

# Literature, Print Culture, and the Indian New Wave

## ABSTRACT

This article explores the rise and fall of the Hindi literary film, circa 1969–1995. I discuss three hybrid genres that emerged from collaborations between modern Hindi writers and Indian New Wave filmmakers: light-hearted, middlebrow comedies about urban life; an avant-garde cinema characterized by a *mofussil* modernism; and an activist cinema concurrent with the Indian human rights movement. The article concludes by identifying the factors that pushed Hindi literature and cinema apart in the 1990s, with changes in state policies, the growth of private television channels, and the provincialization of Hindi literary culture.

In 1969, three unusual Hindi films started doing the rounds of the film festival circuit in India: Basu Chatterjee's *Sara Aakash* (The whole sky, 1969), Mrinal Sen's *Bhuvan Shome* (1969), and Mani Kaul's *Uski Roti* (*His Daily Bread*, 1969, released 1970). Though very different films, all shared the same cinematographer and wore the visual influence of European art cinema on their sleeves.<sup>1</sup> Crucially, all three were adaptations of modern Indian literature, following in the footsteps of Satyajit Ray's *The Apu Trilogy* (*Pather Panchali* [Song of the little road, 1955], *Aparajito* [*The Unvanquished*, 1956], and *Apu Sansar* [*The World of Apu*, 1959]). Since the early 1960s, Indian cinephiles had been hungry for a homegrown new wave, their hunger whetted by their exposure to the few European art films that circulated through the efforts of

1 That cinematographer was twenty-three-year-old Kewal Krishnan (K. K.) Mahajan (1944–2007), who would go on to shoot many of the most acclaimed Indian New Wave films. For a profile of Mahajan, see Rudradeep Bhattacharjee, "Even in the Darkness, He Dreamed of Lights: A Tribute to Renowned Cinematographer KK Mahajan," *Scroll*, July 13, 2017, <https://scroll.in/reel/843613/even-in-the-darkness-he-dreamed-of-lights-a-tribute-to-renowned-cinematographer-kk-mahajan>.

amateur film societies and through the International Film Festival of India (held in 1952, 1955, and annually since 1965).<sup>2</sup> To contemporary audiences, the near-simultaneous appearance of *Sara Aakash*, *Bhuvan Shome*, and *Uski Roti* in 1969—with their whimsical editing, fresh-faced casts, and naturally lit images of the world outside of studio sets—felt like a long-awaited breath of fresh air. The New Wave moment had finally arrived in India and had arrived to stay.<sup>3</sup>

A generous catalog of the Indian New Wave, or the New Indian Cinema, over the next two decades would comprise around a hundred films in five languages. Yet, barring a small set of works by a familiar roll call of internationally recognized auteurs (Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, and Shyam Benegal), little critical attention has been paid to arthouse Indian cinema, which remains strangely absent in most catalogs of world cinema—poorly archived and rarely watched or taught outside of India.

This article explores a remarkable aspect of Indian New Wave filmmaking: the deep and enduring ties with modern Indian literature that allowed New Wave films to serve as a contact zone between the worlds of print and celluloid. Partly due to the state-owned Film Finance Corporation's preference for funding low-budget films based on the work of "eminent writers in Hindi and other national languages" and partly due to middle-class investment in print culture during this period of socialism and economic stagnation, modern Indian literature played a crucial role in the Indian New Wave.<sup>4</sup> Not only did an astonishing number of New Wave films have their roots in modern Indian literature, but the very form of this cinema also often aspired to literariness. While there has been some analysis of the relationship

2 For more on international arthouse cinema, film society culture, and cinephilia in postcolonial India, see H. N. Narahari Rao, ed., *The Film Society Movement in India* (Mumbai: Asian Film Foundation, 2009); Rochana Mazumdar, "Debating Radical Cinema: A History of the Film Society Movement in India," *Modern Asian Studies* 46, no. 3 (2012): 731–767, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X11000710>; V. K. Cherian, *India's Film Society Movement: The Journey and Its Impact* (New Delhi: Sage, 2016); and Abhija Ghosh, "Memories of Action: Tracing Film Society Cinephilia in India," *Bioscope: Journal of South Asian Screen Studies* 9, no. 2 (2018): 137–164, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0974927618814026>.

3 As the "Manifesto of the New Cinema," by Mrinal Sen and Arun Kaul, put it, "This New Cinema Movement (NCM) as it might be termed has manifested itself through the 'New Wave' in France, the 'Underground' in America, and yet other unlabeled currents in other countries. The time for launching such a movement in India is now ripe." Mrinal Sen and Arun Kaul, "New Cinema Movement: Extract from Manifesto," *Close Up* 1, no. 1 (July 1968). See also Aruna Vasudev, *The New Indian Cinema* (New Delhi: Macmillan, 1986). The most famous skeptic of any notion of an Indian New Wave was Satyajit Ray, who ridiculed what he saw as the sterile experimentalism of younger directors such as Mani Kaul and Kumar Shahani. See Satyajit Ray, "An Indian New Wave?" and "Four and a Quarter," in *Our Films, Their Films* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 1976). For an overview of scholarship on Indian New Wave cinema, see Ira Bhaskar, "The Indian New Wave," in *Routledge Handbook of Indian Cinemas*, ed. K. Moti Gokulsing and Wimal Dissanayake (Oxford: Routledge, 2013).

4 See the report by B. K. Karanjia, film critic and founding chairman of the Film Finance Corporation, "Launching the New Wave," *Indian Post*, November 6, 1988, 6–7. Cited in Bhaskar, "Indian New Wave," 21. The Hindi reading public was quite receptive to these adaptations, often noting the prestige that a film adaptation conferred on an author. See, for instance, the celebratory tone of Satish Verma's cover story on literary cinema for *Dharmayug*: Satish Verma, "Sahityik Kathae Film Chaukhate Mein" [Literary fiction in the cinematic frame], *Dharmayug* 23, no. 46 (November 26, 1972): 8–9.

between film and literary culture in the case of Bengali, Kannada, and Marathi, this article focuses on the largely unstudied relationship between postcolonial Hindi print culture and the New Cinema.<sup>5</sup> From the late 1960s to the mid-1990s, the so-called Indian New Wave became a source of endless commentary and discussion in the Hindi public sphere, acting as a bridge between the middle-class and radical sections of the intelligentsia. This article maps this vital literature-cinema nexus, drawing on interviews and pulling together material housed in various print and cinema archives.

Before the New Wave, popular Hindi cinema had mostly ignored Hindi literature altogether, turning instead to Urdu for the hybrid, poetic language in which it spoke of love, faith, and justice.<sup>6</sup> The Indian New Wave brought the Sanskritic neologisms of literary Hindi into cinema theaters for the first time.<sup>7</sup> Three distinct New Wave forms reflected a vibrant dialogue with the themes and preoccupations of postcolonial Hindi literature: a genre of lighthearted comedies about middle-class life (the middle cinema), adapted from the fiction of writers such as Kamleshwar and Mannu Bhandari; an avant-garde or experimental cinema that emerged out of collaborations with modernist Hindi writers such as Nirmal Verma, Mohan Rakesh, and Ramesh Bakshi; and the topical, issue-based cinema most closely associated with screenplays by the Marathi playwright Vijay Tendulkar.<sup>8</sup> While the political and aesthetic differences between these films are significant, they share an orientation toward vernacular literary culture that extends beyond individ-

- 5 On Hindi literature and the New Wave, see Harish Kumar, *Cinema Aur Sahitya* [Cinema and literature] (New Delhi: Sanjay Prakashan, 1998); and Ravikant, *Media Ki Bhasha-Leela* [The play of language in media] (New Delhi: Vani, 2016), 121–154. For the Bengali case, see, for instance, two essays by Moinak Biswas: “Early Films: The Novel and Other Horizons,” in *Apu and After: Re-visiting Ray’s Cinema*, ed. Moinak Biswas (Kolkata: Seagull Books, 2006); and “Bengali Film Debates: The Literary Liaison Revisited,” *Journal of the Moving Image* (1999). For Kannada, see Madhava Prasad, “Ghattashradha: The Ritual,” in *The Cinema of India*, ed. Lalitha Gopalan, 24 Frames (London: Wallflower Press, 2009), 170–179. For Marathi, see Hrishikesh Ingle, “Marathi Cinema: Notes towards a Liminal History,” *Asian Cinema* 28, no. 2 (2017): 199–218; and Amrit Gangar, “Marathi Cinema: The Exile, the Factory and Game,” in Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Routledge Handbook of Indian Cinemas*, 72–87. For the emerging links between popular Hindi cinema and contemporary Indian writing in English, see Sangita Gopal, “‘Coming Soon to a Multiplex Near You’: Indian Fiction in English and New Bollywood Cinema,” in *A History of the Indian Novel in English*, ed. Ulka Anjaria (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 359–372.
- 6 Although the popular Hindi novelist Gulshan Nanda had a very successful career writing for the commercial Bombay film industry, forays into film by Hindi writers such as Premchand, Bhagwati Charan Verma, Amritlal Nagar, and Phanishwar Nath “Renu” were short-lived and unmemorable. By contrast, a well-established nexus with Urdu writers had been a foundational feature of the Hindi/Hindustani cinema, from the late colonial period onward. By 1969, Urdu poets who had left a lasting impact on the popular cinema included left-wing stalwarts such as Sahir Ludhianvi, Majrooh Sultanpuri, Kaifi Azmi, and Jan Nisar Akhtar. The ranks of Urdu prose writers who had worked for the Bombay cinema included Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, Ismat Chughtai, Sa’adat Hasan Manto, and Rajinder Singh Bedi. In the 1970s, notwithstanding the popularity of *masala* films by Urdu writers such as Salim-Javed and Kader Khan, the tide slowly began to turn in favor of Hindi.
- 7 See Mukul Kesavan, “Urdu, Awadh and the Tawaif: The Islamicate Roots of Hindi Cinema,” in *Forging Identities: Gender, Communities, and the State in India*, ed. Zoya Hasan (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1994), 244–257.
- 8 For an influential account of how and why Hindi cinema diverged into multiple forms in the 1970s, see Madhava Prasad, “The Moment of Disaggregation,” in *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 117–131.

ual instances of novels or short stories serving as sources for films. In what follows, I briefly explore each of these film genres, placing them in conversation with Hindi literary debates about realism, modernism, and socialism and with successive literary formations (the *nayi kahani*, or New Story, of the 1950s; *sathottari*, or post-1960s literature; and the *samantar kahani*, or Parallel Story, which became popular in the 1970s). Drawing on brief case studies, I analyze the literariness of the Indian New Wave as a “material phenomenon produced by a system of institutional interests and actors.”<sup>9</sup> The article concludes with a reflection on the circumstances that pulled apart modern Indian literature and cinema in the 1990s.

## A MIDDLEBROW REVOLUTION

The most vital role in sustaining the short-lived nexus between Hindi literature and the Indian New Wave was played by the popular, general interest magazines *Dharmayug*, *Sarika*, and *Dinmaan*—Indian equivalents of *Life* and *Reader’s Digest*—that formed the very heart of the Hindi public sphere in postcolonial India. It would be difficult to overstate the importance of these magazines and their “middlebrow cosmopolitanism” in shaping middle-class opinion and reflecting its center of gravity; to flip through their archives today is like watching a stop motion animation film in which Nehruvian socialism slowly comes apart.<sup>10</sup> These general interest magazines took Hindi’s ambition of becoming independent India’s preeminent national language quite seriously, frequently carrying translations from other Indian languages as well as reports on world literature, cinema, and politics. Edited by prominent Hindi *littérateurs*—Dharamvir Bharati (*Dharmayug*), Kamleshwar (*Sarika*), and Raghuvir Sahay (*Dinmaan*)—these magazines became vociferous champions for the new literary cinema, turning obscure New Wave directors into familiar, household names through frequent reviews and interviews, despite the difficulties that the directors faced in securing a theatrical release for their work (see Figure 1). Indeed, Bharati and Kamleshwar would themselves go on to write screenplays for New Wave films.<sup>11</sup>

The relationship between the Indian New Wave and the popular middle-class magazines went beyond that of patronage or publicity: both reflected the anxieties, concerns, and desires of the same audience. The same petit bourgeois desires—for scooters, for new clothes, and for small luxuries such as a cup of coffee at a nice restaurant—that animated middle-class cinema

9 Simone Murray, “Materializing Adaptation Theory: The Adaptation Industry,” *Literature/Film Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2008): 4–20.

10 The term is from Aakriti Mandhwani, who convincingly argues that middlebrow magazines are vital sources for understanding “the emergence, nature, and concerns of the Hindi middle-class reader in the post-Independence period.” Aakriti Mandhwani, “*Saritā* and the 1950s Hindi Middlebrow Reader,” *Modern Asian Studies* 53, no. 6 (2019): 1797–1815, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X17000890>. For an account of the emergence of middlebrow culture in the American context, see Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

11 Kamleshwar wrote the dialogues or screenplay for most films directed by Basu Chatterjee and Gulzar in the 1970s and 1980s and wrote extensively for the mainstream Hindi cinema. Bharati’s 1967 novella of the same name was the source for Shyam Benegal’s *Suraj Ka Satvan Ghoda* (*The Seventh Horse of the Sun*, 1992).



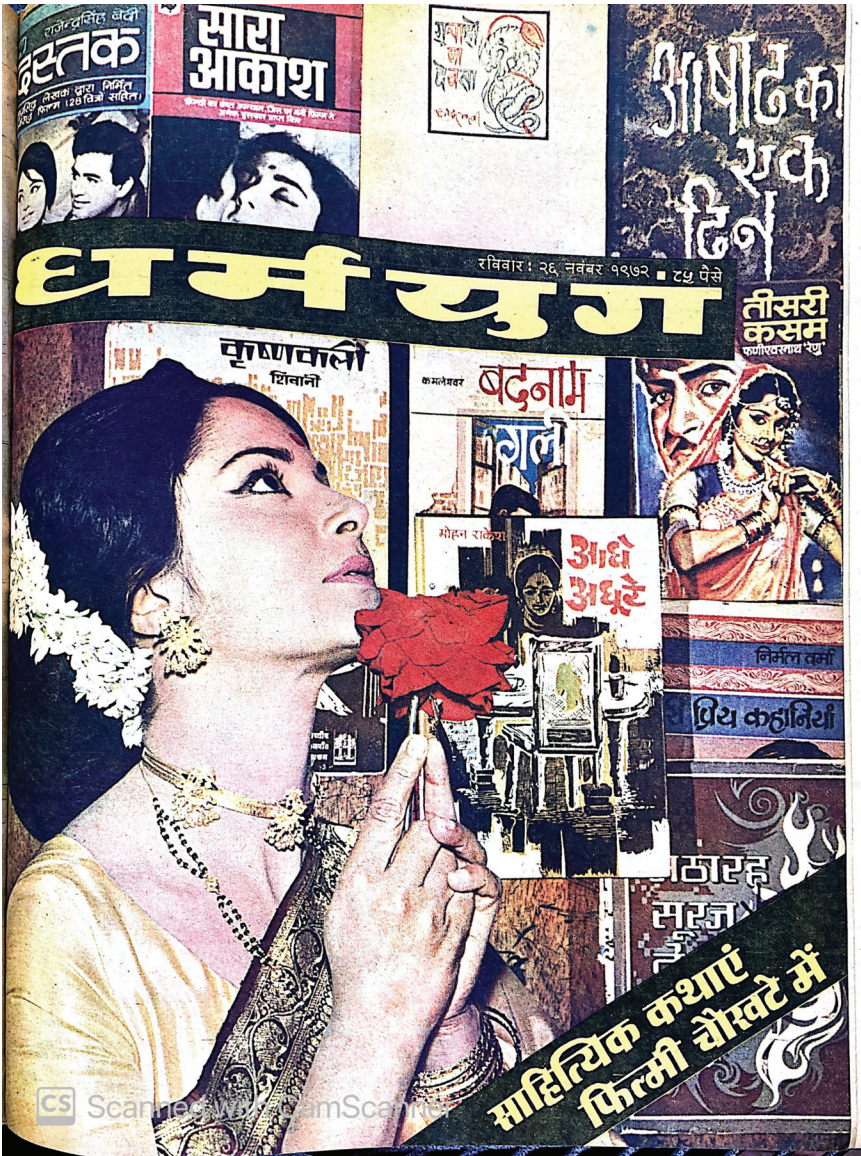


Figure 1. A cover story on “Hindi Fiction in the Cinematic Frame,” *Dharmayug*, November 26, 1972 (Bennett, Coleman, and Company Limited, 1972). Photograph by the author.

of the time also animated these magazines.<sup>12</sup> The protagonists of films by the likes of Basu Chatterjee, Hrishikesh Mukherjee, and Sai Paranjpye often look like they could have stepped out of advertisements in *Sarika* or *Dharmayug*. Besides, the various social movements that emerged in the turbulent 1970s

12 For more on the changing consumption practices of the Indian middle class, see Douglas Haynes et al., eds., *Towards a History of Consumption in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010).

left their traces in these magazines, just as they did in the Indian New Wave. The many investigative journalists or lawyers in the more political New Wave films perform a function similar to that of news features and photo collages in these magazines, which try to make the sordid and strange headlines from rural India—a caste atrocity here, a case of police brutality there—more intelligible to the urban middle-class reader.

What did this middle-class literary culture look like? Consider, for instance, a *Sarika* special issue on short stories, dated July 7, 1978.<sup>13</sup> This issue was among the first edited by Kanhaiyalal Nandan, who had only recently replaced Kamleshwar, the magazine's longtime editor. Under Kamleshwar's editorship, *Sarika* fashioned itself as a magazine with a keen sense of world literature—featuring translations from Japanese and Arabic, updates on Swedish cinema, and a regular series of translations from a range of South Asian languages, including Urdu, Maithili, Bengali, Sindhi, and Marathi.<sup>14</sup> *Sarika* was also the first major Hindi publication to feature a special issue on Dalit literature.<sup>15</sup> Under Kamleshwar's leadership, *Sarika* had become a keen promoter of a sensibility that Kamleshwar called the *samantar kahani andolan*, or parallel story movement: inspired by cinema and grounded in the banal struggles of everyday life in the towns and cities of northern India.<sup>16</sup> Despite the magazine's recent change in editors, the July 7th issue continued to reflect Kamleshwar's invigorating editorial policy of publishing a mix of provincial and cosmopolitan texts from India and abroad. A column on little magazines reported on recent gossip in the Urdu, Bengali, and French literary scenes. Besides a selection of short stories, the issue also featured an excerpt from British citizen Mary Tyler's memoir recounting her controversial imprisonment during the Indian Emergency (1975–1977) as well as a lengthy interview with Sachidananda “Agyeya” Vatsyayan, the doyen of Hindi modernism.<sup>17</sup> Interspersed with this intellectual content were advertisements for the kinds of products advertisers thought the readers of Hindi literature might be interested in: English speaking courses, hair removal creams, bindis, talcum powder, toothpaste, and castor hair oil.

One of the readers of this issue of *Sarika* was a young film student named Raman Kumar, who was then searching for ideas for his first feature. Kumar found himself fascinated by a short story in the issue titled “Columbus Zinda Hai” (Columbus lives on), a bleak and spare story about love, marriage, and disillusionment by Narendra Maurya, an obscure writer from a remote part of central India.<sup>18</sup> “Columbus Zinda Hai” is told in the first person from

13 *Sarika* 18, no. 222, July 7, 1978 (Bombay: Bennett Coleman and Company Limited).

14 Francesca Orsini, “The Archive of Literary Activism: The Magazine, the Short Story, and the World in 1950s India,” presented at the 48th Annual Conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin–Madison, WI, October 17, 2019.

15 *Sarika* 17, no. 201, Harijan Ank (Harijan Issue), November 11, 1977 (Bombay: Bennett Coleman and Company Limited).

16 For more on the *samantar kahani* movement, see Lucy Rosenstein, “Sacetan Kahāni and Samāntar Kahāni: Principal Movements in the Hindi Short Story of the 1960s and 1970s,” *South Asia Research* 13, no. 2 (1993): 117–131; and Vinay, *Samkālīn Kahāni: Samāntar Kahāni* [The contemporary story: The parallel story] (New Delhi: Macmillan, 1977).

17 Mary Tyler, *My Years in an Indian Prison* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1977).

18 Raman Kumar, interview by the author, October 3, 2018; and Narendra Maurya, “Columbus Zinda Hai” [Columbus lives on], *Sarika* 18, no. 222, July 7, 1978, 30–33.

the point of view of Miss Ganguly, the daughter of a provincial bureaucrat who feels stifled by the insular and arrogant worldview of her parents. The heroic Columbus of the story (no postcolonial irony seems intended here) is a classmate of hers, a fellow graduate student named Gyan. They fall in love and elope against her parents' wishes, despite the fact that Gyan is poor and his stipend inadequate. The harshest and most matter-of-fact denouncement of this marriage comes from the narrator's mother: "Daughter, the sari that is wrapped around your body now is worth two hundred and sixty rupees," she says. "Do write to us when you can afford to buy another one like this, we will think of it as a historical event no less significant than the Second World War."<sup>19</sup> Life after marriage turns out to be an endless journey of disappointment and hardscrabble economic struggle for the narrator. All the theories and ideals she imbibed in her MA classes cannot prevent her from feeling occasional pangs of regret. Pushed to the wall by circumstances, Gyan, the Columbus of his little provincial university, abandons his research and ends up becoming a ghostwriter of doctoral dissertations—all of his academic brilliance eroding away, coming to nothing.

"Columbus Zinda Hai" forms the kernel of Raman Kumar's popular debut film, the charming *Saath Saath* (Together, 1982). Kumar's adaptation injects new characters, comic sequences, and songs into the threadbare plot of the original story, altering its tone significantly. Transposed from the *mofussil* regions of central India to Bombay, the film explores the pleasures of wealth and upward mobility as much as it does the privations and *ressentiment* of lower-middle-class life. As such, the relationship of the film to the lower-middle-class ethos of the literary source is ambivalent: it is as if the advertisements in *Sarika's* pages have bled into Maurya's story, mixing contradictory desires together. The privileged young protagonist of *Saath Saath*—Geeta (Deepti Naval)—is not as helpless a character as Miss Ganguly in the story. After eloping with her Columbus (here named Avinash instead of Gyan), Geeta promptly takes up a job as a schoolteacher, overriding her husband's feeble opposition. Unlike Miss Ganguly in the story, Geeta has no second thoughts about leaving her parents' opulent Malabar Hill apartment and making her own way in the world. It is not her but the fiery socialist orator Avinash (Farooq Shaikh) who cracks under the pressure of the long lines, tiresome routine, and daily humiliations of lower-middle-class life. Taking up a job in a publisher's firm, Avinash quickly ditches his socialist ideals: offering bribes to government agencies in return for textbook contracts and ruthlessly exploiting authors to cheat them of their royalties. But Geeta feels increasingly alienated from the new Avinash—who has replaced his austere *kurta-pyjamas* with polyester-blend shirts and who now peppers his conversations with gratuitous English words instead of with Hindi-Urdu poetry. Unwilling to live her mother's life, Geeta decides to leave Avinash, a decision that echoes the reinvention of home, marriage, and family by the feminist writers of the era.<sup>20</sup>

19 Maurya, "Columbus," 31.

20 While the New Cinema remained dominated by male directors (barring important exceptions such as Sai Paranjpye and Deepa Dhanraj), the incipient feminism of films such as *Saath Saath* and *Umbartha* (The threshold, Jabbar Patel, 1982) reflected the emergence of a robust women's movement in India in the 1970s,

Because *Saath Saath* is such a naive film, so transparent in its valorization of youthful *adarshvaad* (idealism), it brings to the surface often invisible aspects of the middle-class literary and intellectual culture of its time. It is the world of print—books and newspapers—that constitute the ethical foundation of middle-class life in the film, to the point where literariness and socialism become indistinguishable virtues. Before he metamorphoses into an evil capitalist publisher, Avinash works as a freelance writer whose pro-worker reporting tends to be rejected by the editors of big newspapers, who are unwilling to print material critical of the oligarchs who own both the newspapers as well as the factories. Avinash is also the proud author of an unpublished novel about life in Bombay's slums that has been rejected by several publishers (no matter that he himself is the estranged son of a family of rural landlords and does not appear to have ever lived in a slum). It is this literary Columbus with whom Geeta, and the camera, fall in love amid the library stacks. The first fissures in Geeta and Avinash's marriage also take the form of an argument over a book—when Avinash refuses to even consider publishing a manuscript about the lives of poor peasants in rural India, insisting that the only books worth publishing are the ones readers want, such as romantic fantasies and crime thrillers (he later adds pornography to the list). After becoming a successful publisher, Avinash refuses to join his former mentor in following up on their long-cherished dream of setting up a small, independent newspaper. In ways both banal and existential, Avinash and Geeta's political idealism is enfolded within a world of print. The limits of their political agency are marked by the ghosts of the books never published and by the amateur socialist newspaper that remains only the pipe dream of a handful of intellectuals.

The struggle between austerity and consumerism that *Saath Saath* dramatizes was a key feature of the middle cinema tradition, which occupied an ambivalent position in between the mainstream film industry and the more avant-garde sections of the Indian New Wave.<sup>21</sup> The middle cinema tried to marry the idealism and seriousness that the middle class still associated with literature with the newfound pleasures of prosperity and consumption. In middle cinema classics such as *Golmaal* (Messed up, Hrishikesh Mukherjee, 1979), *Chhoti Si Baat* (A small matter, Basu Chatterjee, 1976), and *Chashme Buddoor* (Away from the evil eye, Sai Paranjpye, 1981), these new pleasures

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crystallized by the publication of the Government of India's *Towards Equality* report of 1974, which provided a comprehensive overview of the social, economic, cultural, and political status of women in India. For an accessible history of the Indian women's movement, see Radha Kumar, *The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800–1990* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1993).

21 Madhava Prasad suggests that the commercially oriented middle cinema should not be seen as part of the Indian New Wave per se but rather as an appropriation of its realist aesthetic by the mainstream film industry. Similarly, Ira Bhaskar distinguishes between the sentimental solutions offered by the middle cinema and the more political narratives of left-wing New Wave films. I use the term *middle cinema* in a more expansive sense, to include films on middle-class life by left-leaning filmmakers such as Saeed Akhtar Mirza and Raman Kumar, which were addressed to the same audience and engaged similar dilemmas around class identity, consumption, female sexuality, and marriage. See Madhava Prasad, "Middle Class Cinema," in Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film*, 160–188; and Ira Bhaskar, "Indian New Wave," 29.



took the quite literal form of a makeover sequence. In other films, they could take the form of sequences recreating the seductive, kinetic pleasure of cruising through the city in a car or taxi instead of being packed into an overcrowded bus or train—such as in *Rajnigandha* (The tuberose, Basu Chatterjee, 1974), *Albert Pinto Ko Gussa Kyun Aata Hai* (What makes Albert Pinto so angry?, Saeed Akhtar Mirza, 1980), and *Katha* (A story, Sai Paranjpye, 1983). In formal terms, this marriage between the serious virtues of literature and the more populist pleasures of cinema was reflected in hybrid narrative modes that self-consciously signaled their own literariness: for instance, the literary frame story of the disillusioned physician-writer in Hrishikesh Mukherjee's *Anand* (1971, screenplay by the poet Gulzar) or the dense, reflexive interior monologues in Basu Chatterjee's otherwise fluffy *Rajnigandha* (adapted from a short story by Mannu Bhandari).

True to its roots in the middle cinema, *Saath Saath* does not end with the dissolution of Avinash and Geeta's marriage but holds out the possibility of reconciliation between them—as well as between socialist principles and the quest for a good life and between the worlds of print and celluloid. Even as *Saath Saath* fights a Pyrrhic battle against the middle-class abandonment of the intertwined worlds of print and socialism, it closes on a relatively hopeful note, holding out the possibility that the Geetas and Avinashes of 1980s India would be able to fashion a new, socialist vocabulary of self, home, and marriage different from that of their parents.

When I interviewed him in October 2018, director Raman Kumar was more circumspect about this possibility as well as about the future of the middlebrow literature-cinema nexus. Like many others, Kumar had come to cinema through theater, via his links with the left-wing Indian People's Theatre Association. He graduated from India's National Film Institute in 1980 and saw his first feature film release in 1982, the same year as the television boom in India. Kumar later became part of a wave of middlebrow filmmakers who switched over to television, starting his career with a bang by co-directing the iconic soap *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi* (This thing called life, 1984–1987) for the public network Doordarshan, drawing on screenplays by the Hindi poet Sharad Joshi. In time, however, with the rise of private satellite television, Kumar found that the audience's appetite for literary material had diminished, and he switched over to directing more commercially oriented content for film and television (while continuing to experiment with more literary material as a theater director). Looking back, Kumar now seemed to suggest that the optimism of *Saath Saath's* investment in literature reflected a unique—and short-lived—conjuncture in Indian intellectual and cultural history:

I experienced the 1980s as a time of hope, as a time when socialism was being reinvented all over the world. Back then, our generation had a lot of faith in the ability of literature, theater, and cinema to create a different world. The real disillusionment came later, after the fall of the Soviet Union, and after the failure of any one of the Indian Communist Parties to live up to their promise. . . . I would say that ours was the last generation of truly literary filmmakers. We used to subscribe to literary magazines in our hostel rooms [in

the Film Institute in Pune] and carry them around in our pockets to read on buses. Most of those magazines are now defunct. You can count the number of films that draw on literary sources on your fingers now. And even then the source is almost always an English book. The links between cinema and Hindi literature will end with my generation.<sup>22</sup>

### **MOFUSSIL MODERNISM**

As we turn from the middlebrow to the avant-garde, a comparison with French art cinema—the default model for new film movements all over the world—can be instructive. The mythology surrounding the *nouvelle vague* can sometimes obscure the fact that the global prestige of French art cinema in the 1950s and 1960s owed more than a little to the literary avant-garde.<sup>23</sup> A number of collaborations, particularly those of the Left Bank writers and filmmakers, contributed to the creation of a shared *écriture* that was “alternatively, or interconnectedly, filmic and novelistic.”<sup>24</sup> This nexus was reflected in the cinematic techniques of literary figures such as Jean Cocteau, Marguerite Duras, and Alain Robbe-Grillet, as well as in the decidedly literary style of filmmakers such as Alain Resnais, Robert Bresson, and Chris Marker. The site of these collaborations was typically Paris, the city through which—to use Pascale Casanova’s memorable phrase—the “Greenwich Meridian” of European aesthetic modernity passed.<sup>25</sup> Unlike French, Hindi enjoyed very little prestige or cultural capital in the world literary marketplace of the 1960s and 1970s. Even its domestic claim on the status of a national language was exceptionally shaky, undercut not only by its limited geographical reach but also by the presence of older rivals such as Urdu, Braj, and Maithili even within the so-called Hindi Heartland of North India. A literature-cinema nexus did not develop in Hindi till the New Wave period (1969–1995), when the Film Finance Corporation, headed by B. K. Karanjia, established literariness as a criterion through which the government would select projects to fund.

Following in the footsteps of their French guru Robert Bresson, avant-garde Indian filmmakers such as Kumar Shahani and Mani Kaul turned to the *nayi kahani* (New Story) movement of the 1950s and 1960s as a source for a new kind of literary cinema.<sup>26</sup> Like Bresson, Shahani’s and Kaul’s

22 Raman Kumar, interview by the author.

23 While the early films by the *Cahiers du cinéma* group are sometimes seen as a reaction to the “literary” style of studio films, the proper target of their criticism was not literary influence as such, but the formulaic mode of adaptation in studio-produced costume dramas: thus, the shrine to Balzac in François Truffaut’s *The 400 Blows* (1959). John J. Michalcyk, *The French Literary Filmmakers* (Philadelphia: Art Alliance Press, 1980).

24 Lynn A. Higgins, *New Novel, New Wave, New Politics: Fiction and the Representation of History in Postwar France* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 10.

25 Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. Malcolm DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

26 The *nayi kahani* (New Story) movement was the preeminent mode of modernist realism in Hindi literature post-Independence. Some of the major writers associated with the movement include Mohan Rakesh, Kamleshwar, Nirmal Verma, Rajendra Yadav, and Mannu Bhandari; one or more works by each of these writers ended up being adapted for the screen by New Wave filmmakers. For an English-language

engagement with modernist literature and painting was serious, cerebral, and deconstructive—a mode of adaptation best described as “refractive” rather than derivative, following André Bazin.<sup>27</sup> But there was a crucial temporal lag between the *nayi kahani* and the New Wave: by the time these stories were adapted for the screen, obituaries for the *nayi kahani* had already begun to appear in the Hindi press. While the *nayi kahani* had first emerged in the 1950s, a time of relative optimism, its screen adaptations responded to a very different chronotope—that of the decades of underdevelopment and disillusionment that followed the cascading crises of the 1960s.<sup>28</sup> For Hindi writers, in particular, these were years characterized by a bitter *mohabhang* (disillusionment or broken love) with the Nehruvian project—with unemployment and inflation at dangerous levels; growing levels of working-class militancy that culminated in the massive, nationwide railway strike of May 1974; and unending lines for rationed food and kerosene that saw even middle-class households participate in the picketing of ration shops.<sup>29</sup> The most popular poetry in Hindi literary circles during this period spoke of betrayal, disappointment, and inchoate rage: of bullet holes in street corners and of national maps slopped with cow dung.<sup>30</sup> A keen sense of provinciality and belatedness was central to the work of the *sathottari* (post-1960s) generation of Hindi writers: during the long 1970s, the Prime Meridian of Hindi literary modernity passed through the in-between and incomplete spaces of the *mofussil* regions rather than through the metropolis of New Delhi.<sup>31</sup> It was this *mofussil* modernism that would fascinate the more avant-garde filmmakers of

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introduction to the *nayi kahani*, see Preetha Mani, “What Was So New about the New Story? Modernist Realism in the Hindi Nayī Kahāni,” *Comparative Literature* 71, no. 3 (2019): 226–251, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00104124-7546181>.

- 27 André Bazin, “Le Journal d’un curé de campagne and the Stylistics of Robert Bresson,” in *What Is Cinema? Vol. 1*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 125–143; Kumar Shahani, *The Shock of Desire and Other Essays*, ed. Ashish Rajadhyaksha (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2015); Mani Kaul and Udayan Vajpeyi, *Abhed Aakash: Mani Kaul Se Udayan Vajpeyi Ki Baatcheeet* [The undivided sky: A conversation between Mani Kaul and Udayan Vajpeyi] (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2011); and Vikrant Dadawala, “Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh and the Passing of Soviet India,” *South Asia* 44, no. 6 (2021): 1090–1113.
- 28 To list just a few: the Sino-Indian War of 1962, Nehru’s death in 1964, the droughts and famine scares of 1966–1967, the Maoist-inspired Naxalbari insurgency of 1967, and the suspension of democratic rights during the Emergency of 1975–1977.
- 29 See Arvind Rajagopal, “The Emergency as Prehistory of the New Indian Middle Class,” *Modern Asian Studies* 45, no. 5 (2011): 1003–1049; Nagindas Sanghavi, “From Navnirman to the Anti-Mandal Riots: The Political Trajectory of Gujarat (1974–1985),” *South Asian History and Culture* 1, no. 4 (2010): 480–493; Bipan Chandra, *In the Name of Democracy: JP Movement and the Emergency* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2017); Ranabir Samaddar, *The Crisis of 1974: Railway Strike and the Rank and File* (New Delhi: Primus Books, 2017); Stephen Sherlock, *The Indian Railways Strike of 1974: A Study of Power and Organised Labour* (New Delhi: Rupa and Company, 2001); and V. Krishna Ananth, “Remembering May 1974: The Historic Railway Workers’ Strike,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 51, no. 22 (2016): 16–19.
- 30 I’m referring here to the poetry of Sudama Pandey “Dhoomil” (1936–1975), the angriest of the angry young men who dominated Hindi letters during this period. See, for instance, the poem on the twentieth anniversary of Indian independence, titled “Bees Saal Baad” (Twenty years later), in Sudama Pandey “Dhoomil,” *Sansad Se Sadak Tak* (From the Parliament to the street) (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1972).
- 31 From the Arabic *mufassal*, the passive participle of “to divide” or “separate.” In the Indian subcontinent, *mofussil* has been used as an administrative term referring to remote, provincial regions for many centuries now—first by the Persian-speaking bureaucrats of the Mughal Empire and then by British civil servants.

the New Cinema. Even from the oeuvre of *nayi kahani* writers Mohan Rakesh and Nirmal Verma, it was uncharacteristically melancholic stories about waiting and paralysis, set in transient spaces in between the countryside and city, that appealed to New Wave filmmakers, as a somewhat miffed Verma himself noted.<sup>32</sup> Held back by censorship as well as a perpetual lack of funds, there would be no iconic kisses like those of Jean-Paul Belmondo and Anna Karina in the Indian New Wave—disillusionment and not *jouissance* would be the dominant flavor of its avant-garde films in the 1970s.

Indeed, in retrospect, the most striking feature of the Indian New Wave's encounter with Hindi literary modernism is the frustrated longing that characterizes films such as *Sara Akash* (The whole sky, Basu Chatterjee, 1969, adapted from the novel by Rajendra Yadav), *Uski Roti* (adapted from a short story by Mohan Rakesh), *Maya Darpan* (The mirror of illusions, Kumar Shahani, 1972, adapted from a short story by Nirmal Verma), *27 Down* (Awtar Krishna Kaul, 1974, adapted from a novella by Ramesh Bakshi), *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* (Man rises from the surface, Mani Kaul, 1980, adapted from the collected works of Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh), and *Naukar Ki Kameez* (The shirt of a servant, Mani Kaul, 1999, adapted from a novel by Vinod Kumar Shukla). When adapted for the screen by filmmakers such as Mani Kaul and Kumar Shahani, this *mofussil* modernism became a tangible chronotope in the setting of a small, provincial town with its lone railway or bus station. Think of Taran in her red sari, standing listlessly by the single-gauge train tracks in *Maya Darpan*, caught between the decaying feudal world of her father and the unconvincing maps of the new, planned city-to-be that the engineer shows her.<sup>33</sup> Or of Balo waiting patiently in the center of the frame as a dust storm takes over the screen in *Uski Roti*.<sup>34</sup> For modernist writers in Hindi as well as for the modernist wing of the New Wave, the *kasbas* (semi-rural towns) of North India were not backward spaces but the ground zero of a decaying postcolonial modernity—spaces of suspended promises, where past and future met. In many ways, this symbolic investment in provinciality and decay reflected the combination of great geographical reach and narrow social diffusion that characterized the Hindi literary field in postcolonial India, at least up to the 1980s.<sup>35</sup> While the Hindi literary field did have insti-

32 Nirmal Verma, "Nirdeshak Ko Lekhak Se Jodne Waale Kahani Ke Kendriya Tatva" [The key elements linking the director to the writer], *Dharmayug* 23, no. 46 (November 26, 1972): 11–12.

33 For more on *Maya Darpan*, see Laleen Jayamanne, *The Epic Cinema of Kumar Shahani* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015); and Aparna Frank, "Critical Review: Kumar Shahani's *Maya Darpan* (1972)," *Synoptique—An Online Journal of Film and Moving Images Studies* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 127–150.

34 Ashish Rajadhyaksha, "Mani Kaul and the 'Cinematic Object': *Uski Roti* and the Rulebook of Cinema," in *Indian Cinema in the Time of Celluloid: From Bollywood to the Emergency* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 319–351; and Colin Burnett, "Transnational Auteurism and the Cultural Dynamics of Influence: Mani Kaul's 'Non-Representational' Cinema," *Transnational Cinemas* 4, no. 1 (2013): 3–24, [https://doi.org/10.1386/trac.4.1.3\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/trac.4.1.3_1).

35 For more on the sociology of Hindi literature, see Sanjay Joshi, *Fractured Modernity: Making of a Middle Class in Colonial North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001); Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920–1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Charu Gupta, *The Gender of Caste: Representing Dalits in Print* (New Delhi: Permanent Black; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016).

tutional bases in cities such as New Delhi and Allahabad, the readers and writers of the many literary magazines that were its veins and arteries were scattered across small towns all over North India.<sup>36</sup> Almost uniformly, these readers and writers were upper-caste Hindu men, primarily from the Brahmin or Kayastha castes.

Yet this was a period in which modern Indian literature *mattered*, as it has not mattered since. Consider, for instance, a relatively obscure literary adaptation from the period: Awtar Krishna Kaul's *27 Down*. Kaul's debut film (released posthumously after the tragic death of the young director) begins with a confession of failure. As the 27 Down train departs from Varanasi toward Bombay, beginning its lost journey westward across the Indian subcontinent, a young man (M. K. Raina) lies immobile on the upper-berth of a "sleeper" coach, looking feverishly into the distance. His voice reaches us over the noise of the moving train and the sound of a child crying:

People make journeys from one place to another, but all I do is travel from one thought to the next. People board the train at one place and de-board at their destination. . . . I get on and get off anywhere I like. I don't know where I'm headed, or why I'm headed there. I don't know who I am fighting. . . . It is only when I look at a calendar or a watch that I know that I'm alive. To be honest, my life went wrong right from the very beginning. Not a single day from my childhood flashes out to me when I try to remember it. I see a dull scene before my eyes—a rising morning sun, a bridge, a single berth on the third-class compartment of a running train—and nothing more.<sup>37</sup>

With its palpably literary beginning, *27 Down* promises to bring to Indian audiences a world rarely seen on-screen before the Indian New Wave—the world of Hindi literary modernism. Today, *27 Down* is a somewhat obscure film, a footnote in the story of the Indian New Wave, remembered only for Apurba Kishore Bir's handheld cinematography, inspired by *The Battle of Algiers* (Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966), of Mumbai's railway network, then the primary infrastructure binding the metropolis to a vast, underdeveloped hinterland. But our understanding of the Indian New Wave can only be partial at best without a serious engagement with the vernacular literary fields that mediated between history and its inscription in celluloid. In order to historicize the dense, disenchanted interior monologues that bind the film together, we must turn to postcolonial Hindi literature, to a now out-of-print modernist novella by a forgotten master of the post-1960s literature of *moha bhang*, Ramesh Bakshi (1936–1992).<sup>38</sup>

36 As Nandini Chandra argues, the "Hindi literati's experience of modernity and the urban public space was to a large extent negotiated via smaller towns . . . with their unbroken continuity of open fields, rustic food-stuffs, and lifestyles." See Nandini Chandra, "The Pedagogic Imperative of Travel Writing in the Hindi World: Children's Periodicals (1920–1950)," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 30, no. 2 (2007): 293–325, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856400701499250>.

37 *27 Down* (Awtar Krishna Kaul, 1974). All translations mine.

38 For a Hindi-language introduction to Bakshi, see Rajendra Sinha, *Ramesh Bakshi Ke Upanyason Mein Vyakti-Bodh* [Self-discovery in the novels of Ramesh Bakshi] (New Delhi: Nachiketa Prakashan, 1980).



By and large, *27 Down* is a relatively straightforward adaptation of Bakshi's novella, *Atharah Suraj Ke Paudhe* (The seedlings of eighteen suns), whose title references the eighteen-day-long battle of Kurukshetra that forms the crux of the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*.<sup>39</sup> *Atharah Suraj Ke Paudhe* tells the story of the sentimental education of a disillusioned twenty-four-year-old train conductor named Sanjay (he shares his name with a character blessed with divine sight in the *Mahabharata*). Despite his grand mythological name, the Sanjay of *Atharah Suraj Ke Paudhe* and *27 Down* is a melancholic, fatalistic character, trapped in a limbo between village and city, unable to transcend the “fractured modernity” of the North Indian middle classes.<sup>40</sup> He dreams of becoming a painter or sculptor but is forced to take up a job in the Indian railways by his overbearing, patriarchal father. Almost miraculously, a chance encounter with a fellow passenger in the dehumanizing crush of a Bombay suburban train brings some color and hope to his dry life. He falls in love with Shalini, a seemingly modern woman with a job and a room of her own. But neither of them seems willing to make the decisive break away from their traditional families that would allow them to become a truly bourgeois couple with a modern, companionate marriage. Their love remains unconsummated and incomplete. Instead, Sanjay is forced by his father to marry the daughter of a rich rural landlord, whose rustic ways disgust him. As a dowry, the bookish and urbane Sanjay receives a gift of four buffalo—creatures that seem to be relentlessly advancing toward him in his nightmares, taking over his home and consciousness. Trapped in a life he never wanted, Sanjay becomes a wandering drifter, disappearing from home for large stretches of time, unable to love his wife or to repair the ruptured bond with Shalini. Both the novel and the film brim over with resentment, regret, and helpless rage: affective moods characteristic of *sathottari* (or post-1960s) Hindi literature, of a generation of petit bourgeois would-be-radicals whose manifestos ultimately did little to dismantle resilient social structures.

While the title of Bakshi's novella came from the Hindu epics, its non-linear experimental prose—which draws on cinematic techniques such as flashbacks, extreme close-ups, ostentatious montages, and the use of cuts on sound to transition between scenes—marked Bakshi as part of the same film generation as Alain Robbe-Grillet, Marguerite Duras, or Julio Cortázar.<sup>41</sup> The preface to *Atharah Suraj Ke Paudhe* invokes the internationalism of early twentieth-century European modernism, but if *Atharah Suraj Ke Paudhe* is indeed an avant-garde text, then it represents an avant-garde impulse turned sour, one that has been defeated and humiliated by history.<sup>42</sup> “What

39 Ramesh Bakshi, *Atharah Suraj Ke Paudhe* [The seedlings of eighteen suns] (Varanasi: Bharatiya Gyanapitha, 1965). Following the release of the movie, the novel was reissued under a new name and with a new preface: Ramesh Bakshi, *27 Down* (New Delhi: Hind Book Centre, 1974). Subsequent references are to the 1974 edition.

40 Joshi, *Fractured Modernity*.

41 For more on the unprecedented prestige, visibility, and political importance of the film generation in Europe, see András Bálint Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950–1980* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

42 This souring of the avant-garde impulse was arguably a feature of the entire *laghu patrika* (little magazine) literary scene in Hindi from the 1960s to the 1990s. Bakshi was himself an editor of a little magazine (*Aaveg*) and helped organize the first multilingual, all-India Little Magazine Conference in the late 1960s. For more on

do I care for Futurism, the speeded-up version of Cubism?” declares Bakshi grandiosely in his preface to the novel. “All I have borrowed from it is its *gati* (‘speed’ or ‘rhythm’) and mixed it up with countless things from around me: machines, sounds, descriptions, instruments, noises, struggles, wars, piston-gears, and balance wheels.”<sup>43</sup> Bakshi’s debt to the *gati* of Futurism is evident in the extended analogy that defines the novella, fusing Sanjay and the Indian railways together into the kind of humano-mechanical protagonist so beloved of Italian Futurism. Sanjay is born on a moving train in between two *mofussil* stations, and his life remains bound to the vast network of the Indian railways: the “most important material emblem of modernity” in India, for at least a century since the start of passenger services in the 1850s.<sup>44</sup> As a child, Sanjay idolizes his engine driver father. As an adult, he eats, sleeps, and showers on board trains and is haunted by the premonition that his life will come to an anonymous end on a moving train. The simple present tense of the narrative merges into frequent onomatopoeic recreations of the sound of a moving train, and it is the speed and rhythm of the train that propels the narrative forward. Twenty pages into the novella, it places its cards on the table, with Sanjay declaring, “I am the Indian Railways.” But Bakshi’s New Man, his humano-mechanical protagonist, does not rush breathlessly toward the future like his distant Italian cousins. Like the overcrowded and accident-prone Indian railway network in the 1970s, Sanjay is trapped in the “narrow lanes of the present,” alienated from “the endless expanse of the past and a future that is fast asleep,” making journeys that are ultimately circular.<sup>45</sup> Images of train accidents and broken limbs recur through the novella with pessimistic regularity. Brought up in a harsh patriarchal environment and raised on a steady diet of lower-middle-class fears of failure, Sanjay remains transfixed with an image from his childhood memories: a derailed coach, stripped of all its furnishing, covered with layers of dust that no effort of his can remove, a coach that always appears to be crying.

In its film adaptation, Bakshi’s derailed, postcolonial Futurism loses some of its formal edginess, tempered by a placid, out-of-place score and choppy, uneven editing. Sanjay is played by a twenty-four-year-old M. K. Raina, then fresh out of theater school, and Shalini by the Bollywood star Rakhee Gulzar (see Figure 2). Picked out of jostling crowds by Apurba Kishore Bir’s camera, they make an odd couple on-screen: Raina’s lanky frame, intellectual-style beard, and introspective, literary diction contrast with Rakhee’s movie-star charisma. At the same time, the amateur and incomplete-seeming texture of *27 Down* itself appears marked by the fractured modernity it depicts. Though largely realist in tone, the film retains an avant-garde impulse in its visual obsession with the railway as a contradictory symbol of movement and stasis, escape and entrapment, and happenstance and fate. Most of *27 Down*’s most

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the avant-gardism and radical politics of the *laghu patrika* world, see Rajiv Ranjan Giri, *Paraspar: Bhasha, Sahitya, Andolan* [Reciprocity: Language, literature, social movements] (New Delhi: Rajkamal, 2018), 120–140.

43 Bakshi, *27 Down*, 6.

44 Marian Aguiar, *Tracking Modernity: India’s Railway and the Culture of Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

45 Bakshi, *27 Down*, 7.



Figure 2. M. K. Raina as Sanjay and Rakhee Gulzar as Shalini in *27 Down* (National Film Development Corporation, 1974).

memorable sequences feature trains: a long shot of the impossible multitude pouring out of a single train at Bombay's Victoria Terminus station; documentary-style images of homeless people sleeping on station benches; a withered old priest offering prayers to the Ganges from the inside of a train window; and picture-postcard compositions of steam engine trains on bridges. If the famous train sequence of Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali*—in which two young children encounter a train for the first time in their lives—epitomizes the techno-optimism of Nehruvian modernity, then the melancholy, regretful, and vagabond train sequences of *27 Down* reflect the waning of this optimism and its replacement by a crippling disillusionment.<sup>46</sup> No trace of the hope animating Ray's depiction of the railways as an engine of modernity seems to survive in *27 Down*. Beyond Sanjay and Shalini, on either side of the railway tracks, the Indian countryside stretches out like an endless wasteland of disappointment and missed opportunities.

### THE BURNING VILLAGE

Besides the middle cinema and the avant-garde cinema of literary modernism, the Indian New Wave moment also saw the proliferation of social realist films that explored the persistence of landlessness, poverty, and caste violence in rural India, following the failure of land reform policies or

46 For an influential take on the train sequence and its technological optimism, see Geeta Kapur, "Sovereign Subject: Ray's Apu," in *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2000), 201–233.

community development programs to substantially make a difference in the lives of those at the very bottom of the social pyramid.<sup>47</sup> The bleak themes of these films reflect the urgency of the agrarian question in 1960s and 1970s India, as tensions between rural laborers and landowning farmers exploded into violence in places as far apart as Thanjavur district (Tamil Nadu) and Naxalbari village (West Bengal). Shot on location in soft, muted Eastman-color stock, rural New Wave films tend to have a texture and tone that most closely resemble that of a news feature—objective rather than intimate.

The paradigmatic representation of the countryside in Hindi New Wave cinema can be found in Shyam Benegal's early feudalism trilogy—*Ankur* (*The Seedling*, 1973), *Nishant* (*Night's end*, 1975), and *Manthan* (*The Churning*, 1976)—whose success made the films into an influential template for later filmmakers.<sup>48</sup> Political differences notwithstanding, the representation of rural India in later films—such as *Gaman* (*The departure*, Muzaffar Ali, 1978), *Aakrosh* (*Cry of the wounded*, Govind Nihalani, 1980), *Paar* (*The crossing*, Goutam Ghose, 1984), and *Disha* (*Direction*, Sai Paranjpye, 1990)—adhered to the same social realist pattern, translating the diverse dialects and customs of rural India into stories legible to the national audience. Typically responding to the headlines of the day—such as the rise in agrarian violence in the Telangana region (*Ankur*, *Nishant*), the growth of Naxalism in tribal areas (*Aakrosh*), or the causes of migration from rural to urban areas (*Gaman*, *Paar*, *Disha*)—these films assumed no familiarity with local power dynamics, customs, or dialects. The radical political aesthetic of *Dalit Chetna* (or “Dalit Consciousness,” to use Omprakash Valmiki's term) was entirely absent in these films, which focused on upper-caste disillusionment with the State and society rather than Dalit or Adivasi customs, worldviews, or perspectives.<sup>49</sup> No matter the setting, the villagers in these films speak a form of lightly accented Hindi for the benefit of the national viewer.<sup>50</sup> Yet the apparent simplicity of the mise-en-scène could be deceptive, as Ira Bhaskar reminds us: through “the tracking camera, the pan, the deep shot, the long take, and staging in depth with multi-planar connections,” these films hinted at a “complex and ambiguous reality beyond the frame of the image.”<sup>51</sup>

The relatively middlebrow form of the Indian New Wave's political cinema enabled it to become the site of crucial intermedial connections across Indian languages. In its heyday, the Hindi New Cinema created a powerful interface between Hindi, Bengali, and Marathi literary cultures and between journalism, literature, human rights activism, and cinema. The most visible

47 For more on the failures of land reform policies and community development schemes, see Francine R. Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947–2004: The Gradual Revolution*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 156–222, 481–547; and Benjamin Robert Siegel, *Hungry Nation: Food, Famine, and the Making of Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 152–182.

48 Anuradha Dingwaney Needham, *New Indian Cinema in Post-Independence India: The Cultural Work of Shyam Benegal's Films* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

49 Omprakash Valmiki, *Dalit Sahitya ka Saundaryashastra* [The aesthetics of Dalit literature] (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2009).

50 For influential critiques of the New Cinema's realism, which had an ambivalent relationship with the developmental state, see Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film*, 188–216; and Rajadhyaksha, *Indian Cinema*, 219–254, 352–391.

51 Bhaskar, “Indian New Wave,” 27–28.

face of this interface was the Marathi playwright and human rights activist Vijay Tendulkar, who wrote the screenplays for most of Shyam Benegal's and Govind Nihalani's films (typically translated into Hindi by collaborators such as the theater actor-director Satyadev Dubey). As the New Wave's most prolific writer, Tendulkar would bring the concerns of the Indian human rights movement to the center of the New Wave screen, in films that featured lawyers (*Aakrosh*), academics (*Ardh Satya*, *Half truth*, Govind Nihalani, 1983), and journalists (*Party*, Govind Nihalani, 1984) in important roles as non-partisan arbiters of truth. While the decision to translate these Marathi screenplays into Hindi for adaptation onto the New Wave screen was a commercial one, based on the larger market for Hindi films, it resulted in Tendulkar being able to address a significantly larger and more dispersed audience—his was certainly the largest megaphone ever commanded by the president of a human rights organization in postcolonial India. As the caste atrocities and agrarian struggles of the post–Green Revolution period are increasingly erased from popular memory, New Wave films (along with archives of the Indian human rights movement) survive as an important, if partial, archive of this time of blood and violence.<sup>52</sup>

Consider, for instance, Goutam Ghose's *Paar*, perhaps the Indian New Wave's most moving film about the endemic caste violence of the period, which was partially adapted from a Bengali short story. The period between the 1970s and 1990s saw a wave of agrarian violence in the state of Bihar in eastern India, as landless peasants (predominantly Dalits) confronted landlord castes over the denial of minimum wages, the failure to implement land reform, and issues of dignity and self-respect.<sup>53</sup> The immediate spark for the violence was the mushrooming of Naxalite squads who, inspired by Maoist techniques, fought a pitched guerrilla war with the caste militias raised by landlord groups.<sup>54</sup> As this agrarian struggle raged on, Indian newspapers breathlessly reported on one massacre after another—Belchi in 1977 (seven killed); Parasbigha and Pipra in 1980 (eleven and fourteen killed, respectively); Gaini in 1982 (six killed); Kaithibigha in 1985 (ten killed); Arwal, Kansara, and Darmia in 1986 (twenty-three, eleven, and eleven killed, respectively);

52 Aswini K. Ray, "Human Rights Movements in India: A Historical Perspective," *Economic and Political Weekly* 38, no. 32 (2003): 3409–3415; and Ajay Gudavarthy, "Human Rights Movements in India: State, Civil Society and Beyond," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 42, no. 1 (2008): 29–57. For a digital archive of fact-finding reports and ephemera from the human rights movement, see the web project "Documents on Human Rights Violations," hosted by the University of Pune, Center for Social Sciences and Humanities, accessed January 3, 2021, <http://www.unipune.ac.in/snc/cssh/HumanRights/index.html>.

53 Prasan Kumar Choudhary and SriKant, "Mohabhang: Karvat Badalte Bihar Ke Dalit, 1967–89" [Disillusionment: Dalits in a changing Bihar, 1967–89], in *Swarg Pe Dhawa: Bihar Mein Dalit Andolan 1912–2000* [A claim on the sky: The Dalit movement in Bihar 1912–2000] (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2015).

54 Bela Bhatia, "The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar," *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 15 (April 9–15, 2005); and Ashwani Kumar, *Community Warriors: State, Peasants and Caste Armies in Bihar* (New Delhi: Anthem Press, 2008). George J. Kunnath argues that it was only caste solidarity among Dalits that enabled the "rebels from mud houses" to operate so successfully in a flat, non-forested terrain that was absolutely unsuited for guerrilla war. George J. Kunnath, *Rebels from the Mud Houses: Dalits and the Making of the Maoist Revolution in Bihar* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2012).



Bara in 1992 (thirty-five killed); Bathani Tola in 1996 (twenty-one killed); and Laxmanpur-Bathe in 1997 (fifty-eight killed). Most of the victims of these massacres were Dalit. The wave of violence in Bihar shook up the discourse around caste in the national press and became the grounds for intense political maneuvering between Indira Gandhi and her opponents. With almost daily reports of caste-related murders or arson, it was no longer possible to pretend that Vinoba Bhave's Bhoodan (or voluntary "Land Gift") movement had solved "the world's most refractory land problem."<sup>55</sup> The immediate "inspiration" for *Paar* was one of these massacres—an event that took place in the village of Pipra, in Patna district, during the night of February 25, 1980.<sup>56</sup>

Like most rural New Wave films, the origins of *Paar* lay in a young director's encounter with disturbing newspaper reports.<sup>57</sup> At that time, Ghose (b. 1950) was a rising young star of the Indian New Wave, known for his documentaries about dispossession—*New Earth* (1973), *Hungry Autumn* (1974), and *Chains of Bondage* (1977)—and for his feature film on the Telangana uprising, *Maa Bhoomi* (Our land, 1979). Initially, Ghose had wanted to make a documentary about the caste massacres in Bihar. But after his first recce, he decided to make a feature film instead. When Ghose began writing the script for *Paar* in 1982, he realized "in a flash" that he wanted the climax to be an adaptation of Samaresh Basu's "Paari" (The crossing), a spare allegorical story about the struggle of two Dalit laborers against the rising waters of the Hooghly River, reminiscent in some ways of Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*.<sup>58</sup> Ghose encountered the story "sometime in the 1970s" and "found it to be an amazing metaphor for human endurance . . . and the tremendous feats human beings are capable of."<sup>59</sup> He then worked backward from this literary inspiration, sketching out a backstory for Basu's more archetypal protagonists. *Paar*, like many other rural New Wave films, approached the agrarian question through literature, displaying a close affinity for the social realism of left-wing Indian authors such as Premchand (1880–1936), Mahasweta Devi (1926–2016), and Basu. From Premchand onward, Indian social realism had been marked by a characteristic investment in empathetic representations of the state of

55 The phrase is from Daniel Thorner, "Emergence of an Indian Economy: 1760–1960," in *Land and Labour in India*, ed. Daniel Thorner and Alice Thorner (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1962).

56 The origins of the violence lie in a dispute between the Dalit residents of Pipra and Kurmi caste landlords who lived in a neighboring village. The residents of Pipra, who worked as hired laborers for the Kurmi landlords, were agitating for government-approved minimum wages. This dispute had turned violent two months prior to the incident, with the murder of a Kurmi landlord, Bhola Singh. In retaliation, a mob of around five hundred armed men laid siege to Pipra, murdering fourteen people and burning down twenty-six homes. For more details, see newspaper reports from the time: Janak Singh, "Fourteen Harijans Die in Six-Hour Bihar Carnage," *Times of India*, February 27, 1980; "Genesis: Landlords vs. Landless," *Searchlight*, February 26, 1980; and Suryanarayan Chaudhary, "25 February Ki Woh Kaali Raat" [25 February: That black night], *Dinmaan*, March 9, 1980, 24–26.

57 Goutam Ghose, interview by the author, August 13, 2019.

58 Samaresh Basu ("Sameresh Bose") (1924–1988) was a left-wing Bengali writer, known for his stories about life in Kolkata's industrial suburbs as well as for his travel writing. "Paari," one of his most famous stories, is a compassionate if bleak narrative about the struggle of migrant workers in Basu's hometown of Naihati. Samaresh Basu, "Paari" [The crossing], in *Samaresh Basu Srestha Golpo* [The best stories by Samaresh Basu] (Kolkata: Prabha Prakashan, 1961), 46–61.

59 Ghose, interview by the author.

extreme physical distress in which most rural Indians still lived, “allowing the reader to be insider enough to experience this rhythm, and outsider enough to comprehend it.”<sup>60</sup> Following in the footsteps of Basu’s naturalistic fiction, *Paar* strains at the limits of what urban, upper-caste Indians could understand about caste and oppression in rural India. It takes the viewer to the edge of another, subaltern experience and no further.

The first section or movement of *Paar* reenacts newspaper accounts of the Pipra massacre with reasonable fidelity; the second movement depicts a long migration by two survivors of the massacre that culminates in an extended sequence adapted from Basu’s story. *Paar* begins with a twenty-minute-long extended sequence that establishes the unbroken darkness of the Bihari countryside (this was a period before widespread electrification) as a key visual motif of the film. The sequence begins in medias res: as the setting sun glows fiercely in the distance, a row of vehicles slowly approaches the stationary camera. All we can see are their amber headlights. A somber, orchestral refrain suggests that there is something ominous about these approaching lights, though we cannot yet know what is wrong. The film cuts to the dark interiors of a hut in the Dalit hamlet, illuminated only by match flares, as Rama (Shabana Azmi) tries to light a lamp. But there is no kerosene or paraffin in the house. After a brief, confusing scene in the dark, we cut to medium shots of the clearing outside Rama’s mud home, as she greets her husband, Naurangia (Naseeruddin Shah). It is the post-sunset golden hour for landscape photography, and the village looks beautiful in the warm, diffused light. But darkness soon falls, and seen from the point of view of the Dalit hamlet, the approaching headlights look even more sinister—it could only be the landlords or the police headed this way, and neither are a welcome presence. For the next few scenes—a confusing montage of screams, pie-dog howls, and gunshots—the screen is lit up only by the light of the torches and flashlights that belong to the gang of mercenaries working for the landlords. It is from their point of view that we witness the massacre. They are in no hurry and walk with the swagger of villains in the Hindi cinema. As Naurangia and Rama escape, leaving Naurangia’s parents behind, their huts are set on fire behind them (see Figure 3). By the light of a flashlight, we see the residents of the village take shelter in a temple. As the gunmen enter the temple (off-screen), the man holding the flashlight begins to throw up. Soon, another set of headlights cut through the darkness: it is the police, arriving at dawn. No longer isolated and unlit, the village now teems with representatives of state and civil society—the police, politicians, journalists, and a district magistrate. Here, the film begins to closely resemble the form of a post-Naxalbari activist documentary, such as *An Indian Story* (1981), Tapan Bose’s 16mm film on agrarian violence and police brutality in Bihar.<sup>61</sup> Actual photographs of the Pipra massacre are spliced into the

60 Paresh Chandra, “Premchand’s Fantasies and the Nation as Allegory,” *Humanities Underground* (blog), April 13, 2014, <http://humanitiesunderground.org/premchands-fantasies/>.

61 Sadly, *An Indian Story* has now become somewhat obscure and is rarely taught or screened in India. The only copy I could track down was at the National Film Archive of India, Pune.



Figure 3. The burning village in *Paar* (The crossing, National Film Development Corporation, 1984).

film, newspaper stories flash on the screen, and the village head is interviewed by unseen journalists and addresses the camera directly. Naurangia and Rama, meanwhile, have fled the village and are headed to Calcutta; the story of their migration will make up the second movement of the film.

While the first sequence of *Paar* displays the New Wave's drive toward photojournalistic realism, its bravura final sequence, based on "Paari," is closer to allegory.<sup>62</sup> Unable to find work even as *badli* (daily-wage, non-permanent) workers in the decaying jute industry on the outskirts of Calcutta, Naurangia and Rama take up an assignment to herd pigs across the Hooghly River—not using a boat, but by swimming across the river alongside the beasts (see Figure 4). The drama of Rama and Naurangia's mad dash across the Hooghly is created through a montage of many quick shots, alternating between close-ups, medium shots, and long shots that reveal the Hooghly in all of its monsoon spate.<sup>63</sup> Circling the tiny, exhausted figures in

62 Basu's story "Paari" has a fiercely naturalistic tone to it: the struggle of Rama and Naurangia against the waters of the Hooghly has an elemental, pre-political quality in his prose, like that of "man and a woman from a prehistoric era of the earth." The naturalistic invoking of deep time throughout the story has an uncanny effect, as if the brick kilns and mills are a false matle covering up a more primeval reality of unbroken exploitation and hunger. Basu, "Paari," 46.

63 The director Goutam Ghose stated, "I shot the scene from a boat, using a two camera set-up. We actually shot it in the monsoon, in July, and you could make that out by the color of the river in the original print. Unlike Shabana Azmi (Rama), who was an excellent swimmer, Naseeruddin Shah (who played Naurangia) did not know how to swim very well. He had to be rescued by our divers twice. It was only the courage and passion of the actors that made the scene possible. The first day of the shoot was a disaster. Huge crowds gathered on both banks, and cutting them out of the frame was a real challenge. The most difficult part was controlling the herd of swine, who only obeyed commands from their herder. In a single day, Shabana and Naseer picked up the peculiar sounds that herder made, and that's how the scene finally worked. When we actually crossed the river and reached the other side at Shahgunj (a small town near Kolkata), we broke out into a spontaneous celebration. We felt like we had understood how the crossing was really a metaphor for human endurance and achievement." Ghose, interview by the author.



Figure 4. Rama (Shabana Azmi) and Naurangia (Naseeruddin Shah) herd pigs across the Hooghly River in Paar (*The Crossing*, National Film Development Corporation, 1984).

the mighty river, Ghose's cinematography establishes a close parallel between humans and livestock, hinting at an awful truth: both in the village and on the edges of the industrial economy, the market value of Naurangia and Rama's labor as unfree workers is less than that of the pigs they are herding. The closing shot of the film shows Rama and Naurangia asleep in the pig shed, exhausted by their ordeal. Rama is pregnant and afraid that the journey might have harmed the fetus she is carrying. Naurangia places his ear to her abdomen, to listen for movement. All we hear, as spectators, are the snorts of pigs, but he declares that the child is alive. Relieved, they fall asleep.

Unlike the Third Cinema-style documentaries of the 1970s, whose audience rarely exceeded groups of students and activists sympathetic to the idea of armed struggle, the presence of familiar New Wave stars such as Naseeruddin Shah and Shabana Azmi helped propel *Paar* to become a national and international success. Shah won the Volpi Cup for Best Actor at the Venice Film Festival for his performance as Naurangia (the only Indian actor to do so to date), and *Paar* became a popular film on Indian television in the 1980s. We may think of the unbridgeable gap between Pipra and *Paar*, between the original event and its New Wave reenactment, and between stars such as Naseeruddin Shah and Shabana Azmi and the anonymous survivors of caste violence as a reflection of the necessary conditions through which filmmakers could appeal to the middle-class audience's sense of morality and justice. Like the many fact-finding reports by Indian human rights organizations on the agrarian violence in Bihar, *Paar* cloaks its politics under the rhetoric of an address to civil society.

Two years after *Paar*, in response to yet another massacre in Bihar (the murder by the police of twenty-two peasants who were agitating for land reforms at Arwal in April 1986), a large group of retired judges, writers, filmmakers, students, and teachers came together to form the Indian People's Human Rights Commission (IPHRC). The president of the IPHRC was a

New Wave filmmaker, Mrinal Sen, and its tribunal on caste violence was modeled on the International War Crimes Tribunal led by Bertrand Russell and Jean-Paul Sartre that had played a significant role in turning global opinion against the American intervention in Vietnam.<sup>64</sup> However, the postcolonial Indian intelligentsia—lawyers, teachers, writers, and New Cinema filmmakers—simply did not possess the same power to mold public opinion and state policy that intellectuals such as Sartre and Russell did in relatively bourgeois Europe (or, indeed, violent caste militias such as the Ranveer Sena, the Lorik Sena, or the Sunlight Sena did closer to home). This sociological fact, more than anything else, marked the political limits of the literature-cinema nexus of the era.

In retrospect, one of the most striking features of the Indian New Wave is the recurrence of scenes of disillusionment that undermine any coherent ideological meaning, scenes in which the urban, middle-class intelligentsia of Nehruvian India confronts the limits of its power and understanding. A sobering (even paralyzing) realization regarding the relative powerlessness of urban intellectuals (and their audience) is at the heart of many of the best New Wave films, across languages—such as *Maya Darpan*, *Ashani Sanket* (*Distant Thunder*, Satyajit Ray, 1973), *Jukti Takko Aar Gappo* (*Reason, Debate and a Story*, Ritwik Ghatak, 1974), *Nishant*, *Aakrosh*, *Akaler Sandhaney* (*In Search of Famine*, Mrinal Sen, 1981), *Elippathayam* (*Rat-Trap*, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, 1981), and *Amma Ariyan* (*Report to Mother*, John Abraham, 1986). What looks like a cinema of resistance or protest at first glance reveals itself to be quite introspective about its own failures and limits. In a sense, this disillusionment—and the rediscovery of rural India that it prompted—is the real political legacy of the Indian New Wave.

## THE FUTURE OF THE HINDI LITERARY FILM

How did the literature-cinema nexus of the Indian New Wave come apart? For a little over two decades, the New Wave had functioned as a unique contact zone between the cinema hall, printing press, and coffee house intellectuals. This contact zone disappeared in the 1990s. As India embraced economic liberalization, public-sector funding for arthouse cinema petered out, and the National Film Development Corporation reevaluated its priorities. For most of the twentieth century, the Indian middle class had been a class of clerks rather than compradors—defined by its relatively low levels of consumption, which it tended to valorize through discourses of austerity, responsibility, and piousness. In late colonial Bombay, for instance, it was not disposable income as much as their enthusiastic participation in the print public spheres that separated many middle-class households from the upper echelons of the working class.<sup>65</sup> But by the mid-1980s, as the eco-

64 T. U. Mehta and P. S. Poti, *Report of the Indian People's Tribunal on Arwal Massacre* (New Delhi: IPHRC, 1987); and Indranil Banerjee, "Arwal Peasants Case: Rights Body Formed to Atrocities Committed by Govt.," *India Today*, March 31, 1987.

65 Douglas Haynes estimates that 40 percent of middle-class households in Bombay in the 1940s lived on an income only marginally higher than the upper levels of the working class. What distinguished them from the working class was their expenditure on "items that contributed to the reproduction of middle-class-ness," such as education. See Douglas E. Haynes, "Creating the Consumer? Advertising, Capital-



monic paradigm shifted, the market for black-and-white televisions, color televisions, and video cassette players had begun to grow at a tremendous rate—by 1989, televisions were selling almost as much as radios for the first time in India.<sup>66</sup> Video parlors and video libraries, both legal and illegal, sprung up all over the country, sometimes circulating bootlegged foreign films or pornography, creating an exciting, erogenous alternative to the relatively staid programming on state-run television or radio channels. The first few years of Indian television were a boom period for New Wave–style adaptations of Hindi literature, by directors such as Raman Kumar and Saeed Akhtar Mirza. But as television took the place of older middlebrow magazines, the cultural capital commanded by Hindi writers and editors began to depreciate in value. In time, with the coming of private entertainment channels and live news broadcasts, Hindi writers would become marginal to the television universe of kitschy horror shows, mythological epics, Indi-pop music videos, and gloriously melodramatic *saas-bahu* (mother-in-law versus daughter-in-law) dramas.<sup>67</sup> One of the last notable films in the New Wave style, Saeed Akhtar Mirza’s *Naseem* (The morning breeze, 1995), stages a confrontation between the brash new world of television and the older syncretic legacy of Hindi-Urdu literary culture as embodied in the film by the communist poet Kaifi Azmi—a confrontation that the poet eventually loses.<sup>68</sup>

Since the late 1980s, the Hindi public sphere has been characterized by a paradox: even as the number of Hindi speakers and readers continues to rise, literature has become increasingly marginal within this public sphere. As the privileged language of national politics and administration and through the newspaper revolution of the 1980s, Hindi grew faster than any other vernacular language. Similarly, the growth of television in the 1990s and early 2000s saw the creation of Hinglish and the increase in popularity of Hindi written in the Roman script.<sup>69</sup> But this muscular expansion came at a cost.

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ism, and the Middle Class in Urban Western India, 1914–40,” in Haynes et al., *History of Consumption*, 185–223.

66 Figures from Surendra Laxminarayan Rao, *Consumer Market Demographics in India* (New Delhi: National Council of Applied Economic Research, 1993).

67 For more on *saas-bahu* dramas, see Shoma Munshi, *Prime Time Soap Operas on Indian Television* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2010).

68 *Naseem* was released in 1995, a pivotal moment in Indian television history that marked the end of the hegemony of literary content creators such as Raman Kumar and Saeed Akhtar Mirza, who had been a co-director of the popular television series *Nukkad* (Street corner, DD1, 1986–1987). Throughout the film, Kaifi Azmi’s ailing character stays immobile in his room, far away from the television, which he requests his family to switch off. It is as if Azmi and the television embody alternative, even incompatible, public spheres—and it is the television that triumphs over the poet. In his youth, Azmi had shaken up *mushairas* (poetry readings) throughout North India with his firebrand *nazms* (poems) such as “Aurat” (Woman) and “Makaan” (Home), which signaled the arrival of a bold new era in left-wing poetry with their hypnotic use of *aj* (today) as an urgent refrain. The only glimpse we see of this leftist, firebrand Azmi in *Naseem* is a single scene in which he requests a young radical Muslim not to misinterpret the words of the Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz. We never do get to hear him recite his famous poem on the fall of the Babri Mosque. The film does not end with poetry, but with the death of the poet himself.

69 Hinglish is a mix of Hindi and English that became popular with the rise of television in India and currently serves as the default linguistic register of Bollywood films as well as television advertisements. Francesca Orsini, “*Dil Maange More*: Cultural

The marginalization of the largely left-wing Hindi literary establishment within the *peshawari duniya* (professional world) of newspaper and magazine publishing has produced an impoverished public sphere, in which the only poetry that circulates widely takes the form of Bollywood lyrics, doggerel, and fragments of religious verse.<sup>70</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s, the geographical horizons of Hindi were anything but provincial. The itinerant, cosmopolitan protagonists of Hindi writer Nirmal Verma's hauntingly beautiful stories from the 1950s and 1960s—who wander through European bookstores like djinns, who queue up for jobs outside factories in London with the dust of many countries under their collars, or stroll through the Charles Bridge in Prague discussing the latest Fellini movie—remain a striking reminder of postcolonial Hindi literature's internationalist and world-making ambitions. These ambitions would remain frustrated. Increasingly since the 1990s, English has come to take the place of Hindi as a national link language within India, and as the preferred medium for conversations between different regional literatures, while also serving as a gatekeeper controlling access to world literature.<sup>71</sup> Even as the Hindi public sphere has steadily expanded, the Hindi literary field has shrunk. As part of an aggressive rebranding strategy, India's largest media conglomerate—Bennett, Coleman and Company Limited—would shutter a whole host of periodicals in the mid-1990s, including *Dharmayug*, *Sarika*, and *Dinmaan*, which reportedly brought in only a tiny fraction of the group's revenue.<sup>72</sup> No equivalent periodicals or websites have taken their place. Nor has any writer in the last forty years been bestowed with the kind of moral authority and political power that Hindi readers once bestowed on the likes of Ramdhari Singh “Dinkar” (1908–1974) and Phanishwar Nath “Renu” (1921–1977).

Raman Kumar's intuition that his would be “the last generation of truly literary filmmakers” working in Hindi may yet be proved wrong.<sup>73</sup> But the

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Contexts of Hinglish in Contemporary India,” *African Studies* 74, no. 2 (2015): 199–220, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00020184.2015.1045721>. For more on the growth of the Hindi press, see Robin Jeffrey, *India's Newspaper Revolution: Capitalism, Politics and the Indian-Language Press 1977–1999* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); and Sevanti Ninan, *Headlines from the Heartland: Reinventing the Hindi Public Sphere* (New Delhi: Sage, 2007).

70 For more on the causes and consequences of this marginalization, see Asad Zaidi's introductory note to *Das Barasa: Hindi Kavita Ayodhya Ke Baad* [Ten years: Hindi poetry after Ayodhya], vol. 1 (New Delhi: Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust, 2002).

71 Francesca Orsini, “India in the Mirror of World Fiction,” *New Left Review* 13 (2002): 75–88; and Rashmi Sadana, *English Heart, Hindi Heartland: The Political Life of Literature in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

72 Samir Jain, who took over management of the company in the 1990s, is often seen as the prime mover in the dramatic transformation of the Indian newspaper industry after economic liberalization in 1991. Under Jain's watch, the company aggressively prioritized advertising revenue over all other concerns, appealing to the brand-conscious aspirational consumer rather than intellectual elites. Ken Auletta, “Citizens Jain: Why India's Newspaper Industry Is Thriving,” *New Yorker*, October 8, 2012, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/10/08/citizens-jain>. See also Jitendra Gupta, interview by Umesh Chaturvedi, *Khabar Flash*, January 15, 2018, <https://khabarflash.com/jitendra-gupt-former-depty-editor-dinman/>.

73 Recent films that affectionately celebrate Hindi novels or poetry as a stubborn part of the ethos of lower-middle-class life in North India include *Masaan* (Crematorium, Neeraj Ghaywan, 2015), *Bareilly Ki Barfi* (Seeking True Love, Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari, 2017), and *Badhaai Ho* (Congratulations, Amit Ravindernath Sharma, 2018). Amit Dutta's *Aadmi Ki Aurat Aur Anya Kahaniya* (The Man's Woman and Other

1990s certainly marked the end of an era for the Hindi literary film. The middlebrow literary culture that had once been the source of so much hope and inspiration for the likes of Kumar is yet to recover, even as Indian writing in English has gone from strength to strength. While the aesthetic and thematic legacies of the New Wave can be still be seen in contemporary independent cinema from India, Hindi cinema's strong institutional nexus with vernacular literary culture did not survive the 1990s.<sup>74</sup>

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*Stories*, 2009) is a more avant-garde adaptation of short stories by the Hindi writer Vinod Kumar Shukla, very much in the vein of New Wave director Mani Kaul's *Naukar Ki Kameez* (*The Servant's Shirt*, 1999). Raman Kumar, interview by the author.

74 The links between the Indian New Wave and contemporary independent cinema are explored in Ashvin Immanuel Devasundaram, ed., *Indian Cinema beyond Bollywood: The New Independent Cinema Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 2018).