



The Post-Parallel Turn: Negotiating Corporate Capital and Creative Autonomy within Streaming Interfaces

Sufiya Ansari

Junior Research Fellow, Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India & Assistant Professor (Gazetted), Department of Higher Education, Government of Madhya Pradesh (on EOL - LWP for higher studies), India

Abstract

For decades, the study of Indian cinema has relied on rigid, binary taxonomies: the commercial monolith of Bollywood versus the aesthetic and political resistance of Parallel, Independent, or Middle Cinema. However, the contemporary media landscape- driven by global streaming platforms, algorithmic curation, and boutique production ecosystems- has triggered a structural shift. This paper proposes the term “the Post-Parallel Turn” to define a contemporary cinematic space where these traditional boundaries are entirely dissolved. Central to this shift is “Production as Praxis,” which this study conceptualizes not merely as a financial or logistical backend, but as an active, ideological methodology that engineers taxonomic fluidity. By analyzing how production houses like Clean Slate Filmz leverage star-backed institutional autonomy to redirect global streaming capital, we see production operate as a site of artistic intervention. Through a comparative analysis of Imtiaz Ali’s *Tamasha* (2015) and Anvita Dutt’s *Bulbbul* (2020), this paper examines how the material realities of casting, funding, and platform-specific distribution collapse high-end corporate capital into radical, genre-bending aesthetics. Ultimately, the paper argues that the Post-Parallel turn forces film scholarship to move past static aesthetic divisions and evaluate categorization through the active, liquid workflows of contemporary production.

Keywords: Post-Parallel Turn, Hybridity, Boutique Production Cultures, Industrial Reflexivity and Prestige Aesthetics.

Introduction

The collapse of the classical Indian film taxonomy does not merely represent a temporary

Article History: Received: 10 June 2026. Revised: 20 June 2026. Accepted: 10 August 2026. First published: 31st August, 2026.

Copyright: © 2026 by the author/s.

License: Distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

Published by: Adrija Press, India.

Citation: Ansari, Sufiya. (2026). The Post-Parallel Turn: Negotiating Corporate Capital and Creative Autonomy within Streaming Interfaces. *Newliteraria Journal* 9:1, 36-47. <https://dx.doi.org/10.48189/nl.2026.v09i1.005>

market fluctuation; rather, it leaves contemporary cinema permanently situated in a state of hybridity, multi-platform fluidity, and structural synthesis.

This state of hybridity is grounded in postcolonial cultural theory, most famously articulated by Bhabha (1994), who conceptualized the “Third Space” as an interstitial zone where cultural signs are continuously negotiated and recontextualized. In the context of Indian cinema, this hybridity has mutated. While Prasad (1998) historically mapped the “ideological state apparatus” of Hindi cinema as a rigid negotiation between feudal forms and capitalist modes of production, contemporary scholarship argues that this hybridity is now both aesthetic and structural. As Mehta (2020) and Ganti (2012) observed, the globalizing pressures of the 21st century have forced the Indian film industry to continuously hybridize its content- mixing local sensibilities with global generic formats- to appeal simultaneously to a fragmented domestic audience and a transnational diaspora.

However, this hybridity has evolved beyond standard Bollywood melodramatic formulas. Increasingly, hyper-local, regional narratives rooted in specific cultural topographies are achieving unprecedented “glocal” success and mainstream dominance. A prime example is the phenomenal success of Rishab Shetty’s *Kantara* (2022), which grossed over ₹450 crore worldwide by leveraging deeply localized folklore and the *Bhoota Kola* ritual of coastal Karnataka into a universally accessible action-drama template. Similarly, the mythic-horror film *Tumbbad* (2018) demonstrated the immense endurance of regionalized storytelling; despite a modest initial run, its subsequent theatrical re-release grew into a massive box office triumph. This shift underscores a broader democratization and mainstreaming within Indian cinema: global audiences are no longer just looking for homogenized, pan-Indian urban tropes, but are actively seeking out raw, unapologetically specific local mythologies that resonate on a universal scale. This hybridity is accelerated by a profound multi-platform fluidity, a phenomenon rooted in Jenkins’s (2006) foundational framework of “convergence culture.” Jenkins posited that media content flows fluidly across multiple channels, driven heavily by both the active participation of consumers and structural corporate alliances. In the contemporary Indian landscape, this fluidity is deeply tied to what Mini (2020) identified as an “OTT/Streaming Revolution” that has decoupled the film text from the physical constraints of the multiplex screen. Consequently, media forms must now possess an inherent elasticity; they move fluidly between theatrical grandiosity and small-screen intimacy, thereby erasing the material boundaries that once neatly separated “prestige festival indies” from “mass multiplex blockbusters.”

Ultimately, this environment demands a structural synthesis. This dynamic is grounded in the political economy of media, specifically Caldwell’s (2008) framework of “production culture.” Caldwell demonstrated that industrial workflows, casting negotiations, and funding mechanisms are not neutral logistics, but rather sites of critical and artistic synthesis where industry workers actively theorize their own practices. In Indian cinema studies, Rajadhyaksha (2009) has long argued that the “industrialization” of Indian cinema required a synthesis of informal market dynamics and corporate financial systems. Applying this to the Post-Parallel Turn, this structural synthesis represents a deliberate convergence: boutique production houses use the institutional leverage of mainstream stardom to capture global streaming capital, collapsing corporate financial backing and radical, avant-garde aesthetics into a single, unified industrial workflow.

The Collision of Aesthetics and Political Economy

To understand the taxonomy of the Post-Parallel Turn, film scholarship must abandon the reductive binary that separates textual form from industrial finance. Categorization is no longer defined by what is on screen (aesthetics) or who paid for it (economics) alone, but rather by

how the two collide. Historically, cinema studies has suffered from a methodological schism, where text-centered formalists ignore the material realities of the marketplace, and political economists reduce artistic expression to a mere byproduct of capital. This compartmentalization is entirely inadequate for analyzing contemporary Indian media. The structural transformation of contemporary Indian media production extends the institutional critique mapped by Tejaswini Ganti. In her work, Ganti (2012) asserted that the formalization of corporate capital led to a systematic gentrification of Hindi cinema, which she observed “is articulated through a discourse of quality, improvement and innovation that is often based upon the displacement and exclusion of the traditional working-class film-goer” (p.77). Under this corporate regime, the aesthetic choices visible on screen become deeply bound up in the anxieties of brand positioning, multiplex economics, and demographic targeting.

Ganti’s intervention highlights that the visual text cannot be divorced from its financial architecture. Therefore, when looking at works within the Post-Parallel Turn, categorization cannot be achieved by simply measuring the budget or cataloging the genre tropes. Instead, scholars must look at what Caldwell (2008) termed the “industrial reflexivity” of contemporary production cultures, where the economic transactions of filmmaking are themselves a form of critical praxis. The traditional taxonomies mapped by early scholars like Prasad (1998)- who argued that Indian cinema’s forms were strictly dictated by a conservative “feudal-corporate mode of production”- are destabilized by this modern collision. In the contemporary era, economic structures do not merely constrain artistic expression; rather, artistic expression actively exploits economic structures. When a boutique studio leverages corporate or streaming capital to produce a radical, non-formulaic narrative, the economic backend and the on-screen aesthetic do not exist in isolation. They collide to create an entirely new cultural form. Consequently, to categorize a film in the post-parallel era requires the critic to trace the fluid relationship between the balance sheet and the camera lens, recognizing that the financial transaction is the very mechanism through which the aesthetic transgression is made possible.

Historical Binaries and the Genesis of the Post-Parallel

To fully grasp the theoretical stakes of the Post-Parallel Turn, one must map the historical field against which it reacts. Historically, classical Indian cinema categories were built on rigid, seemingly irreconcilable oppositions. The most foundational of these taxonomies pitted the state-subsidized, realist aesthetics of auteurs like Satyajit Ray against the unapologetically commercial, multi-genre “masala” universes of directors like Manmohan Desai. As Jaikumar (2006) observed, the regulatory and aesthetic debates surrounding late-colonial Indian cinema were deeply shot through with contradictions. The clashing discourses of British imperialism and Indian anti-colonial nationalism did not exist in isolation; rather, they operated as linked expressions of a broader geopolitical and cultural transformation, where filmmakers actively negotiated state regulation to fashion a distinct regional film industry. This early institutional friction laid the historical groundwork for the rigid critical binaries that later split Indian film studies.

This bifurcation was not merely aesthetic; it was strictly institutionalized by the state through regulatory bodies like the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC), which funded parallel films under a paternalistic mandate of nation-building. This historical binary did not disappear with the advent of globalization and the liberalization of the Indian economy in the 1990s; rather, it mutated into a contemporary iteration that framed a new generation of creators. In the early 2000s, this opposition was re-enacted through the stark polarization between the gritty, lo-fi, independent realism of Anurag Kashyap and the glossy, hyper-monetized, diaspora-targeted escapism of Karan Johar. For over a decade, film critics utilized this Kashyap-Johar axis to define the limits of Hindi cinema, asserting that an invisible,

impenetrable wall separated the subaltern, rule-breaking indie from the elite, formulaic mainstream multiplex blockbuster. However, the historical bifurcation of Indian cinema has undergone a radical transformation. The traditional division between state-supported “New Cinema”- long analyzed by scholars like Rajadhyaksha (2009) and Prasad (1998) as a site of state-vetted aesthetic purity- and the market-driven commercial industry has been effectively displaced by a hyper-commodified global media infrastructure. In this contemporary streaming paradigm, the state is no longer the primary arbiter of cultural value. Instead, the industry demands a new type of cultural producer capable of navigating the dual pressures of transnational corporate finance and localized, auteurist expression.

Rajadhyaksha’s intervention exposes the structural crisis at the heart of modern Indian film taxonomy. The contemporary landscape no longer forces creators to choose between the aesthetic austerity of Kashyap or the fiscal excess of Johar. Instead, the Post-Parallel Turn operates precisely by cannibalizing both poles simultaneously, creating an unstable synthesis that defies traditional categorization. When a modern cinematic text fuses the auteurist, psychological interiority typically reserved for the arthouse with the massive visual scale, high-end production budgets, and star-driven marketing mechanics of the mainstream studio, the classical taxonomy collapses entirely. This collapse is driven by a structural reality: global streaming algorithms do not differentiate between the “multiplex movie” and the “festival film”- they demand content that maximizes engagement by blending high-concept prestige with polished, high-production-value spectacle. Consequently, the historical binaries that once safely compartmentalized Indian cinema studies have ceased to function as separate, parallel industries. They have instead collapsed into a singular, liquid terrain where the mainstream is consistently experimentalized from within, and the experimental is radically scaled up through corporate capital. To look at Indian cinema through the old lens of “mainstream versus indie” is to misread the contemporary moment; we are now operating in a post-parallel reality where the fringe has become the center, and the center is entirely dependent on the aesthetics of the fringe to retain its cultural currency.

The Streaming/OTT Industrial Complex and the Pre-Segmented Audience

This landscape of liquid taxonomies finds its material infrastructure within the contemporary streaming/OTT industrial complex. Production houses operating at the vanguard of the Post-Parallel Turn, most notably Clean Slate Filmz, explicitly reject both the traditional 2,000-screen theatrical release model and the isolated, niche circuits of international film festivals. Building upon this framework, the contemporary viewer is no longer understood through traditional geographic parameters; rather, as Lobato (2019) conceptualized, streaming platforms interact with a pre-segmented, algorithmic global audience bound together by automated taste clusters.. In this digital distribution paradigm, the financial viability of a project is decoupled from opening-weekend box-office returns and immediate mass-market saturation. Instead, it relies on global subscription retention and cross-demographic appeal.

This platform architecture inherently forces a structural and aesthetic blur that completely dismantles the conventional markers of cinematic scale. A text like *Bulbbul* (2020) illustrates how the streaming interface commands a radical synthesis of previously oppositional forms. To survive within a digital catalog where a user can scroll past a title in milliseconds, the film requires a hyper-polished, visually magnificent aesthetic- a level of production value historically reserved for big-budget Bollywood studio spectacles. Yet, to achieve critical prestige and generate the “prestige television” brand identity that platforms like Netflix leverage for cultural capital, the text must simultaneously exhibit an independent, experimental thematic depth. As Mini (2020) observed, this dual imperative transforms the boutique production house into a site of intense industrial negotiation. The streaming platform operates

as a disciplinary apparatus that fundamentally alters the aesthetic choices of contemporary showrunners and producers. Because the digital interface flattens the distinction between the multiplex blockbuster and the independent film, a text must possess a dual identity: it must deploy the visual grammar of cinematic luxury to seize the viewer's attention, while embedding the complex, counter-hegemonic narratives of the avant-garde to cultivate critical legitimacy.

Mini's assertion underscores how the material realities of the platform dictate a hybrid creative praxis. Clean Slate Filmz does not scale down the mainstream; rather, it scales up the experimental by routing it through global streaming capital. By operating outside the conservative constraints of traditional theatrical distributors- who often filter out radical thematic choices under the pretext of broad domestic family appeal- and simultaneously rejecting the lo-fi, underfunded constraints of the classical indie, this production model creates a deeply compromised, highly sophisticated cinematic mutant. The aesthetic polish of *Bulbbul* becomes the trojan horse for its radical feminist critique. Ultimately, the OTT industrial complex proves that when the mode of distribution transitions from a physical box office to a global digital network, the traditional categories of "commercial" and "independent" cease to function as distinct aesthetic choices, collapsing instead into a unified strategy of platform survival.

Aesthetic Omnivorousness and Transnational Genre Cannibalization

The structural shifts engineered by the streaming complex are mirrored at the level of reception and authorship by a profound aesthetic omnivorousness. Modern Indian audiences and creators have evolved into what sociologists term "cultural omnivores"- consumers whose tastes are no longer bound by traditional class hierarchies or localized generic expectations, but who instead fluidly cross boundaries to consume both "high" and "low" cultural forms. This omnivorous appetite collapses the historical distance between disparate global film movements. Within the Post-Parallel Turn, a single film text can effortlessly host the brooding, shadows-and-light architecture of German Expressionism, the radical, anti-feudal political anger of Third Cinema, and the deeply entrenched, melodic emotional core of traditional Bollywood lip-sync or high-melodrama background tracks.

This multi-tiered aesthetic synthesis cannot be understood as a superficial pastiche or a standard postmodern homage. Rather, it represents an active, material strategy of narrative survival in a globalized market. In her foundational study on globalization and media reception, Gillespie (1995) observed that transnational audiences possess a nuanced capacity for decoding hybrid media texts. She demonstrated that contemporary media consumers do not experience cultural texts in isolation; instead, they engage with them through a multi-layered, comparative framework where local generic traditions are continually negotiated against a global repertoire of images. This hybrid reading practice allows a text to resonate across multiple audiences simultaneously, offering localized emotional familiarity while operating within broader, globalized visual registers. Gillespie's insight explains how the modern Indian creator uses aesthetic omnivorousness as a deliberate tool of production praxis. In a film like *Bulbbul*, this omnivorousness is visually and structurally undeniable. The film's production design deliberately channels the haunting, gothic mood of classic European horror, yet its narrative framework functions as a direct critique of land-owning feudal violence- a thematic preoccupation deeply rooted in India's own radical parallel traditions.

Crucially, the film does not discard the sonic vocabulary of popular Hindi cinema; it retains the sweepingly emotional background scores that historically triggered affect in the traditional theater. By feeding these seemingly contradictory filmic languages into a single production pipeline, the creators build a text that is legible to a global subscriber base familiar

with Western gothic tropes, while remaining firmly anchored in the cultural and emotional landscape of domestic Indian viewers. Aesthetic omnivorousness, therefore, becomes the linguistic currency of the Post-Parallel Turn, transforming the film text into a site where global film history is systematically cannibalized to reconstruct the boundaries of local commercial cinema.

To fully differentiate the Post-Parallel Turn from previous historical shifts in the Indian film apparatus, we must analyze the structural mutation of what was traditionally termed “middle cinema.” During the 1970s and 1980s, middle cinema- pioneered by directors like Hrishikesh Mukherjee, Basu Chatterjee, and Shyam Benegal- emerged as a specific, intermediate category. It was structurally defined by realistic, middle-class, or rural stories told within slightly commercialized frameworks that rejected the overt melodramatic excesses of the mainstream masala formula. Historically, the original Parallel Cinema movement functioned by deliberately scaling down the aesthetics of the mainstream ecosystem. By stripping away spectacular, high-budget star vehicles and lavish studio sets, early independent filmmakers committed to an aesthetic of narrative austerity, sociopolitical gravity, and everyday realism. This historical reliance on institutional and material scarcity stands in sharp contrast to the contemporary post-parallel turn, where boutique production houses leverage high corporate budgets to make unconventional narratives viable.

The Post-Parallel Turn, however, operates on a completely inverted industrial logic. Rather than scaling down Bollywood, it radically scales up the experimental. It takes the thematic risks, radical politics, and genre-bending anxieties historically confined to the cash-strapped margins of independent or parallel filmmaking and wraps them in massive corporate budgets, high-end visual technologies, and star-driven marketing campaigns. Filmmakers in this era do not compromise on visual grandeur to tell a complex story; instead, they use that very grandeur as the material vehicle to make the complex story viable. In her extensive study on the industrialization of Hindi cinema, Ganti (2012) captured this fundamental shift in how prestige and scale interact within the modern studio ecosystem. She demonstrated that the contemporary corporate film economy has effectively inverted the traditional relationship between financial capital and artistic risk. While the historic parallel or art cinema depended on institutional austerity to preserve its ideological independence, the modern boutique production sector operates on the premise that unconventional, high-concept narratives require significant financial scale, polished aesthetics, and stylistic opulence to secure market visibility and achieve cultural authority within a highly congested media landscape. Ganti’s observation illuminates the exact praxis behind this institutional mutation. When a studio like Clean Slate Filmz mounts a project, they are not attempting a lo-fi, minimalist retreat from the commercial industry. Instead, their production praxis involves weaponizing major capital to give an experimental text- like a feminist gothic horror or a fractured psychological drama- the institutional heft, visual polish, and distribution power of a mainstream blockbuster. The mutation of middle cinema into the Post-Parallel Turn therefore represents a transition from a cinema of subtraction to a cinema of multiplication. It proves that in the contemporary landscape, the boundary between the artistic fringe and the commercial center is no longer bridged by downsizing budgets, but by inflating the visual and economic scale of the radical until the distinction between the two disappears entirely.

Case Study I - *Tamasha* and Mainstream Subversion

The Structural Irony of Corporate Capital

The industrial assembly of Imtiaz Ali’s *Tamasha* (2015) presents a profound structural irony that directly challenges the traditional methodologies of the political economy of film. In classical film scholarship, the financial source of a cinematic text is routinely assumed to

dictate its ideological and formal parameters; massive corporate investment is conventionally equated with narrative conservatism, risk-aversion, and the reproduction of dominant state or capitalist ideologies. *Tamasha*, however, was mounted at the absolute zenith of mainstream Indian commercial luxury. The film was co-produced by Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment- a legacy production house synonymous with high-grossing, uncritical action-comedies and masala entertainers- and distributed by Eros International, then a global conglomerate specializing in maximizing diaspora-driven theatrical revenue. Furthermore, the production leveraged the highest tier of contemporary Bollywood currency: it cast Ranbir Kapoor and Deepika Padukone, an elite onscreen romantic pairing guaranteed to secure massive opening-weekend box-office returns, and anchored its sonic landscape in a score by A. R. Rahman. On a corporate balance sheet, *Tamasha* was structurally indistinguishable from a standard, tentpole Bollywood studio product.

Yet, the praxis of this production lies in its radical diversion of corporate capital away from formulaic escapism and toward an uncompromising, interior critique of late-stage capitalism and identity fragmentation. Instead of reassuring the multiplex audience with a standardized narrative of romantic fulfillment or upward mobility, the film uses its lavish budget to chronicle the psychological alienation of its male protagonist, Ved, as he suffocates under the panoptic discipline of corporate monotony. As Ganti (2012) noted in her analysis of industrial shifts, the emergence of corporate financing in Hindi cinema attempted to introduce predictability into a fundamentally volatile market. Yet, within this corporate paradigm, the star-vehicle functions as more than a simple tool for box-office saturation; it serves as a critical mechanism for mitigating investment risk, simultaneously creating complex avenues where corporate logic and auteurist aspirations must be continually negotiated.

Ali's production praxis explicitly exploits this volatility. By utilizing the institutional safety net provided by Kapoor and Padukone's star power, the production secures major studio funding to mount what is essentially a deeply anti-capitalist, existentialist tract. The corporate apparatus that funded the film did so on the material assumption of a predictable romantic commodity, yet the material reality of the text subverts this expectation from within. This creates an industrial dissonance: the film's financial architecture belongs entirely to the mainstream multiplex economy, but its thematic orientation aligns with the counter-hegemonic anxieties traditionally confined to parallel or independent cinema. Consequently, *Tamasha* demonstrates that under the conditions of the Post-Parallel Turn, major corporate capital does not automatically enforce artistic conformity; rather, it can be systematically co-opted from within the belly of the industrial beast to finance its own psychological critique.

The Camouflage of Mainstream Tropes

If the financial assembly of *Tamasha* relies on structural irony, its formal execution operates through a sophisticated strategy of textual camouflage. The film does not reject the spectacular generic tropes of popular Hindi cinema- such as the lip-sync song sequence, the exotic destination romance, or the hyper-emotional background score- but instead weaponizes them as psychological and theatrical devices to map internal trauma. In the film's first act set in Corsica, the spectacular song sequence "Matargashti" mimics the joyous, escapist choreography of a traditional Bollywood romance. However, within the overarching narrative structure, this sequence is revealed to be a profound act of psychological dissociation. The exoticized landscape and the performance of the "Don" persona are not authentic expressions of romantic freedom, but a temporary escape from the protagonist's impending corporate castration. The trope of the song is hollowed out; it becomes a symptom of a fractured psyche rather than a tool for audience entertainment.

This subversion becomes explicitly clear in the film's second act, where the sonic vocabulary of Bollywood is deployed to signal psychological collapse. During the track "Heer Toh Badi Sad Hai," the film employs a lively, upbeat Punjabi folk rhythm- a musical format structurally engineered in commercial cinema to induce spectator pleasure and celebratory affect. Yet, the visual track completely contradicts this sonic register, depicting Ved trapped in a loop of mechanical, dystopian corporate routines. The upbeat music functions as an ironic, agonizing counterpoint to his internal death. As Gopalan (2002) argued in her theorization of the structural interruptions of Indian cinema, conventions like the song-and-dance sequence possess their own distinct formal logic. In the hands of contemporary auteurs, these musical interventions have evolved beyond their historical function as simple narrative pauses or external spectacles. Instead, they create a sharp formal tension, utilizing the generic expectations of auditory pleasure to mirror internal psychological trauma or visual alienation.

Gopalan's framework illuminates the precise formal praxis of *Tamasha*. The film's songs- composed by Rahman and written by Irshad Kamil- do not interrupt the narrative to sell a soundtrack; they are the narrative's primary psychological battleground. When Ved later undergoes a public mental breakdown in the track "Agar Tum Saath Ho," the scene strips away all traditional romantic glamour. The camera holds on raw, weeping, unpolished close-ups of Kapoor and Padukone, subverting the idealized aesthetic of the star-vehicle. The romantic ballad is transformed into a claustrophobic space of relational disconnect. By using the formal tropes of Bollywood as a camouflage, Ali's production praxis tricks the commercial apparatus into displaying a deeply experimental, avant-garde exploration of a fractured self on the IMAX screens of the multiplex.

The Categorization Failure

The convergence of corporate financing and formal subversion in *Tamasha* results in a total collapse of traditional critical taxonomy, marking a definitive site of categorization failure. When a critic attempts to position *Tamasha* within the historical quadrants of Indian film studies, the text systematically evades placement. It cannot be filed under "Bollywood" without ignoring its formal fragmentation, non-linear timeline, and explicit critique of the very bourgeois capitalist structures that Bollywood has historically celebrated. Conversely, it cannot be categorized as parallel or independent cinema without completely disregarding its multi-million-rupee budget, its reliance on a legacy corporate distributor, and its use of A-list stars whose public personas are deeply embedded in mass-market commercialism. It represents a crisis of the label.

This failure of categorization is precisely what defines the Post-Parallel Turn. The film proves that the boundary between the mainstream and the alternative is no longer a spatial or economic division. As Prasad (1998) historically argued, classical Hindi cinema functioned primarily through a narrative structure designed to maintain a conservative ideological equilibrium. Rather than catering to a naturally uniform public, the commercial film carefully synthesized diverse cultural attractions to appeal to a fragmented audience, reinforcing traditional social hierarchies and stabilizing national anxieties within a single, cohesive cinematic experience. *Tamasha* shatters this equilibrium by refusing to offer a clean resolution. The film ends not with a traditional domestic marriage or a conservative integration into society, but with Ved abandoning the corporate order entirely to become a nomadic storyteller- an explicit defense of artistic praxis over economic utility.

Case Study II - *Bulbbul* and Studio-Scale Radicalism

Clean Slate Filmz and Boutique Studio Praxis

If *Tamasha* (2015) demonstrates how a mainstream auteur can subvert corporate capital from within the traditional studio system, Anvita Dutt's *Bulbbul* (2020) illustrates how a boutique production house can construct an entirely independent institutional umbrella to redirect global streaming capital toward radical ends. Founded by actor Anushka Sharma and producer Karnesh Sharma, Clean Slate Filmz represents a critical evolution in contemporary production praxis. The banner operates not as a legacy studio seeking mass theatrical saturation, but as an agile, star-backed boutique outfit specifically engineered to interface with global over-the-top (OTT) ecosystems- most notably Netflix.

This boutique model introduces a distinct structural strategy: it leverages the cultural and institutional clout of an A-list Bollywood star (Anushka Sharma) to act as a protective buffer for non-traditional, risky, and highly experimental content. Traditional theatrical distributors in India have long functioned on deep economic conservatism, frequently filtering out unconventional or structurally subversive screenplays under the assumption that a film must cater to a generalized "universal family audience" to recoup its investments. Clean Slate Filmz explicitly bypasses this gatekeeping apparatus. By striking direct-to-digital licensing deals with global platforms, the production house secures premium budgets without the corresponding pressure to deliver a formulaic commercial product. Applying Caldwell's (2008) foundational concept of "industrial reflexivity" to the contemporary era, it becomes evident that modern boutique entities frequently engage in deep corporate self-theorizing. They leverage their structural mobility to constantly negotiate the terms of their creative autonomy and professional identity against the shifting backdrop of corporate distribution networks. Clean Slate's praxis embodies this negotiation; it transforms the financial backing of global streaming capital into a site of artistic sovereignty, allowing a first-time director like Anvita Dutt to execute a singular vision that completely breaks away from the patriarchal and narrative conventions of mainstream Hindi cinema.

The High-Aesthetic Trojan Horse

The formal architecture of *Bulbbul* operates as a highly sophisticated aesthetic trojan horse. Historically, radical, independent, or parallel cinema in India has been associated with an aesthetic of material austerity- relying on lo-fi textures, gritty social realism, and muted visual palettes to signal its political detachment from the glamour of Bollywood. *Bulbbul* systematically flips this expectation. The film is mounted with a lush, lavish, and hyper-saturated visual maximalism that rivals the highest production values of big-studio cinema. Shot by cinematographer Siddharth Diwan, the film's visual landscape relies on an opulent, crimson-and-magenta color palette, heavily borrowing from the chiaroscuro lighting of classic European painting, the surrealist shadows of German Expressionism, and the grand, period-accurate production design of colonial Bengal.

However, this visual luxury is not deployed for empty, superficial escapism or bourgeois nostalgia; instead, it is weaponized to unpack an uncompromising, anti-feudal feminist critique of systemic patriarchal violence. The lavishly mounted ancestral mansion (*haveli*) becomes a gothic panopticon where women are systematically silenced, abused, and broken. The film's primary aesthetic choice- the hyper-saturated red light that bathes the forest during the supernatural sequences- is not a mere genre convention of horror, but a visceral, externalized manifestation of the protagonist's internal trauma and subsequent radical rage. Scholars like Mini (2020) have noted that the emergence of digital streaming platforms in India initially opened up vital regulatory cracks, allowing creators to bypass traditional theatrical censorship and engage with sensitive political themes. Expanding on this industrial shift, it

becomes evident that the contemporary streaming environment demands a visual vocabulary of premium polish to secure visibility within a saturated digital interface. When utilized by counter-hegemonic creators, this premium aesthetic functions as a sophisticated rhetorical tool. By adopting the alluring visual languages of luxury and cinematic spectacle, these creators are able to present deeply unsettling critiques of historical and structural violence to a global audience.

Mini's framework directly illuminates Dutt's formal praxis. *Bulbbul* uses the sonic and visual vocabulary of cinematic luxury to draw the spectator into a space that ultimately forces an encounter with the horrors of domestic violence, child marriage, and marital rape. The film retains the grand background scores and high-end visual effects typical of a major studio tentpole, yet it directs these tools toward an explicitly radical, textually experimental ending where the victim of patriarchy transforms into a vengeful, justice-enforcing supernatural entity. By executing this synthesis, the production proves that under the conditions of the Post-Parallel Turn, a film does not need to look "shabby" to be politically radical; instead, it can wear the most glamorous clothes of commercial cinema to execute its aesthetic and ideological subversion.

The Streaming Taxonomy Breakdown

The industrial placement and formal synthesis of *Bulbbul* ultimately culminated in a total breakdown of streaming taxonomy, further exposing the obsolescence of traditional film categorization. Because the film bypassed the physical theater entirely to debut as a "Netflix Original," it was immediately liberated from the conservative regulatory oversight of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) in India- a state censorship apparatus that historically cuts or softens explicit depictions of sexual violence, political subversion, and structural critiques of religious or patriarchal institutions. The streaming platform provides an alternative digital space where the radical thematic depth of parallel cinema can be expressed without compromise, while simultaneously endowing the text with a global distribution reach that far exceeds the historical capacity of the parallel film festival circuit.

This institutional shift results in an acute categorization failure for the media critic. *Bulbbul* cannot be categorized as independent or "indie" cinema in the traditional sense, as its institutional backing, marketing machinery, and premium production values are directly tied to a multinational media conglomerate. Yet, it cannot be categorized as Bollywood because it actively rejects the structural pillars of the mainstream industry: it completely lacks a bankable male superstar, features no commercial song-and-dance interruptions, and delivers a narrative that thoroughly destabilizes the conservative family structures that Bollywood historically sanctifies. It exists in an institutional and formal limbo.

While Lobato (2019) has demonstrated that the digital streaming interface operates not as a neutral catalog but as a highly structured, curated space governed by algorithmic curation, its visual layout introduces a unique spatial dynamic. On the modern streaming homepage, historical categories of media classification are effectively flattened out. Independent, avant-garde cinematic text is placed in direct proximity with mass-market commercial entertainment. For the viewer, this interface leveling strips away traditional institutional gatekeeping, allowing high-concept, niche narratives to compete directly for visibility alongside high-budget blockbusters. In this flattened ecosystem, *Bulbbul* establishes an entirely new mode of engagement. It does not fit the historical description of middle cinema because it refuses to compromise on visual grandiosity or settle for an everyday, domestic realism. Instead, it creates a new, liquid genre: a high-budget, star-produced, streaming-centric gothic avant-garde. Ultimately, *Bulbbul* demonstrates that the Post-Parallel Turn is characterized by a complete structural breakdown where the economic backend of global corporate distribution and the

radical aesthetics of independent artistic practice are no longer mutually exclusive, but are instead synthesized to redraw the boundaries of what contemporary Indian cinema can achieve.

Conclusion

The structural and formal trajectories of *Tamasha* (2015) and *Bulbbul* (2020) provide a definitive, historical answer to the crisis of classification in contemporary Indian film studies. When evaluating the current state of classification, it is evident that the field has entered an era of liquid cinema. Categorization can no longer function as a static taxonomy of separate boxes- where a film is labeled “Bollywood” based on its budget, or “Independent” based on its political deviance. Instead, the Post-Parallel Turn demonstrates that the financial backend and the on-screen aesthetic have collapsed into a singular, fluid site of negotiation. Production has emerged as an active praxis- an ideological methodology through which creators systematically weaponize the material realities of casting, corporate finance, and global streaming networks to engineer spaces of artistic transgression that the traditional studio system would otherwise forbid. By analyzing these shifts, this paper has demonstrated that the historical binaries that once safely organized Indian cinema- such as the neat polarities between Satyajit Ray and Manmohan Desai, or later, Anurag Kashyap and Karan Johar- have been rendered functionally obsolete. *Tamasha* proves that a film can inhabit the very center of corporate Bollywood luxury, using major star currency and studio capital to deliver a deeply fractured, existentialist critique of late-stage capitalism. Conversely, *Bulbbul* proves that a boutique production house like Clean Slate Filmz can capture multinational streaming capital to execute a radical, anti-feudal feminist critique wrapped in a hyper-polished visual luxury that strips independent cinema of its historic material austerity. Ultimately, the Post-Parallel Turn forces a profound methodological shift in how film scholarship must approach the text. Scholars can no longer evaluate a film simply by what is on the screen or who paid for it in isolation; rather, the text must be evaluated through the active, liquid workflows of its assembly. In this new landscape, commercial capital is consistently co-opted to fund its own subversion, while radical, avant-garde aesthetics are scaled up to achieve global visibility on digital interfaces. As the boundaries between the multiplex blockbuster, the streaming original, and the experimental indie continue to dissolve, film studies must abandon its rigid, static labels. Categorization must be understood not as a collection of fixed genres, but as a dynamic, evolving mapping of industrial collisions- proving that in contemporary Indian cinema, the financial transaction has become the very mechanism through which artistic liberation is realized.

References

- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
- Caldwell, J. T. (2008). *Production culture: Industrial reflexivity and critical practice in film and television*. Duke University Press.
- Ganti, T. (2012). *Producing Bollywood: Inside the contemporary Hindi film industry*. Duke University Press.
- Gillespie, M. (1995). *Television, ethnicity and cultural change*. Routledge.
- Gopalan, L. (2002). *Cinema of interruptions: Action genres in contemporary Indian cinema*. British Film Institute.
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York University Press.
- Lobato, R. (2019). *Netflix nations: The geography of digital distribution*. New York University Press.
- Mehta, R. B. (2020). *Unruly cinema: History, politics, and bollywood*. University of Illinois Press.
- Mini, D. S. (2024). Indian pandemic entertainment: Aesthetics and infrastructure. In V.

Mayer, M. Banks, & N. Lavi (Eds.), *Media industries in crisis: What COVID unmasked* (pp. 110–119). Routledge.

Prasad, M. M. (1998). *Ideology of the Hindi film: A historical construction*. Oxford University Press.

Rajadhyaksha, A. (2009). *Indian cinema in the time of celluloid: From Bollywood to the emergency*. Indiana University Press.

Films

Ali, Imtiaz, director. *Tamasha*. Performance by Ranbir Kapoor and Deepika Padukone, Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment / UTV Motion Pictures, 2015.

Dutt, Anvita, director. *Bulbbul*. Clean Slate Filmz / Netflix, 2020. *Netflix*, www.netflix.com.

Bio-note

Sufiya Ansari is an Assistant Professor (Gazetted) in the Department of Higher Education, Government of Madhya Pradesh (on EOL - LWP for higher studies). She is pursuing her Ph.D. as a UGC Junior Research Fellow in the Department of English, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi. Her research articles have been published in *Chalchitra Sameeksha*, *Dabeer*, and other prominent platforms, and she has presented her work at national and international conferences.

Email Id: ansari74852000@gmail.com

ORCID Id: 0009-0001-7898-413X

