

## Comedic Crossovers and Madras Money-Spinners

Padosan's (1968) *Audiovisual Apparatus*

*Film World*, an India-based trade journal that was initially published out of Madras, launched its first issue in 1964. A glossy publication oriented toward journalists and film industry personnel, as well as a broader segment of film enthusiasts, the first issue announced in a preface by editor M. Ranganathan:

**film world**, a current study of international films and filmfolk, makes its bow in a world of film periodicals and books with this inaugural issue. This is the first time that a publication of this kind is being made available to the public throughout the length and breadth of the world.

The object of this publication is to promote understanding, friendship and collaboration among filmfolk and movie fans living in all parts of the world. This volume will greatly supplement the work of International Film Festivals, which serve a useful purpose in bringing together the leading luminaries of the motion picture world on a common platform with the object of instilling spirit of *camaraderie* and creating opportunities for greater partnership between them.<sup>1</sup>

While in earlier chapters I have referred to various articles and opinions voiced either in *Film World* or by prolific film journalist T. M. Ramachandran, who stepped in as *Film World's* editor in 1967, I now briefly turn to *Film World* itself as an object of inquiry. What prompted its founding in the mid-1960s? If we take the first issue's preface at its word, the answer would simply be that it wished to promote friendship and camaraderie through the (film) world of the 1960s, evocatively rendered on the first issue's cover as a celluloid-encased globe (fig. 26). A foreword by Satyajit Ray emphasizes the unique potential of cinema to engender a sense of global cohesion in a Cold War era:

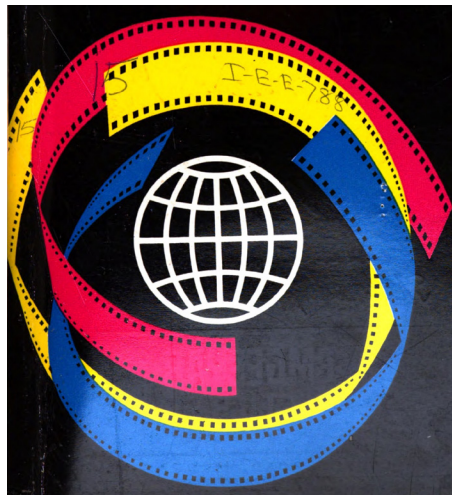


FIGURE 26. Cover graphic for the first issue of *Film World* (1964).

Today, in this jet age, it is no longer possible to consider films of a nation in isolation. . . . And while it is true that a feeling of proximity between the peoples of the world has been achieved through faster travel, the vital need of getting to know each other's hearts and minds can be best fulfilled by the media of communication, of which cinema is by far the most powerful.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, the journal showed a commitment, at least in its first issue, to coverage of film industry happenings in a range of countries, irrespective of political tensions, through features on filmmaking in Pakistan, China, and countries of both sides of the Iron Curtain. In addition to garnering the support of several overseas state institutions of film production and export, the journal spotlights contributions by industry insiders from around the world, and each issue is replete with accompanying photos.

I surmise, however, that the orientation and high production values of *Film World* were centrally concerned with a more specific aim that became urgent by the mid-1960s: to forge networks between the South Indian film industries—particularly that of the Madras-based Tamil film industry—and the Bombay-based Hindi film industry. This concern was palpable through the outsized number of pages and advertisements in each of the next several issues, which were devoted to introducing and showcasing the skills and talents of producers, crew members, and stars from Tamil—in addition to Telugu, Malayalam, and Kannada—film industries. A profile of Tamil producer-director S. S. Vasan of Gemini Studios in the first issue highlights his milestone contribution to the potential for cross-industry ventures: “The movie-makers, especially producers of Hindi films in Madras, owe a deep debt of gratitude to him for effectively projecting the South in Northern India with his spectacular Hindi film ‘Chandralekha’ [1948] and paving the way for the production of more and more Hindi films in South India.”<sup>3</sup> This additional



FIGURE 27. Business cards printed in second issue of *Film World* (1964).

avenue of profit for the Madras studios—that is, through their production of Hindi films—was particularly pressing in light of a mid-1960s industry crisis of poor box office returns, which made financiers risk averse.<sup>4</sup> The next issue of *Film World* actually features printed business cards of several above-the-line personnel from South Indian film industries, ostensibly for international recruitment but in all likelihood aimed at the Bombay industry (fig. 27). By 1968, *Film World* had shifted its primary headquarters from Madras to Bombay.

While a comprehensive history of Madras-produced Hindi films in this period is beyond the scope of my analysis, I focus in this chapter on the production and impact of a 1960s strand of hit Madras studio comedies—"money-spinners," as they were not-so-infrequently and dismissively called—that were remade in Hindi. I first outline how these comedies provide important context for understanding Jyoti Swaroop's hit 1968 Hindi comedy *Padosan* (Girl next door). While *Padosan* was a Bombay-based home production of by-then comic superstar Mehmood (aka Mahmood), the film's production and form are inextricable from a thread of cross-industry ventures that brought a distinct brand of Madras studio comedies into the contemporaneous repertoire of Hindi cinema. An account of *Padosan*'s highly reflexive, rollicking defense of commercial cinema ensues specifically from its status as a comedy, as part of a 1960s legacy of Hindi films that took the excesses of "romance, comedy, and somewhat jazzy music" to an extreme with the advent of color, as they evacuated the IPTA-influenced 1950s mise-en-scène of the street and its publics<sup>5</sup> for either the dollhouse-like studio set or the glamour of exotic, picturesque outdoor locations.

Even as India faced mounting financial, diplomatic, and political crises, as well as the death of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1964, popular Hindi cinema of the 1960s had considerably escapist fare on offer: color, foreign locations, high romance, ornately fashionable interiors, lavish budgets.<sup>6</sup> On one level, this marked an inward focus in the form of the social, away from the 1950s social realism of the street and toward the construction of an increasingly consumerist, middle-class domestic space of the heterosexual couple, even as the locations of their romancing encompassed a dazzling touristic array of outdoor locations.<sup>7</sup> This modern, cosmopolitan imagination dovetailed with global visual cultures of the "swinging" 1960s.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, in a fascinating strand of highly reflexive Madras-produced comedies remade in Hindi, the couple was often significantly defamiliarized if not displaced as the central attraction of the films. The politics of these seemingly apolitical Hindi remakes of Tamil comedies, I would argue, lie in their ekphrastic engagements with pleasure, in highly reflexive exaggerations that often critiqued the hierarchies of the film industry while defending the egalitarian potential of love-as-cinephilia.

This is a key stake of my analysis of *Padosan*, which I include in a strand of cross-industry productions despite its status as a Mehmood Productions venture. Toward the end of the chapter, I contrast the window-as-cinema in *Padosan* to the window's operation in the new wave film *Dastak* (Knock; Rajinder Singh Bedi, 1970). Together, the films reveal contemporaneous polemics over cinema and libidinal excess through the motif of noise. By tracking *Padosan*'s defense of both its means and its ends, I open up the film's own theorization of cinema and cinephilia in that very multilingual, multi-industry, cacophonous world of *Film World*, where staying afloat through intranational networks was as (if not more) pressing a concern as the forging of "camaraderie" through international networks.



FIGURE 28. Still from *Pyar Kiye Jaa* (1966): Mehmood plays Atma, an aspiring filmmaker who names his company Wah Wah Productions.

In the late 1960s, students in the Tamil-speaking state of Tamil Nadu (formerly Madras State) protested the imposition of Hindi as a national language, which they understood as a gross overreach by the central government. They blocked Hindi film screenings in the state, and in retaliation, the Shiv Sena, a nativist organization that sought to claim Bombay for disenfranchised Marathi speakers, blocked the exhibition of Tamil films as well as Madras-produced Hindi films. Meanwhile, film producers, exhibitors, and distributors were in a deadlock.<sup>9</sup> As costs of color film production as well as theater rental had risen, distributors abandoned a minimum guarantee system, by which they had borne responsibility for deficits incurred by box office failures.<sup>10</sup> Distributors instead demanded advances, which placed the burden of box deficits on producers.<sup>11</sup> By the late 1960s, Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi, had come to power, and mass protests were widespread amid political and economic crises marked by deep disenchantment with unfulfilled promises of independence for social equality, employment, freedom from authoritarianism, and freedom from poverty.<sup>12</sup> A slew of other agitations would culminate not in any political resolution but in Gandhi's 1975 draconian declaration of the Emergency and suspension of the Constitution for twenty-one months to forcefully quell dissent.<sup>13</sup>

As the Tamil film industry approached a nadir in its profits in 1964, an exception to that year's weak box office performers was C. V. Sridhar's lighthearted comedy *Kadhalikka Neramillai* (No time for love). Backed by the same Madras-based Chitralaya Pictures, Sridhar directed its 1966 Hindi remake *Pyar Kiye Jaa* (Keep on loving). The Hindi version stars Mehmood as a show-stealing caricature of an aspiring filmmaker named Atma, whose company is parodically named Wah Wah Productions (whose English equivalent might be something like So Cool Productions) (fig. 28). The film's setting is mainly that of a house and its idyllic surroundings, as Atma and his two sisters' parallel romances unfold in step with the comedy. Such lighthearted comedies, like contemporaneous high-budget Hindi romance spectacles, seem incongruously out of touch with their historical contexts of widespread political and economic upheavals. At the same time, the emergence and persistence of Madras-produced Hindi comedies in this period were due precisely to the precarity of filmmaking in a time of crisis. In light of

this volatility, several Madras-produced comedies in both Tamil and Hindi were intensely reflexive and introspective, as they offered ekphrastic arguments that wrestled with the value, pleasures, and limits of commercial cinema. The annual Filmfare Awards, headlined by the preeminent Bombay-based *Filmfare* magazine, registered the impact of such comedy-centered Hindi film ventures through its creation of a new award category, Best Comedian, in 1967, whose inaugural winner was Mehmood for his role in *Pyar Kiye Jaa*.

*Pyar Kiye Jaa* was followed by another reflexive Hindi comedy: S. S. Vasan's 1968 *Teen Bahuraniyaan* (Three dear daughters-in-law), a remake of K. Balachander's 1967 Tamil comedy *Bama Vijayam* (Bama's visit) produced by Manohar Pictures. The Hindi version, as well as a Balachander-directed Telugu version titled *Bhale Kodallu* (1968), were produced by Madras-based Gemini Studios. The three main actresses in the Tamil film also starred in the Telugu and Hindi versions. In the latter, they appear as daughters-in-law of a patriarch played by Prithviraj Kapoor, whose dialogues were dubbed by a voice actor due to Kapoor's weakened health. In *Teen Bahuraniyaan*, the three sibling-couples live in one house with their father(-in-law) as a joint family. The pairs, whose names correspond to pairs of Hindu deities, are clichés of upper-caste, middle-class Hindu couples: Shankar and Parvati, Ram and Sita, and Kanhaiya and Radha.

When a glamorous film star named Sheila moves next door in *Teen Bahuraniyaan*, the three women and their husbands are utterly mesmerized, and all six of them are desperate to earn Sheila's favor and attention. As the couples sink further and further into debt after recklessly going to great lengths to keep up appearances to impress her, the cautious patriarch—a retired schoolmaster—intervenes to help them, imparting a lesson on frugality, simplicity, and living within one's means. The actress Sheila, meanwhile, is not demonized, but is instead portrayed as incredibly down to earth and impervious to the superficial glitz and glamour of her "filmi" lifestyle and milieu. *Teen Bahuraniyaan* reflexively considers the seductions of globally circulating (cinematic) images of décor, ornamentation, and consumption during a time of economic crisis. The film ultimately vouches for the goodness and grounded character of film personnel through the figure of the film star Sheila, in spite of the industry's reputation for and production of superficially flashy and materialistic images. The lesson that Prithviraj Kapoor's schoolmaster Dinanath imparts is one of consuming these images—and indeed all the fun and joy that they bring—with a grain of salt, in order to love them for their underlying sincerity rather than for their outward appearance.

While Prithviraj Kapoor stars in *Teen Bahuraniyaan*, the thundering patriarch of Hindi cinema along with his son Raj Kapoor and grandson Randhir Kapoor are instead parodied by superstar comedian Mehmood in *Humjoli* (Fellow), a 1970 Hindi remake of the 1964 Tamil film *Panakkara Kudumbam* (Rich family). Both films were directed by T. R. Ramanna, and *Humjoli* stars Mehmood in a triple role that essays the one played by comedian Nagesh in the Tamil version. Mehmood's



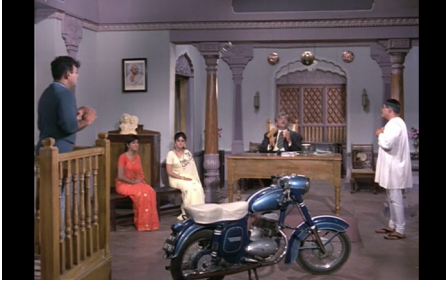


FIGURE 29. Still from *Humjoli* (1970): In-house trial, featuring Mehmood in a son-father-grandfather triple role that parodies Randhir, Raj, and Prithviraj Kapoor.

triple role unfolds as a primary attraction of the Hindi version for its recognizable caricatures of Randhir, Raj, and Prithviraj Kapoor, far outshining the role of the romantic hero played by the much greener Jeetendra. In the Tamil version, Nagesh is the comedian to reigning Tamil star M. G. Ramachandran's hero in *Panakkara Kudumbam*. This was typical in South Indian cinemas, as the onscreen relationship between the comedian and hero often scripted the offscreen relationship between the subaltern-as-fan and star-as-representative for each linguistic state constituted by the 1956 States Reorganization Act.<sup>14</sup>

The onscreen relationship between the comedian and star was a phenomenon specific to a postcolonial vacuum of sovereignty and the emergence of subnationalisms in the South Indian linguistic states, which had been carved out of erstwhile princely states.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, this localized importance of the comedian was untranslatable, begging the question of where and how one locates the politics of comedy in the Hindi remakes. Mehmood's stardom as a comedian was such that several top male stars in the Bombay industry refused to work with him, fearing that he would outshine them.<sup>16</sup> In several Hindi comedies headlined by Mehmood, a primary object of ridicule becomes the Bombay industry itself. The films wrestle with the question of cinema's role in the Nehruvian project of national integration and its limits, and they defamiliarize mainstream cinematic hierarchies of exclusion that tended to reserve romantic fulfillment for specific kinds of idealized bodies.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, the films uphold the sincerity of a cinema that aspired to offer an open invitation for all, to partake in a vast array of pleasures that are ekphrastically iterated as love-as-cinephilia.

Perhaps the most clever subplot in *Humjoli* is that of a tomboyish neighbor who takes a purely platonic fancy to Shivram (Mehmood's third-generation character and Radhir Kapoor parody), whose intentions are misunderstood by everyone including Shivram's incensed wife. A hilariously absurd home-trial ensues, presided over by the Prithviraj Kapooresque grandfather-judge, in a manner that calls attention to the striking inability of not only a broader social milieu but more specifically, the diegetic world of popular Hindi cinema to accommodate cross-gender platonic relationships (fig. 29). The sequence also collapses a

prevalent postcolonial binary between the public and private by not only depicting a cine-juridical process within the space of the home but also bringing this process to ridiculously bear upon the adjudication of whether a man and a woman can indeed have a nonsexual relationship.

Mehmood again essays Tamil comedian Nagesh's famous lead in the 1964 film *Server Sundaram*, remade in Hindi in 1971 as *Main Sunder Hoon* (I am Sundar). Krishnan-Panju directed both films, and K. Balachander, on whose play *Server Sundaram* was based, wrote the screenplay for both films. In both versions, the main character is a poor waiter who considers himself ugly. Through his talent for role-playing and a stroke of luck, he becomes a film star. He gains all the material wealth and fame that he could ever dream of, but when he finally reveals his feelings to the woman with whom he had fallen in love during his waiter days, he is devastated to realize that what he mistook for romantic interest was platonic affection on her part. Most of *Main Sunder Hoon* takes place on set—that is, the set of the home as well as the set of film shoots within the film, which were taking place in actual Madras studios. The latter are an incredible treat in both versions, as they elaborately portray, pay homage to, and parody familiar conventions and genres of commercial cinema. An especially memorable moment is that of a mythological-drama-turned-family-planning-lesson (framed as a stage performance within the film), which mocks the excesses of both commercial cinema and statist didacticism (clip 5).

The 1968 film *Padosan* was made in the midst of the above string of comedies. *Padosan* is a remake of a 1952 Bengali film, *Pasher Bari* (Sudhir Mukherjee), which had, in the meantime, been first remade in Telugu as *Pakkinti Ammayi* by the Calcutta-based East India Film Company under the direction of Chittajallu Pullaya and then in Tamil in 1960 as *Adutha Vettu Penn* by director Vedantam Raghavaiah under the banner of Anjali Pictures, named after Anjali Devi, who starred in both the Telugu and Tamil versions. More than the Bengali film *Pasher Bari*, which actually opens and closes in the urban milieu of a train station, the set of the small-town home in *Padosan* strongly invokes a contemporaneous Madras studio style, whose reflexive parodies of the inner workings of the film industry were the highlights of films like *Server Sundaram* and *Kadhalikka Neramillai*, as well as their Hindi remakes.<sup>18</sup> Sunil Dutt, a top star of Hindi cinema, agreed to play the country bumpkin Bhola in *Padosan*. This comic role, which his wife, Nargis, purportedly urged him to decline, was an exception not only in his career but also in being a rare case of a top star of Hindi cinema agreeing to act with Mehmood.<sup>19</sup>

While star actresses were evidently translatable, insofar as they frequently worked across commercial remakes in different languages, star actors rarely appeared across versions in different languages, even if they acted in films produced by another industry. Remakes in this period, as in the case of *Padosan* and its antecedents in Telugu and Tamil, almost always featured original music





CLIP 5. Onstage mythological-drama-turned-family-planning-lesson from *Main Sunder Hoon* (1957).

To watch this video, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.130.5>



and songs. Thus, despite prevalent characterizations of music—and film songs—as immanently legible and translatable, music was clearly regarded as quite specific in its various textures. Audiences had developed a discerning ear not only for specific playback singers as (aural) stars in their own right,<sup>20</sup> but also for the specific styles of film music that emerged from the creative labor of personnel associated with films of each language or commercial industry.

In *Padosan*, even the credits<sup>21</sup> by graphic designers Ansari and Nasir playfully and reflexively foreground the film's construction—as artifice, as performance, as technologically mediated (fig. 30). The graphics call to mind Albert Zacharias's playful animations that open *Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi* (That which moves is called a car; Satyen Bose, 1958) a similarly unique Hindi comedy that was produced by Kishore Kumar, who also stars in *Padosan*. *Adutha Vettu Penn*, the 1960 Tamil version that preceded *Padosan*, also features animated credits by Dayabhai Patel, which were a novelty for the time. Comprised of zany, animated line drawings, the credit sequence in *Adutha Vettu Penn* did not visualize either the film industry or its own processes of filmmaking as *Padosan*'s and *Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi*'s opening credits did. At the outset of *Padosan*'s credits, R. D. Burman's jazzy horn-and-percussion



FIGURE 30. Stills from *Padosan* (1968): Paper cut-out cartoon stills caricature the Bombay film industry and various processes of film production.

score accompanies a set of stills featuring paper-cut-out cartoons. The distributor's banner dissolves into a title proclaiming "Mahmood Productions Present Their First Ambitious Motion Picture" (figs. 30.1, 30.2). In its self-presentation of a folksy amateurishness, the film appeals to the lovability of bad or low art, strongly associated with comedy in the case of Hindi cinema. This is epitomized within

the diegesis by the Pancharatna Natak Mandal (Five Gem Drama Company), an ironically named amalgam of not five, but four, actors who form a local theatre company led by the exuberant, perpetually betel-chewing Vidyapati aka Guru, or “Learned One,” played by playback singer and actor Kishore Kumar.<sup>22</sup>

Each title card gives way to the next by transitions that imitate an opening window, playing upon the window as a motif within the diegesis that—like cinema—affords a range of voyeuristic and exhibitionistic opportunities.<sup>23</sup> The presentation title is illustrated by colorful houses and as an “opening-window” effect gives way to the title screen, two empty open windows on a house in the bottom corner of the previous frame become the enlarged, primary illustration for the title (fig. 30.3). In the next credit, actor Sunil Dutt appears through one window as a cartoon holding a heart on a plate with an outstretched arm (fig. 30.4)—ostensibly toward his neighbor, the heroine played by Saira Banu, who then appears in her own window in the next credit (fig. 30.5). The three subsequent credits feature caricatures of the comic actors Mehmood, Kishore Kumar, as well as Om Prakash in a “Friendly Appearance” (figs. 30.6, 30.7, 30.8). The later credits continue to caricature the people involved with the film as well as the film’s production processes, beginning with illustrations of other actors and extras as a multitude of individuals clamoring behind a gate (fig. 30.9), of writer Arun Chowdhury as a bookish type (fig. 30.10), from whose Bengali short story *Pasher Bari* the film is adapted, and of lyricist and screenplay and dialogue writer Rajendra Krishan as a typewriter-savvy, cap-wearing, bespectacled gentleman (fig. 30.11).

The credits for camerawork, for art, and for stills and publicity humorously draw attention to an overwhelming preoccupation with the image of the actress as the primary attraction of cinema (figs. 30.12–14, 30.20). The stills-and-publicity credit has a caricature of a brahmin man sitting back in a chair and gazing at cards that display pin-up-style images of women in bikinis.<sup>24</sup> In the credit for camerawork, the cameraman displays a look of extreme irritation toward the oblivious assistant who is the one actually working the camera, although he has it faced upward in the direction of a second floor window, out of which leans a large-breasted older woman with whom he is flirting. The art credit has a caricatured artist holding an enormous, framed painting of a woman, which he is attempting to hang. Within the cartoon cut-out illustration, the “painting” here is actually a photograph of an actress.

Throughout and beyond its credits, *Padosan* plays self-consciously upon its status as a film, and furthermore, as a film positioned amid the milieu of the Bombay industry. The specificity of Hindi cinema is further underscored within the film by comic actor Mehmood’s thickly accented Hindi, marking his memorable performance as Master Pillai, an effeminate South Indian brahmin and classical music and dance teacher.<sup>25</sup> An outsider, Master Pillai’s artistic expertise is rhetorically portrayed within the film as exaggeratedly rigid and unpleasurable compared to the wider appeal and organic nature of something like Guru and company’s theatrical productions, despite their hodgepodge of influences, disregard for classical

forms, and downright amateurishness that amounts to a highly reflexive parody of the Bombay industry and its films. Ultimately, however, despite Master Pillai's ostensibly unpleasurable performances, thickly accented Hindi, and outsider status, he steals the show and constitutes the very heart of the comedy.

As the cartoon stills in *Padosan's* credit sequence caricature the figures involved in the film's production, the instrumental background score exemplifies the eclecticism of what came to be revered as the signature of music director R. D. Burman, who burst upon the scene of Hindi film music in the 1960s. Burman was the son of music director S. D. Burman, and it was Mehmoood who first took a chance on the younger Burman by hiring him as the music director for *Chhote Nawab* (Little prince; S. A. Akbar, 1961). At the outset of *Padosan's* credit sequence is a jazzy horn-and-bongos instrumental track, which gives way to a trilling bamboo flute. Soon, an instrumental leitmotif (which resurfaces in the "la la la la" portion of the first song sequence) takes over, until it ends in a *tihaaai*, or cadence indicated by a triple repetition, which is common in styles of Indian classical music. The *tihaaai* cadence segues into a solo on a mridangam, a drum associated with modes of South Indian, or Carnatic, classical music. The mridangam solo is joined by a melody played on a nadaswaram, a double-reed wind instrument that is also associated with South Indian styles of music. Eventually, a full orchestra also joins in.

As *Padosan's* credits roll onward, more illustrated stills render the film's production processes and its narrative and performance elements as inextricably interwoven. A conspicuous seam in the middle of the editing credit foregrounds the work of cutting and splicing film, making the outstretched arms of a man and woman on the two separate panels appear as if in a reciprocal gesture of embrace (fig. 30.15). A dressed-up, colorfully painted mannequin illustrates the credit for makeup, hair, and costuming (fig. 30.17), and the credit for playback singers features a woman sandwiched between an enormous gramophone and a standing corded microphone into which she is enthusiastically singing, underscoring and celebrating sound-recording technologies as well as the aural performance of the playback singer (fig. 30.21). Such illustrations celebrate the film as a film, understood to be a set of processes and performances indebted to technologies of (re) production.

The caricatured brahmin who appeared in the credits for Mehmoood, author Arun Chowdhury, and the enthusiast of pin-up photos in the stills-and-publicity credit reappears for three more credits. In the choreography credit he is instructing a young woman in dance (fig. 30.16); in the background music and recording credit, he is preoccupied with a gramophone (fig. 30.22); and in the credit for music director R. D. Burman, he is conducting a band comprising a horn player, a violinist, and an accordionist (fig. 30.24). The drawings of the brahmin as bookworm, connoisseur of pin-up photos, technology enthusiast, and music-and-dance instructor make for a caricatured reference both to the powerful influence and disproportionate dominance of brahmins across a number of fields and to the

role-playing talents of actor Mehmood, cast in this film as a South Indian brahmin who is the music and dance instructor of the heroine, for whom he is simultaneously a desirous and aspiring—albeit ultimately defeated—suitor.

In addition to emphasizing various processes of its own production, the credit sequence of *Padosan* also caricatures the status of the commercial film industry out of which it ensues. Aside from an earlier credit that depicts lesser-known actors as a large crowd, assistants are shown as nonprofessionals, collectively illustrated as a complacent child holding a balloon and lollipop (fig. 30.18). Commercial and business aspects of the industry are referred to in the credits for the production managers and the production executives (figs. 30.19, 30.23). The former features a man weighed down by an immense stack of ledgers and paperwork, and the latter depicts an all-powerful businessman sitting high and mighty at a table behind several stacks of bills as a horde of people below him are clamoring for a handout. The credit for the producer shows a confident, grinning man presenting a profusion of flowers to a slender woman, who appears much more coy (fig. 30.25). Ostensibly, she is an actress, and the illustration depicts the oft-gossiped-about affairs involving actresses, among the romantic intrigues and liaisons between figures in the film industry in general.<sup>26</sup>

Amid all the tumult and chaos—the hordes of extras, nonprofessional assistants, endless red tape and paperwork, tight budgets, and “special interests” including those related to love affairs—that characterize the film industry according to the credit sequence, the director emerges in the final credit as a director of traffic (fig. 30.26). In this illustrated pun on the word *director*, cinema is positioned among technologies of urban modernity related to motion and transportation. Building on an association of cinema with technologies of mass transit as discussed in chapter 2, the positioning of the film-director-as-traffic-director in the credit sequence could very well serve as a companion illustration to M. Madhava Prasad’s identification of popular Hindi films’ “heterogeneous mode of production,” which underlies their seemingly disjointed narrative in comparison to a tightly unified, classical Hollywood model.<sup>27</sup> Like the traffic director who tries to implement a semblance of organization or at the very least prevent collisions among an overabundance of vehicles headed in an infinite number of directions, here, the film director streamlines several constitutive elements—these would be song picturizations, dance production numbers, fight scenes, dialogue sequences, and so on—in the act of assembly.

Within the model identified by Prasad, post-production processes take on a crucial and conspicuous role, and the separate recording of a song via playback emerges as an exemplary instance not only of parts assembled in postproduction but also of the commercial logic of industries, as playback recording allowed for the separate production of film music as a distinct saleable product on the part of record companies. Ethical questions surrounding playback were certainly raised as in the 1940s, before it grew to become the norm.<sup>28</sup> With playback song recording,



there is no hiding the technological apparatus, and especially with a dual star system of acting/visual and singing/aural celebrities as identified by Neepa Majumdar, the illusion of the audiovisual image as something “natural” or emerging from a single authorial voice is not only rendered unstable but in fact a site of pleasure that emerges from the aural stardom of the voice that does not actually emanate from the onscreen body from which it appears to be coming.<sup>29</sup> *Padosan* not only stages an ethical validation of playback singing but also offers a validation of the enterprise of popular cinema, for which the ostensible duplicity and commercial expediency of playback becomes metonymic. The film indulges in comedically foregrounding all the “bad” qualities associated with popular cinema, to defend the sincerity of the end that it achieves in the consensual pleasure it affords its spectators, who have repeatedly proven themselves willing to be captivated by its cheap tricks.

Ashish Rajadhyaksha has emphasized the unique placement of Hindi cinema vis-à-vis the Indian state, with the former, despite its cultural power and popularity, having been historically regarded by the latter as an illegitimate, insufficiently modern form. According to Rajadhyaksha, Indian cinema, and particularly the Bombay industry due to its “cultural disqualification from the status of a ‘national cinema,’” has had to continually and publicly justify itself:

That all film narratives also produce self-validating accounts of why they exist and what work they do, is a basic film studies truism. Such an umbrella narrative, internalizing various institutionalized explanations, takes on a particular edge in places like India, where a cinematic text is inevitably required to handle a range of responsibilities supplementary to that of narration proper. Given that the “narrative account” of a film always (again, especially in India) considerably exceeds the boundaries of plausible story-telling, it is perhaps best to see it as existing on top of the story, shored up with additional surrounding layers that provide an “instruction manual” on how the film should be read and, even more significantly, used.<sup>30</sup>

Rajadhyaksha historically situates a degree of self-consciousness on the part of Indian cinema, especially Hindi cinema, in light of the industry’s questionable cultural legitimacy and long-standing tensions between the film industry and the state. He thus positions the films’ self-consciousness and manner of self-presentation as self-validating arguments within highly public negotiations of national culture in a postcolonial moment. However, while Rajadhyaksha seems to suggest the cinema’s implicitly developmentalist orientation toward a spectator in need of instruction, this was not always the case. Films like *Padosan* instead construe a spectator who, even if superficially cinephobic, is deeply cinephilic. *Padosan* ultimately celebrates the affair that ensues from the spectator’s enthusiastic consent to the seduction at hand, *despite* knowing better.

In 1952, the five-year-old Indian state set up the Sangeet Natak Akademi, or National Academy for Music, Dance, and Drama. As part of its program for the



development and preservation of what it deemed as proper national heritage and culture, the state-sponsored All India Radio (AIR) station famously banned the broadcast of film songs. That same year, Radio Ceylon, a station based on the island of present-day Sri Lanka, first aired the program *Binaca Geet Mala*, a countdown of Hindi film songs that was broadcast through Radio Ceylon's newly launched Hindi service.<sup>31</sup> Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, *Binaca Geet Mala*, among other programs dedicated to film songs broadcast by Radio Ceylon, grew to immense popularity. In the midst of the highly public opposing positions taken by AIR and Radio Ceylon toward film songs, the film song came to stand in as a primary representative object of contention in debates over the cultural value of the film industry's output. *Padosan* riffs on this legacy in a number of ways, beginning with its Pancharatna Natak Mandal, a stand-in for the film industry that constitutes a fictional low-brow antithesis of the Sangeet Natak Akademi.<sup>32</sup> A climactic singing competition stages the defeat of classically trained Master Pillai by Bhola, whose ineptness as a singer is overcome with the assistance of his friend Guru, the head of the Pancharatna Natak Mandal played by actor-cum-playback-singer Kishore Kumar, who sings playback for Bhola within the narrative as Bhola merely mouths the words sung by Guru in order to woo and impress Bindu, the girl next door, titular heroine of the film.

Tongue-in-cheek elements of comedy thoroughly infuse *Padosan*, from its credit sequence to its dialogue riddled with ironic puns and Freudian slips, its host of characters whose antics are replete with jokes on regional and linguistic stereotypes, and parodic acting styles that play on the their (and the film's) supposed, ironic aspirations toward high art.<sup>33</sup> Philip Lutgendorf's online "philipsfilms: notes on Indian popular cinema" has a page dedicated to *Padosan*—perhaps lengthiest treatment of this film by a scholar—that identifies the film in terms of genre and literary-antecedent analogs:

The chief virtue of this screwball comedy (which the credits announce as the "first ambitious motion picture" of Mahmood Productions) is that it affectionately spoofs a world seldom seen in commercial films: the milieu of middle class, north Indian Hindus in a provincial town. As in a Shakespeare comedy, or a *prahasana* (farce) in Sanskrit drama, the various types portrayed—the good-hearted simpleton, the lascivious aging Rajput, the bumbling artistes of a low-grade theatrical troupe and their effusive, paan-chewing director, and the Hindi-butcherer South Indian dance teacher—are all recognizable despite their exaggerated caricatures, and their language—richly spiced with (often sarcastic) folk idioms and humorous allusions to Hindu mythology—is likewise on-target. Add strong performances by a talented cast who all appear to be having a good time (including producer Mahmood as the much-maligned Madras), and you get a colorfully beguiling if light-weight entertainment.<sup>34</sup>

The above description is on point in noting several comedic aspects of the film, but by situating the film within the genre of the screwball comedy and likening its structure to the older dramatic genres of the Shakespearean comedy or the *prahasana* genre of classical Sanskrit drama, the description misses an important

inside joke, although it comes close in later noting that the film includes “a charming spoof on the playback convention.” *Padosan*’s rollicking farce soars to its greatest heights upon neither the inanity of its characters nor its narrative twists alone, but upon a reflexive validation of itself as engendered by the foibles of an audiovisual cinematic apparatus that continually reveals itself to be a formulaic farce, albeit a beloved one. The performance of playback singing within *Padosan* unfolds as a quintessential example of artifice and technologized audiovisual excess, and it serves as a portal between the film’s diegetic farce and its ekphrastic claims about commercial cinema as farce.

Defined as a “high-energy dramatic-comedic piece with improbable situations, exaggeration, and oftentimes playful roughhousing,”<sup>35</sup> farce outlines a general form of theatrical comedy that is useful not only for describing the style of *Padosan*’s comedy, especially at the level of acting, but specifically for emphasizing the subtext of the Pancharatna Natak Mandal as a low-brow theatre company that emerges as a parody of the Bombay industry. *Padosan* highlights the influence of and presence within cinema of stage performance genres and styles, which in the modern South Asian context have in turn drawn upon a number of genealogies, including Shakespearean and British drama, classical Sanskrit drama, Parsi theatre, and vernacular modes of musical theatre. While the example of *Padosan* highlights the importance of theatrical influences upon cinema, *Padosan* is not merely an instance of theatre styles seeping into a film adaptation, but rather a film that features a farcical, theatrical performance of itself as a film. In other words, the film presents itself through a subtext of theatre but with the ultimate dramatic effect of spoofing itself as a film coming out of specificities of the Bombay film industry of which it is part.

The girl-next-door heroine of *Padosan*, played by actress Saira Banu, is initially introduced, yet unnamed and unseen, through a photo presented by a fraudulent holy-man-cum-matchmaker to an older uncle of the hero Bhola. Only the back of the photo is visible to the audience, and as the uncle leans back and approvingly beholds its contents, a bright, sunlit song-picturization sequence commences as the film cuts to a low-angle medium close-up shot of the heroine Saira Banu in her role as the young girl-next-door character Bindu, who sits atop her bicycle. Cycling and lip-syncing to the unmistakable falsetto of playback singer Lata Mangeshkar, Bindu sings, “*main chalii main chalii dekho pyaar kii galii mujhe roke na koi main chalii main chalii!*” (Look, I am on my way, on my way, going down the lane of love, may no one stop me, I am on my way, on my way!) (clip 6). Filmed outdoors in the South Indian cities of Mysore and Bangalore, renowned for their greenery and *gulmohar* trees bursting with profusions of scarlet blooms, the sequence features an entourage of girls attired in Western-style clothing, singing, and bicycling. The voices of playback singer Lata Mangeshkar and her sister Asha Bhosle alternate in a back-and-forth style, the former singing playback for Bindu and the latter singing for multiple friends of the heroine at various points in the sequence.<sup>36</sup>



CLIP 6. “*main chalii main chalii*” song sequence from *Padosan* (1968).

To watch this video, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.130.6>



The practice of playback, like the circulation of printed song lyrics, opens up the audiovisual cinematic text to a range of possible meanings, since, first of all, one may consume a song sequence either as an audiovisual song-picturization sequence (on film, video, television, or DVD, depending on the historical period in question), as purely audio (radio, tape, compact disc, or MP3 file), or even as a template for spin-off performances (audio, visual, or audiovisual remixes, live dance performances, song medleys, etc.).<sup>37</sup> As audio alone, one hears “*main chalii main chalii*” as a duet between the singing-star sisters Lata Mangeshkar and Asha Bhosle, but out of a synchresis with the image in the film sequence, the duet between the sisters becomes a dialogue between Bindu and not just one other friend, but a whole entourage of friends.<sup>38</sup>

Lata’s high-pitched voice, associated with a virginal, girlish innocence, is crucial for not just underscoring but for developing the naiveté of Bindu’s character. Furthermore, Lata’s well-known dominance as the older sister and as a shrewd monopolizer of opportunities for women playback singers enhances Bindu’s position as the leader of her entourage, marking her as the heroine of the film. The fact that Asha’s voice—associated with a more playful, flirtatious, and even vampish femininity—sings playback for all of Bindu’s friends is a means of rendering all the friends as completely generic, subordinate to Bindu in their importance,

and collectively less naïve than Bindu as they all playfully caution her, in Asha's singing voice, to beware the dangers of falling in love. The inexperienced, hopelessly romantic Bindu, however, desires nothing more.

Bhola's uncle, to whom Bindu's photo is presented by the matchmaker, clandestinely wishes to pursue a marital alliance with this attractive young woman, due to having fought with his wife, from whom he is separated. Even before the audience sees Bindu, she is an object of the uncle's lustful desires and contemplations, and the *mise-en-scène* of the uncle sitting and gazing at the photo right before the cutaway to the song sequence featuring Bindu atop her bicycle replicates the caricatured image of the brahmin gazing at pin-up-style photos of bikini-clad women in the photography credit. Preceding Laura Mulvey's breakthrough 1978 feminist-psychoanalytic critique of Hollywood narrative cinema's complicity in upholding the regime of a patriarchal male gaze that objectifies feminine figures, *Padosan* overtly invokes and plays on the operation of such a gaze not only by caricaturing its workings in the credit sequence and again through the figure of the older uncle but also through the motif of the window. The construction of Bindu as the primary, passive object of this gaze proceeds through the characterization of Bindu as an extremely naïve, immature girl, despite the more mature, full-figured appearance of Saira Banu, the actress cast as Bindu. Yet, this unequal and exploitative set of gendered looking relations is eventually complicated by the film's imagination of the cinematic apparatus as a *two-way* audiovisual device in addition to Bindu's active role in being knowingly and repeatedly manipulated by its seductions.

As the orphaned simpleton-hero Bhola (literally "innocent one") happens upon the scene of his uncle talking with the matchmaker to the uncle's embarrassment, the disgusted nephew angrily chastises his uncle for the inappropriateness his pursuit, reprimanding him for being a married man and lusting after another woman, and such a young girl at that. Bhola storms out with his belongings, intending to seek out and take the side of his dear aunt, the estranged wife of his erstwhile guardian, who has revealed himself to be but a dirty old uncle. Unknown to Bhola, Bindu, the very girl in the photo presented by the matchmaker to his uncle, occupies an upstairs room in the house adjacent that of his aunt. Bhola moves into the upstairs room in his aunt's house, and it turns out that his window faces that of the *padosan*, or girl next door. Predictably, Bhola falls in love with Bindu, but rather than experiencing love at first sight through the window, it is love at first sound. Although Bhola was smitten earlier in a chance encounter with Bindu at the end of the bicycle sequence, Bhola does not yet know that the very same girl lives next door, and he is this time charmed not by seeing her again in the window but by overhearing her sing as the second song-picturization sequence commences: "*bhaii battuur bhaii battuur ab jaayenge kitnii duur*" (Dear friend, how far away will we go now?).

Bhola's innocence as an enraptured, blind spectator listening only to Bindu's song is juxtaposed with the erotic gaze of not only his uncle but also the audience,



CLIP 7. “*aao aao saanvariya*” song sequence from *Padosan* (1968).

To watch this video, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.130.7>



as the camera intrudes into Bindu's room and reveals the curvy actress nonchalantly taking a bubble bath, drying off, changing clothes, and prancing around the room as she sings in the voice of Lata Mangeshkar. As Neepa Majumdar has argued, Lata Mangeshkar's star persona and crystalline playback voice that came to embody an idealized essence of pure Indian womanhood works to (at least rhetorically) neutralize sexualized visual representations of femininity, especially in lieu of the singer's public image of a desexualized woman clad in white sari, which has more recently taken on matronly overtones.<sup>39</sup> As an acousmatic figure, the star playback singer persists as not only an aural presence but as an auratic presence that contributes to a synchresis whereby her idealized voice and its host of associations takes on an effect of transcendence and deeply influences the overall effect of an audiovisual sequence.<sup>40</sup>

In an inversely gendered version of the bathtub sequence, Bhola and his four pals who form the Pancharatna Natak Mandal crouch by the window as they hope to catch a glimpse of Bindu, though they (and the audience) are caught off guard by the sudden entrance of Master Pillai, a clumsy South Indian teacher of classical music and dance who has an obvious interest in Bindu. Upon Bindu's request for a song, he sings to her suggestively and lecherously, prancing around the room and singing “*aao aao saanvariya*” (Come, come, my beloved; clip 7) in the voice of Manna Dey. As a result of the acousmatic presence of the playback singer, two very

different effects subsist simultaneously: on one hand, the audiovisual sequence is comedic, and on the other, the song itself is highly sentimental and deeply romantic.

The song to which Master Pillai appears to sing and dance is reminiscent of a *thumri*, which became especially popular in the eighteenth century as a form of romantic North Indian sung poetry in which the poetic voice was typically that of a woman, often a woman who has been pining for her beloved.<sup>41</sup> In some *thumri*, this woman is aligned with the figure of Radha, the fervent lover of the Hindu deity Krishna, and while it is not uncommon for men to perform *thumri* compositions, and even less uncommon for men to have written *thumri* compositions, the form is popularly known for being within the repertoire of *tawaifs*, or courtesans who performed in eighteenth-century salons, most famously in the North Indian city of Lucknow. The erotic, feminine associations of the *thumri* form are activated and rendered queer by Master Pillai's expressive dance, reminiscent of the *mujraa* dance performances of the *tawaif*-courtesan, and Master Pillai's performance shocks Bhola, Guru, the rest of the Pancharatna Natak Mandal, and to some degree the audience—who may have instead expected a sequence that reprised the earlier bathtub one—as all are spying from Bhola's window into Bindu's, only to be presented with the spectacle of a ridiculous Master Pillai, instead of Bindu, singing about love and dancing around the room.<sup>42</sup>

Known for his extremely pliable, smooth voice and some degree of formal training in styles of Indian classical music, Manna Dey has been lauded for his rendition of “*aao aao saanvariyaan*,” perceived as a beautiful, heartfelt, even virtuoso performance that has precipitated more contemporary nostalgic reactions, such as the following:

This is by far the toughest song from the film. . . . Though it did not become so famous, I can bet on the number of singers who can actually sing this as flawlessly as the great Manna De [*sic*] did.

Or:

So beautiful, so innocent.<sup>43</sup>

The above are comments made by YouTube users on an upload of the “*aao aao saanvariyaan*” sequence, as is the following one, which confesses:

I always feel so bad for poor Masterji at the end of this movie :-(<sup>44</sup>

As an acousmatic figure, Manna Dey infuses Mehmood's campy performance with an authoritative sincerity that contributes to the empathy that the character of Master Pillai generates, even though he is the rival of the hero Bhola as a suitor also vying for Bindu. This pathos becomes more trenchant through the material contexts that underlie Mehmood's (and several of his characters') marginality.

Mehmood was marked by the excess of a comedian, by which he could never emerge as a convincingly ideal, romantic hero onscreen, despite his superstardom as a comedian. He was also marked by the excess of his outsider status as a Muslim



South Indian, whose dark skin and ostensible ugliness and sexual undesirability are pejoratively referenced in the climactic “*ek chatur naar*” song sequence in *Padosan* and throughout the 1971 film *Main Sunder Hoon*. In both films, Mehmood’s characters makes overtures toward heroines who do not return their affections, and their overtures are as uncomfortable as the extent to which Mehmood’s (characters’) bodily excess precludes the romantic fulfillment that remains the privilege of men and women whose idealized bodies, social locations, and locations in hierarchies of stardom allow them to exist onscreen as icons of romance. *Humjoli* additionally shows—even if not critically enough—the undue burden borne by women with non-idealized bodies. The heroine’s mother is ironically named Rupa, which means “beautiful.” The daughter of a rich family, Rupa is abandoned by her groom at their wedding because she is considered ugly, as her dark skin is naturalized to unattractiveness. The character who becomes the villain steps forward to charitably marry her, only to plot her murder after she gives birth to a daughter, inherit her wealth, and go on to marry his sweetheart.

When Master Pillai makes his dramatic entrance in *Padosan*, Bhola retreats from the window and seeks the counsel of Guru, who never seems to realize that he is offstage as he theatrically plays the role of an all-knowing seer. Guru parses out the situation to the group, declaiming that it most certainly cannot be Master Pillai’s looks that have caught Bindu’s attention, and therefore it can only be Master Pillai’s artistic faculties. Guru advises that Bhola learn music in order to impress Bindu, and Bhola tries, only to fail miserably. Ironically, while Bhola, Guru, and the rest of the Pancharatna Natak Mandal regard Master Pillai as a grave threat, it is clear to the audience that Bindu only flirts with Master Pillai because she knows that Bhola and his friends (along with the audience) are trying to watch her from Bhola’s window, and she wants to teach them a lesson.

Further dejected by his failed attempt at singing, Bhola and the rest of the group hang their heads as Guru paces the room. A radio plays in the background, and the voice of renowned playback singer Mohammed Rafi croons, “*aanchal men sajaale naa kaliyaan*” (Adorn the drape with tender buds), the refrain of a song from the film *Phir Wohi Dil Laya Hoon* (I have brought the same heart once again; Nasir Hussein, 1963). Guru is suddenly struck with a plan, which he explains, tries out, and excitedly reiterates to Bhola with the phrase “*aavaaz merii, shakl terii!*” (My voice, your face!) Inspired by the cinematic convention of playback song recording, Guru develops a ruse, and he and Bhola practice by singing and lip-syncing, respectively, to the even older film song from the film *Ratan* (Gem; M. Sadiq, 1944), “*jaanevaale baalamvaa lautke aa lautke aa lautke aa*” (My departing lover, turn around and come back, turn around and come back, turn around and come back).

Directly referring to earlier film songs as well as the star playback singer Mohammed Rafi as the collective source of inspiration for Guru’s plan, *Padosan*’s direct engagement with the convention of playback is unmistakable in the ruse

that Guru comes up with. Guru thus recruits the resources of popular Hindi cinema and film songs for a project of romance with his characteristic over-the-top, theatrical panache. Dramatizing the endeavor to help Bhola woo Bindu and defeat Master Pillai (even though Master Pillai does not actually pose much of a threat), the members of the Pancharatna Natak Mandal execute an inane but highly entertaining scheme that arises in the first place out of their inability to behold—or for that matter *want* to behold—a world that exists apart from the idioms and situations of the theatre. The extent to which they are enveloped by the theatre and its fictional world parodies the world of popular Hindi cinema that is dearly loved by its most dedicated cinephiles, where and for whom everything is stylized performance: performances of romance, performances of song (including performances by playback), performances of comedy, and performances of even death, as *Padosan* later shows.<sup>45</sup> The reflexive motif of performance in *Padosan* is especially layered around Kishore Kumar, a film actor who plays the leader of a theatre company within the film, who doubly sings playback for several songs in *Padosan* as well as singing playback for Bhola within the diegesis as the character Guru, and who is in turn inspired to do so by the playback singer Mohammed Rafi, whose song from another film plays on a radio within this one.

However, it is emphatically not the isolated practice of playback singing that is the butt of the film's farcical parody or its argument. As noted earlier, following All India Radio's brief unwillingness to broadcast Hindi film songs, film music—like romance—became a representative object in debates over the cultural value of popular cinema.<sup>46</sup> *Padosan* uses the ruse of playback within the diegesis as a means of validating the endeavor of Hindi popular cinema itself. As the equation of playback with the film industry is drawn out in *Padosan* through the Pancharatna Natak Mandal's playback ruse for impressing Bindu, the Pancharatna Natak Mandal is further aligned with the popular Hindi film industry. The theatre troupe has already been shown in various scenes of *Padosan* to be referring to, rehearsing, or performing lovably bad versions of the Persian Laila-Majnun romance and Hindu parables and epics, which have been popular subjects for several earlier popular Hindi films.<sup>47</sup> In addition, Guru is perhaps inspired by William Shakespeare's play *The Taming of the Shrew* when he insists that Bhola must ignore, insult, and even slap Bindu in order to tame her feisty demeanor into one that will exude tender affection. The heterogeneity of texts and influences that the Pancharatna Natak Mandal draws upon and inadvertently parodies as a result of maintaining little regard for their formal or classical integrity is a well-known attribute of the Bombay industry in terms of histories of influence as well as labor.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, Hindi cinema's primary preoccupation with romance is also shared by the Pancharatna Natak Mandal.

The low-brow Pancharatna Natak Mandal has further resonances with the film industry in being of questionable repute and in being depicted as teeming with amateurs who pour in from all sorts of places, which is similar to the manner in

which the film industry is depicted by *Padosan*'s opening credits. The members of the Pancharatna Natak Mandal not only confuse different plays even while they are acting in them but are also much more interested in Bhola's love life than they are disciplined or focused on their professional pursuits. They are shown in one scene to grandly and shamelessly walk offstage in the middle of a performance in front of a packed hall as soon as the equally uninhibited Bhola runs onstage and poorly improvises some dialogue in order to give his actor-friends an update regarding Bindu.

Aside from Guru, the three other members of the Pancharatna Natak Mandal carry names that identify them squarely as representatives of the cities and regions from which they hail. These names are Benarasi, Calcuttiya, and Lahori, Benares being a Hindu pilgrimage city in the heartland of Hindi-speaking North India; Calcutta, the capital of West Bengal in the Bengali-speaking eastern region of the subcontinent; and Lahore, the capital of Punjab in what was then West Pakistan. Far from being random, each of these regions and the linguistic, religious, and even national communities with which they are associated are well-known origins for several film-industry figures who immigrated to Bombay, some as refugees during the violent 1947 Partition of India and Pakistan, when two wings on either side of the subcontinent became the Punjabi/Urdu-language-dominated West Pakistan and the Bengali-speaking East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh).<sup>49</sup>

The figure of the "Madrasi," an often pejorative generic term for a person not necessarily from the city of Madras but from the southern regions of the subcontinent, is conspicuously absent in the Pancharatna Natak Mandal's microcosm of the pan-South-Asian makeup of the Hindi popular film industry of Bombay, a city that has been synonymous with cosmopolitanism. But the "Madrasi" is present in *Padosan*—as none other than Master Pillai, played by the comic superstar Mehmood, who was himself of South Indian heritage and had been working in a string of Madras-produced Hindi films at the time of *Padosan*'s production and release.<sup>50</sup> Recognizable both as a second-generation insider to the popular Hindi film industry and as a distinctly comic star of South Indian heritage, Mehmood/Master Pillai is similarly recognizable in *Padosan* as one who is simultaneously inside the film as well as the Pancharatna Natak Mandal, even as a rival/antagonist. The latter is largely a conceit, since Master Pillai's character is endearing in his sincerity and in fact poses no actual competition to Bhola for Bindu's affections.

After Guru devises the cinematic playback-inspired scheme for helping Bhola one-up Master Pillai and win Bindu, the plan is soon put into action. Bhola is positioned in the window that faces Bindu's, as Guru and the other members of the Pancharatna Natak Mandal conceal themselves in corners of the room that Bindu will not be able to see (fig. 31). Kishore Kumar/Guru sings while Sunil Dutt/Bhola lip-syncs the not-so-subtle opening lines of the next song, "*mere saamanevaalii*

FIGURE 31. Still from *Padosan* (1968):  
The window as a two-way audiovisual  
apparatus that both reveals and conceals.



CLIP 8. “*mere saamanevaalii khidkii*” song sequence from *Padosan* (1968).

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.130.8>



*khidkii men ik chaand kaa tukdaa rehtaa hai*” (In the window opposite mine lives one as dear as a piece of the moon) (clip 8). As anticipated, Bindu is drawn by the singing and comes to the window that once again offers the chance to look, listen, laugh, and fall in love—depending on where one is positioned in relation to it.

The window, like the photos held by the brahmin in the credit sequence and the uncle in the beginning of the film, is initially a device by which the pleasurable, erotic image of a feminine figure is offered as an object for the presumably heteropatriarchal gaze of the voyeur-spectator. But unlike the photo, the window, like cinema, additionally affords an opportunity not only to witness a variety of

*moving* visual spectacles but also to hear a variety of *sounds* that ensue forth. The window both reveals and conceals, like the technology of film that takes us into Bindu's chamber and reveals her to be in the nude as she is bathing, though the *mise-en-scène* (the bathtub, bubbles, towel, etc.) and the frame together orchestrate the withholding of a fully nude view.<sup>51</sup> As Bhola closes his eyes during this sequence while Bindu's/Lata's voice floats through the window and puts him in a reverie, Bhola is shown as absolutely and utterly *bholaa*, or innocent, in the same way that Bindu is innocently unaware that she is being watched as she sings in the bathtub and dances around her room after getting out.

When Bhola takes his friends from the Pancharatna Natak Mandal to spy on Bindu through the window so that they can see the woman with whom he has fallen in love, they are presented with a very different sight than the one they expected. Instead of the group fully becoming, like the brahmin in the credits or the uncle at the beginning of the film, lustful male voyeurs who seek pleasure in the erotic image of a feminine figure, their plan to spy on Bindu through in the window is thwarted when she notices them looking at her and purposefully incites a song-and-dance performance by Master Pillai instead, who then becomes the spectacle put on display for the (dis)pleasure of the aghast onlookers. Yet even this displeasure is a conceit. Comedic sequences constitute *Padosan*'s primary attractions and sites of spectatorial pleasure, as they defamiliarize dominant—and dominant presumptions of gendered—looking relations and modes of spectatorial pleasure.

Guru quickly catches onto the potential for romance afforded by this concealing-revealing two-way window of audiovisual spectacle, and he aims to make the most of it. Under the direction of Guru, Bhola soon becomes an exhibitionist, a performer who desires to not only be seen and desired but also be heard. Like the filmmaker who understands the apparatus within which a series of images and sounds can captivate the spectator, Guru, the head of the film-industry-microcosm that is the Pancharatna Natak Mandal, is shown to take full advantage of the apparatus of the window by using it to conceal himself as an out-of-frame playback singer while Bhola is spectacularly and magically "revealed" as flawlessly and passionately singing to Bindu. As the window in *Padosan* becomes an endlessly reflecting mirror of itself within a technological apparatus of cinema, all trickery on both sides is rhetorically vouchsafed by the impassioned sincerity of the romance that it ultimately engenders.

The tight association of popular film and romance in terms of the particular way in which romance is stylized and performed in Hindi cinema, as well as the cinephilic romance that emerges through the spectator's impassioned reciprocity, is parodied in a sequence that soon follows as Bhola expresses doubts as to whether it is right for him to win Bindu over by letting her think he is singing to her, essentially deceiving her because he does not actually possess the ability to sing that well. Guru convinces Bhola that his worries are irrelevant and that once Bindu falls

in love with him, she will be so overcome by tenderness that she will forgive and forget the deception by which he initially courted her. Guru confidently imitates the way that he foresees Bindu acting toward Bhola once she falls in love with him, and Guru sings to Bhola, punning on his name and role-playing as if Bindu, “*mere bhole balam, mere pyare balam*” (My innocent/Bhola beloved, my dear beloved).<sup>52</sup>

This brief song sequence continues as Guru sings to Bhola in the manner in which he believes that Bindu will herself do in no time, and Guru’s song awkwardly crams together several commonplace expressions of love. What emerges is a humorous string of clichés of romantic Hindustani poetry, parodying its cloying sentiments and florid styles as Guru spouts his own version in such a relentlessly repetitive manner that the love lyric disintegrates into doggerel. The occasional conspicuous insertion of highly Sanskritized words—the word *bhaashaa* (language), for example, in the phrase *nainon kii bhaashaa* (language of the eyes)—sounds extremely awkward and out place in expressions of romance that derive not from Sanskritic idioms or literary forms but from Urdu and colloquial Hindustani forms. Like the scenes in which different theatrical forms and epic narratives are jumbled together or confused by the actors of Pancharatna Natak Mandal, here the Sanskritization of familiar Hindustani idioms renders them obnoxious, as the ardor of their romantic content cools off into series of tepid banalities whose overall effect is comical.

The images and motifs of Hindustani love poetry in “*mere bhole balam*” have been repeatedly deployed in countless popular Hindi film songs, often crafted without any strict adherence to standardized conventions of the classical literary and musical forms that they build on. As Guru, Benarasi, Calcuttiya, and Lahori sing and dance around Bhola, Benarasi plucks an *ektaaraa*, a small single-string, single-note lute associated with wandering folk minstrels. The twanging of the single-string *ektaaraa* works as a comic repetitive sound effect, like the “wah-wah-wah” effects used in cartoons, and with the *ektaaraa* sound woven into Guru’s boisterous singing and dancing that elicits the participation of the rest of the Pancharatna Natak Mandal, this fifth song sequence effectively and humorously parodies the monotony of the romantic clichés that often appear in popular Hindi film songs.

Bhola is enchanted as Guru sings, apparently fantasizing that Bindu will indeed sing to him so, to the extent that Bhola begins to worry over how he will respond. Guru chuckles, assuring Bhola that when one is in love, one’s responses emerge spontaneously and melodiously—just like in the movies! Guru suggests that Bhola could begin by calling out his beloved’s name, and he demonstrates by passionately summoning, “Anuradha!” Quickly, Guru is reminded by Benarasi that the name of Bhola’s neighbor and love interest is not Anuradha but Bindu. Not too perturbed, Guru simply replaces the former name with the latter and goes on to sing out Bhola’s hypothetical response in a “spontaneous”—yet clearly formulaic—melodic verse. Just as Guru punned earlier on “Bhola” and “innocent,” he puns on the name





CLIP 9. “*merii pyaarii bindu*” song sequence from *Padosan* (1968).

To watch this video, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.130.9>



“Bindu” as “bindi,” a mark that adorns a woman’s forehead and is often, particularly in the case of a married woman, vermillion in color. Guru’s lyrics yield further parodic nonsense: “*merii pyaarii binduu, merii bholii rii binduu, merii maatherii binduu, merii sinduurii binduu, merii binduurii binduu . . .*” (My lovely Bindu, my innocent Bindu, my forehead-y Bindu, my vermillion Bindu, my bindi-like Bindu . . .) (clip 9).

The originality of the “*mere bhole balam*” sequence lies paradoxically in its unoriginality that makes it a parodic prototype of the popular romantic Hindi film song. By exaggeratedly showing the omnipresent romantic film song to have been reproduced to the point of meaninglessness, “*mere bhole balam*”—as yet another one—indicates the compulsion to still continue witnessing, repeating, and performing these songs as sincere expressions of love.<sup>53</sup> What Guru presents to Bhola as a song that is spontaneous and passionate could not be further from the truth. Clearly, it is something we have already seen and heard before in the form of numerous other film songs—and yet at the same time, Guru’s song is somehow original, creative, entertaining, and catchy.

Presenting itself as a collective hyper-cliché of love songs found in popular Hindi films, “*mere bhole balam*” sings out in praise of commercially produced film songs like itself, which are beloved because of, rather than despite, their formulaic

qualities, as their ostensible non-specificity yields an infinite degree of iterability. Rather than positing commercially produced forms as utterly devoid of content, however, *Padosan* posits them as constituting valuable raw materials for their range of expressive possibilities and functions. It is not just one film after another but one lover after another who is urged by these repetitions to continue to repeat and believe in the free-floating, endlessly proliferating form(ula) of love in popular Hindi cinema, apparently unmoored from any authentic origin as it thrives in a world external to any single text, whose address encompasses lovers within the films, lovers outside the films, and most especially, the cinephilic lovers of the films who keep coming back with their eyes and ears wide open.

The climactic sequence of the film *Padosan* is undeniably that of the song “*ik chatur naar*,” itself based on a version that was originally sung by Kishore Kumar’s older brother Ashok Kumar for the 1941 film *Jhoola* (Swing; Gyan Mukherjee). The “*ik chatur naar*” sequence features a singing battle between Master Pillai and Bhola/Guru that stages the triumph of the playback (and implicitly cinematic) duo over the classically trained music and dance teacher. Bindu enjoins Master Pillai, who visits her home to instruct her in music and dance, to teach Bhola a lesson and put him in his place, complaining that Bhola has been harassing her through his window, which faces her own. Bindu’s pride has been wounded because Bhola sweetly “sang” the song “*mere saamanevaalii khidkii men*” to her earlier, only to rudely pull down his blinds (upon Guru’s insistence) as soon as Bindu appeared to show some interest in him. Unlike Guru, Master Pillai is unable to intuitively grasp either the situation or the proper way of making the most out of the facing windows by, for example, purposely using them to intimidate Bhola. When Bindu indicates to Master Pillai that Bhola is watching them from his window, instead of immediately picking up on her hint and sensing that Bhola is a threat, Master Pillai goes over and begins greeting Bhola in a warm, friendly manner. Bindu has to stop him and spell out that she is upset over the arrogance with which Bhola has displayed his musical talents from his window.

Finally, Master Pillai understands that he must regard Bhola as a threat, and on the spot, a singing competition ensues as the two face off through their windows (clip 10). Master Pillai marshals the resources of his classical training in music, dance, and drama, praising the beauty and intelligence of a woman—Bindu—in highly reverential, Sanskritized Hindi to which he, in the voice of playback singer Manna Dey, also adds displays of improvisational virtuosity in classical South Indian Carnatic-style *aalaap*, *konnakol*, and *svaraa*, which are, respectively, free-form melodic phrases, vocalized poetic compositions of percussive syllables, and rhythmic improvisations of solfège that require an understanding of *raaga*, or melodic frame, as well as *taala*, or beat cycle. Master Pillai further includes *nritya*, a portion of pure dance that occurs within performances of South Indian classical



CLIP 10. “*ik chatur naar*” song sequence from *Padosan* (1968).

To watch this video, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.130.10>



dance styles like *bharatanaatyam*, which involves stamping the feet and displaying hand gestures in a virtuoso show of dexterity.

Hidden away, Guru has the task of singing back to Master Pillai as he sings playback for Bhola in a *savaal-javaab* (question-and-answer) form that occurs as a competition at the level of the film and emerges simultaneously as a *jugalbandii*, or musical duet, featuring the playback singers Manna Dey and Kishore Kumar. In contrast to Master Pillai, Guru sings in language that is much more colloquial, and he also sings of a woman—again, Bindu—as clever, although Guru means it insultingly as he describes her getting caught in her own trap, compares Master Pillai’s dark countenance and singing to that of an ugly, annoying crow, likens Bindu’s grace as a dancer to that of a hobbling mare, and sarcastically proclaims Master Pillai to be her perfect romantic complement, given his expertise in classical dance. Guru responds to Master Pillai’s displays of virtuosity with gibberish and yodeling, and by suddenly changing the raga and key in the middle of the song.<sup>54</sup> Guru throws off Master Pillai. Such abrupt changes in either the raga or the key, especially, are rarely tolerated in standardized forms of Indian classical music; it is the adherence to such rules, in fact, that sets these forms apart from semiclassical or so-called lighter styles of music. At one point during the singing duel, Master Pillai, despite the fact that he is being insulted, becomes so rapt by Guru’s singing

that without even realizing what he doing, Master Pillai starts to visibly enjoy his opponent's song, closing his eyes and rocking and swaying to the beat until a very irritated Bindu elbows him to stop immediately.

In the end, Guru and Bhola triumph as Master Pillai's voice eventually cracks, not only foreshadowing a victory for Bhola in his pursuit of Bindu but also upholding the creative enterprise of playback and the apparently organic, creative, and much less formalized structure of film songs with which playback is associated, in contrast to the classical forms offered by Master Pillai, which are shown to be less pleasurable, less flexible, and less spontaneous—and yet indispensable to the overall pleasure of the viewer. In this sense, the competition between Guru/Bhola and Master Pillai is much less a showdown between a North Indian versus South Indian character than it is an exaggeratedly polemical juxtaposition of classical and film music. The former may seem to be the case when, for example, Guru insults Master Pillai's dark complexion as an undesirable trait, which resonates with prejudices against darker skin and generalized stereotypes of South Indians as being of darker complexions than their North Indian counterparts. However, given the equation of Guru/Bhola with the convention of playback and the self-consciousness with which *Padosan* parodies itself as coming out of an illegitimate, inauthentic, and amateur film industry (akin to the diegetic Pancharatna Natak Mandal) that exploits a technological apparatus that in turn enables pleasures of looking, listening, and romancing (akin to the diegetic window), the “*ik chatur naar*” sequence also becomes engaged in *Padosan*'s ultimate endeavor of validating itself as a stylized spectacular, cinematic performance. The convention of playback becomes metonymic, both within and without the diegesis, for the commercial cinema's excesses of “romance, comedy, and somewhat jazzy music.”

Manna Dey's singing playback for Master Pillai in *Padosan* would have been recognized as a parody of Carnatic or classical music rather than an authentic sign of the same.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, Master Pillai holds a harmonium, an instrument typically used in folk, semiclassical, and North Indian and Hindustani styles of classical music and less immediately associated with Carnatic styles of classical music. Guru also uses a harmonium, and he is accompanied by the other members of the Pancharatna Natak Mandal, who do not play instruments commonly used in systems of classical music, but play rudimentary, makeshift instruments that are either like the *ektaara* played earlier or fashioned out of simple household objects whose apparent sounds emerge as audio effects that came to mark R. D. Burman's film songs made of eclectic and highly percussive sounds. While standardized forms of North Indian/Hindustani and South Indian/Carnatic styles of classical music each have distinctive, recognizable styles of *aalaap*, *bol*, and other improvisational forms, Master Pillai's apparently South Indian/Carnatic classical expertise is counterposed not to North Indian/Hindustani classical styles but to Guru's nonsensical gibberish, his abrupt change in the raga and key, and his yodeling, which was also a hallmark of Kishore Kumar's style of playback signing—all of

which were as rare in both Carnatic and Hindustani systems of classical music as they were common in contemporaneous film songs.

The seductive pleasure to be found in film songs is upheld not only by Master Pillai's defeat but also by his unwitting, demonstrative enjoyment of his opponent's singing as well as the fact that an enraged Bindu loudly turns up a radio after Master Pillai has lost in order to tune him out. The radio plays and gives way to a jazzy instrumental leitmotif that surfaces throughout *Padosan*, and Master Pillai is oblivious to Bindu's intentions to spurn him as he naively praises her excitedly for coming up with the great idea of turning on the radio. The song competition forms the climax of the film, though it is not the climax of the diegetic narrative—here, the layers of *Padosan* separate into the narrative of suitors contending for Bindu, which is largely secondary to its farcical drama of spoofing and validating its own endeavor as film that is loveable despite its undisciplined mishmash of influences and participants. As mentioned earlier, the former drama of Bhola and Master Pillai competing for Bindu is largely precipitated by the Pancharatna Natak Mandal's initial perception of Master Pillai as a threat. He then actually becomes a rival only because Bindu wishes to spite Bhola after Guru, à la *The Taming of the Shrew*, ludicrously insists that Bhola show some arrogance toward his neighbor. Guru insists that this arrogance will stoke Bindu's desire and redirect the feisty behavior she displays toward him.

In fact, the next two songs are sentimental numbers that feature the eventual blissful budding romance of Bindu singing to Bhola and then Bhola singing to Bindu, as Guru predicted and previewed earlier, and these songs do not constitute either the resolution or the most memorable song sequences of the film. Instead, the last two romantic songs only reprise the defeat of classical forms by cinematic modes of performance in the “*ik chatur naar*” competition sequence, as *Padosan*'s self-parody circumscribes the narrative of the couple's union within a metatext that reveals *Padosan* to be an instance of the romance-cum-farce that is cinema. Through parody, *Padosan* illustrates popular cinema as a paradox. Despite all that popular films, here under the sign of film songs rendered via playback, seemingly lack in terms of finesse, sophistication, plausibility, authenticity, discipline, and originality, people still fall head over heels for them, over and over and over again.

For example, “*mere bhole balam*” lays bare the clichés of film songs and even has a line in which Guru pretends, as Bindu, to sing to Bhola, “*tere qadamon meraa pyaar, meraa sansaar, merii qismat hai mujhe apnaa banaa le*” (My love, my world, and my fate are at your feet, make me yours). A later sequence in which Bindu actually sings to Bhola is not at all campy in any overt way, but its sentiments are expressed in terms that are strikingly similar to that which was just parodied in the earlier sequence, with the latter song actually echoing the very cliché of the feminine lover placing herself at her beloved's feet as the opening lines confess, “*sharam aatii hai magar aaj ye kahanaa hogaa, ab humen aap ke qadamon*

*hii men rahanaa hogaa*" (I feel coy, yet I feel I must say that all I want now is to remain at your feet).

In both this song as well as the final one, "*kahanaa hai . . . aaj ye tumse pehlii baar, tum hii to laaii ho jiivan men meraa pyaar pyaar pyaar*" (I have to say this to you today, for the first time, you have brought love love love into my life), in which Bhola is again assisted by Guru to sing back to Bindu, emphasis is placed on the respective phrases "*kahanaa hogaa*" and "*kahanaa hai*." These are different conjugations of the same verb phrase denoting a compulsion on the part of the poet/singer/speaker to *say* something. Yet the authority of what the speaker/actor merely says or speaks is not enough in matters of intense emotion—namely, those connected with love. As a result, the playback singer is recruited, entering as an acousmatic character whose voice emerges for its spectator-listener within the diegesis as a one that, for the spectator beyond the diegesis, appears to transcend both the diegesis as well as the world outside of it.

During the last song, one of Bindu's friends recognizes the voice of Guru, and she whispers her suspicions. As Bhola/Guru continue singing to the other friends who have assembled in Bindu's window to witness her lover-neighbor sing to her on her birthday, Bindu and her friend quietly slink away, enter the house next door, and come up the stairs behind Bhola and Guru to catch them red-handed in their playback-inspired ruse. Guru even continues singing for some time before he turns around and sees the girls angrily staring at him. The window as a revealing-concealing audiovisual apparatus has been dismantled, its illusion destroyed. Incensed that Bhola has deceived her, Bindu spitefully resolves that she will marry Master Pillai. While this may constitute the climax for the narrative of the couple's union, which has just been jeopardized, it occurs only in the last few minutes of the film as part of the series of moments that reprise the "*ik chatur naar*" duel that I hold as the climax of the film as whole, which I have tracked along *Padosan*'s primary ekphrastic register, where the duel occurs as an instance of popular cinema's triumphant public solicitation of the hearts belonging to its vast audiences.

In these last moments of the film, Guru once again comes to the rescue—with yet another ruse. He has Bhola lie down on his bed with a noose thrown around his neck, and as the wedding of Bindu and Master Pillai commences, Guru and the rest of the Pancharatna Natak Mandal enact a dramatic performance of bereavement in front of Bindu, telling her that Bhola has committed suicide and martyred himself in the name of his unrequited love for her. As Bindu wails that she only wanted to teach Bhola a lesson and does in fact love him, Guru tells Bindu that there is yet the hope if she is pure of heart, like the mythological Savitri, who wrangled her husband's life from Yama, the lord of death. Guru thunderously proclaims that like the legendary Savitri, Bindu, too, may be able to defeat the god of death and breathe life back into Bhola, should she confess her love and agree to marry him instead of Master Pillai. Also saddened by Bhola's "death," Master Pillai in fact urges Bindu onward, and surely, Bindu's confession miraculously "resurrects"



Bhola, who then takes Master Pillai's place as Bindu's bridegroom. The last shot shows Bhola and Bindu enjoined in the Hindu wedding ritual of taking steps around a fire, and in a corner of the foreground, a shehnai—an instrument that has become synonymous with South Asian weddings—is being played by Master Pillai, who has tears streaming down his face.

Like the spectators who repeatedly fall for the illusion with which they are presented, Bindu once again falls for the Pancharatna Natak Mandal's theatrics—this time, its staging of Bhola's death—despite having just discovered that Guru and company have collectively deceived her in helping Bhola sing to her from his window in a voice that was not his own. Juxtaposed with a film like *Singin' in the Rain* (Stanley Donen, 1952), *Padosan* has no investment in finally synchronizing faces to their respective voices and paying out the ideological dividends of this unity through a coinciding narrative resolution.<sup>56</sup> Rather than upholding an ethic of honesty in straightforward, realist storytelling, *Padosan* celebrates the excess and duplicity of cinema as epitomized by the convention of playback, validating an ethic of technologically mediated love that affords repetitious audiovisual pleasures that proliferate despite their crude appearances, inciting an honest, cinephilic affair that endures despite the spectator's awareness of the fraudulent nature of popular cinema's seductions.

As a film that is exemplary in the reflexivity of its presentation and parody, *Padosan* offers an opportunity to contextualize the primacy of the film song as an autonomously circulating form as well as an object that became metonymic for the industry from which it emerged amid highly public debates over the cultural value of the popular cinema industry that congealed most explicitly in the 1950s around the positions taken by AIR toward film songs. The centrality of the song picturization sequence to Hindi cinema becomes an opportunity to re-evaluate classical film theory's overwhelming concerns with the image as an erotic object that can work with cinema's technological apparatus toward the consolidation a patriarchal gaze. While Christian Metz crucially located the semiotic paradox of "offscreen sound" in the fact that no sound actually emanates from the onscreen image but nonetheless seems to do so as an effect of synchronized sound, *Padosan* makes an interesting theoretical proposition in its manner of depicting facing windows as a mutually constitutive, two-way *audiovisual* cinematic apparatus that solicits its intended spectators of various genders, who may or may not respond in a predictable manner.

If one regards *Padosan* as an argument, then one is presented with a thesis that collapses the endeavor of popular Hindi cinema into its cumulative diegetic excess of romance that repeatedly ensnares its viewing-listening spectators through their consenting—if unpredictable—willingness to be captured by cinema's blatant trickery, epitomized by the paradoxically straightforward duplicity of imbuing a

lip-syncing face with the voice that emanates from the elsewhere that is the invisibly conspicuous playback star. An other to the diegesis, the playback singer's voice implodes the self-containment of the film, which emerges not just as a specific unified audiovisual object whose erotic delights absorb the spectator into contemplation, but as an overt performance whose spectacularly technologized pleasures of "romance, comedy, and somewhat jazzy music" constitute repeating, reproducible formulae that recognize themselves as such across iterations that also serve as a templates for subsequent iterations.

Playback practices lay bare the technological construction of the audiovisual object in its most heightened, conspicuous moments of song sequences, which were both denigrated and revered as excess. Reflexivity was thus embedded both technologically and discursively in popular Hindi cinema not as a result of a set of purely aesthetic preferences leaning toward what one might term "postmodern," but as a result of the industry's historical position of illegitimacy as a cultural form vis-à-vis not only Hollywood but also, over the 1960s, the institutionalization of an auterist world cinema and a state-sponsored discourse that sought a properly modern, authentically national cinema. Amid this polemic, the competition that is staged between implicitly cinematic and classical musical forms in *Padosan* takes a position that validates the film song as a representative object that speaks for the ethics of popular cinema in the sincerity of its belovedness.

*Padosan* thus evidences the degree to which song sequences in popular Hindi cinema were charged not only by their own audiovisual spectacular effects and affects, but also by their historical contexts, their promiscuous blending of disparate musical styles, their foregrounding of performance and technology, and their thematic preoccupation with romance and seduction by which they became both iterations of formulae as well as templates for further repetitions. In their proliferation, songs emerge as aural and textual objects that circulate independently from any given film as a whole at the same time that they become representative of their film sources as well as the affective and material excess of commercial cinema's reach in their ubiquity across public and private spaces. *Padosan* depicts and defends the twin cumulative romances that ensue out of the affective relationships structuring the production, narration, and collective spectatorship of popular films on the grounds of their sincerity, as they are collapsed into one another to render the cinephile and the cinema as yet another modern iteration of the classical figures of the lover and beloved who have been allegorically invoked by countless song lyrics in countless moments of romantic song sequences.

The concerns that ensue out of a reading of *Padosan* engage larger debates over film and commercial media, beginning with the classic, hotly debated question of what degree of spectatorial agency may or may not be afforded by profit-oriented mass media industries, the stakes of which reside in whether popular cinema holds the potential for understanding and critiquing its contexts and for imagining and creating less oppressive and increasingly egalitarian social formations.

Walter Benjamin's oft-cited meditation on this question in what has come to be known as his "Artwork Essay" has remained powerful and influential, its hallmark being the intense ambivalence with which Benjamin forecasts the future trajectory of cinema, which he identifies as an art form that is tied to the historical moment of modernity at the level of its medium specificity as a mechanized, reproducible form, for better and for worse.<sup>57</sup>

Writing in the wake of Nazism's rise, Benjamin is poignantly aware of the fascist ends to which cinema has been and may once again be recruited, but he also holds out hope in cinema's potential to liberate the masses from authoritarian power structures. For Benjamin, this hope is warranted by the fact that such an art form, characterized by mechanical reproducibility, has already marked a radical epistemological shift. Arising out of modern technologies of reproduction, cinema, according to Benjamin, has the capacity to reinvigorate the consciousness of the masses by having displaced the elitist aura of uniqueness, individuality, and originality that, in an earlier era, held art objects as transcendent—as above and apart from their social formations. As an art object, cinema thus reintegrates itself into social formations by virtue of its status as a mechanized medium that is inextricably intertwined in its modern historical contexts.

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, fellow intellectuals of the Frankfurt School, were much less forgiving in their equally renowned indictment of commercial media, especially in relation to Hollywood, as a "culture industry" whose pleasures lulled the masses into a stupor of complacency that in turn enabled their exploitation by lurking dominant capitalist interests.<sup>58</sup> The saturation of media formations by commercial corporate interests has only intensified in an era of late-capitalist globalization, as transnational media conglomerates continue to consolidate their reach over increasingly vast audiences.

In a comprehensive monograph that treats the genre of the American film musical, however, Rick Altman argues for the degree of agency afforded to the spectator precisely through cultures of interactivity and participation around popular media.<sup>59</sup> Toward the end of *The American Film Musical*, Altman directly engages Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of the culture industry, particularly with respect to the stance of condemnation they take toward popular music, which they hold to be utterly unsophisticated and vapid. Adorno and Horkheimer instead laud the alternatives of highly atonal or dissonant music, which in their view productively stimulates the listener to begin intellectualizing and questioning the very category and nature of music itself.

Altman, however, defends the simplicity of popular music, especially that which was composed for film musicals during their heyday, arguing that this apparent simplicity was not a result of flawed construction but the result of the creative labor undertaken by composers to write songs through which audiences could easily sing along and actively participate.<sup>60</sup> By noting that sheet music would sell out instantly on the heels of a successful film musical's release and that piano sales

remained extremely high during the same period despite the economic depression of the 1930s, Altman argues that the simplicity and popularity of songs from American film musicals poised spectators to become active performers and musicians who would continue to sing, play, and perform their own renditions of the numbers that they witnessed in the space of the theatre. For Altman, the problem with unfamiliar, complex musical forms like those exalted by Adorno and Horkheimer is that in the end, large numbers of people do not have the means of (re)producing such forms and are then left in the very position of the passive spectator-listener-consumer that Adorno and Horkheimer abhor.<sup>61</sup>

Altman's argument, in this sense, suggests that the form of popular (film) music, in its invitation for repetition and repurposing, can transfer the agency of its field of ideological meaning from the text itself to the listener-viewer, who can repurpose it for a number of creative and expressive possibilities. To what end, however? If the capacity for world-making is embedded in this propensity for popular media forms to invite active modes of engagement and meaning-making on the part of its listener-viewers, as important would be the question of the content—that is, the politics—of its ensuing practices.<sup>62</sup> This is especially evident in a digital era, as participation as an end in itself can just as easily yield nefarious consolidations of violently chauvinistic, majoritarian collectivities.

*Padosan's* staging of the ethical *ends* to which popular forms of music are put is thus a key part of its argument, wherein love—particularly as cinephilia—is invoked as both the driver of its production and the outcome of its expressive capacity. On the one hand, the film defamiliarizes the workings of a heteropatriarchal, upper-caste gaze—and its aural equivalent—through its play with the apparatus of the window in a way that perhaps most provocatively suggests that such a *gaze/listening position* itself is an excess, rather than its conventionally feminine object. In addition, while the Panchatantra Natak Mandal goes to clearly absurd ends to manipulate Bindu into falling in love with Bhola, the suggestion by the end of the film is that she is a consenting party to its ongoing (cinematic) manipulation, owing to the sincerity of the enterprise on *both* sides of the apparatus.

On the other hand, the formation of the romantic couple (heterosexual, middle-class, upper-caste, Hindu) in *Padosan*, amounts to yet another cliché among the rest that it bares. To an extent, this is parodied from the outset of the film, as Bhola reads an orthodox Hindu text that prescriptively outlines the four stages of a man's life. He is suddenly hit with the realization that, having reached the age of twenty-five, he is supposed to get married. However, the film's construction of its idealized couple is less self-aware in, for example, its naturalization of Bindu's transformation from a flirtatious—if naïve—young girl, to a paragon of an ideal, wifely, sari-clad Indian woman. Additionally, in one of the few serious moments of the film, Bhola is beaten up by a gang of visibly Muslim men paid off by Master Pillai, which naturalizes aggression to "bad" Muslims in constructions of Muslim minority figures through binaries of good versus bad, of nonviolent versus violent

and of, eventually, secular versus religious.<sup>63</sup> Mehmood, who was known for playing characters with the Hindu name Mahesh across multiple films, explicitly avowed his Gandhian commitments and his status as a peace-loving “good” Muslim.<sup>64</sup>

Cinephilia, conceived as an impassioned practice of reading through viewing and listening, cannot preclude trenchant critiques and rejections of deeply problematic representational regimes and hierarchies of power. In *Padosan*’s two-way—though not necessarily equally distributed—audiovisual apparatus, the capacity for spectators to actively respond is the thing that accords cinema its value and vitality. The pathos elicited by the closing image, as the ostensibly ugly South Indian Mehmood-as-Master-Pillai plays the shehnai and cries in the foreground, is one that mourns the limits of the possible. For even the most imaginatively escapist world of cinema can never unmoor itself from the material hierarchies of the world from which it springs. At best, a two-way apparatus allows for the possibility that the two worlds can, indeed, transform one another through unrelenting practices of *savaal-javaab*, or “question-and-answer.”

Titled “More Noisy Than Comic,” N. C. Sippy’s short 1969 review of *Padosan* criticizes the film for its low production values, crude humor, and noise: “*Padosan* is a musical farce which strains all its resources to create humour. Unfortunately, the resources appear to be meagre, the strain shows and the humour is mostly of a crude and noisy kind.” Curiously, the author goes on to admit several positive aspects of the film, even as he seems compelled to reiterate the poor quality of the film as a foregone conclusion:

Some of the most successful comic moments are provided by Kishore Kumar. Sunil Dutt makes a game, even if often embarrassing, try at playing clown. Saira Banu looks fairly lively. Mahmood, quite entertaining now and then, doesn’t offer anything really fresh.

Composer Rahul Dev Burman offers a couple of catchy songs.<sup>65</sup>

Despite admissions of the film’s moments of playful and lively acting, comedic success, and catchy songs, the review’s lede comes down on *Padosan* as “noisy” film. Here, noisiness does not refer to actual sound but instead connotes an unspecified offending excess that emanates from the film’s low production values, low-quality humor, and lack of “anything really fresh” in Mehmood’s performance.

Quite often, critics who were writing for contemporaneous English-language periodicals allow that Mehmood’s comedies were highly entertaining. Yet, in the same breath, they seem compelled to dismiss Mehmood and his films in consistently general terms: as noisy, obscene, vulgar, unwholesome, and unoriginal, with very little specificity. Sippy’s review emphasizes *Padosan*’s low production values, from which he seems to automatically derive the film’s low quality overall. While the term *noisy* can evoke a disembodied, unpleasurable, aural excess, it also operates—as

in the case of Sippy's review—as a pejorative metaphor for other excesses that are uncritically naturalized to devalued entities, whether specific kinds of films or specific kinds of bodies. In *Padosan*, the small-town romance itself—even if sidelined by the comedic farce in *Padosan*—invokes a distinctly urban issue of unwanted sounds and of the propensity of sounds to transgress thresholds of the public and private. This theme in *Padosan* surfaces in the contemporaneous 1970 film *Dastak* (Rajinder Singh Bedi), and together, the films point to a polemical discourse of noise—and a statist discourse of noise pollution—as intimately tied to problems and possibilities of excess, modernity, and sexuality.

Much more recently, a 2005 judgment of the Supreme Court of India sought to establish nationwide rules for curbing noise pollution. The judgment occurred in response to a pro bono publico petition by a citizen, Anil K. Mittal. As recounted in the opening statements of the judgment, Mittal was moved to file a petition by the rape of a thirteen-year-old girl in Delhi, whose cries for help “sunk and went unheard due to blaring noise of music over loudspeaker in the neighborhood,” after which the girl immolated herself and died. The judgment's recounting of this tragic rape vilifies “noise polluters” as the assailants and the “blaring noise of music over loudspeaker” as their weapon before going on to note that their other hapless victims include students who are unable to study.<sup>66</sup> That a tragic instance of violent sexual assault precipitated the Supreme Court's recent ruling on noise pollution raises the historical inextricability of noise regulation, on the one hand, from patriarchal state control, modern technologies, and gendered violence, on the other. By thematizing the propensity for sound—and for cinema, through its songs—to breach gendered thresholds of the public and private, both *Padosan* and *Dastak* intuitively grasp the transgressive potential of popular cinema, in challenging the heteropatriarchal organization of its world with the mere suggestion of nonconjugal, nonreproductive feminine sexuality and its pursuit of pleasure.

In revisiting M. Madhava Prasad's keen analysis of *Dastak* in his groundbreaking *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction*, I want to tug at an important thread in Prasad's reading of *Dastak*, with an ear toward further unraveling the tremendous potential for ongoing analyses of aurality and sound in the historiography of cinema and modernity. Prasad's reading of *Dastak*, a film released within two years of *Padosan*, situates the film in a historical discussion of middle-class cinema, whose major ideological project was that of constituting the modern nuclear family unit within a realist domain of conjugality. For the middle-class cinema that emerged alongside the establishment of the state-funded Film Finance Corporation in 1960, the problem of popular cinema was the public woman who was readily available onscreen as an erotic object for the spectator's gaze in exchange for the price of a ticket. Prasad notes:

As such the task that the film-makers undertook was not a confrontation with the popular cinema but an education of their audience in narrative form which could



retain its integrity while absorbing the libidinal excess of the polymorphous popular film text. From the contracted voyeurism of the popular film text (and the brothel), the middle-class cinema turned its audience towards a “realist” voyeurism in which sexuality occurred in the depths of screen space, as an attribute of subjectivity.<sup>67</sup>

Indeed, the central narrative and formal tensions in *Dastak* revolve around the neighborhood’s expectation that Salma, a newlywed who moves with her husband Hamid into a modest Bombay flat that happens to be in a red-light district, is a prostitute whose sexuality is on offer to any customer who is willing to pay. The camerawork, as well as the density and porosity of urban spaces, allows passersby within the diegesis—and spectators without—to readily intrude into the private domain of the couple as voyeurs and prospective clients, regarding Salma as a public woman even after they come to know better. Hamid and Salma’s attempt to establish their middle-class respectability in a red-light district unfolds as an allegory of the middle-class cinema’s attempt to establish its respectability in a popular medium associated with the raucous libidinal excess of entertainment, spectacle, and sensual pleasure. As Prasad notes, the constraints on the middle-class aspirations of the young couple in *Dastak*, whose private intimacies are threatened by the gaze of omnipresent voyeurs—including the spectators—are intensified by their marginalized Muslim minority status in a predominantly Hindu milieu.<sup>68</sup>

While *Dastak* has since emerged as a quintessential film in discussions of middle-class cinema, the Indian New Wave, the Hindi film genre of the Muslim social, and the recurrent archetypal dichotomy of the virgin/whore in films from the 1950s and 1960s, *Dastak*, like *Padosan*, invites analyses that attend to sound as a fundamental motif, texture, and problem of urban modernity.<sup>69</sup> For in *Dastak* it is the knock at the door, among other unexpected sounds of urban dwelling, that poses the most severe and uncontrollable threat to the privacy of the couple. The film’s title itself, which means “knock,” highlights the series of ongoing intrusions by strangers who come to the apartment and assume that Salma is, or is like, the woman who had previously occupied it and conducted her business of entertaining men as an artist and sex worker in the tradition of the courtesan-tawaif.<sup>70</sup>

Prasad’s analysis of *Dastak* highlights the voyeuristic gaze that is produced by the film’s camerawork and then redirected by its middle-class, realist narrative as a libidinal excess (of popular cinema). Yet, the uninvited intrusions that violate the couple’s conjugal domain are patently and thoroughly sonic, as much as—if not even more than—they are scopophilic. While similarly constituting the window as a threshold between the public and private, *Padosan* instead defends popular cinema’s audiovisual and libidinal excess precisely for breaching this threshold to engender love-as-cinephilia within a domain of consent and reciprocity between the spectator and cinema. This divergence notwithstanding, the two films ensue from a 1960s context of crises that propelled their deeply reflexive considerations of cinematic form and pleasure in ethical terms, energized by Cold War-era imperatives of cultural diplomacy through cinema, the proliferation of state institutions



CLIP 11. “*baiyaan na dharo*” song sequence from *Dastak* (1970).

To watch this video, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.130.11>



that sought to modernize Indian cinema, and the emergence of a grassroots film society movement.

The very first diegetic song sequence in *Dastak*, “*baiyaan na dharo*,” juxtaposes simultaneous expressive performances of feminine desire across a virgin/whore dichotomy (clip 11). The faint background strains of the same lyrical composition, an offscreen sound, float into Hamid and Salma’s apartment from without. Salma’s recognition of the composition as one that she knows in a different melody motivates her own performance of the song for her husband. Belonging to the musical genre of the *thumri*, the song is coy and suggestive.<sup>71</sup> The initial faint offscreen voice is throaty and low pitched, and the spectator recognizes that it very likely belongs to a sex-worker-cum-entertainer who is singing for her clients, given that the apartment is in a red-light district. Salma’s naïveté is apparent in the fact that she does not pick up on this, and her rendition proceeds in the recognizably high-pitched, saccharine falsetto of star playback singer Lata Mangeshkar, which came to be naturalized to an idealized, virginal femininity.<sup>72</sup> While Salma is expressing her romantic and sexual feelings for her husband, sideways pans and cuts reveal that she, like Bindu in *Padosan*’s bathtub sequence, has an audience of which she is unaware. In *Dastak*, the spectator is aligned with the men in the neighborhood, who perk up at the sound of her voice and approach her window aroused not merely as voyeurs but, more specifically, as eavesdroppers.

This opening song sequence thus characterizes the difference between the vamp and the virgin as a matter of the bodies, vocal textures, address, and spatial context for their expressions of sexual desire, rather than as a difference in the genre of the expressions themselves. In *Dastak* this becomes, in turn, a reflexive allegory for the presence of songs in a cinema that is addressed to a middle-class spectator. The implicit ideological argument is that the difference between the clatter of a vulgar popular cinema—which *Padosan* goes to great lengths to celebrate and defend—and the tunefulness of a middle-class cinema does not lie in the films' oppositional aesthetics per se—for example, in the presence or absence or even divergent genres of songs. Rather, the distinction lies in whether the songs emanate from a domain of propriety and respectability, which circumscribes expressions of feminine sexuality and desire within the private space of conjugality. Directed by Rajinder Singh Bedi, an Urdu writer and member of the Progressive Writer's Association, *Dastak* is infused by an anti-commercial, writerly orientation that rhetorically eschews the gratuitousness of raw audiovisual spectacle epitomized by the libidinal excess of feminine sexuality.

It is in the policing of the boundary between music and noise—of what sounds, from which bodies, and from where are acceptable and pleasing—that the ideological desires of a middle-class cinema overlapped rhetorically with the ideological workings of a patriarchal state. In *Dastak* Hamid is utterly ineffective in blocking the sonic excess—the knocks, for one thing—that continually penetrate the private space of his marital home. Despite the couple's resolve to maintain that Salma's sexuality is not available to the public, Salma is betrayed by the window—that is, the porosity of her private space, which can neither contain her desires nor protect her from desirous others in a (cinematic) world where solicitations and sexual advances are expressed either as music, if properly middle class and respectable, or as noise, if it is in excess of middle-class propriety (fig. 32).

When Salma sings desirously to her husband, her voice, unbeknownst to her, is audible to eavesdroppers. Her entertainment's public availability—even if inadvertently—is interpreted as proof that she is available as a woman of the night. The sounds that in turn enter Hamid and Salma's apartment as unwanted noise—knocks on the door, audible brawls, and the songs of the sex workers who entertain their clients in the red-light district—make Salma perpetually anxious about her sexual desires for her husband. Hamid becomes enraged by his inability to prevent the breaching of boundaries by these various sounds, despite mandating that Salma stay within the confines of the apartment, in the same way that he gifts her a bird and insists that it must not be freed from its cage for its own good.

As Hamid's frustrations come to a head, it is amid the cacophony of the crowd's aural intrusion into the couple's intimate space that Hamid forces himself on Salma in an act of marital rape. Although Salma is newly wedded, the shy couple has not yet consummated their marriage. Halfway through the film, after having gotten into a brawl with neighbors who yet again assume that Salma is available as a sex worker, Hamid seethes with anger and insists that he must have Salma himself

FIGURE 32. Still from *Dastak* (1970):

Here, too, the window is a two-way audiovisual apparatus that both reveals and conceals.



before she is snatched away and enjoyed by another man. Whereas *Padosan* embraces a literal window of opportunity for consensual seduction, Hamid's act of aggression is driven by his inability to control the sounds that flout the boundaries between the private, intimate space that he shares with his wife and the space of the public bazaar outside. As the marital rape unfolds fully within the confines of the apartment, the audible tide of a roaring crowd below surges up as an offscreen sound into the frame of the couple's private space. This is the only sound besides the dialogue between Hamid and Salma as he rapes her. In this way, noise—as unwanted sonic intrusions and leaks—becomes a central motif in both *Padosan* and *Dastak* for sexual exchanges that spill over the boundaries of middle-class propriety. The *lakshmana rekha*, or mythic patriarchal barrier within which the honor of a married woman is impervious to violation so long as she stays within its demarcation, is apparently not soundproof.

Discourses of noise in South Asia arise as a problem of modernity specifically because of sounds' abilities to flagrantly violate the spatial and social autonomy of the public and private, whose gendered binary has been central to dominant articulations of a national modernity.<sup>73</sup> *Dastak* thus dramatizes noise as a conflict between the modern urban organization of middle-class families into atomized units, on the one hand, and the population density and limited availability of affordable private housing in urban centers, which forces strangers to live in cramped quarters and close proximity, on the other.<sup>74</sup> Noise from without crosses the bounded, private arena of the modern couple and nuclear family unit—an arena that is spatially depicted in *Dastak* and other films as that of the middle-class urban apartment, which *Padosan* strongly invokes even in its small-town set(ting). In turn, noise becomes an issue that is inextricable from sexual politics of modernity in South Asia, insofar as the heteropatriarchal control of sexuality has continued to define boundaries of caste, communal identity, and class.

The issue of noise—and characterization of noise as a pollutant, moreover—highlights the conflict between the preservation of sociospatial boundaries of (sexual) purity that scaffold the modern lives of caste, communal identity, and class, on the one hand, and the demand for affordable urban housing that forces proximity to strangers and the omnipresent risk of (sexual) contact that threatens the

patriarchal control of women's sexuality, on the other. Historical and contemporary policies concerning noise pollution, among other environmental issues, have seemed neutral in the rational voice of the state, as it insists on taking action in the name of public good. *Dastak* highlights the segmentation of a listening public into bodies that carry gender, class, caste, and communal identities. The comforts of certain (e.g., upper-middle-class and upper-caste) bodies are differentially and systematically prioritized by a patriarchal statist discourse, just as the propensity of certain bodies (working-class, Dalit, Muslim) to engage in the production of pollution of various kinds is much more frequently assumed.

As the discourse of noise pollution has resurfaced in contemporary India, so, too, have the exclusionary politics that often belie complaints of noise. For example, a controversy spiraled out from a 2007 tweet by Hindi playback singer Sonu Nigam in which he complained, "God bless everyone. I have to be woken up by the Azaan [Islamic call to prayer] in the morning. When will this forced religiousness end in India."<sup>75</sup> Several ordinary citizens, politicians, and Bollywood stars weighed in with various positions, some asking why Nigam chose to single out the azaan when "forced religiousness" emanated just as much from Hindu temples and festivals such as Ganesh Chaturti, Diwali, and Navaratri, among a host of industrial disturbances.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, a follow-up judgment by the Supreme Court regarding noise pollution was issued in October 2005, three months after the initial judgment, which addressed this (communal) elephant in the room: a specifically Indian (if not South Asian) debate over the constitutionality of noise pollution policies that potentially curbed free expression and, more particularly, the free (public) expression of (private) religion. Fascinatingly, the follow-up Supreme Court judgment turned to an editorial published by the "Speaking Tree," a pop-spirituality column in the *Times of India*. The judgment quotes the editorial at length, in order to advance an argument about the inauthenticity of loudspeakers in religious traditions:

Wait a minute. There were no loudspeakers in the old days. When different civilisations developed or adopted different faiths or when holy books were written to guide devotees, they did not mention the use of loudspeakers as being vital to spread religious devotion. So the use of loudspeakers cannot be a must for performing any religious act. Some argue that every religion asks its followers to spread its teachings and the loudspeaker is a modern instrument that helps to do this more effectively. They cannot be more wrong. No religion ever says to force the unwilling to listen to expressions of religious beliefs.<sup>77</sup>

The judgment goes on to reproduce the remainder of the editorial, which selectively quotes passages from the Bhagavad Gita, Qur'an, and Bible to argue that Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity all advise against preaching to those who are unwilling to listen and that loudspeakers are entirely irrelevant to these religious traditions due to their nonexistence when each of the three faiths were established. In averring, "In our opinion [the quoted "Speaking Tree" editorial] very correctly

states the factual position as to the objective of several religions and their underlying logic," the Supreme Court judgment thus exerts its own authority not only as an interpreter of religious texts (via the "Speaking Tree" no less) but also in promoting a conservative position that assumes the establishment of pure, monolithic traditions of world religions that become corrupted with any historical change.<sup>78</sup> I point this out not to argue against the regulation of noise pollution per se but to push the point that the discourse over noise and noise pollution in India—parallel to the politics of noise abatement elsewhere—has been deeply enmeshed with the normalization of problematic discourses and structures of gender, class, caste, and religion, to the extent that they appear apolitical and merely factual.<sup>79</sup>

Just one year before the famous attempt to ban film songs on All India Radio, the erstwhile Indian state of Madhya Bharat passed a Control of Music and Noise Act in 1951. In the same vein as the older version, the redrawn and renamed Indian state of Madhya Pradesh passed its *kolahal niyantran adhiniyam* (Noise Control Act) in 1985, which offers a series of definitions that include the following for loud music, noise, and soft music:

- (a) "loud music" means sound produced on or from band, bag pipe, clarinet, shahnai, drum, bugle, dhole, daf, dafda, nagara, tasha or jhanj and includes any loud sound produced by any other instrument or means. . . .
- (c) "noise" means sound from any source whatsoever of such character as causes or is likely to cause mental or physical discomfort to a man of ordinary sensibility or susceptibility or causes or is likely to cause disturbance in the study. . . .
- (f) "soft music" means sound produced on or from any of the following instruments, namely:
  - (i) sitar, sarangi, ektara, violin, bansi, dilrubam, bin, veena, sarod, jaltarang;
  - (ii) piano, harmoniyam, gramophone, tabla, khanjari, dholak and mridang;
  - (iii) transistor, record-player, stereo or radio in so far as musical programmes only are concerned.<sup>80</sup>

A number of things are striking about these definitions enshrined as law. For starters, the instruments that produce "loud music" and are thereby imbued with the propensity to create noise are all associated with folk and brass band (i.e., nonclassical, nonelite) forms. By objective standards, for example, the daf (which supposedly produces loud music) and the khanjari (which supposedly produces soft music) are similar tambourinelike instruments. A major difference, completely unrelated to volume, is that the khanjari, also known as the kanjira, has been standardized as an instrument in South Indian classical music and dance performance. This, perhaps, merits its inclusion alongside the mridang or mridangam, a barrel drum used for the same purpose. In this way, the post-independence state enshrined notions of propriety that privileged classical forms of expression that came to be associated with upper-class, upper-caste practices as authentic and inoffensive.<sup>81</sup> *Padosan* shrewdly participates in this music/noise polemic by



exaggerating and ultimately rejecting this very hierarchy of bodies, instruments and styles: brahmin versus folk actor, harmonium versus rudimentary household objects, and classical versus film music.

When cast as an object of statist and social control, noise can emerge by default as an unbelonging, threatening outsider—a pollutant, an uncontrolled excess, a hazard. Even when noise is characterized as disembodied, atmospheric, and alien, however, it often remains intimately tied to the bodies that are systemically and violently implicated as similarly unbelonging. Comedy's woeful neglect across the volumes of scholarly writing on Hindi cinema is, perhaps, a symptom of the extent to which comedy's historical status as a "low" form has persisted, alongside its assumed vacuity as mere noisy entertainment. Although *Padosan*, a hugely popular hit comedy, and *Dastak*, a canonical film of the Indian New Wave, may seem to be an odd couple for analysis, their connections are in fact organic, beyond their mere contemporaneity.

As the pages of publication like *Film World* suggest, the 1960s were marked by imperatives to not only produce good cinema but also make use of cinema's potential for doing good in the world. What either of these ambitions looked like—good cinema, on the one hand, and doing good in the world, on the other—was no straightforward matter. An array of films enthusiastically converged over this question even if they diverged in their answers, with *Padosan* and *Dastak* as cases in point. *Film World*, through its orientation that was at once international and intranational, had sought to bring together a fractured world of the "jet age" through cinema's commensurate potential for scale. As the Madras industry continued to produce Hindi films through this period of volatility, it sought new avenues for distribution. Emerging from this ambition, the 1972 India-Iran coproduction *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat* came to fruition as a Madras- and Tehran-backed joint venture that was released in both Hindi and Persian.

*Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat*'s Indian leads include South Indian dancer-actress Waheeda Rehman and *Dastak* lead Sanjeev Kumar, who were by then established as figures of the Bombay industry. The heroine of *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat* is a trafficked Indian singer-dancer in Iran played by Waheeda Rehman, who becomes metonymic for the unregulated overseas circulation of Indian films of questionable quality. *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat* reflexively engages and defends not only the libidinal excess of feminine sexuality in song-dance films but also the material excess of their circulation through unregulated channels of informal and clandestine distribution. *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat* recuperates the value of popular cinema amid disillusionment with not only state-driven internationalisms, but also the nation-state itself. As I detail in the next chapter, the material contexts and ethical stakes of the long 1960s culminate in the film's ekphrastic vision of a fraternal postnational world constituted through love-as-cinephilia as an ethical horizon of the popular.