

# Begum Samru and the Security Guard

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## Prelude: The *Haveli* of Begum Samru

What does Begum Samru have to do with a cinema in Delhi?

Begum Samru's palace was the site of many a *nautch* (dance performance) where the Indian and British elite of late Mughal Delhi would gather to watch the skilled singing and dancing of professional *tawaifs* (courtesans) in the heart of the Old City.

The Mughal ruler Shah Alam (1759-1806) acknowledged Begum Samru as his esteemed protector, and the military strategists of the East India Company considered her crucial to their territorial ambitions. Her acquisition of tremendous political, military and economic clout has been documented. Her talent at diplomacy and her political wiles have been noticed, as have her instincts for survival and success. Yet, none of these accounts acknowledge the fact that she began her professional life as a young *tawaif* (courtesan) in Delhi.<sup>1</sup>

But in the elite enclaves where the *nautch* played out, there was always an awareness of the presence of a non-elite element in this play of pleasure and desire, the commodification of sexuality as/and spectacle: "No *nautchni* is expected to wear longer than three or four years, after which she exercises her art among the lowest of the low".<sup>2</sup>

Two centuries later, the grounds of her palace have become the crowded, bustling Bhagirath Place, the centre for the film distribution trade in Delhi, where over 100 film distribution companies operate.

Brian Larkin, who has worked extensively on visual culture in colonial and postcolonial Nigeria, while writing on cinema viewing in Northern Nigeria follows the historian and philosopher of modernity, Walter Benjamin, in viewing fantasy as the energy stored in the concreteness of objects. My essay, drawing upon earlier work done by researchers of the Publics and Practices in the History of the Present (PPHP) project at Sarai, and my own fieldwork, attempts to look at the fantasy shaping the cinema viewing spaces of contemporary Delhi, a fantasy which has more in common with the Indo-British 'gentry' attending the *nautch* at Begum Samru's palace than mere coincidence. My attempt is to

establish parallels between these two phenomena, in terms of the 'desirable' audience for the display of sexuality and experience of pleasure, and to map a history of the imagination of the 'gentry', a widely prevalent term in the Delhi cinema trade for an upper-class audience. This essay will map a rough and not-quite-ready historical trajectory of the city's cinemas. The focus is on practices within and outside the law; of changing laws and shifting transgressions; of changing land use patterns, and of dispossessions that define the cinema today; a map of cinema that mirrors the larger transformations of the city. A map that increasingly represents "objects that were once new and symbolized modern life but whose historical moment has passed [and have] become inadvertent but dense signifiers in social structure".<sup>3</sup>

### Imperial Cinema

When Imperial Cinema in Paharganj started showing films in 1933, the audience took its time to come in for the (then silent) shows. Screenings didn't start at fixed times, but had to wait for enough people to come in. Those waiting for the hall to fill up were entertained by dancing girls, performing in front of the screen. Early in its history in Delhi, cinema was accorded the same moral censure as the *tawaif*. This is reflected, for instance, in a particular letter to the editor of an unknown Urdu paper, in the archival collection of Mr. V.B. Soni, the grandson of the cinema hall's founder.

*"Janaab Editor Sahib,*

*"For empathising with us on the matter of the Paharganj Cinema, and for supporting us by writing regular articles, we are very greatly indebted to you. The Cinema Hall has ceased its activities, but when we reached the cinema and came to know why it has closed, then we got to know that in actuality all the hard work of Guru Ghantal has come to naught; they are repairing the roof, from which one gathers that from now on the cinema will show mostly talkie films. We also came to know that the owner of the cinema has gone to Bombay to get a new talking machine. If what appears to be is actually true, then all our hard work, and Guru Ghantal's, has gone waste.*

*We beseech God to help us".*

Despite the protests in the first years, the Cinema Paharganj, situated in the liminal space between the Walled City and the new British city, flourished. The Soni family who constructed and ran it were influential builders; they had come to Delhi from Rajasthan as stone suppliers for the Imperial Works which had built the great edifices of Lutyens' new city. The eldest son of the family, according to V.B. Soni, was greatly attracted to the 'glamour' of the British and the parties he was invited to. He also wanted to live the *zamindar* (feudal landlord) lifestyle. And it was his decision, after his father's death, to convert a space in Paharganj planned for a 'Soni Hall', into Imperial Cinema. This became the first cinema to operate outside the Walled City (where the moneyed elite of the city still lived), and before the theatres of Connaught Place in the new city started showing films. Even in the 1930s, claims Mr Soni, Paharganj was a bit volatile, with a communally mixed,

working-class population. Paharganj saw the worst of the local Hindu-Muslim riots in September 1947.

After Partition, both the profits and contests around Imperial Cinema increased. The Soni family left the construction business to concentrate on cinema. Meanwhile, in Paharganj, there was the increasing threat of *goondagardi* (hooliganism). This was a widespread phenomenon in the cinema viewing experience of the post-Partition city. With the sudden demographic spike in the city's population due to the influx of refugees from Pakistan, the cinema as a site of leisure boomed. The *goondas* (local toughs) 'owned' halls, in the sense of being well-known in the area and having exclusive rights to 'black market' the tickets of that hall (cornering tickets in bulk and selling them at inflated prices). This was, of course, contested by the management of the halls; and each time a new cinema hall was built there was intense contest within the area for the 'ownership' of the hall. In the case of Imperial, Mr Soni links it directly to the state of dispossession of the new migrants coming into the city after Partition. The *goondas* who 'owned' Imperial were all from Lahore and Amritsar: Man Singh, Naddi, Malkhan. To counter them, Imperial employed its own toughs, who were also Partition migrants.

The claims of sharing in the profit of the film trade were made through what seems like highly performative violence – battles with the police, soda bottles hurled as projectiles, the ripping of seats. K.C. Soni, a relative of V.B. Soni who has been active in the running of the hall since 1954, remembers that there were pitched battles fought every evening. Shops outside the hall used to down their shutters at 6 pm. The police used to camp outside the hall for six months at a time. This went on till about 1971. Vijay Kumar, who runs a pavement bookstall outside Imperial, and whose family earlier had a tailoring business which made the curtains used to cover the screen at Imperial, remembers the employees of the cinema showering soda bottles on the *goondas* from the roof of the cinema. These contests, with the cinema management and the police on one side, and the *goondas* on the other, were, paradoxically, carried out while the hall was functioning at its peak, attracting families to watch religious films, Punjabi films, and *naach* (dance-filled) films like *Nagin*, which ran for 25 weeks in 1956, earning the cinema such handsome profits that the owners went in for a major renovation and installed air-cooling and a Westek sound system. In this renovation, the separate 'Ladies Gallery' running along the right hand side of the hall was removed to make way for a much more spacious balcony – perhaps a reflection of the increase in the 'family' audience.

The lumpen figure of the *goonda* was a contrast to the image of the bourgeois 'gentry'/family man upon whom the presence of 'ladies' bestowed respectability. They co-existed for three decades in the various accounts of Imperial Cinema. The *goonda* menace, according to K.C. Soni, finally subsided in 1971. The 'gentry' deserted the hall only by 1977. People in the trade also link much of the perceived 'decline' of the cinemas in Old Delhi and in Central Delhi to the movement of the 'gentry' away from living in the Old City towards the new expansion of the city southwards. Another crucial factor is the coming of television and video in the early 1990s. The business of Amarnath Thakkar, who specialised in distributing films for the Sunday morning shows, was nearly wiped out by the telecast, from the mid-'80s onwards, of the mythological serials *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* on national television.

In the case of the Imperial, as with other cinemas, the 'decline' in viewership has nothing to do with the occupancy rates of the hall. It is a remembered decline of the 'class' of visitors that comes to the hall.

"*Yahaan to ab sirf muth maarnewaale aate hain* (Only masturbators/wankers come here now)", says Prem Singh, the older gatekeeper at the cinema. He laments that there is no gentry today. "*Jab main gate par ticket check karta hoon, boo aati hai* (When I check tickets at the gate, it stinks)".

I was there on a Tuesday afternoon, a working day. Of the 381 seats downstairs, 238 were occupied; as were 112 of the 189 in the balcony. Nearly 60% occupancy. The manager, Mr Choudhary, told me that on Sundays and other holidays, the hall was nearly always house-full. There are regulars who come in everyday. "*Yahaan ki 'Top Class Gentry', jhalliwaale, rehriwaale, rickshawaale* (The best of the gentry from the neighbourhood: load carriers, cart pushers, rickshaw pullers)". The average occupancy is between 65-75% per week. "When it rains in Delhi, all other cinema halls are empty, this one is full. At Rs. 10 per ticket, even coolies can come here to take shelter".

The spectacular *goondagardi* of the 1950s and 1960s was linked to claims of profit from the leisure time of the 'gentry', the desired/desirable audience of the cinema. Would it be too presumptuous to surmise a certain Nehruvian hangover in this image of this desirable audience, this gentry? A salaried man, presumably with an English-medium education, bringing his family to the cinema for an evening out, and having to confront the lumpen figure that the Nehruvian state, despite all its socialist efforts, could not accommodate – the refugee as profiteer.

Today, post 'liberalisation', the contest that *goondagardi* once represented is still spectacular – but the networks involved are, if not more intricate, certainly much more organised. The image of the gentry, the fantasy embodied in the concrete and glass of the new cinema spaces, has itself undergone tremendous change.

One of the most articulate representatives of this new fantasy/vision is Sonali Rastogi of the Morphogenesis Architecture Studio, a firm that designs corporate headquarters, malls and multiplexes, and sees itself as committed to the project of 'urban renewal'. They have designed most of the multiplex spaces of the PVR (Priya Village Roadshow) group of cinemas in the city.

"Global Indians. We need to ensure that our newly built environment corresponds, and the paradigm shift in Indian culture be addressed," she remarks. "Our aspirations as Indians have changed. Earlier, when our mothers went shopping to South Extension or GK I (elite markets in south Delhi), we were left to play in the park with the drivers of our cars. Now, who do you see in the park but the drivers? That Indian doesn't exist anymore (who could sit and wait in the park). Today we are as time-crunched and as networked as anyone in the world" (*First City* magazine, October 2004).

PVR Anupam, Priya, Naraina and Vikaspuri are the four Delhi cinemas that pay the highest entertainment tax, in that respective order. PVR alone accounts for almost 50% of the total entertainment tax collections in the city of Delhi (based on 2002-03 data).

When in 1997 PVR Anupam 4 opened in the Saket Community Centre in South Delhi (in collaboration with Village Roadshow Pictures, Australia), it articulated a vision of quality

cinema that had much to do with the variety of films on offer, and the promise of exclusivity. Ticket prices were Rs. 100, to begin with (current prices are Rs. 150). But there was a problem. To this space (of the “global”, “time-crunched”, cash-rich Indian) the driver sitting in the park, the impecunious student, the small-time *goonda* and his small-time ‘black’ marketeering, still had access: thanks to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi stipulating that 20% of the seats in a hall be kept at a minimum price. This translated into the front row of tickets being sold for Rs. 7 only.

“It is utterly ridiculous. Cinema is not an essential commodity. It is like asking Pizza Hut to control the price of 20% of their pizzas. I’m running a theatre for a certain clientele. A cheaper cinema is doing it for another clientele. Why confuse the two?” commented Ajay Bijli, owner, Priya Entertainment (*The Hindustan Times*, 11 January 2000).

“There are times when anti-social elements enter the cinema with low priced tickets and create problems for women”, Bijli had earlier remarked (*Indian Express*, 20 March 1998).

The minutes of a meeting regarding the admission rates of cinema halls, held on 24 May 1999 under the chairmanship of the Chief Secretary (CS) of Delhi, report that the CS observed:

“...Delhi being the Capital of the Country, there is a greater need for small halls/mini theatres with 100 to 200 seats and such new cinema halls should equip themselves with the best possible modern amenities in the matter of comfort and equip with latest cinematographic technology...today, there is control on rate of tickets only in respect of 20% of the seats but such control can be considered for being relaxed in case facilities in the existing cinema halls are upgraded...Mini theatres and cinema halls should be set up at central places to avoid cost of transportation for the cine-goers. Cinema plots should not be auctioned by the DDA but should be given on reserve price keeping in view that the cinema is one of the important means of entertainment for the common man and deserves to be encouraged by providing land at cheaper rates...The removal of restrictions on rates of cinema tickets should be supported with the condition of upgradation of facilities as in the past it was found that removal of restriction on 80% of the seats have not resulted in any tangible improvement in the facilities”.

This logic invokes the upper-class educated ‘public’ that film scholar S.V. Srinivas, who has done extensive work on film viewing cultures in South India, speaks of as making the public sphere, an authority to which appeals could be made in matters of ‘common interest’. Hence the common man is invoked to make land cheaper for cinemas, and yet it is stipulated that all ticket prices can be deregulated with improvement of facilities – effectively restricting class access to the multiplexes solely to the “time-crunched” “global” Indian.

One of the most ironic demonstrations of laws changing in the ‘public interest’ was when the New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) refused to renew the lease of Chanakya, one of Delhi’s more successful single screen theatres. Despite the success of Chanakya, the NDMC wanted to convert it into a multiplex. The corporation argued that the potential

revenues from the multiplex would be far greater than the yearly Rs. 15 lakhs they received from Chanakya.

On the same day as the *Indian Express* reported the impending closure of Chanakya, it also carried a report on Delhi's parking woes:

"New Delhi, August 8: MCD (Municipal Corporation of Delhi) Commissioner Rakesh Mehta today filed an affidavit before the Delhi High Court, detailing a coordinated policy to improve parking facilities in the city.

"The court had, on August 4, asked the Corporation, the NDMC, DDA (Delhi Development Authority) and the Transport Department to work together and draft a policy on parking. Mehta told the court today that the growing vehicular population was one of the major problems. All the agencies have observed that multi-level parking is needed in view of the shortage of space, he said".

How does this link to the emergence of multiplex culture? Mr R.K. Saxena, the proprietor-manager of the Delhi Commercial Press, Chandni Chowk, which once printed tickets for over 40 Delhi cinemas, told me how, in his business, the cinema ticket printing is increasingly being replaced by tickets for parking (multiplex cinemas have computerised ticketing, and don't outsource). The manager of Moti Cinema told me that the gentry will not come to the hall because there is no parking space. Eros Cinema in Jangpura, currently closed, is slated to open as a multiplex in two years. The manager claims that they will wipe out the nearest competition, 3Cs, because they have parking space for 150 cars.

"The parking space in cinema, theatres, places of public assembly shall be provided as under:  
Cars: 10% of the seats".<sup>4</sup>

Cinemas are required by law to provide parking space for 80-90 cars. Contrast this to the reality around PVR Anupam 4 in Saket, the first of Delhi's multiplexes, and the one that pays the Delhi government the highest entertainment tax figures in the country. There are over 300-400 cars parked there at any given time. Parking has spilled onto the access roads that ring the Saket Community Centre, where the cinema is located, on two sides.

The gentry drives cars. Delhi has more cars than the other three metros put together. The gentry has seceded from the city's chaotic public transport network. The gentry is seceding from the older model of the cinema hall, which with all its class differentiation, was still a space where all social groups sat under the same roof.

In PVR's expansion plans, there is the further development of the 'Cinema Europa', first seen in the Metropolitan Mall, Gurgaon. With plush red leather seats, direct access to exclusive restaurants and bars, and ticket prices starting from Rs. 500.

"In a landmark move in March 2003, PVR Limited (operating as PVR Cinemas) has successfully raised private equity from ICICI Venture as part of funding to support its Rs. 100 crore expansion plan. ICICI Venture has invested Rs. 38 crore in PVR

Limited, the balance coming by way of Rs. 40 crore debt funding, and the rest in accruals. This represents the most significant investment in the Indian cinema industry in recent times and bears testimony to the immense faith ICICI has reposed in the business model, promoters and management team of PVR".<sup>5</sup>

Thus, government as well as institutional funding is backing an imagination of the city in which cinema, the institutionalised space for pleasure and desire, is restricted to the elite, and all other spaces become illicit.

June 1997 was a significant month in the history of cinema in Delhi. It was the month that PVR Anupam 4 started operations. It was also the month of the Uphaar cinema conflagration. Uphaar was owned by the Ansals, a family in the construction business. Anupam, before it became PVR Anupam 4, was also owned by them.

Uphaar Cinema in Green Park was built in 1973. On 13 June 1997, during the screening of the Hindi film *Border*, a generator caught fire immediately after the intermission. The audience noticed smoke coming from the side of the screen, but most people thought it was a 'special effect' device that was part of the movie. By the time they realised that a fire had broken out, it was too late. The majority of those trapped inside the hall died in a stampede or as a result of asphyxiation. The final tally was 59 dead, including children, and 103 injured.

The smoke reached the balcony due to the Ansals' flouting of building by-laws. They had raised to ceiling level what should have been a three-foot wall surrounding the generator. The ground floor parking area was enclosed, with no provision to ventilate the smoke from the adjoining generator room. When the generator caught fire, burning oil being spewed by it came in contact with parked cars. This led to the burning of at least 27 cars in the jam-packed parking area, which should not have admitted more than 15 vehicles. Smoke from this area passed inevitably through the stairway into the hall and onto the balcony, as there was no opening on the ground floor through which it could escape.

The case against the Ansals went on in court for six years, at the end of which the courts gave a landmark judgement. The judgement followed a petition by the Association of Victims of Uphaar Tragedy (AVUT), consisting of family members of the victims who moved the Delhi High Court on 28 July 1997. Significantly, the victims of the Uphaar tragedy were predominantly from the upper-middle-class, English-educated elite families of South Delhi, the 'gentry' which had migrated away from Imperial and Moti.

On 25 April 2003, delivering its 192-page judgment, the Delhi High Court awarded a compensation of about Rs. 18 crores to the families of the dead and to the injured. Emphasising that the tragedy was an avoidable one, the Division Bench comprising Justices S.K. Mahajan and Mukul Mudgal held the owners of the building, Gopal and Sushil Ansal, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (Licencing), the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and the Delhi Vidyut Board (DVB) guilty of giving short shrift to safety norms at the cinema. The court said that the Ansals would bear 55% of the total compensation amount while the remaining 45% would be shared equally by the DVB, the MCD and the DCP (Licencing). The court concluded: "It is our experience that the authorities including the licencing authority, the Delhi Vidyut Board, the health authorities and the municipal authorities, adopt a casual approach in inspecting the cinemas and other places visited by large numbers of people".

However, in the criminal case going on concurrently, the AVUT's plea to cancel the bail of the Ansals, on charges of destruction of evidence, was dismissed by the court. The Ansals, not yet convicted for criminal negligence in the Uphaar Case, have recently built a mall in Faridabad, Haryana, in which PVR is running a two-screen multiplex. They have plans for expansion in Delhi, Gurgaon, Faridabad, Ludhiana, and Lucknow.

Uphaar Cinema, meanwhile, remains closed. While the government agencies paid up promptly, the Ansals said that they needed to dispose of the Uphaar property to be able to pay. A contempt of court notice was slapped on them by AVUT, following which the Delhi High Court allowed them access to the property a month after the defence counsel had finished giving evidence in the criminal case.

Meanwhile, it would not be a leap of the imagination to see the connection between the MCD and the licencing department being penalised for the Uphaar tragedy, and the alacrity with which they conducted raids on errant cinema halls this year, and over the past few years. "The Delhi Police on Saturday sealed three cinema halls in the city, two for exhibiting pornographic films and a third for flouting fire safety norms. According to the police, nearly half a dozen other cinema halls are under the scanner for similar violations".<sup>6</sup>

To comply with the regulations meant losing the marginal profits that cinema exhibition still brought in. Many owners of cinema halls who had other businesses preferred to shut the halls down. Hall owners such as the Ansals, the Soods (Eros Cinema) and, formerly, the Sonis, are builders and real estate developers.

In the past few years there has been a paradigm shift. Laws and regulations have been rapidly changed to allow the development of the mall-multiplex combine. Many state governments repealed the Urban Land Ceiling and Regulation Act (ULCRA). Property that was locked, so to speak, for a long time has now been released for development.

The ULCRA had been passed in 1976, during the Emergency, with the rhetoric of 'ensuring equitable distribution and avoiding speculative transactions relating to land in urban agglomerations'.

It was repealed in 1999, effective immediately in Haryana, Punjab and all Union Territories. Immediately afterwards, the boom in malls started along the Mehrauli-Gurgaon Road in Gurgaon, Delhi's satellite town in Haryana. The Haryana government is, in fact, cashing on the boom. It amended rules to remove all technical bottlenecks that hindered setting up of malls on a stretch of the Mehrauli-Gurgaon Road. Not just that, the government's decisions made one believe that just about any available land in the city could have only a single use: commercial. That was clearly evident when Haryana Development Authority (HUDA) planned a huge commercial area, including an eight-storied mall, at a site where Gurgaon's Central Jail stood for years. Morphogenesis designed one of the largest malls in Gurgaon, the Metropolitan Mall, with a 7-theatre PVR multiplex.

"Designing a mall that is not just a stack of shops fitted into a building, but more like an enclosed Indian street system. It was seen as a space where, in a climate of retail strategy, the hangout space must be created", comments Sonali Rastogi of Morphogenesis. In conversation, she revealed that the "Indian street system" had a specific name: Chandni Chowk. So while Chandni Chowk as a site of leisure for the "time-crunched" "global" Indian was being recreated, redesigned and air-conditioned in Gurgaon, what about the actual Chandni Chowk?

Kumar Talkies in Chandni Chowk has closed down as a cinema hall. Nine shops opened in the outer walls, taking advantage of the MCD relaxation of rules: 20% of the land use of a space given to cinema could be used commercially. The hall was supposed to start functioning in two years, after the MCD sanctioned a plan for commercial and cinematic use. However, as the cinema hall hasn't started functioning, the status of the shops has been deemed illegal as the usage is 'commercial'. Much noise was made about Kumar Cinema's 'heritage' status (it became operational in 1935). MCD building officials, meanwhile, say that taking into account "the special nature of the walled city", the norms and guidelines that applied to the cinema halls in the rest of the capital did not apply here. This is why none of the other cinema halls in Chandni Chowk have been sanctioned in this mixed land use.

It goes without saying that being in the middle of what is the biggest wholesale market for many goods and commodities in North India, Kumar Talkies is unlikely to attract the 'gentry'.

### **What Does Begum Samru Have to Do with Any of This?**

The audience at Begum Samru's *nautch* was a restricted, elite audience, consuming 'liberated' female sexuality as spectacle. The non-elite participation in this play of pleasure and desire, though acknowledged, was supposed to be second-hand. It was a 'globalised' audience, British and Indian, at the dawn of Empire, and in one capacity or the other, serving it. The land on which the *haveli* was built was a gift for services rendered to the Emperor. After all, early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Delhi wasn't a democracy, but a dotard court trying to come to terms with, and be accommodated within, the expanding, ruthlessly capitalistic logic of Empire.

The similarity with 2004 is obvious. The representation of a particular brand of 'liberated', uninhibited female sexuality begins in mainstream cinema only after the economic reforms that heralded in 'liberalisation'. There is a globalised aesthetic to the display of the female body (as a fetishised object), which is synchronous with the investment of institutional, global capital in the Bombay film industry and television. It is not the 'masses' that these images are meant for, but the consumers who flock to the multiplexes, and malls, and 'world class' theatres, where private security frisks you before letting you in. All cinemas in Delhi with any pretensions to having a gentry audience have a security check at the gate. Contrast this to the Imperial, Ritz or the stalls of Regal, where the audience is herded in like cattle, even if the numbers aren't exactly reflective of the simile.

Affordable cinema halls where the non-elite can watch films are declining, often by being found illegal, whereas rules are changing to accommodate malls and multiplexes. The avenues for non-elite entertainment, the circulation of digital copies via VCD and cable TV, are deemed pirate. It is, in more senses than one, a 'recycled', second-hand modernity, constantly under threat; but it thrives nonetheless.<sup>7</sup>

Palika Bazaar is one of the sites where this pirate modernity thrives. It is an underground market in the centre of the city, where the trade in pirated and pornographic digital video flourishes. Pornographic VCDs sell for as little as Rs. 20-25 if you bargain hard enough, and buy in quantity. There are many varieties available, but the main divide is

between foreign (read white) and *desi* (Indian). White women are considered to be beyond the purview of morality. The *desi* pornography shows anonymous women, often south Indian, to whose often forcible degradation and humiliation the state turns a blind eye.

But over the last couple of months, various agencies of the state took a stand regarding the circulation of pirate CDs in two cases. One depicted a state-level beauty contest winner (Miss Jammu); and the other a female student from an elite private school in Delhi, captured on a cellphone while performing explicit sexual acts. The police went so far as to arrest the chairman of the web portal Baze.com, for not taking 'appropriate action' against the sexually explicit MMS clip being sold on the website. Palika Bazaar temporarily suspended the more illicit of its operations.

The hysteria generated tells its own story of state and media anxieties about circulation and the 'honour' of the elite woman. The sexuality of the elite woman, as seen in the ads for Satyam Cineplexes ("The sudden surge of hormones isn't due to special effects", "...there's enough temptation to send the mercury soaring", "Your date won't need another hint") is meant to be displayed only in the multiplex, the mall, and the MMS-enabled phones of the elite – in the new Chandni Chowk re-imagined in Gurgaon. All other desire for visual pleasure is either illegal and/or despicable, or on its way to being so. Only wankers come here now.

I don't know about Begum Samru, but Sir David Ochterlony surely would have approved.<sup>8</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Salim Kidwai. "The Singing Ladies Find a Voice". In *Seminar* 540, August 2004.
2. Thomas Bacon. "The Nautch in Tents (c. 1831-36)", quoted in *Historic Delhi: An Anthology*, ed. H. K. Kaul (Oxford University Press, 1985).
3. Brian Larkin. "Colonialism and the Built Space of Cinema in Nigeria". From *City Flicks: Indian Cinema and the Urban Experience*, ed. Preben Kaarsholm (Seagull Books, 2004).
4. Delhi Cinematograph Rules, 1981, Schedule 1, 17(3)(A).
5. Ipan are the PR consultants for PVR Cinema and PVR FACTORY Distribution Network..
6. "Crackdown on cinema halls, three sealed". *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, 21 September 2004.
7. Ravi Sundaram. "Recycling Modernity: Pirate Electronic Cultures in India". In *Sarai Reader 01: The Public Domain* (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, 2001, Delhi).
8. David Ochterlony was the first British Resident at Delhi, winner of many battles that expanded the territories held by the East India Company. He was a regular at the Begum's entertainments.