

# Los Angeles Times

[Entertainment](#)

## [MOVIES](#)

---

---

[24 Frames](#)

Movies: Past, present and future

'Ra.One': Shah Rukh Khan as Bollywood superhero

November 4, 2011 | 4:30 pm



You might not expect an Indian actor to get much attention strolling past the high-end stores on Rodeo Drive. Yet as the Bollywood star Shah Rukh Khan turns the corner to walk into a Beverly Hills hotel on a recent Friday afternoon, Indian nationals materialize out of nowhere to point and stare. Eager onlookers pull out cameras and take photos with him. Even gaggles of white teenage girls gawk — they don't know Khan, but there are few men who could pull off a mod jacket and jet-black ponytail so convincingly.

Brad Pitt and Will Smith may have millions of fans around the world, but Khan — or SRK to the faithful — quantifies his groupies with a few added zeros. He is the biggest movie star you've never heard of. And perhaps the world's biggest movie star, period. In a country of 1.2 billion where movies are a way of life, Khan delights fans with romance, comedy and action, sometimes all in the same movie. (This is Bollywood, after all.)

The actor had come to Los Angeles on a rare publicity trip to promote one of the most important releases of his career, "Ra.One," which opened around the world and in a number of Southland theaters last week. With a budget estimated at \$30 million, the film, directed by the veteran Anubhav Sinha, is touted as the most expensive project in Bollywood history.

"Ra.One" brackets a sweet father-son story around a splashy, effects-driven action tale about a video game designer who finds the real and virtual worlds melding. Amid the latex and the lasers, there is also, needless to say, singing and dancing — think of it as a sort of Indian "Tron."

"We're trying to Bollywoodize the superhero," Khan, half-smiling, said of "Ra.One." (The title is short for Random Access 1.0; if pronounced a certain way, it is also a pun on the Hindu demon Ravan.)

The results thus far have justified the investment. Reviews have been mixed, but "Ra.One's" distributor estimates that the picture already had grossed more than it cost to make, taking in \$35 million around the world in its first five days of release. It rang up \$1.65 million in ticket sales in the United

States, the distributor said; the film is currently playing in about 135 U.S. theaters.

Although Bollywood movies remain barely a niche in the West, they're a billion-dollar business in Asia. It's a business propelled in part by sheer volume, with movies cranked out in the manner of the classic Hollywood-studio model. Khan himself has starred in more than 70 films.

Born to Muslim parents in modest circumstances in New Delhi, the actor arrived in Mumbai in 1991, and it didn't take him long to attract a following. Just one year later he costarred in a romantic drama titled "Deewana." It became a hit, and he was off to the races.

"I was driving down a small lane in India recently, and I remembered that 20 years ago I was driving down the same lane, and I had maybe 10 or 20 dollars in my pocket," said Khan, who is not above a little self-mythologizing. "I couldn't believe all that had happened to me. I feel lucky and even guilty to have this much."

Although the actor, who is married with two children and who turned 46 earlier this week, cuts a figure that could appear next to any encyclopedia's entry for "movie star," he maintains that the key to his fame is his accessibility. "I don't like the trappings of stardom," he said. "I wear the shoes and the Dolce & Gabbana," he said, pulling on his jacket, "because I'm told to. But I'm not trapped by it."

Those who know him say Khan is right in at least a certain regard. Despite the fame and the wealth (his estimated net worth is more than half a billion dollars), he is willing to mingle with fans in a way that might be surprising to American A-listers, who are cosseted by handlers and bodyguards.

Khan seems to possess the Clintonian skill of making every person he addresses feel as if he or she is the most important person in his life at that moment, which is not easy to do when 1.2 billion people are involved.

"Shah Rukh has this ability to be the perfect combination of who he is and who the public wants him to be," said Sinha. "And he can turn it on without even thinking about it, in a second." Sinha recalls that during the production of "Ra.One," he had asked Khan to record a birthday video for his son, who would celebrate without his father while the director worked on the film. The filmmaker expected the star to record a quick video greeting; instead Khan sang and danced for him for nearly four minutes.

Khan could have been a lot better known in the United States; he says he turned down the part of the game show host in "Slumdog Millionaire" that went to Anil Kapoor. "It's a very nice movie, but it's not an Indian movie," Khan said of director Danny Boyle's best picture Oscar winner. "We need a 'Life Is Beautiful.'"

To ensure that happens, Khan has over the last few years struck up relationships with Hollywood film executives, including 20th Century Fox's Jim Gianopulos and Sony Pictures' Amy Pascal, in the hope that they could collaborate in a way that would bring together Indian talent and Hollywood know-how.

Khan said he has no desire to become a star in the United States, although he is developing an East-meets-West-themed movie with "Taxi Driver" writer Paul Schrader.

Even after a grueling global press tour, Khan continues to work — he says he will relax on the flight back to India and then dive back into several new projects. "Some people say, 'Shah Rukh, you work so hard. Why don't you sit back with a glass of red wine or go out on the terrace for a smoke?' But that's not me."

And on cue, he gets up from the interview to catch a car to the airport, pausing to take a few pictures with fans as he leaves.

RELATED:

[Shah Rukh Khan's "Ra.One.:" Bollywood goes Hollywood](#)

[Movie review: Ra.One](#)

-- Steven Zeitchik

[twitter.com/ZeitchikLAT](https://twitter.com/ZeitchikLAT)

Photo: Shah Rukh Khan at the Beverly Wilshire last week. Credit: Al Seib/Los Angeles Times

#### FROM AROUND THE WEB

[Dr Phil's Divorce Settlement Has Just Been Revealed And It Took Us By Surprise](#) /

*Ninjablogger*

[The UNTUCKit fit – Shirts designed for comfort, not convention.](#) / *UNTUCKit*

[Why Doctors Will No Longer Prescribe Metformin \(WATCH\)](#) / *healthnewstips.today*

[15 Actors Who Kept Thier Wives Away From The Spotlight](#) / *Standard News*

[Best Dressed at the 2017 CMA Awards](#) / *StyleBistro*

Recommended by