

## **A LOVE STORY OF FANTASY AND FASCINATION: EXIGENCY OF INDIAN CINEMA IN NIGERIA**

Kaveri Devi MISHRA\*

**Abstract.** The prevalence of Indian cinema in Nigeria has been very interesting since early 1950s. The first Indian movie introduced in Nigeria was “Mother India”, which was a blockbuster across Asia, Africa, central Asia and India. It became one of the most popular films among the Nigerians. Majority of the people were able to relate this movie along story line. It was largely appreciated and well received across all age groups. There has been a lot of similarity of attitudes within Indian and Nigerian who were enjoying freedom after the oppression and struggle against colonialism. During 1970’s Indian cinema brought in a new genre portraying joy and happiness. This genre of movies appeared with vibrant and bold colors, singing, dancing sharing family bond was a big hit in Nigeria. This paper examines the journey of Indian Cinema in Nigeria instituting love and fantasy. It also traces the success of cultural bonding between two countries disseminating strong cultural exchanges thereof.

**Keywords:** Indian cinema, Bollywood, Nigeria.

### **Introduction: Backdrop of Indian Cinema**

Indian Cinema (Bollywood) is one of the most vibrant and entertaining industries on earth. In 1896 the Lumière brothers, introduced the art of cinema in India by setting up the industry with the screening of few short films for limited audience in Bombay (present Mumbai).

The turning point for Indian Cinema came into being in 1913 when Dada Saheb Phalke considered as the father of Indian Cinema. He made the first feature (silent) film "Raja Harishchandra" publicly screened in Coronation cinema in Mumbai. Inspired by the silent movie - "The Life of Christ" [1].

After the success of Raja Harishchandra, Dada Saheb Palika made nearly 95 movies and 26 short films in a span of nearly two decades of his career as filmmaker. He made movies including - Satyavan Savitri, Mohini Bhasmasur, Lanka Dahan, Kaliyamadan etc.[2]

Later Ardeshir Irani ended the era of silent movie paving way for talkies and made the India's first audio-visual film. “Alam Ara” and the first colour

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\* University of Technology, PNG

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.factsninfo.com/2013/07/dadasaheb-phalke-facts-biography-father-of-indian-cinema.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://rollingframes.org/2016/07/13/the-father-of-indian-cinema-dadasaheb-phalke/>

movie “Kisan Kanya” 1960’s with the the introduction of color and sound, Indian cinema witnessed its golden era. The filmmakers experimented with various types of music from classical to pop, and thus began the era of melodrama, with big huge sets, cheerful music with song and dance in 1970’s. It was the time when Bollywood films achieved major commercial success, that in turn, provided ample opportunities to the Indian filmmakers to exhibit their creativity. [3]

### **Advent of Bollywood films in Nigeria: An epilogue**

Despite the lowly represented Indian immigrants, Bollywood could successfully win over the hearts of Nigerians with respect to entertainments. According to the High Commission of India in Nigeria, only about 35,000 Indians live in the country primarily in Lagos, out of a total 170 million population [4]. Unlike others parts of the world, Bollywood itself caters to its strong immigrants and Non Resident Indians (NRI) population in US, UK, Canada or Australia.

The journey of Bollywood in Nigeria began in the early 1950’s, when a Lebanese business man decided to import Bollywood movies against expensive American movies for distribution and consumption in Nigeria. This initiative turned into a massive and unexpected success.

The intense melodrama, fantasy, music and dance of the early 1950’s of Indian Cinema fascinated the Nigerians, where people instantly related the themes and story line. Bollywood films strong plot has typically promoted the traditional values of family, faith, morality and hard work, the concepts that deeply shared by the Nigerians. In addition to joint -family set up’s, glamorous weddings, actors dressed in colorful costumes, traditional display of culture like eating with fingers, loud music, drumming. Furthermore, few themes of the films portray on fighting against poverty, overcoming colonial influence, love, romance, courtships and the like.

All the films casted with handsome heroes, attractive heroes and beautiful damsels improbable plots and happy endings that made perfect connections and bonding among the audience. That was how it made the Nigerians flock to see Indian movies and this state of obsession has never really eased till to date [5].

According to South Asian Magazine for Action and Reflection (SAMAR) [6], “Mother India,” the three-hour classic epic melodrama starring the legendary actress Nargis in 1957 is one of the most popular of all Indian films in Nigeria till date.

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<sup>3</sup> Joshi, Hemant. "Indywood The Indian Film Industry" (PDF). *Deloitte*

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/nollywood\\_rivals\\_bollywood\\_in\\_filmvideo\\_production/](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/nollywood_rivals_bollywood_in_filmvideo_production/)

<sup>5</sup> <http://lagosconvo.com/tvmovies/10-classical-indian-movies-nigerians-watched/>

<sup>6</sup> [samarmagazine.org/archive/articles/2](http://samarmagazine.org/archive/articles/2)

While screening of the film at an open-air cinema in Kano, in northern Nigeria, SAMAR's correspondent noted that, the audience had already seen the movie 15 times and sang along to all the Hindi songs (although their native language is Hausa). The Nigerians are so inclined with the film "Mother India" that they have memorized all the dialogues (which neither was dubbed into Hausa nor even had subtitles). The film shown for decades in Nigeria, according to film distributors could be still screened in any cinema hall for house full of audience any time.

Bollywood films in Nigeria have high influence in their life over forty ywood years that is reflected in their streets and commercial areas. Bolladorned with Bollywood posters and stickers adorned across streets, salons, tailors, garages, taxis and buses, Nigerian have grown up watching Indian movies generations of the youth have infatuated with Indian Cinema and the fascination for "Bollywood" is beyond Hollywood among them. Indian movies have been an integral part of their culture and have contributed to a large extent to adopt to new fashion in Nigeria. Having copied from the Bollywood, the Hausa singers have sung Hindi songs their own language. It is also important to note that Bollywood Cinema has inspired Nigerian novelists too.

In contrast to American or English movies, the fans of Indian movies argue that Indian culture is "just like" Hausa culture. Instead of focusing on the differences between the two societies, they more tend to connect to similarities. Men in Indian films, for instance, are often dressed formally in long Sherwani similar to that of Hausa dogon riga, over which they wear long waistcoats, much like the Hausa palmaran. The wearing of turbans; the presence of animals in markets; porters carrying large bundles on their heads, chewing gum, biting sugar cane; youths riding Bajaj motor scooters; wedding celebrations and so on. In all manners, the visual subjects of Indian movies reflect back to Nigerian viewers aspects of everyday life. [7]

### **Rise of Nigerian Cinema (Nollywood)**

According to an Indian Global Cinema survey conducted by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) (2006), India remains the world's leading film producer, while Nigeria Film Industry (Nollywood) deemed the second-largest producer of movies in the world after Bollywood achieving the second place ahead of United States (Hollywood). [8]

In the seventies and eighties before the advent of Nollywood, Indian films had a cult like following in Nigeria. Its outlandish scenes, sometimes magical and

<sup>7</sup> <http://samarmagazine.org/archive/articles/21>

<sup>8</sup> <http://uis.unesco.org/>

surreal themes, and weird characters never bothered its many patrons who were enthralled by its simple entertainment and riveting love songs.

It was in 1992 that the rise of Nigerian Cinema (Nollywood) seen emerging with its straight-to-video movie “Living in Bondage” made by Kenneth Nnebue a Nigerian electronics salesperson. The movie was made in a small budget of \$12,000 but a big hit with selling more than a million copies.

Jake Bright (2015) affirms that by 2009 Nigerian film industry (Nollywood) has evolved and had surpassed Hollywood as the world’s second largest movie industry by volume after Bollywood. According to the Nigerian government, in 2014, it recognized Nollywood as a \$3.3 billion sector industry with 1844 movies produced in 2013 alone.

In an article for the New York Public Library, Sylviane A. Diouf, curator of digital collections at the Schaumburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem, wrote: “India and Nigeria both endured centuries of British colonialism and are now saddled with massively corrupt governments and rapacious international corporations. Arranged marriages, caste barriers, and the importance of morality, honor, family name, and religion were all topics central to Bollywood and to African societies... The struggle against colonialism; the poor, the exploited and the oppressed as central characters; and mythology — issues European and American cinemas completely ignored — strongly resonated on the [African] continent. Bollywood offered a model of cultural resistance and a path between tradition and modernity.” [9]

Brian Larkin, an anthropologist who has studied Hausas' love for Bollywood, wrote in a research paper: “Nigerians fans of Indian movies argue that Indian culture is ‘just like’ Hausa culture. Instead of focusing on the differences between the two societies, when they watch Indian movies what they see are similarities, especially when compared with American or English movies.” [10]

### **Research methodology**

This study examines the popularity of Bollywood films. For this research, 10 classical movies have been selected for review and analyses. Those movies are all time hit and till to date, that they can be watched repeatedly across the regions. These movies were blockbuster not only in India but also treated same as in overseas. Nigerian film distributors made the best of its trend and popularity. The movies were of different genres from action thriller to love, romance, to snake girls. Nigerian fans still recollect the old golden memories of Indian Cinema way ahead of globalization. Another aspect of Bollywood film was that they are well scripted, acting near perfect and the storyline very similitude with the event of

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.nypl.org/blog/2011/12/06/bollywood-and-africa-love-story>

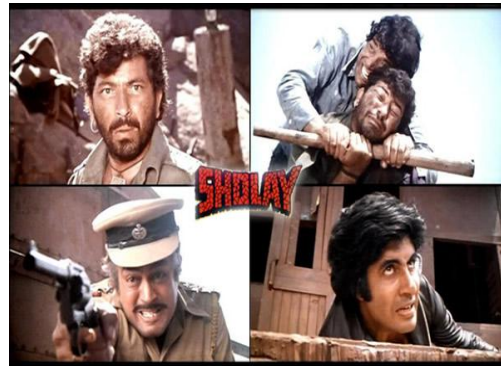
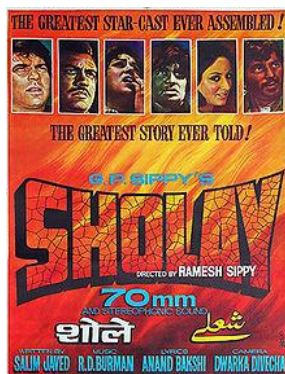
<sup>10</sup> <http://www.wcas.northwestern.edu/projects/globalization/secure/articles/larkin2.pdf>

actual life. Hero, suspense, love romance music all well wrapped with complete entertainment.

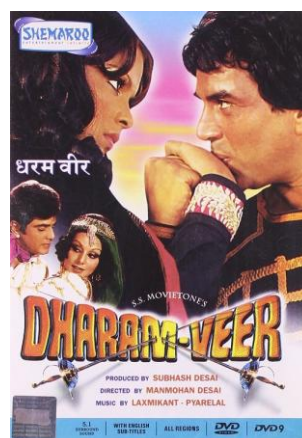


Fig. 1: Collage of the 10 Bollywood movies posters

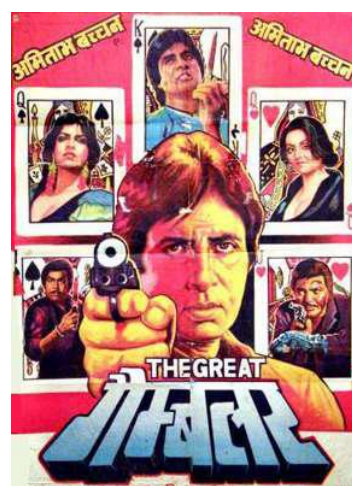
**Sholay (1975)** action adventure directed by Ramesh Sippy. The film plot is based on two criminals played by Dharmendra (Veeru) and Amitabh Bachchan (Jai), hired by a retired police officer (Sanjeev Kumar) to capture the ruthless dacoit Gabbar Singh (Amjad Khan). The two main female characters played by Jaya Bhaduri and Hema Malini is considered till late as one of the best Indian classic film ranked first in the British Film Institute's 2002 poll of "Top 10 Indian Films" of all time. A film where several genres was reflected from violence to conformation to feudal ethos. It was a homosocial bonding and the role of the film as a national allegory. Sholay is such a big hit that it has been re-released to theatres in the 3D format on January 2014.



**Dharam Veer (1977)** brought a fresh idea and a story revolving around siblings separated and then reunited. The movie was fun, romantic, Indian royalty, pets, heroes, villains colorful costumes a perfect Indian love story with dancing to hummable music. The lead roles were played by Dharmendra, Jeteendra, Neetu Singh, and Zeenat Aman.



**The Great Gambler (1979)** a thriller story is based on international gangsters, spies and secret agents of different countries' intelligence agencies and their undercover operations. This film had high production costs with a significant portions of it being shot in international locations including Cairo, Lisbon, Rome and Venice. The Great Gambler has been widely appreciated for action, direction and cinematography. It was a movie about look alike, there is a mix up and one person goes on to pretend to be the other, until at the end, the two must work together to save the day. The role was played by renowned actor and star of Bollywood Amitabh Bachchan, playing the action hero role Jai (Amitabh Bachchan) who plays the role of a great gambler who has never lost any gamble, his entanglement with the underworld, Inspector Vijay (also played by Amitabh) who is after the gangster group Jai is involved in.

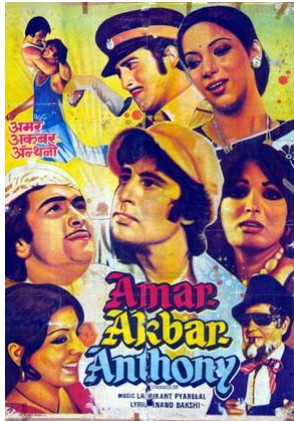


**Nagin (1976) (Female Snake).** This movie was a Bollywood horror fantasy thriller film, produced and directed by Rajkumar Kohlion. Nagin was inspired by “The Bride Wore Black”, based on Cornell Wool rich’s novel and François Truffaut’s film. The film was a Blockbuster at the box office. It was a new genre plot of snake gets a human body in on a look to take revenge the death of her snake husband. Most Nigerians know it as the original snake girl, the

vengeful snake girl who went on a killing spree trying to avenge the death of her snake husband. Nagin would change form to the love of each of the friends she held responsible for her love's death and kill them. Another movie based on snake girl with modern outlook was Nagin starring Sridevi and Rishi Kapoor in main lead roles.



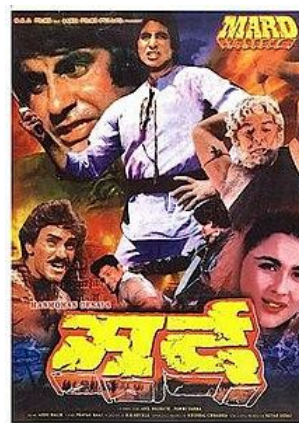
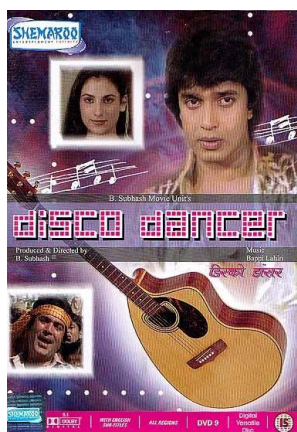
**Amar Akbar Anthony (1977).** Another movie on family separation and reunion, where once again, the villain's daughter falls in love with one of the heroes.



**Burning Train (1980).** The action thriller, produced by BR Chopra and directed by Ravi Chopra had big popular star cast the plot revolved around super express train. The film starts from childhood with the story of three friends, one of them is the son of wealthy industrialist and has a strong passion about fastest cars.

The two other works as engineers in Indian Railway Board. Their passion inspires them to make a train in India. The train named Super Express unfortunately the train catches fire on its inaugural run from New Delhi to Mumbai. The villain puts a bomb on the train as revenge. He is portrayed as a heartbroken lover and one who lost the bid to build the train. The friends who made the train try to put their life in danger do their best to save the many lives. The movie is an emotional tale with good music.

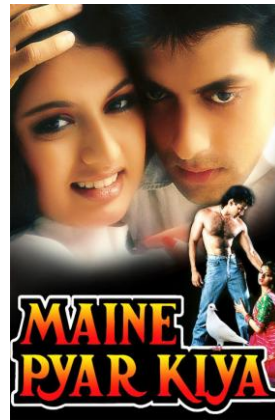
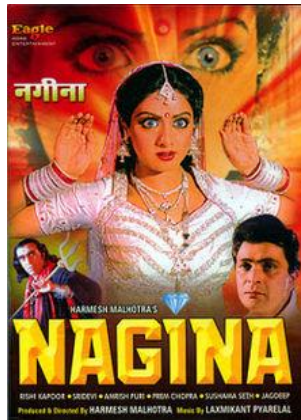
**Disco Dancer (1982)** was a great hit in Nigeria the movie that promotes morality, ethics and a saga of rags to riches. The hero a Disco dancer takes on a murderous corrupt mill-owner and smuggler. He falls in love with his daughter. The hero gains huge fame and becomes the greatest disco dancer, the lead was played by Mithun Chakraborty (Jimmy) in the movie became a sensation across Nigeria for his dance and acting skills, his name became synonymous with Jimmy. It was the first Indian's highest earning film to cross 100 Crore worldwide. The sound track became a big hit and success a won the Gold award. The name Jimmy became synonymous to Indian actors thereafter.



**Mard (1985) (Man)** literal translation of Mard is man representing masculinity another blockbuster hit by Amitabh Bachchan the movie was set in pre-independence India. It is a tale of a young man, Raju, separated from his biological parents when traitor Indian and English lords attacked them. He falls in love with the daughter of the villain. The plot revolves around separation and then reunion.

**Nagina (1986)** this surreal movie of two Snake girl inspired Nollywood to make their own Nigerian version “Nneka the pretty serpent”.





After **Maine Pyar Kiya (1989)** literally translation means (I loved) it was a musical romantic movie starring Salman Khan who is popular till date and young actress Bhagyashree in the lead roles, produced by Rajshri Productions. It was a story two friends Prem and Suman, who gradually fall in love with each other. The movie was a super hit and block buster earned over 356 million (\$ 5.6 million). Many Nigerians liked the movie and many thought that it was inspiration. When the star Salman Khan had to choose between an arranged marriage with someone he didn't love and running away from his family to follow the woman of his heart my friend said, it was a movie depicting what was happening in the world many youngsters were moved by the climax of the movie.

The above stated Bollywood films have been popular across Nigeria. The Indian cinema at post independence period evolved from portraying Hindu mythology and epics to concurrent themes in based on the problems and prospects of the poor, disadvantaged, under privileged and the exploited gentry at large. From these themes to fantasy and melodrama has been a long journey for Bollywood as an entertaining Industry. Currently, Indian cinema has gained its strong foothold in the global context, while producing highest number of films in multi-lingual and vernacular languages. Taking into account, the enormous number of viewers and the consequent revenue generation of Indian films across the world make it a one of the most viable film industries in the world.

### Conclusion

The global successes of Indian films reflect the rich creative and cultural aspect of the sub continent that has effectively crossed all borders and barriers in the world of entertainment. The illustrious phenomena of Indian Cinema were able to reach sub Saharan African region the early 1960's from Nigeria to Egypt to Senegal. Generations of Nigerian's fans have grown up with Bollywood, bear

witness to the cross-cultural appeal of Indian movies. That is how Bollywood films have carved a niche of itself across the world.

Indian cinema is more favorable now than it used to be before. Indian Film makers still have enough to offer to the audience on corruption, love, epic, and women's fights against issues like gender discrimination, human rights, empowerments, most recently terrorism, alike issues. Bollywood definitely remains rooted with a vibrant creative community, new technology, global presence and investment interests. All in all Indian Cinema has evolved its potential transcending across borders. Therefore, we experienced ample scope for cultural exchanges and collaboration.

In the phase of post globalization, Indian Cinema (Bollywood) and Nigerian Cinema (Nollywood) are playing a vital role in keeping their identity and cultural ethos through cinema. These countries are able to produce movies for more niche audiences that would have been unattainable previously. The way ahead for Bollywood and Nollywood is likely to be a collaborative effort given their individual disposition in both India and Nigeria.

Nigerian film Director Bond Emeruwa said that the cultural flows are relevant to the notion of the Nollywood industry in different dimensions. "We are telling our own stories in our own way. That is the appeal both for the filmmakers and for the audience the idea of cultural flows are central ideas to globalization". [11]

Arjun Appadurai (1996) [12] Nollywood can also be seen as a result of globalization through the consideration and reach of entertainment or the flow of information and images, which is evident through the films themselves. More and more overseas scholars, as well as individuals out of curiosity, are taking interest in the Nollywood industry. The films are widely accessible to anyone around the world online. This connects Nigeria to the outside world in many ways, and again, displays how globalization has a direct effect on Nollywood.

It transpires from the Appadurai's statement that there is a positive connectivity between Bollywood and Nollywood in their success stories.

### **International collaboration: Singing to the tunes Bollywood numbers**

The trend of collaboration is already setting and Bollywood is witness the new trend. Popular Senegalese-American pop star Akon first collaborated with Indian artists in 2011. As part of the sound, track "*Chammak Challo*," for the superhero movie *Ra.One*. [13]

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.ibtimes.com/bollywood-west-africa-nigerias-love-fascination-indian-cinema-video-1169057>

<sup>12</sup> <http://lagosconvo.com/tvmovies/10-classical-indian-movies-nigerians-watched/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/4302d597-badd-37ff-b799-abf2b71fd8d7>

Akon has perfected his Hindi accent, giving one more reason for Africans to sing and dance to the hummable tunes of Bollywood. In India Akon's songs in Hindi are very popular and played in every bar, club and gym. The singer is in high demand and is likely to collaborate with other Bollywood filmmaker's for upcoming film in coming days. Akon is seen as part of a new crop of Western artists looking to tap the vast Indian market through movies and music.

India's Acting High Commissioner in Nigeria, Kaisar Alam (2015) stated: "India can use its more than 100 years of experience in Bollywood to assist Nigeria. The Indian commission is facilitating a partnership between Nollywood (Nigeria's movie industry) and Bollywood (India's movie industry) that has contributed greatly to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of respective countries." [14]

Lights, Camera, action of Indian cinema have and will continue to attract and entertainment people all over the world.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.covafrika.com/2015/01/nollywood-and-bollywood-film-industries-to-collaborate/>