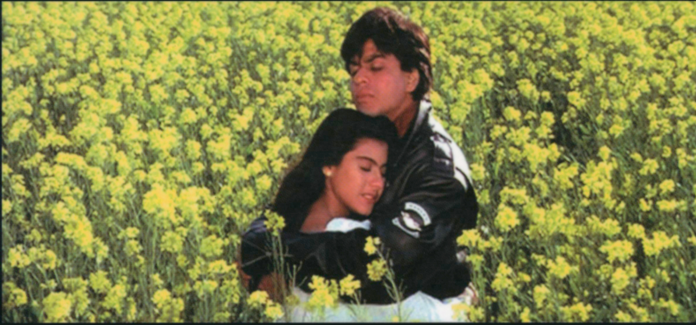


Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge

दिलवाले दुल्हनिया ले जायेंगे

Anupama Chopra



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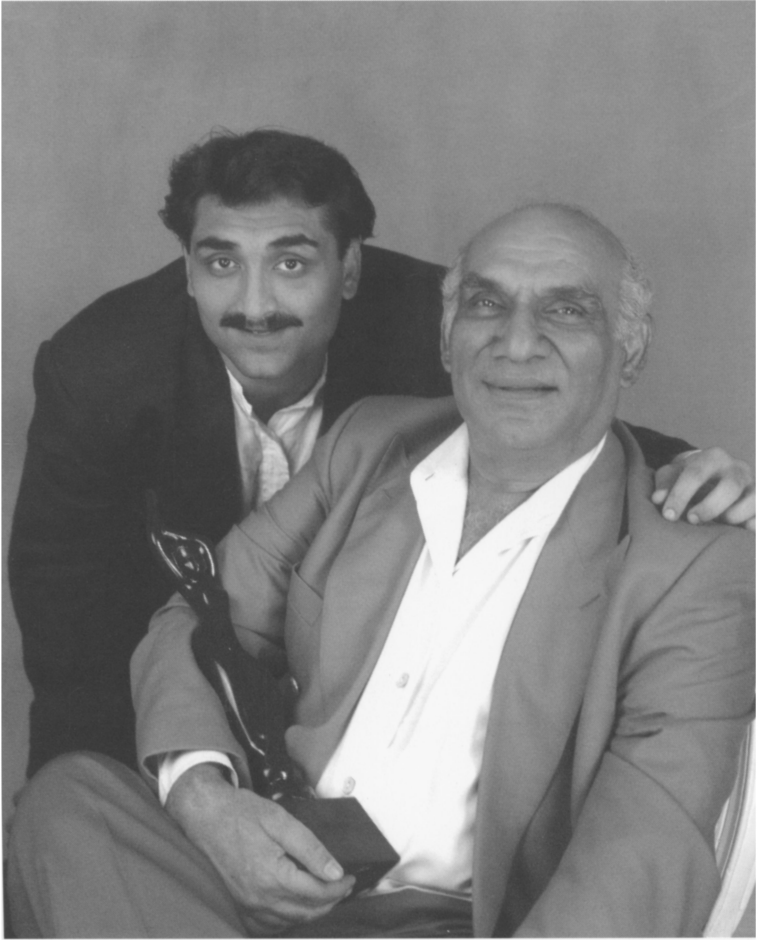
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Aditya and Yash Chopra (© Yash Raj Films)

Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge
(The Brave-hearted Will Take the Bride)

दिलवाले दुल्हनिया ले जायेंगे

Anupama Chopra

For Vinod

'Tujhe dekha to yeh jana sanam'

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1 'Terah ka tees': The DDLJ Phenomenon

'*Terah ka tees, terah ka tees, terah ka tees,*' the black-marketeers are muttering under their breath. On a humid Sunday morning at the Maratha Mandir theatre in Mumbai, their business is to make sure that no one goes away disappointed. A blackboard on the balcony ticket widow announces: 'This show is sold out'. But the black-marketeers repeat their patter urgently: the 13-rupee ticket is still available, for only 30 rupees. When a customer bites, they shuffle into a corner to conduct business. Five of them, holding ten tickets each, work the crowd under the shifty gaze of their boss, Kundan. He's been in the trade for three decades and knows every move.

The Maratha Mandir cinema hall, inaugurated on 16 October 1958, has a thousand seats. It is located in a predominantly Muslim area in South Central Mumbai, where towering modern buildings stand next to ramshackle shops and mills. That scalpers are plying their trade here isn't surprising. In a movie-mad country, where 11,962-odd¹ cinemas satisfy the viewing appetites of 12 million people daily,² scalpers aren't just the norm, they are a necessity. One way the film industry gauges the success of a film is by what the black market prices tickets at – for big star cast movies, a 100-rupee ticket can sell for ten times more.³

What's surprising is that the black-marketeers are still doing business for this movie. A film's black market, much like hype, deflates



A poster outside the Maratha Mandir announces the phenomenon (© Yash Raj Films)



Crowds queue outside the Maratha Mandir theatre

rapidly in the weeks after its release, sometimes within days. The more successful films might have black-marketeers doing business for a few months. But *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (*The Brave-hearted Will Take the Bride*) has been running continuously in theatres for more than six years. 'It's a first-grade picture,' Kundan says with the jaded expertise of a man who has seen a thousand films fail, 'that's why the public still comes.'

Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge, universally known as *DDLJ*, is the longest running film in the history of Indian cinema. Since its release on 20 October 1995, the film has run in hundreds of theatres in India and abroad. It has been telecast 12 times⁴ and is available in video, VCD and DVD versions. But fans still throng to the theatre. Almost every week a new Hindi film is released,⁵ but the audience faithfully flocks back to *DDLJ*, to partake in this familiar pleasure.

Watching *DDLJ* at Maratha Mandir is like participating in communal karaoke, or a performance of a well-known mythological play in a village square. As the story unfolds, the audience cheers, mouths dialogue, and sings with the songs. It is unlikely that anyone is seeing it for the first time. In fact, some people may have seen it 15, 20, even 30 times. Kundan says that they come 'to do time-pass', pass their time in an inexpensive,⁶ air-conditioned, entertaining way. He talks of regulars who come every day. 'I've never seen such a craze for a film.'

In 2001, *DDLJ* broke the continuous-exhibition record of *Sholay* (*Embers*, 1975), the film industry's previous benchmark, which had run