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Writing History for Cinema:
Archives, Archaeological
Sites and Homes

We are to talk about the problems of writing history for Indian films; and we are saying we have not yet properly embarked upon this task. This brings to mind the opening passage of a book *What is Called Thinking*. “We come to know what it means to think when we ourselves try to think. If the attempt is to be successful in this we must be ready to learn it. As soon as we allow ourselves to become involved in such a learning we have admitted we are not yet capable of thinking (Heidegger, 1978).”

If the premise of this discussion is the admittance we have not given rise to adequate historical studies on Indian films, we are saying we have not deliberated properly on what constitutes history. We are feeling a sense of urgency and are lamenting that the necessary sources that normally sustain such efforts—films and ancillary materials like posters, song booklets, lobby cards, etc—have dried or are drying up fast. But we are not saying this history is entirely lost and cannot be re-constructed. A seminar is convened in order to discuss what we could do under these circumstances, what other kinds of histories we could give rise to. What has not been done cannot be done; what is to be done cannot be the same as what was not. If *that* history cannot be written then what could

be, is the question we are asking. So the project is to think how to re-think film history. What this means is that the premise here is a realization there could be not one but several kinds of film history. Many scholars in the past have come to such realizations while thinking history, much has been written on the topic of the plurality of history. We begin here on that note.¹

I do not know the exact circumstances under which Heidegger wrote the above book and felt compelled to say the above things. But we could note with some interest, that as he launches his project he proposes a shift from an Apollonian mode of thinking to a Dionysian one. So it is not as if he is saying no one has ever thought; in fact he is clearly suggesting that if one is to think anew what 'thinking' is then one is obliged to think in a different way. Some intellectual projects require a shift in the very base they stand on. If the problem of the writing of Indian cinema history is being addressed and if that is an incomplete project, if we are required to think of another kind or other kinds of histories, then we need to think and conduct our researches in other ways.

The two words 'cinema' and 'history' come together and the first step taken by the scholar is to produce a historiography. The move then is to collect film titles and make up a list of films made by a production company or a filmmaker. One then proceeds to gather synopses of the films listed, names of the makers of the films, the actors who played in them, etc. We feel the sources that produce this initial material constituting a filmography are becoming scarce. In the backdrop of this situation we imagine a scholar embarking upon writing the history of Madan Pictures, an important film production company most of whose films are lost today. This scholar would need a list of film titles made by the studio over each decade, and complete with cast, credits—and if possible, synopses too. He might need to know which films were commercially successful and which critically. He would also want to gather information about trade and related issues. The scholar will collect all of this above by visiting film archives, libraries, studio collections, old print material, etc. And as the scholar proceeds, the exact nature of work he would like to do around these films, their makers and audiences would begin to get clear, ideas would take shape. Till here it is a familiar path a research takes; but now follows examples of how this could take turns towards other directions. The above scholar hears of a print of a silent film *Vilwamangal* lying in the vaults of the cinémathèque française.² He is immediately curious to know if the film is the one made by Fram Madan or the one by Homi Master. Let us further imagine that on receiving his letter, the cinémathèque invites him to visit and check this out for himself—and for them. The credits are in Hindi or Bangla; they need to

identify the filmmaker and the production company and have not yet done so. He sees the film and finds it to be the one made by Master and not Modi. But he does not stop at the credits—who would?—and sees the entire film. And as per habit, he takes copious notes and acquires a couple of stills. The knowledge of the film by Homi Master is now archived with him.

Let us now take another scholar, who is working on Raj Kapoor's films and has started with *Aag*. The film interests her and she likes to engage in rigorous textual analysis. Consequently, she needs to know which film version of *Vilwamangal* Kapoor had seen so he deemed the text an epitome of lofty art and so cited it in his film. The young protagonists of *Aag*, a boy and a girl, escape from home late in the night to see a play on the poet Vilwamangal. The latter is so much in love with a prostitute Chintamani, that he swims across a raging river holding on to a dead-body (taking it to be a log) and climbs up to her balcony by the help of a snake (taking it to be a rope). She tells him if he were to direct such a love to God, he would surely find Him. Deeply moved by the experience the two children along with some other friends plan to put up their own version of the story as a play. The young hero Kewal is to act in the lead and direct. But the heroine of the play (his girl pal) does not appear on the final day, as her family must abruptly leave town. The play does not happen.³

All this is part of a long flash-back, which covers almost the whole film and is divided into three movements. The second movement takes place in Lucknow. Kewal is in college and wants to produce a play based on a classical text—the Kalidas play on Shakuntala. That attempt fails too, for the heroine's marriage is fixed and her family disallows her from appearing on stage. In the third movement, Kewal comes to Bombay and begins to direct commercial theatre. Annoyed when his heroine falls in love with him and thinking she loves him for his good looks only, he asks her to consider his character and qualities (*seerat*), not appearance (*surat*). He enjoins that instead of romantic pursuits she should try and lift theatre so it 'touches the skies.' For him, the commercial plays he does compare badly with the ones he had admired in youth. He thinks contemporary audiences have no taste for the kind of plays he admires; and raves about a cultural decline in the country, the nature of which he is unable to adequately explain. As a result of all this he feels he is not capable of doing 'good theatre.' And so one day while a play is nearing completion, Kewal picks up a flaming torch (a property of the play) and burns his face. Whether Kapoor's film is a brilliant or average exposition of a filmmaker's angst is not a historian's concern, but that it contains many references to contemporary cultural histories is.

Raj Kapoor often visited Calcutta in his early life, when his father acted in the New Theatres' films. Several films in different languages (Bangla, Hindi and Tamil) titled *Vilawamangal* and *Chintamani* were made in Calcutta studios in the twenties through till the forties. These were phenomenally popular all over India. For the second scholar the question is which version Kapoor saw and cited in *Aag*. And she needs to be in touch with the first scholar, consult his notes and stills. Continuing in this vein, let us imagine she finds that the film in the French archive *is* the one cited in *Aag*.⁴ The study on the 1948 film made in Bombay would certainly get a tremendous boost because of inputs from a silent film made in Calcutta.

The above imaginary case history of a study, places some points before scholars of Indian cinema. Any one element in a film could take a scholar towards other films, other archives and from there to other histories—or History. It demonstrates how while sifting through primary materials we come across much that might seem unimportant then but would acquire importance in future. And so lastly, this is about how a scholar turns into a collector and a private archive. This is also about how personal and institutional, real and virtual collections of material and information could operate in tandem.⁵

Embracing other histories

We do not always realize how far film scholarship is depended on non-filmic material and here is one example to illustrate that. The actor Vishnupant Pagnis, playing the lead in the film *Sant Tukaram*, is widely perceived as the personification of the seventeenth century saint by the lay public as well as artists and film scholars. Today all representations—calendars, wall posters and book illustrations—use images from the Prabhat film in order to refer to the medieval figure. One sees this actor as the definitive and final image of and signifier for the medieval personality. Wondering at the closed representational world this creates, I started looking at play posters, photographs, and book illustrations to find out if there was something before and apart from Pagnis. What the search led me to is the realization that by giving him that role, the filmmakers could have been selecting one representational mode over some others—namely a play by the Rajapukar Natya Mandali.⁶ Stupendously popular, the play ran for over three years and a theatre named Tukaram was built in Kalyan with the ticket sales. They play was turned into a canned film *Tukaram, aani Jai Hari Bitthala* (1931), considered by some as the first Marathi talkie. A reading of its script reveals how different it is from the 1936 Prabhat film. We

can today confidently talk about at least two distinct modes of representation of Tukaram because of this play. My search also resulted in amongst other things: a lithograph dated 1912 (approx) by Shivaji Ananta Mane from the Raja Ravi Varma press at Lonavala and an illustration in the 1923 edition of J. Frazer's translation of Tukaram's poems. Clearly there is one clear line of representations the Prabhat personnel followed and another that they discarded. This was further confirmed when in the early nineties one reel of a 1929 film version of *Sant Tukaram* was found in Kolhapur and archived at the National Film Archives in Pune. Pagnis closely resembles the actor of the silent film, who in turn looks like the figure in Frazer's book.

The nineteenth century saw widespread efforts by most contemporary writers (M. G. Ranade and many others) to cast this medieval saint-poet as a graceful romantic figure, likening him to Keats or Shelly or to Socrates (accordingly Tukaram's wife is said to be a Xanthippe). Pagnis certainly is superb as a meditative creative person, sitting quietly alone in the privacy of his house, on a forest or on a hill-top penning down his verses. But according to contemporary accounts, namely from the saint-poet Bahina-bai, the above was not the case at all. When she visited Dehu she found Tukaram was 'day-n-night' in the temple, singing *kirtan* with his disciples and some villagers crowding around. He recited his poems spontaneously and someone else wrote them down. The film shows him as gentle and soft-spoken; his writings however show him as breaking poetic forms and social norms, adopting multiple tongues and styles in order to convey his thoughts and views. On occasions he is sophisticated; on others *vulgaire* and irascible. The representation of Tukaram in the film is in response to contemporary needs to see this important medieval personality invested with contemporary and urban dimensions. If one remains within the parameters of the film text, one has a kind of understanding of this man, the film and surrounding histories; studies from a position outside provide other understandings.

Cutting across genres reaching history

When we stretch the boundaries of search, go beyond studies confined within film narratives and audience reception, we might begin to pay greater attention to a single motif or single image. Very interesting and surprising things happen then. That leads to other films and the study cuts across genres. Secondly, that embraces not just cultural but social and political histories of the time when the film was made. We realize that narrative films regularly inscribe apparently innocuous narrative-visual-audio

motifs in order to establish at times strong and at times tenuous links with contemporary history. So no doubt a historiography of cinema is made out of a list of films and filmmakers etc; but it could also emerge out of studies of images with indexical or/and



Aaram



Aaram

iconic status. I will further elaborate this with the figure of a lone woman walking in a city, meeting up with a man and having adventure and romance.

One of the most remarkable examples of this is *Aaram* (D. D. Kashyap, 1951). An empty silent city square; a girl (Madhubala) walks alone in the quiet of the night. Emerging from the depths and approaching the camera she says, “You must be wondering why a lone woman is walking alone in the city in the middle of the night.” However these words are directed not at the audience but a young man (Dev Anand), who enters frame and snaps at her, “I am not interested in knowing that. But why are you following me?” The mysterious woman shrugs, “Why are you walking in front of me?” A painter named Shyam the man walks away and climbs up to his studio apartment.

Looking outside a little later, he finds it is raining hard and the girl has taken shelter below a balcony. He calls her up, gives her the frugal dinner he was about to eat and some dry clothes. She sleeps in his bedroom, while he spreads a mat on the kitchen floor. He finds her name is Leela; but does not question why she is out at night alone.

Clearly nothing happens between them that night; and yet the fact they have slept apart must be underlined for the benefit of audiences un-accustomed to seeing men and women spending nights under one roof. The next day the city square wakes up. A man is seen in the neighbourhood, playing with a Yo-yo and singing jauntily: ‘Life is a Yo-yo.’ Scores join him in this unusual scene of men, women and children all swinging the toy and adding to the refrain—including a pair of apparently gay men, with one arm around the other’s waist, while manipulating a toy with the other. The song over, the friend Chunilal ascends the stairs, enters the

apartment through the kitchen window and finds the hero asleep in the kitchen. The night has truly been free of sexual happenings. The three discuss their money problems and decide they should sell some of the hero's paintings. The presence of the third person reinforces the nature of camaraderie between the hero and the heroine. The figure of the lone woman out in the streets and then spending the night in a stranger's house is thus fully normalized.

Dressed in fashionable but rented clothing, they visit a private club in order to find rich buyers. At the table there is another lone woman figure—a rich elderly lady (Durga Khote) sipping a cup of tea. Overhearing them, she rightly guesses the young ones are in trouble and pretending to be what they are not. Taking out her visiting card, Sita-devi approaches Leela and asks the latter to see her the following day. She promises she would organize an art exhibition and introduces the young woman to her son (an angst ridden youth, always at the piano, seen through a screen of cigarette smoke). A few days later, Sita-devi proposes Leela should marry her son; but not once does she inquire after her 'future daughter-in-law's identity and background, her caste and class (*jaati, kula, gotra*). The rich widow is free to go wherever she likes, do whatever she desires. But she provides respectability to a young woman, who has emerged from out of nowhere and has no social anchoring.

But we ask: who is this Leela? This new woman in the city is not a *bad-woman*. She is not punished for her transgressions. She fulfils her many desires: to be free, to fall in love and pursue some goal. She becomes the partner of a hero similarly footloose and fancy-free. Actually, she might be new to the Indian urban scenario, but not to Indian literature. Coming out of traditional narratives, the representation is endorsed by the past as it were. A distinct source of this narrative motif and visual image is the *pari* from Persian stories that came to India in the ancient times, became hugely popular through the art of story-telling or *dastan-goi* in the middle and late-middle ages. This representation stayed on to become even more popular in the print era; and in this last phase, her stories and iconography got mixed up with those of western fairies (traditionally and repeatedly linked to the *pari* through cultural and political exchanges between Europe and Asia).

A *pari* is a free agent flying in the sky. She is intelligent, wise and able to perform miracles. She resides in some zone between the heavens and the earth called *paristan* or the land of the *pari*. Patriarchy of yore has often exhibited the need to imagine lands dominated by and titled after women. However, this land is not exactly like the land of the Amazon or the Pramila. Wise patriarchal figures too live in the aerial spheres where the *pari* resides. They caution her to stay away from men on Earth (mortal women rarely

feature in these tales). But full of curiosity about the mortals, she wants to visit the Earth—on her own or with a woman friend. But of course, once there she meets with a wonderful man and falls in love. The story is then what the two do together and what happens to their love. Films borrow the *pari* figure to create female characters in contemporary settings. Like a fairy, the film representation is invariably clothed in white dresses or white *saris*. I found the *pari* image in many films, and the search took me outside the canon of film studies. At times we do not move beyond a hand full of films, neglect what is available and then lament about disappearing resources.

Laj (Waheeda Rehman) in *Solva Saal* (Raj Khosla, 1958) is adored by her widower father and the three siblings she is raising like a mother would. But as she also pines for love and romance, she has responded to the advances of a male college-mate. One day on the prodding of this unsuitable man, she leaves home with her mother's expensive pearl necklace. They are supposedly to get married in his parent's house and so are going to Delhi. At one of the stations, the man descends with her suitcase and absconds. A journalist with an eye for yellow journalism, Pran (Dev Anand), is in the same train and has been observing the duo. He rightly concludes the girl



Solva Saal

is in trouble, so leaves the train to join her. And as she is determined to catch the thief, he offers his help. They ask the Sikh driver of a taxi to take them to the main taxi stand, where they would inquire amongst the drivers if any one of them gave the thief a ride. Overhearing their conversation, the driver becomes suspicious and conveys to the others at the stand that these two are unmarried and yet out together in the dead of the night. Perhaps they have

stolen the pearls and are trying to establish their 'innocence.' Overhearing this, Pran breaks into a song, pointing at Laj sitting in the cab—framed by the cab window, looking like a painting or a photo.

“You must have heard in the *qissa* stories or *chaupals*,
 How a certain king is charmed by a certain *pari*.
 Well, that same *pari* is back again
 With new charms and tricks
 Look again carefully,
 This is she!”⁷

The men have certainly read and heard such stories—and so

have members of the audience. They all *know* it is perfectly normal for a *pari* to wander alone in a city, get friendly with a man and share an adventure. This beautiful girl could be a winged creature, come down on earth to carry out some good deeds; and so there is nothing wrong here. The men nod their assent and are ready to be of help. The audience is reassured too. These films seem to bear the promise that life for modern urban men and women could be a mix of adventure and domesticity. It is possible for a city-girl to share a night with a man, and team up with him in the pursuit of adventure and romance—or in order to carry out some task. Such a woman is one who a man can marry when the job is done. The end of the film sees the respective parents agreeing amicably to this union. No doubt these films are about allowing women to partake a little in the freedom and equity a modern nation is meant to bring to its citizens. These are about creating women with beauty and intelligence, spirit and fire and making them available to the best man (the hero). These are about creating ideal couples for the new nation. Such a closure can surely be seen as the full domestication of the woman. But these films are important for two reasons. They surely are creating a representation of an ideal woman very different from the standard practice. Secondly, they do allow women a certain degree of freedom, volition and pleasure, something rare in films made today—but more about that later.

The world of the *pari* is not free of binaries of good and bad; there are bad *paris*. Her life is constantly endangered by evil male magicians or the very mortals who so fascinate her. Her curiosity about the earth and its men lead her to much sorrow. She gets entangled in human affairs and falls in love with a man. Whether she marries one or is forced to return to her domain, the end is seldom a happy one for her. In the former case, she must lose her wings—her freedom, her powers. Marriage means she must be fully domesticated. At times a man chops off her wings so she can never return to her land; at times she is content to lose her identity and privileges for the love of a man⁸ Men too are cautioned about the seductive powers of the *pari*, but they do not listen to the advice of their family and community. This is the ultimate male-fantasy about a superior woman, who must be available and then be subservient to him, a woman who does not belong to the patriarchy that orders his life. At times, a man's life is imperilled by an evil *pari* and then a good *pari* comes to his aid (as in *Gul-e-Bakabali*, a tale that has been made into several films in all parts of India). The figure of the protective mother and the seductive wife combine in the persona of the morally superior and physically beautiful *pari*.

Interestingly, these tales often dove-tale into other stories, the tale of Hatim Tai for example. Hatim belonged to the ancient

nomadic Tai tribe in pre-Islam Arabia. His story has been filmed more than a dozen times over seven or eight decades. Interestingly, many of these films (like the above ones) were made by the Iranian or Parsi community of Bombay (Phalippou, 1993). The evocation of pre-Islamic tribes and ancient Iran no doubt is a political act and the films must be studied for the subliminal discourses of people of displaced origin.

Hatim Tai (1954) by J. B. H Wadia carries a complex delineation of the relationship between *paris* and men on earth.⁹ The film is marked by several allusions to past histories of India's trade and cultural relationship with the middle-east: Yemen, Iran, Egypt, etc. Hatim Tai liked to travel during which time he would help people in trouble and give in charity. One day he meets a noble, who seeks his help in bringing back a *pari* to life. She had come visiting his land and palace. Finding her alone in his bed chambers, he had touched her with evil intentions and she turned into stone. No girl can feel safe in his land now, and he wants to rectify the situation and be absolved of his sins. The narrative thus begins with a father-figure's contrition and a series of deeds and adventures stemming from the desire to rid a land of oppression of the female and other injustices.

Critiquing patriarchal narratives

Interestingly, several films based on pre-Islamic societies (not only those containing the representation of the *pari*) show women capable of own volition, acting on their own, dispensing justice, bringing in social equality and helping single men and communities. Such representations find their apogee in the film *Alam Ara* (Nanubhai Vakil, 1972), a story of a woman who conducts good deeds for family, community, and kingdom. In this film, the heroine is abandoned at birth because she is a girl child, but is brought up by a poor and pious man.¹⁰ She trains herself according to her circumstances; she learns forbearance and gains intellectual and

spiritual powers. She is soon called upon to help people in collectively combating famine and flood (documentary footage refers to real history) and against the oppression of an evil queen. The young prince of another land is charmed by this seductress queen. In the course of the film, he learns to erase class division, mingle with the populace. Together, Alam Ara and the prince dethrone the



Chalti Ke Naam Gadi

queen so the two principalities combine in peace and join hands in the development of the region.¹¹

To sum up: films carrying representations of the *pari* open up several theoretical concerns—in particular those pertaining to feminist criticism. In some of them, the woman initiates the narrative (as in *Aaram*). In another film *Chalti Ke Naam Gadi* (Satyen Bose, 1958), the heroine appears alone in the middle



Chalti Ke Naam Gadi

of the night (in a white sari) and is dressed as a *pari* in a dream sequence. She helps cure the hero's elder brother of his misogyny and unite with his former lady love. At times the motif is rather subtle. In *Alam Ara* (1972), the heroine is called away the first time as her father is dying. It is as if she can be truly altruistic only after the 'death of the father;' it is as if a girl child can do what fathers fail to achieve.

The *pari* figure is still popular and little girls are still compared to one. There is something childlike in the *pari*, who does not know the rules of the earth. With her a mortal enters into a wholly new world of fun and frolic hitherto unknown to him. But as mentioned above, many films speak of how such a woman (and girl child) is curbed, her wings clipped. A remarkable occurrence of this motif is the Malayalam film *Padam Onnu: Oru Vilapam* (T. V. Chandran, 2003). Shahina, a Muslim girl studies in class X and is a good student. She does not want to marry, but is forced into marriage with a man, who has a wife and a daughter. She refuses to consummate the marriage, but bonds with the little girl. One day Shahina joins the girl in reading a book with a poem and the illustration of a fairy. In a day-dreaming sequence that both seem to share, the young woman appears as a fairy and leads the little girl into a beautiful world of trees, flowers and butterflies. The rest of the film is about Shahina's gradual destruction in the hands of her husband and the local *kazi*. It is ironic that women are asked to grow up free and liberated like a fairy only to have their wings chopped off. It is important to investigate why societies should imagine and reach out towards what they do not actually want. We do not yet have this particular answer and could know it after we have studied properly all such representations in India of the *pari*, *pramila*, *apsara*; of the *gandharvas* and *kinkar-kinkari*. There are many such ways scholars

wishing to understand societies and human history come to be engaged with the symbolic orders. These are some ways historical studies can combine with studies of the image.

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¹ The sixties saw a rise of a modern sense of what history can do. The eighties saw literary and cultural theory aligning with historical thought and giving rise to New Historicism. Students of film studies wanting to visit those academic spaces might want to start with Stephen Greenblatt's work on literature and Clifford Geertz's writings on cultural anthropology. Personally I had 'turned from theory to history' in the very late eighties, during the writing of *Awara* (1992; Penguin re-issue, 2003). This was because of several reasons and because of realizations of what I would like to do and what I must not. It would be difficult to point at any one definite scholar who inspired this. For instance, apart from the above writers, I was greatly inspired by *The Order of Things* by Michel Foucault and kept up with the scholars of New Historicism. Students today might like to read Greenblatt's explanation of how he came upon the term 'new historicism' in an essay 'Towards a Poetics of Culture' in *New Historicism* edited by H. Aram Veesser (1989). A more recent work that is very important for talking of film in tandem with thoughts about modern historicity is Philip Rosen's *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (2001).

² This is based on an announcement by the Alliance Francaise of a film programme that included this title and which was to travel in India. The programme was cancelled and we did not get to see the film in India. The programme note did not provide the filmmaker's name for this particular film. Regretfully, my subsequent attempt to see the film at the French archive failed, and this remains yet another 'must do' task not done.

³ The delineation of the 'present time' in this film brackets the flash back. The film begins with Kewal entering his bridal chamber—he has just got married. The bride informs she is his childhood pal. The two parents have met after long years and have decided these two should marry. Kewal gets back his childhood love—and with this return, he feels all his former ideals can return too. Facing the camera and revealing his half-burnt face, he tells his bride: as a couple, they would now put up Bhakti plays like Bilwamangal and Shakuntala. Clearly, in this debut film, theatre is a metaphor about the 'difficulties of making good films' in Bombay studios.

⁴ I made one effort to see the film in Paris. As I was too late in

making contacts and as the person in charge was absent due to illness, I could not see the film and have engaged in this story of a person whose collection (of written down synopsis and film stills) of this rare film becomes a secondary but convenient source of information for a scholar.

⁵ The South-Asian Cinema list serv at University of Pennsylvania is serving that purpose at this moment, with the members exchanging information, sharing material. My own eagerness to supply copies of CDs and DVDs to those in need is connected with this paper. A small aside at this point: valuable materials are lying with other archives in other countries—Algeria, Scotland and Ireland, Madrid—who knows where else. As we communicate with scholars of different countries and cities, we need to initiate cross-border searches for material in institutional archives.

⁶ The film is lost, but the play-script is available in library of the National Centre for the Performing Arts, Mumbai. It is extremely instructive to study this script in order to appreciate all the narrative and visual decisions taken by the Prabhat personnel while making their version.

⁷ *Suna hoga apne, qissa ye choupal mein*
Ek raja phas gaya tha, ek pari ke chaal mein.
Wo pari aayi hai phir naye jalwe liye
Han! Dekhiye dekhiye gaur se phir dekhiye
Yehi to hai woh; yehi to hai!

⁸ The domestication of celestial beings is a very old theme. These films are also churning out old stuff in new forms. In the Kalidas play *Vikramorvasi* about the King Vikramaditya and the *apsara*

Urvashi, she is married to the king at the end of the play and is included in the inner chambers of the palace. But in the Epic *Mahabharata*, she leaves the Pururava heartbroken for having broken a promise (though unwittingly). Several of Kalidas plays are thus 'regressive' compared to the Epic (Thapar 2000, Chatterjee, 2005).

⁹ An important story from ancient Persia (Iran today) involves a historical and pre-Christianity figure Hatim Tai. His story has been made into films several times; Babubhai Mistry, the pioneer of special effects filmmaking in India, did so in 1954 and 1993—both the versions contain Hatim Tai's adventures and exploits with *paris* (good and bad), his acts of charity and altruism (for which he became legendary) and his love and marriage with one.

¹⁰ Kaifi Azmi helped with the script and composed the dialogue and songs.

¹¹ The story differs from the original *Alam Ara* (1931). In the Ardeshir Irani version, Alam Ara is raised by nomadic tribes, who help her be re-instated as a princess. These belong to a large group of films

based entirely on religious and community building discourses—films that could be termed ‘Islamicate.’ The genesis of this part of the article dates back to the time before Rachel Dwyer’s use of this term in her book *Filming the gods, Religion and Indians Cinema*, London : Routledge, 2006 and before Ira Bhaskar and Richard Allen use the term in the title of their book *Islamicate Cultures of Bombay Cinema*, New Delli : Tulika, 2009. At that time, I was calling these films on Islamic discourse Islamic films. Here I am using the term Islamicate and including these films under that genealogical term.

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