

Introduction

Mirror and Lamp

In 2013 India celebrated a hundred years of cinema. During its century this cinema, and in particular Hindi-language popular cinema, arguably the most important of several cinema industries in the Subcontinent, has been both mirror and lamp—reflecting “Indianness” back to Indians at home and abroad, but also shaping Indianness. Movie-going in India is a special sort of pleasure—for many affording rare access to privacy, a sometimes three-hour-long respite from noise and heat in an air-conditioned, carpeted interior, where one can be alone with oneself among others, in the dark. This pleasure necessarily induces a different relation to interior, psychic space, without having to submit to sleep, even absenting the enjoying ego from the enjoyment: this is as close to accessing (unconscious) desire as most ever come, and could even be considered a kind of wild psychoanalysis. For many Indians without the means, it affords opportunities to travel (“transport”?), if only on the wings of fantasy: to alternative realities, foreign locales, alien cultures, unfamiliar aesthetics of self and unaccustomed social arrangements, pleasurable disorientations of everyday life. The “dream machine” is also a space-time travel machine—“motion” pictures *move us* to different zones, to unaccustomed emotions.

Sitting in darkened cinema theaters in India, the spectator might also be struck by how often Indianness itself is what is being screened—in both senses. Hindi cinema has been, to change metaphors, a “dream machine,” producing images of collective or national identity that, with every iteration, prove more transitional, contradictory, and elusive or enable us to screen truths about ourselves from ourselves. There is a double valence to the “moving pictures” of Hindi cinema: what *moves* audiences of this extremely popular cultural form is on the one hand the reflection of what is constructed as everyday Indian life

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and on the other hand the production of fantasies—and fantasmatic displacements—of an essential, primordial, idealized Indianness that is yet unachieved. This doubleness hints at an anxiety about the reliability and integrity of presumed anchors of national identity. Realist representations “screen” that anxiety behind images that blur or fissure and finally undo the very categories of Indianness assumed to be givens. This book reframes Hindi cinema as a domain where fantasy is as important as realism, a site for the simultaneous construction *and* deconstruction of Indianness.

The genre “Bollywood,” associated with Bombay (Mumbai) and Pune, emerged around 1931. Madhava Prasad reminds us that the coinage can be traced back to a description of films produced in Tollygunge studios in Kolkata as “Tollywood”; this description was subsequently extended to films produced in the Bombay (Mumbai) film industry as “Bollywood.”¹ Initially a deprecatory journalistic label, “Bollywood” has since the 1980s become a transnationally recognized metonymic signifier, sometimes overshadowing the broader category of Hindi cinema. Some, admittedly, embrace it as enhancing Hindi films’ visibility on the global cinema circuit. Here I use the term “Hindi cinema” because it is the accurate term for the majority of films I discuss, along with some strategically chosen exceptions such as *Slumdog Millionaire* (Danny Boyle, 2008).

No other recently published book, to my knowledge, offers as sustained a discussion as this one does of the role of fantasy in Hindi cinema. Of course, I do not claim to be the first or sole observer of fantasy in this cinema, and here I take the opportunity to indicate how my approach is significantly different from that of comparable studies. Indeed, I have learned much from these studies, including those that discuss either realism or fantasy, or both.

Among comparable books is Prasad’s *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction* (1998). Its chief concern is with (especially Marxist) theory and its import for film studies. Though my own analysis also identifies the ideological underpinnings of dominant narratives in Hindi films, my approach is different in its conceptualization of their narratological strategies, philosophical premises, and particularly the structuring dialectic of realism and fantasy. Another comparable book concerned with ideological analysis is Ravi Vasudevan’s edited anthology, *Making Meaning in Indian Cinema* (2000): the various essays discuss an assortment of topics, including fashion, gender, and the ideology of the family and domestic arrangements in 1950s-era Hindi cinema. The collection’s declared focus is on how popular Indian cinema makes *political* meaning, but it is an edited anthology, whereas my own book is a much more sustained argument about how such meaning-making is best understood within the frame of the dialectic of reality and fantasy.

Vijay Mishra’s *Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire* (2002) is another comparable book. This is a compendious and erudite discussion of Bollywood cinema as a storehouse of images of a pan-Indian culture rich in traditions as well as cinematic genres ranging from the epic to the Indian gothic; it elaborates on the role of religion and gender dynamics within the film industry. Mishra’s

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book, like mine, considers the influence of contemporary popular culture on Hindi cinema, and like mine it is sensitive to the significance of the diaspora in shaping some of the concerns of Hindi films. An important point of contrast is that whereas Mishra suggests that Bollywood films are “temples” of the desire for community and a pan-Indian national culture, my own book extends this important point by exploring the rich veins of complication and contradiction introduced by the irruption of fantasy within sanctioned narratives of Indian-ness. Fantasy, I demonstrate, often encodes suppressed or repressed desires that fissure the surface, or skin, of the popular Hindi film, revealing important fault lines of identity and society.

A competing book that, like mine, attends to the constitutive contradictions of Indian films is Jyotika Viridi’s *The Cinematic ImagiNation: Indian Popular Films as Social History* (2003). My book shares with Viridi’s an interest in approaching Indian cinema as a national-popular matrix in which one can trace narratives of the emergent nation. Yet Viridi seeks to show how the notion of the nation manages to cohere despite contradictions and internal conflicts; she draws attention to the conflicted relationship between the national and the transnational. Viridi’s argument, like mine, is informed by film theory, cultural studies, and postcolonial theory, as well as psychoanalysis—especially in her discussion of masculinity, which accords with much in my own discussion of the “Angry Young Man” films of the mid-1970s, and in her treatment of the “Avenging Woman.” Yet ultimately her focus on the figure of the family distinguishes it from my argument, which is more concerned with the way the dialectic of realism and fantasy allow a much broader and richer range of themes to be highlighted, well beyond the family dynamic.

Lalitha Gopalan’s *Cinema of Interruptions: Action Genres in Contemporary Indian Cinema* (2002) is another competing book, employing analytic strategies and theoretical idioms more familiar in Western film studies. It proposes to refract Western film theory “through a reading of interruptions in Indian films.”² My book shares Gopalan’s interest in the significance of these “interruptions,” as well as a methodological commitment to resisting a provincial theoretical framing of Hindi cinema. Yet Gopalan’s book, pivoting on the erotic conceit that cinema “proposes” to us, is avowedly a treatment of *action genres*. My book differs markedly in its broader generic reach and its emphasis on a more transnational analytic, without discounting or discrediting popular reception—domestic discourses of pleasure, Subcontinental articulations of social norms, rooted mores, culture, or everyday praxis. Informed by postcolonial discursive strategies, my approach makes explicit the function and significance of contradictory desires or “nonrealistic” elements that arise within the main narratives of Hindi cinema. It more consistently traces the subtle and complex ways in which fantasy, as conceived in film theory, works in a dialectical relationship with the social text of this cinema to produce meaning—or to raise difficult issues. These distinctive features are most evident in the close readings I present of particular films.

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Other books invite more attenuated comparison with mine, and I note a few in passing, including the many general surveys of the film industry such as Nasreen Munni Kabir's *Bollywood: The Indian Cinema Story* (2001), a somewhat enthusiastic and uncritical overview. Other works, such as the more recent *Global Bollywood: Travels of Hindi Song and Dance* (2008), edited by Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti, may appear to present a competing approach, but they are only glancingly comparable. Essays contained in *Global Bollywood*, for instance, deal with "fantasy sequences." Yet they largely discuss only "song and dance" routines and *filmigit* (film music), the most elementary level of "fantasy." My book is very different from these and several others quoted or cited in its pages, in its consistent, sustained, and multilayered appreciation of the relationship between realism and diverse forms of fantasy. There are certainly many other books that touch on themes discussed in my book, or discuss realism and fantasy, but they do so without developing that relation in depth, across different genres and sub-genres, across the nation's boundaries, or over the period covered by my analysis, from Independence through the post-1990s liberalization era and into the present. I cannot here survey the vast range of commentary and scholarship on Hindi cinema (let alone "Indian cinema"). While there is a vibrant industry of commentary on Indian cinema, many published works do not meaningfully compete with my own particular approach, although I gratefully acknowledge that I have learned much of what I know from this rich body of work.

Here it might suffice therefore to observe that my book is framed by two kinds of analyses of Hindi cinema, and some of these along with the works discussed above are presented summarily in the next two endnotes. One kind of analytic approach, reflected in works dating from the 1990s through the early 2000s, highlights social and aesthetic realism; social issues including poverty, work, and development; class and neofeudal social conditions; crime, violence, and the law; and gender, sexuality, and the family.³ A second, produced roughly between 2000 and the present, focuses more on industry changes, audience or reception studies, historicist (re)framing, and globalization's influence.⁴

What then is the singular contribution of my book? While several of the other works on Hindi cinema have suggested that cinema reflects the image of the imagined nation as it has developed since Independence, they have tended to emphasize primarily the major social or cultural themes and the realist narratives. It is a diacritic of my approach that "Indianness" remains an important conceptual category, but I draw attention to the subtle yet powerful centrifugal forces that are increasingly represented in cultural forms, principally the cinema: Indian identity is growing more "flexible" or fungible today as compared with the early and emergent national identity of the immediately post-Independence era of the 1940s and 1950s. Nationalism must be historicized and understood as dynamically changing with the increasingly globalized flows of culture, people, goods, and capital; indeed, nationalism is taking new and occasionally virulent, but always politically significant, forms—as with the recent election of the new prime minister, Narendra Modi. It is especially important to

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recognize how globalization as an external force and post-1990s liberalization have wrought changes in Indians' self-image. No mirror is more revealing than Hindi cinema.

My project focuses attention on recognizing the contradictions of Hindi cinema, and the contradictory play of realism and fantasy (including the often overlooked or repressed dimensions of psychic life and marginalized desire), as *productive*, and on tracing the increasing disaggregation of “Indianness” in response to the forces of globalization and economic liberalization. In highlighting, unlike most other comparable studies, the subtle but significant—and often misunderstood or neglected—role of fantasy, my book does not in any sense neglect the fascinating subtleties or complexities of Hindi cinema’s commitment to represent the social in a realist mode. Neither do I suggest that fantasy is more important than realism in Hindi cinema. Far from it. Rather, it is in the interplay of the realistic and the nonrealistic elements that we can fully appreciate the richness of this cinema, and it is in close textual analysis that this richness can emerge. As always, God and the Devil are in the details.

The customary attitude to fantasy in Hindi films can be characterized as a tendency to deprecate it as mere attraction or distraction—even mere silliness. Nor does most commentary, including scholarship, seriously and consistently analyze the dialectical relationship between fantasy and realism, even when that relationship is noted. While there are books that discuss fantasy in Indian cinema, few attempt to track it diachronically, as I do, from the time India gained independence from the British in 1947 to the contemporary conjuncture—in order to trace the sometimes vexed and contradictory fashionings of Indian identity. In that contemporary conjuncture, I suggest in my Conclusion, globalized mediascapes require an interrogation of the integrity or sustainability of the category “Indianness” in Indian cinema generally. Hindi cinema, I argue, is increasingly the locus classicus for the construction of the public image of Indian identity, as contrasted with other major cultural forms such as classical music, dance, or even the news outlets—access to which after all remains limited for many, even for the vast majority. Throughout, my book intentionally and consistently focuses on familiar mainstream examples while also considering less iconic films, in order to track what I call “condensations” of the dominant Indian sensibility or temper at a given historical and cultural moment.

Perhaps what remains most distinctive about the analysis offered in my book, then, is that it draws out the diversity of forms of fantasy, from the most commonplace sense of the “fantasy sequence,” familiarly known as the “song-and-dance routine,” to expressions of psychic life inadmissible otherwise, at the level of the diegesis, and highlights their subtle and sometimes disruptive or destabilizing momentum. For all these various forms are in fact operative, sometimes simultaneously, in Hindi cinema, and far from providing mere escapism of the kind too often pejoratively associated with “Bollywood,” the seams of fantasy threaded through these films offer rich and often unorthodox possibilities for meaning-making and self-fashioning.

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Contradictions and Condensations

Popular Hindi films reproduce a constitutive contradiction of cinematic representation. In even the most formulaic realist narratives, for example, the hero proclaims his patriotism, and his actions serve as object lessons in good Indian citizenship. Yet antirealist elements fissure the surface narrative, offering pleasurable ruptures of or anxious *supplements* to the sanctioned mimetic narration; they often interrupt realist diegesis, interposing defamiliarizing and destabilizing fantasies. The formula narrative surface may be disfigured by a “stain” that nonetheless has a pressing claim to psychic truth otherwise inexpressible.

Perhaps the dialectic between realism and fantasy is endemic to the cinematic apparatus. The film screen or photograph, Stanley Cavell remarks, is unlike a painting because it implies a reality “behind” itself, extending outside its edges, constituted by the inadequacy of representation. The screen always screens its existence from the spectator, and screens the spectator from the projected world, making the viewer unviewable—and therefore absolving him or her from having to make ethical decisions the characters face in the diegesis, while indulging pleasurable fantasies. The “world viewed” onscreen cannot claim existence as a predicate. It does not exist *now*: there is always a time lag. Yet spectators may suspend disbelief, fully captivated by/in the fantasy screened now as “the [real] world.”⁵

André Bazin’s influential account of realism suggests that cinema, like the photograph, “actually contributes something to the order of natural creation instead of providing a substitute for it”; this argument somewhat paradoxically entails the notion that the camera itself should not be *seen* as *distorting* “the natural” order, for naturalness implies immediateness, or more precisely non-mediation. The camera, David Bordwell clarifies, “should not stray” over this representational axis of meaning-making but should obey the 180-degree rule.⁶ In practice, and famously in the work of the great Yasujiro Ozu, the camera occasionally does stray over the axis, without shattering the realist illusion. A commitment to realism *as stylistic convention* is more important than rigid adherence to a body of realist *techné* or formalist dogma.

It is instructive to contrast formalism and realism. Formalists focus on filmic techniques: editing, montage, fast and slow motion, low and high camera angles, the manipulation of two-dimensional mimesis of reality. Rudolf Arnheim, Sergei Eisenstein, and other formalists skeptical about film’s capacity to capture the full visual experience of reality championed film’s compensatory or supplementary virtue—its expressive and artistic potency. Votaries of realism such as André Bazin, Siegfried Kracauer, and Stanley Cavell, by contrast, emphasize that the “world viewed” by the camera *is* indeed capable, through such techniques as the long take, deep focus, minimal and continuous editing, of capturing and rendering reality, without need for specious supplements such as montage or expressive manipulation of the two-dimensional representation. Film’s art consists in its perfect re-presentation of the world.⁷ This is not naive

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verisimilitude. Cavell cites the insistence of realists such as Irwin Panofsky and Bazin that “the medium of movies” was “reality as such”; both “wish, correctly, to emphasize that on film reality is not merely described or represented. But obviously it is not actually present to us either. . . . [W]hat makes the physical medium of film unlike anything else on earth lies in the absence of what it causes to appear to us; that is to say, in the nature of our absence from it; in its fate to reveal reality and fantasy . . . by projections of reality . . . in which . . . reality is freed to exhibit itself.”⁸

Hindi cinema cannot be reduced to either naive realism or escapist fantasy: it makes a more complex, if implicit, claim to indexicality. Mary Ann Doane theorized the “medium specificity” of film, identifying its most striking characteristic as “indexicality,” the “ability to capture time and movement” or “life itself.” The “experience of a medium is necessarily determined by a dialectical relation between materiality and immateriality,” and therefore between realism and fantasy.⁹

As *method* or technique, cinematic realism can be self-effacing (hiding the machinery of representation) or self-reflexive. It renders the real in a presumptively transparent manner or admits that reality is captured (honestly) if artfully—but not distorted.¹⁰ Filmic narratives are interesting because of complications and interruptions; fantasy infiltrates even the most innocent representations and self-representations, complicating naive realist notions of mimesis. While at one level Hindi cinema cleaves to the Bazinian ideal of realism, relying on *mise-en-scène* more than montage, claiming to reconstitute the world without manipulating space and time, at another it accommodates the distortion of everyday reality, disrupting logical sequence or disordering “commonsense” perception through nonrealistic or fantasy elements. Realism and fantasy are bound in an epistemological parallax, or dialectic in Walter Benjamin’s sense, as condensing “history at a standstill” in the cinematic image, but also as the commonplace and commonsense notion of a dynamic contradiction where the real and the imaginary, the fantasmatic or even the Real, are palimpsested or antithetically configured. This antithesis evokes Sigmund Freud’s opposition of the reality and pleasure principles, and Jacques Lacan’s elaboration of the orders of the Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real. In the cinematic dialectic, fantasy elements destabilize the realist diegetic world of even mainstream Hindi films *and* unleash desire (or even “drive”) expressed as alternative “imaginary” possibilities.

I begin by framing the general argument of this book, introducing the dialectical opposition of realism and fantasy as a key modality. Next I present a brief overview of the history of Hindi cinema, followed by a consideration of Hindi cinema’s claim to be the national cinema. After defining some key terms, including the “dream machine” of the title, I consider the implications of the dialectic of realism and fantasy and foreground the problematic of Indianness. Finally, I outline the individual chapters, highlighting their arrangement in a sequence spanning the period of postcolonial Hindi cinema roughly from Inde-

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pendence in 1947 to today. Tracing this arc over the decades, I suggest that Hindi cinema functions as both mirror and lamp of Indianness, representing and simultaneously defining historically specific “condensations”—desublimations, refractions, or crystallizations of shared consciousness.

These condensations index the reigning cultural climate or constellations of sociopolitical/cultural identity at different historical conjunctures: the “social realism” that defined Hindi cinema’s Golden Age from about 1940 through the 1960s, the emergence of a righteous “anger” that informed the Angry Young Man and the Avenging Woman cinema in the 1970s through the 1980s, the emergence of a new cosmopolitanism emerging in the neoliberal 1990s, and the current constellation under globalization. This current constellation is widely represented as a culture-flattening diffusion of a McDonaldised (U.S.-oriented) monoculture, “centrally conceived, controlled, and comparatively devoid of distinctive substantive content,” producing nothing. Yet there have been reactive condensations that may be interpreted as “glocalizing,” “indigenously conceived, controlled, and comparatively rich in distinctive substantive content”; these have, as George Ritzer puts it, led to the “expansion of something,” even if it was the expansion of the imagination.¹¹ Critical studies have registered these condensations but have not always understood or considered seriously the dialectic of realism and fantasy through which they are cinematically rendered.

There is a vernacular utopianism inherent in all fantasy. Ernst Bloch decided the utopianism of daydreams and storytelling produced as salve against perceived deficits of experience as “simple, false, disengaged and abstract.” From his Marxist perspective, a “concrete” utopianism, requiring “tarrying with the negative,” reliant on action oriented toward social change, was preferable to compensatory fantasies of the “cowardly ‘as if,’” even if it imagined a better world.¹² Yet compensatory fantasies tendered in works of fiction, art, and film provide emotional and psychical sustenance, aesthetic pleasure, and intellectual resources, challenging and redressing the status quo. For Freud, psychical reality, as Cornelius Castoriadis explains, is not subordinate to our perception of “reality” but its foundation, albeit guided by the pleasure principle. Fantasy is not mere escapism.¹³

Post-Independence Hindi cinema is a rich site for mapping a *collective consciousness* in specific phases of the nation’s cultural history. My approach foregrounds the circulation and convergences of fantasies that reveal what is conventionally inexpressible—but psychically true. Paradoxically, Hindi films presume to condense an immutable Indianness (“traditional values”) and simultaneously narrate a becoming-national, negating that immutability. The project of figuring and configuring national culture is continually interrupted and disaggregated by processes of political transformation and cultural fragmentation, increasingly global flows, and unruly identifications, rendering Indianness not molar but molecular. This is consistent with centrifugal national/cultural trends in China and other countries, Slavoj Žižek suggests; we don’t really understand the processes involved—and need new theories to explain them.¹⁴ As Ashish

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Rajadhyaksha writes about Indian cinema, “There appears to be something out there that still needs ‘an account.’”¹⁵

The Idea of Indianness

Hindi cinema may be entertainment, even a “spectacular” apparatus in both senses of the word. But since Independence it has also inscribed, in Gyan Pandey’s words, the “biography of the nation-state,” charting its avowedly “secular, democratic, non-violent course,” and its linchpin, the idea of Indianness.¹⁶ Yet that worlding is fissured and shifting: “Indianness . . . finds itself in a constant state of transition, dually combating and incorporating outside sources.”¹⁷ Pandey’s “biography” must countenance the idea that the object of that biography is invented as much as represented.¹⁸

Eric Hobsbawm writes that the affirmation of national identity requires the *invention* of “tradition.”¹⁹ He is responding, Joan W. Scott reminds us, to a call to reassess Stalinist historiography, “with its ahistoric notions of workers and class struggle,” to complicate any primordialist or ahistorical project of defining national identity, for “although we take identities for granted as rooted in our physical bodies (gender and race) or our cultural (ethnic, religious) heritages . . . they don’t follow predictably or naturally from them.”²⁰ Like other identities, Indianness is not a primordial and immutable essence but a dynamic construction that encodes its own deconstruction.

My argument extends Benedict Anderson’s thesis in *Imagined Communities* that print capitalism was instrumental in defining national identity as a political community “imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”²¹ The meaning of Indianness is not exhausted by reference to a territorially bounded, sovereign national essence. Anderson himself acknowledges that even large nations have finite but *elastic* boundaries. Indianness denotes an elastic, *imaginary*, and not only political identity; as such, it “supplements” and exceeds actual instantiations.

This is where fantasy enters the dialectic. In *Hindu religion and mythology* heaven is the zone where fantasies are fulfilled, the priceless *chintamani* (jewel of one’s deepest fantasy) found. In *Hindi cinema* fantasy is laminated to this Ur-meme of one’s deepest desires, illustrating the “complicated dynamic of recognition and misrecognition that brings a sense of identity into being and *calls that identity into question.*”²² Popular Hindi films reveal a “logic” of disavowal—disavowal of what one is driven to believe or of whom one is driven to identify with. Judith Butler describes such identification as “an identification that one fears to make only because one has already made it.”²³ Similarly Julia Kristeva, echoing Nietzsche, highlights “this incredible need to believe,” the “narcotic that makes living easier, for—happy infantile and amorous trauma—it is the foundation of our capacity to be . . . *speaking beings.*”²⁴ Fantasy unleashes possible identifications supplementing mimetic representations of essentialized identities, including religious and national identities—a negation of what Fredric Jameson, in theorizing realism, refers to as “the time of the preterite.”²⁵

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I foreground contradictions embedded in narratives of national “Hindu” identity in social realist films *and* relatively innocuous popular melodramas. Such contradictions are endemic to the tentative self-fashionings of post-Independence secular socialism and representations of Indianness in the contemporary globalized conjuncture. India’s information technology boom and new cultural prominence are celebrated in campaigns of “India Shining” and “poised” but are also accompanied by anxieties about Indianness becoming deterritorialized and disaggregated. The film star Amitabh Bachchan was recruited to present this new narrative of India: his significance as an iconic, “nonrepresentative representation” of Indianness is discussed in Chapter 3.²⁶ Bachchan exemplifies a Bazinian realism, illustrating how it is “at the ontological level that the effectiveness of the cinema has its source,” how the screen “put[s] us ‘in the presence of’ the actor” himself.²⁷

Uniquely among major film industries, Indian cinema functioned, Roy Armes reminds us, even when national sovereignty was denied to citizens.²⁸ The Indian cinema industry was active forty years before the end of the British Empire but flourished after Independence, superseding other forms of cultural production in *mediating* the representation of national, sovereign identity, enabling the construction of fantasy identifications.²⁹ It also furnishes an object lesson in a performative paradox: that the very performance of national or personal identity in cinema and life frustrates attempts to fix an immutable essence. This double potentiality of cinema as representation and performance gains from a brief historical perspective, which I offer below.

Historical Retrospective

In Paris on March 19, 1895, the Lumière brothers presented the world’s first film on their newly patented cinematograph. Only a year later, films were being made in India, well before the country became a sovereign democratic republic in 1947. Even in the earliest domestically produced feature-length “mythological” film, *Raja Harishchandra* (1913), melodrama operates as a *hinge* in the dialectic between realism and fantasy. The genre of the “mythologicals”—what Salman Rushdie dubbed the “theologicals”—was eclipsed in the 1950s by the rise of the Hindi Socials.³⁰ This “Golden Age” cinema of the 1940s through the 1960s was committed to a social realism, displacing the melodramatic tendencies of silent films. Only a handful of the thirteen hundred silents survive.

Yet fantasy was always a key element of Hindi cinema. Fantasy sequences are conventionally associated with song-and-dance interludes; even the first talkies featured them prominently, beginning with *Alam Ara* (Light of the World, Ardeshir Irani, 1931), featuring seven songs.³¹ Other films had more (forty and even sixty) until a consensus emerged that too many were deleterious though a few were *de rigueur*.³² Unlike Hollywood narrative (linear and “psychologized”), mainstream Indian cinema “offers us a different order of diegesis,” more like that of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.³³ These ancient epics render real

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and imaginary (“fantasy”) time in parallax view, mundane temporality nested within cosmic and mythic time.

Although the *natya* (traditional dance) of classical Sanskrit theater declined with the language (between the tenth and twelfth centuries), Sanskrit dramatic traditions bequeathed to Indian cinema lineaments of form.³⁴ Classical *rasa* theory (in which connoisseurship of art, and particularly of drama, is associated with the cultivated appreciation of the aesthetic essence of the work of art as a whole, as well as of each formal element) was always fundamental. Folk traditions and other dramatic forms came to the fore. From Bengal came *Yatra* or *Jatra*, from Uttar Pradesh Ram-and-Krishna *Lila* (“play” in both senses), from Gujarat *Bhavai*, from Tanjore *Bhagavata Mela*, from Tamilnadu *Terukuttu*, from Andhra Pradesh *Vithinatakam*, and from Karnataka *Yakshagana*. Also influential were performances of *bahurupis* (itinerant performers), as well as *tamasha* and other street performances.³⁵

Silent films relied on visual representation of the body to carry meaning. Sound facilitated the studio system’s emergence and flourishing from the 1920s through the early 1950s. Film was culturally unifying, speaking to and for people across mutually unintelligible languages—witness the massive box-office success of India’s first “talkie,” *Alam Ara*, made sixteen years before Independence. Sound capitalized on Parsi theater’s influential Hindi-Urdu performance tradition (dating from the nineteenth century). Parsi theater “displayed an odd mixture of realism and fantasy, narrative and spectacle, music and dance, lively dialogues and ingenious stagecraft, all amalgamated within the accepted narrative discursivities of melodrama.”³⁶ Theatrical houses that clearly bore the imprint of Parsi theater, especially in the realms of song and dance alongside dialogue, included the Elphinstone Dramatic Company and the Victoria Theater Company, in name and melodramatic form also influenced by Victorian theater.

In the work of producers of the post–World War I era, including Chandulal Shah, Ardeshir Irani, and J.B.H. Wadia, one can already discern a self-reflexivity about “Indianness”—witness Dhiren Ganguly’s *Bilet Pherat* (Foreign Returned, 1921). This self-reflexivity grew in the late 1920s through the 1930s with the rise of the Studio Era. V. Shantaram’s Prabhat Film Company was inaugurated in 1929, Birendranath Sircar’s New Theatres of Calcutta in 1930, and Himansu Rai and Devika Rani’s Bombay Talkies in 1935. Scores of less important companies—nearly ninety in all, emerged in western India alone: Imperial Film Company, Wadia Movietone, Ranjit Movietone, Sagar Film Company, Paramount Film Company, and many others, each generically specialized. Wadia Movietone, for instance, became identified with *Hunterwali* (The Huntress, Homi Wadia, 1935), featuring Nadia the eponymous Huntress.

Postcolonial Hindi cinema was framed—and influenced—by two events: World War II and Independence. As the studio system crumbled, compensatory developments buoyed the film industry: the boom in “black money financing,” the rise of independent producers, and the emergence of the Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA), an antifascist initiative for artistic innovation, in

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1942. Eminent members included Ritwik Ghatak, Mrinal Sen, K. A. Abbas, and Raj Kapoor.³⁷ The pre-Independence state deprecated and dismissed the cinema industries as an alien cultural form.³⁸ Yet from the 1960s the government began to intervene more directly in film financing and regulation through official censorship codes. Remarkably, India only liberalized the film industry in 1998, granting it official industry status in 2001.³⁹

A National Cinema?

Indian films in general have been produced under an informally capitalist regime despite the absence of a state capitalist system, Prasad suggests, in ideological contravention of state-sponsored secular socialism.⁴⁰ Each decade of Indian cinema produced an iconic film or films definitive of the *Zeitgeist*. This serves as rough organizing principle for my chapters, each focusing on key films from each decade as representative *condensations*. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, appointed the S. K. Patil Film Inquiry Committee. Its report linked the commercial and cultural spheres, noting increasing private investment and endorsing the Films Division's support for social realist cinema. It underwrote Hindi cinema's claim to be the national cinema. The commission's ideological leanings were evident in its support of "realist rootedness versus indigenous mass culture, nationalist utopia versus the regionalist components of nationalism."⁴¹ The creation of the national film archive and a national film institute further consolidated the Hindi cinema industry. However, dissenting opinions began to emerge about the legitimacy of Hindi cinema's self-proclaimed priority, particularly because it entailed the marginalization of other cinemas. Recently, Hindi cinema—including Bollywood, Hindustani (a blend of Hindi and Urdu), "Hinglish" (a blend of Hindi and English), and diasporic cinema—has enjoyed success nationally and internationally.⁴² So have hybrid musicals such as Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Bombay Dreams*, stage shows, and films such as *Moulin Rouge* (Baz Luhrmann, 2001). But is it meaningful to speak of *Hindi* cinema as a national cinema?

"The emergence of Bollywood as a space of cultural production and expression that is now decidedly global," Anandam Kavoori and Aswin Punathambekar observe, "spells trouble for categories such as 'Indian cinema,' 'nation,' 'public,' 'culture,' 'modernity,' 'identity,' and 'politics.'" They note that Padma Lakshmi and Freida Pinto may be nominally "Indian," but they are really transnational "brands." Aishwarya Rai "made it to the cover of *Time* magazine, and even taught Oprah Winfrey and her viewers to wear a sari," but her Indianness was hardly the point of interest. Other signs of Bollywood's globalization include an episode of *The Simpsons* in 2006 in which the Simpsons' trip to India concludes with a *filmi* song-and-dance routine. Shekhar Kapur, acclaimed director of *Elizabeth* and *Bandit Queen*, predicted that Bollywood will "define and dominate global entertainment in the twenty-first century."⁴³ As modernity itself grows more "liquid," in Zygmunt Bauman's phrase, modern Indianness is correspondingly becoming

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more disaggregated,⁴⁴ this is an important argument in my Conclusion. Indianness resists fixing, and is becoming increasingly deterritorialized, “a heterogeneous imaginary that draws energy from historical formations of colonialism and postcolonialism, discourses of diversity, and exercises of bureaucratic power.”⁴⁵ My book tracks this imaginary in Hindi cinema over the decades since Independence.

Popular Hindi cinema does not compare favorably with the best international cinema. It often fails to meet minimal standards of “realism,” being predisposed to “fantasy sequences” featuring song-and-dance episodes at odds with the diegetic continuum, sentimental dialogue, melodramatic plotting, ridiculous comedy, risible heroes and heroines, repressed sexuality, outworn social mores or reactionary moralism, cliché “philosophy,” shopworn traditionalism and spirituality, unconvincing *mise-en-scène*, and generally low production values. Excepting parallel or art cinema (Satyajit Ray, Shyam Benegal, and other luminaries), the cinema rarely seems invested in high art: image texture, the crystallization of time, or the fluid framing and shifting focus within an uncut shot that enrich, for instance, Chris Marker’s *La Jetée* (1962) or *Sans Soleil* (1983). But neither is Hollywood. Realism is not a standard but a convention.

A better appreciation of Hindi cinema requires “thick” description, as Clifford Geertz might put it, engaging the dialectic or parallax between realism and fantasy. This poses a challenge for audience reception: commentators frequently undertheorize the role of fantasy, underestimating how “popular cinema remains unencumbered by any obligation to reflect reality”; besides, “Bollywood is selective” in “maintaining, affirming and/or ‘resituating’” Indianness as “systems of values.”⁴⁶ Hindi cinema cannot “fix” an *echt* Indianness because representation is always imperfectly achieved. Yet inadequation is a source of creativity.

Besides, identity itself is a deficient category.⁴⁷ Hindi cinema is “implicated in strategies of containment, subjugation and resistance rather than emanations of fixed homogeneous categories such as class, gender or race.”⁴⁸ Rather than sedimented identities, it is better to speak of *actants* in global networks—circulations of culture, information, goods, and capital, as Bruno Latour reminds us: “By following circulations we can get more than by defining entities, essence or provinces.”⁴⁹ And these circulations encompass more than what Kuan-Hsing Chen defines as the ambit of “Asian” studies, a project of “deimperialization”: elaborating “authentic” subject-constructions to counter imperialism’s stereotypes.⁵⁰ The signifiers of “Asia,” like those of “India,” need to be assessed against the backdrop of neoimperialism; Indianness is also implicated in official discourses of modernity. Thus *Mother India* (1957), discussed in Chapter 2, ought to be contextualized with reference to Nehru’s programs of development, industrialization, and agricultural modernization. These programs informed communications policy in India’s first Five-Year Plan (1951), drafted four years after Independence. It postulated that “an understanding of the priorities which govern the Plan will enable each person to relate his or her role to the larger purposes of the nation. . . . All available methods of communication have to be developed and the people

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approached through the written and the spoken word no less than through radio, film, song and drama.”⁵¹

If Indianness is simultaneously a material reality and a discursive and even fantasmatic construction, the drive to mimeticism finds its natural matrix in the Golden Age of social realism—particularly in the films of Raj Kapoor and Mehboob Khan. Social realism was a discursive frame in which religion and community, sexuality and gender, class, national character and regional difference, caste and ethnicity, even skin color, were parsed to conform to regularities and patterns—ideological *condensations*—such as secular socialism. But the parallax of realism and fantasy gestures toward an *excess, a remainder*, though their parallax requires spectators to view the film in stereopsis, combining both. Besides, social realist discourse about Indianness runs up against fantasy *identifications* not contained within regularized and reified *identities*, as I show in Chapter 1, discussing the film *Awaara*, whose protagonist perversely embraces the disparaging label ascribed to him: *awaara* (savage/vagabond).

Another condensation of Indianness has been around confessional, religious, or ideological *belonging*, particularly *Hindutva* (“Hinduness”). This was an invention of the nineteenth century, and as Chapter 4, on “terrorism cinema,” shows, conflates Indianness and Hinduness on the mythological warrant of primordial Hindu cultural community.⁵² Yet Hindi cinema also propagates a centrifugal drive, propelled from reified identity by fantasmatic or imaginary identification, fueled by global cultural flows. These flows pose a challenge to cultural insularisms; popular Hindi cinema accelerates “disaggregation” of Indianness even when national narratives attempt to contain it.

A commonplace of Western cinematic traditions is that “all that remains of the national specificity question is a vague memory of a certain unease about the national film enterprise itself.”⁵³ Yet Hindi cinema remains obsessed with Indianness, coded in the claim of being the national cinema, which might be an unsustainable notion.⁵⁴ Ray’s famous *Pather Panchali* (Song of the Road, 1955) is very different from *Mother India*, discussed in Chapter 2, though both are icons of the Golden Age. *Pather Panchali* appeared only two years earlier, yet it projects a radically different sensibility. It was shot in black-and-white while *Mother India* was shot on Gevacolor negatives and then transposed to Technicolor stock. Furthermore, Ray’s neorealism contrasts with the complicated—inconsistent—social realism of Khan’s film. Benegal, the famous Bengali filmmaker, was critical of the presumption that while Hindi filmmakers (such as the secular nationalist Raj Kapoor) “were somehow more representative of India,” Bengali filmmakers like Ray “only represented Bengal.”⁵⁵ Clearly, Telugu or Tamil cinema has different aesthetics—and habitus—from Hindi or Punjabi cinema, let alone diasporic cinema. The local, furthermore, is not to be subordinated to the regional, national, or global. Tamil or Telugu cinemas often present dissident constructions of national culture. Such distinctions, though beyond the scope of this book, are crucial: they demand due modesty in pronouncements about “Indianness.”

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If national identity is understood as the *demos*, Seyla Benhabib emphasizes, there is “no way to cut” the “Gordian knot linking territoriality, representation, and democratic voice.”⁵⁶ But, however fugitive, the imaginary of Indianness “masks the hierarchy of subject positions and belonging divided along the lines of gender, class, ethnicity, and caste.”⁵⁷ It is impossible to designate a national cinema in a country with twelve major languages, a thousand dialects, many ethnic groups, over a billion inhabitants, and a diaspora spread across the “Brown Atlantic” and Asia, the Americas, Europe, and Africa. There is a huge diversity of religion and region, rural versus urban, educated versus unlettered. Can Hindi cinema meaningfully claim to represent Indianness—even as what Fredric Jameson termed “national allegory,” a formulation for which Jameson was roundly criticized, notably by Aijaz Ahmad?⁵⁸

Hindi cinema is arguably a “legitimate metaphor” for Indian society and politics, which “appear to have merged.”⁵⁹ Its claim to be a national cinema rests on the ability to reflect *and* fashion shared constellations of identity—as mirror and lamp. Ravi Vasudevan underscores its power to circulate a “reproducible image” of Indianness.⁶⁰ Similarly, Ernest Gellner suggests nationalism is the nation’s mother, and not vice versa.⁶¹ Yet Perry Anderson criticizes Gellner for underestimating cinema’s role in the mimesis of national identities.⁶² A national cinema condenses a singularity fantasmatically projected (a posteriori) as defining essence of “the people.” Often this projection is an anxious reaction to real or imagined threats. Therein lies a paradox. As Žižek notes, the national “Thing” is “conceived as something inaccessible to the other and at the same time threatened by” that other.⁶³ Instead of the anxious fetish of “authentic” identity, Indianness might be conceptualized as relative and “differentiative,” politically *equivalent* to other sovereign national identities and *differentiated* from them not as commodified reification but as motivated identification.

By century’s end India will be among the four largest economies. The film industry consistently outperforms other contributors to the annual GDP and is expected to grow, in this era of increasing media convergence. Localization—or “glocalization”—is nevertheless crucial. Hindi cinema, in Vasudevan’s words, is not only a “matter-of-fact everyday space”; it is also adjunct to “a broader space, in the market, near factories, schools, office blocks, in a mall, in residential areas.”⁶⁴ However, cinematic space is to be conceptualized not as territorially circumscribed within a cinema complex but as extending seamlessly into virtual (online, global) spaces opened up by new media.⁶⁵

It would be hard to exaggerate the importance of the *virtual* production of hyperinvested “identity” constructs on television and the silver screen. These constructs can be ideologically regressive, antiminoritarian: is this not the case with the massively promoted and widely promulgated serialized Hindu epic *Ramayan*? The first episode was telecast on Doordarshan’s National Television Programme, charged with the dissemination of a patriotic Indian (Hindu majoritarian) sensibility. Produced and directed by Ramanand Sagar, that first broadcast was followed by seventy-seven weekly episodes. Though panned by

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critics and secular intellectuals as a “communalist,” Hindu nationalist narrative, its success was unprecedented. Subsequent events seemed to suggest the antisecularist consequences of this mass-mediatic phenomenon: three years after the telecast, tensions between Hindu and Muslim communities erupted in a series of riots across northern India, culminating in December 1992’s destruction of the Babri Mosque by Hindu extremists.⁶⁶ Just as scandalously, the 2002 communal riots in Gujarat resulted in the deaths of more than one thousand people under the watch of BJP’s Hindu fundamentalist leader Narendra Modi, who in 2014 became India’s newly elected prime minister. There are many parallels in Hindi cinema for Hindu nationalism relayed through the *virtual* hyperinvestment of Indianness.

Comparisons with radio and TV provide illuminating parallels for resistance to Hindi cinema’s claims to being a national cinema. The television industry has been criticized for nationalist bias; while experimental broadcasts date from 1959, general Hindi-language services were inaugurated on August 15, 1965 (Independence Day), and in 1966 the Chanda Committee Report called for the autonomous incorporation of television. Radio is much older. In 1957 the Director General of Information and Broadcasting announced the state’s intention to change the name of All India Radio to “Akashvani” (Voice from the Skies), which was interpreted as evidence of a long-standing bias toward Hindi. In the 1970s the Verghese Committee recommended the creation of an autonomous national broadcasting corporation, a single comprehensive entity. In the 1980s the Joshi Committee advocated a more autochthonous rather than “derivative” idea of modern Indianness.⁶⁷ Both media industries privileged Hindi.

The attendant controversies were heightened by the separation of government-sponsored radio and television services on April 1, 1976, through the establishment of the national network Doordarshan.⁶⁸ The Constitution of India provided in Articles 343–351 for Hindi (Devanagiri script) to be “the official language of the Union,” with English remaining the “subsidiary national language” to facilitate governmental communication among the national and interstate agencies.⁶⁹ Arvind Rajagopal underscores how for Doordarshan *national programming* denotes “an emergent category of software in Indian television drawing upon mythological and historical sources, and portraying an idealized past” that is “projected as the crucible for shaping Indian identity.”⁷⁰ The dispute demonstrates how the ideologically motivated production of national identity solicits an equal and opposite reaction, or deconstruction.

Resentment against the de facto hegemony of Hindi in radio and television extends to the domain of cinema. Although there are other cinemas (Tamil, Bengali, Malayali, and others), Hindi cinema is *primus inter pares* and influential as a dominant *cultural* model. There is the unarguable demographic preponderance of Hindi speakers in the country. Neither can we dispute the unsurpassed *volume* of the Hindi film output. Taken together, the Indian film industries produce between eight hundred and nine hundred films annually, in various languages. Hindi films outnumber all others. A third factor is that

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Hindi speakers—often religiously identified as Hindu—wield *political as well as economic power*. Many Hindi-language films are funded, directed, “performed,” and distributed by members of the Hindi-speaking community, representing shared ideological, religious, political, and economic interests. For these reasons and its long history, Hindi cinema *is* the undisputable major presence in the Subcontinental mediascape: it is practically the national cinema.

Admittedly, there is a measure of contingency in my focus on a few examples of Hindi cinema. I do not discuss the significant production from regional film industries, whether in Bengali or Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, or Kannada, although these “regional” cinemas “articulate vastly different concerns and address local identities within India.”⁷¹ I leave untouched hundreds of other important or interesting films, including minor or small, low-budget films. While I select representative films, these selections may seem arbitrary. For instance, I do not discuss the very important film *Ankur* (Seedling, Shyam Benegal, 1974) but I discuss two films from the following year (1975), *Deewaar* and *Sholay*, and knowledgeable readers might find such selection arbitrary, given that Benegal’s film is artistically superior to the two popular hits. My selections may seem to other readers, especially experts, all too predictable. Yet this is not a book exclusively for experts. I acknowledge and accept my limitations. I also affirm the value of considering landmark or otherwise important Hindi films that define Hindi cinema, precisely because my premise is that that *popular* cinema helps define Indianness.

Inside the Dream Machine

My title, *Dream Machine*, apostrophizes an actual machine (a dream machine or “dreamachine”) that uses stroboscopic flickering light to induce hypnagogic effects on a subject. The machine is simple: a cylinder with side perforations. It is contemporaneous with the traditional record player, the gramophone—also rotating on a turntable at the rate of 78 or 45 revolutions per minute. Grand claims have been made about its profound effect on the brain. I adapt the image to exploit the broader implications of the dream machine’s hypnagogic power, highlighting the immersive experience of cinema and its *double séance*: in the hypnagogic state one is simultaneously in the real world and transported elsewhere. The dream machine is most effective if the subject’s eyes are closed. To dispel the effect, the subject need only reopen them. This suspension between the actual and the hypnagogic is a suggestive image for Hindi cinema’s “suspension” between realism and fantasy.

Hindi cinema certainly evokes the dream machine: purveying dreams, reflecting Indianness back to subjects who identify with aspects of the national imaginary through “projection,” in Mary Ann Doane’s phrase.⁷² The cinematic dream machine projects and (re)produces condensed images of Indianness at specific historical conjunctures—but *also* tests conventional limits of *realism* and what is taken to be *reality* by interposing competing fantasy identifications

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and truths. Entering the dream machine of cinema offers both scopic and visual pleasure, licensing temporary indulgence of otherwise impermissible desires, hopes, aspirations, and fears. Exiting the machine's hypnagogic state (or just the theater) and reentering "reality" can itself be revealing. An even broader interpretation might assimilate Hindi cinema to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's category of "social machines that create and recreate the identities and differences . . . understood as the local."⁷³ As an apparatus (re)producing the local (Indianness), the cinema machine (the camera-projector mechanism) "become[s] a 'larger social and/or cultural and/or institutional 'machine' for which the former is only a point of convergence of several lines of force in the latter."⁷⁴ There are other important referents of the dream machine metaphor, including the technology, or industry, of image production. Bernard Stiegler suggests that "*industrial temporal objects* are the new century's determining elements."⁷⁵ This book approaches Hindi cinema as a technology for producing condensations of national culture—including national *fantasy*. It is in this sense too a "dream machine."

My book's title also invokes a machinic mirroring: the dream machine suggests cinema's ability to function like the *dispositif*: the spectator is captured by the cinematic apparatus, suspended between reality and fantasy *and* interpellated within the public sphere of democracy, which Žižek conceptualizes as a "formal link of abstract individuals."⁷⁶ Jürgen Habermas theorizes this functioning of the public sphere, and Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge elaborate the notion of the *cinematic* public sphere mediating between state and civil society, facilitating the *representation* (here, of Indianness to Indians) but also *producing* cultural identity.⁷⁷

Certainly the category "public sphere" ought to be invoked with caution. The Habermasian desiderata are not met in every case: Hindi cinema is not necessarily in counterpoint to the discourses of the state; neither is it always genuinely transparent, open to participation from all parties of implied publics. It is not consistently oppositional or linked to the public exercise of reason (following Kant's important distinction between public and private). Further distinctions, having to do with class, ought to be noted too. Yet with Kavita Daiya I argue for construing Indian cinema as a public sphere text.⁷⁸

At least *social realist* Hindi cinema is able to produce a kind of counterpublic and a countermemory, unlike Bollywood extravaganzas, facilitating reflections in a way analogous to Kant's public reason, which "must always be free," while the private use of reason "may often be very narrowly restricted" without hindering the project of enlightenment.⁷⁹ Counterpublics may aspire to this kind of "freedom": it would be hard to imagine, given rates of public literacy and the economic conditions of most Indians, a more effective public sphere than cinema.

Yet public reason is hardly cinema's primary concern. In a globalized era we are increasingly caught up in what Guy Debord has described as the "society of the spectacle."⁸⁰ Hindi cinema too is driven by imperatives of entertainment. But it is also impelled by the forces of desire for what is publicly disallowed/dis-

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avowed and by desire for a “deconstructive reinvestment” of traditional values threatened by modernity and globalization. Vasudevan highlights the melodramatic mode of realism as a supplementary relation between the ideologically sanctioned status quo and the transgressive force of fantasy; melodrama can potentially “undertake a narrative and performative operation which allows for forbidden, transgressive spaces to be opened,” if only to be folded back into “a moral order.”⁸¹ Accordingly, “realist” and “fantasy” representations may be differentiated *modalities*, with fantasy augmenting, refracting, or supplementing realism. This supplementarity, furthermore, is heterogeneous and segmented, ranging from song-and-dance routines to fantasy in the psychoanalytic sense, tapping into unconscious reservoirs of psychic life including fantasy scenes of seduction crucial to the Oedipus complex and therefore to subjectivation, exceeding conscious reality and the “symbolic.”⁸²

Freud had already in 1897 come to recognize that theories of seduction may be produced by fantasies, not necessarily actual sexual seduction or abuse. Still, invoking a psychoanalytic interpretation of fantasy in this context will provoke familiar objections that Western psychoanalytic constructs—especially the crucial structure of the Oedipus, the model of the drives, the operation of desire within the Symbolic, and the notions of collective or individual fantasy—are alien to the Indian context. The eminent Indian psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar suggests that psychoanalysis has had only a slight influence on Indian culture, yet even he has explicitly employed a psychoanalytic lexicon to describe the “everyday fantasy” and intimate relations among Indians.⁸³ In any case, fantasy is Hindi cinema’s stock-in-trade: the power of fantasy “comes to our rescue by extending or withdrawing the desires beyond what is possible or reasonable” in a given social milieu; fantasy opens onto an alternative “world of imagination . . . fuelled by desire . . . [w]here we can continue with our longstanding quarrel with reality.”⁸⁴ Psychoanalysis, even if a “derivative” discourse within Hindi cinema studies, provides a critical vocabulary for understanding psychic life.⁸⁵

Arguing that the translation of fantasy must inevitably assume a catachrestic quality, I have dealt elsewhere with whether psychoanalytic and other Western theoretical categories can travel.⁸⁶ Prominent postcolonialists such as Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha have regularly employed Freudian and Lacanian categories in discussing non-Western texts.⁸⁷ And students of Hindi cinema, including Madhava Prasad, Jyotika Virdi, and Lalitha Gopalan, have applied presumptively “Western” theoretical categories extensively. Still, the psychoanalytic category of fantasy is admittedly a recalcitrantly local projection, and must be acknowledged as prohibitive of translation both figuratively and geographically—or championed as a primary mode for the obdurate reaffirmation (“return”) of the local even or especially *from within* the spaces of the hegemonic universal, a process Spivak, along with Peter Geschiere and others, has theorized.⁸⁸ Admittedly, there are misuses of psychoanalytic categories such as “extimacy,” but that is a different problem.⁸⁹ Untranslatability here is precisely resistance to what Spivak terms “the law of the strongest.”⁹⁰

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Hindi cinema's "untranslatability" is an effect of the dialectic between realism and fantasy—manifested as culturally specific, rather than medium specific, idiom: overstylization. And much of this emotionally as well as technically overstylized/oversaturated treatment is most visible in antinaturalist modes, particularly "fantasy" sequences.⁹¹