

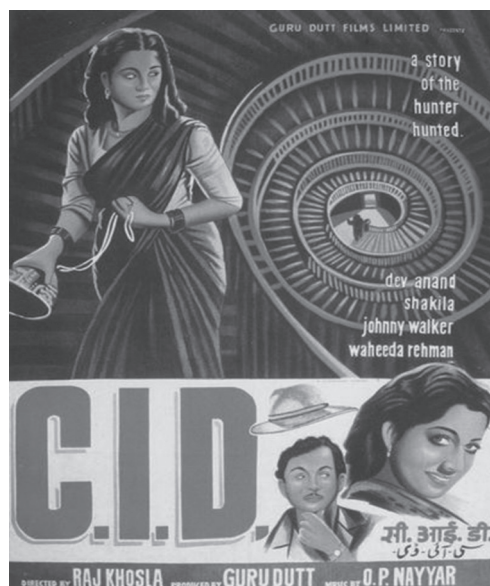


BOMBAY NOIR

Looking for film noir in India, apparently, is to miss the point of Indian cinema altogether. On one hand, debate on the form of Indian popular cinema is alive and well, as evidenced in the recognisable scholarship on the specific form and structuring of various genres. Nonetheless, noir receives passing mention. By contrast, in the United States the growing number of compendia on film noir, the lists of films added, subtracted, and discovered defy any settled definition of a canon. Revisionism, rather, plagues film noir more than any other genre, most prominently gestured at through nomenclature: historical noir, neo-noir, tech-noir French noir, Nikkatsu Noir, to name a few. Between James Naremore's magisterial book *More than Night: Film Noir and its Contexts* and David Desser's provocative offering in his essay 'Global Noir: genre film in the age of transnationalism' I must confess, to being gripped by 'Noir envy'.¹ Given the depth of historical research and global reach of the genre proposed in these studies, a calculated hunch and deep envy suggests that at one point or another Indian cinema too must have been seduced by noir's allure. However, as this essay reveals, detecting noir accents in Indian cinema is less than straightforward—a circuitous route yields unexpected rewards in the form of lost films (both long and short), marginal styles, low budget productions, obsolete technologies as well as conceptual brilliance. To look

for noir is to remap genealogies of Indian cinema. It is also to undergo cognitive relocations when confronting the distinctiveness of Indian cinema. In the spirit of the original cinephiles, let us begin this chapter with a familiar directive found in a *policier*, slightly altered: hunt down the films!

Long absent in Indian cinema studies, film noir is finally sighted in 2000 by Corey Creekmur in his reading of Raj Khosla's Hindi film *C.I.D.* (1956):



C.I.D. Poster

'If *C.I.D.*'s story incorporates some of the differences between traditional detective stories and the hard-boiled variations that inspired film noir, in its visual style the film's affiliation with Hollywood noir is even more evident.² Eschewing the presumption of direct influence or homage, Creekmur suggests a wider net of influences and affiliations with the visual style of film noir than has hitherto been explored in writing on this period, particularly discovering a consonance between the opening segments of Fritz Lang's *The Big Heat* (1953) and *C.I.D.* It appears, for reasons that will continue to unravel as scholarship expands, that historical noir styles subside completely in popular Indian cinema in the 1960s and 1970s, resurfacing again as cycles of neo-noir films emerge from America, Japan, and Hong Kong in the late 1980s.³

Taking a cue from Corey Creekmur, though, the year 1989 seems overdetermined. Two films reshaped the codes and conventions of Indian popular cinema and provided intimations of a concept that was yet to arrive in the

scholarship: film noir.⁴ The first, Vidhu Vinod Chopra's *Parinda* (1989), is a film that has by now been canonised by scholars in two different accounts.⁵ My reading in *Cinema of Interruptions* (2002) classifies it as a gangster film drawing on its visual and narrative virtuosity, most evident in extensive explorations of time and point of view in the film.

A complementary reading of Chopra's film is forwarded in Ranjani Mazumdar's *Bombay Cinema* (2007) when her attention turns to narratives of decline besetting the city of Bombay: '[...] the city of ruin emerges to express catastrophe, despair, and permanent crisis'⁶ and later '[...] the spatial topography of dread, decay, and death. One of the principle features of noir is its ability to destroy urban spectacle.'⁷ What Mazumdar brings into focus is the idea of noir, a genre that since the 1980s has clung to the gangster films, as is the case with other national cinemas in earlier decades. While crime films abound in other regional cinemas—Tamil films for instance—gangster films rely on the *topos* of a modern city, and the repeated return to Bombay in such films seals its fate as the iconic city in this genre. In a series of overlaps and steady distillation, *Bombay Noir* is the term that I want to recognise as the concept that emerges rife with anachronism from the shadows of Mazumdar's 'Bombay Cinema' and 'noir'.⁸

In the archives of cinophilia, however, the primacy of the term Bombay Noir belongs to the long lost, now cult classic *Raakh* (*Ashes to Ashes*) directed by Aditya Bhattacharya, and released in 1989. A desultory, hot-headed lad's turning into a killer after his girlfriend is raped is *Raakh*'s flimsy plotline that slips behind the spectacular visual compositions that prevail in our memory of the film. Without an afterlife on DVD, *Raakh* disappeared from circulation but its influence is visible in the night-for-night compositions obtaining in Sudhir Mishra's *Is Raat Ke Subhah Nahin* (*The Long Night*, 1996), Ram Gopal Varma's *Satya* (1998) and several others.

As if to remind us that the title pledges a rise from the ashes, Bhattacharya released a slightly edited version for the film festival circuit in 2011, *Raakh Redux* (2011). The title reverberates through the film at the register of the *mise-en-scène*: the opening sequence is a night scene at a tea stall on the edge of a road with no particular landmark in sight. The film unravels around the existential plight of the reluctant protagonist, Aamir, who hits the road and strikes up a friendship with a kid living in the rubble of a razed building, the Bata Shoe Factory on Reay Road, Mumbai, whose ruined splendour hasn't been seen on screen since. These are the ruins of a factory system that Mazumdar imagines in *Parinda*, but is only realised in *Raakh* in a monumental fashion.⁹

In a breathtaking moment in the film, a day of hanging out is recorded by the camera as it cranes over the façade and after a cut slowly glides low across a courtyard bordered by stately lamps looming over the factory floor; on the soundtrack is Amir's voiceover recounting events which are dissociated from the camera's movements. How can one not read the leftover scaffolding as a mausoleum for factory work, after an era of strikes and lockouts, after arson and extortion gained purchase, and after the ordered hits and accidental murders that plagued factory life in Bombay?¹⁰

In its reincarnation, *Raakh Redux* cannot recover the factory system in Bombay, but in its restored state as the primogenitor of Bombay Noir the film offers us a conceptual model to imagine the archive by summoning lost and marginal films or perhaps even commandeering films from other generic locations.

In its second act, the film reminds us of a certain audacity in the visual register, the audacity to play with darkness in colour and shun the flat lighting that is the hallmark of mainstream Indian cinema, Bollywood. In its mannered study of the gangster genre, *Raakh Redux* recalls for the cinephile Seijun Suzuki's gangster films—*Branded to Kill* (1967) and *Tokyo Drifter* (1966) and anticipates Jim Jarmusch's *Ghost Dog* (1999). According to urban legend, a film distributor in Hyderabad advised a novice filmmaker that he should try to emulate the darkness of *Raakh* in his forthcoming projects. This was Ram Gopal Varma, whose first film *Shiva* (1989) was released the same year!¹¹

Noir lighting, also known as Expressionist lighting, which reduces the blinding effect of the fill light so as to produce shadows and enhance the range of black to white, is largely the provenance of cinematographers and to consider the 'noir' in Bombay cinema would mean a consideration of style.¹² The legendary cinematographer V. K. Murthy was responsible for the house style of Guru Dutt Productions, which, according to Creekmur, showed a deep familiarity with American cinema and noir style as is evident in assorted genres: in comedies such as *Mr. and Mrs. '55* (1955) as well as melodramas such as *Kaagaz ke Phool* (*Paper Boats*, 1959). An ambience of intrigue and gloominess produced by chiaroscuro silhouettes in black and white films, however, is barely sustained in the long first wave of colour films in India.¹³ Colour processing laboratories were not standardised, often holding unintended images awash in red and blue tints. While cinematographers were still figuring out how to work colour, chance experiments conjured a practice whereupon it was devised that colours in a frame would be sufficient to provide tonal depth. In low-budget films for instance, it was standard practice to use two

lights on either side of the camera, in order to provide luminosity in colour and minimise mishaps in the handling of stock at processing laboratories. In higher budgeted films sets were evenly illuminated, a flat lighting mode that produces few shadows, flattens depths, and softens star faces into a glamorous haze, the characteristics of what became the 'Bollywood' style. But unless one suspects that those cinematographers with a proclivity for using shadows practiced their craft in subterranean genres, one has to await the arrival of cinematographers with a penchant for 'crepuscular aesthetic'.¹⁴ Both possibilities unfolded in Indian cinema.

Raakh and *Parinda*, for instance, display a play of light and shade that is the hallmark of noir crime (a far cry from the brightly lit crime films made by N. Chandra (*Tezaab*, 1988) and Manmohan Desai (*Naseeb* [1981] and *Coolie* [1983])). Binod Pradhan deploys a spectrum of light and shadow, his signature most legible in the slicing planes of actions through cranes and tilts in *Parinda*. Santosh Sivan's handiwork in *Raakh*, by contrast, suffuses the film in blacks and blues—this, combined with his handheld camera movement, brings an oblique film style into being, an existential noir.¹⁵ It appears that shadows define crime films. Hemant Chaturvedi enhances contrast by increasing the ratio between key light and fill light in Vishal Bharadwaj's gangster film, *Maqbool* (2004); key light is at least five times as strong as fill light or alternatively, the intensity of fill light is a fifth of highlight. Similarly, Ranjan Palit plays with handheld camera and almost dispenses with the fill light in Bharadwaj's serial killer film, *Saat Khoon Maaf* (*Seven Sins*, 2010), a style that recalls the lighting arrangements mastered in black and white films.

Although a tract on colour processing is long overdue, for our purposes here I want to restrict the discussion to how features of noir can be indeed discerned in cinemas of India, major and minor, and to insist that reading strategies have to be adjusted accordingly. In the case of Bombay noir that I will explore further, neo-noir features will be seen to have a furtive presence in gangster films, serial killers, and capers, a disagreeable bunch of films that offers none of the glamour of Bollywood.¹⁶

Bombay Noir and Gangsters

Hindi cinema of the late 1980s and 1990s can be divided into a 'before' and 'after', from the moment a young man from Hyderabad entered the world of filmmaking in Bombay. With a cinephiliac attachment to genre cinema—*Sholay* (1975), *Jaws* (1975), and *Mackenna's Gold* (1975) figure as his favourite films—Ram Gopal Varma's early experiments were in Telugu horror and



Parinda, Poster

crime films, genres that he would elevate from disrepute and neglect as in the case of the former, or revise as heists and capers as he did with the latter. In his transition to Bombay cinema, Varma undertook a circuitous route to his favourite genre, initially capitulating to the dominance of the love story genre in Hindi cinema by offering his version of the genre, a cinephile's love in *Rangeela* (1995). His biting criticism of the *nouveau riche* in his Telugu horror films is transformed onto a grander canvas, the Bombay gangster film in which the rackets of the underworld are rendered gruesome on screen.¹⁷ With *Satya* (1998) Varma inaugurated a gangster film cycle that was employed by every ambitious filmmaker who wanted to break into Hindi cinema, which till then had the fossilised structure of an oligopoly without the material conditions undergirding it.¹⁸

Satya's success helped formalise his own production outfit, defiantly named Factory. As a producer he was responsible for a cycle of films in which protagonists are crime bosses, gangsters, kidnappers, and femme fatales, while the cityscape is a playground for land speculations and the sea-front open for smuggling. Productions from the Factory radiated a distinctive style and narrative mode whose imprint is still evident long after Varma folded his operations. It is in the refurbishing of horror films that Varma's signature is most legible. The logic of film length becomes flexible, as is evident in contemporary small budget 'multiplex' films: shorter films, songs and dance sequences excised, interval erased and so on.

The name of the production company was Varma's response to the old guard that dismissed his ability to churn out films and rebound after every

crash. His financial calculations for film productions spawned a series of mergers and collaborations so as to stave off the losses of one through the winnings of another, a hustle that cannot escape the impression of being seen as front companies in their changing titles: Ke Sera Sera, RGV, Sahar, XYZ and so on. His response to the heady period of globalisation and liberalisation of the 1990s was to depict intrigue and betrayal amongst Bombay gangs whose structures of operations on a global stage were no different from those of the legitimate corporations who were exploiting the loopholes of changing tax codes; white collar crime was not that different from the organised structure of the underworld as is revealed in his film *Company* (2002).

Let us begin after the interval in *Company*. Unfolding on the screen is a montage of cityscapes: high-angle shots of skyscrapers on the sea front that seem recognisable as snapshots of Mumbai; a couple of foggy images of high-rises; and still more random shots of high rise buildings in tropical settings—the proverbial tile roofs and palm trees in the *mise-en-scène*. On the soundtrack we hear the shrill ringing of a string of cellphones; one by one they ring and on each instance release a different tune. As the ringing becomes louder and more insistent, the editing accelerates and produces a shuffling of images whose speed throws the quietly composed images of the high rises askew. We don't eavesdrop on conversations conducted on these cellphones but are directed to understand how urban topography has been remapped by the satellite reach of the cellphone and how the preeminent sound of the contemporary global urbanscape is echoed in the film. In this regard, this moment in the film recalls the early genre of city films whose fascination with the frenetic pace of urban life was conveyed to us through vehicular sounds and whistles of the factory—the symphony of the city. Yet in *Company*, sounds of the modern city are either suppressed or subsumed to the high-pitched sounds of the cellphones, producing with considerable acoustic flourish, a hybrid between an earlier cinematic city of panoramic shots and newer ones constituted of fragmentary snapshots.¹⁹

Company prepares us for this series of post-interval images in several ways. Early on, immediately following the first song and dance number, the film cuts to a series of extreme long shots of a city that we assume is Mumbai. The camera follows the flight pattern of a hawk and the voiceover on the soundtrack—actor Makrand Deshpande's—narrates the characteristics of the predator bird in a tone that one could easily associate with television commentaries on wildlife. The abrupt cut from the hawk's hunting habit to Malik's biography—he is one of the two gangster protagonists in the film—

encourages the viewer to form a metaphorical association between Malik and hawk. But what is more interesting for my purposes here is the series of the images of high-rises and the flying hawk, a set of optical and acoustic registers that will be worked over in the portions after the interval; the cityscapes in the later instance are more agitated and the jangling sounds of several cellphones replace the gravitas of the initial voiceover.

The ubiquity of the telephone, both mobile and wall-units, characterises the movement and transactions across different spaces in *Company*. Malik, the minor don whose fortunes are on the rise, and Chandu, a hot-headed small time thug who climbs quickly to the top of Malik's organisation, reach out through cellphones to collapse spatial differences within Bombay, and, in their relocation to Hong Kong, the spatial distance between the two cities. When Chandu seeks refuge in Kenya, cellphone calls triangulate the three locations. Even the wall unit, a less glamorous version of the cellular technologies, plays a substantial part in the film. Crime Branch officer Srineevasan locates a mole in his office by obtaining telephone records that reveal an exchange of calls between Malik and his subordinate; Malik's girlfriend, Saroja, forewarns Chandu's wife, Kannu, of an impending assault on Chandu's life by using a telephone from her bedroom in Hong Kong.

As phone calls accelerate the movement of information between spaces—hits are arranged and called off with substantial ease because of cellphones—they also accentuate an older rhythm of simultaneity and causality that characterise action genres: the visual rhythm of inter-cutting. *Company* is rife with various degrees of inter-cutting starting from shot-reverse-shots in one room to a three-way phone conversation between Chandu in his nondescript Hong Kong office with Kekre in a jeep on a highway out of Bombay, a style that fortifies the film's thematic preoccupation with rapid movement across national boundaries. This resorting to cellular phones doesn't acknowledge the range of possibilities that are currently available to signal temporal simultaneity including split frames on screen or a more radical disregard for flight from one spatial location to another in favour of virtual travel that is accomplished by cruising the web. Apparently, *Company* prefers to restage styles of movement and blockage that surface in earlier cycles of the global crime thriller while simultaneously intensifying the audio and optical effects ensuing from a chase sequence by borrowing from the contemporary cellular technologies.

In lieu of high-speed chase sequences through roads, urban and ex-urban, *Company* turns to roadways as the staging ground for a hit. The contract, or

'supari', begins in Zurich, Switzerland where Raote, a minister in the state government, commissions a hit. The target is none other than the Home Minister Patil, a member of his own party. We cut from the lakeside view in Zurich, where the contract is issued, to a seafront balcony in Hong Kong. The camera glides between Malik, Vilas, Pandit, Saroja, Kannu, and other hangers-on as they draft a plan to kill Patil. According to Raote's dictates, the hit should be perceived as an accident lest it draw too much attention from the media. The music is upbeat with throwaway lines indicating the similarities between scripting a hit and film. Malik conjures an ingenious solution, a road accident, carefully calibrated so as to appear to be nothing more than a routine accident. In a close-up, he storyboards the crash: on a two-lane highway, a cargo-carrying lorry will swing into the opposite lane, toppling the minister's car. With little lapse between conception and execution, the film cuts to Mumbai where Kekre is lurking outside the minister's residence waiting to tail him. Sighting the unexpected presence of two young children in the Minister's car, Kekre panics and reaches Chandu in Hong Kong, who in turn calls Malik who is transacting business on a motorboat. Chandu's sentimental attachment to children momentarily ruins the smooth operation of the assassination, and we witness the renegotiations as telephone calls fly back and forth between Kekre and Chandu, and then between Chandu and Malik. The film intersperses these exchanges with high-angle, long shots of a highway where we see an even movement of cargo traffic in one direction and the minister's two-car convoy tracked at some distance by Kekre's jeep. Malik grows increasingly impatient with Chandu and has no intention of calling off the hit. Piqued, he short circuits the three-way telephone exchange by directly ordering Kekre to carry out the assassination. What follows on-screen is a shot of a major crossing on a highway. A fully loaded lorry veers into the minister's car precisely at the moment when the security advance has inched a few meters ahead. The impact of the collision spins the vehicle off the road and in seconds it goes up in flames. As the film cuts, we move into a heated exchange between Chandu and Malik on the virtues of killing children which also touches upon discipline and pecking order in the gang, all of which will precipitate the splintering of the gang after Chandu kills Vilas Pandit and flees to Nairobi.

But what is of interest to me is the orchestration of the assassination as accident. The cellular economy quickens the flow of information and it matters very little to us or to Kekre that Malik and Chandu are located in Hong Kong while Kekre tails the Minister on a highway out of Mumbai;

distances are of little consequence as long as the cartography of the accident is transparent to all the killing parties. What the assassination is predicated on is an even flow of traffic on the two-lane highway that we also witness from a high-angle shot, but even the most regulated traffic has to acknowledge the possibility of the rogue driver who can swerve across a moving lane of traffic. It is precisely the possibility of such human error that Malik and gang bank on, a calculated risk that is fairly successful when older and newer technologies co-exist.

It is worth noting that there is nothing exceptional about the trope of the motor accident in action genres; in crime thrillers speed often results in crashes.²⁰ A state-of-the-art version obtains in *Syriana* (2005) where the film marshals technologies available in the military-industrial complex to assassinate a crown prince towards the end of the film. In a stunning replay of precision-guided bombing, United States fighter planes take instructions from a remote location in Washington D.C. as they swoop down to focus on one car in the prince's convoy. Despite *Syriana's* exposé of the interdependency between oil interests and the war economy, the special effects in the film emerge from the very military-industrial complex that the film critiques. *Company*, in contrast, is produced by a film industry that functions at the margins of such heavy weaponry and it follows that the special effects would be less militaristic and, by extension, less spectacular. Hence what unfolds on-screen is an old-fashioned accident regulated by cellular technologies.

Yet the film doesn't see cellular technology as a neutral conduit between spaces, an instrument that can aid the business of the underworld, but as a device that can be subjected to eavesdropping and surveillance. In a showdown at Aslam Ali's place, Malik ticks off his rival Saeed for conducting business over the phone. Krishnan, Chandu's footsoldier who inherits a substantial portion of the business in Bombay, is seen talking on a rotary phone but he too will resort to the anonymity of the call booth to advise Chandu against arriving in Bombay as he flees from Hong Kong after having gunned down Malik's manager, Vilas Pandit. What is already being intimated in these random gestures of caution is the double-edged sword of cellular technology: its expansiveness maps a territory for the underworld that is no longer beholden to conducting its activities in the dark alleyways of the modern city (or as Edward Dimendberg terms it, 'the centripetal city.')

At the same time, cellular technologies are vulnerable to a wide range of surveillance techniques that often exceed its own imaginings of itself as a breakthrough technology. Despite these fleeting moments of paranoia, *Company* remains

somewhat sanguine about cellular technology, resorting instead to an older form of crime thriller that has the police hunting down criminals across national boundaries. Srineevasan locates Chandu in Hong Kong and the Hong Kong police seem to be in constant touch with the Bombay Crime Branch with updates on the most recent shootouts and underworld activities.

However, it would be premature to suggest that *Company* harbours an exhilarating relationship to the contemporary mediascape, where the casual deployment of cellular technologies widens the activities of the gangsters as they move effortlessly between Mumbai, Hong Kong, Nairobi, Zurich, South Africa, and Bangkok on the one hand, and on the other hand narrows the distances between different spaces while simultaneously decentering the structure of the organisation.

A closer look suggests the film is equally invested in conveying a deep familiarity with the contemporary mediascape that includes a wide range of visual technologies located on the continuum from entertainment to surveillance. Not unlike the cellphone, television monitors are omnipresent in the film, often broadcasting on-the-ground news of gangster killings and police encounters. Chandu's mother Rani discovers from a television news programme that her son has been gunned down in Kenya, Sreenivasan surfs television channels to keep abreast of the media's reportage of gangster activities, and so on. There is even a sinister moment when a steadicam glides up close to Minister Raot and his family glued to the television news program detailing Chandu's arrest by the Crime Branch, a proximity that produces the startling effect of us watching Raot watching television. A more vivid interplay between film and other visual technologies can be seen in the credit sequence which is a montage of images including extractions from surveillance cameras and recordings obtained directly from a television monitor, a mode of presentation that locates us in a similar position as television viewers and not as film-goers. Here the film relies on our familiarity with television modes of investigative reporting, especially exposés conducted by using hidden cameras. Perhaps the most sensationalist example of this mode of investigation in recent history is best illustrated in the news magazine *Tehelka*'s sting operations that recorded officials from the ministry of defence accepting bribes. We can also include in this category the banal circulation of cellular phone images of film star Kareena kissing her boyfriend in a café in Bombay. Early in the film, Chandu and his buddies state that nobody goes to the cinema any more ever since VCDs and DVDs hit the market. Hidden recording devices also frame criminals in the film. Warsi's bragging that he

and not Malik is the don of Mumbai is conveyed in no time to Hong Kong—we are unaware of the primary recording device—and the telephone offers us access to the off-screen space of Warsi's killing.

Similarly, the voiceovers evoke the gravitas of classical Hollywood's crime films, but here, in keeping with the narrative's movement through multiple spaces, we hear several: the omniscient narrator's voice is credited to Makrand Deshpande but Malik, Sreenivasan, and the newscaster from *Aaj Tak* (*Till Today*) amplify the multiple layering of the contemporary mediascape.

The prolific references to current technologies of recording and watching are not relegated to discrete moments of sequencing, random props in the *mise-en-scène*, or calibrations on soundtrack but bleeds into the composition of filmic images, especially the ones that have long worked as stock footage in action genres, the panoramic shots of cities and other kinds of establishing shots. In effect, it encourages us not to overlook these customary images. Subtly and surreptitiously, the film recasts the common objective point of view in the film so as to implicate us in a relay of surveillance. Panoramic shots of Bombay, Hong Kong, or Nairobi are routinely distorted through the use of fisheye lens. While the lens captures a wider picture on-screen, we cannot escape the association of its widespread deployment in surveillance cameras, a deployment that the film seems not only cognisant of but also wants to impress on us. Here the wide-angle panoramic shots offer pause—if such a thing is possible in a narrative that unfolds at such a break neck speed—and allows us to question the contours of the filmic images that it serves up for our entertainment. One of the more unsettling effects occurs when the film captures Sreenivasan driving into Chandu's hospital in a pan from left to right using a fisheye lens; there is somebody watching the Crime Branch officer. We also see extensive use of this lens in establishing shots filmed indoors. For instance, a routine shot-reverse-shot sequence intersperses the exchange between Chandu and Malik with reaction shots of other gang members before the segment closes with an establishing shot that distorts the space while mapping the entire room. Even in Sreenivasan's office, the camera is located somewhere below his desktop and will scope out the entire room at the end of an interrogation; he too is subjected to a regime of surveillance. At times, it is a low-angle shot that awaits a character's movement through a wide space, producing the effect of a stalking camera that we see in horror films, even in Ram Gopal Varma's *Bhoot* (*Ghost*, 2003). A close analysis of the location of this camera has failed to uncover any systematic placement. The camera is everywhere and we are the ideal viewers of various scenes of

action. In this context, it is worth remembering Paul Virilio's theorisation of the longstanding relationship between the cinematic apparatus and the war machine: reconnaissance missions undertaken by the military inspired high-angle shots from helicopters. Despite this revelation, as viewers we have become accustomed to these images and do not regularly endow them with sinister meaning.²¹

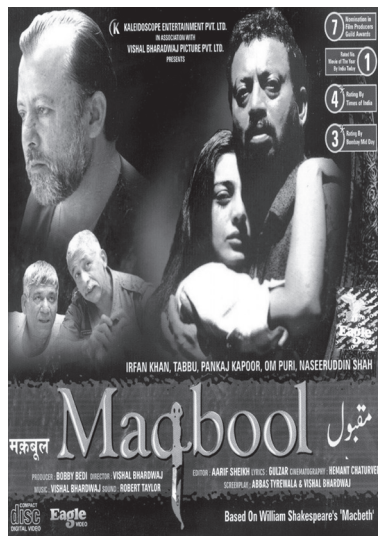
The film's experiments with the distortions made possible by using anamorphic lenses bears the signature of the cinematographer Hemant Chaturvedi, who had been deploying this effect as a cameraman for the wildly popular Hindi television quiz show *Kaun Banega Crorepati* in which he would amplify the size of the small studio audience through such optical effects. For *Company* he outfitted a 435 Arriflex with a 24 mm anamorphic lens procured from a camera supplies store that had been in disuse since the 1970s. The squeezed image produced during the shoot was stretched during projection to achieve the intended distortion; 'wrong lens on the right camera' is how Chaturvedi describes his shooting style for Varma's film.²²

The anamorphic images cast a dystopian pall over the narrative, not through spectacular digital effects that stage a paranoia associated with state-ordered technologies of surveillance, but by fundamentally reorienting our relationship to the perceptual regime. The establishing shot that always gives us an overview of the space of action is substantially revised so that a wider and distorted space of action is carved out. By providing a curvature to the ordinary gangster film, the ubiquitous use of fisheye lens infuses the narrative with an unprecedented level of paranoia that richly deserves our consideration of the film as a central text in 'Bombay noir'.

A cinephile alert to absence as well as presence may have noticed the unhurried yet decided departure from Bombay's skyline and monuments in crime narratives since *Company*. The city's gothic grandeur appears as a remainder from an earlier era of colonial and post-colonial spectacle that has now been swapped for malls, suburbs, slums, and back alleys recorded under a new appellation, Mumbai. The irony should not be lost on us that a city notorious for its highly speculative real estate market has long been beholden to memorialising its skyline in crime films.²³

With the slow disappearance of the panoramic night shots of Marine Drive and the backlit monuments of gothic Bombay, a new kind of crime cycle commences with gangs decamping to overseas locations such as Dubai as in *Ab Tak Chappan* (2004) and *Dil Par Mat Le Yaar* (2000). More pointedly in Vishal Bharadwaj's *Maqbool* (2003), the movement is towards the interiors

of the country where crime plots are hatched to be executed in Bombay. This breathtaking adaptation of *Macbeth*, according to Bharadwaj, was inspired by *Parinda*, Varma's films, and Mahesh Manjrekar's *Vaastav* (1999), and is allegedly a gangster film. Yet the grandeur of narrative matched by Chaturvedi's cinematography produces a surreal effect at times, and at other moments the play of light and shade in the badlands of a feudal outpost provokes one to think of the possibility of this film as a thinly disguised noir wandering into sunlight, a paradoxical effect that prompts one to utter, 'sunny noir.'²⁴ Bombay has a spectral presence in *Maqbool*. By setting the drama in the hinterlands it revises and darkens the gangster genre.



Maqbool, Poster

Serial Killers and Media Classic

Although the disappearing skyline is not the purview of Mazumdar's analysis of a crop of recent films—spatial metaphors dictate her nomenclature—she detects a 'landscape of dystopia' in 'Urban Fringe' films that rehearse 'a crisis of representation particular in its cinematic form.'²⁵ Mazumdar's 'Urban Fringe' clings to the shadows of noir, close enough that we can see it as a junior branch of the neo-noir genre in Bombay cinema, producing films that critique the dominant image of Indian cinema, 'Bollywood.'

Noir percolates a low budget production at a different register, thus summoning our attention to another set of conditions. In the early 1990s a

group of six aspiring filmmakers huddled in a basement office in the suburb of Andheri watching videos streaming on a television monitor.²⁶ These men with outsized ambitions were Shivam Nair, Sriram Raghavan, Shridhar Raghavan, Shiv Subramaniam, Abbas Tyrewala, and Anurag Kashyap—the ‘gang’ from Media Classic. Sriram Raghavan had graduated from the Pune Film Institute and was from a transitional generation addicted to long nights of video watching at film school; Shivam Nair had edited and directed television shows; Shiv Subramaniam and Shridhar Raghavan were toying with scripts and the former had acted in a couple of films, Vidhu Vinod Chopra’s *Parinda* and Sriram Raghavan’s student film, *Eight Column Affair* (1987); Abbas Tyrewala was a kid from Bombay vying to cash in on his dreams to break into the mainstream film industry at any cost but the iconoclastic cinephiliac world of Media Classic was heady. Anurag Kashyap, who has spoken extensively on various online sites about his film education acquired during this period, recalls a mutilated video of Martin Scorsese’s *Taxi Driver* (1976) streaming on a small monitor; for him this basement was the school laboratory that he did not have to abscond from. The fate of Media Classic is commonplace in the chronicles of independent productions across the world, suggesting a whiff of chance and dashed hopes, and deserves recounting.

A roomful of talent is easy prey for a ruthless entrepreneur and one arrived at Media Classic: a real estate developer, Janak Mehta, who had also produced a Marathi serial. His offer was 52 films, each 45 minutes in length, to be screened on television; the films were their choice. The gang now morphed into a working collective to devise a strategy to link the prospective films together: a series about serial killers. A collaborative machine was put into place and yielded five video-films in 1999: Sriram Raghavan’s *Ram Raghav*, Anurag Kashyap’s *Last Train to Mahakali*, Shivam Nair’s three films *Auto Narayan*, *Billa-Ranga* and *Firoz Daruwala*. Culled from stories published in an in-house Marathi-language cop magazine called *Dakshita*, these films mix meticulous details found in police procedurals with the salacious zest of serial killer films. A youthful irreverence towards mainstream cinema was the inspiration for these films but their innocence made them unprepared for Mehta’s machinations: a declaration of bankruptcy after the first five films. It soon became apparent to Media Classic that they were victims of a double-cross: bankruptcy was a substantial tax write-off for the builder who had made a killing as a real estate developer. Bailing out on a commitment of 52 films was a blow to the gang, but the bigger letdown was the embargo placed on screening of the films since the twisted logic was that a bankrupted project

could not generate revenue. (Reportedly, Ram Gopal Varma saw the films and hired Anurag Kashyap to script his *Satya* and his production company, Factory, produced SriramRaghavan's *Ek Hasina Thi*[2003].)

Double-crosses court responses and a version of this relay played out on a different screen for Media Classic. While the conditions imposed by bankruptcy included an embargo on broadcasting the films on television, there was no clause to stop online screening of the films. Anurag Kashyap's online cinephile blog 'Passion for Cinema' and YouTube channel play *Last Train to Mahakali* on the click of a mouse—the most fitting revenge conjured by cinephiles. (At times, these video films now circulate under other monikers to avoid lawsuits; *Billa-Ranga*, for instance, has been renamed *Kuku* to subvert the court ruling embargoing these films.)

The other video-films await adoption by film festivals and retrospectives, but currently as contraband DVDs they provide unalloyed glee to a cinephile on whom the irony is not lost that these short works sketch a city that neither resembles the gothic city of *Parinda* or the centripetal spaces of suburban Bombay with shiny malls and tall apartment complexes financed by speculators such as Janak Mehta himself. Rather, these video films are trained on sprawling slums where serial killers prowl at night and , their notoriety noted eponymously by Media Classic . In their ability to simulate fear and paranoia in hapless commuters coursing through the arteries of the city, these video-films sketch the longevity of such affect since its first sighting in classical noir.

In hindsight, these works provide glimpses of a changing mediascape. Both video and television inflected the aesthetics of Media Classic, notwithstanding the contradictions. The aspirations of the collective were to work in analogue though its members' cinephile archive was nurtured initially through the portals of Video as VCR. To note, this was a period before the construction of multiplexes and a period when the state-run television station Doordarshan had to compete with private satellite television programming, channels on which these serial films would have been exhibited. Although the aspirants preferred the choice of 16mm, Mehta's budget forced them to shoot on Hi-Band U-matic camera, an obsolete electronic recording technology once used by Doordarshan for making television films. Perceiving this as an inferior and sub-standard recording technology, Sriram Raghavan admits, however, to feeling less anxious about shooting ratio, a constraint faced routinely with celluloid stock. While video would be subsequently harnessed by the art world, the view from Media Classic was to consider it as a transitional

technology that would fall short of the luminosity available in analogue film and be eventually deemed obsolete with the arrival of digital film production.

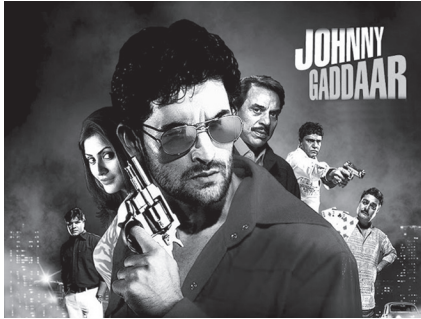
Despite their reservations about video, the subsequent works of these filmmakers reveal affection for video monitors and television; incorporated as significant props in their films, the scanned images on monitors distinctly recall the collaboration amongst cinephiles in a basement laboratory. Similarly, the narrative themes of their longer feature films amplify the independent spirits of the 1990s. Anurag Kashyap's *Paanch* (2003), Ranjani Mazumdar argues, has the first intimation of a femme fatale²⁷; *Black Friday* (2004) reworks the political drama to convey a closer kinship to noir than expected; *Gulaal* (2009), loosely recognisable as a political drama, is redolent with intrigue and subterfuge; *No Smoking* (2007) offers a nihilistic riposte to the State's *cordon sanitaire*, with excursions into surrealism. (With the release of *That Girl in Yellow Boots* and the two-part *Gangs of Wasseypur* Kashyap has decisively increased the budgets of low-budget indie films). Sriram Raghavan's dexterity with action genres harbours a cinephile's attachment that is evenly matched with film school rigour: avenging women feature in *Ek Hasina Thi* (produced at Ram Gopal Varma's Factory) and the spy thriller *Agent Vinod* (2012).

Although facsimiles don't obtain, the search for noir in Indian cinema turns out to be an endeavour in disassemblage, strains dispersed across a range of genres and recognisable in lighting, composition, *mise-en-scène*, archetypes, and narrative drive. Looking for a prototype is besides the point given the dragnet's scope to reshape the topography of genre cinema in Bombay, a vindication that squares with Sriram Raghavan's second long feature film *Johnny Gaddaar* (*Johnny the Traitor*, 2007) that was signalled as a caper and thriller on its initial release. Genre categories barely do justice to the film whose conceptual virtuosity, particularly the rehearsal of its subject matter, outmanoeuvres my own archaeology of Bombay noir. In the spirit of full disclosure I have to reveal that it lists as one of my top ten films in *Sight and Sound's* Decade Poll, 2012. Acknowledging the film's seduction summons its operations to be decoded up close, mimicking its own manoeuvres.

Johnny Gaddaar: Counterfeiting Noir

There's a whiff of the French in Sriram Raghavan's *Johnny Gaddaar*. Kalyan, a corrupt cop from Bangalore who has few compunctions about waterboarding his prisoners or cutting off the fingers of those who double-cross him, tips off his pal Seshadri, a crime boss, about a consignment of French furniture. The

contraband is Seshadri's if he pays rupees 2.5 crore upfront, a proposition which results in a gang meeting: each of the five members will advance rupees 50 lakhs and the profits on the sale of the contraband will be equally shared. Seshadri chalks a meticulous plan of collection and delivery: the



Johnny Gaddar, Poster

strongman in the gang, Shiva, will travel to Bangalore from Bombay by train with the advance and return with the loot. The breezy logic of a caper hides an irresistibly gripping calculus, and we are doomed to resolve the secret relationship between numbers and geography that the film insists are linked.

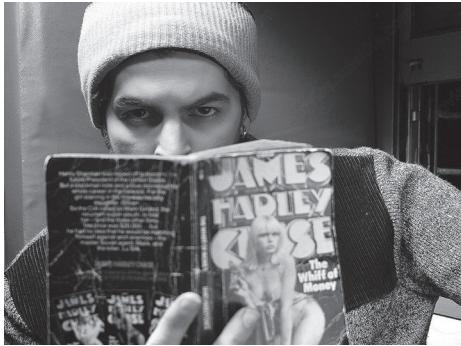
At stake is the hefty figure of rupees 2.5 crores that casts a spell on Minni, Shardul's wife, who is having an affair with Vikram. The camera lingers on her lipsticked accounting of the digits on the bathroom mirror, with the number '2' lightly erased as if to alert us to allotments that will be revised. But there are other competing ratios in the division of the heist. The window is of two days: the gang will meet at 7:30 pm at Seshadri's place armed with their share, Shiva will take the money on the 22nd to Bangalore by the 9:30 night train, and return to Bombay on the 25th. Two days is what Seshadri allots for the exchange of money and goods, and later in the film it's the same figure that Kalyan insists that he will need to solve the crime



Johnny Gaddar, Poster

of Shiva and Seshadri's murders. More numbers run circles around Prakash who exclaims that he has withdrawn Rupees 35 lakhs from the stock market

and needs four days to return it otherwise he'll go belly up; earlier he has expressed frustration at the list of 41 passengers who were on the train with Shiva, and that it would take 10–15 days to track each and every one of them. It is again Prakash who, coming up short on the amount, secretly corrupts his share with rupees eight lakhs of counterfeit money.²⁸ In a slow unravelling of



Johnny Gaddar, Poster

the caper, rupees 80,000 of this counterfeit amount is released into the economy by Vikram who has by then amassed the loot. He offers his share to help settle Prakash's debt of rupees tenlakhs to a player at the club who boasts of having casually piled up rupees 22 lakhs at a gambling table the previous year.

With these numbers on one side of the equation and the distance travelled to perform the original caper on the other side, the film initiates a counter-geography mapped out by Vikram who subverts the straight forward transaction. He drives out to Goa on the 21st but swerves towards Pune where he parks his car at the train station and orders an auto-rickshaw to the airport so as to board a plane to Goa. Securing an alibi by closing a deal with his lawyer Gomez, he surreptitiously slips out of Goa by flying to Bombay on the afternoon of the 22nd; later in the day he sneaks onto the very train that Shiva boarded earlier. Knocking Shiva unconscious and dead, Vikram accomplishes his heist by alighting at Pune where his car awaits him at the station. He banks on the fact that his drive from Pune to Bombay will pass off as the return drive from Goa to his accomplices. Phantom geographies abound to confuse us and, by extension, Kalyan the detective: in a fit of dementia, Shiva's mother insists that her son is off to Calcutta and not Bangalore. Keeping pace with the logic of timing in capers, here too we are urged to grasp the significance of punctuality or face the consequences of running against time. The gang convenes at 7:30 at Seshadri's; the night train to Bangalore is at 9:30 pm; the wedding anniversary party hosted by Varsha and Prakash is at 8 pm; Vikram sets off to meet his girlfriend at 2 pm but doesn't get home before 2:30 pm.

The dizzying tally of numbers and geography exceeds the diegesis of the film. In the DVD extras we learn from Sriram Raghavan that he was inspired

by 240 other Johnnys in world cinema: *Johnny Mera Naam* (1970), *Johnny Guitar* (1954), *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995) and so on. More crucially, the short, fleeting quotes from *Parwana* (1971) cost Raghavan Rupees 20 lakhs, a figure which doesn't tally in any calculation even if you were to skew the figures towards geography or bend them to favour time. There is only conclusion: 'Go figure!'

How does one read a film that reads itself at every turn, at every twist pulling in a set of quotations that delights and frustrates a cinephile? Let's begin with the obvious dedications that open the film whose importance is underscored by their appearance before the credit sequence: the film is dedicated to two masters, Vijay Anand and James Hadley Chase. The latter, an Englishman, was a pulp fiction writer popular in India whose racy narratives and sleazy covers were forbidden pleasures at school. Raghavan pays homage to him again when the protagonist, Vikram, reads or at least ducks behind Chase's *The Whiff of Money* (1969) as the train pulls out of V. T. Station. A whiff of money chases French furniture.²⁹

The gang is a bunch of bookworms: Shardul's wife Minni and Vikram's girlfriend read R. K. Narayan's *Guide*, which should be recognised as the source for one of Vijay Anand's films. Kalyan too is partial to crime fiction: *The Life and Crimes of Charles Sohbraj* is slammed on the table when he arrives in Bombay to commandeer the investigation into Seshadri and Shiva's murders and locate the missing stash of money. Other kinds of readings in the film send us secret signals on decoding the film: from an oblique angle we see Shiva for the first time as he is watching Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) on television. Are we supposed to correct the idiom to 'eyes wide open' as is our directive or submit to the logic of misapprehensions and misrecognitions? Shardul is the one rewarded with a close-up of his object of scrutiny: an auto shop's repair label pasted on Vikram's car engine puts some of the pieces together. His wife Minni, we learn, whiles away her evenings putting together a jigsaw puzzle of *The Titanic*, as if that would relocate her from her dead-end marriage to Shardul and straight into Vikram's arms.³⁰ Prakash is no reader of books but of cards and chance, and at times, signage: writing on a t-shirt invites a nickname for the wearer—Diesel. He reads the streak of coincidences as luck, and rises to the bait of a canny player in his club, promptly losing rupees ten lakhs. And Seshadri, who dies too early before the interval, is alert to slips of tongue: Vikram implicates himself when he reveals a detail that he was not to know. Reading and decoding by members of the gang points the finger at Vikram but at every turn a smart aleck is killed while cracking the whodunit puzzle.

As it reels us into a crime film with details of routine business between corrupt cops and smart thugs, the film changes course by switching codes. The neat caper unravels, undone by double-crossings which are rendered in a style with semblances to noir lighting. For instance, the dark shadows in Vikram's room, the menacing shadows of the back staircases, and night shots of tall building and back alleys are visual motifs that Marc Vernet isolates in the American film noir and those recur here. Furthermore, the caper absorbs the nihilism of noir by insisting on our astuteness and vigilance in the face of red herrings, which in this film go by another name.

Naidu, a cop who collects the rupees ten lakhs owed by Prakash to a club player, spots a series of watermarks on the thousand-rupee currency note with Gandhi's beatific smile—a sure sign of counterfeiting. Shardul overseeing the settlement is told that rupees 80,000 of the collection is counterfeit, a fraud that only Naidu's keen eyes would spot. Shardul tracks Vikram from whose pile the fakes materialised, but we know that Vikram had lifted the money from the original collection of rupees 2.5 crores. News of the forgery reaches Prakash, who misreads the situation and heads off to meet Vikram and enlist his support to confront Shardul, whom he assumes has made off with the original collection. This is because (we find out) it was originally Prakash who couldn't come up with the entire 50 lakhs and thus adulterated his contribution with eight lakhs of counterfeit notes, a short-term arrangement that he assures Vikram he would have rectified. In response to Prakash's confession Vikram shoots him dead, but soon thereafter is cornered by Shardul in the bar who, in turn, meets his deadly end twice over by way of Vikram's gun and Minni's cuckoldry.

The film extends the metaphor of counterfeiting further, propelling it to a deadly end. After Shardul is killed and Minni appeased, Vikram tries to pass himself off as Shardul by wearing the latter's jacket and driving his car across rain-lashed roads to collect the loot that he assumes Minni and he will now possess. In the meantime, Varsha deduces that Prakash was slain by Shardul and his car toppled off the cliff into the lake. In a punitive ending thrillingly reminiscent of the best of closures, she guns down Vikram mistaking him for Shardul. Counterfeits coupled with misrecognition turn out to be tried and reliable aphorisms plucked from pulp fiction.

Tracing the vertiginous logic laid out by the film hardly helps us to make inroads into its hermeneutical system that has arrows pointed in opposite directions and is constantly outwitting us with its confounding logic. Vikram's decision at the road sign mounted at the entrance to the highway too easily

settled on a string of coin tosses, one out of three and then three out of five, to choose between Pune and Goa? is our plight too. A punter's intuition, the film suggests, is equally matched by a detective's/reader's insights.

However, this spiralling logic of chance and design is blunted by the film's sentimental attachment to a set of objects that it returns to periodically and nudges us to look at: the *topoi* of cinephilia. The opening credits feature black and white shots of slick streets with vehicles crisscrossing the screen, a sequence that reverts to openings of classical American film noir and the black and white films of Navketan Production such as *Kala Bazaar* (1960), *Kala Paani* (1958), and *C.I.D.* After the opening shooting in black and white, red blood drips over the title—a direct homage to the title sequence of Vijay Anand's *Johnny Mera Naam* (1970) in which dripping blood is the chosen font for the title sequence. *Johnny Gaddaar* then turns decisively to colour. This homage to Anand is more overtly intimated in the black and white pre-credit sequence where we see photographs of Chase and Anand, side by side, provoking fits of adolescent bilingual punning arising from a translation of Anand's last name into English Chase Happiness—and by extension a deep suspicion that both authors embraced pseudonyms in their devotion to crime.

Commanding as much respect as Chase (but among cinephiles), Anand is the cult director whose flair with the thriller finally receives the most intimate recognition in *Johnny Gaddaar*. *Johnny Mera Naam* playing on a television at a motel desk (reminiscent of all the films beholden to the psychotic desires of such gatekeepers after *Psycho*) supplies Vikram with his secret identity, Johnny, to which the initial 'G' is added spawning more bilingual puns in the diegesis. 'G' (*ji*), a phatic suffix conveying politeness in Hindi, is renamed 'Gaddaar' by Prakash, which translates into English as 'one who betrays'. Hence the title of the film: Johnny Gaddaar. Other pseudonyms proliferate in the film. Seshu resorts to the diminutive 'Vicky' moments before trapping Vikram; Minni passes for Twinkle on Vikram's mobile to hide her infidelity. The profusion of names mimics *Johnny Mera Naam* in which the protagonist plays a spy donning several monikers and infiltrates a crime gang with tentacles in Nepal. In that film's denouement, the spy's real identity is revealed in a drawn out name-calling fistfight between warring antagonists that is conveniently resolved as a union of long lost siblings. To decode Raghavan's *Johnny Gaddaar* one has to enter the logic of Anand's film that is equally besieged with a different kind of counterfeiting, a shadow play of *incognito*.

In a lesser film this quotation from Vijay Anand's film may have served as a reverential homage or a throwaway remark, whereas in this updated caper

the arrow points the other way, to the other film that also plays on television: *Parwana* (1971). This forgotten B-film starring Amitabh Bachchan is reified for its split narrative, a hallmark of Indian cinema where the interval serves as an organising principle.³¹ In the first half of the film, Bachchan plays a shy writer harbouring his secret love for the girl next door; this is the part that Prakash and Varsha watch on television. The second half of this film converts Bachchan into a scheming criminal who covers his tracks by surreptitiously flying from Bombay to Nagpur to board the Calcutta-bound train that originated at Dadar. As it turns out, this is the section that grabs Vikram's attention and gifts him the diagram to outwit his partners in the caper. But there are other characters in the film that cherish a similar attachment to the B-film. Kalyan cracks the crime by evoking *Parwana*, which is the template from which Vikram conceived his heist in the middle of a caper. So it follows that Raghavan's film grafts *Parwana* with *Johnny Mera Naam*; that is the puzzle we have to decipher to outflank the red herrings that the film throws our way in its beguiling calculus of figures and geography.³² Counterfeiting logic is not the preserve of the thematics of the film, but permeates its structuring. The secret password is the provenance of cinephiles whose archives stretch hither thither with a promiscuity that outdoes Minni's infidelity. In a nod to his earlier film, *Ek Hasina Thi*, Raghavan leaves women and money untouched at the end of the film; their collusion and shenanigans will require another film. What the film invites us to do is to acquiesce to its oneiric logic of associations, the much-beloved preoccupation of the cinephile, from one film to another with impunity permissible in dream work.

In its extravagant homage to Vijay Anand, *Johnny Gaddaar* puts together a small yet impressive cycle of capers in Indian cinema that deserve a revival. RamGopalVarma's Telugu film *Govinda! Govinda!* (1993) recounts an elaborate theft of the monetary offerings at the Tirupati Temple and his production outfit's *Money Money* (1995), a caper. Varma's collaboration with Mani Ratnam on a script produced the zany *Thiruda!Thiruda!(Thief! Thief!,1993)* which gleefully narrates the antics of a couple of small-town thieves who have chanced upon a trainload of money looted by an international gang of criminals. Comedy is again the mode chosen by Srinivas Bhashyam's *Paisa Vasool* (2004) in which two women find themselves unwittingly in a caper. Heists, capers, and counterfeiting are rendered as tomfoolery in Indian films. Perhaps playing with money is not funny business for the Board of Censors: counterfeiting is an act of treason; heists a criminal act in a monetary economy. Counterfeiting is commemorated as a comic motif in the canonical

film, *Sholay/Flames*, (1975): tossing a coin is how Jay decides on a plan of action with his partner in crime, Veeru. At the end of the film we realise that Jay always wins the toss because the coin is a counterfeit. *Johnny Gaddaar* eschews fixing chance in a coin toss by increasing the stakes to 1,000 rupee currency. In this wager, Raghavan's film trades comedy for noir; the latter's anti-capitalism identified by French cinephiles unspools *Johnny Gaddaar* in its second half.

Conclusion

It's time to revisit Gresham's Law: bad money drives out good money. It is invoked here not as a resigned sigh over the whims of destiny but as a cautionary tale for another market, the marketplace of ideas and names. Nomenclature too has purchase, its circulation interrupted by fixity: 'Bollywood' to describe the films from India. That is a version of bad money. As the discussion above has revealed, Bombay Cinema, Bombay Noir, Urban Fringe, Caper, Serial Killer Films, Cruel Cinema, also circulate in Indian cinema, drawing these films into a promiscuous global cinephilia that has little patience with unitary terms. Perhaps Bollywood cannot be displaced as the image of Indian cinema, but another exchange of ideas is well underway, a gift economy that has long been in place. In a most extravagant gesture, French cinephiles conjured 'film noir' for those American films that dared to strike in the shadows. Across decades and into the next century it's time for some belated Indian gifting: retract Bollywood, issue a slew of new genres that dare to buck the trend.

By exhuming lost works and marginal production practices, Bombay noir conjures the possibility of noir in other sites, Tamil and Bengali cinema for instance. An idea of Indian noir, however, may never emerge fully given the disenchantment with nationalism and global capitalism that this genre harbours.

References

Thanks to Andrew Spicer for a careful reading of an earlier version of this paper published in *A Companion to Film Noir*, ed. Andrew Spicer and Helen Hanson (Walden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), and to Anuj Vaidya for promising a partnership in crime.

All images from *Johnny Gaddaar* courtesy: Sriram Raghavan

Notes:

- 1 James Naremore, *More than Night: Film Noir and its Contexts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). David Desser, 'Global Noir: Genre Film in the Age of Transnationalism', in Barry Keith Grant, ed., *Film Genre Reader* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2003).
- 2 Corey Creekmur, 'Notes on C.I.D.' at <http://www.uiowa.edu/indiancinema/cid>; accessed 5 August 2011.
- 3 For Madhava Prasad's concept of the 'super genre' see his *The Ideology of Hindi: A Historical Construction* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000). For action genres with a global resonance see my *Cinema of Interruptions: Action Genres in Contemporary Indian Cinema* (London: BFI Publishing, 2002).
- 4 Or was it 1988? One can attribute two dates to Indian films: the date found on the Board of Censor Certificate that qualifies the film for release and is the date that is held on for national awards in India; the other date that we find on online sites such as IMDb is the release date of the film. So a film passed by the Board of Censors in late December is eligible for awards that year but can be released in the following year. This shifting timeline also recurs in American films vying for the shortlist drawn up by the Oscars.
- 5 Here I'm evoking my reading of *Parinda* in *Cinema of Interruptions: Action Genres in Contemporary Indian Cinema*.
- 6 Ranjani Mazumdar, *Bombay Cinema: An Archive of the City* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007), p. 150.
- 7 Ibid., p. 160. See also Ravi Vasudevan's coinage 'city of dread' in his reading of *Gardish*: 'Selves made strange: violent and performative bodies in the cities of Indian cinema, 1974-2003' in *Sarai Reader 2*.
- 8 Pulp fiction set in Bombay has a long history in Marathi and Hindi. More recently English writing on the seedier aspects of this metropolis is available in Vikram Chandra and Suketu Mehta's writing. In an uncanny coincidence of nomenclature, worthy of note is Pankaj Mishra's review of Vikram Chandra's novel *Sacred Games* in the *New Yorker* titled 'Bombay Noir.'
- 9 Email exchange with Aditya Bhattacharya, May 2011.
- 10 For a comprehensive understanding of the convergence between the working class and right-wing politics in Bombay see Thomas Blom Hansen, *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay*

- (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).
- 11 *Shiva* is not a study in the play of light and dark but it was a trendsetter in cinematography: the first Indian film to use the Steadicam. See my *Bombay* (London: BFI Modern Classics, 2005) for a detailed history of the Steadicam in India.
 - 12 See Marc Vernet's marvellous essay 'Film Noir on the Edge of Doom', in Joan Copjec, ed., *Shades of Noir* (London: Verso, 1993). Among the many pithy formulations in his essay, Vernet recalls Paul Schrader's own contribution to one-liners that states that before the *film noir* of the 1950s there was *film gris* of the 1940s. On matters of the visual in film noir, it's always rewarding to return to Janey Place and Lowell Peterson's 'Some Visual Motifs of *Film Noir*', in Alain Silver and James Ursini, eds., *Film Noir Reader* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1996).
 - 13 Thanks to Ranjan Palit for enlightening discussions on lighting and cinematography.
 - 14 An inter-textual relay that haunts this essay in the section on serial killer films: Richard Dyer's evocation of Chris Drake's evaluation of Darius Khondji's cinematography in David Fincher's *Seven* (1995). Richard Dyer, *Seven* (London: BFI Modern Classics, 1999).
 - 15 Shadows can warp narratives too. Madhu Ambat's cinematography in Mani Ratnam's *Anjali* (1990) was prematurely criticised for bathing children in shadows.
 - 16 I'm beholden to David Desser's reading of genealogies of nomenclature besetting film noir and Bollywood: 'Shree 420', in Lalitha Gopalan, ed., *Cinema of India* (London: Wallflower Press, 2010).
 - 17 Interview with Ram Gopal Varma (Mumbai, 2003). Varma can recall the opening sequence of all these films shot by shot.
 - 18 See also Ranjani Mazumdar's reading of Varma's *Satya and Company* in *Bombay Cinema: An Archive of the City* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
 - 19 Here I am beholden to Edward Dimendberg's formulation of the centrifugal and centripetal spaces in his reading of the relationship between the American urban spaces and Hollywood-style film noir. See his *Film Noir and Spaces of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).
 - 20 Here it is productive to evoke David Desser's formulation that the car chase is a recurring trope in the recent crop of global noir films.

- Consider the car chase in *Ronin* for instance.
- 21 It is not uncommon for Indian filmmakers to solicit the services of an air force pilot for an aerial shot that may add a certain flamboyance to a song and dance number.
 - 22 Thanks to Hemant Chaturvedi for sharing theories of his practice with me, July 2008.
 - 23 It's worth noting that housing woes have figured in documentary films: see Anand Patwardhan's *Bombay Our City* (1985).
 - 24 Desser, 'Global Noir: Genre Film in the Age of Transnationalism'.
 - 25 Ranjani Mazumdar, 'Friction, Collision, and the Grotesque: the Dystopic Fragments of Bombay Cinema', in Gyan Prakash, ed., *Noir Urbanisms: Dystopic Images of the Modern City* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 150–186.
 - 26 Details of this period were culled from interviews with Anurag Kashyap, Shivam Nair, and Abbas Tyrewala, August 2007; and interview with Sriram Raghavan, August 2008.
 - 27 Mazumdar, 'Friction, Collision, and the Grotesque'.
 - 28 Many thanks to Roberto Tejada who suggested that I would find companionship in Jacques Derrida's reading of counterfeiting. Only hubris would find this section a copycat crime. Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
 - 29 There are more Gallic references supplied extra-diegetically: Sriram Raghavan dedicates his student film *8 Column Affair* (1987) to George Franju; Vikram is inspired by Alain Delon's roles in Melville's French capers.
 - 30 This is an obvious quotation from *Citizen Kane*: much to Kane's consternation Susan spends her days in Xanadu by putting together jigsaw puzzles.
 - 31 See *Cinema of Interruptions* for a reading of the interval as a structuring device in popular Indian cinema.
 - 32 There are red herrings here too: Seshadri's evokes a scene from Brian de Palma's *Scarface* (1983) when the gang convenes at his home to tally the collective stash. The songs in the film lead us to other films from the sixties and seventies.