

THE FAMILIES OF HINDI CINEMA: A SOCIO-HISTORICAL APPROACH TO FILM STUDIES

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In a recent paper on the Hindi box office hit *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun/Who Am I to You* (Sooraj Barjatya, India, 1994), Vamsee Juluri argues that 'in the context of the meeting of global capitalism and local forms of privilege, the audience's investment in the family as a category of globality represents the possibility of epistemic opposition to hegemonic notions of the global.' On this basis, Juluri goes on to maintain that the celebration of the family is *HAAHK*'s 'most useful contribution to history.' (1999: 231).

The model of history which informs Western film theory is rooted in modernisation theory as it was developed in the fifties by economists and political scientists who took a particular construction of the development of Western/American capitalism as the paradigm of history, including the linear succession of 'historical periods' from classical antiquity to the present culminating in American (post)modernity (Harootunian and Sakai 1990, Willemsen 2000). Within this historicist trajectory, configurations that do not conform to hegemonic, that is, Western, notions of modernity are viewed as 'pre-modern'. This way of approaching social formations conceals unevennesses and conflicts that exist in any society. I suggest that the significance of the family in *HAAHK* can be fully grasped only if we consider the possibility that different discourses and temporalities pertaining to different historical epochs operate simultaneously within any one formation [1].

For cultural theory to consider the necessary heterogeneity of any culture means finding a way to explore the relation between different discourses, as also between the different historical epochs which activate them. How do cultural forms operate across temporalities and socio-historical formations? Forms change, but the change is never wholesale: the first step is never a change in the forms themselves, but in their function. In other words, the function of a cultural form in a given socio-historical constellation is always the unstable effect of a contest between the temporalities and forces that are constitutive of the constellation and which struggle to ascribe meaning to the form. Here I want to look at *HAAHK*'s family as a cultural form (a construct) and map its trajectory in Hindi cinema from the 1950s to the 1990s. Which forces are at work in determining its function and meaning?

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Within the Hindi film industry as a whole, *HAAHK* relaunched the 'family film' genre by tapping into a traditional trope: the 'problem' between arranged marriage and romantic love. In *HAAHK* the arranged marriage between Rajesh/Mohnish Bahl, nephew and heir to an

industrial empire, and Pooja/Renuka Shahane, daughter of an equally rich professor functions as the background to the romance between the hero, Rajesh' younger brother Prem/Salman Khan and the heroine, Pooja's sister Nisha/Madhuri Dixit. Most of the three hours plot is devoted to a series of ostensibly 'traditional' religious (read Hindu) and family festivities with parties at the temple and the homes of the two families. These allow Vamsee Juluri to observe that 'In spite of its silence about the costs to the women in the household and the underprivileged world outside, *HAAK* has celebrated, rather infectiously at that, how things might have been with access to non-stop family love and affection.' (1999: 241).

There is a fundamental contradiction between *HAAK*'s claim to modernity and the silence of its women. As in most cinemas, in Hindi cinema representations of women function as the terrain where social and economic change is negotiated [2]. In reality *HAAK*'s women are not silent; that they should seem to be so suggests that the process of negotiation has been suspended. As Juluri points out, a specific agenda runs through the text: it frames the women characters' speech and simultaneously erases its interpretative operation. In the process the women's silence is naturalised: the film presents as 'necessary' and 'natural' a female silence that is effectively contingent and socio-historically specific. Two questions therefore arise: what are the modalities of the discourse naturalised by *HAAK* and what is this discourse's relation to the socio-historical context in and for which it operates? In other words, what is at stake in *HAAK*'s women's silence?

The family has been a central concern of Hindi cinema and, more generally, Indian culture since the late nineteenth century. Until the first half of the twentieth century colonial rule occupied the political sphere. Colonial modernisation presented itself as an operation on and within the public sphere. Indian historian Partha Chatterjee has argued that, constructed by the very logic of colonial segregation as the unreconstructed, pre-modern site of indigeneness, for Indian nationalism the sphere of the family came to function as the privileged site of Indian identity.

During the late colonial and post-colonial periods, the domestic sphere of the family thus emerged as the terrain where Indian nationalism deployed its own project of modernisation. The Indian nationalist Congress had been committed to modernisation before and after Independence. However, originally, the Congress was a restricted group of predominantly Hindu and upper-caste intellectuals. Nationalist mobilisation demanded from the Congress that it expands its reach. In the run up to 1947, when it extended its political contract to 'the people', the Congress effectively incorporated into its democratic apparatus local structures such as the caste-based village council (Kaviraj 1997). That is to say, as the ruling coalition of the Indian nation-state, the modernising Congress had to enter into a compromise with aristocratic and religious forces that resisted modernisation. As a result, under Nehru, modernisation was implemented, but the relationship between the political project and the socio-economic reality was a contentious and difficult one. The gap between the two was a zone of tensions between modernising and anti-modernising forces.

In India these tensions were played out most clearly within the ostensibly non-occupied domestic sphere - a sphere that was held to be 'traditional' and, simultaneously, the object of nationalist modernisation. Cinema mediated these tensions. This explains the prevalence of melodrama in Indian cinema. As in Western melodrama, its mode of address mediates the inscription of the male spectator in civil society as a modern, individuated subject - the active participant of a patriarchal society who is 'individuated' because the criteria of his participation in the political sphere of the democratic state are not (pre)determined by an external authority such as a person's status in a feudal hierarchy or the caste system, but by the enfranchising of his individual desires as those of the exemplary citizen.

In the late forties and fifties the star and national icon Nargis functioned as the displaced site where the tension between the nation-state's imbrication in (colonial and Indian) religious and aristocratic structures, on one hand, and its commitment to capitalist modernisation on the other, were mediated. Simultaneously mother and object of desire, Nargis' characters and

star persona enabled the state to accommodate pre-modern forces while sanctioning capitalist modes of production, individuated subjectivity and romantic love. So, in *Andaaz/A Matter of Style* (Mehboob Khan, India, 1949) the character of Neeta/Nargis revolves around the tension between responsible motherhood and (the suspicion of) extra-marital romance. In Nargis' last film and the one which turned her into the ultimate symbol of the Indian nation, *Mother India* (Mehboob Khan, India, 1957), Sunil Dutt was cast in the double role of Radha/Nargis' husband and son.

The iconisation of Nargis went hand in hand with her gradual de-sexualisation. Used by Mehboob Khan to merge the symbolism of aristocratic feudalism and capitalist modernity, and by Raj Kapoor to explore Oedipal nostalgias for an idealised 'tradition', Nargis' 'purity' passed - and was designed to pass - in silence over many of the contradictions of Partition and capitalism. It is my contention that the 'silence' of the women in *HAAK* must be read in the light of this contained, silenced sexuality of the 1950s national female icon, culminating in her emblematic 'Mother India' status.

'Mother India' is a concept, a myth linking a fantasy of a primordial, pre-colonial society to the secular, post-colonial, post-Partition state. The modernity of the Indian nation and its secularism have tended to be measured and defined against the Islamic state of Pakistan. In the ten years after Partition, the question of abducted women emerged as a prominent site for the deployment of the state's discourse on secular modernisation (Das 1995) [3]. If in Hindu society the acceptance of women who bore children by Muslim men was by no means given, a particularly thorny question in the contemporary debate on abduction was the resistance of many women to being repatriated. Nationalism had inscribed women's bodies as the body of the nation. As a result, the very real fact of these women's cohabitation with Muslim men was seen as a threat to the nationalist ideal.

On one level, this led to the erasure of Nargis' own 'Muslim-ness', along with her sexuality (Roy 1998). At another, it produced stars such as Meena Kumari, who functioned as the carriers for everything that modern India was unwilling to recognise as part of the nation.

Meena Kumari and *Pakeezah*

Like Nargis, Meena Kumari was a fundamentally modern, nationalist construct: both were symptomatic of that amalgamation of 'modernity' and 'tradition' central to the discourse of nationalism. However, since Nargis stood as the symbol of an Indian nation that, while effectively imbricated in religious (read Hindu) and aristocratic structures, presented itself as secular and modern, Meena Kumari's characters tended to operate within a space that can be best characterised as the modern nation's image of 'tradition'.

The fundamental contradiction between the modernity of the Meena Kumari construct and its ostensibly traditional paradigms produced, in Hindi cinema, the romantic courtesan. Meena Kumari's off-screen life extended her persona as the lovelorn woman who drowns her passion in drink, writes poems in Urdu and dies an early death. Her courtesan and the public persona functioned simultaneously as an object of nostalgia and a powerful challenge to nationalist ideology.

Below: Sahibjaan's dance on broken glass in *Pakeezah*



Pakeezah/Pure Heart (Kamal Amrohi, India, 1971), Meena Kumari's best known performance, tells the story of Sahibjaan/Meena Kumari, an orphan raised by her (courtesan) aunt who, growing up to become a courtesan-singer in Mughal Lucknow at the turn of the century, falls in love with a benevolent, aristocratic stranger. The film also presents the clearest example of how Meena Kumari functioned as Nargis' 'other'.



First planned in 1958 by Meena Kumari and her husband, the director Kamal Amrohi, *Pakeezah* took 13 years to finish. At one level, the film is rooted in the 1950s and what was then the dominant genre, the 'feudal romance' (Prasad 1998). By the time *Pakeezah* was released, however, Hindi cinema had found new ways to address an audience increasingly disillusioned with nationalist modernisation. Disillusion manifested itself in the genre now associated with the 1970s, the modern action Hindi cinema and its star, Amitabh Bachchan, noted for his portrayal of the urban anti-hero.



Now, *Pakeezah* is not typical of the 1970s; it does, however, reveal formal uncertainties that are symptomatic of an attempt to devise new ways to address a changing audience. This audience finally emerged in the 1970s as 'the Indian middle class'. Since this is the class targeted by *HAKK* for its notion of 'Indian family', *Pakeezah* can legitimately be used as the starting point for an understanding of the modalities of *HAKK*'s discourse.

The condition for 'typical' films to be perceived as, precisely, 'typical', is that while they function as a means to mediate the contradictions constitutive of the constellation they address, they successfully suspend the perception of contradiction. They become 'ideology'. *Pakeezah* is in a sense a failed experiment in ideology undertaken at a time of ideological realignment: its formal uncertainties - which I will discuss below - are an effect of the fact that while the film addresses contradictions within nationalist modernisation that had begun to become apparent in the 1960s, at the same time the film has not yet worked out the narrative strategies required to erase successfully the perception of contradiction.

A text works towards resolution, but resolution never exhausts the multitude of voices that run through the text. Some are 'silenced' by the invisible hand of the author. My analysis of *Pakeezah* seeks to map the journey into silence of some of the voices that run through *HAKK*. This will not reveal 'resistance', but, rather, the socio-historical modalities of a discourse that by the 1990s had come to be perceived not as 'discourse' or ideology, but as 'Indian reality'. The hope is that, in the process, the modes of articulation and reception within which resistance has been constrained will also become clearer.

Pakeezah was released in a year marked by the war with Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh. The making of the film spanned over a decade marked by a crisis at the institutional and economic levels. Nehru's death in 1964 left a vacuum; the Congress confronted the political crisis in the name of continuity and Indira Gandhi took over. In practice, the new leadership engaged in a major economic and political re-alignment. In 1971 Indira Gandhi dissolved the *Lok Sabha* and called for elections a year in advance. She backed up her populist campaign with a set of agricultural reforms aimed at promoting capitalist

modernisation throughout the country.

It is an open debate among Indian historians as to whether, with the Green Revolution, Indira Gandhi effectively hit at the heart of the landed upper strata, thereby radicalising a process to an extent Nehru never dared to initiate, or whether, as many have argued, she reversed the reforms that Nehru had begun to implement towards the end of his government. Be that as it may, *Pakeezah* is located at that junction in Indian history where the upper *and* the lower castes/classes are directly targeted by economic change. In other words, whether effectively modernising or not, Indira Gandhi's reforms were *presented* as capitalist and modernising attempts to appease a discontented rural and urban proletariat. As a result, one of their (most likely) unintended effects was to bring the government under strong fire from a panicking proprietary class (Kaviraj 1997: 66).

Madhava Prasad has discussed the 1970s as a moment of 'disaggregation of the social from the state'. In the 1950s, Hindi cinema constructed and addressed a generalised and modernising 'Indian public'. Prasad argues that in the 1970s the dominant popular form of Hindi cinema lost legitimacy. Hindi middle-class cinema - of which *HAHK* is an instance - resulted from the segmentation of 1950s cinema and constructed the 'middle class' as 'a community that wanted to be left alone, anxious to recover its unity in a situation of crisis.' (Prasad 1998: 142-43).

At one level, middle class cinema enabled a middle-class imbricated in religious and casteist structures to re-imagine itself as modern and pan-Indian, at another, genre fragmentation enabled what was effectively a Hindu upper-caste to further construct itself as separate from the lower classes. But the emergence of middle-class cinema and the reconstruction of the upper-caste as 'middle-class' did not take place overnight. Spaces that had been opened up by Nehruvian nationalism had to be adjusted to the socio-economic requirements of the new configuration - Indira Gandhi's India - and its contradictions. Transitional films such as *Pakeezah* served to mediate that adjustment. By the 1970s, when the new genres of 'middle-class', 'action' and 'parallel' cinema could be conceived as categories in their own right, Hindi cinema had already found new ways to address a fragmented audience, mediating in a manner that these audiences would deem convincing the contradictions constitutive of the 1970s socio-historical context. Unlike these films, and like 1950s cinema, *Pakeezah* is still addressing a pan-Indian, non-segmented audience. At the same time, proposing itself as a site for the mediation of an impending disaggregation, *Pakeezah* also seeks to resolve the contradiction between the middle-class' claim to modernity and its upper-caste-ness.

The question for *Pakeezah* was: who is 'the middle-class' and how to appeal to it in a way that this class will find convincing? The problem of the domestic sphere formed the basis of 1950s cinema. Patriarchal pre-colonial, colonial and nationalist discourses had inscribed 'woman' as the inhabitant of this space. Developing out of a discursive practice - the 1950s 'feudal romance' - which had used representations of women to mediate the modalities of modern India, *Pakeezah* tests its mediatory power over the same terrain. In the film, representations of female subjectivity function as the terrain for the reconstruction of the upper-caste as 'middle-class'. Here I want to look at the modes of address mobilised by the film to reconfigure a male upper-caste subject as a nominally modernising middle-class subject. This is the subject that later will be addressed and consolidated by films such as *HAHK*.

Broadly speaking the spatial and narrative conventions of Indian cinema have been discussed as 'dissected' and 'integral.' Under the first category fall point-of-view and shot-reverse-shot conventions that are also used by American cinema; the second category includes a range of non-perspectival arrangements. (Rajadhyaksha 1987, Vasudevan 1991). The way in which Hindi cinema orchestrates these compositional and narrative procedures allows us to read how films address and 'solve' the amalgamation of modern and (pre-colonial and colonial) pre-modern structures, the combination of which constitutes the project of was nationalist 'modernisation'.

Chronologically, *Pakeezah*'s economy of space provides an insight into the rearrangement of modern and pre-modern forces engaged during the shift from Nehru to Indira Gandhi. In the film, signs of an incipient disaggregation of the social from the state produced a defamiliarisation with the space of 1950s romance and a mobilisation of non-perspectival modes. In the film at least three scopic regimes operate: hierarchical, perspectival and theatrical. The three are at work in a scene in which the heroine is invited to dance at her lover's wedding to another woman. At this point the film enters a field of 'uncertainty over the political ground of representation.' (Prasad 1998: 145).

Briefly, the scene opens by laying out a hierarchical space: patriarchs on one side, women peeping through the *zenana*'s (the women's quarters') windows, the heroine's aunt opposite the patriarchs and, in a direct line to Sahibjaan's point of entry, her lover. As Sahibjaan enters, begins her dance and notices her lover, the hierarchical space gives way to a perspectival one. Sahibjaan's dancing body - a body that is initially contained within the confines of the theatrical and hierarchic space - energises an expansion and re-modulation of spatial boundaries. Following first her movements and then her gaze (towards her lover), the camera is forced to open up the initial layout and then moves into a shot-reverse-shot sequence. Here it is the lover's unwillingness to return Sahibjaan's look which keeps the spectator locked into a perspectival address and which, moreover, inscribes the perspectival space of individuated desire as a distorting space in relation to the 'stable', frontal, theatrical and hierarchic space of Sahibjaan's performance, through dance, of her caste-status. But the late arrival of one more patriarch interrupts this individuating current by obstructing the spectator's view: his body comes in between the camera and Sahibjaan's body. The tension between aristocratic and humanist forces is eventually resolved through the inscription of Sahibjaan's aunt. Literally containing both hierarchical and progressive spaces, her look mobilises and constitutes a new theatrical space: one which incorporates all the different spaces associated with the patriarchs, the *zenana* and the two lovers. This resolution translates and resolves formally the tensions demanding a narrative denouement: Sahibjaan turns out to be the illegitimate daughter of a benevolent aristocrat. This enables the wedding of the two lovers and their incorporation into the hierarchical structure of the aristocratic family.

As in colonial and nationalist discourse, in *Pakeezah* the 'traditional' terrain where a nationalist subject imbricated in patriarchal religious and aristocratic structures imagined himself as modern and secular, is female. From this perspective, the question for the subject of *Pakeezah* was 'how to accommodate female desire without unduly disrupting the space of the upper-caste family?' In the film the theatrical address functions as a space for the reconfiguration of the upper-caste family, because within it the upper-caste subject can accommodate his casteist basis to the requirements of a nominally modernising, nationalist discourse. In the 1950s 'reformism' was the preferred mode of existence of this discourse.

The courtesan has a long tradition in nineteenth century Bengali theatre, a tradition that Hindi popular cinema took over wholesale. The recruitment of 'fallen women' enabled the Bengali stage and, with it, early nationalist culture, to cast women in female roles while simultaneously preserving the 'purity' of the upper-caste women who formed the ranks of nationalism [4]. The nationalist reformists' attitude to these 'fallen women' - sometimes descendants of the Muslim dancers and singers of Northern India, often mistresses of rich *babus* or daughters of middle-class families which had seen better days and who gained a living by training as classical singers - was, to say the least, ambivalent. Regarded as a necessary evil, sometimes sympathetically as victims of exploitation, but perceived by most as manipulators and a threat to domestic bliss in respectable Bengali homes, their recruitment in the theatre was regarded by reformists as part of women's social rehabilitation (Banerjee 1998).

In *Pakeezah* the theatrical space mobilised through the look of the heroine's aunt serves to contain the threat of individuated female desire. The nationalist self constructed through this mode of address is a function of this containment. When her aristocratic lover does not respond, Sahibjaan breaks a lamp and dances on the broken glass. Her blood on the soft

white carpet is not a sign of her pain, but the silent trace of the beholder's shame on her behalf [5]. The humanist perspective of the spectator can no longer sustain an image of Sahibjaan as the unselfconscious and unproblematic courtesan. The experience of romantic love has defamiliarised the courtesan from her profession and subordinate status - hence her pain. At this point the text constructs a viewer benevolent enough to acknowledge pain, but also one for whom a courtesan's pain is only a distant and embarrassing spectacle: the film downplays the tactile, physical grain of the dance by softening the floor of the dance-space and decorously tracing her bloody footprints on canvas instead of an unyielding floor.

In *Pakeezah* the theatrical space defines the time and place within which the courtesan's romantic resistance is articulated. Since from this perspective the woman's desire can be acknowledged only in so far as spectacle, representations of her subjectivity - a subjectivity which is in excess of Hindu nationalist reformism - are allowed to surface exclusively within the terms made available by nationalist ideas of aristocratic culture. This is the space of the song.

Persian and later Urdu poetry, flourishing in Indian Mughal society, elaborated a discourse of love that Hindi cinema adopted when it turned to the thematic of love. Mainstream Hindu society, which has continued to be governed by the caste system, was in no position to generate such a discourse. After 1947, Hindi cinema borrowed the discourse of love elaborated in Persian/Urdu poetry and superimposed it on the traditional sexual relations of Hindu society (Prasad 1998: 111). Nevertheless, as Prasad observes, the refined language of Urdu poetry continued to serve as reminders of its aristocratic origin. Accordingly, in *Pakeezah*, acknowledgement of the heroine's desire requires that her social status be refigured. In conformity with the codes of the feudal family romance, Sahibjaan's identity is reinscribed as aristocratic. On this condition only can her romance and subjectivity materialise on screen.

Theatrical space can be found in Western as well as Indian cinema. Its function in individual (Indian and Western) films varies depending on the visual modalities activated by the discourse that is dominant at a particular socio-historical juncture. Notwithstanding, the theatrical space and its frontal address have tended to be regarded as 'indigenous' to Indian cinema (Vasudevan 1991). The theatrical space of Indian cinema derives from Indian *and* colonial theatre. As Ashish Rajadhyaksha (1987) and Sudipto Chatterjee (1999) have shown, the space of Marathi and Bengali theatre was far from being unreconstructed, Indian terrain. Dharmadas Sur, the architect-designer of the Bengali stage, claimed that for his Great National Theatre (opened in Calcutta in 1873) 'we never took the help of any Englishman or engineers', but, as Sudipto Chatterjee has shown, the theatre was built literally by imitation:

This loftily named Bengali theatre was modelled after the Lewis Theatre located in the 'white' quarters of Calcutta where the local English community went for entertainment. The Lewis Theatre was modelled on the Lyceum of London, which in turn, was supposed to reflect the Hellenic Lyceum, the Lukeion, where Aristotle is fabled to have taught his gathering of students.' (S. Chatterjee 1999: 10).

Five years after the opening of the Great National Theatre, Sourindramohan Thakur published his paradigmatic *Bharatiya Natya Rahasya or A Treatise on Hindu Theatre*. As Sudipto Chatterjee observes, 'the semantic equivalent for 'Bharatiya'/Indian in the Bengali title becomes 'Hindu' in the English subtitle. The express intention of the treatise is to reclaim the mythic origins of the Sanskrit theatre as legitimate history, thereby creating an absurd manifesto for a Sanskritic-Bengali theatre.' (S. Chatterjee 1999: 20). At this point two considerations arise. Firstly, the theatrical space that 1950s cinema mobilised as the indigenous space of the Indian family was a hybrid formation that resulted from late nineteenth-century Bengali reformist nationalism. Secondly, as early as the late nineteenth-century, this nationalist space was being inscribed as Hindu. What is the function of this mode of address in later cinema and, more specifically, in *HAAK* ?

HAHK

In the 1970s, for the first time, the Hindi film industry came to see in the state a competitor. In 1969 the Indian government had issued specific guidelines for a national cinema. It also promised financial support, via the new Film Finance Corporation, to films that were 'realist' in their depiction of Indian life. The response from the industry was to defend its market by incorporating and simultaneously displacing the state's realist aesthetics. In the process, Hindi cinema reconfigured one of the central concerns of the Indian upper-caste - the accommodation of female individuation and desire within its feudal structures.

Indira Gandhi's populism rendered the redefinition of the upper-caste as 'middle-class' all the more urgent. In the 1950s the dominant modes of address of Hindi cinema had been the reformist address activated through the theatrical space and its re-configuration, as in *Pakeezah*. This space inscribed individuated desire within the aristocratic tradition of Persian/Urdu poetry and court cultures. In the 1970s, this solution was deemed 'unrealistic'. The film industry thus proceeded to counter the FFC's threat by proposing more suitable spaces of individuation: not the aristocratic tradition of Persian and Urdu poetry and courts, but a domain that can be best described as Indian ideas of Western capitalist modernity. Song-less films and the English expression 'I love you' emerged in Hindi cinema in this period. And yet a look at *HAHK* reveals that the theatrical space was not abandoned. On the contrary, as in much middle-class cinema, in *HAHK* this space frames and channels the possibility of romance and individuated subjectivity.

Pakeezah did fail to meet the requirements of an upper-caste confronted with Indira Gandhi's capitalist economy and populism. Where it failed, however, was not in its mobilisation of the theatrical space, but in its marking it as 'aristocratic'. In other words, emerging from a nationalist cinema that in the 1950s and 1960s had used the theatrical space to accommodate a nominal commitment to modernisation and reform, the middle-class cinema that emerged in the 1970s incorporated this space and, seeking to realign its mode of address to meet and counteract the populist requirements of Indira Gandhi's state, simultaneously erased the theatrical space's aristocratic markers. Middle-class cinema thus negotiated individuated subjectivity for a restricted section of the Indian population by mobilising a domain - English culture - that although equally exclusive to the upper-caste/middle-class, offered the advantage of presenting itself as secular and caste-less. In this way 'I love you' firmly relocated the upper-caste in capitalist modernity as 'middle-class'.

In spite of the much heralded break-through to 'modernisation', Indira Gandhi's reforms greatly advanced the economic and political power of large landholders, rich farmers and the regional bourgeoisie (Chatterjee 1997: 53, Kaviraj 1997: 83). These classes were, however, simultaneously under nominal pressure from Indira Gandhi's populism. For them the new middle-class cinema functioned as a means of entrenchment. Accordingly, the middle-class reinforced the endogamous space of the aristocratic family by adapting it to the nominally modernising requirements of Indira Gandhi's government and its pseudo-realist aesthetics. That is how within 'mature' middle-class cinema such as *HAHK* the theatrical and perspectival spaces can co-exist. The historical subject of Hindi middle-class cinema is a function of the orchestration of these spaces into a cinematic narrative space capable of both containing and regulating female desire.

In *Pakeezah* the perspectival address which locks the viewer into the exchange of looks between lovers is subsumed into the theatrical space. What margin of autonomy is this type of individuating address given in the 1990s middle-class cinema? In *HAHK* romance takes place exclusively within the religious and neo-aristocratic space of the endogamous family. So, the second song of the film, 'Wah Wah Ram Ji' ('Ode to Lord Ram') - sung at a pilgrimage site where the two families meet to arrange the marriage of Prem's older brother Rajesh with Nisha's elder sister Pooja - simultaneously acts out (a) the rituals of prayer and devotion to the Hindu gods Ram and Sita from the *Ramayana*, (b) the arranged engagement of Rajesh and Pooja and (c) the romance between Prem and Nisha. Prem and Nisha's individuated

subjectivity can thus deploy itself exclusively in so far as it conforms to the dictates of a Hindu ideology that constructs the characters not as autonomous individuals, but on the basis of patriarchal, Hindu and casteist co-ordinates.

HAAK's family presents itself as modern, but as Vamsee Juluri observes, the characters who occupy its space do so within the family's hierarchical structure. We have seen that in *Pakeezah* the neo-aristocratic family and its theatrical space were mobilised against the (nominally) modernising claim of Indira Gandhi's more inclusive populism. Similarly, as Vamsee Juluri argues, the family of *HAAK* is mobilised not as family (or tradition) per se, but against capitalist modernity and globalisation. Being a response to a configuration that presents itself as modern, *HAAK*'s family inevitably absorbs from the latter capitalism's nominal consideration for individual liberties and aversion to aristocratic and religious ideas of identity. However, this family's opposition to aristocratic and religious structures is made oblique by its simultaneous resistance to capitalism's discourse of modernisation. *HAAK* seeks to mediate and resolve this oblique trajectory.

HAAK mediates a project alternative to globalised capitalist modernisation. It does so by engaging a struggle over the same sphere that Indian nationalism had used as the terrain for capitalist modernisation. That is to say, *HAAK*'s counter-project is undertaken on the same battle-field (the family) of the opponent (the modernising state) by mobilising a category (tradition) that Indira Gandhi and, before her, Western capitalism, had inscribed as 'the other' of capitalist modernisation. So, while Indian nationalist modernity set out to 'modernise' the traditional family sphere, *HAAK* proceeds to 'traditionalise' modernity. As a consequence, the fully modern aspects that have infiltrated the sphere of personal experience (such as romantic love) are not eradicated, but absorbed into the family sphere and adjusted to its patriarchal, communal and casteist requirements.

Bipan Chandra has argued, the first stage of communal ideology

is the belief that people who follow the same religion have common secular interests, that is common political, economic, social and cultural interests. [...] From this arises the notion of socio-political communities based on religion. It is these religion-based communities, and not classes, nationalities, linguistic-cultural groups, nations or such politico-territorial units as provinces or states, that are seen as the fundamental units of Indian societies. The Indian people, it is believed, can act socially and politically and protect their collective or non-individual interests only as members of these religion-based communities. These different communities are alleged to have their own leaders [...] the best they can do is to unite as communal leaders and *then* serve the wider category of the nation or country. (1987: 398)

In *HAAK* romance sanctioned by the legal structure of marriage (the love between the older couple) deploys itself entirely within the theatrical architecture of the family house. By framing legally sanctioned reproduction within its walls, the family guarantees the continuity of the community. That is to say, the film presumes 'traditional' family ties to be simultaneously a product of and a condition for individuated subjectivity. While the positing of romance as the sine-qua-non for the continuity of tradition betrays the modernity of *HAAK*'s ideas of 'tradition', the fact that sexuality cannot be addressed except in terms of traditional, familial space indicates that *HAAK* is putting forward ideas of identity that are community and caste-based.

In *HAAK* individual characters are first and foremost members of a hierarchically and communally ordered space, and only *then* individuals with the capacity for individual desire. Accordingly, in the film the perspectival space in which sexuality occurs as an attribute of individuated subjectivity is incorporated, only to be disavowed as 'unreal', within the religious and neo-aristocratic space that frames it. In this context, romance and female sexuality become a matter of social reproduction which is the productivity of 'the family.'

What exceeds this goal is disowned as 'unreal'. So, in *HAAK* the space of extra- or rather pre-marital sexuality (the romance between the younger couple) is contained, unsurprisingly, as 'spectacle'. The crucial encounter between the two lovers takes place during a women-only cabaret that channels the threat of excessive female sexuality. And while within these unreal, marginalised spaces the two lovers can meet, within the structure of the family they can interact only through the mediation of servant and dog.

In the film the theatrical space of *Pakeezah* re-emerges to be further redefined in the frame of the late 1980s 'Hinduisation'. To return to Vamsee Juluri, then, the 'history' to which *HAAK* contributes is the discourse of Hinduisation that was also mobilised in the late 1980s by the BJP. Unlike *Pakeezah*, in *HAAK* the paradigms of this family-based community are not spelled out, but presented as natural and 'Indian'. As Vamsee Juluri observes, they are hierarchical (servants can only act as mediators of, but are not entitled to, love), oppressive for women and, I add, exclusively Hindu. These paradigms are not new to *HAAK*, but how does the family constructed in the 1990s compare to earlier constructions of 'tradition'?

Vamsee Juluri notices two dynamics at work in the joint family of *HAAK*: self-sacrifice (the 'silence about the costs to the women in the household and the underprivileged world outside'), and protection ('access to non-stop family love and affection'). Sudhir Chandra has argued that both were imagined as specific to 'the Indian family' ever since early nationalism adopted the domestic sphere as the terrain for nationalist modernisation (1992). Chandra has traced the construction of the Indian family through the work of nineteenth century writers. The writer Tripathi Govardhanram was extremely ambivalent towards unreconstructed familial relations; nevertheless, he regarded the joint family as the best of two evils (the other being Indian notions of Western social relations). In 1891 Tripathi Govardhanram wrote:

While everybody is to have his or her liberties in my family, the liberties of no one are to go to the extent of clipping the necessary liberties and moral rights of other members, including even minors. (in S Chandra 1992: 77-78).

Evidently in 1891 constructions of 'tradition' did not a priori jeopardise civil rights. On the contrary, it was through representations of women as individuals with modern rights that nationalist modernisation proved its strength. As a consequence, in the early nationalist period progressive possibilities were opened up for women in (as well as outside) the family. In Indian cinema the family has remained available as a site for women characters to display considerable modernity well into the 1990s. In *HAAK*, however, female sexuality and individuation are alarmingly displaced. Most of the action takes place within the theatrical space of the family house. The two exceptions are the temple, which consecrates heterosexual and family-sanctioned romance, and, within the house, the segregated quarters where the women-only cabaret is staged. This performance within the performance plays out the love between the two protagonists by replacing the male lover with a comic character, a caricature of the modern woman. The replacement is crucial: on one hand it safeguards the 'purity' of the heroine; on the other it confronts the threat of female, even lesbian, desire by ridiculing and punishing it.

In *HAAK* female desire is literally contained within a space that, inscribed as Hindu and mobilised by Indian nationalism against the excesses of capitalist modernisation, in the 1990s is finally re-proposed as the site of all social and individual relations. In the age of global capitalism *HAAK* further consolidates the religious and upper-caste basis of the middle-class Indian subject by engaging an exclusionary project: to define the national space as Hindu and to re-enclose women in the very spaces which nationalist modernity had begun to open up.

* * *

Communalism engages the re-centring of an ostensibly 'traditional' (Hindu and aristocratic) sphere that was constructed as periphery by Western and colonial modernisation. In a world where ideas of globalisation help conceal the fact that the unmarked centre remains the West,

the periphery makes a bid for the centre by investing a contested terrain - representations of women - with values that Western imperialism and Indian nationalism have constructed as 'other' to themselves. What is at stake in the silence of *HAAK*'s women's is therefore more than an Indian question. The film-maker Kumar Shahani has written that

Perhaps the failure of India to reconstitute itself as a nation is an opportune indication for the world to see that the era of nationalism, founded upon the exclusively Western European experience of the last few centuries cannot serve as a model of self-determination any longer anywhere in the world, not even in the emerging sub-nationalities. I imagine the future of civilization demands an extension and inclusion of the civil society to the other, rather than the divisive exclusions that the anomic processes have set in motion through ethnic, linguistic, and other fundamentalisms. (in Kapur 1998: 207).

Here I have tried to go some way towards Shahani's idea of 'extension and inclusion' by looking at the forms of a culture not as the pre-modern effects of a practice - film studies - tacitly centred on the Western model of modernity, but as forms that are autonomous in their operation because they function in and for a sovereign civilisation.

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Notes

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2. For a discussion of women as the terrain for the mediation of socio-economic change in Western cinema see Johnston, Claire (1980) 'Double Indemnity' in Ann Kaplan (ed) *Women in Film Noir*. London: BFI: 100-111.
3. During Partition more than 75,000 women are believed to have been abducted and raped by men of religions different than their own (and indeed sometimes by men of their own religion). A treaty was signed by the government of India and Pakistan in 1947 for their repatriation. This took place during the following 10 years, sometimes against the will of the individual women, many of whom had by then been accepted into the new family and converted to its religion.
4. Geraldine Forbes has shown that the regional women's associations that emerged throughout the country during the freedom struggle had very specific agendas. In Bombay 'Dadabhai Naoroji, who was a DSS (*Desh Sevika Sangha* or Women Serving the Country) founding member and leader of Congress, insisted that member should have impeccable credentials. She believed women of high status would elicit respect from the public.' Performing only actions that 'preserved their dignity and "innate modesty" (...) precluded marching side by side with women of "undesirable" character.' (Forbes 1998: 133). In Calcutta, the MRS (*Mahila Rashtriya Sangha*) 'espoused a radical ideology but followed a mobilisation strategy that constructed women as innately religious.' (Forbes 1998: 136), where the mobilised religious iconography was exclusively Hindu. Finally, with the exception of radical, communist groups disenfranchised by the Congress, nationalist women 'did little to generate a feminist consciousness. They marched and picketed in sex-segregated groups, usually wearing distinctive orange or white saris to emphasise their purity and sacrifice. Their directives came from the Congress Committees. (...) Male guardianship prevailed (...). Women could "come out" because the house was on fire. The expectation was

that once the fire was out, women would go back inside the house.' (Forbes 1998: 156).

5. Compare this with the noise made, in *Subarnarekha* (Ritwik Ghatak, India, 1962), by Seeta's body against the rough walls of her home as she hears of her husband's death and faints, or the prostitute's crying child in *Pyaasa* (Guru Dutt, India, 1957). In both films the noise takes over, thus undermining the regular unfolding of the narrative. In *Pakeezah*, on the other hand, the song adds to the spectacle. This enhances the visual and emotional pleasure of the spectator, a pleasure relying on the objectification of Sahibjaan.

Against the recurring argument about the transgressive potential of the song in Hindi cinema, it is worth bearing in mind that the acceptance of the singing courtesan-actress as a legitimate performer for the Bengali middle-class, and her subsequent adoption by Hindi cinema, was prompted by the decision of prominent Hindu figures such as Ramakrishna to give the famous courtesan-actress Binodini Dasi their blessing. In other words, the status of the Hindu priest reinscribes within the hierarchical system, and thus contains, the threat of low-caste female individuation. Thus framed the courtesan's performance - her 'excessive' identity - can be consumed by the Hindu upper-caste/middle-class safely.

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