ISSN 0975 - 5810

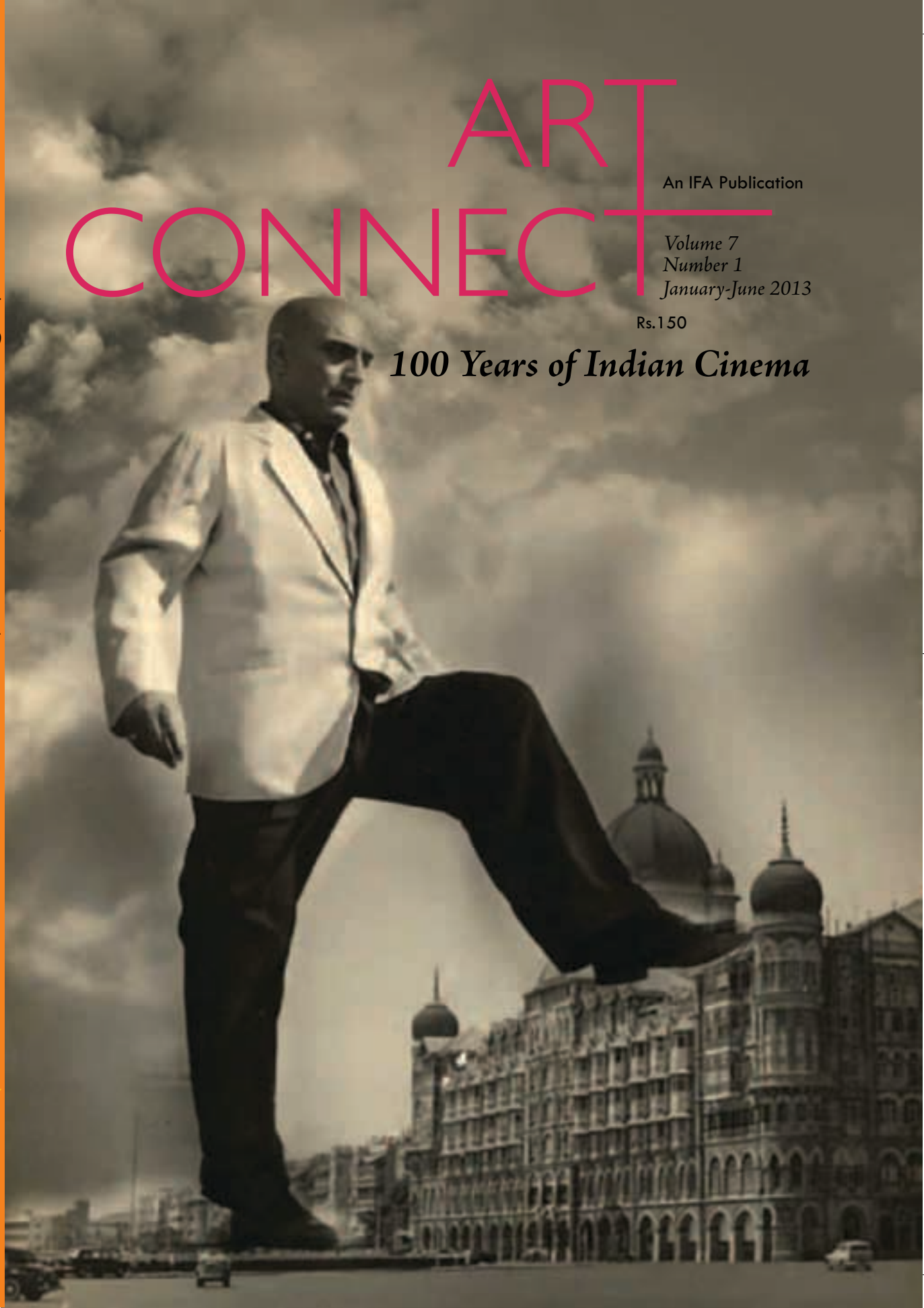
ART CONNECT

An IFA Publication

Volume 7
Number 1
January-June 2013

Rs.150

100 Years of Indian Cinema



ArtConnect *Volume 7, Number 1* *January-June 2013* IFA

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Printed by B Narahari, published by Anmol Vellani on behalf of India Foundation for the Arts and printed at Manipal Press Ltd., Press Corner, Tile Factory Road, Manipal, Udipi, Karnataka - 576 104 and published at India Foundation for the Arts, 'Apurva', Ground Floor, No 259, 4th Cross, Raj Mahal Vilas IInd Stage, IInd Block, Bangalore - 560 094. Editor - C.K. Meena

Photo and Text Credits

Ashim Ahluwalia, Gautam Pemmaraju, Rashmi Sawhney, National Film Archive of India, Journal of the Moving Image, Times of India Archive, Debashree Mukherjee, Priya Paul, Lawrence Liang

Cover Image

A small-format poster, called a lobby card, for the film *Doctor Z* (1959). Photograph courtesy Priya Paul.

In *ArtConnect* Volume 6 Number 2, on Page 75, several women percussionists were mentioned as belonging to the devadasi community. Thanjavur Rajalakshmi a.k.a. Rajam has clarified that she is not a member of this community. We regret the error. — Editor

Editorial

Since the centenary of Indian cinema is a milestone that cannot be ignored, our choice of theme for this issue was pretty much unavoidable. What we did take care to avoid, though, was treading the beaten path. We have slipped behind the scenes and sneaked towards the fringes, chosen the seedy over the glamorous, the fans over the superstar, the little-known over the celebrated, the background score over the hit song. The cover image blatantly advertises our intention—to intrigue, startle and amuse you as much as to enlighten you.

Filmmaker Ashim Ahluwalia, a self-confessed hardcore fan of trash and sleaze, reminds us that C movies are a legitimate part of our 'filmic' past. His article, an excerpt from a forthcoming book, offers a vivid picture of the subterranean world of exploitation cinema. Ahluwalia provocatively argues that C-grade cinema—and not our so-called art cinema or parallel cinema—is the only truly experimental Indian film form.

To find out what Mrs Solomon and Robert Master are up to, you will have to read Debashree Mukherjee's brief history of film practice extrapolated from Priya Paul's vast collection of film memorabilia. Concentrating largely on B movies, Mukherjee locates the Bombay film industry as a work site and gives us a glimpse of the innumerable skilled specialists—many of them obscure and unsung—who contribute to the collective enterprise that is filmmaking.

In keeping with the unusual nature of this issue we have an unorthodox piece: a fake interview by a fake journalist. Far from it being an untrammelled flight of the imagination, the 'interview' constructed by Rashmi Sawhney consists of meticulously excavated chunks of research adroitly welded together to sculpt the figure of Fatma Begum, India's first woman filmmaker, and offer a speculative history of her life and times.

Gautam Pemmaraju takes us beyond the archetypal *dishoom-dishoom* sound of the hero-villain fights in mainstream Hindi cinema as he examines how sound effects contribute to the composite soundtrack. Through his interviews with a galaxy of sound professionals and filmmakers who have worked on landmark Hindi films, he provides an insight into effects-production and aesthetics in the era of analogue sound, and the changes they underwent with the advent of digital technology.

If you believe that the life of the scholar lacks the 'thrills, spills and chills' that the big screen offers, you might change your mind after reading Lawrence Liang's description of an academic exercise that morphed into a comedy of errors. While following fans of the south Indian film-star Rajinikanth, Liang gets swept away by what can only be described as a 'filmi' turn of events.

Permit us, too, a bit of *dialoguebaazi*: This is a magical, engrossing, unique and inimitable homage to Indian cinema.

C.K. Meena
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Going Underground:

Notes on an Uncontrolled Cinema

Ashim Ahluwalia

All photographs courtesy the author

Call them cheap, trashy, pornographic, underground—C movies are a legitimate part of our filmic past, argues Ashim Ahluwalia. During his decade-long love affair with Indian-made exploitation cinema, he has found it to be not only deranged and scandalous but also accidentally lyrical and avant-gardist. Saluting its rejection of established conventions, standards and categories, he provocatively states that C-grade cinema is the one truly experimental Indian film form. In this excerpt from a forthcoming book, Ahluwalia describes how the C movie unwittingly breaks the patriarchal order and contains stylistic elements that lend themselves to radical filmmaking.

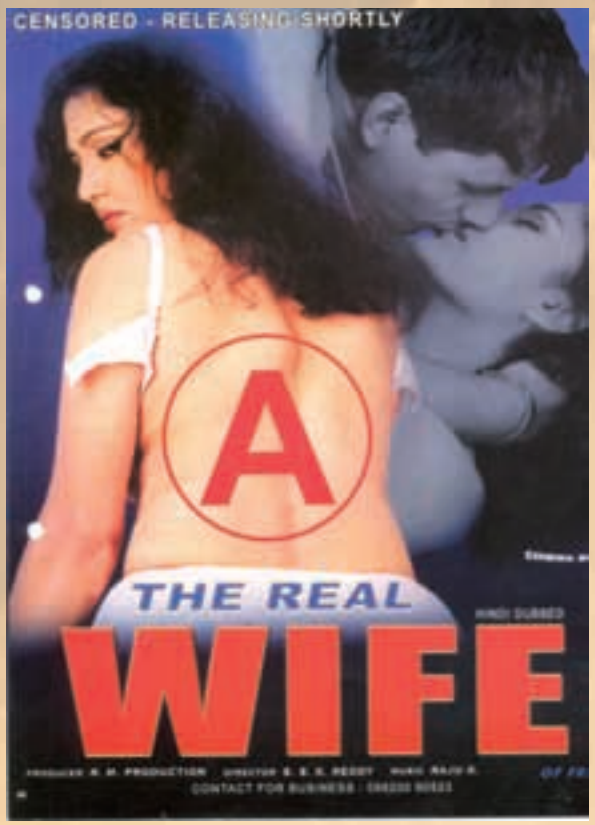
The chief enemy of creativity is 'good' taste – Pablo Picasso

1

The stars must have been aligned when, entirely by chance, I happened upon a sordid poster of a film-in-production called *Maut Ka Chehra* (n.d., Face of Death). It was the late 1990s and I had caught a glimpse of it in *Super Cinema*, a trade magazine crammed with unreleased C-grade films looking for distributors. The poster featured a man in a silver-foil suit ripping the heart out of a hairy gorilla. Blood was shamelessly hand-painted all over the photograph. Around them floated cut-outs of garish nymphets offering breasts and thighs. A few midgets provided comedy. Everyone looked like they were about to give, or possibly receive, some form of sexual gratification. The blurb asserted: "Never seen before such sexy lover story." It was all so nasty, and yet so incredibly alluring.

That image spiralled me into a decade-long love affair with C-grade cinema. I decided to make a documentary about the filming of *Maut Ka Chehra*, spending much of the following year with actors, producers and directors in the murky backrooms of the industry. Many of the films were pornographic, and therefore illegal. Eventually the documentary I wanted to make fell apart—nobody wanted to participate for fear of arrest or of knife-wounds from gangland financiers. Years later, I returned to those abandoned experiences, reworking the stories and characters into a semi-fictional film called *Miss Lovely* (2012). It's only now, in retrospect, that I am beginning to truly grasp what dragged me into this cinematic wilderness in the first place.

One of the first C movies I saw was made by two men with missing surnames: Vicky (the director, who also inspired the name of my protagonist in *Miss Lovely*) and Suleiman (the producer). The film, *Band Kamre Mein* (n.d., Behind Closed Doors), is the tale of a freshly married woman called Seema, possibly the most repressed housewife on the planet. Eager to lose her virginity, she is shattered to find her new husband impotent. Eventually collapsing into a nervous wreck, Seema sweats her way through a series of seductions of family members who include her husband's nephew Ravi. More seductions follow—one involving a male prostitute, and finally



Going Underground — Ashim Ahluwalia

the icing on the cake: a lesbian liaison with Rosy, the sexy servant. Hallucinating about a sex potion that can make all her fantasies come true, Seema is left with no choice but to bump off her tiresome husband with a toy gun. A sprawling mess of a film, it left me with the desire to watch a hundred more.

The next thing I chanced upon, Ramesh Lakhiani's *Khopdi* (1999, The Skull), offered a twist on the same theme by adding rubber monsters to the sex-starved landscape. I couldn't believe these films could get weirder, but they did. Unlike B movies that actually tried to follow through with a cohesive storyline, C movies never cared to do so. They were concocted to deliver cheap titillation to a sexually starved audience of working-class males. And yet, at least in the early days of Indian exploitation cinema, they weren't hard-core pornography either. For decades, C-grade cinema and pornographic films followed separate paths, eventually marrying in the fleapits of India in the early 1980s.

Of course, sex and cinema have been friends since the very birth of motion pictures. The late David F. Friedman, maker of exploitation films in the US, writes, "After Mr. Edison made those tin-types gallop, it wasn't but two days later that some enterprising guy had his girlfriend take her clothes off for the camera."[1] By 1899 the first totally nude females appeared in motion pictures, and within three years sexual intercourse had been captured on film.

The exact date of the first pornographic film remains unclear, though two shorts that date from as early as 1907 have been identified.[2] In India it was possible to find 16 mm stag reels produced by maharajas or colonial rulers that showed their household help in erotic situations. As public demand for smut grew, these private productions would no longer

suffice. New approaches of dispersal had to be invented.

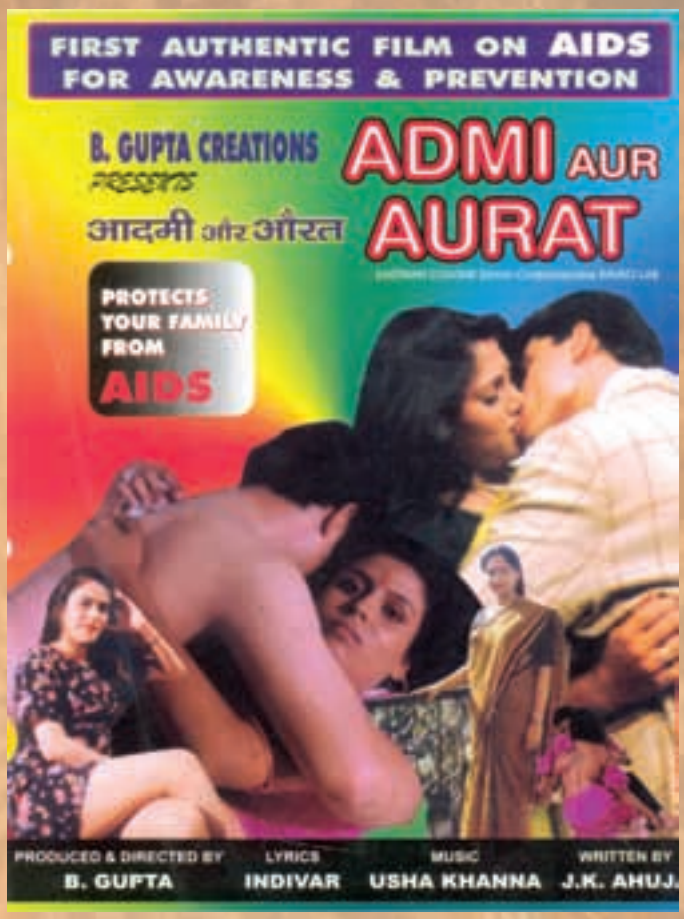
In C-grade cinema, producers would bypass the censors by never including explicit material in the main film. Even if censors demanded cuts it would have no effect on the outcome, for the forbidden reels, known in Bombay as "bits", would make it directly to the projection booth of the cinema at night, carried by hand or on a bicycle. Here these sex reels would be spliced back into the main film, often in a random spot. So in the middle of a tragic death scene, it wouldn't be unusual to suddenly have an eleven-minute female masturbation sequence.

From the 1930s to the 1960s, 'bits' reels were intermixed with any trash picture, popping up in the middle of Dara Singh wrestling movies, for example, and often containing full-frontal nudity. In the 1970s, these reels would also come to include explicit sexual activity stolen from scratchy Swedish or German blue films. By the early 1980s, however, Indian producers were no longer smuggling in European porn; they were very confidently shooting their own.

Besides sex-horror films, several sub-genres were spawned by the C-grade industry, such as the female *daku* (bandit) picture, the tribal exploitation film, the domestic lesbian tragedy and the impotent husband melodrama. The most intriguing, however, was the medical film. In movies such as I.V. Sasi's *Teen Love & Sex* (1982) and anonymous fare such as the undated *Lady Doctor, Gupt Gyan* and *Birth of a Baby*, audiences were shown graphic footage of childbirth and venereal diseases. The basic idea behind these films cloaked in pseudo-science was to allow the mostly rural audience to get guilt-free peep at female genitalia. The camera would often participate like a doctor, probing the female body in the form of a medical check-up. Ghastly scenes would sometimes offer up diseased private parts for examination. Animated eggs would float across the screen, fusing with a barrage of creepy photographs and narration pinched from forgotten Italian sex education films.

It was no surprise, then, that the Indian middle class saw this as intolerable screen fare. Bollywood looked down on these films like poor, unwashed relatives that had arrived for dinner uninvited. And yet they couldn't be dismissed because of their massive small-town viewership. Spurning the narrative weight of

Going Underground — Ashim Ahluwalia

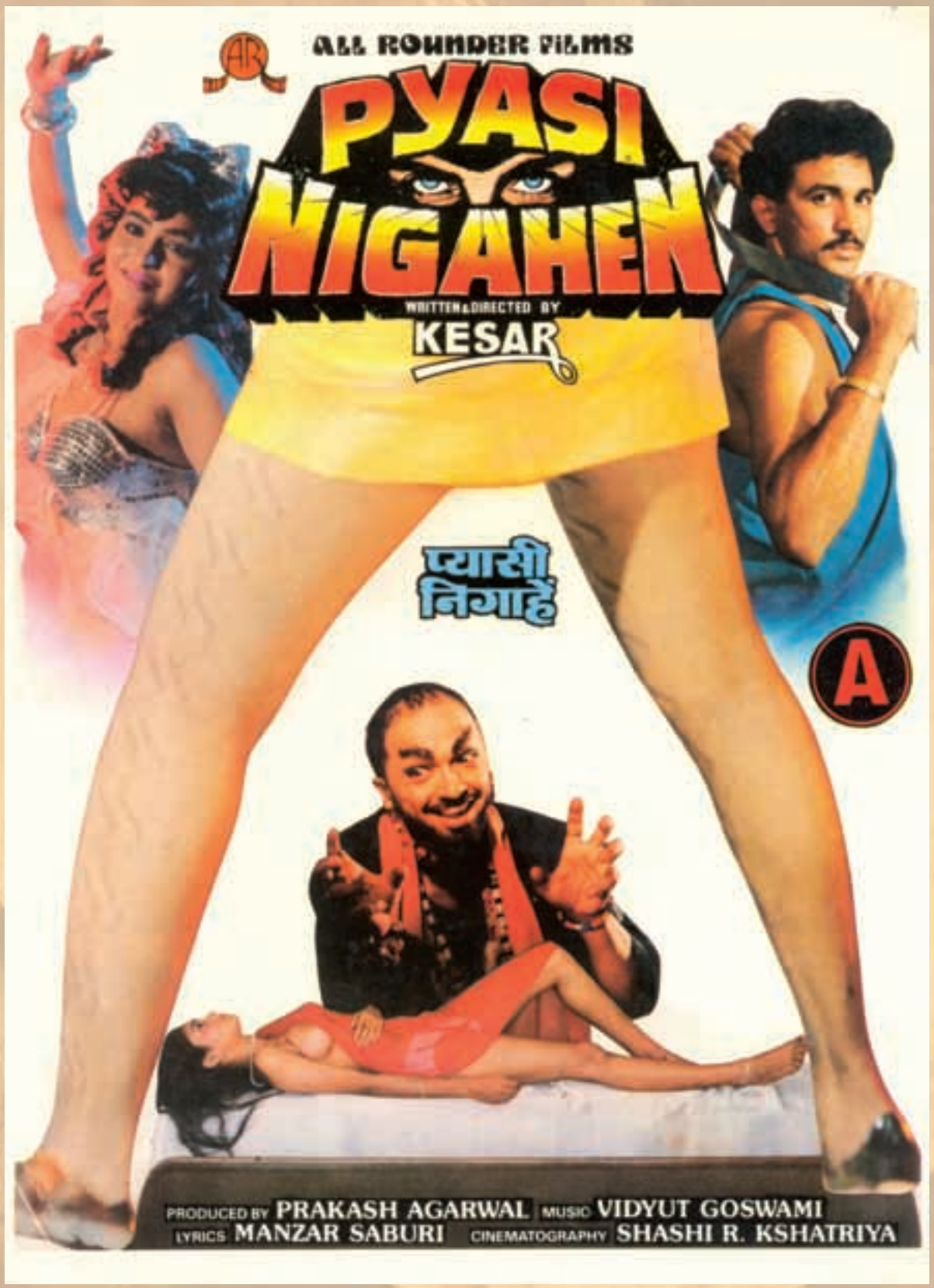


Bollywood, these pictures dealt in smutty, uncontrolled spectacle. They articulated what spectators truly desired—a vision sometimes deranged and scandalous, sometimes accidentally lyrical, but always dangerous if silenced and banned.

Eventually, though, these filmmakers were silenced; their stories have been left unrecorded. As India globalised in the 1990s, and celluloid became unaffordable, porn on VCD and the internet flooded the market, destroying the need for these underground films. They exist only as oral history and hearsay. All we know is that thousands of them were made each year and hundreds would play every month. Most are now lost. It is a mystery how these filmmakers and actors functioned in such a conservative atmosphere.

In a sense, my film *Miss Lovely* offers a sort of 'revisionist' history. Not because it documents the history of exploitation films, for such a record has never existed, but because it can be seen as an attempt to address an inequality in our conception of Indian film history. After all, our filmic past is not just contained in the worlds of the mainstream and parallel/art cinema movements, but in this shadow cinema as well.

C-grade cinema is authentically marginal, a cinema of the gutter, and the missing link between Bollywood and pornography, documentary and narrative, tradition and modernity. And what appears to be simply marginal soon exposes itself to be symbolically central. Through these films we can see how Indian society struggles with outlawed subjects: eroticism, violence, female sexuality and homosexuality. If most Bollywood


ALL ROUNDER FILMS
PYASI NIGAHEN
WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY
KESAR
प्यासी निगाहें
A
PRODUCED BY PRAKASH AGARWAL MUSIC VIDYUT GOSWAMI
LYRICS MANZAR SABURI CINEMATOGRAPHY SHASHI R. KSHATRIYA

pictures are about the Indian ideal of sameness and the things that bring us together (family, tradition, ritual), C movies are about our differences. This cinema breaks the repressive patriarchal order unintentionally—because it is wildly out of control.

2

In contrast to these eccentric, handmade films, Bollywood and other mainstream cinemas of the world are industrial projects of entertainment dictated by business. The dominance of manufactured cinema is now universal, trickling into our consciousness and expression. Over the last few decades, we as audiences have sluggishly consented to, and, at times, enthusiastically collaborated in these widespread mechanised systems of pleasure, allowing a sort of hollow, plastic form of communication to become the norm, all in the service of decency, popularity and turnover.

Ever since the invention of the 'talking picture' it has been assumed that films are an extension of theatre where a story should always be acted out literally before an audience (the camera) under controlled conditions. But cinema has so much more to offer. As filmmaker Ricky Leacock commented, in mainstream cinema "Control is of the essence. The lines are written down and learned by the actors, the actions are rehearsed on carefully constructed sets, and the rehearsals are repeated over and over again until the resulting scene conforms to the preconceived ideas of the director. What horror… None of this activity has any life on its own."[3]

In industrial cinema, the slickness of production conceals the lack of the real, the shallowness of themes, and a general exhaustion of cinematic form. Mainstream cinema exploits ideas and images from the past, from already-popular comics and literature and from any place it can find inspiration, raiding and appropriating until nearly every trace of purity, emotion and meaning has been worn out. If any cinema was truly to be called exploitation cinema, it wouldn't be C-grade cinema with its cottage-industry production: it would be the mainstream.

3

Unfortunately the alternative offered by the art cinema movement, formerly known in quaint terms as parallel cinema, is equally uninviting.

The early days of Indian art cinema were full of hope with Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak introducing a genuine, indigenous modernism into India's cinematic culture which, at that point, was still largely rigid and theatrical.

It was just a matter of time, however, for state-sponsored parallel cinema to fill the gap left by these directors. A new breed of director and film emerged, claiming to be formally and authentically 'Indian' but lacking in historical consciousness. These films—with a handful of exceptions, mostly made by south Indian filmmakers—were hardly Indian in form, and had an obvious debt to a bagful of European films of the time. Some of the most 'Indian' art films of the 1970s were essentially Bresson, Bergman and Godard re-set in Indian rural landscapes. The oblique nature of these films and a notional relationship to ancient Sanskrit texts made these films critic-proof. If you questioned them, you didn't 'understand' them.

By 'tagging' ancient Indian manuscripts and theory that the viewer might not know, and embedding them in an indescribable haze of content, certain directors got away with never being fairly assessed. Almost everything they made was considered unquestionably 'brilliant'. But this also managed successfully to kill off, in subsequent generations, an interest in exploring new kinds of cinema. They had few successors, and left next to nothing for future generations of young Indian filmmakers to take forward.

There's never been a better time, then, for a new generation forced between the two rather unsatisfactory poles of mainstream and art cinema to look at what the C movie involuntarily offers—with its accidental avant-gardism, its unlicensed madness, its underground spirit that rejects established rules, laws, conventions, standards, genres and categories. This cheap, trashy cinema recognises something every filmmaker can learn from: that expression is a primary purpose of the human organism, and without restrictions, it can detonate and flower in the purest, wildest, most beautifully unchained form.

4

One could argue that the C movie offers a third option, bursting with more formal potential than the two traditional tropes of mainstream and art cinema. In fact, as far back as the 1920s, artists and writers of the Surrealist movement began to channel the unconscious as a way of revealing


HARGARAN S.B. SINGH NAGI PRESENT
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CINEMASCOPE
MUSIC
NADEEM SHRAVAN
PRODUCED • DIRECTED BY MOHAN BHAKRI
PHOTOGRAPHY
ARVIND BHAKRI

the true power of the imagination. They were the first to understand the exploitation film not as parody but as offering new aesthetic possibilities that reflected an unconscious, primal state.

Paul Hammond, a critic who studied Surrealism, describes how these artists went prospecting for the latent meaning of movies, mining seemingly innocent-looking films for buried sexuality. Connoisseurs of garbage, they uncovered treasures of poetry and subversion in the bargain basements of cinema, in the C movies of their time. André Breton, the founder of Surrealism, mentions a film he saw in the late 1920s that completely disorientated him. Titled *How I Killed My Child* (n.d.) and made by an anonymous priest known as Peter the Hermit, it is described by Breton as "a film of unlimited insanity."[4] Nor did the surrealists ignore the crumbling screening venues of these films. As Robert Desnos writes, "Above all, cinema auditoria must be afflicted with the same decay as the films they show."[5] The Greek surrealist Ado Kyrou was clear in his advice: "I ask you, learn to go and see the 'worst' films; they are sometimes sublime." He described the incredible *Ship of Condemned Women* (1953), made by Raffaello Matarazzo, as a film "in which sadism, revolt, eroticism, religion and melodrama conspire to form a series of problematically linked scenes dependent on the commonplace, raised by its rigour to the level of pure involuntary poetry."[6]

The French poet Louis Aragon talks as early as the 1920s of 'synthetic criticism', suggesting an alternative way to interpret a film, a way to bring to the surface a film's second, secret life.[7] In a sense, any Kanti Shah or Joginder

film is bursting with this hidden content: Sapna erotically handling a doorknob or Poonam Das Gupta sucking on a whisky bottle reveals a veiled space where society's latent repressions can be found.

5

In production, as in consumption, C-grade cinema is a marginal, naïve enterprise, at once scandalous and idiotic, almost condemned to fail from the very start. So what is inspirational about these films? And can they offer any aesthetic possibilities for future filmmakers?

(a) THE DREAM FILM

The story, in the classical sense, is unimportant in the C movie. In *Haiwan* (1977), as in many other films of this kind, strange scenes that feel incomplete are inserted at random points throughout the film. Actors change, primary characters disappear and new characters are introduced. The C movie is spontaneous, episodic, associative and unconstrained by the rules of traditional narrative cinema. This, in the hands of a more able filmmaker, opens up all kinds of possibilities of form, not unlike those of experimental cinema. Such fractured storytelling charges a film with a strange energy, making it more unusual, more spectacular, more mysterious, and more taboo. Evoking more dream than reality, it signals the forgotten, repressed dimension of things.

(b) THE SELF-AWARE FILM

The centrality of spectacle in the C movie tends to disturb the normal cause-and-effect chain required to tell a story, and allows the filmmakers to get away with murder when it comes to continuity editing. Most C movies blatantly use stock music and recycled shots throughout. Shots of exteriors of buildings, thunder and lightning, breasts and thighs are shamelessly stolen from other films. Actors look into the camera while performing, breaking the illusion that conventional films construct. Whereas the classical narrative film accentuated 'seamlessness', the C movie does the opposite—falling apart at the seams—reminding the audience that they are, in fact, watching a film. This offers a far more postmodern, self-conscious viewing experience than mainstream films, which feel almost old-fashioned in comparison.

(c) A NEW VOCABULARY

This kind of cinema is full of unsteady camera work, underexposed and out-of-focus shots, and colour banding caused by poor-quality film stock. Yet, in a strange, accidental way, there is something magical about this style. In an unrelated text, the experimental filmmaker Jonas Mekas engages an idea that could quite easily be applied here: "I am sick and tired of the guardians of Cinema Art who accuse the new filmmaker of shaky camerawork and bad technique. In like manner, they accuse the modern composer, the modern sculptor, the modern painter of sloppiness and poor technique. I have pity for such critics. They are hopeless. If we study the modern film poetry, we find that even the mistakes, the out-of-focus shots, the shaky shots, the unsure steps, the hesitant movements, the overexposed and the underexposed bits, have become part of the new cinema vocabulary, being part of the psychological and visual reality of modern man."[8]

(d) A CINEMATIC RIOT

Ado Kyrou writes, "We seek a shock cinema with lightning and thunder, murderous passions, a lust for revolt"[9] and in many ways, this is what C-grade cinema does. It centralises the role of the heroine (the heroes are usually sidekicks, unlike Bollywood, where the female characters are rarely significant); it displaces the natural order of middle class morality by introducing unbridled sex and violence; and it destabilises the status quo, forcing us to question many conformist tendencies that we take for granted. With a wild disregard for all rules and for the act of censorship, the C movie is no less than a cinematic mutiny.

6

We can see from many of these tendencies that C-grade cinema, quite unconsciously, is the one truly experimental Indian film form. Separated from their shabby substance, these films have stylistic elements that lend themselves to radical filmmaking. This cinema inadvertently blows apart filmic conventions, mapping undercurrents of desire while it does so.

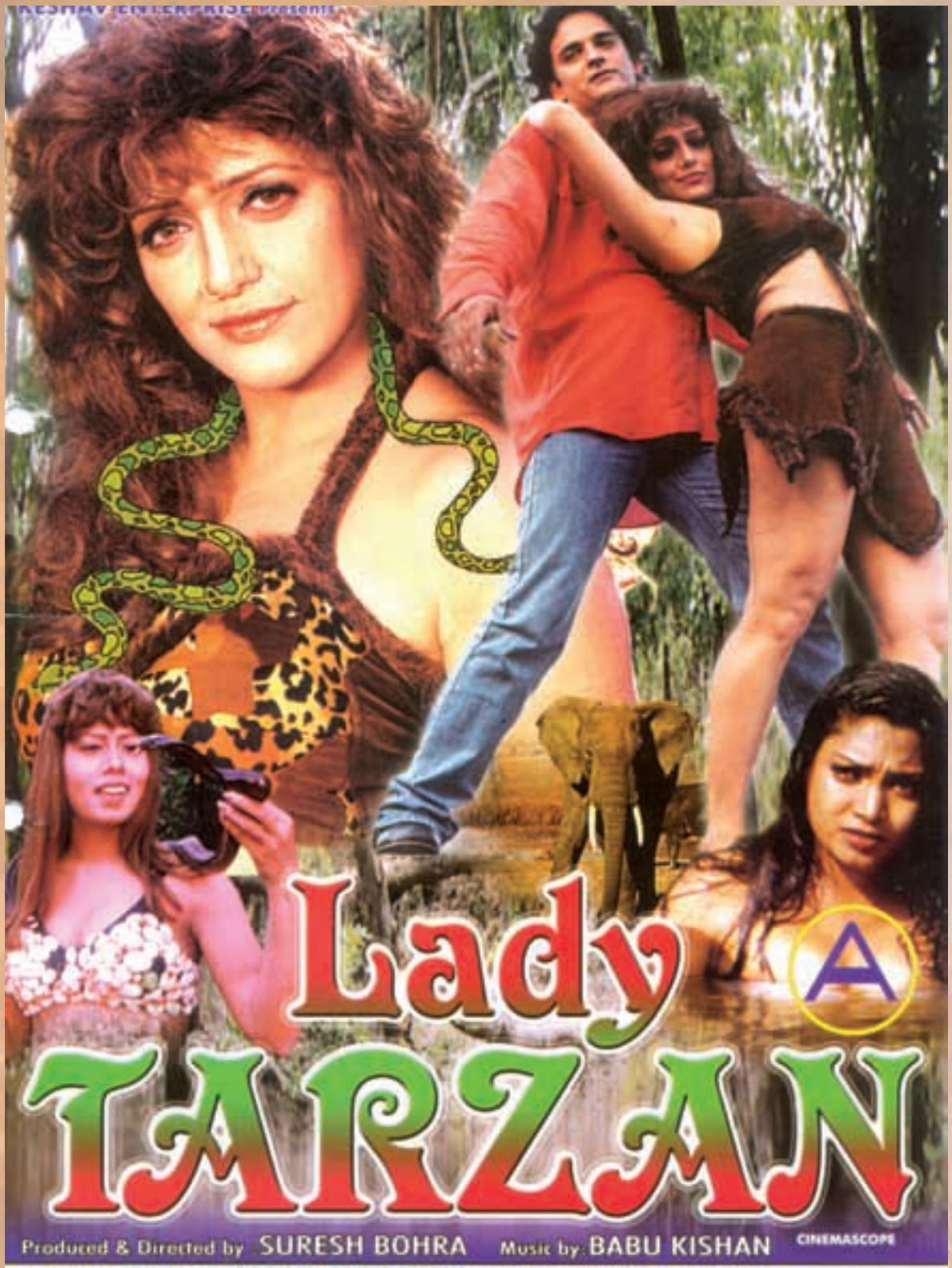
Miss Lovely is inspired by many of these formal elements. Just like in exploitation cinema, the film uses little fragments of plot as loose frameworks to explore and exhibit the characters'

emotions, attitudes, experiences and reactions. Letting go of an allegiance to a written script, the film dodges regulation, developing organically. Its pulse and personality are not dominated much by 'story' but primarily by the atmosphere and people in it, their faces, movements, tone of voice, their stumbling, their silences—reality as exposed through everyday qualities of life, free from literary and theatrical dominance.

Possibly, future Indian independent filmmakers could draw inspiration and energy from the collision of discourses in C-grade cinema—psychological, sexual, political, poetic, philosophical—detonating these elements into new, uncontrolled forms of cinema. Instead of making films that reach us slick and dead, we could try and break that cycle through a complete derangement of the official filmic senses. And there is no better model for that than the cheapest, trashiest films one can find.

[Excerpt from a forthcoming book due for publication by Onlab (Berlin) in 2014.]

***Ashim Ahluwalia is a filmmaker based in Mumbai, whose debut feature film* Miss Lovely *was selected for the 2012 Cannes Film Festival. He was named "one of the ten best emerging film directors working today" by Phaidon Press in* Take 100: The Future of Film.**



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NOTES

1. Eric Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True! A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 6.

2. Ibid., pp. 6-7.

3. Richard Leacock, 'For an Uncontrolled Cinema' in P. Adams Sitney (ed), *Film Culture Reader* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), p. 77.

4. Paul Hammond, 'Available Light' in Paul Hammond (ed), *The Shadow And Its Shadow: Surrealist Writing on the Cinema* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), p. 29.

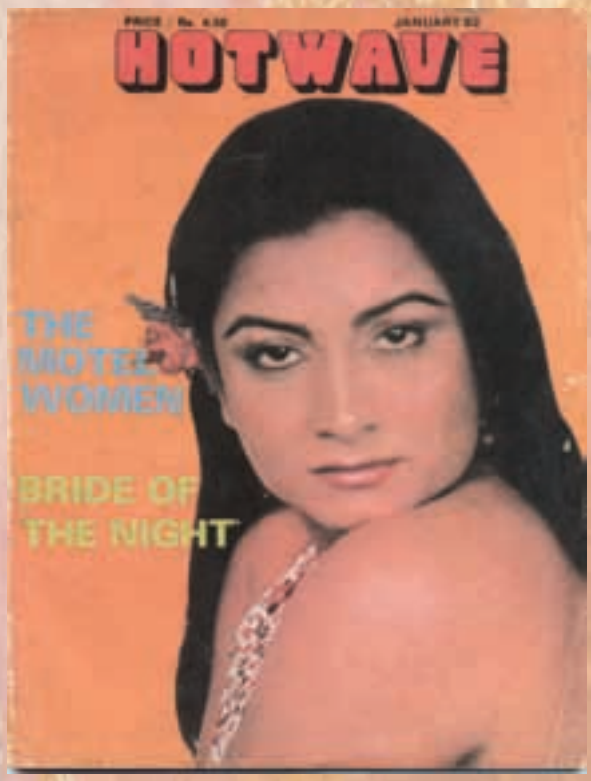
5. Ibid., p. 24.

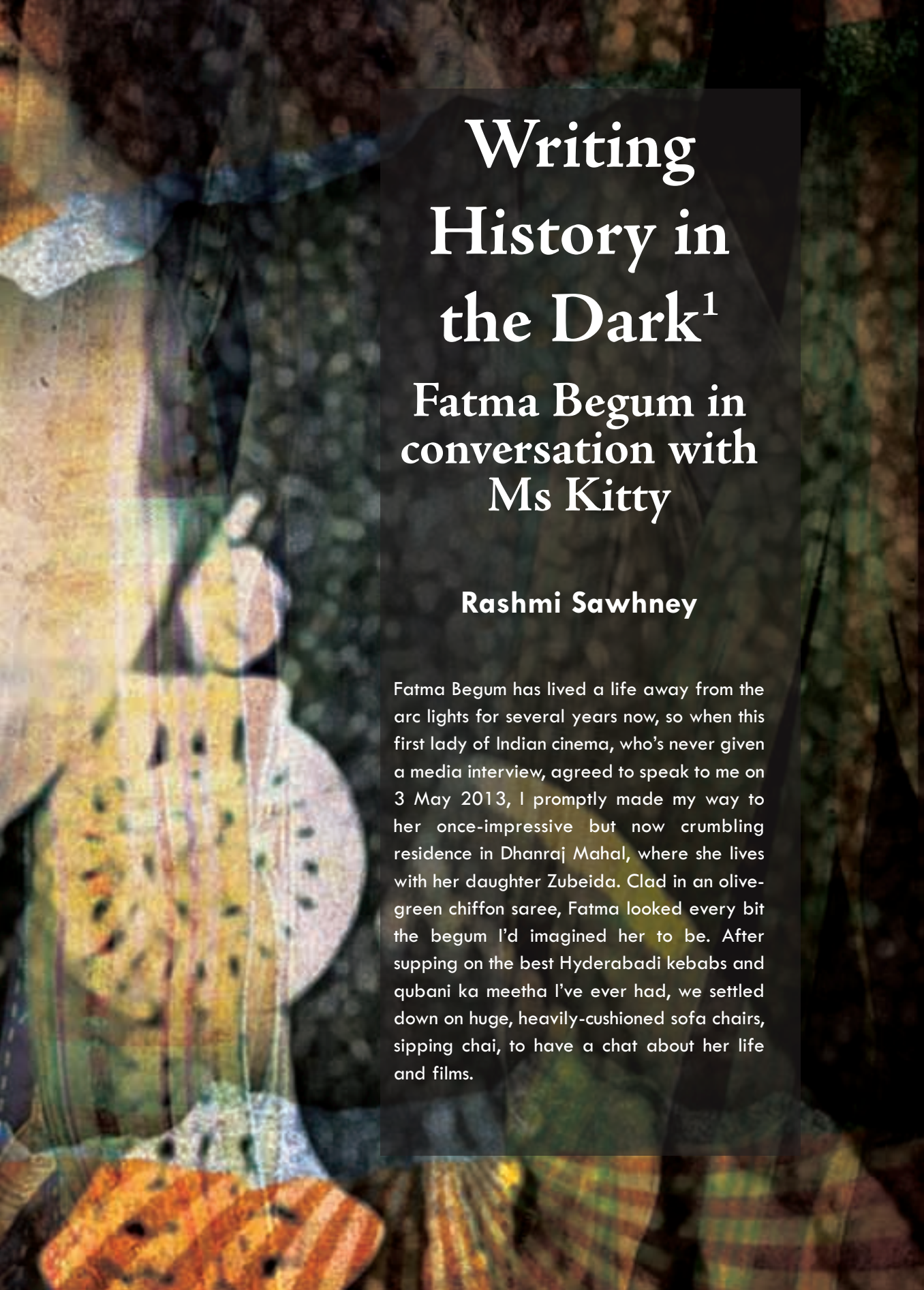
6. Ibid., pp. 29-30.

7. Ibid., p. 8.

8. Jonas Mekas, 'Notes on the New American Cinema' in Sitney (ed), *Film Culture Reader*, p. 105.

9. Hammond, 'Available Light' in Hammond (ed), *The Shadow And Its Shadow*, p. 4.





Writing History in the Dark[1]

Fatma Begum in conversation with Ms Kitty

Rashmi Sawhney

Fatma Begum has lived a life away from the arc lights for several years now, so when this first lady of Indian cinema, who's never given a media interview, agreed to speak to me on 3 May 2013, I promptly made my way to her once-impressive but now crumbling residence in Dhanraj Mahal, where she lives with her daughter Zubeida. Clad in an olive-green chiffon saree, Fatma looked every bit the begum I'd imagined her to be. After supping on the best Hyderabadi kebabs and qubani ka meetha I've ever had, we settled down on huge, heavily-cushioned sofa chairs, sipping chai, to have a chat about her life and films.

Ms Kitty: Fatma-ji, thank you so much for agreeing to this interview. You have generally stayed away from the media, so this is really very special.

Fatma: I never really warmed to the media. Only gossip and scandal! Poking into the private lives of film stars!

Ms Kitty: But when you started working in cinema in the 1920s, many film magazines were being set up all over the country. There was this great interest in cinema and its technology. People wanted to read about cinema in Europe, Russia and America.

Fatma: That was then. But now? Good thing I was never a star. No journalist wanted to spread gossip about me. (*Laughs*) As for my life in cinema…

Ms Kitty: Yes, that's what interests me. The world hardly knows anything about it.

Fatma: No one knows, not even me! (*Laughs at her own joke*) How much can I remember at my age? It was so long back.

Ms Kitty: Well, let's try. How did you get into films? Where does the story begin?

Fatma: Do you know I did my first film when I was thirty? Yes. Before that I was acting on the Gujarati and Urdu stage. I never really thought about becoming a film actor. And even after I started, I acted in films only now and then. And then the talkies came… *Duniya Kya Hai* [1938] was my last film; I must have been about forty-six or so then.

Ms Kitty: You and your daughters had overlapping film careers. Sultana and you made your debuts in *Veer Abhimanyu* [1922]. You were thirty; she must have been fourteen or fifteen? Two years later, at the age of twelve, Zubeida made her debut in *Gul-e-Bakavali* [1924]. The three of you were like the first all-female family of Indian cinema! Was it strange being in competition with your own daughters?

Fatma: Actually, acting in films with my daughters, made my entry into the industry much easier. We worked quite a lot with Imperial and

Kohinoor, and these studios became an extension of our family life—in fact I was so comfortable working there that I rarely freelanced with any other studios. Zubeida, Sultana and I shared everything, including all our gossip!

Ms Kitty: So do you have any memories of *Veer Abhimanyu*? That was Ardeshir Irani's first film as producer before he set up Imperial Studios, wasn't it?

Fatma: How can I remember? I can hardly recall my own life! Let me see, memories are so visual, almost like a film playing in your mind. Sometimes we make it all up. (*Smiles mischievously*) I remember the scenes where Sultana, as Uttara, learns to dance from Arjuna, who's in exile and in disguise. She was absolutely exquisite! Sultana was the best dancer in the family. She often practised at home, but even I was startled by what she pulled off in the film. Manilal Joshi, who directed the film, played the role of Abhimanyu. In those days you often had to be an actor, singer, writer, director, all at the same time. I played Subhadra, Abhimanyu's mother. It was a huge project: do you know that more than 5,000 people were involved with the production?

Ms Kitty: Five thousand people! Mr Irani must have been some producer to pull that off. You must have learned a lot about production from him.

Fatma: He was a shrewd businessman, and a great manager. Also a nice person with many friends.

Ms Kitty: He was like a mentor to you, wasn't he?

Fatma: Yes, he took me under his wing and was so generous with his time and ideas. I remember when we were doing Nanubhai Desai's *Sati Sardaba* [1924] I got a crash course on taxation from him! This was the first film Ardheshir produced under the banner of Saraswati Films; I remember this because he was facing some tax issues with the earlier production house, and had just set up this new one. It was those

conversations that got me thinking about setting up my own production house, which I did two years later.

Ms Kitty: I find it amazing that all three of you acted in this film. Zubeida played the lead role of Sardaba, if I'm not mistaken? It must have been great fun to watch and learn from each other. But was it awkward to do romantic scenes in front of your daughters?

Fatma: No, not really. I mean, we all understood that it was acting, after all. Well, maybe at first it was a bit awkward, because Zubu and Sultana were quite young when they started acting. But the producers and directors we worked with were very understanding. For example, I had some steamy scenes with Raja Sandow in some film. *Kayu film hatu, kashu yaad nathi rehtu have.* (What film was it, I don't remember anything these days.)

Ms Kitty: You're thinking of Manilal Joshi's *Prithvi Vallabh* [1924], the historical romance?

Fatma: Yes, yes, that one. You've done your research, huh! I was playing Minalvati and Sandow was King Munja. Manilal worked out a shooting schedule which made sure Zubu and Sultana were not on sets when the romantic scenes were being filmed. So these kinds of minor adjustments were possible in those days. Of course, all of us watched the film together when it was released, but nothing in it made us squirm.

Ms Kitty: Excuse me for digressing a bit, but I can't help but notice that photograph on the wall. There, that large one behind you, to your right. I can recognise Homi Master in the photo, surrounded by a big crowd as he's getting out of a car. And there's a woman in the car, wearing sunglasses, whose face is not very visible…

Fatma: Oh that! That's the only photo I have from my film years, a press photo from the premiere of *Kala Nag* [1924]. That's me in the car. Homi Master played the male lead. He was very popular with the crowds, but was quite overbearing as a co-star. He fussed over every aspect of the film. Kanjibhai Rathod who directed the film was a soft person,

and we felt sorry for him sometimes because Homi would bully him into changing this or that thing in the film. In the end, though, it turned out to be a fabulous thriller. It was based on that infamous Champsi-Haridas murder case, one of the first films to be based on a real-life crime.

Ms Kitty: Which reminds me, Fatma-ji, I have something to give you. I found this in a *kabaadi* shop. It's a copy of the *The Bombay Chronicle* dated 5 January 1924, which carries an advertisement for *Kala Nag*. It says: "Thrilling plot, revealing various styles of treacherous fraud of the modern civilization, and dreadful assassination for the ardent desire of wealth or passions and rape and ravishment by atrocious villains!"

Fatma: *Mashallah*, that's so kind of you! Would you like some more kebabs? Nobody makes them like Zubu does—it's a secret recipe she learnt from her mother-in-law, the Rani of Dhanrajgir. (*Lowering her voice*) But I've seen her make those kebabs on the sly; I will give you the recipe in return for this wonderful newspaper clipping.

Ms Kitty: A secret recipe from the royal kitchens of Hyderabad! Yes, please, my friends will be so envious of me! But perhaps later, when we finish the interview. Do you have a favourite among the films you acted in?

Fatma: I think Nanubhai Desai's *Mumbai Ni Mohini* [1925]. What a wicked film! You know how films needed to have English titles to be able to travel? I don't know why, but *Mumbai Ni Mohini* had two English titles: 'Social Pirates' and 'Night Side of Bombay'! Mohini was meant to be a pun on the 'charms of Bombay', and I thoroughly enjoyed playing the character of a temptress. You remember the story? I fall in love with the Anglicised manager, Manohar, of my rich old husband's estate. Manohar embezzles a large sum of money from my husband, blames it on a co-manager, whom we then attempt to murder, unsuccessfully.

Ms Kitty: A great story for a Hitchcock film or a *film-noir*!

Fatma: But I didn't like the ending: we

Ibrahim Muhammed, the Nawab of Sachin. Photograph from www.royalark.net (accessed on 10 May 2013)

get caught and have to die. I would have liked to rob the old husband, elope with the lover, and escape to a sunny island to lead a James Bond lifestyle! If only I were an actor today…

Ms Kitty: Or perhaps if you had met Jamshed Wadia before Mary Evans did, you could have been a fearless diamond queen, flying from horseback to train-top, wielding a whip…

Fatma: (*Laughs*) Well, not unless I was also a white woman; Wadia would never have chosen a dark-skinned Indian woman for that role! But seriously, you have no idea what it meant for me to get into the film industry. People say Fatma is the first woman director in Indian cinema, but so what? Had I been the tenth woman director in India, would it have been any less significant? There are many women actors today who have become politicians and cultural ambassadors for India. This had already started happening in the 1950s with Nargis and…no, even earlier, with Devika Rani. But the 1920s was different. To add to that, I was married to the Raja of Sachin and to leave all that luxury to struggle to become a film actor in those days, can you imagine how difficult that was?

Ms Kitty: Sachin was a princely state near Soorat in British India, right? Pardon me for asking a personal question, but didn't your husband object to your joining the industry?

Fatma: (*Laughs hysterically*) I got married in 1906 at the age of fourteen. My husband, Ibrahim Muhammed Yakut Khan III Bahadur, the Nawab of Sachin, and I had three daughters. Zubeida first, then Sultana, and then Shehzadi. In the 1920s, often the nawabs were unable to pay taxes demanded by the British rulers, and it was easier to send off their older wives to the film industry than to support them. Of course, I was a stage actor, and had great interest in films—we had special screenings for the *zenana* women when the travelling cinema companies came to our town…

Ms Kitty: Oh, I see. So it suited you both. And your daughters? Do you have any regrets that they joined the film industry?

Fatma: I thank Allah that my daughters grew up to be independent women. When I moved to Bombay, I brought them with me. There was no way they could have escaped the lure of cinema, and fortunately, all of them came off the better for this. Zubeida was top of the charts in the 1930s, earning Rs 2,000 per month. Sultana was the absolute star of the silent era, but her memory was weak, and she couldn't remember her diaogues for the talkies. I was a strict mother and I made sure the girls had their milk and *badaam*s every morning, but Sultana would drive me mad, making me chase her around the house with a fistful of *badaam*s, the little *shaitan* that she was! Of course, when love comes knocking there's no getting away, and Sultana and her husband Seth Razzaq moved to Karachi after Partition. Though she gave up acting after marriage, she dabbled in production. The one thing I will regret until my dying day is that I couldn't go for the premiere of Sultana's first production, *Hum Ek Hai* [1961], in Karachi. I can't remember exactly what year it was …but it was just a little before the war with China. The newspapers used to be full of reports on tightening border controls. So my visa was rejected. I guess life is as Allah wills it.

Film actress sues 'husband' for ₹5 lakh

Sultana, the well-known film actress has filed a suit at the Bombay High Court asking for a declaration that she was the lawfully wedded wife of Yakub Hussenbhoy Laljee, son of the ex-president of Bombay Municipal Corporation. She also prays the defendant ... pay Rs 5 lakh with interest at 6 percent from July 13, 1930 till payment...

Counsel said she alleged there was a marriage between herself and the defendant at the Taj Mahal Hotel on June 6, 1928, and that by a nikkanamma he settled Rs 5 lakh on her as dower...

Defence said no marriage had taken place ... Counsel for plaintiff Sultana Yakub Hussein, opposing the transfer to the long causes board said that proceedings were launched far back and in the meantime every love letter, every sonnet, and every poem had been taken inspection of by the defendant ...

His Lordship: That is very romantic.

And now counsel added, they had produced a pre-

WELL-KNOWN FILM ACTRESS SUES FOR MAINTENANCE

FIVE LAKHS CLAIMED

cious little statement. He submitted that a more ridiculous statement had not been filed on the record of the High Court before. His (Laljee) story was false on the face of it. The plaintiff's case was based on documents...

Mr Wadia said one of the alleged participants in the conspiracy was the Kazi, who performed the marriage, himself. That gentleman was one of the only two recognised Kazis in Bombay and... he was intending about the Taj Mahal Hotel for the purpose of the conspiracy...

His Lordship: How many marriages has he performed at 9 pm at the Taj Mahal Hotel? ... These are matters to be gone into.

JULY 30 1931

News report on Sultana's marriage – Times of India Archive

Ms Kitty: But didn't Sultana marry Yakub Husseinbhoy Laljee in Bombay in 1930?

Fatma: That Yakub was a liar and a thief, and I hope he rots in hell!

Ms Kitty: What about your youngest daughter, Shehzadi? You've hardly spoken about her.

Fatma: Shehzadi was always the quietest of the three. But so much suppressed anger in that girl ...nobody but her *abba* could pacify her when she threw a fit. She must have been nine or ten when we moved to Bombay. She never got to like the city. She missed her friends in Sachin. Zubeida, Sultana and I were so busy with our film shoots in those years that perhaps we neglected her…Then one day she told us she was going back to Sachin. For the first year or two after she left she would send an occasional letter, but slowly that too stopped. None of us have heard from her in a long time. When we got news of her *abba*'s death, I was secretly hoping that I'd see her at the burial, but she didn't come. (*Blows into her delicately embroidered handkerchief and pops a paan into her mouth.*)

Ms Kitty: I'm sorry to have upset you—perhaps we should talk about more cheerful things. Why don't you tell me about *Bulbul-e-Parastan* [1926], such an amazing fantasy film that was!

Fatma: Shehzadi came often with me to the *Bulbul-e-Parastan* sets. I was hoping seeing the shoot would get her interested in film production. But she would sit all day, head buried in some book or another, never


ZEBUNI
GULBAKAWALI
गुलबकावली
NITIN BOSE
TAROJ MOVIETONE

glancing at the glamour and excitement around her.

Ms Kitty: It was your first film as a director, wasn't it? Quite an expensive film for its time, what with all the special effects and trick photography.

Fatma: The film was partly set in a fairyland, so the script demanded a lot of special effects, which Ardeshir helped me to create. Even simple things, like showing the movement of celestial creatures between *parastan* and earth, had to be worked out from scratch.

Ms Kitty: What was it about *parastan* or fairyland that was so appealing to filmmakers in the 1920s and 1930s? *Gul-e-Bakavali* is one of the most widely adapted stories in film history. Zubeida and you acted in Mohanlal Dave's production [1924]. Then Mohanlal Shah did a remake in 1930. Then Madan Film Company produced it in Bangla in Calcutta, and it was adapted twice in Telugu and thrice in Tamil. Some of these films had famous stars too, like M.G. Ramchandran in the 1955 Tamil version, and N.T. Rama Rao in the 1962 Telugu version.[2] I am amazed by Indian cinema's fascination for these stories of doomed love between celestial women and mortal men. I wonder what it is about impossible desire that holds such allure for cinema.[3] See, I bought this poster of the 1930 film from some auction house in Bombay—had to spend a fortune on it. It's ridiculous how film memorabilia has become such a hot ticket item in the art market.

Fatma: If only we'd all been a little more careful about our film knick knacks, we could have been millionaires by now! I had so many old film magazines, letters from fans, photographs, posters, even costumes from some of those fantasy films…but that wretched fire destroyed everything. We had to gather what little could be salvaged and rebuild this house. Zubeida's husband had built it for her in the 1930s. It was the most expensive house in Bombay at that time. My son-in-law was an extravagant man, with opulent taste. Of course, we couldn't restore the house to its full

Imperial theatre, Lamington Road, Bombay

glory. But I am still hopeful. Sometimes old belongings are suddenly rediscovered. Just a few years ago, didn't they find the letters two French philosophers had written to each other? Some Beaver (*sic*) and her lover, Sater (*sic*) [Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre] or something—I can't pronounce those French names. The woman thought the letters had been lost when her lover's house was bombed, but then they were discovered in her own house after her death. So I pray each day that my little bundle of film souvenirs is lying around forgotten somewhere, waiting to be discovered and make me rich again!

Ms Kitty: That would be wonderful! As it is, only a handful of the silent films survive. You were so lucky to watch all these films in the theatre! They say that more than 1,300 were made. Do you have any recollection of watching your first public screening of *Gul-e-Bakavali*?

Fatma: Like it was yesterday! I had some photos of the film premiere, but they were lost in that fire too. So all these years, I've played out events from my film life like a reel in my mind's eye, hoping the images won't disintegrate…I still remember the sari I wore that day, it was deep blue with a large gold border. Zubeida,

Sultana and I sat together. And in the row behind us sat Mohanlal Dave the scriptwriter, Dwarkadas Sampat the producer, and Khalil the lead actor of the film. Or perhaps they were in the row in front of us. They must have been; I think Sampat's bald head was getting in my way. He was not exceptionally tall, but since I'm a short woman, I always prefer front rows in the cinema. The hall was packed, and I felt so proud watching Zubu and Sultana on screen.

Ms Kitty: Where did you watch it?

Fatma: At the Imperial theatre on Lamington Road. All Kohinoor films used to be released there. *Gul-e-Bakavali* ran for over twenty weeks in Bombay. Imperial theatre started as an opera house in 1905, but I'm told that today it only screens Bhojpuri films. I was driving past the theatre the other day and was really pained to see it. It's on the verge of collapse. At one time its screen had projected and etched so many film stars onto the public's imagination…but today nobody cares about its history.

Ms Kitty: My mother remembers watching the film in Lucknow. I think it was one of the first films to be distributed across the country, and I read that even the Indian Cinematograph Committee of 1927-28 mentions that it was liked by audiences both in the north and south of the country. Even by British administrators. It was probably the biggest hit of the silent film era, establishing the Arabian Nights fantasy as a viable genre for the Bombay film industry.[4]

Fatma: Perhaps the film had wide appeal because it belonged to everyone and no one. It was like a pan-Indian *khichdi*. With earlier films you could often tell it was made by a Gujarati, Maharashtrian or Bengali and so on. In *Gul-e-Bakavali*, we used all kinds of costumes: tribal-type outfits, skirts and shararas of the sort Arabian women wear, saris and dhotis, and

Sultana – National Film Archive of India

gypsy-inspired dresses. There was a brilliant dance sequence with the dancers in burqas—you would never see that today. A Rajput character is called Jalad Singh and his son Taj-ul-Mulk has a Muslim name. Mohanlal Dave was a conservative man, but his script had clothes slipping off a sleeping Bakavali![5] All this was new.

Ms Kitty: Dwarkadas Sampat was going in bold directions with the Kohinoor films. It's a pity that the studio was forced to shut down in 1932. You must have some good memories of Kohinoor…

Fatma: Well, it was a long time ago, but I'll never forget a film directed by Kanjibhai Rathod. What fun we had working with him! Kanjibhai was the first professional director at

Kohinoor —he was not a partner in the firm, but was hired especially to direct films. He was a Dalit and his parents were Arya Samajis, and we expected him to be very strict. But he never took offence at our silly pranks on the sets. I remember how the actor Gangaram would mimic Kanjibhai's mannerisms, especially the way he consumed snuff. And then once in some very serious scene—I think it was a death scene or something—we started mouthing all these funny lines while acting! Of course, that was because in the silent days, actors could say anything they liked while playing a scene as long as they had the correct expression![6]

Ms Kitty: That really does sound like a lot of fun! Pity Dwarkadas Sampat could not quite get the hang of the talkies and keep Kohinoor alive. But Ardheshir Irani made the transition nicely. You must have visited the sets of *Alam Ara* [1931] while Zubeida was shooting for the film. What was that like?

Fatma: *Alam Ara* was a leap in the dark! The crew made lots of mistakes as no one knew how to shoot with sound. It was shot like a play being filmed. Ardheshir got Joseph David, the stage director, to help with shooting. Joseph brought a camera and a mike. On the first day of shooting, a coconut was broken, silence was ordered, the camera and mike were switched on, and the scene went on and on! Nobody really knew when to stop or start the scenes and dialogues, and finally the American sound expert Mr Lemming—or was it Fleming?—[Demming] shouted furiously, "Will somebody please say cut?"![7]

Ms Kitty: Many filmmakers and producers found it difficult to cope with the technology and finances of sound recording…

Fatma: The transition to the talkies was very difficult. The cost of making films went up because producers had to import new recording and editing equipment, and exhibitors had to wire up their theatres to screen films with sound.

Ms Kitty: Wasn't Ardheshir Irani the first to equip Imperial Studio with a Tanar Single sound-on-film recording system?

Fatma: (*Ignores the question*) And sound meant realism. It meant language and speech and all that goes with it—local setting and culture, for example. That was not my cup of tea: I liked to borrow from here, there and everywhere for my films. So I gave up film production and only did some acting roles after 1929.

Ms Kitty: But what made you get into film production in the first place? A woman in the 1920s!

Fatma: You think women couldn't be enterprising in those days? And remember I'm Gujarati and I thought that my production house would make money. I had to fend for myself and my daughters. When I set up the production house, I was still learning how the business of cinema worked. In 1926 and 1927, I made only two films under the Fatma Film Corporation banner: *Bulbul-e-Parastan* and then another film which was better known by its English title, *Goddess of Love*. Even I've forgotten what it was called in Gujarati!

Ms Kitty: And what about finances and distribution?

Fatma: I made a few mistakes with finances, and had to dissolve the company and re-establish it as Victoria Fatma Film Corporation in 1928 for tax purposes.

Ms Kitty: But then you directed and produced two films in 1928 itself! *Heer Ranjha*, in which Zubeida played Heer, and *Chandravali*.

Fatma: Yes, I had become wiser by then. But my best year was 1929, when I managed to make four films: *Kanaktara*, in which Sultana acted, *Milan Dinar*, *Naseebni Devi*, in which both Sultana and I acted, and *Shakuntala*. But after that…It was hard for a woman filmmaker to raise finances. Harder than even now…

Ms Kitty: Well, many women directors have told me that producers think women have no head for business! I've heard some strange stories about Dwarkadas Sampat too. You knew him well; what was he really like as a producer?

Fatma: I don't know what you've heard, but Sampat was quite a visionary. He was among the first to imagine a professionally-run studio. Before that, film production in India was a rough-and-ready business.

Even what Dadasaheb Phalke set up was nothing more than a family-run cottage industry system. Sampat was a strange kind of realist, though. He insisted that characters in his films wear real jewellery and authentic clothes, which I agree is a bit crazy. He also maintained a zoo in his studio, to provide animals for his film shoots.[8]

Ms Kitty: So how did he get into films?

Fatma: From what he told me, he was inspired by the success of Phalke's *Lanka Dahan* [1917]. But because he was a newcomer in the industry, no director or technician was ready to work for him. At that point he heard that the director S.N. Patankar was in need of finances, so he decided to fund him. Of course, they fell out a few years later—some silly squabbles over cultural identity or some such thing. You should ask Virchand Dharamsey-bhai about this story, he knows what really happened. I don't really know all the details.

Ms Kitty: Yes, Virchand-bhai brings up the Patankar–Sampat story in some article; I have made a note somewhere, I should look it up. But Sakina told me Sampat gave her a really tough time.

Fatma: Which Sakina? The actress?

Ms Kitty: Yes, she said she had to do some scene that demanded semi-nudity in one of Sampat's films, and she wasn't very comfortable with that.

Fatma: That Sakina is such an attention-seeker! She has been telling this story to everybody, trying to make trouble for no reason. What happened was that Sakina had to bare her breasts in *Sati Anusuya* [1921] in the scene where Anusuya suckles the gods. But she sat alone in a room in the studio, while the scene was shot through a hole in the studio wall with the camera placed outside, so what is she making such a song and dance about?[9]

Ms Kitty: Well I guess she just wasn't adequately prepared for doing a scene like that.

Fatma: That doesn't make her a very good actor then, does it? I personally get very angry with all this *hullagulla* over morality. It is full of hypocrisy.

Ms Kitty: Did you never object to your daughters doing bold scenes? For example, Zubeida's forty-eight kisses with Jal Merchant in that Ezra Mir film *Zarina* [1932]—did that never bother you? The media was ablaze with controversy over that film for months. For example, I came across this magazine report on *Zarina* which says, "Zubeida plays a vibrant, volatile circus girl whose kisses steam up the screen, sparking off a heated debate on censorship…"

Zubeida in *Zarina* - *Journal of the Moving Image*

Fatma: You know only too well how the media like to sensationalise things!

Ms Kitty: I won't comment on the media, but I find the Bombay Censor Board's list of 'objectionable' scenes quite extraordinary. I have this document here with a long list of such scenes. Let me read a few out to you: unnecessary exhibition of feminine underclothing; the exhibition of profuse bleeding; nude figures; offensive vulgarity and impropriety in conduct and dress; indecorous dancing; excessively passionate love scenes; and bathing scenes passing the limits of propriety!

Fatma: (*Laughs*) I know this list very well. I had to go over it each time I sent a film to the Bombay Censor Board. I could almost rattle it off in my sleep in those days. Look, where is it gone, that photo of Zubeida's; I had kept it safely in this book to show you. Ah, here it is. Some media people had come the other day to interview her; they took a photo and

Zubeida - National Film Archive of India

gave her this copy. What does she look like if not respectable?!

Ms Kitty: She looks beautiful, and she looks a lot like you! Your times were so fascinating. All this confusion about what was socially acceptable and what was not, and cinema of course was the greatest taboo of all. Apparently Dadasaheb Phalke found it so difficult to get women actors that he had to cast men "with delicate features and slender hands" as women.[10] The film industry must really thank Muslim, Jewish and Anglo-Indian women for taking to the screen. Tell me, why did the industry men fuss so much about making the industry a place where 'respectable women' could work? Dhiren Ganguly, the filmmaker, writes in *Film Land* that "the women in the industry were unfit because of their base mode of living, vicious environment, their want of culture and their indifference to education".[11] See, I have a copy of the article here. What does he mean by 'base mode of living' and 'want of culture'?!

Fatma: Any woman would welcome it if the industry stopped exploiting women. Let them start by paying us the same as our male co-actors. Men like Ganguly decided that the film industry would become more respectable if more upper caste Hindu women joined the industry. Such men thought that Devika Rani, Shanta Apte and Durga Khote—all

wonderful actors—contributed to the respectability of the industry. So I am told.

Ms Kitty: But they didn't escape the hypocrisies of the industry either. Devika Rani's kissing scene in *Karma* [1933] kicked up such a controversy!

Fatma: And what a wasted kiss too! They must have slowed down the speed of the projector to make that kiss last four minutes. There was no chemistry between Devika and her husband Himanshu Rai—it looked like both of them were ready to run…and of course she did run off a few years later, with Najam-ul-Hussain! Would you like some more tea?

Ms Kitty: No, thanks, I think I should take your leave now. We've been chatting for long, and you must be tired. It's been such a pleasure talking to you. I'll come back another day maybe, for your kebab recipe?

Fatma: Well, come on a Wednesday. That's when nobody is at home. And I'll let you in on a little secret. Some of us ladies from the old days of the industry—those who are still around, *mashallah*—have been gathering all the old celluloid strips the censors made us cut. Our celluloid is like us, you know, it's wasting away day by day, so we thought we'd have some fun with our moving images before they fade away altogether. We meet here every Wednesday, look through the film bits. Some of it is quite raunchy, let me warn you! Sometimes we join the bits to create new content.

Ms Kitty: I can just see the headline of a sensational news report—film stars of yesteryear experimenting with naughty found footage!

Fatma: (*Laughs*) Now I'm tired…all these memories you've stirred up. I really need to sleep my thoughts away…but I'll see you soon. Next Wednesday, perhaps?

On her off days Ms Kitty masquerades as Rashmi Sawhney, Programme Executive at IFA, and in Second Life, as faculty in film and cultural studies at the Dublin Institute of Technology.

NOTES

1. "*A film historian is somewhat like an archaeologist, trying to get an idea of a society gone by, with the help of a few potsherds, broken bangles and some beads.*" T. Bhaskaran, 'Problems Faced by Film Historians in India', *Journal of the Moving Image*, No. 9 (2010).
An undisputed challenge to historians of early Indian cinema is the dearth of documentary evidence—scripts, photographs, industry records, posters, film production equipment, and indeed the films themselves—to help reconstruct the history of this period. What can emerge, then, is merely a partial narrative that cajoles you into alternative ways of re-thinking film cultures and historiography. Using the liberty afforded by this duress, I have attempted to reconstruct the context within which Fatma Begum—whose generic title of Begum forever cloaks her in mystery—worked as an actor, director and producer in the Bombay film industry in the 1920s and 1930s. A few entries, across disparate sources—mainly in journals such as *Mouj*, *Majha*, *Filmland* and *Film India*—about her films and her daughters' lives in cinema, come to the rescue in what can only be a futile, if wishful, pursuit of discovering India's first woman filmmaker. I have therefore resorted to a patchwork-quilt approach in weaving together this narrative in the form of an interview between a film journalist, Ms Kitty, and Fatma, to create a speculative history of her life and times.

2. Kaushik Bhaumik, 'Gul-e-Bakavali as Text and Film Script: Introduction', *Bioscope*, 3 (2) (2012), pp. 175-207.

3. For an interesting discussion on *pari*/*parastan* stories, see Gayatri Chatterjee, 'Writing History for Cinema: Archives, Archeological Sites and Homes', *Journal of the Moving Image*, No. 9 (2010). Chatterjee argues that the *pari* symbolises the impossibility of desire. For example, a common narrative is that the *pari* falls in love with a mortal man despite numerous warnings and then has to deal with this problem-situation. She can either

choose to stay with her lover in the human world, or can return to *parastan*. If she stays on, she must lose her wings—the symbols of her freedom and powers—and be fully domesticated. Or she holds on to her wings, but goes back to her own land broken-hearted. Chatterjee adds that it's not only the *pari* who succumbs to desire; men too give in to her beauty and seductive powers, but ultimately they must establish control over her and diminish her superiority. "The ultimate male fantasy is a superior woman, but one who is still available and subservient to him."

4. 'Transcript of Interview with Virchand Dharamsey', *Bioscope*, 3 (2) (2012), pp. 175-207.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Virchand Dharamsey, 'The Advent of Sound in Indian Cinema: Theatre, Orientalism, Action, Magic', *Journal of the Moving Image*, No. 9 (2010).

8. Sampat belonged to a Kutchi-speaking Halai Bhatia family from Jam Kambhatiya near Jamnagar and ran a shop in Rajkot. At some point in the early years of silent cinema, he bought a projector, and was given a few short films for free, which he started to screen. His parents wanted him to go to Europe to become a chartered accountant but he was not really interested. Fortunately for him he fell really sick at sea and had to return mid-voyage, after which he pursued a career in cinema. 'Transcript of Interview with Virchand Dharamsey', *Bioscope*, 3 (2) (2012).

9. Ibid.

10. Mohun and Choudhuri, 'Of Wayward Girls and Wicked Women: Women in Silent Indian Feature Films', *Deep Focus*-6 (1996), pp. 4-14.

11. Samik Bandhopadhyay, *Indian Cinema: Contemporary Perceptions from the Thirties* (Jamshedpur: Celluloid Chapter, 1993).

The poster of *Zabak* (1961) directed by Homi Wadia.

Out of Sight: Archiving Hidden Histories of Practice

Debashree Mukherjee

All photographs courtesy Priya Paul

Our understanding of Indian cinema would remain incomplete until we acknowledged its supporting cast of hairdressers, poster painters, costume designers, still photographers, makeup artists and numerous other specialists invisible to the public eye. In January 2013, Debashree Mukherjee curated an exhibition of Hindi film memorabilia titled 'Maya Mahal', which featured artefacts from the private collection of Priya Paul, Chairperson of Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels. In this essay, Mukherjee uses examples from the collection to point to hidden histories of work and practice, and to give us a fragmented view of low-budget films, lost genres and the wage-workers who mark each film with their individual skills.

Heterodox in its scope and range, Priya Paul's collection of film memorabilia represents an eccentric mix of films. There are archives larger than this, there are archives that are more systematic, but the pleasure of serendipity springs from juxtaposition, not from order and expanse. Comprising approximately 5,000 paper artefacts, the Priya Paul collection was built using an intuitive logic that brought disparate objects together with scant regard for cultural hierarchies. And thus, Mehboob Khan's *Mother India* (1957) is shelved with K.S. Reddy's *Daku Rani Himmatwali* (1984), and Guru Dutt's *Pyaasa* (1957) jostles for space with Akkoo's *Aadam Khor* (1955), to create an associative magic.

In January 2013 an exhibition titled 'Maya Mahal' presented a first glimpse of this collection. As its curator I wanted to distil the chief promise held out by the collection rather than illustrate its range. This promise was the elemental contract of cinema itself: to deliver sensory excitement, voyeuristic delight and magical worlds. Thus, the exhibition showcased genres, practitioners and aesthetics that are often forgotten in a bid to celebrate auteurs and 'classics'. This is an alternative history of Hindi cinema—one that is decidedly excessive, melodramatic, even utopian.

Many of these films have not been considered socially or artistically significant by dominant standards. Most of them firmly belong to the B-circuit and were made on a low budget, with scant attention to subtlety and much emphasis on thrills. B movies have traditionally circulated in mofussil towns, rural centres, and the working class neighbourhoods of big cities. The point is not whether these films are 'good' or 'bad', but that these are desires and imaginations that have existed alongside the mainstream, often erupting into it. The power of the mainstream blockbuster draws on the affective charge of the

underground, the unseen. The two go together, much like the Ravi-Vijay duo in Yash Chopra's *Deewar* (1975). In the A-circuit universe, Vijay must be punished for his transgressions and die in the climax. But he is also the more exciting sibling, dangerous and sexy, flouting all norms and making us secretly root for him. As we celebrate the centenary of Indian cinema, we must also look at the B movie, the ogre in the cave, the misshapen twin of the mainstream.

Hidden histories of work and practice are encoded within the Priya Paul collection. Film artefacts such as lobby cards, posters and song booklets evoke layered histories—of the men and women who created the object in itself (still photographers, poster painters, graphic designers, printers) and of those who created all that is contained within the frame (art directors, costume designers, choreographers, background dancers, light boys). The Bombay film industry is seldom approached as a site of work. But it is in fact an industrial-affective site where technology, innovation and improvisation go hand-in-hand with risk, ambition and desire. Over the last decade, some areas of Indian film and media studies have clearly veered toward the documentation of practice. Signs of this change in direction can be seen in Raqs Media Collective and C.K. Muralidharan's research on 'The History and Practice of Cinematography in India,'[1] Sarai-CSDS's project titled 'Publics and Practices in the History of the Present', Ranjani Mazumdar's work on production designers and poster makers,[2] Clare Wilkinson-Weber's study of 'dressmen' (costume managers in Hindi cinema), Tejaswini Ganti's ethnographic research on production and Gregory Booth's study of the music industry.[3]

We do not have *any* collective memory of the actors, producers and directors of B- and C-grade movies. And when it comes to the legendary classics of mainstream Hindi cinema, we rarely recognise the efforts of specialists such as art directors, costume designers, makeup artists or stunt masters. Here are some artefacts presented in the 'Maya Mahal' exhibition, viewed from the angles of labour and biography. What follows is an exercise in seeing and naming that will necessarily be incomplete and fragmented, for it will largely take the form of an inventory of biographies, a catalogue of practices. Perhaps it could also point to possibilities for research and historiography.


GEVACOLOR
ZIMBO
HOMI WADIA

Stunts and Action

Zimbo (1958) was a colour remake of Wadia Movietone's superhit film *Toofani Tarzan* (1937), both directed by Homi Wadia. The success of *Toofani Tarzan* had launched a veritable cycle of jungle adventure films; the film itself remained in circulation for about twenty years. The story begins when Professor Chakravarty, who is working on a formula for eternal life in his top-secret forest laboratory, is killed by wild animals. Before dying, though, he fixes the anti-aging formula in an amulet around his infant son's neck and sets him aloft in a hot air balloon. The boy is brought up by the jungle in Tarzan-fashion, and adopted by Dada, a chimpanzee. Seventeen years later the professor's brother arrives on a mission to find his nephew. He is accompanied by his beautiful, adopted daughter Leela. This character is played by Chitra and she immediately falls in love with our dashing local Tarzan. For the rest of the film we see her play Jane in demure leopard skins and battle it out with her romantic rival, Maya.

Chitra (d. 2006) was a leading lady in low-budget films of the 1950s and 1960s. Born Afsar Unissa Begum in Hyderabad, her life and work have gone practically undocumented. The Priya Paul collection, with its emphasis on stunt and fantasy films, brings an actress such as Chitra into the public eye. In an interview to Khalid Mohamed in 1990, Chitra constructs her own narrative. As a child she frequently went to Bombay for family holidays, and was soon swept up by the film craze. Her first role was opposite Ajit in Safdar Aah's *Maan* (1954) but real success came with P.N. Arora's *Chor Bazaar* (1954) opposite Shammi Kapoor.[4]

Chitra proudly listed *Zimbo* among her most significant films calling it "India's first jungle colour film." Her

account of her short-lived professional success is bitter-sweet:

> I've done all sorts of films… I lived in a bungalow-type house, I changed seven cars as I became more and more popular. I've done 111 films, I've counted them actually… But then there was an *ajeebsi* [strange] tragedy… Work stopped coming and there wasn't the kind of money flow as earlier. … I'm okay, I have a decent 650 sq ft flat, a phone. God forbid, I've never starved. I've adjusted to the times. I like travelling by auto rickshaw, it's like sitting on a *jhoola* [swing].[5]

Tracking biographies like Chitra's opens up several other narratives of lost genres such as jungle stunt films, and players such as Azad, the muscular Tarzan of India, or even Pedro, 'the human chimpanzee'.

Opender Chanana, film professional and labour activist, starts his book on work conditions in the Bombay film industry with a reference to a news report from 1938 written by a young film journalist from Lahore, B.R. Chopra. Three actors had drowned in the Powai Lake during the shooting of Mohan Pictures' *Vir Bala*. Chanana recounts that Chopra wrote a strident editorial in his magazine, *Cine Herald*, and "called upon the Producers to give material and moral support and relief to the dependents of the victims. It also suggested, as guidance for future, to stunt companies, to arrange for safe guards beforehand for those who play with *danger.* It stressed the need for security and assurance against loss of life to artists."[6] This editorial did not change the industry's approach to safety norms or compensation. However, it pointed to a huge blind spot in discussions around the Indian film industries—that

unorganised, informal labour and precarious working conditions had been ignored entirely.

In the same year as the Powai Lake accident, a predecessor of Chitra and Azad at Wadia Movietone faced a series of shooting mishaps. Pramilla, born Esther Abraham, acted in more than thirty-five films from 1935 to 1961 and was closely associated with the stunt film genre, acting in adventure films such as *Jungle King* (1939) from Wadia Movietone and *Bijlee* (1939) from Prakash Pictures, where one would find her dressed in tiger skins and jumping off horses. Pramilla performed her own stunts in many films and sustained many severe injuries. In 1938 during the shooting of *Jungle King* she had a couple of narrow escapes. The film unit had gone to Ghodbunder for an outdoor shoot and there was a scene in which she had to sing while swimming in a river. Unbeknownst to anyone in the crew:

> A whirlpool sucked her under; she kept bobbing up and down; each time she managed to come up she would make frantic gestures asking for help. The camera crew continued shooting, mistaking her frantic gestures for authentic acting. She was in her tiger costume, which was heavy, and when she finally gave up, she was thrown out by the whirlpool onto the bank. Everyone came up to congratulate her – 'Kya scene tha!'[7]

The other serious accident that took place at the time gave Pramilla a broken nose, and for years to come she took great pleasure in pointing out the 'dent' in her nose.

Esther Victoria Abraham (1916-2006) was born into a wealthy Baghdadi Jewish family in Calcutta. Like in a typical melodramatic film, a sudden reversal in family fortunes

forced Esther and her sisters to seek employment immediately after school. Esther started her professional life as a teacher at the Talmud Jewish Boys' School. By 1934, Esther was nineteen, divorced and a single mother. During a casual visit to Bombay, she got an acting offer and immediately sent a telegram to Calcutta "saying she would not be returning".[8]

As Pramilla, she excelled in roles that presented her as a bold, westernised woman, mostly playing a 'dangerous' second lead. While Fearless Nadia played the vigilante superwoman in many of these films, Pramilla performed the scheming vamp. But she seems to have recognised that these gender stereotypes not only sent out moralistic messages about the 'emancipated woman' but, paradoxically, also enabled the unabashed portrayal of strong, sexually-aware female characters.

The fragmented archive of Indian cinema bears traces of these few shooting accidents primarily because they involved relatively well-known actors. It might be worth mentioning that there is no count of the light boys, stuntmen, setting *dada*s and electricians who have died of electric shocks or fallen off *tarafa*s (catwalks) in their highly risky, improvisational work environments.[9]

Publicity Art

One of the few Hindi cinema 'classics' represented in the Priya Paul collection is *Mother India*. The collection contains a publicity booklet for the film, an elaborate document that carries production information and a heavily illustrated synopsis. This twenty-two-page booklet differs from the song booklet genre in that it contains no lyrics at all. Most unique is the fact that instead of photographic publicity stills, it carries hand-painted images in which the technique of over-painting is used—the artist paints over actors' photographic portraits with oils. Rachel Dwyer and Divia Patel point out that the artist L.L. Meghanee had selected "key photographs illustrating the most dramatic points in the film." They analyse the visual style, saying that "the exaggerated and rough brush strokes give an effect similar to that of Western Expressionist painting. …The entire booklet is charged with an emotional and passionate intensity that aimed to glorify India and its traditional ways."[10] One sees a steady rise in this kind of formal analysis of poster art and artists, and a growing

interest in compiling these artists' professional histories and studying the history of poster printing technologies.

Another interesting publicity document is the song booklet. This is a slim pamphlet that carries a miniaturised version of the film poster on the cover, and contains the synopsis, production stills, and complete cast and crew credits, besides the lyrics of the songs. Most song booklets translate the textual material into two or more languages, such as English, Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati and Bengali, except for the lyrics of the songs, which are transliterated into those languages. Booklets were often meant as publicity targeted at distributors and exhibitors, but were also sold directly to spectators, as the price of four *anna*s printed on some covers indicates. Not surprisingly, this fragile and slight object is one of our most precious resources for writing a history of Indian cinema today. Nearly 2,200 films were produced in Bombay alone between 1931 and 1950 and at least eighty per cent of these films are now unavailable for viewing. The prints have crumbled to dust, been destroyed in fires, or simply disappeared for lack of care and archival attention. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that the archive of early Indian cinema is haunted by

this absence. Thus, the song booklet with its rich information and illustrations is often the only means to reconstruct a lost history. From the perspective of visual history, the design and typeface used in these booklets also reflect the artistic currents of the times. For example, the stunning booklet cover for M. Udwadia's *Shahu Chor/Prince of Thieves* (1936) uses a mix of styles including an art deco background and typeface combined with photographic cut-outs. A preliminary search has revealed nothing about the artist, S.K. Murthy, except that he was possibly a well-known art director in south India.

Hair and Makeup

Tracking film practitioners through film memorabilia is a dizzying enterprise. Clues lead to other clues, protagonists multiply and mimic each other, the original chase is forgotten and one starts shadowing newer characters. One such character is 'Madam Solomon' credited for the 'Hair Styles' in S.U. Sunny's *Uran Khatola* (1955), a fantasy film starring Nimmi, Dilip Kumar and Surya Kumari. Written by Azim Bazidpuri, the film is set in a mythical land called Shanga, ruled by a fair queen. The plot opens when Dilip Kumar's plane crashes in this

land and he falls in love with the high-born local lass, Nimmi. The film was lavishly produced by Naushad who also scored some memorable songs for the film. Given that there are no screen credits for individual actors' hairstylists, it can be assumed that Mrs Solomon was responsible for styling at least the main female characters. Nimmi sports a variety of elaborate hairdos in the film, mainly chosen for their old-world appeal. Soft curls, fancy ringlets, intricately arranged plaits, and semi-pompadours from the Victorian era create Nimmi's pretty look. Surya Kumari's hair is more demurely designed to create a mature and elegant effect. Both characters are given a wide range of hair accessories and ornaments to add to the exotic appeal of the imaginary world they inhabit. One can only imagine what references Mrs Solomon used to decide upon these looks, or what discussions there might have been at a pre-production stage. There is no trace of the mysterious Madam Solomon in the usual records. IMDb.com, however, has a listing for Mrs R. Solomon and credits her with a brief filmography including *Guide* (1965), *Dil Diya Dard Liya* (1966), *Ram aur Shyam* (1967) and *Patthar Ke Sanam* (1967). Even if Solomon's career was only a decade long, as IMDB claims, the nine films that are listed can only represent a slice of her body of work.[11]

Hairdressers in the 1950s and 1960s were part of the small tribe of female film professionals you would encounter in a studio. The other careerists in this tribe were actresses, extras and dancers. Ram Tipnis, a makeup artist who started his film career in the 1940s, has said in an interview that:

> In fact Bombay Talkies and Filmistan started the trend of having a separate Hair Department. Before that the actresses would get their maids to do their hair or everyone would just do their own hair, you know Indian style. …Even in the Costume department we had men. Sometimes if they needed help they might call the Hair assistant, but no, there were no other women employed in the studio.[12]

By the mid-1950s the situation had changed somewhat. Bhanu Athaiya was hired by Guru Dutt to design costumes in *CID* (1956) and the rest is history.

The story of women's work in the film industry is waiting to be excavated from clues such as these. While those who worked in the first decades of the film industry are no more, it is yet possible to do a much-needed oral history project for the 1950s and beyond.

Art Direction

When the moving image is frozen on paper, in the form of publicity stills, our relation to it is altered. Not caught up with following characters, actions and events, we can have a more contemplative relationship to the film visual. The *Uran Khatola* lobby card capitalises on this difference in form. It is relatively spare and showcases the two highlights of the film: sets and costumes. In a fantasy film, these are the chief attractions, and the lobby card economically privileges these to guarantee an evening of spectacle.

Uran Khatola opens with a scene of an

old-fashioned galleon being tossed mercilessly on the high seas. Only one man survives the shipwreck and finds himself on the shores of an unfamiliar island. He then makes his way through an eerie forest and reaches a tiny house, shabby and with a pointed roof, much like in an illustrated Grimms' fairytale. These are carefully constructed sets complete with specially moulded trees, painted skies and artificial giant cobwebs. Coupled with low-key lighting and wide-angle lensing, the determinedly non-naturalistic sets create an Expressionist aesthetic. Later, when we are taken to the mythical land of Shanga, the film treats us to a dizzying series of phantasmagorical sets. Colossal statues of gods that breathe fire, idyllic pleasure gardens, a musical bridge, flying chariots and a royal bed shaped like a blossoming flower are just some of the stunning creations of art director V. Jadhav Rao. Rao's name crops up in films from the 1950s right through the 1980s and yet one can find no systematically listed biographical or professional information about him. The same goes for Bachubhai Mistry, the art director of *Zimbo* and of several special effects and stunt films produced by the Wadia Brothers. Mistry's name recurrently appears in the Priya Paul collection with films such as *Zimbo*, Nanabhai Bhatt's *Madame XYZ* (1959), and Homi Wadia's *Zabak* (1961).

Art Direction, nowadays known as Production Design, was one of the first specialised film categories to be acknowledged by the Filmfare Awards. Instituted in 1953, the Filmfare Awards started with five basic categories: Best Film, Director, Actor, Actress and Music Director. The next year it added the categories of Story, Supporting Roles, Cinematography and Sound. In 1955, two more categories were added: Editing and Art Direction. It took another couple of years for Lyricist, Dialogue Writer and Playback Singer to be included. Categories such as Action and Choreography, those staples of Bombay cinema, were only recognised post 1988. The film industry has long recognised Art Direction as being one of the core elements of film production, but the names, filmographies, innovations and signature strategies of art directors are difficult to come by. The Bombay film industry is often blamed for not documenting its own past but traces do exist as award histories, and records of crafts unions and associations.

Choreography

Zabak is a resplendent Persian adventure film shot in Geva Colour. It stars Mahipal as the title character, a polyglot healer and a carefree soul. He falls in love with the wealthy Zainab (Shyama) but the difference in their status presents the first of many obstacles in their path. After being persecuted by Zainab's family, he joins a gang of bandits. The sets, designed by Bachubhai Mistry, are extravagant in scale and breathtaking in detail. Mistry follows the Islamicate iconography of spires, domes, latticed windows, diaphanous curtains and pendulous chandeliers. The costumes, by Mohamed Umer, follow the Arabian Nights model of unisex harem pants, waistcoats and fezes. Umer was also responsible for the costumes of *Zimbo*, radically different from those in *Zabak*. The film credits three women for 'Hair Styles': Nargis, Norma, and Geeta. At this stage in my research, I have absolutely no information on them.

No Persian fantasy is complete without dances, and *Zabak* features examples of synchronised group choreography. It continues a tradition seen in films such as K. Amarnath's *Alif Laila* (1953) wherein the focus is on symmetrically arranged bodies, epic sets, chorus lines and frontal tableau displays. The film credits three choreographers: Satyanarayan, Surya Kumar, and Chetan. Both Satyanarayan and Surya Kumar were prolific choreographers and dancers from the 1950s right up until the 1980s. Satyanarayan was partial to ballet and some of that proclivity is evident in *Zabak*. The dances in the film work organically with the sets and costumes to create a unified pageant of attractions.

Surya Kumar was Anglo-Indian by birth and was known to his colleagues as Robert Master. He is sometimes even listed in a film's credits as 'Robert'. Symptomatic of the acute lack of documentation of choreographic practice in Bombay cinema, Surya Kumar's professional information is nearly impossible to come by. This is compounded by the fact that for the ninety-four films he is known to have worked on, there are many more where his work might be uncredited. He himself appeared in many of the famous dances he choreographed, as a backup dancer, a band member, or even to partner the lead female dancer. According to the dancer Edwina Lyons and Thomas Daniel, it appears that he introduced the international dance

sensation of the 1960s, 'The Shake', to Hindi film audiences with the song '*Jaan Pehchaan Ho*' from Raja Nawathe's *Gumnaam* (1965).[13] It is worth mentioning that Surya Kumar was the man behind the '*Hum Aapki Aankhon Mein*' dream sequence in *Pyaasa*. Typically, the Priya Paul archive frequently brings up his name. He also choreographed dances in *Uran Khatola*.

According to Lyons, Surya Kumar was so penniless in his last years that he had to beg his dancers to buy him a pair of spectacles. He died of a heart attack sometime in the mid-1980s, in a makeup room in a studio.

In the preceding sections I have tried to demonstrate some of the tangents one could follow while looking for traces of film work. The Priya Paul collection brings certain histories into focus with its privileging of stunt and fantasy genres. Narratives of local innovation, transnational referencing, and precarious labour are stamped onto these films. A focus on cultural work can yield a new approach to the history of Indian cinema, one that simultaneously acknowledges its industrial and artistic facets. We are also reminded that film is an inherently collaborative medium involving hundreds of salaried experts and wage-workers who mark each film with their individual skills. An auteurist history of Hindi cinema is inadequate to either the memory of these practitioners or the complex practices they represent.

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NOTES

1. This research project was among the first to be supported by IFA.

2. Ranjani Mazumdar received an IFA grant in 2002 to study the Bombay film poster.

3. Gregory Booth, *Behind the Curtain: Making Music in Mumbai's Film Studios* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Tejaswani Ganti, *Producing Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry* (Duke University Press, 2012); Clare Wilkinson-Weber, 'The Dressman's Line: Transforming the Work of Costumers in Popular Hindi Film' in *Anthropological Quarterly*, 79(4), pp. 581-608 and her forthcoming book titled *Fashioning Bollywood: The Making and Meaning of Hindi Film Costume*; Ranjani Mazumdar, *Bombay Cinema: An Archive of the City* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007) and 'The Bombay Film Poster' in *Seminar*-525, 2003; http://www.sarai.net/research/media-city.

4. http://cineplot.com/encyclopedia/chitra/

5. Ibid.

6. Opender Chanana, *The Missing 3 in Bollywood: Safety, Security, Shelter*

(Switzerland: UNI Global Union, 2011). See also G. Nihalani, S. Chatterjee & Gulzar (eds.) *Encyclopedia of Hindi Cinema: An Enchanting Close-Up of India's Hindi Cinema* (New Delhi: Popular Prakashan, 2003) for the section on stunts and safety hazards.

7. R. Shahani (ed) *Pramila – Esther Victoria Abraham* (Mumbai: Sound & Picture Archives for Research on Women, 1998), p.16.

8. Ibid.

9. A lower-rung Art Department assistant is often called 'setting *dada*', the term '*dada*', meaning 'older brother', being a mark of respect. Setting *dada*s are responsible for dressing a set according to the instructions of the art director. It is a job that includes everything from carpentry and painting to arrangement of props and furnishings. A *tarafa* is a narrow wooden walkway that runs above the set in a studio and from which light-men hang and adjust lights and cables.

10. Rachel Dwyer and Divia Patel, *Cinema India: The Visual Culture of Hindi Film* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), p. 163.

11. See http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1351931/?ref_=fn_al_nm_1

12. Interviewed in Bombay, 2008.

13. http://dustedoff.wordpress.com/2011/10/10/edwina-part-2-a-cast-of-characters/(Surya Kumar)

Gautam Pemmaraju

Soundbaazi:[1] The Sound of More than Music

'Loud' is the word that most easily springs to mind when one describes the soundtrack of the archetypal Hindi film. The main purpose of sound is to heighten the melodrama, to imbue the hero with a mythic aura through blood-and-thunder dialogue. What, then, is the role of sound effects in the composite soundtrack and how are they conceived? Drawing from conversations with several sound professionals and filmmakers, Gautam Pemmaraju gives us an insider's view of effects production and aesthetics during the analogue era of sound production in Hindi cinema. From the age of the talkies he takes us through the dubbing era to the digital age, when technology brought about a radically different tone, texture and timbre to contemporary sounds.

Walking out of a movie theatre with a buzzing head, ringing ears and fevered eyes after a three-hour, dense sensory encounter, carrying away in one's mind an iridescent pastiche of bravado-ridden dialogue, catchy tunes, sugary lyrics and a dizzy graphic composite, is a profound cultural experience. In the numb moments immediately after the film ends and the lights are switched on, the complex vortex of images and sounds swirling about within us conceals far more than what is later articulated and discussed threadbare with companions and friends. The sound of cinema, beyond the spoken word and the music, is registered in (and more often than not relegated to) the deeper recesses of the mind. From the more obvious ricocheting gunshots to the lone dramatic footfalls and to the abstract textures embedded deep in the background, there is a complex ecology of sonic material that accompanies the image, providing context, psychology, oblique cues and significant depth.

The final arbiter of the sound mix of films for the Indian viewing public has traditionally been (and in many ways continues to be) the projectionist. With a studied or even random method of ascribing hierarchical value, he may boost the volume during dramatic sequences, amplifying crowd-pleasing, *paisa-vasool* (get your money's worth) dialogues, histrionic portions of the background score, or any other sections that he may regard as worthy of in-your-face audio. This process invests him with extraordinary cultural power—he post-mixes the film soundtrack during its viewing, conducting a real-time 'live' mix which, in turn, shapes and influences what is heard more prominently and what is not (and where it is heard from, in quite a few cases), thereby recalibrating the painstaking and fine balance achieved by the collective efforts of the 'sound department' of the film. In fact, it is he, one can safely surmise, who has shaped in extraordinary and idiosyncratic ways the loudness of the film, altering the craft of the recordist,

re-recordist and mixing engineer[2] not to mention the final choices of the director, the producer and others who influence the film sound's final form before it is released to the viewing public. This idea of optimum loudness is central to the film sound mix and has been traditionally associated with efficacy, impact, power and success. The sound must 'cut through', the dialogues must be heard, especially the ones that lionise the hero and demonise the bad guy, and also those that map the moral landscape of the story through the characters that play it out. Importantly, the sound coming out of speakers of varying fidelity and competence must also 'cut through' the large, noisy fans affixed to the ceiling and walls; it must be heard above any and all extraneous sounds that stubbornly find their way into poorly equipped theatres in moffusil towns and inner cities. From Rajahmundry to Raibareli, the sound must be heard.

The projected sound is typically tinny and shrill, much like the mixes of bawdy folk tunes, film songs and religious/devotional music played in rickshaws and trucks, wherein the mid-range and high frequencies are boosted so that the music may be heard in the open cabins despite the rush of wind and traffic noise. For film practitioners and viewers alike this loud, shrill sound was indeed a 'culture' born of specific needs, practices and tastes linked to pre-existing performance traditions. By all accounts, Mangesh Desai[3] the celebrated sound recordist understood this elementally. Acutely aware of poorly maintained projectors, foggy lenses, poor mechanical transport, acoustically inadequate spaces and whimsical projectionists, the man who influenced generations of film sound professionals in India was able to strike an unusual balance—a fine 'mix', so to

speak—given the reality of theatrical exhibition and the vagaries of style/taste on a broad scale. It had to work for everybody.

In the conventional hierarchy of film sound, dialogue took precedence over background music and effects. Of course, songs in Hindi cinema occur mostly as independent tableaux within the narrative, and it is only on occasion that they are more cinematically integrated with the narrative structure of the film. Early Indian cinema mimicked (and often adapted) stage plays; music and songs were performed alongside dialogue. Virchand Dharamsey writes that most studios produced films on the lines of stylised Parsi theatre with "Oriental and mythological subjects and costumes, plots of high exaggeration, mistaken identities, coincidences, lost and found themes, and above all, the progression of narrative through songs and dances and the traditions of

negating time and space."[4] With one microphone capturing all the sound—the spoken word, the songs, and effectively every incidental, ambient sound that occurs—the 'mix' on set as the camera filmed the scene was moderated by moving characters who sang and spoke in turn, and by musicians hidden away behind set props or off-camera. Booth says in this context that "the network of attitudes and practices that determined the use of sound-film technology was structured by the technological demands of simultaneous recording, as well as aesthetic and narrative conventions of music drama performance".[5]

Apart from songs and playback music, what were the other sounds of mainstream Hindi cinema? The onomatopoeic myths of '*dishoom*' and '*dishkiyaaon*'[6] notwithstanding, how were sound effects produced; how indeed were they

conceived of? What was their importance and role in the composite soundtrack? Drawing from conversations with several sound professionals and filmmakers, I look here at effects production and aesthetics during the analogue era of sound production in Hindi cinema, which began to fade away in the early 1990s. Digital technology brought paradigmatic change, not just in terms of the non-linear editing process, sophisticated stock effects libraries, digital recorders, storage and transfer, and ultimately projection and exhibition, but also in the way it broadly impacted practice as well as specific aesthetic, creative choices. In particular, digital technology also brought about the radically different tone, texture, timbre and dynamics of contemporary sounds, a more rigorous technical realism that effectively created a previously unheard 'universe of sounds' and current modes of sonic bricolage.

Culture-driven Soundtrack

Rakesh Ranjan, veteran sound man and Head of the Department of Sound Design and Recording at Whistling Woods International, argues that the Hindi film soundtrack is culture-driven and is linked to "larger-than-life performances and rendering". The 'dubbing era',[7] when sound was untethered from the visual, further contributed to this conception, as the reconstruction of the soundtrack involved primarily dialogues, background music and songs, followed by ambience and effects. The background score was in constant counter-play with the foreground (dialogues), and sought as much attention and space. Given this density on the soundtrack, "…where is the chance of using ambience and other effects?" Ranjan asks rhetorically. The scenic drama and the theatrical declamations (popularly known as *dialoguebaazi*) were underscored primarily by background music; the sounds intrinsic to the physical action—from footfalls and door-closes to body movements—were always subservient and often deemed unnecessary. The idea of fighting for space for effects is a critical one; there literally was *no space*, either physical—in the limited capacity of optical film and later magnetic film, or conceptual—in the idea of what kind of sounds appeared in the soundtrack. All that mattered was that the effects had to have some 'value', some *raison d'être* that justified their inclusion. Punches, in this context, had to be "larger than life", Ranjan points out, and were often

specifically tailored to distinguish the hero from the villain. The hero's punches had to be more 'heroic', and in many instances, they were distinctly louder than the others, endowing a special aura to the filmic moment and the character, and contributing to the mythic quality of the hero and of the film.

This expressionistic usage is a unique narrative device, and the art of Hindi film sound is linked in no small measure to such ideas, says Ranjan. He alludes to Ajay Devgan's fight scenes in *Qayamat* (2003), where the foley work on his punch sound included that of a metallic ring being struck, thereby enabling the sound to be "a performer in itself". The effectiveness of the sound effects and sound design is what "contributes to the storytelling", says Ranjan. He makes a fine point here: many sound effects have performative and narrative attributes that go beyond the merely incidental and representational; they are less embedded in the psychological terrain, where a compounded sonic space provides subtle, abstract cues. Interestingly, he brings up a general idea: vigorously clanging temple bells could signify a joyous occasion, such as the birth of child, but in a complete inversion, it could also signify the inner turmoil of a tortured soul, or a grim, traumatic event. The filmic moment, the narrative context and the surrounding sonic space shape the symbolism.

Symbolism has been dominant in film sound practice. Kuldip Sood, a practitioner who is Ranjan's senior, also points to such usage. As an assistant re-recordist, Sood was responsible for creating all the sound effects for *Sholay* (1975), the first 70 mm stereophonic Hindi film—a landmark for the sound crew and for sound design in Hindi cinema. The 'heroism', he says, is reflected in the *mukkey ka awaaz* (the sound of the punch), which should 'sound heroic'. The artfulness during that period, Sood continues, was in working with the limitations: the economic realities of the times, the government restrictions on imports, the poor-quality amplifiers, and the lack of resources and time for extensive, detailed sound work which was reflected in the culture of relegating sound (aside from music and background sound) to the bottom of the food chain.

But on occasion, the foresight and passion (and money) of a director or producer would open up great

opportunities, and *Sholay*, Sood says, was singular in this regard. From sourcing over a hundred different belt buckles for Gabbar Singh's famous "*Kitney aadmi thay*" scene to reconstructing the tonga, or horse-cart, in Rajkamal Kalamandir studios, the freedom and time available to create a complex sound design was exemplary and unheard of in those days. Interestingly, a variety of sounds of jewellery, baubles and trinkets were used to accentuate Hema Malini's "bubbly character", says Sood. Since the *ghungroo* (bell) clusters of the *payal* (anklet) were small and far too close to one another to make a loud sound, they were made to order so that the foleyed sound could be resolved to tape without distortion and with appropriate definition. All soundmen speak of the difficulties of working with bells during the analogue era (recording crickets at night, on the other hand, seems to have been a rite of passage). Similarly, glass bangles of different gauges were combined to create a composite sound.

Hitendra Ghosh, who worked with Mangesh Desai, the mix engineer on *Sholay*, at Rajkamal Kalamandir, speaks at length in revealing anecdotes. He specifically points to the use of sound in what was then known as 'parallel cinema'—mostly, state sponsored low-budget cinema which, unlike mainstream Hindi cinema, usually recorded sync sound on location. Largely echoing the 'loudness' theme and 'heroic' aspect of punches, he points specifically to a scene from Shyam Benegal's *Nishant* (1975) wherein Girish Karnad unsuccessfully resists the abduction of his wife, played by Shabana Azmi. As he walks around in agitation, pleading with the bystanders who watch on impassively, an eerie rhythmic chant occupies the soundtrack. The film was shot in Pochampally in Andhra Pradesh, and Ghosh recalls that as the crew were wrapping up the day's shoot in the little town where darkness had already descended, they heard a strange, unsettling sound. Ghosh went off into the darkness to investigate, following and finally locating the sound: it was

being chanted by a woman who had been visited by the *devi*, a 'possessed woman' who was in a trance. He unobtrusively made a recording. In the post-production stage, they found the background score falling somewhat short in expressing the helplessness and fear experienced by the emasculated husband. They decided to use the chant in lieu of music, as texture to convey the power of the scene.

This textural use of a sound effect was uncommon then. The effect is neither incidental nor atmospheric, and it does not perform a narrative function. Intent is what is critical here. Going beyond convention, the sound effect achieves an abstract screen life,

contributing obliquely, by intent, to the mood and psychology of the filmic moment. Referring to surreptitiously recorded police wireless sounds that were used in *Ardh Satya* (1983). Ghosh points out that foley work was not extensively done during that period. Recordists such as he made extensive recordings during location shoots (birds, rain and other nature sounds were big on the agenda), and these were informally exchanged with other colleagues. Rajkamal Kalamandir, he says, had a fairly extensive collective of stock sounds, including punches, gunshots, some explosions, door and window sounds, nature, and ambience, and one would hear them on many a soundtrack since most sound work during the 1970s and 1980s was done

at Rajkamal, with Mangesh Desai at the helm.

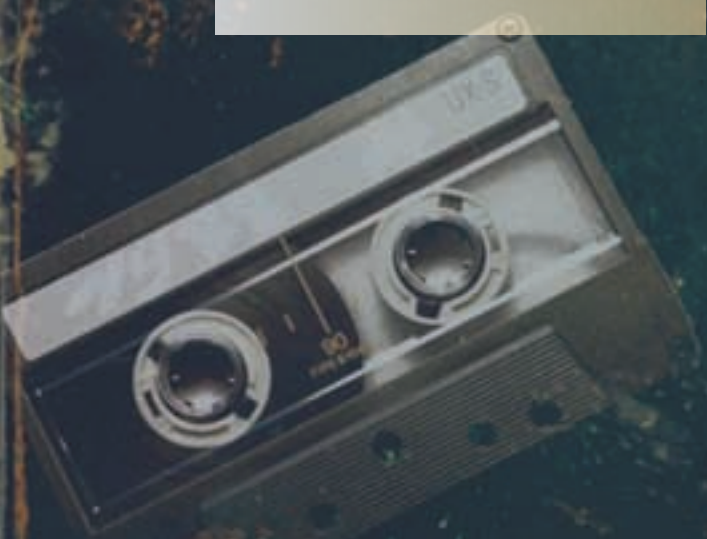
Budget Constraints

Possibly the most limited and hackneyed sound is the screeching of car tyres, says Ghosh. Creating extensive, realistic location recordings was nearly always out of budget; car chase scenes were generally shot only once. Such 'expensive' sounds would travel widely, and it was no surprise that the same loops of car tyre squeals and screeches were so commonly heard. This sound, in turn—much like gunshots, explosions and punches—came to signify a certain kind of sound culture within the community, which reflected budgets and attitudes towards the sound effects track. The sound quality also varied significantly since it depended on the quality of magnetic tape used in transfers, dubs, and the occasional original recording. 'Transfer rooms'[8] also sold stock sounds, or to be more precise one could rent the rooms by the hour to collect stock sounds for a film under production. BR Films too offered these facilities, says Narinder Singh, one of the early sound recording graduates (1966) from the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII).

Singh describes how the proliferation of cheap quality magnetic stripe tape affected sound quality. Stripe tape is a 35 mm monaural format with a magnetic recording area and a 'guide' stripe to keep the tape properly aligned when played back. The costlier and superior format, though, is 35 mm 'full-coat' tape with three to six track variants. He points out a fascinating aspect of the business—that a lot of stripe tape was cheaply imported in bulk during the 1970s because there was a roaring trade in cheap bangles made of melted-down tape! The reels of these tapes were made up of lengths of stripe tape of varying quality—different levels of magnetic emulsion, differing lengths joined together poorly, etc. Stripe tape would be sold

according to the number of joints in it while full-coat was the norm for recording dialogues, songs, and important effects. But as Narinder Singh and others point out, harsh economic realities and the hierarchy of cinema production process resulted in several make-do solutions, the use of jointed stripe tape being one. Sound recordings on such tapes made their way to the final mix. Looped sound effects (a short effect replicated several times to cover an entire sequence), created and transported on such inferior quality tapes, travelled from one production to the other. Indrajit Neogi, another veteran location soundman, says that "for quite a while we survived on recycled, joint tape". Referring to Indian-made stock from the now-defunct public sector firm INDU, he specifically alludes to the poor quality of emulsion, despite which it was often used in lieu of the prohibitively expensive Kodak. Anup Deo, a senior sound engineer tutored by Mangesh Desai, says that testing the stripe tape became important, and the aim was "giving good sound" within the constraints. "One or two joints in a 1000-foot reel were fine," he recalls.

From the dynamic limitations of optical tape[9] (mixes were still done on optical till the late 1970s) to high contrast film, noisy negatives, and the general proclivity towards 'loudness', the limited dynamic range of produced sound in Hindi cinema remained intact till the arrival of magnetic tape,[10] which initially opened up the dynamics for production (if not for exhibition), and then of multi-track magnetic formats and synchronisation of machines,[11] which further expanded the possibilities for more complex and rigorous layering of the soundtrack. The chemical processing of stock was also a problem, so much so, Singh reveals, that on Mangesh Desai's insistence V. Shantaram set up a lab to maintain higher and uniform standards. The playback era and the era of dubbing effectively destroyed perspective in Hindi cinema, Singh says, echoing a thought that is commonly uttered by soundmen and other professionals of that time. The



effects that appeared on post-production soundtracks were alien to the space in which the action took place on screen (and so were the vocal performances); synthetic sounds that ruptured the linkage between space and sound became the norm. This generalised absence of fidelity entrenched itself in broader practice. And by all accounts, including Singh's, the art then was not about the truthfulness of perspective, realism, or the fidelity of tone, texture and timbre but about the narrative, expressionistic and mythic values of the sound effect, for it was through such a culture-specific set of codes that "the illusion is getting completed". Textile mill sounds in Sai Paranjpe's films, airport announcements in *Humraaz* (1967), train sounds in the award-winning *27 Down* (1974) and *Kudrat* (1981) besides several others, the use of atmosphere and silence in *Ijaazat* (1987)—Singh cites a variety of creative uses of sound effects in his work. He points also to the work of others, in particular, the dramatic door knocks in *1942 – A Love Story* (1994).

Shyam Benegal says unequivocally that the general objective, in films with non-synchronous sound, was "how to keep the ambience out", since sound was regarded as an 'add-on': "it was never seen to have the same complexity…the cinema created the world through the visual, and sound played a secondary role". Discussing the elementary principles of cinematic sound, from illustrative, incidental, synchronous and non-synchronous (diegetic and non-diegetic),[12] the iconic filmmaker asserts the sensory experience of sound. Pointing to a variety of uses, he says, "I'm very keen on telling you what is happening all over the space…and what you cannot see" and thus, the story and "strength of the image", Benegal says, is enhanced by sound. This is a fine point indeed for it marks a distinct difference between the films made by him and his peers who made films in that vein, and commercial Hindi cinema. Shyam Benegal mostly shot sync sound and worked with Hitendra Ghosh, and Mangesh Desai mixed the films; although the sound professionals were common to both kinds of cinema the results were almost always dramatically different. He too refers to import restrictions and the slow diffusion of new technology over several decades and argues that the grammar and vocabulary of sound work (and cinema for that matter) were linked to technological changes. Benegal also brings up the profound cultural moorings of sound in Indian cinema,

giving the examples of the sound of a bird recalled from memory in Satyajit Ray's *Aparajito* (1956) and the rustling of paddy fields in his own *Ankur* (1974).

Landmark in Soundtrack

"In the art world," Ramesh Sippy explains, "they thought of sound and visual together; it was not just a film that told a story." *Sholay* was an important event in India for the cinema soundtrack: it was the first 70 mm stereophonic projection. Thinking about sound conceptually and narratively began at the writing stage, the veteran filmmaker says. "The galloping sounds of the horses had to come alive in a different kind of way," he says, and with *Sholay*, "sound was what really mattered". The ability to build a character through sound was alluring, says Sippy, recalling how the character Gabbar Singh draws the belt buckle across rocks in an iconic scene; it was a way also to awe the audience, heighten their expectancy. He points out that the original writing was very powerful; it was through the written word and the meticulously constructed character traits that the sounds emerged. Sounds came to mind just as visuals did, he points out tellingly, adding that a fine, essential balance must exist between technology and storytelling. With *Sholay* though, as he has said on numerous occasions, money was not on his mind—it was the creation that mattered. The time, effort and money invested in the sound design of the film remained unmatched during that era and for a long time after. From the eerie silence following the arrival of the dead young boy, the equally disquieting sounds of the swing in the sequence where the family is being butchered, Hema Malini's 'jabber-jabber' presence, Gabbar Singh's footsteps and the ricocheting gunshots, to the captivating drama of the train heist sequence, the sounds that shaped the film are not just numerous but very skillfully and painstakingly created. So involved was he with the film and its every process, Sippy reveals, that he even stepped on and off the tonga that was brought to the dubbing floor by Kuldip Sood, hoping to contribute in some small way. Perhaps a few of those sounds made it to the final mix?

"Indian cinema never understood composite sound," says K. Hariharan, an award-winning filmmaker and teacher from Chennai. The rules of melodrama dominated the approach, and the sounds, from incidental to archetypal (crickets, koels, monsoon rains etc) primarily served the purpose

of heightening the melodrama. He argues that the soundtrack was in essence "a ritualistic celebration of traditional archetypes". The 'non-real' sounds—those located outside the film's visible frame—performed the function of 'real' sounds; they signified the action, or more precisely, were intended to perform a representational function in part, but through a fetishised dislocation and amplification. There was dissatisfaction with the real. Reality and realism were not enough; something larger, mythic—and louder—was needed. Hariharan reiterates the running theme: "It was believed that film delivers its best when at the highest volume."

The playing field, the resources and the game—so much has changed with digital technology. But it would be inaccurate to attribute this change merely to technology. Sweeping economic changes, the onset of satellite television, increased access to more 'western sounds' and production techniques, greater formal distribution and exhibition of Hindi cinema around the world—all these come into play significantly. What changed radically, though, was the sound itself—its tone, texture, timbre and dynamics.

Nakul Kamte, one of the more prominent sound designers working today, speaks of the crowd sounds in *Lagaan* (2001). Cables were laid out and planted in the dusty fields of Bhuj; multiple microphones placed at strategic points captured the largeness and density of the animated crowds. He points to an altered approach to microphone technique. It is not just about the number of microphones, money and flexibility, but also about how one conceives of capturing sound. For example, he does extensive foley work and also has the luxury of being able to tap into very extensive and detailed sound effects libraries. The composite sound effect is a complex composition of layers, including

foleyed sound, stock, textures, and anything else that the designer may think appropriate. Pointing to *Taare Zameen Par* (2007), he says that the sound was considered to be 'invisible' by several commentators, which he considers a big compliment. This too is indicative of a shift in approach. The big, dramatic sound still exists and is an integral part of the sound culture, but within certain contexts, he points out. A distinct style of sound use still dominates films such as *Don* (2006), *Son of Sardar* (2012) and other such big-ticket mainstream films. He reveals that they had to source some punch sounds from Hyderabad for *Om Shanti Om* (2007); they performed the function of harking back to the era of damp, recycled, false-perspective sounds.

Resul Pookutty, whose work on *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) won an Oscar, describes the transition from analogue to digital during the early 1990s in great detail. He had always been "handicapped" by having merely a few days of "proximity to the film" beforehand, he says, and therefore it was always a fight to assert the value and the importance of the composite soundtrack. He argues keenly that "every sound comes with anthropological information"; recognising this idea helps one understand the staging of sound. This is an interesting shift in thought and approach, and it is linked not just to the opening up of technological possibilities, but also to the conception of the spectrum as a unified space; for the sound spectrum is not just a stage in itself, but a multidimensional terrain. It was partly such a notion that informed his approach to *Slumdog Millionaire*, wherein the strategy "was not to record dialogue but to record the soundscape of the city". Pookutty also does extensive foley work, building up the sync track. He often works on certain sections of the effects track at facilities abroad, where foley artists are able to create complex specialty effects.

Nuanced Sound Design

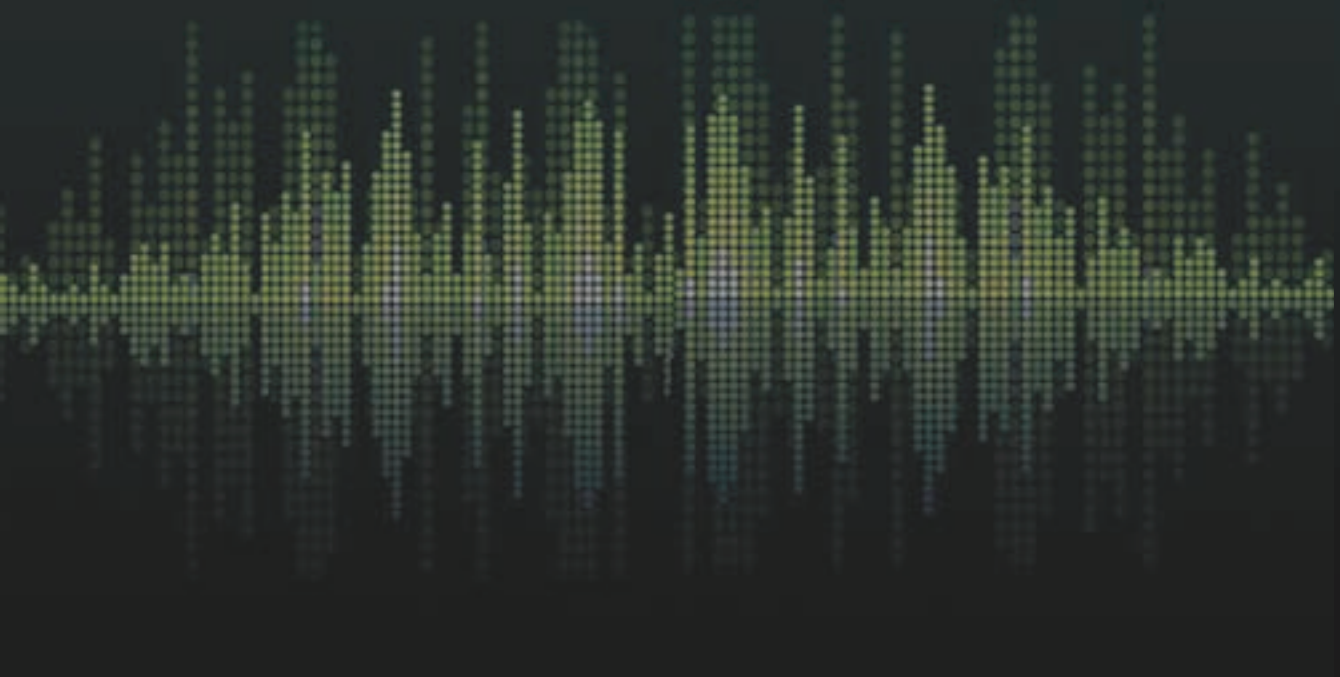
Pookutty's colleague and contemporary P.M. Satheesh also does foley work abroad whenever he finds that the effects cannot be created in India. Quite appropriately, he starts by

speaking of his first job interview in Bombay after he moved there as an FTII graduate. It was in a sound facility and as he was being asked questions, an effects track of punches on magnetic tape kept playing in loop. Work was in progress in the studio, and it seemed to be an apt punctuation to the beginning of his professional career. His thoughts too indicate a shift in approach and ideas. Technology has certainly made things easier, he argues; its purpose is to find smoother, easier, less time-consuming and more efficient processes. But the conceptual approach, he asserts, lies in understanding the soundtrack as "an abundant, complex and polyphonic" composite entity. He believes foley to be one of the tools of sound design, but the soundtrack itself, with its complex sonic terrain, he indicates, is constructed using a wide range of tools and devices, not to mentions skills and talent. With good foley work and a more cohesive, broader sense of design aided in part by new technology, as opposed to patchwork, piecemeal approaches, one can make a modest budget film seem far more sophisticated, Satheesh suggests. But as we move on to more complex exhibition systems the balance between the toys and the art is one that must be carefully calibrated. He points to his work on the national award-winning documentary *Kumar Talkies* (2000), *Ishqiya* (2010) and *Saat Khoon Maaf* (2011) as examples of more thoughtful and nuanced sound design.

Foley work in Indian cinema has not attained the stage of sustained discipline and innovation. There are just a handful of foley artists and unlike in the West, there has not been a continuing tradition—from stage plays, magic shows and radio dramas to television cartoons and feature films—of specialists who know how to make sound from objects. Karnail

Singh, who has been working as a foley artist along with his two-man crew of Sajjan Chaudhary and Gupta for over twenty-five years now, reiterates the problem of space on the soundtrack: "dialogues *aur* background *key baad bachey huey* gap *mey hamara kaam hai*". Drama, dramatic effects, and big, loud sounds—these again are the building blocks of *soundbaazi*. Hitendra Ghosh recounts a fascinating instance of a film made by Shyam Benegal for which the sound work was done in Moscow. The sound facility there provided a team of women foley artists who very inventively devised a makeshift pulley and gear contraption on the spot, in order to create the sound of a bullock cart moving along a village road—a sound they had never heard before.

Baylon Fonseca, another contemporary award-winning sound designer, strongly feels that one needs to be as artful as one can with whatever is at hand. He concedes, though, that what is at hand is radically different from what was at hand twenty years ago. There are still battles to be fought in the terrain of the soundtrack and the balance between its components. Even to this day "the level goes up if the director feels the soundtrack is empty". He firmly believes in designing the texture of the dialogue in the context of the idea of the film, the characters and the composite soundtrack, indicating a unified approach to the sonic space of the film, as opposed to discrete hierarchically placed components. As an example he alludes to *Game* (2011). Also mentioning the sound work on *Rock On* (2008), *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* (2011),



Wake Up Sid (2009), *Udaan* (2010), *Shaitan* (2011) and *Gangs of Wasseypur* (2012), he says that recorded sound effects still travel around a fair bit, although in contemporary times, unlike in the analogue days, sounds can be so multilayered, textured and transformed that it may be impossible to identify discrete original recordings.

Vikram Joglekar, a senior sound designer and technician who works with Dolby, describes the mainstream Hindi film sound mix as a 'cobra mix': the dialogues and the background rise up in volume periodically at provocative junctures. The changes we have seen over time, he argues, are basically "less and less defects, more realistic perspective, and better placement of sound effects". He points to the soundscape of Kolkata in *Kahani* (2012), and the design of *Anhey Ghorey Da Daan* (2012) as interesting examples of contemporary work. He too points to the general discomfort with silence on the soundtrack and a deeply entrenched culture of 'loudness'. Unlike in the West, there is really no regulation on loudness levels in cinema theatres here, he points out.[13] Although Dolby (and DTS) has brought in greater sophistication in cinema sound projection systems, and theatres have also altered significantly over the last two decades, traditional attitudes towards the soundtrack have yet to change. Dolby stereo projection had a short life here in India before Dolby 5.1 appeared on the scene. Now that several theatres are Dolby 7.1 compatible, the new multichannel format Dolby Atmos will also be introduced soon. Dolby professionals such as Joglekar conduct mixing sessions to demonstrate the capabilities of the technology and how the various channels can be exploited. The learning curve often appears steep, he says, since there is really little point in filling the multiple channels with the same sounds. It is how one conceptually understands and exploits sonic space that really matters.

Things have changed for the better in many ways, Shantanu Hudlikar of Yashraj Studios says, but generally "there is too much sonic information". With immediate access to sound

libraries and talent around the world, the possibilities, in theory, are endless. But he feels that there seems to be a tendency to over-contour the soundscape and fill it up with sounds "just because you can".

There are a wide range of approaches to foley art and although the spoken word, the song and background music still dominate the Hindi film soundtrack, there seems to be a steadily increasing desire to strike out in more interesting directions. The sounds of yesteryear may have gone but several intrinsic structures of taste and form are still in place. If, yesterday, artfulness was expressed through inventiveness that overcame privations, perhaps the art of today lies in making sonic sense of all that abounds.

In all of this, from then to now, from the analogue to the digital and to the curious, fascinating in-between time, the *baazi* was and is very much in play.

Gautam Pemmaraju is a Mumbai-based independent writer and filmmaker with a keen interest in sonic art and sound/music conceptualism. He is currently working on a documentary film supported by IFA on the comic-satire poetry traditions of the Deccan.

NOTES

1. The grandiloquent lines delivered with a flourish by the heroes and villains of popular Hindi films are known as *dialoguebaazi*. I've coined *soundbaazi* to denote the loud and theatrical background sounds that accompany the words.

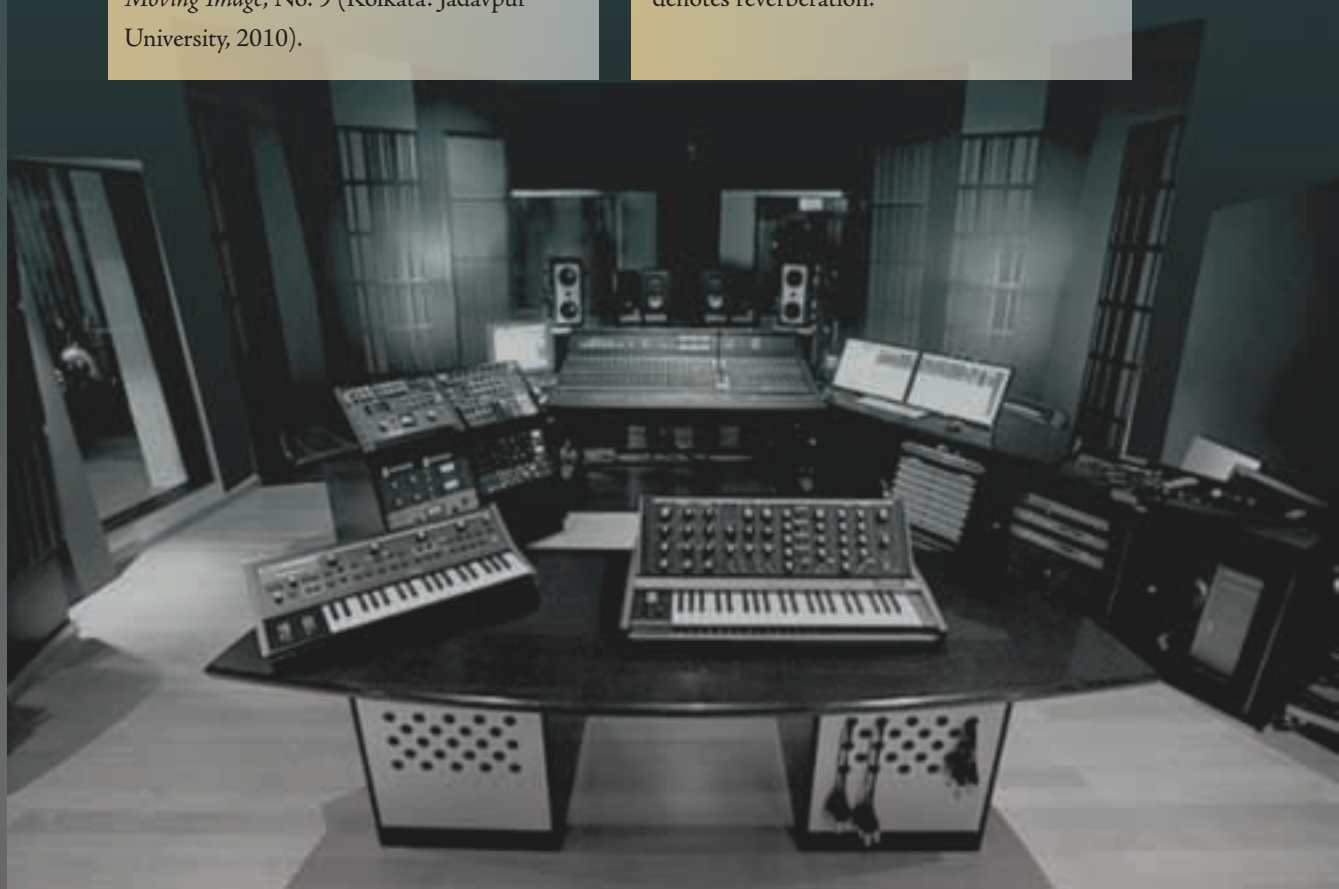
2. The main technicians who work on the Hindi film soundtrack.

3. For list of credits, see this IMDb entry: http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0220827/

4. Virchand Dharamsey, 'The Advent of Sound in Indian Cinema: Theatre, Orientalism, Action and Magic', *Journal of the Moving Image*, No. 9 (Kolkata: Jadavpur University, 2010).

5. Gregory D. Booth, *Behind the Curtain: Making Music in Mumbai's Film Studios*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 34.

6. Part of the cinematic pop-culture, *dishoom* is an onomatopoeic word mimicking the shot, retort, bang or explosion from a gun. Besides little boys' mock gunplay where, much like bang-bang, *dishoom* is shouted out loud to indicate a shot being fired, the word has a much broader semiotic character. Its 'social life' is a wide and interesting one. In popular myth, this representative sound of when gunshots are fired on screen is mimed by sound professionals shouting out the word. *Dishkiyaaon* is an onomatopoeic variation; the elongated syllable at the end denotes reverberation.



7. A critical landmark in the history of cinema is the separation of the production of the sound from the image. In India, this led to the 'playback' and later, the 'dubbing' era. Although technically some productions began to record songs separately from the mid 1930s onward, special recording facilities for music began to be established in the late 1940s and early 1950s. 'Dubbing' eventually followed 'playback'—the already recorded song was 'played back' on set and actors mimed the words of the song. Soon enough, the production of the dialogue also came to be separated from the filming on a set or a location. This was driven by a technological imperative: the noise made by the moving parts of the camera. For further reading, an extensive online resource is available at http://www.filmsound.org/film-sound-history/. See also www.cinematechnologymagazine.com/pdf/dion%20sound.pdf

8. Transfer rooms are where images/sound are transferred from one format to another, i.e. from celluloid to videotape, from optical film to magnetic tape, and now from analogue to digital. Whereas exclusive transfer rooms were common because of the many formats and the time-consuming process of transferring material from one to the other, nowadays (and for over a decade now), most post-production facilities offer transfer and data management services.

9. Early sound recordings for film were made on optical tape, essentially photographic film upon which the analogous sound signal was captured. This sound would be read by the film projector alongside the image. (For further reading, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sound_film and http://www.filmforever.org/chap2.html.)

10. Magnetic tape revolutionised sound recording and production, and it had a significant impact on films. Sound captured analogously on tape with magnetic emulsion on it was of far better quality (and dynamics) than that on optical film. Audio

playback heads on projectors would read and decode the signal on magnetic stripes that ran alongside the optical film for the image. (For further reading on magnetic tape formats see http://www.filmforever.org/chap2.html; http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/13071/20040303030000/www.acmi.net.au/AIC/HIST_REC_NAGRA.html; and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magnetic_tape_sound_recording)

11. Magnetic tape machines with multiple tracks on them were used in parallel, effectively increasing the number of tracks upon which sound could be recorded. This was known as multitrack recording. During the dubbing era, a significant innovation was the Rock and Roll dubbing machine invented by M. Ninnie around 1960, which allowed the sound to be recorded in synchronisation with the picture. This eliminated the approximate and laborious process of trying to independently record a sound effect that syncs with the action in the picture. This dubbing machine eventually found its way to Hindi cinema in the early 1970s, (For further reading, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_multitrack_recording. See also the links in Note 9 above. For the Rock and Roll system,see http://msteer.co.uk/analyt/jfilmdubbing1.html)

12. Diegetic sound is sound whose source is seen on the screen or implied by the action in the film, i.e. the sound of an empty shell from a gun falling on the ground, where the falling shell may not be seen but is implied by the gunshot. Non-diegetic sound is the opposite: there is no visual action to indicate its source, nor is it implied by the action. Voice-over narration and music are non-diegetic sounds. (For further reading see http://filmsound.org/terminology/diegetic.html)

13. The Calm Act is a U.S. broadcast regulation which controls the loudness of digital programming, including commercials.

Following Fans:
The Curious Case of the Man from Japan

Lawrence Liang

All photographs courtesy the author

A scholarly pursuit of the fan club phenomenon led Lawrence Liang to the streets of Bangalore, in 2005, where a mighty army of fans of the film-star Rajinikanth was preparing to celebrate the release of his latest film *Chandramukhi*. As cinema conquered reality, Liang found it increasingly difficult to retain his autonomy and maintain a professional distance. On an impulse, he decided to abandon the notebook and embrace the new role that had been suddenly thrust upon him—a move hovering on the brink of perilous discovery, as he was to soon find out.

So there I was on a *mandap*, seated on a large, ornate chair (the kind used by newly-wed couples on stage) between the local corporator and a religious pontiff, a massive garland of flowers around my neck, waving at over 5,000 Rajinikanth fans assembled at the Rai Bahadur Arcot Narrainsawmy Mudaliar School (RBANMS) ground in Ulsoor, Bangalore, with a single thought running through my head: "How did I get myself into this and how am I ever going to get out of it?"

Flashback to March 2005

Rajinikanth's film *Chandramukhi* (2005) was slated for release just a few weeks after I had finished reading S.V. Srinivas' seminal book[1] on fan clubs of the film-star Chiranjeevi in Andhra Pradesh. Enthused by the direction that his work was taking film studies in India to, I decided that it might be fun to come up with a few of my own questions and follow the activities of the Rajinikanth fan clubs in Bangalore. Srinivas' book on fan clubs begins with a fundamental question: What is the nature of the public sphere constituted by cinema? Given the pervasive publicness of cinema, Srinivas finds it curious that classical accounts of the public sphere ignore

the cinema-watching public, and that most historical and contemporary debates on film spectatorship in India constantly condemn the unruly and excessive behaviour of fans and relegate it to a non-public space. His work on Chiranjeevi fans sought to determine the political history of fan clubs by examining how the star was the focal point for the mobilisation of various subaltern groups, and how cinema constituted an important mode through which people asserted their claims over the public sphere.

I found his argument compelling but was also curious to see how it would hold up in the context of Bangalore, a city with a history of linguistic diversity, but which had also witnessed a rise in an aggressive form of linguistic sub-nationalism. Tensions between the Tamil and Kannadiga populations erupted every once in a while over the sharing of the river Cauvery's waters, as well as over the perceived threat posed by the strong presence of Tamil films in the city. It seemed to me that unlike the Chiranjeevi fan clubs within Andhra Pradesh, which primarily addressed the question of local politics, the fan clubs of stars such as Rajinikanth and Kamal Haasan in states other than Tamil Nadu carried the additional burden of mobilising migrant identities. Most members of the Rajinikanth fan clubs were young men working in precarious labour conditions in the informal sector as auto rickshaw drivers, mechanics, waiters and so on.

Around the same time I was also interested in the histories of different cinematic spaces in the city, how different kinds of public congregated around a Rajinikanth film, and what the differences were between a Sri Balaji theatre in Neelsandra and a Naga theatre in Ulsoor. So, armed with my questions, a camera and a notebook I started tracking these spaces and talking to fans in the run-up to the release of *Chandramukhi*. I was joined by my colleagues Namita and Shailesh on the day of the premiere. Besides the buzz that usually accompanies the release of a Rajinikanth film there were great expectations from *Chandramukhi* since the previous Rajinikanth-starrer *Baba* (2002)—which many had speculated would launch his political career—had been a surprise flop at the box office. Rajinikanth had gone on record to say that after the release of his next film he would compensate all the distributors of *Baba* who had suffered losses. The date that had been selected

for the release of *Chandramukhi* was significant also because it was the very day on which Kamal Haasan's self-produced film *Mumbai Express* (2005) was being released, and while the two stars may have had some fans in common, fan clubs are usually competitive and antagonistic, especially when it's a question of which star occupies more public space. In Ulsoor, Kamal Haasan's film was to be released in Ajanta theatre, which was less than 250 metres from Naga theatre, the venue of Rajinikanth's film.

Ulsoor has traditionally been a Tamil-dominated locality. Its history is linked to that of the Tamil migrant labourers whom the British brought to Bangalore in the early nineteenth century when they demarcated the Cantonment region from Old Bangalore. A number of the street names and prominent buildings testify to the Tamil character of this neighbourhood. The Tamil Sangam has its office opposite the Ulsoor Lake. On the road skirting the lake and less than 100 metres from Ajanta theatre is a statue that testifies to the history of the linguistic and ethnic contestation between pro-Kannada groups and Tamils. This statue, a little under three feet high, is of the poet–saint Thiruvalluvar, the author of the *Thirukkural*,[2] who is often regarded as a symbol of Tamil identity. In 1991, after the statue had been erected, various pro-Kannada groups protested. The statue was veiled and a police van permanently posted at the venue to protect it from vandalism. The measure of this little statue's symbolism can be gauged by the fact that when the (Tamil) sandalwood smuggler Veerappan kidnapped the matinee idol Rajkumar—one of the leading figures of the Kannada public sphere—one of the ransom demands he had made was that the statue be unveiled. Riots had erupted after the news of the kidnapping and the Tamil community had borne the brunt of the mob violence.

The covered statue also inspired anonymous graffiti that would appear around every birth anniversary of Thiruvalluvar, especially in Ulsoor and the Cantonment area. Most of these were straightforward political appeals such as "CM [Chief Minister] Unveil Statue of Saint God Thiruvalluvar" but sometimes they amusingly referred to current events, as in "First read the Holy Thirukkural. Then read The Da Vinci Code". The statue was finally unveiled, after a High Court order in 2009, by the then Chief

Minister of Tamil Nadu M. Karunanidhi, who was himself a symbol of the marriage of film and politics in south India. A number of leaders of the Karnataka Rakshana Vedike (Karnataka Protection Forum) had been taken under preventive detention before the unveiling ceremony, and over 4,000 security personnel shared space with members of the Tamil Sangam and various fan clubs during the unveiling ceremony which was thinly attended since many feared it would spark off violence.

M. Madhava Prasad, in an important rethinking of the relationship between cinema and politics in south India,[3] suggests that scholars who attempt to explain the cinematic basis of politics often have an instrumental understanding of cinema—as a carrier of political messages to the masses. This model ignores the specificity of cinema as a representational medium in which the star on the screen is not just a figure of glamour but also invested with the ability to represent the identities and aspirations of a particular linguistic community-in-the-making. The star in south Indian cinema is thus a vehicle through which a new kind of patriarchal figure emerges, and upon whom rests a burden of political and moral representation of a linguistic community. In this formulation there can be no clean division between text and context, and Prasad offers us a new term—cine-politics—which allows us to view the realm of politics and cinema not as separate but as necessarily conjoined concepts that allow us to better understand why certain star-fan relations emerge specifically in south India, which are distinguishable from a generic fan-devotional activity directed towards a pan-national star such as Amitabh Bachchan. According to Prasad:

> Cine-politics is not about the infusion of star charisma into electoral politics, nor about the use of cinema to disseminate party slogans. It is a distinct form

> of political engagement that emerged in some of the linguistically defined states of southern India at a certain historical juncture where Indian nationalism's ideological suturing could not take care of certain gaps in the symbolic chain. A set of contingent factors led to a situation where cinema, a form of entertainment that was then learning to speak, came to be chosen as the site of a strong political investment, where audiences responded with enthusiasm to an offer of leadership emanating from the screen and, through the fan associations that emerged later, established a concrete set of everyday practices that re-affirmed the position of the star as leader.[4]

Extending Prasad's argument, one could describe the relation between fans and stars in terms of affective affinities in which the transaction between the star and the fan is measured via the currency of passion, enthusiasm and commitment. I use the phrase with a nod to Goethe's idea of elective affinities, which attempts to characterise forms of attractions in natural and social relations. While Srinivas' and Prasad's works attempt to understand fan activity in relation to a larger understanding of politics, it may also be useful to see such activity in ways that are not subsumed by the question of politics or claims of identity. Of equal importance for me would be how fan activity allows for an expressivity of the body and temporal experience. What does it mean for a fan to come out to celebrate the release of *his* star's film? What forms of connectivity to different planes of life does a celebration allow? What forms of self are vitalised by a passionate investment in the success of a film which one owns by virtue of one's affective investment in the star? What does an enthusiastic dance activate for other bodies?

A Corporeal Cinephilia

Walking through Neelasandra and Ulsoor, one could almost sense a palpable passion hovering in the air, as if one were witnessing not just a kind of cinephilia—a word primarily reserved for a visual experience—but a corporeal cinephilia which implicated all the senses and transformed every aspect of public space. Almost every inch of St Johns Road, from Naga theatre leading up to the RBANMS

ground, had been covered with posters, banners, pamphlets and flags bearing images of Rajinikanth and of his fans as well. The façade of Naga theatre had been obscured by a massive collage of Rajinikanth posters that provided us with a virtual tour through his career; the collage seemed to be as much of an attraction as the film itself.

Right through the morning there were huge crowds waiting expectantly outside the hall, although the show would begin only at 12.30 p.m. Those fortunate enough to have a ticket looked pleasantly smug but they sympathised with those trying desperately to buy a ticket. Rumours of the going rates of black-market tickets circulated slightly faster than share prices in a stock exchange, but there were no bears to be found in this bazaar of devotion. When I asked people how much a ticket would cost 'in black' I was first told that I could secure a front stall ticket for around Rs 3,000. As if that wasn't impressive enough, another person clarified in a somewhat indignant tone that the information was inaccurate, that that was the rate the previous evening, and that by now it was Rs 5,000 for the front stall and Rs 10,000 for the balcony; he even offered to help me get a ticket if I were interested. There was, of course, no way of verifying this information without significantly denting my less-than-impressive wallet.

I decided to focus instead on speaking to people and documenting the variety of signage on the road. An auto rickshaw driver showed me a fresh tattoo of Rajinikanth's name on his hand, while many others showed me watches with his images. But the one

image that struck me the most was that of a black-and-white photocopied A4-size sheet of paper with the image of a young man posing stylishly for what seemed like a studio picture. Raja (a fan of the Rajinikanth film *Basha*, as the sheet informed us) wore sunglasses, held a mobile phone in one hand and had the other hand in his pocket. Morphed images of Rajinikanth surrounded his own. He had innovatively stuck his little pamphlet above the more glamorous posters and it rode on the wave of not just the star but of other fans as well.

There was something strangely effective and touching about Raja's strategy. If most of the posters invited the attention of the public through the logic of the spectacle, limited resources had necessitated an aesthetic innovation that nonetheless enjoyed vicarious success. This led me to think of the relation between vicariousness and fan activity. In legal theory, vicarious liability is a concept that assigns liability to persons even if they are not necessarily the agents of an action; thus an employer may be held to be vicariously liable for the actions of his employees. Fan activity, with its forging of affective affinities with the star, appeared to allow for the exercise of a certain vicarious sovereignty of the self. Bodies that do not visibly occupy public space suddenly erupt in dances, claiming their share of publicity, and anonymous faces appear in pamphlets otherwise reserved for 'missing persons' announcements, literally bodying forth an ephemeral presence. But what did the appearance and disappearance of this presence mean? The pamphlet would disappear in a few days, as would the gigantic collage on the theatre's façade, but for the duration of their existence they had been transformed, and they had also transformed the space they inhabited.

Kajri Jain's work on calendar art[5] provides us with a useful way of thinking about ontology as duration. Tracing the different circuits of value embodied in bazaar images of gods, she suggests that while these images, which are cheap reproductions, occupy the space of low art, they simultaneously gain great ethical value as religious objects. By focusing on their circulation one is able to provide an account of the value of these objects as "fleeting constellations between the image, other bodies or objects, and the quality, rhythm and intensity of time at a given moment".[6] It seemed here that in contrast to the idea of a given time in which the hands of the clock move ceaselessly to dictate the rhythms of work and the

body at work, what fan activity allowed for was a celebratory time in which vicarious sovereignty served as a way of determining one's 'time pass'.

As I walked towards the RBANMS ground where a major rally was to culminate, I should have intuited the adventure that was in store for me. The procession itself was a spectacular carnival with over a hundred Tempo vans carrying cutouts of Rajinikanth making their way slowly through the streets of Ulsoor. The procession was led by a motley crew of acrobats, drummers dressed in leopard skins, and a brass band playing the star's greatest hits. The music was infectious and very soon everyone including me was swaying to it as we walked along with the procession. The persona of a visible outsider who could even have been a foreigner partaking in the festivities for Rajinikanth is not the ideal one for an aspirational fly-on-the-wall ethnographer to adopt, and I was very soon the object of curiosity for a number of people.

It started innocuously enough with many of the fans asking me about what I was doing and why I was interested in Rajinikanth. I tried explaining my general research interest and talked about growing up surrounded by Rajinikanth and Kamal Haasan posters in the Shivajinagar area. The conversation then steered towards my ethnicity and I had a slightly more difficult time explaining my Indian-Chinese origin and how it had little to do with my interest in Rajinikanth. By this time the handful of people around me had grown into a larger group and I could hear people whispering "Japanese Japanese" in the background. I mumbled something about not being Japanese and attempted to slip away since I was worried that the procession was getting far ahead of us and we would miss the programme. After a series of handshakes and hugs I managed to shake them off and rejoin the procession but I was followed by a small and persistent group that, to my dismay, kept introducing me to various people as Japanese. It was clear that vicarious sovereignty had come back to claim its tax from the researcher.

Going With the Flow

When the procession came to a stop at an intersection, a group of enthusiastic young fans started asking me whether people in Japan loved Rajinikanth as much as they did in India. I didn't have the heart to say

that I had no clue, and I don't know what it was that prompted me to answer, "Yes, we love Rajinikanth very much." Perhaps I just went with the flow, or maybe it was my natural inclination towards being a prankster, or just a pragmatic surrender to the idea that it was easier to answer these questions than to explain my participation in the celebration. At any rate my answer only led to further questions: Which is Rajinikanth's most popular film in Japan? Do only boys like Rajinikanth or girls too? Will Rajinikanth ever act in a Japanese film? Do Japanese fans dance in the hall when a song plays? Which was my favourite Rajinikanth film? I discovered that the only correct answer to the last question was *Padiyappa* (1999) after I was gently admonished for placing *Basha* (1995) above *Padiyappa*. But by this time there was no turning back, and like Yudhishtira's whispered white lie "Ashwathamma the elephant not the man" all I could feebly mutter in the din of the music was "the researcher not the Japanese fan". I subsequently found out that there had already been larger conspiracies churning which resulted in my initially hesitant and subsequently enjoyable role of Doppelganger. One of the leading newspapers in Bangalore had apparently carried a story that day, claiming that many Japanese fans had flown down from Tokyo to catch the premiere of *Chandramukhi* in Chennai.

Soon I was posing for photographs with various fan clubs and a Rajinikanth flag was draped around me. The fact that I didn't sound Japanese, that my English was clearly inflected with a Bangalore accent, or that I spoke Hindi and even understood a smattering of Tamil didn't matter. The idea that I was a Japanese fan from Tokyo seemed far more important than the trivial matter of veracity. Phone calls were being made, informing others that a Japanese fan was present at the celebration, and the next thing I knew I was being introduced to the President of the Rajinikanth Fans Welfare Association. I started to enjoy the banter with the various groups, gave a few autographs, and even corrected them when they said "Tokyo"—I was from Okinawa, I told them.

By then I had figured that it was pointless continuing this adventure as a research project. I kept aside my notebook and decided to just enjoy the rest of the celebration. By the time the procession reached the RBANMS ground I had my own little band of

protectors who claimed partial ownership over me for having discovered me. The president of the fans association started his speech and introductions of the chief guests amidst much cheering, and at one point in the speech he seemed to mention the word "Japanese", or was I imagining things? He translated his own speech into English and announced, "Friends, today we have with us a Japanese fan who has come all the way from Japan to celebrate with us and show his affection for our beloved superstar. We would request him to come on the stage and say a few words." I temporarily forgot the situation I was in and excitedly thought that there perhaps was a real Japanese fan who may have travelled from Chennai to Bangalore. I dug into my bag to retrieve my camera to click the Japanese fan, but before I could take it out, the fans close to me broke into cheers, and grabbing my hands, started waving them about. I was rapidly led towards the stage. I ineffectually protested about not being able to give speeches, to which the president laughed and said, "Why sir, feeling the shy, don't worry superstar Rajini is with you". When I tried to resist for the second time he was visibly displeased and requested me in a tone that sounded more like a command, "Sir, please come up and show respect for the star." I walked up to the stage and was garlanded by the president and introduced to the corporator and the pontiff who were already seated on the dais.

I quickly tried to think of what I would say and even wondered whether I should put on a slight Japanese accent to sound a little more authentic, but all my plans were laid to waste the moment I came face to face with 5,000-odd enthusiastic fans. I muttered a few nervous words about how popular Rajinikanth was in Japan and how we wished that we could have someone like Rajini-sir in Japan. Sensing the slight disappointment of the crowd I raised my hand to show the famous *Baba* sign and then managed to end on a more buoyant note with the well-known saying among Rajinikanth fans, "There is only one sun, there is only one moon, there is only one mother and there is only one star—Superstar." As academics we know that the largest crowd that we will ever address will at best be a few hundred in a seminar room, and if earlier in the morning I had been thinking about vicarious sovereignty, all I could think of now was what it might feel like to be a vicarious rock star. Feeling slightly more at ease I went back to my chair and proceeded to engage more confidently in some small talk with my fellow chief guests. After a few more speeches the president said that there would be an early lunch after

which the procession would finally head towards Naga for the premiere. I was by now quite enthused with my newly adopted persona and even hoped that the welfare association would give me a free cinema ticket.

As I descended from the stage, I encountered a group of policemen deployed to provide protection for the programme. One of them smiled at me and said, "Sir, aren't you the lawyer with that human rights organisation?" I recognised him as someone I had met a few days ago in a police station I had gone to in connection with the arrest of a Tibetan activist. Before I could answer I could hear the fans clapping and waving and realised what this revelation could mean. I looked at the cop blank-faced, kept saying "Okinawa" and walked straight ahead towards the exit, looking for the nearest auto rickshaw. My big garland around me, a group of fans following me and urging me to join them for lunch, and with a puzzled policeman who was perhaps wondering if all Japanese looked alike, I hopped into a moving auto, much to the disappointment of the fans, and asked the driver to just take me anywhere.

As a research trip I guess it was an unqualified disaster, and I am not any closer now than I was in 2005 to figuring out the dynamics of Rajinikanth fan clubs in Bangalore, but as an encounter in which cinematic effects spill over from the screen and eventually take over the real world, infusing it with the magic of surreal encounters, shared happiness and momentary dangers, one couldn't have asked for more cinema.

Lawrence Liang is a lawyer and film scholar at the Alternative Law Forum. He is currently finishing a book on law and justice and cinema in India.

NOTES

1. S.V. Srinivas, *Megastar: Chiranjeevi and Telugu Cinema after N.T Rama Rao* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009).

2. The *Thirukkural*, believed to have been written in around 30 BC, is considered a masterpiece of Tamil literature. It is written in the form of couplets that deal with virtue, love, and other aspects of ethical living.

3. M. Madhava Prasad, 'Cine-Politics: On the Political Significance of Cinema in South India', *Journal of the Moving Image*, No. 1 (1999). Available at http://www.jmionline.org/film_journal/jmi_01/article_03.php.

4. Ibid.

5. Kajri Jain, 'More than Meets the Eye: The Circulation of Images and the Embodiment of Value', *Contributions to Indian Sociology-36* (February 2002), pp. 33-70.

6. Ibid., p. 67.

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REGD. NO: KARENG/2009/29264

ArtConnect

An IFA Publication

Volume 7, Number 1
January-June 2013

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