THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

SITARON KA TARANA:

ACTS OF EXPRESSION IN THE BOMBAY FILM SONG

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF CINEMA AND MEDIA STUDIES

BY

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2023

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Abstract

My dissertation titled "Sitaron Ka Tarana: Acts of Expression in the Bombay Film Song" is on the convergence of film and poetry in the song sequences of Bombay cinema of the 1950s, and I explore the philosophical issues these sequences raise around language, experience, and expression. Drawing on Stanley Cavell's writings on skepticism in literature and film, I put film-philosophy's concerns about film's medium-specific properties (such as its representations of reality, its displacements of character and performance) in conversation with the central topics of the philosophy of language (the nature of meaning, the relation of language and reality) to open out a fresh perspective on the meetings of word and image in the Bombay film song. In my chapters, I conduct comprehensive analyses of individual films and their songs, uncovering the complex patterns of verbal imagery that are essential to understand the workings and structure of the films, while also exploring the Bombay cinema's unique industrial and aesthetic practices, such as the "playback" convention and the poetic traditions behind the song lyrics. These specificities and details of the appearances of the songs are often neglected and buried in scholarship on the Indian film song, and my work shows that close, precise, and narratively situated analyses of individual songs is essential in understanding the larger puzzle of Indian cinema's dependence on this lyrical convention. In my first chapter, I take up the under-studied field of Bombay comedies, focusing on the interactions of male and female voices across duets and solo songs, in the 1958 screwball comedy, *Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi* (*That Which Moves is Called a Car*), and explore how the sexual politics and ideas of conversation and of marriage in classic Hollywood comedy is mediated and transformed by the convention of the sung duets between the couple. In my second chapter, I show how the sung poetry in Guru Dutt's 1957 film *Pyaasa* (*Thirst*), which follows the disillusionment of a socialist poet with his art, explores a philosophical crisis of voice and language. The third chapter is

on a genre of iconic songs in the films of actor-director Raj Kapoor, especially the 1951 *Awara* (*Vagabond*) and the 1955 *Shree 420* (*Gentleman Thief*), which I see as evoking the question of the individual political voice that is central in the historical context of the new democratic nation. Traditionally scholarship in the field of film-philosophy has predominantly focused only on a set Western canon of films, while the scholarship on India's popular cinema has primarily studied its films through the lens of political nationalism with an almost exclusive focus on the mode of melodrama. My dissertation works to put these two fields in a more productive and fruitful dialogue with each other. I also examine key figures involved in this period of cinematic history, providing new perspectives on major actor-directors like Guru Dutt and Raj Kapoor, highlighting the unique case of singer-actor Kishore Kumar, and bringing out the oeuvre of lesser-studied figures, like the singer Geeta Dutt and the lyricist Shailendra.

Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank my dissertation committee, David Rodowick, Daniel Morgan, and Rochona Majumdar, for their sustained and generous engagement with my work over the whole course of my time here at the University of Chicago and especially during the writing of this dissertation. Through his courses, his writing, and his conversations, David provided the foundations for my intellectual interests, shaping my ideas and ways of understanding film and philosophy. He has also served as an indispensable source of warmth and confidence. Dan has been a consistent and supportive guide, and the dissertation derives fundamentally from his invitations and encouragements to explore and cultivate my nascent thoughts through writing and discussion. He has been a model for my scholarship both in the expansiveness of his interests and the precision of his conceptual insights. Rochona's knowledge of and enthusiasm for the subject has been a source of continuous inspiration and challenge. My dissertation has profited immensely from her careful attention, keen observations, and perceptive judgements, and she has pushed me to situate my ideas more precisely within a broader framework of scholarship and of Indian history.

I'd like to thank the Cinema and Media Studies Department, as well as the University of Chicago as a whole, for providing a rigorous and stimulating intellectual environment. In particular, I want to thank Tom Gunning, who taught me so much about how to watch and write about films, Tyler Williams, whose course on Hindi poetry was essential to the development of this project, and Robert Pippin for his support and guidance on my field exams. I'd also like to especially acknowledge Robert Bird, with whom I was glad to have shared a different initial interest, and with whom I wish I could share this current work.

Colleagues and friends have given me community and companionship that have sustained me through my graduate years. Thank you, Sean Batton, Jenisha Borah, Pedro Noel Doreste,

Anirudh Karnick, Ritika Kaushik, Leah Li, Cooper Long, Emma Lunbeck, Cinta Peleja, Debarati Roy, Amy Skjerseth, and Labanya Unni.

To my parents, I couldn't even begin to express my love and gratitude, but I would at least like to affirm the fact that the interests of this dissertation emerge from and lead back to them.

Finally, I'd like to acknowledge the central way in which all my individual endeavors are really dual. Each page of this dissertation has been marked by the involvement and presence of Max Bean. I am grateful to him for helping me edit and revise my writing, for pushing me to clarify and deepen my ideas and arguments, and for joining me in my love and admiration for these films and songs. I am lucky to have this level of joyful mutual investment in all our shared projects, of which this dissertation is only one.

Introduction

I.

The history of Bombay cinema is the history of its songs. Its milestones and eras are often defined as much by the appearances of singers, lyricists, and composers as by the actors, directors, and films themselves. From the arrival of synchronized sound, a large music industry began to form itself within the film industry. But while songs were ubiquitous through the films of the 1930s and 1940s, the films mostly relied on actor-singers, and only occasionally employed dubbing. It is the "long" 1950s, from 1947 to 1962, that saw the establishment and development of the "playback convention," the acknowledged use of star singers, and the form of the song sequence became codified around it. Each film required six or seven songs, and the lyricist would be part of the conception of the film, writing lyrics as the story was developed and working with the director and the music director. The songs would be recorded by the singers, and then the shooting of the film would commence, with the actors lip-syncing during the song sequences. These songs formed almost the totality of Hindustani popular music until well into the 1990s, traversing wide territories outside their parent films through radio and gramophone (and later cassettes, CDs, and YouTube). It is possible to see the film songs as free-floating objects, to study their independent life in these adjacent and new media, but my particular interest is to study them in their home soil, in the medium of film, and in the particular films in which they appeared.[1]

In my dissertation, I will conduct a set of analyses of individual films and their songs, uncovering the web of verbal imagery that is essential to understand the workings and structure of

[1] "Bombay cinema" refers to films that were produced in the city of Bombay in the language of Hindi/Urdu/Hindustani. The most used phrase to refer to this cinema is "Hindi cinema," but it implies that the language of the films is primarily Hindi, which is not accurate for the dialogue and especially not for the poetry of the lyrics, and in a period that was fraught with this religious linguistic debate, the term carries unwarranted connotations. Lunn makes a case for referring to this film industry as "Hindustani cinema," and he emphasizes the "expansive linguistic possibilities" available to film and the "opportunities that film afforded writers to *not* make explicit ideological choices." David Lunn, "The Eloquent Language of Hindustani," 23.

the films. My interest in the poetry of the songs, however, is not merely in the play of patterns and motifs, but in the fact of the expression of the characters. The songs consist of moments of characters involved in exemplary acts of expression, enacting various possibilities of language in ways fundamentally dependent on the medium of film. Characters are presented as they find words for their experience in acts of singing, or at times listening, across a range of contexts. The songs operate, for example, as a declaration of selfhood (*Awara*'s "I am a Vagabond"), as a playful conversation between a couple (*Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi*'s "I am the melody of the stars"), as a plea for transcendence (*Pyaasa*'s "Today, lover, take me in your arms").[2] Covering a wide spectrum of mental and communal life, staging moments of privacy and community, forms of thinking, and ways of being with oneself and with others, the Bombay film song continuously plays with and tests the boundaries between the self, the world, and other people, and, in its use of poetry, emphasizes the function of the medium of language in mediating these boundaries.

Poetry has long been a mobilizing concept for filmmakers and film theorists to explore the nature of the medium of film, to conceptualize its properties, and to experiment with modes of its construction. In "The Question of Poetic Cinema" Tom Gunning gives an overview of the ideas of the major figures in this tradition, discussing for example, Jean Epstein's focus on the revelatory aspects of film and its associative dream-logic, Maya Deren's theory of the suspension of time, Pier Paolo Pasolini's belief in the oneiric unconscious poetic energies that undergird and are repressed by narrative films, and Stan Brakhage's desire to create a visual equivalent for poetic language that shows "visual experience in all its flux."[3] Gunning outlines how these figures share a certain conception of modern poetry—as lyrical emotional expression, as fundamentally opposed to

[2] From the films: *Awara* (*Vagabond*) (Kapoor, 1951); *Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi* (*That Which Moves is Called a Car*) (Bose, 1958); *Pyaasa* (*Thirst*) (Dutt, 1957).
[3] Tom Gunning, "The Question of Poetic Cinema," 569.

narrative, and as a mode that highlights the formal qualities of the medium of language—and describes how they draw on an idea of poetic language to imagine and conceptualize a mode of cinema that paradoxically privileges image over language, and which locates the most revelatory, most "cinematic" experience in non-narrative visual experience.

In Bombay cinema, the convergence of film and poetry takes another path. The Bombay song sequence does share qualities of the experimental tradition of poetic cinema as outlined by Gunning: it provides a break from narrative action, it suspends a strictly linear time, it lingers on the lyricism of the human face, and it often displays playful and sometimes dream-like visual compositions. Yet, it is also crucial to recognize the qualities that distinguish it starkly from the experimental tradition, qualities that have often led critics and independent filmmakers to dismiss the song sequence as the least cinematic aspect of these films and to decry the dominance of the music industry over Indian cinema. These seemingly negative qualities are the sudden intrusion of spectacle in narrative, the use of typified static close-ups of stars, the artifice of the playback convention, the standardized genres of songs, and the conventional poetic vocabulary. In each film, these elements open out networks of connections with the songs of similar genres, create breaks in the auteur-driven model, and, like all generic conventions, provide easy opportunities for unoriginal work. But the characteristic that distinguishes the song-sequence in Bombay cinema most prominently from the experimental tradition is the focus on sung words, within which the word begins to take on a power equal to and greater than then image.

By dramatizing acts of expression, the Bombay song sequences put a pressure on language in the understanding of film, where the ability to express oneself to others, to respond verbally to a situation, or to reflect on one's state of mind, form the core of the drama, intrinsic to the understanding of character, relationships, events, and the world of the film. This tradition of poetic cinema cannot rest on neat conceptual divisions between narrative and poetry or between language

and image. It calls for a new understanding of the relation more broadly between word and image, which directs its attention to the nature of cinema's access to the characters in moments of expression and expressiveness. My claim in this dissertation is that such attention will make possible a renewed sensitivity to the power of words on film, to that forcefield of body, mind, face, selfhood, and society out of which the words emerge.

II.

In the history of Indian film criticism, the songs of the 1950s have been slow to receive critical or theoretical attention. The first academic works on Bombay cinema of this era, such as those by Chakravarty, Prasad, Rajadhyaksha, and Vasudevan, which conducted ideological critiques of the cinema and its participation in the nationalist project, attempted no sustained analyses of the music or form of the songs, addressing them only as excesses to the narrative and interludes of entertainment.[4] Since then, both ethnographic and analytic studies have begun opening out the song sequence as a complex filmic convention, exploring its history, its mode of production and its particular formal and thematic characteristics: Beaster-Jones, Booth, Sen, and Sunya have written on the variety of musical and lyrical styles and sources of the songs[5]; Gopal, Morcom, and Wani on the multi-faceted relation of song, particularly love songs, to narrative[6]; Dass and Majumdar on their

[4] Sumita Chakravarty, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema, 1947-1987;* Ashish Rajadhyaksha, *Indian Cinema in the Time of Celluloid: From Bollywood to the Emergency;* Ravi Vasudevan, *The Melodramatic Public: Film Form and Spectatorship in Indian Cinema.*

[5] Jayson Beaster-Jones, *Bollywood Sounds: The Cosmopolitan Mediations of Hindi Film Song;* Gregory Booth, *Behind the Curtain: Making Music in Mumbai's Film Studios*; Biswarup Sen, "The Sounds of Modernity: The Evolution of Bollywood Film Song," 85–104; Samhita Sunya, "Moving toward Prem Nagar: An Intimate Genealogy of the 'City of Love' and the Lyrical Worlds of Hindustani Film Songs"; Lalitha Gopalan, *Cinema of Interruptions: Action Genres in Contemporary Indian Cinema.*

[6] Sangita Gopal, *Conjugations: Marriage and Form in New Bollywood Cinema*; Anna Morcom, "Performance, Performativity and Melodrama as Dramatic Substance in Hindi Film Song Sequences"; Aarti Wani. *Fantasy of Modernity: Romantic Love in Bombay Cinema of the 1950s.*

political resonance[7]; Iyer on the practices and discourses around dance[8]; and Dyer, Majumdar, Sundar, and Srivastava on the practice of playback singing and the phenomenon of dual stardom that it engendered.[9]

Much of this work informs my study, and in my chapters I will pick up on a few inspirations and quarrels with their arguments. In this introduction, I want to establish certain of my systematic differences from the common interpretations of the film songs. I will focus on three broad topics—the idea of emotional expression, the nature of love songs, and the meaning of the playback convention.

a) Emotional Expression

In discussions of the phenomena of the Bombay film song, especially in overviews but even in focused essays, there's a temptation to try to capture the whole nature and function of this unusual convention in a single essential concept. A common approach is to frame the songs as moments of emotional expression. Here are a few representative examples:

—"These song situations give audiences insight into the emotional states of the characters at particular moments in the film and provide a way for film directors to condense a great deal of emotional information into a few minutes of screen narrative…Songs often provide an outlet for emotions that would otherwise be inexpressible by characters within the narrative; thus, many songs allow for relatively subtle representations of a character's interior states."[10]

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[7] Manishita Dass, "Cinetopia: Leftist Street Theatre and the Musical Production of the Metropolis in 1950s Bombay Cinema"; Rochona Majumdar, "Song Time, the Time of Narratives, and the Changing Idea of Nation in Postindependence Cinema."

[8] Usha Iyer, *Dancing Women: Choreographing Corporeal Histories of Popular Hindi Cinema.*

[9] Richard Dyer, *In the Space of a Song: The Uses of Song in Film*; Neepa Majumdar, "The Embodied Voice: Song Sequences and Stardom in Bombay Cinema"; Pavitra Sundar, "Gender, Bawdiness and Bodily Voices: Bombay Cinema's Audiovisual Contract and the 'Ethnic Woman"; Sanjay Srivastava, "Voice, Gender and Space in Time of Five-Year Plans: The Idea of Lata Mangeshkar."

[10] Beaster-Jones, *Bollywood Sounds*, 79.

—"The film song…was *raga*-based and used to express and elaborate on moods and affective states—love, desire, loss, melancholia."[11]

—"The songs and dances were inserted into this pattern of formulaic coincidences with their stereotyped situations and characters to provide an emotional outlet for one of the stars, comic relief in an awkward situation, or romantic interplay, or to convey a message reflecting traditional Indian values…The Indian audience is primarily concerned with how well a singer renders a song, rather than with the logic of what a character sings or the fact that the same voice is used for different characters; the Indian audience's second concern is the visual enactment of the lyrics. Therefore, the audience is not concerned with the standardization of a character type with a specific voice. The emphasis is on the context, action, and emotion being expressed and not whether it is appropriate to the character. The sentiment a character expresses often reflects the audiences' emotion."[12]

—"It is the song that expresses the central meaning of the sequence—meanings that have to do with emotional intelligibility and the exteriorizing of inner subjective states…cinematically, the experience of the film communicates by privileging a performance of suffering and an intensification of emotion via music and mise-en-scène."[13]

—"However, spectacular and emotional excess were invariably privileged over linear narrative development. The spectator was expected to be involved not primarily through anticipation of *what* would happen next, but through *how* it would happen and affective involvement in the happening."[14]

—"Thus, the dramatic and emotional states of the characters are reified and brought into being in the narrative in song sequences with particular intensity."[15]

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[11] Sangita Gopal, "The Audible Past," 810.
[12] Teri Skillman, "Songs in Hindi Films: Nature and Function," 151-2.
[13] Ira Bhaskar, "Emotion, Subjectivity, and the Limits of Desire: Melodrama and Modernity in Bombay Cinema, 1940s-'50s," 166.
[14] Rosie Thomas, *Bombay Before Bollywood: Film City Fantasies*, 232.
[15] Morcom, "Performance," 136.

This emphasis on the emotional expression of the songs has the virtue of countering another common account of the songs as intervals of spectacle that interrupt the narrative and provide "extra-cinematic" pleasures. But a deeper problem lies behind the pervasiveness of this model. In its assumption that what is being expressed in songs are always "emotions" and that the act of expression consists in making an inner experience available for outer consumption, this framing of "emotional expression" harbors and sustains deeper reductive ideas about expression that hinders our understanding of the work of the songs.

Readings of this kind tend to focus on melodramas and take both their particular examples and their general sense of the "Hindi film" from that particular genre. An acknowledged influence behind this focus on the melodramatic form is Peter Brooks' *The Melodramatic Imagination.*[16] In his study, Brooks retrieves the term from its pejorative connotations of excess, simplified morality, spectacle, mindless popularity, and shows it to be an aesthetic mode that constitutes a valuable and significant response to conditions of modernity, one that crosses the boundary between low and high art, forming a vital impulse even in the serious thinkers and writers of the 19th century, such as Balzac and Henry James.[17] An influential body of film criticism is devoted to extending his theories to frame film as a medium has inherited this melodramatic imaginary.[18] Brooks theorizes the melodramatic form as a historic response to the Enlightenment, to its rationalistic presentation of a non-metaphysical world void of morality and a concurrent devaluing of the emotional life. This sense of loss of meaning, caused by the loss of the "traditional sacred," is counteracted by the

[16] For an (uncritical) discussion on the influence of the category of "melodrama" on Indian film criticism, see Ravi Vasudevan, "Melodrama," 125–128.
[17] Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination,* viii.
[18] For an overview of the field, see Christine Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field" and Linda Williams, "Melodrama Revised."

melodramatic mode which undertakes "an effort to signify," compensating for the loss of meaning with an attempt to re-sacralize everyday life by positing hidden meanings behind its façade.[19] The pressure, and pleasure, of the melodramatic texts becomes to reveal and body forth this underlying moral meaning, what he calls the "moral occult."[20] In a striking comparison, he writes that where comedy deals with deafness, with problems of miscommunication, and tragedy with blindness, with problems of insight, the characteristic trait of melodrama is muteness, in its central organization around the problem of stifled expression and finds its release in moments of heightened expressivity.[21] In his analysis of melodramatic theater and novels, Brooks shows there was a prolific use of non-verbal signs, mute gestures, and tableaus, which he understands as hysterical expressions, as unconscious somatic betrayals of repressed subjectivity, signs of a desperate dissatisfaction with language as a medium of communication.[22]

This interest in the mute but expressive gesture becomes, in an influential and dominant strand of Indian film criticism, the model for understanding Indian cinema—in particular, the Indian film song. In an essay that makes explicit this inheritance of Brooks's ideas, Bhaskar argues for "the centrality of the song as the language of the ineffable."[23] Analyzing the songs, or what she calls the "hysterical texts," of three films, *Gopinath* (1948), *Daera* (*Circle)* (1953), and *Devdas* (1956)*,* she writes the melodramatic form was resonant in India as an exploration of subjectivity that turned tragic because the desires that were released could not be satisfied in the historical moment, restricted as they were by issues of caste, class, and gender.[24] She writes, "If conventional language is inadequate to express the stress of emotion, the language of poetry, music and gesture enables a spontaneous

[19] Brooks, 11, xiii.
[20] Ibid, 5.
[21] Ibid, 57.
[22] Ibid, xi.
[23] Bhaskar, "Emotion," 163.
[24] Ibid, 170, 164.

and immediate contact with the 'occult realm of true feeling and value' (Brooks 1984, 75)."[25] The expression of the intense emotion is viewed as the prime signal of an "inner" subjectivity: "it is the embodiment of the individual's most intense condition of felt selfhood."[26]

What's crucial to recognize is that a theory of language that undergirds such a reading. On this theory, language acts as a screen to emotional expression, the idea being that without words we could express "directly" and without interference.[27] In such a reading of songs, the words fade away, and the songs become a flow of pure emotion, expressing "the ineffable." The lyrics might as well be groans and sighs. The "spontaneity" and "immediacy" of the songs implies that the characters must be uncritically absorbed in their songs, for this understanding of expression and the emotionality of the content of the expression leaves little room for deliberation and decision in the choice of language and manner of expression. By focusing only on songs that are sung alone, it removes the act of expression from the intersubjective arena, and by rendering mysterious and inchoate an idea of the "inner" self, it defines the individual as a private inaccessible entity.

It also implies that the viewers of film are absorbed in a similar "spontaneous" and "immediate" manner in the reception of these songs. This conception does not account for the deep conventionality of the form of the song sequence, one which thrives on connoisseurship, calling for a recognition of the styles of singers, composers, lyricists, stars, for the innovations and play in poetic vocabulary, the knowledge of which is the foundation of our appreciation and understanding of these songs.[28] The lyrics of the Bombay film song were written by poets, whose reputations were

[25] Ibid, 168.
[26] Ibid, 163.
[27] See for another example: "Melodrama…both insists on the realities of life in bourgeois democracy…and, in an implicit recognition of the limitations of the conventions of representation—of their repressiveness—proceeds to insist on, force into an aesthetic presence, desires for identity, value, and fullness of signification beyond the powers of language to supply." Christine Gledhill, "Christine Gledhill on 'Stella Dallas' and Feminist Film Theory," 45.
[28] See Isabela Huacuja Alsonso's essay on the hit parade radio programme, *Geetmala*, and its production of a "'discerning' Hindi film-song critic," in "Songs by Ballot: Binaca Geetmala and the Making of a Hindi Film-Song Radio Audience, 1952–1994," 66.

often established outside of film. They were not minor poets that were drawing on literary movements of Urdu poetry happening elsewhere, they were themselves counted as the chief poets of those circles.[29] And the centrality of these lyrics should be unmissable in a musical form like the Bombay film song that privileges the interaction of words, voices, and melody. Manna Dey, a major singer in Bombay cinema, wrote, for instance, of his attraction to the film song and the qualities that led to his frustration with the strand of "classical" Hindustani music he was trained in—that the words in the *ragas* dissolved into sounds and were not adequately enunciated, and that he felt there was often a "discrepancy between the melody and the import of the lyrics."[30]

An obstacle to recognizing the importance of the lyrics of the song in criticism is the focus that is put on the music—not via a musical analysis which would yield more layered meanings, but on the fact of its musicality—along with an implicit assumption of music being an art form that provides an unmediated sensuous experience. One can locate this idea in Suzanne Langer's influential passage about how music mimics our inner states, functioning as "a tonal analogue of emotive life":

> The tonal structures we call "music" bear a close logical similarity to the forms of human feeling—forms of growth and of attenuation, flowing and stowing, conflict and resolution, speed, arrest, terrific excitement, calm or subtle activation or dreamy lapses—not joy and sorrow perhaps, but the poignancy of both—the greatness and brevity and eternal passing of everything vitally felt.[31]

Richard Dyer, whose work on star-texts and the "utopianism" of musicals has deeply influenced scholarship on the songs in Indian film, quotes this passage in his book *In the Space of a Song*, and this

[29] See Raza Mir and Ali Husain Mir. *Anthems of Resistance: A Celebration of Progressive Urdu Poetry*.
[30] Admittedly, other factors were at play—what he calls the "tedious" length of the "classical" performances, and the threat of being "reduced to abject penury." Manna Dey, "Becoming a Playback Singer."
[31] Suzanne Langer, *Feeling and Form,* 27.

understanding of music, alongside his interest in the "entertainment" value of film, reaffirms his understanding of musicals as working at the level of "sensibility." For example, of the nature of the utopian aspirations of Hollywood musicals, he writes, "It presents head-on as it were, what utopia would feel lie rather than how it would be organized."[32] Similar analogies to music have influenced melodramatic film criticism, such as in Linda Williams's essay "Melodrama Revised," where she uses an idea of "Romantic" music, in particular its dramatic arc of the departure from and return to the tonic key, to describe the temporal and rhythmic flow of the melodramatic narrative, and she argues that these patterns "take on a visceral sort of ethics. They are *felt* as good."[33]

This understanding of music's affective mode, as mimicking and working at the level of our feelings—one that is, incidentally, much contested in the philosophy of music—when applied to the experience of film restricts our critical interest to our "immediate" and "unconscious" responses, to only our *felt* responses, as if any one's feelings, even and especially our own, were so easily available for analysis.[34] My work proceeds, instead, from the conviction that the nature and being of an individual "song" or "film" is not available unmediated to our senses, that, on the contrary, it is itself the goal of my criticism to capture and articulate.

Instead of understanding film songs, and our responses to film songs, as uncontrolled expressions, we can study them as a field where the powers of expression are presented and explored. That is, instead of basing our understanding of expression on an idea of the unbridled reactive feelings of hysterics, another line of claiming a Freudian inheritance is to recall that these suffering women were responsible for forming the psychoanalytic foundation of the "talking cure,"

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[32] Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia," 20.
[33] Linda Williams, "Melodrama Revised," 73.
[34] See in particular, Wye Jamison Allanbrook, *The Secular Commedia: Comic Mimesis in Late Eighteenth-century Music*, 170. Allanbrook's thesis is that instead of viewing the "classical" music of the eighteenth-century instrumental music as an "imageless world of disembodied passions," we can study it through "an actual semiotic code of expression," deriving from a mimesis of the social historical world, especially from the dance steps, theatrical gestures, narrative tropes, and character's voices of the comic opera.

to recognize their capacity for talk, for their imagination and verbal awareness, to see them as having been actively engaged in their ways of making sense and meaning of their lives and their world. The control we exercise over our expression is always in question, but it remains the medium of our self-understanding. This would provide a foundation to understand better how our lives are lived and formulated in language—and, to the specific point of this dissertation, how film songs are created and experienced in language.

b) Love

"It is not just any emotional state that is brought to the fore in song sequences in classic Hindi cinema but, most commonly, love and romance."[35]

A significant critical deployment of the idea of the songs as emotional outpourings is worth treating separately. It is exemplified by three recent works on the film songs of the 1950s—Gopal's *Conjugations: Marriage and Form in New Bollywood*, Wani's *Fantasies of Modernity*, and Morcom's essay "Performance, performativity and melodrama as dramatic substance in Hindi film song sequences." All three writers treat love as the paradigmatic emotion, and so even as they acknowledge that a wide range of other genres and modes of songs do exist, they take the love song as key to an understanding of the song sequence as a whole.

Gopal's study focuses on the relationship between the love songs and the narrative, framing her subject as that of "the dual enunciation of the couple—in song and narrative."[36] Within stultifying narratives structured by familial and social norms that restrict individual freedom and desire, the song works as a "safe house" for the couple, allowing them a time and space to explore their relationship apart from society's eyes, and also allowing the audience "to sensually experience

[35] Morcom, "Performance," 133.
[36] Gopal, *Conjugations,* 39.

the stakes of such coupling."[37] These sites offer moments and spaces of intimacy that cannot be imagined and fulfilled within the narrative. According to her argument, over the decades, with the supposedly progressive removal of the restrictions on the couple's "right-to-be" in Indian society, the narratives begin to explore not the conflict between the couple and society but the internal conflicts of the post-nuptial couple and the song sequence changes its function "from constituting the couple as private to constituting the couple's interior."[38]

Morcom continues this presumption that in "Hindi" cinema there is a conflict between "personal desire of the protagonist and its typically forbidden public expression," and locates the song sequence as a form that performs and mediates this conflict.[39] Drawing on performance studies of Butler and Foucault, she finds in the song sequence a moment akin to a 16th century public execution, a moment of "confrontation…between people and the might of the sovereign."[40] According to her, the song sequences are moments of heighted performativity, "ostended" into the narrative, and they serve to make the matter of love social, not an issue between the couple but a platform of public address.[41]

Both Gopal and Morcom argue against the portrayal of songs as forming mere intrusions into the narrative but their arguments only serve to put the songs in a new relation of antagonistic excess to the limits of the narrative. Interestingly, they both use criminal and judicial metaphors. Gopal speaks of the songs as a "safe house" and Morcom of the songs as a site of public execution. One as a private refuge from punishment, the other as the public address before the enactment of punishment. But the narrative is the punishing authority in both cases. This model of the narrative of the 1950s as "spaces of family and coercion" arises from Prasad's influential work 1998 *Ideology of*

[37] Ibid, 26.
[38] Ibid, 45.
[39] Morcom, "Performance," 135.
[40] Ibid, 135.
[41] Ibid, 140.

the Hindi Film, in which he argued that the dominant narrative form of "Hindi" commercial cinema is that of the "feudal family romance," which "wishes to prevent the 'invention of the couple,' a secession from the joint family and traditional authority."[42] Vasudevan, in his 2010 *The Melodramatic Public*, also writes that 1950s cinema was "governed by the logic of kinship relations, and its plot driven by family conflict."[43] This has become such a dominant narrative of its own that it stifles ways of looking and thinking about 1950s Bombay cinema, and like a fugitive romantic couple, one desires to flee from it in search of a refuge.[44]

Aarti Wani's *Fantasies of Modernity* is one such refuge to an extent. In her expansive study of Bombay films, she shows the rarity of the onscreen "feudal family romance" and points instead to the wealth and range of onscreen narratives, plots, genres, and styles that cannot be subsumed under the term "feudal" and are decidedly urban and individualistic.[45] But while she displaces the feudal shadow from the narrative of these films, it continues to linger in the form of offscreen social norms. She argues that Bombay cinema peddled in fantasies of love and romance, offering "its audience an experience of love as entertainment, an experience they were disallowed in reality by the patriarchal family and caste structures that strictly regulated the sexual economy of its members."[46] The songs then continue to function as "the singular and transgressive space for the expression of the erotic in love," and perform the pedagogical function of teaching its listeners and viewers about romantic love and modern selfhood.[47] As she puts it in another essay on 1950s cinema, "Love was

[42] Prasad, *Ideology,* 64.
[43] Vasudevan, *Melodramatic,* 99.
[44] The model of subversive song within a conservative narrative needs to be investigated more broadly. Like with Gunning's critique of Donald Crafton's argument of the disruptive relationship between narrative and gag in comedies, we need to be open to seeing the complex non-linear workings of narrative: "While most narratives operate so that containment dominates disruption, thus providing closure, it should be emphasized that the forces of disruption *are essential* to even the most conventional narrative." Tom Gunning, "Response to 'Pie and Chase," 120-2.
[45] Wani, *Fantasies,* 23.
[46] Ibid, 22.
[47] Ibid, 93.

still a novelty being delivered by films as entertainment. The 'fact' of love itself was new and interesting, the 'problem of love' yet to be experienced."[48]

All three writers take romantic love as a well-delineated object that is introduced into Indian society in the twentieth century and then disseminated as a commodity by films. But the songs are not merely recycling and shuffling around a set discourse of Western love, they draw on a long and diverse tradition of erotic and love poetry. The songs constitute interventions within a range of conventions from numerous poetic, religious and literary sources—the Urdu ghazal, Bhakti devotional songs, Persian tales of Laila-Majnu, Bengali folk music, Shakespeare's pairs of lovers—these examples are only the sources that are brought up in one song "Paanch Rupaiya Barah Aana" ("Five Rupees and Sixteen Annas") between Madhubala and Kishore Kumar in *Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi* (*That Which Moves is Called a Car*).

Because love is taken as straightforward and the act of expressing an emotion as unproblematic, it is no surprise that the three writers barely mention, let alone analyze, the actual lyrical content of these persistent love songs and duets. All the films, and the couples in them, have things to say—not just declarations, but also debates and deliberations—that are specific to their occasion and situation. By attending to particular films and listening to the words that are exchanged between a couple, we will come to see the myriad ways in which these matters of love are presented, the way they are inflected differently by different performers, lyricists, directors, and singers.

We may come to recognize that what Madhubala wants from Kishore Kumar in the 1958 *Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi* (*That Which Moves is Called a Car*)—adventure, spirit, equality—is different from what Waheeda Rehman wants from Guru Dutt in the 1957 *Pyaasa* (*Thirst*)—transcendence and escape—and very different again from what Nutan wants from Ashok Kumar in the 1962 *Bandini*

[48] Wani, "The 1950s Stardom," 57

(The Caged One)—self-destruction, penance. And what Nargis wants from Raj Kapoor in the 1951 *Awara* (*Vagabond*)—sexual frisson, childhood companionship—is different from what she wants from him in the 1955 *Shree 420* (*Gentleman Thief*)—stability, family, moral integrity.

And we may realize that Kishore Kumar's campy exaggerations in "Ek Ladki Bheegi Bhaagi Si" ("A girl drenched in rain"), or Guru Dutt's private introspection in "Udhar Tum Haseen Ho" ("There you stand beautiful"), or Dilip Kumar's serious intensity in "Dil Tadap Tadap Ke" ("The heart's wild beating"), or Dev Anand's debonair friendliness in "Maana Janaab Ne Pukara Nahin" ("Agreed the gentleman didn't call me"), each exhibit and extend the different ways a man can invite a woman to a duet of love.[49]

I would like to retrieve in the 1950s a particularly liberating moment of explorations of love and gender relations. What is on offer is not a monolithic model of love. The nature of love, marriage, sexuality, femininity, and masculinity, are, in a metaphorical and in an experiential sense, live questions for the onscreen couple. They are tested and reimagined, recreated, reformed in their conversations with each other.

c.) Playback

In his introduction to *In the Space of a Song*, Dyer writes that while dubbing was "deceitful" in Hollywood and "fluid or casual" in Italian cinema, in "Hindi" cinema it was "transformative."[50] This insightful comparison, which recognizes the uniqueness and importance of the playback convention, is followed unfortunately by a very cursory discussion of the songs of two films, *Mother India* (1957) and *Pakeezah (The Pure One)* (1972), from which Dyer concludes that in "Hindi" cinema the fact of playback singing in conjunction with the kind of "timeless space" that is constructed by the mise-en-

[49] The songs listed are from the films, in respective order: *Chalit Ka Naam Gaadi (That Which Moves is called a Car)* (Satyen Bose, 1958); *Mr. and Mrs. 55* (Guru Dutt, 1955); *Madhumati* (Bimal Roy, 1958); *Paying Guest* (Subodh Mukerji, 1957).
[50] Richard Dyer, *In the Space of a Song: The Uses of Song in Film*, 43.

scene of the song sequence leads to an approach he characterizes, without further elaboration, as "spiritual," "mythic," "archetypal," and "dharmic."[51]

Neepa Majumdar's essay on the playback convention comes in her book on female stardom in early "Hindi" cinema. She offers an alternative monolithic theory: "If in European modernity the human voice is associated with interiority, truth and authenticity, in Indian cinema the female singing voice became another site of externalized displacement for anxieties about the true nature of actresses."[52] Using as a case study the decades-long dominance of the playback singer Lata Mangeshkar, Majumdar draws on the discourse of "purity" and "virginity" around the singer's offscreen persona (in contrast to her sister Asha Bhosle's more controversial marital life), and argues that the ideological work of the playback convention consists in the fusion of the "pure female voice" with the "eroticized female body"—a combination that manages to at once suggest and contain female sexuality, to allow for the construction of an idealized essence of Indian femininity.[53] This argument about the insidious meaning of Mangeshkar's vocal dominance has been repeated and reworked study after study, e.g., by Mishra, Sundar, and Srivastava, and is treated by them as the main, often only, understanding of the playback convention.[54] The fact of the equally long dominance of a handful of male playback singers, such as Manna Dey, Mohammad Rafi, and Kishore Kumar, gets only cursory mention. Ashwini Deshpande has responded to this argument by critiquing its lack of detailed analyses of particular songs, its failure to address the formal and historical differences of the onscreen performances of particular actresses across film genres and

[51] Ibid, 52-55.
[52] Neepa Majumdar, "The Embodied Voice: Song Sequences and Stardom in Bombay Cinema," 173.
[53] Ibid, 194.
[54] See Vijay Mishra, *Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire*, 166-168; Sanjay Srivastava, "Voice, Gender and Space in Time of Five-Year Plans: The Idea of Lata Mangeshkar"; Pavitra Sundar, "Gender, Bawdiness and Bodily Voices: Bombay Cinema's Audiovisual Contract and the 'Ethnic Woman'."

styles and its refusal to attend to the diversity of the moods that Mangeshkar sung in as well as the development of her voice over the course of her career.[55]

Following Deshpande's expansive engagement with the multitude and plurality within the work of a single singer, I will argue that the playback convention—and the song sequence as a whole—need not, and should not, be seen as defined by one key element, as accomplishing just one thing, like establishing a timeless, mythic space, or defining the essence of Indian womanhood. Far from being exhausted by the formulation of the bringing together, in Majumdar's terms, of the "ideal voice" and "ideal body," and far from unreflectively and unconsciously expressing cultural preoccupations, the playback convention is uniquely equipped to investigate the meanings and possibilities of the coming together of the voice and body on film. [56] The disassociation of sound and image on film, an inherent technological fact of the medium, is acknowledged and mined by this convention, and this lack of necessary synchronization allows the songs to conduct explorations of selfhood.

As both Dyer and Majumdar highlight, the convention of playback singing and its system of dual stardom in Bombay cinema is not anxious in that way that it is in Hollywood, where lip-syncing is a mark of dishonesty and the subject of a strange preoccupation. As noted by Majumdar, the 1953 *Singing in the Rain* was false to its own professed theme of revealing and acknowledging the true origin of the voice on screen by employing Betty Noyes secretly to dub the voice of Debbie Reynolds.[57] In Bombay cinema, the use of playback was openly acknowledged, and though it was well known that the actors were not the singers, their performance in the song sequences was crucial to their star personas. Compilations of songs on records, cassettes and digital playlists come

[55] Ashwini Deshpande, "Lata Mangeshkar: The Singer and the Voice."
[56] Majumdar, "The Embodied Voice," 177.
[57] Ibid, 177-178.

organized as often around the actor's performances as the singer's, as often around Waheeda Rehman or Madhubala as around Geeta Dutt or Asha Bhosle. This fact of simultaneous disembodiment and embodiment of the voice and its attachment to filmic bodies seems to be essential to the appeal and authority of these songs—and to the kinds of philosophical problems it raises.

In Hollywood musicals, the figure of the singing and dancing star places an emphasis on individual talent, and this leads to a philosophical interest in the idea of active self-performance, of creatively tapping into one's "true self." This sense of an inherent creative, talented self is often expressed through a sense of play and superfluous energy. Kishore Kumar, the only major actor who sang his own songs in the Bombay industry of the 1950s, also thrives on this. But with the playback convention, under the deliberately acknowledged doubled expression of the character, a range of different philosophical aspects opens up. The capacity for the possession of a separate singing voice satisfies simultaneously a desire for both the active and passive expression of the self: the achievement of voicing oneself and the pleasure of being voiced by another.

Again, we need to be clear that the meaning of the playback convention—what it expresses and how it operates—is not monolithic, and that it changes depending on the narrative, genre, character, lyrics, and performance (both physical and vocal). Each song carries out active and persistent adjustments between instance and convention, between character, star, and singer. The possession of a voice, the sense of a doubled reflective self, can be interpreted and inhabited in many ways. Its effect may be liberatory, unveiling a capacity of self-expression, or isolating, expressing the sense of being singled out and separated from others. In the 1954 *Aar-Paar* (*This or That*), Geeta Dutt while singing for the "heroine" Shyama in the duet "Sun Sun Sun Zalima" ("Listen, listen, listen, cruel one") conveys a spontaneous exuberance that radiates outwards, a quickness to retaliate to the man who starts the song. But when she sings for the "vamp" Shakila in

"Hoon Main Abhi Jawaan" ("I am Still Young"), her voice turns inward, signifying a secure self-sufficiency, not deeming the man who listens to be capable of understanding her.

Another example (also from films directed by Guru Dutt to stabilize at least one vector of inflection) is the iconic pairing of singer Mohammad Rafi and comic actor Johnny Walker, in songs like "Sar Jo Takraye"("When your head spins") or "Jaane Kahan Mera Jigar Gaya Ji"("Where did my heart go?").[58] Rafi provides Walker a voice that does so much match and inhabit his body, as much as illuminate aspects of his physical presence, imbuing him with an aura of freedom and articulateness.

In the context of the playback convention, songs without lip-syncing—where a song is played non-diegetically or when played diegetically but sung by someone offscreen—also take on new meanings, playing on the character's lack of access to a playback voice. This is especially apparent in the work of S.D. Burman, primarily a composer, but also a singer for this genre of songs, and in certain songs by Geeta Dutt, such as "Waqt Ne Kiya" ("What has time done").[59] In these cases, the disembodied voice of the singer seems to deepen the inexpressivity of the characters on-screen, who are denied the power of a voice.

The draw critics feel toward theories of melodrama arises out of an attunement to essential concerns in the film songs, to its terrain of intimate and public mediations between the self, the other, and society. I propose a need to philosophically interrogate these ideas of interiority, privacy, selfhood, and expression, and further, a need to recognize that the film songs are themselves engaged in such an interrogation. This will concurrently involve needing to understand the specific cinematic mode of perception, where what is involved is more than a dramatic mise-en-scene, a visual spectacle of expression, but where ideas of expression are themselves transformed.

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[58] From *Pyaasa (Thirst)* (Dutt, 1957) and *Mr. and Mrs. 55* (Dutt, 1955).
[59] From *Kagaz Ke Phool (Paper Flowers)* (Dutt, 1959).

III.

My interventions in this discourse, and my readings of individual songs, are grounded in a body of ideas from the philosophy of language developed by Stanley Cavell, who was responding to the work of J. L. Austin and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Cavell's ideas provide a particularly apt lens for understanding the work of film songs because his understanding of expression, as it emerges through his engagement with ordinary language philosophy, finds extended application and development in his writings on film. Both by clearing up restrictive assumptions and by actively drawing attention to certain crucial issues, Cavell's philosophy will enable me to address the content of the conversations and self-reflections that occur in the Bombay film song in a medium-specific way, taking into account the particularities of language and performance that are embedded in these forms of expression of characters on film.

"The philosophy of ordinary language," Cavell writes, "is not about language, anyway not in any sense in which it is not also about the world. Ordinary language philosophy is about whatever ordinary language is about."[60] The emphasis on the "ordinary" focuses attention on our everyday inhabitation of language as opposed to the dominant philosophical tradition, which treats language as if from outside, as a system whose primary function is to describe the world, i.e. to state facts. This leads to an emphasis on truth and verifiability of statements, with words understood as "names" of objects, concepts, sensations, thus segmenting experience into discrete units. This logical-descriptive view of language leads, in the dominant tradition, to a form of skepticism, in which, estranged from our "ordinary" confidence in the use of language, doubts arise about whether our words can reach the world, whether they in fact block us from an "unmediated" experience of the objects that they name, and whether they can adequately capture and convey our experience to

[60] Stanley Cavell, "Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy," 95.

another person. In response to these doubts philosophers redouble their efforts to systematize language, to give it a logical grounding, to reify words into essences, all of which further erode our lived ease in language.

In Cavell's writings, he explores these anxieties over language, presenting the impulse toward skepticism both as inevitable and as needing to be overcome. His work in the philosophy of language is aimed not at the isolated analysis of the common topics such as referentiality or meaning, but at a gestalt understanding of how language molds experience, how it constitutes our world, our life lived with others as well as our access to ourselves. There are many winding paths that can be taken through his work to track these interests in the fact of language and our possession of a voice, but they all include his two signature discussions of the relationship of speakers to language and the act of speaking.

The first is Cavell's engagement with Austin's reframing of language as action, not description. In his series of lectures *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin identifies a class of statements he calls "performative utterances," in which the saying of something is actually the doing of it, such as "I promise," or "I bet," or, most vividly, "I declare you man and wife."[61] These examples undo our sense of language as merely reporting on the conditions of the world, showing instead the power of "mere" words to intervene and enact things. Cavell's extension of Austin's project involves first a criticism of its limits. He writes that Austin, "pictures speech as at heart a matter of action and only incidentally as a matter of articulating and hence expressing desire."[62] For Austin, representative examples of words in action often occur in social situations where individual behavior is bound to some extent by convention, such as a marriage ceremony, the manners of eating at a high table, apologies to a neighbor, the identification of a bird. But Cavell seeks a

[61] J.L. Austin. *How To Do Things with Words,* 6.
[62] Cavell, "Passionate and Performative Utterance," 159.

philosophy of language that would be able to admit examples of a far more personal kind, words spoken by individuals who are in a relationship with each other, bonded by ties of love, duty, betrayal, disappointment. It is to correct this "relative, continued neglect of the passions, or say the expressive, in speech" that Cavell defines what he calls the "passionate utterance," which can encompass instances of both speech and song, and can range from the operatic ("Henrich, what have you done to me?") to the mundane ("I'm bored").[63] In these, unlike the "performative utterances" Austin analyzes, another specific individual is addressed and encountered in all their specificity, and a personal response is demanded which is not determined by either logic or convention. This leads to a shift of emphasis from "language" to "voice," bringing to the fore not only a shared and mutual system of meaning, but the fact of our individuated possession of language, not only what words are used, but the how they are used, by whom, to whom.

The second key discussion is Cavell's interpretation of Wittgenstein's concerns around privacy in *Philosophical Investigations*. The sphere of language that preoccupies Wittgenstein has to do with ideas of the relation of the mind to the body, the relation of "outer" words to "inner" sensations and thoughts. For Cavell, central to Wittgenstein's project is an effort to free us from these fixed conceptions of the "outer" and "inner," from the notion that the meaning of words derives from a concurrent inner experience, on which model, theoretically, by attaching a sign to a thought or sensation, we feel we can give words private meaning. This assumption tends to spiral out into another version of the skepticism about language: an anxiety about the gap that is created between the word and the individually felt or thought experience, about how "mere" words could ever adequately convey our individual mental experience, which becomes under this picture, inescapably private and hidden behind unrevealing bodies. A world is threatened where words and

[63] Ibid, 159.

bodies are opaque surfaces, impossible to decipher. Some examples Wittgenstein gives to convey these anxieties are of a diarist desperate to conceal a sensation, to name something no-one else could possibly decipher, or a man thumping his chest and exclaiming that no one else could possibly have "this" pain.[64] In Cavell's reading, these men, in making urgent assertions of absolute privacy, are in the throes of "a fantasy of necessary inexpressiveness," driven by an unconscious desire to make oneself unknown and unknowable.[65] They seem to want to avoid the moment of expression to another person, having lost their faith in it, to want to erase even the implication of another person or a world held in common, and so to deny the shared public grounding of language.

Cavell's discussions of Austin and Wittgenstein both emphasize the act of expression and are announced as reinserting the role of passions and desire in speech. Both shift the terrain in the theory of language from questions of truth and verifiability, of language as the mapping of the world, to matters of conversation and shared forms of life between people; from an interest in isolated and contextless sentences to real ethical and moral encounters. Both deny that language can seamlessly draw its authority from conventionally accepted procedures but instead emphasize the unstable ground of those procedures. The skepticism against which both Wittgenstein and Austin are writing makes the stakes of language not merely those of a momentary lack of intelligibility and communication, but those of inhabiting the world and society itself, what Cavell describes as "the fact of the expressiveness and responsiveness of speech as such."[66]

These animating concerns of Cavell's around the expression through language and the body find some of their most sustained explorations in his writings on film theory and individual films.

[64] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* 97-100.
[65] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason,* 351.
[66] Cavell, "Something out of the Ordinary," 231.

Indeed, he has written often, in differing formulations, of his deep and abiding interest in "the transfigurative power of the motion picture camera on human beings and their utterances."[67]

Analogous to the problem of the skepticism over language that Austin and Wittgenstein intervene in, there is the skepticism that concerns itself with perception, whether our senses can guarantee an infallible access to the world, or whether they give us "mere" phenomena, blocking us from reaching the things themselves. Central to Cavell's account of film, as developed in his book *The World Viewed*, is the claim that film, by staging an encounter with perceptual reality, partakes of that nexus of fantasies, doubts, and anxieties around the nature of our connection with the world, around the limits of our grasp of it. With its photographic capture of the material world, film brings a sense of conviction in it, satisfying our desire to regain access to the world. But along with the precision, presence, and authenticity of filmed objects, comes a sense of their ghostliness, insubstantiality, and transience. On film, "the world" is projected on a screen away from us, leaving us unseen, providing us an experience where we are both compelled toward reality and held in abeyance from it.[68]

Coeval with the skepticism of the material world is the skepticism of other minds. This skepticism, which Cavell calls "the problem of the other," like the skepticism of the material world, is presented in the philosophical tradition as a set of epistemological questions about whether other people really exist, whether, like us, their bodies have minds, or whether they are just automata.[69] The relation between mind and body gets a heightened emphasis, and there's a sense that the body of the other person potentially serves as a perceptual barrier to their inner reality, rather than expressive of it. In both cases, Cavell sees, hidden behind those epistemological questions, a

[67] Cavell, "Afterword," in *Between Opera and Cinema*, 225.
[68] For a thorough discussion of Cavell's discussion of how the ontology of film relates to this dynamic of skepticism, see D. N Rodowick, *Philosophy's Artful Conversation,* 197-216.
[69] See Cavell, "Part Four: Skepticism and the Problem of Others," *The Claim of Reason,* 329-497.

collection of psychological and ethical issues. The anxieties about whether we can know the reality of others, Cavell argues, are an expression of our sense of our moral responsibility to acknowledge them, to remain responsive to them. The problem then is not to know that others are real, but to remain present in the face of their **undeniable** reality.[70]

In his film theory, Cavell sees these concerns as arising in relation to what happens to the human body onscreen. Film creates a "photographic field of expression," as Richard Moran phrases it in elucidating Cavell's ideas, not just by actively creating meaning through techniques of editing and composition, but through the mere fact of its focused attention on the world and people. By the nature of its photographic revelation of faces and gestures, its subjection of bodies to what Cavell calls "perpetual visibility," film trades in a vision of incessant human expressivity, revealing to us that bodies are naturally expressive, showing us as constantly alive, active, mindful—a vision that appeals especially to those who are in a state of doubt, despair, confined by a sense of oppressive privacy, which, Cavell reads as the state of the modern individual.[71]

Film, for Cavell, is then natively philosophical, transforming the debates and concepts of traditional philosophy about "reality and its representation, about art and imitation, about greatness and conventionality, about judgment and pleasure, about skepticism and transcendence, about language and expression."[72] His studies of classic Hollywood cinema, in his books *Pursuits of Happiness* and *Contesting Tears,* considers works of popular cinema as actively participating in, reflecting on, and intervening in these philosophical debates. Because Cavell allows his understanding of the medium of film to be informed not solely by modernist or experimental cinema, the traditional object of theories of film's medium specificity, but also and especially by

[70] For the pressing theme of "acknowledgement" in Cavell, see his essays "Knowing and Acknowledging" and "The Avoidance of Love."
[71] Cavell, "What Photography Calls Thinking," 131.
[72] Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, epigraph.

popular cinema, his work emphasizes the role of stars, narratives, and genres, and understands generic conventions, types, and tropes to be productive of meaning, not in a predetermined formulaic way, but as capable of participating in and investigating the driving preoccupations and myths of a society.[73] In his writing on film, he tries to capture our ordinary critical and reflective experience of the constructed nature of films, our knowledge of stars and our appreciation of the convention and artifice of film. The discourse over the dangerous illusory powers of cinema that dominated much of film theory is simply averted**.** Our interest in the performance of the actors, for example, is dual: it is an interest both in the fiction and in the reality, in the character and in the star, in the medium and in the content. Further, on film, there is a "natural ascendancy of actor over character," with the flesh-and-blood reality of humanity onscreen overwhelming their fictionality.[74] The figure of the star actor is understood, not in terms of an ideological vehicle, but as the fulcrum of our interest in the human body, as representative of the endless human capacity for expressivity. The film star is a figure who partakes in a paradigmatic self-revelation, who is able to possess, control, exemplify the achievement of individuality.[75]

The therapy for our skeptical condition lies in the achievements of individual films that draw on these powers of the medium and bear responsibility for them. Cavell's philosophy of film, deeply informed by the American Romanticism of Emerson and Thoreau, is fundamentally ethical, and he sees films as capable of providing a transformative mode of perception of the world and other people, capable, in his phrasing, of "accompanying" our moral lives and "educating" our experience.[76]

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[73] Cavell's understanding of the relation between modernism and film is of course a far more complex issue, since his approach to classical cinema is itself informed by modernist art. See Jennifer Fay and Daniel Morgan, "Cinema, Modernism, and the Perplexing Methods of Stanley Cavell."
[74] Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 53.
[75] See Cavell's discussion of types in *The World Viewed,* 35-6, and the privacy of stars in *Contesting Tears*, 128.
[76] Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness,* 11-14.

With these ideas about expression in language and on film, I hope to re-engage our understanding of how Bombay film songs draw on and participate in the expressiveness of film, how they use and explore the nature of the intimacy with people and the world that is peculiar to the medium of film. The words and voices of the songs are not only heard, but they are also viewed against the world. The metaphysical gap between ourselves and the world of the film, the reality that film affords and the doubt that it partakes in, the magnified projection of bodies, faces, voices, landscapes, and objects—all the familiar yet continually strange properties that we devote our studies to in our field are given a unique turn by the convention of the Bombay film song. The songs arise at an intersection of words and lives, connecting the words to the body, gestures, and life of a character, deriving their meaning from being situated in narratives and genres and incarnated by stars, both actors and singers. The songs, with their flexible synchronization of voice and body, constitute a layered formal element that provides a fertile ground for investigations into the nature of the act of expression and its attendant philosophical issues, such as those of selfhood, gender and sexuality, and the relations between individual and community. The background of skeptical doubt over language and perception hovers over the film songs, and, in my readings of particular songs, I will argue that they provide exemplary acts of expression that express and respond to these ethical crises.

The song sequences of 1950s cinema are familiar fragments of Indian popular culture, pervasive in the "ordinary" aural world of India and still a powerful influence on its film history, but there is something that is hidden, resistant, and slippery in the polished surfaces of the songs, too apt to be passed by and trivialized. Beneath these surfaces lie depths of philosophical associations, in the nature of the poetic traditions they draw on and in the nature of the poetry of film itself, drawing as the songs do on all the powers and transformations of film. This is a project to put the fragments back into their whole.

VI.

My first chapter deals with songs that envision (and embody and en-voice) successful acts of expression, in which language, perception, and imagination all allow for the creative encounter of an individual with an other. Unsurprisingly, these songs appear in a comedy film, in Satyen Bose's 1958 *Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi* (*That Which Moves is Called a Car)*. The film centers on three brothers played by three brothers: Ashok, Kishore, and Anoop Kumar. They live in an insular world, with the eldest, Ashok, enforcing a strict rule forbidding interaction with women. The core conflict of the movie is established in the first scene where a spell is chanted by the three brothers against a woman, and the narrative turns on breaking this taboo, making the theme of the film that of the discovery of sexuality, with its connections to ideas of childhood, dream, imagination, and the unconscious. Focusing on the interactions of male and female voices across duets and solo songs, and on Kishore Kumar's role as an actor-singer in particular, I will explore how the sexual politics and ideas of conversation and of marriage in classic Hollywood comedy are mediated and transformed by the convention of the sung duets between the couple, which become a medium to explore a more libidinal and liberatory relationship between body and language.

In my second chapter I turn to a film where the expressive resources of the song are used to explore the threat of inexpressiveness, a philosophical crisis of voice and language where there is a persisting sense that words fail to reach either the society or the individual other. The protagonist of *Pyaasa* (*Thirst*) is socialist poet, Vijay, played by actor-director Guru Dutt, and the film follows his increasing disillusionment over the state of the world and his loss of faith in the power of poetry. This is staged pivotally in the songs that Vijay performs. Reading it alongside his later 1959 film *Kagaz Ke Phool* (*Paper Flowers*), where Dutt plays a film director and a sense of crisis of cinema is explicitly rendered, I analyze how by casting himself as a poet, *Pyaasa* makes use of the song sequence as a space to explore the nature of film's revelation of the self and the world and casts a

fresh light on the idea of cinematic self-reflexivity. Vijay's songs take place in public spaces, in front of large, assembled audiences and are addressed to the nation or the world in the abstract. Three of the film's other songs, meanwhile, are performed by female characters, and these songs, unlike those of Vijay's, occurring in private, intimate settings, take the form of duets, actual and imagined, in dialogue with a single other. I will also explore how these women's songs, though embedded in a larger narrative of a male melodrama, reveal a crisis parallel to that of Vijay, articulating a more explicitly gendered register of the poet's Romantic despair over the problems of the expression of self in language and perception, and concerning the fantasies and failures, not, as in Vijay's case, of the relation between self and the world, but rather, of the relation between self and other people.

In the third and last chapter, I take up the mode of self-declaration and the question of the individual political voice that is central in the historical context of the new democratic nation. I will study two social realist films by Raj Kapoor: the 1951 *Awara* (*Vagabond*) (1951) and the 1955 *Shree 420* (*Gentleman Thief*), focusing on the two major songs within them performed by Raj Kapoor and the singer Mukesh, "Awara Hoon" ("I'm a vagabond") and "Mera Joota Hai Japani" ("My shoes are Japanese"). The films' animating political concerns of the relation of the individual and the community, as explored in the narratives through the pervading themes of inequality and the social construction of criminality, are encoded and investigated in these songs. I include in my analysis a song performed by Johnny Walker and singer Mohammad Rafi, "Yeh Hai Bombay Meri Jaan" ("This is Bombay, my life") from *C.I.D.* (*Criminal Investigation Department*) (1956), and another "Wahan Kaun Hai Tera Musafir" ("Who is there for you, Wanderer") performed on Dev Anand and sung (not lip-synced but overlaid) by S.D. Burman from the 1965 *Guide*. I set out these songs—three of them written by the lyricist Shailendra—as a mini-genre that share a number of characteristics: the mobilization of the comedy, pathos, and social critique from Chaplin's Tramp figure; the use of location shooting in Bombay (standing apart from the studio scenes in the rest of

the film); the characters' status as thieves; the emphasis on the walking gait of the body; the move from a private self-declaration to a broader public address and dialogue, particularly, the entrance of women's voices; and most significantly, the association of the songs with the character's experience in prison.[77] I will show how these songs that have become representative of this era of Bombay cinema are themselves working out the problem of representativeness, the role of first-person expression of an individual in representing a community.

[77] As may be noticed, the song from *Guide* provides negations of some of these characteristics—it is not lip-synced, it is not about Bombay, it is not performed in a comedic tone—but it is precisely these contrasts that will help throw into clearer light the meanings of these characteristics.

Chapter One:
What Kind of Tale is This? The Songs of *Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi* (1958)

I.

A girl, all drenched and dripping	*Ek ladki bheegi bhaagi si*
Awake in the sleeping night	*Soti raaton mein jaagi si*
Met with a stranger	*Mili ek ajnabi se*
No one else around	*Koi aage na peeche*
You tell me, what kind of tale is this?	*Tum hi kaho ye koi baat hai*

So sings Kishore Kumar, the lead actor in the 1958 film *Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi*, which translates as *That Which Moves is Called a Car*. He is playing a mechanic, Mannu, negligent on night duty, whose sleep is interrupted when a girl, Renu, played by Madhubala, comes knocking in the middle of the night, drenched from the rain, with her broken-down car in tow. Her irritation is sparked at finding him yawning and musing about waking up from a wonderful sleep. This establishes the combative mood of their first encounter as they together push her car from out of the street into the garage, quarrelling over what work each of them has to do—a quarrel that involves a renegotiation of their class relations. Even though she has a sneezing fit and attempts to wring her saree dry, she refuses his offer of a coat or a cup of tea and stalks around the garage as he starts working under the bonnet of the car. Noting her mood, he decides to respond to it. Using the knocking of his tools as the opening beats, he transitions smoothly from speech into song, beginning with this first verse.

As he sings this tale of a girl coming out of her house and meeting a stranger in the night—the "dark," "quiet," "rainy," "mad" night, as it gets progressively inflected in the lyrics—he prances

around the garage, side-stepping and curtseying in mimicry, enlisting the tools of his trade in the tinkling and tinkering of the music, playing on the bolts, wrenches, a car horn, and at one point performing Chaplin's dance of the dinner rolls with a set of screws.

Figure 1.1 Still from Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi (Bose, 1958)

Swaying and wavering,	*Dagmag dagmag lehki lehki*
Forgetful, wandering, drifting	*Bhooli bhatki behki behki*
Wayward she left home	*Machli machli ghar se nikli*
In a mad black night	*Pagli si kaali raat mein*

The figure of the stranger in the song, with its connotations of potential danger, is mentioned repeatedly in the refrain but not developed in any form. The song is notably not a song of seduction, and the encounter between the stranger and the woman is not pursued. The song's descriptive focus is only on the woman, but the lyrics do not delineate any conventional attributes of feminine beauty. The figure of the woman that this song conjures is instead a restive night spirit. A litany of words is used to describe her bodily movements and psychic states—"flaming" and "storming" in anger, "lost" and "wandering," "sulking," "stooping," "stalling," with "a screw loose."

Her body is drenched, her head is wet	*Tan bheega hai sar geela hai*

Some screw is loose in her	*Uska koyi pench bhi dheela hai*
Standing, stooping, moving, stopping	*Tanti jhukti chalti rukti*
She came out in the dark night	*Nikli andheri raat mein*

This mechanical, natural, bodily force is what gets called a girl. His song's teasing quality targeted at her stubbornness and snobbery is countervailed by his recognition of her as being on some kind of quest, driven by a mysterious, restless desire to leave her house and be moving about at night.

The song's conversion of individualized experience into a poetic encounter is one of the available possibilities of the convention of the song sequence. Here, it is put into action by Mannu, the character, by virtue of being Kishore Kumar, the actor and singer, a significant exception to the lip-syncing convention of the era. Putting himself on display while singing of his perception of her, Mannu manifests that capacity of the self to alter perspectives and, in response to the moment, in response to another, bring out the latent mythic possibilities in the ordinary.

Figure 1.2 Still from Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi (Bose, 1958)

The themes and images that are put into play in this first encounter will determine the meaning and strength of our interest in following the ensuing adventures of this pair. Over the course of the song, Renu is drawn as if enchanted—a sneeze finally giving way to a smile—to

Mannu's singing, as its rhythmic, repetitive, alliterative verse opens out a playful atmosphere alive with a sense of the expressive capacities of the voice and body and in a language capacious enough to capture her wayward self. The song and the scene will end with both of them acknowledging the madness in the other. The nature of the appeal of this song must explain Renu's subsequent determined courting of Mannu—the first (unconscious) gesture of which is her forgetting to pay him the charges for the repair and leaving behind her purse. This ensures that their encounter is left unfinished, and her debt of five rupees and twelve annas will form the motive for their next meeting, and the one after that, and the one after that too.

The interplay of night and day will be a leading motif of the film, the pattern across which their relationship is to be placed and explored. She had questioned him angrily about why he was sleeping in the middle of the night, and she will repeat this question again later in the film, then toward the middle of the day, as if incredulous in general at the unawakened state of men. In this song, Mannu responds by returning the question—why is she awake on this rainy night?

We will find out the following night, when Mannu is tasked, by his elder brother, with locating her and collecting the unpaid fee, that she performs in a play that ends after midnight. As we enter the lobby of the theater along with Mannu, swinging her purse, we are given a look at the poster with her photograph. The play is entitled only "Juliet." Here lies one answer to the question of why she is awake at night: she is out calling for the missing Romeo. And he will answer more than once, but his first attempt is in a dream, where they sing the first of their duets in the play's iconic balcony setting. Getting him to answer while awake will be more difficult, and one of the impulses of this film will be to explore the nature of the hesitations and repressions that come in his way.

II.

Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi is about three brothers, Brijmohan, Jaggu, and Mannu—played by the real-life Kumar brothers—who run a garage in Bombay and live in an insular world without women,

because the elder brother believing himself to have once been deceived in love, enforces a strict rule forbidding any interaction with the opposite sex. The film follows a comic chain of events through which, one by one, three women, beginning with Renu, then Sheela and Kamini, enter the lives of the three brothers and this taboo against women is overcome.

This narrative premise is condensed and conveyed, in the style of a fairytale, through an animated title sequence, establishing the film's playful and festive mood. The title sequence also importantly functions as an overture, cycling through the melodies and motifs of the songs to come, identifying the film with its soundtrack while announcing the constellation of the well-known talents that worked on its production: the music director S.D. Burman, his assistant and son R.D. Burman, the lyricist Majrooh Sultanpuri, the singers Asha Bhosle, Manna Dey, and Sudha Malhotra, choreographers Pt. Badri Prasad and Herman Benjamin, the dancers Helen and Cuckoo, cinematographer Aloke Dasgupta, and the director Satyen Bose.[1] The seven songs that were written, composed, sung, acted, directed, and edited for this film and which form its most enduring and endearing passages come out of a practice that demands this dense pooling of collective labor. In this chapter, I will undertake a reading of all seven of these songs.[2]

One of the guiding principles of my reading is the observation that *Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi*, like many Bombay films of its era, is in direct conversation with Hollywood films, particularly from

[1] Unlike Raj Kapoor, Guru Dutt, Vijay Anand, and to a lesser degree even Raj Khosla (the other directors whose films I will be writing on in my dissertation), Satyen Bose is not a well-known director with an established oeuvre. But his films provide a unique perspective on the theme of childhood and adolescence, rare in Bombay cinema, as in the 1954 *Jagriti (Awakening)* and 1964 *Dosti* (*Friendship).* His first two films are made in Bengali, and the 1951 comedy *Barjatri* (*Bridegroom*), with its plot of a group of men trying to find a bride for one of their gang, would make a good companion text with *Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi.* While Bombay comedies remain under-studied, Bengali comedies are getting more critical attention. See Sharmistha Gooptu, "Common Man's Comedy: The Bhanu Factor."

[2] Though these songs are famous and get mentioned in overviews of Bombay cinema, there is no critical discourse on this film. The longest bit of scholarship is an encyclopedic entry which expectedly fails to grasp the film's narrative and thematic coherence: "The film resorts to silent Hollywood comedy techniques like speeded up action and back projection…and freely digresses into scenes only tenuously related to the narrative (the great lovers-in-history number, *Paanch rupaiya bara anna*)…Very soon after it starts, the film signals its disregard for chronological consistency." Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willemen*, Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, 354.

the 1930s and 1940s. It forms part of what Miriam Hansen has called "the international history of classical American cinema."[3] In her discussion of the mobility of classic Hollywood as an aesthetic mode and the nature of the "Americanism" that travelled with it, Hansen frames its contribution not merely in ideological and economic terms, but famously as "vernacular modernism," with the potential to become "a powerful matrix for modernity's liberatory impulses—its moments of abundance, play, and radical possibility, its glimpses of collectivity and gender equality."[4] But where Hansen emphasizes that these liberatory impulses arise primarily from the "sensory experience and sensational affect" of the medium of film, I would like to draw attention to the specific meanings that are formed through the deliberate references of particular films to other particular films, in which ideas of "gender equality"—a subject of this chapter—are not merely "glimpsed" but investigated.[5]

One Hollywood comedy in particular, Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night* (1934), provoked a startling number of overt remakes and adaptations in 1950s Indian cinema, such as the Bengali film *Chawa-Pawa* (*Wanting-Getting*), the Hindustani *Chori Chori* (*Like a Thief*) and the Tamil *Missiamma* (*Madam*).[6] The narrative of each film includes a pretend marriage between the protagonist couple that prepares the way for their real marriage at the end, as well as a scene where the couple must spend a night sharing a room and end up fashioning a barrier between themselves.

Chalti ka Naam Gaadi is not one of these, but I have come to associate it with another Hollywood comedy, Howard Hawks' 1938 film *Bringing up Baby*. Not only does it have the elements of a screwball and slapstick comedy, there is a similarity in the manner in which the woman takes the active role in the courtship, which also consists of songs, chases, and childish games. There is no

[3] Miriam Hansen, "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism," 69.
[4] Ibid, 69.
[5] Ibid, 70. In this dissertation, I will mention references made by Bombay films to certain films of Capra, Sturges, Welles, Chaplin, and Hawks, but films from genres like noir and melodrama were also influential.
[6] Some other examples: *Aah* (Nawathe, 1953), *Mr. and Mrs. 55* (Dutt, 1955), *Tumsa Nahin Dekha* (*I've never seen anybody like you*) (Hussain, 1957), *Miss Mary* (Prasad, 1957), *Solva Saal* (*Sixteenth Year) (*Khosla, 1958).

leopard stalking around Bombay but its liberation of instinct and sexual energy now gets carried out by the character of the brothers' animalistic car, "Champion." An idea of mechanism, instead of primitivity, figures the couple's relation to sexuality in this film. These kinds of associations led me naturally to connect this film with a work that has become central to my notion in film criticism in general, Stanley Cavell's *Pursuits of Happiness*, in which he performs close readings of seven classic Hollywood films, which delineate a genre he calls "the comedies of remarriage."[7] It is not a coincidence that these two films I mention in connection to Bombay cinema—*It Happened One Night* and *Bringing up Baby*—are the only two of Cavell's seven "comedies of remarriage" that don't actually involve divorce and a literal remarriage—a social convention that would not have been widely acceptable in India.[8] The term "genre" for Cavell is conceived, however, not as a commercial category of film production and reception, unproblematically employed, but in terms of a "medium," a ground for the creation of meaning, and he studies the comedies of remarriage as a set of films exploring and revising a myth.

The leading features of this myth are straightforward—a married pair quarrel, go through a divorce and a period of separation and have to find a way to get together again—but the myth is never definitively closed. Alongside this central current, or even substituting for it, are a range of other possible features and elaborations such as the couple having known each other since childhood, for the woman to have a special relation with her father, who is on the side of her desire, for the woman's mother to be absent. But one central—constitutive—feature is for the couple to participate in a mode of moral conversation about issues, as Cavell's title implies, regarding life,

[7] The seven comedies are *It Happened One Night* (1934*), The Awful Truth (*1937*), Bringing up Baby (*1938*), The Philadelphia Story (*1940*), His Girl Friday* (1940*), The Lady Eve* (1941*),* and *Adam's Rib (*1949).

[8] Though *Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi* does present, albeit implicitly, an instance of divorce, and even a remarriage, only not to the same person. This occurs in the comedic storyline not of the main couple, but the melodramatic one of a supporting pair.

liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.[9]

The fate of the specific marriages then begins to echo with the fate of a democratic nation. The institution of marriage is never justified in these comedies through institutional, familial or legal sanction, leaving the question of the idea and worth of marriage in the private hands of the couple, yet the relationship that the couple work out between themselves—after much debate and deliberation carried out not in seminars or congresses but in the midst of ordinary and absurd comic situations—comes to represent the possibility of a more free and equal community at large.

A key category that underlies Cavell's work on this Hollywood genre, and which is central to this dissertation, is that of "conversation," which he uses to describe the kind of talk between the couple that forms the basis of their relationship. The Hollywood films are generally recognized for their witty and fast paced dialogue, but for Cavell, this characterization doesn't capture the depth and seriousness of this mode of discourse. He writes of the depicted couple, "talking together is fully and plainly being together, a mode of association, a form of life, and I would like to say that in these films the central pair are learning to speak the same language."[10] Cavell derives the term "conversation" from Milton's *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, in which Milton argues that divorce is necessary to uphold marriage as a spiritual, and not merely legal, category, to ensure and encourage an equal companionate relationship between the man and the woman, one that involves the capacity for "a meet and happy conversation."[11] In Cavell's reading, the Hollywood comedies, through their depiction of particular marriages, are involved in interrogating the nature of the knowledge and intimacy required in human relationships. The depicted marriages provide a model for a reciprocal transformative philosophical education, where self-knowledge is gained through a participatory

[9] Cavell, *Pursuits,* 31-2.
[10] Ibid, 88.
[11] Ibid, 87.

mutual acknowledgement of the other and involves a commitment to the "ordinary" inhabitation of the world.[12]

The "myth" of the central pair gets a musical transcription in Bombay cinema. Significantly, it is precisely in these Indian Capra remakes and in adjacent romantic comedies that a genre of film song that is colloquially referred to as a "conversation" song achieved its greatest popularity. A version of the male-female duet, these songs involve the couple singing in an improvised responsive style, and the verses exchanged between the man and the woman are often structured through a series of playful questions and answers. The two pivotal duets of *Chalti*, "Main Sitaron Ka Tarana" ("I am the melody of the stars") and "Haal Kaisa Hai Janaab Ka" ("How are you feeling, Sir?") are part of this genre, and many of its other key exemplars, like "Aankhon Mein Kya Ji" ("What's in my eyes?") from the 1957 *Nau Do Gyarah* (*Disappearance*) or "Dekho Rootha Na Karo" ("Don't get angry") from the 1963 *Tere Ghar Ke Samne* (*In Front on Your House),* are also written by Majrooh Sultanpuri, the lyricist of this film.

But when this mode of conversation between the man and the woman is not found, comedy turns into melodrama. In a subsequent book *Contesting Tears*, Cavell groups together four Hollywood films that he terms as "the melodrama of the unknown woman," defining this genre in terms of the failure of the realization of marriage.[13] In these melodramas, the women, often entrapped by repressive social conditions, cannot achieve self-expression in a relationship with a man, and the mode of communication between the sexes is blocked and marked by irony.[14] As Rodowick elucidates the genre, "the unknown woman of the melodramas does not share a language with those around her," and isolated from her community, she turns inwards toward an independent quest for

[12] Ibid, 240-1.
[13] The four films are *Stella Dallas* (1937), *Now, Voyager* (1942), *Gaslight* (1944), and *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948).
[14] Ibid, 47.

self-knowledge.[15] Even in the comedies, Cavell observes, there is "a lingering villainy" associated "with the fact of maleness itself—as maleness, or rather masculinity, has been defined, or deformed, in our culture."[16] This "taint of villainy" in the comedies must defeated for them to pursue a more equal relationship with the woman, but in the melodramas, this taint becomes a disabling vision of corrosive masculinity.

In my previous section, I suggested that this dynamic was in play in the song "Ek Ladki Bheegi Bhaagi Si" ("A girl drenched"). The threat of a dangerous masculinity, in the figure of the stranger, that hovers lightly over the song, and which Mannu needs to defeat, will get its full development in the second half of the film in a suave villain, the Raja, played by character actor K.N. Singh, and his younger accomplice Prakashchand, played by Sajjan, who run an abducting-and-murdering criminal ring. The generic relation between comedy and melodrama that Cavell explores across two different groups of films thus finds expression in a single film. The temporality of the Bombay film, with its long runtime, often 180 minutes instead of the 90 minutes of a classic Hollywood feature, allows in a literal sense, more time for this outbreak of melodrama, and it will become the responsibility of our main couple to find a way to overcome it.

I have found it fruitful to place *Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi* as a distant participant in these revisions of the myth of the remarriage comedy, proving that this myth had not by 1958 been exhausted and was capable of finding a flexible and capacious home in the film culture of this newly constituted democratic nation, with its differences in length, mood, and possibilities of narrative but also most particularly in its distinctive formal element of the song. In this chapter, I will show how the songs carry out an intensive negotiation of gender relations, arguing that the particular inflection that *Chalti* makes on the "remarriage comedy" is an interest in the transition from childhood to

[15] D.N. Rodowick, *Philosophy's Artful Conversation*, 268.
[16] Cavell, *Contesting,* 116-7.

adulthood and that its depiction of a belated coming to terms with sexuality explores the movement from insularity to community through an encounter with the gendered Other.

III.

The film opens on the three brothers out on a public square, trying to repair their stalled car. The crowded streets of Bombay form a moving canvas of buses, pedestrians, and trucks behind them, and to the side—not yet noticed by the trio—a woman watches them flirtatiously.
The brothers can't locate the problem in the engine, and they argue back and forth about it with diminishing clarity, until the eldest, Brijmohan, suddenly pronounces this strange judgement: "I know what the problem is. One of us has this morning woken up and seen the face of a woman." The middle brother, Jaggu, and the youngest, Mannu, are quick to deflect blame from themselves, but they do so with equal strangeness. Neither gives a straight denial—Jaggu says he saw only his own face in a mirror, and Mannu says he saw only Brijmohan's face as he was coming down the stairs. The difference between a man's and a woman's face is up for question, which signals to us the extent of their insularity but also shows their openness, as if a woman's face could any moment begin to hover over any of their faces.

They eventually notice the curious female onlooker, scare her away by a mad display of gibberish, and if this magic ritual actually worked or all the car needed was a solid kick, the engine comes to life and the car starts off on its own, driverless—a unique trick of this car named "Champion" that is displayed proudly through the film. As the brothers run after it to climb in, music begins to play along with a few spontaneous beeps from the car horn, and the trio begin a rousing song about the virtues of movement, singing the chorus in unison and alternating lines of the verses between them:

Such a little thing the world has not understood	*Itni si baat na samjha zamana*
The one who keeps on moving will gain all the treasure	*Aadmi jo chalta rahe mil jaye har khazana*
Broken or damaged, as long as it moves, it's good	*Tooti phooti sahi, chal jaye theek hai*
True or false, as long as it moves, it's good	*Sachi jhooti sahi, chal jaye theek hai*

Figure 1.3 Still from Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi (Bose, 1958)

Their voices pervade the city, as they drive together, sitting up on the backs of the car seats or prancing in its ambit, honking at the pedestrians scurrying out of the way of their car as it zooms through the streets, forwards, backwards and in circles. The song unfolds on a constantly changing background, in a lively and lax mixture of location shooting and studio shots, embracing the cinematic tricks of rear, reverse, and sped-up projections. Though most of the action of the narrative will occur within the cloisters of the brothers' motor garage, the film opens, and will also close, on location, situating the characters and the drama of their private lives in firm relation to the public sphere. Gathering together an audience through this song, their chorus is addressed outwards and declares the title of the film:

Watch out, mister, pay attention	*Baju, babu samjho ishaare*
The horn calls—pum pum pum	*Horan pukare—pum pum pum*

Around here, that which moves is called a car, my dear	*Yahan, chalti ko gaadi kehte hain, pyaare*

The strange formulation of the titular phrase—"chalti ka naam gaadi"—is taken from a couplet attributed to medieval poet Kabir.[17] The couplet turns on a series of double-meanings: *narangi* which means "orange" can also mean "no-color"; *bane doodh,* or "collecting milk," is the process of making a kind of cheese called *khoya* which also happens to mean "lost"; and *gaadi* which means "car" can also mean "stuck." The couplet translates as:

That which is brightly colored is called an orange (no color),	*Rangi ko narangi kahe,*
That which is collected milk is called cheese (lost).	*Bane doodh ko khoya.*
That which moves is called a car (stuck),	*Chalti ko gaadi kahe,*
Looking at this Kabir weeps.	*Dekh Kabira roya.*

The brothers incongruously take on the role of the saintly poet and formulate their own moral philosophy through a thematic elaboration on that one phrase. Their song accepts the consequences of the double meanings of "gaadi," accepts the possibility of stoppages and stallings coming in the way of movement. Their profession as mechanics take on an added connotation in this regard, and even in the midst of the song, they will open the bonnet of the car and engage in its repair. The contradictory meanings of the words that provoke for the poet a religious despair over the entrenched confusion of values in human society is transposed in this song and film into a comedic acceptance of instability and absurdity, a willing embrace of mobile mechanical modernity through an insistence of collectivity:

[17] Two other 1950s films use this same couplet. The 1956 *Jagte Raho* (*Keep Awake*) is a black comedy, in which the couplet, sung by a drunken figure, retains the dark connotations of a society in ruin. The 1957 *Dekh Kabira Roya* (*Looking at this, Kabir weeps*), like *Chalti*, is a romantic comedy about three women in search of three men.

What is fame, moving is the name of the game	*Shoharat hai cheez kya, chalne ka naam hai*
What is dignity, moving is the name of the game	*Izzat hai cheez kya, chalne ka naam hai*
If difficulty comes in the way, we'll crush it	*Mushkil jo aa pade thokar se taal de*
Even if a mountain blocks us, we'll crush it together	*Parbat bhi ho khade phir mil ke taal de*

But because the theme of the men's fear of women has already been declared, we are made to feel the obvious lack in this song of fraternity, and the concluding image of the film already hangs before us: the song will be reprised with three women now driving the car, and the brothers sitting at the back—and a central event in achieving this conclusion will happen to be each of the three brothers' waking up to a woman's face.

The song puts into play a number of visual and narrative themes that will run through the film, but our most compelling impressions from this song are of the brothers themselves. The trio of voices that take part in the song are Kishore Kumar as Mannu, Ashok Kumar, also singing for his own character, Brijmohan, and Anoop Kumar's Jaggu lip-syncing to Manna Dey. The verses are started by the authoritative Brijmohan in his slow steady voice, then promptly and energetically developed by Mannu, who ornaments them with his own yodeling and onomatopoeic sounds, and Jaggu nudges his way in, now and then, in his own offbeat style. The brothers' mode of talking together, addressing each other, developing, and countering each other's rhythms, is set out in this song that lingers over these ways of their being around each other in word and deed.

Figure 1.4 Still from Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi (Bose, 1958)

From the opening scene, and in the full-throated display of this song, we are let into the intimacy of their relations with each other, a self-contained world that thrives on the dynamism of the nature of the dialogue between them—the words that ricochet from one to another, often issuing from the older brother, spiraling down the chain of command and thrown back and forth between the two younger brothers. Because of the intermediary space created among the trio, the siblings never lock into relations of diametric oppositions and their arguments always skid into endless circles.

The fascination this film has for brotherhood is so strong even the villains aspire to it. The melodramatic plot that shadows the comedy of this film will also take up an inverted relation of brotherhood. The second half of the film opens with a scheme being hatched by the two villainous figures, the Raja and Prakashchand. The Raja will introduce Prakashchand to Renu as his younger brother and arrange to get them married. Later, they conspire, her rich father can be made to conveniently die of heart disease, and the inheritance can be split between them. As the Raja lays out his wicked plans, at the moment he is telling him how he will make Prakashchand his younger brother, Prakashchand interjects with naive eagerness, "really?" The Raja laughs sardonically and replies that it's only for the purpose of the plan. Prakashchand, disappointed, sighs, "Ah, acting." The three brothers are not "acting" their roles as brothers. The fact of the actual brotherhood of the

Kumar brothers is exploited not only by the plot of the film but seems to be apprehended by the very medium of film, where the transfiguration from actor to character remains in an ongoing tension.

Sometimes referred to as the Indian Marx brothers, one significant difference, among others, is that the Marx brothers rarely, perhaps never, arrive on film as brothers. They are strangers who just happen to stumble upon each other, become drawn to each other and only end up as a collective over the course of the film. The Kumar brothers come into the scene tumbling and falling over each other, explicitly acknowledging that they carry about them an air of their long association together, or not merely "long," rather an endless association because it goes backto the time before time properly began for them—*forever* for the younger brothers.

The interest in childhood of the characters is deep in the myths that engage Bombay cinema of this time. Many of its contemporary films start with the period of childhood and involve a transition into adulthood through a scene of time lapse, such as with Raj Kapoor in *Awara* (1951) or Nutan in *Sujata* (1959). In these films, childhood is often associated as a site oftraumatic and fateful events involving the dissolution of the family.[18]

In two brief jagged accounts, Brijmohan will also tell us about having to raise his two younger brothers himself, but we never get the details, we never see this past, and they never even discuss it amongst themselves. The particular aspect of childhood that is revealed in the Kumar brothers is not that of haunted memories. It is simply the fact of their having been children together.[19] The fact of their shared childhood diffuses itself over all their interactions and the mode

[18] Also in *Devdas* (1955), *Mother India* (1957), *Waqt* (1965), *Amar, Akbar, Anthony* (1975), the list could go on. Here is another way in which the runtime of the film alters the medium, in this case, the narrative's inhabitation of time, allowing for the past to be more insistently present. See Corey K. Creekmur's essay on what he calls "the maturation dissolve," "Bombay Boys: Dissolving the Male Child in Popular Hindi Cinema."

[19] See Marrati's discussion of this topic: "'Having been a child' is not a fact from the past that we may indifferently recall or forget, but rather an internal aspect of our existence that will last as long as we do. As for Heidegger, being-toward-death defines our relation to time and to ourselves as long as we exist, 'having been a child' defines for Cavell our

of their daily life, not least in their belief in magical thinking. The continuing relations between these siblings suffer no interruptions of generational difference. It is a resolutely linear image of the family, one that, precisely because of this factor, is able to hold out a promise of the recovery and persistence of childhood.

IV.

The stage has been set: the brothers are in a state of prolonged childhood innocence and must overcome a grudge against women. This is the stage familiarly understood as adolescence, and the challenge the film sets for itself is to traverse it while retaining, not abandoning or overcoming, childhood. The brothers must confront the transformations and confusions involved in the coming of sexuality, a primary one being the emergent realization, or is it a remembering, of the body as sexual, and the mode of the song sequence will prove itself an ideal exploratory ground for this (re)discovery.

There are two songs that undertake this task—one between two men, Mannu and Jaggu, and the second between two women, two courtesans, unnamed as characters but easily recognizable as Cuckoo and Helen, well-known dancer-actresses in 1950s Bombay cinema. These are sung by Sudha Malhotra and Asha Bhosle, also the voice for Madhubala in the film.

The songs present a neat pair of contrasts. One takes place in the home ground of the film, the brothers' garage, with the men improvising a dance floor in front of and on top of the rows of cars; the other forms our first entry into the space and scenario of the melodramatic storyline and is performed in the villain's mansion hall replete with mirrors, pillars, and chandeliers. One is a riff on the "Watermelon Song" by country singer Tennessee Ernie Ford and uses instruments like horns and drums; the other follows the convention of the *mujra* song, performed by courtesans wearing

relation to knowledge and language, hence to philosophy, as long as we live." Paola Marrati, "Childhood and Philosophy," 957.

ankle bells and surrounded by accompanists playing sarangi and tabla.[20] And there's the difference in the style of dance. I suspect that the duo of choreographers credited in the film's title sequence may have split the conception of these dances between them, creating a playful dialogue between the two sequences—Pt. Badri Prasad, veteran in the field, working with Helen and Cuckoo on the Kathak-style dance of the *mujra*, and Harman Benjamin, the newcomer who would go on to define the '60s jazz dance style, directing the antics of Kishore and Anoop Kumar.

The song between Mannu and Jaggu is sung by Kishore Kumar, with insertions from Anoop Kumar himself (or perhaps it is again Manna Dey). Both Mannu and Jaggu have had encounters with women that morning when they are called to fix Renu's car at her father's house, where her friend Sheela is also introduced. Jaggu first discovers the two women in a posture which signals their compatibility with the brothers—tools in hand, elbows deep in the engine of the car. Terrified by their proximity, Jaggu attempts to flee their house in the car but unbeknownst to him carries Sheela with him, and then he attempts to flee the car by running out on the road until he is literally chased down by her.

Mannu is later dropped off at the garage by Renu in her car. Seeing Jaggu intently observing the farewell waves they exchange, Mannu starts a song to toy with the conjectures he can see developing in his brother's mind, and also probably for himself to make sense of this first break into their narrow world:

I was there, she was there	*Hum the who thi*
And the atmosphere was just right	*Aur sama rangeen*
You understand?	*Samajh gaye na?*

[20] See Iyer's *Dancing Women* for a detailed history and analysis of such dance-centric song sequences, especially how a "dance vocabulary precedes and influences the composition of the song." Usha Iyer, *Dancing Women,* 28.

He concocts a tale of the beginning of a romance involving cliches of coy looks, fluttering eyes, and beating hearts, but he shies away from any real content with the teasing refrain:

Oh wait till I tell you *Kehta hoon*

But first let me catch my breath *Dum toh lene do*

As he sings, the brothers dance, overcome by a bout of jitters, around the garage, jumping up and down on cars, carrying, circling, and falling over each other. Witnessing them is the young garage boy, Mojha, a direct representative of adolescence, listening on with his own attentiveness to this disrupted tale and participating in the music-making by converting a car horn into a saxophone.

Figure 1.5 Still from Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi (Bose, 1958)

Each verse of this scattered, stuttered, but highly suggestive account is punctuated by Mannu with the question "you understand?" but of course Jaggu doesn't understand. His face beads with sweat as he tries to follow the implications of Mannu's maddeningly incomplete phrasings that depict no linear order of events, only gestures of "pulling," "throbbing," "looking," "turning" that evoke the heightened sensuality and temporality of an imminent erotic encounter:

A little little bit, a long long breath,	*Thoda thoda sa, lamba lamba saans*
Slowly slowly, she pulled	*Dheere dheere usne khencha*
Then her saree became her slave	*Phir uska pallu ban ke uska daas*
Slowly slowly I pulled	*Dheere dheere maine khencha*
In confusion then our own hands	*Ghabrahat mein phir apna apna haath*
She pulled, I pulled	*Usne khencha maine khencha*

Figure 1.6 Still from Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi (Bose, 1958)

Jaggu trails after Mannu, his limp hands trying to mimic his brother's quick wild gestures, in his desperate attempt to keep up with what he perceives as a new efflorescence of sexual knowledge in his brother and to extract this knowledge from every move of his brother's body. In response to this tale, deviously filled out by Mannu with heaves and pants, Jaggu periodically interjects his contribution to the duet, a pitiful lament: "Oh Mannu, it's happened to you. Now what will become of me?"

In stark contrast to this erratic display, the song and dance of the courtesans is a smooth and coordinated performance, with the hints fully developed and dance moves fully formed, witnessed by an audience of older men and the jaded Raja. The dance is carried out with the sophistication, self-assurance and controlled abandon of practiced professionals performing in a traditional genre.

The realms of suggestiveness that the full bodies of the brothers strain to express are now conveyed by the precise play of Helen's eyebrows. The theme of a passionate interaction is continued in this song, now detailed with the delicacy and nuance of refinement, as the two women sing, alternating lines:

What pleasures there are in love,	*Kya maza ishq mein hai,*
Hearing it you will become oblivious.	*Sunke ho jaohe gum.*
What pleasures there are in love,	*Kya maza ishq mein hai,*
You will understand yourself.	*Khud samajh jaoge tum.*
Try burning all night like me	*Tum bhi mere tarah saari raat jalkar dekhlo*

The dancers Cuckoo and Helen seem to enter the film from a different generic universe. They appear to represent and participate in the corrupt universe that obtrudes into the film in the shadow that the Raja carries with him. But the placement of the song invites other interpretations.

Figure 1.7 Still from Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi (Bose, 1958)

In the scene just previous to the dance, Brijmohan, annoyed by Mannu and Renu's growing intimacy and provoked by Mannu's first sign of rebellion against his authority, finally reveals the roots of his grudge against women: how, many years earlier, a wealthy woman jilted him in favor of a wealthy Raja and how, for the sake of his brothers, he brought himself back from the brink of

suicide. This speech brings in the specter of a love very different from the one at play in the comedic trajectory of Mannu and Renu, a love that is shaded by the sense of betrayal and despair. The subsequent transition into this *mujra* genre—the dancers addressing a shadowy figure with his back to us—prepares us for the revelation of the Raja, who had come to make a marriage offer to Renu's father for his fake brother, as the same one who had been responsible for Brijmohan's past and was now intending to cast the same gloom on the younger pair.

However, his face is shown only halfway into the song, the dancers meanwhile face the camera and seem to address us directly. Thus, immediately following the bitter judgement against the fickleness of women by Brijmohan, there appear these arch representatives of femininity itself, with the explicit protestations of faithfulness that start the song:

We are yours,	*Hum tumhare hain*
Come out from your house	*Zara ghar se nikal kar*
And take a look	*Dekhlo*
If you don't have trust,	*Na yakin aaye*
Let's exchange our hearts with each other	*Toh dil se dil badalkar dekhlo*

The voices of these women—one literally the same as that of Renu's singing self—don't participate in the villainy but comment on it. The song continues in this vein, protesting against men's tendency towards sexual jealousy and distrust, and so even alongside their knowing promises ofexquisite pleasures, the dancers bring in the darker tones of the threat of grief and violence, nowas experienced by women:

If you want, grind my heart into a powder	*Chahe chutki se mere dil ko*
And take a pinch from it to test it	*Masal kar dekhlo*

The song paves the way for a decidedly gothic turn of events. Following it will be the conversation between the Raja and Prakashchand, their scheming to pervert marriages for money, and then will burst out of her mad isolation of Kamini, Brijmohan's old lover, and the revelation of the same wrong done unto her, underscoring the necessity in this film for staking out a more innocent sexuality.

Figure 1.8 Still from Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi (Bose, 1958)

These songs form the two passages in the film that let loose the body onscreen and are distinguished by the fluid camerawork which concentrates our attention on every fleeting movement, expressionm and gesture, making available a space for an extended examination of the sexual nature of the body, one that is inextricably tied to that of the mind. The songs offer a range of arresting faces, each engaged in the consideration of the nature of sexuality—Mannu's deceptive mockery, Cuckoo's glances, Helen's eyebrows, and even the villain's dramatic coil of hair is expressive, but most memorable is Jaggu's baffled and bewildered face, intensely focused on Mannu's nonsense. Jaggu's repeated line through various conversations—"the question now arises"—portrays him as perpetually off-kilter, striking poses of deep deliberation, treating all the events, most particularly gender relations, as a great philosophical puzzle, only for his reflections to get driven out by the exigencies of the situation. Here is an image of a face carrying out what Freud marks as the source and prototype of all intellectual activities, the most powerful stimulus to psychic thought itself, that

of the infantile sexual investigations of a child kept in the dark about sexuality, suspicious of received stories, but driven to theorize, speculate and interpret—one of film comedy's recurring stances towards sexuality. In Buster Keaton's scratch of his head, in front of a projected film, at the end of *Sherlock Jr.* in response to the cut between the couple kissing in reconciliation and the couple in a nursery, bouncing babies on their knees, there is, alongside another joke on his character's naivety, a gibe at the lapse in the educative power of film, of film's avoidance of the pervasive fact of our involvement with sexuality and at the continuing puzzlement of our ease in including it in marriage and justifying it through children.

But the mysteries of sexuality are hardly to be deciphered in the actual depiction of the sexual act. In the dance of the brothers, the body is distorted and made cartoonish and mechanical, as their mental confusions are somatically converted into an extreme awkwardness and nervousness of motion. Somehow, it is through this very failure at recognizable sexual expression that their dance provides a refreshingly libidinal exploration of sexuality.

V.

From the presence and expulsion of the first female onlooker on the brothers in the opening scene, I have been inclined to attribute our attachment and fascination with these brothers to the woman's point of view—a point of view that takes on a greater specificity with the entry of Renu. From Mannu's first song in the garage, she is the one we watch watching the brothers, attending to their delusions. Active and resourceful, she analyzes quietly the rules of their games and then enters to disrupt and transform them. Madhubala's performance gives Renu a manner of amused and oblique observation, often displayed by sidelong glances at the brothers, especially in those moments of confusion. She will look quizzically at Mannu when he describes the peculiar grudge his brother has against women, and ask pointedly what women have done to deserve this, and then she will look knowingly at Brijmohan as he stutters over the picture of the woman she

discovers under his pillow, and then will declare straight out to him, when later he tries to dissuade her from meeting Mannu, that he is wrong in his judgment about women and that "when the time comes, I will prove it." Once they have followed Prakashchand into the trap the Raja has set for them, and they have been tied up together, it is she who recognizes Kamini from the picture and brings about their escape. And after winning Mannu, and reuniting Brijmohan with his lover, she will preside even over the pairing of Sheela and Jaggu. When her friend is too embarrassed to answer Jaggu's anxious proposal ("My brother is asking if you'll marry me. Tell everyone that you love me more than anyone else."), it is Renu who interprets her response as a "yes." These attributes of Renu get a distilled force in her one solo song.

Figure 1.9 Still from Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi (Bose, 1958)

Prakashchand has been courting Renu as part of their scheme to gain control of her inheritance, but he has already begun to show a real interest in her. Renu accepts his courtship, partly in deference to her father, who approves of the match, and partly out of annoyance at Mannu's lack of initiative. They all happen to meet up at a car race, where Mannu in his vintage car beats Prakashchand in his sports car through a complete and charming disregard of the rules both of fair play and of reality. Afterwards, Mannu recognizes Prakashchand—he had witnessed him getting rid of a dead body the night he had turned up at Renu's—and the pair connive to expose Prakashchand's criminal doings. When the latter next comes calling, Renu telephones Mannu. Their

plan is to follow Prakashchand when he leaves, but Prakashchand is ready to leave almost immediately. She has to act quickly. How can she stall him for the five minutes it will take Mannu to arrive with his car?

Summoning her inner resources, Madhubala's voice turns into Asha Bhosle's and calling out with an exclamation "arre," Renu's song begins:

Please stop	*Ruk ja o na ji*
What's the hurry?	*Aisi kya jaldi*
My side will get hurt by	*Chub jayegi pehlu mein*
The thorn of separation	*Virah ki soi*

The song plays on a common genre of *virah* (separation), in Bombay cinema of the time. In the usual course of a romantic relationship, there would be an inevitable period of estrangement and longing, and a sad song would be performed sometimes by the man, usually by the woman, alone. But in this film, there is no possibility of a song in solitude, no room for isolated rumination—everyone's solitude and sleep is constantly broken into by others. Mannu can't even brood in peace; his two brothers observe his lovesick behavior over dinner and nudge each other distractingly. The sole exception to this social world is Kamini, Brijmohan's lover, who is shut up in a house where no one can hear her cries. In this film, isolation becomes a curse so hard to imagine that when she speaks, from that space of shatteringsolitude, she seems to disrupt the whole fabric of the film. Even so, the camera never discovers her alone and we only hear about her isolation in speech to others.

Within the pervasive sociality of the film, and within the steadfastly playful and un-tortured relationship of Renu and Manu, such a song would be impossible, so it is sung here not honestly but as an act of deception. The lyrics convey an earnest emotionality and the theme of the cruelty of the fickle lover, which these songs inherit from the ghazal and Krishna-Radha poetic tradition, but

Renu, as she dances, sings, flirts, maintains a playful separation from her words.

The evening has just started, and you're getting up to go	*Shyaam dhali nahi aur chale tum utkhe sanam*
For my sake, don't go swaggering away	*Yoon na chalo ithlake aji tumhe meri kasam*
Listen, dear, don't be tyrannous	*Dekho balam yoon na dhao sitam*
I am vulnerable like a touch-me-not flower	*Nazuk hoon main jaise chhui mui*

The ruse works. Prakashchand reacts with amazement to her transformation. Unlike the Raja at the courtesan dance, he does not domineeringly, or leeringly, sit back to enjoy the spectacle but helplessly trails after her, flummoxed, pleased, and then enthralled. Finally gaining confidence, he even begins to participate in the drama, pretending to leave and getting stopped. Recognizing and desiring the strange power and mysterious energy of the experience of the song, he wants to step up to the challenge and sincerely become a romantic lead, but he is unable to make an answering call. This cannot be a duet. As a villain, he has no singing voice—or perhaps because he has no singing voice, he must be a villain.

Figure 1.10 Still from Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi (Bose, 1958)

With Prakashchand, Renu exhibits and plays up a breathy sensuality that is at odds with her manner when she is with Mannu—and as if to underscore the difference in the possibilities and freedom from traditional femininity that her relationship with Mannu gives her, from this song

onwards till the end, when she is with Mannu, she will join the brotherhood and be cross-dressed as a boy.

The song ends with Prakashchand sneezing from the flower that Renu jokingly puts beneath his nose and they share awkward laughter. In many ways, Prakashchand is the villainous shadow of Mannu—on the night that Mannu unwittingly invades Renu's house and must flee through the darkened streets after stealing some fruit, he encounters Prakashchand also hurrying furtively through the darkness hiding a much more serious crime. But though he is a murderer and is reviled as pretentious, he too is interested in cars, takes a drive with Renu, and participates in the race, and their inverted relationship also grants Prakashchand a comedic streak.

In the scene after this song, Renu and Mannu follow his car in their car. Getting suspicious, Prakashchand parks his car and watches how they nose their car right behind his. Then, he puts on his own outfit of a mad holy man and, jumping on their car, scares the ineffectual spies. The pair, who have been proudly calling each other mad and relishing their distance from social norms, are outperformed by this man who has seemed until now nothing but a stiff. Though he ends up accepting the Raja's ploy to abduct Renu and forcibly marry her, he is still absent from the final showdown, spared the final meting out of justice, which the Raja meanwhile does not escape and is even driven in an almost gothic madness to attack his wife with a knife before the police arrive and cart him off. It is as if Prakashchand's participation in this song redeems him, by instilling in him a capacity for disguise, if not yet that almost moral doubleness of self—that capacity to reflect and express different aspects of oneself indicated by the possession of another voice—that playback singing requires, and the absence of which becomes not just the mark of a villain but the very definition of villainy.[21]

[21] Incidentally, the only instance I can recall of a villain singing is in the song "Aake seedhi lagi dil pe" ("It hit straight on my heart") from the 1962 comedy *Half Ticket*. The song features a cross-dressed Kishore Kumar dancing with Pran, a

VI.

The exploration of the relationship between the main pair takes place most concentratedly in the two duets they sing together—one takes place in a dream, the other in reality; one at night and another in the day.

Their first duet occurs when Mannu comes to the theater in search of Renu to return the purse and retrieve the fee she forgot to pay. There he discovers an image of her on poster of her play titled "Juliet." Unable to get admission into the theater, he finds her car and decides to lie in wait for her in the backseat, but as he is wont to do, he falls asleep. He sleeps through the whole play (which we do not see), and he is still sleeping when Renu comes out to her car, as the clock strikes twelve. Without noticing him, she throws her frilly costume on top of him in the backseat and drives off to her house. While she is driving and he is under her costume, seeming to sense her presence, he begins a dream, indicated by the film's superimposition of her poster on his sleeping form. In the dream he plays out the conflict between his attraction for her and the task his older brother has set him—to have this particular debt settled between him and her and to thus ward off any unfinished continuing relationship with women.

Figure 1.11 Still from Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi (Bose, 1958)

major villainous actor of Bombay cinema, and it is of course Kishore Kumar who, singing both the male and female parts of the duet, generously lends his own voice to the villain.

Mannu's imaginative elaboration shifts us into a stylized stage setting against a painted nightscape, cotton clouds and a marble balcony, outfitted with pillars and billowing curtains, out on which emerges Renu in her Juliet costume. She calls out to the empty stage below, flourishing her arms in their gauzy sleeves, she begins her song:

I am the melody of the stars	*Main sitaron ka tarana*
I am the tale of spring	*Main baharon ka fasana*
Take a yawn, take a stretch,	*Leke ek angdai mujhpe*
Cast your glance at me and fall in love.	*Daal nazar ho ja deewana*

After she repeats this chorus twice, a laughing-singing voice is heard from off-stage, and a moment later Mannu comes skipping in, clad like a swashbuckling movie stair, a dagger tucked into his belt and a feathered hat strung across his back; the lover displaying himself as flamboyantly as the spectacle of the beloved on the balcony. He sings in reply:

Your beauty is a treasure.	*Rup ka tum ho khazana*
You are the love of my life, I concede—	*Tum ho meri jaan ye maana*
But first! Give me my	*Pehle dedo mera*
Five rupees and twelve annas.	*Paanch rupaiya barah aanna*
Otherwise brother will hit me – Oh no!	*Marega bhaiya – na na*

Listening intently, as if nothing could delight her more than this man before her making this silly demand, she begins her argument:

Forget the world of wealth, beloved	*Maal-o-zar, bhoolkar, dil-jigar*
Ask me for instead for a precious keepsake	*Humse nishaani mango na*

And the rest of the song is sung back and forth between them in this vein—her, building up a veritable library of philosophical, folk, aesthetic, and religious references in favor of the supremacy of love, and him, happily adding and conforming to these discourses but still not leaving off his insistence on the payment of the fee.

Figure 1.12 Still from Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi (Bose, 1958)

For example, in the previous verse, she invokes the Arabic/Persian/Indian variant of the Romeo-Juliet tragedy, the Laila-Majnu legend. For the word "beloved," she uses the phrase *dil-jigar*—literally "heart-liver," metaphysically the vital organs involved in the affections of our soul—and he will answer by bringing in the mood of ghazal poetry and its common complaint of the punishing tyranny of the beloved:

The blood of the heart to drink	*Khoon-e-dil peene ko aur*
Pieces of liver to eat	*Lakht-e-jigar khane ko*
This is the punishment, Laila	*Yeh giza milti hai Laila*
Your lover suffers	*Tere deewane ko*

Soon after, they will play with the vocabulary of Bhakti religiosity, such as *maya* (illusion) and *saanch* (ultimate reality), and its imperative to shun the material world in favor of transcendental truth. Renu sings:

Love without worry	*Bekhabar, pyaar kar*
What is the world of money	*Dhan ki duniya kya hai*
Mere wavering shadows	*Dhalti chhaya hai*

Mannu replies:

Beloved, that's very true	*Dilruba, sach kaha,*
Your love is the ultimate reality	*Saanch tera pyaar*
Everything else is illusion	*Baaki maya hai*

In other verses, they turn to the aesthetic pleasures of art, nature, and music. She demands:

Forget your sorrows, pick up an instrument	*Gham bhula saaj uthaa*
Sing a raga to my beauty	*Raag mere roop ke tu gaaye ja*

And:

You are a great admirer of art	*Tu kala ka hai deewana*
What other excuse do you want?	*Kam hai kya tujhko bahana*

During this banter, Renu remains consistently dressed in her Juliet gown, but Mannu undergoes many changes—first as the swashbuckler, then as Majnu on the deserts, then as a bespectacled Bengali man carrying a black umbrella, and finally as a priest with ash on his forehead circling his holy basil plant. Quick to respond to her invocations, he continuously adapts himself to exhibit the stereotypes of the pining and despairing lover, singing about and enacting an energetic display of grand histrionic gestures like running about and crying "Laila Laila" disconsolately, or wandering around jungles disoriented like a *jogi* (ascetic).

The stage is large and the song flexible. In two improvisatory diversions, Mannu suddenly interposes a couple of verses from older songs. He sings the music composer S.D. Burman's popular rendition of a Bengali folk song, about a lover being careful around his sleeping beloved:

Tread carefully in the garden, O bumble bee *Dheere se jaana bagiyan mein, bhawra*

Then a few verses later, now in the garb of the priest, he sings K.C. Dey's famous religious song from a 1935 film *Dhoop Chhaon* (*Sun and Shade*):

There's a thief after your bundle, traveller, *Teri ghatri mein laga chor, musafir,*

Wake up, wake up *Jaag zara, tu jaag zara*

Both sudden detours remain thematically connected to dreams and sleep, but the tender folk infusion of the pastoral and the religious theme of awakening from our bondage to our senses are given a prosaic and comic spin, reminding us, if we could forget, that we are in the presence of the singer Kishore Kumar, that this is his unconscious that we are being purportedly shown, one that reveals a mind steeped in music, full of little borrowed and imitated pieces of songs and selves. His singing style with its resistance to the fixity of forms and an open accommodation of outside forces becomes a defining aspect of the character of Mannu in whose voice this song is sung.

In the musical passages between the verses, the couple keep their roles of the lover and beloved in flux, bringing in small and sweeping gestures and turns of their body into their sung dialogue. Stage machinery has them gliding, floating, appearing and disappearing somewhat mysteriously, flitting between fantasy and reality, as they tease each other with the existence and possibility of the other. There is something particularly of the fairy about Renu. She will keep running away from him out of the frame, only to return suddenly behind or beside him, challenging his private ruminations, throwing him a flower and reinitiating the conversation. Playing on her

image in the poster, she deliberately strikes similar statuesque poses, but never remains frozen as an ideal, and cheekily glancing about, manifests a living breathing changeability. This is his dream, and she is to be a creature of his imagination, the projection of his desires, yet she is accorded and retains a strong independence, allowing us to see the song sequence as a real encounter between the two individuals.

There is a darkness to the roles on offer for them—she as a distant beloved, threatened into stillness, and he as a self-absorbed lover. Through this dream play, they overcome the hints of madness and isolation in the history of tragic love stories, and in contrast offer a vision of equality, mutuality, and exchange that takes full advantage of the fact of film, of its inescapable movement, its tricks, and its imbrication in plot and character. The conventions, cliches, and traditions of love are not just parodied but stretched to include moods of laughter and play, providing an arena to exhibit the mutability of the self and render it particular and ordinary.

Across this large canvas of the history of love, this pair find and assert their individuality by playing up the two references to the specificities of their first encounter. Her purse, anachronistic to her costume, is dangled in front of Mannu and kept out of his reach, as he pleads for his fee. It becomes an over-determined object for the desires of Mannu, a compromise formation between money and sexuality. However, even as Mannu is ridiculed for his concern for settling the little debt between them under duress of his brother, the expression of this desire endears us to him, and it is not for nothing that it is given a prime position in their shared chorus of the film.

In the background of this small sum of money hover the various jewels that are hoarded, stolen, and gifted during the course of the film. The Raja and Prakashchand have a jeweler killed and ply Renu with gifts of jewels as part of their scheme. Renu's father who is fearful of the theft of his house jewels, clutches them in the backseat on the way to deposit them in the bank, making him blind to the relationship growing between Mannu and Renu in the front seat.

In contrast, here is Mannu counting off his fingers five rupees and twelve annas. His demand of the petty sum becomes a sign of honor. It displays his understanding of the value of the particular and assuages in the woman a deep worry over her sexuality and independence, which the villain's extravagant gifts only increase. This emphasis on the small but precise amount of money owed by the woman to the man is an echo of the itemized bill for 39 dollars and 60 cents that Clark Gable hands to Claudette Colbert's father in *It Happened One Night* (1934) in lieu of a ten-thousand-dollar reward. But characteristic to the Bombay film and to Kishore Kumar's inhabitation of the character, Mannu does not just ask for the amount, he sings it, unfurling its factual banality with his voice like the words of a poem, transfiguring the ordinary yet again. But of course, while profoundly pleased at this insistence, Renu serenely continues to refuse to ever pay the fee. That would be to settle and finish the debt and debate between them.

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The mercurial pace and scope of this night duet gives way to a gentler and grounded day duet. By the time of the second duet, the couple have stabilized their presence to each other enough that they can engage each other in a song while co-existing on the same plane of reality and durable identity.

Unlike the sui generis dream song, this second duet fits more neatly the mood and landscape of a courtship song common to Hindi films of this time—the pair of lovers retreat from the city, often out onto a body of water, and in these secluded settings, participate in an exchange of sung dialogue. This occurs when Mannu is lured out by Renu, on the pretext of having car repair done, to picnic in the rural outskirts of Bombay, and this one full day that they spend together is condensed into a song.

When Mannu finds out that there are no cars around, she jokes that there are many other things to do in the world apart from fixing cars such as, she says, noticing a chicken coop, catching a

rooster. Unblinkingly, he runs after the birds, he squawking and she laughing. As he falls and gets entangled in a net, she comes to extricate him and translates her laughter into a joking question:

How are you feeling, sir?	*Haal kaisa hai janaab ka?*
—What do you think?	*—Kya khayal hai aapka?*
Oh, you became so unsteady	*Tum toh machal gaye*
—I just slipped	*—Yuhin phisal gaya*

She helps him up and they go off together across the horizon, and we follow them on their boat ride and their walk through the hilly woods. The lyrics bring back the hints scattered in Mannu's teasing song to Jaggu of before—the breezy atmosphere, the sound of hearts beating, the tantalizing flutter of the saree, the inviting look of the eyes—now put into full sentences and actually stated by them:

Mad dear, did you ever think	*Pagli, pagli, kabhi tune socha hai*
Why we met on the way?	*Raste mein gaye mil kyun?*
—Mad dear, why does my heart beat	*—Pagle, pagle, teri baton baton mein*
When I'm near you?	*Dhadakta hai dil kyun?*
—The things you are saying with your eyes!	*—Kabhi kuch kehti hai,*
Control your glances.	*Zara nazar ko sambhalna*

While this makes the song an actualization of a fantasy, it remains tentative. Their declarations of love are still presented in a state of suspension. Each of their statements are couched in an interrogative, asking the other for confirmation, refraining from a full admission:

Listen, shall I entertain my heart this way	*Kaho ji, roz tere sang*
Every day in your company?	*Yuhin dil bahalaye kya?*
—If you can understand it, then understand	*—Suno ji, samajh sako,*
it yourself, what do you want me to say?	*Toh khud samjho, bataye kya?*

The song contains queries and retorts that keep them engaged in a continuous intimate dialogue without slipping into sentimentality. They even exchange their lines of the chorus—with Mannu calling her "sir" and Renu asking him to be careful with his glances.

Figure 1.13 Still from Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi (Bose, 1958)

The conversation of love, the manner and style in which courtships and relationships can be conducted, gets three variations in this film about three pairs of lovers. The tale of Brijmohan's failed courtship of Kamini, having taken place in the past of the film, comes to us in multiple dramatic renderings, told and retold in anger, bitterness, sorrow, and eventually forgiveness. The course of Jaggu's and Sheela's love runs askew in its own idiosyncratic way, needing the dogged persistence on Sheela's side, who declares her desire for a "round-bellied," "dim-witted lover" who would submit to her commands and finds her fantasy easily realizable in the scatter-brained Jaggu. They eventually come to a strange agreement between them about what they want from each other, marked, in the few conversations to which we are privy, by a halted, stuttering, mumbled, even

mute, manner.

The full range of the intricacies of courtship is explored only between Renu and Mannu and their mode of conversation, which gets its full demonstration in these two duets, is the only one that can match in its comic rhythms and allusions the brothers' own life in language and that thus finds its home within the film's larger whirlwind of language of jokes, asides, obsessive repetitions, circulating cliches, fragments of songs, chants, and gibberish.

The song started with peals of laughter from Renu and it ends with the yodeling of Mannu—bordering the intervening lyrics of the song with the natural expressions and skilled indulgences of the body.

Once the song has ended and evening has fallen, Mannu wants to get home early to avoid a confrontation with his brother. Failing to get him to linger together in the inviting darkness of night, Renu tries to provoke him into an acknowledgement of the attraction between them by announcing her upcoming engagement with a prince—one which we know is far from confirmed and rests entirely on her consent. Unable to see through her ploy, Mannu wills himself to act pleased and pictures how their wedding would be a grand affair, with crowds and a large banquet, though he goes on to comment how they would not be able to spend such a day together again, losing their freedom to meet and roam. This is the only reference to the actual ceremony of marriage in the film—the finale of the film does not show their marriages, the three pairs are just crowded in the car together singing the first song. While he rightly begins to see their way of spending time together as a better symbol of the continuing intimacy required of a marriage thana ceremony, he is not able yet to put both the day and night together, to stay on till night with Renu.

This duet is then followed not by an affirmation of their relationship but a re-entrenchment of the evasions that plague Mannu. Having left in a huff, Renu will return from the picnic to discover the Raja speaking with her father, and it as if Mannu's moment of hesitation precipitates the

ensuing melodramatic course of events.

Only after he has stayed up late nights with Renu playing at being spies that the final acknowledgement of their feelings can take place. It is not until the climactic sequence, when they are tied up together in the villains' hideout, that they will begin to admit their love as they discuss, in a brief reprise of the Romeo and Juliet theme, their intention to die together, which is then immediately abandoned in favor of the desire to live together.

This shared excursion of a single day is given the condensation peculiar to the song sequence—their words and expressions are encased together in the cyclic time of poetry, promising the possibility of return and repetition. The resolution of the barriers to their relationship takes place after all the songs they share together. The function of the song is not to magically resolve psychological tensions, but to provide an experience, an occasion, a vision of intimacy and rapport that the couple can use to then orient their faith in their lives with each other.

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That one duet takes place in the day and the other at night follows the deliberate diurnal patterning of their meetings through the first half of the film, their songs being tightly woven in their ongoing narrative entanglements with each other. The first occurs right before Mannu stumbles onto Renu's bed, having been driven into her garage in his sleep, and the second duet comes the morning after Renu has come to his garage to wake up each of the brothers. Then, Mannu, taken aback at her capacity to enter into their sacrosanct realm, has this exchange with her:

"How did you get here?!"

—"Just like you turned up in my house the other night."

"That happened by accident!"

—"I also came by here 'by accident'"

"If my brothers see you, there'll be hell to pay."

—"Are they also still sleeping?!"

"Yes, here's a chance. Go away."

—"I came to pay the five rupees and twelve annas."

"Oh, I waive that debt. Please go."

—"Why? When you came to my house, you created an uproar, woke up my father and the whole household. Today I will not leave till I give over the five rupees and twelve annas."

Whether accidentally or fortuitously or willfully, Renu and Mannu meet each other recursively, driven by chance and desires not fully admitted to themselves. By making their encounters in bed into such comic accidents, the film continues its quest for a more innocent sexuality, working to defuse the threats that are carried in the wake of sexual adulthood, such as the entrenchment of gender roles and the loss of childish flexibility of thought and body. In both of their nightly encounters—in the garage their first night, and in her house, Mannu has to provehimself to be unthreatening—in the first, he sings his song, and in the second instance, he runs away from the house, leaving the house jewels intact, and eating only three bananas and two apples.

While Renu needs only to be woken once, Mannu will have to awakened four times in the first half of the film—while sleeping on night duty, then woken by his brothers the following morning as he mumbles about waiting for a girl to come back at night, then that night he sleeps and dreams the duet, and finally this morning when Renu comes to wake him up for good.

She also goes on to wake his other brothers, first Jaggu, whose waking thoughts are always clouded by murky fantasies and fears, but most decisively Brijmohan. Integral to courting Mannu is the awakening of Brijmohan, and the extended sequence that morning is not between Renu and Mannu but between Renu and Brijmohan. Entering his room, she catches him speaking in his sleep: "I knew you'd come someday, I was waiting for you." The way the eldest brother handles this unexpected encounter—covering himself with a blanket and reduced to stuttering—we realize how

fully he has participated in his own delusions, how he had not just been exercising a calculated oppression of his brothers. She will find the woman of his dreams literally housed under his pillow in the form of a picture, and will also later find the same woman in flesh, but only after Brijmohan changes his beliefs.

In a film that is shot mostly in the long takes appropriate for comedy—which allow for a distanced perspective, showcase the duration and improvisatory skill of performance and the relations between people—there are few moments of close-ups in the film, and even fewer of the point-of-view close-ups. The two significant occasions they occur and acquire an intensity is at these two moments of Renu and Mannu awakening to each other.

The choice to cut to a closer look at the moment of awakening emphasizes the shock of waking to another face, and the close-ups provide not just a clearer view of their reactions, but a revelatory view, inviting us to participate and inhabit this intensified mode of perception between the couple. At the moment of awakening each catches the other in an unbalanced encounter, on the verge of consciousness as the self returns to the world in a state of psychic openness. Further still, there is one awakening at night, and another in the morning, accommodating those differing kinds of sensuality and vulnerability. They take turns waking each other up, reenacting repeatedly the transition from dream to reality, from the private world of fantasy and desire to the shared world of responsiveness and action. The ethical encounter with "the face of the Other" that Levinas conceives of as occurring in violent and tragic settings, causing "a trauma of awakening" where the self is fractured by the realization of the "infinite responsibility" owed to the "Other," here gets a comic inflection, with, instead, a liberatory sense of language and perception working together to allow for a creative and imaginative encounter with a finite other.[22]

[22] As quoted and critiqued in Cavell's essay "The Scandal of Skepticism," 144-152.

Descartes had framed the modern skeptical condition as a problem of certain knowledge, exemplified by our inability to distinguish between a waking state and a dreaming one. In Cavell's Emersonian ethical reframing of the dynamic of skepticism, this means the danger lies in failing to know or perceive the reality of ourselves and others. What is threatened is not so much our life as our perception of people and the world, and what is needed is a recovery of this perception. Through his emphasis on the diurnality of the Hollywood comedies, Cavell reads them as offering such a recovery, specified as the continual navigation of the passage from night to day and back again, an acceptance of ourdoubt but with renewed chances at mornings and awakenings.[23] In *Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi*, this passage from night to day is taken by the couple together, and taken together repeatedly, in a redemptive mode of perception and conversation that finds its crystallization in their two duets.

[23] Cavell, *Pursuits,* 240-1.

Chapter Two:
The Power of Poetry, The Failure of Poetry: The Songs of *Pyaasa* (1957)

I.

Figure 2.1 Still from Pyaasa (Dutt, 1957)

What can I give you, oh wonderful sights of nature?	*Main doon bhi toh kya doon tumhe, aye shok-nazaron*
All I have are a few tears, a few sighs	*Le deke mere pass kuch aansoo hai kuch aanhein*

A man, silhouetted among trees, walks away, his back to the camera, as this despairing verse is recited in voiceover. A fitting start to Guru Dutt's 1957 film *Pyaasa* (*Thirst*) about a poet's loss of faith in his poetry.

The film opens moments earlier on the man reposing on the grassy pasture beside a lotus-filled pond. Following the turns of his gaze through point-of-view shots, we look at the branches of the trees, the arcing birds, a bee carousing among the flowers. A quiet, careful search for words and phrases takes place in the voice-over as if the speaker is in the midst of composing a poem:

These laughing flowers	*Yeh haste hue phool*
This scented garden	*Yeh mehka hua gulshan*

This color and splendor	*Yeh rang mein aur noor mein*
Full of submerged paths.	*Doobi hui raahein*
Drinking the nectar of the flowers, the bees dance	*Yeh phoolon ka ras pi ke machalte hue bhawren*

The bee gets crushed by the boot of a passing man. A shadow passes over the poet's face and the mood darkens. The poem does not describe the death of the bee, it shifts abruptly to those closing lines about having nothing but a "few tears, a few sighs" to offer to nature. The words do not turn outward at the event. They turn in on themselves, questioning the powers of poetry itself. Words become equated with expressive but suffering and impotent responses. Abruptly cutting off the series of intimate shots, the poet gets up and walks away between the trees, out of what will turn out to have been the film's only scene of nature, into the city where the film's narrative will unfold.

These first moments of the film are private. We seem to be overhearing the thoughts of this lone man. It is also the first scene of publicity. Both the poet and the poem are exhibited to us, and the poem is addressed not to himself but out to nature. The film will involve this continuous back and forth between an emergence from the private and a retreat from the public as it follows the poet's search for an audience for his poetry and his increasing dissatisfaction with the power of poetry to reach and affect the world. The opening scene already intimates the ending of the film, when the poet will again, and this time with utter finality, renounce poetry, become silent and turn his back on the camera, retreating from the exposure of film into privacy. Then, he will be accompanied by a woman, as hand in hand, they walk away, back out of the city.

Figure 2.2 Still from Pyaasa (Dutt, 1957)

Though bookended by these scenes of the rejection of both the camera's gaze and poetic expression, *Pyaasa* stages this disappointment over film and poetry through a series of powerful songs, themselves achievements of visual and poetic composition. In this chapter, I will explore how these songs form the medium to explore a philosophical crisis of voice and language, one that ranges from the grand public drama of the relationship between the self and society to the private intimate drama of the relationship between the self and the other.

I.

The interchange of point-of-view shots and images of the poet's face in the opening scene encourage a perceptual identification with the poet, making us see and think the world through him. They equally focus on the face of the poet, making us attend directly and closely to his responses. On film, subjectivity is externalized, it relies on beholding and being invested in a face that is responding to the world. The poet, who is the subject of the film as well as the object of its visual attraction, is played by Guru Dutt. He is also the director of *Pyaasa*, a fact central to its viewing experience, not only to its production history. The doubled presence of Dutt as the eye framing the

camera as well as the face opening itself up for view in front of it, sets up a tension in the film—a knot of narcissism and vulnerability that confuses the line between self and the world.[1]

Dutt, who starred in several of his own films, experimented with this dynamic of self-involvement and self-revelation throughout his career. This practice reached an apotheosis in the last film he directed in 1959, *Kagaz ke Phool* (*Paper Flowers*), set in the contemporary Bombay film industry, in which he plays the role of a successful film director who suffers a fall from fame, and the film ends with the fictional director dying at the site of his former glory, in his film studio. The causes of this director's decline are given variously as a bad marriage, alcohol addiction, an affair with an actress whom he discovers and who goes on to supersede him. However, a deeper unspecified mood of despair envelops the film and its protagonist, one that can't be localized onto such clear factors. In this, *Kagaz Ke Phool* seems a continuation of *Pyaasa.* In *Pyaasa*, the poet's art follows the opposite trajectory to that of the director's, with his socialist poetry gaining in value and circulation over the course of the film, transforming from a loose sheaf of hand-written papers to a filed manuscript and then to a printed book. Yet the film's narrative of increasing artistic success is matched, at every turn, by the poet's growing disillusionment with poetry, and it ends with his final renunciation of his art.[2]

Both *Pyaasa* and *Kagaz ke Phool* trace the same crisis—an artist's gradual estrangement from his art, exploring themes of the nature of artistic activity, the film and publication industries'

[1] A notable example of a similar tension is in the work of Orson Welles, who was a major influence on Dutt's work and self-presentation, and central to the history of the critical reception of Dutt's work. This tension, though, is far from an inevitable outcome of any doubled presence of the actor/director. The directing and acting style of Raj Kapoor, which I will analyze in my next chapter, yield themselves to an entirely different dynamic of the self's revelation of itself, which can be seen, for example, in the direct looks that he shares with the camera in the song "Mera Joota Hai Japani" ("My shoes are Japanese") in *Shree 420* (1955).

[2] Sudhir Mahadevan, in an essay titled "The Cinema as Mass Culture: The Melodramas of Mechanical Reproduction," explores the negative connotations of this transformation of Vijay's poetry from manuscript to mass-circulated print, which the film sees as it leading to a loss of personhood, and he highlights the irony of Vijay's poetic critique of mercenary culture becoming itself the object of consumption by that same mercenary culture.

commercialization of art, and the acutely felt tensions in the relation of artist to audience. Tracking the difference in how this crisis is dramatized across the two closely related films will show how the exhibition of the self on film is at the center of this problematic, for their crisis is provoked by a sense of a loss of control over the art, a loss of faith in its power of expression, its ability to reveal and express the self. It will also set up the unique displacement that *Pyaasa* carries out from film to poetry, by casting the artist as poet instead of director, enabling it to carry out an analysis of film in its songs.

Shot in Cinemascope, *Kagaz ke Phool* paints its world in wide compositions that seem to loom over the diminished faces and figures of its characters. Though as the director, Dutt is the controlling force behind the frame, in his role as Suresh Sinha, the protagonist director, he appears to be trapped within the frame. He is often presented in full-length shots against the backdrops of film theaters, studio sets, and mansions, which in their sheer physical width and presence undermine his control over his own art and wealth. The film is structured as a flashback from the perspective of the aged and dying Suresh Sinha revisiting his old studio. The bulk of the film's narrative takes place after his disgrace and failure, imbuing this film about film with a sense of alienation from the film world. There are a few scenes that depict him at the height of his success but even those portray him in largely passive poses, often leaning back, whether in his car, next to the cameraman, in a hammock, or at the screening of a new film.

Figure 2.3 Still from Kagaz ke Phool (Dutt, 1959)

The pivotal moment in his work as a director is when he is presented as a viewer of film. At a screening of the rushes of a film-in-progress, we see a shot of a woman who has mistakenly entered the set and got captured by the mounted camera that was sweeping in for a close-up at that same moment. Suresh is entranced by the image, despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that it has slipped out of his control: not only was the woman mistakenly on set, but the shot was then printed without his authority. This epiphanic appreciation of the magnetic screen presence of Waheeda Rehman, playing a character named Shanti, whom he will go on to make a star of this film, serves as a testament to his sensitivity as a director and to his understanding of his medium in his acceptance of the power of accident on film. But this scene's celebration of the power of a projected face is deeply ambivalent in a film where the characters otherwise shy away and resist close-ups. The same camera setup of the close-up of Shanti is echoed in the climactic moment of Suresh's breakdown as director when he himself in a drunken daze is drawn onto the set and finds himself facing his own camera and lights. Both Suresh and Shanti, who is never fully invested in her career as an actor, are caught by the same intrusive sweep of the camera and are both discomfited by its gaze.

This ambivalence over the exposure of the self, suffering the passivity of viewing or the passivity of being viewed, forms the basis of a recurring visual motif of *Kagaz Ke Phool*: a beam of

light in the studio set. In key scenes—during Suresh's meeting with Shanti, during their realization of the impossibility of their affair, during his death—a beam of light appears suddenly from the roof of the set, in a way that is not diegetically grounded. It functions as a symbol of isolation, framing the still, silent, characters at a distance, evoking the entrancing spotlight of fame and publicity along with its isolating effect, surrounding the characters in darkness. It is in scenes with this lighting motif that the two central songs of the film occur: "Waqt ne kiya" ("What time has done") and "Bichde sabhi baari baari," ("Everyone left, turn by turn"). Forming exceptions to the dominant lip-syncing convention, these are both sung in voiceover. Suresh and Shanti never sing to each other, and more significantly, Suresh never lip-syncs to any song at all. The melancholic verses hang over the characters, expressing their condition for them but not granting them the expressiveness of voicing it themselves, and so seem to constrict their agency in their lives.

Figure 2.4 Still from Kagaz ke Phool (Dutt, 19590

Pyaasa shares the cinematographer, V.K. Murthy, and shades of the visual mood of *Kagaz ke Phool*. Set in narrow dark streets under the glare of streetlights, amidst mist and fog, it could be taking place in the span of one eternal night. But entering the darkness of the film in periodic interruptions, the songs of *Pyaasa* set the rhythm of the film and provide a kind of verbal relief and release, allowing space for active, individual expression. While in *Kagaz Ke Phool*, the artist's work—

his films—are not depicted, in *Pyaasa* the poet's work—his songs—are the central focus of the film. The songs which the poet, Vijay, performs through the course of the film trace his increasing despair and loss of faith. Though the words come with difficulty to Vijay, though he strains them to its limits, the songs are achievements of his self-expression. The songs also form a central arena for the expressions of other characters, particularly the women in Vijay's life, the prostitute, Gulabo, and his college lover, Meena. Not only is the act of singing, via lip-syncing, the focus of the songs, so is the act of listening. Each song is performed in the presence of an audience and each is dramatized by a camera that is mobile and active in the space between the characters, drawing into their faces as it traces the words that travel between them.[3] The camera's gaze will not be treated in the fearful aversive way it is in *Kagaz ke Phool*, though neither will its authority be unquestioned, for there will occur a decisive turning away from it.

The difference between the two films lies in how the films create their world and give us access to it, how they let us into the spaces and lives of the characters. In *Kagaz ke Phool,* the isolation of the characters in a world they cannot control is given a visual illustration in the stark and portentous beam of light that seems to transfix them and their views of each other. In *Pyaasa*, a similar sense of isolation is instead dramatized from within a constant interpersonal dynamic between the inhabitants of its world as carried out in the verbal and visual sphere of the songs, allowing for a more fluid possibility of communication. In *Kagaz Ke Phool* then, the director as director creates a visual world of distant characters, and in *Pyaasa*, the director as poet allows for more intimate revelations through voiced words, and it is this difference in the songs, in the use the song as a space to explore the nature of film's revelation of the self and the world, that casts a fresh light on the idea of cinematic self-reflexivity.

[3] My sense of the work of Dutt's moving camera in carrying words between people arose from reading Daniel Morgan's essay "Object Lessons" which explores in detail the complex patterns of the camera movement in the film.

With its backstage depictions of all the "paper flowers" of film production, its detailed presentation of the cinematic apparatus and milieu of the studio set, *Kagaz ke Phool* seems the chief Indian participant in the international trend in the 1950s and 1960s of self-reflexive auteur-driven films (*In a Lonely Place* (1950)*, Sunset Blvd.* (1950)*, The Bad and The Beautiful* (1952)*, Peeping Tom* (1960)*, 8 ½* (1963)*, Contempt* (1963) etc.), but I contend that *Pyaasa* was also an unusual participant in this trend. The concentration of these kinds of films in and around this midcentury moment expresses a shared sense of crisis over cinema, a wavering of belief in the medium even amid the extravagant celebration and display of its milieu and its processes. Putting these two Indian films in this context will not only broaden the global scope of this trend, it will also provide insights into one aspect of this crisis: the self-destructive entrapment of the individual in a world which increasingly cannot be disentangled from the self.

In *Pyaasa*, the film director is incarnated as a poet, and this displacement of film into questions of poetry opens up ways to address the issues of self-expression and the self's relation to the world in ways specific to the exposure of the self in language and in film. In the poetry of the song sequences, the film finds the locus of its reflections about its own medium, bringing to light a certain dimension of film's power of presenting people and language.

Pyaasa inherits the Bombay film song convention and dissects it. From being the ground of meaning, it becomes the main subject. There hovers over Vijay an air of incommunicability, silence, and voicelessness. His poetry is successful only in print. In his live performances, Vijay consistently fails to have an impact on the assembled audiences he seeks. Only a few individuals in each audience prove sensitive enough to receive his words. However, these live performances of his poetry take the form of the songs in the film, and it is through these songs that we, the film audience, receive the poetry—not as the private composition of an individual, but as a composite of actor, director, cinematographer, singer, composer, and of course, the lyricist—Sahir Ludhianvi, in this case. So

though at the diegetic level, Vijay's poetry fails, at the formal level, there is a conviction in the total power of the song. The crisis over cinema, which was explicitly rendered in *Kagaz Ke Phool*, is also present in *Pyaasa* as it both sustains and wavers in the belief in its own songs.

In the rest of the chapter, I will carry out a lyrical and visual analysis of the songs, both the words of the songs and the work of the camera in carrying the weight of these words on film—first, of Vijay's songs, to explore what poetry and singing mean to him, how their power is understood, displayed and questioned by him, and then, of the songs of the women, to show how this power is harnessed by them in parallel and alternate ways that provide variations and elaborations on the film's fundamental theme of the crisis of expression.

II.

Figure 2.5 Still from Pyaasa (Dutt, 1957)

The chatter of conversation at a party is suddenly stilled. The gathered guests all turn to look toward the camera. A voice emanating from outside the frame starts to sing these verses:

Who are those people whose love was returned by love?	*Jaane woh kaise log the jinke pyaar ko pyaar mila*
When I asked for blossoms, I got a garland of thorns	*Humne toh jab kaliyan maangi kaaton ka haar mila*

When I searched for happiness, I got the dust of sorrow	*Khushiyon ki manzil dhoondi toh gham ki gard mili*
Wanting the poems of love, I got cold sighs	*Chahat ke nagme chahe toh aahein sard mili*

Alone on the other side of the room, Vijay is discovered as the source of the song. In his pose, Vijay is figured as Christ and he even adorns himself verbally with "a garland of thorns." In these verses, which become the refrain of the song, he separates his experience from that of others. This felt isolation is literalized in his distance from the other guests and plays itself out in the hushed semi-hostile arrangements they make around him through the song.

Figure 2.6 Still from Pyaasa (Dutt, 1957)

The scene is a party at the publisher Ghosh's house. Vijay has recently been hired as an assistant at Ghosh's magazine, and Ghosh has asked him to serve as an attendant at his party to test his suspicions about the relationship between Vijay and his wife, Meena, knowing that they had been lovers in college. Other poets are guests at the party, and two of them sing couplets of polished Urdu verses, replete with the terms and mood of the ghazal world. (In fact, these couplets were taken from the compositions of two actual contemporary poets, Majaz and Jigar Moradabadi.) The guests applaud with genteel good taste. The couplets are graceful and well-formed, but they lack something. They do not have the backing of film. All the powers of film will be roused into action

only when Vijay starts singing. The mystery of film's investment and fascination with this poet is linked to the larger mystery of Bombay cinema's long fascination with, dependence on, and transformation of a certain kind of poetry.

Vijay recites his poem in response to these other poets, in competition with them. Where their verses were about requited love, he sings about its failure. Where their poetry was recited in the typical *mehfil* (poetic gathering) style with an emphasis on the conventional artifice of the play of poetic vocabulary, Vijay uses a simpler, more direct vocabulary, and he performs with sincerity, his whole self made present in his words.

That this strikes true, even given that Vijay's words are sung by the professional singer, Hemant Kumar, reveals how ideas of selfhood are refracted on film, how it allows for a capacious reframing of the relations possible between a self and its body and voice. The separateness of the singing voice, the release of another voice from his body, signifies Vijay's access to a realm of expressiveness, presence, and immediacy that surpasses the abilities of the other poets.

Like a martyred ghost, already haunting the party, Vijay speaks as if from beyond death, looking back at his life and finding it strewn with sighs and sadness. He sings of wandering as a maddened lover, bereft of friendship and companionship, tired even of his own shadow. The ghostly phrases of the song tap into two central features of our experience of film: the strange filmic figuration of the physical body, that is both absent and present; and the crystallization of time on film. The song is able to hold the fleeting sense of time alongside a feeling of captured eternity, endowing the words with both the freedom of the present moment and the fixedness and fatedness of the past.

Vijay's words are imbued also by the magnetic force of the mobile camera that intercuts between the triangle of Vijay, Meena, and Ghosh. Each appears alone in their own frame. Their looks—accusatory, despairing, suspicious—connect them. Though Vijay's words address only his

own condition, it is Meena's tearful response, and her underlying unhappiness in her marriage, that add a vital texture of loneliness and suffering to the song. Carrying Vijay's words, the camera moves us between the characters, allowing the words to build their meaning within this intersubjective space.

If this is called living, then I'll live on like this	*Isko hi jeena kehten hain toh yoonhi jee lenge*
I won't complain, I'll seal my lips	*Uff na karenge lav seelenge*
I'll swallow my tears	*Aasoon pee lenge*
Why worry about sorrow?	*Gam se ghabrana kaisa*
I've received sorrow a hundred times	*Gam sau baar mila*

The poetic images flicker away with Vijay ending the song promising to "seal his lips," "swallow his tears" and go on uncomplainingly to do what "is called living." The emphasis that is put on that word underlines again how much he carries the air of speaking from beyond death, a tendency that persists through his other songs and that will intensify at the end of the film. But before that moment, he makes another attempt to sing out to the world present before him, in the song "Jinhen Naaz Hai Hind Par" ("Those who are proud of this land"), and this time, he turns directly to the camera that has been attending him so closely.

The prelude to the song takes place when a drunken Vijay, mourning the recent death of his mother, is led by his friends to a courtesan's apartment. The generic convention leads us to expect a song and dance performed by a courtesan, and such a song seems to commence as a young girl is shown dancing while surrounded by her male customers. But the instrumental music that plays is not a prelude to any words. Instead as the pace of the drums build up, there is a significant interruption to the girl's dance—the cries of her sick baby left in a crib by the side of the stage.[4] A

[4] Rockwell discusses this scene: "By robbing the tawaif scene of its traditional song sequence status and transferring that role onto the social commentary of Vijay, Guru Dutt strengthens the message of 'Jinhen Naaz Hai Hind Par' through

series of close-ups force us to an uncomfortable proximity to the dancer's distressed face, as she slips in and out of her seductive performative look, as well as to the unbothered leering faces of the men watching her. These shots are not initially anchored to Vijay's perspective, but as he watches her being forced to ignore her baby so as to earn money for medicine, tears appear in his eyes and when we next cut to the dancer, there is water on the lens, as if we are gazing through his tears. But the point-of-view dynamic remains unstable. Coming closer and closer to Vijay's face, we catch him with his eyes closed in distress, yet the teary-eyed shots of the courtesan continue, and persist for a moment even after we see him leave the room. The camera seems to inhabit a space outside Vijay, detached but still affected by him, capturing in its sudden unexpected emotiveness, our knowledge of eyes not only as an instrument of looking but as a means of expression and response.

Figure 2.7 Stills from Pyaasa (Dutt, 1957)

the delayed gratification of the audience expectation for a song at this point in the film. The tawaif's dance is stripped of its positive aesthetic value and the commentary itself becomes a thing of beauty." Daisy Rockwell, "Visionary Choreographies," 117.

Vijay leaves the courtesan's room, staggers drunk through the streets of the red-light district, and collapsing on a street corner, it is he who commences the song. He does not intervene in the situation with the dancer and her baby—the beholding eye is expressive but helpless, incapable of physical action. Words are his sphere of action. A few moments later, in the middle of the song, when he tries ineffectually to come between a man dragging a woman into a house, he is shoved to the ground, and clinging then to a pillar for support, he can only continue singing.

Figure 2.8 Stills from Pyaasa (Dutt, 1957)

But he doesn't break into this song with immediate conviction. The camera stays uncomfortably close to his face, to his eyes, making us feel the pressure of the experience on his mind, the pressure he feels to respond to it. He first begins humming a tune and then, starting and stopping, manages a few stray words before the lyrics begin in proper.

These lanes, this bedecked auction house	*Yeh kuche, yeh neelamghar dilkashi ke*
This robbed caravan of life	*Yeh lootte hue kaarvaan zindagi ke*
Where are the guardians of self-respect?	*Kahan hai kahaan hai muhafiz khudi ke*
Those who are proud of this land, where are they?	*Jinhe naaz hai hind par woh kahan hai*

Because the refrain is addressed to the leaders of the state, to the patriots who proclaim pride in the country, the song has been read primarily as a critique of the Nehruvian state and its failures to achieve social progress and political change.[5] But the tone of the song is peculiar for a protest song. It is not a vehement, assured assignment of blame and responsibility. The emphasis of the song rather falls on Vijay's compelling but halting struggle to evoke and express what he observes. Alongside the political judgment, a concurrent drama is taking place—a judgment of language, of poetry, of the capacity and need to describe and put the world into words.

Figure 2.9 Still from Pyaasa (Dutt, 1957)

As Vijay walks through the neighborhood, scenes of street life are shown as if occurring in a shadow puppet play. The houses with their lit balconies and porches form the visual edges of the street, with the young girls and roaming men appearing in silhouettes on the sidelines. His song, with its list of indicative phrases—"these lanes," "this defamed market," "this tinkle of coins"—suggest a visual and aural display of these streets, but the song does not employ the documentary capacity of

[5] See, for example, Darius Cooper, *In Black and White: Hollywood and the Melodrama of Guru Dutt*; Alison Griffiths, "Discourses of Nationalism in Guru Dutt's *Pyaasa*"; Priya, Joshi "Cinema as Public Fantasy"; Daisy Rockwell, "Visionary Choreographies"; Sudhir Mahadevan, "The Cinema as Mass Culture: The Melodramas of Mechanical Reproduction"; Daniel Morgan, "Object Lessons"; and Rakesh Sengupta, "Negotiating Empathy and Excess: *Pyaasa* as a Melodrama of Authorship."

film. We barely see the scenes he describes; they are evoked only by his words. The girls and their customers of his song do not enter the narrative as characters; they only illustrate and provoke his words. The drama of the song lies in his verbal responsiveness. Our interest is not solicited by the narrative deployment of a prostitute's story, rather our interest is solicited by his capacity to word the whole milieu. His skill in rhyming, versification, and imagery is on display, and the song harmonizes the disharmony of the buying and selling of flesh, the weak, sick, tired faces and bodies, capturing the sad reality in pleasing alliterative phrases, like "yeh badnaam bazaar."

These difficult streets, this defamed market	*Yeh purpech galiyaan, yeh badnaam bazaar,*
These unnamed travelers, this tinkle of coins	*Yeh gumnaam raahi, yeh sikko ki jhankaar*
These bargains on chastity, these arguments over those bargains	*Yeh ismat ke saude, yeh saude pe takrar*
Those who are proud of this land, where are they?	*Jinhe naaz hai hind par woh kahan hai*

The song conjures up restless, winding, difficult, dark streets, where the sound of anklets and drums clash with that of belabored breaths, heavy sighs, taunts, and coughs. The music and dance, the beauty of the girls, the decorated strings of flowers sound against the clinking exchange of money. That these sights, these sounds, this possibility of human life is still within the grasp of words allows for some release, but it also underscores the bitter power of language, capable of capturing anything but changing and accomplishing nothing, and this already threatens a disillusionment with expression.

While singing, Vijay addresses the stream of passers-by but cannot sustain their attention for long enough to gather them as a collective audience. Instead, he appeals directly to us as film viewers, as the song ends with him turning to the camera, gesturing at this "looted caravan of life," as he sings this last verse,

Go call the countrymen	*Zara mulk ke rehbaro ko bulao*
These lanes, these streets, show them these sights	*Yeh kuche, yeh galiyan, yeh manzar dikhao*
Those who are proud of this land, call them	*Jinhe naaz hai hind par unko lao*
Those who are proud of this land, where are they?	*Jinhe naaz hai hind par woh kahan hai*

Figure 2.10 Still from Pyaasa (Dutt, 1957)

It's a weak and staggering turn to the camera. The same dark condemnatory social vision will recur in Vijay's final song, but there, he will not turn toward the camera but away from it, and away from this whole world, as he calls for its destruction.

The effort of expression in this song seems to expend all of Vijay's reserves, and the series of events and losses that preceded it—the news of his mother's death, the rejection by his brothers, the rejection of his poetry by the publisher, the loss of his editorial job, the witnessing of Meena's unhappy violent marriage—all these experiences push him into a suicidal frame of mind. Drunk and disheartened, he makes his way to Gulabo's house, where she, perceiving his mood, declares, "The world needs you. It needs your poetry." To which he answers, "The world needs no one. How much I have tried to send my poetry out to the world. And you know how the world valued it? As

wastepaper sold for ten annas." Suggesting that there are other reasons to live, Gulabo intimates her love for him, but this does little to console him. Later that night, after she has fallen asleep on her watch, he wakes up with memories of taunts and rejections echoing in his mind. He is shown writing something before he leaves her apartment. At a train station, he meets a beggar to whom he gives his coat and heads toward the tracks. Perhaps sensing Vijay's intentions of suicide, the beggar follows but himself gets stuck in the tracks of an oncoming train. Vijay tries to free him but without success, and at the last moment, the beggar throws him off as the camera fades to black. Vijay's fate is left uncertain but the body of the beggar wearing Vijay's coat gets mistaken for him. The next day, the newspapers announce the death of a poet, and report that in his pocket has been discovered a poem that forms "his last message to the world."

We never get to see or hear this final poem to the world, but all of Vijay's poems that have appeared in the film have been directed with an equal intensity at "the world." The words *jahaan*, *alaam*, and especially *duniya*—all synonyms for "the world"—recur throughout his songs, and not as passing references but as the locus of his attention and appeal, his sorrow and anger. Vijay's sense of self, the self that speaks in his poetry, is bound up with a concept of a whole world to which he feels beholden and which he seeks to be in dialogue with.

Romanticism has been frequently brought up in discussions of *Pyaasa*, through the usual associations of self-expression, emotionality, and affinity with nature.[6] Vijay certainly strikes many conventional poses of a Romantic poet through the film—reclining in the grassy meadow, clutching his head—but perhaps the central Romantic problematic can be located in Vijay's songs, in their peculiar intensification of the relationship between the self and the world. Placing the Romantic movement in the philosophical moment of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, around the same

[6] See for example, Mahadevan, "Cinema as Mass Culture," 87-88.

time as Kant's "solution" to skepticism that gives us access to the things in the world on condition of being shut out absolutely from the "thing in itself," Cavell reads Romanticism as the expression of a similar philosophical problem around the desire to assure one's existence and relationship with the world, which, in an animistic way, is seen as deadened and must be brought back to life, and the burden of this responsibility falls to the individual self. [7]

This overarching dichotomous sense of the self and world plays itself out in the visually and dramatically antagonistic relationship between Vijay and the diegetic audiences of his performances. Vijay's first encounter with a public audience in the film occurs at his college reunion, where a friend asks him to perform a poem. Stepping onto the dais and looking out over the assembly, he notices Meena, who has already been established as his lover from college. He seems to choose his poem in response to her, and without any music, he sings,

I have become tired of the crisis of this life	*Tang aa chuke hum kashmakash-e-zindagi se hum*
My sadness may lead me to casting off the world	*Thukra na de jahan ko kahi bedilli se hum*

Figure 2.11 Stills from Pyaasa (Dutt, 1957)

[7] Cavell, "Emerson, Coleridge, Kant," 27-33.

As he sings, he clutches the microphone in desperation to reach the world even as he threatens to reject it. His background shifts behind him. It abstracts into a flower-wreathed empty space, literalizing Vijay's persistent mood of isolation, but also marking that isolation as the source of his words—that sphere of the private self that is not able to find accommodation in the social world and which therefore is able to reflect poetically on that world. While songs in contemporary Hollywood musicals and other Bombay films often function as sites for forming community, for generating a musical and physical energy that assures a collective expression and communication, Vijay's performances repeatedly enact an alienated relation between individual and community.[8] In his songs, the exchange of energy is skewed. He doesn't draw energy from the audience and is instead left deeply enervated by his songs. In all the gatherings where he sings, Vijay inserts notes of discord and despair. At the dinner party, his song had been initiated in response to other poets who had recited more conventional poems of the happiness of love, and in the brothel song, he revealed the grim reality underneath the gaudy surface of beauty, youth, music, and dance. Here, at a college reunion, he provides these gloomy verses. The diegetic stage returns as he ends the poem with this verse,

Today I have broken all relationships of hope	*Lo aaj humne tod diya rishta-e-umeed*
Now I won't complain to anyone	*Lo ab gila na karenge kissi se hum*

This same move toward the cessation of complaint and silence is how Vijay ends the song at the dinner party, with the lyrical images there of lips being sealed and tears being swallowed. In both

[8] Richard Dyer, in his book, *In the Space of a Song,* discusses this characteristic in Hollywood musicals such as *On the Town* (1949) or *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944). Given their shared political and economic critique, a good contrast to *Pyaasa* in the Bombay context is Raj Kapoor's *Shree 420* (*Gentleman Thief*) (1955), especially in the songs, "Dil ka Haal Sune Dilwaala,"("Listen to the state of my heart") where the individual sings of his personal suffering in front of a receptive and encouraging audience, and "Ramaiya Vastavaiya" ("Lord Ram, will you come?"), where the verses are passed between different individuals bridging the spaces between them and reuniting them. This will be discussed further in my next chapter.

these songs, Meena is individually marked out, the camera moving between her and Vijay, under the watchful unmoved eye of her husband. Both these songs seem initially to locate Vijay's disappointment in love as the chief cause of his disillusionment with the world, and Meena certainly interprets herself as the focus of his songs. Following the dinner party, she meets him at the publishing house where she tries to address their personal relationship, but her appeal is rebuffed. Vijay responds with an abstracted air, saying that he has no complaint against anyone, a line that he will repeat again to her more forcefully at the end of the film. The mood of romantic disappointment that the songs express turn out not to be reparable by the love and attention of a particular person, and after the dinner party scene, he will not seem to address any further songs to her. Behind the poses and images of the unrequited love, there is a wider despair that cannot get located in individual romantic dramas and demands expression in a Romantic relationship with the world as a whole.

Figure 2.12 Still from Pyaasa (Dutt, 1957)

The same phrasing of casting off the world reappears in a short poem Vijay recites while drunk before the brothel scene,

Sadness coming near, I got worried and began drinking *Gam iss qadar bade ke mein ghabra ke pee gaya*

I pitied this heart's helplessness and began drinking	*Iss dil ki be-basi pe taras khaa ke pee gaya*
The world has rejected me for so long	*Thukra raha tha mujh ko badi der se jahan*
Today all the world I cast off and began drinking	*Mein aaj sab jahaan ko thukra ke pee gaya*

Almost every one of his poems comes on the brink of the exhaustion of words, on a decision to stop speaking and a gesture to waive away life and the world. There is a burst of expressiveness before a retreat into silence, the fluency and beauty of the poetic verses coming to hit against some sense of the impossibility of continuing to voice himself or to speak to the world.

Vijay's poetry is published only after his purported death. Gulabo gathers his manuscript and gets the publisher Ghosh and Vijay's brothers, now keen to profit off his poetry, to print a book of his verses. Vijay, after the accident on the train tracks, meanwhile is found in a state of amnesiac silent half-coma in a hospital. His poetry attains such popularity that even Vijay's nurse at the hospital reads his poetry, and she reads out these lines as she sits beside his bed,

I am tying flowers in your hair	*Mein phool tank raha hoon tumhare*
Your eyes lower in joy	*Tumhaari aankh masarrat se jhukti jaati hai*
I don't know what I was about to say	*Na jaane aaj main kya baat kehne vaala hun*
My mouth is dry, my voice keeps stopping	*Zaban khsuhk hai awaaz rukti jaati hai*
Shadows of dreams and thoughts waver around me	*Khayal-o-khwab ki parchayyian ubharti hain*
You have wrapped your delicate arms around my neck	*Mere gale mein tumhaari gudaaz bahein hain*
The shadow of my lips is falling on your lips	*Tumhaare honton pe mere labon ke saaye hain*
You are certain that nothing would separate us now	*Tumhe yakeen hai ke ab hum kabhi na bicherenge*
I worry that we are separate even in this union	*Mujhe gumaan ke hum ab tak paraaye hain*

These lines are taken from the lyricist Sahir Ludhianavi's own poem, "Parchhaiyaan" ("Shadows").[9] Written in 1956 in response to the Suez Canal crisis, it is a longform poem about the devastation suffered by two lovers during a war. Within the original context of the poem, the verse that is read out by the nurse in the film occurs in the description of the early romantic meetings of the young lovers. The momentary shyness of an adolescent romance, expressed in the dry mouth and the stopping voice, takes on in the context of its appearance in *Pyaasa*, a bleaker sense of voicelessness and exhaustion, matching that of Vijay's other poems. The romantic encounter is again shadowed by a deep ambivalence.[10] Vijay's desire to be in dialogue with the world is in tension with the realm of interpersonal romantic love. These spheres could be conceivably brought to coincide, for the love for an individual to form a bridge back to the community and the wider world—a mythic structure that plays out successfully in innumerable comedies and romantic dramas—but the tragic vision of *Pyaasa* explores a darker trajectory.

At the sound of his own poetry read out by the nurse, Vijay starts awake and regains his voice, but his attempt to reclaim his identity is immediately taken as madness and he is put in an insane asylum. However, Vijay is able to escape in time to attend his own funerary celebration on the anniversary of his supposed death, which is being organized by the very people who have refused to recognize him and conspired to keep him locked up. Interrupting the speech being given by Ghosh in his honor, Vijay begins to sing what will be his final song, in which the *duniya* (world) will resound most insistently.

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[9] See Raza Mir and Ali Husain Mir. *Anthems of Resistance: A Celebration of Progressive Urdu Poetry,* 133.

[10] The film's version also switches the pronouns of the last two lines. In his original, the first person, the man, has the certainty and security of being together, and the second person, the woman, expresses her concern over their separation. The film version reverses the genders, with the man expressing a sense of the inevitable separation even within a union. This gendered difference will be explored more fully in the women's songs of the film.

This world of palaces, thrones, and crowns	*Yeh mehlon, yeh takhton, yeh taajon ki duniya*
This world of enemies of man, of empty rituals	*Ye insaan ke dushman, samajon ki duniya*
This world of money-hungry tendencies	*Yeh daulat ke bhuke, riwajon ki duniya*
Even if one wins this world, what of it?	*Yeh duniya agar mil bhi jaye toh kya hai*

Figure 2.13 Still from Pyaasa (Dutt, 1957)

Vijay sings his last song to the largest audience that has been assembled so far, culminating the drama of the isolated self in society. The seats face a stage where his marble bust is about to be unveiled, but he enters from behind the crowd, asserting his living reality amid this worshipping of the dead. Standing in a doorway in the dark cinema-like auditorium, as if emerging from the projector light, the backlit Vijay also comes framed as a ghostly image. He embraces this pose of resurrection, beyond life and death, one that is set up by the repeated Christ references through the film, and it invests his poetic voice with a power of uncanny perspective:

Every body wounded, every soul thirsty	*Har ik jism ghayal, har ik ruh pyaasi*
In their eyes trouble, in their hearts sadness	*Nihagon mien uljhan, dilon mein udaasi*
Is this a real world or a world of insensitivity?	*Yeh duniya hai ya aalam-e-badhawasi*
Even if one wins this world, what of it?	*Yeh duniya agar mil bhi jaye toh kya hai*
Youth loiter around, becoming sinners	*Jawaani bhatakti badkaar ban kar*
Young bodies are adorned for the markets	*Jawan jism sajte hain bazaar ban kar*
Here love is turned into trade	*Yahan pyaar hota hai vyopaar ban kar*
Even if one wins this world, what of it?	*Yeh duniya agar mil bhi jaye toh kya hai*
This world where mankind means nothing	*Yeh duniya jahaan aadmi kuch nahi hai*
Loyalty means nothing, friendship means nothing	*Wafa kuch nahi, dosti kuch nahi hai*
Where there is no value put on love	*Jahan pyaar ki qadr kuch nahi hai*
Even if one wins this world, what of it?	*Yeh duniya agar mil bhi jaye toh kya hai*

Figure 2.14 Still from Pyaasa (Dutt, 1957)

With these verses conjuring up a phantomic society of troubled eyes and saddened hearts hidden behind grotesquely decorated and marketed bodies, the song gives the bitterest account of

broken society yet given in the film. The refrain, made in impersonal phrasing, questions the value of such a world, a world where the words of mankind, loyalty, friendship, love, are rendered meaningless. The rhymes and wordplay—e.g. of "pyaar" and "vyopaar," "love" and "trade"—bring out the confusion of values in such a society, revealing in the words the thin line, phonetic and moral, between an ideal and its corruption, and in this, seeming to condemn the complicity of language in the corruption of society, the words each marked by the life and beliefs of the society. In Vijay's despairing rhymes and alliterations of misery, the words themselves seem to crack under the strain of the internal contradictions of a failed society.

The refrain's stress on *duniya* returns with an emphatic stress in the last verse, where, alongside a musical crescendo, the song takes a dramatic turn.

Burn it, blow it to embers, this world	*Jalado isse phoonk dalo yeh duniya*
From my sight, remove it, this world	*Mere saamne se hatalo yeh duniya*
It's yours, you take care of this world	*Tumhari hai tumhi sambhalo yeh duniya*
Even if one wins this world, what of it?	*Yeh duniya agar mil bhi jaye to kya hai*

This call for the burning of the world, and the divesting the self of any responsibility for it, appears suddenly, forming a drastic turn from the listing of social evils, and it marks a departure from the genre of political protest in which critics have usually placed Vijay's poetry. The first person enters in this last stanza, in defeat. From the vengeance of the command to burn the world, there is an immediate and steep despairing decline toward the first-person insistence to remove the world from *his* eyes and then leaving it to the care of others. These verses culminate the pattern of Vijay's gestures of rejection of the world and his sense of voicelessness before it. A reading of this song as only a critique of the Nehruvian state cannot account for the intensity of this sentiment, which seems to leave no room for hope or struggle for political or social change.

There's something deeply modern about this feeling of the hopelessness of satire and protest that pervades the song. The pre-Romantics have a faith in the power of satire that, one feels, can no longer be recaptured. For example, Samuel Johnson's 1738 poem "London" and the third Juvenal satire it draws on are both also about the depiction of social corruption in a city, where the poets dramatize their choice to leave the city to go into the country, but both end in an assured poetic voice, their pens poised, ready to write another satire when society should need it. Vijay, in contrast, gives up all poetry.[11]

Situating Vijay's crisis as only national restricts its scope. Its expression of the sentiment of a whole-scale destruction of the world resonates with a global midcentury moment. In *Pyaasa*, the end of the world comes briefly, if climactically, and it comes as a line in a song, as a desperate cry not as a science-fiction scenario, yet I see it also as participating in another contemporary trend of films, along with that of self-reflexive films, those that depict the end of the world or convey some apocalyptic vision, almost always dealing with the nuclear threat, films like *Kiss me Deadly* (1955) and *Dr Strangelove* (1964). *Pyaasa* provides a different reading from the Cold-war scenarios of Hollywood, showing the crisis to not be external and objective, but one that stems out of the sense of the crisis of meaning and expression in the social world and so, in the practices of art and film. The song's force lies in the conceptual drama it presents of relation of the individual voice in society and the

[11] Compare with the last verse of Juvenal's third satire:

Farewell; and when, like me, o'erwhelm'd with care
You to your own Aquinum shall repair,
To take a mouthful of sweet country air,
Be mindful of your friend; and send me word,
What joys your fountains and cool shades afford:
Then, to assist your satires, I will come;
And add new venom, when you write of Rome.

And the last verse of Johnson's *London*:

Then shall thy Friend, nor thou refuse his Aid,
Still Foe to Vice forsake his Cambrian Shade;
In Virtue's Cause once more exert his Rage,
Thy Satire point, and animate thy Page.

sense of language as bound with the world. The very possibility of the political sphere—a sphere of shared discourse and action—is rendered uncertain. The compact between individual and society is broken, the ground of the world holding them together having collapsed.

Vijay does not declare that this song will be his last. He does not at any point announce that he will stop writing poetry, but this song leaves behind a stark emptiness in its wake, in its absolute obliteration of the world, which suggests the impossibility of continuation of life and language. The few remaining speeches and dialogue will get slower, more pained, and there will be no more songs. Only this same last stanza of this song will recur once more.

The funerary celebration ends in darkness and confusion, with the publisher and Vijay's friend cutting off all the lights to put a stop to Vijay's song. Afterward, another gathering is called for Vijay to clarify and reclaim his identity, and in a doubling that follows dream-logic, it takes place in the same space, looking exactly as before, except with Vijay now on the stage. Given access to the official microphone, with the opportunity to "win" the world, to reach his audience, Vijay, witnessing the hypocritical support now given to him, instead renounces his identity completely, declaring "I am not Vijay." The audience turns immediately from adoration to anger, and the last verse of his song plays over the scenes of them rioting.

Figure 2.15 Still from Pyaasa (Dutt, 1957)

These rioting crowds, surging around the lone embattled figure of Vijay, play a peculiar role in the film. They are the backdrop against which the drama of the individual voice is drawn. Though supposedly devoted readers of his printed poetry, yet they fail utterly to recognize and appreciate that same poetic voice powerfully present and live before them. In this final scene of the ambivalent confrontation of a man with the masses whom his voice has reached, *Pyaasa* is referencing *Meet John Doe* (1941). Capra's hero is also formed verbally, through radio speeches, and he comes to stand for the ordinary representative citizen of the nation. But all the power of this "John Doe" figure is drawn from the earnest beliefs of other ordinary citizens, not from an isolated individual self but from a receptiveness to the community.[12] The climactic scene where a crowd riots against the hero is explained by their susceptibility to the manipulations of the mass media moguls, and the ambivalence of the film lies in the possibility of attaining direct contact with the people. In *Pyaasa*, the anxiety over the audience is not over the intervention of canny industrialists or politicians (Ghosh is villainous certainly, but the scale of his machinations through his small publishing house is far from national). Instead, there is the more abstract grounding failure of the individual and society to together establish a secure intersubjective world. *Meet John Doe* ends with a suicide that is averted by avowals that the political fight is worth fighting and continuing. *Pyaasa* ends with a kind of death in the denial of his identity. His renunciation is not a sacrifice. It serves to prove and correct nothing at all. The film had seemed to set up for a final climactic encounter in a film theater, where the

[12] This, and the preceding thoughts on individuals and community, is inspired by Toles' interpretation of *Meet John Doe*. Of the scene where Gary Cooper, who is playing the John Doe figure, has to give a radio speech for the first time and to learn to inhabit the John Doe voice with sincerity, Toles writes, "Frank Capra's films are generally animated by a fantasy which makes the emergence of an individual sense of self depend on a much larger group (call it a community) resolving to seek, once again, purposes, beliefs, gestures and attitudes which will bring it together. What is unusual and moving about Capra's dramas of convergence is that the hero can do nothing meaningful or integrating on his own behalf when he is cut off from the life of the group, or when he is only able to find groups too scattered and demoralized to energize him. The hero in *Meet John Doe*, a ballplayer separated by injury from the jubilant life of the ballpark, is stranded within himself, almost without knowing it." George Toles, "Believing in Gary Cooper," 39.

audience witnesses the public clarification of morality, like, for example, in Capra's earlier films, the courtroom in *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1937) or the senate floor in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) (Though even by the time of *Meet John Doe*, which ends on a snowy desolate rooftop, this has become hard for Capra to dramatize). Instead, *Pyaasa* ends with a distrusting retreat from the mass audience.

This retreat is signaled by the verses playing in voiceover. The force of Vijay's last song had been from the sense of a voice speaking beyond death—a voice yet paradoxically actual, active, inhabited by an individual. Now the verses are repeated without Vijay singing them, as already only a memory and trace of his song.

Figure 2.16 Still from Kagaz ke Phool (Dutt, 1959)

Pyaasa's gesture of withdrawal anticipates the permanent withdrawal of the voice in Dutt's subsequent film *Kagaz Ke Phool* where Dutt's character will not voice, through lip-syncing, any songs. Where *Pyaasa* ended in a film theater, *Kagaz Ke Phool* ends in a film production studio. After the failure of his directorial career, the protagonist director, Suresh, has lived the remainder of his life reclused from the world. The film begins with him going back to visit his old studio, and it

concludes with him dying aged and alone in the empty set, sitting in the director's chair surrounded by the film apparatus, while a song plays over him, in which "the world" again has a haunting oppressive presence:

What shall I bring to meet the world?	*Kya leke mile ab duniya se*
Apart from tears, I have nothing	*Aanso ke siva kuch paas nahi*
This world is a world of deception	*Matlab ki duniya saari*
Everyone left one by one	*Bichde sabhi baari baari*

The same sense of personal defeat and social corruption is present in this song as in the final song of *Pyaasa*. Here, its presentation links it directly to the question of film, with the shadowy emptiness of the studio, the façade of the sets, the ominous blankness of the instruments all contributing to the aura of loss.

The death of the director is not announced as literally in *Pyaasa*, but it can be found embedded in the reference to Sturges' *Sullivan's Travels* (1941), in the sequence on the train tracks and its aftermath. In *Sullivan's Travels,* the protagonist film director gets mistaken for dead, after a tramp's body, wearing his stolen shoes, is found mangled on train track. (*Pyaasa* though overturns Sturges' cynicism and makes Sturges' sinister tramp a minor tragic figure, whose dying act is to save Vijay's life.) The death of the director (or sometimes the producer, the other authorial force) is, incidentally, a recurring trope in self-reflexive midcentury films, coming in varying inflections, e.g., in *Sunset Blvd* (1950), *Two Weeks in Another Town* (1962), *Peeping Tom* (1960), *Contempt* (1963) etc. Both *Pyaasa* and *Kagaz Ke Phool* then participate in this interrogation of a sense of the end of cinema through an individual artist's death, and in both films, there is a haunting continuation of the voice at the

moment of renunciation and death.[13] The voice survives at the end—but it is an uninhabited lone voice that is unmoored from the world.

VIII.

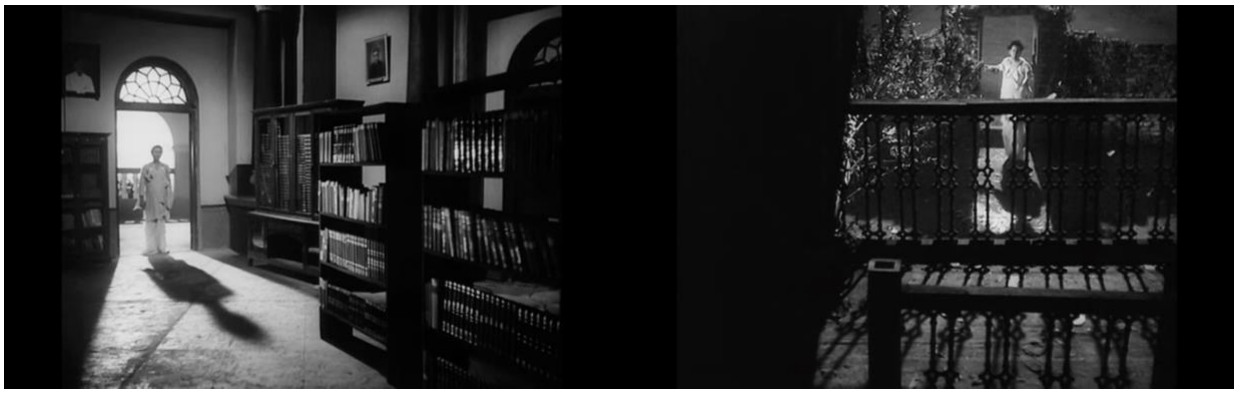

Figure 2.17 Stills from Pyaasa (Dutt, 1957)

Pyaasa has an epilogue. It does not end with Vijay's final song. He does not confront the publishers or his brothers or his amassed readers. His response to them is silence. The film instead ends with two interactions with women. To both women, he will appear standing under a doorway, as he did at the start of his song at his memorial celebration. Framed with his shadow falling long in front of him, he now only liminally occupies the world he has rejected. First Meena seeks him out, just after the riot following his renunciation of his identity. Following him out of the crowd into a separate room, she demands an explanation of his refusal to embrace his new wealth and fame, and insists that he act, that he take revenge against those who betrayed him. He answers that he has no complaint against any individual, only against the ways of the world, that he will find no peace within it, that he is going far away. As he walks out, a wind rises, blowing out the light of the room and

[13] And the major directorial death that both these films are now inescapably marked by is Guru Dutt's own death in 1964, possibly by suicide, which makes these films seem acts of premeditation and preparation. It seems fitting that a poem was produced for Dutt's funeral by a poet and lyricist in the industry, Kaifi Azmi. It starts,

No one comes to stay forever in this world	*Rehne ko sadaa dahar mein aata nahin koi*
They don't leave like you though	*tum jaise gaye aise bhi jaata nahin koi*

scattering papers, then a wind continues, across a cut, to blow the shutters open in Gulabo's room. Waking up suddenly in a feverish state that she had been left in after being trampled by the crowd at Vijay's last performance, Gulabo tells her friend that someone is calling for her, and running downstairs, she finds Vijay waiting at the doorway to her building. To her too he says that he's going far away, to a place from which he won't need to go any further, but on her questioning if that is all he has come to say to her, he asks if she will come with him. They walk out together away from the camera into a twilight mist.

There is a shift in these final scenes to the women's perspective of Vijay. After the burning of the world and the collapse of his voice, identity, and action, there are left these scenes of two encounters, where Vijay is a framed image, our view of him mediated through the women. Gulabo's vision of him is accompanied by the sound of music that is not from any of his songs. It is from one of her own songs. To understand the film's concluding notes, we must go back to three songs that are sung not by Vijay but that are sung to him, by women.

While Vijay has been performing in public spaces to large, assembled audiences, these three women's songs took place in private, intimate settings and were performed by Gulabo, Meena, and the one whose music ends the film, a religious street singer. Instead of being addressed to the nation, or to the world in the abstract, each of these songs takes the form of one half of a duet, actual or imagined, in dialogue with a single other. But the crisis of expression explored in Vijay's songs, its central motif of a lone voice, is not overcome or redeemed in these songs but persists in a parallel register. Their songs provide an alternative frame of this crisis, working through the problems of the expression of self in language and perception, not through the relationship between self and society, but through the exploration of the verbal and visual relationship of a couple.

The first of the three—in fact the first song of the film—is sung by Gulabo to Vijay. They meet at night when he overhears her reciting a poem of his. She has salvaged his poems from the

junk seller, and her singing of his verse offers the first sign in the film that his words have the power to reach another. In fact, their whole relationship will be formed and conducted through his words and her appreciation and caretaking of them. As Vijay calls out to her, she stops reciting his verse and turns toward him. Picking up on his call to her "*suno, maine kaha*," "listen, I say"—she breaks into another song, seeming to improvise as she sings,

Who knows what you said?	*Jaane kya tune kaha*
Who knows what I heard?	*Jaane kya maine suna,*
Something transpired between us	*Baat kuch ban hi gayi*

Figure 2.18 Still from Pyaasa (Dutt, 1957)

The encounter described by the song is framed as an immediate attraction, an agreement realized without words, without regard to (or at least without memory of) their meaning or specificity.

Silence prevailed	*Sansanhat si hui*
A beating was heard	*Thartharahat si hui*
Some dreams awoke–	*Jaag uthe khwab kai*
Something transpired between us	*Baat kuch ban hi gayi*

Locks of hair fall on the shoulder	*Zulf shaane pe mude*
A scent rises up	*Ek khusboo si udi*
Some secrets open up–	*Khul gaye raaz kayi*
Something transpired between us	*Baat kuch ban hi gayi*

The short rhythmic verses describe momentary gestures, of eyes coyly dropping, feet gently lifting, hair falling on a shoulder, and their subject-less phrasing conveys a dissolution of boundaries between persons and bodies, the experience not individuated, but fully, sensually, shared. The song suggests a mood and a field of perception between the couple that is not actually fulfilled by Vijay and Gulabo. The song is framed through close-ups of Gulabo singing that are not quite in Vijay's perspective. They do follow his gaze, but they offer the camera an intimacy with her that is not available to him and present her power and presence in a way he seems as yet blind to. The song holds out a vision of an ideal redemptive love, its lyrics promising the rising of new dreams, the release of secrets, a sense of freedom and awakening. But as she leads him through the streets, we intuit that she is a prostitute who has assessed him as a possible customer, and this awareness taints the hopefulness of the song. The song ends abruptly with a change of voice and tone on the part of both Gulabo and Vijay, as she climbs a staircase, and he follows her. She gets irritated at his not really being a customer, and he gets impatient with her denial of knowledge of his poetry. The song fails to actualize its vision.

Figure 2.19 Still from Pyaasa (Dutt, 1957)

The dislocation of perception between the couple is explored fully in the one song that Vijay and Meena sing together. Their song is presented sandwiched within the episode of their chance meeting in the elevator of the publishing house. There, in that confined space, the camera dramatizes the failure of their relationship through varying visual frames: through moving point-of-view shots that place us in both of their subject positions, isolating one from the other; through two-shot compositions where they look past each other, and their eyes don't quite meet; and through reflections, with Vijay looking at Meena's reflection rather than at her face directly. If one looks, the other looks away. Their glances at each other are not sustained, their views of each other not able to include the other, that is, not able to accept and bear the other's view of themselves.

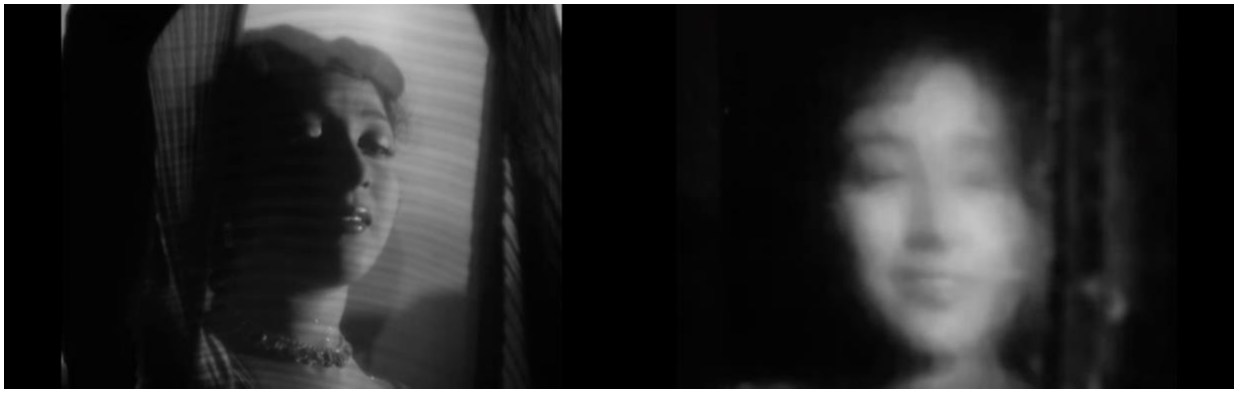

Figure 2.20 Stills from Pyaasa (Dutt, 1957)

This mismatch of looks leads to a flashback, and within the flashback, to a duet, where there is a deliberate misdirection of words. Their inability to sustain a perception of each other is matched by their inability to sustain a conversation. The conversations between Meena and Vijay throughout the film are stilted, and their words flow only in those instances of communication that are safely unidirectional, such as in letters, poems or in speeches that one can give to another, where one is protected and insulated from the other. In this, their one duet, which ought to offer an opportunity for the exchange of words between a couple, the exchange is undercut, both in the presentation and in the content of the song. The song is separated from the diegetic present by two layers. It is reached through two dissolves initiated by Vijay's fantasy—the first from within the elevator through Meena's reflection to a scene from their past, and then from that memory into a fantasy that Vijay had at the time, as he looked on at a party of dancing couples. It is in this fantasy that the duet occurs. Both dissolves involve him drifting into memory and then into fantasy, falling into a private dream, avoiding Meena's look.

The duet takes place on a celestial stage set, brimming over with unmoored romantic symbols: balloons, glitter, mist, billowing curtains. The song is structured as a call and response:

Vijay: *What if in your eyes*
I reside my heart?
Meena: *What if I trap your heart*
by blinking my eyes?

Vijay: *Hum aapki aakhon mein*
Iss dil basa de toh
Meena: *Hum moond ke palkon ko*
Iss dil ko saza de toh

Vijay*: In your hair, I will tie*
flowers of love.
Meena*: What if by swaying my hair*

Vijay*: In zulfon mein gundenge*
Hum phool mohabbat ke
Meena*: Zulfon ko jhatak kar*

I drop your flowers?

Hum yeh phool gira de toh

Vijay*: I will bring you into my dreams*

and tease you

Meena*: What if from your eyes*

I erase all sleep?

Vijay*: Hum aapko khwabon mein la*

La satayenge

Meena*: Hum aapki aakhon se*

Neende hi uradein toh

Figure 2.21 Stills from Pyaasa (Dutt, 1957)

In the song, Vijay's words of love are met with a resistance that he doesn't acknowledge. He wants to rest his heart in her eyes. She threatens to punish him by closing her eyes. He wants to tie flowers of love in her hair. She shakes them off and lets them fall. He tries to bring her into his dreams; she threatens to blow away his sleep. He will fall in a faint at her feet; she will not fan him awake. He persists in his declarations as she drifts further away, echoing the dynamic of Gulabo's song, with its pattern of approach and distance between the couple.

Figure 2.22 Still from Pyaasa (Dutt, 1957)

As they sing, the couple dance stiffly, not quite meeting each other's eyes or arms, amid clouds, behind veils. They are shown each to be trapped in their privacy, failing to find a common intersubjective ground of speech or gaze. At the end of the song, she dances away from him, ascending heavenly stairs, and at the end of the elevator scene a few shots later, as he exits the elevator, she says she has forgotten that she was to go upstairs, and is left to ascend upwards, this time not into celestial clouds but trapped and jailed behind the grilled doors of the elevator—a jarring end to a jarring duet.

Daisy Rockwell in her essay, "Visionary Choreographies," brings out the irony of this song. However, her reading is that the song is an attack on "the hollowness of conventional love and the delusional quality of stylized expressions of devotion and affection," which assumes too easy a dismissal of more "conventional" love songs. My reading is that it is presenting the problems of this particular romantic relationship through a targeted ironic use of popular conventions. Where a similar duet in *Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi*, "Main Sitaron Ka Tarana" ("I am the melody of the stars") presents the possibility of a creative imagination that affirms the perception of the other, showing how individual subjective imagination can aid in viewing and seeing the other, this duet in *Pyaasa* sees imagination as drowning out real perception.

In both Gulabo's song and in the scenes and duet between Vijay and Meena, there were close-ups of the women that seemed to show Vijay's vision of the women, but in these close-ups, much more was revealed to us than to Vijay. In Gulabo's song, we sensed her tired and cynical inhabitation of the role required by her profession, but also, alongside that, her resources of playfulness and improvisation, her passion for and skill in poetry. In Meena, we witness her unexpressed longing, moral conflict, and unhappiness in her marriage. Vijay is not the sole conduit of our interest in the women, and in the third of the women's songs, "Aaj Sajan Mohe Ang Laga Lo" ("Today, lover, take me in your arms"), his point of view is completely abandoned, and he becomes instead the object of view for Gulabo and for us.

After a violent encounter with a client who refuses to pay, pushes her out of his car, and calls a policeman on her, Gulabo hurries through the street and runs into Vijay who protects her from the policeman's questions by referring to her as his wife. Not realizing the impact of this offhand remark on Gulabo, he leaves to walk up the stairs to a rooftop balcony, and as she sits despondently with her unexpressed love, a religious singer on the streets begins to perform, in this third version of a broken duet, a devotional song in the voice of mythic Radha addressing her lover Krishna. He, of course, does not respond, his voice being unavailable to be occupied from within the song. This setting and voice, which is a whole genre of its own within devotional music, is established in a preface to the song:

Suffering through the sadness of separation	*Sakhi, virha ke dukhde seh seh kar*
Radha was in a state of senselessness	*jab Radhe besudh ho li*
One day, she went to her lover and said–	*Toh ik din apne manmohan se jakar yoon boli–*
Today lover, take me in your arms. Make my life fruitful.	*Aaj sajan mohe ang laga le*

The song continues within Radha's speech about her search for love and contact with Krishna:

Today lover, take me in your arms	*Aaj sajan mohe ang laga lo*
My life will be fulfilled	*Janam saphal ho jaye*
The heart's pain, the body's fire	*Hriday ki peeda, deh ki agni*
They will all become calm	*Sab seetal ho jaye*
For many eras I have been awake	*Kai jug se hai jaage*
My eyes don't have the luck to see you	*More naine abhaage*
I don't feel like living without you	*Kahin jiya nahi laage bin tore*
I don't see happiness ahead of me	*Sukh dikhe nahi aage*
Sadness comes running after me	*Dukh piche piche bhaage*

Figure 2.23 Stills from Pyaasa (Dutt, 1957)

The singer's performance on the street is intercut with close-ups of a listening Gulabo, as she begins to follow Vijay up the stairwell. While in the last two songs, Vijay looks on to an ascending woman on a staircase, here, the dynamic is inverted. This song continues the previous women's songs' visual analysis of the kinds of separation possible between a couple. Through both intercut parallel shots and in fluid long-takes, the camera provides a study of the emotional and perceptual barriers between Vijay and Gulabo, one unaware of the other, and one unable and unwilling to reach the other.

The song, in its expressions of an age-long loneliness and the pursuing shadow of sadness, shares the sense of despondence and entrapment of Vijay's songs, with an equal sense of the burden of inescapable subjectivity—the first-person voice feels captive within itself. But a new kind of ease and release also seems to be allowed by the song. This song is the one song of the film that is not sung by any of the main characters, and its vocabulary stands apart, deriving from a folk tradition and dialect different from Vijay's poetry. Instead of Vijay's isolated personal compositions, the religious song draws on the vocabulary, characters and situations that are more securely and collectively shared. And unlike Vijay's anxious relation to his audiences, whom he tries to collect and who turn against him, the religious singer has an assured audience. People are shown gathered on the streets for her performance.

Figure 2.24 Stills from Pyaasa (Dutt, 1957)

Gulabo is not part of this depicted street audience. She stands apart in an adjacent unconnected space, but she still feeds off the song. Through the voice of the street singer, a particular kind of relief comes to Gulabo, the release in the externalization provided by an expressive voice.

Each of the three women's songs of *Pyaasa* is sung by Geeta Dutt. A recurring singer in Guru Dutt's films, singing for many of its central female characters, Geeta Dutt is a key agential voice in defining the mood and style of his filmic oeuvre. While these women's songs in *Pyaasa* are not narratively bound together in the figure of a competing female poet, Geeta Dutt's voice carries some of the qualities of a competing authorial presence. Existing scholarship on lip-syncing by female singers understands it primarily as the layering of an idealized female body with an idealized female voice. Within the limits of this model of lip-syncing, the fact that the three songs sung by female characters are all voiced by one playback singer would be seen as a conflation of femininity, projecting an image of a unified ideological Indian femininity, one that drowns out individual women.[14] But to see the singer as merely instrumental in the exhibition of a stereotyped gendered self is to miss her active intervening presence in the film, and to misunderstand the work of the voice. The way a camera works as a means of framing, dramatizing, and giving significance to the presented objects, so can the singer be understood to be providing a perspective, to be inhabiting and exploring the internal states of mind. The singer's voice coming from elsewhere floats over Gulabo's face, seeming to understand her, to express and speak for her, allowing her to lean on the voice. That the religious singer and Gulabo are not in the same visual space highlights the power of

[14] Most essays on this topic focus only on the case of sister singers Lata Mangeshkar and Asha Bhosle and the virgin-vamp gendered discourse around their styles of singing, and this gets treated as the main, often only, understanding of the playback convention. See Neepa Majumdar, "The Embodied Voice: Song Sequences and Stardom in Bombay Cinema," 194; Vijay Mishra, *Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire*, 166-168; Sanjay Srivastava, "Voice, Gender and Space in Time of Five-Year Plans: The Idea of Lata Mangeshkar"; Pavitra Sundar, "Gender, Bawdiness and Bodily Voices: Bombay Cinema's Audiovisual Contract and the Ethnic Woman.'"

the voice that can travel over frames. In thus emphasizing the acts of singing and receptive listening, the song enacts the very work of the playback singer, dramatizing the donation of the expressive powers of the voice to the responsive emoting body and face of the actor.[15]

Interweaving then the presence and perspectives of four different women—the mythical Radha, the street singer who embodies her, Gulabo whose thoughts the song expresses, and the actual playback singer, Geeta Dutt—it is not surprising that this song contains the film's one allusion to its title in the feminine form: "pyaasi"—i.e. "thirsty" but with a feminine noun: "a thirsty woman." The verse goes,

Make me yours, hold my arms	*Mohe apna bana lo, more bahan pakad*
I am a servant of the ages	*Main hoon janam janam ki daasi*
Slake my thirst, Lord Krishna, mountain-mover	*More pyaas bujha do, manhar Girdhar*
I am thirsty in my depths	*Main hoon antar ghat ki pyaasi*
My love, my dark one	*Prem Sudha, More Sawariyaan*
Make it rain so that the world water-filled becomes	*Itni barsa do jag jal thal ho jaye*

Alongside the invocation of the titular thirst, we find a counter image to the burning of the world that Vijay demands in his last song. The natural remedy to thirst is water, not fire, and here the water is sought not only for one thirsty individual but for all the world via the blessing of rain,

[15] Another example of the rescue through expression that lies in the songs, and that allows for the transformation of streets through words to take place, is the song "Sar Jo Takraye" ("When your head spins"). Mohammad Rafi, one of the two singers for Vijay, also sings for Johnny Walker, who often plays the comic companion to the melancholic Dutt in his films. In *Pyaasa*, Walker plays Sattar, a street masseur who is the one figure of sanity and undampened cheer in the film. A friend to Vijay, he mediates between Gulabo and Vijay, is the one who frees him from prison, saves him from the mob, in general, acts as the guardian of Dutt's life energies. His qualities are condensed in the song through which he enters the film, in the evening mist, limping in under the streetlights:

When your head spins, and your heart is sinking
Come my love, to me, why are you worried?

While continuing the film's mood of heart-sinking suffering, the song suggests that a simple head massage could solve one's pain, providing an instance of healing bodily contact between people.

with the plea for the world to become filled—fulfilled—with water. Both Vijay's world-catastrophic command and the religious singer's world-redeeming plea happen in words, which form the imaginative field of action of the film.

Krishna's epithet "sawariyaan," "the dark one" (that is, dark in skin-color; the Christian connotation of an evil being is entirely absent) is stretched out in Geeta Dutt's singing, as the camera tracks back from Gulabo's face to frame her and Vijay on the roof of the terrace. The answer to the titular crisis in this song is an achievement of communion with another person, with both the divinity and the humanity of another person, one that holds the promise of a state of redemption for the whole world. And the embrace that is longed for and sought in this song does get an ambivalent fulfillment in the film's last scene with Vijay and Gulabo, when the melody and drumbeat of this song is reprised. Gulabo rushes down the staircase of her building, reversing the upward inaccessible movement of the earlier staircase scenes, and as she rushes toward Vijay and finally falls into his arms, there is a series of cuts between the two faces, in which Vijay is shown standing still by the doorway, and the movement and energy all come from Gulabo. Though Vijay seems to have sought her out by coming to her house, he doesn't call out her name, silent as he has now become. The need for a voiced expression is transcended, for without him calling, she hears him. This final alternation of shots places us in Gulabo's perspective, and the music appears in a crescendo of her desire for him. It is not Gulabo who is framed as Vijay's refuge but he as hers. She accepts Vijay's barely pronounced desire to leave and for her to accompany him on his undefined journey. The last image of this couple, walking into what could be the misty light of either daybreak or nightfall, not into the world together with renewed purpose, but out of it with shared abandon, offers an ambiguous answer to the film's crisis.

And this ambiguity is present in the song itself for it remains an incomplete duet, framed as a speech to another whose voice is longed for but whose reply is never heard. Here the beloved is

elevated to a deity, both desired and embodied, but also metaphysically afar. This mixing of the erotic and the religious is typical of the devotional tradition. Radha's desire for the embrace of Krishna is the desire for divinity, for religious transcendence, offering, on one object, the mythic satisfaction of both physical and spiritual desire. While this song engages in these fantasies of ultimate fulfillment, there is also an underlying sense of the assured metaphysical separation and defeat.

None of these three women's songs in their failed versions of the duet offer the cure to the state of loneliness and thirst in the film; they only express it through another inflection, focusing not on the world but on an idea of another individual. For these songs only yearn for and dramatize the condition of the duet, never quite achieving it, and they are marked by a sense of the impossibility of enacting an encounter. The wide canvas of the world is narrowed to an interpersonal individual encounter. Instead of Vijay's expression of the fantasies and failures of the relation between the self and the world, they are about the fantasies and failures of the relation between the self and other people. Though they provide a different dynamic from Vijay's songs, they equally convey a sense of trapped subjectivity while also offering, out of the failures, a poetic release.

Chapter Three:
Songs of the Tramps: *Awara* (1951), *Shree 420* (1955), *C.I.D.* (1956), *Guide* (1965)

I.

Figure 3.1 Still from Awara (Kapoor, 1951)

A popular anecdote about the 1951 film *Awara* (*Vagabond)* is related by its screenwriter K.A. Abbas. He and the actor-director Raj Kapoor had invited the lyricist Shailendra to hear the story of the film.[1] This was the customary practice in the Bombay film industry, as the songs would often be written, composed, and recorded before the shooting of the film began, and the film would consequently grow around them. They told Shailendra of the many travails undergone by the titular young vagabond. He, though born to a judge, is forced to grow up in the slums of Bombay. His mother, falsely accused of adultery by her husband, had been driven away and had raised her son on her own, striving to make a living and educate him, but when he's still a child, she falls sick and is unable to support them. He turns to theft and crime to survive, but after falling in love with his childhood friend—who happens to be the ward of his father, the judge, and has grown up to be a lawyer—he strives to renounce his criminal ways, but social forces stand in his way. In the climax of the film, all three—the judge, lawyer, criminal—confront each other in a courtroom where their

[1] As related in Kumar, Anuj. "People's Poet," *The Hindu,* August 02, 2012.

relations are brought to light. Asked for his thoughts on the story and character, the lyricist responded concisely with a line of poetry:

He was a vagabond	*Awara tha.*
Turning on the horizon	*Gardish mein tha,*
A star in the sky	*Aasmaan ka taara tha*

The word *awara* is a derogatory term, carrying connotations of homelessness, vagrancy, and crime. The phrase in the second line, which I've translated as "turning on the horizon" comes from an idiom in Urdu, "gardish main hona" ("to be in revolution") which implies both instability, in the sense of being turned around, and misfortune, in the sense of there being a disturbance in one's stars. The lyric conveys the feeling of being at the mercy of one's fortune, in a state of chaos and uncertainty, but its final line contains a sudden upward movement which allows for a liberating redefinition of an *awara* as a travelling star. This lyric becomes the famous title song of the film—"Awara Hoon" ("I'm a vagabond")—the words now in a direct first-person present-tense. Coming in a moment of self-declaration, they become the bold gesture of a vagabond vaulting himself into the heavens.

The song comes about a third of the way into the film after a flashback sequence to the *awara's* childhood. His first crime is committed one night when, faced with a feverish and starving mother, he is driven in desperation to steal bread but is caught. At the children's prison, he is given food, and clutching the bread that they hand to him, he starts laughing at the irony. The sound that emerges out of the young boy's mouth is dissonantly an adult sound, forming a disturbing eruption of experience onto the face of childhood. His face dissolves into that of Raj Kapoor, still in a prison outfit and laughing over a piece of bread. We learn that he has spent his adolescence in and out of prison. Now, released from this most recent stint, he walks out and starts the title song, which is sung by Kapoor's long-time collaborator singer Mukesh.

Figure 3.2 Still from Awara (Kapoor, 1951)

Placed at the end of adolescence, which involves a taking on of social realities beyond the individual, the song contains an underlying political critique against the society that has marginalized such an individual and such a condition, but it is primarily a song of the self, enacting its power to name and to voice its condition, to find freedom from social imposition by an act of self-declaration. The appeal of the song lies in this urgent and intimate register of the first-person. And this individual self is one that seems newly aware and responsive to a sense of publicness and community. Unlike the songs typical of this era that were sung either in complete privacy, alone or with a lover, or were sung publicly to an already assembled audience, like on stage, this song starts and ends the individual alone—but along the way he encounters and addresses others and so makes an audience out on the city streets.

"Awara Hoon" became one of the most enduring images of Bombay cinema. The song gained a significant international following in the 1950s in the Soviet Union, China, Israel, Egypt, Turkey, Nigeria, Zanzibar, and Greece—all non-Western countries, many of which were in a position similar to fifties era India in one way or the other: socialist, postcolonial, newly democratic.[2]

[2] There is a fascinating body of work around *Awara's* global reception. See Sudha Rajagopalan, *Indian Films in Soviet Cinemas*; Anjali Gera Roy, "Indian Films in the USSR and Russia"; Dina Iordanova, "Indian Cinema's Global Reach"; Dimitris Eleftheriotis and Dina Iordanova, "Indian Cinema in the World"; Dimitris Eleftheriotis, "Films across Borders: Indian Films in Greece in the 1950s and 1960s"; Claire Cooley, "Soundscape of a National Cinema Industry: Filmfarsi and Its Sonic Connections with Egyptian and Indian Cinemas, 1940s–1960s"; Jie Li, "Gained in Translation: The

The classical era of Bombay cinema is a period conveniently bookended by major political events. On one end, in 1947, there is the Independence and Partition of India and Pakistan, the establishment of democratic government, and the ascension of statesman Jawaharlal Nehru as prime minster. On the other end there is the loss of the Indo-China war in 1962 and the death of Nehru in 1964. We can also mark it by events internal to film technology and production: on one end, the consolidation of the convention of playback singing and on the other, the arrival of color.

In this chapter, I will study "Awara Hoon" in relation to three other songs of the era, which I consider together as a mini-genre—a genre not of films but of film songs, where, as shall be later elaborated, a genre is understood to be working out a particular set of questions at a particular point in political history and the history of the aesthetic medium. These songs are often taken as representative of this period of Bombay cinema, and in this chapter, I will explore the kind of political possibilities and reflections that are being carried out by these songs and discuss how the idea of representativeness—the role of first-person expression of an individual in representing a community—is itself the theme of the songs. This decade of new democracy provided conditions under which ideas of the relation between individual and community took on a powerful and energizing force, and I will argue that a new kind of political voice is achieved by these songs that rests on and is shaped by the cinematic and poetic power of the form of the song sequence.

II.

Awara opens in a courtroom; the main narrative being given as a flashback. On trial is the *awara*, played by Raj Kapoor, for the attempted murder of a judge, played by Prithviraj Kapoor, and the

Reception of Foreign Cinema in Mao's China"; Krista Van Fleit Hang, "'The Law Has No Conscience': The Cultural Construction of Justice and the Reception of 'Awara in China."; Ahmet Gurata, "'The Road to Vagrancy': Translation and Reception of Indian Cinema in Turkey"; Brian Larkin, "Indian Films and Nigerian Lovers: Media and the Creation of Parallel Modernities."

guiding narrative and moral question of the film, as raised by his lawyer and lover, played by Nargis, is what possible relation there can be between a prison-frequenting *awara* and a well-respected judge. It will turn out to be those of the most intimate kind, that of blood: Prithviraj Kapoor being Raj Kapoor's father in the film as in reality. The father must recognize the son, just as the judge must recognize the criminal as his own creation.

Apart from a few words, the *awara* remains mute behind bars in the opening sequence. After the flashback to the circumstances of his birth are unfolded through his father's narrated memory, he reappears as the grown son, regaining his unbarred face and his voice to sing "Awara Hoon." It is only when we return to the trial in the final section of the film that he is given the opportunity to speak in his defense. The speech he gives sums up the film's position on the social construction of criminality and the need for the equal access to employment and education:

> After becoming a murderer, I have got this much freedom that I can reach my voice to your ears. If you had heard me before, maybe I wouldn't be in this situation. I'm a vagabond, murderer, criminal. But even if you hung me, you would not get rid of the disease of crime. The germs of crime came not from my birth, but from the gutter I grew up in. The gutter is still there, and the seeds of crime are still being sown. And countless children who live there are becoming prey to it.

It has been widely recognized that Bombay cinema is responding to the political condition under the new nation, and the discussion of the political dimensions of its films typically read in terms of its representation of the Nehruvian state, either as endorsing its institutions and norms, or as critiquing the continuing presence of inequality and oppression. *Awara* has been studied as doing both, affirming its ideals as well as expressing disappointment over its failures, but it is often read as

resting its political faith, however wavering, ultimately in its institutions of legal and social reform.[3] Under this reading, the film participates in what political theorist Sudipta Kaviraj has termed the "strange enchantment with the modern state" in Indian politics, with the state being "implicitly invoked in every demand for justice, equality, dignity, and assistance" and becoming "the repository of people's moral aspirations."[4]

But perhaps this enchantment with an idea of the state is more in the criticism of the film than in the film. The politics of *Awara*, and the politics of film in general, cannot be summed up in the content of a didactic speech. There's a reason that what has remained in memory and film history is not this speech but a line of a song and an image of an individual out on the streets. The song offers a different entry into the questions of the films' engagement with politics—one that comes not in the form of the prose in legal discourse but in that of poetry and song, and perhaps in attending to this valence of film songs, we can start to see them as another kind of repository for people's moral aspirations.

The faith, aesthetic, moral as well as political, of *Awara* seems to lie in the character's capacity for expression, in film's capacity to create such a moment. In court, Raj voices his sense of injustice. In the song, instead of an argument, there is a poetic and political act of self-definition. In the courtroom, the concern is with the content of the speech. In the song, what matters is the having of a voice. The achievement of the song needs to be understood in a different political register, one that considers the central possibility opened up by the technique of the song sequence—the emphasis on the capacity of voicing oneself.

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[3] See, for example, discussions of *Awara* in Priya Joshi, "Cinema as Public Fantasy"; Samir Dayal. "The Wish to Belong, the Desire to Desire: The Emergent Citizen and the Hindi 'Social' in Raj Kapoor's *Awaara*.; Wimal Dissanayake and Malti Sahai, *Raj Kapoor's Films, Harmony of Discourses*; Michael Hoffheimer, "*Awara* and the post-colonial origins of the Hindi law drama"; Ravi Vasudevan, "Addressing the Spectator of a 'Third World' National Cinema: The Bombay 'Social' Film of the 1940s and 1950s."

[4] Sudipta Kaviraj, "On the Enchantment of the State: Indian Thought on the Role of the State in the Narrative of Modernity," 295.

Stanley Cavell's "moral perfectionism" offers a framework to explore the nature of the political authority of an individual voice. It provides a way to understand the political sphere outside of state-centered politics, concerning itself not with the dominant deontological theories of rights, duties, and principles or the utilitarian theories of the maximization of pleasure and distribution of goods, but with individual ethical and moral self-examination. The focus is not so much about voicing specific complaints against society but about what it means to have a political voice at all, to be capable of speaking representatively.

Cavell describes moral perfectionism as "a dimension of moral life" concerned with "the state of one's soul, a dimension that places tremendous burdens on personal relationships and the possibility or necessity of the transforming of oneself and of one's society."[5] Through his interpretations of Emerson as well as a range of other philosophical texts, films, and plays, Cavell draws out a model of moral thinking that pictures the self as on a journey of change and re-invention, toward an idea of its better self. He writes,

> there is no question of reaching a final state of the soul but only and endlessly taking the next step to what Emerson calls an "unattained but attainable self"—a self that is always and never ours—a step that turns not from bad to good, but from confusion and constriction toward self-knowledge and sociability.[6]

This examination and judgement of the self on its own self does not, and cannot, take place in isolation but demands cultivating a responsiveness to others and taking on the responsibility of its society.

While Cavell often expresses his dismay that Emerson is not sufficiently recognized as a serious philosopher and a foundational thinker of America, Emerson's influential status as a thinker

[5] Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 2.
[6] Cavell, *Cities of Words,* 13.

of democracy and modern selfhood is quite well-recorded in spheres outside academic philosophy—and far beyond America. His writings were by no means incidental in shaping ideas of democratic and social revolutionary thought in modern India, forming one of the many strands harnessed by the philosophically expansive and politically capacious project of Indian self-determination that was underway in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Jawaharlal Nehru quotes long passages from Emerson's essays in his 1942 *Discovery of India* describing the need for India to seek and cultivate a sense of self without imitation, and there are strong resonances of Emerson's "self-reliance" in Gandhi's mobilization of the term *swaraj* (self-rule), a defining concept of the Independence movement. Gandhi deliberately played on the double ambiguity of the reflexive *swa*, where the self may refer either the nation or the individual, suggesting the necessity of the simultaneous processes of achieving alongside national self-determination, a moral self-mastery.[7]

Cavell's concept of moral perfectionism finds its initial motivation, even its name, through a critique of a work of political theory—John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice,* in which Rawls dismisses as undemocratic a type of philosophical thought he terms "perfectionism" which he finds exemplified in Nietzsche's writings (beneath whom Cavell excavates Emerson's influence). Understanding this type of thought as a concern with self-improvement, Rawls accuses it of a desire to foster an aristocratic cultured class deserving a larger share in the distribution of goods. Cavell seeks to counter this charge, by showing how this focus on the self, far from fostering elitism, suggests an element that is essential to the critique of democracy from within, to what he calls, modifying Rawls' title, "a conversation of justice."[8]

[7] See Ananya Vajpayi's discussion of the connotations of *swaraj* in her book *Righteous Republic: The Political Foundations of Modern India.*
[8] Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome,* xxxii.

Cavell argues that Rawls, in his theorizing of democracy, is primarily interested in the processes by which the principles of social organization can be decided fairly, and he posits an ideal "conversation of justice," where these decisions would be derived from universal, rational, and objective judgments. Rawls suggests a thought experiment in which this conversation occurs under a "veil of ignorance," where no participant in the conversation would know who they are going to end up being—including gender, class, or race—in the society to be established. This, Rawls believes, taking as innate and inevitable a model of rational self-interest, would lead to the foundation of the most egalitarian democratic principles.

Cavell, through his formulation of perfectionism, offers a different idea of voice from Rawls' idealized conversation. His use of the word "voice" derives from multiple philosophical interests: Wittgenstein's derivation of our shared attunement in language; Austin's attention to our ordinary mastery of our language, our lived confidence in naming and speaking about our ordinary world and being responsible for our words to others; Kant's notion of an aesthetic judgment and *sensus communis*, where an individual speaks in a "universal voice." In each case, and cumulatively in Cavell's philosophy, the idea of a "voice" emphasizes the role of language and expression and requires a revision of our understanding of how the self finds its community, where the claim to speak for others is grounded in one's subjective experience: "the community, rather than its existence being taken for granted, is always in the process of forming itself in every word."[9] Society is not conceived as an aggregate of private individuals coming together in a public space, for the private and public cannot be easily separated and established. They are formed together, at one and the same time, something in the nature of *swaraj*—"the constitution of the public," requiring, in Emerson's words,

[9] Cavell, "Interview with Paul Standish," 158.

at the same time, the "institution of the private."[10] There is a continuous back and forth between self and society, where both are not fixed but under transience, and it is a necessity as well as a responsibility for the self to speak for its society, to represent it.

What Rawls would view as individual "bias," the anchoring of our thoughts and lives in a finite viewpoint, Cavell understands as the necessary "partiality" of our human condition, which is not to be judged as "unavoidable" but acknowledged as forming the basis of the possibility of conversation—it being conceivable only between two separated beings in the midst of their lives. In an essay, comparing Cavell's concept of justice with Rawls's, Naoko Saito argues that Cavell's notion of the self is radically different from that of the traditional political theorists, who emphasize the autonomy of the self and its ability in freedom to make and follow laws, rationally, impartially. Instead, in Cavell, she writes, "The autonomy of the self is replaced by a *singularity* of the self, and solidarity by *separateness*. Justice calls upon us not to lose our partiality, but to become representative of human partiality." [11]

Cavell frames the democratic commitment of moral perfectionism not in terms of an ideal of the equality of rights of individuals but through an understanding of "representativeness," which indicates a more fundamental recognition of mutuality where "each one of us is to be seen as a representative for each of us."[12] This forms the grounds of possibility of democratic conversation. Democracy calls for a political optimism, involving a belief in the capacity of the self to voice itself and affirming the necessity of the grounding of that voice in a shared community. As he frames it,

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[10] "For Emerson you could say both that this requires a constitution of the public and at the same time an institution of the private, a new obligation to think for ourselves, to make ourselves intelligible, in every word," Ibid*,* 45.
[11] Naoko Saito, "The Conversation of Justice: Rawls, Sandel, Cavell, and Education for Political Literacy," 12
Saito's essay is only one of a growing body of research on Cavell's philosophy of democracy. See also Andrew Norris, *Becoming Who We Are: Politics and Practical Philosophy in the Work of Stanley Cavell*; Aletta J. Norval, *Aversive Democracy: Inheritance and Originality in the Democratic Tradition; Wolfe, Cary et al. "The Political Theory of Stanley Cavell.";* Linda M. G. Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment;* Andrew Norris et al., *The Claim to Community: Essays on Stanley Cavell and Political Philosophy.*
[12] Cavell, *Conditions,* 9.

> [The] doubt of the existence of consent, hence of the legitimacy— hence of the existence— of society, is never permanently resolved, strikes me as revelatory of the nature of democracy: of the sense that in a democracy our public and our private lives stand to compromise each other, can as it were be ashamed of each other, that I owe to my society a meet and cheerful exchange to reaffirm my consent, or else a willingness to articulate the public causes of my unhappiness.[13]

Political depression then manifests as a sense of inexpressiveness, suffocation, and voicelessness—as my reading of *Pyaasa* has also borne out. As Cavell writes,[14]

> We do not know in advance what the content of our mutual acceptance is, how far we may be in agreement, how far responsibility for the language may run. But if I am to speak in my own voice, I must be speaking for others and allow others to speak for me. The alternative…is not: speaking for myself privately. The alternative is having nothing to say, being voiceless, not even mute.[15]

Moral thinking, under this understanding, is not a process of giving reasons, making arguments, explaining choices based on principles, but a process of self-examination and making an expressive declaration. Cavell writes, "Moral Perfectionism's contribution to thinking about the moral necessity of making oneself intelligible (one's actions, one's sufferings, one's position) is, I think it can be said, its emphasis before all on becoming intelligible to oneself."[16] This making oneself intelligible—to oneself and to others—puts pressure on self-expression, of finding ways to speak in first-person that call up a community and make oneself representative.

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[13] Ibid, 68.
[14] Ibid, xxxi.
[15] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason,* 28.
[16] Ibid, xxxi.

Again, there are resonances with Indian thought and politics. In an essay on Gandhi's political philosophy, Akeel Bilgrami observes something similar in Gandhi's emphasis on "the power of exemplary actions to generate a moral community".[17] He describes Gandhi as overturning a dominant strand of moral philosophy that frames moral acts as choices and can be described in a dictum along the lines of Kant's categorical imperative, "When one chooses for oneself, one chooses for everyone."

> In Gandhi's writing there is an implicit but bold proposal: "When one chooses for oneself, one sets an example to everyone.' That is the role of the *satyagrahi* [Gandhi's term for the ideal political self, a non-violent fighter for Truth]. To lead exemplary lives, to set examples to everyone by their actions. And the concept of the exemplar is intended to provide a wholesale alternative to the concept of principle in moral philosophy.[18]

The focus for Gandhi, as for Emerson and Cavell, is on the individual self, on the embodiment of a life in character, where the locus of dissent is not the contesting of choices and principles, but exemplary expression and behavior.

Film, whose inherent democratic constitution is another theme for Cavell, does not produce *satyagrahis* nor elected representatives.[19] But as a medium that is deeply invested in our moral imagination, it trades on an idea of the exemplar in its registering of individuality in the cinematic star, where stardom is conceived not as a product of beauty or glamor, as much as a power of self-invention. As Cavell suggestively frames it, "it is a democratic claim to personal freedom."[20]

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[17] Akeel Bilgrami, "Gandhi, the Philosopher," 4163.
[18] Ibid, 4162.
[19] For one Cavellian account of film as a "moving image of democracy," see Davide Panagia, "Attending to Film: *The World Viewed* and Cinematic Political Thinking."
[20] Stanley Cavell, *Contesting Tears,* 128. Another version of this idea is found in *The World Viewed,* "The general difference between a film type and a stage type is that the individuality captured on film naturally takes precedence over the social role in which that individuality gets expressed. Because on film social role appears arbitrary or incidental, movies have an inherent tendency toward the democratic, or anyway the idea of human equality." A parenthetical remark follows: "But

Apart from "Awara Hoon," *Awara* has other songs that display a relation of the self to its community, like the boatmen's warning song to the judge, "Hoshiyar" ("Beware") or the song, "Pativrata Sita Mayi" ("Virtuous Mother Sita"), which acts as a chorus to the sequence in which Raj's mother getting turned out of the house into the streets. In both those songs, there is also a strong individual voice, but it comes enmeshed in its community, its words echoed and strengthened by a group of other voices. In the presentation and structure of the songs, the individual's voice is secured by the backing of a chorus, assured of its position in a community. In "Awara Hoon," the individual voice calls out, without any guarantee of a response. Embodied in the star Raj Kapoor, it speaks in first person, partial and impassioned but seeking to be representative. It enacts the moment of finding oneself in the midst of society, stained with sin, intimate with inequities, having to negotiate the public world and find one's voice within it.

III.

Figure 3.3 Still from Shree 420 (Kapoor, 1955)

The latent political resonance of "Awara Hoon" is brought to the fore in another song written by Shailendra in the 1955 film *Shree* 420 (*Gentleman Thief*), in which Raj Kapoor reappears in his

because of film's equally natural attraction to crowds, it has opposite tendencies toward the fascistic or populistic." Cavell, *World Viewed,* 34-5.

tramp outfit from *Awara*, with the addition of a bindle, on a country road, migrating to Bombay for work. After failing to obtain a ride in a rich man's car, he again sets out walking towards the city, and, addressing his shoes playfully, he starts this song "Mera Joota Hai Japani" ("My Shoes are Japanese"). Starting initially on his own, he addresses other varied migrants on his way, this time explicitly calling up ideas about the nation and the identity of its new citizenry:

My shoes are Japanese	*Mera joota hai japani*
These pants English	*Yeh patloon inglistani*
On my head is a red Russian cap	*Sar pe lal topi russi*
Yet my heart is Hindustani[21]	*Phir bhi dil ha hindustanti*
I have gone forth on this open road	*Nikal pade hain khuli sadak par*
Resolute and proud	*Apna seena taane*
Where to go, where to stop	*Manzil kahan, kahan rukna hai*
Only the One Above knows	*Uparwala jaane*

Figure 3.4. Still from C.I.D. (Khosla, 1956)

[21] The identity of *Hindustani* (of Hindustan) is not a religious term but carries connotations of a land and heritage shared by Hindus and Muslims alike, prior to the British conception of India, via their shared language of "Hindustani," a term that, since then, has lost to the ideologically motivated split between "Hindi" and "Urdu." See Manan Ahmed Asif, *The Loss of Hindustan: The Invention of India.*

A third song from the 1956 noir *C.I.D.* (as in Criminal Investigation Department), "Yeh Hai Bombay Meri Jaan" ("This is Bombay, My Life") references these two songs of Raj Kapoor, though it is written by another lyricist, Majrooh Sultanpuri, and stars Johnny Walker, a character actor. Having inadvertently witnessed a murder, Walker is held for questioning overnight at a police station but is released in the morning after being identified as a mere pickpocket. As he walks out into the daylight, he sings a song that describes the hardships faced by the inhabitants of Bombay with its ethos of cutthroat ambition and its cruel fact pace set by the new industrial landscape, but as in the other two songs, these notes of suffering and social critique are framed within an attitude of resilience and cheerfulness:

O my heart, it's hard to live here	*Ae dil hai mushkil jeena yahan*
Be careful, be wary	*Zara hatke, zara bachke*
This is Bombay, my life	*Yeh hai Bombay meri jaan*
Here buildings, there trams	*Kahin building, kahin traamein*
Here motors, there mills	*Kahin motor, kahin mill*
Everything is found here	*Milta hai yahan sab kuch*
Except for a heart	*Ek milta nahin dil*
Not a name or sign of humanity	*Insaan ka nahin kahin naam-o-nishaan*

These three songs have often been put together, both in popular memory where they are considered definitive of this decade in Indian cinema, and in scholarship, where they are seen as responding to and articulating the lived experiences of industrial modernity and new national identity. Two recent essays, Manishita Dass's "Cinetopia" and Rochona Majumdar's 'Song-Time, The Time of Narratives," focus on the political potential particular to the song sequence, one they both designate as "utopic," as concerned with the imagination and experience of a condition of

justice, freedom, and equality in an ecstatic realization of the site of modern democratic citizenship. Dass discusses two of these songs, "Awara Hoon," and "Yeh Hai Bombay Meri Jaan," and places these in a larger category of street songs, depicting migrants, laborers, and the homeless. She reads them as emerging out of the influence of the leftist cultural organization IPTA (Indian People's Theatre Association) and its creative mix of folk-infused and agit-prop performance styles, and finds that this category of street songs aims to represent the experience of the city by the poor, to depict their social reality and also carve out a space for their self-expression and hope for change.[22] Majumdar, through a discussion of "Mera Joota Hai Japani," and "Yeh Hai Bombay Meri Jaan," argues that these songs in particular, and the songs of commercial Bombay cinema in general, offer an experience of a hybrid pan-Indian present, fulfilling the desire for a sense of an assimilated whole, of the past and present, tradition and modernity, a temporal affect that is irreducible to developmental narratives served by the state.[23] Both Dass and Majumdar locate the political potential of the songs in their mobilization of the properties of film: Dass sees cinematic space as allowing for the creation of an image of city and street life that is compositely and mythically drawn; Majumdar sees cinematic time as providing a liberatory sense of presentness that is nonetheless infused with layers of other temporal registers of the precolonial and colonial past and the future.

These accounts provide resonant and productive analyses of the songs as political explorations of a new democracy, but, as I have explored in the previous section, I am interested in emphasizing, instead of space and time, a cinematic aspect which is not usually taken as an index of cinematic specificity but is crucial to Bombay cinema: the voice. And to explore how these songs mobilize the idea of voice in presenting expressive acts of self-declarations, I will first show how

[22] Manishita Dass, "Cinetopia: Leftist Street Theatre and the Musical Production of the Metropolis in 1950s Bombay Cinema."
[23] Rochona Majumdar, "Song Time, the Time of Narratives, and the Changing Idea of Nation in Postindependence Cinema."

these three particular songs belong in a group of their own and, through narratively situated close readings of the three songs, elaborate on the very specific network of connections between them that give them meaning.

I think of these three songs as a "genre" in the Cavellian sense. As mentioned in my first chapter, Cavell conceives of "genre" as a "medium," i.e. a ground for the creation of meaning. In his work *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*, the idea of the genre of "remarriage" is a product of the work of criticism, arrived at through close readings of a set of seven films. Pre-existing categories like "women's films" or "screwball comedies" or "romantic comedies" don't shed light on the unique set of relations between these seven films. It is only through an attention to this specific intertextual network of connections that the meaning of the films, their philosophical investigations so to speak, can be understood. The films that make up a genre are, in Cavell's suggestive conception, inheriting, exploring and interpreting a myth.[24] In the case of the remarriage comedies, the myth is that of a married pair who quarrel, go through a divorce and a period of separation and have to find a way to get together again; and this myth has its philosophical significance for how self-knowledge and the knowledge of the world is to be achieved through a single relationship within the repetitions of ordinary life. But the myth is never definitively closed. There can be a range of other possible features and elaborations on it. In Cavell's terms a genre is not defined by an objective set of features; it is an open set where each member participates by contributing new features or varying old ones. But there can also be an end of a genre, when the genre seems to have reached a point of saturation and the life of its features seems exhausted.[25]

[24] Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 31. See also the extended discussion of genre-as-medium in his essay "The Fact of Television," 79-82.
[25] Cavell, *Pursuits*, 30.

I read these film songs as forming a genre, as working out internally a set of conditions, each song putting different pressures on different aspects of a myth. The chief subject of this myth is not the relations between a couple but the relations between the self and its community, and what the songs explore is a kind of political and moral self-enactment. This myth is explored through several shared characteristics: the characters' status as thieves and the association of the songs with the characters' stints in prison; their presentation of the representative individual, through stardom and the playback convention; the mobilization of the comedy and pathos of Chaplin's Tramp figure; the locale of the city; the emphasis on the walking gait of the body; the move from a private self-declaration to a public address and dialogue; and the entrance of women's voices. These characteristics form the subjects of the section.

IV.

In "Awara Hoon" and "Yeh Hai Bombay Meri Jaan," the songs are sung right at the moment of their leaving a prison, and in "Mera Joota Hai Japani,' this too happens in the reprise of the song. While Johnny Walker walks out of prison, stretching his arms in the morning light, the felt freedom from constraint is expressed strikingly by the feet of Raj Kapoor in both *Awara* and *Shree 420*. As the first notes of the song ring out of "Awara Hoon," the prison quarters dissolve into a busy footpath and the camera starts at ground-level before panning up to Kapoor's face. It singles out his shoes as he turns, left and right, a little hesitantly and a little threateningly, as he reclaims his inhabitation of the streets. In "Mera Joota Hai Japani," this same framing and camera movement is repeated and made explicit when before beginning the song, Kapoor, in a gesture of self-sufficiency after being refused a ride in a car, cheerfully addresses his own worn-out shoes, saying "chal beta japani" ("come my Japanese friends"). At the end of the film, after his stint as a "gentleman thief" is over and he is released from prison, he finds himself back in his old clothes and, this time with some resignation, he again addresses his shoes and repeats the song. The camera shows his feet, as they

turn uncertainly this way and that before marking a direction and regaining their initial sense of purpose and lightness of step.

Figure 3.5 Still from Awara (Kapoor, 1951)

The three songs come at a moment of reflection after an experience or threat of isolation and confinement, and with a sense of release and rediscovery of the characters' footing in society, they become a public declaration of freedom. They each exhibit and dramatize the finding of oneself back in the midst of a moving society: having to single oneself out within the flow of existing social bonds (*Awara*), or facing again the city in the morning with a new awareness of its night (*C.I.D.)*, or coming out into open uninhabited landscape, on an empty road under an expansive sky, and discovering that the bounds of the current society are limited, and its bonds can be redrawn into a new one (*Shree 420).*

Figure 3.6. Still from Shree 420 (Kapoor, 1955)

Our characters are all criminals—a pickpocket in *C.I.D.,* a smuggler and assorted thief of wallets, cars, and banks in *Awara*, and, at the biggest scale, a financial racketeer in *Shree 420*. They are far from being political prisoners, yet their prison experience seems to authorize a political critique and to be associated with a time of self-reflection. I read this as being socially and historically derived from the legacy of the anti-colonial nationalist movement, which involved the mass imprisonment of cultural and political leaders, granting those in prison a claim to a special critical perspective on the government. Two of the major texts of the movement, Gandhi's *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1922-29) and Nehru's *Discovery of India* (1942-5) were both written while in prison. Behind these two writings, there is the presence of Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience*, written after a night in prison for refusing to pay taxes in protest of the government's involvement in war and slavery, which deeply informed Gandhi's philosophy and political tactics, making "civil disobedience" the name for his mass protest movement. Our characters emerge from prison, not with tracts on national determination, but with songs that carry connotations of independence and self-determination that can only come out of this history.

The act of pickpocketing works as an opening maneuver in two of the songs, as the characters on being released from prison return unrepentantly, almost instinctively, to their trade. In "Yeh Hai Bombay Meri Jaan," after singing his first verse about the need to be careful in Bombay, Walker himself pickpockets a wallet from a passing stranger. Kapoor starts singing "Awara Hoon" right as he swings a pocket watch he has just stolen from a passing stranger.[26] And as he sings, a man

[26] This is a reference to a scene in the 1943 film *Kismet* (*Fate)*, where Ashok Kumar pickpockets a gold watch (but significantly does not sing), an earlier instance of the interest in the criminal hero, and I believe the reference is less to the particular film than to the stardom phenomenon that followed for Ashok Kumar. The two moments are brought together in a parodic scene in Kishore Kumar's 1974 film *Badhti Ka Naam Daadhi* (*That which grows is called a beard*), where, playing a film director, he directs a scene of a character coming out of prison singing, very hoarsely, "Awara Hoon" and ineptly freeing a pigeon like Ashok Kumar's symbolic move in *Kismet*. It also raises the question about why the stars of Bombay cinema, from the 1940s through the 1970s, both men and women, are all almost ritually initiated with a filmic experience in prison; sometimes justly and sometimes unjustly imprisoned; sometimes it is the core of the narrative, often forming only an opening or ending moment. Examples include *Aar-Paar* (*This or That*) (1954)*, Bandini* (*The Caged*

whose spectacles, cane, and moustache evoke Gandhi, listens appreciatively but then retreats alarmed, as Kapoor almost aggressively steals a wallet from him. The lineage from Gandhi is thus acknowledged but so are its limits, demonstrating cinema's desire to provide, in response to the era's need, for a different kind of moral exemplar. The chorus of the *Shree 420* which asserts the foreign origin of the shoes, hat and pants is also in direct dialogue with Gandhi's political advocacy of khadi, Indian-made cloth. In the film, it is the villain, Seth Sonachand and his cronies who now wear the dhoti, which has been appropriated by the corrupt political class, and Kapoor's character explicitly makes this contrast. In lieu of that lost symbol, the cinema creates another one—one that is a hybrid of clothes, self-referential, musical, tramp-esque.

The petty thievery of the characters functions as a mark of their entanglement with social reality, denying them a position of moral righteousness from outside it. Cinema's alignment with the pickpocket is evident also in American and European cinema of this decade, with Fuller's *Pickup on South Street* (1953) and Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959), and this affinity between the camera and the thief perhaps owes something to their shared attentiveness to and knowledge of details hidden in public view, their ease in inhabiting urban crowds and a reckless sense of delight in an individual morality. But in these songs, unlike in Fuller and Bresson, this is not used as an occasion for a visual analysis of the close and precise handling of objects without the knowledge of faces. Here, the pickpocketing is conducted in a passing breezy manner, with the camera's interest lying in the voice rather than the hands. The blatant public display of the thefts asserts a sense of community with strangers, inviting an understanding of the act as a kind of illicit but intimate knowledge of other people. The

One) (1963), *Waqt* (*Time*) (1965), *Aradhana* (1969), *Amar, Akbar, Anthony* (1977). This trend seems to lose force by the 1990s, with prison being treated less symbolically and more via a gritty realism in crime films, and then it almost totally fades out of screen presence with the increasing wealth and bourgeois status of the characters in the 21st century.

pickpocketing scenes then seem to function to strengthen our interest in the thieves, to justify their claim to speak and be heard.

Dass, in her essay "Cinetopia," attributes the leftist political vision of these songs to the influence of IPTA (Indian People's Theatre Association).[27] That is more apparent in a different song that Shailendra, a member of IPTA, wrote for Bimal Roy's 1953 film *Do Bigha Zameen* (*Two Acres of Land*) in which a group of laborers sing:

Mountains were cut, rivers were divided	*Parbat kaate saagar paate*
Mansions were built–by us	*Mahal banaaye humne*
We spread a garden over stones	*Patthar pe bagiya laharaayi*
We made the flowers bloom	*Phul khilaaye humne*
Though ours, it is not ours	*Ho ke hamaari huyi na hamaari*

The claim of those laborers to have their voices heard rests on the hard physical unrewarded work they've invested in building the society that shuns them. Our thieves, on the other hand, raise their political claim out of nothing in particular, or rather precisely from their sin and culpability. The pleasure of the songs derives from their very lack of labor and work. Theirs is not the muscled torso and sweat-damp brow, but the gestures and gait of leisure, and they seem to evoke a sense of our inherent right as individuals to participate in society in the natural, un-laboring, condition of humanity. In this, they draw on the vision of the body in silent comedy: expressive and poetic, graceful but also antithetical to work, to useful and productive labor. Kapoor in *Shree 420,* singing "apna sina taane" ("my chest outstretched and proud"), perhaps comes closer than the other two thieves, in his physical willingness to work, but in his skipping and hopping down the roads, there is

[27] Dass, "Cinetopia," 106-11.

a reveling in a superfluity of energy, and he most explicit recalls the silent comedians in his use of sped-up projections.[28]

Here are two actors deeply informed by Chaplin—Raj Kapoor, who actively cultivated his Tramp persona through his outfit and manner—and Johnny Walker, whose relation to Chaplin was mediated by the influence of the 40s comic actor Noor Mohammad "Charlie." Their performances draw on a sympathetic familiarity with the Tramp and his humanist form of class critique and secure the right of their characters to inhabit the city streets as vagrants and yet be spokespersons for their society.

The one time that Chaplin's Tramp does reveal his voice, it is to sing. Having already resisted the transition to synchronized sound in his 1931 *City Lights*, the suspense in the 1936 *Modern Times* lies around the moment of the Tramp being finally forced to reveal his voice. The intrusion of speech is there faced and averted through a song. But to choose a particular language for the song would undercut the Tramp's claim to be an international representative of the human community, and further, the fact of language itself seems to entail the price of disavowing the body—the body that had been his medium of expression and connection with the audience for two decades. To admit to a voice seems, for Chaplin's Tramp, to involve suppressing the ability of the body to be its own self-sufficient articulate medium.[29] It would reveal that he, like the rest of us outside the magical medium of silent film, was a divided being, having both a mind and a body. Chaplin had to find a way to anchor the mind back into the body through the voice, so when the Tramp sings his song at the end

[28] This is directly acknowledged by Raj Kapoor in his 1970 autobiographical film, *Mera Naam Joker* (*My Name is Joker*), where in the midst of another song sequence, his character of an aging clown in a circus invites children to view passages from *Awara* and *Shree 420*, which are anachronistically presented as silent films to be played on a bioscope. A rather disturbing contrast is deliberately presented between an aged Raj Kapoor in his garish clown suit and the freshness and crispness of his black and white youth, and indicates that by 1970, the 1950s decade was already viewed nostalgically as a lost era.

[29] See Chaplin's own view of silent film being "universal means of expression" in his article, "Rejection of the Talkies," 63.

of *Modern Times*, his words are meaningless, drawing grammatically and phonetically on the European languages but bringing them back into a playful babble—and retaining our attention on his gestures and expressions.

This concern is not present for Kapoor and Walker, for the notion of stardom in Bombay cinema involved, allowed, and even depended on an access to a voice—a voice that was not tethered to the body from which it seemed to emerge. Star personas were built through the songs and the collaboration with singers, in what Neepa Majumdar has termed a system of "dual stardom."[30] Under this convention, there is a deep and intimate relationship between the body and voice. On the death of the singer Mukesh in 1976, Raj Kapoor wrote:

> There was Mukesh—my soul, my voice. I was a mere body. It was he who sang to the hearts of the people all over the world, not me. Raj Kapoor was an image, just a carcass of flesh and bones. When he died, it was destroyed. I felt there goes my breath, there goes my soul. I know what went away from me.[31]

Throughout his films, Raj Kapoor engages with an idea of his own stardom, often, as suggested by this quote, conceiving it as a mask, as in the logo of the theatrical masks in *Shree 420*. This perception of himself as a mere image, "a carcass," culminates in his 1970 autobiographical film *Mera Naam Joker* (*My Name is Joker*), in which a puppet of a joker becomes his recurring symbol. In *Awara*, he makes repeated reference to his face, in situations when he was mistaken, rightly so, as a thief by Nargis's character, saying, "Meri surat hi to aise hai"("It's the fault of my face"), signaling through this seemingly self-deprecatory joke an awareness of his stardom. In *Shree 420*, after the cementing of his star persona, the surreptitious compact that he had shared with the camera in

[30] Majumdar, "The Embodied Voice: Song Sequences and Stardom in Bombay Cinema," 194.
[31] As quoted in Ritu Nanda, *Raj Kapoor Speaks*, 99.

"Awara Hoon" becomes a direct frontal address and almost winking at the camera, he declares his face again:

Familiar is my face	*Surat hai jaani-pehchaani*
Surprised shall people be	*Duniya waalo ko hairaani*

This image of the Chaplin-esque tramp on the road in *Shree 420* is mediated by another Hollywood reference, to Sturges' 1941 *Sullivan's Travels*. His get-up and bindle and the specific camera movement that pans up from the feet recall the scene in which the comedy director, played by Joel McCrea, first sets out disguised as a tramp to gain experience of the streets and make a serious social problem movie, all the while being followed by a giant luxury van filled with studio executives out to document this adventure. In making this reference, Kapoor declares himself a director embodying the poor man, but absent is Sturges' eroding irony about film images, its perpetual failure to capture reality, its trading in false surfaces. In *Shree 420*, whose driving theme is that of disguised identity, this possibility of skepticism is not merely overlooked but overcome—and overcome, to use Kapoor's own interpretation, by his possession of Mukesh's voice. Kapoor's sense of film as hollowing him out and turning him into an exposed exterior is mitigated for him by a belief in the reality of the voice that pierces through the image. And this tension between a face exposed for public view and the authentic privacy of the voice is deliberately played up by Kapoor and provides the quality of the wounded depth to his songs.

Meanwhile, in *C.I.D.,* there is a different equation at play, with the voice granting him, not an innerness but a breadth of the self, becoming a resource to tap into a more general life. In the police station, while being questioned, Walker cowers and squeaks as he pleads his innocence. But once released and out of doors, as he starts his song, out from the thin-voiced and thin-bodied Johnny Walker comes the warm deep-throated voice of Mohammad Rafi. There is an ongoing mutual

interpretation of voice and bearing, with Rafi mimicking Walker's actions in tone and Walker's physicality taking on the sonority of Rafi's voice. Together, in their incongruity, they represent the lightness of the comic spirit co-existing harmoniously with the gravity of a deeply felt humanity. The effect is of a dual performance, a duet of voice and deportment.

In these tramp songs, the break between voice and body becomes a liberatory moment, signifying a capacity for self-reflection, an attitude of flexibility to the social roles that have been assigned to them. By deepening and widening their being, their voices, through their differing dynamics, open the self outwards. Unlike Guru Dutt's character in *Pyaasa*, whose possession of a voice (or rather, two voices, since two singers aid him) separated him and isolated him further from his community, these tramps are singled out but remain ordinary and rooted, inviting community.

V.

Figure 3.7 Still from Shree 420 (Kapoor, 1955)

In Cavell's moral perfectionism, the self-examination of an individual must involve an imagination of a "good city," one which allows the space for a collective "conversation of justice."[32] In these films, the idea of Bombay is under investigation, and all three songs of our genre are about arriving at or living in Bombay. "Awara Hoon" and "Yeh Hai Bombay, Meri Jaan" take place in the

[32] Cavell, *Cities of Words,* 17.

city, the characters wending their way across an imaginative and vital jumble of location-shooting, rear-projections, studio-shots and B-roll footage of monuments like the Victoria Terminal railway station and the Marine drive. But even as he walks amid crowded streets and slum neighborhoods, Kapoor's *awara* declares himself as alone, inhabiting an empty and silent place, signifying that the city he lives in has not yet been made his,

Of a lonely path and an unknown city	*Sunsaan dagar, anjaan nagar*
I'm the beloved	*Ka pyaara hoon*

Figure 3.8 Still from C.I.D. (Khosla, 1956)

Walker, on the other hand, is deeply at home in the city in his song, "Yeh Hai Bombay Meri Jaan." The city is as much the subject of the song as Walker's character, and the two merge affectionately into each other under the phrase, "meri jaan," or "my life." As Kaviraj writes in his essay, "Reading a Song of the City," about his experience of listening to this song while growing up in a small town in Bengal: "It instantly communicates the bodily rhythms of a person walking through a crowded Indian city—full of unruly, jostling crowds on the pavements and traffic on the streets."[33]

[33] Kaviraj, "Reading a Song of the City: Images of the City in Film and Literature," 261.

Here politics, there cards	Kahin satta kahin patta
Here theft, there races	Kahin chori kahin race
Here robbery, there hunger	Kahin daaka kahin phaaka
Here kicks, there knocks,	Kahin thokar kahin thes
The jobless have plenty of work here	Bekaaron ke hain kayi kaam yahan
Be careful, be wary	Zara hatke zara bach ke
This is Bombay, my life.	yeh hai bombay meri jaan

The city conveyed is a threatening antagonistic space. English words like "race," "mill," "business," "building," are strewn about the lyrics to convey a sense of the troubling new landscape, acting as little alien blocks of meaning which however find a way to settle into the Hindustani language, demonstrating a resilience. And amid the described realm of violence and crookedness, the mild politeness of the word "zara" ("excuse me") in the refrain lightens but also highlights the existential pressure of the self having to make sense of itself and carve its own ethical path in the modern metropolis.

In *Shree 420*, there are, as it were, two cities: the good city of migrants, laborers, and footpath sellers, where Kapoor's character finds his welcome; and the bad city of wealthy, supposedly upright citizens, who are all really criminals and swindlers, living off the poor. Two of the songs in the film take place in this locale, and both, through their costumes, performances, and dances, evoke the "rural" or "village" setting, showing the idea of the village to persist in the imagination of the city. In both, there is a large gathering of a sympathetic crowd, who participate in the song in the chorus by singing and dancing. In these sequences, through a moving camera, the community is united, or

through editing, a community is stitched together.[34] In *Awara* and *C.I.D.,* too, the village and folk worlds that exist on the outskirts of the city are evoked through song. But the three city songs that I am exploring differ from these. They start out singly and then turn to others to start a conversation, and a community is gathered, not as a chorus that sings behind a soloist, but as a miscellaneous collection of passers-by, encountered one by one and differently in the singer's passage through the streets.

Figure 3.9 Still from Awara (Kapoor, 1951)

The characters reflect upon themselves then, not in solitude, but out in the open air, seeking out listeners. Picking up on momentary encounters with people on the street, the tramps address each verse to a different listener. These others do not join in the song, but they express themselves mutely and are essential to the structure and the feel of the song: in "Yeh Hai Bombay Meri Jaan," there's the street seller, who watches genially as Walker steals the harmonica, the police officer who he bumps into, the boys running alongside his carriage, the impassive horse carriage driver whose cap he flings; in "Mera Joota Hai Japani," there is the row of farming women, the camel driver who

[34] These songs seem to fit better than the tramp songs Dyer's influential account of musicals as offering a satisfaction for the desire of community through song and dance, but in his reading, this satisfaction is illusory and the films are offerings within capitalism for the losses and deprivations that capitalism itself causes (Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia"). But this reading would not account, even in these "village city" songs, of the sense of loss and sorrow in Shailendra's lyrics, one that doesn't find consolation in the current system. For a fuller discussion of the limitations of Dyer's model in the postcolonial Indian context, see Majumdar, "Song Time," 110-2.

mimics Raj's gestures; in "Awara Hoon," there are the women laborers on the truck, the kids milling about on the slum streets, the man he steals the gold watch from, the other who looks on appreciatively and then gets his wallet stolen. Both in the lyrics and in the accompanying images, there is a sense of a broader world present at these songs, an interest in the people who hear them that is encoded within the song sequence.

Figure 3.10. Still from Shree 420 (Kapoor, 1955)

This address to a varied community is enabled by the highly mobile compositions of the sequences, which depict different forms and means of movement, from cars, bicycles, and trucks to horse-drawn carriages, elephants, and camels, creating a sense of continuous onward momentum. In lieu of the socially established dance forms of the "village" songs, there is a marked emphasis on the walking gait of the body.

The association of walking for India cannot help but have Gandhian connotations. It symbolizes a trust in the sufficiency of the body to carry out its will, but again, this self-sufficient individual is not isolated but representative of the rights of the people. In these songs, though, instead of a serious march, the pleasures of movement are present in the ease and grace of their gait—the twirling and skipping that the tramps all do, as they accompany their voice with the harmonica and the flute.

Figure 3.11 Still from C.I.D. (Khosla, 1956)

In *C.I.D.* and *Shree 420*, the move from a private self-declaration to a public address and dialogue involves especially the entrance of women's voices. Walker's song turns from a solo performance fully into a duet. While out on the streets, he meets up with his love-interest, a woman, played by Kumkum and sung by Geeta Dutt, who had arrived, with affectionate anger, to bail him out of jail. After listening to a few verses, impatiently joins in the song. Puncturing his deprecating tone of despair about life in the city, she turns around the refrain, and replies, putting herself in playful equality with him:

It's a bad world, he says	*Bura duniya woh hai kehta*
Don't be so naïve	*Aisa bhola toh na ban*
The one who puts in work gets results	*Jo hai karta woh hai bharta*
This is the way here	*hai yahan ka chalan*
Corruption will not work here	*Dadagiri nahin chalegi yahan*
O heart, it's easy living here	*Ae dil hai aasan jeena yahaan*
Listen mister, listen friend	*Suno mister suno bandhu*
This is Bombay, my life	*Yeh hai Bombay meri jaan.*

It is not a coincidence that this song is written by Majrooh Sultanpuri, the lyricist of *Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi*, and he brings to our genre the comic mode of "conversation," which allows for the voice of the woman to forcefully intervene in the song and change its words.

Figure 3.12. Still from Shree 420 (Kapoor, 1955)

In *Shree 420*, a wordless chorus of mournful female voices enter the song briefly at the moment of the appearance of a caravan of migrants moving across the desert, a moment that has been identified as evoking the mass migrations of the Partition.[35] But it is in the reprisal of the song at the end of the film that an individual female voice joins in—again, it is Kapoor's character's love-interest, played by Nargis and sung by Lata Mangeshkar. At the climactic point of the narrative, after his fall into crime and redemption, when his participation in a financial racket has been discovered and is about to be led away into custody, he makes a speech. As in the courtroom in *Awara*, he again propounds his socialist and humanist ideals and reveals that he has been transforming the racket, of amassing wealth from the small contributions of the poor under the fraudulent promises, into a Capra-esque gesture of a collective public fund to be used to build their own housing. The listening crowd of the indignant victims is shown silent in response, their anger quieted but yet

[35] Majumdar, "Song Time," 116.

unconvinced.[36] The film cuts to him being released from prison an unknown interval of time later. He sets out, leaving the city and entering the open road, singing again his old song. A female voice intervenes, and we see Nargis on the horizon singing to him. We had left him unsure of a response from the collected crowd and we don't encounter that collective again, but Nargis comes to stand in their stead. Lata Mangeshkar's voice helps change the individual song into a collective vision, fulfilling the verse of the gathering on the road that he had sung alone at first and which they now sing together, by exchanging lines and combining voices,

I have gone forth on this open road	*Nikal pade hain khuli sadak par*
Resolute and proud	*Apna seena taane*
Where to go, where to stop	*Manzil kahan kahan rukna hai*
Only the One Above knows	*Uparwala jaane*
Let us keep growing in strength, us wanderers	*Badhte jaye hum sailani*
Like a collected stormy river	*Jaise ek dariya toofani*

Delighted, Kapoor takes her hand and tries to pull her toward the open road, in a deliberate echo of the end of *Modern Times*, where the Tramp and the girl walk away disillusioned from the city. But there is a difference here. Instead of following him, Nargis pulls him in the other direction, and as they come at the crest of the hill, there is in the background, looming over the horizon, an image of a housing complex—in a sense, a fulfilment of his plan. Yet because of the rapidity of the climax, this is not established as a real achievement, and she seems to be pointing to the still existing possibility of that fulfilment. Instead of a sunset, or a sunrise, on an open road, there is this

[36] We can see resonances to the same dynamic of the individual and the crowd in the final scene of *Pyaasa,* which I had also argued arose in conversation with Capra's films. In both cases, the narrative does not allow for a vision of collectivity. Unlike in the final song in *Pyaasa*, here in *Shree* 420, the self is not defined against a misguided crowd, but the song still does need to depart from a depicted crowd to imagine a fulfilled collective.

projection of a vision of a community that has been perfected, the achievement of collectivity and will and effort. It is a return to the city—not the present Bombay, but a Bombay transformed.

Figure 3.13 Still from Shree 420 (Kapoor, 1955)

Both women play a similar role in relation to the men, battling their cynicism and isolation and inviting a renewed sense of participation in the urban political life. In the *C.I.D.* song, Kumkum/Geeta Dutt, in modifying the refrain, tests Walker's words and redefines his vision, showing there to be room for a productive disagreement. In *Shree 420*, Nargis/Lata Mangeshkar combines her voice with his, to assent to his vision, but also to remind him of the meaning of his words, recalling him to hope and to collective action. In requiring and making room for the entry of the woman's voice, the songs show the necessity of conversation, proof that the words of the individual can be shared and assessed—but not in an abstract Rawlsian rational debate of ideas, but a conversation between specific, finite, and gendered individuals. The songs significantly include the assent of only one other individual, rather than a whole community. They envision a solidarity that is not mass but individuated. But not any single relationship can bear the symbolic force that is required. These songs are marked by the presence of marriage, with both women tantamount to being fiancés of the men, not yet engaged or married but having discussed their willingness to share a life, and their marriage comes to stand as an emblem of the possibility of a more equal and just community.

VI.

In *Awara*, however, there is no joining female voice, and at the end of the film, the *awara* is back again in prison, and in the final shot, the jailed door swings shut on him, as he stands with his back to us, the light streaming down from a high barred window. His song is reprised, but the words of his self-declaration, "awara hoon" now detach themselves from his lips and play over him. Their tone has now become mournfully elegiac rather than confidently assertive. Though this vagabond has now gained a father and a lover, this achieved community is kept deferred, and its attainment is far from certain from within the present state of society.

Figure 3.14 Still from Awara (Kapoor, 1951)

This note of melancholy was present already in the song. At one moment, Kapoor, passing through a slum neighborhood, picks up two young babies, who recall the vulnerability of his just past childhood self, as he sings,

World, I am hit by the arrows of your fortune *Duniya, main tere teer ka ya taqdeer ka maara hoon*

Figure 3.15 Still from C.I.D. (Khosla, 1956)

In "Yeh Hai Bombay Meri Jaan," Walker also picks out a poor child in the midst of his gamboling, forces him to listen to his verse, and hugs him as he finishes singing:

Everything is found here	*Milta hai yahan sab kuch*
Except for a heart	*Ek milta nahin dil*

Both these moments contain an intensified address to children and the words *duniya* (world)(in "Awara Hoon" and *dil* (heart) in "Yeh Hai Bombay Meri Jaan" are sung in a more plaintive mode, leaning out of the rest of the song in their intensity. Piercing through the comedic cheerfulness of the tramps is an awareness of darkness, and their laughter is inflected with shades of irony and grimness, as made explicit in "Awara Hoon":

I have no home, my misfortune assured	*Aabad nahin barbad sahi*
Still I sing these songs of happiness	*Gata hoon khushi ke geet magar*
My body is riven with wounds	*Zakhmon se bhara seena hai mera*
But these mischievous eyes laugh	*Hasti hai magar yeh mast nazar*

A contemporary Turkish critic, Sabri Esat Siyavuşgil, responding to the fervor around the film in Turkey, where *Awara* would be remade as *Avare* in 1962, wrote of the melancholy of the title song, interpreting it as a response to the process of Western modernizing, writing,

> "Awara hoon" is a strange journey and a song of yearning that blends within its melody the joy of embarking on this road and the feeling of melancholy that comes from leaving the old road. And this song gradually expands in our soul which is familiar to these sorts of feelings. We cannot remain indifferent to the intimate heart-to-heart of a large country that is more eastern than we are. We do not listen to this music intently because the title of the song is "Awara" [a word shared by Turkish], but because we sense a contradiction of feelings and a sweet melancholy in its melody. Perhaps it reminds us of our own yesteryear…It is the farewell song of a country that is more eastern than us. We listened to it with great pleasure, but tomorrow we will forget it. Indians too will forget "Awara hoon"…and will feel the need to create other melodies that will keep time to the firm march of their journey.[37]

Figure 3.16. Still from Awara (Kapoor, 1951)

To my ear, the melancholy of "Awara Hoon" is not sweet, but it is political, and it is not a farewell song, but the incipient declaration of a new democratic spirit. The song's grief over the

[37] As quoted in Ahmet Gurata, "'The Road to Vagrancy': Translation and Reception of Indian Cinema in Turkey," 82.

present state of society comes not from a nostalgia, but a sense of a possible but not yet existent future. The song, along with the other two of our genre, originates in a critique of society, a knowledge of its hypocrisy, the harshness of its law, the lack of conscience in man, but its outcome is released in laughter and song, with a sense of the survival of the self, of its capacity to voice its experience and speak to others. Siyavuşgil was right that the nation did make newer melodies which kept time to its ongoing journey, but to what extent it was a "firm march" is yet to be seen.

VII.

In 1965, the characteristics of the genre of tramp songs would re-emerge in a song that plays over the credit sequence of Vijay Anand's *Guide*, "Wahan Kaun Hai Tera Musafir" ("Who is there for you, traveler?") Written also by Shailendra, the song deliberately evokes and dismantles the myth of the genre.

Figure 3.17. Still from Guide (Anand, 1965)

The opening of the film is the opening of a prison gate as the protagonist, played by Dev Anand, walks out, having served out his sentence. He halts at a crossroad, under a road sign, one pointing to "Jail" and the other to "City." In a voiced inner monologue, he decides not to return to the city where he has become infamous because of his prison sentence and turns, disheartened, toward the countryside as the song commences. A voice, sung by S.D. Burman and not embodied by any on-screen actor, asks:

Who is there for you, traveler?	*Wahan kaun hai tera musafir*
Where will you go?	*Jayega Kahan?*
Take a breath for a moment—	*Dam lele ghadi bhar—*
Where else will you find this shade?	*Yeh chhaiyan payega kahan?*

Figure 3.18 Still from Guide (Anand, 1965)

The song sequence follows Dev Anand as he wanders, seemingly with no intended destination. Each cut reveals him in a different setting—walking down a town road, walking through fields, riding a bus, riding a bullock cart, stopping on a bridge, taking shelter from the rain under a tree. As the seasons pass, his clothes grow more ragged, his shoes wear out, he looks lost, depressed, bruised, he resorts to physical labor, he is taken for a beggar, and finally he takes rest in a village temple. The sequence ends with a gesture of solicitude by a traveling sage who puts an orange blanket over his shivering sleeping body. It is a fateful moment, for it will lead to the villagers' mistaken belief that he is also a sage, and because the village is suffering under a drought, he will find himself driven by their faith and trust in him to fast unto death.

The film is an adaptation of R.K. Narayan's 1958 novel *The Guide*, about a love affair between a tour-guide and a married dancer. The guide, after going to prison for an act of jealousy in which he forges the dancer's signature on the receipt for some jewels, turns his back on his small town and

ends up as this village sage. Before Vijay Anand's film, a 1962 Hollywood film was made based on the same book by director Tad Danielweski and writer Pearl S. Buck that also starred Dev Anand and Waheeda Rehman. R.K. Narayan relates his involvement in that production in an essay called "The Misguided Guide," where he criticizes the liberties taken with his novel, not least the transposition of the entire narrative from the fictional South Indian town of Malgudi to the real North Indian Udaipur. Narayan's thoughts on the Bombay adaptation are not known, but since it shares these same alterations and adds further substantial transgressions, one can imagine he would not have appreciated it much more—unless, that is, he had an ear and taste for the Bombay song sequence. The Bombay adaptation introduces six songs, composed by S.D. Burman. The Hollywood film had no songs, and a cut was later made of the Bombay film for international circulation which also removed all the songs. Not surprisingly, those versions have no current life.

The Bombay film is additionally loyal to the novel in one feature that the Hollywood film lacks: it retains the flashback structure of the novel, which also begins with the release from prison and follows the protagonist who relates his own past life. Its opening song sequence, however, bears no relation to the novel, which does not relate any arduous and mournful wanderings before arriving at the village temple, nor does it make the moment of turning away from the city so decisive and fateful. Instead, what occurs in the film is the deployment of these markers from the other songs of our genre, transmuted however into a far more despairing vision. His walking has no ease or grace. No women join him. He addresses no one. The easy, fluid public pickpocketing has become a tortured, jealous, private forgery. The film even strips the protagonist of his power of storytelling. The flashback to the past is motivated instead through a narration by the dancer, played by Waheeda Rehman. And it strips him of his power to sing his own song.

Those days have gone	*Beet gaye din*
Those moments of love	*Pyaar ke palchhin*
Those nights have become dreams	*Sapne bani woh raaten*
They have forgotten you	*Bhool gaye woh,*
You also forget	*Tu bhi bhulaa de*
Those meetings of love	*Pyaar ki woh mulaqaaten*
All darkness lies ahead	*Sab door andhera,*
Wanderer, where will you go?	*Musafir, jayega kahaan*

Figure 3.19 Still from Guide (Anand, 1965)

The lyrics take up the themes familiar from the songs of before, of being unloved, of wandering, the metaphysical transience and mystery of the world, a feeling of belonging to nowhere or no-one—but while the songs of the tramps were about participating in a city, coming to a city, founding a city, *Guide* is about leaving a city. The habitual knowing movements of the vagabond on the city streets with a critical and ironic vision his society in *Awara* and *C.I.D.*, or the purposeful energetic striding toward the city in *Shree 420*, becomes here an interminable journey, only passing through places and residing nowhere. The roads are far more scenic, the setting picturesque, but the journeying has become hopeless. There are no encounters with others, no sense of a shared journey.

There are no friendly or bemused glances from strangers. The only woman present appears in the form of photographs that fall from Dev Anand's bundle of belongings, tokens of a lost time. Where the songs in *C.I.D.* and *Awara* portrayed a thriving present, and the song of *Shree 420* looked to the future, this song is haunted by the past. The only interactions Anand has with other people is through the exchange of money: he is seen getting his wages after working as a temporary farm hand; he is humiliated as people throw coins at him presuming him to be a beggar. The torn Japanese shoes of *Shree 420*, there a sign of scrappy resilience, are here worn completely to tatters and abandoned over the course of the song, as Anand proceeds barefoot, until his sole is pricked by a thorn and bright blood shines.

Figure 3.20 Still from Guide (Anand, 1965)

The irony is that all this happens in bright Technicolor. His sorrowful journey takes place against the vivid background of real locations, blue rivers, green fields, flowering orange *gulmohar* trees, a glowing sunset, white snow peaks. The "India" he travels is far wider in scope than the black-and-white city limits of the three 1950s films, but its various landscapes remain separate, unable to be evoked and united under an idea of a polis. Instead of the background of the city, its inhabitants and its social institutions, there is nature. The technicolor has a mocking quality and further, the novel widescreen format shrinks the human scale. Where the empty countryside in *Shree 420* allowed for a vision of human inhabitation, the brilliance of the background here highlights the

guide's isolated condition. Nature's presence, the light of her evenings, the bloom of her flowers, conveys a Romantic sense of distance, her beauty alluring but ungraspable. This reaches its apotheosis in the final act of the film, which takes place in the wide desert and depicts the suffering of the people under drought and their desperation for rain. The theme is not now the possibility of change between the self and society, but a sense of the finitude of man and his impotence in the face of nature, a turn from the political to the metaphysical.

Figure 3.21. Still from Guide (Anand, 1965)

The choice of Dev Anand for the role adds another dimension to the negation of the myth, for his role in *Guide* acts as a counterpoint to his characteristic star persona, built around the songs from the 1957 comedy *Nau Do Gyarah* (*Disappearance*) and the 1958 comedy *Solva Saal* (*Sixteenth Year*), both written by Majrooh Sultanpuri. There he sang verses like,

I'm a traveler of love	*Hum hain raahi pyaar ke*
Don't speak to me of other things	*Humse kuch na boliye*
Whoever meets me with love	*Jo bhi pyaar se mila*
I will be theirs	*Hum ussi ke holiye*

And:

This heart of mine is vagabond	*Hai apna dil toh awara*
Who knows where it will land	*Na jaane kis pe aayega*

Adjacent to our genre in its theme of happy vagrancy, these songs are romantic variations of its concerns, involving a light-hearted declaration of self where the self's concerns are love and freedom. In the song in *Guide*, the romance has turned dark and despairing, and the freedom has become a despondent rootlessness.[38]

Not only has the cheerful and critical *awara* turned into an aimless and despondent *musafir*, "wanderer," he has also lost his voice. The *awara* declared himself, affirming his own identity. Here, he is subjected to his identity.

The song is sung by S.D. Burman, who worked primarily as a music composer but occasionally sang for films in the 1960s. He would never lend his voice to the characters and instead would sing about them over them. His small but notable collection of these songs, including "Sun Mere Bandhu Re" ("Listen, o my friend") from the *Sujata* (1959), "O Mere Majhi" ("O, my boatman") from *Bandini* (*The Caged One*) (1963), and "Kahe Ko Roye" ("Why do you cry?") from the *Aradhana* (1969), are all sung for characters who find themselves isolated: a low-caste woman, an unmarried mother, a repentant murderess, and in this rare male case, an ex-convict. On radio and recordings, Burman's voice is deep, melancholic, aged. On film, his voice has all those qualities, but also something else: it gives a sense of distance, of coming from outside the world. Though sometimes his songs are

[38] Already by 1962, the lyricist Sahir Ludhianvi gave Dev Anand's persona a more melancholic inflection in *Hum Dono* (*Us Two*), about the 1962 Indo-China war, in a bittersweet song that goes,

I've gone along accompanying my life	*Main zindagi ka saath nibhata chala gaya*
Blowing away worries with cigarette smoke	*Har phikr ko dhuen main udata chala gaya*

Here we have a snapshot of the different dominant concerns of the three lyricists I've discussed in the dissertation—the openness of the self to the other in Majrooh Sultanpuri, the alienated self in Sahir Ludhianvi, and the isolated self in search of a collective in Shailendra.

diegetically located in a passing boatman's song or in a song sung in a local tea-shop, his voice always comes from afar, reaching into a shunned privacy. Burman's voice comes in to console, advise, bemoan, to express and share the crisis of the character. His voice here is directed at the *musafir*, naming him, reminding him of his isolation, expressing a profound sympathy but also sharing his melancholy, not giving hope but the release of expression.

This change leads to a profound difference, changing the mood and potential of the song entirely. Instead of the character making his own declarations and announcements of his thoughts and his condition, instead of an active interpretation, reflection and performance of the self, Dev Anand's character is rendered passive in the exposition of himself and his condition. The singing voice comes to us as separate and overlaid onto the montage of his depressed and isolated journeying, and I read it as registering a loss of individual agency.

Figure 3.22. Still from Guide (Anand, 1965)

The *musafir* (wanderer) finds his *manzil* (destination) at the end, but it's not the socialist community of *Shree 420* or the fulfilling relationship of *C.I.D.* or even the deferred hope of *Awara*. It is a retreat into the private metaphysical self. As in the Raj Kapoor films, a community will gather again, but not now to discuss the political problem of housing but to lament over the weather. As the crowd grows larger and larger in a sign of widening desperation, they turn to the guide for guidance, but he is progressively weakened and does not have the voice for grand speeches. He only

makes desperate pleas for religious unity, in which is felt not the active desire for meaningful change in the current world, but the vantage point of someone outside the world, viewing its meaningless social differences.

Say the wise men	*Kehte hain gyaani*
The world is an illusion	*Duniya hai phaani*
Like writing on water	*Paani mein likhi likhayi*
Everyone sees it, everyone knows it	*Hai sabki dekhi hai sabki jaani*
No hand can grasp it	*Haath kisi ki na aayi*

In *Awara,* the heartfelt cry to the *duniya* (world) refers to the socio-political world and its problems are the social problems of class, crime, and poverty. In *Guide*, the *duniya* is the sensual world and its problem is that it's a vanishing illusion.

The idea of an exemplary self remains, but the self-knowledge that is achieved is not one of a coming into adulthood, into political consciousness, into a possession and reclamation of society. As the guide lies dying, the film ends with a depiction of a spiritual self-examination. Instead of a conversation with a finite other, there is an inward debate between his dying self and his *atman,* the eternal self, and the *atman* speaks:

> *Throw me in fire, I won't burn. Cut me with a sword, I won't get cut. You're an ornament, you must die I am atman, immortal. Death is a thought like this life is a thought. There is no happiness, no sorrow, no world, no other world, no man, no god, only I am.*

As he dies, he mutters, "In the distant mountains there is rain. The body has gone, should I go? Should I change?" The novel ends at this moment, in ambiguity. The Bombay film bursts out a big thunderclap and rain pours down on the rejoicing of the community, yet its final shot is of Dev Anand's *atman* saying "Sirf Main Hoon," "Only I Am." The self, retaining its majesty, its grandeur,

but cut off from life, vitality, is the answer to the song's question, "wahan kaun hai tera?" ("where will you go wanderer?"); it forms the journey's end for the *musafir*. The self-expression becomes a private, religious affirmation with no reference to a shared peopled world, no moniker of "awara," no affectionate "Bombay," no proud "Hindustani," a pure self.

I said that the convention of the song sequence began, in 1951, with "Awara Hoon," to allow for the opening out and exploring of a new kind of political voice, in search of a community, the voice of a song embodying a political hope. By 1965, this convention of the song sequence somehow ceases to be able to answer the desire for political self-expression and signals a political depression.[39] It is widely acknowledged that a change comes in the 1960s in Bombay cinema, that an era ends, and looking at the progress of this genre of songs is one way of locating this change and its underlying political implications.

[39] This genre finds another negation in the 1970s in the Amitabh Bachchan song, "Rote Hue Aate Hain Sab" ("We all come crying") from the 1978 film *Muqqadar Ka Sikander* (*Conqueror of Destiny*). That song also comes after a dissolve from an ironically laughing child to an adult and involves Bachchan (lip-syncing to Kishore Kumar) singing on the streets of Bombay. However, he is not walking, but speeding through traffic on a motorcycle and he has no individual encounters on the way. A large crowd gathers to watch him, but their faces blur into anonymity. It seems to signal, not political depression as in *Guide,* but political cynicism.

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