

PRESS INFORMATION/update:

International Conference Shah Rukh Khan and Global Bollywood September 30th – October 2nd 2010

Opening

Museum of Ethnology
September 30th, 14.00

Lectures, Exhibition

October 1st – 2nd

Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Vienna, NIG,
Universitätsstraße 7/4

The Conference:

Popular Hindi Cinema today – generally known as Bollywood Cinema – is a global cultural phenomenon with enthusiastic audiences and fan-communities all over the world. The products of the Indian film industry, which annually creates a lot more films than does Hollywood, have been in circulation worldwide for quite some time and have generated a highly popular mainstream cinema which poses a challenge to US- and European films, not only on the subcontinent or in the South-Asian Diaspora but literally on all continents. Bollywood completely changed Euro-American visions of India; it has almost become synonymous for the modern globalized India of the present day, mainly because it appeared in the West not as a cineaste fashion but as a lifestyle. Since the 1990ies Bollywood nourishes diverse streams of popular culture – fashion, dance, music, jewellery, furniture design – which are globally distributed and permanently locally recreated. This relation simultaneously impacts on content and style of films, their modes of production, international circulation and reception. In this globalized process the Internet plays an important role with its “participant public”, also called “prosumers”, who at the same time consume and create media-contents. Images, films, stories and object-art are produced, “fan-fiction” and “fan-art”, which in turn are again globally distributed.

Indian Cinema and its role in the context of globalized media-flows, cosmopolitan art-worlds and popular cultures has also become a focus of vibrant academic research from a wide range of disciplines and theoretical perspectives like film and media studies and art theory in the frame of postcolonialism and global cultures, or work on postcolonial dynamics and new artistic practises and performances but also research on diaspora, migration and transcultural processes from the point of view of social sciences or economics.

A growing number of publications and conferences have been dedicated to the topic that embraces films and audiences as well as diverse cultural practises and performances. The role of ICT in these processes has emerged as a new point of interest, in particular in regard to the study of participant audiences and fan cultures.

The conference is embedded in ongoing research and study curricula at the University of Vienna (e.g. the Department of European Ethnology, Bernhard Fuchs; the Department of Theatre, Film and Media Studies, Claus Tieber, and the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Elke Mader) where a new international and interdisciplinary Bollywood research network will be established during the conference.

The Star:

The Vienna conference is quite unique in focusing on the Indian megastar **Shah Rukh Khan** as point of departure for interdisciplinary discourse. The actor and his significance as protagonist for diverse dimensions of the globalization of Indian cinema constitute the prism through which the dynamics of global Bollywood are analysed from a multitude of directions. Since 10 years SRK is the central icon of popular Hindi cinema, not only within the Indian Diaspora but also for Western audiences, e.g. in the German speaking countries his films are cult-media of very active fan communities. In his films SRK often embodies the synthesis of opposites like the contradictions between Indian identity and cosmopolitanism, tradition and modernity or contradictory differences between religions or between projections of male and female. He offers possibilities of identification and belonging in diverse cultural contexts; this mediating and inter-connecting function as well as his strong, emotional performance is the origin of the star's worldwide success.

Scientists, scholars and filmmakers from Asia, Europe, USA and Canada discuss diverse aspects of SRK and his work, his social influence as a star and his embodiment of values, attitudes and emotions as well as his significance as an icon of religious unity. The "star" is a way to communicate meaning in a media-centred world as Indian cinema – much more than today's Western cinema – features an elaborate and powerful star-system which is only comparable to early Hollywood but actually quite surpasses it in the ritualising of stars and their particular role as influential personalities in the social domain. Therefore "megastar" and meaning in the context of globalization and Shah Rukh Khan as a contemporary protagonist of postcolonial India are central issues of debate.

Conference Highlights:

The key-lecture is held by **Nasreen Munni Kabir**, director, producer and film-theoretician, who also created the highly acclaimed documentary *The Inner and Outer World of Shah Rukh Khan* (India/GB/USA 2005). Several other prominent representatives of Indian cinema are attending the conference like filmmaker and art-director **Aradhana Seth**, who will share insights into working for the Shah Rukh Khan blockbuster *Don* (India 2006, D: Farhan Akhtar).

The five workshops (*1 - Reception and Fandom*, *2 - Song and Dance*, *3 - Gender*, *4 - Religion and Film*, *5 - Stardom and Globalisation*) discuss Bollywood cinema, the Indian mega-star and the diverse issues emanating from his *persona* through a multitude of perspectives. Film screenings (a documentary about Austrian Shah Rukh Khan fans by Mehru Jaffer and the "first Austrian Bollywood movie" by Sandeep Kumar as well as an exhibition on Shah Rukh Khan & fan-art accompany the programme.

Among the about 45 conference speakers, besides many other eminent scholars and artists, are internationally renowned researchers like **Rajinder Dudrah**, who is one of the most important

protagonists of the topic. His publications (*Bollywood: Sociology Goes to the Movies*, Sage Publications, 2006 or *The Bollywood Reader*, Open University Press, 2008) have given important impulses to social and cultural studies of popular Indian cinema, particularly in regard to transnationalism and gender research; Dudhra is currently director of the drama department at Manchester University. Also present is **Ashish Rajadhyaksha**, Centre for Studies in Culture and Society at Bangalore University, who is one of India's most respected, famous film-scientists; among his numerous publications he also co-edited the seminal *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema* (British Film Institute and OUP, 1994).

Two sections are moderated by outstanding British scientists – **Rachel Dwyer**, Professor of Indian Cultures and Cinema at SOAS, University of London, and social anthropologist **Rosie Thomas**, Director of CREAM/Centre for Research and Education in Arts and Media, University of Westminster. Among the international lecturers from diverse disciplines are **Amy Villarejo** (Cornell University), who talks about intermediality and star-construction, **Sudha Rajagopalan** (Utrecht University), who works about the reception of Shah Rukh Khan in Russia or musicologist **Silvia Martinez Garcia** (ESMUC, Barcelona), who presents research on the value of stars within Spain's multi-cultural music scene. **Adelheid Hermann-Pfandt**, professor of Religious Studies at Germany's University of Marburg will talk about the importance of a public role model like Shah Rukh in the promotion of ideas of unity among human beings within India and abroad. According to him, he first "experienced the inter-religious oneness of god" through a Shah Rukh film.

Located in the centre of Europe the conference is a meeting point between European and international scholars and filmmakers, mainly from Asia, USA and Canada, who work in or about Bollywood and its charismatic protagonist Shah Rukh Khan.

Venue:

Inauguration and invited speakers:

September 30th 2010: Museum of Ethnology, Neue Burg (Imperial Palace), 1010 Wien

<http://www.khm.at/en/the-museum-of-ethnology/the-museum/>

Workshops, Exhibition and Research Group Meetings:

October 1st – 2nd 2010: University of Vienna, Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Universitätsstraße 7, 1010 Wien

For further detailed information please visit the conference website

<http://www.univie.ac.at/srk2010/>

Or contact the press office

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Conference Committee

Rajinder Dudrah (University of Manchester, Department of Drama and Screen Studies)

Martin Gaenszle (University of Vienna, Department of South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies)

Deana Heath (Delhi University)

Mehru Jaffer (IANS, University of Vienna, Department of South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies)

Christian Schicklgruber (Museum of Ethnology, Vienna)

Claus Tieber (University of Vienna, Department of Theatre, Film and Media Studies)