

The Bombay Muslim Social (1940-90):

Law, Desire and Modernity

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by

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Certified that the thesis entitled **The Bombay Muslim Social (1940-90): Law, Desire and Modernity** submitted by me for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Jadavpur University is based upon my work carried out under the supervision of Dr Subhajit Chatterjee, Department of Film Studies, Jadavpur University, and that neither this thesis nor any part of it has been submitted before for any degree or diploma anywhere / elsewhere.

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Countersigned by the supervisor:

Dated:

Preface and Acknowledgements

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Abstract

This thesis is a study on the representation of the Muslim community through the cinematic imagination of their modernity. It looks into the emergence of the Muslim Social of Bombay cinema as a popular genre that forms a repository of Muslim society and the Islamic way of life. Through this dissertation I have tried to capture a community's attempt at negotiating with their internal dilemma and their resistance to accept the representation of the actual discrimination through an imagination of the real that is couched in the nostalgic past. These arguments are based on a close study of how cinema could be looked upon as a social archive of history as well as memory. The negotiation with history and memory has shaped my argument to classifying popular Bombay cinema into two categories, one representing a more or less majoritarian outlook (Cinema A) within a heterogeneous public space and another representing a minority community (Cinema B) within a homogeneous private space. In other words, the study has split popular cinema along a fault line of how two primary set of films are negotiating with contemporary history and modernity. In this thesis, Cinema B is my focus of study where I have shown that it portrays the same society that Cinema A engages with but in a completely different light because of the community that it represents. In other words, Cinema B is not a constant critique of the majoritarian (Hindu) nation. Rather it is endorsing a culture that is imagining itself as sacrosanct with the modern idea of the nation. It is how this imagination evolves over the fifty years (which forms the scope of my study) that I have presented here. I have studied this evolution by proposing three *moments of imagination* moving from the classical Muslim Socials to the New Wave Muslim Socials. The study is pertinent in the context of the current social scenario where we are constantly being forced to negotiate our position within the larger imagination of the modern state. The role of cinema as an archive of history becomes equally important.

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Chapter 1

The Muslim Films of Bombay Cinema: An Introduction

*Your history gets in the way of my memory.
I am everything you lost. You cannot forgive me.
I am everything you lost. Your perfect enemy.*
~ Agha Shahid Ali

In our everyday lives, the past is often – rightfully or not – associated with that which is perused in official accounts of the state or in books curated and documented by historians and state recognized institutions. And yet, in our personal lives we do look back at our pasts but refer to them as memories. Thus, history itself can be of two types – the textbook history, which often tends to become agents of ideological propaganda of those in power. A simple example is the recent redrafting of the educational policies for schools in India, especially with the proposal of the National Education Policy that promotes the idea of ‘one nation one education’ (thus, trying to bind the nation/country within an enforced common history which may not be all that common); and the individual history that often finds expression/representation as memory, which could be public and yet private simply because it does not enjoy the sanction of the state through its various agencies. For the common man, memories are never histories. They are a part of us – subjective, personal, and private, and most definitely, lacking historical, ideological as well as institutional sanction. Within our subconscious, we have been conditioned to make this distinction between memory and history. We discard memory as just a fragment of our own lived past, while we elevate history based on our commonsensical understanding of something that is institutionally approved. We have been conditioned to believe that to become a part of history our memories have to be stripped off their subjectivity, thereby doing away with the personal. Only then can they be elevated to the position of history. Yet, while we internalise this distinction, we are constantly trying to cope with this dilemma between history and memory, for as thinking

individuals we cannot disregard nor deny what we have experienced and witnessed. As a result, we sometimes tend to forget to distinguish between memory and history as evidences of the past. This happens when a particular event, which we were first-hand witness to (for example, the partition memories of millions of Indians in the subcontinent) finds its way into the pages of history. It is through this act of forgetting to distinguish between history and memory that we comprehend an event in time in its totality. But what is so problematic about this? Sometimes we experience a conflict when we try to come to terms with the way an event that we have experienced or have been witness to has been captured in the annals of ‘history’, and how they are different. In other words, memory either corroborates history for such an individual or has the potential to render it problematic. Within this ruptured reality of memory and history, I am looking at cinema as a medium of mass propaganda that finds itself positioned quite precariously at a halfway point between conventional history and a quasi-evidence based history (which may be called memory). My primary focus in this thesis is on specific Indian films produced by the Bombay film industry between the 1940s to the 1990s that represent Muslim society, culture and modernity. Through my research I have tried to show that while these films endorse conventional history¹, yet there is evidence of an obverse action by them. In this history-memory paradigm, this work studies a set of popular Hindi films produced by the ‘Bombay industry’ over the course of half a century, and how it addresses larger concerns of desire, modernity and law.

Scope of the study

In this study, I have tried to map the history of Bombay films dealing with or depicting Islamic life and culture. It begins from the popular “Orientals” of pre-independence era through to the advent of sound and colour, down the course of recent Indian history. However, the area of focus spans roughly across fifty odd years, beginning with the classical Muslim Socials of the early 1940s till the 1990s which saw an allegedly New Wave surface. The spectrum of this thesis begins from 1940 because as

¹ This is based on my argument that the medium of cinema is conducive to becoming the perfect tool for state propaganda as we have seen earlier in history, especially with regard to German cinema.

pointed out by Ira Bhaskar and Richard Allen, the genre² ‘Muslim Socials’ – named as such by the industry – came into usage as a term by the early 1940s if not before (Bhaskar & Allen, 2009). The Muslim Social films of Bombay cinema, therefore, form the point of entry of this study, which goes on to look at the various categories of films or what Ira Bhaskar and Richard Allen has pointed out as sub-genres – socials, historical, courtesan, new wave – that portray an Islamic way of life or living as well as its evolution over the years. This Islamic way of life or living is the constant in all the films that form a part of this study as it defines the focus through which these films are to be read and understood. The term, ‘Islamicate’ has come to be associated with it and forms a significant part of this study. A more detailed look at this term and the debates surrounding its usage has been taken later in this chapter.

The study spans across five decades but not necessarily in strictly historical progression. In other words, this study has not divided these fifty odd years into decades, but has grouped the films based on their characteristic themes or broad topics like ‘Muslim Historical’, ‘Muslim Courtesan’, ‘classical Muslim Socials’ (as contextualised within an Islamic setting), ‘New Wave Muslim Socials’, etc. It has been contained till the 1990s, not because the observed phenomenon of films with Islamic plots, storylines, characters, iconography, idioms of expression, events, etc., ceases to exist or be produced after that, but because the nature of representation, primarily in the Muslim Socials, radically changed. The main focus of this study is to chart that transition that eventually results in the New Wave Muslim Socials and their representation of the community. I have briefly paused at some of the representative films of this category like *Garm Hawa* (M.S. Sathyu, 1973) – which can be called the harbinger of this last phase which saw the popularity of the realistic films, *Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro* (Saeed Mirza, 1989), and *Mammo* (Shyam Benegal, 1994). The films have been observed keeping in mind the changes in economy³ and socio-political developments in India and the subcontinent at large that dictated the logic of representation in films. The Muslim Socials as we know

² There is wide contention over the designation of terms like Muslim Socials as genres. This will be taken up in detail in subsequent chapter on genre.

³ It was an economy which was rocked by liberalization wherein the diaspora, with its power of foreign currency, began to play a more significant role. The typical Muslim Social became redundant as the industry began to feed into the demands of those who brought in a large chunk of the revenue.

them – as sub-genre of the Socials dealt with the usual drama of marriage, family, festivals and customs, along with song and dance but within a milieu that was specifically Islamic in nature (Vyas, 2011).

The Muslim film and the genre question

It is easy to readily slip into using terms like ‘Islamicate’ and ‘Muslim/Islamic’ to refer to the set of films that form a part of this study. But what are these Muslim films and why are they being addressed to by singularly referring to a specific religious community? These films are produced by the Bombay film industry that portrays Muslim religious culture and history. They draw from the Muslim community’s imagination of its identity and culture, often with reference to the Islamic rule or Mughal history in India. Therefore, films which give primacy to this are usually referred to as Islamic/Muslim films. They are positioned as repositories of the ethos of a community.

The question of genre forms a natural point of inquiry in this study and there is a wide contention over the designation of the term ‘Muslim Socials’ as a genre (or a sub-genre), a detailed study of which has been done in one of the subsequent chapters. The Muslim Socials was the only genre form that was coined by the industry and has been considered “a diffused category that simply nominates films about contemporary social life” (Bhaskar and Allen 2009: x). Such an observation brings it very close to it being defined a sub-genre or part of the larger “Socials”, so much so that by the 1960s the category had defined itself through “a recognizable set of narrative and iconographic elements, character types, and star personas” (Bhaskar and Allen 2009: x). These ‘Islamicate’ films, while being very much a part of the industry, yet were playing a strong role in fulfilling a similar function for the Muslim population as the Socials were playing for the so-called non-Muslim mass/majority⁴. They were bearing witness to a change that the community was undergoing and bringing them within the arguments of citizenship, modernity and nationhood while also catering to a desire to familiarize and recognize. While discussing Muslim Socials, whether within the paradigm of genre or simply as a

⁴ Here I am referring to Rachel Dwyer’s observation about the naming of a genre or a set of films through a religious identity.

nomenclature, it is worth noting Rachel Dwyer's observation about the strategic silencing of the word 'Hindu' before the social, thereby more clearly defining the norm that is Hindu (Dwyer, 2006). Her observation throws light that forces one to look from a different angle altogether and I have elaborated on it later in this chapter.

It might seem easy to simply state that the Muslim Socials were a parallel category that were developing alongside the Hindu Socials, but they were very much present right from the beginning. However, two things become important in this regard – first, the normative idea/understanding that the Socials were essentially representative of all sections and communities of contemporary society even though the protagonists were hardly ever marked as non-Hindu were being silently contested; and second, the seeds for Muslim Socials were embedded within the so-called Hindu Socials or any other genres for that matter, through the special characters who were marked by their clothes, language, diction that made them stand out from the rest, or at least the hero/heroine. Thus, the Muslim Socials without actually attempting to break away from or break into the dominant space of the Socials were actually creating a niche for themselves. They germinated from the snippets of Muslim society, represented through the smattering of Muslim characters who appeared as side-kicks and functioned as windows giving a quick glimpse into the “other” world behind the *purdah*. The question that arises here is whether the Muslim Socials were influencing the other genres and whether they were any different or were they the same. However, in a study spanning fifty years and dealing with “Socials” it is difficult to completely ignore the progress of time and its impact on the content of the film, and it is indeed one of the reasons that has determined the spectrum of this study. The study primarily focuses on the Socials and how a set of films, otherwise classified under ‘Socials’ was trying to deviate from the norm even while being within the paradigm of what has been termed as the Social films.

Engagement with memory

Ashis Nandy engages quite significantly with the dichotomy of history and memory (Nandy, 2015). According to him, history enjoys institutional support, and is laden with ideological demands, “political correctness and a reliable, official, empirical

basis” (ibid: 1). Memory, due to its lack of this institutional veracity, is often overlooked as a reliable source of information or archive of history. Our memories are assumed to “cover some of our intimate relationships, private hatreds, traumatic or life-altering experiences, dreams and encounters with the sacred” (ibid.) – in other words, all that is subjective and outside the realm of the state-approved institutions, all that which “protect (the) vulnerable, silenced communities and cultures as a ‘private’, autonomous, inviolate space outside the domain of the state and outside authoritative, professional, disciplinary constructions of the past” (ibid.). What is it (apart from it being mnemonic) that renders memory so inadequate to bear the burden of past? Maurice Halbwach refers to the idea of collective memory and its separation from history by differentiating how memory signifies events that actually took place, while history is the discursive representation of what historians believe should be remembered by society (Halbwachs, 1980). Following similar arguments, an interesting observation was made by Barbara Creed and Jeanette Hoorn⁵ as to how, with the gradual disappearance of the rural world in the West, memory evolved from being the historical to the psychological – the social to the individual – the objective message to its subjective reception, and from repetition to remembrance (Creed & Hoorn, 2011). In other words, memory came to be separated from what is considered as the past. While for Nandy, “...collective memories are a ledger on which a community or cultures writes its passions,...” (ibid.), Creed and Hoorn observed that factors like the breakdown of traditional cultures, industrialization, urbanization and the increasing complexity of modern living all undermine memory (ibid.). On the other hand, for Susan A Crane⁶ it is of crucial importance for the individual to be written back into collective memory for “collective memory ultimately is located not in sites but in individuals” (Crane, 1997). This observation was drawn by Pierre Nora into his argument about the importance of collective experience of memory because each individual in the collective brings different personal histories to the experience of remembering. It is these “lost or contraband memories” (Nandy 2015: 1) that hold the clue to a community’s imagination of an ideal society that they want to live in. Such memories render a certain

⁵ A more detailed discussion of this is available here: Memory and History: Early Film, Colonialism and the French Civilising Mission in Indochina. Detailed reference provided in bibliography.

⁶ Susan A Crane, “Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory”, *American Historical Review*, 102:5 (December, 1997), 1372 – 85.

“cosmopolitanism” that enables a society to accept and accommodate differences and the otherness of others. Indian history is replete with instances of overlapping cultures and traditions. These have come to shape and colour what we come to understand as our past. The course of modern Indian history has been evidence to the fact that the power structure of a society determines and sometimes even redefines history. Indeed, it is the objective nature of history that renders it vulnerable to such influences. The ideological sanction and approval of the state that it enjoys makes it prone to such changes.

Coming back to Nandy’s iteration of history being everything that can be documented (to serve the institutional demand to be politically correct and have empirical basis) and is non-mnemonic, it may be suggested that cinema as a medium becomes a potentially viable source of ‘history’. As mentioned earlier, cinema as a mass medium (especially in the Indian context), finds itself positioned quite precariously at a halfway point between conventional history and a quasi-evidenced based history. It is a visual medium that can be seen and heard, and enjoys a certain amount of sanction or support from the institutional sources through censorship. In other words, cinema can become an archive of time, of various moments in past by drawing upon memories and lived / subjective experiences as well as documenting facts. Cinema has often been considered a product of / mirror to society. It is a reflection of society, drawing stories of individual experiences stringing them together either along a thread of collective imagination or aligning them to an event in history. Cinema has a history of being used as mechanisms of state sponsored propaganda, aligning the events / incidents in the cinematic plot in such a way that the story narrated gets a certain colour or focus. The camera may not always be a silent and mute spectator, but it is many a time made to capture certain things in a certain way, leaving out something here or adding a little something there, in the name of history. The wide reach of cinema, propelled with the attraction of moving images, makes it a lucrative propaganda mechanism. It easily attracts people’s attention and holds a certain appeal, so much so that actions and events have the propensity to take on a colour, and be accepted; even at the cost of the audience ending up viewing a ‘coloured reality/history’.

The distinction between two proposed categories of cinema

Drawing from Nandy's iteration on memory poised against history (Nandy, 2015), this thesis distinguishes between two types of cinema. Cinema A: that which is aligned to what we have previously established as "authentic" history – reiterating and corroborating it (and hence, enjoying institutional sanction as well as acceptance); and Cinema B: that which is constantly rendering Cinema A problematic while remaining within the paradigm that encapsulates Cinema A as well. It does that by questioning Cinema A, posing subtle evidences and witnesses that provoke a counter-narrative to that of Cinema A. In other words, Cinema A is conventional history (textbook history / political party propaganda) and Cinema B is memory or history that is private and public at the same time and yet not institutionalised. It endorses conventional history and yet at the same time there is evidence of an obverse action. Thus, for instance, Cinema A would include films like *Anari* (Hrishikesh Mukherjee, 1955), *Ab Dilli Door Nahin* (Amar Kumar, 1957), *Shree 420* (Raj Kapoor, 1959), etc., which has a strict Nehruvian approach; and Cinema B would include films like *Najma* (Mehboob Khan, 1943), *Elan* (Mehboob Khan, 1947), *Pakeezah* (Kamal Amrohi, 1972), *Garm Hawa*, *Nikaah* (BR Chopra, 1982), *Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro*, *Mammo*, etc., that portrays the same society that Cinema A engages with but in a different light where the hero is no more the normative 'unmarked' figure, but rather clearly identified by his language / diction and appearance apart from the spaces that he and those around him are occupying. In this regard, I would like to clarify that this unmarkedness implies the all-inclusive apparently neutral but tacitly promoting a Hindu majoritarian ideology, under the veil of secularism. Films belonging to the category of Cinema A have played their role in the nation-building programme throughout Indian political history. The state needs a citizen figure to uphold and present / exhibit as a role model that each individual living within the purview of the law of that state must strive for. The second chapter of this thesis looks into this in more detail, drawing from Ravi Vasudevan's observations on local cinematic cultures and the need to focus on it while studying cinema in order to capture the essence or subjectivity of the characters/culture/community portrayed in the film (R. S. Vasudevan, 2015). His observations have helped align the focus of this study to look at popular cinema within the paradigm of nation and post-independence nation-building project of the new India.

Madhava Prasad's observation in the Introduction to his book that deliberates on the "hegemonic alliance between advanced capitalism and the cinematic institution" (Prasad 2010: 2) throws further light on this. Therefore, if we are to take cinema as a state apparatus, it becomes an agent of passive revolution, bearing witness to the changes in civil society and its gradual integration into the bourgeois society. Cinema thus aids to build a meta-narrative – of the 'state first' model of capitalist development, where nation-state is first established, followed by a process of reform from above that gradually modernizes the nation and expands the domain of capitalism – and feeds into it. Prasad evokes Partha Chatterjee's notion of how once a nation-state is established, it is followed by a process of reform from above, which is taken up as a project of modernising the state; its objective being to establish a modern nation-state that is conducive to capitalist growth (Prasad 2010). Here the principle task of the state is to conquer the civil society and establish a unitary bourgeois subject, in other words, a Citizen-Subject. Thus, these films act as agencies and become the modern state's one of the many apparatuses to take up its hegemonic project, taking forward Prasad's argument that this duality is part of modernity – cinema captures this duality of a statist versus cinematic imagination. Cinema becomes a repository of public versus privatized memory.

Three moments of imagination of the Muslim Socials

Having established the difference between the two categories of Cinema A and Cinema B, let us now look at Muslim/Islamicate cinema strictly from the perspective of it being part of what can be said to be Cinema B. While doing that one realises that there does exist some cracks which make it difficult to provide a clear definition of what is Cinema B merely by the argument or observation that they are representative of a particular community and their negotiation with reality as they grapple to come to terms with a postcolonial modern nationalism that they encounter. If we are to zoom in on Cinema B, given that it is the primary focus of this thesis, and look at the kind of films that comprised it, a parallel argument could seem to develop through which the body of films constituting Cinema B can be divided into three broad moments. This means Cinema B becomes a much more fluid category which witnesses the transition of the

representation of the Muslim imagination across a range of films. Therefore, I have divided Cinema B into three crucial moments or phases, so that through its movement across these moments, Cinema B becomes evidence to the transition or evolution of the body of films that it is representative of – from a veiled community that was choosing to hide itself under a supposed Islamic national imagination, to the gradual parting of that veil to let in the light of reality and western modernity, and finally to the complete unveiling of that popular Muslim imagination of the national that made way for the New Wave Muslim Social films.

The *first moment* can be said to be defined by the early Muslim Socials (produced between the 1940s and 1960s) with their artificial sets and stereotypical motifs and iconography. It must be kept in mind that mise-en-scene form an important aspect for the understanding of the films of not only this moment but across all three moments. It is through the change in mise-en-scene that the transition across the three stages is captured. In the first moment, the mise-en-scene gives a façade to the reality in which the community lived in real-life. It enabled the films to build an imagination of a modernity that is located in the glorious past of the Mughals and the nawabs. The films helped pave the way of the cultural and spatial distinction of a community through an imagined reality. They were marked by the discrimination in representation – a homogeneous Muslim society marked by the sheer absence of members from any other community. The evolving nature of cinema led to the *second moment* in the 1960s where we see the earliest negotiation of Cinema B with reality. From the late 1960s onwards the debate stands more on the grounds of law and modernity where identity within a realistic heterogeneous public space becomes more important in these films. It was the beginning of the process of unveiling of a community from its representation of modernity through an imagined reality. The third moment bears witness to a complete collapse of that veil of imagination. In other words, we witness the unveiling of the representation of a reality embedded in past history that help us as audience to come to terms with the day-to-day reality of a community, and become used to the cinematic representation of it. This idea was developed from an overview given by Ira Bhaskar and Richard Allen about Muslim Socials in general. This study has attempted to take it further by splitting into three transitional phases that helps to accommodate the way in which the films have evolved,

capturing the various moments of rupture within the form of the Muslim Socials to give a coherent narrative.

The Muslim Social has a slightly different status. Although it can be considered a part of the broader genre of ‘the Social’ singled out as a genre category that simply nominates films about contemporary social life. Furthermore, not only was the ‘Muslim Social’ singled out as a genre category, but by the 1960s it had hardened into a clearly recognizable set of narrative and iconographic elements, character types, and star personas [...]. In its iconic form from the mid 1940s to the late 60s, it is typically set in Lucknow as the contemporary *avatar* of the nineteenth-century culture of Wajid Ali Shah, complete with *mushairas* [...] It stars the cultivated nawab with the heart of gold who can no longer sustain the lifestyle of yore [...] ‘The Muslim’ in Bombay cinema has undoubtedly undergone stereotyping and the mature Muslim Social could be considered paradigmatic of this stereotyping: the aristocratic *nawab*, the decadent and cultured by turns; the hyperbolic version of the Madonna-whore dichotomy in the figuration of the angel of the house and the courtesan; and the poetry-spouting hero. Stereotypes are normally countered by a call for realism, and such was the demand made by the New Wave filmmakers who sought to counteract stereotypes of the aristocratic *nawab* inhabiting a never never land of Lucknawi culture with stories drawn from the contemporary everyday that attempt to capture the real experience of Muslim men and women. (Bhaskar and Allen 2009: x-xi)

As it can be seen that there are two ways of understanding what constitutes Cinema B:

- i. being representative of non-institutionalised memory or history; or
- ii. being defined by its transition across three moments in Bombay film history

While both are equally persuasive, it is primarily the second argument based on which I have carried out my research by further dividing Cinema B into these three moments that hold a parallel argument to the representation of Muslim society in Bombay cinema from

the 1940s till the 1990s. I will elaborate on these three moments a little later in this chapter. A detailed study of it has been taken up in the third chapter.

The Islamic films and the oriental history

While the primary focus of this thesis is on the films produced between the 1940s till the 1990s, it is difficult to ignore the influence of the oriental fantasy films (beginning as early as the silent era) in building the popular iconography of the Islamic culture. Albeit, the ones represented onscreen were a hybrid that were produced keeping in mind the audience and the market in which they were released. This section focuses on the observations made by Rachel Dwyer that charts the growth in popularity of the ‘Islamicate’, a term which comes to be associated, especially within the academe to identify films representing Muslim culture. Within the duality that cinema exhibits, Indian cinema saw the popularity of the ‘Islamicate’ films. Rachel Dwyer reads into the strategic silencing of the word ‘Hindu’ before the Social, thereby more clearly defining that to be Hindu is the norm in this supposedly secular modernized independent nation (Dwyer, 2006). Her observation throws light onto a slightly different perspective of looking at Muslim films. However, it is problematic to categorise all films portraying a Muslim milieu as Muslim Socials since the division is much more nuanced than a simple broad stroke. There were many films dealing with a Muslim setting or characters or even stories but not necessarily a social. Rachel Dwyer had used the term ‘Islamicate film’ (ibid.), which Ira Bhaskar and Richard Allen have later taken further and used it as the ‘Islamicate culture’ (as evident in the very title of their book). They have pushed past that broad demarcation of Muslim Social and have tried to look at the films more closely, categorizing them as the Muslim Historicals, Muslim Courtesans, the Classic Muslim Socials, and the New Wave Muslim Social and after. There have, however, been various debates regarding the use of the term ‘Islamicate’ by various scholars, which I have tried to capture and attempted to engage with.

The representation of Islamic/Islamicate culture in popular Bombay/Hindi cinema is not a recent post-independence phenomenon; it has a history longer than what we now understand as Bombay industry films. It has been a practice that has long existed in the

industry, and especially during the pre-independence period. Films depicting Islamic culture were not just a post-independence phenomenon; they were quite prevalent even in pre-independent India, especially through the Arabian Nights stories like *Aladdin*, *Hoor-e-Arab*, *Shahi Chor*, *Laila Majnun*, *Shirin Farhad*, *Alibaba and Forty Thieves*, etc. These films were set against the background of an Arabian culture through the use of popular stories and mise-en-scene. These films were produced at a time when Indian cinema was not a national cinema – it did not have a nation-building project / vision to fulfil. Hence, the orientals were a product of absolute business venture with an eye to ensure returns from the market. People were familiar with the Arabian Nights tales, and hence, the films enjoyed popularity and wide appeal among the masses who formed the immediate audience as well as the upper class members of the society, both Indian and foreigners. Notably, these films were mostly produced abroad and then distributed and exhibited in India. India proved to be a valuable market for these films, what with the popularity of the stories as well as the western conception of East as the exotic orient. The settlement of the Europeans also contributed to the non-native audience for these films. Whether these films consciously contributed to any of the core questions that I am trying to address is not clear; but they provide evidence to the fact that films with Islamic settings and stories were produced much before the so-called Socials came into the picture, and they commanded a sizeable portion of the audience. According to Anisur Rahman, four out of eight films made during that significant colonial decade were related to Muslim subjects (Rehman, 2011). In his essay, Rehman takes a tour of the Bombay cinema and its concern with films that were associated with Muslim subjects and representations. Beginning from *Alam Ara* (Ardeshir Irani, 1931) he makes mention of *Lal-e Yeman* (Homi Wadia, 1933) and *Pukar* (Sohrab Modi, 1939), and underlines the fact that the subject was considered worthy of attention, and that there was a respectable number of viewers in the market. However, Rehman's primary argument is to not categorise all subject related with Muslim life under the broad label of the Islamicate. Rather it would be better to view Muslims represented in Bombay cinema as part of a larger Indian reality, than be shown representing a separate category in conformity with their religious identity. After all, filmmaking is an industry – a profit-making concern involving high stakes. It will produce films that would find large acceptance among its audience and

endure large turnovers for the producers. Thus, the ‘orientals’ (a term which again was an industry coinage as evident from its popular usage in various film magazines and trade journals of that time⁷) seem to be an example of the early popular films in India.

However, Rosie Thomas speculated about the potential of these Arabian Night fantasy films to actually throw the history of film in India into question.

What if Hiralal Sen’s⁸ feature film did exist? What if *Ali Baba* and not *Raja Harishchandra* was Indian cinema’s foundational text? What if India’s first celluloid hero was not a noble royal from the Hindu epics but a feckless young woodcutter from a quasi-Arabian / European orientalist tale? The implications are intriguing. Rather than begin with a forty-minute Hindu myth, Indian cinema history would kick off with a two-hour, confusingly culturally-hybrid tale from the *Arabian Nights*, set within an Islamic fantasy world and keying into global orientalist obsessions at the high point of cosmopolitan modernity. (Thomas 2014: 8-9)

She argues that if for once we abandon the accepted history of the beginning of Indian cinema and assume that *Ali Baba* was the first feature film made in India, it would throw open the possibility of other landmark films in this genre to become more prominent. In fact, she gives the earliest hint of the possibility of an alternative history to cinema, which might also throw a completely different hue to the categories I am looking into. Thomas goes on to give a chronological overview of films like *Gul-e-Bakavali* (Kanjibhai Rathod,

⁷ “As we will see, what they all drew on, alongside the common indigenous roots, was a transnational, imaginary Orient. Indeed, the Indian film industry trade press of the early 1930s advertised distributors’ lists of imported ‘Oriental’ and ‘Semi-Oriental’ films.” (Thomas 2014: 34)

⁸ Just at the time when cinema had made its inception in India, attempts at making the first Indian film was being made not just by the crowned father of Indian cinema – Phalke – but also by others in Bombay and Calcutta as well. As Rosie Thomas rightly mentions that it is well documented that a number of people in different parts of the country were experimenting with this new technology in the early decades of the twentieth century. Indeed Thomas claims that quite another man may have claim to the title of Indian cinema’s unsung pioneer – Hiralal Sen from Calcutta. He was the founder of the Royal Bioscope Company and had two dozen or so production under his belt by 1913. He had made quite a few dance shorts around the time 1903 when he also made a two hour version of *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, a popular story in India. However, all claims to such an aspect of history is now purely on hearsay and anecdotes as in 1917 Hiralal Sen’s life works went up in flames and there are no record of screenings of the film, although it was talked about a lot in Calcutta.

1924) whose female lead, Fatma Begum went on to become India's first woman filmmaker when she wrote and directed the film *Bulbul-e-Paristan* (Fatma Begum, 1926). The film starred her two daughters Zubeida and Shazadi⁹. The Indian Cinematograph Committee Report states that in 1927 there were three more such fantasy films that featured among the top-ten box office hits of that year, including Ardeshir Irani produced *Aladdin Ane Jadui Fanas* (B.P. Mishra, 1927) with which he started the famous Imperial Studios. In the same year, Imperial made *Alibaba Challis Chor* (B.P. Mishra, 1927) that introduced the superstar Sulochona into films. The first sound film *Alam Ara* also came from Imperial Studios in 1931, which was also again based on an Arabian Night fantasy story. In fact, with the coming of sound, the fantasy films flooded the scene because of the opportunities they gave for extravagant spectacle, dance and music.

Around 1955, *Filmindia* magazine ran an article quoting Kardar's¹⁰ opinion about how the Middle Eastern market was yet to be explored and it was showing signs of profit. This would mean there needs to be more films with Arabic or Muslim or Islamic appeal and yet be popular in taste so that they can be exported to Egypt where they can have a profitable run. Most of these films were seen to play upon and around the popular themes and ideas about the cultures and beliefs of the Muslim community, the observing of *purdah* in Muslim homes with the *zenana* located as an inner sanctum that was most of the time completely detached from the world outside. The language they spoke, which had a heavy influence of Urdu; the etiquette they maintained and the refinement of values and cultures that they exhibited, apart from the typical iconographic evidence of Islamic culture, together went on to form a distinctive genre form through which Islamic culture resonated with a certain kind of historical imaginary that is symptomatic of larger

⁹ This is also an example of the practice of women entering the industry; women who were previously courtesans in the older cities of Lucknow and Calcutta, but had to abandon their trade with the coming in place of colonial legal structures and join the film industry, the only place where their talents found ready takers.

¹⁰ A.R. Kardar was a filmmaker who was fondly known in the Bombay industry as 'Mlyanji'. Born in Lahore he moved to Calcutta and joined the East India Film Company, and eventually moved to Bombay. He was a founding member of the The Film and Television Producer's Guild of India along with stalwarts like V Shantaram, Sohrab Modi, Vijay Bhatt, Mehboob Khan and Raj Kapoor. He also set up Kardar Studios and over a span of three decades, it produced films like *Shanjanah* (1946) *Dard* (1947), *Dillagi* (1949), *Do Phool* (1958) etc.

historical processes and experiences. They are charged with significance for the future. As mentioned before, iconography formed an important area of understanding for the kind of culture and milieu that these films were trying to draw from or transport its audience to. A distinctive iconography drawn from the architectural forms as well as paintings of the Sultanate and Mughal periods was what the mise-en-scene of these films used to spectacular effects. From the huge *havelis*¹¹ to the houses of the courtesans or the room where they performed – everything oozed with an aesthetic that was easily associated with the Islamicate culture of the Bombay cinemas (Bhaskar & Allen, 2009). These films with their aesthetic appeal evoked a generalized orientalist imagery that became familiar with the audience and which the filmmakers successfully exploited. As pointed out by them, Bombay cinema was to a large extent constituted by the Islamicate traditions of popular culture and the orientalist forms of international cinema. This observation supports my previous statement regarding the films of pre-independent India with its Sultanate or Mughal aesthetic influence and theme.

Researchers and archivists like Kaushik Bhaumik and Virchand Dharamsey have identified these films as oriental or fantasy films, terms that will be often used to refer to the so-called Arabian Nights stories films.

A very small percentage of the 1500 or so films produced in the silent cinema era are denoted to Indian religious subjects or display hints of imaging a prescribed ritualistic regime of gestures and social behaviour. The bulk of the cinema in this period consisted of a mix of fantasy films derived from various story traditions popular on the subcontinent, the most significant one being the *Arabian Nights*... (Bhaumik 2008: 2)

According to Virchand Dharamsey, these oriental films are the direct influence of the Parsi theatre. In India, Parsi theatre created oriental dramas, inspired by Shakespeare

¹¹ The term *haveli* is commonly used for a traditional large mansion with historical and architectural significance that flourished during the 18th and 19th century particularly in Rajasthan and Gujarat. The word *haveli* was derived from Arabic, meaning 'private space' which was became popular during the Mughal era. Historically, *haveli* was the visual representation of the social status and prestige of the owner, expressing goodwill (or reputation) in society. A more detailed study has been done by Aayushi Verma and Ila Gupta in "A Study on Old *Havelis*: Lost Heritage of Saharanpur". *The Chitrolekha Journal on Art and Design* 1 (1)

and other popular playwrights from the West and adapted them to suit the local tastes (Dharamasey, 2010). They created Roman and Arabic backgrounds, which amalgamated into Indian backgrounds and costumes along with Indian actors. As pointed out by Bhaumik, “the public energies of the nationalist context allowed for the absorption of a modern technological medium like cinema into the Indian ‘tradition’” (Bhaumik 2008: 2). In 1932, a review of the film *Jalti Nishani* (Anil Biswas, 1955) appeared in the November issue of *Filmiland*. The review was otherwise superficial, but what is important to note is that at the end the writer notes that the film is very interesting for the mass as well as for the experts for its intrinsic merits and that he is sure that it will be appreciated everywhere. Another interesting thing that was noticed was how a film like *Laila Majnun*, produced by Madan, received negative reviews from film magazines like *Varities Weekly*, who wrote it off saying that the high-class Indian gentry still preferred the imported production. This only goes to point out that there was a demand for films with such themes or storylines – whether it was the “high-class Indian gentry” who preferred the foreign productions or the common man who was anyway nowhere in the league to becoming an Indian sahib. In fact, this was in 1931, the year that saw the release of four films based on legends with Oriental settings, including two *Laila Majnus* (Madan, Dir. J.J. Madan / Krishna, Dir. Kanjibhai Rathod), one historical *Noorjehan* (Imperial, Dir. Ezra Mir) with an oriental atmosphere (Dharamasey, 2010). Between 1931 and 1935, 120 oriental films were made in India and around 40 in the years between 1936 and 1940. There was an obvious downslide of oriental films towards the end of the thirties. This was mainly because by the 1940s most of the reputed film studios had begun to gradually shift towards social themes. The historical and political significance of those years cannot be completely left outside the argument of reason, though Dharamsey in his essay has made no such mention of that. Despite this shift however, some studios like Imperial, Ranjit and Sagar continued to produce action and oriental films. Thus, now and then big banners would come up with one of those like Mehboob Khan’s *Aan* of 1949, which was the first post-independence film with such a theme that achieved world success with releases in Europe. Anisur Rahman responds to this observation of the dwindling number of Muslim subject films from the 30s to the 40s

saying that the decade made way for the production of some of the most remarkable films¹², which only suggests that,

...the decade sought its character at a broader level of reception, and a more holistic representation of the Indian society and culture, which the subsequent two decades sharpened further.(Rehman, 2011)

Indeed, particular geographical location that engrossed the attention of the filmmakers repeatedly and by implication, of the viewers, was Baghdad. The mythic and the real characters that caught both their fancy and attention included Ali Baba, Alif Laila and Laila Majnun on the one hand and historical figures like Akbar, Anarkali and Mirza Ghalib on the other hand. It can be said that these showed a sort of hangover for romantic themes, plots, characters and situations. They seemed to have potential to engage viewers, and hold them in spell for the three hours of the cinematic entertainment.

However, one could draw from Rosie Thomas' observation to conclude that these oriental Arabian Nights' quasi-Arabic fantasies paved the way for the inception of the 'modern' within its narrative. Thomas notes that while these films included elements within its narrative that were essentially Muslim in ethos and appeal, their construction of the 'Islamicate' world was much less loose than the ones constructed by the other genres, in this case the Muslim Social and its sub-genres. I argue here that it is this looseness that rendered a certain degree of flexibility to these oriental films to make spaces for curious appropriations. This further went on to allow "cross-fertilization with the ubiquitous traces of Rajput or Mughal courtly culture and a Hinduisng nationalism" (Thomas 2014: 33), which, as Thomas notes though did complicate matters further, it helped India construct its own imaginary, quasi-Islamicate Orient (ibid.)(Thomas, 2014b). As for the element of the modern introduced by these films, she argues it is through the operation of these elements on two levels – them being perceived both as local as well as international¹³ and hence modern. It is interesting to note Thomas' observation of how the older cinema workers from that period referred to these films as 'jadoo' (magic) films

¹² Films like *Bandhan*, *Anmol Ghadi*, *Jugnu*, *Nadiya KePaar*, *Mela*, *Barsaat*, *Andaz* and *Mahal*.

¹³ This obviously is in reference to the concept of the European Orient and a much more local negotiation of that idea within the specificities of the Indian culture and spectatorship.

while in a review published in *Filmiland*¹⁴ suggested that in the 1930s these films were also referred to as ‘Mahomedan’ films (Mitra, 1934). It was one of the earliest instances of magic realism in cinema in India. There was another aspect to the role of the orientalist influence in the development of the oriental fantasy films of early Indian cinema. The advent of the ‘fashionable international orientalism’ was widely embraced by Indian film-makers¹⁵ as well as their audiences, thereby placing these filmmakers at the table of global modernity.

Indian cinema and the legacy of the Islamicate empire

While this research began with the role of the Muslim Socials, over the course of the study, the term ‘Islamicate’ became prominent. While the most obvious usage has been that of Ira Bhaskar and Richard Allen, the term was first used by Mukul Kesavan in his essay “Urdu Aawdh and the Tawaif: The Islamicate Roots of Hindi Cinema”. It became a source of reference for Bhaskar and Allen in their book, which gave currency to the term within contemporary discussions on films with a focus on a specific narrative, theme and subject matter – something commonly understood as the Muslim films. However, the term has had its share of debates surrounding it and there is a need to pause and reflect on that a little. Rachel Dwyer, while talking about the mythological films and their religious significance claimed that given the Islamic restrictions on the depiction of God and his Prophets, there is no equivalent in ‘Islamic’ film to parallel the mythological and devotional films and so it may be said that there is no ‘Filming the gods’ (Dwyer, 2006). She goes on to mention that there is however a genre in Indian cinema that mentions the religion by its name – that of the ‘Muslim Socials’, hinting upon the existence of a range of films which could be clubbed as sub-genres of this. She however draws the terminology from Mukul Kesavan who says that there are two possible ways of charting the relationship of Hindi cinema with Muslims (which would include aspects of their religion as well as socio-historical traditions) – one is to survey the people who were involved in the making of Hindi cinema, namely actors, directors, song writers,

¹⁴Jatindra Nath Mitra, “A Review of Indian Pictures”, *Filmiland*, Puja issue, 1934.

¹⁵ Madhu Bose’s *Alibaba* (1937) and *Court Dancer* (1942) starring his dancer wife Sadhana Bose.

composers, technicians, producers, and the other is to undertake a study of the archetypes of the Muslim as represented in Hindi cinema – the *tawaifs*, the begum, the *khatoons*, matriarchs in *pardah*, the presence or the absence of the “modern” in their representation as Indian Muslim women (Kesavan, 1994). He however expunges both these approaches and rather embarks upon a much more empirical study of it where we associate icons and symbols as registering a certain religio-cultural tradition. Hence, we have the association of scalloped arches or onion domes as cues for those representative of the Islamic or the Muslim. He notes that these might have been part of the free register used by art historians a few generation back, but these have come to be loaded with meaning and ideas that the modern Indian state is constantly trying to negotiate with for “both academic rigour and secularist scruple combine to caution us that there are no building manifestoes hidden in the Quran, nor are Hindus bound to a single architectural idiom.” (Kesavan 1994: 245) This observation has been used later in this study for the nostalgic evocation of a past through a recreation of the space, the architecture, the milieu and the associated aesthetics while looking at some of the films. These films have become repositories or archives of such aesthetics and culture, and therefore a ready reckoner of a set of films that evoke a certain nostalgia and capture a specific cultural essence. Kesavan builds more on this idea to give a definitive argument regarding the use of the term “islamicate” and for which he draws from Marshall Hodgson:

Islamicate would refer not directly to the religion, Islam itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslim themselves and even when found among non-Muslims. (Kesavan 1994: 246)

Anisur Rehman, however, counters Kesavan, Rosie Thomas, Ira Bhaskar and Richard Allen’s appropriation of the term “to designate all motifs and manners associated with Muslims as ‘Islamicate’”(Rehman 2011: 29). According to him, despite the link between Islam and Muslims, “all constructions relating to Muslims are not to be assessed in terms of their religious identity” (ibid.). In fact, he has pointed out the use of the term ‘Islamicate’ as one of the “problematic identifiers... that seems to have emerged as a category to discuss the representation of Muslim subjects in Bombay cinema...” (2011:

28-29). Rehman tries to buttress his thesis through the argument that Islam is a faith while the followers of that faith are Muslims, and therefore, the two terms cannot be synonymously used.

Like all religious faiths and their followers, Islam and Muslims are also linked but all constructions relating to Muslims are not to be assessed in terms of their religious identity. The thesis advanced by those projecting the Islamicate category, thus, crumbled as it fails to take note of a simple distinction that Islam is a faith while Muslims are the followers of that faith, and the two are not necessarily the one and the same for all possible reasons. Muslims are a people in a social matrix and live as simple or complex a life as anyone else to deserve cinematic representation.

(Rehman 2011: 29)

Muslims, especially in the Indian subcontinent, form a heterogeneous category who may profess and practise one faith but speak different languages and reflect various cultures. Indeed, there is a clear distinction of culture and aesthetics among the Muslims of different parts of India; even their histories. Muslims from southern part of the country is completely in the dark when it comes to the lived experience of the history of partition that distinctly defines the histories of Muslims from either side of the western and eastern border. The trauma of suddenly being separated from a place which defined their identity can never be relatable to those from south. Rehman thus refuses to designate all actions of all the categories of Muslims under one reflective and representative term – the Islamicate. For Rehman, the usage of the term by Kesavan, Bhaskar and Allen, as drawn from the reflections on the same by Marshall Hodgson, does not hold good. According to him, “Muslims represented in the Bombay cinema are a part of the larger Indian reality [and] have to be viewed as such rather than shown to be representing a separate category in conformity with their religious identity” (ibid.: 29). However, Kesavan along with Bhaskar and Allen, all have used the term ‘Islamicate’ rather than Muslim merely for the fluidity it provides in the understanding of the notions of Islam as well as Muslims and their representation, both as a faith as well as the practitioners of that faith, within the

larger socio-political history of the subcontinent. As per Kesavan, the term captures the very essence of the Islamicate films:

Islamicate empire bequeathed to Hindi cinema much more than a medium and vocabulary; it provided it with images of the good life, a model of the man about town, a stereotype of cultivated leisure and the ingredients for rentier decadence. All of the above were derived from a part-fantasised vision of Nawabi Lucknow, which was nostalgically remembered as the last bastion of a beleaguered Islamicate culture, the culture of the Urdu speaking elite. (Kesavan 1994: 251)

In fact, the same term can be used to study similar genre of films in a different cultural context. Indeed, Kingshuk Chatterjee's comments on the history of north Indian Muslims through his study of Aligarh Muslim University and the role it played in the community overall adds to the frequent reference to the university and to the propositions of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan about the role of Muslims in modern Indian history and politics, which went a long way in defining the course of their history. In this regard, one of Chatterjee's observations is quite relevant: "...communities and identities are not products of imagination; the process of imagination simply helps in giving an existing community a definite shape at particular conjunctures" (Chatterjee 2007: 173).

In the third chapter, I will be looking into the figure of the courtesan in Hindi cinema and their role within the larger narrative of Indian cinema, and will be using Kesavan's statement as a peg around which the arguments over the religiosity of the courtesans can be addressed. Furthermore, I feel that it is from this point that the question of the "Muslimness" of the Muslim Social films can be addressed. To understand typically, the Muslim Social cannot be looked simply as a parallel to the 'Hindu' Socials that became popular in Bombay cinema. The Socials are a broader genre that focuses on the representation of love, marriage and family life. The Muslim Socials are a part of that broad genre. Its position as a distinctive category can be traced as recently as the 1940s.

Building stereotypes through architecture, language, space and memory

Mukul Kesavan begins his essay by hitting the nail on its head with his critical observation that addresses the question of iconography and its association with regard to religion and spaces (Kesavan, 1994). He uses the term “architecture” in a very interesting manner, suggesting it to be representative of not just the space that one associates with architecture in general but also the language, Urdu. It (Urdu language) is therefore, by extension, a tradition or a part of cultural history as a unit of that larger architecture of Hindi cinema as a whole. He provides an entire list of words that constitute a wide register of the vocabulary used in popular Hindi cinema – words that we as audiences are quite familiar with, precisely due to their extensive use in popular films and film songs. While this does very effectively feed into the whole argument of the secular nature of Hindi cinema as an industry which is influenced by and caters to a multicultural Indian society, it also brings into question the nature of the role or the purpose of the ‘Muslim Socials’ or what we shall now refer to as the Islamicate films at the same time. The Islamicate would therefore constitute not just the Muslim Socials but the other popular categories – the courtesan films, the Muslim Historicals, the classic Muslim Socials, and the New Wave Muslim Socials.

Kesavan observes that administrative and the literary traditions of the Islamicate empire had continued way into the colonial period, and even received patronage from the colonial state. Indeed Hindi cinema holds evidence to this observation given the prominence of the language in the industry, not to mention, the large number of Urdu writers who gained massive popularity among their audience. Thus, for the average viewer, words like *mujrim* (accused), *sabot* (evidence), *chashm-o-deed gawah* (eyewitness), *vakil* (lawyer), *qatl* (murderer), *insaaf* (justice), *gunehgaar* (criminal), *bayaan* (statement), etc., become a part of the register in a film depicting a courtroom drama. Questions regarding whether the Islamicate forms a stronger contender for genre formation have been addressed in the chapter on genre where I have undertaken a detailed study of whether films with Muslim themes – popularly referred to as Islamicate films – stand to qualify as an independent genre or whether they fall within the larger definition of the popular genres, functioning as a hybrid or sub-genre.

The Islamicate genre

Given the gamut of films that can be categorised under the umbrella term of 'Islamicate', it seemed a natural course of action to engage with some of these films from the perspective of genre. A brief study of genre in cinema has been used to draw one into the exercise of studying these films to determine whether they can actually be constituted a genre by themselves. These will also be related to the arguments that surround the Muslim Social films and whether they form a separate genre or are a subgenre of the larger Socials. Some of these arguments have been influenced by the ideas and observations put forth by Ira Bhaskar and Richard Allen along with Rachel Dwyer; all this while taking a brief look at the term, its history and the possibility of an alternative history that could have the potential to completely turn the logic and understanding of the history of Indian cinema on its head. This will be a deliberate attempt to address the question of what is a 'Muslim' Social and whether such a nomenclature raises the possibility of the Social being a 'Hindu' Social by default, raising questions about the normative nature of such a term. The exercise would be an attempt at engaging with the usage of such terms to counter the common mistake of glossing over them without realising the need to pause and brood over such very basic phrases that we have come to associate with a certain kind of popular Hindi films. Kesavan writes:

Islamicate empire bequeathed to Hindi cinema much more than a medium and a vocabulary: it provided it with images of the good life, a model of the man about town, a stereotype of cultivated leisure and the ingredients for reinter decadence. All of the above were derived from a part-fantasized vision of nawabi Lucknow, which was nostalgically remembered as the last bastion of a beleaguered Islamicate culture, the culture of the Urdu speaking elite. (Kesavan 2011: 251)

In relation to this Kesavan also makes the observation that with the coming of the new wave in Indian cinema, directors like Benegal and Nihalani seemed to consciously break away from the song and dance melodrama of Hindi cinema till then, to replace it with a movement that was concerned with distancing itself from the conventional commercial cinema and its bazaar Urdu. Kesavan's explanation to the song and dance format of the

commercial Hindi cinema till then was due to its influence and derivation of the nuances and practices of the populist Parsi theatre. Rosie Thomas has argued that the *Arabian Nights* films as a genre had put the question of the Islamicate under particular strain. She notes, that like the Muslim Socials (including the courtesan and the historical films), early Indian cinema's fantasy films quite conveniently drew on an imagined Mughal past and an Indo-Persian culture.

Looking at the Islamicate through a gendered study of the courtesans

It is interesting to note that for a large section of the Indian audience, the courtesan films tend to be straitjacketed as a Muslim film. There has undoubtedly been curiosity regarding the inner world of the courtesans and Mir Hadi Ruswa's *Umrao Jaan Ada*, published in 1905 became an instant hit. It was later translated in English in 1961 and then twenty years later made into a Bombay film in 1981. Right from the first appearance of the novel in the early years of the twentieth century, the book has been the primary source of information into this world of tradition, culture and etiquette wrapped around the enigma that these extremely talented women maintained around themselves. Veena Talwar's study of the nature of the women who make way or find themselves in this profession and the circumstances that forced them to make that choice, notes that the "kernels of their stories were embedded in the reality of the gender bias in society" (Oldenburg 1990: 267). She goes on to make another significant observation, "Here they could be women first, and Hindus and Muslims in a more mutually tolerant way, because the culture of the *kotha* represented both and was acknowledged as a truly synthetic tradition" (ibid.). Poonam Arora brings out an interesting aspect with specific reference to the historicity of the culture that these films claimed to depict. According to her, even though the *kotha* has now come to be associated with the artistic accomplishments of the Mughal aristocracies of the nineteenth century, the key aspects of the *tawaif's* performance have been derived from Hindu artistic traditions (Arora, 1995). The *tawaif* (courtesan) film highlights this multiculturalism of the courtesan's performance and such a syncretism plays a crucial role in suturing both Hindu and Muslim spectators into the film's narrative. She refers to Iqbal Masud's observations on the unequivocal

construction of the dancer (*tawaif*) as a Muslim woman.¹⁶ Masud, however, had pointed out that it was necessary to remove the *tawaif* from within the ghettoized space of the Muslim cultural life to a position of a public spectacle within a secularised space of the film (*ibid.*). Arora further goes on to explain the charge of the Muslim woman seducing the Hindu audiences as a coded articulation of the *tawaif* on behalf of the disenfranchised Muslims of India of their repressed desires that have been silenced by the so-called secular Indian democracy. She reads this desire as a desire for an illusory originary homeland that holds the promise of respectability and equality. She explains this desire for an idyllic homeland as an escape from a social context wherein a vast majority of Indian Muslims feel marginalized and silenced (*ibid.*). She further explores this idea by drawing references to films like *Pakeezah* and *Umrao Jaan* (Muzaffar Ali, 1981; JP Dutta, 2006) where she suggests that the *tawaif*'s lyrics are symptomatic of the Muslim community's sense of separation from those who are now on the other side of the national divide. Also, that the very absence of acceptance by the majority Hindu population is expressed through the *tawaif*'s lyrics that tells of the desire of the Muslim community for recognition in the Indian state. Arora also brings in another dimension to the whole idea of the woman as the nation and her body as the repository of all that is deemed moral / virtuous / pure. In stark contrast to this, the Muslim woman embodies a certain version of Muslim womanhood that signifies the underside of the state-sponsored and the triumphant nationalist narrative. Arora compares that while the construction of the woman as "Mother India" writes the sanctioned narrative of a unified and teleologically formed nation, the independent *tawaif* writes the proscribed narrative of a still contingent nation.

Conclusion

While on one hand Kesavan has tried to look into the idea of the Islamicate culture, what he does is significantly give longevity to the whole question of what

¹⁶He says this in the context of discussing the popularity of these films because of their plots, which at the most overt level, elided issues of Hindu-Muslim strife. At the same time, the cinema's fascination for Muslim audiences has been explained by Masud as their ability to return these audiences to a mythic and romanticized precolonial past.

constitutes the relationship between Hindi cinema and the Islamicate culture (Kesavan, 1994). For according to him, this relationship does not conform itself within the restricted paradigms of the Muslim Social as a genre or the stock Muslim characters present in popular Hindi cinema. It takes us beyond as Urdu, Awadh and the tawaif all come together and become instrumental in the shaping of Hindi cinema as a whole rather than being just a Muslim component in it. He concludes the essay by throwing light upon the fact that this term 'Islamicate' will cease to exist when Indians will no more make this association between the notions of nawabi with Muslimness (Kesavan 1994). However, to make that dissociation would be to shut out one aspect of Indian history altogether. For while it is true that by nawabi one does not essentially refer to a Muslim past, it is also true that an understanding of the heterogeneous nature of the term as comprising both Hindus and Muslims and referring more to a way of life determined by socio-cultural history than by faith alone, is necessary. In fact, an understanding of this will give a greater clarity to the nature of history that these films are possibly trying to hark back to. It resonances of a history that has been witness to a form of toleration that contemporary India has failed to achieve, thereby rendering the figure of the ideal citizen problematic. It is only through an acceptance of this aspect of history that such controversies over the use of a religious faith as part of a genre can be understood and overcome.

Rachel Dwyer has tried to draw a rationale behind the terminology of the Muslim Social to eventually come to the conclusion that the 'social' in Hindi cinema is by default the "Hindu" social and hence the special categorization of the 'Muslim Social' (Dwyer, 2006). As for the phrase itself, there is a contrast which hints on the nature of these films and the world they portray, the history they trace. Thus, looking at all these films from the context of the various epochs that they have been drawn upon provides us with the tools to narrate an alternative or parallel history of the Indian subcontinent (primarily in the context of North India and the divided Northwestern Province of Punjab). These films express a community's desire to lay claim to a common history of a nation that they have played an equal role in building. Hence, they are not just looking back towards a past that was theirs alone, it is an elaboration on the notion of equal claim to even the idea of the modern state that they have become a part of. Thus the thesis takes a broad sweep across a range of films dealing with Muslim lives – history, geographical setting, culture,

memory, practices – from the 1940s and extends till the early 1990s, trying to capture how film narration and content/story have evolved. While the early films were primarily concerned with the popularity of the Arabic stories and themes, the films after that began to explore the history of the region and its relation with the community that was closely followed by the socials. However, the socials produced immediately after the independence, were busy portraying an image of the modern Muslim who is recognizing the need for education for the community.

In this thesis there are three primary entry points through which the film texts are to be studied – law is one of them which addressed some of the debates surrounding the questions of personal law and the demand for a Uniform Civil Code. These three entry points have been accommodated within the macro movement of the classical Muslim Social to the New Wave Muslim Socials for it is the acceptance and coming to terms with the modernity that this transition encapsulates. From the veiling of the reality through the imagination of a modern that is located in the past, to the unveiling of it through an engagement with realism be it the space or through law. Films like *Nikaah* and *Talaaq* (Rajendra Kumar, 1958) will come into direct reference for this as it deals with the position of the woman within the private sphere of the family. *Mammo* is also another film deals with questions of both political history as well as the plight of Muslim women under the subjection of the Muslim Personal Law. Also *Mammo* addresses the question of how political legalities enjoy priority over humanitarian needs in the modern world of nation states. As part of Benegal's 'Muslim Trilogy' *Zubeidaa* (Shyam Benegal, 2001) follows *Mammo* and we see a glimpse of the question of inter-religious marriage, property and inheritance rights as well as the position of the adopted son. Apart from the strictly historical films, each of the films bears evidence to the socio-political situation of the era they were trying to depict. These films are mostly part of the third moment of the history (as introduced earlier in this chapter) of the Islamicate films of Bombay cinema which accepts the unveiling of the imagined representation by accommodating the reality of segregation, discrimination and ghettoization that they have encountered as a minority community.

A major area of thrust in this thesis is the question of modernity both from the point of view of aesthetic as well as from the point of view of the position and agency of the modern nation-states in shaping the lives and histories of the common people; and how these films serve as narrative texts and testaments to those processes. Here I would like to refer to Ben Singer's modernity thesis¹⁷ which according to him has three main components and suppositions that intertwine with each at various levels. However, essentially for the present study, Singer's modernity thesis helps me to establish the relation of modernity with cinema in the first place and therefore provide me with an inroad. First, Singer refers to the idea that cinema is *like* modernity. His modernity thesis stresses the key spectatorial and formal similarities between cinema – as a medium of strong impressions, spatiotemporal fragmentation, abruptness and mobility – and the nature of metropolitan experience. For him both are characterized by the prominence of fleeting, forceful visual attractions and contra-contemplative spectatorial distractions. Thus, this first component of the modernity thesis posits a relationship of **resemblance**. In his second component of the thesis, Singer alludes that movies and movie-viewing resemble the subjective experience of the urban modernity¹⁸. Singer explains this that the modernity thesis is interested in understanding cinema as a *part* of that modernity – as a significant element of modernity sharing a dynamic relation with a range of adjacent similar phenomena. Thus, this second component of the modernity thesis positions cinema within relationships of **contextual contiguity and interactions**. The third component, according to Singer, is the most controversial one. It revolves around the argument that cinema was a *consequence* of modernity, thereby positing a relationship of **causality**. Singer notes that although there is very little that has been said with regard to the precise mechanisms by which modernity created cinema, the general assumption is that the intensity of modern experience generated in individuals a psychological predisposition toward strong sensations, reflecting profound changes in the “perceptual mode” prevailing in modern society. He mentions that a corollary assumption would be that perceptual modernity somehow influenced the creative process so that filmmakers

¹⁷*Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* by Ben Singer, Columbia University Press, 2001: New York.

¹⁸But as Gunning suggests the relationship goes much deeper than this for, “We are dealing here not only with equivalences and interpretations among the diverse manifestations of modernity”.

were inclined to express in film style the tempos and shocks of modern life. This reference to the relation of cinema with modernity forms a part of my introduction to the whole study to explain my choice of films as the narrative texts.

The third aspect as mentioned in my thesis title is what brings the first two aspects together, and that is the notion of desire. While the contemporary world is bombarded with the realities of the present and the constant negotiation with the interjection of modernity, there is also an equal force of desire for the opposite – for all things that is not modern, that which constitutes the past and the remnants of which defines how one addresses the present today. This forms largely a part of history and a looking back to history. Along with this, there is also a more personal and private desire – a gaze with which the outer world is gaining access to a world otherwise inaccessible to them in reality. Thus, within these paradigms, this study strives to understand the notions – historical, social as well as political – in formulating the figure of the citizen and its evolution through a close study of the cinematic texts where it will treat cinema as an archive for the future. The study emphasises the role of cinema in society as a reflection to itself, seeking to show to its members the reality that they exist and even propagate.

Chapter 2

Popular Cinema as Archive: at the Crossroads of History and Memory

Ashis Nandy in his essay on “Memory Work” recollects an observation he made in his earlier essay “History’s Forgotten Doubles”¹⁹:

Memory work can even prod communities towards cultivated, calibrated forgetfulness that comes not from failures of memory but from what can be called “principle of principled forgetfulness”. You sometimes choose to live life with anti-memories, as if you have forgotten the unforgettable, as if you have “worked through” your haunting experiences of humiliation, uprooting, torture and genocide. (Nandy 2015: 600)

Studies conducted on mass violence occurring in recent history have shown there is a tendency among survivors to not wish to remember the time, the trauma that haunts them every day. They refuse to dwell on the incidents and memories and very often negotiate or come to term with the contemporary through an imagined reality. This could be either to emotionally shut themselves from reliving the trauma of such experiences, or to distance themselves from that experience in order to move forward. In this study, I have tried to find two parallel trajectories through which cinematic representation of common man’s negotiation with contemporary politics and history have found expression in Bombay cinema. This concept has already been introduced in the previous chapter where I have briefly spoken about Cinema A and Cinema B. This chapter attempts to take that idea further in order to find a clear demarcation between the two categories, which is premised upon the idea that both these categories represent a nation or a community’s attempt to address the reality through a representative modernity that each has imagined for itself. It further zooms in on Cinema B to take a closer look at how Cinema B comes to be the representative category of the various forms of the Muslim Socials (from 1940s till 1990s) that are the focus of this thesis. This has been done by further dividing Cinema

¹⁹ Ashis Nandy, “History’s Forgotten Doubles.” *History and Theory* (1995), 34 (2): 44-46

B into three separate categories or moments and to see the transformation of that visual imagination as one moves through each of those moments.

Right at the onset, I would like to make it clear that both Cinema A and Cinema B are visual representations of two types of imagination of the modern nation and its culture. Cinema A is the visual representation of a majoritarian imagination that come to terms with contemporary history and politics by focusing on a new future and a new nation that has to be built. It is a textual narrative of the social history of the time that encompasses the macrocosm of modern life.

Nandy has said:

Worse off are memories that challenge the mega-projects of Westphalian nation-states, ideologies of progress, development, national security and dominant ideas of national identity. These memories reject oral history's claim to be the final resting place for the refurbished memories that have not been captured in texts and audio-visual records. (Nandy 2015: 601)

Thus, drawing from Nandy's iteration on memory poised against history, this study distinguishes between Cinema A: that which is aligned to what we have previously established as "authenticating" history – reiterating and corroborating popular narratives; and Cinema B: that which is constantly rendering Cinema A problematic while remaining within the paradigm that encapsulates Cinema A as well. This paradigm is the visual imagination of the representation of one's history, modernity and the nation. It problematizes by questioning Cinema A by posing subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) evidences through visual narratives that provoke a counter-narrative to that of Cinema A. In other words, Cinema A is conventional history (textbook history / political party propaganda / state records) and Cinema B is memory or history that is private and public at the same time but yet not institutionalised, or if one is to look at this through the logic of the imagination of reality, that which does not find itself aligned to the nationalistic imagination of that state (as we see in the case of Cinema A). It is history based on memories or imaginations of lived experience – often like memoirs. Cinema B does not negate conventional history; rather it endorses conventional history, and yet at the same time, there is evidence of some obverse action. Thus, in my understanding Cinema A

would include films like *Anari* (Hrishikesh Mukerjee, 1959), *Ab Dilli Door Nahin* (Amar Kumar, 1957), *Shree 420* (Raj Kapoor, 1955), etc., which, given their timeline, seem to endorse a Nehruvian approach to portraying society and thereby the future of modern India and its citizens, while Cinema B would include films like *Pukar* (Sohrab Modi, 1939), *Najma* (Mehboob Khan, 1943), *Elan* (Mehboob Khan, 1947), and later on *Pakeezah* (Kamal Amrohi, 1972), *Tawaif* (B.R. Chopra, 1985), *Sardari Begum* (Shyam Benegal, 1996), *Garm Hawa* (M.S. Sathya, 1974), *Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro* (Saeed Akhtar Mirza, 1989), *Mammo* (Shyam Benegal, 1994), etc., that portray the same society that Cinema A engages with but in a different perspective as well as setting. In fact, the setting indeed is a very crucial element in the broader understanding of these two imaginations. It includes a Muslim hero, his religious identity made obvious through the use of stereotypical identifiers. However, there is a transition in the representation of the hero as is evident as we move across the films in chronology. While language/diction is one of the identifiers, one cannot ignore the evolution it has undergone since the 1940s till we reach the 1990s. The same applies to attire as well as the space within which the characters, primarily the hero, are moving. From the distinctly homogeneous space that is occupied by members of the same community as the hero, the films move to a more heterogeneous space. Therefore, the aim of this study is not to prove whether Cinema A or Cinema B is superior, but to observe the role played by Cinema B, especially in contrast to Cinema A, to become an archive of public memory as well as its veil; and in doing so, Cinema B may not necessarily be in contradiction to Cinema A always. It will also look into what comprises the representational modes of Cinema B and why are they public and private at the same time. In doing so, I have drawn primarily from the observations and arguments of Kingshuk Chatterjee and Urvi Mukhopadhyay, and referred to others like Ravi Vasudevan and Ashis Nandy in order to posit the observation and the larger argument within the paradigm of the nation and the history of the growth of cinema.

One of the premises of this thesis is that Cinema A, knowingly or unknowingly, actively participates in the state's project of bringing to life its (state's) imagination of a future and the figure of what the state considers the 'ideal citizen'. Its strict adherence to maintaining a neutralizing position, especially when it comes to the identity of the hero

and the spaces that the hero occupy makes it almost perform the function of that of ‘censorial’ control. These have been described as “a middle-class social cinema of reform”²⁰(Vasudevan 2002) which was the result of consolidating nationalist ideologies with socialist aspirations of the 1940s and 1950s, or what can be broadly understood as the years coming immediately before and after independence. Indeed, films falling within the category of Cinema A have played their role in the nation-building programme throughout Indian political history. The state needs a citizen figure to uphold and present as an exhibit/a role model, which each individual/citizen-subject living within the purview of the law of that state must strive for. Bombay cinema, with its spectrum of films falling within the category of Cinema A, has played a significant role in building that imagined future of that ideal citizen figure, through events/characters. Urvi Mukhopadhyay has drawn a clear picture of the amalgamation of socio-economic factors, coupled with the political scenario prevailing during the decade leading up to the Indian independence and thereafter that played a significant role in the turn that Bombay cinema took and the position that it came to enjoy as a filmmaking industry. A detailed discussion on this has been carried out later in this chapter.

Indian cinema (in this case, Cinema A) has played a strong role in building consensus through iconography, mass appeal and a call for nation building, thus proving itself as mechanism of public address. Cinema B too does the same. It addresses the question of nation building within the community but through a specific imagination or veiling. It could be through a call for members of the specific community that it may represent to unite in favour of reformist measures so as to be aligned with the larger argument of the nation; or a cry out to victims who have undergone the trauma of losing one’s homeland and denied their rights on the very soil that raised them. However, these films use specific motifs and icons, with the desire to draw upon subjective memory, appealing to the personal, and contextualising history within these paradigms – all of which are planted within the same motifs and icons that are used by Cinema A. For example, the same Muslim character in Cinema A who sports a *russi topi* and is a symbol of Nehru’s call for a united modern nation where there is unity amidst diversity, becomes

²⁰ Introduction to *Making Meaning in India Cinema*, edited by Ravi Vasudevan (p. 4)

a symbol of a particular community and its way of life in Cinema B. Cinema B, in other words, pins the focus and then zooms in on that so that we are exposed to a microcosm of a Muslim community and their way of life. It is this recurrence of specific iconography and motifs of one community that makes it necessary to place these films under the lens of genre, which has been done in the third chapter. Since this study focuses on how this community finds representation in popular cinema, one must keep in mind that this microcosm as we see in the popular Muslim Socials is beyond the representation of the community as we have seen in the oriental or the mythical. It requires a study of some of the major debates regarding Islamic culture and the representation of a particular community in the light of a specific imagination that it has determined for itself within the paradigm of the framework of the modern nation. The next section engages with this in detail wherein I have contextualized this through a study of what is broadly understood as the Islamic way of life.

The public and the private spheres in the Islamic way of life

It is interesting to note Ravi Vasudevan's comment in the context of how the contemporary trade discourse²¹ was undergoing a transition about the relation between social and cultural segmentation and nationhood.

For *Filmindia*, Socials were in the first instance films about Hindu society; Muslims by contrast tended to dwell in the past, making historical films, or historicals. It was only lately that films representing modern social life among Muslim were being made. There seems to be a perceived lag here. While the magazine welcomed the new trend of Muslim producers and directors seeking to represent contemporary Muslim life, we may notice it was not necessarily a modern dynamic that these films were meant to fulfil: that they should be about the challenges posed to Muslim modernization, as might be the case with Hindu Social films. Rather, the

²¹ "With the screen overwhelmed with numerous stories of Hindu social life, the film had helped to set a Hindu pattern of social life to the entire country, with the result that people never had a chance to know how our Muslims lived behind the veil." ("Masoom' Portrays Muslim Life Excellently," 1942)

producer was congratulated for the first time in bringing to the screen “an excellent and faithful portrayal of the intimate life in our millions of Muslim homes”. (Vasudevan 2015: 34)

It is this idea of the intimate life of the Muslim community that buttresses my observation regarding the private homogenous nature of the social/veil that the community was building around themselves. It is this community representation of Cinema B which demands an understanding of the major debates around Islamic culture and its negotiation with the modern state and notions of nationhood. In this regard, I would like to discuss how the Islamic way of life have been revised in the postcolonial context, and hence, drawing on Kingshuk Chatterjee’s observations and arguments²², which will be relevant to a phase of my argument about Cinema B.

Chatterjee discusses about the Islamic way of life, throwing light upon the notions of public and private. In order to do so, he has pointed out that it is the superiority of Western education – similar to the viewpoints held by a segment of the Muslim elite at the time of Sir Syed who were convinced that “Islamic intellectual tradition was incapable of accommodating the advances of Western science”(Chatterjee 2007: 179)– that explains the predominance of the belief that Islam was inadequate in several respects as a religion and a social order. It is also a critique of the idea of the Islamic way of life that is upheld many times while explaining the portrayal of Muslim society. But what is this Islamic way of life? It is that which propagated the Islamic world view, which according to the popular understanding of Islam meant that it is the duty of every Muslim to meticulously follow the religious injunctions of Islam. These injunctions were derived from the Qur’an, which are based on the example set by the Prophet Muhammad through his teaching and actions. However, Sir Syed was quick to realise the drawbacks of such an outlook and therefore aligned himself to Reformist Movement of the nineteenth-century Islam through which he attempted to present his case for the need for Muslims to study science that would convince the conservatives (Chatterjee 2007). Chatterjee sums up Sir Syed’s Islamic world view as:

²² In “The Politics of Reformist Islam in India: The Ambitious Legacy of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan” published in *Of Matters Modern: The experience of Modernity in Colonial and Postcolonial South Asia*, edited by Debraj Bhattacharya, Seagull Books, 2007, Calcutta.

It should not be seen as a complete way of life, embracing both the public and the private spheres; rather, it should be taken simply as a religious dispensation providing guidance (at best) in the private sphere of Muslim society. Muslim societies had to be reformed in the light of the advances in the realm of knowledge made in the West but adaptable anywhere. (Chatterjee 2007: 189)

He too, thus, endorses the Nehruvian ideal of secularism, a stand that was also taken by ‘secular modernists’ or ‘reformists’ or ‘Islamic modernists’ (Esposito, 1987; Lapidus, 2002) where religion remains a part of an individual’s private life. But while in the public, a citizen must conform to the western notions of knowledge and understanding. Of course, there was immense opposition put up by ‘traditionalists’ who attempted a revival of the Islamic traditions. Chatterjee further explores the various viewpoints of the elites, a section of which also held the view that “a fastidious adherence to legal prescriptions and proscriptions in every way of life ... tended to constrict innovation and ossify the dynamism used to characterise it (Islam)” (ibid.). Very interestingly, Kingshuk Chatterjee has played upon this notion of ‘Islamic way of life’ to address Sir Syed’s insistence of the prevalence of the British Raj, even at a time in history when the nationalist fervour was fast gaining ground.

Sir Syed was determined to highlight the advantages of British connection in the realm of education. He believed that education in India had tended to stagnate over several centuries; the tide of Western education unleashed by colonial rule would bring this stagnation to an end and lend education in India the element of dynamism that it had begun to lack. Indian, Hindus and Muslims alike, would once again begin to progress. (Chatterjee 2007: 185)

Sir Syed rather believed that “India under the British Raj had the conditions that were conducive to the Islamic way of life” (Chatterjee 2007: 188). It is this ‘way of life’ which was so important for the community, especially the traditionalists belonging to the elite section who were yet to come to terms with the decadence of the nawabi culture and give up on the traditionalist outlook. It may therefore seem that for Sir Syed, who also

belonged to the elite Muslim class, the complete dismantling of the gentry was not what he wanted, as it would mean that the acceptance of the superiority of the advances of Western science would result in Islam being “banished from public sphere – where it functioned as an inhibitive factor – and confined to the personal sphere of one’s life” (Chatterjee 2007: 179). Rather he was looking for a negotiation of the western ethos and education with the community that has been critiqued even within their community (by the ‘secular modernists’) for its failure to the public and the private separate. Chatterjee further presented the outlook that one section of the Muslim elite who agreed that Islamic societies needed reform but did not endorse the complete banishment. For them the main culprit was not Islam but the manner in which Islam was practised. Chatterjee cites Esposito and Lapidus and says:

In every Muslim community, though, there was a section of the elite which believed that Islam in itself did not encourage fatalism or impede progress. Rather, it was the practice of Islam in a strict legalist manner, with a fastidious adherence to legal prescriptions and proscriptions in almost every aspect of daily life, that tended to constrict innovation and ossify the dynamism that used to characterise it. Proponents of this approach agreed that Islamic societies needed reforms and adoption of advances made in the West. However, they differed from secular modernists in suggesting that reforms should aim at rehabilitating Islam as a dynamic element in the public life rather than banishing it altogether. (Chatterjee 2007: 180)

Since this study focuses on how this community finds representation in popular cinema, one must keep in mind that this microcosm as represented through Cinema B and the popular Muslim Socials is beyond the representation of the community as we have seen in the oriental or the mythical. They were the products of an influence of modernity that came with technology. Kaushik Bhaumik, while tracing the history of early cinema in India, has realised that the orientals²³ or the mythical fantasy films which formed a bulk of the films produced and distributed across the country in the early 1920s,

²³ This has been elaborated upon later in the chapter.

“complicate the consensus on the ‘traditional’ moorings of early Indian cinema” (Bhaumik 2008: 2). It is with these early films that the country’s negotiation with a modern technology like cinema begins. However, with the coming of the 1940s and 50s there is a clear movement from the mythical to the social, and in order to enter into a deeper understanding of this one needs to look at the movement of the way in which modernity now comes to associated with the thematic. The representation of modernity therefore happens through the thematic representation of events and characters as we see in the classical Muslim Socials. Thus, by the 1930s, the film narratives began to evolve according to their negotiation with the socio-political development of that time. A consensus had to be built, which was done through the veiled representation of an imagination of the modern, which I have looked into in the next section.

Building consensus through iconography and stereotype

Cinema in general, has always played an important role in exploring spaces and building a certain idea of a culture and history in the minds of its audience that goes on to influence audience expectation and reaction to what they see onscreen in subsequent films. In other words, each epoch of film history influences not just the cinema that will come after it but also the viewers. Indian cinema has had a strong role in building consensus through iconography, mass appeal and a call for nation building.

The question of who fashions these categories [of traditional and modern] is central here, and may suggest a variety of usages at any point of time.

The job of historical research would be to locate key moments at which influential usages were formulated. The state as it evolves policies of censorship, taxation and institutional formation, is an influential player in the processes which define the status of cinema as a cultural institution.

The nature of the discussions changed in the transition from the colonial to the national governments, the latter demonstrating a more powerful sense of ideological tasks to which cultural institutions should be oriented in the vision of an independent India (Vasudevan 2015).

Not all films were always overtly about the project of nation-building. Amidst the nationalist wave and its modernist (Hollywood-style) narrative representation in cinema, there was also a category of films that concentrated on the common man – one who was not always the centre of attention, the non-hero, the non-normative – but who was also a part of that modern nation. In such films, the story moved itself away from nation-centric macro story to a more people-oriented narration of events or story. As a result, the narrative setting also changed accordingly. From the representation of a social macrocosm that included members of different communities in society finding their space within a broader social milieu, the representation of the communitarian microcosm which focused on one individual meant a more private and homogenous social space which did not accommodate anyone outside that. Thus, through these films (Cinema B), individual/private histories circulated simultaneously along with the readily accepted official history. This thesis attempts to study the ways in which Cinema B explores events, characters and incidents that were occurring at a time in history.

In doing so, in most cases, it ends up picturising the same events of history but with a different perspective or point of view as we see in the case of *Garm Hawa* where a Muslim family struggles to come to terms with the loss of their homeland. The eldest member of that family cannot imagine herself anywhere outside of the walls of the house that has been the roof over her head for more than half a century. Those who refuse to give up the land which they have called home all their lives, are eventually shown joining a stream of humans rallying for a better future, under the leadership of a party that follows a social ideology, quite foreign to the idea of the Islamic way of life that we have so far seen in the classical Muslim Socials. Indeed, with *Garm Hawa*, Cinema B manages to capture winds of change that portray the transition from the first phase to the second phase in the veiled imagination²⁴. While Cinema A bears evidence to the history of a nation, it often ended up becoming a larger than life archive to popular events and ideologies. It often had to overlook the individual, ending up being the voice and history of the majority. Cinema B offers that opportunity to pause and look at a single event / character in history that may or may not concur with Cinema A. Thus, while Cinema A

²⁴ Referring to the three moments of imagination through which the community negotiated with the modern.

would capture the hero as socially ‘unmarked’ of his identity, Cinema B draws currency from the very identity of its characters and the homogeneity of the setting in which its stories unfolded.

Nation formation and the emergence of the Bombay film industry

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the films have to be read and posited against the historical premise on which many of their ideas rest. Also, it is difficult to ignore the impact of various external influences on the film industry which also determined the way it developed and grew to become a significant part of popular Indian entertainment. Urvi Mukhopadhyay has observed that the Bombay film industry visualized a syncretic Indian heritage that draws from the rich history of the Indian subcontinent and projects a modern nation that is inclusive and liberal. Admittedly, this went against the growing communalisation within the subcontinent during the 1940s, thus throwing a light on the kind of stand that the industry was willing to project. According to Mukhopadhyay, the hybrid nature of the composition of the film industry was determined by a number of factors(Mukhopadhyay, 2013).

Economy: The World War II had massive economic impact so much so that by its end in 1945, there was “rampant inflation, widespread corruption, shortages and black-market prices that dislocated a wide section of the rural population, forcing them to leave for the cities” (Mukhopadhyay 2013: 145). This resulted in grave food shortages in the eastern India resulting in large number of rural population migrating to the cities as well as to western India. This was because Bombay by this time was witnessing a steady boom in economy what with the region having profited by “supplying wartime materials at a time of disruptions in high-sea communications” (Mukhopadhyay 2013: 146). This triggered a large-scale migration as Bombay emerged as a city with increasing employment opportunities. John Lent provided his observation on the socio-economic instability caused by the war and its impact on the emerging native film industry:

The international depression had a devastating effect on the rural economy of India with the consequence of creating a massive pool of unemployed

who drifted to the burgeoning urban areas and in many respects constituted a new audience for the Indian-produced films which required for systematic mode of production if the demand was to be met.” (quoted in Mukhopadhyay 2013)

With the economic pressure caused by the world war, film production in India maximised due to the drastic fall in production of foreign films, thanks to overseas trade disruptions. It not only provided impetus in producing more films but also created a scenario wherein Indian films got the chance to monopolise the national market. Subsequent expansion opportunities in distribution and exhibition of indigenous films also followed (Mukhopadhyay 2013). According to the *Report of the Film Enquiry Committee* (Government of India 1935), the growth of the exhibition network was largely due to the purchasing power of the masses who could afford to watch films regularly in theatres, as they now had steady sources of income having secured a job after moving to the city. Of course, the absence of competition from foreign films created a demand for indigenous cinema, which resulted in good returns for almost all films made in India. Thus, film production became a lucrative business to invest one’s money for quick returns, and those who had come into quick money through sudden profit and wanted to multiply their gains, became interested in investing in film production²⁵. This resulted in there being more money available for production rather than in investing to develop a stronger and more secure distribution and exhibition sector, which could have laid the foundations of an organized cinema industry in India.

Bombay being at the forefront of the race for industrialisation compared to the other regions, having profited by “supplying wartime materials at a time of disruptions in high-sea communications” (Mukhopadhyay 2013: 146), it was only natural that it would come to enjoy being the centre of commerce and industry. From the context of the film industry, it was only a matter of time that regional studios not just in Poona and Kolhapur

²⁵ Radha Subramanyam (2000) and Amrit Gangar (2005) have described how the combined effect of various controls and shortages during the wartime resulted in multiplication of black money by manifold, which did not take long to find its way into the film industry. This brought about the existence of such entities like ‘fly-by-night operators’ who invested in one or two films to make easy money and then vanishing soon after.

but also as far as in Calcutta would feel the need to become part of the bigger financial networks of Bombay at a time when cost of production was surmounting due to the inflation. Having realised the potential of a pan-India audience, the new studios²⁶ in Bombay began to produce films that helped them capture the all-India market rather than catering only to the regions as they have been doing so far. With the migration of skilled as well as unskilled labour to western India, and especially to Bombay, many found employment in the film industry, which, because it was primarily an emerging sector, did not require any specialised skills (Mukhopadhyay, 2013). Mukhopadhyay has done a brief study on two of the most prominent new studios that came up during this period – Bombay Talkies and Filmistan (which was offshoot of Bombay Talking) – and has shown that having broken away from the old methods of production and functioning²⁷, these studios, particularly Bombay Talkies, began to be described as a “full-fledged corporate body with a board of directors” (Rajadhyaksha and Willeman 1994: 64) headed by prominent industrialists and businessmen with considerable influence and control over banks, insurance companies and investments trusts (Mukhopadhyay 2013).

Politics and religion/communalism: It is at this time that the communal politics was also gaining ground, what with the ideologies that emphasized the importance of religious communities were getting increasing acceptance in Indian politics. As Urvi Mukhopadhyay has pointed out, religious symbolisms were so ingrained in the political rhetoric of that time that they even began to influence significant sections of the Congress leaders who were seen to invoke Hindu symbolism in their speeches. This was interesting given that they adhered to a political position that was otherwise subscribed to the stance of secular nationalism. Mukhopadhyay also commented upon the debates surrounding the acceptance of a communalised version of the past in the light of the communal tensions during the years leading up to 1947. While extremists from both camps (Hindu and Muslim) harked upon their respective periods of medieval glory, secularist forces like

²⁶ The sudden inflow of capital investment also provoked increased interest in the building of film studios, which in turn led to a rise in the already high cost of producing films. in the face of these rising production costs, coupled with economic inflation, studios employed traditional means of generating capital could not retain their monopoly of the film industry. (Mukhopadhyay,)

²⁷ V Shantaram, the pre-eminent figure at Prabhat Studio in Poona, broke away from Prabhat in 1942 to start his own studio, Rajkamal Kalamandir, in Bombay.

Nehru, Abul Kalam Azad and Gandhi chose the composite culture of the medieval period as the chosen site for historical arguments rather than the Vedic period of the Hindus and the “pristine Arabic culture” (Mukhopadhyay 2013: 156) of the Muslims as their ideal past. Abul Kalam Azad drew attention to the eleven hundred years of Muslim common history with the Hindus in his presidential address at the Ramgarh session of the Congress in 1940 (ibid.). He said:

The joint wealth [of Indo-Islamic culture] is the heritage of our common nationality and we do not want to leave it and go back to the times when this joint life had not begun. [...] I am one of those who believe that the revival [of the past glories] maybe a necessity in a religion but in social matters it is a denial of progress. (Hasan 1993: 67-8)

According to Urvi Mukhopadhyay, the reservation about invoking the Hindu or Muslim golden age were based on the argument that it “denied the historical reality of the previous thousand years” (Mukhopadhyay 2013: 157). Similar ideas were echoed by Nehru who in his reflections from the Ahmednagar jail stated, “...the non communal perspective of a composite nationality of Hindu and Muslims was the foundation of modern Indian society” (ibid.). During these times of turmoil, the Bombay industry was seen to produce a series of films which portrayed an idyllic relationship between the Hindus and the Muslim. They “sought to portray the medieval period as the source of a composite culture” (ibid.: 159). In the light of these films, Mukhopadhyay has raised the following question:

These historical representations raise questions about the influence of communalist political trends on the media. Were film makers choosing these themes on the presumption that Mughal romances would be accepted by the public despite the contemporary controversies? Or was the industry invoking the syncretic cultures of the medieval past as a means of counteracting contemporary political trends? (ibid.)

This takes us back to the first moment of the Muslim Socials as proposed in this thesis that involves a kind of cinema which could provide a veil of imagination that helped the community to hide/negotiate the problems they were grappling with in reality. I have

described this engagement with a veiled imagination of reality as a nostalgia which had become popular at that time.

It was also the time when Jinnah was invoking the ideas of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan to propose for a separate nation for the Muslims of the subcontinent. I have closely referred to Kingshuk Chatterjee's observation on Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's thoughts and ideologies (which were later readily taken up by Jinnah, thus resulting in Sir Syed being often dubbed as one of the primary proposers of the two-nation / divided-nation theory when in reality it couldn't have been more removed from it) later in this chapter. Mukhopadhyay cites Mushirul Hasan's observation (Hasan 1993: 5), "...the demand for a separate homeland for the minority Muslim community on the basis of the 'two-nation theory' was seen as a formidable reality from the early 1940s. [... Muslim] League leader, Jinnah articulated a clear vision for a separate state for Muslims in post-independence India.." (Mukhopadhyay 2013: 152). This drastic change was primarily due to the infiltration of Hindu right wing extremist elements into the Congress that resulted in the blurring of the differentiating line between the secular Congress and the right-wing Hindu Mahasabha (ibid.). Thus the political scenario coupled by the communal tensions that prevailed during the 1940s seemed to have an influence in the popular medium.

Language: All the factors as discussed, played a considerable role in bringing about a change in the composition of the Bombay film industry. As workers moved to Bombay and joined the industry, it also accommodated actors, directors, scriptwriters, music directors from various part of India hailing from different socio-cultural and even religious backgrounds. They came with their regional undertones and influences that found an immediate taker in the contemporary films, which thrived on the regional flavour that these artists brought in. Consciously or not, this began to give an inclusive feel to the content (the storyline or the language or the music) which drew from regional influences. It helped Bombay cinema acquire a cosmopolitan outlook as well as nationwide acceptance. As economic factors played a significant role in the production of films at that time, it must have had some effect on the content of the films made then. It is quite early at this point to say that the socio-political history of that time was not playing any role at all. Even though Bombay was in a position to come to the forefront of

filmmaking in India, it being the centre of India's industrial and financial networks (Prasad, 2010), economy could not have been the sole determining factor. However, because of the pan-India audience that the Bombay films now began to reach out to, there was a conscious decision to use Hindustani – a mix of Devanagari Hindi along with Urdu. This became possible through the active contribution of writers like Sadat Hasan Manto, actors like Ashok Kumar (a Bengali), music directors like Ghulam Haider (who was a Punjabi), etc. Hindustani was a language that was widely acceptable in the Indian subcontinent, no matter how artificially it was developed, strictly to cater to the wide audience (Mukhopadhyay 2013). Mukhopadhyay cites K.A. Abbas's remark on this language factor: "the commercial instinct of the producers pointed towards a compromise between the lingua extremes, seeking to make the dialogue in their pictures understood by the largest number of cine-goers all over the country"(Abbas, n.d.: 253) Abbas further goes on to describe this language as:

Not a very elegant or literary language, a curious mixture of Hindi words like *prem* (love), *ashirvad* (blessings) and *lagaan* (auspicious time), and Urdu words like *manzil* (path), *mohabbat* (love) and *mehfil* (concert), certainly an artificial language, but a language that had a chance of being understood in Calcutta and Bombay as well as in Allahabad and Lahore and even to some extent, in Mysore and Rangoon. (ibid.)

According to Mukhopadhyay, this conscious use of a hybrid/artificial language as Hindustani was a clear indication of the industry's preference to "favour the idea of a syncretic cultural tradition as the foundation of modern Indian society"(Mukhopadhyay 2013: 150). Urvi Mukhopadhyay has pointed out that despite the contribution of the left-leaning Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA)²⁸ towards enabling the Bombay film industry to counter communalist depiction in its cinema, it was not easy for the industry

²⁸ It owes its origin from the Progressive Writers' Association Conference of 1936 which sowed the seeds of the formation of the Indian People's Theatre Association that was formally inaugurated in 1943. IPTA saw stalwarts like Prithviraj Kapoor, Hemango Biswas, Kaifi Azmi, Salil Chowdhury, Ritwik Ghatak, Balraj Sahni as its members whose leftist leaning and associations with the Communist Party of India are not unknown, neither is one not aware of their immense contribution to the IPTA's larger idea that art and culture could not remain alienated from life, but must mirror it. It is this which brought together individuals from multiple arenas of creative pursuits.

to completely avert the effects of the contemporary communalism. Hence, we have seen many popular Muslim artists like Dilip Kumar, Meena Kumari, Madhubala, and many others who chose to assume Hinduised names in order to project a national image of themselves as leading stars of the time (Vasudevan 2002). The influence of the IPTA could also be one of the reasons behind the religious dissociation of the industry while onscreen. Given its strong Marxist leanings, it was but natural for the Association to be bound by class structure over anything else (religious or caste). The hybrid language by this time had become the normative one, as audiences became more and more alienated with the pure forms of either Hindi or Urdu²⁹. While the industry favoured a ‘hybrid middle path’ with regard to the language, it is hard to locate this outside the history of language’s role in the earliest demands for nationhood. This was also the time when the Congress and the Muslim League began to put forward divergent visions of the future nation, a time when the demand for a separate homeland for the minority Muslim community gathered ground. It was a direct influence of the “two-nation theory” that was allegedly proposed by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan.

While this syncretic cultural tradition was about inclusiveness of different languages and cultures, the socials that the Bombay industry eventually began to produce in large number and which gained immense popularity had more to do with doing away with all kinds of identifiers that pinned a certain character or a setting to a particular community. Thus by the late 40s and early 50s, the popular Socials were the films which had heroes who were not specifically shown to be belonging to any particular community. It could be argued that this was probably because these films were brought produced at a time very close to the independence of India, and even the film industry was more eager in contributing to the nation-building project. As a result, it ended up aligning itself to that of the Nehruvian form of secularism which has been described by Rajeev Bhargava as “a state that separated itself from religion and was indifferent, if not hostile to it” (Bhargava, 2017). He takes a closer look at Nehru’s form of secularism and cites:

²⁹ For present day viewers, watching a *Mughal-E-Azam* – with its heavy usage of pure Urdu – is as good as watching a film in one of the regional languages with subtitles that they do not understand.

The nationalism that needs to be built in India must have its doors and windows open to internationalism. But for this to happen, the state must not identify with even any religion. The ends promoted by any religion, no matter how valuable, cannot be the ends of a secular state. (ibid.)

However, one must not confuse this with a state that is anti-religious. Nehru was staunchly aware of the multicultural nature of Indian society. He acknowledged the need for unity amidst diversity, and yet he was not ready to promote the idea of an ideal state “where religion as such is discouraged, or pushed into oblivion” (Gopal & Iyengar, 2003). Thus what was proposed as a secular form of distancing the state from any particular religion while at the same time acknowledging their presence to uphold the ideals of secularism, eventually morphed into an exclusionary form. The Bombay cinema with its new-found Hindustani language became a representative of that as it began to build images of heroes who were unmarked and unidentified of their faith. It is for this reason that when certain films began to overtly portray one single community which was otherwise not visible, that we come to have a series that was capturing the call of a community that was trying to say something for itself. As Urvi Mukhopadhyay points out, “Perhaps its internal tussle between identification with exclusive religious or regional communities on the one hand, and identification with a broader national self on the other, led the film enterprise to deny the monolithic identity formation discourse of contemporary communal politics” (Mukhopadhyay 2013: 156). The film industry was more focused on its commercial goal of establishing an all-India market and to align itself to the idea of a multicultural Indian society. Thus, through this discussion I have touched upon the factors that broadly influenced in concretizing the formation of the nation concept within the imagination of the industry, which to a certain extent determined the negotiation of the community with the reality of the modern nation-state and how it found representation in popular cinema through the Muslim Socials (Cinema B). While doing so, I have briefly reflected upon the two-nation theory of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and the position taken up by the Congress and the Muslim League. Sir Syed’s position in the formulation of a separate identity among the Muslims makes him an interesting case, which throws light on this relevant discussion. This has been taken up in the next section.

The nation and nationalism/internationalism of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan

Here I will be spotlighting on some of the views put forth by Kingshuk Chatterjee about Sir Syed's two-nation theory which paved the course of Muslim separatism in the postcolonial history. What makes Chatterjee's argument important is its relevance in the understanding of Sir Syed, which could be interesting especially in the way Chatterjee has proposed a coming together of an Islamic way of life and modernity, even in the midst of a socio-political scenario wherein a tacit Hindu majority had a sway. Through this two-fold argument he draws a relation between an Islamic way of life and the colonial modernity on the one hand, and how the Lucknavi nawabi culture forms a restorative paradigm for the community on the other hand.

Known principally as the founder of the Aligarh movement, ... Sir Syed was also a votary of Islamic reformation. He was one of the architects of political consciousness, community identity, and the world view of Indian Muslims in the nineteenth century, which were considerably different from all other previous formulations of Islamic identity in the subcontinent (Chatterjee 2007: 175).

Sir Syed has been painted by historians (assumably towing the line of the Benedict Anderson's idea of nations as "imagined communities") as the progenitor of Muslim separatism/nationalism in the Asian subcontinent. Chatterjee looks deeper than the otherwise commonly understood notion that what Sir Syed began as a means to defend the interests of the Muslim elites/aristocrats of north India laid the seeds of the discourse to develop separatist character. It was Congress's integrative politics, which as mentioned in the previous section led to the infiltration of right-wing elements that threw into question the Congress's loyalty towards a secular nationalism, that triggered the postulation of the two-nation theory and the subsequent Aligarh Movement led by Sir Syed (Chatterjee 2007). Urvi Mukhopadhyay's comment that as the ideologies emphasizing religious communities were gaining ground and finding wide acceptance in Indian politics – "religious symbolism was so ingrained in contemporary political rhetoric that even significant sections of Congress leaders invoked Hindi symbolism in their speeches, despite adhering to the political position that otherwise "subscribed to the

stance of secular nationalism” – this affected the articulation of the stereotype of ‘national community’ (Mukhopadhyay 2013: 153). Chatterjee points out that even though Sir Syed is widely acknowledged as the harbinger of modernity among Muslim communities, there has hardly been much study on his political thoughts which would situate him in the context of transnational Islamic thought of his time. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan is the founder of the Aligarh Muslim University that helped in the spread of western education in north India, especially among Muslims. He believed in Islamic reformation and was “one of the architects of political consciousness, community identity and the world view of Indian Muslims in the nineteenth century” (Chatterjee 2007: 175).

Sir Syed’s view on multiculturalism was expressed through his belief in the need to build a multinational state in a multinational society like India. He had realised the need to accommodate each of the components of such a variegated society in order to build a modern nation where each community is recognized and gets equal opportunity in the nation’s development. It throws into question whether he at all envisioned a separate Muslim nation, or rather wanted a common nation for all living in the subcontinent. As Chatterjee pointed out, it is hard to ignore Sir Syed’s use of ‘nation’ and ‘nationalism’ as terms of reference³⁰, “his [Sir Syed’s] understanding of these terms was not inspired by the European experience.” Rather Sir Syed found no necessary convergence between nation (what to him was *quam*) and the state. All he wanted was to modernize Indian Muslim society. Indeed, Sir Syed was one of the earliest proponents of a multicultural societal setup for a country like India that acknowledged the history of all communities living together and having undergone shared experiences. Much before the Indian freedom struggle began in its full force, Sir Syed had foreseen the day when the people of the subcontinent would demand for a democratic state for themselves, free from the shackles of colonial Raj. However, he was also acutely aware of the setbacks that his

³⁰ Chatterjee has pointed out that Sir Syed’s thoughts on ‘nation’ and ‘nationalism’ developed as a response to the rise of the Urdu-Nagri controversy towards the end of the 1870s. It involved the demand for the use of the Devanagari script for Hindi and be given parity of status as enjoyed by the Perso-Arabic script of Urdu. Chatterjee has drawn attention to the social character of this controversy wherein those coming from Bengal preferred the Devnagri script which they found easier to learn compared to the more unfamiliar Perso-Arabic script. The Muslims feared that a parity of Devnagri with Perso-Arabic would only result in enabling the babus from Bengal (who were already higher qualified) to occupy all administrative posts in north India.

community would face. He was a part of the judicial wing of the East India Company's administration where he had first major encounter with the English language and the progress made by Western education, and how far behind his community lagged. The British mistrust of Muslims was also not overlooked by him as he realised that there was a popular hypothesis that Indian Muslims were opposed to the British Raj³¹ nor did he ignore the lack of acceptance of the British among the Muslim society. He was quick to realise that the causes of the Muslim society could be addressed only through cordial relationship between both sides and acceptance of one another. Chatterjee points out:

In the Muslim world of the nineteenth century, this diagnosis³² had a further corollary. When its ruling elites tried to come to terms with their own military inferiority vis-à-vis the Western powers by trying to adopt Western technology, they realised that such adoption was not possible within the existing educational apparatus – which was why Ottoman Turkey, Qajar Persia and Egypt under the pashas began to incorporate Western ideas on the natural and social sciences into their curriculum through a piecemeal introduction of Western education. Accordingly, a segment of the elites in the Muslim world began to subscribe to the western view that the Islamic intellectual tradition was incapable of accommodating the advances of Western science because these were products of a different intellectual tradition. (Chatterjee 2007: 178-9)

³¹ Enamoured of the West, Sir Syed believed that Indian Muslim society needed the support of the Raj to progress, just as the Hindus did on their path to progress. But as per some popular interpretations of the sharia, any state ruled by a non-Muslim was a *dar al-Harb* (Land of War), and it was an obligation (*farz*) for [sic] every Muslim to wage a *jihad* (struggle) until Islamic rule is established and the state becomes a *dar al-Islam* (Land of Peace). This made the British look upon Muslim with suspicion; the Wahabi Movement and considerable Muslim participation in the great uprising of 1857 apparently lent substance to that suspicion." Sir Syed made efforts to explain the participation of Muslims as a result of the certain British policies which had hurt Muslim sentiments, thus highlighting the fact that Muslim animosity towards the British was due to specific policies.

³²The general consensus that identifies the dominance of Western countries in the material superiority they enjoy as a result of the Industrial Revolution which marks out technology as the crucial element of difference between the Western world and the rest.

In both the films, *Elan* and *Najmawee* see how the Muslim society is deeply entrenched in the Islamic way of life, as a result of which those who were not able to embrace the advancements in the arts and sciences in the West were falling behind those who accepted it. Sir Syed too faced considerable opposition from the elite Muslim community until his luck turned, thanks to the success of the Aligarh Movement³³. Thus this goes quite in opposition to Urvi Mukhopadhyay's observation of the Muslim Socials for their overtly Islamic representation, which tended to be make it more artificial and further from reality. However, it could be that the representation of a homogeneous Muslim community was a conscious way to highlight the inadequacies of the "intellectual tradition" that has till then determined the intellectual pursuits of the community. Creating a heterogeneous and therefore possibly closer to reality community/social scenario might have taken away the film's focus on addressing only the issues pertaining to the (north) Indian Muslim community³⁴. Of course, one cannot deny the nostalgic looking back at a milieu that was, and which still had such an immense control over the community.

Thus, I would like to propose the phrase 'recuperative difference' in order to describe the process of asserting a difference and then recuperating from that while staying within the hegemonic power structure. This can be explained through the first moment of Cinema B which involved the depiction of a homogenous Muslim society, where modernity is claimed by the minority community basis the difference – an assertion of modernity through the difference. Thus what we see is a comparative dimension at work, which enables the segregation of the community by harking back on a glorious past that provides a veil of imagination. However, that veil does not stay long and we soon witness the unveiling of that imagination. Hence, the two-fold argument of

³³ As Chatterjee pointed out, in 1875, the Muhammedan Anglo-Oriental College was founded in Aligarh, which later became the Aligarh Muslim University. Aligarh became so integral to the subsequent activities of Sir Syed that his efforts for the dissemination of Western education in Muslim Society are collectively called Aligarh Movement.

³⁴ It must be kept in mind here that the Muslim representation that we are talking about with respect to Bombay cinema and more specifically with reference to Sir Syed was definitely north India-specific, and more specifically of the Muslim elites. The lived experience of Muslims from east and south India are markedly different.

Chatterjee becomes relevant to a postcolonial identification or visualisation of the Islamic culture, which is in line with Nehruvian modernism.

Reform through education and its resistance

Drawing from the observation of the Muslim community not being equipped with the intellectual tradition that Western education demanded, this section takes a very brief look at the community's resistance towards modern education as it would go against the norms of the Islamic way of life.

Sir Syed attributed Muslim backwardness to a failure on the part of the Muslims to adapt their beliefs and practices to modern times. (Chatterjee 2007: 182)

Kingshuk Chatterjee draws from Sir Syed to observe that apart from the socio-cultural factors, religious factors also kept Muslims away from schools run by Western educationists. The *ulemas* who were primarily responsible for dissemination of education and learning within the Muslim community were opposed to Western education as “intrinsically opposed to divinity – science does not accept nature as an expression of God’s will but as regulated by certain impersonal [and hence, universal] laws³⁵.” What is interesting is Chatterjee’s observation regarding that section of the Muslim population who were not part of the elite (but not necessarily labourers or agriculturalists/farmers) mainly the middle class – “those Muslims who needed to work for their livelihood disregarded religious injunctions and requirements to embrace Western education.” Thus, there was a clear divide among the Muslims – one that wanted a complete dissociation from any form education that was influenced by Western traditions; another that wanted a separation from the Islamic reasoning altogether to be completely aligned to the teachings and advances of Western education; and yet another, which was more in favour of a

³⁵ Chatterjee further observes, “This was tantamount to denying God his most significant attribute, omnipotence: even God could not violate the laws of nature if he wanted. Such an approach was considered antithetical to Islam in two ways: theologically, such an approach was guilty of *shirk* (association of some other force with any of the attributes of Allah, in this case omnipotence); and practically, such an association was supposed to lead to materialism and atheism.” Sir Syed of course had a very clear explanation of that – for him it is Allah who has created the laws of nature.

middle path that attempted to strike a balance between modernity and the Islamic way of life (Chatterjee, 2007). The early/classical Muslim Socials that belonged to the first moment of imagination, capture all three sections of society. These films have portrayed characters that were part of the elite Muslim world but believe in the positivity and advantage of Western education. The heroes in both *Elan* and *Najma* endorse this kind of a world view. These films also include characters who were staunchly opposed to modern education and reform, these included *maulvis* or orthodox Muslims for whom the omnipresent superior power was more powerful than Western science and technology. Finally, there are those who completely denounce the Islamic way of life, having been completely overwhelmed by modern education and the modern ways of the world. Cinema was a reflection or mirror to the society. This was one of the positions of IPTA with regard to art forms – cinema, along with all the other crafts that formed a part of its making, – being one of them.

Cinema as archive

Ravi Vasudevan has drawn attention to the “domain of recognition [which] implies a focus on *local* cinematic cultures rather than a comprehensive and a differentiated sense of what the cinema means in society” (R. Vasudevan 2002: 7-8). Indeed, he points out that the term ‘local’ is being strategically used to bypass the ideologically loaded concepts of the national and the indigenous. Rather, the cultural transactions involved in the mobilisation of local forms are central, and that would include performance practices, musical and linguistic idioms, formulation of personality types who condense social consensuses about the representative image. It is against this light that this thesis will try to look at Cinema B. There is no denying the fact that cinema plays a significant role in acting as a mirror to the society. It captures and portrays what it sees around itself. It explores spaces and builds up a certain idea of a culture and history of a community or a moment in history in the minds of its audience that goes on to influence audience expectation and reaction. It can be safely said that each epoch of film history is a testament to how cinema influences not just the cinema that will come after it but also the viewers. This is achieved by the dual role of cinema as a mass medium for

promoting popular/institutionalised ideas as well as the medium that provides the agency to question the normative. Indian cinema has had a strong role in building consensus through iconography, mass appeal and a call for nation building. As evident from the films produced immediately post-independence, which mostly concentrated on giving the nation a hope and a vision for the future to the present day, cinema – as a work of art, as a result of someone’s creative endeavour – has also primarily been a reflection of various aspects of our society. It is interesting in this context to note how Indian cinema has evolved itself in a way to produce films that cannot be put under a single genre style. The socials have always been a popular genre in Indian cinema, dealing with the modern ideas of love, family, marriage and individuals as citizens. It appealed greatly to a nation that was born at the stroke of midnight. However, it is interesting to note how Indian cinema, while working within the categories of what constitutes a social, has succeeded in weaving in aspects of other genres (action, musical, thriller, etc.), thus creating a ‘hybrid social’. Hybrid or not, the socials evolved to address a large spectrum of population across the Indian subcontinent with different linguistic, religious, regional, social and even geo-physical backgrounds while focusing on the representation of love, marriage and family life. These films projected a certain kind of future, and their success largely depended on playing up a culture and tradition that was both familiar to its audience as well as imbibed a sense of aspiration – very crucial for a young nation.

Early Hindi cinema (especially those films belonging to the immediate post-independence period) was marked by the advent of the ‘social’, a genre that fed into the whole project of nation building of the state. Notions of equality and democracy were running high as prerequisites of a modern state which India as a nation was striving for and the state itself formed a large presence (invisible or otherwise) within the narrative of these films³⁶. Within this broad category of popular cinema there was a range of films which were marked by their distinctive appreciation and taste for Muslim culture and tradition. There is an evocation of a memory long past which these films are trying to reach into – probably motivated by some kind of nostalgia, a desire. Within the academic regime they have come to be termed as ‘Muslim Socials’ drawing inspiration from the

³⁶ Films like *Shree 420*, *Awaara*, etc.

industry's usage of the term as found in various trade journals of the time. The Indian socials have popularly been known as 'Socials', making film scholars question whether the socials which specifically dealt with Muslim community / history / characters, etc., be called 'Muslim Socials'. There has been enough debate about whether they are to be categorised as a branch of the Socials or a completely separate/independent genre by itself. These have been discussed in detail in the next chapter on genre. Within this paradigm of the Indian social, the dual role of cinema can be said to be evident – both as a medium of propaganda for those in power, as well as an agency of aberration. The propaganda does not evidently occur directly as a state sponsored project. Rather it is the alignment of Cinema A's imagination along with the state's idea of nation and modernity. Film history bears evidence to the fact that cinema has primarily operated as a state apparatus, however indirectly as it may be. This has been through a direct control of the medium by the state, either financially (by recognising it as an industry – something that has not happened in India) or by its power to censor. This kind of censorial control empowers the state to influence what sort of 'reality' cinema will show to the public, and the state does intervene in some cases to exercise its control through censorship in the name of larger good of the society and its peace or through a passive endorsement of a certain kind of representation of reality. It is an assertion of control not just over cinema as a medium or a craft or as a creative product, but also over its viewers – the citizens of the state. The state determines what is suitable for its citizens to watch – most of the time it is that which does not provoke the citizen to question the supremacy of the state. The citizen must not be made privy to another reality which the state does not promote. They must not be shown that there exists a history that is alternative to what is believed or popularly accepted, or hold up a picture of an ideal society where the individual comes before the state, where homogeneity is questioned, and anything outside of the normal is accepted. This study has tried to identify the point(s) of negotiation between two types of history (authenticating and the personal / memory) through the Muslim Socials. In doing so it has not only looked into Muslim Socials, but also brought under its purview a broad spectrum of films – ranging from the orientals to the more modern films of the latter half of the twentieth century. This ability to talk about / engage with things across a broad spectrum is not peculiar to Indian cinema, but cinema in general. Through this

engagement we also see how the past has been articulated in these films and how it keeps coming back.

In India, the cinema industry has remained an entity not directly identified with the state as its agents of propaganda; and yet it has, consciously or unconsciously, promoted a vision of a future that the leaders of independent India had dreamt of – for themselves as citizens of this country and for the rest of the country as a whole. Madhava Prasad in the Introduction to his book, *Ideology of the Hindi Film* deliberates on:

[the] hegemonic alliance between advanced capitalism and the cinematic institution as approached upon by western film theory as a challenge to its efforts at building an alternative cinema committed to progressive social goals. (Prasad 2010: 11)

Interestingly, Indian cinema has often played the role of the deviant, swerving away from the norm, pushing against the established boundaries of moral and social codes and practices. In the process, it has ended up documenting the changes undergone by society over the years. The state, however, refused to acknowledge cinema to be part of a structured industry like any other conventional industries, thus cutting off benefits in the form of funds and subsidies from everyone associated with the art. Rather, the state has often expressed its dissatisfaction at the liberal notions of the practitioners of the craft³⁷. Just as there are films that become propaganda mouthpieces of the state, there are others which uphold the liberal attitude that question the norm and push the boundaries of acceptance. Indeed, the film industry has consistently attempted to breach the walls of normativity that the state carefully builds around its citizens and try to maintain a strong hold over them. Therefore, if we are to take cinema as a state apparatus, it becomes an agent of passive revolution, bearing witness to the changes in civil society and its gradual integration into the bourgeois society. Cinema thus aids to build a meta-narrative – of the “state first” model of capitalist development, where nation-state is first established, followed by a process of reform from above that gradually modernize the nation and

³⁷ Cinema’s influence over the larger public was not restricted within the length of the cinema reel, rather it went beyond it, as the audience closely followed the life and actions of their favourite actors and actresses. Singers, songwriters, directors and producers too had their own fan following, which they utilized to their benefit many times.

expand the domain of capitalism – and feeds into it (Prasad, 2010). This is nothing but falling back on the tradition of reading cinema as an apparatus. For Madhava Prasad, the feudal family romance in Indian cinema is representative of the conflict of two ideologies of modernity that elaborate the cultural process of Hindi cinema. Reformist Hindi cinema's attempt to look at society from the other end of the binocular, involved a vertically controlled realist representation of peripheral modernity. This is seen in the case of New Wave cinema where the marginalized and the minority are seen occupying centralised position in the narrative of a story that revolves around a largely Hindu-ised society. Prasad evokes Partha Chatterjee's notion of how once a nation-state is established, it is followed by a process of reform from above, which is taken up as a project of modernising the state; its objective being to establish a modern nation-state that is conducive to capitalist growth. Here the principle task of the state is to conquer the civil society and establish a "unitary bourgeois subject", in other words, a Citizen-Subject. Thus, these films belonging to Cinema A act as agencies and become one of the many apparatuses of the modern state's hegemonic project, taking forward Prasad's argument that this duality is part of modernity – cinema captures this duality of a statist versus cinematic imagination. Cinema becomes a repository of public versus privatized memory.

The oriental films (especially those which were produced under the Homi Wadia banner) also played an interesting role in the film industry's endorsement of the Hindu-Muslim unity. Rosie Thomas points out the marked difference of the film *Lal-e-Yaman* from the prevalent Euro-American oriental in its depiction and celebration of a recognizable Islamic religion and philosophy. For the first time, comes the mention of one film falling within the popular oriental genre to exhibit a close relationship of the same to the Muslim world and religion. It is a clear moving away from the secularist tendency that was exhibit in the prior film, *Gul-e-Bakavali*, which, as Dharamsey has pointed out to have secularized its source story, for the original story, as published by Naval Kishore in 1882, had a distinctly Islamic context, with direct references to God and the Prophet Mohammed. The film had changed the name of the king from Zeen-ul-Mulk to Raja Jalad Sang / Singh and had introduced *yakshas*, sati, Indra along with fakirs, paris and burqas (Thomas, 2014b). It seemed to be a deliberate attempt at a balancing out the

influence of any particular religion. On the other hand, Sufi mystical philosophy formed a large part of *Lal-e-Yaman*. The film ends by celebrating the Islamic religion through the depiction of the hoisting of the Caliphate flag along with a song in the praise of Allah. In fact, it had a sequel called *Noor-e-Yaman* which had the fakir and a second heroine who is shown refusing to renounce Islam. According to Rosie Thomas, this was a very tactical move on the part of the films' producers, Homi Wadia, who was known to be a staunch nationalist. These films definitely had a political dimension to it, which Thomas reads as an attempt to Hindu-Muslim unity and an anti-communist politics by trying to produce a film with heavy Islamic references to counter the rising surge of Hindu *bhakti* movement in the country at that time. However, the Arabian fantasy films of the post-1933 period showed a deeper understanding of and a real engagement with Muslim communities in India. Thus, *Lal-e-Yaman* marks the transitional period of the 1930s where there was a conscious political attempt at addressing the concerns of religious differences and a feeding into the idea of a cosmopolitan modernity along with the nationalist fervour that was soon to gain momentum in the region. Rosie Thomas however, underlines the flip side of the popularity of such a genre, arguing that while such endeavours can be seen as efforts to attract the Muslim population to the movies, they also ran the risk of exoticising and other-ing the entire population through a mass medium like cinema. However, with the rise of the nationalist surge the realist 'social' melodramas became popular resulting in the slow petering down of the trend for fantasy films, though they continued as cheaply made B grade fantasy films, which Rosie Thomas claims fed the subaltern audiences (Thomas, 2014b). Thus, the oriental fantasy films laid the early foundations for a genre of films that would go on to reflect a culture of the composite geo-political space of the Indian subcontinent. If I were to map these within the paradigms of Cinema B, there were stark contrasts to Cinema A which was constantly trying to break free from the shackles of the past and make most of the just acquired independence. However, did it mean that Cinema B, with its representation of the non-normative and the constant tendency to come back to the past, was not interested in making a place for itself in the newly-formed nation? Rather, Cinema B showed a picture of a society that was coming to terms with the reality of history by veiling the everyday experience under the popular imagination of a nostalgic and glorious past.

Films like *Najma* acknowledged that the Muslim community needed to re-wire themselves for the needs of the modern nation. These were films that were acknowledging individual communities and their lacunae, and at the same time the willingness to strive for self-improvement to become equals within a democratic nation. These films play an equally strong role in building a consensus regarding the nature of the population of India, the nature of law that these people would like to bring them under the purview of, the nature of the figure of the citizen that modern India would strive for. For it is undeniable that after independence this valuation of the Muslim culture fed into the secular ideology of the Nehruvian polity. This is where *Garm Hawa* becomes quite significant as it tries to trace the historical event of partition and how it came to influence the Muslims in India. While they remained upholders of the Islamic way of life in the private confines of their homes, in public they became the citizens of a free nation that sought to equate all its citizens through a thorough stripping down of all markers. There is no denying the fact that films about Muslims were more involved in portraying a homogeneous communitarian society – where the specific and rather iconic mode of address (internal mode of address), the decor and architecture (mise-en-scene), the language, etc. – all seem like an invitation to the public to cast their gaze on something otherwise private (under purdah). Interestingly, in the Muslim socials, unlike its normative Hindu counterpart, it was this entering into the private space/realm of the Muslim society that was considered binding. If unmarking is a process towards modernity, Muslim socials are aberration. Shahid Amin in his essay “Representing the Musalman: Then and Now, Now and Then” says,

The sense of belonging – belonging to the present nation – involves the creation and replication of a sense of ‘them’ and ‘us’ through icons, stories, and narratives. This siring of communities and narratives about long-existent collectives often takes place simultaneously. (Amin, 2005)

Amin’s essay throws light on the issue of how such pushing back individual markers of identity into the realm of the private has only led to a further stereotyping of an image. If one is to put it very bluntly, Nehruvian secularism was based on the premise of equality between persons of all religion irrespective of caste, class, or even region. However, at

the same time, in reality they or those at the helm were trying to unite a nation that has just suffered the onslaught of partition on both its western and eastern borders. They were leading a nation of people who were greatly influenced by Gandhi as well as the doctrines of Ambedkar not to forget the secular position of Muslims like Azad. Thus, here was a nation with all its differences that was trying to unite its people. However, Shahid Amin has raised the question that how can difference be represented without stereotyping the group concerned – a major problem confronting the Indian nation today (Amin, 2005). When faced with the notion of figuratively representing Nehru's mantra of unity in diversity, it was natural to take recourse to representation of the superficial differences, as Amin cites the example of the billboard appealing for a united India. The billboard illustrated a group of men each representing his community or region through certain iconic stereotypes. What caught my attention in all of this is the fact that while most of the cases the differentiating marker has been their regionality – Punjabi, Bengali, etc., but not in the case of the Muslim. Thus, it can be conjectured that initially there was a fascination for things oriental and hence the popularity of such films among western audiences, including those who were residing in India at that time. This fascination continued well into the first few decades of post independence Indian films.

Conclusion

Thus it can be said that Indian popular cinema can be broadly divided into two categories through which the industry has been catering to the popular imagination of a large section of its audience. The visualization of specific imagination has been undertaken through a representation of a macrocosm of public heterogeneous space and a microcosm of private homogeneous space. In fact, imagination is a memory work which involves the excavation of possibilities and arguments which have been left out by the contemporary historical regime. Based on the larger focus of this study being on the Muslim Socials, the chapter has highlighted the various trajectories through which the microcosmic world as portrayed in the Muslim Socials transition to emerge into New Wave Muslim Socials. One would wonder what contributed to this continued fascination for such films, especially at a time and even much after that when the new Indian nation was trying to

build the first foundations for the world's largest democracy. While at one hand there were films being made that played up the need to build up a socialist state, here were these one off Islamicate films that managed to fair pretty well at the box office. While social reality was the protagonist around which the actors played their roles, in the Muslim socials a world was woven that was completely detached from that social reality. It was a world of courtesans, of men and women living in separate quarters, of women observing purdah, a glorified world of nawabs. It was a costume drama with song and dance, of probing into a world whose doors were still not thrown open and these films were providing that chance view of it. In other words, Cinema A and Cinema B can be said to constitute films as a means of writing history. At the end of it, it can be said that cinema is a peculiar kind of institution that has strategically placed itself in a position to arbitrate the two types of history. It helps the audience imagine a certain space and the people that constitute that space. In this regard, it is necessary to address the genre question given that the Muslim Socials function through various iconographic stereotypes that keep recurring across the narrative. This has been done in the next chapter where I have looked into the question of genre and tried to posit the Muslim Socials within the paradigm of genre.

Chapter 3

Approaching Bombay Muslim Cinema through the Prism of Genre

We often relate certain public events with a subjective experience. Our emotional reaction to that event or moment in history is many a times determined by our memory. As a result, when a film narrative revolves around such an event, our reaction to it as an audience and the visual pleasure we derive while watching that event unfold onscreen is influenced by our personal experience or memory that we come to associate with that event. Sometimes this association is exclusive, that is, it is specific to individuals and their experiences, and at other times, it is a more inclusive or collective in nature, wherein a singular event appeals or affects the collective memory of a large group of viewers that has the potential to generate a reaction. It is this reaction that influences the audiences' acceptance of a creative work, in this case, a film narrative / plot. Ashis Nandy in his work on memory posits memory against history observing that "the primary job of collective memory is not to supply an additional archive for historians, but to ensure social cohesion or to define national culture" (Nandy 2015: 598). He refers to the mnemonic domain that makes the audiences' reaction to a narrative 'memory-driven' rather than occupying any space within our knowledge system. In other words, memory resists erasure through "memory work" which turns memories into a part of everyday rhythm. It is in this manner that memory is normalized to allow audience build an association of events in history with memory that could be said to influence the way in which a genre develops and holds its appeal among its audience. In other words, it can be said that the nature of genre and the way it appeals to the audience is largely influenced by how memory determines our reaction to events captured onscreen or referred to within the narrative structure/plot. This reference could be blatant (for example, when the plot is all about capturing the historic event of partition of the Indian subcontinent) or subtle in nature (for example, when it is a narrative of a Muslim community and their attempts at realigning themselves to the demands or vision of the new modern India). Through an understanding of the complexities of genre and the dilemmas involved while defining it, this chapter tries to capture and negotiate with the idea of whether a specific Islamicate

genre could exist within the body of mainstream popular cinema. In the previous chapter, I have looked into the the proposed idea of Cinema A and Cinema B where I have shown how Cinema A is paradigmatic of the national popular constituting one hero who is representative of the mass, and Cinema B as counterpoised to Cinema A that opens up trajectories of addressing the representation of Muslim imagination of modernity in response to notions of contemporary nationalism. This chapter takes a closer look at Cinema B given that it is the primary focus of this thesis, and looks at the kind of films that comprised it and how they can be divided into three broad moments. This argument, which has been introduced and briefly discussed in the first chapter, will now form the crux of this chapter and taken forward.

One of the defining features of genre is that it is developed on the basis of the success of a set or series of films that capture a certain culture-scape or follow a typical narrative path thereby forming a pattern. If we merge the idea of collective memory along with the argument of a representative imagination of a community with the concept of genre, we may be able to propose a certain link between genre and the notion of memory along with popular imagination on one side, and the significant role played by the latter two in establishing genre's close association with cinema. I refer to Madhava Prasad's observation in the Introduction to his book that deliberates on the "hegemonic alliance between advanced capitalism and the cinematic institution"(Prasad 2010: 2) to explain the evolution of cinema as a technology/technique to a craft. Genre is one of the outcomes of that evolutionary process undergone by cinema over the years. Even though the study of genre started through literature, it has come to be quite frequently associated with popular culture today. For cinema and the nature of its influence as a popular art form or as a reflection of popular culture, it was a natural phenomenon for generic categories to develop within it. These categories were mostly structured by the mass demands to which a film catered. Films which fulfilled a certain kind of audience demanded or provided a visual pleasure of a particular kind came to be grouped together under one umbrella term or category or genre. Hence, genre provided a supportive framework for cinema to cut broad strokes as it tried to cater to a mass audience highly motivated by popular culture. While popular Hollywood cinema has been organised mostly on the basis of genre, it must be mentioned that it has not been able to make its

inroad into popular Indian cinema precisely because the format of Indian popular cinema seem to staunchly refuse the organization or categorization of the genre system. The narrative format of Indian popular cinema is a fluid concept which when seen within the paradigm of Hollywood film genre, it could be said that Indian cinema accommodates multiple genre forms of the Hollywood cinema. It is an amalgamation of melodrama, action, comedy, romance as well as action. From the particulars of film advertising in the various mass media formats to television broadcast schedules and distribution of the CDs and DVDs through local video rental outlets, genre has defined every aspect of cinema as an industry – production to consumption, and even what would be the desired effect it is expected to create upon the audience. The structured segmentation in Indian cinema, as discussed by Ravi Vasudevan, has rendered it problematic, thus, making it difficult for film scholars to strictly conform to the western (American) genre division while talking about Indian cinema (R. Vasudevan, 2002a). Due to the very nature of its visual content and its relevance to socio-political events, an attempt at restructuring the generic division of cinema in India has had to accommodate some of the specific concerns of the region. A study on this brings forth the problems of enforcing western genre division in the context of Indian cinema.

Cinema has been predominantly a mode of narrative storytelling employing audio-visual that embraces categorization offered by the genre system and at the same time accommodates new ideas and modes of representation (such as graphics or frame within frame visuals). From the beginning it has been seen to constantly breach the boundaries set forth by its own tendency to conform to the set categories of genre, that is, while it readily conforms to categorization through the genre system, the very nature of cinema as a medium enables it to push the paradigmatic boundaries. As espoused by genre theory, such films became inevitable expressions of the spirit or mood of a particular period of history that were reflected in the ideas and beliefs of the time. Steve Neale has pointed out how the generic image of a film is promoted through photos, stills, publicity materials and reviews, thus shaping the audience's expectations even before they watch a film (Neale, 1980). It is for this reason that genre films gained such wide popularity. From being objects of fascination and enigma, cinema thus grew to become repositories of a visual content that could be immediately understood and associated with.

As argued earlier with reference to Nandy's contention, this visual content evoke a certain kind of pleasure (through memory, desire, nostalgia as well as history) that may develop into an iconic character that would come alive again and again, thus making cinema an archive of time. However, the very nature of genre undercuts the characteristic features that categorize cinema within a certain genre. As Steve Neale has clearly pointed out, genres are not systems but processes of systematization, and cannot be defined as fixed forms (Neale, 1980). Genre is a constant process of negotiation and change. The collaborative nature of genre enables it to allow a work of art/creativity (in this case cinema) to involve the works of many artists and their art forms. Genre movies are therefore commonly understood as expressions of the defining spirit or mood of a particular period of history – its dominant set of ideals and beliefs that motivate the actions of the members of that contemporary society. This has also been reflected in the arguments of Barry Keith Grant who says that genre films relate to the culture that produced the film (Grant, 2007).

Traditionally, the term 'myth' refers to a society's shared stories, usually involving gods and mythic heroes that explain the nature of the universe and the relation of the individual to it. Such mythic narratives embody and express a society's rituals, institutions and values. In Western culture, myths, initially transmitted orally and then in print, have been disseminated by mass culture since the late nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, genre films with their repetitions and variations of a few basic plots are prime instances of mass-mediated contemporary myth. (Grant 2007: 29)

Thus genre address both the topical issues that arise at particular points in history as well as more universal questions that can be more readily understood globally. It is this close association with society that makes genre films popular, for the audience can easily relate to what they see onscreen as well as associate with the emotions undergone by the characters in the film; not to mention the familiarity with the narrative progression that makes the audience anticipate the nature of the visual pleasure that they will be made party to. This also influences the way in which a particular genre becomes more popular

at a certain moment, overriding the other genres for genre movies are always about the time and place in which they are made (Grant, 2007). This maybe one of the explanations to the evolution in the nature of Islamicate films produced between 1940 and 1990, which, as has been proposed in this study, can be understood by categorising the entire gamut of these films across three essentials moments – the Muslim Socials, the Muslim courtesan films, the New Wave Muslim Socials – that are defined based on the films’ interaction with and representation of society and its popular imagination. In other words, this study takes up a categorization of the community’s imagination of nationalism and modernity through each in order to establish their position within the national framework.

The first moment (begins in and around the 1940s and continues till the 1960s)

It is defined by the early or classic Muslim Socials with their artificial sets and stereotypical motifs and iconography. Mise-en-scene formed an important part of this moment, giving a façade to the reality in which the community lived in real-life. They helped pave the way of the cultural and spatial distinction of a community through an imagined reality. The films that comprised the Muslim Socials between the early 1940s till the late 50s, were distinctly known for their elaborate sets (most times an entire community space used to get recreated on an artificial set) with their specific Muslim iconography – what Mukul Kesavan has described as the “onion-shaped domes” – where the characters moved within a homogeneous space that was marked by its ‘Muslimness’. In other words, the period between the 1940s till close to the 1960s saw the production of a series of films which were marked by a mise-en-scene that made somewhat overt use of Islamicate characters, settings, iconography – so much so, that one could not but help notice the sheer lack of the non-Muslim in these films – be it non-Muslim characters, spaces, culture as well as everyday practices. However, such is not the reality that the Muslims in India were living in during that time. They were living in heterogeneous communities which included not only Hindus but also other non-Muslim minority religious groups like Christians, Sikhs, etc. It was also the time when the nationalistic fervour had picked up its tempo (during the early 40s) and along with it the various debates, some of which were distinctly communal in nature. Most importantly this was the period during which the community and the entire population of the Indian subcontinent were coming to terms with the phenomenon of Partition which was to affect

the entire region. Thus, it can be said that these films, with their use of everything Islamic/Muslim fell into the same trap that Cinema A was falling into – that is – a complete non-representation of a section of the population, or rather the singular representation of only one community and the spaces they occupied. It seemed that the films of this first moment were trying to develop a new kind of Social³⁸ that was couched on the idea of establishing a modernity that was rooted in a golden era of the past – a time of nawabs and their lavish lifestyle.

The Muslim Social has a highly different status. Although it can be considered a part of the broader genre of ‘the Social’, this is a diffused category that simply nominates films about contemporary social life. Furthermore, not only was ‘the Muslim Social’ singled out as a genre category, but by the 1960s, it had hardened into a recognizable set of narrative and iconographic elements, character types, and star personas, of which *Mere Mehboob* (1963) is paradigmatic. In its iconic form from the mid 1940s to the late 60s, it is typically set in Lucknow as the contemporary avatar of the nineteenth-century culture of Wajid Ali Shah, complete with *mushairas*... (Bhaskar and Allen 2019: x)

One could actually draw a parallel to this phenomenon from history where we see Wajid Ali Shah recreating his beloved Lucknow in Metiabruz near Khidderpore in Calcutta after having been banished from Lucknow by the Company³⁹. It was almost a refusal to accept the reality or rather an act of defiance through which the modernity and superiority of a community was being established by harking back to its past glory. This was the community’s means of demanding specificity within the national popular. Thus the ‘Islamicate’ (with its iconography and stereotype) acts as a veil-like structure that enables the community to resist the representation of the actual discrimination of their culture through this popular imagination. This constant attempt to recreate a past culture that had

³⁸ This is what is popularly understood as the mainstream Social with its project of building a nation based on a popular imagination of what constitutes a nation.

³⁹ Refer to one of the most comprehensive and closest to truth narrative of the history of Lucknow, and hence, of the fall of the Mughal empire in the hands of the British East India Company during the reign of Wajid Ali Shah.

little significance in the present in the name of ghettoisation gained cinematic logic through the films of this moment, thus fostering the imagination of such a culture.

The second moment (from the late 1960s till the 1990s)

The depiction of a community through a certain cinematic mode does not last long. Cinema is a medium that evolves with time drawing influence from contemporary socio-political as well as cultural history of a geographical space and the community inhabiting that space. Hence, as a result of this evolving nature of cinema, by the 1960s the second moment begins wherein we see the earliest negotiation of Cinema B with reality. This happens through the slow and gradual inroad of law within the otherwise private space. Thus, one can say that from the 1960s onwards, the debate stands more on the grounds of law and modernity where identity within a realistic heterogeneous public space becomes more important in these films. It can be said that the notion of identity that these films accommodated within their narrative underwent a transition—moving from the ‘private homogeneous’ to the ‘public heterogeneous’ space. It is in this second moment, where we see the popularity of courtesan films like *Pakeezah* (Amrohi, 1972) and *Tawaif* (Chopra, 1985) along with films with socialist and communist leanings like *Garm Hawa* (Sathya, 1974) and *Nikaah* (Chopra, 1982), that the initial negotiation with reality leading to the unveiling of the imagined representation is seen. There is a clear shift in the cinematic space as we witness the gradual disappearance of the homogeneous social fabric, giving way to a more realistic representation of the contemporary world. The elaborate sets which were once solely occupied by members of one particular community now began to accommodate those from other communities within the cinematic frame. The film’s narrative accommodated an exchange or negotiation of Muslims with non-Muslims. In other words, it can be said that this was the period of negotiation of space, representation as well as an acceptance of realist representation. There is reformulation of the narrative of the story and the representation of the characters. The elaborate sets were still there, but they were now beginning to be a more realistic representation of the world around. It acknowledged the everyday negotiation that the members of that community had to undergo both within themselves as well as with members of other community. It was the unveiling of the representation of an imagined reality of a community. This could have happened with any minority

community that was negotiating with the socio-political realities of the time. If one is to ask why it has to happen within the Muslim community, there is no clear answer for that.

The third moment (1990s onwards)

This is the most decisive one that takes the representation of the community farthest from where we started. It is here that we see a complete collapse of the veil of imagination. In other words, we witness how the New Wave Muslim Socials unveils the imagined representation of reality that was taken up by the classic Muslim Socials. It helps us as audience to come to terms with the day-to-day reality of a community and become used to the cinematic representation of it.

... the 'New Wave Muslim Social' is another constructed critical category. It serves to draw attention, on the one hand, to the way in which within the distinctively realistic idiom of the New Wave, a certain group of films take as their focus contemporary Muslim social life, and, on the other hand, to the way in which, even as these filmmakers depart from the representational norms of the genre, they invoke or reference these norms. (Bhaskar and Allen 2009: xi)

Gone are the sets which are now being completely replaced by the city space as in the case of *Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro* (Saeed Mirza, 1989). The second moment had already initiated this process and the audience is already prepared to witness the community within non-studio space. It may not necessarily be that these films capture the story against the backdrop of a city or an urban space. However, the urban setting helps to build upon the grim reality that these films aim to capture. The film is representative of the socio-political situation prevalent in the country at that time when the pro-Hindutva forces were gaining grounds and mobilizing themselves, which resulted in the communal tension of the early 1990s. Another such film is *Mammo* (Shyam Benegal, 1994), which though forms a part of the trilogy on Muslim women written by Khalid Mohammed, follows the "realist idiom of the New Wave" (Bhaskar and Allen 2009: 306).

Thus we see such a wide difference in the representation of Islamic culture and ethos between films produced in the 1940s and those made in the 90s. Hence, the

complaint against genre being repetitive with formulaic representations is downplayed by the constant dilemma and difficulty experienced while defining genre precisely due to the evolution or transformation that genre allows. It is an idea or a notion that theorists have been trying to come to terms with and accommodate within the production economy of art. Thus, genre is not simply about some formulaic stereotypical representation, but that which allows for some dynamic interplay of narrative and memory in its very constitution. It is a fluid enough category that has the capacity to accommodate the popular imagination of various communities in society that the film is portraying through that genre. The very repetitiveness that has been pointed out as the drawbacks of genre, in our case, gives genre the leverage it needs to allow the films to establish markers and identifiers of a social group or religious community.

The genre debate

Edward Buscombe had suggested that to comprehend genre it is best to start by an understanding of genre criticism in literature since it is in that context that certain problems first arise (Buscombe, 1970). Aristotle was the earliest theorist to set into motion the practice of genre analysis for literary texts (Aristotle, 1982). His *Poetics* managed to address ideas that find currency even today within the concerns of the study of film genre – the formal properties of genre (common elements that allow a number of films to be grouped together and conceived as a category), its mode(s) of addressing the spectators and the pleasures offered. In other words, genre is a mode of codification through which a semblance of organization is achieved within a large body of work that are similar in various aspects. These aspects of similarity keep appearing in (cinematic) texts, branding them as belonging to the same category. Interestingly, it is the repetitiveness that associates genre with popular culture, starkly pitting it against Mathew Arnold's notion of good art or culture which describes it as something that is original, distinctive and at the same time complex (Arnold, 1960). Arnold in his seminal work on culture attacked conventionality and mindless conformity to any kind of idea – faith or politics. For him, it compromised man's capacity to indulge in intellectual free play. In this light, popular art comes to appear as something that is formulaic, lacking in

originality and authenticity. Therefore, such arguments were mostly used while reflecting upon the assumed differences between literature and popular writing, often feeding into the debate posing “true art” against popular art / culture. Against these views, the very qualities that define a genre (like repetitiveness, formulaic progression of narrative, style, common theme, memory that leads to nostalgia as well as desire, etc.) have been held against it, accusing it of inculcating false consciousness of well-being by becoming subject to industrial products of capitalist economy. The Frankfurt⁴⁰ School primarily brought about the charge of commodifying folk art into elements of mass culture; the generic formulas acting as controls to organize and label the masses of consumers. However, by the twentieth century, the common man’s paradigm was defined by the capitalist/industrial economy, due possibly to various world events that impacted global economy and influenced trade and labour. Come to look at it that way, genre can be said to have subverted creative art (which tended to be outside the realm of the common man) by breaking away from the high brow of exclusivity that true art emphasized upon. It helped popular art as well as folk art and culture to gain currency and popularity within the mainstream. This subversion helped to break the commonsensical understanding of what constituted good art, giving currency to the non-normative or that which has been ‘othered’. Genre helped folk art break into the realm of the popular and gain access into the everyday lives of common man. It broke away from the niche that placed it on a pedestal while giving no access into either the domain of high art or popular art (Welleck & Warren, 1949). Every art form within the domain of the popular is an expression of the aesthetics of those who practise it. It is an expression of identity and everyday experiences that influence the art. Thus elements of folk art became commodities of mass culture, and enriched popular art. Indeed popular art or folk art are artistic expressions that give agency to individual cultures and their practices. Scholars have voiced the importance of studying popular culture thus empowering fringe cultural groups to

⁴⁰ A group of researchers in Weimar Germany who applied Marxism to radical interdisciplinary social theory came to call themselves the *Frankfurt School*. It was included notable social theorists including Max Horkheimer, T.W. Adorno, Erich Fromm, Walter Benjamin, etc. They tried to develop a theory of society based on Marxist and Hegelian philosophy that also utilized the insights of psychoanalysis, sociology, existential philosophy and other studies. They analysed social relations within capitalist economic systems that helped to critique large corporations and monopolies, the role of technology, the industrialization of culture, and the decline of the individual within the capitalist society.

become sites of ideological struggle that would eventually carve out a space for the common man. It gives representation and lends voice to the marginal by bringing it to the centre, and thus challenging the predominance and prominence of ‘true art.

Genre culminated with cinema thus blurring the lines of dissociation between high art and popular art. While literary critics, claiming that there could be “no community, no genial middle ground” (Brooks, 1970), continued their battle against the blitz of the popular upon high art, they were also acutely aware of the rising influence of formula-driven motion pictures that were gathering large and faithful communities of spectators. This made cinema, as an art form, become economically viable. Genre films became pronounced in American cinema that witnessed the advent of the popular Westerns, the noir and their many variations, melodrama, etc. Each of these catered to the taste of specific groups. It must be understood that these genres and the films that were produced under their influence were products of the time; an artistic and creative response to the social-political condition. Thus the development of genre became staunchly embedded in the social history of time, and they became a product of history. A similar historical progression can be said to have occurred in Indian cinema as it showed the path towards bringing inexpensive and viable mode of entertainment to the masses, thus transcending the barriers of language through visual stories. Genre addressed the masses, bringing them together under the common umbrella of the popular that functioned within the paradigm of the modern nation. Thus the audience became subject to a visual pleasure of nostalgia and desire that gave them hope and made them dream for a brighter future. It was not a new phenomenon to witness cinema operating as a mass medium idealizing a certain way of life.

Position of the Islamicate films within the paradigm of genre

This section takes a look at the characteristic features that define genre and whether those features can be found in the Islamicate films that are being focused upon in this thesis

Conventions

A film's generic association is marked by visual and aural motifs, represented through set design, language, similarity/repetition of plot, and as in the case of the Indian subcontinent, the impact of a shared political and geographical history. They are familiar symbols used to narrate a story, drawing upon the viewer's capacity to easily associate with a certain history, milieu and culture. They predetermine the audience's expectation, thus allowing an economy of expression to be achieved. These may be identified as conventions, involving frequently used styles/techniques or narrative devices that are typical of (but not necessarily unique to) a particular generic tradition. Aural conventions like dialogue, musical figures or styles and sound effects, along with mise-en-scene are repeated in film after film creating a pattern to form a corpus of deterministic features that are associated with a particular body of films. Just like genre predetermines the audience's expectation, it also functions as an implied agreement between the filmmaker and the audience to accept certain artificialities. This allowed a smooth progression of plot and ensured the audience's acceptance of it.

The graphic style used in the opening credits of a film – a common practice in Hollywood westerns where a particular font was used – immediately triggered an association for the audience to correlate with a corpus of films belonging to a specific genre; this association also forms a part of convention. Indeed there is a rich history of the use and development of specific typography for the screen credits by motion picture studios in Hollywood as early as the 1930s (Yu, 2008). The Rockwell font became a trademark for the westerns. A similar practice can be seen in Bombay cinema, especially at a time when most films were moving on and using Hindi and English, and sometimes even only English script for their credits. It must be mentioned here that it has been a convention in Hindi cinema to roll out their credits in three primary languages – Urdu, Hindi and English (irrespective of whether it is an Islamicate film or not). This could be because all three languages were equally popular and important in post-independent India – English as the language of modern governance, Hindi as the language spoken and understood by maximum number of people, and Urdu as a language that was more widely understood than even Hindi, a language that captures the nostalgia for an erstwhile glory of a secular and tolerant Indian society. This made it necessary for

filmmakers to accommodate all three, after all, they were engaging with a medium that could reach out to the masses. These were also evidences of the heavy influence of Urdu writers in the industry, which has continued to remain so even today. Indeed Kesavan sums it up as: “While the house of Hindi cinema has many mansions, its architecture is inspired by the Islamicate forms. The obvious example of these Islamicate forms is Urdu” (Kesavan, 1994: 256).

To mark a film’s association with a certain religious community that has had a significant influence in Indian cultural history, Urdu script made a comeback; sometimes even the English font style was written imitating the Urdu script. Unlike the westerns, these are evidences of the influence of Urdu, which along with other motifs make the correlation more prominent and symbolic. The audience is immediately made aware of the setting and milieu they are to expect, which will form the backdrop of the story even before the film begins. Many a times the opening credits in an Islamicate film would be portrayed against a background of a minaret or a dome-shaped structure or be accompanied by music that is largely associated with Islam – the most common being the call for *azaan*. It has often been pointed out that a study of the Islamic influence within the Bombay film industry would necessitate a profiling of some of the prominent names (singers, songwriters, music directors, directors, producers, etc.). It is however difficult to tag them as contributing to only one kind of films/stories, even though some names like Shama Zaidi frequently features in films (irrespective of the genre/subgenre) that need to capture a certain Islamic influence/touch. This could well form a separate study altogether.

Iconography

While discussing genre within a visual medium, one of the defining criteria should naturally be what is actually being seen on screen. In the context of the Islamicate films iconography comes to play a significant role. They determine or mark a film text as essentially evoking an Islamic tradition, culture and history. The term “iconography” is derived from art historian Erwin Panofsky’s discussion about Renaissance art, wherein themes or concepts are represented or expressed through symbolically charged object and events (Panofsky, 1939). When applied to cinema, it could be what comprises Edward

Buscombe's distinction between a film's inner and outer forms. The inner forms consist of the film's themes (Grant, *while discussing westerns*), while the outer form refers to the various objects that are repetitively found in a film, or in other words, iconography.

Mukul Kesavan explains how, as an audience, we associate certain icons and symbols as registers of a religio-cultural tradition. As a result, audiences also associate the scalloped arches or onion domes as representative of the "Islamic" or the "Muslim" culture, which would include language, customs and practices, architecture, art, ways of living, etc.

Setting

Setting is understood as the physical time and space within which a film's story/plot unfolds, which sometimes becomes a more defining feature of a genre over others. This rings true for the Islamicate films that draw upon the iconic settings (be it location or the architecture) that immediately establish the context within which the filmmaker has chosen to unravel the story. For example, a film like *Mughal-e-Azam* (Asif, 1960) begins with a replica of the undivided Indian subcontinent – identified as 'Hindustan' – towering over a skyline that was distinctly Islamic in architecture. It is one of the classic examples of the early films with their depiction of a homogenous space within which a community is looking back at the glorious past of Mughal history. The opening shot of the film immediately establishes that the story is set at a time when the Mughals ruled the large expanse of the Indian subcontinent; at the same time appealing to a common geographical and mythological history where the Ganges is referred to as the "holy river". From that perspective it can be said to be the perfect historical film that raved about an Islamic rule over a land that has been considered the land of the Hindus. Indeed, the film is about Akbar, the Mughal king who propounded the *Din-i-ilahi* and propagated tolerance, as well as an oblique comment on the notion of justice and tolerance exercised by the Mughal emperors. This was potently depicted through the *insaaf ka tarazu* (scales of justice), which the camera captures to ensure that the audience took notice, absorbed its significance and related to the idea of justice and equality – two fundamental rights laid down by the Indian Constitution. The scales of blind justice are extremely relevant in modern independent India. Through the use of such a symbolic props the film manages to transcend between Mughal history and recent times within the

span of a single shot, all because of the audience's prior knowledge and association with the motif of justice. Mukul Kesavan writes:

Islamicate empire bequeathed to Hindi cinema much more than a medium and a vocabulary: it provided it with images of the good life, a model of the man about town, a stereotype of cultivated leisure and the ingredients for reinter decadence. All of the above were derived from a part-fantasized vision of nawabi Lucknow, which was nostalgically remembered as the last bastion of a beleaguered Islamicate culture, the culture of the Urdu speaking elite. (Kesavan 1994: 245)

Cinema's nostalgic representation of a time in history stoked the audience's desire to relive certain memories of a history they had complete or partial familiarity with. Such representations opened up windows to that world, thus subjecting a moment in history to the nostalgic gaze of the audience. Using specific settings, either in the form of props or even through a physical location like Lucknow that came with its history and dominant Islamic culture, the films triggered an immediate association in the audience. This association transpired in specific ways across the moments. While we see the opening shot of films like *Najma* (Mehboob Khan, 1943) or *Elan* (Mehboob Khan, 1947) with a skyline that was dotted with specifically Islamic architectural motifs, in *Garm Hawa* the same onion shaped domes and other architectures form a part of the realistic frame right from the opening shot of the film that invoked an Islamicate history and culture. However, the representation is no more through set design but a realistic on-location shoot. This is one of the moments of rupture where the reality is making its way into the narrative resulting in the loss of that veil that prevailed earlier Muslim Socials, and thus rendering it heterogeneous in composition. The story set in Agra, established through repeated shots of the Taj Mahal along with the panoramic view of the swathing green fields from the minarets of Fatehpur Sikri. The audience associate the film's content with the history of the setting, telling the story of a Muslim family affected by Partition. The family becomes representative of a generation of Muslim population who suddenly found themselves rendered homeless and alien in a land they had called home since the time of their forefathers. Thus, the conflict and the trauma that the characters undergo are

automatically established through the use of generic motifs, and the characters garner sympathy of the audience due to their pre-existing knowledge of that history.

By the time a film like *Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro* comes about Islamicate cinema has already moved into the third moment, and the audience's immediate memory is no more captured by the history of communal fracas that were related to Partition. The communal tension continues, but it has taken different form. The film is set in the urban underbelly of Mumbai, which has no such Islamicate history like Lucknow or Agra. Yet, for the audience, certain distinct pointers and motifs mark the identity of the characters whose stories are to be played out in front of them. They become aware that the primary characters are Muslims shown to be surviving in an urban India that was desperately coming to terms with the onslaught of a liberal economy and globalization that opened the doors of plenitude to one section while sucking dry the means of survival of another. The society was marked by a chasm of 'haves and have nots' and minorities, in this case Muslims, found themselves at the wrong end of the brunt. The film's characters were moving within a space where everyone was battling for survival, and the battle was twice as hard for Muslims who were struggling to survive amidst a sudden Hindutva mobilization that swept Bombay during the 1980s. Their skull cap, practices and places of worship, in other words, the private became the public that determined their identity and position in society. In both *Garam Hawa* and *Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro* the film's success depended heavily on the audience's prior knowledge of the setting that each of the plots were unfolding in.

Stories and themes

Most genre films are instances of classical narrative cinema that focus on an individual hero who overcomes the various obstacles to achieve his goal. Therefore, a problem is introduced at some point in the story and the rest of the story progresses resolving that crisis. Within this primary dramatic arc exists the secondary narrative that focuses on the heterosexual romance. Thus, the genre narratives with their rising and falling action, coupled with the secondary narrative, are marked by a closure where all the plot strands are brought together. Genre movies also engage with social issues and debates and cast them within the generic framework of the formulaic narratives. While

Thomas Schatz mentions that all film genres concern themselves with elements that threaten normative social order in different ways, some genre theorists argue that the over-riding theme of genre films is a version of the individual in conflict with the society, and this tension represents the ongoing negotiation we all make. This is a struggle that permeates across societies down history, which might be the reason behind the popularity of genre practice and its repetitiveness. According to Schatz, the extent to which a genre film achieves closure is important for reading its political implications. Thus, there is a conflict, which might take place within the realm of the determinate or the indeterminate space. The determinate involves the attainment of a closure, that is, happy ending. It is therefore artificial, since life, unlike such stories, continues beyond the happy ending. It is the lack of such closures that make the plot closer to reality like we see in *Garam Hawa*. The protagonist does not walk into the sunset but joins a stream of humans rallying for a better future. The indeterminate space on the other hand is concerned with the social order, thereby coding the conflicts within the paradigms of a heterosexual society. The indeterminate space does not make it a less genre film nor does the determinate space makes it less real, for in both cases the film has managed to invoke the universal truths and impulses within the audiences.

Keeping the above discussions in mind, some content analysis will now be done where I will narrow down upon a set of films to take a closer look and see whether they can be placed within the broader arguments of genre. The storylines of these films can be classified down the years as they transition from one imagination to the other. It is through the logic of the story that I have tried to classify the three moments of Cinema B. The classic Muslim Socials involve a hero marked by his religious identity and belong to a homogenous social order that finds representation onscreen. Thus, in this case the marking is not discriminatory but are definitive imaginative elements. They move within an elaborate artificial set, designed to create a world of imagination that is deliberately distanced from the reality. The stories are mostly about the community negotiating with its circumstances through a complete refusal to accept the present and find its modernity by moving back in history in a nostalgic reminiscence. It is an imagination that is refusing to come to terms with the actual political reality. However, at the same time, such cinema does have a charm of its own as the audience is allowed to escape into a

world that is less grim than the reality that they inhabit. This can be said basis the popularity of the representation of this kind of imagination in the Muslim Socials through the 40s, 50s till the 60s. In the second category of imagination, there is a gradual acceptance of reality as the narrative rests on debates that are more grounded on law, modernity and identity. The courtesan films are the harbingers of the second moment where we see a gradual transition in the representation of a modernity that makes inroad through law. The New Wave Muslim Socials (or the third moment) is the unveiling of the early Muslim Socials to come to terms with the contemporary politics and reality, thereby showing how that imagination has failed. This gradual transition of the imagination could only be tracked through the story.

Najma was produced in 1943 and became almost a blueprint for the Muslim Social films that followed. It is the story of two Muslim families and reflects upon how they engage with concerns of class and economy. The hero, Yusuf, is played by Ashok Kumar looking dapper in western clothes in the opening scene which was shot in a studio with a painted skyline dotted with silhouettes of mosques and minarets. Yusuf falls in love with Najma but their romance is interrupted when his father announces his betrothal to his cousin, Raziya. Najma convinces Yusuf to marry Raziya in order to respect his family honour while she herself marries a wealthy merchant, Mukkaram Nawab. Yusuf sinks into depression and Raziya soon finds out about Yusuf's hidden love and becomes jealous. In the mean time Mukkaram overhears Raziya berating Najma over her love for Yusuf and in a fit of anger decides to kill him. He meets with an accident on his way and it was Yusuf who saves Mukkaram's life. He assures both Raziya and Mukkaram that he and Najma are going to give up each other, and with this they part forever. The film upholds the institution of marriage and conservatively shows that a woman's place is behind the purdah. However, it successfully manages to capture the anxiety of a generation witnessing the breaking down of old and familiar traditions due to the social changes brought about by modern education. The film emphasizes the importance of education within the Muslim community, while stressing on the value of family honour and tradition. It harps on the traditional *tehzeeb* (etiquette) of Lucknow and its influence on family and society, and this structure becomes a prototype for representing the

traditional Muslim community that recognized the need for education while balancing it within the traditional ethos.

Elan was produced in 1947 and became one of the six highest grossing films of the year. Produced by Mehboob Khan the film is set in Hyderabad, another city of nawabi history much like Lucknow, and is the story of Javed and Sajjad, who were cousins. Sajjad was an uneducated but spoilt son of rich parents, who squandered his money on gambling and courtesans. Javed was the son of Sajjad's mother's older sister. When he lost his father, his mother was left without any means to support herself and her son, and thus ended up taking shelter in a small portion of his sister's palatial house. She befriends a well-mannered and educated young girl, Naaz Parwar, who initiated teaching lessons for her. When Javed returns from Aligarh having earned a degree in law, he comes across Naaz and the two falls in love. However, when Javed's mother proposes a marriage alliance to Naaz's father, she is refused; instead, her father decides to get Naaz married to Sajjad. The marriage soon revealed the darker side of Sajjad, and his mother realizes her mistake in spoiling her son, which was responsible for his unruly behaviour. One day, in a fit of rage when Sajjad tries to kill his own son, he is killed by his own mother. Naaz takes the blame and Javed as a lawyer come to her rescue, and proves her innocence. The film takes a natural recourse as Javed offers to marry Naaz, but he was refused by her. Instead she donates her palatial house for running a school for the poor and the orphans. The film revolves around the theme of the role of education in modern society through which the poor can rise up in society while the uneducated rich son of the zamindar loses all his property in gambling. Released at a time of history when India was coming to terms with becoming an independent nation, the film highlights the need for education for building a nation steeped in history and reeling in superstition. The courtroom scene is symbolic of the Muslim community embracing the modern tenets of civilization. The film ends with a very pertinent message, asking the community to arm themselves with education so that they are not obliterated from the face of this new nation. This has resonance of what Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's thought about the future of Muslims in a Hindu dominated India. The actions of the secondary characters also bear evidence of the social practices prevailing in the princely state of Hyderabad at that time.

Muslim men marrying European women were not a taboo in Hyderabad, and that has been wonderfully portrayed through the character of Javed's friend, Bedil.

Pukar, directed by Sohrab Modi, is one of the earliest films that was released in 1939. It was an Urdu film about the Mughal emperor, Jehangir, his sense of justice and how he offers himself to be killed when the empress is accused by a washerwoman of killing her husband during a hunt. This was a test for the emperor who claimed that the law knew no class distinction. However, the washerwoman magnanimously forgives him when he offers to kill himself. Like a typical Sohrab Modi film, it is loaded with elaborate camera movement and long dialogues in Urdu which are delivered in a dramatic manner. As Ira Bhaskar and Richard Allen describes,

The elaborate camera movements that trace the entry of the Emperor into his court and the visual realization of a courtly majesty are complemented by the deeply metaphoric and poetic Urdu dialogues of the film scripted by Amrohi, which capture the gravitas of the legal debate in terms that give emotional weight and resonance to dry abstractions. (2009: 112-113)

They further comment on the visual design that reiterates what is the broad observation of this thesis:

The poetry of the dialogues in *Pukar* is complemented by a use of set design and cinematography that combine to imagine the Mughal and Rajput worlds. Modi creates an innovative and consistent visual design in his use of wipes shaped like Islamic pointed arches and diamonds that are congruent with Islamic visual design... (2009: 118-119)

The film deals with Jehangir's profound meditation on the nature of justice, governance and law in the light of clan allegiances, religious difference, class and caste divisions and biases. Thus we see the prevalence of the rule of law even over the Rajputs in the figure of Sangram Singh who despite being a loyal Rajput is first loyal to the principle of rule of law. By celebrating the idea of polity and governance as practised by the Mughals, that is, the ideal of universal system of justice, *Pukar* speaks in radical

terms the history of an indigenously conceived just polity that was hopelessly compromised by imperialism (Bhaskar & Allen, 2009).

These three films capture the imagination of the first moment wherein we see a community veiled behind a representation of modernity that is couched in the nostalgia of a golden past. Each of these films embody a homogeneous microcosmic social space that zooms in on the representation of a community that is coming to terms with their reality behind a veil.

The two renditions of *Umrao Jaan* (Muzaffar Ali, 1981 and J.P. Dutta, 2006) were an attempt to portray the life and story of one of the most famous courtesans of Lucknow. We as audience have always been curious about their lives and these stories are coming straight from the mouth of Umrao Jaan, an exact rendition of the printed biography by Mirza Muhammed Hadi Ruswa (based on which the two films' narratives are arranged), charting the ups and downs in the lives of these women. It became the source of inspiration for the many depiction of the courtesan in Indian cinema. There is the Lucknawi *tehzeeb* that becomes imperative for the young Umrao Jaan to nurture and cultivate from a very young age. They were highly cultured and sophisticated women trained in the various forms of art and culture, with whom the young princes spent their time to be made aware of similar sophistications that a person of zamindari household is expected to exhibit. However, like all courtesan stories Umrao Jaan's life unfolds no differently. She falls in love and wishes for a social acceptance that would give her a place within familial codes of society. Pakeezah gets such a closure but not Umrao Jaan. They are realistically left outside the realms of societal norms. The film's story may not entertain a different ending. But it is significant to note how an entire film is based on the life of a so-called outcast woman. These films are moving out of the practice of painting a picture of an imagined society where women of elite family found their way into these stories.

Tawaif, directed by B.R. Chopra was produced in 1985, bridging the wide chasm in the imagination of the audience from a world of courtesans, shrouded amidst the civility and etiquette of a culture that was long gone, with that of the social reality they were living. Located in Bombay, the film could be said to be the result of the influence of

the New Wave aesthetic of mainstream that had hit the Islamicate films as well. However, the subject seems to re-echo *Pakeezah*'s appeal for the right of a courtesan to be courted and be married to someone of her choice. For the first time in this film, the middle class woman sacrifices her love for the redemption of the courtesan; it has always been the other way round. There are some scenes in *Tawaif*, which bear striking similarity with that of *Pakeezah*, the most prominent among which is the tawaif dancing on white floor with bloodied feet, almost proving her purity in blood before eventually losing her love to someone else. Also, in the final scene, where Qainat joins the hands of the Dawood and Sultana, once again, the space of the kotha is transformed into the place of a wedding.

Garam Hawa was a film that primarily focused on the lived experience of a generation of people of this country who had to give up their homeland and settle in a foreign country. It is more a historical document rather than a film that is trying to check itself with all the required generic elements that allows it to belong to one of them. It is a testament of the transformation of the lives of people and their livelihoods that were affected in the wake of the "South Asian holocaust" (Bhaskar & Allen, 2009). In that sense, *Garam Hawa* does not have any songs apart from the call for prayer and the rare *qawwali* that strictly does not follow the usual song and dance routine involving the hero and the heroine. Does it have a happy ending? Not particularly, for the family disintegrates, their sense of belonging given a toss as they are forced to uproot from their ancestral house; close relatives turn upon each other, and of course the death of Aamina. There is no happy ending but a clear message put out that to survive in a country which is undergoing a change as massive as the Partition experienced by the Indian subcontinent, along with the struggles of the newly born nation trying to get itself on its feet, one is bound to choose one of the options that are being made available to them at that point of time, whether political or social. An individual cannot fight a battle on its own. Ira Bhaskar describes *Garam Hawa* as a film "that marks a radical departure from the reigning concerns and forms of the generic framework of the Muslim Social which it at once inhabits and transforms" (Bhaskar & Allen, 2009).

These films, though characteristically different from one another, serve the larger argument of the forming the second moment of rupture that initiates the slow unveiling of the community's imagination of modernity.

Salim Langde Pe Mat Rore revolves around the lives of a few young Muslim men in Mumbai. Set against the Hindutva mobilization the film revolves around Salim Pasha, a small-time thief who lives with his parents and sister in a shady neighbourhood where crime and illegal activities are the order of the day. Salim is aware from the beginning that given the circumstances, his identity as a Muslim will never let him earn a decent living and live respectfully. He will never be trusted, and therefore, will never get a job. However, with time he decides to change his life and live honestly, but just when we assume that everything is finally working out and the pieces of his life are falling into place, Salim is killed on the day of his sister's anniversary by a member of a rival gang. No matter how hard he tries to run away from it, his past eventually caught up with him. The film is a realistic portrayal of a generation that was taking up violence as a career and the society that differentiated people on the basis of religion. There is a change in the themes and concerns in the films. More importantly, the setting is one that is completely removed what we have seen so far, even in the films of the second moment. At one time it was more about social equality and secularism, but the films speaks about how such differentiation is nothing but a larger plan to keep the countrymen busy fighting with one another. This phase of involved the complete unveiling of the community as it came face-to-face with the reality

All these films are reflective examples of a progression witnessed in the manner in which social concerns were addressed in Islamicate films. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, such engagement with social conventions is a feature of genre practice. However, what can be further said in this case is that in the process of capturing the social reality, they became repositories of various moments in history. Even though I have looked at these films through the coloured glass of each of the moments proposed in this study, this repetitive engagement of these with the contemporary society in the various imagined forms of representation, is what marks these films and categorizes them under a common genre. This progression in representing the contemporary can be

observed from the early 1940s, which according to Ravi Vasudevan was a crucial period both politically as well as culturally for the institutionalization of ideas about the relations of so-called Hindu majority to Muslims, who were the most substantial minority group, in the run-up to the decolonization and Partition of the subcontinent (R. S. Vasudevan, 2015). These films also broke the commonsensical notion, popularized by film journals like *Filmindia*, about socials being films about the Hindu society for Muslims tended to dwell more on the past, making historical films, or historicals. Hence, the Islamicate metamorphosed into a sub-genre that contested the primacy of what is often not called the Hindu socials (R. S. Vasudevan, 2015).

Characters, actors and stars

As Barry Keith Grant said, “Character actors contribute to the look of particular genres, populating the worlds of genre movies and becoming a part of their iconography” (Grant, 2007) These maybe familiar figures that populate the screen alongside the hero and yet their presence is important in narrating certain aspects of the story. In Indian cinema such character actors have primarily contributed to the comic element or a realistic commentary on society or merely for parody. Yakub as Bedil in *Najma*, almost sketches a character type that will become much popular in later films and become a staple of this genre in more films to come in the future. He will be the comic friend of the lovelorn hero, the perfect foil, who in his comments and actions, replays or ironizes the romance of the hero. This was a role which came to be closely associated with Johnny Walker who played such roles with great aplomb in *Chaudhvin ka Chand* (Sadiq, 1960) and *Mere Mehboob*. Similarly, the actors who play the role of the main characters are also signifiers of certain codes and values that society has come to associate with them. The casting in mainstream genre cinema is very much like screen credits typography where actors are often cast in roles based on their physical attributes or the popular image that precedes them. Such was the case for an actor like Ashok Kumar who was an actor often seen playing the roles of the Muslim hero, whether it is Shahbuddin of *Pakeezah* or Yusuf in *Najma* or Nawab Buland Akhtar in *Mere Mehboob*. Actors sometime offer definitive performances that forever associate them with a particular role or types of roles. Some actors become icons because of their performances in genre films, their faces and bodies immediately recognizable in the culture. Ashok Kumar, a well-established

Hindi star was often seen in the leading role. He became the suitable centre-point to the distinct spaces of modernity that emerged around the hero – the doctor in the hospital or the lawyer in the courtroom.

Stars are individuals whom the audience comes to associate with a physical and concrete embodiment of society's values. They are a reflection of what the public desires or considers as the ideal. The public aspires to the ideal image of the star and the values that he upholds in the films. When such stars come to be associated with a genre, they can be said to reinforce each other. Thus for Ashok Kumar as a star he was embodiment of the modern hero who was beyond the identifying marks of caste or religion. He was the figure of the social hero who embraced modern ideals in public while quietly retaining his values of family, etiquette and marriage for the private space. He might as well have been the protagonist from a Hindu family who was trying to do the same for society at large. Hence, the audience might immediately associate him with a Muslim hero but as a star who embraced the contemporary values of society.

Viewers and audiences

Audiences sustain genres and give them meaning. As mentioned before, genre was existent much before theoretical studies were conducted on it and had made a place for itself in the minds of the public. For a mass medium like cinema, genre is a necessity. It helps to categorize films for prospective viewers through advertisements, posters and other industry catalogues. Genre films makes the audience enter into an implicit contract by making them familiar with the tropes and features that constitute a particular genre and evoking those expectations with which the viewers have become familiar. Thus, the viewers unknowingly enter into a contract that will make them almost function in the way the genre wants them to.

These repetitive qualities or features can be treated as reference figures or industry codes (which have been consciously developed through extra-filmic elements as well as through the audio-visual narrative of the film) marked by a thematic similarity, which the film is aware of. This is defined by indexicality, which is the relationship between the object to be photographed and the resultant image of it. This relationship is developed by the presence of the camera as well as the man behind the camera who is

suitably aware of the mise-en-scene to be captured and what they are going to convey to the audience. In the case of the Islamicate films, this development of a relationship started as early as the oriental films. As Lawrence Alloway states that the familiar symbols in works of art have cultural meaning which may extend beyond the context of the individual work in which they appear (Alloway, 1971). According to him, icons are second order symbols bearing meaning which may not necessarily have any connection established within the individual text, but is already symbolic because of their use across a number of similar previous texts. The repetition of certain visual patterns allows audiences to know what to expect of these patterns by their physical attributes, dress, etc. It enables them to know by the disposition of figures, which is dominant, and which is subordinate. This process of signification, developed over time, served well for bringing about conciseness in narrative.

The generic dilemma: problem of defining genre

It has always been problematic to define genre within strict paradigms. As Wellek and Warren in their *Theory of Literature* captures the crux of the problem:

The dilemma of genre history is the dilemma of all history: i.e., that is, in order to discover the scheme of reference (in this case, the genre), we must study the history; but we cannot study history without having in mind some scheme of selection. (Wellek & Warren, 1956: 260)

This is much akin to Buscombe when he says with regard to cinema that to know or learn about one kind of cinema one must look at certain kind of films, which again depends upon whether one knows what kind of films to look at (Buscombe, 1970). This again brings us back to the original question of knowing or learning about one kind of genre to actually know which films to look at that fall within that genre. Wellek and Warren offer a very practical way out of this dilemma wherein they note that it is possible to draw up a list of element which are found in a to-be-defined genre, in this case, the Islamicate films, and to say that any film which includes one or more of these elements would thereby be

held to be an Islamicate film, though not necessarily identical to other examples of the form.

As gathered from the arguments of the various theorists, the fundamental requirement for defining a genre is to determine the corpus of films that constitute its history. Each method of genre definition⁴¹ has its own limitations (Bordwell, Staiger, & Thompson, 1985). The most common out of which is the empiricist method in which by a circular logic films selected have already been chosen as representing the genre by some prior knowledge. Andrew Tudor however has identified the “empiricist dilemma” in such a method wherein it is necessary to isolate the body of films; though that can be done on the basis of the principle characteristics which again can be discovered from the films themselves after they have been isolated (Tudor 1973). The only plausible solution to this problem is to rely on a common cultural consensus where almost everyone agrees that a set of films belong to a particular genre. He rests his proposition on the argument that genre is what we collectively believe it to be. Grant agrees that Tudor’s solution offers a pragmatic approach taken up by many critics (Grant 2007). However, genre still remains defined by very unstable categories that undergo change with possibly almost every film. For example, crime and science fiction film as well as the westerns are defined by their setting and narrative content. While horror or comedy films are conceived around the emotional effects that these films intend to trigger. Hindi cinema has seen the coming and going or disappearing of various genres over the years, but the Social has been a robust and dominant one that has survived the test of time. Rachel Dwyer speculates that it could be because of the fuzzy nature of its boundaries that it refuses to be straight-jacketed (Dwyer 2010). Ravi Vasudevan described it as the genre through which the industry addressed the issues of modern life (R. Vasudevan, 2002b). Thus, it is a genre to which films whose categories cannot be clearly assigned are clubbed. This is in comparison to genres like action films, war films or gangster movies. In fact, the formula-based approach of the Bombay film industry, where a film to be a success at the box office, must have a smattering of romance, song, action and melodrama, makes it

⁴¹ Here I refer to Janet Staiger’s suggestion of four ways of defining genre – the idealist; the empiricist; the a priori; and the social convention.

difficult to strictly adhere to the confines of generic features without the above mentioned formulaic elements crawling their way into the narrative.

Religion to define a genre

The Islamicate films are not religious films and must not be confused or clubbed with the Muslim devotional films that Rachel Dwyer has talked about in her essay on the Muslim devotional genre in Hindi cinema (Dwyer, 2010). However, questions have been raised over the naming of a genre by a specific religion, thereby marking its conformity to it, if not by religion then at least by the cultural practices of the followers of that religion. The not naming of the non-Muslim Social as the “Hindu Social” is obvious of the fact that “Hinduism is the invisible norm, the standard default position” (Dwyer, 2010). The socials in Bombay cinema addressed the masses, thus contributing in the nation-building project. A major force of reckoning at this juncture of Indian political history is the thrust on an Indian version of secularism by which instead of keeping religion separate from the state, it promoted a spirit of tolerance emphasizing on the inclusiveness of all religion and culture. In other words, it was a secularism which was keener to accommodate a multi-religious, and therefore multicultural, Indian society (Nandy, 1995). This gave the Muslim socials a certain peculiarity; it depicted a range of films that specifically addressed concerns of the Muslim community but from a completely non-religious point of view. In other words, they isolated religion from the modern approach to life that the film promoted while catering to an audience who were rooted to religious world view, and rarely remained uninfluenced by religion. They dealt with Muslims and their changing position in Indian society down the history post-independence. The early films bore the ideological influences of Syed Ahmed Khan whose pre-independence speeches invoked a modern future for the Muslims in the subcontinent. He fervently spoke of a modern educated Muslim population that marched shoulder to shoulder along with their Hindu counterparts and took equal responsibility in running the country. As Kingshuk Chatterjee acknowledges Sir Syed as “the harbinger of modernity among Muslims of the subcontinent” (Chatterjee, 2007) and notes,

Known principally as the founder of the Aligarh Movement for the spread of western education in north India, Sir Syed was also a votary of Islamic reformation – a movement that was arising almost all over the Muslim world. He was one of the architects of political consciousness, community identity and the world view of Indian Muslims in the nineteenth century, which were considerably different from all other previous formulations of Islamic identity in the subcontinent. (ibid.: 174)

However, Syed Ahmed Khan's dream of a modern future for the Muslims in the subcontinent was set in a colonized India. The Muslim socials seemed to draw upon the Ahmed Khan's idea of educating the population to make them fit for a post-colonial India that was dreaming to build a future on its own. These films showed an uncanny mix of Syed Ahmed Khan's belief and a secularism specific to India⁴². The Islamicate films in general deal with a history, a culture, language, architecture and sometimes, even religion. Audiences may be aware of them which would make it easy for them to comprehend the nature and context of the narrative, and the experiences undergone by the characters within the film. The Islamicate films reflect a certain cultural Islam which defines their mores of living and everyday practice, including language. Thus, to categorize a set of films simply based on their religio-cultural representation makes it too easy to fall within the many limitations of genre definition. Indeed Ravi Vasudevan observed that as the political demands for the representation of community interests accelerated in the late 1930s along with the secularized disposition of critics like K.A. Abbas, there emerged a more homogenised set of demands on how communities should be represented on screen, that is, through a prism of social reform (R. S. Vasudevan, 2015). It is this that led to the Muslim socials of the 1940s that were products of this recalibration.

There is no denying the general influence of Islamic culture in Bombay cinema and the contribution of the community towards its popularity. The Islamicate films testify for that – the iconographic, performative and narrative idioms that have been shaped by

⁴² This has been discussed in detail in the second chapter on the vision of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and his desire for the role Indian Muslims, particular elite Muslim from north India to play in the running of the nation.

the requirements of popular cinema. They have been distilled into our conscience through films falling within the categories of Muslim Historical, the Muslim Courtesan and the Muslim Social. These sub-genres were later invoked by filmmakers at different historical moments according to the pressures and concerns of the time (Bhaskar & Allen, 2009). Thus it can be said that the Islamicate films largely (as well as those of the second and third moment) uphold one of the primary characteristics of genre – that of representing the spirit of the time; as well as the flexible nature of such categorization which accommodates the evolution of a genre and the role that it encourages the films to play in the context of the changing contemporary. This is evident in the way the historical films, salient in the early years of Indian independence, were invoked by filmmakers much later in the first decade of the twentieth century in response to the communal tension of the time as in seen in the case of *Jodha Akbar* (Gowariker, 2008). Similarly, the earlier films located the Islamicate idioms within the elite Muslim cultures in the Muslim Socials. This was completely turned on its head with films like *Fiza* (Khalid Mohammed, 2000) and *Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro* when the focus shifted to the working and middle-class in the later films. It is this very volatile nature of the genre that rendered it capable of capturing the evolving nature of the Islamic representation of its culture and idiom of the subcontinent for the last seventy years.

It almost seems that this specific aspect of genre theory acts as the peg around which the Islamicate films explore their culture and community. Rather genre gives them that contained environment within which they get a chance to delve in and take a closer look within. A good look at these aspects (which the genre encourages these films to explore) throws light upon the problems and dilemmas of a community that is trying to move along with the waves of social and political change and yet hold on to the last straws of individuality. In other words, looking at a range of these films over the course of five to six decades, one gets a panoramic view of the changes and negotiations that a community has undergone. It is a reflection on a community that is marked by its history, culture, politics as well as tradition. The closing scene of *Garam Hawa* seems to capture this dilemma and efforts at negotiating one's politics and identity with the changing courses of time and history. When the subcontinent is ripped open by ghastly scars of communal hatred, there are also a few in the middle of that chaos who refuses to

acknowledge the transformed social equation that they once enjoyed. Salim Mirza refuses to accept any place other than his hometown, Agra, to be the soil in which he will breathe his last. Salim Mirza could be the last of the elite Muslims who makes way for the working and middle-class. His joining the protest rally, demanding the rights of those who refused to abandon India as their motherland and their country of origin, under the obvious banner of the leftist movement is a clear indication of the path that the Muslim Socials were going to take. They reflect the fall of the Urdu speaking Muslim elite who enjoyed positions of political and administrative importance. They comprised the Hindustani Musalmans of northern India, especially the areas surround Delhi and Uttar Pradesh as well as Hyderabad in the south. They are also called the Urdu speakers, for it being their native language. They possess a sense of group identity based on cultural and historical facts like Islamic religion, Persian cultural tradition and its Indian offspring, the Urdu language.

Conforming to the established generic concerns and framework

Genre as a theory of categorization is avoided by many as it lays down many rules which many creative artists would otherwise prefer to not conform to. Indeed it has been a contested topic from as early as the romantic age in literature. However, in the context of the films that are being studied in this thesis, it is doubtful whether the filmmakers were actually consciously trying to make films that confined itself to a certain genre or getting away from it. Indian films have largely been identified as this song and dance routine with a good dose of melodrama followed by a happy ending. Thus, it is easy to categorize a courtesan film with a melodrama, one of the most widely accepted and popular genres in Indian cinema. And yet they may be not. Not all the courtesan films portray a happy ending in the sense of the hero and the heroine coming together and living happily ever after. Rather they end with the courtesan figure walking into the sunset refusing to conform herself within the societal norms. Many a times the courtesan becomes the symbolic figure who breaks away from the norms of society that has relegated them to a derogatory position. As history tells us, the courtesans were among the earliest examples of independent women in this country, who chose to live their lives

differently and on their own terms (Oldenburg, 1990), not to mention their role in the early years of the independence movement (Rao, 2019). Rather it is when they try to weave themselves within the fabric of society by renegotiating the terms of the social contract, that society tries to freeze each individual with, that they come very close to losing that very identity as well as independence. Thus, it might seem fit that such elements are not taken into consideration while trying to categorize the given set of films through genre. *Garam Hawa* was a film that primarily focused on the lived experience of a generation of people of this country who had to give up their homeland and settle in a foreign country. It is more a historical document rather than a film that is trying to check itself with all the required generic elements that allows it to belong to one of them. It is a testament of the transformation of the lives of people and their livelihoods that were affected in the wake of the “South Asian holocaust” (Bhaskar & Allen, 2009). In that sense, *Garam Hawa* does not have any songs apart from the call for prayer and the rare *qawwali* that strictly does not follow the usual song and dance routine involving the hero and the heroine. Does it have a happy ending? Not particularly for the family disintegrates, their sense of belonging given a toss as they are forced to uproot from their ancestral house; close relatives turn upon each other, and of course the death of Aamina. There is no happy ending but a clear message put out that to survive in a country which is undergoing a change as massive as the Partition experienced by the Indian subcontinent, along with the struggles of the newly born nation trying to get itself on its feet, one is bound to choose one of the options that are being made available to them at that point of time, whether political or social. An individual cannot fight a battle on its own. Ira Bhaskar describes *Garam Hawa* as a film “that marks a radical departure from the reigning concerns and forms of the generic framework of the Muslim Social which it at once inhabits and transforms” (Bhaskar & Allen, 2009). It is to be duly noted that she does not completely write off the film as outside the generic concerns but one that is very much within it and yet trying to transform the codes that define the genre. *Garam Hawa* was pushing the industry to introspect and question itself, paving a way forward through change and transformation according to the socio-political concerns of the time. In another sense, it does fulfil a very vital aspect of genre theory – that of being an evidential witness to time and become archives of historical references. *Pakeeza* might

seem the perfect example of the song and dance routine that Indian cinema is trademarked for, with a good dose of melodrama. And yet as a film it is talking about a certain social history and of people in that society who were subject to the socio-cultural norms of the time. It brings out the issues of gender and the biasness of society that is dominated by patriarchy. It also provokes the audience to delve deeper into recent colonial history where the courtesans held important civic positions (Oldenburg, 1990).

Conclusion

It can be said that Islamicate films constitute a repository of works that engage with the Islamic culture, using the elements that constitute a genre – conventions, iconography, setting, narrative, characters and above all, portraying contemporary society. The association of specific industry figures who are practitioners of the craft also positions them as strategic coordinating points. Genre is conformative to the extent of thwarting creative expressions, and yet is flexible. The Islamicate films, through their non-conformity to any existing generic formula, have upheld the true nature of genre. At the same time, they have proven to be repositories of values and social codes as well as archive of their changes down history. Islamicate films (apart from the historicals) have metamorphosed themselves over the years to capture the changing notions of society. However, it is too early to say whether or not Islamicate films can be classified under a separate genre; rather, it can be said that they have the potential become a genre of subversion where the normative or that which enjoys institutional as well as societal acceptance / recognition gets resisted or simply turned on its head. In other words, Cinema B⁴³ would constitute this genre, which showed the potential for a parallel narrative – real or imagined – or history that goes on to provide a point of negotiation between two representations of the same history. There has also been evidence of how

⁴³Cinema A: that which is aligned to what we have established in the last few paragraphs as history – reiterating and corroborating it (and hence, enjoying institutional sanction as well as acceptance); and Cinema B: that which is constantly rendering Cinema A problematic while remaining within the paradigm that encapsulates Cinema A as well (by questioning it, posing subtle evidences and witnesses that provoke a counter-narrative to that of Cinema A). In other words, Cinema A is conventional history (textbook history / political party propaganda) and Cinema B is memory or history that is private and public at the same time and yet not institutionalised.

genre provides the authorial figure of the director or the filmmaker or the producer, a framework within which they can animate the elements of the genre to their own purpose. From the point of view of genre, the classic Muslim Socials as well as the New Wave Muslim Socials are a confirmation of that as we see the filmmakers give representation to their imagination of the modern, pushing the limits of the genre while at the same time using its framework in order to give the audience the space within which they can associate as well as negotiate the changes that the director was invoking. It is the flexibility of genre, especially within the context of Indian cinema, where an umbrella genre like that of melodrama (that includes musical, western, social as well as classical melodrama) encapsulates most films within its folds. One might ask as to why were these films being distinctly made. Was there a specific audience that distinctly asked for these films, thus creating an economic motive for the industry? One possible explanation could be that if these films were mapped to the corresponding socio-political history of the time when they were getting produced, it can be seen that there is a resonance of some of the larger concerns for the community. For example, the early films produced around the time of the independence were trying to capture how the Muslim society was grappling with the onslaught of modern notions for a new nation to be born and the role and position of Muslims in such a scenario. There are echoes of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan who founded the Aligarh Muslim University to promote the development and education of Muslim youth. His vision was to provide Muslims the proper education and exposure so that they can participate in the nation-building project on equal terms with other members of the society (in particular, the Hindus from eastern India). The later films (the 90s to be precise) take a completely different turn when it comes to representation. It captures the impact of the open economy on certain sections of the society who have been denied the privilege that the boom in economy brought about, and the resulting frustration which is either manifested as anger or a silent resignation to the reality. While addressing the debate – is Islamicate a background or does it define a community – from a genre point of view, it becomes difficult to draw a clear line. While it does provide a background against which the story is set, yet it is difficult to ignore the truth that the responses of the characters to events are determined by their identity. This identity is established through the generic features that seem to provide a background. This helps to position these films

as repositories of the history of a section of the population of the Indian subcontinent. It is through the logic of the story that I have tried to classify the three moments of Cinema B. The classic Muslim Socials establishes the paradigm that defines these films and which has been elaborated upon in the chapter. It is almost as if an act of collective mapping has been undertaken but not a specific collective mapping. Thus, genre is not simply about some formulaic stereotypical representation, but that which allows for some dynamic interplay of narrative and memory in its very constitution. It is a fluid enough category that has the capacity to accommodate the popular imagination of various communities in society that the film is portraying through that genre.

Chapter 4

Muslim Courtesan Films as a Transitional Phenomenon

Among the four major categories or sub-genres of the Islamicate films that Ira Bhaskar and Richard Allen have introduced, the courtesan films have been quite popular; indeed, they would have well stood the test of time and popularity outside of such categorization. The genre still enjoys a significant position within the aegis of Indian popular cinema, with films like *Umrao Jaan* (Muzaffar Ali, 1981; JP Dutta, 2006) which has two versions that are spaced twenty five years apart, *Pakeezah* (Kamal Amrohi, 1972), *Tawaif* (BR Chopra, 1985), *Sardari Begum* (Shyam Benegal, 1996), etc., capturing the imagination of the Indian audience through the evocation of an imagination of a past that played upon the popular nostalgia through costume, dialogue, story, music and dance as well as engaging with contemporary society. Drawing upon the discussion on Cinema B in the previous chapter on genre, this chapter clearly positions the courtesan films within the linear trajectory through which the Muslim imagination evolves across the three stages or moments. The courtesan films form a crucial part of that transition that enables Cinema B to move from the classical Muslim Socials to the New Wave Muslim Socials. The courtesan films belong to the second movement as we see the earliest negotiation of Cinema B with reality. This is wherefrom the unveiling of the imagination takes place and in this chapter we see the interesting role that the courtesan films play in defining this moment. It is from here that we see that the debate stands more on grounds of law and modernity, where identity comes to be located within a heterogeneous space that is both real and public.

It is difficult to deny Bombay cinema's fascination for the Islamicate culture, a reflection of the attraction of the Indian cine-audience as well. I draw upon Mukul Kesavan's study, where he explains how, as an audience, we associate certain icons and symbols as registers of a religio-cultural tradition (Kesavan, 1994). Hence, we make the association of scalloped arches or onion domes as cues for those which are representative of the Islamic. However, such associations are merely aesthetic in nature, and often have

nothing to do with religion per se. The courtesan films fulfil these paradigms in more ways than one. They depict certain characters who may not necessarily be Islamic and yet their movement is confined within a space that is popularly assumed to be Islamicate. This would include the language, the customs and practices, architecture, art, ways of living, geo-political history, etc. It is this association of the characters with the space (with its Islamicate features) that elicits the Indian audience's fascination for things Islamicate in nature. These films act as a snippet or a window into a world that has otherwise been kept away from the gaze of the public.

The courtesan films are poised in the crevice between the Muslim historical films and the Muslim socials. They draw upon the idea of projecting an image of the past, or of a certain milieu, which might be an indulgent provocation towards invoking a memory. The chapter discusses in detail how the courtesan films, located in cusp of history and modernity, bore the hint of what was to come later – the New Wave Muslim Socials. In this chapter, I propose to look at the courtesan films as an intermediary, a bridge, between the past and the future, occupying a dynamic position within these set of films.

Observations on the courtesan films of Bombay cinema

Hindi or Bombay cinema has depicted the courtesans as victims of social exclusion. They were the “other” who lived on the fringes of society within a specific locality that was earmarked for them. They may be the epitome of beauty and refinement, but it became their bane. While they fascinated and attracted men of power through their beauty and talent, they were looked upon as morally loose, selling their modesty in exchange of money. Their refinement and talent was only a tool for the means, meant to ensnare men with their charm. Bombay cinema, however, has also made subjective portrayals of courtesans, where the focus of the narrative has been the life and story of a famous tawaif – a life outside the accepted social institutions of marriage and family with no promises of fidelity from the men who visited them. Ironically, while the values of fidelity, devotion and other normative values associated with love, maybe misplaced with reference to a courtesan, the courtesans demonstrate all that – faith, commitment, complete surrender to one love, and to the idea of love – something that the world around

failed to fathom. The Islamicate identity of the courtesan figure is also characteristic of Bombay cinema – whether the courtesan is Hindu or Muslim, the space she occupies, the etiquette she practices are all essentially Islamicate – whether the kathak that she performs in the mujras or the domed arches and the filigreed interiors within which she moved. It would be interesting to note Poonam Arora’s observation regarding the portrayal of the courtesan figure here which gives a slight twist in our understanding of the courtesan figure and how the Bombay industry preferred to draw such figures:

It is interesting that even though actual tawa'ifs have lived as extremely wealthy and independent women who invariably shun marriage and prefer lesbian relationships (as Oldenburg⁴⁴ has shown), the narratives about them persistently represent them as wanting to escape from their lives into “respectable” heterosexual marriages. (Arora, 1995: 82)

The relation between the courtesans and the Bombay film industry

The courtesan is not a figment of imagination but a historical figure who occupied a significant position in both Mughal and Rajput history. However, the social position of the tawaif suffered a setback with the colonial crackdown on the courtesans, whom the British identified as the “sing and dancing girls”, reducing them to the position of mere prostitutes and entertainers (Oldenburg, 1990). With the fall of Awadh, many of the courtesans migrated to Kanpur and made it their home, trying to create a second home as they drew upon the nostalgia of Lucknow, a past they held with much pride and nostalgia⁴⁵. Kanpur could never become Lucknow, succeeding only in creating a decadent throwback of the world that once was. The tawaif too lost her sheen and came to be treated as nothing more than prostitutes. This was the time when the Bombay film industry was beginning to soar, what with the popularity of the motion film industry and the coming of sound. Famous courtesans like Gauhar Jaan marked their position in the

⁴⁴ Arora is referring to Veena Oldenburg’s anthropological study of a group of courtesans from north India the essay “Lifestyle as Resonance: The Case of the Courtesans of Lucknow, India”. Oldenburg’s observations have been referred to in detail later in the chapter to look into the role of the courtesan as a public woman in society.

⁴⁵A glimpse of this socio-political history can also be found in Vikram Seth’s novel, *A Suitable Boy*.

history of sound industry in India(Sampath, 2011). In fact, the early Bombay film industry is indebted to some very talented musicians who were tawaifs, and who, with the transformation of the social structure during the build up to the Indian independence, finally turned towards the film industry. The industry gladly welcomed such massive powerhouses of talent. The film industry at that time was considered a taboo among for women, a space that was quickly filled by the likes of Gauhar Jaan, Jaddan Bai and many others.

The courtesan films

The courtesan films, as the title itself suggests, is about the courtesans or *tawaifs*, who were socially located at the fringes, and yet occupied a special position in society, both economically as well as culturally. The most accomplished of these courtesans were said to belong to Lucknow, the capital of the kingdom of Awadh. They were either born into this trade or were sold into the *kothas* as young girls. The Bombay films depicting these courtesan figures are mostly set in Lucknow, the centre of courtly culture and practices, home of the nawabs as well as Kanpur and Delhi, which too became popular centres with time, especially after the fall of Lucknow⁴⁶. However, before delving any deeper into the depiction of these characters in the Bombay films, I have taken a quick look at the figure of this *tawaif* and their position in history through the observations of Lata Singh⁴⁷ who has explored the public roles of the courtesans, particularly within the nationalist discourse. Singh makes a very interesting commentary on how the courtesans “camouflaged” their true personas to become the legends that they were. She notes:

‘Tawaif’, the term used for a courtesan, has accumulated over time moralistic, value-loaded connotation; in the popular mindset it was equated to a whore, forcing these women performers into silence. When they did speak, they had to reinvent themselves through polite myths to reinforce their self-esteem, which had been consistently battered by

⁴⁶ Here I am referring to the fall of the nawabs of Awadh after the rebellion of 1857.

⁴⁷ Singh explores the figure of the courtesan in the political space of the nationalist discourse where they are otherwise denied visibility and respectability in her essay “1857 Visibilising the ‘Other’ in History: Courtesans and the Revolt” (Singh, 2007)

references to them as fallen and dangerous women. They had to constantly camouflage their personas, a crucial process to make them into the legends that they were. (Singh 2007: 1677)

This almost resonates with the observations from the previous section regarding the representation of the courtesan figure in cinema, and how different they were from reality. I have reasoned it as the industry aligning itself to the majoritarian opinion regarding the figure of the woman, particularly those who are considered fallen. Singh makes an almost similar (to my argument regarding the veiling of the reality through an imagination of the past) but an interesting comment about the silencing and invisibilising of the reality of the courtesans and how they reinvented themselves through myths to come to terms with their battered self-esteem. Thus it seems that this coming to terms with the truth about their reality by hiding behind a veil of imagination as we have seen in the classical Muslim Socials is also the historical truth about the role and position of the courtesans in the social world.

Under the patronage of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, Lucknow had become the cultural centre of art and culture. The opulence and splendour with which the nawab's era was known by (until the siege of Lucknow), all have been successfully depicted in films like *Umrao Jaan* and *Pakeezah*. However, this was not the case with all courtesan films. Films like *Tawaif* and *Sardari Begum* portray a social milieu that was completely removed from the earlier films. But with the fall of the nawab when the British took over Lucknow, the position of the courtesans underwent a major downturn. As their king and his influential courtiers were banished (who had to take refuge in Metiabruz near the Khidderpore area of Calcutta), the British administration equated the *kothas* with brothels and completely ignored their creative aspect (Singh, 2007). The courtesans were also dealt with tough hands due to their suspected role in the mutiny. One such figure is Azizun Nisa "who made a pivotal contribution to the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny, at the forefront and behind the scenes, working as an informer, messenger and possibly even a conspirator in the Kanpur chapter of the rebellion" (Rao 2019: 1). However, none of these found representation in the popular culture. While *Umrao Jaan* has been the story of the eternal courtesan that has pulled all the right strings in the minds of Indians, with *Pakeezah* the genre reached a

pinnacle with the courtesan seeking her position within the social fabric through law. *Tawaif* and *Sardari Begum* and a few others go on to capture the tragic figure of the “other” woman, albeit in a different setting as compared to the former two. The courtesan figure has fascinated the audience and filmmakers over the years. They have invariably been portrayed as the other woman – the mistress – for whom the wealthy patron would be ready to lose it all, and yet it would be through the sacrifice of the other woman that the patron would be redeemed. She was the woman who was trained in the arts and the literatures, who wrote verses and spoke a variety of languages. The figure of the courtesan is “at once most desired and the most condemned of women” (Bhaskar & Allen, 2009). The courtesan figures of Bombay cinema struggled to work around the conflicting nature of the historical reality of a tawaif – who was a woman who knew how to make use of the art of love to her advantage – and the industry’s portrayal of such a woman in all her purity. It is this conflicting nature of the courtesan figure that creates an undertow of melancholic yearning that is characteristic of the genre itself. This section looks into these films more closely in the light of these observations and arguments.

***Pakeezah* (Kamal Amrohi, 1972)**

Pakeezah is the story of a courtesan, Sahibjaan, born in a kotha and brought up to be one by Nawabjaan. Fate takes its own course as Sahibjaan falls in love with Salim Ahmad. With Salim she dreams of marriage and a life of stability and lifelong commitment; she almost tries to achieve the impossible. Dibban warns her by pointing out to the reality of things – Salim had praised the beauty of her feet and prayed that they do not touch the ground lest they get soiled because he had not seen them with their *ghungru* (ankle bells). It is a symbol that is a mark of a woman whom society believed was “public”. Salim, however, decides to judge someone for what they are and not what society makes of them. Thus, when he witnesses the public harassment that he and Sahibjaan had to undergo in the hands of the public, who recognized her as the famous courtesan, he decides to give her the dignity and respect that any human being deserves, and the only way that was possible was through the institution of marriage. He decides to marry her in the presence of a *maulvi* as well as witnesses from among members of the society. However, while Salim contemplates for a happy future with her, Pakeeza realizes that no matter how many times she changes her name, her identity as the courtesan will

never abandon her. She also comes to term with the bitter truth when she realizes that she might be the famous and sought after courtesan within the precincts of the *kotha*, but for the world outside she is nothing but a fallen woman, a common prostitute, a mere “singing and dancing girl”. Her identity, independence, power and splendour, all are associated with the space that has also come to define her.

Pakeezah is more of a story about a woman being a courtesan by default, having been born in a *kotha*. She falls in love with Salim Ahmed who is impressed by the sheer beauty of her feet. The feet here become the symbolic reference (a part for the whole) of the beauty of the woman. Salim is the modern man who stands up for her and even walking out on his family elder who cast aspersions on her character without knowing the truth. He is willing to marry her even after she reveals the truth about her (being a courtesan), give her a new name and identity and a status that society still considers beyond her. Yet, her past and the pressures of society weigh her down as she flees from the *durgah* where they had decided to tie the knot. She cannot *kabool* (accept) the man she loves to marry her because she has realised that in the eyes of the society she will always remain a soiled woman and she refuses to bring that into the life of the man she loves. Hence, she publicly refuses him and goes back to the *kotha*. For once, the tawaif denounces the society before it could denounce her. Even though her name might mean the pure one, it is the worst irony of her life, for she is considered the impure one who would taint the life of her lover.

Pakeezah too is filled with iconographical references of the time and place. There is an attempt to recreate the *kotha*, especially in the scene where she begins the iconic song, “Inhin logon ne le liya dupatta mera” (roughly translating, these are the same people who have stripped me off my pride)⁴⁸. While *Pakeezah* captures the imagination of her audience, in the background, the director indulges in recreating his idea of that part of the city of Lucknow. And this culture was to a large extent defined by the presence of the tawaif’s *kotha* that comprised an important aspect of Lucknow’s culture, history and geography. As E Alkazi wrote in *Preface: Illusions of Lucknow*,

⁴⁸ My translation

Here, in Lucknow, was a way of life that beguiled the senses and overwhelmed them; a court that drowned itself each year in a paroxysm of grief over the recollected suffering of its religious martyrs, and, at the same time, savoured life to the full, with such finesse that its culture became a byword for refinement, courtesy and literary elegance. (Alkazi, 2006)

There is also a reference of the famous courtesan, Gauhar Jaan and how her beloved *gulabi mahal* (pink palace) is up for sale as she is no more at the hilt of her career. It also signifies how the power, respect and position enjoyed by these *tawaifs* were short-lived. The film dealt with the interior and the exterior, the private and the public in terms of contrast. It was a conscious effort on the part of the director to represent the two in a manner that left little unsaid about the difference that signified them. The interior was a world that was almost make-belief, a world where men would lose themselves, where the norms and conventions of society do not exist. The exterior or outside world is portrayed in such a way to signify just the opposite. There are two specific instances where this outside burst into perfectly created frame of the interior. First, where Sahibjaan's mother, having been rejected by her lover's family and stripped off her desire to be a part of the society through the institution of marriage and family, takes refuge in the cemetery that was located on the fringes of the city – a stark reminder of her position in the society. However, it indulged very little in engaging with the interior or the private space until we come upon the scene where for the first time we see the camera moving as if following the lovers. It gazed at them in the same way as the public that was following them. The stable gaze with which we had been witnessing the life of the courtesan so far is suddenly shaken as it came in contact with the outside world. Suddenly the world of mirrors, gilded cages, fountains and *thumri* vanished only to be replaced by the harsh and crude society that could only express itself through norm and conventions or through the violence of the mob.

The film ends with a strong note of defiance against the age-old norms of society with regard to the position of the courtesan within the social fabric. We see Shabuddin's father, the old patriarch who had previously rejected Sahibjaan as his daughter-in-law,

mourning the loss of his son and agreeing to a marriage between his grandson and a tawaif. Sahibjaan's aunt declares that Sahibjaan can only be considered a part of that family if Salim's wedding procession (*doli*) comes to her doorstep fetch his bride. Two important events take place on screen that challenges quite a few age-old social norms – the courtesan finally gets to marry her beloved, a privilege that, as previously mentioned, was not deemed to be enjoyed by the courtesans; and the reiteration of the marriage *dua* within the precincts of the kotha, another even that was never seen before. In the final scene, with Pakeezah finally consenting to marry Salim Ahmed, the maulvi recites the wedding verse, which resonates throughout the place. It is a stepping stone towards a future or fate for these courtesans and their profession, which till then was considered beyond them. The kotha, which had only heard the trained voices of the courtesans along with the sound of their ankle bells, is now being penetrated by the sacred verses that sanctify the marriage.

Pakeezah is a film that occupies a strong position within the courtesan genre, while at the same time it is untypical in the way it reconstructs the setting, which is more contemporary in nature. It immerses itself in “an orientalist intoxication of the past” (Bhaskar & Allen, 2009) while advocating for liberating transformations within the society for these courtesan figures. It portrays the breaking down of the practice of fetishization of the figure of the woman and vouches for a liberal acceptance of her desire. Thus, *Pakeezah* is poised at a very critical angle between the past and the present, the traditional and the modern (contemporary), paving the way for films with more contemporary settings that does away with the moral condemnation of the life of a courtesan, like in *Tawaif*.

***Tawaif* (BR Chopra, 1985)**

Tawaif comes after the “hot winds” of Sathyu's *Garm Hawa* (1973) had already hit the country, creating a wide chasm in the audience in their imagination of the world of the courtesans, shrouded amidst the civility and etiquette of a culture that was long gone with that of the social reality they were living. Thus, the depiction of an Islamicate social life did not resort to invoking the “imaginary social landscape of civility and wealth” of Lucknow, rather, the film is located in Bombay – gritty and urban, which Bhaskar and

Allen points out to be the influence of the New Wave aesthetic on mainstream cinema (Bhaskar & Allen, 2009). However, the mise-en-scene seems like a negotiation with the ethos of the classical Muslim Socials and the New Wave Muslim Socials as we see a projection of a milieu that bears strong influences of Islamic iconography and yet it is not marked by the absence of a non-Muslim. In other words, the veil of homogeneity has been removed to give way to a heterogeneous setting. The film advocates the right of a prostitute or courtesan to be courted and be married to someone of her choice. There are, however, presumptions regarding her brashness as contemporaneous to all courtesans or prostitutes. For the first time in this film, the middle class woman sacrifices her love for the redemption of the courtesan; it has always been the other way round where the fallen woman sacrifices her love, however pure, in order to attain virtue. As Ira Bhaskar and Richard Allen points out:

The introduction of the character of Qainat [...] is crucially important, for her sympathy with the figure of the prostitute indicates that social change against male exploitation of women requires the solidarity and leadership of women. (Bhaskar and Allen 2009: 205)

There are some scenes in *Tawaif*, which bear striking similarity with that of *Pakeezah*, the most prominent among which is the *tawaif* dancing on white floor with bloodied feet, almost proving her purity in blood before eventually losing her love to someone else. Also, in the final scene, where Qainat joins the hands of the Dawood and Sultana, once again, the space of the *kotha* is transformed into the place of a wedding. Bhaskar and Allen point out an alliance of the three essential idioms of portrayal of women in Indian cinema – the traditional ‘Mother India’, the modern middle-class intellectual and the working-class prostitute – quite a feat for a filmmaker to have articulated such a message in the mid-1980s, who resorts to his old fashioned moral sermonizing through Mr Nigam’s harangue.

***Umrao Jaan* (Muzaffar Ali, 1981 and JP Dutta, 2006)**

The first subjective portrayal of the courtesan figure was in literature, in Mirza Muhammed Hadi Ruswa's *Umrao Jaan Ada*, a biography charting the life and experience of the famous courtesan from Lucknow. It became the source of inspiration for the many depiction of the courtesan in Indian cinema. It provided the perfect backdrop and story for filmmakers interested in the "narrativization of female subjectivity" (Chakravarty, 1993) and both Muzaffar Ali and JP Dutta's production are examples of such attempts. In Muzaffar Ali's *Umrao Jaan* we find the narrative giving prominence to the 1857 rebellion and entwining itself more closely against the backdrop of the rebellion and the British crackdown that followed. Both portrayed how the culture and *tehzeeb* were drained out of the centre of culture by blood and violence. Pitted against this historical background, *Umrao Jaan* became the "quintessential courtesan of Bombay cinema". From the very beginning we see Ameeran / *Umrao*'s fate being determined by the actions of others. His father's enmity with Dilawar ended up in her being first kidnapped and then sold off. Ameeran landed up in the *kotha* of Khanum Jaan, who trained her to become a courtesan and she went on to become the famous *Umrao Jaan*. She did not have a choice in that either and as advised by Maulvi Saab, her foster father, she had to forego both her childhood and the language of her childhood, for they were her past with which she now had no connection. She was trained in the art of literature and music along with royal etiquette, all for one purpose – to charm men. *Umrao* falls in love with Nawab Sultan, but love and marriage were not meant for a courtesan, for the Nawab was compelled to marry someone of his mother's choice. Life takes *Umrao* through many ups and downs, forbidding her to abandon the life that fate had endowed upon her. She had to flee the city that had become her home since the time she had become *Umrao*, when the British attacked Lucknow in retaliation to the rebellion of 1857. Fate took her to her hometown Faizabad, only to be cruelly rejected by her own brother, who refused to accept the sister who had become a *tawaif*; the *kotha* had become her home and it will be her home even in death. In a way, Muzaffar Ali's *Umrao* had succeeded in completely severing herself from the past. For unlike JP Dutta's *Umrao*, the nature of her relationship with the Nawab Sultan was more mature and companionate in nature as their bond is sealed through their shared love of poetry. JP Dutta's *Umrao* seems not to forget that she was not born into a *kotha* and hence is different from other courtesans. There is an

attempt to establish her sexual purity, which she uses as proof of her fidelity, something which is left open-ended in the earlier version.

Unlike the 1981 version, JP Dutta's version of 2006, opens with the top angle shot of an old haveli, only to zoom into the figure of an old woman, whom the audience soon identifies to be the ghostlike remnant of the famous courtesan of Lucknow, Umrao Jaan. From the first shot the audience is made aware of the decadence and fall in fortune of a past that had seen glorious days. Unlike the snapshots that adorn the opening credits of Muzaffar Ali's *Umrao Jaan*, interspersed by the engagement ceremony of young Ameeran, JP Dutta's begins on a rather gloomy note, marking the voice of the narrative, being that of Umrao Jaan herself telling the story of her life to Ruswa. Muzaffar Ali's version does not give that kind of agency to the courtesan heroine who narrates her tale to Ruswa or the audience. Rather, he builds the character of Ameeran right from the young girl who was shown living under amidst the love and care of her family and who due to a twist in fate was sold off in a kotha. Later in Ali's film, Ameeran is shown being briefly reunited with her family as she finds her mother and brother when she came to perform in the same town. But as luck would have it, she was spurned by her own brother who did not want to be associated with a sister who was a courtesan by profession. This aspect of Ameeran's life has not been captured by JP Dutta. Despite the differences in the narrative point of view, the pathos of the courtesan figure remains evident in both.

***Sardari Begum* (Shyam Benegal, 1996)**

Sardari Begum is a more recent depiction of the courtesan figure, embedding her within a space which is more familiar to the contemporary audience. Instead of the singing-dancing courtesan figure, she is depicted in this film as a *thumri* singer. With *Sardari Begum*, it seems that the courtesan genre no more indulges in the act of nostalgia, creating a window through which we peer into another world. It is more simply a story of a woman who chooses to follow her heart to fulfill her passion to become a successful singer. She was not born into the profession and towards the end she becomes the embodiment of liberal thoughts and ideas. She is a successful singer who sang who recorded songs were widely sought after. This was the 90s India where newer forms of circulation of music was making their mark. Thus, it can be said that *Sardari Begum's*

story is pitted by Shyam Benegal at a time when a musical form that was considered niche was slowly getting appropriated by the mainstream and integrated into the nation's music culture. Benegal loads its depiction in sarcasm when he shows representatives of various political parties attempting to appropriate Sardari as "a great artist" and a "true symbol of Indian civilization". This comes immediately after the policeman is shown describing Sardari as a "naachne gaane waali" (singing and dancing girl), a phrase that rings a bell of similarity in the way the courtesans were described in the British municipal files. *Sardari Begum*, as a film, is a development in the linear progression of the narrative of the range of courtesan films that this chapter is looking into. It retains the main elements of a courtesan film, while confronting the new set of socio-political issues that the 1990s ushered in.

In this sense, *Sardari Begum* as a film consciously welds in elements of the courtesan film with that of the New Wave Muslim Socials, marking a complete removal from the veiled imagination of the first movement. This film also charts the transformation of the *thumri* as a form that was previously only performed by *tawaifs* in the sanctity of their *kothas* or to a niche audience during a *mehfil* to burst into the public domain through technological advancements, primarily Radio and the gramophone, as well as the development of a culture of appreciation of such music through public performances. There is an oblique reference to the story of Gauhar Jaan (1873-1930), eminent Hindustani/North Indian classical vocalist who symbolised the resurgent women musicians of her time. The musical scene in India at the turn of the twentieth century witnessed tumultuous changes. The traditional custodians of the art form, the *devadasis* in the South and the nautch girls and *tawaifs* in the North, who had nurtured the art for centuries, became victims of the morality laws of the British government and the prudery of an 'enlightened' and educated Indian elite (Sampath, 2011). Sardari is continuously seen striving to perform in such public events, which was the only means of making her art, her music, her voice reach the larger audience. In fact, Benegal uses Sardari's story as the backdrop against which the story of migration of *thumri* music from the private (*kothas* and *mehfils*) to the public (national stage) is told. Its consequences are also made evident when Sakina's debut performance did not turn out well as her audience was more keen on the performance of an established singer like Sardari. Sardari's caustic response

to the crowd's demand for "we want Sardari" underlines the lack of musical knowledge and capacity for appreciation that Bhaskar recognizes as the consequence of the shift in the patronage forms to an uninitiated public. In a way, it also underlines the reality of how removed the present audience / patron was from a culture and a history that was their own.

The story of Sardari Begum is told through many voices who have come to touch her life at various points of time. In this respect, it is more akin to *Umrao Jaan* than *Pakeezah* or *Tawaif*, while it does have a few features that enable it to stand on its own. Sardari Begum was a practitioner and patron of arts. For it, she was ready to leave the comforts of a home that a socially well-placed family provided. She was fiercely independent "who lived life according to her own terms" to finally reach the pinnacle of success that she had dreamed for herself, all of which, ironically, was a source of disrepute for her father and even her brother, Jabbar. Bhaskar and Allen points out that *Sardari Begum* is not a film that is set in a kotha, nor telling the story of a singer-dancer (*tawaif*) who performs *mujras*. Sardari Begum is "a professional singer, traditionally called a *baiji*, and one considered the highest in the courtesan hierarchy" (Bhaskar & Allen, 2009). That *Sardari Begum* was not the story of a tawaif is evident in the absence of a longing for the permanence of love, marriage and family. Sardari rather considers them as mere distractions in the way of one's "*mausiki*", something that Sakina only realizes after her mother's death. In fact, Sardari Begum had created a public image of herself as a successful classical singer, who has earned her money and her reputation through her music and not by selling her body.

The film is almost like a closure to a form that celebrates a certain history, while opening itself to the influences of another. Thus, within a supposedly courtesan film, we see strong evidences of the New Wave Muslim Socials that leave their mark in strong bold strokes. Even though *Sardari Begum* is categorized as a courtesan film, a closer look at the film shows the cracks in the wall of resilience that try to maintain a water tight compartment of this genre with the others. The film is an evidence of the transformation of the form as well as the notions of acceptability, which would make it impossible for future filmmakers to posit a film in the present with a so-called courtesan at its centre.

Muslim identity of the courtesan

Drawing upon Kesavan and Hodgson's arguments regarding the idea of the Islamicate (as discussed in the earlier chapter) this section studies the Muslimness with which these films were marked by. Even though history may say otherwise, cinematic representation of the courtesan, or the impression in the minds of the audience has been that of a courtesan who is Muslim, or follows the Islamicate practices. We see that in *Umrao Jaan* and even in *Pakeezah*, where even though the religious identity of the courtesan is not an important factor in the narrative, the filmmaker seems to not be able to break away from the notion. The iconic stars playing these roles are however non-Muslims, who become immortalized in history as Pakeezah or Umrao Jaan or Sardari Begum or Sultana. To identify the courtesans as Muslims by default raises the question of identity of the figure of these empowered women who were considered independent and educated, holding their sway over men as well as in the minds of the people. They were economically powerful as well, for as evidence from administrative reports from the British colonial period show, these courtesans belonged to the first class of Indians who paid their taxes and owned property (Oldenburg, 1990). It compels one to make assumptions or draw conclusions about the position of Muslim women in society during that time. Such conclusions are not too farfetched until we come to the study of the courtesan figure as individuals in society; for, these women were not only hailing from one community, commonsensically assumed, the Muslim community. It is this commonsensical nature of the popular assumption regarding the identity of these women that is reflected in the films which could be questioned. It is here that we might raise the question that while we find the identification of the courtesans with a particular religion as problematic, these women were inevitably projected within a space that was considered essentially Islamicate. The answer lies in coming to terms with our very basic conception of architecture in India and its commonsensical association with religious culture. It brings us once again to confront what constitutes the Islamicate and here I draw from Kesavan's statement, influenced by Marshall Hodgson,

Islamicate would refer not directly to the religion, Islam itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the

Muslims, both among Muslim themselves and even when found among non-Muslims. (Kesavan, 1994)

This statement, if taken as a peg around to look at the genre, shakes the very arguments or observations based on which the genre segregation has been made, writing them off as merely commonsensical. It is our commonsensical understanding of our socio-political history that makes us prone to such observations and pushes us towards certain conclusions. To dispel further confusion, Kesavan notes that the markers, which seemingly pointed to the Muslim nature of these films, might have been part of the free register used by art historians a few generation back, but which have come to be loaded with meaning and ideas that the modern Indian state is constantly trying to negotiate with for “both academic rigour and secularist scruple combine to caution us that there are no building manifestoes hidden in the Quran, nor are Hindus bound to a single architectural idiom”(Kesavan, 1994).

B.R. Chopra’s *Sadhana* (1958), which is considered a predecessor of his 1985 courtesan film, *Tawaif*, is cast within a Hindu setting; whether or not that is the reason behind it being categorized as a social is a point to conjecture. However, it is loaded with symbols of Islamic tradition, culture as well as iconography as “is evident in the environment of the *kotha*, in the Islamic multifoil arches, the *kathak* dance and costume of the courtesan, and the gestures of greeting and approbation” (Bhaskar & Allen, 2009). It is worth mentioning at this point that Ira Bhaskar and Richard Allen in the introduction to *Islamicate Cultures of Bombay Cinema* has pointed out that these iconographic markers like the *mujra* is not essentially an Islamicate form. They appear in non-Courtesan films as well, albeit being performed by a public woman who is essentially Muslim. Bhaskar argues that it is the valorization of the courtly culture of the Muslim elites in Bombay cinema – through the popular imagination of the royal Mughal courts and the nineteenth century aristocratic Lucknow – that rendered the identity of the courtesan to be dominated by an Islamic imagination. In fact, the *mujra* becomes an expression of allure as well as defiance for the courtesan towards the domination of a patriarchal society, whether Hindu or Muslim.

There is another aspect to this question of identity that these films portrayed. Both in *Umrao Jaan* as well as in *Pakeezah*, the women are renamed to shed one identity and assume another. It also underlines the fluidity of identity among women. They either bear the names of their ancestors and forefathers and later their husbands or they shed that identity to take up a new one. So Ameeran becomes Umrao and Sahibjaan becomes Pakeezah. Play of identity is also another thing that is quite relevant in the case of *Pakeezah*. She initially hides behind the identity of being the niece of the famous courtesan Gauhar Jaan; both Salim and Sahibjaan are unaware of the link that each one bears to the identity of their predecessors.

Whether it was the fact that one of the most popular and successful rendition of the courtesan figure was a Muslim, or a double marginalization of a section of the population, it is difficult to pinpoint the reason behind the courtesan being invariably portrayed as a Muslim or moving within a space that is characteristically Islamic in nature. It is this fluidity that marks the courtesan films as a point of junction where the historical Islamicate films and the Muslim socials merge. The courtesan marks the bridge, which allows two categories / sub-genres to flow from one to the other, and this happens at various levels. There is a marked difference in the visual pleasure between the historical and the Muslim socials and the courtesan films stand right within that cusp.

Courtesan: the powerful women of Lucknow

The courtesan films also marked the importance that these women enjoyed within the nawabi culture of yesteryears. These courtesans were an influential female elite of the city of Lucknow and then later on of Kanpur (Arora, 1995; Oldenburg, 1990). They were well trained in music and dance as well as were highly learned. They enjoyed the patronage of kings and nawabs of the land and owned large properties. In fact, they are the first documented natives who paid taxes under the British law. They were classified as the “dancing and singing girls” and fell among the highest tax bracket (Oldenburg, 1990). Indeed, they were the first generation of Indians who paid civic taxes for their properties, which are documented in the civic tax ledgers of 1857 – 77.

Wajid Ali Shah, the last nawab of Awadh, gave great impetus to the Lucknow *gharana* of the dance form of *kathak*, which reached its pinnacle during this period. The courtesans were trained in *mujras*, which were a non-erotic dance form, performed to pay obeisance to the *mehfil* (the people gathered, which sometimes constituted some of the most powerful of society). Some of the famous courtesans of this time were Gulbadan of Benaras, Sukhabadan Benaraswali, Jan Baksha Bandawali, Umrao Jaan, Chandrabai Akbarabadwali, Jaddon. An example of the extent to which the power and influence of these courtesans extended was the Muslim courtesan, Anara Begum, who belonged to the court of Raja Gaj Singh, the King of Jodhpur, who was a Mansabdar at the time of the Mughal Emperor, Shah Jahan. She had a say in the administration of the kingdom as well as the authority to appoint the heir apparent. It was at the behest of Begum Anara that the elder son had to forfeit his heirship to his younger brother. The *Dastur Komwar*, which bears the official records of the state of Jaipur and of Jat history, records a large number of courtesans who were on regular payroll and reward list of the state of Jaipur. Raskapoor, a talented dancer in the court of Maharaja Jagat Singhji of Jaipur, was given the title of *Adhrajani* and the power to mint coins in her own name. Being an intellectually refined lady she was also given charge of the *pothikhana* (library).

Enough has been researched and written regarding the association of the courtesans with prostitution. In the medieval period, emphasis was indeed placed on “sex aspects of the profession and on its perfidies” (Chandra, 1973). However, Sumita Chakravarty points out that it is the cultural contribution of these courtesans during the Mughal period that most informs contemporary understanding of the courtesans (Chakravarty, 1993). Essayist, historian and novelist, Abdul Halim Sharar (1860 – 1926) commented on the social standing of these women saying that the women “participated more or less as equals in the gathering of refined and polished people... The houses of Chaudhrayan Haider Jan and some other courtesans of high status were the ‘clubs’ of genteel people” (Sharar, 2000). Thus, these were empowered women, the custodians of cultural traditions, enjoying great prestige among the highest of society.

Like the *Dastur Komwar*, the courtesans found their way into another historical document of the colonial period – that of the documented records of the vast amount of

property that was seized from them by the British Raj for their alleged role in supporting and assisting the revolt of 1857 (Oldenburg, 1990; Rao, 2019). According to Oldenburg, “These women, though patently noncombatants, were penalized for their instigation of and pecuniary assistance to the rebels.” From the list of items seized we can get an idea of the privileged existence that they enjoyed, courtesy their generous patrons. The list included, gold and silver ornaments studded with precious stones, embroidered cashmere wool and brocade shawls, bejeweled caps and shoes, fly whisks with handles made of gold, silver, jade and even amber, silverware, jade goblets, plates, spittoons, hookahs and many others. The value of the property seized from them amounted to nearly four million rupees at that time. With a history such as this, it is but inevitable that the popular imagination of these courtesans and their world would be that of privilege and splendour.

Having greater access to the public sphere – they were indeed the epitome of the modern woman who participated equally as men and were some of the earliest citizens of the region. They owned property and paid their taxes for the same. Indeed, the British were quick to realize that it is this elite cultured section of society that needs to be crippled for their benefit from multiple angles. The 1857 revolt was the first incidence of dissent expressed by the natives against the British rule. While it was difficult to pinpoint of the accusation at the nawabs and princes, it was easy to pin down the courtesans. These courtesans were accused of harbouring the dissenting men and giving them shelter and even funding the revolt in various ways. Just as they were the privileged tax-paying native, it also made them vulnerable to any of the changes in civic laws by the British; and indeed it did not take long for the British to bring down their axe on this section of the population. Oldenburg, who identified them as “cultural institutions” (Oldenburg, 1990), noted that the usurpation of the Kingdom of Awadh in 1856 by the British and the forced exile of the king and many of his courtiers, put an abrupt end to the royal patronage for the courtesans. It did not take long for the British to impose the contagious diseases regulation as well as heavy fines and penalties on the courtesans for their role in the rebellion. It was the first signals of the debasement and thereby transformation that this social institution was to undergo. From being the custodians of culture they were reduced to “singing and dancing girls” by the British, a classification that was used to

identify them in the civic tax ledgers. They came to embody the “exotic” Indian women, as imagined by the colonial authorities.

The irony of their fate

Ira Bhaskar and Richard Allen describes the opening sequence of *Pakeezah* as that through which director Kamal Amrohi distils the idiom of the courtesan genre, eliciting and framing the idiom through which the courtesan will be portrayed. They point out that “while the allure of the courtesan figure is rooted in her beauty, her art and the charge of her sexuality that is available to all men, especially to the highest bidder, she is also conventionally portrayed as *pure* either literally or metaphorically.” Purity is an idea that is inherent of this genre - (*Pakeezah* means pure) – it is quite in contradiction to the materialistic nature of the courtesan’s profession. Yet in film after film the idea of purity is a constant while portraying these women. There is also the desire to strive for purity of things other than sexual (for it is difficult to accept the sexual purity of a courtesan and among all the rights, the right to withhold from sex is the one right that she cannot exercise). Thus, the courtesan strives for the purity of the art form that she practices, which is as pure as the fire. Director, Amrohi seems to hint towards that in the opening scene of *Pakeezah* where Nargis dancing beneath the candlelit chandelier almost seems to rise up from the flames, invoking the idea of purity. Umrao Jaan and Sardari Begum too are seen to strive for an excellence in their art form, Sardari Begum more so. Indeed, the genre is embedded in irony, which is what makes it profoundly melancholic. The *kotha*, which is the sanctuary of the courtesan, eventually comes to embody her tomb. This is what we see in *Pakeezah* where she says that the *kotha* which was once considered her shrine will eventually be her tomb. Thus, when Nargis flees with Shahabuddin, dreaming of a white house atop a hill where her palanquin will carry her in her red wedding ensemble, she is soon seen fleeing that same house in a palanquin, very far away to a world which is the opposite of what she had dreamt – a graveyard.

Songs, lyrics and the woman question

Bombay cinema and its deep association with song and music is not something new. A clique like that of the courtesan films drew a large following through its songs. While Pakeezah is noted for its haunting scores and Umrao Jaan is noted for its lyrics, Sardari Begum and the others are treasure trove of some of the most famous *ghazals* and classical songs of Hindustani classical music. If studied from the point of view of purpose that these songs serve in the film, especially with respect to the lyrics, there is an underlying attempt of the woman question being brought forth. These songs, besides being some of the finest examples of Hindustani music, also speak about the plight of women, in which, surprisingly, there is not much of a difference between a courtesan and woman from a respectable family in this patriarchal society.

JP Dutta's *Umrao Jaan* begins by narrating the story of her childhood against the backdrop of a young girl leaving her father's abode forever. The song

Ab jo kiyo ho data aisa na kijo / Agle janam mohe bitiya na ki jo...

(What you have done, O Lord, please do not repeat again / In the next birth, do not make me a daughter again...)

resonates in the background, and keeps coming back at various points in the film. These lines are based on an original Amir Khusro poem, reflecting upon the plight of women in general, which finds relevance even in the life of the courtesan, privileged and regaling in splendour. It comments on the gender implications of a society that is defined by the patriarchal order. It is that patriarchal society that creates the courtesan and then condemns them. In fact, while Muzzaffar Ali's version played up the Umrao Jaan of Lucknow, speaking in the repertoire and sophistication of the Urdu or Hindusthani that was predominant in Lucknow, JP Dutta brings out the influence of the flavours of the hinterland, which marked the language of the songs – the *thumris*, *dadras*, *kajris*, *hiros*, *chaitis*. It also implies the training that these women underwent in order to be a successful courtesan one day; they have to learn to speak in “Khari boli”, the sophisticated Urdu / Hindusthani of the city. It is worthwhile to note that Khusro's depiction of the plight of women in society so many centuries back, finds currency in

Bhaskar and Allen's observation regarding evidences of the elements of the New Wave Muslim Social through its engagement with the concerns around the probing of gender roles in contemporary society. It is not simply an evolution of the genre; rather, the genre's engagement with women who were independent and powerful makes it only obvious that such questions would be raised. In *Pakeezah*, the muezzin's call for prayer to chant the wedding vows that would bring together Sahibjaan / *Pakeezah* and Salim Ahmed is an indication of the changes that these women were enforcing within the strictures of societal norms.

Conclusion

Both the *Umrao Jaans* can be said to be strongly seated within the paradigm of the courtesan genre, while at the same time planting evidences of the changes that they would undergo. After all, these films, while being produced today, were engaging with a narrative that belonged to an age that had been left far behind. It is but to be expected that they would either be influenced or that there would be a certain change in the depiction itself. After 1981 it took nearly 30 years for the next *Umrao Jaan* to be made, and yet the industry has been continuing to engage with courtesan narratives. In this chapter we have seen that there is a movement in presentation – a change in the mise-en-scene – across the courtesan films that form a part of study for this chapter.

In the two transition films – *Pakeezah* and *Tawaif* – the opposing pull of modernity and an allegiance to tradition and practice is most prominently felt. Both show a happy ending, breaking away from the norm set by *Umrao Jaan* and other films depicting courtesan figures even in the fringes. However, unlike them, *Pakeezah* and *Sultana* have to prove the purity of their love through a similar shot of bloodied feet trembling on the beat of the music on a stark white floor. It almost invokes the idea of Sita proving her purity by walking through fire. They both find acceptance in the world but only at the expense of having to prove the strength and purity of their love by blood. These films tried to tell the other side of the story, the story of the other woman who enticed the richest and most powerful of men in the society. In doing so, they portrayed a slice of society that catered to our nostalgic demand for things from yesterday. Indeed,

these films were an exercise in nostalgia, stoking a desire to look back and live in the past for the duration of the film. This required arrangements of lavish sets that were either created on an idea of the mise-en-scene as imagined by the director and his set designer. It carved out a space in time (the narrative time) within a certain mise-en-scene, which in turn, triggered a certain desire for the past among the audience

The generic division of the Islamicate films and the categorization of these set of films under the common heading of courtesan film is not so easy. If the two *Umrao Jaans* are to be considered as courtesan film, then *Pakeezah*, *Tawaif* and *Sardari Begum* cannot fall strictly within the same category. The idioms that define these films are not as similar to be grouped within the same category. This throws the very categorization of these films into question as the water tight compartments seem to not be able to hold itself together against the opposition, which was but bound to happen. These films only bring to the fore every society's fascination to look at the past. However, it is the lens with which they look that colours their understanding of that society, which, in the case of these films and their filmmakers, influence the way they portray that past. From the perspective of the imagination of Cinema B, it is with the courtesan films that the unravelling of the community begins. Although films like *Pakeezah* and *Umrao Jaan* still portrayed a mise-en-scene that was essentially Islamic in nature, there were element of the reality in the shape of law and representation of the social milieu within that space. The scene in *Pakeezah* when they board the tonga and enter the police station is an iconic moment when the public is breaching the watertight walls of the microcosm of the classical Muslim Socials. With *Tawaif* and *Sardari Begum*, the complete removal of the veil of imagination takes place. Gone are the homogeneous private spaces, replaced by heterogeneous public spaces as we see in the opening scenes of *Tawaif*. Indeed, *Sardari Begum* is the ultimate example of having dissociated itself away from that veiled representation. As already mentioned, courtesan films come under the second movement of that popular imagination that provides a safe transition of Cinema B from moment two to moment three.

Conclusion

Communities and identities are not products of imagination; the process of imagination simply helps in giving an existing community a definite shape at particular conjunctures. (Chatterjee, 2007: 173)

This thesis is a study on the representation of a community through the cinematic imagination of their modernity. This modernity finds expression through a veiled imagination that does not allow the contemporary to breach into its representation. The study dwells on a community's (in this case the Muslim community) attempt at negotiating with their internal dilemma through their resistance towards accepting a representation of the actual discrimination. Hence, they formulate an imagination of the real that is couched in the nostalgia of a glorious past that has very little connection with the contemporary or the real. These arguments are based on a close study of how cinema could be looked upon as a social archive of history as well as memory. One of the main arguments in this thesis is that within this ruptured reality of memory and history, cinema acts as a medium of mass propaganda that finds itself positioned quite precariously at a halfway point between conventional history and a quasi-evidence based history (which may be called memory).

It is this negotiation with history and memory that gave way to classifying popular Bombay cinema into two major categories, one representing a more or less majoritarian outlook (Cinema A), and another representing a minority community (Cinema B). In other words, it can be said that popular cinema is being split along a fault line of how two primary set of films are negotiating with contemporary history and modernity which is finding expression through two types of imagination. Even though one represents a macrocosm which revolves around an all-inclusive social reality and the other is representative of a microcosm of a homogeneous space, it will be difficult to posit the two categories completely in opposition to the other. In that case, if the second category (what has been termed as Cinema B) is not taking an oppositional stand to the first category, which is Cinema A, then we may ask why Cinema B is necessary at all. This can be comprehended through the argument of how history and memory are both

objective and subjective evidences of past events respectively, and are not necessarily in opposition to one another. However, an understanding of the distinction between the two is necessary to know the role that each play while archiving history. Based on this understanding it has been argued that while Cinema B is memory or history that is private and yet public at the same time, it portrays the same society that Cinema A engages with but in a completely different light for the community it represents. In other words, Cinema B is not a constant critique of the Hindu nation. Rather it is endorsing a culture that is imagining itself as sacrosanct with the modern idea of the nation.

The Socials which form the entry point to this study is seen to split into the normative (Hindu) Socials and the Muslim Socials. It is almost as if Cinema B is like taking a closer look at one of the many communities that are represented through Cinema A. This means that this is a phenomenon that is by default a condition for any community that does not belong to the majority. It opens up the possibility for minority communities could forge the imagination of their culture and community in the public imagination. In other words, this is a phenomenon which could have been witnessed through the representation of any other community. Thus, while Cinema A captures how the realities of a modern secular postcolonial nation are being readily accepted by the majority community, Cinema B pulls a veiled wrap over the realities of discrimination and segregation by following the logic of national popular Muslim imagination. It paves the way for a distinction in culture and space through the imagination. Thus when the larger population was embracing the modern reality of the nation state, the Muslim Socials were becoming a reflection of clinging on to a glorious (yet evidently decadent) Mughal or nawabi culture. It was as if the veil acted as a means to an Islamicate resistance to the actual discrimination, which were not finding representation in the cinema. Thus, Cinema B shows us a community that was grappling with the contemporary reality through silence, by refusing to talk about it and thereby not acknowledge it. It was almost like the logic of what hasn't been spoken about has not occurred. Given that the study begins with the 1940s and runs through the rest of the century till the 1990s, the thesis has aligned the veiled imagination of the community along the events that occur down the years, and which reflect upon the way in which the imagination evolves. This means the imagination of the community does not remain sacrosanct, rather evolves. It is basis this logic that the

thesis has shown how the imagination can be split into three separate moments. The splitting of this imagination of a glorious historical past to give way to a concretised imagination show that the veiling has not worked. Thus we have seen two types of imagination of nation and culture. One that represents a majoritarian imagination that matches with the vision of the state. It is also for this reason that Cinema A has many times run the risk of being marked as state endorsed when in fact state does not endorse any form of representation. The second one is a more specific imagination that deals with a specific culture of a communitarian microcosm.

The veil of imagination is not retained for long as cracks begin to appear and the reality starts seeping into the cinematic representation. The artificial sets which once stood for the community space now gave way to realistic representation of the community. It is with this that the unveiling of the community begins. I have used the term “unveiling” to mark this transition or the collapse of the imagination through a logic of ghettoisation. Therefore, it can be said that this thesis has thrown open the idea of a new kind of social which was based on the whole idea of *mis-en-scene*. This justifies the movement to the third phase where we see concrete demands to face the fact of ghettoisation as the veil slowly gets completely removed. The imagination of the community is no more caught within a cultural logic of a nostalgic past. The role of cinema as an archive to recent political history, also form a significant part of this study, which feeds into the logic of the veiled imagination. The nostalgic evocation of past through a recreation of the space, the architecture, the milieu and the associated aesthetics have led to films becoming repositories or archives of such aesthetics and culture. The movement of the classical Muslim Socials to the New Wave Muslim Socials have enabled cinema to occupy a position through which it can capture the way history unfolds through Cinema B.

This study has also touched upon the idea of the *Islamicate*, a term which has found traction within the academic circle (though not so much within the industry). It can be said that the notion of the *Islamicate*, a term which comes to be associated with films representing Muslim culture, was a ploy that was helping to give shape to this cinematic imagination to forge a homogeneous communitarian space that was marked by the

absence or exclusion of non-Muslims. However, there are arguments across both sides of the table regarding the validity of a term like the Islamicate that was simply built upon the preconceived notion of what constitutes the Islamic way of life. This thesis negates Mukul Kesavan's observation that the term 'Islamicate' will cease to exist when Indians will no more make this association between the notions of nawabi with Muslimness (Kesavan 1994). However, to make that dissociation would be to shut out one aspect of Indian history altogether. For while it is true that by nawabi one does not essentially refer to a Muslim past, it is also true that an understanding of the heterogeneous nature of the term as comprising both Hindus and Muslims and referring more to a way of life determined by socio-cultural history than by faith alone, is necessary. In fact, an understanding of this will give a greater clarity to the nature of history that these films are possibly trying to hark back to.

Post script:

Law has played a significant part in this imagination for it has formed the first ruptures through which the first cracks begin which eventually leads to the disintegration of the imagination. Even in a film like *Pakeezah* that is replete with the Islamicate iconography, the film does capture the intervention of law, and hence, of the realistic life as we see the camera capturing the society (comprising non-Muslims) moving into the space of the main characters. In fact, this also brings in the question of purity. The private and homogeneous nature of the representation of a community or culture brings in the notion of a purity of that space. This infiltration of the heterogeneous reality is done through the intervention of law. This study has also shown how the courtesans were one of the earliest tax payers in British India, who owned property and whose records can be found in the administrative ledgers of the time. One of the more contemporary developments of law with respect to this community is the debate surrounding Personal Law and the arguments in favour of or in opposition to bring all communities under the Uniform Civil Code. This could not be envisaged within the present study, but the rupturing of reality that we have seen law bring about has opened the possibility of taking a deeper look at this aspect. It has been glossed over by mentioning films like *Nikaah* (BR Chopra, 1982)

and *Talaqq*(Rajendra Kumar, 1958) as some of the representative films that is deeply embedded within the ethos of Islamic way of life and yet raising questions on the woman's right to determine her fate even within the familial set up. A film like this is just the tip of the ice-berg as they hold massive potential for other films engaging with similar topics that fall within the New Wave Social.

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