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Cinetopia: Leftist Street Theatre and The Musical Production of the

Metropolis in 1950s Bombay Cinema

<u>**Introduction: Singing in the Streets**</u>

The image of Bombay in 1950s Hindi cinema is inextricably tied up with the sound of music and the practice of singing in the streets. One of the earliest instances of this image can be found in Raj Kapoor's *Awara* (*The Vagabond*, 1951), which introduces an iconic figure of 1950s Bombay cinema,[i] Raj/Raju, the Chaplinesque tramp played by Kapoor himself. The tramp-as-hero makes his first appearance in a musical sequence, cavorting through the streets of Bombay as he lip-synchs the film's theme song:

> *Awara hoon, awara hoon*
>
> *Ya gardish mein hoon*
>
> *Asman ka tara hoon*
>
> *Awara hoon….*
>
> *Abad nahin,*
>
> *Barbaad sahi,*
>
> *Gata hoon khushi ke geet magar…*
>
> (I am a vagabond, I am a vagabond
>
> Or a star of the skies, in transit
>
> I am a vagabond…
>
> I am not settled

Yes, I'm ruined,

Yet I sing songs of happiness…)

A smalltime thief, Raju has just been released from his latest stint in prison and is already back to the tricks that presumably landed him in jail; we see him steal a watch from an initially unsuspecting pedestrian and flee from pursuit, first on feet, then on a commandeered bicycle, and finally on a passing truck into which he clambers, only to be unceremoniously ejected by the fisherwomen traveling in the truck. His actions, costume (tattered shoes, rolled-up trousers that are too short for him, a battered hat, and an incongruously formal jacket), body language, and the lyrics of the song establish his identity as an "*awara*," a Hindi/Urdu word that carries connotations of "vagabond," "wastrel," and "loafer." However, Kapoor's "*awara*" is also a self-proclaimed "*asman ka tara*" or a star of the skies, seemingly proud of his marginal status, inclined to soar above the circumstances of his life with songs of happiness ("*khushi ke geet*"), and the primary focus of the camera's and our attention. The song sequence thus manages to reclaim the word "*awara*" from its purely negative valences and invests it with the aura of stardom, signaling the arrival of a new kind of hero in Bombay cinema – the "loafer" or the quasi-proletarian hero representing the urban underclass – and a reorientation of Bombay cinema towards the experience of the urban poor and a new kind of public.

This sequence also marks the emergence of the city street as one of the iconic settings of 1950s Bombay cinema. The street in this sequence is a hybrid space, created through a combination of realistic detail -- as in the panoramic street scenes and later on, in shots of slums and naked children by the roadside – and stylizations of the urban scene. The theatricality of the initial street scene is unmistakable: we see a crowd of urban

"types" hurrying by in syncopation with the melody along a studio-generated street dominated by the facades of shop-fronts, signboards, and an iconic lamppost. The city street is thus abstracted from location and specificity, formalized through a deliberately theatrical set design shaped by a dream world aesthetic, and turned into a space for performing a cheerfully defiant, ostensibly proletarian identity, just as performance turns into a means through which the outsider-hero lays claim to the space of the city.

Awara is one of several well-known Hindi films of the 1950s to feature the streets of Bombay and its urban underclass in prominent roles, and to use musical performance to generate an ostensibly subaltern image of the city. Films such as Raj Kapoor's *Awara* and *Shree 420* (1955), Guru Dutt's *Aar Paar* (1954), Raj Khosla's *C.I.D.* (1956, produced by Guru Dutt), and the crime films produced by Nav Ketan Studios such as *Taxi Driver* (Chetan Anand, 1954), *Pocket Maar* (H.S. Rawail, 1956), and *Kala Bazaar* (Vijay Anand, 1960) move out into the streets of Bombay thematically, and, at times, quite literally as well. Quite a few sequences in some of these films (e.g., *Taxi Driver* or *C.I.D.*) are shot partly or entirely on location, which, as Moinak Biswas and Ranjani Mazumdar have noted, was a fairly novel move for Bombay cinema of this period.[ii]

However, as the "*Awara Hoon*" sequence indicates, this urban turn in Bombay cinema does not necessarily involve a steadfast commitment to location shooting and a stylistic move into the register of social realism that we might associate with tales of urban deprivation or working-class life. In fact, the musical sequence was one of the principal modes in which these films delivered the city of Bombay to the public imagination as an emblematic space of India's postcolonial modernity, embodying a particular secular vision of India, as well as the hopes and the frustrations reared by

independence and uneven development. Music, set design, and the aesthetic of live performance were used to create not an "authentic" representation of real-life locales but rather, to evoke the social realities and the material cityscape of Bombay as well as utopian hopes for the future, and to transmute these into an iconic urban space oscillating between exuberance and disenchantment, between the dream of a just and equitable society and the reality of social injustice and inequality. This space relies for its legibility and evocative power on an "unreality effect" and can perhaps be best understood as a "cinetopia." In using the word "cinetopia" to refer to this cinematic space, I'm drawing on the literal sense of "utopia," which means "no place" or a place that exists nowhere, and also on an understanding of Foucault's notion of "heterotopia" as a space that is simultaneously mythic and real (unlike utopia, which is an entirely imagined space), a composite space that brings together several sites normally deemed incompatible (and that could include elements of both utopia and dystopia) -- a space that is in conversation with, but also distinct from, real spaces.[iii] The word "cinetopia" also alludes to the utopian impulse of the leftist street theater movement of the 1940s (organized under the banner of the Indian People's Theatre Association or the IPTA), an impulse that I argue played an important, if indirect role, in the musical production of the metropolis in 1950s Bombay cinema. In this essay, I focus on the neglected role of the IPTA legacy in the musical re-imagination of the city street as a site of social critique and utopian fantasy, and show how this cinematic space emerged out of an encounter between cinema and the postcolonial city on the one hand, and between Bombay cinema and the Indian cultural left on the other.

Shadow Cities

The emergence of the city as a dominant cinematic motif in the first decade after independence coincided with the unprecedented urban growth of the 1940s and the 1950s, which resulted in an accelerated, and often violent, restructuring of urban space and everyday experience. Between 1941 and 1951, the population of Indian cities grew by 40% -- due mainly to the war, the demands of a state-sponsored program of industrialization, the effects of famine, and the Partition of India. Of the estimated 7.3 million refugees who crossed over to India by 1951, more than half settled in urban areas.[iv] In Bombay, the influx of post-independence refugees created a housing shortage not only among the poor but also among the middle classes: "A pre-war survey had reported Bombay to have 85 slums spread over 330 acres. By 1956-57, the number of slums had risen to 144, with a total acreage of 877 and a population of 415,875."[v]

The flow of political refugees and economic migrants into the cities transformed their socio-economic geography. Refugee encampments and shantytowns mushroomed in vacant lots, along roads and railroad tracks, changing not only the urban landscape but the lived experience of its inhabitants as well. The postcolonial phase of Indian urban history has been dominated by "the gradual, unconscious, and unintended emergence of a society and city of the poor"– the "unintended city," in architect and social activist Jai Sen's influential formulation.[vi] While this shadow city was, to a large extent, the unintended result of modernist planning and development programs, the cheap labor and services provided by its inhabitants soon became indispensable to what Sen calls "the urban city" – the city of the middle-class and the wealthy. It is hardly surprising, then, that little attempt was made "to accept the poor and the disadvantaged as part of the urban

development process – to accept them as equal and integral citizens" or "to develop ways through which their disadvantage might be reduced."[vii] The unintended city, Sen argues, unsettles the traditional urban-rural dichotomy as the residents of this city "are the same people as the poor in villages, with the same backgrounds and a very similar present existence of disadvantage and exploitation, " and, in the case of the migrant laborers, are often driven to the city by economic need rather than by any desire to live there permanently; "…even if they do [want to live there permanently], they cannot, because they are rejected and kept marginal by the urban city."[viii]

In his introduction to *The Secret Politics of Our Desires*, Ashis Nandy situates Indian popular cinema – or more specifically, Bombay cinema – in the unintended city or the urban slum by describing this cinema as an expression of the "slum's point of view" of Indian politics, society, and the world.[ix] The urban slum is his chosen metaphor for Bombay cinema because he sees both as modes of negotiating survival in the city and as "low" forms of the modern: "The popular film *is* low brow, modernizing India in all its complexity, sophistry, naiveté, and vulgarity. Studying popular film is studying Indian modernity at its rawest, its crudities laid bare by the fate of traditions in contemporary life and arts."[x] While Nandy rightly identifies Bombay cinema as a key site of Indian modernity and an alternative public sphere for a huge urban underclass, his view of popular cinema is limited by a lack of historical depth and a reliance on a clichéd association between Indian cinema and the masses (dating back to the 1920s), even as he attempts to reconfigure the link by valorizing, rather than lamenting, it. He runs the risks of projecting an image of Bombay cinema as an unchanging monolith that sprang, fully formed, from the anxieties and aspirations of the disenfranchised masses; of downplaying

its multiple ties to other cultural formations, both "high" and "low;" of erasing a long history of elite engagement with popular cinema; and of reinforcing a dehistoricized critical vocabulary in which categories such as "popular Indian cinema," "Bombay cinema," or "the song-and-dance sequence" operate as unchanging structural features rather than as contingent and syncretic historical formations. While I draw on Nandy's evocative metaphor in arguing that Bombay cinema played a central role in exploring the unintended city of dislocated people – a city that, incidentally, provided it with a large segment of its audience -- during what I call "the long 1950s" (stretching from the climactic phase of the decolonization movement in the mid-1940s to the end of the Nehruvian era in 1963), I highlight the Indian left cultural movement's shaping influence on this role (and on the cinematic staging of the city through musical sequences), thereby contributing to an ongoing project of historicizing Bombay cinema and its contexts.

IPTA and the Remaking of Bombay Cinema

The Bombay film industry underwent a radical transformation in the late 1940s and the 1950s; this was a transitional period not only in terms of politics but also of film history. By the end of World War II, the studio system that had consolidated itself in the 1930s had broken down, independent producers had entered the fray, and the search was on for a new, marketable formula with a nation-wide mass appeal. Ironically enough (ironic given subsequent leftist denunciations of Bollywood as capitalist, exploitative, and reactionary), this new formula was partly forged by a group of left-wing artists and intellectuals associated with the vibrant left cultural movement that had emerged in the 1930s-1940s under the banners of the PWA (Progressive Writers' Association), and its

mass-based sister organization, the IPTA (Indian Peoples' Theatre Association), and dominated debates on literature, the arts, and social change in India between the 1930s and the 1950s.

The *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema* describes the IPTA movement of the 1940s-50s as "the only instance of a cultural avant-garde in contemporary Indian history," claiming that, "for a brief period following World War II and the early years of independence, virtually the entire cultural intelligentsia was associated with or influenced by IPTA (or PWA initiatives)."[xi] The IPTA was formally established in Bombay in 1943 by a group of progressive writers, artists, and theatre workers who recognized the potential of popular theatre as an effective weapon in the fight for national liberation from British imperialism, in the international battle against fascism, and in the struggles of peasants and workers against hegemonic structures of oppression, both colonial and internal. The primary aim of the IPTA, as identified in the "All Indian People's Theatre Conference Draft Resolution," was to mobilize "a people's theatre movement throughout the whole of India as the means of revitalizing the stage and the traditional arts and making them at once the expression and organizer of our people's struggle for freedom, cultural progress, and economic justice."[xii] While it was organized under the aegis of the then-undivided Communist Party of India (CPI), its membership and influence was much wider than a singular emphasis on the CPI's role would suggest. As Malini Bhattacharya has argued, the IPTA movement was not the result of a party directive but emerged out of the activities of several local, left-leaning cultural groups (e.g., the Youth Cultural Institute in Calcutta) that used performance to mobilize political opinion and support.

Moreover, many of the IPTA activists were either unaffiliated with the party or worked in a kind of contentious solidarity with its aims.[xiii]

The IPTA movement consolidated itself in the context of the Bengal famine of 1943 (a product of administrative failure and wartime profiteering which led to the death of some two million people from starvation[xiv]) and the CPI-led peasant and workers' movements in Bengal, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh. By 1945, IPTA had expanded into a nation-wide movement, particularly active in the major urban centers of Bombay and Calcutta and in the countryside in Bengal, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh, as well as in Punjab, Assam, and Orissa. Squads of cultural activists would go out to perform for mass audiences in villages, towns, mill areas, and working-class districts, using agitprop theatre, songs of resistance, skits, puppetry, pantomime, and posters, and drawing on regionally specific, popular traditions of dramatic performance, such as *burrakatha* of Andhra Pradesh, *tamasha* of Maharashtra, and the *jatra* of Bengal, to disseminate their political views. These performances can be seen as aesthetic and political responses to a wide range of contemporary developments, such as the Bengal Famine of 1943, the peasant movements in Telengana (Andra Pradesh) and Tebhaga (Bengal), the Second World War, the hanging of young revolutionaries in Kayyur in Kerala, the trauma of communal violence, the Partition of India and the mass displacement caused by it, and a growing sense of disenchantment with the Nehruvian state. The initial, pre-independence phase of the IPTA movement is still widely remembered as a heady moment of cultural ferment, radical idealism, and political fervor. In one former IPTA activist's words, "something called hope was just around the corner"[xv]: the hope of using art as a political

weapon, a consciousness-raising tool, and a means of bridging the gap between middle-class radicals and the "people."

Before it disintegrated in the 1950s, the IPTA movement brought the suffering subaltern – more specifically, the suffering peasant – center-stage both as subject and spectator. While the eruption of the village into urban consciousness (in the form of the starving millions who poured into the cities and towns during the famine of 1943, and the peasant rebels of the 1940s) sparked off the IPTA movement, it was sustained and enriched by the close interactions between the activists/performers and the mass audiences for whom they performed. As Nandi Bhatia and other scholars have pointed out, the IPTA inaugurated a traveling theatre that drew on traditional popular modes of performance (though without always problematizing the ethical or aesthetic dimensions of appropriating "the folk"), moving political theatre into a space within the reach of "the people," and mingling contemporary or topical themes and the codes of high naturalism and realism with stylized performance elements drawn from folk traditions.[xvi]

While the IPTA movement is widely credited with having changed the structure and conception of theatre in India,[xvii] its impact on popular cinema has received little critical attention, and there is, as yet, no systematic book-length study of the multiple connections between the IPTA and the Bombay film world.[xviii] The IPTA was particularly strong in Bombay and its performances attracted many members of the Bombay film industry, both as participants and as viewers.[xix] Moreover, in the 1940s and the 1950s, several of the figures associated with or influenced by the PWA and the IPTA movement turned towards the Bombay film industry, partly in order to make a living -- but also in the hope of both reaching and creating a mass audience through the medium of

cinema. This group included K.A. Abbas, Bimal Roy, Chetan Anand, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Zia Sarhady, Sadat Hassan Manto, Ismat Chughtai, Shaheed Latif, Sombhu Mitra, and Krishan Chander among the better-known directors and scriptwriters; Balraj Sahni, Dev Anand, Zohra Segal, and A.K. Hangal among the actors; Kaifi Azmi, Anil Biswas, Salil Chowdhury, Shailendra, and Sahir Ludhianvi among the lyricists and composers.[xx] I argue that in their roles as directors, actors, scriptwriters, lyricists, and composers, they drew on the IPTA experiment to re-orient Bombay cinema towards the mass subject and the mass public, shift its thematic focus to the experience of modernity in the "unintended city," and fashion a mass cultural critique of the postcolonial nation-state's failure to extend the rights of social citizenship to the vast majority of Indians.

While the more popular aspects of this enterprise would eventually congeal into generic conventions, in the 1950s Bombay cinema was still an emergent formation, a site of unprecedented transactions between "high culture" and "low culture"[xxi] and of widespread experimentation. These experimental efforts led to trend-setting box-office hits, such as Raj Kapoor's *Awara* (*The Tramp*/*The Vagabond*, 1951) and *Shri 420* (*The Cheat*, 1955), which proved to be immensely popular not only in India but in the Middle East, in China, and in the former Soviet Union, and the crime thrillers starring Dev Anand (mostly produced by Navketan Films); films which fared less well at the box-office at the time but went on to become cult classics, such as Bimal Roy's *Do Bigha Zameen* (*Two Acres of Land*, 1953), Guru Dutt's *Pyaasa* (*Thirst*, 1957) and Sombhu Mitra's *Jagte Raho* (1956); and films such as Zia Sarhady's *Humlog* (*All of Us*, 1951) and *Footpath* (1953), Amar Kumar's *Garam Coat* (*Warm Coat*, 1955), and Ramesh Saigal's *Phir Subah Hogi* (*Dawn Will Come Again*, 1958), all of which have remained

fairly obscure but are nonetheless crucial in understanding the process of experimentation going on in Bombay at the time and the cinematic legacy of the IPTA movement. I do not, of course, mean to suggest that all of these films were shaped by an explicitly leftist vision of society and radical change. More often than not, these films were animated by left-liberal ideas and a humanistic concern for the downtrodden, and by what I would describe as a populist political imaginary, oriented around an idealized and amorphous "notion of the *sovereign people* as an actor in an antagonistic relation with the established order."[xxii] However, the thematic and aesthetic imprint of the IPTA movement can be seen not only in the ways in which these films imagine political space somewhat simplistically in terms of a conflict between the powerless and the powerful, but also in the use of song and dance to explore the plight of the urban poor (a category that included slum-dwellers and displaced peasants, as well as the downwardly mobile middle classes), and to provide a critical perspective on the shortcomings of the Nehruvian[xxiii] nation-state's project of modernity even while endorsing aspects of it.[xxiv]

The cinematic legacy of the IPTA is usually discussed (if at all) in terms of an impulse towards social realism and often in terms of failure – the failure to inject a dose of social realism into Bombay cinema and the inevitable dilution of radicalism in the cauldron of mass culture. However, a focus on the failure of the social realist agenda makes us lose sight of the fact that social realism was one of the many strands of the IPTA movement in the 1940s; it also prevents us from exploring the ways in which the IPTA experience and aesthetic actually left their mark on Bombay cinema. As several scholarly & eyewitness accounts indicate, songs, dances, tableaux, and shadow-plays – all of which relied on stylization and a fusion of entertainment and edification – as well

as non-naturalistic modes of staging and acting formed an integral part of leftist street theater performances right from the beginning. For instance, the "Voice of Bengal" squad that toured India in 1944 used a mixture of plays, pantomime, choral songs, solo musical numbers, and dance drama to bring attention to the plight of the victims of the man-made famine in Bengal. Protest songs, short skits, and shadow-plays were routinely performed as part of political meetings and proved to be quite popular. The formation of the Central Cultural Squad of the IPTA in 1945 was partly prompted by a recognition of the popular appeal and potential political power of such performances; the Central Cultural Squad briefly brought together a number of talented musicians, dancers, choreographers, and performers from different parts of India (e.g., the musicians Ravi Shankar, the dancer/choreographer Shanti Bardhan, the composer Salil Chowdhury, among others) who collaborated to produce experimental ballets on political issues, such as *Spirit of India* (1945) and *India Immortal* (1946).[xxv]

Subsequent efforts to translate the IPTA experience and aesthetic into the medium of popular and commercial cinema, I argue, drew extensively on such non-realist modes of performance. It involved an attempt to create a cinematic idiom that would both draw on, and speak to, the experiences of "the people," an idiom that would be meaningful without being overtly didactic, and that could, to use Richard Dyer's formulation, combine entertainment with social critique and utopian vision (or more specifically, a sense of "what utopia might feel like").[xxvi] This actually contributed significantly to a reworking of the framework of commercial Hindi cinema *from within*, and to the creation of a cinema characterized by a populist approach to the experiences of the urban poor; broad strokes and emotive flourishes; an accessible lyricism; a combination of naturalistic

acting styles, expressionist modes of performance, and agitprop techniques borrowed from leftist street theatre; and, most importantly for the purposes of this essay, the extensive use of songs and dances as narrative devices, means of emotional expression, vehicles of social critique, and tools of urban exploration.

The Musical Mapping of the City

The song-and-dance number had, of course, been a staple of popular Indian cinema ever since the beginning of the sound era, but it underwent a radical makeover in the 1950s in the hands of new lyricists, composers, choreographers, and directors, many of whom had either been associated with, or influenced by, the IPTA movement. Well-known poets like Sahir Ludhianvi, Majrooh Sultanpuri, Shailendra and Kaifi Azmi worked as lyricists in the Bombay film industry, writing witty, ironic, complex, yet accessible lyrics of love, despair, protest, solidarity, and, at times, radical critique.[xxvii] Gifted composers like Salil Chowdhury, Hemant Kumar, and Anil Biswas set these lyrics to fresh, catchy, hummable tunes, creating songs that would go on to have a shimmering after-life outside the movie-theatres. Directors like Guru Dutt and Raj Kapoor -- both of whom were influenced by, and collaborated with, former IPTA activists (e.g., the lyricists Majrooh Sultanpuri and Sahir Ludhianvi in Guru Dutt's case, and the scriptwriter-director K.A. Abbas and the lyricist Shailendra in Raj Kapoor's case) – picturized the songs with verve and originality, situating the numbers not in a realm of pure fantasy but within the everyday urban space inhabited by the characters but at the same time, lifting the quotidian into an abstract, often lyrical dimension.

The choreography of the everyday in many of these musical sequences bore the imprint of the experiments with Indian dance-forms conducted by Shanti Bardhan and his IPTA associates between 1944 and 1946, and even earlier, by the dancer-choreographer Uday Shankar and his colleagues and students at the short-lived Uday Shankar India Culture Centre (USICC), an alternative performing arts academy in Almora (in north India), set up in 1938. As Prarthana Purkayastha notes in her study of political dance practice in twentieth-century India, Shankar's Almora Centre offered an innovative training programme in the performing arts that not only combined techniques drawn from classical Indian dance forms with elements of modern western dance and theatre pedagogy (e.g., the approaches of the German dancer Kurt Jooss and the Russian theatre director Michael Chekov), but also emphasized improvisation, "underlining the importance of a conscious relationship between the gestures of everyday life and dance movements."[xxviii] The goal of this training system, as well as of Shankar's own choreographic works in the 1940s (e.g., *Labour and Machinery*, which focused on the plight of mill workers and the alienation of labor in industrial society, and the dance sequences in the 1948 film *Kalpana*) was to explore contemporary socio-political issues and tell stories "through dance in a language that was non-codified, improvisatory, and open-ended."[xxix] While the Almora Centre closed in 1944, its influence reached Hindi cinema through the work of trainees who found employment in the Bombay film industry (e.g., Guru Dutt, who had been a scholarship student at Almora and gained a foothold in the industry first as a choreographer), and through the prism of IPTA performances. Shanti Bardhan, the choreographer-director of the IPTA Central Cultural Squad from 1944 to 1946, and several other members of the Squad had been part of Uday Shankar's

performing troupe in the early 1940s, and brought their training to bear on the IPTA dance-dramas, using an eclectic blend of regional dance forms, folk performance traditions, and agitprop techniques to interpret contemporary social and political realities (*Bhookha Hai Bangal*, *Spirit of India*) and nationalist narratives of Indian history (*India Immortal*).[xxx] Not only were members of the Bombay film world – even those formally unaffiliated with the IPTA (such as Raj Kapoor and Guru Dutt) -- exposed to these performances but some of the IPTA artist-activists (e.g., Zohra Segal, Narendra Sharma, Sachin Shankar, and Prem Dhawan) went on to choreograph for Hindi films as well. In her capacity as the dance-director of Prithvi Theatres (established by Raj Kapoor's father, Prithviraj Kapoor), Segal, who had taught dance at Almora and joined Prithvi in 1945, also trained a number of actors and dancer-choreographers who migrated from the theatre to cinema, including Satya Narayan, the future dance-director of Raj Kapoor's *Shree 420*.[xxxi]

Bombay cinema's encounter with the IPTA aesthetic thus involved an engagement with modernist Indian choreography and was mediated through a complex network of performances, interactions, and influences that remains largely unmapped. Rather than trying to trace the multiple axes of this encounter (a project more suited to a book), my article, which is exploratory in scope, focuses on one of its major outcomes: the emergence of the street as a prominent site in the cinematic atlas of the city. Musical sequences in films such as *Awara*, *Shri 420*, *Aar Paar*, *Mr and Mrs. 55*, *C.I.D.*, *Taxi Driver*, and *Kala Bazar* transform the city street into a site of wry social critique as well as into a luminous space of romance, community, utopian hope, serendipitous encounters, vibrant performance, and cheerfully defiant proletarian self-definition. An exaggerated

studio aesthetic remains central even as the films ostensibly move into real-life locations, with the street mostly being staged in the studio and the set as artifice calling attention to itself and distilling the city into instantly recognizable urban icons, and easily navigable moral maps (e.g., the contrast in *Shree 420* between the luxurious yet shadowy interiors of the haunts of the rich, and the evenly-lit streets identified as the space of the people). Musical sequences played a key role in mapping the metropolis along melodramatic lines, with a populist emphasis on the suffering and the spirit of the poor and the moral corruption of the rich. Paradoxically, these sequences often transformed the shadow city of the poor into a space of performance where experiences and predicaments that would otherwise be considered simply appalling, such as the plight of homelessness, were simultaneously dramatized and transcended through song and dance.[xxxii]

Take, for instance, the sequence featuring the song "*Teri Dhoom*" in *Kala Bazaar* (*The Black Market*, Vijay Anand), a 1960 film produced by Navketan Films. *Kala Bazaar* is fairly typical of the crime films produced by this studio, which used the trope of crime in the city and the figure of the proletarian hero -- a cab-driver, a pickpocket, or, as in this case, a ticket-scalper -- to comment on social inequality and exclusion. In this sequence we see the ticket-scalper, played by a debonair Dev Anand, and his clownish sidekick literally dancing their way home after a hard day's work through dark streets full of homeless people sleeping on the pavement. They are singing a cynical ode to the power of money, which evokes a sinister world ruled by hard cash and brute economic logic. The lyrics are tinged with black humor and combine with the huddled figures of the pavement dwellers and the noir conventions of chiaroscuro lighting used in this sequence to produce a dystopic vision of the city that offers a powerful, if implicit, critique of the

nation-state's skewed project of modernity. But at the same time, the exuberant lilt of the music, the animated performances of the two actors, and the spectacular high-angle shots almost seem to transform this rather grim and dark space into a giant playground for these two people, introducing an unexpectedly ludic element into an otherwise bleak scenario.

A similar ironic engagement with the dark city and the problem of homelessness can be found in a pivotal musical sequence sequence of *Phir Subah Hogi* (1958), featuring Raj Kapoor as Ramu, a penniless law student who is eventually reduced to sleeping on the pavement. In this sequence, we see him wandering through the streets of Bombay at night, pausing to address communities of the homeless as he sings a song written by the famous Urdu poet and lyricist, Sahir Ludhianvi. The song mocks the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's vision of India's place in an international community through a witty parody of a well-known Urdu poem, "*Tarana-e-Milli*" ("Anthem of the Community," by the poet-philosopher Muhammad Iqbal), which envisions the nation of Islam in transnational terms. It deflates the grandiose cosmopolitanism of Iqbal's and Nehru's rhetoric through the trope of homelessness and plays on the contrast between the lofty idea of being at home in the world and the predicament of being literally homeless:

> *Chino Arab hamara*
>
> *Hindustan hamara*
>
> *Rehne ko ghar nahin hai*
>
> *Sara jahan hamara…*
>
> (China and Arabia are ours
>
> Hindustan is ours
>
> No home to call our own

The whole world is ours…)

As in the sequence from *Kala Baazar*, there is an odd but captivating disjuncture between the relatively upbeat tune, the ironic edge of the lyrics, and the stylized tableuax of poverty and homelessness – the emaciated bodies of a homeless family eating their meager dinner, the huddled masses asleep on the pavement, the gaunt faces of despair emerging out of the shadows -- that accompany the song and punctuate Ramu's nocturnal wanderings.

As a visually striking mode of articulating a populist critique of the democratic claims of the nation-state, homelessness becomes a central trope in Bombay cinema of the 1950s. The streets of Bombay, however, do not merely constitute a space of alienation and poverty in these films but are often re-imagined as a place where spontaneous affective ties can be formed and where community can be (re)created on the basis of a collective experience of displacement and deprivation, rather than religion or kinship (the films studiously avoid drawing attention to any kind of difference other than that of class) – and, of course, through musical performance. *Shree 420*, one of the iconic Bombay films of the 1950s (which also proved to be extremely popular not just in India but also in the erstwhile Soviet Union, China, and the Middle East), provides a vivid example of how the street is thus reconfigured as a site of performance, spectacle, and community. The film features actor-director Raj Kapoor in his signature role as Raj/Raju, a Chaplinesque figure who sets out, at the beginning of the film, to seek his fortune in the distant city of Bombay, hoping that his college degree, certificate for honesty, and zeal to work will help him find gainful employment there. Upon his arrival in the city, he is buffeted by a series of minor misfortunes and confronted by the brutal realities of life in a

city driven by greed, corruption, selfishness, and class conflicts. A cynical beggar gives him a crash course in the ways of an indifferent city: *"Yeh Bambai hai Bambai! Yahaan imaraten bane hai i(n)ton ke aur dil paththar ke!"* ("This is Bombay! Here buildings are made of bricks and hearts of stone!"). Soon, however, he finds a temporary refuge in the company of a group of pavement dwellers living in the shadow of a huge mansion belonging to a corrupt industrialist (predictably, the villain of the piece). After some prodding by the matriarch of the homeless community, the pavement-dwellers welcome Raj into their "space," give him a cup of hot tea, and ask him to tell them about his life.

Predictably, a musical sequence follows, in which Raj tells them the story of his life through the song, *"Dil ka haal sune dilwala"* ("Oh warmhearted people, listen to my story"), linking his tragic-comic tale of woe it to their experiences, and using direct address and a combination of song, dance, humor, and mime to draw the members of both his diegetic audience and his actual audience into the charmed circle of performance. The camera divides its attention between Raj and his audience, with medium shots and close-ups of Raj alternating with glimpses of the pavement-dwellers clustered around him, mesmerized by his performance. We see them swaying to the beat of the music, nodding sympathetically at his account of hardships, and laughing in unison at his jokes; eventually, some of them join him as he dances and what began as a solo performance turns into a collective celebration, captured in striking overhead shots towards the end of the sequence. We can see the IPTA aesthetic and vision at work not only in the explicit theatricality of this sequence – the frontal address to the camera, the tableaux effect of some of the shots of Raj and his audience, the visual and aural evocation of "the folk," the combination of didacticism, sentiment, comic relief, and foot-

tapping rhythms – but also in the way in which it connects performance with shared experiences of deprivation and social injustice on the one hand and with the creation of collective affect and a shared worldview on the other. This sequence evokes memories of street theatre performances, with the police van that arrives towards the end serving as a concrete reminder of the repressive forces of the state apparatus that such performances often encountered in colonial India. More crucially, through its depiction of Raj's rapport and interactions with his entranced audience, it enacts the fantasy of subaltern spectatorship that lay at the heart of the IPTA movement: the hope of using performance to speak to an audience of the oppressed and to "move" them towards a political understanding of their lives and times, and an identification with a common cause.

The inhabitants of the shadow city thus come out of the shadows in such sequences, gaining visibility as performers, onlookers, and choric commentators – and, at times, as facilitators of romance. The possibility of romance is almost always present in the cinematic street, along with passers-by ready to pitch in to provide mood music or a helpful musical push to an uncertain pair, as in *Aar Paar* (*This Way or That*, 1954, Guru Dutt) or *C.I.D.* (1956, Raj Khosla).[xxxiii] Guru Dutt, the director of *Aar Paar* who also exerted considerable creative influence on *C.I.D.*, drew on his training as a dancer and a choreographer (at Almora) to pioneer what at would become a trend in song-picturization when it came to romantic sequences set in the city: a blurring of the lines between everyday space and the space of fantasy, and the use of marginalized characters working in the informal sectors of the urban economy, such as street urchins, female laborers, street vendors and musicians, and petty criminals, as active participants and choric commentators. While Raj Kapoor had introduced the IPTA-style chorus as the voice of

protest in *Awara*, Guru Dutt's innovations can be seen as extending the chorus into the space of everyday life and romantic encounters in the city.[xxxiv]

Cinetopia: "Yeh hai Bombay, meri jaan!"

The city street is reconfigured as a site of romance and community, even as it is explored from the assumed perspective of the marginalized. A musical sequence from the 1956 crime film *C.I.D.* captures the contemporary discourse of cinematic urbanism in all its complexity. Shot on location in the streets of Bombay, it features a minor character – a happy-go-lucky pickpocket played by the comedian Johnny Walker – along with an ensemble of passers-by. Having just been released from police custody, the pickpocket bumps into a policeman right outside the police station and then quite abruptly embarks on a song and a seemingly aimless stroll along Bombay's oceanfront drives:

> *Ai dil hai mushkil jeena yahan*
>
> *Zara hatke zara banchke yeh hai Bombay meri jaan.*
>
> *Kahin building kahin tramen kahin motor kahin mill*
>
> *Milta hai yahan sab kuch ek milta nahi dil*
>
> *Insanka hai kahin naam o nishan*
>
> *Zara hatke zara banchke yeh hai Bombay meri jaan.[xxxv]*
>
> (My love, it's difficult to survive here.
>
> Twist and turn, stay on your guard, this is Bombay, my love.
>
> Buildings, trams, cars, and mills,
>
> You can find everything here except for a human heart.
>
> There is no sign of humanity here,

So twist and turn, stay on your guard, this is Bombay, my love)

The song goes on to advise the imagined audience of the various perils of city life, providing a crypto-Marxist commentary (as Sudipta Kaviraj has pointed out in his analysis of the lyrics), albeit in eminently accessible language, on modernity/the metropolis as a space of alienation, exploitation, and dehumanization, and urges them to be ever vigilant as this is no ordinary city.[xxxvi] The refrain of the song emphasizes Bombay's status as the paradigmatic site of metropolitan modernity while the verses catalogue in acerbic detail the various dangers, temptations, and heartbreaks that await the naïve and the unsuspecting around every street corner in this heartless and conniving city:

Kahin satta kahin patta kahin chori kahin race

Kahin daka kahin phanka kahin thokar kahin thes

Bekaronka hai kayi naam yahan

Ai dil hai mushkil jeena yahan

Zara hatke zara banchke yeh hai Bombay meri jaan

Begharko awara yahan kahte hans hans

Khud kate gale sabko kahe isko business

Ik chiz ke hai kayi naam yahan

Ai dil hai mushkil hai jeena yahan

Zara hatke zara banchke yeh hai Bombay meri jaan.

[Here you see gambling, there you see stealing,

    and there the race course.

Burglary, cheating, disappointments, and insults abound.

Here the unemployed have many names.

It's difficult to survive here, my love,

So twist and turn, stay on your guard, this is Bombay, my love.

People here mock the homeless, call them tramps,

They themselves slash people's throats but that's called "business."

Here there are so many names for a single thing!

It's difficult to survive here, my love.

So twist and turn, stay on your guard, this is Bombay, my love.]

On one level, the urban space mapped out by the song – a space crisscrossed by webs of crime, deceit, and exploitation – resembles a treacherous concrete jungle where nothing is as it seems and life is reduced to a constant struggle for survival. However, the upbeat tempo of the song, its lively tune and jaunty refrain, and the sunny, vibrant city streets through which it flows, evoke a mood of joyous enjoyment and a sense of the excitement of metropolitan life, providing an ironic counterpoint to the dark vision of the city offered by the lyrics. And finally, in a surprising move, a working-class woman whom the pickpocket encounters in the street joins in the song, subverting the critique offered by the male voice with a subtle variation of the refrain and a brief but emphatic counter-vision of the city as a place of freedom and opportunity:

Bura duniya woh hai kehta aisa bhola tu na ban

Jo hai karta woh hai bharta hai yahan ka yeh chalan.

Tadbeer nahin chalne ki yahan

Yeh hai Bombay, yeh hai Bombay, yeh hai Bombay meri jaan

Ai dil hai aasan jeena yahan

Suno mister, suno bandhu, yeh hai Bombay meri jaan.

[Don't believe everything you hear, you simpleton.

The only rule/truth here is that you have to take the initiative to win.

Fate does not determine lives here.

My love, it is easy to survive/live here,

Listen to me, pal, this is Bombay, my love.]

Instead of confirming the pessimistic refrain – "*ai dil hai mushkil jeena yahan*" ("it is difficult to survive here, my love") -- the woman unexpectedly replaces "*mushkil*" (difficult) with "*aasan*" (easy, doable), asserting that one can survive with ease in the city if only one learns the rules of the game and has the courage to avail of the opportunity that the city offers – the chance to take one's fate into one's own hands.

The dialogic quality of this sequence enables it to combine a streetwise, affectionate tribute to the city's potential with a cautionary critique of its evils, and to evoke the complex social geography of the city as cinetopia, characterized by a blend of contrapuntal images and antithetical spaces (of alienation and possibility, of actuality and make-believe). It is this fusion of contradictory elements that aligns this cinematic elsewhere with the conceptual domain of Foucault's heterotopia: a virtual space that temporarily disrupts the continuities and ostensible normalcy of everyday space and time by bringing together several seemingly incompatible spaces, yet bears a precise relation to a real socio-spatial order, both refracting and contesting it by simultaneously staging, and providing a fleeting imaginary resolution to, some of its defining contradictions. The musical sequences discussed in this essay project a heterotopic vision of the city, neither

wholly realistic nor entirely divorced from reality, oscillating between utopian yearnings and dystopian anxieties, and marked at once by stylized evocations of socio-economic inequality and deprivation, and compensatory fantasies of transformation and plenitude.

Arguably, this vision of the city is, to a large extent, a projection of elite fantasies of the shadow city, subaltern spectatorship, and national integration, as well as of an elite fascination with cosmopolitan Bombay. However, it can also be seen as a cinematic extension of the IPTA legacy of radical street performance -- if we understand the term "radical street performance" to mean acts that create "visions of what society might be, and arguments against what it is," while "inviting the participation of all who pass."[xxxvii] Like many other musical sequences of the time, the *Yeh hai Bombay meri jaan* number manages, if only in passing, to dissolve the tension, or even the distinction, between entertainment, utopia, and social critique by fusing the everyday with the utopian through the logic of performance. In these sequences, the dystopic image of the city merge with brighter, more enticing visions of urban opportunity, freedom, and excitement to create a composite image of the metropolis as at once a space of enchantment and exploitation, just as the IPTA legacy of "people's theatre" blended with the commercial imperatives of entertainment to produce musical sequences that transformed the city of Bombay into a magical space of possibility and becoming even while making visible its fault-lines of class and social injustice.

[i] I will be using the term "Bombay cinema" to refer to the products of the Hindi language film industry based in the city of Bombay.

[ii] See Moinak Biswas, *Historical Modes of Realism* (Ph.D. diss., Monash University, 2003) and Ranjani Mazumdar, "Cosmopolitan Dreams," *Seminar* 598 (June 2009).

[iii] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16 (Spring 1986), 22-27. I have also consulted the annotated translation provided by Lieven De Cauter and Michiel Dehaene in *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*, ed. Dehaene & De Cauter (London & New York: Routledge, 2008), 13-29. My use of the term "cinetopia" is, in some respects, similar to the musicologist Josh Kun's concept of "audiotopia," also inspired by Foucault's essay (see Kun's *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America*, University of California Press, 2005). However, while Kun sees audiotopias as "sonic spaces of effective utopian longings where several sites normally deemed incompatible are brought together" (23), I view "cinetopia" not simply as a utopian space or even as an approximation of utopia but as a complex cinematic space that incorporates both utopian and dystopian elements, and contradictory representational and political impulses.

[iv] Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (New York: Farrar Strauss Giroux, 1997), 129.

[v] Norma Evenson, *The Indian Metropolis: A View Toward the West* (London & New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 210.

[vi] Jai Sen, "The Unintended City," *Seminar* 200 (April 1976): 33-40, 35.

[vii] Sen , "The Unintended City," 34.

[viii] Sen "The Unintended City," 39.

[ix] Ashis Nandy, "Introduction: Indian Popular Cinema as a Slum's Eye View of Politics," in *The Secret Politics of Our Desires: Innocence, Culpability and Popular Indian Cinema*, ed., Ashis Nandy (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), 1-19.

[x] Nandy "Introduction," 7.

[xi] Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willemen, eds., *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 109.

[xii] *Indian People's Theatre Association Bulletin 1* (July 1945).

[xiii] In this, as well as in other respects, the IPTA movement has a remarkable affinity with the Cultural Front in the U.S.

[xiv] The famine of 1943 exerted a radicalizing influence on a generation of Bengali artists, activists, and intellectuals who came of age in the 1940s.

[xv] Reinhard Hauff, *Ten Days in Calcutta/A Portrait of Mrinal Sen: A Film by Reinhard Hauff* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1987) 73.

[xvi] Nandi Bhatia, *Acts of Authority/Acts of Resistance: Theater and Politics in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 93.

[xvii] For an influential account of this moment, see Malini Bhattacharya, "The IPTA in Bengal," *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, January-March 1983, and "The Indian People's Theatre Association: A Preliminary Sketch

of the Movement and the Organization, 1942-47," *Sangeet Natak* No. 94 (October-December 1989). Also see Rustom Bharucha, *Rehearsals of Revolution* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983).

xviii The November 2008 issue of *South Asian Cinema* ("Leftist Thought in Indian Cinema") acknowledges and attempts to address this gap.

xix See, for instance, Zohra Segal's recollections of IPTA in Bombay, "Theatre and Activism in the 1940s," in Geeti Sen (ed.), *Crossing Boundaries* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1997).

xx This is not an exhaustive list.

xxi I do not mean to suggest that such transactions were unique to the 1950s but I do think that both the scale and the terms of the engagement distinguished this decade from the ones preceding and following it.

xxii Francisco Panizza, "Introduction: Populism and the Mirror of Democracy," *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, ed. Francisco Panizza (London: Verso 2005), 4. My use of the term 'populist' is influenced by Panizza's discussion of populism as a mode of political identification in which "an aggregation of discontents" (10) is transformed into an anti-status quo discourse and a dichotomization of political space into "the people" and its "other."

xxiii The state that emerged after India's independence has been described by scholars as the Nehruvian state, as it bore the imprint of India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's modernist political imagination and his vision of the state as an instrument of social reform and modernization. See Sudipta Kaviraj, "On the Enchantment of the State: Indian Thought on the Role of the State in the Narrative of Modernity," in Akhil Gupta and K. Sivaramakrishnan, eds., *The State in India After Liberalization: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2011), 31-48.

xxiv Standard accounts of 1950s Bombay cinema tend to over-simplify the terms of its engagement with the Nehruvian vision, emphasizing lines of affiliation over those of irony and contention.

xxv See, for instance, Gul Bardhan, ed., *Rhythm Incarnate: Tribute to Shanti Bardhan* (Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1992); Darshan Chaudhuri, *Gananatya Andolan* (Calcutta: Anushtup, 2009); Sumangala Damodaran, "Protest through Music," *Seminar* 588 (August 2008); Sudhi Pradhan, ed., *Marxist Cultural Movement in India: Chronicles and Documents, Vols. I-III* (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1979-1985); Anuradha Ray, *Chollish Dashaker Banglay Ganasangeet Andolan* (Calcutta: Papyrus, 1992); Reba Raychaudhuri, *Jibaner Tane, Shilper Tane* (Calcutta: Thema, 1999); Sajal Raychaudhuri, *Gananatya Katha* (Calcutta: Mitra and Ghosh, 1990).

xxvi In "Entertainment and Utopia," (*Only Entertainment*, Routledge, 2002), Richard Dyer argues that cinematic entertainment presents "what utopia would feel like" through a historically variable and culturally specific affective code that uses both representational and, more importantly for cinema, non-representational signs such as color, texture, movement, rhythm, melody, and camerawork. He sees the utopian sensibility in entertainment as simultaneously responding to emotional needs created by real social inadequacies (and thereby pointing to these deficiencies), denying the legitimacy of the needs that it does not address, and trying to paper over contradictions. In this view of entertainment, what usually gets dismissed as escapism is reconfigured as a *potential* form of critique (among other things) that can actually serve to draw our attention to the gap between what is and what could be.

xxvii See Ali Husain Mir & Raza Mir, *Anthems of Resistance: A Celebration of Progressive Urdu Poetry* (New Delhi: IndiaInk, 2006), especially Ch. 6 ("Progressive Poetry and Film Lyrics"), and Akshay Manwani, *Sahir Ludhianvi The People's Poet* (New Delhi: Harper Collins India, 2013).

xxviii Prarthana Purkayastha, *Indian Modern Dance, Feminism, and Transnationalism* (London: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2014), 66-67.

xxix Purkayastha, *Indian Modern Dance*, 63.

xxx See Purkayastha, *Indian Modern Dance*, 79 --107, and Bardhan, ed., *Rhythm Incarnate: Tribute to Shanti Bardhan*.

xxxi Kiran Segal, *Zohra Segal: 'Fatty'* (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2012).

xxxii This claim does not, of course, hold true for all IPTA-influenced films of this period; the street in Guru Dutt's *Pyaasa* (Thirst, 1957), for instance, is a much darker, dystopian space.

xxxiii See, for instance, the sequence featuring the song "*Kabhie Aar Kabhie Paar*" in *Aar Paar* or the song "*Lehke Pehela Pehela Pyaar*" in *C.I.D.*

xxxiv For a discussion of the influence of the IPTA mode of choral singing on Awara, see Gayatri Chatterjee, *Awara* (Delhi: Penguin, 2003).

xxxv Lyrics by Majrooh Sultanpuri; music by O.P. Nayyar. My translation.

xxxvi Sudipta Kaviraj, "Reading a Song of the City – Images of the City in Literature and Films," City Flicks: Indian Cinema and the Urban Experience, ed. Preben Kaarsholm (Calcutta: Seagull, 2004), 60-82.

xxxvii Jan Cohen-Cruz, "General Introduction," *Radical Street Performance: An International Anthology*, ed. Jan Cohen-Cruz (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), 4. I should add here that by "radical" I mean acts that question or re-envision the existing social order and entrenched relations of power. The term can obviously refer to right-wing agendas as well as left-wing projects, although here I am using it to refer to what can be broadly construed as leftist interventions.

Filmography

Aar Paar (*This Way or That*, 1954, Guru Dutt) [Screenplay – Nabendu Ghosh/ Dialogue -- Abrar Alvi / Lyrics – Majrooh Sultanpuri / Music – O.P. Nayyar]

Awara (*The Tramp*, Raj Kapoor, 1951) [Sceenplay – K.A. Abbas/ Lyrics – Hasrat Jaipuri & Shailendra/ Music – Shankar-Jaikishen]

C.I.D. (1956, Raj Khosla) [Screenplay & Dialogue – Inder Raj Anand/ Lyrics – Majrooh Sultanpuri / Music – O.P. Nayyar]

Kala Bazaar (*The Black Market*, Vijay Anand, 1960) [Screenplay – Vijay Anand/ Lyrics – Shailendra/ Music – S.D. Burman]

Phir Subah Hogi (*Dawn Will Come Again*, Ramesh Saigal, 1958) [Lyrics – Sahir Ludhianvi/ Music – Khayyam]

Shree 420 (*The Gentleman Cheat*, Raj Kapoor, 1955) [Screenplay—K.A. Abbas / Lyrics—Shailendra, Music – Shankar-Jaikishen]