

## **Industry Status for Bombay Cinema**

On 10 May 1998, in an attempt to appease the restive clamour of the film world, industry status was granted to film by the Indian State under the aegis of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led-government, the political arm of the Hindu Right. This decision marked a watershed in the hitherto fraught relations that had existed between the State and Bombay cinema for over fifty years since Independence. Addressing a large gathering of film personalities at a national conference on 'Challenges Before Indian Cinema', organised by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry and the Film Federation of India, the Information & Broadcasting (I&B) Minister Sushma Swaraj announced that the ministry would place a proposal in Parliament that would include films in the concurrent list,<sup>1</sup> thereby bringing it within the purview of the central government ('Industry Status Granted To Film Industry', 1998).

Industry status signified a dramatic shift in State policy towards Hindi cinema as an entertainment industry. Past governments had made empty promises to various industry delegations over the decades that exacerbated tensions between an indifferent and often draconian State and an increasingly anxious industry. So what prompted this decision that led to, 'the changing relations between the Indian state and Bombay cinema in a global context' (Mehta 2005: 135) and what was at stake for the right – wing government? And more importantly, what could be the possible implications of this new status on the industry? I hope to answer some of these questions by tracing the process of negotiation initiated from the early 1990s between the Hindu Right (primarily the BJP and the Shiv Sena) and Bombay film industry which, to some extent, may have anticipated the momentous decision of May 1998.

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<sup>1</sup> The constitutional provisions in India on the subject of distribution of legislative powers between the Union and the States are covered in three lists of functions: (1) the Union list, (2) the State list, and (3) the Concurrent list which includes issues/topics that both the Union and State Government can legislate on. Until Swaraj's announcement cinema had hitherto been under the state list.

Conferring industry status on Bombay cinema could be read as an implementation of the BJP 1998 election manifesto on cinema which promised to take appropriate steps to protect the interests of the film industry if voted to power and offered the following six incentives, the first being particularly relevant to this discussion:

1. Allow film-makers through suitable provisions to raise resources from financial institutions to curb the influence of underworld
2. Have automatic certification of films that do not have explicit scenes, violence and sex
3. Offer 'Q' certificate to quality films, which will be exempted from entertainment tax
4. Set up theatres at all district headquarters and large population centres
5. Create special fund to promote regional cinemas
6. Introduce legislation to provide retirement benefits to artistes and crew

(BJP Election Manifesto 1998: 'Our Policy on Media, Cinema, Arts', <http://www.bjp.org/manifes/chap17.htm>.)

In the years preceding the landmark decision, the Bombay film industry was reeling under acute crises of arranging institutional finance, copyright violations, piracy and government apathy. Bombay cinema demanded industry status on the assumption that it would solve many of the aforementioned problems ('Film world demands industry status', 1997). Judging by the trade press reports, members of the film industry seemed naively optimistic in their anticipation of financial investments by the State and the belief that it would solve the numerous industrial problems plaguing the industry. Key members of the industry believed it was time for a national film policy to be devised since it was responsible for providing direct employment to one million people and many more indirectly and to facilitate the arrangement of institutional finance ('Film world demands...', 1997) as the quality of films was deteriorating due to dubious financiers. It was believed in some quarters that even though 'underworld money constitute(ed) only a fraction of film finance,' institutional

financing (could) play a great role in eliminating even this small fraction from the film world ("Film world demands...", 1997).<sup>2</sup>

### **Underworld/Mafia Funding and 'Black Money'**

The only explicit reason for conferring industry status given by the BJP-led Indian state was to weed out illegal sources of film financing by the mafia/underworld and a large volume of 'black money' (see Shoesmith 2007: 320) that circulated in the Indian economy in general and, more specifically, in funding film productions. Arjun Appadurai offers a valuable insight into this murky world of film financing, observing the ubiquity of cash in it:

Much of Bombay's film industry runs on cash—so-called black money. As a shrewd local analyst said to me, there is no real film *industry* [original emphasis] in Bombay, since there is no money that is both made and invested within the world of film. Rather, film financing is a notoriously gray area of speculation, solicitation, risk, and violence, in which the key players are men who have made killings in other markets (such as the grain trade, textiles, or other commodities). Some of them seek to keep their money out of the hands of the government, to speculate on the chance of financing a hit film and to get the bonus of hanging out with the stars as well. This sounds similar to the Hollywood pattern, but it is an entirely arbitrary cast of characters who might finance a film, so much time is spent by "producers" in trolling for businessmen with serious cash on their hands. And since these bankrolls are very large, the industry pays blockbuster prices for stars, and the entire cultural economy of the film world revolves around large cash transactions in black money. Periodically big stars or producers are raided by income tax officials, and a media bloodletting about seized assets is offered to the public, before business as usual resumes. (Appadurai 2000: 633)

Bombay is thus the site of contestation where realpolitik and the reel meet the underworld resulting in a complex nexus of shady financial deals, money laundering, and extortion

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<sup>2</sup> According to Sultan Ahmed, President of the Indian Motion Pictures Producers Association (IMPPA) in 1997.

rackets that exist due to the collusion of corrupt police and politicians.<sup>3</sup> Besides the involvement of the mafia in production and overseas rights, 'unaccounted money in real estate, stock brokerage, gold and diamond trade, as well as from politicians and political parties has found its way into the industry' (Gabriel 2005:50). Recent scholarship by Brian Shoesmith and Noorel Mecklai refers to '...a certain degree of either tacit complicity between politicians, the underworld, and the Indian film industry, or coercion on the part of the BJP and its allies such as the Shiv Sena in Mumbai' (Shoesmith 2007:321).

Relations between the state, Bombay cinema, and the underworld have historically been complex making it particularly challenging for empirical research and analyses. As Karen Gabriel confirms, 'although members of the industry are inclined to be tight-lipped especially on the matter of political interference and the role that the underworld plays in the industry, these are important factors' (Gabriel 2005: 49).

In an interview, Swaraj alluded to the 'convoluted state of affairs' of the industry and asserted that industry status to film would be the solution:

If you are committed to good cinema, you will have to provide good finance. By according the status of industry, we have given pictures the much-needed eligibility to seek funds from legitimate places. Thus, a semblance of order is now possible in what has been a rather confused and convoluted state of affairs. (quoted in Mehta 2005:139)

Thus a simplistic equation was drawn and a direct causal connection made between 'good cinema' and 'good finance' without providing any hard evidence.

### **Towards Corporatisation? Implications for the Film Industry**

This new status enabled the film industry to be eligible for the infrastructural and credit support given to other industries. This watershed moment was soon followed by a series of

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<sup>3</sup> This murky film-mafia nexus came to the fore with the murder of music conglomerate owner, Gulshan Kumar in 1997, and the attempted killing of prominent film personalities such as producer Rakesh Roshan in 2000. There have been legal trials, notably of major film financier Bharat Shah and producer Nazim Rizvi in 2000. See Manjunath Pendakur (2003: 51-55) for more details.

other state-instituted changes (Mehta 2005:136).<sup>4</sup> In October 2000, under the Industrial Development Bank Act, the film industry was eligible for financial support from 'legitimate' institutions. The Union Budget proposals for 2000-1 offered concessions to the film industry by reducing the cost of raw film, customs duty on cameras and other film equipments, and extending income-tax benefits under section 80HHF to non-corporate bodies ('Union Budget Gives Benefits To Film Industry', 2000). For the first time in 2000, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) organised an 'International Conference on the Business of Entertainment: INDIA – Opportunities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' that was inaugurated by the Union Minister of Information & Broadcasting (I&B) Arun Jaitley who in his address gave indications that "the Centre was keen to help the industry which had been ignored for far too long" and released a FICCI report prepared by Arthur Anderson on the entertainment industry (Sen-Gupta & Gupta 2000). It was followed in successive years by FRAMES 2001 and FRAMES 2002, FICCI-sponsored global conventions, the first of which was inaugurated by Swaraj who reiterated that "the government (was) committed to nurturing the entertainment sector and expanding the market size in India and abroad" ('FRAMES 2001: 2001). In May 2001, Swaraj led a 25-member delegation to Cannes to promote overseas sales of Indian films (136) and even personally 'designed a special logo to give a distinct identity to the Indian film industry abroad' ('Sushma Swaraj Designs Special Logo for Indian Films', 2002).

As Monika Mehta points out, to fully understand the significance of the industry status it is imperative to examine the historical conjuncture in which this decision was taken. The changing attitude of the State towards Bombay cinema should be situated against the backdrop of two other significant developments: Firstly, it was the era of economic

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<sup>4</sup> According to Mehta (2005:136): "In 1998, Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha granted many long-standing demands of the film industry, including reduction in custom duties on cinematographic film, exemption of recorded audio and video cassettes from excise duties, and tax incentives, to name a few. In 2000, Sinha added further concessions including a complete exemption on export profits, further reduction in import duties on cinematographic equipment, and more tax incentives."

liberalization which imposed certain economic imperatives on the Indian state, forcing it to open its markets to western products and culture, and become a global player. Secondly, 'during the same period, both the Bombay film industry and the state began pursuing Indian diasporic communities' (136) since they emerged as valued audiences in Bombay's box-office figures and desired investors in the Indian state's political, economic, and cultural plans. Mehta makes a significant observation which could possibly explain, to some extent, the interest of the BJP-led State in the industry. She argues that 'by designating film as an industry, and thereby bringing an "unorganized" and "informal" sector of the economy under its purview, the state was actively attempting to (re)inscribe its authority in the context of globalization' (Mehta 2005: 137).

It is not a mere coincidence that it was the BJP-led government that finally met the film world's longstanding demand for state recognition. Observing that "the rise of cultural nationalist politics signified by the Hindu nationalist and pro-business Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (was an) important factor in the state's shifting attitudes toward the Hindi film industry" (Ganti 2004:51), Tejaswini Ganti points out,

It is no surprise that it was a BJP government that granted industry status since the party's support base is heavily drawn from petty traders and small businessmen who comprise the vast distribution, exhibition, and finance apparatus for Hindi filmmaking. (Ganti 2004:51)

I would like to suggest that the BJP government wanted to harness a powerful, creative mass medium that had thrived despite State censure, neglect and suspicion. By awarding industry-status to the world's most prolific film-making machinery, the State, under the aegis of the BJP-led government, was both officially recognizing the mass appeal, reach and popularity of the cinematic medium as well as the export potential of Bombay cinema as a global commodity for diasporic consumption and investment. It was also reacting to the process of globalization by making the hitherto shady business of film financing legitimate and 'cleaning up its act' in order to meet global standards for attracting prospective exports and

investments from affluent diasporic communities. Corporate status enabled the State to officially distance itself from the ill-repute of mafia money.

In the weeks following the corporate status of film the Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI) issued a set of 'norms' for financing films:

The IDBI has said that to be eligible for its film-financing scheme, the movie should have a capital of Rs. 5 crore [50 million] to Rs. 25 crore [250 million] for Hindi films and Rs. 30 lakh [300,000] to Rs. 10 lakh [100,000] for regional films. The scheme says no two films should be the same and the investment would vary *depending on the "treatment" of the story or concept and scale of production...*[added emphasis]. The security towards the loan will be a lab letter, assignment of Intellectual Property Right of the proposed films as also existing rights on old films. (Mehta 2005:141-2)

As Mehta observes,

In recognizing film as property, the state which is formally in charge of protecting and safeguarding the rights to property is able to control the kind of films produced. In making a distinction between Hindi and regional films and prescribing a larger amount of initial capital for the former and a lesser one for the latter, this policy seeks to (re)inscribe the dominance of Hindi and Bombay cinema both nationally and internationally. (2005: 142)

Thus, this decision couldn't be taken at face value for it came with strings attached and much deeper implications for the industry. As reflected by the aforementioned norms, the IDBI policy didn't offer easy recourse to film financing. Instead it privileged established producers and discriminated against regional films (although creating a special fund to promote regional cinemas was one of the incentives mentioned in the 1998 BJP manifesto). Instead, 'through a host of rules mandated and enforced by state supported financial institutions, the policy sought to transform the nature of the film industry' (Mehta 2005: 142). While the Bombay cinema desired the benefits that resulted from corporatization, such as legitimate financing and larger markets, this process also extended the authority of state-supported financial institutions through a new set of rules imposed on the production and marketing of

films. Extending Mehta's argument, I would suggest that the State, through these financial institutions, could decide which films received financing whilst discriminating against those productions it didn't think fit for state sponsorship. This came strikingly close to resembling state patronage and signaled unprecedented level of interventions in the creative process at even the pre-production stages of film-making. Thus, industry status could be seen as a justification and a pretext for the increasing regulative authority of state-supported financial institution.

I argue that granting industry status was an opportunity created by the BJP-led State to control Hindi film production which had been hitherto largely unorganised and beyond direct governmental control particularly regarding financing films. This is further confirmed by reports of a proposal to transfer cinema from the state to the concurrent list which was "widely seen as the centre expanding its power at the cost of the state exchequer" and attacked by several opposition-rules states which alleged that the centre was acting with a "vested interest" ('Films To Come On Concurrent List', 2001).

In the following sections I trace the BJP/Shiv Sena's decade-long interventions to promote a Hindu nationalist ideology in the Bombay film industry since it had 'recognized the value of film as a political tool from its earliest days in the 1980s' and had 'employed film techniques to advance the cause of Hindutva'<sup>5</sup> (McGuire 2007: 8). In order to achieve this, the Hindu Right adopted various strategies ranging from negative pressures primarily from the Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray and his cohorts to establishing dialogue with important industry members; giving incentives such as national awards, tax exemptions and arranging free screening of films that espoused the nationalist agenda; using celebrities for electoral

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<sup>5</sup> Hindutva literally translates as 'Hinduness', coined by V.D. Savarkar, denoting nationalist, revivalist, chauvinistic Hinduism that forms the basis of Hindu right-wing ideology and the movement for a Hindu nation.



purposes; socializing and attending previews/premieres; and using theatrical exhibition to disseminate Hindutva propaganda.

### **The Role of Shiv Sena and Bal Thackeray in the Bombay Film Industry**

It is of immense significance that Bombay is both the home of the Shiv Sena, '...the most markedly xenophobic regional party in India...' (Appadurai 2000: 629) and the Hindi film industry. Therefore it is not surprising that the fluid spheres of politics and cinema permeate, intervene, overlap to form complex and often unequal ties between influential politicians and obsequious film personalities, many of whom owe their careers to the 'patronage' of the Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray. His weakness for the world of Hindi cinema is well-known, having family connections in the industry. His father, 'Prabodhankar' Thackeray, a famous social reformer, had a brief stint as a publicist with Homi Wadia's film company in the 1940s. His brother, Shreekant, a renowned music director, produced a few Marathi films and reviewed Hindi blockbusters for the Shiv Sena mouthpiece, *Maarmik* (Mishra: 2001b).

Bombay, the home of the Shiv Sena, was the vortex of extreme nationalist politics unlike any other Indian city. Writing in 2000, when nationalist fervour was at its peak, Appadurai succinctly elucidates the Shiv Sena credo:

Today the Shiva Sena controls the city and the state and has a significant national profile as one of the many parties that form the Sangh Parivar (or coalition of Hindu chauvinist parties). Its platform combines language chauvinism (Marathi), regional primordialism (a cult of the regional state of Maharashtra), and a commitment to a Hinduized India (Hindutva, the land of Hinduness). It has created a relatively seamless link between its nativist, pro-Maharashtrian message and a national politics of confrontation with Pakistan. (2000: 629)

Much has been written in the trade press and the print media about the ubiquity and omnipresence of Balasaheb Thackeray, 'the vitriolic head of the Shiva Sena', (Appadurai 2000: 644) in Bombay, his nexus with the film industry and the nefarious activities of his henchmen and party workers. Shoesmith and Mecklai observe that the Shiv Sena was 'seeking to coerce some members of the powerful film industry into alignment with their

ideological position' and also mentioned that the 'Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray's involvement with the film industry (was) well documented' (Shoesmith 2007: 321).

In 1993, Hindi films starring allegedly 'anti-national' stars such as the popular action-hero Sanjay Dutt, <sup>6</sup> held under the TADA <sup>7</sup> for illegal possession of guns and Pakistani and Indian artistes collaborating with such artistes were blacklisted by the right-wing, their films boycotted and even banned. This prompted an industry delegation to meet the BJP All India General Secretary, Pramod Mahajan, to resolve several agitations that were taking place against Sanjay Dutt films and other artistes. Mahajan in denying any such party activities clarified that BJP was 'not at all interested in such a move by which the film industry's day-to-day business [was] interfered' ('IMPDA Delegation Meets B.J.P. Leader', 1993). However the objective of this article is to provide evidence to the contrary by revealing the interventionist strategies of the BJP/Shiv Sena in the daily workings of the film business.

In keeping with the Shiv Sena's jingoistic nationalism and demonisation of Pakistan/Muslim as the enemy/'Other', the Shiv Sena 'supremo' Bal Thackeray threatened that he would obtain a list of film personalities who attended Pakistan Day celebrations and call for a countrywide ban on their films. Having already received the names of two Muslim stars, the legendary doyen of Hindi cinema, Dilip Kumar and the star actress Shabana Azmi, it was reported that Thackeray would not allow films to be screened in the country even if the sufferers were

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<sup>6</sup> One of Hindi cinema's successful actors, Sanjay Dutt, was convicted recently, on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2007, for six years on the last day of an epic trial into India's worst terrorist attack, the bombings in Mumbai in 1993 that claimed the lives of 257 people. Dutt, whose early success was founded on action hero roles but later turned his hand to comedy, was found guilty of illegally possessing three AK-56 rifles, a pistol and ammunition in a trial that lasted more than a dozen years. See Ramesh ('Bollywood star Sanjay Dutt jailed for six years', 2007).

<sup>7</sup> TADA, an acronym for The Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, was an Indian law active between 1985 and 1995 (modified in 1987) for the prevention of terrorist activities in Punjab. It was renewed in 1989, 1991 and 1993 before being allowed to lapse in 1995 due to increasing unpopularity due to widespread allegations of abuse.

Hindu producers ('Thackeray Threatens To Boycott Star', 1993). Thackeray's actions exemplify Appadurai observations on how Shiv Sena's nationalist ideology '...sutured a specific form of regional chauvinism with a national message about Hindu power through the deployment of the figure of the Muslim as the archetype of the invader, the stranger, and the traitor' (2000: 646).<sup>8</sup>

Besides assuming the role of aggressor, Bal Thackeray's 'moral support,' consent and approval was often sought by popular actresses like Manisha Koirala before agreeing to act in any potentially controversial film ('Manisha Koirala Denies Having Approached Balasaheb', 1996). Many years later, in 2002, the actress would seek Bal Thackeray's intervention in resolving a dispute with the film director of *Ek Chhotisi Love Story* (Shashilal Nair, 2002) over an injunction order regarding allegedly 'obscene' scenes in it. This would anger both the film industry for 'taking the help of a political party known for its violent ways' ('Sena Chief will mediate to end *Ek Chhotisi* row', 2002) as well as the ire of the Bombay High Court which decided to issue contempt notices to Koirala and Nair, seeking an explanation from both as to why they had sought the intervention of an 'extra-constitutional authority' when the court was seized of the matter (Mishra, 2002c).

The Shiv Sena leader often acted as a mediator during strikes and rifts between trade unions such as Film Makers Combine (F.M.C) and the Film Distributors Combine (F.D.C)<sup>9</sup> and assumed the role of arbiter in industrial disputes such as during the troublesome issue of the entertainment tax in 1996/7 which was akin to almost divine intervention.

In an attempt to quell rumours of the growing politicisation of the industry, a vehement denial of any involvement by either the Shiv Sena or its leader was published<sup>10</sup> as a page-long

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<sup>8</sup> Appadurai (2000: 646) says that, 'The Shiva Sena has achieved this suture by a remarkably patient and powerful media campaign of hate, rumor, and mobilization, notably in the party newspaper *Saamna*, which has been the favorite reading of Mumbai's policemen for at least two decades.'

<sup>9</sup> See Pendakur (2003: 84-88) for more details on the principal industrial production and distribution organisations in the 1990s.

<sup>10</sup> It was published in the name of the chief of the *Chitrapat Shakha*, G.P. Shirke

statement in *Trade Guide* which seemed to confirm rather than deny the extent of the politicisation of the film industry:

Shri Balasaheb Thackeray Not To Attend Any Function Of Film Industry

Shri Balasaheb Thackeray has clarified that he is not going to attend any function or *mahurat* [premiere] in the film industry. We hereby state that neither our Balasaheb Thackeray nor the Shiv Sena are in any way involved in any film project. (*Trade Guide*, 3 August 1996)

Neither trade press reports, photographic records nor interviews divulge as much about Thackeray's insidious ties with the Bombay film industry as does the aforementioned advert which reads like a self-confession. Thackeray continues to be an authorial godfather figure under whose shadow the Bombay film industry lives, many in fear of their lives and livelihood as it is common knowledge that survival and success in the industry is almost impossible without either the tacit or active support of the ubiquitous 'supremo.'

Besides the extraordinary influence wielded by Thackeray as exemplified by the entertainment tax stalemate, the Shiv Sena's *Chitrapat Shakha*<sup>11</sup> influenced industry decisions to a great extent admitting that although it was not connected with the paying public, it took full interest and responsibility for all developments that occurred in the film trade. According to Maithili Rao,<sup>12</sup> a well-known Bombay-based film critic, the film trade unions had been infiltrated by members of the Shiv Sena, once the bastion of the Left (Communist). Hindi cinema in the 1950s was influenced by a variety of factors particularly the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) which was a theatre movement informally affiliated to the Communist Party of India (CPI).<sup>13</sup> However over the years due to the

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<sup>11</sup> A branch of the Shiv Sena that dealt chiefly with film industry issues

<sup>12</sup> Personal interview with her in Bombay & a follow-up e-mail questionnaire, 28<sup>th</sup> May, 2007

<sup>13</sup> Founded in 1943 in Bombay by a group of progressive writers, musicians, actors, artists, and activists, IPTA's manifesto was socialist, based on freedom, social justice and recognising the rights of workers. Many prominent actors, composers, directors, lyricists, and writers from the Bombay film

growing influence of right-wing politics of the Shiv Sena there was the steady erosion of other political influences in the industry. Particularly significant is the fact that Thackeray's daughter-in-law, Smitha Thackeray was elected as president of the film industry's oldest producers' association, the Indian Motion Picture Producers' Association (IMPPA) for two consecutive years, from 2001-03, testifying the Thackeray family's clout in the film industry ('Smitha Thackeray Heads IMPPA Again' 2000).

### **The Indian State and Hindi Cinema: A Brief Historical Background**

It is significant to note that no political party, not even the Congress, had spent as much time and effort establishing dialogue with the cine-world as the BJP–Shiv Sena combine did in the 1990s. For Maithili Rao,

the BJP's pursuit of cultural nationalism and xenophobia (was) a contrast to the implicit underlying idea of internationalism among communist and Congress trade unions. The narrow parochialism of the BJP (was) apparent in all the organisations it ha(d) formed.<sup>14</sup>

The aforementioned Union budget proposals, negotiations and international conventions held to discuss the future growth potential of the entertainment industry initiated by the BJP-led government implied a significant departure from earlier decades of state censure, highhandedness and often neglect harking back to colonial times. As Ganti writes: "Rather than perceiving it as a vice, the Indian state, since the late 1990s, perceives commercial filmmaking as a viable, important, legitimate economic activity that should be nurtured and supported" (Ganti 2004: 50).

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industry had been involved in this movement prior to their work in cinema. From this involvement came a concern and tendency to depict the lives and troubles of the downtrodden, marginalized segments of society, to point out the exploitative nature of capitalism, and romanticise and valorise the poor (Ganti 2004:28).

<sup>14</sup> Email correspondence with Maithili Rao, 6 June 2008.

From colonial times the Bombay film industry has been a site of intense contestation between the Indian state and Hindi cinema. According to Ganti,

the Indian state did not accord filmmaking much economic significance, despite the fact that after independence, it was the second largest “industry” in India in terms of capital investment, the fifth largest in the number of people employed, and the second largest film industry in the world. (Ganti 2004:44)

Rather than thinking of the dominant mode of filmmaking as aiding economic development of India, state policies of taxation and licensing accorded it the status of a vice. Cinema has been an object of government regulation in India since the colonial period through censorship, taxation, allocation of raw materials, and control over exhibition through the licensing of theatres. For many years, the Hindi film industry put forward its list of demands to the Finance Minister prior to the annual budget, asking for concessions. These demands included the reduction or removal of import duty on raw stock since raw stock is not produced in India, the exemption of filmmakers’ export earnings from income tax; and the most contentious issue between the film industry and the state at the regional level, the entertainment tax, with filmmakers recommending the central government to either reduce, standardize (it varies from state to state) or abolish the tax altogether. Cinema has also been a “problem” warranting the attention of a number of government commissions, inquiries, and symposia in independent India such as the 1951 Film Enquiry Committee, the Khosla Committee on Film Censorship in 1968, the Working Group on National Film Policy in 1980 (Ganti 2004: 47-48).

Ganti makes an interesting argument that:

The roots of the Indian state’s antipathy toward cinema can be found in the attitudes of nationalist leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. The Indian National Congress (INC) did not accord the medium much importance, most leaders viewing cinema as “low” and “vulgar” entertainment, popular with the uneducated masses... Both Gandhi’s view of cinema as corrupting, and Nehru’s view of film as a tool for

modernization have crucially shaped state policy and rhetoric toward cinema in independent India. Gandhi's moralism and nativism and Nehru's internationalism and modernism are present in prohibitive policies such as censorship and taxation and in developmental policies that established a cultural and cinematic bureaucracy to counter the dominance of the commercially oriented film industries. (Ganti 2004: 46-47)

I believe that these preconceptions persisted over the decades during the lengthy tenure of the Congress Party at the helm. Thus, a striking characteristic of this state-generated discourse about cinema was the intense ambivalence expressed toward cinema and its practitioners. Historically, the dominant tone about the Bombay film industry was that it churned out escapist, frivolous and formulaic cinema, for 'mere entertainment' which was not 'meaningful' or 'artistic' enough. Elected officials and bureaucrats throughout the decades exhorted filmmakers to make 'socially relevant' films with a pedagogical purpose. In an attempt to foster 'good' cinema and counter the dominant mode of filmmaking (as represented by the Bombay industry) the Indian state established a vast cinematic bureaucracy. Following the recommendations of the 1951 Film Enquiry Committee, the central government expanded its relationship with cinema beyond censorship and taxation by setting up the Film Finance Corporation (FFC) in 1960 which later became the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) in 1980. While NFDC has been relatively successful in producing films it has never fulfilled its promises of developing an alternative distribution and exhibition network. Other government institutions set up to promote 'quality' cinema are the National Film Archive, the Film and Television Institute which trains actors and technicians, the Films Division that produces both national and regional newsreels and documentaries, and the Directorate of Film Festivals which organises film festivals, operates the Cultural Exchange Programme for films and sponsors films for international festivals (Ganti 2004: 49:50).

### **Bridging the Gap Between Industry and the Hindu Right**

Regular interaction between right-wing politicians and influential representatives of the film industry characterised much of the decade of the 1990s. Frequent meetings were held, charter of demands presented and delegations sent by the BJP to establish dialogue thereby attempting to influence and sometimes coerce the industry into adopting its Hinduvta agenda.

In May 1993 the *Trade Guide* ('F.M.C. Delegation Meets B.J.P. Leader') reported a joint meeting between the BJP and members of the Film Makers Combine (F.M.C.) supposedly leading to a secret deal that accepted the party's charter of demands. Among the conditions accepted were:

*No ridiculing of Hindu sentiments in any film [added emphasis] as also sentiments of other religions; members of the industry charged, arrested and under investigation in anti-national activities will be suspended till proved innocent; artistes, male and female, posing nude for magazines, will be banned; Members of the industry should not criticise or condemn Hindus involved in the Ayodhya<sup>15</sup> movement or maha-aartis [added emphasis].<sup>16</sup>*

In 1994, a delegation from the BJP Film Cell met the Censor Board Chairman Shakti Samanta and submitted a memorandum demanding more stringent censorship which read as follows:

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<sup>15</sup> The demolition of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya, supposedly the birthplace of the mythic god Ram, was a rallying point for all Hindu nationalists and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) who had launched a movement in 1984, The Ram Janmabhoomi – Babri Masjid for the building of a temple to the mythic god Ram on the site of this mosque. In a dubious re-writing of history by the Hindu Right, it was allegedly the original site of a temple that had been destroyed by a marauding Muslim ruler Babur who invaded the Indian subcontinent in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This movement gathered momentum in the 1990s and formed an integral part of the BJP/NDA electoral manifesto.

<sup>16</sup> See Appadurai (2000: 647) on the ethnocidal uses of this new ritual innovation by the Shiv Sena in Bombay.



1) No feature-film should be allowed on TV without prior permission of C.B.F.C 2) All vulgar songs, in words and picturization, should be deleted from films 3) There should not be any political influence while choosing members on the C.B.F.C. panel. Instead, people from the industry should be given more representation ('B.J.P. Film Cell Meets C.B.F.C. Chairman', 1994).

An assurance was given to the delegation that immediate steps would be taken within a week's time, failing which the B.J.P. Film Cell would organise mass-protests everywhere ('B.J.P. Film Cell Meets C.B.F.C. Chairman', 1994). In a press release sent to the *Trade Guide*, the BJP Film Cell issued a strong statement: 'we warn such producers that even if they manage to get a censor certificate, our *jan andolan*<sup>17</sup> would not let them show these films in theatres' ('B.J.P. Film Cell Warns of Action', 1994).

#### **The formation of the BJP 'Film and Television Forum'**

In 1996, at the inaugural function of the BJP Film & Television Forum the Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra announced that the BJP – Shiv Sena state government was ready to create a corporation with a corpus to finance films. The forum, in its germinal concept, seemed to anticipate the industry status which would be awarded by the BJP Central Government in less than two years. The Deputy Chief Minister further stated that the Forum would 'play a constructive role in bridging the gap between the government and the film industry...' ('B.J.P. Film & Television Forum Formed', 1996), an euphemism for overt interference by the right-wing in the industry. Nitish Bharadwaj, a television actor who had enjoyed immense popularity in the role of the mythic god Krishna, would be the President of the BJP Films & Television Forum; a move which highlighted the growing star power in right-wing politics ('B.J.P. Film & Television Forum Formed', 1996).

#### **Celebrities and Right-wing Electoral Campaigning**

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<sup>17</sup> Hindi word meaning 'Mass Agitation'

The phenomenon of film stars joining or supporting party politics can be traced much before the decade of the 1990s, a practice that cut across party lines. In the pre-Independence era, stalwarts like producer Chandulal Shah and singer-actress Jaddan Bai gave generous donations to Mahatma Gandhi's epic struggle against the British. Literateurs and artistes such as Balraj Sahani, Shailendra, Dina Pathak and Majrooh Sultanpuri were closely associated with the Left movement and even campaigned for the Communist Party of India during elections. The cinema-politics bond continued during the Nehru and Indira Gandhi eras. Actors Raj Kapoor and Dilip Kumar were star campaigners for Krishna Menon when he fought the Lok Sabha elections against Acharya Kripalani in 1962 whilst Sunil and Nargis Dutt and Manoj Kumar had close ties with the Congress party under Indira Gandhi. However, despite these close associations, actually contesting an election or enrolling as a member of a political party didn't occur till the early 1980s when Rajiv Gandhi and his think-tank hit upon the idea of enlisting film personalities into the Congress. Thus, in the 1984 Lok Sabha elections the star actors Amitabh Bachchan and Sunil Dutt and actress Vyjayanthimala Bali were given party nominations and their victories ushered in a new era of the star politician (Rajashyaksha, 1996).

However, it was the sheer participatory force of film and television celebrities that made the right-wing electoral campaign remarkable, prompting a leading newspaper to label it as 'the politics of greasepaint' (Rajashyaksha, 1996). The purpose of celebrities in politics was, according to the National Convenor of the Cultural Cell of BJP, 'to collect crowds...as celebrities attract people...can get people to listen to them. People want to meet them, listen to them. But many celebrities have political acumen like Shatrugan Sinha, Raj Babbar and survive as politicians and celebrities.'<sup>18</sup> Radha Rajashyaksha highlights the film-politics nexus by observing that,

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<sup>18</sup> Telephone interview with Sri Gagendra Chauhan, National Convenor of the Cultural Cell of BJP, Mumbai, October 2007.

though 1996 speaks of an unprecedented desperation in this sphere, Indian politics has for long been associated with film folk who have either campaigned for political parties or actually stood for elections...In 1991, the Bharatiya Janata Party, whose president L.K. Advani had earlier decried such tactics, proposed the candidature of Arvind Trivedi (who would become the Chairman of the Censor Board of India in 2002) and Deepika Chikhalia, actors who played the roles of the mythic characters Ravana and Sita in the phenomenally popular teleserial *Ramayana*,<sup>19</sup> for the Lok Sabha elections (Rajashyaksha, 1996).

The BJP clearly saw in these popular, mythic figures a chance of extending their reel roles into a ballot-box opportunity.

The Hindu Right's unique brand of nationalist politics turned electoral campaigning into a spectacle for mass participation. Much had been written about the Right's flamboyant, performative style of mass mobilisation of the electorate by political scientists, historians and communications scholars - in particular by Arvind Rajagopal in *Politics After Television*.<sup>20</sup> Shoesmith and Mecklai propose that, 'the politically astute BJP drew much of its electoral momentum in the mid-1980s from the Hindi film spectacular' (Shoesmith 2007: 321). As a former film critic for *Organiser*, a right-wing party magazine, and a former I & B minister, L.K. Advani, chief ideologue of the BJP, was aware of the power of both the electronic media and of films ('Soft core between the hard line', 2002). The cross-country *rath yatras* (chariot trails) by politicians dressed as epic characters seeking votes, the elaborate, public rituals and

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<sup>19</sup> One of two Hindu epics, the other being *Mahabharata*.

<sup>20</sup> See Rajagopal (2001), *Politics After Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. In his study Rajagopal asserts a causal link between the broadcast of the Hindu mythological epic, *Ramayana* and its catalytic impact in changing the terms of cultural and political discourse and therefore paving the way for the electoral victory of the BJP. He argues that the broadcast of the serial on national television provided for the first time a single field of social connectivity across the nation and brought into salience the differences in India's split publics.

*yagnas* (fire-worship) were an integral part of the electoral campaign to visually astound the masses into frenzied devotion and submission. Shoesmith and Mecklai suggest that 'by adapting such film techniques to politics', the BJP constructed 'a solid support base for the Hindu Right from the vast, already-disaffected constituency of filmgoers' (Shoesmith 2007: 321).

Bharadwaj is an excellent example of a celebrity being used as a political tool for electoral propaganda. There was slippage between the man and the character he played - gullible voters swayed by religious fervour believed that they were supporting Lord Krishna whilst he was role-playing for electoral gains, dressed in flamboyant costumes exhorting the masses to pay homage by casting their votes for the BJP. It was an instance of the 'willing suspension of disbelief.' Yet, as Joshua Meyrowitz has pointed out, 'because politics is a dramatic ritual, it is ultimately impossible to separate the thread of reality from the thread of performance' (Gamson 1994: 190).

According to a veteran politician, 'Film stars are misused and exploited by political parties, but they don't mind because the spin-offs are good...like favours granted by the ruling party if an actor happens to be campaigning for it, or power, money and publicity' (Rajashyaksha, 1996). In Indian politics, the party is a brand which the model, in this case the film star, endorses ('Ideology? What's that?', 1998). Even the then President of India, Mr. Narayanan, whilst addressing the 45<sup>th</sup> National Film awards ceremony in 1998, remarked on the cine world's 'indulgence in the froth and bubble of politics' ("Industry status to cinema will help workers": Narayanan', 1998). In 2002 the marriage of politics and cinema reached its zenith with the appointment of Vinod Khanna and Shatrughan Sinha, two celebrity actors, as central ministers by the then-Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. According to the trade publication, *Film Information*, 'it [was] for the first time that stars of the Bombay film industry [had] become ministers in the central government' although South Indian stars like M.G. Ramachandran, N.T. Rama Rao and Jayalalitha had led their parties successfully in the state elections to become chief minister ('Bombay Stars in Central Ministry', 2002). For film historian Feroz Rangoonwala, 'present developments [were] both disheartening and

ridiculous, star presence [having] increasingly become ornamental in politics, especially with the BJP' ('Star presence has become ornamental in politics', 2002). However to quote Joshua Gamson: 'the spread of rationalized celebrity culture is perhaps inevitable, especially in the political arena, where consumption [in this case, votes] is so similarly affected by attention' (1994: 191).

### **Film Exhibition Sites For Premieres & Propaganda Screenings**

The following section examines the manner in which the extraordinary mass appeal of Hindi cinema was exploited for electoral propaganda, using the cinema hall as a channel for the dissemination of nationalist propaganda. As mentioned before, the Hindu Right had long recognised the immense power and reach of film propaganda, in representational terms of its popular Hindi tunes and lyrics, and its unique exhibition mode required by the cinematic apparatus.

On several occasions and with alarming frequency special previews of selected films were screened for important right-wing politicians; and politicians were made guests of honour at film premieres, audio-cassette releases and/or at film award ceremonies. There are numerous photographs of such occasions in trade papers as both politician and celebrity were aware of being privileged to be in the company of the other and happy for being recorded for the sake of posterity.

### **Cinema Halls and *Hindutva* Electoral Propaganda**

As part of its electoral campaign, the BJP screened propaganda material such as video cassettes during intervals at cinema halls in the hope of reaching 'a large section of the people through this publicity channel' ('BJP Poll Campaign enters Cinema Halls', 1996). According to a 1996 *The Times of India* report, the BJP released a two-minute video cassette entitled *Parivartan ki Ore/Towards Transformation* which was intended for screening in over 3,000 cinema theatres nationwide and in almost all Lok Sabha constituencies. According to party general-secretary and central election committee secretary Pramod Mahajan the documentary in Hindi would be shown during the interval and on cable networks such as

Jain TV and NAPC. Besides Mahajan, the party president, L.K. Advani, former party president Murli Manohar Joshi, the party's prime ministerial candidate Atal Behari Vajpayee and Sushma Swaraj were among those featured in the film that 'exhort(ed) the people to vote for the BJP for a better tomorrow' ('BJP Poll Campaign enters Cinema Halls', 1996).

The BJP had also devised a unique way of promoting its prime ministerial candidate by releasing a song-based short film in 35mm which would be screened in approximately 1,000 cinema halls across the country (Kulkarni-Apte: 1998b). The song titled *Neta Bas Eka Atal Ho*/A Leader like Atal would emphasise Vajpayee's oratory skills and leadership qualities, clearly suggesting that he was the best and only alternative to lead the nation (Kulkarni-Apte: 1998a). Quite significantly, *The Times of India* reported that it would be the first time that a political party in India would be campaigning on the big screen (Kulkarni-Apte: 1998b).

A sequence showing Indians and foreigners alike standing for the Indian national anthem in *Kabhi Kushi Kabhi Gham*/Sometimes Happy, Sometimes Sad (Karan Johar, 2001, referred to as K3G) became a ploy by the south Bombay wing of the BJP to highlight the importance of the national anthem and exemplified how a Hindi film could be exploited to serve jingoistic nationalism, smacking of opportunism. BJP activists demonstrated outside a cinema hall which had been screening the aforementioned film for seven weeks prior to the sudden nationalistic awareness, appealing to the public to stand up when the anthem was played during the film. The BJP leader Sanjay Bedia opined that the national flag and anthem were a matter of pride for every countryman – 'everyone claims that he or she is a patriot, so the least they can do is stand in honour of the national anthem when it is played' ('BJP uses 'K3G' to bring in respect for anthem', 2002). When asked why the party was reacting ten months after the film was released, Mr. Bedia said, 'our appeal is not restricted to one particular movie. Since 'K3G' happens to play the anthem, we want to make a beginning here' ('BJP uses 'K3G' to bring in respect for anthem', 2002). It should be mentioned that this practice continues till the present time and it is only in Bombay cinema halls that the national anthem is played to an almost mandatory standing audience.

Besides targeting theatrical exhibition, the BJP and the Shiv Sena used the catchy tunes and lyrics of popular Bollywood songs to attack leaders of opposition parties such as Sonia Gandhi, releasing poll-publicity audio cassettes featuring these chartbusters (Kulkarni-Apte: 1998a).

### **Other Discriminatory, Regulatory Interventions**

The State sought to regulate film production not only through film financing, but also through official and unofficial measures such as free screening of Hindu nationalist films, entertainment tax exemptions and national film awards which aimed to define and promote what according to the BJP was 'good cinema.'

Certain films that promoted Hindu nationalist discourse or were based on the lives of Hindu ideologues like Veer Savarkar were given state benefits and screened for free. In 2001 *The Times of India* reported that:

nearly one lakh school children from slums and municipal schools (would) be shown the Hindi film *Veer Savarkar* free of cost with the help of a private foundation in Bombay... with a view to *inculcating patriotism and nationalism among children* [added emphasis]. ('"Veer Savarkar' to be screened free for school, slum children', 2001)

### **Partisan Tax Concessions**

In 1996 *The Times of India* reported on special favours had been granted to three films *Hindustani*/Indian (S. Shankar, 1996), *Prem Granth*/India (Rajiv Kapoor, 1996) and *Agni-Saakshi* (Partho Ghosh, 1996), the latter produced by Bal Thackeray's son. According to the report, the BJP leader Pramod Mahajan had urged the government to exempt *Hindustani*, from entertainment tax as he was 'impressed by its "tight-plot" woven round the theme of corruption and its debilitating effect on the country's public life' ('Mahajan for tax exemption', 1996). Mr. Mahajan felt that Kamal Hassan's role of a septuagenarian freedom fighter-turned crusader would help generate greater awareness on the issue of corruption. Significantly, a senior functionary of the Maharashtra BJP observed that, 'the film echoe[d]

the BJP's pet theme of criminalisation of politics. Being a popular film with a strong visual appeal, *Hindustani* [could] *drive home the party's viewpoint*' [added emphasis] ('Mahajan for tax exemption', 1996). Reportedly, Mahajan had also written to the state governments of New Delhi, Gujarat, Harayana and Rajasthan recommending that the film be exempted from entertainment tax in the aforementioned BJP-ruled states. Inquiries revealed that Mahajan's recommendations were most likely to be accepted by the ruling BJP-Shiv Sena government which seemed quite willing to forsake its hefty share of revenue accrued by the tax in favour of party propaganda through the medium of a film that espoused its nationalist agenda ('Mahajan for tax exemption', 1996). According to a prominent exhibitor, 'higher the tickets rates, the more the government recover through entertainment tax. It would have recovered more had it not allowed films like *Agni-Saakshi*, *Prem-Granth*, *Masoom* (Mahesh Kothare, 1996) to be tax free' ('City theatres to close on Sept 13', 1996).

Significantly, the state government's decision to exempt *Prem-Granth* and *Agni-Saakshi* from the entertainment tax had incurred the wrath of the opposition parties in the two houses of state legislature ('Mahajan for tax exemption', 1996). Poet and film-maker Ramdas Phutane, a member of the legislative council, accused the ruling Sena-BJP government of bestowing special favours on the aforementioned films. In a statement to *The Times of India* he expressed his displeasure: 'the booming guns may be the director's idea of love and amity, but *Agni-Saakshi* does in no way merit tax-exemption' ('Mahajan for tax exemption', 1996). That such a film had found favour with the state government was not surprising since the producer was the late Bindumadhav Thackeray, son of the Shiv Sena chief, Bal Thackeray. According to a veteran Bollywood watcher, 'what (was) deeply distressing (was) that the Sena-BJP government seem(ed) to be applying its own rules to favour film-makers and banners of its choice' ('Mahajan for tax exemption', 1996).

### **State Awards: The National Film Award Controversy**

Mehta has suggested that through national awards the state plays a crucial role in producing genres through official patronage. National awards are official stamps of approval that encourage producers to churn out ideologically similar fare. As Pendakur observes, "the



government's role in India's cinema is clearly that of the patron and the police. One cannot help notice how close it is to a feudal overlord who patronizes art and, at the same time, sets serious limits to it" (2003:84). The State ceremonially endorsed big-budget, family films such as *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge/The Brave-Hearted Will Take Away The Bride* (Aditya Chopra, 1995), a phenomenal box-office hit particularly with the diasporic audiences in the US and UK, for providing 'wholesome entertainment' and 'as a national award winner...also granted the privilege of being *tax-free*' [original emphasis] (Mehta 2005:145). Since state awards are quite often incentives to reward filmmakers for maintaining the status quo and/or promoting partisan politics it wasn't wholly unexpected that instances of politicization occurred. There is, of course, a long history of state patronage, which, according to Pendakur "works in subtle ways to reinforce the power of the state as the ultimate arbiter of taste, morality, and the boundaries of political discourse in Indian cinema" (2003:84).

In 2001, controversy broke out over the decision taken by an allegedly 'government-backed partisan jury rather than an independent body' ('Jury's Out', First Edit, 2001) to award the National Film Awards for best actress and actor to Raveena Tandon and Anil Kapoor for their roles in *Daman: A Victim of Marital Violence* (Kalpana Lajmi, 2001) and *Pukar* (Rajkumar Santoshi, 2000) respectively. Coincidentally, Lajmi's partner, the music director Bhupen Hazarika, was awarded the prestigious Phalke award by the government, a recognition that Rao believes was politically motivated and totally undeserving.<sup>21</sup> Condemning this politicisation of the award-giving process, a *The Times Of India* editorial decried:

for cinema's sake, let's leave cinema alone. What's politics got to do with it, anyway? Why should a film win an award simply because it ... propagates Indianness, features artistes who campaign for the ruling party or features the nation's number one enemy...More importantly why should a specialist body like a film jury comprise non-specialists like campaign managers, dance teachers, political *netas* <sup>22</sup> and friends of *netas*? ...Any political party – be it the BJP or the Congress – should clearly demarcate

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<sup>21</sup> Email correspondence with Maithili Rao, 6 June, 2008

<sup>22</sup> Meaning 'Leader' in Hindi

its field of activity, which obviously is the political arena alone. ...Hard-core ideological intonations have led to the asphyxiation of many an autonomous body, transforming art and intellect into shallow propaganda. ('Jury's Out', First Edit, 2001)

Reacting to the charges of intervention in these awards, Swaraj denied that there had been any attempt to compromise the independence of the jury and claimed that at no point had her ministry sought any lists of films or tried to influence the jury, the members having been cleared by her without allegedly going into their political leanings. However she did concede that 'four of the members could be described as pro-BJP' ('Sushma denies intervention charge in film awards', 2001).

## **Conclusion**

More than any other political party in India, the BJP and its allies were aware of the importance of the film industry and recognised its growth potential particularly with the Indian diaspora in the US, Canada, UK and Middle East. The BJP had recognised the power of the cinematic apparatus as a cheap mass medium that reached the common man <sup>23</sup>. It used the industry as a conduit for various purposes, not least for party propaganda and for the dissemination of nationalist ideology to illiterate masses for whom the moving image rather than the written word was the effective means of communication.

The changing dynamics between the BJP-led Indian State and the Bombay film industry post-1998 could be retrospectively traced to the early 1990s when the BJP had developed various strategies to involve itself in the workings of the film industry, not least by infiltrating the trade unions. Industry status, along with all its benefits, provided the State with a means of regulating a hitherto unorganized and amorphous business sector by its fiscal policies on investment, the Intellectual Property Right and also by giving positive incentives such as national awards to make its patronage and pleasure known. Recognition of the film industry could also be seen as a means of controlling content in ways more subterranean, more

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<sup>23</sup> Telephone interview with Sri Gagendra Chauhan, National Convenor of the Cultural Cell of BJP, Mumbai, October 2007

effective, and less public than through the censorship battles of the 1990s. As Manjunath Pendakur observes, 'investors usually attempt to influence the content of the films' (2003:54). For Mehta, 'the process of constructing and then policing corruption produce(d) another opportunity for the state to "act" and to (re)inscribe its authority' in the context of globalization (2005: 140).

This new relationship between Bombay cinema and the Indian state was illuminated by a quip made by the Finance Minister after granting the film industry a series of concessions: 'I hope these concessions combined with what I have already done on the indirect tax side will reassure the entertainment industry that *Hum Saath Saath Hain/We Are United* (Sooraj R. Barjatya, 1999)' <sup>24</sup> (Quoted in Mehta (2005:149). His use of the title of a big-budget Bombay 'family' film to characterize the changing relationship between Bombay cinema and the Indian state was not in jest but an insightful remark about the twin goals of the BJP, namely, to globalize in an uniquely Indian way, whilst attesting to the patriarchal alliance between the State and Bombay cinema (Mehta 2005: 149).

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<sup>24</sup> Released in 1999 and produced under the banner of the traditionally conservative Rajshri Productions.

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