

**RNIB**

supporting blind and  
partially sighted people

# Bollywood for all

the demand for audio described Bollywood films

Executive summary

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The quantitative research for this report was done by Agroni Research.

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## Foreword

Films and TV programmes are often difficult to appreciate if you can only hear them. Imagine a scene where a would-be killer is stalking the heroine in a lonely alley. In the absence of dialogue, the background score alone would be inadequate to render the scene captivating unless you can see the action. Audio Description (AD) enhances an audience's involvement by adding a narrative, which draws word pictures for the audience during sequences in which the dialogue is few and far between.

RNIB's involvement with AD has ensured that more than 300 cinemas in the UK are equipped with systems that facilitate AD and the majority of Hollywood films released in UK cinemas have an AD track on them. Going to the movies is no longer considered the prerogative of sighted people.

This study seeks to expand the horizons of RNIB's initiative, and take it to new shores. A logical extension of this initiative would be to involve Bollywood, the world's most prolific film industry producing around 700 films every year, in this venture. The study explores whether a potential demand for audio described Bollywood films exists in the UK and India. Apart from establishing the demand, it seeks to understand the best medium (TV/DVD/Cinema) to introduce the availability of audio described Bollywood films and language preferences of the target audience for audio described Bollywood films. It also aims to understand the best ways of reaching out to this audience to create awareness about the availability of this service.

Using both qualitative and quantitative research, the study clearly shows that there is a huge unmet need for audio described Bollywood films in the UK and India.

Bollywood continues to shine for millions of its fans ever since it released its first silent film. These films mean much more to viewers than just pure entertainment. They have managed to create that original, sentimental celluloid connection with audiences around the world. In such a scenario, it becomes even more significant that every single person, including people of Asian origin with sight loss, get that chance to sit back and enjoy a Bollywood film of their choice, independently.

This report can be used as a reference tool by the Bollywood film industry, AD providers and Bollywood film distributors. RNIB hopes that the results of this research will not only assist the introduction of AD in Bollywood films but also go a long way in bridging that gap in accessibility for millions of its fans.

**Leen Petré**

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- Birmingham Focus on Blindness
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# Executive summary

## 1. Why was this project undertaken?

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) is a registered UK charity, representing the needs and interests of around two million blind and partially sighted people in the UK. RNIB works directly and indirectly with blind and partially sighted people, representative organisations, government sectors, broadcasting and entertainment industries, and a range of professionals working in the field of visual impairment.

A needs survey carried out by RNIB in 1991 showed that 94 per cent of blind and partially sighted people watch films/television regularly. The survey found that filmed entertainment and media play an important role in their lives by providing access to news, information and entertainment. Independent film/television viewing can be facilitated by the provision of Audio Description (AD).

AD is an additional commentary to a film/television programme, describing body language, expressions and movements. It gives people information about the things that they might not be able to see, so that they can keep up with the action on the screen. It takes away the dependence of relying on someone else to fill in the gaps.

RNIB has ensured access to films by working with all areas of the film industry, including film distributors, exhibitors and equipment manufacturers, and by influencing legislation. In the UK today, the majority of Hollywood films are screened with AD, and 40 per cent of cinemas are equipped to deliver AD. Many Hollywood DVDs also include AD on mainstream UK releases, with the service often promoted on relevant film websites.

The Indian film industry, popularly known as Bollywood, is by far the most prolific film industry in the world. The industry, which produces about 700 films a year, has always had a strong and passionate relationship with its domestic audience. But the 21st century has seen a new breed of Bollywood fans cropping up across the globe. Even second or third-generation Asian emigrants, who do not always speak the language of the film, definitely know their Hrithik Roshans and their Kareena Kapoors. It is the sheer exuberance of these films that drive them to bridge the language barrier.

Today, the UK is the largest market for Bollywood films outside India.

But since Bollywood films are currently not available with AD, they largely remain inaccessible to their blind and partially sighted viewers. RNIB, through this study, sought to investigate the demand for audio described Bollywood films in the UK and India.

## 2. What was done during the course of the project?

The project aimed to understand behaviours and attitudes of blind and partially sighted Asian people towards the viewing of Bollywood films with and without AD. The findings of this project draw on the data collected through a combination of qualitative and quantitative research studies to provide an accurate picture of the issue being addressed, with a comprehensive analysis of the barriers faced by the target audience when watching Bollywood films.

### 2.1. Objectives

The primary objectives of this study were to provide answers to the following questions specifically in relation to blind and partially sighted people of Asian origin:

- How often does the target group watch Bollywood films, eg at the cinema, on DVD, or on television?
- Would AD encourage the target group to watch Bollywood films more often?
- Is the target group likely to change its film viewing habits if AD was provided on these films?
- Which factors influence the target audience's views on AD of Bollywood films, eg degree of sight loss, personal circumstances etc?
- What preferences do the target audience have in terms of language of the description, eg Hindi or English?
- When AD is provided, what impact does it have on the experience of watching Bollywood films (positive or negative)?
- How might description in Bollywood films differ from description in Hollywood films to increase viewing and viewing pleasure?
- Should the UK AD guidelines be adapted for AD in Bollywood films?

The project also aimed to put forth recommendations for further implementation of the findings.

### 2.2. Quantitative research study

The quantitative research was undertaken with 260 blind or partially sighted people of Asian descent (including people of Indian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin only), living in the UK. The sample included a range of ages, sight conditions and levels of familiarity with Bollywood films.

## **2.3. Qualitative research study**

Fifty blind or partially sighted Asian people were interviewed for the qualitative study. Of these, 25 people were interviewed in the UK and 25 in India. The sample included a wide range of ages, sight conditions and familiarity with Bollywood films although the majority of participants tended to have severe sight problems.

# **3. Key findings and conclusions**

## **3.1. Current barriers to watching Bollywood films**

Despite accessibility issues, 19 per cent of the 260 respondents in the quantitative study said they watched a Bollywood film on television everyday, with 6 per cent stating that they watched them on DVD about once a day.

Viewing of Bollywood films at the cinema was much lower, with 66 per cent stating they never watched Bollywood films at the cinema. However, about 15 per cent said they watched a Bollywood film in a cinema at least once a week. A significant number of respondents, 40 per cent, believed that their current sight level was a major factor that prevented them from going to the cinema to watch Bollywood films, as it affected their understanding of the film.

## **3.2. Likelihood of people watching Bollywood films with AD**

Over half of the respondents in both studies stated that they were more likely to watch Bollywood films if AD was provided (56 per cent in the quantitative study and 92 per cent in the qualitative study). AD improved understanding of the film clip for blind and partially sighted people, with people reporting a greater grasp of location, characters, expressions and the plot.

## **3.3. Three key areas were identified**

### **3.3.1. Description over songs**

Respondents felt it was important to provide AD during songs as well as in the standard story so as to be able to follow what was happening on the screen.

### **3.3.2. Language of the description**

The majority of respondents preferred AD in Hindi compared with description in English.

### **3.3.3. Awareness about audio description**

The research found that only five per cent of respondents in the quantitative study had any previous experience of AD. 16 per cent were aware of AD but

were not aware of its features and what it had to offer. There was a significant lack of awareness about AD amongst blind and partially sighted Asians in the UK.

## 4. Recommendations

The study was able to establish a number of areas in which the Bollywood film industry, RNIB, various associations working with blind and partially sighted people in India, sectors within the Government of India and other stakeholders could usefully collaborate to improve the accessibility of Bollywood films in the UK and India. The findings of this research study resulted in the following recommendations:

### **Recommendation 1: Initiate partnership working with the Indian film industry**

RNIB to work closely with the Indian film industry, sharing the expertise and the experience, it has built up while working with UK Hollywood distributors. The aim would be to support the setting up of a system in the UK and India that can produce AD for Bollywood films.

### **Recommendation 2: UK pilot of audio described Bollywood films**

Keeping in mind that all systems and infrastructure enabling the provision and delivery of AD in films are in place within the UK, it would be operationally simpler to pilot the product in the UK first, and then share the experience and expertise with the industry in India.

If the AD track was available for UK cinema release, the track could then be included on the DVD and tested in the Indian DVD market.

### **Recommendation 3: AD for all mediums**

The research study was unable to bring out a clear preference for any particular medium for accessing Bollywood films in the UK or India. A split between preferences was evident amongst younger cinema goers (18-44 years) and older home entertainment enthusiasts. Therefore, the Bollywood film industry should be encouraged to make AD tracks available across diverse film viewing platforms – cinema, DVD and eventually television.

If AD were to be made available as an optional audio track on the regular DVD release, it would not only increase the availability of accessible Bollywood films but also lead to a greater acceptance of AD amongst the general population in both India and the UK.



#### **Recommendation 4: Raising awareness amongst the target population in the UK**

4 (a) RNIB to plan awareness campaigns with the aim of familiarising the UK Asian blind community with the concept of AD. These promotional activities should be planned bearing in mind the specific characteristics of the Asian community such as language preference of the target audience and their knowledge of Hindi.

4 (b) RNIB to share the findings of this research with the UK distributors of Hollywood films who are forming alliances with the Indian film industry and distributing Bollywood films in the UK, including Warner Bros and Sony Pictures.

4 (c) RNIB to create awareness within the UK cinema exhibitors about the possible arrival of audio described Bollywood films. This would enable cinemas to appropriately assign films to specific screens that are equipped to handle AD.

4 (d) RNIB should work in partnership with organisations providing services to different Asian communities in the UK to raise the level of awareness about AD for blind and partially sighted people. The evidence from the research indicates that there is a high demand for other specialist services like ‘talking newspapers’ for blind and partially sighted people within the different Asian communities. This provides a favourable context for the introduction of AD aimed at Asian communities via Bollywood films.

These activities and campaigns would need to be planned and organised in conjunction with the relevant industries.

#### **Recommendation 5: Raising awareness amongst the target population in India**

5 (a) RNIB and associations working for/with blind and partially sighted people in India to work collaboratively with the specific departments within the Government of India, with the Indian counterparts taking a lead role in creating awareness about AD and its eventual availability on Bollywood films in India. As AD is a medium for moving images, cinemas and television could play an instrumental role in creating this awareness.

### **Recommendation 6: Engage with the Bollywood film industry**

6 (a) RNIB could participate in conferences and discussions relevant to the Indian film industry and non-profit organisations working in the field of visual impairment and access technologies in India. This would enable wider awareness and discussion on the subject with a larger audience. Once the discussion gathers momentum, it should be steered towards practical solutions to making AD technology widely available.

6 (b) RNIB may wish to think about working in partnership with selected Bollywood film producers in order to set up a pilot project using AD in Bollywood films. Such a development would not only benefit blind and partially sighted people in the UK and India but others living across the globe. This could be done by organising workshops for selected Bollywood film producers and provide them with practical advice and support for implementing the Bollywood Audio Description Initiative.

### **Recommendation 7: Possible introduction of a legislation in the UK**

RNIB may wish to explore with Ofcom, the possibility of achieving a quota for AD on Bollywood channels shown in the UK.

### **Recommendation 8: Accessible technology in the UK**

The evidence from the survey suggests that many blind and partially sighted people have difficulty operating current electronic devices providing access to AD. It is recommended that RNIB continues to work with manufacturers and television platform operators to ensure that they implement a 'shortcut' button on the remote control so that people can easily access AD.

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