

Hollywood Bollywood

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I protest! On behalf of all self-respecting members of the Hindi film industry (not 'Bollywood' please). First 'sensible' 'alternative' film makers spend time making sensible alternative films, and sneering at commercial Hindi cinema. And then they turn around and rip off the formula to try and get some butts in the seats. Seen Hollywood Bollywood? The Guru? Sneering seems par for the course where Hindi films are concerned.

At a party, I explain how a song and dance number is actually put together and get incredulous responses 'You mean the stars actually rehearse?' 'that much hard work goes into it?' Yes indeed, that much hard work does go into it. It is as tough to make a good film as it is to make a bad film. What we've lacked so far has been the vision and will to bend the formula that had the industry in its thrall. But the times they are a-changing. Nothing like hunger to give you a new perspective. And there are a lot of hungry people out there.

The first kind of hunger is real. This has been a disastrous year, with flop after flop. There is very little money in the industry. You can't lynch a producer for your dues if you know he genuinely doesn't have any resources left. Scary stories abound — like that of the producer who still holds his meetings at the Marriot, but goes home and lives on bananas — which are all that he can afford.

The great tried and tested formula has finally failed — and how! Not stars, not music, not hype — nothing has made films work. Of course we writers are sitting on the sidelines laughing our heads off. Now when you say 'Look I have this great story —' people listen.

Earlier they would say 'can we put Hrithik in it? Is there an action sequence in which we see his muscles?' When the choice is between bananas and changing your way of functioning — even the elephants of the industry are shuffling around muttering words like 'good story... different... emotional... small budget...'

The second kind of hunger is the one that will make the biggest difference. People are hungry for good work. Surely you've noticed that in the last five years, the look of Hindi films has undergone a sea change. The camerawork, the art direction, the styling — all of it has caught up with the rest of the world.

Our technicians are on par with the best in the world — but are rarely given platforms to prove it. Everybody is looking for a

project that's 'different'. That challenges them as professionals and allows them to push their craft and creativity to the limit.

And so, even if you are an absolute newcomer, if you've got a great story, you can get floored by the receptivity that is shown to you. Everybody is sick of being called 'Bollywood' in this patronising manner ('Hindi Film Industry' if you please). A whole lot of people believe that they can make films better than Hollywood — and are waiting for a chance to prove it.

Like me, a whole brood of new directors, bound scripts in hand, fanatic gleam in the eye, are prowling Bombay. And for the very first time doors are not only opening but you're being welcomed in. It's a good time to be around. My faith in our films has been renewed by the fact that Hollywood feels the need to rip them off. Hilarious, isn't it?

And so I look forward to what the New Year brings for the Hindi film industry. (For the last time — NOT Bollywood!)