

# Consuming Cultural Hegemony

Harisur Rahman

# Consuming Cultural Hegemony

Bollywood in Bangladesh

palgrave  
macmillan

Harisur Rahman  
Department of Political Science  
and Sociology  
North South University  
Dhaka, Bangladesh

ISBN 978-3-030-31706-5      ISBN 978-3-030-31707-2 (eBook)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-31707-2>

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer  
Nature Switzerland AG 2020

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG  
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

## PREFACE

Following the collapse of the European colonial system, the new nation-states in Asia and Africa gradually entered the international system, but the process of colonial disengagement was not well planned or peaceful. Besides creating human exodus, catastrophe and trauma, partition in 1947 led to more partition and created more disparity, social and political unrest, war, hatred, alterity and hegemony within and across the society in South Asia. Partition has changed the socioeconomic, political and cultural relations between South Asia's nation-states. For instance, before partition, despite communal unrest and socioeconomic disparities between the Hindu and Muslim communities, the circulation and viewership of Kolkata's and Bombay's films in Dhaka were not seen as problematic or hegemonic. Soon after partition, India's films in Pakistan began to be treated as foreign films and taxes were imposed on them. Following the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965, the Pakistani government imposed a ban on Indian films. With the creation of Bangladesh, the ban was re-imposed, and it continues today.

Despite import bans on films from India—which account for more than 90% of South Asia's total film output—at different historical moments, a large number of Bangladeshi viewers across age, sex and class lines have regularly viewed Indian films, legally and illegally circulated or broadcast. What production values and elements of cultural representation have made Indian films appealing to Bangladeshi viewers? How does the consumption of local cultural products or of regionally hegemonic ones reinforce class disparity in Bangladesh? What are the various

means of circulation and how do these affect the production and commercial viability of Bangladeshi culture industries in general and its film industry in particular? With legal provisions and enforcement in place in Bangladesh, what role does the “piracy” of Indian film play there? To answer these questions, I carried out extensive fieldwork and used symbolic/interpretive approaches and concepts from media anthropology, film studies, communications and cultural studies to investigate the process of circulation and viewership of Indian films among the middle class in the Bangladeshi capital, Dhaka. I demonstrate the way Indian film, mainly Bollywood film, exposes class differentiation within Bangladesh while reinforcing India’s cultural hegemony there.

While apparently apolitical in nature, cultural exchange and circulation have been a matter of contention given India’s hegemonic position in the region. Through an examination of the nuances and contours of the circulation and viewership of Indian films among middle-class audiences in Dhaka, I reposition Bangladesh in the South Asian cultural scene and contribute new knowledge, perspectives and understandings about cultural consumption and India’s regional hegemonic power and its relations with smaller neighbors.

Dhaka, Bangladesh

Harisur Rahman

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Dr. Greg Booth who was so much more than just a supervisor to me. Greg represents the perfect balance of guidance and intellectual freedom. His direction, cutting-edge academic scholarship, critical comments and holistic view down to the minute detail and specificity helped me navigate, explore, interrogate and communicate media worlds with different eyes. He was very flexible and always encouraged me to think in my own way and cultivate my own intellectual style and academic flair. Under Greg's tutelage, I have also made my mark on academic tutoring. I am grateful to Greg for his generosity and support.

To Dr. Mark Busse, the perfect co-supervisor, whose thought-provoking comments and advice have enriched the style and structure of my writing. Mark provided valuable feedback in my draft chapters. He was generous with his time and provided guidance and motivation. I am thankful to Mark for his kindness and assistance.

To Dr. Lotte Hoek and Dr. Ravi Sundaram for their critical comments and invaluable suggestions in writing this book. I am also grateful to the participants for their comments during the Faculty Workshop on Academic Writing and Publishing, sponsored by the Subir and Malini Chowdhury Center for Bangladesh Studies at UC Berkeley and the American Institute for Bangladesh Studies, in April 2018. I specially would like to thank Dr. Lawrence Cohen for his valuable comments in one of the chapters of my book.

To Dr. Christine Dureau, Dr. Cris Shore, Dr. Judith Littleton, Dr. Julie Park, Dr. Kirsten Zemke, Dr. Phyllis Herda, Dr. Simon Holdaway,

Dr. Sun Hee Koo and Dr. Susanna Trnka who extended their helping hands and inspiration at different points in time.

To my fellow colleagues at Auckland, particularly members of the Socio-Cultural Anthropology Doctoral Writing Group and of the Ethnomusicology Friday Meeting Group for the vibrant discussions and for providing critical comments on various chapters of my book. I would like to thank all the members, including Andrea Low, Daniel Hernandez, Faruk Shah, Katie Longmuir, Michelle McCarthy, Michelle Williams, Olivia Barnett, Paul Robertson, Sally Raudon, Samuel Shapiro and Sarah Krose, for their comments and cooperation. I also thank conference participants in Australia and Bangladesh for providing their valuable comments on one of my chapters of this book. I also would like to thank Mona-Lynn Courteau for her superlative editing help.

To my flatmates in Auckland—Akbar Hossain, Dewan Mahbub Sarwar, Salim Anwar, Shahnoor Islam and others, who were quite supportive of me. My special thanks to Salim Anwar for his help and cooperation in making my stay in Auckland memorable.

To Dr. Fahmidul Huq, Dr. Manosh Chowdhury, Dr. Rasheda Akhtar, Dr. Sayeed Ferdous, Dr. Sumon Rahman, Dr. Zahir Ahmed and Dr. Zakir Hossain Raju, who were generous in providing time and advice on various matters while I was in Dhaka. Special thanks to Dr. Zahir Ahmed for orienting me to a relatively new terrain of anthropology of media during my study at Jahangirnagar University in Dhaka in the early 2000s.

To my research participants in Dhaka, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all of them for their time and cooperation. They have been the centerpiece of my research.

To my parents and siblings, especially my eldest sister Minara Hai and my eldest brother ANM Younus, whose sacrifice and support made my study possible up to this level. I have no words to express my gratitude to them.

To my wife, Sayeda Tasnuva Swarna, who questioned my ideas and thoughts all the times and provided me the moral support and encouragement to complete my work. Words fail to express my gratefulness to Swarna. I would also like to express my gratitude to my mother-in-law and father-in-law for their affection and support throughout my work. Above all, to my then 9-month-old daughter Ilma Juweria, to whom I was still a two-dimensional image mediated by Skype during my dissertation writing days at Auckland. She has been my true inspiration to complete my dissertation and book. I would like to dedicate my book to my parents, my wife and my daughter.

# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
	<i>Toward the Research Problematics</i>	1
	<i>Conceptual Scheme</i>	5
	<i>From “Cultural Subscription” to Cultural Distinction</i>	5
	<i>Cultural Hegemony</i>	7
	<i>Regional Modernity as Hegemony</i>	10
	<i>Ethnographic Setting</i>	12
	<i>Field Setting</i>	13
	<i>Sampling and Sample Size</i>	15
	<i>Data Collection and Analysis Techniques</i>	17
	<i>Hiatus in the Fieldwork</i>	18
	<i>Ethical Considerations</i>	19
	<i>Chapter Outline</i>	20
	<i>References</i>	24
<b>2</b>	<b>From Partition to Hegemony: Bangladesh and Bangladeshi Films in the South Asian Context</b>	<b>29</b>
	<i>Background</i>	29
	<i>Bangladesh and Its Polemics with South Asia</i>	31
	<i>Bangladesh’s Love-Hate Relationship with Indian Film</i>	37
	<i>Film Circulation and Viewership in Colonial East Bengal</i>	39
	<i>Sound, “Islamicate” Culture and the Crossover Appeal of Hindi Films</i>	45



	<i>Film Circulation and Viewership in East Pakistan</i>	50
	<i>Film Circulation and Viewership in Independent Bangladesh</i>	54
	<i>References</i>	55
<b>3</b>	<b>Ethnographic Fieldwork: The Self as an Informant and an Observer</b>	61
	<i>Part One: Me as an Informant</i>	61
	<i>Part Two: Me as an Observer</i>	68
	<i>Conclusion</i>	76
	<i>References</i>	77
<b>4</b>	<b>The Political Economy, Materiality and the Visceral Experience of Cable Television</b>	79
	<i>Materiality of Media and the Creation of Space</i>	79
	<i>Background of Cable TV in Bangladesh</i>	83
	<i>Stages of Circulation</i>	85
	<i>The Arrival of DTH and the Creation of the Own Control Room</i>	87
	<i>Defining and Controlling Cable Operators' Areas</i>	92
	<i>Roles of Cable Operators and Their Interactions with Subscribers</i>	94
	<i>Number of Cable TV Channels and Films Per Week</i>	99
	<i>Conclusion</i>	101
	<i>References</i>	102
<b>5</b>	<b>The Cultural Economy of the CD/DVD Store and the Creation of Space</b>	105
	<i>Background</i>	105
	<i>The (Re)production of CD/DVDs</i>	107
	<i>Promotion and Pricing of CD/DVD</i>	110
	<i>CD/DVD Placement, Supply and Demand</i>	113
	<i>Selling and Persuasion Strategies</i>	116
	<i>Volume of Circulation of a New Hindi Film</i>	118
	<i>The CD/DVD Business in Transition</i>	120
	<i>Conclusion</i>	122
	<i>References</i>	123

<b>6</b>	<b>Culture of Copying and Copying of Culture: Media “Piracy” in Bangladesh</b>	125
	<i>Culture of Copying Instead of “Piracy”</i>	125
	<i>Media “Piracy,” IP Law and Bangladesh</i>	127
	<i>Copying in Dhaka’s CD/DVD Market</i>	129
	<i>Indian Films and Music via “Video/Movie Channels”</i>	133
	<i>The Circulation of Indian Films and Music via FTP and the Internet</i>	137
	<i>Indian Film Music via Mobile and FM Radio</i>	141
	<i>Viewers’ Practices and Perceptions About Copying and Circulation</i>	143
	<i>Conclusion</i>	146
	<i>References</i>	147
<b>7</b>	<b>Belonging to Class: Hindi Film and the Formation of Middle-Class Audience in Bangladesh</b>	151
	<i>Putting the Film Audience into Perspective</i>	151
	<i>Defining Class Through Cultural Tastes</i>	156
	<i>Middle-Class Morality and Film Viewership</i>	157
	<i>Viewer Interest in Hindi Films and Stars</i>	159
	<i>Viewer Interest in Bollywood Fashion and Beauty</i>	163
	<i>Bollywood Fashion at Dhaka’s Eid Market</i>	167
	<i>Conclusion</i>	169
	<i>References</i>	171
<b>8</b>	<b>Negotiating Mediated Modernity and Culture: When “Soft Power” Becomes Hard</b>	175
	<i>Negotiating “Soft Power”</i>	175
	<i>Controversy Over Theatrical Access to Indian Films</i>	178
	<i>Arguments Against Showing Hindi Films in Bangladeshi Theatres</i>	184
	<i>Arguments for Showing Hindi Films in Bangladeshi Theatres</i>	189
	<i>Viewers’ Opinions on Theatrical Access to Indian Films</i>	192
	<i>Conclusion</i>	194
	<i>References</i>	194

<b>9</b>	<b>Bollywoodization or Ghettoization? The Bangladeshi Dream Factory is in Disarray</b>	197
	<i>Background</i>	197
	<i>The Bollywoodization of Bangladeshi Films</i>	199
	<i>Labeling Film with Poverty</i>	206
	<i>The “Discourse of Obscenity” and the Alienation of the Middle Class</i>	212
	<i>The Gentrification of Bikolpo Dhara (The Alternative Stream)</i>	213
	<i>Conclusion</i>	214
	<i>References</i>	216
<b>10</b>	<b>Summary and Conclusion</b>	221
	<i>Background</i>	221
	<i>Media Circulation of Culture</i>	222
	<i>Copying and the Commoditization of Culture</i>	223
	<i>From Cultural Consumption to Cultural Hegemony</i>	226
	<i>Hegemony Versus Resistance</i>	227
	<i>The Hegemony of Bollywood and the Marginalized Film Industry in South Asia</i>	229
	<i>References</i>	234
	<b>Index</b>	237

## ABBREVIATIONS

ATCO	Association of Television Channel Owners
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BDT	Bangladeshi Taka
BTCL	Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Limited
BTV	Bangladesh Television
CD	Compact Disc
CF	Consent Form
CNN	Cable News Network
COAB	Cable Operators Association of Bangladesh
CRT	Cathode Ray Tube
DD	Doordarshan
DTH	Direct-to-Home
DV	Digital Video
DVD	Digital Video Disc
FDC	Film Development
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FM	Frequency Modulation
FTP	File Transfer Protocol Corporation
HBO	Home Box Office
HD	High Definition
II	In-depth Interview
IMDb	Internet Movie Database
INR	Indian Rupee
IP	Intellectual Property
ISP	Internet Service Provider
LED	Light-Emitting Diode

NDTV	New Delhi Television
P2P	Peer-to-Peer
PIS	Personal Information Sheet
RJ	Radio Jockey
SMS	Short Message Service
TRIPS	Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
TSC	Teachers Student Center
TV	Television
USA	United States of America
USD	American Dollar
VCR	Video Cassette Recorder
VHS	Video Home Service
VOD	Video on Demand
WiMAX	Worldwide Interoperability for Microwave Access
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

## LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 2.1	Number of film productions in independent Bangladesh, by year ( <i>Source Author</i> )	38
Fig. 2.2	Number of films produced by language in pre-1947 India ( <i>Source Author</i> )	46
Fig. 4.1	a and b DTH technology and control room ( <i>Source Author</i> )	91
Fig. 4.2	Webs of cables ( <i>Source Author</i> )	95
Fig. 5.1	The creation of commodity ( <i>Source Author</i> )	108
Fig. 5.2	A locally designed Hindi film poster to promote a DVD ( <i>Source Author</i> )	111
Fig. 5.3	Demand for films in CD/DVD stores ( <i>Source Author</i> )	115
Fig. 6.1	Bangladeshi government's poster campaign against "piracy" ( <i>Source Author</i> )	128
Fig. 6.2	Copying facilities inside CD/DVD stores ( <i>Source Author</i> )	130
Fig. 6.3	Ad citing torrent, FTP and other services ( <i>Source Author</i> )	139
Fig. 7.1	a and b Ad for Pakistani clothing in a Dhaka market ( <i>Source Author</i> )	166
Fig. 7.2	Shop named after Aishwarya Rai, a Bollywood actress ( <i>Source Author</i> )	168
Fig. 8.1	Bangladeshi filmmakers and artists protesting against a theatrical showing of a Hindi film ( <i>Source</i> This image was taken by Khaled Sarkar and published on the Web site of Bangla daily newspaper <i>Prothom Alo</i> [ <a href="https://www.prothomalo.com">https://www.prothomalo.com</a> ] on January 21, 2015. Image used with permission)	180
Fig. 9.1	a and b Dhallywood film named after Bollywood film ( <i>Source Author</i> )	201

- Fig. 10.1 The hegemony (While Bollywood’s hegemony across South Asia is obvious, its influence within India may be discerned in its transformation into a state-endorsed “soft-power,” its generation of half of the total film revenues, its monopolization of urban multiplexes [Athique & Hill, 2009], its alliances with multinational media production houses and its creation of national meta-narratives [Devasundaram, 2016]) of Hindi film in South Asia (*Source* Author)

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1	Sample distribution	15
Table 2.1	History of film in colonial India, Pakistan and Bangladesh	41
Table 2.2	Number of films viewed by eminent Dhaka personalities, by language, during the colonial East Bengal and Pakistan eras	51
Table 4.1	The hierarchical structure of cable TV circulation in Bangladesh	85
Table 4.2	Films shown per week on cable TV in Dhaka	100
Table 5.1	Share of shelf space by genre in retail CD/DVD shops	114
Table 9.1	Nomenclature of Bangladeshi films in the 1990s and the 2000s	207
Table 9.2	Ghettoization in Bangladeshi film names, the 1990s and the 2000s	209