

Introduction

“Romance, Comedy, and Somewhat Jazzy Music”

In his 1977 *Experiment in Autobiography*, prolific Indian filmmaker and writer K. A. Abbas characterizes his choice to work within the Bombay industry as necessitating compromise on matters of form, for the expediency of reaching a mass audience of Indian spectators. As such, he was blindsided by the explosive success of *Awara* (*The Vagabond*, Raj Kapoor, 1951) not only within India but also abroad.¹ Abbas, who wrote *Awara*'s screenplay and was known for his Left ideological alliances, led the first Indian film delegation to the Soviet Union in 1954. In recounting the trip, he reflects:

We thought we had made a good enough film within the limits of commercial Indian cinema, offering its progressive social message (criminals are not born but are created by social injustice) rather attractively packaged in a pattern of romance, comedy, and somewhat jazzy music. It was a hit in India. But in our wildest dreams we had never expected that people steeped in the traditions of “socialist realism,” who were familiar with the classics produced by such masters of realistic cinema as Eisenstein and Pudovkin, would take more than a passing interest in such a film.²

Abbas goes on to describe his interactions with Soviet audiences, in his attempt to understand why an avowedly—from his perspective—inferior Indian commercial film had excited Soviet audiences accustomed to the films of their own compatriots, who had masterfully inaugurated a great (rather than merely “good enough”) political cinema. He is nonplussed by the irony of Russian audiences embracing Indian cinema at a time when Indian filmmakers like himself were drawing on Russian—among other European—models of political filmmaking, whether those of the avant-garde (e.g., Eisenstein and Pudovkin) or of socialist realism.

In a debate with a Soviet student, Abbas came to understand that perhaps audiences' immeasurable delight lay not so much in *Awara*'s social commentary as in what Abbas had thought of as its packaging. “Instead of war,” Abbas remembers

the student saying, “we want to see love on the screen, we want to see carefree happiness, we want someone to make us laugh. That’s why we are crazy about *Awara*.”³ The exchange, emerging from the two parties’ respective encounters with films from one another’s contexts, captures diverging assumptions over what constituted *good* cinema in a postwar, post-independence Cold War period. For Abbas, an ideal cinema was—in order of priority—socially progressive, accessible to the working-class masses, and formally virtuosic.

A little more than a decade later, A. V. Meiyappan, founder of Madras-based AVM Productions film studio, strategically embraced the opposite claim: his Hindi-language films were intended to be wholly apolitical, and he was taken aback upon finding them unceremoniously caught up in a storm of protests. Purchasing a full-column advertisement in the *Times of India* to make his claim in great detail, he accused highly partisan factions of blocking Madras film producers’ painstaking efforts to provide “mere entertainment” as a much-desired balm for turbulent times.⁴ Meiyappan published his advertisement-cum-treatise in 1968, as political agitations had come to a head in both India and the world. Over India’s second post-independence decade, searing disillusionment had pierced through any semblance of a postcolonial honeymoon. In a fractured world, India was a fractured nation whose cracks were on full display by the mid-1960s, following a humiliating defeat in a war with China, a struggling economy, the devaluation of the Indian rupee, workers’ protests, and youth agitations under an increasingly authoritarian central government under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

At the time of Meiyappan’s 1968 *Times of India* treatise, students in the South Indian Tamil-speaking state of Tamil Nadu had been protesting the North Indian imposition of Hindi as a national language, and they were targeting and shutting down screenings of Hindi films throughout the state. Meanwhile the Shiv Sena (Army of Shivaji) had sought to “reclaim” Bombay for disenfranchised, working-class native Marathi speakers. Espousing anti-migrant rhetoric against South Indians in Bombay, the Shiv Sena had attracted unemployed Marathi-speaking youth.⁵ Bombay’s cosmopolitan history and demographics notwithstanding, the coastal city on the Arabian Sea—and center of the Hindi film industry—was now within the state borders of Maharashtra, after the erstwhile Bombay State had split into two linguistically defined Marathi- and Gujarati-speaking states in 1960. In retaliation for the anti-Hindi protests that had blocked the exhibition of Hindi films in Tamil Nadu, Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray had incited the organization’s *chitrapat shaakhaa* (film branch) to patrol theatres across Bombay and block screenings of not only Tamil-language films but also any Hindi films that had been produced in Tamil Nadu’s capital city of Madras, the center of the Tamil-language film industry.⁶

A decade apart, Abbas’s and Meiyappan’s remarks unfold as reactions to unexpected encounters between their commercial films and a set of audiences beyond their respective industries’ primary territories of distribution, whether internationally (in the case of Abbas) or intranationally (in the case of Meiyappan). Both

take the trouble to emphasize that commercial success has remained secondary in their endeavors, as they yoke the sheer scale of commercial cinema to an opportunity to widely disseminate social good of some kind. Abbas characterizes this social good as an explicitly ideological, progressive, political intervention, while Meiyappan characterizes it as an explicitly nonideological, apolitical one. As evidence for the absence of any self-interested motivations tied to financial gain, Meiyappan reveals that he promised all proceeds from Bombay screenings of his films to victims of the December 1967 earthquake in the city of Koyna, also in the state of Maharashtra. (Strategically, this aimed to portray Bal Thackeray and the Shiv Sena as the more self-interested party, since the losses incurred by blocked screenings of Madras-produced films would ostensibly affect fellow Maharashtrian earthquake victims, rather than South Indians affiliated with the Madras film industry.)

This book takes seriously such claims, which avowed a commitment to social good through Hindi cinema's widespread popularity among audiences both within India and overseas. I neither take these claims at face value nor dismiss them outright. Instead, I trace the material histories and pressing ethical and political imperatives that demanded a reckoning with cinema's relationship to world-making over a long 1960s period. Abbas's and Meiyappan's remarks suggest a general historical trajectory of this period in an Indian national context, from a moment of optimism over India's place as a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement and Cold War-era peacekeeping to one of dimmed enthusiasm for the "Third World project"⁷ and disillusionment with the Indian national project itself—much less India's potential to be any kind of world leader.⁸ While this arc is not inaccurate, it is an incomplete picture in terms of the circuits and aspirations of Hindi cinema in the period between the Bandung Afro-Asian Conference in 1955 and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's suspension of the Constitution and declaration of the Indian Emergency in 1975. Simply put, Hindi films in this period continued to enjoy and sustain immense popularity through ad hoc cross-border channels of distribution that eluded centralized control by either the state or even the Bombay industry.

Meiyappan's characterization of his films as "mere entertainment," akin to Abbas's characterization of *Awara's* strategic packaging in "romance, comedy, and somewhat jazzy music," summons popular legacies of 1960s Hindi cinema: color, foreign locales, high romance, higher-octane jazz-and-rock-inflected music, and overtly commercial, escapist fare.⁹ I revisit this period precisely to ask what "mere entertainment" might belie in terms of cinema's historical relationship to world-making. That is, how cinema mobilized collective imaginings and collective practices aimed at material transformations in the world through, rather than despite, "romance, comedy, and somewhat jazzy music." Cinema took on considerable diplomatic significance during the 1960s, amid the efflorescence of postwar art cinema, the mushrooming of film festivals, the growth of several postcolonial cinemas, and the proliferation of film initiatives that served various intelligence agencies' global Cold War interests as the US and the USSR vied for geopolitical

dominance. To fill in a more detailed picture of the broader significance accorded to cinema during this period, I turn to a set of Hindi films that entered their own arguments into a heated terrain of debate about cinema in the world.

I show, through a set of Hindi films' own reflexive engagements, that the figure of the singing dancer-actress came to embody the excess of Hindi commercial cinema: its capital excess as a commercial industry; its audiovisual excess as a music-and-spectacle-driven cinema; and its libidinal excess as a seductive cinema that was beloved by vast audiences both within the Indian subcontinent and across Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East, and the Indian Ocean world. The seemingly insatiable demand for Hindi films repeatedly bore the consternation of editorials and official reports from both within and outside India that painted the commercial song-dance films as siren-like: alarmingly noisy and nonsensical, if not dangerously seductive and utterly vulgar.

Repeatedly, Hindi films in this period rendered the figure of the singing dancer-actress as metonymic for the singing, dancing cinema. Through reflexive allegories, they defensively extolled not cinema *per se* but, more specifically, the love that Hindi cinema could engender *en masse* in the form of cinephilia. The gendered terms of these allegories posited Hindi cinema as a unique, feminine object of exchange, whose ostensibly immanent legibility and lovability across boundaries of language and nationality could bring together a world that was rent by material inequalities and national-cultural divisions. Love-as-cinephilia unfolds in the films as a thoroughly modern force and as path toward a world forged in principles of friendship, reciprocity, and collaboration in contrast to a global industrial modernity driven by self-interested, exploitative, (neo)colonial accumulations of capital. Often, this avowal of cinephilia was accompanied by a far more ambivalent stance toward the commercial film industry itself, portrayed as a less-than-ideal means to an idealized end.

I turn to a small set of films that may initially seem to be odd, atypical instances: prestige coproductions, low-budget comedies, remakes, and failures. I look at these films because they emerged from attempts to facilitate and deepen exchanges between film industries and their audiences, whether through explicitly progressive political commitments or through "mere entertainment." Together, these films reveal material histories of Hindi cinema's circulation within and beyond India, in addition to highlighting the importance of cinephilia as driver of collaboration and exchange between industries at the level of production and across audiences at the level of distribution. The homosocial character of film financing and distribution partly accounted for the films' allegorical idealization of a fraternal order in its imagination of how—and between whom—cinematic exchanges could shape the world anew.¹⁰ Likewise, the figure of the singing dancer-actress emerged as metonymic for Hindi cinema's ostensibly immanent expressivity, legibility, and exchangeability, partly because several star actresses—particularly dancer-actresses—were well known for working across multiple languages and commercial industries within India.¹¹

By closely scrutinizing the gendered terms—and gendered hierarchies of labor—of these films’ own arguments about Hindi cinema in the world, I offer an account that looks with fresh eyes at world cinema, cinephilia, and the global 1960s via Bombay. Popular legacies of the global 1960s bring to mind a cocktail of political turbulence, paranoia, pleasure, and protest: “hippie” and countercultural youth rebellions, antiwar demonstrations, radical anticolonial struggles, the specter of nuclear annihilation, women’s movements, civil rights mobilizations, liberal drug use, free love, jet-setters, and rock and roll.¹² I focus on Bombay (cinema) as a “nodal point”¹³ of the global 1960s in order to consider what both love and cinema meant for shaping a world order that palpably hung in the air as a question during this Cold War period. I join other recent scholars that have turned to the Global South in order to reconsider Cold War–era histories in the everyday through perspectives, cultural practices, and locations beyond state-level diplomacy and beyond a focus on the superpowers of the US and USSR.¹⁴

The world as a biophysical, planetary totality was first revealed to the human eye in 1946, when the first images of Earth were taken from a US rocket launched from New Mexico. Theorizing world-making in an earlier historical period, Ayesha Ramachandran offers a poignant analysis of how in the absence of such ocular evidence, the world was rendered as a totality—that is, how cartographers, philosophers, and poets in early modern Europe conceived of the world as a whole and brought it into being on paper during an age of European maritime exploration and imperial expansion.¹⁵ In following this particular strand of imagining the world, Ramachandran tracks a shift from a cosmological ordering in which the world referred to a totality of God’s creation to a conception of the world as a discrete planetary entity shaped by man. Because the world could not be apprehended by the eye as a totality, Ramachandran insightfully underscores the role of the human imagination in rendering the world as a conceptual and material whole.

At the outset of the Cold War, the world as a totality was for the first time rendered both visible as an object of photography and vulnerable as an object—or what Rey Chow refers to as a target—of human-inflicted (nuclear) catastrophe.¹⁶ The nuclear arms race and the space race produced technologies of unprecedented scale and spectacle, from the distances that rockets could go to the destruction that atom bombs could inflict. As such, ambitions of world-making from a variety of locations recruited a commensurate marshaling of technologies of scale. In this context, cinema operated as a potent vehicle for the exercise of soft power—in the case of, for instance, the global distribution of Hollywood films as well as the US Information Agency’s public diplomacy films, technologies, and educational initiatives that aimed to win “hearts and minds” worldwide.¹⁷

Whether on the part of governments, industries, nonstate agencies, or individuals, perceptions of cinema as a potent medium of both influence and cosmopolitan engagement with the world at large was hardly without precedent.¹⁸

Instead, what changed in the postwar moment was the intensity of the stakes in which cinema was caught up, particularly as war-torn Europe and atom-bombed Japan faced the ascendance of the US as a superpower in the world.¹⁹ The development of postwar European art cinema, the state-supported emergence of film festivals and delegations, and the proliferation of journals dedicated to film criticism formed the institutional foundations of world cinema, which in this period largely connoted an art cinema of social uplift that placed a premium on the visionary acumen of the director-auteur. In Europe, these initiatives were in no small part a response to the unprecedented geopolitical dominance of the US.²⁰

Institutions of postwar European art cinema and criticism have had a foundational imprint on film studies as a scholarly discipline and on the historiography of cinema in contexts outside Europe.²¹ This is evident in the canonization of certain films and filmmakers as belonging to the terrain of world cinema while others remained outside this domain. Despite *Awara*'s immense popularity across audiences both within India and overseas, for example, it was Bengali filmmaker Satyajit Ray's neorealist film *Pather Panchali* (Song of the little road, 1955) that yielded breathless, repeated praise for finally "put[ting] Indian cinema on the world map," following the film's acclaim in the West at a plethora of international film festivals.²² Abbas, in his autobiography, articulates the axiom that "criminals are not born but are created by social injustice" as the key lesson he embedded in his screenplay for *Awara*. This message could just as easily describe the vaunted postwar Italian neorealist classic *The Bicycle Thieves* (Vittorio De Sica, 1948), which preceded *Awara* by only three years and famously inspired Ray's *Pather Panchali*.²³

Awara and *Pather Panchali* (or for that matter, *The Bicycle Thieves*) may seem to be antipodes in terms of commercial versus art cinema or melodrama versus realism. Yet, as Neepa Majumdar has pointed out, the reduction of Indian art cinema to Ray, Ray to *Pather Panchali*, and Ray/*Pather Panchali* to the antithesis of commercial Indian cinema obscures the range and porosity of practices that constituted Indian art cinema and its commercial "others."²⁴ Among *Pather Panchali*'s varied legacies is its embrace of "anticommercial imperatives."²⁵ Despite Ray's own writings that decried the loose narratives and melodramatic proclivities of commercial Indian cinema, *Pather Panchali* did in fact draw on techniques of visual storytelling and melodrama from mainstream commercial Indian cinemas—namely, "the transfer of inner psychological and moral realities onto externalized icons . . . whose meaning is immediately legible."²⁶ In this manner, Indian filmmakers and critics working across a variety of practices were omnivorous in the influences that they engaged, debated, and drew into their own practices. This is evident in the careers of several filmmakers who in this period worked across multiple formal idioms, industries, languages, and scales of production: from experimental films to star-studded ensemble films, from song-dance films to songless films, from children's films to farcical comedies, and from state-sponsored films to commercial productions across language industries within India.²⁷ Such versatile

filmmakers included both Ray and Abbas, as well as Ritwik Ghatak, Hrishikesh Mukherjee, and Bimal Roy, among others.²⁸

Continuities across the emergent Indian art cinema and commercial cinema over the 1960s notwithstanding, several commercial Indian films took great pains to reflexively dramatize and defend themselves as art and as not only grounded, but even as uniquely equipped to address pressing social issues in the world.²⁹ Several circumstances account for this defensive positioning, including the ongoing self-consciousness of being an other of not only Hollywood cinema but also of a properly modern, authentic Indian (art) cinema.³⁰ By the 1960s, the category of world cinema was well established through an auteurist discourse of art cinema and its attendant institutional networks of film festivals in and beyond postwar Europe.³¹ In India, officials, filmmakers, activists, and audiences engaged with the category of art cinema and with developmentalist aspirations to modernize Indian cinema through a range of institutions that were established in this period.

In addition to the earlier establishment of the Films Division in 1948, which produced state-sponsored documentaries, the government inaugurated the first International Film Festival of India in 1952, the National Film Awards in 1954, the Film and Television Institute of India in 1960, the Film Finance Corporation in 1960, and the India Motion Picture Export Corporation in 1963, which, along with the Film Finance Corporation, was subsumed under the National Film Development Corporation created in 1975. Simultaneously, the Federation of Film Societies of India was established in 1959, as the film society movement took root across multiple centers nationwide. The term *film appreciation* captured the pedagogical side of these projects, which sought to refine Indian audiences' discerning capacities when it came to cinema, such that neither audiences nor filmmakers would be stuck in their holding pattern of what many regarded as an insufficiently modern—yet crudely tenacious—popular film form.³² This is what Abbas had self-consciously described as “the limits of commercial cinema.”

Alongside the proliferation of institutions of film culture in this pre-television period came the advent of color stock. The advent of color in Indian cinema brought a 1960s “postcard imagination” of consumption and leisure to the screen, with several big-budget Hindi films featuring an array of picturesque locales across and beyond the subcontinent.³³ Even as Hindi films of the 1960s oozed with the exuberance of color and romance, film production across India experienced tremendous volatility and precarity due to an economic crisis that culminated in the devaluation of the Indian rupee, rising costs of production tied to tariffs and expenses for importing color stock, and a standoff between film producers and distributors, as well as a number of political agitations—including the anti-Hindi protests that shut down screenings of Hindi films in Tamil Nadu and the retaliatory shutdowns of Madras-produced Hindi films in Bombay. Although the state had been investing in institutions of film culture, the Bombay industry was not among its primary beneficiaries.³⁴

The state's developmentalist discourse contributed to a wider polemic that pitted a yet-to-be-realized state-sponsored, middle-class Indian cinema against mainstream commercial cinema. The middlebrow Indian new wave that emerged from the 1950s art cinema known as "parallel cinema" was defined by its difference from commercial cinema, even when in practice, there was constant movement and overlap between the two. The corollary middlebrow discourse of film appreciation veered toward colonial, need-based theories of reception, which held patronizing assumptions about certain segments of the population (e.g., girls, women, rural communities, the urban poor) being especially prone to acting on base instincts, against their better judgement.³⁵ Where mainstream commercial cinema had purportedly taken advantage of the masses by tailoring itself to these baser instincts, film appreciation proposed civilizational training by which the masses would learn to resist and overcome an inferior cinema's cheap seductions.

As Hindi films themselves engaged with this polemic over a period of intense volatility, I show how some films offered counterarguments premised upon the deification of love as an ethical horizon. Rather than a sign of backwardness, libidinal excess was defended as a marker of true love, which was in turn put forward as a thoroughly modern ideal. Often, this argument surfaced through compulsive, melodramatic disaggregations of love from lust, truth from artifice, friendship from exploitation, inner substance from superficial beauty, and music from noise.³⁶ All of the latter—lust, artifice, exploitation, superficial beauty, and noise—constituted the very terms with which the Hindi film industry was frequently denigrated as a debased hotbed of immoral excess. The films' defensive counterargument was that Hindi cinema could produce a libidinal excess of love that was qualitatively and quantitatively unmatched, in the iteration of cinephilia. After all, excess was the mark of an embodied truth in matters of love, and love-as-cinephilia could be experienced and distributed on a scale that could rise to the occasion of drawing together a fractured nation and world.

In tracking the persistence of love as an argument about excess and cinephilia over the 1960s, I build on Arti Wani's insightful study of love in Hindi cinema of the previous decade.³⁷ Wani's analysis proceeds from two keen observations. Firstly, despite the prominence of romantic love in Indian cinema, focused scholarly attention on love as a specific phenomenon in Hindi cinema has been relatively scant. Secondly, as also noted by literary scholar Francesca Orsini in a longer cultural history of love in South Asia, Wani points to the outsized prevalence of romantic love and free-choice romantic couplings in a textual domain (of mass entertainment, in the case of popular cinema) in contrast to its far more muted embrace in the domain of everyday practice.³⁸

Wani suggests that in the case of Hindi cinema, caste may be the central present absence historically, as a ubiquitous subtext and structure that was seldom

represented in explicit terms.³⁹ She surmises that caste may have been the primary material context that drove romantic love's overwhelming presence and celebration onscreen as a fantasy of modernity, while being withheld as a lived experience for many in terms of everyday practice.⁴⁰ Caste, as a structure of accumulation that rationalizes inequality through shape-shifting ritualized and secularized practices of touching/not touching, has depended upon vigilant control over women's sexuality for its social reproduction.⁴¹ Thus, on the one hand, free-choice romantic love carries the radical potential for going against the mandates of socially prescribed practices that have demarcated caste boundaries through the regulation and control of sexuality. On the other hand, however, images of romantic love in Indian popular cultures have privileged upper-caste Hindu middle-class conjugality as an unmarked ideal, which unfolds as an ostensibly progressive, secular, modern practice of free choice.⁴²

Navaneetha Mokkal presciently notes that "the possibilities of being publicly recognized as a desiring and desirable subject and the ease with which an individual can be projected as an icon of romance and agency is coterminous with caste privilege. The structure of caste grants greater autonomy, mobility, and desirability to certain sections of the population."⁴³ Many have argued that the "woman question" of Indian modernity is thus inseparable from the "caste question" in colonial and national discourses that constructed upper-caste Hindu womanhood as the inviolate "inner" essence of national identity.⁴⁴ This dominant national discourse, which placed "the woman as the emerging figure of modernity in need of containment,"⁴⁵ put immense pressure on narratives of Hindi films. The dominant post-independence form of the social frequently labored to rhetorically neutralize—most often, through narratives of middle-class, upper-caste conjugality—one of the most palpable hallmarks of the Bombay industry's excess: the spectacularly public, sensual presence of the star actress.⁴⁶

Ideological critiques of mainstream cinemas' privileging of a "male gaze" have been an important contribution of feminist film theory and Marxist apparatus theory.⁴⁷ Critiques of this influential work are also important in rightly noting the privileging of binary gender difference over other kinds of difference in theories of spectatorial identification.⁴⁸ While much of 1970s feminist film theory took a position of deep suspicion toward spectatorial pleasure vis-à-vis mainstream (particularly Hollywood) cinema, subsequent feminist critiques of this work have offered important considerations of spectatorial pleasure as potentially—though never automatically—liberatory.⁴⁹ Additional rejoinders have noted that even if a cinematic apparatus ideologically constructs dominant spectatorial positions of identification (e.g., that of the "male gaze"), the spectator themselves may or may not occupy these positions in a predictable manner.⁵⁰ I take Hamid Naficy's reflections over third-world film spectatorship and ideological "haggling" as a particularly instructive model, which accounts for spectatorial agency without denying the ideological power of images.⁵¹ Seemingly oddball Hindi films that emerged

from cross-industry ventures over the 1960s offer a chance to examine a range of contemporaneous ideological pressures, especially as these pressures were shaken up through the acts of translations that ensued from the involvement of multiple industries, intended audiences, and idioms of cinema.

In the 1957 India-USSR coproduction *Pardesi* (Foreigner; aka *Journey beyond Three Seas*, K. A. Abbas and Vasili Pronin), for example, uncharacteristically explicit invocations of caste are juxtaposed with the more commonplace representation of feudal structures of class, as grounds for “homosocialist” solidarities between the toiling Russian peasant and the Indian Dalit against their feudal and upper-caste brahminical oppressors. In a string of Madras-produced Hindi remakes of Tamil comedies, the romantic couple often comes off as an exaggerated caricature, if not a comedic cliché that spoofs and sidelines their centrality. In the 1972 India-Iran coproduction *Subah-O-Sham* (From dawn to dusk)/*Homa-ye Saadat* (Bird of happiness, Tapi Chanakya, 1972), the predominantly Muslim characters are depicted as ultramodern, and their Muslimness remains largely unmarked and inconspicuous.⁵² This was unique in that it went against contemporaneous tendencies of Hindi cinema toward either tokenistic representations of Muslims as side characters along binaries of “good” versus “bad” Muslims or nostalgic “Muslim socials” set in bygone eras, such as *Mughal-e-Azam* (*The Great Mughal*, K. Asif, 1960) and *Pakeezah* (*The Pure One*, Kamal Amrohi, 1972).⁵³ Across these instances, love is theorized as a libidinal excess that is thoroughly modern, yet vociferously distanced from the excess of capital gained through extraction and exploitation. I pull this out as a reflexive argument about popular cinema and cinephilia, as it sought to distinguished the authenticity, social value, and moral value of cinephilia from the financially motivated constraints of the industry.

This theorization of the value of popular Hindi cinema privileged the sincerity and scale of pleasure afforded by a consensual, dynamic relationship between the seductive cinematic object and a spectator who is *willingly and knowingly* seduced by its artifice, beyond and despite the transactional, monetized terms of their encounter. This is an especially important counterclaim because it addressed a far more agential viewing subject than the one imagined either by contemporaneous developmentalist projects of film appreciation or by Hindi films’ representational tendencies to idealize specific kinds of subjects. This more agential addressee was also one of two minds, as the defensiveness of the films’ arguments about cinema suggests polarities of a spectator who is at once deeply cinephilic and deeply cinephobic. Cinephilia, here, is proposed as that “something” that is embodied and authentic in its vitality and critical awareness. It is posited as an excess that is inadvertently produced by a commercial industry, yet crucially escapes its commoditization.

Excess as a term denotes a range of interventions across both cinema studies and studies of sexuality, and it has been conceptually significant to South

Asian (cinema) studies in particular. I retain multiple valences of excess as a set of historical and disciplinary debates over cinematic form, idealized bodies, and hierarchies of value. This is in keeping with feminist commitments to vigilance against the naturalization of social hierarchies—including those of but not limited to gender—lest they appear uncontested and ahistorical. Kristin Thompson's well-known formalist definition of cinematic excess is premised on the narrative unity of classical (i.e., Hollywood) cinema.⁵⁴ Stating that excess tends to elude analysis, she defines excess as that which is unmotivated and thereby counter-narrative and counter-unity. However, this formalist definition does not account for the ways in which excess, as well as notions of classicism, are historically contingent on regimes of power and (aesthetic) value. Masha Salazkina's historiography of Sergei Eisenstein's unfinished film *¡Que viva México!* is an example of a formalist approach to cinematic excess that emphasizes the inextricability of excess from dominant institutions of power, as she takes up Raymond Bellour's notion of a "textual unconscious" to consider elements that escape both systematization into economies of meaning and inclusion into easy or definitive historiographies.⁵⁵

Linda Williams's theorization of excess is among the most methodologically pertinent to analyses of popular Indian cinemas. She focuses on "body genres" of horror, pornography, and women's melodramas that are often regarded as gratuitous vis-à-vis the "classical realist style of narrative cinema."⁵⁶ She links the ostensible excess of body genres to the spectacular onscreen feminine body's centrality in the production of spectatorial sensations and to the wider assumption that spectators' bodies automatically mimic the involuntary sensations being represented onscreen—such as fright, sexual arousal, or pain/weeping. In surmising that gendered, bodily associations account for these genres' low cultural status, she urges caution in uncritically assuming either what spectators' bodies do, how they are gendered, and how they experience pleasure, or that these genres are indeed "excessive" and gratuitous. Excess in this sense must be understood through the dominant historical contexts that frame its status as such, in opposition to what remains unmarked as purported "non-excess."

For scholars of popular Indian cinema, excess has been a key term for presenting historical and theoretical debates over both film form and public displays of feminine sexuality. Rather than a face-value descriptor, excess points to dialectics of value, seeing, and sensing in Neepa Majumdar's history of gender and stardom, for example, as well as in Arti Wani's analysis of love in 1950s Hindi cinema and Usha Iyer's study of dancer-actresses.⁵⁷ Melodrama appears as excess in relation to realism; formal elements like song sequences appear as excess in relation to narrative structures of classical cinema; and spectacles of performing women appear as excess in relation to idealized upper-caste middle-class Hindu women whose sexuality is confined to the private space of conjugality.⁵⁸ The latter concern overlaps with Durba Mitra's recent work on sexuality and the social sciences in modern India, which she frames as a historiography of excess. Excess, in her account, is

indelibly linked to the archival excess of deviant women in social scientific knowledge produced by colonial and Bengali men, whose obsessive production of all Indian women as potential prostitutes carried the authority of social scientific fact.⁵⁹

While Mitra's account is not concerned with cinema, it nonetheless lends crucial historical context to administrators' preoccupations with deviant women from colonial through post-independence periods. Similar preoccupations have centrally structured discourses and taxonomies of excess in relation to specific star bodies and popular cinema on the part of detractors as well as defenders.⁶⁰ Excess is invoked as similarly attached to marginalized bodies in Navaneetha Mokkil's much more contemporary analysis of sexual subjects and sexual figures—namely, the sex worker and the lesbian—in the southwestern Indian state of Kerala.⁶¹ Another valence for excess emerges in Ashish Rajadhyaksha's theorization of the ontology of celluloid cinema itself, proposed as a dialectic between excess and containment.⁶² In his theorization, containment invokes the material structure of both the film frame and the movie theatre, while excess points to “how cinematic exchanges trigger off something that can spill over into extra-textual and other social spaces.”⁶³

Whether in reference to aesthetic forms or to bodies, excess tends to belie hierarchies of difference that are structured by what is privileged as *non-excess*: as unmarked. As this privileged center is contested, so, too, are notions of excess. In the case of film form, excess has historically invoked women's genres and “low” body genres,⁶⁴ as well as elements perceived to be in excess of formal and aesthetic ideals that are ostensibly authentic.⁶⁵ While often tied to ideals of Hollywood classicism, the privileging of formal unity further crystallized through an influential postwar European discourse of world cinema, which denoted an auteur-helmed, realist cinema in the postwar period.⁶⁶ Contemporaneous accounts of Bombay films' overseas reception, however, show that boundaries between excess and realism—the latter understood as grounded in a material context that may or may not align with modes of realist aesthetics—to be contingent and contested rather than fixed.⁶⁷ The cross-industry productions I examine entered their own arguments perceptively and reflexively into this terrain of debate.

In considering Hindi cinema in the world of world cinema over the 1960s, I trace a historical and theoretical tension between three kinds of excess: the excess of bodily difference, the excess of form, and the excess of capitalism. All three privilege a universal, modern subject against whom excess is defined: he is unmarked by the bodily excess of race, gender, caste, and class; he is constituted as the individualized subject of realist perspectival relations; and he is a rational, productive agent of choice within an efficiently industrialized economic order. I look at how a number of Bombay films reflexively and simultaneously grappled with these inter-related excesses in the post-independence, Cold War period—that is, the libidinal excess of (especially feminine) star bodies, the formal excess of spectacle-driven

audiovisual forms, and the capitalist excess of profit-oriented mass production and consumption, over a period still marked by nominal commitments to ideals of Nehruvian socialism as well as Gandhian austerity. By lyrically extolling cinephilia—rather than cinema—as their product, these productions sought to actively theorize and argue their own role in the world.

I join Sarah Keller, among others, in seizing cinephilia as an opportunity to think more expansively, beyond its origin points, about love for cinema through manifold histories and practices.⁶⁸ In her poignant, wide-ranging history of cinephilia, she notes the term's emergence in 1920s France and later resurgence in the postwar period as "French cinephiles' efforts to reclaim the cinema (even popular cinema) for art . . . focused its amorous attention on cinema's expressive, image-oriented (rather than literary) abilities, its unique purview, and its untapped potential . . . wrought for the most part by professional critics and filmmakers rather than by laypersons."⁶⁹ While she surmises that high-low culture distinctions between the cinephile and fan have perhaps lain in their respective specializations in cinema versus stars, she acknowledges that this distinction is often untenable.⁷⁰

Much work on cinephilia has maintained an emphasis on writing as a primary form of the cinephile's amorous expression.⁷¹ This can exclude important phenomena like Hindi film songs, which have been primary interfaces for participatory, cinephilic engagements that are irreducible to star adulation alone. My account marshals love lyrics in a longer history of South Asian oral cultures and in Hindi cinema as an undertheorized element that has much to contribute to histories and theories of cinephilia. This is an especially important consideration in contexts where oral practices like poetry and song have been an important vernacular site of knowledge production, especially for those who were excluded from opportunities to read and write.⁷² Onscreen romance unfolds in several moments as tongue-in-cheek paeans to love-as-cinephilia, in defense of the spectators' affections and screen objects' solicitations despite the circumstances of an explicitly transactional affair involving an industrially produced commodity. How, why, and where these ekphrastic arguments arose over the 1960s—that is, rhetorical details and claims about cinema within a set of films—sustains my inquiry, as it occasions a textual and material history of cinema and cinephilia in the context of Hindi films' highly mobile, prolific circulation both domestically and overseas.

Sirens of Modernity is structured in two parts. In part 1—"Establishing Shots: World Cinema in Tongues," I move from the category of world cinema to the lyrical trope of the "City of Love." I juxtapose the claim that songs drove Hindi films' immanent widespread legibility among less educated audiences in the world (chapter 1) with a genealogy of song lyrics that demonstrates the significance of lyrics and songs as key interfaces for collective, critical reflections propelled by cinephilia (chapter 2). In part 2—"Star-Crossed Overtures: Cinephilia in Excess,"

I look at a set of cross-industry productions over the long 1960s, including India-USSR and India-Malaya coproductions (chapter 3), a set of Madras-produced Hindi remakes of Tamil comedies (chapter 4), and an India-Iran coproduction (chapter 5).

Throughout the book, I turn to press sources, trade journal reports, parliamentary proceedings, memoirs, and archival ephemera that shed light on material histories of Hindi films' prolific circulation both within India and overseas. I read these sources critically as anecdotal fragments,⁷³ alongside films, song sequences, and song lyrics that offer reflexive, allegorical commentaries on their (gendered) contexts of collaboration and aspirations of worldmaking through cinephilia. My emphasis on networked histories complements the insights of a recent collection of essays edited by Monika Mehta and Madhuja Mukherjee, which compellingly makes the case that cross-industry circuits are a rule rather than an exception in the history of Indian cinema, if not the history of cinema more broadly.⁷⁴ It is as a specialist of Hindi cinema that I am approaching a particular set of cross-industry productions over the long 1960s. Debates over cinema's role in the world—and the world's role in cinema—raged across manifold locations as well as languages in this period. I hope to capture some sense of these debates' vociferousness by reading a set of Hindi films as enthusiastic and argumentative participants.

Chapter 1, "Problems of Translation: World Cinema as Distribution History," offers an overview of how the category of world cinema gained traction during a crisis of distribution in postwar Europe. Through a review of historical and scholarly work on cinematic translation, I emphasize language translation as one aspect—but not always an essential or primary one—of distribution over the 1960s. Hindi films' overseas circulation in this period invited contradictory claims in Anglophone press accounts: on the one hand, film songs were noted as propelling Hindi films' circulation regardless of dubbing or subtitling; on the other hand, film songs were identified as the roadblock that hindered the films' comprehensibility, particularly in the West. Explanations for this contradiction tended to reproduce (neo)colonial, racialized, classist theories of reception, which naturalized cinematic forms of ostensible excess to audiences and places perceived as backward. Such explanations assumed that musical films were immanently legible through the body and thus crude. I consider other explanations that might account for Hindi films' overseas popularity in this period: from the films' cheap availability through ad hoc and informal distribution channels, to their tendency to narrate interior conflicts through their external visualization,⁷⁵ to their musical expressivity. These elements constituted not an underdeveloped cinematic language but a vernacular whose narrative and sensorial modes of expression surely invited contemplation as well as sensorial pleasure.

Chapter 2, "Moving toward the 'City of Love': Hindustani Lyrical Genealogies," observes that while Hindi song lyrics were not always translated, they reveal witty, ekphrastic participation in post-independence debates over the Bombay-based

cinema's questionable legitimacy as a national form. I contextualize these debates in a 1930s prehistory of the anti-colonial All-India Progressive Writer's Association, many of whose members worked as lyricists and writers in the Bombay industry.⁷⁶ I show that film song lyrics in the early talkie period drew on premodern genres and tropes of love poetry—such as *prem nagar* (“City of Love”)—to defend cinematic forms of alleged artifice. Romantic song lyrics reflexively pointed up the noisy exuberance of romantic love—as a horizon of universality and intimacy, beyond language—that the urban machine of popular cinema could manufacture for the world en masse, in the modern incarnation of cinephilia. Premodern lyrical antecedents of the cinematic “City of Love” offer a comparative historical perspective on the potential as well as limits of cinephilia, regarding love as an ethical praxis for translating critical reflection into collective action toward radically egalitarian forms of sociality.

Chapter 3, “Homosocialist Coproductions: *Pardesi* (1957) contra *Singapore* (1960),” focuses on the elaborate 1957 Indo-Soviet coproduction *Pardesi*, the first of a handful of high-profile, star-studded coproductions via the Bombay industry over the long 1960s. In each of the transnational prestige productions examined in the book, the endeavors of coproduction are reflexively rendered in melodramatic registers within the films, wherein the figure of the singing dancer-actress becomes metonymic for Hindi song-dance films that had been circulating among contemporaneous audiences—both diasporic and non-diasporic—through multiple second- and third-world contexts. Within a dialogic arena of debate over both world cinema and cinema in the world, I note *Pardesi*'s implicitly gendered casting of Hindi cinema as a feminine token of exchange, embodied by the singing dancer-actress whose charms are defensively extolled in service of “films for friendship,” in codirector Abbas's words.⁷⁷ To the latter end, *Pardesi* melodramatically and reflexively divorces its own coproduction from profit-driven strategies of cofinancing, instead embracing both coproduction and the formal idioms of popular Hindi cinema as means of forging embodied homosocial(ist) bonds between audiences of the world against the backdrop of the Cold War. I end by juxtaposing the ambition of *Pardesi* with that of the Indo-Malay coproduction *Singapore* (1960) in order to emphasize the two contemporaneous coproductions' distinct ambitions and overlapping contexts of production and distribution.

Chapter 4, “Comedic Crossovers and Madras Money-Spinners: *Padosan*'s (1968) Audiovisual Apparatus,” continues chapter 3's exploration of cross-industry productions through an account of commercial remakes of films across languages and industries within India. In a parallel to the discourse of world cinema in Europe, a 1960s discourse of world cinema in India was partly motivated by an especially acute crisis of revenue loss in the Madras industry. Thus, the advocacy of world cinema on the part of Indian industry affiliates was simultaneously an advocacy for collaboration, support, and exchange across commercial language industries and their respective audiences within India. This context gave rise to

a set of Hindi remakes of highly reflexive 1960s Madras studio comedies, which critics decried as “money spinners” for their comedic excess.

Comic superstar Mehmood was a preeminent attraction in several Madras-produced Hindi comedies. His stardom—and histories of Hindi film comedy generally—remain virtually absent in scholarly accounts of Hindi cinema. Unraveling the manner in which Mehmood’s home production, the 1968 hit comedy *Padosan* (Girl next door) is structured around a *mise en abyme* of the window as cinematic apparatus within the film, I pull out the film’s own arguments about cinema, authorship, and form in defense of material practices of playback recording and histories of nonprofessional, amateur labor alongside classically and professionally trained film workers in the Bombay industry. I contextualize my reading of *Padosan* in histories of Indian cinema of the 1960s—a decade in which the “parallel” Indian art cinema established its foothold—to underscore the window as a key stand-in for cinema upon a threshold of modern sexuality, epitomized by the urban problem of noise and related legal debates over noise regulation. Interweaving a comparative analysis of noise, sexuality, and the apparatus of the window in the 1970 parallel film *Dastak*, I emphasize *Padosan*’s polemical meta-commentary upon the belovedness of the Bombay industry’s cacophonous, vulgar seductions.

Chapter 5, “Foreign Exchanges: Transregional Trafficking through *Subah-O-Sham* (1972),” connects practices of production across commercial industries within India to the instance of the 1972 India-Iran coproduction *Subah-O-Sham*. The film’s Telugu director Tapi Chanakya had by then remade the hit Telugu comedy *Ramudu Bheemudu* (1964) as Madras-produced hits in both Tamil and Hindi with *Enga Veettu Pillai* (1965) and *Ram Aur Shyam* (1967). The film’s heroine is a trafficked singer-dancer from India living in Iran, played by Indian film star Waheeda Rehman, whose film debut had in fact been as a dancer in Tapi Chanakya’s 1955 Telugu film *Rojulu Marayi*. I connect the meta-cinematic registers of *Subah-O-Sham* to a material history of third world celluloid smuggling networks. Through archival documents and press sources, I trace the Indian state’s contemporaneous attempts to crack down on a film smuggling scheme by which “blue films,” or exploitation films, were being clandestinely imported from the Middle East as the cheap celluloid waste that constituted a raw material for manufacturing plastic bangles, which were exported in large quantities for valuable foreign exchange.

I highlight the resonances between *Subah-O-Sham*’s reflexive defense of the trafficking of Indian films in the Middle East and the contemporaneous scandal of celluloid bangles. Laden with overtones of unconstrained feminine sexuality, celluloid bangles were a colorful, modern alternative to the married woman’s much more audible glass bangles. In both cases, forms of audiovisual artifice—blue films that appear as mere waste headed for the bangle factory; colorful celluloid bangles that are decorative but do not chime—enable material circuits that exceed boundaries of the licit and sanctioned. To acknowledge and defend the

promiscuous excess of both cinema and modernity, *Subah-O-Sham*, I show, reflexively renders the Hindi song-dance film in the incarnation of an irresistible feminine catalyst toward a post-national future forged in an ethos of fraternity.

Centering cinephilia as both a practice and a vibrant ekphrastic discourse through Hindi films allows me to put pressure on historiographies and theories of cinephilia that siphon off engagements with the popular, particularly when the latter is star-centered. *Ekphrasis* generally refers to a rhetorical device: a verbal description of a visual object. W. J. T. Mitchell parses ekphrasis as a method of contemplating the relationship between the verbal and visual, of the symbolic (language) and iconic (image).⁷⁸ Across several periods, Hindi commercial films have vividly described cinema.⁷⁹ This underscores not only a separateness between the “thing” and its description (even if the description is occurring within a film) but also the status of such description as an explicitly rhetorical strategy. Mitchell further notes that “insofar as art history is a verbal representation of visual representation, it is an elevation of ekphrasis to a disciplinary principle.”⁸⁰ I embrace this as a reminder that academic disciplines constitute merely one site of knowledge production, along a continuum of energetic critical engagements with cultural forms. It is in this spirit that I engage Hindi films’ own ekphrastic claims about cinema in the world.⁸¹