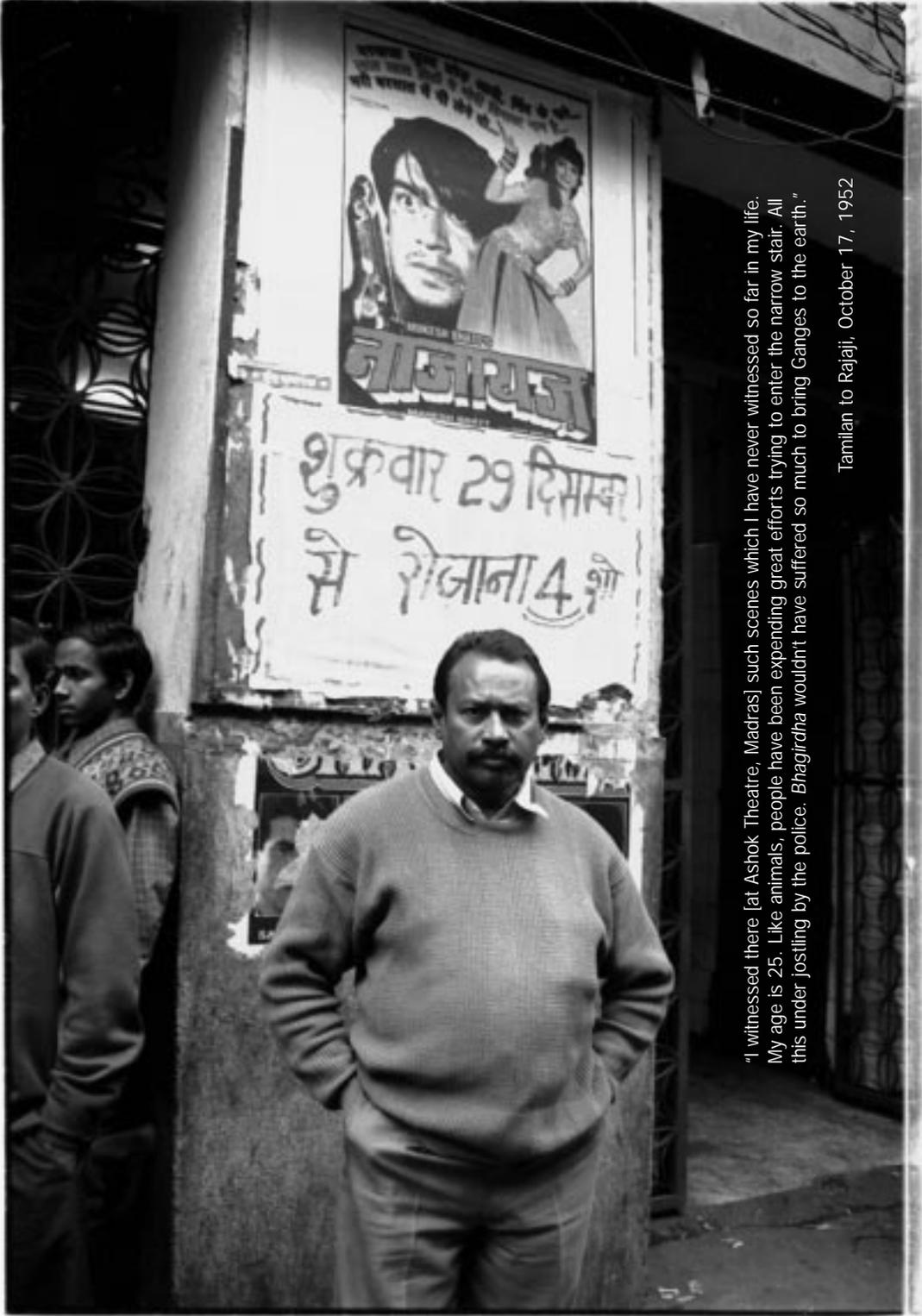


Old Media/New Media



Ongoing Histories



"I witnessed there [at Ashok Theatre, Madras] such scenes which I have never witnessed so far in my life. My age is 25. Like animals, people have been expending great efforts trying to enter the narrow stair. All this under jostling by the police. Bhagirdha wouldn't have suffered so much to bring Ganges to the earth."

Tamilian to Rajaji, October 17, 1952

An Imperfect Public

Cinema and citizenship in the 'third world'¹

RAVI S. VASUDEVAN

In this lecture I will be considering the issues of cinema and citizenship from the point of view of the cinema as an industrial form generating large-scale consumption. This could be called normal film experience, "in the sense of a cinema that is ordinary and widely available".² From the outset I should note that I have used the term Third World to outline certain general characteristics rather than provide a comparative, empirical account of these issues as they are played out in a number of countries, although, in the second part of this paper, I do look to the Indian context to flesh out my exploration of issues. The term Third World is used here to broadly address the circumstances of economically backward or underdeveloped societies, with vast problems of poverty and illiteracy. These societies are characterised by the maintenance of ostensibly traditional religious, familial and socially segmentary coordinates of identity, rather than the apparently transcendent individualist and contractual relations of advanced capitalist societies. Of course, the old concepts of the three worlds themselves require to be re-worked in the light of new, if recently shaky, developments of capitalism in the South East Asian region, and because of the fall into political, social and economic crisis of the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe. In turn, we need to reflect on how much some of the formulations for the Third World may speak to the circumstances of migrant, diasporic communities in the European and North American metropolis. Nevertheless, I hold onto the conceptual frame of a Third World society. If, in the course of time you will notice that by sleight of hand the Third World has by and large collapsed into India, I hope you will indulge the lapse and take it as a sign of respectful discretion about opinionating on cultures I do not know so well. In any case, I hope the issues remain pertinent.

Citizenship and cinema

There are two ways in which the category of the individual, one of the key terms in the discussion of citizenship, has been associated with the cinema. This is in the form of the Hollywood cinema, or what has come to be called classical narrative cinema, whether observable in Hollywood or as part of a more generalised practice. And also in the notion of an art cinema, attentive to a more reflective and interrogative relationship to individual perception. What needs to be emphasised is that these forms are historical and come into being at a certain time. They are not the transcendental indices of how stories should be told in cinema, or how spectators should be addressed. One of the issues I would like to highlight in this lecture are the parallel strands in film and political theory which would seek to question, or at least to complicate, any straightforward positing of the individuated spectator or the individual citizen as the inevitable or even the ideal figure of cultural and political life.

Civil society and political representation in the post-colonial situation

At this point I would like to show how the question of citizenship, of civil and political rights, has been conceptualised in recent Indian political theory. I draw here upon the work of Veena Das, Sudipta Kaviraj and Partha Chatterjee. While these writers cannot be collapsed into one view, and Veena Das presents a distinctive feminist voice, they have overlapping concerns. The most important of these, perhaps, is the sensitivity of these writers to the ways in which Indian people translated the modern concepts of social and political representation that emerged under colonial rule into distinct languages and paradigms of political selfhood.

The argument turns on the way modern civil society, and its characteristic discourses of representation, communication and discussion, tends to be the preserve of a small elite in colonial and post-colonial societies. For Kaviraj, this discourse is also specifically a language which undergoes translation when it comes into the vernacular discourse employed by colonial subjects, "Once [an idea like democracy] enters the vocabulary of colonial peoples and comes to figure in their imagination, these ideas sometimes displace other existing concepts, occasionally achieving startling osmosis with earlier prevalent ones. As these ideas are vernacularised, they become easily available to the ordinary political imagination. Their meanings, their implications and consequences begin to diverge significantly from the trajectories analysed within traditions of western theory".³

The vocabulary of the vernacular does not have room for the discourse of the individual citizen, in Kaviraj's opinion, "because of the insufficient spread of the social logic of *gesellschaft*".

In Indian society, despite the inroads modernity has made into traditional forms of communitarian bonding of people, the process of individuation has not remade the entire logic of the social world. Perception of disadvantage often tends to be more collective than individual, but collectivity itself is seen in a non-modern manner, as solidarities that are not interest based. Disadvantage is seen more as unjust treatment of whole communities, like lower castes, minority religious groups and tribal communities, which are thus seen as potential political actors for social equality. The principle of [people's] self-identifying action is not poverty but discrimination. And the relevant unit of social analysis is not the individual but the community.

Chatterjee has charted the colonial subjects' response to western modernity in ways similar to Kaviraj's, and employs the term 'political society' to encompass the forms of mobilization around collective identities. 'Political society' is composed of parties, movements, and non-party political formations. "The institutional forms of this emergent political society are still unclear. Just as there is a continuing attempt to order these institutions in the prescribed forms of liberal civil society, there is probably an even stronger tendency to strive for what are perceived to be democratic rights and entitlements by violating those institutional norms".⁴

I would suggest that the emphasis on collectivity and community in these positions, while pointing to real tensions in Indian systems of political representation, may not be adequately historical in their descriptions, and tend to an absolute, mutually exclusive relationship to western theories of civil society and individual interest. Historically, the drives

of collective or group identity were not put together in total independence of state initiatives. They drew on a different logic of representation instituted under colonial governance, one which continued under post-colonial regimes. Thus the personal law in India relating to property rights and inheritance has been governed by the post-colonial state's sensitivity to community practices, especially of religious community, preserving them against any universal codification for fear that this would be seen as an incursion into minority rights. Reservation of posts in government-run institutions to compensate for historic discriminations of caste has been another aspect of state policy. Such features are part of a different order, construction of social and political rights articulated by the state itself. Indeed state and civil society in India have been composed of a mixture of collective and individuated codes in civil and criminal law. Thus, while drawing attention to how Indian politics marks certain points of departure from western norms, by pitting collective and community based interests against state and civil society, these writers may have skirted the ways in which forms and institutions intermesh.

I would suggest that the dis-establishment of the individual and the citizen as crucial actors in these critical discussions of the patterning of Indian political forms tends to be prescriptive, framing a cultural and political agenda for how to constitute a democratic polity more attentive to the cognitive structures through which relations of subordination and marginality are experienced in India. This is noticeable again in Veena Das's critical and yet empathetic understanding of the discourse of community, which remains anti-statist in its premises. She has pointed out how the preservation of a community's rights to autonomy in the matter of personal law has proven highly problematic for women of the community denied right to property, inheritance and maintenance. However, she contests those who favour state legislative intervention to supplant community identity by that of the individuated subject. Instead, she argues that exchange and debate should be possible between communities, the community of women seeking to alter women's rights within religious community. While there is certainly no foreclosure in Das's argument of the right of the individual oppressed by community norms to exit from community, we may wonder if oppositional strategies have not been more multi-form, utilizing both the channels of government legislation and of courts of law, along with recourse to debates and mobilization within community, to gain their ends. In saying this, I do not mean to take away from the politically important insights that have emerged from these efforts to theorize differences between Indian political practices and western political theory. But I would suggest that these lie less in arguing for entirely different and mutually exclusive definitions of rights, than in attending to the specifics of the cultural and political discourse which fashion political institutions, representational practices and different forms of political activity.

State cultural policies and the film spectator

If we shift our consideration of political selfhood to the realm of cinema in post-colonial Indian society, we need to develop a resonating series of investigations as political theory is reframed through the spheres of state cultural policy, artistic and public discourses on film, and in the practice of the cinema. The ideal of the spectator as citizen in the classical sense occurs in the discourse of a film society/art cinema intelligentsia, and is even

invoked by people within the mainstream film industry. In the aesthetic framing of the discussion, the discourse emerges as part of a critique of existing commercial Indian films, highlighting the need for a realist observation which would capture the authentic idioms and rhythms of Indian life. The commercial cinemas of India, compendia of melodramatic narrative and comic and musical performance sequences, were especially targeted for a perceived derivativeness on the sensational aspects of the Hollywood cinema, and for their orientation to melodrama and action rather than drama and psychological and individual portraiture. This art cinema discourse was instituted by figures such as Satyajit Ray and Chidananda Das Gupta in the film society movement that started in 1947. Implicit in their agenda was the desire not only to make films but also to cultivate spectators who were attentive to the drama of the individual, the type so memorably incarnated in the Apu character of Ray's great trilogy. Ray's work in the 1950s was to produce images celebrating the romance of modernity while at the same time attending to a sense of loss in the passage of earlier, lusher senses of the self, as in the evocation in *Jalsaghar/The Music Room* (1958) about a declining aristocrat's immersion in the world of classical music. Occasionally, Ray devoted himself to a fulsome, if not entirely self-confident critique of the continuing sway exercised by feudal authority and irrational and superstitious beliefs, as in *Devi/The Goddess* (1960).

In contrast, the political elite did not exhibit such a modernist outlook, or at least not for all art institutions. Thus, the cinema lags behind in the overall formation of national institutions of art: the National Gallery of Modern Art, the Lalit Kala, for painting, the Sangeet Natak Akademi, for dance and drama were all formed in the first years after Independence in 1947. In fact active state support for the cinema as an art institution followed on from the success of Ray's *Pather Panchali/Song of the Road* in 1955, a venture which only received support from the Bengal government in its last stages. There followed the setting up a Film and Television Institute of India in 1960 and the Film Finance Corporation shortly after, but the lag in institutional formation even for the needs of the art cinema indicates the ambivalence of the new state in this cultural field. This is even more pronounced in the case of the film industry as a whole. The government set up a film enquiry committee in 1951 to look at the problems faced by the industry and came up with recommendations to improve and systematize industrial conditions by reducing taxes, encouraging substantial capital investment and setting up technical institutions. However, except in the latter field, these other recommendations fell by the way side.

There is a definite sense here of how the political elite considered the commercial cinema to be an inadequate place to nurture a culture of citizenship, of the culturally authentic and the modern. Of course, one should stress that there was ambivalence in some sectors of this elite even around the question of the modern as a whole. Perhaps the lag we have noticed in the formation of national art institutions suggests the ambiguous position of the modern, mechanical apparatus of the cinema in contrast to the traditional arts. Thus S.B. Keskar, Minister for Information and Broadcasting in the post-Independence government, saw radio and cinema as vehicles of an already existing national or traditional culture. He thus reduced broadcasting time for what he perceived to be inauthentic film music on the national radio, insisting that it only be used for classical music. (The decision was sub-

sequently reversed when it was realised that state radio was losing out at peak service time to Radio Ceylon, which had taken over the broadcasting of film music). Keskar regularly invoked the Government's objective as one of taking over a patronal function in the arts. If there is a conception of citizenship here, then it is a restrictive one, focused on the need to reproduce a 'traditional' identity and the attributes of authenticity. Of course, the State's definition of Indian music was at variance with both modern popular audiences, and even, it may be argued, earlier popular traditions that were at a remove from the music patronised by the courts.

This is not to entirely discount the priority given to cultural tradition in state policies. For, as various writers have argued, a significant imperative in a post-colonial scenario is, if not the recovery, then the re-invention and re-connecting of cultural knowledge and memory suppressed or fetishized under colonial rule. Such suppression occurred through the new and culturally alienating processes of education that emerged under colonialism. More broadly, social identity and customary practices had acquired fixed and constraining connotations under the system of classifications developed for the needs of colonial governance.

Highlighting the political implications of cultural domination, Roy Armes has argued that colonial education ensured "that the colonized come to enjoy none of the attributes of citizenship". He goes on to a rather excessive discounting of nationalist attempts to introduce the standard institutions of democratic representation because of their western origin. Thus he notes, "The nationalist did not seek to revive a traditional form of society or to mobilize mass support for the independence movement in terms of ethnic identity - denigrated as 'tribalism' by the colonisers. Instead, their ambition was to create a modern state, using concepts of democracy, elections and political parties borrowed from the West. Even the underlying democratic definition of 'one man, one vote' conceals a concept of western origin: individualism".⁵

As we have observed, the arguments of recent Indian political theory are quite different. Rather than insist on an indigenist resistance to western categories, these writers have pointed to the importance of the translation and re-embedding of categories within evolving cognitive fields, and a complicated reconstruction of political identity. There is a democratic drive to self-determination involved here, which we could define as the freedom to determine the nature of the self, the coordinates of being, meaning and action. As Balibar points out, the question of the citizen is linked to his or her transcendence of the category of the subject, a figure literally subject to various forms of authority, of feudal lord, sacred power, monarchical rule and, indeed, the modern state as well. In this conception sovereignty must come to reside not in some external institution or hierarchically subordinating set of allegiances, but within the individual citizen. How the individual determines the cultural coordinates of her sovereignty has to be worked out in historical context. To entirely privilege fixed notions of cultural identity over their historically experienced adaptation to new concepts of political representation is somewhat naive. In the context of cinema, it could be argued that a certain form of the discourse of citizenship animates the resistance to the unilateral decision of the state and cultural elites to formulate the terms of acceptable national culture. In this sense, the tutelary forms of state cultural control advocated by

Keskar would go against the drives of self-determination associated with the discourse of citizenship.

Here, not only did the state and cultural elites regard the cultural choice of the consumer of the popular cinema as manipulable and inferior, they also argued for a policing of popular viewing practices through censorship policies. Paradoxically, while the cinematic institution was thus perceived to be culturally illegitimate, its popular appeal, its social reach, was acknowledged and presented a threat, or at least an impediment, to the cultivation of civil society. Awareness of the substantial constituency the cinema commanded resulted in the government taxing, regulating and seeking to make the cinema an instrument of state ideology. Huge entertainment taxes were levied. These varied from state government to state government, but could range from 25% to 40%, a factor which has for long been considered a serious disincentive to stable long term investment by legitimate financiers. Interestingly, in certain states a special tax was levied on cinema owners for the policing of the area surrounding the cinema - as if the cinema did not quite lie within the domain of civil society and the normal responsibilities of government.

Despite these strictures, the government was willing to fashion the popular cinematic institution into an instrument of its ideology. This was literally as a physical space, irrespective of its other contents, a space in which images were projected for a significant social congregation. Subjecting this space to its overarching design, the government enforced a compulsory block booking by all permanent theatres of documentary films made by its monopolistic organisation, the Films Division. The films dealt with subjects deemed the appropriate concern of new citizens: representations of traditional culture, nationalist hagiography, information about the various regions of India, the display of state developmentalist policies that aimed to transform the economy, the conditions of life, and, indeed, the character of its subjects. The spectator came into a space subject to state surveillance and extortionate financial exactions to view a stigmatised object; but they were, in the process, yoked to an official and normative imagining of nationhood.

While the independent Indian state has been supportive to an art cinema enterprise in terms of funding policies and institutional development, there are instances of other Third World governments supporting the cinema as an industry like any other. Within this less exclusive policy, a special emphasis has been placed on the art film, but not in a fashion where other practices are made illegitimate by the state. In political terms, this more expansive attitude suggests a notion of the cinema as part of the cultural process of forming a civil society, where its modes of story-telling and the types of subjectivity these address are not determined by government and cultural elites. Admittedly, overall there has been little success in this attempt. The one notable effort, 'Embrafilm' in Brazil, effectively opened the door to pornography in its bid to fill reserved screen time for the Brazilian industry. What exactly was hoped for by such institutional consolidation? At one level, the critics of Indian popular cinema hoped that the industry would be re-shaped according to the universal coordinates of film making, associated with Hollywood cinema but generalized to a substantial section of the western world. The desire for such a model is evidenced by the widespread, pan-Indian middle class approval - even by sections of the artistic intelligentsia - for the emergence of directors such as the Tamilian Mani Rathnam, who has displayed the skills

of Hollywood style film-making while maintaining the standard repertoire of attractions associated with popular cinema. We must assume that such approval derives from the project of transforming the spectator of commercial cinema through immersion in focused rather than distracted responses to story-telling, linear causality in narrative structures and psychological representation of characters - narrative dispositions which would enable the emergence of a more 'rational' and individually calibrated relationship to the world. Let me put this model aside for the moment, and look at the cinematic conventions Indian popular cinema's critics have believed to be such an impediment to the emergence of discourses of citizenship in the field of cinematic subjectivity.

The peculiarities of Indian film

Writings on various Third World cinematic experiences, for example Thailand⁶, Sri Lanka⁷, Egypt⁸, Brazil⁹, and Mexico¹⁰, suggest that the particular distracting quality of Indian popular cinema, heavily and not necessarily coherently punctuated by song, dance and comic scenes, is not entirely distinctive. I will come back to the issue of distraction in its implications for spectatorial dispositions after considering the broad representational formats and modes of address of Indian popular film as these cluster around the question of melodrama, systems of typage and forms of direct address.

We may observe in Indian cinema the lexicon of melodramatic features noticeable in European stage melodrama: a bipolar moral universe; non-psychological characterisation, character being externalised into codified gesture, bodily demeanour and facial expression; a narrative propensity to collapse familial and public functions; intimately related characters playing out the larger functions of public authority.

In terms of discourses of subjectivity and citizenship, Madhava Prasad¹¹ has recently argued that the recourse to such systems of typage and the lack of perceptual and psychological individuation plots exactly a scenario of subjection, and sees the popular film narrative as a socially symbolic one. Such a reading conceives popular narrative as a directly, almost transparently, political form. Here state has not emerged separate from forms of authority incarnated in the family. These are hierarchical and feudal forms emphasising privilege over merit, blood ties and loyalty over choice and contract. Popular cinema is then a narrative system dramatizing a pre-modern organisation of politics in a transitional colonial and post-colonial society. The non-individuation of characters is intelligible if they are seen as exemplary interdependent figures assigned their roles within an overarching system of authority. Like other critics, Prasad has linked this authority structure to an indigenous, Hindu religious code of the authoritative image, that of *darsana*, where power is reposed in the image rather than the viewer. For him, *darsanic* codes define a fixed field in which characters derive their status in relationship to a central ordering principle or authority figure. Even the distractive, disaggregated aspects of the popular film, such as comic functions, are seen within this orbit. Prasad situates the codes of physical comedy and typage associated with unheroic propensities and incompetence in romance in terms of the imagery of class and caste relations in Indian society.

For Prasad, non-individuation has its particular defining register in the lack of the representation of privacy in Indian cinema, a lack centred on the informal prohibition that has

developed around the kiss. Highlighted in conservative Indian discourses as sign of national virtue and purity, Prasad instead analyses the prohibition as a sign of the power of traditional patriarchies to oversee and constrain the emergence of the conjugal domain and the nuclear unit. Such a pre-emption of a crucial condition for the creation of individualism and civil society implies the subordination of the modern state to a decentred system of feudalised authority. Prasad's outline of the popular Indian cinema does not, on the other hand, simply withhold or deny the possibility of spectator-citizens in Third World contexts. He argues that various tracks of subjectivity are in play in the popular film, the pre-modern form co-existing with other drives and desires centred on conjugal romance and consumerist fantasy.

Contrary to this framework, and arising out of a formal analysis I have undertaken of the popular Bombay cinema, it can be argued that the filmic techniques of individuated character perception are very much in place, if intermittently and, sometimes deceptively. Such articulations work, at certain decisive periods, to aid differentiation of state from a network of traditional patriarchal enclaves. Here filmic techniques of intimacy are observable, for example in the ways shot-reverse-shot and communication through sound and musical address is used to carve out a private space within a hierarchically coded public sphere. Now, while this in a sense qualifies the argument, I would suggest that many of its digits are still in place, but that we could benefit from unpacking them and re-framing them within some of the parameters set by political theory.

We would then arrive at a very suggestive area of tension in Prasad's analysis. Do the patterns of non-individuation speak of the retracing of the contours of a traditional and extensive patriarchy and its prohibitions; or do they also speak to a desired continuity of the filmic subject with community? There is, for instance, the narrative function of comic plebeian figures who have this unerring habit of interrupting moments of intimacy. Here the prohibition would not be an authoritarian one, but rather a playful opportunity to arrest that withdrawing of the couple from society under the sign of the kiss. Of course, and this Veena Das forcefully reminds us, community may itself be riven with hierarchy centred on gendered authority. Thus we have not only one type of symbolic communication to the audience through direct address, but several: authoritarian in the univocal look of patriarch as he balefully allocates rank within the world of the fiction, communitarian in the systems of play contrived by comedic instances. And the shifting modes of engagement of performance sequences are by turns celebratory and controlling, as in the way a rather dark image surfaces in the gaze of the male community as it envelops the female performer, a staple item of popular film attractions at least since the end of the 1950s.

What is evidently required here are precisions of the larger argument about the relationship between screen practices and audience histories. The induction of an address to audiences into screen practice is not by itself distinctive. As Thomas Elsaesser puts it, "The fact that in early cinema the films imagined their audiences to be physically present, while in the later, narrative full-length feature film, it was precisely the imaginary viewpoint of the spectator, his or her virtual presence in the representation that became the norm, indicates that what is contrasted is not theatre and cinema, but one kind of cinema with another kind of cinema".

What is distinctive is the continuation of this imaginary communication between screen and audience in the longer history of Indian popular cinema. Here, emergent work around the exhibition context will be important to understand shorter patterns in the relationship. In the Indian case, fan cultures have been an important source of investigation for the way screen practice must take note of audience orientations. The work of S.V. Srinivas¹² on the fan clubs of the Telugu star, Chiranjeevi indicates how fans lobby to control the star image, exercising a pressure which necessitates the star to publicly reassure them that he will conform to their expectations. Screen practice and star discourse may come to be articulated with politics directly, as happened in Andhra and Tamil Nadu in India where stars came into public office, and so brought the fans as agents into very domain of political representation. However, it is more common that the cinema functions as a crucial cultural space for the public articulation of subordinate group interests, one relegated to the shadows of social and political life. Here the realm of cinematic exhibition may power forth various subordinated struggles of marginal and impassioned groups, contests that pepper the urban geography in a territorial and often violent engagement of subaltern groups with cinema owners and police over the control of the cinema.

While retaining a notion of the hierarchical field within which senses of the self are constructed, once we have loosened the terms on which the popular film form symbolises society, then we may also consider the regime of attractions it combines as sites of play with hierarchy rather than straightforward instruments for the relaying of hierarchy. Most care seems to be required in the examination of the relationship between character representation and systems of typage, i.e. the employment of a recurrent, relatively fixed set of attributes to define character. This issue bridges drives within representation between (i) character verisimilitude, (ii) character as emblematic figure, a figure scaled upwards in terms of the significance and the manner of his or her discourse, and (iii) performative articulation of character according to a stereotypical regime of sociological, sartorial and character attributes. However, even the regime of the social stereotype can produce counter-vailing tendencies. Thus in cinema, the fixing of the attributes of religious community for Muslims and Christians rather than the privileged majority of the Hindus in India, while functioning within a symbolic hierarchy, can also act as a source of pressure on that hierarchy when manipulated by asymmetrical hierarchies of star discourse. The key Bombay film star, Amitabh Bachchan, is a case in point. He could assume Muslim and Christian roles, as in *Coolie* (Manmohan Desai, 1983) and *Amar, Akbar, Anthony* (Manmohan Desai, 1977), but his commanding position in the star hierarchy put pressure on the regime of social representation which would subordinate such figures within the film.

Here we may observe something of the shifting terms of subjectivity within film, which of course sit only quite schematically with the parallel political categories we have referred to. Notably missing in any collective or group identity referred to by the cinema is that of caste. Films tend to avoid this category to avoid controversy and ensure the widest possible reach, but also, perhaps, to tacitly invoke the upper caste figure as the normative one. In some recent instances, this has been quite explicit. Nevertheless, the formation of relatively inflexible community categories, echo, in however distortive and caricatural a way, the long-term crystallization of group claims within democratic politics.

Amongst these forms of character representation, the most interesting is that of the emblematic character. Here, in a way quite distinct from the realistic character and the typed character, there is the emergence into view, at a symbolically charged public site, often the law court, of a figure who will carry a discourse that tends to critique hierarchical forms on the terrain of the state and insists on a different set of claims on it. Here, in a way quite different from Prasad's reference to the residual gesture to the audience via a look, there is a fuller, sustained address, perhaps mediated by an audience internal to the fiction, but an address nevertheless to us. Here the popular film exercises a direct political compact with the cinema audience, rather than an indirect one. We may observe this as a drive to crystallise a new sense of community identity in the audience, as happened in the Tamil cinema of south India which sought to forge an anti-Brahmin identity; or more broadly a democratic address that brings it close to the desire to constitute an un-hierarchical, individual humanist society. But even if it is the latter, it is articulated as a work not of character driven narration but of condensation, a condensation on to a figure of the demands of and for community. The individual always stands for something, does not just stand for him or herself; here, too, one can see a junction between the articulation of individual and group claims.

Conclusion

In short, there is nothing wrong with the importation of the contaminated western concept of the individual vote. For the sake of God, community or individual - let the individual decide what defines his or her selfhood - we should hang on to this colonial legacy, whatever the misgivings of well intentioned cultural critics. On average India has had a reasonably good, 55-60% turnout at the hustings. If there is nothing wrong with the capacity of the Indian people to exercise their democratic rights at election times, they show a brutal capacity to withhold a mandate to 80% of films released in the market. My exercise here has not been to defend or promote the commercial Indian cinema, an often very troubled and troubling commodity, but rather to suggest the need to reckon with the distinctive way the domain of popular film spectatorship articulates a cultural and political subjectivity, and the need to formulate policies and practices to shape it in as creative a way as possible.

Julio Garcia Espinosa, the theorist of a 'third cinema' practice pitted against large-scale industrial forms, generated a utopian image of a cinema that refused to duplicate the perfection achieved by the US cinema. For Espinosa, the cinema of his imagination would instead remain imperfect, rejecting the division between producer and spectator that had fashioned north American movies into objects perfected for a market of passive spectators. Espinosa argued that we could hardly discount such a vision as impractical or utopian, because we do not know the potentials of technology for mass involvement in the creative process¹³. I do not want to tarnish that very beautiful image in the least. But, at the moment, I am left with my own rather ramshackle version of it. For the imperfection of the cinema I have discussed lies in its 'failure' to exorcise the ghost of the spectator from its spectral space. This is a screen that speaks to its audience, often in ways that engage us in a purposeful political address and a raucous fabrication of community. It is a significant space, I would suggest, to think about the productive imperfection of political subjects.

NOTES

- 1 This is a condensed version of the Van Zelst Lecture on Communication delivered at Northwestern University, Evanston in 1998.
- 2 *A second life: German Cinema's First Decade*, Thomas Elsaesser, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 1996
- 3 "Democracy and Development in India", Sudipta Kaviraj, in Amiya Bagchi (ed) *Democracy and Development*, London, St. Martin's Press, 1995.
"Dilemmas of democratic development in India" in Adrian Leftwich (ed) *Democracy and Development: Theory and Practice*, Oxford, Polity Press, 1996.
- 4 "Beyond the nation? Or within?", Partha Chatterjee, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Delhi, January 4-11, 1997, pp. 30-34.
- 5 *Third World Filmmaking and the West*, Roy Armes, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1987
- 6 "Of genres and savours in Thai film", Gerard Fouquet, *Cinemaya* 6, New Delhi, 1989-90, pp. 4-9
- 7 "Sri Lankan Family Melodrama: a Cinema of Primitive Attractions", Laleen Jayamanne, *Screen* 33 (2), 1992, pp. 145-53.
- 8 "The 'New Egyptian cinema'", Lisbeth Malkmus, *Cineaste*, 16 (3), 1998, pp. 30-31
Michael J. Martin, *New Latin American Cinema*, Detroit, Wayne Street University Press, 1997, Two Volumes.
- 9 *Brazilian Cinema*, ed. Randal Johnson and Robert Stam New York, Columbia University Press, 1995, Introduction.
- 10 "Tears and Desire: Women and Melodrama in the 'Old' Mexican Cinema", Ana M. Lopez, in John King, Ana M. Lopez and Manuel Alvarodo, ed, *Mediating Two worlds: Cinematic Encounters in the Americas*, London, British Film Institute, 1993.
- 11 *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Reconstruction*, Madhava Prasad, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1998.
- 12 "Devotion and Defiance in Fan Activity", SV Srinivas, *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, 29, 1996, republished in Ravi Vasudevan (ed.), *Making Meaning in Indian Cinema*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2000.
- 13 "For an Imperfect Cinema", Julia Garcia Espinosa, in Michael J. Martin, *New Latin American Cinema*, Vol.I, pp. 71-82.

Table 1.1
A comparative sensorium study of four (4) Delhi cinema halls

	PVR Anupam	Delite (pr. Day-leet)	RadhuPalace	Swarn Talkies
Food	paper coke and hot buttered popcorn	potato burger and cold coffee	fried dal and pep-see	bread-omelette, unbuttered popcorn, peanuts, pakoras, aloo-chaat, veg rolls, and hot tea
Smell	hot buttered popcorn and whiffs of passing perfumes	frying oil and stale air freshener	sweat and stale food	fresh food, fresh tea, fresh piss
Temperature	cold, airless	air cooled to comfort, but the condensation sticks	hot when the fan is on, hot when it isn't	slow warm rising damp
Sound	dolby surround, cell phone and <i>babalog</i>	song and dance, yawns and loose change	concerto for projector noise, bat squeak and lata mangeshkar	whistle, wah-wah, shuffle, yell, yodel, rustle, stamp and groan

