

# EVERY tuesday

One Week in One Day

A Weekly dedicated to Art, Culture & Entertainment

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VOL. 2 | ISSUE 17

December 9, 2008 Rs. 20/-

## Pride and Prejudice

Aditya Vyas

*It has been just over a week since the Mumbai terror attacks and even before the blood stains have been washed from the affected sites, we have a situation where political entities are bickering amongst themselves over the choice of the new chief minister.*

*It is really shameful of our politicians as well as the bureaucracy to be displaying such cheapness at an hour when what the country needs is a dynamic and solid leadership. A lot has already been said about the politicians and the system as a whole and it looks like the country is almost on the verge of an uprising against politicians; as one placard at the Gateway of India rally said: "Dogs and politicians not allowed"!*

*It was also suggested by some that the public should not pay taxes. This seems quite illogical and we should not let our emotions spoil discipline, whatever little is left of it.*

*If we think about what led to the incidents that shook the city then it is quite evident that it was sheer neglect in our intelligence systems.*

*In many ways, we also have ourselves to blame. How many times have we as people shown the discipline that a citizen or a national should show? Even in matters as simple as driving, how often do we come across people who switch lanes as if there were no other cars on the road? If that is the kind of behaviour prevalent amongst the educated and elite then we have much to learn.*

*As a nation, our priorities have always seemed a little mixed up - trying to hold on to power in the face of terror and death; refusing to let go our prejudices over matters such as caste, religion and regionalism.*

*In these matters, there is no doubt that artistes can play a large role in sensitising society, and thankfully, they are doing so. The question is, is anybody out there listening?*



## Wide angle

**N**umbers matter. The young demographic of India is an asset, said Nobel laureate Amartya Sen. This has proved true, as it is this power of the Indian population that has been instrumental in putting India on the global map.

While the entire world is investing in India's economy, the entertainment world is not left out. Mergers and foreign direct investments started seeing results since 1990s when a number of television channels came in to the country. It is now the big brother or Bollywood's chance, which is dissolving frames with the father of films, Hollywood, in several joint ventures and meeting considerable

success. Hollywood companies have been sharing technology with Indian films. For instance, *Kaho Na Pyaar Hai* and *Krrish*, the sci-fi film on the lines of *Superman* with magical powers, used a lot of technological support from Hollywood.

Now Hollywood is making even bigger strides in tying up with Indian companies like Big Entertainment, Pritish Nandy Communication, UTV Motion Pictures and many more.

*Saawariya* was the first Hindi film produced by a Hollywood studio that has been released among the projects planned by Sony Pictures Entertainment. SPE Films India - a part of Sony Pictures Entertainment, which

encompasses motion picture production and distribution, TV programming and syndication in 67 countries. Earlier, Sony Pictures distributed *Lagaan*, but *Saawariya* is the first movie that is a Sony Pictures financed and produced enterprise.

Warner Brothers and Disney Studios also have projects in India and almost every Hollywood studio is looking eastward to Bollywood's huge fan base and box office returns.

"What is truly driving this phenomenon is the size of the market, how quickly India is growing and how much disposable income is available for entertainment," says Vin Bhat,

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co-founder of Saavn, a digital distributor of South Asian movies, television shows and music videos in the United States.

As Mini Verma, a seasoned watcher of the emerging interest in Bollywood, says, "The Indian consumer has amassed more wealth per capita, especially in urban areas, and that's what the studios have seen - the end consumer can afford the stuff and afford it *en masse*." She observes that the biggest drivers for Hollywood are the multiplexes flourishing in India. While earlier Hollywood looked solely at the distribution of Hollywood products within India, now they are financing Bollywood for both the Indian market and worldwide.

Deborah Schindler, president of

International Motion Picture Production at Sony Pictures, says, "Certainly the news and perception of India is different now." She points out that Sony is a global company, which in the past decade has produced 36 native language films in 12 countries. "We wanted to expand our involvement in other countries and the two places we've identified in the last two years have been Russia and India. We would not go to a country where movies aren't an integral part of the local culture, and obviously there's this long history of movie-making and with 1,000 movies being released a year in India it's an integral part of Indian society. We are excited that our first movie is a part of that," says Schindler.

Close on the heels of *Saanvariya*, Warner Brothers has announced that it is making Ramesh Sippy's *Chandni Chowk to China*, starring Akshay Kumar under the direction of Nikhil Advani. Fox Star Studios has entered into a multiple-film deal with ace producer Vipul Shah, whose latest film '*Singh is King*' became the top-grosser Indian film of all times. It includes development and production of a visual effects-driven fantasy action movie, a romantic comedy and a first-look deal on Shah's future projects. Under the agreement, the VFX (visual effects) film will be supported by a team of top visual effects directors from Hollywood and supervised by Fox's award-winning team, said Vijay Singh, CEO of Fox STAR Studios India Pvt Ltd. "It is just amazing how Indian cinema has continued to reinvent itself and is today the best expression of popular Indian culture. Our relationship with Vipul is special - a shared vision to create global quality content, but with an Indian soul for Indian audiences across the world," Singh added. He also said they are committed to bring global strengths of Twentieth Century Fox and STAR to the development, production, distribution and marketing of Bollywood movies.

Walt Disney Company (India) managing director, Mahesh Samat reveals that the firm's plans for 2009-'10 include alliances with Shah Rukh Khan's Red Chillies and Kamal Haasan for live action films.

Yash Raj films and Walt Disney Studios have also come together. Walt Disney is one of the biggest and oldest of Hollywood and Yash Raj is the biggest in Bollywood, and the two have come together to produce animation films. Their first production was *Roadside Romeo*, which was released last month.

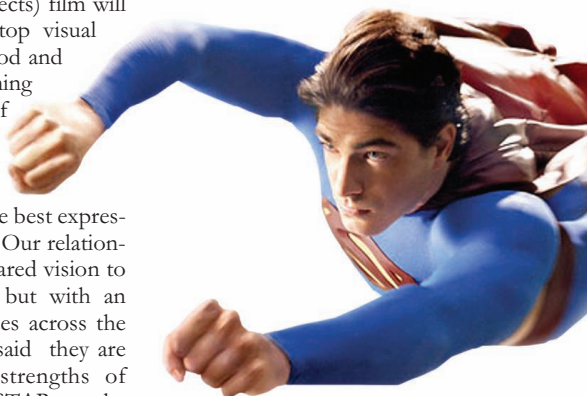
The expanding Indian film industry is expected to touch the \$4.4 billion mark by 2012 from \$2.4 billion in 2007. "It's about how well Indians move out of their comfort zones and take some risks," said Rajinder Dudrah, a scholar of Indian cinema at the University of Manchester. "Bollywood is becoming internationally savvy and these potentially untapped audiences could transfer into box office returns."

Says Shyam Benegal, India's most respected producer and director, "With a population of about 1.1 billion and some of the world's

lowest movie ticket prices, India already has the planet's largest film-going audience. There definitely is a methodology there. In the past they were coming with their own movies only with the purpose of distribution, with the help of subtitling and dubbing. But this could tap only ten per cent of the movie audience. Indians like to see movies closer to their own lives. So now the idea is to collaborate for those kinds of movies, which are Indian with definite international flavour, which appeals to Indians living abroad. This ensures better profit."

"Bollywood has undergone a change with a lot of big-budget, Hollywood-type movies with modern themes," said Amita Sarkar, director of the Federation of India Chambers of Commerce and Industry's entertainment division.

The keys to growth will be merchandising and international growth, Sarkar said. Bollywood has long tried to reach beyond its borders. The International Indian Film Academy (IIFA) awards were launched in London in 2000 as an international marketing tool for A-list studios and talent. After the first show, Hindi cinema ticket sales grew 35 per cent in Britain over the following six months, according to the IIFA.



"Their aim is to connect with the world's largest cine-going audience," says Vipul Shah, who has entered into a Rs-150-crore deal with Fox-Star Studios.

The marriage is expected to bring in more professionalism and sophistication in production values. Film marketing professional Vikramjit Roy says: "We live in an era where co-operation and joint ventures are natural. A tie-up with a Hollywood or some other international studio brings in scale (in terms of markets, fund flows and operations) and professional and technical expertise and this adds to the creative process. As the market for Indian cinema grows internationally, these global networks will allow Indian film producers to showcase their work outside the home market and get greater exposure.

Says Ram Kamal Mukherjee, vice-president, Media and Special projects, Pritish Nandy Communication, "Recently we have tied-up with Sony Pictures (Hollywood) for three-film contract - a Rs 250 crore deal. As far as the technical expertise is concerned, I think that Bollywood is equally capable of

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**tuesday**  
One Week in One Day  
A Weekly dedicated to Art, Culture & Entertainment

Editor and Publisher:  
**Shashi Vyas**

Advertising and Marketing:  
**Vinit Ganjwala**

Distribution and Public Relations:  
**Vaibhav Patil**

Editorial Co-ordination:  
**Menka Shivdasani and Raju Kane**  
The Source, 107, TV Industrial Estate, Worli,  
Mumbai: 400018.  
Tel: 24901330  
e-mail: [everytuesday@editsource.com](mailto:everytuesday@editsource.com)

Published by:  
**Ace Publications and Promotions Pvt Ltd.**  
B' Wing, Barodawala Mansion,  
81, Dr Annie Besant Road, Worli,  
Mumbai: 400018.  
Tel: 24902832, 66608717  
e-mail: [everytuesday07@gmail.com](mailto:everytuesday07@gmail.com)

Printed at:  
**Spenta Multimedia**  
Peninsula Spenta,  
Mathuradas Mill Compound,  
N M Joshi Marg, Lower Parel,  
Mumbai 400 013.  
Tel.: 2481 1048

Registration Number: RNI 4789

Published by:  
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making films in terms of technology compared to Hollywood. It would bring in a sea change in terms of production, post-production and even marketing. When we have the budgets to pump up the project then we can afford to go beyond our set parameters."

However, he agrees, that Bollywood can learn much from Hollywood about different, smart ways to distribute and generate interest in movies using various platforms. India makes 1,000-odd movies a year and earns a revenue of \$3 billion while Hollywood makes just 600-odd movies, earning revenue in excess of \$80 billion.

As far as the scripts are concerned, it is a creative process and one needs to work hand in hand. He does not see much interference in terms of content at the moment. "They want to tie-up with Indian production houses because they want to make films with our values and content. They will certainly not be a part of a shoddy product or subjects, which doesn't create any international interest. I believe that every film finds its own audience and that's the magic of cinema. They are aware of our milieu because Bollywood mainstream cinema has made its mark at Cannes and Oscars. Like the way we understand their cinema, they too understand what

we are making and not just that, they even appreciate our efforts."

Interestingly even Indian bigwigs are looking for investing in Hollywood, in their quest to expand their business. Recently, Steven Spielberg, one of Hollywood's most powerful directors, has joined hands with Indian mogul Anil Ambani. Ambani is to back Spielberg's studio with \$550m of equity investment from his Mumbai-based company Reliance Big Entertainment. Another \$750m will be raised in debt, say reports.

Big Entertainment has pursued openings in Hollywood for months. At Cannes this year Anil Ambani announced that he was looking to put \$1bn into eight Hollywood-based production companies owned by celebrities including George Clooney, Nicolas Cage, Tom Hanks and Brad Pitt. Reliance, which is also picking up cinema chains in the US, is attempting to build a global movie company.

UTV, which is building a media empire, encompassing movies, television and the Internet with 32 per cent ownership by Walt Disney Co, is already producing films in Hollywood. It co-produced the recent M. Night Shyamalan's fairly successful horror flick "*The Happening*".

These Indian groups stand to profit more than investors in Hollywood because they can use US connections to make more money in the Indian media market. Receipts from the domestic movie industry are reportedly rising at a happy 15 per cent a year compared with the US, where the growth rate is under 5 per cent recently.

Indians' Hollywood tie-ups are driven by the opportunity to better learn the ropes, to be able to get access to the latest technology and to be able to get scale, said Farokh Balsara, who oversees the media and entertainment industries for Ernst & Young.

Surely the pictures are merging in a way that the joining of the two frames achieves seamless perfection.



## Stop Press!

Every Tuesday, Mumbai's only arts and culture magazine, celebrated its first anniversary in August 2008. Since its inception on August 14, 2007, it has become a trusted source of news and information related to the art world, reaching out to - and being supported by - some of the most prominent people in the fraternity.

Now, in the diamond jubilee year of Indian independence, Every Tuesday has set its sights even higher. A collectors' issue in the style of a coffee table book is being planned, and is due for release on the eve of Republic Day next year. The book will feature the people who have shaped the world of Indian art and culture post Independence.

In the light of this ambitious project, subscribers may please note that four issues of Every Tuesday are being dropped, and that subscriptions will be extended for that period accordingly.

There will be no issues of Every Tuesday dated December 23 and 30, 2008, and January 6 and 13, 2009.

## Cultural treat

Kalyan Gayan Samaj has organised a Gandharva Mahotsav at Aatre Rang Mandir, Kalyan on December 12, 13 and 14, 2008.

On December 12, Padmashree award winner Hariharan will mesmerise the audience with his beautiful ghazals at 9 p.m. December 13 has music greats like Pandit Ajay Pohankar and Devaki Pandit. December 14 will have a stunning dance performance by Kathak dancer Aditi Bhagwat at 10.30 a.m. In the evening, there is sitar performance by Niladri Kumar and a fabulous fusion by Roopak Kulkarni (*bansuri*), Satyajit Talvalker (*tabla*) and others will follow.



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