

“Quit India”

“Quit India”:

The Image of the Indian Patriot on Commercial British Film and Television, 1956-1985

By

Dror Izhar

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2011
The present binding published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-7740-9

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-7740-4

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO MY PARENTS, THE LATE ZVI IZHAR AND
BELOVED HANNA IZHAR, ISRAELI PATRIOTS WHOSE LOVE OF ISRAEL,
DESPITE THEIR CRITICISM, AND TO A GREAT EXTENT MY OWN CRITICISM
RELATING TO ITS CONDUCT, SEEPED DEEPLY INTO THIS BOOK.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book could not have been written if it had not been for the patience and help of two men. Professor of History, Shlomo Sand, of the Zalman Aran School of History at Tel Aviv University contributed to the initial formulation of my work. Yet I am most grateful to Professor Frank Stern, whose advice, wisdom, infinite patience, historical sagacity, love of cinema and understanding of the history of cinema and history of Europe, helped me greatly in writing this study.

My job as an assistant librarian at the Tel Aviv Cinemateque and Israeli Film Institute provided me with access to hundreds of written and visual sources. I am grateful to my colleagues, including Paula Barashi-Coopershmidt, Karine Galor, Reuven Schlossberg, who helped me find films that enriched the thesis—Tom Shoval, The Late Sarah Darom, Malka Papo, Pini Shatz, Alon Garbuz, Talma Cohen, Rachel Nir, Michal Matos, as well as many others at the Tel Aviv Cinemateque who supported me and listened to me both when I grumbled and when I was happy.

The librarians at the British Film Institute and its staff assisted me greatly both in London and later. The list is much too long, but I would like to express my special gratitude to Sean, Tony and many other wonderful people whose assistance was priceless, and it is only due to advanced senility that I cannot remember the names of all the people who helped me.

Many students and doctoral candidates also provided me with assistance: thanks to Dr. Ami Vatori for his wise and wonderful comments, and to Dr. Yvonne Kozlovsky-Golan and Dr. Levana Janine Frank whose support was of great assistance. I would like to thank, from the bottom of my heart, the teaching staff and students in my course British Cinema and National Cinema at Sapir College, for the great pleasure and joint learning experience during the preparation of the course. Enormous thanks to Tammy Orvall, Ruti Falshenberg and my late cousin Yael Lotan for helping translate my feeble academic English into excellent academic English.

And last but not least, thank you CSP, for believing and supporting this project, and especially to Caroline Koulikourdi and Amanda Millar for your patience and support; God knows I needed them both.

My sincere thanks to Mr. David McCall from the BFI for his Visual Contribution to this book and Graham Clarke for his Proofreading.

PREFACE

Said Jaffrey, born in 1929, and Sabu Dastagir (1925–1963), both Muslim Indians who apparently never met, had very different destinies. Dastagir was employed as a groom in the court of a Prince in an “independent” princedom. When he was twelve, Dastagir was discovered by the American documentary filmmaker Robert Flaherty, who directed a feature film in 1936 entitled *Elephant Boy* with Zoltan Korda. Korda and his brother Alexander, a Jewish-Austro-Hungarian-British film producer and director in his own right, turned Sabu into a star. As a child, he was exploited by them and gained recognition and fame in exotic films such as *The Drum* (1938) and thus, in my view, Dastagir was a victim of the British occupation of India. When he reached adulthood, he fought in World War II and won a medal of honor as a pilot. He then moved to Hollywood, where he starred in several insignificant films, and finally died of a heart attack at the age of thirty-eight.

Jaffrey, the son of a doctor, enjoyed the privileges of an education and completed a graduate degree at Allahabad University. He began his career as a presenter and amateur actor, moved to the US, where he specialized in theatre, and then moved to the UK where he was granted citizenship. After many twists and turns, he emerged as a well-respected actor in his adopted homeland, and was awarded the title of Knight of the British Empire for his contribution to British cinema. In 1997, in the musical *My Fair Lady*, he played Colonel Pickering, an army officer who dedicated years of his life to the study of the Urdu language. In the 1950s, Peter Sellers acted in an amusing sketch about an Indian producer who tries to implement the lessons and conclusions drawn from the failure of a production of *My Fair Lady* in India. In the past, casting an Indian for this role was possible only in an amateur production in Oxford or in an Indian college. Jaffrey enjoyed sweet revenge in 1997 when the British applauded and praised his casting as brilliant, and declared that he was the perfect Pickering. In my mind, these two actors represent India and Indians during the struggle for Indian independence. Both belong to the Muslim minority, descendants of Mogul rulers. Jaffrey even played a Muslim ruler in the prestigious television series *The Jewel in the Crown* in 1983. In Richard Attenborough's film *Gandhi* (1982) he played Sardar Vallabhai Patel, an anti-Muslim

Hindi and one of the leaders of the Indian Congress Party, a tough right wing politician who served as the Minister of Interior in Nehru’s government, who was a wealthy and cynical attorney.

Dastagir’s cinematic persona in the film *The Drum* opens the discussion, in the introductory chapter of my book.¹ In this film, directed by Zoltan Korda and filmed in color, several Character Types were set which were influenced by the first significant imperial film, *Sanders of the River* (1935). From this point on, the entire British film industry (as well the British establishment) viewed the rebels involved in the legitimate uprising against British rule as the epitome of iniquity. An example of this attitude is the character of Gul Khan, the uncle of the youthful prince Azim in the film *The Drum*—a dangerous, fascist and opportunistic freedom fighter who exploits other people and plots to slay the British in order to reestablish the tyrannical Mogul empire. In the film there are two types of collaborators: one is Prince Azim, a pampered and spoiled youth that must undergo a journey of purification and degradation in order to attain enlightenment i.e. collaboration with the British. Another is the responsible and mature Prince Mohammad, who has already attained enlightenment and bravely defies the enemies of the empire as personified by Gul.

If we observed, on the one hand, the traditional-establishment interpretation that defined the collaborator as a good Indian patriot, than on the other hand the film presents the character and voice of the ideal occupational rule in the eyes of the industry and establishment, personified in the film *The Drum* by the character of Captain Curruthers, the embodiment of the ideal officer and benefactor of British rule. His attitude towards Azim is that of a surrogate father. He is courageous, honest, has a sense of humor, is fair and decent, tolerant and humane, and loves India and Indians with all his heart, but fights the Indian patriot in order to eradicate any attempt at independent and individual thought. His motives are portrayed as legitimate in all British Empire films throughout the 1930s, as are his pretensions of providing a father figure preparing the natives for political maturity. These characters will continue to star in British Empire films for twenty-eight years—why?

¹ Korda—see further on in the Introduction chapter; Jaffrey—see later in The Introduction chapters D and E. Some sources referred to Sabu as Selar Shaik Sabu.

The reasons stem from the non-white immigration into British society during the de-colonization that occurred in parallel to Britain's loss of its imperial assets following the war and the failure of the Suez Campaign in 1956. These were the two factors that, in my view, firmly fixed the characters that I will discuss in the first chapter of my thesis, dealing with British Empire films from 1956 to 1958. The films that will be reviewed—*Bhowani Junction* (1956) and *Northwest Frontier* (1958)—differ from one another. The former was directed by an American Jew, George Cukor, written by a naturalized American Austrian (Ivan Moffat), with most of its actors, with the exception of the female lead, and film crew being British. The film was shot in Britain and India, was considered a British film (due to the interior scenes filmed in Britain), and was based on a bestselling novel with the same name written by John Masters, a novelist who served in India. This film and *Northwest Frontier*, directed by Jack Lee Thompson, are action adventure films dealing with half-casts.

Yet if in Cukor's film these are dangerous people who need constant instruction from the British officer, then in *Northwest Frontier* the half-breed is an evil Muslim patriot fighting the British using despicable means. These two films, directed by the Jewish-American Cukor and the British Thompson, demonstrate the exacerbation of racism among the petit-bourgeois proletariat in Britain in this period, fanned during the expansion of Imperialism throughout the Victorian era. This hatred was expressed in grave incidents of pogroms against Indian and black immigrants that occurred the year that *Northwest Frontier* was released.

The second chapter summarizes British attitudes and public opinion towards decolonization at the beginning of the 1960s. A film that represents these attitudes is an adventure bordering on horror film: *The Strangers of Bombay* (1960), by Terrence Fisher, tells a historic tale of the repression of an extreme Hindi sect who worshiped the goddess Kali, committed to the robbery and murders of Indians, and later also the British. The helpless employees of the East India Company are assisted by informers, former sect members and Indian soldiers, who infiltrate the sect's strongholds to exterminate members. The film bolsters and reinforces the sense of paranoia, as it depicts the Indian population as collaborating with sect members, or as helpless as the British. It is only the resourcefulness of the British Intelligence officer, standing up against the unyielding British establishment, which succeeds in destroying the nefarious sect; by the way, the half-caste continues to constitute a threat in this film as well.

The second part of the study deals with the transformation that occurred in the image of the Indian patriot in empire films, and the third chapter—“But I Didn't Want to be a Devil in a Skirt”—deals with two films that were neglected by researchers and overlooked by general criticism. The first is *The Long Duel* (1967) directed by Ken Annakin. Based on a real story, with the star being a Sultan, the film details a good and patriotic Indian, a noble, humane, a devoted father and husband, who is forced to fight the British who imprison, for unseemly motives, members of his tribe. The patriotic head of the tribe is portrayed, for the first time, not by a British supporting actor, who until that time traditionally depicted patriotic Indian villains, but rather by an American star (Yul Brynner), opposing two officers—Freddy Young, a humanist, tolerant officer who resists the racist and intractable policy that is represented by his former superior Miles Stafford (whose daughter Jane supports him and constitutes an antithesis of women who supported the officers who fought the patriots).

The second film is a mad and vulgar comedy entitled: *Carry on ... Up the Khyber Pass* (1968) directed by Gerald Thomas. The film, a box office hit among cinemagoers that year, describes a rebellion by vile Indian patriots from north-west India against the brave British, with the pretext being totally ridiculous. The very fact that this comedy was a box office hit is greatly indicative of the transformation in the taste of audiences that had internalized the decolonization process.

The last two chapters deal with the deepening of the transformation during an interesting period of British history—Thatcherism of the 1980s.

Chapter D deals with literary adaptations of the bestselling novel *The Jewel in the Crown* by Paul Scott, a soldier in World War II who died before his four books of *The Raj Quartet* were adapted into a very successful, high quality commercial television series in Britain in 1983. The series deals with the conflict between occupied Indians and occupying British, through fascinating love stories in India and their tragic, non-realized results. The second and controversial adaptation by David Lean of the canonical novel written in 1924 by EM Forster *A Passage to India* (1985). The novel was a scathing indictment of the British occupation rule through a story that occurs in a fictitious city in India occupied by the British. A blameless Muslim doctor is implicated in a libelous rape accusation (which we are not sure actually occurred), with the accuser being a young British woman engaged to marry a Magistrate court judge in the city, who came to see the “Real India” and understand the situation

of the British and Indians during this period. With the exception of the Director of a British College, who courageously opposes the provincial-racist British community verging on paranoia, the doctor has no one in the occupying establishment willing to come to his rescue. The trauma caused by the trial turns him into a proud Muslim nationalist, instead of a bootlicking and subservient Indian attempting to find favor with the British occupation.

Chapter E deals with the biography of Mahatma Gandhi directed by Sir Richard Attenborough, which is the final seal of approval in the Acceptance of the Indian patriot. I describe the process of acceptance and opinions for and against with an emphasis on Gandhi not as a saint, but as a skilled and experienced politician, a multi-faceted individual who knew how to maneuver between numerous types of dialogs in order to promote his objectives.

This research utilizes diverse means including first hand and secondary sources, analysis of novels that served as the basis for films, dialogs from scripts, film reviews about these films, memoirs and biographies of actors and directors who participated in and created these cinematic creations, in an attempt to answer six overlapping, related and interwoven questions:

- (a) How is the “other” portrayed in British culture?
- (b) Did colonialism continue to exist in Britain as a cultural condition or phenomena even after its political demise?
- (c) What happens when political / cultural / social circumstances cause a value based transformation in British public opinion depicted in British films or Anglo-American co-productions during the said periods?
- (d) Did this transformation contribute to a renewed understanding of the non-white “other,” whose religion and background is different and who immigrated to Britain, and did this transformation result in an understanding of the non-white cultures from which these others originated?
- (e) What happens to public memory, its agents and channels, when a colonial state changes, at once, from a country with a homogenous population, culture and social-ethnic composition (principally white and Christian) into a heterogeneous country?
- (f) The sixth question, which stems from the first two, deals with the manifest and latent tension between fiction and historical facts (mainly with respect to the biography that depicted Gandhi's life)

and whether, as a result of the homogenous change in the metropolis state, i.e. Britain, there is also a transformation in values that takes into consideration the real interpretation?

In other words, did non-white immigration now make a more sympathetic film about a patriotic Indian, such as Gandhi, possible?

Did white racism that continued, to some extent, to be part of British society in the 1950s, enable intentional historical distortion, as is the case of the film *The Strangers of Bombay*?

I hope to answer these six questions in this study. I would like to state that the study does not deal with the history of British society, politics and cinema in general, but rather refers only to the specified films and their literary sources, as far as possible. The study deals with the reactions of British cinema and television to one episode in Britain’s annals—its colonial past.

For the same reason, I did not refer extensively to the history of British imperialism over the centuries or its specific history in India, from the 18th century until 1947. There are many worthy and important studies and theses about these issues, and there are also many such studies about British cinema and television.

A SHORT EXPLANATION REGARDING COMMON SENSE AND RECEPTION STUDIES

Since, I refer in this book to two cultural theories, each will need a brief introduction.

Common Sense is a cultural process defined in the early 1920s by Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist statesman and scholar who founded the Italian communist party with Antonio Negri and others. His writings were rather obscure until the 1960s, and today he is considered an innovator in many academic spheres.

The term refers to a delayed intellectual process, which allows the average person to digest truth, be they social, scientific, cultural or otherwise. By operating this cultural process, we enter the realm of “folklore,” in which all these known truths comfortably become norms, self evident facts.

British colonialism, for instance, was already an established known fact, while the de-colonialization was not.

It is logical, in my opinion, that resisting this new historical and socio-political phenomenon, coupled with the new process of non-white immigration, would react harmfully with the average British Common Sense.

Therefore, a movie like *North West Frontier* or *The Strangers of Bombay* further strengthened the racial feelings, thus allowing Common Sense to supply a comfortable psychological succour, entrench the arrogant white British person’s collective feeling, and in a roundabout way (such as the case with *North West Frontier*) even inflame racial riots.

It is precisely for this reason that the 1964 British election and the social-cultural changeovers created new paths to renew Common Sense. If in the late 1940 to 1950s there was a reaffirmation of the colonial order which had flourished a century earlier, there is now a new Common Sense. This process acknowledges the existence of the third world, concedes that

colonialism was a cardinal sin, and allows for new cultural interpretations, and means that work such as Paul Scott's *The Jewel in the Crown* series (1966–1975) and a true milestone movie like *The Long Duel* (1967) could be written and made in this era. It's inconceivable to assume that such artistic works would be commercially and artistically successful in 1954 or 1958, the year that *Bhowani Junction* by John Masters was published, and *North West Frontier* was made. To put it simply, there was no audience to see or read them in great numbers. In 1966 and 1967, the average British person was readily absorbing anti-colonial works.

In the 1980s Thatcherism was a socio-cultural movement which fought hard to reverse Common Sense back to pre-1964, and is why we can witness the lack of satirical bite in David Lean's adaptation of the 1924 classic *A Passage to India* (1984), while *Gandhi* (1982) epitomized the 1960's Common Sense in all its splendour.

If Common Sense studies the cultural and social acceptance of breakthroughs and changeovers in all spheres of life, starting from political changeover and ending in fashion, then Reception Studies is a study of interpretation.

Beginning with a breakthrough study by Professor Anthony Bennett regarding the success of Ian Fleming's James Bond series, and continuing to the study of different cultural and artistic projects, from canonical books to comics and internet bloggers, this theory offers to us a cohesive and even sensible outlook of a very elusive meaning of interpretation.

Reception Theory might address such questions as: how one does explain the intricacies of a Dickens book, if one is an Arab? How does an average person understand *Gone with the Wind*, the book or the movie? It can be illustrated through the different interpretive readings, Indian and British, to two artistic projects in two different decades. *The Drum* and *Gandhi*. Indians read these cinematic texts in different way than the British critics and filmgoers read them at the time. In 1938, the illiterate Indian (Pathans to be exact) saw the racial undertones in Zoltan Korda's film, and their indignation engulfed both Hindus and Muslims into political agitation which effectively banned the Indian release of the film.

Nearly five decades later, Salman Rushdie and Sumitra Chakravarty, both Indian immigrants albeit from different religious backgrounds, a well known author and an Indian-American theorist-historian, criticized Richard

Attenborough's *Gandhi* and offered radically different interpretations. British reviewers such as David Robinson in *The Times* regarded it as a noble work, while Rushdie in a scathing tongue-in-cheek attitude attacks the film in the same paper as a misguided hagiography, an article which brought about a no less severe return attack from the director himself. Chakravarty, in a book dedicated to Bollywood cinema, wrote a special chapter addressing the national Indian element in this film and how it helped to smooth and indeed to erase all the unpleasant sides of the Mahatma Gandhi by bringing forth evidence of the Indian government's enthusiastic involvement in the project and her personal interpretation. Thus an author writing a daily newspaper and an academic writing a book provide us with examples of Reception Studies, its importance, its modes and significant contribution to this book.

PART A.
AN INTRODUCTION

**“I REFUSE TO BETRAY MY FRIENDS”:
BRITISH EMPIRE FILMS DURING THE 1930S**

CHAPTER ONE

BRITISH EMPIRE FILMS IN THE 1930s: CONTEMPORARY VIEWS

In *British Genres: Cinema and Society*, Professor Marsha Landy defines British Empire films as movies that celebrate the patriotism and myths of national identity; they are examples of the most nationalist of films.¹

Soundtrack production also enabled the intensification of new nationalist content in the film industry. Moreover, the 1930s strengthened the confidence of public opinion the British government planted one hundred years earlier at the beginning of the Victorian era. Again, it was this Victorianism, cloaked in liberalism and caring, that caused the mentality of the Prime Ministers, ministers, governors, heads of the army and police and civilian clerks to permeate all levels of society who still had not found enough political power to free themselves from their status discomfort. The simplistic viewpoint at that time maintained that British control was a big white father instructing his little children, the non-white natives, to be responsible.

If anyone dared ask the simple question “when will they be given the responsibility to govern themselves?”, the answer would be unanimously thundered by the Government, the Press, the movies and most certainly the average person in the United Kingdom through the better part of the 1920s and 30s (and of course naively maintained by the mandated policy of the League of Nations). Being backward and primitive, owing to their education and social upbringing, was at the heart of this. These Natives were not educated enough politically or socially (let alone culturally) to assume a modicum of Independence. They, this argument continued- even

¹ Marcia Landy, *British Genres: Cinema and Society, 1930–1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 2, 39, 97–110. Landy hypothesized that these same British Empire films lacked the ability to survive financially in Britain. The public was not attracted to these films, even if they were commercially successful, because they were defeated by more successful categories issued by the American film industry, such as the Western.

under the pretense of specific difficulties, cannot be granted independence. The European Civilization (British) took years of Trial and Errors, to achieve its superiority, embraced new theories, modified its Policy through a patient and painstaking process to become a democracy. The Europeans (British), solved the Democratic Mysteris long ago, and naturally, this formed part of the British government's answer; it set the public opinion in Britain regarding the legitimate desires of the occupied areas' party leaders who wanted freedom and independence. It also blocked the United States President Wilson's idea of self-determination, coined following the First World War, and upon which they based their request for independence.

In the case of India, these difficulties derived largely from British initiatives such as inter-religious tensions between the Hindi majority, Sikh minority, and vociferous Muslim minority. An offspring of the Mogul Occupiers, it was by now assimilated into the Indian population but became a bitter and faltering minority, separated by socio- religious habits from the Hindi majority.

The camp heads during those days were Mohandas Karmanchand Gandhi (1869–1948), the leader of the "Indian National Congress" party (ICP). He was a social conservative and humanist who initiated the anti-violence movement against the British. The head of the Socialist branch of the Party, who sometimes disagreed with him and sometimes cooperated with him, was the pragmatist, Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964); he was the head of the party and Prime Minister of India until his death. And finally, Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1875–1948), who was previously active in this party until he left and became a Muslim separatist and Head of "The Muslim League," the opposition to congress.

The empire movie generally emphasized expansion and construction, as Landy states:

The empire film translated expansionism, colonization and commerce into a spectacle of benevolence of high-minded heroes, acting in the name of Royal prerogatives, culture, against anarchy, and the white man's burden.

In this genre, the social position of the British hero is highlighted. He is a man of important status with specific values characteristic of that same status, as well as the primary agent of the Empire—the British government. A common hero, depended on by his work staff (army officers, administrative clerks etc.). He controls internal politics and the

territories under British occupation and is described by Landy as possessing two essences:

... either he is unswerving in his commitments and dedicated to the mission of providing responsible law, order, and a system of morality based on British values, or he undergoes a conversion, whereby he discovers the imperatives of the British imperial project after having questioned or evade his responsibility.²

The natives can be divided into the three following types:

- (a) The redeemer, turned by promises of land and power to cooperation with the British
- (b) Those faithful from the start to the British Master, and
- (c) The miscreant, lacking a conscience, who wants for selfish cold and power-imposing purposes, to exempt himself from British authority.

The Empire is presented as the supplier of justice, wisdom and peace, while the enemy is violent, wild, with a presence that must be removed in order that peace can reign once again. Landy comments that certain characteristics of these movies are that:

The ritualized and individualized confrontation of the protagonist with the enemies of Civilization is also altered. The British protagonist not only seeks to avoid conflict and to solve problems with the aid of the law.

The way in which the white woman presented in these films can be separated into three prototypes:

The white woman who is related to the garrison commander and affianced, if not married, to the protagonist, the daughter of the explore or adventurer lost in the depths of the Wilderness who comes to free her father and

² The hero's position brings him, Landy argues, to adhere to the community consensus, although in the Empire films he will function as a community agent. A second cause that distorts reality is violence, a factor always presented in these movies as a direct function of the natives, not of the government (European foreigners also join them, many of whom are neurotic, money hungry British men that directly incite the natives). The Western differs in that it is more democratic in its view of the white hero.

enlists the aid of the Protagonist, and the Native woman who is an ally of the chief Antagonist and a troublemaker.

Women in Empire films live and integrate within the community—they never appear as prostitutes and/or the lovers of the simple soldier. In relation to the natives, they are either an obedient body lacking in individualism, interested in the white man's arrival to the place, or exotic dancers, unless this is the bad woman asking a favor from the native scoundrel. As a prerequisite to action sequences, there is always at least one dance by the natives in the colonial movies; we will not delve deeply into their character and behavior, as: "... The effects of colonialism are seen in the ways in which the people accept or resist the decrees of the administrator."

The movies show a timeless world, primitive in which the singular change that occurs within is a violent one. The natives begin a rebellion that is immediately suppressed by the British and then "restores the authority of the British rulers and the primacy of British Civilization over the indigenous culture."³

In reality, the British Empire is predisposed toward a view of the Commonwealth maintaining independent countries that unify under the British crown. The films do not show this, but in Landy's opinion, they express the confrontation between those of privileged status, who connect their fate with that of the white British government, and those without control whose origins are in the lower classes, in a violent and subversive manner. These positions are disguised and, in fact, the discussion is about white masculinity, an aspect of the traditional family unit's construction, and not the question of division of control in regards to the independence of the natives.⁴

Sarah Street, a historian of British film, writes that the 1930s actually mark the death of traditional colonialism. In the beginning of the period, Empire movies drew large crowds to the box offices of Britain and: "Focused on the male experience, of [the] empire; usually from an upper-class

³ Ibid., 98–99. On the subject of the Indian woman, Landy comments: "In the Indian films dancers are usually female and serve as a distraction from the intrigue that takes place 'during the performance'."

⁴ Ibid., 99–100. Street also makes similar comments, although she deals more with British society. Study to follow.

imperialist perspective. The 'White Man's Burden' was to maintain order and inculcate native obedience in the colonies ..."⁵

Professor Jeffrey Richards clarifies minimally about the sympathy felt by the government, its Parliamentary representatives and, in fact, the entire public, from the middle class, the workers, and parts of the upper class concerning the film industry.⁶ From here, it is also clear why there was political significance to these films for the government and to what degree the producers requested to make as many films of this type as possible.⁷

British Empire film—the Indian Interpretation

The historian Prem Chowdhry argues that the racist outlook of the white British, masculine in nature and supreme over the controlled Indian race, existed in the cultural recipe since the institutions of the nineteenth century, beginning in literature, journalistic writings, illustrations and plays.⁸ Altogether, these did not equal the visual power of the American or British Empire films that showed viewers a specific imperial identity. Britain and Hollywood operated under a common denominator, and with parallel images and ideas. Ideals were, in practice and in principle, tools in the hands of interest holders who wanted to safeguard the imperial

⁵ Sarah Street, *British National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1997), 36–40. The imperial movie was born within a double consensus: that a film is an efficient tool for every purpose, primarily as propaganda for specific ideas that the government wants to spread, and a consensus that erases the native as a serious person with patriotic intentions and desires that are inconsistent with his British master.

⁶ Jeffrey Richards and James Curran, "Patriotism with Profit: British Imperial Cineman of the 1930s" in *British Cinema History*, eds. James Curran and Vincent Porter (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1983), 245–256. This was the conclusion that a committee of the Agriculture Minister, Lord Moyne, decided in 1936 in one of many reports that dealt with the significance of British nationalist cinema. He gave an example of this: "The cinematograph film is today one of the most widely used means for the amusement of the public at large. It is also undoubtedly a most important factor in the education of all classes of the community, in the spread of national culture and in presenting national ideas and customs to the world."

⁷ Ibid. Moreover, there is an almost inexhaustible potential, the committee asserts, to tailor ideas about the enormous number of people to whom the film cinema spread and he concluded that "the propaganda value of the film cannot be overemphasized."

⁸ Prem Chowdhry, *Colonial India And The Making Of Cinema Image, Ideology and Identity* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000), 1–8, 9–27 and 68–72.

point of view. Until 1945, the visual content in these films emphasized a portrayal of the British as completely personifying the culture of the Western white world.

The conclusion according to Chowdhry's findings is that cinema functions as an important stage in the process of British Common Sense/ Folklore. In her opinion, the success of imperial movies in this decade derived from two things:

- (a) Their promotion to a very specific viewing population—the unemployed and the lower classes in order to create identification with the Empire and to feel a patriotic sense of pride in their country's achievements
- (b) To divert attention from the class contradictions within their society, with the purpose of ratifying the representation tradition for law and order, a system that created the status quo in Britain and its territories.⁹

In India itself, the British tried to institutionalize an education system that failed, and actually caused a continually contradictory situation because "like any other literary and cultural texts, the Empire films reveal the contradictions of the social formation in which they were located and produced."

The Indian researcher argues that if we take into account that ideological and market powers exist, and do not exactly meld well together, then this same clash frequently also exists in Empire films. The role of the British films was not to introduce a united India into the national view, but rather to emphasize its heterogeneity and divisions, thus hinting at the potential social and political disturbances in India only a British presence could neutralize.¹⁰

The Indians quickly realized the meaning of this narrative. They started a series of political reactions that challenged the validity of the imperial philosophy, which went against their ideological conceptions. The reaction

⁹ Ibid., 1–3. In a parenthetical clause, I will note that there are also good reasons for Hollywood's "common sense."

¹⁰ Ibid., 1 and 4–6, 9–27. The researcher claims that within the colonial weaving there is the possibility of creating anti-colonial, subversive themes.

came after the Indian Law was legislated in 1935, which gave restricted freedom of speech and protest, but was sufficient in helping these viewers to express their objection to the films. This escalated to the point that the British movie *The Drum* (1938) and the American *Gunga Din* (1939) were willingly boycotted in India. In summary, Chowdhry concludes that these films indicated an important cultural change in the British countries relating to the images of the British and the natives, and to the nuances that exist between the colonial society and Cinema.¹¹

In principle, there is truth to Landy and Chowdhry's position, while Street and Richards describe a social situation. Indeed, Landy also bases her points of view on the Gramscian principles of the structure of Common Sense/Folklore logic, while Chowdhry incorporates the principle of the "subaltern studies" theory which argues that the conquered have a unique voice of their owner.

In spite of this, a man by the name of Alexander Korda tried with unstoppable success to awaken interest in the British Empire during the same years, attempting to influence public opinion by promoting the British government, revealing enthusiasm in the renewed imperial initiative of that decade.

Sir Alexander Korda, producer and director (1893–1956) and his director brother Zoltan (1895–1961) were two of the prominent names in designing the Empire film. A native of Hungary, Alexander became a citizen of England in 1933 and established London Films. Other immigrants, including his two brothers who came with him to London, joined the permanent staff. His films won international acclaim. Mainly they were imperial adventure films with an either candid or hidden tone, comedies and historical films, some of which he directed and most of which he produced. Korda became a zealous Conservative—a financial and professional supporter of the party, he produced and directed election films as well as pro-conservative news dailies. He made many connections with its leaders. In specific cases, he even employed the rebellious sons of the same party who had protested against the conciliation with the Nazis such as Lord Robert Vansittart, who worked as a screenwriter in the movie

¹¹ Ibid., 89. *Gunga Din* directed and produced by the American George Stevens. An example of objections can be found in T.L. Acharya's article "This Unending Slander," see *Hindustani Times* April 4, 1938; reprinted from *Journal of Motion Picture of India*.

"Ninety Years of Glory" (1936), or Winston Churchill who worked as a historical advisor in several of the brothers' Empire films.

On the other hand, Zoltan consistently albeit privately, supported the left, but publicly (and in this was no exception to other Labour well wishers) he was an imperialist through and through. Throughout his Imperial Trilogy, he supported his brother's conservative ideas, and even the most astute interpreter could not detect any subversive leftist ideals behind the visual & cerebral cinematic texts. The scriptwriters were conservative Jewish immigrants with bourgeois backgrounds, or proper British natives that belonged to the upper-middle class. From here historian Roy Armes knows that their films: "... reside in a never-never land of tired imagination. None the less, an examination of the underlying ideology of Korda's work is of interest since it forms an example of the remoteness of 1930s British cinema from the real preoccupations of its audience."¹²

¹² Roy Armes, *A Critical History of British Cinema* (Oxford: Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd, 1978), 113–126.

CHAPTER TWO

A PROTOTYPE OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE FILM: *SANDERS OF THE RIVER* (1935)

Marcia Landy's views

There are certain essential components of the imperial adventure genre: unconditional praise for white control, emphasis on stereotypes of the “other,” and attitudes related to the control relationship between whites and natives. The protagonist of *Sanders of the River* (1935), Commissioner R.G. Sanders, represents the good administrator, educated in a private school, with pious values of fair play, responsibility and obligation: “he rules over the natives not only like a father but also as a surrogate for the king of England.”¹

Captain Curruthers is his equivalent in *The Drum* (1938), and characters in other works can be seen to take a comparative role: Officer Rodney Savage in the film version of *Bhowani Junction* (1956), John Scott and his civilian parallel Mr. Bridie in *North West Frontier* (1958) and the spiritual grandfather, Captain Lewis, the EIC man in *The Strangers of Bombay* (1960).

¹ Marcia Landy, *British Genres* 101–2. In the movies of 1967 there would be images that were more humane, contemporary and subversive, and criticized the occupying regime to which they had faith. Examples of this are Freddie Young, the humanist police officer in *The Long Duel* (1967); the Anglican priest Charlie Andrews in *Gandhi* (1982); Fielding, the character of author E.M. Forster in the romantic movie *A Passage to India* (1985); and the character of a different author, Paul Scott, the sergeant Guy Perron in the television series *The Jewel in the Crown* (1983). It should be noted, that there are whites craving profit in this movie, taking advantage of the natives, inciting them to fight with Sanders who is naturally the symbol of British rulers, and for that insolence are punished with death. The evil whites (one of them is an Italian and the other British), compared unfavorably with the governor in Africa who was placed there not for profit, but for humanistic purposes. A criticism of this type exists only in one movie: *North West Frontier*.