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Cinema and Society

FILM AND SOCIAL
CHANGE IN PAKISTAN

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FOREWORD



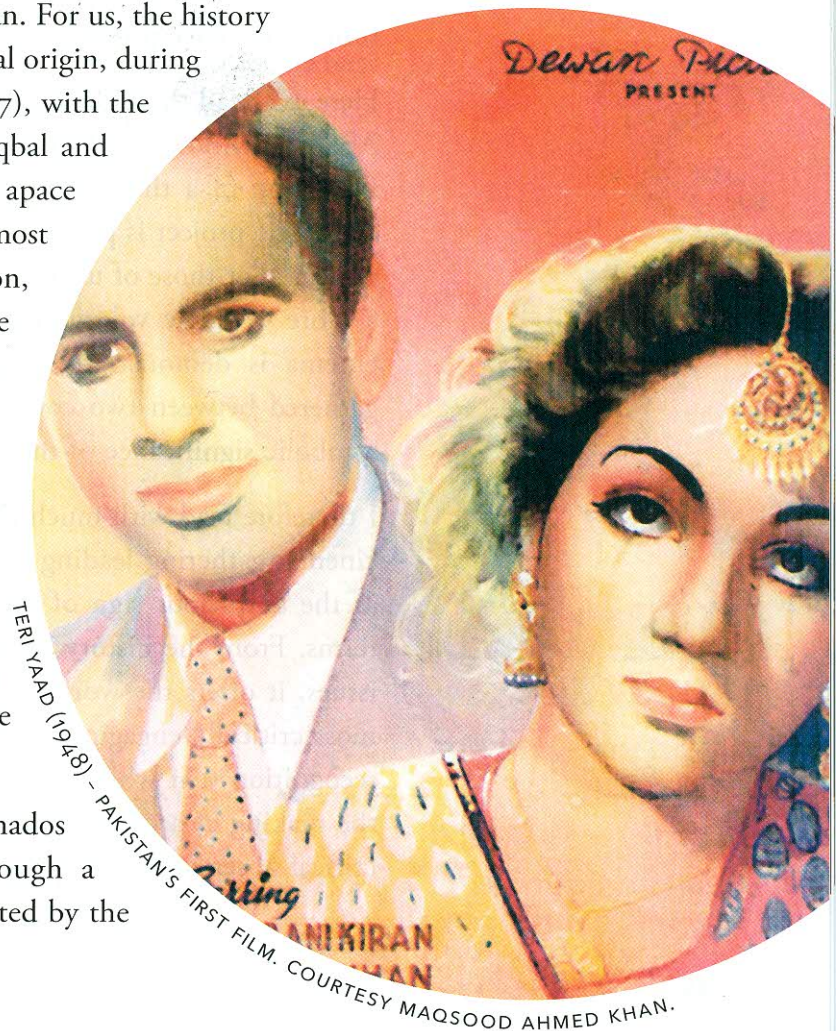
Pakistan and the Idea of a National Cinema

Hamid Dabashi

What do we say when we say 'Pakistani Cinema?' In what particular manner is it that we can consider the aggregation of a body of cinematic work cohering in the making of a 'national cinema'? The question is not limited to Pakistani cinema and can be extended to any other claim a scholar or cultural critique makes about a 'national cinema'.

To answer that question we need to go a bit upstream from what holds a national cinema together and look at what constitutes the nation itself. Today the name of 'Pakistan' in the globalized mass media is entirely bereft of social depth and cultural referents. A country of more than 200 million human beings with a rich and diversified history is reduced to a subsidiary of 'security and terrorism studies', with the coded names of 'Osama bin Laden', 'the Taliban', and 'al-Qaeda' as its main hallmarks. I say 'globalized mass media' purposefully for that is certainly not the image of Pakistan for those of us born and bred in or about Pakistan. For us, the history of Pakistan begins at its modern political origin, during the traumatic drama of 'Partition' (1947), with the monumental figures of Muhammad Iqbal and Mohammad Ali Jinnah, and continues apace with the rise of Faiz Ahmed Faiz as the most widely celebrated poet of his generation, linking Pakistan's poetic significance to other luminaries of his age from Vladimir Mayakovsky in Russia to Nazim Hekmat in Turkey, to Ahmad Shamlou in Iran, Mahmoud Darwish in Palestine, and Pablo Neruda for the global Spanish world. For those of us who were born to this history, the current mass media image of Pakistan is deeply flawed, disorienting, and above all disconcerting.

If the world of 'security studies' aficionados follows the history of Pakistan through a succession of political leaders, punctuated by the



possession of the nuclear bomb, and rivalry with India over Kashmir, an alternative vision of its past and present can be carved from its culture, literature, visual and performing arts. It is in precisely that domain, where a nation registers its aspirations transcending its realities, that the idea of a 'Pakistani cinema' presents itself.

In my work on various aspects of world cinema, I have found the idea of a 'national trauma' at the heart of a collective memory useful in designating the idea of 'national cinema'. So if for example in Palestinian cinema what they call 'Nakba/Catastrophe' is that defining trauma, the revolution and subsequent Iran-Iraq war might be considered that trauma in the case of Iranian cinema. Similarly, we can trace traumas such as the Russian revolution of 1917 in the rise of Soviet cinema, or the rise of fascism in the Italian New Realism, or the Cultural Revolution in the making of the Chinese New Wave. In the case of Pakistani cinema we may consider and suggest the traumatic experience of Partition, the inaugural moment of the nation, as that traumatic experience that eventually manifested itself in what that and subsequent generations of Pakistani thinkers, poets, artists, and filmmakers have produced.

Here as I read through this fabulous collection of essays that my dear friend Ali Nobil Ahmad and his colleagues have collected, it strikes me that the formation of a timely and judicious hermeneutic circle around any given cinematic project is profoundly important in its establishment as a national cinema. For those of us interested in Pakistani cinema, there can scarcely be a more welcome volume than this book, with which the fact of Pakistani cinema is demonstrated through a sustained body of critical thinking gathered between two covers for the whole world to read and learn. The symbolic significance of the act is no less than its critical import.

I therefore read with much pleasure this first academic volume on Pakistani cinema, gathering leading scholars in the field of South Asian film studies as the auspicious sign of a cinematic adventure finally coming to its own terms. From the history of the Pakistani film industry to current thematic issues, it offers the world at large a magnificent single constellation of the most critically engaging writings on the subject. The result is the uncanny recognition that while reading this volume one is a participant observer in the making of a national cinema little known before with such precision of critical observations.

It is particularly important that the objective of this volume is to understand Pakistani visual culture in relation to social issues. This will make *Cinema and Society* of immediate concern to a whole host of other fields in social sciences and the humanities. We will therefore have in our hands a singularly significant volume that restores the social roots and the cultural flowering of a nation too often denied its enduring concern with the aesthetic reason of its worldly whereabouts. From deeply informed academic writings to literary and journalistic essays, this collection of writings provides insightful reading of the visual archive of Pakistani cinema for the world at large. Added bonuses include essays translated from Urdu, abridgements of out-of-print film histories and a plethora of rare visual material.

It is impossible to exaggerate the significance of this single volume, not just in putting Pakistani cinema on the global map with a rich and diversified body of critical writing, but beyond that worthy project, in making a significant contribution to the hermeneutic circle around a national cinema, without which it might disperse or disappear into a nativist cul-de-sac.

I feel privileged to have seen this volume before its official publication and very much welcome the prospect of teaching it soon to my own students next time I offer my staple course of the last two decades, 'Cinema and Society in Asia and Africa'.

Hamid Dabashi

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, NEW YORK

Preface and Acknowledgements

Ali Nobil Ahmad and Ali Khan

The planning of this book began in 2010 when we embarked upon research into the history of the Pakistani film industry. Struck by the near total absence of published scholarly material and debate about this topic, we felt compelled to compile a volume that might get the ball rolling. Although we wanted to include the best research currently being conducted on film in Pakistan, we were convinced that an edited collection would need to combine previously unpublished work with older writings that are either out of print or scattered across disparate books, journals and in some cases, newspapers.

The films discussed in the pages that follow are of interest in their own right. Our treatment of cinema, however, is informed by a concern to understand visual culture in relation to social change. In this respect, our objective is to contribute not just to film studies but also to the fields of anthropology, sociology, urban studies and history in South Asia. Within the humanities and social sciences, conversations about Pakistan's past and present are stunted by an excessive focus on high politics and 'security' issues; they would be enriched by a diversification of topics, texts and primary sources to include films and related aspects of popular culture.

Cinema and Society is a response to these needs for engagement with film and social transformation in Pakistan. Its various chapters consider different dimensions of the cinematic past, and, a series of subsequent 'transitions' that made the film industry what it is today. Some are academic works written for this book; others are literary, journalistic and humorous writings assembled to inform and stimulate but also to entertain and occasionally amuse. The inclusion of these diverse registers—together with rare images and posters—reflects a commitment to reaching as wide an audience as possible.



We are particularly grateful to LUMS (Lahore University of Management Sciences): the Faculty Initiative Fund and the Research Committee at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences provided essential funding for our work on the book, allowing us, amongst other things, to hire research assistants Aimon Fatima and Faheem Ameen. In addition, Sophiya Anjum, Maratib Ali Shad and Naseer ud Din worked tirelessly on a number of tasks ranging from locating images and writing captions to interview transcriptions and compiling a filmography.

Our fieldwork was made possible by industry stalwart Rana Imtiaz who opened doors, arranged interviews and located rare material. Additional aid came from Wasay Chaudhry who provided unique insight into Punjabi cinema and Ali Qazilbash who assisted in arranging key interviews.

Omar Ali Khan made available his entire collection of posters and film memorabilia; his knowledge of the film industry was a constant source of information. So too Haroon Khalid, Nadhra Shahbaz and Mazhar Iqbal who maintains the most extensive website on Pakistani cinema. Our thinking on technology owes a good deal to Farida Batool's important research on new media in Lahore; Usman Ghafoor helped us grapple with recent developments in Pakistani cinema, acting as a consultant for the book's concluding essay. We learned much from Professor Ravi Vasudevan whose comments on various articles for a separate special issue of *Bioscope* helped us develop many of our ideas; also Professor Hamid Dabashi, whose generous support and encouragement have been a blessing. Mohsin *artist*—twenty years a film billboard painter—was instrumental in locating rare films, posters and other material drawn upon in our own essays.

At LUMS, a highly intelligent group of students who took the course *Cinema and Society* contributed to stimulating discussions that inspired us in our research. It was taught again at Brandeis University, Boston, in 2014, where another cohort of bright undergraduates provided fresh and energizing input. Colleagues in the South Asia department there were extremely supportive of this experiment: Sarah Lamb, Jonathan and Ulka Anjaria and Harleen Singh are fondly remembered. In Berlin, Zentrum Moderner Orient is gratefully acknowledged for its flexibility and support during the latter phases of the book's writing, editing and compilation.

Ameena Saiyid, the Managing Director at Oxford University Press was supportive of this project from the start. The final product would not have been possible without her encouragement and backing and the diligence of

her editorial team, in particular Tara Kashif, who worked tirelessly on the manuscript for a period of several months.

So too our contributing authors whose patience has been considerable. The editorial process has taken its sweet time and they have accepted delays with good grace. For permission to reprint their chapters we thank: Ziauddin Sardar for *Dilip Kumar made me do it*; Milan Hulsing for *Pashto Horror Films*; Haris and Ayesha Gazdar for allowing their father Mushtaq Gazdar's book, *Pakistani Cinema*, to be abridged; the Bangla Academy for permission to publish Lotte Hoek's abridgement of Alamgir Kabir's *The Cinema in Pakistan*; Musharraf Ali Farooqui for the *Foot Worshippers Guide to Watching Maula Jatt*; Penguin India and the Manto family for Saadat Hasan Manto's *Nina, the Inscrutable Housewife*. Kamran Asdar Ali's essay on *Behan Bhai* first appeared in Dawn Books in 2013; a longer version of Khan and Ahmad's *Violence and Horror in Pakistani Cinema* was published in *Third Text* in 2010; Iftikhar Dadi's *Modernity and Vernacular Cinema*'s builds on 'Registering crisis', an essay in *Beyond Crisis*, edited by Naveeda Khan, published by Routledge, New Delhi in 2010. Hashim bin Rashid and Sher Khan's *Goonda Raj* first appeared in 2012 in *The Express Tribune*. Zachary Canepari, Niklas Hallen, Gwen Kirk and Adnan Bilgrami deserve special thanks for allowing us to publish their important photography throughout the book.

We would also like to thank our families: parents, siblings and wives whose love and understanding are essential to all our endeavours; and daughters, Alena and Rosa, who give us reason to feel blessed and remain hopeful for Pakistan's future.

Ali Nobil Ahmad and Ali Khan

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