

From Romeo to Rambo: Popular Portrayals of Journalists in Bollywood Cinema

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Most of us go to the movies to have fun: to laugh, cry, boo, cheer, be scared, thrilled, or simply to be amused for a few hours. But movies are something more than just an evening's entertainment. They are also historical documents that help us see—and perhaps more fully understand—the world in which they were made.

— Steven J. Ross, *Movies and American Society*¹

Bollywood cinema serves as a prism reflecting to the world the people and ethos of India. The conflict and congruence between reality and fiction make Bollywood films one of the most interesting reflections of the perceived imagery of its subjects. This article attempts to understand the depiction of journalists in cinema by analyzing the popular portrayal of the journalist in Bollywood films.

Siegfried Kracauer believes that in a majority of contemporary films, “things are pretty unrealistic,” but he also asserts that unreal cinema is “daydreams of society in which the true reality comes to the fore and its otherwise repressed wishes take on a form.”² This argument stems from the notion that cinema reflects people’s aspirations and hopes of how

they see or wish to see the world. This is also true for the portrayal of journalists in Bollywood cinema. Before the economic liberalization was unleashed in 1991, journalists in India occupied an inconspicuous position in society. They were considerably overshadowed by politicians, freedom fighters, smugglers, and doctors. Similarly in Bollywood films, journalists had smaller roles and often played a minor and insignificant part in the story's narrative.

However, with post liberalization, and more recently with the rapid proliferation of news channels and newspaper publications entering the market, journalists and media have been put on the front bench and occupy a more vocal and visual role in Indian society. This has also led to more and more Bollywood films using journalism as a main focus of their narrative.

Most commercial films are not a prism reflecting reality, but a figment of someone's imagination and desire to see the world as he or she would like to. Hindi film is also devoid of much reality and is often an exaggeration, yet it defines its audience's aspirations and perceptions. As Ashis Nandy says, "Studying popular film is studying Indian modernity at its rawest, its crudities laid bare by the fate of traditions in contemporary life and arts. Above all, it is studying caricatures of ourselves."³

And this is what the article reflects—the caricature images of journalists portrayed by Bollywood, from their most Romeo-like romantic image to their most macho Rambo superhero. For our analysis we have taken commercially popular films where the role of the journalist or media has been important in the film's narrative script. We considered films over a 30-year period from 1981 to 2011, exploring movies where the journalist's character stands out or has been entrenched in public memory for its journalistic aspects.

The study discusses 33 films ranging from *Mr. India* (1987) to *Rockstar* (2011); see Appendix A for list of films studied. Although journalism plays a minor role in *Rockstar*,

that film has been an important recent vehicle in defining the popularity of the male protagonist's character and the journalist's role is symbolic of the entertainment reportage in India.

Our analysis revealed five popular representations of the journalist that we've classified as romantic companion, glamour chaser, investigative superhero, power magnate, and brainless mouthpiece. These categories, though distinct, can also find themselves sharing screen space and often overlapping in the same film's narrative. This article argues that these stereotypes have been so strongly entrenched in Bollywood scripts that even films inspired by real-life incidences fail to break free of them.

The Romantic Companion

An extremely popular category, films here portray a journalist as the romantic companion to the other lead protagonist. At least 10 Bollywood films during the 1981-2011 time period have shown journalists chasing the subject of their story and eventually falling in love with them. This storyline leads the films to focus on the journalist character moving from his or her professional work to the ability to fight, dance, sing, and seduce the protagonist of the opposite sex.

Films such as *Mr. India* (1987), *Sachche Ka Bol Bala* (Truth Triumphs, 1989), *Dil Hai Ki Maanta Nahin* (The Heart Does Not Listen, 1991), *Mohra* (Pawn, 1994), *Dil Se* (From the Heart, 1998), *Wajood* (Existence, 1998), *Mission Kashmir* (2000), *Elaan* (Manifesto, 2005) and *Krrish* (2006) are symbolic of how the journalist has left no stone unturned to be the perfect romantic companion first and a journalist later.

While this category is the most unrealistic, it perhaps plays on people's fantasy of seeing an almost impossible love story unfold before their eyes. This argument finds resonance with Rachel Dwyer, who defines Bollywood as "entertainment, presented in a melodramatic mode, with glamorous fantasies and famed for its song and dance numbers, yet

it has routinely been disparaged, labeled as formulaic, escapist, derivative.”⁴

The film *Dil Hai Ki Maanta Nahin* (The Heart Does Not Listen, 1991), inspired by Hollywood director Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night*, is the story of happy-go-lucky reporter Raghu Jaitley (Aamir Khan) who is recently fired from a tabloid for not producing any sensational news stories. On a bus, Raghu meets Pooja Dharamchand (Pooja Bhatt), the rich, wild daughter of a shipping tycoon; Pooja has run away from home, intending to marry a movie star whom her father disapproves. The father hires private investigators and also advertises a reward for the whereabouts of his daughter, which puts some goons on Pooja's trail.

Raghu sees this as an opportunity to resurrect his journalism career and strikes a deal with Pooja to take her safely to her destination in return for an exclusive story. After the bus breaks down, Raghu and Pooja go through various adventures together and find themselves falling in love. But a misunderstanding leads Pooja to believe that Raghu is just looking for a story and does not love her. In the entire movie, there is not much indication of any journalistic pursuits until the last few minutes when Pooja's father reads Raghu's article in the newspaper and is impressed with it; he clears up the misunderstanding his daughter has and urges her to marry Raghu.

The entire premise of *Dil Hai Ki Maanta Nahin* is based on the portrayal of Raghu not as a reporter, but as a romantic companion to the rich escapee. He entertains Pooja through song and dance and even fights her kidnappers to be her knight in shining armor. His singing, dancing, and even fighting skills are exhibited throughout the movie in great detail, while his journalist skills are sidelined. This made the film a light-hearted romantic comedy, and it was a big hit that year.

Mr. India (1987), an older, extremely popular film directed by Shekhar Kapur, who is known globally for directing the Hollywood film *Elizabeth*, tells the story of a bubbly,

cheerful news reporter, Seema (Sri Devi), and a boy next door, Arun (Anil Kapoor), who turns into a superhero. Mr. India—Arun— upon discovering the invisibility formula, sets out to fight the world's evils. The reporter Seema is helped by the superhero Mr. India, who also rescues her from the villain's den, where she had gone to expose the smuggling of idols and gets into trouble. She wants to interview Mr. India, but her editor is disinclined to believe her and laughs at her for believing that an invisible man exists until Mr. India pays him a visit.

Seema falls in love with Mr. India and her desire to interview him leads her to do a seductress dance sequence in the rain while singing a song titled "I Love You."

Although the film shows the reporter investigating certain stories, often at great risk to herself, it downplays her journalistic work by making the scenes funny. When Seema wants to investigate something fishy in a casino, she dresses and acts like Charlie Chaplin and the scenes that follow are filled with comedy. Even here she is rescued by Mr. India, bringing the romance angle in the film once again.

As the film progresses and the love between the two grows, Seema's role as reporter takes a backseat and she is shown more as a companion to the superhero, who in the end helps rid the world of the main villain.

In the more recent film *Krrish* (2006), television show producer Priya (Priyanka Chopra) along with her friend Honey (Manini Mishra) decide to make a show about Krishna, a village boy with super human skills. Aware of Krishna's feelings for Priya, Honey convinces Priya to ask Krishna to come to Singapore (where they are based) so they can shoot for the show. In this film, Priya is shown as a silly journalist who always listens to her friend Honey without thinking for herself.

Krishna turns out to be Krrish, the new superhero in Singapore. During the course of the film, Priya is shown falling in love with Krishna and then trying to help him so she can redeem herself for manipulating him at the beginning. Towards the end of the film, Priya

comes across as nothing more than a companion to Krrish, who tries to save the world from a mad scientist.

The Glamour Chaser

At least nine films feature the glamour chaser, including *Page 3* (2005), *C Kkompany* (2008), *Tere Bin Laden* (Without You, Laden, 2010), *Mumbai Meri Jaan* (Mumbai, My Life, 2008), *Halla Bol* (Raise Your Voice, 2008), *Rockstar* (2011), *Krrish* (2006), *Delhi 6* (2009), and *Phas Gaye Re Obama* (I Have Been Trapped, Obama, 2010), with the latter five finding cross references with other depictions.

Every newspaper and television station in India includes news from the film industry, socialites, flashy industrialists, and celebrities. This celebrity infused news is popularly called the Page 3 news, a term derived from its prominent display on page three of newspapers. This Page 3 world, is described by Daya Thussu as a “gossip-laden reportage of the life and times of the metropolitan party-goers, their affairs and glitzy lifestyles.”⁵

The importance of Page 3 news cannot be overlooked as a profit making device for most publications. Even serious national newspapers often use at least a snippet of a “Page 3” story on their front pages.

It comes as no surprise then, that when Bollywood director Madhur Bhandarkar decided to make a film about the world of “Page 3” journalism, he titled it *Page 3* (2005). The film is about a woman journalist, Madhvi (Konkana Sen Sharma), who covers the party circuit in Mumbai. Madhvi is shown as a woman who mingles with the party crowd to find news and who often turns gossip into news.

All is well until she changes her beat to crime and uncovers a ring of industrialists who are sexually exploiting minors. Madhvi loses her job and struggles to find one, only to return back to cover the Page 3 parties. Thus the protagonist is shown as someone who couldn't cover the serious beat of crime, which was “tough” and more “difficult” than writing

about the Page 3 parties.

In the film *Rockstar*, Aditi Rao Hydari is shown as a television journalist named Sheena who is forced to dig out details about a new, upcoming singer called Jordan. The young journalist is shown chasing the story of the male lead who rises from a nobody to become a popular singing sensation.

As Sheena digs deeper, her curiosity to know and report on everything about Jordan, from his private affairs to his public persona, increases. The rock star's violent behavior, scuffles with the press and his promoters, and his love affair with a married woman all are rigorously chased by the press and often made into headline news.

Thussu believes that the glamour associated with television takes primarily two forms: Bollywood and crime. The latter is beautifully explained in the film *C Kkompany* (2008), a comedy that highlights the popularity of crime shows in television journalism. In *C Kkompany*, television reporter Akshay Kumar (Tusshar Kapoor) falls in love with the underworld don's sister. The only way the two can unite is to escape from the country, which requires a lot of money that Akshay does not have.

Akshay, along with his two comrades Mr. Joshi (Anupam Kher) and Lambodar Jha (Rajpal Yadav), create a fake mafia organization named C Kkompany (D Company is the most feared mafia group in India, taking its name from their boss Dawood Ibrahim, one of FBI's most wanted criminals). They hope to use the fear of the mafia to get Mr. Joshi's disrespectful and stingy son to part with some ill-gotten wealth. Akshay and his friends send Mr. Joshi's son a taped message threatening to kill him if he does not pay 10 million rupees. This money, the old man Mr. Joshi believes, will get him back his respect and Akshay his girlfriend.

But when the producer of Akshay's channel finds the extortion tape, he knows he has hit the jackpot. The producer quickly airs the tape on the channel and introduces the world to

a new mafia organization called C Kkompany. Akshay becomes the leading reporter on the story and eventually an anchor of a show where people can request the unknown C Kkompany to help them solve problems.

While the film's script tries to showcase ordinary people's lives where sometimes they resort to extraordinary ways to solve their everyday problems, journalism plays the role of a connector between the public and the mafia. The film shows how the television channel benefits from this linkage by drawing high television ratings points. The media organization is shown chasing the glamour of the crime world, turning a fake mafia group, C Kkompany, into a national rage.

This film category is inspired by today's news coverage, where every television channel has a show dedicated to crime. These shows are often sensationalized and advertised to masses and have a huge fan following. Films too often highlight the media's role as glamour chasers, often resulting in a negative portrayal of journalism.

Tere Bin Laden (Without You, Laden, 2010), is a comic satire where a journalist, Ali Hassan (Ali Zafar) of downmarket channel Danko TV (based in Pakistan), harbors hopes of going to the United States. He needs lots of money to pay the travel agent to fulfill his U.S. dream.

So when he sees an Osama Bin Laden look-alike, Ali conceives a devious plot to develop a fake Osama tape in order to make money. He does not expect the U.S. to react so strongly and set up military operations in Pakistan, which means that the issuance of visas gets stricter, making it impossible for him to immigrate to the U.S. from Pakistan.

Ali then decides to make another tape where "Osama" is shown to declare a ceasefire with the United States. Ali gets support from an unlikely ally named Ted, a lead figure in the FBI who is tired of chasing Osama.

This spoof highlights the media's tendency to air sensational news without

verification. *Tere Bin Laden* shows the editor of Danka TV paying a hefty sum to get his hands on the Osama tape and selling it to an Indian channel that runs it without verifying its content because he knows the glamour associated with Osama will get him profits.

A fairly small but significant portrayal of this form of journalism is shown in the film *Mumbai Meri Jaan* (Mumbai, My Life, 2008) based on the July 2007 bombings on Mumbai trains. Seven bombs went off in the first class compartment of seven local trains in Mumbai during the peak rush hour, killing 187 people and injuring many more.

When television reporter Rupali Joshi (Soha Ali Khan) rushes to the blast scene to report on the incident, she discovers her fiancé has been killed in the blast. A devastated Rupali is tormented by her channel to report extensively on her tragedy. The film portrays the prevalent perception that reporters are heartless individuals who make money out of people's tragedies because the glamour associated with crime and death draws in the ratings.

Other films that show the media chasing glamour stories include *Halla Bol* (2006), *Rockstar* (2011), *Delhi 6* (2009), and *Phas Gaye Re, Obama* (2010) where reporters are shown chasing the story for purely glamorous reasons either it involves celebrities, sensational news like monkeys creating havoc, kidnappings, or rich non-resident Indians. These films also find a cross referencing with other journalistic depictions.

The Investigative Superhero

This is a category where the role of investigative journalist finds two extremes in the 30 year period studied. In the first extreme, shown in such films as *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaron* (Just Let It Go, Friends, 1983), *Tridev* (Trinity, 1989), *Pratibandh* (Restriction, 1990), and *Krantiveer* (Revolutionary, 1994), the journalist makes powerful enemies in the course of his or her investigative work, just like a superhero who takes on the bad guys. Unfortunately, the journalist ends up paying a heavy price through personal loss or injury—becoming a martyr in the process.

At the other extreme, reflected in *Guru* (Master, 2007), *Kurbaan* (Sacrificed, 2009), *Kabul Express* (2006), *No One Killed Jessica* (2010), and *Rann* (Battle, 2010), the journalist's investigative work can change the course of events and save the world from terrible tragedies just like a superhero. Further analyses of films that fall into this category show that the former extreme is slowly being replaced by the latter.

Investigative journalism is but one of many styles of reporting seen in newspapers and on television around the world. This style of journalism is typically associated with covering crime, political corruption, or scandal, and this is what Bollywood focuses on as well. A typical investigative reporter in a Bollywood film will either be a tunic-clad revolutionary who finds himself under threat or worse and who is attacked by those he is exposing, or he will be a smart opportunist who is well aware of the implications of his story and knows how to leverage it to his advantage.

In the first case, the investigative reporter often pays a heavy price for his/her reporting. In *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaron* (Just Let It Go, Friends, 1983), photo journalists Vinod Chopra (Naseeruddin Shah) and Sudhir Mishra (Ravi Vaswani) are jailed when the villains shift the blame of a murder and bridge collapse on them with the help of their conniving editor. In *Tridev* (Trinity, 1989), journalist Srikant Verma (Shekhar Suman) is killed after drinking poisoned milk. In *Pratibandh* (Restriction, 1990), a small role played by Madan Jain as an investigative reporter saw him being killed in the backseat of a car for investigating corrupt politicians. In *Krantiveer* (Revolutionary, 1994), Meghna Dixit (Dimple Kapadia) known as "kalam wali bai" (woman with a pen) is raped by her subject of investigation, Chatur Singh, a local gangster.

These drastic "martyr" endings of investigative reporters have been replaced in more recent films with roles that have undergone a change. Before we explore this, let us look at a film inspired by real life instances in India with some crucial modifications. The film *Guru*

(Master, 2007) is based on the life of one of India's greatest business tycoons and inspired by the book *The Polyester Prince*. The movie finds the script modified from reality when it comes to depicting the repercussions of investigative journalism.

In *Guru*, the lead character of Gurukant Desai (Abhishek Bachan) is said to be inspired by the life of prominent Indian industrialist Dhirubhai Ambani, while the old school ethical, idealistic newspaperman Manik Dasgupta, a.k.a. Nanaji (Mithun Chakravarty), mirrors Ramanth Goenka, founder of *Indian Express*.

R. Madhavan plays investigative reporter Shyam whose character is based on the journalist S. Gurumurthy, who exposed several corruption and illegal deals made by the tycoon. Unlike Gurumurthy, who found himself in trouble with the government, Shyam is shown to have a smooth sailing.

The power of cinema history is that it often replaces academic history in the public's imagination. Indian cinema's history is not about truth, nor is it an enquiry into truth, notes Dwyer. Bollywood limits the portrayal of an investigative reporter to two distinct categories: one who suffers greatly because of his or her investigation and one who can make remarkable discoveries and change the course of unimaginable events. This is a trend seen in recent films that explore investigative journalism and consequently, we decided to name this category "investigative superhero" to reflect an evolution from the earlier investigative martyr image to current depictions in Bollywood films.

The film *Kurbaan* (Sacrificed, 2009) is set against the background of global terrorism. Journalist Riyaz (Vivek Oberoi) loses his girlfriend and fellow journalist in a bomb blast in an airplane. This prompts Riyaz to go on a mission to uncover the people behind the bombing. He makes remarkable progress and discovers the people involved, but instead of reporting his investigations, he takes on the role of the protector and tries to stop a terrorist attack in an exaggerated role that breaks through all the boundaries of journalism.

In recent years, real life investigations have been flooding television channels and newspapers in India. The investigative reporters who have been hailed as heroes for their good exposé journalism have also inspired film scripts. However, the role of the investigative reporter as a lone defender of truth in earlier films has now been replaced by the reporter leveraging his or her profession to safeguard himself or herself by garnering the power of the fourth estate and mobilizing public support and scrutiny.

Exaggeration is perhaps a key to the success of more realistic films like *Kabul Express* (2006), a documentary by director Kabir Khan about investigative reporters covering the Afghan war that did not do well at the box office. Khan, who made several documentaries in Afghanistan, loosely based the film on his experiences in Afghanistan.

Another very popular film focusing on investigative journalism and based on real life events is *No One Killed Jessica* (2010). Jessica Lal, a young model, was shot dead in an upmarket pub by a man who was the son of a powerful politician. Even with dozens of eyewitnesses, the case fell through because the witnesses perjured themselves and the accused was acquitted. A series of investigations by *Tehelka* magazine exposed the lies of the witnesses and the bribes and threats received by others. This led to a national outcry and social networking sites were used to mobilize public support; demands were made for the case to be reopened and tried in a fast track court. Eventually the accused were re-arrested and booked for murder.

The film *No One Killed Jessica* plays close to reality with some cosmetic modifications. A television journalist is more glamorous than an invisible print reporter, so the script has its lead character Meera (Rani Mukerjee) as a TV journalist. She is introduced in the film as the first woman war reporter and is based on Barkha Dutt, a prominent journalist at NDTV and perhaps one of the most talked about television journalists in India. In the film, Meera is working for NDTV, where she is depicted as a ruthless, ambitious

go-getter. It shows her planning sting operations to expose the lies of the witnesses and to garner public support through her aggressive reporting of the story.

As the story of Jessica Lal is rather fresh in public memory, the film could perhaps not deviate much from reality. It is perhaps a marked shift in representing investigative reporters as defenders of the truth without much care for personal safeguards; yet they also are shown as aggressively safeguarding themselves against any backlash from pursuing their investigations. Meera is shown to ruthlessly pursue her story, attack critics, and safeguard herself by garnering public support.

In *Rann* (Battle, 2010), the investigative reporter is shown to safeguard himself by approaching a rival channel to air a tape exposing his own channel's vested interest in planting a false story. He also keeps a copy for himself, in case his plan backfires. *Rann* will be explored in detail in the next category, which highlights the power games in the media.

The Power Magnate

At least seven films, including *Rann* (Battle, 2010), *Main Azaad Hoon* (I Am Free, 1989), *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* (But the Heart's Still Indian, 2000), *Nayak* (The Real Hero, 2001), *Guru* (Master, 2007), *Rang de Basanti* (Color It Saffron, 2006), and *New Delhi Times* (1986) fall into the power magnate category. Others that show glimpses of the media's power include *Page 3* (2005), *Tere Bin Laden* (Without You, Laden, 2010) and *Phas Gaye Re, Obama* (I Have Been Trapped, Obama, 2010).

Rodney Tiffen calls news media “kingmakers” who “have the power to build up power of others, as vested in reputation, social status and wealth. They also have the power to attack those assets and erode the power founded on them.”⁶

Tiffen's argument is that the journalists associated with commentary and analysis are often treated as “sense-markers.” The film *Rann*, directed by Ram Gopal Varma, is about

competition in the electronic media and its implications. It looks at the corruption of television news and how ratings drive news channels to compromise journalistic ethics, resort to sensationalism, and convert news into the worst kind of entertainment.

Rann is a story of a rivalry between two television channels: One is run by the upright, well respected Vijay Harshvardhan Mallik (Amitabh Bachchan) and the other by his one-time colleague Amrish (Monish Behl). When the Malliks lose the ratings race to Amrish, Vijay's son Jai, who doesn't bear the same ideals and principles of his father, actively supports a political plot to overturn the prime minister of the country.

Jai fabricates a tape to show the prime minister was responsible for a terrorist attack and cons his father into showing the fake sting on his channel. Vijay's reputation helps to avert any question about the credibility of the tape and adds to its authenticity. The ensuing uproar forces the country's prime minister to resign. This leads to Jai's partner in crime, a wicked politician named Mohan Pandey, becoming the new prime minister.

The film highlights the power a media organization has in affecting events as important as the appointment and removal of a prime minister. It also reinforces Tiffen's view that journalists like Vijay are the "punditocracy, the commentariat, the secular priesthood...who are the most directly influential of journalists, because their voices are highlighted and most aggressively marketed."⁷

However, since Bollywood films often show good triumphing over evil and provide a happy ending to increase box office numbers, the second half of *Rann* is all about this. Rookie journalist Purab Shashtri (Ritesh Deshmukh), who idolizes Vijay, joins their channel and investigates the story. His investigation exposes Jai and Pandey's unscrupulous scheming. Afraid that his mentor Vijay is involved, Purab takes his finding to the rival channel. The rival channel head Amrish then uses the power he now has to strike a deal with the scheming politician. He takes half a billion rupees, or around \$8 million, to not telecast

the tape. This again shows the power that media have and how well they can leverage it to their advantage

Completely disillusioned, Purab goes to his mentor, Vijay, and reveals his plans of quitting the profession and tells him his findings. A shocked Vijay airs the sting that leads to the downfall of the corrupt politician. This film beautifully analyzes the different power plays of the media and how media uses their power to influence people with or without ulterior motives.

Main Azaad Hoon (I Am Free, 1989) is the Indian adaptation of *Meet John Doe*, the 1941 Frank Capra classic. The movie showcases the power of the media, which in this case uses the prevalent social and economic ills in society, to bring to life a fictitious character who is fearsome, honest, and willing to take on the powerful. Similar to the original Frank Capra movie, the Indian version makes an unemployed, and naïve, Azaad (Amitabh Bachchan) into a cult figure.

Subhashini (Shabana Azmi) writes for a daily newspaper and is on the verge of losing her job when she decides to file a column with a fictitious letter written to her by someone named Azaad. The column manages to attract wide attention due to its straightforward and direct tone. The same attention forces Subhashini and the newspaper owner to bring out the fictitious character to the public through a vagabond whom they name Azaad.

Very soon, people start flocking to listen to Azaad, who becomes a much sought after figure. The interest in Azaad is also due to the fact that he has announced he will end his life on Republic Day (January 26) in protest against rampant corruption and maladministration.

What seemed a campaign against corruption by the newspaper in the beginning, soon turns out to be an ambitious plot by the proprietor of the newspaper for political gains. In the end, even though Azaad realizes that he is being used as a pawn by the newspaper, he gives in to the sentiments and emotions attached to his fictional character and jumps from a

building to match the expectations of the public. A newspaper column thus turns a simple, faceless youth into a martyr—all for readership and circulation.

Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani (But the Heart's Still Indian, 2000) is a comic take on the rivalry between two television channels for ratings: Ajay Bakshi (Shah Rukh Khan) and Ria Banerjee (Juhi Chawla) play rival TV journalists who deploy all the tricks possible to outdo each other.

The plot takes a serious turn when the two get caught in an ugly political battle between chief minister Mushran and opposition leader Ramakant Dua. An old man accused of murder and sentenced to the death penalty becomes a victim of their political games; the two journalists try to protect the old man by finding the truth and exposing the lies.

Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani shows shades of power associated with the media. First, how the media associates power with higher ratings, and secondly, how political parties find their ambitions fulfilled by getting the media on their side. This supports Tiffen's view that since the media have the power to influence the public's viewpoint, it also leads to a parallel profession of public relations. Lastly, the film looks at how the media have the power to kindle public outrage, garner support, and bring about a revolution. This was also observed in *No One Killed Jessica*.

Another film that shows how much politicians depend on the media for public opinion is *Nayak* (The Real Hero, 2001). During a live television interview, the chief minister of a state is so enraged by journalist Shivaji Rao's (Anil Kapoor) line of questioning that he asks him to run the state for a day. Afraid that the journalist will destroy his public image, the chief minister facing the heat dares Shivaji to accept the challenge.

It is impossible that Indian politicians who are desperate to cling to power would ask a journalist to take over the reins of a state. Even in this case, the chief minister is shown to think the journalist will not be able to take the challenge—only to be proved wrong.

Shivaji uses the power of a politician to get access to secured documents and the ability of a reporter to investigate corruption. This leads to some explosive findings for which Shivaji is also threatened and assaulted, leading this category to overlap with that of the investigative superhero.

The investigative superhero and power magnate categories often find a common playing ground, both in films and in reality. Investigative reporters are considered a powerful force to reckon with, whose reportage can often create revolutions and bring a change in the power equations of the land. This is the most feared view of the media that has in recent times gained prominence in the real world, and later films have used real life inspired stories to portray this. However, films still have not managed to break totally free of the stereotype that the reporter somehow pays a price for his reportage.

The power associated with the press also can be gauged by their glamour quotient and the desire of films to use real journalists and media brands on screen. Often professional journalists make a small but significant appearance on camera to highlight the prominence the issue has gained in the press through the film's script.

Films on crime or the mafia often use leading crime journalists of popular Hindi channels who are widely known among the masses to highlight the significance of the plot. *C Kkompany* used Zee News branding in the film, based on the popularity of Zee's crime shows.

NDTV's campaign slogan "Justice for Jessica" was strongly entrenched in public memory and the makers of *No One Killed Jessica* decided to use NDTV as the vehicle for the entire film. Even though the investigations were done by other journalists of other media organizations, NDTV in the film script was credited with every success. This was partly due to the power and popularity of the channel and its celebrity reporter Barkha Dutt.

In the film *Rang De Basanti* (Color It Saffron, 2006), a serious issue of substandard

fighter planes was tackled by NDTV, which is perceived as a serious national news channel. If the filmmakers had used a fictitious news channel, people may not have been able to make the connection.

The Brainless Mouthpiece

In this category, journalists are shown as brainless twits who simply follow instructions, bytes, or gossip without questioning anything. An excellent critique of this form of journalism came from Aamir Khan's *Peepli Live*, India's official entry for the Oscars in 2011. The film is a satirical take on the reaction of the Indian media to the growing number of farmer suicides in the country. Natha (Omkar Das Manikpuri), a poor, debt-ridden farmer in a village, decides to kill himself to qualify for a government grant compensating families of farmers committing suicide; the media swoop down upon him and his family to make a circus out of this grim situation. They follow Natha everywhere—even when he goes to the toilet—and report on everything that is told to them, no matter how banal it sounds.

Another film that makes a mockery of the sensibilities of a reporter is *A Wednesday* (2008). Naina Roy (Deepal Shaw) plays the role of an ambitious reporter who wants to earn a name for herself by breaking the news about an alleged bomber threatening to create havoc in Mumbai after being tipped off by the bomber himself. She does, says, and reports only the things told to her by the alleged bomber—being nothing but a perfect mouthpiece.

In *Halla Bol* (Raise Your Voice, 2008), actor Sameer Khan (Ajay Devgan) is the prime witness of a murder case. A young girl was killed by a powerful politician's son and his friends. This film drew similarities with the murder of Jessica Lal, on whose story *No One Killed Jessica* was based. But unlike the latter, journalists in *Halla Bol* are shown as reporting only news fed to them by politicians and others and as not questioning anything or analyzing the situation. In a scene where the actor is beaten up badly by goons when he performs at a street play to create awareness, the press is shown only too happy to film the whole scene.

This perfectly embodies their portrayal as a brainless mouthpiece.

In the film *Delhi 6* (2009), the media circus regarding the news of a “Black Monkey” attacking residents of Delhi is flared up to show ridiculous and meaningless reportage on television news channels. It shows how rumors are taken to be gospel truths and the news channels turn everything into a major headline, generating fear and mistrust among the public.

The reports of the “Black Monkey” (never clearly identified in the film) attacks in the city of Delhi shown in the film were inspired by real reports of much publicized monkey or monkeyman attacks in and around Delhi in 2001. The film spoofs crime show anchors and news readers analyzing and debating on this issue in animated yet absurd ways. The film is a satire on the media and once again highlights the media as having no brains.

Conclusion

In India where superstars are worshipped like gods and some even have temples, it is common that they are paragons of virtue and goodness in films. Journalists, especially if played by a main protagonist, also have their share of heroic deeds far away from reality.

While journalists prior to the 1980s were not the favored subjects around which to revolve a film script, since the 1990s they have increasingly become the focus of film makers. This is mostly due to the proliferation of television and the glamour associated with today’s journalists and media. Plus, the news media have a far reaching impact on society and this has created certain public perceptions about journalists, which in turn find a reflection in the scripts of Bollywood.

While the romantic companion helps make the script a fairy tale with a happy ever after ending, the glamour chaser highlights today’s media focus on Bollywood and other celebrities who are believed to attract a large readership or audience. While the watchdog role of the Indian media can be depicted through the categories of investigative superhero and

power magnate, these categories often tend to show an exaggeration of the role of the journalist and media operations. Lastly, the brainless mouthpiece speaks of the most prevalent public opinions and those who do not trust the media and believe them to simply be mouthpieces of those in power.

As the profession of journalism has evolved, so has the portrayal of journalists in Indian films. Whether it is films that influence public perceptions of journalists or vice versa is debatable. Ross believes audiences have a symbiotic relationship with films. Quoting a New York reporter in his book, Ross says, “What audiences see is partly a reflection of what audiences are. And what they are is no less influenced by what they see.”⁸

But Bollywood films have often been an exaggeration—classifying journalists as either the greatest or the worst of their kind. Though a lot has been written about Hollywood films depicting journalists, there is little or no literature talking about journalism in Bollywood.

Bollywood films have portrayed journalists as both heroes and villains. Known for his scholarship on the subject of journalism in Hollywood films, Matthew Ehrlich believes “‘bad journalists’ characters actually have helped shore up the press’ preferred self-image, either by seeing through lies and pretense to the truth or by paying the price for not telling the truth.”⁹ This could be a reason for the popularity of films like *Rann* and *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* where bad journalism is defeated by good reporters with support from the public.

Ehrlich also argues that by “analyzing movies as a long running commentary on the press,” people can become educated about the media profession.¹⁰ This article has been a small attempt at understanding the popular portrayals of journalists in Bollywood films and a lot more work needs to be done by academics to understand the motivation and repercussions of such portrayals.

Appendix A: Films Studied

1. *A Wednesday*, directed by Neeraj Pandey, 2008
2. *C Kkompany*, directed by Sachin Yardi, 2008
3. *Delhi 6*, directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, 2009
4. *Dil Hai Ki Maanta Nahin* (The Heart Does Not Listen), directed by Mahesh Bhatt, 1991
5. *Dil Se* (From the Heart), directed by Mani Ratnam, 1998
6. *Elaan* (Manifesto), directed by K. Ramanlal, 2005
7. *Guru* (Master), directed by Mani Ratnam, 2007
8. *Halla Bol* (Raise Your Voice), directed by Rajkumar Santoshi, 2008
9. *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaron* (Just Let It Go, Friends), directed by Kundan Shah, 1983
10. *Kabul Express*, directed by Kabir Khan, 2006
11. *Krantiveer* (Revolutionary), directed by Mehul Kumar, 1994
12. *Krrish*, directed by Rakesh Roshan, 2006
13. *Kurbaan* (Sacrificed), directed by Rensil D'Silva, 2009
14. *Main Azaad Hoon* (I am free), directed by Tinnu Anand, 1989
15. *Mission Kashmir*, directed by Vidhu Vinod Chopra, 2000
16. *Mohra* (Pawn), directed by Rajiv Rai, 1994
17. *Mr. India*, directed by Shekhar Kapur, 1987
18. *Mumbai Meri Jaan* (Mumbai, My Life) directed by Nishikanth Kamath, 2008
19. *Nayak* (The Real Hero), directed by S. Shankar, 2001
20. *New Delhi Times*, directed by Ramesh Sharma, 1986
21. *No One Killed Jessica*, directed by Rajkumar Gupta, 2010
22. *Page 3*, directed by Madhur Bhandarkar, 2005
23. *Peepli Live*, directed by Anusha Rizvi, 2010

24. *Phas Gaye Re Obama* (I Have Been Trapped, Obama), directed by Subhash Kapoor, 2010
25. *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* (But the Heart's Still Indian), directed by Aziz Mirza, 2000
26. *Pratibandh* (Restriction), directed by Ravi Raja Pinisetty, 1990
27. *Rang De Basanti* (Color It Saffron), directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, 2006
28. *Rann* (Battle), directed by Ram Gopal Varma, 2010
29. *Rockstar*, directed by Imtiaz Ali, 2011
30. *Sachche Ka Bol Bala* (Truth Triumphs), directed by Dev Anand, 1989
31. *Tere Bin Laden* (Without You, Laden) directed by Abhishek Sharma, 2010
32. *Tridev* (Trinity) directed by Rajiv Rai, 1989
33. *Wajood* (Existence), directed by N. Chandra, 1998

Endnotes

¹ Steven J. Ross, *Movies and American Society* (Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), Preface xiv.

² Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 163. Also in Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimer Essays*; ed. Thomas Y. Levine (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1995): 24.

³ Ashis Nandy, ed., *The Secret Politics of Our Desires: Innocence, Culpability and Popular Cinema* (London: Zed Books, 1998), 7.

⁴ Rachel Dwyer, "Bollywood's India: Hindi Cinema as a Guide to Modern India," *Asian Affairs* 41.3 (2010): 382

⁵ Daya Thussu, "The Murdocization of News: Case of Star TV in India," *Media, Culture & Society* 29 (2007): 593.

⁶ Rodney Tiffen, *News and Power* (Sydney: Oxford University Press Australia, 1989), 174.

⁷ Ibid., 176.

⁸ Ross, *Movies and American Society*, 1.

⁹ Matthew Ehrlich, "Facts, Truth and Bad Journalists in the Movies," *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism* 7.4 (2006): 502-503.

¹⁰ Matthew Ehrlich, "Thinking Critically about Journalism Through Popular Culture," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 50.4 (1996), 35.