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Hollywood biggies partner with Bollywood to improve distribution and reach

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Article Content:

Hollywood's relationship with Bollywood is evolving. Instead of studios funding Indian films, individual American filmmakers are collaborating with local producers, aiming to improve international distribution and global visibility.

Martin Scorsese recently served as executive producer on Dharma Productions' *Homebound*, while Michael Bay is set to collaborate with Vinod Bhanushali's Bhanushali Studios. Industry experts say these tie-ups are designed to expand the global reach of Indian films, especially those with potential on the festival and awards circuit. While such international names typically share in profits, they usually do not hold intellectual property rights alongside Indian producers.

Given that the objective is global visibility rather than ownership, such collaborations can even be informal. In the past, Hollywood director James Cameron publicly backed SS Rajamouli's *RRR*, while Oscar-winning composer

Hans Zimmer is set to co-compose music for the upcoming mythological epic *Ramayana*.

Creative validation

“These are projects where mentors and curators such as these international names can help, given that Indian producers can only do so much in terms of new stories and tapping new markets,” said Yusuf Shaikh, film producer and distributor, and founder and chief executive of low-cost theatre chain Janta Cinema.

The presence of [Hollywood](#) names, Shaikh added, helps Indian cinema experiment with new storytelling formats, technology, visual effects and action —especially as audience tastes have evolved post the covid-19 pandemic, with wider exposure to global content via [OTT platforms](#).

At a screening of *Homebound* in New York, Scorsese said he was “waiting for all of America” to watch the film, which is based on a true story. *Homebound* is among the 15 films shortlisted for the 98th Academy Awards for Best International Feature Film.

“Now with the possibility of these films getting streamed and (being available) in theatres, they can be accessible to different cultures,” Scorsese said, calling the film a “terrific” example of Indian independent cinema.

A changed model

The nature of Indo-Hollywood collaboration has clearly evolved. Earlier, US studios entered India through capital-heavy models—co-financing films, distributing content or setting up local arms. Many of these efforts struggled due to structural differences between the Indian and US markets.

[Paramount Global](#) exited India in April 2024 after selling its entire stake in Viacom18 to Mukesh Ambani’s Reliance Industries. Walt Disney shut down Hindi film production in 2016, closing UTV Motion Pictures, and Universal Pictures closed its India office in 2020, with Warner Bros now distributing its Hollywood titles locally.

Low-risk, high-impact

“Now, we are seeing individual filmmakers collaborating at a creative or branding level and not as studios,” said Charu Malhotra, co-founder and managing director at Primus Partners, a management consultancy firm.

"When someone like Martin Scorsese or Michael Bay comes on board, it is less about running the business and more about lending credibility, mentorship or creative alignment."

From a business perspective, the model is low-risk and high-impact, Malhotra said. Hollywood filmmakers do not need to invest capital or understand India's complex distribution system, yet gain exposure to a fast-growing market and new [storytelling](#) voices. Their association can lift a film's valuation, improve overseas rights pricing and help secure better streaming deals.

IP stays home

In most cases, Hollywood collaborators neither invest significant capital nor own IP, industry experts said. The rights usually remain with Indian producers, while the international filmmaker may receive a fee, backend participation, a success-linked bonus or symbolic equity—focused on alignment rather than ownership.

"India is an interesting and growing market for everyone, and they can see the share of Hollywood box office rising in the country," said film producer and trade analyst Girish Johar. "So it only makes sense to have one-on-one conversations or expand footprint."