

## Asia to Watch, Asia to Present : The Promotion of Asian/Indian Cinema in Japan

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## **Asia to Watch, Asia to Present: The Promotion of Asian/Indian Cinema in Japan**

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In Japan today we can enjoy a variety of films from all over the world. Needless to say, the majority of Japanese audiences favor Hollywood cinema. In addition to Hollywood movies, however, we also have the chance to view films not only from Europe but also from Asia, Africa, and Latin-America. Japanese audiences may be the most fortunate in the world in terms of having access to a plethora of films produced in foreign cultures. We have a particularly wide range of choices in Asian cinema. Asian films from Korea, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand, India and Iran are regular items in the entertainment information magazines published every week. Some of those films attract fervent support from Japanese audiences: the Indian film *Muthu* (1995) in 1998; the Korean film *Swiri* (1998) in 2000; another Korean film, *JSA* (2000), in 2001; the Thai film *Satree Lex* (Iron Lady; its Japanese title is *Attack Number Half*) (2000) in 2001; the Hong Kong film *Shaolin Succor* (2001) in 2002; and the Chinese film *Hero* (2002) in 2003. Asian films are establishing their popularity in Japan at an ever-increasing rate.

Curiously enough, however, excellent Asian films can often fail in Japan. For example, the Thai film *Nang Nak*, which broke all box-office records in Thailand in 1999, was a miserable flop at its Japanese release in 2001. This film was based on a well-known Thai ghost story. Every Thai citizen knows the sad story of Nang Nak (Mother Nak), which has been repeatedly cinematized throughout Thai film history. The latest *Nang Nak* film was directed by the young and very talented Nonzee Nimibutr whose first film achieved both a favorable reception and commercial success in Thailand. Nimibutr made *Nang Nak*, his second film, into a work of great beauty by carrying out meticulous historical research and also by introducing state-of-the-art special effect. It was not simply a ghost story, but a touching story of the intense love between Nak and her husband. In spite of all these strengths, the film failed to attract Japanese audiences.

Another example is the Korean film *Chingu* (Friend, 2001). This film narrates the story of four men who have been friends since childhood. They live in Pusan, a port city in southern Korea, which is known for its distinctive dialect, very different from the standard Korean language. The story spans the period from the mid-1970s to the 1990s. Strong emotions, deriving from male mutual support, anger over betrayal, and love and hate in heterosexual relations are vividly and painfully portrayed, making the film very powerful. This 2001 film also swept all box-office records in Korea. However, its 2002 release in Japan did not attract large Japanese audiences in the way it did in Korea, despite a giant publicity campaign by its distributor.

In these cases, the film distributors seem to have selected films on the basis of their quality and popularity in their original countries. Despite their belief that those films could also win enthusiastic popular support in Japan, they did not catch the attention of Japanese audiences. In reality, this kind of gap between audience reception and the distributor's expectations is common. Mass audiences of a different culture do not always respond in the way the presenters of Asian films would reasonably expect.

What causes this gap of reception? This essay aims to explore this question by presenting a case study of the promotion of Indian cinema, in which I have been engaged for more than 25 years. Through this case study, I will identify problems, clarify obstructive elements, and offer suggestions for improvement. To begin with, I shall look at the Indian film *Muthu*.

### The Case of *Muthu*

In 1998, one Indian film appeared on Japanese screens. The Tamil film *Muthu*, which was made in Chennai (formerly Madras), the biggest city in south India, was released under the Japanese title *Mutu: Odoru Maharaja* (*Muthu: Dancing Maharaja*; Plate 1). The show



Plate 1 The leaflet of *Muthu* at 1998 release

started on June 13 at the Cinema Rise Theater in Shibuya, Tokyo and ended on November 20. It ran for 23 weeks, gaining an audience of 127,445 people and earning more than 208 million yen in total. This made it the top film in 1998 in the category of independent “first-run show” theaters. After its release in Tokyo, the film traveled to other cities in the country, and was later broadcasted by WOWOW, the most famous private satellite channel for cine-fans. Its sale in video and DVD format followed. Eventually, even NHK, the public broadcaster, which is regarded as the most conservative television company in Japan, broadcasted *Muthu* at the end of 2001. All these facts point to the unusual success of this Indian film in Japan. The big hit made by *Muthu* was truly a phenomenon to be noted in 1998.

Why did this film achieve such great success in Japan? From a business point of view, Indian films usually have major disadvantages for public screening. Indian cinema is not Hollywood cinema: its films are not a known entity and their stars are totally unfamiliar faces to Japanese audiences. Accordingly, publicity is crucially important. Moreover, since the average running time of Indian films is about three hours, the maximum number of shows is limited to three a day in Japanese theaters. Indian films are likely to be less lucrative for commercial theaters than other films that can be shown five or six times. When ticket prices are the same, those theaters are not inclined to select Indian films as their programs.

In spite of these disadvantages, *Muthu* was a big box-office hit. When it shown, the theater in Tokyo was packed at almost every show. The records state that the average attendance was from 264 people to a capacity audience of 303 seats. This means that the rate of occupancy was about 90% for every show. All these records far exceeded our expectations. Why was it such a great success? Here, I list a breakdown of seven reasons that contributed to its success.

(1) *Muthu* is a well-made entertainment film that only professionals could create. The combination of high-level technique and simplicity as popular entertainment is quite sophisticated. Its song-and-dance scenes and action sequences in particular are superb and powerful. For example, the scene of the song called *A Vegetarian Crane*, which lasts for 5 minutes and 11 seconds, consists of 145 cuts produced with technical expertise in cinematography, choreography and editing. Such high-level techniques surprised Japanese audiences, and the variety of entertainment elements amused them. The story is simple and full of stereotypes: love triangle, banal dichotomies (such as those between good and bad, rich and poor), and a familiar pattern of disguised nobles. Accordingly, Japanese audiences had no difficulty in following the foreign story.

(2) Another Indian film released in 1997 paved the way for *Muthu*'s success in Japan the next year. *Raju Ban Gaya Gentleman* (1992), a Hindi film made in Mumbai (formerly Bombay), was publicly shown and gained a favorable response from Japanese audiences (Plate 2). It had been 43 years since the films *Aan* (1952) and *Chandralekha* (1948) had been released in Japan in 1954 (see the next section). These two films were representative of Indian entertainment films, usually called “masala (spice) films” in India. Eventually, thanks to *Raju*, Japanese people came to recognize this entertainment film genre once



Plate 2 The leaflet of *Raju Ban Gaya Gentleman* at 1997 release

again, and became interested in Indian cinema.

By the mid-1990s, Indian cinema had acquired some fans among young Japanese people. First, workers from South Asian countries, Pakistan and Bangladesh in particular, brought their favorite Indian films into Japan. Japanese people then encountered them at shops stocking Islamic foods or rental video shops for foreign customers from South Asia. Some Japanese people became enthusiastic fans of Indian cinema. Accordingly, a core stratum of Indian film supporters in Japan had been in firm existence before the release of *Raju*.

(3) The film distributor of *Muthu*, Xanadoux, presented it with eagerness and meticulous preparation. Jun Edoki, a young Japanese film critic, initially purchased the video of *Muthu* in Singapore by chance, and liked it very much. He introduced it to his friends, including Xanadoux employees. Atsushi Ichikawa of Xanadoux then suggested to Edoki that Xanadoux release this film in Japan. The rights to show *Muthu* in public were obtained by another friend of Edoki, who was working for a distribution company called JCA. All these men joined hands to plan *Muthu*'s distribution in Japan. These three parties – Ichikawa of Xanadoux, Edoki, and his JCA friend – were film specialists who were highly experienced in distribution, and they made every effort to ensure the successful release of

*Muthu*. Xanadoux's effort was especially noteworthy. The company carried out a large-scale campaign to disseminate approximately 700 forms of publicity, double their usual amount, in various forms of mass media.

(4) The encouraging decision of the Cinema Rise movie theater made an indispensable contribution to the smash hit of *Muthu*. Cinema Rise chose *Muthu* for one of its 1998 releases from among many alternative cult-art films. Although Cinema Rise was a relatively new theater, it had already established its prestige as the leading theater for cult films in Shibuya. Young people could always expect something new and different whenever Cinema Rise started to show new films. When the manager of Cinema Rise saw *Muthu* and decided to show it at his theater, "We were already half-way to success," Ichikawa of Xanadoux told me once.

(5) At Cinema Rise, the audiences viewed *Muthu* in a way totally unimaginable in other theaters. The audiences were asked by the theater through the notice papers and announcements to express their emotions while watching the film. Open expressions – laughing, clapping, shouting time, singing songs in accordance with the events on screen – were encouraged. It was like a live concert of pop music. The audiences enjoyed this lively and interactive atmosphere, and they told their friends about this unique experience. Thus the reputation of *Muthu* rapidly spread by word of mouth.

(6) Fans of Hong Kong and other Asian films liked and supported *Muthu*. The former were frustrated since Hong Kong cinema had lost its energetic allure because of the coming hand-over of the territory in 1997. Around 1997, those film fans started seeking out other Asian films for alternative entertainment. They discovered Indian popular films and switched their focus to them. These were highly experienced, sophisticated filmgoers who quickly learnt how to enjoy Indian films to the full. It was these fans who fervently acknowledged *Muthu* when it was screened on the occasion of the Tokyo International Fantastic Film Festival in November 1997. It may therefore be no exaggeration to say that the decline of the Hong Kong film industry led to the successful acceptance of Indian cinema in Japan.

(7) The final point is related to the Japanese view of India and the rest of Asia. The filmic world of *Muthu* represents the rural area in India. By this, the film unintentionally offers such stereotypical images of India as the ordinary Japanese would expect. In my observation, the Japanese audiences of *Muthu* comfortably discovered that the visual images of India in this film were just like those they had expected. To our regret, the Japanese image of India as a "backward" country, where people wear traditional Indian clothes, living in "eternal villages" under the "caste" system, is unchanged. It is undeniable that the Japanese do not regard India highly, nor indeed the whole of the rest of Asia. Japanese people have long harbored a superiority complex toward "backward" Asian peoples. This prejudice may sometimes cause the reception gap described above, and affect the business prospects of Asian films. With hindsight, we perceived that even the presentation of Indian films in the past was also partly responsible for producing and disseminating a biased understanding of and misleading information about India. The next section further explores the formation of prejudice against India by examining the distribution history of Indian cinema in Japan.

### A Brief History of Indian Cinema in Japan

In the mid-1980s, my friends and I organized Indian film festivals several times. According to research that we conducted then for our catalogues, the first Indian film, not counting a joint-production film, ever shown in Japan was *Aan*. This Hindi film was distributed by the major distribution company Towa and released at Shinjuku Gekijo (Shinjuku Theater) in Tokyo from January 1 to 10 in 1954. *Aan* was the first Technicolor film in India, and was shown at the London International Film Festival in 1952. It was later released in the UK by a distribution company called London Films. In those days London Films had a good business relationship with Towa, and they suggested that Towa import *Aan* for release in Japan. This costume-play film starring Dilip Kumar was well accepted in Japan and earned a considerable profit.

Following *Aan*, in April the same year the Tamil film *Chandralekha* was released in Tokyo (Plate 3). The film was distributed by Nippon Cinema Corporation (NCC). When we conducted our research, NCC had already collapsed and disappeared, and no information has since been made available. Because of this, it is very difficult to clarify how this film was brought to Japan. A source, however, suggested it was a barter item. In the 1950s it was quite common to send commodities made in India to overseas business partners in the form of barter, after receiving imported goods from abroad. Because this exchange method was prevalent when India was dreadfully short of foreign currency, it might have been the case with *Chandralekha*. The pamphlet prepared by NCC for *Chandralekha*, whose Japanese title was *Shakunetsu-no ketto* (Fight under the red heat), introduces its producer-director, S. S. Vasan as the “Cecil B. DeMille of the Indian film industry.” This shows that the distributor had obtained correct information about the film.

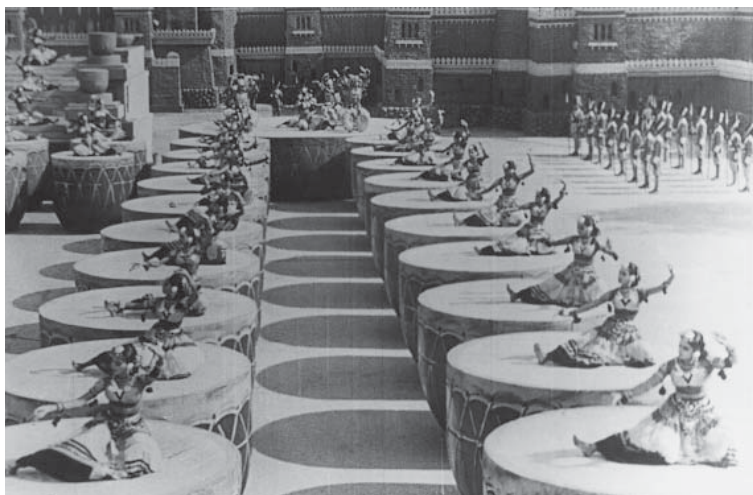


Plate 3 *Chandralekha* (1948)

Thirdly, in 1955 NHK televised the Hindi film *Baiju Bawra* (1952) with simultaneous interpretation by Kyuya Doi, a professor at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. He appeared in a small circle in the corner of the TV screen and interpreted the filmic dialogues. This *Baiju* is also an entertainment film.

All three are Indian popular films. In other words, they are “masala films” full of song-and-dance scenes. This means that the introduction of Indian cinema in Japan started with the popular formula films that formed the mainstream of the Indian film industry. However, the subsequent advent of Indian art cinema, represented by the films of Satyajit Ray, eradicated all memory of these popular entertainment films.

In 1956, Satyajit Ray’s film, *Pather Panchali* (Song of the Road, 1955) won the Best Human Document Award at the Cannes International Film Festival. This Bengali art film made in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) caused a great sensation in the western world, and impressed its audiences with the artistic value of Indian cinema. One Japanese woman from Towa was among them. Kashiko Kawakita, widely known as Madame Kawakita, instantly decided to introduce this film to Japanese audiences. She subsequently imported this film in cooperation with her husband Nagamasa Kawakita, the president of Towa and also the president of the Art Theater Guild (ATG).

Until then, however, Indian films had been totally unknown in Japan. Considering this disadvantage, Madame Kawakita decided to show the film in the circuit of the ATG, which was Japan’s most influential film society with a large membership. *Pather Panchali* under its Japanese title, *Daichi no uta* (Song of the Earth) was thus released in 1966, and was favorably accepted by Japanese audiences as well as film critics. In 1970, Satyajit Ray’s *Aparajito* (Undefeated, 1956) was screened, again through the same circuit of the ATG. Moreover, Madame Kawakita and Etsuko Takano, the manager of Iwanami Hall in Tokyo, joined forces to found Equipe de Cinema (Friends of Cinema), an association for the benefit of people who want to see excellent films. For its opening program, they selected the Apu trilogy: *Pather Panchali*, *Aparajito*, and *Apur Sansar* (The World of Apu, 1959; Plate 4). Subsequently Equipe de Cinema continued to introduce eleven of Ray’s films including his final work, *Agantuk* (Stranger, 1991), which was released in 1992.

In the meantime, in 1990 Equipe de Cinema also released Mira Nair’s film *Salaam Bombay!* (1988). As a result, in Japan Indian cinema came to signify Satyajit Ray’s films plus *Salaam Bombay!* In fact, these were the only Indian films that the Japanese public saw until the Indian popular film, *Raju Ban Gay Gentleman* was eventually released in 1997.

This Satyajit Ray monopoly over 20 years resulted in a serious problem with the Japanese reception of Indian cinema. Ray’s films gave Japanese people the strong impression that all Indian films must be art films like Ray’s, and consequently fixed a biased view of Indian cinema in the Japanese mind. This biased view is as follows: Indian films are very serious, filmic stories about rural life; all the main protagonists are poor and wear traditional Indian clothes; and we are expected to say how greatly we have been moved after viewing them. Unsurprisingly, those people who got to know Indian cinema at this period equated it with Satyajit Ray films.

In 1982, the Japan Foundation Film Festival took place in Tokyo. Eleven Asian films were shown: two films each from Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka, and





**Plate 4** The catalogue of Apu trilogy (*Pather Panchali*, *Aparajito*, and *Apur Sansar*) at 1974 release

three from India. The three Indian films were the Hindi film *Bhumika* (The Role, 1977), directed by Shyam Benegal; the Bengali film *Neem Annapurna* (Bitter Morsel, 1980), by Buddhadeb Dasgupta; and the Malayalam film *Kumatty* (The Bogeyman, 1979), by Aravindan. This film festival attracted large audiences. Thanks to their considerable success, those films were later shown all over Japan. As the result of this film festival, Japanese people realized that Indian cinema had many excellent film directors other than Satyajit Ray. However, those three films were also art films. Accordingly, the fixed view equating Indian cinema with art films remained as unchanged as ever.

In 1983 and 1985 Indian Film Festivals took place in Japan, both of which I organized with the help of many friends (Plate 5). I was eager to introduce Indian popular films, rather than art films. Unfortunately, however, they drew little attention.

In 1988, the Indian Film Festival was organized by Pia Co., the publisher of the weekly culture information magazine known as *Weekly Pia*. As an advisor, I selected 25 Indian films including many popular entertainment films. First of all, I chose the super-hit Hindi film *Sholay* (The Blaze of the Sun, 1975), and the very popular Tamil film *Muthal Mariyadai* (Prime Honor, 1985). I also added several classic films full of song-and-dance

**インド映画祭ニュース** No.1  
Indian Film Festival in Japan 1983  
JUNE

日本初公開 秀作3本をこの秋に!!

〈上映作品〉 (享暮: 二本読)  
芽ばえ ままごとの家 サーカス  
〈オープニング上映〉  
1983年9月21日(水)~25日(日)  
労音会館ホール (国電水道橋下車)  
〈レギュラー上映〉  
1983年10月15日(土)~30日(日)  
鈴なり音音館 (下北沢下車)  
主催 「インド映画祭」実行委員会

▶ ままごとの家 (Gharonda)  
ヒンダイ語/カラー/1977  
監督 ビーム・セン  
主演 アモル・バレーカ  
ザリナー・ワハブ

▼ サーカス (Tharu)  
マラヤラム語/白黒/1978  
監督 アラヴィンダン  
主演 ゴービー  
ヴェヌー

▲ 芽ばえ (Anur)  
ヒンダイ語/カラー/1974  
監督 シヤーム・パネガル  
主演 シヤバーナーズミー  
アナン・トナード

● モーニング・シヨウの3本とあわせて、6本、3つの異なる種類の体験が楽しめます。  
● 観覧券は8月より順次発売し、大學生協等で販売します。モーニング・シヨウは毎日会場でお求め下さい。

**インド映画祭モーニング・シヨウ**  
主催: 国際交流基金

● 上映作品 「魔法使いのおじいさん」(マヤヤラム)  
監督 アラヴィンダン  
「ニュージカル女優」(ヒンダイ)  
監督 シヤーム・パネガル  
「若いひとくち」(パンダル)  
監督 プッダードー・ダスグプタ

● 期日 1983年9月23日、24日、25日 9:30AMより。  
● 会場 労音会館ホール

インドの映画館では、古い5作を毎朝モーニング・シヨウとして観せています。私達は昨年、大塚新館で開催した国際交流基金主催のインド映画祭3本を、国際交流基金の協力を得て、本プログラムに編入してみました。

Plate 5 The leaflet of the first Indian Film Festival in Japan in 1983

scenes, such as *Awara* (The Vagabond, 1951) and *Pyaasa* (The Thirsty One, 1957), both in Hindi. Those 25 films were shown in all over Japan and attained a fairly good response. However, the result was far from my expectations.

From this time, Indian films started being shown at various film festivals in Japan. Nevertheless, by 1997, most Indian films shown in Japan were still art cinema alone, and the fixed view was still constantly prevalent.

To reiterate, in 1997 the Indian popular film *Raju Ban Gaya Gentleman* was eventually released in Japan after a long break of 43 years. At the same time the Tamil film *Indira* (1995) was also released. *Indira* was directed by Suhashini Maniratnam. She is the wife of the director Maniratnam, who is one of India's most admired contemporary directors and is trying to integrate the formula of Indian popular films into his own artistic style. His wife's film, *Indira*, which portrays the life of a young country girl under the caste system, apparently shows a touch of Maniratnam. This may be natural because he wrote the script and gave advice while his wife was shooting. In expressing social, sometimes political themes, Maniratnam's films introduce his cinematic aesthetics of elegantly smooth camerawork and emphasize the apt insertion of fascinating song-and-dance scenes. He represents the new era of Indian cinema, and is considered to be one of the leading directors

in India. *Indira*, under the influence of Maniratnam, engaged those Japanese audiences who preferred “serious” Indian films.

At last, 1998 witnessed the *Muthu* boom. It completely eradicated the “die-hard” assumption of Indian cinema as art film. Instead, however, Japanese audiences came to believe that Indian cinema was composed of such “masala films” as *Muthu* alone.

In the summer of the same year, Maniratnam’s *Bombay* (1995) was also released. This film did not successfully engage Japanese audiences. The story of *Bombay* is rather serious, and depicts the Hindu-Muslim conflict in 1993. The main protagonists – a Hindu boy and a Muslim girl – fall in love with each other, and get married in Bombay (now Mumbai) after running away from their hometown in Tamilnadu in the south. In Bombay, they are involved in a riot caused by the conflict between Hindu and Muslim people. In this film, the songs sung during their love scenes are enthralling, and its story illuminates various social realities of India. In this sense, it could have been significantly informative for Japanese audiences. Unfortunately, however, the influence of *Muthu* as pure entertainment was too prevalent and overwhelming. This time, Japanese audiences were not ready to appreciate another type of Indian film. *Bombay* therefore missed out on an appropriate evaluation in Japan.

During this period, several incidents occurred that had unfortunate consequences for Indian films. One was major trouble with the transfer of the rights of the film *Yajaman* (1993), in which Rajinikant and Meena, the famous duo in *Muthu*, starred before their appearance in the latter film. Due to mistakes on the part of its producer and agents, the rights for the film were sold simultaneously to two different Japanese distributors. They filed suit against each other, a fact reported in the Japanese mass media. This man-made disaster easily destroyed the accumulated respect gained by Indian films, and its associated business as well.

Another incident occurred on the occasion of the 1998 Tokyo International Film Festival. This was also a business dispute. Initially, the TIFFF committee wanted to hold a retrospective of Maniratnam’s films in collaboration with one distributor in Kobe. This distributor informed the committee that he had the rights to those films. However, it later turned out that he only had the rights to the Hindi-language versions. Because Maniratnam’s films were very popular in India, the Tamil originals were often dubbed into Hindi for the convenience of release in northern India. Film distributors were allowed to select one version according to language territory.

In fact, another Japanese distributor held the rights to the original Tamil versions. This distributor claimed that screening the Hindi versions at TIFFF could infringe on its rights. This claim was taken as a kind of blackmail. The TIFFF committee held a meeting to discuss this trouble. Finally, one of the important committee members is said to have shouted, “Cancel all screenings of such troublesome Indian cinema!” News of this episode spread quickly and widely in the Japanese film industry, because that gentleman was the most influential figure in the industry. After this incident, no distributors dared handle Indian films. Major film distributors completely quit dealing with Indian cinema, which they feared could risk damaging their corporate prestige.

Thus the Indian cinema boom arrived in 1998 and quickly departed again in 1999. After 1999, approximately ten Indian films were released in Japan, among them Rajinikant's *Arunachalam* (1997), *Batcha* (1994), and *Padayappa* (1999); Shah Rukh Khan's *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* (1995) and *Dil Se* (1998) (Shah Rukh Khan was the leading actor of *Raju Ban Gaya Gentleman*); and Aishwarya Rai's *Jeans* (1998) and *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* (1999) (Aishwarya Rai was the 1994 Miss World). All of these had been major hits both in India and abroad; all of them completely failed at the box office in Japan. Since 1999, Korean and Thai films have been very popular. Korean cinema currently dominates Asian films in the Japanese market. Indian films are almost ancient history.

In summary, the biased, fixed presumption of Indian films as art cinema prevented the Japanese from grasping Indian cinema as a whole for more than 30 years. Next, although the 1998 popularity of *Muthu* as an entertainment film replaced the old assumptions with new ones, it did not lead to the effective introduction of diverse Indian films. Finally, ugly business disputes have killed Japanese interest in Indian cinema. We can draw useful insights from this overview of the distribution history of Indian cinema in Japan.

### **Advantages and Disadvantages of Promoting Indian Films**

For the last several years, by observing the ups and downs of Indian films in Japan, I have gained a solid understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of promoting Indian films. The following is a list of the main points that I have so far identified, including both positive and negative aspects regarding promotion.

#### **Advantages**

(1) Thanks to the extraordinary success of *Muthu*, Indian popular films are today recognized by Japanese people. Accordingly, we do not need to explain Indian films in great detail.

(2) The number of Indian film fans is increasing. They are keeping up with the trend of new Indian films by purchasing DVDs and VCDs through online shops, most of which are run by NRI (Non-Resident Indians) in the US.

(3) Professional subtitle translators from Indian languages into Japanese have emerged. Formerly, the subtitles of Indian films were translated from their English scripts. Consequently, there were many mistakes, particularly with Japanese spellings of the Indian names. Although experts on Indian languages and local cultures were sometimes invited to supervise Japanese translations, they could not always be involved because of budget limitations. With the boom in Indian films, Japanese translators of Indian languages learnt the particular skills required for subtitle translation. Now, several experienced translators are ready to produce Japanese subtitles directly from Indian languages.

(4) Specialists in India and specialists in film began to collaborate in distributing Indian films. While the distributors have a professional understanding of film in general, their knowledge of India and Indian films is scarce. They need to have the specialists of Indian culture and Indian films join them in order to ensure appropriate promotion. Recently, such collaboration in the promotion process has been growing more common.

(5) The boom in Asian cinema is still going on, even though the dominant positions are currently occupied by Korean and Chinese films. Faithful supporters of Asian films still exist in considerable numbers, and they are maintaining their interest in Indian cinema.

### **Disadvantages**

(1) Because the impact of *Muthu* as entertainment was too intense, Japanese people are even now inclined to understand Indian films solely in these terms. The memory of *Muthu* creates problems, because it can prove to be a major obstacle for distributors who intend to introduce other types of Indian films.

(2) The image of “troublesome Indian cinema” persists even today. Few distributors are interested in Indian films.

(3) The lack of proper business manners on the Indian side is unchanged. Their perceptions of film rights, contracts, publicity, scripts and even film prints are quite different from those of the Japanese. For example, film scripts in Indian languages, which are mostly romanized, are usually incorrect. Although a script should be an accurate transcription from the completed film, the details of the dialogue are usually far different from what is actually spoken in the film. Accordingly, when preparing Japanese subtitles for an Indian film, the first job is to correct the dialogue in the script to match the film. This is necessary for “spotting,” that is, measuring the duration of each dialogue to determine how many Japanese letters can be used for its subtitle. This is only one of many problems to be faced when distributing Indian films.

(4) The long running time of Indian films is a major discouragement for theaters.

(5) Because Indian popular films are produced under the “star system,” they can be appreciated only when audiences are fully familiar with the film stars and their public aura. In Japan, such information is still insufficient and often unavailable in Japanese.

Considering these disadvantages, in my view the biggest obstacle is a striking difference in the perception of decent business manners between India and Japan. Of course, we may face this sort of obstacle whenever we attempt to bring any foreign cultural product into Japan. When it comes to film distribution, however, distributors in almost all countries share a standard understanding of proper business manners. Asian countries such as Korea, Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, Thailand, and Iran are supplying their films to Japan on a regular basis. They rarely cause problems. Only the Indian film industry sticks to its outmoded business manners, which continue to be problematic. We should urge the Indian film industry to update its way of business. This is crucially important for the promotion of Indian films in Japan.

### **Conclusion**

Two great problems must be overcome in order to optimize the business prospect of Indian films in Japan. The first is to wipe away the fixed assumptions about India and Indian cinema that still remain prevalent. Once stereotyped assumptions or racial and cultural prejudice are formed, they are hard to destroy. This tendency is related to the Japanese

ignorance of India. While Japanese people are keen to keep up with what is new in the western world, they tend to be content with their banal, stereotyped images of Asian peoples and cultures. Without breaking this mindset, the Japanese cannot possibly get to know and understand Asian countries.

Moreover, such fixed assumptions about India and Indian cinema are reinforced by a lack of information supply from India. The parties who present Indian films must therefore endeavor to introduce a wide variety. Otherwise, this regrettable discrepancy will be indelible: while distributors show Indian FILMS, audiences enjoy watching INDIAN films. This discrepancy will only disappear after a number of Indian films have been shown continuously to the Japanese public.

Fortunately, the Japan Foundation (up to 2004 its Asia Center) holds Indian film screenings as part of its film festivals as well as in the form of a retrospective every two or three years. The Japan Foundation shows a wide range of Indian films, albeit not on a commercial basis. In 1998 it organized the Indian Film Festival in Japan 1998. Six films were shown in the series entitled “The History of Indian Popular Cinema after Independence,” and six more in “Raj Kapoor and Maniratnam: Two Great Directors.” At that time, screenings outside Tokyo were rare. In 2000 and 2001, it held a Guru Dutt



Plate 6 The leaflet of the Guru Dutt Retrospective in 2001

Retrospective, and screened ten of his films. Those films of Guru Dutt, who was a famous director-actor-producer, are still traveling all over Japan (Plate 6). The Japan Foundation's projects thus give Japanese audiences valuable opportunities to enjoy a different kind of Indian films, in addition to those of Satyajit Ray or *Muthu*.

In 2002 and 2003, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Japan and India and the centenary of the Japan-Indo Association, the Japan Foundation again organized the Indian Film Festival in Tokyo 2003. Six Indian films were shown, including *Lagaan: Once upon a time in India* (2001), which was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language film in 2002.

The second problem to overcome is that of outmoded Indian business manners, which openly neglect the international standard. As described above, we have to urge Indian film industry to modify their old business manners according to the internationally agreed standard. It will be very difficult for the Japanese to promote Indian films on a regular basis unless the Indian side improves in many ways. Indian films are internationally exported to the UK, the US, Asian and African countries. Most of their overseas distributors are NRIs, who deal with Indian films just as cheap entertainment. In this context, the Indian film industry does not feel it necessary to update its business style. Its executives do not feel that they need a real business sense like that of major Hollywood companies. It is true that the Japanese film industry is very fastidious, and perhaps even too strict and honest. Even so, the Indian film industry should first learn what the film business should be like. They can study major Hollywood companies or the Hong Kong film industry. Then, we will be able to collaborate each other on the shared understanding of film business.

Not only the Indian film industry but also the Indian government has much to learn from international business practices in other countries, in order to ensure the promotion of its own films. For example, the Korean Embassy in Tokyo holds a number of regular screenings of Korean films at its Cultural Council. The Korea-Japan Association Library generously lets us check out videos of various films and TV soap operas. These services are offered to promote Korean visual culture. In August 2002, the Thai Embassy held a garden party to promote two Thai films, *Mon-Rak Transistor* (2002) and *Jan Dara* (2001). Both films are scheduled for release in the coming winter. Their active promotional activities were highly appreciated by Japanese journalists and film critics. Moreover, the Sri Lankan Embassy held special screenings of ten Sri Lankan films in September 2002 at the Focus on Asia Fukuoka International Film Festival, as well as at the Japan Foundation on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Japan and Sri Lanka. The cultural sections of those embassies are eager to promote their films in Japan, and know what to do and how to do it. I believe that a similar effort by the Indian Embassy would help to disseminate Indian films in Japan.