Funky Bollywood: The Wild World of 1970s Indian Action Cinema

By Todd Stadtman

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Despite the often stereotypical notions of Bollywood, it's not all weddings, wet saris and running around trees. In the 1970s, Indian cinema gave birth to a new breed of action movie, one that combined its own exuberant traditions with foreign influences like the gritty urban crime thrillers of the New Hollywood, Hong Kong martial arts cinema, and Italian exploitation fare.

This was the domain of hard fighting he-men stars like Amitabh Bachchan, Dharmendra and Feroz Khan and badass, whip-wielding heroines played by the likes of the gorgeous Zeenat Aman, Hema Malini, and Rekha.

Let world cult cinema fanatic Todd Stadtman be your guide through this world of karate killers, femme fatales, space age lairs, bombshells and booby traps with Funky Bollywood, a book with an attitude as freewheeling and feisty as its subject matter, bursting with colour and imagination on every vibrant page.

Funky Bollywood: The Wild World of 1970s Indian Action Cinema By Todd Stadtman Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1334161 in Books
- Published on: 2015-03-16
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.50" h x .67" w x 8.50" l, 1.43 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 240 pages

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Todd Stadtman has been writing about world cult cinema since 2008 on his Rondo Award nominated blog Die, Danger, Die, Die, Kill! and as a regular contributor to Teleport City, one of the longest running cult cinema websites on the Internet. His work has appeared in The Times of India, Famous Monsters magazine, and on the websites io9, Mondo Macabro, The Cultural Gutter, Permission to Kill, Monster Island Resort, and Movie Fan Princess. He also contributed to the Turkey edition of the World Directory of Cinema, published by Intellect Ltd.

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These days pretty much every westerner has some idea in their head of what a Bollywood movie looks like: The vibrant colors! The over-the-top acting! The constant singing! However, those ideas are more frequently derived from the countless parodies and pastiches of Bollywood that are floating around popular culture than they are from any exposure to the real thing.

In fact, in my own United States, there are no doubt many people who would tell you, with absolute conviction, that they had seen a ?Bollywood movie. This despite the fact that what they had actually seen was something along the lines of Slumdog Millionaire or ?Bride and Prejudice?both of them British productions, albeit with some ethnic Indians among their cast and crew, that pick and choose from Bollywood traditions as suits their creative ends, but which ultimately fall short of bearing all the hallmarks of that very particular branch of world cinema.

Of course, there are also those rare ?Westerners, cineastes and cultural tourists alike, who harbor a genuine curiosity about Bollywood. And for those folks there exists no shortage of published materials on the subject. In my experience, the books on Hindi cinema that are available in English tend to fall into one of two categories. On the one hand, there are scholarly tomes that will tell you all you want to know about the canonical ?classics of Indian popular cinema?films like, for instance, Mehboob Khan's Mother India, or the works of auteur director Guru Dutt?and discourse eloquently upon subjects such as the trauma of partition and how it ?evidences itself in the films of Bollywood's golden age. On the other, there are those lush coffee table books that celebrate the glamour of modern Bollywood?with all of its gorgeous stars, lavish production design and fabulous costumes?as a return to the irony-free glitz of old Hollywood.

But what if you are someone whose interest in Bollywood is neither academic nor ?motivated by a desire to worship at the ?altar of its current stars? What if you are, for instance, someone like me?a person who has left the world of high-brow film connoisseurship behind and dedicated himself to trolling the more disreputable regions of world popular cinema in search of, for lack of a better word, cheap thrills?

Well, if that's you, welcome to the world of 1970s Indian action cinema.

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