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The forking paths of Indian cinema

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17

THE FORKING PATHS OF INDIAN CINEMA

Revisiting Hindi films through their regional networks

Madhuja Mukherjee

Introduction

This essay sets out to remap Hindi popular cinema by locating its regional trajectories and questions conventional accounts of Indian cinema that present a narrative of a fixed and definitive Hindi language cinema produced in Bombay. Indian films of the 1920s employed inter-titles in a variety of languages (English, Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali), as is evident not only from surviving films but also from the *Indian Cinematograph Committee Report* (ICCR 1927–1928), and were produced and circulated across multiple locations throughout India (on the ICCR see Jaikumar 2003). Furthermore, studies of film studios have demonstrated that the production of Hindi-language cinema was not, in fact, limited to Bombay, but rather that in the 1920s and 1930s studios were set up in disparate places such as Calcutta (in Bengal) and Pune (in Maharashtra) (see Bhaumik 2001; Mukherjee 2008). Consequently, the meteoric growth of Bombay-based Hindi melodramas in the 1950s, followed by the emergence of the blockbuster model that relied on famed stars such as Amitabh Bachchan, formulaic narratives and generic hybridity in the 1970s and the transnational success of Bollywood in the 1990s, can be explained through reference to a complex web of industrial conditions and historical evolutions (on Bachchan see Prasad 1998, and on Bollywood see Rajadhyaksha 2002). By addressing crucial debates and studies on Indian cinema and focusing in particular on the complicated regional production and circulation of Hindi cinema, this chapter argues for an alternative, and more geographically complex, historiography of Indian cinema.

The generic diversity of Indian cinema in the 1920s–1930s

Ashish Rajadhyaksha's landmark 1987 essay on the "Phalke Era" analysed the ways in which the idea of Indian modernity was forged through the mythological films produced by D. G. Phalke in Mumbai during the 1910s and 1920s, and in so doing laid the ground for new approaches to studies of Indian cinema. Subsequently, more recent research has stressed the popularity of other genres and the transnational flows of Hollywood films across Indian territories during this period. For instance, Nitin Govil and Eric Hoyt (2014) have shown how *The Thief of Bagdad* (1924, USA, Raoul Walsh) became a huge international success largely due to United Artists'

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distribution networks throughout Asia, while research by Valentina Vitali (2008) and Anupama Kapse (2014) have drawn attention to the vibrant presence of action and stunt films in India during the silent era.

In his dissertation on the growth of the Bombay film industry between 1913 and 1936, Kaushik Bhaumik (2001) discusses the dynamic dialogues between Hindi films, the so-called regional language films in Bengali, Punjabi, Gujarati, Marathi and the like and the popular cinema of Hollywood. By drawing on diverse sources, including the ICCR and Bhaumik's critical map of Indian films, this chapter highlights their multiple paths, especially their regional and cosmopolitan networks, and the fact that in the 1920s colonial India was regularly exposed to a wide range of American (and European) films. The production of Hindi films, which had (and have) pan-Indian distribution and exhibition networks, was actually dispersed across different sectors of British India and thus both culturally and economically divided. Such cultural interactions and economic explorations in relation to Indian modernity may be read in the light of Miriam Bratu Hansen's assertion that:

> cinema was not only *part and symptom* [italics added] of modernity's experience and perception of crisis and upheaval; it was also, most importantly, the single most inclusive cultural horizon in which the traumatic effects of modernity were reflected, rejected or disavowed, transmuted or negotiated.
>
> *(Hansen 1999: 62)*

Thus, as Anupama Kapse discusses, films such as *Diler Jigar* (1931, India, G.P. Pawar) presented "new social, psychic, and artistic possibilities" (Kapse 2014: 224). Building on such studies of early cinema, I will now explore how modernity was refracted through cinema and the manner in which popular cinema became both "part and symptom" of the modernity project, advanced to a great extent by the Indian bourgeoisie (on the project of Indian bourgeoisie see Chatterjee 1994).

Modernity, New Theatres and the 'literary mode': Hindi cinema in Calcutta in the 1930s

In the early 1930s, the concept of an idealised Indian cinema was expounded and quickly became inextricably linked with debates about modernity (see Mukherjee 2012a), nationhood and nationalism and the process of becoming 'modern' (see Niranjana *et al.* 1993). For example, as quoted in the report of the *Indian Film Industry's Mission to Europe and America* (published by the Motion Picture Society of India, Bombay, July–December 1945) during his Presidential address at the 51st session of the Indian National Congress in 1938, the nationalist leader Subhas Chandra Bose said:

> We should make India and her culture known to the world […] If we could send out cultural and educational films made in India, I am sure that India and her culture would become known and appreciated by people abroad.
>
> *(Bose, quoted in Motion Picture Society of India, Bombay 1945: 2)*

Thus, not only was a nation being "imagined", but certain cultural forms such as cinema were being employed as a vehicle for national modernity. While both Soviet and (pre-1933) German nationalist models were pivotal in such debates, in India, the *Bhadralok*—English educated, urbane (upper-caste, Hindu) gentry of Bengal—became the bearer of such imaginings

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(see, for example, Kaviraj 1995). A thorough study of debates on cinema suggests that the aspiration to material supremacy (through education, scientific development and industrial growth) and spiritual sovereignty (involving culture and "the woman's question") could effectively be integrated into the cinema, since film was perceived as a technologically driven "art" form with "cultural" implications. Cinema could simultaneously project technical sophistication, an "imagined" Indian culture, and (a mythologised) history. In fact, a number of film reviews, editorials, letters to the editor, and pieces of studio news published in the influential journals such as *Film India*, *Film Land* and *Varieties Weekly* and others illustrate how issues of modernity, technology, industry, culture, language, artistic forms and gender were collapsed into the cinematic frame. In effect, cinema was seen as both a cultural product and project that had to be located within a larger international context, specifically in times of war and nationalism.

One may locate the emergence of New Theatres Ltd (henceforth NT) within the context of such debates. NT was established in Calcutta (Bengal), in 1931, by Birendra Nath Sircar, an Engineer trained in Glasgow, the son of the Advocate General of Bengal, and thus exemplary of the Bhadralok. From its inception until 1955, NT built technologically advanced studios, hired proficient (foreign) technicians, well-known authors, artists, musicians and directors (some of whom were active National Congress members), and produced films in Bengali, Hindi, Urdu and other languages. Sircar's early productions were immediately seen as an example of the Bhadralok's successful adoption of a popular form that had immense economic and cultural possibilities. During the inauguration of Chitra, NT's principal theatre in north of Calcutta, in November 1930, Subhas Chandra Bose urged Sircar, his employees, and the public to "to give less importance to foreign language films and focus on films made in Bengali" (see Mukherjee 2008). NT's other main cultural site, New Cinema, was inaugurated in Central Calcutta in 1932 by the well-known author, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, who was also a National Congress leader and whose writings often seemed to "fill out" Bose's ideological considerations (see Sarkar 1987). Chattopadhyay was closely linked with NT's productions and the studio gained substantial pan-Indian popularity and respectability via adaptations of his novels. The links between active national politics, economic struggles, the growth of small scale industrial operations and debates on culture, technology and the positioning of the Bhadralok as the agency of change thus constitute crucial points of departure in the attempt to understand how cinema was imagined as a vehicle of modernity.

The association with Bose's and Chattopadhyay, together with the involvement of eminent musicians, technicians and authors, including Noble laureate Rabindranath Tagore, posit NT's activities in the wider political–cultural map. Moreover, Sircar's social status played a crucial role in establishing NT's position of respectability. NT was perceived as an "emblem of culture" and was often pitted against companies which produced films with physical action or comedies. As the writings of well-known journalist, writer and filmmaker K. B. Abbas (1939) make clear, companies such as NT and Prabhat Film Co., Poona, which made progressive-realist and "Saint films" in Hindi and Marathi, fulfilled the nationalist model of an ideal cinema (on Prabhat see Geeta Kapur 2000). Specifically, NT's "literary style", which was achieved through the adaptation of novels, complex characterisation, a manner of narration that portrayed character's interiority through meandering narratives, complicated dialogue, application of thoughtful background music, the creation of realistic settings and so on, contributed to its high status (see Mukherjee 2008). NT often quoted European authors such as Goethe and Voltaire in its advertisements and placed its elephant logo (comparable only to MGM's roaring lion) above the names of directors and popular actors establishing a distinctive identity (Mukherjee 2009).

Such a revisionist history of NT reveals that the Hindi market was not entirely dominated by production companies based in Bombay, such as Bombay Talkies, Wadia Movietone and

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Ranjit Studios. Rather, NT and Prabhat Film Co., not only created a dent in the Northern and Western territories but also pioneered narrative and musical patterns and introduced a new visual iconography. This influence can be observed throughout the 1940s even though the studios located in the regions declined and then closed down in the 1950s. It is at this point that Bombay re-emerged as the principal site of Hindi film production, eventually becoming the "port of arrival" for many artists and reinforcing the widely known Hindi "Socials" (see Vasudevan 1989).

The decline of Calcutta studios and the rise of the Bombay brand in the 1950s

By the mid-1930s NT became a benchmark of idealised cinema. For instance, an anonymous reviewer in *Film World* (February 1934) emphasised that NT films were of "very high standard", the dialogue used "natural accent" and deployed "flawless" technique. However, *Film India* (January 1939) reviewed *Street Singer* (1938, India, Phani Majumdar), one of NT's biggest hits (with their pan-Indian singing sensations K. L. Saigal and Kanan Devi nee Bala), as "amateurish" and unsatisfactory, while *Lagan* (1941, India, Nitin Bose) was described as "nothing" compared to "the old standard of New Theatres" (1941, June, *Film India*). Nonetheless, such a narrative of the gradual decline of the ideal NT film is simplistic and misleading. For while NT had become principally associated with what have been termed "literary" films, in actual fact a number of its films did not fit within the framework (see Mukherjee 2011a and 2014). Moreover, the Hindi film market was bifurcated by multiple tendencies and some of the most popular Hindi films of the period belonged to other genres: action-thrillers produced by Wadia Movietone such as *Hunter Wali* (1935, India, Homi Wadia); (quasi-)historicals produced by Minerva Movietone such as *Pukar* (Call, 1939, India, Sorab Modi), *Sikandar* (1941, India, Sorab Modi) and *Jailor* (1938, India, Sorab Modi); Bombay Talkies' "socials" such as *Nirmala* (1938, India, Franz Osten), *Jhoola* (Swing, 1941, India, Gyan Mukherjee), *Naya Sansar* (New World, 1941, India, N R Acharya), *Kismet* (1943, India, Gyan Mukherjee); and big hits such as *Khazanchi* (1941, India, Moti B Gidwani) that incorporated a variety of popular tropes and reimagined the very notion of the popular. Moreover, during this period, Prabhat Film Co. had continued to produce "progressive" films directed by filmmakers such as V. Shantaram; Imperial Film Co. had produced India's first colour film, *Kisan Kanya* (1937, India, Moti B. Gidwani); and Mehboob Khan had made *Aurat* (Woman, 1940, India), portraying the iconic mother figure. While these films belonged to the all-inclusive Indian genre of the "Socials", some of them were also costume dramas set in the medieval period and thus adopted a distinct historical imaginary. The decline of the NT style, which had been one of the dominant modes in the 1930s and 1940s, must therefore be located in the complex mesh of political and cultural transformations of the period.

NT and the other studios in Calcutta, such as Sree Bharat Lakshmi Productions, began to disintegrate as a result of war and the volatile economic–political conditions of the 1940s (see Mukherjee 2009). During the Second World War, while Indian soldiers were fighting abroad, Eastern India lived in fear of bombing. Moreover, the Nationalist movement was at its peak and unprecedented communal riots soon ensued. Following the devastating Bengal famine in 1943 and nationwide bloodshed in 1946, both Independence and Partition took place in 1947 (see Sarkar 1984). Bengal experienced this traumatic transition in multiple ways and the film industry in Calcutta was severely affected. NT's economic and cultural dominance and the overall control of the big studios dwindled dramatically following these tragic events.

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Nonetheless, 1940 witnessed an increase in industrial investment (in iron, steel, ammunitions, etc.) and this increased employment and the amount of money in circulation. Rapid migration from rural areas to the cities further increased the size of the cinema-going public and a new kind of money resulting from shady wartime deals popularly known as "black money" became easily available to the film industry (see Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1980: 127–128). New strategies, including "one-film contracts" with the cast and crew became a common practice and although the cost of production increased four to six times, wartime deals brought easy and unaccounted capital (see Mukherjee 2009). Therefore, despite the scarcity of (imported) raw stock, and huge increases in cost of production (due to higher studio charges, star salaries, etc.), the industry experienced unprecedented growth and the number of films produced per year increased as a result of the expanded market. Popular films that previously ran for four to six weeks now ran for four to six months and NT had its biggest hit ever with *Wapas* (Back, 1943, India, Hemchandra Chunder). Thus, even when there was the risk of war and riots, there was no dearth of companies in cities such as Bombay, Calcutta, Madras (in South India) and Lahore (now in Pakistan). More than a hundred new companies—most of them with limited capital—were launched and production boomed, creating a huge demand for raw film, equipment, technicians, stars, and so on.

During the war, the studios suffered considerably due to a shortage of raw film stock, which was initially rationed and later available only on the black market. The big studios also suffered a severe financial crisis as hired personnel were quickly "bought" by the new companies with free-flowing capital. The patriarchal and vertical control of the studio owners no longer seemed viable. The situation was even more difficult in Bengal since partition meant that a large part of its market became a "foreign" market with the formation of (East) Pakistan. The removal of technical support from Europe as a result of the war, renewed control through censorship, the need to produce war propaganda films (which eventually flopped), the lack of raw film stock, and the scarcity of sufficient theatres to cater for the increased number of films produced all contributed to the disintegration of the studios. As for NT, directors such as Pramathesh Chandra (P.C.) Barua and Devaki Kumar Bose had already departed and with the war even respected technician–directors such as Nitin Bose and Bimal Roy left for Bombay. Furthermore, NT's production costs were far greater than the profits it could garner during this period and in 1955 the studio made its last films.

Conversely, by the 1940s, Bombay was the place to be (see, for example, Prakash 2010). Already in the previous decade Bombay had become a vibrant space for artistic encounters. Various groups and associations were established such as the Progressive Writers Association (1936), the Indian People's Theatre Association (1944) and the Progressive Artists Group (1947); moreover, in 1943 the headquarters of India's Communist Party was shifted from Lucknow (Central India) to Bombay. By the mid-1940s, there was a vibrant group of left-wing thinkers contributing to cultural life including eminent writers such as Saadat Hasan Manto, Krishan Chander, Ali Sardar Jafri and Ismat Chugtai, as well as performers and poets such as Sahir Ludhianvi, Majrooh Sultanpuri, Prem Dhawan, Shailendra and Kaifi Azmi. The presence of such figures contributed to the production of progressive films such as *Dharti Ke Lal* (Children of the Earth, 1946, India, K.A. Abbas) and *Neccha Nagar* (Lowly City, 1946, India, Chetan Anand). Additionally, the rapid economic growth in and around Bombay led to a migration towards the city, and the small-scale industries mushrooming in the Bombay suburbs produced greater possibilities for film production than in the city of Calcutta, which was only beginning to adjust to the millions of "refugees" who had arrived post-partition. Thus, the struggle over

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the Hindi film market was not solely the result of political change in the wake of the war and partition, but also the rapid development and subsequent stability of the Bombay production companies and the vibrant, left-leaning social and cultural scene in the city.

The rise and rise of the "Hindi Socials"

Ever since the mid-1930s, the genre labelled as the "Hindi Socials" had drawn on the discrete melodramatic tendencies pioneered by NT, Prabhat and Bombay Talkies. For example, India's first cinemascope film, *Kaagaz ke Phool* (Paper Flowers, 1959, India, Guru Dutt), is set during a moment of transition and describes the decline of the studio era and the way one director, Suresh (played by Dutt himself), negotiates these changes. It makes specific references to NT, contrasting films such as *Street Singer* and *Nartaki* (Dancer, 1940, India, Debaki Bose) as examples of the failing studio style with *Vidyapati* (1938, India, Debaki Bose) and *Devdas* (1935, India, P. C. Barua) as examples of an earlier golden age. Thus, the film tells the story of an era, interweaving Suresh's personal crisis with references to NT's films and history. In the process, Dutt fabricates intricate inter-textual links, employing creative mise-en-scène to allude to the dominant images of Barua's *Devdas*—shots of murky, sinister streets; the hero languishing in grief and pain; his visits to the brothel as in *Pyaasa* (Eternally Thirsty, 1957, India, Guru Dutt) (see Mukherjee 2011b).

In his reading of Hindi films of the 1950s, Ravi Vasudevan (1989) argues that Indian melodramas (and the "Socials") are dominated by two basic plot types. The "renunciation" plot, in which the hero rejects authority is exemplified by *Devdas* and *Pyaasa*; while *Awaara* (Vagabond, 1951, India, Raj Kapoor), *Deewar* (The Wall, 1973, India, Yash Chopra) and *Shakti* (Power, 1982, India, Ramesh Sippy) exemplify the second type which features an (Oedipal) "conflict" with an authorial father figure (see also see Vasudevan 2002). According to M. Madhava Prasad (1998), the social spaces articulated in such melodramas, and especially those of films from the 1960s, represent "a conflict between two ideologies of modernity, one corresponding to the conditions of capitalist development in the periphery and the other aspiring to reproduce the ideal features of the primary capitalist state" (Prasad 1998: 55). In examining the relationship between the transformation of cinematic institutions and the on-going struggle over the formation of the state, Prasad interprets films of the 1960s such as *Sangam* (Confluence, 1964, Raj Kapoor) as "feudal family romances" (Prasad 1998: 64) that narrativise negotiations between the newly formed nation-state and the conventions of existing community structures. Equally importantly, he highlights the tensions between spectatorship and citizenship embodied in such films.

Prasad goes on to demonstrate how, following the crisis of the Indian state after the death of India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and the meteoric rise of (his daughter) Indira Gandhi, which resulted in the rule of decree barring elections and civic rights in 1975, the film industry reconstituted itself "formally" through a process he describes as the "aesthetics of mobilization" (Prasad 1998: 138–159). By this point the democratic revolution had been "indefinitely suspended" and the cinema addressed the new context through "three distinct aesthetic formations—the new [state sponsored, developmental] cinema, middle-class [commercial] cinema, and the popular cinema of mobilization" (Prasad 1998: 118). Valentina Vitali (2008) also explores the cinema's response to this "moment of disaggregation" vis-à-vis the state, by comparing low-budget action films with films featuring Amitabh Bachchan, the biggest star of the period. An analysis of the interactions between "A-movies" and "B-movies" reveals how the cinematic scene was actually "highly hybrid", creating a "transnational category [in which] the national and regional forms" (Vitali 2008: 186) retained their distinctive characteristics.

Prasad's complex readings of the relationship between the state and cinematic forms call attention to the multiple courses within the industry. For instance, he identifies two types of

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"Middle Class Cinema"; the first emerges from the culture of progressive realism in the films of Prabhat, while the second derives from the NT style, reproducing a realist aesthetic but working within a populist mode. As a result, there were two types of middle class cinema, one "asserting the national role" and the other attempting to produce "an exclusive space of class identity" (Prasad 1998: 163). More central to the concerns of this essay is his reading of middle-class cinema's:

> overwhelming dependence on Bengali culture [and the NT style] for its narrative and iconographic material as well as filmmaking talent […] [and the ways in which] the industry found in those narratives a ready supply of "difference" which could be re-presented.
>
> *(Ibid.: 164–165)*

Films by Bimal Roy such as *Parineeta* (The Married Woman, 1953, India), *Do Bigha Zamin* (Two Acres of Land, 1953, India), *Biraj Bahu* (1954, India), *Devdas* (1955, India), *Parakh* (1960, India) and by Hrishikesh Mukherjee, such as *Anuradha* (Actress, 1960, India), *Anupama* (1968, India), *Satyakam* (1969, India), *Anand* (Bliss, 1971, India), *Bawarchi* (The Chef, 1972, India), *Chupke Chupke* (Hush Hush, 1975, India) (Figure 17.1]), all belong to such practice.

It is worth noting that the principal action hero of the period, Amitabh Bachchan, also performed in a number of Hrishikesh Mukherjee films, and that the exclusion of his middle-class roles (and his own English educated background) raise a series of questions around the construction of his star persona and point towards a possible new reading of industrial networks.

Figure17.1 Films such as *Chupke Chupke* (Hush Hush, 1975, India) were dependent on Bengali culture, and the NT style, for their narrative and iconographic material.

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During this period his persona was based primarily on elements such as forbidding anger, the question of an unresolved past, a deep attachment to the mother, excessive gloom and physical suffering. Yet the concurrent success of *Zanjeer* (Shackles, India, Prakash Mehra) and *Abhimaan* (Pride, India, Hrishikesh Mukherjee) in 1973, *Hush Hush* and *Sholay* (Embers, India, Ramesh Sippy) in 1975, and *Alaap* (Overture, India, Hrishikesh Mukherjee) and *Amar Akbar Anthony* (India, Mammohan Desai) in 1977, complicate such a simplistic, one-sided reading of his persona. For example, *Hush Hush*, which is a reworking of the Bengali film *Chhadmabeshi* (Incognito, 1971, India, Agradoot), presents Bachchan as an English Professor and portrays several middle-class characters, themes and situations that reinforce middle-class endogamy. Moreover, through location shooting and the creation of familiar situations and situational dialogues, Mukherjee transposed realistic aesthetics to the commercial sector. Particularly significant in this regard are the uses of music and the treatment of situation-specific songs.

The nature and functions of the "Middle Class Cinema" described by Prasad are dealt with explicitly in *Guddi* (1971, India, Hrishikesh Mukherjee). Here both the audience and the protagonist, Guddi, who is herself obsessed with popular cinema, are taken on a journey that leads them to become (seemingly) more rational and educated film-goers. Thus, the film addresses issues such as the problem of the reality-effect vis-à-vis tropes of popular cinema and the rise of stars following the disintegration of the studios. Such subjects are developed through a series of scenes in which Guddi is gradually reformed. Mukherjee represents the film industry in terms of visionary directors and good-hearted actors (especially those playing villains) and crews, thereby, as Prasad argues, "softening" the critique of popular cinema by portraying it as an enterprise. Moreover, the film draws attention to the use of playback, and the role of musicians, writers, technicians and the like. Not only does the film make use of actors from the early talkie period like Master Shiraj, but also features contemporary stars like Dharmemdra (playing himself), who escorts Guddi and her fiancé to a dilapidated studio, which, he claims belonged to Bimal Roy. As the camera tracks to draw attention to the remains of the past, Dharmendra's voice-over describes how they had shot landmark films such as Roy's *Bandini* (Captured Female, 1963, India), *Do Bigha Zamin* (1953, India) and *Madhumati* (1958, India), in the same studio. "Who remembers those names", he laments, before adding, "our names will be forgotten too." Aside from the fact that Mukherjee aspired to produce an idealised audience (or "citizen-subjects") in the new nation, his allusions to his own reformist films such as *Anupama* (1966, India) and those of Bimal Roy underline a longer trajectory of realist aesthetics that includes Roy's *Do Bigha Zamin*, a landmark and popular adaptation of *Ladri di biciclette* (Bicycle Thieves, 1948, Italy, Vittorio De Sica) scripted by Mukherjee, as well as his seminal work for NT such as *Udayer Pathey* (Towards the Light, 1944, India, Bimal Roy). The persistence of such "Bengali" elements alongside the dominant melodramatic mode, not only illustrates the industry's negotiation of the process of the formation of the national state, but also demonstrates how the promise of modernity evoked in the early period was kept alive and perpetually deferred.

Writing about *Kalapani* (Deported, 1958, India, Raj Khosla), which is a reworking of the Bengali film *Sabar Upore* (Beyond Everything, 1955, India, Agradoot) Prasad suggests that:

> The loss of thematic and iconic integrity that the Bengali "social" genre undergoes in the hands of the Bombay film industry has many causes. […] The result was the creation of a new form which, in spite of the "nationalization" of the Hindi film industry in Bombay, would henceforth and for a long time retain these regional features.
>
> *(Prasad 2011: 78)*

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The concluding section thus extends this proposition and examines this process of "nationalisation" and the "inscribing" of regional cultural features in contemporary cinema to reveal what we could term the "forking paths" of mainstream Hindi films.

The local in the global

With nationwide inflation in the 1980s, the production system in Bombay weakened considerably and, after a decade of astounding successes, even Amitabh Bachchan's films began to fare poorly at the box office. Moreover, amidst rapid political changes after Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination and as his popularity began to wither, Bachchan stepped into politics, becoming a Member of Parliament. But the 1980s also witnessed the successful re-entry of producers from Southern provinces, with Tamil and/or Telugu companies producing a number of Bachchan vehicles such as *Andha Kanoon* (The Law Is Blind, 1983, India, T. Rama Rao), *Mahaan* (Great, 1983, India, Prakash Mehra and S. Ramanathan), *Geraftaar* (1985, India, Prayag Raaj) and *Akhree Raasta* (The Last Option, 1987, India, Bhagyaraj).

The media culture was also changing rapidly, with the arrival of new colour TV channels in 1982 and the introduction of cassette and videotapes in the music industry (see Manuel 1993). One of the biggest successes of the decade was a smaller-budget film, *Disco Dancer* (1982, India, Babbar Subhash), which, together with *Kasam Paida Karne Wale Ki* (I Swear by My Father, 1984, India, Babbar Subhash) and *Dance Dance* (1987, India, Babbar Subhash), comprised a loose "trilogy" that effectively introduced new musical (and media) forms, such as disco (see Mukherjee 2012b). The success of such smaller-budget films emphasises the influx and spread of new media and music cultures during this period, and one could suggest that the Bachchan film *Agneepath* (Path of Fire, 1990, India, Mukul S. Anand), which co-starred the lead from the disco trilogy, Mithun Chakraborty, was a response to these industrial (and political) changes.

Anurrag Kashyap's magnum opus *Gangs of Wasseypur* (2012, India), which was made and released in two parts, responds to these intense negotiations, while also harking back to the "B-movie" phase of Hindi cinema (see Mukherjee 2015) (Figure 17.2). The films are set in a quasi-real space in Jharkhand (formerly part of Bihar, India), and deal with the nexus between the coal mafia and politicians through a narrative that encompasses a broad historical arc and three generations of characters. Interestingly, the memory of Bachchan's star-persona (as well as those of Sanjay Dutt and Salman Khan) functions as a powerful structural device in the film. For example, the story of Faizal Khan, the protagonist of part 2, models his life on the estranged father–son narrative of *Trishul* (Trident, 1978, India, Yash Chopra). Indeed, it is by weaving a mesh of cross-references that Kashyap crafts a potent story that provides a commentary both on public cultures and their import within social histories. The films also evoke the memories of the "B-movies" of the 1980s and 1990s and of disco, employing the title song of *Kasam Paida Karne Wale Ki* when Sardar Khan, the protagonist of part 1, decides to confront his father's murderer, Ramadhir Singh. The use of the song, performed by a Mithun Chakraborty lookalike, makes the sequence both intensely comic and emotionally tense. The repeated use of camp cultural references give Kashyap's films added complexity, drawing attention to problematic issues in cultural and social history. Moreover, it is well-known fact that the film's music director, Sneha Khanwalkar, travelled across Bihar and the Hindi heartland (in the North of India) in order to collect local music and sounds. Thus, one of the most popular songs in the films, "Womaniya", was recorded in Patna, Bihar, using two local

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Figure 17.2 The epic *Gangs of Wasseypur* (2012, India, Anurrag Kashyap) harked back to the disco and B-movies of the 1980s while also drawing on popular songs collected in Bihar and the Hindi heartland in the North of India.

singers, while the singers in the female chorus were formally untrained women discovered in a local temple. In an interview dated 1 August 2012 on the web channel BollywoodHungama.com, Khandwalkar suggested that:

> The voices in every state [of India] have a different grain, you can tell immediately [where they are from] […] now technology allows [local recording] […] you can even go to a house and record […] in the studios you lose this energy […] for "Womaniya" we recorded live […] everything is mixed […] It's fun.

Kashyap's films may be described as an extension of multiplex films that address the concerns of the *neo*-middle classes (see Gopal 2011). However, alongside such films, Kashyap's productions, such as the widely discussed small-budget films *Queen* (2013, India, Vikas Bahl) and *Masaan* (Crematorium, 2015, India, Neeraj Ghaywan), which received a certain degree of international acclaim, focus on local settings. These films also make use of regional differences in speech, dialect, community practices (including subjects such as caste discrimination) and a range of sub-cultural practices. One could argue that this renewed regional focus is a product both of personal concerns of the filmmakers, industrial renegotiations and the renewed interest of global media in local events and cultures.

This continuing dialogue between global Bollywood and local cultures highlights the authorial, industrial and cultural transactions that still exist between the Hindi mainstream and its many others. Indeed, in recent years there have been many popular films such as *Kahani* (Story, 2012, India, Sujoy Ghosh) and *Piku* (2015, India, Shoojit Sircar) that were not only largely shot in Calcutta but also featured substantial involvement on the part of the Bengali film industry in terms of both cast and crew, and therefore is considered quasi-Bengali productions.

Conclusion

This essay has focused on New Theatres and its legacy in order to present a revisionist history of Hindi cinema. However, a similar argument can be made in relation to Marathi language films, drawing attention to the extent to which Prabhat Film Co. created a dent in the Hindi film market during the 1930s and to which Dada Kondke's *tamasha*-style popular cinema, in

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films such as *Pandu Havaldar* (Constable Pandu, 1975, India), exerted a considerable influence on Hindi popular cinema (on Marathi cinema, see Ingle 2015). The more one examines the historical evolution of industrial structures, the more it becomes clear that the modes of production of Hindi cinema are manifold and the films it has produced complex and full of fissures. Moreover, what may at first appear to be the sudden and unexpected emergence of the "local" (places, themes, characters, idioms, cast and crew) within the framework of contemporary global Bollywood is in actual fact the contemporary manifestation of a cultural practice that has been vibrant from the very earliest days of Indian cinema.

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