

**FILM DANCE, FEMALE STARDOM, AND THE PRODUCTION OF GENDER IN
POPULAR HINDI CINEMA**

by

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This dissertation undertakes a historical and theoretical analysis of constructions of gender and sexuality through popular Hindi film dance. This hybrid dance form, primarily staged by female performers until recently, has featured a syncretic mix of Indian classical and folk dance traditions as well as transnational dance forms since the early 20th century. My study of this popular cultural form explores the interactions of Hindi cinema with indigenous and foreign dance forms, constructions of the performing body and of spaces of performance, differing narratives and histories of male and female stardom, and the mechanisms for the ideological constitution of the Indian spectator-subject. Drawing on interdisciplinary work on stardom, gender analysis, and performance theories from the contemporary field of dance studies as well as ancient South Asian texts on performance, I investigate the role of dance in the construction of the stardom of four iconic dancer-actresses from the 1930s to the 1990s: Sadhona Bose, Vyjayanthimala, Waheeda Rehman, and Madhuri Dixit.

This project employs a body-space-movement framework (studying the spaces of dance, the movement vocabularies used, and the resulting construction of star bodies) to engage in a broader discussion of cinematic representation, body cultures, and the construction of gender. I propose a taxonomy of song-and-dance sequences to consider the various functions of musical and dance sequences in popular Hindi cinema and examine the gendering of performance in each of these registers. Employing the body-space-movement framework, I suggest that dance often

enables female dancer-actresses to author particular types of cinematic narratives. Each chapter undertakes a historical analysis of the question of respectability that has dominated discourses on dance and film acting by women, and investigates thus the links between ideology, stardom, and constructions of femininity.

Through a sustained analysis of film dance, I engage with questions that have long occupied scholars of South Asian cinema: how does popular Hindi cinema generate spectatorial desire and engagement differently than other cinematic cultures, through what mechanisms does the song-and-dance sequence produce romantic, erotic, and communitarian affects, and what are the specific mobilizations of space, movement, and bodies that create the particular address of this cinema?

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1.0 INTRODUCTION: FILM DANCE, FEMALE STARDOM, AND THE PRODUCTION OF GENDER IN POPULAR HINDI CINEMA

As forms invested in the exploration and exhibition of movement, cinema and dance have had a long history of engagement. Cinema enlisted dance from its very beginnings – in films like *Dickson Experimental Sound Film* (William K. L. Dickson, 1894) and *Annabelle the Dancer* (William K. L. Dickson, William Heise, 1895), the Edison Manufacturing Company employed dancers to demonstrate cinema's propensity for the spectacular display of movement. The shared investment in movement ensured a spontaneous intermediality between early cinema and dance, with traditional or exotic dances frequently featured during the first decade of cinema (Guido 143). In India, the earliest produced films like *Dances from Alibara*, *Moner Mantan*, *Sonar Swapan* (Hiralal Sen, 1903) and *Dancing of Indian Nautch Girls* (Elphinston Bioscope, 1906) reveal a similar interest in dance. In what is considered the first Indian narrative film, *Raja Harishchandra* (D. G. Phalke, 1913), we see an instance of devotional singing and dancing, while D. G. Phalke's later films, *Lanka Dahan* (1917) and *Kaliya Mardan* (1919), feature more elaborate dances drawing from native folk dance forms. While the films do not survive, there are reports of dance segments and dancing girl characters in films from the 1920s such as *Andhare Alo* (*The Influence of Love*, Sisir Bhaduri, Naresh Mitra, 1922), *Pati Bhakti* (*Human Emotions*, J.J.Madan, 1922), and *Kalyan Khajina* (*The Treasures of Kalyan*, Baburao Painter, 1925) (Gopal and Moorti 25). A late silent film, *Diler Jigar* (*Gallant Hearts*, G.P. Pawar, 1931) combines its

swashbuckling attractions with a dance sequence by the heroine, Saranga (Lalita Pawar), who shimmies with a knife and a tambourine as part of an acrobat group. However, it is with the introduction of sound to Indian cinema in 1931 that song-and-dance sequences begin to feature as a regular element of popular film narratives. In the manner of the early talkies in Hollywood, advertisements from Indian films magazines in the 1930s show that many early Indian talkies were marketed as “all talking, singing, dancing” films. For instance, an advertisement for the first sound film, *Alam Ara* (Light of the World, Ardeshir Irani, 1931), describes it as featuring “100 percent talking, singing, dancing” (*Film Land*, 1931). While talking and singing signify the new aural capacities of sound cinema, the inclusion of dance in the trio of talkie descriptors suggests the added dynamism that the movement vocabulary of dance brings to the sound film, combining as it does the pre-sound cinema’s obsession with capturing movement and the novelty of synchronized sound-image relations. The year 1935 in particular is significant for the evolution of popular Indian film dance as it was marked by an important technological and cultural phenomenon – the introduction of the playback system. With the development of this system, songs began to be pre-recorded and played back while the actors lip-synched the words for the camera. The playback system impacted film dance in two ways – it eventually brought about the separation of acting and singing so that playback singers became the voice for a range of actors, some of whom came to prominence for their dancing abilities, and it allowed actors greater mobility, which eventually allowed for elaborately staged dance numbers (Gopal and Moorti 25).

This study focuses on film dance and female stardom in popular Hindi cinema from the 1930s to the present day to explore how the dynamic figurations of the body wrought by cinematic dance forms produce unique constructions of gender, stardom, and spectacle. As a

staple “attraction” of the Hindi film form, dance is a critical component whose cultural production needs to be historicized and theorized in relation to the production of cinematic narratives, star bodies, and spectator-citizens. Hindi film dance has featured a syncretic mix of Indian classical and folk dance traditions as well as transnational dance forms since the early 20th century. Analyzing the collision and coalescence of various cultural forms in the bodies of performers serves to illuminate how the planes of the popular, the national, and the global are constantly negotiated and articulated by popular Hindi cinema, especially in its song-and-dance sequences. I utilize stardom as an analytical category since the star acts as a nexus for relations between industry, narrative, and spectatorship. Because women were the primary performers of dance in Hindi cinema until the late 1990s and because gender plays a central role in the discourses of censorship and spectacle that animate film dance, I have organized this study around female film stars. Drawing on interdisciplinary work on stardom, gender analysis, and performance theories from the contemporary field of dance studies as well as ancient South Asian texts on performance, I investigate the role of dance in the construction of the stardom of four iconic dancer-actresses from the 1930s to the 1990s: Sadhona Bose, Vyjayanthimala, Waheeda Rehman, and Madhuri Dixit. This selection is not meant to be strictly chronological or address all periods of Hindi cinema. Rather, I have selected these stars based on the role played by dance in the construction of their stardom, and their relation to the problematic of female representation through dance. The choice of these four upper-caste, upper-class, classical dance-trained actresses enables a historical analysis of the various inflections of the question of respectability that has dominated discourses on dance and film acting by women.¹ Indeed, it

¹ Sadhona Bose was trained in the East-Indian classical dance form, *Manipuri*, and the North-Indian form, *Kathak*, while the south Indian actresses, Vyjayanthimala and Waheeda Rehman were schooled in the South-Indian dance

serves to demonstrate the legitimacy accorded to some kinds of dancing bodies on the stage and the screen but also the fragility of this stardom, given persistent tensions around public female performance.² The focus on these four dancer-actresses also facilitates the mapping of three important moments in Hindi film dance – the 1930s and 1940s when the introduction of sound initiates the articulation of a song-and-dance vocabulary and when classical dance is appropriated by middle- and upper-class practitioners; the 1950s and 1960s when the newly-independent nation sets up cultural institutions to canonize and classify classical and folk dances even as films with dancer protagonists convey certain tensions that illuminate the place of the female dancer and the film actress in the national imaginary; and the 1980s and 1990s when the movement vocabulary of the heroine changes dramatically, marking the collapse of the coy heroine/salacious vamp divide and provoking outrage, extended censorship battles, and hectic strategies of recuperation of the iconic woman of the nation. Reading the regulation of dance practices and vocabularies as an index of prevailing moral attitudes to women’s visibility and participation in the public sphere, I analyze the place of the female protagonist within the narrative as well as that of the actress in public discourse, and consider how the introduction of dance into the performance repertoire of the Hindi film heroine repeatedly produces fractured narratives, split characters, and doubled personas.

form, *Bharatanatyam*. Madhuri Dixit was trained in *Kathak*. In each chapter, I discuss the significance of their classical dance training on the star texts of these dancer-actresses.

² In every chapter, I discuss other kinds of dancing bodies that are marginalized at each historical juncture under consideration, whether those of the *tawaifs/courtesans* and *devadasis/temple dancers* who traditionally performed the dance forms later canonized as classical, or the cinematic vamp who was inserted into dance numbers and completely isolated from the narrative.

1.1 INFLUENCES ON AND ATTITUDES TO FILM DANCE

Like the other elements of the Hindi film form, film dance drew from a range of popular cultural forms circulating in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The popular theatrical forms of this period – the *Nautanki*, Parsi theater, and *Tamasha* as well as the folk form of the *Jatra* – all featured a combination of romance, melodrama, comic sequences and song-and-dance numbers (Mishra, Gopal and Moorti, Gokulsing and Dissanayake). Additionally, various regional folk dance forms like *Bhangra*, *Raas Lila*, *Lavani*, *Ghoomar*, *Garba*, and *Dandiya*, among others, have inspired the dance idioms of popular Hindi cinema. The two most common classical dance influences on Hindi film dance come from the north Indian form, *Kathak* and the south Indian one, *Bharatanatyam*. In rewriting the content, style, and intent of classical and folk dances and through its adaptation of various Indian and foreign movement vocabularies, film dance articulated new affective registers to respond to a growing film viewing public from the 1930s. Foreign dance forms such as belly dance, the waltz, cha-cha-cha, the twist, and swing featured extensively in Hindi film dance from the 1930s through the 1960s, disco through the 1970s and 1980s, and its current Bollywood avatar incorporates elements of jazz, hip hop, salsa etc. The Hollywood musical has been a significant influence in terms of cinematography and editing, and as I shall discuss later in this chapter, the placement of dance in popular Indian film evinces a range of borrowings and departures from the narrative structure of the Hollywood musical.

The promiscuity of Hindi film dance's borrowings and its alleged corruption of dance forms has provoked a range of reactions from a variety of commentators. In a 1956 publication released by the Film Federation of India to mark the 25th anniversary of the Indian talkie, the cultural revivalist, E. Krishna Iyer, who brought the devadasi dance form of *Sadir attam* into

public practice in the 1930s as the preeminent classical dance form, Bharatanatyam, complains that in its use of music and dance, “the screen has vitiated and even vulgarised the tastes of the masses, ... regaling them with exotic, or hybrid or other types of art with scant regard for national traditions” (12). In the same publication, the acclaimed Kathak dancer, Sitara Devi, who began her career by dancing a range of “hybrid” numbers in Hindi films from the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s, remarks,

In films...dancing, especially that of the classical variety had little expression. Any type of hip-movement passed for dancing. ... our choreographers put Rambha and Samba or mixed the western system with distorted “Mudras” [hand or facial gestures] of our classical forms. Sometimes it becomes difficult to classify a dance number in a film. It neither appears classical nor folk. (112)

The (always unflattering) comparison with classical dance is a regular trope in the discussion of Hindi film dance; for example: “the classical dance is like pure mathematics, calculus, for example, and the film dance is like the simple proposition that two and two make four” (Ranjan 11). It is worth noting that the anxiety regarding the hybridity of film dance and its effect on public taste is most marked in journalistic discourse of the 1950s and 1960s, when the impetus to canonize national dance forms was at its peak. A classical dancer, Satyavaty, declaims in a 1952 *Filmfare* article titled, “Dance Forms of West Corrupt Our Films:” “A glance at one of the dances exhibited in our Indian films is enough to make an intelligent person recoil in sheer disgust” (10), the “intelligent” person referred to being the classical dance *rasika* or informed viewer. This divide in the figuration of the classical dance *rasika* and the film dance spectator aided in the construction of an elite cultural class, and signaled hierarchies of taste in the public realm. Mohan Khokar, a dance scholar who, through his books on Indian classical and folk dance

forms, became a central figure in the pedagogical project of educating a new citizenry on its cultural heritage, notes of film dance: “The style of the dance was on very rare occasions classical; mostly it was a mixture of glamour and tinsel, often leaning heavily towards vulgarity. In fact, the dance in the Indian film came to be associated with a lack of purpose and a certain cheapness in taste, designated in common parlance as ‘filmi’” (“Traditions of Indian Classical Dance” 228). The vernacular adjective, “filmi,” regularly employed in fan magazines as well, is meant to refer to popular Hindi cinema’s inflated rhetoric and aesthetic of excess, standing in pejorative opposition to the classical, the realistic, the tasteful. The other set of responses to Hindi film dance frequently addresses the place of dance in the film narrative, in the manner of this 1957 article in Filmfare:

In films, dances are merely “inserts”. They are meant to further the story (this they rarely do), but mainly they are in the nature of embellishment to the picture for the purposes of the box-office. As embellishment, therefore, film dance must primarily appeal to the eye. It must be seductive, spectacular and fast in movement. ... The film dance pleases the eye, titillates the mind, and is forgotten in a little while. (Ranjan 9)

The author enlists a set of descriptors of film dance that continue to circulate to this day – as a spectacular distraction from the main narrative involving a recruitment of the body for visual pleasure, and as a forgettable low art form that is primarily directed at commercial success. As a result of the predominance of female on-screen dancers, discussions of film dance also often revolve around questions of sexuality, ideal Indian femininity, and body cultures. In a 1966 feature titled, “Dance in Cinema: Gimmick or Necessity,” the author summarizes anxieties about the pluralism of styles that marks the realm of popular entertainment and the participation of the heroine within this system: “In most films it is the heroine herself who is called upon to perform

the dance. ... The dance is usually a rehash of movements picked at random from Indian and western dances – hardly in tune with the dignity and purpose of the heroine’s role. ... a serious film-maker must understand that the heroine is not a mere entertainer” (Shankar 23).³ The discourse around popular film dance underscores thus relations between the elite and the popular, the respectable and the disreputable, while highlighting as well the drive towards homogeneity by the nation-state and the radical heterogeneity of popular cultural forms.

1.2 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Film dance mobilizes the entire apparatus of the cinema by bringing together the dancing body, music, costume, choreography, cinematography, mise-en-scène, and editing to generate a uniquely filmic spectacle. Studies of the interaction between dance and cinema have variously employed the names: screendance, dancefilm, cinedance, dance for camera, and videodance. All of these are distinguished from the “documentary” recording of dance through their foregrounding of cinematically specific elements such as slow motion, dissolves etc. Dance theorist, Douglas Rosenberg, uses the term “screendance” to designate dance and non-dance choreography created for any size or type of screen, including cinema, video, art installations etc. Erin Brannigan employs “dancefilm” to emphasize the centrality of cinema in framing and editing dance sequences choreographed for the screen. Common to all these theories is an interest in the formal functions of the cinematic medium and how these can be employed to

³ In a different vein, it is worth noting that “serious” Indian art or parallel cinema typically eschewed dance as a non-realistic interruption and indeed marked its difference from mainstream popular cinema through its abjuration of song-and-dance sequences.

represent dance and even emancipate it from the conditions of theatrical perspective. Maya Deren, in the 1940s, for example, saw the interaction of dance and cinema as capable of producing an exceptional vision of human freedom where dancers could transcend the limitations of space and time through the employment of cinematography and editing. In her 1945 film, “A Study in Choreography for Camera,” that Deren refers to as a pas de deux between the dancer and the camera, through camera movement and editing, the dancer-choreographer, Talley Beatty leaps magnificently across multiple indoor and outdoor spaces (Durkin 386). Theories of screendance and cinedance tend to focus on formalist, avant-garde practices, while many American and European studies of film dance mainly attend to art and experimental cinema. While these approaches may be useful to study dance in Indian documentary or experimental cinema practice, for example in the “dance films” of Arun Khopkar, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, or Kumar Shahani, which consciously explore the formal relations between dance and cinema and the capturing of movement, they do not resonate as well with the concerns of popular Hindi film dance.⁴ Given its location in the realm of popular entertainment, Hindi film dance is not characterized by abstract explorations of movement but is rather focused on the display of the performing body and virtuoso dancing, and other attractions of mise-en-scène such as locations, costume etc. While, in many instances, Hindi film song-and-dance sequences do “transcend” space and time by shifting locations, changing costumes, and altering movement vocabularies within the same number, these are in the service of a certain kind of cinematic tourism. Lalitha Gopalan, for example, notes: “the abrupt cut to exotic locations sparks the tourist interests of the

⁴ Some of the films on dance by these directors include: Arun Khopkar’s *Sanchari* (1991) on Bharatanatyam dancer, Leela Samson, and *Pravahi* (2005) on Bharatanatyam dancer, Alarmel Valli, *Bhavantarana* (1991) by Kumar Shahani on the *Odissi* guru, Kelucharan Mahapatra, and Adoor Gopalakrishnan’s *La Danse De L’Enchanteresse* (2007) on the south Indian classical dance form, *Mohiniattam*.

viewer, and similarly the object-laden *mise-en-scène* endorses consumerism” (15). I employ the simple concatenation of film and dance, “film dance,” rather than any of the terms mentioned earlier, such as screendance or cinedance, since they suggest a tighter imbrication between the formal properties of dance and film than evidenced in popular Hindi cinema. In popular Hindi film, dance functions as an “additive,” a special type of attraction in the omnibus “masala” form, and is often not especially differentiated in its movement choreography from stage performance.⁵ Also, since the scope of this study is limited to cinema and I am not considering dance in other media such as video etc., terms such as screendance would be too broad for this purpose.

I employ a body-space-movement framework (studying the spaces of dance, the movement vocabularies employed, and the resulting construction of star bodies) to engage in a broader discussion of cinematic representation, body cultures, and the construction of gender. Dance theorists have suggested how dance uses as well as creates space. By studying how star dancing bodies define spaces of performance in Hindi cinema even as cinematic spaces construct certain types of performing female bodies, I argue that the performativity of the dancing body alters space differently than other modes of performance. Employing Lefebvre’s formulation of space as a social product, I examine the social and cinematic construction of gender through a comparison of spaces for male and female performance. In Chapter 4 that focuses on the preeminent dancing actress of the 1990s, Madhuri Dixit, for example, through an analysis of male and female versions of the same dance number, I demonstrate oppositions between female performance (rehearsed, professional, performed on stage for a paying audience, fetishization of the body) and male performance (spontaneous, amateur, “un-choreographed,” occurring in the

⁵ The formula or “masala” film refers to the Bombay cinema’s omnibus aesthetic form consisting of family melodrama, action sequences, comic routines and song-and-dance numbers, each having a heterogeneous range of appeal within the film’s loose narrative framework (Prasad M., “Ideology of the Hindi Film” 7).

open, not spectacularizing the male body). Certain movement vocabularies similarly engender specific types of cinematic bodies and spaces. For example, Vyjayanthimala's training in and continued performance of the classical dance form, Bharatanatyam, produced a certain kind of performing body that was employed in a number of costume dramas and in the courtesan film genre, and led to the creation of performance spaces such as royal courts or the professional stage in order to accommodate her movement vocabulary. Vyjayanthimala's movement vocabulary produced an image markedly imbricated in popular Hindu iconography and extra-diegetically, her classical dance training helped to create a "clean" star text, more or less insured against scandal and gossip, and served to prop her up as an icon of national cultural heritage. The body-space-movement framework, which will be expanded on later in this chapter, thus helps us plot the historical and cultural genealogy of trademark song-and-dance structures in Hindi cinema – such as, the vamp-nightclub-cabaret number, the tawaif-kotha-mujra number, the bride-wedding-traditional folk dance number – along the axes of the performing body, the space of performance, and the movement vocabulary.

In addition to analyzing films featuring the dancer-actresses under consideration, as well as other key films for the study of film dance, I investigated the discourse around film dance by looking at scholarly, journalistic, and personal accounts of performance cultures including music, theater, classical and folk dance. To understand the state's agendas of regulation and reform in relation to dance and cinema, it was also necessary to study governmental documents such as the report of the Indian Cinematograph Committee, formed in 1927, the annual reports of the Sangeet Natak Akademi (The National Academy for Music, Dance and Drama), especially the proceedings of the Film Seminar organized by the Akademi in 1955, and the court petition and Central Board of Film Certification guidelines following the censorship controversy over Dixit's

1993 dance number, “*Choli ke peeche kya hai*” (“What is beneath your blouse?”). Where the films themselves are no longer available, para-textual materials like film booklets, print advertisements, and film reviews helped reconstruct diegetic and extra-diegetic narratives. The autobiographies of Sadhona Bose (and her director-husband, Modhu Bose), Vyjayanthimala, and Waheeda Rehman (in the form of a dialog in the last case) offered insights into the stars’ experiences and self-construction as dancer-actresses. Personal interviews with Rehman and Madhuri Dixit threw light on actual choreography practices during different periods as well as their own control over and negotiation of narrative roles and dance movements created for them.

1.3 A BODY-CENTERED TAXONOMY OF SONG-AND-DANCE SEQUENCES

In order to analyze the role of film dance in constructing female stardom, it is important to understand the relationship between the Hindi film narrative and the song-and-dance sequences that interrupt or erupt out of the narrative. Studies of the Hollywood musical have categorized the genre into backstage and integrated musicals. The backstage musical is constructed around the staging of musical performances or the putting up of a show, typically with protagonists who are professional entertainers. The musical numbers accumulate serially and are often standalone spectacles connected only loosely, if at all, to the narrative in which they are embedded. In the integrated musical, on the other hand, the numbers are woven into the narrative and are motivated by plot development and or character psychology. The performers express their emotions to each other or to the audience through song and dance without the self-conscious invocation of a performance situation (Langford 84-90). While this categorization is useful to articulate the relationship of musical numbers to the narrative, it considers the song-and-dance

sequence as a combined entity, whereas I argue that music and dance each relate differently to the narrative. Additionally, for historical reasons concerning the aesthetic development of popular Hindi film, this cinematic form, unlike the Hollywood musical, is simply not as invested in the rationalization of the insertion of song-and-dance numbers into the film narrative. Thus, a single film may have integrated numbers that externalize and express inner states of mind as well as non-integrated numbers that are inserted as pure spectacle.

Within scholarship on Indian cinema, there has been some discussion of song-and-dance sequences, usually with an emphasis on the music rather than on dance. In her analysis of Hindi film songs, Anna Morcom notes that some songs “are *overtly* situational, lacking coherence in their audio dimension, whereas others are more *implicitly* situational, working well on their own as well as working well with the film” (“Film Songs and the Cultural Synergies” 162). While Morcom’s typology helps to think about the status of song sequences outside of the film narrative (as standalone segments on television, CDs, youtube etc.), it focuses on the aural dimension of the song-and-dance sequence and the integration of the musical number into the narrative. In her book, “Cinema of Interruptions,” Lalitha Gopalan analyzes a “constellation of interruptions” that structure popular Indian cinema, including the song-and-dance sequence, the intermission, and negotiations around censorship regulations. Gopalan offers a taxonomy of song-and-dance sequences in the director, Mani Ratnam’s films, outlining five ways in which Ratnam employs musical numbers to negotiate spatial and temporal discontinuities. She identifies song-and-dance sequences that regulate *spatial* disjunctions by propelling the narrative through multiple diegetic spaces in the space of the song and those that condense or smooth over various events or *temporal* shifts in the narrative. A third type she terms the “Indian backstage musical,” which features a diegetic audience and where the coincidence between performance

time and real time weaves the number into the narrative. The fourth and fifth categories concern the integration of the musical number into the narrative, with some numbers deliberately linked to it and others functioning as extra-diegetic sequences that abruptly break its spatial continuity (129-135). Given Gopalan's focus on cinematic "interruptions" as well as Ratnam's conscious engagement with the question of narrative and song-and-dance integration, this taxonomy emphasizes the management of the anachrony of the song-and-dance interruption in relation to narrative space and time rather than the specific functions of music and dance within the Hindi film form. Commenting on the function of the song sequence in Hindi cinema, Sangita Gopal argues that the musical sequence is a critical device for accommodating the competing demands – of pleasure and pedagogy – placed upon popular Hindi cinema. Focusing on the romantic, conjugal couple in Hindi cinema, Gopal contends that the song sequence allows for the expression of desires proscribed by the narrative that prohibits certain kinds of desire, and curtails certain modes of enjoyment (39). Where the narrative accommodates the demands of tradition, the song sequence affords the couple sovereignty and autonomous mobility, however temporary. While "the *narrative* relocation of the couple within the extended family/community is a sign of ideological closure," she points out that "the successful nucleation of the couple in the romantic duet and the intrusion of song and dance into the larger culture indicate Hindi film's social effectivity" (39). Hindi cinema thus employs this dual enunciation of the couple – in the narrative and the song sequence – to comply with current and dominant interests but also to suggest emergent formations respectively. In an article on the song-and-dance sequence, Gopal and Biswarup Sen elaborate on these emergent formations, arguing that the song sequence "posits scenarios of modernity that the narrative is unable to depict, [...] envisions ways of acting and behaving not coded into the text, [...] registers the shock of the new not recordable by

the prose of the film, and [...] affords the possibility of *jouissance* or joyous release that cannot be spoken by any character or voice” (147). This points to a textual bifurcation between the narrative, which is the space of family and convention, and the song-and-dance sequence, in which a more radical and “modern” expression of freedom and desire can erupt.

While valuable in theorizing the formal characteristics of popular Hindi cinema and relating these to the ideological construction of the narrative, these discussions of the song-and-dance sequence primarily focus on the *aural* dimension of the sequence, i.e. the song and its dissemination in the public realm, and on visual *mise-en-scène* elements such as foreign locations, lavish costumes etc.⁶ Calling specific attention to *dance* in the song-and-dance sequence (which includes a consideration of movement vocabulary, music, star bodies, *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, editing) is necessary as it is often the *dance* in the song-and-dance sequence that is incommensurate with the construction and representation of performing bodies in the narrative. A focus on the dancing body highlights how *dance movements* interrupt narrative modes of being and moving, and how attention to this physical interruption or alteration of movement vocabulary is key to understanding production and reception modalities and economies. In the narrative, for instance, the performing body has a certain valence but in the dance and “action” sequences of the film (corresponding typically to the female and male performers in the film), the same body is mobilized and displayed differently. In these sequences, the body is spectacularized through choreographed movements, costume, make-up, *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, and editing. The regime of performance, including facial expressions and physical movement, is significantly altered as is the mode of reception.

⁶ Most studies of the song sequence, for example by Arnold, Booth, Chandavarkar, Dutta, Morcom (“Film Songs and the Cultural Synergies”), Mukherjee (“Hindi Film Songs”), and Ranade, are focused on the music and singing only, and do not undertake an analysis of film dance.

Audiences pay much more attention, suddenly, to limbs and torsos and their movement through space. This immanence of the star body, of body as body rather than as a vehicle for a diegetic character makes dance and action sequences central devices in constructing the iconicity of certain star bodies.⁷ Analyzing dance in the song-and-dance sequence furthers and complicates the discussion of this particular spectacular attraction/interruption by foregrounding the separation of *movements* (walking/sitting/standing etc. in the narrative vs. swaying, “running around trees,” and other forms of dancing in the song-and-dance sequence), *spaces* (realistic vs. fantastic spaces, diegetic spaces vs. extra-diegetic excursions to the Swiss alps, for example), and *bodies* (diegetic protagonists vs. standalone dance performers, including vamps, item girls, background dancers etc.).⁸ Consequently, a focus on dance extends the taxonomies specified above by not only addressing questions of integration into narrative space and time but by also engaging centrally with issues of stardom, gender, and performance.

The purpose of such a taxonomy is hardly to create strict categorizations of what are often fluid forms but, by describing some common patterns, to help us consider the various functions of musical and dance sequences in popular Hindi cinema. A taxonomy like this allows us, for example, to look more closely at the various spaces that Hindi film constructs in different kinds of song-and-dance sequences, the affective and economic investments in these spaces, and the gendering of these spaces through the various sub-categories of performative display. It also enables a sharp focus on film dance through a close examination of various bodily movements

⁷ One has only to consider the beefy Salman Khan, a contemporary actor specializing in action sequences, or the dancer-actress, Vyjayanthimala, to recognise the importance of these “body” sequences in constructing particular types of star texts and cinematic narratives.

⁸ Item girls are female performers in dance numbers known as “item numbers” that bear no relation to the narrative but are inserted purely as spectacular attractions.

that may or may not be designated as dance. In other words, this categorization is driven by the following questions: what is construed as dance in Hindi cinema, who dances and how, what are the spaces in which dance takes place, how does the Hindi film narrative transition to a dance sequence, and how do these dance gestures and movements relate to broader questions of gender and stardom? At a fundamental level, I propose a differentiation between *song sequences* and *song-and-dance sequences*, where the former do not feature dance at all while the latter may feature various kinds of movements that may be described as dance. Song sequences may further be categorized into the “background-voiced” song sequence and the “lip-synchronized” song sequence. While playback singing has been a feature of the majority of Hindi film song and dance sequences since the mid-1940s, the sub-categories I have proposed refer to the lip-synchronization of the song by on-screen characters. Thus, the “background-voiced” *song sequence* is one where no on-screen character appears to sing the song since there is no synchronization of any character’s lips with the song we hear. Also, the characters do not engage in any movement that may be designated as dance. An example of this would be the song, “*Chalo dildar chalo*” (“Come, my beloved”) from *Pakeezah* (The Pure One, Kamal Amrohi, 1972), the only number in this Muslim courtesan⁹ film that does not feature dance, but is also tellingly not voiced by either of the protagonists, Salim or Sahibjaan, in order to suggest the freedom of Sahibjaan (Meena Kumari), the courtesan protagonist, from a performance regime that she has fled, and to heighten the effect of conveying their conjoined interiority and conjugal

⁹ The Muslim courtesan film, as the name indicates, features a Muslim courtesan and the narrative is set in an Islamicate setting. In his essay on the tawaif, Mukul Kesavan coins the term, “Islamicate” to “refer not directly to the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims” (246). See *Islamicate Cultures of Bombay Cinema* by Ira Bhaskar and Richard Allen for a discussion of various types of courtesan films in Bombay cinema.

bliss. A number of devotional songs in Hindi cinema are “background-voiced” in order to suggest the collective subjectivity of the devotees and their address to an omnipresent, invisible god. An example is the *bhajan* (devotional Hindu song), “*Aa ja re*” (“Come to us, Oh Lord”), from *Roop Ki Rani Choron Ka Raja* (H. S. Rawail, 1961). In a “lip-synchronized” *song sequence*, one or more on-screen characters’ lip movements are synchronized with the song, but the characters do not move in a manner that may be described as dance, i.e. their movements are not *strictly* and *continuously* coordinated with the rhythm of the song. An example is of the stationary Adhir (Sunil Dutt) lip-synchronizing to Talat Mehmood’s rendition of “*Jalte hain jiske liye*” (“These eyes that burn”) while on the phone with Sujata (Nutan) in Bimal Roy’s *Sujata* (1959). However, while the characters in a “lip-synchronized” song sequence may be sitting, standing, lying down, or walking, movements not generally characterized as dance, these could become dance-like if synchronized with the song’s rhythm. An example that comes to mind is of Shankar (Dilip Kumar) striding along to the song’s rhythm as he lip synchronizes to “*Ae mere dil kahin aur chal*” (“Oh my heart, let’s go elsewhere”) in *Daag* (Amiya Chakravarty, 1952). This brings us to the category of *song-and-dance sequences*.

1.3.1 Narrative Numbers/Production Numbers

I propose two broad sub-categories of song-and-dance sequences: the “production number” and the “narrative number,” both featuring physical movements that may be designated as dance. The narrative number, as the name suggests, is a song-and-dance sequence that is integrated, to various degrees, with the narrative in terms of the lyrical content of the song, the spaces in which the sequence is performed, the characters performing it, and the movement vocabulary employed by these characters. A narrative number typically features diegetic characters and involves

movements that range from languid swaying to walking or skipping along rhythmically with intermittent gestural expression and choreographed dance “steps.” The point of differentiation from what I call the production number is that movements in the narrative number are not *strictly* and *continuously* coordinated with the melody and rhythm of the song. The dancer-actress Waheeda Rehman’s description of “love songs” applies to a range of romantic *narrative numbers* in Hindi cinema: “In a love song the couple would usually hold hands, or run through fields. So no dance steps were required” (Kabir 153). The rhythmic walking of Shankar (Dilip Kumar) to “*Ae mere dil kahin aur chal*,” for example, could be argued to be on the cusp of a lip-synchronized song sequence and a narrative song-and-dance number as his physical movements are synchronized to the rhythm and melody of the song but are not choreographed as dance “steps” and feature very little gestural articulation. More commonly, I consider the narrative number as featuring more “free-flowing,” internally-focused dancing rather than the codified, outwardly-focused, presentational, posed, and controlled dancing of the production number. The world of the narrative number is usually a self-enclosed one where bodily movement is meant to express inner emotions, most typically set to a romantic song. Additionally, in narrative numbers, characters may not be obviously centered on screen, unlike the proscenium-like performance space of many production numbers. In terms of gesture and movement, the narrative number is less likely to feature defined gestures and dance steps that are *codified*, *repetitive*, and *replicable*. Rather, the narrative number is often marked by minimal or naturalistic gestural articulation. Examples of the narrative number, as I describe it, include, Chandralekha (T. R. Rajakumari) swaying by a tree to the song “*Saanjh savera*” (“At dusk and dawn”) after her first encounter with the prince-hero in *Chandralekha* (S.S. Vasan, 1948), Amit (Amitabh Bachchan) and Chandni (Rekha) walking along tulip fields and singing “*Dekha ek*

khwaab toh yeh silsile hue” (“These events as I saw in a dream” *Silsila*, Yash Chopra, 1981), and Ganga (Madhuri Dixit) dancing to “Der se aana” (“Your coming late”) in *Khalnayak* (*Villain*, Subhash Ghai, 1993). In the last example, while Dixit’s performance includes some dance “steps,” and she is joined in some segments of the song by other dancing women, the song is primarily addressed to the hero, and does not include continuously codified dance movements, i.e. there are sections of the song that are not accompanied by any dance moves at all. Ravi Vasudevan briefly discusses the difference between the “narrational song” which occurs at “the point in the narrative when music is used to interpret the significance of a sequence” and “those performances which are specifically marked as spectacular and non-narrative in the basic structure of their address” (“The Melodramatic Mode” 45), citing the cabaret and comic sequences as examples of the latter. Through a focus on dance, this taxonomy explores these different modes in a much more detailed fashion in order to closely understand the function of music and dance in popular Hindi cinema.

In contrast to the narrative number, the production number is *structured* around a display of dancing body/bodies, highlighting the spectacular rather than the narrational pleasures of the text. The production number sometimes features dance performed on a stage within the diegesis, or is shot and edited as a performance for an internal audience (of one or more members) within the film.¹⁰ More importantly though, the production number is marked by a mode of looking where the performer explicitly invites and often returns the gaze of the audience (internal to the film as well as spectators of the film). Unlike most narrative numbers, specifically romantic

¹⁰ This taxonomy differs from the classification of backstage and integrated Hollywood musicals in that the genre of the backstage musical, which involves the mounting of a show, is not very common in Hindi cinema. Also, song-and-dance sequences are found across various genres in Hindi cinema rather than solely in musicals. The production number as described here is not always performed on a stage within the film, and may be performed in private, domestic spaces as well. Indeed, the production number may often be integrated into the narrative.

duets, the dominant focus in the production number is not on romance as much as on the attractions of performance itself, which invites a form of looking (from the characters and the audience) that is very different from that in the romantic duet/narrative number. Indeed, it is this mode of looking (by the camera, the characters, and the audience) that marks a song-and-dance sequence as a production number even when the space of performance is private. It is in the production number then that the most spectacular display of dancing ability occurs, and the singing and dancing is not limited to just an external manifestation of internal feelings centered around heterosexual conjugality. Like Busby Berkeley numbers in the American film musical, the Hindi film production number is marked as a coded spectacle which often functions as an enclosed unit within the narrative, and which often halts the forward movement of the story (Mellencamp 72). The production number is markedly set off from the narrative by a system of visual and aural brackets created by the dramatically altered movement vocabulary produced by dance, and the transition from speech to song in the song-and-dance sequence. Examples of production numbers include the spirited “gypsy” dance performed before the Prince of Sikkim by Shalini (Vyjayanthimala) (“*Hothon pe aisi baat mai dabaake chali aai*”/“These words on my lips,” *Jewel Thief*, Vijay Anand, 1967), the professional dancer, Mohini’s (Madhuri Dixit) stage performance to “*Ek do teen*” (“One two three”) in *Tezaab* (Acid, N. Chandra, 1988), and the film star Om Kapoor’s (Shah Rukh Khan) production number, “*Dard-e-disco*” (“The pain of disco”) in *Om Shanti Om* (Farah Khan, 2007). I refer to this kind of song-and-dance sequence as the *production* number for a variety of reasons. For one, as the most lavishly produced attraction in a film, it brings to fore the economics of the *production* of song-and-dance sequences, and the considerable financial investment in these often standalone segments that call for the creation of

separate spaces, costumes, and indeed performing bodies.¹¹ For another, the term *production* foregrounds the entirely constructed nature of this sequence, which, unlike the narrative number makes no attempt to be imbricated in the story, but marks an overt production of a different space, time, and order of performance. Finally, as I argue throughout this dissertation, the production number foregrounds the *production* of gender through the construction of these different spaces and movement vocabularies that have historically been dominated by female performers.

In addition to the song sequence and the song-and-dance sequence categories, the taxonomy I propose also includes “pure dance” sequences that are not accompanied by a song and are hence not meant to convey the semantic content of a song but function solely to display the performer’s dancing skills. This is similar to the concept of *nrita* in Indian classical dance, where certain dance segments are designed only to show off the physical skills of the dancer and serve as embellishment.¹² “Pure dance” sequences are often found in films with dancer-protagonists, for example, the courtesan, Indrani’s (Sadhona Bose) *Manipuri*-inspired dance in the court of King Jaisingh in *Raj Nartaki* (Court Dancer, Modhu Bose, 1941), the stage dancer, Jimmy’s (Mithun Chakraborty) practice of his disco moves to recorded music in *Disco Dancer*

¹¹ It is rumored, for example, that Bollywood’s preeminent star, Shah Rukh Khan, had to undergo rigorous physical training to build the six-pack abdomen that is the central, fetishized feature of *Dard-e-disco*, but not otherwise exhibited in the film. More generally, I contend that performers’ bodies are accorded a different aura and representational valence in production numbers and hence I refer to the production of separate performing bodies in these numbers.

¹² In *nrita*, the movements of the body and limbs are performed for their own sake, for their beauty and decorative effect, and not in order to convey any special meaning to the audience. *Nritya*, on the other hand, includes *abhinaya* or expression, conveyed through facial expressions, codified hand gestures, and symbolic poses of the body to relay the meaning of a theme or idea to the onlooker. A third category, *natya*, combines both *nrita* and *nritya* and additionally features the element of drama through spoken word and other conventions of the stage (Khokar, “Traditions of Indian Classical Dance” 58).

(B. Subhash, 1982), the background dancer, Mili's (Urmila Matondkar) gyrations on the beach to the percussive "Rangeela theme" (*Rangeela/Colorful*, Ram Gopal Varma, 1995), or the vigorous "dance-off" between two professional dancers, Nisha (Karisma Kapoor) and Pooja (Madhuri Dixit), in *Dil toh Pagal Hai* (*The Heart is Crazy*, Yash Chopra, 1997).¹³

As may be evident from this taxonomy and the examples cited, the order of performance significantly alters as we move from the pure song sequence to the pure dance sequence, the latter overtly putting the performing body and its movement on display in a manner not encountered in the former. Indeed, the nature of dance movements and the modalities of their display help explain the gendering of Hindi film dance, where, as we move from the song sequence to the production number and the pure dance sequence, the presence of the male protagonist/performer is dramatically diminished. While the romantic duet in the Hindi film typically features the central heterosexual couple, the production number is dominated by female performers.¹⁴ Where dancing is a desirable or sometimes necessary attribute for Hindi film actresses, until recently, it has not been a requirement for male actors, highlighting the tendency

¹³ In some song-and-dance sequences, the *nrita* or "pure dance" segment can be employed to convey emotions and further the narrative as well. For example, when Sahibjaan (Meena Kumari) dances on a shattered glass lamp in the final song-and-dance sequence of *Pakeezah*, "Teer-E-Nazar," her intricate footwork or *tatkar*, as it is known in the Kathak lexicon, becomes a deeply expressive indicator of her emotions, while also marking the mutilation of one of the most important parts of the body for the dance of the *tawaif/courtesan*, her feet.

¹⁴ From the 1940s to the 1990s, a handful of male actors such as Master Bhagwan, Gopi Krishna (a classical dancer who acted in a few dance films), Shammi Kapoor, Amitabh Bachchan, and Jeetendra danced in films, and even then, mostly in coupled production numbers. On the other hand, most actresses during, before, and after this period have performed production numbers of varying types, displaying a range of dancing skills and expertise. Mithun Chakraborty, the disco-dancing sensation of the 1980s, is among the rare male actors whose dancing body was spectacularized in a manner similar to that of actresses. The current Bollywood dispensation has seen a change in that production numbers are now also choreographed for male stars like Hrithik Roshan, Shah Rukh Khan etc. However, even now, while there is a proliferation of item girls, the corresponding equivalent for male performers, i.e. "item boys" are not a regular feature of Bollywood films.

to display and spectacularize the female body through dance in this film culture.¹⁵ That this is a commonplace is evident in film critic Partha Chatterjee's nostalgia for a time when heroes did not engage in the vigorous thrust-and-heave gyrations of post-1990s actors like Govinda (his example):

In the good old days, dancing was not considered a masculine pursuit and the likes of Dilip Kumar, Dev Anand and Motilal, of an earlier generation, would have taken exception to the very suggestion that they did more than a few rudimentary steps in their films as an accompaniment to the songs they picturised. ("A Bit of Song and Dance" 197)

Chatterjee expresses no such reservations about female performers, however. In other words, male actors may be featured in *song sequences* and in *narrative* numbers that demand minimal/"rudimentary" dancing, but the production number, especially, is the proper domain of the female performer. Unlike in the Hollywood musical, where male stars like Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly are held to be the epitome of film dance performance and their star status owes to a great extent to production numbers specially designed to show off their dancing skills, in popular Hindi cinema, dance is much more crucial to the construction of the female star text. Dance, in fact, is the legitimized form of mobility for the female performer, while action/fight sequences

¹⁵ The functions of the narrative number and the production number are revealed in the isolation of the vamp and the contemporary item girl to the production number, where this female performer appears only in the song-and-dance sequence, or exits her marginal role in the narrative without ceremony, or is actually killed off in order to clarify the desire of the hero for the heroine. The vamp and the item girl have no place in the narrative number as they are outside the sphere of sociality of the protagonists and their only role is as public performers. The (typically male) comic sidekick, on the other hand, may feature in narrative numbers as he is an active participant in the narrative and the social relations between characters.

perform that function for the male performer.¹⁶ Through this taxonomy, I hope to have demonstrated that a focused analysis of dance in Hindi cinema's song-and-dance sequences provides insights into the material and representational histories of this form, and that an examination of the spaces and bodies in these sequences is critical for understanding the different narratives and histories of male and female stardom.

1.4 WHY STUDY POPULAR HINDI FILM DANCE?

While song-and-dance sequences have been theorized as interruptions and attractions by various scholars (Gopalan, Gopal and Moorti), a focus on dance reveals that some types of song-and-dance sequences, e.g. production numbers, function differently as interruptions/attractions than others, such as narrative song-and-dance numbers, or song sequences with no dance component. Narrative numbers and pure song sequences are more imbricated in the narrative and hence more related to its homogeneous time, while in stopping the narrative for their spectacular attractions, production numbers produce a different temporality, a heterogeneous time. Within Indian film scholarship and popular film criticism, there is mention of audiences walking out for a snack or a smoke during song-and-dance sequences (Gopalan 19, Kabir 47).¹⁷ However, because the production number's function as spectacle exceeds its function in the narrative, it offers

¹⁶ While both these "attractions" involve carefully choreographed movements, these are gendered to serve the heteronormative trajectory of the narrative. Accordingly, action requires the (usually) male protagonist to demonstrate certain requirements of character – strength, nobility, agility, musculature, while dance becomes a means for the (usually) female protagonist to display the requisite feminine characteristics of beauty and sexual attractiveness through her dancing skills.

¹⁷ Waheeda Rehman quotes the director Guru Dutt as saying, "In our business, we call a song the audience finds boring a "cigarette song" – that's the moment when people leave the theater and go out for a smoke" (Kabir 47).

heterogeneous pleasures which may in fact prompt *repeat viewings* of the film or, in the age of television and the internet, of that particular song-and-dance sequence. Since dance choreographs the body differently than narrative, it produces a different order of screen performance that functions as a repeated attraction on account of the dancing skill on display, the euphoric production of community through group dancing or of the couple through a duet, or for its spectacular display of the performing body that provokes and responds to a variety of spectatorial desires.¹⁸ One example of the last – from Tamil and Telugu cinema of the 1980s and 1990s – is the inclusion of titillating dance numbers by the dancer-actress Silk Smitha that were guaranteed to draw audiences back for multiple repeat viewings. Dance, in this case, produces the heterogeneous time of stimulation and physical engagement with the number that is quite separate from, and often more compelling than spectatorial investments in the narrative. A rather different example of the particular attraction of dance numbers is evident in the audience interest in the high-brow, semi-classical¹⁹ film dance performances of a dancer-actress like Vyjayanthimala. An accomplished Bharatanatyam dancer, Vyjayanthimala, in films like *Nagin* (Female Snake, Nandlal Jaswantlal, 1954), *New Delhi* (Mohan Segal, 1956), *Kathputli* (Puppet, Amiya Chakravarty, Nitin Bose, 1957), and *Sadhna* (Realize, B.R. Chopra, 1958), drew in

¹⁸ Many of Hindi cinema's attractions/interruptions are marked by their specific employment of the performing body. While I've discussed how the body changes in a dance sequence, comic sequences often derive their humor from bawdy/bodily elements such as comic gestures (e.g. Keshto Mukherjee's drunken winking or Johnny Lever's farcical facial and bodily contortions). Similar to dance sequences, action sequences produce spectacular bodies engaged in heightened movement. All of these sequences feature a different kind of bodily performance than that of the linear narrative.

¹⁹ Semi-classical dance is intermediate in style and gestural articulation between classical and popular dance. It borrows movements and gestures from classical dance but renders them in a popular idiom by making them simpler and less strictly codified. *Bharatanatyam* "dance ballets" and *Rabindra Nritya* (a dance form conceived by Rabindranath Tagore in the 1930s) are examples of semi-classical dance, as are the "classical dance" sequences in Hindi cinema that typically feature actresses trained in classical dance such as Sadhona Bose, Vyjayantimala, Waheeda Rehman, Hema Malini, Jayaprada etc.

audiences specifically for numbers that flaunted her dance expertise. This was an aspect of her star persona that directors of her films consciously mobilized through the insertion of production numbers to showcase her talent.

A specific study of dance also demonstrates differences in spectatorial engagement with song sequences and with song-and-dance sequences, especially production numbers. In the case of the latter, spectators *watch* the sequence again and again rather than just listen to it, since the primary attraction is the visual element of dance. Where in the repeated *listening* of film songs, audiences become familiar with the style of music directors, playback singers, and lyricists, recurrent *viewing* of dance sequences focuses attention on the on-screen performer/s and the behind-the-scenes choreographer. This reveals the differing investments – of filmmakers and viewers – in song sequences and in dance sequences. Hindi cinema’s “heterogeneous form of manufacture” (Prasad M., “Ideology of the Hindi Film” 42-45) reflects this in the amount of time and money set aside from the film schedule and budget for the shooting of song-and-dance sequences as well as the appointment of particular singers, music composers, stars, and choreographers.²⁰ This is especially evident in the contemporary Bollywood film featuring the mandatory “item number” (a dance number that is blatantly unrelated to the film narrative and primarily intended to showcase skimpily-clad bodies and raunchy dance moves) where a particular choreographer may be called upon only to choreograph this production number on account of her/his expertise in the form, and an “item girl” (a female star or a lower-rung performer, depending on the film’s budget and credentials) recruited for a specific deployment of

²⁰ Madhava Prasad argues that unlike the serial form of production in Hollywood, in the Hindi film industry, the various elements of the film are produced by specialists and then assembled. The song-and-dance sequence is often produced separately by specialists including the music director and the music crew, and the dance choreographer with her/his crew.

her body through her dance moves (characterized by moves referred to in the Hindi vernacular as *jhatkas* and *matkas* or vigorous heaving of the torso, swaying of the waist etc.).

Differentiating between song sequences and dance numbers complicates a term commonly used in Hindi film production and in studies of this industry – “song picturization.” Gregory Booth describes the term as “used most frequently by the Indian press to identify both the process of adding visual images to a song and the resultant product” (“Religion, Gossip, Narrative Conventions” 143). In their analyses of the Hindi film song sequence, Booth, Neepa Majumdar, and Richard Dyer point out that since the term, “song picturization” indicates that songs are recorded first and then “picturized,” this suggests the primacy of the song, which sets the agenda for the visuals (Booth, “Religion, Gossip, Narrative Conventions” 143, Majumdar 180, Dyer 43). While this applies to non-dance song sequences and to narrative numbers, where say, a romantic duet is first recorded, and then the director, choreographer etc. determine what the characters on screen are to do with themselves while the song plays out, it may be argued that for many production numbers that foreground dance moves, it is the movement vocabulary planned for the sequence that influences the kind of song to be recorded. Thus, in the production stages of a film starring accomplished dancer-actresses such as Vyjayanthimala or Madhuri Dixit, for example, filmmakers may often decide to include one or more dance-heavy production numbers to showcase these actresses’ talent, which in turn may prompt them to commission songs to match the desired movement vocabulary. Producer and director, J. Omprakash, in an interview on Vyjayanthimala, asserts that, “Having a dancer as an actress is great for a producer as music is much better and there is grace in the dance picturization” (Baaje Payal: Episode on Vyjayanthimala). The improvement in a film’s music as a result of it featuring a dancer-actress suggests that the dance vocabulary significantly influences the music of a film, often calling for

enhanced rhythmic structures to accompany the dance. *New Delhi*, which features Vyjayanthimala as a professional dancer, for example, creates a number of narrative situations to put on display the actress's considerable dancing skills, and the songs to which she dances foreground qualities such as rhythm and speed, and include extended non-vocal, instrumental sections to complement the dance movements. It is also no coincidence that a majority of the dance numbers featuring the vamp from the 1950s through the 1980s were voiced by Asha Bhosle, whose sensuously husky voice was chosen as it was well-suited to the erotic gyrations of the vamp, indicating that a music-related decision about the choice of playback singer is influenced by the kind of dancing body on screen. It seems then that dance-centric production numbers engender a different mode of production and reception, propelled by the display of the moving, on-screen body (and while the stationary, off-screen voice of the playback singer remains important, it shares or even subsumes its primacy to the visual attractions of the dancing body). I therefore suggest that a process of "dance musicalization" – where a particular type of desired dance vocabulary precedes and influences the conceptualization of the song – may substitute "song picturization" in many Hindi film production numbers. This displaces "the priority of the song as a musical object, rather than as a visual object" (Booth, "Religion, Gossip, Narrative Conventions" 143) since the visual attraction of dance dictates the aural dimension of the song in the case of many production numbers.²¹

²¹ The proposed typology points thus to differences in music in each category as well, where a background-voiced song sequence may often possess certain sonic qualities such as echo to indicate omniscience, faraway-ness etc., while narrative numbers emphasize melody and lyricism to fulfill their function in expressing inner feelings, and production numbers are characterized by an emphasis on rhythm, a faster tempo, and or extended musical sections for *nritta* display.

The primacy of dance in the current Bollywood aesthetic has specific implications for the construction of contemporary stardom. Majumdar discusses how in the 1930s, “the star’s identity was primarily constructed in terms of the voice rather than the body” and hence “histrionic ability in all major actors was understood to include musical ability” (180). While, in the decades that followed, cinematic stardom was split between the off-screen voice of the playback singer and the on-screen body of the actor (not necessarily always dancing in the musical numbers), since the mid-1990s, when dance-heavy production numbers became de rigueur in most popular Hindi films, the ability to dance has become a key factor in the actor’s ascent to stardom. In an industry where dancing skills constitute a significant part of the star’s identity, any aspiring actor today needs to have dance training, often acquired at the numerous “Bollywood dance” schools in various parts of the country, and in fact, of the world.²² The primacy of dance in the Bollywood song-and-dance sequence has also resulted in the increased importance of the choreographer. Before the late 1980s, quite unlike music composers, the choreographer (often known then as the “dance master”), was a little-known figure among Hindi film viewers, with few exceptions like the Kathak-trained Hiralal, Sohanlal, and Gopi Krishna. The spectacular production number, “*Ek do teen*,” featuring Madhuri Dixit and choreographed by Saroj Khan redefined film dance to such an extent that Hindi film choreographers such as Khan, Chinni Prakash, Shiamak Davar, Farah Khan etc. became household names from the 1990s onwards. As I discuss in Chapter 4, the spirited, rambunctious, uninhibited dance vocabulary of “*Ek do teen*” defined new performance paradigms for the Hindi film heroine, made the choreographer a key figure in the heterogeneous mode of production, and ensured that dance-centric production

²² See Shresthova (*Is It All about the Hips*) for a detailed discussion of Bollywood dance schools and performance cultures.

numbers became a mainstay of popular Hindi cinema. Today, the director, choreographer, and music composer work together on the processes of song picturization and dance musicalization. Given Bollywood's investment in staging spectacle, and the signal role of the song-and-dance sequence in this project, the choreographer is a vital crew member who often not only arranges dance moves, but also directs the entire song-and-dance sequence, making sure that the mise-en-scène, cinematography, and editing all contribute to the production of Bollywood's big-budget song-and-dance extravaganzas. One of Bollywood's most successful choreographers and directors, Farah Khan, describes the process of choreographing a song-and-dance sequence:

When I choreograph, that entire piece is mine. First, I try to understand how the song fits into the film situation or an item. I discuss it with the director. Yes, and keep the actor in mind. There is no point in expecting the actor or actress to do things they cannot do. ... Then, I work with the set designers, costumes. And I direct that piece. It is like a four to five minute short film within the film ... in the middle of their film, they [the directors] can take four to five days off, as I direct the whole sequence. (Rehman 66)

Khan's collaboration with set and costume designers, and other film crew indicates how dance in Bollywood is part of a larger complex of affects generated by particular types of bodies, movements, and spaces that foreground the transnational aspirations and address of this cinema.

1.5 BODY, MOVEMENT, SPACE – AN ORGANIZING FRAMEWORK

Within the field of dance studies, there has been some investigation of the relationship between dance and space, where, through motion, dance is understood to use as well as create space, and

define the properties of the space it creates. The performativity of the dancing body alters space; in other “regular,” non-dancing modes of being, such as sitting, standing, walking, sleeping etc., bodies occupy space in a different way than when dancing. As performance theorist, Peggy Phelan notes, “While it is true that bodies usually manage to move in time and space, dancing *consciously* performs the body’s discovery of its temporal and spatial dimensions” (92). While all actions may be argued to be performative, dance gestures and movements configure spaces as markedly so – whether in the narrative or the production number. In the narrative number, for example, the romantic couple does not merely walk through a field of tulips or mustard flowers (which would suggest the functional activity of covering the space of the field to get from point A to point B) but their jaunty perambulations, their stroking of the flowers and of each other, or their running across the field from opposite directions to collapse in each other’s arms bespeak a different relation to space, one that transforms the field into a space for the performance of romance. Similarly, a sequence featuring a group of colorfully-dressed *Bhangra* dancers accompanying the principal protagonists in a seemingly spontaneous jig on a Punjabi plain mobilizes folk dance to transform the locale into a metaphor for the nation. The movement vocabulary of the characters’ bodies thus changes the function of the space in question. In these examples, the locations are marked as spaces of spectacle through their physical attributes (red tulips, golden mustard flowers etc.), and through the protagonists’ body movements and costumes.

The difference in the movement vocabularies of the narrative and the production numbers configures spaces as private or public, which in turn defines the spectatorial gaze to be directed at the performing body. In her discussion of song sequences, Gopal notes that the romantic duet provides the central heterosexual couple of the Hindi film with a space for private expression,

and for the expression of privacy (152). Additionally, Gopal and Sen describe how song sequences posit an “interior scenario of modernity” where characters are individualized through the creation of interiority and private space, and “singing, rather than dialogue, expresses the innermost aspects of heroes, heroines, and even sidekicks” (152). They argue that this individualizing function explains the focus on *romance* in most song-and-dance sequences. While this is a perceptive reading of the function of the romantic duet and applies to narrative numbers that feature the romantic couple or even one member of the romantic dyad (expressing joy, expectations, or sorrow at separation from the partner in *solo* narrative numbers), it does not address the motivations and operations of the *production* number. The production number – performed for an audience, even if comprising one person (typically, the hero-spectator) – articulates very different spaces and configurations of desire than the narrative number. Close attention to the *dance* movements in a sequence thus becomes essential for developing a comprehensive understanding of the workings of the song-and-dance number in the Hindi film. To illustrate their point about the song-and-dance sequence serving to express interiority, Gopal and Sen discuss the romantic duet, “*Yeh mera prem patra padhkar*” (“When you read my love letter”) from *Sangam* (Union, Raj Kapoor, 1964) as a performance of *private* love between Radha (Vyjayanthimala) and Gopal (Rajendra Kumar) in a *public* space as they cavort in a large garden which is absolutely empty. I contrast this with what I argue is a production number in the same film, “*Main kya karoon Ram, mujhe buddha mil gaya*” (“What am I to do, Ram, I married an old fogie”). The heroine, Radha (played by Vyjayanthimala, the preeminent dancer-actress of the 1950s and 1960s), addresses this song to Sundar (Raj Kapoor), the man she has been forced to marry but is only now learning to love. While the space is private – Radha and Sundar’s bedroom – the performance is focused not on expressing Radha’s interiority but highlighting her

masquerade as a French showgirl. She stops Sundar from going to a cabaret/strip-show in Paris – because he will not take her with him – and mimics the performance herself. His discomfort at this flagrant performance of female sexuality by his wife in their private space is palpable, and hence her refrain, “what am I to do, I married an old fogie.” This is the only sequence in which Radha wears western clothes, and in fact creates a sartorial bricolage from the elements of the room’s décor, including wearing a lampshade as a hat. She thus consciously constructs the persona of a publicly dancing woman. I argue that it is the quality of the *dance* performed that marks the difference between the public and the private, and the kinds of bodily movements, gestural vocabularies, and appearance (costuming, make-up) that are appropriate to each. The difference between this sequence and “*Yeh mera prem patra padhkar*” maps to the private nature of Radha’s relationship with Gopal (a secret love) and the public one with Sundar (sanctified by marriage). As evident within the same film, the private enactment of interiority can take place in a public space (the garden), and alternately, a private space (the bedroom) can become an arena for “public” performance. This has relevance for the kinds of spaces employed in Hindi cinema’s production numbers, especially for the staging of dance performances by female characters, typically split between the publicly-performing vamp and the more private/domestic routines of the heroine.

The intertwined relationship of dance and space, of movement and environment, is apparent in the spaces mobilized by Hindi cinema for the staging of dance. These include spaces for professional performance such as the stage, princely courts, the *kotha* or *mehfil* (the Islamicate *tawaiif*/courtesan’s performance space), the temple, the cabaret etc. and those for apparently spontaneous performances at wedding venues, discotheques, in the bedroom (as seen in the example from *Sangam* above), on hilltops and in fields, and very frequently in the space of

fantasy as well. A consideration of these spaces leads to a number of questions: How do these spaces affect the kind of dance performed in them? At the same time, how are these spaces defined by these dance vocabularies? What is the relation between performer, movement vocabulary, and space of performance? What kinds of spaces are designated as narrative number spaces and as production number spaces? When do these get intermixed and for what narrative/ideological purpose? While I will engage with these questions in detail in each chapter, I shall make some preliminary observations here. Dance theorists, Alexandra Carter and Janet O'Shea, argue that inter-related theories of corporeality and architecture help us to see "the space of the dance not just as a neutral void but also as 'performative', as the interior spaces of the body become entwined with 'the external spaces of performance'" (19). Using this approach to understand bodies, movements, and spaces as constitutive of each other enables us to analyze the gendering of performance in popular Hindi cinema by examining the spaces occupied by male and female characters, the types of physical movement sanctioned for each, and indeed the very attributes of the idealized male and female body. Considering the relationship between the insides of the body and its constitutive outsides provides a useful framework to analyze, for example, the choreography of the production number "*Ek do teen*" mentioned earlier. This song-and-dance sequence, commonly seen as signaling the collapse of the heroine and vamp categories, did so by marshaling the erotic movement vocabularies of the vamp (while "tempering" these with the gestural repertoire of the heroine, as I shall elaborate in Chapter 4), changing the type of performing body (more lithe, dressed in revealing costumes etc.), but also, significantly, by altering the space of performance. The dancer-protagonist, Madhuri Dixit dances on a stage with a ramp, a structure architecturally similar to the nightclub stage on which the Hindi film vamp typically danced. Ranjani Mazumdar describes this space in her discussion

of the vamp: “At the center of the club is a ramplike stage for the dancer, designed to provide her easy access to the spectators. She moves from the stage to the customers at the table, blurring the intended separation from the stage” (88). The ramp in “*Ek do teen*” allows Dixit’s character Mohini to sashay into the standing audience while remaining above them and out of their reach (rather than walking amongst them, thus marking her difference from the sexually-available vamp), but it also facilitates low angle shots of her, and perpendicular access to her dancing body, modes of shooting earlier reserved for the vamp. Simultaneously, the ramp acts as a space for modeling clothes, a routine included in the choreography, and signaling new attitudes of the body in the Indian cultural imaginary at the time. Thus, a single architectural element serves to transform bodies and their arrangements or movements in various ways. In her analysis of architecture as an inhabiting force within choreography, professional choreographer, Carol Brown observes that “understandings of the body are radically affected by the history of spaces” (59). While her own work is situated in the context of site-responsive, contemporary dance, her observations may be integrated into the body-movement-space framework I have outlined here. The history of spaces such as the *kotha* (quite literally, a brothel, but also a culturally vibrant space of music, dance, and poetry) in courtesan films such as *Pakeezah* or *Umrao Jaan* (Muzaffar Ali, 1981), or the nightclub/cabaret where vamps danced in erotic abandon from the 1950s to the late 1980s tell us a lot about the kinds of bodies and movement vocabularies employed in Hindi cinema’s regime of representation. Ira Bhaskar and Richard Allen describe the space of the *kotha* in their book, *Islamicate Cultures of Bombay Cinema*:

The space of the *mehfil* where the *mujra* takes place is central to the genre of the Courtesan film. It is at once an architectural environment, a social space and a performance space in which the spectacle of song and dance and the cinematic rendition

of that spectacle cohere, and in which the entertainment offered to the spectator within the film interacts in complex ways with the entertainment of the film. (49)

The space of the kotha hosts the event of the mehfil where an audience (composed of men) is seated on three sides of a room, the musicians on the fourth, and the female *tawaif* dances in the middle. The dancing body of the tawaif, her gestures, and movement vocabulary (limited to the space between the members of the audience, and borrowing from the erotic rather than the devotional aspects of the Kathak vocabulary) belong to and are indeed defined by the characteristics of this architectural environment (Islamicate arches, pillars, intricately woven carpets etc.) and the arrangement of bodies within this space. In his discussion of the history of Kathak, Khokar contends that the foremost artists of the dance form until the twentieth century were men who often danced in temples and in some of the courts of the various native states (by which one assumes he is referring to non-Mughal courts). Women dancers, on the other hand, were *nach-walis* or nautch girls who performed a courtly and, according to him, bawdy version of Kathak:

The tradition of this dance began with the Moghuls, when there was a wholesale importation of dancing-girls from Persia, for the entertainment of the pleasure-seeking rulers and their fawning toadies. ...the girls began to perform a Kathak of their own – a style which, while retaining the basic graces of the art, divested itself of much of its dignity and directed itself towards sensualism. Eventually, the dance of the nautch girls came to be associated with voluptuousness and lasciviousness, and the dancers came to be categorized as women of easy virtue. (“Traditions of Indian Classical Dance” 134)

In this narrative, the space of the temple and the court, or even the “native” court and the Mughal court, produce different kinds of dance and dancing bodies. With the anti-nautch movement

launched in the late nineteenth century, the confiscation of many kothas by the British following the Indian Mutiny of 1857, and the fall of the feudal order in the early twentieth century, many of the kothas turned into tawdry dance bars, which in turn altered the mujra form as well. Thus, it becomes important to consider the history of these spaces, and the contexts of performance to understand the configurations of these dance forms and the bodies that perform them. These bodies in turn also define the spaces of performance. The constitutive braiding of the dancing body and the space of dance is evident in that the kotha itself came into being as a space for the exhibition of the tawaif's dance.

A similar folding of performative bodies and spaces is witnessed in the vamp's cabaret performance. The cabaret became one of Hindi cinema's stock locations from the late 1950s to the late 1980s, "an illicit landscape of gambling, gangsters, and smugglers, on the one hand, and the excessive and dangerous display of female sexuality, on the other" (Mazumdar 86). It was a virtual space that mainly existed in the cinematic imagination as the location for the vamp's dance, which was also referred to as the cabaret – a provocative, westernized floor-show typically performed in front of a seated audience. The use of the same word, cabaret, to describe the space and the dance attests to their imbrication, where it is difficult to determine whether the space of the nightclub-cabaret was conceived first and a dancing body commensurate with its moral and aesthetic coding was created later, or whether the movement vocabularies developed by vamps of the 1950s such as Cuckoo and Helen actually necessitated the creation of a space that could accommodate this new erotic register of physical movement. To trace the history of the space of the cabaret, it would also be necessary to consider the influence of the Film Noir-like spaces (characterized by smoky dark cellars, deep shadows, and an atmosphere of intrigue), and the sensuously undulating movement vocabulary in earlier song-and-dance sequences such

as, “*Tadbeer se bigdi hui taqdeer bana le*” (“Make your own fortune,” *Baazi*, Guru Dutt, 1951), and “*Aaiye meherbaan*” (“Welcome, darling,” *Howrah Bridge*, Shakti Samanta, 1958) among others.²³ The relation of space and dance can be examined as well by analyzing how choreography weaves the body and the space into the performative event of the dance. For example, the vamp’s performance included being looked at as she danced on the stage, but also involved physical proximity with her audience. The space of the cabaret accordingly included a stage, a ramp for the vamp to shimmy towards her seated audience, and an arrangement of the audience that allowed her to establish contact with her customers, laying a hand on a man’s thigh here, a sequin-stockinged leg on a table there. This organization of the cabaret space and the spatial practices of the cabaret dance form enabled dynamic camera movement as well, revealing the syncretic nature of film dance choreography that integrates actor movement, mise-en-scène, and cinematography.

While space may be argued to be “a dynamic field of forces acting on and through the body” (Brown, 59), and indeed as I have discussed above, it influences bodily movement in many ways, equally, the bodies of certain performers determine the spaces that circulate in popular Hindi cinema. The famed dancing bodies of stars like Sadhona Bose in the 1930s and 1940s, and Vyjayanthimala in the 1950s and 1960s, for example, generated particular narratives and cinematic spaces. Films like *Alibaba* (Modhu Bose, 1937), *Kumkum the Dancer* (Modhu Bose, 1940), and *Raj Nartaki* (Court Dancer), in which Sadhona Bose had top billing in the opening credits, were conceived as dance-dramas with her dancing skills in mind. The titles of

²³ Also critical to this history of the cabaret in popular Hindi cinema are the playback singers that lent the required sensuous quality to the song-and-dance sequences. “*Tadbeer se bigdi hui taqdeer bana le*” and “*Aaiye meherbaan*” are sung by Geeta Dutt and Asha Bhosle respectively. The languorously seductive voice of these singers complements the languid movement vocabulary of the actresses Geeta Bali and Madhubala respectively. In the years that followed, Asha Bhosle became the de facto voice of the vamp.

two of the three films listed are themselves an indicator of the influence of Bose's dancing body on the film's narratives, as are these descriptions of her films in the *Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema*: "Dance film idealizing poverty made mainly to showcase Sadhona Bose's talents" (*Kumkum the Dancer*, 285), "A dance-based mythological [that] highlights Bose's dancing talents" (*Shankar Parvati* (Chaturbhuj Doshi, 1943), 300), "Set in feudal Manipur, presumably to display Bose's abilities in the famous classical dance form of the region" (*Raj Nartaki*, 291). Bose's training in Manipuri dance is indeed put on full display in *Raj Nartaki's* temple and court scenes, the traditional spaces for Indian dance performance, here specifically designed to highlight her dancing body. In the court dance, for example, Bose's character, Indrani enters at the top of a flight of stairs between two intricately carved arches, one behind her and one in the foreground in order to frame her grand entry. In films such as *Devdas* (Bimal Roy, 1955), *Sadhna*, *New Delhi*, *Kathputli*, *Jewel Thief*, and *Amrapali* (Lekh Tandon, 1966), Vyjayanthimala plays the role of a professional dancer, and as with Bose, the films create spaces – such as the kotha, the princely court, and the professional stage – to emphasize the star's dancing skills. The *Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema's* entry for *Kathputli* – "A Vyjayanthimala vehicle, the film consists of expensively staged dance sequences loosely strung together" (350) – reveals the impact of the star's dancing persona on her films' themes and stylistic organization. Further, the *Encyclopedia* notes of her career: "[Since Nagin] almost always has a mandatory dance sequence evoking "classical art" associations. ...This pseudo-classical style...is a filmic equivalent of calendar art's version of Ajanta murals and Tanjore glass paintings, taking over the icon of the large-hipped full-bosomed beauty developed by Ravi Varma (238)." The "pseudo-classical" style that marks Vyjayanthimala's films derives from the hybridity of her movement vocabulary, costumes, and the spaces she creates and inhabits with her dancing body, all directed – as with

the painter Ravi Varma – at a popular address while harnessing the “prestige” of classical art. Vyjayanthimala’s training in the south-Indian classical dance form of Bharatanatyam significantly influenced the performance style and mise-en-scène of the song-and-dance sequences in her films, introducing into Hindi cinema the gestural vocabulary of Bharatanatyam, the *amrapali* costume, and south-Indian visual motifs such as the *gopuram* (the intricately-carved entrance dome to the temple).²⁴ The examples of Bose and Vyjayanthimala thus demonstrate the force of dancing star bodies (where dancing bodies, as discussed before, have a different relationship to space than other kinds of performing bodies) on the design of cinematic spaces in popular Hindi film.

1.6 FILM DANCE, CLASSICAL DANCE, FOLK DANCE – INFLUENCES, PARALLELS, DIFFERENCES

While it is a commonplace to refer to Hindi film dance as a hybrid of Indian classical and folk dance forms, a focused analysis of film dance calls for a closer examination of the influence of classical and folk dance cultures on Hindi film dance, the representation of these dance forms on screen, and the analytical tools that texts on classical dance forms can provide for the study of film dance. To study the difference in the aesthetic organization and spectatorial address of Indian classical dance and Hindi film dance, we may turn to the terms *lokadharmi* and

²⁴ The *amrapali* costume was named after Vyjayanthimala’s costume in the film *Amrapali*, in which she plays the eponymous Hindu courtesan. It became the default Bharatanatyam or sometimes even “classical dance” costume in Hindi film dance. The costume includes a short, tight blouse, a diaphanous sari wound tight around the legs, and does away with the *pallo* or the piece of cloth/section of the sari covering the blouse and the waist. This costume is much more revealing of the lines of the dancing body than the traditional *Bharatanatyam* costume.

natyadharmi defined in Bharata Muni's 2nd century A.D. treatise, *Natya Shastra*. As Khokar describes them, the *lokadharmi* form is "down-to-earth in its character and true-to-life in its manner, easier to follow, has a wide appeal" while the *natyadharmi* form is that which is "formal and contrived by rigid rules and principles, harder to follow, meant for those equipped to understand the art" ("Traditions of Indian Classical Dance" 59). While these terms were originally used to differentiate between classical and folk dance traditions, or the dance practices of professionals in the temples and the courts and those of the "common" people performed to mark festivals, season changes, and other events, they function as eloquent descriptors of contemporary *natyadharmi* classical Indian dance forms and the *lokadharmi* popular Hindi film dance style. Specifically in terms of gestural vocabulary, classical and folk dance historian, Kapila Vatsyayan notes that in *natyadharmi* forms, the same actor/dancer assumes different roles, without change of costume, and "the whole range of impersonal human situation and experiences [is] expressed through gestures" (*Indian Classical Dance* 18). The *natyadharmi* mode of presentation is in evidence in classical dance forms such as Kathak, Bharatanatyam, *Odissi* etc. where a single dancer essays the role of say, the mischievous baby Krishna and his mother Yashoda, as well as the young, flirtatious Krishna and his lover, Radha. The dancer also delineates through gestures of the hands (*hasta mudras*) and eyes (*drishti mudras*), as well as head, torso and limb movements, the entire locale in which a scene unfolds, such as the lapping of the waves in a lake, the swaying of creepers on the bank, the lotuses in bloom in the lake etc. Vatsyayan contrasts this with *lokadharmi* folk dance conventions:

While the classical dancers describe the animal or the bird through a series of movements and gestures, the folk dancers become the bird through one or two characteristic movements of the bird. ... the hands and the vast body of gesture language used in

classical dance styles are practically absent in all tribal and folk dancing. (*Traditions of Indian Folk Dance* 374)

While Hindi film dance sometimes draws on classical dance gestures, unlike the natyadharmi mode described above, it does not rely only on gestural articulation, but typically mobilizes mise-en-scène elements such as costume and location changes to suggest change in character or situation. Thus, even in a semi-classical dance number like “*Bagad bam bam baaje damru*” (“The drum goes bagad bam bam”) from *Kathputli*, the Bharatanatyam-trained Vyjayanthimala dons two costumes – of a peacock and a village girl – to depict the two characters in the song rather than suggest these two through gestures alone. The song transitions from one character to another by having her dance towards the camera into an extreme close up that blurs and cuts to her as the other character, so that through cinematography and editing, the “double role” is sutured. As in Vatsyayan’s description of folk dances above, to depict the peacock, Vyjayanthimala adopts some characteristic moves of the bird such as its forward-backward neck movement, the unfurling of the tail, and leaps and twirls in the air, in addition to an illustrative costume and some classical dance gestures such as the *mayura* (peacock) hand gesture and the *pralokitam drishti mudra* (eye gesture in which the eyeballs move from left to right and back). In the breadth of its address to a large constituency of viewers, and its concomitant investment in comprehensibility, Hindi cinema creates a seamless amalgam of various dance forms without adhering strictly to the conventions of any of these. So, while song-and-dance sequences often deploy classical dance gestures, especially when the dancer is a classical dance exponent within the diegesis, the rigorous correspondence between gestures and meaning that is mandated in Indian classical dance is not a feature of these hybrid film dance depictions. Rather, the style is recognized as “classical” through costume (even if it is some variant of the *amrapali* costume

described earlier), makeup, and select body codifications such as the distensions of the neck typical of Bharatanatyam, or the *chakkars* or spins of the body from the Kathak lexicon. Film dance is thus characterized by style recognition (certain formations as “classical,” others as “folk” etc.) rather than by strict adherence to the codes and conventions of the dance forms it borrows from.

The other difference between Hindi film dance and classical Indian dance forms is the stance adopted by the body and the body’s occupation of space. Most classical Indian dance forms feature codified movements in space along straight lines, diagonals, figures of eight, and spirals. What is distinctive about Bharatanatyam, for example, is its definition of movement in space along straight lines or triangles, which in turn creates a movement vocabulary that is characterized by lateral movements of the head, lower limb movements along straight lines or marking two sides of an imaginary triangle, and upper limbs following the lower limbs or weaving circular patterns along the space covered by the lower limbs. Kathak, like Indian miniature painting, conceives of space only in straight lines, which leads to a front-back treatment of space in its movement vocabulary (Vatsyayan, *Indian Classical Dance* 88). Movement patterns in Odissi, on the other hand, are decidedly circular, with the *Minadandi* movement (literally, covering space like a fish) being the most common technique to cover space through semi-circular turns of the leg. Movements known as *gheras* cover space in circles, half-circles, semi-circles, and concentric circles (Vatsyayan, *Indian Classical Dance* 61). The highly codified movements of feet, knees, torso, neck, head, arms, wrists etc. in classical dance forms lead to a particular relationship to space that Hindi film dance with its eclectic borrowings does not adhere to, even in depictions of classical dance on screen. Hindi film dance tends to be characterized by rhythmic impulses rather than by the specific positioning of body parts, and in

this it shares the emphasis on movement evidenced in lokadharmi folk dance forms: “all classical styles in India have evolved from strict adherence to a particular stance or pose where the body achieves an abstraction of a totally different order. ...In the folk forms, the emphasis is on movement, however limited, as opposed to stance, although the stance is not altogether absent” (Vatsyayan, *Traditions of Indian Folk Dance* 375). The hybrid film dance also borrows freely from transnational forms such as cha-cha-cha, modern jazz, salsa etc. where the emphasis is on the coverage of space – whether floor-space or space in the air – through leaps and jumps. Classical Indian dance rarely features such movements as its sculptural quality derives from a preoccupation with time rather than space, with the dancer constantly trying to achieve the perfect pose that will convey a sense of timelessness. Vatsyayan observes that in Indian classical dance, “the human body has been conceived of as a mass which can be equally divided along a central median. Further movement is determined by the nature of deflections from this median” (*Indian Classical Dance* 24). In Kathak, for example, torso movements are produced only by changes in the angle of the shoulder line, where the depressing of one shoulder and the raising of the other creates a movement known as *kasak masak*. In Bharatanatyam, “the dancer emerges from a stance of perfect balance to execute a series of abstract geometric movements in a given time cycle, and returns to a pose of perfect equilibrium” (Sahai 155). In this dance form, the torso is never split into the upper or the lower torso through deflections of the waist. Hindi film dance, on the other hand, manufactures its sexualized spectacularization of the performing female body through sinuous movements of the torso (at their extreme, characterized by vigorous heaving of the breasts, and swaying of the waist and buttocks, the afore-mentioned *jhatkas* and *matkas*). Choreographer Saroj Khan’s comment on the Bharatanatyam-trained actress, Hema

Malini's dancing skills reveals the difference in the movement vocabularies of classical and film dance:

I choreographed a *tandav* [a particular type of dance item] with Hemaji. She is a brilliant dancer but she is a stiff dancer, though now she has opened up. Before, she had that Bharat Natyam style so it would take time to loosen her body. One day I was assisting P. L. Raj in *Dharmatmaa* and we were shooting the song *Meri galiyon se logon ki yaari badh gaayi*. She had to do a movement that she just couldn't do because of her Bharat Natyam training. (Patsy N.)

Considering that the dance movements for this sequence, influenced in parts by Arabic belly-dancing, include considerable deflections of the torso, and some major heaving of the breasts, one can see why Khan believes that Malini's Bharatanatyam training comes in the way of her film dancing.

While Hindi film dance has different aesthetic and affective aims than classical Indian dance forms, the detailed documentation of the codifications of the dancing body in treatises like Bharata Muni's 2nd century A.D. text, *Natya Shastra* and Nandikesvara's medieval work, *Abhinaya Darpana*, suggests methodological approaches for the study of film dance movement vocabularies. According to these texts (which became a primary source for the resuscitation of classical Indian dance forms in the 1940s, and which continue to define classical movement vocabularies in forms across the country), dance can be divided into three performative categories: *nrita*, *nritya*, and *natya*. *Nrita* refers to "pure" dance movements that are not intended to convey a particular meaning to the audience but rather to demonstrate the dancer's skills. *Nrita* movements are defined by three essentials: a basic stance, decorative hand gestures, and movement of the legs or feet. In contrast, *nritya* or expository dance meant to convey a narrative

or an idea to the onlooker, includes *abhinaya* or expression, conveyed through *mukhaja* or the face (involving movements of the eyebrows, eyelids, eyeballs, nose, lips, chin, and mouth), and *sarira* or the body (using the major limbs, and movements by the head, chest, waist, hips, thighs, hands, and feet). Natya is a more theatre-related category where nrita and nritya are both utilized, but in addition, the element of drama is introduced through the use of the spoken word and other conventions of the stage (Khokar, “Traditions of Indian Classical Dance” 58). Like these classical dance categories, song-and-dance numbers include passages that “show off” a dancer’s skills and others that demonstrate her/his ability for expression. The *antara* and *mukhda* of a song may be described as dominated by nritya and natya, where dance movements are accompanied by facial expressions to convey the content of the song. The instrumental interludes that typically punctuate these sections frequently feature nrita or pure dance with an emphasis on physical movement. Additionally, production numbers are more focused on nrita since the lyrical content of the song is not as important as the dance movements, and the number is designed to put on display dance skills.²⁵ Narrative numbers, on the other hand, are more likely to feature elements of nritya and natya since they aim to convey narrative meaning. It is also important to consider which parts of the body are usually deployed in each of these dance categories. The *Natya shastra* presents a dizzying variety of movements and expressions constructed through various body units. For example, it details as many as eighty face movements, produced by the head, eyes, nose, cheeks, mouth, lower lip and chin. Eye movements specifically are codified into thirty-six kinds of glances, which employ the eyebrows, eyelids, eyelashes, eye-balls, and pupils. Similarly, specific instructions are provided for the use of the hands, arms, breasts, sides,

²⁵ Production numbers like “*Bagad bam bam baaje damru*,” “*Ek do teen*,” and “*Dard-e-Disco*” are dominated by a rhythmic quality rather than lyrical complexity.

belly, waist, thighs, shanks, and feet to produce different kinds of gaits, leaps, jumps, and whirling movements of the body (Khokar, “Traditions of Indian Classical Dance” 61). In *Abhinaya Darpana*, Nandikesvara outlines three elements of bodily gesture: *anga* (the limbs), *pratyanga* (parts of the body), and *upanga* (features) (17). Taking my cue from this elaborate lexicon of classical dance movements, I deconstruct the dancing female body in Hindi cinema into three broad categories – the *face*, the *torso*, and the *limbs*. Each of these “body zones” is capable of a variety of addresses depending on the deployment of their constituent parts, and the social connotations of those gestural articulations. In his annotation of the *Abhinaya Darpana*’s description of the functions of the face in dance, Khokar notes, “The face of the dancer becomes the register of the flitting feelings and passions that well up in response to the words of the song and their emotionally charged musical release; the eyes, eyebrows, mouth, lips and cheeks all become potent instruments of suggestion and insinuation” (“Traditions of Indian Classical Dance” 78). Vatsyayan remarks of the face and torso: “The movement of the minor limbs, particularly the mukhaja [facial] ones, like the eyebrows, eyeballs, eyelids, chin, nose, lips etc. relate to *abhinaya* [expression]. On the other hand, thighs, waist, side and chest movements are primarily discussed as *nritta* technique” (*Indian Classical Dance* 15). The face then is commonly considered to express/register feelings, while the limbs and torso define the body’s relationship to space. The tripartite system I have proposed – comprising the face, torso, and limbs – helps to analyze the ways in which the performing female body is constructed, and the relationship of film dance to other dance forms. In Hindi film dance, the facial features most employed are the eyes and the lips, while torso movements focus on the breasts, the waist, and the buttocks. As mentioned before, movements of the limbs or of individual fingers for example, are not strictly codified as in classical dance forms, but create kinesthetic patterns and context-specific

meanings in each instance of eclectic appropriation. Each of these body zones also interact with each other to produce varied affects, sometimes complementing, at others counteracting the insinuations of certain moves. In Chapter 4, for example, I discuss in detail how Madhuri Dixit's famously "innocent" smile attenuates the suggestive torso movements that she appropriates from the vamp. While the vamp's face is marked as bawdy on account of her lustful glances, her biting of the lip etc., Dixit's smile conveys the appropriate attributes of the heroine – innocence, vulnerability, and a non-threatening sexuality. In one of the films discussed in Chapter 3, *Sadhna*, in which the Bharatanatyam-trained Vyjayanthimala plays a coarse courtesan, Champabai, the purportedly raunchy mujra dance number, "*Kaho ji tum kya kya khareedoge, yahan toh har cheez bikti hai*" ("Tell me sirs what would you like to buy, all sorts of things are sold here") is rendered sexually anodyne by the dancer-actress's energetic jumps and leaps that put her footwork on display but do not convey anything of the courtesan's flirtatious coquetry (which is usually communicated in the Kathak lexicon that the mujra borrows from through the raising of the eyebrows and sidelong glances). Dance critic and historian, V. A. K. Ranga Rao, approves of the toning down of this production number through Vyjayanthimala's moves and the camera placement: "Considering that it was set in a bordello, it could have been a lascivious come-on. By the camera angle (no cleavage), movements (no bumps and heaves) and her expression, it was a straightforward invitation to come and have fun" (34). The emphasis on footwork rather than on the torso and the eschewal of traditional facial gestures employed for seduction ensure that a respectable dancer-actress like Vyjayanthimala can perform a mujra number without censure.

1.7 BACKGROUND DANCERS AS THE “FOLK”

The standard arrangement of dancing bodies in most Hindi film song-and-dance sequences, especially production numbers, is characterized by one or more central dancers (typically the heroine/vamp or the principal romantic couple) and a group of “background dancers” or “junior artists.” These background dancers usually wear identical costumes that are always differentiated, however, from the costume of the principal dancer/s. They also perform identical moves, sometimes in synchronization with the central performer/s, at others separated from the more spectacular moves of the central performer/s, acting as a background to the latter. Indeed, as the phrase “background dancers” suggests, the principal function of these dancing bodies is to provide a *ground* against which the *figure* of the central dancer/s stands out. This is similar to the figure-ground relation in music where the chorus serves to foreground the individual voice. In the Hindi film song-and-dance sequence this relation is achieved by creating a uniform background of costume, gestures, and moves against which the main dancers are foregrounded. Group choreography of this type is clearly influenced by Broadway and Hollywood representations of uniformly lined-up chorus girls but also by Indian classical and folk dance traditions. The *Natya Shastra*, for example, describes group formations such as *gulma* (a closed cluster made by dancers), *sringhala* (a chain formed by dancers holding hands), *latabandha* (a creeper-like formation produced by dancers putting their hands around each other) (Vatsyayan, *Indian Classical Dance* 17), which are evidenced in numerous Hindi film song-and-dance sequences. While in production numbers performed on stage, background dancers function to augment the spectacle through synchronized movements, which also serve to create a space in which the central dancer’s performance is staged, in many off-stage production numbers as well as narrative numbers, they are often seen to accompany and dance along with the romantic

couple, all of them cycling, picnicking, partying, celebrating a wedding etc. Here, in addition to the above roles, the background dancers could be argued to create a sense of community, designating social networks of family and friends amongst whom the hero and heroine dance. This leads me to suggest that through their collective presence, background dancers produce the illusion of community and indeed of the folk in a diverse range of song-and-dance sequences, and that specifically in terms of dance, their arrangement, gestural vocabulary, and function within the choreography is significantly influenced by folk dance conventions. The individual and collective organization of the central performer/s and the background dancers (notably, always in the plural) respectively is similar to that of the classical dancer who occupies center stage to display her/his dancing virtuosity and that of folk dancers who perform identical moves in identical costumes. “In contrast to classical dancing,” Vatsyayan notes, “[in folk dance] the vocabulary of movements is restricted to a few mannered motor movements and does not allow for individual variations or improvisation. Improvisation may occur in the whole group in some rhythmic patterns but not through the evolution of new movements by a single dancer” (*Traditions of Indian Folk Dance* 374). Similarly, in Hindi film dance configurations, the central performer/s perform the most spectacular moves and often seem to improvise, while for the background dancers, the emphasis is on sameness and repetition. Additionally, just as “the whole system of *mukhaj abhinaya* (facial mime) so distinctive of classical forms, is minimum in the folk forms” (Vatsyayan, *Traditions of Indian Folk Dance* 374), so too in film dance, the central dancer may display a range of facial expressions, but the background dancers predominantly perform only physical moves involving the torso and the limbs in order to create a space out of their rhythmically synchronized movements.

Siegfried Kracauer, in an essay titled, “The Mass Ornament,” discusses the “Tiller Girls,” an early twentieth-century dance troupe comprising chorus girls of identical height and weight, performing precisely matching steps. The Tiller Girls, argues Kracauer, do not appear as human beings but as a mass ornament containing no individuals or organic energies, their performance the opposite of the communal dancing at village festivals and other events involving folk dance (76-78). If we follow Kracauer’s assertion that the mass ornament reenacts the contemporary reality of capitalist production, the varying formations of Hindi film background dancers from the 1950s to the present Bollywood dispensation become an eloquent testament to the conditions of capitalism in the Indian subcontinent. Until the 1990s, the arrangement of background dancers in Hindi film production and narrative numbers was never as precise (in terms of coordinated movements or costumes, or exactly identical bodies) as the western chorus girl formations they were influenced by. Quite unlike the Ziegfeld girls, for example, the ragtag team of typically working class background dancers intimated the discontinuous assembling processes not only of Hindi cinema but of South Asian modernity itself. With the arrival of high-budget Bollywood films imbricated in a triumphalist neo-liberal discourse, however, the song-and-dance sequence changed radically, and one way in which these numbers became globally-appreciated spectacles was by replacing the old background dancers with Caucasian women (typically from Russia, Central Asia, and East-Europe), and with upper-class college students trained at dance-cum-fitness centers such as the Shiamak Davar Institute for the Performing Arts. The choreographer Farah Khan, among the first to introduce these changes in the background dance formation, remarks: “I insisted that people dancing in dance troupes should be fit. There is no point in forty-year-olds playing college students. So I brought young people into the troupe. Naturally, in comparison actresses had to look good as well. It is also to do with how India has changed. Many

more people work out and go to the gym now. ...It is nice to have bodies in shape” (Rehman 76). The perfectly coordinated movements of these lithe new dancing agents of “India Shining” accord serendipitously with Kracauer’s observation that, “A system oblivious to differences in form leads on its own to the blurring of national characteristics and to the production of worker masses that can be employed equally well at any point on the globe” (78).²⁶

1.8 CHAPTER DESCRIPTION

As mentioned earlier, each chapter of the dissertation focuses on a particular dancing film star and a certain period. In Chapter 2, through the figure of Sadhona Bose, I investigate the role of dance in the construction of female stardom in the 1930s and 1940s. Bose’s elite background activates a discussion of the history of the revival of classical dance forms and their adoption by middle- and upper-class Indians. Figures like Rabindranath Tagore and Uday Shankar are pivotal in this history. Among the first and very few choreographer-costume designer-dancer-actresses, Bose’s contribution to the movement vocabulary, the conceptualization of space, and the general “look” of film dance deserves detailed attention. Chapter 3 examines four films featuring female protagonists who are professional dancers to note the recurrence of narrative and cinematic tropes that reflect cultural anxieties around female sexuality and economic independence. In narrativizing dance as *work*, these films are structured around the dichotomies of home/world, wife/courtesan, and private/public in order to negotiate the figure of the dancing woman. A study

²⁶ “India Shining” was the marketing slogan meant to encapsulate a sense of economic optimism, adopted by the Hindu-right political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, in 2004.

of the star texts of the renowned dancer-actresses, Vyjayantimala and Waheeda Rehman, who play the dancing protagonists in these films, and the tensions within the narratives reveal fractured discourses around the figure of the female public performer. With her vigorously libidinous dancing, Madhuri Dixit, the leading Hindi actress of the late 1980s and the 1990s, initiated the consolidation of the brazen vamp and the coy heroine, which in turn led to multiple strategies to contain the subversive energies unleashed by the spectacle of female performance through dance. In Chapter 4, I investigate how Dixit's sensuous production numbers transform the construction of the female body on screen and indeed the very conditions of female stardom in Hindi cinema. In particular, I analyze dance numbers from three films featuring Dixit – *Tezaab*, *Sangeet* (Music, K. Vishwanath, 1992), and *Beta* (Son, Indra Kumar, 1992) – to investigate how film dance partakes centrally in the crisis of female representation in Hindi cinema of the 1990s. The epilogue considers changes in film dance since the 1990s, and its status in contemporary Bollywood cinema as well as on reality TV shows. Through an analysis of certain intertextual song-and-dance sequences, I demonstrate how Bollywood references Hindi cinema of the past mainly through a pastiche of earlier styles of dance, music, and choreography. Arguing that melodramatic representations of history are often more dependent on gesture and music than on narrative, I examine how a history of Hindi cinema is constructed through a remembering of epochal dance moves. Indeed, in certain song-and-dance sequences, contemporary actresses occupy the dancing bodies of past female stars via new technologies, pointing to the continuing link between female stardom and film dance in Hindi cinema.

**2.0 THE BHADRAMAHILA DANCER-ACTRESS: SADHONA BOSE AND
DISCOURSES OF RESPECTABILITY AROUND DANCE AND FEMALE STARDOM
IN THE 1930S AND 1940S**

Court Dancer (Modhu Bose, 1941) was hailed as the “first Indian film with dialogue in English to be entirely produced in India with an all-Indian personnel.”²⁷ Also released in Hindi and in Bengali – as *Raj Nartaki* – this extravagant, trilingual production was promoted as the Wadia Movietone studio’s most ambitious film to date. Through this “orientalised classical dance film [designed] for European audiences” (Thomas, “Not Quite (Pearl) White” 49), studio founder J.B.H. Wadia sought to change the image of the Wadia Movietone studio that had until then mainly produced stunt films such as *Hunterwali* (Homi Wadia, 1935), *Miss Frontier Mail* (Homi Wadia, 1936), and *Diamond Queen* (Homi Wadia, 1940). These stunt films were extremely popular among the “mass audience” but were almost entirely ignored by the press as lowbrow cultural products, rarely deemed deserving of a review in the film magazines of the time. *Court Dancer* was conceived to change all that with its high production values, its showcasing of Indian “classical dance,” and its acclaimed Bengali dancer-actress, Sadhona Bose, a petite, classically-trained dancer whose star text was seen to be in complete contrast to that of the muscular, Australian-born, British-Greek “Fearless Nadia,” the rambunctious heroine of the

²⁷ Cited from the film’s opening credits.

Wadia stunt films. Why did J.B.H. Wadia choose an orientalized dance film as his prestige project? Why was Sadhona Bose selected as the face of this big-budget, trilingual production? And what was the impetus behind the tragic narrative of a courtesan's doomed love for a prince? Through a focus on Sadhona Bose, this chapter explores the relationship between the discourses on dance and cinema during the 1930s and 1940s, which also throws light on why J.B.H. Wadia turned to orientalized classical dance and Sadhona Bose at that particular historical moment. An examination of Sadhona Bose's star text serves to narrativize the rise to stardom of the upper-class, upper-caste Hindu woman in the film and in the dance cultures of the 1930s. This in turn calls for a consideration of the status of dance in public discourse, the movement vocabularies enlisted in film dance, and the performance registers available to female dancers and actresses of the time. Telling the story of film dance and female stardom in the 1930s and 1940s through the figure of Bose allows for a range of explorations. Her elite background, for example, activates a discussion of the history of the revival of classical dance forms and their adoption by middle- and upper-class Indians in the 1930s and 1940s. Figures like Rabindranath Tagore and Uday Shankar are pivotal in this history, and indeed in Bose's development as a public performer. As the principal star of J.B.H. Wadia's *Court Dancer*, Bose symbolizes the cultural cachet that classical dance came to acquire by the early 1940s, albeit when performed by an upper-class woman from a "respectable" background. Dance was key to Bose's film stardom, and her entire oeuvre of ten films, from *Alibaba* (Modhu Bose, 1937) to *Vikram Urvashi* (Modhu Bose, 1954) was conceived and designed around the display of her dancing skills – whether through oriental dance fantasies or a generic tendency I term the "dance social."²⁸ Given this dissertation's focus

²⁸ Bose's filmography includes: *Alibaba* (Modhu Bose, 1937), *Abhinaya* (Modhu Bose, 1938), *Kumkum the Dancer* (Modhu Bose, 1940), *Court Dancer* (Modhu Bose, 1941), *Meenakshi* (Modhu Bose, 1942), *Shankar Parvati* (Chaturbhuj Doshi, 1943), *Bhola Shankar* (Vishram Bedekar, 1951), *Shin Shinaki Boobla Boo* (P.L. Santoshi, 1952),

on the role of film dance in the construction of female stardom, Bose serves as a striking example of a film actress in the 1930s and 1940s whose stardom owed in a very great measure to her ability to dance.²⁹ Considerations of gender, class, and religion are imperative to understanding what kind of dancing was now sanctioned as respectable, which in turn determined the kinds of dancing bodies that could achieve cinematic stardom. In this chapter, I shall discuss how Bose's social background and classical dance training mark a change in the construction of female stardom in the 1930s and 1940s, as an emergent bourgeoisie and the demands of cultural nationalism decree as disreputable or not-Indian-enough the earlier film actress figure, mainly drawn from the Muslim courtesan tradition or the Anglo-Indian community.

The 1930s are a key moment for the study of film dance, when, as Madhuja Mukherjee notes, "the film-song soon became an autonomous spectacular 'song and dance' unit" (49). Much has been written about how by the mid-thirties, film music comes to have an independent existence through the radio and the gramophone.³⁰ However, the transition from the song

Shesher Kabita (Modhu Bose, 1953), and *Vikram Urvashi* (Modhu Bose, 1954). Publicity materials exist for at least two other films: Amar Pictures' *Paigam* and Ranjit Movietone's *Vish-Kanya*, but it is not clear if these films were ever completed and released.

²⁹ The other Hindi and Bengali film actress of the time who was known for her dance and performed the role of a dancer in at least two films was Leela Desai. She played the role of a *devadasi* in *Bidyapati* (Debaki Bose, 1937) and of a courtesan, Roopkumari, in *Nartaki* (Debaki Bose, 1940). However, her star text is not as defined by dance as that of Sadhona Bose in that not all her films are dance-centric, reviews do not primarily focus on her dancing, and she does not have a parallel career as a professional dancer. Baburao Patel, editor of the magazine, *filmindia*, and a voluble opinion-maker, compares the two: "I have seen Leela [Desai] in action. I would call it just prancing. Somehow, whenever I see Leela I have the feeling of an odd-sized egg bouncing on the stage. ... Sadhona [Bose] is perhaps the only one who is so near my ideal. She knows enough technique to impress the average dance-lover, she has more than enough natural grace, she has sweet womanly looks, a suitably pleasant expression and in addition to all this just that little something which puts kick into her work and satisfies the spectator (Rani 37)."

³⁰ Arnold 94-102, Mukherjee 49, Manuel.

sequence to the song-and-dance unit deserves further attention. As an actress for whom spectacular *production numbers* were specifically choreographed, Bose is a key figure in this transformation.³¹ Bose's extant films – *Alibaba* and *Court Dancer* – are noteworthy for the production numbers especially designed to show off her dancing skills, but also her choreography and costume-design abilities. As evident in these films and also in booklets of her other films, Bose was an ambitious choreographer of group dances featuring a large number of background dancers, and an adventurous costume-designer, whose creations reflect the same hybrid, oriental, “modern” aesthetic encountered in her dance.³² Among the first and very few costume-designer-choreographer-dancer-actresses, Bose thus emerges as an artistic pioneer who, through the conceptualization of space, movement vocabulary, and the general “look” of popular film dance, contributes to a new cinematic and dance idiom and indeed to a newly emerging mass culture. Like the turn-of-the-century founders of modern dance in America – Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan, and Ruth St. Denis – Bose, in composing and performing her own dances, redistributes and re-genders creative roles typically allocated to men until then.³³ This provokes an inquiry into the relationship between women, dance, and modernity and places dance not at the margins of social developments in the 1930s, but at the very heart of the “women’s

³¹ For a description of the “production number,” see the taxonomy of song-and-dance sequences detailed in Chapter 1.

³² As gleaned from film credits and the autobiographies of Sadhona and Modhu Bose, Sadhona Bose was responsible for choreography and costume design in at least four films – *Alibaba*, *Abhinaya* (Modhu Bose, 1938), *Kumkum the Dancer* (Modhu Bose, 1940), and *Court Dancer* – though it is likely that her influence on choreography and costume design extended to most of her films.

³³ Just as, until the end of the nineteenth century, Western ballet was choreographed mainly by male ballet masters, until the 1930s, for Indian dance traditions like Sadirattam (later, Bharatanatyam) the male *nattuvanar* (the hereditary dance guru, conductor, and choreographer) was a central figure and the bearer of the performance tradition.

question.”³⁴ Using Bose’s two extant films, film booklets, articles and reviews in film magazines, print advertisements, and her autobiography, *Shilpir Atmakatha* (Autobiography of an Artist), I shall examine her career as a dancer and as a stage and film actress, which in turn produces an illuminating narrative of female performance in cinema and dance during the period.

2.1 A HOUSE OF MUSIC, DANCE, AND SOCIAL REFORM

Sadhona Bose (1914-1973) was born into a prosperous Bengali family in Calcutta. Her father, Saral Chandra Sen, a barrister, was the fourth son of the social reformer, Keshab Chandra Sen, a member of the Brahmo Samaj, and later, the founder of the breakaway “Brahmo Samaj of India.”³⁵ Her mother, Nirmala Sen, was the daughter of Burma’s (now Myanmar) first Indian Administrator, General P.C. Sen. Two of her aunts were members of the royalty, queens of the princely states of Cooch Behar and Mayurbhanj, and her older and younger sisters married into the royal families of Chittagong and Kapurthala respectively. In keeping with her Brahmo Samaj background, Bose was given a diverse education, attending the Loreto Convent school, and also learning music and dance at prestigious institutions such as the Sangeet Sangha, and the Sangeet Sammilani. She took *Kathak* lessons from Tarakanath Bagchi, and learned *Manipuri* dance from

³⁴ In his famous essay, "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question," historian Partha Chatterjee discusses the role of women’s issues in the debates over social reform in nineteenth century Bengal and the relationship of the social position of women to the politics of nationalism in India.

³⁵ The Brahmo Samaj, founded in 1828 by Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Debendranath Tagore, initiated social and religious reform, focusing on the emancipation of women through education, and the abolition of the dowry system. It also campaigned for the abolition of the caste system. In its reform of Hinduism, Keshab Chandra Sen’s “Brahmo Samaj of India” included aspects of Christianity, while its social campaigns focused on women’s education and protests against child marriage.

Guru Senarik Rajkumar. She was a pupil of the famous *Thumri* exponent, Girijasankar Chakrabarti, and took piano lessons from T. Francopolo. Later, in the 1930s, she also learned music from the famous film music composer, Sachin Dev Burman (S. Bose 10-35). While Bose and her sister, Nilina (who later became a renowned Thumri exponent by the name of Naina Devi) took Thumri lessons and learned dance, these were not meant to be professional pursuits. Naina Devi recalls, “Taking up dance or music as a profession however was out of the question. Even Mejdī (Sadhona), so as not to jeopardize my chances of finding a good match, did not become a professional actress until after I was married, and even then, my parents disapproved strongly of her decision” (Rao, “Heart to Heart” 38). Additionally, while the family generously patronized the arts, care was taken not to associate with traditional female performers of music and dance, the *tawaifs* or courtesans, as indicated by Naina Devi: “The house was always full of music. My brothers would organize *mehfils* of the leading male singers – Girija Babu (Girijasankar Chakrabarti), Enayet Khan and others, but none of the *tawaifs*” (Rao, “Heart to Heart” 39).

The attitude of Bose’s family to *tawaifs* or to the professional performance of music and especially dance by women was not uncommon at the time, and reflects the status of dance in public discourse in the early decades of the twentieth century. By the late nineteenth-century, the split between body and voice was exacerbated as dance and music increasingly diverged. While singing (privately) would soon become a respectable activity for middle-class women, dance carried with it the unshakeable association of courtesans who traditionally both sang and danced. Even within North-Indian Hindustani musical traditions, certain forms were preferred to others. By the 1920s, music scholars like V.D. Paluskar and V.N. Bhatkande were textualizing Hindustani musical practices, but as Nita Kumar and Vidya Rao have argued, this process of

textualisation happened at the expense of the “light classical” musical forms like the Thumri and the *Kajri*, precisely the forms sung by the courtesans (Kumar 149, Rao, “Thumri and Thumri Singers” 301). Bhatkande charged these light classical musical forms with lewdness, blaming illiterate Muslim singers and their ignorance of “spiritual” Sanskritic traditions for this (Rao, “Thumri and Thumri Singers” 301). He refused to meet the courtesans, who he claimed would not help in the systematization of music, his primary aim in life. Indeed, as Matthew Rahaim, in his study of gestures and voice in Hindustani music, has shown, scholars such as Bhatkande systematized and wrote about Hindustani music in a way that omitted gestural articulation altogether. Through this period of the severing of the voice from the body, male and female singers employed smaller gestures so as not to attract attention to the body (Rahaim 28-29). Beginning in 1882, the British government, with the support of many Indian reformists, launched the anti-*nautch* movement to abolish traditional dancing women such as the tawaifs (courtesans) and the *devadasis* (temple dancers), who performed publicly, and whose art was seen, by the anti-*nautch* campaigners, as a mere pretext for prostitution (Coorlawala, “Ruth St. Denis” 130).³⁶ An 1894 pamphlet, “Opinions on the Nautch Question,” published by the “Punjab Purity Association” (one of many “Social Purity Associations” sponsored by the Purity movement in England for the reform of public and private morals) demonstrates how the bourgeoisie sought to separate “the gem from the dirt,” the song being the gem and dance, the dirt (11). Significantly, this pamphlet also quotes Bose’s social reformist grandfather, Keshab Chandra Sen’s opinions on the *nautch*:

³⁶ *Nautch* is an Anglicized pronunciation and transliteration of the Hindustani word for dance, *naach*. “Nautch” had a pejorative intent and was specially used to designate the dance of the tawaifs and the devadasis. For more on the anti-*nautch* movement and the performance cultures of the tawaifs and devadasis, see Meduri, Nevile, Ohtani, and Srinivasan.

The nautch-girl is a hideous woman...hell in her eyes. In her breast is a vast ocean of poison. Round her comely waist dwell the furies of hell. Her hands are brandishing unseen daggers ever ready to strike unwary or wilful victims that fall in her way. Her blandishments are India's ruin. Alas! her smile is India's death. (qtd. in Nevile 168)

Given this contempt towards dance, how did Sen's grand-daughter come to be a celebrated public dancer around forty years later? What were the shifts in discourse over this period that allowed a girl from his own upper-class Bengali family to learn dance forms like Kathak or musical forms like the Thumri that were the domain of the tawaifs through the nineteenth century and until the early decades of the twentieth?

2.2 KEY INFLUENCES ON BOSE'S DANCE IDIOM

Tracing the influences on Bose's dance choreography and performance leads us through a history of dance in India in the first thirty years of the twentieth century, particularly in relation to the canonization of classical dance forms, Rabindranath Tagore's dance-dramas and the dance form he developed called *Rabindra Nritya*, Uday Shankar's articulation of modern Indian dance, and the "oriental dance" ballets of Anna Pavlova, Ruth St. Denis, Shankar, Ram Gopal and others. Through her training in classical dance as well as personal interactions with many of these figures, Bose developed a hybrid dance idiom that illuminates and engages with the tensions between tradition and modernity that significantly mark this late-colonial period.

By the 1920s, cultural revivalists like E. Krishna Iyer started crusading against the anti-nautch movement and began to "rehabilitate" dance forms such as *Sadirattam* performed by the devadasis in South India. For these dance forms to be deemed acceptable by bourgeois patrons

however, reformers like Iyer had to accede to part of the anti-nautch campaigners' demand – that the social customs and rituals associated with these forms be excised and only the “pure art” be retained. Iyer, a lawyer in Madras, tried to secure audiences for the hereditary devadasis, but when that failed, he began studying Sadirattam himself, and in 1926, presented it as the dance form of *Bharatanatyam* before the cultural elite of Madras (Chatterjee 27). In the same year, between January 8 and May 9, 1926, the Denishawn Dance Company, formed by Ruth St. Denis, a pioneer of modern dance in America, and Ted Shawn, her husband, performed over one hundred dance concerts in India. St. Denis choreographed and performed a series of dance productions inspired by Indian themes such as, *The Nautch*, *The Dance of the Black and Gold Sari*, *The Cobras*, *Yogi*, and *Radha*. Very loosely borrowing from Indian dance forms that were then barely known outside the circle of traditional performers like the devadasis and the tawaifs, these pieces, as their titles indicate, repeatedly represented India as a land of dancing girls, snake charmers, and spiritual mystique (Chakravorty 110). However, St. Denis' performances were hailed as rekindling interest and pride among her Indian audiences in their dance forms. The dance critic, Walter Terry, for example claimed that Ruth St. Denis' “non-authentic Indian dance helped reawaken the subcontinent's slumbering dance art and [was] at least partially responsible for the renascence of India's respect for its 2,000 year old heritage” (qtd. in Coorlawala, “Ruth St. Denis” 123). The legendary Russian ballerina, Anna Pavlova, toured India a year later. In the early 1920s, she had choreographed a production titled, “Oriental Impressions” that included Indian-themed pieces such as *Krishna and Radha* and *A Hindu Wedding*. These pieces were co-choreographed and performed by a young Indian art student who would go on to become the face of modern Indian dance globally, Uday Shankar. In her discussion of “oriental dance,” Joan Erdman explains that the term was initially used by Europeans and Americans to describe

balletic dances that were “eastern in theme, content, mood, costume, musical accompaniment, inspiration, or intent” (“Dance Discourses” 288). She cites examples ranging from Mata Hari’s 1905 performance at the Musée Guiment as a temptress of Lord Shiva, with the deity represented by a half life-size carving from the museum’s collection to Loie Fuller’s dances “rippling with flowing veils” and using a “Hindu skirt” sent to her by young officers in India to the 1909 season of Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes whose elaborate costumes and sets and exotic themes brought the Orient to the world of ballet (“Dance Discourses” 289). It is worth noting how dance is a key element of this fascination with the Orient, mobilizing as it does the prevailing interest in Oriental fashion, textiles, and arts and crafts. Indeed, by the 1920s, “oriental dance conjured up expectations of exotic movements, glittering costumes, flowing lines, sublime dedication, and minor mode or strangely tuned music” (“Dance Discourses” 288). As will be discussed shortly, Bose’s choreography reflected this attention to costume, sets, and props to create an “oriental” movement vocabulary.

In addition to influencing Shankar and introducing him to the world of dance in 1922, during her 1927 visit to India, Pavlova directly inspired two other important figures in Indian dance. She encouraged the Brahmin wife of the head of the Theosophical Society – Rukmini Devi Arundale – to learn and perform Bharatanatyam in public, and also exhorted the socialite, Leela Sokhey, to study Kathak. Sokhey, under the stage name Madame Menaka, went on to popularize Kathak around the world (Coorlawala, “Ruth St. Denis” 134). Meanwhile, in 1930, the Madras legislative assembly passed a bill to “absolve” devadasis of their service to the temples, which in reality deprived the temple dancers of their erstwhile prestige, financial independence, and rights to property inheritance. This dissociation of dance from the devadasi served to remove the stigma from public dancing and encouraged non-devadasi women from

middle- and upper-class families to study dance. Mirroring Bhatkande and Paluskar’s mission to textualize Hindustani music, Arundale undertook the reconstruction of Sadirattam, reclaiming it as Bharatanatyam, “the purest and most “authentic” traditional dance of the Natya Shastra, effectively shifting the focus of the dance from the living tradition to texts” (Coorlawala, “Ruth St. Denis” 134). Recognizing that there was no “classical” Indian music or dance outside the nautch, these reformers belonging to the Hindu bourgeoisie turned to Sanskrit texts like the *Natya Shastra* to project an unbroken tradition of “respectable” national cultural forms, a process referred to as “Sanskritization” by later scholars (Sarkar Munsii 62, Coorlawala, “Classical and Contemporary Indian Dance” 57) . In articulating the movement vocabulary of Bharatanatyam for example, Arundale stripped Sadirattam of much of its objectionable *sringara* or erotic elements, and emphasized the *bhakti* or devotional elements of the form. Her aversion to the mixture of religious piety and sexual desire that characterized devadasi dance style is evident in this interview:

Sringara is not sensuality. It also means a love of a great kind, such as the love of Radha for Krishna as depicted in Gita Govindam. ... So if it has been said that I am against *sringara*, I can only say that the inference is wrong. But there are certain types of *padams* [category of dance item] that I have objected to. From one *vidwan* [scholar] I learnt the old *padam* tamaraksha with a lot of *sanchari bhavas*³⁷ of the languishing *nayika* separated from her lover. She describes not only her love but the whole process of physical contact

³⁷ The Natya Shastra describes three categories of *bhavas* or emotional states: eight *sthayee* or dominant emotions (such as love, sorrow, anger etc.), thirty-three *sanchari* or temporary/transitory emotions that contribute to the constitution of the sthayee bhavas (for example, doubt, bashfulness, lust, envy), and innumerable *sattvika bhavas* or physical expressions of feelings (through sweat, tears etc.) (Pande 313). In the context of Arundale’s account, it is apparent that she is objecting to sexually-explicit *sanchari bhavas*.

and in gestures at that! To depict such things is unthinkable for me. A famous man gave me a book on *sanchari bhava*. When I read it I just felt sick. (qtd. in Ramnarayan 23)

The transmutation of Sadirattam into Bharatanatyam by figures like Arundale was informed by nationalist, reformist, Theosophical, revivalist, and purist goals aiming for the construction of “a gendered middle-class respectability that is simultaneously upper caste, Brahminic, modern, and westernized in its sensibility” (Ram 5).³⁸ Thus, while the Western ballet-loving Arundale sought to “cleanse” Sadirattam of its erotic elements, she also simultaneously “modernized” the Bharatanatyam costume, creating a leaner silhouette that would allow for greater freedom of movement. As Uttara Asha Coorlawala has argued, Sanskritizing a dance form not only involves relating it to older Sanskrit texts and rediscovering or reinventing its methodology, but also “refining” the dance form by adapting its costumes, repertory, and technique to urban sensibilities (“Classical and Contemporary Indian Dance” 59). In keeping with the nationalist impetus behind cultural reform, the Sanskritization of many dance forms in the 1930s and the 1940s not only elided traditional female performers like the courtesans and temple dancers but also led to an erasure in official and academic accounts of the influence of western oriental dance and of modern dancers like Ruth St. Denis. As Erdman argues, by mining ancient texts to theorize the dance of the present, Indian dancers and scholars “invented a new dance tradition based on claimed antiquity, asserted authenticity, well-intentioned chauvinism, and middle-class purity” (“Dance Discourses” 293). These values made classical dance training and performance a suitable domain for proper Indian women (up to the point of marriage). In 1936, Arundale instituted the

³⁸ The movement vocabulary of Sadirattam was mostly lost through its sanskritization into Bharatanatyam. There are some examples of Sadirattam in early Tamil cinema, from which one infers that Sadirattam is a “looser” style with “softer” moves, not bound by the geometric precision of Bharatanatyam. Contemporary dancer-scholars like Swapnasundari are among the very few who have studied and perform this earlier temple and court dance style, that she has renamed “vilasini natyam”.

Kalakshetra Foundation in Madras, where respectable young girls flocked to study dance for the first time.

Closer to Bose's home, in Bengal, by the early 1920s, Rabindranath Tagore introduced dance in the curriculum of the Viswa-Bharati University he had established at Santiniketan. In 1919, on a trip to the region of Manipur in North East India, Tagore saw a performance of Manipuri dance and remarked that he "felt that there he had at last found the solution to the tragedy of India's dying dance" (Bowers 105). He invited Manipuri dancers from Agartala to teach at Viswa-Bharati. However, to avoid criticism for introducing formal dance training in the curriculum, the university magazine expunged any mention of dance: "Two artistes have arrived at Shantiniketan from the court of the Maharaja of Tripura. The male students of the ashram are learning musical exercise to the rhythm of *Manipuri Khol*"³⁹ (Ghosh 41-42). The university's annual report featured the same deliberate omission, "Male students of the ashram learnt exercises from Buddhimantra Singha, sent by Tripura's Maharaja Bahadur" (Ghosh 10). The replacement of dance with exercise and the emphasis on male students are eloquent signs of the censure attending dance training or performance by women. However, by 1925, Tagore invited the Manipuri dancers, Nabakumar Singha and Baikunthanath Singha to Viswa-Bharati to teach female students, as he considered the dance form apt for women. A number of Viswa-Bharati's female students started taking lessons in Manipuri dance. The classes, however, continued to not be publicized so that the residents of the town of Shantiniketan would not find out about them (Ghosh 20). Through the 1920s and 1930s, Tagore invited various folk and classical dance practitioners to Viswa-Bharati who introduced, for example, the "cymbal dance" from Saurashtra, *Garba* dance of Gujarat, *Kathakali*, *Kaikuttikali*, and *Kallammuli* from Kerala, the

³⁹ The *Manipuri Khol* is a double-headed wooden drum.

Kandy dance of Sri Lanka, Russian ballet, English ballroom dancing, and Bengali folk dances such as *Raye-Beshey* and *Jaari* (Ghosh 11, 16-17, 44-45). This eclectic inclusion of dance forms in the university curriculum was in keeping with Tagore's desire to change the status of dance in India and re-introduce it to "respectable society:" "Dance is a part of performing arts courses in every country, and is respected as a medium of expressing emotions. Just because it has disappeared from our respectable society, we have assumed that we don't have it anymore" (Ghosh 4). Increasingly, dance became an important element in his plays as well, moving as he did from *gitanatya* or musical drama to *Rabindra Nritya Natya* (Rabindra Dance-Drama), where the play includes dance, songs, and instrumental music. Between the years 1933 and 1939, Tagore wrote the famous dance-dramas: *Tasher Desh*, *Chitrangada*, *Chandalika*, and *Shyama*. *Rabindra Nritya*, the hybrid dance form in his dance-dramas, featured stylistic idioms drawn from several Indian and Southeast Asian dance traditions. The primary movement vocabularies were borrowed from the Indian classical dances, Kathakali and Manipuri, and Southeast Asian styles such as the Javanese and Balinese dance forms, and the *Kandy* dance of Sri Lanka (Mandakranta Bose 1087). The aim was to create a new dance style liberated from the formulaic choreography and narratives of classical Indian dance and to encourage the performer to use dance gestures to interpret character and situation. Tagore saw dance as the perfect articulation of his songs and poetry, and "[p]ursuing an essentially expressionist goal, he would choose gestures and movements that best brought out the meaning of a song or a whole play" (Mandakranta Bose 1089).

Around the same time, in the 1930s, another Bengali, Uday Shankar, formed his dance repertory – the "Uday Shankar Company of Hindu Dancers and Musicians" – that extensively toured Europe and America. Shankar was hailed as the progenitor of "modern" Indian dance. His

repertoire consisted of episodic “theme” dances that combined poses and gestures from classical and folk dance forms, as well as from temple paintings and sculpture seen on his travels throughout India. Given his mostly Western audience through the thirties and the forties, Shankar learned to present a variety of short items that he made accessible to this audience by avoiding complicated *hasta-mudras* or hand gestures that had very specific coded meanings in the classical movement vocabulary of many Indian dances (Hall 331). He also replaced the complex footwork found in most classical forms with simple stepping and skipping foot movements. As the dancer-critic Fernau Hall observes, “The Shankar technique begins with curving movements of interlocked hands and then moves on through curving movements of arms, head, torso, and legs. ... The footwork, unlike the intricate beaten footwork in classical Indian dancing, is all of a piece with the movements of the rest of the body” (343). Additionally, where Indian audiences familiar with classical dance vocabularies would delight in the restatement of phrases and emotions with subtle changes, and dance performances would often take place over many long nights, Shankar held his European and American audiences’ attention with brief, episodic dances featuring short, repeated dance movements. Because he took inspiration from sculpture and painting, his ballets were often characterized by static poses and tableaux. Like the *divertissements* in his mentor, Pavlova’s programs, Shankar’s pieces acted as a showcase for “Indian” costumes, themes, and tunes (Erdman, “Performance as Translation” 81). As with the oriental dances of St. Denis, Pavlova and others, Shankar’s international success was attributed in large part to his ability to “determine European audiences’ span of attention to oriental dances, their reliance on elegant or exotic costuming and jewelry to accord with their own interest in fashion, their need for the exotic to fulfill expectations, and their keen interest in the sensual and the romantic” (Erdman, “Performance as Translation” 76). His appropriations of

various movement vocabularies and his reconstruction of these for an urban (often Western) audience make Shankar a key figure in dance choreography for the Indian stage and screen in the late thirties and through the forties. During his 1933 India tour, for example, when Shankar presented his repertoire to Indian audiences, spectators were reportedly enthralled by the production of this “stage dance” which they had witnessed until then only when foreign performers such as the Denishawn Company visited India (Erdman, “Who Remembers Uday Shankar?”). While previously, dance performances were staged in royal courts or in temples, Shankar was among the first performers to adapt these for the modern stage. The simplification of traditional dance techniques, the shortening of the length of the dance performance, and the adaptation of these appropriated dance forms to the modern stage significantly influenced film dance in general and Bose’s choreography in particular.

Shankar’s success in the West created an international market for Indian dance, and the growing fame of dancers like Menaka and Ram Gopal among others points to the complex relations between oriental and classical dance, discursively constructed as European-inspired and traditionally-Indian during this period (Erdman, “Dancing Discourses” 294).⁴⁰ A photo-feature on dance in the Bengali magazine, *Deepali*, includes four photographs, of “Nataraj Vasi famous for displaying Indian Dance in Java; Srimati Azurie and her partner in the dance “Radha Krishna;” Srimati Menaka who performed Indian dance at the Berlin Olympics last year; Ram Gopal, who has recently performed Indian dance in New York and Los Angeles” (*Deepali*, Saradiya Puja Special Issue 200). The range of postures, gestures, and costumes in this photo-

⁴⁰ Menaka, known by her stage name, Madame Menaka, was among the first non-tawaif practitioners of Kathak in the twentieth century. She was considered an instrumental figure in the transformation of the maligned "nautch" dance into the respectable classical dance form, Kathak, in the 1930s. Ram Gopal was a famed modern Indian dancer and choreographer, who, like Uday Shankar, combined classical Indian dance with balletic choreography.

feature reflects the variety of “classical” dance idioms constructed in the 1930s and 1940s, a period marked by intense political and cultural nationalism as we have seen, but also by a frenetic internationalism in the exchange of cultural forms, as evident in dance and in the cinema. That the “skimpy” costumes donned by the dancers in this photo-feature would be considered risqué just a few years later and would hardly be encountered in classical dance performances in India from the late 1940s onwards (when costumes were designed to cover much of the torso and limbs) is testimony to the flux during this period when dancers mediated between what westerners had come to expect as oriental dance and the manner in which it was presented in indigenous Indian contexts by traditional performers. In just a few years, dance forms – including movement vocabularies, costume and makeup, and performance repertoire – would get systematized and institutionalized, and figures like Shankar would be perceived as “presenting oriental dance from Europe, not quite Indian and certainly not authentic” (Erdman, “Dance Discourses” 295). The following report from 1935 by Santidev Ghosh, Tagore’s student and a teacher at Santiniketan, on a dancer, Aruna Bagchi’s performance at the All India Music and Dance conference in Lucknow, already points to the systematic differentiation between classical dance (Rabindra Nritya is considered classical by Ghosh) and oriental dance:

She danced to two Tagore songs in a style completely different from ours [Rabindra-Nritya]. It was not even close to Bharatanatyam, Kathak or Manipuri. It was mime along with hand movements rhymed to simple steps. This kind of dance choreographed to easy beats that emerged in the educated society of Bengal is called “Oriental Dance” by the Bengalis. (168)

For Ghosh, the marker of differentiation is clearly the “ease” and “simplicity” of oriental dance versus the rigor and discipline of classical dance. Another commentator, Hemendra Kumar Roy, displays a similar bias in the January 1938 issue of the Bengali film magazine, *Deepali*:

Most Bengalis have a strange notion about dance. ... They queue up to watch anyone who stands on stage and makes hand-and-foot movements, now being sold as “oriental dance.” ... Bits of *Bolpuri*, *Manipuri* with a bit of *Udayshankari* or other styles are thrown in to create an oddball mix.... It takes years to complete dance training in both South India and Burma. But in the fad called Bengali modern dance, there is no space and time for such training and practice. (Roy 4)

The critique of oriental dance as hybrid and easy to learn and perform is contrasted with a newly-emergent discourse of classical dance as involving long and rigorous training, pointing to the nascent structuring of classical dance idioms, which would go on to be systemized and increasingly textually-fixed in the years after independence from British rule, when the Indian government would initiate the setting up of cultural institutions like the Sangeet Natak Akademi (The National Academy for Music, Dance and Drama) among others. The slippage evidenced here between modern Indian dance and oriental dance is telling in that, with the canonization of classical dances in India, these multifarious dance forms, including Rabindra Nritya came to be considered semi-classical at best, and inauthentic hybrids at worst. In the context of Bose’s stage and film dance choreography in the 1930s and early 1940s, however, it is important to note the degree of freedom exercised by performers during this period in appropriating freely from Indian classical and folk dance forms as well as European-style oriental dance to create performance idioms that were traditional and modern, cosmopolitan and nationalistic at the same time.

2.3 DANCE BECOMES RESPECTABLE FOR THE BHADRAMAHILA

This lengthy account of classical and oriental dance in India in the early decades of the twentieth century serves not only to illustrate the easy hybridity among dance forms during this period, but also to trace how dance is constructed as a national cultural heritage that slowly comes to be embodied in young, middle- and upper-class women. Between the Western oriental dance popularized by globally-renowned figures such as St. Denis and Pavlova, the efforts of upper-caste reformers like Iyer and Arundale to Sanskritize classical dance forms, and the interest in and adoption of dance by respected upper-caste and upper-class cultural icons like Tagore and Shankar, a measure of prestige began to be accorded to Indian dance forms. The movement of dance from temples and courts (the performance locations for traditional performers such as the devadasis and tawaifs) to the secular proscenium facilitated its transformation into a proper, modern profession. While in South India, Arundale's Kalakshetra Foundation became a key training and research center for Bharatanatyam and other classical dances with a majority of female students who eventually became gurus or teachers themselves, replacing the earlier male *nattuvunar* tradition, in Bengal, Tagore's dance-dramas "were among the first ones to be choreographed and performed onstage with the participation of girls from 'good' families" and Shankar's dance company had a number of female dancers from "respectable" families as well (Sarkar Munsii 28). One such aspiring *bhadramahila* (literally, polite/decent lady, but referring more broadly to bourgeois Bengali women) dancer was Sadhona Bose, a member of Keshab Chandra Sen's extremely respectable family.⁴¹

⁴¹ It should be noted that not all Brahmo families were considered "respectable" or part of the *bhadralok* (literally, gentleman or well-manned person but referring more generally to the educated elite). In fact, through their affiliation with the Brahmo Samaj, they faced the ire of non-Brahmo following, upper-class Bengalis for radically

In 1927, Sadhona Bose's future husband, Modhu Bose founded the theatre group, "Calcutta Amateur Players" (C.A.P). In his autobiography, *Aamar Jeeban* (My Life) Bose remarks, "It was always my dream to create my own theatre group, where men and women from progressive, aristocratic, respectable families would perform" (110).⁴² These bourgeois men and women that Bose refers to were known in the Bengali vernacular as *bhadralok* (literally, gentleman or well-manned person, but referring more generally to the educated elite). Bose, grandson of the famous historian R.C. Dutt, a student at Santiniketan and Bidyasagar College, and briefly, assistant cameraman in London and at the UFA Studio in Germany, was very much of *bhadralok* stock himself. That taking up acting as a profession, especially by the kind of *bhadramahila* women Bose wanted in his group, was still taboo during this period is reflected in the struggle over the naming of the group: "First I thought that our troupe would be named "Calcutta Art Players," but everyone suggested that it was important to mention the word "amateur" otherwise no parents would agree to allow their daughters to perform in our group" (Modhu Bose 110). To avoid controversy and public censure, C.A.P. initially promoted its plays as *private* charity shows performed by amateur players, which indicates the deep prejudices against *paid public* performance by "respectable" women.⁴³ In his account of the premiere of the C.A.P. play, *Alibaba* on 17th January, 1928, Bose makes further reference to this:

violating traditional norms. Sen's family was part of the social and financial elite in Calcutta and hence exercised *bhadralok* privilege. The *bhadralok* class was by no means homogenous, and was marked rather by complex class-caste tensions. Not all *bhadralok* Bengalis, for example, considered dance to be a respectable profession.

⁴² The difference in the titles of the autobiographies of Modhu and Sadhona Bose is noteworthy for the gender reversal it suggests: while Modhu Bose's *Aamar Jeeban* (My Life) implies a personal memoir, Sadhona Bose's title in the third person, *Shilpir Atmakatha* (Autobiography of an Artist) asserts the importance of her professional life and work as an artist. Significantly, she writes her autobiography in English, he in Bengali.

⁴³ One notes a similar tension between amateur and professional status with regard to the question of women's labor in the film industry in the 1930s, a question that is foregrounded only when "cultured ladies" take up acting

Right before the show we had to face a major problem. People of orthodox mentality opposed the idea of mixed casting of men and women from respectable families, *especially* when it was Alibaba that was being staged. On the day of the show, they staged a *dharna* [protest] outside the hall with black flags. At the end, we had to plead with them that this was a charity show so that they would agree for it to be performed. (111, emphasis added)

Given that, by many accounts, Khirode Prasad Vidyavinode's 1897 adaptation into Bengali of the Alibaba story from the *Arabian Nights* was one of the most popular pre-World War I plays, advertised as a "magnificent Comic Opera" and a "genuine Fountain of Mirth and Merriment," (Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema 270, Thomas, "Bombay before Bollywood" 10), one can read the reaction against this particular C.A.P. production as fuelled by outrage at respectable, bhadramahila women performing in an oriental song-and-dance spectacular. Bose quotes a review of his play in the magazine, Nachghor, to highlight the gentrification of such oriental plays as undertaken by C.A.P.:

We apologize. We were not correct in what we expressed in our last issue about men and women from respectable families participating in "Alibaba" staged at Empire. Before watching the play last Sunday we had no idea how one can edit out the disputable parts of a play like "Alibaba" such that even the feelings of the most orthodox individuals will not

as a profession. Nalini Tarkhud, film actress and columnist, remarks in a magazine column from 1933 titled, "Cultured Girls and Cinema Acting:" "I am at a loss to understand why respectable girls are not expected to take up film acting as a profession. In the present economic depression this will be a means of support to many a cultured girl. We must not forget that not everybody in this world has a fat bank balance to work as an amateur and it is very narrow minded to expect honorary labour from the cultured ladies when the producer himself eagerly looks to making millions" (47). Honorary labor and pursuing acting as a hobby was an assured way for the "cultured" actress to distance herself from the paid, professional, working class actress.

be hurt. The play has been portrayed in such an ugly manner in other contemporary playhouses. (Modhu Bose 112)

The inclusion of the *bhadralok* altered the very nature of these plays, removing erotically-charged or bawdy elements that would offend the sensibilities of the actors and the audiences for this newly-sanitized entertainment. The cultural forms of theatre in the 1920s and film in the 1930s were marked by a discourse of respectability where, in the spirit of cultural nationalism, the *bhadralok* or English-educated urbanized Bengalis were urged to participate in and thereby improve these forms (Bhowmick 16, Mukherjee 19, 27, 35). The emphasis, as seen in this opinion piece in a magazine, was on expurgating the theater and the cinema of their “low-bred” personnel, including the *baijee* actresses from the Muslim courtesan tradition: “I hope that the educated, civilized society would try for the upliftment of this art form [cinema] with their taste and restrained and beautiful manners and behavior” (Ray 290-91).⁴⁴ C.A.P. turned professional in 1936, nine years after its inception, and was finally named “Calcutta Art Players” as Bose had originally planned. Like many C.A.P. performers, Sadhona Sen (Sadhona Bose’s name before marriage) was permitted to perform in amateur shows for public charities. She performed in Modhu Bose’s 1930 play, *Daliya*, at the age of sixteen. They were married the same year. The couple worked as a team over the next two decades, producing plays, films, and dance-dramas. The social discourse around acting and dancing by women was still fraught, as Bose remarks in her autobiography:

⁴⁴ In her book, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947*, Joya Chatterji discusses how the period under consideration is characterized by a bourgeois discourse constructing Muslims as *chhotolok* (literally small people, referring here to caste, class, and educational differences from the *bhadralok*) while Hindus were urged to become *bhadralok*.

It is not like theatre was an acceptable or reputed thing in society, unlike now. ... As for bhadramahilas entering the theatre either professionally or as a hobby, it was strictly prohibited. ... Amidst much disrespect, at the cost of losing our reputation, hearing lot of negative things from orthodox households and a major section of the local print media, we had to stay fixed on our decision to be on stage. (19)

Because Bose worked solely in her husband's plays and films (until 1943 when she starred in Chaturbhuj Doshi's film, *Shankar Parvati*, which was seen as a betrayal by Modhu Bose and precipitated a temporary separation between the couple), there was some deflection of the general disapproval attendant upon dancer-actresses at the time, while also resulting sometimes in the ascribing of her stardom entirely to Modhu Bose:

It is doubtful whether the young Sadhona Sen ... would ever have turned out to be the great artist that she is today had not she met Modhu Bose. ... Sadhona Sen would, in the normal course of events, have adorned the home of a leading politician or an official. A close relation of [royalty], Sadhona, according to the convention which then prevailed, would never have favoured the idea of the stage as a career but for her fortunate meeting with the enterprising Modhu Bose. ("Sadhona Bose. A Thumbnail Sketch")

In choosing a career as a dancer-actress-choreographer-costume designer, Bose marks a shift in the construction of the bhadramahila from an educated woman, trained in cultural forms like music and dance, but destined for domesticity, "adorning" the home of an important man (like her sisters and aunts who married into royalty), to a professional, public performer who defined the evolution of forms like the dance-drama and film dance.

In addition to her training in classical dance and music, and her work with Modhu Bose and C.A.P., Bose's associations – even if brief and fleeting – with Tagore, Shankar, and Pavlova

establish her as being very much at the center of the movement to reinvent Indian dance forms, as is evident in her own performance and choreography. In 1930, Bose played the role of the heroine in Aparesh Chandra Mukhopadhyay's dramatized version of Tagore's short story, *Daliya*, directed by Modhu Bose. She mentions being under Tagore's tutelage:

During the course of rehearsing for this play, Rabindranath Tagore himself taught me acting. I would receive these lessons at his house in Jorasanko. ... I am extremely lucky that Tagore was so pleased with my acting that he came and saw each and every run other than the inaugural night. (S. Bose 27)⁴⁵

Early in her autobiography, Bose also talks about her meeting with Pavlova, who watched a performance of Bose's play *Alibaba* at the Empire theatre and invited her to perform in her *Krishna and Radha* ballet. The performance never took place, which Bose refers to as her "greatest misfortune" even as she expresses her fascination with Pavlova and Russian ballet in general: "Madam Pavlova's "Dying Swan" performance still continues to inspire me" (20). Bose also cites a review of her dance-drama *Omar Khaiyyam* in The Statesman that compares her with Pavlova: "Sadhona Bose's ballet now at Regal theatre is the most lovely that has been seen in Delhi since Pavlova visited us. In colour, composition, and movement it is the equal of Russian ballet at its best" ("Review of Omar Khaiyyam"). Bose's association with Uday Shankar was in the form of a close friendship that developed in Calcutta with Shankar and his French dance partner, Madame Simkie (Modhu Bose 158-59). Earlier, Shankar had tried to persuade Bose's parents to allow her to join his troupe. However, when they insisted that she be accompanied by

⁴⁵ Over the next two decades, Sadhona and Modhu Bose would return to Tagore's works, with Sadhona Bose performing in a ballet version of the Tagore poem, *Abhisar* (published in 1900 and performed in 1948 by the Indian Revival Group), and Modhu Bose directing a film *Sesher Kabita* (1953), based on Tagore's 1929 novel. Both works employ dance for thematic expression.

a guardian, he refused as he was working on a tight budget and could not afford to keep an extra person in his troupe. Bose describes this as the second biggest setback in her life after the cancellation of Pavlova's project (21-22). Shankar's influence on the Boses' performance repertoire was also felt through Timir Baran, an important musician in Shankar's troupe in the thirties, the music composer for Modhu Bose's films, *Kumkum the Dancer* and *Court Dancer*, and long-time collaborator with Sadhona Bose on films and stage ballets. Baran retained Shankar's emphasis on dance-centred percussion-based rhythms in his film compositions. A disciple of the renowned *sarod*⁴⁶ player Ustad Allauddin Khan, Baran displayed in music the same eclecticism that Bose did in dance, improvising on Indian classical music, introducing the violin and guitar in his orchestra, and taking melodic inspiration from Middle-Eastern musical forms. Thus the music and dance performance in most of Bose's films and plays exhibited a free interplay between Indian, Western, and Middle-Eastern forms, quite like the oriental dance ballets of St. Denis and Pavlova, but with a much stronger foundation in Indian classical music and dance. Bose herself refers to her plays as "neo-classical ballets," which have their "base in tradition but are at par with the rhythm of the times" (64).⁴⁷ She discusses how her neo-classical ballets offer a modern interpretation of traditional forms: "As I grew up, I added my own touches to traditional Indian dances and tried to give them a new look, which would have the potential to bring a fresh perspective to dance" (15). During a period – the 1930s and 1940s – when dance

⁴⁶ Sarod is a stringed instrument, similar to a lute, used in North-Indian classical music.

⁴⁷ The term neo-classical has multiple valences in Indian dance scholarship. While Bose uses it to denote a "modern," hybrid form of classical dance, a new classical dance as it were, dance scholars like Vatsyayan refer to Indian classical dances in general as "neo-classical" rather than as "classical" to account for the appropriations and restructuring of these forms in the twentieth century. In this view, the term "neo-classical" acknowledges that these forms have all been "restructured or reconstructed in order to fit a model ... to cater to a group of norms built to fit western performative models as well as Sanskrit aesthetic requirements" (Sarkar Munsri 34).

movements were not yet as strictly codified as they would be by the 1950s, in her film and stage choreography and costume-design, Bose brings in elements of classical dance forms like Manipuri, but also freely borrows from Rabindra Nritya, ballet, Middle-Eastern, and South-East Asian forms. An admirer of Western ballet and ballroom dancing, she asserts however that Indian dancers should not blindly emulate Western dances but adhere to the tenets of traditional Indian dance (68). This simultaneous appeal to tradition and modernity can be understood in the context of the contemporary nationalistic rhetoric in India that sought to create a picture of an ancient civilization with rich cultural forms ready to embrace the ideals of modern nationhood.⁴⁸

2.4 THE INITIATION OF THE BHADRAMAHILA INTO CINEMA

Neepa Majumdar, Rosie Thomas, and Kaushik Bhowmick, among others, have delineated the history of female film stardom in Bombay cinema from the 1920s through the 1950s. Considering the figure of Sadhona Bose within this history of the transition of the Hindi film actress's lineage broadly from the Muslim courtesan to the Anglo-Indian professional to the "cultured" Hindu lady illuminates particular tensions related to the public performance of dance, which has implications for genre and authorship as well. The report of the Indian Cinematograph

⁴⁸Bose's articulate descriptions of her dance practice and the primacy she accords to classical Indian dance forms serve to differentiate her from other oriental dancers in the film industry such as Azurie, for example. Baburao Patel, who describes Bose as an ideal, technically-accomplished film dancer, exclaims about the more audacious Azurie: "Oh, that girl! She is a League of Nations in whom every dance of the world is found with all the labels wrongly stuck. She can hardly be called a classic [sic] dancer representing any cultural school of the country. She specializes in mass entertainment and I wouldn't be surprised if she starts dancing on her head one day because people like it" (Rani 37). Bose and dancers like Azurie are differentiated through their respective affiliations with high art and popular entertainment.

Committee (ICC) formed in 1927 with the interlinked agendas of regulation, reform, and education, reveals much about prevailing attitudes to Indian film actresses of the time with remarks such as: “With a few exceptions (mostly in Bengal), the actors and actresses are not drawn from the cultured classes. The actresses are mainly recruited from the “dancing girl” class. Indian women of the better class do not take up film-acting as a profession” (Report of the ICC 33).⁴⁹ That a common discourse inflected film acting and dancing, specifically the popular nautch forms, is evident in the various pronouncements of the mostly bourgeois respondents in the ICC.⁵⁰ A member of the Punjab board of film censors, Diwan Bahadur Raja Narendranath, for example, observed that the cinema was replacing the nautch as entertainment for men (ICC Evidence Vol. II. 139). Bhowmick discusses how it was easy to make this analogy between the cinema and the nautch in the context of the cosmopolitan *bazaar* cinema of the 1920s and early 1930s, which was a pastiche of Oriental fantasies, Parsi-Urdu theatre-style romance plots, and Hollywood stunt film scenarios, and highlighted the exotic charms of the heroine through her dancing (“Separating the Gem” 6). The transition to the talkie film and the film industry’s desire to create a more acceptable image for itself in a bourgeois-nationalist mode resulted in the emergence of the bourgeois “cultured lady” as “the touchstone by which cinema was to be brought to the attention of the cultural elite” and whose educational status was highlighted in order to align the film actress with the new public role of women in the national movement (Majumdar 9-10). The cover page of the 1939 New Year issue of the Bengali magazine, *Deepali*, includes a photo feature

⁴⁹ In Bengal, as discussed earlier, there was a move to encourage the participation of the Bengali bhadralok in semi-professional theatre groups (such as Modhu Bose’s C.A.P.), many of which would go on to produce cinematic adaptations of literary works in the sound period. Bhowmick notes, “Almost all the directors and actors entering Bengali cinema in this period came from the amateur stage specializing in realist theatre” (“The Emergence of the Bombay Film Industry” 126).

⁵⁰ For more on the ICC and its attitude to film actresses, see Jaikumar and Sinha.

captioned “India’s four educated, aristocratic film stars” and lists the actresses featured in the image: Sadhona Bose, Devika Rani, Leela Desai, and Chhaya Debi. The largest image in this feature is of Bose in a demurely-wrapped sari and *bindi* (dot on the forehead), lending her a distinctly Hindu appearance in this picture, quite unlike her Arabic dancing girl look in *Alibaba*. The feature’s emphasis on education and aristocracy makes evident the mapping of cinematic stardom along the axis of class as a new generation of privileged-class and -caste filmmakers and audiences sought to reform the cinema. In her study of the Indian “Modern Girl” in the 1920s and 1930s, Priti Ramamurthy discusses a 1939 series on film personalities in the *Illustrated Weekly of India* magazine that actively reconstructed actresses as *Bharatiya naris* – literally, Indian women, but connoting here respectable icons of Indian womanhood. By this time, acting had been coded as acceptable professional work, “which “trailblazing” upper-caste Hindu women had to be educated into and worked extremely hard at” (Ramamurthy 168). Tellingly, the photo series discussed by Ramamurthy also features Sadhona Bose and Devika Rani, both pictured reading a book. Bose’s profile includes details of her well-known family and describes her as “having a well-won reputation as a danseuse,” *not* a dancing girl (Ramamurthy 168). This new figure of the professional, public, dancing woman is distanced from the earlier figure of the professional courtesan; Bose is portrayed as drawing from the “Hindu” dance forms of Manipuri, Kathakali, and Kathak rather than from the *kothi* or *mujra* dance repertoire of the Muslim courtesan.

One of the major areas of reform of the cinema in the 1930s was on-screen dancing. While the early talkies were marketed as “all talking, singing, dancing” films, the increasingly dominant and intertwined discourses of respectability and social reform led to a regular condemnation of dancing (and of that other form of on-screen sensuality – kissing) in film magazines.

Vishwambhar Prasad 'Premi Visharad' for example, opined that the popular films of the times were unfit for women, children, and respectable society because of the dances and kissing (Prasad 7). The removal from exhibition circuits of *Zarina* (Ezra Mir, 1932) – a film that featured 86 kisses and what were deemed to be risqué dance sequences by Zubeida, one of the top stars of the silent era – precipitated a move towards self-censorship, with the film industry informally but effectively banning mouth-to-mouth kissing and ensuring that dance sequences were significantly denuded of their erotic connotations. However, the association of on-screen dancing with female eroticism was not so easy to shake, as is suggested by this 1935 editorial in *Moving Picture Monthly*: “The ‘Purity’ campaign which convulsed the American moving pictures did not cause any furore in India. Barring dance sequels [sic], Indian films possess no such ‘Evil’” (Bandhopadhyay 28). As the only “evil” in Indian films, dance (clearly, in its “vulgar” forms) conflicted with the nationalist and pedagogical aims of the film industry in the mid- to late-1930s. The new impulse to use cinema as a tool of moral self-improvement required that all signs of the Islamicate courtesan be eliminated from the film actress, which included changing the names of Muslim performers to Hindu ones. Modhu Bose recounts his selection of the heroine for his first sound film, *Selima* (1935): “After searching for a heroine for quite some time, we selected a girl from Faizabad. ...I named her ‘Madhavi’. Her mother was a nautch girl but she was brought up in a different environment at a relative’s place. Her mother did not want her to follow her profession so Madhavi’s gait, action, and movements were far from that of a nautch girl” (215). After this film, Modhu Bose did not need to bother with re-naming or re-making his actresses in the bhadramahila mode since his wife, Sadhona Bose, who would go on to act in the rest of his films, already fit the description.

Sadhona Bose's plays and later films were promoted as neo-classical ballets and film ballets respectively, distancing them in name and idiom from any associations with the nautch. Through her expertise in classical Indian dance forms and her upper-caste background, Bose was seen as symbolizing the essence of indigenous tradition even though she freely appropriated from non-Indian dance forms and costuming traditions. Indeed, throughout her career, despite her bold experimentations with dance idioms, Bose was promoted as upholding national traditions via her classical dance-derived vocabulary and thus easily appropriated into the prevailing discourse of cultural nationalism. In parts of her autobiography, she projects herself as something of a social reformer through her dance and theatre performances. Describing a pan-India dance tour with Madhu Bose and C.A.P., she says, "We stepped out of our home with the mission to serve Indian audiences with our dance dramas" (36). Where dance was an excuse, in the popular film genres of the twenties and early thirties, for risqué erotic display, the "dance social" genre created by the Boses in the late 1930s and 1940s employed "classical" dance as a pedagogical tool to educate the masses about their cultural heritage and as a medium for socially useful entertainment. A close look at Bose's films reveals the complex negotiations in the construction of "tradition" and "modernity" through film dance.

2.5 ALIBABA – GENTRIFYING THE ORIENTAL SPECTACULAR

Sadhona Bose made her film debut with the Bengali film *Alibaba* (Modhu Bose, 1937), an adaptation of Khirode Prasad Vidyavinode's extremely popular 1897 play. Bose had performed the same role – of the effervescent servant-girl Marjina – in the stage version in 1934. The stage and film versions both featured C.A.P. performers. Modhu Bose's *Alibaba* followed in a long

line of film adaptations in various Indian languages of the Arabian Nights tale of a woodcutter who chances upon a cave filled with stolen treasures.⁵¹ However, in his version, the eponymous hero, Alibaba is a minor character while Sadhona Bose's Marjina is the central protagonist of the film. Even the booklet for *Alibaba* is dominated by Bose's Marjina, with its only two color pages featuring her prominently. She is the primary focus on the cover page, the medium close-up shot of her face and shoulders calling attention to the exotic headgear and costume of her own design, while the titular character, Alibaba is relegated to the bottom corner of the page. In most of her films that followed, Bose continued to be the central protagonist, with the narratives designed to showcase her facility with dancing and singing. In *Alibaba*, she performs in ten of the film's fourteen musical sequences, with two song sequences that put on display her singing abilities, two dance sequences set to instrumental music, the rest being narrative numbers that are integrated into the diegesis and extend it through song and dance.⁵² Each type of musical sequence performs a different function in relation to the narrative and to Bose's star text. Her two song sequences – “*Amar Ei Je Chattir Antare*” (“In my heart”) and “He has bound me with love” – work as expressions of Marjina's interiority, as she sings to herself of the incompatibility between her desires and her status as a slave. Bose does not dance at all in these two sequences, which are clearly meant to exhibit her vocal training and establish her as a star who can sing in addition to dancing. On the other hand, playback singing is employed for the other two song sequences in the film – “*Amar Kemon Kemon Korchhe Keno Mon*” (“Why is my heart restless”)

⁵¹ Film adaptations of *Alibaba* include: *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* (Hiralal Sen, 1903-4), *Alibaba Chalis Chor* (*Alibaba and Forty Thieves*, B.P. Mishra, 1927), *Ali Baba and Forty Thieves* (J.J. Madan, 1932), *Ali Baba* (Mehboob Khan, 1940), *Alibaba and the Forty Thieves* (Homi Wadia, 1954), *Marjina Abdulla* (Dinen Gupta, 1973), and *Alibaba aur 40 Chor* (*Alibaba and Forty Thieves*, Latif Faiziyev and Umesh Mehra, 1980).

⁵² For details on the differences between song sequences, narrative numbers, production numbers, and pure dance numbers, see the taxonomy of song-and-dance sequences in Chapter 1.

and “*Asa Rekhe*” (“I spend my days in hope”) – which are picturized on the actress Indira Roy, and sung by Indubala, a famous vocalist of the time. The five narrative numbers are all in the form of conversations between Marjina and a male character (her fellow slave, Abdullah; her love interest and Alibaba’s son, Husain; and the cobbler, Mustafa, whom she seduces through song and dance to come and sew up Alibaba’s brother’s corpse). In these, Bose dances as she sings, employing props like peacock-feathered brooms and decorative metal whips, and settings such as long, winding staircases that allow for extended dance movements. The first narrative number in the film is the famous Abdullah-Marjina sequence, “*Chhi Chhi Etta Janjal*” (“Oh! What a dreadful lot of rubbish”). The *Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema* describes this particular sequence as one “that long set the standard for film musicals” (270). Where earlier song-and-dance sequences reportedly featured more static framing, producing frontal, tableau-like scenes, the variations in camera distance and the use of continuity editing techniques in this number ensure a more cinematically engrossing dance performance.

In a 1934 article for the Bengali magazine, *Ruparekha*, titled “Rhythm in Screen,” Modhu Bose remarks, “In all good motion pictures, even though the motion is of substanceless shadowgraphs and is only an illusion after all, the rhythmic flow should be felt muscularly and mentally to create in the audience the maximum of interest, pleasure and appeal” (Bandyopadhyay 76). Bose goes on to discuss the creation of cinematic rhythm through different narrative modes such as comedy and tragedy, but in his films that follow and that feature Sadhona Bose, such as *Alibaba* and *Court Dancer*, it would seem that dance and song sequences are the primary means of creating a “muscular” and “mental” rhythm in the audience. Indeed, reviews of *Alibaba* emphasize two differently-treated modes of presentation, commenting on the staginess of the narrative and the dynamic treatment of space and movement in the song-and-

dance sequences. According to the *Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema*, “The slow, mannered acting and the frontally framed tableau shots are enlivened by the dance scenes” (270), indicating the differences in visual, aural, and performative registers between these two modes of cinematic presentation. The mention of dance in review after review of the film suggests the “muscular” rhythm added by the choreography, as for example, in this review in *Bhagnadoot*:

Direction and proper expression of the cinematic language have made *Alibaba* stand among the first class films. Such *Lasya* (grace) has never been expressed through cinematic dance. Among the actresses, Sadhona’s acting comprising of her song-and-dance deserves maximum praise. (qtd. in Modhu Bose 226)

The signal role of Bose’s choreography and performance is worth noting, so that while J. J. Madan’s adaptation of the Alibaba story, *Ali Baba and Forty Thieves* (1932) was panned for being “a stage-play reproduced on the screen. ...Actors were all ‘stagy’ and made no impressions whatsoever” (qtd. in Mukherjee 123), Modhu Bose’s *Alibaba* was praised as “Impeccable in its dance, songs and acting. The first rays of the sun in the new wave of Bengali films” (qtd. in Modhu Bose 226). The equal place accorded to dance attractions as to the narrative is reflected in the *Alibaba* booklet, where a number of pages feature one image from a key dance sequence and another from an important narrative event, indicating the primary attractions in the film. From her first film itself then, Bose promoted dance as a key element of her star text.

Bose’s contribution to popular Indian film dance derives from her own performative flair, which prompted the design of lavishly-produced “pure dance” and production numbers for the dancer-actress, but also from her choreographic innovations such as orchestrating dances with many background dancers, articulating a syntax of cine-choreography that employs mise-en-

scène elements such as costumes and architectural motifs, camera placement and movement, editing patterns, and the layering of performance spaces through central-background dancer relations to produce physically dynamic dance sequences. *Alibaba's* two "pure dance" sequences set to instrumental music are the most spectacular of the song-and-dance sequences in the film and marshal architectural features, a large number of background dancers (from the C.A.P. troupe), elaborate costumes, and intricate dance moves by Bose to produce a new dance idiom in Indian cinema. In the first of these, Marjina and a group of dancing girls in Alibaba's employ perform a dance to wake up their master. The group dance is framed by Islamic arches and windows that convey the oriental setting of the story but also echo the movement vocabulary of the dancers as they rhythmically raise their arms in arch-like formations. The sequence is dominated by long shots in order to capture the dynamics of the group dance, with Marjina in the foreground and a semi-circle of dancers performing identical moves in the background. The background dancers execute simple swaying steps, creating a rhythmic background against which Marjina employs a more complicated movement vocabulary. The most remarkable feature of Bose's costume in this number are the diaphanous wing-like props attached at the hips to her slinky satin gown that sway provocatively as she executes belly dance-like moves to a percussive beat in this most "oriental" (i.e. attempting to evoke the Orient of the Arabian Nights as constructed by various adaptations) of the film's dances. The next number is the climactic dance performance from the Arabian Nights tale, where Marjina does a dagger dance before Alibaba and the leader of the thieves, stabbing the leader and protecting her master at the end of the performance. Initially the number features only the background dancers performing synchronized steps (with very few of the C.A.P. dancers showing much talent for dancing). Alibaba then tells the distracted leader, "You don't seem that pleased. Wait till you see my

Marjina dance,” which prompts Bose’s grand entry down a large winding staircase after which she proceeds to perform the solo dagger dance. The architectural design of the set for this number once again highlights Bose’s complete vision for her choreography. A set of five ornate arches forms the background, from which two winding sets of stairs afford entry for the dancers, who then perform in front of a fountain. The floor design is also composed with the choreography in mind, with a checked tile pattern on the sides and the central dancing area demarcated by circular tile patterns that create an interesting visual geometry with the dancers’ movements, especially when captured in the sequence’s top angle shots. Marjina wears a fantastically hybrid costume composed of harem pants, a tunic with a dazzling geometric pattern, wing-like epaulettes, and an intricate crown seemingly inspired by the costume for the Cambodian classical dance form, *Robam Preah Reach Trop* (or Khmer classical dance). Her movement vocabulary is similarly influenced by Khmer classical dance and Sri Lankan Kandy dance. In a film dominated by Bose’s singing and dancing attractions, this is a fittingly spectacular finale that combines the attractions of her distinctive movement vocabulary, hybrid costumes, and extravagant sets.

The description of Bose’s *Alibaba* as a “first class film” in the review in *Bhagnadoot* above calls for further discussion. While the film broadly belongs to the fantasy and costume genre that was perceived to address a “mass or ‘C-grade’ class of audience” (Thomas “Bombay before Bollywood” 9), the presence of actors and personnel from the *bhadralok* made a significant difference. In her discussion of orientalist films in the 1930s, Thomas cites the examples of two film stars who had earlier performed oriental dance on the variety show circuit – the popular Anglo-Indian star of the 1920s and 30s, Patience Cooper, and the Australian-born Mary Evans aka Fearless Nadia who, in the early thirties, had performed “Gypsy” and “Persian”

dances in exotic stage costumes consisting of sheer harem pants, the veil of an Arabian Nights temptress, and a bare midriff (“Bombay before Bollywood” 50). While this brand of oriental dance “legitimized the display of eroticized female bodies” (Thomas, “Bombay before Bollywood” 50), Sadhona Bose’s own importation of oriental dance motifs is marked as respectable on account of her being an upper-class Indian, promoted as a classical dance exponent, and dancing and acting in a gentrified theatre and film context. In *Alibaba*, a fully-clothed Bose employs a movement vocabulary that draws on transcultural orientalist trends and on local performance traditions, including some simplified classical Kathak vocabulary but dominated by Middle-Eastern influences from belly-dancing to match the Arabian Nights theme of the film. According to a contemporary review of the film, “The dances that she [Bose] directed and danced had very little touches of Indian dance but we loved them” (“Review of Alibaba” 5). Borrowing from international orientalist dance, Urdu *qissa-dastan* (storytelling) traditions, Parsi theatre, classical Indian dance, and Hollywood, the Boses participate in the cosmopolitan modernity that marks the orientalist Indian films of the 1920s and 1930s but are resolutely highbrow and employ a discourse of classicism to signal their difference from the lower-brow oriental fantasy genre. Thomas notes, for example, that Modhu Bose’s *Alibaba* “was widely celebrated and seen as more ‘respectable’ than the Wadia’s Islamicate films, despite being more obviously derivative of Hollywood (and Western theatre) and less directly related to indigenous traditions” (“Bombay before Bollywood” 64). Thus, Sadhona Bose’s reputation as a classical dancer from a Brahmo family, Modhu Bose’s standing as the director of C.A.P. with its bhadrak performers, and the general address of their plays and films to upper- and middle-class audiences established them as more authentically Indian than the lower-brow oriental dance and

film practitioners. It was probably this “respectable orientalism” that prompted J.B.H. Wadia to invite the Boses to participate in his international prestige project, *Court Dancer*.

2.6 THE SELF-REFLEXIVE DANCE SOCIAL GENRE

From the available information on Sadhona Bose’s films, one gathers that while dance is a predominant element in all her films, she specifically played the role of a dancer-actress in at least three films: *Abhinaya* (Expression, Modhu Bose, 1938), *Kumkum the Dancer* (Modhu Bose, 1940), and *Court Dancer* (Modhu Bose, 1941). The very titles of these films (*abhinaya* is a Sanskrit word used to describe facial expression in Indian classical dance texts) proclaim dance as their principal attraction. At a most basic level, one may presume that Bose’s expertise in dance generates film narratives about dancers in order to justify the many dance numbers in these films. However, the particular types of narratives and the generic tropes invoked suggest a deeper engagement with the issues surrounding the public performance of dance by women. Since *Abhinaya* and *Kumkum the Dancer* are no longer available, I reconstruct their narratives through paragraph-textual materials like publicity booklets and reviews in magazines. In *Abhinaya*, as the film’s booklet informs us, Bose plays Manisha Chowdhury, a “modern woman” who has won the “Miss Bengal” beauty contest organized by “Jagrata Bharat” (Awakened India) magazine. When she learns of her husband, Hirak Roy’s (Dheeraj Bhattacharya) love for another woman, Ratna (Pratima Mukherjee), she leaves home and soon becomes a famous theatre actress by the name of Debi Indrani at the Metropolitan Theatre. Manisha’s identity is obscured and revealed in the various roles she plays – as the presumed-dead wife, as debutante actress, and in the role of the

playwright Kalidasa's tragically-wronged heroine, Shakuntala in a play within the film.⁵³ In the end, Manisha/Indrani gives up her husband so he can marry his pregnant lover, Ratna. In *Kumkum the Dancer*, Bose plays the eponymous heroine, a village girl, who earns a precarious living as a dancer in a dramatic company ("Bewitching Sadhona Bose Stars..."). The *Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema* summarizes the film thus:

Dance film idealising poverty made mainly to showcase Bose's talents. Labour leader Suryashankar is jailed for trade union activities and, when released, finds that his friend Jagdish has stolen his property and plagiarised his play *Bhookh* (Hunger). To take revenge on behalf of the poor, Suryashankar's daughter Kumkum (Bose) marries Jagdish's son Chandan (Bhattacharya). Later she collaborates in staging a play meant to expose Jagdish's evil past. The film's publicity slogan was "She robbed her husband to feed the poor!" (266)

Produced by J.B.H. Wadia and directed by Modhu Bose, *Court Dancer* (*Raj Nartaki* in Hindi and Bengali) was promoted as the studio Wadia Movietone's prestige production. The film narrates the story of the Prince Chandrakriti's (Prithviraj Kapoor) doomed love for the court dancer, Indrani (Bose). The film is set in Manipur in the early years of the 19th century and features Manipuri-inspired dance by Bose. Historically, court dancers, like court poets, were employed by royalty to perform at the court, at public festivals, and on official occasions like a coronation or a birth in the royal family (Allen and Bhaskar, 339). While Indrani, the film's protagonist, performs these functions, the story is constructed as a tragic tale of ill-fated love and of her profession not being accorded the respect it deserves. The film concludes with Indrani swallowing poison and killing herself in order to protect her prince-lover and the state of

⁵³ Shakuntala is the heroine of the classical Sanskrit playwright Kalidasa's play *Abhigyanashakuntala* (The Sign of Shakuntala). Her story is somewhat intertextual with Manisha's in that Shakuntala is abandoned by her husband who forgets her until he sees a ring he once gifted her.

Manipur. Significantly, in each of the three films discussed above, Bose's dancer protagonist has a double figuration – as the housewife Manisha and the dancer-actress Debi Indrani in *Abhinaya*, as the poor village girl and the wealthy daughter-in-law who stages a play to avenge her father in *Kumkum*, and as we shall see shortly, the spiritual dancer of the *Raas Lila*⁵⁴ and the sensuous court dancer in *Court Dancer*. This doubling suggests the tensions surrounding the construction of a narrative around a female dancer, who needs to be recuperated always from her profession by being depicted as forced to dance (Manisha becomes the dancer-actress Debi Indrani only when abandoned by her husband), as dancing for a higher purpose (Kumkum's dancing initially serves for the upkeep of her poor family and later as a tool for revenge against injustice), or as a performer who employs dance for spiritual expression (in *Court Dancer*, Indrani performs the *Raas Lila* as a personal act of devotion to Krishna, rather than as an employee in the king's court). Dance, in these films, is thus constructed not as a medium for entertainment but as a tool for personal and spiritual expression, with the doubling of the dancing protagonists pointing to the tensions between the discourses of dance as entertainment and as art.

I refer to the generic tendency of the Boses' films as the "dance social" on account of the imbrication of spectacular dance sequences and a melodramatic narrative form that, through the figure of the marginalized dancer-actress protagonist, articulates changing relationships between the traditional and the modern, the social and the individual, the public and the private.⁵⁵ The

⁵⁴ A devotional dance item in various classical and folk dance idioms depicting the dance of the god Krishna, his lover, Radha, and the Gopis (cowherdesses) of Vrindavan where Krishna grew up. In *Court Dancer*, Bose performs the Raas Lila in the classical Manipuri style, where statues of Krishna and Radha are brought out of their rooms in the temple and placed in the centre of the *rasamandali* (the circular area where the dance is performed).

⁵⁵ The Social is considered a reformist genre with a focus on the representation of contemporary love, marriage, and family life. Its thematic focus usually resides in the conflict between inherited, feudal values and forces of social change. As Allen and Bhaskar note, this conflict is "typically focused around the heroine as a figure of virtue

recurrent tragic female dancer-actress figured as the noble, sympathetic victim of social orthodoxy is similar in form and intent to the female protagonists of 1930s socials such as *Kunku* (Marital Mark, V. Shantaram, 1937) and *Aadmi* (A Man, V. Shantaram, 1939), who contest middle-class orthodoxy and inevitably meet with a tragic fate. Vasudevan notes that “a substantial vein of social films was devoted to making a critique of Indian society and setting up an agenda for change” (*The Melodramatic Public* 103). The Boses’ dance socials construct, through repetition, the myth of the sacrificial, wronged-by-society dancer-with-a-golden-heart as a response to the contemporary discourse around public, female dancing. The self-reflexive nature of many of Bose’s films makes evident the new discourse around actresses that Hindi cinema of the late 1930s and 1940s wanted to propagate – of dancers and theatre actresses and by extension, film actresses, as cultured, misunderstood, tragic figures put upon by a barbaric society that does not accord them the dignity they deserve. It is no coincidence that these roles are played by a bhadramahila dancer-actress like Bose, whose star text simultaneously demands respect for public dancing by women and announces that the prostitute-actress is now a thing of the past. While the bazaar cinema had its own share of dancing women, the focus was not on the subjective experiences or emotions of these characters but on their external dancing bodies. By turning the gaze inwards and narrativizing the lives of dancing women, Bose’s films announced a new genre and a new kind of star. Where older genres like the stunt or adventure film (which often also featured a sequence of dances arranged one after another) were driven by external goals, Bose’s dance films elaborated the psychology of characters through the tropes of realist tragedy and melodrama. This fit in with the bourgeoisie’s preference for didactic, “serious” cinema, where even if there was no room for serious philosophical films, as one critic put it, the way out was to make films with “acute touching tragic

in whom the value of tradition inheres, but also as a victim who is exploited by the very traditions she is required to uphold” (*Islamicate Cultures* 65).

plots or social deformities” (*Filmiland*, 1933, 19). After *Alibaba*, most of Bose’s surviving films are in the mode of serious or tragic melodrama with the dancing protagonists beset by moral questions triggered by their status as dancer-actresses, reflecting thus upon Bose’s own experiences in theatre and in the cinema as well as the larger discourse around dancing and acting. Employing the tropes of the social, which Vasudevan refers to as the genre of modernity (141), and the one favored by the Indian middle class, the Boses articulate a modern-nationalist discourse of dance, not as merely a sensational attraction or a lure for the mass audience, but as a tool for social reform, especially concerning the figure of the dancer-actress.

Majumdar argues that the 1940s, especially in the period after World War II, were marked by the rise of the star system which led to a greater emphasis on the star as genre: “The story was subordinated to the star text, and the star text was not merely one among several heteronomous elements that went into the final film text, but rather, along with music, the overriding one that organized and structured everything else” (131). In producing the generic syntax of the dance social, Sadhona Bose’s star text prefigured this shift to the rise of the star system. Her agency as a certain kind of dancing actress allowed her to shape the stories written for her. Indeed, the famous Bengali playwright Manmatha Ray is said to have written *Kumkum the Dancer* specifically for Bose (“Bewitching Sadhona Bose Stars...”). The actor as author exerts a different kind of force than the director or other crew members. In the use of her or his particular body, gestural vocabulary, and range of expressions, the star produces certain narratives, cinematic spaces, and mythologies. While Modhu Bose was instrumental in creating the dance film genre as well, Sadhona Bose’s physical skills as a dancer and her construction of a bhadramahila dancing body author a certain kind of film that blends the spectacular attractions of film dance with a discourse of cultural nationalism. The influence of Bose’s dancing body on the narratives of her films is

evident in these descriptions in the *Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema*: “[*Kumkum the Dancer* is a] Dance film idealizing poverty made mainly to showcase Sadhona Bose’s talents” (266); “[*Shankar Parvati* as a] A dance-based mythological [that] highlights Bose’s dancing talents” (280); “[*Court Dancer* is] Set in feudal Manipur, presumably to display Bose’s abilities in the famous classical dance form of the region” (272). The suggestion that whether the film is a social, like *Kumkum*, a mythological, like *Shankar Parvati*, or a costume drama like *Court Dancer*, the generic syntax is in service of Bose’s overriding star quality of dance, is recurrent in most reviews of Bose’s films, such as this one of *Kumkum the Dancer*:

Sadhona Bose, probably the most alluring and fascinating personality that has ever thrilled an audience of Indian dance lovers, is the star, soul, substance and inspiration of the forthcoming Sagar Movietone release “*Kumkum the Dancer*”. ... The picture was made to provide a vehicle of expression for the beautiful art of this great and in her own way unique, Bengalee artiste whose dancing is really a miracle of exquisite grace and enchanting loveliness. (“Bewitching Sadhona Bose Stars...”)

Genres, narratives, locations, cinematic spaces, music, costume, and makeup thus become “vehicles” in Bose’s films to drive her star attribute to the fore.

2.7 COURT DANCER – THE ORIENTALIZED DANCE SPECTACULAR

Wadia Movietone’s tri-lingual prestige production, *Court Dancer*, is emblematic of the battle between popularity and respectability in the cinema of the 1930s and 1940s. As Thomas has discussed in her essay on the Australian-born Fearless Nadia, heroine of Wadia Movietone’s very popular and profitable stunt films, their mainstay, J.B.H. Wadia relied on *Court Dancer* for

the intellectual and critical credibility that eluded him because of his studio's regular output of lowbrow stunt films ("Not Quite (Pearl) White" 49). According to Thomas, the Wadia brothers, Homi and J.B.H., held rather different visions of the nationalist project. Homi Wadia, director of most of the studio's stunt films, believed that the hybridized stunt film reflected the fluidity within the porous borders of modern India, while J.B.H. Wadia prized an image of national self-definition that drew on "pure" tradition but set it within "modern" European humanist and scientific social values. Accordingly, he valued "realist" melodramas on social issues and orientalist classical dance films that would appeal to European audiences ("Not Quite (Pearl) White" 49-50). He invited Sadhona and Modhu Bose, who had as we have seen, already combined these two generic syntaxes in their dance socials, *Abhinaya* and *Kumkum the Dancer*, to collaborate on *Court Dancer*. Modhu Bose recollects his first meeting with J.B.H. Wadia: "From what he said I gathered that he wanted to make a film which would also be accepted outside India, that is, a film for the international market and in English. I told him the story of "Rajnantaki" which I had already staged as "Rajnati" (277). Bose had staged Manmatha Ray's play "Rajnati" with his C.A.P. performers, and Wadia's approval of the story indicates a correspondence of interests and audiences and a certain zeitgeist that favored the infusion of classical dance idioms into orientalized costume dramas.

The three dance sequences in *Court Dancer* all feature Bose and are influenced by the Manipuri classical dance tradition. As discussed earlier, just a few years before, Tagore, who believed that Manipur "was a country where the arts had remained fully alive and active" (Bowers 105), had introduced this dance form in Santiniketan. He also employed Manipuri dance in his own plays, and it was the defining form in his hybrid Rabindra Nritya (Khokar 6). Tagore's high regard for the form contributed to the recognition of Manipuri as one of the major

classical dances of India. In 1941, as the nationalist reconstruction of Indian culture was hectically under way, it is no surprise that the culturally aspirational J.B.H. Wadia chose to showcase classical Indian dance in his prestige project. During a period when the discourse of cultural nationalism grew by drawing various cultural forms into its ambit, the newly reconstructed classical dance idioms not only became respectable themselves but also lent respectability to other domains of public performance such as the theater and cinema. Bose brought to Wadia's film the cultural capital of classical dance and her bhadramahila star text, while the idealism and nobility of her courtesan character, Indrani projected a tradition built on a spiritual base. It is significant that the film's first dance sequence depicts the Raas Lila in the Manipuri style, with Madhav Menon, a dancer from the Travancore district in south India playing Krishna, and Bose, his divine consort, Radha. The audience for this Raas Lila sequence includes the appreciative prince Chandrakirti, and a group of holy men amidst whom the high priest of the kingdom sits unrecognized. The high priest, moved by Indrani's dance, comes up to her and says, "I have never seen such devotion before, my child. It seemed as if Radha herself had come down on earth and danced for us." He is about to bless her and apply "the holy dust from the feet of our lord" on her forehead, when the king intervenes and declares that she is the court dancer, upon which the holy man retreats in horror. While, through the Raas Lila, Indrani establishes herself as a Radha-like figure, the devout paramour of the lord (Krishna but also here, prince Chandrakirti), the high priest's reaction points to the discourse around the chaste temple dancer and the corrupt court dancer, a distinction that animated the anti-nautch movement in the colonial period and which has been naturalized in contemporary accounts of most Indian classical dances, as for example, in this assertion by the celebrated Bharatanatyam dancer, Leela Samson:

Until the early years of the 20th century, dance was still a vital part of temple ritual. Traditionally, the temple was maintained and patronized by the local ruler or chief. ... During British rule, however, a period of degeneration set in. *Devadasis* began to dance in the courts of princes and in the homes of rich landlords. The religious significance of dance was forgotten. Poets began to write eloquently on the greatness of their patrons and dancers began to interpret these poems. The temple dancer became a court dancer, often of ill repute. (30)

Entirely placing the blame for the “degeneration” of dance forms on the British (when there are extensive records of court dancers from much earlier) points to the nationalist impulse – that continued in much of dance scholarship through the twentieth century – to construct a continuous “Indian” tradition that was destroyed by British intervention.

As the first spectatorial experience of her dance, the Raas Lila is crucial in establishing Indrani’s “purity” and the spiritual function of dancing in general (which has extra-diegetic resonance at a time when a number of Indian dances were being “cleansed” of their erotic elements to promote a *bhakti*-based classical dance idiom). Only later do we witness the more sensuous court dance, which she must perform as part of her professional obligation, unlike the Raas Lila, which is presented as an expression of her “true” spiritual self. The contrast between Indrani’s profession and her personal character is remarked upon in the following review of the film which itself reveals contemporary social attitudes to dance and to traditional practitioners of dance forms: “The dancer, *in spite of her professional pursuits*, is a woman of high morals” (“Court Dancer” 47, emphasis added). This reflects the discourse around the renaissance of classical dance during the thirties and forties where, “while the devadasi and nautch dancers were condemned as “sinful,” their artistic practices were revived as repositories of spirituality”

(Chakravorty 113). *Court Dancer* is in accordance with this promotion of classical dance as a tool for purification, reform, and national regeneration, but creates a sympathetic character in its court dancer. The newly-canonized Manipuri dance form lends “dignity” to Indrani’s performance and promotes a message of dancers as noble carriers of tradition rather than as courtesans to be sneered at. The devout Hindu Indrani is often shown praying to Krishna and swallows poison at the end in order to save the kingdom from marauding outsiders. Her nobility is thus established through her service to religion and the state. As argued earlier, it is evident here as well that Sadhona and Modhu Bose use the tropes of melodrama (with its suffering and sacrificing heroine) and the social (highlighting social injustices against subaltern figures) to promote a new construction of the dancing heroine as a figure to be respected and idolized, which conflates with the entry of the new “cultured woman” into films. Class and religion are key factors in differentiating between the earlier Islamicate and eroticised milieu of dance in the adventure-romance bazaar cinema and this new spiritualized Hindu presentation of classical dance-based performance.

Indrani’s “professional pursuits” are showcased in the other major dance sequence in the film where she performs her role as a dancer in the court. Unlike the communal space of the Raas Lila that is democratically occupied by many dancer-devotees, the architectural features of the court are employed to highlight in particular Indrani’s dancing body. In the opening shot of the sequence, her grand entry into the court is framed along a long flight of stairs between two intricately carved arches. The camera is placed at the foot of the stairs, the low angle shot emphasizing the scale of the scene. Indrani is now dressed in a more hybrid costume than the Raas Lila’s traditional Manipuri one. The highlight of this dance sequence is a series of close-ups of Indrani’s hands meant to highlight certain classical *hasta mudras* or hand gestures. In his

autobiography, Modhu Bose remarks that, “To understand India’s classical dances, one needs to have thorough knowledge about the technique, “mudra” etc. of each form. Even the audience has to learn the mudras. If they do not understand the meaning of the mudras and movements, they cannot obtain the complete pleasure that the performance can yield” (312). One may assume that Bose employs the series of close-ups in the dance sequence as a pedagogical tool to educate the film’s intended audience of foreign viewers and upper-class urban Indians at a time when Indian classical dance forms were being popularized precisely among these constituencies. The film’s central investment in dance is evidenced in the involvement in the choreography of traditional dance gurus, Jayashankar from Kerala Kalamandalam (the Malayalam poet Vallathol’s school of performing arts in south India), and Guru Senarik Rajkumar from Manipur (S. Bose 46). The composition of music complementary to these elaborately choreographed dance sequences required the music composer Timir Baran to transport his musicians from Calcutta to Bombay, since according to Modhu Bose, the stunt-film-producing Wadia Movietone did not have an orchestra of its own (49). In addition to preparing for her role and conceiving and choreographing the dance sequences, Sadhona Bose reports that she “was busy during the whole period with costume design (all the costumes were brought from Imphal, Manipur) and teaching ballet to the other dancers” (45-46). Modhu Bose reveals the emphasis placed on the dance sequences during production and post-production when he mentions that he and the editor first worked on the dance sequences, and that “While shooting the long dances, we always used two cameras, sometimes even three. For all the three [language] versions, we took each shot thrice” (50).

The orientalized classical dance of *Court Dancer* was designed in accordance with J.B.H. Wadia’s vision of Indian modernity that drew on tradition, and through dance, in this case, also

asserted modern India's cultural and political selfhood. The English booklet for *Court Dancer*, designed mainly for Western audiences, read: "Our India – Ancient India, the fountain head of all civilization and culture of the world is today an almost forgotten country. Few people outside this country know of its glorious tradition in art, culture and science" (qtd. in Dwyer and Patel 119). The booklet also included extracts from the writings of Max Muller and other Indologists. The artwork for the booklet, rendered by the famous artist and later art director M.R. Acharekar, reflects the influence of classical Indian painting and sculpture, in particular, the paintings from the Ajanta caves in the rendering of the dancer's pose, gestures, and costume. As Rachel Dwyer and Divia Patel note, the references to classical Indian art in the advertising of *Court Dancer* were highly appropriate given the nationalist ideals projected in the booklet and in the film's publicity in general. Significantly, even though *Court Dancer* only managed to recover its costs in the three language versions, it succeeded in gaining entry into the pages of film magazines, in contrast to the lack of attention to the Wadia stunt films (Majumdar 107). A *filmindia* review of the film even included a box titled "The Salute" written by the editor, Baburao Patel, a feature not commonly found in the rest of the magazine's reviews. The piece is an encomium to the film that is lauded as establishing India's stature in the world:

I salute Producer Jamshed Wadia of Wadia Movietone for his pioneering enterprise in producing India's first picture in English – "The Court Dancer." [This film] will be the most eloquent ambassador of our thrice unlucky home land. ... I know what it is to be an Indian in those arrogant foreign countries where every coloured man is taken for a barbarian. ... For, truly, as a cultural propaganda, "The Court Dancer" is a patriot's gift to the nation. ("Review of Court Dancer" 18)

The concern expressed in the film booklet about India being “almost forgotten” since foreigners do not know of its “glorious tradition in art, culture and science” and Patel’s distress over being mistaken abroad for a “barbarian” like any other colored person are eloquent markers of the bourgeois anxiety over the representation of India abroad at a time when nationhood had begun to seem like an achievable reality. *Court Dancer*’s mobilization of the English language, classical dance, and a glamorous bhadramahila star signpost the film’s aspirations towards a “modern” nationalism, where cultural forms like dance become the defining feature of national differentiation.

As dance took on this valence for religious and nationalistic discourses in the 1930s and 1940s, it is important to consider Sadhona Bose’s star text in relation to those of the most popular female stars of the period – the muscular Caucasian, Fearless Nadia and the urbane Hindu “first lady” of Indian cinema, Devika Rani. While Nadia was Indian cinema’s preeminent stunt film heroine, Devika Rani was a key figure in the development of melodrama, each signifying the low and high cultural axes of popular Bombay cinema respectively. Considering Bose, and the genre of the dance social that she was instrumental in defining, adds a further level of complexity to current examinations of the various forms of modern Indian femininity in the late colonial period. Thomas’s foundational work on Nadia and Devika Rani proposes that both stars were “complementary exotic fictions, speaking to the project of defining Indianness whilst simultaneously exploding the idea of Indian cinema as isolated from the rest of the world” (“Not Quite (Pearl) White” 38). We see a similar imbrication of tradition and cosmopolitanism in Bose’s star text where she is hailed as an exponent of classical Indian dance but also acknowledged as an urbane, glamorous dancer, choreographer, and designer of syncretic modern costumes (rather than adopt traditional dance costumes, Bose created original designs as seen in

the geometric Art Deco motifs in her costumes in *Abhinaya* and *Alibaba* in Figs. 2 and 17 respectively). In an era when public dancing (among the upper classes) itself was an act signifying a new Indian modernity, Bose's pioneering contributions to dance, theater, and cinema were indeed radical. Thomas notes that "Devika Rani's significance stemmed from her social status as an upper middle-class Brahmin – *who she was* – and Nadia's from her body and its skills – *what she could do*" ("Not Quite (Pearl) White" 57). Interestingly, Bose's stardom derives from both of these; her physical and expressive skills as a dancer are of course formidable, but they receive sanction only because of her social background. Like Devika Rani, the foreign-educated grand-niece of Tagore, Bose's claim to an aristocratic lineage easily lends her a respectability that Nadia, with her background in the circus and variety show circuit would never have access to. Additionally, Devika Rani and Bose are seen as ambassadors of India in that their success with Indian films in English was seen as enhancing the "prestige of the Indian screen in the eyes of the foreigner" (qtd. in Ramamurthy 168).⁵⁶ What differentiates Bose from Devika Rani, however, is the highlighting of classical dance expertise in her star text, which, given the nationalist discourse around dance during this period, marks her as more authentically native, more Indian. This, curiously, aligns her with Nadia who, despite her whiteness, became a popular nationalist icon signifying Indian strength and power in films like *Hunterwali*, *Hurricane Hansa* (R.N. Vaidya, 1937), and *Punjab Mail* (Homi Wadia, 1939). Bose, through her own physical prowess in dance, came to signify Indian "culture." The *bodies* of Bose and Nadia, in dance and action sequences respectively, were spectacularized through choreographed movements, costume, make-up, mise-en-scène, cinematography, and editing. As discussed in the earlier chapter, these "body" sequences call attention to limbs and torsos and their movement

⁵⁶ While Devika Rani spoke poor Hindi, Bose was fluent in Hindi, Bengali, and English, not to mention in Indian performative traditions.

through space. Dance and action sequences served as central devices in constructing the iconicity of Bose and Nadia's star bodies respectively, and allowed for them to become signifiers of national culture and power respectively.

2.8 CONCLUSION

In 1941, the same year as the release of *Court Dancer*, Sadhona Bose composed a stage ballet titled *Bhookh* (Hunger) on the Bengal famine, which according to dance scholars, broke fresh ground by being the first Indian dance ballet to deal with a contemporary theme (Khokar 223, Bandopadhyay 131). *Bhookh* initiated a new trend in ballet composition. Through the 1940s and early 1950s, Bose composed and participated in dance ballets such as *Birth of Freedom*, *Whither Now*, *Divine Source*, *Samarpan*, and *Ajanta* (Khokar 223). Despite accounts of her alcoholism and general dissipation during these years, she was approached by new dance ballet groups such as the Indian Revival Group and New Age Dancers, pointing to the tenacity of her star text and professional image as an important dancer-choreographer (A.M.Khokar).

During the making of the film *Meenakshi* (Modhu Bose, 1942), Bose made a forceful assertion of her star power. The film, produced by the prestigious New Theatres, was originally supposed to feature the foremost male star of the times, K.L. Saigal. After *Court Dancer*, Sadhona Bose's contracts included a clause that in the title credits, her name would appear separately on a different title card. K.L. Saigal requested that his name be added on Bose's title card, even if in a smaller font size, but she refused. Modhu Bose reports:

She was hell bent that there will be no changes in the clauses of her contract. B.N. Sircar of New Theatres heard everything and said that "when Mrs. Bose has refused, I can't do

anything. Work will progress according to the contract. If Saigal doesn't agree, we have to replace him." That is how Najmul Hossain came to play the role in the last minute.

(292)

This incident gives us a sense of Bose's confidence in her stardom, especially after acting in the prestige production, *Court Dancer*. *Meenakshi* did not receive very favorable reviews, however, and this *filmindia* review may also suggest a transition in spectatorial tastes from dance films to the omnibus social that would become the defining cinematic genre in India in just a few years:

The man who brought the first dancing girl to the screen, seems to have done the greatest harm to our industry. Because, if a dancer is cast in a picture, the director forgets to tell the story and keeps his girl dancing in his picture. To find illustrations in support of this statement, pictures featuring Sadhona Bose, Leela Desai and Sitara may be seen. It does not seem to have occurred to these directors that dancing is merely an additional asset to the acting talents of these dancing heroines. ... these directors keep imposing on the public one or two dances by these dancers in their pictures without any rhyme or reason and at the sacrifice of the fundamental story. ("New Theatres' Disappointing "Meenakshi" 79)

The waning, by the mid-1940s, of the careers of all three dancer-actresses mentioned in the review⁵⁷ lends weight to the speculation about the fading of the dance film in the wake of the rise of the omnibus social, which attempts to integrate the song-and-dance sequences into the "fundamental story" or the central narrative. The dance film's unabashed celebration of its female leads' dancing skills for which the narrative was often only a shell produced a very

⁵⁷ Leela Desai's last film was *Nagad Narayan* (Vishram Bedekar, 1943) and while Sitara played bit roles in three films after the 1940s, the dominant phase of her film career as a dancer-actress in Bombay cinema ended with *Badi Maa* (Master Vinayak) and *Phool* (K. Asif) in 1945.

different kind of star text, where dancing was not “merely an additional asset to the acting talents of these dancing heroines” but the very foundation of their popularity and stardom.

Sadhona Bose’s own star text underwent radical transformations during this period. In 1942, she signed her first film with a director other than Modhu Bose. *Shankar Parvati* (Chaturbhuj Doshi) was released in 1943. Soon after the release of the film, Sadhona Bose left Modhu Bose’s apartment and moved into her own in the posh Marine Drive area of Bombay, precipitating a separation between them. Modhu Bose recounts that the apparent problem was that he had raised objections to the loud music and night-long parties that Sadhona Bose used to indulge in regularly (300). A long concluding section of his autobiography dwells at length on this period and is revelatory of their relationship as husband and wife, and director and star. He projects himself as the architect of her star text: “Since she was just 13, from 1930, whatever success she achieved on stage and screen was all under my direction. ... Maybe now Sadhana felt that whatever film she works on will be a hit only because of her” (301), and proceeds to express his opinions on women acting in films in general:

The reasons [for female actors] losing balance between home and career are their rising ego and financial independence. ... She [the female star] no longer wants any guardian – mother, father, husband, guru or anyone else. She feels that taking anyone’s advice will hurt her pride and belittle her. This spells doom for her. The once happy *sansar* [family, marriage, household] is broken. Waywardness becomes a way of life and she falls into the clutches of insanity. ... From my years of experience I have come to the conclusion that those who want to take up acting – especially film acting – as a profession cannot maintain a *sansar*. (318)

Bose's transition to this attitude from his zealous mission in the 1920s to bring girls from respectable families into the theater and cinema speaks volumes about the anxieties of the bhadralok regarding the psychological and financial independence accrued to women from participating in the public sphere. While Sadhona and Modhu Bose were reconciled after a few years, and made two more films together (*Shesher Kabita* in 1953, and *Vikram Urvashi* in 1954), this episode exposes the fragility of female stardom when the conditions under which it has been promoted are altered, as when the bhadramahila Bose wrests independence from her director-husband. A consideration of Bose's personal life in general, including her early insistence on a career in dancing and acting, her marriage and then separation from Modhu Bose, rumors about extravagant parties and promiscuity, and later, a life of penury and destitution points to narratives of resistance to contemporary gender norms and directs our attention towards the socio-historical contexts in which the voices of female pioneers in the realm of entertainment are produced and circulated. As the author of significant changes in women's participation in the performing arts, Bose had to continuously walk the line between respectability and censure. She contested middle-class codes of feminine propriety but her class background also facilitated her emergence as an icon of modern Indian womanhood. The construction of her stardom at the intersection of the paradigms of modernity and national identity, cosmopolitanism and tradition demonstrates the complex and dynamic interactions between the categories of gender, nation, and culture.

**3.0 TRANSITIONING FROM BAI TO DEVI: NARRATIVIZING DANCE AS
PROFESSION IN THE FILMS OF VYJAYANTHIMALA AND WAHEEDA REHMAN
IN THE 1950S AND 1960S ⁵⁸**

“*Main stage ki mallika ke bajai ghar ki rani banoongi.*” (“I’d rather be queen of the home than empress of the stage.”) – *Kathputli* (Puppet, Amiya Chakrabarty, Nitin Bose, 1957)

“*Tum bahu nahi ho, devi nahi ho; tum ek vaishya, tawaif, naachnewali ho. Grihasti ke gehne vaishya nahi pehente. Yeh tujhe jala dengi.*” (“You are not a daughter-in-law, you are not a respectable woman; you are a prostitute, a courtesan, a dancing girl. You cannot wear the jewels of the bride; they will burn you.”) – *Sadhna* (Realize, B. R. Chopra, 1958)

“*Kaanton se kheench ke yeh aanchal, todke bandhan baandhe payal, koi na roko dil ki udaan ko, dil woh chala. Aaj phir jeene ki tamanna hai.*” (“I pulled my sari from thorns; I broke all my ties and tied dancer’s anklets around my feet. Don’t stop the flight of my heart; I want to live again!”) – *Guide* (Vijay Anand, 1965)

⁵⁸ *Bai* or *baiji* was the common North Indian appellation for professional female musicians and dancers, who were often courtesans that enjoyed princely patronage. The literal English translation of *devi* from Sanskrit/Hindi is “goddess.” However, it refers more broadly to a virtuous, respectable, usually married woman.

“*Kahin aisa na ho ki Hira devi ko koi chahnewala na ho aur Hirabai ko koi dekhnewala na ho.*” (“What if there is no one to love Hira Devi (the wife figure) and no one to look at Hira Bai (the stage actress) anymore?”) – *Teesri Kasam* (The Third Promise, Basu Bhattacharya, 1966)

In this chapter, I examine popular Hindi cinema’s discourse on dance and female stardom in the 1950s and 1960s by analyzing four films that feature female protagonists who are professional dancers. While Hindi film narratives of the 1950s and 1960s routinely feature publicly dancing women in the form of vamps, these spectacular dancing figures are designed to be marginal to the narrative and hence do not produce the ideological upheaval that a publicly dancing *heroine* does.⁵⁹ Across the stage actress of *Kathputli*, the *tawaif* (courtesan) of *Sadhna*, the “classical” dancer of *Guide*, and the *nautanki* performer of *Teesri Kasam*, we see a recurrence of narrative and formal tropes that reflect cultural anxieties around female sexuality and economic independence, especially when related to public dance performance by the heroine. In narrativizing dance as *work*, these films deploy the dichotomies of *ghar* and *bazaar* (home and the public space of the bazaar with its dancing women and other vices), *devi* and *bai* (wife and courtesan, or respectable woman and woman of the bazaar), and private and public to negotiate the figure of the dancing woman, who is a source of both pleasure and danger, fascination and

⁵⁹ From the late 1950s to the 1980s, the female figure of the vamp functioned as the archetypal performer of the raunchy song-and-dance sequence in Hindi cinema. As part of a parallel “star system,” one with significantly less financial power and social acceptance than that of the heroine, vamps such as Helen, Kalpana Iyer, Bindu, Aruna Irani, and Jayshree T, among others, acted as gangsters’ molls whose participation in a film was often restricted to a “cabaret” performance in a casino/bar/nightclub. The kind of *dance* they performed (including costume and make-up) marked them as Westernized outsiders characterized by an unrestrained sexuality, the opposite of the heroine, who was the site of virtue and thus of “Indianness.” For a detailed discussion of the figure of the vamp, see Mazumdar’s *Bombay Cinema: An Archive of the City*.

revulsion. Through a consideration of the star texts and dance performances of Vyjayanthimala and Waheeda Rehman, the famous dancer-actresses featured in these four films, and the spaces of the *kotha*, the stage, and the home, I argue that these structuring dichotomies that undergird popular Hindi cinema and indeed the socio-political construction of gender, become foregrounded when bodies, movements, and spaces related to professional dance constitute the basis of the film narrative. The four films under consideration in this chapter variously narrativize the transition (or the impossibility thereof) of the dancing protagonist from *bai* to *devi*, in each case addressing the newly-independent nation's cultural mandate to recuperate traditional dance forms while marginalizing or gentrifying their original female performers. I investigate the effects of this reform-driven directive on star texts and narrative structures, suggesting that dancer-actresses exert a strong authorial force that may often subvert the goals of the state and its sanctioned male-centric cinematic narrative form. Thus, while classical dance-trained actresses like Vyjayanthimala and Waheeda Rehman serve to cleanse the image of the traditional dance performer and of the female film star, through their production numbers, these dancing heroines also alter the narrative structure, the conventional romantic plot, and the nature of the spectatorial gaze, often displacing the hero as the agent of action and deploying dance as an instrument of narrative resolution.

As the iconic woman of the nation (Mazumdar 85), the heroine is the bearer of the social norms of ideal womanhood, aligned along the axes of the private sphere, domesticity, economic dependence, monogamous heterosexual marriage, and motherhood, among others. In the period under consideration, this role necessarily has to be in an agonistic relationship with that of the professional dancing woman, who through her public performance before a paying audience wrests economic independence and is often disallowed from, or has to forego traditionally

feminine functions in the institutions of the home, marriage, and motherhood. In her study of female stardom in Indian cinema from the 1930s to the 1950s, Majumdar observes that “the connotations of public performance and, thus, of visual availability, shared by the female star, the stage actress, and the courtesan, make them all occupy an analogous space in the public imagination, a space that is morally defined in opposition to the domestic space of the wife” (14). In the case of dancer-actresses especially, given that their embodied dancing skills are consistently on display and a fundamental component of their stardom, their visual availability is much more marked and occupies a different register than that of film actresses who were not famous for their dancing abilities.⁶⁰ Additionally, during this period, the association of public, professional dancing with traditional dancing women such as the *tawaifs* (courtesans) and the *devadasis* (temple dancers) has not yet been completely severed. This produces, in popular film narratives featuring a dancing protagonist, an imbrication of the categories of professional dancer, courtesan, and prostitute, all “women of the bazaar” rather than “women of the home.” In the films discussed in this chapter, *Sadhna* and *Teesri Kasam* feature dance as a component of commercial sex work, while *Kathputli* and *Guide* promote dance as art, pointing to the varied discourses on dance and the economy of the display of the female body, which nevertheless produce similar tensions with respect to the construction of the female protagonist. Given the history of the gentrification of classical dances in India, the structuring of private and public space along gendered lines, and the construction of the cinematic gaze, the figure of the female dancer in twentieth-century popular Hindi cinema has always been problematic for the narrative

⁶⁰ This difference is highlighted by the categories of the “production number” and the “narrative number” in the taxonomy of song-and-dance sequences detailed in Chapter 1, where the dance-dominated production number constructs different regimes of performance and spectatorship than the narrative number.

and ideological project of this cinema.⁶¹ Thus, a focus on dance adds to the substantial scholarly engagement with Hindi cinema of this period, by throwing new light on questions of stardom, gender, and genre that are foregrounded when the female protagonist is a public performer, when the heroine and vamp binaries are accommodated within the body of the dancing heroine, and when public dancing stands in for female film stardom (Majumdar, Mazumdar, P. Roy, Vasudevan).

A specific focus on film dance during this period highlights as well negotiations between the cinema's investment in spectacular attractions and its avowed adherence to the developmental script of the newly-formed nation and its private and public institutions. As is evident in the films of various dancer-actresses through the history of popular Hindi cinema, there is a constant tension between putting the skills and bodies of these performers on display in the song-and-dance sequences and morally recuperating them within the narrative. This dual role of the dancer-actress often produces a split figuration of the female protagonist in the films under consideration (and in other films featuring actresses famed for their dancing abilities). The central conflict of these films' narratives is produced through a split between two professions – that of the public dancer and the home-bound housewife. This split is evident at formal and narrative levels, between song-and-dance sequences and the narrative, production numbers and narrative numbers, public and private spaces (kotha/home, stage/bedroom etc.), and styles of costuming, make-up, and movement vocabulary. Indeed, the split is manifest even in the double names of these dancing female protagonists, for example, Rosie/Nalini (*Guide*), Rajni/Champabai (*Sadhna*), Pushpa/Miss Pushpa (*Kathputli*), Kamla/Kaminidevi

⁶¹ See Chapter 2 for an extended discussion of the appropriation of dance forms from traditional practitioners and their canonization as “respectable” classical dances by upper-caste and –class individuals and groups.

(*Payal/Dancer's Anklets*, Joseph Taliath, 1957), *Munni/Laila-e-Aasman* (*Sunghursh/Struggle*, H. S. Rawail, 1968), *Jyoti/Jugni* (*Namkeen*, Gulzar, 1982) etc. The contrast between the private, prelapsarian “name of the home” and the public, professional name of the kotha or of the stage indicates the doubled figuration of innocence and corruption that these narratives are obliged to devise when the female protagonist is a professional dancer.

These narratives about public dancers function as a commentary on female film stardom in diegetic and extra-diegetic ways. Diegetically, the films under consideration narrativize female stardom by featuring as central protagonists, acclaimed stage actresses, celebrated classical dancers, and popular courtesans. Considering that most Hindi films until the 1990s displace representations of the film industry and of film stardom onto the stage, and even then cinematic and theatrical performance are often condensed into on-stage song-and-dance sequences, the performative regimes in these four films provide substantial ground to study discourses of female film stardom during this period. The extra-diegetic engagement of these films (and others depicting female performers) with the contemporary industrial-economic structures of female stardom may be understood through their function as a “showcase” or “vehicle” for famous dancer-actresses like Vyjayanthimala, Waheeda Rehman, Padmini, Ragini and others. As I shall discuss in this chapter, a number of these “dance films” are conceptualized in order to “exploit” the dancing skills of these dancer-actresses, but the female stars in turn wrest cinematic authorship by producing narratives that reflect the power of their performing bodies, and by defining regimes of cinematic representation that are not circumscribed by male desire and intent alone. The folding of this economic and cultural agency with diegetic narratives that celebrate the dancing skills of these actresses even as they construct them as being

performed in tragic circumstances of enforced labor, sexual oppression, and social ostracization suggest the various links between ideology, stardom, and constructions of femininity.

3.1 DISCOURSES ON WOMEN AND DANCE

Various historians and cinema scholars have related the discourse on Indian modernity in the 19th and 20th centuries to the construction of a certain kind of ideal womanhood. Most famously, Partha Chatterjee in the essay, “The Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question,” argues that the discourse of Indian nationalism was driven by the need to protect the spiritual essence of the nation, which in turn was enshrined in the figure of the woman and the home. “The home was the principal site for expressing the spiritual quality of the national culture, and women must take the main responsibility of protecting and nurturing this quality” (Chatterjee 243). A system of gendered dichotomies structured around inner/outer, *ghar/bahir* (home/world), woman/man, and spiritual/material thus shaped the nationalist project. To become the idealized repository of national values, the woman had to be recast and constantly reinvented through a pedagogical regime that combined tutelage in traditional (Hindu) customs as well as modern education. The anxiety around the definition of Indian womanhood was fundamentally predicated on the private/public divide, separating the ideal Hindu woman not only from the English memsahib but also from lower-class “public” women, chief among them the prostitute, the dancing girl, the courtesan. Mazumdar describes how the double location of this construction of the woman in both colonial ideology and middle-class nationalism’s engagement with colonialism reproduces the western metaphor of the streetwalker as the only possible public woman (82). As discussed in Chapter 2, traditional dancing women like tawaifs and devadasis were read as iterations of this

public female figure, producing a resolute imbrication between public dancing and sex work. In an essay on the tawaif in Hindi cinema, Shweta Sachdeva Jha discusses the demarcation of private and public spaces in colonial India according to codes of sociability, where “decent women did not interact with men who were not related to them ... Only prostitutes socialized with men in public. Thus the tawa’if was a ‘public’ woman, as she entertained men who were unrelated to her in a public space” (177). Anna Morcom similarly notes that public female dancing was incompatible with marriage and respectability because these dancers associated with men outside the traditional patriarchal circle of the father and the husband (*Illicit Worlds* 14).

In the early years of the cinema in India, until the late 1930s, this injunction on public visibility meant that film actresses were largely drawn from this category of public women from the courtesan tradition. Cinema’s status as the newest and most popular public institution figured film actresses as women of the city even if they played domestic characters in the diegeses. As outlined in Chapter 2, however, the gentrification of the film actress from the late 1930 onwards was meant to ensure that the image of the actress was commensurate with the abstract diagram of Indian womanhood drawn by the nationalist agenda. The same was true for the public female dancer. Traditional Indian dances had to be recuperated to present a grand narrative of an uninterrupted indigenous cultural heritage through a process of sanskritization (see Chapter 2), which in turn demanded an erasure of the history of low-caste public women as the progenitors, preservers, and practitioners of India’s performance arts. A reconstructed “classical” tradition brought dance into the realm of upper-class and -caste respectability. It is helpful to consider the role of cultural institutions set up by the Indian state after independence from British rule in 1947 in effecting this cultural “renaissance,” which in turn affected how classical and folk dances were

figured in popular cinema. In January 1953, the Union Ministry of Education inaugurated the “Sangeet Natak Akademi,” a national academy of Dance, Drama [including Film until 1961], and Music. According to the organization’s inaugural annual report in 1953-54,

The necessity of such an organization was all the more compelling in view of the fact that all of a sudden the erstwhile princely patronage to the arts had ceased to function or was fast ceasing. In the void thus created, the art traditions were faced with the grave risk of breaking down in an atmosphere of general decline in our cultural and artistic values. (1)

Princely states such as Awadh, Lucknow, Tanjavur, Hyderabad etc. had fostered a cultural environment where tawaifs, devadasis, and traditional musicians were accorded financial and social prestige and patronage. The Akademi represented the state’s project to extricate these performing arts from their traditional milieus and transplant them on to the “secular” stage, which often entailed erasures and alterations in these performance traditions and their exponents. Lakshmi Subramanian has observed of this period that, “the process of classicism involved the rewriting of the content and style of music as well as reconstituting the social context of patrons and performers” (76). One of the principal functions of the Akademi was to codify and hierarchize dance practices. The Akademi’s “Expert Committee on Dance” was in charge of the classification of dances, deciding through their annual awards which dances would be recognized as classical, compiling technical terms and texts on music, dance, and drama, and organizing regular festivals of classical and folk dances (Sangeet Natak Akademi Report 1958-59 12-15). Meanwhile, as art historian, Jyotindra Jain has argued, the Government of India’s Republic Day parades (organized every January 26, since 1950 when India was declared a Democratic Republic), enlisted various folk dance traditions to “perform” the cultural diversity of the nation while emphasizing an abstracted, generalized notion of Indian tradition. Dance was one element

in a range of symbols, performances, and spectacles – such as the national flag, the national anthem, and the national calendar – that was designed to provide a unifying effect on separatist elements (52). Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of the nation, who institutionalized the Republic Day parade that comprised tableaux of folk and tribal life of each state and a folk dance festival, writes: “the procession would be a moving pageant of India in its rich diversity. ... I would love to see in our procession people from various parts of India including our tribal people, the Nagas from the North East, the Bhils from Central India, the Santals and others showing that they are also full partners in this great enterprise of India going ahead” (qtd. in Jain 53). Dance, in this scheme of cultural nationalism, was considered a means by which national and regional identities are corpo-realized through various classical and folk movement vocabularies. Despite the official mandate for “authenticity,” the production of the nation and its communities frequently occurred through mixed or even invented traditions. Govind Vidyarthi, a technical officer in the 1950s and 1960s at the Sangeet Natak Akademi reveals, in a piece in the Akademi’s journal, how a generalized Indian folk and tribal tradition was produced:

With more and more urban people presenting folk dances there has been an increasing tendency to include pretty college girls and even “extras” who dance for the films. Usually a Dance-Director-Choreographer accompanies them and one could see in the Talkatora Camp hectic rehearsals for the “creation” of a folk dance. These urban folk dancers are a feast for the camera and they hit the headlines in the press. (82)

Through repetitions and iterations at such parades and folk dance festivals, these dances came to stand in for “tradition,” with renowned dance scholars like Vatsyayan and Khokar using images from the Republic Day folk dance festival in their authoritative books, *Traditions of Indian Folk Dance* and *Splendour of Indian Dance* respectively. While changes in performers and contexts of

performance often radically altered traditional cultural forms, the Akademi continued an official discourse predicated on the concept of “authenticity.”

The first of the Sangeet Natak Akademi’s series of all-India seminars on the performing arts was the Film Seminar held in 1955, which provoked discussions on how the cinema of the new nation (included in the purview of the Akademi for only eight years after the organization’s inception) could be recruited to promote “Indian culture.” The seminar, whose directors were the thespians, Devika Rani and Prithviraj Kapoor, included film directors, producers, actors, music composers, lyricists etc. from across the country. The tensions between promoting cultural forms in the manner propagated by the Akademi (as “authentic” classical and folk forms) and the hybridity endemic to popular cinema are manifest specifically in the discussions on film music and dance. Music composer, Anil Biswas, for example, makes a case for film music being distinctively Indian: “When our music goes to a foreign country, that country should recognize it as something Indian and not a part of its own music. ... I am a lover of Western music, but as *Western music*. I still maintain that our music must retain the character of being Indian” (R. M. Ray 169). While disparaging the inclusion of non-Indian music, Biswas celebrates hybridity within Indian musical forms, referring to popular film music as, “the product of the beautiful marriage between folk and classical music ... which today has made the whole of India music-conscious” (170). He concludes his presentation with the declaration, “An ideal film-music, when it is in its true character, will be a beautiful amalgamation and take the new shape of the new music of new India” (180). Biswas’s claim of national music status for film music must be read in the context of the state’s proscription of film music on All India Radio in the 1950s when the Minister of Information and Broadcasting, B.V. Keskar banned film music on the state-owned radio station for its hybridity, and specifically its use of western instruments that

“challenged the aims of the national cultural policy” (Jhingan 159). Through the period of this controversy, the film industry claimed as its cultural project the transmission of India’s musical traditions to the common people. The Hindi and Marathi film actress, Durga Khote, makes a similar claim for film dance at the Film Seminar:

The consciousness of rhythm and dance in the homes of people inspired by films has given birth to scores of dance academies. Indeed, had it not been for the film actress, the Bharat Natyam, the Kathakali, the Manipuri and the Kathak dances would never have left the threshold of their provinces and become part of Indian culture. Through the medium of films, it is the film actress who has taken these arts to the homes of the people. (R. M. Ray 183)

It is important to note here the role ascribed to the film actress in particular as it was mainly women who danced in popular Indian cinema until the late 1980s (see Chapter 1). The claim for the relationship between the film actress, classical dance, and the popularization of these dances was a contentious one, as evidenced in other observations at the same seminar. The Bengali actress from Jean Renoir’s *The River* (1951), Suprova Mookerji, for example, sharply counters Khote’s claim:

In taking the art to the masses, we have often debased their tastes because the examples set by the films on dancing and music have not always been too healthy. Bharat Natyam, Kathakali, Manipuri and other forms of folk dances, I may be permitted to say, have survived and even made advances to their techniques in spite of the films. As a matter of fact, few would look to films for their correct interpretation. (R. M. Ray 185)

Uday Shankar, doyen of “modern Indian dance,” in his paper titled “The Message of Dance in Films,” presented at the seminar provides a trenchant criticism of popular film dance:

As regards the classical dances, it pains me to find that with the growing interest to introduce dance in motion pictures, a slow deterioration of classical dance is spreading its shadow over the art itself, and is bound to cause great harm to our classical dance, in course of a short time. I may even call it ‘motion picture classical dance’, instead of recognizing it as representing the real one. (R. M. Ray 238)

Himself criticized later by classical puritans for “presenting oriental dance from Europe, not quite Indian and certainly not authentic” (Erdman, “Dance Discourses” 295), Shankar is a pivotal figure to understand the construction of a dance tradition to fit the discourse of national modernity (where the modern nation derives its cultural status from its “ancient” cultural forms but divests them of their non-modern aspects so they can be transposed easily onto the modern stage). His 1948 film, *Kalpana*, features his trademark hybrid of classical and folk dance forms, imbued with a nationalist intent. Through dance, Shankar attempts to create a sense of a folk possessing a varied but inclusive Indian cultural tradition. In a key segment of the film, the protagonist Udayan’s cultural institute (modeled on the “Uday Shankar India Culture Centre” Shankar set up in Almora in 1939) organizes the *Vasanta Utsav* or “Spring Festival of India,” where delegates from all over India and Asia are invited to present their dances. The festival, which takes up more than forty-five minutes of screen time, functions as a spectacular display of the nation through dance. Female performers parade various regional costumes, and in a song that makes an appeal to erase regional differences, male and female dancers perform a variety of regional folk dances. Like Nehru’s Republic Day parades, through dance, *Kalpana* attempts to create a sense of a varied but connected Indian nation.

If dance (on stage and screen) in the 1930s and 1940s is engaged in a project of gentrification of traditional forms, performers, and audiences, the 1950s and 1960s witness the

canonization of classical dance forms and the celebration of a generic folk dance style as embodying the aesthetic and ethical ideals of the new Indian nation. In film dance, the high art model of classical dance is suitably modified into the mass art requirements of a popular cultural form by presenting song-and-dance sequences typically lasting from four to six minutes rather than the entire classical dance repertoire, simplifying the highly-codified movement vocabulary of classical dance, and hybridizing music, gestures, and costume. Actresses trained in classical dance, such as, Vyjayanthimala, Padmini, Ragini, Kamala Laxman, among others, come to stand in for a “classical” aesthetic that merges “tradition” and a new national ethos. Similar to the cinematic crystallization of classical Indian dance into a set of tropes, Indian folk dances are also combined into a generic filmic folk dance, typically featuring men and women in rural costumes consisting of the North Indian *dhoti kurta* for men (a tunic and a piece of cloth tied around the lower torso) and *ghagra choli* for women (a blouse and voluminous skirt), a movement vocabulary dominated by “folksy” steps like twirling, spinning, and various group formations, all performed to songs rendered rustic with an infusion of lyrics in the North Indian dialect of Bhojपुरi. While there are variations to this type, as Arundhati Subramaniam notes, “the “folk dance” in Hindi cinema is, almost by definition, “exotic” and “folksy” because regional features have to be ironed out to make it seem like it could be performed in almost any hamlet in the country” (135). Well-known film dance choreographers from this period, including Hiralal, Sohanlal, Gopi Krishna, and Lacchu Maharaj employ these performative stencils to create dance numbers appropriate to a range of film narratives in the 1950s and 1960s.

While it may seem that dance and cinema had gained a measure of respectability by this time, film narratives with dancing female protagonists feature a recurring eruption of conflicts around the publicly dancing woman that demonstrates the persistence of the discourse on

women's presence and participation in public spaces. In the films I analyze here, as well as the larger body of films featuring female protagonists as actors, dancers, or professional performers in general, conflicts arise because the protagonist is not engaged in just any public profession such as say, selling merchandise, but specifically in the public performance or entertainment business, which as we have seen, has a tenacious association with the bazaar and the city in ways that other professions do not. In a figuration delicately balanced between home and world, tradition and modernity, the on-screen feminine body is a volatile composite of these opposing attractions. Anustup Basu, in his study of popular Hindi cinema's favorite vamp, Helen, writes: "The flesh and blood of the female form are ... always in stages of esoteric transcription, being reified and reduced into both, the drawings of the nation as well as its torrid others – the putrid vices that prevent the nation from coming into being" (140). This bifurcated figuration of the woman constructs the mixed-race, Westernized, skimpily-clad Helen as a vamp upon her debut in the Hindi film industry in the early 1950s, as "the absolute counterpoint to the nation imagined as woman" (Basu, A. 140). In complete contrast, the heroines I discuss in this chapter, Vyjayanthimala and Waheeda Rehman, emerge around the same time as top heroines, their classical dance-trained bodies in consonance with the national-modern definition of cultural heritage. Despite the close fit of these dancing stars with the mold of ideal Indian womanhood, however, the four films under discussion exemplify why a dancing protagonist continues to be a thorn in the side of the national project of defining ideal citizens and institutions. Basu describes "narrating the woman" as an anxious and furious undertaking, "perpetually geared toward foreclosing that moment when a female corporeality – as a voluptuous cluster of errant and naturalistic energies – becomes apparent in passing, in between iconic diagrams of virtue and vice that mutually contend over, intersect, and occupy it" (140). In the dance films under

consideration, the formidable physical presence of the female protagonists, expressed through their expert dancing, threatens the financial and emotional economy of the normative household. While, in the binary system of the popular cinema's figuration of woman, "a relentless process of transmissions between the icon and the flesh" (Basu, A. 140), it is fairly uncomplicated to displace the fleshly presence of Helen or other vamps into the "putrid," "torrid" zones of the seedy cabaret nightclub or the sleazy gangster's den, how does popular Hindi cinema manage the dangerous cracks that threaten to destroy the edifice of ideal Indian womanhood, marriage, and domesticity when the corporeality of its "iconic diagram of virtue," its heroine, is put on display through dance?

3.2 DANCING BODIES, SPACES, AND MOVEMENT VOCABULARIES

This chapter engages with four types of dancing women in different contexts, spaces, and employing a variety of movement vocabularies. *Kathputli* (Puppet, Amiya Chakrabarty, Nitin Bose, 1957) is described in the *Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema* as "a Vyjayanthimala vehicle" consisting of "expensively staged dance sequences loosely strung together" (350). Indeed, Vyjayanthimala gets first billing in the credits, and features in seven of the film's eight song sequences, which include four lavishly-produced production numbers performed by her on stage. Her character in the film, Pushpa, a poor girl who does odd jobs to support herself and her school-going sister, gets fascinated by a puppet show one day and strikes up a friendship with the puppeteer, Shivraj (Jawahar Kaul). In attempting to get him a break in the theater, she herself is picked out and groomed into the star, Miss Pushpa, by the theater director, Loknath (Balraj Sahni). Shivraj, now her husband, resents her success but is unable to financially support the

family after meeting with an accident. Torn between love for her husband and respect for her widowed mentor Loknath, and between her domestic and maternal duties (she has a daughter soon after marriage) and needing to earn a living from the theater, Pushpa sings, in the final production number, of being a puppet herself. In a hasty resolution, Shivraj is reconciled with her, while the camera pans to a wistfully smiling Loknath.

Pushpa's fame as a theater actress derives entirely from her dance numbers; we barely see any "acting" or dialog-delivery on stage. We are also led to believe that Pushpa sings her own songs; there is no playback singer. This construction of the star as someone who can sing, dance, and act elides the popular cinema's heterogeneous form of manufacture, which includes playback singers, choreographers, dance doubles, body doubles etc., just as it makes the song-and-dance spectacle stand in for theater and entertainment in general. The film uses the theater to generate a self-reflexive discourse about cinema and more broadly the entertainment industry. When Loknath initially asks Pushpa if she will work in the theater, she strongly refuses, saying, "*Nahin nahin theater wale log acche nahin hote*" ("No way! Theater folk are not good people"). Loknath then embarks on a long and fiery speech about the unfairness of this attitude, and declares, "We are always in the eye of the public, we are always under scrutiny. People criticize us but despite this we sing, we dance, we entertain the public." Pushpa's conversion from sceptic to a champion of the theater is a pedagogical nudge to us film spectators, as is the film's unsympathetic attitude to her abrasive husband Shivraj's comments on the theater as a place of vice and corruption. Loknath's role as the behind-the-scenes director who choreographs Pushpa's stardom echoes the popular construction of the male director as the creative force and the female star as the glamorous front of show business. Indeed, throughout the film we see Loknath only promoting female stars – his now-dead wife who was an actress, Pushpa, and then Kamala

(Kamala Laxman). *Kathputli* conforms to Majumdar's assertion that the ambivalence towards the cultural status of the cinema renders "stardom as feminized in relation to production studios," with stardom gendered female (in the 1930s in Majumdar's argument, but stretching into the 1950s and 1960s as we shall see in this chapter) and "implicit equivalences ... made between cinema, stardom, femininity, and nation" (10).

In *Sadhna* (Realize, B.R. Chopra, 1958), B.R. Chopra's "social problem" film whose express purpose is to highlight the social evil of the tawaif/courtesan culture (more broadly, prostitution) and suggest means of reform, Vyjayanthimala plays a popular and prosperous tawaif, Champabai, who takes on the guise of a virtuous middle-class girl, Rajni to earn some extra money from the masquerade. The deception is required by the young Sanskrit professor, Mohan (Sunil Dutt), whose ailing mother (Leela Chitnis) wants to see him married before she dies. Rajni is presented as a prospective daughter-in-law. Soon after her encounter with the devout mother and the loving son, Champabai embarks on a project of self-transformation, and eventually gives up singing and dancing for a reclusive life of religious devotion. When Mohan discovers that she is a tawaif, a dancing girl, he is outraged, but she tells him of the tragic circumstances that forced her into the profession. While he continues to want to be romantically involved with her, his mother is aghast that a tawaif has set foot in her sacred home. After an impassioned exchange between Champabai, her pimp, and the mother at the threshold of Mohan's house, Champabai-as-Rajni is finally accepted into the domestic fold. The film ends with Rajni (in bridal finery), Mohan, and his mother singing a bhajan (religious Hindu song) before a statue of the Hindu god, Krishna. Sumita Chakravarty notes that "socials" like *Sadhna* and earlier, *Aadmi* (V. Shantaram, 1939) "portrayed the trajectory of the prostitute from that of fallen woman to one restored to social respectability through marriage. The "rescue" scenario,

wherein the unfortunate woman trapped in a life of moral degradation is rescued by a good man, dominated these films” (274).

Despite being a courtesan film, a genre typically marked by lavishly-produced song-and-dance numbers, and especially one starring Vyjayanthimala, a dancer-actress whose very presence in a film signaled a conspicuous investment in dance numbers, *Sadhna* features only two production numbers in a total of six song sequences. These two numbers are staged as early *mujra* performances in Champabai’s kotha and are later followed by solo narrative numbers that mark Champabai’s transformation into a devout and obedient daughter-in-law figure. The low number of spectacular production numbers is in keeping with the film’s self-promotion as a social problem film, not one that is designed as a vehicle for Vyjayanthimala’s dancing skills. Significantly, in recognition of her acting abilities, Vyjayanthimala won her first Filmfare Award for Best Actress for this film, buttressing the film’s status as a serious-minded social that proved its leading actress’s abilities beyond her famed proficiency in dancing. In keeping with the film’s social reform agenda, even the two *mujra* dance numbers are self-reflexively critical of tawaif culture. The first, “*Kaho ji tum kya kya khareedoge, yahan toh har cheez bikti hai*” (“Tell me sirs what would you like to buy, all sorts of things are sold here”) has Champabai gleefully list the pecuniary transactions she excels in, which include trading in love and respectability: “*Mohabbat behti hun main, sharafat behti hun main*” (“Love, respectability, it’s all for sale here”), prefiguring her monetarily-driven masquerade as Rajni. In the second *mujra*, “*Aise waise thikanon pe jaana bura hai*” (“Frequenting places – like the kotha – is harmful”), Champabai recites a litany of the financial, marital and other woes that will befall the man who visits the kotha and gives his heart to the tawaif. “*Dil toh kya ghar baar bhi lut jaata hai*” (“Not just your heart, but your home and entire life will be destroyed”) she warns, even as she jauntily dances as

the agent of ruin of her customers. Given their general function as key indices of moral status (Majumdar 161), these particular song-and-dance sequences signify unacceptable expressions of female desire, typically conveyed through the debauched song-and-dance of the vamp. While a defining feature of the courtesan genre is the representation of the courtesan “as a figure of purity and innocence whose dance expresses her inner integrity in defiance of the circumstances that define her outer existence” (Allen and Bhaskar 44-5), at this point in the narrative, Champabai does not reflect this bifurcation of inner virtue and external circumstance. Rather, *because* this film does not follow the tragic courtesan narrative trajectory of a failed movement from the kotha to the home and from bai to devi, instead of a fractured tension between inner feeling and outer performance, we see a strident transformation of Champabai’s inner structure of feeling. This is reflected formally in the transition from production numbers performed in the public space of the kotha to soulful narrative numbers performed in private spaces, culminating in a religious song in the sanctum sanctorum of the marital home. Indeed, in a triumphant reinstatement of narrative over the spectacle of a Vyjayanthimala production number, the most well-known and best-remembered song in the film is the mournful dirge, “*Aurat ne janam diya mardon ko, mardon ne usko bazaar diya*” (“Women gave birth to men, who in turn sold them in the market”), which acts as a social commentary on the suffering, sacrifice, and shame of women in a world ruled by men. The relative unpopularity of the two production numbers in this film may be ascribed to their sanctimonious articulation of the perils rather than the pleasures of the kotha. The social problem film’s intention is all too clear and devoid of the mix of danger and desire that otherwise pervades the cinematic kotha.

Unlike the clear reform-driven agenda of *Sadhna*, *Guide* (Vijay Anand, 1965) and *Teesri Kasam* (The Third Promise, Basu Bhattacharya, 1966), starring Waheeda Rehman, provide more

complex articulations of the relationship between gender and public performance. *Guide* was a prestige project starring Dev Anand as the charismatic guide, Raju, and Rehman as the dancer, Rosie. Rosie's mother, a devadasi/temple dancer (depicted in the film more as a "madam" of a brothel) keeps her away from a professional career in dance, and to ensure her a life of respectability, marries her off to the archeologist, Marco (Kishore Sahu). Rosie is unhappy in the marriage and her only passion is dance. With Raju's motivation, she walks out of the marriage and embarks on a successful career as a professional classical dancer. Her romantic relationship with Raju, now her manager, sours as he indulges in drinking, gambling, and making as much money as possible from her performances. Raju is found guilty of forging her signature and gets a two-year jail term, at the end of which he wanders off to a village rather than back to his hometown. The villagers mistake him for a holy man and a seer and he is eventually talked into going on a twelve-day fast to bring the village some much-needed rain. In a departure from the R. K. Narayan novel on which the film is based, the film ends with a miraculous downpour even as a gaunt Raju dies with Rosie and his mother (Leela Chitnis) by his side.

Describing *Guide* as "an extended commentary on the economic and sexual politics of performance" Chakravarty notes that the film captures a particular ethos of the postindependence era when popular Hindi cinema entertained "the fantasy of the cinema as the agency that would transport a celebrated national artistic tradition to the wider population" (46). Indeed, through the figure of Rosie, the film charts the national-cultural narrative of the transition of professional dancers from the devadasi community to the classical dance podium, signifying respectability. Rosie's husband, Marco, represents older attitudes to public performance when he reprimands her for wanting to dance, a profession he refers to as "*bazaar* *pesh*a" (profession of the bazaar, and related thus to sex work). He says, "I cannot bear some man throwing pennies at my wife to

watch her dance. What will happen to my social status if you become a dancer?” Raju, on the other hand, is the ideal figure of national modernity, who encourages Rosie to break out of caste and gender restrictions and shape her own future, citing illustrious dancers like Uday Shankar, Shanta Rao, and Bala Saraswati as respected artists in their own right. The two lavishly produced stage performances, “*Piya tose naina lage re*” (“Since I met your eyes, beloved”) and “*Mose chal kiye jaaye saiyyan beimaan*” (“My traitor-lover tortures me”) function as tools in this project of providing a cultural pedagogy of the new nation by featuring a collage of various classical and folk dance forms, including film dance versions of Bharatanatyam, Manipuri, Lavani, a folksy dance celebrating the Holi festival etc. Sangita Shresthova observes of this pastiche of classical and folk dance forms: “The director’s choice to cut between several styles rather than focus on Rosie’s mastery in a particular regionally specific dance form attempts to infuse the heroine with a pan-Indian identity, a feature that scholars have identified as a recurring feature in the immediate postindependence cinema” (“Dancing to an Indian Beat” 249). This pan-Indian cultural amalgamation is mirrored as well in Raju’s multi-lingual address to tourists from different regions as he switches easily between Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, English, and Punjabi. Significantly, despite this drive towards national integration, Rosie has to adopt the Hindu name, Miss Nalini, as her stage name, underscoring the need to construct national culture as the domain of the Hindu majority.

Based on the short story, *Mare Gaye Gulfam* by Phanishwarnath Renu, a renowned Hindi novelist, *Teesri Kasam* tells the story of a brief encounter between an innocent bullock-cart driver, Hiranman and a famed nautanki actress, Hirabai. Hiranman is given the responsibility of transporting Hirabai to a village fair forty miles away, where she is to perform with the Bharat Nautanki Company. He narrates local stories through the local folk musical form to her and they

begin to develop an understated fondness for each other. When Hiranman attends Hirabai's nautanki performances at the village fair though, he begins to be troubled by the associations of her profession with sex work. When the local Thakur (landlord), Vikram Singh requests her to stay on after the fair for a while with him as his concubine/mistress, Hiranman tells her to quit the nautanki altogether. In a rare affirmation of a dancing woman's delight in public performance, Hirabai refuses, saying, "That's impossible. Acting as Laila and Gulbadan (common nautanki characters) has become an intoxication for me. What else do I have to live for other than the heady intoxication of traveling to different places, wearing finery and dancing in the spotlight?" Even as she longs for a life of simple domesticity with a man like Hiranman, she is wary of quitting the life she knows. She meets him one last time and says ruefully, "*Main bik chuki hoon, meeta*" ("I've already been sold"). As he sees her train depart, Hiranman swears to never give a company actress a ride in his bullock cart again.

As in *Kathputli*, the theatrical form of nautanki is mainly represented through Hirabai's song-and-dance sequences on stage, and is used to frame the discourse around the (theatrical and cinematic) actress. In a scene at the village fair, a group of men, including Hiranman, sit around at night chatting in a tea stall about women of the city versus those of the village that are familiar to them. Conveying a mixture of awe and fear of the city, its women, and its entertainments, one of the men says, "When you sit in the cinema theater, you can even touch the screen." They speak in wonderment about film heroines until someone says, "wait till you see our Hirabai perform at the fair tomorrow." In this setting, Hirabai is the urbane star (she is described as a woman from *paschim*/the west) while a pre-modern, traditional, "innocent" past is inscribed in the character of Hiranman. Significantly, the tradition/modernity dyad is expressed through music and dance respectively. He sings; she dances. While both are folk performers, his amateur status is

highlighted by the spontaneous, unpaid, voluntary, and collective nature of his performance while hers is rehearsed, paid, and typically presented as a solo on-stage performance designed to invite the audience's gaze. Through the contrast between these two regimes of performance – the nine song sequences in the film are nearly equally distributed between them with five song sequences sung by Hiranman and four production numbers performed by Hirabai – the film juxtaposes the modern, urban form of nautanki (conveyed primarily through a filmic version of “folk dance”) with folk music, which it constructs as the more authentic representation of the village and of tradition. Representations of folk dance in Hindi cinema are complicated by the contexts in which they occur. In films like *Mother India* (Mehboob Khan, 1957) and *Madhumati* (Bimal Roy, 1958), among scores of others, folk dance is employed as shorthand to convey rural simplicity and the innocence of characters, but these performances are also spontaneous group dances involving no monetary transaction. Conflicts arise when a folk dance and theatrical form like nautanki is depicted, with the focus on paid, public performance by a central female dancer. As seen across all four films, it is this mode of female performance, whether in the context of classical dance, theatre, folk dance, or the mujra that unsettles social and narrative structures.

3.3 THE SPACES OF THE BAI AND THE DEVI

In her discussion of the spaces occupied by the vamp and the heroine, Mazumdar notes that, “Bombay cinema evolved a unique relationship between sexuality and space” (85). In *Sadhna*, the split in female figuration is marked through the spaces of the home and the kotha and the thresholds between these. The kotha itself is split by another threshold – that between the public performance space of the kotha and Champabai's private bedroom. Earlier, prior to her

transformation into the good girl, Champabai traverses these two spaces with ease, and looks back teasingly at her lascivious male audience as she retreats into her boudoir at the end of a dance number. Once reformed, however, she revolts against and eventually completely retreats from the outer space of performance into this private space that has been turned into a spiritual sanctuary, the space of narrative numbers. Thresholds and doors spatialize the impossible movement of the bai into the realm of the devi, as Champabai says in her letter to Mohan, “*Mai jaanti hoon ki vaishya ke liye grihasti ka har darwaza band hai, lekin us darwaze ke bahar mai aapki darshan karna chahti hoon*” (“I know that the doors of domesticity are closed to a prostitute but I want to gaze upon you from outside this door”). Champabai’s invocation of the word “darshan,” which refers to the exchange of glances between the Hindu devotee and his/her god instates Mohan as her romantic and spiritual savior (much like the god Krishna who is earlier depicted as the agent of Champabai’s transformation during a narrative number that repeats the door/threshold motif, “*Ramji ke dwaar se tora manwa kyon ghabraye re*” (“Why do you hesitate at the door to the Lord Ram?”)). The film’s climax takes place, tellingly, at the threshold of the home, with Champabai’s pimp on one side and Mohan’s mother on the other, the former trying to convince her that she belongs to and weilds power in the spaces of the bazaar, the streets, the kotha, while the latter eventually capitulates and stops her from stepping out of the threshold again into those spaces of debauchery. The mother-in-law-to-be sums up the heavy-handed Hinduized reform agenda of the film: “*Tum is ghar mein bahu ban kar aayi thi, ab vaishya banke nahi ja sakti ho. Grihasti ka ghar behti ganga hai, bhagwan ka mandir hai aur mandir ke dwaar kabhi kisi ke liye band nahi hote*” (“You came into this house as a daughter-in-law, you will not step out as a prostitute. The home is like the sacred river, Ganga, it is the

temple of the gods and the doors of the temple are never closed to anyone”).⁶² Through its movement from the opening mujra production numbers in the kotha to the concluding religious bhajan in the sacred space of the home, *Sadhna* produces a schematic narrative for the establishment of the normative Hindu household with its ideal home-bound, non-dancing daughter-in-law.

In contrast to *Sadhna* and to some extent, *Kathputli*, in *Guide* and *Teesri Kasam*, the absence of a clearly-marked domestic space prefigures the impossibility of the transition of the protagonist from bai to devi. In *Guide*, Rosie moves constantly – from her mother’s house where she was not allowed to grow up for fear of imbibing courtesan culture, to Marco’s stifling mansion where she is not permitted to dance, to the Udaipur hotel where she’s abandoned by the traveling Marco, to Raju’s home where her dancing creates a rift between him and his mother, and finally to the mansion that she and Raju move into, but which remains a cold and divisive place as their unmarried, live-in arrangement prevents its transformation into a domestic haven. The stage endures as the only space where Rosie comes into her own, and indeed her two on-stage production numbers, “*Piya tose naina lage re*” and “*Mose chal kiye jaaye saiyyan beimaan*” contain the emotional expressivity of narrative numbers as she communicates her feelings to Raju through dance. Chakravarty’s observation that “The journey motif ... underscores the lack of stability and the certainty of change as endemic to courtesan culture” (280) applies to Rosie’s life but is even more accentuated in the peripatetic *Teesri Kasam*, where

⁶² As evident in *Sadhna*, *Guide*, and in a number of reformist narratives of the period, the mother-in-law figure or the hero’s mother is a key representative of “tradition” and of the domestic sphere, who tutors the heroine in subordinating her desires to the narrative requirements of the male subject, her son. In *Sadhna*, by himself, Mohan is ineffectual in recuperating Champabai’s virtue; his mother is the one to ensure Champabai’s circumscription within the space of the home. In *Guide*, because Raju’s mother leaves the home when Rosie arrives, the project of transforming Rosie from a bai to a devi remains incomplete.

Hiraman's bullock cart acts as a liminal place between domesticity and performance, between private and public space. It starts off as a vehicle for a professional woman whose work demands that she travel from place to place, acting thus as a symbol of her public and itinerant lifestyle. However, through the various poignant narrative numbers sung by Hiranman as he transports her, it becomes their shared space, a space of protection from the world, a space of dreams and fantasies. In one of the narrative numbers, a band of children run after the cart and sing to them, "*Laali laali doli mein laali re dulhaniya*" ("The bride arrives in the red bridal palanquin") while Hiranman and Hirabai imagine a life of conjugality with each other. Hirabai later tells her friend that Hiranman used to drop the cart's curtain so people could not see her, adding, "*aath aane ki ticket lekar jise poora duniya dekh sakta hai use woh chupa kar le aaya*" ("He concealed and protected the modesty of a woman that people can pay a few pennies to watch at the nautanki show"). The complexity of split female figurations, of concealment and visual availability, is reflected in the mise-en-scène of the film, which is split between the road and the fair, the spaces, respectively of Hiranman and Hirabai, narrative numbers and production numbers, folk music and folk dance.

I have selected these four films for analysis on account of their varied articulations of the home/world divide that animates the national discourse on women, particularly when the female protagonist chooses public dance performance as a career. *Sadhna* and *Guide*, for example, present two opposing relations between the private space of the home and the public space of dance performance. Where *Sadhna* brings the courtesan, Champabai, into the sacral space of the home by terminating her dancing career, *Guide* takes the bored housewife, Rosie, into the realm of worldly fame through dance. Tellingly, the former movement from the kotha to the home results in a "happy ending" of lifelong domesticity devoid of dance, while Rosie's financial

independence and fame do not bode well for the romantic relationship with Raju and she is left alone at the end of the film with only her successful dance career, which seems to be of little comfort to her. In *Kathputli*, Pushpa's sense of entrapment – of being manipulated as a puppet – between her public success and private tribulations with an insecure husband and, in *Teesri Kasam*, Hirabai's fantasies about escaping the imprisonment of the nautanki and entering a life of rural domesticity point to the anxieties evoked by the physical, financial, and emotional empowerment of professional performers and the narrative strategies designed to recuperate these figures within the normative confines of the household. Additionally, these four films cover a range of high and low art forms – classical dance, theater, nautanki, mujra – allowing in turn for an exploration of the range of discourses around dance in multiple spaces and contexts. The films suggest their moral and aesthetic alignment with high art forms like classical dance and theater in *Guide* and *Kathputli* respectively by showing appreciative, disciplined audiences comprising both men and women (the presence of the latter a clear sign of the respectability of the performance idiom) seated in auditoriums, and clapping politely at the end of the performance. *Kathputli* even features a scene in which Loknath tutors the audience into the correct mode of appreciation, explaining to them the difficulty of acting on the stage, putting up a play etc. The all-male audiences in *Sadhna* and *Teesri Kasam*, on the other hand, are disavowed as drunk, lecherous, lumpen men who reduce Champabai and Hirabai to dancing prostitutes, even as the dance forms – mujra/Kathak and nautanki/folk dance respectively – are some of Hindi cinema's favored modes of generating song-and-dance spectacle. Despite the difference in dancing contexts, the moral virtue of all four protagonists is held suspect for a considerable duration of the narrative; while Hirabai and Champabai are explicitly associated with prostitution, Rosie's devadasi lineage and Pushpa's supposed dereliction of her domestic

duties constantly call into question their claims to respectability. Finally, the films under consideration allow for a comparison between the anxiety-ridden contemporary discourses on dance and female film stardom in the film narratives and the star texts of the two dancer actresses, Vyjayanthimala and Rehman, who, with their training in classical dance and relatively scandal-free public personas represent the new ideal of the cultured Indian woman in the 1950s and 1960s.

3.4 DANCE FILMS AS WOMEN'S FILMS

In an essay on narrative structures in popular Hindi cinema of the 1950s, Vasudevan outlines the function of the female protagonist as fulfilling the various needs of the male subject, ranging from sexual gratification to the restoration of the moral order (“The Melodramatic Mode” 50). According to Vasudevan, the narrative and its agent, the hero, typically generate simple nurturing female figures, and sometimes more “active” ones like Chandramukhi, the tawaif (played by Vyjayanthimala) in *Devdas* (Bimal Roy, 1955) or Gulabo, the prostitute (played by Rehman) in *Pyaasa* (Thirst, Guru Dutt, 1957). However, these latter figures are transformed from impure denizens of the bazaar to pure-hearted caretakers through the influence of the hero (and related agents of domesticity such as his mother or family). The typical narrative mechanism of the period “allows for forbidden, transgressive spaces to be opened up – of familial conflict and aggression, of sexuality – and then closes these spaces, re-instituting a moral order” (Vasudevan, “The Melodramatic Mode” 39). Within this scheme, the woman’s function is to restore identities and normalize family relations. However, when the plot is organized around *female* desire, the inherent instability in the popular cinema’s process of

meaning-making becomes singularly pronounced as “The transgression opened up is intolerable, and the pressure to see incommunication resolved and normalcy restored is given priority” (Vasudevan, “The Melodramatic Mode” 50). It is helpful to employ and push further at Vasudevan’s narrative analysis with respect to the four “dance films” in this chapter, as they all foreground female desire, and their focus on the female protagonist’s choices and decisions instates the woman as the center of narrative attention. As discussed earlier, until the 1980s, Hindi film heroines rather than heroes were *required* to dance, which in turn impacted their visual and narrative representation. Thus, a central focus on dance in a film narrative would inevitably result in a dominant female protagonist. Additionally, since narrative explorations of film stardom were often displaced onto other media like the theatre, which in turn were represented through song-and-dance attractions, there was a general tendency to narrativize stardom through *dancing* female protagonists. Significantly, unlike the audio-visual spectacle of dance, of which the woman is constructed as the primary agent, *aural* stardom tended to be narrativized through male protagonists. There were a slew of films on classical musicians, always male, in the 1950s and 1960s, including *Baiju Bawra* (Vijay Bhatt, 1952), *Basant Bahar* (Raja Nawathe, 1956), *Kohinoor* (S. U. Sunny, 1960), and *Sangeet Samrat Tansen* (S. N. Tripathi, 1962). V. Shantaram’s *Jhanak Jhanak Payal Baje* (The Tinkling of the Anklets, 1955) featuring the classically-trained dancer and choreographer, Gopi Krishna, is one of the rare films from the period on a male dancer.

Where, in a typical male-centered narrative, what Vasudevan terms “para-narrative units,” such as song, dance, and comic sequences, create parallel pleasures to the central narrative (31), in a female-centered dance film, the para-narrative unit of the song-and-dance sequence, and in particular, the production number that explicitly invites the spectatorial gaze

upon the dancing body, deeply problematizes the work of the narrative. Of the four films, only in *Sadhna*, an avowed social reform film, is the narrative directed towards restoring normalcy and resolving incommunication between the hero's desires and the heroine's actions. As noted earlier, the two opening song-and-dance sequences in the form of the tawaif's mujra are the only production numbers in this Vyjayanthimala-starring film, while the rest are mournful lamentations about how the tawaif is a product of an unjust patriarchal society, narrative numbers devoted to resolving the dissonance produced by the earlier unabashed performance of the tawaif heroine. The "intolerable transgression" of the film's heroine lies in her pre-existing status as a tawaif, who must then be domesticized by the Sanskrit professor hero, and his pious mother who schools her in *sanskriti* (tradition), an act mirroring the sanskritization of dance forms performed by traditional dancing women like tawaifs and devadasis. Early in the film, when she first meets Mohan and his mother, the Islamicate tawaif, Champabai, takes Mohan's leave with an inadvertent *aadab* (a Muslim form of greeting with the palm raised towards the inclined head) that she quickly changes into a *namaste* (a common Hindu gesture involving pressing the palms together and bowing the head).⁶³ This gestural transformation prefigures the steady sanskritization of Champabai into Rajni, where through devotion to the god Krishna in the spiritual realm, and to the professor, Mohan (another name for Krishna) in the domestic/romantic realm, Rajni becomes a proper subject of the normative Hindu family. However, in Vyjayanthimala's film from the previous year, *Kathputli*, a blatant vehicle for the dancing star, the entire narrative is in the service of her scintillating production numbers, with only half-hearted attempts to resolve the miscommunication between Pushpa, her husband, Shivraj, and

⁶³ Though Champabai is not a Muslim in *Sadhna*, the figuration of the cinematic tawaif and the kotha is inevitably *Islamicate* as it harks back to cultural traditions in princely states like Lucknow and Awadh, governed by Muslim rulers.

her director, Loknath. A conventional resolution is tagged on in the final minutes of the film, when Shivraj returns with their daughter to embrace Pushpa back into the familial fold. However, this remains a noticeably weak attempt to neutralize inadmissible conflicts and desires, especially those of Pushpa – for public performance and for Loknath – which entirely exceed this hasty resolution.⁶⁴ The film, in its lack of dedication to the narrative demands of Indian domestic melodrama, including to heterosexual romance, reveals that its central investment is to put on display its leading lady's dancing abilities.⁶⁵ Thus, often in films starring dancer-actresses like Vyjayanthimala, the para-narrative unit of the dance number “floats free of the business of narrative” (Vasudevan, “The Melodramatic Mode” 50), refusing to be integrated into the conventional exigencies of the male-centric plot, and opening up the popular cinematic narrative to other configurations of spectatorial and performative pleasures.⁶⁶

While *Sadhna* and *Kathputli* have conventional resolutions of varying degrees of conviction, *Guide* and *Teesri Kasam* are even more radical in their flouting of conventions and

⁶⁴ The film's commitment to “distractions” such as production numbers rather than to a central heterosexual romance is suggested by the presence of only one romantic narrative number, “*Manzil wohi hai pyaar ki raahi badal gaye*” (“The destination is still love, but the travelers have changed”), which is sung by Pushpa and Loknath, seemingly to each other. The lyrics and movement vocabulary of the song suggest a budding romance between these two characters and a sidelining of Shivraj, but the film does not actively pursue this common love triangle plot, which makes the song and its placement in the narrative extremely confusing – is this merely a rehearsal for Pushpa's induction into the theater or does it convey her confusion, which we encounter only in one other scene, but is otherwise not rigorously explored? Significantly, there is no romantic narrative number between Pushpa and her puppeteer husband, a character who remains a mere placeholder for home and for the heroine's virtue.

⁶⁵ In the TV series on film dance, *Baaje Payal*, Mohan Kumar, film producer and director observes, “If we didn't exploit [sic] Vyjayanthimala in one or two dances, which is her strong point, it would be our folly.”

⁶⁶ This is especially true of Vyjayanthimala's early films such as *Bahar* (M. V. Raman, 1951), *Ladki* (M. V. Raman, 1953) *Nagin* (Nandlal Jaswantlal, 1954), *Pehli Jhalak* (M. V. Raman, 1955), *New Delhi* (Mohan Segal, 1956) etc., where, as a dancer-actress paired with non-A-list heroes, she exerted considerable authority over the narrative functions. Films in which she acted opposite the comic hero and famous singer, Kishore Kumar, are particularly interesting as these “light comedies” are dominated by the para-narrative units of music, dance, and comedy, the narrative a slender framework to showcase these principal attractions.

integrating the narrative into reassuring structures. While in both films, there is some recognition of the virtuous nature of the dancing female protagonist (which differentiates her from the vamp), the heroine remains an ambivalent figure on account of her sustained transgression, which takes the form of a continued career in dance/theater. The male subject (Raju, Hiraman) is left in a state of profound confusion and disillusionment because the female subject (Rosie, Hirabai) will not transition into the position marked for her by the narrative, signaling the impossibility of romantic heterosexual union. Raju, the agent of national-modernity, the enabler figure who encourages Rosie to pursue a career in dance regrets his abdication of the traditional role of the male subject: "I should have married you, but instead of making you goddess of my home, I decided to first make you queen of the world." These films' conclusions are thus marked by the pathos of unresolved conflicts and unfulfilled domestic desires, even as Rosie and Hirabai continue, putatively, to enjoy professional success and fame. The *Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema* notes of *Teesri Kasam*: "the sentimental story touches on the gross sexual oppression of women but in the end places its sympathies with the disillusioned Hiraman rather than with the woman" (410), pointing to the compulsive narrative urge to satisfy the desires of the male subject over all else. The third promise of the film's title refers Hiraman's resolve not to transport a bai from a nautanki company ever again in his bullock-cart, while the first two resolutions are to not cart smuggled goods and illegal bamboo, all these goods figured as illicit and corrupting of the innocent naïf. While *Sadhna*'s project of social reform is in line with the ideology of a benevolent nationalism that seeks to incorporate the margins into the mainstream (Chakravarty 304), through her refusal to be assimilated, Hirabai imperils the emotional economy of the innocent villager with his traditional scheme of domesticity, just as trade in smuggled goods threatens the national economy and its development-driving five-year plans.

Dance films or films with central, dancing female protagonists, in addition to diegetically producing women-centric narratives, and narrativizing female stardom, extra-diegetically allow for female stars to assert their agency and star power. Chakravarty notes that the courtesan film, one of the principal dance film sub-genres for showcasing an actress's dancing and acting skills: "emerges as a vehicle for the acting talents of women. Nargis, Meena Kumari, Vyjayanthimala, Suchitra Sen, and Sharmila Tagore, all top-rated actresses, took these roles at the height of their careers" (275).⁶⁷ The filmographies of dancer-actresses like Vyjayanthimala and Rehman in fact include more than one courtesan film, with Vyjayanthimala playing a courtesan in four films: *Sadhna*, *Devdas*, *Amrapali* (Lekh Tandon, 1966), and *Sunghursh* (H. S. Rawail, 1968), and an amateur or professional dancer in seven others, and Rehman playing a tawaif, dancer, or nautanki actress (filmically rendered as a variation of the tawaif) in five: *Roop Ki Rani Choron Ka Raja* (H. S. Rawail, 1961), *Mujhe Jeene Do* (Moni Bhattacharjee, 1963), *Teesri Kasam*, *Guide*, and *Namkeen* (Gulzar, 1982).⁶⁸ This intersection of female stars and dance films reveals a curious intertextuality between female film stardom in the period and cinematic narratives of public performing women. These dance films afforded prestige roles for leading actresses, as women-centric narratives with the actress as lead protagonist were scarce. So, even as the films narrativized the oppression and marginalization of the performing woman, extra-diegetically, they highlighted the ability of female film stars to draw in audiences on their own strength. Thus, we see a double narrative at work, of diegetic vulnerability and victimhood and extra-diegetic

⁶⁷ The principal sub-genres of the popular Indian dance film include those featuring: the tawaif (Muslim/Islamicate courtesan), the pre-Islamic Hindu courtesan (examples being *Chitrlekha* (Kidar Sharma, 1964) and *Amrapali* (Lekh Tandon, 1966)), the court dancer or *raj nartaki*, and the temple dancer or the devadasi.

⁶⁸ The seven films in which Vyjayanthimala plays a dancer are: *Bahar* (M. V. Raman, 1951), *Yasmin* (A. R. Kardar, 1955), *Pehli Jhalak* (M. V. Raman, 1955), *New Delhi* (Mohan Segal, 1956), *Kathputli*, *Ishaara* (K. Amarnath, 1964), and *Zindagi* (Ramanand Sagar, 1964).

power and agency. This doubling can be read into narrative structures as well, as Adrienne McLean points out in her study of labor in female performance, with a specific focus on Rita Hayworth and her song-and-dance sequences: “Taken together, the numbers do not further the story but tell a different one – one in which the women rather than men are in charge, figuratively and literally” (132). Thus, even if the endings of *Kathputli* and *Sadhna* conform to narrative structures that fulfill the male subject’s desires, the power of Vyjayanthimala’s production numbers exceeds this convention and the films remain known as “Vyjayanthimala films.” In foregrounding and celebrating song and dance, the given domain of the heroine, dance films provide us with a different paradigm of entertainment, one in which the female performer and the dance number do not remain suppressed but burst forth beyond the confines of the male-centric narrative.

While leading actresses of the period such as Nargis, Meena Kumari, and Nutan did have women-centric films especially designed to demonstrate their acting abilities, the dancer-actress wielded authorship of a different nature on account of her particular skills, which engendered a distinctive mode of performance, with altered relations between spectacle and narrative. Producer and director, J. Omprakash, for example, asserts that, “Having a dancer as an actress is great for a producer as music is much better and there is grace in the dance picturization” (Baaje Payal: Episode on Vyjayanthimala). The improvement in a film’s music as a result of it featuring a dancer-actress resonates with the concept of “dance musicalization” I propose in Chapter 1, where the dance vocabulary precedes and influences the conceptualization of the song, and often calls for enhanced rhythmic structures to accompany the dance. For example, the presence of Vyjayanthimala in a film is likely to lead to the conceptualization of folk and classical dance numbers, which in turn influence the musical compositions in the film. One could surmise, for

example, that energetic, percussion-heavy, folk music-based songs like “*Bakad bam bam baaje damru*” (“The drum goes bakad bam bam”) in *Kathputli* and “*Chad gayo paapi bichua*” (“A scorpion has climbed over me”) in *Madhumati* were composed to showcase Vyjayanthimala’s effervescent dancing skills. In some cases, films come to exist only to celebrate the skills of the dancer-actress. Lekh Tandon, director of *Amrapali*, in which Vyjayanthimala plays the eponymous Hindu courtesan, admits, “I made *Amrapali* only because of Vyjayanthimala being such a great dancer and because of the choreographer Gopi Krishna. Without them, I wouldn’t have made the film at all” (Baaje Payal: Episode on Vyjayanthimala). The film is marked with Vyjayanthimala’s authorial stamp, featuring a series of dazzling production numbers designed to show off her classical dance skills, the *raison d’être* of the film.⁶⁹ Indeed, in Hindi cinema of the 1950s and 1960s, on-screen representations of classical dance (altered of course into the popular film dance idiom) typically occurred through the courtesan film (which showcased variations of the dance form, Kathak) or through films starring Vyjayanthimala, so that the star herself defined a new cinematic sub-genre, marked by prolific production numbers, often featuring the south Indian classical dance form Bharatanatyam that she was a celebrated exponent of.⁷⁰ Reviews, like this one of *Nagin* (Nandlal Jaswantlal, 1954), reiterate that the narratives in many Vyjayanthimala films are mere placeholders for her resplendent dancing: “*Nagin*’s story seemed more like a flimsy excuse to string along a series of melodiously-composed Hemant Kumar [songs, performed] by a sinuous Vyjayanthimala. She had eight scintillating Lata solos to put

⁶⁹ It is said that the commercial failure of the film precipitated Vyjayanthimala’s decision to quit acting in films, suggesting the extent of her authorial investment in the film.

⁷⁰ Other dancer-actresses of the period whose presence in films signalled a predominance of dance numbers were the Bharatanatyam-dancing sisters, Padmini and Ragini, and Sandhya, the dancing star of many films directed by V. Shantaram. However, none of them were as popular or prolific as Vyjayanthimala.

across on screen – each was a hit” (Raheja). Clearly, *Nagin*’s attractions seem to lie in its music and dance, with mention made only of the music composer, playback singer, and dancer-actress, suggesting as well a powerful connection between the workings of these three. Indeed, music and dance were so critical to the film that “the last four songs, two reels of musical climax, were [shot] in colour” (V.A.K. Rao 32).⁷¹

The dancer-actress also authored new modes of presenting dance on the on-screen stage that was the space for many of the production numbers of the period. In the production number, “*Bakad bam bam baaje damru*” in *Kathputli*, for example, Vyjayanthimala plays a peacock heralding the rain as well as a village girl who sings and dances to the song. Both characters are seemingly on stage simultaneously, with the editing suturing the split between the two roles. In her discussion of double roles, Majumdar remarks that, “The spectacular and performative pleasures offered by the double exposure of the star body allowed a showcasing of the star’s ability to incarnate different identities” (138). Essaying the dancing roles of the girl and the peacock intensifies Vyjayanthimala’s star presence by demonstrating her mastery over the gestural vocabularies of folk as well as classical dance respectively, where intricate movements of the eyes, the face, and the body are employed to depict the peacock, while the girl employs the film folk dance vocabulary of the period with her twirling body movements, her swirling skirt etc.⁷² This doubling of dance performance is in evidence in the case of other dancer-actresses

⁷¹ One of the three choreographers of the film was Hiralal (the other two being Yogendra Desai and Sachin Shankar), who with his brother Sohanlal was brought to the Bombay film industry from Bangalore by Vyjayanthimala’s enterprising grandmother, Yadugiri Devi. Hiralal and Sohanlal became the most sought-after choreographers during these two decades, and choreographed the majority of Vyjayanthimala’s dances as well. Vyjayanthimala thus introduced a new idiom of dance not just through her own performance but through the introduction of these choreographers into the industry.

⁷² A number of Hindi films of the period with Tamil producers featured another dancer – the Bharatanatyam-trained Kamala Laxman or Kumari Kamala – who only performed one or two production numbers in the film and

like Sandhya and Padmini as well. In the production number “*Arre ja re hat natkhat*” (“Go away, you mischief-maker”) celebrating the colorful festival of Holi in *Navrang* (Nine Colors, V. Shantaram, 1959), Sandhya performs a “dancing double role” presenting a female dancer frontally with a male dancer’s costume on her back, literally turning back and forth between the two personas. The Bharatanatyam-trained Padmini plays the male and female lovers in “*Piya milan ko chali radhika*” (“Radhika goes to meet her lover”) from *Payal*, both sequences demonstrating the dancer-actresses’ facility to incarnate different roles. Films featuring dancer-actresses also often presented a variety of dance styles within the same film and often within the same number to convey both the versatility of the dancing star as well as present a pan-Indian dance idiom. In the various production numbers of *Kathputli*, Vyjayanthimala performs variations of Bharatanatyam, Kathakali, Kathak, and the generic folk dance seen in “*Bakad bam bam baaje damru.*” In *New Delhi* (Mohan Segal, 1956), as a dancer from the southern Indian state of Tamilnadu, she performs the *allaripu* item from the Bharatanatyam repertoire, a piece choreographed by the respected nattuvanar, V. S. Muthuswami Pillai, and thus bearing all the signs of south Indian classicism. Later, in the same film, she play-acts as a girl from Punjab, a north Indian state (a figuration that can be read as a double role) and sure enough, a key aspect of this role-play, when the actress in question is Vyjayanthimala, is a performance of the dance of that state, the folk dance form of Gidda. By depicting her as a south Indian Bharatanatyam dancer who can also adeptly perform the vigorous moves of Gidda, the film textually reinforces

had no extended role in the narrative. A performer of a dance “item,” like the vamp, Laxman, however, represented the opposite end of the dancing spectrum, where her high-speed dancing and famed ability to hold a pose marked the pinnacle of classical dance skills. She performs the “classical” production number “*Hai tu hi gaya mohe bhool re*” (“Oh you have forgotten me”) in *Kathputli*, and two production numbers in another Vyjayanthimala-starring film, *Parthiban Kanavu* (D. Yoganand, 1960), in addition to Bharatanatyam items in *Chori Chori* (Stealthily, Anant Thakur, 1956), *Shaadi* (Marriage, Krishnan-Panju, 1962) and *Jwala* (Flame, M. V. Raman, 1971).

its message of national integration while extra-textually hailing her as a “national” Hindi film actress, not just a “regional” south Indian one. Yet another stylistic feature of films starring dancer-actresses is the production number featuring two accomplished dancers in a “dance *jugalbandi*” or a dance-off.⁷³ Vyjayanthimala’s career includes legendary “dance *jugalbandis*” such as the one between her and the other renowned Bharatanatyam exponent, Padmini in the Tamil film, *Vanjikottai Valiban* (S. S. Vasan, 1958, also released as *Raj Tilak* in Hindi), between her character and a court dancer in *Amrapali*, and between her and Helen, the reigning vamp and performer of western dances, in *Prince* (Lekh Tandon, 1959).⁷⁴

In addition to the dance performances in a film, the presence of the dancer-actress moulds the narrative structure in numerous ways as well. The most apparent one is the predominance of production numbers that are lavishly produced spectacles designed and promoted as the primary attractions of the film. In order to accommodate these typically non-diegetic numbers (that often do not refer to diegetic events or relate to diegetic spaces), the narrative has to create diegetic situations that lead into them. This could range from scripting a character who is a performer so that stage performances are expected of her, to manipulating the diegesis in order to allow for a production number. In *Roop Ki Rani Choron Ka Raja*, where Rehman plays a tawaif-in-training, a folk dance production number, “*Tomar amar prem ri*” (“This love between you and me”) is

⁷³ A *jugalbandi*, literally meaning “entwined twins,” is a performance in Hindustani classical music between two solo musicians, vocal or instrumental.

⁷⁴ In the production number, “*Muqabla humse na karo*” from the Gopi Krishna-choreographed *Prince*, the split between the Indian heroine and the western vamp is spectacularly crystallized through dance, with Vyjayanthimala performing a series of Indian dance forms in each stanza of the song (Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kathakali) and Helen executing a slew of “western” dances including flamenco and belly dance. Tellingly, the playback singer for Vyjayanthimala is the unglamorous and sweet-voiced Lata Mangeshkar while Helen’s performance is voiced by Mangeshkar’s husky-voiced sister, Asha Bhosle. From the 1950s through the 1990s, the dulcet, high-pitched Mangeshkar was the voice of the heroine while the sultry-voiced Bhosle sang for the vamp.

staged, not only to display the actress's dancing skills but also to render her morally innocent through this performance of a communal, spontaneous folk dance rather than the *mujra* that she is being trained to do. In order to stage the production number, however, a spatial transition from the film's primary location of a ship is required, which in turn produces copious narrative manipulations. In a 1966 article in the film magazine, *Filmfare*, the writer of a piece on whether film dance is a gimmick or a necessity notes of this sequence from *Roop Ki Rani Choron Ka Raja* and production numbers from other films such as *Gehra Daag* (Deep Scar, O. P. Ralhan, 1963) and the Vyjayanthimala-starrer, *Leader* (Ram Mujherjee, 1964):

Occasionally a filmmaker wants to incorporate folk dances in his picture, but the picture deals with city life. So the story is suitably twisted, with the main characters visiting a village.... Such twists and turns of the story are not justifiable – they are surely too high a price to pay just to get in a dance sequence. (Shankar 25)

The writer's perception of a scintillating production number as "too high a price to pay" for narrative interruption reveals much about his single-minded allegiance to narrative events but little about the enormous popularity of precisely these numbers, which, in many cases continue to constitute the cultural memory of these films. Additionally, in films featuring dancer-actresses there is frequently a reduction and postponement of narrative numbers, to mark the difference between this category of actresses and those not very proficient in dancing. We have already seen how *Kathputli* and *Sadhna* have only a single romantic narrative number each, since the film's primary investment is in the dancing heroine's production numbers. True as well of films starring dancer-actresses like Padmini and Ragini, such as *Payal* and *Awara Badal* (Wandering Cloud, B. R. Ishara, 1964) respectively, this redistribution of production and narrative numbers suggests an altered construction of the narrative structure, the diegetic romance, and the

spectatorial gaze. The dance film is also known to confer prime narrative relevance to production numbers, especially when they are placed at the climax of the film, their spectacular energies employed as a ruse for deceiving the villain/s, thus anointing the dancing heroine as the agent of action. From Sadhona Bose's final dagger dance in *Alibaba* (Modhu Bose, 1937), the spectacular drum dance climax in *Chandralekha* (S. S. Vasan, 1948), Ragini's ingeniously wily final production number, "*Parwaney teri shama jal uthi*" ("Moth, your flame is afire") in *Awara Badal* to Vyjayanthimala's dizzying dance number, "*Hothon pe aisi baat*" ("These secrets I've kept to myself") in *Jewel Thief* (Vijay Anand, 1967), the dancing heroine displaces the hero as the instrument of narrative resolution and employs her mesmerizing allure to hypnotize the villain/s. The very gaze she invites upon her dancing body causes the downfall of her rapt audience. These examples serve to underscore how, in the 1950s and 1960s, the spectacle of music and dance drive technological changes (only song-and-dance sequences being shot in color, for example), production innovations (cinematography, makeup and costume, sets and props, editing), the significance of certain industry personnel (music composers, playback singers, choreographers), and the very scripting and assembly of the cinematic narrative. The dancer-actress is a pivotal figure in choreographing these changes and fashioning new regimes of female representation.

3.5 SPLITTING OF BODIES AND NAMES

Since dancer-actresses demand the scripting of a role that will put on display their dancing abilities, their characters often exceed the standard role of romantic heroine, mother, and wife, whose performative repertoire is meant to be circumscribed to song sequences and narrative

numbers at the most. The movement vocabulary of the production number does not have a place within the domestic melodrama, when performed by the female protagonist. The professional performer is a diegetic construction that responds to the need to showcase the dancer-actress's skills, but since the discourse around public dancing has historically been fraught, this produces a different kind of melodramatic narrative. Chakravarty's observation of the courtesan film: "The normal world and its values are overturned in the courtesan film, primarily definitions of "home"" (275) is applicable across a variety of dance films, and this overturning provokes the narrative strategy of the splitting of performing bodies, spaces, names, histories, and performative regimes. During the 1950s and 1960s, vamps played by Helen, Cuckoo, Nadira, Kuldip Kaur and others allowed for the splitting and neat distribution of virtue and vice between vamp and heroine that could be understood by way of moral binaries like east/west, tradition/modernity, wife/whore (Basu, A. 146, Mazumdar 84). This split was signaled through the names of the characters, their demeanor, movement vocabulary and costume, and the spaces they inhabited. In a classic example of this system of splits, *Shri 420* (Raj Kapoor, 1955) pits Nadira's vamp, Maya (one of the meanings of this Sanskrit word is the enticement of illusion) against Nargis's heroine, Vidya (the Sanskrit word for knowledge). Maya dances, in her backless, sequined gowns in public production numbers, while the cotton sari-clad Vidya's narrative numbers occur only in the private realm of romance. In the dance films analyzed in this chapter, however, the dancer-actress herself generates the spectacle of the production number, obviating the need for a vamp. Even if these heroine-led production numbers are never as bold and brazen as those of the vamp (a transition that occurs only in the 1990s, as discussed in Chapter 4), the characterization of the heroine as a public dancing woman necessitates recuperative narrative strategies. As an economically-independent public dancer, the dance film

heroine is herself split along the axis of wife/whore, and tradition/modernity. The national-cinematic project of constructing the ideal woman thus needs to be executed within one body, split between the polarized professions of dancer and housewife. While in the tragic courtesan film of the 1970s and 1980s, such as *Umrao Jaan* (Muzaffar Ali, 1981) and *Muqaddar ka Sikandar* (King of Fate, Prakash Mehra, 1978), “the conflict generated between desire for the courtesan and duty towards the family and the woman of the home ... can only be resolved with the rejection of the courtesan” (Allen and Bhaskar 20), the films under consideration from the 1950s and 1960s represent variations of the national-bourgeois project to transform the tawaif or professional dancer into a non-dancing wife, representing thus a rejection of the courtesanal profession but not of the courtesan herself who must be recuperated into society (and into the narrative by quitting her performance in production numbers).⁷⁵ In her discussion of the “guilty pleasures” of female performance in popular Hindi cinema, Majumdar cites a scene from *Jagte Raho* (Stay Awake, Amit Maitra, Shombu Mitra, 1956) depicting a drunk and lecherous man leering at a dancing woman – his wife imagined as a courtesan – and observes that “the only way to legitimize the viewer’s pleasure in this song and dance performance is to provide the good wife with an imagined double, with both roles played by the same actress” (14). This frequent trope of doubling, in which the good wife engages in role-play as the vamp is necessarily a temporary transformation, maintaining thus the foundational heroine-vamp divide that buttresses

⁷⁵ A narrative variation on this split is the double role, where an actress plays out the good girl/bad girl binary through two roles. For example, in *Anhonee* (K. A. Abbas, 1952), Nargis plays the courtesan, Mohini, and her good sister, Roop (the names signifying “seductress” and “beauty” respectively), while in *Raat aur Din* (Satyen Bose, 1967), she plays the schizophrenic housewife Varuna, whose alter ego, Peggy, is a bar dancer by night. In *Mausam* (Gulzar, 1976), the actress, Sharmila Tagore, plays an innocent village girl, Chanda, and her courtesan daughter, Kajli. In Chapter 4, I discuss the splitting of good dancing and bad dancing and hence virtue and immorality in *Sangeet* (K. Vishwanath, 1992), where Madhuri Dixit plays the classical dance-trained Nirmala and her daughter, the nautanki performer, Sangeeta.

gendered constructions of ideal citizenry.⁷⁶ In films featuring dancer protagonists however, the performativity of gender roles is highlighted by the professional dancer sometimes temporarily role-playing as the wife and at other times, being force-fitted into the mould of the ideal wife. Here, the dancer, the *bai*, is the protagonist, in a complicated relationship marked by desire and anxiety, with the figure of the good wife, the *devi*. The four films in this chapter demonstrate varying degrees of commitment to charting the transition from the *bai* to the *devi*, while the viewer's pleasure in the heroine's dance numbers is legitimized by the reform-driven promise of her character eventually giving up dance and being integrated into the family structure.

Sadhna's Champabai is the most conspicuous embodiment of this split through her role-play as the daughter-in-law-to-be, Rajni. In a scene that underscores the performativity of ideal Indian womanhood, and its construction through clothing, gestures, and behavior, we see Jivan, Mohan's conniving friend, bring Champabai to Mohan's house. As the courtesan crosses the domestic threshold, Jivan hastily covers her head with the end of her sari, a mark of domesticity and respectability in North India. Champabai, who as discussed earlier, replaces her Islamicate gesture of the *aadab* to Mohan with the Hindu *namaste*, yanks the sari off her head as soon as she crosses the threshold on her way out. This threshold marks the dividing line between the Islamicate world of the bazaar and the sanctified space of the Hindu household that has no place for dance. The performative aspects of different models of femininity are even more strikingly emphasized when Champabai wears the bridal sari and jewellery given by Mohan's mother in

⁷⁶ This is in evidence also, for example, in *Sangam* (Raj Kapoor, 1964), when the heroine (played by Vyjayanthimala) breaks out of character to perform a cabaret number, "*Main kya karoon Ram, mujhe buddha mil gaya*" ("What am I to do, Ram, I married an old fogie"). See Chapter 1 for a discussion of this song-and-dance sequence. The wife-dancer doubling forms the narrative foundation of V. Shantaram's *Navrang* (1959), in which the poet protagonist imagines his rustic wife as a seductive dancer in a sustained doubling that comes to threaten his marriage. The doubling allows for the staging of spectacular production numbers without the narrative conflicts generated in the films discussed in this chapter.

the kotha for a dance performance. Her non-ironic masquerade is met with raucous laughter from her customers who jeeringly call out to her as *gunwanti* (cultured woman), *dulhan* (bride), *devi* (goddess/respectable woman). While the bridal finery acts as a citation of respectable femininity, the sound of the dancer's anklets on Champabai's feet and her swaying gait reveal this as performance. Champabai runs back into her room, the stripping of her masquerade making traumatically explicit to her the irreconcilable split between the bai and the devi. She comes out in her tawaif's costume with her dancer's anklets in hand. The men, however, demand to see a "bridal dance": "*aaj toh kulwanti ka naach hoga*" ("today, we'll see a cultured woman's dance"), they say, to which she retorts bitterly, "*Kulwanti ka naach dekhna hai toh apne ghar jao, apne ma behnon ke paas jao. Main tawaif hoon, vaishya hoon*" ("If you want to see a cultured woman's dance, then go home to your mothers and sisters. I'm a tawaif, a prostitute"). She closes this statement reflecting the intolerable fragmentation of female identities by throwing her dancer's anklets on a mirror, shattering forever her image as a tawaif. She never dances again in the film.

This trope of the tawaif's bridal masquerade occurs repeatedly in films of the period, meant within the narratives to be a tragic comment on the inaccessibility of domestic bliss for these women, but suggesting as well the constructedness and performativity of the naturalized role for the woman as wife, daughter-in-law, and mother. In *Roop Ki Rani Choron Ka Raja*, the hero Chagan (Dev Anand) remarks to the tawaif-in-training, Roop (Waheeda Rehman) whose forehead has accidentally been smeared with *sindoor* (bridal vermilion) "*Jis roop ko bazaar ki raunak bankar ek din murjhana hai suhaag ka anmol taaj pehenke kitna khil utha hai woh*" ("Look how the beauty that has to grace the bazaar/the flesh trade and wilt away is resplendent with the greatest of jewels, the bridal vermilion on her forehead"). This facile anointing with

respectability by the male protagonist gets critically interrogated when the cinematic tawaif herself undertakes a masquerade. In *Sunghursh*, released ten years after *Sadhna*, Vyjayanthimala's tawaif character Laila-e-Aasman dresses up, once again, as a bride before her customer and comments sardonically, "*Kisi unche Hindu gharane ki bahu lagti hun na*" ("I look like the daughter-in-law of some upper-caste Hindu household, don't I?"). Hirabai of *Teesri Kasam* exposes the naturalization of domesticity when she tells Hiranman, with a combination of ruefulness and determination, "*Stage par ek do ghante ka naach karna aasan hai par zindagi bhar Sati Savitri ka naatak karna mujhse nahi hoga. Laila ka part karnewali Laila banane chali thi*" ("It's easy to dance for a few hours on stage but I cannot play the role of a dedicated housewife for the rest of my life. I played the romantic role of Laila on stage and thought I could play it in life as well"). The terms, "masquerade" and "performativity" have been employed in feminist film studies and critical theory to discuss performance and reception. Building on Joan Riviere's discussion of masquerade as involving the donning of a mask of femininity by women who find themselves in a masculine position of authority, Mary Ann Doane argues that masquerade "constitutes an acknowledgment that it is femininity itself which is constructed as mask" (25), and that "the mask is all there is" (37). This theory of the masquerade combined with Judith Butler's theorization of performativity, where gender is enacted through a set of discontinuous and parodic performances, enables a reading of the economically-empowered Hirabai and Champabai's stage and kotha performances and their exposure of the binary constructions of femininity as an unmasking of the normative operations of gender performativity. While in the social reform mode, Champabai desires and dons the mask of domestic femininity, Hirabai's is the rare case of the acknowledgment and rejection of the mask. Chakravarty discusses the courtesan, who is inscribed with contradictory social meanings of

attachment and alienation, as a masquerading and liminal figure, “an impersonation writ large – culturally, individually, sexually” (288). The courtesan’s impersonation, as seen in the examples above, allows for a play on questions of identity and difference, allowing, as Chakravarty points out, for the interrogation of cultural assumptions about sexuality and social mores (280).

The public performer’s impersonation as well as the genre’s drive towards her social and psychic transformation involves a process of renaming. The Hindu/Christian overtones in the names Nalini/Rosie (Raju pacifies his indignant mother that Rosie is not Christian, but that that’s only her “pet name”), the insinuations of innocence and corruption in Rajni/Champabai, Munni/Laila-e-Aasman, Pakeezah/Sahibjan, or Hiranman/Hirabai,⁷⁷ the professional requirement for the female performer to be unmarried and hence Pushpa’s stage name being retained as Miss. Pushpa even after she is married, or the difference between the steady flame of Jyoti, the domestic Rehman character who has quit the nautanki and her stage name of Jugni (firefly, vivid but unsteady light) in *Namkeen* all exemplify the multiple splits along religion, caste, profession, and respectability.⁷⁸ Needless to say, the cinematic vamp has no name other than her stage name (if she is even accorded that). Since she has no place in the melodrama of marriage, and is purely a figure of spectacle, not of the narrative, she does not require to be named. “As both a

⁷⁷ The courtesan Sahibjan is renamed Pakeezah (the pure one) by the hero, Salim, in *Pakeezah* (The Pure One, Kamal Amrohi, 1972), where *jan*, like *bai*, is a suffix for a public performer in North India. In *Teesri Kasam*, while Hirabai calls Hiranman her “*meeta*” because they share the same name, Hira (diamond), the suffix *bai* lends her name the commercial character of the bazaar, i.e. she is a diamond among courtesans, a shiny, decorative object for sale, while “Hiranman” signals the character’s innocence, referring as it does to a mind as clear and pure as a diamond.

⁷⁸ The re-christening is often undertaken by a male character, whether it is the according of the stage name (Raju comes up with the stage name, Nalini) or the domestic alias (Jivan names Champabai Rajni). The names are not to be mixed up as they exhume shameful pasts and histories. In *Sunghursh*, for example, the Vyjayanthimala character beseeches her lover, Kundan (Dilip Kumar) to call her Munni and not Laila, for “*Laila toh ek nachnewali ka naam tha aur main usko bhoolna chahti hoon*” (“Laila was the name of a dancing girl and I want to forget her”).

threatened and threatening icon of cultural (in)difference, the figure of the courtesan allows us to explore the psychosexual dimension of the Indian national imaginary,” observes Chakravarty (272). The popular cinematic imagination reflects the contradictions embodied in the figure of the public performer through its own conflicting drives between narrative and spectacle. The female public performer is a vital figure in the analysis of socio-cinematic figurations because her enactment of conventional female roles of seductress and domestic goddess on stage or in the kotha rips open the illusion of the cohesion and fixity of these roles and in fact their very binaryness. Indeed, the doubling and splitting of female characters can be read as part of the struggle to restrain the terrifying slippage between these roles.

3.6 MANAGEMENT OF SPLITS THROUGH STAR TEXTS

“Women can,” as Basu points out, in the feudal family romance, the predominant Hindi film genre of the 1950s and 1960s, “always be objects of desire, but it is the picture of the desiring woman that must be banned” (145). In considering the desires and transgressions of the four dancing protagonists in this chapter, factors such as genre and star texts must be taken into account. The heroines’ transgressions in *Guide* and *Teesri Kasam*, for example, are partly permitted by the generic modes of these two films. Where *Sadhna* and *Kathputli* were designed for a mass audience, *Teesri Kasam* is based on a famed literary work, shot in black and white (not a common choice in mainstream Hindi cinema by the late 1960s) by Subroto Mitra, Satyajit Ray’s favored cinematographer, and produced by the poet and lyricist, Shailendra, a member of the leftist Indian People’s Theater Association. The film was a commercial flop. *Guide* is also a literary adaptation, and even though the film version altered the novel’s ending to a “happier”

one, the film diverges quite strongly from mainstream narrative trajectories in that the hero dies, leaving behind a financially-independent and successful dancer-heroine. Rehman's particular star text allows, in no small measure, for the acceptance of ambivalent and transgressive characters like Rosie and Hirabai even by a mainstream audience (*Guide* was a resounding commercial hit). Routinely described as "graceful" and "dignified," much-admired qualities in the proper Indian woman, Rehman had an off-screen image that was relatively unsullied by scandal (except for a rumored liaison with the married director, Guru Dutt, which on account of his untimely death, was tinged more with tragedy than disgrace). Majumdar discusses how in the case of an actress like Nargis (popular from the late 1940s to the late 1950s, when she quit her acting career), whose star text was marked by her courtesan lineage and her extended relationship with the married director and her regular co-star, Raj Kapoor, her roles in films like *Anhonee* (K. A. Abbas, 1952) were employed to "manage, contain, and morally clarify the disparate and contradictory knowledge that constituted the Nargis star persona at the time of the film's release" (171). Rehman, daughter of a district commissioner, trained in Bharatanatyam under respected gurus like Tirachandoor Meenaxi Sundaram Pillai, famous for her refusal, while signing her first acting contract at the age of sixteen, to change her name (unlike other Muslim actresses like Nargis, Madhubala, and Meena Kumari) or wear revealing costumes, was seen as indubitably respectable (Kabir 12-13). Her "clean" star text obviated the need for authentication on screen, and in fact acted as a compass for the moral legibility of her on-screen characters that in turn took the liberty of complicating standard assumptions about female virtue. In her Hindi cinema debut in the film *C.I.D.* (Raj Khosla, 1956), for example, her character, Kamini, a gangster's moll, is recuperated from the moral condemnation reserved for the vamp when we learn that she was brought from an orphanage into the world of crime and that she hates her involvement in

this business. The vamp with her heart in the right place then proceeds to assist the hero in busting the criminal operations she is a part of. In her next film, *Pyasa*, Rehman similarly plays a prostitute with a heart of gold, a force of moral rectitude in a corrupted world. These roles that establish the “inherent goodness” of Rehman’s characters irrespective of their professions, as well as her off-screen reputation counterbalance the disturbance and disquiet wrought by complex characters like Rosie and Hirabai, those rare Hindi film heroines of the 1950s and 1960s who choose career over domesticity, profession over romance.

The status of dance itself in the 1950s and 1960s had undergone a significant shift from the earlier decades. Dancer-actresses like Rehman and Vyjayanthimala were part of a second generation of non-devadasi women trained in classical dance, which by then had gained a good measure of middle-class respectability through the efforts of Rukmini Devi Arundale’s dance school: the Kalakshetra Foundation, the Sangeet Natak Akademi and other cultural institutions. Both actresses were trained by respected Bharatanatyam gurus, with Vyjayanthimala’s dancing being especially lauded in India and abroad. She learned Bharatanatyam from the age of eight under the tutelage of Guru Vazhuvoor Ramiah Pillai, and then Guru Dandayudapani Pillai from the lineage of the famed Thanjavur school of dance. It was at one of her Bharatanatyam recitals that A. V. Meiyappa Chettiar, founder of the south Indian film studio, AVM Productions, and the film director M. V. Raman saw her and approached her for her first film role in *Vazhkai* (Life, A. V. Meiyappa Chettiar, 1949). In her autobiography, the dancing star recounts, “The sole demand in this maiden film was my skill as a dancer. The whole script revolved around dancing, and there were four dance sequences, both classical and folk” (Bali and Sabharwal 39). The film was simultaneously released in Telugu as *Jeevitham* and remade in Hindi as *Bahar* (M. V. Raman,

1951). In various interviews and in her autobiography, Vyjayanthimala credits herself with the introduction of classical dance into Hindi cinema:

Bahar took the entire North by storm... The audience here had not seen those kinds of gestures, expressions, *mudras* [hand and facial gestures], and graceful movements with classical or folk touch ... This film became a trendsetter paving the way for dance with a definitive form in Hindi cinema. Until then, by and large, it seemed to connote some westernized shake-shake, or wriggling of the hips. (Bali and Sabharwal 45)

While earlier dancer-actresses like Sadhona Bose, Sitara, and Leela Desai had introduced elements of east and north Indian classical dances such as Manipuri and Kathak into Hindi film dance, Vyjayanthimala's Bharatanatyam-inflected dance idiom did indeed become the definitive representation of the south Indian classical dance form in Hindi cinema, and she came to be known as the "southern sensation with twinkle toes" (Janaki 10). Through her film career and later, continuing to the present day, Vyjayanthimala continued a parallel professional career in Bharatanatyam dance, which distinctly influenced her cinematic star text. Anecdotes of her rigorous Bharatanatyam training with Guru Dandayudapani Pillai even through hectic shooting schedules in Bombay, when she would return from film shoots at 8PM and then practice Bharatanatyam until 4AM reinforce the image of a dedicated classical dancer who happened to work in popular cinema as well (Janaki 17). Indeed, Vyjayanthimala assiduously maintained that her classical dance repertoire had nothing to do with her film dance vocabulary: "Dance influenced my films a great deal, but my films had nothing to do off-stage ... I was very careful that no shades of film movements should creep into my Bharatanatyam" (Janaki 10). Praised by Bharatanatyam scholar, C. V. Chandrashekar as "a hardcore traditionalist, avoiding dilution, modernity and experimentation" (Janaki 18), Vyjayanthimala, through her diligent separation of

film dance and Bharatanatyam embodied the intractable hierarchies between the popular and the classical. “My stage audiences never expected me to bring film dance into these performances. That’s the reason even today they respect me as a classical dancer. They don’t associate me with films,” she reasons in the television series, *Baaje Payal*, continuing that she has the best of both worlds: “It is God’s grace that I have mass adulation from film audiences and critics’ appreciation for my classical dance” (Baaje Payal: Episode on Vyjayanthimala). While orthodox journals on classical music and dance hail Vyjayanthimala’s classical dancer avatar – “Bharatanatyam has little place for movements of the torso or the hips; and this is fully endorsed in her dance” (Vijayaraghavan 31) – film directors like Lekh Tandon apologize for the corruption of this classical vocabulary in film dance: “Filmi movements are brought in for the mass audience. Stage audiences have taste, knowledge, and understanding, which film audiences do not have” (Baaje Payal: Episode on Vyjayanthimala).

Through her classical dance training, Vyjayanthimala came to be considered an icon of national culture, winning prestigious national awards such as the Padma Shri in 1968, the Sangeet Natak Akademi award in 1982, and numerous awards in the field of classical dance, including Nritya Shiromani, Natyakala Sikhamani, Nritya Nirupama Visharad, and Nritya Ratnakara. Her status as a national cultural icon was further cemented when she became the first classical dancer to be voted in as a member of the Indian parliament in 1984. She performed Bharatanatyam recitals before dignitaries such as the Indian president, S. Radhakrishnan, prime ministers, Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi, Queen Elizabeth II, and American president Dwight Eisenhower, and was the first Indian dancer to be invited to perform at the United Nations’ 20th anniversary celebrations in 1969 (“A Life dedicated to Dance” 5). In 1959, after a performance at the Sarah Bernhardt Theatre in Paris for UNESCO, an article in the French

newspaper, *La Revolution*, declared: “This diamond-decked goddess of Indian dance finds Paris at her feet” (qtd. in “A Life dedicated to Dance” 11). The goddess imagery permeated Vyjayanthimala’s cinematic star text as well in that her employment of Bharatanatyam’s movement vocabulary and costume functioned as a visual stand-in for “tradition,” which as Tapati Guha Thakurta has argued in her reading of the paintings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century artist, Raja Ravi Varma, comes to be located in certain iconic images of Indian womanhood. Varma’s iconography of romantic, classical “nayikas” (heroines in different moods) “became the main site on which the artist (and his critics) negotiated and reconstructed notions of the ‘mythic’ and ‘sacred’ of ‘tradition’ and a new national ethos” (Guha Thakurta 94). The *Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema* describes Vyjayanthimala’s films as always including a “mandatory dance sequence evoking “classical art” associations... This pseudo-classical style ... is a filmic equivalent of calendar art’s version of Ajanta murals and Tanjore glass paintings, taking over the icon of the large-hipped full-bosomed beauty developed by Ravi Varma” (238). Himself a leading figure in the development of calendar art in India, Varma’s rendition of the Indian woman in his paintings and widely-circulated prints combined an Orientalist vision with the concerns of Indian nationalism, where “culture” and “tradition” are located in a new “national” iconography of images of women and mythic heroines as ideal national prototypes (Guha Thakurta 94). With an image markedly imbricated in popular Hindu iconography and her training in Bharatanatyam (predominantly practiced by Hindu devadasis prior to its gentrification), it is no accident that Vyjayanthimala’s filmography includes a number of costume dramas or historicals set in a distinctly Hindu past or that all her on-screen characters

have always been Hindu (even her Islamicate tawaifs in *Sadhna* and *Sunghursh* are recuperated as Hindu in their domestic avatars as Rajni and Munni respectively).⁷⁹

In contrast to Vyjayanthimala's Tamil Brahmin roots, Rehman came from a Tamil Muslim family, and tellingly, though she was trained in Bharatanatyam as well, her star text did not carry the same "classical" connotations. She recounts that when, as a fifteen year old, she and her sister performed a Bharatanatyam recital before the distinguished politician, C. Rajagopalachari, he commented, "it's surprising how good your Bharatanatyam *abhinaya* [facial expression] is despite you being Muslim girls" (Baaje Payal: Episode on Waheeda Rehman). Her dance guru, Tiruchandur Meenaxi Sundaram Pillai, initially refused to teach her because she was a Muslim girl. She quotes him as saying, "She won't be able to express our *varnams* [musical compositions]. How will she do *abhinaya*" (Baaje Payal: Episode on Waheeda Rehman)? Even though Rehman debuted as a dancer and not an actress in the Telugu film, *Rojulu Marayi* (Tapi Chanakya, 1955) followed by dancing-only roles in *Jayasimha* (D. Yoganand, 1955) and *Alibabavum 40 Thirudargalum* (T. R. Sundaram, 1956), her initial career in the Hindi film industry was dominated by dramatic roles featuring narrative rather than production numbers. Her *abhinaya* or facial expressions were always praised, as for example, when the director, Guru Dutt, commented on her performance in the song "*Jaane kya tune kahi*" ("I wonder what you said") in his film, *Pyasa*: "She did the song well because she is a dancer. She knows how to give silent expressions" (Kabir 38). Rehman recollects that, "Because *Pyasa* was such a serious,

⁷⁹ Some of the costume dramas and historicals featuring Vyjayanthimala include *Raj Tilak*, *Parthiban Kanavu*, *Baghdad Thirudan* (T. P. Sundaram, 1960), *Irumputhirai* (S. S. Vasan, 1960), *Chittoor Rani Padmini* (Narayana Murthy, 1963), and *Amrapali*. Her costume in *Amrapali* (in which she plays the eponymous Hindu courtesan) came to be the default Bharatanatyam or sometimes even "classical dance" costume in Hindi film dance and is in fact known as the Amrapali costume. The costume designer of the film, Bhanu Athaiya, reportedly studied the paintings at the Buddhist Ajanta caves, where the film itself was later launched, all of this bolstering the classicist claims of the film (Narayanan).

dramatic role, people thought of me only as an actress and not a dancer and for a long time I didn't get dancing roles" (Baaje Payal: Episode on Waheeda Rehman). Indeed, not until the sixties, well into her acting career did Rehman play a dancer-protagonist in films like *Roop ki Rani Choron ka Raja*, *Guide*, *Teesri Kasam*, and *Mujhe Jeene Do*. Vijay Anand, director of *Guide* remarks, "Waheeda Rehman had a grace in her demeanor that only a dancer could have. But the world and she herself had forgotten that she was a dancer. I realized she needed a role of a dancer and hence *Guide*" (Baaje Payal: Episode on Waheeda Rehman). As with Dutt's comment on Rehman's expressive abilities, once again, her dancing skills are translated into abstract qualities such as "grace," which also resulted, one could argue, in the predominance of song sequences and narrative numbers in films like *Guide* and *Teesri Kasam*, unlike the strong authorial presence of dance numbers in Vyjayanthimala's films.⁸⁰ While her skills as a dancer are not as refined as Vyjayanthimala's (who continues to be a stage performer of Bharatanatyam, while Rehman stopped performing Bharatanatyam once she started acting in films at the age of sixteen), Rehman's star text was also inflected differently on account of her religious background and her greater acclaim as an actress than a dancer. "Many people didn't know that I am a trained dancer because they felt I didn't behave like one," she remarks in an interview (A. Kumar), suggesting that the cultural iconicity of a classical dancer, especially a proponent of Bharatanatyam, did not accommodate an actress of Muslim lineage, who spoke Urdu, and did not conform to the physical appearance of a Hindu goddess.

⁸⁰ Unlike Rehman, who mainly worked with film choreographers like Hiralal and Sohanlal, many of Vyjayanthimala's "classical" production numbers were choreographed by Bharatanatyam gurus such as Muthuswami Pillai (*New Delhi* and *Piya Milan* (T. R. Raghunath, 1958)) and Dandayudhapani Pillai (who choreographed the sequence, "Oonchi oonchi dukan" in *Pehli Jhalak*).

Vyjayanthimala faced another kind of prejudice though, as a dancer-actress. The first four years of her acting career in the Hindi film industry were dominated by dance films, which earned her a reputation as mainly a dancer with meager acting abilities. Only in 1955, when the director Bimal Roy cast her in the role of the courtesan, Chandramukhi, did she come to be taken seriously as an actress, which was reflected in her nomination for the Best Supporting Actress award category at the popular Filmfare Awards.⁸¹ *Devdas* has commonly been marked as a defining moment for the actress: “For Vyjayantimala, the character marked a turning point from glamour to pure histrionics, offering her scope to explore her potential as a dramatic actress without taking away from her, the most outstanding gift she brought to cinema – her dance” (Bali). The film marks her transformation from dancer to actress within and without the diegesis. In the diegesis, the tawaif Chandramukhi gives up dancing and becomes a *jogan* (female devotee), devoted to one man, while extra-textually, the award nomination, the opportunity to work with a respected Hindi film director, and with an A-list hero like Dilip Kumar “elevated” Vyjayanthimala from a dancer of south Indian origins to a national star with pan-Indian appeal. A feature on the actress in the popular film magazine, *Star and Style*, commented on this transition: “In the wake of “Devdas” came films like “Naya Daur,” “Sadhana,” “Madhumati” and “Paigham” rounding out Portrait No. 2 as the heroine who could no longer be shrugged off casually as a “dancing star” (5). Not surprisingly, Vyjayanthimala’s three ensuing Filmfare Best Actress awards were for *Sadhna*, *Gunga Jumna* (Nitin Bose, 1962), and *Sangam* (Union, Raj Kapoor, 1965), all three films highlighting her “serious” acting abilities rather than her trademark production numbers. This trade-off also meant, however, that her authorial control

⁸¹ Vyjayanthimala refused to accept this award as she maintained that hers was not a supporting role but as important to the narrative as that of the other female character, Paro.

over the narrative (through production numbers, as discussed earlier) was diminished, as her performative repertoire was subsumed into the conventional narrative trajectory of the male-centric film (for example, *Gunga Jumna* and *Sangam*). She was never quite as luminously in charge (as in her early dance films such as *Ladki*, *Nagin*, *New Delhi*, *Madhumati*, *Kathputli* etc.) once the jouissance of her dancing body was circumscribed by the mandate of narratives driven by the hero's goals.

3.7 CONCLUSION

An analysis of dance films and dancer-actresses in the 1950s and 1960s reveals the sustained but constantly reworked tensions between public performance and constructions of ideal femininity. While the films under consideration articulate continuing anxieties about the participation of the heroine in the public sphere through dance, the star texts of dancer-actresses like Vyjayanthimala and Waheeda Rehman serve to cleanse the image of the dancing woman, and thus of the female film star. Through the participation of various cultural figures and institutions, the gentrification of classical dance begun in the 1930s and 1940s had been achieved to a great degree by the 1950s. The marginalization of traditional female performers had served to destigmatize public dance performance by upper-class and -caste women and even allowed for their promotion as ideal national-cultural bodies. When classically-trained dancers entered the film industry, they authored new cinematic narratives as well as altered star texts and performance repertoires:

Among the actresses who came to the fore in the fifties were some good classical dancers – Vyjayanthimala, Padmini and Waheeda Rehman... One good resulted from this “elevation” of the dance from the vamp to the heroine – its quality improved and it began

to be taken seriously. With a few exceptions, the dance in films is now less vulgar (as leading ladies perhaps are reluctant to perform provocative cabaret numbers). (Shankar 23-24)

The project of securing respectability – for public performance by women – that defined much of India’s discourse around dancing and film-acting through the first half of the twentieth century is narrativized in the dance films of the period and in the star texts constructed by Vyjayanthimala and Waheeda Rehman, the interaction between the narratives and the star texts underscoring new oscillations between disrepute and esteem, censure and veneration.

4.0 STARDOM *KE PEECHE KYA HAI*: MADHURI DIXIT AND THE NEGOTIATION OF THE HEROINE-VAMP DIVIDE IN NINETIES' HINDI CINEMA ⁸²

Chandan Arora's 2003 film, *Main Madhuri Dixit Banna Chahti Hoon!* (I Want to Be Madhuri Dixit!), opens with an empty stage above which we see the banner "*Akhil Bharatiya Sarvajanic Ramlila Samiti*" (All-India Ramlila Committee), suggesting that we will witness a Ramlila performance in which, typically, the Ramayana epic is enacted through dialog, songs, and dance. What we see instead is a *filmi*⁸³ entertainment with a young woman, Chutki (Antara Mali), dancing to the popular Hindi film song from the 1980s, "*Ek do teen*" ("One two three," *Tezaab/Acid*, N. Chandra, 1988). A painted backdrop featuring skyscrapers stands in for Bombay, the metropolitan capital of the Hindi film industry, distant geographically and in many other ways from Gajraula, the small North Indian town where this part of the film is set. As the audience – composed entirely of men – cheers on, Chutki dances to two more songs: "*Hum ko aaj kal hai intezaar, koi aaye leke pyaar*" ("I yearn for the one who will bring me love") from the film, *Sailaab* (Flood, Deepak Balraj Vij, 1990), and "*Choli ke peechhe kya hai?*" ("What is

⁸² Translated from Hindi as "What is behind the stardom?" to indicate this chapter's interrogation of the role of film dance in female stardom, and an allusion as well to Madhuri Dixit's controversial song-and-dance sequence, "*Choli ke peechhe kya hai?*" ("What is behind/inside your blouse?") from the film, *Khalnayak* (Villain, Subhash Ghai, 1993).

⁸³ "*Filmi*" is the Hindi vernacular for acting or dancing that is typical of Hindi films. I specifically use "filmi dance" to refer to the dancing in Hindi films that is marked by a hybridity of gestures and movement vocabularies taken from classical dances, folk dances, and transnational dance forms.

behind/inside your blouse?”) from *Khalnayak* (Villain, Subhash Ghai, 1993). As indicated by the film’s title, and as immediately recognizable to anyone familiar with the Indian mediascape, Chutki dances to three popular song-and-dance sequences originally featuring the leading Hindi film actress of the late 1980s and the 1990s, Madhuri Dixit. The film utilizes the figure of Dixit as a symbol in narrating the story of Chutki’s small-town aspirations towards Bollywood stardom. While Dixit is thus constructed as the definitive emblem of female stardom, tellingly, much of the delineation of her star text, and of Chutki’s impersonation occurs through re-enactments of Dixit’s song-and-dance sequences. Chutki’s mimicry of Dixit’s dance movements, make-up, and costumes from these films (all of which constitute the complex of film dance), as well as our instant recognition of these, are an index of Dixit’s enduring popularity, but more importantly for this study of film dance, a marker of the extent to which her star text is defined by her *dance* sequences. This figuration of Dixit that emphasizes her dancer over her actress persona (Chutki does not mimic Dixit’s histrionic abilities through famous dialogs, for example, as would definitely be the case if a male star like Amitabh Bachchan were being alluded to) provokes the following inquiry into the role of film dance in the construction of Hindi female stardom in the 1980s and 1990s.

Acclaimed as a fine actress and a spectacular dancer, Dixit’s 28 year-long career is signposted by in/famous song-and-dance sequences⁸⁴ such as, “*Ek do teen*” (*Tezaab*/Acid, N. Chandra, 1988), “*Dhak dhak karne laga*” (*Beta*/Son, Indra Kumar, 1992), “*Choli ke peeche kya hai*” (*Khalnayak*/Villain, Subhash Ghai, 1993), “*Didi tera devar deewana*” (*Hum Aapke Hain*

⁸⁴ Dixit’s “infamous” numbers include “*Choli ke peeche kya hai*,” which ran into censorship trouble for its lyrics and her suggestive dance movements, while her moves in songs like “*Dhak dhak karne laga*” were criticized as being excessively raunchy. For discussions of the censorship battles around “*Choli ke peeche kya hai*,” see Monika Mehta’s *Censorship and Sexuality in Bombay Cinema*, and Shohini Ghosh’s “Queer Pleasures for Queer People” and “The Troubled Existence of Sex and Sexuality: Feminists engage with Censorship.”

Koun...!/Who am I to You...!, Sooraj Barjatya, 1994), and “*Dola re dola*” (*Devdas*, 2002).⁸⁵ In the reception of these wildly popular song-and-dance sequences, Dixit was hailed (and oftentimes criticized) for introducing a new sensuality to film dance. She was seen as a harbinger of novel “trademark” moves, and as the definitive female dancing star of the period whose song-and-dance numbers were often bigger draws than the films themselves. Dixit’s dance numbers marked a redefinition of choreographic styles, altering the spaces in which song-and-dance numbers were staged, and featuring radical changes in the costume and make-up of the dancing *heroine*. Indeed, along with the other prominent star of the 1980s and 90s, Sridevi (also famous for her dancing),⁸⁶ Dixit was acknowledged as introducing a movement vocabulary that marked a major shift from the body language considered appropriate for the chaste and virtuous heroine to

⁸⁵ A longer list of Dixit’s famous numbers reads as a veritable chronicle of the film dance aesthetic that she redefined throughout this period. These numbers include, in addition to the ones listed above: “*Hum ko aaj kal hai intezaar*” (*Sailaab/Flood*, 1990), “*Main tumhari hoon*” (*Sangeet/Music*, 1992), “*Athra baras ki kunwari kali thi*” and “*Main Kolhapur se aai hoon*” (*Anjaam/Result*, 1994), “*Mera piya ghar aaya*” (*Yaraana/Friendship*, 1995), “*Que sera sera*” (*Pukar/Call*, 2000), and “*Kahe ched ched mohe*” and “*Maar dala*” (*Devdas*, 2002). Of these numbers, a majority have been choreographed by Saroj Khan, a decisive figure in the redefinition of the song-and-dance number of the late 1980s and the 1990s, who conceptualized a new female movement vocabulary during this period, and was a key element in the construction of the Dixit star text.

⁸⁶ Sridevi is also a critical figure in effecting these transformations in female stardom, as evidenced in her 1987 Saroj Khan-choreographed dance number, “*Kaante nahi katate yeh din yeh raat*” (*Mr. India*, Shekhar Kapur) that marked a radical departure from the movement vocabulary of the heroine. However, dance occupies a slightly different valence in the construction of Sridevi’s star text than in Dixit’s. Since many of Sridevi’s early Hindi films [e.g. *Himmatwala* (*Courageous One*, K. Raghavendra Rao, 1983), *Tohfa* (*Gift*, K. Raghavendra Rao, 1984)] were remakes of South Indian films, in which, by this period, more overtly sexual dancing was part of the performance idiom of the heroine, she was seen as an outsider, and hence not that problematic for configurations of the *Hindi* film heroine. In fact, her dance moves and physiognomy were routinely ridiculed (“thunder thighs” etc.) in the same vein as much of mainstream South Indian cinema was by the Bombay-based film magazines, until her 1986 hit *Nagina* (Harmesh Malhotra) established her as a full-time Hindi film actress. Additionally, comedy plays a much more prominent role in Sridevi’s star text than in Dixit’s, and many of her famous dance numbers, such as “*Hawa Hawa*” (*Mr. India*, Shekhar Kapur, 1987) and “*Na jaane kahan se aayi hai*” (“Don’t know where she has come from,” *Chaalbaaz/Trickster*, Pankaj Parasher, 1989) feature comic dance moves that structure her dancing persona differently than Dixit’s. It is also worth noting that unlike Dixit’s “comeback” film, *Aaja Nachle* (*Come, Dance!*, Anil Mehta, 2007), Sridevi’s return to acting in *English Vinglish* (Gauri Shinde, 2012) was not dance-focused, indicating that her star text in general is not as defined by dance as that of Dixit.

a new kind of dance vocabulary that approximated that of the heroine's dark other, the Hindi film vamp of the 1950s-1980s. Until the late 1980s, the double figuration of female presence in the popular Hindi film was typically coded by the difference in the *dance* performed by the heroine and the vamp. In 1988, with her vigorously libidinous dancing in the song-and-dance sequence, "*Ek do teen*," Dixit initiated the consolidation of the brazen vamp and the coy heroine. While all of this has been remarked upon by film critics and scholars, in this chapter, I examine the tensions and alterations provoked in the popular Hindi film narrative and in modes of female performance by the dissolving of the heroine-vamp divide, and argue that these refigurations often revolve around dance. Hindi cinema of the 1980s and 1990s resorts to multiple strategies to control and contain the subversive energies unleashed by the spectacle of female performance, especially when the heroine, Dixit in this case, performs "vampish" production numbers. These strategies are designed to discipline/justify the heroine's sexually explicit dancing persona, always recuperating her as the "good girl" eventually. By deconstructing the dancing female body into three broad categories – the *face*, the *torso*, and the *limbs* – I analyze how Hindi cinema of the period, and its dancing poster-girl, Dixit, continue to ensure the separation of the heroine from the vamp. In addition to modifying movement vocabularies and performance attributes, this cinema also alters the *spaces* in which this new heroine performs her risqué dance routines, moving these to domestic spaces, to the space of the hero or villain's fantasy, or explicitly isolating the space of dance from that of the narrative. A close analysis of the slippage between the heart and the breast in the production number, "*Dhak dhak karne laga*" ("My heart goes thump thump") highlights a system of splits employed in many of Dixit's films – between the narrative and the song-and-dance sequence, between song and dance itself, between playback singer and on-screen dancer, and between the romantic and erotic drives of the song-and-dance

sequence, while focusing on the difference between the dance of the hero and the heroine in Hindi cinema of the 1980s and 1990s throws light on the gendering of performative spaces. These changes in the Hindi film narrative and its figuration of its female lead point to the cultural anxieties around the female body. Since film dance partakes centrally in this crisis of representation, a close inspection of the heroine-vamp of the 1990s demonstrates how the performing female body is constructed in this period, what spaces she is allowed to inhabit, and in what ways her body inhabits these spaces through movements and gestures. In this chapter then, I track the kinesthetic history of the Dixit star text from *Tezaab* (N. Chandra, 1988) to *Aaja Nachle* (Anil Mehta, 2007), and through it, the role of dance in the figuration of female stardom during this period. Dixit is the central figure in this chapter not only on account of being a very talented dancer-actress, but also because she is the architect as well as the product of a particular historical moment when film dance becomes very important in the construction of female stardom, when the libidinal energies that were earlier split between the vamp and the heroine are now entirely invested in the latter. A specific focus on Dixit's dance numbers thus enables the study of a new symbolic produced by transformations in the existing regimes of the representation of female sexuality.

4.1 COLLAPSING THE HEROINE-VAMP DIVIDE IN “EK DO TEEN”

While Dixit has featured in innumerable narrative as well as production numbers, her fame as a dancer-actress owes, to a considerable extent, to a series of production numbers performed during a fourteen year period, between 1988 and 2002. The production number “*Ek do teen*” (“One two three”) in the 1988 film, *Tezaab*, launched Dixit's stardom (even though she had

debuted as an actress in 1984). To date, Dixit's spirited dancing in this number remains the principal attraction of this action movie. This song-and-dance sequence was seen to mark such a significant shift in Hindi film dance choreography that the popular Filmfare Awards (commonly referred to as the Academy Awards for Hindi cinema) instituted an award for best choreography in 1989 to honor Saroj Khan, the choreographer of this sequence. The song stands out in what is otherwise a typical 1980s action movie, in which the hero, Munna (Anil Kapoor) is on a mission to avenge his parents' murder, and save the heroine, Mohini (Dixit), from her greedy father, Shyamlal (Anupam Kher), and from the dreaded gangster, Lotia Pathan (Kiran Kumar). As a setup for the production number, we are told that Mohini is *forced* to dance on stage to pay for Shyamlal's drinking and gambling habits. She declares that she doesn't want to dance, but wants to study instead. However, to repay Shyamlal's debts, she has to take to the stage for this dance number. The sequence opens with a hoarding displayed outside a theater that reads: "Mohini Night: The Singing Dancing Sensation of the Year," a description that fits Dixit's own spectacular rise to stardom that year. The number, performed on a large stage before a crowded audience, launches with a dialog between the audience demanding to know where she has been, and Mohini responding that she has been waiting for her lover and entreating him with the song that we then hear. The production number is thus couched within a romantic narrative so that even a professional performer like Mohini has to be seen as dancing to a song about waiting and pining for her lover. This, and the suggestion that the dance spectacle is staged for the audience's pleasure (within and without the narrative) against her desire (she would rather study than dance) points to the *work* the narrative has to do to justify the staging of a production number with the *heroine* of the film. No such excuses are required when the vamp performs in a production number. Dixit's costumes and dance vocabulary in "*Ek do teen*" were seen as provocative at the

time and the number has been generally viewed as the marker of a new kind of performance aesthetic for the Hindi film heroine. Sangita Gopal observes that, “Dixit’s *jhatkas* and *matkas* (convulsive heaves and swings of the body) in this and subsequent dance numbers, definitively completed the blurring of the distinction between heroine (Indian) and vamp (Western) that had been in progress since the 1970s” (41). Dixit’s own recent reminiscence of her performance in “*Ek do teen*” calls attention to the shedding of the “inhibitions” that constrained the dance vocabulary of the Hindi film heroine until then: “*Tezaab* was an important film for me in terms of shedding inhibitions, both as an actor and as a dancer. I knew I was a good dancer, but whenever I watched myself on screen I always felt I wasn’t giving my best. I was holding back. [...] Sarojji introduced me to the language of cinema – how to sway and smile during a step” (Somaaya, Kothari, and Madangarli). It is critical to understand the role of *dance* in marking the transition from the upright and uptight “*Bharatiya nari*” (ideal Indian woman) heroine to the uninhibitedly gyrating one. While the external appearance of the vamp, often dressed in “revealing” Western clothes, was an important aspect of her on-screen persona, the blurring of the vamp/heroine divide is not understood as being initiated by actresses of the 1970s such as Zeenat Aman, who did, as Mazumdar notes, mark a distinct shift by naturalizing the Western “look” so that “[t]he regulation of desire was already undergoing a series of disruptions in the 1970s” (90). Glamorous actresses of the 1970s such as Aman and Parveen Babi may have adopted the appearance of the Westernized vamp (through costume, make-up, and performances in nightclubs), but it is Dixit and Sridevi in the 1980s that breach the heroine-vamp divide. This is principally because of the kind of *movement vocabulary* they adopt in their dance numbers, the *spaces* in which these dances are staged, and the manner in which cinematography and editing are deployed in the design of these numbers. In terms of movement vocabulary, Mazumdar’s

description of the vamp's repertoire of movements can be applied to nineties' heroines such as Dixit and Sridevi as well:

What makes the vamp look different is not just her direct address, but also her deeply erotic performance. [...] A heavy movement of the bosom is usually accompanied by coy and seductive expressions on the face. The dancer's relationship to music is unique. There is a rhythmic combination of sound and body that evokes a hyper-real world of desire. (87)

Dixit's *jhatkas* and *matkas* (heaving of the chest, pelvic thrusts, exaggerated swaying of the hips) in "*Ek do teen*" indeed signal "a rhythmic combination of sound and body" that resembles the movement vocabulary of Hindi cinema's most famous and popular vamp from the 1950s to the 1980s, Helen, rather than that of earlier heroines. "*Ek do teen*," for example, has an instrumental interlude that shows low-angled shots of Mohini on her knees, bent backward, and playing a saxophone in a short, spangled skirt. The cinematography, costume, and the arrangement of torso and limbs are once again reminiscent of the vamp. Also, like the vamp, and unlike the erstwhile Hindi film heroine, Mohini's dance movements are often choreographed on a horizontal plane in relation to the stage she is dancing on, i.e. she crawls, writhes, clambers forward and backward, all of which makes these dance steps "vampish," while the earlier dance of the heroine was mostly vertically-oriented, performed standing or sitting, but rarely on the ground. The *space* in which the production number is staged additionally signals the collapsing of the heroine and vamp categories by combining the more conventional production number space of the heroine – the stage – with a *ramp* that projects out of this stage and calls to mind the vamp's nightclub setting that often featured a bar-top, a walkway, or some other linear access to her spectators. In "*Ek do teen*," the ramp allows for low angle shots of Mohini, and perpendicular access to her

dancing body, for example, when she crawls towards the camera placed on the floor of the ramp. As Mohini dances and walks on the ramp, the audience, composed mostly of men, looks up at her. Where Helen was choreographed to dance atop bars in song-and-dance sequences such as “*Baithe hain kya*” (“Why are you sitting”, *Jewel Thief*, Vijay Anand, 1967), the semi-public space of the cabaret has been replaced with the paid, public performance of the heroine, and the bar-top with the ramp.⁸⁷ Some of the “vampish” quality of “*Ek do teen*” also derives from the low-angle shots of Mohini dancing on the ramp, and the high-angle shots that capture her writhing on the floor of the stage.

The dissolving of the heroine/vamp binary that “*Ek do teen*” precipitated was seen as being completed by two Dixit production numbers that followed a few years later: “*Dhak dhak karne laga*” (*Beta/Son*, Indra Kumar, 1992) and “*Choli ke peeche kya hai*” (*Khalnayak/Villain*, Subhash Ghai, 1993). The censorship controversy over “*Choli ke peeche*,” initiated by a petition filed in the Delhi High Court demanding the deletion of the production number from the film and a ban on audio cassette sales, demonstrated that the breaching of the heroine/vamp divide had very real repercussions for the public reception of steamy production numbers. There had never been a call for a ban on similarly suggestive numbers performed by vamps like Helen, Bindu etc. Subversion was detected only when the sacred body of the *heroine* was choreographed as the

⁸⁷ Significantly, during the number, Mohini also uses the ramp to model different outfits in the manner of a fashion show. The ramp thus makes all too evident the function of the production number as a space for the display of the female body as well as emerging fashion trends. The conflation of the spaces of dancing and modeling indicates new body cultures even as film dance shows and ramp modeling become more common in India a little after this period, in the early 1990s. The ramp and the stage both emerge as spaces for the display of the woman through codified bodily movements and extravagant costumes. For more on the relationship between song-and-dance sequences and fashion, see Mazumdar, who employs the term “cinematic flaner” (93) to describe how song-and-dance sequences in the 1990s provide “spaces for an aggressive and sophisticated form of fashion display,” operating like “virtual, mobile, clothing catalogs embedded within the narratives,” and offering “female spectators the privilege of flaner” (96).

dominant site of wanton sexual desire. Following the *Choli* controversy, the Information and Broadcasting ministry recommended a revision of the Central Board of Film Certification (commonly known as the Censor Board) guidelines to curb “obscenity and vulgarity” (Ghosh, “Troubled Existence” 240). A partial list of these guidelines illuminates how central dance is in the 1990s production number for the display and regulation of the heroine’s body, calling as it does for the censorship of:

1. Selectively exposing women’s anatomy (e.g. breasts, cleavage, thighs, navel) in song and dance numbers, through suggestive and flimsy dresses, movements, zooming particularly in close-shots.
2. Stimulation (sic) of sexual movements (e.g. swinging of car, cot). [The Censor Board guideline about the latter movement – of the cot – refers to the song-and-dance number “*Sarkaye lo khatiya jaada lage*” (“Bring your cot closer to me as it’s cold”) that featured some hectic pelvic thrusting by Govinda and Karisma Kapoor in the film, *Raja Babu* (David Dhawan, 1994).]
3. Man and Woman in close proximity to each other or one over the other and in close proximity and making below-the-waist jerks suggesting copulation.
4. Pelvic jerks, breasts swinging, hip jerks, man and woman mounting on each other, rolling together, rubbing woman’s body from breasts to thighs, hitting/rubbing man with breasts, sitting on each other’s thighs and waist with entwined legs, lifting and peeping inside a woman’s skirt, squeezing woman’s navel and waist.
5. Coins, etc. being put inside blouse and other types of eve-teasing as there is invasion of privacy of woman’s body.

Many of the movements listed above had, by the mid-1990s, become part of the regular repertoire of Hindi film dance, extensions of Dixit’s early *jhatkas* and *matkas*, themselves

modeled on the vamp's dance vocabulary. It would *seem* then that the distinction between the vamp and the heroine had completely collapsed by this period.

4.2 MANAGING BODIES AND SPACES TO MAINTAIN THE HEROINE-VAMP DIVIDE

While, as mentioned in the earlier section, Dixit's production number, "*Ek do teen*" is commonly heralded as collapsing the categories of heroine and vamp,⁸⁸ I examine in particular the mobilization of certain movements, gestures, and spaces of dance to complicate this narrative and argue that this was anything but a smooth transition. By analyzing the strategies employed to manage this radical transformation of the Hindi film heroine that is primarily signaled by her dance numbers, I seek to demonstrate how dance is deployed to disrupt *and* manage older configurations of desire. A detailed discussion of how Hindi cinema of the 1990s labors to contain the subversive potential of the new heroine-vamp throws light on the battles fought over the female body and its on-screen representations during this period. When the heroine-vamp split begins to be annulled, film dance becomes a critical site for the negotiation of cultural anxieties around female sexuality. Until then, Hindi cinema had sought to manage these anxieties through a splitting of on-screen female presence. Vasudevan, for example, notes that the social film of the 1950s "tends to split the woman in terms of the figuration of her desire. Legitimate figures are held close to the patriarchal hearth [...] and a more overt sexuality is displaced to another figure" ("Shifting Codes" 74). That other, shadowy (in the narrative) figure was the

⁸⁸ See Gopal, Mazumdar, Mehta.

vamp who danced in spectacularly racy solo production numbers for over thirty years, from the 1950s to the 1980s. The split between the seductress vamp and the demure heroine enabled Hindi cinema to embody conflicting value systems in these two divergent figures. “By the nineties,” observes Mazumdar, citing Dixit’s provocative dance numbers in *Tezaab* and *Khalnayak*, “the earlier binary oppositions, so dear to the nationalist imaginary, had ceased to hold. The heroine now occupied the space of the vamp through a process marked by a public display of desire and an entirely new discourse of sexuality that threatened the old boundaries” (90). While Dixit and Sridevi did inaugurate new figurations of female desire through their song-and-dance numbers, an analysis of Dixit’s production numbers in particular demonstrates that the internalization of the heroine/vamp split within the heroine is not uncomplicated and effortless, and in fact forces the Hindi film narrative to produce a variety of strategies that seek to manage this new and potentially dangerous circulation of the heroine’s body.

4.2.1 Altering Performing Bodies or, Smiling through the Pain of Dancing

As described in Chapter 1, I employ codifications of the dancing body articulated in Bharata Muni’s *Natya Shastra* and Nandikeshvara’s *Abhinaya Darpana* to deconstruct the dancing female body in Hindi cinema into three broad categories – the face, the torso, and the limbs. In the 1990s, one of the key strategies for differentiating the new heroine-vamp from the erstwhile vamp is to enlist two separate regimes of performance for the new heroine’s face and body. In Dixit’s production numbers, torso movements are focused on the breasts, buttocks, and the waist, while the eyes and the lips primarily mark facial expression. Dixit’s movement vocabulary in these numbers (except when they are designed as “classical dance” numbers) is very different from that of classical Indian dances such as Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kathakali etc. In these

classical dances, for example, the torso is hardly ever broken up into the upper and the lower torso. Dixit's *jhatkas* and *matkas*, however, are defined by deflections of the upper and lower torso, focusing on a heaving of the breasts, outward thrusts of the hips and the pelvis, and waist movements that borrow from belly dancing. It is this movement vocabulary of the *torso* that the Dixit-Saroj Khan dancer-choreographer combine borrow from the vamp, and hence the characterization of Dixit's production numbers as collapsing the heroine-vamp divide. However, the division of dance movements according to body zones that I have proposed also allows us to examine how Dixit's dancing is designed *not* to be entirely "vampish" and hence escapes the censure that the vamp's dance vocabulary is subjected to (within the narrative and in social discourse more generally). Mazumdar notes that, "the vamp's highly provocative and excessive performance situate[s] her within a moral universe of ungainly femininity" (88). Among the many strategies Hindi cinema of the 1990s deploys to distance its provocatively dancing *heroine* from this moral universe is to slightly modify her gestural repertoire, especially in relation to the movement of the *limbs* and the *face*. Thus, Dixit and Sridevi, even in their most "scandalous" production numbers, are not choreographed to spread their legs as much as say, Helen or Hindi cinema's other vamps. Even when Dixit dances on the floor in the "*Ek do teen*" number, her legs are coyly crossed. Also, the heroine often smiles sweetly, marking her "innocence," while the facial repertoire of the vamp includes leering lasciviously, licking her lips, and keeping her mouth sensuously open as she shimmies and shakes. These gestural changes are intended to designate the difference between the wanton, dangerous, illicit *sexuality* of the vamp and the innocent, unintended, un-reflexive *sensuousness* of the heroine. In the case of Dixit, special mention must be made of her smile that was always remarked upon as one of the highlights of her star body. In an interview, Saroj Khan, the most famous choreographer of Dixit's production

numbers, says of the actress, “Madhuri Dixit is one actress who gets all the moves right, she moves right, she smiles at the right time” (Patsy N.). In an interview with Dixit quoted earlier in this chapter, she reminisces, “Sarojji introduced me to the language of cinema – how to sway and smile during a step” (Somaaya, Kothari, and Madangarli). Where the vamp’s facial expressions are marked by suggestive glances, biting of the lip etc., Dixit and Khan ensure that she smiles innocently, “at the right time,” so that her famed smile attenuates her employment of the torso movements of the vamp. The critic, Partha Chatterjee, otherwise quite stridently censorious of the 1990s song-and-dance sequence, notes of Dixit: “Madhuri’s innocence, vulnerability and girlish sexuality all come out as she slides, writhes, slithers, and shakes to the inane lyrics of ‘Ek do teen’ set to a quickly forgettable tune” (“A Bit of Song and Dance” 215). While all the movements listed by Chatterjee map to the torso and limb movements of the *vamp*, it is Dixit’s smile that communicates to him the appropriate attributes of the *heroine* – innocence, vulnerability, and a non-threatening “girlish” sexuality. This is evident again when he compares her production numbers to others in the period:

Madhuri Dixit, hips swaying seductively, responded with inviting yet shy eyes to ‘Choli ke peechey kya hai’ [...]. The song, for all its implied vulgarity, is picturised with a fair degree of craftsmanship, and is remarkably tame in comparison to the hell-bent-for-leather [sic] efforts of the most successful pair today – Govinda and Karisma Kapoor who together have brought the Indian cinema to the limits of vulgarity. (Chatterjee, “A Bit of Song and Dance” 216)

For Chatterjee, the difference between Govinda and Karisma Kapoor’s pelvic-thrusting gyrations in “*Sarkaye lo khatiya jaada lage*” and Dixit’s breast-heaving in “*Choli ke peeche kya hai*” lies in Dixit’s “inviting yet *shy* eyes” (my emphasis), where once again her *facial* expression, in this

case, communicating that most heroine-like quality of shyness, differentiates her from the vamp and from the dancing heroines and heroes that follow her.⁸⁹ The other facial element that distinguishes Dixit's production numbers is her comic performance within these. Even as she sways and glides voluptuously on stage during the "*Ek do teen*" number, Dixit's character, Mohini pulls funny faces and winks comically at the audience. Dixit's sense of comic timing serves to mark her performance, even within raunchy production numbers, as "natural" and "spontaneous," and invests her with the subjectivity and agency accorded to the heroine but rarely to the vamp. Dixit's *face*, which attenuates the sinuous insinuations of her *torso*, is thus a critical element in locating her dancing persona within the realm of the heroine rather than that of the vamp.

A narrative device that Hindi cinema of the 1990s often employs to differentiate the heroine's performance from that of the vamp is to emphasize the former's *reluctance* to dance in a production number. In the staging of the "*Ek do teen*" song-and-dance sequence, we have already seen how the narrative represents Mohini as an unwilling public performer, recuperating her good girl/heroine persona. Forced by an insensitive, selfish, and degenerate father to dance for money, Mohini's dance is cast within the terms of a modern-day courtesan tale, where the performer needs to be rescued from the tainted life of paid performance. In three of the four films in which Dixit plays the part of a professional dancer – *Tezaab*, *Sangeet*, *Devdas* – dancing for a

⁸⁹ This characterization of Dixit as extremely graceful despite her "vulgar" dance moves is very common in public discourse. Also interesting in this context is the film *Dil Toh Pagal Hai* (The Heart is Crazy, Yash Chopra, 1997), which stars the actresses mentioned here – Dixit and Kapoor – as professional dancers in the hero, Rahul's (Shah Rukh Khan) musical theater troupe. Nisha's (Karisma Kapoor) dancing is energetic and efficient, but Rahul tells her that Pooja (Dixit) is the superior dancer since she is more natural, graceful, and "*woh sirf apne liye naachti hai*" ("she dances only for herself"). Nisha's dancing is choreographed along the lines of *nrita* or non-expository dance, marked in this case, by rapid footwork, and hectic spins and backbends, while Pooja's sequences are imbued with *nritya* or expressive quality, where frequent close-ups show us her talent for conveying emotions through facial expressions, or *abhinaya*.

paying public is portrayed as reprehensible and something her character needs to be delivered from (by the hero, of course).⁹⁰ In contrast, the vamp, always a paid, professional dancer, is usually shown to be dancing quite felicitously and of her own volition. Other than the occasional Hindi film that hints at a tragic story for the vamp, we are rarely given a back-story for her flagrantly sexual production numbers. The other condition in which the heroine performs the production number is out of a sense of duty. In *Khalnayak*, for example, Ganga (Dixit) stages the production number, “*Choli ke peeche kya hai*” in order to nab the villain, Ballu, and save her fiancé Ram’s reputation. Mobilizing the devices of impersonation and masquerade, Ganga deflects the moral censure that would otherwise be directed at a conventional Hindi film heroine who teasingly asks the villain “*Choli ke peeche kya hai*” (“What is under/inside my blouse?”) as she suggestively lifts and drops her bosom. Writing specifically about this song-and-dance number, Monika Mehta notes, “Ganga’s guise as a dancer constructs the expression of her sexuality as a masquerade. We as privileged spectators know that behind this guise is a “pure” Ganga who loves Ram and who is enacting this role from a sense of duty” (163). The sub-inspector Ganga impersonates a folk dancer but is actually an agent of the law, who, as she performs her breast-heaving dance, *watches* Ballu’s moves and plans to nab him later. As spectators then, we identify with both subjects, Ganga and Ballu, and partake of the pleasure in knowing Ganga’s ruse, as well as the pleasure in looking at her sexualized performance. Thus,

⁹⁰ In *Tezaab*, her avaricious father is killed, and the hero, Munna rescues her from her dancing career. *Sangeet* shows Sethuram Sargamwala (Jackie Shroff) transform Sangeeta (Dixit), the blind *Nautanki* dancer who is forced to perform lewd dances for a male audience, into a respected dancer who travels abroad to perform as part of the “Festival of India” program. In *Devdas*, the male protagonist, Devdas tells the famous courtesan, Chandramukhi (Dixit), “*Mat haath lagao mujhe, nahi dekh sakta hun main aurat ka yeh roop*” (“Don’t touch me, I cannot see this form/avatar of woman”), which prompts her to eventually give up her profession as a dancer and turn into a *jogan*/female ascetic. The fourth film, *Aaja Nachle* (2007), marks a radical departure from this trope, as I shall discuss later in this chapter.

“while we might view Ganga just as Ballu and his gang do, we are not fully aligned with them, and we can therefore fully enjoy the dance performance without feeling complicit in an illicit activity” (Mehta 164). In the case of the vamp, the narrative makes no such effort to complicate the gaze directed at her dancing figure, and unlike the duty-bound heroine, vamps, in general, are rarely depicted as putting on a show for a “higher purpose.” In other words, the heroine is accorded interiority and motivation for her bawdy production numbers; the vamp has none. The primary function of the vamp is to dance, which is not the case for the heroine even when she plays the role of a professional dancer in a film. Duty and duress then help to explain away the display of the heroine’s dancing body, and much narrative time is invested in establishing that the heroines played by Dixit and Sridevi are “good girls” who would not normally perform a production number of this kind on stage.

4.2.2 Altering Spaces of Performance to Choreograph New Geographies of Desire

Addressing the transition from the vamp to the heroine-vamp, Mazumdar notes of the change in performance spaces: “The space of the nightclub has today lost its earlier iconic status. What happened to the vamp and her space? As the heroine moves into the space of the vamp (or vice versa), desire and space are dispersed. The dances were no longer located in a morally coded space, but moved into multiple locations” (90). Among these multiple locations are a variety of “domestic” spaces through which the “sexy” production number of the 1990s marks its variance from the vamp’s performance, that typically took place in the space of the nightclub, “an imagined, placeless, and virtual space of sexual excess, villainy, and underworld negotiations” (Mazumdar 86). Staging a sexually explicit dance performance in a private space, say of the bedroom, enshrines it within the discourse of conjugal sexuality, quite unlike the public

distribution of the vamp's performing body to a paying, viewing audience. In the rare instances when the vamp dances in a private space, the sequence is located in the evil villain's bedroom, a den of vice just like the nightclub, and it remains a paid performance since the vamp is usually constructed as the villain's "keep." The space, in other words, is anything but "domestic." The vamp is similarly kept out of communal domestic spaces, but the new heroine-vamp, Dixit in this case, freely performs production numbers like "*Athra baras ki kunwari kali thi*" (*Anjaam/Result*, Rahul Rawail, 1994) at "family functions" or gatherings of the extended family so beloved to Bollywood and so necessary for its staging of song-and-dance spectacle.

During this period, Hindi cinema's other strategy for employing the heroine's body in sexually brazen production numbers is to remove these performances to the *stage*, ensuring a clear-cut separation between narrative and performance spaces (as I shall discuss later, the male protagonist rarely occupies the performance space of the stage in this period). This separation of the spaces of the heroine in the film narrative and in the production number retains the "opposition between female virtue and "dangerous sexuality" (Mazumdar 89) enacted through the heroine-vamp divide. Accordingly, on stage, this new heroine may writhe on the floor, or sashay amidst her audience in skimpy costumes, but in domestic spaces like the home, she continues to be docile, duty-bound, and is often dressed in Indian clothes (for example, outside of the song-and-dance sequences, Mohini is mostly dressed in Indian *salwar kameezes* in *Tezaab*, and Dixit's character in *Beta*, Saraswati, only wears *saris*). It is worth noting that a significant number of Dixit's most famous production numbers – including "*Ek do teen*," "*Hum ko aaj kal hai intezaar*," "*Main tumhari hoon*" ("I am yours," *Sangeet/Music*, K. Vishwanath, 1992), "*Main Kolhapur se aai hoon*" ("I have come from Kolhapur," *Anjaam*), and "*Que sera sera*" (*Pukar*, Rajkumar Santoshi, 2000) – are isolated as stage performances. The other stage-

like performance space employed for Dixit's celebrated production numbers such as, "*Choli ke peeche kya hai*," and "*Kahe ched ched mohe*" ("Why do you tease me") and "*Maar dala*" ("I am slain," *Devdas*, Sanjay Leela Bhansali, 2002), is that of the *kotha*, the space in which the courtesan performs with her audience sitting around her. As discussed earlier, when these performances are staged for a paying audience, Dixit's characters are "absolved" or "redeemed" of the immorality of paid public performance through the duty/duress argument. This excuse is obviated when the production number is staged for a non-paying audience, for example, at a college festival or a fund-raising event (spaces that the vamp has never been allowed to occupy). Such a space allows Dixit's character to freely adopt a strikingly sensuous movement vocabulary (as evidenced in her sinuous hip undulations in the *Koli* number, "*Hum ko aaj kal hai intezaar*") since the space as well as the transaction with the viewing audience is rendered safe for the heroine's role in the narrative. The relationship of the heroine with the internal audience for her production number is indeed a vital factor in distinguishing her from the vamp. While the vamp danced for coarse and callous gangsters, Dixit's character, Mohini, for example, performs to a cheering audience in "*Ek do teen*." The ramp affixed to the stage in this number serves, on the one hand, to sexualize her body, but on the other, unlike a conventional stage that separates the audience from the performer, it allows for entry *into* the audience, and hence greater audience participation. Thus, Mohini is surrounded by fans cheering from three sides, and we frequently see the silhouetted hands of the audience below her. In her formulation of the "myth of the audience," Jane Feuer argues that the inclusion of an audience within the film provides a point of identification for the audience watching the film (451). Thus, as spectators of *Tezaab*, we are moved to cheer alongside Mohini's fans within the film. It is not coincidental that the chanting of

“Mohini! Mohini!” before the song begins, as well as the entire pre-number dialog between her and the audience has been memorized by Dixit’s fans and become a part of the song sequence.

While the separated performance space of the stage offers one strategy for sanctioning sensational production numbers, the transformation wrought by these song-and-dance sequences in existing regimes of female representation requires the films of this transition period to work hard to create spaces where the heroine can dance like the vamp. The “fantasy” number, so common in the 1990s song-and-dance repertoire, figures in Dixit’s catalog of raunchy production numbers, where “an imagined, placeless, and virtual space of sexual excess” (Mazumdar 86) is moved from the vamp’s nightclub to the narrative hero or villain’s fantasy. Since it is not possible to accommodate this kind of dancing body in a “real,” recognizable location within the narrative, virtual spaces are designed to separate the dancing persona of the heroine-vamp from her diegetic role as the modest, duty-bound heroine. Rick Altman comments on the role of make-believe modes – dream, performance, and role-play – in effecting a “personality dissolve” in the American film musical where “an individual gains the right to “play out” personal fantasies without succumbing to the judgments normally associated with conscious behavior. The character can say what he/she pleases and yet in the eyes of his/her psychic sensor it is as if nothing had either been said or done” (83). We have already seen how the spaces of performance and role-play are employed in numbers like “*Ek do teen*” and “*Choli ke peeche kya hai*” to effect a personality dissolve in Dixit’s characters.⁹¹ Additionally, by displacing the “repressed material” of female sexuality and forbidden desires onto Dixit’s *fantasy* numbers, Hindi film narratives of the time produce a similar personality dissolve, where her salacious dances are

⁹¹ It is to be noted that in the case of Dixit’s production numbers, the dances are not staged in *her* fantasies, and hence her character does not initiate the “personality dissolve,” but it is produced by the narrative to justify the bifurcations in her performance.

recuperated into the normative influence of the narrative and of Hindi cinema's moral compass by figuring them as fantasies. I will shortly discuss the staging of such a fantasy number in relation to the "*Dhak dhak karne laga*" production number from *Beta*, but would like to point out here that the vamp's production numbers were never staged as part of anyone's fantasies; depicting the vamp's erotic performance as grounded in the dense materiality of corporeal experience and concrete spaces posed no problem for the Hindi film narrative. The vamp's sexuality is very much of this world, while that of the heroine, even in her new avatar, needs to be displaced to the realm of the imagination. Where *Beta* displaces the steamy "*Dhak dhak karne laga*" number to an imaginary grotto in the hero's daydream, other films resort to a strategy of "replacement," where even when the Dixit character is not the original dancer in a sequence, she gets placed in it through the hero's fantasy. In *Anjaam*, as the creepy-stalker male protagonist, Vijay Agnihotri (Shah Rukh Khan) watches a *Lavani*-inspired stage performance of the song, "*Main Kolhapur se aai hoon*" ("I have come from Kolhapur"), he replaces in his mind (and for us) the anonymous dancer on stage with the object of his obsession, Shivani Chopra (Dixit). Thus, the film stages a Dixit production number even when her character in the narrative detests, and eventually murders the male protagonist. In *Koyla* (Coal, Rakesh Roshan, 1997) the near-fatally injured Shankar (Shah Rukh Khan) watches a skimpily-clad "gypsy" girl dance to "*Badan juda hotein hain*" ("Our bodies may be separated") and promptly replaces her with his lover, Gauri (Dixit). And so we get a Dixit production number even when in the narrative, her character, Gauri is locked in a brothel by the villain. This substitution, where other, "lesser" performing bodies are substituted with Dixit's star body, allows the films to get around the quandary of having the heroine dance in some situations, while making sure the audience gets its "*paisa vasool*" (money's worth) from Dixit's dancing that is usually a big draw in any film

starring her.⁹² This steady displacement of Dixit's character into the space of fantasy is self-reflexively referenced in Sudhir Mishra's *Dharavi* (1992), where Dixit plays herself, as the superstar "dreamgirl" of the impoverished taxi-driver Rajkaran's (Om Puri) fantasies. Just above the picture of Dixit pasted on the window of Rajkaran's taxi is an "I love India" sticker. The entire visual and audio scape of the sprawling slum in which the film is set and takes its name from is dominated by posters featuring Dixit and her songs from *Tezaab* and *Dil*. As Rajkaran drunkenly kisses his taxi, imagining it to be Dixit, he asks her "*tum toh meri ho na*" ("at least you are mine, right?"). She comforts him, saying "*hanh, sirf tumhari*" ("yes, only yours"), constructing Dixit's red chiffon sari-clad star body as the everyman's fantasy figure, at the personal and national level. In an "art" film marked by realist codes (i.e. featuring no song-and-dance sequences, set in the "real," gritty space of the slum), Dixit's star body stands in for the space of fantasy, and the phantasmic attractions of commercial cinema including its fantastical dancing bodies.

4.3 SPLITTING FEMALE PRESENCE THROUGH DANCE VOCABULARIES

In addition to the various strategies mentioned above, Hindi films of the 1990s also attempt to manage the heroine-vamp merging by splitting female presence through double roles and love triangles. In *Sangeet* (Music, K. Vishwanath, 1992), Dixit plays the roles of the older "classical

⁹² In more recent films, in the 2000s, Hindi cinema has returned to a bifurcation of female attractions, not through the heroine/vamp split but through a heroine/"item girl" divide. Now, instead of replacing the performing woman on stage with the fantasized heroine body, the item girl performs an isolated number that is often only slightly more risqué than the heroine's own production numbers.

dancer,” Nirmala, and the younger, blind, *nautanki* dancer, Sangeeta (both styles of dancing rendered in their filmi avatars).⁹³ The two characters only find out towards the end of the film that they are mother and daughter, separated at the time of Sangeeta’s birth to an unwed Nirmala. We are introduced to the blind Sangeeta Bai in the film through the first song-and-dance sequence, a bawdy production number, “*Main tumhari hoon...bas tumhare liye hi kunwari hoon*” (“I am yours, and have remained a virgin/unmarried only for you”) performed to an all-male audience. Before she begins, the manager brusquely orders her “mother,” Shanta bai (the woman who rears her), to pull her *ghaghra*/skirt down further to reveal her waist and navel (a particularly fetishized element of Dixit’s dancing body), remarking “*yahan Meera ka bhajan ho raha hai kya?*” (“Is a devotional song being performed here?”). The mobilization of costumes, movement vocabulary, cinematography, and editing (all of which combine to create film dance) in this number is similar to many of Dixit’s other “racy” production numbers and hence deserves detailed description. Sangeeta’s costume, as in many of Dixit’s “rustic” production numbers, is designed to show off her *jhatkas* and *matkas*, and comprises a low-cut, knee-length *ghaghra*/skirt revealing her belly, a short, tight bodice with embroidery outlining her breasts, and a thin *dupatta* (a piece of cloth that covers a woman’s blouse or tunic) that she never wears but throws into the crowd at the beginning of the dance. The production number opens with a medium close up of Sangeeta’s waist and breasts swinging rapidly in a classic Dixit-Saroj Khan *jhatka* movement. She then turns and sways her buttocks at the audience. After some long shots of her dancing, we finally get a close-up of her face, as she winks at the men in the audience and sings, “*Main*

⁹³ We are not specifically told that Nirmala is a classical dancer, but in the flashback to her youth, we are told she was obsessed with dancing, and see her perform a Bharatanatyam-Kathak hybrid on the terrace of her house. She is also shown as a wealthy patron of the arts. We have filmi depictions of (and a contrast between) classical and folk dance through these two figures.

tumhari hoon” (“I am yours”). Using the coquettish vocabulary of the *Lavani* dancer, she bites her little finger, and regularly turns her back to the audience to show off her shaking hips. Like in “*Ek do teen*,” floor movements are included; here, she rotates on the floor of the stage on one hand, holding her *ghaghra* in the other. As she sings “*aag laga de yeh mehfil mein meri gulabi kaya*” (“my rosy body will set fire to this gathering”), the sequence cuts from a medium long shot of her body to a medium close up of just her breasts and waist as, with her hands, she outlines her breasts. This editing pattern is repeated throughout the song which features many medium close ups of Sangeeta’s breasts, waist, and buttocks. Meanwhile, the cinematography is dominated by low angle shots of her to emphasize these torso movements. In the audience, a man draws a sketch of her, or rather of her torso, with an emphasis on her breasts. Sangeeta is “rescued” from this kind of dancing by the male protagonist, a struggling folk singer, Sethuram Sargamwala (Jackie Shroff) who tears the offending drawing of Sangeeta’s breasts, rushes up to the stage (conveniently at the end of the number), and covers her torso with his turban-cloth. Later, he convinces her to quit *Nautanki* dancing, and move with Shanta Bai to the unfinished building in which he lives with his folk music troupe.

The next song-and-dance sequence in the film, “*O rabba koi toh bataye pyaar hota hai kya*” (“Oh lord, someone tell me what love means”), is Sethuram’s fantasy number, where Sangeeta now dances only for him. Significantly, she is more “soberly” dressed in a Kathak-style *lehenga-choli-odhni*⁹⁴ costume that reveals no flesh. The mise-en-scène, mode of address, and choreography construct the song as a narrative rather than a production number. Rather than the stage, in Sethuram’s fantasy, Sangeeta dances in the semi-constructed building they inhabit, both

⁹⁴ The *lehenga* is an ankle-length skirt, the *choli*, a fitted blouse, and the *odhni*, like the *dupatta*, is a loose piece of cloth that covers the torso.

of them sing alternately (but only she dances), and they sing of their budding love for each other (in contrast to the sexual discourse of her proffered virginity in the earlier song-and-dance sequence). The camera, accordingly, does not linger on any of her body parts, and rather than the earlier close-ups of her *torso*, we are now presented with close ups of her smiling *face*. The movement vocabulary is influenced by Kathak, from which it borrows *chakkars* or spins of the body, combining these with more filmi gestures of the hands and face that do not conform to the strict lexicon of *thaat* movements in Kathak.⁹⁵

Soon after, Sethuram takes Sangeeta to Nirmala and says, “*Main chahta hoon Sangeeta accha naach seekhe, sacchi seva kare kala ki*” (“I want Sangeeta to learn good/gentrified dancing, and devote herself to art”). As Sangeeta takes Nirmala’s blessings, Nirmala slips into a production number fantasy involving Sethuram and Sangeeta. The aspirational “classicism” of this number is evident in the lyrics: “*Saat suron ke taar ban gaye tera mera pyaar*” (“Our love has become like the strings of the seven musical notes”), which reference Indian classical music, and also in the dance and mise-en-scène. In the style of V. Shantaram’s musicals such as *Jhanak Jhanak Payal Baaje* and *Navrang*, the architecture is a kitschy recreation of “classical” motifs including ornate arches, fluted columns, and marble platforms on which peacocks flit about. With a large statue of Shiva, and multiple fountains, and male and female dancers in the background, Sangeeta, in the first stanza, performs a Bharatanatyam-hybrid dance. In Nirmala’s imagining of Sangeeta as a classical dancer, the latter is seen as employing the movement vocabulary of Bharatanatyam when she strikes the *Nataraja* pose by bending a leg forward and holding the toe, or when she executes floor movements of gliding on her knee and executing

⁹⁵ In *thaat*, the dancer “strikes a stance and adopts a number of graceful attitudes and embellishes these by doing soft, gliding movements of the neck and the wrists and by punctuating them with abrupt, darting glances of the eyes” (Khokar, “Traditions of Indian Classical Dance” 135).

hasta mudras or hand gestures. For the first time in the film's song-and-dance sequences, we encounter frequent close-ups of her *feet* to show off her footwork. However, as with the employment of Kathak in the earlier number, in this one, Bharatanatyam is hybridized by bringing in filmi movements of the torso (such as the swinging of the hips), the face (that does not adhere to the head movements and facial expressions of Bharatanatyam), and the limbs (which do not follow the strict lexicon for hand and leg movements defined in Bharatanatyam). The legibility of film dance comes then from style recognition (i.e. through the song, costumes, and adapted movement vocabulary that mark this sequence as "classical") rather than the rigorous correspondence between gestures and meaning that is mandated in Indian classical dance. In this stanza, Sangeeta is dressed in the *amrapali* costume described in Chapter 1. While this costume shows off as much skin as Sangeeta's costume in the Nautanki production number, it is considered "safe" since it is a signifier of filmi classical dance, especially Bharatanatyam. In the third stanza, Sangeeta similarly dons a modified *Mohiniattam* costume, where the flowing, ankle-length traditional costume is replaced with a very tightly-wound knee-length sari. This is typical of Hindi film dance's depiction of classical dance, often signaled through costume and a rudimentary movement vocabulary of a particular dance form.

Over the course of these three song-and-dance sequences, all of which are designed to showcase Dixit's talent with executing various movement vocabularies, Sangeeta's movements become more and more decorous, approaching the *accha naach* ("good dance") of the film's verbal and visual discourse. This transition is also marked by the change over the three numbers from close-ups of her torso to her face to her feet respectively. Sangeeta's schooling in *accha naach* ("good dance") is thus visibilized through these numbers, and rewarded in the end with a

trip abroad along with Sethuram to perform as part of the Festival of India program,⁹⁶ underscoring the culture-nation relationship that Nirmala mobilizes throughout the film to argue for the preeminence of classical dance over any popular/folk forms. Through the two Dixit characters then, the film institutes a double regime of performance, disavowing the raunchy production number and supposedly identifying with a more “respectable” idiom, referring extra-textually as well to the doubling in Dixit’s star text as a classically-trained dancer famous for her risqué production numbers. In her analysis of the double roles of the actress, Nargis in *Anhonee* (1952) and in *Raat aur Din* (1967), Majumdar observes that “The spectacular and performative pleasures offered by the double exposure of the star body [allow] a showcasing of the star’s ability to incarnate different identities” (138). The Sangeeta figure refers to that aspect of Dixit’s star text that is defined by her libidinous dancing and her revealing costumes, while the modestly-dressed, deglamorized Nirmala (with minimal make-up and oversized spectacles), who promotes classical dance, evokes Dixit’s training and proficiency in the classical dance form, Kathak. This doubled figuration allows for a showcasing of both kinds of dancing that Dixit is famous for, while also producing various modes of identification and disavowal. Majumdar notes that, “In Indian cinema, star personae become fixed, but they need constant repairs in screen role after screen role. The double role, I would argue, does a more efficient repair job than any single screen role” (156). *Sangeet* uses Nirmala’s character to repair Madhuri Dixit’s star text, which on account of her production numbers, is closer to Sangeeta’s character (an innocently sexy dancing woman). Nirmala, and the gentrified Sangeeta in the latter part of the film, reflect Dixit’s ideal star persona while Sangeeta in her earlier nautanki avatar is a comment on Dixit’s rambunctious

⁹⁶ A traveling cultural program that was conceptualized to popularize Indian folk arts and crafts for foreign audiences, but functioned also as a pedagogical event for the Indian middle class that was familiarized with many folk music and dance forms through televised broadcasts of Festival events.

production numbers, even though the narrative justifies Sangeeta's lustful dancing through its construction of her character as a blind, impoverished, and more-or-less orphaned girl (the duress argument). The film displaces onto the early Sangeeta "the troubling aspects" of Dixit's star persona (Majumdar 168) and then eliminates them by gentrifying her under the tutelage of the ideal Dixit star persona embodied by Nirmala. Tellingly, while the film itself flopped at the box office, "*Main tumhari hoon*" became famous and is still remembered, hinting at the frequent failure of the Hindi film *narrative* to contain the subversive energies unleashed by the bold production number. Additionally, the failure of the film may suggest that the strategy of having a different Dixit persona in production numbers and in the narrative and narrative numbers worked more efficiently through a separation of performance vocabularies and spaces.

Another splitting mechanism that some of Dixit's films employ is the love triangle, where Dixit's character is contrasted with another female figure, both defined by their relation to one man. *Khalnayak* (1993) opens with the title song "*Nayak nahin khalnayak hai tu*" ("You're not the hero, you are the villain"), in which Sophia (Ramya Krishnan), the *khalnayak* (villain), Ballu's girlfriend performs a production number. The low production values in this sequence are evident in the tacky sets and indifferent choreography. Clearly, no attempt is made to invest this performer or this performance with anything like the aura of Dixit's dancing in the big production number of this film, "*Choli ke peeche*." We are given few details about Sophia other than that she is a model and a dancer, both "shady" professions already associated with the underworld and with crime.⁹⁷ Sophia, then, is the old-style vamp to Dixit's heroine, Ganga (a cop by profession, and as mentioned earlier, a dancer only as masquerade). While "*Choli ke*

⁹⁷ Gangsters' molls have been figured as professional dancers since the 1950s in Indian cinema, but the model is a new configuration, as mentioned in the analysis of "*Ek do teen*."

peeche” is a much more suggestive number than “*Nayak nahin khalnayak hai tu,*” because it is performed by the heroine and even then only in the service of the law, it is the more important production number both within and outside of the film text. Sophia features only in her one production number, and has no narrative numbers, unlike Ganga, who features in song-and-dance numbers with both the *nayak* (hero), Ram and the *khalnayak* (villain), Ballu, who falls in love with her. Additionally, Ganga’s production number, “*Choli ke peeche*” is imbricated in the narrative and in fact performs a key function in initiating the drama of the diegesis. Sophia’s production number has no narrative role and is a standalone sequence that is played over the opening credits, and thus peripheralized further by the intrusion of this non-diegetic element. Thus, the heroine text and Dixit’s star power provide her agency in her production number, while Sophia, the vamp, remains a fetishized object, a momentary distraction. In a film that is structured around dichotomies, it is worth noting that male splitting occurs in the *narrative* (between Ram/the good son/the law, and Ballu/the bad son/the outlaw) and constitutes the main focus of the film, while female splitting is relegated to the *song-and-dance sequences*, distributed (unevenly) between Ganga and Sophia. In *Koyla* (1997), we again have a vamp figure in Bindya (Deepshikha), secretary and mistress to Raja Saab (Amrish Puri), a villainous feudal lord who tricks the innocent and virginal Gauri (Dixit) into marrying him. Bindya is attracted to Shankar (Shah Rukh Khan) who loves and is loved back by Gauri. The vamp is required in both these films to clarify the moral position of Dixit’s heroine character as that of the ideal woman *despite* her participation in seductive production numbers. The overt libidinal charge of the vamp’s performance serves to highlight Dixit’s character’s innocence and more acceptable and disciplinable sexual charge. Even if Dixit’s characters, Ganga and Gauri, dance with apparent sexual abandon, the Sophias and Bindyas have no place in the mythic structures of the Ganga-

Ram-Balram and Shankar-Gauri⁹⁸ relationships based on the enduring bedrock of monogamous, heterosexual romance.

4.4 MANY A SLIP TWIXT THE HEART AND THE BREAST: SPLITTING FEMALE PRESENCE BETWEEN THE PRODUCTION NUMBER AND THE NARRATIVE

A close analysis of the production number, “*Dhak dhak karne laga*” (*Beta*/Son, Indra Kumar, 1992), serves to illustrate the importance of studying Hindi film dance as a separate and sometimes competing mode of discourse from the narrative and even the song that the dance is complementary with. The slippage between heart and breast in this particular song-and-dance sequence serves to highlight a system of splits – between the narrative and the song-and-dance sequence, between song and dance itself, between playback singer and on-screen dancer, the romantic and the erotic drives of the song-and-dance sequence, and the heroine-vamp tensions that have been discussed so far. *Beta* features all the tropes of popular Hindi film melodrama – the intense, almost excessive mother-son relationship, contrasts of tradition and modernity, as well as of the rural and the urban. Raju’s (Anil Kapoor) mother dies at birth. His father remarries in order to please Raju. His stepmother, Lakshmi (named after the goddess of wealth in Hindu mythology, but indicating here the rapaciousness of the character), deliberately raises Raju to be an uneducated farmer so that she can eventually usurp his property. Raju falls in love

⁹⁸ The names of the main characters in *Khalnayak* and *Koyla* respectively are allusions to godly couples/relationships. The vamps, on the other hand, have interchangeable, and often Westernized names.

with and marries Saraswati (Dixit; her character is named after the Hindu goddess of wisdom), an educated and shrewd woman who unravels her mother-in-law's schemes and eventually makes Raju aware of these as well. Dixit won the Filmfare award for Best Actress for *Beta*, and was praised for her acting prowess in the role of the feisty daughter-in-law who dismantles the evil conspiracies of her stepmother-in-law.

Beta also became (in)famous for the song-and-dance sequence “*Dhak dhak karne laga*” in which Dixit's heaving bosom is the predominant feature. “*Dhak dhak karne laga*” is preceded by Raju's first encounter with Saraswati at a wedding. As he stares at her, her *dupatta* (the cloth that covers her blouse) flies off her and onto his face. She quickly covers her chest with her hands, prefiguring the focus on her breasts in the song-and-dance sequence to follow. Later, while resting on the fields that he tills, Raju looks at her photograph and hears her laughing at him – a reminder of a prank she played on him at the wedding. The photograph is a medium close up of her, including her face and upper torso. He touches her breast/heart (the slippage between the two is what the dance will play on) and hears it beat “*dhak dhak*” (similar to “thump thump,” onomatopoeic to the beating of her heart). The song-and-dance sequence is inaugurated with a cut from a close up of him staring at her picture to an extra long shot of Saraswati whirling in an orange satin sarong-sari and embroidered bustier (a sexed-up version of the traditional *sari*). The camera circles around her in a tracking movement from behind some trees, capturing Saraswati as if from Raju's point of view. He is dressed in black and brown, and blends into the background, while Saraswati's costume is in flaming orange, in complete contrast to the surroundings and serving to highlight her dancing body. The setting is a wooded grotto with a waterfall, trees and creepers, with some stairs for Raju and Saraswati to strut on and heave against, a patch of sand for Saraswati to crawl on as she dances, and some hay for them to roll in

during the number. In effect, the *mise-en-scène* is of a piece with the choreography. The sequence alternates between two-shots of both characters, and “solo” shots of Saraswati dancing, and of Raju watching her. When Saraswati sees Raju, she begins to run, but he holds her arms back. They are framed in a medium close up in profile so we can see her heaving bosom as she says, “Ouch!” She starts off the song: “*Dhak dhak karne laga, ho mora jiyara darne laga*” (“my heart goes thump thump and begins to be afraid”) while undulating her hips and waist, and thrusting her bosom back and forth. A high angle shot from behind his shoulder calls attention to her breasts. The slippage between heart and breasts is thus made visible through the dance moves and camera placement, even as the lyrics speak of the *dil* or heart, and make no mention of breasts. Indeed, the song heard by itself could refer solely to the wild beating of the heart common to a new romance.⁹⁹ Given how it is figured in the dance though, it is not surprising that the lines “*dhak dhak karne laga*” are never sung by Raju. We are to assume that not only is he impervious to the mixture of excitement and fear accompanying love/sex, but that it would also be improper to have him heaving *his* chest to the lyrics.

The work that a popular Hindi film song-and-dance sequence typically has to do to cover up its intent to titillate is evident in this sequence through the contrast between the *song* – lyrics, music, and choice of playback singer – and the *dance*. The slippage between heart in the song and breast in the dance is symptomatic of a larger folding of love and lust, of the romantic and the erotic. The lyrics struggle to recuperate the romantic even as the dance is constructed as an

⁹⁹ A similar heart/breast involution is present in “*Choli ke peeche kya hai*,” where Ganga (Dixit) responds to the question, “*Choli ke peeche kya hai*” (“What is behind/inside your blouse”) with “*Choli mein dil hai mera, yeh dil main doongi mere yaar ko*” (“My heart is inside my blouse, the heart that I will give to my love”). Once again, Dixit’s dance moves are designed to make this slippage apparent even as the lyrics attempt to displace the erotic charge, or rather to combine it with the assertion that Ganga is a righteous woman (a policewoman in this case) who will give her heart only to the good cop, Ram. Refer to Monika Mehta’s chapter on this song-and-dance sequence for an in-depth analysis of how the narrative attempts to rein in the sexual charge of this number.

erotic fantasy, so that while “*Dhak dhak*” has an unmistakable erotic charge transmitted predominantly through the dance moves, and also phrases like “*Saiyan baiyan chhod na, kachchi kaliya tod na*” (“Let go of my hands, dear, do not pluck (my) tender buds”), these are “tempered” with the more conventional romantic language of film songs, in this case, about their commitment to their “*rishta*” (relationship). Raju’s response to Saraswati’s chorus line, “*Dhak dhak karne laga, ho mora jiyara darne laga*” (“My heart goes thump thump and begins to be afraid”) is “*Dil se dil mil gaya, mujhse kaisi yeh haya*” (“When our hearts have met, why the need for this modesty”), attempting through his reference to their hearts (as purely the loci of romantic feeling this time) to suture the fissure between the romantic and the erotic and provide the excuse of imminent conjugality for this fantasy. The instrumental music interludes are also designed to reconcile the opposing strains of the “*Dhak dhak*” sequence. Even as Raju (and we) watch Saraswati dancing – backlit in one shot, so you can see her entire silhouette through her sarong, crawling on the sand in another with the camera placed behind her to emphasize her buttocks – the music features a soulful flute track that plays over the shot/reverse shot sequences of him watching and her dancing, as if to mask this moment of salacious voyeurism – for himself and us.¹⁰⁰ In addition to the lyrics and the music, the song attempts to *tame* the dance through the choice of the playback singer as well. The sequence is thus marked by a singer-dancer split in that the playback singer for the voluptuously dancing Dixit in this song is Anuradha Paudwal, famed for her “sweet” and “innocent” voice and devout renditions of *bhajans* or devotional

¹⁰⁰ There are two “solo” dance sections between each of the song’s stanzas, where Saraswati is shown dancing, mostly in full-figure long and medium long shots that always cut to medium shots of Raju watching her intently. This positions Raju as the figure that, through his personal daydream, leads us into this communal spectatorial fantasy. His figuration in this song is significant. Where in the rest of the narrative he has been portrayed as a clumsy country bumpkin with no libidinous charge (his only affective investment being in his stepmother), here he comes across as a self-possessed, amorous adult male, which makes it easier for us to identify with him in directing our gaze towards the voluptuously dancing Saraswati.

Hindu songs. The split between voice and body, between the unglamorous and even pious star texts of playback singers like Lata Mangeshkar, Anuradha Paudwal, and Alka Yagnik and the “glamorous and potentially slanderous aura” (Majumdar 194) of the female star produces a “dual star text” (Majumdar 173). The contradictions between the actress and playback singer’s star texts have been analyzed in detail by Majumdar, who notes that, “Implicit in the dual star reference of female song sequences is a moral hierarchy between the female *voice* and the female *body*. Unlike the voice, the body is available for visual consumption and lends itself more easily to scandalous associations” (191). This is evidenced when Dixit’s rambunctiously raunchy production numbers such as “*Dhak dhak*” and “*Choli ke peeche*” are voiced by “homely” singers like Anuradha Paudwal and Alka Yagnik respectively, in an attempt to mitigate the overt sexuality of the on-screen female performance. However, it must be noted that, unlike Lata Mangeshkar, the pre-eminent playback singer of popular Hindi cinema, who Majumdar focuses on, these contemporary playback singers do not possess authoritative enough star texts that can in any way prevail over the potent physicality of Dixit’s dancing that bursts out of this attempt at restraint as well.¹⁰¹ Through these maneuvers then, the *song* endeavors to attenuate the blatantly lascivious display of Saraswati’s body through the *dance*, or, alternately to mask the bawdy, bodily emphasis on the breast that the dance celebrates with the discourse of the *dil*/heart that the song tries (quite in vain) to promote. Once again, the spectacularizing of the dancing female

¹⁰¹ These singer-dancer figurations take different forms based on the film’s discourse on dance and the dancing female body. In *Dil Toh Pagal Hai*, for example, where the Dixit character, Pooja, is constructed as the more Indian, Kathak-dancing, demure female lead versus the Westernized, Jazz-modern dancing, brazen Nisha (Karisma Kapoor), Dixit’s ideal dancing body (that dances only for itself and not for public performance) is accompanied by the ideal female voice of Hindi cinema – Lata Mangeshkar, while Nisha’s production number, “*Le gayi le gayi dil le gayi le gayi*” (“She took my heart away”) is sung by Mangeshkar’s “dark double,” her sister, Asha Bhosle. From the 1950s through the 1990s, the dulcet, high-pitched Mangeshkar was the voice of the heroine while the sultry-voiced Bhosle sang for the vamp.

body in this example illustrates why a specific focus on film dance is critical to understanding the operation of the song-and-dance sequence within the logics of the Hindi film narrative.

Indeed, the logics of the Hindi film industry of the 1990s dictate that a film starring Dixit must feature a *production number*, often a sensationally sexy one, the money shot as it were, of most of her films. While, on the surface “*Dhak dhak*” appears to be a narrative number – intended as an expression of heterosexual romance (taking place in Raju’s imagination at this point),¹⁰² and featuring the male and female protagonists – the choreography of Dixit’s dance provokes a “mode of looking” upon one of these two bodies (hers) that generates the spectacular address of the production number. One example of this is the collusion between the choreography and the cinematography to exhibit alternately Saraswati’s front and back to us as she dances. When she dances in a two-shot with Raju during the chorus, she is choreographed to embrace him frontally, facing us, but then also turns around so her back and buttocks are on display to us as well. Raju remains in the same pose throughout these moves, his address being personal, directed only to her, embodying the interiorized mode of the narrative number. The alternation between shots of Saraswati’s back and front occurs in the solo sections as well, and her costume has been designed with these poses in mind – she wears a blouse with an embroidered bustier in the front and backless behind, and her sari *pallo* (the part of the sari that covers the torso) is draped as a diaphanous diagonal between her breasts rather than performing its traditional role of covering them. Needless to say, this manner of framing and choreographing

¹⁰² Significantly, at this point in the narrative, Saraswati has expressed no interest in Raju, and has, in fact, recently ridiculed him in public and will do so again in the next scene. It is only after he saves her from being raped that she comes to even look favorably upon him. Also, she is engaged to another man, but when he turns out to be judgmental and a coward, she “requests” Raju to marry her instead. So, the relationship is fraught with the passions of a boy-man on the one hand and the indebtedness of a woman who would lose face in society if she doesn’t get married on the other. But, in the meanwhile, this song-and-dance sequence enables the erasure or at least postponement of such anxieties by functioning as Raju’s fantasy of Saraswati’s acceptance of him as a lover.

the female lead as a solo attraction within a song-and-dance sequence that features the couple allows us to gaze upon the sexualized female figure. In the solo sections, Saraswati's performance is addressed to more than just the single viewer (Raju) within the diegesis. Additionally, these sections feature more intricate dance moves, all of which marks them as eruptions of the production number within the narrative number. The very insertion of song-and-dance sequences in Hindi cinema is part of an economy of spectacle, but in such sequences, solo female dancing is employed to allow for a burst of production number-style spectacle *within* the narrative number, further highlighting the dancing female body as the primary locus of spectacular pleasures in a majority of song-and-dance sequences.

When the song-and-dance spectacle unleashes this libidinal energy through the dancing body of the *heroine*, however, we can be sure that the film text will labor to reinstate its moral universe through the *narrative*. Popular Hindi film traditionally does this through a system of doubling that endeavors to reconcile the deeply contradictory operations undertaken by the narrative and the song-and-dance sequence. In Dixit's case (as seen in *Tezaab*, *Khalnayak* etc.), this doubling takes place between the production number and the film narrative. In *Beta*, in most of the narrative segments, Saraswati plays the unglamorous, efficient housewife, dressed in demurely-draped saris, with a correspondingly "decorous" movement vocabulary, entirely unlike the chest-heaving, slinky sarong-wearing Saraswati of the dance sequences, which function, in this film, as the realm of fantasy, and are eventually her only world outside the home. Mehta remarks of this bifurcation in Dixit's appearance in the narrative and in the song-and-dance sequences: "Dixit brought an enticing combination of innocence, comedy, and sensuality to her performances. [...] she also drew on the gestures and dress of the vamp, though this poaching was largely limited to her dance performances" (160). Dixit's own description of her character in

Beta betrays the doubling at work in the construction of the female star text at this time: “I love Saraswati of *Beta*. She is gutsy and self-righteous [sic], also spunky and sensuous. She does a *Dhak dhak*... and then takes over the reins of a joint family, proving that a woman can be a different person in different circumstances” (Somaaya, Kothari, and Madangarli). The “circumstances” of the narrative demand a good *bahu* (daughter-in-law) who is “gutsy” for all the right domestic reasons, restoring the family’s property to its rightful heir, while the production number calls for the “spunky” avatar of the heroine who is unafraid to adopt the movement vocabulary of the vamp through her chest-heaving and hip-swinging moves. Dixit is among the few Hindi film actresses of the time who is able to reconcile these attributes constructed as opposites, the unrestrained sexuality in her song-and-dance sequences offset further by the extra-cinematic construction and public perception of a sexually conformist, indeed mostly scandal-free personal life, a key aspect of an actor’s star text. The struggle over the representation of female sexuality through production numbers in the 1990s, and the tension between the production number and the film narrative in displaying and containing the female dancing body respectively, is demonstrated in three song-and-dance sequences in *Beta* that relate to three stages of the central heterosexual romance in the film. Saraswati’s risqué bosom-heaving dance in “*Dhak dhak*” is explained away as Raju’s fantasy of her *before* their romance has been initiated in the narrative. Tellingly, while the next song-and-dance sequence in the film, “*Koyal si teri boli*” (“Your cuckoo-like voice”) also takes place in the realm of Raju’s fantasy and features once again, solo sections of Saraswati dancing, her costumes and dance moves are less sexualized than those in “*Dhak dhak*.”¹⁰³ The mise-en-scène and choreography are more typical

¹⁰³ The onset of mutual romance between Raju and Saraswati is relatively delayed in this film – she is initially engaged to another man, but is also not shown as being particularly attracted to Raju until after they marry. However, as an industrial product belonging to a certain economy of spectacle, the film cannot delay the

of a conventional, romantic, narrative number, perhaps because Raju is now seated *with* Saraswati (not alone with her photograph, as before) in a cowshed after rescuing her from the rapist villain. The fetishization of Saraswati/Dixit's body by Raju/the film is commensurate then with her function in the heterosexual romance. The closer she comes to being figured as a lover and wife in the narrative, the less overtly sexualized her performing body becomes in the song-and-dance sequence. Similar to *Sangeet's* gradual gentrification of the heroine's dancing body as she becomes imbricated in the narrative as a suitably decorous partner for the hero, the film dance complex of choreography, mise-en-scène, cinematography, and editing conspire to subdue Saraswati's dancing body in *Beta*. Indeed, we have quite an altered figuration of Saraswati by the time we get to the third song-and-dance sequence of the film, a celebratory post-coital number following her marriage to Raju, where a group of women farm workers demand to know, "*Saiyanji se chupke hui kya teri baat*" ("What secret conversation were you having with your lover?"). In an inversion of the song/dance dichotomy in "*Dhak dhak*," here, the *song* brims with sexual symbolism – bees deflowering buds, a parrot dipping its beak into her mouth, etc. – while the fully-clad Saraswati is choreographed to dance coyly, mixing a folk dance idiom of group dancing, swirling skirts etc. with classical dance gestures, especially *hasta mudras* (hand gestures), such as *tamrachuda* (cock's head), *karkata* (crab), and *kartarimukha* (scissors), in an attempt to tone down the sexual innuendo in the lyrics. Since we now see the "real" Saraswati and not Raju's masturbatory projections of her, and since she is now a married woman in the

romantic/erotic song-and-dance attractions for too long, and hence these two sequences are scripted as occurring in Raju's daydreams.

narrative, her dancing is appropriately bashful.¹⁰⁴ The gestural vocabulary of dance serves then as a subtext that mirrors the narrative progression of the romance by transitioning the heroine from titillating to increasingly demure and domesticated gestures as she moves from single to conjugal status. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that Dixit's (in)famously sensuous production numbers – “*Ek do teen*,” “*Hum ko aaj kal hai intezaar*,” “*Dhak dhak karne laga*,” “*Main tumhari hoon*,” and “*Choli ke peeche kya hai*,” among others – are performed by her *unmarried* characters in the films. Marriage brings about the retirement of this new avatar of the heroine – as heroine-vamp – from the production number, and her domestication into tepid narrative numbers.¹⁰⁵

4.5 DANCE, SPACE, GENDER

In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre argues that every mode of production produces a certain space, its own space (31). In his formulation, space is a social product, which in turn affects spatial practices and perceptions (26). If we consider the movement of the performing body in cinematic space, and the processes of production of this space in 1990s Hindi cinema, the social and cinematic construction of gender is evidenced through a comparison of the spaces for male and female performance during this period. To illustrate this contrast, I focus on two

¹⁰⁴ The only exception is when the heart/breast slippage is momentarily re-invoked in this number: Saraswati sings, “*Apne haathon se dil ko dabaane lagi*” (“I pressed my heart with my hands”), accompanied by a gesture of squeezing her breasts.

¹⁰⁵ Interestingly, post-marriage, this was evidenced in Dixit's off-screen star persona as well when she retired (temporarily) from the movies into domesticity and child-rearing. Her comeback film, “*Aaja Nachle*” did not feature the raunchy Dixit production numbers of yore either.

instances from the film *Tezaab* (1988), starring Dixit – one being the introduction of the male and female protagonists of the film, and the other involving male and female versions of the same song-and-dance sequence, “*Ek do teen*.” In a film culture where the introduction of stars in the film (known as their “entry”) is an elaborately choreographed attraction, the difference in the entry of the two protagonists in *Tezaab* points to the disparate investments in male and female performance. While Mohini’s (Dixit) production number version of “*Ek do teen*” marks her spectacular entry in the film, Munna enters the plot when Mohini is kidnapped right after this sequence. His sister sends him a telegram asking him to come to Mohini’s rescue. The star Anil Kapoor’s introduction as the Munna character begins with a scene shot in the film noir style, as we see his backlit figure walk into an urban “*mohallah*” or neighborhood, whose impoverished residents are lined up to greet him. The backlighting renders him as a figure of mystery and power. In her entry earlier in the film, on the other hand, Madhuri Dixit is instantly put on full and fully-illuminated display as she performs to an anonymous paying audience that demands her entry on stage by chanting, “Mohini! Mohini! Mohini!” Where she sashays onto the linear ramp on stage, he struts along a city street and is greeted and saluted as “Munna *bhai*” (*bhai* literally meaning brother, but in this context, an index of the respect/awe they have for him, and a marker of his gangster status). The subjective camera ensures that we adopt his point of view, while Mohini is filmed frontally. We next see a close up of his shoes as he puts his feet up on the table where he collects his weekly *hafta* (a regular payment made to local gangsters by small business owners). We then see a shot of his hand pulling down a defaulter’s arm, which cuts to a close up of his glinting knife from which the camera tilts up to finally grant us a view of his face as he launches into a punchy dialog commensurate with a male star’s introduction, and one that would elicit much applause from the audience: “*teri zindagi aur maut ke beech ka faasla Munna*

ke chaku ke dhaar se zyada nahi” (“the line between your life and death is only as fine as the blade of Munna’s knife”). Anil Kapoor/Munna’s entry thus emphasizes his voice, dialog delivery, and his action-hero body through the metonymic devices of his shoes and knife, while Madhuri Dixit/Mohini’s entry is signaled through the “Mohini Night: The Singing Dancing Sensation of the Year” hoarding, and her publicly dancing body.¹⁰⁶ This gendered entry – the hero through the tropes of action, the heroine through the attractions of song and dance – sets up their performative spaces and attitudes for the rest of the film. While both entries focus on the face, the torso, and the limbs, the movements of the male and female protagonist are choreographed very differently to emphasize the most gendered aspects of performance. Accordingly, the grimacing face of Munna’s action hero is contrasted with the open, smiling visage of Mohini as the dancing heroine, while shots of her swaying hips and dancing limbs find their inverse in the emphasis on his muscled torso and fighting limbs. In these action films of the mid- to late-1980s then, the space of the man is outside, on the streets, in the city; it is the space of “action.” Women on the other hand, occupy the more domestic and intimate spaces of households, but also, during this period, of the stage – the space of dance performance.

A comparison of the male and female versions of “*Ek do teen*” makes the gendering of space through different dance vocabularies even more apparent. In the *plot* of *Tezaab*, we encounter Mohini’s version of “*Ek do teen*” first, though we later learn that Munna’s version precedes Mohini’s in the *story*, i.e. her version is a reprise of his; she performs her number in

¹⁰⁶ This pattern of gendered entry begins to change in the late 1980s, when for example, the star Aamir Khan makes his debut entry with a song sequence, “*Papa kehte hain*” (“Father says”) in *Qayamat se Qayamat Tak* (From Resurrection to Resurrection, Mansoor Khan, 1988). Released in the same year as *Tezaab*, this film is commonly seen to mark a return to the song-and-dance-filled love story after nearly a decade-and-a-half of action-oriented vigilante films. In this new dispensation, male actors start dancing much more than their predecessors, but the production number continues to be dominated by female performers.

remembrance of him. As mentioned in the discussion of Mohini's version, the film narrative creates a "setup" for this production number by the heroine, and addresses the problem of the display of her performing body by displacing it onto the stage (for which she has already manifested her hatred). The production number is thus isolated from the rest of her role through a separation of performative spaces. The male version, on the other hand, is designed as a *narrative number*, where Munna sings and dances to amuse and "manao" Mohini, or deflate her annoyance at him. Munna and his markedly comic dance troupe of men gambol along the streets of Bombay, through and past easily-recognizable signposts of public spaces such as the Akbarallys department store, the Asiatic library, and the red BEST buses that are ready markers of the city. While Mohini performs in a closed space, on a stage with a ramp, in Munna's version, the ramp is replaced with the road, as he performs a spontaneous dance in Bombay's streets. The male protagonist thus annexes public spaces for his performance by dancing in the narrative space of the city that is an important element in this action movie, while the female protagonist is removed to the space of the stage (which is non-narrative in the sense that it does not play any role in the film other than constructing a space for this production number). Through the *narrative number*, male performance is imbricated in the narrative, while female performance is dislocated to the *production number*.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ *Tezaab* includes another narrative number – "So gaya yeh jahan" ("The world has gone to sleep") – in which Munna and his friends drive about at night through the streets of Bombay. In contrast, Mohini's narrative number – "Keh do ke tum ho mere" ("Tell me you are mine") – only takes place in a romantic situation, with Munna, and in the space of fantasy. On a related note, while male friendship is often celebrated with narrative numbers, song-and-dance sequences extolling female bonding are often choreographed as production numbers. In *Devdas*, the friendship between the female principals, Paro (Aishwarya Rai) and Chandramukhi (Dixit) is eulogized with an elaborately choreographed production number "Dola re dola," so that we are supplied the spectacle of two leading female stars dancing together. The heightened role of film dance in constructing female stardom is once again made evident in the director's addition of this scene where Paro and Chandramukhi meet (unlike in the novel on which the film is based, or earlier cinematic adaptations in which their encounter is fleeting at the most)

The two versions are further marked by spontaneous/rehearsed and amateur/professional dichotomies that are significant for an analysis of male/female performance paradigms. Mohini's version is encountered earlier than Munna's in the plot because this sprightly production number serves as a spectacular entry for her, and an early attraction in the film, but as is later revealed, her song is not original but a rehearsed copy of Munna's spontaneous song from earlier. His is not a stage performance for an audience but a personal performance for his girlfriend, Mohini. He wears everyday clothes, and his dance moves are "loosely" choreographed to look "natural." He whistles sections of the song, highlighting the spontaneous production of music from within his body, while in Mohini's version these are rendered as instrumental interludes produced by an orchestra. Munna's background dancers are a ragtag team of men dancing comically. Unlike Mohini's anonymous and standardized line of background dancers, he dances with his friends, whose outfits are not coordinated, and in fact are designed to mark them as distinct types – the bearded, *lungi*/sarong-wearing Muslim, the turbaned, *dhol*/drum-playing Maharashtrian etc., all conveying a sense of spontaneity rather than of rehearsed performance. The movement vocabulary, costumes, and spaces in which Munna and his friends perform are figured along the lines of folk dance, which "belongs to the community as a whole and is intended primarily for the pleasure of the participants themselves" (Khokar, "Classical and Folk Dances" 57) while Mohini's dance is intended for exhibition and the viewing pleasure of internal and external audiences. While Munna, with his troupe, is the popular entertainer of the community at large, Mohini, is the individual, professional dancer on stage.

just so they may dance together! This number takes place indoors as part of the *Durga pooja* celebrations in Paro's house. Soon after, Devdas and his friend, Chunnilal sing "*Sheeshe se sheesha takraye*" ("The clinking of our glasses") as they drink and dance in the streets of Calcutta. Once again, male dancing is situated outdoors, in the city, and is seemingly not "choreographed."

While Anil Kapoor was generally known to be a good dancer, and we may assume that this song was included to showcase his skills, all of these factors as well as the comic tone of his version make visible the difference in the display of male and female bodies in film dance. That male protagonists are constructed as *subjects* rather than *objects* of desire, even when dancing, is made evident in another Dixit film, *Khalnayak*, where her controversial production number, “*Choli ke peeche*” is paralleled by a narrative number performed by Ballu (Sanjay Dutt) and his gang of hoodlums. Mehta notes of the male version, “The editing processes and camera angles do not sexualize the men’s bodies as they imitate the earlier performance. Whereas the women’s performance is spectacular and riveting, the men’s performance is comical and ungainly. The men fail miserably at being either sexy or alluring” (165). Male performance in the 1990s song-and-dance sequence is deliberately ungainly, as men, especially action heroes, are not supposed to dance and put on a show for an audience. In both films, in their narrative number versions, the heroes parody the sensuous moves of the heroine (Dixit in both cases) in the parallel production number to emphasize sexual difference and deflect the gaze.¹⁰⁸ Identifying the “myth of spontaneity” as one of the key elements in the “myth of entertainment” that the Hollywood musical promotes, Jane Feuer argues that comic dancing in particular is choreographed to seem like an involuntary response, “an utterly seamless monument of naturalness and spontaneity” (460). Where in the Hollywood musical, the “natural” musical comedy performances are offset against the strained, artificial “serious” performances meant to denote high art (444), in the Hindi films I have discussed, the spontaneous and comic *male narrative number* parodies the rehearsed and sexualized *female production number*. In keeping with the myth of spontaneity,

¹⁰⁸ Even in a recent instance of a male production number, “*Dard-e-Disco*” (“Pain of Disco,” *Om Shanti Om*, Farah Khan, 2008), the spectacularized dancing body of Shah Rukh Khan is narratively located within a discourse of parody, specifically here, of the “item number.”

“performance is no longer defined as something professionals do on stage; instead, it permeates the lives of professional and nonprofessional singers and dancers” (Feuer 453). Within the narrative number/production number dyad I have posed, the former is more likely to be characterized as voluntary, spontaneous, innocent, while the latter is deliberate, practiced, corrupt. While, unlike the American film musical’s dual-focus narrative (Altman 50), the Hindi film is not routinely characterized by parallel musical numbers for the male and female protagonist, in the two cases I have discussed so far, when parallel renditions of the same song *are* featured, they only serve to heighten the opposition between the space of female performance (rehearsed, professional, individual, restricted space of performance, dislocated from the narrative, performed for a paying audience, fetishization of the body) and that of male performance (spontaneous, amateur, collective, seemingly un-choreographed, occurring in the city/in the open, not on a stage, imbricated in the narrative, not spectacularizing the male body).

4.6 AAJA NACHLE – COMMEMORATING DIXIT AND HINDI FILM DANCE

I conclude with *Aaja Nachle* (Come, Dance!, Anil Mehta, 2007), Dixit’s “comeback” film after a five-year hiatus, to discuss changes in her star text, and also in Hindi film dance and its relation to female stardom. The film is clearly designed as a vehicle for Dixit’s dancing talents, and the title of the film itself indicates the emphasis on dance. Indeed, the film is, in a sense, a paean to Hindi film dance and to its foremost exponent from the 1980s and 1990s, Madhuri Dixit. Briefly, the film is about New York City resident and dance trainer, Dia Srivatsav’s (Dixit) return to her hometown, Shamli, in India, to revive the Ajanta Dance Academy where she learned her

skills.¹⁰⁹ On his deathbed, her guru has handed over to her the responsibility of saving Ajanta and preventing the construction of a mall on the site. Raja Uday Singh (Akshaye Khanna), the local MP and supporter of the construction of the mall, makes a deal with Dia that if she can produce a spectacular show with the residents of Shamli within two months, he will not demolish Ajanta. Following the generic Hollywood dance film convention of turning novices into expert dancers within a deadline, the film portrays the travails and eventual success of Dia's ragtag dance troupe. Ajanta is saved, the lives of the town-dwellers are transformed, and Dia returns to New York to continue with her job as a dance instructor there.

In her book on Rita Hayworth, McLean speaks of a category of musicals that she refers to as "women's musicals," which "feature women as the predominant performers in both the narrative and the musical numbers" (130). She goes on to say that in these women's musicals, "there is often a sense of professional pride and display of ability in the dance performances, not just an external manifestation of internal feelings exclusive to heterosexual romance" (McLean 142). Given that Dixit is the biggest star attraction in *Aaja Nachle*, and a professional dancer and choreographer in the film, it would be justified to call this a women's musical, the first in Dixit's career.¹¹⁰ The film assiduously works to portray Dia as a professional dancer with no real romantic or sexual inclinations towards any of the male characters (though there is a suggestion of a possible future romance with Raja Uday Singh, but only in New York when he turns up in

¹⁰⁹ In many ways, the film is intertextual with events in Dixit's personal life that were the subject of extensive media coverage. Dixit got married to a US-based doctor in 1999 and migrated to Denver, Colorado. She stopped acting in Hindi films for about five years, during which time she had two sons. The nostalgia of Dia's guru and of Shamli's residents is intended to echo Hindi film spectators' nostalgia for Madhuri Dixit, their beloved dancing star.

¹¹⁰ Even if Dixit's films, *Raja* and *Beta* were re-christened *Rani* and *Beti*, and she exercised a lot of authority in the kind of roles she essayed, she was always imbricated in a romantic narrative that strove to define her narrative persona, unlike in *Aaja Nachle*.

her studio at the end of the film). Thus, unlike a lot of her earlier films, there is no need here for narrative “justifications” for her production numbers, which in any case, are not particularly steamy, but characterized more by the efficient exercises in choreography that typify contemporary Bollywood dancing. Additionally, the production numbers follow broadly the generic conventions of the backstage musical and are focused on depicting Dia’s skills as a professional dancer and choreographer. While these numbers showcase Dixit’s dancing abilities, there seems to be a withdrawal from the overt sexualizing of her body that marked her earlier production numbers. There are multiple reasons for this re-figuration of Dixit’s dancing body. For one, within and outside of the diegesis, she is a married woman and a mother. As discussed before, the Dixit characters that perform in erotically-charged production numbers are unmarried women, not sacralized by the institution of marriage as yet. The fetishization of the virginal unmarried body – a tabula rasa, as it were, for the inscription of textual and spectatorial male fantasies – accounts for the waning in general of female stardom post-marriage and -childbirth in the Hindi film industry. In keeping with Dixit and her character Dia’s marital status, the movement vocabulary and costumes in *Aaja Nachle*’s production numbers are relatively conservative, especially when compared to the contemporary dance numbers of young heroines and item girls. This has to do also with Dixit being perceived as now older than the ideal dancing body, and belonging to an earlier more voluptuous body type than the taut young bodies of contemporary heroines and item girls. Also, by this time, the heroine-vamp divide is almost entirely erased. There are other figurations of female presence such as the heroine-item girl, but in general, Hindi films from the late 1990s do not display as much moral anxiety around the dancing heroine. As a result of the transformations in the Dixit star text brought about by the changes in her personal life, as well as these shifts in the construction of female film dance

during this time, the dichotomies or splits in Dixit's characters' that have been discussed thus far are not evidenced in *Aaja Nachle*. In effect, Madhuri Dixit had changed and so had the world around her. One reason for the failure of the film at the box office could actually be the *lack* of the split Dixit figure that had come to function as a safe space for the frisson produced by fantasies involving the good girl heroine.

The film points to other ways in which the Dixit figure reflects changes in film dance and avenues for female stardom in popular Hindi cinema's post-1990s avatar, Bollywood. *Aaja Nachle* depicts *film dance* as a means to preserve national cultural traditions and build a sense of community. Accordingly, the responsibility for these traditionally male duties is given here to the dancing *heroine* rather than to a hero. The primary relationship in the film is between the *guru* (teacher), Makarand, and his *shishya* (disciple), Dia. The teacher-disciple relationship is a foundational bond in Indian classical dance cultures and serves here as a marker of older traditions and the respectability associated with them, even when the dance that the guru teaches is a hybrid form: a Kathak-infused filmi style, as seen in the first production number of the film, “*O re jiya*” (“Oh my heart”). Thus, the dance taught at Ajanta is firmly within the popular film dance idiom, but is constructed as a *kala*, an art form, using the terms typically assigned to classical dance discourses. Dia describes the dance that she has learned and now teaches as the *virasat* or heritage of the town and indeed, of India. The discourses of globalization enter the terrain of film dance as she demands of Raja Uday Singh: “*aapke mall ke liye is sheher ki virasat ko mita denge?*” (“for the sake of your mall, will you obliterate the heritage of this city?”). The narrative thus constructs dance as a sign of tradition, and malls as standing in for a capitalist modernity that endangers *indigenous* art forms. When Chaudhuri, a local politician refers to Ajanta as “*yeh naach gaane ka adda*” (“a den of singing and dancing”), Dia counters that it is

not “*naach gaana*” but “*nritya, sangeet, aur sanskriti, hamare desh ki poonji*” (“dance, music, and culture, the wealth/legacy of our nation”), using the classical Sanskrit rather than the colloquial Hindi words for singing and dancing. By framing what is essentially a Bollywoodized film dance as a national cultural form, *Aaja Nachle* participates in Bollywood’s mythologization of its own attractions, of which dance is a very important one.¹¹¹ Through its appropriation of the discourse of art, heritage, and tradition, *Aaja Nachle* forges a link with respected classical dance forms to buttress the status of film dance. In the larger cultural domain, by the late 1990s, Bollywood dance classes had become a common feature in Indian cities and towns, and film dance was not looked down upon any more. Dixit’s ebullient production numbers and her star text as a good middle-class girl contributed significantly to this change in public perception of the erstwhile bad object, filmi dance. *Aaja Nachle*’s investment in eulogizing film dance is also evident in its preoccupation with establishing the respectability of dancing and of dancers. Not only is the principal narrative concerned with securing Dia’s reputation in the town (after all, she is a professional dancer, elopes with an American, is divorced, and a single mother), but other characters also serve to advocate the merits of dancing. When Mrs. Chojar, a middle-aged housewife, wants to perform in the show, her husband, a stodgy government officer, scripted to parody an earlier period of popular Indian culture, says, “*agar meri Mrs drama khelengi toh office mein kya izzat reh jayegi meri?*” (“If my wife acts in a play, what will my colleagues at work think of me?”). The wife retorts to his “traditional” view of acting and dancing by calling

¹¹¹ Through self-reflexivity and intertextuality, Bollywood reinforces its own mythologies and celebrates its own attributes. *Aaja Nachle* elevates film dance and also, like other Bollywood films, references older film texts in an attempt to resolve tensions between “tradition” and new mutations of a transnational modernity that become manifest in the rapidly mediatized global nation. The girls who audition for the show that Dia is staging dance to famous production numbers from the past such as “*Aa ja aa ja mai hoon pyaar tera*” (*Teesri Manzil*, Vijay Anand, 1966), “*Dil cheez kya hai aap meri*” (*Umrao Jaan*, Muzaffar Ali, 1981), and, in a self-reflexive moment, even Dixit’s production number, “*Dhak dhak karne laga*,” which makes Dia laugh knowingly.

him “*duniya ka sabse boring aadmi*” (“the most boring man in the world”). The hurt husband secretly requests Dia to give him a role in the dance performance so his wife will find him exciting.¹¹² Film dance is thus rendered as a pedagogical apparatus for accessing the new Indian zeitgeist of global modernity. Tellingly, Dia’s dance training consists of aerobics-style exercises, and style tips to the young female protagonist of the show, Anokhi (Konkona Sen Sharma) whom Dia reprimands for her disheveled hair and loose clothes. Under Dia’s guidance, Anokhi is trained to meet Bollywood’s expectations of a “good” dancer and an “attractive” woman, as she dances in a blue chiffon sari and straightened hair.

Through dance, Dia performs the role of the *sutradhar*¹¹³ in the musical dance show, but equally in the lives of the people of Shamli. Through dance training and performance, she is shown as transforming each person’s life (including those of the audiences at her shows). Her childhood friend Najma says, “*Bahut saal hue naachke, aur jike bhi. Mujhe ek baar phir naachna sikha de Dia, mujhe ek baar phir jeena sikha de*” (“It’s been many years since I danced, and since I lived as well. Teach me to dance once again, Dia, teach me to live.”). “When a woman begins to sing, as well as dance, she can become a point of identification and community in addition to, or possibly instead of, a figure or object representing only sexual difference” (McLean 126). Dixit’s comeback film clearly articulates her agency (as character and as star) as

¹¹² This theme is taken up as the central motif in the 2008 film, *Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi* (Aditya Chopra) – like *Aaja Nachle*, also produced by Yash Raj Films – where the male protagonist (here a dull insurance agent, again a hark back to the 70s and the 80s) surreptitiously learns film dance to impress his wife, prove to her that he is not “boring,” and win her affection.

¹¹³ Literally, the holder of strings in a puppet show, but more generally refers to the narrator figure, the one who controls the form and content of the narrative.

lying in her ability to dance and to teach others to dance, and thus live richer lives.¹¹⁴ If we can ascribe a significant part of Dixit's star power to her dancing talent, this women's musical, which features her as the principal protagonist and sole star in the film, affirms the role of dance in the construction of her star text. Where in her earlier films, she danced to seduce the hero or trick the villain, here she dances and choreographs dance performances to rejuvenate an entire community and ostensibly even preserve a national tradition. Her role in the film as a choreographer in addition to being a dancer contributes to her augmented agency. For the first time, she not only performs but also creates; she has moved from being the *shishya* (disciple) to becoming the *guru* (teacher). This is in keeping with her more recently being anointed as the prima donna of popular Hindi film dance, especially as the celebrity judge on the hugely popular television dance show, *Jhalak Dikhhla Jaa* (Colors). The fourth season of the show even devoted two episodes to a "Mad for Madhuri" special where all the contestants danced to her production numbers, indicating her pervasive influence over Indian popular culture. Dixit's reality television appearance allows for an extension of her stardom, which would have otherwise been seen as destined to decline, like that of most female performers in the Hindi film industry. But rather than fade into "character actor" oblivion (her spectacular, dancing body would be difficult to fit into the mother mold reserved for older actresses anyway), through dance, Dixit has re-invented her career as the elder stateswoman of film dance. In the two decades since her racy production numbers in *Beta*, *Khalnayak* and other films, the Hindi film heroine's dance vocabulary has permanently altered to include the dance moves that Dixit made so popular. The Hindi film narrative no longer labors to justify these dance numbers, as evidenced in the "item number," a

¹¹⁴ Much of this agency also comes from her being an NRI (Non-resident Indian) who teaches dance in New York, which also enables the conceptualization of the heroine as a divorced single mother.

dance number that is manifestly unrelated to the film narrative and primarily intended to showcase skimpily-clad bodies and raunchy dance moves. From initiating the bridging of the heroine-vamp divide in “*Ek do teen*” in 1988 to performing an item number herself – “*Ghagra*” in *Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani* (Ayan Mukerji) – in 2013, a kinesthetic history of Dixit’s career encapsulates and has indeed produced radical changes in popular Hindi cinema’s representation of dancing bodies, especially those of its lead actresses. Her latest film, *Dedh Ishqiya* (Abhishek Chaubey, 2014), concludes with Begum Para (Dixit) eloping with her maid-lover, and opening a dance school for young girls, a safe haven for dancing bodies swirling in a homoerotic world of female desire, away from the prying eyes of the male protagonists. On the show, *Jhalak Dikhhla Jaa*, with trademark moves such as a coquettish eyebrow gesture, a wanton toss of her head, or instructions to the show’s participants on how to perfect that subtle swing of the hip from “*Hum ko aaj kal hai intezaar*” (while always smiling as you sway), Dixit activates spectatorial memories of her dancing on people’s television sets every night. Her body is an eloquent beacon of the transitions in Hindi film dance and female stardom over the last twenty-five years, from introducing the vamp’s movement vocabulary into the repertoire of the heroine to making this type of filmi dance the norm for heroines and eventually even heroes, as well as for millions of aspiring dancers. Indeed, the question, “*stardom ke peeche kya hai?*” (“What is behind the stardom?”) requires no prevarication in the case of the Dixit star text.

5.0 EPILOGUE – BOLLYWOOD AND FILM DANCE TODAY

In *Don: The Chase Begins Again* (Farhan Akhtar, 2006), a remake of the 1978 film, *Don* (Chandra Barot), the A-list actress Kareena Kapoor makes a “special appearance” in the production number “*Yeh mera dil*” (“My heart”), shimmying sexily to seduce the eponymous don and avenge the murder of her fiancé at his hands. In the original 1978 version of the film, this voluptuous production number is performed by the leading *vamp* of Hindi cinema, Helen. In both films, this character, Kamini, is killed by the don right after the production number, and the role is thus restricted to this dance number. The replacement of the *vamp* by a top Bollywood actress signals a number of changes in the production and reception of Hindi film dance and of female stardom. While the hero of both versions of the film is played by the most popular actor of that generation – Amitabh Bachchan in 1978 and Shah Rukh Khan in 2006 – it is in the figuration of the contemporary Bollywood actress that we detect a significant shift. Madhuri Dixit’s bold production numbers marked the bridging of the heroine-*vamp* divide in the 1990s, but as demonstrated in Chapter 4, this was not an easy transition and provoked a variety of battles over the display of the female body on screen. By the first decade of the new millennium, however, the dance vocabulary employed in the heroine’s production numbers had altered so radically that the heroine-*vamp* divide and its concomitant moral binaries *appeared* to cease to be of much concern in public discourse around the cinema. The example from *Don: The Chase Begins Again* also serves to illustrate the contemporary Bollywood cinema’s investment in

“celebrating” popular Hindi cinema of the past through remakes and through intertextual references to song-and-dance numbers from the past. In this concluding chapter, to extend this dissertation’s examination of dance and female stardom up to the present, and to point to further areas of exploration that a focus on film dance opens up, I briefly discuss the changing role of the heroine as the “item girl,” Bollywood intertextuality through dance, new modes of participatory fandom evidenced in reality dance shows, and broadly, contemporary film dance cultures in relation to globalization.

5.1 FROM THE PRODUCTION NUMBER TO THE ITEM NUMBER

One of the principal markers differentiating the contemporary Bollywood cinema from earlier modes of popular Hindi cinema is the “item number.” Popularly held to be inaugurated by the song-and-dance sequence, “*Chaiyya chaiyya*” in *Dil Se* (From the Heart, Mani Ratnam, 1998), the item number is typically a dance number that is blatantly unrelated to the film narrative and primarily intended to showcase raunchy dance moves and skimpily-clad bodies (usually of women). Traced to popular indigenous traditions such as *Tamasha* as well as the urban “bar dancing” culture (Basu, P. 174), the item number is often constructed like a music video.¹¹⁵ Signaling a new economy of dance in Hindi cinema, the item number is a standalone attraction featuring bodies, spaces, movement vocabularies, and technical flourishes that are unconnected

¹¹⁵ Tamasha is a folk theatre from Maharashtra that intersperses dialog with the dance form, *Lavani*, which is characterized by erotic themes and sensuous dance moves. Bar dancing refers to erotic dance performance to popular film songs by “bargirls” in “dance bars” in urban centers in India. Dance bars, as the name suggests, serve alcohol and feature dancing bargirls. The audience for Tamasha and bar dancing is predominantly male.

to the rest of the narrative. The “item girl,” the female performer at the heart of the item number, for example, rarely features in the rest of the narrative. Unlike the vamp, who was typically associated with the villain, and whose cabarets and production numbers were sometimes integrated into the narrative and helped move the plot forward, the item girl is purely an agent of spectacle, devoid of narrative purpose. Hence, the moral binaries that defined the vamp-heroine dyad do not apply to the item girl and the heroine. This separation of the dancing body from moral codes points towards the Bollywood cinema’s production of spectacle, where the body – often re-constructed through plastic surgery (or extreme fitness regimens before the shooting of an item number), but also through sets, costumes, cinematography, and editing – is presented as a commodity that materializes new patterns of consumption. “The body and the item number circulate disembedded from celluloid, as autonomous goods on sale, in conflated fantasies of sexual desire and consumption” (Rehman 66).

The difference between the older production number and the contemporary item number is evidenced in the cinematic construction of dance in these two forms. The item number, focused not as much on the dancing skills of the item girl as on her “sex appeal,” engenders a movement vocabulary defined by the striking of sensuous poses, and a central focus on the gyrating torso. Indeed, in a cinematic culture where dance has become a prerequisite for female and male stardom, the spectacle of the dancing Bollywood body is manufactured through a multiplicity of means rather than just through the performer’s skills. Shyama, an actress from the 1940s and 1950s, remarks on the difference between the filming of dance in that period and today: “We used to dance the entire *mukhda* and *antara* in one take. Nowadays, actors do one move and cut, just a small move of the head and cut” (“The Saroj Khan Story”). This observation underscores the difference between figural dancing, where the dance is primarily produced

through the body of the dancing figure, and the mechanical construction of dance through cinematography, editing, and special effects. Saroj Khan, the celebrated choreographer of the 1990s, notes of contemporary choreography: “The entire raw stock is brought to the editing table and the song put together there. We used to put camera angles according to the movement; now you can choose whichever angle you want. There’s nothing much for the dance master to do” (Rajan).

Initially, the item girl, like the vamp, was drawn from what was considered a lower rung of performers; “starlets” like Isha Koppikar, Amrita Arora, Rakhi Sawant, Koena Mitra, Negar Khan etc. either featured as item girls in big budget films or as female protagonists in low-budget multi-starrers. The 2005 film, *Bunty aur Babli* (Shaad Ali), in which a top Bollywood actress, Aishwarya Rai performed the item number, “*Kajra re*” (“My kohl-lined eyes”), heralded the participation of A-list actresses in item numbers. Kapoor’s reprise of Helen’s cabaret number in *Don* is a part of this phenomenon. In recent times, top male actors such as Shah Rukh Khan, Hritik Roshan, and John Abraham have also featured in item numbers. The participation of A-list actors and actresses in item numbers points to new configurations of stardom, where the star *body* rather than expressive attributes elicited in acting sequences becomes the defining feature of the star, and dance becomes the primary tool to showcase this ideal body.¹¹⁶ The economies of stardom remain in place however as these top actors and actresses charge enormous fees to put on display the spectacle of their dancing bodies. Thus, while Kapoor may adopt the movement vocabulary of the vamp in *Don*, the vamp-heroine binary is sustained in a different form in the price attached to gazing upon her shimmying star body versus that of Helen.

¹¹⁶ The relationship of Bollywood dance to new body cultures centered on fitness is evident in the immense global popularity of aerobics-style Bollywood dance classes that focus on weight-loss, body-toning and the like rather than on learning specific dance skills. See Shresthova (*Is It All about the Hips*).

5.2 CITATIONS OF THE CINEMATIC PAST THROUGH DANCE

Kapoor's recreation of Helen's dance in "*Yeh mera dil*" is one mode of Bollywood's commemoration of the past – through remakes of films and re-productions of song-and-dance sequences. Another form of intertextuality with the past is through song-and-dance sequences composed of a collage of earlier styles of dance, music, choreography, and mise-en-scene. The song-and-dance sequence, "*Woh ladki hai kahan*" ("Where is that girl") from *Dil Chahta Hai* (The Heart Desires, Farhan Akhtar, 2001), for example, deploys a series of gestures, costumes, and locations associated with popular film dance to define and periodize popular Hindi cinema. The sequence alludes to cinematic eras through movement vocabularies that transition from Jazz-inspired moves in the 1950s, to group "picnic" dances of the 1970s, to the synchronized gyrations of Madhuri Dixit's 1980s and 1990s numbers. Dance becomes the signal attribute of popular Hindi cinema that is mobilized to recreate the history of this film industry and culture. Similarly, the production number, "*Dhoom tana*" (*Om Shanti Om*, Farah Khan, 2007) quotes from four dance numbers from the 1960s and 70s. The film's protagonists are transposed into the space of popular Hindi cinema, where dance is the principal tool for the expression of desire. In the production number, "*Phir milenge chalte chalte*" ("We'll meet again") from *Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi* (A Match Made in Heaven, Aditya Chopra, 2008), the male protagonist Raj, played by Bollywood's poster boy, Shah Rukh Khan, takes on the dancing personas of various stars from earlier eras of popular Hindi cinema, including Raj Kapoor from the 1950s, Dev Anand and Shammi Kapoor from the 60s, Rajesh Khanna, the 70s, and Rishi Kapoor from the 80s. In this fantasy world, Raj dances alongside actresses from contemporary Bollywood figured as heroines from the past. Dance, once again, becomes Bollywood's favored mode of articulating stardom and the unique characteristics of famous stars. In the extravagant production number, "*Deewangi*

deewangi” in *Om Shanti Om*, 31 stars from the Hindi film industry, who have no role otherwise in the film, make a “special appearance” for this song. Each of these stars displays their trademark dancing styles and gestures, so that every *body* comes to be a signpost for a certain phase in the history of the industry. Actresses such as Urmila Matondkar, Shilpa Shetty, and Priyanka Chopra, for example, re-enact their sensuous moves from *Rangeela* (Ram Gopal Varma, 1995), *Shool* (E. Nivas, 1999), and *Bluffmaster* (Rohan Sippy, 2005). In the Bollywood star system, certain dance moves stand in for a star’s whole career, and indeed for entire periods of popular Hindi cinema.

Significantly, in the three intertextual song sequences discussed above, none of the contemporary stars actually bears a resemblance to stars of the past (e.g. Bipasha Basu as Nutan, Kajol as Nargis, Sonali Kulkarni as Madhuri Dixit etc.), but through dance, costume, and make-up, a resemblance is constructed. The markers of stardom are thus inscribed not in physical appearance or in acting prowess but in exteriorized aspects that can be replicated by Bollywood. The selectivity of references from the past indicates that Bollywood films elect to remember a cinema of spectacle to form a link to their own participation in and celebration of spectacle, as not an embarrassment anymore but a self-assured assertion of identity. What is commemorated is a cinema of dress, gesture, dance moves, sets and props: the very elements that take center stage in the contemporary Bollywood aesthetic.

5.3 PERFORMING CINEMATIC FANDOM THROUGH DANCE

Through song-and-dance intertextuality, Bollywood aims to create a somatic nostalgia, where a repertoire of familiar gestures triggers a physical memory of past cultural rituals (such as dancing

in the aisles, copying the trademark moves of your favorite stars etc.). Dance is a key element in the film industry's construction of stardom as well as fandom, where the history of Hindi cinema is reconstructed through a remembering of epochal dance moves. Indeed, dance routines are all-important to the Bollywood idiom, so that globally, Hindi cinema is now associated with dance rather than with the song sequences that marked its difference earlier.¹¹⁷ Indeed, Bollywood has spawned a veritable industry around dance. In addition to dancing in their films, stars perform at award ceremonies, on "world tours" that draw huge expatriate and local crowds, and at weddings and private events of the wealthy. Concurrently, contemporary Indian fandom is increasingly enacted through song-and-dance competitions on television. There are innumerable reality shows designed around participatory fandom, such as *Boogie Woogie* (Sony Entertainment), *Dance India Dance* (Zee TV), *Nach Baliye* (Star TV), *Jhalak Dikhhla Jaa* (Colors) etc. that feature the entire spectrum of the youth population – from urban hipsters to rural aspirants – competing for the closest approximation of a particular star's dancing style or enacting the trademark dance moves of a particular song. Significantly, Bollywood dance numbers often feature a chorus that is accompanied by distinctive dance moves that are then replicated on these TV shows, in discotheques, at weddings, and in other private and public dancing venues.

Contemporary Indian fandom, then, is increasingly enacted through mimicry in these televised dance competitions that are based on a performative knowledge of the cinema. Where earlier expressions of fan culture centered around collecting film memorabilia, or dressing like a star, or taking on his/her mannerisms, these private acts of embodiment have been eclipsed by the emergence of an industry devoted to fandom as embodiment. The more accessible the star

¹¹⁷ Bollywood dance parties, DJ nights, stage shows, and dance classes across Europe, America, and other parts of the world (where Hindi cinema did not traditionally have an audience earlier) are testimony to the predominance of dance in the dissemination of Bollywood.

body, the more rampant its appropriation and occupation. With an address to urban, cosmopolitan, and rural audiences, this new media-generated appropriative fan culture is linked to larger economies of aspiration and mobility. Participants are required to be somewhat familiar with Indian classical and folk dance forms as well as hip-hop, contact improvisation, salsa, capoeira etc., and create hybrid vocabularies under the watchful eyes of celebrity judges from Bollywood including dancer-stars like Dixit and Mithun Chakraborty, as well as star choreographers such as Saroj Khan, Farah Khan, Vaibhavi Merchant etc. In a mediatized fan culture where dance forms are validated through TRPs (Target Rating Points that measure the viewership for a show), audience polls and the like, and dances are performed under broad rubrics such as “village dance,” “festival dance,” and “regional dance” (Biswas 194, 197), the hybridity of popular Hindi film dance is foregrounded and celebrated more than ever before as these competing dancing bodies are implicated in new transnational circuits of reception and consumption.

APPENDIX A

A GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Bai or **Baiji**: The common North Indian appellation for professional female musicians and dancers, who were often courtesans that enjoyed princely patronage.

Bhangra: A vigorous Punjabi folk dance performed mainly by men.

Bharatanatyam: A South-Indian classical dance form, among the first to be canonized as “classical” by the Sangeet Natak Akademi (The National Academy for Music, Dance and Drama). In addition to a vast gestural vocabulary, Bharatanatyam is characterized by the *araimandi* (half-squat) stance, and the execution of geometric movements in a given time cycle.

Bollywood: Following Madhava Prasad (“This Thing called Bollywood”) and Ashish Rajadhyaksha’s descriptions of the term, Bollywood, in this dissertation stands for a specific mode of popular Hindi cinema that developed from the 1990s, characterized among other things, by family melodramas, big-budget, spectacular song-and-dance sequences, characters who often live outside of India, a conscious display of multinational brand names, and an unmistakable address to a diasporic audience. Following closely on the heels of economic deregulation in India in 1991, Bollywood proceeded to trigger a larger entertainment complex that now includes television, music, advertising, fashion, and new media.

Devi: The literal English translation of *devi* from Sanskrit/Hindi is “goddess.” However, it refers more broadly to a virtuous, respectable, usually married woman.

Filmi: The Hindi vernacular for acting or dancing that is typical of Hindi films. I specifically use “filmi dance” to refer to the dancing in Hindi films that is marked by a hybridity of gestures and movement vocabularies taken from classical dances, folk dances, and transnational dance forms.

Islamicate: In his essay on the *tawaif/courtesan*, Mukul Kesavan coins the term, “Islamicate” to “refer not directly to the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims” (246).

Item Girl: Female performer in dance numbers known as “item numbers,” which bear no relation to the narrative but are inserted purely as spectacular attractions.

Kathak: A North-Indian classical dance form, one of the eight dance forms canonized as “classical” by the Sangeet Natak Akademi (The National Academy for Music, Dance and Drama). In addition to a vast gestural vocabulary, it is marked by elaborate footwork and spins of the body.

Kathakali: A South-Indian classical dance form performed in the state of Kerala, and among the eight canonized classical dance forms. It is predominantly performed by men, whose facepaint and costume indicate their characters.

Koli: A folk dance form performed by fishing communities in Maharashtra.

Kotha: The performance space of the *Islamicate tawaif* or *courtesan*, “at once an architectural environment, a social space and a performance space in which the spectacle of song and dance and the cinematic rendition of that spectacle cohere” (Allen and Bhaskar 49).

Lavani: A folk dance form from Maharashtra that is characterized by erotic themes and sensuous dance moves.

Manipuri: A canonized classical dance form from the North Eastern state of Manipur that predominantly depicts religious themes, especially the *Raas Lila* or the dance of Krishna and Radha.

Mehfil: A performance of poetry, music, or dance before a small, intimate audience.

Mohiniattam: Literally translated as “the dance of the enchantress,” Mohiniattam is a classical dance form from Kerala, performed mainly by women, and marked by fluid, graceful movements.

Mujra: A Kathak-based dance performance by tawaif/s in the space of the kotha. This form was created and popularized in the 19th century by nautch girls (dancing girls) patronized by Mughal and other noblemen and English soldiers among others.

Mukhda and **Antara:** In Hindi film songs, the opening stanza is referred to as the mukhda. It is the introductory and principal phrase of the composition that, like the chorus in western music, is repeated after every following stanza. Each of these stanzas that form the body of the song is known as the antara. The mukhda and antara are sung by one or more characters, and are often interspersed with instrumental sections.

Nattuvanar: The male hereditary dance guru, conductor, and choreographer of the Bharatanatyam dance form.

Nautanki: A North-Indian folk dance and theatre performance tradition. Often in Hindi cinema, nautanki is reduced to a generic folk dance performance, frequently of a raunchy nature.

Nautch: An Anglicized pronunciation and transliteration of the Hindustani word for dance, *naach*. “Nautch” had a pejorative intent and was specially used to designate the dance of the tawaifs and the devadasis.

Odissi: A canonized classical dance originating from the state of Odisha in eastern India.

Tamasha: A folk theatre from Maharashtra that intersperses dialog with the dance form, *Lavani*, which is characterized by erotic themes and sensuous dance moves.

Thumri: A category of semi-classical music within the North Indian Hindustani classical music system, in which short romantic or religious compositions are set to music. In the 19th century, Thumris were predominantly sung by courtesans and were often accompanied by dance.

Vamp: From the late 1950s to the 1980s, the female figure of the vamp functioned as the archetypal performer of the raunchy song-and-dance sequence in Hindi cinema. As part of a parallel “star system,” one with significantly less financial power and social acceptance than that of the heroine, vamps such as Helen, Kalpana Iyer, Bindu, Aruna Irani, and Jayshree T, among others, acted as gangsters’ molls whose participation in a film was often restricted to a “cabaret” performance in a casino/bar/nightclub. The kind of dance they performed (including costume and make-up) marked them as Westernized outsiders characterized by an unrestrained sexuality, the opposite of the heroine, who was the site of virtue and thus of “Indianness.”

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