

## Homosocialist Coproductions

*Pardesi (1957) contra Singapore (1960)*

Following the resounding success of *Awara* (Raj Kapoor, 1951) among Soviet audiences, screenwriter K. A. Abbas led a film delegation to the USSR in 1954. A founding member of the Indian Peoples Theatre Association (IPTA) affiliated with the Communist Party of India, Abbas was a prolific journalist and writer who saw cinema as an ideal medium for raising the masses' consciousness toward progressive social causes. In 1955, India had declared its adherence to the Non-Aligned Movement, whose principles of Cold War neutrality were drafted at the Bandung Afro-Asian Conference in Indonesia that year.<sup>1</sup> The Soviet Union "gave a full-throated endorsement, roaring in support of the anticolonial claims of the attendees," and for the next decade, diplomatic relations remained warm between the Indian socialist democratic government under its first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru and the Soviet Union under Nikita Khrushchev.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly after the Indian film delegation's visit to the Soviet Union, plans began for a coproduction between Abbas's company Naya Sansar (New World) and the Moscow-based Mosfilm Studio. A three-year-long process culminated in a film released in two languages: a Hindi-dubbed version titled *Pardesi* (Foreigner) and a Russian-dubbed version titled *Khozhdenie Za Tri Morya* (*Journey beyond Three Seas*), released in 1957 and 1958, respectively. Abbas's recollections of the coproduction appear in a chapter of his autobiography titled "Three-Legged Race." The chapter's titular metaphor evocatively captures the challenges that ensued from the coproduction's commitments to a deeply collaborative transnational venture, involving two directors, two cinematographers, two music director-composers, and two editors, as well as production on location in both the Soviet Union and India.<sup>3</sup> Among the difficulties that came up for Abbas was the matter of contributing his portion of funds to the joint venture. In the Bombay industry, a typical method of financing films was to mortgage the negative to private investors upon

its completion. But in this case, the negative of *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* was in Moscow. Although the coproduction was a private (rather than state-backed) endeavor on the Indian side, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru intervened on Abbas's behalf in light of the perceived diplomatic significance of the endeavor.<sup>4</sup> Abbas ended up getting a loan—typically unavailable for filmmaking, since cinema was not officially recognized by the government as an industry—from Finance Minister T. T. Krishnamachari.

Distribution rights were negotiated at the very outset of the coproduction. Abbas explains that “India and the ‘Indian overseas’ (where substantial numbers of Indian settlers are and where the Indian version could be exploited) were to be with us; while the Soviet Union, and the rest of the Western world would be exploited by Sovexportfilm on a fifty-fifty basis.”<sup>5</sup> While a shorter, 101-minute Hindi version is currently available in a poorer-quality black-and-white subtitled DVD edition (along with shorter unsubtitled Hindi versions), no digitized color version of the Hindi film is readily available.<sup>6</sup> A 1999 Ruscico DVD release, intended for distribution outside the former Soviet Union, is the best-quality release among available versions, barring any well-preserved archival prints. The 143-minute Ruscico DVD features a high-resolution, wide-screen color version of the film over two discs that include several DVD extras and language options. This is perhaps the version that is closest to a 151-minute version of the film, which was edited down to an “overseas reduced length” of 122 minutes and submitted by India as an entry to the 1958 Cannes Film Festival, where it was selected for that year’s competition and honored among “Five Outstanding Pictures of the World.”<sup>7</sup> To a major institution of world cinema like Cannes, *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* was eligible for consideration only through its official categorization and submission under a single country of origin, despite the fact that the film’s collaborative process was in many ways antithetical to this imperative.

The language options offered by the Ruscico DVD are solely European languages: Russian, English, and French DVD menus; Russian audio; Russian audio with either English or French voice-over translations; and subtitles in English, French, Spanish, Italian, and German. The absence of any Hindi-language option whatsoever is not surprising, in light of the film’s distribution rights having been divided at the outset of the coproduction. At the same time, the absence of this option points to the extent to which *Pardesi/Khozhdenie*, in being so emphatically invested in its own coproduction as a political project of Indo-Soviet cinematic collaboration and exchange, goes against the grain of the most visible (and audible) institutional and market divisions that often map onto area-studies territorial blocs. The endurance of such blocs of distribution is apparent through the menu of European language options offered by the Ruscico DVD, at a remove of four decades from the time of the film’s release.

In this chapter, I detail the extent to which *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* was steeped in its endeavor as a coproduction, as the film’s diegetic world and production

contexts thoroughly infused one another across variations in the film's multiple extant versions. Toward the end of this chapter, I contrast the material and diegetic contexts of *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* with those of *Singapore* (Shakti Samanta, 1960), a Hindi-language Indo-Malay coproduction. While *Singapore*'s production was more overtly commercial, both coproductions mobilized the diegetic figure of the singing dancer-actress—and the stardom of the dancer-actress Padmini in particular—as a distinctly Indian feature that could contend with issues of multilingual distribution. Through a juxtaposition of *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* and *Singapore*, I emphasize material-historical and diegetic motifs of the singing dancer-actress as a uniquely mobile figure across industries within India and between Indian and overseas industries through a handful of transnational prestige coproductions over the long 1960s.

The importance of the figure of the singing dancer-actress in this period and of the kind of cinephilia that she figured in turn were indispensable to the ambitions of multiple cross-industry productions that proceeded via the Bombay industry. Diegetic sequences across seemingly oddball productions over the 1960s conflated the singing dancer-actress with the audiovisual excess of Hindi cinema in order not only to spotlight the stardom of dancer-actresses but also to make ekphrastic arguments about Hindi cinema's comprehensibility to audiences across languages and its world-making capacities therein.<sup>8</sup> In the films that I examine in part 2, the libidinal excess of love-as-cinephilia is reflexively posited as a well-matched adversary to a range of exploitative excesses that have tended to organize the world: colonialism, casteism, classism, racism, authoritarianism, and sexual violence.

Among the blind spots in these theorizations of love-as-cinephilia, however, is that they rhetorically defend the figure of the singing dancer-actress as metonymic for Hindi cinema's unique capacity to (re)productively engender an overwhelmingly homosocial modernity, based on principles of friendship and exchange. In the case of cross-industry productions, this idealized homosocial world not only reflected the status of film (co)financing as a hierarchically masculine affair but also advanced a heteropatriarchal—and ultimately limited—theorization of love and pleasure. Such ekphrastic claims often contradicted other formal and narrative elements that betrayed far more robust possibilities for cinephilia and spectatorial pleasure. The top YouTube comment for a Hindi version of *Pardesi/Khozhdenie*, for example, is from a user who goes by a Russian woman's name and fondly recalls: "That was my fav movie when I was a child :) I simply got stuck to the screen when I have seen fabulous Padmini dancing in a temple. . . . 'This is Lakshmi, she's a dancer. She can speak with her dance gestures'—that was something like out of this world to me."<sup>9</sup> This top comment not only registers the tremendous impact of dancer-actress Padmini's relatively brief cameo but also underscores the extent to which that sequence was perhaps far more memorable than the extended scenes of masculine bonding, which comprise the film's narrative-ideological core and take up the majority of its screentime.

*Pardesi/Khozhdenie* not only elevates a mythos of origin for its contemporaneous contexts of Indo-Soviet friendship but also advances a series of arguments about popular cinema's formal capacities for world-making in a reflexively "homosocialist" manifesto for its own coproduction. The film adapts the classical Russian literary text of a memoir by Afanasy Nikitin, a fifteenth-century Tver merchant "who opened, in 1466–1472, a trade route from Europe to India."<sup>10</sup> Repeated melodramatic disaggregations of friendship from both romance and commerce declaim the coproduction's own endeavor as being wholly motivated by friendship and not by self-interest. *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* was produced during the period of the Soviet Thaw, following the death of Joseph Stalin. This period ushered in the circulation of Hindi films among Soviet moviegoers, as well as a healthy sense of socialist goodwill between India and the Soviet Union.<sup>11</sup> Especially popular among Soviet audiences were Hindi films featuring actor-director Raj Kapoor, known for his tramp characters in films such as *Awara* and *Shree 420* (Mr. 420; 1955), whose screenplays were in fact written by none other than Abbas.<sup>12</sup> In this context, *Pardesi/Khozhdenie*'s project emerges as the establishment of a genesis story of Indo-Soviet camaraderie and homosocialist solidarities through Russian literary-historical figure Afanasy Nikitin.

A prestige coproduction that realized its ambitions of scale in a rather literal sense, *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* was shot in SovColor and SovScope.<sup>13</sup> The color photography and wide-screen aspect ratio enable several panoramic vistas, painted as well as photographic, which highlight and juxtapose Soviet and Indian landscapes and monuments throughout the film. In its wide-screen versions, the symmetry of a painted title image establishes the duality of the film's twin national contexts of production through several details, with the left and right sides mirroring one another in their layout, as dramatic orchestral music scored by Boris Tchaikovsky presents the feature as a coproduction of Naya Sansar and Mosfilm Studios (fig. 10). On either side, block text rests in the foreground at the bottom of the screen, displaying the names of the two studios in front of statues of paired men and women workers who are frozen in the athleticism of agrarian and manual labor. These statues of workers are painted atop blocks, and the figures stand tall with their chins raised and their faces angled, their gazes converging at a central point upon a horizon that extends into and above the position of the audience below. The statues rise into a continuous sky that is bright behind them, gradually darkening toward the top corners and edges to effectively spotlight the figures against a breaking dawn. Diagonally behind the figures are monuments on either side, in the bottom corners of the frame and appearing to be at some distance in the background. The tapered, domed peaks of a temple on the left complement the squared lines of a cathedral on the right, and while the monuments are distinctive and visible, the statues of the working-class pairs occupy an indisputable



FIGURE 10. Still from *Khozhdenie Zi Tri Morya* (1958): Title credit.

position of prominence. Subsequent credits continue to emphasize the meticulously symmetrical nature of the film's coproduction, through multiple layers of collaboration between cast and crew from both India and the Soviet Union.

In the opening title image, as well as in at least two subsequent moments, the film explicitly envisions the transnational participation of both men and women workers in its progressive-socialist world-making endeavors. This world-making endeavor, however, is narrated through a hierarchal opposition between a primary masculine domain of work and friendship in the space of the world and a secondary feminine domain of romance and love in the space of the home. On the one hand, the film does acknowledge the revolutionary potential of love when it crosses thresholds imposed by the heteropatriarchal "organization" of the world along lines of class, caste, race, and nationality. On the other hand, *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* ultimately exalts the heroic selflessness of masculine characters who renounce their personal libidinal desires in the interest of socially oriented matters of work, duty, and friendship. The film thus forwards a limited Gandhian logic of austerity, which fails to see that heteropatriarchal injunctions against love and sexual desire across thresholds of difference have been central, rather than peripheral, to the reproduction of highly exploitative hierarchies of race, caste, and class.<sup>14</sup>

Codirector Abbas highlights *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* commitments to "genuine co-production" in a 1969 article titled "Films for Friendship," which opens an issue of the Indian trade journal *Film World* dedicated to Soviet cinema. Abbas states:

The production "Pardesi" was launched only in 1956 with the two directors (K. A. Abbas and V. I. Pronin) jointly calling "Camera." That continued to be the basis of our joint work—two directors, two cameramen, two sound recordists, two art directors, and a mixed Indo-Soviet cast led by Nargis and Oleg Strizhenov. In that sense, it remains to date the only genuine co-production between an Indian and a foreign producer.<sup>15</sup>

While *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* was in competition as a nominee for the prestigious Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival in 1958, Abbas does not wear this accolade at all, instead locating the achievement of the film entirely in the fact that "it remains to date the only genuine co-production between an Indian and a foreign producer."<sup>16</sup> Among the most visible manifestations of the film's status

as a joint production are its leads, as the film features a transnational love story between Soviet actor Oleg Strizhenov as the hero-traveler Afanasy Nikitin and Indian actress Nargis as an Indian village woman named Champa.<sup>17</sup> However, the romance between Afanasy and Champa occurs as a monsoon-season interlude that remains star-crossed. Instead, it is the friendship between Afanasy and Sakharam, played by Indian actor Balraj Sahni, that endures as the most robust outcome of Afanasy's travels to India—as a homosocialist allegory, in turn, for the coproduction itself.

Following the title credits, we see Oleg Strizhenov as Afanasy, weakened and haggard upon returning “from the end of the world.” Weary from his travels, Afanasy seeks refuge in a church. He sits alone in a dim, candlelit cell, and as he removes a figurine of an Indian woman from his tattered bag, the strains of an Indian *aalaap*, or free-form introductory passage of notes, float up in a woman's voice.<sup>18</sup> This very melody becomes a leitmotif for the as-yet-unseen Champa as well as India, and Afanasy gingerly holds the figurine and gazes upon it for a moment, before removing a journal from his bag and opening it up. The rest of the film proceeds as a flashback that is motivated by Afanasy's continuation of his writings, as he prays, in a voice-over, for strength to share what he has seen. The fifteenth-century literary-historical text of Nikitin's memoir is in this way written into the film. The audiovisualization of the text is framed as a journey of remembering and writing along with Afanasy, as he plunges into his memories to retrace the footsteps of his journey to India.

The flashback begins in the same way as the film's opening scene—with a younger Afanasy having grown weak from his most recent travels and in dire need of rest. However, at this earlier moment in his life, before he has traveled to “the end of the world,” he has made it back to his home from a shorter trip to Lithuania<sup>19</sup> with nothing left in his pockets due to having been robbed by multiple bands of thieves on his return journey. His mother and sisters, as well as a young woman whom his mother hopes will soon be married to Afanasy, are as glad to see him as they are anguished by his insatiable wanderlust, which has brought about his poor health and penury. To their dismay, Afanasy's friend and fellow trader Mikhail persuades Afanasy to go to Moscow even before he has fully recovered, in order to seek the prince's patronage for further travel and trade. Although Afanasy is a merchant by trade, the outset of the film shows neither his pockets nor his health to be any measure of his heroic legacy. This parallels *Pardesi/Khozhdienie's* ambitions as prestige coproduction, which avowedly subordinated any commercial ambitions to the deepening of transnational collaboration, friendship, and camaraderie through cinema.<sup>20</sup>

When Afanasy and Mikhail arrive at the prince's court to find a patron for their travel and trade, the prince refers to the “world” as a domain of resources for Russia, as well as a space for expanding and enhancing Russia's renown. “We don't travel enough around the world, merchants,” the prince proclaims, adding

that many Russians, alas, do not even know of the existence of other lands. In the Russian version, the prince states that a man from Lithuania had recently been telling the court about a fantastic land called India, where a short-tempered monkey-king rules people who have heads of dogs—sometimes two—and tails. Afanasy, through Mikhail, voices doubt over the facticity of the Lithuanian man's testimony, having heard otherwise from Persian traders. He avers, "People in India are just like other people. Only they have dark faces." Through Afanasy's response, the film advances the importance of firsthand encounters with the world as correctives to false accounts that stand in for truthful knowledge about foreign people and places.

The prince character's advocacy of endeavors to curb Russia's isolation and enhance the country's renown resonated with the climate of the contemporaneous long 1960s Soviet contexts of *Pardesi/Khozhdenie's* production.<sup>21</sup> The film, furthermore, underscores histories of mercantile trade across Eurasian kingdoms, locating Persia as a key intermediary between Western and Eastern regions of the continent—a legacy whose contemporaneous cinematic resonances lay in the crucial, yet under-analyzed role of independent distributors in the Middle East in facilitating the transnational circulation of films across the continent. The film's depiction of a long history of Russian-Persian-Indian friendship worked to emphasize Soviet claims to a Central Asian region that was notoriously polarized between antagonistic political factions and Cold War blocs at the time.<sup>22</sup> The palace scene concludes with a frontal medium close-up of the prince as he dramatically turns toward the audience and pronounces an imperative that Russian merchants go forth and trade throughout the world.

Marking Afanasy and Mikhail's departure by boat, a nondiegetic folk song that is an ode to the (home)land of the Volga River commences over wide still shots of painted landscapes that transition through match cuts to wide photographic pans of the river—ostensibly the Volga—as it snakes through lush green landscapes (fig. 11). The camera eventually alights on Afanasy and Mikhail, who are on a boat with a jolly band of Tver merchants. Afanasy goads Yevsey Ivanovich, an older merchant portrayed as a merry drunk, to regale the men with his fantastic accounts of two-headed ocean dwellers and people who wear feathers in their hair and rings in their noses. Such explicitly imaginative characterizations of fantastic foreign lands give way to Ivanovich's utopian declaration that "we will outshine the Moscow merchants!" His declaration marks out a distinction between the endeavors of the traders and those of the seat of power. The endeavors of the traders align with those of the filmmakers, whose ambitions are independent and potentially subversive of—even if crucially supported by—the official desires of their respective states.

Cutting from the court to Afanasy's home, the film juxtaposes the prince's declaration with the reaction of Afanasy's mother, who instead demands that Afanasy stay at home. At the very outset of the film, the space of the home emerges as a



FIGURE 11. Still  
from *Khozhdenie Zi  
Tri Morya* (1958):  
Painted panorama of  
Russian landscape.



feminine, domestic space for a static family life that Afanasy's mother wants her son to settle into, in contrast to the dynamic allure of travel amid the fraternities of princely rulers, ambassadors, and traders. In the opening moments of the film, as Afanasy begins the writings that frame his flashback, he wonders in a voice-over whether his desire to see the world caused not only his physical but also his spiritual undoing, precipitating a fall from godliness through the temptation of a wanderlust that lands him in the lap of the devil, as his mother believes. This ambivalence over the moral value of wanting to *see* the world through travel and trade is continually raised, in order to emphasize the sincerity of Afanasy's wanderlust not as an end in itself but as a means of world-making through the forging of progressive-socialist solidarities across national, linguistic, and cultural boundaries.

Afanasy's continual invocation of this question and his insistence that his motivations are noble ventriloquize the ethical aims and claims of a cinematic undertaking's resource-intensive scales of production. Afanasy insists in the opening voice-over, as well as in subsequent intermittent voice-overs, that he has benefited very little financially and that he has been compelled by a sincere desire to not only see but also record and share his firsthand account of the various people and places of the world he has encountered through his arduous travels that have severely compromised his health. In this manner, Afanasy becomes aligned with the project of the filmmakers, who were sandwiched between state imperatives to enhance their nation's prestige by making world-class artistic films on the one hand and the demands of their respective mass publics at home who clamored for hit films that would offer their filmmakers the satisfaction of box office success on the other. Driven neither by the vanity of acclaim nor by the greed of economic gain, Afanasy's motivations for travelling as an independent merchant are expressed in terms of his desire to humbly share his experiences of the world and to advance relationships of cultural exchange and understanding. The possibilities and limits of such Cold War-era cultural diplomacy through channels of the popular—or in Abbas's words, "films for friendship"—unfold through the film's diegetic explorations of travel, trade, romance, and friendship across national, linguistic, and ethnic borders.



Through a series of repetitions and oppositions, *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* proposes the nature and value of true friendship as a mode of world-making. Early on, Afanasy finds himself alone after his dear friend Mikhail dramatically falls dead while they are proceeding by foot across the deserts of Central Asia. A lonely Afanasy finds and joins a caravan, and as the caravan is making its way through the desert, another lone man calls out and runs toward it. He introduces himself as Miguel Rivera, a Portuguese merchant en route to India. Miguel, whose name is but an Iberian variation of Afanasy's dearly departed Mikhail, asks if he may join them, and an overjoyed Afanasy steps forward, shakes Miguel's hand, and says aloud, "It seems God Himself is sending me a companion." The warmth that Afanasy extends to Miguel, such as when Afanasy offers Miguel his coat on a cold night, dramatizes the treachery of Miguel's imminent betrayal under the cover of darkness. Miguel stealthily pickpockets Afanasy, bursts the caravan's water supply, steals a horse, and runs away while the caravan sleeps.

The characterization of Miguel as a Portuguese merchant is a key that unlocks an important allegorical register of the film. Afanasy, Mikhail, and eventually Sakharam, Hasan-bek, and Lakshmi are emblems of sincere commitments to transnational exchanges of friendship on the one hand, in contrast to Miguel as an emblem of colonial greed on the other. The subtext for this juxtaposition is the well-known history of Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama leading the first European expedition that successfully reached India by sea. In fact, the Russian title of the film *Khozhdenie Za Tri Moray* (*Journey beyond Three Seas*) is referred to when Afanasy tenderly wraps Miguel in his coat and urges him to take heart and not get discouraged by the arduousness of the journey. At the beginning of this sequence, Afanasy is writing in his journal, and Miguel asks him, "What is it you're whispering and writing all the time?" To this, Afanasy responds, "I want to tell people about what they've never seen." Not only does Afanasy reestablish his motives for traveling to a place as distant as India, but also his motives are contrasted to Miguel's far more avaricious and self-interested designs. Shortly thereafter, the brotherly Afanasy assures Miguel, "It's only about six days more, and then across the sea to India," which narrates a shared fifteenth-century Russian and Portuguese history of reaching India by sea for the first time. This shared history, however, is shown to fork in its radically differing causes and effects, with a Russian commitment to friendship and mutual understanding splitting itself off from a Western European legacy of colonial plunder and exploitation.

Discovering Miguel's betrayal, Afanasy resolves to catch him, and the first of two objects his mother had given him—an heirloom necklace—comes in handy, as he offers it to an elder of the caravan in exchange for a horse. Recalling that Miguel had talked of going to India via Hormuz, Afanasy rides off in the same direction. Unbeknownst to Afanasy, Miguel is on the same ship that Afanasy ends up boarding, which sets off from Hormuz for India. Miguel hides himself in a dark corner

of the ship, and the orchestral score emphasizes a sense of foreboding. He is eventually discovered by Afanasy, and a dramatic nighttime scuffle ensues as Afanasy chases Miguel from the hold to the deck, while the ship rocks through a raging storm. Providential justice is meted out as waves wash over the deck and swallow up Miguel, sparing Afanasy as well as leaving his hands bloodless. The moment Miguel vanishes into a dark, tumultuous sea, the ominous orchestral score that is intertwined with sounds of crashing waves brightens into a triumphant major key.

Once again, Afanasy is left without a companion. Soon after the ship reaches India, the lone Afanasy comes across a man whom he had just encountered as a performer in the midst of an open-air marketplace. Afanasy is terse, feeling slighted that the Indian man, Sakharam, had refused to accept his coins when taking up a collection from the audience. Sakharam, whose Sanskrit name means "friend of God," responds that he was testing Afanasy to see if he had a conscience and is gladdened to see that Afanasy took offense. "You're new here and I wanted to get to know you better," Sakharam explains, confessing that he was vetting Afanasy as a potential friend rather than regarding him as a patron and source of economic gain, again invoking the ethical ambitions of the coproduction. When Afanasy finds out from Sakharam that the governor, Asad Khan, has taken his horse, Afanasy's character is once again put to the test when he seeks out the governor. When Asad Khan invites Afanasy to work for him in return for his horse, Afanasy adamantly refuses to betray his loyalties to his own prince and homeland. Afanasy's integrity as a friend to India is thus established as being contingent on his loyalty to his own people, and it is in this sense that the coproduction's logic of friendship is built upon a specific allegory of bonds between ostensibly (modernizing) Russian and Indian values, rather than through an allegory that locates this encounter within a universalizing, liberal cosmopolitanism.

Friendship and understanding between people of different nations—that is, that which underlies the film's own endeavor of coproduction—is established as a politically progressive means to a more egalitarian world. Dismayed when the governor won't return his horse, Afanasy returns and shares his woes with Sakharam as they sit beside a fire at night. Sakharam says to Afanasy, "If people treat other people the way they want to be treated . . . the world will change." The soft lighting and the gentle nondiegetic flute melodies maintain an effect of peace overall, rather than one of despair. Sakharam reaches over Afanasy to cover him with a blanket, just as Afanasy had previously done for Miguel. However, while Miguel had treacherously betrayed Afanasy, Sakharam is shown to reciprocate where Miguel did not, juxtaposing Miguel as a figure of colonial plunder with both Sakharam's and Afanasy's selfless commitments to mutual exchange.

Sakharam advises Afanasy to throw himself in front of an ambassador who will be visiting shortly and complain about Governor Asad Khan in order to get his horse back. Knowing that he will be risking his life by standing in front of the ambassador in an act that may be mistaken as impudent, Afanasy does as Sakharam



CLIP 2. Afanasy and Sakharam come across the dancer Lakshmi in *Khozhdenie Zi Tri Morya* (1958).

To watch this video, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.130.2>



suggests. To Afanasy's delight, the ambassador is none other than Hasan-bek, the Persian ambassador from Shirvan whom he had met and befriended while sailing down the Volga River. Their friendship saves Afanasy from any punishment, and moreover, Asad Khan grows meek in front of Hasan-bek and agrees to return Afanasy's horse. The diplomatic importance of friendship and the significance of Central Asia as a strategic intermediary between the two ends of the continent are reestablished through Hasan-bek's reappearance in India, after having initially come across Afanasy at the very outset of his journey down the Volga River. Through its invocation of Shirvan, a region of then-Soviet Azerbaijan, in this climactic moment, the film paints a panoramic, homosocialist geography of friendship across Eurasia via Afanasy, Hasan-bek, and Sakharam.

One evening, as Sakharam and Afanasy are taking a stroll through an ancient monument and confiding in one another about their respective heartbreaks, they come across a court dancer who happens to be practicing inside an ancient temple. The dancer, played by dancer-actress Padmini, proceeds to dance as Sakharam whispers to Afanasy, "She can speak through the gestures of her dance. . . . Listen to what she's saying" (clip 2). The sequence cuts between the dancer's performance and the rapt faces of Afanasy and Sakharam, as Sakharam interprets aloud the meaning of her gestures, which are directed towards Afanasy: "If you're our friend, and I can see that is so, my heart and my house are always open for you" (fig. 12). While Sakharam remarks that the dancer's gestures are immanently legible to

FIGURE 12. Still  
from *Khozhdenie Zi  
Tri Morya* (1958):  
Padmini as temple  
dancer Lakshmi.



anyone who listens, he somewhat paradoxically ends up interpreting their meanings to Afanasy within the scene. In this sequence, Padmini becomes metonymic for the song-dance forms of Hindi cinema. The film reflexively explains, extols, and defends the unique legibility of song-dance forms across boundaries of language, while also insisting that an unfamiliar viewer must learn how to view and listen to—that is, how to read—such expressive cinematic forms that do not depend (only) on speech.

The dancer Lakshmi, we learn, has fallen in love with Afanasy. By reciprocating in a solely platonic fashion, however, Afanasy shows himself to once again renounce any self-interest, remain in full control of his libidinal desires, and subordinate the ephemeral feminine pleasures of romance to the far more enduring masculine legacies of duty and friendship. This gendered hierarchy of ethics, as we will see, surfaces repeatedly and reflexively throughout the film. By exalting genuine friendship above the excesses of both commerce and romance, the film *rhetorically* subordinates its formal excesses of romance, song-dance sequences, and panoramic vistas, as well as its capital excesses of scale, to a project of “genuine coproduction” that is firmly anchored in homosocialist principles of two-way exchange and friendship.

In the sequence of Afanasy’s departure from India, Sakharam sings in the voice of Manna Dey “*phir milenge jaane waale yaar do svidaniya*” (We’ll meet again, friend, we’ll meet again) in both Hindi (“*phir milenge*”) and Russian (“*do svidaniya*”). The sequence cuts back and forth between Sakharam among a crowd on the shore and Afanasy on the ship, as they face one other in the moment of their parting. Common to Soviet dubbing practices, a voice-over narration in Afanasy’s voice resumes over the song, translating its message as “You’re withdrawing from my eyes, but not from my heart. And if tomorrow we’re no more, others will come in our place.” As Afanasy’s ship sails away, the song comes to an end with a percussive cadence, after which the voices of an a capella chorus ascend in a coda, as the crowds along the Indian shore sing a prolonged, repeated “*do svidaniya*” in Russian (We’ll meet again) before their voices fade out with a fade to black.

Through this bilingual moment in the film that triumphantly repeats the phrase “we’ll meet again,” the coproduction places itself in arc that both narrates

and fulfills a fifteenth-century promise of exchange between India and Russia. The scene addresses its two target audiences simultaneously and enfoldes the Russian and Hindi versions of the film into a single project, whereby the dual dubbed versions of the film occur as the means of fulfilling the coproduction's spirit of collaboration and mutual exchange, allegorized by Afanasy's own project of building a world through homosocialist commitments to friendship. The film locates the value of cinema, as a technology of *seeing*, in its ability to bring distant cultures face to face. *Pardesi/Khozhdenie*, furthermore, reflexively extols its "genuine" coproduction as an ethical mode of seeing-as-transformation through a symmetrical exchange that outlasts the finite duration and ephemeral visual pleasures of the film: "You're withdrawing from my eyes, but not from my heart. And if tomorrow we're no more, others will come in our place."

The final scene of the Russian wide-screen version features an orchestral score that accompanies a pan of a landscape that is recognizable as the vista of Russia shown at the film's outset. The worn and haggard Afanasy, having reached his homeland, kneels and crosses himself as he fondly says aloud, "My dear Russia." Afanasy falls prone as he embraces the ground, while the music rises in triumphant chords that accompany a crane shot leading into a panoramic view that pans left, presenting the Volga River once again, through lush green trees before dissolving into a painted title image of Afanasy's book, quill, and inkwell. White block text appears, proclaiming "The End," followed by the final fade to black. There is no need to return to the dimly lit room in the church, which had motivated the film as a flashback occurring in tandem with Afanasy's completion of the memoir. For the intended purpose of his writings as professed throughout his voice-overs was to share the legacy of the trials and tribulations and, most importantly, the friendships that unfolded over the course of his "journey beyond three seas." This task, as the film's work that is presented as Afanasy's life's work, becomes complete with the moment of Afanasy's return to Russia. *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* thus narrates and simultaneously situates itself as a direct inheritor of a fifteenth-century legacy of friendship and exchange initiated by the historical figure of Afanasy Nikitin.

Early in the film, as Afanasy and a group of fellow Tver merchants set out along the Volga River, the men grow apprehensive, fearing that an approaching boat may be a group of Tatars. It turns out, however, that the boat is Hasan-bek's, a friendly Persian ambassador from Shirvan. In the only instance of completely untranslated dialogue (i.e., neither subtitled nor dubbed in the languages of the target audiences), Afanasy is able to display his facility in Persian, again marking out the historical centrality—both geographically and economically—of the erstwhile Persia along trade routes between eastern and western regions of the Eurasian continent. "It's so nice to hear the language of my home country," Hasan-bek expresses

to Afanasy—a sentiment that also holds traction with the fact that the *Pardesi/Khozhdenie*'s primary dialogue-translation strategy was dubbing, with all characters speaking Hindi in one set of versions and all characters speaking Russian in another set of versions, except for this brief moment of Persian dialogue.

Neither the ability of the Indian characters to speak Russian in the Russian version nor the ability of the Russian characters to speak Hindi in the Hindi version is motivated by any details of plot that might, for example, have shown the characters' language acquisition to be gradual, along a learning curve induced by a sustained encounter with a character of a foreign tongue. While the visibility of race and ethnicity can interrupt the naturalization of the dubbed language to the faces that appear to be speaking, the desire for a specific kind of realist coherence crucially precedes the question of this naturalization. Markus Nornes notes, for example, that in response to Fox Studios' first release of a Japanese dubbed film (*The Man Who Came Back* [Raoul Walsh, 1931]), a Japanese critic stated that "if you sit down and think about it, the idea is incredibly absurd. Foreigners, Farrell and Gaynor, speaking Japanese. First you have to get rid of that unnaturalness. It's only tolerable because it's that kind of melodrama."<sup>23</sup>

Melodrama, as a mode of externalizing interior conflicts through aural, visual, and narrative oppositions, can decenter or preempt desires for naturalism,<sup>24</sup> making dubbing "tolerable" despite its visibly and racially marked "unnaturalness." In the case of *Pardesi/Khozhdenie*, the dubbing is tolerable not only because of the melodramatic proclivities of its frontal and gestural acting styles, painted tableaux, and plot twists of coincidence and serendipity that were familiar to audiences of both Soviet and Indian cinemas, but also because of the melodrama of the film's reflexivity. The film constantly underscores the fact of its coproduction and sets itself up as a film whose narrative explicitly thematizes and announces its extra-narrative project of traversing national and linguistic boundaries in order to offer up a vision of a shared Indo-Soviet past, present, and future. Afanasy—like such a project itself—is an epitome of the film's determination in the face of myriad difficulties. Upon being asked by Hasan-bek how he will manage to get to India without knowing the route, Afanasy's response is framed by a frontal medium close-up in which he declares that the challenges of language and translation, among others, are hardly insurmountable: "What it takes is aspiration, and he who has a tongue will find his way!"

Visually externalizing the emotional contours of the plot, the high points of Afanasy's journey are pictured in bright and often sunlit sequences, while dimly lit scenes mark out his troubled times and moments of despair—often in cramped, indoor spaces. While the brightness of daylight illuminates the Tver merchants' pleasant encounter with Persian travelers, a painted panorama marks nightfall, and the ensuing, far less friendly encounter is shrouded in darkness. The earlier allusion to Tatars ends up prophetic, foretelling the fate of the boat at their hands. The Tatars are depicted as aggressive, ruthless pirates who plunder the ship





FIGURE 13. Still from *Khozhdenie Zi Tri Morya* (1958): Wide shot of Central Asian desert landscape.

by night and kill several of the Tver merchants in course of their bloody raid. Scholar Vadim Rudakov places such representations of Tatars as bloodthirsty barbarians among “the worst traditions of the old Soviet films.” In response to a more recent controversy that arose around the persistence of such representations, Wahit Imamov notes that such portrayals of the predominantly Muslim Turko-Mongol Tatars are historically “part of the Kremlin’s determination to use culture to promote Russia’s image as a Slavic, Christian nation.”<sup>25</sup> While *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* forwards progressive commitments to upending social ills that stem from race, class, and caste hierarchies, religious orthodoxies, and imperial greed, its progressive vision is limited by the blind spots of homogenizing representations that define and visualize Russia and India along majoritarian-nationalist lines of race, religion, and language at the expense of their myriad alternatives. Following the Tatar’s raid, Afanasy and Mikhail continue by foot, motivating wide shots of Central Asian landscapes that are at once constitutive of and marginal to a Russia-centric Soviet visual geography.

Abbas recalls that “in cinemascope and colour the scenes of India we had shot and the scenes of Central Asian deserts which they had shot in the Soviet Union looked really grand” (fig. 13).<sup>26</sup> In several sequences, the film reflexively celebrates its non-realist performative, gestural, and pictorial excesses not as modes that take liberties with the truth of its literary-historical source material but as modes that deepen the authenticity of an affective experience that immerses the spectator as a participant in the coproduction’s mediations of friendship and exchange through cross-cultural cinematic encounters with the world. One evening, for example, Indian actress Nargis’s character of the village girl Champa observes Afanasy as he writes in his journal, and she asks what he is recording in his book. The two of them are alone, and Afanasy responds that he has been chronicling everything in the course of his journey, including his voyage by ship, the incident in which he was robbed by Miguel, and his encounter with a girl “with the eyes of fire.” Her eyes downcast, Champa recognizes that Afanasy is referring to her, and she suggests that he not write about this girl he speaks of, should his writings come to harm her reputation. Afanasy, without a second thought, abides by Champa’s request and begins to blacken out a section of his writings. It is through this scene



that an ellipsis in the literary text of Nikitin's memoir is imagined, through which romance, as a quintessential element of popular cinema, gets stirred into the cinematic adaptation.

On the film's lukewarm reception in India, Abbas recalls that an audience member remarked, "Why didn't they make Afasani Nikitin into an Indian who loves a Russian girl? That would have been really appealing."<sup>27</sup> To this, Abbas responded, "That wouldn't be true."<sup>28</sup> *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* thus remained committed to the historicity of its adaptation-in-translation through the very possibilities of melodrama and popular cinema. To this end, the film frames Afanasy's journey as a flashback, includes intermittent narrations in Afanasy's voice to remind the audience that they are witnessing what he has recorded as a document of his journey, and imagines a redacted portion of the original text to justify the inclusion of a love story. The commensurability between excesses of detail and scale, on the one hand, and commitments to a deeply historical narrative of Indo-Russian friendship, on the other, continued through the Moscow-based Geographical Society's publication of an elaborately and colorfully illustrated, hardbound, trilingual print edition of Nikitin's memoir in 1960.<sup>29</sup> Featuring abridged versions of Nikitin's memoir printed with visually intricate, embossed flourishes in Russian, English, and Hindi, the volume includes a facsimile insert of an original handwritten manuscript in addition to glossy card inserts illustrating Nikitin's travels (figs. 14, 15, 16). The inserts are styled as colorful Persian miniature paintings, invoking Orientalist legacies of highly popular, richly illustrated European-language editions of *The Thousand and One Nights*.<sup>30</sup>

The communal pleasures of color, imagination, exaggeration, exotic vistas, and gestural modes of expression are apparent not only in the sequence of Sakharam and Afanasy's encounter with Lakshmi but also in several other sequences that take place in India and reflexively invoke performance- and song-dance-based expressive modes of Indian cinema. In one memorable sequence, for example, Champa dresses in Afanasy's coat, jacket, and hat to regale a group of her girlfriends with tales of his adventures. She dramatically reenacts his ship voyage through her exaggerated bodily gestures and vocal inflections, replete with scenes of fighting sea monsters and resisting the wiles of fairies along the way. Her admiration for Afanasy is apparent as she characterizes him as bravely fighting off the sea monsters and steadfastly resisting the temptations of the fairies. The scene is humorous, and Champa's act is not entirely false in the qualities that it bestows upon Afanasy. She paints him through an intentionally stylized virtuoso performance, which is beheld as such by her thoroughly and willingly captivated diegetic audience.

When land is first sighted from Afanasy's India-bound ship, the *aalaap* leitmotif floats up for the first time since the film's beginning, and the mise-en-scene brightens, visually reflecting the lithe spirits of the passengers aboard the ship. Through

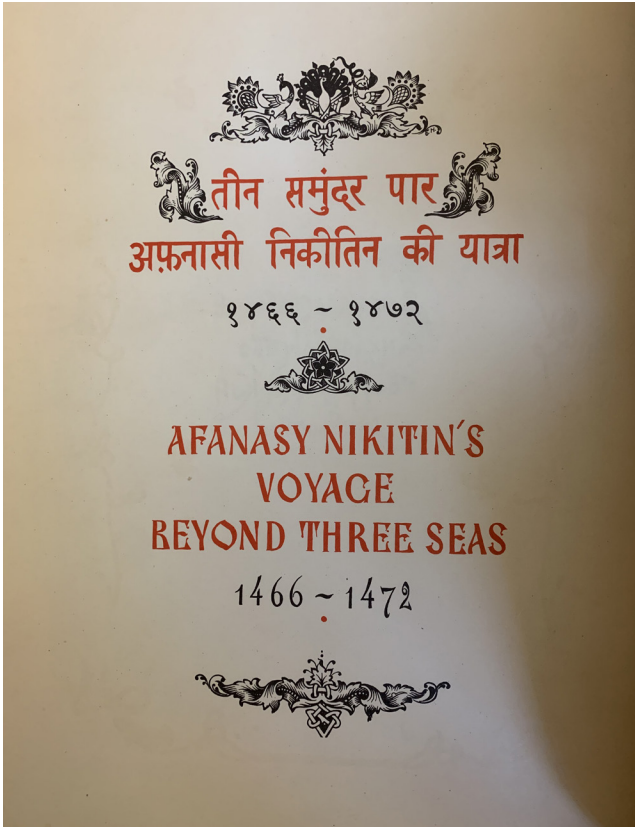


FIGURE 14. Hindi and English title page of a trilingual edition of Afanasy Nikitin's *Voyage beyond the Three Seas* (1960).

the *aalaap*, India is first heard as a woman's voice rather than seen, and the camera focuses on the mesmerized faces of Afanasy and other passengers. They are transfixed as they gaze upon the land that is ostensibly in front of them and sigh, "India" (fig. 17). A cut reveals the object of their gaze to be a panoramic vista of silhouettes against a brightening dawn, as Hindu chants fill out an emotional moment for Afanasy, who gazes upon the land and utters, "I've been dreaming of you for so long." Another cut reveals a slightly closer—and brighter—panoramic view of (mostly) men performing morning ablutions in the sea, and the chorus of chanting and singing is suddenly anchored in the diegesis of their ritual observances (fig. 18). The earlier prominent orchestral score now yields to the sounds of Indian folk songs and folk instruments—bamboo flutes, plucked lutes—that accompany a series of additional panoramic vistas, as the landscape is captured as an aurally and visually delightful complement to the earlier vistas of Russia.

Lead actor Strizhenov recalls various aspects of the production over the course of playing the role of Afanasy Nikitin in an interview included as a special feature of the 1999 Ruscico DVD of *Khozhdenie* intended for distribution outside the

FIGURE 15. First page of Hindi section of a trilingual edition of Afanasy Nikitin's *Voyage beyond the Three Seas* (1960).



FIGURE 16. One of seven Persian-miniature-style card-insert illustrations in a trilingual edition of Afanasy Nikitini's *Voyage beyond the Three Seas* (1960): "An Indian noble plays host to Afanasy Nikitin."



former USSR. Strizhenov fondly reminisces about the coproduction despite the fact that it was often intensely grueling not only because the entire cast and crew had to travel to, from, and within the Soviet Union and India, but also because Strizhenov had little respite from the shooting schedules because he appeared in virtually every scene. He nostalgically recalls the scene in which the ship from



FIGURE 17. Still from *Khozhdenie Zi Tri Morya* (1958): Afanasy's ship reaches India.



FIGURE 18. Still from *Khozhdenie Zi Tri Morya* (1958): Wide shot of fishermen, among other vistas upon Afanasy's arrival in India.

Hormuz makes landfall in India as the most memorable moment of production—for, according to Strizhenov, the people of the coast were simply going about their daily routines of offering morning prayers, fishing, and so on. Whether or not the scene was the authentic ethnographic record that Strizhenov describes, the manner in which he recalls this particular moment is strikingly similar to the way in which his character, Afanasy, beholds the scene within the film: India materializes as a long-awaited feminine object of desire. In such instances, the endeavor of the coproduction remains so tightly bound to its thematic and narrative energies that they become indistinguishable.

In its cinematic adaptation of Nikitin's memoir, *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* allows the audience to experience Afanasy's arrival in India as an audiovisual turning point: all of a sudden, the *mise-en-scène* looks and sounds markedly different. The camera lingers in place for a thirty-second wide shot that captures an encounter between Afanasy's horse and an elephant after Afanasy has alighted from the ship amid audible melodies of Indian folk instruments. A lengthy sequence then follows Afanasy as he slowly walks through a bazaar, which further paints the initial encounter between Afanasy and India through the newness of the sights *and* sounds he beholds. A crane shot brings into view a man on a dais below, performing right in the midst of the bustling open-air bazaar. The character is Sakharam, and he sings a folk song in the voice of playback singer Manna Dey that opens with references to the Ramayana and eventually lands in a chorus that beckons the participation of the onlookers as the camera is lowered and additional singers join in: “*ye hindustaan hai pyaare, hamaarii jaan hai pyaare*” / “This is Hindustan, my dear—this is our love, my dear.”



FIGURE 19. Still from *Pardesi* (1957): Sakharam's puppet show in the bazaar.

The song is neither dubbed nor subtitled in extant versions, and its importance is far less in its lyrical content—the “welcome to Hindustan” chorus is, after all, redundant—than in its form and its positioning vis-à-vis the audiences that are both within and outside the diegesis. The fact that the song commences in the midst of a busy open-air market dovetails with both codirector K. A. Abbas and actor Balraj Sahni's involvement with the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), a Left cultural organization and affiliate of the Communist Party of India, which espoused a commitment to art directed toward the empowerment of the masses.<sup>31</sup> There is no diegetic motivation whatsoever for the crane shot that initially positions the audience above the dais, as if looking down from the elite balcony seats of a theatre. In the Hindi version of the film, there is even a cut to a close-up of an onstage puppet theatre that *becomes* the big screen for a moment, with Sakharam appearing to sing “playback” for the puppets (fig. 19). However, as soon as the chorus commences and the crowds start to join in, the camera brings the audience to occupy a ground-level position amongst the crowd, reveling in the pleasures of a peoples' participatory art form—that is, popular cinema—that aims, through its songs, to cut across the class and caste positions of its audiences and bring them together in a public space.

The well-documented influence of IPTA on the Hindi popular film industry reveals itself across several 1950s films of Raj Kapoor, among others, in which the small man is frequently shown traipsing through the streets of Bombay and singing to the crowds (and film audiences) about his aspirations in the big city.<sup>32</sup> The quintessential example of such sequences is comedic actor Johnny Walker's oft-remembered “*ye hai bambaii merii jaan*” (This is Bombay, my love) from the 1956 film *C.I.D.* (Raj Khosla), whose chorus is actually quite similar in its lyrics to Sakharam's “*ye hindustaan hai pyaare*” (This is Hindustan, my dear.)<sup>33</sup> While an explicit reference to modern-industrial city spaces is not within the historical purview of *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* as a period film, *Pardesi/Khozhdenie's* contemporaneous contexts are nonetheless implicitly present. Johnny Walker's “*ye hai bombay merii jaan*” (This is Bombay, my love) is iterated in Balraj Sahni's



"*ye hindustaan hai pyaare*" (This is Hindustan, my dear) as an invitation for the audience to publicly participate in an art form that opens itself out to all. As the song ends, multiple shots capture the diversity of its audience members. When Sakharam holds out his upturned drum for coins and teases individual audience members, their heterogeneity is underscored through their appearance as well as the ways in which Sakharam addresses them—the audience includes old and young, Hindu and Muslim, men and women, and those wearing tattered clothes alongside a brahmin priest, a money lender, and Afanasy.

*Pardesi/Khozhdenie* posits cross-cultural (cinematic) encounters with an outside world as utopian opportunities to critique and reimagine the hierarchical social structures of one's local contexts. When the crowd at the bazaar performance begins to disperse, Afanasy witnesses a woman wailing in distress over her daughter Champa, who has suffered a snakebite. The ensuing episode advances a critique of the rigidity of the upper-caste, brahmin, priestly class that does so little to help Champa while Afanasy, a stranger, is much more sympathetic in offering his assistance. Reprising Ivanovich's earlier declaration aboard the ship that "we will outshine the Moscow merchants!" it is through contact with outsiders that entrenched hierarchies of one's own society are called into question. Afanasy follows the woman and sees her husband furiously ringing a temple bell, although the priest who comes to meet him stoically responds that the head priest is unavailable to help.

Her face out of view, Champa lies unconscious at the very bottom of the frame as a crowd gathers around her parents and bears witness to their desperation. At this moment Afanasy resorts to the second object that his mother had bequeathed to him, and he asks Champa's parents if he may offer a snakebite antidote that he carries with him. Champa continues to largely remain out of the frame as Afanasy administers the ointment, building suspense over the predictable romance to come. It is only after Afanasy walks away that the camera slyly grants an intimate view of Champa's face, as her mother holds and gently turns her head toward the camera. A bamboo flute resumes the lilting melody of the *aalaap* leitmotif while the audience is invited to gaze upon her face, just as they had gazed upon India, for the first time. The bright melody and luminous lighting leaves little doubt that Champa will surely awaken.

The coproduced *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* advances the transnational class solidarity of men and women workers—including, of course, the joining together of film industry workers—as a foundation for Indo-Soviet friendship. This solidarity is explicitly put forward in the language of caste in Afanasy's response to Champa's father when the men sit down to eat and Champa's father tells Afanasy, "You know, we usually don't eat with people of other castes. But you are quite another matter. We consider you one of us." To this, Afanasy responds, "But we do belong to the same caste. . . . My father was a ploughman, too." He invokes unities of both friendship and occupational caste-as-class that surmount their apparent differences,



CLIP 3. “*rim jhim rim jhim barse paanii re*” song sequence from *Khozhdenie Zi Tri Morya* (1958).

To watch this video, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.130.3>



expressing solidarity and pride in agrarian and manual labor. This moment hearkens back to the painted title that elevates the importance of collaboration between men and women workers in the world, across nationalities and religions.

A romantic folk song sequence, “*rim jhim barse paanii aaj more aanganaa*” (“*Rim jhim*” go the water droplets today as they splash upon my courtyard”), features Champa singing in the voice of playback singer Meena Kapoor through a striking montage that spotlights various tasks and crafts of manual labor (clip 3). Against the backdrop of a sustained downpour, Champa, Afanasy, and the other villagers are collectively engaged in wielding a plow, pounding grain, spinning pottery, weaving rope, grinding flour, and spinning thread. The audiovisual choreography of the sequence celebrates the rhythmic movements and sounds of men and women workers and their implements as the villagers join in for the chorus while they spin, pull, pound, and grind away.

*Pardesi/Khozhdenie* is structured in two parts around the expectation of an intermission, and part 2 of the wide-screen versions opens with a title sequence of credits that is similar to the sequence that opens part 1, only that part 2’s credits are superimposed over panoramic views of Indian landscapes and sounds of Indian folk melodies, which counterbalance the Russian landscapes and orchestral music that open part 1. Following part 2’s opening credits, a sequence of intertitles recaps



the happenings of part 1. From there, the plot resumes with a shot of a slow fall down along an intricately sculpted tower of a Hindu temple, accompanied by the audible sounds of singing and chanting. As the camera descends, a festive procession comes into view, and Afanasy, who is walking by, begins to follow the procession into the temple. He is angrily shooed away at the entrance by a group of brahmin priests who allege that he, a foreigner, will defile the temple.

Suddenly, the sonorous voice of a lone singer is heard, and the entire crowd turns to see Sakharam standing to the side of the temple, as he begins to sing in the voice of playback singer Manna Dey, "*raam kahaan, tujh men raam mujh men, sab men raam samaayaa, sabse kar le pyaar jagat men koi nahiin hai paraayaa re*" (Where is God? God is in you, God is in me, God dwells in all, Love all in the world, no one is a 'pariah').<sup>34</sup> As the song goes on, Afanasy recalls the event in a voice-over narration that translates the song's Gandhian critiques of caste hierarchies<sup>35</sup> into racialized terms: "God is not in a church, or in a mosque, He's in your heart, you silly. Open it up and you will see His reflection both in white and Black people. If God gets offended when a man of another faith comes to his temple, then he is not God. Priests divide people into castes, while all men are brothers."

Sakharam's song moves the crowd to the extent that they boldly usher Afanasy into the temple at the behest of the priests who slink back into a corner, while Sakharam continues to persuasively sing. Vernacular performance—in the form of Sakharam's song—is framed as a progressive force that overturns the authority of the brahmin priests through collective action in the name of a God/love that is immanently accessible to all, regardless of caste, race, religion, or nationality. At the entrance of the temple, the vast crowds below join in and resume the chorus as they together chant, sing, chime, drum, clap, and dance while Afanasy is escorted into the temple. The scene fades to black and then cuts to a wide shot of the temple after the crowds have dispersed, with the tiny figures of Afanasy and Sakharam conversing in a corner. Afanasy is explaining that he left Champa without even saying goodbye, with little alternative left. "Today the doors of this temple did open for me," he says, "but there're still so many obstacles in the world that separate people." Sakharam confesses that he understands Afanasy's predicament, telling Afanasy that he himself had fallen in love with a woman of another caste, and because they couldn't be together "according to our country's laws," she swallowed poison to end her life.

An issue rarely mentioned in explicit terms in Hindi films of the period, the diegetic context of explaining an aspect of Indian society to a foreigner motivates a direct acknowledgment of taboos on love across caste boundaries as an important yet daunting site of struggle. Yet, as they wander about the structure of the ancient temple and reflect upon their woes, Sakharam tells Afanasy that he believes that the ephemerality of happiness and love is far outlived by one's deeds. He points to the stone temple as an example, and as they walk through it for some time, the sequence affords several touristic views of the temple's interior structure and

FIGURE 20. Still  
from *Khozhdenie Zi  
Tri Morya* (1958):  
Afanasy and  
Sakharam discuss  
life, love, and work.



sculptures (fig. 20). The pair surmises that the artists surely suffered the heartaches of various loves and took them to their graves, while they bequeathed to the world the fruits of their labors that have stood the test of time. Art and work are exalted in a shared masculine homosocial space of enduring legacies, while heartache is normalized as a shared inevitability and, along with romantic love, relegated to an ephemeral feminine domain of private emotions that are nonetheless valuable for their libidinal energies that can be nobly diverted into one's work.

Incorporating a spectrum of anticolonial, third world, and leftist thought, from Gandhian ideals to socialist commitments to workers' struggles, *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* tellingly falls prey to the shortcomings of political visions that have tended to separate matters of the world from matters of love through gendered hierarchies of value that are contingent on assumptions of scale. Sakharam points to the stone temple as material evidence for the durability and timelessness of artists' work, in contrast to the evanescence of those very artists' heartbreaks, which surely propelled the expressiveness of their art. Even as *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* explicitly critiques brahminical practices of exclusion and the role of temples in producing boundaries between "brothers," it fails to fully indict the regulation of sexuality as a central, rather than peripheral, aspect of caste practices' social reproduction and endurance. The conversation between Sakharam and Afanasy sentimentalizes heartbreak and romanticizes the renunciation of prohibited love as experiences that improve the quality of one's (art)work and its potential to impact masses of people. The pursuit of prohibited love, in contrast, is construed as a far more individualistic and indulgent affair. Reflexively, the film forwards an argument about itself, as it leaves aside its romantic plot in order to prioritize its world-making endeavor of Indo-Soviet friendship.

Afanasy is ultimately successful in his work. He meets the sultan, who finds that Afanasy is a sincere representative of his prince and homeland, worthy of receiving an official decree to take to his prince so that trade may indeed commence between India and Russia in the spirit of friendship. The sultan is played by actor Prithviraj Kapoor, the father of actor Raj Kapoor and quintessential onscreen patriarch of Hindi cinema known for his thunderous, booming voice. Following the accomplishment of the major aim of his journey, Afanasy wanders about,

eventually returning to the coastal village that he “knew well.” The film juxtaposes Afanasy’s fulfilled task—a destiny decreed by divine providence as well as various benevolent patriarchs-cum-patrons—with his unfulfilled love, as he thinks about Champa and arrives at her house. He goes near a window to look in, and Champa is shown cradling an infant as she hums a lullaby. Keeping himself hidden in the way that Champa had done when he had left her house, Afanasy leaves his whole purse upon the windowsill, as an anonymous donation to her family. Yet again, the film avows the ethical steadfastness of Afanasy’s endeavor—and that of the coproduction—through a rhetorical renunciation of both romantic and commercial gains, construed as excesses of ephemeral pleasure that are subordinated to the transcendence of enduring brotherhood.

While making his way toward the shore, Afanasy comes across Sakharam, who has fallen ill. Sakharam recalls their earlier conversations, surmising that the problems of the world are so overwhelming that any attempt to battle them can seem utterly futile. Sakharam refers to the histories of several conquerors who came to India and greedily looted the land, again juxtaposing Afanasy’s sincere commitment to establishing links of friendship between India and Russia with the selfish intentions of (implicitly) colonial merchants. This, Sakharam’s remarks suggest, offers hope of a world that could be otherwise—possibly even a world where their respective loves would not end up in heartbreak. Afanasy assures Sakharam, in a confirmation of their socialist, anticolonial camaraderie, “I’m going to tell the Russians, my countrymen, about the good people of India. That they hate the injustice just like us.”

After a fade to black, a brief low-angle shot shows Sakharam holding out his upturned drum while coins come flying in, which dissolves into the moment of parting between Afanasy and Sakharam. The proximity of the scenes implies that Sakharam, knowing Afanasy to be penniless, raises and donates his own collection to Afanasy so that he may journey back to his much-longed-for homeland of Russia. In these latter scenes of Afanasy’s return to the coastal village, the greed-driven injustices of colonial histories are contrasted to redistributive gestures that are motivated by the sincerity of transnational friendship and love, with Afanasy leaving all of his earnings for Champa’s family on the one hand, and Sakharam giving all that he has to Afanasy on the other, in order to enable Afanasy’s return trip that will carry forward a legacy friendship between the two lands.

*Pardesi/Khozhdienie’s* exaltation of friendship unfolds through its opposition of idealized platonic homosocial love to both romantic fulfillment and commercial success. Aside from the heterosexual presumption of this opposition’s denial of any possibility of sexual desire between men, feminine figures like India, Champa, and Lakshmi (whose name invokes the Hindu goddess of wealth) appear as siren-like temptations—even if naively so, on their part—that offer opportunities for both erotic pleasure and material gain. Afanasy resists these temptations at every turn, in his duty-bound commitment to the greater purpose of his mission and

loyalty to his homeland. Ironically, however, the film entirely depends on the spectacular presence of these ostensible excesses to have any legs. The film, in other words, could have rather easily done without its heavy-handed doses of homosocialist bonding. But without its high production values, its transnational vistas, its “love themes,” its stars, and Padmini’s dancing, *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* attempt to move large swathes of its dual audiences would have been unlikely to stand even a chance.

A rare lighthearted moment of humor alludes to love as a force that goes against the status quo, as Afanasy seeks out the sultan in order to initiate a Russia-India trade agreement that is to be his life’s legacy. Afanasy approaches a letter-writer for his services, in hopes of introducing himself to the sultan. The scribe says that he charges one rupee for a letter to one’s parents, two for a letter to one’s wife, and three for a letter to one’s beloved. His quip characterizes true love as necessarily going against the grain of socially prescribed practices of marriages. While *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* rhetorically and narratively frames its love story as a brief detour, spectators may not have necessarily apprehended it as such. Through ethnographic work with Soviet audiences who watched Hindi films during the Soviet Thaw, for example, Sudha Rajagopalan found that “most viewers interviewed for the project commented that [Hindi] films made a deep impression on them at the time because of their ‘love themes,’ and secondarily for their social narratives.”<sup>36</sup>

The “love themes” in *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* take off only after Afanasy is forced to halt his journey. Following his arrival in India, Afanasy hops on his horse to continue inland toward Bidar, and the distinctive, staccato strains of a sarode (plectrum lute) sustains a montage of panoramic landscape shots motivated by Afanasy’s intended onward journey. However, his plans are quickly interrupted by the first rains of the monsoon, a season associated with romance in several Hindustani folk songs and film songs. The coming of the monsoon forces Afanasy to turn around, which finally occasions his coming face to face with Champa after her father invites him to stay as a guest in their home through the end of the season. When Afanasy and Champa are introduced for the first time, the camera lingers on each of their faces as they gaze at one another, with the *aalaap* leitmotif rising up and taking the place of any exchange of words between the two of them. The manner in which Afanasy gazes at Champa recalls the manner in which he had been transfixed upon his first glimpse of India and said aloud, “I’ve been dreaming of you for so long,” as Champa, the star Nargis, and India mesh together in a feminine, Orientalized figure of erotic fantasy that narratively triangulates the friendship between Afanasy and Sakharam as the most enduring bond within the film.

Among the most spectacularly exuberant moments of the film is a dream sequence, which begins while Afanasy is torn between his feelings for Champa and his knowledge that the obstacles of religion, cultural background, and societal



CLIP 4. Romantic dream sequence from *Khozhdenie Zi Tri Morya* (1958).

To watch this video, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.130.4>



expectations stand in the way of their union (clip 4). Afanasy is shown to be looking out at the rain through the bars of a window, and as he closes his eyes, snow is superimposed over the rain. We are whisked away by an orchestral score to a Russian winter, and the sounds of chiming bells are heard as a horse-driven sleigh comes up over the horizon of a painted panorama of a snow-filled, fairytale-like landscape. The music crescendos into a joyful, symphonic melody while the painted landscape cuts to a medium shot of Afanasy and Champa in a sleigh, with the superimposition of a fast-moving painted landscape giving the impression that we are riding along as the sleigh is speeding through a flurry of falling snowflakes.

Champa wears a white bridal veil, and Afanasy is beaming with his arm outstretched, as he says, “This is our unbounded Russia! Is it to your liking?” He pulls Champa’s veil back, declares his love, and asks if she loves him, to which she happily responds in the affirmative, “My love is as pure as the Ganges’ water, as this snow” (fig. 21). However, when Afanasy asks if she will marry him, Champa appears downcast and says that such a thing is impossible, owing to their different countries and religions. In utter anguish, Afanasy calls out, “O God! Where is your Truth? Why is the world organized in this way? Answer me, or I’ll rebel” (fig. 22). Champa vanishes, and the music recedes, leaving only the sounds of bells and hooves as Afanasy finds himself alone in the sleigh and begins screaming, “Champa!” It is at this moment that he awakens and realizes that he had been dreaming. The nondiegetic sounds of bamboo flutes establish that he yet remains in India, and Afanasy once again looks out of the window, as he begs, “O merciful

FIGURE 21. Still  
from *Khozhdenie  
Zi Tri Morya* (1958):  
Afanasy's romantic  
reverie.



FIGURE 22. Still  
from *Khozhdenie  
Zi Tri Morya*  
(1958): Afanasy's  
momentary rage  
over prohibitions  
against love.



God, forgive me in my insanity.” Seeing that the rain has stopped, Afanasy resolves to leave the village.

The dream sequence portrays love as a disruptive force that is diametrically opposed to socially sanctioned practices of marriage, thereby posing a radical challenge to the structural organization of the world. Afanasy’s anguish over the insurmountable difficulties of being with Champa lead him to demand answers and cry out, “Why is the world organized in this way? Answer me, or I’ll rebel!” When Afanasy wakes up and asks to be forgiven of his “insanity,” the never-to-be romance between Champa and him elicits pathos, and the questions that Afanasy had posed in his delirium linger past the film’s short-lived escape into an exceedingly joyful place where he and Champa could proclaim their love for one another. In an earlier scene, Champa had stood before the altar of a Hindu deity and prayed that the rains would never stop, so that Afanasy would continue to stay on. However, no divine intervention prevents Afanasy’s departure. Champa hides herself behind a door and is nowhere to be found as Afanasy bids her parents farewell, his heart heavy that he will be leaving without even saying goodbye to Champa. Her parents reveal to Afanasy that Champa is soon to married to her betrothed, to whom she was promised when she was but an infant. Thus, Afanasy and Champa’s union is one that is wholly relegated by the brutal “organization” of their own rational world into the realm of a cinematic world: a space of utopian dreams that indict that which structures their impossibility on the ground.

On the one hand, the film seems to renounce its love story, as it frames the romance between Afanasy and Champa as a brief, star-crossed interlude before



Afanasy moves along in his journey. On the other hand, the love story forms a core cinematic attraction of the film, in terms of the *rim jhim* song sequence, the depiction of the stars Nargis and Strizhenov in a snow-filled romance, and Afanasy's thunderous critique. The film rhetorically retracts this question when Afanasy apologizes for questioning God's will in a weak moment of insanity. He virtuously accepts his imminent separation from Champa as a divinely ordained matter, after he and Champa have separately beseeched the helping hand of Christian and Hindu deities, respectively. The film implies that the lack of any divine intervention is in fact a providential blessing for Afanasy's larger mission. As in other contemporaneous Hindi films, the narrative of *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* presents a gendered opposition between romantic love as a personal indulgence and work as a duty to the nation or world. While the excess of love is subordinated to the exigencies of duty in diegetic narratives of heroic sacrifice, it is hardly the case that either the films' formal strategies or spectators' engagements necessarily conceded to this hierarchy.

The contemporaneous iconic romance *Mughal-e-Azam* (The Great Mughal, K. Asif, 1960), which became the highest grossing Hindi film to date upon its release, is a case in point. The audiovisual climax of the lavish period film is the song sequence "*pyaar kiya to darna kya*" (So what if I have loved, what is there to fear?), in which the maidservant Anarkali (Madhubala) fearlessly and openly declares her love for the Prince Saleem (Dilip Kumar) in a song-dance performance. Her declaration, in the voice of playback singer Lata Mangeshkar, flies in the face of the emperor Akbar's (Prithviraj Kapoor) command that she abandon the affair that has jeopardized the dynasty's future. The shooting of "*pyaar kiya to darna kya*" in Technicolor heightened the spectacular effect of its set, which was an elaborately designed and painstakingly constructed replica of the Mughal-era Lahore Fort's Sheesh Mahal (Palace of Mirrors). The well-known offscreen romance between Madhubala and Dilip Kumar further heightened the film's erotic charge, and the film's legacy remains not in its didactic parables of duty to the nation, but in its iconicity as a spectacularly lyrical, song-filled, erotically charged ode to prohibited love.<sup>37</sup>

I read the conflict between the libidinal excess of romantic love and the disciplined austerity of work as an opposition in *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* that betrays a reflexive ambivalence over the value of cinematic pleasure. The film's renunciations of romance through Afanasy's encounters with both Champa and Padmini are ambivalent because they are merely rhetorical. The film, after all, does not actually forego these elements. Several posters and publicity images, moreover, highlighted the transnational love story as the film's major attraction (figs. 23, 24). By narratively subordinating romantic fulfilment and commercial success to a greater homosocialist cause, the film claims an explicitly progressive vision that becomes, through its gendered hierarchy of love and work, paradoxically less so. Such a claim devalues romance and sexuality as feminine excesses whose value





FIGURE 23.  
Romanian poster for  
*Khozhdenie Zi Tri  
Morya* (1958).

lies only in their potential to ultimately serve and invigorate a masculine, socially oriented ethos of work for its far greater scale of production.

The film's most radical moment perhaps emerges when Afanasy questions the "organization" of the world in his delirium of ostensible insanity. For it is in this brief delirium that the film explicitly acknowledges the centrality of injunctions against love across certain thresholds—and the control of sexuality—to practices that organize the world along hierarchies of gender, race, caste, and class. One cannot work against the latter hierarchies without also rejecting the naturalization of the gendered hierarchies of value that sustain their reproduction. Thus, rather than devaluing love as an apolitical excess that necessarily undercuts work, what would it mean to think of the politics of love as a question of work?<sup>38</sup> Or to think of the libidinal excess of cinephilia in terms of "inconsequential" spectatorial labors that reject masculine imperatives of productivity? Imperatives for pleasure to be (re)productive, after all, have served both fascistic regimes and oppressively heteropatriarchal regimes of sexuality.<sup>39</sup> Herein lie the stakes of revisiting the 1960s as a decade of popular Hindi cinema that has often been defined by—and decried



FIGURE 24. East German poster for *Khozhdenie Zi Tri Morya* (1958).

for—its excesses of romance, uncritically conflated in turn with the excesses of crass commercialism and consumption.

Among a spate of contemporaneous Hindi film coproductions that were zealously announced but never completed was an India–East Germany prestige film in the mid-1960s titled *Alexander and Chanakya*.<sup>40</sup> Announced as a 70-mm venture featuring elaborate sequences starring dancer-actress Padmini, the title strongly suggests a homosocialist endeavor in the vein of *Pardesi/Khozhdenie*, as it teases a similarly ambitious period film that imagines and depicts an East-West encounter between Alexander the Great and Chanakya, whose popular legacy has been that of a brainy brahmin strategist-adviser to Emperor Chandragupta Maurya. Padmini's casting in not only *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* and the shelved *Alexander and Chanakya* but also in an Indo-Malay coproduction titled *Singapore* (Shakti Samanta, 1960) reveals a contemporaneous pattern of marshalling star dancer-actresses to headline cross-industry productions aimed at multilingual distribution both within and beyond

India. Padmini was also cast in *Mera Naam Joker* (My name is Joker; Raj Kapoor, 1970), which cast Soviet actors, was partially shot on location in Moscow, and was written by *Pardesi/Khozhdenie*'s codirector and cowriter K. A. Abbas.

A 1975 Indian trade journal's profile of Padmini, among other South Indian actresses who moved into the Hindi film industry, notes:

Glamorous Padmini arrived with "Mr. Sampat." In "Raj Tilak," she shared stellar honours with Vyjayanthimala. For a time she worked in B class films like "Singapore," "Payal" and "Ragini." Her big break came when Raj Kapoor cast her in his "Jis Desh Mein Ganga Behti Hai." After working in a number of films she got married and is now settled in the U.S. Her last film was "Mera Naam Joker."<sup>41</sup>

The characterization of *Singapore* as a "B class" endeavor offers a striking contrast to the ambition of a prestige production like *Pardesi/Khozhdenie*, as the latter took so seriously the task of cross-industry collaboration that its commercial success, at least in India, was ultimately weighed down by this burden. For Abbas, however, the fact that *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* did not go on to be a lucrative box office hit was a testament to its sincerity. In subsequent occasional reports that laud India's few forays into coproduction and often advocate for further exploration of such opportunities with various nations, *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* is almost always listed, while *Singapore* is almost always elided.<sup>42</sup> By comparing the two films, which were only three years apart, we are able to consider how the coproductions entailed highly varied ideological ambitions, on the one hand, and shared strategies of practice, on the other, within an overlapping context of the Bombay industry over the long 1960s. The classification of *Singapore* as a "B class" film was due neither to its production values nor to its production practices but rather to its presumed orientation toward a primarily working-class South Asian diaspora in Southeast Asia. This was yet another instance of the prevalent tendency to derive the quality of a film from the presumed quality of its audiences, as elaborated in chapter 1.

Across multiple cross-industry productions in this period, the dancer-actress—as both a diegetic figure and a star—was vested with a central role in both imagining and facilitating the business of multilingual film distribution. Recent scholarship on dance and Indian cinema has contributed poignant insights into gendered hierarchies of value and cinematic form, which have tended to privilege speech over song, acting over dancing, and ostensibly natural modes of expression over gestural, embodied ones.<sup>43</sup> Dancer-actress Padmini, who stars as a dancer in both *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* and *Singapore*, was the second of three dancing sisters known as the Travancore sisters. She made her cinema debut in Uday Shankar's Hindi film-ballet production *Kalpna* (1948), after which she established herself as dancer-actress in Tamil cinema.<sup>44</sup> While she also starred in a few other Hindi films in the early 1950s, her initial Hindi films were all produced by Madras studios.

Prominent dancer-actresses in this period, particularly those who worked in South Indian industries, were mobile in unique, albeit highly gendered, ways.<sup>45</sup>

It was much rarer for prominent male stars to appear in films in different languages, even when they starred in films produced by another industry.<sup>46</sup> Star dancer-actresses featured prominently as anchors in cross-industry productions, including the India–United States coproduction *Guide* (Vijay Anand, 1965), whose screenplay was written by Pearl S. Buck and adapted from R. K. Narayan's eponymous English-language novel.<sup>47</sup> The casting of dancer-actresses allowed for narratively motivating and marketing spectacular dance-oriented production numbers as a specific attraction of the Indian involvement in high-budget prestige ventures, whose inclusion of such numbers was also a strategy of reaching for distribution across multilingual audiences. In addition, in both *Pardesi/ Khozhdenie* and *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat* (Tapi Chanakya, 1972), an India–Iran coproduction that I examine in chapter 5, the singing dancer-actress unfolds as a metonymic figure through whom reflexive arguments about the intelligibility and ethical sincerity of Hindi song-dance films unfold onscreen. While *Singapore* is far less reflexive and far less invested in its self-presentation as a prestige film than *Pardesi/ Khozhdenie* or *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat*, *Singapore's* casting of dancer-actress Padmini embraces a shared strategy of capitalizing on the ostensible exchange value and translatability of the stardom of Indian dancer-actresses, specifically.

An Indo–Malay coproduction shot in Singapore, *Singapore* was a coproduction between F. C. Mehra's Bombay-based Eagle films, with Shaw Studios and Cathay-Kris,<sup>48</sup> the two major studios in Singapore. Shaw Studios was run by its namesake Hong Kongese founders, whose Singapore productions were aimed at a multilingual Southeast Asian market. "As the longest running studio in Chinese-language film," writes Darrell William Davis, "Shaw Brothers negotiated, compromised, and co-opted its way through almost 90 years."<sup>49</sup> Several scholarly accounts characterize the Shaw brothers as ruthlessly pragmatic managers of a diasporic commercial empire of film distribution and production who positioned themselves early on as providers of entertainment for colonial territories across East and Southeast Asia. By the 1930s, they "had linked British Hong Kong, China and Southeast Asia into a transnational entertainment businesses."<sup>50</sup> In addition to producing and distributing Chinese films for a large diaspora across East and Southeast Asia, they, along with Cathay-Keris, were central to the development of Malay cinema as it flourished over the 1950s and 1960s, when Singapore was the major center of production.<sup>51</sup> Although Singapore initially merged with Malaysia upon the latter's establishment as an independent nation-state in 1963, Singapore separated and became its own nation-state within two years.<sup>52</sup>

*Singapore* was an Indo–Malay coproduction undertaken at the tail end of a peak period of Malay film production in Singapore. Among the production practices that had been employed by Shaw Studios in Singapore was the hiring of directors from other parts of Asia, including Indian (though not necessarily Bombay or Hindi film) directors like Lakshmana Krishan, B. N. Rao, and S. Ramanathan. Their influence and presence in the Malay commercial film

industry—alongside the popularity of Indian films that had been circulating through Southeast Asia as part of a larger colonial network—is attributed to the song-dance forms of Malay films of the period.<sup>53</sup> As a Hindi film coproduced by a Bombay producer along with Singapore-based Malay-film-producing studios, all parties stood to benefit from *Singapore's* potential for availing multiple channels of distribution. There was a ready market for Indian films in Malaya, though the largest South Asian community was a Tamil-speaking diaspora rather than a Hindi-speaking one. *Singapore's* extended production numbers shot on location in Singapore were among the first instances of what went on to become a vogue for foreign location shooting in 1960s Hindi cinema.<sup>54</sup> Thus, two interconnected contexts of multilingual distribution—those of South Asia and Southeast Asia—figure in the production of *Singapore*, particularly in its strategic casting of actresses.

The stars that headline the film are Shammi Kapoor, a brother of Raj Kapoor whose legacy includes being known as the “Elvis of India,” alongside Malay star Maria Menado and dancer-actress Padmini. Dance numbers additionally highlight Anglo-Burmese dancer-actress Helen, who was known as a Hindi film star of cabaret production numbers specifically.<sup>55</sup> In *Singapore*, Helen plays a Malaysian village dancer. Another feminine side character who is part of an intendedly comic subplot is named Chin Chin Choo, in an echo of the jazzy Helen-starrer “*meraa naam chin chin chuu*” (My name is Chin Chin Choo), a song sequence from the hit 1958 Hindi film *Howrah Bridge*, which was also directed by Shakti Samanta just two years earlier. *Singapore's* status as a heavily Indian-helmed coproduction becomes evident in its playing up of generic, racialized caricatures within a Southeast/East Asian milieu of characters at a time when tensions between India and China over issues in Tibet and other northern regions were building.<sup>56</sup> Maria Menado plays a seductive Malay woman named Maria, and her vamp—who is later revealed to be a gang leader—is the foil to the pristine, virtuous femininity of Padmini's Indian diasporic character Lata.

The plot revolves around a crime intrigue: Shammi Kapoor's character Shyam is the Indian scion of a Singaporean rubber estate. He travels to Singapore to see what is amiss when his on-location estate manager Ramesh suddenly goes incommunicado after having just revealed to Shyam that he found a map pointing to a treasure buried at the rubber estate. Several local—and generically East/Southeast Asian—gangs, in addition to Lata's own father Shivdas, attempt to wrest control of the map and take possession of the hidden treasure. The narrative significance of the rubber estate belies a material history of coloniality and labor that bind the two contexts of production, as the origins of a significant Tamil diaspora in Malaya and Singapore lay in their colonial transport and exploitation as indentured plantation laborers under (and within) the British empire. Here, Padmini's status as both a well-known dancer-actress in Tamil films and a stage performer of Indian classical dance who had been dancing for audiences in Malaya connects



1960



## (SYNOPSIS)

Shyam deputed his manager Ramesh to sell off his Rubber Estate in Singapore. While going through the old records Ramesh finds a map revealing that there is a huge treasure in the Rubber Estate. He immediately writes to Shyam. But to Ramesh's surprise neither Shyam replies his letters nor he comes to Singapore.

Ultimately Shyam is contacted on the phone. But the line is cut in between the talk. Failing to understand anything Shyam flies to Singapore.

In the plane he meets a Malayan beauty, Maria, who falls in love with Shyam at the very first sight.

In Singapore Shyam comes to know that Ramesh is missing since his talk on phone was abruptly cut off. Shyam desperately starts searching Ramesh — he informs Police, taps every source which could lead him to Ramesh. In his search he meets Lata, an Indian dancer and comes to know that Lata's sister Shobha is infatuated to Ramesh. Now he visits Lata's place occasionally. He is treated like a member of the family by Shivdas, the uncle of Lata.

One day Lata, Shobha, Shivdas and Shyam go to the Rubber Estate for pic-nic. At the very first opportunity Shivdas steals that map leading to the treasure from Shyam's bag. Shobha sees and follows Shivdas in the jungle. Shyam too follows them.

At a distance Shyam finds Shivdas's deadbody in the jungle. No sooner Shyam is recovered from the shock he is attacked by the gangsters. Struggling hard he reaches back in his Rubber Estate where Police is already waiting for him with the warrant of arrest on the charge of murdering Shivdas.

Is Shyam exonerated from the charge of murder?

Who wins Shyam's love — Maria or Lata?

To know this all see film **Singapore** in your favourite theatre.

FIGURE 25. Image from a press booklet for *Singapore* (1960).

the linguistic specificity of a Tamil diaspora in Southeast Asia to a Hindi-language Bombay coproduction's casting of a star who was prominent not only in Tamil films but also through performance circuits that connected the subcontinental Tamil mainland to its diaspora in Southeast Asia (fig. 25).

*Pardesi/Khozhdenie* explicitly extolls the value of the singing dancer-actress's expressive modes as metonymic for the song-dance-based Hindi cinema's ability to cross boundaries of language. Yet, *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* rhetorically disavows the libidinal excess generated by the formal and commercial excesses of song-dance elements as well as romance. The film subordinates the latter pleasures to the work of homosocial world-making, rather than leaving them as non-(re)productive ends in and of themselves. One irony, of course, is that this hierarchy becomes inverted in practice, as the onscreen presence of the singing dancer-actress, the embodied presence of the star dancer-actress, and "love themes" have occupied primary rather than secondary interfaces for spectatorial engagement. Another irony is that the onscreen figure of the singing dancer-actress required the cross-over labor of dancer-actresses from South Indian film industries, even as this figure was deployed as one who was metonymic for Hindi cinema's unique propensity for scale-making enterprises of multilingual distribution through its very excesses both within and beyond India.

In considering the contemporaneity of coproductions like *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* and *Singapore* in an account of 1960s Hindi cinema, I have refused the ostensible valuelessness that might be accorded either to a "B class" film like *Singapore*, to *Pardesi/Khozhdenie*'s commercial failure in India, or to both films' status as largely forgettable historical exceptions. Instead, I am interested in these films precisely for the ways in which they reveal historical—and highly gendered—patterns of cinema's world-making ambitions and practices via the Bombay industry. Through the prominence accorded to South Indian dancer-actress Padmini, for example, both films highlight the Bombay cinema's multilingual, cross-industry conditions of both production and distribution within India. These domestic conditions were continuous with the transnational coproductions' ambitions and strategies of marshalling various formal excesses toward the scale-making enterprise of multilingual distribution as a practice of world-making through cinema. In order to emphasize these historical continuities, I turn in the next chapter to one of the most undertheorized and underhistoricized aspects of popular Hindi cinema over the long 1960s: that of a string of Madras-produced Hindi remakes of Tamil comedies. Easily devalued either as quickly churned-out remakes on the one hand or as politically vacuous entertainment on the other, several of these comedies are among the most reflexive films that not only made energetic ekphrastic arguments about their own value but also betray a keen awareness and engagement with the ostensible formal and commercial excesses of Hindi cinema as the key to their cinephilic, world-making potential over a highly volatile period for Indian filmmakers, the nation, and the world.