



**BORN AGAIN**

Pass by the rundown Bharat Mata in Mumbai's Parel, and you'll see an unusual sight—a winding queue outside the theatre, something that's been missing from the Marathi cinema scene for a while. Till a few weeks ago, the queue was for *De Dhakka*, the smash hit that revved up the fortunes of Marathi cinema; now it's for an oddity called *Foreigncha Patlin*, advertised as the first Marathi film with an American heroine.

At the multiplexes, which are screening *Valu* and *Tingya*, the reception is equally warm. Marathi cinema, which had sunk into a morass of indifferent and loss-making movies for decades, is on a comeback, even as most Bollywood releases sink at the box-office.

Hearteningly, the spiral is both in terms of aesthetics and box-office. If you have masala fare like *Aamhi Saatpute* and *De Dhakka*, which has reportedly

ing mainly on Marathi films. "We've had huge success with films like *Saade Made Teen*, *De Dhakka* and *Aamhi Saatpute*," says Saddiq. Refusing to confirm the trade buzz that *De Dhakka*, inspired by the Hollywood hit, *Little Miss Sunshine*, will break all previous box-office records with collections closing at Rs 6 crore, the distributor just smiles. "People are calling it the *Sholay* of Marathi films," he says. "Now you deduce what that means by way of numbers."

With nearly 50 Marathi films under production, the drought is evidently over.

*Marathi cinema has not only returned to form, it's heating up the box-office as well, says Meena Iyer*



**RETURN OF THE NATIVE** Sanai Chaughade (top) and *Tingya* (below) are examples of a resurgent Marathi cinema

# A rocking comeback

totted up a record profit of Rs 6 crore, there are also critically feted films like Umesh Vinayak Kulkarni's *Valu*, which played at premier international film festivals and is currently in its silver jubilee week. Mangesh Hadawale's *Tingya*, on its part, won plaudits at the Cannes market section and has also picked up nine Maharashtra state awards. "It's the post-*Shwaas* effect," says actor Atul Kulkarni, talking of Arun Nalavade's moving 2004 film which was India's entry to the Oscars and triggered the renaissance of Marathi cinema.

What's interesting about the current revival is that it is being backed by big Bollywood corporations and a host of non-Maharashtrians. Subhash Ghai's Mukta Mallipx bankrolled *Valu*; *Tingya* was produced by Ravi Rai. Bollywood distributor Azam Khan managed to double his profits with *Tingya*, while another distributor, Saddiq, is concentrat-

While the Maharashtra government's grant of Rs 30 lakh to first-time producers, as well as its diktat to multiplexes to screen Marathi films, has contributed to the resurgence, Bollywood producer N R Pachisia, who is bankrolling *Jhak Marli Baiko* with Bhagyashree, says it is the average Maharashtrian who should be given credit for infusing life into Marathi cinema. "*Bhasha prem* (love for the mother tongue) is the reason why Marathi cinema has found so much patronage," he says.

Saddiq disagrees. "It isn't as if Maharashtra weren't proud of their lit-

erature or their language five years ago," he says. "But at that point, crude cinema was ruling the roost. "So, the up-market Maharashtra preferred to patronise Marathi theatre, and maybe catch the occasional potboiler on satellite."

Shreyas Talpade, whose home production Sanai Chaughade is currently breaking new ground, says, "Marathi cinema is no longer Bollywood's poor cousin." His own production, made at a budget of approximately Rs 1 crore, has production values that can compete with the average Bollywood film. "If you want to find a theatre audience, you have got



to give them glossy fare," he says.

The actor says he did some serious rethinking about the malady that had struck Marathi cinema. "When Marathi theatre is houseful on a day that India is taking on Pakistan in a

cricket final, there is no reason for our cinema to suffer. Also, when Telugu cinema is such a big rage, I wondered why we Marathi guys weren't get our numbers correct. After all, Maharashtra is double the size of Andhra Pradesh. It meant that if you package it right, have the song-n-dance shot on par with Bollywood films and set aside a good budget for the publicity, then Marathi cinema can rock."

Satellite companies like UFO Moviez which beam Marathi films across the state, have also made it easy for the man in Amravati to enjoy a film on the same day as the man in Mumbai. Pointing to the gleaming trophy of Zee's *De Dhakka*—which is in its 12th week in 47 theatres—Sanjay Gaikwad of UFO Moviez says, "It's a long time since Bollywood had anything so spectacular to give away. The prodigal has returned." **TM**