Notes

1 For a similar discussion about the pastoral idyll of the village in Bengali partition literature, see Chakrabarty, 2002.

2 Salil Chowdhury's song occurs in a film called *Chhaya* and was sung by a very popular singer, Talat Mahmood.

References

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REALISM AND FANTASY IN REPRESENTATIONS OF METROPOLITAN LIFE IN INDIAN CINEMA

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Literature on cities has since the 19th century been centrally preoccupied with one grand theme: the ceaseless conflict of interests between two opposed energies, embodied, on the one hand, in the transparent city that planners and administrators, architects and utopianists dream of bringing into being, and on the other, in the dense, obscure, opaque lived city of human experience. The spaces of the city are a site where struggles between opposing forces and desires, hopes and projections, are played out—confrontations between a governing will and a resistant population or between classes, rulers and ruled. Michel de Certeau, looking down at New York from the top of the World Trade Center, contrasted the Concept City, seen from a godly perspective, and characterized above all by its high visibility, to the city of experience which lies just on the other side of visibility, in the activities of what he calls the ordinary practitioners of the city who live down below, below the thresholds at which visibility begins. 'They walk . . . they are walkers . . . whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban text they write without being able to read it.' The great 19th century novels portray this living city, capturing in an exuberant prose, as in Dickens, the density and confusion, the impenetrable complexity of the city, in tales that are often premised on the idea that this is a moral confusion, a failure of reformist will. The anxiety pro-

duced by this metropolitan excess gives rise to the figure of the detective, a la Sherlock Holmes, who is capable of seeing through the London fog and reasoning his way through the indecipherable, dangerous neighbourhoods inhabited by criminals, the unemployed and the outcast. It also gives rise to the figure of the Baudelairean *flaneur*, who revels in the city's sights and spaces, acceding to its overpowering sensual effects and thereby gaining room for a private enjoyment of its disorder. Holmes represents the vertical, penetrating, controlling, organizing gaze of governance,[1] whereas the *flaneur* resides on the same plane as the others, charting a horizontal, zig-zag course through a diversity of signs and activities that he takes in with a detached eye but makes no attempt to control or clarify.

Another theme that figures equally often in the literature is that of the country and the city, the relationship, both complementary and conflictual, between rural and urban. Here the city's own internal complexity is bracketed away in order to highlight its position within a larger economic, social, cultural and political geography. This is the city as an expansionary force, devouring the other and reconstructing it in its own image. In Henri Lefebvre's words, 'Urban life penetrates peasant life, dispossessing it of its traditional features: crafts, small centres which decline to the benefit of urban centres . . . Villages become ruralized by losing their peasant specificity.' (Lefebvre, 1996:119).

Two perspectives, internal and external: (i) the city in itself, internally split into a rational grid aspiring to a universal rationality, and the everyday life, with its teeming diversity, which defies this logic. And (ii) the city in its external aspect, in its relation to its other, again has two dimensions: firstly, the city as site of attractions, exercising what social scientists call the pull factor, a place to go to, an object of imagination and fantasy; and second, the city as a logic of urbanization, which extends beyond the territorial limits of the city proper and transforms the other—the country—into an extension of itself, giving rise, as Lefebvre puts it, to a ruralized countryside.

Since we are dealing with narrative cinema and its representations of metropolitan life, it is appropriate that we should focus, at the outset, on what appears to be an intimate relation between the city and the logic of fictional representation. James Donald, writing on cities and cinema, remarks: 'The modern(ist) metropolis and the institutions of cinema come into being at about the same time' (Donald, 1995). Even if it is not immediately clear precisely what significance Donald attaches to this coincidence, I believe it is possible to posit a certain logic of fictional representation, not confined to the cinema but also applicable to it. Simply stated, this is a logic which manifests itself as a limit to representability, i.e., fictional tales can be located in real cities, but not in real villages. Indeed, the vast majority of fictions which take place in urban settings employ the spaces of existing cities, except in utopias which are anyway imagined as alternatives to existing reality. The city, by nature, is capable of containing, without loss of credibility, an infinity of fictional characters and events. This is because a city is experienced as a space inhabited by a *population*, whose numbers can be counted more or less accurately, but whose mutual relationships cannot be easily specified. In urban spaces, individuals encounter each other as strangers, reified entities, whose position in a social network cannot be known immediately. A face in the crowd can be substituted by any other.[2] A village, where every individual's position in the social network is clearly marked, has no dummy places, no empty seats where fictional characters can be placed. The fictional village has to be invented wholesale. Conversely, even if one were to present all the details of a particular existing village in a fictional account, the same logic would make us read it as a fictional one, as a metaphor for the village. One of the consequences of what Lefebvre terms ruralization and the resultant loss of peasant specificity could be that the village too becomes a stretchable entity, equipped with transferable places, occupied by substitutable individuals: fictional characters. But by and large, this constraint still governs fictional representation, making the village a metaphorical entity and the city a space of infinite metonymy. Modern fiction—whether as novel or narrative film—has a congenital intimacy with the urban.

Thus the city is the pre-eminent space of representation(s). It is the seat of power, from where political representation realizes itself, it is

where the last word on justice is spoken, where the complex economic activity of the surrounding territory is sought to be represented, with more or less accuracy, in the speculations of the marketplace. The city is also, in one of its figurations, a parasitical organism,[3] feeding off the village but by the same token, it is also a superstructural phenomenon, a representation in itself, functioning as the consciousness of the land, a consciousness which the peasants ('a sack of potatoes') cannot have. That is what explains the common sense, productive of many narrative situations, that the village cannot *know* the city in the way the city can know the village. Modifying Marx's famous remark, we might say that 'the village cannot represent itself, it must be represented.' In two senses: (i) it must be represented by/in the city and (ii) (in fiction) it must be represented by another village.

For popular Hindi cinema the metropolis of choice has always been Bombay.[4] From *Miss Frontier Mail* (dir. Homi Wadia, 1936) to *Satya* (dir. Ram Gopal Varma, 1998), Hindi cinema's narrative geography, which is otherwise extremely unspecific, incorporates, as a significant turn in the plot, the event of 'going to Bombay.'[5] The city itself figures with varying degrees of specificity, a variance that can be explained in terms of both technological developments making possible a greater investment in realism, as well as the particular genre of film that is in question. A standard device involves showing a montage of Bombay's famed tourist spots and other landmarks as the protagonists enter the city (e.g. *Nau do Gyarah*, dir. Vijay Anand, 1957) or a more disturbing montage of the city's dangerous seductions, for which, naturally, what could be more effective than a quick scanning of a series of film posters and banners accompanied by a loud and fast-paced [Mohammed] Rafi song (as in *Guddi*, dir. Hrishikesh Mukherjee, 1971). The cinema's constant and overwhelming presence, in the form of posters, of songs blaring from a variety of sources everywhere, of crowds in front of theatres—these are as crucial to the cinematic evocation of the big city as anything else.

Paradoxically, the choice of Bombay as the default metropolis in the popular Hindi cinema is indicative of, among other things, the *metaphorical* status that the 'city' occupies within an imaginary that

always, compulsively, invokes the city as part of the city-country dyad. Wherever this paradigm prevails, the term 'Bambai' serves to signify the generic metropolitan other, rather than the specific entity that the city of Mumbai is. The location of the film industry there also contributes to the consolidation of this association, as if reinforcing the metaphorical, symbolic dimension by a self-referential twist. It is as if any other city, even Delhi, would be too specific, too resistant to the symbolic logic involved in the representational practices of popular cinema: to say that someone upped and went to Bombay seems self-explanatory: it simply means that they migrated from the country to the city; to say they went to Delhi or Calcutta is to immediately beg the question, 'Why there?' Bombay is Bombay plus The City. Other cities lack this double status as far as the Hindi cinema is concerned.

Leaving aside such standard minimal references to 'going to Bombay' which are a staple of the Hindi film, we could possibly identify two significant cinematic Bombays which have a more than perfunctory presence. These two Bombays have much in common but their difference lies both in their visual quality and narrative functionality. Let us simply call them the Bombay of the 50s and that of the 70s and after. The relationship of characters to the cityscape, the way the city figures, as metaphor as well as site of unfolding of events, in effect the city as horizon of a representational project: all undergo a significant transformation as we move from one to the other, a shift that must be assumed to relate to the changing aesthetic concerns of the Bombay cinema as much as to the social transformations that have altered the image of the city in public discourse.

The first Bombay, which the song '*yeh hai Bombay meri jaan*—'this is Bombay, my love' (*CID*, dir. Raj Khosla 1956)—immediately evokes for the average Hindi film viewer, is a city of pleasure and danger, of a thrilling anonymity as well as distressing inequality, both joyous and fearsome (see Kaviraj, in this volume), a space where class conflict is a dominant thematic concern. We may include here the well-known examples like *Shree 420* as well as the films of a group of filmmakers—Guru Dutt, the Anand brothers, Raj Khosla—who specialized in a *noir*-ish cityscape that defined one of the distinctive sub-genres of the 50s.