

## Democracies: Films for Freedom, Creativity & Individual Expression

September 28, 2023

Mumbai: With the commercial success of Bollywood star Shah Rukh Khan's latest movie **Jawan**, Khan has become the first actor to have two Rs 1000 crore entries within the same year as his first movie of 2023, **Pathaan** also crossed Rs 1000 crore at the global box office.

Bollywood, the Hindi film industry, has faced a critical crossroads in recent years. Big-budget movies featuring India's most bankable megastars such as Akshay Kumar, Aamir Khan, and Ranbir Kapoor have failed to make an impact at the box office. This year has been particularly challenging for Bollywood, with several heavily advertised flops including Kumar's "Bachchan Pandey," Kapoor's "Shamshera," and Khan's "Laal Singh Chaddha". Even Kapoor's "Brahmastra," which was expected to be a blockbuster, had a poor debut.

The success of **Jawan** and **Pathaan** may revive Bollywood, which was in a comatose state due to continuous failure of its productions.



*From the trailer of **Jawan***

Just before the 2019 elections, **Mulk** was released and Abhinav Sinha, Director of **Mulk**, had said that the film was a 'propaganda of my version of nationalism'. Again the elections of 2024 are due. Whether the film also conveys a message to the audiences is a question.

**Nirmalya Dutta**, a reviewer in the "**Hindustan Times**" dated September 23, 2023 says that for the Modi supporters, 'Jawan' presents a sad tale of poor healthcare,

pre-historic farming practices and other malaise that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is trying to fix. Modi's detractors can use the second half of the movie, where the capitalism is painted as the villain. (Modi is known to welcome the role of businessmen in developing the nation.)

*Bollywood has played a crucial role in shaping India's national myth by weaving serious issues such as social justice, women's rights, gay rights, and interreligious marriage into its movies. The engaging narratives of these films epitomized the pluralism of India and serve as both commercial entertainment and political commentary.*

*Since 1930s, from the beginning, Bollywood's political philosophy has been Marxist and its **villains have been businessmen**. Its stories are not anchored in the history and culture of any part of India and is based on an imaginary social scenario of huge slums of Mumbai. Immediately after independence on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947, when India was poor and all the large businesses were multi-national, this philosophy fetched audiences all over the nation.*

*The Bollywood culture during the late 80s and nineties, when the three Khans started controlling the Bollywood, **looked down upon Indian culture and Hinduism**, by focusing on social ills. The results of a recent research at IIM Rohtak showed that Bollywood showed Hindu monks in a bad light while Muslim, Sikh and Christian religious persons were always shown as the best of persons.*

*Slowly the nation developed and Indian businesses were seen to help develop the nation. Secondly the people overcame the inferiority complex, imbibed during the 200 years of British colonialism and started **taking pride in their 10,000 years-old culture, which was the universal culture of Asia** till the onslaughts of Islam and later the west. Thirdly the Cinema in regional languages, particularly in Telugu and Tamil from the South, has become financially stronger. Fourthly technologically it has made it easier to dub the films in regional languages into Hindi.*

*When Telugu and Tamil films, which are situated in the local cultural ethos and history, were presented to all-India audiences, they turned out to be authentic. These films resonated with the audiences all over India due to the basic cultural unity of Indian sub-continent.*

*RRR's references to Indian Epic Ramayana touched the chords of Indian audiences speaking languages other than Telugu also.*

*In the last 2 years, South Indian film industries have experienced tremendous success while Bollywood has had flops, Indian Cinema has come to mean something much more than Bollywood cinema.*



*RRR, a Telugu-language movie, the **third-highest-grossing Indian film of all time**;  
Director: S. S. Rajamouli and co-written by V. Vijayendra Prasad;  
Stars N. T. Rama Rao Jr., Ram Charan, Ajay Devgn, Alia Bhatt and others;  
Its song "Naatu Naatu": Best Original Song award at the 95th Academy Awards.*

United States Democratic Congressman **Ro Khanna** led a bipartisan Congressional delegation to India on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2023, the Independence Day of India. The delegation paid tributes to Mahatma Gandhi at Rajghat. The delegation exchanged views on advancing bilateral partnership with **Dr. S. Jaishankar**, India's Minister of Foreign Affairs. The delegation also shared perspectives on the global situation and the US-India collaboration on multilateral, regional and global issues. The Foreign Minister also discussed the transformation underway in India, especially its outcomes of better governance.

Besides political engagements, the delegation also visited Bollywood and met Amitabh Bachchan, India's best-known actor. Amitabh's father was a poet and was a friend of Ro Khanna's grand-father- Amarnath Vidyalkar. Mr. Vidyalkar was a scholar, a Gandhian, a journalist and a politician. Vidyalkar served as Minister of Education, Labor, and Languages in the Government of Punjab from 1957 to

1962. He was a member of the First (1952–1956), Third (1962–1967), and Fifth (1971–1977) Lok Sabhas.



*US Congressional delegation with Dr. S. Jaishankar, Foreign Minister of India*  
Qatar's Al Jazeera, which is perceived by many to be espousing the radical philosophy of Muslim Brotherhood and the Indian-American Muslim Council, which masquerades as an Indian group but which is perceived by many as a group run by Pakistan's ISI, have both criticized Ro Khanna's meeting with Abhijit Iyer-Mitra, a public intellectual perceived as a 'Rightist (*by Indian definition*)'. They both wanted the US delegation to meet, besides the government officials, only those, who follow the leftist and radical Islamist ideologies.

[www.DiGiNews360.com](http://www.DiGiNews360.com) wants every such group to inter-act with whomever the group wants to. In fact, if such a group wants to exchange views with persons and organizations in all the different hues of thinking in the vibrant democracy of India, we welcome it.

*But if the US delegation wanted to meet with people, who represent Indian Cinema, it would have had to meet others besides the Bollywood part, since Indian Cinema is today much bigger than Bollywood alone.*