

Globalization and Culture
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Lecture – 18
Bollywood Assemblages – I

Hindi films have been travelling for always a century, not just Hindi films, but Indian films have been travelling for a century, but everyone has been talking about the travel of Bollywood films, and has been looking at it, as fallout of globalization, ignoring the earlier flows of Indian cinema, since a nineteen thirties. Indian films have been travelling since thirties, only when they began to travel to the west, only when they began to find a bigger audience in the west, even though there was an audience for the west, of foreign influence in the west, as early as the fifties, when we found that there is evidence for hundred films have been exported to the west and did find some takers, some audience in the west.

Its only in the post nineties, a audience of Hindi films in their new avatar as Bollywood films, that has attracted inordinate, inordinate media attention, and its new market for the for Indian films in the west, among, not only in the west because they are being exported to the west, but among the white audience, that has, that has that has become the talk of the whole world, and that has and that is seen as the globalization of Indian cinema, Indian commercial cinema.

A movement, it began almost a century ago. So, in this section I am going to look at, I am going to compare two markets where Indian films the tradition markets for Indian films, we saw in the Unesco report that the British Malaya, was one of the traditional markets for Indian films, and I am going to compare this traditional market of Indian films, with the new market for Indian films in the west, by looking at two spaces, the space of Singapore, and the space of Germany and also comparing a few other perspectives.

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Now, in the case of Singapore its extremely interesting, because here, the old market, because this is a traditional market for Indian films, the old audience of Indian films in Singapore, who some of whom were born in the, the British Malaya, they rubbed shoulders us with the new audience of Bollywood films. So, there is a, there is a assemblage of the old audience, the old Chinese, the Tamil, and the Punjabi audience, many of them over the history in the plantation economy, with the new audience, who consists of professional workers or new NRI audience, new expatriate audience, who frequently, who they have become a avid fans of Indian films in the, in since a nineteen nineties, and also a new generation of viewers, a new generation audience, who are, a who have the knowledge of Indian cinema, but seem to enjoy the new brand of Bollywood films.

So, we are going to look at some of these, we are going to meet some of these audience, and I will summarize the interviews I had with some of them, instead of playing the interviews for you. So, I take you to the Jade Cineplex in Shaw towers, which is a cinema, Cineplex, exclusively dedicated to this screening of Indian films in Singapore, the screening of Hindi films in Singapore, and I must point out that in all of South East Asia, unlike Bangkok, we found, where we found Indian films, Hindi films over screen once a month, some, some films in other language as well was screened in theatres only once a month, largely due to the efforts of the Singh brothers.

In Singapore has, is the only part of South East Asia, which has theatres exclusively dedicated for this screening of Indian films, and there are some theatre complexes in which, by convention, or a because of their location, Hindi films are screened and the other theatres in which Tamil film screens are screened. In addition to that some of the main stream multiplexes on Orchard road, also screened us a few in Hindi films such as Chandi Chowk to China was screened in one of the, one of the main streams, one of the Cineplex located at the Orchid road, when it was released in 2008, 2009, but Jade Cineplex in Shaw towers, is one such complex, where Hindi films are, which is exclusively dedicated to the screening of Hindi films.

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So, we work into Jade theatre, and it is on Beach road, and just to cross a national library of Singapore. When we cross the road we inhabit, we enter a different world, we are crossing the road and when we come to beside enter a totally different world altogether. I take you to the ticket counter, and the friendly, friendly assistant, the Malay assistant in that ticket counter, who in addition to selling tickets, also offers you friendly advice about the kind of films with which are doing well, and which film you should be watching, and which you should be watching or which hasn't found many takers, then she is my informant on the films which did well, which surprise me considering that those were not the kind of films which were expected to do well, but in the Diaspora spaces, as I was warned by the owner of video parlour in Bangkok, the films which we

do well in India not necessarily the films that do well in the diasporas, and this information was confirmed by the friendly counter assistant in Jade Cineplex.

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I meet a young couple who are going up to watch tickets for new release of that week, a new release which was Kambakht Ishq. It was screened in its Cineplex, dedicated to the screening of Hindi films, and a Singapore's, you know, the Bollywood assemblages as I said, function with the multiple histories of Indian migration, as those, as well as those of cinematic exhibition in the case of Singapore, through which Singapore's different ethnic populations such as the Malay, and the Chinese, were also inserted in the Bollywood space, along back South Asians and in expatriate Indians.

So, here this couple is Malay, of Malay heritage, the young woman is completely Malay, but the young man, her escort friend is of mixed parentage, his father is Indian and his mother is, sorry his father is Malay, and his mother is an Indian. So, because of that, he is able to not only enjoy, understand, the films, the visual aspect of films, like most Malays do, but likes many Malays, and because of his knowledge of Urdu, which he is got from his mother, from one of his parents, he is able to understand the language of the film as well. And this couple, the young woman was a big fan of Shaheed Kapoor, and John Abraham, and a couple sang a song of Kuch Kuch Hota Hai for me.

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But, other than the young couple, I also met this mother and daughter, duo, the Malay mother and daughter, which reveal to me with the difference between preferences of the new generation, the old audience of the Hindi films, the mother for instance, and the new audience of Hindi of Bollywood films, the daughter. While the mother claimed to big fan of a Hindi films of the nineteen seventies, such as the Dewar, and was the die heart fan of Shashi Kapoor and Amitabh Bacchan, and she found the Hindi films of the nineteen seventies better than the present generation of Bollywood films, because according to her, they had a storyline and they, they were more entertaining, and they were more socially oriented,, than the new films. The daughter of course, was hooked to the new Bollywood films, and the two ladies had come together to watch a Shaheed, new Shaheed Kapoor release Mausam, which is a not the run of the mill Bollywood film, which is, which would I would assume, would make the both mother and daughter happy, because its serious, and yet it uses the Bollywood glamour.

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It does bring in the overall charm, when at, the story begins, and yet it is cast in the Bollywood glamour. And now these spaces of exhibition in the Diasporas, in our spaces in which one finds not just Indian viewers, but all South Asian viewers, particularly viewers from those nations, where screening of Hindi films has been banned, given the hostile relations between the India and Pakistan, and also in Bangladesh, which where, where they have not been screened for a long time.

So, during my visit to Jade complex, I also met these Bangladeshis from who were visiting from UK, and one of the highlights of their visits as I found in case of Afghanis and the Pakistanis, was to take in a new Hindi film, and they had come to watch New York.

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Apart from the Bangladeshis, I found this young doctor from US, UK, who was were visiting again a Punjabi doctor, a second generation Indian Punjabi from UK, who was visiting family in Singapore, and she would come along with her girl friends, who were of the different nationalities, a Pilipino, a friend from Singapore, and two other friends from UK, white friends from UK, they were accompanying her during this visit to the theatre.

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But I found the space of the audience, the space of Jade, segmented, not only in terms of necessity and nation, but also in terms of class, because as opposed to the Bangladeshi expatriate women, the visiting UK Bangladeshi, the (Refer Time: 12:16) UK Bangladeshis women, I also met these shy guest workers from Bangladesh, and as we know now that Bangladesh, the Singapore has invites a large number of Bangladeshis migrant workers, who are largely employed in the construction industry, and sometimes some of them are students, now the sole entertainment for these workers, after 5 days, or 6 days of hard work, they will get weekly off on Sunday, is to take an film, while the Tamil migrant workers, gravitate towards sometimes to the Rex theatre sometimes when they can afford the price on tickets, which is about, which ranges between eight to ten dollars, depending on the day of the week you watch.

Bangladeshi workers were found in Jade Cineplex, spending, choosing to spend their hard earned money on watching a Hindi film, a John Abraham film.

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And we meet this young couple who had come Jade hopping, I wish I could play the song from them, but I am not able to play the song, perhaps I could do it later.

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They sang the entire Kuch Kuch Hota Hai song for my benefit, it was very lovely, and they knew all the lyrics of all the Hindi films songs, which I myself wasn't aware of, and they, they were not only aware of the songs, they were also aware of the gossip for films Hindi films, and during this time when Shah Rukh Khan visited Singapore, he had a huge Malay audience coming to greet him.

Malay audience of all ages and generations, and all sexes, is coming to greet him and welcome in to Singapore. Now from Singapore I take you to another traditional market of Hindi films, and this as I said earlier, that apart, in the western world, the major exports of Hindi films of in the fifties, in the fifties between fifty six and sixty two, out of ten percent of films which were exported to west, Russia constituted the most important, a major market for the these films, and in response to a talk I gave, on a community radio programme in Canada, I received his letter from a Russian audience, who since has become a friend, and contributed to a volume I have added.

Through this, we come to know how the, how Russians, before the lapse of, we are talking about the pre-global era, and before the collapse of the former USSR, how a, how the, what was status of in Hindi films in Russia, before the collapse, before the Iraq globalization, and before the collapse of the former USSR, and I would read this to you, just to, since I do not have, have not conducted field work in Russia. I only have, I draw on her authority, and I thank her for sharing this with me, and sharing her people with me, in the edited volume, my edited volume, which she says that for me, as well as for many other Russians people, India is a Greenland, the motherland of philosophy, poetry, and tradition. We actually do not see it as some exotic sunny sandal smelling place, as some westerners probably, in my generation it is something we grew up with, a pathway to childhood.

So, this is significant, before we move on to the new Bollywood audience, in the other parts of the west, this testimony of, a someone who grew up in the former Russia, is very important, because in Russia unlike in the present west, Indian films were not eroticised, as she distinguishes herself from other westerners, and says that is a pathway to childhood.

For example, it was my father who drew my attention to (Refer Time: 16:39) when I was five, and we were both fascinated by its complex story within story plot, my classmates and I used to be great fans of Kipling films, the when I grow older, I understood that most of the short stories were dictated by the fear of the wild and the unknown, and I think the white man's burden, was basically inspired by it, as well.

Now, she talks about having discovered Rabindranath Tagore, and when she goes into her reception of Russia Films, of in Hindi films in Russia.

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And from here, from there I know want to Germany. I was told that, except for community, there are no screenings of Hindi films in Germany anymore, except for an occasional community screening, there are no further, no screenings of Hindi films in Germany. This is in 2011, I was surprised to find on my arrival in the tourist town of Heidelberg, when I switched on my television, I found myself watching a film which, which had women dressed in saris, and I was like, quite surprised to see that on German television, because they seem to be speaking German, and as I, out of curiosity I continued to watch the filming screen on television, the faces seemed very familiar to me, where I, I assumed that it is part of some exotic German drama, tele soap or drama, a, when King Khan appeared on the screen, and I realised I was watching Chuk de India, and you wont believe that I was watching Chuk de India in German, in that Shah Rukh Khan was speaking German .

And then I was informed that Germany has, has now market for Hindi films, not only the among the, the South Asians, not only among the Diasporas, but also among the Turkish people, the, but afghans, other south the Pakistanis, other south the Asians, but also among Germans, and thus started with the, with the screen, airing of down market channel in Germany, which was largely watched by Turkish and Afghan audience, and these films were, were screened on the Saturdays, the day I happened to switch on my television set, and it was because these films were being screened on (Refer Time: 19:29), the channel went up market, it from viewers not only among the working class

Turkish and Afghan migrants, but also the mainstream migrants. So, the Germany did not have regular exhibition of Indian films, as in Singapore, where they continued to be screened, there were no theatres dedicated to the screening of Indian films in Germany.

But they are regularly screened at least in 2011, they were being shown in on television and other Germans watch them through on DVDs and CDs, but I was extremely surprised to find these posters of Salman Khans new release, Ready, being posted outside a pub in Heidelberg, as one walks out of the railway station, as one walks down the bridge, one, I found these posters where you can see the dates of the screenings of Ready in different German towns, on second June, in (Refer Time : 20:26) and fourth June in (Refer Time: 20:45) on sixth in Hamburg, and tenth June in Hannover, and they are being screened, as screened in cinema halls Keeno Noise, in (Refer Time: 20:57) in Cinemax in Hamburg and Rudnick and Cinemax may colloid(Refer Time: 21:04) in Hannover.

Now, I was told that now, there are no more screenings of Hindi film anymore, they are mainly community screenings. So, probably these are community screenings, but they were being popularised in very visible spaces, in very main stream spaces outside this pub in Germany. So, is Germany ready for Salman Khan? It has been ready for Shah Rukh Khan for a long time. In fact, Shah Rukh Khan is a very popular Hindi film actor in Germany. It started with the shooting of his film, in DD of Dil to Pagal Hai, in the Black Forest and a subsequently a number of his films have not only been screened, but they have also been shots in different parts of Germany, such as Don 2 was at shot at this time.

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Now, now, how does Germany look at Bollywood? How does the new audience of Germany the new Bollywood audience as may call them, and the new market for Indian films in Germany, how is it viewed there? And is it different from the viewing or the pleasures than the Bollywood films offer in the old Diasporas, or the traditional markets such as Singapore and Russia.

To some extent, I would say that it ducktails into that interest, that that brand of orientalism, which we found interest in traditional Indian philosophy religion, Tagore and the works, which we found in markets like Russia, it is a same cult for Indian mysticism, yoga, which a, which creates a taste for Bollywood in, in Germany, and it has a continuity between the new oriental interest in yoga and mysticism, and the Bollywood in present.

This is at the Heidelberg railway station, I found in the book shop in the railway station, Bollywood films, Bollywood DVDs of Bollywood films, incidentally, the two films which I found, the two DVDs I found was one of, Kabhi Kushi Kabhi Gam, and the other one, these were with the German subtitles and produced in Germany, and the other one was Karan Arjun, an old Shah Rukh Khan starrer, both Shah Rukh Khan starrers, but was what surprised me when more was, that not only with DVDs being to sold in main stream shop, in a railway station, but there were also Indian film magazines.

Bollywood film magazines, being marketed in the available across the counter, two film magazines; one is called Bollywood and the other one is called Ishq. The, the and both these films are, carry along the lines of filmfare and other tabloids it is in India, which carry gossip about the latest gossip about Indian film stars, and they are in German. They are being marketed, but interestingly these books are stacked, just it in the stacks which are makes to the stacks which sell books on yoga Buddisism, Buddhism, Indian mysticism, art of living, and so on.

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So, I can, you can take a look at these film magazines, Best of Bollywood, which is in English and there is also an issue of Ishq, which I cannot see here, but I found it in bookshop.

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Now, from Heidelberg, we move to Mannheim, and we see how Bollywood audience, how German audience yet to watch films in Mannheim. As I was waiting outside this DVD shop in Mannheim, a young couple walked in, they, and this is the kind of spaces through which Bollywood films have leaked since the seventies, they have been stocked in grocery stores, and they are just oppose against all other things Indian, such as henna, bindis, and dals and spices. So, it is part of the entire parafunctionalia of India, of Indian mysticism, spirituality it in the west, and which is being the, (Refer Time: 25:56) that is being marketed in the west, its in one such shop, Mannheim, in the Turkish quarter, this is where I found the, I found this, the places from where, German audience watch subtitle Indian films. And again like the spaces in Bangkok, these are pirated DVDs of Bollywood films.

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And we have this young Turkish women who picks up bangles, after picking up a DVD of a film.

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And now we meet young men in another Bollywood play store, which is called Bollywood incidentally, and who aspires to be Shah Rukh Khan. Now this young man is from Pakistan, his father has started grocery shop in Mannheim, and he stocks the largest collection of Bollywood videos and DVDs which are in the case shop called Bollywood, not Asia bazaar.

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And Asia bazaar is incidentally the oldest shop which stock DVDs, but the interesting thing is, when I was, when I was waiting outside, I was told to go and visit this shop, when I was waiting outside photographing the signboard, which I do not have in this slide, I found a young German boys, teenagers rather, both ask me singing lejha lejha, and this came as a surprise I thought I miss heard them, because I thought I was imagining it, but I went closer and I found they were indeed singing lejha lejha.

And this came as a big surprise for me because I was told that the audience of Bollywood films in Germany is largely restricted to women, and too to young teenage women in Germany, but this was not teenage women, but young teenage young men, who were singing the Bollywood song, when they saw me in dressed in, when they saw an Indian women taking pictures of the Bollywood store, Bollywood key store.

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This is one of the oldest stores, in which, stores, which have been there since 70s own by a Sikh, who stocks Bollywood merchandise, and from Mannheim, we moved to Frankfurt; in Frankfurt once again we see posters of Hindi films. The latest release as well as the old releases, stacked in Harris Trading Company, own by Mr. Boebath, and Mr Boebath has been, has stocked Indian DVD s and video cassettes, and audio cassettes of Hindi films. He claims to have the latest collection of audio cassettes in Germany, which has no takers today in the age of DVDs and CDs and in this shops.

So, this is one of the oldest shops, which has stocked groceries, in, and this is again opposite the (Refer time: 29:14) for the Central Station in Frankfurt, and during, during my, I hung around the shop for almost an hour, to see the kind of people who were visiting this store, and the kind of the films they were buying, I found a very interesting response, very interesting sample. So, very disparate in terms of age, in terms of functionality - the first person I got an meet to was an Ethiopian who, who was who was now resident in, in Germany, and who came to get his DVDs of Indian films largely because of his nostalgia of for homeland, and because he was a big fan of Hindi films, when he was in Ethiopia, when he moved to Germany, he continued to watch Indian films, and he seem to have a preference again, for the older films rather than the new films in contrast to new Bollywood audience of German films.

A few minutes later, a German couple walked in and sought my advice, as to what films they ought to be taking, they ought to be watching, they had watch some of the canonical Bollywood films, like Kal Ho Na Ho, Kabhi Kushi Kabhi Gum and. So, on, but they wanted to watch some offbeat films, and sought my advice as to which one they should be watching this week.

But if we look surprising where this middle age women, who had come to pick up copies of filmfare and Stardust from this grocery store, and then I asked them, about how they got interested in Bollywood, in film magazines, one of them volunteer to inform me that, she had, she, she began to watch Bollywood films, and to like them, because they were very romantic, as compared to German films, and they promoted traditional family values, which a certain generation of German women, particularly women like, where there is possibilities for romance, there are possibilities for preserving traditional family values, which some of them missed, they found in Indian films particularly Shah Rukh Khan films, and this middle age women was so inspired by Indian films, that she has started learning Hindi, so as to be able to understand those films better, and also kept hands on, on the gossip in the Indian film industry, by picking up her copy of filmfare and Stardust and all the latest film magazines.

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And here we meet Mr Rajan of another DVD store; this is unlike a Bopet store. Its not a grocery store, its, its only a DVD store, and its owned by an Afghan, asylum seeker in

Germany, who had to flee Afghanistan most of the, most of the owners of the DVDs shops in Frankfurt happen to be Hindus, or even Muslims from Afghanistan, who had to flee Afghanistan, after Talibanization, and many of them had set up these shops, incense shops, or DVDs shops, which Mister Raju spoke fluently Hindi, and German English and also Punjabi, because from Afghanistan he had come to India, he had been a government merchant in Faridabad, and from there he had moved to, subsequently moved to a Germany.

Now, in Mr. Raju's shop, I found DVDs, I could buy a DVD of the Hindi film, the latest release I do not remember probably, it was wanted already, and I could get that DVD for two euros, only for two euros whereas, legal, legally made album of, of very old Bollywood films say Kabhi Kushi Kabhi Gum could be available for something like twelve dollars. So, unlike a Germans, who strictly adhere to piracy laws and ask for original album rather than pirated albums, the south Asian buyers and even some German buyers that I met in the DVD shop, were not ours buying this pirated versions, as to be able to check in the latest Hindi film releases.

Where in Mister Raju's shop I found not just the latest Hindi films releases, but also DVDs of the latest Punjabi films, incidentally manufactured in Italy, and marketed by a company in Netherlands. So, there was kind of triangulation of a film DVD which was manufactured in Punjab, and then it was dubbed in Italy, or it was a company, it was very complicated thing, but the DV s of Punjabi films which are not available in India, I could buy in the shop, in this shop called Dostana in Frankfurt.

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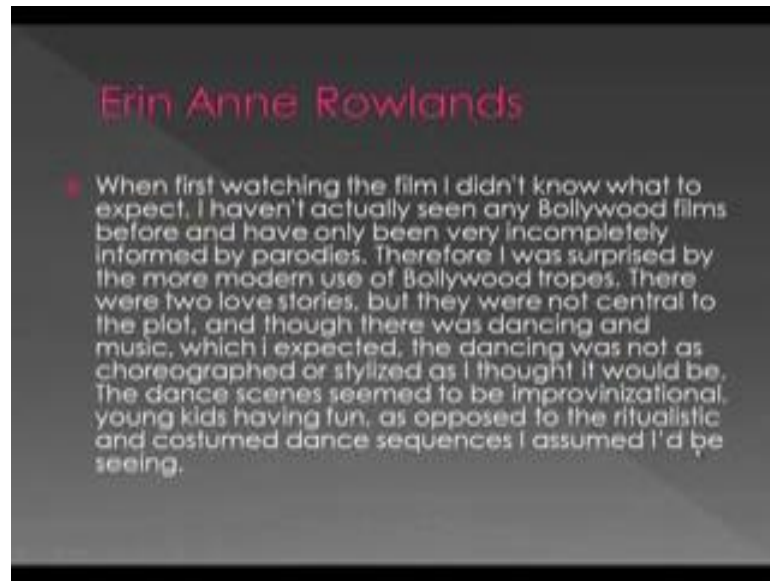


So, there is an another store in Koin, owned by a lady a called Kajol who was again from Afghanistan, and you can see Bollywood merchandise, stacked along the other grocery items in her shop.

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So, I conclude by this testimony from young Canadian student, as to why, the west, how the west responds to Bollywood, Bollywood films, and of course, she is a student of Indian cinema. So, her, her appreciation of Bollywoods films is more, it is more informed rather than of the lay audience. So, she says when first watching the film, I didn't know what to expect, I had not actually seen any Bollywood film before, and I have only been very incompletely informed by parodies.

Therefore I was very surprised by the modern use of Bollywood tropes, there were two love stories, they were not central to the plot, and she is talking about the film she has watched, the dance scenes seems to be improvised, young kids having fun.

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So, what, what seems to be saying is that, the film still employed peoples of Bollywood cinema girl meets boy, the villain, a sacrificing mother, they expecting the film to end happily, but it was different. So, the contrast of the happy carefree student days, against the intensity of the protests and eventual quasi terrorist acts is what makes the film so gripping.

The presence of the white, she is talking about Rang de Basanti, the presence of the white women was also interesting from films like Shakespeare wala, and Gandhi, to placed like borderline novels like Passage to India. It appears that white female characters are like able to relate Indian male characters, the kinship is always emphasized, this pattern appeared again in Rang de Basanti, but I was struck by the fact that the relationship between Sue and DJ was never consummated. So, this kind of sums up the response of the new generation of the Bollywood on audience, such as this young student of a course in film study, a young white student in a course in film studies, who is interested in seeing the integration of the two cultures, and she wants to see more Bombay cinema in the future.

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But I would conclude by, by the responses of the young German women, who had come to pick up DVD, DVDs in the store in Mannheim, when I asked them in my broken German, what films they like, which films, which Bollywood films they had seen, and who was their favourite actor, the answer was Zophi, Zophi. So, many, that they could not possibly remember the names of the films they had seen, or the names of the actors they, they liked.

But its certainly King Khan, Shah Rukh Khan, who enjoys the great following not only in Germany, but Austria, where I believe friends of Shah Rukh Khan, circulate dolls in a model after Shah Rukh Khan, as a way of expressing their loyalty, as the part of his fan club.

So, with this I conclude this unit, which compared the traditional markets of Bollywood Hindi cinema, with the new markets of Bollywood cinema in the west, and had in between market in the west, which displayed elements of both.

Thank you.