

Foreign Exchanges

Transregional Trafficking through Subah-O-Sham (1972)

The 1967 Hindi film *Ram Aur Shyam* (Ram and Shyam), a comedy of errors that stars Dilip Kumar in a double role, was a production of the Madras-based Vijaya Vauhini Studios under B. Nagi Reddy and Chakrapani. The film was a remake of the 1965 Tamil film *Enga Veettu Pillai* (Son of our house), which was in turn a remake of the 1964 Telugu film *Ramudu Bheemudu* (Ram and Bheem). In a tour-de-force of mistaken identities, reigning stars N. T. Rama Rao and M. G. Ramachandran headlined the double role of separated twins in the Telugu and Tamil versions, respectively. The Telugu version was the maiden venture of the Hyderabad-based Suresh Productions, and the films marked major successes for the young filmmaker Tapi Chanakya, who directed all three. Among Chanakya's first films was the 1955 film *Rojulu Marayi* (The days have changed), in which Waheeda Rehman, who would go on to become a major star in the Bombay industry, made her screen debut as a dancer. Rehman, a classically trained dancer who hailed from an Urdu-speaking Deccani (South Indian) Muslim background, was first cast in Hindi films by filmmaker Guru Dutt, which launched her career in the Bombay industry in the mid-1950s. Over the 1960s, she remained a leading star of Hindi cinema. Rehman's hits in this period included the aforementioned *Ram Aur Shyam*, a Madras-produced Hindi remake of a Tamil remake of a Telugu remake. All three versions were directed by Chanakya, in whose earlier Telugu film Rehman had made her screen debut as a dancer twelve years prior.

Such an account only scratches the surface of cross-industry networks of production and labor—in their most visible instances of circulating stars and directors—between media capitals both within India, and as a wider phenomenon of the global 1960s. The 1972 film *Subah-O-Sham* (From dawn to dusk), whose Persian title is *Homa-ye Sa'adat* (Bird of happiness), seems an exceptional instance of

a high-profile international coproduction via Bombay. The film was released in both Hindi and Persian versions, and it features by-then Hindi film star Waheeda Rehman in a transnational love story opposite Persian film star Fardeen, with Hindi film star Sanjeev Kumar playing Fardeen's brother. Indeed, there was no other India-Iran coproduction to speak of during this period. Yet, the ostensibly exceptional joint venture of *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat* was nonetheless beholden to other continuities, including the contemporaneity of other joint ventures that emerged from ambitions in both India and Iran to engage the world through cinema.¹ Emerging as yet another drop in a steady trickle of transnational prestige productions, *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat* also ensued from a wave of Madras-produced Hindi films. Written by B. Radhakrishna, the film was coproduced by the Madras-based Shree Ganesh Prasad Movies and Tehran-based Ariana Studios. It was directed by Chankaya—the director in whose 1955 Telugu film Waheeda Rehman had made her debut and in whose Hindi film *Ram Aur Shyam* she had starred as Hindi film star Dilip Kumar's love interest.

In *Ram Aur Shyam*, Dilip Kumar plays a double role of long-lost twins who happen to cross paths and end up switching their identities.² One twin is a painfully shy heir to the fortune of a wealthy household who meekly suffers the villainy of his avaricious brother-in-law, and the other twin is a charismatically outgoing and mischievous country boy who has grown up under the care of an adoptive mother in a village. While Waheeda Rehman is cast as a wealthy, educated young woman who is the love interest of one twin, actress Mumtaz plays the role of a village belle who is the love interest of the other twin. The film marked a huge break for Mumtaz, brokered by comic star Mehmood's insistence that Dilip Kumar cast her in the film. Kumar's published autobiography details the calculations that gave tremendous decision-making power to a leading hero when it came to casting a heroine:

[Producer] Nagi Reddy was all admiration for Saira [Banu] and her recent performances and was certain that her pairing with me in the comedy situations would be a huge draw since she possessed a wonderful flair for spirited comedy. Since it was my practice to take an active interest in the making of my film, I voiced my opinion that I did not agree with Nagi Reddy on this issue because I felt she was too delicate and innocent in appearance for a character that had to have loads of seductive appeal and a bold, buxom appearance. At the same time, Mehmood Ali, the famous comedian, was persistent that for this role we should cast vivacious Mumtaz, his co-star in many of his and wrestler Dara Singh's movies. He was so sincere in his recommendation of her that he even carried tins of film reels depicting Mumtaz to exhibit how talented she was. Mumtaz eventually bagged that role.³

The same publication features musings by others about Dilip Kumar, and it includes a recollection of this casting decision from Mumtaz's perspective. She

offers a glimpse into the hierarchies of bodies and labor that were attached to hierarchies of production values and market values of A versus B versus C films and to notions of quality. Mumtaz recalls:

I owe my rise in Bollywood as a star and an actress of consequence to Dilip Sahab. At the time when comedian Mehmood suggested my name to Dilip Sahab for a role in *Ram Aur Shyam* (released in 1967), I was mostly working in films starring the famous wrestler Dara Singh, apart from Mehmood himself. The Dara Singh films came under the “C” category in commercial terminology. As a result some heroes who were nowhere near Dilip Sahab in stature were refusing to work with me. . . . It was in such a scenario that Mehmood took tins of reels of a film starring me with him to Madras to show Dilip Sahab who was looking for a heroine to play the rustic character opposite the character Ram. It was very good of Mehmood to take the trouble because he and I were a good successful team and, in normal circumstances, no actor would like to break a successful team and go all out to recommend his heroine to a superstar and pave the way for her rise. . . . Just imagine the scenario. An actress who has faced the humiliation of being rejected by a few A-list lead actors is picked by the legendary thespian Dilip Kumar to star opposite him. It made sensational news. I remain eternally indebted to Dilip Sahab for changing the course of my career. Overnight, after the announcement of the casting appeared in the media, I was in great demand.⁴

In Mumtaz’s description, stardom unfolds as embodied, speculative quality that directly impacts the valuation of both the star and the film. It is a category of labor that the star internalizes as a sense of personhood, as the star is slotted into tiered categories of films. Both Kumar’s and Mumtaz’s anecdotes emphasize the power of men in industry hierarchies in a casting decision that was fully negotiated between men (the producer, the leading star, the comic star–friend), with the leading hero having final say.

The above anecdotes set the stage for a tail end of a long 1960s period that had teemed with world-making aspirations through cross-industry, multilingual film projects that espoused explicit commitments to collaboration and exchange, alongside attempts to make use of both extant and new channels of distribution. Hierarchies of business remained interlaced with deeply personal networks, and men—whether stars, producers, or distributors—often reigned over decision making through their speculative assessments of value and risk. While *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa’adat* presents itself as an India-Iran coproduction, an account of the film solely through its dual nationality not only flattens the involvement of Madras, Bombay, and Tehran as three networked media capitals but also obscures the film’s endeavor as a global-popular rather than state-driven practice of world-making. Neither the actress Mumtaz nor the comic actor Mehmood were part of *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa’adat*. Yet, their own backgrounds recall material histories of business, travel, and commodity circuits across South and West Asia, which contextualize the India-Iran coproduction *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa’adat*

in networks that predated the emergence of and did not necessarily go on to align with the ambitions of their respective modern nation-states.

Like several others who ended up in the Bombay film industry, neither Mumtaz nor Mehmood's families were native to Bombay.⁵ Mumtaz hailed from an ethnically Afghan family in Mahshad, Iran, and her father was a dry fruits vendor who traveled to Bombay for business, where Mumtaz grew up with her mother following her parents' divorce when she was an infant.⁶ Mehmood hailed from a South Indian nawabi (princely) background. When his father was an infant, the family left for Mecca by sea, for the dual purposes of pilgrimage and job-seeking.⁷ In 1920, just a few years after their arrival, a storm hit Mecca and left some members of the family dead and the others bereft of means. Mehmood's aunt, suddenly a teenage widow, boarded a ship for Bombay with her brother, Mumtaz Ali.⁸ As a child wandering around Bombay, young Ali happened to befriend B. G. Horniman, the British editor of the *Bombay Chronicle*. Ali eventually formed a theatre company, and one day, Horniman introduced him to Himanshu Rai, who had established the famed Bombay Talkies film studio with his wife, Devika Rani. Ali eventually joined Bombay Talkies studio as a dancer in the early 1930s.

Accounts of both Mumtaz's and Mehmood's arrivals in Bombay emphasize histories of trade, empire, and routes of pilgrimage across South and West Asia and an Indian Ocean world in which the port city of Bombay constituted a key node of travel and commerce. *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat* stands out as a unique cross-industry collaboration that nonetheless emerged from extant, robust networks of transregional travel and commerce, which included thriving informal practices of film distribution. Where the 1957 *Pardesi/Khozhdenie Za Tri Morya*, as discussed in chapter 3, paints travel and trade as the domain of men who, like its hero Afanasy, move across the world while women remain rooted in the home and nation, *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat* spotlights an uprooted and ultimately re-rooted heroine who moves as an exploited object within illicit circuits of trafficking. *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat*'s milieu of seedy networks of exploitation allegorically invokes the contemporaneous context of Indian films' informal circulation in Iran and the Middle East, more generally, as referred to, for example, in a 1963 Indian state agency's lament in a trade journal that "third-rate [Indian] films are imported at cheap prices and exhibited in the Iranian market."⁹

Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat reflexively extols "foreign exchanges" not only through commercial film production but also through commercial film distribution. The film forwards an ethical vision of popular cinema as a medium of world-making through a distinction between economies of greed and solidarities of love. The figure of Waheeda Rehman's character Shirin, a trafficked Indian singer-dancer in Iran, becomes metonymic for the trafficked object of the Indian song-dance

film. The film reflexively defends the value of even ostensibly low-quality, “cheap” films in their potential to transcend their circumstances and engender a postnational, fraternal world borne of love/cinephilia rather than marriage/transaction. *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa’adat* conflates the libidinal excess of song-dance films with the libidinal excess of feminine sexuality in order to argue the (re)productive potential of both as a means of world-making through love/cinephilia.

While Shirin, as a fallen woman, becomes metonymic for the trafficked film object, *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa’adat* does not place the burden of reform entirely on her. Instead, *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa’adat* emphasizes the (re)productive potential that equally lies in the lover’s (cinephilic) regard for even the fallen woman’s purity of heart. This love redeems Shirin from the trafficked context of her cross-cultural mobility in order to engender a postnational future that emerges from a genuinely impassioned, loving, cross-cultural (cinematic) affair. *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa’adat* ekphrastically extols popular cinema as a uniquely convertible, feminine token of exchange for producing a world forged in an ethos of fraternity. In part, this diegetic allegory was underlain by the ostensible status of the star dancer-actress as both exceptional to Indian cinema and translatable as a source of exchange value across commercial industries both within and beyond India.¹⁰ For Iranian audiences, the figure of the singing dancer-actress was familiar through not only the popularity of Indian films in Iran but also the prominence of sequences motivated by the contemporaneous trope of the café dancer in popular Iranian films.

In an intriguing manner, the narrative of *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa’adat* refers to a material history of Indian films’ overseas distribution. Practices of unregulated distribution easily escape the radar of official records, and a major challenge of piecing together their histories is that their fragmentary traces are spread across multiple locations and languages. Intensely reflexive cross-industry productions like *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa’adat* straddle multiple locations that were already networked through transnational circuits of film distribution. The films themselves thus emerge as robust historical artifacts, whose layers reveal their material practices of production, formal strategies, and dual address to audiences split by both language and location, vis-à-vis two or more distinct commercial-industrial cinematic contexts.¹¹

While perusing periodicals, parliamentary proceedings, and trade journals in an attempt to excavate histories of Bombay films’ overseas circulation over the 1960s, I came across a few mentions of a smuggling ruse involving waste celluloid headed for bangle factories. Over the 1960s, large quantities of celluloid waste—that is, film scraps—were being imported by Indian manufacturers of brightly colored, cheaply produced plastic bangles, which were in turn being exported for valuable foreign exchange. In what follows, I detail the material and affective economies of (waste) celluloid vis-à-vis the bangle scheme as revelatory of the politics

of sexuality in the Indian state's concerns over smuggling and its endeavors to both regulate overseas film distribution and encourage the influx of foreign exchange. I go on to highlight the ways in which *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat* depicts and responds to the issue of Indian films' unregulated overseas distribution through its gendered constructions of cinema, pleasure, and world-making.

What finally emerges is not only a remarkably "colorful" story but also an opportunity to consider the materiality of celluloid as plastic and to insist that the stakes of film import-export regulation, as well as overtures of diplomacy through cinematic coproduction, remained intimately concerned with questions of modernity and sexuality. In its attempts to regulate overseas distribution over the 1960s, an Indian statist discourse often presumed that the capital excess of illicit circulation (e.g., films that were being smuggled) entailed the libidinal excess of illicit content (e.g., exploitation and poor-quality films circulating as Indian culture).¹² In allegorically framing Shirin as trafficked feminine cinematic object from India, *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat* both assumes and reorients the heteropatriarchal terms of Indian statist anxieties over unregulated overseas distribution. *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat* thus engages, and itself emerged from, a material history of Indian films' circulation through a transregional economy of cheaply produced, discarded, and repurposed plastic commodities.

Amid the financial crises and food grain shortages in India during the 1960s, the plastic bangle manufacturing sector constituted a significant, growing export industry that was bringing in valuable foreign exchange.¹³ A 1965 Indian trade journal report shows that among other plastic goods, bangles trailed only polythene lined jute, PVC cloth and sheeting, and plastic raw materials in terms of export earnings.¹⁴ With plastic bangle manufacturers having consolidated their interests into the All India Celluloid Bangles Manufacturers' Association (AICBMA), the industry was a prolific one.¹⁵ With the 1962 onset of the Sino-Indian war, foreign exchange earnings were touted as a patriotic imperative. "Save Foreign Exchange," urges the headline of a December 1962 *Times of India* brief, which goes on to report that the state of Maharashtra's minister for industries attended a meeting of the AICBMA in order to emphasize "the need to save foreign exchange and divert it for purchasing arms to meet Chinese aggression."¹⁶

More than a decade later, after the Bombay Municipal Corporation levied an 8 percent sales tax on plastic bangles, a press report cites the potential loss of foreign exchange as an oppressive consequence of the increased tax on plastic bangles:

Though a small-scale industry, the plastic bangle is an important foreign exchange earner. Annual exports of plastic bangles, started in 1957–58, are now of the order of Rs. 90 lakhs per annum. Bombay is an important centre for this industry.¹⁷

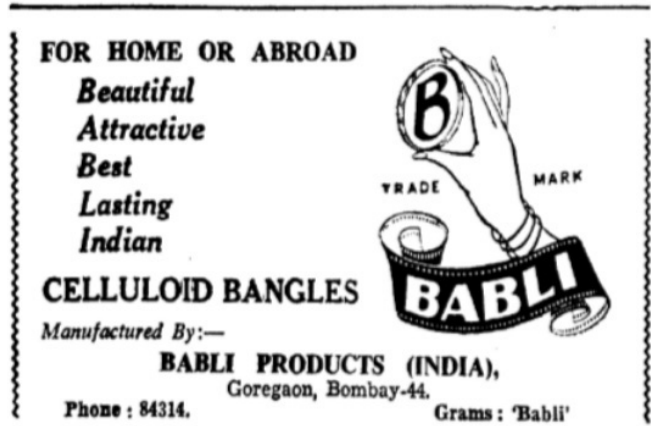


FIGURE 33. Advertisement for Babli Celluloid Bangles.

The report additionally mentions the dissatisfaction of the “all-India plastic bangles manufacturers’ association” with “the imposition of heavy import duties on raw materials.” Referring to AICBMA as a *plastic* bangles manufacturers’ association, the report suggests an interchangeability between celluloid and plastic in this particular manufacturing context. In contrast, the defendant of a 1962 court case tried to argue that as a seller of celluloid bangles, he was not subject to a special tax levied on the sale of plastic bangles. Ultimately, invoking the authority of none other than the Encyclopedia Britannica, the Maharashtra High Court “negatived [no pun intended!] the applicant’s contention that the bangles were made of cinematograph films . . . and therefore were not made of plastics.”¹⁸

Among the raw materials used to produce plastic bangles was waste celluloid, cheaply imported in large quantities. This association was popularly known. In his foreword to an anthology of filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini’s poetry, for example, filmmaker James Ivory remarks on the instability of celluloid and loss of films that are not adequately preserved: “In India, old films are sometimes made into women’s bangles; when a film is a flop, it’s said to have ‘gone to the bangle factory.’”¹⁹ The mythologized trope of the film-turned-bangle is a variant of other similar tropes throughout the history of cinema, from varnish²⁰ to silver earrings, to clicking heels,²¹ to bangles. Invoked as the fate that awaits discarded celluloid, these objects spectacularly render the failure of films that are far better off as mere trifles, with their conversion into feminine accessories putting a fine point on the films’ inconsequence. Given the popular knowledge that waste celluloid was a raw material for the production of plastic bangles, this material relationship between cinema and plastic bangles also came to imbue the latter commodity, as a women’s fashion item, with the popular allure of contemporaneous moving images—colorful, decorative, modern, feminine, sensual. In some advertisements, the glamour of this association was explicitly invoked (fig. 33).

In 1963, the Indian government established the India Motion Pictures Export Corporation (IMPEC). Between its founding in the early 1960s and dissolution into the National Film Development Corporation by the late 1970s, what repeatedly arises across parliamentary proceedings and press reports is that the principal impetus for IMPEC's founding was twofold: to nationalize export in order to curtail film smuggling and access the valuable foreign exchange that was being otherwise lost to racketeers, in addition to regulating the kinds of films that were being imported as well as exported. A 1989 report on national communication policy, published by the Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilisation, characterizes the aims of the erstwhile entity in these very terms: "In 1963, the India Motion Pictures Export Corporation was set up to streamline the export of films. The corporation ensures that foreign films brought into India are worthwhile and culturally relevant."²²

Despite the touted success of IMPEC's dealings in a dedicated "Filmotsav 78" film market, which was held in Madras and concluded with the sale of "100 movies fetch[ing] Rs. 17 lakhs," IMPEC's forays into controlling overseas film distribution was largely a story of failure.²³ A 1980 national film policy report published by the Indian Ministry of Information and Broadcasting includes a postmortem of sorts on IMPEC, which, along with the Film Finance Corporation, had been folded into the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC). While lauding some inroads made by IMPEC toward its twin goals of serving as "the sole canalising agency for the export of Indian feature films," which was intended to in turn "promote export of Indian films and discourage malpractices," the report ultimately concludes that IMPEC fell short on both counts due to its inability to establish and nourish robust networks with overseas distributors.²⁴ "In other words," the report states, "IMPEC had become [yet another] competitor of Indian exporters basically in the field of exporting Hindi films which were already being handled by [several] commercial exporters."²⁵

As a story of export regulation attempts and failures therein, the story of IMPEC attests to the very robustness of a thriving, unregulated network of commercial film distribution via Bombay. In addition, IMPEC's rather general aim of "discourag[ing] malpractices" begs the question of what such "malpractices" might have encompassed and what, exactly, IMPEC sought to gain from nationalizing film distribution. Several overlapping concerns emerge, which also point to the difficulty of fixing cinema as an object. Even saleable units, for example, range from the individual print to the negative, to more abstract notions of intellectual property.²⁶ Concerns over the smuggling ruse involving plastic bangle industries came to light alongside the activities of IMPEC: according to parliamentary proceedings and press reports, sex and exploitation films, also known as blue films, were being clandestinely relayed from the Middle East, disguised as waste celluloid headed for bangle factories.²⁷

In the case of the bangle scheme, statist concerns over both film contraband and unauthorized channels of celluloid export-import sought to exert control over

a range of ostensible excesses. Anxieties over informal cash flows were figured as the exploitation of Indian culture—coded as feminine—among unknown foreign bodies. Through such a stance, the state assumed the very objectifying heteropatriarchal gaze that feminist scholars have critiqued as a dominant structure of exploitation, which can operate across a range of films from pornography to mainstream commercial films.²⁸ Subsequent feminist scholarship, in the wake of 1970s psychoanalytic theories of the male gaze, has insightfully argued that with regard to practices of reception, pornographic content in itself does not automatically entail uncritical objectification, just as non-pornographic content in itself does not preclude the same.²⁹ In the case of IMPEC, statist anxieties over the excess of unregulated film distribution were interwoven with anxieties over the excess of feminine sexuality, as they overlapped in a material and affective economy of mass-produced plastic commodities that encompassed bangles, waste celluloid, popular Hindi cinema, and blue films.³⁰

Associations between black money, the Bombay film industry, and the Middle East as a haven for smuggling have long been reported and dramatized in the Indian public sphere.³¹ Indeed, in the expected absence of a readily accessible paper trail left by agents operating within unofficial or illicit film distribution networks, much—including the methodological question of how one excavates such histories—remains crucially beholden to imaginative conjecture over potential avenues of historiography. My own inadvertent discovery of the bangle scheme was fully indebted to its happenstance discovery by journalists and state authorities in the 1970s, as a result of which it was documented in parliamentary proceedings as well as local press reports. As a set of practices, this history of illicit film distribution draws attention to the materiality of celluloid and its impact on circulation. To put it another way, the same ruses would not have worked for smuggling VHS tapes and vice-versa.

Under the headline “Where Smuggling is King,” a 1974 Indian newspaper report notes that “blue films are imported illegally against the clandestine export of Hindi feature films to West Asian countries.”³² This particular scheme is mentioned as one that worked hand in hand with others, according to another Indian newspaper article published seven months later:

A flourishing racket in the smuggling in crime-sex thriller films has come to light. According to one estimate, about 50 films a year are smuggled in from abroad. . . .

The smuggled films are exhibited mostly in rural and semi-urban areas either with forged censor certificates or without certificates, according to censor board officials.

Among the methods adopted to smuggle the films in are (A) getting them under the garb of waste films, meant for the bangle industry and (B) substituting the thrillers for Indian films to be brought back after exhibition abroad. The sources said that the bangle industry was permitted to import waste film as raw material and this was exploited by smugglers.³³

The former article refers to “West Asian countries” generally, as a key conduit for sourcing sex films in the guise of returning prints of Indian feature films. The latter article not only reiterates this particular scheme but additionally describes the practice of clandestinely importing “thrillers” in the guise of waste celluloid headed for bangle factories for subsequent illegal exhibition in “rural and semi-urban areas” within India. Together, these reports draw attention to the porosity—even interdependence—of manifold distribution practices and film objects that lie along a continuum between licit and illicit, epitomized by the trope of smuggled films disguised as returning prints. The precise contents of such films remains unclear: Were they pornographic? Were they C films that, in actress Mumtaz’s aforementioned description, included wrestling and stunt films? Or were they merely smuggled films that were presumed to harbor illicit content because of their unauthorized circulation or the less desirable audiences (e.g., “rural and semi-urban”) who were viewing them?

While the press reports play up the more sensational, lurid aspects of the above schemes, Indian parliamentary proceedings reveal far more generalized anxieties over controlling overseas distribution. The question of regulation emerges in the proceedings as not merely a matter of seizing contraband (e.g., sex films and black money) but, much more so, as a conundrum over having arrived late to the party, so to speak, with the establishment of IMPEC constituting a floundering attempt to retroactively exert control over an already-thriving set of ad hoc networks of overseas film distribution.³⁴ The perceived stakes are revealed in these proceedings to be about the loss of foreign exchange and tax income, which was in turn projected as a set of patriarchal anxieties over what kinds of moving images were circulating as Indian culture among overseas patrons. In this logic, the cinematic object of statist regulation is rendered feminine, and the state’s own heteropatriarchal gaze is presumed as the operative one on the part of overseas patrons as well.

An import tax was levied on celluloid waste, which sparked widespread opposition among the AICBMA. Members of the manufacturers’ organization somewhat predictably accused the government of curtailing the livelihoods of their scores of workers in addition to curbing the valuable foreign exchange that the plastic bangle industry was contributing to the Indian economy through their export dealings.³⁵ Eventually, the attempts to curtail film smuggling with a tax on waste celluloid—and more generally, IMPEC’s endeavor to “canalise” the export of celluloid reels—failed. Akin to the postmortem on IMPEC that appears in the 1980 national film policy report, the “Questions and Answers” portions of parliamentary proceedings that were recorded on at least two occasions between 1973 and 1974 reveal a set of grave concerns. They admit tremendous difficulties in reliably reporting the number of Indian films being exported, the films that were being exported, to where they were being exported, and the amount of money that was involved. In detailing the bangle scheme having come to light, the proceedings

acknowledge both the ingenuity of such schemes as well as their proliferation, noting that the bangle scheme was certainly but one among several other sophisticated, as-yet-unknown methods.³⁶

The ingenuity of the bangle scheme in particular is strikingly cinematic by virtue of not only the bangle's material associations with celluloid but also its status as a physical object that, like cinema, is imbued with properties of aural and visual expression and deeply associated with negotiations of modern feminine sexuality. Glass bangles in many South Asian communities were held to be a quintessential—even talismanic—accoutrement for a married woman. In several instances, a refrain of “out with the old, in with the new” characterizes reports about the ascendant popularity of the plastic bangle from the 1950s onward as a replacement for the more traditional, highly audible glass bangle. A 1953 newspaper report, for example, laments the fact that “one of the ancient small-scale industries of our country with an All-India demand, the glass bangles industry is now in desperate straits unable to meet the competition of plastic bangles.”³⁷

In another instance almost two decades later, the replacement of glass bangles by plastic bangles is similarly invoked—albeit slightly less melancholily—in a letter to the editor about the impact of modernization upon small towns in North India:

The biggest and most noticeable change is in the number of radios and transistors in the villages. When I came to live here I was perhaps the second or third radio licence holder in the village. Since then the number has gone up many times.

The vegetable vendor is here and the goods that other vendors sell have changed. Glass bangles and coarse cloth have been replaced by plastics, table cloth, lip-stick, nail polish and bright-patterned cloth of synthetic fibre. Young girls wear tight shirts and *chudidars* and none of the village elders even take notice of this. Daughters-in-law only make a pretense of veiling their faces. In panchayat meetings female members, generally middle aged women, enthusiastically participate in decision making.³⁸

For the author, the glass bangle's replacement by the plastic bangle heralds the onset of modernity not only as an influx of communication technologies (e.g., radios) but more particularly, as growing brazenness on the part of women who are more aware of their sexuality, expressive of desires for fashionable commodities, less modest, and more vocal as decision makers in public—rather than merely domestic—spaces.

An ambivalence toward the plastic bangle as a sign of the “modern,” associated with shifting gender roles, commodity consumption, fashion, and cinema, underlay contemporaneous reports of the potential dangers that it could pose to its wearers. These included bad luck, according to a 1971 report that “plastic bangles are being thrown away in their thousands in Surat following a rumour that they bring ill-luck.”³⁹ The author remains skeptical, wryly surmising that “perhaps, the Surat rumour is the handiwork of a shrewd manufacturer of glass

bangles or an imaginative goldsmith,” before confidently concluding that “plastic bangles will undoubtedly survive the malaise.”⁴⁰ A few years later, a news story reported on the bizarre instance of an “upcountry merchant” traveling to a city, purchasing celluloid bangles, and stashing them with a lawyer friend in that city so that he would not have to carry them around before he was due to catch his homebound train.⁴¹ In the meantime, inspectors happened to visit the lawyer and find the bangles on premises, for which the lawyer was fined:

To keep celluloid-based articles on business premises without a licence is an offence and the lawyer was duly charged. The magistrate did not agree with the lawyer's arguments and fined him Rs. 200. The magistrate said the lawyer, of all the people, should have known the law.⁴²

Celluloid was thus administered as a controlled substance, subject to regulation not only because of the potential dangers posed by its moving-image contents but also because of the apparent dangers posed by virtue of its physical properties (e.g., flammability).

Chief among the plastic bangle's physical properties—and one that was hardly unrelated to its material and affective associations with celluloid and cinema—was its primarily visual allure as a colorful, feminine commodity that was widely affordable and accessible. Its associations with modern femininity and cinema coalesce in a song sequence from Madhusudhan Rao's 1970 Hindi film *Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* (Even the mother-in-law was once the daughter-in-law). In the song sequence, whose lyrics were penned by writer Rajendra Krishan, the hero is outfitted as a bangle seller holding a pole that displays a colorful array of bangles (fig. 34). In the voice of playback singer Kishore Kumar, actor Sanjay Khan croons the song's chorus to his beloved, played by actress Leena Chandvarkar (clip 12):

lelo chuudiyaan, jii lelo chuudiyaan (Take some bangles, yes, take some bangles)
haan niilii niilii piilii piilii (Hey, blue-blue, yellow-yellow)
laal harii aasmaanii (Red, green, azure)

Offered in a romantic overture as spread of colors, the celluloid bangles are visually enticing in their many hues. This is reinforced by the lyrics, and the word *aasmaanii* (azure) is particularly evocative of a playful, modern option among an eye-catching array of choices. The overture is distinctly sensual and erotic, as a marked departure from the glass bangles whose wearing and color—often green, white, or red, according to the customs of a particular community—are expectations and signs of marriage.

In lyrical genealogies of South Asian courtly and folk poetry, the chief attributes of (glass) bangles, as a poetic trope, have included their physical propensities toward chiming, on the one hand, and breaking, on the other. In this textual domain, bangles are largely either a liability for the married woman who must wear them or an aural apparatus that can ventriloquize the desire that she is too

FIGURE 34. Still from *Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* (1970): As a romantic overture, the hero offers an array of colorful plastic bangles to the heroine.



CLIP 12. “*lelo chuudiyaan*” song sequence from *Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* (1970).

To watch this video, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.130.12>



coy to voice.⁴³ These conventional poetic situations include a woman fearing that her bangles may be broken by a lover who grabs her by the wrist, whether the advance is welcome or not, with their breakage portending misfortunes for her husband. Or a woman’s stealthy movements—for example, to meet a lover other than her husband—being betrayed by the clinking of her bangles. Or the clinking of a married woman’s bangles expressing the desire that she is too bashful to voice.

In the “*lelo chuudiyaan*” sequence (clip 12), the sense of “out with the old, in with the new” is thus epitomized by the shatterproof, colorful plastic bangle, whose chief attribute is visual rather than aural and which is chosen by a woman



FIGURE 35. Still from *Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* (1970): As an acceptance of the hero's romantic overture, the heroine stretches out her arm desirously, as the plastic bangles herald sensual pleasure.

of her own volition, rather than prescribed as a formality of marriage. During a brief musical interlude between the man's opening overture and the woman's response, we see Leena Chandvarkar's character slyly removing a gold bangle from her left wrist and transferring it to her right wrist, whereby she is able to display her unadorned left wrist and solicitously sing in the voice of playback singer Lata Mangeshkar (fig. 35):

dedo chuudiyaan, jii dedo chuudiyaan (Give me bangles, yes, give me bangles)
ye suunii hai kalaai merii dhol jaanii (These my wrists are empty, my dear)

Following her rejoinder, Sanjay Khan's character takes the hand that she offers and sensuously slides a plastic bangle along her arm. As he does so, the close shot of Sanjay Khan slipping the bangle on Leena Chandvarkar's arm pans to the right, showing her character to be overcome with pleasure.

This particular sequence, along with a trail of advertisements, press reports, and editorials, explicitly cements contemporaneous gendered associations between women's expressions of sexuality and desire, cinema, and celluloid bangles as a cheap, colorful, modern alternative to the (married woman's) much more audible glass bangles. Whether smuggled films that appeared as mere waste headed for the bangle factory or colorful celluloid bangles that were decorative but did not chime, such "illicit" economies of celluloid point to modes of audiovisual excess that escape statist and patriarchal regulation. In this manner, illicit economies of celluloid waste not only emerge as highly cinematic, both materially and affectively, but also point to a more plastic (pun intended) history of Indian cinema in this period, both domestically and overseas. A media ecology of plastic draws together seemingly disparate histories of cross-industry Madras-Bombay productions, *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Saadat*, the mobile and ostensibly translatable stardom of dancer actresses, waste celluloid, plastic commodities, transregional channels of informal distribution, film smuggling, and debates over excess and sexuality.⁴⁴

A 1967 edition of the *Hindustan Times Weekend Review* features an article whose headline puts forward the question "In the re-vitalisation of the Indian film indus-

try, what is the role of the proposed 'kissing seminars'?" The article, by renowned film critic and historian Chidananda Das Gupta, cites a recent turn of events by which Union Minister of Information and Broadcasting K. K. Shah apparently found himself at the center of a controversy owing to "charges of a 'double standard' between foreign and Indian films around the question of kissing."⁴⁵ Das Gupta notes that as a consequence, Shah "has offered to hold seminars and elicit public opinion on the question: to kiss or not to kiss."⁴⁶ Das Gupta goes on to playfully engage the question, and in doing so, he underscores the conundrums of such proscriptions—even if self-imposed, rather than enforced, practices of censorship⁴⁷—on a medium that is bound to continue to circulate beyond the territorial jurisdiction of a nation:

The problem in regard to co-productions has not arisen but may rear its ugly head. In a production owned by India and another country: whose moral code is to be observed? Will Indian actors be allowed to kiss the foreign girls and vice versa in such films? Will a co-production be considered a foreign film for Indian audiences, or an Indian film for foreign audiences, or an Indian film for Indian audiences?

In the Middle East where quite a few Indian films are exported, codes of public demonstration of sentiments towards the other sex are, if anything, more severe than in India. Should we selfishly consider the morals of our youth and help to corrupt theirs for the sake of a little foreign exchange? What's a little foreign exchange between friends—us and the Arabs? Instances are known of Indian women being asked to cover their fashionably bare midriffs in the streets of Cairo. The sex appeal of Indian films derives more from the bare midriff than any other single sector of female pulchritude. Is it then a friendly act towards these countries to subject them to these sights? . . .

Seminars on kissing, apart from deciding the Indianness of the act and the desirability of performing it on the screen, may profitably go into these finer branches of the problem, so as to settle it once and for all.⁴⁸

Even if somewhat facetious, Das Gupta's remarks refer not only to the prolific export of Indian films to the Middle East, specifically, but also to their presumed circulation as exploitation films owing to their feminine sex appeal among (implicitly masculine) Arab—among other Middle Eastern—audiences. This presumption emerged in part from statist anxieties and their attendant racialized and classist notions of reception and in part from the status of Hindi films as a cheaper commodity in a global film market, by which they became associated with the viewing practices of lumpen masculine audiences.⁴⁹

Das Gupta's larger point is a critique of the double standards by which the censorious, moralist impulse to oppose titillation and stave off the corrupting effects of celluloid seems to apply only to Indian audiences, since the same concerns ostensibly vanished in the face of business opportunities for Indians to earn foreign exchange from overseas audiences. Among overseas audiences, Das Gupta suggests, attractions such as the bare midriff—rather than the kiss—can



FIGURE 36. Production still from *Subah-O-Sham* (1972): Hindi film star Waheeda Rehman with Persian film star Fardeen.



FIGURE 37. Production still from *Subah-O-Sham* (1972): Persian film star Fardeen with Hindi film stars Waheeda Rehman and Sanjeev Kumar.

constitute a veritable peep show. In asking, “What’s a little foreign exchange between friends?” Das Gupta invokes a presumed cultural intimacy between Indians and “the Arabs” by which the cash earned for the sale of an Indian actress’s onscreen sex appeal is little more than a familial exchange to the benefit of both parties. These two senses of “foreign exchange”—as a purely monetary transaction, on the one hand, and as a diplomatic token of friendship, on the other—are central to *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa’adat*’s endeavor as a coproduction (figs. 36, 37).

Furthermore, Das Gupta’s concerns are on point with respect to the issue of onscreen sexuality becoming particularly fraught in contexts of coproductions. The heroine of *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa’adat* emerges as metonymic for Hindi films whose song-dance attractions captivated foreign audiences, and the narrative arc of the film delivers a melodramatic defense of Hindi song-dance films’ potential to buttress foreign exchange in the diplomatic sense of cross-cultural friendship—in contrast to which, foreign exchange as profit and spending power is eschewed as an end in and of itself. The stakes of this disavowal lie in an exaltation of the world-making capacities of cinema through independent—that is, non-state—industry logics, whose commercial priorities are rhetorically eschewed as a primary end in order to distance industry practices from the realm of exploitation

and duplicity. What the film reflexively avows in this manner is the sincerity of its endeavor. Excesses of Hindi cinema—that is, “romance, comedy, and somewhat jazzy music”⁵⁰—are reflexively extolled for their capacity to engender an impassioned excess of love-as-cinephilia, which is rhetorically contrasted to and separated from the excess of profit.

Although Hamid Naficy refers to the “good bit of coproduction history between Iran and India” over the early artisanal period (1897–1941) and subsequent industrializing period (1941–1978) of Iranian cinema prior to the Revolution, *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa’adat*’s self-designation as a “first” is indicative of an ostensibly unprecedented degree of collaboration between the two industries, as the film was aimed at a dual release from the outset.⁵¹ The Madras-based Ganesh Rao Movies oversaw the Hindi version, and the Tehran-based Ariana Studios, the Persian one. Moreover, the film’s aspirational project of cinematic exchange is embedded as a diegetic attraction and ekphrastically argued through the romance that unfolds between Persian film star Fardeen and Hindi film star Waheeda Rehman.

Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa’adat also stands out as distinct from a key earlier moment in the coproduction history between Iran and India when Iranian filmmaker Abdolhossein Sepanta traveled to India and directed the first five Persian talkies in collaborations with studios in Bombay and Calcutta.⁵² In this earlier moment, the primary impetus for collaboration was technology, as Sepanta traveled to India to use the studios’ sound film facilities. The impetus for *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa’adat* was much more thoroughly embedded in an industrial mode of film production, as it offered an opportunity for a Madras studio to capitalize on a market for Hindi films through stars associated with the Bombay cinema, and for a Tehran studio to do the same with a Persian-dubbed version among an audience who was readily familiar with both Hindi and Persian films and stars.

Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa’adat presents itself primarily as a cinematic exchange between stars of the Bombay and Tehran industries—Hindi film stars Waheeda Rehman and Sanjeev Kumar are featured abroad in Iran at the same time that Persian film star Fardeen is featured in a Hindi film. In the Hindi version, the opening credits roll against a nighttime urban background with the camera moving quickly—as if driving—through the colored lights of a city by night. Superimposed text is displayed in bright neon-green letters to the accompaniment of music directors Laxmikant-Pyarelal’s upbeat jazzy score led by horns. The credits are all presented in English, with the exception of the film’s title, which is triply displayed—as was typical for Hindi films at the time—in Roman (English), Devanagari (Hindi), and Nastaliq (Urdu) scripts. The film is declared to be the “First



FIGURE 38. Still from *Subah-O-Sham* (1972): Title credit.

Hindi Film Shot in Iran” (fig. 38), and it takes pride in “Introducing Fardeen (The Matinee Idol of Iran).” Additional credits single out the participation of Iranian crew members and production facilities, making it clear that this Hindi-language version of the film is addressing an audience that is much more familiar with Hindi cinema than with Persian cinema. The credit sequence in the Persian version, in contrast, highlights a flashing, chandelier-like background, accompanied by a score that features ostensibly Eastern instruments.

As Anupama Kapse has noted, Sepanta’s journey in the 1930s to produce the first Persian talkie in collaboration with Ardeshir Irani’s Imperial Film Company of Bombay reveals the status of Bombay as an alluringly modern metropole within networks across South and West Asia.⁵³ What is striking about *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa’adat* is that this relationship seems reversed: while the Persian version emphasizes an India-facing Eastern milieu at its outset, the opening credits of the Hindi version present Tehran as a jazzy, ultramodern metropole in a manner that gelled with a contemporaneous vogue in Hindi cinema for shooting in glamorous international locations like Paris, London, Rome, Beirut, and Tokyo.⁵⁴ The contemporaneous Iranian government under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi supported film coproductions and foreign productions on location, in addition to sponsoring modern architectural projects that aimed to highlight Tehran’s status as modern, cosmopolitan, global city.⁵⁵ While the Iranian film industry at this point had developed ample resources in terms of capital and technology, Indian—as well as Hollywood and Egyptian—films still remained popular enough that they posed a degree of competition to Iranian films in Iran in a way that was completely untrue the other way around.⁵⁶ The dual-star strategy of casting Hindi film star Waheeda Rehman opposite Persian film star Fardeen attempts to strike a sense of balance in the coproduction. Yet, in light of a fundamentally imbalanced field of reception, this highly visible calculation may have been what led to the film’s failure in India.

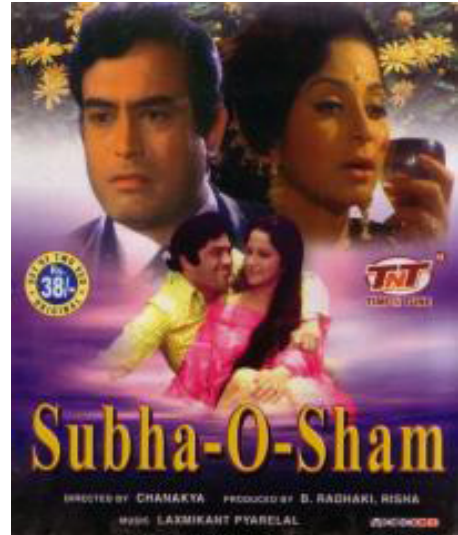


FIGURE 39. Cover image: Time-N-Tune 2007 VCD edition of *Subah-O-Sham* (1972).

In fact, while the Hindi *Subah-O-Sham* is currently available as a nondescript and unsubtitled two-disc set of VCDs released by the Delhi-based distribution company Time-N-Tune (TNT) in 2007, nothing on the VCD's packaging notes that the film is an India-Iran coproduction. Instead, with Waheeda Rehman and Sanjeev Kumar prominently featured in the top image and appearing to be in a sort of embrace in the center image, the VCD cover—taken from a publicity image for the Hindi film—strongly suggests a love story between the two of them (fig. 39), although this is not at all the case in the film. Fardeen, a Persian film star and popular romantic hero also known by his full name Mohammed Ali Fardeen, is in fact the hero of the film. It is he who stars as the love interest of Hindi film actress Waheeda Rehman, and it is their romance that melodramatically unfolds over the course of the film. Sanjeev Kumar, meanwhile, plays Fardeen's fun-loving and kind brother Nasir.

In contrast to both the 2007 VCD packaging of a 138-minute Hindi version⁵⁷ of *Subah-O-Sham* and the packaging of an LP released in India alongside the film (fig. 40), a Persian poster that accompanied *Homa-ye Sa'adat's* Iranian release prominently displays the fact that the film is a coproduction. The poster's artwork highlights close-up, painted renditions of all three leads (Persian film star Fardeen, Hindi film star Waheeda Rehman, and Hindi film star Sanjeev Kumar), and directly below the film's title, the text prominently announces the film as the first Iranian and "Hindi" film to have been undertaken as a coproduction (fig. 41). The fact that Iranian audiences were much more familiar with Hindi films and stars surfaces in subtle ways within the film and certainly in its publicity.⁵⁸ The film's diegetic self-presentation as a genuine coproduction that was motivated by love



FIGURE 40. Cover image: EMI record album of songs from *Subah-O-Sham* (1972).



FIGURE 41. Persian poster for *Homa-ye Sa'adat* (1972).

and friendship, rather than by profit, constituted an overture of cross-industry diplomacy at a moment when Iranian filmmakers were frustrated by the imbalances of exchange, as the popularity of Hindi films in Iran was not accompanied by a reciprocal popularity of Iranian films in India. At the same time, the film constituted a Madras producer's attempt to make a Hindi film that could take advantage of the prestige—and potential returns—of a star-studded transnational coproduction shot on location in Iran.

Among the central preoccupations of a 1971 report on the progress of the Iranian film industry is the issue of competition from Indian films, and the report's insights are critical for understanding the landscape—or perhaps minefield—of film policy, cash flows, and histories of transregional distribution out of which *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat* emerged. The report, published one year before *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat*'s release, notes that it was only very recently that a few Iranian films had finally managed to outcompete their Indian counterparts in Iran.⁵⁹ For the Iranian film industry, the issue was not merely domestic competition with Indian films but also having to compete with Indian films as Iranian films aspired for wider transregional distribution. “In markets like Afghanistan,” the report surmises, “Iranian films need more time to surpass the prosperity of Indian films.”⁶⁰ It adds that the Iranian industry of late was well-poised to finally overtake the popularity of Indian films because of the recent strides it had made in technological and infrastructural investments:

A superior feature of the Iranian movie industry is its excellent and complete equipment. Large amounts of capital and foreign currency reserves have allowed the movie studios to import the most modern type of equipment. . . . Iranian stories are considered more attractive visually than Egyptian or Indian stories. . . . In many cases, audiences are more eager to hear the latest songs by their favorite singers than to see a film. . . . India does not permit Iranian films because it does not want hard currency to leave the country. This closes the Indian market.⁶¹

The report's comparison between Iranian and Indian films is striking in two ways: Firstly, it emphasizes Iranian films' superiority in terms of production values that made their stories “more attractive visually,” in comparison to both Indian and Egyptian films. Secondly, the report diminishes the artistic value of Indian films by construing their songs as an exception and relegating them to a distinctly non-cinematic element that appealed to audiences, by which the films' low quality could then be derived from their inferior stories.

In this contemporaneous context of Iranian filmmakers' concern over Indian films' popularity among Iranian audiences, the reflexive melodrama at stake in *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat* is one of justifying the enterprise of a lucrative singing Indian cinema in Iran. The Persian title *Homa-ye Sa'adat* (Bird of happiness) refers to a mythical bird (*homa*) in Persian lore, which is believed to be perpetually in flight and bestow prosperity upon any person who falls in its shadow. This “bird of happiness” is simultaneously a fitting reference to Waheeda Rehman's character Shirin. For, like the mythical bird perpetually in flight, Shirin is a displaced migrant from India who has inherited her mother's occupation as a dancing girl, akin to the trope of the café dancer that was a staple of contemporaneous Persian films. Shirin is subject to the whims of an older man who basks in the prosperity of her shadow through arranging her dance programs for audiences in Tehran, where he has continued to keep her as a cash cow.

Waheeda Rehman was well-known not only as a dancer-actress but in particular for her roles as the prostitute Gulabo in *Pyaasa* (Guru Dutt, 1957); the courtesan-dancer Rosie who, like Shirin, inherits her profession from her mother in the prestige film *Guide* (Vijay Anand, 1965); and the dancing girl Hirabai in *Teesri Kasam* (The third vow; Basu Bhattacharya, 1966). In *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat*, Shirin first appears in a song sequence that begins within the first few minutes of the film, after she is invited to perform by the host of the party, who introduces her as "Miss Shirin . . . born in India, but an excellent artist of our nation."⁶² The adoption of Shirin as a singer-dancer of "our nation" (i.e., Iran) despite her birth in India parallels the manner in which Hindi films were frequently "adopted" by overseas audiences, sometimes by being redubbed in the languages of their respective target audiences.

Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat's narrative project aims to move Shirin, a dancing girl who has been brought to Tehran from India, out of the stigmatized spaces of exploitation and into an upper-middle-class space of respectability, while simultaneously moving an upper-middle-class strata to accept love rather than socioeconomic status as a (re)productive foundation for world-making. Melodramas that switched around protagonists' class positions were a well-established staple of both Persian and Hindi films, with the Hindi film *Awara* (Raj Kapoor, 1951) being a classic precedent that would have been familiar to both audiences. *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat* puts forward and ultimately pries apart an association between singing Indian films and exploitation/flesh trade through the character of Shirin/Waheeda Rehman, whose diegetic occupation as a dancer from India reflexively pointed to Waheeda Rehman's actual occupation as a star dancer-actress in Hindi films. While Persian films, too, featured café-dancer sequences, popular Hindi films, in Iran among other places, were virtually synonymous with their song-dance sequences.⁶³

In this manner, the coproduction addresses two sets of contemporaneous anxieties. The first was an Indian statist anxiety over informal modes of transregional film distribution by which not only illicit content but also the necessarily lower-class status of such films' patrons were presumed. The second of these anxieties was the sense of unequal exchange on the part of the Iranian film industry, given the one-sided popularity of Indian films in Iran. Through the first song sequence in *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat*, Shirin is presented to the gaze of the audiences both within and outside the film, with the hero Aram (Fardeen) among the diegetic audience. She sings and dances suggestively, and within the film, the pleasure that the Iranian audience takes in her performance is framed as a cosmopolitan appreciation of an Indian art form, evidenced by the host's introduction and subsequent repetition of the fact that she is "born in India, but an excellent artist of our nation." Shirin wears the unmistakably Indian garb of a saree, in sharp contrast to the audience of upper-middle-class Iranians outfitted in formal, Western attire (fig. 42).

FIGURE 42. Still from *Subah-O-Sham* (1972): Shirin's clothing marks her as Indian, in contrast to the upper-middle-class Iranians outfitted in formal Western attire.



Throughout the film, Shirin's Indian origins are visually highlighted by her attire, which continues to stand out against the Western-style attire of the Iranian characters who surround her. Shirin's visually marked identity as an Indian singer-dancer in Tehran constitutes an address toward the film's contemporaneous Iranian audiences for whom Indianness would have been equated with the song-and-dance-based Hindi films that were popular in Iran at the time. In a heavy, drunken stupor as she dances, Shirin sings (synced to playback singer Lata Mangeshkar's omnipresent falsetto), "*chhod meraa haath mujhe piine de, aaj saarii raat mujhe piine de*" (Let go of my hand, that I may drink, All through this night, let me drink). In the Persian version, her status as a fallen woman is emphasized in sequences that show her ordering and downing vodka at a bar. These scenes of her gratuitous drinking at a bar are not in the Hindi version, perhaps because its associations would have tipped her over into vamp territory.

Both black-and-white and color YouTube clips from *Homa-ye Sa'adat*, the Persian version, indicate that several of the song sequences in the film were dubbed in Persian, many of which feature the voice of Googoosh, a sensational star-singer in Iran.⁶⁴ Googoosh's Persian version of the first song begins with the refrain "*maste mastam kon*" (Make me drunk). Known for her stylistic impersonations, Googoosh adopts a high-pitched falsetto that imitates the high-pitched singing style of playback star Lata Mangeshkar in her Persian versions of the film's songs.⁶⁵ A few user-uploaded YouTube clips from *Homa-ye Sa'adat* are stamped with the insignia of Iranian Television Network (ITN), a satellite channel that targets diasporic Persian audiences. Yet, the clips from the film that were ostensibly captured and uploaded to YouTube from ITN broadcasts are color Hindi versions of the song sequences, which additionally feature Arabic subtitles.⁶⁶ A more complete 122-minute Persian version features a mix of songs in Hindi and Persian, sung by Lata Mangeshkar and Googoosh, respectively. This indicates—as per the aforementioned 1971 report on the progress of the Iranian film industry—that

the reception of Hindi song-dance sequences among overseas, non-Hindi-speaking audiences over the postwar decades (and after) was not contingent on formal translation. Formal translations of Hindi films' dialogue through dubbing or subtitling were undertaken in some cases by independent overseas studios and distributors, whether as a matter of national film policies or as a matter of preference in specific reception contexts.⁶⁷

In fact, Googoosh's official recording of Persian versions of the film's Hindi songs was something of an exception. Song lyrics were rarely translated, even when Hindi films' dialogues were dubbed or subtitled in this period. It is crucial to recognize, however, that audiences actively labored and learned to understand the formal and gestural languages of the melodramatic and song-dance films, whose expressive qualities resonated among them. This is evident through the fact that *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat*'s scores were different in the Persian and Hindi versions. While the duo Laxmikant Shantaram Kudalkar and Pyarelal Ramprasad Sharma, known as Laxmikant-Pyarelal, composed the score for the Hindi version as well as the songs for both versions, renowned film composer Rubik Mansuri composed the score for the Persian version.⁶⁸ In the case of contemporaneous commercial remakes across languages and industries within India, too, such translations of music and songs were par for the course, through practices that were specific to each linguistic-industrial cinematic context. This strongly pushes against received notions that music and songs were automatically and immanently legible and translatable without any decoding across cultural, national, and linguistic boundaries.

Thus, while songs—or, at times, entire films that resorted to visual externalizations of inner conflicts—were untranslated and did not depend on formal translations, this did not mean that they were automatically less sophisticated in their creative production, less meaningful for audiences, or less exacting on audiences' intellectual capacities in comparison to films that happened to have higher production values and formal translations. This bias, I contend, was prevalent among critics through Hollywood-centric Anglophone discourses and Eurocentric discourses of world cinema. The influence of Euro-American discourses of quality was often palpable in third world contexts' espousal of modernizing aspirations for their cinemas.⁶⁹ In official and written discourses about cinema in both Iran and India, for example, aesthetic notions of a given film's quality were often naturalized to a film's economic value and presumed proximity to an idealized spectator: bourgeois, cosmopolitan, educated, modern.⁷⁰

In the aforementioned 1963 trade journal report, for example, an Indian state agency expresses concerns over the respectability of Indian culture being tarnished through unregulated economies and base forms of "third-rate films." This concern plays out in *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat* through a tug-of-war between a defensive avowal of Shirin's art as a sincere form of expression and the circumstances in which her art has been commodified and stigmatized within an

exploitative economy of flesh trade, with her body being sold through her forced labor that is euphemistically characterized as that of a dancing girl.⁷¹ It remains far from incidental that Shirin, as a dancing girl who is metonymic for the song-dance enchantments of Indian cinema, is depicted to be in high demand among Iranian audiences, whose willingness to pay for her entertainments yields a lucrative opportunity the elderly man who in turn exploits her, acting as a kind of manager-pimp. One can easily read the tensions within the film over Shirin's occupation as being tied to her status as a bearer of Indian culture as it is bought, sold, and exchanged through unregulated, sprawling networks of film distribution.

At the same time, however, the film unfolds as being much more specifically about her status as a figure of Hindi cinema and its modes of formal excess, which tended to be naturalized to working-class bodies. The endeavor to pry Shirin's art out of a context of exploitation is a reflexive argument that both avows the song-dance modes of commercial Indian cinema and insists on their scale-making capacity for ethical modes of foreign exchange. The film's material excesses of style foreground a sense of its high production values. Sets, recurring motifs of chandeliers among other décor, costumes, music, and its *mise-en-scène* that ranges from immaculate interiors of homes to bars, nightclubs, and the film's glamorous outdoor locations all work to elaborate its modern spaces of consumption, which emphasize the film's cosmopolitan form and ostensible aesthetic as well as production values.

Through a series of melodramatic twists and turns, romance comes to the rescue, neutralizing the stigma of Shirin's occupation by prying it apart from an economy of commodities. The narrative rescues both the enchantments of her song-dance—that is, the enchantments of Hindi films—and the patronage of her audiences by rendering them as art and love, respectively, in order to relocate Shirin within a transnational, upper-middle-class space of respectability. Her sexuality is repositioned from being a commodity to being a sincere, embodied—and ultimately reproductive—expression of her own desire. It is ultimately not Shirin's art or culture that changes but rather its location, motivation, and reception, as she is shown to enter an upper-middle-class space where she and her arts of song and dance are beloved and organic, rather than forced and exploited. To an extent, this parallels the trade journal report's emphatic recommendation that “the distribution of Indian films has . . . to be entrusted to well established firms for screening at first class halls.”⁷²

By night, public urban space becomes a sinister location of imminent bodily harm to Shirin in the Hindi version, although it is a world that she must inhabit due to her profession as a dancing girl, thereby remaining in a perpetual state of vulnerability. Early in the film, Aram happens to be driving by, and he witnesses the danger that she is in. He quickly gets out of the car, heroically beats up her would-be assailants, and saves Shirin, to whom he offers a ride home.⁷³ She is so intoxicated that once they arrive at her house that Aram ends up getting out of the

car to help her. When he brings her to the bedroom, she looks at him and says, “Ah, so you have come this far? Well, you are a man of the second type [i.e., of another kind]—there is no need for excessive formalities,” as she falls supine on the bed.

The seeming innuendo, as the two are alone in Shirin’s bedroom, leaves Aram uncomfortable and confused, and through the similar-sounding words *qism* (type) and *qasam* (oath) that are indistinguishable through Shirin’s drunken slurring, the Hindi version’s dialogue also incorporates a subtle reference to the 1966 Hindi film *Teesri Kasam*. In *Teesri Kasam*, Waheeda Rehman plays a dancing girl who becomes the love interest of a bullock-cart driver played by Raj Kapoor, and their romance first blossoms over the course of a ride that he gives her. *Teesri Kasam* ends with the bullock-cart driver taking his third and final vow over the course of the film that never again will he transport a dance girl in his bullock cart. After Aram leaves without exploiting Shirin for sex, Shirin reaches for a notepad and reads a note aloud that Aram has scribbled to her along with his phone number: “Respected Lady, Among men, there is a third type as well, whom you have not yet encountered.” In the Hindi version, she wonders aloud, “*tiisrii qism kaa aadmii?*” (Third type of man?), which further extends the subtle intertextual reference to the film *Teesri Kasam*.

In both versions, Shirin soon calls Aram, and they arrange a date at a club. In the Hindi version, she tells him that she would like to meet a man of the “third type.” The respective sounds of generically Middle Eastern melodies of plucked lutes in the Hindi version and percussive sounds of a Middle Eastern drum in the Persian version bridge a cut to a belly dancer at a club. In the Hindi version, this scene opens with a view of a lighted stage in a nightclub, with a dancer beginning to writhe to the opening music of a belly-dance-style cabaret routine (fig. 43). In the Persian version, the dancer is initially framed by a medium shot, as she rapidly shakes her hips. For audiences familiar with Iranian popular cinema, the dancer would have been recognizable as the famous cabaret and screen dancer Fatemeh Sadeghi, popularly known by her stage name Jamileh. Jamileh herself, according to Ida Meftahi, began as a stage performer who “mostly [performed] self-trained [Hindi-film-]style Indian dance.”⁷⁴ In both the Hindi and Persian versions of *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa’adat*, each with its own diegetic music, Jamileh is soon joined by an entourage of dancers. A cut reveals Shirin among the members of the audience, as she attentively watches Jamileh dance while waiting for Aram to join her at their designated meeting place. The cabaret sequence, motivated by the film’s shooting on location in Tehran, presents a racy routine that is emphatically framed as a special display of Iranian culture for its equally cosmopolitan Indian audience, the irony being that Jamileh’s dance style was categorized in Iran as having been drawn from those of Hindi cinema.⁷⁵ Shirin is positioned as the prime (Indian)

FIGURE 43. Still from *Subah-O-Sham* (1972): Belly dance cabaret sequence featuring a cameo by popular Iranian dancer Jamileh.



spectator, who watches the performance intently and appreciatively, while Aram arrives only after it ends.

The nightclub scene further highlights Tehran's jazzy modernity through shots that emphasize, in both versions, social dancing that cuts across genders. When Aram arrives, Shirin tells him that he missed a wonderful performance, to which he replies in the Hindi version, "But I am quite sure that dance would not have been anything like your dance." Aram's compliment leads into a conversation in which he asks her where she learned to dance, and after explaining that her mother was also a dancer, she says in the Hindi version, "Often, that which we cannot say with our tongue we can express so easily through the gestures of dance" (clip 13). Shirin's explanation of gestures' abilities to transcend language barriers is strikingly similar to Sakharam's explanation of Lakshmi's dancing in *Pardesi/Khozhdenie*, as detailed in chapter 3.

Roughly bookending a period of the long 1960s, both films present conversations that explicitly remark that dance in general and expressive, gestural Indian dance styles in particular can transcend barriers of language and speech. In both coproductions, presentations of dance within the film—as ekphrastic invocations of the song-dance sequences for which commercial Hindi films were known abroad—are in this way translated by Indian characters, who teach their foreign companions to appreciate and understand a form whose value and meaning lies in the fact that it can be universally comprehended. While this apparently universal comprehension is paradoxically belied by the Indian characters' explanatory dialogue, in both cases, the cross-cultural value of such gestural modes is acknowledged as being realizable only through the spectator's grasp of their value and openness to learning how to appreciate their expressivity. In *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat*, the initial declaration of "I love you" also occurs not through speech but through gestural modes in both versions.

The fraught cultural politics of dance—especially in terms of its associations with public displays of feminine sexuality—propel defensive justifications of dance as art in both films, although Shirin's occupation as a dancer as well as her status



CLIP 13. Belly dance cabaret sequence from *Subah-O-Sham* (1972).

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.130.13>



as a trafficked woman remain a much more central problem in *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat*.⁷⁶ At one point early in the film, Aram caustically asks Shirin in the Hindi version, “What can be the difference between a prostitute and you?” Later, when she is inside her home, the elderly man who acts as Shirin’s manager urges her to get ready for her evening program, though she refuses, reflecting over Aram’s words and remaining adamant that she no longer wishes to dance for money. Having fallen in love with Aram, Shirin decides that she will dance only to express her love for him and drink only the wine of their love.

The song that constitutes a titular reference in the Hindi version punctuates a reconciliation between Shirin and Aram after Aram apologizes, and the two of them meet along a sparkling beach. Shirin in a peach salwar-tunic bedecked with crystals and Aram in a dapper tan suit wear the glamour of their stardom against a backdrop that offers touristic views of the Caspian Sea (clip 14). Shirin begins to croon, in the voice of Lata Mangeshkar, “*saaqii kii zaruurat hai na jaam kii zaruurat hai, hamko to sanam tere bas naam kii zaruurat hai, subah kii zaruurat hai na*



CLIP 14. “*subah-o-sham*” song sequence from *Subah-O-Sham* (1972).

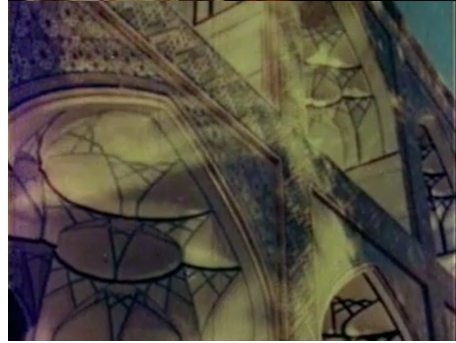
To watch this video, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.130.14>



shaam kii zaruurat hai, hamko to sanam tere bas naam kii zaruurat hai” (There is neither a need for a cup-bearer nor a need for wine, for me, my dearest, there is only the need of your name; there is neither a need for dawn nor a need for dusk, for me, my dearest, there is only the need of your name.) Aram, with whom the audience is aligned in watching Shirin dance, is smitten with love, as the formal and libidinal excess of song-dance is removed from the space of the bazaar and placed in the domain of love—construed allegorically as a space of cinephilia that arises from consent and reciprocity rather than a space of transaction that arises from greed and exploitation.

The issues of class difference that lurk beneath Shirin and Aram’s relationship surface after Aram’s brother Nasir accidentally lets slip in front of their mother that Aram has a romantic interest. To preemptively stanch her objections, he lies that Shirin is the daughter of an Indian maharajah. When Aram’s mother insists that their families meet, Nasir and Aram pull a very hesitant Shirin into

FIGURE 44. Still from *Subah-O-Sham* (1972): A shot of domed architecture, from a touristic montage that highlights a series of Iranian monuments as well as views of Tehran by day and night.



the charade. Aram's mother buys the charade, and she remains extremely pleased with the prospect of having Shirin, whom she thinks is an Indian princess, for a daughter-in-law. The Hindi version foregrounds Aram's mother's modern attitudes, which gel with her class status and are made explicit when she encourages Aram to go out on an extended excursion with Shirin, having approved of her and her (supposed) family background. She tells Aram in the Hindi version, "It is very important to get to know one another before marriage."

With the encouragement of his mother, Aram takes Shirin along for a tour of Iran. This segment, which does not appear in extant Persian versions, is delivered in a travel-documentary-style voice-over, as Aram provides commentary over a montage of shots that pan over a series of national monuments and attractions that were standard fare in other contemporaneous Iranian prestige coproductions: the Shah Mosque in Isfahan, views of Tehran by night and day, the Golestan Palace, and the Peacock Throne (fig. 44). Through the entire sequence, as Shirin and Aram are not in the picture, the explanatory voice-over's effect is one of a direct address that presents the series of monuments and views through slow, panning movements of the camera over the structures and interiors of the monuments along with wide still shots of Tehran by day and night.

The opportunity of cinematic coproduction, in this case, is usurped as an opportunity to directly showcase and exchange views of one another's heritage, alongside the indirect showcasing that takes place through the cinematic exchanges between two sets of stars. Given Iranian audiences' familiarity with Hindi film stars, this exchange would have been readily apparent. In the Hindi version, however, the touristic vistas are offered as additional attractions that compensate for the fact that the Iranian stars would not have been widely recognizable as attractions to Hindi film enthusiasts. Toward the end of the touristic montage of Iranian monuments in the Hindi version, the score abruptly changes with a cut to a shot of swans in a lake, as the earlier soft music of a zither is replaced by bold, jazzier strains that announce the beginning of a song sequence. Aram and Shirin sit in



CLIP 15. Touristic sequence and beginning of “*terii merii merii terii nazar lad gayii*” song sequence from *Subah-O-Sham* (1972).

To watch this video, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.130.15>



a colorful rowboat in the middle of a deep blue lake, as they alternate in a duet that features the voices of playback singers Kishore Kumar and Asha Bhosle, “*terii merii merii terii nazar lad gayii*” (Your gaze wrestled with mine, mine with yours).

While the style and sound of the back-to-back sequences—the touristic montage and the romantic duet (clip 15)—are markedly different, they both celebrate the specificity of cinema as a medium that allows for audiovisual cultural exchanges across language and geography. The touristic montage directly addresses an overseas audience, and the romantic song revels in a romance of consent as reciprocity, as it is the first song that occurs as a duet between Hindi film star Waheeda Rehman/Shirin and Persian film star Fardeen/Aram. The end of the song sequence gives way to a sitar *jhaalaa*, a fast-paced musical conclusion that bridges a montage of ancient Indian stone sculptures—similar to those featured in *Pardesi/Khozhdenie*—of various deities in poses of erotic communion, superimposed over a twilight beach landscape. The figures are not only suggestive of consummation but also highlight and celebrate the nature of a cross-industry, star-studded tryst that is bookended by montage sequences of monuments, Iranian on one side and

Indian on the other. With a sudden cut, Shirin and Aram are shown in conversation on a beach, with Shirin regretting aloud that she let herself go while Aram assures her not to worry, as they will anyway be married.⁷⁷ The context—that they have had sex—is clear, and despite Shirin's misgivings, the sincerity of their passion is sanctioned by the monuments that stand both as witnesses to the lovers' consummation and as participants in a tryst of their own, through an exchange of stars and vistas afforded by intimacies of the coproduction.

Naturally, all that is well cannot end well just yet. The burden borne by the narrative in having to successfully transform not Shirin but the upper-middle-class milieu that shuns her occurs as an ekphrastic engagement with the contemporaneous burden borne by Hindi films in having to defend their merits both domestically and overseas. The resolution offered by *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat* comes about through labors of love on multiple levels, deployed as a wedge to drive apart the insistent coupling of exploitation and profit in order to make room for both love and art. The elderly man who acts as Shirin's manager proves himself a villain by blowing her cover purposely, thinking that she will then be forced to return to him and resume her dancing. In speaking to Aram's mother, he refers to Shirin as *maamuulii raqqaasaa*, an ordinary dancing girl, in the Hindi version. Enraged, Aram's mother confronts Aram in both the Hindi and Persian versions. Aram boldly retorts that he will marry no other and that he will simply leave the household if Shirin is unwelcome. Aram's mother's next move is to pay Shirin a visit and offer her a large sum of money with the assumption that Shirin is simply after wealth. When Shirin insists that she wishes to wed Aram out of love itself and not for money, Aram's mother in turn implores Shirin to let go of Aram for the same reason—that is, out of love itself. The elderly woman tells Shirin that by marrying Aram, she will ruin his life, as the stigma that she carries as a dancing girl will irrevocably damage him socially and professionally.

As with Aram's mother's attempt to pay Shirin, every economic transaction in the film becomes a test of character, and the appearance of money in any scene portends only the worst. Earlier in the film, the workers who were easily bribed to play the parts of the maharajah's entourage are shown as not only boorish and gluttonous but also dishonest in attempting to steal extra cash from inside the house. The thick wads of cash that Aram's mother offers Shirin in exchange for leaving her son both carry the mother's mistaken assumptions of Shirin's greed and foretell of the heartache of separation. Taking Aram's mother's words to heart, Shirin puts on her own charade so that Aram will distance himself from her in both versions, for his own good. She lets Aram come to her while she puts on an appearance of being intoxicated, and she tells him that she tricked him as she has done with many other men of his class, whom she seduces in order to extort large sums of money from their mothers, who inevitably bribe her to leave their sons. She enhances her

charade with the wads of cash that Aram's mother had in fact left her, which Shirin waves under Aram's nose as proof of her supposed scheme.

Aram responds not only by insulting Shirin by calling her a base and vicious woman but also by calling her Indianness into question. Crushed by what he beholds—that Shirin's love was apparently only a façade for her greed—he slaps her in anguish and says in the Hindi version, “Now I see how base and vicious a woman you are! Indian women are never dishonest! They will put their own lives at stake, but they will never disgrace their own love! And even this I doubt, that the blood in your veins is Indian!” The whole scene in the Hindi version and the slap in particular in Hindi and Persian versions are dramatized by loud musical chords. Before leaving, Aram sarcastically adds that if it is money that Shirin is after, then he might be able to send a few of his friends her way.

To taint love with money constitutes the ultimate disgrace, and for Aram, it is unthinkable that an Indian woman would do such a thing. While Shirin is in a sense playing a part that is scripted for her by her occupation as a dancing girl/café dancer whose body is publicly available for sale, this script of questionable virtue remains at odds with her Indianness, the film suggests. The dramatic irony of the film's narrative is drawn out through the fact that the audience knows that it is the sincerity of Shirin's love that drives her to take on the overdetermined role of a dancing girl who sells her body, and the second half of the film takes several twists and turns in order to arrive at the resolution that comes about through Aram's recognition of Shirin for what she is: a woman who is unwavering in a love that is uncontaminated by economic motivations, her profession notwithstanding.

The film is critical not only of economies of greed that are tied to bribery but also of classist attitudes that hinge conjugal arrangements upon desires for status and wealth. The marriage between Aram's brother Nasir and his wife, Afzaan, implied to have been arranged by his mother, is a comedic caricature of an unhappy, bickering couple. At one point when Afzaan picks a fight with Nasir in the bedroom, a playful song sequence in the Hindi version lampoons their pairing, as Nasir expresses his confoundedness over why Afzaan is always angry and unhappy through the voice of Mohammed Rafi in the bouncy number, “*merii biivii jahaan se niraalii hai, jaan zaalim ne merii nikaalii hai*” (My wife is one of a kind in this world, her tyranny has vanquished my life). The comedic song sequence includes such verses as “*har ghadii mujhse ladne ko taiyaar hai, merii taubaa ye kitnii vafaadaar hai, mujhko jannat mile ya jahannum mile, har jagah saath ye jaanevaalii hai*” (She is prepared to fight with me at every moment, it's incredible that she is so loyal, whether I am sent to heaven or hell, she will be there wherever I go).

Utterly disillusioned by what Aram regards as Shirin's betrayal, Aram apathetically agrees to marry Nazneen, a woman his mother chooses for him, and the second loveless marriage of the household goes forward. Nazneen turns out to be an exaggeratedly poor wife and mother who perpetually smokes, gambles, and

goes out to nightclubs with her girlfriends. The deplorable foundation of status and wealth that drives the alliance between Aram and Nazneen is juxtaposed with Shirin's selflessness in coming to see Aram's mother on the day of the wedding in order to return the money that Aram's mother had offered her as a bribe. Before Shirin is able to leave, Aram enters the room, angrily asks whether she has come in pursuit of more money, and spitefully declares that he will pay her more than any other rich man she has had.

Serving Shirin the crowning humiliation of dragging her downstairs despite her protests as well as those of Nasir in both versions, Aram announces before the wedding guests that Shirin will dance before them as the hired entertainment of the evening. In an elegiac, mournful melody sung by playback singer Lata Mangeshkar in both a 122-minute Persian version and 158-minute Hindi version, Shirin renders a song that is laced with pathos as she dances and wryly sings: "*tumko mubaarak ho ye shaadii khaanaa aabaadii*" (Congratulations to you on this wedding, this making of a prosperous home). The mournful melody calls into question the assumed happiness of the occasion. A verse of the song states, "*pyaar nasiibon se miltaa hai, har ek phuul kahaan khiltaa hai*" (Those who are fortunate find love—where is it that every flower blooms?) The lines characterize love as something that makes one fortunate, as well as something that is a privilege limited to those who are more fortunate in terms of their class status.

The blind spots of the film's critiques of class hierarchies and prejudices are evident in its earlier scenes of the working-class "actors" hired to perform as the fake-maharaja's coterie in order to convince Aram's mother that Shirin is an Indian princess. The working-class men are depicted as obscenely ill-mannered and unrefined, in addition to being greedy insofar as they are willing to do anything for material gain. Similarly lumpen men are depicted in later scenes as ruffians who are prone to aggression and more than willing to be paid off for their acts of violence. *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Saadat* strains itself to place Shirin—who is metonymic for Hindi song-dance films—within a space of respectability, while not only distancing her from a working-class milieu that is perceived to be unrefined but also critiquing the cold rigidity of an upper-middle-class segment that enjoys her performances but stigmatizes her as a person who engages in this form of (forced) labor. For the film to arrive at its resolution, the tables of class have to be turned through lessons learned on all sides, as labors of love are melodramatically divorced from those of profit.

In the film's insistent opposition between the libidinal excess of love and the capital excess of greed, the sole character who remains irredeemably villainous is the elderly manager, who aims to manipulate and control Shirin in order to profit from the exhibition of her body. He inquires over her whereabouts with two neighborhood ruffians, who point Nasir out as he goes to and fro, visiting Shirin's

apartment quite regularly to look in on her. The ruffians assume that the two are having an affair, and they are eager to play police and beat Nasir up. The elderly man offers them cash to do so, and the visibility of money signals his violent, exploitative, and greedy intentions. Although Nasir financially supports Shirin by renting an apartment for her and bringing her groceries, cash remains completely out of view during the interactions between them, and Nasir's intentions toward her are shown to be uncontaminated by greed or lust.

The film's climax occurs when Aram returns from Ahvaz to Tehran for a visit and trails Nasir to investigate why he has been wandering off. Aram is furious to find Nasir in Shirin's company, and he assumes that Nasir has been a client of Shirin's in an ongoing affair. He deduces that Razak, the fatherless boy who is a classmate of his and Nazneen's son, Romin, is "the fruit of your sins," to which Shirin emotionally indicts Aram's misplaced suspicions as she finally reveals to him that Razak is in fact "the delicate flower of our love." In both Hindi and Persian versions the distinction between sinful and chaste reproduction occurs outside of any invocations of legitimacy through marriage, instead drawing on a distinction between sex/cinema that is motivated by profit, on the one hand, and that which emerges out of love, on the other.

The chain of events by which Shirin will eventually take the place of Nazneen in the house as a wife and mother is set off when Nazneen bribes the same neighborhood ruffians to kill Shirin and Razak. However, because Romin happens to be playing with Razak, the ruffians end up taking all three of them toward Shiraz, which Aram's mother comes and tells Nazneen in a panic. Nazneen, too, begins to panic, and she and Aram's mother speed in the direction of Shiraz. Meanwhile, Nasir and Aram have also chased the ruffians, whom they fight and defeat through a finale action sequence. Shirin and the boys are rescued just as Nazneen's car approaches, veers off the road, and meets with a collision. Nazneen sustains lethal injuries, and as she dies, she asks for forgiveness and urges Shirin to step in and be a mother to Romin.

An earlier scene in both versions, like the intertextual references to Waheeda Rehman's other roles as a dancer-actress, reflexively foregrounds the coproduction as a showcase of its stars. This cross-industry labor of love is rendered through the love story between its romantic leads and the brotherly relationship between its male leads. During an initial chance encounter between Razak and Aram at a train station, neither recognizes the other, although Razak says to Aram, "Excuse me, sir, you look just like my favorite film star!" (fig. 45) In the aftermath of the fight-sequence finale and Nazneen's death against the backdrop of the desert landscape of Shiraz, Razak says to Nasir, "Excuse me, Uncle—is that film star my father?" Nasir confirms, and Razak and Romin are happy to find that they are in fact brothers. In the Persian version, this moment is extended, as the brothers hold hands, prance about, and joyfully exclaim, "We're brothers, we're brothers!"

The Hindi version ends as the camera zooms out to a wide shot of the landscape that shows the members of the family walking toward the center and embracing



FIGURE 45. Still from *Subah-O-Sham* (1972): “Excuse me, sir, you look just like my favorite film star!”

one another. The Persian version extends this slightly, to show the family getting into their cars and driving off. While a dramatic Western orchestral score had accompanied the fight scene, this score is overtaken by a jazzy melody that incorporates more generically Eastern instruments and motifs, as the newly (re)constituted family is drawn together in the Persian version’s closing moments. In both the Persian and Hindi versions, the conclusion envisions a postnational third-world modernity constituted by cinema, as a force that engenders intimacies of brotherhood and love. With Razak’s realization that his father is his favorite film star, Fardeen merges with the character of Aram as a figure of Persian cinema, who is joined together with Waheeda Rehman/Shirin as a figure of Hindi cinema. Shirin has finally overcome the stigma of her profession as a dancing girl/café dancer, as Aram’s upper-middle-class milieu has been moved to finally accept her within a domain of love and art, rather than relegating her to a domain of greed and profit.

In *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa’adat*, as in *Pardesi/Khozhdenie*, the project of coproduction is in this manner allegorized through transnational diegetic romances and brotherly exchanges, which vociferously distance themselves from motives of profit and lust. Love, within the diegesis of each film, is imbued with the potential for constituting cross-cultural social formations against the grain of hierarchies of caste, class, and nation. Nonetheless, both films rhetorically subordinate the libidinal excess of romantic love to their ethical constructions of a homosocial world through reciprocal, fraternal exchanges between brothers. The project of “films for friendship”—in the words of *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* codirector K. A. Abbas—becomes a project of cross-industry exchanges in *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa’adat*, with coproduction reflexively extolled as a primary end in itself rather than as a strategy of cofinancing.

Ekphrastic concerns over the form, function, and value of cinema, in addition to material contexts of informal distribution, are negotiated within the diegetic spaces of both *Pardesi/Khozhdenie* and *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa’adat*. Both extol the value of cinema as a medium that is accessible to a vast public, as they defend the seductions of song-dance-based modes of expression that are beloved by audiences across lines of class, language, and nationality. Read as ekphrastic arguments about

cinema, cross-industry productions like *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat* contain a plethora of fragments that reference a world of networked media capitals (e.g., Bombay, Madras, Moscow, Tehran) and distribution circuits in the world, outside the contemporaneous arena of so-called world cinema. Analogous to the cleavage of voice and body precipitated by the practice of playback, the cleavage of language and (dual) authorship wrought by the coproductions' self-presentation turns the seams of the films' production outward, inviting their audiences to take pleasure in the cinematic romances at hand and to themselves participate in the exchanges of songs, stars, landscapes, monuments, and friendships that are on offer onscreen.

Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat not only depicts and allegorizes the trafficking of Indian films through Shirin, as a feminine object of exploitation but also offers a pedagogical response to contemporaneous statist concerns ensuing from this material context of informal distribution. *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat* engages the anxieties over smuggling and unreported foreign exchange that prompted the establishment of IMPEC in the first place, as well as anxieties over "third-rate" Indian song-dance films circulating as exploitation fare overseas. It additionally engages contemporaneous anxieties on the part of Iranian filmmakers over the competition that Indian song-dance films posed to Iranian films and the one-sidedness of their popularity in Iran. *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat's* proposed solution is neither to eliminate the formal and libidinal excess of commercial Indian films nor to clamp down on their circulation among foreign audiences. Rather, the ekphrastic registers of *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat* suggest that Hindi cinema audiences take pride in the merits of its song-dance-based modes of popular cinema and its insistently modern production value, at the same time that foreign (e.g., Iranian) audiences view the libidinal excess of Hindi song-dance films as a sincere, embodied form of expression that inspires love above and beyond greed or exploitation. The film thus celebrates the sincerity of the Hindi celluloid object's song-dance expressions for its ability to inspire equally sincere affections in the foreign lover-cinephile—rather than mere customer—in its forays abroad.

Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat encodes the intimate labors of cross-industry diplomacy in the feminine figure of Shirin as a stand-in for Hindi song-dance films circulating among foreign audiences. Thus, the film's vision and practice of world-making extolls popular cinema's propensity to catalyze fraternal and familial bonds among its audiences, distributors, and producers across and beyond Madras, Bombay, and Tehran. Shirin-as-cinema, in the closing moments of the film, is the embodied (re)productive force that restores the fraternal intimacy between Aram/Fardeen and Nasir/Sanjeev Kumar, as two male stars who are emblematic of their respective industries. In addition, the motif of adoption, with which the film opened in its characterization of Shirin as an artist adopted

by Iran despite her Indian origins, is re-invoked in the closing moments of the film.⁷⁸ Shirin's integration into Aram's (that is, the Persian film industry's) family seals her own adoption process. Furthermore, her adoption of Romin solidifies the bonds between him and Razak, who are envisioned as the assured future of a cross-cultural brotherhood⁷⁹ that constitutes the (re)productive aspirations of the coproduction.

This layered, fraternal microcosm constitutes *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat*'s closing argument. The film ekphrastically renders the intimate reciprocities of its own coproduction across chasms of language, class, industries, state borders, and national borders. These cinephilic reciprocities, the film argues, are made possible through song-dance modes of Hindi cinema, through stars as figures of a global-popular imagination of modernity, and through modes of commercial filmmaking whose excesses of scale were well suited to world-making imperatives of a Cold War, nuclear age. In *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat*, it is the libidinal excess of love-as-cinephilia that finally overcomes exploitative hierarchies of transaction to engender an insistent modern, postnational world constituted through the scalable intimacies of cross-cultural cinematic exchanges. Not unlike heteropatriarchal Indian statist discourses that perceived what was beyond its control through the ostensible excess of feminine sexuality, *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat*, too, conflates feminine sexuality with the libidinal excess of Hindi films' song-dance modes. In contrast to a statist discourse that perceived this excess as a threat, however, *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat* instead defends this excess by extolling its (re)productive capacity for world-making through the reciprocity of love-as-cinephilia, beyond the limiting forms of either upper-class conjugality or the nation-state.

The telling irony of this argument is that *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat* was not (re)productive of much, at least in an Indian context, where it flopped. One could say, in this regard, that it was destined for the bangle factory. Such an expression, premised on an equation of femininity with inconsequence, ensues from a material and affective history of economic value that begs for an excavation—for a visit to the bangle factory, so to speak. Indeed, objects like *Subah-O-Sham/Homa-ye Sa'adat* allow us to weigh the historical terms of their failures and devaluations in spite of their ambition and insistence that the world could be otherwise and that cinema had the potential to make it so. Throughout this book, I have taken up such objects not to uncritically reinvest them with value, but to dwell upon the very politics of their inconsequence, then as well as now. I remain enamored with each and every film that I have discussed in this book, even as I find them deeply flawed. There is little need to resolve these contradictions, as loose ends are—like the excess of feminine sexuality—perhaps all too often regarded as something in need of tying up.