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Bollywood

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Get to know the people
who built Bollywood

Discover the songs, dance,
and history of Bollywood films

Become the superfan you
always wanted to be

Maaz Ali
Maaz Khan
Anum Hussain

*Creators of the Desi Standard
Time podcast*



Bollywood

by Maaz Ali, Maaz Khan,
and Anum Hussain

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dummies
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Bollywood For Dummies®

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Introduction

More than likely, you've heard of an industry somewhere called Bollywood. You may have experienced the music through participating in a Bollywood wedding dance. Or perhaps you may have seen an actual Bollywood film with subtitles. But whether or not you've experienced a taste of Bollywood, have never been exposed, or are a die-hard fan, this book has something for you.

Bollywood is among the largest film industries in the world, with nearly a thousand films being released each year. The industry offers a diverse sampling of content, mixing various religious and regional influences of the Indian subcontinent to create films like no other. That said, most films are Hindi-language ones, but we explore the other flavors throughout this book.

The name Bollywood itself comes from merging "Bombay" and "Hollywood," given Bombay (now known as Mumbai) is where most Hindi films were historically produced. Now Hindi-language films are being shot all around the world, with London as a regular destination for making movies.

The Bollywood style itself is a delight to the eyes, full of expressive visuals and elaborate song and dance routines. And over the years, Bollywood has become an industry with diverse stories with global appeal. This book takes you from the genesis of the industry to the modern day production styles to every new innovation over the decades in between.

About This Book

Bollywood For Dummies is intended to be a handy reference, which means that you don't need to read the chapters in order or from beginning to end. We provide notes along the way, signaling you if there's another chapter with more detail on something you just read. That way, no matter how you read, you'll be easily guided on where to go next.

Of course, the Bollywood industry is constantly creating; we provide detail on everything until the time of publishing, but encourage you to follow along for updates on our podcast, Desi Standard Time.

Here is a brief snapshot of what we cover in this book:

- » An overview of one of the largest film industries in the world, including an inside look at the core Bollywood families that make up the industry and the endless talent occupying the Bollywood big screen.
- » The history of every decade of Bollywood from its inception to present day, including the Partition, which separated India and Pakistan, and the impact it had on overall entertainment industry.
- » The evolution of Bollywood music, its influence on the movies, and its impact for the Bollywood dance fanatics.
- » The fans and audiences that adore Bollywood worldwide.
- » How the entertainment industries in other South Asian countries have been impacted and impact Bollywood.

Foolish Assumptions

In this book, we make the following assumptions about you, our dear reader:

- » You have some interest in Bollywood, whether new to the industry or a lifelong fan.
- » You have access to any device that would allow you to watch, listen, or consume our various Bollywood recommendations.
- » You can read.

Icons Used in This Book

Icons in this book point out important tidbits for you to look at, remember, and absorb. Here we review the icons that we use throughout this book to guide you on your Bollywood journey.



TIP

The Tip icon points out helpful information that will help you more deeply understand the details of Bollywood.



REMEMBER

The Remember icon marks interesting or useful facts about Bollywood.



**CULTURAL
WISDOM**

The Cultural Wisdom icon helps to point out key parts about the surrounding South Asian culture that influences various parts of the Bollywood industry.

Beyond the Book

A few of our podcast fans have already asked where they can turn to find out more. Beyond this book, we've put together some additional resources for those who need them:

- » **Cheat Sheet:** Go to www.dummies.com and search for “Bollywood Cheat Sheet” to find a handy reference guide for all things Bollywood. The online Cheat Sheet is particularly valuable for getting direct links to music videos or other fun Bollywood entertainment.
- » **Podcast:** We, the authors (Maaz Ali, Maaz Khan, and Anum Hussain), aren't employees of the Bollywood industry, but as long-time fans we host and produce a podcast called Desi Standard Time. Desi Standard Time's name itself is an ode to the people of South Asia and the long-standing trope poking fun at how South Asians are typically never on time, requiring their own “standard time.”

Go to www.instagram.com/desistandard to enjoy our own posts, content, stories, and links to podcast episodes to continue being a part of the South Asian entertainment fan base. We also highlight podcast episodes.

Although this book serves as an educational reference guide, our podcast serves as a place to appreciate, study, and sometimes criticize the various aspects of the industry. Our episodes take a birds-eye look at themes that transcend the industry, such as the infamous hip-thrusting dance moves that have dominated endless Bollywood music videos or the evolution of rock music in Pakistan.

Where to Go from Here

If you're completely new to Bollywood, we suggest starting with [Chapter 1](#) and [2](#) to get a basic breakdown of the industry as well its people, places, and history. If you've already been exposed to Bollywood and here to reminisce or explore a subject you're less aware of, peruse the Table of Contents or index to jump right to actors, music, or whichever category you deem worthy. If you're South Asian and are more intrigued by the greater diaspora, we dedicate the entire [Part 5](#) to just that.

This book isn't linear, so ultimately you can start anywhere and then go where your inner Bollywood dancer takes you next.

Part 1

Getting Started with Bollywood

IN THIS PART ...

Bite off your first taste and find out more about one of the largest film industries in the world.

Understand the fundamentals of Bollywood, covering what you need to know about the industry and the key people.

Get an inside look at the core Bollywood families and see how they influence and partake in the industry.

Begin your appreciation for the talent, on and off screen, who have become Bollywood legends.

Chapter 1

Introducing Bollywood

IN THIS CHAPTER

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

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.



imageBROKER /Alamy Stock Photo

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



CULTURAL
WISDOM

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.



REMEMBER

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.



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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.



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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