

2023-09-21

Off Screen Perspectives: India's Transnational Independent Film Production Culture

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Bhatia, N. (2023). Off screen perspectives: India's transnational independent film production culture (Doctoral thesis, University of Calgary, Calgary, Canada). Retrieved from <https://prism.ucalgary.ca>.
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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Off Screen Perspectives:

India's Transnational Independent Film Production Culture

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN LANGUAGES, LITERATURES AND CULTURES

CALGARY, ALBERTA

SEPTEMBER, 2023

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Abstract

The academic scholarship on Indian film has predominantly focused on Bollywood cinema, examining central aspects such as the aesthetics, style, genre, ideology, industrial structure, and culture, as well as the transnational circulation and consumption of Bollywood in the era of globalization. This resulted in limited scholarship about independent, regional, and alternative cinemas in India. However, there is increasing interest in studying these cinemas, including their aesthetics, production processes and distribution models. Therefore, this dissertation contributes to and addresses this gap in the scholarship by examining India's transnational independent film production culture. Employing an interdisciplinary approach that draws insights from Media Industry Studies, specifically John Caldwell's "cultural-industrial" method (2008), this dissertation emphasizes the need to examine the political-economic/industrial structures and labour practices in relation to each other. Therefore, it combines textual, industrial, and cultural analysis, alongside bottom-up methods such as personal interviews and participant observation to gain deeper insights into the film policies, practices, and professionals — making and facilitating Indian independent cinema transnationally.

The focal point is the National Film Development Corporation of India (NFDC) – established in 1980 as a state-sponsored organization for developing alternative cinemas. This dissertation examines the management of NFDC, its annual film market Film Bazaar, as well as the professional world of its staff members and producers – who are primarily involved in creating independent cinema transnationally. The case study of NFDC explores how the organization managed and restructured itself in response to the neoliberal-national policies, leading to the formation of a transnational independent film production culture in the mid-2000s. The case study of Film Bazaar addresses the implications of these industrial structures on the programming,

practices, and management, revealing the precarious work culture of its labour (e.g., low pay, contractual, and seasonal work). The final case study examines the under-explored role of Indian producers, their production culture, and the emotional labour within these transnational structures of independent filmmaking. Indian producers weave hero narratives, intertwining their beliefs and practices rooted in mentoring, networking, and creative entrepreneurship.

Preface

This thesis is an original work. The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board approved this research study (REB20-1037) on November 16, 2020. Part of Chapter 3 of this thesis has been published as a peer-reviewed article, “The Transnational Tales of an Indian Creative Producer,” in the journal *Transnational Screens* 13, no. 3 (August 2022): 234-248.

Acknowledgements

It takes a village to write a thesis! I feel blessed to have the support of my mentors, friends, and family, who each contributed to the writing of this dissertation in their own special way. I would like to begin by expressing my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Charles Tepperman, for introducing me to the novel scholarship on Media Industry Studies and inspiring me to pen this dissertation. Over the past four years, Dr. Tepperman guided me in cultivating the scholar's "way of life" – encouraging practices such as introspective walks, recommending humour to kick-start the day on a lighter note, and fostering an academic ethos that emphasizes protecting time for writing and strengthening my thesis. His feedback was both insightful and revelatory, enriching this work. His unwavering support offered a non-judgemental space, empowering me with the confidence and opportunity necessary to evolve into an independent researcher.

As an international student far from home, I found invaluable support and guidance from my co-supervisor, Dr. Devika Vijayan. From the moment I enrolled in the program, Dr. Vijayan provided continuous guidance at each step of my academic journey. I truly appreciated her help in rehearsing my first graduate conference presentation together. Dr. Vijayan consistently encouraged me to recognize and value my progress in the program. She always welcomed diverse perspectives, fostered a spirit of greater intellectual exploration, and offered advice to elevate the quality of my thesis. I am deeply grateful to have had her support throughout this journey.

I gratefully thank Dr. Cheryl Dueck and Dr. Matthew Croombs, who graciously agreed to serve as my dissertation committee members and provided their valuable support along the way. Dr. Dueck's confidence in the earlier drafts of my work, combined with Dr. Croombs's positive feedback, encouraged and motivated me to progress further.

I am especially grateful to several scholars: Dr. Swapnil Rai for collaborating on a panel at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies Annual Conference 2022 and offering continuous guidance in navigating academic life; Dr. Sudha Tiwari for insightful conversations about Indian art cinema; and especially to Dr. Alisa Perren, Dr. Mark Deuze, Dr. Sarah Hamblin, Dr. Patrick Vonderau, Dr. Skadi Loist, Dr. Marijke de Valck and Dr. Smith Mehta for offering mentorship and career support. Many thanks to our Graduate Program Director, Dr. Elena Bratishenko, and faculty members — Dr. Miao Li, Dr. Martin Wagner, Dr. Ben Whaley, and Dr. Marie-Andrée Bergeron — who fostered a kind and supportive environment to conduct research.

I would also like to thank the Canadian independent filmmaker and producer Matt Watterworth, who provided mentorship during my industry internship in Calgary. The internship culminated in producing a docu-series, “Through Her Eyes,” that supported the voices of Black, Indigenous and Women of Colour (BIWOC) in Canada and was streamed on TELUS with a reach of more than 1 million subscribers. I immensely benefitted from this internship experience and my research and analysis gained immeasurably from exposure to the film and media industry culture.

I extend my deepest gratitude to my immediate family, who, despite the geographical boundaries, never ceased to encourage me, believe in me, and keep me in their prayers. They were always just a phone call away, ready to indulge in sometimes the most mundane stories, share in moments of joy, lend an empathetic ear to my worries, and offer loving support whenever I needed it. I am also thankful to my two close friends (Miriam and Shraddha), as well as the graduate studies cohort, for making my journey pleasant and memorable with their willingness to collaborate on empowering projects, their regular check-ins, and their provocative ideas.

Lastly, this dissertation would not have been possible without the constant support of my husband Dr. Sören Wacker, who stood by me through thick and thin. I am deeply grateful for his unconditional love and care – be it running errands, preparing meals, patiently listening to my research ideas, providing insightful feedback, enduring my sometimes-repetitive rants, or sharing laughs over watching and re-watching episodes of *Friends*. You are the best thing that ever happened to me!

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Suman Bhatia, and Sunil Bhatia.

Thank you for your continued love, support, and blessings.

Radha Soami.

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Introduction

How would you define independent filmmaking, and how does the industry perceive independent cinema? The state of Indian institutional funding is abysmal.

—Kabir, personal interview, August 1, 2021.¹

I grew up watching Hindi-language films, popularly known as “Bollywood.”² I remember regularly listening to Bollywood songs on a small tape recorder in the 1990s. Indian film studies scholar Lalitha Gopalan calls songs “interruptions” in cinema, arguing that they are integral to exploiting the market.³ The three leading popular stars, Shahrukh Khan, Amir Khan, and Salman Khan, danced to the tunes and dominated the Mumbai film industry scene in the 1990s. However, scholars of the Indian film and media industry, such as Tejaswini Ganti, Adrian Athique, Aswin Punathambekar, and Nitin Govil, assert that the recognition and corporatization for Bollywood came after the government granted the official “industry” status to the film sector in 1998 post

¹ The Indian producer interviewed for this research is referred to by the preferred pseudonym, Kabir.

² The term “Bollywood” has been under scrutiny. First, the term often ghettoizes all Hindi-language cinema and even Indian cinema under one umbrella of “Bollywood,” ignoring the diversity and variety of regional and alternative filmmaking. Second, the term is considered derogatory because it is a western construct based on the term “Hollywood,” alluding to imitation and copying.

³ Lalitha Gopalan, *Cinema of Interruptions: Action Genres in Contemporary Indian Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 2002), 136.

liberalization.⁴ As a result, Hollywood studios such as Columbia Pictures, Sony, Disney, Warner Brothers and 20th Century Fox also began investing, and large Indian companies formed new production and distribution companies – Birla Group, Tata Group and Reliance Industries after Indian cinema acquired industry status in 1998.⁵ Neo-liberalization contributed to the massive commercial growth of the Mumbai-based film industry, and Bollywood also eventually gained “cultural legitimacy” in academia.⁶ Today, there is no scarcity of scholarship on Bollywood and its global presence in Indian film studies. Bollywood continued to rise, and India’s alternative cinema collapsed and struggled to find support and recognition.

Bollywood dominated the discourse for decades. However, there is currently a growing interest in examining India’s diverse regional, independent, and alternative filmmaking cultures. This dissertation addresses this gap and contributes to this need by examining India’s transnational independent film production culture. Employing a widely advocated hybrid approach by media industry studies scholars, specifically John T. Caldwell's “cultural-industrial” framework (2008), this dissertation examines the macro-level political-economic/industrial structures and micro-level beliefs and labour practices of the Indian independent filmmaking community.⁷ In doing so, it examines how government and industry workers navigate political-economic structures and make

⁴ Tejaswini Ganti, *Producing Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 1-37; Nitin Govil, “Recognizing ‘Industry,’” *Cinema Journal* 52, no. 3 (2013): 172–76, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cj.2013.0019>; Adrian Athique, *Indian Media: Global Approaches* (Cambridge, UK ; Polity Press, 2012); Aswin Punathambekar, *From Bombay to Bollywood: The Making of a Global Media Industry*, vol. 5, Postmillennial Pop (New York: NYU Press, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.18574/9780814771907>.

⁵ Ganti, *Producing Bollywood*, 1-37.

⁶ Ganti, *Producing Bollywood*, 1-37.

⁷ John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008); David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker, *Creative Labour: Media Work in Three Cultural Industries* (London: Routledge, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203855881>; Janet Wasko and Eileen R. Meehan, “Critical Crossroads or Parallel Routes? Political Economy and New Approaches to Studying Media Industries and Cultural Products,” *Cinema Journal* 52, no. 3 (2013): 150–57, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cj.2013.0028>.

sense of their own work. The media industry studies approach has not been hitherto used to examine India's contemporary independent filmmaking culture.

The focal point is the National Development Corporation of India (NFDC or the "Company"), its annual film market, Film Bazaar, as well as staff and film professionals who are primarily involved in creating independent cinema transnationally. NFDC is the singular state-sponsored institution for developing and supporting alternative cinema in India. The government established the company in 1960 under the title Film Finance Company (FFC). In 1980, NFDC emerged from the merger of two film institutions, the FFC and the Film Export Corporation, becoming the central agency for implementing several government policies in the film industry.⁸ In its early years, FFC/NFDC funded the filmmakers of the parallel cinema movement (e.g., Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, and Mrinal Sen) and provided financial aid to filmmakers to complete their films, charging them interest on the loan. NFDC further became involved in many activities of filmmaking nationally and internationally such as subtitling, importing, building theatres, and funding notable films in the 1980s including, Satyajit Ray's *Ghare Bhaire* (1984) and Ketan Mehta's *Mirch Masala* (1986). The company also became involved in international co-productions with films such as Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi* (1984) and Mira Nair's *Salaam Bombay!* (1988), which received international acclaim.⁹ By the 1990s, the NFDC, though, had incurred major losses, and the development of alternative cinema ended. The company restructured amidst increased corporatization in the mid-2000s. Since 2007, NFDC has become more involved in the growth of the national film industry and the globalization of independent filmmaking through

⁸ Manjunath Pendakur, "India's National Film Policy: Shifting Currents in the 1990s," in *Film Policy: International, National, and Regional Perspectives*, ed. Albert Moran (Routledge, 1996), 145-168.

⁹ Pendakur, "India's National Film Policy," 146.

several international programs such as Screenwriter’s Lab and Work-in-Progress (WIP) Lab and the Co-production market. The NFDC facilitates international co-productions and collaborations by annually organizing Film Bazaar, a market that invites film buyers, programmers, investors, and distributors from around the world. NFDC supports the production, distribution, exhibition, and promotion of Indian cinema, especially for international film festivals. In 2012, it established an online streaming platform, “Cinemas of India,” with the aim of promoting Indian cinema globally. Since its inception, the company has funded/produced over 300 films in over 21 regional languages, many of which have earned wide acclaim and won national/international awards. Therefore, NFDC has emerged as an important node between the Indian government, the independent filmmaking community, and international film festivals.

This dissertation thus examines India’s transnational independent film production culture through the examination of NFDC, Film Bazaar and its participants, specifically the role of the senior staff, film programmers, consultants, and creative producers. Therefore, it incorporates interviews of staff members, film professionals, as well as producers who were part of international co-productions through the NFDC Bazaar such as *The Lunchbox* (2013), *Qissa* (2013), *Masaan* (‘Fly Away Solo,’ 2015), *Chauthi Koot* (‘The Fourth Direction,’ 2015), *Sir* (2019) and *Nasir* (2020). The research adapts media industry scholarship to an Indian context in order to analyze both the micro-level labour practices and professional world of the independent film community and the macro-level political-economic/industrial structures of the Indian film industry. It examines their labour practices within the neoliberal, national, and transnational structures of the industry. In doing so, this dissertation contributes to an “industrial-cultural” understanding of India’s transnational independent film production culture.

Historically, traditional scholarship on Indian film studies paid greater attention to the examination of consumption, reception, and analysis of films themselves. This resulted in limited scholarship on the “backend” of filmmaking, i.e., production processes, industry experiences, belief systems, values, and labour practices within the Indian film industry. This dissertation fills this gap by examining Indian “independent” film production culture from an industrial and cultural perspective. It examines alternative or independent film production cultures, belief systems, navigational tactics, and practices in the current neoliberal and national structures of the Indian film industry. This dissertation reveals how the Indian government’s neoliberal, and national (even nationalist) policies shape the films, attitudes, values, practices, and work culture of the independent film community. Therefore, it analyzes the policies and institutions primarily involved in independent films, explores the cultural practices integral to this kind of cinema (e.g., mentoring, creative storytelling, community-building, and networking), and examines the role and agency of film professionals themselves, including creative managers, film programmers, consultants, and producers.

Thus, this dissertation examines the contemporary moment in India’s independent cinema and its relationship to the global film culture through an industrial, political-economic, and cultural perspective. It does so by examining how the state-sponsored institution for the development of alternative cinema in India, NFDC and its participants navigate making Indian independent films in the post-liberalized, national/nationalist, and transnational contexts. Neoliberalism reduces the role of government and favours deregulation, free-market policies, and heightened competition.¹⁰

¹⁰ Manfred B. Steger and Ravi K. Roy, *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 38-39.

Neoliberalism entails the promotion of individualism, consumerism, and entrepreneurial values.¹¹ However, state subordination to capital over the past three decades resulted in more neoliberal agendas in the global film and media industries, where they now coincide with the rise of global nationalism and regulatory governments. Therefore, the relationship is not unequivocal and has become more complex. The epigraph by the Indian producer Kabir opens a discussion on the need to define independent films and the challenges of the independent film community in the Indian film industry such as inadequate public funding, the power of Bollywood and its star culture, accelerated corporatization, and state regulations contributing to the deterioration of democratic values in current India.¹²

Bollywood and Independent Cinema

This section sets the foundations for the dissertation, beginning with a concise yet focused literature review of academic scholarship on Bollywood, and it subsequently explores the emerging literature on contemporary independent cinema. This review of the literature (including scholarship on Bollywood) is important for three main reasons. First, it recognizes the dominant presence of Bollywood in both academia and industry, suggesting the challenges of the independent film community (particularly in Mumbai) which regularly navigates its dominance. Second, the review reveals that traditional film studies scholarship on Bollywood drew largely on literary theory, history, and cultural studies. These approaches contributed to a growing body of

¹¹ Steger and Roy, *Neoliberalism*; Vincent Navarro, “Neoliberalism as a Class Ideology; Or, the Political Causes of the Growth of Inequalities,” *International Journal of Health Services* 37, no. 1 (2007): 53. <https://doi.org/10.2190/AP65-X154-4513-R520>.

¹² Kabir, personal interview, August 1, 2021.

scholarship that focuses on the examination of Bollywood films' textual analysis such as aesthetics, style, representation, themes, content, and ideology, and to some extent, audience reception, and consumption in the era of post-globalization. While these are important concerns, they resulted in limited attention to off-screen labour practices, power dynamics, negotiations, and tactics that take place in the making of films and media. This leads to the third reason, which is related to the theoretical perspectives of this research. This dissertation builds on and advances this previous literature to address this gap and offers off-screen perspectives about Indian independent filmmaking. It adapts studies of the film and media industry approach to an Indian context, specifically in examining India's transnational film production culture for independent cinema.

Thus, I open the discussion with some important scholarly works about Hindi cinema, such as the *Ideology of the Hindi Film*, in which Madhava Prasad challenges the view of popular Hindi cinema as kitsch and escapist. Prasad examines the capitalist tendencies of Hindi cinema and how it reinforces dominant ideologies that serve the nation-state and ruling elites.¹³ In his introduction to the book, *The Secret Politics of Our Desires*, Ashis Nandy argues that the study of the popular film allows “studying of Indian modernity and its politics at its rawest as such films represent low-brow, modernizing India in all its complexity, sophistry, naivety and vulgarity.”¹⁴ In *The Melodramatic Public*, Ravi Vasudevan examines the patriarchal structures and socio-cultural and political dimensions of the Indian melodramatic narrative, asserting that art film critics failed to

¹³ M. Madhava Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction*, Oxford India Paperbacks (Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 12.

¹⁴ Ashis Nandy, *The Secret Politics of Our Desires: Innocence, Culpability, and Indian Popular Cinema* (London; New York, N.Y.: Zed Books, 1998), 7.

grasp the complexity of popular cinema, which is much more complex than these criticisms acknowledge.¹⁵ In *The Cinematic ImagiNation*, Jyotika Virdi reads Hindi films within their sociocultural and political contexts. Virdi shows how Hindi cinema constructs and maintains a sense of a unified nation through its narrative by negotiating diverse religions, languages, regions, classes, and castes, and how women are both empowered and domesticated within the narrative.¹⁶ Thus, these works focused on examining the place of “popular” cinema by articulating the discourse of caste, class, and gender through the aesthetic, sociological and ideological analysis of film texts.

Additionally, the umbrella term “Bollywood” habitually obfuscates the diversity of Hindi-language films. In *Conjugations*, Sangita Gopal divides Hindi language filmmaking into three eras: Social films of the 1950s, Classic Bollywood or Masala films of the 1970s and New Bollywood starting in the 1990s. Gopal argues that New Bollywood cinema emerged because of the free-market economy and liberalization.¹⁷ The New Bollywood encompasses films of various genres and styles that target various classes and audiences, both in India and overseas – NRI (Non-Resident India) blockbusters, extravagant star-driven films, as well as romantic and action comedies and darker, grittier, social realist films. Karan Johar’s NRI blockbusters are high-budget productions made for the large Indian diaspora. The films often depict Hindu culture and traditions, as well as explore universal themes of love, family, and relationships. Similarly, the historical

¹⁵ Ravi Vasudevan, *The Melodramatic Public: Film Form and Spectatorship in Indian Cinema* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

¹⁶ Jyotika Virdi, *Cinematic ImagiNation: Indian Popular Film as Social History* (New Brunswick, UNITED STATES: Rutgers University Press, 2003), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucalgary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3032095>.

¹⁷ Sangita Gopal, *Conjugations: Marriage and Form in New Bollywood Cinema*, South Asia across the Disciplines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). Karan Johar is a Bollywood film producer and owner of a leading production and distribution company, Dharma Productions.

period dramas of the director, Sanjay Leela Bhansali are grand and extravagant spectacles while the films of Hindi-language directors, Ram Gopal Verma and Dibakar Banerjee are low-budget, depict darker themes of violence, corruption, and social injustice. Consequently, New Bollywood combines Hindi-language indie filmmakers and a wide range of Bollywood filmmakers. Moreover, there has been a continuous interest in the study of NRI audience-oriented films owing to the massive success of Bollywood films abroad such as *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jaayenge* (1995), *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* (2002) and *Kal Ho Na Ho* (2003). The films glorify Indian traditions and values against the West and, in doing so, they reinforce patriarchal and nationalist culture.¹⁸ Simultaneously, the diasporic filmmakers use Bollywood tropes and motifs to comment on such issues in their films such as Mira Nair's *Mississippi Masala* (1991) and *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), Gurinder Chadha's *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993), Udhyan Prasad's *My Son the Frantic* (1997), among others. Jigna Desai's *Beyond Bollywood* is the first book on South Asian diasporic cinema in the United States, Canada, and Britain from a feminist and queer perspective.¹⁹

While most scholars focused on the socio-cultural, historical, and political breadth of Bollywood film and its global appeal, few film and media scholars examined the internal structures and mechanisms of the Bollywood film industry itself through ethnographic, industrial, and textual analysis. In *Fashioning Bollywood*, Clare M. Wilkinson-Weber combines anthropological and film studies approaches to examine Hindi film costumes in relation to the production process as a way to raise questions about identity, gender, and work.²⁰ In his work, *From Bombay to Bollywood*,

¹⁸ Asma Sayed, *Bollywood in Diaspora: Cherishing Occidental Nostalgia*, in *Diasporic Choices*, ed. by Renata Seredynska-Abou Eid, (Oxford, U.K: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2013).

¹⁹ Jigna Desai, *Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203643952>.

²⁰ Clare M. Wilkinson-Weber, *Fashioning Bollywood: The Making and Meaning of Hindi Film Costume* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350051188>.

Aswin Punathambekar employs a global approach to studying the “national” processes and practices of media companies, technologies, professionals, and audiences in the formation of Bollywood. Punathambekar’s work engages with scholarship on media industries, production cultures, and cultural globalization.²¹ In *Orienting Hollywood*, Nitin Govil employs a comparative framework through a media industry approach, discussing both formal and informal transnational exchanges and encounters between Bollywood and Hollywood. Govil argues that the relationship between Bollywood and Hollywood has been that of “proximity and distance,” suggesting a paradoxical relationship. This entails synergies and “closeness” through joint ventures and co-productions, collaborations, as well as the differences, controversies, and questions of “copying” and piracy.²² In *Producing Bollywood*, Tejaswini Ganti examines the history and development of the industry structure of Bollywood in the context of globalization and neo-liberalization of India.²³ For this dissertation, Ganti’s work provided important insights into the Hindi film industry structure and its culture, which has gone through massive corporatization post-liberalization. Ganti’s work largely engages with the perspectives of popular film directors and actors (often turned into producers) while overlooking the alternative/independent cinemas, which also contribute to building the industry.²⁴

The defining traits of the Indian film industry include dominance of big-budgeted popular Bollywood films, song/dance musicals and star-driven cinematic narratives. The industry is primarily dominated by the private sector, established production houses and media corporations

²¹ Punathambekar, *From Bombay to Bollywood*, 25-50.

²² Nitin Govil, *Orienting Hollywood: A Century of Film Culture between Los Angeles and Bombay*, Critical Cultural Communication (New York: University Press, 2015), 184.

²³ Ganti, *Producing Bollywood*, 1-37.

²⁴ John Caldwell and Afroz Taj, “Tejaswini Ganti, Producing Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry,” *Southeast Review of Asian Studies* 35 (2013): 243+.

that contribute to the commercialization of the industry. While the state provides little public support or funding, it shapes and controls the industry through media regulation, including censorship guidelines. Further, the industry also encompasses diverse regional film industries such as Tollywood (Telugu) and Kollywood (Tamil), Mollywood (Malayalam), which have received relatively less scholarly attention. In recent years, the South Indian film industry began challenging the power of Bollywood with mainstream films such as *Bahubali* (2015) and *RRR* (2022), finding success among Hindi-language audiences.²⁵ Moreover, the primary focus has been more on popular cinema, rather than the diversity and complexity of the art-house, alternative, regional, or independent cinemas in India.

India witnessed the rise of the art-house cinema or Parallel Cinema movement in the late 1960s and 1970s, promoted by the director, Satyajit Ray internationally and further propagated by the state through the NFDC/FFC. The common features included low budgets, location shooting, and non-professional actors.²⁶ Indian art cinema directors, including Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, Shyam Benegal, and Mrinal Sen, among others, were mostly associated with the film society movement – the initiative to cultivate and disseminate good taste through cinema. Western art cinema aesthetics influenced Indian filmmakers.²⁷ According to Indian film historian Rochona Majumdar, Indian art cinema of the 1960s and 1970s employed narrative and aesthetic approaches that foreshadowed the critical perspectives later examined through the postcolonial, feminist, and

²⁵ Priyanka Sinha Jha, “Bigger, More Profitable — How South Indian Film Industry Took Pole Position from Bollywood,” *ThePrint* (blog), June 12, 2022, <https://theprint.in/opinion/bigger-more-profitable-how-south-indian-film-industry-took-pole-position-from-bollywood/992420/>.

²⁶ Annette Kuhn and Guy Westwell, “New Indian Cinema,” in *A Dictionary of Film Studies* (Oxford University Press, 2020), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780198832096.001.0001/acref-9780198832096-e-0476>.

²⁷ Rochona Majumdar, “Debating Radical Cinema: A History of the Film Society Movement in India,” *Modern Asian Studies* 46, no. 3 (2012): 731–67, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X11000710>.

other radical historical analysis during the 1980s and 1990s.²⁸ Thus, the studies of art cinema echo conventional film studies approaches by exploring historical, ideological, and aesthetic perspectives.

However, there is a growing scholarly interest in examining the independent and regional filmmaking cultures of India. *Tamil Cinema in the Twenty-First Century* examines the shifting structure, ideology, and narratives of the Tamil film industry.²⁹ Indian film and cultural studies scholar and expert in Indian independent filmmaking Ashvin Immanuel Devasundaram published three books, discussing the content, style, financial models, and circulation of independent films. This includes *The New Independent Cinema of India: Rise of the Hybrid* (2016), *Indian Cinema Beyond Bollywood* (2018) and *Indian Indies* (2022).³⁰ Anand Pandian's *Reel World* engages with the alternative reality of filmmaking in popular Tamil productions. Pandian places a particular focus on the perspectives of film professionals on filmmaking by telling the “story of that story” to understand the “off-screen” creative processes.³¹ However, limited attention has been paid to the examination of production experiences, practices, and values of labour (popular and anonymous)—who produce, facilitate, and navigate making Indian art and independent cinema transnationally. The media industry studies scholarship has yet to be applied to examine India's independent cinemas. This review reveals an important gap in the scholarship, which this

²⁸ Rochona Majumdar, *Art Cinema and India's Forgotten Futures: Film and History in the Postcolony* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 70, <https://doi.org/10.7312/maju20104>.

²⁹ Selvaraj Velayutham and Vijay Devadas, eds., *Tamil Cinema in the Twenty-First Century: Caste, Gender and Technology* (London: Routledge, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429244025>.

³⁰ While Devasundaram authored solely *The New Independent Cinema of India: Rise of the Hybrid* and *Indian Indies*, the work—*Indian Cinema Beyond Bollywood: The New Independent Cinema Revolution* is an edited collection featuring contributions from multiple Indian film studies scholars.

³¹ Anand Pandian, *Reel World: An Anthropology of Creation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 23, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822375166>.

dissertation aims to contribute to by examining the transnational independent film production culture of India.

While this dissertation is not an aesthetic or textual analysis of selected films, it is important to understand and theorize the usage of the term “independent” in the Indian film industry. The scholarship on American independent cinema can be useful in understanding India’s independent cinema, and its symbiotic relationship with Bollywood and media corporations. In American cinema, the term “independent” connotes films produced, distributed, and exhibited outside Hollywood studios and mainstream theatre chains. However, the meaning has undergone shifts in film history.³² Geoff King defined American independent cinema from an industrial and an aesthetic perspective such as narrative, form, genre, and content.³³ Prominent scholars in the literature about American independent cinema, including Geoff King, Michael Z. Newman and Yannis Tzioumakis, argue that it is hard to define independent cinema strictly in economic terms because the boundaries between studio and independent filmmaking become blurred. Several Hollywood-owned specialty divisions, also known as mini-majors, produce, exhibit, and distribute independent-spirited films. For instance, Orion, Miramax, and New Line produced many independent films in the 1990s, the 1990s and 2000s, but these major formerly independent distributors (Orion, Miramax, and New Line) were later owned by Hollywood studios (MGM, Disney, and Time-Warner, respectively). Scholars debated the end of independent cinema by the end of the 1990s when studios started to invest in independent films.³⁴ King used the term

³² Michael Z. Newman, *Indie an American Film Culture*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 3.

³³ Geoff King, *American Independent Cinema*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

³⁴ Tzioumakis, Yannis. *American Independent Cinema*, 2nd Edition, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

“indiewood” to describe the in-between space or this unsettling relationship between Hollywood and independent films in the neoliberal market.³⁵ This scholarship on American independent cinema helps in theorizing the diversity of Indian independent cinema by focusing on various aspects including, the industrial structures, aesthetics, style and content of films.

The Indie film movement boomed in the 1990s in America. In India, it began in the mid-2000s with filmmakers such as Anurag Kashyap, Dibakar Banerjee, and Vishal Bhardwaj. Film and media scholars and critics have attempted to describe the films which depart from mainstream star-driven, big-budgeted, song and dance musicals of Bollywood using terms interchangeably such as “independent,” “indie,” “hindie,” “hatke” or the “new new wave.” Indian Independent cinema exists in all its complexities from the micro-low budget, art-house, cult-like and ‘hatke’(off-beat), to the in-between ‘mindie’—mainstream/indie cinema. Like American indie filmmaking’s relationship to Hollywood, Indian indie films similarly sometimes exist in a symbiotic relationship with Bollywood and private studios in Mumbai. In his pioneering work, *The New Independent Cinema of India*, Devasundaram argues that new independent cinema has emerged from an interstitial space between Bollywood and Art-house or Parallel Cinema with ‘glocal’ tendencies, i.e., “global in aesthetic and local in content” since 2010.³⁶ Discussing the production, circulation, and distribution models of independent films, Devasundaram employs the term independent for different kinds of fiction films (and documentaries), including those that are

³⁵ Geoff King, *Indiewood, USA: Where Hollywood Meets Independent Cinema*, International Library of Cultural Studies 2 (London; I.B. Tauris, 2009).

³⁶ Ashvin Immanuel Devasundaram, *India’s New Independent Cinema: Rise of the Hybrid* (London: Routledge, 2016), i.

financed/distributed by studios and Bollywood stars, as well as those that are self-funded or supported through crowdfunding.³⁷

In their book, *World Cinema*, Shekhar Deshpande, and Meta Mazaj discuss three major reasons that contributed to the development of what they call the “cinema of new social realism” — films that rejected the dominant conventions yet are hard to define. First, neoliberal policies widened the capital and diversified the market; second, the filmmakers gained more exposure to international cinemas; and third, the new technologies allowed the production, distribution, and exhibition of films in new ways such as Torrent and YouTube. According to Deshpande and Mazaj, this cinema of margins is sometimes partially or fully supported by the state through the National Film Development Corporation of India (NFDC), but it is distinct from the state-supported 1960s and 1970s cinema and from the social realism of Hindi-language mainstream cinema as practiced by the director, Ram Gopal Verma. The director, Anurag Kashyap, who originally worked with Ram Gopal Verma, remained at the centre of this new kind of independent filmmaking in Mumbai.³⁸ In 2012, Kashyap launched his two-part film series *Gangs of Wasseypur* (*GOW*), which has now acquired a cult status. The film introduced me to Hindi-language cinema, which was not mainstream yet recognized at home and abroad. This was the beginning of a new era of independent cinema in India that had acquired visibility in the global “art cinema” of the international film festival circuit. *GOW* was produced and marketed by Viacom 18 studio (also known as Paramount 18 Studios), a collaborative venture between India’s Network 18 and Viacom

³⁷ Tupur Chatterjee, “Book Review: Ashvin Immanuel Devasundaram, India’s New Independent Cinema: The Rise of the Hybrid,” *BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies* 10, no. 1 (June 1, 2019): 91–95, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0974927619874580>.

³⁸ Shekhar A. Deshpande and Meta Mazaj, *World Cinema: A Critical Introduction* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 160-163.

CBS, which has emerged as one of the major distributors of Bollywood films. Therefore, the film gained recognition, profiting from wider marketing and distribution.

Expanding the scholarship on contemporary Indian independent cinema, this dissertation employs the term “independent” and contributes to ways to theorize independent filmmaking, as well as examines independent filmmaking from an “industrial-cultural” perspective. Independent films break the conventions of Bollywood, such as star-driven productions, elaborate song-and-dance musicals, and happy endings—irrespective of the funding structure of films. Therefore, one way to approach “independent films” is by understanding what they are not, i.e., independent films defy the conventional narrative of Bollywood films. Bollywood films have larger-than-life characters, and excess emotions, and are long and dramatic. The common themes of Bollywood films include love, friendship, kinship, moral conflicts, and loyalty.³⁹ Despite having varied production structures, the selected internationally co-produced films for this study consistently break the mainstream storytelling conventions of Bollywood such as *The Lunchbox* (2013), *Qissa* (2013), *Masaan* (‘Fly Away Solo,’ 2015), *Chauthi Koot* (‘The Fourth Direction,’ 2015), *Sir* (2019) and *Nasir* (2020). These internationally co-produced films have a multinational crew of editors, music composers, and cinematographers. English, Hindi, Punjabi, and Marathi are the linguistic landscape of these films. Festival film aesthetics of art cinema—characterized by a serious, contemplative, and unsettling approach shaped these internationally co-produced films. The films are reminiscent of art-house cinema that invites ambiguity in the way we see in a festival film such as minimalism, existentialist themes, long shots, minimal dialogue, slow pace, and

³⁹ Tejaswini Ganti, *Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema*, 2nd ed., Routledge Film Guidebooks (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 103-136.

open/ambiguous endings.⁴⁰ The films also address social issues such as gender, class, caste, partition, religion, and identity politics. For example, *The Lunchbox* focuses on a local practice of Mumbai's lunchbox service, exploring themes of urban isolation, identity, and relationships. In contrast to most Bollywood films, *The Lunchbox* has unconventional storytelling and an open ending, which is often associated with art-house and festival films. *Masaan* deals with the Indian caste system, corruption, death, and sexuality. The film explores existentialist themes of individual pain, suffering, sexual repression, and loss. *Qissa* focuses on the deep-rooted desire of a Sikh man to have a male child to continue the lineage of the family. The film explores the subject of displacement, gender identity and sexuality. *Chauthi Koot* focuses on the 1984 separatist movement in Punjab when the Indian army is battling against the Khalistani separatists. In her article, "At Home in the World," Harmanpreet Kaur also observes that the film, *Chauthi Koot* contains national themes and aesthetic values associated with art cinema such as long tracking shots, minimum dialogue, and attention to cinematography in relation to "time and space, nature, bodies, colour, geometry, and rhythm."⁴¹ *Sir* explores themes of forbidden love, social class, and aspirations through the journey of a young widow who works as a maid for an upper-class wealthy man. Similar to *The Lunchbox*, the film has an open ending. A Tamil-language film, *Nasir*, focuses on the challenges of a Muslim man in contemporary India. The film received appreciation among art-house cinema enthusiasts. Film critic Kirubhakar Purushothaman, in his review, calls it a story

⁴⁰Cindy H. Wong, *Film Festivals: Culture, People, and Power on the Global Screen* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 65-99. In her work, film festival scholar Cindy Wong defines "festival films" in opposition to conventional mainstream Hollywood narratives.

⁴¹ Harmanpreet Kaur, "At Home in the World: Co-Productions and Indian Alternative Cinema," *BioScope South Asian Screen Studies* 11, no. 2 (2020): 123–45, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0974927620983941>.

of “our land” “through an embrace of the cinematic language.”⁴² Devasundaram’s study also discusses Indian independent cinema’s ‘glocal’ tendencies, i.e., “global in aesthetic and local in content.”⁴³ Overall, the films borrow from the Anglo/Western film festival aesthetics of art cinema, as well as draw from the aesthetic grammar of a broad range of transglobal influences from world cinema (ranging from Korean and Japanese to Iranian cinema), but they remain rooted in contemporary national themes, issues, and discourses of India.

Exploring the production context provides another lens for understanding the diversity of internationally co-produced independent films. Global South filmmakers began using western co-production and festival funds to finance films because of a lack of public funding in their home countries post-liberalization.⁴⁴ But India has a robust domestic market, as well as a private financing sector and studios. Therefore, it led to relatively fewer fully internationally financed films. However, the support of NFDC contributed to a string of internationally co-produced films in the past decade. Indian independent filmmakers and producers who chose a less travelled path of international festivals and co-production funding—combined partial funding support through the state, private studios, and/or investors, making it more challenging to classify internationally co-produced independent films. Additionally, most producers interviewed for the research argued that international co-production structures sometimes can increase the budget for films. Thus, the usage of the term “independent” can be problematic from an economic perspective. In our

⁴² Kirubhakar Purushothaman, “Nasir Movie Review: A Devastating Story of a Salesman,” *The New Indian Express*, accessed February 27, 2023, <https://www.cinemaexpress.com/reviews/tamil/2020/may/08/nasir-movie-review-a-devastating-story-of-a-salesman-18359.html>.

⁴³ Devasundaram, *India’s New Independent Cinema*, i.

⁴⁴ Tamara L. Falicov, “The Festival Film: Film Festival Funds as Cultural Intermediaries,” in *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*, eds. Marijke de Valck, Brendan Kredell, and Skadi Loist, (London: New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 211.

interviews, the industry, however, self-identifies its cinema as “independent” regardless of the film’s production structure. Yet, some producers interviewed for the study show disdain over those independent films that received funding through Bollywood production houses and media companies.

Over the years, the binaries between high/low culture and art/commercial cinema seem to have become more complicated and intermingled to create new hybrids. As remarked by Devasundaram earlier, Indian independent films sometimes exist in a symbiotic relationship with Bollywood—even get produced/distributed by popular Bollywood stars, production houses, or large corporations.⁴⁵ Large production and distribution companies launched subsidiaries to support and invest in this alternative cinema including, ALTBalaji (a subsidiary of Balaji Motion Pictures), UTV Motion Pictures (a subsidiary of the Indian media conglomerate, UTV Software Communications, which is now a subsidiary of The Walt Disney Company), Yoodlee Films (a subsidiary of leading music company, Saregama India Ltd.), Aamir Khan Productions (owned by Aamir Khan, a popular Bollywood star). This includes films such as *Dev D* (2009, UTV Motion Pictures), *LSD* (2010, ALTBalaji), and Aamir Khan Productions produced films such as *Peepli Live* (2010), *Delhi Belly* (2011), *Dhobi Ghat* (2011), and *Ship of Theseus* (2012). International Film Festivals, multiplexes, and streaming platforms have increasingly screened Indian independent films. Similarly, Bollywood is increasingly producing content-driven cinema and combines conventional mainstream narratives to explore social issues such as women's empowerment (*Pink*, 2016), drug abuse (*Udta Punjab*, 2016), and homosexuality (*Badhaai Do*,

⁴⁵ Devasundaram, *India's New Independent Cinema*, 80-108.

2022). Therefore, it is becoming important yet complex to distinguish between various contours of the Hindi language and independent cinema.

Therefore, it will be further helpful to distinguish between various forms of Indian independent cinema. For this, I borrow insights from Mette Hjort's concept of "strong" and "weak" forms of transnationalism as it relates to the transnational elements present in the production, distribution, reception, and films themselves.⁴⁶ In a similar vein, the independence of the films can be theorized in terms of "strong" independence and "weak" forms of independence. Films that use non-studio money, defy the norms of Bollywood, and get distributed on alternative platforms (e.g., YouTube) are more independent. The film, *Gandu* ('Asshole,' 2010) is an excellent example of strong independence. International art cinema inspired this provocative low-budget film, and it had a successful film festival journey. The director of the *Gandu*, Q, refrained from pursuing theatrical distribution due to its controversial themes. However, the film's popularity grew when it leaked on the internet.⁴⁷ But the films that secure funding from media corporations and integrate some elements of commercial cinema, such as stars or songs, while breaking fewer norms of Bollywood are on the "weak" side of independence. Such "weak" independence in films also benefits from massive marketing budgets, which aids in nationwide promotion and theatrical distribution in India. As discussed above, financed by studios, Anurag Kashyap's *Gangs of Wasseypur* (2012) negotiates commercial aspects of Bollywood cinema while simultaneously challenging its conventional narrative. However, this negotiation questions the independent spirit of the film. During our interviews, Kashyap's film sometimes was not considered independent due

⁴⁶ Mette Hjort, "On the Plurality of Cinematic Transnationalism," 12-33.

⁴⁷ Bhavesh Bhimani, "Burning Bright: To 'Q' or Not to 'Q'...!!," *Burning Bright* (blog), March 24, 2012, <http://burnighbright.blogspot.com/2012/03/to-q-or-not-to-q.html>.

to its production structure and style.⁴⁸ In the context of the transnational production structure of independent films, *The Extraordinary Journey of a Fakir* (2018) is not a Bollywood studio-financed film; it is a multinational co-production—shot in India, France, Belgium, and Italy. However, the film stars a popular Tamil actor, Dhanush and indulges in mainstream dance, songs, and humour. Circulated in the international film festival circuit, the film received critical recognition and awards. It had international distribution in many countries including, India, France, Germany, the USA, Canada, Singapore, and Malaysia.⁴⁹ But it was not commercially successful.⁵⁰ While the films that receive the most funding from the art-house film festival structures rarely get distributed widely because of the rising costs of marketing and distribution in India. An exception to this is the film, *The Lunchbox* (2013). I examine the film’s successful transnational journey in the final chapter of the dissertation. Except for such far and few successes, several interviewees agree that a countless number of films get made in India—some even make rounds of A-list festivals, and yet they never “see the light of the day.”⁵¹

As aforementioned in this section, this dissertation offers the off-screen perspectives of the selected internationally co-produced independent films associated with development labs and funds of international film festivals and co-production treaties through the NFDC Bazaar. The international co-productions frequently break the norms of a Bollywood film through international

⁴⁸ Deepti DCunha, personal interview, July 13, 2021; Kabir, personal interview, August 1, 2021.

⁴⁹ “After Garnering Rave Reviews Worldwide, Dhanush to Launch Indian Trailer of ‘The Extraordinary Journey of the Fakir,’” *The Times of India*, June 3, 2019, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/hindi/bollywood/news/after-garnering-rave-reviews-worldwide-dhanush-to-launch-indian-trailer-of-the-extraordinary-journey-of-the-fakir/articleshow/69633258.cms>.

⁵⁰ “The Extraordinary Journey of the Fakir,” *Box Office Mojo*, accessed March 13, 2023, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/release/rl24282369/weekend/>.

⁵¹ Kabir, personal interview, August 1, 2021; Pooja Mohite, personal interview, April 8, 2021.

production structure, cinematic language, and content; therefore, the dissertation employs the term independent for films that were circulated in the international film festival circuit through the programs of NFDC Bazaar regardless of their funding structure.

Research Objectives and Questions

This dissertation examines the processes, practices, and perspectives behind the development, production, and circulation of independent films in a transnational context. The term “transnational” is preferred over “global” because the global, a “decentred” concept, suggests a faceless “totality” in a way that erases the value of nations in being “post-national.”⁵² However, the term “transnational” is more helpful in indicating the continuing role and importance of national governments in constructing borderless film culture and structures. The objectives of the dissertation thus include examining the role of the government organization, the NFDC, Bazaar and staff/film professionals in developing independent cinema in a transnational context. Since the dissertation examines macro-organizational and micro-individual challenges, constraints, and strategies, it allows examination of the little-acknowledged role of Indian producers in transnational film culture and provides a better understanding of transnational independent production film culture. Therefore, the research interrogates a series of important research questions related to Indian independent film production and its transnational culture.

One overarching question for the dissertation is, how has the contemporary independent film production culture in India evolved to become more organized, transnational, and

⁵² Kathleen Newman, “Notes on Transnational Film Theory: decentered capitalism, decentered subjectivity,” in *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*, eds., Natasa Durovicová and Kathleen E. Newman (London, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), 3-11.

collaborative, and what factors have contributed to this shift? I divide this major question into three important sub-questions to answer them systematically in chapters, substantively and serially. First, how does the NFDC, a state-sponsored organization, support transnational culture for independent cinema in India? This question highlights the larger role of the organization and suggests an investigation into the political-economic/industrial structures of the Indian film industry. Second, how do the management strategies and labour of staff members contribute to the formation of the transnational culture for Indian independent films? This question emphasizes the creative management, beliefs, and practices of film professionals working at NFDC Bazaar, recognizing that this management and work culture exist in the larger industrial/political-economic structures of India. Third, what insights do the production stories of producers provide about the transnational culture of Indian independent cinema? The final question examines the creative production practices and stories of producers, who play a key role in exploring international training and funding options to produce, exhibit and distribute independent films transnationally. These three questions allow interrogation of larger political-economic/industrial structures and individual practices for a holistic and nuanced understanding of the transnational turn in India's independent film production culture through an industrial and cultural perspective. They allow an interrogation of film policies, tactics, creative practices, beliefs, and values that contribute to the development of India's transnational independent film production culture.

Theoretical Perspectives

Theoretical influences for the research include an array of interrelated disciplines and studies including, history, political economy, sociology, anthropology, management studies and culture studies. This dissertation interlinked these approaches in the manner suggested by Media

Industry Studies (MIS), an interdisciplinary approach to examining industrial structures, policies, processes, and cultural practices behind the making of film and media. This “disciplinary heterogeneity” of MIS entails drawing from a range of disciplines, including film studies, mass communications studies, cultural studies, sociology, and business and management studies. Researchers often contextualize findings and ground them in the “lived experiences” of media workers to comprehend “how and why the media industries ultimately work the way that they do.”⁵³ Foundational works in the MIS field, such as *Production Culture* (2008) and *Production Studies* (2009) employ this approach and thus influence the theoretical framework for this dissertation. A common attribute of production cultures scholarship is that it views “media production as a site of meaning-making – not necessarily the meanings that are made in media texts and commodities, but more in the meanings and values that media workers hold about themselves and their jobs.”⁵⁴ In *Production Culture*, Caldwell uses a hybrid “cultural-industrial” approach that entails combining political economy and cultural studies to understand both the industrial structures and the culture of production.⁵⁵ Such an approach allows situating the cultural narratives, labour, practices and “work worlds” of workers within the larger industry contexts and production conditions.⁵⁶ Both political economy and cultural studies approaches emerged simultaneously in the 1970s and 1980s. Examining the political economy of media industries includes investigating questions of power, ownership, and censorship by examining the growth of

⁵³Matthew Freeman, “Introduction: Media Industry Studies—What and Why?,” in *Industrial Approaches to Media: A Methodological Gateway to Industry Studies*, ed. Matthew Freeman (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 90, https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-55176-4_1.

⁵⁴Daniel Herbert, Amanda D. Lotz, and Aswin Punathambekar, *Media Industry Studies* (Newark, UNITED KINGDOM: Polity Press, 2020), 61.

⁵⁵ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 5.

⁵⁶ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 345.

the media in capitalism, as well as the regulatory structures, commercialization, and media privatization.⁵⁷

While the political-economic approach entails a critique of larger corporations and governments in their goals of concentrated media ownership, control and profit, the cultural studies approach builds largely on analyzing “the interplay between lived experience, texts or discourses and the social context.”⁵⁸ Borrowing insights from social sciences and cultural studies, production studies research—a subfield in media industries research—emphasizes studying “production as culture” by examining the rituals, routines and values of creatives. The focus of production studies is on examining the power play and social hierarchies in the everyday production processes.⁵⁹ However, the disciplinary debates emphasized that the political economy focuses overtly on the economic sphere to the extent of becoming a reductionist while ignoring individual agency and power. Similarly, the cultural studies approach was criticized for its increased attention to textual analysis, cultural discourses, and reception studies. However, the debate has been challenged by scholars who argue that “the conceptual or methodological divisions between or among political economy, cultural studies, and social research have essentially collapsed, yielding scholarship that synthesizes these areas with grace and delicacy.”⁶⁰ MIS scholars now advocate the hybrid approach for a more rigorous, rich and contextualized research because it considers both the macro-level political-economic conditions of the industry and the individualized understanding of the creative culture and agency of its participants. Therefore, “media industry studies today is

⁵⁷ Freeman, “Introduction: Media Industry Studies—What and Why?,” 89-90.

⁵⁸ Paula Saukko, *Doing Research in Cultural Studies* (SAGE Publications Ltd, 2003), 2.

⁵⁹ Vicki Mayer, “Bringing the Social Back in,” in *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, ed. Vicki Mayer, Miranda J. Banks, and John Thornton Caldwell (New York: Routledge, 2009), 13.

⁶⁰ Janet Wasko and Eileen R. Meehan, “Critical Crossroads or Parallel Routes? Political Economy and New Approaches to Studying Media Industries and Cultural Products,” *Cinema Journal* 52, no. 3 (2013): 155.

principally *contextualisation*—it aims to trace connections between the micro and the macro, between production and culture, so as to better understand *how* and *why* the media industries ultimately work the way that they do.”⁶¹

While media industry studies frequently investigate the question of the industry structure, processes, labour practices and values of media makers within organizations and companies, film festival research critically examines the management and practices in film festivals, including negotiations in programming, positioning and local/global relations with the city, community and industry.⁶² Film festival scholarship has traditionally focused on A-list film festivals of the Global North, resulting in a lack of attention to the festival culture of the Global South. However, scholars are increasingly emphasizing the importance of studying film festival culture and practices of the Global South, especially when major Anglo/Western festivals (e.g., Cannes, Venice, Toronto, Rotterdam) have begun the trend to support independent filmmakers of the Global South through development funds. This trend began in the 1990s when the states leaned toward neoliberal policies and decreased state funding. The festivals continue to expand their pre-production activities through several transnational models, such as film funds and awards for pre-development, post-production, and co-productions.⁶³ This research contributes to the emerging field by examining South Asia’s largest film market, Film Bazaar, and its transnational practices in the development of India’s independent film production culture. As both MIS and film festival research emphasize the importance of examining the role of human agency and industry practices, this dissertation

⁶¹ Freeman, “Introduction: Media Industry Studies—What and Why?,” 12.

⁶² Marijke De Valck, “What is a film festival? How to study festivals and how you should?,” in *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*, eds. Marijke De Valck, Brendan Kredell, and Skadi Loist (London: Routledge, 2016), 8.

⁶³ Falicov, “The Festival Film, 210.

combines a broader organizational study and a micro-level approach that considers individual roles and agency in the curation, creation, and management of the NFDC Bazaar's global infrastructure in relation to its national political-economic structures. This dissertation thus discusses the rise of the religious Hindutva ideology by PM Modi's BJP (Bhartiya Janta Party) and the controversial merger of film organizations under NFDC.

In this way, the hybrid method allows for contextualizing the larger political-economic, as well as the individual practices, agency, and work culture. Therefore, this dissertation contributes to this need for examining both political-economic structures and the creative labour of individuals. Moreover, MIS scholars, such as Mark Deuze, David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker, have previously examined the precarious and emotional labour of workers in creative industries.⁶⁴ I also found this approach to be relevant in studying the professional experiences of the interviewed film producers and workers associated with the NFDC Bazaar. Therefore, this dissertation borrows insights from affective and media industry scholarship to examine the work of producers including, emotional labour, human management skills and construction of communities.

Method

This research deployed qualitative methodologies from MIS to gain a detailed understanding of the attitudes, opinions, and experiences of industry professionals. MIS scholars collect data through media content, press interviews, trade publications, and in-depth interviews. The method employed in this dissertation similarly includes case studies, narrative analysis, textual

⁶⁴ Mark Deuze, *Media Work*, 1st edition (Cambridge: Polity, 2007). David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker, *Creative Labour: Media Work in Three Cultural Industries* (London: Routledge, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203855881>.

analysis of the media content, participant observation, and interpretive analysis. This research was built on a case study approach to investigate independent film production policies, processes, and practices in a transnational context. The case study approach involves a deeper understanding of a phenomenon through a detailed examination of a “particular case, which can be an event, a process, an institution, a country, even an individual.”⁶⁵ This research entailed understanding the international developments in Indian independent film production over the past decade through the case study of the organization, the NFDC Bazaar and its participants. The case study approach is productive for this research for a variety of reasons. First, the case study approach works best in understanding policies and their complexities. The second advantage of the approach is that it enables a broad examination of a phenomenon from both the macro-level of an organization and the micro-level of the perspective of participants. Third, “case studies are almost always a mixed-method investigation” and include a combination of approaches, such as document analysis, interviews, and observation.⁶⁶ Studies that use the case study approach are rigorous and allow cross-examination of the data and theory-building.

This dissertation collected, classified, and interpreted the qualitative data about the NFDC, Film Bazaar, as well as the Indian film industry and national politics as it relates to independent filmmaking and its transnational developments. India lacks comprehensive and accurate quantitative data about the size of the industry, annual production investments, box office returns and other data on the film industry in India.⁶⁷ In his article, “Recognizing Industry,” Nitin Govil

⁶⁵ Hilde Van den Bulck et al., eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Methods for Media Policy Research* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 71, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-16065-4>.

⁶⁶ Hilde Van den Bulck et al., *The Palgrave Handbook of Methods for Media Policy Research*, 79.

⁶⁷ “Annual Report 2011-12,” 22, accessed June 13, 2023, https://www.nfdcindia.com/pdf/annual_11-12.pdf. The data can be collected through sources, including (but not limited to) the Film Federation of India, Film Producers’ Guild, Indian Motion Pictures Association, South Indian Film Chamber of Commerce, East India

discusses how this lack of reliable and enumerative/quantitative data, as well as the informality of the sector, prevented the Indian film industry from being recognized formally.⁶⁸ This dissertation, therefore, adopted a qualitative research approach and focused on conducting the textual, narrative, discursive, and interpretive analysis.

I collected and classified qualitative data based on Caldwell's work, *Production Culture*, in which interprets the culture, practices, social behaviour and rituals of the Los Angeles film industry workers.⁶⁹ For his research, Caldwell proposes and employs an innovative "cultural industrial" method to interpret and contextualize the data i.e., which entails combining "textual analysis of trade/worker artifacts; interviews with film and television workers; ethnographic field observations of production spaces and professional gatherings; and economic and industrial analysis."⁷⁰ Caldwell classifies the data or what he calls "deep industrial practices of film/video production" into three categories: "fully embedded," "semi-embedded," and "publicly disclosed deep texts."⁷¹ The first category of fully embedded deep texts and rituals commonly takes place among industry professionals and therefore excludes the large public. These "intra-group relations or bounded professional exchanges" in Caldwell's work include materials such as how-to manuals, on-the-set crew instructions and work behaviour, union and guilds workshops, newsletters of memberships, etc. The second category, semi-embedded texts, refers to the exchange between industry professionals such as electronic press kits, trade publications, panel discussions,

Motion Pictures Association. However, these do not provide quantitative data about the entire film industry and the numbers can even be inaccurate. The only measurable data available in the Indian film sector pertains to the number of films certified by the Central Board of Film Certification each year for public exhibition.

⁶⁸ Govil, "Recognizing Industry," 172–76.

⁶⁹ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 1.

⁷⁰ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 346.

⁷¹ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 347.

internship programs or workshops to “make it in the industry.” These are “inter-group relations or professional exchanges with ancillary public viewing” to maintain professional relationships and stimulate new collaborations with industry makers, media companies, and associations. While these are created for communication between industry professionals, they might be accessible to the public. The last category, publicly disclosed deep texts, is deliberately crafted for the public and includes materials such as the making of documentaries, DVD director tracks, “extras,” screenings and Q &A sessions, viral videos, etc. These “extra-group relations or professional exchanges for explicit public consumption” thus involve and engage audiences to participate, promote and consume content related to the making of film, television, and media. In this way, they provide “access” to how “practitioners work, think, and talk about how they work and think.”⁷²

Drawing on Caldwell’s framework, this research focused on the principal state-sponsored organization for promoting Indian independent cinema internationally – NFDC, Film Bazaar and its participants, specifically senior staff, film programmers, consultants, and producers.⁷³ The data was, therefore, collected through the websites and annual reports of NFDC Film Bazaar, government reports, media industry reports, interviews, and observations, as well as textual material about the film industry and politics available through digital media news, press releases

⁷² Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 348.

⁷³ While Caldwell focuses on Hollywood, the primary goal is to interpret the various ways in which the industry makes sense of itself and examine the larger relationship between industry structures and the professional world of its labor, which can be adapted and utilized in examining other film industries, including India. The methods used in his work, such as interviews, observations, archival, and industrial/cultural analysis, provide a sophisticated model for adaptation to examine industrial structures, creative labor, and the culture of production. There is limited research on the media industries of non-western contexts and the model allows adaptation for studying other industries, while even discovering similarities and dissimilarities in the “work-worlds” of workers in India and the West.

and popular press. Between 2019-21, I participated in Film Bazaar 2021 (online), Toronto International Film Festival 2019 (in person), Calgary International Film Festival 2021 (in person) and Banff Media Festival 2019 (in person), attended a production workshop (online), and several industry panels (both in person and virtual), as well produced an online documentary for TELUS to get professional experience through an internship program in the industry. Film and media industry scholars habitually work in the industry and consider professional experience to be a vital aspect of research in this area. I worked as a junior producer with a group of six women to produce the TELUS docu-series about navigating healthcare as a woman of colour in Calgary.⁷⁴ This provided me with important production experience and knowledge about the film and media industry culture, for example, the way people interact in the environment such as the informality of relationships, the importance of choosing to work with compatible people and volunteering as a necessary tool to find work. Thus, the participation and production experiences contributed to the understanding of film industry culture and practices. Further, media permeates every aspect of our lives, becoming an integral part of our existence. Media industry experts such as Mark Deuze believe that the present era is defined and understood by this interconnectedness through media platforms.⁷⁵ I conducted this research during the global COVID-19 pandemic when digital media influenced personal, professional, cultural, and social life at a much-accelerated rate. Thus, it was inevitable not to include the online and digital world of controversies and debates about trends and

⁷⁴ It would have been ideal to get the production experience in the context of the Indian film industry. During my efforts to gain production experience through an internship, I successfully established a connection with Storiculture - a company dedicated to promoting South Asian cinema in India. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances related to the global COVID-19 pandemic, this collaboration did not come to fruition. However, I believe that it was still valuable to have industry experience by interning at a local independent film company in Calgary.

⁷⁵ Mark Deuze, *Media Life* (Praze, Czech Republic: Karolinum, 2015).

changes (such as digital censorship rules) shaping India's independent cinema, film industry, culture, and politics. The Ethics board of the University of Calgary provided the ethics approval prior to interviews and fieldwork. I offered the interviewed participants consent forms, giving them the choice to remain anonymous to avoid risk to their reputation during the interviews.

The interview process began through the website of the NFDC and Film Facilitation Office (FFO), which contains a list of internationally co-produced films within the past decade. Therefore, the process began with contacting participants associated with NFDC Bazaar and their contemporary international co-productions (e.g., senior staff, film programmers, consultants, creative producers, etc.) via social media such as LinkedIn or Facebook from that list. However, establishing contact with film professionals was challenging because of a lack of association with film industry professionals prior to the study. Additionally, the research was conducted during the pandemic, which contributed to spatial-temporal challenges such as differences in time zones. I used the snowballing technique to continue contacting selected participants relevant to the study virtually. This technique allowed for limiting the bias in selection because the existing interview participants nominated potential participants to engage in the study. The interviews provide in-depth knowledge about the phenomenon based on lived experiences.⁷⁶ In this light, I conducted thirteen personal interviews involving six film professionals/staff members and seven producers who participated in international co-productions facilitated by the NFDC Bazaar. Although qualitative research can be “invariably small,” it contains bulky and rich data.⁷⁷ Additionally, the sample size must be pragmatic and manageable because this needs to be analyzed and interpreted

⁷⁶ Nick Emmel, “Purposeful Sampling,” in *Sampling and Choosing Cases in Qualitative Research: A Realist Approach* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2013), 1-12, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473913882.n3>.

⁷⁷ Emmel, “Purposeful Sampling,” 7.

in an organized manner within a limited budget and timeframe.⁷⁸ The interviews occurred online due to the pandemic, and each interview lasted approximately 2 hours. I strategically employed the interview method to gain information on the values, attitudes, and belief systems of participants, which would otherwise be impossible to obtain.

The goal of the interviews was thus twofold: first to deepen insights into the larger organizational/industrial structure and second to understand individual production stories, belief systems, values and practices that form the culture of the industry. This entailed preparing an interview questionnaire, including questions related to industry experiences, labour struggles, creative contributions, and international co-productions. The interviews began with a broad question to stimulate conversation such as “How has Indian independent filmmaking and your role in it evolved over the past decade?” “What is the role of a creative producer?” and “How was your experience at the Film Bazaar?”⁷⁹ I asked a similar set of questions to the participants while allowing some flexibility in the form of a semi-structured interview. This provided an opportunity for participants to share anecdotes stories and engage in dialogue and discuss their work in detail. Researchers employing narrative approaches for analysis frequently facilitate interviews in a manner that motivates participants to recount stories about the “phenomenon of interest.”⁸⁰ I kept reflection notes, transcribed the interviews using Microsoft Word software, and proofread them for readability and accuracy.

⁷⁸ Jennifer Mason, *Qualitative Researching* (London: Sage, 1996), 120–144.

⁷⁹ For a full list of interview questions used, please see Appendix.

⁸⁰ Kathryn Roulston, *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis* (SAGE Publications Ltd, 2014), 299, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446282243>.

Employing Caldwell's methods discussed above in this section, this collected data can be classified into "fully embedded," "semi-embedded" and "publicly disclosed deep texts" for this dissertation. The "fully embedded deep texts" for this dissertation included personal interviews because they provided insights into the "intra-group relations" through "trade and craft narratives and anecdotes" by revealing how industry professionals think, describe, and even theorize the work they do.⁸¹ However, the interviews contained "managed" information, and did not adhere strictly to the "bounded professional exchange" such as on-the-set production training and work behaviour, as observed in Caldwell's work.⁸² As a result, categorizing this data was challenging as the extent to which participants managed the sharing of those professional experiences and narratives cannot be fully discerned. "Semi-embedded" texts involving "inter-group relations" between professionals with "ancillary public viewing" included materials such as annual reports, press releases, policy documents, government reports, business reports, and trade publications, as well as observations, and internship experiences.⁸³ These "semi-embedded" texts provided important information about the organization and larger film industry structures and policies. "Publicly disclosed deep texts" accessible to the broad public include published interviews, public debates, and news articles in national and international media and press.⁸⁴ Taken together, these

⁸¹ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 347.

⁸² Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 347.

⁸³ "Semi embedded" texts such as annual reports, press releases, policy documents, and government reports – emanated from the website of NFDC, catalogues of Film Bazaar, as well as Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Producers Guild of India, and Film Facilitation Office. Simultaneously, the "semi-embedded" texts also included business reports, particularly prepared by global consulting firms such as McKinsey, and trade publications such as Screen Daily, Film Companion and Hollywood Reporter. Additionally, my internship experiences as a junior producer, as well as participation in industry panels at the Film Bazaar and several international film festivals provided insights into production culture.

⁸⁴ "Publicly disclosed deep texts" are disseminated through media outlets such as The Hindu, India Times, The Quint, The New Yorker, The Guardian, and The Wire. Moreover, supplementary pertinent information was available through new media such as Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter. These platforms provided industry news, trends, and updates.

textual activities show the complex ways in which the industry communicates with each other and to the public. These texts thus offer a way to understand, examine and interpret the diverse, even conflicting ways that the industry and its workers explain, delineate, and deliberate on the nature and meaning of Indian independent filmmaking in a transnational context.

Incorporating MIS approaches and Caldwell's interpretive framework or meaning-making approach, I analyzed the data to make sense of India's transnational independent film production "work world" since the mid-2000s. Caldwell's theory proposes the approach of "culture as an interpretive system" to study the industry structurally and culturally.⁸⁵ The focus is on interpreting the collected data to understand the "cultural meanings and values" of the community.⁸⁶ Caldwell emphasizes that media practitioners' interviews contain valuable cultural knowledge, but they are "managed" and "spin-driven" sources not to be taken at face value.⁸⁷ Similarly, media and communication scholars Kenton T. Wilkinson and Patrick F. Merle emphasize the importance of using business press and trade reports for media industry scholars. According to Wilkinson and Merle, these secondary sources offer the latest updates and insights into the rapidly changing structures, content, and conditions of the industry due to globalization, increased exchanges, and technological changes. However, they also warn about the possible bias due to the dominant control of media corporations and greater reliance on "political and economic elites."⁸⁸

Therefore, I critically analyzed the recurring themes and narratives in the collected data by employing the MIS approach, particularly Caldwell's interpretive framework and "cultural-

⁸⁵ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 2.

⁸⁶ Herbert, Lotz, and Punathambekar, *Media Industry Studies*, 61.

⁸⁷ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 2.

⁸⁸ Kenton T. Wilkinson and Patrick F. Merle, "The Merits and Challenges of Using Business Press and Trade Journal Reports in Academic Research on Media Industries: Using Business Reports in Media Research," *Communication, Culture & Critique* 6, no. 3 (2013): 415–31, <https://doi.org/10.1111/cccr.12019>.

industrial” approach. Caldwell’s approach combines industrial/political-economic analysis with practices and values of labour in relation to each other. Based on Caldwell’s framework, I cross-checked the “semi-embedded” (i.e., annual reports, trade publications, observations etc.), “fully embedded” (e.g., personal interviews) and “publicly disclosed deep texts” (e.g., media coverage and press) to analyze the data. The cross-checking process was important and helpful in critical analysis, as well as in developing a more nuanced understanding of the transnational culture of independent film production culture. For example, NFDC discusses the challenges of lack of state funding/assistance, corporatization and “Bollywoodization” in “semi-embedded” texts, such as annual reports.⁸⁹ However, NFDC rarely articulates apprehensions about national film policies or media corporatization in “fully embedded” and “publicly disclosed deep texts” such as personal interviews and press articles in media, respectively. Similarly, some examples of conflicting interests also did arise—such as when the senior staff’s management decisions differed from those of the contractual staff, or when NFDC’s pursuit of transnational goals stemmed from supporting the national film industry while producers primarily pursued intellectual stimulation and artistic gratification through international co-productions. In this way, this dissertation examined both the larger industrial political-economic structures and individual cultural practices, power dynamics, creative management, and negotiations in the making of India’s transnational independent film production culture.

⁸⁹ Ashish Rajadhyaksha, “The ‘Bollywoodization’ of the Indian Cinema: Cultural Nationalism in a Global Arena,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 4, no. 1 (January 2003): 25–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1464937032000060195>. Note: From here on, this dissertation employs the term, “Bollywoodization,” coined by Ashish Rajadhyaksha, to refer to the hegemonic position of Bollywood as an all-encompassing cultural industry, resulting from globalization in the 1990s. “Bollywoodization” entails a shift to a market-driven approach or commercialization that permeates various aspects of filmmaking such as aesthetics and narrative but also popular culture such as advertising and fashion.

Finally, the emerging trend of combining theoretical and methodological approaches in MIS studies allowed me to conduct an interdisciplinary study for a holistic examination of India's independent film production culture and its transnational turn. This dissertation is in conversation with some of the prominent contemporary film and media industries scholars, including David Hesmondhalgh, John Thornton Caldwell, Vicki Mayer, Dina Iordanova, Tejaswini Ganti, Amanda D. Lotz and Timothy Havens, among others. This research is an original and timely contribution to the growing need for an interdisciplinary research method, offering a transnational approach to film production and MIS by adapting it to the context of the Indian film industry. This dissertation examined a range of textual material, including annual reports, trade publications, personal interviews, and political discourse in the national and international press. More broadly, this research expands and contributes to the growing body of scholarship on the studies of the film and media industries, production culture, film festivals, independent cinema, transnational cinema, and film and media governance. In doing so, the dissertation contributed to a more holistic understanding of Indian independent film production and its culture in a transnational context. Therefore, the research provided important insights for film and media industry scholars, film professionals, and policymakers.

To this end, the first chapter, “The NFDC Effect and India’s Shifting Independent Film Culture,” explores the policies, operations, and tactics of the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC), as it navigates the neoliberal and national/nationalist structures of the Indian film industry. In doing so, the first chapter examines the changing attitudes of the government towards independent filmmaking and the emergence of a transnational culture since 2007. The second chapter, “Inside Film Bazaar” focuses on the case study of Film Bazaar, organized by the NFDC annually. It explores Bazaar’s transnational model, trends, and practices in the context of

the global film festival circuit. Therefore, it allows examination of the Bazaar's programming, management, and internal structure within the larger neoliberal, nationalist and transnational goals of the Indian government. The third chapter, "The Curious Case of Creative Producers," examines the transnational working practices, experiences, struggles and related navigational tactics of creative producers (e.g., networking, hustling, and telling tales of tenacity), who began their journey at NFDC Bazaar, co-produced films internationally and contributed to the making of India's transnational independent film production culture.

To summarize, this dissertation examines the policies, professionals and practices associated with NFDC-Bazaar, which is known for facilitating Indian-European co-productions such as *The Lunchbox* (2013), *Masaan* ('Fly Away Solo,' 2015), *Chauthi Koot* ('The Fourth Direction,' 2015), *Sir* (2019) and *Nasir* (2020), among others, which deviate from the conventions of Bollywood productions. These films received support from international film festivals in the Global North, which began providing professional training and development funds to independent filmmakers from developing countries over the past two decades. Consequently, India's independent film production culture has become more collaborative and transnational in the past decade. Employing MIS, specifically, the production culture approach, this dissertation aims to understand the ways the government and industry professionals make sense of India's transnational independent filmmaking and their own work. NFDC Bazaar's transnational support for independent filmmaking was rooted in the growth of the national film industry, which is largely built on the government's neoliberal film policies, and therefore, the organization indirectly supported the growth of media corporatization in the Indian film industry. However, the interviewed contractual staff members/workers are motivated by artistic gratification, intellectual stimulation, and community-building. Several interviewed producers additionally show neoliberal

faith in creative entrepreneurship, individualism, and the importance of commercializing independent cinema. Taken together, they contribute to highly volatile working conditions (e.g., lack of state funding, increased corporatization, structures of freelancing, and globalized gig economies). Such precarious conditions require emotional and creative labour, in which the producers emerge as resilient heroes and survivors, who embark on a transformative journey and return to their home country with newly acquired social and symbolic capital, skills and tactics to navigate the world of transnational film production. These findings provide an industrial-cultural understanding of transnational cinema; therefore, they contribute to the burgeoning scholarship on production culture studies, film festivals, transnational cinema and studies of film industries, media, globalization, and Indian independent cinema.

Chapter 1: The NFDC Effect and India's Shifting Independent Film Culture

On June 11, 2021, the National Film Development Corporation of India (NFDC) launched a “corporate video” which highlights its contributions to the Indian art-house and independent cinema since its establishment in 1980.¹ This 5-minute and 13-second video provides an overview of the role and activities of NFDC. It begins with a short clip from one of NFDC’s most successful films, *Gandhi* (1982), which was produced with the support of Indira Gandhi, the former Minister of Information and Broadcasting. During 1966-1977, Gandhi served as the Prime Minister of India. However, after the Emergency in 1975, Gandhi was confronting a growing crisis in Punjab and supported the film with the intention of restoring both the Congress Party and her own image.² This example suggests NFDC’s historical relationship with India’s national politics. The video further presents visuals from Indian art or New Indian Cinema of the 1980s, for example, *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro* (1983) and *Salam Bombay!* (1988), as well as contemporary independent films such as *The Good Road* (2013) and *Island City* (2015). It also provides notable examples of NFDC-facilitated international co-productions, such as *Arunoday* (‘Sunrise,’ 2014), *The Lunchbox* (2013), and *Chauthi Koot* (‘The Fourth Direction,’ 2015) among others. The names of prominent Indian art cinema filmmakers appear on the screen such as Satyajit Ray, Shyam Benegal and Mani Kaul, Mrinal Sen, as well as contemporary independent filmmakers such as Anurag Kashyap, Gurvinder Singh, Dibakar Banerjee and Ritesh Batra. The video features NFDC’s efforts in digitally restoring

¹ NFDC Corporate Video, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_6VESj6EvI.

² Rachel Dwyer, “The Case of the Missing Mahatma: Gandhi and the Hindi Cinema,” *Public Culture* 23, no. 2 (May 1, 2011): 349–76, <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-1161949>.

notable Indian art films, such as *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro* (1983), and *Mirch Masala* (1987). These examples demonstrate NFDC's role in supporting Indian art cinema and contemporary independent filmmaking internationally. The video contains advertisements/campaign songs for the promotion of government initiatives. The massive presence of popular stars in the songs suggests the dominant power of Bollywood and its relationship with NFDC. Finally, it is important to note that the video begins and ends with the logo of NFDC's pay-per-view platform, "Cinemas of India" in blue and saffron colour. The colour saffron has become a symbol of the current nationalist political party, Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) in several campaigns, suggesting its influence on the organization.³ Taken together, this video reflects some of the central themes of this chapter, focusing on NFDC's operations, policies, and the emergence of transnational production culture for independent cinema in India. Thus, this video sets the stage for an engaging examination of NFDC, and this chapter will discuss each of these factors.

This chapter explores NFDC's policies in response to political-economic transformations in the mid-2000s and examines its implications for both the organization itself and contemporary Indian independent filmmaking at large. This suggests studying how NFDC shapes and is shaped by political-economic/industry structures, i.e., neoliberal-nationalist, and transnational structures, the impact of globalization, corporatization and "Bollywoodization" in the Indian film industry. This chapter examines NFDC's management, tactics, and transformation, and argues that NFDC's operations and initiatives contribute to the neoliberal-national/nationalist structures of the Indian film industry.

³ Himanshu, "Modi Wears Saffron Cap, Starts a Trend in UP; Other Parties Follow Suit with Their Colours," *The Federal*, June 12, 2022, <https://thefederal.com/states/north/uttar-pradesh/modi-wears-saffron-cap-starts-a-trend-in-up-other-parties-follow-suit-with-their-colours/>.

NFDC operates in the present political-economic context of India, in which the neoliberal, transnational and nationalist structures intersect with each other. The neo-liberalization in film policies and acquisition of the status of the “industry” in the 1990s contributed to the corporatization, international productions/collaborations, and the rise of Bollywood in the Indian film industry.⁴ NFDC adopted neoliberal attitudes toward independent cinema in India in the mid-2000s due to commercial pressures on alternative cinemas in India. Since its reestablishment in 2007, NFDC became more involved in the growth of the national film industry, supporting the private sector and developing transnational programs through mentorship, script labs, and a co-production market, which contributed to the formation of transnational independent film production culture. In doing so, NFDC creates both opportunities and challenges for the independent filmmaking community.

Today, independent filmmaking in India confronts dual challenges arising from the growing control and power of a neoliberal-nationalist regime. The period of Hindu right-wing nationalism began in 2014, and it is also important to discuss the interventions and ideologies of the current political party that shape and contribute to NFDC’s organizational structure and practices. State subordination to capital over the past three decades resulted in more neoliberal agendas in film and media industries, where they now coincide with increased cultural policing and regulatory regimes. Narendra Modi, India's Prime Minister and the leader of the nationalist political party, BJP, introduced the ‘AtmaNirbhar Bharat Abhiyan’ (Self-reliant Scheme of India) on May 12, 2014. Modi's speech emphasized the importance of reinforcing the five foundations of

⁴ Tejaswini Ganti, *Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema*, 2nd ed., Routledge Film Guidebooks (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013).

the country: “economy, infrastructure, governing systems, vibrant demography and supply chain.”⁵ His address, similar to the former US President Donald Trump's “America First” call, confirmed that populist-nationalist beliefs were inherent in economic globalization and international relations under Modi’s leadership.⁶ In the same vein, during the first week of his presidency in 2021, the current President of the US, Joe Biden unpredictably launched the “Buy American” agenda, which echoes the “Make in India” campaign of PM Modi in his first year of office in 2014. In his Opening Pledge of the BJP’s Election Manifesto in 2014, PM Modi argued: “to build a Modern India: the best foundation is our own Culture.”⁷ These new strategies hint at growing protectionism in the political economy of the post-globalized era. In a speech at the World Economic Forum in 2018, PM Modi advocated instead for a new economic liberalism, one that is rooted in cultural nationalism.⁸ Political analysts have questioned Modi’s campaigns because his leadership shows tensions between the nation’s global and protectionist aspirations.⁹ Neoliberal policies tend to reduce the role of government in censoring and regulating film and media, thus favouring deregulation, free-market policies, and heightened competition.¹⁰ In the words of Nobel Laureate Economist, Ronald Coase, there is no fundamental difference between “free market for

⁵ “India’s New Self-Reliance: What Does Modi Mean?,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, accessed October 16, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/indias-new-self-reliance-what-does-modi-mean>.

⁶ “What Does Being ‘Vocal about Local’ Mean for India’s Global Trade Strategy?,” *The Wire*, accessed October 14, 2020, <https://thewire.in/economy/india-global-trade-vocal-about-local>.

⁷ “BJP Manifesto 2014 Highlights,” accessed June 6, 2022, <http://cdn.narendramodi.in/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Manifesto2014highlights.pdf>.

⁸ “Opening Plenary with Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India,” *World Economic Forum*, accessed May 2, 2022, <https://www.weforum.org/events/world-economic-forum-annual-meeting-2018/sessions/opening-plenary-3b35f029-befa-4892-a2d7-3725a9d94418/>.

⁹ Swaminathan S. Anklesaria Aiyar, “India’s New Protectionism Threatens Gains from Economic Reform,” *Cato Institute*, Policy analysis no. 851, October 18, 2018, <https://www.cato.org/policy-analysis/indias-new-protectionism-threatens-gains-economic-reform>.

¹⁰ Manfred B. Steger and Ravi K. Roy, *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010).

goods” and “free market for ideas.”¹¹ But under the new nationalist political right governance in India, these two notions do not equate. This suggests that the government aims to develop film trade policies that encourage international collaborations, co-productions, and foreign shooting in India. However, it does not necessarily entail unfettered creative freedom, as the government concurrently increases regulations (e.g., digital censorship). In introducing his founding study about contemporary Indian independent cinema, Devasundaram also argues: “The nation is currently undergoing a tumultuous neoliberal restructuring characterized by a commitment to consumer capitalism, foreign multinational investment, and an inexorable thrust towards a global free market economy. These liberalization-induced vicissitudes in the Indian nation-state are punctuated by a paradoxical retrenchment of right-wing Hindu religious and nationalist ideology.”¹² The Indian government is propelling neoliberal-nationalist agendas in film, media, art, and culture. As a result, NFDC is also being shaped in an increasingly contesting and conflicting manner—driven by the neoliberal and hyper-nationalist goals of the Modi government. Therefore, this chapter reveals the implications of this juxtaposition in shaping NFDC and its impact on India’s contemporary independent film production culture.

This chapter is divided into four parts, beginning with contextualizing the NFDC and discussing the evolving mandates of the organization toward alternative cinemas in India. The second section discusses the economic conditions of the 1990s and the tactics adopted by NFDC to adapt to neoliberal policies, thereby transforming itself into becoming profitable and contributing to the discourse of commercially viable independent cinema at NFDC. This section

¹¹ Ronald H. Coase, “The Market for Goods and the Market for Ideas,” *The American Economic Review* 64, no. 2 (1974): 385, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1816070>.

¹² Devasundaram, *India’s New Independent Cinema*, 2.

also demonstrates that the organization's adaptation of neoliberal policies resulted in a complex and symbiotic relationship with Bollywood and the private sector of the Indian film industry. The third part examines the role of the state in constructing a more globally acceptable independent film culture in India, and how the shifting mandates contributed to the rise of transnational culture for independent filmmaking, from pre-production and production to circulation and distribution. However, this transnational culture originates from and exists in the interest of the national film industry and culture. The last section discusses how the NFDC contributes to the government's efforts in leveraging its "soft power" through cinema. This section also discusses the structural conditions and heightened regulatory frameworks because of the rise of right-wing nationalism in India. The nationalism in the governance of film and media now intersects with the spirit of creative entrepreneurship and commercialism, leading to a "regulated" free-market system for independent filmmaking in India. Thus, this chapter reveals the continuities and discontinuities in the operations of NFDC, and how they contribute to the present landscape of India's transnational independent film production culture. The organization promotes and encourages the independent filmmaking community to negotiate values of commercialization, creative entrepreneurship, and transnational art film culture, resulting in combining funding from international subsidies/co-production treaties, and private investors, and studios. In doing so, NFDC negotiates between changing economic, political, and technological conditions, shaping the culture of Indian independent filmmaking and the attitudes of its community.

This chapter thus views NFDC as part of the media industries, which are defined as sectors that produce, manage and circulate intellectual property.¹³ In the seminal work, *Media Industries*,

¹³ Gillian Doyle, *Understanding Media Economics*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles, California ; London: Sage, 2013).

Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren provide an overview of transformations and changes that shaped film and media industries, arguing they found themselves constantly in flux, and therefore, they adapt and respond to external changes such as the rise of neoliberal economic policy, growth of an international middle class, dramatic changes in social interaction because of the internet, and shifting definitions and roles of labour in the digital age. Additionally, they argue trade treaties and other economic and geographical agreements led to more regional and transnational collaborations in globalized media cultures.¹⁴ The cultural institutions have also reorganized themselves and adapted to the present landscape of media convergence, technological development, and global exchange. John Hill and Nobuko Kawashima underline how changing economic, technological, cultural, and political forces shape the film policies of states globally.¹⁵ Film festival scholar Skadi Loist summarizes the impact of neoliberal and corporatization on the film festival network.¹⁶ Loist argues the rise of neoliberalism drove a major shift from the welfare state to privatization within the arts and culture sectors. Governments viewed culture as crucial in the development of national identity and, therefore, supported it enormously through public funding. However, this “ideological shift” promotes a neoliberal corporate “value-generating creative industry,” which affects film festivals and cultural institutions.¹⁷ This trend increased after

¹⁴ Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren, *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method* (Chichester, West Sussex ; Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 1.

¹⁵ John Hill and Nobuko Kawashima, “Introduction: Film Policy in a Globalised Cultural Economy,” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 22, no. 5 (October 19, 2016): 667–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2016.1223649>.

¹⁶ Skadi Loist, “The film festival circuit: Networks, hierarchies, and circulation,” in *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*, eds. by Marijke de Valck, Brendan Kredell, and Skadi Loist (London: Routledge, 2016), 58.

¹⁷ Loist, “The film festival circuit,” 58.

the 2008 financial crisis, which further diminished funding opportunities in the cultural sector.¹⁸ Similarly, this case study shows the impact of neoliberal-national forces on the policies of NFDC and Indian independent filmmaking writ large.

Therefore, a critical political economy of media industries approach is useful in studying NFDC, its behaviour and its impact on India's independent filmmaking culture. The political economy approach investigates the operations of media organizations and their products in the economic and political contexts in which they exist.¹⁹ In this way, it focuses on the questions of power, regulation, and ownership. According to media industry studies scholars, Daniel Herbert, Amanda Lotz, and Aswin Punathambekar, the political economy approach examines the features of the nation-state, such as its media system, if it operates in a democratic or authoritarian context, if it is a private or publicly held traded commercial enterprise, or if it receives funding from the government to support the public interest. This includes laws which allow or limit certain forms of ownership and content, as well as international trade or copyright agreements, that influence the political economy of media industries.²⁰ Media industry scholars Daniel Herbert, Amanda Lotz and Aswin Punathambekar argue that the scholarship using a political economy approach has a long history dating back to mid-20th century, but it undoubtedly includes an examination of the shifts that occurred due to the globalization of media economies. The research about the 1990s particularly examines the consolidation of media ownership (from a multitude of competitors to a few) and conglomeration (from a single industry player to holdings across multiple industries).²¹

¹⁸ Loist, "The film festival circuit," 58.

¹⁹ Matthew Freeman, *Industrial Approaches to Media* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 87, <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-55176-4>.

²⁰ Herbert, Lotz, and Punathambekar, *Media Industry Studies*, 92.

²¹ Herbert, Lotz, and Punathambekar, *Media Industry Studies*, 30.

For example, this study cites important works in this context such as Ben H. Bagdikian's *The New Media Monopoly* (2004) which critically questioned how the mergers and acquisitions led to increased control by a few owners, as well as Jennifer Holt's research in *Empires of Entertainment* (2011) that showed how regulatory shifts contributed to increased consolidation in the 1990s.²² Post-globalization, the critical political economy approach in the media industry scholarship entails a critique of larger corporations and states in their goals of concentrated media ownership, control, and profit.

In their book, *Understanding Media Industries*, Timothy Havens and Amanda Lotz offer a sophisticated framework to study the political economy of media organizations, which can be productively applied to the NFDC. Havens and Lotz organize their analysis into three aspects: mandates, conditions, and practices. The first section, *mandates*, concentrates on an analysis of the primary goals of the organization and the rationale for its operation. The second level of the framework examines the various *conditions* under which the media industry operates. These conditions are usually broader than individual companies and regulate the behaviour of the media industry. This includes regulatory, economic, and technological conditions that are larger than the organization itself. The last level is an examination of *practices* which Havens and Lotz describe as the everyday roles of organizations and individuals in the media industries.²³ They argue that all these levels affect each other, especially working conditions and the texts produced. I apply this

²² Ben H. Bagdikian, *The New Media Monopoly*, [Revised and updated edition] (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004); Jennifer Holt, *Empires of Entertainment: Media Industries and the Politics of Deregulation, 1980-1996*, Book Collections on Project MUSE (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2011) quoted in Herbert, Lotz and Punathambekar, *Media Industry Studies*, 30.

²³ Amanda D. Lotz and Timothy Havens, *Understanding Media Industries*, Second edition. (New York; Oxford University Press, 2017), 24.

model to an examination of NFDC's mandate, conditions, and practices in order to contextualize them in the larger political-economic structures of the Indian film industry.

This framework is productive in studying the complexities of NFDC because it is an institution that is constantly negotiating between its artistic, political, and business goals in the age of media convergence. In his foundational work, *The Cultural Industries*, David Hesmondhalgh argued media industries are high-risk businesses and aim to minimize risk and maximize profits. According to Hesmondhalgh, the behaviour of cultural industries is “complex, ambivalent and contested” because of their high risks, and they are more inclined “to support conditions in which large companies and their political allies can make money.”²⁴ Similarly, the NFDC operates in a high-risk environment due to changing political, economic, and technological conditions as they influence our media industries worldwide. NFDC has a relative or “circumscribed agency” because, on one hand, it negotiates its policies and practices to reduce risk, outsource and generate profits with limited public funds, and on the other, it remains an active agent in facilitating the agendas laid by the central government for film and media policies. Thus, this chapter emphasizes the complex and sometimes ambivalent nature of NFDC as reflected in its mandates, conditions, and practices. This chapter focuses on the first two aspects of the mandates and conditions of NFDC vis-à-vis the development of India's contemporary independent cinema and its transnational film culture. The third aspect involves an examination of its day-to-day practices, the role of creative labour and their working conditions, which will be discussed in the next chapter, focusing on the study of the state-sponsored film market, Film Bazaar as organized by NFDC annually. This chapter investigates the mandates of NFDC within the larger industrial contexts and

²⁴ David Hesmondhalgh, *The Cultural Industries* (London: SAGE Publications, 2012), 8-16.

the political-economic conditions of current India, which shape the organization and its support for independent filmmaking culture.

Based on Caldwell's "industrial-cultural" method described in the introduction, this chapter collects and analyzes "semi-embedded" texts emanating from NFDC's website, annual reports, trade publications, government and industry reports, as well as "publicly disclosed deep texts" such as published media interviews, as well as public debates in national/international newspapers and popular press to gain information about the organization, independent filmmaking, government policies and larger Indian film industry. The results from "publicly disclosed deep texts" such as the popular press (e.g., *The Hindu*, *The Quint*, *The New Yorker* etc.) reveal some criticism about the NFDC's operations, as well as the larger impact of the right-wing government on freedom of expression and independent filmmaking. The "fully embedded texts" such as the interviews expressed varying responses about the impact of the right-wing government on the NFDC. Those who make up the higher or permanent positions (i.e., managers, head and directors) at NFDC were less inclined to discuss the impact of the political party on NFDC.²⁵ Conversely, those in contractual and flexible job positions at NFDC (e.g., film programmers, coordinators, and consultants) or who left the organization exhibited a greater interest in discussing the ramifications of the right-wing regime or the existing structural challenges of the institution. Aparna, a senior staff member of NFDC expresses in our interview: "The government is the sole owner [of NFDC], and they have the right to tell what to do in terms of administrative functioning and financial

²⁵ During the interview process, significant challenges were encountered in interviewing current managers and members of the management team. In some cases, junior workers were explicitly denied permission to be interviewed.

functioning. But in terms of creativity, I have not experienced interference.”²⁶ While the former marketing consultant, Shraddha Chauhan, reveals that changes in the political party entailed changes in the activities and workings of the NFDC.²⁷ In the study of media industries, Caldwell notes that it is further crucial to identify the speaker because those at the top of the hierarchy tend to manage information for personal or professional advantage, promotion, and branding purposes.²⁸ Moreover, while the interview responses differ in opinions, contemporary debates persist regarding the rise of right-wing nationalism affecting India’s democratic values, film, media, and even academia. In April 2022, thirteen academic fellows also resigned from the Australia India Institute (AII) of the University of Melbourne, claiming a lack of academic freedom and the institute’s reluctance to publish articles, which criticize the ruling party.²⁹ On January 20, 2023, a debate ensued after the PM Modi government banned the BBC documentary, *India: The Modi Question* and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (I&B) prevented its online circulation by blocking the link. However, it became difficult to control viewership, with screenings being held by students at various universities.³⁰ Students were detained over organizing the screening, which was referred to as “unauthorized gatherings” at Jamia Milia University in Delhi.³¹ The regulatory structures under the PM Modi government have been an ongoing

²⁶ Aparna, personal interview, June 4, 2021.

²⁷ Shraddha Chauhan, personal interview, June 3, 2021.

²⁸ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 3.

²⁹ “What an Academic Freedom Debate Says About Australia-India Relations,” accessed April 22, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/04/what-an-academic-freedom-debate-says-about-australia-india-relations/>.

³⁰ Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, “India Stiffens Censorship, Blocking BBC Documentary Critical of Modi,” Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, accessed June 17, 2023, <https://www.asiapacific.ca/publication/india-stiffens-censorship-blocking-bbc-documentary-critical>.

³¹ “Students Detained over BBC Modi Documentary,” *BBC News*, accessed June 17, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-asia-india-64407921>. The documentary has recently become available again on the American digital library, Internet Archive. *The Modi Question - 1 - BBC Documentary India Episode 1*, accessed June 17, 2023, <http://archive.org/details/the-modi-question-bbc-documentary-india-episode-1>.

conversation within India and internationally. The time is thus right to examine the role and interventions of the Indian government concerning film and cultural studies. Therefore, this chapter will take these concerns into consideration in this chapter to contextualize the operations of NFDC and the independent filmmaking culture.

Brief Background and Evolving Mandates of NFDC

The governance of the media comes under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (I&B) in India. According to the I&B, NFDC is a public sector company established under the Companies Act of 1956. According to its official mandate, the company's primary task is to plan, promote and organize the integrated and efficient development of the Indian film industry based on the national economic policies and goals sometimes set by the Central Government from time to time. The company's stated objectives are to: "Embody the spirit of service to the film industry, promote film excellence, and develop cutting-edge infrastructure and equity products in the audiovisual and related fields."³²

The company has three additional objectives as described on its website: "to develop talent and to facilitate the growth of Indian cinema in all languages through productions and co-productions, script development and need-based workshops," "to promote Indian culture through cinema in India and overseas," and "to build a lean and flexible organization responsive to the needs of the Indian film industry."³³ These goals show the NFDC incorporates national, cultural,

³² "Film Documents Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India," as of September 30, 2020, <https://mib.gov.in/film/films-documents>. "As of March 31, 2019, the company has 75 full-time employees (17 executives and 58 non-executives); the authorized and paid-up capital is Rs. 45.50 crores and 45.39 crores respectively. The Government of India has a 100% stake."

³³ "NFDC: Cinemas of India," accessed September 17, 2020, <https://www.nfdcindia.com/company-profile/>.

economic, and transnational objectives into their mandates. The NFDC was restructured under the supervision of the former managing director, Ninalath Gupta and saw steady growth since its restructuring in 2006-2007. In 2015, Gupta resigned due to ideological conflicts after the rise of the nationalist ruling party in India.³⁴ At the present moment, the role and control of the government have increased exponentially in several cultural institutions and especially, in the Hindi-language film industry. Throughout this chapter, I substantiate the claims that the policies and practices at NFDC are at the juncture of—cultural, economic, national (even nationalist) and transnational objectives and how they impact the organization and thus India’s independent filmmaking culture. In what follows, I begin with a discussion of the evolving - even - contesting mandates of NFDC and its relationship with alternative cinema since the 1960s.

In her seminal book, *Art Cinema and India’s Forgotten Futures*, Indian film historian Rochona Majumdar traces the history and origins of NFDC.³⁵ Majumdar argues that the history of the Film Finance Corporation (FFC) can be divided into three phases, with the first phase between 1960-68 when the corporation lacked clarity in its mandates; 1968-76, which saw the rise of “The Indian New Wave”; and the final phase, 1976-80, culminating with the merger of FFC with Indian Motion Picture Export Corporation, leading to the formation of National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) which continues to exist till today.³⁶ According to Majumdar, in the first phase, when FFC was established in 1960 on the recommendation of the S.K. Patil Film Enquiry Committee Report of 1951, it funded films in a disorganized manner with no clear mandate. In its

³⁴ Shraddha Chauhan, personal interview, June 3, 2021.

³⁵ Majumdar, *Art Cinema and India’s Forgotten Futures*, 70. Note: Rochona Majumdar’s book was published in 2021 and I came across it after drafting the first chapter in 2022. The work, however, helped substantiate and strengthen some of the arguments about the shifting mandates of NFDC.

³⁶ Majumdar, *Art Cinema and India’s Forgotten Futures*, 70.

initial years from 1960 to 1968, the company was placed under the Ministry of Finance and then moved to the I&B in 1964.³⁷ FFC produced over 50 films by established filmmakers by 1968, including three by Satyajit Ray, and it expanded to control distribution and exports by 1973. By 1974, it became the “channelling agency for all imported celluloid raw stock” and started importing foreign films for local distribution in 1975.³⁸ The company merged with the former Indian Film Export Corporation (IMPEC) and Film Finance Corporation (FFC) in 1980. The firm underwent restructuring and emerged as the central agency to encourage the production of “good cinema” in the country through NFDC until today.³⁹

Since its inception, the NFDC has funded/produced over 300 films in over 21 regional languages, many of which have earned wide acclaim and won national/international awards. FFC arguably had developmental and national interests in promoting a specific category of the art-house cinema of India, which the state described as “good cinema.” By this, they meant a kind of cinema that was distinct from mainstream popular cinema; however, it conformed more to styles and forms of international art-house cinema. The 1951 report of the Indian government’s Film Enquiry Committee defined art cinema of the time as “serious, good, parallel cinema” and believed that “commercial cinema” had damaging effects on the Indian audience.⁴⁰ The Film Enquiry Committee was set up by India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, post-independence in 1949 with the aim of supporting the film sector through institutional changes.⁴¹ This led to the

³⁷ Majumdar, *Art Cinema and India’s Forgotten Future*, 70.

³⁸ Ashish Rajadhyaksha, *Indian Cinema in the Time of Celluloid: From Bollywood to the Emergency*, South Asian Cinemas (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 2009), 234.

³⁹ Majumdar, *Art Cinema and India’s Forgotten Futures*, 70.

⁴⁰ Rochona Majumdar, “Art Cinema: The Indian Career of a Global Category,” *Critical Inquiry* 42, no. 3 (March 2016): 583, <https://doi.org/10.1086/685605>.

⁴¹ “Jawaharlal Nehru and the Rise of Indian Cinema,” Sahapedia, accessed June 26, 2023, <https://www.sahapedia.org/jawaharlal-nehru-and-rise-indian-cinema>.

development of the Film Facilitation Company (FFC, which later became NFDC), the Film and Television Institute of India in 1960 and the National Film Archives of India in 1964 with the aim of educating and developing a national identity. Therefore, this period reflected the Nehruvian developmental and national approaches to support alternative cinema through the FFC.⁴²

Today, NFDC employs the terms “good cinema,” “art cinema,” “independent” and “Indian cinema” interchangeably throughout the discourses produced in the press, annual reports, and interviews. However, the company also recognizes that Indian cinema is diverse and acknowledges contributing to regional cinemas through production to “showcase India’s most imaginative, diverse and vibrant film culture.”⁴³ The tendency to equate “art cinema” with “national cinema” began in the 1960s globally assembling the “great directors” as the “proof of national importance.”⁴⁴ The Indian government also established FFC in the same period with similar “national” objectives to support Indian cinema. However, the concept of “national cinema” entails criticism—especially in India because the label of “Indian” or “national” cinema by the state masks the existence of a myriad of regional films under one umbrella. In the article, “The Concept of National Cinema,” Andrew Higson, a transnational/national film policy scholar, further provided a significant point of departure to complicate the usage of the term by interrogating questions about the content, form and production, exhibition, distribution, and reception of the “national films.” It is worth quoting the extensive list of questions proposed by Higson:

⁴² “Jawaharlal Nehru and the Rise of Indian Cinema,” Sahapedia, accessed June 26, 2023, <https://www.sahapedia.org/jawaharlal-nehru-and-rise-indian-cinema>.

⁴³ “Annual Report 2014-15,” 10, accessed June 26, 2023, https://www.nfdcindia.com/pdf/Annual%20Report%202015_lrs.pdf.

⁴⁴ Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover, *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 7.

First, there is the possibility of defining national cinema in economic terms, establishing a conceptual correspondence between the terms ‘national cinema’ and ‘the domestic film industry,’ and therefore being concerned with such questions as: where are these films made, and by whom? Who owns and controls the industrial infrastructures, the production companies, the distributors, and the exhibition circuits? Second, there is the possibility of a text-based approach to national cinema. Here the key questions become: what are these films about? Do they share a common style or worldview? What sort of projections of the national character do they offer? To what extent are they engaged in ‘exploring, questioning and constructing a notion of nationhood in the films themselves and in the consciousness of the viewer?’⁴⁵

These questions help understand the usage of national cinema at economic (i.e., ownership and regulatory structures) and textual (e.g., narrative content and style) levels in the operations of FFC. For example, the FFC mostly funded the cinema of the 1960s in India. The initiatives of the FFC aimed at national development and welfare by providing financial aid through loans to good quality “small budget, off-beat films” in 1968 based on the Nehruvian policies.⁴⁶ Therefore, most films were national in terms of production but transnational in terms of their influences, style, and circulation. The interventions of FFC, however, led to what Madhav Prasad calls a “state-sponsored movement”—a developmental and national project, popularly known as “The Indian

⁴⁵ Andrew Higson, “The Concept of National Cinema,” *Screen* 30, no. 4 (December 1, 1989): 36, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/30.4.36>.

⁴⁶ “Jawaharlal Nehru and the Rise of Indian Cinema,” Sahapedia, accessed June 26, 2023, <https://www.sahapedia.org/jawaharlal-nehru-and-rise-indian-cinema>.

New Wave” in 1969 with the production of films such as *Uski Roti* (Mani Kaul), *Bhuvan Shome* (Mrinal Sen), *Sara Akash* (Basu Chatterjee) and *Kanku* (Rathod).⁴⁷ However, the company failed to release many “New Wave” films due to its poor distribution system.⁴⁸ In the article, “Art Cinema,” Aparna Frank discusses the state-backed films of the “Indian New Wave” won many national awards and represented Indian cinema on the international film festival circuit.⁴⁹ Frank adds that the “Indian New Wave” was neorealist, artistic, and humanist–based on international influences of art-house cinema and *auteurs* such as Jean Renoir, Vittorio De Sica, Akira Kurosawa, Federico Fellini, and Michelangelo Antonioni.⁵⁰ The current wave of NFDC-facilitated films still exhibits traces of this style of cinema. The “New Wave” filmmakers had a “humanist” political vision to contribute to India’s national history, and the films dealt with issues such as poverty, caste, gender, and partition.⁵¹ But the FFC-made artistic films seldom had dissident origins because of the “Congress-Left political alliance.”⁵² Therefore, when FFC was restructured into NFDC in 1980, it was rooted in the process of regulation and nationalization of the film industry, in accordance with the goals set by then Prime Minister and leader of the Congress Party, Indira Gandhi. Majumdar cites the company’s five major objectives in the 1975-76 report:

- (i) promote and assist the film industry by providing, affording or procuring finance or other facilities for the production of films of a good standard and quality with a view to raising the standards of films produced; (ii) to develop

⁴⁷ Madhava Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction*, Oxford India Paperbacks (Delhi ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 121.

⁴⁸ Ira Bhaskar, “The Indian New Wave,” in *Routledge Handbook of Indian Cinemas* (Routledge, 2013).

⁴⁹ Aparna Frank, “Art Cinema,” *BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies* 12, no. 1–2 (June 1, 2021): 23–26, <https://doi.org/10.1177/09749276211026077>.

⁵⁰ Frank, “Art Cinema,” 23-26.

⁵¹ Frank, “Art Cinema,” 23-26.

⁵² Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film*, 121.

the film in India into “an effective instrument for the promotion of national culture, education, and healthy entertainment” and this is to be achieved by granting loans for modest but offbeat films of talented and promising people in the field; (iii) since the role of the corporation is more promotional than of commercial nature, to give due consideration to making films of artistic merit; (iv) to extend the activities of the corporation to other two inter-related fields of exhibition and distribution, so that the films financed by Corporations gets a fair chance of release; (v) to acquire theatres on lease in the four metropolitan cities.⁵³

In her study, Majumdar shows that the company was more focused on a national, promotional, and developmental/welfare side than “commercial” by “producing films of artistic quality.” The other important goal of the organization was to contribute to the sectors of “distribution and exhibition,” but it frequently failed to do so.⁵⁴ In the above passage, the state aims to support the “good quality” or “off-beat” to “promote and assist” the national film industry. As described in the opening of this chapter, another important production was *Gandhi* (1984) – a politically motivated production by NFDC to restore the global image of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi after the controversial Emergency 1975-77, which had damaged the nation and its artistic and cultural heritage including, cinema. Indira Gandhi was also working as the Minister for Information and Broadcasting at the time. Indira Gandhi read the script, approved changes, and facilitated funding for the film through

⁵³ Committee on Public Undertakings, “Seventy Ninth Report on Film Finance Corporation of India Limited Pertaining to Ministry of Information and Broadcasting,” October 23, 2017, 3, <http://10.246.16.188:80/handle/123456789/58416>.

⁵⁴ Majumdar, *Art Cinema and India's Forgotten Futures*, 71.

NFDC, which received a large sum of \$6.5 million for the production of the film from the Indian government.⁵⁵ This example also demonstrates that the practices of NFDC were rooted in national branding and its continuation in the present era will be further explored in this chapter. In the 1980s, the objectives of NFDC further combined developmental and commercial interests, as expressed in the following report:

Set up in 1980 with the merger of the erstwhile Film Finance Corporation and Indian Motion Pictures Association (IMPEC), the mandate of the National Film Development Corporation, as laid down by the Government of India in the Memorandum and Articles of Association of NFDC, can be broadly divided into developmental and commercial/business. The same would guide the strategy of NFDC with regard to its activities in the forthcoming five years and on a long-term basis.⁵⁶

Despite the integration of commercial interests, film historian Sudha Tiwari examined NFDC's role in supporting New Indian Cinema (1960-80), revealing that the company fully financed and produced notable films in the 1980s. For example, *Ghare Baire* (1984), *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro*, *Party* (1984, Govind Nihalani), *Om Dar Ba Dar* (1988, Kamal Swaroop), among others.⁵⁷ Tiwari adds that the company had been in losses since the mid-1970s and the crisis increased in the 1990s due

⁵⁵ Dwyer, "The Case of the Missing Mahatma," 349–76.

⁵⁶ "Annual Report 2011-12," 27, accessed June 5, 2023, https://www.nfdcindia.com/pdf/annual_11-12.pdf.

⁵⁷ Sudha Tiwari, "From New Cinema to New Indie Cinema: The Story of NFDC and Film Bazaar," in *Indian Cinema Beyond Bollywood: The New Independent Cinema Revolution*, ed. Ashvin Immanuel Devasundaram (Routledge, 2018), 32. Further, an important work to be given additional attention to integrate in future research about the NFDC is Tiwari's latest work, *The State and New Cinema in Contemporary India 1960-1997* (Routledge India, 2023).

to liberal reforms.⁵⁸ Subsequently, the NFDC adapted to the neoliberal policies in supporting independent cinema and contributed to the growth of the Indian film industry in the mid-2000s.

NFDC Negotiating the Neoliberal Pressures

This section explores the shift from developmental to neoliberal approaches and reveals the market-oriented tactics adopted by NFDC post-liberalization. In doing so, it demonstrates the complex relationship of NFDC with the neo-liberalization, Bollywood, and corporatization of the Indian film industry, emerging as a supporter, critic, and contributor to these industrial structures simultaneously. India recovered from the economic crisis in the 1990s when globalization had pushed nations towards a free-market economy and deregulation.⁵⁹ PM Manmohan Singh opened the economy through neoliberal policies and Bollywood began dominating globally. Industry scholar Ganti argues that the neoliberal policies and granting of “industry” status by the government of India in 1998 accelerated the growth of Bollywood globally. The status allowed the flow of funds as loans from banks and other financial bodies. India’s economy became more connected to the global capital market because of gaining industry status. Hollywood studios such as Columbia Pictures, Sony, Disney, Warner Brothers, and 20th Century Fox began co-producing Indian films. Large Indian companies formed new production houses and distribution companies—Birla Group, Tata Group and Reliance Industries. This led to the film and media

⁵⁸ Tiwari, “From New Cinema to New Indie Cinema,” 32.

⁵⁹ India, newly independent, was aiming for self-efficiency based on the inward-looking and isolationist strategic policies of the first five decades since its independence in 1947, with protectionist foreign policies focusing primarily on its land borders with countries such as Pakistan, China, and Bangladesh. It made sense to the then Prime Minister of India, Jawahar Lal Nehru, to adopt a non-alignment policy for India because the country had just become independent, and the aim was to protect its national sovereignty. However, the Nehru-Indira “self-sufficient” government resulted in lower economic growth.

corporatization of the industry. The state announced tax incentives and policies such as exemption from entertainment tax to stimulate the tourism and exhibition sector. The policies allowed the opening of multiplexes in many cities post-2000. Between 2002 and 2011, the number of multiplexes rose from 80 to around 1000 screens. The rise of multiplexes also led to the formation of a new cinema, which is commonly referred to as “multiplex cinema” made specifically for the “niche” or Indian urban middle-class audience. However, this kind of cinema exists within the dominant production and distribution structures of Bollywood.⁶⁰

The construction of a “multiplex cinema” within the neoliberal structures, dominated by Bollywood and media corporation, serves as an example of the economic pressures that alternative cinema, as well as NFDC, went through post-liberalization. Over the years, the NFDC adapted to such economic changes and became entwined in the structures of Bollywood, corporations, and the private sector. As discussed in the previous section, when the initiatives of the government were leaning towards welfare and socialism in the Nehruvian era (1947-64), NFDC mostly funded the filmmakers of the parallel cinema movement and later provided loans and, even fully financed a few films a year until the 1980s. However, political-economist Pendakur, writes, the industry suffered from “uneven development, chaotic production conditions,” and corruption in the government.⁶¹ By the 1990s, NFDC had incurred major losses and Bollywood became a tool of “soft power” after the state adopted neo-liberal policies and granted the “industry” status. The NFDC was restructured amidst increased “Bollywoodization” and corporatization in the mid-2000s.

⁶⁰ Ganti, *Bollywood*, 47–48.

⁶¹ Pendakur, “India’s National Film Policy,” 148.

The changes that came between in the mid-2000s were significant and Ninalath Gupta, the former managing director, is known for restructuring and turning NFDC into a profit-making organization. In what follows, I discuss the navigational tactics the company employed to minimize risk and increase its profits to adapt to the neoliberal structures, and how this results in working closely with Bollywood, and ultimately contributing to the private sector after its 2007 restructuring. According to Gupta, the company was known for producing and funding “off-beat” films since its inception, but its role was supposed to be more developmental from the beginning:

NFDC’s mandate was not to produce films. It was set up to facilitate the growth of the industry. It’s a very broad-based agenda. The articles of association do not mention film production. They talk about building theatres and promoting Indian cinema in India and abroad. Yet, in the last 30 years, NFDC is only known for producing films.⁶²

In our interview, Aparna, a senior staff member at NFDC, argues that the central government labelled it a “sick company.”⁶³ The art-house cinema was subject to economic pressures in the renewed policies of NFDC, therefore, the emphasis shifted to co-producing through public-private partnerships. NFDC’s 2006-07 annual report reveals that the focus was on generating profits: “without deviating from its mandate of promoting the Cinemas of India,” the company will only finance the first feature film of filmmakers, “subject to budgetary caps” and will “co-produce small budget, good quality commercially viable films with partners within India and abroad, on a public-

⁶² Uditia Jhunjhunwala, “Nina Lath Gupta: Why the Film Bazaar Works,” *Mint*, November 15, 2014, <https://www.livemint.com/Leisure/ry7sif0CXofv8FCtp5JpeI/Nina-Lath-Gupta-Why-the-Film-Bazaar-works.html>.

⁶³ Aparna, personal interview, June 4, 2021.

private partnership basis, with a view to generating revenue.”⁶⁴ According to Aparna, the films produced and financed by NFDC seldom made money: “The kind of films that were financed at FFC neither earned profits nor were geared toward commercial success. When I joined, we shifted the focus away from sole production to distribution and fostering of partnerships.”⁶⁵ Aparna thus notes that the company was not generating profits:

Neither production nor distribution is a revenue generator. One big change post-2007 was to produce films of solely debutant filmmakers and co-produce films with returning filmmakers, who have secured 50% of the funding.⁶⁶

While reducing the funding and initiating public/private partnerships can be seen as a tactic to respond to the neoliberal structures of the industry, Aparna carefully argues that the lack of profit was not the main reason for NFDC to choose private partnerships over the public production of independent films. She instead says that the production culture has changed, and therefore, it was not effective to produce films with state funds:

In the past, the traditional model for producing a film involved creating the film first and then seeking distributors in the market. However, the industry has shifted significantly, and this was the primary reason for setting up Film Bazaar. Today, there is a desire to be involved in a film’s development from its inception, to gain insight into its potential outcome. This contrasts with simply being handed a finished product and being instructed to distribute it,

⁶⁴ “Annual Report 2006-07,” 7, accessed June 5, 2023, https://www.nfdcindia.com/pdf/annual_06-07.pdf.

⁶⁵ Aparna, personal interview, June 4, 2021.

⁶⁶ Aparna, personal interview, June 4, 2021.

as this approach is not productive for distribution. Therefore, I firmly believe in increasing partnerships within the private sector.⁶⁷

In this passage quoted above, Aparna discussed how the NFDC adapted to the global production changes by participating in the entire industry food chain—from pre-production and production to circulation, exhibition, and distribution. This contributed to India’s independent film production culture, making it more transnational and collaborative. The next section examines the role of NFDC in constructing a transnational culture for independent filmmaking since 2007. The state played a vital role in shifting the attitudes of independent filmmaking to balance the values of commerce and art cinema. Aparna encouraged the commercial agenda in their discourses and practices in the re-establishment of the company, and the new aim was “to continue curating high-quality projects while also being mindful of the commerce and the commercial viability of these projects.”⁶⁸ The following Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (I&B) report on film development discusses the goals of NFDC and its corporate mandate:

As a film development agency, NFDC is responsible for facilitating growth in areas/segments of the film industry that not only have a cultural bearing but also in areas which cannot be taken by private enterprises due to commercial exigencies thereby facilitating a balanced growth of the industry. However, even while its role in the Indian film industry is largely

⁶⁷Aparna, personal interview, June 4, 2021.

⁶⁸ “Nina Lath Gupta On Why NFDC Believes In The Cause Of Independent Indian Cinema!,” *Jamuura Blog* (blog), November 10, 2015, <http://www.jamuura.com/blog/nina-lath-gupta-on-why-nfdc-believes-in-the-cause-of-independent-indian-cinema/>.

developmental, as a public sector enterprise, NFDC also has a corporate mandate and is responsible for generating a healthy balance sheet.⁶⁹

The above I&B report suggests continuing contradictions in the current mandates of NFDC, which is divided between its developmental goals as a public unit and its corporate objectives as a company.⁷⁰ NFDC thus differs from other cultural institutions in India for several reasons. First, it does not function under the Ministry of Culture, and second, it has a corporate mandate, which requires that the company generates annual revenue, which it frequently fails to do. Thus, it may not be entirely dependent on the I&B financially, but it frequently borrows money from the Ministry and needs permission for various other business activities. NFDC is not an autonomous body, and it works closely with the government's vision of the Indian film industry and culture. However, as a corporate body, NFDC has continually adapted to the changing economy and technology since the 1990s and developed its infrastructure towards a more global company. This ability to adapt distinguishes it from many Indian cultural institutions that struggle to navigate and respond to global changes.⁷¹

NFDC adapted additional market-oriented tactics for financial stability post-restructuring in the mid-2000s. The company reduced staff size, and administrative costs, as well as reorganized its offices.⁷² Aparna, a senior staff member, adds: "We shut down many of our offices. We went from having eight offices to having three regional offices and one main office in

⁶⁹"Annual_Report_2015-16," 235, accessed November 5, 2020, https://mib.gov.in/sites/default/files/Annual_Report_2015-16_0.pdf.

⁷⁰ The previous section discusses NFDC's evolving and contesting mandates since its establishment.

⁷¹Yudhishthir Raj Isar, "Cultural Policy in India: An Oxymoron?," in *The Routledge Handbook of Global Cultural Policy*, Ed. Victoria Durrer, Toby Miller, Dave O'Brien, (London: Routledge, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315718408-31>, 490.

⁷² "Annual report 2008-09," 7, accessed June 22, 2023, https://www.nfdcindia.com/pdf/annual_08-09.pdf.

Bombay.”⁷³ Additionally, the company produced campaigns for government clients while increasing partnerships with the private sector, including media companies, investors, Bollywood, as well as the international art cinema community. In our personal interview, the head film programmer Deepti DCunha asserted that Gupta transformed NFDC, turning it from an old government office “where files are falling” into a sophisticated corporate office.⁷⁴

To meet its corporate objectives, NFDC, however, negotiates between the cultural and economic pursuits of the nation, as well as the national and political interests of the ruling party. It frequently engages in cultural activities by producing short films, documentaries, musical anthems, radio series, and electronic media advertising for government and non-government agencies, and these serve as the major source of revenue for the company. Thus, it works across media, taking advantage of the media convergence culture, “releasing media campaigns across Television, Radio, Digital Theatres, Web, Mobiles, and Public LCDs for over 30 government clients.”⁷⁵ In 2009, the I&B approved NFDC to run media campaigns on behalf of various ministries.⁷⁶ This was one way in which NFDC generated revenue, according to Aparna.⁷⁷ The tactics resulted in the company's growth, as described in the annual report of 2011-12:

Following the restructuring of the company in 2010 through internal reforms, diversification of business activities, and infusion of additional equity by the Government of India, the corporation has been on a steady growth chart. Its

⁷³ Aparna, personal interview, June 4, 2021.

⁷⁴ Deepti DCunha, personal interview, July 13, 2021.

⁷⁵ “Annual Report 2014-15,” 11, accessed June 1, 2022, https://www.nfdcindia.com/pdf/Annual%20Report%202015_lrs.pdf.

⁷⁶ “Review-by-the-Government-on-the-Working-of-(NFDC)-for-the-Year-2012-2013.Pdf,” accessed June 1, 2022, [https://www.nfdcindia.com/pdf/Review-by-the-Government-on-the-working-of-\(NFDC\)-for-the-year-2012-2013.pdf](https://www.nfdcindia.com/pdf/Review-by-the-Government-on-the-working-of-(NFDC)-for-the-year-2012-2013.pdf).

⁷⁷ Aparna, personal interview, June 4, 2021.

turnover has increased from Indian Rupee (INR) 17.31 Crores in FY 2008-09 to INR 255.21 Crores in 2011-12, resulting in a Compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 392% over four years. While the employee turnover ratio increased from INR 9 Lakhs to INR 239 Lakhs in the same years, Profit before Tax of NFDC in FY 2011-12 stands at INR 4.08 Crores as against a loss of INR (-)10.30 Crores in FY 2008-09.⁷⁸

The above passage illustrates some of the ways NFDC was able to transform itself and gain financial success through various business-oriented tactics. However, in June 2013, the I&B changed its Electronic Media Policy to the Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity as the only agency to run media campaigns for the Central Government. As a result, turnover and profit declined at the company.⁷⁹ This decision was changed again in 2015, anticipating this would resume the growth and profitability trajectory of NFDC; therefore, NFDC could place advertisements on behalf of the central government, and it allowed NFDC to function according to the business model or the “Revival Plan” proposed and authorized in 2010.⁸⁰ Therefore, the advertisement policy changes serve as an example of internal issues between NFDC and the I&B.⁸¹

In these tensions and negotiations between cultural, economic, and national forces, the film institutions and their policies sometimes find themselves working in a symbiotic relationship with the very hegemonic structures that they try to contest. For example, the British film policy was tailored to combat the economic power of Hollywood, and the idea of national remains central to

⁷⁸ “Annual Report 2011-12,” 7, accessed June 1, 2022, https://www.nfdcindia.com/pdf/annual_11-12.pdf.

⁷⁹ “Annual Report 2014-15,” 18.

⁸⁰ “Annual_Report_2015-16,” 17, accessed June 3, 2022, https://www.nfdcindia.com/pdf/AnnualReport-2015-16_lrs.pdf.

⁸¹ Guneet Monga, personal interview, June 14, 2021.

national governments in implementing film policy. However, the national is re-articulated in favour of transnational Hollywood production, facilitating “the subsidy of big-budget Hollywood productions through the use of tax credits.”⁸² In the same vein, the NFDC reinvented its policies in response to economic globalization to support the national cinema and its film industry. However, its policies in its establishing years were rooted in supporting “good” alternative cinema against commercial cinema.⁸³

While Europe and Canada contend the domination by Hollywood, independent or art cinema in India confronts challenges from its Hindi-language domestic film industry in Bombay, popularly known as Bollywood. Since its reestablishment in 2007, the policies work in a close relationship with the private sector and Bollywood. In the 2014 Knowledge Series at the Film Bazaar, NFDC collaborated with Bollywood by inviting Karan Johar, CEO of Dharma (a major Bollywood production house), to deliver a Master class on Indian cinema. As documented in its annual report 2019-20, the NFDC also increased celebrity engagement with Bollywood in its government campaigns. For example, Akshay Kumar, a famous Bollywood star, aided in promoting the launch of FASTag, an electronic toll system developed by the National Highway Authority of India.⁸⁴ Kumar has been labelled “Hindutva's poster boy” in Caravan magazine.⁸⁵ This suggests NFDC negotiates its relationship with Bollywood for leverage and

⁸² Hill and Kawashima, “Introduction,” 670.

⁸³ Pendakur, “India's National Film Policy,” 146.

⁸⁴ “Annual Report 2019-20,” 43, accessed June 22, 2023, https://nfdcindia.com/pdf/AnnualReport2019-20_WEB.pdf.

⁸⁵ Bhavya Dore, “Akshay Kumar’s Role as Hindutva’s Poster Boy,” *The Caravan*, accessed June 22, 2023, <https://caravanmagazine.in/reportage/akshay-kumar-role-hindutva-poster-boy>. Carvan is a reputed magazine that provides long-form narrative journalism focusing on Indian politics and culture. It was also awarded the Shorenstein Journalism Award for 2023 at Stanford University in recognition of its coverage of the curtailment of democracy and human rights in India in spite of “intimidation and threats from the government.”

survival. Aparna, a senior staff member asserts that the current objectives of the NFDC do not aim to compete with the private sector anymore: “It [NFDC] is an institution that is on the periphery of the industry and its role is to step in, where there’s a gap in the industry, and not the need to substitute something that’s already happening in the private sector.”⁸⁶ This suggests that the binaries between the public/private sectors dissolved during its restructuring in 2007. The Indian film industry always had self-entrepreneurial origins that comprise “independent contractors or freelancers” flourishing independently of state aid for decades.⁸⁷ However, NFDC subsidized and supported many art films during the parallel cinema movement. The renewed policies focused on international and public-private partnerships, shaping the production and distribution culture of independent films in India. The organization provided infrastructure to the new independent filmmaking community in the development stages; however, in terms of production, NFDC has financed only a handful of film projects of first-time filmmakers in the past decade and has internationally co-produced a few films, such as *The Lunchbox* in 2013 and *Chauthi Koot* in 2015. NFDC’s current policies show discontinuities, as they encourage free-market policies and creative entrepreneurship and no longer provide the means to contest the dominance of Bollywood, corporatization, or concentration of media ownership; rather, they contribute to these trends. In our interview, Aparna further emphasizes that commerce is part of the creative industry, and one aim of the organization is to educate the artist “who tends to be apologetic” about the commercial aspect of filmmaking. In the same conversation, Aparna’s comments demonstrate NFDC is at the nation’s service:

⁸⁶Aparna, personal interview, June 4, 2021.

⁸⁷Ganti, *Bollywood*, 60.

I believe that NFDC has no business being in business if you're going to use government money to be in business, then you are not doing the role of a government institution and a welfare state. Your job is to supplement and facilitate the growth of that sector of the private, not to compete with the private sector and always maintain that.⁸⁸

Aparna's statement shows that the organization viewed neoliberal structures and commercialization as a "welfare" tool for both the creative and national economy. This underscores the continued relevance of the nation-state in the globalized world because commercialization and marketization ultimately are beneficial for the "national interest."⁸⁹ The policies of NFDC are framed under the given predetermined national and global economic conditions. According to the McKinsey 2016 Report, India's continued economic growth stems from steps undertaken after the 1991 fiscal crisis when it introduced structural reforms in the industry, trade, and public sector for macroeconomic stabilization. As a result of introducing such reforms, India's economy became more market-oriented, encouraging the role of private and foreign investment. Such liberal economic reforms have contributed extensively to the country's growth, making it one of the central economic forces in Asia.⁹⁰ Therefore, NFDC as a state-sponsored institution contributes to the national economic growth and development of the country by facilitating more private and foreign partnerships. The state works in subordination to the private sector, contributing to the national (even nationalist) neoliberal project. The company is

⁸⁸Aparna, personal interview, June 4, 2021.

⁸⁹ Des Freedman, *The Politics of Media Policy* (Polity, 2008), 9.

⁹⁰ "India's Ascent: Five Opportunities for Growth and Transformation," McKinsey, accessed June 6, 2022, <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/employment-and-growth/indias-ascent-five-opportunities-for-growth-and-transformation>.

involved in the defensive growth of its domestic film industry and local culture and encourages its filmmaking community to become “independent” of the state. This is evident in the ways it addresses the problems of producers and directors of the 1980s, i.e., equipping the independent film community with professional and technical skills through international mentorship programs, labs, and workshops and facilitating collaborations with the private sector and international film festival community. The producers interviewed for the study also believe in individuality, creativity, and entrepreneurship to “make it” in the film industry. The values of the interviewed producers demonstrate the role of the state in cultivating a class of creative entrepreneurs. These belief systems are consequences of a neo-liberal faith in individualism and creative self-entrepreneurship, which will be discussed further in the final chapter about creative producers and the precarity of working in transnational film culture.

NFDC continued adapting and negotiating its policies, subordinating the needs of a neoliberal-national economy. In this process, the activities of NFDC contribute to the increased power of corporatization and concentration of media ownership due to the government’s alignment with neoliberal policies. The neoliberal strategies are frequently celebrated because they provided new avenues of production, distribution, and exhibition to the independent films of India. Over the years, the increased free-market policies however created a concentration of corporatization and media ownership by the “Big Six” —just four companies—Comcast, Walt Disney, 21st Century Fox/NewsCorp and Time Warner Holdings, at present, produce 90% of the world’s media content.⁹¹ Similarly, India is one of the biggest media markets in the world, and a handful of media

⁹¹ “Indian Brand Equity Foundation Media and Entertainment Report 2018,” accessed November 18, 2020, http://india.mom-rsf.org/uploads/tx_lfrogmom/documents/422-1592_import.pdf.

companies dominate in India. Within the national Hindi language market, Dainik Jagran, Hindustan, Amar Ujala and Dainik Bhaskar each have three out of four readers (76.45% readership share), and this trend extends to regional media.⁹² Similarly, Yashraj Film Studios, Eros Entertainment Ltd., and Red Chillies Entertainment Pvt. Ltd. remain key players in the film industry.⁹³ The policies of NFDC shifted in favour of neo-liberal faith in the free market and creative entrepreneurialism by synthesizing commerce, art and creativity in their policies, discourses, and practices. As previously noted, Tiwari examined the role of FFC/NFDC in supporting the Indian New Cinema (1960-80) and the contemporary indie cinema of the 2000s. Tiwari describes the journey of FFC/NFDC by citing Mani Kaul's *Uski Roti* (1969), which struggled to get a theatrical release while Ritesh Batra's *The Lunchbox* (2013) was a box-office success. According to Tiwari, this cinematic shift symbolizes the "journey of a nation-state from being a developmental state to a neoliberal facilitator state."⁹⁴ However, it must be noted that the global success of *The Lunchbox* was an exception, and it was distributed by one of Bollywood's dominant production houses, Dharma Productions. In contrast, NFDC-facilitated transnational art-house films and co-produced films lack wider distribution and seldom generate profits. Therefore, the commercialization spirit of the organization has not yet yielded financially successful transnational films.

Bollywood and the private sector frequently produce and distribute NFDC-supported films. For example, *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* (2015) was part of the Screenwriter's lab in 2011, later

⁹² Anuradha Bhattacharjee, Liwei Wang, and Tapasya Banerjee, "Media Ownership and Concentration in India," in *Who Owns the World's Media?: Media Concentration and Ownership around the World*, eds. Noam, Eli M., and The International Media Concentration Collaboration. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), Oxford Scholarship Online, doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199987238.003.0025.

⁹³ "Indian Brand Equity Foundation Media and Entertainment Report 2018," 15.

⁹⁴ Tiwari, "From New Cinema to New Indie Cinema," 25.

produced and distributed by Yashraj Films, one of the largest production and distribution companies in Bollywood. Shyam Benegal, who led the “middle cinema” genre in the 1970s, approached a production company such as UTV Motion Pictures for the financing and distribution of his Hindi film *Welcome to Sajjanpur* (2008). Paradoxically, NFDC critiques privatization in the Indian film industry:

The film sector in India suffers from a lack of access to institutional funding across the value chain. Shortage of funds and rising cost with only studios as a source of capital for most films (institutional funding being limited to very few films), has been an issue. The bulk of Indian films continue to be funded primarily by private investors, rendering the business of film product somewhat unplanned without a long-term vision of growth. This is a major disadvantage in optimizing the potential of the Indian film sector.⁹⁵

The above statement scrutinizes the lack of state funding and the dominance of the private sector in limiting the growth of the industry. Although the NFDC documents these challenges in their annual reports, it noticeably refrains from addressing concerns pertaining to national film policies or the corporatization of media in public discussions or interviews. This suggests underlying tensions and conflicting objectives in the organization’s operations. The 2013-14 Annual Report of NFDC shows Bollywood production houses and corporatization have transformed “the pre-production phase of movies” and the industry “has become more structured, with greater emphasis

⁹⁵“Annual Report 2016-17,” 46, accessed June 10, 2021, https://nfdcindia.com/pdf/Annual%20Report%202016-17_lrs.pdf.

given to the acquisition of script, planning, budgeting and financing activities.”⁹⁶ Simultaneously, the organization criticizes “the concentration of power in the hands of a few top actors and now directors and technicians, a phenomenon prominent across all language markets, but even more in Bollywood and the South-Indian film industry is unsustainable a long-term perspective as the high talent acquisition costs leads to higher risks and in certain cases impact the return.”⁹⁷ Moreover, NFDC’s involvement with the private sector contributes to “Bollywoodization,” corporatization and conglomeration within the Indian film industry. In the same vein, the state participates in the capitalist system as “any other big private entrepreneur” in the Mexican film industry.⁹⁸ NFDC is, therefore, not a key player in the market per se, but it still plays the role of an active agent to contribute to the growth of the private sector based on the economic goals and strategies that are set by the government. This section thus demonstrated that NFDC simultaneously supports, critiques, and contributes to neo-liberalization, “Bollywoodization” and corporatization of the Indian film industry.

In doing so, NFDC shaped the attitudes of the independent filmmaking community to adopt a more individualistic and creative entrepreneurial approach based on neoliberal-national film policies in its restructuring. This shifted independent film production culture to negotiate between the values of commerce/art, and become increasingly dependent on the private sector, Bollywood, alternative and international funding support. Contemporary independent cinema also became diverse and varied. It encompasses films—from the ultra-low-budget and radical to the art-house,

⁹⁶“Annual Report 2013-14,” 29, accessed September 8, 2020, [https://www.nfdcindia.com/uploads/Annual%20Report%202014\(English\)_lrs.pdf](https://www.nfdcindia.com/uploads/Annual%20Report%202014(English)_lrs.pdf).

⁹⁷ “Annual Report 2013-14,” 29.

⁹⁸ Peter H. Smith, “El imperio del PRI,” quoted in Rodrigo Gomez, “The Mexican Film Industry 2000–2018: Resurgence or Assimilation?,” *Political Economy of Media Industries: Global Transformations and Challenges*, ed. Randy Nichols, Gabriela Martinez, (New York: Routledge, 2019), 60.

off-beat, in-between or “mindie” (combining features of mainstream Bollywood and indie cinema). In his pioneering work on Indian contemporary independent cinema, Devasundaram discussed the diverse funding, exhibition, and distribution models of current independent filmmakers.⁹⁹ The diverse practices of independent filmmakers, with some working in proximity to Bollywood and private studios, and others exploring crowdfunding, international co-production markets and film festival circuits, demonstrate an individualist approach to independent filmmaking. This lack of collective vision and combined resources hinders the development of a collective independent film movement in the industry. During our interviews, a few Indian producers expressed that contemporary independent cinema confronts greater challenges compared to the parallel cinema movement, due to global changes resulting in a lack of a collective movement, infrastructure, and resources.¹⁰⁰

As developed in the introduction of this dissertation, it is additionally important to define the degree of independence and distinguish between various contours of local and transnational independent filmmaking to understand the implications of these various industrial models. For example, local filmmakers who work closely with Bollywood and media corporations frequently make films that align with mainstream/commercial cinema values, as seen with directors such as Anurag Kashyap (*Dev D*, 2009), Dibakar Banerjee (*LSD*, 2010) and Abhinay Deo (*Delhi Belly*, 2011). First-time filmmakers who develop their films with international mentors through NFDC, international festivals, and funding support frequently make films that echo western art-house cinema values. Some examples of these filmmakers include Anup Singh (*Qissa*, 2013), Gurvinder

⁹⁹ Devasundaram, *India's New Independent Cinema*, 80-108.

¹⁰⁰ Aditi personal interview, July 21, 2021; Kabir, personal interview, August 1, 2021.

Singh (*Chauthi Koot*, 2015), and Chaitanya Tamhane (*Court*, 2014). International film festivals exhibit both kinds of independent cinemas. However, the former exists in closer proximity with Bollywood's ecosystem (e.g., inter-textual elements, songs, and funding), and the latter has become deeply embedded in the strong *auteur* style of filmmaking culture, which resonates with the international festival circuit, and the NFDC, as well as the film festival network facilitates and perpetuates it. The adoption of market-oriented policies in its restructuring in 2007, thus also contributed to the formation of a transnational film production culture for contemporary independent filmmaking. The next section discusses NFDC's role in the development of transnational independent filmmaking over the past decade. The next chapter will further examine the implications of transnational programming and curation through the case study of NFDC's Bazaar.

Making Transnational Independent Film Culture

NFDC has emerged as an important node in creating a transnational culture for contemporary independent cinema and contributing to its increasing presence globally. Previous research shows that the involvement of a nation-state in cinema can have a significant effect on fostering and influencing film production through incentives, awards, subsidies, and censorship.¹⁰¹ As noted in the previous section, the FFC/NFDC has been the central agency for many governmental decisions about the Indian film and media industry since the 1960s. The Indian film industry flourished, however, without state support for decades, except for the parallel cinema

¹⁰¹ Shohini Chaudhuri, *Contemporary World Cinema: Europe, the Middle East, East Asia and South Asia* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/005236152>.

movements in the 1960s, when the state provided financial and infrastructural support to non-commercial cinema through the FFC/NFDC. The organization is today known for facilitating, producing, and co-producing alternative cinema in several regional languages. NFDC supports the “production of films in various Indian languages.”¹⁰² NFDC shapes the production, distribution, and consumption of independent films both nationally and internationally, with the potential to shape our understanding of Indian independent cinema for world cinema, global film festival circuit and market.

Indian Independent films have become “transnational,” crossing borders at the pre-production, production, distribution, and exhibition stage, but this transnational film culture is associated with the nation because it emerges from the endeavours of the state which has promotional and “national” motivations. In the article, “Concepts of Transnational Cinema Revisited,” cultural studies scholar Song Hwee Lim emphasizes that geographical boundaries cannot confine certain national ambitions and they are “increasingly projected onto the global stage” through transnational means in such a way that transnational trends become inevitable.¹⁰³ Lim views the national and the transnational as “mutually parasitic” concepts as “liaisons” and “flirtations”; they are “tied, annexed and reciprocally kept hostage together.”¹⁰⁴ The NFDC-facilitated independent films that become transnational are an excellent example of this phenomenon.

¹⁰² “NFDC: Cinemas of India,” accessed April 21, 2022, <https://www.nfdcindia.com/apply-now/>.

¹⁰³ Song Hwee Lim, “Concepts of Transnational Cinema Revisited,” *Transnational Screens* 10, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25785273.2019.1602334>.

¹⁰⁴ Jungbong Choi, “Of Transnational-Korean Cinematrix,” *Transnational Cinemas* 3, no. 1 (May 22, 2012): 3, https://doi.org/10.1386/trac.3.1.3_7.

The NFDC facilitated the development and exhibition of several independent films in the international festival network over the past decade. Most independent films that travel to international festivals go through one or the other programs of the state-sponsored organization, NFDC.¹⁰⁵ The independent films that have received infrastructural support through NFDC programs became transnational, though they have become intertwined with the national ambitions of the state to establish itself as a global player in the market. Transnational independent films (including internationally co-produced independent films such as *The Lunchbox* (2013), *Qissa* (2013), *Masaan* ('Fly Away Solo', 2015), *Chauthi Koot* ('The Fourth Direction,' 2015), their filmmakers and producers received international training and/or participated in the state-sponsored programs of NFDC's annual film market, Film Bazaar such as Screenwriter's Lab and Work-in-Progress (WIP) Lab and the Co-production market. These programs offer opportunities to develop scripts and receive mentorship from experts in the international film industry and festival professionals. NFDC selects a maximum of 5 feature-length films for the WIP lab to be screened at Film Bazaar for further development. The company also organizes Film Bazaar annually to invite film buyers and sellers from around the world.¹⁰⁶ Through Film Bazaar, the films go to various international co-production markets; some are co-produced with multiple different countries, while some receive development funds from the international film festival circuit, where they go through various stages of script development, and the films frequently get circulated in the international festival circuit.

¹⁰⁵ I employ the term "independent" to refer to the transnational films that break the conventions of mainstream popular Bollywood cinema, which are star-driven, big-budgeted and contain elaborate song and dance musicals, and happy endings—irrespective of the production funding structure of films. Though this dissertation does not focus on the textual analysis of transnational independent films, I discussed the usage of the term "independent" in introducing this dissertation.

¹⁰⁶ Film Bazaar India, "Film Bazaar India," accessed September 18, 2020, <https://www.filmbazaarindia.com/>.

Thus, Indian independent filmmaking culture is becoming more transnational at all levels, from pre-production to exhibition and distribution with the aid of the programs and activities of the NFDC. However, the roots of these transnational film policies can be traced back to 1977 when the company began facilitating co-productions between foreign and Indian filmmakers.¹⁰⁷ NFDC has been increasingly engaging in fostering international partnerships through international co-productions and cross-cultural activities between India and Europe since the mid-2000s. An example of this approach is the initiative known as “Prime Exchange (2009-2013),” which was funded by the European Commission. The program provided space for Indian and European producers to co-produce films through script development, market analysis, sales, and distribution support.¹⁰⁸ Thus, transnational initiatives provide opportunities for independent filmmakers to work with international film communities. In our interview, NFDC’s senior staff member Aparna emphasized that “Indian cinema was functioning in a very insulated manner. We focused largely on connecting younger Indian filmmakers with the international film fraternity.”¹⁰⁹

NFDC-assisted independent films that travel through the international film festival circuit exhibit the “residual” of art cinema. Historically, this shows the long “liaison” between Indian and European art cinema, as well as between the FFC-made films during the “Indian New Wave” which carried transnational influences in aesthetics and style, as discussed in the background section. Indian independent film-making continues to be informed by the narrative paradigm of the art film, which is seen in films such as *Ship of Theseus* (2012) and *Kaaka Muttai* (2015) in

¹⁰⁷ Tiwari, “From New Cinema to New Indie,” 30-31.

¹⁰⁸ “PrimeXchange 2013,” Issuu, accessed September 8, 2020, https://issuu.com/filmbazaarindia/docs/primexchange_2013.

¹⁰⁹ Aparna, personal interview, June 4, 2021.

international film festivals.¹¹⁰ However, contemporary independent films that travel through the international film festival circuit are relatively more popular outside India.¹¹¹ Does that mean these films resonate less with domestic audiences because they are largely mentored and produced through the film festival circuit, their western film programmers, and festival funding programs? Or is it simply the dominating presence of Bollywood, with its massive marketing and high-budget filmmaking, that overshadows the alternative cinemas? The streaming platforms (e.g., Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Disney+Hotstar) initially challenged the dominating presence of Bollywood. They contain content from world cinema, which altered the taste of the Indian audience, especially during the pandemic years. However, in the same period, Bollywood films seem to have dominated the streaming platforms because the producers could not screen mainstream films theatrically because of COVID-19. The limits and limitations of streaming platforms will make an interesting topic for further research.

The transnational efforts of the NFDC were driven by its primary objectives of re-establishing the company itself and contributing to the promotion and growth of the national film industry. NFDC enabled the circulation of transnational capital, labour, and resources, which minimizes risk and increases opportunities for economic growth for the domestic film industry and the company itself. NFDC has focused on international mentorship programs, professional training, and the international co-production market to not only facilitate collaboration with the global film and media culture and increase its national presence at major international film festivals but ultimately to pursue the possibilities of creating employment opportunities and growth in the

¹¹⁰ Frank, "Art Cinema," 23-26.

¹¹¹ Anand Chandrasekhar, "Selling Indie Films to an Indian Audience," SWI swissinfo.ch, accessed June 15, 2021, https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/zurich-film-festival_selling-indie-films-to-an-indian-audience/40840868.

domestic film and media sector. According to the 2016 industry report, *Indywood*, the Indian film industry, needs skill enhancement and film tourism “to ensure growth and profitability.”¹¹² As a result, NFDC also focuses on skill development, which will be discussed further in the following chapter. Additionally, NFDC aims to “monetize” and promote Indian culture globally through its online streaming platform, “Cinemas of India.” The I&B Strategic Plan (2011-17) authorized “the digital restoration of 77 acclaimed feature films with an outlay of Rs.10.00 crores so that the content can be monetized.”¹¹³ According to the Annual Report 2012-13, NFDC made the restored films available on its website in Pay-per-View format by launching an online platform called “Cinemas of India” for the distribution of alternative films:

The brand Cinemas of India (COI), a multi-faceted distribution platform to facilitate showcasing of Indian cinema. COI released *Anhey Ghorhey Da Daan*, *As the River Flows*, *Maya Bazaar*, *Gangoobai*, *The Good Road & Tasher Desh* and re-released 34 digitally restored films including *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaron* and *Salaam Bombay* which were also released in various theatres in 2012 & early 2013. NFDC took this significant step to promote Indian cinema by setting up a Video On Demand (VOD) platform, www.cinemasofindia.com to upload and stream Indian films across geographical, social & cross-cultural barriers.¹¹⁴

¹¹² “Indywood The Indian Film Industry,” 32, accessed September 8, 2020, <http://producersguildindia.com/Pdf/Indywood%20The%20Indian%20Film%20Industry.pdf>.

¹¹³ Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Government of India, “Strategic Plan 2011-17,” accessed April 17, 2023, <https://mib.gov.in/documents/budget-and-plan/strategic-plan>.

¹¹⁴ “Annual Report 2013,” 8, accessed May 31, 2022, <https://www.nfdcindia.com/pdf/AnnualReport2013.pdf>.

This online platform serves as an example of how NFDC manages its global, cultural, and corporate mandate while taking advantage of technological innovations and the previously earned symbolic capital of filmmakers of the Parallel Cinema movement such as Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak and Mrinal Sen. These activities reveal the continuities within the organization as it exploits the national “residual” culture, aiming to celebrate its past in the present.¹¹⁵ The platform, “Cinemas of India,” also represents a tactic to develop the film distribution system, which the organization has previously struggled to achieve. The restoration of films was also a step towards the restoration of the image of NFDC in the independent filmmaking community of India. In our interview, the senior staff member Aparna discloses the complaints of several Indian art cinema filmmakers who had previously collaborated with NFDC between the 1960s and 80s. These filmmakers made allegations that their films were lost within the organization, resulting in limited visibility and distribution.¹¹⁶ NFDC had lost its credibility. The restoration and distribution of these films proved to be an effective strategy for earning social capital in the industry. States become frequently involved in “public performance of power, often in the form of residual from much earlier periods [...] for presenting a version of national heritage.”¹¹⁷ The restoration of “national” films for the global world became one of the major steps of NFDC to bridge the gap between NFDC and the contemporary independent filmmaking community.

This section explored how the global initiatives of NFDC have been tied to promoting and growing the national film industry, and how NFDC-facilitated independent films became more

¹¹⁵ Raymond Williams and Jim McGuigan, *Raymond Williams on Culture and Society: Essential Writings*, ed. Jim McGuigan, (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2014), 306.

¹¹⁶ Aparna, personal interview, June 4, 2021.

¹¹⁷ Williams and McGuigan, *Raymond Williams on Culture and Society*, 306.

transnational in their style, production, and exhibition. In this way, the organization also emerges as a “gatekeeper” in promoting Indian independent cinema transnationally through its state-sponsored programs, motivated by national aspirations of creating a “good quality” transnational independent cinema. Nitin Govil argues that national acts as a marker in the organization and operations of media industries. For example, countries commonly provide incentives for local and international cinema production as part of national policies. Govil asserts countries continue to “think nationally” even when cultural production is global.¹¹⁸ Similarly, this discussion shows that NFDC, as the central institution for the development of Indian cinema, “thinks nationally” to exploit global and local capabilities to contribute to the national film industry, as well as to promote Indian cinema in the world. The transnational independent filmmaking culture thus emerges out of these national endeavours. What are then the implications of the NFDC “thinking” nationally, and becoming a “producer” (i.e., mostly through infrastructure, script labs, and programming) of the independent cinema of India? The next part develops further on this national mandate of NFDC and explores its implications in the context of the Hindu nationalist regime.

National Branding and “Soft Power”

The politics of national cinema can be reduced to a marketing strategy, an attempt to market the diverse as, in fact, offering a coherent and singular experience.

—Andrew Higson, “The Concept of National Cinema,” 37.

¹¹⁸ Nitin Govil, “Thinking Nationally: Domicile, Distinction, and Dysfunction in Global Media Exchange,” in *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method*, ed. Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren (Chichester, West Sussex ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

The primary aim of NFDC is to plan, promote and develop the Indian cinema, culture, and film industry nationally and internationally.¹¹⁹ For this reason, NFDC habitually participates in the global film festival circuit to promote Indian cinema since its inception. The annual reports reveal the NFDC engages with major international film festivals and markets, such as the Cannes Film Festival, Venice Film Festival, European Film Market (Berlin) and American Film Market. It encourages interviews with trade publications such as *Screen* and *Box Office India* for promotional and marketing purposes, as well as to increase collaborations with A-list festival programmers, international sales agents/distributors, and journalists.¹²⁰ NFDC highlights the increasing international collaborations of the Indian film industry in their annual report 2016-17:

The growing success of Indian Cinema internationally, coupled with increasing collaboration between Indian filmmakers and International Producers along with the greater acceptance of Indian artists in mainstream Hollywood content, be it on the silver screen or television, demonstrates the growing contribution of the Indian Film Industry as a significant tool of soft power. This notion of soft power takes a critical perspective given its power to draw audiences freely to India. The presence of a strong Indian diaspora further acts as a catalyst to unleash the power of Indian entertainment and film content worldwide.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ “NFDC: Cinemas of India,” accessed September 17, 2020, <https://www.nfdcindia.com/company-profile/>.

¹²⁰ “Annual Report 2016-17,” 23, accessed September 8, 2020, https://nfdcindia.com/pdf/Annual%20Report%202016-17_lrs.pdf.

¹²¹ “Annual Report 2016-17,” 45.

The above passage reveals that NFDC believes the Indian cinema is a potential tool of “soft power” globally, and it aims to enhance the Indian film industry’s previously established function of “soft power” in the global market. This is expressed more directly in the report: “NFDC’s competitive position in the Film Industry is derived from its core competency of being a broad-based film development company that leads in the development, production, distribution, and marketing of all forms of films in various Indian languages, thus showcasing the nation’s soft power globally and adding to the equity of the brand “Incredible India.” ”¹²² NFDC here affirms its contribution to the vision of the government and supports campaigns to enhance “soft power” such as “Incredible India,” which was launched in 2002 to promote tourism and brand India globally until today. In this way, NFDC also aims to contribute to it through its international collaborations, global presence, and transnational films. While the term “soft power” is commonly associated with Bollywood, NFDC’s activities expand and shape the existing global image of India, thereby contributing to the nation’s “soft power.” While NFDC employs the term “soft power,” the senior staff member Aparna emphasizes her distaste for the term in our personal interview and refrains from discussing its usage by other staff members of the NFDC.¹²³ Joseph Nye coined the term “soft power” to describe the ability of a country to influence the larger world without coercion. Nye proposes that power is associated with the “country’s culture, political ideals and policies.”¹²⁴ When other nations view these values as legitimate and democratic, it enhances the “soft power” of a country. However, Shashi Tharoor, an Indian National Congress intellectual and politician

¹²² “Annual Report 2014-15,” 37, accessed June 21, 2023, https://www.nfdcindia.com/pdf/Annual%20Report%202015_lrs.pdf.

¹²³ Aparna, personal interview, June 4, 2021.

¹²⁴ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, 1st ed. (New York: , 2004.), 14, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015058283899>.

cites the example of Mahatma Gandhi's ideas of non-violence and its vast appeal worldwide that permeated India's path to freedom to argue that the notion of "soft power" existed in the Indian culture even before the term was even coined in the West.¹²⁵ Tharoor further argues "India must remain the land of the better story: a society with a free press and a thriving mass media, where the people whose creative energies are daily encouraged to express themselves in a variety of appealing ways [...] this is not about propaganda."¹²⁶

NFDC contributed to a similar vision of "soft power," envisioning the transnationalization of film production as an instrument to establish a national voice within world cinema. Vikramjit Roy, former General Manager of Film Production at NFDC and current Head of the Film Facilitation Office of the I&B in India asserts that "through all our ventures, we wish to form a strong connection between all these cinemas to create a single brand called Indian Cinema."¹²⁷ The 2011-12 annual report of NFDC also highlights the symbolic value of film culture on a global stage by stating that "film is an important tool of socio-cultural change and of soft diplomacy, it is the considered view of the corporation that greater leverage needs to be given to this sector both domestically and on a global scale."¹²⁸ The transnational infrastructure of NFDC to support small-budgeted independent films was designed in the service of strategic national branding and economic growth of the national film industry in India. The nationalist shift in Indian politics emerged after the rise of the 'Hindutva' ideology of the Modi government. The current government is leveraging India's transnational film culture as a tool of "soft power" to further its political

¹²⁵ Shashi Tharoor, "India as a Soft Power," *India International Centre Quarterly* 38, no. 3/4 (2011): 340, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41803989>.

¹²⁶ Tharoor, "India as a Soft Power," 338.

¹²⁷ "Beyond Bollywood," accessed September 24, 2020, <https://punemirror.indiatimes.com/others/leisure/beyond-bollywood/articleshow/31687869.cms>.

¹²⁸ "Annual Report 2011-12," 7, accessed May 31, 2022, https://www.nfdcindia.com/pdf/annual_11-12.pdf.

interests in building diplomatic relationships internationally, as well as pushing Hindu nationalist agendas institutionally. Before examining the implications of this shift on NFDC, the subsequent pages provide an overview of the rise of Hindu nationalist ideology and its continuing impact on India's politics, film, media, and culture.

Media and scholarly literature discuss the cultural implications of the 'Hindutva' ideology and comment on the ongoing active debates about freedom of expression and the death of democracy in India under the Hindu-led nationalist regime of Modi. 'Hindutva' is a political doctrine that departs from the essence of an Indian constitution that is rooted in secularism. 'Hindutva' is an ideological push toward a homogeneous Hindu culture, which is set against Article 51A of The Constitution of India that demands: "to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities."¹²⁹ The rise of the Hindu-nationalist agendas of India affects this "soft power" of India, which now exists in this nationalist political context. The definition of "soft power" originated from its secular and diverse culture and values. The country has a 5,000 years old history of cross-cultural connections; the rich palimpsest of Indian culture comprises the ancient civilization of the Indus Valley; the ancient lifeways of Sanskrit, the Islamic cultures of Turks, Afghans, and Mughals, as well as the Western modernity of European colonizers.¹³⁰ Therefore, the first Prime Minister of India, Jawahar Lal Nehru, promoted nationalism through the notion of "unity in diversity." However, the massive shift in Indian politics toward the Hindu right-

¹²⁹ "Article 51A in The Constitution Of India 1949," accessed November 28, 2020, <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/867010/>.

¹³⁰ Judith E. Walsh, "Introduction," in *Brief History of India, (2nd Edition)* (New York: Infobase Learning, Facts On File, 2011).

wing challenges this pluralist and secularist vision of India. India has never witnessed the rise of the Hindu-nationalist culture hitherto with such intensity, scale, and force.

The current PM Modi has placed Hindu nationalist allies at the heads of important universities and institutions.¹³¹ In 2015, approximately fifty writers, including filmmakers, returned their national awards to show their revolt against increasing intolerance and political interventions in appointments at cultural institutions in India.¹³² Indian political economy and politics scholar, Raju J Das examines “the ongoing attack on democracy and secularism” while arguing that “the right-wing government is placing fascistic Hindu nationalist ideologues in charge of the universities and cultural institutions.”¹³³ Das examines the “communal-political agenda” of the current regime and urges reflecting not only on electoral politics and its relationship to capitalism but also on the human condition in India, raising questions which are worth quoting here:

What does the electoral influence of right-wing political forces, in general, say about Indians as citizens of the country, and as just simple human beings? What does it say about India’s democracy and the institutions of the state that are supposed to protect the secular fabric of the constitution? How can a person kill someone next to her just because she may have different religious

¹³¹ “In India, Modi’s Policies Have Lit a Fuse,” *The New York Times*, accessed July 19, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/01/world/asia/india-modi-hindus.html>.

¹³² “Nearly 40 Awards Returned during Award Wapsi, Says Govt. Actual List Has 40 More,” *Catch News*, accessed November 30, 2020, <http://www.catchnews.com/india-news/nearly-40-awards-returned-during-award-wapsi-says-govt-actual-list-has-40-more-1486392266.html>.

¹³³ Raju J. Das, “The Hindu Right’s Nationalist Worldview and Democracy in India,” in *The Political Economy of New India* (Routledge, 2021).

views and engage in different religious rituals? How can one believe in the lie created by a few people that one is worse off because of his/her religion?¹³⁴

Political analysts believed Modi would leverage India's supposed "soft power" by focusing on cultural heritage and diaspora to influence regional and foreign policies.¹³⁵ In contrast to these beliefs, international relations and media scholar Ian Hall argues Modi leveraged India's "soft power" by reinventing its foreign policies based on "Hindu nationalist ideology."¹³⁶ This reinvention exists alongside its "failure to open up the country's economy [...], and its patchy record in bolstering India's hard power, despite its posturing during significant crises, like those that erupted at Doklam in mid-2017 and in Kashmir in early 2019."¹³⁷ The government further actively rewrites history by erasing the descriptions and identities of Muslim rulers in school textbooks and changing official place names from Muslims to Hindus. The attempt to disempower and obliterate Muslim minority communities in India has never been so potent.¹³⁸ Christophe Jaffrelot, an Indologist and expert in South Asian political economy, shows how Modi's politics combines a nationalist and populist agenda, leading India toward authoritarianism and ethnic democracy—a majoritarian community that oppresses Muslims and Christians. Modi's nationalist-populist politics frequently targets secularists, intellectuals, universities, and NGOs. Jaffrelot

¹³⁴ Das, "The Hindu Right's Nationalist Worldview and Democracy in India," 101.

¹³⁵ Howard Schaffer and Teresita C. Schaffer, "India: Modi's International Profile," *Brookings* (blog), November 30, 1AD, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/india-modis-international-profile/>.

¹³⁶ Ian Hall, *Modi and the Reinvention of Indian Foreign Policy*, *Modi and the Reinvention of Indian Foreign Policy* (Policy Press), 10, accessed November 24, 2020, <http://policy.press.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1332/policy.press/9781529204605.001.0001/upso-9781529204605>.

¹³⁷ Hall, *Modi and the Reinvention of Indian Foreign Policy*, 10.

¹³⁸ Jeffrey Gettleman and Maria Abi-Habib, "In India, Modi's Policies Have Lit a Fuse," *The New York Times*, March 1, 2020, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/01/world/asia/india-modi-hindus.html>.

argues that Modi's government has centralized power and continues to attempt to limit the power of institutions such as the Supreme Court.¹³⁹

Cultural nationalism has taken hold in India's film and media culture. Prakash Javadekar, the former Minister of Information and Broadcasting, emphasized that India needs to harness its "soft power" through Indian cinema.¹⁴⁰ Javadekar's interview, however, focused primarily on the examples from recent nationalist films of a well-known Bollywood star, Akshay Kumar, such as *Pad Man*, *Toilet Ek Prem Katha*, *Kesari*, and *Mission Mangal*.¹⁴¹ In the article, "New Myths for an Old Nation," Rachel Dwyer, an Indian film studies scholar, also comments on India's secular "soft power" and how it intersects with the Hindu nationalism of India: "This new vision of India seeks to remake it as a sacred homeland for Hindus rather than a secular republic."¹⁴² Dwyer notes there is a noticeable increase in self-censorship and a surge of hyper-nationalist films/war films, biopics and historical dramas in Bollywood within the last decade and cites examples of contemporary films such as *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* (2015), *Padmaavat* (2018), *Uri: The Surgical Strike* (2019) and *Manikarnika: The Queen of Jhansi* (2019). She argues that the Bollywood films attempt to justify war and state violence, in which the main protagonist acts as a defender of the nation and is willing to sacrifice his personal life and happiness. Dwyer discussion on the film,

¹³⁹ Christophe Jaffrelot, *Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691223094>.

¹⁴⁰ "Cinema Soft Power of a Strong India: Prakash Javadekar," *Deccan Herald*, December 23, 2019, <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/cinema-soft-power-of-a-strong-india-prakash-javadekar-788135.html>.

¹⁴¹ Additionally, Javadekar's speech also suggests neoliberal-nationalist principles underlying Indian film policies. Javadekar discussed the potential of foreign exchange and commercial gain from Indian cinema but also hinted at regulating streaming platforms by the I&B. The current government is increasingly controlling the film industry through new policy measures. Therefore, the aspect of media censorship is subsequently explored in this section.

¹⁴² Rachel Dwyer, "New Myths for an Old Nation: Bollywood, Soft Power and Hindu Nationalism," in *Cinema and Soft Power* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 192, <https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9781474456272.003.0010>.

Uri: The Surgical Strike (2019) is particularly intriguing because the film was a massive success and bears a striking resemblance of the actors to the current Indian Prime Minister, Modi, and the National Security Adviser, Ajit Doval. They oversaw the “surgical strikes” carried out against Pakistan following the attack on Uri in 2016. Vicky Kaushal, a Bollywood hero who began his film journey with indie films such as *Masaan* (2015), delivered a strong performance as Major Vihaan Singh Shergill—a “national military hero” and attracted a strong response and attention from the audiences, like the reaction of his men when he asks them about their spirit, or “josh,” in the film. The term “josh” (i.e. spirit) was used in the film and by politicians such as Manohar Parrikar and Nirmala Sitharaman, who were serving as the Minister of Defence during the time of the Pulwama attack, which was viewed as an attempt to capitalize on the Indian government's assertive military actions against Pakistan for electoral gain.¹⁴³ This reel and real-life semblance continued after the success of the film to exploit the nationalistic and patriotic sentiments of the Indian people and strengthen communal politics. During the inaugural ceremony of “The National Museum of Indian Cinema,” PM Modi addressed the gathering of Hindi film actors, directors, and other influencers by asking, “How’s the Josh?” in Mumbai. However, the response from major Bollywood actors and directors was apolitical, positive, and optimistic, discussing the creative opportunities and growth of the Indian film industry.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Dwyer, “New Myths for an Old Nation,” 199.

¹⁴⁴ “PM Modi Quotes Uri as He Asks ‘How’s the Josh’, Aamir Khan and Karan Johar Reply ‘High Sir’. Watch Video,” Hindustan Times, January 20, 2019, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/bollywood/pm-modi-quotes-uri-as-he-asks-how-s-the-josh-aamir-khan-and-karan-johar-reply-high-sir-watch-video/story-39tV0G3BCvuWIHB0XUDAgJ.html>.

Indian journalist Samanth Subramanian also remarks that Bollywood portrays “Hindu heroes and Muslim villains” since the rise of the Modi government.¹⁴⁵ In this context, PM Modi openly supported the highly controversial Hindi-language film, *The Kashmir Files* (2022), which traces the history of the exodus of Hindus from Kashmir in the early 1990s. While the exodus of Hindus took place, the film shows the Muslim population as the villain and Hindus as victims. The film critics also criticized the film for manipulating historical facts in a propagandistic manner.¹⁴⁶ The film strengthens PM Modi’s agenda of Hindu nationalist politics; it received state support after its release and became commercially successful. Criticism grew against the Modi-led BJP government for creating religious divides between Hindus and Muslims, and riots broke out in various states after the film's success.¹⁴⁷ Dwyer’s remarks in the article, “New Myths for an Old Nation” aforementioned pertain to the debate about *The Kashmir Files* (2022) because it asserts that “the Hindu nationalists promote the narrative of Hindus as victims of outsiders who are now claiming their rightful inheritance.”¹⁴⁸ Pratap Bhanu Mehta, an expert in Indian politics, similarly contends that Hindu nationalism’s alliance with authoritarianism weakens India’s democracy and its values.¹⁴⁹ Mehta adds that the Modi government altered Hinduism to form the ‘Hindutva’ ideology, which is based on creating the narrative of victimhood among the Hindu population and

¹⁴⁵ “When the Hindu Right Came for Bollywood | The New Yorker,” accessed April 17, 2023, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/10/17/when-the-hindu-right-came-for-bollywood>.

¹⁴⁶ “‘The Kashmir Files’ Is a Manipulative Propaganda Vehicle To Rouse Emotions Against Muslims,” *The Wire*, accessed July 19, 2023, <https://thewire.in/film/the-kashmir-files-manipulative-propaganda-vehicle-rouse-emotions-vivek-agnihotri-bjp>.

¹⁴⁷ “‘Hatred, Bigotry and Untruth’: Communal Violence Grips India | India | The Guardian,” accessed May 10, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/18/hatred-bigotry-and-untruth-communal-violence-grips-india>.

¹⁴⁸ Dwyer, “New Myths for an Old Nation,” 192.

¹⁴⁹ Pratap Bhanu Mehta, “Hindu Nationalism: From Ethnic Identity to Authoritarian Repression,” *Studies in Indian Politics* 10, no. 1 (2022): 31–47, <https://doi.org/10.1177/23210230221082828>.

pursuing political dominance over other communities.¹⁵⁰ The existing scholarship reveals that the criticism of India's national politics, specifically concerning the deteriorating democratic values with the rise of Hindu nationalism, is not solely limited to Western studies – Indian political economists, media scholars, specialists, and journalists have also articulated similar concerns.

The influence of Hindu nationalist politics has implications for NFDC and independent filmmaking culture in India. NFDC's current activities intersect with the national/nationalist goals of the government. The central government funds and commissions NFDC to make short films and events, which are symbolic of national unity and development. In its restructuring in the mid-2000s, NFDC began producing audio-visual content for government clients to meet its corporate objectives, as established in the previous section of this chapter, "Negotiating Neoliberal Pressures," therefore, this entailed contributing to the government's larger economic and educational campaigns, both nationally and internationally. Since the right-wing government rose to power in 2015, the recent activities of NFDC have contributed to an India of the Modi government, which marks a pragmatic shift in the conception and practice of "soft power" by India. In 2017, the committee of Parliament on official languages suggested that scripts be sent in Hindi to NFDC and that the films must later be dubbed or subtitled in Hindi for international film festivals. This shift is an example of the recent consolidation of the political right in India and its impact on NFDC.¹⁵¹ But the organization aims to expand regional cinemas through production and exhibition globally, under the program "Film Production in various Indian languages" – a means

¹⁵⁰ Mehta, "Hindu Nationalism," 31–47.

¹⁵¹ "Now, Regional Movies to Carry Hindi Subtitles or Be Dubbed," *The Trusted News Portal of India*, accessed November 4, 2020, <http://www.coastaldigest.com/now-regional-movies-carry-hindi-subtitles-or-be-dubbed>.

to exhibit India's diverse film culture.¹⁵² However, imposing Hindi is an attempt to erase the regional voices toward homogenized Indian culture under the Hindu nationalist regime. It sparked preceding debates over linguistic nationalism when the Home Ministry circulated the circular that "all ministries, departments, PSUs and banks, who have their official account on social media, should use Hindi, or both Hindi and English, but give priority to Hindi."¹⁵³ Further, the government assigned NFDC with the task to produce a video commercial and an anthem for the celebration of the Anniversary of Surgical Strike Day and execute a two-day live music performance "Prakram Parv" at India Gate to pay tribute to the Indian Army. National Highways Authority of India also commissioned NFDC to make 4 short films, titled "Various Achievements over 4 years."¹⁵⁴ The I&B report acknowledged and appreciated NFDC for these activities. The report notes that NFDC's most recent notable productions include "the advertisements commemorating 50 years of the 1965 Indo-Pak War Victory of the Indian Army, signature film of the Accessible India Campaign, Navy Day film of 2015, MyGov corporate film, brand film and celebrity endorsements for the International Day of Yoga among others."¹⁵⁵ According to the 2020-21 annual report, NFDC organized a Short Film Competition on Patriotism in 2020 to celebrate Independence Day. NFDC invited short films from 'Citizens of India' on "Patriotism: Marching Towards Atmanirbharta." Three films won this competition include *Am I?*, *Ab India Banega Bharat (Now*

¹⁵² "NFDC: Cinemas of India," accessed September 17, 2020, <https://www.nfdcindia.com/company-profile/>.

¹⁵³ "The Politics Of Linguistic Nationalism: Why The Attempts At 'Imposing' Hindi?," *Youth Ki Awaaz*, June 30, 2014, <https://www.youthkiawaaz.com/2014/06/politics-linguistic-nationalism-attempts-imposing-hindi/>.

¹⁵⁴ "Government Review of NFDC 2018-19," accessed October 2, 2020, https://nfdcindia.com/pdf/NFDC_Eng_Review2018-19.pdf.

¹⁵⁵ "Annual Report 2015-16," Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Government of India, accessed November 5, 2020, <https://mib.gov.in/documents/annual-reports>.

India Will Become a Nation), and *10 Rupees*.¹⁵⁶ It is unclear how these films won the competition, but their promotion of a singular ideology and interpretation of patriotism raises concerns about them being potentially propagandistic. All three films supported the Modi government's initiative of 'AtmaNirbhar Bharat' (Self-reliance scheme). In consonance with the Self-reliance scheme, the films promulgated the idea of a new India, in which the citizens are independent and reject the purchase of Chinese products or foreign dependence on the nation's economy. In this way, patriotism is associated with supporting the initiatives and campaigns of the current political party in these films. However, patriotism does not necessarily entail supporting the ideologies of the political party in power. In recent years, patriotism has become entwined with anti-nationalism in India, and those who express dissent and protest the political party are labelled as anti-national. In their article, "Construction of 'Anti-National,'" Rida Ansari and Sadia Riaz interrogate similar questions about how India media is contributing to a negative definition of nationalism by 'othering' Pakistan, and assert that the difference in opinion does not make a citizen anti-nationalist.¹⁵⁷ A former associate editor with the *Times of India*, Jug Suraiya also wrote that this "self-styled patriotism" equates the government to the nation, which poses a threat to democracy.¹⁵⁸ Further, the Ministry of Human Resources Development also commissioned NFDC to make a film, *Ek Bharat Shreshta Bharat (One Nation Supreme Nation)*, which also became the

¹⁵⁶ "Annual Report 2020-21," 19, accessed June 21, 2023, https://nfdcindia.com/pdf/Annual%20Report%202020-21_WEB.pdf. The use of the term "Bharat" for India implies the problematic Hinduization of the nation. This debate started in 2015 and gained momentum again after the Modi government proposed renaming the country to "Bharat" in 2023.

¹⁵⁷Rida Ansari and Sadia Riaz, "Construction of 'Anti-National': Framing and Othering Discourse in Indian Media," *Global Media Journal* 18, no. 36 (September 1, 2020): 1–8.

¹⁵⁸ Jug Suraiya, "Don't Confuse Anti-Government with Anti-National," *The Times of India*, accessed June 22, 2023, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/jugglebandhi/dont-confuse-anti-government-with-anti-national/>.

major theme of India's presence at the Cannes Film Festival in 2022, and marks 75 years of diplomatic relations between India and France. In her article, "The Saffron Carpet," global creative industries scholar Anubha Sarkar writes that Indian cinema is merely becoming "a placeholder for soft power in the West."¹⁵⁹

Cultural policing, censorship, as well as self-censorship, are becoming a norm—even in the digital era under the nationalist regime. During a media interview, one of the former directors of NFDC, Rajesh Khanna, discussed the importance of producing small-budgeted films with strong content and international standards for a global audience, which would put the Indian industry on the global stage. In the same media interview, Khanna declared that the web series would soon come under the radar of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC): "Our country is known for its strong cultural values and our OTT [Over the Top or streaming platforms such as Netflix] content contrasts with it. Filmmakers need to draw a line in their freedom of expression and not abuse the privilege."¹⁶⁰ Note that these comments on regulations and moral policing were made by a former director of the NFDC. Independent films now bear the burden of a monolithic Hindu "national" Indian culture, limiting the artistic and political expression in Indian Cinema. Historically, CBFC or commonly known as the "censor board," is linked to its colonial legacy and Victorian morality, which continues until today. The CBFC is a state-run body that oversees the editing, censorship, and even prohibition of films based on cultural sensitivities. However, producers could contest and appeal to higher authorities, committees, and the I&B and, finally, to

¹⁵⁹ Anubha Sarkar, "The Saffron Carpet: All Is Not Well with India at Cannes," accessed May 25, 2022, <https://www.southasiatoday.com.au/article-10236-the-saffron-carpet-all-is-not-well-with-india-at-cannes-details.aspx>.

¹⁶⁰ "Web Series Need to Be Censored: NFDC Head," *DT next*, accessed June 1, 2022, <https://www.dtnext.in/cinema/2020/07/20/web-series-need-to-be-censored-nfdc-head>.

the court.¹⁶¹ In 2020, the I&B passed new regulations for the surveillance of online and digital content and held a meeting with major online platforms to implement self-regulation.¹⁶² In 2021, the government abolished the Film Certification Appellate Tribunal, which allowed challenging the decision of the censor board. The decision was scrutinized by independent filmmakers (such as Vishal Bhardwaj, Guneet Monga, and Hansal Mehta) because it will mean further delays and obstacles to defying government decisions in regulating film content.¹⁶³ In his 2022 book, *Indian Indies*, Devasundaram, also notes that “dissenting and critical voices in the academic sphere” have been subject to an “authoritarian censoring gaze,” and the new censorship regulations pose an additional threat to Indie films that are “culturally and politically outspoken.”¹⁶⁴ Film and media industry scholars Smith Mehta and D Bondy Valdovinos Kaye discuss the implications of digital censorship on the online film and media production culture of India. They argue that the current government uses communal politics, and ongoing policy interventions limit freedom of expression and promote Hindu nationalism.¹⁶⁵

In our interview, Indian producer Mathivanan Rajendran, who was involved with NFDC for his internationally co-produced independent film, *Nasir* (2020) disclosed that NFDC is a government organization: “There is some level of tweaking of the pitches, some level of reading

¹⁶¹ Pendakur, “India's National Film Policy,” 162.

¹⁶² “Shri Prakash Javadekar Meets Representatives of OTT Platforms,” accessed June 8, 2022, <https://mib.gov.in/sites/default/files/Press%20Release%20dated%204.3.2021.pdf>.

¹⁶³ “‘Sad Day For Cinema’: Filmmakers Criticise Abolition Of Film Certification Appellate Tribunal,” <https://www.outlookindia.com/>, January 12, 2022, <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/entertainment-news-sad-day-for-cinema-filmmakers-criticise-abolition-of-film-certification-appellate-tribunal/379613>.

¹⁶⁴ Ashvin Immanuel Devasundaram, *Indian Indies: A Guide to New Independent Indian Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2022), 2, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003089001>.

¹⁶⁵ Smith Mehta and D Bondy Valdovinos Kaye, “Media Censorship: Obscuring Autocracy and Hindutva-Ideology in Indian Governance,” *Communication, Culture and Critique* 14, no. 3 (September 1, 2021): 524–28, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ccc/tcab036>.

of the scripts.”¹⁶⁶ The film, *Nasir*, an Indo-Dutch co-production, focused on the hate speech against Muslim minorities in India. It received support from the NFDC, and critical acclaim at the international film festival such as the Rotterdam. *Nasir* received the “Gap Financing Award” at Bazaar 2014 and the film premiered at the 2016 Rotterdam International Film Festival in the “Bright Future” section.¹⁶⁷ It secured Hubert Bals Fund for script development and the NFF+HBF co-production fund.¹⁶⁸ However, Rajendran revealed that the streaming platform, Netflix declined to release the film *Nasir* on their platform due to the film’s ideological content.¹⁶⁹ The film eventually failed to get nationwide distribution. The case of *Nasir* also suggests that NFDC facilitated the development of independent films with dissenting content, but it does not actively engage in the distribution of these films within the neoliberal-nationalist structures of the Indian film industry. In the present time, the commercial agendas thus also intersect with the nationalist and regulatory regime of India. The controlled film and media are creating additional barriers to telling alternative/independent stories nationally and internationally. In what follows, I discuss three anecdotes to describe the impact of this trend and the exploitative tendencies of working with studios and the private sector as independent filmmakers in a “regulated free market.”

In 2012, Anurag Kashyap, who has been at the forefront of Indian independent cinema, launched his two-part film series, *Gangs of Wasseypur (GOW)*, which has acquired a cult status. The film marked the beginning of a new era of independent cinema in India that had gained

¹⁶⁶ Mathivanan Rajendran, personal interview, May 28, 2021.

¹⁶⁷ “NASIR – exground filmfest 34,” Exground Wiesbaden, as of May 23, 2021 [source removed], <https://exground.com/en/programm/international/nasir/>.

¹⁶⁸ Liz Shackleton, “Stray Dogs Picks up Rotterdam Competition Title “Nasir” (Exclusive),” Screen, accessed May 23, 2021, <https://www.screendaily.com/news/stray-dogs-picks-up-rotterdam-competition-title-nasir-exclusive/5146058.article>.

¹⁶⁹ Mathivanan Rajendran, personal interview, May 28, 2021.

visibility amidst the global “art cinema” lovers of the international film festival circuit. Viacom 18 Motion Pictures produced and marketed *GOW*. Viacom 18 Motion Pictures is a collaborative venture between India’s Network 18 and Viacom CBS, which has emerged as one of the major distributors of Bollywood films. In 2020, Kashyap reported he had received no royalty payments from the studio, nor had he profited from the cult status of *GOW* and its subsequent release on streaming platforms.¹⁷⁰ During the 2021 World Cinema International Conference, Devashish Makhija, an independent filmmaker, made similar remarks about the ultra-low-budget model of Yoodlee Films, a division of India’s oldest music company, Saregama India Limited. Founded in 2017, Yoodlee Films began producing and distributing alternative cinemas in India across languages and genres. Makhija worked with Yoodlee for *Ajji* (2017), and the film is now streaming on Netflix. But Makhija revealed that the company forced the team to work on a shoestring budget, which created precarious working conditions for the entire crew.¹⁷¹ In 2022, Chattarpal Ninawe, the writer-director of a Marathi language film, *Ghaath* revealed that the co-producer, Jio Studios pulled the film out of Berlinale film festival and banned it from travelling to the international film festival circuit based on political and ideological themes of the film.¹⁷² These anecdotes reinforce the increasing power of large media corporations and nationalist regimes in controlling and regulating the Indian independent filmmaking culture. These are not isolated cases because

¹⁷⁰ “‘For The Studio, Gangs Of Wasseypur Is Still A Flop’: Tweets Anurag Kashyap After Richa Chadha Talks About Not Getting Royalty,” NDTV.com, accessed April 19, 2022, <https://www.ndtv.com/entertainment/for-the-studio-gangs-of-wasseypur-is-still-a-flop-tweets-anurag-kashyap-after-richa-chadha-talks-about-not-getting-royalty-2265366>.

¹⁷¹ Devashish Makhija, “Dialogue between Filmmakers: Geetha J./Devashish Makhija” (Discussion, *World Cinema International Conference 2021*, Madrid, Spain, June 15-16, 2020), https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qvpLYogX0adMJkL9fQMtBptUX_ky0DHZ8Ailc4R3Mto/edit.

¹⁷² “Chhatrapal Ninawe (@papapancho0) • Instagram Photos and Videos,” accessed May 23, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CdfJcVHsEa0/>.

independent films, especially Hindi-language filmmakers in Mumbai, struggle to work outside Bollywood and conglomerates' dominant production and distribution system. Thus, independent cinema is becoming more dependent on Bollywood and media corporations, which, in turn, are facing increased pressure from Hindu nationalist regimes.¹⁷³ These anecdotes raise questions about precarity, creative labour, as well as the fate and meaning of “independence” in independent cinema.¹⁷⁴

Conclusion

NFDC reflects the tensions and influences of neoliberal and national forces, under which the organization's goals evolved to create a more transnational culture for independent filmmaking in India. NFDC adapted and managed its operations to mitigate risk and increase profits through various market-oriented tactics such as private, public, and international partnerships; reducing staff size and offices, and making national/nationalist advertisements, short films, and media campaigns for the government to salvage itself and support the national film industry and economy. However, art cinema which was once seen as a reference for non-commercial values such as “authenticity” and “simplicity”¹⁷⁵ as well as “seriousness of intent”¹⁷⁶ underwent a transformation and shifted to negotiating between the values of art/commerce to contribute to the growth of the national film industry. The policies of the NFDC demonstrate the changing attitude

¹⁷³ “Modi's Growing Crackdown on Bollywood,” accessed June 3, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/11/27/modi-bollywood-crackdown-muslims-hindu-nationalism/>.

¹⁷⁴ The introduction offers answers to these debates by showing ways to theorize and conceptualize India's contemporary independent cinema.

¹⁷⁵ Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film*, 127.

¹⁷⁶ Bhaskar, “The Indian New Wave,” 19.

of the government towards independent filmmaking, which contributes to a shifting production culture for independent cinema in India that is based on contributing to the neoliberal-national/nationalist structures of the industry. NFDC reduced its financial support for independent Indian cinema simultaneously. In 2013, NFDC put a halt on production funding, which raised concerns of the filmmaking community, arguing “good cinema in the country is independent of NFDC.”¹⁷⁷ Indian film historian Tiwari also adds, “the Indie cinema of the 2000s may be independent of the state, but is totally at the behest of market forces.”¹⁷⁸ The practices of NFDC contribute to the increased struggles of independent filmmakers by making them more dependent on Bollywood production houses, corporations, conglomerates, investors, and international subsidies. Majumdar also laments the death of art-house cinema in India because of commercialization and an overall lack of public funding support from NFDC and the Indian government.¹⁷⁹ However, the Indian art-house cinema exists at the margins and gets circulated in the film festival circuit and streaming platforms. Contemporary independent cinema that exists in a symbiotic relationship with Bollywood and media corporations relatively gains more visibility in the form of wider distribution in the domestic film industry and internationally. This symbiotic relationship becomes a major factor among Indian film studies scholars for not preferring the term “independent.” During informal conversations at the recent visit to the 2023 Society for Cinema and Media Studies Annual Conference, I interacted with several scholars who rejected the use of

¹⁷⁷ However, NFDC invited applications for the production and co-production of documentary and feature films in 2023. “NFDC Move a Setback to Serious Cinema Production: Filmmakers,” *The Hindu*, July 16, 2013, sec. Cinema, <https://www.thehindu.com/features/cinema/nfdc-move-a-setback-to-serious-cinema-production-filmmakers/article4920620.ece>.

¹⁷⁸ Tiwari, “From New Cinema to New Indie,” 41.

¹⁷⁹ Rochona Majumdar, “What Was behind the Slow Decline of Indian Art Cinema?,” *Scroll*, October 27, 2021, <https://scroll.in/reel/1006632/what-was-behind-the-slow-decline-of-indian-art-cinema>.

the term “independent” to describe the current wave of films. Contemporary independent filmmaking has become deeply intertwined with Bollywood studios and media companies, but independence cannot be solely understood by examining the production structure of the films. The other factors, such as aesthetics, content, and creative vision of the films, contribute to the debate of independence in filmmaking, and I discussed these concerns in the dissertation’s introduction.

Conducting a case study of NFDC presented a path to understanding the larger impact of neoliberal, national, and nationalist policies on independent filmmaking and the organization itself. NFDC emerged as a site of negotiation, struggle, and contestation, which, in turn, reflected the struggles of the broader independent film community. In concluding this chapter, I reiterate Hesmondhalgh’s important work on cultural industries cited in the theoretical section of this chapter, in which he argues that the activities of cultural industries are marked by complexity, ambivalence and contestation, and they thus may even support conditions that benefit large corporations and political affiliates.¹⁸⁰ This chapter demonstrated how NFDC operates with a relative agency, negotiating between its national, cultural, political, and economic motives and, in the process, creating a globally acceptable and commercially viable independent cinema in India.¹⁸¹ NFDC marked a transnational turn in the state-supported alternative cinema, but it was driven by the “national interest” of supporting domestic film industry outputs. The neoliberal faith made NFDC more of a media company or private body than a public institution, as it became an

¹⁸⁰ Hesmondhalgh, *The Cultural Industries*, 8.

¹⁸¹ While there are certainly other institutions and avenues that support independent filmmaking culture, this dissertation focuses primarily on NFDC, which is the central institution that supports and implements state film policies in India. Therefore, this exploration exists at the expense of other agents and institutions. See, for example, the YouTube documentary that discusses the DIY (Do it yourself) practices of Indian independent filmmakers, *The Other Way - A Film about Indian Indie Filmmakers and Their Films*, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T2a05JeF47Y>.

active participant in the growth of corporatization and conglomeration of the industry, as well as supporting the national/nationalist campaigns of the government. The chapter revealed the implications of neoliberal-national/nationalist structures on Indian independent film production culture. Therefore, India's independent filmmaking has also become entwined in neoliberal, national, and transnational structures. The current government posits that this form of cinema is meant to achieve two distinct objectives. First, it must function as a driving force for economic development in a neoliberal market. Second, it should represent Indian culture on a global level in accordance with the government's guidelines and regulations. The collaborations between the international and Indian independent film communities became increasingly connected to the nation through the NFDC. However, the importance of cultural nationalism is rising in India and globally. The neoliberal-national/nationalist policies of the government thus have contesting effects on independent film production culture. The renewed attitudes and values of the government toward Indian independent filmmaking also include the promotion of neoliberal culture through creative entrepreneurship, international collaborations, and productions, as well as offering transnational mentorship and funding opportunities—rooted in beliefs and values of the Anglo/Western film festival circuit. I will discuss the implications of these values in the following chapter. Finally, the rise of the nationalist government added tensions in the transnational film culture because, on one hand, NFDC on behalf of the government continues the neoliberal project through ease of foreign shooting initiatives such as the “Make in India” campaign of 2015, inviting the global film community to invest in India and on the other, it regulates freedom of expression through new digital censorship regulations and increased cultural nationalism that favours homogenized Hindu culture. This kind of “regulated free market” now governs the Indian film industry, including independent filmmaking. Thus, this chapter argued that NFDC's transnational

film policies are shaped by the neoliberal-national/nationalist structures of the Indian film industry. In doing so, it contributes to the burgeoning research on transnational film studies, the political economy of media industries, cultural policy studies, the globalization of media economies and Indian independent cinema. This chapter provides a macro-view of the NFDC within neoliberal-national structures of the Indian film industry, laying the groundwork for the next chapter. These structures create precarious working conditions for the organization's staff members/film professionals, supporting Indian independent cinema. Through the case study of NFDC's annual film market Film Bazaar, the next chapter integrates micro-level interactions, creative/contractual labour and formal/informal practices of film professionals and workers within these larger neoliberal-national and transnational structures.

Chapter 2: Inside Film Bazaar

How do I enter India? If I come to Mumbai, I am only meeting Bollywood. When you hear of the number of films being made, you only panic. Foreign film programmers did not know where to begin in India. So, Goa becomes the place where at least the government is organizing Film Bazaar. Internationally, Film Bazaar has gained a notable reputation for its important work in sorting and segregating films.

—Deepti DCunha, personal interview, July 13, 2021.

Through the examination of the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC), the previous chapter established that transnational film policies emerged in response to the neoliberal and national structures of the Indian film industry. A continuation of these policies is South Asia's largest film market, the Film Bazaar, which has been organized by NFDC in Goa each November since 2007. NFDC intends to bridge the gap between the South-Asian film community and international film festival professionals through the Bazaar. It encourages "sales of world cinema in the South-Asian region," and invites approximately 1000-1600 film festivals and industry professionals from 36 different countries each year from around the globe.¹ In our interview, the head film programmer Deepti DCunha notes that the Bazaar's objective of creating a market for

¹ Film Bazaar, "Film Bazaar India," accessed September 17, 2022, <https://www.filmbazaarindia.com/>.

South Asian cinema has been unsuccessful. According to her, 98% of submissions are from India, while only 2% are from other South Asian countries.²

The epigraph of this chapter, taken from the same interview, reveals that the international film festival community has increasingly turned to the Bazaar to discover India's alternative or independent films that deviate from mainstream contemporaneous Bollywood cinema. The Bazaar is closely tied to the international film festival circuit, agendas of the Indian government and the larger Indian film industry. Therefore, it offers an important perspective for studying Indian independent cinema's transnational culture. This chapter thus examines the Bazaar in relation to the Indian government's larger neoliberal, nationalist and transnational goals, which were established in the previous chapter. It discusses how these macro-level political-economic objectives shape Bazaar's internal structure, its labour practices, and Indian independent films that travel internationally. This entails an understanding of the Bazaar's organizational structure, management, programming, and practices of its participants in constructing Indian independent filmmaking. In this way, the chapter examines what it means to work at the Bazaar and manage it. In doing so, it interrogates what these practices reveal about international film festival culture, and how it supports India's independent filmmaking culture.

To answer these questions, this chapter combines the film festival research and Media Industry Studies (MIS) approach. This integrated approach has not been previously employed in the examination of the Bazaar. Both MIS and film festival scholars emphasize the importance of studying agency, power dynamics, management, and negotiations in film and media cultures. MIS scholars are concerned with concepts of gatekeeping, policymaking, and industry structures in

² Deepti DCunha, personal interview, July 13, 2021.

understanding the power dynamics, rituals, and work habits in the film and media industries. They emphasize the importance of the individual's role and agency in shaping the culture within the larger structures. In MIS studies, this kind of examination offers insights into "production hierarchies, into questions of priority, into corporate synergy and into commercial imperatives."³ Meanwhile, studies of film festivals also examine the close relationship between agency/structure, local/global, and actor/network of the festival. In her pioneering work, film festival expert Marijke de Valck examines the interdependence between human actors (i.e., filmmakers, programmers, sales agents, etc.) and non-human actors (such as the press, companies, and city) in shaping film festivals.⁴ As part of its research agenda, film festival scholars have also recently developed a novel interest in studying the strengthening relationship between the industry and film festivals.⁵ Festival scholar Dina Iordanova observes how the festivals have emerged as key players in the industry through their increased participation in production financing, networking, and distribution. Iordanova further notes that scholars unanimously agree that media industries studies needs to conduct more research about "how the film festival structures and narrates itself, what its components are, what constitutes the play of power between its participants, and how this is re-enacted in the time and space of the festival and even beyond."⁶ This type of examination, according to Iordanova, will contribute to "how the festival inscribes itself into the context of its

³ Freeman, *Industrial Approaches to Media*, 89.

⁴ Marijke de Valck, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia* (Amsterdam University Press, 2007), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46mv45>.

⁵ Marijke de Valck, "Supporting Art Cinema at a Time of Commercialization: Principles and Practices, the Case of the International Film Festival Rotterdam," *Poetics* 42 (February 1, 2014): 40–59, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2013.11.004>.

⁶ Dina Iordanova, "The Film Festival as an Industry Node," *Media Industries* 1, no. 3 (2015): 7-11, <https://doi.org/10.3998/mij.15031809.0001.302>.

locality and how it insinuates itself into the global galaxy of other festivals.”⁷ In other words, there is a need to examine how film festivals contextualize these global infrastructures locally. This chapter provides some answers to these questions and contributes to the understanding of how the Bazaar adapts the macro-level global model of film festivals in national/local political-economic structures while examining micro-level social interactions, practices, and values of its labour.

Considering the growing interest in and a gap in understanding the relationship between film festivals and the industry, a combination of film festival research and the MIS approach offers a productive way to conduct this case study. The chapter adopts the “stakeholder” theory of film festival research, proposed by Ragan Rhyne in the article, “Film Festivals Circuits and Stakeholders.”⁸ This approach examines film festivals from an organizational perspective by closely examining the strategic management of its stakeholder relations, their specific interests, and motivations in sustaining the festival network, including festival organizers, sponsors, distributors, filmmakers, producers, industry, and policymakers. This includes examining programming and accreditation practices as integral to the formation of the organization, its social position, identity, and agency.⁹ Stakeholders are vital to the examination of film festivals; however, the industry is only one of the stakeholders in the larger structure of film festivals.¹⁰ But examining festivals in relation to the industry becomes essential, especially in the case of business film festivals, which are not designed for audiences but for the sales, distribution, and marketing

⁷ Iordanova, “The Film Festival as an Industry Node,” 11.

⁸ Ragan Rhyne, “Film Festivals Circuits and Stakeholders,” in *Film Festival Yearbook 1: The Festival Circuit*, eds. Dina Iordanova and Ragan Rhyne (St. Andrews: St. Andrews Film Studies, 2009), 9-22.

⁹ Rhyne, “Film Festivals Circuits and Stakeholders,” 9-22.

¹⁰ De Valck, Marijke, Brendan Kredell, and Skadi Loist, *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice* (London: Routledge, 2016), Xii.

of films.¹¹ The Bazaar is not an audience festival. It is a film market that curates films for international film festivals and stimulates the development, production, and circulation of films nationally and internationally. Therefore, for this case study, the model helps accentuate the diverse motivations and values of those who work, have previously worked and/or are associated with Bazaar, particularly the senior staff, film programmers, consultants, independent filmmakers, and producers.

This chapter combines the “stakeholder approach” of film festival research with the MIS, specifically the production culture studies approach. According to Caldwell, production culture, or more precisely, “the culture of film/video production,” entails an examination of social behaviour, habits, and practices of industry workers.¹² Caldwell urges researchers to investigate these cultural practices of media workers in relation to the political-economic structures of the industry. In this way, Caldwell underscores the importance of studying the cultural “work worlds” of media professionals in neoliberal industry structures, corporatization, and government regulations.¹³ Industry studies scholar Vicki Mayer adds that production studies captures how “power operates locally through media production to reproduce social hierarchies and inequalities at the level of daily interactions.”¹⁴ Mayer emphasizes the tensions between an individual’s agency and the social structures in which the agency exists.¹⁵ As a result of the hybrid approach, the Bazaar provides a compelling case study for examining the diverse beliefs, values and power dynamics –

¹¹ Iordanova, “The Film Festival as an Industry Node,” 7-11.

¹² Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 7.

¹³ John Thornton Caldwell, “Cultures of Production: Studying Industry’s Deep Texts, Reflexive Rituals and Managed Self-disclosures,” in *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method*, eds. Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 209.

¹⁴ Vicki Mayer, “Bringing the Social Back in,” in *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, eds. Vicki Mayer, Miranda J. Banks, and John Thornton Caldwell (New York: Routledge, 2009), 15.

¹⁵ Mayer, “Bringing the Social Back in,” 15-24.

encompassing the cultural and professional world of staff and creatives, who support Indian independent cinema. This chapter positions the Bazaar and “work world” of its labour within the larger neoliberal, national, and transnational festival/industrial structures.

Building on Caldwell’s method, the first chapter involved collecting and examining data from “semi-embedded texts” such as annual reports, trade publications, news and media content, national discourses, and press interviews. This chapter supplements the data by combining and analyzing additional “semi-embedded” texts such as observations at the 2021 Film Bazaar (January 16-21, 2021, and November 20-25, 2021), as well as incorporating “fully embedded texts” such as interviews of film professionals, and workers associated with the Bazaar. The “fully embedded” texts provide important insights into how industry practitioners describe and even theorize the work they do. My experiences at the Bazaar in 2021 were intriguing for three major reasons. First, Ninalath Gupta, the former managing director of NFDC and founder of Bazaar, resigned in 2015. Gupta’s resignation was perceived as a watershed moment in the management of the Bazaar by several interviewed staff members and producers. Second, the right-wing Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) government came into power in 2014 and won elections for two terms consecutively and with a parliamentary majority in 2019. This electoral result suggests consolidation of power and the potential for increased control over cultural institutions in India. Third, the pandemic disrupted the film festival ecosystem internationally, and it initially postponed the Bazaar in 2020. However, NFDC efficiently reorganized its film trade activities virtually using a 3D interface and held the Bazaar online twice in 2021. The online version of Bazaar also had a networking area and a market guide that contained e-mail addresses and general information of 430 delegates to book personal meetings. I used this information to contact film professionals relevant to the project and set up semi-structured personal interviews.

To provide a comprehensive examination of the Bazaar, this chapter begins by discussing the larger transnational model of the Bazaar and the related individual practices of its participants. Then, it reveals how the Bazaar functions and adapts the transnational model in the context of its local political-economic/industrial structures. Therefore, it explores the micro-level professional world – social behaviour, industry sessions, as well as the creative and precarious work of its labour, reflecting the macro-level political-economic structures.

Therefore, this chapter is divided into four sections. The first section of this chapter provides a brief background on the history of film festivals and introduces the existing transnational model (e.g., Open Pitch, Industry Screenings, Co-production Market) of the Bazaar. These programs are designed in a close relationship with the global structures of international film festivals, demonstrating that the Bazaar is integrated into the larger festival circuit. The second section examines the programming practices and the emergence of a transnational art-house “Bazaar Film” with and for international film festivals. This section also discusses the informal practices, such as networking and mentoring that contribute to the development of transnational film production culture in India. Shifting from the transnational structures of the Bazaar film festivals to the national political-economic/industrial structure of India, the third section analyzes the micro-level social interactions between its participants, as well as the branding strategies of the Bazaar, reflecting the neoliberal-national/nationalist industrial structures. This provides the important foundation for the fourth section, which focuses on the creative management of the Bazaar within these neoliberal-national industry structures of India. It demonstrates how the Bazaar adapts the transnational model, shedding light on the paradoxical processes of creating the art-house “Bazaar Film” alongside beliefs of balancing the values of commercial and art cinema in independent filmmaking. By examining the creative management of the Bazaar, the third section

emphasizes the labour of a senior staff member, referred to by their chosen pseudonym, Aparna, as well as several others, revealing the precarious work culture and internal structural issues of the Bazaar. I conclude that the Bazaar has evolved to become a fragmented and contested space because of the government's long-standing neoliberal, national, and current nationalist goals. In doing so, the chapter demonstrates the formation of the transnational production culture for independent filmmaking at the Bazaar.

Transnational Model of the Bazaar

Historically, film festivals were a “European phenomenon” before spreading globally. Film festival scholar De Valck divides the evolution of film festivals into three phases. The first phase started in Venice in 1932 and lasted until the early 1970s. During the first phase, national identity, political, and ideological interests were predominant; in their second phase, film festivals became more independent, taking the role of “protectors of the cinematic art” until the 1980s; during their third phase, film festivals spread globally in the 1990s, creating the international film festival circuit and becoming more professionalized and institutionalized.¹⁶

Today, film festivals provide a space for cross-cultural exchange and contribute to the pre-development, production, circulation, and exhibition of world cinemas. Based on a 2013 report, there are approximately 10,000 festivals worldwide.¹⁷ Film festival scholars explore networks of film festivals and markets as an alternative distribution system, the cultural implications of film festival funds, festival programming, and curatorial practices in cultivating taste in global

¹⁶ De Valck, *Film Festivals*, 19-20.

¹⁷ Stephen Follows, “How Many Film Festivals Are There in the World?,” Stephen Follows, August 19, 2013, <https://stephenfollows.com/many-film-festivals-are-in-the-world/>.

cinema.¹⁸ Film festivals contribute to the making of transnational art-house films, communities, and industry structures. Film festivals have traditionally facilitated the circulation and promotion of specialty or art-house cinema, by providing a space for exhibition and creating a buzz around the films. Besides the promotion of art cinema and the formation of diverse communities, festivals serve many other important functions. They stimulate the business of filmmaking and invest funds and resources from production to postproduction. They select films, celebrate them, build audiences, and have a critical role in encouraging tourism, marketing, and establishing a brand for cities.¹⁹

In this way, film festivals are closely connected to the larger film industries globally. The film festivals contribute to and shape the larger industry structures, practices, and cultures of transnational filmmaking across the world. However, film festivals hold vital importance for art-house and independent cinemas because the festivals are built on “prestige, honor and recognition.”²⁰ Therefore, film festivals particularly provide opportunities for the exhibition and promotion of alternative and arthouse film cultures, which otherwise struggle to find visibility in a highly saturated marketplace. Indian art films have been circulated and exhibited in film festivals. This exhibition dates back to the 1950s when the Indian art film director, Satyajit Ray, won the ‘Best Human Document Award’ at Cannes for *Pather Panchali*.²¹ The Indian film exhibition trend

¹⁸ Marijke De Valck and Skadi Loist, *Film Festivals / Film Festival Research: Thematic, Annotated Bibliography (2nd Ed.)* (Universität Hamburg, Institut für Germanistik, 2009), <https://doi.org/10.25969/MEDIAREP/12900>.

¹⁹ Shekhar A. Deshpande and Meta Majaz, *World Cinema: A Critical Introduction* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2018).

²⁰ Marijke de Valck “Fostering art, adding value, cultivating taste,” in *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*, eds., Marijke de Valck, Brendan Kredell, and Skadi Loist (London: Routledge, 2016), 105.

²¹ Ruman Ganguly, “Cannes to Pay Tribute to Satyajit Ray with a Retrospective,” *The Times of India*, accessed March 29, 2023, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/bengali/movies/news/cannes-to-pay-tribute-to-satyajit-ray-with-a-retrospective/articleshow/91250414.cms>.

at the international film festivals continued until the 1980s and increased in the mid-2000s again with the independent cinema, with notable examples including *Gangs of Wasseypur* (2012), *The Lunchbox* (2013), and *Masaan* (2015).²² 2013 marked 100 years of Indian cinema and India celebrated the occasion at the 66th Cannes Film Festival.²³

Film festivals regularly organize film markets for the marketing, sales, and distribution of films. Ruby Cheung, in her article, “East Asian Film Festivals: Film Markets” provides detailed information about markets that are organized by film festivals annually. According to Cheung, festivals organize film markets, which are often held alongside the international film festivals annually, with few exceptions such as the popular American Film Market (www.afma.com), founded in Santa Monica in 1981 and held annually in November as a stand-alone event. Cheung discusses a series of film markets at international film festivals. For example, the European film market (www.efm-berlinale.de) was launched in 1952 alongside the Berlin International Film Festival, and Marché du Film (www.marchedufilm.com) is organized alongside the Cannes Film Festival since 1958. Additionally, the International Film Festival of Rotterdam (IFFR) founded CineMart in 1983, and the Toronto International Film Festival offers an industry programme (<https://tiff.net/industry>) each year. These markets often bring together film buyers, sellers, and investors to boost the promotion, production, co-production, sales, marketing, and distribution of films.²⁴ In this manner, the film festival markets are a converging point for independent film

²² Aysha Iqbal Viswamohan and Sanchari Basu Chaudhuri, “Traversing Boundaries: Contemporary Hindi Cinema at International Film Festivals,” *South Asian Popular Culture*, August 25, 2022, 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14746689.2022.2115736>.

²³ “India to Be Guest Country at Cannes 2013,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, accessed April 4, 2023, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/cannes-2013-india-guest-country-393734/>.

²⁴ Ruby Cheung, “East Asian Film Festivals: Film Markets,” in *Film Festival Yearbook 3: Film Festivals and East Asia*, ed. Dina Iordanova and Rubh Cheung (St. Andrews: St. Andrews Film Studies, 2011), 40-61.

directors, producers, distributors, sales agents, buyers, sellers, and programmers. Therefore, they provide rich knowledge and insights to study transnational flows, people, and practices.

While the Global North has a relatively long tradition of organizing film markets, the Bazaar (<https://filmbazaarindia.com/>) is a novel intervention in India, launched in 2007, and quickly becoming South Asia's largest annual film market.²⁵ The Bazaar adapts the transnational structures of international film festivals, specifically the model of the International Film Festival of Rotterdam (IFFR) to an Indian context.²⁶ The final section about creative management will discuss how the Bazaar adapts the IFFR model within the neoliberal-national structures of the Indian film industry. Since 2007, the Bazaar acts as a node in the formation of transnational film cultures for independent filmmaking in India.

The 2021 Bazaar comprised five main events including Work-in-Progress labs (WIP), The Viewing Room (VR), the Co-production market, Knowledge Series, and Industry Screenings. The Co-production Market is for filmmakers who have not begun shooting their films or are at the script-writing stage. Industry screenings allow filmmakers to showcase and pitch their films to registered delegates. There is a cost of INR 3,000/- (inclusive of all taxes, exclusive of bank charges) per screening for booking one Industry Screening.²⁷ The Bazaar also offers advertisements (for a fee) as part of the Industry Screening to increase the visibility of films.²⁸ The feature-length films that are in post-production but not complete become part of the Work-in-Progress Lab or the Viewing Room (VR). However, the films that are not selected by the Bazaar

²⁵“NFDC Film Bazaar,” *Marché du Film*, accessed February 9, 2022, <https://www.marchedufilm.com/programs/co-production/nfdc-film-bazaar/>.

²⁶ Aparna, personal interview, June 4, 2021.

²⁷ 1 Canadian Dollar is equal to 59.28 Indian Rupee and 1 United States Dollar is equal to 82.33 Indian Rupee as of October 14, 2022. So, the cost of presenting a film at Film Bazaar is approximately CAD\$50 per screening.

²⁸ Film Bazaar, “Film Bazaar India,” accessed July 15, 2022, <https://www.filmbazaarindia.com/>.

are still available in VR. It is a screening platform for both short films and feature-length films from India and South Asia. This includes films that are complete or in post-production stages and are looking for gap financing, distribution, festival funds and/or world sales. Therefore, it is a restricted zone for selected delegates that can help expand the vision of the film. The VR had about 200 films in 2021.²⁹ The Knowledge Series contains informative discussions, panels, and presentations by the key players of the film industry, including heads of major media corporations (studios/producers/distributors etc.), international film festival programmers, sales agents, independent aggregators, and content providers. Open Pitches at the Co-production market, Work-in-Progress lab and industry screenings are all part of the five-day event in Goa. Open Pitch allowed filmmakers and producers to present their artistic vision of the film to all registered delegates attending the Bazaar online, including international sales agents, distributors, producers, sales agents, and festival programmers. The pitch provided an opportunity to show a preview of the unfinished version of the film project through visual clips to instigate interest among the film festival/industry professionals for production funds, gap financing, exhibition, and distribution. Thus, the Bazaar organizes discussions by key industry players, pitching sessions, and production and distribution opportunities for the independent filmmaking community. These activities of Bazaar are embedded within the larger transnational structures of the global film industry.

These transnational events are designed in a close relationship with the international film festival circuit and practices of collaborating, pitching, networking, and co-producing internationally. Das, a former programming coordinator, describes the transnational model of the Bazaar with this statement: “There are certain structures which are the same across the world, and

²⁹ Film Bazaar, “Film Bazaar India,” accessed October 7, 2022, <https://www.filmbazaarindia.com/>.

that is the structure of the market.”³⁰ Das is pointing to what Iordanova calls a “loosely connected network” of film festivals and markets.³¹ Several film festival scholars note festivals are expanding their activities through co-production markets, funds, and training events.³² Iordanova, in her essay, “The Film Festival as an Industry Node” observes that film festivals are no more mere exhibition venues, but they now participate and “trigger” the film’s cycle from development to production and circulation, and are closely involved in transnational structures and industrial practices. Additionally, Iordanova discusses the common industrial practices of the festivals by referring to models such as talent campuses, pitching sessions, development funds, and awards.³³

Through similar transnational practices, Bazaar positions itself alongside the macro-level global structure and format of international film festivals and their markets, which contributes to the increased exhibition of Indian independent films in international film festivals. Therefore, the Bazaar emerged as the “producer” of Indian art-house cinema by adapting the models of international film festivals and constructing a transnational film culture for Indian independent cinema. This brings prestige and credibility to the Bazaar, thereby positioning and branding its identity alongside A-list film festivals of Europe and their markets. The Bazaar thus has been facilitating the production, co-production, circulation, and distribution of several Indian independent films internationally since 2007. This includes films such as *Ship of Theseus* (2012), *Qissa* (2013), *The Lunchbox* (2013), *Thithi* (2015) and *Chauthi Koot* (2015), among others. Indian film historian Tiwari also notes that the Bazaar acts as a facilitator in supporting art/independent

³⁰ Abhra Das, personal interview, October 2, 2021.

³¹ Dina Iordanova, “The Film Festival Circuit,” in *Film Festival Yearbook 1: The Festival Circuit*, edited by Dina Iordanova and Ragan Rhyne (St. Andrews: St. Andrews Film Studies, 2009), 23- 39.

³² De Valck, “Supporting Art Cinema at a Time of Commercialization”, 42.

³³ Iordanova, “The Film Festival as an Industry Node, 7.”

cinemas in India.³⁴ Therefore, the transnational films facilitated by the Bazaar have been increasingly screened in international film festivals. However, it raises several important questions about programming, power dynamics, management, and labour practices in the Bazaar. Therefore, the next section begins by focusing on the transnational programming and practices of film professionals at the Bazaar.

Producing “The Bazaar Films” and Transnational Practices

[International film festivals] define the stories that we must tell about ourselves.

—Kabir, personal interview, August 1, 2021.

Film festivals shape and contribute to how we make, celebrate, and circulate films. Film festivals act as “gatekeepers” and “tastemakers” of film culture through programming, writing film history, building canons, and shaping the perception of national and global cinemas.³⁵ Scholars argue that film festivals have emerged as “producers” of world cinema through programming and funding.³⁶ De Valck notes that the examination of programming is challenging for film festival scholars due to an increased number of film festivals with diverse interests and resources. However, one way to approach programming is through historicizing the festival and understanding its development.³⁷ Building on this perspective, this section explores the

³⁴ Tiwari, “From New Cinema to New Indie,” 39.

³⁵ De Valck “Fostering art, adding value, cultivating taste,” 113.

³⁶ Daniel Steinhart, “Fostering International Cinema: The Rotterdam Film Festival, CineMart, and Hubert Bals Fund,” *Mediascape*, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 1–13; Tamara Falicov, “The “Festival Film”: Film Festival Funds as Cultural Intermediaries,” in *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*, ed. Marijke de Valck et al., (Routledge, 2016), 209–29.

³⁷ Marijke de Valck, “Finding Audiences for Films: Programming in Historical Perspective,” in *Coming Soon to a Festival Near You: Programming Film Festivals*, ed. Jeffrey Ruoff (St Andrews Film Books, 2012), 25–40.

programming practices of the Film Bazaar – shaped by the history of NFDC and global perception of Indian art cinema – and examines how they contribute to producing the genre of “film festivals” a.k.a. “the Bazaar films” with and for international film festivals. Subsequently, it examines the transnational practices of festival participants that contribute to reproducing these norms and values.

In India, the Bazaar acts as the “producer,” negotiating the beliefs and practices of international film festivals to curate, program, develop and facilitate India’s transnational arthouse/independent cinema. Through these activities, Bazaar contributes to the increased exhibition of independent cinema in the international film festival circuit. The formation of this genre of independent cinema within Bazaar entails negotiating the notions of “taste” of the international film festival circuit, including the Western values of art cinema/aesthetic merit, national /universal themes, and local narratives/global or festival audience.

The Bazaar cultivates and negotiates Anglo/Western values of “taste” and aesthetic merit in the film festival circuit. The programming coordinator Das explains that Bazaar’s Indian independent films that manage to get funds, screening and circulation in the international film festival circuit are curated largely by a group of international film festival programmers, industry experts and a few local film professionals at the Bazaar.³⁸ The Bazaar’s lead film programmer, Deepti DCunha, explains the curation process as follows:

³⁸ Abhra Das, personal interview, October 2, 2021.

I can see the film with a European lens because I have understood the taste. I've studied it very closely. I can tell what Marco will like. What Cameron will like? What Thierry will like? ³⁹

DCunha's role as a programmer and "tastemaker" is vital in sustaining the larger film festival network because it reproduces the taste of international film festivals. DCunha here is referring to the international film festival programmers, directors, and professionals—Marco Mueller (Venice Film Festival), Cameron Bailey (Toronto International Film Festival) and Thierry Fremaux (Cannes Film Festival) and their artistic interests. DCunha here establishes credibility through her informed narrative, which helps her navigate the international film festival circuit and curate films for it. Moreover, her interest is in curating a "festival film"—a certain Indian art film which she believes has the potential to become part of international film festivals. The term "festival film" was first used in the review of the Rotterdam Film Festival (IFFR) by James Quandt, the director of programming at the Cinematheque Ontario in Toronto since 1990. Quandt discusses the formula of an international art house festival, which is built on a set of specific aesthetic practices:

Adagio rhythms and oblique narrative; a tone of quietude and reticence, an aura of unexplained or unearned anguish; attenuated takes, long tracking, or panning shots, often of depopulated landscapes; prolonged hand-held follow shots of solo people walking; slow dollies to a window or open-door framing nature; a materialist sound design; and a preponderance of Tarkovskian imagery.⁴⁰

³⁹ Deepti DCunha, personal interview, July 13, 2021.

⁴⁰ James Quandt, "The Sandwich Process": Simon Field Talks About Polemics and Poetry at Film Festivals," in *On Film Festivals*, ed. Richard Porton (New York, NY: Wallflower, 2009), 76-77.

The aesthetic qualities outlined above by Quandt are regularly associated with what now is known as “festival film.” Media scholar Cindy Wong argues that a “festival film” does not follow the conventional narrative of Hollywood or mainstream cinema. In this way, Wong defines “festival film” by asserting “what festival films are not.”⁴¹ In her narrative, DCunha also distinguishes between independent films and art films, in which the latter is associated with film festivals: “Independent is very different from art-house. Art-house filmmaking is for the sake of art. You have to be engaged with the medium and understand the new possibilities of the medium.”⁴² DCunha thus believes in curating based on the aesthetic merit and artistic qualities of a film, and according to her, “festivals are custodians of quality.”⁴³ In this narrative, DCunha positions an art film that travels to international film festivals higher up in the fashion suggested by Stinger, who argued that the films that festivals produce and promote – confirm specific aesthetic or stylistic criteria, reflecting the “cultural hierarchies of taste.”⁴⁴ Thus, the qualities of art cinema and aesthetic merits become an important way to “sort and segregate” films in the programming of Bazaar.⁴⁵

In this way, the Bazaar emerges as curator and facilitator for “festival films,” negotiating the Anglo/Western taste of film programmers and professionals at major A-list international film festivals. In the introduction of this dissertation, I referred to Indian transnational independent films such as *The Lunchbox* (2013), *Chauthi Koot* (2015), *Qissa* (2013) and *Masaan* (‘Fly Away Solo,’ 2015) that embody the characteristics of “festival film.” All these films have travelled to

⁴¹ Cindy H. Wong, *Film Festivals: Culture, People, and Power on the Global Screen* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 68.

⁴² Deepti DCunha, personal interview, July 13, 2021.

⁴³ Deepti DCunha, personal interview, July 13, 2021.

⁴⁴ Julian Stinger, “Regarding Film Festivals” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2003), 143.

⁴⁵ Deepti DCunha, personal interview, July 13, 2021.

international film festivals and were supported and developed through the Film Bazaar.⁴⁶ DCunha adds: “Since its establishment, the Film Bazaar has sent films from its Work-in-Progress (WIP) lab to A-list festivals annually. European film programmers have mentored the selected films, and the festivals see value in European mentorship. This brings them certainty that the films will meet the norms of their festivals.”⁴⁷ Through its programs such as Screenwriters’ Lab, WIP and Co-production market, the Bazaar curates, develops and presents a selection of Indian independent films each year. These films receive mentorship training from the international film festival community, allowing them to incorporate Anglo/Western values of quality and aesthetic merit. Thus, the films are curated and developed within these transnational film festival structures to facilitate international collaborations, funding opportunities and co-production schemes. Festival scholar Dorota Ostrowska argues in her study that the Cannes Film Festival and its development/funding initiatives contribute to “Cannes film” and “the result of these processes are films which cater to the political and aesthetic tastes of those who enable their production in the first place—film festivals such as Cannes.”⁴⁸ This suggests the power of international film festivals to shape global production culture to produce the genre of a “festival film” for world cinema through its programming and curation process, as well as its novel script development and funding structures.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Uditia Jhunjhunwala, “Why NFDC’s Film Bazaar Is the One Market You Need to Keep Your Eyes on,” Text, Scroll.in (<https://scroll.in>, November 20, 2015), <https://scroll.in/reel/1561/the-one-market-you-need-to-keep-your-eyes-on-nfdcs-film-bazaar>.

⁴⁷ Deepti DCunha, personal interview, July 13, 2021.

⁴⁸ Dorota Ostrowska, “Making Film History at Cannes,” in *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*, eds., Marijke de Valck, Brendan Kredell, and Skadi Loist (London: Routledge, 2016), 28.

⁴⁹ Deshpande and Mazaj, “Films Festivals and World Cinema,” 113.

Similarly, the development of the market for “festival film” at NFDC played a key role in the emergence of a “Bazaar Film.” During the Bazaar 2021, Meenakshi Shedde, a senior film programmer at film festivals such as Berlin International Film Festival, described that the films that emerge out of the Bazaar can be classified as “Bazaar Films.” Shedde was essentially describing a particular transnational set of qualities in “Bazaar Films” that have the potential to travel through the international film festival circuit.⁵⁰ Caldwell employs the term “self-theorizing talk” to refer to the socio-professional practices of the sort Shedde engages in, wherein industry professionals habitually reflect and even theorize the work they do in the industry.⁵¹ The theorization of “Bazaar Film” suggests how the Bazaar curates, facilitates and “produces” Indian art-house/independent films, specifically for international film festivals. However, this development and curation process entails shaping the films based on Western taste, style, and aesthetic norms that are valued and promoted by festivals. In her study of NFDC Bazaar, Tiwari also observes that Bazaar has been subjected to criticism for its “preference for films displaying the European realist tradition.”⁵²

The origins of this Eurocentric approach in the development of “Bazaar Films” can be traced back to the history of NFDC. As discussed in the previous chapter, NFDC supported Parallel Cinema filmmakers including, Satyajit Ray, and subsequently, funded and provided support to the Indian New Wave movement, which emerged in the late 1960s through the 1980s and was influenced by European neorealism. This influence contributed to the perception of Indian art cinema, negotiating Eurocentric values of art cinema. In the article, “Art Cinema: The Indian

⁵⁰ Meenakshi Shedde, “Meet the Professionals Zone,” (Presentation, Film Bazaar, November 23, 2021).

⁵¹ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 15.

⁵² Tiwari, “From New Cinema to New Indie,” 39.

Career of a Global Category,” Rochona Majumdar traces the visit of Marie Seton, an English film society activist, critic, biographer, and filmmaker who visited the country in the 1950s. In her works, *The Art of Five Directors: Film Appreciation* (1961) and *Film as an Art and Film Appreciation* (1964), Seton distinguishes between art cinema and entertainment. Majumdar argues that the parameters of “art” cinema evoke Eurocentrism and cosmopolitanism. Films that deviate from that norm cannot become part of the canon. It is valuable to quote Majumdar’s discussion on how Seton’s works exclude Ritwik Ghatak, a noted Indian film director between 1952 and 1967, from the list of Indian art filmmakers:

The problem has to do with an appreciation for films that braided the local with the popular to create a cinema that departed from the normative aesthetic of neorealism and universal humanism championed by Seton. [...] Yet his [Ritwik Ghatak] films are not quite classifiable as art cinema in Seton’s schema; they were not cosmopolitan, they did not believe in the “universal accessibility” of the language of films, and they mixed elements of the popular and folk with those drawn from high culture in an effort to blur the distinction between entertainment and art. Yet it would be impossible to speak to the topic of the Indian art film today without, according to Ghatak, the status of a pioneer.⁵³

Majumdar’s analysis shows that the perception and classification of Indian art films have been shaped by defining art cinema using Eurocentric parameters, and films that do not follow these

⁵³ Rochona Majumdar, “Art Cinema: The Indian Career of a Global Category,” *Critical Inquiry* 42, no. 3 (March 2016): 609, <https://doi.org/10.1086/685605>.

traditions are excluded from art cinema. This contributes to the need to negotiate Western art cinema tradition in Indian independent filmmaking. Many Indian independent films still need to negotiate western beliefs of quality and aesthetic merits to be widely circulated in the international film festival circuit. This notion of “universal accessibility” in art films is promoted, produced, and perpetuated by the international film festival circuit. The Bazaar contributes to perpetuating such Eurocentric beliefs through its curatorial and programming practices. Moreover, international film festivals, with their prestige, recognition, and awards/rewards, can even potentially influence non-western filmmakers to “produce for the festival circuit rather than for their region or according to (an imagined) artistic integrity.”⁵⁴ The Bazaar, in turn, by positioning its identity alongside global film festival practices, has the potential to influence Indian filmmakers to produce films for the festival circuit than for India.

Additionally, previous findings underscore how the notions of universal/national shape the curation and programming practices of film festivals. In the book, *World Cinema*, Shekhar Deshpande, and Meta Majaz discussed the approaches that make up the conceptual framework for “festival films,” which combines “national specificity” and “universality.”⁵⁵ Deshpande and Majaz explain: “Inclusion and exclusion, politics of recognition, is the notion of national allegory, the simultaneous ability of a film to project national specificity on one hand and universality on the other.”⁵⁶ In his founding study, Devasundaram demonstrates that the new independent cinema is

⁵⁴ Julian Stringer, “Global Cities and International Film Festival Economy,” in *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, ed. Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 134–144, quoted in Marijke De Valck and Skadi Loist, *Film Festivals / Film Festival Research: Thematic, Annotated Bibliography*, 2nd ed. (Universität Hamburg, Institut für Germanistik, 2009), <https://doi.org/10.25969/MEDIAREP/12900>.

⁵⁵ Deshpande and Mazaj, “Films Festivals and World Cinema,” 114.

⁵⁶ Deshpande and Mazaj, “Films Festivals and World Cinema,” 114.

rooted in the national history while also incorporating global aesthetics. In his study, Devasundaram includes films that emerged out of NFDC Bazaar alongside films that were produced by studios, corporations, and stars.⁵⁷ Shifting the focus on transnational co-productions, media and cultural studies scholar Kaur in her article, “At Home in the World,” discusses the predominant notions of “national stories” and “universality” in the contemporary independent films of India.⁵⁸ Marking the shift from national cinemas to transnational co-productions, Kaur’s article discusses that the aesthetics of internationally co-produced films conform to the parameters of art cinema, and they are shaped not only by the *auteur* filmmaker but also by various stakeholders involved in the international film festival network (e.g., sales agents, funding bodies, and government agencies, etc.).⁵⁹ Further, the transnational co-production funding structures may contribute to increased opportunities for exhibition at international film festivals.⁶⁰ However, major international film festivals regularly limit the selection to one or two films from a single territory. During our interview, the Indian producer Kabir raises questions about the geographical selection process of films at major film festivals:

We are not the crown. It is important to understand the reality of film festivals. They want to select a diversity of films from different countries such as Sudan, India and Indonesia and China. But they can only select a limited number of films from each of those countries. For example, if a film festival has already picked a film from India, selecting a second one can be a daunting

⁵⁷ Devasundaram, *India’s New Independent Cinema*, 122.

⁵⁸ Kaur, “At Home in the World: Co-Productions and Indian Alternative Cinema,” 123-145.

⁵⁹ Kaur, “At Home in the World,” 123-145.

⁶⁰ Guneet Monga, personal interview, June 14, 2021.

task—even if the film is exceptional. This is because we are the jewels on the crown. That’s an absolute reality. Second, do they really pick up good films, or do they pick up films, especially when they pick up from South Asia, with a certain political bias and a certain political outlook?⁶¹

In this narrative, the geographical signifiers dominate the film festival programming. Kabir is referring to the programming frameworks of film festivals by comparing regions to the “jewels” on the crown, i.e., the major international film festivals. India has the largest film industry, and it produces approximately 1,255 films each year.⁶² According to De Valck, the geographical selection process is represented through the festival’s discovery of new trends in various regions in the form of the “new waves” and these trends are recognized through their countries of origin.⁶³ For example, the Indian New Wave. The “national” framework can potentially contribute to preconceptions and presumptions about the genre or themes of films from specific regions. International film festivals are frequently criticized for exhibiting recurrent themes that were associated with Parallel Cinema or New Indian Cinema, such as poverty, tradition/modernity, and rural calamity. A media article notes that “the West and the innumerable festivals are only interested in seeing an India that is wallowing in waste, and India where crime rules...”⁶⁴ For example, crime is a recurring theme in Anurag Kashyap’s films such as *Gangs of Wasseypur* (2012), *Ugly* (2013) and *Raman Raghav 2.0* (2016). Kashyap has gained recognition by representing contemporary Indian independent cinema at the international film festival circuit. In

⁶¹ Kabir, personal interview, August 1, 2021.

⁶² Stephen Follows, “How Many Films Are Made around the World?,” Stephen Follows, October 5, 2015, <https://stephenfollows.com/how-many-films-are-made-around-the-world/>.

⁶³ De Valck, “Finding Audiences for Films: Programming in Historical Perspective,” 25-40.

⁶⁴ “The Film Festival Disease: Celebrating Indian Poverty -Entertainment News,” *Firstpost*, October 23, 2012, <https://www.firstpost.com/entertainment/the-film-festival-disease-celebrating-indian-poverty-499644.html>.

this context, Film Bazaar is known for further facilitating and promoting the films of Kashyap at international film festivals.⁶⁵

However, the curation process is not only shaped by global festival beliefs (e.g., Anglo/Western values, festival film/art cinema, global/local or national/universal) but also by other factors such as the cultural, economic and geopolitical interests of film festivals themselves.⁶⁶ Similarly, the curation at the Bazaar is shaped by the international film festival's diverse agendas, values, and belief systems, as well as the national political-economic/industrial structures of India. Building on the discussion on India's national industrial structure, this chapter will further explore and contextualize the formation of transnational art films, specifically in the section about creative management at the Bazaar.

Further, the curation of Bazaar requires exploring both formal practices of programming, but also several other film industry-specific practices of its participants, such as borderless networking, mentoring, and collaborative culture that are based on the macro-level global film festival culture. These micro-level practices contribute to the formation of transnational "festival film" at the Bazaar, incorporating the Anglo/Western values of international film festivals. Festival scholar Iordanova also observes the common industrial practices of the festivals such as

⁶⁵ Liz Shackleton, "Kashyap, Nair among Film-Makers Selected for Film Bazaar," *Screen*, accessed July 13, 2023, <https://www.screendaily.com/kashyap-nair-among-film-makers-selected-for-film-bazaar/4041791.article>.

⁶⁶ De Valck and Loist, *Film Festivals / Film Festival Research*; Daniel Dayan, "Looking for Sundance: The Social Construction of a Film Festival," in *Moving Images, Culture and the Mind*, ed. Ib Bondebjerg (Luton: Univ. of Luton Press, 2000), 43–52. De Valck and Loist conducted a comprehensive study of existing scholarship on film festivals, highlighting film festivals are driven by diverging economic, cultural, and geopolitical interests of film festivals. This extensive study covers research that demonstrates the "fascist influence over the Venice Film Festival in the late 1930s, the Cold War agenda on the Berlin Film Festival and politically informed (programming) practices in Eastern Europe." Additionally, in his study of the Sundance Film Festival, Daniel Dayan also discovered that film festivals are driven by a group of distinct stakeholders with diverse interests, experiences, and agendas.

networking and pitching.⁶⁷ In her narrative, senior staff member Aparna also placed an important emphasis on building long-term relationships in the international film festival circuit to build the Bazaar.⁶⁸ This reveals aspects of global film festival culture, which is built on cultivating a culture of collaboration alongside innovation and experimentation. In the Indian film industry, Bollywood and the private sector dominate the Mumbai film industry; therefore, the focus of the Bazaar shifted towards constructing “private/public partnerships” and creating a more collaborative film culture, according to Aparna.⁶⁹ Such partnerships and collaborations, both at the domestic and international level, became a defining trait in her approach to transforming the culture of Indian independent filmmaking, making it more collaborative and transnational. Aparna depends on creating a network or community-building to manage and mitigate the risks of managing the film market for independent filmmaking in the Bollywood-dominated film culture of India. The strategy of building long-term collaborative interpersonal relationships also reveals how the film festival world works transnationally. Sagar, a Marketing Manager at Sikhya Entertainment, made similar remarks. Sagar noted that “there is a considerable relationship-building in the film industry. Based on my experience, this entails building relationships with your vendors, with your colleagues, with your co-producing partner’s team.”⁷⁰ These comments suggest the importance of networking, collaboration, and community-building in India’s transnational independent filmmaking culture. These professional practices potentially contribute to the curation process in international film festivals. In the article, “Seeing Differently,” Roya Rastegar examines the curatorial process to

⁶⁷ Iordanova, “The Film Festival as an Industry Node, 7.”

⁶⁸ Aparna, personal interview, June 4, 2021.

⁶⁹ Aparna, personal interview, June 4, 2021.

⁷⁰ Sagar, personal interview, June 25, 2021. Sikhya Entertainment is a Mumbai-based production company, which is known for producing alternative cinema. The company is owned by Indian producer, Guneet Monga. The next chapter will develop on her journey as a producer.

understand “how the keepers of those gates determine who shall pass, and who shall not.”⁷¹ Based on their vast experience of working closely in programming at Tribeca Film Festival, Sundance, and Los Angeles Film Festival, Rastegar argues that one of the major challenges in curation is to select films beyond personal taste and professional network.⁷² In this way, the interpersonal and professional practices (e.g., networking and mentoring) of participants also contribute to the curation process.

The Bazaar 2021 Knowledge Series session between Vetrimaaran and Paolo Bertolini, “A Film’s Cycle: From Idea to Audience,” demonstrates how such personal and professional practices are materialized within the spatial-temporal boundaries of the Bazaar and beyond. This session reveals that micro-level practices such as networking and mentoring also contribute to curation and reproducing the Western “taste” of transnational art cinema at the Bazaar. Vetrimaaran is a four-time National award-winning, Tamil Nadu-based filmmaker and Paolo Bertolini, a film programmer, producer, and regional consultant of the Venice International Film Festival since 2008. The conversation between Vetrimaaran and Bertolini helps illustrate the conventions and practices that contribute to the development of transnational film culture for independent films through the international film festival circuit. The conversation compared the different models and grammar of Indian and European cinema, and the discussion between Vetrimaaran and Bertolini - intended for emerging filmmakers, producers, and other film festival professionals - was “culturally revealing.”⁷³ It provides insights into practices of the larger international film festival

⁷¹ Roya Rastegar, “Seeing differently: curatorial potential of festival programming” in *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*, eds., Marijke de Valck, Brendan Kredell, and Skadi Loist (London: Routledge, 2016), 181-195.

⁷² Roya Rastegar, “Seeing differently,” 183.

⁷³ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 14.

culture and their impact on Indian independent films. Vetrimaaran's film *Visaranai* ('Interrogation,' 2015), a disturbing crime drama on corruption and police brutality, was India's official entry into the Academy Awards in 2017. During the conversation at the Bazaar, Vetrimaaran stated:

There is no parallel movement in [the state of] Tamil Nadu. Whatever you do is for theatrical and based on that, you will get another film. I always say my first film, *Polladhavan*, was a desperate attempt by an assistant director to make a film. My producers wanted five songs, and the climax had to be larger than life.⁷⁴

Vetrimaaran here noted that Tamil language films are mostly made for a theatrical audience; therefore, filmmakers need to integrate commercial elements to "make it" in the Tamil film industry of South India. Vetrimaaran thus deliberately chose to make a film for the international film festival circuit to avoid the artistic negotiations he would potentially have to make in the regional Tamil film industry. The conversation revealed how the famous duo Anurag Kashyap, a popular Hindi-language independent filmmaker, and his former assistant and producer, Guneet Monga, pitched the film to Bertolini.⁷⁵ The duo of Kashyap-Monga collaborated on notable independent films, including *Gangs of Wasseypur* (2012) and *The Lunchbox* (2013), travelled to A-list international film festivals for over a decade and earned international recognition for

⁷⁴ Team FC, "6 Things Vetri Maaran Told Film Bazaar About How He Charted His Cinematic Success," Film Companion, Movie reviews, Celebrity Interviews, New Films Trailer, Web Series, accessed September 23, 2022, <https://www.filmcompanion.in/features/film-festivals/news/vetri-maaran-movies-aadukalam-vada-chennai-visaranai-dhanush-how-he-charted-his-cinematic-success-tamil-movies>.

⁷⁵ Team FC, "6 Things Vetri Maaran Told Film Bazaar About How He Charted His Cinematic Success," January 26, 2021, <https://www.filmcompanion.in/features/film-festivals/news/vetri-maaran-movies-aadukalam-vada-chennai-visaranai-dhanush-how-he-charted-his-cinematic-success-tamil-movies>.

independent films in India.⁷⁶ In a media interview, Monga narrated how Marco Mueller, a veteran festival programmer and producer, explained to her in the early days of her career as a producer that Monga needs to establish a professional network through meetings with foreign distributors and sales agents before the festival.⁷⁷ Subsequently, Monga recognized the need to build her “tribe” by “visiting the big festival towns in the off-season, armed with a list of industry players to track down and meet.”⁷⁸ This provided Kashyap and Monga with social and symbolic capital in the festival circuit, which allowed them to navigate the festival space and support emerging independent filmmakers and producers of India. The recommendation was, therefore, accepted by Bertolini. This agreement to mentor Vetrimaaran for his film highlights the importance of interpersonal relations and networking practices in the international film festival industry. The conversation between Vetrimaaran and Bertolini suggests the networking culture is built and reproduced through routines of interpersonal relations and networking by frequent festival participants. The conversation shows that the transnational film production culture is based on trust and solidarity to support emerging independent filmmakers and facilitate reaching a global audience. Western film programmers trust the recommendations of the Bazaar and of established Indian independent filmmakers, producers, or networks that they have cultivated over the years at international film festivals. The production story of *Visaranai* reveals that creative collaborations are formed through networking within the international film festival circuit institutionally and informally over a period. In a similar vein, Bazaar’s distribution and syndication consultant Pooja

⁷⁶ “Guneet Monga: The Passion Principle,” *Open The Magazine* (blog), February 3, 2023, <https://openthemagazine.com/cinema/guneet-monga-the-passion-principle/>.

⁷⁷ “Guneet Monga Module – Mumbai Academy of Moving Image,” accessed June 30, 2023, <https://www.mumbaifilmfestival.com/blogs/guneet-monga-module/>.

⁷⁸ Uday Bhatia, “Guneet Monga: Indian Cinema’s World Citizen,” *Mint*, March 29, 2019, <https://www.livemint.com/mint-lounge/features/guneet-monga-world-citizen-1553841314069.html>.

Mohite underscores the importance of “micro-level” network-building in independent filmmaking at the Bazaar in the following manner:

It is about whom you met and how soon, how you collaborate, and interpersonal skills to some extent. Sometimes average scripts get made because of good creative producers and the right collaborations. I have seen better films not get made or turned out well. Projects that were not part of the Bazaar often take longer. The project might be good, but how much interest your film can generate is also important.⁷⁹

Interpersonal networking contributes to curating and creating a “buzz” around a film. In India, there are few platforms for independent filmmakers to collaborate internationally, and as a result, film professionals who attend Bazaar and form networks to participate in the international festival circuit potentially become “gatekeepers.” Most of the film festival community comprises those who speak English fluently and have good interpersonal skills to network and understand national and international filmmaking guidelines.⁸⁰ In addition to networking, mentoring practices contribute to the development of a transnational “festival film” at the Bazaar.

During the Knowledge Series session, the director of *Visaranai*, Vetrimaaran emphasized his motivations to reach an international audience because the film highlights characters and situations that are universal, and evokes human emotions such as fear, and survival, which are easy to identify with collectively.⁸¹ In our interview, Bazaar’s senior staff member Aparna, emphasizes that “the priority is to make local content in local languages because that is where the primary

⁷⁹ Pooja Mohite, personal interview, April 8, 2021.

⁸⁰ Pooja Mohite, personal interview, April 8, 2021.

⁸¹ Field Notes on Film Bazaar, January 17, 2021.

market is.”⁸² However, Bazaar’s local films are shaped by western programmers and mentors for the international film festival circuit. As a mentor, Bertolini shaped the film, *Visaranai* by introducing global or festival sensibilities at the level of both content and sound design. For example, Bertolini remarked that the film was “too local” to be understood by the international audience and that the international festivals will potentially label the music as “excessive.”⁸³ This suggests the failure of world cinema and international film festivals, as also remarked by Bertolini in this conversation.⁸⁴ Bertolini, as a western film programmer, mentored Vetrimaaran to negotiate Anglo/Western aesthetics and “taste” in order for the film to be circulated at international film festivals. The festival programmers emphasize the importance of authentic and local stories, but not “too local” to cater to the taste of western audiences. While Vetrimaaran is not required to incorporate the values of mainstream Tamil cinema, his collaboration with the international film festival community requires negotiations between local and global values of the festival. The director, Vetrimaaran, made the suggested changes under the mentorship of Bertolini, and the film premiered at the 72nd Venice Film Festival in 2017. The domestic theatrical version of the film had music, but during the festival run, including the Oscar competition for the “Best Foreign Film” category, the music was not included in the screenings. Vetrimaaran additionally modified the dialogues to make them more universal and appeal to an international audience.⁸⁵ In this way, the transnational film culture for independent films negotiates the idea of the local film for an art-house “festival film” to reach a global audience.

⁸² Aparna, personal interview, June 4, 2021.

⁸³ Field Notes on Film Bazaar, January 17, 2021.

⁸⁴ Field Notes on Film Bazaar, January 17, 2021.

⁸⁵ Prathyush Parasuraman, “The Universe of Vetri Maaran: 5 Things To Look Out For Before Asuran,” *Film Companion* (blog), October 1, 2019, <https://www.filmcompanion.in/features/tamil-features/the-universe-of-vetri-maaran-5-things-to-look-out-for-before-asuran/>.

The mentoring practice and its implications on the journey of the independent film here can be viewed as a give-and-take relationship in the global film industry – it gives an opportunity to reach a wider audience, but it takes away several local elements in favour of the Eurocentric values of art-house cinema. In one of the earliest articles in film festival research, “Global Image Consumption in the Age of Late Capitalism,” film scholar Bill Nichols, rightly pointed out the central concern of film festival research: the local and global dynamics, in which local films are circulated globally but within certain limits of its own system:

The festival circuit allows the local to circulate globally, within a specific system of institutional assumptions, priorities, and constraints. Never only or purely local, festival films nonetheless circulate, in large part, with a cachet of locally inscribed difference and globally ascribed commonality. They both attest to the uniqueness of different cultures and specific filmmakers and affirm the underlying qualities of “international cinema.”⁸⁶

These local/global dynamics have become more complicated, and the festivals emerge as “producers” of art-house films through programming, mentoring and development funding, contributing to the continuation of western notions of quality and aesthetic standards in the global film culture. There is an emerging scholarship on the potential harm caused by neocolonial patterns between film programming and funding mechanisms.⁸⁷ Film festival scholars assert that the new development funding models for the Global South by the Global North have neocolonial

⁸⁶ Bill Nichols, “Global Image Consumption in the Age of Late Capitalism,” *East-West Journal* 8, no. 1 (January 1994): 68.

⁸⁷ Tamara Falicov, “Film Funding Opportunities for Latin American Filmmakers: A Case for Further North South Collaboration in Training and Film Festival Initiatives,” in *A Companion to Latin American Cinema*, edited by Maria M. Delgado et al., (Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 85–98.

tendencies with implications for the content, style and even exhibition of the films. The IFFR provides support for independent filmmakers from “developing countries” through the Hubert Bals Fund since 1988. In the article, “The Film Festival as Producer,” Miriam Ross remarks that a film funded through Hubert Bals Fund becomes its property, gaining or rather giving the funding body the exclusive distribution rights of the film in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg.⁸⁸ Similarly, Indian transnational independent films that travel through the festivals frequently emerge from Anglo/Western programming, mentoring, and funding models – common practices of international film festivals.

However, the adoption of transnational practices also transformed India’s independent film production culture by making it more organized and professional. Bazaar’s senior staff member Aparna adds that scripts are written multiple times, and the international mentoring and training gave independent filmmakers opportunities to develop stronger scripts, co-produce domestically and internationally, and reach a global audience.⁸⁹ The international mentoring practices have also led to greater professionalization and allow Indian independent filmmakers to reach a wider international audience. Many interview subjects of this study unanimously agreed that international collaborations have similarly transformed sound design in Indian cinema. The evolution from dubbed to sync sound (i.e., a synchronized method of sound recording in which the sound is recorded at the time of filming itself) results from transnational collaborations at the production level. India is a loud country, with constant background noise. It is almost impossible

⁸⁸ Miriam Ross, “The Film Festival as Producer: Latin American films and Rotterdam’s Hubert Bals Fund,” *Screen* 52, no. 2 (2011): 261–67. doi:10.1093/screen/hjr014.

⁸⁹ Aparna, personal interview, June 4, 2021.

to record dialogue in bustling cities; therefore, India has a history of dubbing in the cinema.⁹⁰ The French producer of Indian-French co-production *Sir* (2019), Brice Poisson, asserts that European cinema does not have a tradition of dubbing; therefore, he preferred to shoot the film entirely in sync sound.⁹¹ The film was part of the Work-in-Progress lab at the Bazaar and the French mentor of the lab, Jacques Comets, worked as the editor of the film.⁹² In this way, India's independent film production culture became more professionalized and structured. The next chapter further develops the networking and mentoring culture by discussing the important yet neglected function of the producers in the making of Indian independent cinema and its transnational culture.

Thus, this section demonstrated that the Bazaar positions its identity alongside international film festivals by adapting their structures and values through formal practices of programming, which contributes to the formation of transnational art-house or “festival films,” while practices of mentoring and networking practices among frequent film festival participants, further circulate and reproduce those values of film festivals. In what follows, I examine how the Bazaar functions and adapts this global film festival model within the distinct industry structures of India. Therefore, I begin by discussing the micro-level power dynamics that reflect the larger neoliberal-nationalist structures. Then, I will focus on examining the creative management of the Bazaar, and the precarious work culture of its staff members in these larger neoliberal-national structures.

⁹⁰ Pjaikumar, “Out of Sync,” *Sounding Out!* (blog), November 6, 2017.

⁹¹ Brice Poisson, Personal interview, August 19, 2021.

⁹² Rohena Gera [@RohenaGera], “Thank You so Much @filmbazaarindia. It Was an Honour to Work with Master Editor #JacquesComets Thanks to the Official Indo-French Co-Production and the Support of the @LeCNC Aide Aux Cinémas Du Monde. @Tesson_5475 @LenouvelThierry @BricePoisson @FranceinIndia @MIB_India,” Tweet, *Twitter*, November 16, 2020, <https://twitter.com/RohenaGera/status/1328261890372481026>.

Power Dynamics and Branding at the Bazaar

India's independent film production culture is increasingly becoming transnational, and the government aims to promote, commercialize, and establish India as a recognized brand on the world stage.⁹³ The Bazaar is an excellent representation of how India's political-economic motivations are "re-enacted in the time and space of the festival and even beyond."⁹⁴ The micro-level discussions of the participants at the Bazaar reinforce that the Indian government simultaneously promotes and limits the transnational culture through its policies and practices. Throughout this section, I will illustrate how the government views transnational film and media culture as an economic and political opportunity to brand India globally, though it represents a threat to its Hindu-led nationalist objectives simultaneously.

Production studies scholar Vicki Mayer notes that "corporate events are staged in spaces and at times when networks, advertisers, and trade industries celebrate themselves to gain market advantage and position themselves against competitors."⁹⁵ In a similar vein, festival scholar De Valck argues that film festivals are more than just a venue for cinephiles. They are spaces for discussing nationality, political relations, and opportunities for economic growth and success.⁹⁶ In what follows, I analyze several discussions that were part of the 2021 Bazaar to demonstrate how the micro-level sessions and interactions reflect the macro-level political-economic structures, i.e., market-oriented, and nationalist objectives of the Indian government.

⁹³ "'Monetise And Modernise' is the PM's Mantra or Govt. Assets," *India Brand Equity Foundation*, accessed May 20, 2021, <https://www.ibef.org/blogs/monetise-and-modernise-is-the-pm-s-mantra-for-govt-assets>.

⁹⁴ Iordanova, "The Film Festival as an Industry Node," 7-11.

⁹⁵ Mayer, "Bringing the Social Back in," 19.

⁹⁶ De Valck, *Film Festivals*, 16.

During the 2021 Bazaar, approximately 6 out of 10 discussions in the “Knowledge Series” section were primarily concerned with celebrating, establishing, and branding India as a film-friendly destination for global business with excellent digital technology, artists, and locations ready to be discovered and monetized.⁹⁷ For example, the “Filming in India” session focused on “the pro-activeness” of the Film Facilitation Office, National Film Development, and the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting in reaching international standards and goals.⁹⁸ The discussion highlighted the excellence of human resources, highly skilled labour, technological innovations, and post-production facilities in India. In a similar vein, the Knowledge Series session, “A Quest for Excellence,” focused on the recent government interventions to set up the National Centre of Excellence for Animation, Gaming, Visual Effects and Comics industry in Mumbai.⁹⁹ This is an initiative for skill development, offering diplomas, research, degree programs, and courses in technical skills related to VFX, animation, gaming, and the comics sector. In 2014, the Indian and Canadian Governments signed an audio-visual co-production deal to enable producers from both countries to exchange and explore their cultures and creativity, respectively.¹⁰⁰ With the Indian government’s goals to exploit creative and cultural labour, transnational film culture is evolving in India, inviting the exploitation of resources, skilled labour and cheap postproduction facilities through expansion and professional skill training. The industry-oriented study *Global Hollywood* argues that the global success of Hollywood lies in the “New International Division of Cultural Labor” (NICL) via co-productions, intellectual property and copyright laws, distribution,

⁹⁷ Field Notes on Film Bazaar, January 16-21, 2021.

⁹⁸ Field Notes on Film Bazaar, January 18, 2021.

⁹⁹ Field Notes on Film Bazaar, January 19, 2021.

¹⁰⁰ “Canada, India Finally Enact Film Co-Production Treaty,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, accessed October 13, 2022, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/canada-india-finally-enact-film-716453/>.

marketing, and exhibition strategies, and finally audiences.¹⁰¹ The Global South similarly contributes to this larger structure of NICL by supporting the neoliberal-national economy of the country. However, the transnational initiatives intersect with the nationalist objectives of the government. This duality (or contradiction) has been at the heart of the Bazaar since the right-wing government came into power. The micro-level interactions at the Bazaar reflect and reproduce the larger neoliberal-nationalist ambitions of the Indian government.

The discussion, “Meet the Streamers,” at the Bazaar is an excellent example of understanding the micro/macro power dynamics and national branding. The panel included Vikram Sahay (Joint Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting), Aparna Acharekar (Programming Head, Zee5), Karan Bedi (MX Player) and Saugata Mukherjee (Head, Original Content Sony Liv), with Deepti Chawala (Head Distribution & Syndication, NFDC), who moderated the session.¹⁰² The discussion celebrated the streaming culture in India; however, it also disguised the current Hindu nationalist politics and its impact on the Indian film industry. The recent cases that curb freedom of expression in the Indian film industry include controversies around contemporary web series such as *Mirzapur* (2018), *A Suitable Boy* (2020), and *Tandav* (2021).¹⁰³ A court case was filed against the producers of *Mirzapur* on account of the “indecent portrayal of the town Mirzapur and outraging religious belief.”¹⁰⁴ The Supreme Court of India later dismissed the plea, stating that “the court cannot allow any kind of censorship before a show

¹⁰¹ Toby Miller, Nitin Govil, and John McMurria, *Global Hollywood* (London: British Film Institute, 2001).

¹⁰² Field Notes on Film Bazaar, January 19, 2021.

¹⁰³ “From Tandav, Mirzapur to A Suitable Boy- OTT Content Which Courted Controversies! | Web Series News,” *Zee News*, accessed October 13, 2022, <https://zeenews.india.com/web-series/from-tandav-mirzapur-to-a-suitable-boy-ott-content-which-courted-controversies-2344324.html>.

¹⁰⁴ “Allahabad High Court Stays Arrest of “Mirzapur” Makers,” *The Hindu*, January 30, 2021, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/allahabad-high-court-stays-arrest-of-mirzapur-makers/article33699473.ece>.

is released.”¹⁰⁵ The Modi-led government imposed new regulations on censoring digital content, and therefore, Vikram Sahay (Joint Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting) delivered the message during the session, “Meet the Streamers.”¹⁰⁶ Other speakers of the panel did not question the decision. The silence that followed the message of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting reveals the larger political conditions of India. These micro-level interactions reveal the power hierarchies, underscoring the daily interactions that occur in an institutional setting between NFDC workers and the state authority, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The example reinforces that state-sponsored trade events are staged and managed and they frequently lack debate and dissent. The discussion focused more on celebrating the success of streaming content. During the session, Chawala (NFDC’s Head of Distribution & Syndication) called the success of the digital boom the “dramatic exposé of India’s soft power.”¹⁰⁷ Overall, the session emphasized the supremacy of skills, talent, and technology to market India, its culture, and its location to the world. In this way, the promotion of an international film production culture coincides with a self-regulation code for streaming content was also finalized by the digital entertainment committee of the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) in February 2021. Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+, Hotstar, ZEE5 and Voot have agreed with the regulations. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting will control digital audio-visual content, including films, web shows and news and current affairs and broadcasting.¹⁰⁸ The micro-

¹⁰⁵ “SC Dismisses Plea Seeking Pre-Screening Committee for Web Shows,” *Scroll*, October 14, 2022. <https://scroll.in/latest/1034987/sc-dismisses-plea-seeking-pre-screening-committee-for-web-shows>.

¹⁰⁶ Field Notes on Film Bazaar, January 19, 2021.

¹⁰⁷ Field Notes on Film Bazaar, January 19, 2021.

¹⁰⁸ “Media and Entertainment Industry in India, Indian Media Industry,” *Indian Brand Equity Foundation*, accessed May 23, 2021, <https://www.ibef.org/industry/media-entertainment-india.aspx>.

level interactions at the Bazaar as they reflect and reproduce the larger political-economic ambitions of the Indian government.

In *Brand New Nation*, Ravinder Kaur encapsulates this contradiction as she argues that the current Prime Minister Modi positions the nation as a land of promise and investment in the service of global capital, concealing any news that harms the alluring image of India. The state/capital is intimately connected in what she calls the pro-capital nationalist politics of present India. Kaur states, “The nation in this scheme is imagined as a vast enclosure of production, its territory a reserve of untapped natural resources, its population potential producers/consumers of goods and services, and its cultural essence a unique nation brand that distinguishes it from other investment destinations.”¹⁰⁹ The Knowledge Series session, “Filming in India,” emphasized “the ease of filming” through single-window clearance and the significance of locations for foreign shooting to brand India in the global film market. The session echoed PM Modi’s Independence Day speech about the “Make in India” campaign on August 15, 2014:

I want to tell the people of the whole world: Come, make in India.
Come and manufacture in India. Go and sell in any country of the world
but manufacture here. We have the skill, talent, discipline, and desire to
do something. We want to give the world an opportunity to come to
make in India.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Ravinder Kaur, *Brand New Nation Capitalist Dreams and Nationalist Designs in Twenty-First Century India* (California: Stanford University Press, 2020), 13, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503612600>.

¹¹⁰ “Make In India Programme, All About the Manufacture in India Initiative,” accessed May 20, 2021, <https://www.ibef.org/economy/make-in-india>.

The website, (www.makeinindia.com) is devoted to this initiative that “not only showcases the 25 sectors but also puts focus on opportunities, policies and Ease of Doing Business.”¹¹¹ The NFDC also set up the Film Facilitation Office in 2015. Through an online portal, FFO acts as a single-window facilitation and clearance mechanism for international and Indian filmmakers to film feature films, television, and web series in India.¹¹² Mira Nair’s recent web series, *A Suitable Boy* (2020) is one such example. The co-producer of the series Alan McAlex notes that the initiatives taken by the Indian government had significantly supported and accelerated international shooting, co-productions, and collaboration in India.¹¹³ The web series revolves around the theme of tradition/modernity in post-partition and post-independent India. In the weeks leading up to Bazaar, *A Suitable Boy* sparked controversy for allegedly harming Hindu “religious sentiments” by depicting a kissing scene in a temple.¹¹⁴ *A Suitable Boy* is not an isolated case. Recent accusations of “hurting religious sentiments” made against several digital series and films limit creative and artistic freedom.¹¹⁵ Thus, the facilitation and celebration of streaming content exist alongside the new digital regulations and censorship. However, at the Bazaar, no political debates were held.

As discussed in the previous chapter, NFDC was rooted in the process of regulation and nationalization of the film industry, and NFDC films seldom had dissenting origins. During our

¹¹¹ “Make In India Programme, All About the Manufacture in India Initiative.”

¹¹² “About FFO,” Film Facilitation Office, accessed September 22, 2020, <https://ffo.gov.in/en/about-us>.

¹¹³ “Discover the Joy of Filming in India,” *Pickle Media*, May 18, 2022, <https://pickle.co.in/locales/discover-the-joy-of-filming-in-india/>.

¹¹⁴ “Controversy over The Suitable Boy; BJP Claims “Hindu Sentiments Hurt” over “Temple Kissing Scene,”” *The Times Now*, accessed July 28, 2022, <https://www.timesnownews.com/videos/times-now/india/controversy-over-the-suitable-boy-bjp-claims-hindu-sentiments-hurt-over-temple-kissing-scene/81783>.

¹¹⁵ “Creativity up in Smoke?; Artistes Give Their Take on the Kaali Controversy,” *The Tribune India*, accessed July 28, 2022, <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/entertainment/creativity-up-in-smoke-artistes-give-their-take-on-the-kaali-controversy-410553>.

interviews, some participants argued that the films that are part of the Bazaar do not go through any censorship process during their development stages. In a personal interview, programming coordinator Abhra Das noted that film markets do not follow a disciplining culture because they are not geared toward the public.¹¹⁶ In the same vein, Distribution and Syndication Consultant Pooja Mohite asserts that the Bazaar supported a film like *Nasir*, which was about a sensitive subject of religious intolerance. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, the Indian co-producer of *Nasir*, Mathivanan Rajendran reveals that there is a “tweaking of pitches and scripts,” and Netflix further declined to release the films on their platform due to political reasons.¹¹⁷ Similarly, Bazaar’s former marketing consultant, Shraddha Chauhan, claims that the change in the government entails a change in the mandates and vision of NFDC.¹¹⁸ Chauhan highlights an anecdote about a controversial independent horror film, *Sexy Durga* (2017) and reveals that there were attempts to hide the posters of the film during the visit of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting at the Bazaar.¹¹⁹ Indian co-producer of *Nasir*, Harsh Aggarwal also emphasizes that the goals of this new government do not align with the vision of independent filmmaking.¹²⁰ Similarly, the Indian producer Kabir believes that “the government disapproves of independent filmmaking because it is too empowering for democracy.”¹²¹ While there might be no formal censoring of scripts in the Bazaar, the signs of indirect interventions are clear in various other ways.

¹¹⁶ Abhra Das, personal interview, October 2, 2021.

¹¹⁷ Mathivanan Rajendran, personal interview, May 28, 2021.

¹¹⁸ Shraddha Chauhan, personal interview, June 3, 2021.

¹¹⁹ Shraddha Chauhan, personal interview, June 3, 2021.

¹²⁰ Harsh Aggarwal, personal interview, July 4, 2021.

¹²¹ Kabir, personal interview, August 1, 2021.

Censorship and regulation are not a new phenomenon in India. However, self-censorship and cultural policing in film and media accelerated over the past 10 years. India's press freedom ranking has plummeted after Modi came to power. According to the 2017 World Press Freedom Index, India's rank fell from 133 to 136 among 180 countries and is linked with "Modi's nationalism" and "self-censorship" in news and media.¹²² India's rank has been declining since 2010, however, several changes in methodology have been made in creating the index since then. The ranking fell from 122 in 2010, to 136 in 2016 and 142 in 2021.¹²³ Samanth Subramanian, an Indian writer and journalist, also argues that the past governments have also tried to control cinemas in India. However, these attempts have been strengthened in the past decade. For example, the government abolished the law, which used to allow filmmakers to question the decision to ban a film, among other measures.¹²⁴ These constant attempts to limit freedom of expression in film and media by the Modi government continue to persist. Indian independent cinema expert Devasundaram also noted that "India's democratic credentials are facing an existential crisis with the seemingly ineluctable rise of a neo-fascist majoritarian governmental model committed to dismantling the nation's secular socio-political fabric and establishing a theocratic Hindu *rashtra* (nation)."¹²⁵ The previous chapter examined the macro-level nationalist political context and its impact on cultural institutions and filmmaking culture in India. This chapter analyzes the micro-

¹²² "Press Freedom Rankings: India Slips 3 Places to 136, 'Modi's Nationalism' Blamed," *Hindustan Times*, April 27, 2017. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/world-press-freedom-rankings-india-slips-3-places-to-136-modi-s-nationalism-blamed/story-ealyBJzuPAkA7SZ9hqkC9N.html>.

¹²³ PTI, "'Methodology Questionable': India on Findings of World Press Freedom Index 2022," *The Quint*, July 22, 2022, <https://www.thequint.com/news/india/government-rejects-world-press-freedom-index-2022-india-rank-methodology>.

¹²⁴ "When the Hindu Right Came for Bollywood," *The New Yorker*, accessed April 17, 2023, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/10/17/when-the-hindu-right-came-for-bollywood>.

¹²⁵ Devasundaram, *Indian Indies*, 2.

level sessions, interactions, and practices of the Bazaar within its larger neoliberal-national and transnational contexts.

Creative Management and Precarious Work Culture

This section discusses how the Bazaar adapted the international film festival model within the neoliberal-national structures of India. The establishment of the Bazaar can be traced back to the professional experiences of Aparna, a senior staff member who travelled to international film festivals and engaged with the Anglo/Western film festival community in the mid-2000s. The International Film Festival of Rotterdam (IFFR) – known for supporting independent filmmaking – specifically shaped the formation of the Bazaar.¹²⁶ The IFFR launched Cinemart as a “regular film market” in 1983. However, it changed its business model and converted it into a first-ever co-production market to present projects that are looking for additional funding.¹²⁷ Thus, Cinemart developed into an “invitation-only market” and features the selected screenplays-in-development for collaboration, as well as mentorship and networking opportunities.¹²⁸ In 1988, it began providing support for independent filmmakers from “developing countries” through the Hubert Bals Fund. Rotterdam Lab followed in 2005 in commemoration of IFFR's founder, offering training workshops to help producers navigate the world of international film financing, sales, and distribution.¹²⁹ In a similar vein, several film markets started a trend to educate the independent

¹²⁶ Pooja Mohite, personal interview, June 3, 2021.

¹²⁷ “CineMart History - International Film Festival Rotterdam 2012 - IFFR,” September 28, 2011, https://web.archive.org/web/20110928053325/http://www.filmfestivalrotterdam.com/professionals/cinemart/cinemart_history/.

¹²⁸ “CineMart | IFFR,” accessed November 9, 2022, <https://iffr.com/en/about-cinemart>.

¹²⁹ “Rotterdam Lab,” International Film Festival of Rotterdam, accessed February 7, 2022, <https://iffr.com/en/rotterdam-lab>.

filmmaking community of the Global South and provide avenues to launch careers through development funds and training programs.¹³⁰ In her detailed case study about the IFFR, De Valck argues the festival has shifted its discourse and the participants “comfortably mix and match art for art’s sake values with the new ideal of cultural entrepreneurship.”¹³¹ The concept of cultural entrepreneurship is based on neoliberal principles, which perceive cultural activities as revenue generators and, thus, suggest that cultural industries need to be economically viable businesses.¹³² In what follows, I examine to what extent the Bazaar shares similar beliefs when supporting and making Indian independent cinema nationally and internationally.

The Bazaar is transnational in its structure and format due to influences from international film festivals, but it is firmly rooted in India’s national film industry structure. Like the IFFR model, the Bazaar promotes values of “art for art’s sake” and commercialization in the Indian independent filmmaking community simultaneously. During our interview, the senior staff member Aparna asserted that Indian cinema was working in an “insulated manner.”¹³³ Therefore, Bazaar focused on facilitating collaborations and co-productions between independent filmmakers and the international film community. Aparna further argues about the importance of commercializing art cinema:

We focused largely on script labs and project development because until you could bring, a good project to the table, it had no viability; it was to create a facilitative environment. Cinema must thrive in

¹³⁰ Eren Odabasi, “Funds Associated with Film Festivals: Supporting Filmmaking in the Global South,” *Loisir et Société / Society and Leisure* 44, no. 1 (January 2, 2021): 66–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07053436.2021.1899397>.

¹³¹ De Valck, “Supporting Art Cinema at a Time of Commercialization,” 40.

¹³² De Valck, “Supporting Art Cinema at a Time of Commercialization,” 50.

¹³³ Aparna, personal interview, June 4, 2021.

commercial space for it to be a success for any format of storytelling. I think it was very important that we focus on the business sector, sort of educating the independent.¹³⁴

Aparna here emphasizes two aspects – script development and commercialization, which were critical in adapting the IFFR model to establish the Bazaar. The IFFR model was adapted to an Indian context, which involves creative management within the specific industry structure of India, which is more self-entrepreneurial, with little to no public funding. Compared to the IIFR and many European film festival models wherein the international film markets for independent filmmaking are often closely connected to their film festivals, the Bazaar is not strictly tied to the International Film Festival of India in the same manner.¹³⁵ In opposition to the IFFR, which offers funding awards and developing funds, the Bazaar does not offer public funding to finance independent films because of India’s distinctive industrial structural differences. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Indian film industry has self-entrepreneurial origins and existed without state aid for decades, except for the New Wave movement when NFDC produced and financed films of “good quality” in the 1970s through the 1980s. The Bollywood film industry was particularly composed of “independent contractors or freelancers” and has sustained itself without state support for decades.¹³⁶ NFDC incurred huge losses in the 1990s after the government adopted neoliberal policies and art-house cinema confronted a crisis in India. NFDC focused on constructing the Bazaar and building a domestic and international market for independent cinema

¹³⁴ Aparna, personal interview, June 4, 2021.

¹³⁵ Pooja Mohite, personal interview, June 3, 2021. However, the Bazaar has become closely tied to International Film Festival of India since 2022 with the current government’s goals to centralize several film intuitions.

¹³⁶ Ganti, *Producing Bollywood*, 19

to respond to these macro-political-economic upheavals brought by globalization and neo-liberalization in India. The construction of the Film Bazaar highlights the way cultural managers respond to the changing political-economic environment institutionally.

In 2007, Bazaar, however, struggled to adapt the IFFR model for facilitating an international co-production and collaboration market for Indian independent films.¹³⁷ Aparna further conducted several meetings with senior film festival programmers and critics. Through these meetings, she established that the independent filmmakers of India require international mentoring, script development, and trained producers to facilitate collaborations and reach a global audience.¹³⁸ Echoing these thoughts, the former managing director of the Bazaar, Ninalath Gupta asserts: “I heard comments from international programmers about edits, the use of background music or lack of sync sound which got me thinking about a Co-Production Market and Work in Progress Lab. If you are looking at a film finding international acceptability, then why not get feedback from international mentors?”¹³⁹ In this interview, Gupta also emphasized the need for mentoring and collaboration from the pre-development/development stage of Indian independent films. Bazaar continued to evolve and introduced new programs each year. Since 2007, the Bazaar collaborated with international mentors and introduced several programs such as a Work In Progress Lab (WIP), Co-production market, Screenwriter’s Lab, and Knowledge series, as described earlier in the background section of this chapter. These programs aim to provide training

¹³⁷ Nina Lath, “Film Bazaar,” Substack newsletter, *Mise-En-Scène: From Concept to Screen* (blog), July 6, 2023, https://ninalath.substack.com/p/film-bazaar?utm_campaign=post&fbclid=IwAR2BEBiBDp0keM7gWGIII5Kb0dXvDOPxo436_VYtj8gpAEeo0qnmHzcYvFY.

¹³⁸ Aparna, personal interview, June 4, 2021.

¹³⁹ Udita Jhunjhunwala, “Nina Lath Gupta: Why the Film Bazaar Works,” *Mint*, November 15, 2014, <https://www.livemint.com/Leisure/ry7sif0CXofv8FCtp5JpeI/Nina-Lath-Gupta-Why-the-Film-Bazaar-works.html>.

and support for selected Indian independent films, effectively facilitating their production transnationally. By 2011, the Bazaar eventually became an important intervention for the re-establishment of NFDC. While the Bazaar initially aimed to develop an “invitation-only market” like the IFFR’s Cinemart, the program, Viewing Room was introduced in 2012 on the advice of the lead film programmer DCunha, as an alternative platform to facilitate financing and collaboration opportunities for non-curated films at the Bazaar.¹⁴⁰

By adapting the IFFR model, the Bazaar thus establishes itself as a transnational film market to support and facilitate international co-productions and collaboration culture for Indian independent films. However, the lack of state funding continues to exist and contributes to challenges in co-producing internationally. In our interview, the Indian producer, Kabir, reveals that the production team was unable to meet the requirements for a long time because it required partial funding support from the Indian government.¹⁴¹ Therefore, the Bazaar externalizes risk and outsources funding opportunities by mainly acting as a bridge between Indian independent filmmakers, film corporations, and international film festivals.

Additionally, the Bazaar adapted the Anglo/Western film festival model with limited state funding to produce or co-produce Indian independent films, which also potentially contributes to the formation of a particular set of transnational films, catering to the western “taste” of international film festivals. The Bazaar ultimately “produces” films with and for the international film festival circuit. In this regard, the previous section discussed the emergence of the “Bazaar Film.” The creative management of the Bazaar within its neoliberal-national contributes to a

¹⁴⁰ Deepti DCunha, personal interview, July 13, 2021.

¹⁴¹ Kabir, personal interview, August 1, 2021.

divided space because, on one hand, Bazaar curates films with and for festivals, leading to the formation of transnational art house cinema for the festival circuit (which seldom generates profits), and on the other, filmmakers are also required to navigate the balance between values of art/commerce to navigate in the Indian film industry.

Further, Aparna's creative manager journey illuminates the important role of individual creative labor, which often gets overshadowed by studying the impact of a larger organization or industrial structures and political-economic conditions. Media industry scholars David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker assert that "commodity fetishism" masks human experiences, creative labour, and effort in cultural industries.¹⁴² However, the creative labour of Aparna must be studied in the larger industrial context of Indian cinema. The symbiotic relationship between micro-creative practices and macro-industrial conditions contributes to a better understanding of the industry and the values of its workers. Aparna's narrative illuminates creative management and navigational tactics in the light of national industrial structures and transnational infrastructures, and it also reveals information about the global film festival network and industrial changes nationally and globally.

The creative management of the Bazaar entails the changing relationship between art and commerce, which in turn shapes contemporary independent film production culture in India. During the personal interview, Aparna asserted that it is essential for the artist to find a balance between art and commerce to support the growth of independent filmmaking in India.¹⁴³ The Bazaar adopted the global culture of commercializing art cinema and guiding the independent film

¹⁴² David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker, *Creative Labor: Media Work in Three Cultural Industries*, (London: Routledge, 2011), 55.

¹⁴³ Aparna, personal interview, June 4, 2021.

community about international sales, financing, and distribution strategies. Several programs by the Bazaar train the independent film community about the commercial values of cinema. The creative organization often emphasizes “negotiation, mutual adjustment and compromise” between commerce and creativity.¹⁴⁴ This sort of negotiation is at the heart of the film culture at the Bazaar. The complexity of art/commerce relations can be explained into three categories, as summarized by Hesmondhalgh and Baker in *Creative Labor*. First, a romantic vision that puts creativity at odds with the controlling nature of the industry. Second, a populist, market liberal position that commerce acts as a catalyst for creativity, and third, a sociological position that commerce/creativity are intimately connected and inseparable. Aparna takes up a sociological position that art/commerce is so inextricably linked in the industry that it is impossible to separate them.¹⁴⁵ The Bazaar became a platform to train the Indian independent film community professionally and encourage the artists to understand the relationship between art and commerce. Many creative producers who worked with the Bazaar also believed that it is essential to find a balance between art and commerce. For example, the Indian creative producer, Rajendran, believes, “Many people think of [filmmaking] only as an artistic pursuit. It is only artistic, and there is no need for an audience at all in that case. They just want to make the film and it is purely creative. They don’t have a business point of view.”¹⁴⁶ Creative producing shows a similar belief in understanding the importance of monetizing independent filmmaking, and the next chapter further explores the narratives of transnational production.

¹⁴⁴ Hesmondhalgh and Baker, *Creative Labor*, 82.

¹⁴⁵ Hesmondhalgh and Baker, *Creative Labor*, 85.

¹⁴⁶ Mathivanan Rajendran, personal interview, May 28, 2021.

In her narrative about the development of the Bazaar, the senior staff member Aparna added that she established key partnerships with “two wonderful gentlemen” named Edo Abram (CineMart Director at the International Film Festival Rotterdam), and Martin Robert (Director of the New Zealand Film Festival).¹⁴⁷ Aparna uses theatricality in her narrative through the adjective “wonderful” to describe the festival directors, forming a positive image of them and their work at international festivals. This may contribute to the efficient management of the Bazaar collaboratively. But as a senior member of the Bazaar, Aparna is also branding the Bazaar as a collaborative space while carefully excluding any information that might be controversial to the image of the Bazaar. Caldwell notes that industry professionals may manage information for personal/professional benefit, promotion, and branding purposes.¹⁴⁸ Through her narrative, Aparna is weaving a positive image of festivals, which conceals the precarity of working in these environments. However, the Bazaar emerges out of the labour of hundreds of anonymous creative enthusiasts, freelancers, part-time workers, and volunteers. Aparna reveals:

We used to bring in many people on a consultant and contractual basis at Film Bazaar. We have many internships for people. Everybody who worked at Bazaar has done extremely well in the industry. They all have great jobs. It was a fun environment.¹⁴⁹

Aparna describes the work environment as “fun” in contrast to precarious or exploitative because such internships helped many film enthusiasts and workers to launch their careers. Contractual

¹⁴⁷ Aparna, personal interview, June 4, 2021.

¹⁴⁸ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 3.

¹⁴⁹ Aparna, personal interview, June 4, 2021.

jobs, part-time work, gig economies and internships build the Indian film industry, and these are common features of neoliberal societies. Media industry scholar Nitin Govil argues most individuals working in the Indian film industry and associated fields lack permanent employment.¹⁵⁰ Previous research has shown that this kind of employment structure creates uncertain working conditions in industries.¹⁵¹ This research argues that it also has implications for workers and the structure of the Bazaar. According to Aparna, the management of the Bazaar is challenging and requires working long hours. Aparna explains what it means to be working and managing the Bazaar in the following manner:

It is hard work. People used to work through the night. There were always last-minute pressures of printing and project. I've seen people who would leave at 9:30 p.m. For many years, I would not leave before nine or ten at night and because they [the staff members] work beyond working hours trying to turn around the company [NFDC] and restructure it.¹⁵²

Note that Aparna expresses optimism in sharing that Bazaar hires many interns and consultants on a contract basis and these recruits manage to make successful careers in the industry. However, the short-term contractual labour system has both individual and structural consequences on the Bazaar. The lead film programmer Deepti DCunha expresses concerns that the new interns need to be hired and trained for a brief period each year at the Bazaar. Both DCunha and Aparna's narratives show how film festivals and the work in this field are often based on short-term and

¹⁵⁰Govil, "Recognizing 'Industry,'" 172–76.

¹⁵¹ Guy Standing, *The Precariat* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781849664554>.

¹⁵² Aparna, personal interview, June 4, 2021.

contractual work. As discussed in the previous chapter, the central organization for the support of Indian cinema, NFDC, places a strong emphasis on the growth of the film and media industries, which is largely founded on neoliberal and market-oriented policies. This approach contributes to precarious working conditions for those working in the film and media sectors. Scholars from both film and media industries and film festival research have discussed the precarity of working in creative fields. For example, media industry scholars such as Mark Deuze, David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker examine the precarious and emotional labour of workers in creative industries.¹⁵³

While film festival scholars have paid regular attention to film programming and curatorial practices of the festivals, little research exists on the challenges and labour of film festival professionals and programmers themselves. Film festival scholar Skadi Loist discusses the precarious nature of film festival work:

Despite the (supposedly) prestigious status of film festival labour, most people working for festivals find themselves in insecure working conditions. The festival organizations are often precarious entities themselves, struggling for funding and usually operating on a bare minimum, with only very few full-time and year-round employees, some seasonal staff, in low-pay or entry-level positions, and supported by interns and volunteers. This is true for most festivals (even at A-list events such as Berlin, Cannes, and Venice).¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Mark Deuze, *Media Work*, 1st edition (Cambridge: Polity, 2007). David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker, *Creative Labour: Media Work in Three Cultural Industries* (London: Routledge, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203855881>.

¹⁵⁴ Skadi Loist, "Precarious Cultural Work: About the Organization of (queer) Film Festivals," *Screen* (London), vol. 52, no. 2, 2011, 268–73, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/hjr016>.

Loist provides insights into the uncertain and challenging working world of film festivals. The prestigious and glamorous status of film festivals often conceals the precarity that exists within these structures. In the above remark, Loist points out that most film festival workers often find themselves in “insecure working conditions” and that film festivals themselves function under unstable conditions, with limited funding and a shortage of full-time, year-round positions. The festivals depend on a workforce, which comprises low-paid or entry-level seasonal staff, interns, and volunteers. These uncertainties and insecurities among the film festival workers are universal, impacting even A-list film festivals, such as Berlin, Cannes, and Venice. During the interview, DCunha also acknowledges that film programmers struggle financially while narrating an anecdote about her first project at Cannes:

I never obviously in my wildest dreams imagined that I would be working with Cannes. I saved money for two years and landed up in Cannes and paid for everything. I vividly recall my first trip to Cannes, which was quite traumatic for me. I got a bed in the corridor and always found myself hungry. Everything was expensive, and film programmers don't make money. I decided I will travel to festivals that employ and cover my travel and accommodation expenses.

The narratives of DCunha and other film professionals working at the Bazaar suggest insecure working conditions. DCunha has been working contractually for a decade. Therefore, DCunha has wide professional experience in the film festival network, and it is worth quoting an excerpt from our interview, in which DCunha reveals the management of Bazaar and compares it to other international film festivals:

As a project-based staff for Bazaar, my work schedule is limited to the period between July and November. I always feel that the period between December to June could be better utilized for outreach, networking, exploring new markets, and focusing on different regions. On the contrary, I have worked with Locarno, and they have a team that travels to every country and meets filmmakers because they need to persuade them to pay for a visit to the festival or market. The online format has increased accessibility, otherwise participating in Bazaar is costly.¹⁵⁵

The narrative of DCunha reveals several important insights about the work and culture of film festivals. DCunha is comparing her work as a film programmer at the Bazaar and Locarno Film Festival, an annual film festival which takes place in Locarno, Switzerland. However, DCunha here seems more concerned about the consequences of short-term contractual labour on the Bazaar, such as lack of public media outreach and visibility of the market. This shows that DCunha is not pursuing this career for monetary purposes and that she has major concerns about independent film artists' budgets and the future of Bazaar. The micro-level work narrative of DCunha can be contextualized within the larger film festival world, which is built on the culture of precarity. In the same interview, DCunha shared the challenges of working as a woman film programmer and deciding which films will reach festivals in an industry dominated by male directors. The work of

¹⁵⁵ Deepti DCunha, personal interview, July 13, 2021.

a film programmer entails gatekeeping, “making” or “breaking careers.”¹⁵⁶ This dissertation does not examine the patriarchal structures of the Indian film industry at great length. However, it suggests important questions of gender, power, and agency in film festival work that require further examination.

The profession of a film programmer frequently requires working long hours, watching many films in a short period and putting emotional labour into the work. In the article, “Affective Labor and the Work of Film Festival Programming,” Liz Czach, a former film programmer at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), shares her professional experiences working at TIFF, which is one of the most prestigious film festivals in the world. Czach (and many other cinephiles) often describes the work of a film programmer as a “dream job” to get paid for watching films and meeting creative artists and even occasionally seeing stars at the festival. However, Czach views the work of a film programmer as a form of affective labour, which is torn between feelings of pleasure/despair and excitement/disappointment.¹⁵⁷

In her aforementioned Cannes festival narrative, DCunha also expressed excitement about working at Cannes and admitted that film programmers struggle to generate income. Those who work in film and media industries often experience this duality, with researchers becoming more invested in recognizing and examining the emotional and affective labour that comes with it. In “Affective Qualities of Creative Labour,” industry scholars Zelmarie Cantillon and Sarah Baker also refer to the “pleasures and pressures” of working in film and media industries, which are often

¹⁵⁶ Liz Czach, “Affective Labor and the Work of Film Festival Programming,” in *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practices*, eds., Marijke de Valck, Brendan Kredell, and Skadi Loist, (NY: Routledge, 2016), 198.

¹⁵⁷ Czach, “Affective Labor and the Work of Film Festival Programming,” 196-208.

characterized by low pay, long hours, insecurity, and irregularity.¹⁵⁸ Similarly, the experience of Das, who served as the programming coordinator at the Bazaar for several years on contracts reveals this duality of working in the film festival network. In our interview, Das notes:

It is not a permanent job, and the contract keeps renewing every year. The work hours get extended invariably because it [Film Bazaar] is an event. My office has an ocean view, a fantastic building and it is a beautiful setup. It is a chill place. I've made wonderful friends while working here. I like interacting with Indian filmmakers and South Asian, the new talent you know! I get to know which films will become big first-hand.¹⁵⁹

In Das's narrative, the rewards of working in a film festival network include the artistic values, location, and environment of work instead of the final paycheck. It shows that individuals working in the creative industries believe in romantic ideals of art, collaboration, and creativity. For Das, it is the excitement of watching the journey of an independent film through the festival network and eventually reaching audiences globally and finding success. Such romantic narratives drive the community of creatives – both who make and who facilitate – the alternative, art house or independent cinema. However, Das believes he is underpaid but continues to work on a contract basis. Das displays reluctance in complaining because the gratification derived from the work and community outweighs the financial pressures. Das continues:

¹⁵⁸ *Zelmarie Cantillon and Sarah Baker*, "Affective Qualities of Creative Labour" in *Making Media: Production, Practices, and Professions*, eds. Mark Deuze and Mirjam Prenger, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 287-296.

¹⁵⁹ Abhra Das, personal interview, October 2, 2021.

Salary is a problem. I don't think it's because of the pandemic. I was told that no there will be no raise because of the pandemic. But I don't think I have gotten a raise in four years. Of course, the workload has not changed. It has always been more. But given the experience, I think the salary doesn't match. I do not know, although I've requested a raise. But I have continued the work because it makes so much difference for independent filmmakers.¹⁶⁰

Das here emphasizes that he continues to work despite an inadequate salary to support independent filmmaking. This tendency is not just limited to film festival work, but it extends across global filmmaking cultures. Sagar, who works as a marketing manager at Sikhya Entertainment, notes that he does not find his working conditions to be precarious per se or that he is probably “too optimistic.”¹⁶¹ Sagar refers to his work in the work of film marketing as “creative” and states that “when I see the final design of something I created and if it is good, the feeling that I get is priceless. I don't get the same feeling of my salary being credited.”¹⁶² DCunha also adds that several sound designers for independent films do not get paid.¹⁶³ Media industry scholars have previously argued that artistic gratification (e.g., creativity, love of art and pursuit of passion) potentially becomes a reward or “compensation” for the insecurities and lower wages of the job in media industry workers.¹⁶⁴ Similarly, in our research, the interviewed creative workers are driven by ideals of artistic gratification, passion, and creativity. They find several ways to rationalize,

¹⁶⁰ Abhra Das, personal interview, October 2, 2021.

¹⁶¹ Sagar, personal interview, June 25, 2021.

¹⁶² Sagar, personal interview, June 25, 2021.

¹⁶³ Deepti DCunha, personal interview, July 13, 2021.

¹⁶⁴ Hesmondhalgh and Baker, *Creative Labor*, 127.

normalize, and accept the precarious working conditions of the Indian independent filmmaking culture, which are built on underpaid (or even unpaid) labour and instability.

Moreover, the interviewed Indian producers further expressed tensions between emotional gratification and the struggles of making independent films. The Indian producer Mathivanan Rajendran believes in creative entrepreneurship instead of seeking government support. Despite the challenges and struggles of making independent cinema, Rajendran believes it is “selfish” to demand financial support in a country with a relatively larger population and more important social problems. Rajendran emphasizes: “I can’t be so entitled. There are one billion people in this country. There are people with no education and no money. Many people died due to COVID-19. But I want a film fund. It sounds selfish.”¹⁶⁵ Similarly, Aditi Anand, the Indian producer of the international co-production, *The Extraordinary Journey of Fakir* (2018) admits that the contemporary independent filmmaking community confronts greater challenges because of global and technological changes and an overall lack of infrastructure and resources. However, Anand also remarks: “At an emotional level, it’s also an extremely satisfying job. When you are happy in this job, the job satisfaction is very high.”¹⁶⁶ Most film professionals interviewed for this research tell stories of passion and perils of making independent cinema while showing neoliberal faith in creative entrepreneurship, persistence, and individualism. The final chapter analyzes these tensions in the work of producers further in detail.

¹⁶⁵ Mathivanan Rajendran, personal interview, May 28, 2021.

¹⁶⁶ Aditi Anand, personal interview, July 21, 2021.

Conclusion

The Bazaar has currently transformed into a divided and contested space with the government's goals to promote neo-liberal and national/nationalist objectives simultaneously. The Bazaar's workers frequently described their own work with romantic ideals of passion and enthusiasm, eschewing criticism or inquiring about their economic conditions. However, they expressed concerns about the future of the Bazaar. The macro-political-economic structures impacted the micro-level management of the Bazaar. The controversial resignation of the former managing director, Ninalath Gupta, in 2015 represented the final blow to the fragmented structure of the Bazaar. The extent to which this resignation was political remains challenging to ascertain. However, it must be noted that the right-wing government came into power in 2014 and soon after Gupta resigned because of internal conflicts of vision and ideologies between her and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in 2015.¹⁶⁷ Throughout the interviews with the consultants, producers and programmers of the Bazaar, the narrative of pre-Gupta and post-Gupta emerged as the central theme of discussions. The workers at the NFDC made several complaints about the struggles of working without Gupta's supervision. Since Gupta's resignation, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has failed to appoint a permanent managing director at NFDC, and the Bazaar thus depends on acting directors each year.¹⁶⁸ Some interviewed staff members of NFDC Bazaar deemed the company as directionless. DCunha adds that NFDC is driven by

¹⁶⁷ Shraddha Chauhan, personal interview, June 3, 2021.

¹⁶⁸ Abhra Das, personal interview, October 2, 2021.

bureaucratic people who do not understand or have a passion for cinema.¹⁶⁹ A recent article in the Indian media also noted that the Bazaar delivered an underwhelming performance in 2022.¹⁷⁰

Many staff members (including interviewed participants) have left the organization, and NFDC is hiring new staff to re-establish itself.¹⁷¹ For example, according to their professional profiles on LinkedIn, DCunha joined as Artistic Director at Jio MAMI Film Festival.¹⁷² Das joined as Senior Manager at Film Critics Guild.¹⁷³ NFDC is merging with other film institutions, such as the Films Division of India and National Film Archives of India, The Children's Film Society of India (CFSI), and the Directorate of Film Festivals (DFF), which has also left the industry divided.¹⁷⁴ The merger has come under scrutiny because the Modi government, which has had a complete parliamentary majority since 2014, made the decision without any discussions with the stakeholders, including filmmakers, historians, cinephiles, and practitioners.¹⁷⁵ The lack of transparency and privatization of important film archives added to the criticism of the decision.¹⁷⁶ India's acclaimed filmmaker in world cinema Adoor Gopalakrishnan commented on the recent

¹⁶⁹ Deepti DCunha, personal interview, July 13, 2021.

¹⁷⁰ "No Buzz at This Yr's Film Bazaar," *The Times of India*, November 25, 2022, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/goa/no-buzz-at-this-yrs-film-bazaar/articleshow/95749266.cms>.

¹⁷¹ "NFDC Recruitment 2023 - Apply for 35 Assistant Manager Posts," April 19, 2023, <https://www.highonstudy.com/nfdc-35-recruitment-2023/>.

¹⁷² Deepti DCunha, "Artistic Director at Jio MAMI Film Festival," LinkedIn, accessed April 25, 2023, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/deepti-dcunha-80811025/>.

¹⁷³ Abhra Das, "Senior Manager at Film Critics Guild," LinkedIn, accessed April 25, 2023, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/abhra-das-he-him-17493a61/>.

¹⁷⁴ "Film Division of India, National Film Archives of India Merge with NFDC; Industry Divided on the Move," *Hindustan Times*, January 4, 2023, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/entertainment/bollywood/film-division-of-india-national-film-archives-of-india-merge-with-nfdc-industry-divided-on-the-move-101672817801994.html>.

¹⁷⁵ "Saving India's History: Archive Merger Poses Numerous Problems," *International Documentary Association*, August 18, 2022, <https://www.documentary.org/feature/saving-indias-history-archive-merger-poses-numerous-problems>.

¹⁷⁶ "Actors, Filmmakers Write to I&B Ministry Against Merger of Films Division, NFAI With NFDC," *The Wire*, accessed April 20, 2022, <https://thewire.in/film/actors-filmmakers-write-to-ib-ministry-against-merger-of-films-division-nfai-with-nfdc>.

news of a merger of NFDC with other film institutions (Films Division, National Film Archives of India, Directorate of Film Festivals, and Children's Film Society of India) by stating that the organization could only flourish in an “open liberal environment” and accused it of losing relevance and significance to Indian cinema.¹⁷⁷ The future is uncertain for NFDC Bazaar and other involved film institutions, navigating India’s neoliberal-nationalist structures of the film and media industry.

Conducting a case study of the Bazaar offered a way to examine the cultural, artistic, and political negotiations of a nation on an international stage and scale. Since the Bazaar positioned itself alongside the global film festivals and their markets through transnational cultural practices and values, it contributed to the curation, creation, and negotiation of India’s independent cinema in the international film festival circuit. The practices of Bazaar included training the Indian independent film community through international script mentoring, pitching, and networking practices. Through these practices, the transnational turn provided opportunities to professionalize the independent filmmaking community and reach a wider international audience through international development funds, mentoring, and training. However, these practices also limited independence in filmmaking because of curatorial and mentoring practices that were based on the historical dominance of Anglo/Western values of “festival film” and aesthetic merit. Therefore, the chapter also brought attention to the continuities (i.e., curation and programming) and discontinuities (i.e., mentoring practices and development funds models) in the larger international film festival culture.

¹⁷⁷ “NFDC – National Film Development Canned,” *Lokmarg - News Views Blogs* (blog), March 3, 2022, <https://lok marg.com/nfdc-national-film-development-canned/>.

Further, the creative management of Bazaar within the macro neoliberal-national and transnational film industry structure entailed negotiating values of art/commerce, precarious working conditions and a lack of public funding for developing independent films nationally and transnationally. The labour practices and values that emerged within these structures included mentoring, networking, artistic gratification, individualism, and creative entrepreneurship. Additionally, the micro-level social behaviour of participants, industry sessions and labour practices of Bazaar reflected the neoliberal-national/nationalist ambitions of the government, while also revealing how these structures contributed to the internal struggles of Bazaar and its precarious work culture. The previous chapter used a variety of sources including, media content, press interviews, trade publications and industry reports, and existing scholarly literature extensively to provide the macro-view of the political economy of the Indian film and media industries. This chapter contextualized those findings and provided a micro-view of the organization NFDC Bazaar. Therefore, I analyzed the personal interviews, which also became an important source to gain information on the values, attitudes, and belief systems of participants of NFDC Bazaar, and in doing so, the chapter examined their cultural practices, creative labour, and power dynamics in the larger context—established in the previous chapter. Traditional Film festival scholarship focused on A-list film festivals in the Global North, resulting in a lack of attention to the festival culture in the Global South. However, scholars are increasingly emphasizing the importance of studying film festival culture and practices in the Global South, as well as the relationship between the festival culture of the Global North/South. This chapter contributed to this gap by examining the Bazaar and its transnational structure, culture, and practices. Overall, this chapter contributed to the growing scholarship on film festivals, the studies of film industries and production cultures, Indian independent cinema, and transnational cinema.

The next chapter continues the discussion of independent film culture and specifically its transnational co-production culture by closely examining the professional narratives of producers and their creative labour.

Chapter 3: The Curious Case of Creative Producers

I produced many independent films, and it was challenging. The films went to incredible film festivals, but they were not getting released in India. This left me emotionally shattered, and I questioned my decisions. I found that space to be very isolating.

—Guneet Monga, personal interview, June 14, 2021.

While filmmaking is a collaborative process, film studies traditionally paid greater attention to the role of directors, their aesthetic choices, and ideological critiques than to the role of producers, their creative labour and work culture. As a result, the producer's role is misunderstood, stereotyped and little researched. However, the producers' work is complex, varied, and diverse, playing a critical role in the success or failure of films.¹ This research thus contributes to the scholarship about the labour of producers in a non-western context. However, the role of Indian producers examined in this dissertation is transnational. This chapter examines the work of some of the emerging Indian creative producers who are supporting India's alternative or independent cinema by collaborating and co-producing transnationally. This has led to an increased engagement with global film festivals and markets. However, it must be noted that transnational independent co-productions collaborations regularly generate critical and artistic recognition, they rarely become a commercial success.

¹ Andrew Spicer, A.T. McKenna, and Christopher Meir, eds., *Beyond the Bottom Line: The Producer in Film and Television Studies* (Bloomsbury Publishing Inc, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781501300202>.

To address these concerns, this chapter specifically examines the role of Indian producers who were involved with NFDC Bazaar and internationally co-produced Indian independent films. International co-productions have become relatively more frequent among Indian independent filmmakers and producers in the past decade. As examined in the previous chapter, the NFDC Bazaar facilitated international mentorship training, script programs, and a co-production market, which connected the Indian independent filmmaking community to the international film festival circuit. Over the past two decades, international film festivals in Europe and North America also increasingly began offering funding aid and training to the filmmaking community of the Global South.² Thus, Indian independent filmmakers and producers together began considering international co-production models when they either cannot find funding in their home country or had projects that merit international funding and circulation. Therefore, they explore developing funds, script training labs, and co-production markets in the international film festival circuit. This chapter shows how the producers have shifted the discourse about Indian independent cinema, making it more collaborative and transnational.

The epigraph of the chapter opens the discussion of creative producers' participation in international film festivals, their struggles, and their professional experiences in producing Indian independent films internationally. This chapter offers a holistic understanding of the changing role of Indian producers and their role in India's transnational independent film production culture. It provides a nuanced and detailed examination of their production practices, navigational tactics, emotional labour, and work culture. Thus, the chapter interrogates what the production stories of

² Dorota Ostrowska, "International Film Festivals as Producers of World Cinema," *Cinema & Cie, International Journal of Film Studies* 10, no. 14-15 (Spring-Fall 2010): 145, doi: 10.7372/71059.

creative producers reveal about India's changing independent film production culture and how it is becoming more transnational and collaborative. The chapter also investigates what these stories reveal about the producers themselves. Finally, the chapter examines what it means to co-produce Indian independent films internationally as a creative producer. By examining the professional experiences of producers, the chapter thus provides an industrial-cultural understanding of contemporary transnational co-production culture in the context of Indian independent filmmaking.

The first part of the chapter begins by providing a brief background on the historical role of producers in India. It shows how producers emerge as informed and creative collaborators, storytellers and even "theorists" themselves in the making of independent international co-productions over the past decade. The second part of this chapter establishes that "affective" labour is central to the producer's work as they build transnational relationships, networks, careers, and ultimately films. The "affective" labour of producers results from the precarious industry structure of India. However, producers tell gratifying yet cautionary tales of their labour in co-producing independent films internationally. The final part uses the case study of Guneet Monga as a creative producer to reveal tactics and practices that producers used to navigate the challenges such as interpersonal networking, hustling, and telling tales of tenacity. Indian producers in these heroic production stories emerge as resilient heroes and survivors, who embark on a transformative journey internationally and return "home" with newly acquired symbolic capital, skills, and tactics. In this way, the three parts together reveal the various contours of the transnational production culture for independent filmmaking in India.

This chapter adapts production culture studies approaches to an Indian context. Production studies is an interdisciplinary field of research and scholars in this area draw upon various

disciplines such as “social sciences and humanities including critical political-economy, sociology, cultural studies and more importantly, lived realities of people involved in production.”³ The scholars put particular emphasis on the struggles, experiences, and perspectives of film professionals involved in the making of the industry. Production studies view producers as “distinct interpretative communities,” acknowledging that film and media producers work within specific organizational structures, engage in professional practices, and navigate power dynamics on a day-to-day basis.⁴ By viewing film and media producers as distinct communities, production studies scholars aim to better understand the complexities of their work and the challenges they confront in the industry. Caldwell’s “industrial-cultural” approach is helpful in doing production studies research because it allows a more nuanced and holistic understanding of the complexities in the work of producers by contextualizing their micro-cultural practices in relation to the larger industrial structures. Caldwell analyzes the Los Angeles film industry from a cultural perspective and sheds light on how participants in that culture understand and articulate (even theorize) the work that they do. Caldwell emphasizes that the social behaviour of Hollywood media workers is closely tied to the political-economic structures of the Los Angeles film industry. For instance, interpersonal networking practices are more common among media workers in a post-Fordist capitalist environment that is characterized by high risk, flexibility, and job insecurities.⁵ I deploy a similar interpretative approach to studying the transnational turn in India’s independent film production culture to identify the codes of their culture, practices, social behaviour, and rituals and

³ Vicki Mayer, John T Caldwell, and Miranda J Banks, *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries* (London: Taylor and Francis, Taylor & Francis Group, Routledge, 2009), 4, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203879597>.

⁴ Vicki Mayer, Bridget Conor, and Miranda Banks, *Production Studies, The Sequel: Cultural Studies of Global Media Industries* (Taylor and Francis, 2015), Preface X, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315736471>.

⁵ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 59.

then examine these values in relation to the transnational industrial structures. Additionally, I draw upon affective scholarship to locate and examine the labour of Indian producers working on transnational independent productions.

As suggested in the previous chapter, media industry scholars such as Mark Deuze, David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker have examined the precarious and emotional labour of workers in creative industries.⁶ Deuze explores how media makers manage to work and survive the challenges of working in diverse media fields, such as journalism, advertising, and entertainment. This examination considers the ways that media workers manage the uncertain, competitive, and risky nature of film and media industries. Similarly, Hesmondhalgh and Baker examine the experiences of workers in the fields of film, television, and music. The work discusses the challenges of creative workers, such as low-pay, long working hours, and an absence of job security.

Therefore, this research borrows insights from media scholars' research on the emotional qualities of creative work and Hardt and Negri's extensive work on affect theory, invoking the notion of affective labour in the social sense i.e., the type of labour that is closely tied to human emotions, contact and construction of communities.⁷ I deploy this notion to examine producer's labour because their work involves extensive human interactions, community-building and even manipulation of "affects" to make it in the industry. Finally, building on Caldwell's "trade stories" model, I discuss the navigational tactics of producers and propose the archetype of the "hero's

⁶ Mark Deuze, *Media Work*, 1st edition (Cambridge: Polity, 2007). David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker, *Creative Labour: Media Work in Three Cultural Industries* (London: Routledge, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203855881>.

⁷Michael Hardt, "Affective Labor," *Boundary 2* 26, no. 2 (1999): 89–100, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/303793>.

journey,” common among Indian independent producers – particularly for those who worked on international co-productions. Caldwell’s concept of “trade stories” refers to the narratives and anecdotes which film and television professionals share in relation to their experiences and practices within the industry. These stories provide information about industry structures, practices, and professionals themselves. Industry professionals shape their experiences into certain genres of narratives (e.g., war stories, cautionary tales, making-it sagas, etc.). For example, “war stories” are more common among below-the-line workers (e.g., editors, camera operators, grips) and emphasize physical labour and tenacity. “Cautionary tales” are more common in the unregulated sector among industry professionals such as assistants, agents, and clerical staff. The act of storytelling reveals how industry practitioners make sense of their “work-world” and shape it. I will discuss these genres more in detail in the final section of this chapter. Moreover, Caldwell’s trade stories model emphasizes the importance of examining everyday cultural practices and discourses to gain in-depth insights into the larger film industry structures and their relationship to the work culture.⁸

This research deploys qualitative methodologies in film and media industry studies, which aim to acquire a deeper understanding of the perspectives, opinions, and experiences of industry professionals. Based on Caldwell’s framework described in the introduction, this includes combining observations from “semi-embedded” sources (such as production/internship experience, production workshop, and industry panels) and “fully embedded” texts based on personal interviews with producers. I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with seven creative producers, including two French producers who worked on Indian independent films

⁸ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 37-68.

transnationally.⁹ This approach provided insights into the transnational production culture for Indian independent films by examining the lived experiences of producers, and their belief-systems, values, and culture.

Thus, I collected detailed qualitative data for this research through personal interviews with seven producers. The interviewed producers were based in Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Goa, Jabalpur, and Paris. Two of the seven producers were female and five were male. I conducted the interviews virtually (due to the pandemic), which lasted between one and a half to two hours. I analyze the data (mostly the interviews of Indian producers) using the interpretive framework based on Caldwell's *Production Culture*, which focuses on examining the social behaviour, practices and rituals of the Los Angeles film industry workers.¹⁰ Caldwell stresses that "media realities are always constructed" and thus the "self-talk" or narratives of media workers are "rich, coded, self-portraits."¹¹ Therefore, the interviews of media practitioners are valuable but managed and "spin-driven" sources that should not be taken at face value. Deploying Caldwell's interpretive framework, I began by transcribing the interviews, listening to them carefully to find recurring themes and interpreting them in the larger industrial and cultural contexts. The participants discussed their career paths, creative contributions, industrial changes, challenges, and work culture. One participant chose a pseudonym during the interview process; therefore, they will be referred to as Kabir in the discussion. One female producer, Aditi Anand, worked as a creative producer on a successful international co-production, *The Extraordinary Journey of Fakir* (2018).

⁹ Note: While two interviews of French producers were conducted, the research focused more on the narratives of Indian producers working transnationally.

¹⁰ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 1.

¹¹ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 8-14.

The other, Guneet Monga, was part of a successful international co-production film, *The Lunchbox* (2013) along with several other Indian-European co-productions. Mathivanan Rajendran and Harsh Agarwal worked on the Indo-Dutch co-production, *Nasir* (2020). Brice Poisson and Thierry Lenouvel, the two French producers together worked on the Indo-French co-production, *Sir* (2019), and Thierry Lenouvel was also a co-producer for the Indian-German co-production, *Qissa: The Tale of a Lonely Ghost* (2013). These co-produced films were part of several international script labs and co-production markets and received the development of funds and public subsidies in the Global North. The producers often took professional training and participated in the NFDC Bazaar and significant film festivals internationally. Finally, these co-produced films have travelled through the international film festival circuit within the past decade.

Creative and Collaborative “Self-Portraits” of Indian Producers

One question I always ask myself every time I read a script is, “What value do I add?” as a living, creative, thriving being.

—Guneet Monga, personal interview, June 14, 2021.

Indian producers have traditionally been exclusively associated with funding a project; therefore, their role and creative labour remained underdeveloped. In India, the role of a producer is frequently associated with a financier, but “producers globally are creatively charged individuals who find a project, put it together, find money, market and distribute it.”¹² Up until the 1990s, the Indian film industry witnessed “a constant influx of new producers,” who lacked experience and

¹² Guneet Monga, personal interview, June 14, 2021.

training in film production and distribution. The rise in black money and corruption has made film production an attractive option for independent producers and investors looking to launder their illegal money. This era was marked by disparate development, disorganization, fragmented production conditions, and the excessive publicity of stars and their lavish life.¹³ In her study of the Bollywood film industry, Ganti discovered that the Hindi-language film industry suffers from looming anxieties against untrained independent producers. Oblivious to the filmmaking process, they are described to be merely searching for “easy money and fame.”¹⁴ However, after the Indian state gave industry status to the film industry in 1998, the corruption decreased and the industry became more organized, and therefore, many corporate houses and conglomerates began investing in the film business.¹⁵ Many popular Bollywood actors turned into producers, producing their own films, and establishing their film production and distribution companies. The first of its kind was—Amitabh Bachchan Corporation Ltd., which was established in 1995, soon after the economic liberalization of India in the early 1990s. Many other popular stars followed the trend, for instance, Aamir Khan Productions (1999), and Red Chillies Entertainment (2002) owned by popular Bollywood stars Aamir Khan and Shahrukh Khan, respectively. However, this trend also contributed to the myths surrounding independent producers, such as the perception of a producer solely being associated with money. During his research, Devasundaram interviewed Anusha Rizvi, an Indian film director of her independent film, *Peepli Live* (2010), which was produced by Aamir Khan Productions. Rizvi argued that the independent producer has disappeared and been replaced by major corporate studios and production houses such as UTV and Reliance Big

¹³ Pendakur, “India’s National Film Policy,” 148.

¹⁴ Ganti, *Producing Bollywood*, 185.

¹⁵ Ganti, *Producing Bollywood*, 70.

Pictures, which have provided financial support for independent films.¹⁶ In the book, *Indian Movie Entrepreneurship* (2020), business and management scholars Rajeev Kamineni and Ruth Rentschler further examine three categories of Indian entrepreneurial producers: Start-up entrepreneur movie producers, Lifestyle entrepreneur movie producers, and Family Business entrepreneur movie producers. Start-up entrepreneur movie producers are alert and energetic, demonstrating high levels of professionalism and innovation. They are artistically willing to take risks while breaking conventions at the level of content and execution. Lifestyle entrepreneurs view producing as a second business and engage in it for passion or glamour. Family Business Entrepreneur Movie Producers are continuing the legacy of their father/grandfather, but they are passionate and persistent about making movies in many regional languages.¹⁷ These three categories of Indian producers also exist in independent filmmaking in India.

This research focuses on understanding the role of producers in Indian independent filmmaking. In our interview, Bazaar's lead film programmer Deepti DCunha further provided insights into four types of equity producers who support Indian independent filmmaking. The first is a wealthy, upper-caste industrialist who has inherited wealth and believes in supporting the arts through patronage. The second is a real estate producer who uses art-house filmmaking, which rarely makes a profit, to convert black money into white money through paperwork. The third is the vanity project producer, who is more focused on social status or personal desires rather than a commercial or artistic goal. The fourth type is a family businessman who cannot make inroads in Bollywood due to its tight-knit culture. Consequently, they choose to invest a small amount of

¹⁶ Devasundaram, *India's New Independent Cinema*, 85.

¹⁷ Rajeev Kamineni and Ruth Rentschler, "Entrepreneurial Movie Producers in India," in *Indian Movie Entrepreneurship* (Routledge, 2020).

money into art films. This offers a new identity, lifestyle, and a reason to attend film festivals around the world. DCunha also admits that India has a huge crisis for creative producers.¹⁸

In this interview, DCunha sheds light on the various motivations and practices of producers in the Indian film industry. DCunha's narrative suggests production is highly entrepreneurial, full of risk, corruption, and domination by the upper-caste and Bollywood elites. The narrative does not form a very positive image of the producer. It reveals that some producers view investing in art films as gaining social status and identity within the industry, and this can contribute to stereotypes about the role of a producer. For example, Manish Mundra is an Indian film producer who has produced critically acclaimed and award-winning films such as *Ankhon Dekhi* (2013), *Masaan* (2015), and *Newton* (2017). Mundra, who had humble origins, established himself as a businessman and was always fascinated by Indian cinema. However, Mundra does not fit into the typical classification as described by DCunha. Mundra's journey as a producer began in 2013 when he came across a tweet from Rajat Kapoor— the director of the film *Ankhon Dekhi*, in which Kapoor expressed his frustration about the lack of support from producers for independent cinema in India.¹⁹ Mundra reached out to him and offered to support the film financially. Mundra's decision to support an independent Indian director initially stereotyped him as a rich producer, more interested in gaining fame than supporting art. At the beginning of his career, Mundra's engagement with the produced films was limited, and the films did not make a profit. However, Mundra broke the stereotypes about producers over time and emerged as the founder of Drishyam

¹⁸ Deepti DCunha, personal interview, July 13, 2021.

¹⁹ "I'll Beg, Borrow or Steal but Make My next Film: Rajat Kapoor," Hindustan Times, March 7, 2017, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/bollywood/i-ll-beg-borrow-or-steal-but-make-my-next-film-rajat-kapoor/story-XzmbOH45tnDu57aEoutPKL.html>.

Films, a production company that focuses on producing and promoting independent and meaningful cinema in India. During an online interview, Manish Mundra stated that his goal as a film producer is to create a legacy through Drishyam Films, where the films they produce will be a representation of India, such that when someone wants to know about India, they can watch films produced by Drishyam.²⁰ The case of Mundra also suggests the role of a producer is not absolute or universal, rather, each producer has individual motivations and perspectives.

In the past decade, a new type of transnational creative producer has emerged in India, playing a key role in exploring international training and funding options to build a creative team (e.g., finding a director, writer, sales agent, and distributor) and produce alternative stories or independent films that deviate from the mainstream conventions of Bollywood. The Indian creative producers of independent films are relatively more informed of the global film festival world, production practices, marketing strategies and other global industrial changes as compared to the late 1970s and 1980s when several Indian art-house films received state funding support through the National Film Development Corporation of India.²¹ But since India has a history of untrained independent producers and wealthy actors and directors turned into producers, the new Indian creative producer grapples with the burden of misrepresentation. Indian producer Aditi Anand, in a personal interview, responds to the question of creativity in her job in the following manner:

I don't think I like the term "creative producer." The use of the word "creative" implies that producers are not inherently creative, which is not the

²⁰ "The Slow Interview with Neelesh Misra: 'Ab Kisi Ko Kuch Prove Nahi Karna' - Manish Mundra," YouTube video, March 2, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YCJvc-WdtQ0>.

²¹ Devasundaram, *India's New Independent Cinema*, 66.

case. Everybody's job contains both technical and creative elements. It is unjust to imply that a producer has the option of being uncreative.²²

Anand shows contempt for the inquiry of whether her work is creative or not. Throughout the chapter, several other producers seem to justify the value of their role and re-construct an image or identity through creative and narrative tactics. As a result, knowledge of creative producers, by producers and about producers is actively constructed, managed, and performed in media to revamp the pre-existing identity, raise funds and ultimately, sell films. As Caldwell argues, media workers engage in self-talk and self-reflection; therefore, "industrial lore" and critical practices primarily are "self-portraits" in the form of "cultural performances."²³ In what follows, I critically examine the creative and collaborative "self-portraits" of Indian producers to understand their role, labour, and work culture.

Creativity became a central theme of discussions with producers interviewed in this study. Several producers emphasize that creativity is an essential part of their jobs, which manifests in many forms of participation at every level of filmmaking. An Oscar-winning producer of the short film *Period: End of Sentence* (2018), Guneet Monga has shaped independent filmmaking in India within the past decade. The producer of over 30 films, Monga is well-known for setting up independent Indian-European co-productions. Senior film programmer DCunha notes that Monga does not conform to the conventional classification of producers. For DCunha, Monga is somewhat of an exception, and considers her a creative producer.²⁴ Monga received considerable media attention over the past decade for her contribution to world cinema and was also recently conferred

²² Aditi Anand, personal interview, July 21, 2021.

²³ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 18.

²⁴ Deepti DCunha, personal interview, July 13, 2021.

the second-highest French civilian award *Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres*. In our interview, Monga describes her creative and collaborative approach to filmmaking:

As a creative producer, I read scripts and develop them, offering notes and feedback, asking questions, and engaging in healthy debate at all stages of production. I think giving feedback to a writer-director is an art form. The role of the creative producer is to add equal and more value to a vision and uplift it.²⁵

As a creative collaborator, Monga describes the process of working on an indie film and participating in virtually every stage of production. Monga's creative and collaborative approach toward filmmaking stems from her experiences of working on international co-productions through the film festival circuit. She continued exploring the path of international collaborations by participating in major international film festivals for a long period.²⁶ This phenomenon is similar to what the Belgian sociologist, Giseline Kuipers, calls a "transnational professional class" of cultural producers. This class of individuals acquires and transfers knowledge between each other through international networks, by attending international industry events.²⁷ This new breed of Indian creative producers is also a product of the global network of international film festivals, funds, and industry events in the post-globalized era. Therefore, these massive changes in production culture also illuminate the shifts in the globalization of media economies. In a personal interview, DCunha reveals that the international co-production model of the film, *The*

²⁵ Guneet Monga, personal interview, June 14, 2021.

²⁶ Monga, personal interview, June 14, 2021.

²⁷ Giseline Kuipers, "Cultural Globalization as the Emergence of a Transnational Cultural Field: Transnational Television and National Media Landscapes in Four European Countries," *American Behavioral Scientist* 55, no. 5 (May 1, 2011): 552, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764211398078>.

Lunchbox (2013) was an experiment for the producer Monga, who wanted to transform knowledge about the international co-production world into practice. Both Monga and Batra, the director of the film navigated the international film festival circuit together, the script was part of several talent development programs such as Cinemart at the Rotterdam International Film Festival, Torino Film Lab, and Talent Project Market at the Berlin International Film Festival.²⁸ The final part of this chapter will further develop on Monga's production stories, tactics, and the journey of *The Lunchbox*. The "performance" of an Indian independent producer as a creative and collaborative individual stems from international professional training and funding, which they sought for themselves and their films through script labs, co-production markets, public subsidies and development funds offered by the Global North.

Mathivanan Rajendran followed a similar path and emerged as a creative producer of independent films. Rajendran completed his education in Engineering from Virginia Tech in the US, but he also had a passion for theatre and arts.²⁹ Rajendran produces independent films through his independent studio, Stray Factory (2010). It is unclear if Rajendran has inherited wealth and his role does not neatly fit into the DCunha's notion of an equity producer, who is wealthy and has a passion for cinema. In our interview, Rajendran emphasizes that a producer is not just a financier, but a creative and collaborative individual.³⁰ Therefore, Rajendran externalizes risk by primarily focusing on international co-productions, raising funds through international grants and participating in film festivals and markets internationally. Rajendran worked on the first Indo-

²⁸ "The Lunchbox (The Lunchbox (Dabba))," *Cineuropa*, accessed August 3, 2022, <https://cineuropa.org/en/film/237132/>.

²⁹ Mathivanan Rajendran, personal interview, May 28, 2021.

³⁰ Mathivanan Rajendran, personal interview, May 28, 2021.

Dutch co-production in Tamil-language, *Nasir* (2020). The transnational journey of the film began at the NFDC Bazaar's Co-production market in 2017 and 2019, and the film was also part of the Open Pitch program, which curated 14 projects from India and South Asia to facilitate international funding and collaboration opportunities in 2019.³¹ The film received the Netherlands Film Fund, Huber Bals script and development funds and Huber Bals co-production grant in 2018.³² The film went on to win the Network for the Promotion of Asian Cinema award at the International Film Festival of Rotterdam in 2020.³³ Rajendran emerges as a creative and collaborative storyteller/seller during the interview. Rajendran emphasizes a producer pitches film at various film festivals and re-tells often the "story of the story" creatively for marketing and distribution purposes: "Producers' job is also to tell the story of the story i.e., the filmmaker has a story, but the producer must tell the story of that story to everybody else for marketing of the film, for instance. This telling of the story must be creative."³⁴ For this, Rajendran narrates the story of the filmmaker (including other creative artists involved) and his journey to connect it to the story of the film itself. Rajendran also informs himself about screenwriting by learning and exploring, which helps in having productive discussions with writers and filmmakers. At first, the creative tactics of Rajendran reflect the way business and creativity are embedded tightly in the producer's work. They also echo what Caldwell calls the self-promotional ability of media producers. In the same vein, Christopher Meir, a transnational film production studies scholar, in the article, "Producer as Salesman" attributes "salesmanship" as one of the central traits of the British

³¹ BKD, "NFDC Film Bazaar Brings 14 Films in This Year's Open Pitch," National Herald, October 31, 2019, <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/cafe/nfdc-film-bazaar-brings-14-films-in-this-years-open-pitch>.

³² "Following 'Nasir,'" *The Hindu*, May 21, 2018, sec. Movies, <https://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/movies/following-nasir/article23947401.ece>.

³³ "NETPAC Award | IFFR," accessed July 10, 2023, <https://iffir.com/en/awards/netpac-award>.

³⁴ Mathivanan Rajendran, personal interview, May 28, 2021.

producer.³⁵ However, Rajendran’s primary motivation includes seeking creative stimulation and collaborative partnerships. Rajendran adds his producer career is driven by a passion for storytelling.³⁶ Therefore, Rajendran emerges as a creative and collaborative storyteller as much as a seller. Further, Rajendran emphasized that internationally co-produced films continue the tradition of *auteur* cinema, which places the director at the centre of filmmaking. However, Rajendran firmly believes in the active role of a producer as a creative collaborator in virtually every aspect of filmmaking.³⁷

The producer-collaborator “self-portraits” are common among other interviewed producers, who embarked on a similar transnational journey. For example, Indian creative producer Kabir collaborates on exploring the characters with the director:

As a producer, I take a hands-on approach to every aspect of the creative process. From building a team and scouting locations to casting decisions, I am actively involved. This includes involvement in editing and sound design, among other tasks. I am like a director’s mama. While I do not take the approach of telling the director whether their decisions are right or wrong, I prefer to engage in discussions and debates that encourage them to consider different perspectives and add depth to their work.³⁸

Kabir here asserts his involvement in virtually every aspect of filmmaking. To demonstrate his role as a collaborative producer, Kabir further cites an example in which he brought to a female

³⁵ Christopher Meir, “The Producer as Salesman: Jeremy Thomas, Film Promotion and Contemporary Transnational Independent Cinema,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 29, no. 4 (December 2009): 467–81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01439680903180873>.

³⁶ Mathivanan Rajendran, personal interview, May 28, 2021.

³⁷ Mathivanan Rajendran, personal interview, May 28, 2021.

³⁸ Kabir, personal interview, August 1, 2021.

director's attention that, in her female character-driven film, women appear to be confused while male characters seem assertive and more certain of their choices.³⁹ In the same vein, Rajendran collaborates on exploring the characters with the director/writer:

As a filmmaker or producer, it is often necessary to remind other filmmakers of important considerations, such as the social context of the film. For example, the audience may assume that a character comes from a particular background, class, or caste based on their portrayal behavior or appearance. It is important to be aware of these potential assumptions and to provide creative input that avoids perpetuating harmful stereotypes or giving the wrong impression.⁴⁰

As discussed earlier, the producer works closely with the director to bring the director's vision to the screen, as well as to shape and develop it further. The producer's input and collaboration are integral to the creative process and the success of the completed film. Rajendran further notes that "for a long time we've largely had directors-led films, of course, but the collaboration with the producers has always been important."⁴¹ Rajendran's remarks echo the concerns of production studies scholars: "Even when media makers clearly state that they work with a team, the process of celebrating the individual regularly masks production labour as well as the exercise of asymmetric forms of power and control."⁴² The producers portrayed themselves as collaborative and their interventions as supportive.

³⁹ Kabir, personal interview, August 1, 2021.

⁴⁰ Mathivanan Rajendran, personal interview, May 28, 2021.

⁴¹ Mathivanan Rajendran, personal interview, May 28, 2021.

⁴² Mayer et al., *Production Studies, The Sequel*, Preface X.

While most producers describe their interactions as “healthy conversation” and respect the director’s vision, interpersonal conflicts, power struggles and control remain part of the collaborative process. The power dynamics between a director and producer of an independent film also depend on the accumulated social, cultural, and symbolic capital. During an interview, Harsh Aggarwal, who was involved in the Indo-Dutch co-production, *Nasir* (2020) notes that in collaborations between directors and producers, new producers may find it challenging to influence the production process and directors tend to have greater control. The collaborations often have moments of disagreement. Interviewed producers unanimously agree that they ask questions and push directors to re-think certain situations in scripts. In our interview, Kabir discusses the production of a film in the following manner:

In one instance, I had carefully planned for a shooting location at a bus stop, but the crew disregarded my instructions, and the result was chaos. I took charge and reorganized the shoot by using a bus and working closely with the actors, even taking on the role of assistant director at times. I view myself as a directorial producer rather than simply a producer because I often find myself taking on more directorial tasks. I became a producer by chance.⁴³

Kabir emphasizes that the intention is to be supportive of the director, but his comments also show a sense of superiority and an attempt to control. As aforementioned, Caldwell also remarks that media knowledge is managed; therefore, it must be studied carefully. Contrary to Aggarwal, Kabir has been in this business for over a decade and has relatively more production experience. Kabir

⁴³ Kabir, personal interview, August 1, 2021.

has developed an identity for himself, which is that of a “directorial producer,” which brings him to par with the director. Further, Kabir frequently prefers to work with first-time filmmakers, which potentially helps reinforce his position on a film project. The director/producer relationship and power dynamics, therefore, can vary from project to project; they depend on a variety of factors, such as age, gender, economic contributions to the film, and earned social and symbolic capital, which is accumulated over the years. The management of human relationships forms a crucial part of the “performance” of a producer in the production world, as developed in the next part of the chapter.

“People Over Projects:” Emotional Labour of Producers

Why am I struggling to secure grants, do all this work, and try to make a film?

We do it because of our creative interests. We don’t always make a lot of money. It’s not like you make a million dollars all the time. Therefore, it is important to form partnerships with individuals who have compatible beliefs and work cultures. I think that’s how people form partnerships. It is about good vibes. You can go have a drink with them or have dinner later.

—Mathivanan Rajendran, personal interview, May 28, 2021.

Producers are frequently associated with managing finances and budgets, but the work of a producer primarily involves managing emotions. The Indian producers invest “immaterial labour” in internationally co-produced films, and it is a largely neglected, invisible and unseen part of their job. The notion of “immaterial labour” first appeared in a series of papers in the journal *Futur Anterieur* by Michael Hardt, Maurizio Lazzarato, Antonio Negri, and Paolo Virno in the

1990s. The “immaterial labor” was defined as “the labor that produces the information and cultural content of the commodity.”⁴⁴ Later, Hardt and Negri published one of their most influential books, *Empire*, in which they developed a wider definition of the concept: “labor that produces an immaterial good, such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge, or communication.”⁴⁵ This alludes to the notion of “affective labour” which is closely tied to the involvement of human interaction and contact—as well as based primarily on the use of soft skills such as creativity, communication and social relationships in the knowledge economy. These elements form a crucial part of creative producers’ lives; managing people, personal emotions, and those of others, especially on a multicultural crew, define a producer’s job.

For most interviewed producers, the criteria for choosing projects begin by carefully selecting the people they would like to work with. Poisson, the French co-producer of the film, *Sir* (2019) explains that the working relationship with people is more important than the film:

While I am willing to work on films that may not be noteworthy, if the team is pleasant to work with and the risk is minimal, I see no reason not to proceed. My future goal is to produce, sell, and be able to make money in between projects. Therefore, when considering potential projects, the most important factor for me is the kind of people involved. ⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial labor” in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 142, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucalgary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=326396>. The optimistic tone of the term was criticized by several Marxist autonomists who claimed that the definition shows a lack of attention to gender and fails to acknowledge the continuing significance of highly material forms of exploitation and oppression.

⁴⁵ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000), 290.

⁴⁶ Brice Poisson, personal interview, August 19, 2021.

In a similar vein, Monga describes it is the “vibe” of the director, Ritesh Batra at a speed-dating event during Film Bazaar, which led to the collaboration on *The Lunchbox*.⁴⁷ Similar comments were made by Kabir, who privileges the relationship with the director and a certain liking of his personality over everything else: “If the director is someone you trust and if you have a good relationship with the director, then everything else can be worked upon.”⁴⁸ Poisson further states that “you do not want to set yourself up for a conflict.”⁴⁹ Both Poisson and Kabir compare the director-producer relationship to marriage. Poisson believes that “one should not marry someone they wouldn’t want to be divorced from.”⁵⁰ In the same vein, Kabir emphasizes that “regardless of my admiration for an individual’s professional achievements, if we cannot coexist peacefully in the same household, it is not a viable partnership. Constant conflict is not something I want.”⁵¹ This suggests that interpersonal relationships in film and media are highly personal and informal. Not only managing one’s own emotions but managing the emotions of the director and everyone on the crew is also part of the producer’s job. According to Monga, it is the producer’s role to support and encourage the director. As a producer, “your job is to make things happen and ensure that everyone is inspired.”⁵² Affective labour, therefore, is defined as the creation and manipulation of affects for a particular purpose, i.e., to get the film made. Monga further describes herself as largely informed and prepared for human interactions when going to a film festival:

A creative producer’s job begins with having a vision. Then nurture the vision. Protect it every day. It is important to understand the ambitions of

⁴⁷ Guneet Monga, personal interview, June 14, 2021.

⁴⁸ Kabir, personal interview, August 1, 2021.

⁴⁹ Brice Poisson, personal interview, August 19, 2021.

⁵⁰ Brice Poisson, personal interview, August 19, 2021.

⁵¹ Kabir, personal interview, August 1, 2021.

⁵² Guneet Monga, personal interview, June 14, 2021.

those you are working with and align your goals with them. I need to do this for my film. So, you need to read the room. It is important to have some knowledge about the individuals present, their roles and past work, and any relevant information listed in a catalogue or festival program. This research will help identify potential contacts and understand how they may be able to provide valuable perspectives on your film or introduce you to other individuals who could potentially help the project.⁵³

Monga's use of the words "read the room" to influence the decisions of others alludes to the affective dimension of her job. Monga imagines a range of possibilities to "nurture" the projects and compares production to nurturing – an essential aspect of "affective" labour. Monga's "performance" begins when she enters the festival space. Monga constructs the act and yet imagines it to be authentic. This is because Monga works with intuition and combines it with a certain amount of research about the people she interacts with during the festival. Most producers interviewed for the research study agree that they use some sort of "intuition," "vibes," and "energy" in selecting people for transnational co-productions and film collaborations.

The use of words such as "intuition" or "gut feeling" creates an impression that producers do not possess knowledge of filmmaking; however, producers emerge as researchers and even "theorists" to borrow Caldwell's term. In response to a question about understanding transnational co-productions, Indian producer Rajendran asserts, "I have a theory about this. First, the filmmaker should have a voice that is potentially internationally recognized. Second, the story should be interesting. Third, the executive producer and director must be able to provide documentation,

⁵³ Guneet Monga, personal interview, June 14, 2021.

especially in European co-productions.”⁵⁴ In the same vein, Indian producer Anand also states that Indian-European co-productions are like a puzzle, and one needs to put all the pieces together.⁵⁵ In this remark, Anand understands her work as that of a creative problem-solver and the international co-production becomes a challenge to put together “all the pieces” i.e., documents, collaborators, and funding to produce the film. As Caldwell also puts it: “Filmmaking art is essentially a process of physical problem solving based on the obligatory need to overcome production obstacles.”⁵⁶ Moreover, the interviewed producers referred to “intuition” as one criterion for starting a collaboration with a director in their production stories. However, they do not come across as lacking knowledge of filmmaking as art and creativity.

This type of work produces and is produced by social networks and communities which are formed over the years. Producers need to manage these emotions to ultimately get a film made; they also need to continue to find and maintain healthy relationships to continue producing and surviving in the long run. In this sense, the affective labour of the producer constitutes a form of labour that “mobilizes emotions towards a specific end.”⁵⁷ In his article on affective labor, Hardt also argues that “the entertainment industry and the various cultural industries are likewise focused on the creation and manipulation of affects.”⁵⁸ But there is also a potential for community-building in “immaterial labour” because it provides “a sense of connected-ness or community.”⁵⁹ Eventually, the products of this “immaterial labour” are social networks and communities which

⁵⁴ Mathivanan Rajendran, personal interview, May 28, 2021.

⁵⁵ Aditi Anand, personal interview, July 21, 2021.

⁵⁶ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 21.

⁵⁷ Guillermina Altomonte, “Affective Labor in the Post-Fordist Transformation,” Public Seminar, May 8, 2015, <https://publicseminar.org/2015/05/affective-labor-in-the-post-fordist-transformation/>.

⁵⁸ Hardt, “Affective Labor,” 95.

⁵⁹ Hardt, “Affective Labor,” 96.

are formed over the years. Producers privilege building a network or community to continue to work in the industry, and this becomes one of the major reasons that producers tend to prioritize “people over projects.”

According to Hardt, the products of this “labour” are immaterial products such as excitement, satisfaction, and passion; this echoes the narrative of interviewed producers. The co-productions are not purely driven by finance. The producers are rather driven by curiosity or a passion for storytelling. In a promotional video, Monga begins by saying, “I am a born storyteller. I always wanted to tell stories.”⁶⁰ Monga affirms that the goal includes “servicing a story, and that is very important in its any form and format.”⁶¹ In the same vein, Rajendran in our interview states that a “producer’s passion is not about money. It is around stories. It is about telling a certain kind of story. What stories need to be told more? Which stories need to be amplified?” These remarks may also allude to the gate-keeping function of a producer in controlling the kind of stories the audiences would or would not watch in the future. Additionally, the producer with relatively larger symbolic capital (i.e., experience, resources, and connections, etc.) might have greater power to influence the production and reach of certain stories over others. Thus, producers have the power to create “collective, subjectivities, sociality and society itself.”⁶² But at what cost do they create these “imagined communities” of creative storytellers?

As discussed in the previous chapter, gratification often outweighs precarity in the film industry, but this section also focuses on the challenges associated with producing in precarious environments. The producers view emotional labour as gratifying and rewarding. For instance,

⁶⁰ Guneet Monga, personal interview, June 14, 2021.

⁶¹ Guneet Monga, personal interview, June 14, 2021.

⁶² Hardt, “Affective Labor,” 98.

Monga often employs the term “nurturing” for producing a film in a positive manner. The products of producers’ labour include building community and social networks. In their role as creative and collaborative storytellers, producers often express emotional satisfaction. Anand derives emotional satisfaction from her work: “This job can be extremely satisfying and gratifying on an emotional level. When one is content in this role, the job satisfaction is very high.”⁶³ The producers express that these creative collaborations to produce transnational independent co-productions are a highly gratifying process. According to Rajendran, the primary reason for pursuing co-production is the intellectual and creative stimulation of being in such an exciting environment.⁶⁴ Similarly, Kabir admits to working with highly talented and artistic individuals from around the world.⁶⁵ Rajendran admits to working 24 hours a day because “it does not feel like work.”⁶⁶ The interviewed producers spend a considerable amount of time on creative satisfaction, despite the lack of financial security.

However, the rewards of creative labour in this industry entail a high cost, both emotionally and materially. The producers unanimously believe that their work is highly undervalued and does not provide financial support to sustain. Most Indian creative producers interviewed for the study have other means (e.g., alternative business, consulting jobs, etc.) to generate income and survive in the industry. Monga confesses to living a very simple life and regularly depends on consulting to earn a livelihood.⁶⁷ In our interview, Kabir discloses he has another business because otherwise, he could have never survived by producing these films.⁶⁸ During our interview, Poisson disclosed

⁶³ Aditi Anand, personal interview, July 21, 2021.

⁶⁴ Mathivanan Rajendran, personal interview, May 28, 2021.

⁶⁵ Kabir, personal interview, August 1, 2021.

⁶⁶ Mathivanan Rajendran, personal interview, May 28, 2021.

⁶⁷ Smriti Kiran, “Guneet Monga Module – Mumbai Academy of Moving Image,” accessed June 13, 2021, <https://www.mumbaifilmfestival.com/blogs/guneet-monga-module/>.

⁶⁸ Kabir, personal interview, August 1, 2021.

that his co-produced film, *Sir* (2018), earned many awards and was distributed on streaming platforms; however, despite its critical acclaim and recognition, Poisson did not manage to recoup the financial investment, and it resulted in debt.⁶⁹ In our interview, Monga also reveals that she had to sell her house when she was co-producing, *Monsoon Shootout* (2013). However, sometimes the cost is not just economic but also emotional. Monga adds that she contemplated leaving the industry after the massive success of the film, *The Lunchbox*, in 2013 because she was unable to distribute her films in India and she felt emotionally exhausted.⁷⁰ In this way, the production stories take a cautionary turn. Monga further advises to not pursue a transnational co-production model for small-budgeted films.⁷¹ Kabir similarly underscores that an international co-production model increases budgets for independent films, which could have been made on a relatively smaller budget.⁷² Anand notes that a co-production model is a great way to kick off one's career in independent filmmaking in India. But Kabir remarks that it is uncommon for a first-time filmmaker to receive international grants and funding.⁷³ The careers built on the transnational filmmaking model stretch timelines and budgets. The labour that a producer puts into applying for international grants and waiting for funding is also unpaid labour, according to Kabir.⁷⁴

While Europe thinks of filmmaking as part of the culture, therefore spends a considerable amount of public money, filmmaking in India has been mostly privatized since its inception. The definition of the cultural sector in the European Union (EU) includes eight essential activities “artistic and monumental heritage, archives, libraries, books and press, visual arts, architecture,

⁶⁹ Brice Poisson, personal interview, August 19, 2021.

⁷⁰ Guneet, Monga, personal interview, June 14, 2021.

⁷¹ Guneet Monga, personal interview, June 14, 2021.

⁷² Kabir, personal interview, August 1, 2021.

⁷³ Kabir, personal interview, August 1, 2021.

⁷⁴ Kabir, personal interview, August 1, 2021.

performing arts, and audio and audiovisual media.”⁷⁵ Europe recognizes and supports its film, media and audiovisual sector and actively encourages a co-production system for their industries. For example, France views its cinema as not just industry and business but also as a “cultural force.” Therefore, cinema has a strong support system for its cinema, and in 2005, half of the 240 films produced in France were international co-productions.⁷⁶ Co-productions emerged in Europe before becoming popular around the world. Asian and European cultural industries scholar Jimmyn Parc notes that co-productions in Europe emerged as a strategy of defence against the hegemonic structures of Hollywood. After World War II, Europe's film industries faced many challenges, and co-production offered several advantages:

(1) sharing financial burdens and risks among partners, particularly with the help of government incentives, (2) expanding the market size by distributing films in more than one country, (3) advancing skills and technologies for filmmaking and related sectors through spillover and learning from partners, and (4) enhancing cultural diversity through cultural interaction among partners and/or introducing different styles of films to the market.”⁷⁷

Parc further emphasizes the need to conceptualize European co-productions and divide them into two categories: “corporation-led” and “state-led” co-productions. The corporate-led co-

⁷⁵ Raúl Rodríguez-Ferrándiz, “Culture Industries in a Postindustrial Age: Entertainment, Leisure, Creativity, Design,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 31, no. 4 (2014): 327–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295036.2013.840388>.

⁷⁶ Anne Jackel, “The Inter/Nationalism of French Film Policy,” *Modern & contemporary France* 15, no. 1 (2007): 21–36.

⁷⁷ Jimmyn Parc, “Between State-Led and Corporation-Led Co-Productions: How Has Film Co-Production Been Exploited by States in Europe,” *Innovation (Abingdon, England)* 33, no. 4 (2020): 442–458.

productions are driven by finances and focus on optimizing production factors. The state-led co-productions received government incentives and may also serve as vehicles for national branding.

In contrast, India experiences a lack of government financial support for its film industry, which results in limited co-productions, particularly state-led co-productions. The Indian producers of transnational independent films combine international funds and grants with equity money from Indian financiers, whom some producers, in personal interviews, refer to as “angel investors.” Creative producers emerge as non-financiers, as most of them do not have money to put into their films. Being a producer of alternative stories requires passion, creativity, and resilience due to the lack of resources and government support, unlike the European eco-system with state-sponsored funds, grants, territory-based distribution, and sales agents. This shows that the film industry structure is significantly different between India and Europe, which becomes one of the reasons for a relatively lower number of co-productions. Anand states one reason for having difficulties in co-producing with Europe is the marriage of two different funding and distribution structures.⁷⁸ Anand explains:

We raise money to make films, so we also need to sell them quickly to fulfil the financial needs of our investors. In Europe, it is possible to exploit sales companies and festivals to achieve global exposure over two years. However, this approach is not always feasible in the Indian market.⁷⁹

Poisson, Monga, and Anand express that work culture differences between India and Europe created several difficulties during the production phase. During our interview, Anand observes that

⁷⁸ Aditi Anand, personal interview, July 21, 2021.

⁷⁹ Aditi Anand, personal interview, July 21, 2021.

“Indians work 24 hours a day, but often with less efficiency, while those in France and Europe work fewer hours but with greater efficiency.”⁸⁰ Anand discloses an anecdote to discuss the difference between the film cultures, “I recall an incident in Europe involving Dhanush [a popular film star in Tamil cinema], where the driver informed him that their shift was over, and they were leaving. This would never happen in India. There are significant cultural differences between the two countries.”⁸¹ In this remark, Anand is referring to the star culture of the Indian film industry. Dhanush is the lead cast of the co-produced film and a popular film star in South India, and Anand explains that the Indian working class would not “leave” him on the film set because their “shift is over.” In the same vein, Poisson discusses cultural differences through an example of an editing room. During his time on set, Poisson observed a marked difference in the crew sizes and punctuality between Indian and French film productions. The French crews were smaller and more time-conscious, while the Indian crews were larger and less stringent about time.⁸²

To summarize, the gratifying production tales of producers allude to the opportunities for collaboration and creative stimulation of the transnational filmmaking world and the cautionary production tales point toward the challenges of working on a transnational project. These tales thus provide insights into the complexities of producing independent Indian-European co-productions including the opportunities (i.e., soft money, structured production, professional training, networking and linked symbolic capital) and challenges (e.g., increased budgets and timeline, work-culture differences and human relationship or team management issues). The transnational

⁸⁰ Aditi Anand, personal interview, July 21, 2021.

⁸¹ Aditi Anand, personal interview, July 21, 2021.

⁸² Brice Poisson, personal interview, August 19, 2021.

tales of Monga's *The Lunchbox* are an excellent example of how producers navigate these challenges of Indian independent filmmaking in an international context.⁸³

Transnational Production Stories of Producers

Monga worked together with 16 co-producers in the making of the film, *The Lunchbox* (2013), including established mainstream Bollywood producers such as Anurag Kashyap, Karan Johar, Ronnie Screwvala and Siddharth Roy Kapur. Other co-producers also involved in the film's production were ASAP Films (France), Rohfilm (Germany), Cine Mosaic (USA) along with private production companies DAR Motion Pictures, UTV Motion Pictures, Dharma Productions, Sikhya Entertainment, and NFDC. The film was produced with the support of ARTE France Cinema, CNC (France), and MEDIENBOARD Berlin-Brandenburg.⁸⁴ In this section, I focus on how Monga's production stories reveal precarious working conditions and related navigational tactics of producers within the transnational independent film culture of India.

Borrowing insights from Caldwell's (2008) "trade stories" model, I adapt the notion of a "hero's journey," from Joseph Campbell's "Hero with a Thousand Faces," (1949) and Christopher Vogler's "A Practical Guide to Joseph Campbell's The Hero with a Thousand Faces" (1985). Caldwell views trade stories as a "conventionalized industrial habit" that serves many functions,

⁸³ Besides Monga, there are several other women director-producers who are shifting India's film production culture by playing similar roles. For example, Reema Kagit and Zoya Akhtar established the production house Tiger Baby Films, in 2015 and since then have produced several transnational productions including, *Gully Boy* (2019)—with Nas (noted American rapper, songwriter and entrepreneur) as the executive producer—which premiered in Berlin International film festival 2019 and was India's official entry to the Oscars. Several women directors, such as Rima Das, Rohena Gera, Leena Yadav, and Shonali Bose have directed and produced independent films that have travelled through the international film festival circuit over the past decade.

⁸⁴ "The Lunchbox (The Lunchbox (Dabba))," Cineuropa - the best of european cinema, accessed April 3, 2023, <https://cineuropa.org/en/film/237132/>.

such as rationalizations (i.e., making sense of one's own work), cultivating solidarity, career mobility, social pedagogy, and self-legitimation. Caldwell interprets the "trade stories" of Hollywood workers by studying "the formal characteristics of trade stories (who tells them, using what forms of plot and character development)" and contextualizing "trade storytelling within specific labor sectors and working contexts."⁸⁵ In this way, the production stories are classified into various genres such as "against-all odds," "genesis myth," "paths-not taken" and "making-it sagas." Caldwell notes the genres are not restricted to a particular production community. However, below-the-line workers and production workers (e.g., editors, camera operators, grips) frequently narrate "against-all-odds" stories, which typically stress "modest or lowly origins, physical perseverance and tenacity."⁸⁶ Above-the-line professionals (such as creative producers, writers, and directors) tend to narrate "genesis myth" or "paths-not-taken parable" to establish professional legitimacy and industrial heritage to celebrate an "originating moment" in order to gain career capital. Agents, reps, producer assistants and managers work in unregulated and non-unionized sectors; therefore, they narrate "making-it sagas" stories and use workplace networking as a tool for survival.⁸⁷ Thus, trade stories serve many functions, such as establishing and reinforcing professional norms, values, and practices, such as mentoring practices that become vital for transferring knowledge and even reproducing cultural practices. They provide a way for industry insiders to convey valuable knowledge, offering insights into the "craft mystery" and challenges of working in the film and television sector.

⁸⁵ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 37.

⁸⁶ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 40.

⁸⁷ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 38.

In a similar vein, Indian creative producers, especially those who co-produced internationally, narrate the “hero’s journey” through their production tales. The narrative involves the hero, who goes on an adventure, wins in a crisis, and comes back home transformed. As discussed earlier, Indian producers face challenging situations, for example, extensive documentation processes, higher budgets, work culture differences, and human management skills. The act of travelling internationally and pitching alternative stories in India also means that they fight “against-all- odds,” especially against Bollywood’s dominant structures to “make it” in the industry. A-list film festival programmers and industry professionals represent mentors and helpers in these hero narratives. Producers themselves often define access to transnational spaces, such as the NFDC Film Bazaar or Rotterdam Lab, as significant or “life-changing.”⁸⁸ Thus, the journey entails the initial call to adventure (e.g. the decision to co-produce internationally), the challenges and obstacles that the hero encounters along the way (e.g. extensive documentation processes, distribution, establishing contacts etc.), and the mentors and helpers who assist the hero on the journey (e.g. A-list film festival programmers, sales agents and film professionals/filmmakers etc.). The heroic tales that Monga recounts also expose the industry structure and culture of independent filmmaking in Mumbai. In what follows, I analyze Monga’s heroic production stories and examine the navigational tactics such as interpersonal networking, hustling, and telling tales of tenacity.

Monga belongs to the Indian middle class and started her “hero’s journey” as an intern for her best friend’s mother, line producer Anureeta Sehgal, on an international co-production, *Valley*

⁸⁸ Aditi Anand, personal interview, July 21, 2021; Guneet Monga, personal interview, June 14, 2021.

of *Flowers* (2006) in Delhi.⁸⁹ Similar to a “hero’s journey,” Monga confronted the challenges of producing independent films due to the dominance of Bollywood in the Hindi-language film industry.⁹⁰ A long excerpt from our interview describing the precarious nature of working on independent films in India is worth quoting:

Independent filmmaking in India is challenging due to the lack of government grants and dependence on equity financing. The film industry is not based on the merit of a script, but rather on personal connections. It can be difficult to find individuals with similar views who are willing to invest in a project, and there are limited opportunities for alternative or independent films to be screened. Additionally, the dominance of Bollywood and the focus on star power often overshadow our Hindi-language film industry. As a result, it can be difficult to have a different conversation and convince others of the value and potential success of an independent film.⁹¹

This lack of infrastructure and the dominant presence of Bollywood create precarious working conditions for independent Hindi-language filmmaking in India. The corporate and capitalist nature of the Hindi-language film industry adds to the precariousness for independent filmmakers and producers. Besides “Bollywoodization,” corporatization and capitalism, industry scholar Ganti additionally points out the patriarchal dimension of the Bollywood film industry, noting that “the

⁸⁹ Gayatri Rangachari Shah & Mallika Kapur, “‘I Am a Disruptor’: Meet Guneet Monga, Co-Producer of Oscar-Winning ‘Period. End of Sentence,’” *Scroll*, accessed June 18, 2021, <https://scroll.in/reel/914507/i-am-a-disruptor-meet-guneet-monga-co-producer-of-oscar-winning-period-end-of-sentence>.

⁹⁰ Guneet Monga, personal interview, June 14, 2021.

⁹¹ Guneet Monga, personal interview, June 14, 2021.

sites and spaces of production until the early 2000s were highly masculine.”⁹² The media frequently represents Monga as a self-made woman in a male-dominated world of film producers. The newspaper titles often refer to her heroic tales of struggles. Examples include media articles such as, “With money borrowed from a neighbour, Monga went on to co-found production company with Anurag Kashyap”⁹³ and “How Guneet Monga raised money for films: posting online to selling her house.”⁹⁴ Simultaneously, Monga frequently tells stories of her humble beginnings, survival, and growth in media. However, Monga was not a complete outsider because her journey began after working with her mother’s best friend and line producer.⁹⁵

But through such heroic tales of struggles as an “outsider,” Monga establishes her identity and proficiency as a creative producer of small-budgeted independent films. Her micro-production tales expose the larger structural inequalities in the Hindi-language film industry. Monga often emphasizes her persistence and tenacity “against-all-odds” in relation to the way she has been “written off as young and judged for being in a power position” by fellow film and media professionals.⁹⁶ Monga coloured her hair grey to be taken seriously as a young producer in the film business. Being an outsider in Bollywood-dominated film culture, Monga narrates these stories of hardships and growth publicly to establish both professional authority and accumulate

⁹² Ganti, *Producing Bollywood*, 32.

⁹³ Sonia Mariam Thomas, “With Money Borrowed from a Neighbour, Guneet Monga Went on to Co-Own a Production Company with Anurag Kashyap,” *Outlook Business WoW*, accessed July 4, 2021, <https://wow.outlookbusiness.com/guneet-monga/>.

⁹⁴ “How Guneet Monga Raised Money for Films: Posting Online to Selling Her House,” *Times of India*, accessed June 13, 2021, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/hindi/bollywood/news/how-guneet-monga-raised-money-for-films-posting-online-to-selling-her-house/articleshow/68406918.cms>.

⁹⁵ “Producer of Oscar-Winning Documentary, Guneet Monga Talking about Film-Production,” *YouTube video*, accessed July 2, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CC-nMp6zz78>.

⁹⁶ *Producer of Oscar-Winning Documentary, Guneet Monga Talking about Film-Production, YouTube video*, accessed July 2, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CC-nMp6zz78>.

career capital to resist the male-dominated production world of Mumbai. This helps her carve space, identity, and value for herself in the Bollywood-dominated, ageist and patriarchal film industry. These obstacles also made her push boundaries and try to find the best possible solutions to the problems that she has encountered, given the gender and ageist bias of independent filmmaking and the Mumbai-film production world at large. In her several other interviews, Monga states how she has been as an outsider, on the “periphery of Bollywood.”⁹⁷ These discriminatory accounts show that she cannot only survive but succeed despite a lack of resources and support. Industrial exclusion is a common feature that Caldwell defines to be a primary trait of “against-all-odds narratives,” which pushes production workers towards “creative triumph of the will.”⁹⁸ Monga narrates the “against-all-odds” story behind the making of her first film as a producer, *Salaam India*, about a children’s cricket team, in the following manner:

No one was picking up our movie because India lost the world cup miserably. My neighbor had invested money in the film, so I left my job to recover the investment. I ended up doing 350 shows, hired interns, and could return all the money. If you give us 50 lakhs, it will be safe.⁹⁹

The story emphasizes how obstacles pushed her toward exploring creative ways of selling the film. Monga explains how she creatively recouped all the money by screening the film for school children and selling several DVDs. Note how, in the end, Monga adds that the money will be

⁹⁷ Priyanka Bhadani, “I Have Been a Disruptor within the Industry: Guneet Monga,” *The Week*, March 4, 2020, <https://www.theweek.in/news/entertainment/2020/03/04/i-have-been-a-disruptor-within-the-industry-guneet-monga.html>.

⁹⁸ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 46.

⁹⁹“Cyrus Says Ep. 703: Feat. Guneet Monga,” *YouTube video*, May 3, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ViWpN90pHc&t=1404s.

“safe” with her to form trust with the interviewer. Monga here tells the story of production struggle and success to pitch herself as an excellent saleswoman who knows the business of filmmaking.

One creative way to pitch indie films, therefore, is by telling tales of heroism. Being a creative producer, Monga is extremely aware of the power of storytelling. Telling heroic stories against obstacles becomes a tactic used to navigate the risky business of filmmaking and attract investors. According to Caldwell, “against-all-odds” narratives frequently emphasize low budgets as the key to innovation.¹⁰⁰ Monga asserts that innovation in financing independent films became the key to her success. For instance, she states that “we literally killed ourselves to make films on such low budgets that people could take a chance on us.”¹⁰¹ Monga further uses her stories as a tool to legitimize her command over the film business: “Budgets we have been able to sell them in, give a huge return of investment. They’re all profit-making.”¹⁰² Note that Monga views low-budget independent filmmaking as an accomplishment and self-celebratory, explaining how one can pull a profit-making creative film with micro-budgets. In “Tales of Courage,” Edward Bowen makes similar remarks about Italian independent filmmakers and producers who celebrate obstacles, sacrifice and hardship. However, Bowen argues that indie film practitioners tell such “against-all-odds” stories as a “marketing strategy” and also to gain empathy and support from critics.¹⁰³ In the same vein, Monga emphasizes how she finished films in less than a month: “We

¹⁰⁰ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 42

¹⁰¹ Guneet Monga, personal interview, June 14, 2021.

¹⁰² “Guneet Monga on Being Valued at Festivals and Boxed in Bollywood: I Feel like Living Double Life,” *Outlook India*, accessed June 12, 2021, <https://www.outlookindia.com/newscroll/guneet-monga-on-being-valued-at-festivals-and-boxed-in-bollywood-i-feel-like-living-double-life/1963973>.

¹⁰³ Edward Bowen, “Tales of Courage: Trade Stories of Italian Independent Cinema,” in *Experimental and Independent Italian Cinema: Legacies and Transformations into the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Anthony Cristiano and Carlo Coen (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 180-201, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474474054-012>.

have been very hard on ourselves with, making films on low budgets. The directors were supportive. We completed *Haramkhor* (2015) in just 16 days, aware that we could pull it off with the script. The film, *Peddlers* (2012), was filmed in various locations in Mumbai, but we were able to finish it in 30 days.”¹⁰⁴ Monga creatively raised 10 million Indian Rupees (INR) for *Peddlers*, which had a total budget of approximately 20 million INR. by posting the film’s script on Facebook.¹⁰⁵ Monga’s produced films vary in budgets. For example, *The Lunchbox* had a budget of 220 million INR, which makes it closer to a Bollywood film budget. Therefore, many interviewed producers objected to calling Monga’s *The Lunchbox*—an independent film. However, in our interview, Monga self-identifies her films as “independent.”¹⁰⁶

Monga views such production “tales of tenacity” as a form of achievement; therefore, the telling of the heroic tales itself becomes a navigational tactic for her to pitch independent films. But the Indian independent director, Makhija (2021) expresses contempt for harsh working conditions in the Indian film industry. During the World Cinema International Conference held in Madrid virtually, Makhija (2021) points out the exploitative dimension of working on an indie film in the corporatist environment with reference to Yoodlee Films, a division of India’s oldest

¹⁰⁴ Suhani Singh et al., “Truly Independent Cinema Is All about Invention, Innovation and Artistic Inquiry,” *India Today*, accessed April 4, 2021, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/movies/story/20130708-independent-cinema-kiran-rao-nawazuddin-siddiqui-nimrat-kaur-guneet-monga-anurag-kashyap-films-pvt-ltd-764396-2013-06-28>.

¹⁰⁵ “How Guneet Monga Raised Money for Films: Posting Online to Selling Her House,” *Times of India*, accessed July 19, 2022, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/hindi/bollywood/news/how-guneet-monga-raised-money-for-films-posting-online-to-selling-her-house/articleshow/68406918.cms>. 1 INR equals to 0.01656 CAD. Therefore, 20 million INR is approximately 331,200 Canadian Dollars (CAD). Note that there is a huge disparity in funding of independent film projects, depending largely on the production companies backing the projects. Low-budget films can cost anywhere between 10 million to 20 million INR compared to the average cost of Bollywood films ranging between 200 million and 500 million INR. Films with micro-budgets, which can have a budget below 10 million INR, are generally funded outside Mumbai and its dominant Bollywood production structures.

¹⁰⁶I have discussed this question of independence in the introduction of the dissertation. Guneet Monga, personal interview, June 14, 2021.

music company, Saregama India Limited, which has recently begun producing and distributing alternative cinemas of India across languages and genres. Makhija worked with Yoodlee for *Ajji* (2017) and asserts that the team was forced to work on a shoestring budget, which created precarious working conditions for the crew.¹⁰⁷ These remarks suggest paradoxical and sometimes contradictory characteristics of the Indian production narrative. The exploitative nature of the commercialized and corporate Bombay motion film industry extends itself into a “multimedia global juggernaut with skyrocketing revenues and blockbuster production budgets.”¹⁰⁸ Thus, such industry conditions force creative producers to make independent films on lower budgets. On one hand, creative producers of independent films demand support, and on the other, they unintentionally internalize the precarity to the point of self-exploitation. These precarious working conditions push creative producers not only to work long hours but also to view precarity as a catalyst for creativity and celebrate it as an achievement. This results in hustling culture in producing independent cinema because of harsh working conditions.

In the “against-all-odds” trade story genre, innovation and a hostile environment often work simultaneously.¹⁰⁹ In several published interviews, Monga associates producing with “hustling” and calls herself a “proud hustler” and a “disruptor.”¹¹⁰ Monga emphasizes how she “hustled” her way creatively and made it happen despite several challenges. During her hustle at

¹⁰⁷Devashish Makhija, “Dialogue between Filmmakers: Geetha J./Devashish Makhija.” (Discussion, World Cinema International Conference, Madrid, Spain, June 15-16, 2021, https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qvpLYogX0adMjKl9fQMtBptUX_ky0DHz8Ailc4R3Mto/edit).

¹⁰⁸ Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson, “Precarious Creativity: Global Media, Local Labor,” in *Precarious Creativity*, edited by Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson, *Global Media, Local Labor* (University of California Press, 2016), 5.

¹⁰⁹ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 51.

¹¹⁰ Anindita Ghose, “Guneet Monga: ‘I Own My Hustle, I’m Proud of My Hustle,’” *Mintlounge*, May 8, 2021, <https://lifestyle.livemint.com/how-to-lounge/movies-tv/guneet-monga-i-own-my-hustle-i-m-proud-of-my-hustle-111620410724320.html>.

the international film festivals, she creatively disseminated earlier films of Anurag Kashyap, an internationally known independent filmmaker of India. For this, Monga used a pen drive with Anurag Kashyap's name and her own e-mail address. She argues, "At some point, it was so widely available at festivals. Just these creative ways of hustling."¹¹¹ Throughout the heroic stories of Monga, there are two important themes: mentoring and hustling. First, mentors are important in the "hero's journey" and Kashyap represents one important figure in Monga's journey: "We just discussed a few things and immediately started working together and since then there has been no looking back. He has sort of taken that position as a father figure or mentor. I feel secure in doing mistakes because there is someone there."¹¹² The duo director-producer began working together in 2009 after the success of Kashyap's film *Dev D* (2009). Both Kashyap and Monga produced many films collaboratively for five years and travelled to A-list international film festivals with films such as *That Girl in Yellow Boots* (2010), *Udaan* (2010) *Gangs of Wasseypur* (2012) Part 1 and 2 at Cannes, which became a cult classic and is considered a milestone in contemporary independent filmmaking in India. I will return to mentoring, as it is intertwined with the "hustle" in Monga's journey.

Hustling can be seen as a symptom of the present generation post-liberalization, and its meaning has also shifted. In *Knocking the Hustle: Against the Neoliberal Turn in Black Politics*, Lester Spence proposes that one approach to understanding the rise of neoliberalism involves examining the evolving definition of the term, hustle:

¹¹¹ Kiran, "Guneet Monga Module."

¹¹² "Anurag Kashyap Is like a Father Figure to Me: Guneet Monga," *The Indian Express* (blog), October 26, 2013, <https://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/bollywood/anurag-kashyap-is-like-a-father-figure-to-me-guneet-monga/>.

Whereas in the late sixties and early seventies the hustler was someone who consistently sought to get over, the person who tried to do as little work as possible in order to make ends meet, with the ‘hustled’ being the people who were victimized by these individuals (‘He hustled me’), the hustler is now someone who consistently works.¹¹³

In the neoliberal world, the hustle entails precarious working conditions with little to no government support. This concept applies to Indian producers, who work in an environment characterized by high risks of failure. Monga often calls herself a “proud hustler,” who “consistently works,” but hustling can potentially mask the harsh realities of working in the film industry with passion and excitement.¹¹⁴ In the personal interview, Monga explains that, for her, hustling results from her passion for the profession and her enthusiasm to tell stories to a global audience.

Structurally, hustling emerged from neoliberal and self-entrepreneurial structures of the Indian film industry. According to industry scholar Ganti, the Mumbai film industry comprises “independent contractors or freelancers” flourishing independently, without state aid for decades.¹¹⁵ However, as discussed in the second chapter, the Indian government funded many alternative films in the heydays of the Parallel Cinema Movement and the Indian New Wave. Ganti also remarks that “flexibility, fragmentation, decentralization and their associated occupational and employment insecurities that are cited as characteristics of global, late-capitalist order, have

¹¹³ Lester K. Spence, *Knocking the Hustle: Against the Neoliberal Turn in Black Politics* (Brooklyn, NY: punctum books, 2015), 2.

¹¹⁴ Ghose, “Guneet Monga.”

¹¹⁵ Ganti, *Producing Bollywood*, 19.

actually been the defining features of the Hindi-language film industry since the end of Second World War.”¹¹⁶ However, these characteristics – the flexible capitalist hyper-working world of the Hindi-language film industry – inevitably result in exploitation and precarious working conditions for creative producers. The creative producers cannot escape these structural realities and they even reproduce the neoliberal structures of freelancing, creative entrepreneurship, and gig economies, which add to precarity in the industry.

The precarity in the professional world of creative producers in India results from limited resources, inadequate peer networks, and a lack of state support within the Indian independent filmmaking scene. Consequently, these producers must constantly adapt and innovate to overcome challenges and sustain their careers in a highly competitive industry. Hustling thus becomes a way of life for Indian producers. Monga speaks about her beliefs about independent filmmaking in the following manner:

Indian independent cinema is about human experiences. We do not make escapist films. I am attracted to representing human experiences and trying to make people feel something through my films. It is important to me to not take the audience’s time for granted.¹¹⁷

By distinguishing between independent filmmaking and Bollywood, Monga establishes a unique identity for herself, while carefully referring to Bollywood as “escapist” cinema. This is a common trait of the “paths-not-taken parable,” in which film professionals find gratification in choosing alternative career paths. The Hollywood above-the-line professionals, for instance, emphasize

¹¹⁶ Ganti, *Producing Bollywood*, 19.

¹¹⁷ Guneet Monga, personal interview, June 14, 2021.

financial and moral differences as reasons for preferring prime-time television over big-budget films.¹¹⁸ Similar to Hollywood filmmakers, however, with more restraint, Monga shows disdain over the work done in Bollywood to establish herself and her independent film project as relatively superior. Caldwell argues that the habit of telling one's personal career trajectory is more common among Hollywood above-the-line professionals. This type of storytelling is a way to celebrate one's artistic pedigree, which Caldwell refers to as "genesis myth." Monga habitually narrates what Caldwell calls "originating moments" within the "genesis myth" genre; however, it must be noted that Monga belongs to the Indian middle class and her career trajectory is not the result of an ancestral legacy, as is often the case with the above-the-line production narratives of Hollywood. Although I discussed earlier that Monga began her journey with the help of her mother's best friend, which shows the family had some form of contact with film professionals. Yet, she describes herself as a "proud hustler." Alternatively, for Monga, the telling of a career trajectory becomes self-affirmatory and provides much-needed self-talk and psychological support required in an indie filmmaking business in India. The hustling stories sometimes serve a dual function of heroism and pedagogy. Note that Monga compares her work to moving "a mountain," emphasizing that the profession of a creative producer requires both physical and mental strength.: "I advise people to study producing or to start from the ground up and not to judge the process. Some days it may feel like progress is not being made, but I feel I could move a mountain. I have had great mentors, and I believe in mentoring."¹¹⁹ Monga here asks fellow film industry workers "not to judge the process," which potentially contributes to self-exploitation in the business of

¹¹⁸ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 50.

¹¹⁹ Ghose, "Guneet Monga."

indie filmmaking. Monga believes that producing is synonymous with learning and mentoring, and mentoring is an important part of the “hero’s journey.”

In the process of transnationalizing the independent film culture of India, Monga also invents her own identity and reproduces the codes of film festival culture in India, which include mentoring, networking, autonomy, and artistic gratification. Monga consciously manages her reputation, self-promotes and brands herself as a creative collaborator and hustler. Monga refers to the title of her production company, “Sikhya Entertainment,” in which “Sikhya means learning and I am still learning.”¹²⁰ While hustling her way through the transnational independent filmmaking sector, Monga found fellow film industry professionals highly misunderstood and undervalued the role of a creative producer in India. The producers lack peer support and guidance; therefore, the pedagogical function becomes even more important with the need to educate others about the challenging work of a creative producer.

To mentor those starting out in production and to celebrate the hundred thousand follower milestone on Instagram, Monga held the workshop “Producing 101,” and I participated in the workshop on 8 May 2020. In this workshop, Monga emphasized the important yet neglected role of producers: “In India, every actor became a producer, so the industry underestimated the job of a producer. The producer is an invaluable asset. More responsible than a director, a producer is a collaborator who adds value to a film and expands its journey. That’s a lot of work.”¹²¹ Monga frequently speaks about the value of a producer in the Indian filmmaking process through media platforms. As discussed above, Indian independent producers have traditionally been associated

¹²⁰ Guneet Monga, personal interview, June 14, 2021.

¹²¹ Guneet Monga, “Producing 101 Workshop,” May 8, 2020.

with investing money rather than creativity in a film project, which left a functional gap in the filmmaking process. Monga worked on several projects and took many production roles, including executive producer and line producer, to gain industry experience. The most important contribution of Monga to the Indian film industry lies in her efforts to successfully establish the distinct role of a producer in a creative project, in line with several filmmaking cultures in the world. Creating this parity in production culture in India opens many possibilities for aspiring Indian producers to co-produce internationally and create an identity of their own in the industry.

The hustling of producing independent films often involves collaboration and interpersonal networking. As Monga explains, “It was a hustle of keeping those relationships, informing yourself, and then showing them one film after another, and making the best out of the opportunities.”¹²² Monga’s heroic production stories frequently emphasize interpersonal relationships as necessary tools to succeed in the world of independent filmmaking. The international film festival circuit provided additional mentoring support in her transnational journey. Monga participated in international production training programs, including the Producer’s Breakfast Programme at Cannes, Rotterdam Lab for Producers, Trans-Atlantic Partners training and Networking Program, and several other co-production labs. In the “Producing 101” workshop, Monga placed special emphasis on informal networking in the international film festival circuit – a skill that she thinks is indispensable for success in the film business. Networking acts as a tool for professional growth and development in “making-it sagas,” especially within

¹²² Guneet Monga, personal interview, June 14, 2021.

highly “unregulated sectors.”¹²³ Monga explains how she navigated the international film festival circuit through interpersonal networking:

In 2010, I went to the Venice film festival with the posters for *That Girl in Yellow Boots*. I didn't know that you need sales agents. I later learned that you need to book meetings several months in advance. I bought cheap flight tickets to travel to Europe in the off-season and spent five years writing hundreds of emails to meet international buyers. Follow-up and networking are a big part of it. ¹²⁴

The international film festivals represent the unknown in this producer’s “hero’s journey.” Through the mentoring support from international film festival programmers and professionals, and interpersonal networking skills, Monga navigated the uncertainty and risk of producing independent films. The transnational journey of Monga through *The Lunchbox* is an excellent example of it. The networking meetings and the professional training with the international film festival community equipped Monga with the knowledge to explore the official co-production between India and France that was initially signed in 1985. Monga used the treaty for the first time in *The Lunchbox*, which became an Indo-French-German co-production in 2012. The film was initially low-budget and did not require many co-producers. Initially, Monga, therefore, confronted challenges in India in pursuing international co-productions. Monga reveals the struggles of co-producing internationally in her media interview:

¹²³ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 52.

¹²⁴ Guneet Monga, “Producing 101 with Guneet Monga Workshop,” May 8, 2020.

Nobody in India will hear about co-productions. They were like, “If you need \$1.5 million to make your film, then take it entirely from India. Why do you need to raise chunks of it from four different countries?” There’s a landlord mentality. It only changed after a lot of talking.¹²⁵

The international co-production, *The Lunchbox* (2013) became a turning point in the “hero’s journey” of Monga. Not only did the film “receive a standing ovation at Cannes,” but it also received distribution agreements for over 20 international territories. Monga states she sold the film to the entire world within 24 hours at Cannes.¹²⁶ Monga explains how she met Karan Johar, CEO of Dharma Productions, Bollywood’s largest film production and distribution company, at the festival, and both agreed to arrange a screening in the home country. Johar immediately appreciated the film and marketed it as a love story, with the tagline, “Can you fall in love with somebody you never met?” Johar played a key role in the film’s domestic box-office success.¹²⁷ Thus, the distributor later became part of the film at the Cannes Film Festival. However, the alternative distribution system of film festivals doesn’t work consistently for independent films. Scholars often question the distribution function of international film festivals. As film festival scholar Dina Iordanova notes:

It is not correct to think of festivals as a distribution network. Festivals are exhibition venues that need a sporadic supply of content. The network aspect only comes later and on an ad hoc basis. As temporary exhibition venues, festivals have difficulties maintaining steady relations with suppliers and

¹²⁵ Singh, “Truly Independent Cinema.”

¹²⁶ “The Lunchbox (The Lunchbox (Dabba))”

¹²⁷ Guneet Monga, personal interview, June 14, 2021.

cannot commit to working with distributors the way distributors would like.¹²⁸

Monga networked with European buyers and sales agents in the off-season for years. Thus, the worldwide distribution of *The Lunchbox* was not merely the result of one screening and a Critic's Week Award at the Cannes Film Festival. Iordanova rightly points out: "Sending a film to a film festival cannot make economic sense. There must be a string of festivals for the effort to pay off, and there must be a distribution network beyond for it to make real sense (and maybe even turn it into profit.)"¹²⁹ Contrary to Monga's comments in the media, *The Lunchbox* was not sold out overnight at the Cannes Film Festival. The global success of the film results from years of invisible and unpaid labour by film industry professionals, especially producers at these international festivals and markets, that make the wider distribution of internationally co-produced independent films possible. The international co-production model for small-budgeted films is a laborious process because the model involves great human management skills to deal with multiple film professionals and stakeholders on relatively lower-budget films.¹³⁰ Therefore, as a creative producer, Monga spends a considerable amount of time maintaining human relationships to navigate the transnational independent filmmaking world. Informal networking is common because festivals emerged independently of each other; therefore, there is no central organization that organizes and coordinates the "circuit."¹³¹ Film festival scholar Skadi Loist analyzes the idea of the "circuit," which frequently is associated with A-list film festivals. Loist traces the historical

¹²⁸ Iordanova, "The Festival Circuit," 26.

¹²⁹ Iordanova, "The Festival Circuit," 33.

¹³⁰ Guneet Monga, personal interview, 14 June 2021.

¹³¹ Iordanova, "The Festival Circuit," 33.

narrative of the “circuit” and argues that the “circuit” represents the circulation of films, money, and people, and this circuit is connected to smaller film festivals and the industry at large. The terms such as “network, archipelago, rhizome, disruptive short circuits, or periphery” thus better describe the festival’s ecosystem, its flow and culture than the term “circuit”.¹³² Managing human relationships and socializing become an important part of the creative producer’s professional world through which they “build a tribe” in the words of Monga.¹³³ The community-building help navigate and survive the informal structures of the Indian film industry.

In Caldwell’s “making-it-sagas,” the rationale behind networking and building relationships is the job insecurities in the highly flexible world of American studios and corporations.¹³⁴ Film industry scholar Ganti refers to the informality and “centrality of kinship networks” within Bollywood.¹³⁵ In a similar vein, independent filmmaking culture in Mumbai is also built through informal structures and networks, however for distinct reasons. Indian creative producers, for instance, cultivate long-term professional relationships in order to keep producing independent film projects for a prolonged period. Interpersonal networking and maintaining social relations further become potent tools to manage and survive the hardships of working on indie films because films seldom generate money.

Like in “Hero’s Journey,” Monga, having earned social and symbolic capital internationally, now confronts the challenges in her home country as she approaches the final moment of victory. This transformative moment in Monga’s “hero’s journey” occurred after the

¹³² Skadi Loist, “The Film Festival Circuit: Networks, hierarchies and circulation,” in *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*, eds., Marijke de Valck, Brendan Kredell, and Skadi Loist (London: Routledge, 2016), 49-64.

¹³³ Guneet Monga, personal interview, 14 June 2021.

¹³⁴ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 59.

¹³⁵ Ganti, *Producing Bollywood*, 70

success of *The Lunchbox* (2013). During this period, Monga perceived herself to be incompetent at managing production independently in Mumbai. This is because most of her producing experience was international, and it also became a tool to confine her work in the “art film” category.¹³⁶ Additionally, the Indian independent film director and long-term collaborator-mentor of Monga, Anurag Kashyap, closed his company, Anurag Kashyap Films. Therefore, this hindered the distribution of films, such as *Monsoon Shootout* (2013), *Peddlers* (2012) and *Haraamkhor* (2015) in India. However, all these films were screened at major festivals, and Monga sold the rights of films to international territories. This left her “emotionally shattered.”¹³⁷ Thus, the international experience became a liability and producers return to further challenge these stereotypes and navigate the distinct industry structure – the production, sales, and distribution processes, which are entirely different in India. In our interview, Monga acknowledges questioning her decisions to continue producing. Monga gradually began distributing these films in India and rejoined the industry by 2017, but this period between 2013-17 marks an important phase for her, which transformed her world.¹³⁸ Thus, it represents the final phase of “hero’s journey” in the form of resurrection, i.e., personal, and professional growth. Monga began producing again within Bollywood’s ecosystem and beyond. This includes films such as *Soorarai Pottru* (2019), *Jallikattu* (2019), *Pagglait* (2021) and *Kathal* (2023). Her last documentary film, *Elephant Whispers* (2023) won the 95th Academy Award for ‘Best Documentary Short Film’ and it is available on the streaming platform, Netflix.

¹³⁶ “Guneet Monga on Being Valued at Festivals and Boxed in Bollywood: I Feel like Living Double Life,” *Outlook India*, accessed June 12, 2021, <https://www.outlookindia.com/newscroll/guneet-monga-on-being-valued-at-festivals-and-boxed-in-bollywood-i-feel-like-living-double-life/1963973>.

¹³⁷ Guneet Monga, personal interview, June 14, 2021.

¹³⁸ Guneet Monga, personal interview, 14 June 2021.

Conclusion

Monga's "hero's journey" marks a transformational shift from an oblivious intern, who finds mentoring support in Mumbai, and the international film festival circuit, returns to her home country to further navigate the struggles of the Bollywood-dominated Mumbai film industry and eventually gains recognition internationally and nationally. Monga accumulated cultural capital (e.g., film festival awards, training, and recognitions) and social capital (i.e., informal networking and interpersonal relationships) that brought credibility and appreciation. Similarly, the "hero-creative producers" of small-budgeted films, who embark on a similar transnational journey build credibility for independent film projects through international awards and recognitions, and in the process, they also establish a distinct identity for themselves in Bollywood.¹³⁹

However, Monga consciously puts creative and emotional labour into the international production model for *The Lunchbox*, but Poisson, the French co-producer of *Sir* (2019) reveals that Karan Johar, who is the CEO of Bollywood's largest film production and distribution company, Dharma productions, made profits from the success of the film instead of Monga.¹⁴⁰ Poisson himself was in debt and made no profits; however, his film, *Sir*, was sold to streaming platforms. As discussed throughout the chapter, creative producers interviewed for this study, such as Rajendran and Agarwal (*Nasir*, 2020), as well as Anand (*The Extraordinary Journey of the Fakir*, 2018), among others, are following similar paths in the industry. In the book, *The Managed Heart*, Arlie Russell Hochschild perceives the emotional labour of flight attendants as a burden

¹³⁹ Most Indian producers interviewed for the study discussed dependence on international awards and recognition as a way to gain credibility in the Mumbai film industry.

¹⁴⁰ Brice Poisson, personal interview, August 19, 2021.

and critiques capitalism. Hochschild asserts: “It does not take capitalism to turn feeling into a commodity or to turn our capacity for managing feeling into an instrument. But capitalism has found a use for emotion management, and so it has organized it more efficiently and pushed it further.”¹⁴¹ Creative producers are caught in the incessant cycle of advanced capitalism, investing physical, creative, and emotional labour every day in exchange for little to no return, while the major corporations, production houses and streaming services reap the rewards. This is what Rosalind Gill (2010) describes media life as a “pitch.”¹⁴² The personal and professional selves merge in a way that every moment of life potentially “becomes raw material for capital accumulation.”¹⁴³

Finally, the Indian producers interviewed for the study work from various parts of India, but they are a product of a similar “habitus.” According to French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, “habitus” works as a structured system and it “produces individual and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history.”¹⁴⁴ In this way, “habitus” here refers to the collective practices of individual producers through international film festivals. The producer produces and reproduces similar codes and belief systems that they acquired, especially through the international film festival circuit. Media workers often serve as “cultural actors” who can shape the film industry culture and themselves through their practices and

¹⁴¹ Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley, United States: University of California Press, 2012), 53.

¹⁴² Rosalind Gill, “Life is a Pitch: Managing the Self in Media Work” in *Managing Media Work*, edited by Mark Deuze, (London: Sage, 2010).

¹⁴³ Andrew Ross. “In Search of the Lost Paycheck”, in *Digital Labor: The internet as playground and factory*, edited by T. Scholz, (New York: Routledge, 2012), 25.

¹⁴⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, “Structures and the habitus,” in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, translated by Richard Nice, (Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72–95, doi:10.1017/CBO9780511812507.004.

discourses.¹⁴⁵The transnational film production culture thus works as a system of practices and rituals, and it is formed by practices including mentoring, networking, and community-building through the international film festival circuit. These are some of the formal and informal ways through which shared practices and codes of working transnationally are produced, reproduced, and mediated from one culture to another. The belief systems stem from international festival experiences and include the idea of nurturing, creativity, collective authorship, and artistic gratification. These codes romanticize the Indian independent filmmaking world.

The chapter examined the various contours of the transnational independent film production culture instead of championing or rejecting it completely. Precarity in the producer's job thus originates in both forms, i.e., personal, and structural. The creative producer-storytellers find gratification in community-building and feel gratified by their creative work. However, practicing affective labour every day becomes part of the producer's life. The transnational film production culture as a system thus creates these "imagined communities" of creative producers who promote romantic visions of creative work but are ultimately at the service of advanced capitalism because several producers through their work and belief systems are found to be simultaneously reproducing the neoliberal structures of the industry defined by increased creative-entrepreneurship, flexibility, freelancing and globalized gig economies. I have also analyzed these neoliberal filmmaking structures in India's independent filmmaking in previous chapters. This chapter contextualized and examined its implications for the professional world of producers. The chapter concludes that the producers earn social, symbolic, and cultural capital through transnational filmmaking experiences. They return to India, transformed with new skills and

¹⁴⁵ Mayer et al., *Production Studies*, 2.

alternative ways of seeing the filmmaking world to challenge the dominant narratives of Bollywood. Finally, the producers emerge as heroes and survivors, telling narratives of passion, persistence, and resilience about the transnational journey of filmmaking.

Conclusion

Without these very local production work-worlds, government and industry would be merely absentee landlords.

—Caldwell, “Cultures of Production,” 210.

This dissertation began as a series of case studies about the National Film Development Corporation of India (NFDC) and Film Bazaar, while also examining the perspectives of its staff and the beliefs of producers. Employing a transnational approach to Media Industry Studies (MIS), specifically Caldwell’s production culture or meaning-making approach, this dissertation examined India’s transnational production culture for independent films. The scholars in this field examine the experiences, practices and values of industry professionals who produce, make, disseminate, and shape the cinema we watch. In his study, Caldwell emphasizes the need to examine the labour practices and the larger political-economic/industrial structures in relation to each other.¹ Through this novel production culture approach, this dissertation examined the independent production culture through the case study of NFDC Bazaar and its participants as they participate, navigate, and negotiate the international film festivals, co-production culture, and the larger neoliberal-national, and transnational structures of the Indian film industry. This entailed studying the off-screen management structures, policies, tactics, values, and practices of the independent film community working transnationally. Specifically, this dissertation focused on the senior staff, programmers, consultants, and producers supporting Indian independent cinema

¹ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 374.

transnationally. In doing so, it explored the implications of neoliberal-national and transnational structures on the independent filmmaking community, and what it means for their “work world.”

While the macro-industrial structures influence and shape labour practices and beliefs of industry workers – making and facilitating independent cinema within these structures – they are not entirely determining. Caldwell also concludes that the “self-theorization” of workers offers challenges and opportunities for cultural studies scholars, to comprehend their beliefs and practices within “as convoluted, contradictory, heterogeneous, and as ostensibly monolithic ‘industry.’”² Similarly, this dissertation eventually contributed to understanding the collective sense-making process behind independent film productions i.e., the complex and diverse ways in which the government, industry and its workers delineate, describe, discuss, and dispute over the meaning of independent cinema in India. It provided valuable insights into how producers understand their own labour, as well as negotiate, navigate, and even contest dominant industrial structures to make Indian independent cinema transnationally. In this way, the research examined the various ways the industry responded to neoliberal-national and transnational structures to facilitate and produce Indian independent cinema.

To this end, this dissertation was divided into three chapters. The first chapter examined how NFDC responded to the neo-liberalization of the Indian film industry and restructured itself to promote transnational practices for the Indian independent filmmaking community in the mid-2000s. It explored shifting mandates and market-oriented navigational tactics of NFDC since its restructuring in 2007. The renewed policies of NFDC supported the growth of the neoliberal-national film industry, which, in turn, contributed to the increased dominance of Bollywood and

² Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 316.

corporatization in the industry. The transnational infrastructure of NFDC to support small-budgeted independent films was designed in the service of strategic national branding and economic growth of the national film industry in India. However, under the PM Modi-led government, these neoliberal and national objectives intersect with the goals of the nationalist government. The chapter ended with a discussion about the exploitative tendencies of working with studios and the private sector as independent filmmakers in what I called a “regulated free market” – the commercial agendas intersect with the current nationalist goals of the government. The first chapter concluded NFDC negotiates between changing economic, political, and technological conditions, shaping India’s independent film production culture. Today, independent filmmaking in India confronts a dual threat of rising control and power from a nationalist-neoliberal regime. As I was completing this dissertation, the Modi government merged various film institutions under NFDC, which transformed the shape of the organization. This controversial restructuring raises concerns about the organization’s ability to manage and support Indian independent cinema in the future.

The first chapter built a solid background for studying micro-level practices of the Film Bazaar, which includes examining the creative management, internal structure and labour of the senior staff, programmers, consultants, and producers. The examination of these micro-level practices in a larger context is foundational for media industries and production studies approach. Using the media industry studies methods, the first chapter was primarily built on the data collected through annual reports, trade publications, press and media coverage and existing secondary sources, and thus provided a macro-level view of NFDC and the state of contemporary Indian independent filmmaking in India. The second chapter contextualized the perspectives of the labour through a detailed analysis of their personal interviews, using a combination of the media industry

and film festival research approaches. It illustrated how the macro-industrial structures shape management, belief systems, and practices of labour at the Bazaar. The perspectives of staff and industry professionals of Bazaar further contributed to a more nuanced understanding of labour practices in the transnational independent film production world. In retrospect, the second chapter revealed diverse and varied ways in which the staff and film professionals understand, describe, and theorize independent filmmaking and their own work. For example, the senior film programmer DCunha believed her work as a curator entails selecting films based on the taste of western film festivals and aesthetic merit. According to DCunha, these films contribute to the values of “art for art’s sake.”³ Conversely, Aparna, the senior staff member managing the Bazaar, believed that the art cinema must negotiate the values of commerce, contributing to the growth of the industry.⁴ Several Bazaar workers were working precariously on contractual and project-based labour while being driven by notions of artistic gratification and non-material rewards of facilitating Indian independent cinema. The second chapter concluded that the Bazaar emerged as a fragmented and contested space because of the government’s long-standing neoliberal and new nationalist goals.

The focus on micro-level practices of the film festival community in the second chapter allowed further exploration of producers’ less acknowledged and often misunderstood role in the film industry. Thus, the final chapter discussed the Indian producers’ participation in international film festivals, their cultural struggles, practices, and professional experiences in producing Indian independent films internationally. It provided an “industrial-cultural” understanding of

³ Deepti DCunha, personal interview, July 13, 2021.

⁴ Aparna, personal interview, June 4, 2021.

contemporary transnational co-production culture within Indian independent filmmaking and offered a detailed and nuanced cultural understanding of the changing role of Indian producers, their production practices, navigational tactics, emotional labour, and work culture. Previous chapters of the dissertation examined the neoliberal filmmaking structures and international film festival culture in shaping India's independent film production. The final chapter thus contextualized and examined its implications on the professional world of producers. The creative producer-storytellers reproduce the values of international film festivals and believe in collaborations, and community-building of creatives, and are even gratified by their creative work despite the challenges of working in the industry. Many Indian producers are simultaneously caught in the neoliberal-national structure of the Indian film industry, showing faith in creative entrepreneurship, freelancing, and the commercialization of content. In this way, some common patterns emerged because of the neoliberal-national/transnational structures for making Indian independent films. However, there were some variations in the industry perspectives. For example, Indian producer Kabir criticized the lack of funding and government support, while another producer Mathivanan Rajendran believed in individualism.⁵ Finally, the chapter concluded that the producers tell stories of passion, persistence, and resilience, emerging as heroes and survivors in the transnational journey of filmmaking.

Taken together, this dissertation examined the relationship between macro-level political-economic structures of the industry, which is driven by neoliberalism, transnationalism and nationalism, and the micro-level individual practices of labour such as international mentoring,

⁵ Kabir, personal interview, August 1, 2021; Mathivanan Rajendran, personal interview, May 28, 2021.

networking, individualism, and creative entrepreneurship. It demonstrated how the macro-level structures impact and reflect the micro-level practices of film professionals. The central values of the community emerged within these neoliberal-national and transnational contexts of Indian independent filmmaking. For example, the belief in individualism and creative entrepreneurship resulted from long-held larger neoliberal structures, which reduce the expectations of national government funding among independent filmmaking communities in India. While the previous governments had pushed the neoliberal agendas in film policies, the current government combines neoliberalism-nationalism to further encourage practices such as creative entrepreneurship, independence, and individualism, for example, through the ‘AtmaNirbhar Bharat Abhiyan’ (Self-reliance scheme) discussed in the first chapter. Further, NFDC mitigated risk by creating transnational networks, which also contributed to the growth of the Indian film industry. Thus, the practices of international mentoring and networking began as a need for independent filmmaking communities to potentially tap external funding structures; however, the production practices of producers developed to become important for creative stimulation, community-building and artistic gratification of working with international film professionals, who show similar interests in alternative or independent storytelling internationally. The Indian independent filmmaking communities demonstrated a growing trend in understanding the importance of commercializing their films, which results from a lack of public funding or a loan system, which was offered by the central organization, NFDC from the 1960s until the 1980s for the development of alternative filmmaking. These transformations in production and labour practices shaped and shifted the independent filmmaking culture, which currently exists at the intersection of international film festivals, co-productions, neoliberal, and nationalist structures of the Indian film industry. The producers working in these production worlds form transnational networks and experiences and

navigate the challenges of working in the national film industry of India. In doing so, the producers frequently shape, produce, and reproduce the neoliberal faith (e.g., creative entrepreneurship and individualism) and transnational film festival/co-production culture (e.g., mentoring, emotional labour, and artistic gratification) in the Indian film industry.

Overall, this dissertation contributed to the media industry scholarship beyond its dominant American context. It demonstrated the importance of studying transnational production culture through film and media industry studies frameworks. The research used novel interdisciplinary methods of film and media industry studies, adapting them to the Indian context. It focused on India's independent film production culture by analyzing the macro-level political-economic/industrial structures and micro-level "work-world" of labour. It engaged with the ways government and independent film community responded to neoliberal-national/nationalist structures and created a transnational film production culture. Therefore, this dissertation, instead of viewing the "industry" as monolithic, explored the underlying logics, navigational tactics, negotiations, power dynamics, management practices and collective sense-making processes of industry professionals, examining their diverse values, belief systems, and practices that emerge within this transnational film production culture. In doing so, this dissertation contributed to the growing body of scholarship on media industry studies, creative labour, film festivals, transnational film production culture and Indian independent cinema.

However, the research contained some gaps and limitations. For example, the first chapter contributed to studying the impact of neoliberal and transnational structures on NFDC and Indian independent filmmaking culture. However, there is a need for an additional examination of the challenges and experiences of independent filmmakers working with studios and the private sector in a "regulated free market." The second chapter contributed to the examination of the Indian

independent film production culture using film festivals and media industry studies approaches. It briefly developed the neocolonial tendencies of film festival practices and revealed how the international mentoring practices reinforce the historical dominance of Anglo/Western values of quality and aesthetic merit within festivals, and how they impact the production and exhibition of Indian independent films internationally. However, the examination of industrial-cultural practices (e.g., mentoring, networking, community-building etc.) dominated the discourse in the chapter, which sidelined the area of post-colonialism and its relationship to the transnational independent film culture of India. It provided insights into the micro-level practices of the Bazaar and its workers in relation to the larger neoliberal and nationalist goals, but more research is needed into how these results apply to labour practices in the larger Indian film industry. The research could be further developed to examine how this rise of censorship, gig economies, and freelancing culture impact the mental health of film and media workers in India. The final chapter provided valuable insights into the complex workings of the film industry, particularly in international co-productions for independent filmmaking in India. The focus on the micro-level practices of film producers and professionals in the film festival community provided holistic and nuanced data about the independent filmmaking culture of India and its transnational networks. However, this may not be a larger reflection of the diverse regional film industries in India. Producers who made films transnationally may have had a different experience and work culture than those who only worked within India's film industry. Additionally, Indian film studios and corporate production houses also use the term creative producers. Lastly, subjectivity and factors, such as personal identity, perspectives, positionality, and experiences of working in a western context, can lead to potential bias in qualitative studies. However, efforts were made to minimize this bias in several ways. This included employing snowballing techniques in the selection of potential participants

relevant to the study, keeping field notes for reflection, as well as combining and cross-checking evidence from interviews, observations, and textual analysis.

During the research, distribution emerged as one of the most challenging aspects for the Indian independent filmmaking community. Nationwide distribution is costly, and many independent movies cannot secure a release. The distribution aspect of filmmaking has been a mystery not only for industry professionals but also for academics and scholars. However, there is a growing scholarly interest in examining how digital distribution and streaming culture impact the film and media industries. For example, an edited book, *Digital Media Distribution Portals, Platforms, Pipelines* (2022), by Paul McDonald, Courtney Brannon Donoghue, and Timothy Havens, examines the ongoing discourse of digital distribution and disruptions in various sectors, ranging from book publishing to filmmaking, and music.⁶ The emphasis is on understanding the continuities and discontinuities that exist in the distribution world. The growing interest in film distribution is clear through academic works, national conferences, and seminars. For instance, in 2023, the discussions at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies Annual Conference (i.e., the largest conference in film and media studies globally) focused on distribution, with the term “Netflix” appearing 16 times in the conference schedule. A special issue in the critical journal, *Studies in World Cinema*, “World Cinema in the Age of Netflix (2022),” highlights the ongoing scholarship on the impact of streaming platforms on the film and media industries.⁷ Although Netflix remains at the center of these discussions, there is a need for further research on the rise of

⁶ Paul McDonald, Courtney Brannon Donoghue, and Timothy Havens, eds., *Digital Media Distribution: Portals, Platforms, Pipelines*, Critical Cultural Communication (New York: New York University Press, 2021), <http://public.eblib.com/choice/PublicFullRecord.aspx?p=6641706>.

⁷ “Special Issue: World Cinema in the Age of Netflix,” *Studies in World Cinema* 2, no. 1–2 (September 21, 2022): i–iv, <https://doi.org/10.1163/26659891-02010000>.

other streaming platforms, such as Amazon Prime Video and Disney+Hotstar, as well as local streaming culture such as Reliance Entertainment and Zee5 in India. Streaming platforms have proven to be disruptive and controversial, operated largely by algorithmic cultures. The streaming platforms disrupted traditional film distribution strategies, such as theatrical releases and television models, which have created both opportunities and challenges for independent filmmakers and producers. In “Risky Business,” industry scholar Tejaswini Ganti examines the formal theatrical distribution and impact of technological advancements such as video, satellite TV, and multiplexes in the Indian film industry.⁸ Similarly, Smith Mehta’s recent work on the digital transformation of the Indian media industry, *The New Screen Ecology in India* will also be useful for future research in the area.⁹ The acknowledgement of these India-based cognate scholarly works contributes to the ongoing decolonization and addresses western-dominated academic perspectives in the scholarship. Moreover, both media scholars and industry professionals are paying more attention to the distribution aspect of filmmaking. It is significant to understand the effects that streaming and digital distribution have had not only on the content of films through algorithms and recommendation systems, but also on the labour conditions, values, and creative practices of those working in the film and media business. This approach emphasizes shifting the focus from technology to creativity and adds to production studies scholarship by viewing streaming as culture, with its own rituals, habits, and social practices that shape the production, distribution, and consumption of film and media.

⁸ Tejaswini Ganti, “Risky Business,” in *A Companion to Indian Cinema* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2022), 35–59, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119048206.ch1>.

⁹ Smith Mehta, *The New Screen Ecology in India: Digital Transformation of Media* (Bloomsbury, 2023), ISBN: 9781839025716.

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Appendix

The following questions were asked during the interviews. Additionally, the questions were adapted slightly depending on the particular role of the individuals being interviewed during the study.

1. How has independent filmmaking and your role in it evolved over the years?
2. Who is a creative producer? What kind of skills are required to be a creative producer?
3. How would you describe the job of a creative producer?
4. What kind of support network exists for creative producers in India? What do you wish to see?
5. How did you become involved in Indian-European co-production film projects? And, why?
6. What are some of the things you look at when you first receive a script as a producer?
7. Do you participate in the development of a story script? Do you recommend changes in the script?
8. What kind of creative contributions do you make in the direction of the film?
9. Can you walk me through a typical day? How many days/hours do you work in the film business? Do you work long hours? If so, why?
10. What prompted/motivated you to pursue international co-productions? How did it extend your network?
11. Could you talk about the way people form creative partnerships in the industry?
12. How would you name, describe, define, or categorize your film projects in the global film marketplace?
13. How would you describe your experience with NFDC and Film Bazaar?

14. How did you find your job at NFDC and Film Bazaar? How would you describe your working conditions?
15. How does NFDC facilitate Indian-European co-productions? In what ways do NFDC mentoring labs and Film Bazaar support your project?
16. In your opinion, what kind of film qualifies for an Indian-European co-production at the Film Bazaar?
17. How has independent filmmaking in India evolved since the parallel cinema movement?
18. How would you describe your working experience in the Indian film industry?