

REVIEW

M. Madhava Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction.*

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Madhava Prasad's *Ideology of the Hindi Film* is something of a landmark in the study of Indian cinema. The first systematic application of semiotic film theory to Indian films over a book-length work, Prasad sets up an enquiry that speaks to the major issues generated in Euro-American film studies over the last quarter century: the debates over film realism and film melodrama, the question of how spectators are addressed and positioned by filmic narrative processes, how industrial organization influences the character of the cinematic product. However, this is not a straightforward application of an agenda set elsewhere. Prasad's argument frames and deploys issues of film study to specify the politics and ideology of film culture in a post-colonial society.

This is not by the familiar route of asserting the cultural peculiarity of Indian film culture. Instead, Prasad approaches the cinema as emblematic of India's problematic transition to a capitalist organization of society and polity. This argument develops around three themes: the economic dimension of popular film, its characteristic narrative form, and the historical elaboration of the institutions of cinema in the 1970s. To put the economic argument rather boldly, Prasad argues that, in contrast to Hollywood, where production companies controlled distribution and exhibition, in the Indian case, an industry struggling to establish its claims to state support, bank loans and legitimate investment, was dominated by the distribution sector for its finance. This formal rather than real subsumption of production to capital left the different components of production disaggregated into specific skills such as music direction, choreography and dialogue, whose application was not governed by the needs of a singular story line. Even the main narrative elements were defined by the performative enunciation of already known story elements, moral imperatives and rhetorical modes of character speech; they did not seek

to render characters and events in terms of enigma. However, this is not an economic argument. Prasad suggests that this loose assemblage of elements positions the spectator in ways governed by an ideological imperative. In contrast to the Hollywood system in which linear narrative inducts the spectator as complicit agent in the construction of the narrative, and the signs of an external authority narrating the story are occluded, here this authority sticks out, relaying an address to the spectator from the Symbolic Order, the overall source of meaning in society. By this logic, the economic system would change when the transcendent source of social meaning is transformed, and addresses the spectator on different terms.

Prasad uses the category 'feudal family romance' to define the dominant structure of symbolic authority retained by the mainstream Bombay film and mirrored in the work of the major film industries of the south. In this narrative form, the identity of characters is not cohered by individualist drives to romantic and social fulfillment, or through the resolution of narrative conflicts by modernizing state agencies represented by judges and policemen. Instead, this function is fulfilled by the paternalist authority reposed in familial patriarchs, respectable landlords, and urban gentry. For Prasad, this reflects the ideological compromise whereby the Indian National Congress deriving its support from the bourgeoisie and modernizing bureaucracy had to adapt its transformative agenda to pre-capitalist forms of power. Nevertheless, the feudal family romance is a complex ideological form, carrying within it a potential allegiance to an impersonal state form, individualist drives and consumerist desires, even as the authority of 'traditionally regulated social relationships' is reasserted in the narrative resolution.

Prasad does not argue for cultural specificity in this formulation, pointing to the similarity between these narratives and the aristocratic romances of early European stage melodrama. But he does employ a culturally specific term, *darsana*, the power exercised by the authoritative image in Hindu religious culture, to understand the mode of address of popular cinema. In this practice, the devotee is permitted to behold the image of the deity, and is privileged and benefited by this permission, in contrast to a concept of looking that assigns power to the beholder by reducing the image to an object of the look.

Darsana has a wider purchase, being invoked in discourses of social and political authority as well. However, for Prasad the *darsanic* appears to be less a specific cultural institution than a despotic form comparable to the traits of absolutist regimes. Under such regimes, social status derives from the degree of access which social groups and individuals have to a central icon of authority, whether of kingship, divine authority, or the extended patriarchal family. This eligibility rests on very hierarchically coded criteria of social rank.

Prasad's identification of a hierarchical coding of address in popular narrative form leads to a suggestive thesis about the informal prohibition on kissing in Indian popular cinema. Whereas conventional discourses on the cinema argue that the prohibition maintains a sense of national identity against the inroads of western cultural behaviour, Prasad places it within the coordinates of power of the dominant narrative form. He suggests that the feudal family romance seeks to contain those romantic drives that threaten traditional social authority with the spectre of secession. Here the kiss marks the incipient space of privacy and the nuclear family, understood as an infringement of the overwhelmingly public monitoring of sexuality and subjecthood under feudal scopic regimes.

This argument about the reassertion of feudal scopic regimes and the prohibition on the private forms a part of a larger thesis about the relationship between spectatorship and citizenship. In Prasad's argument, the dominant form's highlighting of an address from the Symbolic forecloses on the emergence of the category of the citizen within the spectator, the abstract ideal intelligence invited to participate in the construction of narrative. The Symbolic is relayed through direct address, emblemized by looks into the camera, and through characters who are the bearers of already—interpreted speech and narrative reference. Such an address defines the screen world as acknowledging the audience. In contrast western classical norms, as theorized by Christian Metz, deny audience presence, and the spectator is voyeur of a self—enclosed fictional world in which his vision and knowledge are channelled through the interaction of characters in a logical, cause—effect chain of narrative construction. In such a system, the Symbolic is

no longer externally positioned but comes to repose within the spectator, now the vehicle of story construction rather than its object.¹

While this argument emphasizes the politically suborning effects of the feudal family romance, Prasad does not go on to under-write modern methods of narration and realist imaginative practices as the vehicle of the spectator's emancipation from pre-modern ideologies. Here his work is situated within the arc of political and cultural theory that has shaped over the last decade in India. This sees the project of instituting an Indian modernity as fraught with intractable historical contradictions.² In this argument, the characteristic modern institutions, practices and dispositions, of civil society, citizenship, and the realist reader and spectator, are part of a project of power. Led by the state and new elites, this project excludes subordinated sections of the Indian people from institutions of political representation and cultural legitimacy. This is fully articulated in the second part of the book, devoted to an analysis of how the institutions of the cinema were elaborated in the 1970s.

In line with Prasad's framing of the cinema in political and ideological context, he argues that the Indian state's crisis of legitimacy in the 1970s engendered new strategies both within the industry and through state institutions. The old coalitional base of the Congress came under strain, as reflected in the split in the party. Indira Gandhi's rhetoric of radicalism and modernization led to governmental support for film-makers outside the mainstream through loans provided by the Film Finance Corporation. Strategies of middle-class and 'developmental realist' films emerged, to be regarded anxiously by the film industry. Mainstream film-makers responded by developing their own traditions of middle class cinema and elaborating a new populist aesthetic founded on the star power of Amitabh Bachchan.

Each of these strategies was positioned against the dominant form, although the popular mainstream continued to display the residual signs of its significance. The middle-class film of directors such as Hrishikesh Mukherjee, Gulzar, Basu Chatterjee, and Basu Bhattacharya focused alternatively on a discourse of the ordinary and dramas of

national reconciliation. In the former, the lure of glamour and fantasy and the perils threatened by romantic desire and professional fulfilment were contested by normalizing women's functions for a new patriarchal domesticity. In the latter, social conflicts were reconciled through the Gandhian values expressed by a reformist middle—class. Developmental realism (the dominant focus here is the early work of Shyam Benegal) generated narrative methods which would align the spectator's view with the drives of a reformist, modernizing state in its realist expose of feudal forms and mobilization of exploited groups. The populist cinema, governed by an aesthetic of mobilization, fashioned characters of dominantly plebeian extraction, who would stand as representatives of subordinated society in circumstances where the integument of the old social coalition had given way.

One can only gesture to the main lines of analysis. One of the refreshing dimensions of the approach is the subjection of state—supported cinema and middle-class forms more generally to ideological scrutiny. Here, strategies of disavowal are identified, in which the middle-class addressee is marked out as removed from feudal affiliations, whether through consigning these to the past or to an 'elsewhere', especially the countryside. The realist strategy posits a fully formed stance of modernity for the audience, distancing them from their imbrications in the here and now of a mesh of social forms. On the more precise terrain of developmental realism, Prasad suggests that, in contrast to the classical norm of spectatorial solicitation into the narrative process through identification with characters, a vertical control is exercised over the narrative process. This narrational function invites the spectator into sharing its external, transcendent stance towards the world of the narrative. The privileged position offered to the middle-class spectator is analyzed as an ideological project which subordinates the particularity of regional experience in order to bind the spectator to the nation—state. In contrast, the populist aesthetic would appear to privilege nation over state, or place it in a troubled relationship to state agencies. Here, instead of functioning as the integument of the old political hierarchy, the *darsanic* is now focused on orphans and rebellious and independent characters in whom the community denied fulfilment via the state reposes its faith. But there is no clear cut trajectory delineated here. Prasad seems to suggest that this

new popular form can be reinserted into the hierarchies of the antecedent form. For instance he argues that *Sholay* (Ramesh Sippy, 1975) realigns the aesthetic of plebeian mobilization to the reproduction of feudal authority.

In an epilogue, Prasad uses examples from 1990s cinema to show how the opposition between state and nation in these countervailing narrative strategies is reframed. In films such as *Roja* (Mani Rathnam, 1993) and *Damini* (Raj Kumar Santoshi, 1992), the struggles of romance narrative to establish autonomy from the feudal family is positioned, through the ordering of narrative segments, as an investment in the modernizing state. These changes intimate a real rather than formal subsumption of filmic narrative production to capital. While gesturing to new economic forces in the industry, the argument is not grounded in an analysis of changes in the production system, but in identifying the narrative organization of a category of citizenship which transcends the subjection of character and spectator to feudal authority. A middle-class led nation comes to articulate itself through an incipient form in which narrative is authorized neither by the old Symbolic nor entirely by the methods of Hollywood style classical narration. Instead, it derives from a compact between character and state that solicits the spectator's investment in an ideology of nationalist modernity.

This outline has hardly been able to do justice to this systematically argued and theoretically ambitious work. The arguments about the mode of production of the dominant narrative form, the difficulty of instituting a realm of privacy and the attendant category of the citizen-spectator, and the drives to segmentation of the cinema and its audiences, has generated a rich field of ideas for film and cultural studies. My purpose in the last part of this review is to draw out certain implications of Prasad's book, and to suggest particular problems in the overall conceptualization.

Prasad's project is politically centred on an argument about the radical contemporaneity of the Indian cinema. This stance is pitted against those who would argue that the popular cinema is the repository of longer cultural lineages and traditional belief systems at variance with the institutionalization of a universal, homogenizing

modernity.³ For Prasad, such positions have to be contested as they imply a cultural peculiarity that denies the transformative political capacities of post—colonial societies: ‘we’ have culture (tradition, unchanging archaic identity), the west, politics (and thereby, the motor of transformation). To regain a sense of the political through cultural form Prasad locates Indian cinema within certain universal coordinates of economic and ideological organization. However, his theorizing of the form of capitalist organization in Indian film production circumvents a telos of transformation which follows the prescribed and predictable routes of Euro-American history. In his rendition, the modernization of cultural forms and social and political relations are shot through with power relations which make such an evolution unlikely, perhaps undesirable. In Indian state—supported cinema of the developmental realist type, the struggle for modernity is marked by the hegemonic drives of the nation state and its privileged ruling groups to suggest that they can represent and activate plebeian society. Alternatively, both state-led and industry generated middle-class cinemas either separate middle—class society off from the popular, hermetize it, or seek to contain the subaltern through a discourse of reconciliation and reform. The address places a value on middle-class society and middle-class social leadership, and excludes the subaltern subject from its domain.

This critique of ‘developmental realist’ cinema as a vehicle of state and elite-led passive revolution, and of the alternatively isolationist or reformist agenda of middle—class cinema, puts a particular spin on the absence of the citizen spectator in popular cinematic form. For if the former strategies are oriented to produce the nation for the state, or for a middle-class leadership, the latter would appear to produce the state for the hierarchically coded nation of the feudal family romance. Where then does space of a subordinated subjectivity and spectatorial disposition lie in this framework? Not in the ‘aesthetic of mobilization’, which sets up its own representational hierarchy through investment in the star, but, implicitly, in the incapacity to resolve conflicts of narrative form within a dominant logic. This is pointed to in the textual analysis of *Deewar* (Yash Chopra, 1975), *Dastak* (Rajinder Singh Bedi, 1970) and, to a degree, *Nishant* (Shyam Benegal, 1975). In each of these cases, scenarios of subordination and transgression throw the repressive aspects of ideological operations into sharp relief: in *Deewar*,

through the invitation to the spectator to invest in the masochistic subordination of community to state; in *Dastak*, via the implication of the spectator within the realm of privacy and imaginary activity of its female character; and through epic narrative strategies which exceed and disturb the sphere of middle-class leadership for *Nishant*. In this sense, no one location within the institutions of cinema is valued over the other, and each can be subject to a potential breach, an opening that allows reflection on the conflicts within the form and its ideological proclivities. Of course, the ramifications of this breach differ between forms and their characteristic audiences. The question of audience here would not imply distinct social constituencies, but different audiences dispositions and expectations when confronted with a particular genre or cinematic mode.

The approach is well taken, but I suggest it needs to be complicated by a more careful grounding of ideology in the history of cinematic forms and institutions. What is problematic here is the way Prasad develops something like a master historical narrative in delineating ideological and economic systems. While the second part of the book is governed by a more careful, short-run time frame, it is nevertheless defined by the imperatives of the first, which conceives of the ideological system in rather monolithic terms. The master narrative format is both systematically argued and insightful, but it leaves little room for a sense of historical context and a plurality of trends in the characterization of pre-1970 cinema. The formal subsumption argument casts this problem into sharp relief, resting as it does in a rather uneasy area between the economic and the ideological. At one level of the argument the disaggregated form is governed by the putting out system, but the narrative form that hierarchizes these discretely produced attractions would not exist except for transcendental ideological aims. This top-down explanation, ideology structuring economy, borders on the idealist. A positioning of ideology closer to the historical practices of film-making might generate a somewhat different and more plural theorization of the politics of film culture.

A focus on particular studios, looser structured production systems (especially after World War II), genre evolution, as well as distinct ideological phases would allow us to work towards a more nuanced historical account. The studio period of the 1930s and

1940s, especially in cases such as Bombay Talkies, displayed a greater degree of financial autonomy, and tied stars, music composers, dialogue writers and scenarists to it on a contractual basis. Arguably, this period was also much more systematic in subordinating these elements to the requirements of narrative construction, and generic codification. Accompanying these developments a notably social reformist and democratic ideology is observable in films from Prabhat, Bombay Talkies, New Theatres and Minerva, to mention only the most prominent and better organized studios. Of course, Prasad's thesis is much more directed to the period after the decline of the studios in his reflections on economic organization and the ideology of the feudal family romance. But for this period as well the fit between ideological and economic systems is not entirely convincing. Work on 1950s popular cinema in Bombay which highlights the relation between state and the anti-hierarchical individual seems to anticipate the emergence of 'real subsumption', although the film industry was governed by 'formal subsumption'. Perhaps the lack of fit here is determined by the specificity of the reigning ideology of the immediate post-independence period, suggesting the need for a greater specification of historical context.

The issues involved are as much about form as ideology, or about the ideology of form. Prasad is very suggestive in identifying how performance and presentational (rather than representational) practices in popular cinema inhabit a domain of pre-interpretation, addressing a pre-given symbolic community. However, it is not clear how narrative operates as a dynamic, conflict generating and resolving mechanism if it is only about presenting that which is already-known. In the logic of Prasad's feudal family romance, narrative coherence is achieved by the reinstatement of a traditional patriarchy, but in ways which present it as functioning in privileged simultaneity with other drives. But does this leave the site of coherence unaltered? More pointedly, how is the spectator's view located within the filmic process, (i) in terms of the hierarchized assignment of character functions and status around the ideology of the *darsanic*; (ii) within the linearized segments that are governed by a character-grounded cause—effect structure in the construction of narrative space; (iii) in terms of the overall disaggregated presentational field of the popular film system. These questions amount to an engagement

with a history of the methods of film narration, film-style, as well as a history of the relationship between screen practices and audience reception.

Prasad uses the category of the *darsanic* to define a symbolic social hierarchy. This would imply that films organize the spectator's view to coincide with an understanding of how relations are ordered in society outside the cinema. But what would this mean in terms of cinematic narration? There is a task- here of identifying how the *darsanic* locates characters and is responded to by them within a filmic narrative world. One hypothesis would be that an authoritative figure, symbol or space (temple, landlord's house, court of law), is mobilized to order the place of characters within a scene and over the time of the narrative. But if such a diegetic instance is located, it is not necessary that characters abide by the positions they are assigned by it, nor that filmic techniques subordinate the spectator to the sway of the *darsanic*. Indeed, to assume otherwise could lead to the conclusion that the cinema is vehicle of an archaic inscription of visibility with power, an orientalism that Prasad is at pains to steer clear of. Instead of seeing the discourse of *darsana* framing cinematic narration, we may need to think of *darsana* as being *enframed* and reconstructed by it. Here, the localized deployment of filmic techniques in the micro-narration of a scene-editing, shot-distance and angle, camera movement—alert us to how characters and spectators are being cinematically positioned in relation to the *darsanic* and, indeed, to the construction of privacy. Instead of assuming that the domain of the private is successfully constrained via the informal prohibition on the kiss, we need to ask how the camera implicates us within the space of the couple. This would constitute a field of desire carved out from authoritarian constraints by an intimate relay of eyelines and sound spaces between spectator and characters.⁴

Further, traditions of representation such as the *darsanic* can be interpreted as having enabling as well as authoritative functions. Through the devotional orientations of *bhakti*, *darsana* functions less as the integument of the social order, and more as a point of relay between the devotee / spectator and image-making processes which question social hierarchy and afford a redefinition of self. The devotional genre of the 1930s and 1940s is a case in point: critiquing brahmanical orthodoxy, films such as *Sant Tukaram*

(Fatehlal and Damle, 1937), have the reformist saint invoking the deity to provide an alternative vision of social conditions and political self-determination for the character / spectator. In this devotional film, the transfer between spectator-saint-divine object-back to character / spectator is effected via a cinematic materialization of the miraculous. But redefinitions of subjecthood through image practices are more widely observable across genres. Indeed, one may observe a plurality of cinematically constructed *darsanic* motifs within a film, setting up a conflicting political forcefield of images and image-constituencies.

How the cinema frames these discourses of visual authority, how it hierarchizes them into its levels of narration is the issue at stake: who authorizes a view, locates a figure in narrative space, who speaks, who sees. Even the ostensibly character driven codes of subjectivity and narration associated with Hollywood may be enframed in a transactional relationship with re-inscribed local cultural traditions such as *darsana*. On the other hand, they may stand quite independently, inducting another set of subjectivities or story-telling conventions into the architecture of filmic narrative. Prasad's wariness of arguments for cultural specificity is well-taken. However, recent currents in international film study have sought to recast the opposition between local and universally hegemonic norms of narration into a dialectical relationship. Here the specificity of particular cultural histories—European and American as much as 'third world'—have been constructed to understand the national and regional contexts in which the cinema was instituted,⁵ how it came to assume an identity, became 'ours'.⁶

In the case of Indian popular cinema, one way of realigning the political and cultural frames of reference is to think about the disaggregated filmic system as governed by the cultural experience, if not the clear-cut ideology of modernity. As Prasad argues, the non-continuous system foregrounds the relation between performance and spectator, drawing on live performance codes and abstracts them through the dialectic of presence (direct address to the camera / audience) and absence (the photographed object is absent at the point of reception). So, while invoking the register of theatrical presence and address then, popular Indian cinema, like all cinemas, is at best a simulation of presence.

It is this duality which both articulates a cinematic modernity and denies it. But the lack of narrative integration in popular Indian film narrative does not displace the modern perceptual disposition arising from cinema's fragmentation of the referent into different shots and narrative spaces.

This would imply that, instead of only looking to the overall work of ideology that 'officially' organizes the text, perhaps one should also attend to the fissiparous qualities of cinematic form to focus on the importance of non-continuity in evaluating the narrative universe offered the spectator. In terms of sensory experience, non-continuity would suggest a characteristic modern culture of distraction, where the spectator's world is governed by a multiplicity of focuses and not by a carefully calibrated, goal-oriented channelling of her investment in the narrative process. At issue here is the subjectivity arising from the development of this particular type of cinematic modernity.

In the popular cinema, we may observe a certain problem around the public / private divide which cannot be adequately comprehended in the opposition between feudal and modern scopic regimes. Here, Prasad's invocation of how Indian cinema latently assumes audience presence would be the launching pad for a very substantial enquiry into the relationship between screen practices and audience reception. The rupturing of an integral, self-referential narrative space via direct address suggests a circuit of imaginary communication, indeed, a making of audience into imaginary community. The authorizing voice of narrative community is not fixed, however. Thus, while speech is pre-interpreted in the sense that characters do not speak in the register of everyday, naturalist conversation, but are vehicles of existing language systems, these can be dynamically reconstituted to assume new forms and address contemporary issues. The development of a new linguistic nationalist community in the direct address of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam—influenced Tamil cinema would be an obvious example.⁷ Here, direct address may argue for change on somewhat different grounds than the protocols of narrative continuity, realism, and individual characterization. Even the solicitation of the cinema audience into a familiar community of meaning via direct address need not serve repressive ideological requirements. It has also afforded a certain

movement, an outlining of new forms of subjectivity on the grid of the culturally recognizable. Song sequences deployed from a host of musical traditions have often worked in this way. More anarchically, comedy conventions designate a particular circuit of communication that often destabilize the drives to construct coherent hierarchies of meaning and value in the narrative world.

Community authorization rests alongside, and complicates 'feudal', populist, and perhaps even statist and middle-class ways of organizing narrative.⁸ This domain, centred on the performative, may both deny the atomizing modernity associated with the construction of the private, but may also provide a supportive frame to its cultivation. Here, to cultivate an aesthetic of the private suggests a politics of desire in which the relationship between zones of intimacy and socio-political arrangements need not follow a model of opposition and separation of public and private experience. Thus narrative communities, both relayed and produced afresh by the cinema may provide sanction to privatized story-telling codes such as character point of view.⁹ However, to argue for this is not to deny the retrograde possibility that narrative community may surface in the distorting mirror of the atomized collective, as in the male voyeurism invited by certain forms of spectacle centred on the female body. To decipher the complexity of this logic of cinematic construction, one needs a historical account of the relationship between screen practices and audience reception.¹⁰ The former would include the auditory sphere, the way music sound are generated from the space of the screen. In the process, we might skirt a theory of the cinema that in some foundational way sees it working through the presence/ absence dialectic of presentation and representation as it ceaselessly traverses the space between feudal and bourgeois forms.

I think this would have ramifications for Prasad's analysis of the new and middle cinemas as well. Interestingly, only *Manthan* (Shyam Benegal, 1976) conforms closely to the model of developmental realism he has outlined. This does not invalidate this very suggestive paradigm, one which may explain the historical enervation of an impulse that too strongly relied on a reformist didacticism for its mode of address. And yet, of course, the new cinema culture of the 1970s and 1980s carried many aspirations and agenda: the

drive to develop a more regionally grounded cinema; desires to reflect on the reinvent cultural traditions through the cinema in an implicitly post-colonial agenda; and particular types of realist strategy and dramatic energy which exceeded the developmental ideologies of the Indira Gandhi state. Of course, this is not Prasad's object, concerned as he is with the cultural coordinates of the passive revolution. But there is a substantial subject here still to be uncovered, one related to the development of a new narrative community. For these initiatives fed on and fostered a lively intellectual culture. Film societies, cultural centres, magazines, appreciation courses and the élan of the early film institute generated considerable excitement in the 1970s, and was disseminated quite widely in places like Kerala. Of course, in a sense this was an elitist cinema, but as it was not available for the channelling of state ideologies, how do we place it or make sense of it in terms of an ideology and politics of film culture?

There is a complicated history of film form and cinematic institution involved here. To draw attention to it is not to displace ideological analysis, but to argue for its more careful deployment along the grain of form and the specifics of cultural history. Overall, the theorization of film culture in this book has opened up a range of very productive questions about the relationship between aesthetic and political representation. Indeed, *Ideology of the Hindi film* makes a significant contribution to the evolution of a political theory which does not regard modern civil society, the realm of freely associating individuals who contract to generate institutions of representation, as the uncomplicated goal of democratic initiatives. In looking at the complex ideological articulation of different modes of representation, Madhava Prasad has brought critical issues of contemporary culture and politics into the domain of film studies with an intellectual ambition and political engagement that will stand as a major reference point in public and academic discussions of Indian cinema.

Notes and References:

1. In this formulation Prasad draws upon the work of Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Geeta Kapur on the importance of frontality and direct address in Indian art practices and cinematic codes. Ashish Rajadhyaksha, 'The Phalke Era', *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, 15-16, 1987 and Geeta Kapur, 'Mythic material in Indian cinema', *ibid.*, both reprinted, with revisions, in V. Dhareshwar, T. Niranjana and P. Sudhir edited, *Interrogating Modernity: Culture and Colonialism in India*, Calcutta, Seagull Books, 1992.

2. Best represented by Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and post-colonial histories*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1994.

3. This argument is most forcefully developed in 'The Intelligent Film Critics' guide to the Indian Cinema' in Ashish Nandy, *The Savage Freud*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1995.

4. For an earlier, but still very problematic attempt to think about these issues, see my 'Addressing the spectator of a "third-world" national cinema: the Bombay social film of the 1940s and 1950s', *Screen*, 36 (4) 1995.

5. For example, Ginnette Vincendeau, 'The exception and the rule', *Sight and Sound* 2 (8) 1994, which demonstrates that Renoir's *Rules of the Game* (1939), invariably highlighted in the canon of world cinema by critics, should be understood within a set of local parameters of narrative form, performance tradition (boulevard plays) and cinematographic style (long takes and shooting in depth) that were shared by a number of French films of the time. Other stimulating writing on the importance of local industrial and cultural contexts includes: Ana M. Lopez, 'Tears and Desire: Women and Melodrama in the "Old" Mexican Cinema', in John King, Ana M. Lopez and Manuel Alvarodo (ed), *Mediating Two Worlds: Cinematic Encounters in the Americas*, London, BFI Publishing, 1993 ; Thomas Elsaesser, *A Second Life : German Cinema's First Decade*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 1996 ; James Hay, *Popular Film Culture in Fascist Italy: The Passing of the Rex*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1987; Sue Harper, *Picturing the Past: The Rise and Fall of the British Costume Film*, London,

British Film Institute, 1994, for an understanding of how the historical film reflected popular perceptions about British history ; Susan Hayward, *French National Cinema*, London, Routledge, 1993, who notes the importance of systems of gesture and morphology in condensing social and political consensus through the vehicle of the star. More generally, there is the elegant introduction on the problems and possibilities of the nation of popular cinema in Ginette Vincendeau and Richard Dyer, *Popular European Cinema*, London, Routledge, 1992. Such writing is yet to evolve substantially for the 'third world cinema', as much recent writing has been centred on avant-garde 'third cinema' studies.

6. This agenda would also re-set the terms of an ethnographic cultural studies seeking to recover the many ways audiences interpret texts. While this approach is often unhelpful in entirely dis-establishing formal analysis, Prasad's discomfort with it arises from distinctions that have developed between cultural studies of the west and of the third world. Where the former is governed by democratic assumptions, and the possibilities of multiple viewpoints in the construction of texts, the latter tends to be monolithic in its characterization of the cultural basis of interpretation. Again, this is a question of politics for them, culture or us. But clearly, once the west too is re-made into a series of specific cultural histories, the possibility of putting the democratic and cultural together within an ethnographic approach generates a more universal agenda.

7. See Karthigesu Sivathamby, *The Tamil Film as a Medium of Political Communication*, Madras, New Century Book House, 1981 ; and S. Theodor Baskaran, *The Eye of the Serpent*, Chennai, East—West Books, 1997.

8. Thus Prasad's very suggestive analysis of the deployment of the Ramayana narrative in *Nishant* suggests the importance of narrative community in 'developmental realism' as well.

9. This is observable in the song sequence 'Aaj sajan mohe ang laga lo' in *Pyasa* (Guru Dutt, 1957). A group of Vaishnavite singers perform the *kirtan* expressing Radha's erotic

longing for Krishna, authorizing the movement and look of Gulab (Waheeda Rehman), as she approaches her beloved, Vijay (Guru Dutt). The space of the scene is governed by camera movements and cuts that match the musical address and by the individualized viewpoint of the desiring woman. This scene is also an example of what I have called the enabling functions of *darsana*, where the icon of the beloved serves to foreground the subjectivity of the socially subordinate female character. For an earlier reading which tends to place the accent on the limiting *darsanic* functions of the male icon, see my 'Addressing the Spectator'.

10. This has been signposted in the work of Steve Hughes on exhibition practices in early south Indian cinema. Stephen P. Hughes, 'The Pre-Phalke Era in South Indian Cinema', *South Indian Studies* no. 2, 1996; see also S. V. Srinivas, 'Devotion and Defiance in Fan Activity', *Journal of Arts and Ideas* 29, 1996, for the way in which fan clubs use the cinema to establish a territorially grounded community identity.