Is There an Indian Way of Filmmaking?

Philip Lutgendorf

"…the Hindi film appears to be perhaps the most powerful cultural product based on non-Western aesthetic principles presently alive…."
Lothar Lutze (1985:14)
"The difference between Hindi and Western films is like that between an epic and a short story."
screenwriter Javed Akhtar (cited in Thomas 1985:123)

Poet and polymath A. K. Ramanujan once wrote a serious essay that he playfully titled, "Is There an Indian Way of Thinking?" It began by querying its own question, for Ramanujan was aware of the risk of essentialism (and its past deployment by orientalists, Marxists, nationalists, etc.) when approaching a vast region of greater ethnic and linguistic diversity than Europe. Yet as a trained linguist and folklorist, he was indeed interested in the recurring patterns and themes that lend a distinctive flavor to South Asian culture—a flavor that may be especially recognizable to an outsider, or to an insider who steps out. That Indian popular films have a definite flavor is generally recognized, even by Anglo-Americans who encounter them while surfing cable TV channels—and not simply because the films' actors happen to be Indian. The films look, sound, and feel different in important ways, and a kind of cinematic culture-shock may accompany a first prolonged exposure. I recall an American film scholar, after viewing his first "masala blockbuster," remarking to me that the various cinemas he had studied—American, French, Japanese, African—all seemed to play by a similar set of rules, "…but this is a different universe." Experienced viewers are familiar with the sometimes negative responses of neophyte visitors to this universe: the complaint that its films "all look the same," are mind-numbingly long, have incoherent plots and raucous music, belong to no known genre but appear to be a mish-mash of several, and are naive and crude imitations of "real" (Hollywood) movies, etc.—all, by the way, complaints that are regularly voiced by some Indians as well, particularly by critics writing in English. They also know that millions of people, including vast audiences outside the subcontinent, apparently understand and love the "difference" of these films.

Ramanujan published his essay in the anthology India Through Hindu Categories (Marriott 1990), which was part of a broad if sporadic effort within the Euro-American academy, spurred by the post-World War II interest in interdisciplinary "area studies," to understand other cultures in their own terms, and to acknowledge the assumptions rooted in Western intellectual tradition that had unconsciously biased previous inquiries. For South Asia, the standard narratives of history, religion, and literature had largely emerged out of the colonial-era collaboration of British and Indian elites; given the asymmetry of power in this collaboration, the expectations of the former often influenced the information they received from the latter, which in turn shaped the explanatory narratives they crafted and then (through the colonial knowledge economy) exported back to their native subjects. Despite recent efforts to question or deconstruct the received narratives of "Hinduism" (as a monolithic ideology; see von Stietencron 1995), "caste" (as a rigid "system" and distinctively Indian form of social organization; see Dirks 2001), and even language (in the case of Hindi and Urdu, as reified and religion-specific; see Rai 2001), scholars still remain far from the goal (to cite the title of another recent study) of "provincializing Europe"—turning the lens on the all-seeing eye of Euro-American intellectual (and material) hegemony (Chakrabarty 2000). In the realm of film studies, the Copernican discourse has been of "cinema" in general (i.e., American), with sub-specializations in "national cinemas" orbiting around its sun, each represented by a few key auteur-names. India has long been represented by Satyajit Ray, and "all those musicals"—in embarrassing fact, some 30,000 of them, and counting. That this enormous and influential body of popular art, ignored for decades, is now beginning to receive scholarly notice suggests the need for, at least, systemic realignment (as when a big new planet swims into our ken); a more audacious suggestion is that its "different universe" might make possible an Einsteinian paradigm-shift by introducing new ways of thinking about the space-time of cinematic narrative. That is, of course, if the universe is truly "different." Assertions of the distinctive "Indianness" of Indian

popular cinema—or its lack—have emerged from a variety of scholarly approaches, viz.:

1) Cultural-historical — this traces the distinct features of Indian cinema to older styles of oral and theatrical performance, some of which survive into modern times. A fairly standard genealogy cites the ancient epics Ramayana and Mahabharata, classical Sanskrit drama, regional folk theaters of the medieval-to-modern period, and the Parsi theater of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (e.g., Dissanayake and Sahai 1992: 9-17; Lutze 1985; Mishra 1985; 2002:4-15, 39-45).

2) Technological — here the distinctive visual features of Indian cinema are traced to the advent of technologies of image reproduction during the second half of the 19th century, resulting in the rapid evolution and dissemination of a common visual code for theatrical staging, poster art, cinema, comic books, advertising, etc. (Pinney1999; Rajadhyaksha 1993; Ramaswamy and Uberoi 2002). A related approach, confined to cinema itself, analyzes camerawork and sound, noting Indian filmmakers' rejection of the "invisible style" and "centering" principle of classic Hollywood in favor of an aesthetic of "frontality" (especially in early "mythologicals"), "flashy" camerawork, and a consciously artificial style, further heightened by the use of non-synch sound and "playback" singing. (e.g., Dissanayake and Sahai 1992:19-20; Manuel 1993:37-59; Vasudevan 2000:105).

3) Psychological/mythic — this approach reads popular films as "contemporary myths which, through the vehicle of fantasy and the process of identification, temporarily heal for their audience the principal stresses arising out of Indian family relationships" (Kakar 1983:97); the favored approach is psychoanalytic (e.g., Kakar 1989:25-41), although there has been one ambitious attempt to use a "mythological" film to modify a basic Freudian paradigm, at least with respect to Indian culture (Kurtz 1992).

4) Political-economic — this approach, grounded in Marxist theory, attributes the distinctive features of Indian popular cinema to the material and socio-political conditions of 20th century India and of the film industry itself, and argues that the films encode an ideology that "subsumes" a modernist agenda of egalitarianism, individualism, and radical social change within a feudal and non-egalitarian status quo (e.g., Prasad 1998; Kazmi 1999).

These approaches are neither exhaustive nor necessarily incompatible; many scholars combine two or more. It is fairly common to invoke the first by way of sketching a cultural background, and then to proceed to one or more of the others, perhaps analyzing a single film in their terms (e.g., Dissanayake and Sahai 1992). At times, however, there is an element of antagonism between proponents of the first and fourth approaches. On the one hand, one encounters grandiose claims that the classical tradition and especially the two Sanskrit epics constitute "the great code" of popular filmmaking, and that "any theoretical critique of Bombay cinema must begin with a systematic analysis of the grand Indian meta-text and 'founder of Indian discursivity,' namely the Mahabharata/Ramayana" (Mishra 1985:134, 145). This is a claim that is sometimes made by filmmakers themselves, as when Mumbai director Dharmesh Darshan tells an interviewer, "In India, our stories depend on the Ramayan—all our stories are somewhere connected to this holy book" (Kabir 2001:93; see also Thomas 1995:182, n. 35). On the other hand, a Marxist scholar criticizes "anthropologists and Indologists or others employing the tools of these disciplines" for their tendency "to read popular cinema as evidence of the unbroken continuity of Indian culture and its tenacity in the face of the assault of modernity" (Prasad 1998:15). He warns that such "eternalist proclamations…while claiming to reveal the truth about Indian cinema, actually contribute to the maintenance of an Indological myth: the myth of the mythically-minded Indian" (Ibid, 17). In a more extreme case, a psychoanalyst and critic argues that there is in fact nothing "traditionally Indian" about popular cinema at all, and that its creations represent an "urban, middle-class phenomenon, a direct outgrowth of the colonial presence and the seductiveness of modern technology" (Zutshi 2002).

In what follows, I use my training as a folklorist and student of oral performance and popular narrative traditions to revisit the first approach cited above, but I do so mindful of the criticisms just offered. I have no wish to contribute to what Kazmi calls "the fetishization of tradition" (Kazmi 1999:62), or to suggest that there is an unchanging "essence" of Indian performance, or some genetic inheritance that predisposes South Asians to relish three-hour spectacles of music, dance, and melodrama. Such tastes reflect nurture, not nature, and they, and the films that cater to them, are influenced by diverse forces that also change over

time. The claim that popular films are all based on epic archetypes is demonstrably groundless, as is the hyperbolic (and insulting) generalization that they reflect folk traditions "…that impinge on the Indian's psyche and never allow him to escape from the psychological parameters of being an Indian villager" (Saari 1985:16)—an assessment that reduces a population of over one billion (some forty percent of whom now live in urban areas) to (male) embodiments of an inescapably rustic "Indian psyche." But the Marxist reduction is scarcely more satisfying: M. Madhava Prasad's argument for the decades-long dominance of a single master narrative hinges on a few roughly-sketched plot-outlines, omits questions of reception, and ignores the films' musical component altogether (Prasad 1998:64-72).

The practices and conventions that I will be discussing are observably pervasive of the Indian cultural environment—alluded to in verbal idioms, body language, and ubiquitous iconography. Hence they can be effortlessly relearned by successive generations, though their precise forms at a given moment are of course subject to historical contingency and outside influence. Indeed, the "hybridity" of Indian popular cinema is another of its proverbial features: its pastiche and parody of foreign cultural forms and practices and its frequent borrowing of camera shots, plot ideas, and melodies. Although every cinema borrows, the specific forms that borrowing assumes in the post-colonial South Asian context and the economic and cultural forces that influence it are of course deserving of study. I would venture that the visual and musical hybridity of this cinema has itself become, like other ingredients in its overall spicy masala mix, one of its distinctively "Indian" features—identifying it as, in Anil Saari's words, "an eclectic, assimilative, imitative and plagiaristic creature that is constantly rebelling against its influences…." (Saari 1985:16).

Rosie Thomas has observed that "films are in no sense a simple reflection of the wider society, but are produced by an apparatus that has its own momentum and logic" (Thomas 1996:179). She thus underscores the power of cinematic conventions, whatever their genealogy, to rapidly become self-perpetuating, serving to educate audiences in the expectation of what a film ought to be. Since the makers of commercial Indian films constantly strive to meet the expectations of their audience, a fairly stable loop has been created. In this sense, it is doubtless also correct to assert that the single biggest influence on Indian popular film has long been…Indian popular film. Yet it is equally clear that the distinctive conventions of this artform, which have tenaciously resisted the influence of Western cinemas, did not arise in a cultural vacuum.

In the sections that follow, my aim, first of all, is to give novice students of Indian popular cinema an acquaintance with some of the terms, texts, and narrative genres that are regularly cited in studies of its cultural origins, along with references to relevant primary and secondary sources. In addition, I seek to correct certain imbalances and omissions in the standard genealogical narrative as outlined earlier, by presenting material (e.g. on the Indo-Islamic romance tradition) that has been omitted by other scholars. Finally, I aim to suggest ways in which selected resources drawn from the Indian cultural heritage might be applied not only to the study of Indian cinema (as a bounded, exotic "other" to Western cinemas) but more broadly to the study of cinema in general.

Seeing

Academic scholarship took more than half a century to begin to look at cinematic "looking," and indeed at cinema itself as a subject of serious inquiry. The delay may have reflected not merely the inertia of disciplines, but a more ingrained prejudice toward text over image that may be traced back at least to the Reformation and Enlightenment. The proliferation of ever more sophisticated technologies for the reproduction of images and especially of moving images in the 19th and 20th centuries was experienced by many scholars as a worrisome onslaught on the cerebral realm of verbal discourse. Hence film studies as a discipline necessarily arose as an offshoot of literary criticism, accommodating film as another form of "text." The development of critical vocabulary for analyzing the visual aspect of film—such as Laura Mulvey's concept of voyeurism and "the gaze" and Christian Metz's concept of "scopophilia"—remains an ongoing process. As Prasad points out, both these scholars assume an essentially "realist" cinema whose spectator "occupies an isolated, individualized position of voyeurism coupled with an anchoring identification with a figure in the narrative" (Prasad 1998:74)—an assumption that is problematic when applied to Indian

commercial cinemas. A yet more holistic appreciation of the cinematic experience remains a challenging agenda, and sound and music continue to be relatively neglected realms. As I will note shortly, this intellectual genealogy may be contrasted to an Indian synaesthetic discourse, dating back some fifteen centuries, which is based squarely on visual and aural performance.

Vision and sound interact in the most archaic surviving Indian textual tradition, that of the Rig veda ("praise-wisdom"), a set of roughly a thousand hymns to various deities, dating at least to the mid-second millennium B.C.E. The hymns, which served as a liturgy during elaborate fire sacrifices, are attributed to poets known both as "singers" (kavi) and "seers" (rishi), who were credited with the ability to see both the gods and the "sounds" of the hymns themselves, suggesting a blurring of the senses in mystical experience. Rishi, conventionally translated as "sage," comes from the Sanskrit verb root drish which has the same double meaning that many of its derivatives convey in modern Indian languages (e.g., the Hindi verb dekhna): it means both "to see" and "to look at." Indeed, "seeing" was (and continues to be) understood as a physical encounter in which sight reaches out to "touch" objects and "take" them back into the seer (hence Hindi dekhna is normally compounded with lena, "to take," also used for verbs of ingestion). Likewise derived from drish is the noun darshan, "seeing, looking at," a term that assumed great importance following the decline of the vedic sacrificial cult and the rise, during the first millennium of the Common Era, of the worship of gods who were embodied in sacred images.

The iconic prolixity of Hinduism is a commonplace. There are sometimes said to be "three hundred million gods," and their representations typically bristle with supernumerary heads, arms, and weapons. A shared and striking feature of the deities is their eyes, often huge and elongated, which gaze directly at the viewer. The theo-visual spectacle of the Hindu pantheon was, however, "hard to see" for most Euopean observers prior to the twentieth century, and they dismissed it either as "demonic," or as a misshapen simulacrum of the "realist" aesthetic of Greco-Roman civilization (Mitter 1977)—the latter assessment prefiguring one common Western response to the visual code of Indian popular films. When Hindu images are crafted, their painted or inlaid eyes are customarily added last and then ritually "opened" by a priest using a golden needle. This establishes the deity within the icon and makes him or her available for the primary act of worship, which is "seeing/looking" (darshan). In Indian English, people go to temples "to take darshan" of images; Hindi favors "to do darshan" (darshan karna); both idioms imply a willful and tangible act. Darshanic contact is powerful, and invites the exchange of substance through the eyes, which are not simply "windows of the soul," but open portals to a self that is, broadly speaking, conceived as relatively less autonomous and bounded and more psychically permeable than in Western understandings. Darshan may also refer to the auspicious sight of powerful places and persons; holy people and kings (and of course politicians and filmstars) "give darshan" to those who approach them. Interestingly, the word darshan is further used to denote the principal "schools" of Indian philosophy, which are thus identified as varying "viewpoints," examining the world (or a world-transcending Truth) from different angles of vision.

The derivatives of Sanskrit drish do not exhaust the vocabulary of seeing in India. The word nazar ("look" or "glance"), imported from Arabic and Persian, has similar connotations of tangible exchange and is common both in everyday speech (where it figures in a large number of idioms) as well as in Indo-Islamic religious discourse. It is applied to the eye contact of lovers, especially the first sight that causes passion to arise, and also to the benign gaze of Sufi masters, which watches over and protects their disciples. A similar range of meanings is conveyed by idioms using the Persian-derived nigah, which translates as "look" or "glance," yet conveys a more potent contact than these English words. It also connotes, in the context of a culture that idealized (and occasionally practiced) the veiling of respectable women from all men apart from their immediate kin, a glance that is often illicit and dangerous, and that can easily give rise to a "love at first sight" that is disruptive of social and familial hierarchy (such eye-contact-generated love is, of course, one of the supreme tropes of popular cinema). Another potentially dangerous side of sight—when negative feelings or forces exit or enter through the eyes—is also invoked through idioms of a "black" or "evil" gaze (kali nazar, buri nazar) from which one seeks protection. Such looks are associated with powerful and proscribed desires—especially lust, envy, or covetousness.

The practice of darshan contributes to the aesthetic of "frontality" often noted in discourse about popular

cinema, especially the mythological genre which recapitulates the conventions of poster illustration: the deity/actor , often centrally-framed within a static tableau, is positioned to invite sustained eye contact with the viewer (Kapur 1987:80,; Kapur 1993:92). It likewise contributes to the more ubiquitous fetish, across all cinematic genres, for eyes and glances, especially in scenes between lovers, as well as the great emphasis (also notable in Indian dance, folk theater, and miniature painting) on the eyes as communicators of emotion (e.g., the popular 1970s and 80s technique of repeated facial zoom shots during moments of high emotion). But there is more to cinematic darshan than this, since darshan is emphatically a "gaze" that is returned. In a crowded Hindu temple, one can observe a jockeying among worshipers to position their eyes along a clear axis of contact with those of the god. Their explanations emphasize that they do not merely want to see the deity, but to be seen by him/her, so that the deity's powerful and unwavering gaze may enter into them. I have sometimes translated darshan as "visual communion," but this phrase carries unwelcome Christian overtones. Visual dialog or visual intercourse might be better, if one tones down the latter phrase's sexual vibe—without removing it entirely. But whereas a deity's act of seeing is normally only vicariously sensed by his or her seer, the invention of the motion picture camera and of the shot-reverse shot technique enabled the film viewer for the first time to assume, so to speak, both positions in the darshanic exchange. This is evident in surviving footage from Phalke's Kaliya mardan ("the slaying of serpent Kaliya," 1919), in which a poster-like frontal tableau of the child Krishna (played by Phalke's daughter Mandakini) dancing on a subdued serpent yields to a Krishna-eye-view of the assembled crowd of worshipers, gazing at "him" in reverent awe. This technique became a commonplace in mythological films (for a sustained example, see the first song sequence in Jai Santoshi Maa, 1975), but its ubiquity should not obscure its religious significance. The camera's invitation to gaze through the deity's (or star's) eyes heightens the experience of the reciprocality of darshan, closing an experiential loop to evoke (in a characteristically Indic move) an underlying unity.

Long overlooked even by scholars of Hindu religious traditions, the concept and practice of darshan (for which the key text is Eck's highly-readable 1981 study) has recently come to be invoked in scholarship on Indian cinema (Prasad 1998:74-78; Vasudevan 2000a:139-47; Vasudevan 2000b:119-120, n. 52). Prasad's discussion is extended and deserves comment. Noting the absence of studies of "the politics of darsana" (a variant transliteration), he offers one in the context of his analysis of mainstream Hindi films of the 1950s and 60s. He characterizes these films generically as variants on a "feudal family romance," which he defines as "typically a tale of love and adventure, in which a high-born figure, usually a prince, underwent trials that tested his courage and at the end of which he would return to inherit the father's position and to marry" (Prasad 1998:30). Prasad views this as a regressive narrative form, which, among other things, precludes "affirmation of new sexual and social relations based on individualism" (ibid. 67). In his assessment, darshan itself is another vestige of "feudal" values: "a hierarchical despotic public spectacle in which the political subjects witness and legitimize the splendor of the ruling class" (ibid. 78). In discussing Hindu worship, Prasad emphasizes the necessity of a mediating brahman priest, who controls the darshan experience for the worshiper and reinforces the latter's abject position and lack of agency, noting, e.g., "the devotee's muteness is a requirement of the entire process" (ibid. 75). Identification with the object of "the darsanic gaze" is impossible, Prasad claims, except on a "symbolic" level: "…in symbolic identification we identify ourself with the other precisely at a point at which he is inimitable" (ibid. 76). Applied to films, this means that audiences have difficulty identifying with principal heroic characters and may relate better to minor (but more earthy and "real") characters in comic subplots (ibid. 71-72).

Prasad's remarks on darshan suggest the triumph of ideology over observation; they contradict the diurnal realities of Hindu practice and the experiences described by worshipers themselves. Darshan emphatically does not require priestly mediation, and although prosperous temples usually employ brahmans who tend to the needs of sacred images (bathing, clothing, and feeding them) and who prepare them for public viewing, one may easily observe how marginal such men are to the act of darshan; by and large, worshipers treat them as petty servant-bureaucrats. Further, Hindu devotees are seldom "mute" during darshan; they pray, sing, petition, and express highly individual behavior; uniformly choreographed mass worship, such as prevails in a Christian service (or in choreographed temple scenes in Indian films) is strikingly absent in real

temples. They also make their needs (for flowers, sweets, and other tangible expressions of prasad or "grace" of the deity) known to officiating priests. These responses also go on in the numerous temples and shrines—the great majority of shrines, indeed, including those found in countless households throughout India—in which there is never a "mediating" priest present. Further, Prasad's stress on merely "symbolic identification" suggests his assumption that Western notions of absolute transcendence, of God as the "wholly other" to the human, apply to Hindu deities. But anyone who takes the trouble to read a purana or a devotional chapbook, or to watch a "mythological" film, ought to feel uneasy with this assumption. Hindu deities are emphatically "like us" in many ways; they share human emotions, desires, and needs. This is so partly because they are encountered and intensively "seen" through a reciprocal transaction that is potentially empowering to the human participant.

A sensitivity to the dynamic of darshan might provide a different way of thinking about the visual experience of film. If cinematic "realism" offers an essentially voyeuristic peep into, in Christian Metz's words "a world that is seen without giving itself to be seen," the self-conscious style of the Indian popular film provides what Prasad calls "a representation that gives itself to be seen" (Prasad, citing Metz; ibid. 73). This indeed parallels what Hindu deities do on the stages of their shrine-theaters, but the viewers' response is neither stupefaction nor muteness. Unlike the "gaze," darshan is a two-way street; a visual dialog between players who, though not equal, are certainly both in the same theater of activity and capable of influencing each other, especially in the vital realm of emotion.

Hearing

Discussions of the conventions of Indian popular cinema in terms of those of pre-modern performance genres often invoke the ancient Sanskrit drama and its authoritative treatise, the Natya Shastra, yet they seldom offer detailed information about this text. This is unfortunate, since the Natya Shastra is a key moment in the Indian tradition of thinking about performance; its relevance for film theory potentially goes beyond the stylistic similarities that link the theatre it describes with the latest Hindi or Tamil melodrama. A treatise in thirty-six chapters, the Natya Shastra purports to describe the origin and development of drama, as well as to treat comprehensively of virtually every aspect of the composition and staging of plays. Since, like many important Sanskrit texts, it exists in variant manuscripts and may represent the work of multiple authors, it is difficult to date, and scholarly estimates of its period of composition vary by as much as twelve hundred years (fifth century B.C.E. to eighth century C.E.). Although the text at one point concedes the possibility of a theatrical style based on naturalistic imitation of human behavior (which it terms lokadharmi or "according to the way of the world"—i.e., "realistic"), it disposes of this in two verses (Natya Shastra 14:62-63; Rangacharya 1996:115), and instead devotes itself to what it terms the "theatrical" style of performance (natyadharmi), though natya should not be translated generically as "theater." Rather, natya is a stylized operatic dance-drama characterized by an alternation between spoken and sung passages, and in which "speech is artificial and exaggerated, actions unusually emotional, gestures graceful…." (14:64-65; ibid.).

The Natya Shastra devotes chapters to the design of stages and to props, costumes, and makeup, but the bulk of the text is preoccupied with the expression of emotion through the human body via speech, music, and gesture. Its obsessively tidy classifications (about which I will say more) include descriptions of thirty-six different "looks" (to which it gives primacy, as it elsewhere notes that "Eyes are the foremost means of expression of feelings and emotions; other parts of the body do it after"; 14:32-35; ibid. 113), twenty-four facial expressions, an equal number of hand gestures, and thirty-two foot movements used in both dance and mime (chapters 8-11; ibid. 80-96). Two lengthy chapters are devoted to poetic meters, ornaments, and techniques, and two more, on theatrical speech, prescribe the use of several languages and dialects in accordance with the social status or geographical origin of characters (suggesting this drama's aim to encompass a stratified and multi-lingual society, and making the label "Sanskrit drama" an oversimplification). Six chapters, including three of the longest in the text, are devoted to musical performance, and the single longest deals with songs, which are to be interspersed throughout a drama, performed by an ensemble located at one side of the stage. The fact that drama itself is sometimes defined synaesthetically as "visible poetry" (drishya kavya, ibid. 356) suggests the aptness of the standard Indian-

English word for the visuals in a modern filmsong sequence, which are identified as the "picturization" of the lyrics.

This format of alternately spoken and sung performance, which gave great emphasis to poetic and musical expression of emotion, survived the demise of Sanskrit drama toward the end of the first millennium C. E. and became characteristic of a range of regional folk dramatic forms using vernacular languages. It also became, after the introduction of film sound to India in 1931, the standard format for commercial cinema. Just as, in Sanskrit and most regional languages, there was no word for "play" that did not imply "music and dance drama," so Indian-English "film" normally means one incorporating songs and dances, and there has never been a separate genre category of "musicals" in the Hollywood sense. The specialized skills of lyricists and composers are highly valued within the film industry and among its fans, and their names are likely to appear on posters and billboards as a way of promoting a film (stars' names seldom appear, since their faces instantly identify them). Since the 1970s, dialog writers have sometimes received equally high billing, and the dialogs of many popular films have been published in booklet form; those of the mega-hit Sholay (1975) were even released on bestselling audiocassettes.

The rhetorical and musical dimensions of Indian popular cinema, like those of older genres of performance, present a challenge to English-language viewers. Although the hybrid melodies, instrumentation, and rhythms of film songs may readily be appreciated as an Indian-inflected species of "worldbeat," the poetry of their lyrics is lost—even when (as is seldom the case) song sequences are subtitled on commercially-available DVD releases. Dialog subtitles too mostly fail to convey the elegant turns of phrase, colloquial patois, dramatic innuendos, wordplay, double entendres, and inter-textual references that abound in these films and that make "filmi dialog" a performance genre unto itself—an artificial but admired speech register that is jokingly referred to in such Hindi expressions as "filmi dialog marna" ("to spout filmi dialog"—i.e., to speak in an excessively melodramatic manner). To a far greater extent than is the case in America, the remembered language of popular films—phrases from dialog and lyrics of songs—circulate in everyday speech together with other bodies of oral tradition (such as aphoristic couplets from medieval poet-saints like Kabir and Mirabai) and contribute to a range of casual "performances"—as when one speaker cites part of a line of film dialog and another completes it. In the popular party game antakshari ("game of the last syllable"), players or teams compete to demonstrate their copious memory of song lyrics, with the last syllable of a remembered song-line yielding the first syllable of one to be recalled by the next contestant. Such practices reflect not simply the extent (distressing to some cultural critics) to which film language pervades modern Indian life; they also point to the continuing high valuation of oral rhetorical performance in general—including secular speeches, religious sermons (themselves often accompanied by music), and poetic recitations that sometimes attract stadium-filling crowds.

It is ironic to have to remind a Western critical audience—which is finally becoming comfortable with the privileging of image over text, and which lives in a culture in which poetry is in retreat, political discourse reduced to sound-bites, the art of rhetoric suspect, and the manipulation of emotion and desire increasingly achieved through visual image alone—of the artistic weight that, in successful Indian films, is carried by dialogs structured as rhetorical set-pieces, and by lengthy songs that are sometimes penned by renowned literary poets. Given their importance to audiences, the rhetorical and musical aspects of popular films are grossly neglected in scholarly analysis—dismissed as insignificant relics of earlier performance genres (Prasad 1998:111, 136), or as mere "spectacle" randomly inserted into the cinematic narrative (Dissanayake and Sahai 1992:18). Yet one may ask whether the "message" of a film is confined to its plotline (especially given the characteristically "loose" form of the latter, to be discussed shortly), and whether the work of song, dance, and emotional dialog is not, at times, precisely to fissure the surface ideology of a film, by allowing the expression of suppressed desires and subjectivities (Booth 2000:126; Mishra 2002:161-165; Vasudevan 2000:117).

Incidentally, the intellectual critique of "song and dance" in Indian dramatic performance is not new; for all its discussion of songs, the Natya Shastra cautions against excessive use of them (Rangacharya 1996:42). And at one point the sages, to whom the treatise is being narrated by the legendary author Bharata, ask him why it is necessary, after all, to have dance in a natya, adding "How can dance convey a message?"

Bharata responds by observing that, although dance has no "meaning," it is invariably used in drama because "it creates beauty." He then adds pragmatically that "Generally, people like dance. It is also considered to be auspicious…. It is also a diversion."—which seems to clinch the matter (ibid. 36).

Tasting

One of the most influential and intriguing components of the Natya Shastra is its aesthetic theory, assumed throughout the text but elucidated mainly in chapters six and seven. These serve as locus classicus for the concepts of bhava ("emotion, mood") and rasa ("juice, flavor, essence") which were further developed by later writers on drama and poetry, and indeed by theologians and metaphysicians—for, in a characteristically Indian turn, aesthetic pleasure came to be regarded as on a continuum with or as offering a means to the ultimate experience of transcendent bliss (ananda). The seeds of this understanding are already present in the Natya Shastra's own frame story (to be discussed below) which identifies theater as a "fifth veda" synthesizing and in a sense superceding the traditional four bodies of revealed knowledge. Like the Greek philosophers, ancient Indian thinkers were interested in why people enjoy theater and in what they "get" from it; specifically, in why they derive pleasure from seeing things represented on stage that would not be pleasurable in real life. Whereas Aristotle posited katharsis, a release or purgation, the authors of the Natya Shastra and their successors favored a more complex explanation involving, not surprisingly, an elaborate schema, though its underlying principle is relatively simple. In their view, primary and individualized human emotions (bhava) generated by the multifarious experiences of life are transmuted, through their representation by actors in a dramatic spectacle, into universalized emotional "flavors" (rasa) that may be savored by audience members at the safe distance that theater provides (Masson and Patwardhan 1970:1.24). The complexity of the theory arises in part from the elucidation of the primary emotions, which comprise love, mirth, anger, pity, heroic fury, wonder, disgust, and terror—these eight (actually sixteen, since each bhava induces a corresponding rasa; in addition most later writers add a ninth mood of shanti—peace or quiescence) further proliferate geometrically into sub-categories (e.g., 7:6-8; Rangacharya 1996:65). What is most notable for my purpose is the assumption that, although a given performance will have a predominant rasa-flavor (thus a farce will be dominated by hasya rasa or the comic flavor, and a martial saga by virya rasa or the heroic), it is expected to offer a range of others as well. The imagery used is somatic and in fact gustatory, locating aesthetic pleasure in the body as much as in the mind; thus the text asserts that a drama's rasa may be likened to the taste produced "when various condiments and sauces and herbs and other materials are mixed…." (6:31-33; ibid. 55). Further, it is understood that rasas are fleeting and may be enjoyed serially; a successful performance is thus akin to a well-designed banquet or smorgasbord, serving up rasa after rasa for spectators to savor.

Although modern filmgoers seldom specialize in classical aesthetic theory, the vocabulary of bhava and rasa remains in use in Indian vernaculars, and the broad cultural consensus is that a satisfying entertainment ought to consist of a range and succession of sharply-delineated emotional moods. Whereas Western viewers of Hindi films are sometimes distressed by what seem to them a mélange of genres (comedy, action-adventure, romance, etc.) and too-abrupt transitions in mood (a tragic scene yielding to a comic one, and then to a romantic song set in a fantasied landscape), Indian audiences take such shifts in stride and may even complain if a film does not deliver the anticipated range of emotional flavors (though it should be added that they also at times complain of pointlessness in film sequences if the moods evoked do not in some sense cohere into a satisfying whole). Performance theorist Richard Schechner has observed that whereas Western theater tends to be "plot-driven," Indian theater is more typically "rasa-driven," and has suggested that a familiarity with (what he terms) "rasaesthetics"—a more somatically-based understanding of the effect of performed emotions on the spectator (Schechner 2001; cf. 1985:136-142)—could enlarge the conceptual vocabulary of Western critical theory.

A final aspect of the Natya Shastra deserves mention: its frame narrative, which situates the origin of drama within a time-cycle of four ages (yugas) that become successively debased and enervated. The gods complain to Brahma, the world-creator, that in the current kali yuga (the fourth and darkest age), people no longer understand the vedas, moreover, men of the lowest class (shudras) and all women are forbidden

even to hear them. Hence there is a need for "something which would not only teach us but be pleasing both to eyes and ears" (1:10-12; Rangacharya 1996:1). Brahma obliges them by distilling the essence of the four vedas into a fifth, which he terms the natya-veda, and which is to be accessible to all ranks of society. He then teaches it to the sage Bharata who in turn transmits it to his one hundred sons; assisted by heavenly courtesans (apsaras) who assume the female roles, they perform the first play on a celestial stage (1:14-105; ibid. 1-5). This narrative, suspended by thirty-four chapters on theatrical technique and poetic theory, resumes in the final chapter when the sages ask Bharata how drama was brought from heaven to earth. He replies that, in time, his sons became arrogant due to the theatrical knowledge (veda) they had acquired, and began performing only satires, in which they "encouraged rustic manners" and even lampooned the vedic sages. The latter became angry and cursed the actors to be born on earth in a debased condition: "You will become mere shudras and attain their functions, and those to be born in your line will be impure. And your posterity will be dancers who will worship [serve] others, along with their wives and children…." (36:40-41; Ghosh 1961:2.233). When his sons threaten suicide, Bharata comforts them by reminding them that their art, after all, comes from the creator himself; he sends them to earth to fulfill the curse but also offers a remedy for it: they will obtain royal patronage and acquire prestige, and hence "will no longer be despised by brahmans and kings…." (36:66-67; ibid. 2.236). The final verses of the text, which as in most Sanskrit works identify the "fruit" or merit that accrues to one who reads it, declare that those who study the Natya Shastra, produce plays in accordance with its precepts, or watch such plays as audience members will all "derive the same merit as may be derived by those who study the vedas, those who perform sacrifices…." (36:79; Rangacharya 1996:344).

The term shastra is usually rendered "treatise" or "textbook," and refers to a class of Sanskrit works purporting to offer systematic exposition of a given subject; there are shastras on architecture, grammar, law, politics, erotics—even, allegedly, one for thieves. Typically, a shastra opens with an origin myth, revealing a divine source for the given body of knowledge and ultimately relating it to the veda—the transcendent revelation preserved chiefly by brahmans. Typically too, the organization of material in a shastra reveals an obsessive concern for classification, usually according to numerologically significant schema (e.g., the sixty-four positions of sexual intercourse cataloged in the Kamasutra, a shastra devoted to eros); in all these respects the Natya Shastra is quite standard. What was the intended use, and who was the intended reader, of such a text? Some scholars have proposed that, although the shastras claim to treat of the invention of disciplines and to offer instruction in them, they are better understood as descriptive and ideological works that seek to bring existing bodies of knowledge and practice within the domain of the totalizing brahmanical project (Dahmen-Dallapiccola 1989). Like the 18th century French encyclopediasts, the authors of the shastras were as much concerned with demonstrating their own world-surveying intellectual hegemony as in accurately describing the world around them.

Read from this perspective, the Natya Shastra's frame story implies a flourishing and popular ancient theater, performed by mainly low-class actors but appealing to highly diverse audiences. The authors of the shastra are both delighted and concerned by this phenomenon; they seek to explain it by affirming the genealogical credentials of natya—its basis in the transcendent source of (brahman-brokered) knowledge—but also to explain its present, debased condition (which includes vulgar stage business and the satirizing of high-born people like themselves), and to propose means for its purification and improvement. The egregiously-meticulous rules that pad nearly every chapter seem aimed at the latter goal; they mirror the obsessive detail of older scriptures (known as brahmanas) that minutely prescribed the procedures for vedic fire sacrifices—the ultimate model of ritually correct performance—and they also reflect the authors' preoccupation with social hierarchy (e.g., special gaits and styles of vocal delivery are prescribed for "high," "low," and "middle"-ranked characters; 13:1-24; Rangacharya 1996:101-102). These rules and schema appear in some cases to have been extrapolated from a handful of admired plays, and then gratuitously universalized in typically shastraic fashion (ibid. 167). Though their enumeration may have provided satisfaction to some elite connoisseurs, it seems unlikely that performers were much constrained by such strictures; indeed, most pre-modern theatrical training seems to have relied on apprenticeship and oral tradition rather than on textual study, as remains the case in Indian music despite the existence of numerous

shastras devoted to the classification of ragas, talas, and musical techniques. But there is evidence that some later Sanskrit playwrights did try to adhere to the "rules" attributed to Bharata; not surprisingly, this mostly resulted in unsatisfying plays. Paradoxically, the growing prestige of the Natya Shastra may have helped to kill off the Sanskrit drama it celebrated (ibid. 355).

My contextual reading of the Natya Shastra suggests the ideological agenda behind its mandate for theater: at a time when vedic sacrifice was in decline and brahman authority threatened, the authors of the shastra sought to explain and reform a popular artform that "appealed to everyone" by likening it to ritual performance and by enveloping it in dauntingly technical Sanskrit terminology. The grand theories of our time sometimes seem to me to have a similar aim: the product of increasingly marginalized humanist academics, who perceive the greater prestige of the "hard" scientific disciplines and who advance world-encompassing analyses that rely on daunting pseudo-technical jargon. Academic criticism of Indian popular cinema displays a particular penchant for reductive typologies and stern agendas of cinematic improvement, based on a standard that no actual filmmaker ever seems to approach—only the scholar-critic, with all-surveying gaze, possesses the knowledge (veda) to imagine the ideologically perfect film. Perhaps a film tailored to such prescriptions, could it be made, might liberate us all. Perhaps it would also kill cinema—but then, in Utopia, we might no longer need to be entertained (unlike the citizens of the kali yuga, for whom Brahma compassionately created music-and-dance drama).

Telling

There is general consensus among scholars that the storytelling conventions of Indian popular cinema are significantly different than those of most other cinemas in the world. Accounts of that difference generally focus on the "complexity" and "loose structure" of the plots, their lack of a "linear" narrative, and the presence of "discontinuities" in the form of both subplots and song and dance sequences. Such understandings take the form of assessments either positive or negative. The Bengali art film director Satyajit Ray complained, back in 1976, of the commercial cinema's "penchant for convolutions of plot and counter-plot rather than the strong, simple unidirectional narrative," such as he sought to create in his own films (Ray 1976:23). Dissanayake and Sahai, on the other hand, offer a more appreciative and culture-specfic assessment: "Although…Indian cinema was heavily influenced by Hollywood, the art of narration with its endless digressions, circularities, and plots within plots remained distinctly Indian" (Dissanayake and Sahai 1992:10). Rosie Thomas writes of "the baroque surface of the Hindi film" (Thomas 1985:117), and describes it as a form "in which narrative is comparatively loose and fragmented, realism irrelevant, psychological characterization disregarded, elaborate dialogues prized, music essential, and both the emotional involvement of the audience and the pleasure of sheer spectacle privileged throughout the three hour duration of the entertainment" (Thomas 1995:162). Her further statement that such an entertainment, to be successful, "involves the skillful blending of various modes…into an integrated whole that moves its audience" (ibid.) would of course be disputed by some. Prasad too notes the commercial cinema's preference for "the all-inclusive film, whose vision of the world tends to be multi-faceted, episodic, and loosely structured" (Prasad 1998:47). However, his vocabulary for describing this "vision" is generally negative; e.g., he speaks of the "fragmented" structure of commercial films and complains of their lack of "narrative coherence." In an assessment that echoes that of Ray, Prasad asserts that popular films are characterized by "a textual heteronomy whose primary symptom is the absence of an integral narrative structure"—a structure that, he implies, is present in most other cinemas (Prasad 1998:43-45).

Most scholars explain the narrative structure of popular films historically, citing the influence of older storytelling genres—an argument I will be examining more closely in this section. Prasad is the major dissenter, however, and his counter-explanation needs to be briefly considered. Although he alludes to the conventions of the "romance" in pre-modern literature and points to the resemblance of Hindi films to early American melodramas (though he can postulate no link between the two), his primary explanation of cinematic narrative structure is grounded in the economic and labor practices of the Indian film industry (ibid. 47). Dismissing the "overemphasis on cultural difference abstracted from the social formation as a whole" that he finds characteristic of the cultural-historical approach (ibid. 13), Prasad seeks to ground the conventions of Bombay cinema in its "anarchic backward capitalism" (ibid. 35) and in its adoption of a

"heterogeneous form of manufacture," in which films (like the watches in Marx's classic example of this mode of production) are assembled from separate components produced by specialist craftspeople (ibid. 42-45). The screenplay, itself sometimes authored in committee, is only one of these components; music and song lyrics are others, as is star persona (an element pre-defined by other films); dialogs will be composed by another specialist or set of specialists, and action sequences choreographed by another. Prasad concludes that "the story here occupies a place on par with that of the rest of the components, rather than the pre-eminent position it enjoys in the Hollywood mode" (ibid. 43).

Although the specializations Prasad notes are indeed standard in the Bombay film industry, his implied contrast with a supposedly more "coherent" Hollywood product strikes me as idealistic and overgeneralized. Given the fact that films are complex manufactured products that require large-scale teams to create, he fails to convince me that film production in India is inherently more "heterogeneous" than elsewhere. Moreover, his invocation of market "anarchy" (in which a large number of independent producers operate under unstable financial conditions; e.g., in 1948, some 211 producers issued a total of 264 films, the majority of which, of course, were flops) fails to explain why these legions of producers independently make such similar choices in assembling films. Indian filmmakers are well aware of the alternative, "tighter" narrative models of western cinema, yet they consistently reject these, even as they eagerly appropriate specific plot elements and shot sequences. Prasad's resistance to considering the influence of "culture" as anything other than its "material determinations" (ibid. 47) again reveals his own ideological blinders. The fact that, in Hindi cinema, screenplay and dialog are generally authored by different persons is of course significant (though such a division of labor is not unheard of in Hollywood). This practice, like the sometime fabrication of screenplays-by-committee, reflects a generally looser ideal of individual "authorship" as well as the (already noted) high valuation of rhetorical art in the Indian context: the specialist at crafting powerful, emotionally expressive dialog is indeed on a par with the lyricist/composer team who will author the all-important songs. Yet the inclusion of such specialized efforts does not preclude the achievement of a harmonious whole, and such "coherence" within the desired masala-mix of ingredients in a commercial film is often praised by Indian viewers. In my view, Prasad's theory of "heterogeneous manufacture" fails to fully account for the strong and enduring preference of Indian filmmakers and their audiences for epic-length, episodic, and "baroque" narratives. The study of cultural and literary history yields more compelling explanations, and it is to these that I now turn.

The influence of the classical epic traditions must indeed be noted. References to the Ramayana and the Mahabharata—each of which should be understood not as a fixed, Sanskrit-language text but rather as a multivocal and intertextual storytelling tradition existing in hundreds of literary versions as well as in oral performances—abound in popular art, from ubiquitous "god posters" to comic books to television advertising. Their themes (which include the tension between social duty and personal satisfaction and between the lifestyles of renunciant and householder, the nature and transmission of authority, and the proper relationships between family members and social classes) are alluded to in everyday speech and formal discourse; images of their principal divine characters inhabit countless temples and shrines. Yet the assumption that these epics "influence" popular films must be qualified. Though there have been scores of film versions of each epic or (more commonly, given their length and complexity) of subsidiary episodes drawn from them, the sum total of such productions still comprises only a small portion of Indian cinematic output. Far more common are allusions to epic motifs via character names, dialog, or visual coding. As Booth observes, epic content "usually forms a secondary or allusory subtext rather than primary text" in Hindi films (Booth 1995:173). Such allusions presume an audience that is broadly familiar with the epics and offer it a pleasurable experience of recognition, though they rarely constitute the main story and may coexist with many other allusions—e.g., to other films, folktales, and historical and current events. It is the structure of the epics (and, as I will argue, of a much larger body of popular literature) rather than their specific content that presents a parallel to the way in which film stories unfold. Dissanayake and Sahai observe, "Instead of the linear and direct narratives that conceal their narrativities that we encounter in Hollywood films, the mainline Indian cinema presents us with a different order of diegesis that can best be comprehended in terms of the narrative discontinuities found in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata"

(Dissanayake and Sahai 1992:10-11). What are the nature of these "discontinuities"?

Apart from their sheer (and sometimes intentionally staggering) prolixity, with stories that span several generations (three in the Ramayana, seven in the Mahabharata) and introduce scores of important characters, the pan-Indian epics share a number of structural features. They are both "framed" by narratives that identify their authors (who are also themselves characters in their stories) and the circumstances of their composition, and also by an additional frame story that recounts the circumstances of their telling. These frame narratives recapitulate the conventions of oral performance and establish the context of archetypal performer and auditor. Yet once the "main" tale begins, unfolding as a flashback, it does not proceed in a straightforward manner, but is regularly interrupted by subordinate tales, which branch off from and return to it and which it, in turn, "frames." These sub-stories often recapitulate themes found in the main plot, but always with variations—as in a baroque fugue, or (more aptly) a classical Indian raga. Though they may strike western readers as distracting "digressions" from the "main story," they are not regarded as such by their primary audience, which savors the slow unfolding of the tale through such detours. In oral storytelling and dramatic performance, these subsidiary stories often provide the occasion for humorous set pieces, poems or songs that take on an independent life, fantastic interludes set in alluring or magical realms, or flashbacks, dreams, prophecies and other devices that suggest the designs of fate or the illusory and cyclical nature of time. The effect is indeed non-linear; rather it is one of circles within circles, or of gears set within larger gears—as in a clockwork—that periodically "click" back together to slowly advance the largest, encompassing story-wheel toward its already-anticipated but repeatedly-deferred conclusion. Aesthetically, the effect may be compared to the intricate melodic and rhythmic patterns of Indian music, that bifurcate into individual thematic improvisations but regularly return to a common beat known as the sama—a moment that produces sighs of delight from knowledgeable listeners.

This structure can be illustrated with reference to the Ramayana, the shorter and more "linear" of the two epics (though the unwieldy Mahabharata is even more interesting structurally). The story begins at its end, with sage Valmiki (after a further frame story in which he invents the first poetic meter) composing the story of Rama and teaching it to twin boys among his disciples; the boys then go to sing it in the court of King Rama, its own hero and now a middle-aged man engaged in a multi-day ritual. Unbeknownst to Rama (but known to the audience), the boys are his own sons whom he has never seen, due to his having banished his wife to forest exile—a tragic event that will not be recounted until nearly the end of the tale. The story then unfolds, backtracking to the circumstances surrounding Rama's birth. Within this story many others are told, especially during Rama's youthful training by a sage; most of these tales reflect on the tension between the opposing lifestyles of ascetic sages and householder-kings—prefiguring a resolution of this tension through Rama's own destiny as dharma-king. Following Rama's banishment to the forest due to a stepmother's jealousy, much of the tale unfolds in the dreamlike environment of a wilderness inhabited by talking, flying monkeys and grotesque demons. Ravana, the demon-king, kidnaps Rama's wife, Sita and carries her off to his golden city, on an island in the sea. Following a long quest and a terrible battle, the demons are defeated and Rama and Sita return to their kingdom to begin a happy reign. However, when rumors questioning the pregnant Sita's chastity are reported to Rama, he makes the decision to exile her, and she gives birth to twin sons in the hermitage of Valmiki, the author of the poem. In its final chapters, the poem comes full cycle as King Rama, hearing the story, recognizes the young singers as his own sons. Although a husband-wife reconciliation is attempted, Sita calls upon her mother, the goddess Earth, to witness to her purity and to the wrongs she has suffered, and in an emotional scene worthy of grand opera—or Bombay cinema—the ground splits open and Sita descends into the earth, leaving the bereaved Rama and his sons.

The plot details just mentioned are familiar to most Indians, but the literary text that first presented them is not. Instead the story is transmitted through multiple retellings that often alter or reinterpret its details; many people are familiar with more than one such telling and enjoy hearing multiple perspectives on the tale. For this reason, A. K. Ramanujan has termed the Rama story a "pool of signifiers," and a "common code" for much of India (Ramanujan 1991:46)—a narrative grammar through which social and religious ideals may be represented and even contested. Local-language texts and oral tellings often expand on particular episodes, add new ones, and sometimes question aspects of the patriarchal and upper-caste ideology that pervades

the Sanskrit poem by foregrounding women and lower-class characters, or by critiquing the "perfect man" Rama's lapses from a humane and universalistic dharma (Richman 1991, 2000).

Both the Ramayana and its darker, more ponderous (four times longer), and more Realpolitik-savvy cousin-brother, the Mahabharata (in which an extended royal family is riven by internal squabbles, leading to a fratricidal and apocalyptic war that virtually destroys the ruling class) are essentially about families and resonate with the real experience of many Indians who (regardless of their actual living arrangement) conceptualize themselves as members of close-knit extended family groups mainly based on male kinship. Both epics suggest that their familial microcosm (idealistically united in the Ramayana, fatally split in the Mahabharata) may also stand for society, or in modern times, for the nation. They are inherently "political" as well as "religious" stories, and their easy slide from interpersonal drama to broader social issues is a trait they share with many mainstream films. So is their treatment of personality, which tends to divide contrasting psychological traits among a group of related characters, rather than locating them in a single conflicted individual. Thus the Mahabharata's five Pandava brothers (who share a common wife) often seem to function as one composite hero, split into different selves. The popular cinema also tends to externalize psychological conflict and distribute it over several characters—e.g., Ashis Nandy has noted the extraordinary popularity of the cinematic motif of the double (and sometimes triple), in which a single actor portrays twins, coincidental look-alikes, or a successively reincarnated person (Nandy 1989:44).

Yet the Ramayana and Mahabharata have always shared the spotlight, and in a real sense interacted, not merely with each other, but with other genres of popular storytelling that adhere to some of the same narrative conventions—favoring sprawling, epic tales—but that often foreground rather different values. Regional folk epics, such as that of Pabhuji in Rajasthani (Smith 1991), Dhola in Hindi (Wadley 1989), Palnadu in Telugu (Roghair 1982), and the "three twins" in Tamil (Beck 1982), often celebrate the ethos of lower-status but upwardly-mobile groups, linking them to pan-Indian and Sanskritic mythology but also asserting local identity and agency. Like many modern films, these complex tales may themselves make oblique reference to the pan-Indian epics, as when the popular Hindi martial cycle of Alha-Udal is interpreted as a "Mahabharata of the kali yuga," in which the vanquished warriors of the older epic, now reincarnated, become victors (Schomer 1989). Structural analysis of such epic storytelling—which continues to be performed by bards in multi-session, all-night performances—has only recently been attempted, but has already yielded some interesting typologies, such as Blackburn and Flueckiger's division of Indian folk epics into the broad categories of martial, sacrificial, romantic, and mythic (Blackburn and Flueckiger 1989). Booth has proposed that these categories might better serve for analyzing mainstream films than the vague and overlapping commercial "genre" divisions sometimes invoked (e.g., "mythological," "social," "historical"; Booth 1995:176-179).

The prestige of the Sanskrit epics has also tended to eclipse, at least for outsiders, the popularity of narrative traditions that, although imbued with some of same elements of myth and fantasy that suffuse the epics, express a decidedly more worldly, sensual, and entertainment-oriented ethos. Such are the popular tales of the first millennium C. E. that eventually found their way into the massive Sanskrit anthology Kathasaritasagara ("Ocean of rivers of the great story"), where they are framed as a heavenly entertainment told by Shiva to divert his wife, Parvati. These tales often feature heroes who are wily merchants, disenfranchised princelings, or poor (but not especially pious) brahmans, and whose aim is less the pursuit of dharma than the acquisition of wealth and worldly power—they also enjoy love affairs with glamorous women along the way. To accomplish their ends, these heroes often undertake impersonations, commit thefts, and carry out adulterous seductions, and though they are occasionally assisted by supernatural forces, they just as frequently skewer both pious pomposity and folk superstition. The pace and style as well as the ethos (which manages to pay lip service to the powers-that-be while subtly challenging their authority) of these "action-adventure" tales, which are characterized by abrupt plot turns and mood shifts, dramatic reunions and recognitions, and lyrical interludes set in demi-divine or magical realms, are indeed suggestive of typical masala films (see, e.g., van Buitenen 1959:111-127, 179-258). They also include a feature that is generally not foregrounded in the ancient epics (though it sometimes enters into their oral retelling): a strong current of (often irreverent) humor. Though recorded in a number of famous texts, such stories remained in

oral circulation throughout the pre-modern period, and with the coming of typography in the nineteenth century found their way into the flourishing entertainment literature known as kissa and kahani (Pritchett 1985).

There remains another confluent current of Indian popular narrative to be noted, one that is of special significance for the cultural world of popular cinema. I refer to a strongly Islamicate strain, which has generally been overlooked by scholars invoking the "epic" genealogy of mainstream films. I use "Islamicate" rather than "Islamic" because I refer not to the impact of Muslim religion, but to the influence of a dominant cosmopolitan culture that set the norms for much of western, central, and south Asia for roughly a thousand years. This culture, reflected in (for example) styles of dress, diction, architecture, and music, was embraced to a considerable extent even by polities that remained "Hindu" in their ritual practices, or that even articulated an "anti-Islamic" ideology (Kesavan 1994:245-46; Wagoner 1996). The narrative traditions of the medieval Perso-Arabic and Turkic-speaking world had themselves been influenced by ancient Indian story literature (for South Asia, or "al-Hind" was famed to the west as the "land of story"), but they had also evolved their own distinctive tales, in which fairies and jinns took the place of the demi-divine beings of Indian lore, sorcerers replaced tantric adepts, and the hero's love affairs were inflected with a Sufi flavor, admitting potential readings as allegories of a divine quest. Though the pain of separated lovers (in Sanskrit, viraha) had long been celebrated in Indian poetry and story, the Sufi influence, together with the strict gender codes of many Islamic societies, accentuated the theme of a hero's consuming infatuation for an inaccessible beloved, culminating in romantic desperation and even death ("martyrdom" in the way of love, mystically allegorized to fana or the "annihilation" of self in the divine unity). Entering India with Islamic traders, warriors, and itinerant fakirs or holy men, the Islamicate narrative traditions, especially those of the Persian masnavi and dastan, combined with indigenous strains to produce several hybrid manifestations of extraordinary vigor, ranging from local folk sagas (such as the Punjabi tale of the doomed lovers Heer and Ranjha) to courtly romances that found their way into multi-volume literary form. Two genres of the latter deserve special mention.

In the aftermath of the conquest of much of northern and central India by Muslim rulers at the close of the twelfth century, Sufi orders greatly expanded their activities, establishing khanqahs or "hospices" (usually built around the tomb of a revered Sufi preceptor) that became pilgrimage places attracting a diverse clientele by no means restricted to Muslims. Sufis were particularly interested in the indigenous mystical traditions of yoga and tantra (which resembled some of their own practices of fasting and repetition of divine names) and a lively interaction—at times adversarial, at times dialogic—developed between fakirs and yogis. The older form of the masnavi had been developed primarily by Sufi authors in Persian cultural areas (comprising what is now Iran, Turkey, and much of Central Asia) in previous centuries as an elaborate love story, generally involving a heroic quest, that could be enjoyed as a poetic narrative but also savored as an allegory of the mystical path. Beginning in the late fourteenth century, a group of Sufi authors in northeastern India used these conventions to craft epic-length romances in the local lingua franca that they called "Hindavi" ("the language of Hind," a precursor dialect of modern Hindi). They fused the intense romanticism and quest themes of Persian literature, with characters, legends, and a general cultural ambience that was entirely Indic and indeed Hindu—thus after a prologue that invoked Allah and Muhammad, the works slipped into the pattern of Indian tales involving princes who became yogis (though this was generally a guise assumed in order to pursue an inaccessible beloved—a princess or fairy), and featuring miraculous interventions by gods such as Shiva and Parvati. Four such romances survive, the last composed in 1545, but there is evidence of others that have been lost. Long a neglected genre of early Hindi literature, the Sufi premakhyans or "love stories," as these works are called, have begun to receive scholarly attention (Shirreff 1941, de Bruijn 1996, Behl and Weightman 2000). The most comprehensive study to date repeatedly calls attention to the resemblance between stock features of these stories and the conventions of popular cinema: complex plots involving a love-triangle of a hero and two heroines, lyrical set-pieces placed in exotic or fairytale landscapes, and a pattern of the repeatedly-deferred union of the principal lovers in order to develop the rasa of passionate love-in-separation (Behl, forthcoming). Although there has been much speculation regarding the intended audience and use of these works, there is evidence that they were

recited in both royal courts and Sufi hospices (Behl and Weightman 2000:xiii-xiv), and variously interpreted as romantic entertainments and mystical allegories. Significantly, one of the rare accounts of an informal performance from the Mughal period, written in about 1640 by a middle-class Jain merchant from Banaras, describes his "singing" of Madumalati and Mrigavati, two of the Sufi romances composed about a century earlier, during regular evening sessions with a group of friends (Lath 1981:49).

Stylized oral storytelling remained a popular entertainment form in Islamicate South Asia, and was continually invigorated by Persian-language traditions. During the Mughal period (ca. 1555-1765), there was a virtual craze, among both aristocrats and commoners, for Persian sagas called dastans, which were episodic, immensely-long romances narrated by professional bards. The genre was gradually Indianized, with significant transformations, not the least of which was that it shifted into Urdu, the non-elite lingua franca of the Mughal Empire (grammatically the same language as Hindavi/Hindi, though written in Arabic script). The subject matter of the Persian dastan was traditionally said to be razm-o-bazm—"war and romance"—but characteristically, the Indian dastan-tellers added two more categories to the masala-mix: magic (tilism) and trickery ('ayyari). The former allowed for fantastic otherworlds and enveloping "enchantments" in which a hero might wander for years; the latter highlighted the talents of a comic but dextrous sidekick: a trickster-like figure who added a leaven of earthy, often obscene or scatological humor and worldly-wise pragmatism to the hero's lofty ideals. Significantly, although many of the themes of the dastan are shared with the aristocratic romances found throughout Europe and the Middle East, humor is generally downplayed elsewhere; in India, a "comedy track" often takes the spotlight (Pritchett 1991:41).

The most popular Indian dastan was that of Amir Hamzah, an uncle of the Prophet Muhammad and a minor figure in the early history of Islam. Like Alexander the Great before him, Hamzah captured the imagination of storytellers and became the central figure in a vast cycle of tales, full of expressions of Islamic piety yet essentially secular and escapist in theme. His adventures were recited to avid audiences on the steps of the Great Mosque in Delhi, and some aristocratic connoisseurs kept their own in-house dastan-tellers to endlessly narrate the cycle. Like the heroes of the Sufi premakhans several centuries before, Hamzah acquired, in the course of his exploits, two principal wives, one human and one a fairy—though he enjoyed a host of other amours. His first and most passionate love, for the Persian princess Mihr Nigar, was unconsummated for eighteen years while he wandered in the fabulous realm of Qaf, home of fairies and jinns. Storytellers alternated between the trials of Hamzah and those of his suffering beloved, who was repeatedly rescued from violation by the ingenuity of Hamzah's 'ayyar sidekick, 'Amar. Ultimately Hamzah was united with Mihr Nigar, his fairy wife joined the household, and he lived happily until his eventual (historical) martyrdom in one of the Prophet's battles. Within this framework, which spans four generations, endless expansions and permutations were possible, and the length of a narration depended only on the ingenuity of the teller and the enthusiasm of the listeners. Both were evidently considerable, and surviving accounts mention daily narrations that went on for months. Versions of the Hamzah cycle found their way into literary form during the Mughal period, entering the manuscript libraries of connoisseurs as multi-volume works comprising thousands of illustrated folios. But the real explosion of Hamzah texts occurred with the spread of printing during the second half of the nineteenth century. It culminated in the version published by Naval Kishore of Lucknow, a Hindu enthusiast for Islamicate literature (this was not unusual), who assigned a team of scribes to three oral dastan-tellers and, between 1883 and 1905, issued what is almost certainly the world's longest narrative: a Mahabharata-dwarfing Dastan-e Amir Hamzah comprising forty-six volumes that average nine hundred pages each. This staggering work was not simply a pulp-fiction curiosity; it was a literary achievement, an "astonishing treasure house of romance, which at its best contains some of the finest narrative prose ever written in Urdu" (Pritchett 1991:27)—though it should be noted that its prose is regularly interspersed with lyric verse. It was also, by the standards of the time, a bestseller: "…the delight of its age; many of its volumes were reprinted again and again, well into the twentieth century" (ibid.). According to Pritchett, this literary dastan reached "an extraordinary peak of popularity" at the close of the nineteenth century, and then gradually lost readership, by the end of the 1920s, to the emerging genres of novels and short stories, though the early examples of these were themselves "very dastan-like" (ibid.).

A reader of the Hamzah dastan today (made available in Pritchett's highly-condensed but artful translation)

can note the similarities of its repetitive episodes, its themes of love, honor, and heroism, as well as its sheer scope and narrative profligacy, both to earlier Indian narrative genres and to the popular cinema. The period that witnessed the apogee of Hamzah's popularity coincided with both the fluorit of the Parsi theater (whose plays drew equally on Hindu epics and Indo-Islamic romances) and also the beginnings of the cinema. The Islamicate strain in the latter is often overlooked. Although the Maharashtrian brahman Phalke based his early feature films on Hindu legend, the growing industry soon reached out to a broader narrative pool. With the coming of sound, Persianized Hindi (i.e., Urdu), with its strong literary and romantic associations, became the dominant language of Bombay cinema (Kesavan 1994), and plots were often drawn from Indo-Persian romances, as in the five remakes of the tragic love story of Laila and Majnun—a tale that ranks with that of Devdas as one of the most often filmed in Hindi cinema (Booth 1995:179). The highly-charged lyrics of Hindi filmsongs, with their Islamicate vocabulary, are not merely conventionalized inserts without "social currency" (as Prasad argues; 1998:111); they evoke a world of romantic and refined entertainment that encodes powerful emotional ideals as well as a history of cultural syncretism.

Conclusion

Near the end of his essay "Is There an Indian Way of Thinking?," after summarizing some of the grand theories that account for (or deny) the uniqueness of Indian concepts and practices, A. K. Ramanujan attempted his own answer to his question. Citing his training as a linguist, he invoked the classification of grammatical rules as either "context-sensitive" or "context-free," and extended these categories to apply to the reigning self-idealizations of societies.

I think cultures (may be said to) have overall tendencies (for whatever complex reasons)—tendencies to idealise, and to think in terms of, either the context-free or the context-sensitive kind of rules. Actual behaviour may be more complex, though the rules they think with are a crucial factor in guiding the behaviour. In cultures like India's, the context-sensitive kind of rule is the preferred formulation. (Ramanujan 1990:47)

Whereas Euro-American society imagines itself to be founded on principles that are "universal" and "rational" (hence, context-free), indeed to conceptualize space and time—"the universal contexts, the Kantian imperatives"—as uniform and neutral, Indian epistemologies, for which "grammar is the central model for thinking" favor typologies and hierarchies that particularize and frame within complex contexts (ibid. 51, 53). Ramanujan cites numerous examples, ranging from legal statutes (in which penalties for crimes depend on the social identity of the parties involved) to erotic treatises ("…the Kamasutra is literally a grammar of love—which declines and conjugates men and women as one would nouns and verbs in different genders, voices, moods, and aspects") to classifications of time and space that eschew "uniform units" in favor of contextualized specificities of auspicious or inauspicious conjunction. In narrative literature, Ramanujan cites the ubiquitous practice of framing, invoking the epic traditions:

The Ramayana and Mahabharata open with episodes that tell you why and under what circumstances they were composed. Every such story is encased in a metastory. And within the text, one tale is the context for another within it; not only does the outer frame-story motivate the inner sub-story; the inner story illuminates the outer as well. It often acts as a microcosmic replica for the whole text. (Ibid. 48)

In poetry, he cites the "taxonomy of landscapes, flora and fauna, and of emotions" that establish contexts for poetic imagery, arguing that they refute a nature-culture distinction by converting symbols into icons and ultimately into indexes, "where the signifier is part of what it signifies" (ibid. 49-50). Ramanujan advises, "We need to attend to the context-sensitive designs that embed a seeming variety of modes (tale, discourse, poem, etc.) and materials. This manner of constructing the text is in consonance with other designs in the culture. Not unity (in the Aristotelian sense) but coherence, seems to be the end." (ibid. 49)

Yet the ability to perceive the coherence of "context-sensitive" texts will of course depend on the context of the reader. Victorian Western critics, idealizing a "realist" aesthetic and a tightly-constrained temporal and spatial canvas, typically found the sprawling Indian narrative cycles to be decidedly incoherent: the products of a childish and febrile imagination. It took the sea-changes of the 20th century—the crisis of the World Wars and of the collapse of Western empire, the formulation of depth psychology and of theories of the

unconscious and the attendant re-evaluation of dreams and myths, the literary experiments of Joyce, Grass, Garcia-Marquez and others, and indeed the advent of cinema itself with its potential for flashbacks, dissolves, and a surreal and dreamlike mode of storytelling—to slowly change the prevailing context of narrative reception. As a result, Western scholarship on the Sanskrit epics during the past few decades has generally stressed their profound coherence and integrity of design.

Alertness to the "context-sensitive designs" of Indian popular films may appear to be a tall critical order. The modes of cultural practice and bodies of literature and lore that I have identified in this essay constitute some relevant contexts; they interact with the historical, psychological, ideological, technological, and economic ones identified by other scholars. Certainly, the more one knows of such contexts, the more one will be able to see in a given film. The scholarly study of Western cinema appears to manifest preferences for both relatively "context-sensitive" and "context-free" approaches. The grand, reductive theories—structuralist, Marxist, Freudian—belong in the latter category, and though each has something to offer, the analysis of individual films, especially films that are recognized as enduringly significant, rarely relies on any of them exclusively. Yet when the critical lens is turned to a non-Western culture, sweeping theory may appear more seductive: a handy substitute for having to bone-up on an alien and multifaceted context. Examples of a culturally "context-sensitive" reading of films may be found in Thomas's efforts to elucidate the "intertextuality" of Hindi films, based on her assumption that such films are "always read and produced in relation to other texts and discourses—other films, mythology, popular art, gossip, and so on" (Thomas 1995:158). Her essay on Mehboob Khan's Mother India (1957) shows how much such an approach, when focused on a single influential film, can reveal (Thomas 1989). Similarly, Booth's sensitivity to the "reflexivity" of Hindi cinema, which "gains its primary value from the audience's knowledge of the genre or story being performed (or referred to) and from a collective awareness of the performance as artifice" yields surprising insights into the "densely layered religious, cultural and narrative meanings" of much-maligned filmsongs (Booth 2000:131), or the pleasurable complexity (including allusions to epic characters and situations, to other films, and to the off-screen lives of stars) of Subhash Ghai's 1993 popular potboiler Khalnayak (Booth 1995:184-186).

In a famous essay on art and mechanical reproduction, Walter Benjamin cited the ebullient 1927 prophecy of Abel Gance that the advent of cinema would lead to the avid re-presentation of all significant cultural stories: "…all legends, all mythologies and all myths…await their exposed resurrection, and the heroes crowd each other at the gate" (Benjamin 1955:222). While studying the popular culture of pre-modern India—a society that prized the tactile act of "seeing" as a medium of communication, delighted in episodic, non-linear tales that were elaborately and self-consciously framed, and regarded operatic dance-drama as the ideal generator of aesthetic pleasure or rasa (since, as the Natya Shastra argued, it synthesized all other arts)—it has often struck me that its heroes and heroines were indeed eagerly awaiting cinematic reincarnation. Within their profuse intertextual world, pre-modern Indian storytellers were already fond of flashbacks, lyrical interludes, surreal landscapes, and vast and crowded cinemascopic tableaux; their language was visually intense, almost hallucinatory: screenplays awaiting the screen. A gaze that is more sensitive to Indian contexts will be better able to take in the audiovisual epics of their cinematic heirs and to savor (and critically evaluate) the rasa they offer to hundreds of millions of cinema goers.

Beck, Brenda E. F. 1982. The Three Twins: The Telling of a South Indian Folk Epic. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Behl, Aditya. Forthcoming. Shadows of Paradise: An Indian Islamic Literary Tradition. New York: Oxford University Press.

Behld, Aditya, and Simon Weightman, trans. 2000. Madhumalati, An Indian Sufi Romance. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Benjamin, Walter. 1955. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In Illuminations, ed. Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 217-51.

Blackburn, Stuart H., and Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger. 1989. "Introduction." In Oral Epics in India, eds.

Stuart H. Blackburn, et. al. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1-11.

Booth, Gregory D. 1995. "Traditional Content and Narrative Structure in the Hindi Commercial Cinema." Asian Folklore Studies 54:2, 169-190.

_____. 2000. "Religion, Gossip, Narrative Conventions and the Construction of Meaning in Hindi Film Songs." Popular Music 19:2, 125-145.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2000. Provincialiizing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Dahmen-Dallapiccola, Anna Libera. 1989. Shastraic Traditions in Indian Arts (2 vols.). Stuttgart: Steiner.

De Bruijn, Thomas. 1996. The Ruby Hidden in the Dust: A Study of the Poetics of Malik Muhammad Jayasi's Padmavat. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Leiden.

Dirks, Nicholas B. 2001. Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Dissanayake, Wimal, and Malti Sahai. 1992. Sholay, A Cultural Reading. New Delhi: Wiley Eastern Limited.

Eck, Diana. 1981. Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India. Chambersburg, PA: Anima Books.

Gerow, Edwin. 1986. "Rasa and Katharsis: A Comparative Study, Aided by Several Films." (Unpublished paper, used by courtesy of the author).

Ghosh, Manomohan. 1951, 1961. The Natyasastra, Ascribed to Bharata-Muni. (2 vols). Calcutta: The Asiatic Society.

Joshi, Sam. 2004. "How to Watch a Hindi Film, The Example of Kuch Kuch Hota Hai." Education About Asia 9:1, 22-25.

Kabir, Nasreen Munni. 2001. Bollywood, The Indian Cinema Story. London: Channel 4 Books.

Kakar, Sudhir. 1983. "The Cinema as Collective Fantasy." In Indian Cinema Superbazaar, eds. Aruna Vasudev and Philippe Lenglet. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 89-97.

_____. 1989. Intimate Relations: Exploring Indian Sexuality. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kapur, Anuradha. 1993. "The Representation of Gods and Heroes: Parsi Mythological Drama of the Early Twentieth Century." Journal of Arts and Ideas 23-24, 85-107.

Kapur, Geeta. 1987. "Mythic Material in Indian Cinema." Journal of Arts and Ideas 14-15, 79-108.

Kazmi, Fareed. 1999. The Politics of India's Conventional Cinema: Imaging a Universe, Subverting a Multiverse. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Kesavan, Mukul. 1994. "Urdu, Awadh and the Tawaif: The Islamicate Roots of Hindi Cinema." In Forging Identities: Gender, Communities and the State, ed. Zoya Hasan. New Delhi: Kalli for Women, 244-257.

Kurtz, Stanley N. 1992. All the Mothers Are One: Hindu India and the Cultural Reshaping of Psychoanalysis. New York: Columbia University Press.

Lath, Mukund, ed. and trans. 1981. Half a Tale: A Study in the Interrelationship between Autobiography and History. Jaipur: Rajasthan Prakrit Bharati Sansthan.

Lutze, Lothar. 1985. "From Bharata to Bombay: Change and Continuity in Hindi Film Aesthetics." In The Hindii Film: Agent and Re-Agent of Cultural Change, Beatrix Pfleiderer and Lothar Lutze, eds. New Delhi: Manohar; 3-15.

Manuel, Peter. 1993. Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in North India. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Marriott, McKim, ed. 1990. India Through Hindu Categories. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Masson, J. L. and M. V. Patwardhan. 1970. Aesthetic Rapture: The Rasadhyaya of the Natyasastra (2 vols). Poona: Deccan College Research Institute.

Mishra, Vijay. 1985. "Towards a Theoretical Critique of Bombay Cinema." Screen 26:3-4, 133-146.

_____. 2002. Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire. New York and London: Routledge.

Mitter, Partha. 1977. Much Maligned Monsters: History of European Reactions to Indian Art. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Nandy, Ashis. 1989. The Tao of Cricket: On Games of Destiny and the Destiny of Games. New Delhi: Penguin Books.

Penzer, N. M., ed. 1924-28. The Ocean of Story (10 vols.). London: C. J. Sawyer.

Pfleiderer, Beatrix, and Lothar Lutze, eds. 1985. The Hindi Film: Agent and Re-Agent of Cultural Change. New Delhi: Manohar.

Pinney, Christopher. 1999. "Indian Magical Realism: Notes on Popular Visual Culture." In Subaltern Studies X, eds. Gautam Bhadra, et. al. Delhi: Oxford University Press; 201-233.

Prasad, M. Madhava. 1998. Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Pritchett, Frances W. 1985. Marvelous Encounters: Folk Romance in Urdu and Hindi. New Delhi: Manohar.

_____. 1991. The Romance Tradition in Urdu: Adventures from the Dastan of Amir Hamzah. New York: Columbia University Press.

Rai, Alok. 2001. Hindi Nationalism. New Delhi: Orient Longman.

Rajadhyaksha, Ashish. 1993. "The Phalke Era: Conflict of Traditional Form and Modern Technology." In Interrogating Modernity: Culture and Colonialism in India, ed. Tejaswini Niranjana, P. Sudhir, and Vivek Dhareshwar. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 47-82.

Ramanujan, A. K. 1990. "Is There an Indian Way of Thinking? An Informal Essay." In India through Hindu Categories, McKim Marriott, ed. New Delhi: Sage Publications. 41-58.

_____. 1991. "Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation." In Many Ramayanas, Paula Richman, ed. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 22-49.

Ramaswamy, Sumathi, and Patricia Uberoi, eds. 2002. Beyond Appearances? Visual Practices and Ideologies in Modern India. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Rangacharya, Adya. 1996. The Natyasastra: English Translation with Critical Notes. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers.

Ray, Satyajit. 1976. Our Films, Their Films. Bombay: Orient Longman.

Richman, Paula, ed. 1991. Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

_____, ed. 2001. Questioning Ramayanas: A South Asian Tradition. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Roghair, Gene H. 1982. The Epic of Palnadu. New York: Clarendon Press.

Saari, Anil. 1985. "Concepts of Aesthetics and Anti-Aesthetics in the Contemporary Hindi Film." In The Hindi Film: Agent and Re-Agent of Cultural Change, Beatrix Pfleiderer and Lothar Lutze, eds. New Delhi: Manohar; 16-28.

Schechner, Richard. 1985. Between Theater and Anthropology. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Schechner, Richard, Michele Minnick, and Paula Murray Cole. 2001. "Rasaesthetics." TDR 45:3, 27-50.

Schomer, Karine. 1989. "Pradigms for the Kali Yuga: The Heroes of the Alha Epic and Their Fate." In Oral Epics in India, eds. Stuart H. Blackburn, et. al. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 140-154.

Shirreff, A. G. 1944. Padmavati of Malik Muhammad Jaisi. Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal.

Smith, John D. 1991. The Epic of Pabhuji: A Study, Transcription, and Translation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Thomas, Rosie. 1985. "Indian Cinema: Pleasures and Popularity." Screen 26:3-4, 116-131.

_____. 1989. "Sanctity and Scandal: The Mythologization of Mother India." Quarte