

British Academy of Film and Television Arts
Screen Icons: Amitabh Bachchan

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ARTS



Above: Bachchan (left) filming *Jaadugar* (1989), as captured in Nasreen Munni Kabir's documentary, *Follow That Star*. Credit: Peter Chappell

Cover: As a gold smuggler who must choose between his wealthy life of crime and an honest life with his mother and brother in *Deewaar* (1975). Credit: Eros International

Introduction

Krishnendu Majumdar

Chairman, Academy Education
and Events Committee

Tessa Jowell

Culture Secretary

The Academy understands the importance of promoting excellence in filmmaking on a global scale. Indian Cinema is now beginning to receive the recognition that it deserves in the West. Following on from last year's celebration of Hindi Cinema – our successful BAFTA Goes Bollywood weekend – we applaud the outstanding achievements of a true screen icon of world cinema: Amitabh Bachchan.

Amitabh has been a towering presence for nearly 40 years in Hindi films and has won countless awards and honours. To an Indian audience he needs no introduction but to those less familiar with his work, he was recently described by *The Sunday Times* as “Tom Cruise, Sean Connery and Clint Eastwood rolled into one.”

He is an undisputed screen icon for the longevity of his career and quality of his work. He also has the priceless ability to inspire, captivate and thrill one of the most demanding audiences in the world. There are over a billion people in India alone and hundreds of thousands of the Indian diaspora spread all over the globe. He is an ambassador for his country and the Indian film industry.

On a personal note, I grew up with Indian roots entwined with a Western upbringing in South Wales. In the early 80s, my mother rented Hindi videos. Those films kept me in touch with my Indian heritage. I have fond memories of cycling down valley streets singing Hindi songs from *Sholay* and *Amar Akbar Anthony* with my Welsh friends. There was only one hero for us: Amitabh Bachchan.

On behalf of the Academy, I am delighted to welcome a true screen icon of international cinema to 195 Piccadilly and to host a weekend celebrating his glitteringly successful work.

I'm delighted that BAFTA is hosting this Amitabh Bachchan weekend. Amitabh is a living Bollywood legend, whom I last met at the House of Commons for the International Indian Film Academy in 2006. His role as ambassador for the IIFA has helped to raise a significant global profile for their awards, which we will host this summer in Yorkshire.

Hosting the awards will boost the growing awareness in the UK of the scale of Bollywood and of its great pool of talent, which is increasingly recognised across the world.

It's entirely fitting that BAFTA is now celebrating the work of Amitabh himself. He is arguably India's greatest ever superstar, having appeared in more than 100 films. His versatility and longevity mark him out as a true actor but he's also straddled the world of politics and was even a top-rated TV quizmaster.

Wherever there is a strong Indian culture, Amitabh is a household name. None more so than Britain, where Bollywood is vibrant, successful and gaining increasing popularity.

Around three million tickets to Hindi films were sold in the UK in 2006. Hindi films were the most popular foreign language film, with Indian films accounting for over 13 per cent of all UK releases in total, taking over £15 million at the UK box office.

I had the pleasure of agreeing the UK-India film co-production treaty in New Delhi at the end of 2005. The UK-Indian treaty recognises the strong economic and cultural ties between our two countries and offers the opportunity to strengthen these.

Overview

Indian cinema has many stars but only one demi-god: Amitabh Bachchan. In addition to over 120 film credits, many of them major blockbusters, the multi-faceted actor has enjoyed a short career in politics, hosted India's most popular TV show and formed his own production company (ABCL) whilst winning countless international honours. This weekend's Screen Icons event celebrates a star whose outstanding achievement in world cinema is unrivalled.

Born on 11 October 1942 in Allahabad (Uttar Pradesh), Amitabh Bachchan is the son of famous Hindi poet Harivansh Rai Bachchan. The Bachchan family had no connection to films, so it was assumed that young Amitabh would work in the corporate world. In his early twenties, determined to find fortune in the movies, Bachchan gave up his job in Calcutta and moved to Bombay. After a minor part in the 1969 film *Saat Hindustani*, he worked for years to prove his talent. His big chance came in 1973 with the role of an avenging police officer in *Zanjeer*. The unusually tall actor, with his deep and sonorous voice and powerful, majestic personality, brought unique intensity to the screen, instantly fascinating film audiences.

By the mid-seventies, every Bachchan release attracted millions: *Deewaar*, *Sholay*, *Amar Akbar Anthony*, *Muqaddar Ka Sikandar* and scores of other hits showed him excelling in drama, action, romance and comedy. It is no surprise that the Indian press were quick to label him "the one man industry." When Bachchan appeared on screen, audiences applauded noisily or fell silent in a kind of reverential hush.

By the 1980s, Amitabh Bachchan had become the biggest star India had ever known. In every country where Indian films enjoy a following, including Egypt, South Africa and Malaysia, he won armies of fans.

After meeting with a near fatal accident on the set of *Coolie* in 1983, thousands across India prayed for him. In the early 1990s, when he decided to take a five-year break from film, people assumed his career was over. He returned as a TV host (for the Indian version of *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?*) and soon became a national icon. Affectionately called the 'Big B', he was declared by the BBC's 2000 online poll as Star of the Millennium.

Married in 1973 to Jaya Bhaduri, a renowned actress in her own right, the Bachchans have two children, Shweta and Abhishek. The latter recently married celebrated actress Aishwarya Rai and is a leading actor of his generation.

The Bachchans are today considered Hindi cinema royalty. Off screen, it is unlikely that Amitabh Bachchan's life will ever touch the ordinary. On screen, Indian cinema has found in him a supreme and everlasting example of the Hindi film hero. Bachchan defines what that is: "Leading men are required to do a bit of everything: comedy, action, singing, dancing, romance and a bit of emotion. The heroes are modern manifestations of mythical characters from our two great epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. They're always invincible and always win in the end."

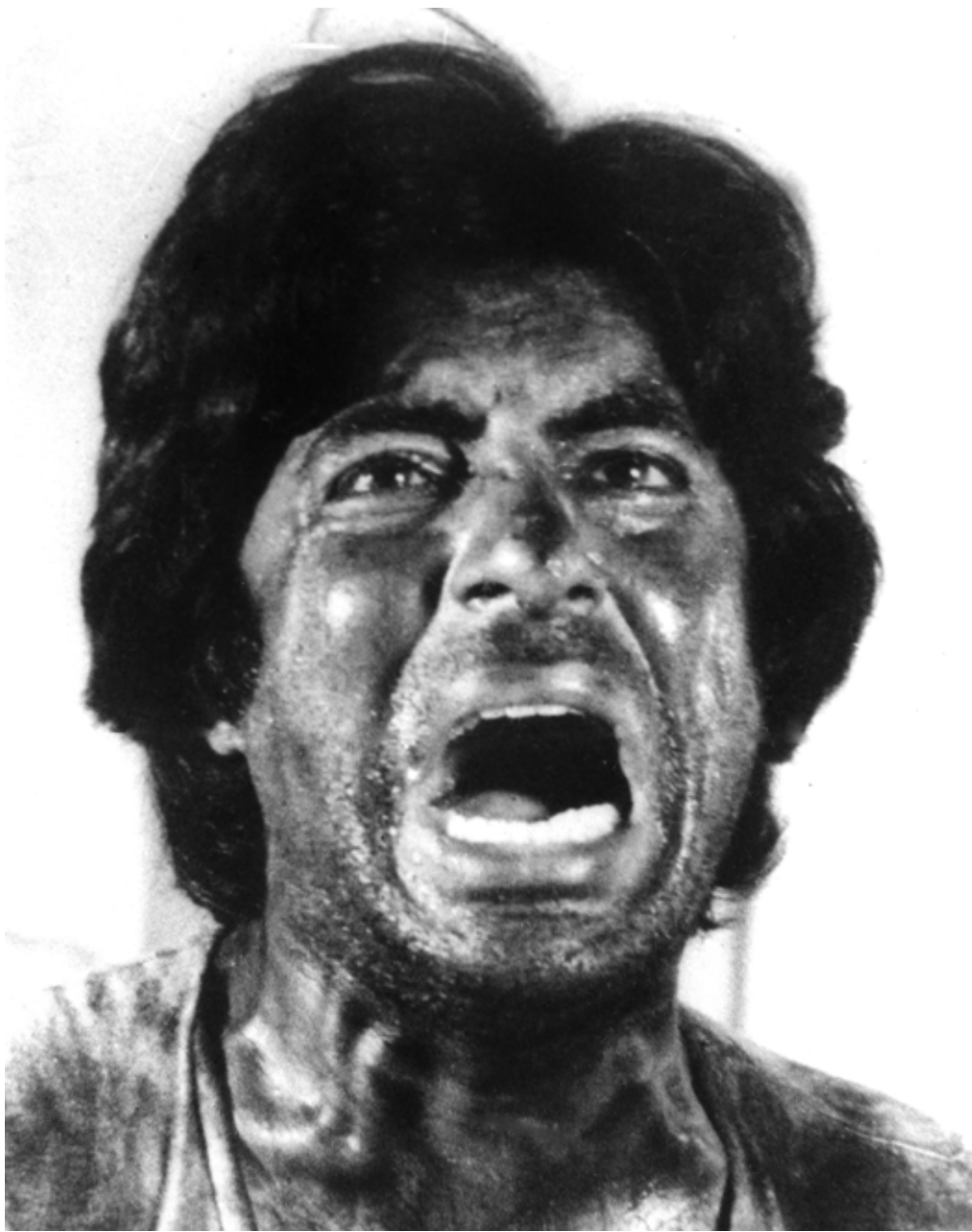
Nasreen Munni Kabir



Above: Bachchan stars as petty criminal Amit, who struggles with alcoholism and family matters in *Suhaag* (1979). Credit: WEG India

The Angry Young Man

Amitabh Bachchan is often called the ‘Angry Young Man’ of Indian cinema, a term inspired by realist London theatre of the 1950s, in particular Osborne’s *Look Back In Anger*. Much as Amitabh is still celebrated for his wide-ranging performances as romantic hero, dramatic lead, comedian and now elder statesman, it is the roles he played as the AYM for which he is most celebrated.



Above: A disgraced Navy captain (Bachchan) begins work in a coal-mine and soon has an opportunity to redeem himself in *Kaala Patthar* (1979). Credit: Yash Raj Films Intl. Ltd

This defiant character, who appeared across several films in the 1970s and 80s, was typically called Vijay (‘Victorious’). Created by writers Salim (Khan) – Javed (Akhtar) as an epic hero rather than a novelistic type, he clearly paralleled Karna in the great Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*. Like Karna, Vijay faces frequent childhood injustice: seeing his parents killed (*Zanjeer*), growing up without the father who abandoned his mother before marriage (*Trishul*), or losing the whole family after a dispute at work (*Deewaar*). Bachchan embodies the besieged male hero in a precarious world who fights a personal war against injustice – specifically the wrongs done to him and his family.

The power of these films is their ability to portray an outraged but sympathetic character. Despite his ongoing struggles, Amitabh as Vijay maintains his self-respect, gains respect from others and is a model of moral rectitude, especially in his interaction with women, elders and children but also in upholding his religious beliefs. He is fierce but controlled and noble, never losing his dignity but robbing others of theirs. Vijay is not a rebel. His fury is not random but focused on righting moral wrongs, which he pursues at the risk of his own life.

Amitabh as Vijay differs from other 1970s ‘AYMs’ such as Bruce Lee, Robert De Niro or Clint Eastwood. He is not an isolated vigilante subversively taking the

law into his own hands but rather an upright man, motivated by family justice. The viewer empathises with Vijay’s anger and his humiliation. He is sad but admirable in his self-sacrifice and fortitude, even when he is doing wrong. We share his pain. We believe he is right, at least most of the time, and that his desire for vengeance is virtuous.

It is perhaps for this reason that Amitabh’s Angry Young Man had such far-reaching cultural impact. For many young Asians the world over, he epitomised a heroic masculinity whilst providing a link to India, its traditional values and a proud, unapologetic sense of self. He was also celebrated as the ideal son, deeply attached to his mother, who would look after family when the father failed. His brooding good looks (and lack of interest in women) added to his appeal.

Amitabh Bachchan, Hindi film’s biggest star, is a great communicator of the moral sentiments while his juniors, especially Shah Rukh Khan, often specialise in depicting the tender ones. Compassion is beautiful but, as Kant says, it has no moral worth in itself, although if it motivates us to care then it has. Indian film still wants the moral hero and, even today, there is only one that will do.

Rachel Dwyer

Filmography

2008 Shantaram *pre-production, attached*
 2007 Sarkar 2 *in production*
 2007 Bhootnath *pre-production*
 2007 Shoot Out at Lokhandwala
 2007 Untitled Sholay remake
 2007 Jhoom Barabar Jhoom
 2007 God Tussi Great Ho
 2007 Cheeni Kum
 2007 Zamaanat
 2007 Nishabd
 2007 Eklavya
 2006 Baabul
 2006 Ganga
 2006 Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna
 2006 Darna Zaroori Hai
 2006 Family: Ties of Blood*
 2005 Ek Ajnabee
 2005 Dil Jo Bhi Kahey
 2005 Viruddh... Family Comes First*
 2005 Sarkar
 2005 Paheli
 2005 Parineeta
 2005 Bunty Aur Babli
 2005 Waqt: The Race Against Time
 2005 Black
 2004 Ab Tumhare Hawale Watan Saathiyao
 2004 Koffee with Karan *TV*
 2004 Veer-Zaara
 2004 Hum Kaun Hai?
 2004 Kyun...! Ho Gaya Na
 2004 Deewaar
 2004 Lakshya
 2004 Dev
 2004 Insaaf: The Justice
 2004 Rudraksh
 2004 Khakee
 2004 Aetbaar†
 2003 Fun2shh... Dudes In The 10th Century
 2003 Baghban†‡
 2003 Mumbai Se Aaya Mera Dost
 2003 Boom
 2003 Armaan†
 2003 Khushi
 2002 Kaante
 2002 Agni Varsha
 2002 Hum Kisi Se Kum Nahin
 2002 Aankhen†
 2001 Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham†‡
 2001 Aks†*
 2001 Lagaan: Once Upon A Time In India

2001 Ek Rishtaa: The Bond Of Love
 2001 Kaun Banega Crorepati Junior *TV*
 2000 Mohabbatein
 1999 Hello Brother
 1999 Kohram
 1999 Hindustan Ki Kasam
 1999 Sooryavansham†‡
 1999 Lal Baadshah†‡
 1998 Bade Miyan Chote Miyan
 1998 Major Saab*
 1998 Hero Hindustani *narration*
 1997 Mrityudaata*
 1996 Tere Mere Sapne *voice**
 1994 Insaniyat
 1994 Akka
 1992 Khuda Gawah
 1992 Zulm Ki Hukumat
 1991 Akayla‡
 1991 Indrajeet
 1991 Ajooba
 1991 Hum
 1990 Aaj Ka Arjun
 1990 Agneepath
 1989 Follow That Star *TV*
 1989 Jaadugar†
 1989 Toofan†
 1989 Batwara
 1989 Main Azaad Hoon†
 1988 Shahenshah
 1988 Soorma Bhopali
 1988 Gangaa Jamunaa Saraswathi
 1986 Aakhree Raasta
 1985 Mard
 1985 Geraftaar
 1985 Ghulami
 1984 Inquilaab
 1984 Kanoon Kya Karega
 1984 Sharaabi†
 1983 Coolie
 1983 Film Hi Film
 1983 Mahaan†
 1983 Nastik
 1983 Andhaa Kanoon
 1983 Pukar†
 1982 Shakti
 1982 Desh Premee
 1982 Bemisal
 1982 Satte Pe Satta
 1982 Khud-Daar
 1982 Namak Halaal

1981 Silsila‡
 1981 Laawaris
 1981 Naseeb†*
 1981 Barsaat Ki Ek Raat
 1981 Yaarana
 1981 Kaalia
 1981 Walayati Babu
 1981 Commander *uncredited*
 1980 Shaan
 1980 Dostana
 1980 Do Aur Do Paanch
 1980 Ram Balram
 1979 Suhaag
 1979 Kaala Patthar
 1979 Manzil
 1979 Jurmana
 1979 The Great Gambler‡
 1979 Mr. Natwarlal‡
 1978 Muqaddar Ka Sikandar
 1978 Trishul
 1978 Don‡
 1978 Kasma Vaade
 1978 Ganga Ki Saugand
 1978 Besharam
 1977 Shatranj Ke Khilari *voice*
 1977 Khoon Pasina
 1977 Immaan Dharam
 1977 Amar Akbar Anthony‡
 1977 Charandas
 1977 Parvarish
 1977 Alaap
 1976 Hera Pheri
 1976 Kabhi Kabhie – Love Is Life‡
 1976 Balika Badhu *voice, uncredited*
 1976 Aadalat
 1976 Do Anjaane
 1975 Faraar
 1975 Sholay
 1975 Zameer
 1975 Chupke Chupke
 1975 Deewaar
 1975 Mili
 1974 Majboor
 1974 Kunwara Baap
 1974 Benaam
 1974 Kasauti
 1974 Dost *uncredited*
 1974 Roti Kapada Aur Makaan
 1973 Namak Haraam
 1973 Abhimaan

1973 Gehri Chaal
 1973 Zanjeer
 1973 Bada Kabutar
 1973 Saudagar
 1973 Bandhe Haath
 1972 Bombay to Goa
 1972 Piya Ka Ghar
 1972 Bansi Birju
 1972 Ek Nazar
 1972 Raaste Kaa Patthar
 1972 Jaban
 1972 Garam Masala *uncredited*
 1972 Bawarchi *voice*
 1971 Pyar Ki Kahani
 1971 Reshma Aur Shera
 1971 Sanjog
 1971 Parwana
 1970 Bombay Talkie *scenes deleted*
 1970 Anand
 1969 Saat Hindustani
 1969 Bhuvan Shome *voice*

† Also playback singer
 ‡ Also soundtrack performer
 * Also producer

Selected Honours and Awards

Government of India

2001 Padma Bhushan
 1982 Padma Shri
 India's fourth and third highest civilian honours respectively, in recognition of distinguished contribution to the Arts.

International Indian Film Awards

Actor in a Leading Role
 2005 Black
 2002 Personality of the Year

Filmfare Awards

Best Actor
 2005 Black
 1991 Hum
 1978 Don
 1977 Amar Akbar Antony

2000 Superstar of the Millenium

*We are sadly unable to list all awards due to space limitations



Above: After playing the hero in *Sholay* (1975), Bachchan will soon be seen as the villain in this year's forthcoming remake. Credit: Adlabs Films Ltd

Thanks

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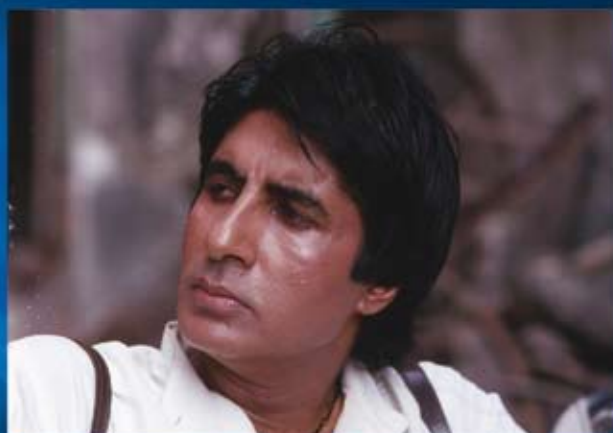
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The UK Film Council is delighted to support BAFTA's celebration weekend dedicated to the enormous success and contribution to the Indian film industry of **Amitabh Bachchan**



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