouse film industry, making more movies than even Hollywood most years. Distributing worldwide and with fans all over the globe, Bollywood's influence can't be overstated. Although the stars of former years continue to appear in movies today, a new wave of actors and actresses have taken the helm and brought Bollywood into the next century. New filmmaking technology, the incorporation of social media, and a willingness to deal with difficult subjects have all led to a very different type of cinematic experience for Bollywood fans.

### WHERE IN THE WORLD IS THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT?

Also referred to as simply the *subcontinent*, this large body of land in South Asia encompasses the countries of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, the Maldives, and Bhutan. This book's focus is on Bollywood and India; however, it also touches upon the people living in these countries and abroad and the influence that the cinema has had on them. Here a few terms used to describe the subcontinent and its people:

- **Diaspora:** The dispersion of a people from their origin or homeland.
- **South Asian:** A people or culture hailing from South Asia; usually referring to countries from the subcontinent.
- **Hindustan:** The first century CE Persian word used to refer to the Indian subcontinent. The same name is used to describe the historic Republic of India.
- **Desi:** Any individual of South Asian descent. A term that is used heavily amongst the South Asian diaspora.

Nevertheless, many of the old faithful characteristics continue to shine through. Old songs are finding new listeners, as the wave of remakes applies not only to movies but to songs as well (refer to the chapters in Part 3 about music). Storylines that enamored audiences decades before are being adapted for modern-day depictions and once again packing theaters across the world. As a new era of Bollywood is ushered in, it will be entertaining to see how the old continues to mix with the new. For some quick recommendations from the modern era and to meet some of today's superstars in Bollywood, check out Chapter 6.

## Grooving and Moving: Bollywood Incorporates Music and Dance

Perhaps no aspect of Indian cinema is as important to its success as the music that accompanies nearly every film. Bollywood soundtracks dominate the Indian music landscape and have fans all over the world. As singers, composers, and songwriters gain recognition across not just India but the entire Indian subcontinent, they inevitably find their way into Bollywood movie soundtracks.

The result is a beautiful harmony of various different styles, cultures, and sounds culminating in a crescendo of beautiful music featured throughout the world's largest film industry. The following sections provide a quick overview. Part 3 covers these types of music in greater detail.

### Understanding the importance of the soundtrack

A Bollywood soundtrack closely follows the themes of its accompanying film. As the story evolves within the movie, the songs come in to elevate the characters and themes within the movie. Different from Hollywood soundtracks where the music is often played in the background during important scenes and sequences, Bollywood soundtrack songs are made specifically for the film they're featured in and are often picturized completely separately from the movie's events. Actors breaking out into song and dance isn't an uncommon sight in Bollywood productions.

In a Bollywood production the playback singers actually sing the songs, and the actors on screen lip sync the song. Many of these playback singers gain international fame and recognition from their appearance on a Bollywood soundtrack; such is the power of the Bollywood music industry. In fact, Bollywood movie soundtracks are the key tool that studios use to market movies. Releasing songs

ahead of a movie's release builds up anticipation and excitement as millions of Bollywood fans jam out to the new movie's songs before they have even seen the movie. Check out Chapter 7 for more information about soundtracks.

## Recognizing the roles of different genres

A number of different musical genres encompass Bollywood music. You can see influences from all over the world throughout different eras in Bollywood. Understanding where each of these individual styles hail from is key to seeing the fabric that makes up Bollywood music as a whole. Here are some of the distinct styles that have influenced Bollywood:

- » **Disco:** Classical Bollywood saw an influx of Western disco styles that moved everyone who listened to the dance floor for an entire decade. Pioneers like Biddu Appaiah and Bappi Lahiri brought a decidedly Western sound to Indian movies and introduced the Indian public to disco music that is still listened to today. Chapter 8 examines each of their stories and how they impacted the Bollywood music industry.
- » **Sufi:** The soulful stylings of Sufi Muslim artists from across the subcontinent helped to incorporate styles like qawwali and ghazals into the Bollywood mainstream. Though originally used in religious contexts, the widespread popularity of soul music spurred Bollywood to incorporate it in many of its movies. Today, some of the most famous Bollywood songs fall in this genre of music. Read all about how this music took over the industry in Chapter 9.
- » **Pop and rock:** The worldwide popularity of pop and rock music made it inevitable that they'd find their way into Bollywood music. The distinct sounds of both genres and the increased visibility for Western artists in India thanks to channels like MTV ensured that musicians in India were influenced heavily by their Western counterparts. Chapter 10 discusses pop and rock in greater detail.
- » **Rap:** Similar to its meteoric rise in the United States and Europe, rap music in India started in underground scenes scattered throughout the country. A new wave of artists and feature films focusing on the genre has brought rap into the limelight, and it will be exciting to see how it evolves in the Indian music scene. Chapter 10 also explores rap.
- » **Folk and Punjabi music:** A rich heritage of song and dance, an extremely proud cultural identity, and singular instruments help to define the Punjabi Folk music genre. Though it was formerly reserved for people of Punjabi origin, new artists and Bollywood features have thrust Punjabi music to the forefront of the Indian music industry, both in popular music and in Bollywood movie soundtracks, Punjabi music is everywhere you look in the modern day. Chapter 11 explores more about its history and evolution.



## Shaking your groove thang: Dance in Bollywood

Dancing is also a significant part of the Indian film culture. Actors and actresses alike are praised and vaunted for their dancing abilities in movie songs. Hrithik Roshan, Madhuri Dixit, Govinda, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, and Shahid Kapoor are examples of Bollywood stars who are known not only for their acting skills, but particularly for their dancing ability.



REMEMBER

The tradition of dance in Bollywood doesn't only live on screen, however. All across the world, talented Bollywood fans choreograph their own dances to Bollywood songs and post their creations to the ever-growing collection of Bollywood dance videos online. Soon the popularity spread with dance teams forming around Bollywood music. Dancers competed in cities and at universities around the globe.



CULTURAL  
WISDOM

Today, dancing is as much a part of the life of a Bollywood fan as any other aspect. Weddings, religious ceremonies, family gatherings, and cultural shows all include vibrant dance displays, often inspired by Bollywood songs or dance scenes. New platforms showcasing dance choreography have helped to spread the popularity of individual Indian music choreographers even more. Of course, as these dancers gain popularity, they come full circle and begin to be featured in Bollywood movies. Chapter 12 looks at these movers and shakers.

## Appreciating Bollywood Worldwide

An industry as big as Bollywood could never be contained to just one country. As Bollywood has grown exponentially over the last several decades and Bollywood fans migrated to different parts of the world, Bollywood movies began to reach a global audience. Today Bollywood reigns as one of the world's largest film industry by number of movies made each year and worldwide revenue. With fans across all of the major continents, Bollywood has grown from its humble beginnings into a worldwide phenomenon. We discuss Bollywood's global reach and fan-demonium in Chapter 13 and 14.

As the world continues to advance technologically and introduce new ways for people to interact, Bollywood fans across the globe have taken full advantage. From memes to social media, movie fans have gone online to share their love (or hate) for all things Bollywood. Not only casual fans, but famous members of the Bollywood industry, such as Karan Johar, have started talk shows to provide even more Bollywood coverage. These media moments only help to spread the culture of Bollywood around the world and introduce it to a wider and larger audience each year. Chapter 14 examines all the different ways Bollywood is making waves through various platforms around the world.

## SAMPLING BOLLYWOOD MOVIES

As you venture out into the world of Bollywood, having a starting point is smart. Chapters 19 through 21 highlight some of the essentials you should view as you begin your Bolly-journey and give you some direction so you're not too overwhelmed. Here are some of the must-watch classics that will give an overall taste of Bollywood cinema and represent a good starting point for any new Bollywood fan:

- **3 Idiots:** What better way to step into the world of Bollywood than to watch a light-hearted modern comedy about three friends that also tackles a lot of societal issues plaguing India today? *3 Idiots* is an Aamir Khan blockbuster that left audiences and critics alike singing their praises. A fun watch that doesn't drag on too long, this is one of the best movies for new Bollywood fans dipping their toes into the water.
- **Deewar (The Wall):** If action is more your style, then *Deewaar* is a great introduction into the genre because it's a good example of Bollywood as well as Classical Bollywood films in general. Featuring none other than the great Amitabh Bachchan, *Deewaar* is an emotional family drama that has survived the test of time as one of Bachchan's most iconic roles. The movie explores a number of darker themes from 1970s India and will leave any viewer in awe of the star power of Bachchan and co-star Shashi Kapoor.
- **Karan Arjun:** This 1995 film features an ensemble cast including big names like Salman Khan, Kajol, and Amrish Puri, and was a huge hit at the box office. Chapter 20 sets out ten must-see Shah Rukh Khan movies; add this to the list as a bonus 11th suggestion to get a taste of Khan's early years when audiences were first falling in love with him.
- **Jab We Met (When We Met):** A film representative of the Bollywood romantic comedy genre, *Jab We Met* is a great love story with funny and emotional parts to it without getting too heavy. For a new Bollywood fan, it strikes the perfect balance between Bollywood cheesiness and a great viewing experience. Pairing Shahid Kapoor and Kareena Kapoor (not related in real life), it also showcases what can happen when two Kapoors light up the Bollywood big screen.
- **Bajirao Mastani (Warrior Lover):** This movie is a perfect introduction to the Bollywood historical drama. Epic movie sets, excellent costume design, star power, and dramatic dialogues abound in this classic story of separated lovers. Featuring the biggest power couple in Bollywood today, Ranveer Singh and Deepika Padukone, *Bajirao Mastani* is a tour de force from start to finish.

Of course, no film industry would be complete without honors and awards to hand out to its biggest stars. Bollywood is no exception. The industry hosts several major awards shows each year and doles out awards in all the major categories. Similar to Hollywood, some of these awards are looked at as benchmarks, whereas others are viewed as intriguing bellwethers to showcase specific works from that year. We look at the different awards shows and what they feature in Chapter 15.

Finally, Bollywood didn't become an international entertainment powerhouse without some help from its friends — namely, other film industries both inside and outside India. Though Bollywood has gained worldwide fame, many people don't know about the different regional cinemas that inspire many Bollywood movies and artists throughout the years. Aside from its neighboring industries, Bollywood also gets its inspiration from the other side of the world in Hollywood. Bollywood has become an expert industry at taking inspiration from another area and adapting it for its tried and true audience. Chapters 16 and 17 discuss all the industries that have shaped Bollywood into what it is today.

