DANCING WITH THE NATION

COURTESANS IN BOMBAY CINEMA

RUTH VANITA

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For my uncle, Prof. Rupin Desai, teacher, scholar and filmmaker

Kshipram vijaanaati chiram shrinoti
Vijnaaya chaartham bhajate na kaamaat
Naasamprishto vyapamyukte paraarthe
Tat prajnaanam prathamam panditasya

He comprehends quickly and listens patiently
Understands things and acts accordingly
Does not intervene in others' business unless asked
He is a true *pandit* (wise person)

Contents

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Ruth Vanita

Introduction

In the megahit film *Ram Teri Ganga Maili* [Ram, Your Ganga Is Dirty][1] (1985), predatory men publicly strip a courtesan, Ganga; this alludes to the attempted stripping of the epic heroine Draupadi, which in India has come to stand for injustice to women. Clad in a red blouse and petticoat, Ganga defiantly sings about how men have polluted her, as they have the river Ganga. But five years earlier, in *The Burning Train* (1980), stripping is an empowering act that inverts the Draupadi moment. When a train is set on fire, and a red cloth is needed to signal the authorities, a wife refuses to give the red veil that symbolizes her wedded status (*suhaag*); glamorous courtesan Ramkali then takes off her own red sari. Clad in a red petticoat and blouse, she holds a baby born on the train, evoking the motherland-as-goddess figure.

These two moments indicate the wide spectrum of meaning that courtesan characters in Bombay films convey.[2] Occurring in large numbers of films over the last eight decades, courtesans constitute a feature that distinguishes Bombay cinema from the rest of world cinema.

I use 'courtesan' as a catch-all term for various groups of women Bombay films depict as making a living by singing, dancing and conversing with men at different times and places in Indian history. In ancient India, they were known as *nagarvadhu* (brides of the city), *nartaki* (dancers) and *veshya* (from the same root as the word *vaishya* [merchant]). The *Niruttara Tantra* (circa eleventh century) states that courtesans, known as *veshya*, are sexually independent women but different from prostitutes who are also known by the same term. By the twentieth century, though, the word *veshya* had come to unambiguously mean 'prostitute'.

[1] Film titles that appear in this book without translations consist of proper names, usually the protagonists' names but also sometimes names of places.

[2] I do not use the term 'Bollywood', because it suggests that Bombay cinema is a spin-off from Hollywood; courtesan characters and films, among other features, illustrate Bombay cinema's distinctiveness.

In late-medieval and early-modern north India, courtesans came to be known as *tawaif* (from the Arabic *tauf*, to move around), *nachnewali* (dancing women) or *ganewali* (singing women). From the late nineteenth century onwards, for reasons discussed later, the term *tawaif* became increasingly synonymous with 'prostitute'. The term *randi* was subject to even greater semantic degradation – up to the early nineteenth century it primarily referred to an unmarried woman, especially one belonging to the nobility, but by the twentieth century it came to simply mean 'whore', which is its only meaning today. In western and southern India, the term *devadasi* (maidservants of God) was used for women who performed in temples as well as royal courts and the homes of nobility.

All of these terms appear in films, especially *tawaif*, *nachnewali*, *ganewali*, *veshya* and *randi*. Terms used for women of performing communities, such as *mirasin* and *domni,* also appear as do words for other types of performers, such as *nautankiwali* (see Chapter 3). In the context of royal courts, the terms *nartaki* (Sanskrit for dancer) and *raqqasa* (Arabic for dancer) are also occasionally used.

Despite the importance of courtesan characters, there is no full-length study of their depiction in movies. There are many articles on the subject, none of which examines more than twenty films at most.[3] Several generalize on the

[3] Books on gender and women in cinema devote some pages or a chapter to courtesan films. The most comprehensive study of the courtesan genre is Sumita S. Chakravarty's chapter 'The Courtesan Film Genre' in her *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema 1947–1987* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 269–305, even though it examines only nine films, and mentions another half-dozen. Archana Verma, in her book, *Performance and Culture: Narrative, Image and Enactment in India* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), has a chapter on *Chitralekha* and *Amrapali*, both set in ancient India. Shweta Sachdeva Jha's 'Frames of Cinematic History: The *Tawa'if* in *Umrao Jaan* and *Pakeezah,*' in *Narratives of Indian Cinema*, edited by Manju Jain (Primus Books, 2009), discusses the way courtesan characters are framed and reconstructed in two films through the star personae of actors Meena Kumari and Rekha. Angma Dey Jhala, in 'From *Zenana* to Cinema: The Impact of Royal Aesthetics on Bollywood Film', in *Popular Culture in a Globalised India*, edited by K. Moti Gokulsing and Wimal Dissanayake (London: Routledge, 2009), 139–53, contests Rachel Dwyer's claim that the representation of courtesans in the context of sensually beautiful princely aesthetics is the result of nostalgia alone; Jhala makes the interesting argument that this representation is as much a celebration of modern India's glamorous fashion world and heritage tourism. Teresa Hubel, in From *Tawa'if* to Wife? 'Making Sense of Bollywood's Courtesan Genre', Department of English Publications, Paper 137, 2012, http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1144&context=englishpub, concludes, on the basis of a great deal of theory and cursory references to nine films, that the courtesan character is a fetish meant to displace real-life courtesans from culture and history. Gayatri Chatterjee, in 'The *Veshya*, the *Ganika* and the *Tawaif*: Representations of Prostitutes and Courtesans in Indian Language, Literature and Cinema', in *Prostitution and Beyond: An Analysis of*

basis of a handful or even a couple of famous films, most commonly *Pakeezah* [Pure] (1971) and *Umrao Jaan* 1981.[4] This book is based on a total of 235 films – 211 films with courtesan characters and 24 others that are relevant in different ways; this is not exhaustive but it is the largest sample studied so far.

My primary lens for examining courtesan films is gender and sexuality in modern India, so this is not primarily a film studies book. I do not employ the language of film theory although I do discuss how cinematic aesthetics shape the presentation of courtesans. I count the numbers of characters and situations in order to think about matters such as the religion of courtesans and villains (Chapter 6), film endings and family structures (Chapter 1).

I first became aware of the position of courtesans as female intellectuals in urban India while I was researching eighteenth-century Lucknow literary culture for my book *Gender, Sex and the City: Urdu Rekhti Poetry 1780–1870* (2012). The playful, witty, erotic voice associated with north Indian *tawaifs*, was, I realized, a voice of indigenous modernity.[5]

European commentators tended to exoticize Indian courtesans as something unique even though courtesans existed in Europe in the early twentieth century. Courtesans do not feature as important characters in European cinema.[6] Some European courtesans recorded their lives, for example, the Englishwoman Harriette Wilson (1786–1845), who was one of four courtesan sisters and was the lover of many statesmen, including Duke Wellesley (who led the Battle of Seringapatnam against Tipu Sultan). French erotic dancer and courtesan Liane de Pougy (1869–1950) wrote her memoirs, as well as a 1901 novel recording her affair with the writer Natalie Barney. These courtesans have been subjects of biography and sensational literature rather than of scholarship and have rarely inspired filmmakers.[7]

Sex Work in India, edited by Rohini Sahni et al. (New Delhi: Sage, 2008), 279–300, devotes seven pages to discussing a dozen films.

4 A typical example is John Caldwell, 'The Movie *Mujra*: The Trope of the Courtesan in Hindi-Urdu Film', *Southeast Review of Asian Studies* 32 (2010), 120–8, which examines only *Pakeezah* and *Umrao Jaan*, notwithstanding its sweeping title.

5 See Ruth Vanita, *Gender, Sex and the City: Urdu Rekhti Poetry in India 1780-1870* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan; New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2012).

6 There are a few exceptions, such as *Lola Montes* (1955), based on a real-life Irish courtesan who died in 1861, and *Dangerous Beauty* (1998), about a sixteenth-century Venetian courtesan.

7 Frances Wilson, *The Courtesan's Revenge: The Life of Harriette Wilson, the Woman who Blackmailed the King* (London: Faber & Faber, 2003).

Historical scholarship has tended to focus on courtesans in the ancient world, in Asia and Renaissance Italy rather than in modern Europe.[8] Euro-American scholarship thus casts courtesans as exotic others.

As Saleem Kidwai points out, Indian historians have largely ignored the importance of performing women in history, and it is scholars of Indian music and dance who have studied them.[9] Kidwai writes that he prefers to call them singing women (*ganewali*) because of the pejorative connotations of the word *tawaif*.[10] Music and dance scholars explore courtesans' role in shaping the performing arts. All agree that courtesans were distinct from sex workers.[11] An excellent study, often overlooked because it is in Hindi, is Amritlal Nagar's *Ye Kothewaliyan*, based on interviews with a number of *tawaifs*, and with men who remember early-twentieth-century *tawaifs*.[12]

Courtesans flourished in cities all over India. They were highly educated and often wealthy women, who were associated with royal courts. They transmitted and developed classical music and dance. Many lived in matrilineal

[8] See, for example, *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, edited by Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2006).

[9] Films, as I discuss later, acknowledge performing women's contribution to Indian culture and history.

[10] Saleem Kidwai, *Song Sung True: A Memoir by Malka Pukhraj* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2002), and 'The Singing Ladies find a Voice' *Seminar* no. 540 (August 2004), 48–54; however, he later used the word *tawaif*, in 'Of Begums and *Tawaifs*: The Women of Awadh', *Women's Studies in India: A Reader*, edited by Mary John (New Delhi: Penguin, 2008), 118–23, and in his study, "The Tawaif in Hindi Cinema," produced for MCRC, Jamia Millia Islamia, 2010.

[11] Most studies focus on courtesans' contribution to music and dance in different eras and regions. For north India, which is most relevant to Bombay cinema's depictions, see Reginald and Jamila Massey, *The Music of India* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1996); Margaret Walker, *India's Kathak Dance in Historical Perspective* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014); Pallabi Chakravorty, *Bells of Change: Kathak Dance, Women and Modernity in India* (Calcutta; London: Seagull 2008); Daniel M. Neuman, *The Life of Music in North India: The Organization of an Artistic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Peter Lamarche Manuel, *Thumri in Historical and Stylistic Perspectives* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989); Katherine Butler Schofield, 'The Social Liminality of Musicians: Case Studies from Mughal India and Beyond', *Twentieth-century Music* 3, no. 1 (2007), 13–49; Manju Tripathi, 'Contribution of Courtesans in the Culture of Awadh', in *Images of Lucknow*, edited by Roshan Taqi (Lucknow: New Royal Book Co., 2005), 151–4. Anna Morcom, *Illicit Worlds of Indian Dance: Cultures of Exclusion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) relies largely on colonial administrators' ethnographies, interviews with late-twentieth-century individuals, and the film *Pakeezah* to wrongly conclude that courtesans were stigmatized women belonging to low-caste performing groups and therefore could never marry (see footnote 12 below), that the erotic dance they performed was distinct from classical dance and that their role in Indian history and culture goes unacknowledged (see my review of this book in *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 38, no. 2, 347–9). There are also studies of individual courtesans, such as Deepti Mehrotra, *Gulab Bai, The Queen of Nautanki Theatre* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2006), and Vikram Sampath, *My Name is Gauhar Jaan: The Life and Times of a Musician* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2010).

[12] Amritlal Nagar, *Ye Kothewaliyan* (Allahabad: Lokbharati Prakashan, 1969).

households, where they hosted and engaged in conversation with men. They would have a long-term, often monogamous, relationship with one man, while continuing to meet and converse with other men. Many later became later-order, lower-status wives of wealthy men, including kings.[13]

Hindi films portray mostly north Indian cities, but as A. K. Ramanujan, among others, points out, courtesans 'had traditionally been the centre of song and dance in South India'; many were learned women and 'were given the same honour shown to poets in royal courts'.[14] Davesh Soneji points out that devadasis were not temple-bound, as they are often mistakenly thought to have been; they also performed at royal courts and wealthy homes.[15]

Courtesans had royal, noble or wealthy patrons. Like a husband, a courtesan's patron was supposed to support her and any children she bore, but she could break off the relationship more easily than a wife could. Courtesans also had a tradition of forming relationships with one another.[16] They were almost the only women who developed non-sexual friendships with men.[17]

[13] Among the many rulers who married courtesans as later (not first) wives were Mughal emperor Jahandar Shah (1661–1713), who married dancing girl Lal Kunwar and gave her the title Imtiaz Mahal. For Mughal emperors' involvements with dancing girls, in some cases elevating them to queens, see Harbans Mukhia, *The Mughals of India* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 117–18. Several Nawabs of Lucknow married *tawaifs*. For lists of their wives, where some are termed *tawaifs*, such as Bhajju Tawaif, while others are listed with typical *tawaif* names and no father's name, see http://www.royalark.net/India4/oudh.htm. Among Wajid Ali Shah's many courtesan wives (see Rosie Llewellyn, *The Last King in India: Wajid Ali Shah 1822–1887* [Gurgaon: Random House 2014], 3) was Begam Hazrat Mahal, who later led the 1857 rebels in Lucknow. In 1802, Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab married a Muslim *tawaif* known as Moran (peacock) who came to bear the title Moran Sarkar.

[14] A. K. Ramanujan et al., *When God Is a Customer: Telugu Courtesan Songs by Ksetrayya and Others* (University of California Press, 1994), Introduction, 26–7.

[15] Davesh Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures: Devadasis, Memory and Modernity in South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). Studies of south Indian courtesans include Saskia Kersenboom, *Nityasumangali: Devadasi Tradition in South India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987); Amrit Srinivasan, 'Reform and Revival: The Devadasi and Her Dance', *Economic and Political Weekly* XX, no. 44 (1985), Nov 2, 1869–76; Frank Kouwenhoven and James Kippen, *Music, Dance and Seduction* (Delft: Eburon, 2014).

[16] Veena Talwar Oldenburg, 'Lifestyle as Resistance: The Case of the Courtesans of Lucknow', in Violette Graff, *Lucknow: Memories of a City* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 136–54; she also cites records to show that courtesans were among the few women in the highest income tax bracket.

[17] Mirza Jafar Husain, in his reminiscences, recalls examples of such friendships, *Qadim Lucknow ki Akhri Bahar* (New Delhi: Qaumi Council Baraye Farokh Urdu Zuban, 1981), 189. James Kippen, *The Tabla of Lucknow: A Cultural Analysis of a Musical Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1988) describes how courtesans helped and patronized male musicians and dancers (23–24).

They performed in male gatherings but also at all-women gatherings in upper-class homes.[18]

Bombay cinema routinely equates courtesans with sex workers, which reflects the changes that took place in the century following 1857. As part of their smashing of indigenous urban cultures, British administrators began to equate courtesans with sex workers; Indian nationalists and social reformers accepted this view, which became dominant in modern India.[19] British rulers criminalized courtesans through a patchwork series of laws and regulations. This process continued in independent India, with police conducting raids, arresting women and humiliating them. This persecution pushed many courtesans into sex work even as others gravitated into theatre and, later, cinema.

Real-life *tawaifs* shaped Bombay cinema. These classically trained female performers were among the first actors, playback singers, choreographers, producers, directors and music directors in Bombay films. Most people do not know about their pioneering contributions.

Tawaif lineages are deeply embedded in the DNA of Bombay cinema. To take a few examples, Jaddan Bai, mother of Nargis and grandmother of Sanjay Dutt, was the daughter of courtesan Daleepbai of Allahabad. Jaddan was a pioneer in Bombay cinema, working as an actor, singer, music composer, director and producer of films. Fatima Begum, actress in silent films and the first woman director (she launched a production company in her own name and made eight silent films, including *Bulbul-e Paristan* [Nightingale of Fairyland], 1926) was from a *tawaif* family, and had a long-term relationship with a Nawab. Bibbo, actor, singer and music director in the 1930s and 1940s, was the daughter of courtesan Hafeezan Bai of Delhi. Gauhar Jan, Zohrabai Ambalewali and Amirbai Karnataki and several others were prominent singers until the Lata Mangeshkar era.

[18] Mirza Jafar Husain, *Qadim Lucknow ki Akhri Bahar*, 189, 206. See also Pran Nevile, *Beyond the Veil: Indian Women in the Raj*, chapter on 'Public Entertainers' (New Delhi: Nevile Books, 2000), 98–9.

[19] Some film critics use the terms *tawaif* and 'prostitute' interchangeably, for example, Harish Trivedi, 'All Kinds of Hindi: The Evolving Language of Hindi Cinema', in *Fingerprinting Popular Culture: The Mythic and the Iconic in Indian Cinema*, edited by Vinay Lal and Ashis Nandy (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 51–86, characterizes a *kotha* as 'a prostitute's house' and refers, without problematizing these terms, to 'the old decadent ambience of the *tawaif* and courtly society' (67).

There is a book to be written about the many courtesans and their families who built Bombay cinema from its inception. This is not that book, however. This book is about the depiction of courtesans in films.

Courtesan characters constitute the first group of single, working women in films, and they are depicted living alone or in chosen families or matrilineal households. Unconstrained by the patriarchal family, they are highly mobile both physically and socially, just like male protagonists. They develop unconventional relationships with other women, men and children. They represent a mixed Hindu–Muslim culture, and function as emblems of the nation and even of humanity engaged in a quest for meaning.

Most commentators assume that cinema models the nation on the patriarchal family.[20] But courtesan characters (in whose homes mothers and children form the primary unit) constitute an alternative emotional universe, one that shapes modern Indian ideas of family and nation (see chapters 1 and 5). Indian cinemagoers grow up with the knowledge that not all families consist of father, mother and children, and that single mothers and all-female households are also families.

Rather than viewing courtesans as marginalized figures in films, as most scholars do, if we acknowledge them as figures constructive of family and nation we acquire a different, less masculinist and more matrilineal, perspective on both.[21]

In most Bombay films, women play second fiddle to men; courtesan films are the single largest group of heroine-oriented films.[22] Little wonder that every major female actor has played this role.

Many film critics' patriarchal bias is evident in their sweeping studies of Bombay cinema that ignore courtesan films or read them as if the hero

[20] For example, Jyotika Virdi, *The Cinematic Imagination: Indian Popular Films as Social History* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003) argues that Hindi cinema forces connections between nation and patriarchal family, domesticating the whore (whom she conflates with the courtesan) and fitting her into a wifely role (87; 132).

[21] Most accounts of the nation in Bombay cinema are heavily masculinist and ignore courtesans. Ashish Rajadhyaksha, *Indian Cinema in the Time of Celluloid: From Bollywood to the Emergency* 2009 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), deals with ideas of nation, modernity, centre and margins, yet nowhere discusses courtesans, and even when he mentions *Mughal-e Azam*, ignores its heroine. The exception is Sumita S. Chakravarty's 'The Courtesan Film Genre' *op. cit.*

[22] Many critics overlook this, for example, M. Madhava Prasad declares, 'Hindi women's melodramas were male-centred'. (*Ideology of the Hindi Film*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), 86.

rather than the heroine is the protagonist. To cite one example from many, M. K. Raghavendra, in his study of films' narrative strategy from the 1950s to the early 2000s, takes no note of courtesan films.[23] Major films like *Amar Prem*, *Chitralekha*, *Amrapali* and the two *Umrao Jaans* are not mentioned and *Pakeezah* is named once in passing. Male bias is evident from a glance through the index. Hema Malini is mentioned once, Madhubala, Vyjayanthimala and Madhuri Dixit thrice each, and Meena Kumari and Rekha not at all. In comparison, their frequent co-stars Dilip Kumar, Dev Anand, Rajesh Khanna and Amitabh Bachchan are mentioned more than a dozen times each.

More importantly, Raghavendra discusses the evolution of male stars' personae but just names female stars as playing particular characters. Thus, the meaning of Shah Rukh Khan's ascent is discussed (280–1), but Madhuri Dixit is simply named. No wonder, having excluded numerous heroine-centred films and even major stars like Rekha, Raghavendra concludes that 'Female stars have not had a defining influence in popular cinema' (151), and also that, apart from Nargis, female stars are never shown as desiring agents. He claims that 'Hindi film romances are usually centred on the hero but there are occasional films in which the focal character is the heroine' (234), and that the 'patriarchal family' remains secure in films (36–7).

As I have argued in earlier work, Bombay films invest as much, if not more, imaginative energy in the male protagonist's assembling a chosen family as in his establishing or recovering a patriarchal one (see Chapter 1). Some conventional heroines also engage in building non-biological, non-marital kinship, but courtesan heroines do so more often, forging odd relationships and alternative kinship networks.

Even when a courtesan character is absorbed into marriage at the end of a film, her friends remain outside of it; the matrilineal household persists. Courtesans' lives and performances insistently remind spectators that civilization and history cannot be entirely subsumed into contemporary formations. The courtesan's voice is the residual voice of excess that haunts and undercuts the earnest didacticism of the modern nation.

[23] M. K. Raghavendra, *Seduced by the Familiar: Narration and Meaning in Indian Popular Cinema* (New Delhi: OUP, 2008). All references are to this edition; page numbers are in parentheses.

Both Hindu and Muslim

Because courtesans live in non-patrilineal households and generally do not have surnames, they cannot be contained in the same categories as women of conventional households. Most Indians' names indicate their religion, but about 22 per cent of all named *tawaif* characters in 147 films cannot be identified by religion (Chapter 6). This indeterminacy is significant. No other important group of characters in Bombay films is indeterminate in this way.

My count of characters from 147 films disproves recent commentators' claims that *tawaifs* represent an 'Islamicate' culture.[24] In these 147 films, there are more than twice as many Hindu *tawaifs* as there are Muslim ones (for details, see Chapter 6).

The red herring of the 'Islamicate' *tawaif* is based on paying excessive attention to a handful of films, especially *Pakeezah* (1971) and *Umrao Jaan* (1981, 2006), while downplaying the much larger number of important films that portray a courtesan culture imbued with both Hindu and Muslim symbolism. For example, Rachel Dwyer and Divia Patel state, 'Films that have the courtesan in a minor role often portray her as Hindu, but where she is the heroine she is always a Muslim.'[25] This is manifestly incorrect, as from *Aadmi* (1939) and *Raj Nartaki* (1941) onwards, numerous films in every decade feature Hindu courtesans as heroines.

This bias is also the result of an outdated approach to history that views the Mughals as the only significant wellspring of precolonial culture, downplaying regional centres and histories. In discussion of courtesan films, this approach leads to viewing Mughal-influenced décor and dress as the hallmark of the women's religion, while excluding the depiction of actual religious practice and symbols.

Cinematic courtesans embody Indian hybrid culture in a distinctive way, just as real-life courtesans did. Women from different communities lived

[24] For a list of commentators who assert that courtesans in Bombay cinema are predominantly Muslim or Islamicate, see Chapter 6.

[25] Rachel Dwyer and Divia Patel, *Cinema India: The Visual Culture of Hindi Film* (London: Rutgers 2002), 69. They refer only to *Pakeezah* and *Umrao Jaan* to characterize 'the courtesan film' (69, 206–7).

together in courtesan households, engaging in a mix of religious practices. They catered to men of different communities, and many courtesans were the offspring of intercommunity liaisons and marriages.

Female Sexuality

Courtesan characters undermine the widely accepted view that before the 1970s (or in some recent accounts, during the 1960s and 1970s) women in Bombay cinema are either Westernized, highly sexed 'vamps' or good and chaste heroines.[26] Critics tend to argue that from the 1970s to the 1980s, the heroine gradually develops the ability to be a desiring and desirable modern woman as well as a good and marriageable one.[27]

This thesis of vamp versus heroine has managed to stay in place only because scholars treat courtesan characters as a separate category, somehow different from 'women'. The latest scholarly re-statements of the vamp versus heroine thesis do not even mention the courtesan.[28] This is similar to modern literary historians' insistence that eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century women

[26] Thus, Geetanjali Gangoli, 'Sexuality, Sensuality and Belonging: Representations of the "Anglo-Indian" and the "Western" Woman in Hindi Cinema', argues that the Westernized vamp was rendered '"liminal" as compared to Indian (read Hindu) women' (in *Bollyworld, Popular Indian Cinema Through a Transnational Lens*, edited by Raminder Kaur and Ajay J. Sinha [New Delhi: Sage, 2005], 145). Ravi Vasudevan writes that the social films of the 1950s tend to 'split the woman', with 'legitimate figures held close to the patriarchal hearth' while 'a more overt sexuality is displaced to another figure' (*The Melodramatic Public: Film Form and Spectatorship in Popular Cinema* [New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2010], 96). This formulation excludes courtesan films like *Rajnartaki*, *Anarkali*, *Sadhna*, *Teesri Kasam*, *Zindagi ya Toofan*, *Mehndi* and *Mughal-e Azam*, to name just a few.

[27] For some reason, Zeenat Aman receives the credit for embodying the shift. See, for example, Ajay Gehlawat, 'The Construction of 1970s Femininity, or Why Zeenat Aman Sings the Same Song Twice', in *The 1970s and Its Legacies in India's Cinema*, edited by Priya Joshi and Rajinder Dudrah (London: Routledge, 2014), 50–61. In fact, several other actors also played this type of woman in the 1970s, for example, Mumtaz in *Aadmi aur Insaan* (1969), Parveen Babi in *Deewaar* (1975), Saira Banu as Kiran, the con woman who becomes the hero's girlfriend in *Hera Pheri* (1976), and even Edna in *Howrah Bridge* (1958), who performs the sexy cabaret number, 'Aa'iye mehrbaan', yet ends up marrying the hero.

[28] See Suneeti Rekhari, 'Sugar and Spice: The Golden Age of the Hindi Movie Vamps, 1960s–1970s', in *Bollywood and Its Others: Towards New Configurations*, edited by Vikrant Kishore, Amit Sarwal and Parichay Patra (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2014), 133–45, and Ajay Gehlawat, *Twenty-First Century Bollywood* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 'Reconstructing Femininity: From the Vamp to Bollywood's New Woman', 40–65. Neither mentions courtesan characters.

did not have access to Urdu poetry, a view that depends upon unwittingly excluding *tawaifs* from the category of 'women'.[29]

From *Aadmi* (1939) onwards, many cinematic courtesans are seductive, desiring women who perform in public and whose chastity is, to say the least, dubious, but they are nevertheless depicted as good persons. Some are modern and Westernized, driving their own cars, living in homes decorated in Western styles and sporting Western dress or hairstyles (*Bank Manager* 1959; *Benazir* 1964; *Guide* 1965; *Dream Girl* 1977) yet are quintessentially Indian and sometimes even represent an idealized Mother India (Chapter 5).

The courtesan thus encapsulates in her own person the trajectory from public seductress to conjugal partner. The shift occurs not just in the 1970s but within each of many films from the 1940s onwards. When she marries, the courtesan or courtesan-like woman may happily give up public performance or may resist doing so (*Abhinetri* 1970; *Do Anjaane* 1976). From the 1970s onwards, there is an increasing rhetorical insistence on the *tawaif*'s unmarriageability and the necessity to preserve her virginity (*Pakeezah*'s over-the-top plot and symbolism marks something of a turning point in this regard).

But even in the 1970s and 1980s (just as in the 1950s and 1960s) there are several instances of non-virgin courtesans marrying. For example, in *Barkha Bahar* [Rainy Season] (1973), the courtesan, who has not only had a child by her lover but also been raped by her regular client and had a long-term sexual arrangement with him, still gets to marry her lover (in an ending changed from Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, on which the film is based). Likewise, in *Jaal* [Net] (1986), the hero chooses to marry his beloved, whom his brother has turned into a *tawaif* and most likely has raped; and in *Angaaray* [Sparks] (1986), the courtesan, also a rape victim, survives and marries the hero.

This may also be the place to dispose of the old red herrings of the male and female 'gaze' and of objectification, which persist despite many feminist theorists having ably dismantled them.[30] Just as there is no one male or female

[29] Ruth Vanita, *Gender, Sex and the City, op. cit.,* Introduction.

[30] For an account of the debate, see Shohini Ghosh, 'Looking in Horror and Fascination: Sex, Violence and Spectatorship in India', in *Sexuality, Gender and Rights: Exploring Theory and Practice in South and South-East Asia*, edited by Geetanjali Misra and Radhika Chandiramani (New Delhi: Sage, 2005), 29–46.