

## FOCUS ON

## India, beyond Bollywood

### 'THE POP GENRE IN INDIA IS SUPER EXCITING'

Shridhar Subramaniam, President, Strategy and Market Development, Sony Music Asia and Middle East, is at the forefront of a significant development in India's music world, where modern Indian pop is increasing its presence as a creative force alongside the dominant movie soundtrack sector.

Subramaniam points out that the popularity of Bollywood has deep cultural roots that cannot be categorised as simply a 'trend': "The Indian fascination with Bollywood is primarily because of the country's oral tradition. Our Indian culture has always been taught in the form of music and dance it has been this way across the ages."

Subramaniam believes that while its place and status in popular Indian culture might be permanent, opportunities for other genres in terms of music consumption are growing.

Sony Music, which has had a presence in India since 1996 (and now has offices in Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai), is spearheading the discovery, development and promotion of other Indian genres, diversifying the musical landscape of the region.

Subramaniam says: "The biggest challenge for any company, genre or artist to achieve scale in this market is being able to participate across a wide variety of languages in a cohesive manner, which is where a major company such as Sony Music can be so useful, because logistically it is very difficult as India creates popular music in each of the 24 main languages."

He points out that what those outside India would term 'Bollywood' is actually just one type of soundtrack, sung in Hindi; other categories include Tollywood (Telegu), Kollywood (Tamil) and Sandalwood (Kannada), all representing different languages in an extremely diverse country.

He adds: "Sony Music participates in multiple languages across multiple genres. We are in the soundtrack market, of course, because every big company has to be, but in the last five years we have also been building the pop roster and market."



Randy Sandhu photo  
by Ramon Ramirez



Those driving the development of the Indian pop scene have been utilising a number of recent developments in India's digital landscape. The prevalence of low-cost smartphones has led to growth in consumption on music streaming services. Subramaniam also cites the importance of social media. "Traditionally, we have two obsessions: Bollywood and cricket, and all our celebrities have come from these two worlds.

"As India is one of the youngest countries in the world with 54% of the population below 25 years of age, we are now witnessing a new generation of artists expressing their creativity on social media and gaining public recognition.

"This has allowed us to bypass some of the traditional mainstream channels, such as TV and radio – that would have been very focused on playing Bollywood songs – and allows us to build direct connections with fans.

"The pop genre in India is super exciting and it's growing across multiple languages."

Subramaniam also believes this new generation of Indian pop stars can enjoy success globally as well as domestically. "There is a huge South Asian (not just Indian) diaspora who listen to our music – in the US, in Canada, in the UK and in the Middle East; it's a similar picture to Latin America. Even now, with traditional Bollywood music dominant, around 15-20% of revenues are generated internationally.

"That global diaspora, on such a scale, means we can make an impact on charts and playlists around the world. Our fans carry a definite weight on platforms like Spotify and YouTube.

"There is of course a language barrier: will people sing along to a Hindi or Punjabi song? Maybe not – but they could dance to it. I think what is very likely there will be a hit, using some Indian phrasing, possibly with a Bollywood element of style, dance and colour and maybe through a collaboration."

Despite this prediction, Subramaniam is mainly focused on something much more sustainable, and something achieved in partnership with the artist. "Our entire approach is based on artist development.

"A one-off hit doesn't create a genre. We believe that Indian music, like hip-hop, can represent more than music and become a culture in itself, and that a form of Indian pop, with Indian artists driving it, will be taken out to the world soon. I believe it's inevitable."



Rohitash photo  
by Tushar Chakrav

